

## Preview of Numbers

This fourth book of the Pentateuch derives its name from the two numberings of the Israelites that are recorded in it. The Jewish title for this book means "in the wilderness." Taken from the opening words of the book, it is probably more meaningful than the English title, in light of the fact that the book picks up the history of the Israelites after their arrival at Sinai and tells of their experiences during their years of wandering in the wilderness. Geographically, the book divides into three sections: at Sinai (1:1-10:10), in the wilderness (10:11-21:35), and in the plains of Moab (22:1-36:13).

Numbers pictures God's faithfulness and patience in contrast to man's unbelief. How quickly the Israelites forgot God's promises and murmured against Him! How prone they were to look only at their troubling circumstances and forget His sovereign care! Yet God brought them through the school of discipline so that they might learn the necessity of complete obedience. His faithfulness is clearly seen in the many wilderness miracles. The preservation of this vast multitude for forty years was possible only by direct, miraculous intervention.

During the wilderness wanderings, a new generation of Israelites arose. Their stay in the wilderness was a continual reminder of the unbelief of their fathers (except Joshua and Caleb), as they too learned the consequences of God's judgment. After disciplining them many times, God led this new generation to the banks of Jordan in faithful fulfillment of His promises.

The Christian experience is typified in Israel's deliverance from Egypt and entrance into Canaan. Exodus is the book of redemption; Leviticus is the book of worship; and Joshua pictures the blessings of possessing the full Christian life. The Book of Numbers, between Leviticus and Joshua, pictures the sad and fatal results of those who through unbelief fail to go the whole way with the Lord.

## Lesson 5      3<sup>rd</sup> June, 2018

### Preparing for the Journey

#### **Lesson Scope:** Numbers 1-10

*References in brackets refer to the lesson scope unless otherwise noted*

#### **Lesson Focus**

Numbers continues the story of Israel's journey in the wilderness. Their eleven-month stay at Sinai was almost over. They better understood God's plan for them. God had established an official worship practice, and they had built the tabernacle—a specific place to worship. God was preparing them to be His people in the land of Canaan, and He was now ready to take them there.

God was providing them with everything that they needed. He gave them the Law. They had a very devoted leader in addition to the pillar of cloud for guidance. He had promised them sustenance and protection in the wilderness. The success of the journey depended wholly on the cooperation of the people and their willingness to obey God's commands.

The Lord graciously guides His people in the way that He calls them to go. Only those who by faith obey Him can enjoy His blessing and realize the fulfillment of His promises.

This lesson has many parallels for us today. God has provided the church with the provisions for our journey as well. Use this lesson to inspire church support and a desire to do our part to propel the church forward. We each should heartily say, "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good." The text is large and the verses in focus are scattered, so try to stay focused on the important teachings. This lesson should be a positive reminder of God's goodness to His faithful people.

**Lesson Aim:** To present essentials for moving forward with the Lord.

**Theme Verse:** Numbers 9:23. At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

## Lesson Text

### Living by God's Commands

**Numbers 1:1-2** And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first *day* of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, <sup>2</sup> Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of *their* names, every male by their polls;

**Numbers 1:52-53** And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, throughout their hosts. <sup>53</sup> But the Levites shall pitch round about the tabernacle of testimony, that there be no wrath upon the congregation of the children of Israel: and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony.

**Numbers 5:2** Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead:

**Numbers 5:6-7** Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; <sup>7</sup> Then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth *part* thereof, and give *it* unto *him* against whom he hath trespassed.

**Numbers 9:4-5** And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, that they should keep the passover. <sup>5</sup> And they kept the passover on the fourteenth day of the first month at even in the wilderness of Sinai: according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did the children of Israel.

### Walking by God's Guidance

**Numbers 9:15-17** And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, *namely*, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. <sup>16</sup> So it was alway: the cloud covered it *by day*, and the appearance of fire by night. <sup>17</sup> And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents.

**Numbers 9:23** At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

### **Uniting With God's People**

**Numbers 10:1-3** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup> Make thee two trumpets of silver; of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps. <sup>3</sup> And when they shall blow with them, all the assembly shall assemble themselves to thee at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation.

**Numbers 10:29** And Moses said unto Hobab, the son of Raguel the Midianite, Moses' father in law, We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel. **Numbers 10:35-36** And it came to pass, when the ark set forward, that Moses said, Rise up, LORD, and let thine enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee. <sup>36</sup> And when it rested, he said, Return, O LORD, unto the many thousands of Israel.

### **Questions for Study**

#### **Living by God's Commands**

1. Why was it important that all the men be numbered? What are the spiritual applications?
2. What truths can be gleaned from the camping arrangement?
3. What principles for dealing with sin are found in 5:2, 6-7?

#### **Walking by God's Guidance**

4. Why are the ordinances important to the church?

#### **Uniting With God's People**

5. Of what benefit were the cloud and fire to Israel? What are their New Testament counterparts?
6. On what basis do we experience the good that God has spoken concerning His people?

### **Analyzing the Passage**

Chapter 1 opens with God calling for a census of the people. They also organized the camp by families, each identified by their standard or

flag. God laid out the plan for the camp in chapter 2. The tabernacle in the center and the Levites around it emphasized the importance of worship and man's need for a mediator.

God required Israel to make restitution to those that they had wronged. They were to restore an equal amount plus an additional one-fifth. God required fairness in interpersonal relationships.

Chapter 9, verses 4 and 5 record the first memorial Passover. A year had passed since the actual Passover meal in Egypt. While at Mount Sinai, God had given further direction for keeping the Passover feast. "And they kept the passover ... according to all that the LORD commanded."

Silver is a symbol of redemption. The call of the silver trumpet signaled the people to march, to gather for war, and to assemble for special festivals. Each of these typifies our response to the Gospel—obeying God's commandments, fighting against the powers of darkness, and participating in worship.

## **Principles and Applications**

### **Living by God's Commands**

1. It is God's purpose for everyone to move forward with Him (1: 1-2). "The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9). This is why He provided the plan of salvation and sent His Son to die on the cross. Moses was commanded to "take ... the sum of all." Back then, God's provision was available through the nation of Israel, but today His provision is through the church. He has designed the church for the very purpose of moving forward with people who are willing to commit themselves to Him.

2. Filling one's place in an orderly way is essential to moving forward with God (1:52-53). God has an orderly approach and expects obedience from His people. He has established levels of authority in the church and home. God has appointed a place for each of us to fill, and if we expect God's blessing, we need to fill our place in an orderly way. We must not compete for someone else's position nor neglect our own, but rather give our best wherever God has placed us.

3. Freedom from sin, personally and collectively, is a must for moving forward with God (5:2, 6-7). "Put out of the camp ... whosoever is defiled." God cannot go with those who have defiled themselves with the

sins of the world. God needed to remind Israel of this at the battle of Ai. It is the responsibility of the church to be sure that she is an unspotted bride for Christ. We each have a personal responsibility for our own lives. Victory is possible only after we have purged ourselves of sin.

4. Appreciating God's work and deliverance in the past is essential to moving forward (9:4-5). God had miraculously delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage. A year later, He commanded them to practice a memorial Passover. We need to observe the memorials of our deliverance. The semiannual observance of Communion helps us to remember the involvements of our great salvation. If we forget what God has done for us, we will lose our focus. An understanding of and appreciation for the beginning goals of our church group help us to maintain the vision. All that we have is only because of God's deliverance and blessing.

### **Walking by God's Guidance**

5. God's presence is necessary to move forward with Him (9:15, 17). "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence" (Exodus 33:15). The success of Israel's wilderness travel depended on their willingness to follow the cloud. New Testament believers have the privilege of God dwelling in them. Without God's presence, our sense of direction is lost and we will follow self and Satan to certain ruin. Some try to find their way alone and on their own terms, but God can use only those who allow Him to abide with them.

6. Obedience is necessary to move forward with God (9:23). We have examples in the Scriptures of those who took their own way. Jonah found himself inside a great fish, and King Saul lost the kingdom because of disobedience. We must be willing to obey at all cost. Our own comforts or agendas dare not conflict with obedience. God requires obedience to the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and church leaders.

### **Uniting With God's People**

7. The redeemed need to be attentive to hear God's call to move forward (10:1-3). Our leaders are as watchmen (Ezekiel 3). Do we hear their warnings against the allurements of the world or the business involvements that would keep us earthbound? Do we regard the Scriptures through their mouths as the trumpet call of God calling us to join together in battle against the enemy of our souls or to move forward in our spiritual journey to higher plains? And finally, are our ears tuned for the sound of the "last trump"? Many people will not be prepared,

because their ears will be full of the things of this world.

8. A complete faith and confidence in God to lead the way is essential for moving forward (10:29). Do we believe that God will go with us, or are we fearful of the future? Do we extend the invitation to those around us to go with us? "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Confidence in our brethren and our leaders will help us to maintain a positive view of the church, including her ultimate triumph.

9. Prayer is essential to moving forward with God (10:35-36). When we waver, we should ask ourselves, "Am I praying enough?" Through prayer we communicate our desire to God and receive direction from Him.

### **Important Teachings**

1. It is God's purpose for everyone to move forward with Him (1:1-2).
2. Filling one's place in an orderly way is essential to moving forward with God (1:52-53).

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3. Freedom from sin, personally and collectively, is a must for moving forward with God (5:2, 6-7).
4. Appreciating God's work and deliverance in the past is essential to moving forward (9:4-5).
5. God's presence is necessary to move forward with Him (9:15, 17).
6. Obedience is necessary to move forward with God (9:23).
7. The redeemed need to be attentive to hear God's call to move forward (10:1-3).
8. A complete faith and confidence in God to lead the way is essential for moving forward (10:29).
9. Prayer is essential to moving forward with God (10:35-36).

### **Answers to Questions**

1. Why was it important that all the men be numbered? What are the spiritual applications?

This was essential to organizing for travel and battle. It helped each man to feel needed and to sense his responsibility to the group. This can be applied to New Testament brotherhood. All are important, and all have a contribution to make.

2. What truths can be gleaned from the camping arrangement?

Organization provided order and identity. Each tribe had a standard, just as our standard is the Word of God. The location of the tabernacle and the Levites emphasized the importance of worship and the need for a mediator.

3. What principles for dealing with sin are found in 5:2, 6-7?

Sin is contagious, just like an infectious disease. Separation is necessary to prevent spreading sin. Repentance is necessary, followed by restitution. God's presence and sin cannot mix. Sin is "against the LORD."

4. Why are the ordinances important to the church?

They help us remember the most important things, which we so easily forget. They help us to appreciate and understand what God has done for us. To let them slip is a breach of faith. To observe them is enriching and fulfilling.

5. Of what benefit were the cloud and fire to Israel? What are their New Testament counterparts?

They reminded Israel of God's constant presence. They also guided Israel through the wilderness, making God's will plain.

Today we have the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit, and the church. When these three agree, we can be sure that we are in God's way.

6. On what basis do we experience the good that God has spoken concerning His people?

Only those who willingly identify and journey with the church will receive God's blessing. This means experiencing the new birth and then submitting to and obeying the authority of the church.

### **Summarizing the Lesson**

We are on a spiritual journey from earth to glory. God has redeemed us from the bondage of sin through our Lord Jesus Christ. He has given us the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. We have ready access to the Holy Scriptures. Let us claim the provisions and make each challenge to our faith a steppingstone on our way toward heaven.

### **Research Guide**

1. Read the entire lesson scope to understand the complete setting.
2. Read key New Testament passages that parallel the lesson teachings (1 Corinthians 5, 11-12; Galatians 6; and others).