

Numbers 26-27 - Inheritance and Legacy

By
Peter Martin
August 2nd 2026

“And it came to pass, after the plague, that the LORD spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: “Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers’ houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel.”

-Numbers 26:1-2

As we approach the end of the book of Numbers we encounter another census of the nation of Israel before they enter into the land of promise. It is important to note that, from a narrative perspective, there is really only one more major event that happens in this book and that is the defeat of Midian in Numbers 31. The rest of the book is going to be chapters like these two as well as a repetition of various commands and ordinances, which is actually a fairly nice transition into the book of Deuteronomy where Moses reiterates the history of the nation up to this point, repeats the Law.

The reason for this repetition is not filler for the Bible, but it allows for Moses to reflect on the Law forty years after he first received it and to give his final wisdom to the new generation that is getting ready to take the land of promise. With that context in mind, that is how we will be approaching these final chapters of Numbers. Not as a repetition of what we already know, but a reflection on these principles by Moses as he nears the end of his life and ministry. And I believe, if we can draw a suitable theme for chapters 26 and 27 it is mostly exploring the Biblical idea of inheritance and legacy.

When Moses first numbered the nation in the beginning of this book, the census was more straightforward. He is merely numbering the men of the various tribes in preparation to invade the land of Canaan. However, we will see in chapter 26 that this time is a little different. Moses is not merely listing the names, but he is thinking about the history of his people, the legacies that brought them to this moment, good and bad, and the eventual inheritance that will occur within the land of their fathers.

“To Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. And Nadab and Abihu died when they offered profane fire before the LORD.”

-Numbers 26:60-61

Verses like the one above are sprinkled throughout this chapter. Once again, this is not meant to give us mere facts about the numbers of the Israelites, but a reflection on their history. This reflection that is more implicit in chapter 26 becomes explicit in chapter 27 in two separate events. The first has to do with land inheritance for the five daughters of a man named Zelophehad who was killed for his sin and had no male heirs. The second is one of the most significant events in the entire book. Moses hands his authority over to Joshua as he prepares to step aside and let Joshua lead the new generation into the promised land.

But before we discuss what I believe to be the major theme of these chapters, there are a couple things that I want to take note of. First, I think that it is interesting that the number of Israelites entering the land are around the same number as those who were supposed to enter the land forty years ago:

“These are those who were numbered of the children of Israel: six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty.”

-Numbers 26:51

“all who were numbered were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty.”

-Numbers 1:46

When we compare the two censuses taken, it looks like there were around two thousand more Israelites who were supposed to enter the land in the beginning versus the number who entered at the end of the book. This is actually pretty amazing considering the sheer amount of Israelites who were killed in the various judgements of this book, on top of the fact that they had been living in a harsh wilderness environment. The only way we can account for this is that, in spite of their sin and rebellion, God had blessed His people and allowed them to prosper even in harsh environments.

This is an important point to note because the nation of Israel was angry at God for leading them into the wilderness because they believed it would kill them, and yet they had actually prospered there to the point that even cataclysmic judgements from God that wiped out tens of thousands of Israelites didn't really diminish their overall population.

Second, although it is a minor point, in chapter 27 God gives women a right to inheritance in lieu of male heirs. This is actually a very significant point because even in western Europe women were not given this right until the early twentieth century. God's

intent for His people was to be free and in order to be free they had to possess rights that allowed them to grow their liberty and responsibility.

This dovetails into the final point I wanted to make and that is, while the priesthood was handed down to Aaron's sons, the rule of Israel was not handed to Moses' sons. It seems as though God is already establishing an ideal for His people that political rule is not to be determined by bloodlines but by merit. God is once again denying His people their preference to be like the other nations who have a monarch who ruled absolutely and through his bloodline. He intends for His people to live as free individuals with a central authority that was there to unify the tribes before God, and not to rule indefinitely. This is why we see Joshua step down from his position after they seize Canaan at the end of the book of Joshua.

That being said though, let's move into the central point of these accounts.

What We Inherit

"Then came the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hephher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, from the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these were the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and all the congregation, by the doorway of the tabernacle of meeting, saying: "Our father died in the wilderness; but he was not in the company of those who gathered together against the LORD, in company with Korah, but he died in his own sin; and he had no sons. "Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers." So Moses brought their case before the LORD. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "The daughters of Zelophehad speak what is right; you shall surely give them a possession of inheritance among their father's brothers, and cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them. "And you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter. 'If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. 'If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. 'And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the relative closest to him in his family, and he shall possess it.' " And it shall be to the children of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD commanded Moses."

-Numbers 27:1-11

As I said, after the census is taken, we have two small and seemingly innocuous accounts that I believe tie in the higher themes of these two chapters. The first has to do

with five daughters whose father died without having any male heirs. They plead their case before Moses, asking that the inheritance pass to them since there were no males who could inherit. God judges favorably towards these women and Israel is given a new precedent for dealing with inheritance in such cases.

One again, this seems to be a more innocuous story, but I believe it does show us a few elements of how inheritance works and what we receive from our parents, whether we like it or not. Now before we delve into these points I do want to mention that the topic of inheritance in our culture is not a topic that we like to think of much, and one that we even disdain to an extent.

The reason for this is pretty simple, we are a highly individualistic culture that favors personal achievement above all else. As such, historically, we haven't liked attributing our success to the success of our parents, nor do we want to believe that our shortcomings are really from them either. Now I will say that the latter point I made is quickly changing. Meaning that while we are still reluctant to attribute our success to our parents, we are more than willing to attribute our failures to them. That being said, let's dive into these Biblical principles and see how they apply to us today.

Our Struggles

"And it came to pass, after the plague, that the LORD spoke to Moses and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying: "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel from twenty years old and above, by their fathers' houses, all who are able to go to war in Israel."

-Numbers 26:1-2

As we can see from the beginning of the census, as well as the plight of these five girls, a chunk of our struggles certainly do come from our parents. This census is taken "after the plague" of the last chapter and is only being conducted because of the failure of the previous generation to enter the land. Meaning that if the previous generation had been faithful to enter the land, this new generation would have been raised in the promised land instead of having to face the monsters that their parents ran from.

The same principle is shown in the story of these girls. While we don't know much about their father, what is clear is that he died "in his own sin". While the text is ambiguous to what this meant, they seem to only want to make it known that their father was not a part of Korah's rebellion. This is probably because Korah's rebellion had a political aspect to it that did affect the families of the men who participated, but regardless, we aren't actually told what their father's sin was. He may have been one of those who fell to the plague that afflicted those who complained about God's judgement of Korah, or

he may have been struck down in the incident of the bronze serpent, or even the plague that consumed the men who went after the women of Moab. All of these are equally possible, but we are just not told which it is.

I think the key here is not *what* Zelophehad's sin was, but only that his daughters are in their current predicament *because* of his sin. This reveals the truth of a verse that is often misunderstood:

"...you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

-Deuteronomy 5:9-10

Instead of seeing this verse as a curse where God will personally judge the children's children of idolaters, I think it is easier to see this as a more obvious description of reality. The failures of our parents create the struggles of their children. If I am lazy as a parent and squander all the family resources, my children will struggle with poverty and a lack of positive role models. This is a struggle that my children didn't ask for, but will nonetheless be "visited upon them" whether they like it or not.

There is another question about how a parent's failures might affect children in a more abstract, and even mystical sense. This would be that if I say I am an alcoholic, this will pass into the genetics of my children and this sin will be visited on them no matter what. While there is strong evidence that *seeing* your parents struggle with a particular sin sometimes leads you to commit a similar sin, even this is dubious. For instance, children who were abused as children are actually *less* likely to become abusers, though they are more likely to end up in other abusive relationships.

It is more likely that if we continue in the sins of our parents this is more due to the environment that we were raised in coupled with an innate temperament that we did inherit from our parents, rather than some mystical curse given to us by God. In fact the Bible seems to dismiss this as an explanation for sin:

"In those days they shall say no more: 'The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children's teeth are set on edge.' 'But every one shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.'"

-Jeremiah 31:29-30

It is only when we harmonize the verse from Deuteronomy and the one from Jeremiah that we get nearer to the complex truth. It would be wrong to think that our lives are entirely our own, and that all our struggles come *solely* from our own choices, but it is equally wrong to think that there is some sort of spiritual force holding us back because of the sins of our fathers. It is only the person who acknowledges *both* of these truths at the same time that can wrestle with the next point appropriately.

Our Name

In the ancient mideast, where the Bible was written, the concept of “name” was a lot more nuanced than it is today. Instead of being merely an arbitrary thing that we call something or someone, “name” was tied very close to identity or character. Consider the following proverb:

“A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold.”

-Proverbs 22:1

Obviously the “good name” mentioned above has little or nothing to do with the aesthetic quality of someone’s name, but instead it has to do with character, legacy, and identity. This concept was shown in the ancient world through a type of surname that usually contained the name of our father, and we actually still have some of these names. Like “Erickson” or “Peterson”, these names literally mean “son of Eric” or “son of Peter”. But I would say in the modern world, the way that we see this more than anything is through our last name which we inherit from our father.

The fact that every culture had some form of this has something to do with how we have always seen this concept. To be the child of someone means that we inherit their legacy, their identity, their reputation. A lot of this is more literal than we think. Our appearance, our temperament, the place we were born, the environment that we grew up in, the values that shaped us, all of these things were “inherited” from our parents.

But again, without balancing the two truths we learned in the last section, this point will be more destructive than helpful to us. If we have a fatalistic view of inheritance, then we see our inherited “name” as a curse that we inherit from our parents. This is why the majority of counsel that we give to people nowadays is to push away the influence of our parents, sometimes literally and ultimately, to distance ourselves from the inheritance of our parents and to build a new identity in relation to who we want to be.

But if we take this point too far we begin to see our identity as being independent from our parents. The reality is that we actually *did* inherit all these facets of ourselves from

our parents. Even if we want to be opposite from our parents, this is itself a reaction to our parents and how they raised us. We are once again asked to balance these two points to the best of our ability. We are neither pure individuals, nor are we merely the product of our birth and upbringing. We are both individuals and people shaped by our upbringing.

These two, seemingly, paradoxical points are exactly what the daughters of Zolephad are balancing when they make their request. Since their father died “in his sins”, one would expect that they would want his name to die with him and to be separated from them. But instead of doing this, they specifically ask to inherit from him to perpetuate his name.

“Why should the name of our father be removed from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father’s brothers.”

-Numbers 27:4

The above statement would seem very strange to the modern person. What do these girls owe their father who died in his sin and left them without inheritance? The answer they would probably give us, and the answer that God smiled upon, is a little more complex than we would like. By calling out their father’s sin they show us that they are not “protecting” his name by hiding his sin or forgiving him out of hand. But the fact that they desire to perpetuate his name means that they do see that they are “indebted” to their father and still desire to honor him.

This helps us answer a question that many people have today: how do we honor parents who are ingrained in vile sins, especially if they never repent? I believe these faithful daughters provide for us a part of the answer. If we bear our father’s name well, if we learn to repent of the afflictions and struggles that we inherit from our parents, we can “redeem” their image and honor them even if they wouldn’t receive this as honor.

I believe that we see this in a lot of our rituals for those who have passed. In medieval times, the Catholic church developed a way for people to both pray to their ancestors as well as to provide “indulgences” for them to escape purgatory early. While I do reject the literal interpretation of these practices, namely that we can actually pray to our ancestors or aid them after the grave, I believe both of these ideas take away from fundamental responsibilities that belong to Christ alone. However, symbolically, I believe these practices contain deep wisdom for us.

By “praying” to our fathers, what we are really doing is asking their image, their memory, their legacy for advice, guidance, and assistance. But where does their image, or

memory exist on this earth after they die? The simple answer is in us. We know that their true soul exists with God, but upon this earth their image doesn't reside in their grave but in our memory of their image and our understanding of their legacy. To "pray" to this is to try our best to reach within ourselves, to honor their image, and act in a way that we believe would honor their memory and legacy.

But this practice was coupled with indulgences. Meaning that we also recognize that our ancestors were flawed and their image and legacy need to be redeemed. But once again, their memory and legacy exist, on this earth, only in us. This means that, to the level that we can learn to turn the negative things we have inherited from our parents into faithfulness towards God, we have succeeded in redeeming their name.

If this sounds too archaic for us today, remember that we still have similar practices today. After someone dies, it is common for people to go to the grave of their loved one and "speak" to them. Beyond this we make sure that their grave plot is taken care of and beautified with flowers. All of this shows the same idea. When we speak to the grave we are speaking to our memory of that person, and when we leave flowers we are trying to redeem their corruption. This is why I am not really against these practices if someone understands what they are doing and they see beyond the symbol to the meaning that God intends.

Our Resources

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance, according to the number of names. "To a large tribe you shall give a larger inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a smaller inheritance. Each shall be given its inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. "But the land shall be divided by lot; they shall inherit according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. "According to the lot their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller."

-Numbers 26:52-56

Beyond the negative things that we inherit from our parents, we also receive a lot of beneficial things from our parents. From the earliest points in our life, we are brought up in unearned resources that come from our parents, even if these resources literally end upon the point of our birth, we are still privileged to some sort of material blessing from our parents. But these privileges extend beyond the material. It is our parents who give us the positive morals that we learn and our parents' good qualities that influence our temperaments.

It is important to remember that even the worst parts of our character come from the most positive parts of our character. So for instance, a person who is wrathful and vindictive might also be very justice oriented, passionate, opinionated, and stern. But, if we never cultivate those more positive parts of our personality and fight the particular temptations that accompany these good qualities, we will lose most of the benefits and succumb to most of the sins that tempt us.

So even if our parents never give us a good example, the positive parts of our character are inherited from them, and it is our job to try to “redeem” those qualities. But it is also important to learn to be thankful for the good things that our parents did, this is a part of redeeming their “name”. Even from a material aspect, a person who inherits wealth or land from their parents honors their name by using the inheritance well. To squander the inheritance or to be ungrateful for it is to go against this good wisdom.

However, it is this point that we struggle with the most in our culture. While it is relatively fashionable to blame our parents, thanking them is fast fading from our world. This is part of our need to feel that we have “earned” all the positive facets of our life. This means that it is more than ok to foist our shortcomings on others, but we take sole responsibility for everything about ourselves that is good.

We even tend to be embarrassed of unearned privilege nowadays. I remember growing up in public school, and while my parents were not rich, by the time I was born, we were fairly well off. But around my friends I almost felt ashamed to be privileged in my upbringing, I felt that, for some reason, it was more noble or honorable to be without advantage of privilege. But this is not what we are taught in Scripture.

“A good man leaves an inheritance to his children’s children, But the wealth of the sinner is stored up for the righteous.”

-Proverbs 13:22

This passage, like most in the Bible, is far more nuanced than we usually give it credit for. It isn’t merely exhorting parents to leave an inheritance for their children, but it is also warning parents that material inheritance is insufficient and can even be stumbling if we aren’t careful. Meaning that in this passage, both the good man and the sinner leave an inheritance, but the good man’s inheritance is passed down multiple generations whereas the sinner’s inheritance goes to the “righteous”. What does this mean? A good man knows that the best thing they could leave their children is not wealth, but good character and values, to put this more simply, a Godly legacy.

But the sinner doesn't understand this and leaves their children merely a physical inheritance that will be squandered and given to the righteous. Take David and Solomon as prime examples. David, though flawed, seemed to have raised Solomon well and also chose his heir well when he selected Solomon to rule. So even though Solomon grew up as a literal prince, awash in every imaginable luxury, Solomon was not spoiled by this wealth but instead built upon his father's foundation in every conceivable way. And, for the majority of his reign he was poised to leave a far greater inheritance to his own children.

However, Solomon disobeyed the commandments of God and multiplied foreign wives. These women seduced Solomon into idolatrous habits that he then introduced to Israel. As a consequence of this sin, God promised to break the kingdom in half and only allow Solomon's son to retain half of Israel. Beyond the spiritual shortcomings associated with this, we see in the story of his son, Rehoboam, that Solomon did not seem to raise him well. He valued flattering words instead of established wisdom, and through his own folly, he broke his own kingdom apart and caused a civil war. By doing this, he fulfilled the Proverb written by his own father, his inheritance was saved up for someone else because of his own wickedness.

This simple story illustrates a good point. It wasn't the inheritance that stumbled the children, it was their character. While Solomon eventually fell in his relationship with God, it is important to note that he failed in the same type of sin that his own father failed in, sexual misconduct. It wasn't the physical inheritance that destroyed him, but his spiritual inheritance.

Like I said before, this concept of material inheritance is unpopular in our country, many parents don't want to leave a material inheritance to their children out of a fear that they will spoil them. The problem is that spoiling a child doesn't begin at the point of inheritance, but years before. While a parent can't ensure that a child can handle wealth and responsibility well, it is the job of the parents to leave a spiritual inheritance rich enough that they might avoid the pitfalls and the dangers of material wealth and luxury.

With this training, a person will be able to wrestle with the temptations of wealth and luxury no matter how vast. Without this training whatever wealth a person may come to own, no matter how meager, will be enough to stumble and even destroy them. The one who has received this lesson well will build wealth and a legacy, not for themselves, but for those who come after. By doing this, they will be able to fight off the more pernicious temptations of wealth and life lived for their own sake. But we must always remember that our spiritual legacy is far more important. Which means that in all our striving to provide a legacy for our children, the striving we do for our spiritual growth and maturity.

“But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”

-1 Timothy 6:9-10

What We Don't Inherit

“Now the LORD said to Moses: “Go up into this Mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel. “And when you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered. “For in the Wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes.” (These are the waters of Meribah, at Kadesh in the Wilderness of Zin.) Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, “who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd.” And the LORD said to Moses: “Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; “set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and inaugurate him in their sight. “And you shall give some of your authority to him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. “He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him by the judgment of the Urim. At his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, he and all the children of Israel with him—all the congregation.” So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.”

-Numbers 27:12-23

The latter half of the chapter shifts from what we do inherit from our parents from what we can't inherit from them. In this story we see something odd happen. We know from other texts that Moses did have sons, and yet, not only do we know almost nothing about them, but none of them seem to even be considered to replace Moses when he dies. For us in the modern age, living in a democratic republic, this doesn't really surprise us, but for our ancestors, this story would have been earth shattering.

As we have talked about before with inheritance, our ancestors took far more interest in bloodlines and genealogies than most modern people do. Therefore, the concept of dynasties made perfect sense to them. And while dynasties will eventually exist in Israel

when they anoint a king, the whole concept of a monarchy is not something that God initially wanted for His people, but we will talk more about this later.

But because Joshua was not related to Moses, we can actually learn a lot from this interaction to help us understand what we can't inherit from our parents, and what we therefore must cultivate for ourselves.

Our Character

"...when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also. Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind."

-2 Timothy 1:5-7

Just like Joshua, we don't really know much about Paul's protege, Timothy's parents. All we know about him is that he was half Jewish and that his mother and his grandmother seemed to be faithful Jewesses who raised him in the faith of their fathers. But we are not told anything about his father, which intimates to us that his father was not a convert to Judaism but was more than likely a pagan. But this is the key for Timothy, while his mother and grandmother gave him proper instruction, he also received bad instruction from the pagan world that he grew up in. This means that Timothy's character, like all of ours, was shaped in participation with what he saw as good and righteous before God. This is why he ultimately followed Paul and was disciplined by him.

The same is true for Joshua. We don't really know anything about his family, it is possible that they were faithful Jews, but it is also possible that they weren't. Regardless, what we know about Joshua is that he *chose* to follow closely to God and the example of his mentor, Moses. As we spoke about before, as parents we are supposed to leave our children a Godly legacy, but their character is ultimately shaped by what they choose to be disciplined by and not by our legacy alone.

Luckily this principle works both ways. So that even if someone leaves their children a horrible legacy of abuse and wickedness, these same children can choose to act outside that legacy and instead follow the path that leads towards God and His righteousness. But this also means that even if we leave our children the best legacy, it is ultimately their choice if they will take up that inheritance and follow after the best of our example.

It is for this reason that this strange ritual, the laying on of hands, takes place. As stated before, the idea of a ritual like this, in which the leader of God's people was appointed, not by birth, but by a willing act of anointing by the current leader would have been shocking to the ancient Israelites. But we have to understand, God did not want His people to be governed by a particular bloodline, He wanted them to be free and to have the ability to govern themselves. This meant that the position that Moses had was for extreme circumstances and was not meant to be a constant role.

The initial system of government that God gave His people was closest to a confederacy, with each tribe acting as their own autonomous sovereign state that could rally with their fellow Israelites in times of need. As such, the people of Israel had no king, only local tribal leaders. But in times of need, like when they were being liberated from captivity, or when they invaded Canaan, or when an enemy invaded their borders, they could be rallied together by a central figure to address the crisis and then that individual was called to step aside when the conflict was over.

Even Joshua does this after they conquer Canaan. When the fighting is over, Joshua encourages the people to commit themselves to God one last time and then we are told:

"So Joshua let the people depart, each to his own inheritance."

-Joshua 24:28

Joshua didn't hold onto his authority, but allowed the people to depart and follow God for themselves. What does this mean for us? If character is not inherited but can only be developed through our choices, a parent must learn the courage to let their children make their own decisions and learn from the consequences. If it were possible to inherit character, this would be superfluous, all we would have to do as parents is to develop our own character before God and to train that character into our children so that when we pass away they could merely follow in the wake of our own goodness.

But this isn't how reality works. We build our legacy so that our children can inherit our *resources* and with these resources we hope that they build a legacy greater than our own. But it is what they choose to do with our resources that will tell the story of their life and legacy. As such, if a parent can't learn to slowly step aside in their children's life and allow them to make their own decisions that they can learn from, they will never develop character.

This doesn't happen instantly, Moses has been discipling Joshua for decades at this point, but we can see that he allowed Joshua to have authority several times prior to this moment. He let Joshua enter the land as a spy in the beginning of this book, and he

has even allowed Joshua to serve as a military commander beginning all the way back in Exodus. Moses led Joshua well, but part of his leadership was giving Joshua autonomy that he might learn to make good decisions and develop his own character.

This is the great challenge that every parent, and person in authority has to grapple with. When we are young, the great challenge we face is learning the strength and courage to take up the right authority and to wield our power well. I think this hits most of us when we first become parents and we realize that we really are responsible for another life. Because our children are born helpless we really do have to make all their choices for them. This amount of authority is daunting, if we are wise, and only if we have the right strength and humility can we wield that authority well.

However when we age, we face a different challenge, the courage to lay that authority down and step aside for the next generation. While Moses was held back from entering the promised land due to his own sin, it is important to note that he accepted his punishment with dignity and he stepped aside when the time came. This is a far cry from men like Saul who clung to power long after they had been called to step aside, and as such became villains in their own story.

I was actually thinking more about this since we just celebrated 250 years of American independence, and the man who embodied this principle better than almost anyone in world history was George Washington, arguably the primary founding father of our nation. After two terms as president, Washington learned the strength to step aside, to lay down his authority even though no one asked him to. It was said that after his resignation, even King George III said of Washington: *"If he does that, he will be the greatest man in the world."*

It seems as though the strength to step aside is even more potent than the strength to step up in the first place. But it is only when we do this, that the next generation can learn to make the right choices and honor God out of their own faith and not merely out of obedience.

Our Destiny

The main picture symbolized in the ceremony of laying on of hands, is to have a burden placed upon one's shoulders. When a legacy is laid on our shoulders, we must learn to bear this burden well, and we must also remember that our burden does not determine our destiny.

This can be taken in one of two ways and both require their own special strength to bear, the weight of a faithful legacy and the shame of a sinful legacy. In the previous

story, the story of Zolephad's daughters, they had to learn to live under the shameful legacy of their father. But, they didn't run away from this legacy, they bore under it with dignity and honor and learned to redeem the sins of their father. We also learn something similar in a part of the census taken in Numbers 26:

"The sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram, representatives of the congregation, who contended against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign. Nevertheless the children of Korah did not die."

-Numbers 26:9-11

It is interesting that the children of Korah were said not to die from the sin of their father. What is more interesting is that the descendants of Korah eventually bore the name of their father with immense honor. For in the book of Psalms we see several of these Psalms written by "The Sons of Korah". Like the daughters of Zolephad, they didn't run away from their inheritance, they learned the strength to redeem it, to turn it towards the glory of God. Many of us fail to do this because we refuse to bear the weight of our families' darker legacies. By running from them we might try to hide them under the rug, all but guaranteeing that they re-emerge in another fashion, or we try so desperately to become the opposite that we create a whole new set of problems for ourselves and our children.

The other way that we can struggle with legacy is when it is good. This might sound strange, but being burdened with a good legacy can be every bit as difficult as being burdened with a shameful one. When Moses laid his hands upon Joshua he felt the weight of what he was asked to bear. Not only the burden of living in Moses' shadow, but the full weight of Moses' colossal responsibility before the Lord and his people. What we do know from the book of Joshua though is that Joshua does learn this strength. He doesn't fall for trying to imitate Moses and therefore becoming an inferior copy, but he also doesn't run away from Moses and fail to honor his legacy.

While both of these principles are incredibly difficult to understand and wrestle with, as Christians we are asked to wrestle with both.

"Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died,

much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.”

-Romans 5:14-15

As children of Adam, we are asked to bear the weight of his sin. From this sin comes our spiritual frailty and our physical mortality. But once we accept Christ, the weight of His glorious legacy is imparted to us. This constitutes the entire Christian life, learning the strength to redeem the sinful legacy of our forefathers, and the strength to live up to the Godly legacy of Christ. While this is a lifelong struggle, the key to doing this well is, I believe, held within the above passage. When Moses laid his hands on Joshua, he received something that was a free gift.

While one could argue that Joshua had earned his position, it was nonetheless freely given by the command of God. If Joshua had purely earned his authority, then it rightly belonged to him and he would have to strive to maintain it. It would be this burden that would produce both anxiety and arrogance. But it is precisely because it was given that he had to treat it in an entirely different way, to learn the strength to live worthy of his call:

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

-Ephesians 4:1-3

Both the call to redeem the sin of our past, and the call to glory in God were not earned or sought after, they were given. This is why we refer to them as “callings”. A call is not generated, it is either taken up or it is ignored. When Paul exhorts us to “walk worthy of the calling...” he is encouraging us to live in this paradigm. Not the worried paradigm of “living up” to a calling, but merely the humility to walk worthy of the calling. To bear it with dignity and seek the strength daily to live worthy of it. To the level that we understand this great difference is the level that we can find peace from our strivings and we can learn to bear our burden well without being crushed by it.

“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. “For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

-Matthew 11:28-30

