

Adult Bible Class
The Book of Numbers
Lesson #16, Chapters 28 to 32

A Review of Chapters 28 and 29

In our last lesson we read that chapters 28 and 29 go together and give a complete list of the national offerings of Israel. They were to be offered by the priests in the Tabernacle at the appointed times indicated after the people entered into the land.

The people were now camped on the plains of Moab on the east side of the Jordan River. They were about to enter Canaan to conquer it and claim it for their own. Yes, there were battles ahead, but God was giving them instructions - instructions for daily offerings and other offerings throughout the year. God was letting them know that ordinary life in the land would soon be coming.

God (through Moses) had previously told the people about these offerings, but this was a new generation and their children (the older generation had died during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness). The list of offerings in these two chapters is a concise list of what God told Moses previously.

Offerings were to be made every day (the morning and the evening sacrifice), every week on the seventh day (on the Sabbath), every month on the first day (the New Moon), and every year in each one of the seven festivals. Christians can see through this that the days, months, and years should be consecrated to God. The Israelite year was made holy by this round of sacrifices. Our lives are made holy by continually claiming the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and offering ourselves to God.

For Christians, the offerings have tremendous meaning:

Daily Offering

All our times belong to God. Each day belongs to Him as we start and end each day with prayer. We need to read God's Word daily for direction, inspiration, and strength. This daily reverence to God is the foundation for everything else that we do.

Sabbath Offering

We need to gather weekly with God's people for teaching, preaching, and worship. The writer of Hebrews warns:

Hebrews 10:23 (NLT) Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. **24** Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. **25** And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.

Monthly Offering

We need to reverence the Lord in every part of our lives - even in times of leisure, vacation, retirement - the hours away from our normal work. Israel made the new moon celebrations holy unto the Lord; the pagan peoples worshipped idols on the new moon holidays.

The Spring Festivals

Passover Offerings and Festival of Harvest

We must remember what Jesus Christ has done for us through His death, burial, and resurrection; and we need to highly value our spiritual experience of repentance, water baptism, and Holy Spirit baptism. This is our salvation, and without it our life has little meaning or future.

The Autumn Festivals

Festival of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Festival of Shelters Offerings

We need to look ahead to the great things that are prophesied in the Scriptures - the rapture of the church, Jesus' return, the 1000 year reign of Jesus Christ, and the hope of heaven. The greatest sacrifices were made by the Israelites for these feasts, but the greatest harvests were reaped as well.

In the last days, the greatest sacrifices will be required of God's people; yet, a great harvest awaits, and the greatest joys will be experienced at the return of Jesus Christ.

Numbers Chapter 30

We are close to the end of the Book of Numbers. As we finish these closing chapters, we will read topics that seem to veer off from the main narrative of the story of the children of Israel preparing to enter Canaan's land. In our last lesson we reviewed the national offerings of Israel - offerings that would be made regularly once they entered the Promised Land. Chapter 30 is about vows.

We studied about vows in Leviticus 27. Making vows was a part of religious life in the Old Testament, but Jesus said concerning everyday vows:

Teaching about Vows

Matthew 5:33 "You have also heard that our ancestors were told, 'You must not break your vows; you must carry out the vows you make to the Lord.' **34** But I say, do not make any vows! Do not say, 'By heaven!' because heaven is God's throne. **35** And do not say, 'By the earth!' because the earth is his footstool. And do not say, 'By Jerusalem!' for Jerusalem is the city of the great King. **36** Do not even say, 'By my head!' for you can't turn one hair white or black. **37** Just say a simple, 'Yes, I will,' or 'No, I won't.' Anything beyond this is from the evil one.

Jesus calls for the Christian to let his normal, everyday language be truthful in itself. We do not need to reaffirm our commitments or our denials with an oath. A Christian does not need to say, "I swear on a stack of Bibles that I will do such and such." Jesus said that our "yes" should mean yes, and our "no" should mean no.

Jesus was not condemning all contracts and agreements between people. In everyday speech we should not take oaths; however, there are business contracts,

marriage vows, etc. These are serious agreements that should be made after much thought and prayer.

In the book of Hebrews we see an example of God Himself making a vow. The Lord swears by Himself since He was the greatest thing He could think of:

Hebrews 6:13 For example, there was God's promise to Abraham. Since there was no one greater to swear by, God took an oath in his own name, saying:

14 "I will certainly bless you,
and I will multiply your descendants beyond number." . . .

16 Now when people take an oath, they call on someone greater than themselves to hold them to it. And without any question that oath is binding. **17** God also bound himself with an oath, so that those who received the promise could be perfectly sure that he would never change his mind. **18** So God has given both his promise and his oath. These two things are unchangeable because it is impossible for God to lie.

Oath taking is a serious business in the sight of God. When a person commits to do something or not to do something and he binds himself with a vow or oath, God takes it all very seriously. Jesus said that his followers should not make vows - not necessarily because they cannot be trusted to keep them, but that a Christian's word should be good enough without adding "by the Lord," or "by Heaven," or "by the great city, Jerusalem." A Christian's plain speech should stand alone as being trustworthy. To add to it almost gives the impression that the person can't be trusted unless He adds oath taking. God Himself has no problem making a vow or a promise because He *a/ways* keeps His word, and He cannot lie. When God makes an oath it is for our sake.

Now let's read Numbers 30 where some considerations concerning vows are made:

Laws concerning Vows

Numbers 30:1 (NLT) Then Moses summoned the leaders of the tribes of Israel and told them, "This is what the Lord has commanded: **2** A man who makes a vow to the Lord or makes a pledge under oath must never break it. He must do exactly what he said he would do.

3 If a young woman makes a vow to the Lord or a pledge under oath while she is still living at her father's home, **4** and her father hears of the vow or pledge and does not object to it, then all her vows and pledges will stand. **5** But if her father refuses to let her fulfill the vow or pledge on the day he hears of it, then all her vows and pledges will become invalid. The Lord will forgive her because her father would not let her fulfill them.

6 "Now suppose a young woman makes a vow or binds herself with an impulsive pledge and later marries. **7** If her husband learns of her vow or pledge and does not object on the day he hears of it, her vows and pledges will stand. **8** But if her husband refuses to accept her vow or impulsive pledge on the day he hears of it, he nullifies her commitments, and the Lord will forgive her. **9** If, however, a woman is a widow or is divorced, she must fulfill all her vows and pledges.

10 "But suppose a woman is married and living in her husband's home when she makes a vow or binds herself with a pledge. **11** If her husband hears of it and does not object to it, her vow or pledge will stand. **12** But if her husband refuses to accept it on the day he hears of it, her vow or pledge will be nullified, and the Lord will forgive her. **13** So her husband may either confirm or nullify any vows or pledges she makes to deny herself. **14** But if he does not object on the day he hears of it, then he is

agreeing to all her vows and pledges. **15** If he waits more than a day and then tries to nullify a vow or pledge, he will be punished for her guilt.”

16 These are the regulations the Lord gave Moses concerning relationships between a man and his wife, and between a father and a young daughter who still lives at home.

This was the rule in ancient Israel. But does it have any spiritual meaning for the Christian? We see that the daughter or the wife are under the authority of the father or the husband. The vow has no real meaning unless it has the stamp of approval of the father or the husband. Further, the father or husband needs to make up his mind whether he accepts the religious vow of his daughter or wife - and his decision once made will stand. A daughter’s first duty is to her father. A wife’s first duty is to her husband. Spiritual commitments to God could be made but with the approval of the father or husband.

Our heavenly Father, our bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ, has authority over us and over our commitments to Him. Jesus said, *“But I say, do not make any vows!”* Our commitments to Him are plain and straightforward - not needing an oath. Our lives are committed to Him, and we must allow Him to direct our paths and have the authority. When we are under His watchful authority, any changes in our paths and our commitments can be directed by Him without guilt of breaking a solemn vow.

Numbers Chapter 31

We have already studied most of chapter 31 which we read along with the chapters about Balak and Balaam. In chapter 31 the army of Israel was commanded to attack the Midianites and Balaam after their women took part with Moab to seduce the men of Israel and cause them to sin and commit idolatry. Israel destroyed them and divided the plunder as directed by the Lord.

Numbers Chapter 32

The Tribes East of the Jordan

Numbers 32:1 (NLT) The tribes of Reuben and Gad owned vast numbers of livestock. So when they saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were ideally suited for their flocks and herds, **2** they came to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the other leaders of the community. They said, **3** “Notice the towns of Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sibmah, Nebo, and Beon. **4** The Lord has conquered this whole area for the community of Israel, and it is ideally suited for all our livestock. **5** If we have found favor with you, please let us have this land as our property instead of giving us land across the Jordan River.”

6 “Do you intend to stay here while your brothers go across and do all the fighting?” Moses asked the men of Gad and Reuben. **7** “Why do you want to discourage the rest of the people of Israel from going across to the land the Lord has given them? **8** Your ancestors did the same thing when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to explore the land. **9** After they went up to the valley of Eshcol and explored the land, they discouraged the people of Israel from entering the land the Lord was giving them. **10** Then the Lord was very angry with them, and he vowed, **11** ‘Of all those I rescued from Egypt, no one who is twenty years old or older will ever see the land I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for they have not obeyed me wholeheartedly. **12** The only exceptions are Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they have wholeheartedly followed the Lord.’

13 "The Lord was angry with Israel and made them wander in the wilderness for forty years until the entire generation that sinned in the Lord's sight had died. **14** But here you are, a brood of sinners, doing exactly the same thing! You are making the Lord even angrier with Israel. **15** If you turn away from him like this and he abandons them again in the wilderness, you will be responsible for destroying this entire nation!"

16 But they approached Moses and said, "We simply want to build pens for our livestock and fortified towns for our wives and children. **17** Then we will arm ourselves and lead our fellow Israelites into battle until we have brought them safely to their land. Meanwhile, our families will stay in the fortified towns we build here, so they will be safe from any attacks by the local people. **18** We will not return to our homes until all the people of Israel have received their portions of land. **19** But we do not claim any of the land on the other side of the Jordan. We would rather live here on the east side and accept this as our grant of land."

This story speaks to us of those Christians who are numbered with the Lord's people, but they do not want to go all the way with Jesus, living as He would have them to live. It was never suggested by the Lord that part of Israel should live on the east side of the Jordan River. The Promised Land was stated as being *west* of the Jordan River (see Numbers 34:1-14). But these two tribes asked to live *east* of the Jordan River because they saw good pasture for their flocks and herds. Moses granted them their request to live on the east side of the Jordan River.

Moses was not happy with this suggestion. He must have thought, "Here we go again!" Moses was concerned that this idea would dissuade the rest of the nation from going forward into the Promised Land itself.

Where people live is very important. Spiritually, God has a "place" that He wants us to live. For these two tribes to live on the east side of Jordan would mean that they would be closest to enemies from the east. They would also be separated from the Tabernacle of Israel and the presence of God. They would think of themselves differently than the rest of Israel because of where they chose to live.

In Christianity there are many levels of commitment among people. There are those who happily embrace sound preaching and teaching, but there are those that receive only a portion of it. God's will is that all Christians should press toward perfection, but a part of the church does not do this. Israel was called by God to possess *the land of Canaan*. This would involve fighting the enemies there and conquering them. This would involve standing with brothers and sisters in unity. This would involve believing God's promises to be good and true.

The land of Canaan was protected by geographical features - mountains in the north, the Jordan River (along with the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea) to the east, the desert to the south, and the Mediterranean Sea to the west. God gives Christians *spiritual boundaries* in which to live to protect us from the dangers that would hurt us or seduce us to become unspiritual or sinful.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad had it all figured out. They liked the land east of Jordan. This land *caught their eye*, and they wanted it. But at the same time, they promised that they would help their brethren conquer the land across Jordan. They promised that they would be just as much a part of Israel living in this place as they would across Jordan. They did, in fact, keep their promise to help their brethren fight for the land west of Jordan. They were, in fact, faithful to help and

they were rewarded for their faithfulness. However, we should be very much aware that separation from the main body of the church is risky business.

Some people do not realize how important it is to seek God's will and way for their lives. It is a rare person indeed who commits his life to the ways and commands of God and His church. It is a rare person who seeks to pattern his life after people in the church who successfully live for God. Keep reading the story:

Numbers 32:20 Then Moses said, "If you keep your word and arm yourselves for the Lord's battles, **21** and if your troops cross the Jordan and keep fighting until the Lord has driven out his enemies, **22** then you may return when the Lord has conquered the land. You will have fulfilled your duty to the Lord and to the rest of the people of Israel. And the land on the east side of the Jordan will be your property from the Lord. **23** But if you fail to keep your word, then you will have sinned against the Lord, and you may be sure that your sin will find you out. **24** Go ahead and build towns for your families and pens for your flocks, but do everything you have promised."

Here is a famous passage of Scripture: *"Be sure that your sin will find you out."* This passage gets quoted for about every sin you can think of, but here in context, Moses is speaking of the sin of refusing to wholly follow the Lord. Sin has a way of "finding" a person eventually.

The Christian life can be divided into two main parts. First, there is the Christian's initial conversion experience. This is patterned after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For the Christian it is repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Following this born again experience, God leads us to a life of obedience, faith, and holy living. The Christian learns to hear the voice of God and obey it (through preaching, teaching, prayer, and Bible study). When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, that body of water brought them out of Egypt and away from their old life and old enemies. However, they were going to have to cross the Jordan River to enter that new life where they would be a new nation before the Lord.

There are many Christians who are caught between the two. Yes, they leave the old life of sin, but they don't really enter into the new life of victorious Christian living in the Promised Land. They are caught in the "middle ground," not in Egypt any more, but on the other hand not fully in Canaan.

There are some Christians who talk the talk, but they don't completely walk the walk. Not only would Reuben and Gad remain on the east of Jordan, but half the tribe of Manasseh would remain there as well. These two and a half tribes would say:

"We love the fellowship of God's people and we are not going back to Egypt."

"We will go with you to fight the enemies of God on the other side of Jordan"

"However, we don't want to live there."

Middle ground Christians are part of the body of Christ, but they are also a weak example of what living for God is all about. When young lambs in the church see one of them, they see someone who separates themselves from the main part of the church. They see someone who has put livelihood and family far away from the core of the church. *But they approached Moses and said, "We simply want to*

build pens for our livestock and fortified towns for our wives and children.” They were keeping their livelihood away from the place that God had promised to give them. They were keeping their families on that middle ground, robbing them of their true inheritance. Joshua, their leader, was going to be on the other side of Jordan. The Ark of the Covenant was going to be over there, as well as the Tabernacle, the place of sacrifice and worship.

What happened to these “east of the Jordan” tribes later in Israel’s history? They *did* help their fellow tribes to conquer the land (and they were invaluable in doing so), *but then they went back across Jordan to live there* (Joshua 22:9). In Joshua 22:10-34 they built an altar of their own and caused much trouble and controversy between themselves and their brethren on the other side (there was only supposed to be one true altar, and that was at the entrance to the Tabernacle). Their actions looked treacherous, but they testified that their hearts were right and their motives pure. Their actions almost caused a civil war in Israel because they were misunderstood. They continued to be a people of spiritual words. However, they were fearful that they would not be accepted by the other ten tribes in the future because the Jordan River separated them from their brethren. They were the ones that separated themselves, and yet they were fearful that the main body of Israel would not consider them to be a part of Israel in the future.

These tribes, because of their proximity to the pagan nations around them, were often the first to suffer troubles:

1 Samuel 10:27 . . . [Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the people of Gad and Reuben who lived east of the Jordan River. He gouged out the right eye of each of the Israelites living there, and he didn’t allow anyone to come and rescue them. In fact, of all the Israelites east of the Jordan, there wasn’t a single one whose right eye Nahash had not gouged out. . . .]

The Tribes East of the Jordan

1 Chronicles 5:18 There were 44,760 capable warriors in the armies of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. They were all skilled in combat and armed with shields, swords, and bows. **19** They waged war against the Hagrites, the Jeturites, the Naphishites, and the Nodabites. **20** They cried out to God during the battle, and he answered their prayer because they trusted in him. So the Hagrites and all their allies were defeated. **21** The plunder taken from the Hagrites included 50,000 camels, 250,000 sheep and goats, 2,000 donkeys, and 100,000 captives. **22** Many of the Hagrites were killed in the battle because God was fighting against them. The people of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh lived in their land until they were taken into exile.

23 The half-tribe of Manasseh was very large and spread through the land. . . **24** . . . These men had a great reputation as mighty warriors and leaders of their clans.

25 But these tribes were unfaithful to the God of their ancestors. They worshiped the gods of the nations that God had destroyed. **26** So the God of Israel caused King Pul of Assyria (also known as Tiglath-pileser) to invade the land and take away the people of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh as captives. The Assyrians exiled them to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the Gozan River, where they remain to this day.

Contrary to the middle ground minded tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, we can look to Caleb as a picture of the Christian who is wholly given to God. Caleb was one of the spies that said, “*Yes! We can overtake the*

enemies of Canaan, and with the Lord's help we can easily conquer the land God has given us!" Caleb was always linked to Joshua, who is a type of Jesus Christ. Scripture bears out: *But my servant Caleb has a different attitude than the others have. He has remained loyal to me, so I will bring him into the land he explored. His descendants will possess their full share of that land* (Numbers 14:24). God linked together faithfulness, obedience, and possessing the land. Even when Caleb was old, he had the strength to fight and win:

Caleb Requests His Land

Joshua 14:6 . . . Caleb said to Joshua, "Remember what the Lord said to Moses, the man of God, about you and me when we were at Kadesh-barnea. **7** I was forty years old when Moses, the servant of the Lord, sent me from Kadesh-barnea to explore the land of Canaan. I returned and gave an honest report, **8** but my brothers who went with me frightened the people from entering the Promised Land. For my part, I wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God. **9** So that day Moses solemnly promised me, 'The land of Canaan on which you were just walking will be your grant of land and that of your descendants forever, because you wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God.'

10 "Now, as you can see, the Lord has kept me alive and well as he promised for all these forty-five years since Moses made this promise—even while Israel wandered in the wilderness. Today I am eighty-five years old. **11** I am as strong now as I was when Moses sent me on that journey, and I can still travel and fight as well as I could then. **12** So give me the hill country that the Lord promised me. You will remember that as scouts we found the descendants of Anak living there in great, walled towns. But if the Lord is with me, I will drive them out of the land, just as the Lord said."

13 So Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave Hebron to him as his portion of land. **14** Hebron still belongs to the descendants of Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite because he wholeheartedly followed the Lord, the God of Israel. **15** (Previously Hebron had been called Kiriath-arba. It had been named after Arba, a great hero of the descendants of Anak.)

And the land had rest from war.

Let's finish reading the story in Numbers about the tribes east of Jordan:

Numbers 32:25 Then the men of Gad and Reuben replied, "We, your servants, will follow your instructions exactly. **26** Our children, wives, flocks, and cattle will stay here in the towns of Gilead. **27** But all who are able to bear arms will cross over to fight for the Lord, just as you have said."

28 So Moses gave orders to Eleazar the priest, Joshua son of Nun, and the leaders of the clans of Israel. **29** He said, "The men of Gad and Reuben who are armed for battle must cross the Jordan with you to fight for the Lord. If they do, give them the land of Gilead as their property when the land is conquered. **30** But if they refuse to arm themselves and cross over with you, then they must accept land with the rest of you in the land of Canaan."

31 The tribes of Gad and Reuben said again, "We are your servants, and we will do as the Lord has commanded! **32** We will cross the Jordan into Canaan fully armed to fight for the Lord, but our property will be here on this side of the Jordan."

33 So Moses assigned land to the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and half the tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph. He gave them the territory of King Sihon of the Amorites and the land of King Og of Bashan—the whole land with its cities and surrounding lands.

34 The descendants of Gad built the towns of Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, **35** Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, **36** Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran. These were all fortified towns with pens for their flocks.

37 The descendants of Reuben built the towns of Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, **38** Nebo, Baal-meon, and Sibmah. They changed the names of some of the towns they conquered and rebuilt.

39 Then the descendants of Makir of the tribe of Manasseh went to Gilead and conquered it, and they drove out the Amorites living there. **40** So Moses gave Gilead to the Makirites, descendants of Manasseh, and they settled there. **41** The people of Jair, another clan of the tribe of Manasseh, captured many of the towns in Gilead and changed the name of that region to the Towns of Jair. **42** Meanwhile, a man named Nobah captured the town of Kenath and its surrounding villages, and he renamed that area Nobah after himself.

CONCLUSION

Living on middle ground - away from Egypt but not quite in the Promised land of victorious living - is a risk. There is danger there from enemies that would attack and enemies that would seduce. People who live on the middle ground can be stubborn. *Moses had to acquiesce to them* - they would not listen to Moses' warnings and obey him, the person who spoke for God.

Protection comes from obeying God and staying with the main body - with God's people who have fully crossed Jordan and left this world behind, following God's promises and living by faith that what God says is true. Those who cross Jordan should expect to fight battles, but they go across with the promise that God has given them the land (a good land) - and the victory.