

## **The Book of Numbers**

- I. Preparations for Departure from Sinai (1:1-10:10)
  - A. Numbering and Organization of the Tribes (1:1-4:49)
  - B. Special Legislation (5:1-6:27)
  - C. Tribal Offerings for the Tabernacle (7:1-89)
  - D. Purification of the Levites (8:1-26)
  - E. Passover (9:1-14)
  - F. The Cloud of Guidance and the Silver Trumpets (9:15-10:10)
  
- II. From Sinai to Kadesh (10:11-20:21)
  - A. Arrangement of the Tribes Marching (10:11-36)
  - B. Grumbling and Unrest (11:1-15)
  - C. God's Provision of Food (11:16-35)
  - D. Insubordination of Aaron and Miriam (12:1-16)
  - E. The Twelve Spies (13:1-14:45)
  - F. Supplemental Laws (15:1-41)
  - G. Rebellion of Korah and Others (16:1-17:13)
  - H. Duties of Priests and Levites (18:1-32)
  - I. Purification Ritual for the Unclean (19:1-22)
  - J. Miriam's Death and Moses' Sin (20:1-21)
  
- III. From Kadesh to the Plains of Moab (20:22-36:13)
  - A. Aaron's Death (20:22-29)
  - B. Defeat of Arad, Sihon, and Og (21:1-35)
  - C. Balak and Balaam (22:1-24:25)
  - D. Israel's Idolatry and Immorality at Baal-Peor (25:1-18)
  - E. Second Numbering of Israel (26:1-65)
  - F. Inheritance Case of Zelophehad's Daughters, Part 1 (27:1-11)
  - G. Selection of Joshua as Moses' Successor (27:12-23)
  - H. Additional Legislation on Offerings and Vows (28:1-30:16)
  - I. War Against Midian (31:1-54)
  - J. The Transjordan tribes (32:1-42)
  - K. Itinerary of Israel's Journey from Egypt to Canaan (33:1-49)
  - L. Allotment of Transjordan Lands (33:50-34:29)
  - M. Levitical Cities and Cities of Refuge (35:1-34)
  - N. Inheritance Case of Zelophehad's Daughters, Part 2 (36:1-13)

## **Numbers: The Complaints and Rebellions of Israel**

"Chapters 11-20 present a dismal record of their acts of ingratitude and of God's consequent judgments on his ungrateful people. Within these chapters are innumerable instances of his continuing grace. The reader of these texts goes astray if he or she focuses solely on God's wrath or on the constant provocations to his anger by his meandering people. The more impressive feature in this text is God's continuing mercy against continuing, obdurate rebellion." (Ronald B. Allen. "Numbers" In *Genesis-Numbers*. Vol. 2 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 785.)

### **Israel Complains About the Lack of Food (11:1-35)**

1. Why does the Lord send the fire in verses 1-3?

"In the midst of his wrath, the Lord remembers mercy. This is one of the ongoing themes of Scripture and is a particular truism in the Book of Numbers." (Ronald B. Allen. "Numbers" In *Genesis-Numbers*. Vol. 2 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 787.)

2. What is the nature of Moses' complaint to the Lord?

3. How does the Lord respond to him?

4. How does the Lord respond to the people?

". . . in ancient times meat was eaten in Israel only on special occasions. In the wilderness it would have been very much a luxury. In any event, the offense of the demand for meat was just part of the larger offense of romanticizing the time in Egypt, where there had always been an abundance of fish and fresh vegetables. They were saying in effect that the entire so-called 'deliverance' from slavery had turned out to be one huge disappointment." (B. Maarsingh. *Numbers: A Practical Commentary*, p. 39.)

### **Miriam and Aaron Oppose Moses (12:1-16)**

1. Why do Miriam and Aaron complain against Moses?

2. How does the Lord respond to the complaint?

3. Why does the Lord relent?

### **The Report of the Spies (13:1-14:45)**

1. Why did Moses send men to spy out the land (Deut. 1:18-25)?
2. What do the spies say and do when they come back from spying out the land?
3. How does the Lord respond in 14:11-19, and how does Moses respond?
4. Why does this rebellion bring the severe judgment of the forty years in the desert?

“ . . . this passage intends to show that the people failed to inherit the Promised Land and hence died in the wilderness without inheriting the blessing, not so much for a specific act of disobedience or for fear of the battles that lay ahead, but rather for the simple fact of their unbelief. They failed to trust in God.” (John H. Sailhamer. *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, p. 388.)

### **The Rebellion of Korah (16:1-17:13)**

1. What is Korah, Dathan and Abiram’s complaint against Moses? Is it justified?
2. How does Moses settle the matter?
3. What does Moses say in verses 8-11 is at the heart of their rebellion?

"Anytime one begins so heavily to emphasize 'my ministry,' then such a one is in danger of standing in Korah's sandals." (Ronald B. Allen. "Numbers" In *Genesis-Numbers*. Vol. 2 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 837.)

4. What is the error in the rebels’ accusation in verses 12-14?
5. Why did the Lord kill them for their rebellion?

“God's method of judging Korah, Dathan, and Abiram was a graphic lesson to the rest of the nation that God would bury those who rebelled against His will. Sin always leads to death (Rom. 6:23).” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Numbers*, p. 48.) He demonstrated this by burying Adam after his sin and then burying humanity under the floodwaters for their sins.

6. What makes this act of rebellion so grievous and evil compared to everything else that Israel has done so far?

7. How do the people respond in verses 41-42?

8. What saves them from the plague?

9. What is the point of the budding staff?

"A man's rod was the sign of his position as ruler in the house and congregation; with a prince the rod became a scepter, the insignia of rule (Gen. xlix. 10)." (C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch. *The Pentateuch*, p. 3:112.)

### **Moses' Sin (20:1-13)**

1. Why did Moses strike the rock twice?

2. Why did the Lord judge Moses so harshly for his actions?

“Moses' anger complicated his unbelief. He was a faithful servant of God except on this occasion. If another person had committed this sin it might not have been so serious, but it was very serious because the man in Moses' office committed it. God therefore shortened the term of Moses' office as punishment. Moses would not bring the nation into the Promised Land (cf. 1 Sam. 13:14; 15:26). Leaders of God's people lose their ability to lead when they cease to rely upon God and impede the manifestation of God's power and holiness.” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Numbers*, p. 59.)

### **The Fiery Serpents (21:4-9)**

1. What about verses 1-3 makes this complaining ridiculous?
2. Why does the Lord have an image of a snake made in order to heal them?

"If ever there were a less expected pairing of types, this would be it. The manna was an altogether gracious gift of God, which the people turned against with stomach revulsion. The snakes were an instrument of God's judgment because of the peoples' ingratitude and rebellious spirits; yet it was a metal copy of just such a snake that became the means for their deliverance." (Ronald B. Allen. "Numbers" In *Genesis-Numbers*. Vol. 2 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 879.)

### **Israel's Sin with the Moabite Women (25:1-18)**

"So now we come to the ultimate rebellion of Israel in the desert. The time is the end of the forty-year period of their desert experience. The place is the staging area for the conquest of the land of Canaan. The issue is that of apostasy from the Lord by participation in the debased, sexually centered Canaanite religious rites of Baal worship—that which would become the bane of Israel's experience in the land. This chapter is an end and a beginning. It marks the end of the first generation; it also points to the beginning of a whole new series of wicked acts that will finally lead to Israel's punishment. . . . But this chapter is unique in the record of the experience of Israel in their move from Sinai to Moab—it describes their involvement in the worship of another deity [cf. Exod. 32]." (Ronald B. Allen. "Numbers" In *Genesis-Numbers*. Vol. 2 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, pp. 914-15.)

1. Why does the Lord have the leaders of Israel killed for the sins of the people?
2. What sin is committed in verses 6-9?

"The point was that in joining the sexual frenzies of the sacrificial feasts of Baal, the man and his priestess-partner now act to transform the worship of the Lord into the type of sexual rites that were the mode of Canaan. Had this outrage not been stopped, there could never have been true worship in the Holy Place again. They were making the place of entrance into a bordello, the entrance of the meeting of God and man into a trysting spot." (Ronald B. Allen. "Numbers" In *Genesis-Numbers*. Vol. 2 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 917.)

3. Why does the Lord bless Phinehas for his killing of the man and woman?

“This incident, as the others in which Israel departed from God, shows the inveterate sinfulness of humans even when God blesses us greatly. It also demonstrates the holiness of God, the seriousness of sin in that it destroys fellowship with God, and the necessity of atonement by blood to restore sinners to fellowship with God.” (Thomas L. Constable. *Notes on Numbers*, p. 85.)

## **Conclusion**

A major lesson in the book of Numbers is the importance and necessity of trust and obedience in the Lord. The Israelites frequently failed to trust and obey the Lord in the midst of their trials, and so the Lord postponed His blessing. Most of them never enjoyed the blessings that the Lord had for them.

"...the point of the book of Numbers is important for God's people in any age: Exact obedience to God is crucial. Numbers makes the point most especially through examples of *disobedience* such as those found in chs. 11-21." (Timothy Ashley. *The Book of Numbers*, p. ix.)

Numbers also teaches that the failures of His people do not frustrate the Lord's plans any more than the opposition of His enemies can. The Israelites' unfaithfulness to the Lord did not stop Him from faithfully carrying out His commitments to His chosen people. Thus, the amazing attribute of the Lord here is His graciousness no matter the circumstances.

Another lesson in the book of Numbers is that the Lord's primary interest in His people is to teach them and grow them in to a righteous and holy people. Though His discipline involves a loss of blessing for Israel, His purpose is to teach and make them stronger. He does this in order to keep them from sinning again so that they experience His blessing to a greater extent. Where their sin abounds, His grace abounds even more greatly.

## **An Outline of the Pentateuch**

- I. The Origin of Humanity and of a Chosen People (Genesis 1:1-50:26)
  - A. The Primeval Events (Genesis 1:1-11:26)
  - B. The Patriarchal Narratives (Genesis 11:27-50:26)
  
- II. The Deliverance and Establishment of Israel (Exodus 1:1-18:27)
  - A. Israel in Egypt (Exodus 1:1-13:16)
  - B. The Journey from Egypt to Sinai (Exodus 13:17-18:27)
  
- III. Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1-Leviticus-Numbers 10:10)
  - A. The Covenant and Law at Sinai (Exodus 19:1-40:38)
  - B. Approaching a Holy God (Leviticus 1:1-10:20)
  - C. Living in the Presence of a Holy God (Leviticus 11:1-25:55)
  - D. Covenant Blessings and Curses (Leviticus 26:1-46)
  - E. About Vows and Gifts (Leviticus 27:1-34)
  - F. Preparations for Departure from Sinai (Numbers 1:1-10:10)
  
- IV. Israel in the Wilderness (Numbers 10:11-36:13)
  - A. From Sinai to Kadesh (Numbers 10:11-20:21)
  - B. From Kadesh to the Plains of Moab (Numbers 20:22-36:13)
  
- V. Israel's Preparations to Enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 1:1-34:12)
  - A. Moses' First Address: A Review of God's Faithfulness (Deuteronomy 1:1-4:40)
  - B. Preparations for Entrance into the Land (Deuteronomy 4:41-49)
  - C. Moses' Second Address: An Exposition of the Law (Deuteronomy 5:1-26:19)
  - D. Preparations for Renewing the Covenant (Deuteronomy 27:1-29:1)
  - E. Moses' Third Address: An Exhortation to Obedience (Deuteronomy 29:2-30:20)
  - F. Moses' Last Acts (Deuteronomy 31:1-34:12)
  
- VI. Israel Enters the Promised Land (Joshua 1:1-21:45)
  - A. The Conquest of the Land (Joshua 1:1-12:24)
  - B. The Division of the Land (13:1-21:45)

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