

The Second Generation: Admonitions



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Numbers 26–32, Romans 5.*

Memory Text: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (*Deuteronomy 6:4, 5*).

T rue to His Word that the rebellious generation who had refused to enter the Promised Land would not enter it, the Lord now brought a new generation to the borders of that same land. There He directed Moses and the high priest, Eleazar, to number the congregation of males from 20 years and upward, “all that are able to go to war” (*Num. 26:2*). Surprisingly, the total in this second count amounted to 601,730 (*vs. 51*), nearly the same as that in the first count, 603,550, 40 years before (*Num. 2:32*). In spite of the divine judgment on the nation, in which the first generation (except for Joshua and Caleb) perished, God had multiplied them abundantly, and the armies of Israel mustered in the plains of Moab were for all practical purposes as large as those of the first generation.

Many questions, however, remained: Was this new generation, having lived with the results of their parents' bad mistakes, ready to learn from those mistakes and obey the Lord? How ready were they to take up the mantle now given to them? What lessons were they going to have to learn, and what can we learn from them, as well?

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 19.*

Land Division

After the debacle at Shittim, a census was taken of the males 20 years of age and older (*Num. 26:1–4*). With just a few notable exceptions (*see vs. 64, 65*), the older generation had died off, and a new one had appeared.

What was one of the reasons that the census was taken? Why would this be important? *Num. 26:52–56*.

Once the second generation had conquered the land, it needed to be divided fairly; otherwise, this could have become a source of fighting and confusion. Fortunately, Moses was still living and could direct in this important matter. As the text states, those tribes with a lot of members were given the most land; those with fewer, less. What could be fairer than that?

Read Numbers 27:1–11. What important principles do we see being made manifest here?

A key element here is the sanctity of the family, especially in regard to property and the rights of inheritance. It's clear that the idea was to keep the property as close as possible within the family. The land, after all, was an "inheritance," and so it belonged in the family.

As we see, too, this was not a one-time deal. Because these women had the faith and courage to approach Moses over an issue of basic fairness, the Lord established a "statute of judgment" (*Num. 27:11*) that would endure for future generations and would protect women who might have found themselves in similar circumstances.

It's always so easy to let things like possessions dominate us so that we forget even the most basic Christian principles. How can we protect ourselves from allowing our desire for things to ruin our relationship with God and with others?

The Lesson in Brief

▶ **Key Text:** *Deuteronomy 6:4, 5*

▶ **The Student Will:**

Know: Review the lessons impressed upon the second generation of Israel who was given the Promised Land.

Feel: Appreciate a democratic style of leadership.

Do: Do our part faithfully, as members of one body.

▶ **Lesson Outline:**

I. Know: Learning From Past Generations

A Even though Moses wasn't to go into Canaan, he helped prepare the people for this long-awaited step. How was the land to be divided?

B How was the new leader for Israel chosen? What was Moses' attitude toward this process?

II. Feel: Qualities of Leadership

A What weight did family needs have in the distribution of land? How does this speak to you of the value of family in God's eyes?

B How did God and Moses respond to the requests of Reuben and Gad and the daughters of Zelophehad? In the light of these experiences, what role does flexibility and give-and-take have in leadership? What other traits of leadership are illustrated?

C What attitudes toward leadership are fostered by a democratic, rather than authoritarian, style of leadership? When is authoritarian leadership appropriate?

III. Do: Acting as One, the Body of Christ

A Why was Moses worried about Reuben and Gad's request to settle before crossing the Jordan? Have we been guilty of caring for ourselves and our family's needs without regard to the responsibilities we have to the church and community?

B What responsibilities do we have to our church and community that are as critical as those Moses stressed to Reuben and Gad?

▶ **Summary:** Though Moses would not lead the people into Canaan, he faithfully administered the final preparations for their entry.

Successor

After so many years in the wilderness, the children of Israel were soon to make their crossing into the Promised Land. A new generation had arisen that was soon to inherit the land first promised to them when still in the loins of Abraham many centuries earlier (*Gen. 17:8*). Thus, despite the setbacks, the rebellions, the murmuring, the lack of faith of His people, God was going to fulfill His word. He was just going to do it with another generation, that's all.

Read Numbers 27:12–23 and answer the following questions:

• **In Numbers 27:12 the Lord talks about the land that He has “given” (in the past tense) to the children of Israel, even though they were not there yet. What does that tell us about God’s promises?**

• **After the Lord told Moses again that he could not cross into this land because of his sin, how does Moses respond? That is, what is Moses’ main concern? What does that tell us about the kind of man he was?**

• **Why was it important that Joshua be given his charge before all the congregation?**

Moses was soon to die, his work being done. The charge was now given to Joshua, Moses’ appointed successor. How interesting that it wasn’t one of Moses’ sons but, instead, someone who had proved his own worth. God, not Moses or the congregation, chose Joshua.

Also, the texts make it clear that, as with Moses, Joshua was to lead only through the guidance of God; that is, besides the written laws and commandments, he also was to seek the Lord’s will through the “judgment of [the] Urim before the Lord” (*vs. 21*).

How often do you seek the Lord in prayer regarding important decisions you need to make? Upon what basis do you make your decisions, if not through seeking God’s will?

Learning Cycle

► **STEP 1—Motivate**

Key Concept for Spiritual Growth: God calls us to learn from our predecessors to pass on the torch of godly wisdom to those who follow.

Just for Teachers: While most track events are individual, relay races are the quintessential example of team cooperation. Passing the baton requires precision. The baton must be exchanged in the exchange zone.

Timing is critical. If batons are passed too early or too late, the team is automatically disqualified. If either the incoming or outgoing runner moves outside his or her lane, interfering with another runner, his or her team will be penalized. Timing the exchange requires hours of practice. If the outgoing runner must slow down to receive the baton, time is lost. If incoming runners overrun outgoing runners, a poor exchange is inevitable. Dropped batons almost certainly ensure a lost race. Yet, a well-executed relay is the most exciting spectacle in racing.

How are we at passing the baton of faith to future generations? How well have we received the baton from past generations? Have we learned from their mistakes or repeated them? Have we learned from their wisdom or arrogantly ignored their values? Have we been intentional or careless about passing the baton? In what ways can we improve?

Activity: Pass out sheets of paper and pens. Ask members to list five values that are important to them. Allow time to share their lists. Ask members why those values are important and who had a part in transmitting those values to them. Now ask what they are doing to transmit those values to others. Ask why it is important to share our values with others.

► **STEP 2—Explore**

Bible Commentary

I. Land Division (Review Numbers 26, 27:1–11, 34:1–36:13 with the class.)

C O N T I N U E D 

Sacrificial System Reaffirmed

When the Lord spoke audibly the Ten Commandments (*Exodus 20*) from Mount Sinai and commanded the building of the tabernacle (*Exodus 25*), the second generation would have been children. Now God chooses to reaffirm, in summary form, the sacrificial system to the adult second generation.

Numbers 28:1–8 describes the “daily” or “continual” offering of a lamb in the morning and one in the evening. It was arranged in such a manner that this sacrifice always was burning (*Lev. 6:9, 13*). This “daily” or “continual” was the sanctuary’s centerpiece. It took priority over all other sacrifices and was central to Israel’s worship. This sacrifice represented the constant availability of God’s forgiveness and acceptance through the Redeemer prefigured in the sacrifice.

Read Romans 5. What does that tell us about the fullness and completeness of Christ’s sacrifice for us?

On the Sabbath day (apart from the “daily”), a special sacrifice was made. It consisted of two lambs, morning and evening (*Num. 28:9, 10*). Then, Numbers 28:11–15 details the sacrifices for the new moon, which then was followed by the festivals: Passover, Pentecost (Feast of Weeks), the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles (*Numbers 28, 29*).

“Some wonder why God desired so many sacrifices and appointed the offering of so many bleeding victims in the Jewish economy.

“Every dying victim was a type of Christ, which lesson was impressed on mind and heart in the most solemn, sacred ceremony, and explained definitely by the priests. Sacrifices were explicitly planned by God Himself to teach this great and momentous truth, that through the blood of Christ alone there is forgiveness of sins.”—Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 107.

Why is it so important to trust only in Christ’s merits and righteousness, as opposed to anything in ourselves, as the only means of salvation? What happens if we start looking to ourselves, as if somehow we could be good enough to deserve or earn our salvation?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

Since Hebrew society was patriarchal (not matriarchal), one easily could assume that women's rights were overlooked. How important, then, that the texts for study here illustrate the following points: (1) that God was interested in the position of women, (2) that civil laws are created to serve the principle of fairness and may be modified when it becomes clear that they actually may contravene the principle they were intended to protect, and (3) that the rights of all persons affected must be considered so that a compromise that meets everyone's needs may be reached.

God's plan for land division awarded land based on tribal need and guaranteed a just distribution in perpetuity. This plan was highly important in an agrarian society, for land signified the ability to sustain life and culture. The right of women to a fair inheritance had to be balanced against the tribal guarantee of a perpetual means of support. As women became owners, it became possible for land to move to another tribe because, in a patriarchal society, the female-owned land would transfer to her husband's tribe. This would reduce the land, the means of support for one tribe as compared with another. The resolution of this matter shows due consideration for both concerns.

Consider This: How do modern civil laws and church practice provide for an equitable distribution of power, wealth, and respect among men and women in our society? If law and past practice no longer serve the principle of fairness, what is the proper way to bring about change?

II. Keeping Your Word and On the Borders *(Review Numbers 30, 32, 2 Cor. 1:20, James 3:3–12 with the class.)*

Honest, open communication shuts the door to many misunderstandings. God wanted Moses to pass this value on to the new generation. How many children are hurt because parents break their promises to spend time with them? How many families are pressured because they fail to meet financial obligations? How many marriages and business partnerships dissolve because partners cannot keep their word?

Personal inconvenience or "rash promises" are not acceptable excuses for not keeping one's word. Often it requires personal sacrifice to keep a

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Keeping Your Word

Read Numbers 30 regarding vows and oaths. What important principle can we take away from this chapter for ourselves today? What does this tell us about the importance of our words? What warnings should we take away from here too?

It's one thing to flat-out lie; that's obviously sinful and wrong. But that's not what's being talked about here. How often have we made a solemn promise, or a vow in the Lord's name, that we absolutely intended to keep at the time, only to eventually break it for one reason or another?

In this immediate context, we're dealing with vows made "unto the Lord," but in reality, when we—especially as professing Christians—say that we are going to do something, we should follow through on it. That we intended to do it at the time we said it will make little difference to the one to whom we make the promises. Maybe the individual will believe us, maybe not. The point is, as professed Christians, what kind of representatives of Christ are we if we are going around making promises or vows that—for whatever reason—we end up not keeping? What good is our religion if we don't keep our word? That's why it is crucial that we be very careful in what we promise or make vows about, because we might find ourselves in the embarrassing position of not being able to follow through, no matter how good our intentions.

"The obligation to which one's word is pledged—if it do[es] not bind him to perform a wrong act—should be held sacred."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 506. In Israelite culture, failure to keep one's promise, sworn in the name of God, was regarded as a sin of omission. In a real sense, failure to fulfill a vow is taking His name in vain, especially if we are Christians who, ideally, do all things in the name of Christ.

How many times have you made vows and promises to others, to God, or to yourself that you have broken? What can you learn from these experiences? What promises can you claim that will help prevent this from happening continually?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

promise, but this is what is expected of all who claim to know God. God always honors His promises—so should those who bear His name.

This responsibility was the issue on the borders of Canaan when the Reubenites and Gadites asked permission to establish themselves east of Canaan. At first Moses assumed that their motive was cowardice, an intent to welch on their obligation to fight alongside their fellow Hebrews in the Canaanite conquest. How often we, like Moses, assume the worst of others. However, this was not their intent. Give Moses credit for giving them the chance to correct his faulty assessment. How many church disputes might be avoided if we followed these principles!

Consider This: What does “giving others the benefit of the doubt” mean to you? How can we replace needless accusations with sincere questions?

► STEP 3—Apply

Just for Teachers: Passing the torch of faith and values can be a frustrating endeavor, as the ensuing dialogue illustrates. Have two people perform the following skit and then discuss it as a class.

- SON, Dad, it's none of your business! It's my life. Why can't you just leave me alone?
- DAD, I can't believe I'm hearing this. My own son! Didn't I teach you anything?
- SON, Look, I've had it. You *can't* live my life for me.
- DAD, That's beside the point. *You* have a moral obligation here. You can't just walk away and leave someone else to do what you should've done.
- SON, Well, you're one to talk. Who said that you were “Mr. Perfect”?
- DAD, Maybe I haven't always lived up to the values I taught you. I'm sorry. But believe me—I tried to keep my promises. I tried to do what's right.
- SON, Well, did you ever think that maybe I'm trying to do the same thing in my own way?
- DAD, Maybe that's the problem. It's not about your way or my way or the high-way. Have you asked, “What does God think about this?”
- SON, I knew it. I just knew it. Sooner or later you'd play the “God card.” That is so phony.

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On the Borders

After all this time, a new generation has arisen, one more than ready to leave the wilderness and finally have a home to call their own. Some were, indeed, more than ready to settle down.

Read Numbers 32:1–5. What is going on here? Why would they make this request?

In Numbers 32:6–15, Moses gives his response. He’s not happy, and he views their actions as sinful. He compares it to what happened the last time they were on the borders and ready to cross over. Except that this time, their reasons were different. The first time they were simply scared of the people in the land and didn’t trust the Lord enough to go over. This situation wasn’t like that one. They weren’t afraid to go over; instead, they liked it where they were and wanted to remain there.

How did the leaders of Reuben and Gad respond, and how did Moses respond in return? *Num. 32:16–42.*

The response of the Reubenites and Gadites showed that they were willing to do their part for the rest of their countrymen. That is, however much they wanted the land that they already possessed, they weren’t going to be selfish about it. However much they were seduced by what they possessed, they were going to make sure the rest of the Israelites got their possessions as well before they settled down to enjoy their own.

Seeing their willingness, Moses, though warning them that “your sin will find you out” (vs. 23), nevertheless took them at their word and agreed on the stated conditions.

Think about your own relationship to the church body as a whole. How much are you seeking to give to the church, in contrast to how much you take from it? What does your answer tell you about yourself? At the same time, might there not be times that, because of circumstances, you need to take more than you can give?

Learning Cycle CONTINUED

- DAD, Go ahead . . . throw God out. Now tell me, where do you get *your* values? Or is this every man for himself? Everybody does what they think is right regardless of which one it hurts?
- SON, That is so unfair!
- DAD, Is it? Look, one day you're going to have a child of your own. What do you want him to be? Are you going to have any values to give him? Or are you going to toss him out like a bottle in the middle of the ocean—adrift until it finds some random shore?
- SON, Oh, boy! I can hear it coming: "Are you going to let the media and the Internet raise him?" Dad, you are so predictable!
- DAD, Maybe so; but someday you're going to have to figure out why you're here, what's your purpose, what gives life meaning—the big questions. You're going to find out that there's more than just you in the world. Maybe then you'll think twice about God.
- SON, And you think I haven't already done that?
- DAD, Well, if you have, don't forget that God loves you and has a plan for your life. Learn from my shortcomings. Don't repeat them. Choose the best that life offers you.
- SON, (*pause*) OK, I'm not making any promises, but I'll think about it.

Questions: What true statements do both father and son make? What do you think they were arguing about? Read "between the lines" and talk about ways to make it easier to transfer God's values to the next generation.

► **STEP 4**—Create

Activity: Building on the discussion of the skit, make a list of five things that you personally intend to do to pass on your faith and values to the next generation.

Further Study: Study the following texts regarding specific points Moses chose to remind the second generation of Israelites about. His remarks are based on the principle: “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history.”—Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches*, p. 196.

- Shittim plague in which 24,000 died (*Num. 25:9, 26:1*)
- Korah, Dathan, and Abiram’s rebellion (*Num. 26:9–11*)
- Er and Onan, sons of Judah (*vs. 19*)
- Nadab and Abihu, priestly sons of Aaron (*vs. 61*)
- The first generation died in the wilderness, except Caleb and Joshua (*vs. 63–65*)

Most of these events listed by Moses were events the second generation experienced. Why allude to these tragedies in Hebrew history? The apostle Paul explains: “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (*1 Cor. 10:11*).

Discussion Questions:

1 How can one generation pass to the next generation its values, beliefs, and zeal? Or can it? Or look at it this way: Should one generation expect the next one to have the same kind of experiences and faith that it had? Discuss.

2 Dwell more on the question of what our role is in the church. First, what is the role of the church as a whole? How do we fit in with that role? Should we always be in a position of giving? When is it appropriate to take?

3 As we have studied the children of Israel on the move in the wilderness, what mistakes have they made that we are in danger of making, as well? What main lessons can we learn from what they have done? More important, what can we do to ensure that we don’t fall into the same traps? Or if we already have, how can we get out of them?

Summary: While Moses still lived, it was fitting that God instructed him to give final instructions to the second generation, reaffirm the faith, and also to appoint Joshua as the nation’s new leader under God.