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NUMBERS 26:1-36:13

Today we bring to a close our three-month overview of the books of Leviticus and Numbers.

In **chapter 26**, we see a census taken. It was important to God that we see the difference in the numbers of the people before and after the 40 year experience.

In **chapter 27**, we see God allowing Moses to go up on Mt. Nebo, and look over into the Promised Land. We also see God repeating to Moses that he will not be allowed to enter the land with the people he has led these past forty years.

Chapter 27:12-14...

Next, we see as Moses is more concerned with the people and who will lead them in his absence than he is with himself...**Verses 16-17...**

And we see that God appointed Joshua to take over for Moses...

Over in **chapter 33**, God tells the people that they are to destroy all the idols of Canaan..all their figured stones and molten images and all their high places of worship...

And He tells them if they don't go in and drive out the inhabitants of the land that the Canaanites will become as "pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides and they shall trouble you in the land in which you live."

In **chapter 35**, we see cities of refuge being set up for the protection of those who kill someone unintentionally.

There is also a repeating of the description of the offerings they were to make in these last chapters...There is a request granted to Reuben and Gad and the half tribe to settle on the east side of the Jordan...and there are other things in these chapters that we aren't going to have time to see...

But I want us to see something else as we end our study today...
something I hope we can apply to our own lives in the day in
which we live.

I want to ask you something...have you ever felt like a failure? Have you ever failed at anything and because of that failure you carry around a load of guilt and shame? I don't believe there is a one of us who could stand up and say, "No, there has never been any failure in my life." Now, some of us might be able to deal with the failure in our lives better than others, but I'm quite certain that most of us have failed, and most of us have felt guilt and shame over our failure.

And let me just say this...maybe what you struggle with is not your own failure, but a great disappointment in your life caused by someone else or circumstances beyond your control.

Maybe you've had a child who has gone astray and no matter what you've said to him, he just refuses to come to his senses.

Maybe you've lost a loved one...through death or divorce.

Maybe you've just had one disappointment after another and none of it has been your own fault.

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I'm certain most of us have either failed or have experienced disappointment in the past, or are right now experiencing great disappointment.

I'm just as certain that the God we serve doesn't want us to walk in the shadow of our failure or disappointment. Yes, we've failed! Yes, we've been disappointed, but **God doesn't want us to walk in failure and defeat and disappointment the rest of our lives. He wants us to walk in joy and victory.**

So, with that in mind, please turn to *Deuteronomy 8*...

While you're turning there, let me just say this...**the wilderness experience was the great failure of the children of Israel.** God had promised these folks that when they left Egypt they would enter into the Promised Land...and this trip from the Red Sea should have taken a very short period of time.

But, you remember what happened...when they got to Kadesh Barnea, they sent twelve spies into Canaan and the spies came back and said...

"Well, everything God told us about that land is true. It is indeed a land flowing with milk and honey and the grapes over there are as big as watermelons...but God didn't tell us everything there was to know about that land."

By the way, I've sometimes felt that way about the Christian life, haven't you? I mean everything He said about it is true, He just didn't tell me all there was...

Getting back to the spies...They said,

"There're giants over there...and we're like grasshoppers compared to them!"

Have you ever felt like there were giants all around you in your Christian life and compared to them you are just a little grasshopper?

Well, as a result of that spy excursion and their fear, these folks made a decision that would change the next 40 years of their lives. That very day, because of a deliberate act of disobedience, they spent the next 40 years walking around and around in circles...**and it was a time of failure...and it appeared to be wasted time and wasted experience!**

Not only was it a time of failure...but it was also a time of disappointment. Have you ever stopped to think of the folks who weren't in on the decision not to trust God? What about the wives of the unbelieving folks and the young people who really did believe that God could do all He had promised? They did not fail themselves, but they had to suffer the consequences of the failure of someone else.

And ever since that time, the term "wilderness experience" or "desert experience" denotes and describes a time in our lives when we walk in **disobedience and disbelief and disappointment.**

So, I want to ask you...have you ever had a wilderness experience? Have you ever had a period of time in your own life when you have rebelled against God's will and walked in deliberate disobedience? Have you ever had a time in your own life when you have failed God? Or, have you been greatly disappointed and discouraged and disillusioned because of what God has allowed to come your way? Or AM I THE ONLY ONE?

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I wish I could stand up here and say I haven't...but I can't do that. I've had my wilderness experiences. They may not have lasted 40 years...but they did last far too long!!

So, I just want us to see some things about this time of failure and disappointment that I believe God's Word teaches us...

Deuteronomy 8:1-3; 15-16...

Did you notice the little three-letter word in **verse 2** and again in **verse 15**... "led"...God led them these 40 years.

I believe sometimes we tend to think these folks were just out there in the wilderness on their own wandering around and around. But, Beloved, just because the people turned their back on God at Kadesh Barnea doesn't mean God turned His back on them. I mean He didn't say,

"Well, you're on your own...I'll catch up with you again in 40 years when most of you are dead..."

No, the fact of the matter is this...God doesn't abandon His people - even when His people turn away from Him, He does not turn away from them. He says, **"I led you...I didn't forsake you...I led you, and I did this in order to do some things I could not have done otherwise."**

God said I did this in order **to humble you...to test you...to make you understand that man does not live by bread alone...**

And notice the last phrase of **verse 16**...
"to do good for you in the end..."

Now, wait a minute...does this mean that God is going to take the people's disobedience...He's going to take when they quaked and quivered in fear and disbelief and were afraid of the giants and then lived for the next 40 years whining and murmuring and complaining...**Do you mean that God is going to take that and do some things in their lives so that in the end they'll be better than there were in the beginning?**

Well, if I understand the Word...that's exactly what He's saying!!

Is God saying that He **excuses** our failure? No, He's saying He **uses** our failure! Does God get great joy when we're disappointed? No, but He can **use** our disappointment. Henry Blackaby says this... "God does not always **intervene**...but He does always **redeem**."

He may allow us to fail and He may allow us to go through great disappointment, but He stands ready to do good for us in the end.

See, as far as God is concerned, there's no such thing as wasted time and wasted experience, because **God uses everything in our lives for a purpose!**

Let's just look at several ways God uses our failure...

1) God uses our failure and disappointments to humble us...

God uses our failure to empty us of our pride. I heard Ron Dunn say one time that being humbled is like **"having the arrogance knocked out of you."**

It's like God just comes up and gives us a blow and "whoosh"...there goes all of our pride!

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Listen, these folks were proud people!! They were **God's** people!! Out of all the other people of the earth, **God** chose **them**!! **God** sent Moses to deliver them from bondage. **God** parted the Red Sea and they walked across on dry land...**God** drowned the Egyptians!!

Have you ever thought about this? The children of Israel on one side of the Red Sea and the dead bodies of the Egyptian soldiers and taskmasters were floating up on the shore. How would you have felt?

I mean...don't you think they sort of went over to the edge of the water and looked at these dead bodies floating around? Don't you think they may have recognized one or two?

Don't you think someone may have said, "Hey, I know him! He used to beat me with a whip when I was slow in making bricks...especially when they wouldn't give us any straw to make bricks with...Look what my God has done to him!"

Can't you imagine these folks saying, "Yes, our God is a great God! Look what He's done for us! And, by the way Moses, when we get to Sinai...you go on up the mountain and find out what God wants us to do and **no problem...we'll do it all!**"

These folks were proud, arrogant, self-confident people...and I want to tell you that if we're not careful...this will happen to all of us every time God does some great things in our lives.

Did you notice how God humbled them?

Verse 3... "by feeding them with manna that they did not know anything about..."

See, they thought they knew every way that God could feed them. They thought no matter what their situation, they knew all the formulas, all the recipes, all the secrets...**I mean, after all, they had God all figured out...**

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt like you had come so far and you had all this "Christian walk stuff" figured out?

I mean...after all, you've been a Christian a long, long time.

And after all, you **read your Bible** every day. And after all, you **come to church** every time the doors are open. And after all, you've been to **retreats** and **seminars** and **revivals** and **Bible Studies** and you have all the right **workbooks** and **notebooks**...And you even have a little **Bible Study satchel** you carry all your **colored pencils** and other **supplies** in.

And you get to feeling sorry for the poor souls who don't know as much as you do. Has that ever happened to you?

Well, I'm ashamed to say I've been there! **I mean, there was a point in my life that I figured that no matter what came my way I could handle it because I knew the right formula!!** **And then there came a time in my life when none of these things we just mentioned worked...**I found myself in a situation where I couldn't **pray** my way out...I couldn't **praise** my way out...**nothing I'd learned in my workbooks helped...**nothing worked for me and I discovered in this situation that **God often colors outside the lines I'd drawn for Him.**

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And God showed me that it's in those times when I am humbled and I've had the arrogance knocked out of me that He begins to feed me in ways I haven't known before...in ways that I didn't get in all those retreats and conferences and seminars.

There's absolutely nothing wrong with retreats, and Bible Studies and conferences and seminars unless all that knowledge puffs you up. But if you get puffed up, God will just let some kind of failure, some kind of disappointment, some kind of problem come into your life **to "unpuff" you and humble you...and knock the arrogance out of you!**

But there is also a second thing...

2) God uses our failure and disappointments to expose what is in our hearts...

"testing you, to know what was in your heart..."

Now, it's not **God** who needs to know what is in their heart! **God already knows what is in their heart!** **They need to know what is in their heart!**

The word "test" – NAS; "prove" – KJV, here means "to lay open"...It's like a surgeon who would lay open the chest cavity to expose what is there with the view of approving or disapproving. If the surgeon disapproves of what he sees...what does he do? He removes it!

So, God says, "I let you fall flat on your face so you'll see and know what's in your heart!"

Well, you may say, "I **already** know what's in my heart!"

You may think you do, but you don't...

Jeremiah: "The heart is deceitful above all else and desperately wicked..." and what's the rest of that verse?
"who can know it?"

Jesus: "It's not what goes into a man that defiles but what comes out...for out of the heart comes the issues of life."

We all have the potential for all kinds of evil, but we can fool ourselves into thinking that our heart is pure...and God wants us to know what's in our heart!

I believe the most familiar example of this in the New Testament is Peter. Remember when Jesus told Peter that before the rooster crowed he would deny Him three times? What did Peter say?

"Oh no, not me, Lord...the rest of this bunch of guys might pull a stunt like that...but not me...not me!!"

But, what did Peter do? Before the rooster crowed he denied the Lord three times.

See, Jesus said, "**Peter, there is 'Christ denial' in your heart!**"
And Peter said, "No, Lord, you're wrong."

And Peter found out when Jesus **humbled** him and **proved** him and **exposed** to him what was in heart, didn't he?

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Failure and disappointment exposes what's in my heart. **Sometimes I'm shocked at what's in my heart.** **Sometimes the way I respond to a situation scares me because it reveals what's in my heart, and I thought I had that long settled!**

See, God knows we need to know what's in our heart so we can deal with it!! **When He shows us what's in our heart, then we can confess and repent and allow Him to cleanse us and empower us...**

We can **think** we know it all and we can **think** we're so spiritual and we can **think** we have all the answers and we can look down our righteous noses at other folks and feel sorry for them because they aren't on the same high spiritual level

and then, God allows something to come into our lives to reveal to us what's really in our hearts!

And He does this for a reason...

3) God uses our failure and disappointments to teach us that man does not live by bread alone...

Now, this is literally, physically true. I mean you can have all the bread Dr. Bob can make, or O'Charley's can make, or Macaroni's can make or The Cooker can make. **(I love to go to Mozzarella's and buy bread and you have to get their bread at their bar, so if you ever see me at the bar at Mozzarella's...just know I'm buying bread...)** but, **all that bread won't guarantee us life.**

Hey, you can even eat a low fat diet, jog 6 miles a day and run into a Mac truck and get killed on your way home from church this morning.

See, even though we don't live by "bread" alone, if you **believe** that "bread" is the essence of life then your life revolves around that "bread"...and you'll sacrifice everything that's dear for that "bread".

I want to ask you...Has God ever allowed you to hunger? God allows us to hunger, Beloved, that He might reveal more of Himself to us than we would have ever known if we had not been allowed to hunger! **Let ask you this...would you be willing to be hungry if that's the case?**

It's not "bread" that makes life worth living, Beloved. And you can substitute anything you want to for "bread"...What's your "bread" this morning? Is it status, success, your children's success, a perfect marriage, wealth, power, prestige...**what have you come to believe is necessary for you to be joyful?**

Sometimes God has to take away our "bread" before we realize we don't really live on "bread". I've heard the pastor say that as he has visited critically or terminally ill folks...folks who knew they were dying...that he's never heard one say, "Oh Preacher, I wish I'd spent more time at the office..."

No, they say, "Oh Preacher, "I wish I'd spent more time in the Word," or "I wish I'd spent more time serving the Lord."

The old maxim, **"I never knew Jesus was all I needed until Jesus was all I had..."** is really true!

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See, God uses failure and disappointment to teach us that it's not "bread" that makes life worth living! It's God and every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God that makes life worth living!

And, that's how God uses our failure and that's how God uses our disappointments!

And if we learn these lessons, you know something? **He will do us good in the end!**

I believe the bottom line is this...I can't always determine what comes into my life, but I can determine how I will respond to what comes into my life...

Some of us need to revisit our wilderness experiences to remember how God has delivered us! Some of you are in your wilderness experience right now. Let me just tell you that God can use every day of your experience to do you good in the end!

I heard the question asked this week... "Are you a fair weather Christian? **Or do you know God well enough that if He leads you through a wilderness experience you can say, 'Thank You, Father, that You count me worthy to humble me and test me so that You can do me good in the end.'**"

See, God's plans for us are for good and not evil to give us a future and a hope. God's purpose in all the circumstances of our lives is for our good and His glory.

Let me just give you several ways God does us good in the end and then we'll be through...

He does us good by teaching us

- 1) about life...God wants us to enjoy our new life in Jesus Christ and not long for the old life in Egypt.

God does us good by teaching us

- 2) about Himself...God wants us to not only **see** what He does but know He does it for a purpose.

God does us good by teaching us

- 3) about ourselves...God wants us to know what **He** knows about us...that we are but dust and prone to wander. That knowledge about ourselves may just keep us from wandering.

God does us good by teaching us

- 4) about faith...God wants our faith to increase...not faith in a preacher or a teacher, or even ourselves. He wants our faith in **Him** to increase.

My prayer is that we will take these lessons with us from our survey of the books of Leviticus and Numbers. **God doesn't want us to fail...**but He is sovereign even over our failures and our disappointments and He can use them to do us good in the end!