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LESSON NOTES

NUMBERS & DEUTERONOMY: LEARNING FROM OUR ROOTS

GROWING EV THE LORD GOD YAHWEH

OVERVIEW

Rationale & Background

WHY STUDY NUMBERS (IN THE DESERT) & DEUTERONOMY (THE WORDS)?

The roots of what we call the “Christian” faith are Holy Spirit’s work with what we call the Torah, or the Pentateuch (Greek for “five”). The Scripture from which the Christ quoted, Paul preached, and John referenced are the Hebrew Scriptures. For the record, the Torah was *one* book penned primarily by Moses, although some of Miriam’s words (see Exodus 15) and other scribes (Numbers 12:3) are used. For the next few weeks we’ll be studying our roots, our roots as Hebrews, specifically the descendants of Abraham. Paul made it quite clear that our heritage dictates an understanding of said heritage; to wit,

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, and heirs according to the promise. –Galatians 3:28-29

Consider, for example, communion. What is its history? When was the “Last Supper” first commemorated? Was it in Jerusalem or in the desert of Sinai? What are the differences, functionally, metaphorically, spiritually between celebration of Passover and the Eucharist? You cannot appreciate the deep power of Communion without understanding the beauty and nuance of Passover.

Consider also why the Christ came to earth as Jesus of Nazareth to serve as an *atonement* sacrifice for our shortcomings, our distance from Him, our blasphemous hubris. Romans 3:25 goes by like a speeding train. It is not, and never was, about us. Without understanding the “Law” as recorded in Numbers & Deuteronomy we become the ultimate pretenders to the Throne.

A NOTE OF ENCOURAGEMENT

The success of any Bible study is entirely dependent upon three entities: you, your teacher and Holy Spirit. Therefore, He exhorts you to study—do your homework; encourage your teacher by prayer and active participation; most importantly, continually pray to Father God for Holy Spirit to guide us as we learn what He taught the writers of Scripture thousands of years ago.

NUMBERS

Believers know the correct name for “Numbers” is actually *Bemidbar*; *i.e.*, Hebrew for “in the desert.” Numbers is the anglicized title generated from the enumerated legacy-lists of people found in chapters 1 & 26. Moses wrote Bemidbar to account for the 38-year period of Israelite wandering in the desert after Sinai. Bemidbar begins with:

The LORD spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. [13 months after leaving Egypt]

And Deuteronomy begins with:

These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the desert east of the Jordan—that is, in the Arabah--opposite Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth and Dizahab.

While Holy Spirit inspired Moses to pen Bemidbar, it's clear portions of the book were added by scribes and/or editors from later periods of Israel's history. Why? Consider the passage below (Numbers 12:3). It would be difficult to assert this came from Moses—

(Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.)

For the record, inspired commentary² clearly indicates Moses was inspired to write Bemidbar.

From Mount Sinai to the border of Canaan, Bemidbar recounts all the kvetching and rebellious nonsense we perpetrated, and its consequences. Even though we had been saved from slavery in Egypt, we were neither faithful, nor thankful nor obedient—we did not listen to the voice of the Lord God Yahweh. We procrastinated, and at times defiantly refused, to take the gift of the promised land, Canaan. And so, we were condemned to end our lives in a desert; only Joshua, Caleb, and our children were able to enter Canaan.

The Christ was described by John as making His “tabernacle with us” (John 1:14); Deuteronomy [actually, “These Are the Words” (*‘elleh haddebarim*)] begins with the Christ Lord God Yahweh also “pitching His royal tent” (the tabernacle) with us. Bemidbar describes Yahweh organizing Israel militarily. Their mission—to re-establish the dominance, re-claim the land, re-institute the Lord God Yahweh as God of Canaan, just like it had been before.³ But, we were less than successful in our mission. Bemidbar describes how the Lord Our God chastened us for our rebellion. The Lord Our God was filled with wrath. Is there any act of defiance more anger inducing than being thankful for a gift of identity (Hebrew to Israelite), or from homeless (Hebrew) to home-bound, Israel.

Bemidbar illustrates and reifies the will of the Lord God. Even though we were rebellious, He was still committed to bringing us to the promised land. Bemidbar had important implications for believers before the Christ came to earth, and after (e.g., Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6,11); to wit, God's grace, God's redemption will not be thwarted by our spiritual stupidity.

¹Adapted, corrected and revised by D. Thomas Porter from Compton's Interactive NIV, © 1996.

²Jesus said, “Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’” (Matthew 5:33) And in the Hebrew Scriptures we find... If a man vows a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. (Numbers 30:2; cf. Deuteronomy 23:21)

³Melchizedek king of Salem (aka later as Jerusalem), was also priest of the Lord God Yahweh **before** Abraham ever entered the land of Canaan (see Genesis 14:18; Hebrews 7).

FOLLOW THE LORD GOD'S SHELTER: IT MOVES, YOU MOVE; IT STAYS YOU STAY

Context (9:1-14). The Passover was an important observance of the Lord God's mercy. It celebrated the mediation of His wrath by "passing over" and not killing the firstborn, a sign that the Lord God Yahweh was indeed Deity, Deity alone.

Well, some had a problem: they had become ceremoniously unclean because of contact with a dead body. Coming to Moses and Aaron for help, they wanted to celebrate Passover, but could not. Moses was unsure, so he went to Yahweh and learned that people on a journey and those who've become unclean because of a dead body can indeed celebrate Passover, just as long as they do so as the Scriptures dictate, a month later (verse 10). Furthermore, if someone is ceremoniously clean and is not on a journey—the failure to celebrate Passover is deadly serious. He will be cut off from the people. Furthermore, if an alien (non-Hebrew) living among you wishes to celebrate Passover, he must follow all the regulations. The Lord God has decreed, *You must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born*. [The alien and his household needed to be circumcised, Exodus 12:48].

- Q Who "passed over" us and did not kill our firstborn in Egypt?
- Q Should atheists be allowed to participate in communion? Who are not, and how are they determined to be unacceptable to participate in communion?
- Q Why did were the ceremoniously unclean unclear about whether they could celebrate Passover?

Numbers 9:15-23. *Move or Stay? Listen & Watch*. The Tabernacle, aka the *Tent of Testimony*, was used to celebrate Passover. When the Tabernacle was set up, the cloud representing the Lord God Yahweh covered it; during the evening until morning, the cloud looked like fire. And this is how it continued—cloud by day, fire by night.

We knew when to break camp—the cloud would lift; whenever the cloud settled, we would camp. So at the Lord God Yahweh's command, we set out or made camp. Often the cloud remained a long time, and we would remain in camp a long time. Sometimes a few days, and sometimes only until morning. At Yahweh's command, we encamped and at Yahweh's command, we set out. We listened to the voice of Yahweh, in accordance with how Moses articulated the commands of Yahweh.

- Q When did the Lord God's cloud move for you?
- Q What happened when you failed to notice God's cloud had moved?
- Q What happens to those who do not tabernacle with the Lord Our God? [Passover is not celebrated; in our case then, until entry to the promised land.]

NUMBERS 9:15-23

On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire.

¹⁶That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. ¹⁷Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. ¹⁸At the LORD's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. ¹⁹When the cloud remained over the tabernacle a long time, the Israelites obeyed the LORD's order and did not set out.

²⁰Sometimes the cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days; at the LORD's command they would encamp, and then at his command they would set out.

²¹Sometimes the cloud stayed only from evening till morning, and when it lifted in the morning, they set out. Whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud lifted, they set out. ²²Whether the cloud stayed over the tabernacle for two days or a month or a year, the Israelites would remain in camp and not set out; but when it lifted, they would set out. ²³At the LORD's command they encamped, and at the LORD's command they set out. They obeyed the LORD's order, in accordance with his command through Moses.