

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 the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Geographically, the book divides into three sections: at Sinai (Numbers 1:1 to 10:10), in the wilderness (Numbers 10:11 to 21:35), and in the plains of Moab (Numbers 22:2 to 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 – 29 May, 2011

Divine Direction for the Journey

Lesson Scope: Numbers 1-10

Lesson Focus

The children of Israel arrived at Sinai on the first day of the third month after coming out of Egypt (Exodus 19:1). Israel left Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month in the second year (Numbers 10:11). This eleven-month stay at Sinai was a very significant period of Israel's history during this time, God gave the Law: they built the tabernacle; the Levitical sacrificial system was begun; and Israel observed the first Passover Feast (Numbers 9:5).

These ten chapters record God's final instructions to Israel before they moved on to the Promised Land. The path ahead was unfamiliar, but God had promised to send an angel before them to guide and keep them in the Way. (Exodus 23:20). Israel's success and safety were dependent upon their obedience to God's direction.

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

In this lesson we can see six separate areas of thought or points: the numbering of Israel, the pattern of encampment, the exclusion from the camp, the keeping of the Passover, the means of direction, and Moses' offer to Hobab. Each unit will make a fruitful discussion. The study questions are directed toward these individual thoughts or points and you are encouraged to spend some time on each point.

Concerning the standards under which the tribes camped, J. A. Seiss writes, "The Jewish writers tell us that the standard of each tribe of Israel took the color of the stone which represented it in the high priest's breastplate, and there was wrought upon each a particular figure a lion for Judah, a young ox for Ephraim, a man for Reuben, and an eagle for Dan." These four figures are the same as the four beasts around the throne (Revelation 1) and the four faces of the living creatures in Ezekiel's vision of deity (Ezekiel 1). In the Gospels, Jesus is portrayed by those same figures: Matthew—King (lion), Mark—servant (ox), Luke—Son of man (man), and John—Son of God (eagle). These four figures represent God's provi-

dential and sovereign care over His people.

It is of interest that the Levites were not numbered with the rest of the tribes. This exemption foreshadows the New Testament doctrine of nonresistance. First Peter 2:5, 9 refers to New Testament believers as a priesthood. The parallel is obvious.

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

Theme Verse: [1 Kings 2:3](#). And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statutes, and his commandments, and his judgments, and his testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself.

Lesson Text:

Identification

[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, ²Take 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. ⁵³But 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.

Sanctification

[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; ⁷Then 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. ⁵And 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.

Guidance

Numbers 9:15

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.

Numbers 9:17

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 10:1-2

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ²Make 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.

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 10:33

And they departed from the mount of the LORD three days' journey: and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them in the three days journey, to search out a resting place for them.

Questions for Study

Identification

1. What spiritual lessons can we learn from the numbering of the men of war?
2. What truths can be gathered from the detailed camping arrangement?

Sanctification

3. What principles for dealing with sin are found in verses 2, 6, and 7?
4. What role do ordinances fill in the life of God's people?

Guidance

5. Of what benefit and blessing were the cloud and fire and the sounding of trumpets 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

The Book of Numbers opens with the command of God to number the men of war from twenty years old and upward. The total of the census reached 603,550. The Levites were exempted because of their service in the tabernacle (Numbers 1:47-53).

The arrangement of Israel's camp is detailed in chapter 2. The tabernacle was pitched in the center of the camp, with the Levites in a close circle around it. This inner circle emphasized man's need of a mediator. Moses and Aaron camped toward the East. The other tribes formed an outer circle some distance away. Judah's camp was toward the east, the direction of the rising of the sun and its prophetic significance. Old Testament saints lived in expectation of the coming "Sun of righteousness" (Malachi 4:2).

The three types of defilement mentioned in 5:2 have typical significance. Leprosy is a type of sin, and it illustrates the visible defilement of sin. The issue, an inner haemorrhaging, is typical of inner corruption.

Defilement from touching a dead body is typical of the corrupting influence of sin.

Verses 6 and 7 of chapter 5 teach that a sin committed against another person is in reality a sin "against the Lord.

Silver is symbolic of redemption. The silver trumpets were used to call the people to journey, to war, and to gather for special festivals. Each of these represents an aspect of our response to the Gospel, obeying God's direction, fighting the Christian warfare, and participating in regular worship. Hobab was likely Moses brother-in-law. Miguel is another name for Jethro, Moses' father-in-law. Hobab's first response to Moses' invitation to accompany Israel was negative. However, Moses' second invitation, which included a present usefulness, brought a positive response. Judges 1:16 indicates that some of Jethro's descendants did settle among the Israelites.

Principles and Applications

Identification

1. Only those who clearly identify with God's people can more forward with Him (Numbers 1:2-3). This calls for a wholehearted response and a full surrender. We are called to put on the whole armor of God, to fight the

good fight of faith, and to endure hardness.

2. God's people move forward as each one takes his appointed place (Numbers 1:52). Every member of the body is needed. Each person in the body of Christ has an important place to fill (1 Corinthians 12:4-12). Spiritual blessing is found in willingly filling our place and in recognizing the contribution of others to the body.

3. Worship holds a central place in the life of God's people (Numbers 1:53). We read the Scriptures and pray on a daily basis. We gather for collective worship on the first day of the each week. Worship is at the very core of the Christian life. We must daily sense our dependence upon God and diligently seek His enabling grace.

Sanctification

4. It is essential that God's people deal decisively with sin in their midst (Numbers 5:2, 6,-7). It must have been a difficult experience for an Israelite to be put out of the camp. Likewise, the excommunication of a church member is painful. But sin debilitates, and tolerated sin spreads. Sin must be confessed and restitution made when necessary. The goal is recovery and restoration.

5. Observing the ordinances helps God's people to maintain an appreciation of all that God has done for them (Numbers 9:4-5). Each of the Christian ordinances is an important part of Christian faith and practice. Ordinances fill a vital role in keeping our focus on God's plan and desire for His people. They serve as a checkpoint for the keeping of the faith.

Guidance

6. God's people must carefully follow His leading (Numbers 9:15, 17, 23). The cloud and the appearance of fire over the tabernacle can be likened to God's will as revealed in the Scriptures. The principles of Scripture are to direct our lives. A Scriptural church helps us to follow God's leading by making practical applications to these principles. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth. Our willingness is crucial to a further understanding of God's will.

7. Faithful leaders will give clear direction, and the people must willingly follow. (Numbers 10:2-3). This teaching recognizes the human instrumentality in the blowing of the trumpets. It is important that those in authority are being directed by the Word. When this is true, the direction they give will be consistent with truth. On this foundation, leaders can speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. (Titus 2:15), and the brotherhood can find joy and fulfillment in obedience.

Guidance

8. God's people should manifest a keen interest in the spiritual welfare of others (10:29). Moses' words to Hobab are heartwarming; they ring with a true interest and concern. The constraining love of Christ moves us to witness for Him. Outreach efforts enrich the life of the congregation. This same interest and concern carries over into brotherhood relationships.

Important Teachings

1. Only those who clearly identify with God's people can move forward with Him (Numbers 1:2-3).
2. God's people move forward as each one takes his appointed place (Numbers 1:52).
3. Worship holds a central place in the life of God's people (Numbers 1:53).
4. It is essential that God's people deal decisively with sin in their midst (Numbers 5:2, 6-7).
5. Observing the ordinances helps God's people to maintain an appreciation for all that God has done for them (Numbers 9:4-5).
6. God's people must carefully follow His leading (Numbers 9:15, 17, 23).
7. Faithful leaders will give clear direction, and the people must willingly follow (Numbers 10:2-3).
8. God's people should manifest a keen interest in the spiritual welfare of others (Numbers 10:29).

Answers to Questions

1. What spiritual lessons can we learn from the numbering of the men of war?

Within the breast of every person is the desire to belong and to feel accepted. As Christians, we are "accepted in the beloved." Brotherhood is a beautiful and wonderful experience.

This brotherhood experience also brings responsibility. The Christian life is a warfare. We are to put on the whole armor of God and be ready to fight the enemy but not each other.

The exemption of the Levites points forward to the separation of church and state and to the New Testament teaching on nonresistance.

2. What truths can be gathered from the detailed camping arrangement?

The camping arrangement speaks of the need for organization and order. The church needs definite lines of authority and established ways of doing things to avoid confusion. The centrality of the tabernacle teaches the im-

portance of worship and of putting God first in our lives. The position of the Levites around the tabernacle emphasizes Israel's need for a mediator. There is prophetic significance in the fact that the tabernacle faced toward the East and that Moses, Aaron, and the tribe of Judah camped on the East side of the tabernacle.

3. What principles for dealing with sin are found in verses 2, 6, and 7?

Sin is contagious, and the unrepentant sinner must be excluded from church fellowship. All sin is against the Lord. Confession and restitution are necessary for the clearing of the guilty. This, of course, must be preceded by repentance. Sin is not to be taken lightly, and the practice of sin is forbidden.

4. What role do ordinances fill in the life of God's people?

Ordinances fill a vital place in keeping a clear focus and a right perspective. They help us to remember and think through God's plan and purposes for His people. They serve as a checkpoint in keeping the faith. To let them slip is a breach of faith. To observe them is enriching and fulfilling.

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

The cloud and fire gave Israel a sense of God's presence with them. Through them Israel had a sense of direction in their journey. They were able to know God's will.

For this direction we look to the Scriptures, the final revelation of God's will. The Scriptures are tangible and convincing. Today the Holy Spirit works through them to reveal the way.

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

Moses invited Hobab to journey with them. This is a basic concept. We experience the good that God has spoken concerning His people by being a part of them. Basic to this relationship is faith in Jesus Christ and the experience of the new birth. The New Testament assumes that believers will be part of a church fellowship. Entwined in all of this are the principles of submission and obedience.

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. Look up "Hobab" and "camp" in Unger's Bible Dictionary.
2. The scope is long and tedious, but read it. It contains some good help.