

A fresh start - again!

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Date: 08 September 2019

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- [0 : 00] It was an absolute joy last night to also get to share with you as we considered the promised land in Scripture. Hopefully the Lord helped you to see some new insights with regard to the promised land.
- Now, Numbers chapters 26 through to 30 are difficult. They have a variety of topics, a variety of styles of literature which Moses gave to us.
- So, for instance, we have a census list. We have a listing of different items that are needed for sacrifices. We have a few short narratives.
- It is a complex passage, but I firmly believe that the Lord has something that he wants us to hear from these chapters this morning.
- You see, at the beginning of today's passage, the people of Israel stand on the plains of Moab, just below Mount Pisgah.
- [1 : 08] Now, if you remember from later on at the end of the book of Deuteronomy in chapter 34, this is where they will remain until they enter into the promised land under Joshua.
- Here they stand, now ready to enter the promised land after nearly 40 years of trying circumstances. If you have not been here for the previous messages in this series, know that the Israelites have had to wander for these many years as a result of their unbelief and disobedience.
- The Lord had graciously redeemed the people from Egypt. They had been slaves in Egypt, yet the Lord, by his power and wonders, brought them out.
- He had miraculously made himself known both to Egypt and also to the Israelites.
- He had defeated the powerful Egyptian military at the Red Sea. He had guided the people of Israel as they moved to Mount Sinai.
- [2 : 26] Yet, despite God's gracious act of salvation and constant provision for his people, they still grumbled against him.
- In Exodus 16, 17, 18, they complain about water. They complain about food. As soon as the Lord calls them to live as a kingdom of priests, the end of Exodus 20 tells us that they draw back in fear and ask Moses to act as a priest for them.
- As we know, only days after the Lord commanded them to worship him alone and not to make idols, Aaron, the very brother of Moses, was making a graven image and leading the people to worship it.
- Yet the Lord was forgiving and merciful. And despite judging the people at that point, he still ultimately forgave them and renewed his covenant with them.
- After even this act of rebellion, we still hear of numerous instances of unbelief in the great God who had redeemed them.
- [3 : 57] The great God who had shown them miraculous signs and spoken to them directly. You see, these stories continue to seem so real to us some 3,000 over years later.
- Because isn't this our story? We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. If we have put our faith in him, we have been justified by faith.

Yet isn't it our story that we still so often give our hearts to other gods? Isn't it still our story that we have seen the works of God in our lives?

Many of us have experienced the miraculous things he has done. And yet we so quickly disobey. Even within the book of Numbers, we have read about a series of great acts of unbelief.

As the Israelites prepared to enter the Promised Land, you remember, they sent in 12 spies. And as they saw the wonderful things of the Promised Land, they came back and 10 of the spies said this.

[5 : 21] In chapter 13, verse 31, they said, We can't attack those people. They are stronger than we are. How interesting! These are the same people who just months before had been slaves in Egypt.

Months before, by their own power, they could not overcome the great Egypt. They had seen that God had redeemed them.

And yet here, they once again rely on their own power and say, we're not strong enough to defeat them. Instead of rising up and trusting in the Lord.

A couple of chapters later, in chapter 20, even Moses does not uphold the Lord as holy at the waters of Meribah.

And so you remember the story, in anger, he strikes the rock twice. And the Lord says, because of this, even Moses will not be able to enter into the Promised Land.

[6 : 37] Now, I've skipped over other instances of unbelief in the book of Numbers. and yet, despite these things, they still stand now, 38 years later, on the plains of Moab, ready to enter the Promised Land.

We could say that the entire previous generation had truly been characterized by their unbelief. And so, as a result, we know that the Lord judged them.

And that entire generation died in the wilderness except for Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun. So, beginning in chapter 26, we have a shift in focus from the previous generation to the younger generation.

Through a series of chapters, we see that despite the unfaithfulness of their parents' generation, God remains faithful.

Never forget that church. God remains faithful. Let's consider God's faithfulness in these chapters from three perspectives.

[8 : 03] In chapter 26, I want us to see God's faithfulness to the people. In chapter 27, I want us to see God's faithfulness through a leader.

And in chapters 28 to 30, I want us to see God's faithfulness through their worship. Let's look at chapter 26 and consider how a census of the people actually shows the Lord's faithfulness.

Now, let's be honest. Chapter 26 is the type of chapter that whenever you're reading through the Bible in a year, you skim over.

I can't tell you how many students or members of churches I've been a part of have told me their stories of reading the Bible through a year, through in a year.

They love Genesis. They love Exodus. Some of that stuff about the tabernacle gets a little too detailed. They push through Leviticus, right?

[9 : 13] And then they get to Numbers, and it's all good until they get to passages like this. Or listing of troops. Or listings of locations.

But don't skip over this chapter, church. There is so much that is here. This is now the second census list in the book of Judges.

In fact, the book begins with a census list back at the very beginning. Now, I want you to think about, I want you to think about what this means.

At the beginning of the book, we have a census list of all the men aged 20 or older. These would have been men that were battle ready.

But here in Numbers 26, the first lines which say, after the plague that the Lord said to Moses or the Lord said to Moses and Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, take a census of the whole Israelite community by families.

[10 : 19] All those 20 year old or more who are able to serve in the army of Israel. the language looks back to that very first census. The key to understanding this census comes at the very end which was read to us a few minutes ago.

In verses 64 and 65 it says that none remained from that previous census except for Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of none.

Can you imagine what that means? That means that in a period of 40 years an entire generation has died.

Now this is not normal. You cannot find a culture or a people alive today who have lost an entire generation in only 40 years.

Numbers 14 33 had said that the entire generation would die and God has been faithful to that. And so the entire generation was judged by the Lord.

[11 : 41] Church, do not forget that the Lord is not only faithful to his promises but the Lord is also faithful to his curses and his judgments.

And so the Lord judged this generation and they died. But this also means that the eldest, the eldest people among the Israelites are 60 years old.

Except for Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of none. everyone who had been 22 at the time of the judgment knew that by the time they were 62 they would have passed.

What would this have done to the generation? To the people? Well, we saw that they often continued in their unbelief.

They often continued to rebel against Moses. But now the Lord has brought up a new generation. I want you to notice a few points of interest within chapter 26.

[12 : 51] First, notice that numbers 2651, which was read a minute ago, gives the total number of the Israelite men over 20 as 601,730.

30. The significance of this total comes in that the total number of battle ready Israelite men in chapter 1 was 603,500.

The numbers are strikingly similar. In other words, the Lord has replenished through this new generation what was lost in the previous generation.

John Calvin notes that within 38 years, quote, during which more than 603,000 men had fallen, God marvelously brought it to pass that the same number of persons should still remain, some 2,500 only, accepted, end quote.

Yes, God had been faithful to bring an end to the previous generation, but to faithfully preserve a new generation that could enter the promised land.

[14 : 19] Second, I want you to notice the tribe of Judah beginning in verse 19 through verse 22. Verse 22 says these were the clans of Judah.

Those numbered were 76,500. In both lists, the earlier census and now this census, the tribe of Judah surpasses the total number of any other individual tribe.

You see, the prominence of Judah had been prophesied long before this passage. Beginning in Genesis 49 verses 8 through to 10, Jacob, the father of the nation of Israel, prophesied to his son Judah and said that the scepter will not depart from Judah.

It goes on to say that his brothers will honor him and he will receive the obedience of all the peoples.

Ages before, God had prophesied and promised that Judah would be prominent. And so we see it here. Of course, one of the few good characters in the book of Numbers, Caleb, is also from the tribe of Judah.

[15 : 50] But we know that this is just the beginning of the Lord's promises to Judah, for it is from Judah whom Israel's greatest king, David, will come.

But far beyond that, we know that the lion of the tribe of Judah, Jesus our Lord, also comes from this tribe.

And so we see the Lord being faithful to Judah, faithful to his promises even in the midst of this genealogy, or this census list.

Third, whenever you are reading a genealogy or a census list, pay attention to any time that the author moves away from giving the numbers.

So, you know, the author will typically say so-and-so had this many people, he was the son of so-and-so, the total of their tribe was this many. But sometimes the author will tell a small story in the middle of giving the numbers.

[16 : 57] These are significant. Notice chapter 26 verses 8 through 11. It says, the son of Palu was Eliab, and the sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Dothan, and Aviram.

That same Dothan and Aviram were the community officials who rebelled against Moses and Aaron, and were among Korah's followers when they rebelled against the Lord.

The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them along with Korah, whose followers died when the fire devoured the 250 men, and they served as a warning sign.

The line of Korah, however, did not die out. This passage reminds us of their rebellion against the Lord. The Lord judged their rebellion with immediate death.

The ground opened up and swallowed some of them. This passage tells us that 250 of them were judged by fire, but despite their terrible rebellion, the Lord did not cut off Korah's line.

[18 : 09] Notice chapter 26, verse 19. It says, Ur and Onan were sons of Judah, but they died in Canaan.

Before Judah's tribe is even mentioned by name, it mentions that two of his sons, Ur and Onan, died in Canaan.

If you remember Genesis 38, both of them are killed by the Lord because they were wicked. So why mention them here?

The fact that they died in Canaan makes no difference to the number of people in Judah's tribe today. But before giving the blessing and showing the great numbers in Judah's tribe, the Lord reminds us that Judah's eldest two children had been killed for their wickedness.

Once again, it seems to be a reminder to tell us that despite their rebellion and their wickedness, the Lord had not cut off Judah's line.

[19 : 31] And finally, notice Numbers 26, verse 61. Verse 61. Oops, went too far. It says, but Nadab and Avihu died when they made an offering before the Lord with an unauthorized fire.

After counting the divisions of Levi's line, we have this reminder that Aaron had his two eldest sons who were judged for offering unauthorized fire before the Lord.

And that passage in Leviticus 10, verse 1, says that what they did went against the Lord's command, so fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed Nadab and Avihu.

Their younger brother, though, was not cut off. Even though they were wicked, even though they did something evil, the Lord was faithful.

He did not cut off their line. In fact, it is their younger brother Eleazar who is helping to do this census.

[20 : 54] The Lord remains faithful even when his people are faithless. In these three stories, we see this pattern.

On the one hand, they show us this faithfulness of God despite the people's sin. But on the other hand, as it said back in Numbers chapter 26, verse, let me find the verse, verse 10, these stories also serve as a warning sign.

As the younger generation prepares to enter into the promised land, they are warned, don't forget Korah's rebellion, don't forget what happened to Ur and Onan, and no, do not forget what happened to Nadab and Avihu.

So on the one hand, they are reminded of God's faithfulness despite sin, and on the other hand, they are given a warning sign against their sin.

And so here in chapter 26, we see through the perspective of the people as a whole, through this census, we see a perspective on the Lord's faithfulness.

[22 : 17] No matter all of the trials, no matter all of the unbelief before, the Lord will be faithful to his promises. Moses. We see this also in chapter 27.

We had read to us earlier verses 12 through to 23. I want us to see that the Lord is faithful to give Israel a leader.

The passage begins by telling us that the Lord allows Moses to go up to the top of Mount Pisgah. He's going to allow him to see all of the promised land.

What an act of grace to Moses. God didn't have to allow him to see the promised land. He could have said because of your sin you will die in the wilderness like everyone else in your generation.

Yet the Lord in his grace allowed Moses to see the promised land. We know that this comes about later on in Deuteronomy chapter 34.

[23 : 26] Lord. The Lord then declares in chapter 27 to Moses that he would be gathered to your people. This is a Hebrew idiom for death.

Although the Lord at this point had not yet revealed the details of eternal life to his people, there was already some expectation of reuniting with the faithful community after death.

And so we see that here. But in verse 15 I want you to see that the focus shifts from Moses to Moses asking for a new leader.

He asked for the Lord to give the people of Israel a new leader. I want you to think about what he says here. Moses does not say I have a son who will replace me.

This is not a royal position so that the son replaces the father. This is not decided by bloodline. In fact Moses and Joshua come from different tribes.

[24 : 47] Instead he appeals to the Lord who knows the hearts of all men. He knows that the Lord will choose the man with the right heart to lead his people.

Both Moses and the next leaders serve as these mediators between the Lord and the people. And so the role is critical.

And notice that in verse 16 Moses uses the imagery of a shepherd to express the need for a leader.

He says in 2016 that he longs for the Israelites to quote not be like sheep without a shepherd end quote. This phrase appears at a few points in Israel's history.

The Israelites need a leader. And so the Lord shows compassion in Moses' request and Israel's plight and appoints Joshua to be that shepherd whom they need.

[26 : 03] Now if you've been reading numbers you might not be surprised at all that the Lord chooses Joshua. After all he's been faithful and served alongside Moses to this point.

However notice once again that Moses doesn't say choose my apprentice he's ready. He leaves the decision to the Lord.

The role of those whom the Lord gives as shepherds over his people is a critically important role.

It's not something that we should be hasty about and say oh we need this person. He's a good businessman. Or oh we need this person. He's a well thought of doctor.

Or oh we need this person. He's the son of the former pastor. That's the way that we think. But the Lord he is the one who will choose the shepherds who are best for his people.

[27 : 12] Now Eliezer performs a ritual and transfers the leadership to Joshua in our passage. But I would note one interesting thing.

Isn't it interesting that in 27 verse 20 the Lord commands that Moses give Joshua some of his authority. Whenever I first read that in my NIV I immediately went over to the Hebrew and read through it and sure enough this is what it says.

It says a portion of your authority. That's interesting. You see the Lord gives people the grace and the authority that they need for the situation and the calling for which God has given them.

And so the authority that Moses needed to lead the people out of Egypt was different than the authority that Joshua would need to lead the people into the promised land.

It seems to me that we see here the truth of Ephesians 4 7 which says to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

[28 : 30] Having a lack of leadership presented a serious threat to Israel. In the time of wicked king Ahab the prophet Micaiah prophesied against Ahab and said I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd and the Lord said these people have no master end quote.

No the people of Israel needed a shepherd who would be faithful to the Lord and would lead the people wisely according to the Lord's ways.

So is it any surprise that in the New Testament in both Mark 6 and Matthew 9 the authors describe Jesus as having compassion on the crowds and Jesus or it says there because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

shepherd. You see in the Old Testament whenever the people needed a shepherd the Lord would raise up Joshua or raise up one of the kings.

Yet we see that whenever Jesus has compassion on the crowds because they are like sheep without a shepherd what Jesus does is Jesus gives them his teaching.

[29 : 59] Jesus heals them. Jesus gives them of himself. Yes the true shepherd that Israel needed back then and whom we need today is our Lord Jesus Christ.

And so the Lord is always faithful to give the people the leadership that they need. So the Lord is faithful to the people in chapter 26 he's faithful through giving a leader in chapter 27 and I want us to see in chapters 28 to 30 that the Lord is faithful through the people's worship.

Now if you read these chapters it seems like a list of festivals and a list of the things that would be necessary for the festivals.

You may read it and think oh that was applicable to them but we don't do those festivals not so applicable to us today. But let's think about what's happening here.

Almost all of these festivals and offerings that are mentioned in chapters 28 to 30 are also mentioned in Exodus or Leviticus.

[31 : 18] in fact the principles that are mentioned in the vowels in chapter 30 also appear in Exodus and in Deuteronomy.

So why are these placed here? Well first I think that they are restated here to once again show us the Lord's grace.

Think about it. The younger generation they did not deserve of their own accord they didn't deserve of themselves the ability to worship the Lord the ability to offer sacrifices or offerings as the former generation did.

No God could have cut off all of them and yet through restating this to the younger generation we see that the Lord allows them to follow the rituals of the covenant just as he had commanded it to their fathers this shows that despite the unbelief of those who went before the Lord will not cut off his people but second I want us to notice the regularity of these offerings so at the beginning of chapter 28 in verses 1 through to 8 we have daily offerings in verses 9 through to 10 we have weekly sabbath offerings in 11 through to 15 we have the monthly offerings and then we have a series of annual rituals and offerings sacrifices and offerings were constantly to come before the

Lord some days had specific rituals but every day had at least some ritual think of how this would shape the nation as they every single day went before the Lord with one of these sacrifices rituals or offerings it would form the people to be a people who were centered on thinking about the Lord it wasn't just something that they thought about with their mind though it was something that they had to do every day as a nation at the same time I want you to realize that these sacrifices and offerings were not a simple request they required great sacrifice on the part of the Israelites whereas Leviticus if you go back and you flip through

[34 : 16] Leviticus whenever it mentions these rituals it says what the priests will do to lead the ritual but numbers is different look at this like for instance go to verse 11 on the first of every month present to the Lord a burnt offering of two young bulls one ram seven male lambs a year old all without defect with each bull there is to be a grain offering of three tenths of an ephah of the finest flour mixed with oil with the ram a grain offering of two tenths of an ephah of the finest flour mixed with oil in other in other words the focus in numbers is not on the procedure but on the amount of things that would need to be sacrificed these this was a significant offering from the people if you tally up all of the sacrifices and offerings in these three chapters you see that it would annually take 113 bulls 32 rams 1,086 lambs 1 metric ton of flour and almost 1,000 liters of oil and wine every year from a people that at this time had no land to call their own yes this would require a great sacrifice on their part it also required persistence persistent obedience day after day week after week year after year john selhammer reflects on this chapter and says quote when modern readers of numbers think scripturally this overwhelming emphasis on sacrificial worship has a common intent to cause each reader to think of the enormity of the offense of our sin against the holiness of god thus driving the repentant sinner to the foot of the cross end quote why did they have to make these offerings why did they have to persist day after day week after week month after month year after year of performing these sacrifices it's because their sin was great and they needed forgiveness they needed to turn again to the

Lord to turn away from themselves and from the idols and come to the Lord and plead that the Lord in his mercy would forgive them as I read through these requirements I can't help but think about Hebrews 9 through to 10 the author recounts the rituals of the old covenant these rituals which had to be repeated time and time again and the author says this quote it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins end quote I know the depth of my personal sin if we were to confess our sin in this room the enormity of it would be too much for any of us to overcome and if you sit there and you think oh well my sin is not so great well then let's let's do something next week what you're going to do is you're going to write down every thought that comes to your mind you're going to write down everywhere that you spend your money everybody that you pass by on the street that you could have helped and

Pastor Brian is going to put it on the PowerPoint for all to see who's willing I don't see any hands right because we realize the depth of our sin it's real and so it pushes us to the cross my sin and the sins of God's people need a far greater sacrifice than bulls and rams and goats and oil and flour and so the New Testament tells us that Jesus God's chosen Messiah lived the perfect life so that he could serve as the perfect sacrifice he died the sacrificial death in our place so that our sins could receive complete forgiveness yes Jesus rose from the dead so that all of us who are united to him by faith can receive eternal life

Jesus his sacrifice was sufficient for all the sins that the Israelites committed they have been sufficient for all of the sins of everyone who has put their trust in him to this day and they are sufficient for everyone out there of all the peoples of Malaysia whom we proclaim the gospel to anyone whom puts their faith in Christ we can know for certain that Jesus sacrifice was sufficient for them Hebrews 9 verse 12 says that he did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves but he entered the most holy place once for all by his own blood obtaining eternal redemption yes I think that these stories of these offerings rituals and sacrifices they point us once again to the

Lord's faithfulness they would have had to trust in the Lord to be able to receive the things that were necessary to perform these sacrifices but ultimately they point beyond these sacrifices to their need for the greater sacrifice in Jesus and so in these five chapters we see three perspectives on God's faithfulness despite the rebellion of his people we see God's faithfulness through the census and raising up a new generation to enter Canaan we see God's faithfulness through the appointment of a new leader to follow Moses we see God's faithfulness in providing rituals not only to provide temporal forgiveness to this new generation but to point to the depth of their sin and make them look forward to the perfect sacrifice who was to come our

[41 : 45] Lord Jesus Christ let's pray Father God your word is so powerful we thank you for it God and we know that through it we get a glimpse of your holiness your righteousness how you are high and lifted up but in the passages today we get a glimpse of your faithfulness that despite the rebellion the unbelief and the sins of your people you remain faithful and you were faithful to your promises to Israel you were faithful when you promised them a king who would come a servant who would come and suffer whom we know as our Lord Jesus Christ oh Lord you are faithful to us father as we think about the great things you have done in these chapters help us to never forget the great things that you have done in our lives

God just just just as the sin of Korah served as a warning to the people back then oh Lord let these people's unbelief serve as a warning to us as well so that we who are in Christ will press on with faith that we will grow in our faith and in the knowledge of the glory of the Lord so that we can rise up as a church and as a people and as the churches in Malaysia and shine forth the light of Christ to proclaim the glory of our Lord to this nation and to these peoples