

Numbers 20-34

Last week we left Moses, in the book of Numbers, approaching the king of Edom to ask permission to pass through their territory, but was denied. It was shortly after this encounter that the brother of Moses, Aaron would die. But what is interesting about his death is what we have talked about earlier regarding the entire revelation of God, and that is it is all a part of His eternal decree to bring glory to His name through His creation, including man.

Numbers 20:22-29 ²² Now when they set out from Kadesh, the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to Mount Hor. ²³ Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying, ²⁴ "Aaron will be gathered to his people; for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the sons of Israel, because you rebelled against My command at the waters of Meribah. ²⁵ "Take Aaron and his son Eleazar and bring them up to Mount Hor; ²⁶ and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar. So Aaron will be gathered *to his people*, and will die there." ²⁷ So Moses did just as the LORD had commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. ²⁸ After Moses had stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar, Aaron died there on the mountain top. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. ²⁹ When all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, all the house of Israel wept for Aaron thirty days.

What happened at Meribah?

Numbers 20:6-13 ⁶ Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them; ⁷ and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁸ "Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink." ⁹ So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; ¹⁰ and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" ¹¹ Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. ¹² But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." ¹³

Those *were* the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the LORD, and He proved Himself holy among them.

What's interesting here is that God gave a command to both Moses and Aaron, and yet who is it that actually strikes the rock instead of speaking to the rock?

Both Moses and Aaron gather the nation, but Moses acts on the rock. But because both of them were given responsibility by God both were punished, but Aaron's judgment would come first.

But back to my point about God's eternal decree. How and why did Aaron die?

There is nothing in the text to suggest that Aaron reached a ripe old and age and died naturally. He died at God's command and He died at the exact time in which God decided to take his life.

This was not something God did on the fly as though He was making up this stuff as He went along. He had decided this from eternity past. He is the cause for all that takes place, but He also provides the means to that end. In other words, God has planned all things but will use people and circumstances to work out His eternal plan of redemption.

For example, who was it who kept Israel enslaved in Egypt during the last years before their release?

Pharaoh.

Who was it who witnessed all of the miracles at the hand of Moses and yet would not submit to God?

Pharaoh.

Who was held personally responsible by God for all of the deaths in Egypt as a result of the Passover of the angel of death?

Pharaoh.

Is there anything to suggest that it was Pharaoh and Pharaoh alone who rebelled against God and was justly punished?

And yet, what do we read?

Romans 9:15-22 ¹⁵ For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." ¹⁶ So then it *does* not *depend* on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. ¹⁷ For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." ¹⁸ So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" ²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it? ²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for common use? ²² What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction?

How is it that Pharaoh can be chosen by God and put in place by God to serve a particular function in God's redemptive plan, and yet Pharaoh is the one who is determined the agent who made his own choice?

Again, though God has determined from eternity how He will carry out His plan, He also chooses the means by which His plan will be carried out. This is the only way evil and sin can make any sense and have any purpose. Otherwise we're left with a God who is a by-stander to man's choices and has to come up with contingency plans to over rule man's choices.

The greatest example of this is found in the cross of Christ. There is no more evil that can be found in man than that man would kill His very creator whom everyone knew was sinless and guiltless.

When the Jews gathered a council against Peter and John for preaching the gospel they were threatened with punishment.

Acts 4:18-20 ¹⁸ And when they had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; ²⁰ for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard."

But Luke records something amazing regarding God's plan of salvation and the people who were to be used to bring this salvation about.

Acts 4:23-28 ²³ When they had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ And when they heard *this*, they lifted their voices to God with one accord and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, ²⁵ who by the Holy Spirit, *through* the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, 'WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS?' ²⁶ 'THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST.' ²⁷ "For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur.

Jesus, Herod, Pontius Pilate along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel were all chosen by God with the specific purpose of bringing God's will to fruition.

And yet, despite the fact that God chose Pilate to be instrumental in putting Jesus to death what are we told about Pilate's culpability when it came to his guilt in putting the Lord of Lords and King of kings to death?

John 19:10-11 ¹⁰ So Pilate said to Him, "You do not speak to me? Do You not know that I have authority to release You, and I have authority to crucify You?" ¹¹ Jesus answered, "You would have no authority over Me, unless it had been given you from above; for this reason he who delivered Me to you has *the* greater sin."

Though the leaders of Israel had the greater sin, Jesus made it clear that the sin of Pilate would be dealt with, and in Pilate's case his sin would be unto eternal damnation. And so, again we see that though God had chosen Pilate before the foundations of the world to put Jesus to death, Pilate is still found guilty because of his own choices.

It was Pilate's choice, it was Pilate's desire to carry out such a deed, and yet he was God's choice to accomplish our salvation. Had Pilate not killed the Lord in the manner in which he did, you

and I would still be in our sins. There is no guess work with God's will. It was determined that Pilate would kill Jesus on a cross to redeem a people for Himself.

Peter confirms this on the day of Pentecost when he addressed the crowds and pointed out how God's eternal plan had come to fruition with all of the actors in place by the will of God.

Acts 2:22-24 ²² "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know-- ²³ this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death. ²⁴ "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

These godless men, including Pilate, were chosen by the predetermined plan of God to carry out God's will. His foreknowledge is not determined by future actions of men, but rather His foreknowledge is simply an acknowledgement of what He knows to be true because He has determined it to be so.

And so, on the one hand God determines who will be used by Him and how and yet each person is personally responsible for their actions because it is they, not God, who are making their own evil choices.

I digress only to make the point, that as we move through this survey of the bible we are continually reminded that the bible is God's word revealing God's plan of redemption that was put into place before the foundations of the world, now being revealed in the books we look at.

So, we left Aaron on Mount Hor as God took his life to keep him out of the land of promise.

Numbers 33:38-39 ³⁸ Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, and died there in the fortieth year after the sons of Israel had come from the land of Egypt, on the first *day* in the fifth month. ³⁹ Aaron was one hundred twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor.

We come next to the book of Deuteronomy. And why is the book of Deuteronomy called the book Deuteronomy?

This fifth book was called by the Greeks Deuteronomion, i.e., the second law, hence our name Deuteronomy, or a second statement of the laws already promulgated. And so, God will repeat and apply the laws that were originally given at Mt. Sinai.

Deuteronomy 5:1-3 ^{NAU} **Deuteronomy 5:1** Then Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: "Hear, O Israel, the statutes and the ordinances which I am speaking today in your hearing, that you may learn them and observe them carefully. ² "The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. ³ "The LORD did not make this covenant with our fathers, but with us, *with* all those of us alive here today.

Deuteronomy 6:4-13 ⁴ "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! ⁵ "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸ "You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹ "You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. ¹⁰ "Then it shall come about when the LORD your God brings you into the land which He swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you, great and splendid cities which you did not build, ¹¹ and houses full of all good things which you did not fill, and hewn cisterns which you did not dig, vineyards and olive trees which you did not plant, and you eat and are satisfied, ¹² then watch yourself, that you do not forget the LORD who brought you from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ¹³ "You shall fear *only* the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name.

Later in this book of the second giving of the law we see that God had something else in mind in regards to why they were to faithfully represent the Lord.

Deuteronomy 27:2-3 ² "So it shall be on the day when you cross the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God gives you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones and coat them with lime ³ and write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over, so that you may enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you.

The law was to follow them into the land. But what is this land called in verse 3 of this text?

It's called a land flowing with milk and honey, the land that was promised to them.

Keeping God's theme in mind as He reveals His redemptive plan, what is this land flowing with milk and honey in the larger scheme of things?

It's the same promised land that Abraham was promised of which he understood to be a land that would be restored to a true paradise.

Hebrews 11:8-10 ⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

Throughout the latter part of the book of Deuteronomy God reminds Israel of the blessings and curses as they are related to the law. And as the nation draws closer to the land of promise He renews the covenant with Israel.

Deuteronomy 29:10-13 ¹⁰ "You stand today, all of you, before the LORD your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, *even* all the men of Israel, ¹¹ your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water, ¹² that you may enter into the covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath which the LORD your God is making with you today, ¹³ in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As we look at the covenant that the Lord makes with His people we see a thread that runs throughout and it is the thread of the land into which God brings His people. If we only look with eyes that see this present world we miss the greatest part of God's eternal plan to redeem a people for Himself.

The promised land to Israel was only a precursor of a greater land to be given by God to His people. Remember that this survey

started in Genesis in Paradise with Adam and Eve, and since the fall of man, this survey is moving toward a restoration of Paradise with the promise given to Adam and Eve.

Deuteronomy has not left the theme of Eden. It is just using a temporary place and promise that is to be fulfilled in the future.

Deuteronomy 30:5-6 ⁵ "The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. ⁶ "Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.

This was the choice for Israel and why the law played such an important role in their lives, because the law was set against the grace that is found in the promises of God by faith alone. And God continually reminded Israel of this choice to either choose death or choose life.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 ¹⁹ "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, ²⁰ by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Keep in mind again, that neither Abraham, Isaac or Jacob ever possessed the land and yet it was and is promised to them to possess.

And how will they possess it?

And finally, God tells Moses, that like his brother Aaron, he will not come to possess the land, but that another will take his place.

Deuteronomy 31:14 ¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, the time for you to die is near; call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, that I may commission him." So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting.

You talk about that sinking feeling of going to the principle's office. This is it for Moses.

And yet Moses still holds fast to his love for the Lord as He proclaims his praise for God in the presence of Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:1-4 ^{NAU} "Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth. ² "Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As the droplets on the fresh grass And as the showers on the herb. ³ "For I proclaim the name of the LORD; Ascribe greatness to our God! ⁴ "The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He.

And then in chapter 33 Moses blesses Israel as he reminds them of God's faithfulness to their fathers. And then we come to the end of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 ^{NAU} Now Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, ² and all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, ³ and the Negev and the plain in the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. ⁴ Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see *it* with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." ⁵ So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. ⁶ And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day. ⁷ Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated. ⁸ So the sons of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the days of weeping *and* mourning for Moses came to an end. ⁹ Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. ¹⁰ Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, ¹² and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

We only got through two books today, but because of their importance, and in light of the fact that it is the last chapters of Moses' life, I thought it was better to slow down a bit and reflect on his work and God's plan for His people. We'll pick up with Joshua next week.