

On the Road Again

Numbers Overview

(preached Pine Grove 1/25/15; Sunday PM)

Introduction

Though we are taking a trip through the Bible, Israel is also on a journey of their own.

It seems like the idea of road trip has been in a lot of my introductions lately...

But I want to share another road trip feature that is probably a source of frustration for many of yall.

If there is one rule for men on road trips, it is usually this...

We want to pull out of the place we are leaving and we want to pull in to the place we are going in the shortest amount of time possible.

Which means that breaks for food, gas and even to go to the restroom must be of the emergency variety.

There is something in every man behind the wheel of a car that makes him able to do without the necessities of life when it comes to travelling.

And the thought of take a break from driving to shop for something is not acceptable.

Even a quick gaze at the magnets or snowglobes at a gas station is considered shopping and is usually met with a frown.

On our road trip out to seminary, a belt on the Suburban broke right outside San Antonio TX.

I was so irritated.

I had planned to make El Paso that day, but instead we only made Fort Stockton.

It cost around \$400 to get it fixed, but I was more upset about the delay than the money.

Which is saying something.

Turns out, it was a huge blessing that it occurred where it did.

If we had passed that exit, there was not another major town for over 300 miles.

We would have been stranded and needed a tow.

Once I realized that, I was thanking the Lord for his perfect timing.

But there is still a part of all of us men that like to as we say it “make good time” as we travel.

And that means that we will avoid delays at all cost.

That is why I am grateful that I was not a part of Israel in the book of Numbers.

Because the book is the story of their road trip to the Promised Land.

If you remember from what have seen already on Sunday nights.

You know that Israel started with God's call to Abraham in Genesis 12.

And it slowly grew to 70 people by the end of Genesis.

And then exploded into a nation in the book of Exodus.

Though they were oppressed and enslaved in Egypt, God blessed them and they became a nation of 2 million people...

Who walked out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses.

God was growing them into a people that He would call his own.

They would be a people who would receive His word.

They would be a people who would serve as a light to the nations.

God would use this nation to point to Himself.

Israel would reflect the glory of the God who had called them.

Ever seen a little boy who looks just like his Daddy?

You never have to wonder who that little boy belongs to.

We say things like, “You got your Daddy written all over your face.”

In the same way, God chose Israel to a nation filled with people who looked like their God.

To give them the right appearance, He led them out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai...

And God gave them his Law in the 10 commandments and He also gave them other regulations that HE would use to protect them...

And to show the rest of the world what kind of God He was.

In turn, Israel was to obey his commands.

And if they did, HE would bless them as a nation.

As Exodus ended, we had a nation with a set of laws.

Yet, they did not know everything about the God who they served.

So, the book of Leviticus was given to show that God was a holy God.

That He did not take sin lightly.

To show that He judged sin seriously.

So, last week we saw how God gave Israel a system of sacrifices to temporarily cover their sin.

As long as they obeyed the sacrifices, God would overlook their sin, and they would be able to fellowship with Him....

As He dwelt among the people in a tabernacle that he constructed.

As Leviticus ends, we have a nation with laws.

WE have a nation that has a greater understanding of the God that is leading them.

We have a nation that is beginning to understand the seriousness of sin.

But we also have a nation without a land.

As the book of Leviticus draws to a close, Israel is still at Mt. Sinai.

However, God had promised them a land of their own.

That was one of the original promises that God made to Abraham.

And when God promises something, we know that HE delivers on His promises.

Therefore, God is preparing his people at Sinai to travel to Canaan.

That is the strip of land that he promised to Abraham.

That is the strip of land where the nation of Israel is located today.

That is the strip of land that is the most fought over in the world as well.

You ever wonder why that is?

I mean if I was going to fight over some land, let it be the island of Bermuda.

OR the Hawaiian islands.

Or even a couple hundred of acres in SC with a big pond on it.

But to fight over a land that is over 50% desert doesn't make much sense.

Yes, there are green areas of the area, but a lot of it is useless land.

So, why fight over it?

Because God has said that it belongs to his people.

Therefore, everyone who hates the God of the Bible wants to see it in their hands.

So, they fuss and fight over it, and they will continue to do it until Jesus sets his throne in Jerusalem and rules the world with an iron rod.

Yet, God gave it to His people years ago, and we are going to see Him leading them there in the book of Numbers.

The only problem is this...

Israel doesn't seem to want the land.

They find every reason not to enter the land.

And because of that, God will delay their road trip to the Promised Land.

And we aren't talking about a short stop at the mall on the way home from the beach.

We are talking about a 40 year delay in the wilderness.

This is the all-time greatest road trip interruption.

And the purpose of this interruption is simple.

God prevented the generation of people who complained about Him from entering.

And that is an important key to understanding how this book is arranged...

So, the outline looks like this...

I. First Generation at Sinai (1:1 - 10:10)

- A. Instruction on Camps (1-2)**
- B. Instruction on Priesthood (3-4)**
- C. Instruction on Holy Living (5-6)**
- D. Instruction on Worship (7-8)**
- E. Instruction on Leaving Sinai (9-10:10)**

II. First Generation Leaving Sinai (10:11 - 19:22)

- A. Leaving In Groups (10:11 – 10:36)**
- B. Living in Disobedience (11-14)**
- C. Living with Consequences (15-19)**

III. First and Second Generation on Road (20-25)

- A. Death of Leaders (20)**
- B. Death in Israel (21)**
- C. Drama with Balaam (22-24)**
- D. Disaster with Baal (25)**

IV. Second Generation at Promised Land (26-36)

A. Preparation for Entrance (26 – 32)

B. Recollection of the Trip (33)

C. Organization of the Land (34-36)

So, let's begin with this first generation of people who are at Sinai...

They have received God's law.

They have been instruction in worship.

Now, they are ready to travel...

Let's begin with.....

I. First Generation at Sinai (1:1 - 10:10)

A. Instruction on Camps (1-2)

Before they leave for the land, God gives a few more instructions about how their community was to be arranged.

These are the days before subdivisions, apartments, and condos.

Though people would live in certain areas, God had made Israel a travelling group of 2 million people.

And as they packed up and then unpacked and arranged their communities, God had instructions on how the tents should be arranged.

And the simple lesson is this...

The tabernacle should be at the center of their community.

And he gives this instruction in the opening chapter of the book of Numbers.

I have never been a camping man; I've always been a hotel kind of man.

But there are tons of people who love to camp and love the community of campgrounds.

I had a buddy who is about as mechanically dumb as I am.

Well, he bought a huge camper to pull behind his truck so he could take his family with him.

Though we weren't there, we heard some funny stories about his first trip to a campground.

He got there. Got unhooked and just took a seat right outside his camper.

He saw his buddies hooked up power and septic systems and following this detailed list of things to do to set up camp.

Though he managed to get it all done on that trip, he sold the camper a few months later.

He told me, "I didn't buy a camper so I could do more work on the weekends."

Well, God required much of Israel as He travelled with them to the Promised Land.

And he gave them clear instructions on that before thy left for the trip.

B. Instruction on Priesthood (3-4)

Chapters 3 and 4 provide more details on how the priests are to function on this trip.

And God also gives precise instruction on how the camp is to be torn down and set up as they travel.

C. Instruction on Holy Living (5-6)

Chapters 5 & 6 are much of the same instruction to the people.

Detailing laws of how to deal with sin and uncleanness.

D. Instruction on Worship (7-8)

Instruction on proper worship of God follows in chapters 7-8

God would speak to Moses from the tabernacle.

He would also lead Israel from the tabernacle...

And that is what we see in chapters 9 and the beginning of chapter 10.

E. Instruction on Leaving Sinai (9-10:10)

God simply gives the nation a few instructions on how he will lead the nation.

Sometimes, the nation would have to camp for days.

Sometimes, they would need to keep moving, so God simply provided direction on what would happen.

Then when we get to Numbers 10:11....

We arrive at the second section of the book where we see....

II. First Generation Leaving Sinai (10:11 - 19:22)

A. Leaving In Groups (10:11 – 10:36)

So, they head out in an ordered fashion according to the Lord's instruction, but it doesn't take long until they begin to complain.

In chapters 11-14, we see Israel....

B. Living in Disobedience (11-14)

In the time that it takes for a 6 year old in the backseat of the car to say...

“Are we there yet,” the nation also begins to complain..

And guess how the Lord responded to complaining?

Look at 11:1...

Some of the complainers died immediately when the Lord sent fire from heaven.

Look, I know we sometimes laugh and joke about our complaining, but God takes it very serious.

So serious that he immediately judged some of the people because of it.

And to show you that complaining is contagious, even the leadership of Israel began to complain.

In chapter 12, we see Moses own brother and sister complain about his leadership.

God immediately that act of rebellion by striking Miriam with leprosy.

Despite such rebellion, the Lord sends spies out to look upon the Promised Land.

Yet, in a culture of complaining, the spies return and do what?

They complain about the people who are in the land.

They see them as too big, too strong and too courageous.

So, the nation weeps over the fact that they will never enter the Promised Land.

I remind you that these are the same group of people who walked out of Egypt because God sent supernatural plagues upon the people there.

This is the same group of people who walked through a sea on dry land with walls of water on both sides.

Yet, now some spies return from a land with a bad report and the people think they are doomed.

We sit and ask how is that possible.

But we are reminded how quickly our faith turns to doubt.

How we see the Lord provide for us, yet still question if He will do it again.

We see the Lord heal, yet we wonder if HE will do it again.

We see the Lord protect us, yet we doubt that He has the power to do it again.

We look upon this people and wonder how they could doubt, but we remember that we have little faith as well.

Unfortunately, doubt is as contagious as complaining.

However, it comes with consequences and in Numbers 14:22, the Lord forbids the current generation from entering the Promised Land.

That meant that the nation would spend the next 40 years wandering the wilderness until that first generation died out.

There are always consequences for sin even for God's people.

Even though you may be a Christian and never feel the eternal effects of your sin...

There still may be earthly consequences for them.

And we see this here as the first generation is never given the privilege of entering the land.

That was certainly a consequence of sin and we see more consequences in chapters 15-19.

C. Living with Consequences (15-19)

In chapters 16-18, we see more rebellion against the Lord as a group of Israelites joined together to question Moses' leadership.

The Lord judged that rebellion as well.

Chapter 19 is the account of the red heifer.

While they wandered in the wilderness in judgment, they had an obvious problem...

They were overrun with dead bodies.

Over a million people died in the wilderness, and with laws that were intended to prevent disease, the nation would be unclean in the presence of all the decay.

So, chapter 19 details how one could be purified from all the uncleanness in the wilderness wandering.

That brings us to the third section of the book of Numbers that begins with chapter 20...

III. First and Second Generation on Road (20-25)

A. Death of Leaders (20)

Between the last verse of chapter 19 and the first verse of chapter 20, 38 years have passed as Israel wanders in the wilderness.

The first generation has passed away and we even see the deaths of Aaron and Miriam in this chapter.

B. Death in Israel (21)

There is also death in the people as well beginning in chapter 21.

As a judgment for their impatience, God sent deadly serpents among the people.

When they repented and cried out to Moses, God told him to make a bronze serpent and place it on a pole.

If people were bitten, they simply needed to look at the serpent on the pole to be healed.

And what do we see here?

Another picture of Jesus.

In fact in the verse that leads up to John 3:16, John writes that Jesus will be lifted up on a pole just like the serpent was in this scene in the book of Numbers.

C. Drama with Balaam (22-24)

Then in chapters 22-24, we read of the account of Balaam.

Balaam was a prophet hired to curse Israel, yet God did not allow him to do that.

In one of the most interesting passages in the whole Bible, God causes a donkey to speak and prevents Balaam from going to curse Israel.

Instead, the Lord speaks through the prophet and actually uses him to bless Israel.

D. Disaster with Baal (25)

In the chapter that closes out this section of Numbers, we see Israel dancing with the devil literally.

They engage in worshipping Baal, a false god of Moab.

He will be a constant source of temptation for Israel.

This will not be the last time that we see Baal worship.

As we close out this section, I think we are amazed at the disobedience of the people.

They are grumblers.

They are complainers.

They are impatient.

They are discontent.

And on top of that, they seek after false gods.

And we look at all that with astonishment.

How could they do this in the face of all God has done for them?

And I think we see the depths of evil in the human heart.

We see just how wicked we are in the face of the goodness of God.

However, what is more amazing that their disobedience is God's continual goodness.

Yes, he judges their sin, but he never leaves His people.

He goes along with them, even when they do nothing to deserve it.

Amazing God. Amazing mercy. Amazing faithfulness. Amazing love.

And now we find ourselves at the end of this long road trip in the final section of Numbers beginning in chapter 26...

IV. Second Generation at Promised Land (26-36)

A. Preparation for Entrance (26 – 32)

And how do understand the Lord's grace in all of this disobedience?

Well, it is seen in the fact that this book ends how it started...

God is preparing Israel to enter the Promised Land.

In this final section....

He prepares them in chapters 26-32...

B. Recollection of the Trip (33)

He reminds them of what he has already done in chapter 33...

C. Organization of the Land (34-36)

And then he gives them more instruction on how to divide the land in the final three chapters of the book.

And I think a few very important truths to remember in this final section...

First, I think it is helpful at times to look back over what the Lord has done for us.

It is good to keep a record of the trip of our lives in some ways.

Not that you have to write it all down, but it is good to have a mental record of where you have been as a Christian.

At times, we get so caught up in the minor details of life.

We worry about things that are so unimportant.

And in those times, I think it is helpful to remind ourselves like God reminded Israel that a look back at what he did is good for us.

Second, I think you need to see that what God says HE will do, he does.

HE was going to lead Israel to the Promised Land when the book started and though it took 40 years to do it, he is going to accomplish it.

That is the faithfulness of God.

That is the dependability of God.

If he says it, he brings it to pass.

That is a source of comfort in the lives of His people.

I used to have a friend when I was in high school,
and though I liked him....

He was the most unpredictable person on the planet.

Some days, he treated you like a best friend.

Some days, he treated you like a stranger.

IT was this inconsistency that eventually lead to us
growing apart.

God is not like that at all.

HE is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

He is faithful and true even when we aren't.

Conclusion

That really closes out the book of Numbers.

And a valuable lesson to take with us from this book is this.

Israel learned of God's holiness in Leviticus, and they experienced His holiness in Numbers.

God judged their sin of complaining, impatience and idol worship.

He judged them completely and immediately.

And I think the church today has forgotten the holiness of God.

We live in a day when many in the church try to see how unholy they can live and still be ok.

That is an unhealthy lifestyle.

Though those in the church are forgiven, there are still consequences for sin.

And I think we would be foolish to think that God no longer judges His people when they disobey.

Though there is no way of knowing, I think we need to remember that sometimes Christians die because of sinful choices.

While that is not always the case, I think the OT is a real reminder that God takes His holiness seriously...

But he also takes the holiness of His people seriously as well.

That is not meant to be a threat, but it should certainly serve as a warning to anyone who thinks that their sin is not a big deal.

Though we are forever grateful that Jesus dealt with the eternal judgment for our sin....

We must live our lives aware of the fact that temporary judgment for sin still exists...

And it is something that the Lord still uses in this world.