

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 08: Numbers 16-36, “*Laws, Wandering & Ceremonies*”

Welcome to week eight of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks. This week, we'll finish up the Bible's fourth book, we'll go from Numbers 16, through 36, looking at some more laws and more ceremonies, and we'll see what happens as they begin their 14 years of wandering in the wilderness. Remember, as we saw last week, they lacked the faith to take the promised land. And because of that, God told them, everybody but Joshua and Caleb were the only two spies who had faith that they could do it, everyone else is going to die in the desert over the next 40 years.

So they know they're going to wander in the desert for 40 years. But in the meantime, there's stuff to do. This is again, another principle that we live by in our lives have faith with God, even when God gives us these very long waiting times, sometimes like this, it's out of punishment most of the time is simply because God's on a different time schedule than we are. Even as we wait, there's stuff to do. And even in the desert, God does great things. So let's take a look at this passage.

Let's begin in Numbers chapter 16, through 19, where we've got another rebellion. This time, there's a Levite named Cora. Remember, the Levites are the priestly clan. They're the ones that are supposed to take care of the tabernacle, and the sacrifices and the altar and all of that, he leads a rebellion, basically saying, We're all special so why are Moses and Aaron leading us. He ends up with some pride. God says, You are my chosen people. You're a special, you the Levites, you're special among God's special people because you're taking care of the tabernacle. But Moses and Aaron, they're special among the special, among the special, because they are going to lead the entire nation.

Every nation needs a leader, every church needs some kind of a leadership under God's authority. And in this situation, God chose Moses and Aaron but Cora decided he was just as good at doing it as anybody else and so he rebelled against them. I want you to notice the response of Moses and Aaron here. They respond to this accusation. First of all, by 16:22, it says, "...by falling on their face before God." They didn't yell at Cora, they went to God. Now they did get angry, and God did deal with it. But their first place to go wasn't to Cora, the first place to go was to God.

Now, God answers their prayer in spectacular and horrifying fashion. And he reestablishes his appointed leadership. So the bottom line lesson for that is, isn't when something goes wrong call for God's calamity to befall your enemies as much as it is, if God has called you leave your defense in God's hand, he will take care of it.

All right, we'll then move along to Numbers chapter 20, where after this one rebellion is put down, then Moses of all people is the one to actually disobey. Number 20 is a pivotal moment in Moses' life so shortly after they've been turned away from the promised land because of their lack of faith. And after all, that he's done for God and all that he's done for the people, this one, quote unquote, small slip up, and he's doomed to miss out on the promised land. Spoiler alert, that's what you'll read about, as you read through Chapter 20, you may think that the punishment is too severe for his crime. And I won't even tell you what the crime is, you can read it when you get there. But it's, again, another example of how God places a higher responsibility on his leaders, and not a greater sense of privilege upon his leaders.

This is something that I'm going to come back to all the way through this because as a church leader, myself, I've got to constantly resist the temptation that even others put upon me, let alone what I put upon myself to be treated special. Because I've got a microphone in my hand and I stand on stage and I teach a lot of people, that doesn't give us a greater sense of privilege, it gives us a greater sense of responsibility. The Bible is clear about that over and over and over again.

We then go to chapters 21 through 25 of Numbers, where we have a bronze snake, a talking donkey and a well placed spear. This is three more really weird stories. So when you read about the bronze snake, remember it for later put a mental note in there, because later on when we get to the New Testament, it becomes a clearer picture of Jesus on the cross Jesus Himself will mention it. So remember the bronze snake for later.

Then, really? A talking donkey? This is one of those like, with you know, Noah and the ark and later on with the with Jonah swallowed by the big fish. This is one of those places where people just roll their eyes and go, Oh, come on just a bunch of fairytales. So I want you to notice a couple things here. First of all, if we believe in the first few words of the Bible in the beginning God, then God making a donkey talk is not a big deal. He can do that. But I also want you to notice how infrequent these kinds of stories are. I just mentioned the other two and there may be one or two others that we can think of off the top of our head that are that are kind of like a weird kind of fairy tale ish. But the rest of the Bible is not like that. It's not like it's one weird fantasy story after another, they stick out because they're so infrequent. So there's no problem that God can do it. But they're not a lot of them. And this happens to be one of them.

So pay attention as it happens, it's an entertaining story. As well as don't forget the message that's spoken of don't get so distracted by the fact that the donkey is talking that you don't notice the message that's going on there, the message is important. And then what I'm calling a well placed spear, that gives us an idea of how severely God treats sexual immorality, especially when we mix it with with worship other gods, which is a very common thing among the pagans.

All right, then we go to Numbers 26, through 34. And we have another census, and another aligning of the property borders. Don't let the numbers slow you down. In the middle of this, we will have a couple amazing episodes that will walk you through them at the beginning of

chapter 27, we have this wonderful little story. In a society, where only men counted, like, to the people, not to God. Women and men all count equally to God. But they had a society as most societies, unfortunately, where women don't count nearly as much as men. And in this society, there's a man who has a low forehead who only has daughters, which means he'll lose his family's inheritance because it passed from father to son. And he goes, and he asks for special permission, can my daughters inherit the land instead of my sons, because I don't have sons. And God says, Yes, and he takes care of this family. And he doesn't treat women less than he treats men. And really, especially in their culture, it's a really important point to note.

So note that at the beginning of chapter 27, and then in chapter 31, you'll notice that the Midianites are punished for trying to seduce the Hebrews away from God. And their punishment also seems harsh to us. But I want you to note, the punishment that God gives them is not a way of making sure that the Hebrews have power, but that the Hebrews keep pure purity and holiness, always more important in God's people than power. Plus, when you take a look at the property borders, and where they traveled, it can be boring to read, I understand that, but pay attention because it is in such detail, that it can literally be plotted on a map. And it has been, and in fact, if you're reading out of a study Bible this week, or if you're reading online, where you're in an app that has notes, take a look for the maps. And you can see a map that shows you the exact property borders, because it's delineated so clearly, in these passages. In fact, I will be putting a link in the show notes from the world Atlas, that shows you a side by side of where the property borders were for the tribes back then, compared to what the land looks like today. So worldatlas.com, you'll see that link in the show notes, take a look at that. It's all written there. But it's also visually described today. And we'll show that for you. This is real history that happens in these chapters.

And then the passage for this week will conclude in Numbers 35 and 36, where special towns are designated for Levites. Remember, the Levites didn't get land, they didn't get a large chunk of land, they were told that they're supposed to take care of the tabernacle, but they had to have places to live. So there are some towns that are designated for the Levites to live in. There are cities of refuge that are designated, which is really important.

And again, one of these things where God did things differently than the nation's around them. They lived in a world of revenge, if you had a family member killed, even if it was by mistake, you took revenge on the person who killed them. But God said no, and you're not going to punish the person who did this by mistake. And they set up cities of refuge where people could escape from the revenge culture is really important safety valve that God put among these people.

And then you see the payoff, whereas Zelophehad's daughters are assigned land, as we talked about earlier. These women, because this man did not have any male sons, and God took care of them anyway. And that's really how Numbers concludes in a really beautiful way. So as you're going through the reading this week, here's what to look for. Look for the nuggets in the middle of the challenging slow parts. I've given you some of them. There's a lot of them there. And notice how all of the passages this week, show God's provision, how they point out

God's holiness, and how they show our responsibility and how we respond to God's holiness and His provision.

All right, I know you're going to enjoy this week. It's a challenge that most people don't even get through. But I've given you nuggets to look for that you will be able to explore it and get a great deal out of it. And I'm telling you enjoy it as well. Maybe some of you for the first time. I hope so. I hope to see you next week.

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