

Lesson 2 – Numbers 18-21

Text: Numbers 18-21

Main Characters: God, Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Og, Sihon, Israelites

Key Passages:

- Numbers 20:10-12 – Because of Moses' disobedience, he was forbidden from entering Canaan.
- Numbers 21:4-9 – This story of the fiery serpents is a foreshadowing of Jesus (John 3:14ff).

Main Storyline:

Following the incident with Aaron's rod budding, God went on to further describe the responsibility and rights of the priests. God reminded Aaron that only the Levites could work in the tabernacle, and if anyone else came near it (the Holy Place), they would die. He also reminded Aaron that many of the offerings and tithes of the Israelites belonged to the Levites for their upkeep. Further, God told Aaron that the Levites would not have any part the Promised Land ("inheritance"), because God was to be their inheritance, not the land. He also gave various laws regarding uncleanness and sin.

In the first month of the 40th year of Israel's wandering (see Numbers 33:38), they came to the Wilderness of Zin (very close to Kadesh Barnea). There, Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, died and was buried. Also, the Israelites began to complain again about not having water. They lamented that they had not died with their brethren "before the Lord" (perhaps referring to the plague on Israel when they had complained after Korah's rebellion). God appeared to Moses and Aaron and told them to take Aaron's rod, gather the congregation, and Moses was to speak a certain rock so that it would yield water for the congregation and their animals. Moses took the rod and gathered the congregation before the rock. However, before acting, he asked the Israelites, "Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" and proceeded to strike the rock twice. Water came out of the rock, but God was not pleased.

God spoke to Moses and Aaron and was upset at them for two reasons. First, because Moses did not obey exactly as God had commanded him: he had hit the rock instead of speaking to it. Secondly, they had become proud and spoke rashly (Psalm 106:32-33) by not giving Him the credit. God told Moses and Aaron that they would not be allowed to enter into the Promised Land for their sins. They called the waters there "Meribah," meaning strife, because Israel contended with God.

Since the years of wandering were coming to a close, the people began to journey toward Canaan once again and needed to pass by several other nations. They first wanted to pass through the land of the Edomites (their brother nation, see Genesis 36). The king refused and forced them to go around the territory. While there, Aaron died, and Eleazar, his son, became the new high priest.

Israel encountered a few other nations on their way to Canaan: the nation of Arad, the Amorites (whose king was Sihon), and Bashan (whose king was Og, see Deut. 3:11). Israel defeated all of these nations on their way to Canaan with God's help.

Unfortunately, the Israelites complained once again about their living conditions, and God became angry. He sent fiery serpents to bite the people and kill them for their complaining. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole, and if any of the Israelites were bitten, they could look up at the serpent and live. Moses obeyed, and those that looked on the serpent survived the bites.

Lessons/Applications:

- 1.) We must remember that we are nothing without God; all glory belongs to Him (Exodus 15:2).
- 2.) Though we can be forgiven, sin always has consequences (consider Moses' sin).
- 3.) No one can "make" us sin; we are responsible for any sin that we commit (Psalm 106:32).
- 4.) If God commands something to be done, it can be done if we have faith in Him (Matthew 17:20).