

Lesson for November 9, 2008

Old Testament Survey

The Book of Numbers

The book of Numbers was written by Moses. This book takes up where Exodus leaves off as the children of Israel begin their journey to the Promised Land. As the nation traveled to the land of promise, they met enemies along the way. By numbering the people, especially the men, the nation was able to form an effective civilian army to fight against their enemies. The key word of this book is "journeys." (Numbers 33:1-3)

Remember that the trip to the Promised Land was only an eleven-day journey, but it took Israel forty years to get there. The reason they wandered so long was due to their disobedience and their bad attitude. There are eight murmuring episodes in the book of Numbers. Discontentment, lust, rebellion and idolatry were the order of the day for the Israelites. Regardless of what was provided for them by God, the children of Israel complained. They continually complained to Moses and blamed God for everything they didn't like along the way. The result was that they were not allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Our attitude is a mirror into our soul. God's Word is very clear on this subject. We are told time and again throughout the Scriptures that we are to do everything without grumbling and complaining. (Philippians 2:14-15) An attitude of gratitude and an attitude of grumbling, complaining and faultfinding are mutually exclusive. Our attitude lets us know whether or not we are trusting God in every situation. Life is not always easy, but trusting God should be. After all, doesn't He have the best in mind for us? (Ephesians 4:29-32)

Gratitude

Gratitude is a matter of having the right attitude. And attitude is everything! Knowing who we are and what we have as a result of being in union with Jesus Christ should cause us to be grateful. As we grow up spiritually, our gratitude will also grow. If we understand that our lives are in God's hands, and that He will direct our paths if we choose to allow Him to, we can have gratitude in any circumstance of life. (Colossians 2:6-8)

We must also learn to be grateful for even the hardships in life. Quite often these situations are used by God to teach us valuable lessons. They can also reveal areas of weakness. How we handle these hardships can be a springboard to advance us in the Christian Way of Life by increasing our faith in God and our dependence upon God. A life of gratitude also prepares us for gratitude in death. (I Corinthians 15:54-57; I Thessalonians 5:18)

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When we complain, we are voicing dissatisfaction and discontentment with our situation to God. Therefore, we are complaining about what He is or is not doing, instead of trusting Him and using the faith-rest technique. I wonder if we have considered that when we have a complaining and worried attitude, that we are actually criticizing God? Is this not the height of human arrogance? We cannot be trusting in God and complaining and worrying at the same time. Remember many situations that we face are of our own doing, not God's. God, however, will often use these situations to teach us valuable lessons. And God is always there to help us through these situations. An attitude of faith brings victory in every trial or test we face. If we pass the test with a good attitude, we have benefited ourselves. God never tests us beyond what we can handle, but we don't know what we can handle until He tests us. Because we *can* handle our situation doesn't mean that we *will* handle it correctly. Proper application of the truth that we have learned from the Word of God is the key to victory in any test.

(I Corinthians 10:13; I Thessalonians 5:18; I Peter 4:12-14)

In Numbers 1-2 we have the numbering of the people and the arrangement of them around the Tabernacle (it being the focal point of camp life). The arrangement of the able-bodied young men who could go to war was God's way of preparing them for the various enemies they would encounter on their journey.

One of the four divine institutions is nationalism. Nationalism is a system established by God in order to preserve the freedom of a nation. The United States for example is one of the most blessed nations in history and has operated as a client nation to God from the day it was founded. A client nation is one in which freedom exists for all people. This freedom includes freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of thought, etc. One of the keys to the success of "client nation U.S.A." has been a strong military organization, which is a very Biblical concept. Throughout history, the nations that did not develop a strong military were overtaken and enslaved by stronger nations.

The protection of our citizens from all enemies (within the nation and outside the nation) is a principle of nationalism. This does not mean that we are isolationists. On the other hand, God does not want us allying ourselves with evil, corrupt, tyrannical nations. The client nation to God is responsible for the protection and perpetuation of freedom. If there is an enemy that threatens that freedom, the client nation must be prepared militarily to deal with it. Christians within the client nation are also responsible for the preservation of God's Word and the dissemination of the gospel of Christ throughout the world.

When a nation fails to acknowledge or forgets to acknowledge the divine establishment principles from God, it will ultimately fail. A nation that acknowledges these principles will survive and freedom will be perpetuated. Such was the nation of Israel until they turned their backs on God and His principles of freedom.

The Nation of Israel

The Jewish nation of Israel is a perfect example of a nation that at times followed and at other times neglected the principles of divine establishment regarding a strong military. In the time of Nehemiah, which we will eventually study, Israel revolted against the authority of God and became split into two nations. The Northern tribes (ten) called themselves Israel and the Southern tribes (two) called themselves Judah. After a series of failures and captivity, from which most Jews (Northern and Southern) learned absolutely nothing about the discipline of God, one group returned to their homeland to rebuild the city. They thought the first step was to fortify the city by rebuilding the walls. When these younger descendants returned after Israel's seventy years in captivity, their first desire was to rebuild. However, in those seventy years Israel had not lost their enemies. When their enemies got word that Israel was rebuilding, they became angry and began to conspire together to destroy them.

The response of the Jewish nation is our illustration of the principle of freedom through military victory. Two things were done by the nation immediately upon return to their land. First they re-established the priesthood (spiritual response) and second they put together a strong army (divine establishment response). Every able-bodied male was trained militarily and could be called up for battle at a moment's notice. Nehemiah then utilized military strategy and tactics to deploy his troops. Nehemiah even armed the civilian population.

The amazing end to this story is that when their enemies heard of Israel's military preparation and readiness they retreated and no battle ensued. It is only through a strong military that wars are averted or won. This is God's system for freedom.

In Numbers 3 we have the setting apart of the tribe of Levi as the priestly tribe, Aaron being the High Priest of Israel. In Numbers 4 the order of service for the priests in the Tabernacle were given. The chapters that follow enumerated the duties of the various groups. In Numbers 11 we see the beginnings of the complaints and murmurings of the nation of Israel. And the final chapters are about the preparation of the nation to enter into the Promised Land and who would go in.

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As God prepared Moses for his death, He also appointed a new leader of the nation of Israel. Joshua was chosen by God to follow Moses as this leader. Joshua had proved himself a faithful servant of Jehovah time and again. When Joshua was sent out with Caleb and others to spy out the Promised Land he and Caleb were the only two that returned with good reports.

God chose Joshua because of his leadership abilities, but more importantly because of his attitude. Joshua knew God and was confident that He would deliver Israel's enemies into their hands if necessary. Joshua became the leader who would finally lead the children of Israel into Canaan, the Promised Land. (Numbers 27:12-23)