

Norwood's Notes: Brief Summaries of Bible Stories

These "notes" are intended to provide a general overview of the basic stories of the Bible in the hope of building greater biblical knowledge and encouraging Bible reading and study. For more information, visit www.UjimaChurch.org

Copyright © 2018 by Dr. J.R. Norwood * All Rights Reserved

May be copied in its entirety and distributed for the purpose of Christian Education with appropriate citation credit

8 - Highlights from Numbers 13 - 24, "Wandering in the Wilderness"

As the Israelites approached the Promised Land, called "Canaan," the Lord told Moses to send men from each of the tribes to spy out the land. The spies traveled through Canaan for forty days. Upon their return, they reported that the land was so plentiful that it was as though it was "flowing with milk and honey." But, they also reported that the people of the land were strong and lived in fortress cities... and, that some who dwelled there were giants! Caleb, the spy from the tribe of Judah, believed that Israel could prevail, but the people were frightened by the report of the other spies who believed that conquering Canaan was impossible (Num 13). The people rebelled against Moses and wanted to choose another leader to take them back to Egypt! Joshua, of the tribe of Ephraim, stood with Caleb in support of Moses and told the people that the Lord would give them victory in Canaan if they obeyed Him and did not rebel. But, the people were so determined to overthrow Moses and return to Egypt that they were about to stone Moses, Joshua, and Caleb! But, the glory of the Lord appeared, shining from the Tent of Meeting. God was displeased with the people's lack of faith and told Moses that He would strike them down and start over, keeping His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through Moses and his descendants. Moses, being a meek and humble man, interceded on behalf of the people, asking God not to destroy them. The Lord was pleased with Moses' prayer. He told Moses that those who had rebelled would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land, but their children would. The faithful Caleb and Joshua would be spared this punishment and live to conquer the land with the younger generation many years later (Num 14).

God sent the people away from Canaan and back into the wilderness to wander for forty years. When they heard this punishment from the Lord, the people, filled with regret, changed their minds again and said they would go up into Canaan. But, it was too late. The Lord was not with them. Some went on their own into Canaan, but they were defeated. As those who had rebelled died during the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, God would raise up a new generation of Israelites to enter the Promised Land. God was still working His plan.

However, the old rebellious generation still would not learn! A man from the tribe of Levi, named Korah, gathered 250 of the chiefs of

Israel and challenged Moses and Aaron. Moses warned them that their rebellion would not be tolerated by the Lord. But, they would not listen. So to show who the Lord had chosen to lead the people and to be the high priest, Moses, Aaron, Korah, and the 250 clan chiefs who followed Korah, brought incense censors to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The glory of the Lord appeared and spoke to Moses and Aaron, telling them that He was about to destroy the rebellious ones... but, Moses pleaded with the Lord on their behalf. God spared most of those who rebelled, but He did not spare Korah and the key people who had conspired with him against Moses and Aaron. The ground split open under their feet and consumed them (Num 16)! The Lord also confirmed that Aaron had been chosen to be the high priest, by having the chief of each of the 12 tribes bring their staffs into the tabernacle. The next day, when the staffs were brought out by Moses, Aaron's had budded and brought forth almonds (Num 17)!

Time went on and the Israelites continued their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. But, the Lord did not forsake the people, even though they disobeyed Him and rebelled against Him. Even Moses lost his temper over the people's grumbling over their thirst and the dryness of the wilderness. When God told him to command a rock to bring forth water, Moses shouted in anger at the people and struck the rock instead, disobeying the Lord out of frustration over the people (Num 20).

God continued to work his plan and bless the people and increase them as they wandered in the wilderness. Out of fear of their increasing numbers, one of the enemies of Israel, a ruler named Balak, summoned the services of a prophet named Balaam to put a curse upon Israel so that they would be weakened and could be defeated (Num 22). The Lord told Balaam not to accept Balak's request. Balak would not be deterred, and sent again for Balaam. This time the Lord told Balaam to go, but only speak what God would tell him to say. When Balaam rode his donkey to meet Balak, the intention of his heart was not to speak only what the Lord told him concerning Israel, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road, blocking the way, with sword in his hand. Balaam could not see the angel, but the donkey did. Three times the donkey refused to go down the road, and three times Balaam struck the donkey for disobeying him. Then the Lord empowered the donkey to speak and tell Balaam about the angel. Then the Lord enabled Balaam to see and hear the angel, who told Balaam that the donkey had saved his life and that he would be spared only if he spoke the words over Israel that God would give him. When Balaam reached Balak, he spoke the Lord's words over Israel. Instead of cursing them, he blessed them (Num 23)! Balak was furious and had Balaam try to curse them as he overlooked the Israelite encampment from different positions. But, two more times, instead of curses, Balaam was only able to issue blessings (Num 23-24)... for God was working His plan.