

BOOK OF NUMBERS

Book of Numbers (Part 1 of 2)

1. This book covers a period of 40 years.
2. Numbers 6:24-26. These 3 verses are commonly used by churches as benediction to give blessing. These verses were given by God to Aaron to bless Israel after their encounter with Him at Mount Sinai. This is similar to the New Testament where the LORD gives grace through our Lord Jesus. With grace, we can have peace. It is an encapsulation of the Gospel.
3. Why was this book called Numbers?
 - a) There were 2 censuses taken in this book of Numbers.
 - i. The first census was taken just a few months before the 600,000 Israelites left Mount Sinai.
 - ii. The second one was taken 40 years later before they entered the Promised Land. There were about 2,000 less men than 600,000.
 - b) In such censuses, only males above 20 years old were included as they were military censuses of able-bodied men ready for war. In both censuses, the size of every tribe was almost the equal.
 - c) In the Old Testament, blessings were counted in terms of fruitfulness in the number of cattle and people. It was clear that God did not bless them during the 40 years in the wilderness as the number of men did not increase but was slightly reduced.
4. While this book of Numbers covers a period of 40 years, the preceding book of Leviticus covers only a period of one month when they were camping at Mount Sinai.
 - a) In fact, the Israelites were camped at Mount Sinai from Exodus Chapter 19 right through Numbers Chapter 10.
 - b) So, Exodus Chapter 19 to Numbers Chapter 10 cover just a few months compared to Numbers Chapters 10 to 36 (which is the last chapter of the book of Numbers) which cover a total period of 40 years.
5. During the few months between Exodus Chapter 19 and Numbers Chapter 10, Moses was listening to God to receive all the rules meant for the Israelites. The question is why did God give them so many rules?
 - a) It is because of God's presence at Mount Sinai and then later at the Tabernacle which was built at the end of the book of Exodus. God's cloud of glory came down on the Tabernacle to lead them by day and with fire by night so as to provide light for the 3 million people (this included the women and children besides the 600,000 men).
 - b) It was clear that the Israelites took God's 40 years of presence in the wilderness for granted. This is no different from princes who see their father (who is the king), as an ordinary man, thus taking him for granted. The Israelites had no reverence for God.

- c) Christianity is about our relationship with God. He lives in us and will never leave us, but it may result in pride and presumption, resulting in the lack of reverence for God.
- d) So, God gave many laws and rules, from the middle of the book of Exodus Chapter 19 right through the book of Leviticus and then to the book of Numbers Chapter 10 (about 1/3 of the book of Numbers), to prevent such presumption.

The Law was divided into 3 categories.

1. Laws that are Costly.

- a) Sacrifices had to be made all the time. These were costly to them, especially when they had limited possessions in the wilderness. They had to continue to support the Levites who lived off such sacrifices.
- b) We are freely saved in Jesus but Jesus paid a great price for our Salvation. He left heaven for 33 years, led a perfect sinless life, and then suffered and died on the Cross.

2. Laws of Cleanliness.

- a) This was for ritualistic cleanliness and not for hygiene reasons.
- b) We have to approach God clean.
 - i. Psalms 66:18 says that if we regard iniquities in our heart, the Lord will not hear us. If we commit any sin after being saved, we must confess and be cleansed by the blood of Jesus to keep that fellowship with God (See 1 John 1:9).
 - ii. Though our relationship with God will never change after Salvation, but the fellowship with God can be affected by our sins.
 - iii. This is similar to our relationship with our earthly fathers. You will have to restore fellowship with your earthly father if you upset him, but you are still your father's child regardless.
- c) The food laws were given to tell the Jews to be careful to choose what were acceptable to God. Hence, Christians must also discern whether what we do is pleasing to God (See 2 Corinthians 5:9).

3. Laws of Carefulness.

- a) We have to be very careful when we approach God. For example, we could see that the Tabernacle was in the midst of the Israelites but no one was allowed to touch the Tabernacle, otherwise they risked death. The Tabernacle was surrounded by the Levites, with Moses and Aaron living in the tents pitched at the door of the Tabernacle.
- b) The 12 tribes of Israel were to arrange their tents such that 3 tribes were to be on each side of the Tabernacle.
 - i. All the tents were in black goat skin and they surrounded the white Tabernacle in the middle.
 - ii. They were to move only when the cloud was lifted. The Priests and Levites were given detailed rules on their roles of carrying and keeping the Tabernacle.

- iii. Everyone had to stay at least half a kilometre away from the tent.
 - iv. The tribe of Judah was to move off first when the cloud was lifted because the word “Judah” means “Praise”.
- c) One of the Christian’s biggest sins today is casualness.
- i. For example, some Christians dress in any way they like instead of being in their Sunday best.
 - ii. This is different from other categories of sins like sins of Commission, and sins of Omission (as in James 4:17).
 - iii. This sin of casualness is the sin of Presumption, it is the lack of reverence for God. (See Psalms 19:13) Will we dress like this if we were invited to the palace to visit the king?
- d) We must know the character of God in order to be able to please Him. Laws are given over and over again to help us remember not to be presumptuous or casual with Him.

What did the Israelites do in the 40 years in the wilderness?

1. The period of 40 years is approximately that of one adult life.
 - a) They did nothing, they had no need to sweat or toil for food and just ate manna. Their clothes and shoes were never worn out. They only needed to worship every day.
 - b) Worship is not just to be carried out on Sunday but in everything we do as in 1 Corinthians 10:31. We are to be God-centred in whatever we do.
2. In the wilderness, there was no one else around them.
 - a) They were literally separated from the world. They were consecrated to God.
 - b) It took the Israelites 40 days to travel from Egypt to Mount Sinai but they needed 40 years to leave Egypt behind in their mind! They had to get rid of the idolatry that was so prevalent in Egypt.
3. During these 40 years, they had to learn to stop thinking about going back to Egypt, even so in the Promised Land later.
 - a) There were lots of complaints during the 40-day trip from Egypt to Mount Sinai and they were always wanting to return to Egypt at every encounter of difficulty, e.g. when they had no water to drink or no food to eat. They had not yet learn how to rely on God. God had to separate them from the world to renew their mind as in Romans 12:1-2.
 - b) So as Christians, we are to be separated from the world in our mind and be transformed by the renewal of our mind.
4. All the needs of the Israelites were provided by One God.
 - a) When they were in Egypt, they thought they had the gods of field, of rain, of cattle, etc. But now, whether it was food, or health, or protection, all of these were provided by One God and they had to learn to rely on Him.
 - b) Christians need to learn this too, to depend on Him for true happiness as true joy is from God. One God touches every part of our life, both secular and spiritual. Do not take God out of your secular life.

5. Manna was provided day by day except that they had to collect double the amount for the Sabbath day of rest.
 - a) This was to make them learn daily dependence on God.
 - b) Christians have to learn to depend on God daily in our job, health, investments, etc.
 - c) Just as in the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, we are to ask God to give us our daily bread, not by month or by entire life.
6. The surrounding nations or people would talk about these Israelites with one true God because they were led by cloud by day and fire by night.
 - a) They had no need to work and were fully provided for. It demonstrated to the other people who the true and living God is.
 - b) Do Christians demonstrate the same in our daily living? We are ambassadors for Christ as in 2 Corinthians 5:20, so we have to glorify God in all that we do every day.
7. At the end of the 40 years, only 2 of all the Israelites, who left Egypt, entered the Promised Land. They were Joshua and Caleb, the rest died in the wilderness.
 - a) The Jews were in 40 different places during these 40 years in the wilderness, averaging one year per location. All the rebellious ones did not enter the Promised Land.
 - b) Similarly, today, how many Christians are saved but did not enter the "Promised Land"?
 - i. We are not talking about heaven but Rest in God while still on Earth. Just as the Israelites had to fight to take possession of the Promised Land, Christians have to fight to enter the Rest of God and be in His will in order to live a victorious Christian life.
 - ii. Unless we know the will of God, we will not be able to conquer sins and be transformed.
 - iii. We have to fight like the Israelites, to conquer city by city of Promised Land. Christians have to rely on God's grace to overcome the strongholds of sin in our life.
 - c) The Israelites were in limbo for 40 years, neither enjoying Egypt nor the rest in the Promised Land. Are we also Christians who are in limbo, neither enjoying the "pleasure of sins" nor the Rest of God? We need to have victory over sins and enjoy the peace and joy that surpasses all understanding. Are you like the 2 out of the 3 million?

Book of Numbers (Part 2 of 2)

The Law and rules in the book of Numbers up to Chapter 10 were given by God. Now, we will see some lessons from the remainder of the book of Numbers.

Chapter 10 – Lessons on Seeking Secular Advice and Complaints

1. Moses pleaded with his father-in-law to be his eyes before he left for the wilderness.

- a) This is an important lesson that Christians can get help from unbelievers and we should not fear from learning non-Christian sources, but we must learn to spit out the bones just like when we are eating fish.
 - b) It is alright to consider secular advice but we have to discern which advice is good, with the help of the Holy Spirit.
 - c) Seeking secular advice is not worldliness. It is not the same as “wanting to be like the world”.
2. Israelites complained a lot in wilderness.
- a) The biggest sin of most Christians tends to be presumption but the commonest sin of commission is COMPLAINT.
 - b) To complain, one needs no talent and it is easy to complain. E.g. the food does not suit our taste, etc. Christians should “eat to live” and not “live to eat”. Unfortunately, food has become an idol to many Christians.
 - c) Our food as Christians should be to do the will of God and be satisfied therein. Jesus shared the Gospel with the Samaritan woman and was full of joy. In John 4:34, Jesus said that “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work.”
 - d) A lot of missionaries struggle in their mission trips, e.g. they cannot eat the local food.

Chapter 11 – Lesson on Delegation and Teamwork

God told Moses to appoint 70 elders to handle the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness. God put His spirit on the 70 selected elders. The lesson here is that some Christian leaders burn out because they have no team members to delegate their work to and have no encouragement.

Chapters 12 and 16 – Lessons on Envy and Pride

1. Chapter 12 reveals the envy of Aaron and Mariam who were the brother and sister of Moses respectively; they were his own family members! Envy was the reason why God did not speak to them but just to Moses. In the end, Mariam was stricken with leprosy by God.
2. This is also a huge problem amongst Christian leaders who refuse to co-operate with one another due to envy and are not willing to seek help from the more spiritually matured Christians. It is the pride of man.
3. Chapter 16 shows that Korah (of the Levites tribe) was not happy that Moses was made the chief when the Levites were the priests. His rebellion resulted in the death of 14,700 Israelites.
4. So, be careful. Be thankful and esteem your leaders. Do not try to build your own kingdom but God’s Kingdom. There are about 40,000 denominations in the Christian world but it is sad that they are not co-operating with one another.

Chapter 20 – Lesson on Obedience

1. The water came from the rock. This is a picture of the “Rock of Christ”.

2. There was a need for enough water to feed 2 to 3 million Israelites and all the cattle in the wilderness every day. The water was provided by God.
3. Jesus is the fountain of water, the fountain of everlasting life. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life as in John 14:6.
4. God told Moses in Numbers 17:6 to strike the rock but in Numbers Chapter 20, God only told Moses to speak to the rock and not strike it. But Moses struck it twice. He was punished by God and was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. Then, thousands of years later, we see Moses in the transfiguration scene as in Matthew 17:1-8.
5. We may wonder why the punishment was so great on Moses that he was not allowed into the Promised Land. This is because the rock was already stricken once in Numbers 17:6 and this time in Chapter 20, Moses was only supposed to speak to the rock and not strike it. As in 1 Peter 3:18, Christ only needs to die once, for all our sins!
6. The lesson here is that the leaders must obey God, otherwise we cannot expect the followers to obey God.

Chapter 21 – Another Lesson on Complaints

1. In this chapter, the Israelites complained about not having food and water in the wilderness. God was angry and sent fiery serpents which were poisonous to bite the people.
2. Moses was told by God to make a bronze serpent and lift it up on a pole as the cure. Whoever was bitten had to look up immediately to the bronze serpent to be cured.
3. In John 3:14, it says that “as Moses was lifted up the bronze serpent, so must Christ be lifted up (on the Cross)”. This is followed by John 3:15-16 which says that we have to believe in Jesus to have everlasting life. Hence, the bronze serpent was a type of Christ.
4. Christians are also infected by the poison of our sins unless we look up at the Cross as in Romans 10:9 and 1 John 1:9.
5. It is also interesting to note that today, all the medical associations have a serpent on a rod as their symbol.

Chapters 22 to 24 – Lesson on the Love of Money

1. Balaam was called by King Balak to put a curse on the Israelites who wanted to cross their land. It was common in those days, to curse the enemy before any war. Balaam could not do his job of cursing the Israelites because God controlled his mouth.
2. Balaam had communication with God but he was a prophet who loved money. He might have been a true prophet but he succumbed to the love of money as in 1 Timothy 6:10.
3. This is a warning to many church leaders and Christians!
4. Balaam even prophesied (in Numbers 24:17) that the Star would come out of Jacob and that a sceptre would arise out of Israel. Balaam gave a prophecy about Christ. This could be why the wise men, during Jesus’ birth, watched out for this Star of Jesus in the sky.

Chapter 25 – Lessons on Idolatry and Sexual Adultery

1. Zimri fornicated a Midianite woman near the Tabernacle and angered God. God killed them.
2. This happened just before they entered the Promised Land where there were lots of idolatry and harlotry. The Promised Land at that time was occupied by Canaanites who practised sex and fertility religions. So, God had to kill this couple as a warning to them.

Chapters 26 to 36

As the book of Numbers continues from Chapter 26 to the book of Deuteronomy, more rules were given by God to the Israelites because they were now nearer to the border of the Promised Land and our careful God was training the Israelites how to please Him in their lives in the Promised Land which they would enter soon.