

## God's Plan vs. Our Plan – Exploring and Breaking a Pattern of Sin

If you've been participating in the chronological reading of the Bible with us this year, today we're reading chapters 31 and 32 of the book of Numbers (BB p 262). Even if you haven't, you can jump in anytime with a syllabus on the table out front or from our website. Plus, you can join the discussion in our Bible Reading Discussion Group on Facebook.



So, in Numbers 31 and 32 we read about how the Israelites are traveling out of the wilderness of the Sinai and/or Arabian desert and have conquered a number of kingdoms on the east side of the Dead Sea and Jordan River. Per God's plan, they were to then cross the Jordan River and take possession of the Promised Land between the Jordan River, Dead Sea, and Sea of Galilee, and the Mediterranean Sea. However, per Nu 32:1: Now the people of Reuben and the people of Gad had a very great number (**an abundance**) of livestock. And they **saw** (ra'ah – to see, appear, but often in context with desire, pleasure, covetousness) the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, and behold, the place was a place for livestock.

What did they see – they left the Sinai desert...



... and **saw** the lush Jordan River Valley.



Oops, wrong Jordan River – this is the one in the Northwest Lower Peninsula of Michigan. The temptation of sin often looks a lot better than it really is. Here’s the Israelite’s Jordan River, still an improvement over the desert.



The tribes of Reuben and Gad (from back in Numbers 2, these two tribes, along with Simeon, traveled together for 40 years) asked to settle in the recently conquered lands east of the Jordan, and half of the tribe of Manasseh asked to join them. They did not want to cross over the Jordan with the rest of the population. Moses rightfully pointed out this rebellion (sin) and how past rebellions really didn’t work out well for the Israelites – and that this rebellion may be the last straw for God’s patience – and they would suffer **consequences**. These tribes then **rationalize** in v 16-19: “We simply want to build sheepfolds for our flocks and fortified cities for our wives and children. <sup>17</sup>Then we will arm ourselves and lead our fellow Israelites into battle until we have brought them safely to their inheritance. Meanwhile, our families will stay in the fortified cities we build here, so they will be safe from any attacks by the local people. <sup>18</sup>We will not return to our homes until all the people of Israel have received their inheritance of land. <sup>19</sup>But we do not want any of the land on the other side of the Jordan. We would rather live here on the east side where we have received our inheritance.”

Rather presumptuous of them... and they repeat this promise to be the point of the spear of the Israelite forces a couple more times.

Moses, without consulting the LORD, eventually agrees to this plan and, because he won’t be accompanying them into the promised land, communicates it to the rest of the Israelite leaders like Eleazar & Joshua.

These three stages are a common pattern for veering from God’s plan for us – for entering into sin, much like wanting to buy a new car or new boat:

1. **See** the shiny object
2. Have or desire **abundance now**
3. **Rationalize** our actions.

It's one of Satan's classic ploys, dating back to the serpent, the apple, Eve, and Adam in the Garden of Eden. Plus, there are two more steps in the pattern:

4. **Consequences** of not consulting God or following His plan
5. God using what happens to further **His will**. Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails. (Prov 19:21 NIV)

So what were the consequences of these actions from Numbers 32 – was it a bad idea from the get-go?

- They lied – despite their promises. Per the census in Nu 26, the total number of men from the Gad, Reuben, half of Manasseh totaled 110,580 men able to go to war. However, per Jos 4:13, these three tribes only send over 40,000 armed men to lead the assault across the Jordan – leaving 70,580 behind to guard their families and livestock.
- The remaining Israelites, missing nearly 20% of their population for those 2½ tribes, had problems occupying all the promised land by Dan, Ephraim, and Manasseh. Notably, Dan was to occupy the area south of them between Judah and the Mediterranean but they wouldn't dislodge the Philistines. Plus Judah, Asher, Naphtali, and Zebulun had pockets of ites they couldn't dislodge.
- Near war with the rest of the tribes then they built an altar on their return in Jos 22.
- Issues in Judges under Deborah and Jephthah with the separation of the tribes by the Jordan River and enlisting tribes to band together to fight.
- When the Assyrians attacked many years later, these trans-Jordan tribes were among the first annexed by Assyria.

How did God ultimately use this plan for further his plans? In 1 Sam 11, King Saul will muster a large force of Israelites and Judahites to defend Jabesh-gilead, a city in the Transjordan, from the Ammonites, and this will lead to his consolidation of power and recognition as the first King of Israel.

Let's apply this 5-step pattern elsewhere in the Bible and see what happens.

### **5 Step Pattern of Following Our Plan into Sin**

1. **See** the shiny object
2. Have or desire **abundance now**
3. **Rationalize** our actions
4. **Consequences** of not consulting God or following His plan
5. God using what happens to further **His will**.

### **Abram and Lot separating (Gen 13 – BB p19)**

As our first example, let's look at a very similar incident that should have clued in Moses and the rest of them that this whole Jordan River Valley thing was a bad idea – Abram and Lot separating in Genesis 13.

Abundance: Gen 13:2-7: Abram and Lot came out of Egypt very rich with livestock (and silver and gold).

Rationalize: Gen 13:8-9: Abram reasoned that if they went their separate ways, the land would better support their large herds (especially since the Canaanites and Perizzites also occupied the land), their herdsman wouldn't quarrel, and their possessions caused envy and strife.

Sight: Gen 13:10 (ESV) - And Lot lifted up his eyes and **saw (ra-ah)** that the Jordan Valley was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt...

Consequences:

- Gen 13:13 – Lot pitches his tent near Sodom – where the men were wicked, great sinners against the LORD
- Gen 14 – Lot became a POW and had to be rescued by Abram and his buddies
- Gen 19 – Lot is “Sodomized” by moving into town and marries a Sodomite(?) wife, had to flee Sodom, loses his wife, procreates with his daughters, and give birth to the Moabites and Ammonites.

God's use of the new plan: When Abram returned from rescuing Lot in Gen 14, he encountered the King of Salem, Melchizedek, who brought Abram bread and wine and blessed him and Abram gave Him 1/10 of the booty from the battle. Melchizedek is believed to be a theophany – OT appearance of Christ cited in Ps 110 and Hebrews.

### **Joseph being sold into slavery (Gen 37)**

Sight: Joseph's brightly colored coat was a constant reminder – a trigger - of dad's (Jacob) favoritism toward this youngest brother, the only son of Dad's favorite wife Rachel and his uppity dreams. Gen 37:18 – When Joseph's brothers **saw (ra-ah)** him coming, they recognized him in the distance and made plans to kill him.

Abundance: What are the other 10 of us – chopped liver? We're the ones doing the hard work while he get lavish gifts and gets sent on missions to snitch on us.

Rationalize: Eliminate him from the family. Rather than kill him, sell him into slavery and make it appear that he was killed by a wild animal.

Consequences: Long-lived depression of their father Jacob - refusing to be comforted, refusing to send Benjamin to Egypt during the famine out of fear. Lingering guilt among the brothers years later on their first visit to Egypt to buy food and being challenged by the Egyptian Prime Minister (Joseph) – Gen 42:21-22: Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.”<sup>22</sup>And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.”

God's use: Gen 45:4 – “I am Joseph, your brother whom you sold into Egypt. <sup>5</sup>But don't be angry with yourselves that you did this to me, for God did it. He sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. <sup>6</sup>These two years of famine will grow to seven, during which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. <sup>7</sup>God has sent me here to keep you and your families alive so that you will become a great nation. <sup>8</sup>Yes, it was God who sent me here, not you!”

## David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11, bb p474)

Sight: 2 Sam 11:2: It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he **saw (ra-ah)** from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful.

Abundance: The woman and power as the king. David sent the army out (but didn't lead it himself). He sent servants to identify the woman. He sent messengers to bring her to him.

Rationalize: David learned her name was Bathsheba and was the daughter of Eliam and married to Uriah. Both of these guys were members of his 30 Mighty Men who had been loyal to him from the time Saul was pursuing him. Plus, he urgently takes her after the time of her purification is complete – when she is most fertile. As John mentioned, he then tried to rationalize his way out of the pregnancy situation calling Uriah home from the front to get him to lie with his wife and, failing that, sends Uriah back to the front with sealed orders that guaranteed his death in battle. We know David wasn't thinking with his heart that seeks after God.

Consequences: Death of Uriah. Consuming guilt that David writes about in the Psalms. Death of his son conceived by this affair. Jealousy & rebellion of his older sons from then on, eventually over the preferential treatment of the next son from Bathsheba – Solomon.

God's use: Solomon would become a great king, build the temple, & be an ancestor of the Messiah, but he also had a sin life in worshipping the gods of his many foreign wives.

Other OT examples include Balaam, Jacob stealing his brother's blessing, & Judah & his wife / daughter-in-law Tamar. The pattern continues into the NT with the parable of the rich farmer in Luke 12 and Ananias & Saphira in Acts 5.

## Peter and Jesus (Mt 16:15 – p1469)

Sight: Peter **saw** the transfiguration in Mt 17 and about a week earlier proclaimed that he knew Jesus was the promised Messiah - Mt 16:15-16: - Then he asked them, "Who do you say I am?" <sup>16</sup>Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Abundance / timing: Peter felt he was in a special place – Mt 16:17-19: Jesus replied, "**You** are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to **you**. **You** did not learn this from any human being. <sup>18</sup>Now I say to **you** that **you** are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. <sup>19</sup>And I will give **you** the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever **you** lock on earth will be locked in heaven, and whatever **you** open on earth will be opened in heaven."

Rationalize: Peter knew the Messiah would free the Jews (**now** he believed), was concerned with Jesus's security and at the last supper pledged to stay with Him to death, despite Jesus's warning - Mk 14:29-31: Peter said to him, "Even if everyone else deserts you, I never will."

<sup>30</sup>"Peter," Jesus replied, "the truth is, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times."

<sup>31</sup>“No!” Peter insisted. “Not even if I have to die with you! I will never deny you!” And all the others vowed the same.

In Gethsemane, He attacked with his sword to attempt to prevent Jesus’ capture. (Remember, Jesus told the Apostles to take a sword in Luke 22 – but this was likely for their defense against robbers when on the road.) Then he denied Jesus 3 times when trapped in the home / courtyard of the high priest (whose servant’s ear he cut off) to save his skin.

Consequences: Peter’s action with the sword put all the Apostles at risk when Jesus was seized. All the Apostles fled into the night, with John Mark possibly losing his clothes in the process. Peter overwhelmed with guilt after his 3 denials of Jesus – that he realized that Jesus had predicted.

God’s use: It was God’s plan for Jesus to be crucified, die, and be resurrected. After Jesus’s resurrection and Pentecost with the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter and the rest of the Apostles understood Jesus’s incarnation and plan for salvation. Jesus restores Peter’s role and confidence in John 21.

### **How do we break this pattern?**

One method from the OT is the tying of tassels to the corners of our garments in Nu 15:39-40 – And it shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, to do them, not to follow after your own heart and **your own eyes**, which you are inclined to where after. <sup>40</sup>So you shall remember and do all my commandments, and be holy to your God.

However, trying to break this pattern on our own is almost certainly doomed to failure - like trying to hold a beach ball under water.

### **Breaking the Pattern of Following Our Plan into Sin**

- 1. Share our desires and plans with God**
- 2. Ask for His guidance**
- 3. Wait, listen, and obey**
- 4. Repeat regularly**
- 5. Watch for His work despite our stubbornness.**

The way to break this pattern is to be in the habit of consulting with God about the things in our lives via our prayer life. It’s wonderful to say prayers of worship, thankfulness, and petition for the healing of others, but we really need to have a heartfelt 2-way conversation with the Holy Spirit. 1 Thes 5:17 tells us to “Pray without ceasing.” Review our thoughts, urges, and ideas with Him and be open to His input. If we have a sinful urge, a shiny thing, ask Him to show us what it truly is – and what the consequences of that action are. He can show us the ugliness of the shiny thing, the lack of urgency to take an action, and the fallacies of our own rationalization. Of course, given our fallen nature, we need to do this repeatedly because our old evil desires will come back. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can break the pattern. We can dismiss our sinful plans and see the beauty of following God’s plans. Jer 29:11 - For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

When we sin, what does God do? He doesn't smite us, but He patiently calls us back, to repent, even if it is over and over. Eze 18:23: Do you think, asks the Sovereign LORD, that I like to see wicked people die? Of course not! I only want them to turn from their wicked ways and live. 1 Tim 2:4: for he wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.

So we shouldn't be surprised that even after we pursue our own plans and suffer the consequences from pursuing them instead of God's plan, God will use the results – the mess we find ourselves in – to work something great in His will. Sometimes it is this realization that will make us turn toward Him and repent – and start listening to Him instead of telling and / or ignoring Him. Last month, John talked about Psalm 51, where David is tormented by the guilt of his sin with Bathsheba. In v10-12 read:

Create in me a clean heart, O God.

Renew a right spirit within me.

<sup>11</sup>Do not banish me from your presence,  
and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

<sup>12</sup>Restore to me again the joy of your salvation,  
and make me willing to obey you.

Let's pray... (blank slide)