

GOD'S PEOPLE IN THE WILDERNESS

A Sweeping Review

Followed by

Preparations to Enter the Land: Theological and Administrative Concerns (Numbers 33-35)

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REVIEW

AT MOUNT SINAI [1:1-9:14]

- Census, Marching Order, Tasks of the Levites
- Specific instructions: purity in the camp (wife suspected of unfaithfulness), Nazirite vow
- Importance of tribal offerings
- Second Passover

LEAVING MOUNT SINAI: OPPOSITION, REBELLION AND CONSEQUENCES [9:15-20:13]

- Preparations to leave
- Complaints regarding manna: elders appointed; quail to excess
- Miriam and Aaron opposed Moses: leprosy for Miriam
- Report of spies and crisis of faith: consigned to forty years [assurance that they would enter the land]
- Rebellion of Korah, Reubenites and 250 leaders: swallowed by the earth and consumed by fire, followed by additional guidelines for priests and Levites
- Water of cleansing to deal with excess of death
- Water from the rock: Moses dishonored God's holiness

AFTER FORTY YEARS [20:14-22:4]

- Negotiating with Edom; the bronze serpent
- Defeat of Amorites and king of Bashan
- Intimidation of Moab and Midianites

ON THE PLAINS OF MOAB [22:4-32:42]

- Balaam summoned by Balak to curse Israel; multiple oracles of blessing instead
- Travesty at Baal Peor reduced their numbers
- Census for military and inheritance purposes; inheritance rights of daughters [see also ch 36]
- Sabbath and festival offerings; vows
- War against and plunder from Midianites
- Two and one-half tribes settled in Transjordan

FINAL PREPARATIONS TO ENTER THE LAND [33:1-36:13]

RECORD-KEEPING – Why include an itinerary? What value is it for future generations?

- Most locations not identifiable (camping sites) but several observations:
 - One year in Desert of Sinai (vs 15)
 - Special mention of Kadesh/Mt Hor/border of Edom (vss 36-39 – end of the 40 years)
 - Border of Moab (vs 44) and plains of Moab (vss 48-50)
- List suggests continuity; written memorial to God's faithfulness in the midst of the Israelites' unfaithfulness
- Ascribed to Moses at the command of the Lord (40 names; see Deuteronomy 2-3; 10:6-7)
- Parallels in Egyptian city lists (example: Thutmose III)

REPEATED INTRODUCTORY REFRAIN: “THE LORD SPOKE TO MOSES [IN THE PLAINS OF MOAB BY THE JORDAN AT JERICHO]”

WARNING OF THE THREAT OF CANAANITE IDOLATRY (33:50-56; DEUT 7:1-16)

- Drive out inhabitants; destroy all images and high places
- They had “been there” already at Baal Peor
- It is God’s land; warning from the Lord (vs 56)

GOD’S GIFT OF THE LAND

- Boundaries of the “land of Canaan”
 - Southern boundary line from border of Edom through Wilderness of Zin, include Kadesh (they had been living on the edge of the land much of their time of wandering) to Wadi El-Arish
 - Western at the sea – where they rarely ventured
 - North – to Lebo-Hamath [and additional, unidentified names]
 - East – across slopes of what we call Golan; Jordan Valley (the 2 ½ tribes “outside”)
- New tribal leaders appointed to assist with land apportionment

DESIGNATED CITIES

- Towns for Levites (35:1-8; see also Lev 10:11; Deut 33:10) – 48 towns altogether, with pasturelands around them; proportional to tribal populations, Levites served as “holy leaven,” teaching Torah
- Cities of refuge (35:6-33; see also Exod 21:12-14; Deut 4:41-43; 19:1-13) – a concept unique to Israel
 - Purpose: provide protection for someone who unintentionally killed another
 - Parties:
 - Guilty person (called “murderer who struck unintentionally”) who was protected in the city of refuge until he stood trial before the assembly
 - Avenger/“redeemer” of the blood/bloodshed (*go’el haddam*) – see also Deut 19:6, 12; this individual was the protector of family rights, redeeming loss sustained by family, either by monetary payment or life
 - High priest – death symbolically atoning for the polluted land
 - Two witnesses – necessary
 - Process:
 - Flight to city for protection until trial and after, if the adjudication was in his favor
 - Assembly determined intentionality (assessing nature of implements that caused death, and potential evidence of antipathy) – evidence of witnesses
 - Equitable justice: no monetary substitute, which would give advantage to wealthy person either for the death penalty or confinement
 - Death of high priest was an atoning sacrifice for people/land (parallel with death of Jesus as high priest - Hebrews).
 - Principles and Lessons:
 - Bloodshed was an offense against life and against God’s dwelling place
 - The only way to atone for land was by the blood of the murderer; measure-for-measure (vss 33-34)