

June 7

Scriptures: Read Numbers 32

Key Verse: “But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out.” (Numbers 32:23)

Overview

With the defeat of Midian, the Israelites acquired much additional livestock and land that was fertile and favorable for grazing (31:32-34). Rather than crossing the Jordan, the tribes of Reuben and Gad desired to settle in these areas, but this was not God’s plan. He had given all the tribes their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan and their placement was to be determined by God through the casting of lots.

Moses’ initial reaction to Reuben and Gad was anger. He was afraid that their request would influence the others to remain complacent with what they had already received, rather than going on into Canaan where they would have to face unknown enemies. He related their request with the tragedy at Kadesh many years previously, which resulted in their fathers discouraging the people from entering the Promised Land and the rebellion which led to God’s judgment (Num.14). The tribes reassured Moses that their request was not an act of rebellion but that all their fighting men would wholeheartedly support him in the battle on the other side of the Jordan, though their families and livestock would remain.

With their persistence and vow, Moses consented, although we do not read of his seeking the Lord’s guidance beforehand as he usually did with important decisions. He strongly warned the tribes of Gad and Reuben to be true to their words, for the break them would be a sin and God would surely know (32:23), implying divine wrath would come upon them for lying to him and God. The records show they remained true to their word and sent their soldiers across in battle, along with those of the half tribe of Manasseh (Josh.4:12; 22:1-4), who probably decided to remain with them in Transjordan when they saw the others had permission.

After Moses’ consent, these tribes quickly went to work rebuilding and renaming those Midianite cities, which had been burned. It was not God’s intention that any Israelite settles outside of the Promised Land; however, these tribes settled for second best, shunning God’s gracious gift, and in so doing they missed His blessing. It also showed a disregard for His will, because they put their own will first. History proved that Moses’ consent for them to remain in Transjordan brought many problems, for when man’s worldly choices come before God’s, it hinders. His purpose and leads to trouble. Soon after Israel had settled in Promised Land, conflict and misunderstanding arose between those on the God-given west side of the Jordan and those on the east (Josh.22). The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh were not only separated geographically from the rest of the tribes, but also separated in that they lacked the unity they once had. This afforded them less protection in time of war; they were the first tribes to be taken into captivity (2 Kings 17:1; 1 Chron.5:26). They were far removed from the Tabernacle and Temple worship, so they lacked the proper fellowship, which was detrimental to their spirituality. In the time of Jesus, these descendants of Israel had long since lost all claims to the promises of God through Abraham and were spiritually apostate.

We learn from this chapter that it is better to be in the center of God's will than to make our own choices out of a selfish desire and pay the sad consequences. Blessings follow those that follow the Lord. Our God knows all things, including our motivations. Sin against the Lord never goes unnoticed, for indeed "your sin will find you out". In one way or another, our sins will be exposed (judgment day), but "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John1:9).

Prayer

O Lord, please keep us from making short-sighted and selfish choices which could keep us from doing Your perfect will throughout the rest of our lives.