

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 16

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

CHAPTER 26-27

INTRODUCTION

The moment of truth for Israel had finally come. They were now encamped in the plains of Moab on the east of Jordan. A new chapter in their history would soon begin. Their lives as slaves in Egypt were history. Their forty years of wandering in the wilderness had now come to an end. They would soon enter into Canaan, the Promised Land. As they looked ahead across the Jordan, they saw their future and their final destination—a new land and a new leader for Moses was not allowed to lead them into the land.

A new generation had emerged. Preparations before entering Canaan must be done. Moses who was their leader had to fulfil at least four important responsibilities to prepare Israel for what lay ahead.

OUTLINE

A. The LORD Instructed Moses and Eleazar, the priests, to Take a Census (26:1-51).

1. The instruction to Moses and Eleazar to a population count from twenty years old and upwards (vv.1-2).
2. Moses and Eleazar carried out the instructions (vv.3-4).

3. The descendants of Reuben numbered 43,730 (vv. 5-11).
 - Dathan and Abiram died together with Korah when they rebelled against Moses, Aaron and the LORD (9, 10)
 4. The descendants of Simeon numbered 22, 200 (vv.12-14).
 5. The descendants of Gad numbered 40,500 (vv.15-18).
 6. The descendants of Judah numbered 76,500 (vv.19-22).
 7. The descendants of Issachar numbered 64,300 (vv.23-25).
 8. The descendants of Zebulun numbered 60,500 (vv.26-27).
 9. The descendants of Joseph came from his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (vv.28-37).
 - a) The children of Manasseh numbered 52,700 (28-34).
 - Zelophehad had no sons, but five daughters (33).
 - b) The children of Ephraim numbered 32,500 (35-37).
 10. The descendants of Benjamin numbered 45,600 (vv.38-41).
 11. The descendants of Dan numbered 64,400 (vv.42-43).
 12. The descendants of Asher numbered 53, 400 (vv. 44-47).
 13. The descendants of Naphtali numbered 45, 400 (vv. 48-51).
- B. The Allocation of the Promised Land (26:52-62).**
1. The LORD instructed Moses (v. 52).

2. The allocation of the land would be given in proportion to the size of the tribes (vv.53- 54).
3. The distribution of the land would be by lot (vv.55-56).
4. The Levites would have no land inheritance (vv. 57-62).
 - a) The Levite families were: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari (57).
 - b) The descendants of Kohath (58-61):
 - Amram was the son of Kohath (58).
 - Amram fathered Aaron, Moses, and Miriam (59).
 - Aaron's sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar (60).
 - Nadab and Abihu died (61).
 - c) The sons of the Levites, age one month old and above were 23,500 (62).

C. These were the New Generation of Israelites (26: 63-65).

1. The census was taken in the plains of Moab by Moses and Eleazar (v. 63).
2. None of them were survived from the first census taken in the wilderness of Sinai (v. 64).
3. It was the LORD'S judgement upon them except for Caleb and Joshua (v. 65).

D. The Inheritance of the Daughters of Zelophehad (27:1-11).

1. Zelophehad had no sons but had five daughters: Mahlan,

Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah (v. 1).

2. Zelophehad's daughters presented their right of inheritance for a piece of the land (vv. 2-4).
 - a) They appeared Moses and Eleazar and all the leaders of the people (2).
 - b) Their father's death was not part of the judgement upon the company of Korah (3)
 - c) They reasoned that they should be given a piece of the land (4).
3. The land law relating to a man who had no son (vv.5-11).
 - a) Moses consulted the LORD (5).
 - b) The LORD'S decision (6-11).
 - The LORD spoke to Moses (6).
 - The daughters of Zelophehad were right (7).
 - The LORD instituted the law concerning the inheritance of a man who had no heir (8-11).

E. Moses' Last Days and the Choosing of Joshua as His Successor (27:12-23).

1. The days of Moses were numbered (vv.27-17).
 - a) The LORD instructed Moses to go up Mount Abarim and view the Promised Land (12).
 - b) Moses would die after viewing the land (13).

- c) Moses sinned against the LORD and could not enter the land (14).
 - d) Moses responded by requesting the LORD to choose a successor to lead the people (15-17).
2. The LORD chose Joshua (vv.18-23).
- a) The LORD commanded Moses to take Joshua (18).
 - b) The LORD instructed on the way to ordain Joshua (19-21).
 - Present Joshua before Eleazar, the priest, and the congregation (19a).
 - Give him a charge in the presence of all (19b).
 - Honour him so that the people would submit to him (20)
 - Eleazar, the priest, would ask counsel before the LORD, and he would lead the people (21)
 - c) Moses carried out the commandments of the LORD exactly (22-23).

COMMENTARY

FORTY YEARS LATER

The LORD called for a second census after the plague that killed 24,000 of them because of the sin of fornication and idolatry with the Moabites and Midianites. The first census also commanded by the LORD was taken some forty years ago. All those who were counted in

that census had died. A new generation had emerged. The reasons for the census were twofold.

First it was necessary to secure the precise number of men who were twenty years old and above. This was to prepare Israel to be ready for war against the Canaanites when they entered the land. The fact that Israel had to claim the land by taking it from the Canaanites should not be a problem. The land belonged to the LORD God who is the Creator of the universe (Psalm 24:1)—*the earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.* The LORD God as Creator and Sovereign has the right to dispose of the land as He pleases. King Nebuchadnezzar learned this truth the hard way. He remarked (Daniel 4:35): *And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?* The sooner man learns this truth the better it will be for him. He will fear God his Creator and obey Him! The Israelites must realise that they are God's instrument of justice because the sins of the Amorites are now full in the eyes of God (cf. Genesis 15:13-21).

Second it was also necessary to find out the total number of males in each tribe. This was for the purpose of facilitating the allocation of the land to the tribes. Each tribe was to be given a portion of land proportionate to its size.

At this juncture, one wonders why the LORD was angry with King David for taking a census of his subjects? King David ordered Joab, his military commander-in-chief to count the number of people in his

kingdom. The two censuses taken by Moses were commanded by God and they were for specific purposes. It was not for the purpose of seeing how great a nation Moses was leading. There was a need to take a count of the people.

In the case of David there was no reason at all. Even Joab questioned the wisdom of David in calling for the census. Joab told him that the LORD God had blessed him. David refused to hear and Joab had to carry out the census. David counted the people to see how great a nation David had amassed for himself, though this is stated but inferred from the context. After the census David realised his sin and confessed to the LORD that he had “done foolishly” (2 Samuel 24:10).

The taking of a census of his military might was quite obvious. It would give him a sense of pride, power and security. That is what some would call, “the numbers game,” bigger is better and stronger, and more secure. David could have sinned in shifting his trust to himself and his army at the height of his glory instead of in God. The census taken by Moses was commanded by the LORD Himself. It had practical and theological purposes.

RESULTS OF THE CENSUS

The results of the census reveal some important significance. First there was not much difference between the first census taken in the wilderness and the census taken in the plains of Moab. The first census totalled 603,550 available soldiers. The second census totalled 601,730. This shows a negligible decrease of 1800 men! This shows that God has been faithful to His covenant promise and that He is committed to protect Israel from being destroyed. The

number of men who were able to go to war had not decreased at all. This was important on the eve of their entering Canaan where they would have to face many enemies. Five tribes showed a decrease in their number since the first census. The five tribes that showed a decrease in their number included Reuben, Simeon and Gad. Simeon registered the biggest drop in its number from 59,300 to 22,200. It is interesting to note that these three tribes camped together on the south side of the Tabernacle. They might have influenced one another. Dathan and Abiram from the tribe of Reuben led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. They were part of the Korah’s rebellion. Perhaps many of them came from these three groups. The arrogant and brazen Zimri came from the tribe of Simeon. It was possible that many of the Simeonites might have joined Zimri in committing the sins of adultery and idolatry and twenty four thousand of them died before the plague stopped. Judah, Issachar and Zebulun showed significant gains. Judah was the biggest tribe, increasing from 74,600 to 76,500.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE PROMISED LAND

The Israelites had no problem in Egypt concerning the ownership of a piece of real property. They had no such benefits nor privilege. They were slaves. But now they were freed and God had promised them the land of Canaan. Possessing a plot of land was now an issue. The LORD specifically instructed Moses how the distribution should be carried out. Hence the census. The land would be allotted proportionately according to the size of the tribes. The bigger the tribe the larger the land. In addition to this,

allocation would be done through the casting of lot. The casting of lot was a legitimate way to decide on certain issues. The writer of Proverbs declare, *The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD* (verse 33).

The descendants of Levi, the children of Gershon, the children of Kohath, and the children of Merari were not allotted land inheritance. They had a slight increase and now numbered 23,000. The LORD was their inheritance. However, we learn later that they were scattered throughout the nation in 48 marked out refuge-cities. The purpose of this was quite obvious. The Levites were given the responsibility of teaching the people the Law and to influence them to be faithful to the LORD. The Levites were to teach the people the meaning of God's Law and the blessings of obeying it.¹ These Levites were somewhat freed from the tedious and long hours of tending, keeping and working on the land to concentrate and give their time to the study and teaching of God's Law! The church of Christ today should learn this valuable

¹ Leviticus 10:11 And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

2 Chronicles 15:3 Now for a long season Israel *hath been* without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.

2 Chronicles 17:7 Also in the third year of his reign he sent to his princes, *even* to Benhail, and to Obadiah, and to Zechariah, and to Nethaneel, and to Michaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah. 8 And with them *he sent* Levites, *even* Shemaiah, and Nathaniah, and Zebadiah, and Asahel, and Shemiramoth, and Jehonathan, and Adonijah, and Tobijah, and Tobadonijah, Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, priests. 9 And they taught in Judah, and *had* the book of the law of the LORD with them, and went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught the people.

principle so that the pastor, who is the shepherd, can focus on feeding the flock.

Once again the LORD revealed that His faithfulness to all His promises and what He said He would do. All those who were in the first census died, except Joshua and Caleb. This was according to the LORD. We learn that God does not change and He means what He says, and He says what he means.

THE WOMEN'S RIGHT TO INHERITANCE

The five daughters of Zelophehad spoke to Moses concerning the law of inheritance. Land inheritance was allotted to sons and not to daughters. Since Zelophehad had no son, but these five daughters they claimed that they should not be penalised for something that was beyond their control. Moreover, they argued that their father had been faithful to the LORD and had not taken part in any previous rebellion against the LORD. They were courageous and they presented themselves before Moses and Eleazar, and the people at the door of the Tabernacle. They appealed to Moses.

The case was unprecedented. Moses therefore brought the matter to the LORD. He did the right thing. The LORD spoke to Moses. The LORD pronounced that Zelophehad's daughters were right. They should not be deprived of the inheritance of land. A Jew's dream was to have his own land, be able to sit under his own fig tree, and to enjoy his family and the fruit of his labour. This was also the wish of the daughters of Zelophehad. The outcome of this case brought about the enactment of the law of inheritance. If a man died and had no

son, then his inheritance must pass on to his daughter, and if no daughter, the inheritance was passed on to the deceased brothers; if there are no brothers, it would pass on to his uncle, and if he has no uncle, the property would be given to his next nearest relative. Later in chapter 36 this law was modified. When the daughter who inherited his father's land married outside her clan, she forfeited her inheritance and a dowry was given to her. In this way, the land remained intact with the tribe.

MOSES' LAST ACT

The last section of this chapter is most touching. It relates to Moses' last act as a great leader. He was reminded by the LORD that he could not lead the people into the Promised Land because of his rebellion against the LORD in the matter of water at Meribah in Kadesh. The LORD told him to ascend the mountain ranges of Abarim (Moses stood on Mt Nebo) to view the land and after that he would be "gathered unto thy people," just as Aaron who had gone before him. It was a solemn moment for Moses. One wonders what Moses would be thinking and feeling in his heart.

Like a true leader who loved the people he led, cared and prayed for the last forty years (Moses was now 120 years old), Moses' first concern was towards the people. He asked the LORD to choose a man who could lead the people so that Israel would not be like sheep without a shepherd (28:16). How magnanimous was Moses. Even when he was told of his imminent death, his first thoughts were for the people whom we have seen had not been very kind and co-operative towards him.

The LORD told him to take Joshua, the son of Nun to succeed him and lead the people into Canaan. The choice of Joshua to become the next spiritual leader of the children of Israel was not a surprise. Joshua had been working closely with Moses since the nation left Egypt. He led the army in defeating the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16). He looked after Moses as a servant (Exodus 24:13; 33:11). He was the only one who was allowed to accompany Moses when the latter went up Mount Sinai where God gave the Law (Exodus 32:17). He was one of the twelve spies, and together with Caleb encouraged the people to enter Canaan and not to be afraid of the inhabitants of the land for the LORD had given the land to them (Numbers 14:6-9). Moreover, the LORD said that he was filled with the Spirit (cf. Deuteronomy 34:9).² He had experienced the rigour and strictness of slavery in Egypt. He journeyed through the wilderness together with the people. He knew the people, having witnessed all that happened. He was the right successor to Moses.

The LORD gave clear instructions on how Joshua was to be installed. Joshua would be brought before Eleazar, the priest, and before the entire congregation. Moses was to lay his hand upon him and give him a charge as the LORD commanded. Moses was told by the LORD to "put some of thine honour

² Deuteronomy 34:9 And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.

Isaiah 11:2 And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;

upon him” so that all the children of Israel might be obedient (28:20). Moses was to pass on to Joshua his responsibilities. Unlike Moses, to whom the LORD spoke directly face to face, Joshua would have to seek the counsel of Eleazar the priest, who used the *Urim* and the *Thummin*, to determine the will of God. We see a progression of the LORD’S way of revealing His will. In the earlier stages of His dealings with Israel, the LORD spoke directly to His prophet Moses. Now the LORD revealed His will through the office of the high priest through the use of the *Urim* and *Thummin*. Today, God revealed His will through the divinely inspired written Word—the sixty-six books of the Holy Scriptures (the Bible).

Moses did as the Lord commanded him. Joshua was ordained as his successor to lead the people into the Promised Land.

SUMMARY

The divinely inspired Word of the LORD gives wisdom. Jeremiah says that if we reject the Word of God what wisdom is there in us—a rhetorical question that gives an obvious answer (Jeremiah 8:9).³ These two chapters are filled with many precious spiritual gems. **The faithfulness of God** stands out in that what God says He does. The children of Israel were now brought to the threshold of entering Canaan, the Promised Land. Moses was not allowed to enter the land. He was the only obstacle that had to be removed before the children of Israel could enter the land. He must die first as

³ Jeremiah 8:9 The wise *men* are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom *is* in them?

God had said. We may feel very sad for Moses because he had served so well and had been faithful to the LORD except for that one occasion as recorded in Numbers 20 where he was told to speak to the rock instead he smote the rock twice. We learn that the LORD expects total obedience to Him and that we should not take Him for granted, even under great stress. He is no respecter of persons. He judges everyone according to His revealed Word.

On the other hand, we learn that when a leader has served the LORD faithfully and earnestly for many years, there is the danger that he might become presumptuous. That is a good warning to many a long serving pastor who arrogates himself to a position short of being God.

We also learn that no one is indispensable in the work of God. The leader dies but the work of God must carry on. In view of this fact, it is imperative that the ruling leader will prayerfully nurture and bring up a successor who is filled with the Spirit of God to take over the reigns. The leader, like Moses, should pass on gradually his “honour upon him before the congregation” so that the people will co-operate and work with him. The ruling leader should not be competing and undermining the work of those whom God has chosen to carry on His work in the church.

The procedure prescribed by the LORD in ordaining Joshua is a model for the present church to follow. The early Christians followed the pattern. In Acts 6, the Christian leaders sought the will of the LORD, chose men who were filled with the Spirit, prayed and laid hands on them. The same was done by the church in Antioch where the Christians separate Paul and Barnabas as instructed by the Holy

Spirit. They prayed and laid their hands on them before sending them off as missionaries to evangelize the regions beyond.

Paul chose Timothy and gave very clear instructions to Timothy that he must do the same when it became time for him to return home to be with the Lord. **2 Timothy 2:1-2**, "*Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.*" AMEN

2. What were the reasons for taking the census?

3. What comforting and warning lessons can we learn from results of the census?

DAILY READING & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

MONDAY: Numbers 26:1-51; Ezra 9:13; Psalm 103:10.⁴

1. What terrible event happened before this census was taken? Who commanded the taking of the census?

TUESDAY: Numbers 26:52-62; Leviticus 10:11; Malachi 2:4-7; Proverbs 16:33.⁵

⁵ Leviticus 10:11 And that ye may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD hath spoken unto them by the hand of Moses.

Malachi 2:4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. 5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him *for* the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. 6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. 7 For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he *is* the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof *is* of the LORD.

⁴ Ezra 9:13 And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities *deserve*, and hast given us *such* deliverance as this;

Psalm 103:10 He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

4. What were the principles of allocating the land so that it was fair?

5. Why were the Levites not given land inheritance like the twelve tribes of Israel? Give reasons.

WEDNESDAY: Numbers 26:63-65; Psalm 119:160; Hebrew 3:17-19; 6:8.⁶

⁶ Psalm 119:160 Thy word *is* true *from* the beginning: and every one of thy righteous judgments *endureth* for ever.

Hebrews 3:17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? *was it* not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Hebrews 6:18 That by two immutable things, in which *it was* impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:

6. How many people of the first census were not able to enter Canaan? What do we learn about God in this regard?

THURSDAY: Numbers 27:1-11; Galatians 3:28.⁷

7. What was commendable in the action of the daughters of Zelophehad? What resulted from it?

8. Why did Moses bring the matter to the LORD? What does it tell us about Moses?

⁷ Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

FRIDAY: Numbers 27:12-23; Psalm 100:3; Matthew 9:36; 2Timothy 2:2.⁸

9. What was Moses' response when told to prepare for his death? What does that show us about his character?

10. God chose Joshua to succeed Moses. Why is it the right choice?

11. Write one thing you have learned about God in these two chapters that has comforted, encouraged, strengthened or warned you.

⁸ Psalm 100:3 Know ye that the LORD he *is* God: *it is* he *that* hath made us, and not we ourselves; *we are* his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Matthew 9:36 But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

2 Timothy 2:2 And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.