

The Family Banner

Today In Your Reading...

We finished *Leviticus*, with the laws of redemption, and headed into *Numbers*, with the first census of Israel. If something or someone was dedicated to the Lord, a person could redeem him, her, or it or buy it back from the Lord for a price. The concept of redemption would be very familiar to God's people when the Messiah would come and redeem His people from their sins.

Concerning the census, which is fitting for a book entitled *Numbers*, the Lord was organizing the people for several reasons, for camp arrangement, for travel purposes, for land allotment in Canaan, and for war. Notice that the priests and Levites were exempted from the census, as they would not go to war. They would not receive any land, and their location in the camp was around the Tabernacle.

With the census, we get an idea of just how many people were involved in the exodus. When Jacob arrived in Egypt, he came with 70 people in his family. Now, according to the census, there were over 600,000 fighting men. A conservative number, then, including priests, Levites, women, children, and the elderly, would be at least two million people. If a professional football stadium held 100,000 fans, Israel would require at least 20 of them to seat everyone. That is amazing, especially when you consider that the Lord has been providing bread and water for them for 40 years.

I noticed today that each tribe had a designated camping area with its own **family banner** (*Numbers 1:52*). These banners would have included the name of the tribe but, perhaps, they would have had symbols as well, something that represented them in some way. Whatever it was, it served as a rallying point, identifiable to others in travel or in war. Of course, flags have been used in this way for centuries.

Daily Reflection

For years now, our family has had a "banner" of sorts, more a motto or purpose statement. Each family member knows it. We repeat it often and discuss what it means and how to live it out. Much like a "life verse" or personal mission statement, we have noticed over the years that it has been helpful to provide our family with God-centered focus, purpose, and unity.

Did you grow up with a family banner, motto, or flag? If so, what was it? Was it helpful?

Do you have a "life verse" or personal mission statement? If so, what is it? If not, consider developing one.

When developing a family banner or motto, life verse, or mission statement, **make sure that it is biblical** and that *it points you and your family members to your God-given purposes*.

Order in the Camp

February 27 — Numbers 2:1-3:51

Today In Your Reading...

God gave Moses specific instructions for how He wanted the twelve tribes to be arranged around the Tabernacle. This arrangement, of course, followed an extensive census in yesterday's reading, in which every male 20 years and older was counted. The Levites were exempt from the general census but were saved for another count, in which every male one month old and older was counted. Then, they too were arranged in camps around the Tabernacle.

As you would expect, God was purposeful in His positioning of the people and there were several symbolic placements. One such placement, for example, was the tribe of Judah, which was told to camp on the east side of the Tabernacle. The east side was significant for several reasons. It was the side with the only entryway to the Tabernacle. The entryway was symbolic of Jesus, as the only way to God. Thus, it makes sense to put Judah on that side, since Jesus would be born of that tribe.

But symbolism aside, we must take note of the meticulous detail that God applies to all that He does. We could start at the beginning with creation and consider the order in which He proceeded to construct the heavens and the earth. We could consider the order of the plagues that He used to demolish the Egyptians. We could note the detailed attention God gave to His laws, the instructions for the building and maintenance of His desert sanctuary, or His descriptions of Israel's fixed festivals. All of these tell us at least one thing — **God is a God of order.**

We could define orderliness as arranging our surroundings and procedures in such a way that we achieve the most effectiveness and efficiency. As God's creatures, made in His image, we are like Him in many ways. We reflect His character. One way is to practice orderliness.

Daily Reflection

Would you consider yourself to be an orderly person? Why or why not?

In what areas could you be more orderly? How orderly are you in your time with God, with your money, with your relationships?

What message does it communicate about God that He is orderly? What message does it communicate when we are disorderly?

Orderliness is a character quality, which means it can be learned. No matter how orderly or disorderly you are, with character qualities, there is always room for improvement.

A Lifetime of Service

Today In Your Reading...

The Lord gave instructions to Moses regarding the jealousy test and offering. If a husband was suspicious of his wife's activities and believed her to be unfaithful, he could summon her to stand before the priest in the Tabernacle and have her tested for adultery. The result would either be the wife's vindication or she would be struck with the curse of infertility and shame. God held the marriage covenant in high esteem. We should do the same.

God also assigned the Tabernacle duties of the Levites — Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. Remember, in yesterday's reading, the Lord exchanged the firstborns for the Levites, and, thus, the Levites were chosen to a lifetime of service before the Lord in His sanctuary. "Bring the tribe of Levi near," He said, "and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. They shall perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to the service of the Tabernacle. You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons. They are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel" (*Numbers 3:6, 7, 9*).

Once the Levites were chosen and exchanged, God assigned each to their places, to help perpetually in the work of the Tabernacle and the sacrificial system. As I read through the places that each family served, I couldn't help but think of the church today. Just as in that desert sanctuary, in today's church there is so much work to be done. In fact, until Jesus returns, the work is never-ending; and, **for a church to be effective and efficient, it relies on the service of its people.**

But when you look at the numbers of Levites who served compared to the number of total Israelites, the lopsidedness is overwhelming. **So few served so many.** Sadly though, that sta-

tistic hasn't changed through the ages. Still today, the few serve the many. *Imagine the ministry impact our churches could have if the majority of people served in some capacity;* but more than that, imagine the spiritual growth and blessing they would receive from fulfilling one of their divine callings in life.

In the New Testament Church, God gifts each one of us to serve His people, yet the majority of folks in our churches sit and watch other people serve them. Don't let that be you! **Get out of the pew and find a place to serve.**

Daily Reflection

Why do you think so many people do not serve in the church? What is the problem?

How would you suggest solving this problem?

You are called to a lifetime of service in the house of God, ministering to His people. There is no age of retirement. I challenge you not to sit and watch others serve. **Ask not what others can do for you, but ask what you can do for others.** "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve..." (*Mark 10:45*).

Honoring Your Vow

March 1 — *Numbers 6:1-27; 10:1-36*

Day 60 — 305 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

God covered some last minute details before He moved the Israelites to a different location. For example, He spelled out the specifics for those who wanted to take the Nazarite vow. He also gave instructions for Aaron's High Priestly prayer and the commands to make and use the silver trumpets. Then, you read about Israel's first organized trek through the desert; it took about three days. God led them to the Wilderness of Paran.

Everything proceeded as planned. Israel gained some experience marching in an organized military manner, in the correct order, behind their banners. The priests and Levites led the way, with the Ark of the Covenant out front and the other pieces of the tabernacle close behind. All was well, but that would soon change.

Let's go back and consider the Nazarite vow. This vow has always fascinated me, perhaps because we don't know much about it. We do know that the Hebrew word *nazir* means "to be separated or set apart." Though anyone (male or female) could be a Nazarite, we only know of three men in the Bible who took the vow — Samuel (*1 Samuel 2:8-28*), Samson (*Judges 13:1-5*), and John the Baptist (*Luke 1:13-17*). The vow also intrigues me because of its symbolism. It was voluntary, temporary, and included three interesting requirements.

First, one had to *abstain from drinking wine*. In fact, one couldn't even touch the seeds or skins of the grapes from which wine was squeezed. While that seems strange to us, when dealing with our fleshly vices or greatest temptations, it's a good idea to draw the line as far back as possible in order to avoid stumbling in that area.

Second, a Nazarite could *not touch any dead thing*, or his separation would be compromised.

We, as Christians, are called to be separated from the "dead" things of this world. Otherwise our Christian testimony could be compromised.

Finally, Nazarites were *not supposed to cut their hair*, at least as long as their vow was kept. You could always tell how faithful a Nazarite had been by the length of his hair. **Can others see evidence of our faithfulness to God?**

Daily Reflection

The Old Testament Nazarites have been replaced with Christians, those who surrender and sacrifice in order to follow the Lord. As a Christ-follower, you have "taken a vow" to be distinct, set apart for God's purposes. How are you doing with overcoming habitual sin, freeing yourself from worldly desires, and being obedient to God's Word?

Can others tell that you have "made a vow" to honor the Lord, or **do you blend in with the lost world around you?**

"I urge you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship" (*Romans 12:1 NASB*).

Blind to the Blessings

March 2 — Numbers 11:1-13:33

Day 61 — 304 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

The people of Israel gave into the adversity of the desert and began complaining to Moses. I'm sure they whined about all sorts of things, but one thing was for sure—the people wept and whined for meat to eat. "We remember all of the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt," they said. "We had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic that we wanted. But now our appetites are gone, and day after day all we have to eat is this manna" (11:5, 6). God's anger burned against His people so much that He set their tents on fire.

Moses even complained, as he reminded God that these were not his people, and that he was not able to sustain them by himself. Then, both Miriam and Aaron complained against God, in which He responded by giving Miriam leprosy. Finally, after spending forty days in the land of Canaan, and after seeing how hospitable the land was, ten of the twelve spies complained of its inhospitable natives.

While it's easy to point fingers at Israel's ungratefulness, we often do the same thing. We, like them, complain in the midst of adversity, inconvenience, obstacles, and unfairness. But the tragedy here is not that the people complained. That's the natural reaction of human beings, for we are sinful and self-centered. **The tragedy is that the people complained in spite of all the blessings God had bestowed on them to this point.**

The people focused on what they lacked rather than on what God had provided for them so far. Rather than demonstrate gratitude for the daily, miraculous provision of manna, the people whined about not having meat. Rather than thanking God for the wonderful prophet they had in Moses, they complained about needing others. Rather than relying on the same God

who humiliated the proud Egyptian empire, the people were quick to look at their own inabilities and count Canaan as a loss. **While they were all too quick to identify what they didn't have, the Israelites were blind to what they did have.** If I were God, I would've been angry too.

Daily Reflection

How much do you complain? How often do you become greedy for what you don't have and discontent regarding what you do have?

What good comes from complaining? What harm comes from complaining?

The cure for complaining is to count your blessings. When was the last time you stopped and thanked God for all that He's done for you? Why not do it now?

Be Careful What You Ask For

March 3 — Numbers 14:1-15:41

Day 62 — 303 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

The Israelites rebelled against Moses after hearing the frightening reports about Canaan from ten of the twelve spies. Joshua and Caleb tried to convince the people that God would help them defeat the tribes in the land, but the Israelites wanted nothing of it. The grumbling got so bad at one point that they appointed a new leader who would take them all back to Egypt.

Even then, Moses had the patience to endure. Though God threatened to let His anger have its way with the people, Moses interceded on their behalf and appealed to God's mercy. As a result, God relented and spared the nation.

However, He would not let them enter Canaan at that time, even though several of them tried. Instead, He told them that they were to turn around and wander in the desert for forty years, until everyone who grumbled was buried in the sand. God offered His people a land of their own and they refused it.

Imagine, for a minute, a single mom who could hardly make ends meet. She had one daughter, for whom she worked very hard to provide and protect. The girl's birthday came around and all the mom wanted to do was to provide one tiny gift. She worked extra hours and pinched every penny to save enough money so that she could buy what she knew would be the perfect gift for her little girl. But when the day came and her daughter tore open the package, she refused it. In fact, she cried and complained that it was not what she wanted, that she wanted something better.

Of course, any mother would be devastated. Her heart would be broken by this ungrateful child. In the end, most mothers would've returned the gift and gotten their money back, but not this mom. She loved the child so much that she

kept the gift for the day when her daughter would better appreciate it.

Daily Reflection

Did you notice that God gave the people what they asked for? They preferred "to die in the desert than to go into Canaan and face the giants" there. So then, the Lord led the people back into the desert to die.

How many gifts has God desired to give to you except that you have refused His generosity by demanding what you wanted instead? *Be careful what you ask for.* He may give you what you want, though it will not be His best for you and it will hurt you in the end.

Have you come to a place in your life where you don't sense the Lord's leadership or the Lord's blessing? Perhaps you have taken the lead yourself and He has backed off, to let you have your way. **Perhaps it is because He has tried to lead you one way or another and you have consistently refused to listen.**

What was the last thing the Lord asked you to do? Where was the last fork in the road? Did you follow His way or your own?

Imagine a life in which you never refused the Lord's leadership. What great things you would see and do. He is waiting to lead you "into Canaan," but **do you have the faith to follow Him?**

Consumed by Jealousy

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March 4 — *Numbers 16:1-18:32*

Day 63 — 302 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

Great drama unfolded as Korah and his side-kicks, Dathan and Abiram, staged a rebellion against Moses and Aaron. They were joined by 250 prominent leaders from among the people of Israel. Their quarrel is described in the words of Korah, "You (Moses and Aaron) have gone too far! Everyone in Israel has been set apart by the Lord, and He is with all of us. What right do you have to act as though you are greater than anyone else among all of these people?" (16:3).

In essence, they were jealous of Moses and Aaron, thinking that they, out of arrogance, had chosen themselves to lead the people. *Korah failed to recognize that it was God who had set Moses and Aaron in their positions of leadership.* We've already read that Moses was a humble man, so this accusation surely broke his heart. In fact, "Moses fell on his face" when he heard Korah's words.

After he gathered himself, Moses cut to the quick and charged Korah and the gang with jealousy, pride, and discontentment. "Does it seem a small thing to you that the God of Israel has chosen you from among all the people of Israel, to be near Him as you serve in the Tabernacle and stand before the people to minister to them? He has given this special ministry to you and your fellow Levites, but now you are demanding the priesthood as well!" (16:9, 10).

Moses was angry and so was the Lord. What followed was a series of incredible events, judgments which God handed down in the sight of all the people. The tents, belongings, and families of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were consumed by the earth, and the 250 insubordinate leaders were consumed by fire before the Tabernacle.

As if that weren't enough to convince the people not to rebel against the Lord or His chosen lead-

ers, He consumed nearly 15,000 of them with a plague before Aaron could intercede for them. The point could not be more clear — **God has assigned us to our lot in life and to the place of service that He desires.** It is not for us to be ungrateful, discontent, or jealous, or to compare ourselves to what others have or do. We are to rest in God's wisdom and serve Him to the best of our ability. **Jealousy and discontentment only lead us to a dead end.**

Daily Reflection

In case you haven't figured it out yet, *life is not fair.* We are not all healthy. We do not all have a big house, nice cars, and lots of money. *You will always find people with more than you have; but, you will also find people with less than you have.* Likewise, you will always find people in better circumstances, with better looks, and more attractive skills and talents; but, guess what, others are looking at you, thinking the same thing. You are better off than they are.

The unfairness of life is a fact, but so is this — **God is sovereign and purposeful.** He has given you what you need, He has stationed you where He desires, and He has allowed you to be in the situations you are for His purposes. **He is not interested in fairness but faithfulness.** Fairness is something that Satan wants you to dwell on. *The Lord desires you to look up from your circumstances and keep your eyes on Him.*

God knows best, and all He asks of you is to trust Him with your life. Focusing on those around you and how better off they are will only lead you to self-centeredness and jealousy. *Your identity is not to be found in what you have or what you do, rather **your identity is in Christ.*** No matter the situation in which you find yourself, whether rich or poor, leader or follower, healthy or not, **you can glorify Him.** In that, we are all equals.