

Large-Print Edition

Adult **BIBLE** **Class**

For Adults Ages 26 & Up

FALL QUARTER
September, October, November 2020



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Building a New Nation

KENNETH A. SPONSLER



“Nation building” has become a term seen fairly often in the news in recent years. What does it mean to build a nation? As used in the secular world, it generally refers to one government’s attempt to change another country’s form of government and, more idealistically, its social and ethical practices. It is usually tried after the military overthrow of a despotic or aggressive regime and has rather limited success.

God has also been in the business of nation building, but His version looks vastly different. Few countries today or in the past would attempt to build an entirely new nation from scratch, but that is what God did in forming the nation of Israel—His own special people on earth.

One year ago, we looked at how God delivered a rabble of Israelite slaves from years of bondage in Egypt, culminating in their escape through the Red Sea and the destruction of their Egyptian pursuers. This quarter we pick up the story where we left off and watch as God begins to mold this collection of families

and tribes into a unified nation under His protection, provision, and rule.

The process was not always easy or pretty. As with any of us, the Israelites had a lot of rough edges to smooth off. Actually, more than rough edges; the problems we see uncovered in these lessons directly result from darkened hearts that needed to be transformed and brought into line with the divine will.

In the very first lesson, we see the Israelites, fresh off their miraculous deliverance through the sea, begin to grumble and complain about their deprivations, even to the extent of accusing Moses (and, implicitly, God) of leading them out to the wilderness for the purpose of letting them die of starvation. This set a pattern that would be repeated many times throughout their desert wanderings. Despite their accusations, the Lord was gracious to provide, as we see in both this lesson and the next.

When ruthless enemies attacked and harassed the camp, the Lord pro-

vided again, this time using Moses to demonstrate the power of intercessory prayer as the battle proceeded.

Moses himself had an ongoing need—one he was not even aware of until it was pointed out to him by his visiting father-in-law, Jethro. The Lord used Jethro to encourage Moses to delegate leadership and share the heavy burdens it brought.

In the second unit we shift gears a bit as we see God begin to instruct His people in what He expected of them as a nation belonging to Him. To accomplish this, He had them settle in for an extended stay at Mount Sinai, the very place where He had called Moses to lead them out of Egypt (Ex. 3). Now Moses would meet with Him on the mountain in order to receive His laws and instructions for the people.

The people remained at a distance while Moses met with God, but they glimpsed the awesome power of the Lord in the cloud, lighting, and thunder atop the mountain. They feared what they saw and were glad to have Moses as their mediator. And when the time came to declare their loyalty, they enthusiastically proclaimed allegiance to their Deliverer and Provider. It was a claim that would soon be put to the test.

The unit ends with Moses spending a full forty days on the mountaintop in the presence of the Lord, receiving detailed instruction on how the Israelites were to become a people of God. His long absence, however, became the occasion of a crisis that nearly ended the whole nation-building enterprise.

Unit III plunges straight into the crisis. Giving in to fears that Moses (and perhaps God as well) had abandoned them, the people took matters into their own hands by seeking a god of their own making to worship and follow. It was blatant idolatry and a flagrant breach of the covenant pledge they had just made. The idolatry quickly descended into pagan revelry

and debauchery.

Even before he saw the degradation for himself, Moses offered the first of many pleas for mercy on his wayward countrymen. The Lord relented from His threat to destroy the nation right then and there, but He sent Moses down to confront the sin and execute His judgment.

The idol had to be destroyed, the primary offenders punished on the spot, and an accounting taken of the people's guilt. Moses offered further intercession to the Lord, who extended mercy again but carried out ultimate judgment on the guilty. The nation building would continue, but there would be extended consequences to the breach of covenant.

As Moses pleaded for the Lord's special presence to remain with him and the people on their journey, he made a bold and unprecedented request: to see God's glory firsthand. The Lord was no doubt pleased by this entreaty and granted it willingly, but with a limitation. No fallen human being can look directly at God's full glory and survive, so Moses was given a partial view, one that still proved awesome and transformative.

Moses' special time with the Lord was transformative in a specific way. His appearance changed, confirming for all the people his authority as God's leader and mediator. With this authority affirmed, the covenant broken by disobedience was renewed, and the nation was set on course again for the plans and promises that God had for them.

God is not building an earthly nation today, but He is building a heavenly people of His own. All who have trusted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord are part of that great people who will praise Him, live for Him, and share in His glory for eternity. Let us learn from Israel's example and prove worthy of the gracious calling He has extended to us!

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

EX. 16:2 And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness:

3 And the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, *and* when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger.

4 Then said the LORD unto Moses, Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a certain rate every day, that I may prove them, whether they will walk in my law, or no.

5 And it shall come to pass, that on the sixth day they shall prepare *that* which they bring in; and it shall be twice as much as they gather daily.

6 And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt:

7 And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what *are* we, that ye murmur against us?

8 And Moses said, *This shall be*, when the LORD shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full; for that

the LORD heareth your murmurings which ye murmur against him: and what *are* we? your murmurings *are* not against us, but against the LORD.

9 And Moses spake unto Aaron, Say unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, Come near before the LORD: for he hath heard your murmurings.

10 And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

11 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

12 I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel: speak unto them, saying, At even ye shall eat flesh, and in the morning ye shall be filled with bread; and ye shall know that I *am* the LORD your God.

13 And it came to pass, that at even the quails came up, and covered the camp: and in the morning the dew lay round about the host.

14 And when the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness *there lay* a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground.

15 And when the children of Israel saw *it*, they said one to another, *It is* manna: for they wist not what it *was*. And Moses said unto them, *This is* the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat.

God Provides Manna and Quail

Lesson Text: Exodus 16:2-15

Related Scriptures: I Corinthians 10:1-10; Exodus 6:1-8;
John 6:30-58; Numbers 11:4-34

TIME: 1445 B.C.

PLACE: Wilderness of Sin

GOLDEN TEXT—“Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

Lesson Exposition

THE PEOPLE’S COMPLAINT— Ex. 16:2-3

Over several months, the Israelites had witnessed ten miraculous plagues poured out on the land of Egypt.

Now finally and fully free of the Egyptians, the Israelites headed into the wilderness. Only three days after their song of praise at the Red Sea (15:1-21), they found themselves without drinking water and murmured against Moses (vss. 23-24). In response to Moses’ plea, the Lord miraculously provided water and then led the multitude to an oasis (vss. 25-27).

This would become a pattern for the Israelite nation in the wilderness. They would face trying situations in this desert land, just as one might expect, and they would repeatedly murmur and complain against Moses and Aaron and ultimately against the Lord.

As the Israelites traveled southward on the Sinai Peninsula toward Mount Sinai, they came to an area known as the Wilderness of Sin (16:1). This barren land offered little in the way of food and water, and it was now one month after they had left Egypt.

Exodus 16:2 tells us the “whole con-

gregation” began to complain against Moses and Aaron. Their complaint concerned a lack of food (vs. 3).

In stating their lack of contentment with the situation, the people said it would have been better for them to die in Egypt “by the hand of the Lord” than to starve in the wilderness. The plagues were probably in their minds. They had been spared from the plagues, but in retrospect they thought it would have been better to die from them than to come all the way out into the wilderness to suffer and die there.

The people said they “sat by the flesh pots” in Egypt (vs. 3), suggesting they had never lacked for food there. While they may have embellished their memory somewhat, there is no reason to believe they did not have enough to eat in Egypt since they had raised cattle and sheep there (cf. 9:4-7; 10:9).

They had brought those animals with them, but at least two factors weighed against slaughtering them for food now. First, the very fact that they were on the move would have made the slaughtering and preparation and preserving of the meat very difficult. Second, the short-term benefit of hav-