

Promise of a New Covenant

Fall Quarter: Covenants With God

Unit 3: An Everlasting Covenant

Sunday school lesson for the week of November 5, 2017

By Rev. Earnestine W. Campbell

Scripture Lesson: Numbers 25:10-13; 1 Samuel 2:30-36

Background Scripture: Nehemiah 25; 1 Samuel 2:27-36

Purpose: To understand that our service to God is built upon integrity and fidelity to our commitments to God and to others

Key Verse: Then I will establish for myself a trustworthy priest who will act in accordance with my thoughts and desires. (1 Samuel 2:35)

Hearing the Word

The *Adult Bible Studies*' writer begins the lesson with the following summary of the Israelites' journey:

- *The book of Numbers is the fourth scroll of the Torah.*
- *40 years of migrating through the desert, Sinai wilderness, the Transjordan region to the plains of Moab, along with a new generation of Israelites.*
- *Most scholars think the “conquest” of Canaan was not a military conquest by an Israelite army but the slow immigration, sometimes assimilation, and local rebellions of Israelite tribes to territorial accumulation.*
- *Only a few wisdom passages are found, few songs are sung. But the marching of military units and conquest of indigenous peoples are readily recorded, and distrust and rebellion of the people against Moses, Aaron, and God are all too frequent—reaching a breaking point for God.*
- *The Israelites lived on the edge of civilization. They were nomads in a barren land not their own, their laws were strict, and God’s judgment often swift. (Numbers 12:1-15, 15:32-36, 20:12).*
- *For some of those who looked back on the wilderness, it was a special time when Israel’s relationship with her God was first blooming (Jeremiah 2:2). For others, the failures of faith of those who roamed the wilderness remained in Israel’s collective memory (Psalm 106:13-14).*

Hearing the Word

Background (Numbers 25:1-9)

The writer shifts to the period of the Israelites' arrival in the land of the Moabites and Midianites and their settling in the town of Shittim. They were sojourners, maintaining their identity as nomads and outsiders, and set apart from the others by God. But, the Israelites still had a spirit of rebellion and assimilation to cultural acts of paganism (verse 1).

The Israelites were entering into the Promised Land, but with calamities looming. The writer states that on one hand, the older Israelites who had left Egypt were on their last legs and a plague took its toll on those who remained, totaling 24,000 lives (Numbers 25:9; 1 Corinthians 10:8 tallied 23,000). To add to this tragedy, some of the Israelites turned again to their rebellious ways, which included the worship of the Canaanite god, Baal of Peor (25:1-3), and ultimately faced God's devastating hand as a consequence for their behaviors. God's response was a command to Moses to kill the leaders, but Moses intervened for the ones that had not worshiped Baal and only ordered the demise of the ones that had.

The writer refers to verses 6 -18 as the "next phase of the story," which reflects a safeguarding for holiness and emphasizing their weeping sorrow because of their sins.

Verses 10-12

"The Lord spoke to Moses: Phinehas (Eleazar's son and Aaron the priest's grandson) has turned back my rage toward the Israelites. Because he was jealous for me among you, I didn't consume the Israelites due to my jealousy. Therefore, say: I'm now giving him my covenant of wellbeing. It will be for him and his descendants a covenant of permanent priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and sought reconciliation for the Israelites." God's reaction was not to "consume" the Israelites in destruction. The scripture translation uses the word "Jealously" for Phinehas's for God's law, but the writer says that it could have been his "zealously" for God's law ("zealously" is used in other translations). God commended Phinehas for his faithful spirit that led to a covenantal promise of "well-being." The writer points to Psalm 106:28-31 as the psalmist singing a song about Phinehas's courage.

1 Samuel 2:12-29

The writer conveys 1 Samuel as a continuation of the "world of Priests." The scripture introduces Eli, a judge and the chief priest of Shiloh, who may have been a descendant of Phinehas, as receiving a word from God. Eli's actions weren't similar to Phinehas's. He received a "divine" complaint about the behavior of his sons and his unwillingness to correct them made his family's future doomed. And, because of this, the hope and promise of God for Eli was given to another, a "trustworthy priest" (verse 35), who

would do God's will.

Applying the Word

Teachers ask class members:

1. Have you ever encountered a "wilderness" experience or in your community? What did you learn from the experience?
2. Discuss ways that humanity's behaviors are rebellious against God's commands and covenant? How can we help in making a better society based on his commands?
3. Have you ever felt judged by God for your shortcomings? If so, how did it make you feel and did you confess?
4. How can you improve your commitment and draw closer to God? Is there anyone to help hold you accountable on your journey?

Conclusion

God's covenant is everlasting, and he is always just. He navigates with us through our journey; we just only need to let him lead our paths.

Closing Prayer

God, thank you for your patience and steadfast love. Let our service be built upon integrity and fidelity to our commitments to you and others. Amen.

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The "Adult Bible Studies, Series Fall 2017" book is used for the content of this lesson.