

What's the Message – Lesson 34

Today we begin our study of the Book of Numbers, and the lessons the Israelites had to learn in the wilderness.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. It is always in His name that our prayers are offered, asking that God will open your hearts during this study to help you learn from the mistakes of our spiritual forefathers, so that we might not repeat the same wrong steps they took. Amen.

In our last lesson we learned a little more of the full meaning of “You shall be holy”, and that it requires us to be obedient to God. We are to live as God’s chosen people, and are given the mercy of His forgiveness when we fail. In today’s lesson we begin our study of the lessons of the Book of Numbers – lessons that the Israelites had to learn the hard way.

The Book of Numbers begins by laying out the order of encampment that the Israelites would follow, and the duties of the different sons of Aaron regarding the elements of the Tabernacle. Then in chapter 9, it explains how the Israelites would stay in a place as long as the cloud of God’s presence remained over the Tabernacle. But when it moved, they moved. In this manner they were led by God.

In chapter 10, verse 11, we read: *In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud was taken up from over the Tabernacle of the testimony, and the people of Israel set out by stages from the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran.*

In chapter 11 we see the people complaining that they had no meat to eat, only this monotonous manna, the same thing day after day. And we see Moses also complaining, asking God why did He lay the burden of caring for the Israelites on him.

In chapter 12 we see the outburst of jealousy of Miriam and Aaron, the sister and brother of Moses. And we read of them saying: *Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?*

In chapters 13 and 14 we read the familiar story of Moses sending spies into the promised land of Canaan so that they would have a better idea of the land and the strength of its people. As we know, all of the spies except Joshua and Caleb were fearful of the might of the people who then lived there, and recommended that they choose a new captain, and return to Egypt.

As a result of this turn of events, the Lord spoke to Moses: *How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs which I have wrought among them?*

So the statement of the judgment of God was made, and He said to them: *your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and of all your number, numbered from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb . . . and Joshua. But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land which you have despised. But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness.*

So now Teacher, there we have a brief summary of the events that begin in the Book of Numbers, but we don't live in a wilderness. So what is the message for us?

Note that we have here three separate situations. First, the complaining over food, then the jealousy of Aaron and Miriam, followed by the rebellion and rejection of the leadership of Moses. In reality, all three of these have the same common denominator: a lack of trust in God.

In the first case they complained that they were sick and tired of the same old manna every day, and wanted some meat to eat. So God said, in modern day terms, "I'll give you meat until it runs out your nostrils and you are sick of it." Then He sent a wind that drove thousands of migrating quail in from the sea. And the exhausted birds fell and piled up to a depth of three

feet, for the distance of a day's walk in any direction around the camp. For two days and a night the people gathered quail, no one getting less than 10 homers. Now, we are told that a homer would be equal to about 11 bushels in our measurement, so that means each person gathered at least 110 bushels of quails! But this should not be seen as a gift of grace from God, this was a judgment and many people died here as punishment for their lack of trust in God's ability to provide.

The second situation was the jealousy of the brother and sister over God's selection of Moses and the presumed relegation of their own status. This was a different version of lack of trust in God. Here, they were not trusting in God's plan and method of achieving it. Here they were assuming an authority that had not been given them. They were not submitting to God's authority because they were not submitting to His chosen leader. This time, Miriam was the target of punishment, and it was leprosy. Moses prayed to God on her behalf, and she was exiled outside the camp for seven days. Then she was healed and allowed to re-enter the camp.

Lastly, we have the case of the spies sent to explore the promised land of Canaan. Their report, except for Joshua and Caleb, was one of fear and mistrust. In short, their picture was that "we can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are. They are giants, and we are like grasshoppers to them." Soon the Israelites were talking about electing a new leader and returning to Egypt. Now God has to really hit them with a heavy hammer. He tells Moses that because of their lack of trust they will be turned back to the desert to wander, one year for each of the days they checked out Canaan, until all the weak-spirited men had died. It would be the children of that generation . . . not them . . . that would be given the promised land. This would be the generation that eventually learned the lesson of trusting in God.

Isn't this a lesson we still have to learn? Can it be learned with something less than the heavy hand of God laid upon us? Can we learn this lesson by reading what happened to the people of Israel and taking it to heart? Do you truly understand what it means to trust God above all other things in your life? Can you practice actually living according to that trust?

Our next study will continue with Part Two of "Lessons in the Desert."