

Numbers 32

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Date: 15 August 2021

[0 : 00] together. Take your word out with me. Let's go into the Bible. It's in Numbers chapter 32. Numbers 32 is where we're at this evening as we just continue to make our way through Scripture.

And some of this, when we get into the book of Numbers, especially some of these historical elements, can be a little trying for us and a little cumbersome, but still I think there are great truths in there. We're nearing the end of the book of Numbers. We're nearing the end of Moses' life. Really things are wrapping up. He is being used of the Lord to transition the nation, if you will. If you remember in Numbers 31, there was the defeat of the Midianites.

One of the last things God called Moses to do was to render his justice and his judgment upon the Midianites because of the sin of Beth Peor, that is the sin, or Bel Peor, the sin with Baal at Peor, which slew 24,000. Because of that sin at Peor, 24,000 Israelite men fell, and God used Moses to be his instrument or his hand of judgment upon the Midianite nation, not necessarily just for that sin, but for their sins, the sins which they had continually committed up to that point.

Moses has already kind of placed the mantle, if you will, on Joshua. He is in the process of transitioning leadership to Joshua. He is going to retell their traveling mercies, as we'll see at the end of the book of Numbers. He is going to give the second telling of the law in the book of Deuteronomy, and then he's going to ascend Mount Pisgah and look from Mount Pisgah's lofty heights, see the promised land, and allow the Lord his God to bury him where no man knows. He will be taken to that place that only the Lord knows. But here we are in Numbers 32, and again, Moses is confronted with something new. It seems as if after 120 years, maybe he wouldn't be confronted with something new.

But he's confronted again with something new, and he's seeking the wisdom. As we will see, he has to seek some wisdom of the Lord, but he also is leaning upon past experiences. But we see here in Numbers 32, two tribes, and we end up being also the half-tribe of Manasseh, the two and a half tribes desire to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan. This would be the regions of Sihon and Og, the two kings which they had already defeated. In the New Testament time, it would be referred to as the Transjordan, that on the other side of the Jordan, or referred to as the regions of Decapolis, the ten cities. But it is that their desire to settle there. So we will see, Numbers 32 will read it in its entirety, but I want you to kind of look at it with this theme, a temptation to compromise. A temptation to compromise. God's clear call from the very beginning.

[3 : 00] If you remember when we went through the book of Exodus, there's this repeated theme. God brought them out of Egypt to bring them in to the promised land. God led them out to bring them in.

And it's that great theme that God doesn't just deliver us to leave us, God delivers us to bring us somewhere, right? He delivered them from the captivity of Egypt for the purpose of bringing them into the promised land. We make that application in salvation. God redeemed us to bring us into his presence, right? And just to redeem us so we would be forgiven of our sins. Salvation is not so much about being forgiven of sins and having our sins pardoned. Salvation is about experiencing the wonder of God's redemption and forgiveness and mercy in order that we may spend eternity in his presence.

Because, friend, listen to me. Forgiveness without the presence of God is still hell. Because the thing that makes heaven glory is his presence.

Just because we don't feel bad about our sins, if we're still not in his presence, it's still not good, right? He redeems us to bring us in.

He sets us free to take us to himself. That's the glory of salvation. That's the glory of redemption. So many people, now I say that, and we have to pause there, okay?

[4 : 35] Because I think that's what sets this whole chapter up. And I know I'm kind of recapping things that we've heard, but we have to pause there. Because there are so many people who just want to be set free. So many people who want to run to Christ so that they can flee the guilt, and

they can feel the forgiveness, and they just want to know.

And really, the question is this. And I know it seems a little harsh, especially on a Sunday night, but just kind of stay with me, okay? The cough drops are working good, so we'll be a little long-winded. Just stay with me a little bit. But if forgiveness, if you could rejoice in forgiveness, even if you couldn't be in God's presence for eternity, then that's not true salvation.

There are so many people who want to come to Christ and say, I just want to be forgiven, I want to be forgiven. They just don't want to feel bad about the things they've done. Listen, I want to be forgiven so that I could spend eternity in his presence.

That's biblical salvation. It is restoring fellowship between holy God and sinful man. God's purpose in the book of Exodus, he brought them out so that he could bring them in.

[5 : 48] He's on the verge of bringing them in. And two tribes say, hey, what about this? The temptation to compromise.

The temptation to compromise. That is, to just go far enough. And we see it in Numbers 32. Now, they fought their last battle on that side of the Jordan River. The Midianites have been defeated. God has raised them in victorious. The plunder has been great.

God has shown his mercies and strength. They're just literally standing in a holding pattern until they cross over. Now the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad had an exceedingly large number of livestock.

So when they saw the land of Jazir and the land of Gilead, that it was indeed a place suitable for livestock. The sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben came and spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, Atroth, Dibon, Jazir, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elelah, Shebam, Nebo, and beyond.

[6 : 58] The land which the Lord conquered before the congregation of Israel is a land for livestock. And your servants have livestock. They said, if we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession.

Do not take us across the Jordan. But Moses said to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben, Shall your brothers go to war while you yourselves sit here? Now why are you discouraging the sons of Israel from crossing over into the land which the Lord has given them?

This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to see the land. For when they went up to the valley of Eshcol, they saw the land, and they discouraged the sons of Israel so that they did not go into the land which the Lord had given them.

So the Lord's anger burned in that day, and he swore, saying, None of the men who came up from Egypt from twenty years old and upward shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

For they did not follow me fully, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Kenzite, and Joshua the son of Nun. For they have followed the Lord fully. So the Lord's anger burned against Israel. And he made them wander into wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil on the side of the Lord was destroyed.

[8 : 06] Now behold, you have risen up in your father's place a brood of sinful men, to add still more to the burning anger of the Lord against Israel. For if you turn away from following him, he will once again, or he will once more, abandon them into wilderness, and you will destroy all these people.

Then they came near to him and said, We will build here sheepfolds for our livestock and cities for our little ones. But we ourselves will be armed, ready to go before the sons of Israel, until we have brought them to their place.

While our little ones live in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land, we will not return to our homes until every one of the sons of Israel has possessed his inheritance. For we will not have an inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this side of the Jordan toward the east.

So Moses said to them, If you will do this, if you will arm yourselves before the Lord for the war, and all of you armed men cross over the Jordan before the Lord until he has driven his enemies out from before him, and the land is subdued before the Lord, then afterward you shall return and be free of obligation toward the Lord and toward Israel, and this land shall be yours for possession before the Lord.

But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out. Build yourselves cities for your little ones, and sheepfolds for your sheep, and do what you have promised.

[9 : 27] The sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying, Your servants will do just as my Lord commands. Our little ones, our wives, our livestock, and all our cattle shall remain there in the cities of Gilead, while your servants, everyone who is armed for war, will cross over in the presence of the Lord to battle, just as my Lord says.

So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, and to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' households, and of the tribes of the sons of Israel. Moses said to them, If the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben, everyone who is armed for battle, will cross with you over the Jordan, and the presence of the Lord, and the land is subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead for an impossession.

But if they will not cross over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan. The sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben answered, saying, As the Lord has said to your servants, so we will do.

We ourselves will cross over armed in the presence of the Lord in the land of Canaan, and the possession of our inheritance shall remain with us across the Jordan. So Moses gave to them, to the sons of Gad, the sons of Reuben, and the half-tribe of Joseph's son Manasseh, the kingdom of Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og, the king of Bashan, the land with its cities, with their territories, the cities of the surrounding land.

The sons of Gad built Debon, and Ataroth, and Aror, and Arothashafan, and Jazir, and Jachbeha, and Beth Nimrah, and Beth Haran, as fortified cities and sheepfolds for sheep.

[10 : 52] The sons of Reuben built Heshbon, and Elela, and Kirathaim, and Nabal, and Belmion, their names being changed, and Simma, and they gave other names to the cities which they built.

The sons of Meshir, the sons of Manasseh, went to Gilead and took it and dispossessed the Amorites who were in it. So Moses gave Gilead to Meshir, and the son of Manasseh, and he lived in it. Jair, the son of Manasseh, went and took its towns and called them Havoth Jair.

Nabal went and took Kenath and its villages and called it Nabal after his own name. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this night. We thank you for this opportunity.

Lord, we pray as we have read your word, now that we will come to a greater understanding of it, not just in its historical setting, but Lord, that we will come to a greater understanding of its application to our daily lives. Lord, just draw us closer to you through it, and Lord, may you be glorified and honored.

We ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. We are looking at Numbers chapter 32. In particular, we are looking at the request of the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad, and later to be joined by the half-tribe of Manasseh, to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan River, to settle in the land in which they conquered previously in their northern conquest from where they are encamped, to take the land which was before them and to make it their home.

[12 : 14] And I introduced this, and I said, this is a temptation to compromise. Some see here types of those who seem to draw close to Christ. Some see even in the wilderness wanderings.

There are those who seem to set out for Christ, but are never fully followers of Him, and therefore die in the wilderness. There are some who want to get close enough to Him, they want to receive the blessing of an inheritance, but they don't want to go all the way into the promised land.

Some see even in the later telling of the men going in, there are some who will go in to the things of Christ, but come back to live in the ways of the world. But what we're looking at, I believe, is a temptation that all men face to compromise.

And we see this because we understand it in its setting. God has called them out to this moment. He led them out of captivity. He has set them free and made them a nation.

And the promise was that they would enter into this promised land. And God had brought them to that place. But yet, on the verge of entering in to take possession of the land that God had promised, all of a sudden there is this question, what if some of us stay behind?

[13 : 19] Where we're at seems to be fitting and we will stay here. So this temptation to compromise, that is to not fully follow, comes really in two matters. And then we have one concluding comment of how to deal with it.

The first one is the perceived benefit. Compromise is always a result of a perceived benefit. We are introduced here to the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad.

And we are told that they had an exceedingly large number of livestock. So we see that they are enriched, right? But we are also introduced into their life situation. Or literally, their blessings. Now, this should not take us by surprise because if we remember, and we go back to the Genesis account, we know that a large number of livestock also divided some other people at one time before.

This is why they could not touch the descendants of Moab because they were descendants of Lot because of a large number of livestock. Which just kind of gives us mere warning, and we don't want to make this some kind of biblical principle, but how easy it is to be swayed by the number of possessions which we hold in this land or in the wealth in which we perceive to hold in this land.

[14 : 32] Because livestock was a representation of enrichment. They didn't walk around with fat wallets, they walked around with big flocks, right? They didn't necessarily, to have a large number of livestock was to be rich.

It was to be wealthy. Your wealth was determined upon your possessions. And here we are told that these were highly blessed individuals. But we see the danger because their life situation showed them as being people who had a large number of livestock and this world always has a way of offering you something which seems to fit you perfectly.

Because it says, when they saw that the land around them was perfectly suited for what they possessed. We need to understand this.

Now I think they rightfully said this is the land which the Lord has conquered. They did not say this is the land which we have conquered. They said this is the land which the Lord has conquered.

Now I'm not necessarily proclaiming here, and we'll try to put it all together, that they were sinful in this action. But, because we understand God's ruling hand, God knew that they would settle there.

[15 : 45] God had led them to lead out Sihon, or to defeat Sihon and Og. God, in his omnipotent control, understood what was going to happen.

But we also see this reality, that they were basing their request based on what they perceived. We have a lot of livestock.

This is some good land. Since we have found something that meets our needs, why go any further? Why push on? Why fight any more battles?

We can be content here. We can be comfortable here. Yet, the cry for 40 years had been, God has set us free to bring us in.

One thing that I have found is Satan always has a way of presenting something immediately to meet a perceived need that keeps us from pushing on further. And this world quite often has a way of making things look good.

[16 : 46] One thing that causes me to stand in awe, now, maybe you don't know, I don't know a whole lot about the promised land. I've never been there myself.

I'd love to go there someday. Maybe I will. But the most fertile strip of land in all the world is on the other side of the Jordan from where they're at. That fertile crescent, that Gaza strip that everybody's fighting over, most fertile piece of land in all of the world.

God enriched his people with the perfect land. What I'm trying to say is they saw something that met their need instantaneously without ever knowing what God had on the other side of the Jordan River.

And when we make decisions based on perception, listen, I can be comfortable here. I can be content here. I'm not saying we're not content, but it's saying that even though God has called me to go further, it seems as if every one of my needs could be met here.

It seems as if I'm perfectly fine here. So they looked around them and they said, this land is perfect for us. Why fight? Why move on any further? Why put our children in danger?

[17 : 55] Why ask our wives to go on this journey? We can stay here. They used what they had as an excuse to stop. And they're making it based on a perceived benefit.

It would be better for them to stay where they were at. When we settle for where it looks good, we often run the risk of not taking a hold of his best.

When we settle for that which looks good on outward appearance, again, go back to Lot. How did Lot end up in Sodom and Gomorrah? He looked and saw that it was green and suitable for flocks.

And it appealed to the eyes. And we read here that they saw the place where they were already at. Hey, if we look hard enough, where we're already at seems good enough, right? But we know that God has called us to more. So we see this perceived benefit. Secondly, we see this temptation to compromise based upon how we perceive things is also the priorities which lead us.

[18 : 59] The priorities which lead us. Because their main priority was we have a lot of livestock. We have our livestock. We have our families.

This seems to be perfect. The sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad prioritize themselves and their possessions over everything else. And they looked at what they had been given.

They looked at what they had been entrusted at. And the greatest thing in their mind was reaching something that would suit them. Moses becomes angry. Moses gets a little upset and rightfully so. He actually calls them a brood of sinners. Which is the first time that that occurs in the Old Testament. And as far as I know, it is the only occurrence of that. Now, we know that John the Baptist calls the Pharisees a brood of vipers, right?

But here, Moses calls the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad a brood of sinners. He says, you're a brood of sinners. He's mad and he's angry and he's rightfully so. And the reason is, is because their priority was self-preservation, but Moses' priority was corporate identification.

[20 : 07] Staying together as the people of God. Moving forward with one heart. It would be what Paul would let us say, intent on one purpose. Pressing forward.

Focused on one thing. Paul's encouragement to the church would always be to be intent and to be focused and to be united over one thing. If we put this in church life, Paul was right when he would say that the individual, the church member who prioritizes himself over the corporate body is always going to cause damage to the body.

He's always calling the church to be united, not to be divided. He's always calling the church to be united and focused and to be intent on one thing, to be moving forward as a body.

This is why we get to Romans chapter 12 passage. This whole Romans 12 Christianity where you're thinking of others more than you're thinking of yourselves and you're living with a prioritizing others over yourself because we see this passage here even as it shows us here.

Moses says there's great danger when any individual group or any individual family begins to see themselves as more important than the corporate body. He says you're putting the body in danger and he says you're doing the same things which your fathers have done because he goes back to those 12 spies and he reminds us that 10 of those spies prioritized self-preservation over faithful obedience.

[21 : 36] He says 10 of those spies saw the land that the Lord was giving them. They understood that God had promised them. They saw the benefits yet they were more concerned about keeping themselves and their families safe except for Joshua and Caleb.

Joshua and Caleb says they fully obeyed the Lord. Now did Joshua and Caleb see the danger? Yes. They saw the land. They saw the giants. They saw the fortified cities.

They saw the dangers but the priority for Joshua and Caleb was obedience not self-preservation. There's a big difference because those who prioritize self-preservation or even self-benefit put the corporate body in danger.

Moses is upset and he reminds us here this great passage. He says for if you turn away from following him he that is God will once more abandon them into wilderness and you will destroy all these people.

Look at what Moses says. Moses says your sin your compromise runs the risk of destroying everyone.

[22 : 53] It runs the risk of bringing danger upon the entire body because he says what you do as an individual matters. We see this over and over again.

I remember wrestling with this in my mind when I was a very young believer. Do my sins affect Do my sins affect others or is it just me? Now I was talking about when I was a brand new believer in Christ.

All we have to do is open up the Bibles and read of the sin of Achan, right? Achan saw the items, he took the items, he hid the items in his own tent, he saw that it was good when the walls of Jericho fell down and they weren't supposed to take any and then the very next time they go out to battle, thousands of people die.

Why? Because of Achan's sin. Achan's sin led to the death of thousands of others because when we begin to prioritize self over the corporate body, we are leading the body into great danger and what Moses is saying here is the temptation to compromise that is to stop short of what God has called us to do is always one of self-prioritization, it is always one of self-preservation, of no, I think right now this is what's best for me.

That is really never the question. The question is not what is best for me, the question is what is best for the people of God? What has God called his people to? And God had called his people to enter into the promised land.

[24 : 26] Now think about this, if two out of the twelve tribes, because the half tribe of Manasseh is not involved in it yet, if two out of the twelve tribes removed all their soldiers from the front lines, see the danger that they're putting upon everyone else?

But the greatest priority for them was this land looks good, we've got livestock, we'll stay here. So we see here this temptation of compromise, was based upon a perceived benefit, it was based upon the priorities which led them, and then we get to this third thing which really wraps it all up in the bulk of the passage given, and is the promises made.

It is the promises that are made, because it says after hearing this, maybe after being shook to the core because Moses called them a brood of sinners, they come in and make an agreement, and their agreement is this, we will build sheepfolds, we will build fortified cities, and we will leave our wives and children here, we will leave our livestock here, and we will go with you into battle, and they make this promise, and Moses says okay that seems right to me if you do that, if you do build your sheepfolds, and you fortify your cities, and you leave your wives and children home, and they make the promise, they say we will go into the promised land, we will cross over the Jordan river, we will fight, and we will not come back until every tribe has its inheritance, and they did that, if you read it historically, what's amazing, you open up the book of Joshua, and you see when the nation is crossing, do you know the first people to go ahead, the sons of Reuben, and the sons of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh led the entire nation across, do you want to know why I think they went, because they had to go win the battle, so they could get back home, right, if I left my wife and children at home,

I'd want to hurry up and get home too, so I would, let's not count them overly righteous, let's just count them overly zealous, they wanted to get back home, and they knew the only way they were going to get back home is they had to go win the battle, we have to go fight, everybody else is like, ah, well we get there, we'll set up home, they're like, hey, home is already set up, I've got somewhere to go back to, so we got to fight our battles now, so they're ahead of the nation, they go, they keep their promises, and Moses holds it to them, Moses says, listen, if you do not do what you're promising to do, let it be known that your sins will find you out, God will know, God will understand, and then he goes to Eleazar, and he goes to Joshua, and says, this is the agreement we've made, if they go and they fight, then their inheritance shall be on this side, if they don't go and they don't fight, then their inheritance shall be in Canaan, and they set up an agreement, and it all seems to be okay, but if we want to do like Paul Harvey, and we want to look at the rest of the story, everybody goes home, and everybody is going back to their land, and it says the sons of Reuben, the sons of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh go back, and they do something very detrimental, and they go back and they build an altar on the eastern side of the Jordan

River, and it almost causes civil war, because the other tribes hear of it, and they get upset, and all the people come together, and they're going to go annihilate the sons of Reuben, the sons of Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, and they're going to go destroy them for idolatry, because God said the only altar that could be set up was wherever he revealed his name, and that first place would be Shiloh, and they go in order to battle against them, and they go in order to wage war, and they go and say, listen, we didn't build that altar to actually put a sacrifice on it, we didn't do that, we just did it as a memorial between us and you.

[27 : 49] My friend, if you read throughout the Old Testament, you'll notice that it's never really what it should have been. The worship of the sons of Reuben, the sons of Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh falter, probably because of their distance away from the presence of God.

And, what's that theme? That theme we find introduced for us, the law of first mentioning, that we find all the way back in the book of Genesis. When man sinned, God put them out of the garden, and he put them what?

Towards the east. Remember that? And I gave you this theme, the scripture, that any time you go towards the east, you are moving further from God's presence.

This is why we see the wise men, the Magi, they come from the east into the presence of Jesus. They come from the east, which means they're moving closer to the presence of God. So there seems to be this theme running scripture, that any time man goes towards the east, he is moving away, further away from the presence of God.

These two and a half tribes, guess where they settle at? Towards the east. towards the east, further from the revealed manifest presence of God.

[29 : 00] By the time Christ is born, in the days of Jesus Christ, when he crosses the Sea of Galilee, he goes into what would be the Transjordan area, Galilee, and it is then referred to as the Decapolis, the ten cities.

It is no longer Judean, it is no longer Jewish territory, it's a Roman colony, it has already been taken captive, there's no presence of any of those things.

It was one of the first to fall, because it was one of the most vulnerable, because the reality is, that when we give in to that temptation to compromise, and not to go all in, complete obedience to what God has called us to do, though it may look good, it does not have lasting benefits, because God has always called us out to bring us in, and the call and the command of the believer is to go all in with the Lord his God, to go all the way, not to stop just because something looks pleasing, not to stop because it looks like it could address the need of the moment, not to stop because it looks like it's suitable for where we're at at the present time, but to always know that what God is calling us to is something better, that what God is calling us to is something eternal, and we don't want to be those who are tempted by compromise and say, well, we'll go make the promise and we'll fight the battle, they did that, they kept up their end of the bargain, but they're also the first group to fall off, because they had moved themselves by compromising further from the presence of God, and it was not easy for them to worship in his presence, let's pray,

Lord, may we be people of steadfast devotion, may we be people as Joshua and Caleb are defined as fully committed to obeying and following you, Lord, may we not be those who stop short, and may our testimony be one of faithful obedience to all you've called us to, and we ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

so, so, so, so, so, so, so, so, Thank you.