

June 4

Scriptures: Read Numbers 26 & 27

Key Verse: “Let the Lord... set a man over the congregation, that [they] may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.” (Numbers 27:26-17)

Overview

The time was coming closer for the entrance into the Promised Land by the new generation; therefore another census was required. This one was more detailed than the first census, since it included the names of all the heads of the families within each tribe. It not only counted the fighting men age twenty and upward, but provided a basis for dividing the land which God was soon to give them. The size of the tribe would indicate how much land they would inherit, but the placing of the tribes was to be decided by casting lots, a common method used in those days whereby they believed God to intervene in determining the outcome (26:54-56).

During the course of the enumeration, we are reminded of the sad incident regarding the sinful rebellion of Korah and the Reubenites, Dathan, and Abiram (26:9-10), a judgment which caused many deaths in the tribe of Reuben (probably the reason their numbers were down in this census), as well as deaths in the other tribes; and we again read of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (26:61). These incidents would serve as a reminder for the new generation not to take the commands of God lightly.

Though they were in their fortieth year since leaving Egypt, the Israelites were now a little less in number (compare 1:46; 25:51) due to the hardship of the wilderness life, but mainly due to the many judgments of God for their wickedness. For those who hear (honor and respect) God, He is merciful, but He is also just and all His punishments were justly deserved. The Lord showed grace and favor to Joshua and Caleb, the only two fighting men of the first census who remained faithful to Him (14:19-30).

With the census and the coming division of the land, five daughters of a man who had died without a son courageously came before Moses, Eleazer, and the elders. They were concerned about their father's name being left out among those who would receive an inheritance, as well as their own rights of inheritance. Moses took the matter up with God, and He quickly gave them a favorable response (27:7). With this, God elevated the position of women and, in fact, wherever the Bible has been honored, the position of women has been lifted up.

The time was coming soon for possession of the Promised Land, but that also meant the approaching death of Moses, since the punishment for his sin at the waters of Meribah was his exclusion from entering the land (27:14; 20:12). This seems harsh, but it serves as a warning to spiritual leaders of the seriousness of their calling and the great responsibilities they have to glorify God in all things and at all times.

Moses' prayer reflects the true heart of this great man of God, one who dearly loved his people. Before he died, Moses wisely asked God to choose his successor (for God's choice would be the best) that they might not be without a shepherd (27:17). His compassionated concern for the people was similar to that of the great coming Prophet, aside his personal desires to see the best

for those to whom he was called to serve (a mark of a true leader; Heb.3:5). God did indeed answer Moses' prayer with His faithful servant Joshua. To be a leader, one must first be a servant (Matt.20:25-28).

Joshua was set in front of the whole congregation to show that he was God's choice and had Moses' support. The laying on of hands symbolized the transferring of authority, honor, and responsibility from Moses to Joshua, so that he would have the same respect and obedience of the people. However, Moses' office of prophet was not transferred since he alone had that special place with God wherein he could go before the Lord and speak directly with Him. To receive guidance from the Lord, Joshua would have to go through Eleazar the high priest, who would in turn look for God's will and guidance in the "Urim" (see Ex.28:30).

Prayer

Lord God, we praise You for Your constant involvement in human affairs. Because You care so passionately, we can trust You to give godly leadership. May we humbly respect Your choices for leadership in Your cause.