

The Bible Story In A Year

Week 8

As the book of Leviticus detailed many laws God had given the Israelites, the book of Numbers (though also including components of the law) focuses on this holy people being mobilized. Note that they are surely now a great nation as God promised (Genesis 12:1-3). Now, having been given the law, built the tabernacle, established the priesthood, and all the various components of what God had done for Israel at Mount Sinai, God was getting them ready to start moving toward the promised land.

1) Numbering and organizing the people.

In the second year after Israel's departure from Egypt, Moses and Aaron were to take a census of every male 20 years old and above in Israel who could serve in Israel's army (Numbers 1:1-4). The total from all the tribes was 603,550. The Levites were exempt from this, as they were going to be responsible for the tabernacle and its furnishings (1:47-51; 3:5-13). The Israelites were then to camp by their own divisions (1:52-54). Judah's encampment (Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun) was on the east side of the tabernacle. Reuben's encampment (Reuben, Simeon, and Gad) was on the south side of the tabernacle. Ephraim's encampment (Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin) was on the west side of the tabernacle. Dan's encampment (Dan, Asher, and Naphtali) was on the north side of the tabernacle. God then divided the responsibilities given to the Levites into four categories. The Gershonites camped on the west side of the tabernacle and were responsible for the curtains and hangings of the tabernacle and courtyard (3:23-26; 4:21-28). The Kohathites camped on the south side of the tabernacle and were responsible for the furnishings of the tabernacle (3:29-32; 4:1-20). The Merarites camped on the north side of the tabernacle and were responsible for the supports, bases, pillars, crossbars, equipment, pegs, and ropes of the tabernacle (3:36-37; 4:29-33). Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons camped on the

east side in front of the tabernacle and would offer the sacrifices prescribed by the Lord as priests (3:38). When the Israelites traveled, the encampment of Judah moved first, followed by the Gershonites and Merarites (carrying the tabernacle), the encampment of Reuben, the Kohathites (carrying the tabernacle furniture), the encampment of Ephraim, and the encampment of Dan. The Israelites were to move whenever the cloud that covered the tabernacle lifted and to camp whenever the cloud stopped (9:15-23). Two silver trumpets were also made that would summon and direct Israel.

2) Complaints during the journey. After being at Sinai for around a year and God having prepared them to be His holy people, the people then set out to continue the journey to the promised land (Numbers 10:11-13). However, as they traveled, they regularly complained. At Taberah, they complained about hardships and God sent fire among the outskirts of the camp (11:1-3). At Kibroth-hattaavah, they complained about the manna God provided them (11:4-6) and God sent them quail (11:18-20, 31-32), as well as a severe plague (11:33-34). At Hazeroth, even Aaron and Miriam complained about God only speaking through Moses (12:1-3) and God reaffirmed His communication through Moses (12:5-8) and punished Miriam (12:9-15).

3) Israel refuses to enter Canaan. In Kadesh-barnea (Numbers 32:8), the Israelites requested for scouts to be sent into the Canaan land God had promised to give them (Deuteronomy 1:22-23) and God gave instructions for one to be sent from each tribe (Numbers 13:1-2). They were to scout out the land and report back (13:17-20). Their 40-day journey of scouting the land is recorded in 13:21-25. When they returned, they reported to the Israelites (13:26-29). Caleb (and Joshua) urged the people to go and conquer the land (13:30), but the other 10 who were sent responded with fear and a negative report (13:31-33). In response, the whole community of

Israelites complained about being led out of Egypt to die in the wilderness and wanted another leader appointed to take them back (14:1-4). Meanwhile, Joshua and Caleb encouraged them to trust God rather than rebel (14:6-10). God was greatly displeased with the Israelites for not trusting Him (14:11-12) and would not allow the faithless rebels to enter the promised land (14:20-35), also killing the 10 spies (14:36-38). Their efforts to take the land without God's help then failed and they were routed another way (14:39-45).

4) Complaints about leadership. One notable rebellion of the people after this involved a Kohathite man named Korah and those with him complaining against the leadership of Moses and Aaron (who were also Kohathites), saying they had exalted themselves (Numbers 16:1-3, 13-14). Moses indicated to them that the Lord would reveal who was set apart and could come near to Him as priests (16:4-7). Moses indicated that these rebels did not appreciate how God had chosen to use them (16:8-11). If the men who had rebelled would meet death in an unprecedented way by being swallowed by the ground, the people would know Moses had been sent by God (16:28-30). The thing happened just as Moses said and the rebels were swallowed alive (16:31-35), plus a plague sent in the camp was stopped after it killed 14,700 (16:46-50). God also made it clear He had chosen Aaron by causing his staff to bud (17:5, 8-10).

God had been preparing His special people to take possession of the Canaan land and live according to His commands. However, this great nation would now face the consequences of their rebellion against God. Now, due to their faithlessness, they would die in the wilderness without going into the promised land (except the children, Joshua, and Caleb).

Discipleship Questions

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Teaching: What did you learn from this lesson?

Rebuking: What are some ways this lesson challenges you to live differently?

Correcting: How does this lesson help you make positive changes for Christ?

Training & Equipping: How can you apply this lesson to be trained and equipped in God's service?