

People on the Move: The Book of Numbers

Planning Ahead

Lesson #6 for November 7, 2009

Scriptures: Numbers 15; 2 Corinthians 2:15,16; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 5:2; Colossians 3:11.

1. In this lesson we will cover the short period of time following the report of the spies and its short-term consequences including the defeat of the children of Israel by the armies of the Amalekites and the Canaanites (Numbers 13; 14) but prior to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On. (Numbers 16:1,2) The people were starting to get used to the idea that they would be wandering in the wilderness. But, God promised them that they would be back. He instructed them about dealing with foreigners and about sins of ignorance and defiance. He also discussed a memorial that they were supposed to wear. Each of these events is probably unrelated to the others except in time of occurrence.
2. Read Numbers 15:1-10,18-21. What was the purpose of those instructions—given for a time which was still 40 years away—regarding future offerings to be made in the land of Canaan? At least part of the reason for those instructions was to assure them that God had not abandoned them in that wilderness. What was God trying to say to the group? Remember that flour, olive oil, and wine were not readily available while they were wandering in the wilderness. None of those blessings were given with their manna! Those items were representative of the blessings that they would one day enjoy in the land of Canaan. Thus, they served as a promise that God's plan would one day be fulfilled.
3. Read Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 2:15,16; Ephesians 5:2. What does it mean to offer yourself as a "living sacrifice"? Worship in our day is to include all that we do and say—the whole week long. The sacrificial offerings described in the Old Testament were all dead; none was alive. Think of the life of Christ. Would you call His sacrifice—coming from heaven to this earth to live and die—a "living sacrifice" or a "dead sacrifice"? Christ gave Himself to show us what He wants of us. His life and death give us a choice. We can choose to follow His example and with the help of the Holy Spirit do our best to live the kind of life which He lived, or we will finally die the second death which He died. Is that a real sacrifice on our part? Or is living a life like the life which Jesus lived the best way to live? Is living a Christian life a real sacrifice in our day? Do you wish that you could indulge in all of the "pleasures of sin"? Some who have tried them say, "Don't go there!"
4. Do we really appreciate all that Christ has done for us? Do we show that thankfulness in concrete and practical ways? Do we love God first? Does that really lead us to love others as we love ourselves? (Matthew 22:37-40)
5. What was God's goal in placing the children of Israel in the land of Canaan at the crossroads of the ancient world? Did He intend for them to build a literal or cultural wall around themselves and isolate themselves from all other communities? Are we supposed to isolate ourselves from other people and other churches? The children of Israel were placed at the crossroads of the ancient world so that they could be a witness to the whole world.
6. Read Numbers 15:14-16; 1 Kings 8:41-43; Isaiah 56:1-8; Luke 10:25-37; Galatians 3:26-29; Ephesians 2:11-18; Colossians 3:11. God had to walk a very narrow path. He wanted His

children to be witnesses to the world but not to adopt their customs or religion. Why do you think that God told them to destroy every trace of the pagan fertility cult religious practices? Jesus' method was to "mingle among the people as One who desired their good." (DA 151.2) From these passages it should be clear that God's goal for His children in all ages has been for them to have such a close relationship with Him that they could safely let their light shine to all around them. The children of Israel were clearly instructed that when strangers or foreigners would come to the temple, if they chose to worship God in the correct way, they were to be treated just like Israelites. All the main roads across the Middle East ran through Palestine. If they had done what God intended, the nation of Israel should have grown and expanded until it encompassed the entire world. That, of course, would have meant that even before Christ came, they would have been ready to enter the heavenly Canaan.

Shouldn't Adventists make a regular practice of visiting Sunday churches to get to know them and with the help of the Holy Spirit lead some of them to a better place?

7. Why is it so easy for us today—as it was for them—to become exclusive, even judgmental and condemnatory of those who seem to be different from what we are in one way or another? Do Seventh-day Adventists ever look down on people of other religions, even Christians? Don't we have "the truth"? Or does "the truth" have us? Does that make us superior in some way?
8. Looking back on those ex-slaves from Egypt, it is easy for us to wonder why they made so many foolish decisions. Clearly, God needed to give them a complete reeducation before they could be His faithful, trusting children. During that transition period from Egyptian slavery to being God's true people, no doubt, there were many times when the people did wrong things ignorantly.
9. **What is a sin of ignorance?** Read Numbers 15:22-27. (Compare Leviticus 4:22,27; **5:2-4,15-18; 22:14**) If someone unwittingly touched something that was ceremonially unclean, failed to pay some money due to the temple without realizing it (Doesn't that sound a little like dealing with the Internal Revenue Service?), or even ate something intended only for the priests, or if a large group of people fell back into doing things the way they had done them while growing up in Egypt, would that be a sin of ignorance? What types of sins of ignorance might we expect to find in such a group of recent ex-slaves?
10. If a sin is truly a sin of ignorance, how does one later discover that it was a sin? What percentage of our sins are sins of ignorance, and what percentage are deliberate? Why do you think sins of ignorance require sacrifices? **What does God say should happen to people who commit sins deliberately? What provision does God make for deliberate sins? (Numbers 15:30,31; 1 John 5:16; Matthew 12:31,32; Luke 12:10)** Was the purpose to scare them into behaving? Is the purpose to scare us into behaving? Remember that the origin of the sacrificial system was at the gates of Eden. It was intended to remind them and us that sin is deadly serious. Does this have anything to do with the "unpardonable sin"?
11. How should sins of ignorance be dealt with? Was it and is it primarily a matter of reeducation? What was accomplished by making an offering for the atonement of such sins? Was God demanding reparations—His "pound of flesh"?
12. There were also sins of ignorance on an individual level. Can you think of an example of such a sin?

13. Read Romans 5:6-8. Why did God go to such lengths and such “expense” to reach out to His erring children? Is God still struggling with such issues today?

14. Read Luke 12:47,48. Are there degrees of sin in God’s sight? (1 John 5:16)

God does not regard all sins as of equal magnitude; there are degrees of guilt in His estimation, as well as in that of man; but however trifling this or that wrong act may seem in the eyes of men, no sin is small in the sight of God. Man’s judgment is partial, imperfect; but God estimates all things as they really are. The drunkard is despised and is told that his sin will exclude him from heaven; while **pride, selfishness, and covetousness too often go unrebuked. But these are sins that are especially offensive to God**; for they are contrary to the benevolence of His character, to that unselfish love which is the very atmosphere of the unfallen universe. He who falls into some of the grosser sins may feel a sense of his shame and poverty and his need of the grace of Christ; but pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give. {*Steps to Christ* 30.1}

15. Read Romans 5:6-11; **7:14-25**; 1 John 1:9; 3:19,20. These verses seem to suggest that even under the best of circumstances, human beings will continue to sin regularly. But, fortunately for us, God has made provision and has a plan to deal with our sins. Is it God’s plan that we should continue to live on this earth, continue to sin, and continue to be forgiven in an ongoing cycle? Or, does God have a better plan for us? Is there some way actually—slowly at least—to stop sinning? One of my friends who was raised as a Catholic told me that he would pray that if he was going to die, he wanted to die on his way home from mass and confession on Sunday morning. That was the only time during the week when he believed that he had at least a slight chance of being saved!

16. Read Numbers 15:30,31. What is a sin of defiance? There are many examples in the Bible and certainly many examples today of people who believe that the only serious sin is if they get caught! What is the most serious thing about sin? Isn’t it what sin does to us? What does sin do to us? Are we making real progress toward heaven?

17. Can you name some individuals in Scripture who defiantly sinned against God? What about Pharaoh? (Exodus 14:8) Esau? (Genesis 25:34) Achan? (Judges 7) Ananias and Sapphira? (Acts 5:1-11) What about those described in Revelation 14:9-11? Would these sins of defiance be similar to the “unpardonable sin” described in Matthew 12:31,32 and Luke 12:10.

18. If you make a careful study of the writings of Moses, you will discover that there was a death penalty connected with the breaking of every one of the Ten Commandments except the tenth. (Leviticus 24:10-23; Exodus 21:12-17; 22:19,20; 31:14,15; 35:2; Leviticus 20:2-5,9-16,27; Numbers 1:51; 3:10,38; 18:7; 25:5; 35:16-21; Deuteronomy 13:5-18; 17:2-5,12; 18:20; 21:18-21; 22:20-25) Why do you think that was? Were those death penalties ever actually carried out? Why is there no death penalty for breaking the tenth commandment? Isn’t breaking the tenth commandment the basis for breaking all the rest? The tenth commandment is a matter of the mind and the heart. No one can know what is going on in the mind of another—only God knows. But sin must always take place in the mind before it can be carried out by the body. Why were there so many death penalties pronounced in the Old Testament?

19. After sinning defiantly, so many people down through history began to make up excuses! That

is a common theme even in movies in our day. Is making excuses for our sins intended to be entertainment? How often do we make up stories to try to explain our behavior? Isn't that a deadly habit?

20. Does God's plan for us include following the example of Jesus on a day-by-day basis until we actually stop sinning? What are the best methods that we have available today to help us stop sinning?
21. Read Numbers 15:37-41. The Jews were instructed to sew small threads of blue into the tassels on the edges of their garments to remind them to keep the commandments. Should we be doing that in our day? What kind of reminders would be useful in our day? Should we—like many others—wear crosses around our necks? (Numbers 15:39-41)
22. This lesson—covering a brief period of time and dealing with an assortment of subjects—shows us in concrete ways how serious sin is, what provisions God has made for sin, and some simple ways that we might use to help us overcome sin.
23. Are we serious about overcoming sin? Do we take sin seriously enough? 2 Peter 3:10-12 tells us that God is waiting for us to get ready so He can come back. Do we need to take sin seriously before He can come back? Revelation 22:11 tells that we will **not** be changed when Jesus comes. Instead, our characters will remain what we have developed here on earth. We must get ready before He comes. How many more years do we want Jesus to wait?
24. Back in the beginning, Satan claimed that he knew how to do a better job running the universe than God did. He claimed that all the angels were "holy" and they should be allowed to do whatever they wanted to do! As we reach the end of this world's history, Satan will be given his opportunity to show how things would be if he were in charge!
25. Do we know how to live the kind of Christian lives that will shine out as examples to all around us? Do people look at us and thank God? (Matthew 5:16) Do people look at us and wish they could be like us? Or, are they repelled or repulsed by what they see in our lives? How many Christians do you know that are living truly Christlike lives? Or, is that an impossible goal?

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