

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 11-6-11 PM NOTES
NUMBERS
#6 in Series in Series, "The Glory of God in the Old Testament"

John 10:10b (NKJV) "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly."

"In contrast to Leviticus, the book of *worship*, Numbers is a book of the people's *walk* with God. Leviticus stresses their *purity*; Numbers their *pilgrimage*. Leviticus is *ceremonial* while Numbers is *historical*. Leviticus gives us a call to *fellowship* with God; Numbers is a call to *faithfulness* to God. The emphasis shifts from *sanctification* before God to *direction by God*."

—Norman Geisler

Hebrews 3:16-19 (NKJV) "16 For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses? 17 Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief."

1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV) "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."

Deuteronomy 1:2 (NKJV) "*It is eleven days' journey* from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea."

I. Israel's Direction From the Lord (Chapters 1-10)

II. Israel's Disbelief (Chapters 11:1-14:25)

A. Discontentment With the Provisions of God (Chapters 11-12)

Numbers 11:14-15 (HCSB) "14 I can't carry all these people by myself. They are too much for me. 15 If You are going to treat me like this, please kill me right now. If You are pleased with me, don't let me see my misery [any more]."

B. Disbelief of God's Promise (Chapters 13-14)

III. Israel's Discipline From the Lord (Chapters 14:26-36:13)

A. The Passing of the Old Generation (Chapters 15-26)

1. The Rebellion Against Moses' and Aaron's Authority

2. Moses' Sin (Chapter 20:1-3)

Numbers 20:10-12 (NKJV) ¹⁰ And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! **Must we bring water for you out of this rock?**' ¹¹ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. ¹² Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'

3. The Bronze Serpent (Chapter 21:4-9)

John 3:14-15 (NKJV) ¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

B. The Preparation of the New Generation (Chapters 27-36)

Hebrews 3:12 (HCSB) "Watch out, brothers, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that departs from the living God."

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Every Christian life represents a pilgrimage. The details of that pilgrimage are different, but the goal and the guide is the same for each disciple of Christ. First, there is the pilgrimage to Christ. Someone said, "Jesus Christ is the only way to the Father, but there are many ways to Jesus Christ." Some came to Him early in life and are without a lot of scars from a long rebellious life. Some were broken by circumstances and drawn by the Father to Christ and His cross after a long life of rebellion. Once we come to Christ and are united with Him through the baptism by the Holy Spirit, the journey to maturity (called sanctification in the Scriptures) begins. For some, the journey to Christ-likeness progresses rapidly but for others it is slowed because of much unbelief and stubbornness followed by the heavenly Father's loving chastisement. In the book of Numbers, we see a picture or illustration of this journey in the journey of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. I don't believe Canaan (the Promised Land) illustrates heaven, but the life that is "more abundant" that Jesus spoke of in **John 10:10b (NKJV)** when He said "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly." The wilderness wanderings illustrate the consequences of refusing to trust God and thus experiencing His chastisement.

For many, studying the book of Numbers sounds about as appealing as curling up in front of a fire on a cold night with a telephone book for your reading material. Actually the book of Numbers, while it has some non-interesting (though important) parts, is overall an interesting account to read. Numbers covers the time from about 13 months after the Exodus until the end of the wilderness wanderings. The book begins with the word "now" and simply picks up where the book of Exodus left off. In the old Jewish scrolls, the name of the book in Hebrew meant "In the Wilderness". In later copies the Greek title of the book was "Arithmai". In Latin that is translated "Numeri" and in English, "Numbers". Norman Geisler gives a good contrast of Numbers with Leviticus. "In contrast to Leviticus, the book of *worship*, Numbers is a book of the people's *walk* with God. Leviticus stresses their *purity*; Numbers their *pilgrimage*. Leviticus is *ceremonial* while Numbers is *historical*. Leviticus gives us a call to *fellowship* with God; Numbers is a call to *faithfulness* to God. The emphasis shifts from *sanctification* before God to *direction by God*" [Norman Geisler, *A Popular Survey of the Old Testament*, Page 74].

We will see today that the main message of Numbers is that God honors faith and chastises unbelief. We learn in Numbers what a horrible sin unbelief really is. Unbelief says to God, "You cannot be trusted". We see the incidents of unbelief recorded in Numbers referred to in the New Testament book of Hebrews. **Hebrews 3:16-19 (NKJV)** "¹⁶ For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, *was it* not all who came out of Egypt, *led* by Moses? ¹⁷ Now with whom was He angry forty years? *Was it* not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸ And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to those who did not obey? ¹⁹ So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." I believe that the purpose of Numbers is to warn the younger generation of Israelites who survived the wilderness wanderings and made it into the Promised Land that unbelief has a high cost. As with the entire with Bible, there is also a warning to us of the consequences of unbelief. **1 Corinthians 10:11 (NKJV)** "Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." You don't have to be a Christian for very long to discover that when we become God's child He leads us to do things that are way beyond our capacity so that we will be forced to leave our comfort zone and believe God for His amazing provision. When we refuse to believe God, we do some wilderness wanderings under His chastisement. From Numbers we see that the wilderness (that word is used 45 times in Numbers) is no fun and joy is as scarce as water. The journey from Sinai, where Israel stayed almost two years to receive the law and build the Tabernacle, to the border of Canaan was a journey of only 11 days. **Deuteronomy 1:2 (NKJV)** says, "*It is* eleven days' *journey* from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea." That eleven day journey took 38 years because of the unbelief of God's people.

I. Israel's Direction from the Lord (Chapter 1-10)

Numbers 1:1-3 (NKJV) “¹ Now the Lord spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first *day* of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying: ² ‘Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, ³ from twenty years old and above--all who *are able to* go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies.’”

In the first ten chapters, we see God's guidance of the Israelites in every area of life. In chapters one and two, we see God giving instructions to number and even arrange the tribes of Israel. When the fighting men were numbered, the number is rather surprising. **Numbers 1:45-46 (NKJV)** “⁴⁵ So all who were numbered of the children of Israel, by their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to go* to war in Israel-- ⁴⁶ all who were numbered were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty.” The census did not include the Levites. That means that the number of people in the wilderness when we add in the women, the older men and the young people under twenty, we can assume the Israelites numbered at least two million! What an amazing God who cared for them in one of the harshest terrains on the planet. Think of the logistics involved! How do you feed two million people, keep them hydrated, and sheltered? How do you deal with issues such as human waste, cleanliness, and such items that we don't tend to think about? God did deal with them and while some essentials, such as the food, were miraculous, others were dealt with through establishing hygiene practices and methods that were way advanced over the knowledge of the time.

Not only do we see God numbering the people we see how the tribes are arranged when camping and when they went on the march. It was a highly organized and symmetrical arrangement. Here is something that we see as we go through Numbers. Our God is a God of organization and order. Some people I have run into think that if something is organized, it is not of God. I agree that we can organize something so that we are in control and almost rule out God moving in and through our plans. However, our God of order and organization desires His people and His work to be organized.

In chapters 5-6 of Numbers we see commands from God about how to handle uncleanness and sin in the camp. There are principles of quarantining people with infectious diseases which was highly advanced for the medical knowledge of the day. In chapters 7-9, God gives provision for cleansing in each of the tribes. Special attention is given to the cleansing of the priestly tribe of Levi. **Numbers 8:5-6 (NKJV)** “⁵ Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ⁶ ‘Take the Levites from among the children of Israel and cleanse them *ceremonially*.’”

In the last half of chapter 9 through chapter 10 we see the pilgrimage toward the Promised Land. **Numbers 9:15-17 (NKJV)** “¹⁵ Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire. ¹⁶ So it was always: the cloud covered it *by day*, and the appearance of fire by night. ¹⁷ Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents.” There was no doubt as to when to travel and which way to travel in following the LORD. They just followed the cloud! Think of the excitement as this huge crowd of people set out to possess the land promised to their ancestor Abraham. These slaves were now free!

II. Israel's Disbelief (Chapter 11:1-14:25)

In these chapters, we see how those that God had called to be conquerors became wanderers under the chastisement of God. Perhaps no other generation with the exception of those who saw the death and resurrection of Christ has ever witnessed more spectacular works of God. Even though God miraculously provided and cared for His people, they would not trust Him. The disbelief was in two areas.

A. Discontentment with the Provisions of God (Chapter 11-12)

Numbers 11:1 (NKJV) “Now *when* the people complained, it displeased the Lord; for the Lord heard *it*, and His anger was aroused. So the fire of the Lord burned among them, and consumed *some* in the

outskirts of the camp.” Have you ever thought of discontentment evidenced by complaining as being a manifestation of unbelief? Complaining, unthankful people are saying to our sovereign God, “I don’t like the way You do things and I don’t trust You.” Their complaining centered in on God’s provision of the manna. Numbers 11:4 tells us that the most vocal of the complaints came from the “mixed multitude” among them. That is translated “the rabble” and “contemptible people” in some other translations. Just as with the Israelites, there is this mixed multitude in every church. They are manifested by their constant complaining and perpetual discontentment. I remember one such man several years ago who wore me out complaining about everything. Even though he was not a member, he would give me lists of things that were wrong with the church. He would make an appointment to tell me in person all the things that were wrong. Most of the things related to his personal preferences. I tried being patient, but one day my patience gage hit empty. I told him (in love) that if he gave me a list of 100 things wrong with the church and I fixed every one of them just like he wanted, he would be back the next week with another list of 100. I told him if I was that discontent with everything in the church, I would find me another church. I’ve never seen him back since then. Sometimes we think of ungratefulness and complaining or “murmuring” as a “minor sin”, but as we are about to see, it is major with God because it is a manifestation of unbelief. A sign in an office said, “No talent, no self-denial, no brains, no character is required to set up in the grumbling business”.

Let’s examine their discontentment with the physical provisions. **Numbers 11:4-6 (NKJV)** “⁴ Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat?’ ⁵ We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; ⁶ but now our whole being *is* dried up; *there is* nothing at all except this manna *before* our eyes!” Without a heavenly appetite, none of God’s food looks good. God takes our unbelief personally. Look at **Numbers 11:10a (NKJV)** Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused...” It is how God responds to complaining that is most important, but look at how it affected His leader, Moses. **Numbers 11:14-15 (HCSB)** ¹⁴ “I can’t carry all these people by myself. They are too much for me. ¹⁵ If You are going to treat me like this, please kill me right now. If You are pleased with me, don’t let me see my misery [any more].” Many are the Pastors who have prayed a prayer similar to Moses’ prayer! We find that God did send them the meat they cried out for. They gorged on it and God sent a plague on them and many died. I told you that God takes complaining and its root, unbelief seriously.

In chapter 12, we see that Moses sister Miriam and his brother Aaron got caught up in the complaining. **Numbers 12:2 (NKJV)** “So they said, ‘Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?’ And the Lord heard *it*.” God was angry with Aaron and Miriam and while Aaron immediately repented, Miriam was struck with the dreaded disease of Leprosy and God only healed her after Moses prayed for her.

B. Disbelief of God’s Promise (Chapter 13-14)

When we get to chapter 13, things go from bad to worse. **Numbers 13:1-2 (NKJV)** “¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² ‘Send men to spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel; from each tribe of their fathers you shall send a man, every one a leader among them.’” The Bible makes it clear in Deuteronomy 1:20-23 that the idea to send the spies was from the people and not the LORD. The LORD is simply allowing the people’s request to show what their hearts were really like. God had already told them what the land of Canaan was like, what nations were there and how He would defeat their enemies if only they would trust Him. Sadly, the flesh would rather walk by sight than by faith.

The spies returned with evidence that the land was just as God told them it would be. Ten of the twelve spies (all but Joshua and Caleb) forgot or just disbelieved what God said about the enemies in the land and how He would defeat them. The 10 spies focused on the human impossibility of taking such a fortified land. The two spies who believed God (Joshua and Caleb) focused on God’s promise. **Numbers 13:30-33 (NKJV)** “³⁰ Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, ‘Let us go up at once and

take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.’³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We are not able to go up against the people, for they *are* stronger than we.’³² And they gave the children of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, ‘The land through which we have gone as spies *is* a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it *are* men of *great* stature.³³ There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.’” The ten left God completely out of the picture! Learn this: Whenever God sends His people on a mission, we will always look like grasshoppers when we compare the obstacles to our strength. When the obstacles, the enemies are compared to God, it is the obstacles that begin to look small compared to God.

Have you ever noticed how much faster unbelief spreads among people than faith spreads? The unbelief of the 10 infects the crowd and they begin to complain against God. **Numbers 14:2b-3 (NKJV)** ² “...If only we had died in the land of Egypt! Or if only we had died in this wilderness! ³ Why has the Lord brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” They had forgotten the 10 plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the water from the rock, the manna and so many of God’s other powerful provisions! We also see that believing God can be dangerous. When Joshua and Caleb exhorted the people to believe God, listen to what happened. **Numbers 14:10a (NKJV)** “And all the congregation said to stone them with stones.”

We have seen Israel’s disbelief. Now let’s look at the sad results.

III. Israel’s Discipline from the LORD (14:26-36:13)

Numbers 14:27-32 (NKJV) ²⁷ “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. ²⁸ Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the Lord, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will do to you: ²⁹ The carcasses of you who have complained against Me shall fall in this wilderness, all of you who were numbered, according to your entire number, from twenty years old and above. ³⁰ 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. ³¹ But your little ones, whom you said would be victims, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. ³² But *as for* you, your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness.’” They were at the border of the Promised Land and now they would not go in for 38 more years (already there 2 years) and all over 20 years old would die in the wilderness. Why? It was because of their unbelief. Oh what a serious and harshly judged sin is this sin of unbelief.

The next day the people grieved over their sin and decided to go into the land, but God had already spoken. There is a time when repentance (and I doubt this was genuine repentance) is too late to avoid the consequences of our sin.

A. The Passing of the Old Generation (Chapter 15-26)

Someone called this time in the wilderness “marking time and making history”. Let me give you a statistic that I think characterizes this wilderness wandering. The thing that characterized this generation was death. Consider how many Israelites died in those 40 years. If there was over 600,000 men who were military age (at least 20 years old) and a comparable number of women 20 and older, that would be 1.2 million people. That works out to 82 deaths a day! The 40 years in the wilderness was a long slow funeral march! The wilderness was one big graveyard.

The way I will cover these verses is to focus in on several incidents.

1. The Rebellion Against Moses and Aaron’s Authority (16:1-40)

A Levite named Korah along with some others challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron. **Numbers 16:3 (NKJV)** “They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, ‘*You take* too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation *is* holy, every one of them, and the Lord *is* among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?’” These men were filled with self-seeking and envy. It was an attempt to defy the God appointed leaders of the nation. Moses and Aaron didn’t attempt to defend themselves. They just told God on him! As they gathered together in sort of a showdown the next day, listen to what God did in Numbers 16:24-33 [read].

2. Moses' Sin (Chapter 20:1-13)

This is a hard passage. The people ran out of water and they started singing their complaint song. God gave Moses instructions in **Numbers 20:8 (NKJV)** "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." God's instructions were clear, but Moses disobeyed. **Numbers 20:10-12 (NKJV)** "¹⁰ And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, 'Hear now, you rebels! **Must we bring water for you out of this rock?**' ¹¹ Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. ¹² Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'" What was this sin that Moses committed that was so horrible that as a judgment he was not allowed to go into the Promised Land with the people of Israel? In what seems like a fit of anger, Moses disobeys God's instructions and even seeks to steal God's glory. God told him to speak to the rock, but he struck the rock with his rod twice and did not give glory to God for the water. Notice the bold area in Numbers 20:10. God shares His glory with no one. Leaders are held to a stricter judgment. I sure remember that as a Pastor!

3. The Bronze Serpent (Chapter 21:4-9)

This account is so very important because the New Testament tells us that it is a picture, an illustration of Christ on the cross. Let me set the scene. The people once again broke out into their complaining song and God sent poisonous snakes among them. Once the venom was in their veins, death was certain. What a picture this is of the venom of sin that courses through the veins of every descendent of Adam. In verse 7, the people repented and God gave Moses instructions as to the remedy for the venom of the serpents. **Numbers 21:8-9 (NKJV)** "⁸ Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.' ⁹ 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." The look was a look of faith that this was God's provision for the poison of sin in them. Those who repented and looked in faith on the bronze serpent lived. Listen to the New Testament in **John 3:14-15 (NKJV)** "¹⁴ And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." Why a bronze serpent? Bronze is the metal that speaks of the judgment on sin in the Bible (the altar where the sacrifices were offered was the "brazen altar"). On the cross Jesus who knew no sin became sin for us and took the judgment that I sin deserved. If we but turn from our sin and look to Him, we will be saved.

Time doesn't allow looking at the whole story of Balaam and the Moabites, and many other interesting events recorded in Numbers.

B. The Preparation of the New Generation (Chapter 27-36)

These chapters deal with a second census after the generation who refused to go in to the Promised Land died. The number of men 20 and older had decreased slightly. We see the number in **Numbers 26:51 (NKJV)** "These *are* those who were numbered of the children of Israel: six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty." Also in these last chapters are the portions assigned the tribes and the cities of refuge.

CONCLUSION

There are two great lessons I want us to learn from the book of Numbers. The first is that refusing to believe God has disastrous consequences. For the lost person, to fail to believe Him for salvation brings eternal separation. For the Christian, unbelief brings God's discipline. The second lesson is discontentment and complaining brings God's chastisement. The reason is that these both have their roots in unbelief. **Hebrews 3:12 (HCSB)** "Watch out, brothers, so that there won't be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart that departs from the living God." (4126)