

# My Favorite Thing About NUMBERS

Numbers 9:15-18  
March 27, 2021

The Hebrew title of the 4<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible is "*Bemidbar*" or "*In the Wilderness*". It is the continuing saga of God's journey with Israel from Egypt to the border of the Promised Land {The English title, "Numbers" comes from the Greek and is named for the 2 censuses in ch. 1 and 26}.

My favorite thing about **NUMBERS** is that God chose to wander with His people = He didn't walk away.

God had delivered, set apart and sustained Israel for His service. However, even though He had freed them from slavery and was working to get them from point A to point B, they were still thinking and acting as slaves/victims. Everything was a struggle. Everything was a crisis. The way was too hard. God's expectations were too great. They didn't trust. They didn't depend. They weren't grateful. But they sure did **A LOT** of complaining and murmuring and rebelling.

Remember that God was trying to get them to the Promised Land – not just to drop them off, but for the express purpose of evangelizing the World.

Clear back in **Genesis 12** God had set Abram apart and promised that through him and his descendants all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

- **Genesis 12:1-3** - The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup> "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

To bless the world by demonstrating, through their fidelity, who God is and to bring a knowledge of Him to all the people of the earth was to be their service to Him. Faithful people would be God's channel of revelation to the world.

And don't forget, that Jesus was to come through them as well – the Savior of the world.

As God's representatives they were responsible not only for themselves but also for the world. It was a high and holy calling. However, they wanted the benefits of being "*God's Chosen People*" and the occupiers of the Promised Land without any responsibility to the One who had saved them and sustained them.

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God was personally leading Israel through the activity of the cloud = When the cloud moved – they moved. When the cloud stopped – they stopped {**Num 9:15-23**}.

God had demonstrated over and over His care for them. He had provided Manna for them for a year and in Numbers 11, this is apparently the problem – Manna.

- **Numbers 11:4-6** - And the rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? <sup>5</sup> "We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, <sup>6</sup> but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna."

Their sin was great. After all their experience of the bounty and care of God, their longing for the luxuries of Egypt and their ingratitude for the sustaining power of God was a direct affront to Him.

**Moses had had enough! JUST KILL ME NOW!**

**God:**

- Appoint 70 men from the elders of Israel. They will bear the burden with you.
- I'm going to give the people what they want – Meat --- for an entire month until it comes out their noses and it becomes disgusting to them. Because they have rejected the Lord and are crying, "why did we ever leave Egypt".

**Numbers 11:34** - .... So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah (graves of lust), because there they buried the people who had been greedy. --- **but He did not abandon them.**

Not done yet...

- **Numbers 12:1-2** - Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. <sup>2</sup> "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?"

They said these things in earshot of the Lord and He was not amused. He must deal with this quickly and publicly. He suddenly showed up and called a meeting {**Numbers 12:5-8**} When the cloud moved back to its place above the Tabernacle Miriam had leprosy! She must go outside the camp for 7 days. The people remained where they were until Miriam had been received back into the camp.

Not done yet...

God told Moses to gather the heads of each tribe and send them to spy out the Land of Canaan. They were instructed to check out:

- The people – are they strong or weak?
- The land – is it good or bad, fat or lean and are there any trees?
- The cities – are they open or fortified?
- Bring back some fruit samples

They returned after 40 days and confirmed that the land was indeed good. **HOWEVER...**

- **Numbers 13:28-29** - the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified *and* very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. <sup>29</sup> "Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan."

Only Caleb and Joshua thought the congregation should go and take possession of the land. *"We can win!"*

But the other 10 spies were terrified and insisted, *"We can't win against these people. They are too strong for us. All the men we saw are giants – we are like grasshoppers compared to them!"*

- **Numbers 14:1-4** - Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. <sup>2</sup> And all the sons of Israel **grumbled** against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! **Or would that we had died in this wilderness!** <sup>3</sup> "And why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" <sup>4</sup> So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."

Good Grief!! Their ingratitude and willingness to return to the land of their slavery is almost beyond belief. The crowd was so riled up that they were prepared to stone Caleb and Joshua.

After a bit of back and forth between Moses and God-----

**God:** *"Okay, Moses I have pardoned them as you have asked (the nation would be spared). However, all those who witnessed the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness and yet have continued to test me these 10 times and refuse to listen to me, will not enter into the land I promised their forefathers."*

When the people heard this, they mourned greatly. **THE NEXT DAY...**

- **Numbers 14:40-45** - they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised."

Even though they had sinned greatly they still expected God to bless them. How strange! Just the day before they'd wanted to stone Caleb and Joshua for the mere suggestion of going into the Land. But now that God had declared that they **WOULD NOT** enter the Land of Promise they were hell-bent on going. Weird! They didn't think they could take the Land **WITH** God, but somehow, they now think they can take it **WITHOUT** Him.

- But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? <sup>42</sup> "Do not go up, lest you be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. <sup>43</sup> "For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you." <sup>44</sup> But they went up heedlessly..... **and the Amalekites and Canaanites became the instruments of God's judgment on His people.**

Because of unbelief, an entire generation of God's people were banned from the Promised Land. But instead of realizing their grave sin and accepting the consequences they were determined to whine and complain and rebel until they breathed their last breath --- **but He did not abandon them.**

## Not done yet...

Korah, Dathan and Abiram rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Aaron {Numbers 16:1-33}. This was high handed and intentional rebellion = it was high treason.

Moses did not attempt to defend himself, but instead said to Korah, *"Okay, tomorrow morning we'll let the Lord decide"*. The next morning the 250 elders brought their censers before the Lord along with Moses and Aaron.

The glory of God appeared and judgment ensued --- but He did not abandon them.

Years went by. Again, there was no water. **Will the people trust God this time? NO!!**

- **Numbers 20:3-5** - They quarreled with Moses and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! <sup>4</sup> Why did you bring the LORD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? <sup>5</sup> Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"

God brought forth water again for the people, but Moses and Aaron would pay a high price for their own lack of trust.

- **Numbers 20:12** - But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."
- **Ellen White {PP 419.1}** - Had Moses and Aaron been cherishing self-esteem or indulging a passionate spirit in the face of divine warning and reproof, their guilt would have been far greater. But they were not chargeable with willful or deliberate sin; they had been overcome by a sudden temptation, and their contrition was immediate and heartfelt. The Lord accepted their repentance, though because of the harm their sin might do among the people, He could not remit its punishment.

## Not done yet...

Many years went by. Most of the old generation had died off and a new generation had taken its place. They have not learned much in their wanderings and are just as quick to grumble and complain as their parents had been. They became impatient because the journey has been long and difficult.

- **Numbers 21:5** - they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!"

In response to their grumbling, God sent snakes among the people but He also provided a way out. He instructed Moses to make a bronze snake and mount it on a pole. **IF** those who were bitten looked at the snake, they would live. You have to look to live. Judgment, yes, but He did not abandon them.

## Not done yet...

**Balak and Balaam {Numbers 22-24}** – After all was said and done and despite his best efforts, Balaam was not allowed to curse Israel, but he came up with a way to destroy them from the inside = seduction and idol worship. According to **Number 31:16**, Balaam encouraged the Moabite women to seduce the Israelites through food so that they would participate in idol worship and forfeit God's blessings.

Balaam's strategy of leading God's people into apostasy through food and sex would outlive him and would be a contributing factor to the eventual demise of the nation. **EVEN THEN GOD DID NOT ABANDON HIS PEOPLE.**

Finally, on the plains of Moab, God instructed Moses on the taking of Canaan. It had been a long and often painful journey, but God had kept His promise to bring Abraham's descendants into the Promised Land.

- **Genesis 22:17-18** - I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

They fought Him nearly every step of the way, yet, even though discipline was swift and necessary at times, God remained faithful. **HE. DID. NOT. ABANDON. THEM.** He continued to sustain them every day of that 40 years.

Now, if you choose to, you can focus on all the judgments found in Numbers – and there are a lot of them. However, it is so important to understand that the judgments of God do not happen in a vacuum. Israel is not innocent in these events. They actively made choices that went against the direct commands of God. They disregarded and diminished His care for them. They murmured against their circumstances. They murmured against God's authority. They tried, challenged and rebelled against Him at every turn. He could have just left them to fend for themselves or He could have destroyed every last one of them, but, He didn't. He continued wandering with them and I find that utterly amazing..... That's my favorite thing about **NUMBERS**.