

THE BIBLE

in a nutshell



Numbers

—compiled by Peter Hammond

- In GENESIS we see man ruined
- In EXODUS we see man redeemed
- In LEVITICUS we see man reverencing God
- In NUMBERS we see man rebelling against God.

A synopsis of Numbers

Numbers begins at Mount Sinai, where the Israelites have received their laws and covenant from God and God has taken up residence among them in the sanctuary. The task before them is to take possession of the Promised Land. The people are numbered

and preparations are made for resuming their march. The Israelites begin the journey, but immediately they murmur and complain at the hardships along the way. They arrive at the borders of Canaan and send spies into the land, but on hearing the spies report, the Israelites refuse to take possession of Canaan and God constrains them in the wilderness until a new generation can grow up and carry out the task.

Wilderness wanderings

The book ends with the new generation of Israelites in the plain of Moab ready for the crossing of the Jordan River. Numbers is the culmination of the story of Israel's

they shall possess of the land of Canaan.

The journey to the Promised Land

The Promised Land of Canaan was a mere eleven day march from Egypt. However, because of the negative and discouraging reports brought back by ten of the twelve scouts, and because the people of Israel chose to ignore the positive report brought back by two of the scouts, Joshua and Caleb, the Israelites grumbled and rebelled against God, and it actually took them 13 780 days.

Because of their disbelief and disobedience, God declared that, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, every one of that rebellious generation over twenty years old, would die before the nation of Israel

Numbers is the culmination of the story of Israel's exodus from oppression in Egypt and their journey to take possession of the Promised Land.

exodus from oppression in Egypt and their journey to take possession of the land God promised their fathers.

As such, the book of Numbers draws to a conclusion the themes introduced in Genesis and played out in Exodus and Leviticus: God has promised the Israelites that they shall become a great (numerous) nation, that they will have a special relationship with Yahweh and that

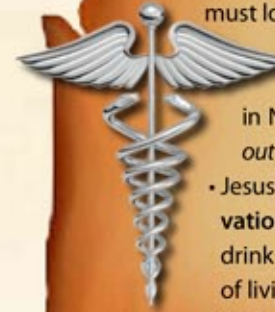
would enter the Promised Land. A new generation was trained and disciplined in the wilderness to conquer the Promised Land, forty years after the Exodus.

Bad examples

Numbers provides many examples of how not to behave as the people of God.

Jesus in Numbers

Numbers reveals much about our Lord Jesus Christ. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." John 3:14-16. The serpents of sin have bitten us all, and the wages of sin is death. We must look unto Christ, crucified for salvation



Today the symbol of ambulances and paramedics is the serpent on the stake, alluded to in Numbers 21:9 and John 3:14. "A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Sceptre shall rise out Israel." Num 24:17

Jesus is the Bread of Life and the Rock of our Salvation. Whoever thirsts must come unto Him and drink and out of his innermost being will flow rivers of living waters (John 7:37-39). Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world

As Israel spent forty years in the wilderness, so Jesus spent forty days in the wilderness being tempted before beginning His earthly ministry

To confirm Aaron's call to be the High Priest, the leaders of each of the twelve tribes were to lay their staff, or stick, before the presence of the Lord. In the morning, Aaron's stick had blossomed with leaves, flowers and budding fruit. The other twigs were still dead. In the same way, God has shown that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, our High Priest, because He alone was dead and is alive forever more.

The Aaronic blessing

"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." Num 6:24-26.



The ten unfaithful scouts gave a negative report, which so discouraged the people that they wept aloud, grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and wanted to stone them to death. They declared that they would rather have died in Egypt! The people dismissed the exhortation of Joshua and Caleb (Num 13:30).

The Rebellion of Korah

Later on in Numbers we read about Korah who mobilised 250 leaders in a rebellion against Moses and Aaron: "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation are holy...and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" Num 16:3.



The response of Moses to this revolution was to turn to the Lord. Do not fight your own battles. You fight God's battles. Let God fight yours. The Lord sent fire from Heaven which consumed the rebels and the earth swallowed them up.

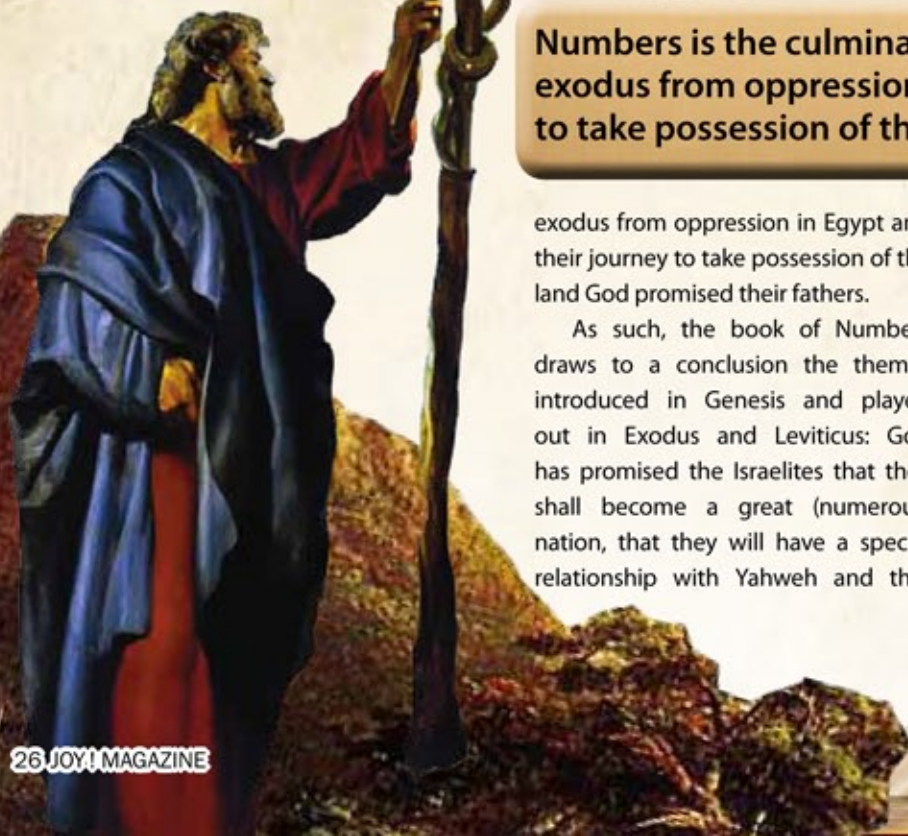
Yet, even after this display of the

power of God, the children of Israel still complained against Moses and Aaron.

The bronze serpent on a pole

When instead of being grateful for God's provision of food in the wilderness, the Israelites grumbled saying they would prefer to return to Egypt, God struck them with a severe plague of fiery serpents who bit the people.

When the people acknowledged: "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you. Pray to the Lord that He take the serpents from us," the Lord commanded



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Miriam & Aaron

Despite the many mighty miracles and miraculous provisions, the children of Israel continually murmured, complained and rebelled. Moses even faced the sedition of his sister Miriam (who placed him in the bullrushes when he was still a baby), and brother, Aaron, the High Priest. Jealousy, a desire for honour and a critical spirit led to Miriam being punished with leprosy for seven days until she repented.

Moses: "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who has been bitten, when he looks at it, shall live. So Moses made a bronze serpent and put it on a pole; and so...if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived." Num 21:8-9

Saved to serve

Numbers makes it clear that the children of Israel were set free from slavery in Egypt to serve God. They were saved to serve. From the instructions of God to Moses, we learn: **carefulness; cleanliness and costliness**

Carefulness, cleanliness, costliness

Each tribe was allotted a specific place in relation to the other tribes. The camp was to

The frustration of backsliding

Numbers also illustrates the frustration of being backslidden. Here the children were freed from slavery in Egypt, but they had not yet entered into the Promised Land flowing with milk and honey. This is a picture of the backslidden Christian, who has too much of the world in them to enjoy Christ and too much of Christ to enjoy the world.

The sin of Moses and the Rock

Moses did an exemplary job leading such a large multitude of dissatisfied complaining people. However, when God commanded him to speak to the Rock, he struck the Rock twice. Because of this disobedience, God told Moses that he would not enter the Promised Land. One may ask why such a se-

"Now these things became as our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted."
1 Cor 10:6

be a hollow rectangle with the Tabernacle in the centre and specific places allocated to each tribe. When the pillar of cloud, or fire moved, the Israelites were to follow.

Very specific instructions were given as to the dismantling and transporting of the furniture and equipment of the Tabernacle. The order of march was specific, with the tribe of Judah leading. Numbers specifies punishments for sins of carelessness. God expects His people to be careful.

The camp had to be spotlessly clean. Sacrifices were required on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. Only the best could be offered to God. Worship requires sacrifice.

True love is measured by sacrifice.

vere punishment for what to us may seem like a small offence - because that Rock was Christ. We read in 1 Corinthians 10:4, that the Rock from which the water flowed, that sustained the children in the wilderness was Christ. Christ suffered once for our sins. He cannot be struck a second time. Nor did He need to be compelled. He willingly gave up His life for us.

God in Numbers

Numbers tells us much about God: He is a God of love and mercy, providing His people with food, water and protection. We also see the Holiness, justice and wrath of God, in His Laws and in His judgement on rebellion. God is a Holy God and we must fear and worship Him. ■

