

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE IN A NUTSHELL

NUMBERS

"Be sure your sin will find you out." Numbers 32:23

In Genesis we see man **ruined**.

In Exodus we see man **redeemed**.

In Leviticus we see man **reverencing** God.

In Numbers we see man **rebellious** against God.

Wilderness Wanderings

The Promised Land of Canaan was a mere 11 days march from Egypt. However, because of the negative and discouraging reports brought back by 10 of the 12 scouts, and because the people of Israel chose to ignore the positive report brought back by 2 of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, the Israelites grumbled and rebelled against God, and it actually took them 13,780 days.

Because of their disbelief and disobedience, God declared that with the exception of the two faithful scouts, Joshua and Caleb, every one of that rebellious generation over 20 years old would die before the nation of Israel would enter the Promised Land. A new generation was trained and disciplined in the wilderness to conquer the Promised Land, 40 years after the Exodus from Egypt.

"Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted." 1 Corinthians 10:6

Bad Examples

Numbers provides many examples of how **not** to behave as the people of God. The 10 unfaithful scouts gave a negative report, which so discouraged the people that they wept aloud, grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and wanted to stone them to death. They declared that they would rather have died in Egypt! The people dismissed the exhortation of the faithful scouts, Joshua and Caleb, who said: *"Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it."* Numbers 13:30. They wanted to go back to Egypt!

A Good Report

Joshua and Caleb declared: *"The land we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread. Their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear."* Numbers 14:7-9.

Disbelief and Disobedience

The people sought to justify their disobedience by wanting to stone them to death. At this point the Glory of the Lord appeared in the Tabernacle and God declared: *"How long will these people reject Me? And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them? I will strike them with pestilence and disinherit them..."* Moses interceded on behalf of the people. The Lord declared: *"Because 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. But my servant*

Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring him to the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it." Numbers 14:22-24

God's Judgement

"And the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, how long shall I bear with this evil congregation who complain against Me? I have heard the complaints which the children of Israel make against Me... The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to the entire number, from 20 years old and above, except for Caleb, the son of Jephunneh and Joshua, the son of Nun. You shall by no means enter the land which I swore I would make you dwell in. But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring them and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your carcasses shall fall in the wilderness." Numbers 14:26-32

The Rebellion of Korah

Korah mobilised 250 leaders in a rebellion against Moses and Aaron: *"You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"* Numbers 16:3. The response of Moses to this egalitarian revolution was to turn to the Lord. Do not fight your own battles. You fight God's battles. Let God fight yours. The Lord sent fire from Heaven which consumed the rebels and the earth swallowed them up (Numbers 16:31-35).

Discontent and Disgruntled

Yet, even after this display of the power of God, the children of Israel still complained against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16:41). Despite the many mighty miracles and miraculous provisions, the children of Israel continually murmured, complained and rebelled. Moses even faced the sedition of his sister Miriam, and brother, Aaron, the High Priest. Jealousy, a desire for honour and a critical spirit led to Miriam being punished with leprosy for seven days until she repented.

Serpents

When, instead of being grateful for God's provision of food in the wilderness, the Israelites grumbled saying they would prefer to return to Egypt. God struck them with a severe plague (Numbers 11:33). *"And the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. 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."* Numbers 21:5-6

The Bronze Serpent on a Pole

When the people acknowledged: *"We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord that He take the serpents from us."* The Lord commanded Moses: *"Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who has been 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."* Numbers 21:8-9

Saved to Serve

Numbers makes it clear that the children of Israel were set free from slavery in Egypt to serve God. They were saved to serve. 80 times in Numbers, we read: *"God said to Moses..."* From the instructions of God, we learn: **carefulness; cleanliness and costliness.**

Carefulness

Each tribe was allotted a specific place in relation to the other tribes. The camp was to be a hollow rectangle with the Tabernacle in the centre and specific places allocated to each tribe. When the pillar of cloud, or fire moved, the people of Israel were to follow. Very specific instructions were given as to the dismantling and transporting of the furniture and equipment of the Tabernacle. The order of march was specific, with the tribe of Judah leading. Numbers specifies punishments for sins of carelessness. God expects his people to be careful.

Cleanliness

The camp had to be spotlessly clean. The expression cleanliness is next to Godliness has tremendous support from the book of Numbers, which specifies God's concern for a clean, neat, tidy and orderly camp. God is Holy and He requires His people to be Holy as well.

Costliness

Sacrifices were required on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Only the best could be offered to God. Worship requires sacrifice. True love is measured by sacrifice. From Numbers we can see that God is an all-consuming fire. We are to fear God and worship Him according to His requirements and nature, not our own.

The Frustration of Backsliding

Numbers also illustrates the frustration of being backslidden. Here the children were freed from slavery in Egypt, but they had not yet entered into the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. This is a picture of the backslidden Christian, who has too much of the world in them to enjoy Christ and too much of Christ to enjoy the world.

The Sin of Moses

Moses did an exemplary job leading such a large multitude of disgruntled, dissatisfied, complaining people. However, when God commanded him to speak to the Rock, he struck the Rock twice. Because of this disobedience, God told Moses that he would not enter the Promised Land. One may ask, why such a severe punishment for what to us may seem like a small offence?

That Rock Was Christ

However, you read in 1 Corinthians 10:4, that the Rock from which flowed the water that sustained the children in the wilderness was Christ. Christ suffered once for our sins. He cannot be struck a second time. Nor did He need to be compelled. He willingly gave up His life for us.

God in Numbers

Numbers tells us much about God: He is a God of love and mercy, providing His people with food, water and protection. We also see the Holiness, justice and wrath of God, in His Laws and in His Judgment on rebellion. God is a Holy God and we must fear and worship Him.

Jesus in Numbers

Numbers reveals much about our Lord Jesus Christ. ***"And 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. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*** John 3:14-16. The serpents of sin have bitten us all, and the wages of sin is death. We must look unto Christ, crucified for Salvation.

Jesus is the Bread of Life (John 6:32-3.5). Jesus is the Rock of our Salvation. Whoever thirsts must come unto Him and drink and out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living waters (John 7:37-39).

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. As Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness, so Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness being tempted before beginning His earthly ministry.

To confirm Aaron's call to be the High Priest, the leaders of each of the 12 tribes were to lay their staff, or stick, before the presence of the Lord. In the morning, Aaron's stick had blossomed with leaves, flowers and budding fruit. The other twigs were still dead. In the same way, God has shown that our Lord Jesus Christ is the Messiah, our High Priest, because He alone was dead and is alive forever more.

"A star shall come out of Jacob; a sceptre shall rise out Israel." Numbers 24:17

Today the symbol of ambulances and paramedics is the serpent on the stake, alluded to in Numbers 21:9 and John 3:14.

The first words ever communicated by telegraph were from the Book of Numbers. Samuel Morse on 24 May 1844 inaugurated the telegraph with these four words from Numbers: ***"What hath God wrought?"*** Numbers 23:23

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace." Numbers 6:24-26

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