

Numbers: Jesus the Guide

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In Leviticus we saw the purpose of Israel's redemption was that we would be **whole** and we noted that it only took one night to deliver Israel out of Egypt but it will take 40 years to take Egypt out of Israel. That in a nut shell my friends is what the book of Numbers is all about. During the 40 years of wondering in the wilderness the nation is going to see 1 ½ million of their country men die an average 82 deaths a day in what was to be only a 11 day journey to the land of promise, no wonder they were constantly on the move. And what was the cause of this delay that led to a whole generation to die along the journey? Are you ready for this? **They refused to trust God even though He proved worthy of their trust.** So for 40 years they complained against God about His **guidance, provision and protection.** **The people didn't like the folks God put in charge, they didn't like the food and drink God gave them, why they even told God that they preferred to go back and be in bondage then to have Him lead them.** They spent most of their time complaining about every move God made, **they were unhappy, ungrateful and defeated followers of God because they were unwilling to slay their biggest foe, themselves.** Hey saints the book of Numbers is going to hit a little close to home. We tend to think that God makes mistakes, that Father doesn't know what is best, and that we are closer to the situation and can better handle things if He would just do things our way.

Dear ones in the wilderness called life there are millions of folks who are fighting God over **CONTROL** of their lives instead of trusting the only one who is capable of fulfilling His promises. **Many a Christian has the faith necessary to trust God to lead them out slavery and bondage to the world but have decided that God can't be trusted to guide them into the fullness of all His promises.**

Numbers is the 4th book that Moses was used to pin and more than 80 times we are told in this book that the Lord spoke to Moses. The book's title in English comes from the Greek and Latin translations based upon the two censuses or "*numberings*" recorded in the book. The first numbering is found in the first chapter and the 2nd census was taken 38 years later in chapter 26. In the Hebrew the title of the book is called "*In the Wilderness*" which better fits the content of the book than does our title "*Numbers*".

There are three divisions in the book:

- I. **Chapters 1-10:10 Preparing the people** (20 days) Here we see God's heart was that the generation that left Egypt would be the generation that inherited His promises.
- II. **Chapters 10:11-25 Failing in faith** (38 years 3 months and 10 days) Here we see that this generation is sent wandering in wilderness for their refusal to trust God above themselves.
- III. **Chapters 26-36 Preparation for promises** (5 months). Finally we see a new generation along with Caleb and Joshua being prepared to move into of possess the

promises God wanted to give to those who would trust Him.

Chapters 1-10:10 Preparing the people (20 days)

The first nine chapters we see God's initial preparation for His people to move the 11 day journey into the land of promises.

Chp. 1-4 Outward preparations

Starting with the Census of chapter 1 and moving through God's organizing them. When Israel left Egypt they were an unorganized band of people who had been enslaved for 400 years. So for the first year God spent in organizing them into a people of 3 million so that they could move across the wilderness and into the land of promises. Folk's there are at times a feeling amongst many believers that some how structure and order is the enemies of the move of the Spirit. Clearly we see that the move into what God had for the nation required preparation and that God was into preparing them for their inheritance. The first thing God did was number the people so they could determine who the 12 leaders were as well as to determine who were the heads of each tribe, family and house. It also was used to determine who would be enlisted to serve in the Army as the census was for every male 20 years and up. God's journey was not a leisurely stroll in the park it was a battle ground and they were in the army NOW! Folks many of our disappoints with God has to do with a false concept of what our relationship with Him is all about. Based upon chapter 2:32 the total number in the combined tribal force was 603,550 and if you consider a conservative number of non combative folks it puts the total population at around 2 to 3 million. We are also told that the Levites were to be engaged in a different battle as they were set to serve the people and the Living God.

Chp. 5-10:10 Inward preparations

From the outward preparations to inward preparations as those who were unclean weren't allowed to come into contact with the rest of people so as to not contaminate others. Then those who had caused harm to others were to be dealt with by way of making restitution. God also dealt with moral impurity especially with regard to the sanctity of marriage as the effect of infidelity what severely handicap the nation in its move towards the promise land. Over and over God spoke to the nation to be separate from sin but in the 6th chapter we learn that God wanted them to be more than just separate from sin He wanted them to be separated to Him. The word "*Nazarite*" means to be separate and was purely voluntary and only for a specific length of time Samson, Samuel and John the Baptist all under took this vow. It had three features to it:

- A. **Abstaining from alcohol**: This dealt with setting aside comfort and enjoyment of the things of this life.
- B. **Allowing the hair and beard to go uncut**: This dealt with the laying aside of our sense of strength and dignity.
- C. **Having no contact with the dead**: This dealt with not being involved with anything that would pollute or keep a person from fellowship with the Lord.

This vow didn't make a person a hermit in fact it was the opposite as those who took this vow became people of action. In the seventh chapter we see another part of the inward preparation was the offerings taken to care for public worship which started with those in leadership. In the 8th chapter God directed the setting apart of those who serve in the

corporate worship as they were to be dedicated to their calling, which was from the age of 25 to 50.

Folks, **God saw that the people would need three things along the journey from the wilderness to the land of promise** and we see in this first section that He provided those three things:

1. They would need a **Guide**, a Pilot if you will: In chapter 9:16 we see that over the tabernacle there was always a cloud by day and a fire by night so that they would always know that the Lord was guiding them.
2. They would need a **Guard** to protect them: So God had them construct two silver trumpets for the calling to arms of the over 600,000 men to do battle.
3. They would need a **Gatherer** for provisions: Though not specifically mentioned in these chapters and not until 11:6 God provided Manna from heaven and water from a rock in 20:10 they already enjoyed the provisions of what was only to be an 11 day journey.

II. Chapters 10:11-25 Failing in faith (38 years 3 months and 10 days)

This section is characterized by constant and consistent complaining of the people against God. It is because of this that God declares in chapter 14:22-23 “*all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.*”

From chapter 11 through chapter 21 we see rebellion against God Guidance,

Gathering and Guarding. There non stop murmuring against God was on three levels:

- A. **First they complain against their circumstances:** They don't like the food and compare what God gave them in freedom and grace to the food of bondage saying in 11:5-6 *"We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"* You say, *"Yeh but eating the same thing day after day for 40 years would get a bit old"*. The more God gave them the more they complained, they wanted meat and God gave them meat then they complained that there was too much meat. These folks had a bad case of selective memory didn't they? True but I remind you manna was **never designed to satisfy them only sustain them 11 days** and it was there rebellion that caused them to eat of it those 40 years. Their complaint and rebellion was a byproduct of their own doing not God's. Listen dear ones as these old testament wonderers can teach us a lesson that we need to hear. Often our dissatisfaction to our circumstances has more to do with our own rebellion than it does with God's provision and plan. Stop your complaining and get moving to the land of promise. The land of promise has endless variety and opportunity so if you don't like what you have perhaps it is so to get you to move forward in your trust and head on over to the land of promise.
- B. **Second they complained against the blessings of God:** When they came to the edge of the land of promise and they sent some spies into the land in chapter 13 the report came back that the grapes were so large it took two men to carry them on a poll. The land was indeed filled with milk and honey as God had said but as bountiful as the land was they chose to see the giants that dwelt there bigger than

the God who gave them the land. This caused them to taste God's blessings as sour grapes, spoiled milk and bitter honey. They chose the minimum of the wilderness simply because they didn't trust God who miraculously supplied what sustained them so that they could enter into what only would satisfy them. There are far too many folks just like this who are living on a minimum of the supply from the Holy Spirit, just enough of Him to keep them going and spend their Christian life complaining that they just don't have enough but are never willing to move into what God has fully provided for them. Saints listen up, you can only be sustained in the wilderness you will never be satisfied until you move into the land of promise.

- C. **Third they complained against the leadership God had provided:** In chapter 16 led by Korah, Dathan, and Abiram they said in verse 3 "*You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord's assembly?*" Two of which were priests challenged the leadership that God placed over them in Moses and Aaron. Here we learn yet another characteristic of a defeat Christian they always think they are holy enough, mature enough and resist anyone that challenges them to go further in their relationship with the Lord.

God dealt with these three levels of complaining by judging them with three things:

- A. **Fire:** Numbers 11:1 we read that "*the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed some in the outskirts of the camp.*" So for the fire of slander and gossip He consumed them with fire. James 3:5 says with this regard "*the tongue is a*

small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.”

- B. **Plague**: For their fear that God was giving them enough in chapter 11:33 we read that *“while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague.”* Their consumption consumed them and made them sick to death. Fear is leads to hording of the very things God has given to be a blessing to us and eventually we will be consumed by the things that consume us.
- C. **Poison snakes**: In Numbers 21:5-6 we read that 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 our soul loathes this worthless bread.” So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.”* Ah envy and jealousy will bite you and poison your life and leave you life less if you don’t look to the antidote.

The only cure for these kind of things my friend is to be found in chapter 21:8-9 where the *“Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.” So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.”* Jesus linked this act of Moses to His cure for our complaining heart in John 3:14-15 when He declared that *“as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”*

III. Chapters 26-36 Preparation for promises (5 months)

Here we are taken to the final section of the book where they take the second census of the new army of the Lord. God informs Moses that the nation will have a new leader as well in Joshua one of only two remaining people who left Egypt and will enter into the land of promise. And why did these two men survive while everyone else died? Well they trusted in God to be able to do even more than He said He would do. They reinstitute the laws and ceremonies and rededicate themselves to God and are ready to enter into the land that God would have given them 38 years earlier had they just trust Him.

In chapter 31-36 we are introduced to Balaam and the Midianites who try to get God to curse his people and all they got was God's heart to bless His people until old Balaam gave the secret of getting the men to compromise with the Moabite women. Also in this final section we see the two and half tribes settling for the land out side of God's best because it seemed best to them. The final three chapters deal with the plans for dividing the land upon their arrival.