

## LESSON 6: NUMBERS

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GROW University - Old Testament 101

### Context

#### Historical Context:

#### Redemptive-Historical Context:

### Theme

*Yahweh is still with His people and faithful to them, even though they battle with unbelief, distrust, and disobedience that result in their failure to enter the Promise Land.*

Two thematic ideas are juxtaposed against one another in the book of Numbers:

- The unbelief, rebellion, and disobedience of the people.
- The faithfulness, patience, and grace of Yahweh.

### Outline W/ Pivotal Texts

- I. Numbers 1-25 – The First Generation
  - A. Chapters 1-10: Obedience
  - B. Chapters 11-25: Disobedience
- II. Numbers 26-36 – The Second Generation - Renewed Obedience

### Theme Texts

The story of two generations:

- **1:2** - A census taken.
- **26:2** - Another census is taken, of an entirely new generation. Why did the first one perish?

## Chapters 1-10

- These chapters tell of this first generation, which...
    - was rescued from Egypt
    - saw the glory of the Lord descend onto Mount Sinai and then into the tabernacle.
  - **Chapter 1:** The census
  - **Chapter 2:** The manner in which the various tribes of Israel were to organize themselves when they camped.
    - The tabernacle was always positioned perfectly in the middle of all the tribes. The people were always reminded that Yahweh was dwelling with them.
- \_Read **6:22-27**. A Blessing that Aaron and his sons are to bless the people of Israel with.
- \_Read **9:15-18**. By this, they knew that Yahweh was leading them to the Promise Land.
- \_Read **10:35-36**. In setting out from Sinai, this is what Moses said when they would set out and when they'd camp.

## Chapters 13-14

Starting in chapter 11, the climate changes entirely.

The people begin to grumble...

...then they lose faith...

...until finally, they rebel against Yahweh and Moses.

Example: Ch 13

Yahweh has instructed Moses to send spies into the land.

v17-20: their mission was simply one of fact-gathering.

\_Read **13:27** - The spies' report after their return.

\_Read **13:30** - The kind of report that Moses had hoped for: words of faith... but from the minority.

\_Read **13:31** - These are the words of unbelief.

\_Read **14:1-4**. The whole assembly responds to to the report with mutiny.

\_ Read **14:5-9**. Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb make an appeal to the people based on the promises of God and on His power and might.

\_Read **14:10a**. Their rebellion is not just against Moses, et. al., but against Yahweh Himself.

\_Read **14:10-12**. Yahweh, with kindled wrath, protects Moses and pronounces His sentence against the people.

\_Read **14:13-19**. Moses prefigures and foreshadows Christ by making a prayer of intercession on behalf of the people,

\_Read **14:20-23, 30-32**.

- Yahweh will not cast His people off entirely. He is still fulfilling promises and moving forward with His plan of redemption.
- Nevertheless there will be real consequences for the people's rebellion. This generation will die in the wilderness, and the taking of the land is delayed.

**Q:** What difference does it make to us that these people did not reach the Promise Land because of their unbelief?

**Hebrews 3:12-13**, *"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."*

21:4-9

**John 3:14-15**, *"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; 15 so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life."*

\_Read Numbers 21:4-9. Note the gospel pattern...

- V4-5 - The People sin (grumbling against Yahweh and Moses, again). This can't go unpunished.
- V6 - The Lord sends His wrath upon their sin (deadly, fiery serpents)

- V7 - Need for a mediator (the people repent, and seek an intercessor to go to the Lord to plead for mercy on their behalf)

Now look at **verses 8-9**.

- **Typology**

- The snake on the pole saved the people from physical death by venom.
- Christ brings a greater salvation. He doesn't save from snakes, as bad as that is, but He saves from Hell. He doesn't only save from physical death, but from eternal death.
- **Q:** How can *looking* at a snake on a pole could ever cure someone of a snake bite, and what is the relationship between that and Jesus on the cross?
  - Clearly what's going on here in Numbers 21 is a miracle.
  - The grounds: "Looking" at the snake is the act of obedience that comes from faith in what God has provided.
  - The application: We are called to trust in God's provision for salvation.

## Chapters 26-36

- Another census for another generation.
- By the end of the book the nation of Israel is encamped on the plains of Moab, just across the Jordan River from the Promise Land.
- Once again, the promises of God are poised to be fulfilled.

## 11:16-30

What is the difference between what the Holy Spirit did in the Old Testament days, and what He is doing now?<sup>1</sup>

- Read **11:16**. The Spirit is only given to leaders among God's people, not all of God's people.
- Read **11:25**. The Holy Spirit enabled these men to prophesy temporarily, because He did not necessarily permanently indwell those whom He came upon.

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Spirit is mentioned as early as Genesis 1:2

- Read **11:29-30**. Moses longs for a better day in the future when the Holy Spirit is more pervasive through the covenant community.<sup>2</sup>
- Judges and 1 Samuel - the Spirit coming upon people and leaving them again.<sup>3</sup>
- Isaiah - Promise that the "Servant of the Lord" will have the Spirit in power upon Him, so that He can accomplish a truly great work of salvation for the people of God.<sup>4</sup>

**Luke 4:14-19** *And Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. **15** And He began teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. **16** And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. **17** And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, **18** "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, And recovery of sight to the blind, To set free those who are oppressed, **19** To proclaim the favorable year of the Lord."*

- Jesus is the "Servant" whose ministry marks a change in the way the Holy Spirit moves among His people.
- Acts<sup>5</sup> (and in Paul's letters<sup>6</sup>) - Now the Holy Spirit is given to all the people of God.
  - He aids and helps us to understand the revelation of God that is already given (aka the Bible).<sup>7</sup>
  - He also conforms us into the image of Christ, little by little, making us more loving and more holy in the world.<sup>8</sup>
- The Contrast Between the Work of the Holy Spirit (OT vs. Today):
  - Today He is poured out on all who believe, and He never leaves them nor forsakes them.

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<sup>2</sup>This will also be prophesied by other prophets (Joel 2:28f) to soon take place.

<sup>3</sup>Judges 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14 1 Samuel 10:6, 10; 11:6; 16:13-16; 19:20, 23.

<sup>4</sup>Isaiah 32:15; 42:1; 43:10-12; 44:8; 45:22; 49:1-6; 61:1-3.

<sup>5</sup>Chapter 2; 8:14-17; 10:44-48.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Galatians 5:16-26 as one example.

<sup>7</sup>1 Corinthians 2:12-15; Psalm 119:18

<sup>8</sup>Sadly, time prohibits a comparison between Numbers 12:6-8 and Hebrews 3:1-6, which goes a long way towards understanding the redemptive-history finality of Christ's prophetic ministry.

## Conclusion

- The distrust and disobedience of the people serve to highlight all the more the faithfulness and patience of the Lord.
- Yahweh is moving redemptive-history forward, and continuing with His plan of redemption for the universe and for His covenant people.

## Application:

- 1) Do not murmur against what God has given you. Instead, trust God's provision for you and for your earthly existence.
- 2) Live / walk in the Spirit day by day and not grieve the Spirit.

**Ephesians 4:29-32**, *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. **30** Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **31** Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **32** Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

- 3) Challenge: Write in your own words a quick summary (think: narrative, not research paper) of redemptive history thus far.
- 4) Share something new you learned or something old you were reminded of with someone this week.