

The Message of the Old Testament

A Book-by-Book Study

NUMBERS

Background

The English title “Numbers” (Gk. Arithmoi) is borrowed from the name of the book in the Greek translation of the OT, the Septuagint. This title is based on the presence of _____ returns in chapters 1–4 and 26. The fifth word of the book in Hebrew, “in the wilderness” (Hb. bemidbar), constitutes its Hebrew title and perhaps gives a better summary of its contents. (ESV Study Bible)

The writer of Numbers, again, for the most part, is Moses.

Contents of Numbers

1-10: God Prepares the People for their Journey and Entrance to Canaan

- By Teaching Them About Purity
- By Giving Them Priests
- By Giving Them His Presence

11-16: The People Do Not Trust God

- They Constantly Complain
- They Rebel
- God Punishes Them

17-36: God Perseveres with the People

- Provides Instructions for Priests and for Purity
- Remains Gracious Despite Continued Sin
- Enables Them to reach the Promised Land

The Message of Numbers

1. God is a great Provider and is gloriously _____.
2. The people of God are _____ and unfaithful.

God’s people must be thankful and trust God. The consequences of failure are _____.

Lessons to be Learned

1. God provides what His people _____.

The first 10 chapters of Numbers communicate God’s continued preparation for the people to leave Sinai and proceed to Canaan and take over the land which he had promised. His provisions for them included the Levites to oversee the upkeep and transportation of the tabernacle, lessons on purity, and the abiding _____ of God.

The three provisions are interrelated. They all have to do with the most important of them which is God’s presence.

- 1.1 Chapter 1 records a tribe-by-tribe census which is followed by designations in chapter 2 for

where each tribe should _____. The Levites camp and minister around the _____ which is the center of the camp and points to the centrality of the presence of God with them.

Numbers 1:53 - -

“But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the people of Israel. And the Levites shall keep guard over the tabernacle of the testimony.”

1.2. _____ relates to the continued experience of the presence of God. The camp must be pure. Marriages must be pure.

Numbers 5:1-4 - - The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Command the people of Israel that they _____ of the camp everyone who is leprous or has a discharge and everyone who is unclean through contact with the dead. 3 You shall put out both male and female, putting them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camp, in the midst of which I _____.” 4 And the people of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the Lord said to Moses, so the people of Israel did.”

1.3. The _____ of God among the people is what fundamentally sets the people apart as belonging to God. Dever writes, “The tabernacle fundamentally represents God’s presence with the people, and the priests’ service identifies these people as specially belonging to the Lord. So the blessing that the Lord teaches Moses to teach the priests—what we call the Aaronic blessing—promises God’s abiding _____:

Numbers 6:22-27 - - The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 23 “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

24 The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;
26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

27 “So shall they put my _____ upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them.”

Chapters 9-10 center on God’s presence with His people. The first half of the chapter recounts the first Passover celebration in the wilderness, a celebration that, supremely, reminds them of God’s presence when He remarkably delivered them from Egypt. In the second half of chapter 9, God promises he will provide a cloud to the travelers for leading them and for reminding them of his continual presence: (Dever, 134)

Numbers 9:15-23

15 On the day that the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony. And at evening it was over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. 16 So it was always: the cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night. 17 And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out, and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel _____. 18 At the command of the Lord the people of Israel set out, and at the command of the Lord they camped. As long as the cloud rested over the tabernacle, they remained in camp. 19 Even when the cloud continued over the tabernacle many days, the people of Israel kept the charge of the Lord and did _____ set out. 20 Sometimes the cloud was a few days over the tabernacle, and according to the command of the Lord they remained in camp; then according to the command of the Lord they set out. 21 And sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning. And when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out, or if it continued for a day and a night, when the cloud lifted they set out. 22 Whether it was two days, or a month, or a longer time, that the cloud continued over the tabernacle, abiding there, the people of Israel _____ in camp and did not set out, but when it lifted they set out. 23 At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out. They kept the

charge of the Lord, at the command of the Lord by Moses.

Numbers 10:33-36

33 So they set out from the mount of the Lord three days' journey. And the ark of the covenant of the Lord went before them three days' journey, to seek out a resting place for them. 34 And the cloud of the Lord was over them by day, whenever they set out from the camp.

35 And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and let your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate you flee before you." 36 And when it rested, he said, "Return, O Lord, to the ten thousand thousands of Israel.

God's provisions for you and me . . .

What has God provided for us in terms of moving us forward in our lives as disciples of Christ?

1. The work of the _____ before Him, Jesus Christ, to obtain forgiveness and right standing with Him.
2. Guidelines in His _____ on how to walk and live in purity (holiness) before Him
3. His _____ to live with us and to lead and guide us.
"We are more fully indwelt [with the Spirit] than the camp of Israel ever was." (136)

2. Complaining reveals a spirit of _____.

The likes of the signs demonstrated by God in Egypt are renown. So astonishing were they that the world knows about them still today. "Has any generation witnessed a more spectacular work of God? And how do the people of God respond? They _____. They constantly complain. These are the kind of people who would complain about the temperature of water miraculously gushing from a rock in the desert, or about mud on their shoes while walking across the bed of a parted sea." (Dever 137)

About what do they complain?

Numbers 11:1 - - And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their _____
...

Numbers 11:4-6 - - Now the rabble that was among them had a strong craving. And the people of Israel also wept again and said, "Oh that we had _____ to eat! 5 We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. 6 But now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this _____ to look at."

Numbers 12:1-2 - - Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. And they said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through _____?"

Are we ever like these Israelites? /!

3. Obstacles are God's _____!

Chapter 13 begins like Christmas eve for an expectant child. . . But what happens when the spies return with the report of what they saw in Canaan?

13:25-29 - - At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. 26 And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the people of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh. They brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us. It flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites

dwell in the land of the Negeb. The Hittites, the Jebusites, and the Amorites dwell in the hill country. And the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and along the Jordan.”

13:30-33 - - But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, “Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.” 31 Then the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.” 32 So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. 33 And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”

Should not the people have recalled all that God had done in Egypt . . . How God rescued them from a nation more mighty than any of these in Canaan?

But here is what they did:

14:1-4 - - Then all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. 2 And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had _____ in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the Lord bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be _____ for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

Joshua and Caleb plead with the people, but they will not hear it! They are ready to stone them. “Once they set their hearts on rejecting God’s truth, they will not even tolerate hearing it. The people God has so carefully prepared for centuries rebel against him.” (139)

Here is what the Lord replied to Moses,

14:10-12 - - Then all the congregation said to stone them with stones. But the glory of the Lord appeared at the tent of meeting to all the people of Israel. And the Lord said to Moses, “How long will this people _____? And how long will they not _____ in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? 12 I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.”

Again Moses _____. Again God relented . . . But He did bring a sentence . . .

14:20-23 - -Then the Lord said, “I have pardoned, according to your word. 21 But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, 22_____ of the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, 23 shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of those who despised me shall see it.”

14:36-37 - -And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing up a bad report about the land—37 the men who brought up a bad report of the land—_____ before the Lord.

“These verses tell us how to understand what happens during the Israelites’ forty years in the wilderness. The prolonged journey is not some mammoth-sized “time out.” not at all. It is God’s _____ sentence on a whole generation. Not one individual who witnessed the miracles or was delivered from Egypt will see the land—except for the two faithful spies, Joshua and Caleb. They have scorned God’s ways and spurned God himself by their insolence, distrust, and disobedience. So God punishes them. The wilderness will not be a bypath but a cemetery.” (140)

The Canaan of Christ’s disciples is this body of _____ and the world of unbelievers. The main command Jesus has given his disciples is to make disciples. It is to go into the world and give people the _____.

When we look at that command all we tend to see is reasons they will ____ believe. But sinners are not obstacles; they are opportunities.

4. God is severe, but God is so _____!

20:2-9 - - Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. 3 And the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! 4 Why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? 5 And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink." 6 Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them, 7 and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 8 "Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle." 9 And Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he commanded him.

20:10-13 - -

10 Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" 11 And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. 12 And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them." 13 These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord, and through them he showed himself holy.

Balak, king of Moab, sought Balaam to curse the Israelites but he replied only blessing upon Israel.

24:10-13 - - And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. And Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them these three times. 11 Therefore now flee to your own place. I said, 'I will certainly honor you,' but the Lord has held you back from honor." 12 And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, 13 'If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of the Lord, to do either good or bad of my own will. What the Lord speaks, that will I speak'?"

Finally Israel arrived at the land of promise, and this demonstrates how God _____ with His people. Despite their rebellion and disbelief, He keeps His promises!

5. God saves sinners by faith

21:4-9 - -

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom. And the people became impatient on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food." 6 Then the Lord sent fiery _____ among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 And the people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8 And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live." 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

John 3:14-16 - - - Jesus spoke to Nicodemus thusly . . . "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the _____ be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

On a cold snowy day, a young man as yet unconverted, one _____, took

shelter from the snow in a primitive Methodist chapel and heard the preacher say from the pulpit: "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You've nothing to do but look and live."

Spurgeon wrote,

"I saw at once the way of _____. I know not what else he said, --I did not take much notice of it,--I was so possessed with that one thought. Like as when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked and were healed, so it was with me. I had been waiting to do fifty other things, but when I heard that word, "Look!" what a charming word it seemed to me! Oh! I looked until I could have looked my eyes away. There and then the cloud was gone, the darkness had rolled away, and that moment I saw the sun; and I could have risen that instant, and sung with the most enthusiastic of them, of the precious blood of Christ, and the simple faith which looks alone to him. Oh that somebody had told me this before, "Trust Christ, and you shall be saved."