

Reading Numbers

The book starts with God giving some final laws before the people leave Mt Sinai and start travelling to the Promised Land. As you will see, the journey is not straightforward. The book ends about 38 years later, making preparation to enter Canaan. As the name suggests, there are lots of numbers in Numbers! There are two censuses, one of the (unfaithful) generation and one of the next generation. Spend a little time comparing these two but do not get bogged down trying to find meaning in every small detail.

Numbers contains some famous stories (e.g. the bronze serpent). As the New Testament says, we are meant to learn from these stories (1 Cor. 10:6), for we are also a people travelling to our Promised Land of the New Creation. Mixed in with the stories are lots of laws. They might seem a bit random but look more closely: these are laws meant to teach us. For example, why are the priests so important? Or consider the strange laws about testing for an unfaithful wife (chapter 5): they make a lot more sense when we remember that Israel is the bride/wife of the LORD. These laws are not really about governing daily actions, but more about symbolic teaching for the life of the ancient church. Read them with this perspective and you will find a wealth of truth for us today.

Resources for going deeper (optional but helpful)

Find these at www.stgeorgesshrewsbury.church/rbt

Bible Project Videos

As always, helpful resources from bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-numbers/

My Daily Reflections on Numbers

The lectionary skips a lot of Numbers (especially the lists) but these reflections will help you with the narratives and the Balaam story.

Book by Book Videos

Lots of short videos by Paul Blackham, author of *Book by Book*, taking you through Numbers 1-19.

Alastair Roberts' Audio Commentary

Detailed but highly rewarding analysis of every chapter in Numbers.

RBT: Numbers

10am on Wed 1st May // Zoom option TBC

Where is Jesus?

The LORD who speaks to Moses in the tent of meeting is God the Son, the Angel of the LORD who has been leading Israel from Egypt to the Promised Land in the fiery, cloudy pillar (Jude 5). Israel must live with the LORD Jesus at the centre of their lives, just as he – in the tabernacle – is central to the layout of the camp. As soon as Israel leaves Mt Sinai (where they have been for a year) they start complaining. Israel's grumbling is a rejection of the LORD who is with them (11:20, 14:14). The LORD speaks to Moses in a way that makes Moses act as a Mediator: one who has seen the face of God and intercedes for his people. This is why Korah's rebellion (chapter 16) is so serious: it is a rejection of Moses who was chosen by God to be a Christ-figure. This is why Moses' own lack of faith (20:12) disqualifies him from entering the Promised Land.

Despite Israel's constant sin, the LORD is gracious. The water from the rock, the bronze snake, the defeat of Sihon and Og, the protection from Balaam's attempts to curse Israel – all of these reveal God's grace and something of his salvation. In the hands of the LORD, Balaam even becomes someone who speaks oracles that prophesy the coming Messiah.

Where is church?

Israel is the ancient church, centred on Christ in the tabernacle. They are meant to be worshippers becoming like their God, and an army carrying out his will. But when the spies return from the Promised Land (chapters 13-14) the people refuse to believe in the LORD. They have seen and heard the gospel enacted in the exodus, but they do not respond with faith (Hebrews 4:1-2), so that generation is condemned to die in the wilderness (Psalm 95, 1 Corinthians 10:1-13). The second census (chapter 26) is the new generation who will enter the promised land. Many of the laws that follow are aimed at helping Israel to be faithful so that they receive their inheritance and become a light to the surrounding nations.

RBT

Asking the questions the Bible wants you to ask of itself.

What did you learn about Jesus?

What did you learn about yourself / human nature?

How were you equipped for works of service to build up the church? What did you learn about the maturity of the church and threats to her growth?

Do you have questions about parts of the book? Are there things that need explanation? Jot them down here.

How were you corrected and rebuked and how do you need to change to be a man/woman of God thoroughly equipped for every good work?

What did you learn from the Scriptures that will help you endure and be encouraged?

How can you look like Jesus in the place that you have been sent by Jesus?

What has helped you love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and what has helped you love your neighbour as yourself?