

THE BIG READ (28)

Jesus in Numbers

A. Introduction

1. Every book of the Bible has one dominating theme – Jesus is the Christ.

“Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”
(Luke 24:45-47)

Jesus is the Christ who will suffer and die.

Jesus is the Christ who will rise from the dead on the third day.

Jesus is the Christ who will forgive the sins of all who repent.

Jesus is the Christ who will be preached to the nations.

2. The Old Testament that Jesus read contained the same 39 books as our English Bibles but was arranged in a different order.

It had three sections – the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

“Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” (Luke 24:44)

The Law (of Moses) contains the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

3. The fourth book in the Law part of the Old Testament is Numbers.

Numbers is a continuation of the story of the previous three books.

The original Hebrew name for the book is “In the wilderness” which probably better reflects the story of Numbers. As the book tells the story of how the Israelites wandered in the desert until the generation that left Egypt had died.

B. Getting Started with Numbers

1. Numbers begins a month after the setting up of the tabernacle at the end of Exodus.

“So the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the second year.” (Exodus 40:17)

“The LORD spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt.” (Numbers 1:1)

It begins with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai and ends with them on the plains of Moab on the border to the Promised Land.

“The LORD spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt.” (Numbers 1:1)

“These are the commands and regulations the LORD gave through Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho.” (Numbers 36:13)

In between these two events 40 years passes during which a whole generation of Israelites die in the desert.

2. Why tell this story?

But the people did not trust God and in chapters 11-25 there are seven distinct episodes of the people grumbling against Him.

i) They grumbled about the journey.

"Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD, and when he heard them his anger was aroused." (Numbers 11:1)

ii) They grumbled about the food.

"The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost – also, the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna." (Numbers 11:4-6)

iii) They grumbled about the people living in the Promised Land.

"We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them." That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert!" (Numbers 13:3-14:2)

iv) They grumbled about their leaders.

"They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?" (Numbers 16:3)

v) They grumbled about God's judgment.

"The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. "You have killed the LORD's people," they said." (Numbers 16:41)

vi) They grumbled about the desert.

"Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarrelled with Moses and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the LORD! Why did you bring the LORD's community into this desert, that we and our livestock should die here? Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to their terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!" (Numbers 20:2-5)

vii) They grumbled about the manna.

"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!" (Numbers 21:5)

God's response was to punish this generation and they died in the desert.

"The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the LORD, I will do to you the very things I heard you say: In this desert your bodies will fall – every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. But you – your bodies will fall in this desert. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the desert. For forty years – one year for each of the forty days you explored the land – you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you." (Numbers 14:26-34)

The old generation rebelled and died.

4. In Numbers 26-36 the story of the next generation is told.

God again prepares His people to enter and conquer the Promised Land.

A new census of Israel's fighting men is taken.

"After the plague the LORD said to Moses and Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, "Take a census of the whole Israelite community by families – all those twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army of Israel." So on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them and said, "Take a census of men twenty years old or more, as the LORD commanded Moses." (Numbers 26:1-4)

Joshua is appointed to lead the people of Israel after Moses.

"Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole assembly. Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, as the LORD instructed through Moses." (Numbers 17:22-23)

Instructions are given for assigning land to the different tribes in Promised Land.

"The LORD said to Moses, "Command the Israelites and say to them: "When you enter Canaan, the land that will be allotted to you as an inheritance will have these boundaries." (Numbers 34:1-2)

The new generation obeyed and lived.

D. Jesus in Numbers

1. Jesus is the cloud and fire who leads and sustains His people on the way to the Promised Land.

"Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the LORD's command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped." (Numbers 9:17-18)

2. Jesus is the bronze snake who gives life to His people when they look to Him.

"The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived." (Numbers 21:8-9)

"Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:14-15)

3. Jesus is the King who delivers His people from all their enemies.

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob, a sceptre will rise out of Israel. He will crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow strong. A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city." (Numbers 24:17-19)

"After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." (Matthew 2:1-2)

4. *"God has saved us and, as we travel through the wilderness of this world, we need to go on exercising faith [in Christ] to enter the inheritance Christ has secured for us." (Adrian Reynolds)*

ⁱ Taken from Teaching Numbers by Adrian Reynolds