

Focused Survey of Numbers

This class is a survey of the book of Numbers. The focus of the study is to relate to the New Testament references made to this record.

CLASS	DATE	CHAPTERS	SUBJECT
1	January 12	Numbers 1-6	Counting Israel / Law of Jealousy The Nazarite Vow / The Levitical Blessing
2	January 20	Numbers 7-10	The Offering of the Tribes / The Levites are Consecrated The Passover / Moving the Ark
3	January 27	Numbers 11-12	The Complaint of Manna / The Complaint of Miriam
4	February 3	Numbers 13-15	The Complaint of the Spies / Unintentional Sin
5	February 10	Numbers 16	Korah's Rebellion
6	February 17	Numbers 17-19	Aaron Chosen as Priest / Laws of Consecration
7	February 24	Numbers 20	Sin of Moses and Aaron
8	March 3	Numbers 21	The Fiery Serpent
9	March 10	Numbers 22-24	Balak and Balaam
10	March 17	Numbers 25-26	The Sins of Baal Peor
11	March 24	Numbers 27-30	God's Amendments to the Law
12	March 31	Numbers 31-36	War with Midian / Cities of Refuge

CLASS 1

READING: NUMBERS 1-6

The Counting of Israel

Jacob entered Egypt with 66 direct descendants. The children of Israel left Egypt numbering 600,000 men. This constant numbering reflects both the blessing of God to Abraham (the multiplication of his descendants) as well as the great logistical miracle God is performing in providing for the Israelites.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Why were the Levites not numbered in this census?
- 2) Which tribe was the largest?
- 3) According to Numbers 3:4, what happened to Aaron's oldest sons?
- 4) What change occurred in regards to the redemption of the firstborn in Numbers 3:45 (8:16)?

The Law of Jealousy

One of the most interesting of the laws of Moses is in chapter 5 dealing with the jealousy of a husband. A husband who believed his wife was adulterous had to have this proven through an intricate offering and test. If she had been unfaithful, then the test brought a curse on the wife.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Why is this law important in protecting wives in Israel?

The Nazarite Vow

One of the most intriguing vows of the law of Moses was the Nazarite vow. This vow could be taken by anyone in Israel, and lasted perhaps a year. In that time they abstained from anything that could even be considered unclean. At the end of the vow they would shave their heads and offer the hair as a sacrifice.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Why might the sacrifice of the Nazarite include unleavened bread? Who else was consecrated before God by the same offering (Ex. 29:1-2)?

The Levitical Blessing

Numbers 6 concludes with the means of obtaining the blessing of God. Once the proper sacrifice was offered, the following blessing could be offered:

The LORD bless you and keep you;

The LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you;

The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace.

Numbers in the New Testament:

The Nazarite Vow is intriguing because of its spiritual connection to the vow of being a Christian. Perhaps even some Christians took this vow (Acts 18:18, 21:24). A Nazarite was someone separated to God (the word *naziyr* means separated). A Christian is separated for God too (Rom. 1:1). They abstained from even the appearance of worldliness, as Christians are called to do (1 Pet. 2:11).

CLASS 2

READING: NUMBERS 7-10

The Offering of the Tribes

The leaders of Israel were called to bring gifts to God for the dedication of the tabernacle. They all offered the exact same gifts, perhaps to avoid anyone declaring that they had built the tabernacle. .

QUESTIONS

- 1) Why might the sons of Korath have received no carts (Num. 4:31-32)?
- 2) How could Moses enter the Tabernacle and Holy Place (7:89) not being a priest?

The Levites are Consecrated

The consecration of the Levites for service to God begins with the lighting of the lampstands. After this the Levites will belong to God. Consecration and purification were major parts of the beginning of the service of the tabernacle and the worship of God. God calls the Levites a “gift” to the priests who would serve.

QUESTIONS

- 1) What symbolism might be present in the Levites shaving their bodies (8:7)?
- 2) What was the age of beginning work and the age of retirement for a Levite?

The Passover

One year now has passed since the Israelites left Egypt. The first ceremonial Passover has come, and God instructs Moses to direct the observance of this day. What is interesting that is added here is the “make up” Passover for those who were not ceremonially pure to take it. They are permitted to take it one month later. It is interesting in particular because they are not told to observe it regardless of their impurity. This is an important lesson to us; it is better to wait to offer to God than to offer to God in error.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Could a Gentile observe the Passover? Was the law of the Passover different for them?

Moving the Ark

Numbers 9 describes the movement pattern of the Israelites. God manifested Himself (the Holy Spirit) through a cloud and fire above the tabernacle. When it moved, they were to follow it. Chapter 10 continues describing this movement with the commissioning of trumpets to sound the movement patterns and calls to worship.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Why did Moses want his father-in-law’s family to stay near them?

Numbers in the New Testament:

There is something of great importance in these chapters that we need to consider in regards to the worship of the church: consecration and purification. When we approach God in worship, we are entering a Temple not made with hands. To come to worship with impure hearts and minds is an abomination to the worship of God. This is apparent in Numbers, and is true for us today.

CLASS 3

READING: NUMBERS 11-12

The Complaint of Manna

Numbers 11 contains two incidents in which the complaints of the people resulted in the wrath of God. The first complaint is not identified, but it might possibly be the same as the second, the complaint of manna. We first saw manna in Exodus 16. Now, a year or more into the journey and the complaint arises of the desire for something other than this bread from heaven. Numbers 11:4 suggests this complaint began with the “mixed multitude” (some translations call them “rabble”), possibly those who had come with them out of Egypt but were not of their number (Ex. 12:38).

This complaining seems too much for Moses to bear. He implores God to make this burden easier, and God does so by selecting the 70 elders to have the spirit of Moses passed among them. These men prophesy (only at that time) and speak the things of God. Once this has occurred, God causes a great wind to bring in quail from the sea. But as they were in the very act of eating this flesh, God struck the people with a plague.

QUESTIONS

- 1) What two ways is the wrath of God manifested in this chapter?
- 2) How would you describe Israel's attitude to manna in 11:6?
- 3) Why would Joshua desire for the men outside the camp to cease prophesying?
- 4) Why is grumbling and complaining such an offense to God?

The Complaint of Miriam

Moses, Aaron and Miriam were all leaders of Israel sent by God (Mic. 6:4) and served as important prophets to the people for God. Yet they seem to have had their struggles, as seen here. It is unclear who the wife is that causes controversy. Some suppose it may have been Zipporah, although she is identified as a Midianite, not an Ethiopian/Cushite. Since Zipporah is not mentioned by name after Exodus 18, it is more likely that this is another wife (perhaps after Zipporah has died). What is important is that her heritage is likely the reason she is not accepted by Aaron and Miriam.

God intervenes without being summoned, and calls them all to the tabernacle, where He strikes Miriam with leprosy. Aaron and Moses both plead with God for intercession and mercy, and God demands her to be set apart for seven days. At the end of that time she returns and the camp moves.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Was Moses breaking the law if he married a Cushite?
- 2) Why did God intervene against Miriam when Moses did not ask?

Numbers in the New Testament:

The grumbling and complaining of Israel is a major theme in Numbers, and one brought to our attention in the New Testament (1 Cor. 10). We are repeatedly commanded not to grumble or complain, and yet most of us struggle with this issue (Php. 2:14, Jas. 5:9, 1 Pet. 4:9, Jude 16). Miriam's complaint shows us even people of virtue and spiritual strength fall to that desire. We need to see too that God stands angry on behalf of His people. We can presume that for those who are righteous, He is angry with those who seek to find fault.

CLASS 4

READING: NUMBERS 13-15

The Complaint of the Spies

Twelve men (leaders/judges) were selected to spy out the land of Canaan. They were given orders by Moses to investigate the land and the people and to bring back produce from the land. They do so, spying all the way to Syria in the north. Returning they give a report to the people of all they saw.

It is important to remind ourselves that all twelve saw the same things. They all testify that the land is magnificent. So when ten of them report that the land was unconquerable, and two (Caleb and Joshua) see this as no problem for God, we should see that the issue not with the circumstances, but with the mind and heart of the interpretation.

The children of Israel thus reject the report that supported God's strength, and chose to accept the lie despite the inconsistencies of the story. Not only this, they decide to return to Egypt, and even seek to stone Caleb and Joshua for their encouraging message. It is in this volatile moment that God appears in the tabernacle.

God declares that the people *"have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice"*. If this ten times is literal, then it demonstrates that these people have been given great mercy and forgiveness by God, much more than the ten plagues on Egypt. But now God's greatest judgment is revealed: these will not enter into the land. The next five chapters span nearly 40 years of waste and loss.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Why might God have ordered spies into the land?
- 2) Was verse 32 a true statement? What may have motivated that statement?
- 3) Who would be allowed to enter the land? Why?
- 4) Why would the Israelites wander for 40 years?
- 5) What was the reaction of the children of Israel to this judgment?

Unintentional Sin

God now reveals in chapter 15 the pattern for sacrifices. Let us understand that these had to be offered at the prescribed altars with the priestly blessings (although there are some notable exceptions). After elaborating this a distinction is made between a sin committed in ignorance and a willful sin. The willful sin results in being cut off from God. The example of this is the Sabbath breaker found a few verses on in the chapter. Consider this willful sin in light of the term used in Hebrews 10:25-26.

QUESTIONS

- 1) Who in the Old Testament had problems because they did not follow the sacrifice pattern?
- 2) What did the blue cord on clothing represent?

Numbers in the New Testament:

The important point in this lesson, which is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10, is that we choose what we believe. Thus faith is a matter or condition of the heart. The Hebrew writer cites this event as a proof that we can lose our salvation if we fall according to this example of disobedience (Heb. 4:1-10). This moment is perhaps the most heartbreaking in the Old Testament; an entire people saved and then lost.

CLASS 5
READING: NUMBERS 16

(NOTES NOT YET COMPLETED – January 7, 2021)