

Exodus Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Ten: The Fortieth Year of Wandering – Numbers 20-36

From Numbers 20 and 33:

- 1) Use the following information to try and determine how many years of relative silence passed between Israel's refusal to enter Canaan (Numbers 13-14) and the beginning of Numbers 20.
 - a) According to Numbers 12:16 and 13:26, where was Israel located when the twelve spies were sent out to explore Canaan? **Kadesh, in the Desert of Paran**
 - b) Based on what you have learned up to this point in the Exodus study, attempt to estimate the amount of time that passed between the time Israel left Egypt and the time Israel arrived in Kadesh (Desert of Paran/Zin) in Numbers 12:16. **2 years (one of which was spent at Sinai)**
 - c) Immediately after the spies' report and the Israelites' failure to trust God to give them Canaan, the Lord told the Israelites they would wander in the desert for 40 years (Numbers 14:33-34).
 - d) To what location did the Israelites return in Numbers 20:1? **Kadesh**
 - e) According to Numbers 33:37-38, when in the history of Israel's wilderness wanderings did Aaron die? **In the fortieth year after Israel left Egypt**
 - f) Whose deaths are recorded in Numbers 20:1, 22-29? **Numbers 20 records the deaths of both Miriam and Aaron.**
 - g) Based on what you have discovered above, roughly how many years of relative silence passed between the Israel's rebellion in Numbers 13-14 and chapter 20? **Miriam and Aaron's deaths must have occurred 37-38 years after Israel's refusal to enter Canaan. The only event recorded during these years was the rebellion led by Korah in Numbers 16-17 (although exactly when during this timeframe it occurred is not specified.) Numbers 20 through the end of Deuteronomy describes events and revelation given to Moses and Israel during their fortieth year out of Egypt. (Moses began leading the people at age 80 and died at age 120 [Acts 7:23, 30; Deuteronomy 34:7]. Some commentators argue that Numbers 20:14, rather than 20:1, marks the beginning of the events that occurred in the fortieth year.)**
- 2) Read Numbers 20:2-13. What did Moses and Aaron do that showed they "did not trust in [the Lord] enough to honor [Him] as holy" (verse 12)? Read Luke 12:47-48 and apply this teaching of Jesus to Moses' disobedience. **Many suggestions have been made about the nature of Moses and Aaron's sin. Previously when the people needed water (Exodus 17:6), God had told Moses to *strike* the rock. When they found themselves in a similar situation nearly 40 years later (Numbers 20), God instructed Moses to *speak* to the rock. Instead, Moses struck it. Some Bible students wonder whether Moses might have disturbed the symbolism that God had intended by his speaking to the rock. The suggestion is that by striking the rock once (years earlier) and speaking to it thereafter, God intended to present a living picture of Christ's atoning death (in which Christ was stricken) making Living Water available for the asking forever thereafter. However, the idea of intended symbolism is based on inference only. Perhaps Moses' ongoing displays of anger (Exodus 2:12, 32:19; Numbers 20:10-11) were the reason for which God harshly judged him. Another suggestion is that in striking the rock, Moses and Aaron hoped the Israelites would credit them for having a role in the provision, and thus, God judged the two men for their arrogance (Numbers 20:10). Whatever the reason, we do know that "to whom much is given, much will be required" (Luke 12). By his disobedience, Moses lost the privilege of leading Israel into Canaan. A lesser man might have not been punished this severely, but Moses spoke "face to face" with God. He had no excuse for not obeying God's instructions completely and exactly.**
- 3) Read Numbers 20:14-21.
 - a) In what sense was Israel Edom's "brother"? (See Genesis 25:24-26, 36:9 and Deuteronomy 2:4.) **Israel (Jacob) was Esau's twin brother and Edom (Seir) was the land of Esau's descendants.**

- b) What additional information do we learn about this incident from Deuteronomy 2:2-19? **The Lord told Moses not to go to war against Edom. Edom was afraid of Israel. The Lord gave the land to Edom's forefather Esau as a permanent inheritance. Israel was also to honor the land inheritance the Lord had given Lot's sons, Ben-Ammi (father of the Ammonites) and Moab (father of the Moabites).**
- c) Is there an individual or group you would show more respect if you viewed their "territory" as God-given (even if they do not acknowledge Him)? If so, explain. **Personal sharing**

From Numbers 21 and 33:

- 4) Read Numbers 21:1-3 and God's words in Genesis 15:13-16, Leviticus 18:24-25, and Numbers 33:50-56. (The "Amorites" is a collective name for Canaanite peoples.) Why did God approve the complete annihilation of the Canaanites at Arad (as well as other Canaanite groups at this time in history)? **Leviticus 18:24-28 speaks of God punishing the Amorites for their sin in the context of a list of laws against sexual perversion. From history, we know that these groups were known for extreme sexual perversion. The nations heard about the Lord and His ways after Israel left Egypt (see Numbers 21:1, Exodus 18:1, Numbers 22:2-6; 33:40, and Deuteronomy 2:4 in light of Joshua 2:8-11). The king of Arad had almost certainly heard all the same things the other nations heard about Israel's God, but he did not repent (as would have been evidenced by respecting and embracing the Israelites as God's representatives). God had been patient with this people group for 440 years (in Genesis 15, God had indicated that He would one day punish the Amorites, but in Abraham's day, "the sin of the Amorites had not yet reached its full measure"). Although it may be shocking to hear that God approved of (and later even ordered) the annihilation of an entire people group, the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). If these groups continued to live in the area, they would have become a snare to the Israelites. God had called them to represent His holy character.**
- 5) Compare Numbers 14:40-45 and 21:3. God granted Israel victory in a place of former defeat. What made the difference? Name the specific area of your own life in which you need to apply this lesson. **Earlier when the Israelites fought against the Canaanites, they were defeated. They had set out presumptuously, in their own power and determination. Forty years later (Numbers 21), they went into battle humbly, asking the Lord to provide victory. As a result, the Lord was with them and they experienced victory. When we humble ourselves before the Lord and go out in His strength, we too can experience victory in places of former defeat. Personal sharing**
- 6) Read Numbers 21:4-9. Did the bronze snake have a power in itself to heal the Israelites? If not, what actually healed them? From John 3:14-15 and 2 Kings 18:4, what did God intend the bronze snake to foreshadow and how did Israel later profane the symbol? **The bronze snake had no power in itself to heal. The simple act of looking was God's unique provision for healing and intended to show that salvation comes by faith. Jesus said that God intended this image to teach people of all time to look to Him to receive healing from sins and to be rescued from spiritual death (John 3). Like the snake, He was "lifted up" (on the Cross) to become the vehicle of our salvation. Later, Israel profaned the symbol by turning the bronze snake into an idol (2 Kings 18:4).**

From Numbers 21-24, 32:

- 7) Glance at Numbers 21:21-35. The territory that had belonged to Sihon and Og is called the Transjordan, or Gilead. It lies east of the Jordan River. According to Numbers 32, which Israelites settled in this place (see 32:1-5, 31-33) and what commitment did they make to Moses and the other tribes (Numbers 32:16-19)? **Gadites, the Reubenites and the half-tribe of Manasseh inherited the Transjordan, east of the Jordan River, formerly the land of Sihon and Og. Although they settled their own families, herds, and flocks, these tribes committed to cross the Jordan and continue fighting with the remaining tribes of Israel until they, too, received their inheritance.**

- 8) Read the story of Balak, king of Moab, and the pagan diviner Balaam in Numbers 22:1-11, 21-35 and 24:5-7, 10-13.
- What motivated Balak to summon Balaam to curse Israel? Did he succeed? **According to Numbers 22:3-4, Balak wanted Israel cursed because he feared them. However, he did not succeed. Instead, Balaam blessed Israel three times and prophesied about Israel's victories.**
 - In Numbers 22:32, the Lord told Balaam his path was a reckless one. Even though Balaam claimed his only intention was to say what the Lord told him, what secretly motivated him (see Jude 11)? **Jude 11 clarifies the seeming contradictions in Numbers 22-24 about Balaam's intentions, explaining that his hidden motive was greed. He wasn't really interested in honoring or obeying the Lord. He was really looking for an opportunity to curse Israel and make a profit.**
 - The Lord captured a donkey's tongue. He also captured Balaam's tongue, so that he repeatedly blessed Israel against his will. Beyond Balaam's blessing and prediction of Israel's future military and political success, what other prediction did the unworthy Balaam seem to make (see 24:17 and Matthew 2:2)? **Many in the early church and in early Judaism believed this text speaks of the coming of the Messiah. Its more immediate fulfillment was found in the kings of Israel who crushed Moab; most notably, King David (2 Samuel 8:2).**
 - For what task or situation will you ask the Lord of Language to capture your tongue? **Personal sharing**

From Numbers 25, 27, 31:

- Shittim (in the Transjordan) was Israel's final place of encampment before they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land they had waited so long to inherit. Read Numbers 25:1-3. According to Numbers 31:16 and Revelation 2:14, who devised a second strategy to bring Israel to ruin after his first attempt was thwarted? **Balaam had been unsuccessful in cursing Israel, but played a role in Israel's seduction.**
- What reason does Numbers 25:6-13 give for the Lord's covenant with Phinehas? **God said Phinehas was "as zealous as I am for my name" (Numbers 25:11).**
- According to Numbers 25:6, 16-18 and 31:1, 7, 15-16, what was Moses' last military action? Why was the Lord's vengeance poured out on the Midianites (Numbers 31)? **According to Numbers 31, the Lord told Moses to destroy the Midianites. They had been responsible for seducing Israel into sexual sin and idolatry (Numbers 25).**
- Have you recently experienced the advance of your enemy (the demonic realm), perhaps first attacking in one form and then another? If so, explain. **Personal sharing**

From Numbers 26-36:

- Why did the Lord order a second census (consider what was about to occur in Israel's history and see Numbers 26:2, 53)? **The first census was taken prior to Israel's 40 years of wandering. There seem to have been two reasons why another census was needed: First, Israel was about to launch their attack on Canaan. The men of fighting age counted in the first census were dead. The leaders needed a new head count. Secondly, once the land was theirs, the new census would provide updated information for land allotment.**
- What information, given in Numbers 26:64-65, confirms that the Lord always does what He says He will do? **Numbers 26:64-65 states that not one of the fighting men who rebelled against the Lord 40 years earlier was still alive, except the two men of faith, Joshua and Caleb (just as the Lord had foretold [Numbers 14:30]).**
- Read Numbers 27:12-23. For what was Moses concerned at the end of his life? Do you share this concern? What are you doing (or what will you do) about it? **Moses asked God to appoint his replacement before he died. He was concerned that God's people would be left "like sheep without a shepherd." Every Christian should be actively discipling younger Christians (especially those who share their gifts and calling) to succeed them in ministry. Personal sharing**