

4. The Wilderness Wanderings Pt. III

The Nation Camped on the Plains of Moab

Introduction

- Israel is now camped on the edge of the Promised Land preparing to enter and possess the Land in accordance with the Abrahamic Promise
- We are nearing the end of the 40 years of wandering that God had promised due to the failure of faith by the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea
- There will be some key changes in leadership
 - Aaron dies
 - Moses anoints Joshua as the leader who will replace him
- But first, some final tests of faith and some final words from Moses before he dies and the mantle of leadership passes to Joshua

I. Israel's Encounter with Balaam and the Moabites (Numb. 22:1-25:28)

A. The Setting:

- Israel is now camped on the Plains of Moab opposite the city of Jericho
- Moab feels threatened by the sheer size of Israel (Numb. 22:3, 5, 41)
- Balak, king of the Moabites, seeks assistance from Balaam to curse Israel
 - Balaam lived in "Pethor, near the River" (Numb. 22:5)—on the River Euphrates, probably near the city of Mari
 - Balaam was a false prophet (Deut. 23:3-6; Josh. 13:22; 24:9,10; Neh. 13:1-3; Mic. 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15-16; Jude 11; Rev. 2:14)

B. Balaam, the Donkey and the Angel of the Lord

1. Balak sends for Balaam to come and curse the Israelites (Numb. 22:1-21)
2. The Prophecies of Balaam
 - a. Prophecy #1
 - b. Prophecy #2

c. Prophecy #3

d. Prophecy #4

NB: Balaam then leaves, (“Then Balaam arose and departed and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way”, Numb. 24:25). He was later killed by Israel when God sent the nation out to take vengeance upon the Moabites.

C. Israel’s immoral interaction with the Moabite women (Numb. 25)

II. Other Events during the 40th Year of the Wilderness Wandering (Numbers 26-36)

A. Moses is instructed by God to take another Census

- The first census was taken 38 years earlier (Numb. 1:1-46)
- This 2nd Census shows a Nation of roughly the same size

B. A special case concerning inheritance laws is clarified

- The case involving the Daughters of Zelophehad (Numb. 27:1-11)
- If a man dies and he has no sons his inheritance passes on to his daughters

C. God directs Moses to appoint Joshua as his successor. (Numb. 27:12-23)

D. Summary of Laws concerning regular Offerings and Celebrations (Numb. 27-28)

- Daily, Sabbath and Monthly Offerings
- Passover
- Feast of Weeks
- Feast of Trumpets
- Day of Atonement
- Feast of Tabernacles

E. Laws concerning Vows (Numb. 30)

- F. God commands the Israelites to take vengeance on the Moabites (Numb. 31)
- The Israelites go out and make war on the Moabites (vv. 1-11)
 - The Israelites return and have spared the Moabite women and children.
 - Moses confronts the Nation and commands that the sexually active women be killed (sparing the virgins) and the male children be killed (sparing the female children). (vv. 12-20)
- G. Several tribes of Israel seek permission to settle on the east side of the Jordan River (Numb. 32)
- Reuben, Gad and the half-Tribe of Manasseh seek permission to settle in trans-Jordan
 - Moses consents demanding that these Tribes assist the other nine and one half Tribes in taking possession of the Promised land.
- H. God commands Moses to record a list of the sites that Israel camped at in the Wilderness Wanderings.
- Moses recounts the journey from Rameses in Egypt to the Plains of Moab
 - Moses cites 40 select encampments (1 for each of the 40 years of Wandering?)
- I. God commands Moses to address the Nation that is about to enter and possess the Land (Numb. 33:50-56)
- When they cross the Jordan they are to:
 - Drive out the inhabitants
 - Destroy their idols and images
 - Dispossess the occupants of the Land
 - Dwell in the Land and possess it
 - Divide the Land among the Tribes

NB: Moses warns the People about the consequences of their not obeying God and driving out the present occupants of the Land:

55 'But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them will become as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land in which you live. 56 'And it shall come about that as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you.'" (Numb. 33:55-56)

- J. Moses describes the extent of the Land (Numb. 34)
- Southern border
 - Western border
 - Northern border
 - Eastern border

- K. Leaders of the 9 1/2 Tribes are appointed to assist Joshua and Eleazar in dividing up the Land (Numb. 34:16-29)
 - 2 1/2 Tribes had already received their Land (trans-Jordan)
- L. Cities for the Levites are established throughout the Land (Numb. 35:1-8)
 - Since the Levites did not receive an inheritance of land—they were to be provided for by all of the tribes—they received 48 Cities throughout the land to dwell in among all of the Tribes
- M. Cities of Refuge are established throughout the Land (Numb. 35:9-34)
 - These were 6 cities of protection for those who had accidentally killed someone. They could find immediate protection so that the community could sort out the facts and ensure that mob rule didn't take innocent life through quick and dirty retribution.

III. Final Events of the 40th Year of the Wilderness Journey: The Book of Deuteronomy

Setting:

- The Book of Deuteronomy primarily consists of a number of farewell speeches given by Moses at the very end of Israel's Wilderness journey and at the end of Moses' life (i.e., last month)
Deut. 1:3 And it came about in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moses spoke to the children of Israel, according to all that the LORD had commanded him to give to them,
- The book was written down in the last *weeks* of Moses' life
Deut. 31:9 So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel.
Deut. 31:24 And it came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, 25 that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, 26 "Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you.
- The location remains the Plains of Moab
- The Nation consisted of those 40 to 60 that had been born in Egypt and those under 40 that had been born in the Wilderness.
- The Nation is poised to enter the land and to engage the occupants in all out war under the leadership of Joshua and the Lord

A. Moses' First Speech (1:5-4:43)

- Moses recalls the gracious blessing of God in taking Israel from Sinai to the Plains of Moab
- He reminds them that God was leading them to possess the Land as a direct fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant
- He reminded the Nation of its failure of faith at Kadesh Barnea and of God's faithfulness in giving Israel victory over her enemies (Og and Sihon)
- Moses again reminds the people of the uniqueness of their relationship to God and how other nations would view it:

Deut. 4: 5 "See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. 6 "So keep and do them, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' 7 "For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as is the LORD our God whenever we call on Him? 8 "Or what great nation is there that has statutes and judgments as righteous as this whole law which I am setting before you today?"

- Moses warned Israel of her inevitable forsaking of God and that in that day God would judge the nation:

Deut. 4:27 "And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you shall be left few in number among the nations, where the LORD shall drive you. 28 "And there you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. 29 "But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. 30 "When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. 31 "For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.

- Moses reminds the Nation of what an extraordinary thing that God has done among them:

Deut. 4:32 "Indeed, ask now concerning the former days which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and inquire from one end of the heavens to the other. Has anything been done like this great thing, or has anything been heard like it? 33 "Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived? 34 "Or has a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? 35 "To you it was shown that you might know that the LORD, He is God; there is no other besides Him. 36 "Out of the heavens He let you hear His voice to discipline you; and on earth He let you see His great fire, and you heard His words from the midst of the fire. 37 "Because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them. And He personally brought you from Egypt by His great power, 38 driving out from before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in and to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is today. 39 "Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other. 40 "So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the LORD your God is giving you for all time."

B. Moses' Second Speech (4:44-28:68)

- Moses reminds the Nation of its obligations to the Lord
- He reminded them of the 10 Commandments and the Nation responds with an attitude of fear and reverence
- The Lord responds to them:

Deut. 5:29 'Oh that they had such a heart in them, that they would fear Me, and keep all My commandments always, that it may be well with them and with their sons forever!

- The Lord further responds:

Deut. 5:32 "So you shall observe to do just as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right or to the left. 33 "You shall walk in all the way which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.

- Moses reminds the Nation of the Laws that would govern their relationship with God
- Moses commands the people with the "Great Shema" (lit. "hear")

Deut. 6:4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! 5 "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 "And these words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart; 7 and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. 8 "And you shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. 9 "And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

NB: This section (lengthened with Deut. 11:13-21 and Numb. 15:37-41) has become the Nation's confession of faith recited twice daily by the devout Jew.

- An important Curses and Blessings section articulated God's intention to Curse Israel for their disobedience and to bless them for their obedience (Deut. 27-28)

C. Moses' Third Speech (29:1-30:20)

- This speech contrasts the Covenant God made with Israel at Sinai and a different Covenant here made on the Plains of Moab sometimes called the Palestinian Covenant.
- It anticipates Israel's failure to abide by the provisions of the Sinai Covenant and anticipates the future relationship with God characterized by a changed heart. As such, it anticipates the New Covenant of Jer. 31:31-34

Deut. 30:6 "Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."

D. Final Events of Moses' Life (31:1-32:43)

- Moses appoints Joshua as the new leader over Israel
- He first addresses Israel:

Deut. 31:3 "It is the LORD your God who will cross ahead of you; He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua is the one who will cross ahead of you, just as the LORD has spoken.

4 “And the LORD will do to them just as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when He destroyed them. 5 “And the LORD will deliver them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandments which I have commanded you. 6 “Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you.”

- Moses then addresses Joshua in the sight of the people:

Deut. 31:7 Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. 8 “And the LORD is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear, or be dismayed.”

- Moses dies on Mount Nebo near the Plains of Moab (age 120)