

# Joshua, the Good Shepherd (Numbers 27)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Numbers

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## I. Introduction

- a. We are in the last year or two of the 40 years (or 42 in the LXX; compare **Joshua 5:5-6**) that the Israelites would spend in the desert before entering the Promised Land.
- b. The Israelites have faced the last major trial in the Wilderness, in which their men were drawn into sexual immorality and idolatry with the Moabite (or Midianite) women, in **Numbers 25**.
  - i. Because of that sin, 24,000 Israelites died. It was only stopped by the bold action of Phinehas. As a reward for his zeal, the Lord granted him and his descendants the “covenant of peace”, the high priesthood.
- c. The Lord told Moses to conduct a second census of the people, approximately 40 years after the first census.
  - i. This occurs before the people enter the Promised Land and is intended to help determine the distribution of land (which will be based on the size of each tribe).
  - ii. Of the first generation of adult males counted in the previous census (other than Moses, who will die soon), only two men remain: Joshua and Caleb. They are the only two men from that generation who will enter the Promised Land.
- d. Now, the final preparation for the Israelites to enter the Promised Land will include:
  - i. Moses giving some final instructions to the Israelites,
  - ii. Moses handing off leadership of the people to a successor, and
  - iii. Moses’ death.
- e. Despite what many Christians think, one of the most important reasons to study the Old Testament books (including **Numbers**) is *to learn more about Jesus*.
  - i. I believe we will see this demonstrated in a wonderful way in the current lesson.

## II. Moses Addresses Problem Raised by the Daughters of Zelophehad

- a. Read **Numbers 27:1-11**.
- b. The problem and the solution.
  - i. Each family was to inherit land within the territory apportioned to their tribe. That land would then be passed down father-to-son through the succeeding generations.
  - ii. A man named Zelophehad, the leader of a family in the tribe of Manasseh, died in the wilderness journey having no sons. He had daughters only.
  - iii. His daughters asked Moses if *they* (the women descendants) could inherit the land that would have gone to their father's line, since he had no sons. In that way, his descendants could maintain his name through the inheritance of land.
  - iv. Moses inquires of the Lord. The Lord tells him that, yes, under the circumstances, the daughters of that man could inherit their father's portion of the land to be distributed.
- c. The role of Moses in the community is revealed in this story.
  - i. From **Exodus 18** and **Deuteronomy 1**, things were set up as follows in Israel:
    1. Moses was not a micro-managing type of leader. Neither did he fit the typical profile of a one-man dictatorship.
      - a. He taught other men the laws and ordinances from God and expected them to promulgate them and to judge over most disputes.
      - b. The pillar of cloud and fire (rather than Moses) guided the people on the route they were to take through the Wilderness, as well as the timing of departures and encampments.
    2. Moses had appointed capable men over the thousands, hundreds, fifties, etc.
      - a. The men may have been chosen by the people, then ordained by Moses.
    3. He explained the laws and ordinances of the Lord to those men and left judgment in their hands for almost every dispute.

4. The few really difficult questions or disputes, which were too challenging for the appointed men to handle, would be brought before Moses for answers.
  - a. In this case, the daughters of Zelophehad had a challenging request, to address a situation that the general regulations did not appear to adequately address.
  - ii. Note that Moses responded by inquiring of the Lord about what to do in this situation. Then Moses followed the instructions given to him by the Lord.
  - iii. Moses provides a model for church leadership that we can learn from!

### III. Moses Told to Ascend Mount Nebo Before He Dies

- a. Read **Numbers 27:13-17**.
  - i. Moses is told to ascend Mount Nebo. He will see the land promised to Abraham and his descendants, but he will not enter it. Instead, he will die on Mount Nebo, and his assistant Joshua will complete the mission.
    1. **Question:** If the Lord told you that you would soon die, what would be the first thing on your mind? Would it be a concern for your own fate, or would your attention turn to personal regret?
    2. In the case of Moses, when he was told that his death was near, *his concern* was for those who would be left behind: the nation of Israel.
  - ii. It is not clear to me if Moses ascended Mount Nebo only once, or if this happened two or more times in connection with his death. His ascent of Mount Nebo and seeing the Promised Land from a distance are discussed in **Deuteronomy**, in connection with his final days and his death.
- b. Let us consider the related accounts of this episode at Mount Nebo, as recorded in the book of **Deuteronomy**.
  - i. Read **Deuteronomy 3:21-29**.
    1. Moses begged the Lord to be allowed to enter the Promised Land. The Lord turned down his request and instead told him to pass the responsibility for leading the people on to Joshua.
  - ii. Read **Deuteronomy 32:48-52**.

iii. Read **Deuteronomy 34:1-8**.

1. This chapter discusses the death of Moses on Mount Nebo.
2. He died at the age of 120, in full vigor. Somehow, he has maintained his strength and vision even at a very advanced age.
  - a. The physical and mental condition of Moses is an upward call to me as I get older!
  - b. Similarly, I am convicted by the example of Caleb in **Joshua 14**, who, at the age of 85, boasted that he was just as strong as he had been at age 40.
- c. The *reason* Moses was not allowed to enter the Promised Land, despite his plea to the Lord, was because of what he did at the Water of Contention, at Kadesh, in the Desert of Sin. There, rather than simply speaking to the rock as directed by the Lord, he *struck the rock twice*.
  - i. Read **Numbers 20:6-13**.
- d. When Moses is told he is about to die, his attention turns to the people he has been leading for the past 40 years.
  - i. He does not want the people to be “like sheep without a shepherd”.
  - ii. **Question:** What does that tell you about Moses?
    1. He cared deeply for the people.
    2. He saw them as sheep who needed to be led and protected, as a shepherd looks after the sheep.
    3. He had been that kind of a leader himself (a good shepherd).
  - iii. **Question:** Does that remind you of anyone else?
    1. **Answer:** Jesus said essentially the same thing about 1400 years later. This is recorded in two places in the gospels:
      - a. “But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him. And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were *like sheep not having a shepherd*. So He began to teach them many things.” (**Mark 6:33-34**, NKJV)

- b. “Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, *like sheep having no shepherd*. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (**Matthew 9:35-38**, NKJV)

#### IV. *Joshua* (the Same Name as *Jesus*) will be the Successor to Moses

- a. Read **Numbers 27:18-23**.
- b. Storyline:
  - i. God answers Moses’ request that the Lord appoint a man to succeed Moses, one who will shepherd the people after his death.
  - ii. The Lord chooses *Joshua*, who had been Moses’ assistant on the journey through the Wilderness. Joshua also had been one of the only two faithful men (12 total) sent to spy out Canaan.
  - iii. Moses lays hands on Joshua in front of Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, to appoint him as successor in leading Israel.
- c. **Questions:** Who was Joshua? What do we know about him? Why did the Lord select him (as opposed to Phinehas, Eleazar, Caleb or someone else)?
  - i. He was from the tribe of Ephraim and was originally known as “*Hoshea, son of Nun*”. Read **Numbers 13:1-8**.
  - ii. Moses gave him the name “*Joshua*”.
    - 1. Read **Numbers 13:16-17**.
    - 2. In the Greek of the Septuagint (Old Testament generally quoted by Jesus and the apostles, used by the early church predominantly for about 400 years, and still used by Eastern churches such as the Orthodox Churches), it says he was given the name “*Jesus*”.
      - a. From the LXX, in **Numbers 13:16-17** it says, in Greek, the lexical form of the name is Ἰησοῦς (Iesous = Jesus).
      - b. This is the very same Greek word used for *Jesus* (of Nazareth) throughout the Greek New Testament.

- c. *Joshua* and *Jesus* refer to the same name, with Joshua being the name in *Hebrew*, and Jesus being the same name in *Greek*.
3. In the Greek New Testament, in the two places where the successor to Moses is referred to (**Acts 7:45** and **Hebrews 4:8**), in Greek it says his name is "*Jesus*". He has the exact same name that the angel assigned to the son of Mary: *Jesus* (**Matthew 1:21**, **Luke 1:31**).
    - a. You can verify the above statement for yourself with an interlinear Greek-English New Testament.
    - b. If you also would like to compare with the Septuagint references in the Old Testament, you can see this in a LXX/NT (Greek-English) interlinear Bible such as the *Apostolic Bible Polyglot*.
  4. I first discovered this (that the assistant of and successor to Moses was given the name '*Jesus*') when reading Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho a Jew* (written c. 160 AD):
    - a. "Now understand that He who led your fathers into the land is called by this name *Jesus*, and first called Auses (Hoshea). For if you shall understand this, you shall likewise perceive that the name of Him who said to Moses, 'for My name is in Him,' was *Jesus*."
    - b. "... And that the prophet whose name was changed, Jesus [Joshua], was strong and great, is manifest to all."
      - i. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 75; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 236)
    - c. At first, I thought Justin must have been mistaken there, since in context it was clear that he was referring to "Joshua son of Nun".
    - d. However, Justin was correct. He was writing in Greek and simply following the LXX, the Old Testament predominantly used by the apostles and the early church.
- iii. As we discussed, Joshua/Jesus was one of only two faithful spies who were sent to spy out the Promised Land (**Numbers 13-14**). He was also one of only two men of the first generation of adult males counted

in the first census (**Numbers 1**), who also would be numbered in the second census (**Numbers 26**), who would enter the Promised Land.

- iv. Joshua first appears in the story of the battle against the Amalekites in **Exodus 17**. This is the first mention of “*Jesus*” in the Scriptures (in the LXX).

1. Read **Exodus 17:8-13**.
2. Moses makes the form of Christ on the cross (holding his arms up with the staff all day long, stationed between two men), while “*Jesus*” leads the nation to victory against their enemies.
3. Early Christian writers saw in this story a foreshadowing of the victory of Jesus over our enemies through the cross, including:
  - a. Justin Martyr, in *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 111; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 254
  - b. Tertullian, in *An Answer to the Jews*, chapter 10; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, pp. 165-166.

- v. He (alone) accompanied Moses when he ascended Mount Sinai in **Exodus 24**.

1. “So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and they went up the mountain of God.... Then Moses and Joshua went up the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain....” (**Exodus 24:13-15**)

- vi. Joshua (*Jesus*) entered the tabernacle with Moses to meet with the Lord and remained there even after Moses departed.

1. Read **Exodus 33:7-11**.
  - a. “So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle.” (**Exodus 33:11**, NKJV)

- d. Early Christian writers saw in this name ‘*Jesus*’ (Joshua), and in him being appointed the successor to Moses, a clear foreshadowing of Jesus Christ.

- i. From Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD:

1. “What I mean is this. Jesus (Joshua), as I have now frequently remarked, who was called Oshea, when he was sent to spy out the land of Canaan, was named by Moses ‘*Jesus*’ (Joshua). Why he did this you neither ask, nor are at a loss about it, nor make

strict inquiries. Therefore Christ has escaped your notice; and though you read, you understand not; and even now, though you hear that Jesus is our Christ, you consider not that the name was bestowed on Him not purposelessly nor by chance.

2. "...But since not only was his name altered, but he was also appointed successor to Moses, being the only one of his contemporaries who came out from Egypt, he led the surviving people into the Holy Land; and as he, not Moses, led the people into the Holy Land, and as he distributed it by lot to those who entered along with him, so also Jesus the Christ will turn again the dispersion of the people, and will distribute the good land to each one, though not in the same manner. For the former gave them a temporary inheritance, seeing he was neither Christ who is God, nor the Son of God; but the latter, after the holy resurrection, shall give us the eternal possession."
    - a. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 113; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 255)
    - b. See also a similar reference in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 265-266.
- ii. From Tertullian, a Christian writer from Carthage, North Africa:
1. "When Oshea the son of Nun was destined to be the successor of Moses, is not his old name then changed, and for the first time he is called Joshua? It is true, you say. This, then, we first observe, was a figure of Him who was to come.
  2. "For inasmuch as Jesus Christ was to introduce a new generation (because we are born in the wilderness of this world) into the promised land which flows with milk and honey, that is, into the possession of eternal life, than which nothing can be sweeter; inasmuch, too, as this was to be brought about not by Moses, that is to say, not by the discipline of the law, but by Joshua, by the grace of the gospel, our circumcision being effected by a knife of stone, that is, (by the circumcision) of Christ, for Christ is a rock (or stone), therefore that great man, who was ordained as a type of this mystery, was actually consecrated with the figure of the Lord's own name, being called Joshua."
    - a. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 3, chapter 17; found in ANF vol. 3, pp. 334-335)



- iii. Eusebius, writing c. 320 AD, also noted the significance of the special name that Moses gave to his successor:
1. "Moses was also the first to use the name '*Jesus*', when he changed the name of his successor and altered it to Jesus. For it is written: "These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, and Moses called Nauses, the son of Nave, Jesus, and sent them." And notice how the prophet, who was deeply versed in the significance of names, and had gone to the roots of the philosophy of the changed names of the inspired men in his record, and the reasons why their names were changed, introduces Abraham as receiving as a reward of virtue from God a complete change of name from that of his father, the meaning of which it is now the time to explain at length.
  2. "And so, also, in naming Sara '*Sarra*', and Isaac called before his birth '*the laugh*,' and Jacob given as a reward of his struggle the name of '*Israel*', and in exhibiting in many other cases connected with the power and significance of names superhuman insight in his inspired wisdom and knowledge, when no one of those before him had ever used the name Jesus, he first of all, impelled by the Holy Spirit, gives the name of *Jesus* to him whom he is about to constitute the successor of his rule over the people, changing the other name he had used before. He did not consider the name of his forefather given him when he was born sufficient (for his parents called him Nauses).
  3. "But being the prophet of God he changed the name received by birth, and called the man '*Jesus*' at the bidding of the Holy Spirit; that he might lead the whole people after his own death, (with the knowledge that) when the law laid down by Moses someday should be changed and have an end, and should pass away like Moses himself, that no one else but *Jesus the Christ of God* would lead that other polity, which would be better than the former.
  4. "And so Moses, the most wonderful of all the prophets, understanding by the Holy Spirit both the names of our Savior, *Jesus Christ*, honored the choicest of all his rulers by bestowing them as kingly crowns, naming worthily the two leaders and rulers of the people the high priest and his own successor, Christ and Jesus, calling Aaron Christ, and Nauses Jesus, as his successor after his death. In this manner, then, the writings of

Moses himself are adorned with the names of our Savior Jesus Christ.”

- a. (Source: Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel*, book 4, chapter 17; available online)
- iv. Other early Christian writings that discuss the significance of the name of ‘Jesus’ (Joshua) as the successor to Moses include:
  1. Irenaeus, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 1, p. 571
  2. Clement of Alexandria, in Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. 2. p. 224.
- e. Putting the pieces together, in this story from **Numbers 27**:
  - i. God is indicating that the successor to Moses would be named *Jesus*.
    1. This also explains why Mary was directed by the angel to name her firstborn son “Jesus”, in **Luke 1:31-32**.
  - ii. Joshua/Jesus is the one who would complete the mission begun by Moses, who would lead the people into Canaan, the Promised Land.
    1. To me, this explains from another angle why Moses could not be the one who would finish the job and lead the people all the way into the Promised Land.
      - a. However, since Moses appeared on the Mountain of Transfiguration with Jesus, I certainly assume he will be among those who are saved on the Last Day.
    2. The honor of completing the mission had to go to someone named ‘Jesus’.
  - iii. Joshua/Jesus was the one who would lead God’s people to victory in battle through the power of the cross.
  - iv. Joshua/Jesus would remain in the presence of the Lord even when Moses departed.
  - v. Joshua/Jesus would bring about the “second circumcision” (**Joshua 5**) referenced by early Christians, the one done with the rock or stone, and as alluded to by Paul in **Colossians**.
    1. Early Christians who made this foreshadowing regarding ‘Jesus’ bringing the second circumcision include:
      - a. From Justin Martyr, writing c. 160 AD:

- i. "...understand what I say: the blood of that circumcision is obsolete, and we trust in the blood of salvation; there is now another covenant, and another law has gone forth from Zion. Jesus Christ circumcises all who will—as was declared above—with knives of stone; that they may be a righteous nation, a people keeping faith, holding to the truth, and maintaining peace."
  - ii. (Source: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 24; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 206)
- b. From Tertullian, writing c. 197 AD:
- i. "...not through Moses (that is, not through the Law's discipline), but through Joshua (that is, through the new law's grace), after our circumcision with 'a knife of rock' (that is, with Christ's precepts, for Christ is in many ways and figures predicted as a rock); therefore the man who was being prepared to act as images of this sacrament was inaugurated under the figure of the Lord's name, even so as to be named Jesus."
    - 1. (Source: Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, chapter 9; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 163)
2. Paul also wrote something that points to this connection.
- a. "In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead." (**Colossians 2:11-12**, NKJV)
  - b. Consider also what it says in the Septuagint in **Joshua 24:30-32**, that the stone knives of circumcision were placed in the grave with Joshua (Jesus) and literally *buried with him*.

- vi. Joshua/Jesus would be the great shepherd over God's flock, so that we would not become weary and scattered, "like sheep having no shepherd".

## V. Jesus, the Good Shepherd

- a. This story from **Numbers 27** highlights an important aspect of Jesus, foreshadowed by the 'Old Testament Jesus' (Joshua). He would be the successor to Moses, who would complete the job begun by Moses, AND...
- b. He would be a good shepherd over the sheep of God's flock, so that we would not become weary and scattered.
- c. Seeing Jesus as the Good Shepherd.
  - i. "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel." (**Matthew 2:6**, NKJV, quoting from **Micah 5:2**)
    - 1. This is connected to His birth in Bethlehem.
  - ii. "Then Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: "I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered."'" (**Matthew 26:31**, NKJV)
    - 1. This is quoting **Zechariah 13:7** from the Hebrew text; also see the Alexandrian text of the LXX.
  - iii. "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again." (**John 10:11-17**, NKJV)
    - 1. This statement by Jesus, that He was "*the* good shepherd" who would lay down His life for the sheep and then take it up again, points back to the prophecy of **Ezekiel 34**.
      - a. There, it prophesies that in the future, the Lord would "raise up" (in the LXX, Greek word: ἀνίστημι / anistemi) *one* good shepherd who would be over all His sheep.

2. He lays down His life for the sheep.
  - a. This reminds me of the story of David, who, as a youth, had risked his own life to rescue helpless sheep of his father's flock from the mouth of a lion or bear. (**1 Samuel 17:34-37**)
  - iv. "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." (**Hebrews 13:20-21, NKJV**)
  - d. **Question:** How do *you* view Jesus?
    - i. Do you view him (first and foremost) as the *ultimate enabler*, who provides grace even when you are deliberately and repeatedly disobedient?
    - ii. Or do you swing to the other extreme and see him as a great *rule-giver and harsh taskmaster* who is just waiting for you to fall short of all of His requirements so that he can disqualify you from an eternal reward?
    - iii. Or do you consider Jesus to be *distant and unconcerned* about the concerns and challenges you are facing in life?
  - e. **Better Idea:** Let us consider a much more balanced, accurate and accessible framework. Let us see Jesus, and relate to Him, as being our *Great Shepherd*.
    - i. He lays down his life for the sheep. He would do anything for us.
    - ii. He is aware of our weakness and vulnerability.
      1. After all, what 'defensive weapons' does a sheep have to fight against or protect themselves from a dangerous predator? (None.)
      2. Likewise, we are vulnerable to Satan's attack, without the protection of our Good Shepherd.
    - iii. He does not want us to be scattered. He wants us to be together as part of one flock.
      1. The lion looks for stragglers who have become separated from the herd when seeking easy prey. Likewise, Satan looks for isolated Christians who are easier to attack.

2. Instead of being isolated Christians, we need to find healthy churches to be a part of, wherever we are.
- iv. He seeks the lost sheep who stray.
- v. He wants us to have good pasture (grass and water), instead of garbage (junk food) and polluted water.
- vi. A shepherd looks over the flock and watches out for wolves and other predators. He does not try to micro-manage the sheep.
- f. The church needs many more church leaders who strive to be like the Good Shepherd. We need parents who are like that, as well. May we all aspire to imitate this core aspect of the character of Jesus Christ.
  - i. Peter calls this imagery to mind in exhorting men who are elders in the church.
  - ii. Read **1 Peter 5:1-10**.
    1. There are challenges both ways on this.
      - a. The elders need to have the hearts of shepherds. Peter calls his fellow elders to:
        - i. watch over the flock,
        - ii. not lord it over the flock,
        - iii. lead by example,
        - iv. watch out for predators,
        - v. lead the flock to good pasture, and
        - vi. not micromanage the lives of the sheep!
        - vii. (Note that This is the same type of heart men need to have in order to be good fathers for their children.)
      - b. Those younger need to be looking for and submitting to that kind of leadership.
    - iii. Read **Ezekiel 34**.
      1. The Lord is upset about the *bad shepherds* who are abusing His people. They are looking out for themselves and do not care about the sheep.

- a. The Lord will call the bad shepherds to account.
2. The Lord promises He will “raise up” one good shepherd in the future, who will be over His flock.
    - a. He is described here as “David”. Since king David died hundreds of years before Ezekiel was writing, this prophecy of course applies to the promised seed of David, the Christ.
- g. In closing, let us consider the heart of Moses and Joshua (the first Jesus), who prepared the way for Jesus Christ, the ultimate Good Shepherd.
    - i. Let us see Jesus in that light and strive to be like Him as we look out for any other sheep that the Lord entrusts to our care.