

12. The Second Generation: Admonitions (4Q 2009—People on the Move: The Book of Numbers)

Biblical material: Numbers 26–32, Romans 5.

Quotes

- The secret of all victory lies in the organization of the non-obvious. *Marcus Aurelius*
- Organization doesn't really accomplish anything. Plans don't accomplish anything, either. Theories of management don't much matter. Endeavors succeed or fail because of the people involved. Only by attracting the best people will you accomplish great deeds. *Colin Powell*
- Ethics must begin at the top of an organization. It is a leadership issue and the chief executive must set the example. *Edward Hennessy*
- The greatness of every mighty organization embodying an idea in this world lies in the religious fanaticism and intolerance with which, fanatically convinced of its own right, it intolerantly imposes its will against all others. *Adolf Hitler*
- The trouble with organizing a thing is that pretty soon folks get to paying more attention to the organization than to what they're organized for. *Laura Ingalls Wilder*

Questions

What are the positive and negative aspects of organization? Why did our church resist organization for so long? How do we see God revealed in these passages? What of the command to kill all but the virgin girls? Why was this necessary, and what of God's reputation? How can we best represent God when we discuss such stories?

Bible discussion

In Numbers 26-32 we have many diverse issues, mainly related to *organization*. One that shouldn't be missed is the case of the daughters of Zelophehad, and the agreement by the Lord that they should have property too—surely unusual by the customs of the time. However there's a footnote in Numbers 36—they were only allowed to marry within their own tribe, otherwise their landholdings would end up belonging to another tribe, thus reducing the original land grant. Joshua is chosen to lead Israel. There are detailed instructions about offerings, and laws about making vows. The war of revenge against Midian is recorded, along with the destruction of the people (everyone except the virgin girls—why?) Arrangements are made for the land east of the Jordan.

Comment

For us today the most alarming aspect in these verses is the command to kill every Midianite except for the virgin girls. Such a command sounds strange coming from the lips of the God of love, and has caused many to doubt his character. In fact such apparently vindictive and violent commands are often cited by those who reject God. For example:

- Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and tortuous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we call it the word of a demon than the word of God. *Thomas Paine*
- Properly read, the Bible is the most potent force for atheism ever conceived. *Isaac Asimov*
- I know of no book which has been a source of brutality and sadistic conduct, both public and private, that can compare with the Bible. *James Paget*
- If a man really believes that God once upheld slavery; that he commanded soldiers to kill women and babes; that he believed in polygamy; that he persecuted for opinion's sake; that he will punish forever, and that he hates an unbeliever, the effect in my judgment will be bad. It always has been bad. *Robert Ingersoll*
- If one were to take the Bible seriously one would go mad. But to take the Bible seriously, one must be already mad. *Aleister Crowley*

Even Helen Keller wrote: "There is much in the Bible against which every instinct of my being rebels, so much that I regret the necessity which has compelled me to read it through from beginning to end. I do not think that the knowledge which I have gained of its history and sources compensates me for the unpleasant details it has forced upon my attention."

Ellen White Comments

God had sent judgments upon Israel for yielding to the enticements of the Midianites; but the tempters were not to escape the wrath of divine justice... the Midianites who seduced them into sin were speedily made to feel God's judgments, as being the more dangerous enemies. "Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites" (Numbers 31:2), was the command of God to Moses; "afterward shalt thou be gathered unto thy people." This mandate was immediately obeyed. One thousand men were chosen from each of the tribes and sent out under the leadership of Phinehas. "And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses. . . . And they slew the kings of Midian, beside the rest of them that were slain; . . . five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they slew with the sword." Verses 7, 8. The women also, who had been made captives by the attacking army, were put to death at the command of Moses, as the most guilty and most dangerous of the foes of Israel. {PP 456}

The Lord is regarded as cruel by many in requiring His people to make war with other nations. They say that it is contrary to His benevolent character. But He who made the world, and formed man to dwell upon the earth, has unlimited control over all the works of His hands, and it is His right to do as He pleases, and what He pleases with the work of His hands. Man has no right to say to his Maker, Why doest Thou thus? There is no injustice in His character. He is the Ruler of the world, and a large portion of His subjects have rebelled against His authority, and have trampled upon His law. . . . He has used His people as instruments of His wrath, to punish wicked nations, who have vexed them, and seduced them into idolatry. {1BC 1117}