



REMINDERS OF GOD'S ATTRIBUTES

Numbers 26–31

To consistently follow what God says, we must have an accurate understanding of who God is. God is revealed to us in the Bible and quite often through His acts recorded there. God's acts in Numbers 26–31 reveal a number of important and impressive attributes of God.

There's an old saying that actions speak louder than words. That's certainly true. And even though God has spoken clearly through Moses here in Numbers 26–31, God is going to speak loudly to a new generation of Israelites through His actions. And His actions are going to reveal some truths about His attributes.

For instance, here in Numbers chapter 26, God's people are reminded that the Lord is *faithful*. God speaks to Moses and Eleazar, the new high priest, in verse 2:

“Take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, by their fathers' houses, all in Israel who are able to go to war.”

Now this was the same instruction the Lord gave at Sinai years earlier in Numbers chapter 1. You might remember that this book is entitled Numbers—from the Greek word *arithmoi*, which gives us the word *arithmetic*. This book opens and closes with a census—it's a book of numbers.

And this final census here indicates that the Lord is preparing His people for conquest. This new generation of Israelites are standing on the threshold of the promised land, which is a testimony that God is faithful in keeping His promises.

Now over in chapter 27 you could write the words, the Lord is *fair*. Here you find the five daughters of Zelophehad coming to Moses. Their father had died without a male heir, and they have no inheritance in the land.

So, in verse 4 they plead their case: “Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers.”

There is no law governing this kind of case, so Moses goes to the Lord. In verse 7 the Lord answers:



Wall drawing of a deity conferring authority on Pharaoh



“The daughters of Zelophehad are right. You shall give them possession of an inheritance among their [uncles] and transfer the inheritance of their father to them.”

God didn’t make a mistake that He’s now trying to fix. This event is recorded in history to make the point that the Lord is compassionate and fair.

There is another critical step in preparing Israel for entering the land, and that’s appointing a successor to Moses. This action reveals that God is *wise*.

The Lord tells Moses to go up on a mountain, where he can see the land the Lord is giving Israel. Then in verse 13, He says to Moses, “When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people.” The Lord will allow Moses to see the land, but He will not allow Moses to enter the land because of his earlier disobedience.

But Moses makes this request of the Lord in verses 16-17:

“Let the LORD . . . appoint a man over the congregation who shall . . . lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd.”

And the Lord appoints Joshua to succeed Moses. There is obvious wisdom in choosing Joshua. He’s the courageous spy who had wanted to go into the land and defeat the giants forty years earlier! And then he was chosen to receive leadership training on the job as the assistant to Moses during the forty years of wilderness wandering.

In verses 22-23, we see a public ceremony:

[Moses] took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazar the

priest and the whole congregation, and he laid his hands on him and commissioned him as the LORD directed.

Joshua is now officially Moses’ successor as Israel’s leader.

The divine instructions that follow reveal another truth about God—that He is *relational*. All the offerings recounted here in chapters 28 and 29 simply reveal the wonderful truth that the Lord wants a close relationship with this new generation of Israelites.

Here we find again God’s directions about daily offerings (Numbers 28:1-8); the Sabbath offerings (verses 9-10); monthly offerings (verses 11-15); and then finally the annual offerings, which include the special Passover offerings (28:16–29:40).

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This is true, not just for the nation, but also for *individuals* whose faith is active and obedient. So here in chapter 30, guidelines are given for making vows to the Lord. Verse 2 says:

“If a man vows a vow to the LORD . . . he shall not break his



word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.”

Now the point of *this* chapter is to warn the Israelites that breaking a vow hinders their relationship with God. Again, this emphasizes that God doesn't want to be isolated; He wants to be involved. And that's still true today, in your life and mine.

In chapter 31 we are given the revelation that the Lord is *just*. The Lord tells Moses in verse 2: “Avenge the people of Israel on the Midianites.”

You may remember how Balak, the Moabite king attempted to curse Israel and then, on Balaam's advice, lured them into idolatry and immorality. The Midianites had joined Moab in attempting to destroy Israel. Well, this is payday for them all.

We are told here that Israel goes to war against them and the results of that war: “They killed every male. They killed the kings . . . And they also killed Balaam,” that false prophet (verses 7-8).

Israel is acting on God's behalf to carry out *His* justice. Now the world doesn't like this attribute of God. But God is not only compassionate; He is also just, and in the end, according to the Word of God, judgment will be delivered on the world of humanity. And only those who have run for shelter in Jesus Christ will escape the coming wrath and holy justice of God.

I am reminded again of one of our country's founding fathers, who once said, “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just; that His justice will not sleep forever.”

Now as we move through chapter 31, we are reminded that God is also *holy*. Here in verses 13-24, God sets forth the proper ritual for purification from uncleanness. This isn't just about good hygiene and washing your hands and behind your ears before supper. Ritual uncleanness is a symbol of sin. And those

who have been made ritually unclean through warfare need cleansing.

This illustrates the truth that our sin needs to be forgiven; we need cleansing in order to have fellowship with a holy God. This is a picture of the coming, cleansing sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who reconciles us to a holy God.

Now the final act here in chapter 31 reminds us that the Lord is *worth praising*. In verse 48, the officers of the army come to Moses with a huge offering of gold jewelry taken with the plunder. And they say in verse 49, “Your servants have counted the men of war who are under our command, and there is not a man missing from us.” This is a gift of gratitude for what God has done, and it comes from every soldier.

And this is where you end up when you walk in obedience with God and discover that He is faithful, fair, wise, relational, just, and holy. What can you do but praise Him?

Why is it important for you personally to regularly take the time to ponder and celebrate God's attributes? What attributes of God can your yet to be saved friends and family see and hear from your life?

How is the message of the gospel affected when we let God's grace and mercy not stand equally beside His holiness and justice? Why do we sometimes let these qualities get out of balance?

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