

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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LESSON SEVEN

NUMBERS, CHAPTER'S 1-19

A secondary name for Numbers might be "*The book of the journeyings*," since it gives the story of Israel from the departure from Sinai to the arrival at Moab on the border of Canaan.

If you examine the chronological hints in the margin of your Bibles, you will see that the period covered by Exodus and Leviticus was not more than a year or two, while that of Numbers was about 38 years.

A map in the back of your Bible will be an aid in mastering this book. You will see the course of the journey was first northeast as far as Kadesh, then south again to a fork of the Red Sea, and finally northeast as before, around the land of Edom to Moab. The outline is not unlike the form of a somewhat irregular "W."

We shall study the book in accordance with a geographical outline, considering first the principal events or facts at Sinai before they started, then what occurred between Sinai and Kadesh, and then between Kadesh and Moab.

This book might almost be called the book of the "*murmurings*," as well as the "*journeyings*," for from beginning to end it is pervaded with the spirit of rebellion against GOD, justifying a sort of abstract given of the period in Psalm 95:10, "**Forty years long was I grieved with this generation.**"

Let us not forget also that while the annals of many powerful nations of that same period are entirely lost to the world, these of a comparative handful of people are preserved, because of the relation they bear to the redemption of the world through JESUS CHRIST. This, as well, accounts for the divine long-suffering towards them, and for all the exhibitions of divine love which the book contains.

In I Corinthians 10, we learn that the things that happened to them were "examples" unto us, in other words, their history throughout was a sort of object lesson illustrating GOD's dealings with us today in a spiritual sense, and in no part of their history is this more true than in Numbers.

At Sinai, Chapters 1-10

What are the chief facts, or events, associated in this book with Sinai? The reading in accordance with the prescribed rules will make it easy to reply:

1. Numbering and arranging the tribes, chapters 1,2.
2. Choosing and assigning the Levites, chapters 3, 4.
3. Special laws and regulations, chapters 5-10.

What was the value or necessity of fact one? Doubtless that every Israelite might know his own tribe or family, especially that the genealogy of the promised Messiah might be ascertained. And then, too, for convenience on the march, and the better preparation for conflict with enemies.

- which tribe was omitted from the numbering, and why (1:47-53; 3:5-13)?
- which tribe was multiplied by two to thus fill the vacancy in the original number (1:32-35)?
- into how many divisions were the Levites classified, and what general duties of the Tabernacle were assigned to each (3:17, 25, 26, 29, 31, 33, 36, 37)?
- what relative position in the camp was occupied by the Levites (2:17)?
- who encamped closest to the Tabernacle on the east (3:38)?
- what special instructions were given for the sons of Kohath (4:1-15)?
- what was the law for the cleansing and subsequent consecration of the Levites (8:5-22)?
- by what symbolic act did Israel identify itself with the Levites as a substitute (8:10, 11)?

Compare also the following verse.

- What did GOD do with the Levites which Israel gave Him, and how does His action illustrate the way in which He still uses His people's gifts (8:18, 19)?

Things to be Noticed

Notice the illustration of GOD's power and wisdom in sustaining such a host for 40 years, in a country where there was neither bread nor water to be obtained - no transports, no supply trains, no friendly nations to contribute anything. GOD was in the midst of them. He was all, but He was enough (Deuteronomy 2:7; 8:4).

Notice the typical position of the Levites.

Their calling for such a special and elevated service was not of debt but of grace, if we consider

their ancestry (Genesis 34 and 49). But observe their preparation for it (8:5-8, 12) - "the blood of atonement, the water of cleansing, the razor of self-judgment."

And if we ask whether there were anything antecedent to this which marked them for this selection, perhaps we find the answer in the surrender of their wills to GOD as indicated in Exodus 32:25-29, with which compare Deuteronomy 33:8-11, and Malachi 2:4-6.

The Minor Regulations

Under the head of fact 3 attention should be called to the exclusion of the unclean from the camp as bearing on our obligation to put away sin from our individual lives not only, but also the exercise of discipline in the church. Compare Joshua 7:11, 12, and I Corinthians 5.

Attention should be called as well to the further allusion to the trespass offering, originally spoken of in Leviticus, to emphasize the two features of confession and restitution, since it is only thus the believer can enjoy Paul's experience (Acts 24:16).

Nor is the law about jealousy without its significance to us.

See the divine care to maintain the integrity of the innocent as well as to punish the guilty (5:14,28). Typically, the Lord Himself is the husband, Israel the wife proven unfaithful, alas! The application can be made to CHRIST and the church, or the individual believer in place of the church. Sin is spiritual adultery.

The law of the Nazarite is full of interest. Here one sets himself apart to GOD in a special manner, temporarily or permanently. He separates himself from things lawful in themselves, but calculated to interfere with his deeper communion and blessing. He is peculiarly a type of CHRIST as suggested in such words as John 17:16-19, but an example to every believer who desires to come into the place of spiritual power. Study such New Testament passages as, **"Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth," "Ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body," "Come out from among them and be ye separate."**

From Sinai to Kadesh, Chapters 10-19

The outline of this part of their journey may be marked by the various "*murmurings*" or rebellions recorded of them, for example:

- Taberah, 11:3;
- Kibroth, 11:34;
- Hazereth, 12:15, 16;
- Kadesh, 13:26.

When did they start (10:11)?

Who accompanied them, and why invited (vv. 29-32)?

What form of prayer was associated with each stage of the journey (vv. 35, 36)?

Is the cause of their first complaint mentioned (11:1)?

What was the punishment in this case?

As to the precise nature of this "burning" nothing is known, some regarding it as external, and analogous to that which destroyed Nadab and Abihu, while others regard it as internal, i. e., some kind of "a wasting effect of the Lord's displeasure." It is also proper to say here, that the exact localities of these places referred to cannot be defined with certainty.

We call the next stopping-place Kibroth, although the proper word as you perceive is somewhat longer. The shorter term, however, will answer our purpose better, as easier to remember.

- to what was this "murmuring," in part attributable (11:4)?
- to what divine appointment or institution did it lead (vv. 16, 17, 24-30)?
- what is the name of the New Testament council of which it may have been the origin?
- with what particular ceremony were they set apart (v. 17)?
- what was the immediate result of this anointing (v. 25)?
- what was the special cause of murmuring in this case (v. 18)?
- does the faith of Moses seem to have been equal to this emergency?
- what explanation of verse 31 is given, showing that the quails flew that high, but were not so thick on the ground?
- How did this gratification: of their desire become a judgment on them?

Spiritual Lessons

Notice the impressive warnings this affords about worldliness.

We long for its gratifications, forgetting its slavery. We are led astray in that direction through our association with false professors or "people of mixed principles."

Notice GOD's dealings with Moses. How gently He passes by his exhibition of infirmity, and notwithstanding this lapse, bears testimony to his faithfulness (12:7). And yet how impartial in chronicling his faults, thus giving us another incidental proof of the truth of this record!

Notice the secret of a ministry of power. The appointment of the rulers in Exodus as compared with the elders here, illustrates the contrast between a ministry exercised in human strength and in the divine strength (Zechariah 4:6; Luke 4:18; Acts 2).

Notice the meaning of the word "prophesied" (11:25). Its importance for this particular lesson is not so great, but for other reasons it is well to know that the usual Hebrew word for "prophet" is of passive import, and implies not so much a speaker as one spoken through. Nor is it restricted in meaning to the foretelling of events, but implies any kind of utterance prompted by divine influence, without reference to time. All this has a very important bearing on the doctrine of inspiration, especially the interpretation of such a passage as II Peter 1:20, 21, showing that the historical as well as the prophetic books so called, are equally inspired.

- what is the event at Hazeroth as given in chapter 12?
- what gave rise to this spirit of rebellion?
- what punishment fell on Miriam?
- why not on Aaron (v. 11)?

- how is the greatness of the character of Moses shown in this incident?

Of course, the practical lesson from this is the seriousness of speaking against GOD's servants (see such a passage as I Thessalonians 5:12, 13); but there is also a typical light in which some have viewed it.

Moses is regarded as representing CHRIST in being rejected by his people, who thrust him out of Egypt into Midian. His Ethiopian bride, is the church, composed chiefly of Gentiles. Aaron and Miriam are the Jews opposing this union. The leprosy is the divine judgments on the Jews, who are nevertheless interceded for by those they oppose, the Christian church. But as Miriam was shut out from the camp only for a season. so when the "seven days" of Israel's rejection are run out, she will be restored again to her land and her GOD in JESUS CHRIST.

- what is the great event at Kadesh, chapters 13, 14?
- how many spies were sent out?
- how many reports brought back?
- what difference is seen between the majority and minority reports?
- in what did they agree or disagree?
- to which report gave the people heed?
- what two men protested against their conduct?
- how is Moses' jealousy for GOD exhibited?
- his love for the people?
- his own greatness of soul (v. 12, last clause)?
- what is the great hope set before us in verse 21?
- what punishment was visited on the rebellious?
- what happened to the men who brought the false report?
- how does verse 30 illustrate II Peter 2:9?
- what showed the impenitence of the nation (vv. 40-44)?
- what further punishment overtook them?
- with whom did this whole plan of the spies originate (Deuteronomy 1:19-24)?
- does Numbers 13:3 necessarily contradict this?
- may not GOD have permitted it merely, when He saw them bent on the purpose?
- may not the commandment, in other words, have been based on the moral condition of the people? (I Samuel 8:22).

Notice that the great lesson of this section is one of warning about unbelief. When at Kadesh there were but a few leagues to travel and they would be in Canaan. Why did they fail? Take GOD's answer for it in (Hebrews 3:19).

The Rebellion of Korah

Chapter 16, which we will not dwell on particularly, is an impressive illustration of divine grace in the light of the previous conduct of the nation. Its renewed reference to offerings and sacrifices when they came into the land, shows GOD's purpose still to make good to them (i. e., to their children who should actually possess Canaan) all His previous promises. Particularly touching is the allusion to sins of ignorance in verses 22 and 28, with which should be contrasted, however, the warning about presumptuous sins (vv. 30, 31), of which an illustration

is afforded in the verses immediately following.

How strange the happenings of the next chapter in the light of all this!

- what two tribes were chiefly represented in this rebellion (v. 1)?
- how numerous the ring-leaders (v. 2)?
- what their animus (v. 3)?
- to whom does Moses first address himself, and why (vv. 6-11)?
- what made Korah's conduct particularly reprehensible?
- of what base falsehood were the sons of Eliab guilty (vv. 12, 13)?
- what suggests the possible extent of this rebellion (v. 19)?
- how once more is the magnanimity and mercy of Moses exhibited (vv. 20-22)?
- what punishment fell upon the ring-leaders (vv. 32-35)?
- what illustrates the blind passion of the people at this time (v. 41)?
- what punishment befell them?
- what further miraculous evidence does GOD give as to the authority of Moses and Aaron in chapter 17?
- how does He offset any tendency to connect in Aaron by the commands of chapter 18:1-7?

The recent death of so many Israelites had put a large part of the nation in a state of legal uncleanness, which greatly alarmed them (17:12, 13). What standing ceremony is now enacted for the purification of such uncleanness in chapter 19? What evidence have we that this sacrifice, like all the others, pointed towards our Lord JESUS CHRIST (Hebrews 9:11-13)? Why so much should be said about uncleanness from contact with the dead is not clear, except as natural death shadows forth spiritual death and the deadly pollution of sin which occasions it. There may also have been sanitary reasons, however, although in the nature of the case they could not have been the more supreme.

Notice the many deep lessons of this section. For example, the wonderful mercy of GOD towards men who have forfeited all claim upon it. The nation had no right to Canaan, but GOD brings them in, and this for his own glory's sake.

Notice how much is said about the "stranger" in chapter 15, and compare it with Paul's teaching about the Gentiles (Romans 9-11).

Notice that sins of ignorance cannot be passed over.

"While grace has made provision for them in CHRIST, holiness demands that they be judged and confessed."

Notice in what presumptuous sin consist (15:31), and be warned against it.

"As the study of the Word is the safeguard against the former, subjection to the Word is the safeguard against the latter."

Notice the folly and peril of envy, jealousy and pride, and familiarize yourselves with such teachings and exhortations as Romans 12:3-8; I Corinthians 3:3; Philippians 2:3-8, etc.

Notice the provision, ample and royal, which GOD makes for His own, as illustrated in His care for Aaron and his house (18:832). Who loses anything when he relinquishes the world for CHRIST?

~ end of Lesson 7 ~
