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Numbers—Wanderings

It is a sad but very real picture of the possibility of being rescued from the world (the Exodus), but not entering into the promised land of God's blessings.

Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-11:1 often in this study.

Other Helpful links

Matthew Henry's Commentary

<http://www.ccel.org/h/henry/mhc2/MHC04000.HTM>

David Guzik's Commentary on

<http://enduringword.com/commentaries/04.html>

Daily Bible Study

Thursday, March 23, 2006



Passage for today: **Numbers 1**

Quick Notes

Notice, they counted the men, twenty years and older, who were able to go to war. They did not ask for volunteers. When you enter the family of God by faith in Jesus Christ, you automatically become one of His soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3–4). Every believer is a soldier, either a good one or a bad one.

Questions to Ponder

In your opinion, why does God want them to number the children of Israel? It is not for His information, for being God—this is information that He knows. Somehow it is for them, for a message that God wants them to understand. What would that be?

What other lessons do you see in this chapter?

How did the children of Israel respond to this command?

Daily Bible Study

Friday, March 24, 2006



Passage for today: **Numbers 2**

Quick Notes

Questions to Ponder

As you look at this chapter, what is the main theme? As you ponder that, how does it apply to our lives today?

Which men are selected to lead each of the tribes? Why?

What lessons are there for us in the layout of the tribes?

Daily Bible Study

Saturday, March 25, 2006



Passage for today: **Numbers 3-4**

Quick Notes

The priests were also a part of the battle, for without the blessing of the Lord, there could be no victory. Some of God's people are in the front lines of the battle, while others are behind the lines, interceding to the Lord.

Questions to Ponder

How did God determine the number of those who were to serve Him as Levities? How does this apply to us today?

What part are these to have in the midst of God's people?

As people were selected and assigned for service in the Tabernacle, what lessons can we learn about how God does things? How does it apply today?

Daily Bible Study

Sunday, March 26, 2006



Passage for today: **Numbers 5**

Quick Notes

Not everybody in Israel was a soldier or a priest, but each individual was responsible to please the Lord and keep from defilement. Israel was to be holy to the Lord; otherwise He could not bless the nation with victory. You may not think you are important to the spiritual battles going on in today's world, but you are; and you must keep clean.

Questions to Ponder

As you consider the place of this chapter in Numbers, what does it teach you about following God?

What is restitution? Is this something that we should follow as Christians today?

Daily Bible Study

Monday, March 27, 2006



Passage for today: **Numbers 6**

Quick Notes

Nazirite comes from a word that means “to dedicate.” Nazirites were men and women dedicated to the Lord, either for a brief period or for a lifetime (Judg. 13:1–5).

Questions to Ponder

What things are a Nazirite to avoid? Why would those be issues they needed to avoid? What things from this can be applicable to us today?

What are the main things covered in the priestly blessing?

What was the priestly blessing supposed to do for or to the people?

What does this mean?

Daily Bible Study

Tuesday, March 28, 2006



Passage for today: **Numbers 7**

Quick Notes

The longest chapter in Numbers deals with a generous offering brought by the leaders of the tribes just after the tabernacle was set up. Leaders certainly ought to set the example in giving, and those men did. The gifts were identical, presented on twelve successive days; and yet in God's eyes, the gifts were individual.

Questions to Ponder

- Why were these gifts brought from the leaders?
- For what purpose were these gifts brought—what would they be used for? How can we apply that today?
- What can we learn about “offerings” in this chapter?
- What happens as Moses goes to talk to God? Lessons for us?

Daily Bible Study

Wednesday, March 1, 2006



Passage for today: **Numbers 8**

Quick Notes

The Levites are commissioned with a special ceremony. After they have been sprinkled with water, they shave themselves all over and wash their clothes and bodies. This is a systematic ‘de-sinning’! They offer special sacrifices. In particular, they have hands laid on them. This is to identify them as representing the whole Israelite community. The Levites in turn lay their hands on the animals that are to be offered in sacrifice for them.

Questions to Ponder

What is Aaron instructed to do with the Lampstand? How does this apply to our lives today?

What place did the Levites play in God’s service? Why?

How are the Levites supposed to serve? What elements of the service of the Levites stick out to you? How can we apply this today?

Quick Facts



Author: Moses

There are in Numbers more than eighty claims that “the Lord spoke to Moses.” It is apparent (33:2) that Moses kept detailed records as an eyewitness of the events in this book.



Time: Numbers stretches over almost thirty-nine years (c. 1444–1405 b.c.). It records Israel’s movement from the last twenty days at Mt. Sinai, the wanderings round Kadesh Barnea, and finally the arrival in the plains of Moab.



Theme: Numbers is the book of Wanderings. It is a sad but very real picture of the possibility of being rescued from the world (the Exodus), but not entering into the promised land of God’s blessings. Read 1 Corinthians 9:24-11:1 often in this study.



Title: The book of Numbers takes its name from the two numberings of the Israelites—the first at Mt. Sinai (ch. 1) and the second on the plains of Moab (26:1–51).

In the Hebrew Bible it is more aptly entitled, “In the Wilderness”, and that’s what the book describes – the children of Israel’s wilderness wanderings.

In fact, there’s another title for the book. I like to call it, “How to Turn a Fifteen Day Walk into Forty Years of Wandering.” Numbers reveals the reasons why the Hebrews failed to enter the land God promised them, and died in the desert. And this is why the book abounds with lessons for us. Spiritually speaking, we’ve been delivered from the Egypt of sin, and promised a place of rest and blessing – but in order to enter in, we like the Hebrews, need to have faith. If we yield to doubt and fear, we too, can end up dying in a wilderness of frustration.

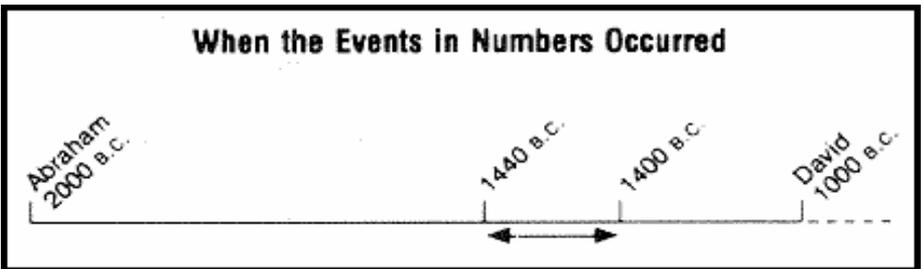
When the Events in Numbers Occurred

Abraham
2000 B.C.

1440 B.C.

1400 B.C.

David
1000 B.C.



Time To Organize

As we gaze over our progress so far in our study through the Bible, we can see a picture forming that hopefully will become more and more clear.

We have seen Genesis—a book of Beginnings
All of us has had a physical beginning, a birth. But like the book of Genesis—we also see the birth of sin in our lives.

We have seen Exodus—a book of Redemption
If you are a Christian, you have had an Exodus, you have come to the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”. You have been rescued from the world and its destruction

We have seen Leviticus—a book of Worship, Approach
As we come to the Lord, we learn and are learning how to deal with sin. We learn how we as an unholy people can approach a Holy God. We are learning how we can deal with sin.

We are now looking at Numbers. Much of the book will deal with Israel’s wanderings. It is a sad picture. The truth is that not every Christian has to experience times of wanderings. Yet the truth is, many do. Yet, I will leave discussing that for a later booklet. This week—we don’t see that yet in Numbers—instead—we see a time of organization and order.

One of the hard keys for Christians to learn, is what is covered in these first chapters—order. Call it what you will—discipline, self control, self order and more.

All the details given us in the book of Numbers – speaks of the value God places on organization. Throughout the Bible, God places a premium on effective utilization of our time and resources.

When Jesus fed the 5000 He first arranged the people in groups of 50 and 100. Then as He broke the bread He gave it to the disciples to serve the people. Jesus didn’t do it Himself. In other words, He was good at organization and delegation.

I run into believers in Jesus who are opponents of what they call

“organized religion”. They assume the more organized you are the less spiritual you are – and I admit, it’s possible to organize out the work of the Holy Spirit. I’ve seen it done. Church leaders become so dependent on their management of a ministry they don’t allow room for God to work. They trust in the flesh, not the Spirit.

But you really can’t read through the book of Numbers without concluding that the worship of God was intended to be “organized”.

In 1 Corinthians 14:40, the Lord commands the Church, “Let all things be done decently and in order.”

Don’t think it’s more spiritual to meet together without a plan and purpose. Numbers 1:3 calls Israel the army of the Lord - just as you and I are soldiers of Christ - and no army goes into battle without a strategy, an organization. Too many churches are weakened by a lack of organization. No one knows their roles and duties. There’s wasted time, and a duplication of effort. Ministry is done sloppily rather than with the excellence the Lord deserves.

It’s been said, “Don’t agonize. Organize.” That’s a message for the Church. Remember in Romans 12:8 one of the gifts of the Spirit is that of leading, or spiritual management. We need people with this vital spiritual endowment. All life has structure. Take away the skeleton from which your organs hang, and over which your skin is wrapped - and you’ll become nothing but a mound of goo. Spiritual life also needs some structure, and organization.

Further, some look at every call to discipline and order in the Christian life as synonymous with legalism. Again, the sad truth is that in seeking discipline—many do and can become legalistic. But that is not saying that order and discipline are bad—no, they are necessary. Just many lose focus—the focus on God. They focus on the discipline alone, and rejoice in their own efforts.

Just understand this, order, discipline, organization—are not bad things—but Godly things. We can see it in creation, we can now see it in His word and how He sets up the plan of His people following Him. God is a God of order....and it is so in your life as well. Disorder is not the aim.

I am always drawn to the fact that one of the fruits of the Spirit is “Self-Control”. Self control, discipline, is a Godly attribute.

One of my favorite proverbs about this is this one:

*The lazy man does not roast what he took in hunting,
But diligence is man’s precious possession. (Pr 12:27)*

That is a proverb that is worth considering....and I tell you this, when you find diligence, discipline...it is precious. It is a good thing. Again, my simple point here...is to note with me, that order is a good thing.

For a good book on this, you might consider one of these:

- Celebration of Discipline, 25th Anniversary Edition
By: Richard Foster
- Ordering your Private world—Gordon McDonald
- Rebuilding Your Broken World By: Gordon MacDonald
- Mid-Course Correction: Re-Ordering Your Private World for the Next Part of Your Journey By: Gordon MacDonald
- A Resilient Life You Can Move Ahead No Matter What By: Gordon MacDonald
- Discipline: The Glad Surrender By: Elisabeth Elliot
- Cure for the Common Life: Living in Your Sweet Spot
By: Max Lucado

The Vow of the Nazarite

The vow of the Nazirite in Numbers 6 was a Jewish rite with extreme spiritual significance. The word “Nazir” means “to set apart”. And the vow of the Nazirite was a special act of devotion to God. There were two kinds of Nazirites: temporary and perpetual. Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist took lifelong vows.

For the duration of his vow the Nazirite agreed to with stain from 3 contacts – the fruit of the wine; no wine, no grapes – no razor was to touch his head; his hair always looked knotty and nappy and unkept – and he could touch nothing dead.

In 1 John 2:16 the Lord sums up the world system that opposes the values of God – “For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world.” Notice the 3 temptations - the lust of the flesh; the desire to feel great - the lust of the eyes; the desire to look great—and the pride of life; the desire to be great.

Guys, this is how a world without God operates.

- Everyone wants to feel great – “Obey your thirst!” – Do what feels good...give yourself whatever you want
- Everyone wants to look great – “Image is everything!” Do whatever it takes to look good. What others think about you is the main thing
- Everyone wants to be great – “You deserve a break today!” – you deserve a break all right, but a painful break.

The vow of the Nazirite though, was the antithesis to the values of the world. The Nazirite was a walking billboard for the values of God. His joy was not derived from physical, but spiritual sources. His identity was not based on external, but internal beauty. And his ambition was not for temporal, but eternal glory.

You and I need to be spiritual Nazirites – walking advertisements for the values of God. We need to demonstrate to the people around us that real life is found in the spiritual, not physical – the internal, not external – the eternal, not temporal!

“All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk.”

— **Numbers 6:4 (from Morning and Evening by Charles Spurgeon)**

Nazarites had taken, among other vows, one which debarred them from the use of wine. In order that they might not violate the obligation, they were forbidden to drink the vinegar of wine or strong liquors, and to make the rule still more clear, they were not to touch the unfermented juice of grapes, nor even to eat the fruit either fresh or dried. In order, altogether, to secure the integrity of the vow, they were not even allowed anything that had to do with the vine; they were, in fact, to avoid the appearance of evil.

Surely this is a lesson to the Lord’s separated ones, teaching them to come away from sin in every form, to avoid not merely its grosser shapes, but even its spirit and similitude. Strict walking is much despised in these days, but rest assured, dear reader, it is both the safest and the happiest. He who yields a point or two to the world is in fearful peril; he who eats the grapes of Sodom will soon drink the wine of Gomorrah. A little crevice in the sea-bank in Holland lets in the sea, and the gap speedily swells till a province is drowned. Worldly conformity, in any degree, is a snare to the soul, and makes it more and more liable to presumptuous sins.

Moreover, as the Nazarite who drank grape juice could not be quite sure whether it might not have endured a degree of fermentation, and consequently could not be clear in heart that his vow was intact, so the yielding, temporizing Christian cannot wear a conscience void of offence, but must feel that the inward monitor is in doubt of him. Things doubtful we need not doubt about; they are wrong to us. Things tempting we must not dally with, but flee from them with speed.

Better be sneered at as a Puritan than be despised as a hypocrite. Careful walking may involve much self-denial, but it has pleasures of its own which are more than a sufficient recompense.

He Blesses and Keeps **(Faith's Checkbook by Charles Spurgeon)**

“The Lord bless thee, and keep thee.” Numbers 6:24

THIS first clause of the high-priest's benediction is substantially a promise. That blessing which our great High Priest pronounces upon us is sure to come, for He speaks the mind of God.

What a joy to abide under the divine blessing! This puts a gracious flavor into all things. If we are blessed, then all our possessions and enjoyments are blessed; yea, our losses and crosses, and even our disappointments are blessed. God's blessing is deep, emphatic, effectual. A man's blessing may begin and end in words, but the blessing of the Lord makes rich and sanctifies. The best wish we can have for our dearest friend is not “May prosperity attend thee,” but “The Lord bless thee.”

It is equally a delightful thing to be kept of God: kept by Him, kept near Him, kept in Him. They are kept indeed whom God keeps: they are preserved from evil; they are reserved unto boundless happiness. God's keeping goes with His blessing to establish it and cause it to endure.

The author of this little book desires that the rich blessing and sure keeping here pronounced may come upon every reader who may at this moment be looking at these lines. Please breathe the text to God as a prayer for His servants.

NUMBERS: THE INCOMPLETE CHRISTIAN LIFE

by Ray C. Stedman

The Pentateuch -- the first five books of our Bible -- trace for us the spiritual journey of an individual from sin into belief and to glorification in Christ. The whole Old Testament was written so that we might see in a vivid way what the New Testament declares to be true. The New Testament confirms this. The New Testament says that all these events involving Israel happened as an example to us, and were written down for our instruction since they are pictures of what we will go through, as we move along with Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

Now, the book of Genesis is a picture of humanity in all its strident, clamant need. It portrays what we look like as a result of the fall of man and the consequent need for God in our life. From Exodus to Deuteronomy, we have the way from Egypt to Canaan as a picture of the way the Christian will move from the slavery of sin to the freedom of victory in Christ, victory in the midst of his enemies. This is precisely the spiritual journey God has called us to, so these books become exceedingly helpful for us. If you read the Old Testament as nothing but a history of ancient events concerning people who have long since disappeared, it will be the dullest, most boring reading you can find. However, if you read it as a picture of what is happening in your life, vividly displayed in terms of these people of old, you will find fascinating reading indeed.

The book of Exodus is a picture of God's delivering power. There we have the three great events in the early life of Israel -- the Passover in Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, and the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai. These correspond with God's work in us. Like the Israelites in the Passover, where the blood was sprinkled for them, we too realized that the angel of death had passed over us in the blood of Jesus Christ shed on the cross and by that event, we were saved. We too moved out across the Red Sea when we openly declared our redemption in Christ and cut off the ties that bound us to the world. We came into the wilderness and heard the law of Moses when we began to learn, perhaps for the first time in our lives, the kind of God with whom we had to deal, a God of utter holiness, of complete righteousness, utterly consistent with himself.

Then in the book of Leviticus we learn how to worship, what it is this kind of God demands, and how a God of such surpassing holiness can dwell with men and women like ourselves. Here we discover the means by which God makes possible the necessary intercourse between God and man.

Now we come to the book of Numbers. In Numbers we have dramatically set forth what is perhaps the hardest lesson a Christian has to learn -- to trust God instead of his own reason. This is where we struggle, isn't it? We think that what we want to do and the way we want to do it is the right way. The hardest struggle we have, even as these Israelites had, is to learn to believe that God knows what he is talking about and that what he tells us is the truth, and is for our good, and to operate on that basis despite what friends and others around are telling us concerning the right way. Proverbs puts it so graphically, "There is a way which seems right to a man, and its end is the way to death." (Proverbs 14:12) The book of Numbers is a picture of that experience in the believer.

You will recognize, of course, that it is the experience of Romans 7 where the unhappy, defeated Christian, who is his own worst enemy, is being disciplined by God because God as a father loves him. He is experiencing in the midst of this discipline the fatherly love and care of God and protection from his enemy. That is what the book of Numbers portrays. It is a picture of people who have come out of Egypt but who have not yet reached Canaan. They had the faith to follow God out of the bondage and slavery of sin but have not yet come into the fullness of liberty and rest in the Holy Spirit -- Canaan being a picture of the Spirit-filled life.

This book falls into three divisions. The first is included in chapters one through ten, and is a picture of God's provision for guidance and warfare. These are the two critical needs of Israel in their march from Mt. Sinai, where the law was given, until they came north across the wilderness of Paran to the edge of the promised land, the land of Canaan. On the way they would need guidance, because this was a trackless wilderness; moreover, they would need protection, for the wilderness was occupied by fierce, hostile tribes that opposed them every time they turned around.

All of this, you will recognize, is an exact picture of our need, isn't

it? We need guidance because of the clever subtleties of the world in which we live and the ease with which we can be misled and derailed; and we need protection because of the enemies among whom we dwell, those within us and round about us, who would defeat us if they could.

In this section that begins with the arrangement of the camp, note two things -- the position of the tabernacle with the tribes on every side, and a numbering of the armed men of Israel. These are pictures for us of the need for defense against the enemies of God. God provides all the strategy and resources necessary to meet every enemy that comes our way. There is not only the order of the camp (the tabernacle surrounded by the tribes), but also there is the cloud over the camp by day and the pillar of fire by night -- all of which (tabernacle, cloud, and pillar) picture for us the great truth of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We have God in our midst. That is a great truth. He is able to direct and to lead us through the wilderness of the world by the guidance of the Word. We are led by the cloud and the fire, just as Israel was led, and we are to be obedient to that leading. This is all the potential we need to get us from the place of the law (the knowledge of the holiness of God) to the rest in the Spirit which the land of Canaan represents. We have everything we need, just as Israel had all that they needed.

But what happened? Well, the major part of this book, from chapter eleven through twenty-one, is a description of the murmuring and rebelling of the people. It is a most remarkable fact, but one every pastor and parent is fully aware of, that rebellion and willful disobedience to God always begin with murmuring and critical complaining. Whenever you find yourself beginning to complain and murmur and whisper and carrying on a carping campaign against the circumstances in which you find yourself, you know that you are on the threshold of rebellion, because it always begins there. Notice that there are three kinds of murmuring -- three levels of complaint -- that occur throughout the wilderness journey.

There was, first of all, the complaint of the people against the circumstances. They complained about the manna and about the lack of water; they complained about the meat and about the wilderness itself. They were always murmuring. This was their favorite outdoor sport, it seems, and they worked at it day and

night. Nothing was right, not even the manna, the miraculous supply of God every day. I wonder if you know what manna typifies in your life? Well, it typifies the Holy Spirit. For the manna, it says, tasted like oil and honey mixed together into a thin wafer. Oil and honey are both symbols of the Holy Spirit. On this they were to feed. But it was just a thin wafer. It wasn't enough to satisfy them -- although it was enough to sustain them -- because God never intended them to live so long in the wilderness. He intended them to get on over into the land of Canaan and begin to feed upon the abundant food there. But they got sick of manna. Who wouldn't after forty years, when it was only intended for a few days? Manna for breakfast, manna for lunch, manna for supper. Nothing but manna, manna, manna -- until finally they began to complain and rebel.

Yet it wasn't God's fault. Manna was never intended to satisfy. It was merely a temporary provision until they could get into the fullness of the land, just as God never intended you to live on the experience of the meager contact with the Holy Spirit you get in a defeated Christian experience. Go on into the land of abundant living. That is where you will find satisfaction.

They also complained about the lack of meat, so God gave them meat for a month until they were sick, and then they complained about the abundance of meat. So on it went. In murmuring they always thought about Egypt and this is a picture for us of a degenerating Christian experience. All they could think of was the meat, the melons, the cucumbers, leeks, onions, and garlic of Egypt. Imagine dreaming of that kind of food! But that is what Egypt meant to them. They had no thought of Canaan because they had no knowledge of it. All they had heard were sermons about Canaan. They had no experience of it. All they could remember was the world out of which they had come. As Major W. Ian Thomas puts it in his book, *The Saving Life of Christ*,

What are these a picture of? A cucumber is 12 inches of indigestion! Leeks and onions and garlic have a very peculiar property about them. They are the kind of food you eat in private but everybody knows about it in public.

Now this murmuring against the circumstances in which they found

themselves was met by the judgment of God in three forms -- fire, plague, and poisoned serpents. I wonder if you can see in each of these a picture of the inevitable result of whining, complaining, and murmuring as a Christian. When we begin to complain about where God has put us and the kind of people he has put us among and the kind of food we have to eat and all the other circumstances of our life, we discover that the fire of gossip, scandal and slander; the plague of anxiety and nervous tension that takes its daily toll of our life; and the poison of envy and jealousy are released in our own life to sap our strength. These things are inevitable.

Not only did the Israelites murmur against their circumstances, but there were several times when they murmured against the blessing of God. Imagine that. They came at last to the edge of the land of Canaan, standing on the very border line at Kadesh-barnea, and there God said to them, "Now move forward. Possess the land." They had sent out the spies and had learned that it was a land flowing with milk and honey. The spies had brought back grapes so large that they had to carry them on a stick between the shoulders of two men, the bunch was so heavy. But they also knew that it was a land full of giants, and because of the giants they were afraid to go forward. They thought the giants were greater than God, so they refused to go on into blessing. They resisted God's efforts to bless them. They were glad to get out of Egypt but they were unwilling to go on into Canaan. This is why they wandered for forty years in the wilderness. The inevitable judgment to them was that if they would not go into blessing, they must experience the full results of a failure before moving on in God's program.

Many, many Christians are living right here today, square in the middle of a howling wilderness, living on a minimum supply of the Holy Spirit -- enough to keep them going, and that's all. They spend their lives in complaining, unending murmuring against their circumstances, yet still are unwilling to move on into the land that God has fully provided for them. This is the problem of so many. While you can be sustained in the wilderness, you will never be satisfied, never. And that is why the wilderness experience is always marked by a complaining heart and an unending criticism of something or someone. In this book it never ended until a new generation was ready to enter the land. God said, "Not one of you older than twenty years who went back at Kadesh-barnea will ever

enter this land, except two men." (Numbers 14:29, 30) Those two men -- Caleb and Joshua -- were men of faith who went on.

Thus it isn't until we make a new beginning in our lives, when we come to the end of ourselves and it seems almost as if we begin again in the Christian life, that we can go on after we have resisted the work of the Spirit in taking us into the land. This is why so many Christians never seem to come to victory until they have a crisis experience, a new beginning, and then they enter into the land.

The Israelites had one other occupation in the wilderness besides murmuring, and that was burying. The mark of the wilderness is that it is a land of death. Did you ever think how many Israelites died in those forty years in the wilderness? This book begins with a census of Israel, and it totals 603,000 men alone, men able to go out to warfare, who are at least twenty years old. Six hundred and three thousand. Most of those men were married. That meant an equal number of women, as well as all the children that were in that camp. Many have estimated the total population at that time to have been well over two million people. Yet in the wilderness, in the space of forty years, one million two hundred thousand of them died, an average of 82 per day, so there was nothing but a great big funeral going on all the time. The wilderness was one huge graveyard. No wonder they had to move so often. You can imagine why, as literally scores of people would die every day through that forty years' time. What a picture of what Romans says, "to set the mind on the flesh is death." (Romans 8:6)

Finally, there is one other form of murmuring here; murmuring against authority. They murmured against circumstances; they murmured against God's effort to bless them, and they murmured against the authority of God expressed through Moses! They said, "All the people are holy. Moses and Aaron, why do you put on airs as though you were better than we are? All of the people of God are holy, in their own eyes." They judged themselves by their own standards and thus rebelled against the properly constituted authority in their midst. They resisted with all their strength the suggestion that these two should be anything more than they.

Have you noticed that this is another characteristic of the defeated Christian? He always thinks he is holy enough, that he is as holy as

he needs to be, and he resents anyone else who seems to be ahead of him or to exercise any authority. He resists any attempt to suggest to him that he ought to be more than he is. That is what these people did.

God met this attitude with the severest judgment of all. There is that dramatic account of the rebellion of Korah and Abiram when they openly challenged the authority of Moses and Aaron. God divided the camp in half and said, "Moses and Aaron you stand over here. Korah and your group, stand over here, and the people stand there." And then he said, "Stand back. I am going to show you who is in authority here." He led Moses to say, "If these people live out their lives as normal ordinary men. then it is a sign that God is not with me, but if God does something absolutely new and the ground opens up beneath them and swallows them alive, it is an indication that God is with me." And as he said the words, the ground opened up beneath Korah and Abiram and all their families, and they went down alive into the pit. Thus God established his authority through Moses by this remarkable judgment. When we rebel against authority, God judges with the utmost severity.

Through all this. interestingly enough, the murmuring went on, in spite of the severity of this judgment, until two things took place. One was associated with the rebellion of Korah and Abiram and the other was in connection with the serpents that came and bit them at the time they complained about the food. Do you remember what Moses did to stop the rebellion at the death of Korah and Abiram? All the leaders of the twelve tribes took rods and put them before the Lord. Aaron's rod was included among them, and when they came back in the morning, they found that Aaron's rod had grown branches, the branches had blossomed and the blossoms had grown fruit and there were almonds hanging on the branches, all taking place overnight. Of the twelve rods, only Aaron's blossomed. This is a picture of the resurrection life. In this, God is saying that the only ones who have the right to bear authority are those who walk in the fullness and power of resurrection life.

Then when they murmured about the food, he sent poison serpents among them. In the third chapter of John our Lord makes reference to this story. Moses cured the effects of the poison by lifting up a brazen serpent on a pole, and all who looked at it were healed. By

that God was saying the only cure of sin of any kind, even sin in the Christian, is a look again at the cross and the way it utterly repudiates all human endeavor and human worthiness by putting Christian living solely on the basis of the resurrection life of Jesus Christ. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3: 14)

The latter part of the book, chapters twenty-one through twenty-six, is a remarkable record of protection in spite of failure. Here you find victory over the enemies around, the outward forces of King Arad, Sihon, Og, King of Bashan, and the attempts of Balaam, the false prophet to try to undermine the people of God, which resulted only in greater blessing. All of it is simply saying to us, in the most vivid language God can find, that though we are disobedient, though we are rebellious, though we turn and refuse to go into blessing, though we wander in a wilderness of defeat and despair and barrenness year after year after year -- nevertheless, the Holy Spirit will never leave us. Even in the midst of our weakness, he grants us protection from our enemies and deliverance from complete defeat. What a remarkable book. But what a picture of what Paul sums up in the poignant phrase, "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24) That is why we need to move on into Deuteronomy, where we get the second law, the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

Prayer:

Thank you, Father, for these graphic things not only written down for us, but lived out in the lives of men and women like ourselves. Thank you also, for this marvelous book so accurately preserved, so skillfully recorded by which we may learn the truth, if we only give ourselves to it and discover what life is all about. Teach us, Lord, to step out of the barren wilderness of our own frustrated lives and begin to rest upon the glorious provision of the indwelling life of our Lord Jesus; to get out of the wilderness into the land, to give up the frustration of an imitation Christian and begin to enjoy the fullness of a life lived in the power of the Holy Spirit. We thank you for this provision in Jesus' name, Amen.

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