Women’s Bible Study

March 21, 2023

Numbers

REVIEW:

Pentateuch Overview:

* Purpose:

-Written by Moses as they prepare to enter the land of promise after the exodus in order to orient them to one God who created all things as compared to the nations’ many competing gods. He writes to show God’s intention in creation for relationship with Him and to reveal His character, ethical standards, and promise.

* Key Verses: Genesis 12:1-3-The call and blessing of Abraham. The fulfilment of these promises constitutes the storyline of the Pentateuch.
* Review Biblical themes we have discussed so far.
* Tonight: Numbers

Review:

🡪In Leviticus they learn they had to approach God on His terms-with the right sacrifice and the right sacrificer.

**Summary of Leviticus:**

The tabernacle has been constructed but in order for a sinful people to dwell with God, their sin must be dealt with. There are very specific regulations for the type of sacrifice that must be offered to atone for sin as well as regulations regarding who may offer them. A holy priesthood is established to intercede on behalf of the people. The Lord’s call is that His people would “be holy as He is holy” but in His grace He has provided a way that they could be forgiven when they are not and He could still dwell among them. However, the sacrifices were ongoing, and the priesthood was flawed in that the priest had his own sin to account for, pointing to the need for someday there would be a perfect sacrifice and a perfect priest. All of this is a shadow pointing to the One to come who would be of a superior priesthood, and who would also be the perfect sacrifice in His willing obedience to God. As such, the atonement He provides will be an eternal atonement and He will maintain His priesthood forever. Leviticus highlights the steadfast faithfulness and mercy of God to provide the sacrifice to meet the demands of His justice and points to His gracious redemptive plan in Christ.

**Numbers-Introduction**

* Numbers means בְּמִדְבַּר, Bəmīḏbar, or “in the wilderness”
* It is a travel log that covers a journey that should have taken about 2 weeks but ends up taking 40 years.
* It can be divided into 5 sections:

1. Wilderness of Sinai (1-10)

2. Travel to Paran (10-12)

3. Wilderness of Paran (13-19)

4. Travel to Moab (20-21)

5. Wilderness of Moab (22-36)

* It ends with a defining moment of God’s grace answering the question “Is God’s covenant still true?”

GROUP STUDY:

Break into groups and work through study guide of Numbers

Discuss Biblical themes together.

Questions??

TEACHING:

**Numbers-Background**

* What’s been going on? They have been delivered out of Egypt, gone through the Red Sea while Pharaoh’s army was destroyed, made into a new nation under God’s law and God has come to dwell among them. He is leading them to the promised land! However, what should have happened next isn’t what happens.
* Instead of entering the land, they wander for 40 years through the wilderness until every adult who saw the wonders of the deliverance from Egypt dies.
* God initiates steps towards the fulfilment of His promises, *but it is delayed by Israel’s unfaithfulness.*

🡪Theme and contribution of the book: The Result of Unfaithfulness.

* Throughout Genesis🡪Leviticus we have been tracing the promises of God and God’s relentless pursuit of His people to bring about His promises despite human failing or circumstances.
* Numbers has us consider the impact that man’s decisions have on God’s sovereignty. These are topics of discussion in evangelism, election, etc. However, Numbers is an exceedingly practical example of how man’s choices impact his life and God’s plans for him. Israel’s example of unfaithfulness becomes a negative example throughout Scripture.

🡪Question to consider: How does my foolishness or faithfulness influence or affect God’s plan for my life?

**Numbers 1-10: Wilderness of Sinai**

* The people have come out of Egypt, formed the covenant, gotten the law, built the tabernacle and God dwells among them.
* They have been at Mt. Sinai about a year.
* Before they leave, Moses is told to take a census (Chapter 1) and then details are given for how the camp is to be arranged when they camp (Chapter 2). God’s holiness was to be at the center of the nation.
* Chapters 3-4 lists the duties of the Levites and the people “settle up” with God for their firstborn. Because of Egypt, all firstborn belong to God but instead of taking them for His service, He takes all of the Levites.
* Chapters 5-6 deal with uncleanness, accusations of adultery, and vows, ending with the blessing of Aaron which we still often quote today.
* Chapters 7-8 show the offerings for the consecration of the tabernacle and give additional regulations for the Levites’ service.
* Chapter 9-The people celebrate Passover, and we see the last example of Israel’s obedience. (9:23)
* Chapters 1-10 are the “background” for what happens when Israel gets to the land and refuses to go in. Initially, God gives them His commands and they obey resulting in peace in their relationship with God. (1:19; 1:54; 2:34; 3:51; 4:49; 5:4; 7:89, 8:4, 8:20, 9:5; 9:23—"And they did so”, “At the command of the Lord”)
* Chapter 10-The people leave Sinai. God is leading them by cloud and fire to where they should go.
* 10:29: Moses asks Hobab, “*Please do not leave us, for you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will serve as eyes for us.”* (While it’s unclear what Moses’ motive is, this may point to the beginning of a step in the wrong direction) (We don’t just find ourselves in a state of rebellion-little steps along the way.)

**Numbers 10-12: Travel to Paran**

* Three days into their journey, the people start to complain. At first, it’s just on the outskirts of camp and the Lord sends fire as a judgment and some of killed. But eventually it’s the whole camp. “*Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent.”* (11:10) Even Moses complains about the burden of leadership. (11:11-13).
* God graciously gives Moses elders to help, and He gives the people meat, but He strikes many with a plague for their rebellion.
* Chapter 12-Miriam and Aaron rebel and speak against Moses, challenging his leadership, resulting in their own judgment.

**Numbers 13-19: Wilderness of Paran**

* Chapters 13-14: 1 man from every tribe is sent into the land to assess it before the whole nation goes in.
* 2 return with a good report, 10 return with a bad report. They lead the people not to trust God and try to start a mutiny with new leadership.
* Joshua, Caleb, Moses and Aaron grieve and call the people to trust God. (No matter our pleas, sometimes people don’t listen)
* Moses intercedes for the people and God doesn’t destroy them, but He declares that none of them except Joshua and Caleb will enter the land. (Joshua 14-Caleb defeats the Anakim)
* After God gives His judgment, then the people try to obey but God is not with them. (Sometimes it’s too late to try to do what the Lord commands)

🡪The people refuse to enter the land and God honors their choice. He lets them waste their whole lives because of their rebellion. (Ripple effect of sin even on those who want to obey, example of our own nation)

🡪How did they get here? Notice the development and progression of sin. Their hearts were hardened by little complaints along the way.

* Philippians 2-Christ’s example of humility. 2:12-14: Paul exhorts them to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. How? V. 14: *Do all things without grumbling or complaining*. (How can we say we trust God’s sovereign hand in our lives and then complain about our day-to-day circumstances? In doing so, we exhibit lack of faith and trust in God’s goodness and tell Him that He is not meeting our needs).
* Chapter 15-Regulations on sacrifices and offerings, a Sabbath breaker is killed.
* Chapters 16-17: Aaron’s leadership is challenged, Korah’s rebellion occurs. Aaron’s leadership is affirmed by God (staff budded)
* Chapters 18-19: Purification laws and inheritance for the Levites and priests.

**Numbers 20-21 Travel to Moab**

* Chapter 20-Miriam dies and Moses rebels. *“Shall we bring water from a rock?”*
* Aaron dies on Mount Hor because of he and Moses’ rebellion at Meribah.

🡪Moses and Aaron are likely grieving, weary of the people’s rebellion, and wandering in the wilderness. But they do not regard God as holy and there are consequences.

* Chapter 21-More rebellion from the people, “*We loathe this worthless food*.” (21:5) Serpents are sent by the Lord as judgment and many die. Story of the bronze serpent which Jesus uses to point to Himself (John 3:14-15).
* Some good news-the two kings on the outskirts of the land across the Jordan (Sihon and Og) are defeated.
* Throughout their rebellion, God continues to give them food, water, manna, and to provide for them. (*Their clothes did not wear out*… Deut. 29:5)

**Numbers 22-36: Wilderness of Moab**

* After years of wandering, the text begs the question, “What about the covenant? Has God forgotten them? The story of Balaam is the answer to that question.
* Balak-king of Moab is fearful of the Israelites (and their God) so he hires Balaam, a sorcerer/magician to curse them.
* 22:6: “*I know that he whom you bless is blessed and he whom you curse is cursed*.” Sounds like the covenant with Abraham. The story sets up a showdown between God and Balaam regarding the people of Israel.
* Balaam attempts to curse God’s people and God uses a donkey as one who has more understanding than the foolish prophet. 2 Peter 2:16: “*rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet’s madness*”
* Balaam gives 4 oracles or “curses”:
1. Numbers 23:9-10: Ends up affirming the fulfilment of God’s promises in Genesis 28:14: “*your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth*.”
2. Numbers 23:19: Will God keep His promised to bless them? “*He has blessed and I cannot revoke it*.”
3. Numbers 24:9: Reiteration of Genesis 12:1-3. God will bless those who bless them and curse those who curse them. (Balak paid money to get himself cursed)
4. Numbers 24:17: One who is coming, a ruler who will crush the foreheads of Moab. This isn’t just an affirmation of Genesis 12, this is an affirmation of Genesis 3.

🡪While Israel is down in the camp complaining, they are totally unaware that in the mountains overhead, God is blessing them.

* Balaam knows he cannot curse God’s people directly so he takes another route, knowing if he can get them to sin against God, He will punish them.
* Chapter 25: The daughters of Moab invite the Israelites to worship their gods, commit immorality with them. God brings judgment and 24,000 died.

🡪 Balaam is brought up multiple times in Scripture as one who causes God’s people to be led astray for personal gain. (Numbers 31:16; Deut. 23:4-5; 2 Peter 2:14-16; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14-15)

* Chapters 26-27-New census is taken, question of female heirs, Joshua chosen to succeed Moses.
* Chapters 28-30: Various offerings restated and regulations regarding vows.
* Chapter 31: Vengeance on Midian and Balaam. This is a very tough passage! But is a direct fulfilment of God “cursing those who cursed them” and the seriousness with which God judges those who entice His people to sin.
* Chapter 32-Reuben, Gad and ½ tribe of Manasseh settle in land of Gilead (land of Sihon and Og) with the agreement that they will help Israel finish possessing the land.
* Chapters 33-36: Recounting of the journey, boundaries of the land, cities of refuge, question of female heirs.

🡪The book ends as they are about to enter the land and Moses is about to die. Before they go in, he is going to give them his last words and that is what Deuteronomy is about.

**Summary of Numbers:**

After spending a year at Mount Sinai, the Israelites head to the promised land, being led by God through the wilderness. As they go, they begin complaining against God and against His chosen leaders resulting in judgment and death along the way. Once they arrive at the land, they rebel and refuse to follow God’s command to go in, turning their 2 week journey into 40 years of wandering for their rebellion. As they wander, every one of that rebellious generation will die, and only Joshua and Caleb being allowed to enter the land. Aaron and Miriam die and even Moses rebels against God, not regarding Him as holy before the people. Just when it seems as if God has forgotten His people and His covenant, the story of Balak and Balaam affirms that God is still with them and intends to bless them despite their rebellious hearts. He doesn’t allow Balaam to curse them but instead he is forced to bless them instead. Balaam still entices the people to sin, however, resulting in God’s judgment on them and ultimately God’s judgment on those who led them astray. The book ends with the people on the verge of entering the land after 40 years of wilderness wanderings and before they go in, Moses has some last words of warning and encouragement to them which we will read in Deuteronomy.

**Thoughts on Numbers:**

* Often in Scripture, we are given example of faithfulness to follow. (Hebrews 11) However, Numbers is an example of unfaithfulness which we are not to follow. They are a fearful example of those who saw all of God’s wondrous works and knew of His salvation, but their hearts were not united by faith, and they did not enter His rest. They did not persevere to the end, and they died outside the land (Read Hebrews 3:16-4:13; Psalm 95:7-11)
* It is reassuring to say that God will forgive our sin and He will. But is it simplistic to think there are no consequences for sin. The choices we make to obey or disobey God matter-make no mistake about that!
* In Christ, we do stand in the unconditional love of God. There is nothing that can take that from us and it is based in the meritorious work of Christ alone. But, there is a “conditional love” of God, meaning you can make choices to put yourself in a place where God can bless you and express more love to you. (Example: Prodigal son. The father loved him unconditionally but until the son humbled himself and came home, he was not in a position to receive the blessing and love of the father.)
* Our relationship with God is that-a relationship. His unconditional love and conditional love aren’t contradictions-they are part of a relationship. He wants us to come back to Him so He can bless us, but He will allow us to choose to follow Him or not.
* Jude 21: “*keep yourselves in the love of God as you await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you eternal life*.” We ought to pray that God would not allow us to make choices that put us in a position to be outside the blessing and expressed love of God. (Of course, God’s discipline is also His expressed love to bring us to repentance)
* We are loved unconditionally in Christ, but we must not presume upon God’s forgiveness as if what we do doesn’t matter.

Application/Discussion:

1. Do you struggle with complaining about day-to-day things? What does that communicate to God about your trust in Him and your faith in His plans? How does complaining open a door for rebellion against God?
2. In what ways do we presume upon God’s forgiveness and not consider the consequences for our sin? How can we rightly understand the forgiveness we have in Christ with the reality that our sin can still have consequences?
3. How should the example of the people in Numbers motivate us to guard our hearts against rebellion and to press on in faith?
4. Any other thoughts or take aways?

**Closing thoughts:**

* How should the book of Numbers have ended? The first generation should have gone into the land. How will your story end? If you are in Christ, you have unconditional love of God but you are to keep yourself in the love of God as well.
* Three main points:
1. We must continue in faith.

2. Our decisions matter.

3. God will remain faithful to His covenant.

* We can rest in God’s faithfulness to His promises and that is our hope. But we are not to be lazy in our pursuit of Him. What we do matters, and we ought to “*work out our salvation with fear and trembling.*”

Quote from Prince Caspian in The Chronicles of Narnia:

“But what would have been the good?"
Aslan said nothing.
"You mean," said Lucy rather faintly, "that it would have turned out all right – somehow? But how? Please, Aslan! Am I not to know?"
"To know what would have happened, child?" said Aslan. "No. Nobody is ever told that."
"Oh dear," said Lucy.
"But anyone can find out what will happen," said Aslan. "If you go back to the others now, and wake them up; and tell them you have seen me again; and that you must all get up at once and follow me – what will happen? There is only one way of finding out.”

🡪God doesn’t want us to live in regret over the past or fear of the future. As the Lord tells Peter when he asks about what will happen in the future, “*You follow Me*!” (John 21:22)

🡪Philippians 3:12-14: “*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.* *Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,* *I press on toward the goal to win the prize of God’s heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.”*

🡪Hebrews 4:7/Psalm 95:11: “*Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts.”*

Homework:

* Read Deuteronomy (Listening to it is great!)
* Work through the study guide as you read.
* Consider getting additional resources to help in your study time.
* Next Study: Tuesday, April 18

Sources Used:

ESV Study Bible

Logos

Hill, Andrew E & John Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids: 2009.

The Bible Project: The Torah Series

T. Desmond Alexander, T. Desmond. *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, Fourth Edition. Grand Rapids: 2022.

Cedarville University: Dr. Miller Old Testament Literature Course