

Numbers 1

The fourth book of Moses called Numbers

¹ Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first *day* of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt,

The book of Numbers gets its name from a census that takes in chapter 1 and again 38 years later in chapter 26. This is the title given to the book when it was translated from Hebrew into Greek in a version known as “The Septuagint.” In some ways this is an unfortunate title because it has caused some to think that this letter is filled with unpronounceable names and is irrelevant to the Christian. The original Hebrew title was “In The Wilderness” and gives us a better grasp of the content of the book. Numbers covers the bulk of the time Israel spent in the wilderness and is filled with fascinating stories that illustrate the struggles of the Christian life.

¹ Now the LORD spoke to Moses **in the Wilderness**

The Time Span

The bulk of the book of Exodus covers a period of about 1 year from Israel’s deliverance to the completion of the building of the Tabernacle. When Exodus is completed, Israel has been in the wilderness for about one year. It is important to keep in mind that this first year has not been spent wandering. Every step of the way had been clearly calculated and directed by God; He boxed them in at the Red Sea and delivered them supernaturally, He brought them to areas where there was no water, or where the water was bitter; but it was all calculated, it was all clearly laid out by God. In Exodus, Israel was not wandering they were following.

The book of Leviticus covers a period of about one month. There is very little narrative in the book; instead it is filled with instruction about worship and is filled with application for believers today.

The book of Numbers will cover a period of about 38 years. Most of Israel’s time in the wilderness is recorded here. It is important to keep in mind that most of this time was unnecessary. When we reach the 13th chapter we find that the nation refused to trust God and enter the Promised Land. As a result they will wander about in the desert for 38 years until the unbelieving generation has passed. God will give the next generation the opportunity to do what their fathers failed to do.

Perhaps the saddest part of the story is the fact that once the cloud began to

move from Mount Sinai the journey should have taken less than 2 weeks. Instead they traveled in the wilderness for 38 years.

Deuteronomy 1:2-3

It is eleven days' journey from Horeb by way of Mount Seir to Kadesh Barnea. Now it came to pass in the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first day of the month, that Moses spoke to the children of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him as commandments to them

Deuteronomy 2:14

And the time we took to come from Kadesh Barnea until we crossed over the Valley of the Zered was thirty-eight years, until all the generation of the men of war was consumed from the midst of the camp, just as the Lord had sworn to them.

Not a lot is known about the years spent in the wilderness, but one verse gives us a sobering commentary.

Deuteronomy 2:3

You have skirted this mountain long enough; turn northward.

The time that God intended for them to be spent in the Land, enjoying victory and its rewards they spent wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. Ten years had gone by, and then twenty, thirty and they were still in the same place doing the same thing. This is tragic picture of the Christian experience of many. Instead of investing in the things of the Lord we live our entire Christian life aimlessly walking in circles. Some have been saved for ten years but they are not ten-year-old Christians as much as they are one year olds ten times over.

Outline:

- Chapters 1- 10 – preparing for battle
- Chapter 11-14 – Israel's failure
- Chapters 15-25 – Wandering around in the wilderness
- Chapters 26-36 – The second generation

We have a lot of years to cover so let's get started

The first 10 chapters deal with preparing to leave Sinai for the land of Promise.

Verse 1:

¹ Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, **in the tabernacle of meeting,**

The scene opens with Moses in The Tabernacle of meeting. The word *meeting* is an interesting word, it is used of the *feasts* in Leviticus 23 and literally means “appointed.” The tabernacle of meeting was the tabernacle of appointment. It was the place appointed for man to fellowship with the LORD. The only way for sinful man to fellowship with God was through the sacrifices that took place at the Tabernacle, just as today the only way to have fellowship with God is by receiving the sacrifice of Christ by faith.

But this tent had another purpose it was also the place appointed for God’s people to fellowship with one another. God’s people would come to worship the LORD but they would always come together. This is a beautiful picture of Christian fellowship.

Notice that it was at the tabernacle of meeting that the LORD spoke to Moses. Moses went to the place where he would have fellowship with God and His people and there the Lord spoke to him. A lot of times when we feel like we really need to hear from the LORD we are tempted to abandon all and head to the mountains to get away from everything, and there as we get high enough in the altitude, we think we are a little closer to the LORD and we might be able to hear His voice better. Certainly there is value getting alone with Jesus. In fact a steady diet of time alone with the Lord is the most important ingredient in your spiritual growth. However, I think that one of God’s primary ways of speaking to us is as we gather together with God’s people, around the table of God’s Word, and we partake together.

I remember times sitting in the sanctuary at Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa, the room was filled with over 2,000 people yet at certain times I felt as though the room emptied and I was the only one there and that Pastor Chuck was speaking directly to me. As a pastor I have been accused of preparing a sermon specifically for an individual because God was speaking so clearly to them in there circumstances. When that happens my answer is always the same: “I really am not that smart, I think God is speaking to you.” Let me encourage you to gather at the table of God’s Word with His people and allow Him to take out the 2 edged sword and speak to your heart.

Organizing the People

² “Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above—**all who are able to go to war** in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

One of the main topics of the book of numbers is battle. Although only about 5 battles are recorded the word “war” is used over 30 times in the New King James version in the book of Numbers. Before Numbers, the word war is used 6 times in the entire Bible. We think of Joshua as the book of war, but Joshua uses the word only 18 times; thirty times in Numbers, 18 times in Joshua. In fact, the word “war” is used more times in the book of Numbers than any other book in the Bible. God’s people who have been saved, governed, and learned to worship; now, must be prepared for war. To a large degree that is what the book of Numbers is about. Israel is going to the Promised Land to fight the enemy and further the kingdom. To be prepared they must learn war.

An Application

Once we begin a trust Christ for salvation God begins to prepare us for battle so we can play a part in furthering the Kingdom of God. We must learn to do battle against the flesh so we are not constantly giving in to sin. We must learn to do battle for the souls of men by sharing Christ with them. We must learn to do battle along with our brothers and sisters in Christ to help them press on in Christ until we all reach the end and hear Christ proclaim “well done.”

First: Take a census; where is your strength?

² “Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above—**all who are able to go to war** in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

The first step in preparing for battle was to take a census of the people. Two things are worth our attention.

First, God expected all those 20 years old and above to be prepared for battle. That means preparations must take place before this to get them ready. Young people should be preparing themselves for the battles you will be facing in the future. Too many young people leave the safety of their homes, youth groups and churches and fall away from Christ because they do not take adequate time to prepare for coming attacks. In college, your faith will be attacked, are you ready? In business your ethics will be attacked, are you ready? In dating your morality will be attacked, are you ready? Now is the time to prepare for the attacks that will come in the future.

Second, if we compare this census with the one taken in chapter 26 we find that some of the tribes grew, and some of the tribes shrank. I think there is an important application we can glean which pertains to our lives. Just as they were in the wilderness, we often find ourselves in a spiritually dry time. We may even feel like we're just wandering around aimlessly. I think it is valuable to remember, based upon what we do in the wilderness; we can either come out having shrunk or having grown. I believe God brings us to those places in our relationship with Him, those difficult times, because He wants to grow us in our relationship with Him. He wants us to learn to trust Him and follow Him.

In the Gospels, we read of the disciples getting into a boat with Jesus. Jesus falls asleep in the front of the boat. As they begin to cross the Sea of Galilee, a storm hits, and the disciples freak out. They were so panicked, they woke Jesus and said, "Master, don't you care that we are perishing." That translates into, "Jesus, You don't love us or care about us. If You really loved me, You wouldn't allow this difficulty in my life, while You were sleeping." We know, in response, Jesus got up and calmed the sea (Mark 4:35-41). They faced a difficulty (you might say they were in a wilderness), and they failed. But was it a total failure?

The next time we see them on the Sea of Galilee in a storm, these same guys, row from evening time 'till 4:00 am without stopping. Jesus sent them out onto the sea and said, "Go to the other side." He went up on the mountain to pray and as He prays, He watches them (Mark 6:45-50). He seems to enjoy watching them row. They row and row, hour after hour... as the night grows dark and morning begins to approach, they are still rowing. They haven't stopped. What happened? Well, in the first storm, they had a wilderness experience, but during that time of difficulty, they learned something. Even though they'd failed, they learned. When we are on the Sea of Galilee and a storm hits, we don't need to be afraid; even if it looks as though God is sleeping and not involved.

As a result of that experience, you could throw those guys out on that sea, in any storm, and they knew, "Jesus has it covered. Even if He's sleeping, He's got it covered." They were in a wilderness, but they grew. Every one of us will face a wilderness. We go through times of dryness in our relationship with the Lord, times of difficulty, times when it seems like Jesus is asleep, not hearing us. We can grow or we can shrink. Depending on how we trust and follow the Lord.

⁴ And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father's house.

¹⁷ Then Moses and Aaron took these men who were mentioned by name,

¹⁸ And they assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month; and they recited their ancestry by families, by their fathers houses...

God chooses 12 men and brings the people together to find out their lineage. Each person was asked, "What tribe are you from?" And they were divided by tribes.

The total count

⁴⁴ These are the ones who were numbered, whom Moses and Aaron numbered, with the leaders of Israel, twelve men, each one representing his father's house.

⁴⁵ So all who were numbered of the children of Israel, by their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and above, all who *were able to* go to war in Israel— ⁴⁶ all who were numbered were **six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty**.

The total number of people who were battle ready came to be 603,550 warriors. At first glance this may seem like a large number, however when we keep in mind that they were entering Canaan where they would do battle with the giant men and walled cities we might do better to consider the purpose behind this census was not to give Israel trust in numbers but to cause them to see their need for the Lord.

It seems we have a constant struggle between trusting in the Lord and leaning upon our own resources. When we get to chapter 13 we find Israel looking at the obstacle they are facing and comparing it to the number of soldiers at their disposal instead of looking to the Lord and relying upon His strength and provision. 603,550 soldiers are no match for a land with vast borders, people living in fortified cities, and an army filled with valiant warriors. But Israel was never supposed to trust in their size, armies or abilities; they were supposed to trust in the power of God. The same is true for the New testament believer.

"Be strong in the Lord in the power of His might" (Eph 6:10)

Therefore one of the first steps in preparing to be battle ready is to understand that our strength is in the LORD. This is one of those foundational truths of ministry. Our strength is never in the arm of the flesh, but always in the strength of the Lord. In fact Paul told the Corinthians that God is looking for the foolish, the weak, and the base in order to do the work of God in a way where He alone receives the glory.

If you desire to be used by God to further His kingdom do not let your weaknesses get in the way. God is strong enough to compensate for all that you are not. In the same way, do not trust in your own strengths. No matter how strong you are it is

a spiritual battle that we are in and we need supernatural gifts not natural strengths.

SECOND: What about Levi?

A careful read of this chapter will reveal that when Moses counted the people for battle the tribe of Levi was overlooked.

⁴⁷ **But the Levites were not numbered among them** by their fathers' tribe; ⁴⁸ for the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: ⁴⁹ "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; ⁵⁰ but you shall appoint the Levites **over the tabernacle** of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; **they shall carry the tabernacle** and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle. ⁵¹ And when the tabernacle is to go forward, **the Levites shall take it down**; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, **the Levites shall set it up**. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. ⁵² The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; ⁵³ but **the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle** of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and **the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle** of the Testimony."

⁵⁴ Thus the children of Israel did; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they did.

Levi was left out of the count for the armies of Israel because Levi was chosen to be involved in the tabernacle ministry. Their job was to assist the priests in ministry.

Look at Numbers 3:11

¹¹ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ¹² "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel **instead of every firstborn** who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, ¹³ because all the firstborn *are* Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I *am* the LORD."

When God delivered His people out of Egypt He used the Lamb as the substitute for the firstborn, and it seem that His intent was for the firstborn of each family to serve alongside the priests in ministry. It would be their job to set up and break down the tabernacle camp around the tabernacle. But now Moses says, "We're not going to use

the firstborn from every family, instead, we're going to use the Levites in place of the firstborn."

The text does not explain the reason for the change. Years ago I heard Jon Courson make an interesting observation from Exodus 32.

Exodus 32:25-27

²⁵ Now when Moses saw that the people *were unrestrained* (for Aaron had not restrained them, to *their* shame among their enemies), ²⁶ then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever *is* on the LORD's side—*come* to me!" **And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.** ²⁷ And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'"

While Moses was on the mountain with God, Israel was in the camp below sinning with the golden calf. When he arrived in the camp, Moses stood in the gap for the people who were about to face the judgment of God and Levi joined with Him. They took out their swords and went to battle for the sake of the nation. So it is possible that the reason God chose the Levites was because of their bravery and their skilled use of the sword to save lives. I think that is a really good illustration of the man God desires to use today. God is looking for those who will become skilled in the use of the "Sword of the Spirit" in seeking to save the lives of those under judgment for their sin.

We might get the impression that the Levites got it easy. All the other tribes have to go to war, and the Levites receive a pass. But before we jump to conclusions look at Numbers 4:23

²³ From thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, you shall number them, all who enter to perform the **service**, to do the **work** in the tabernacle of meeting.

The word used to describe the call of God on the Levites is the word "service" and is used of the Levite's work around the tabernacle nearly 500 times in the Old Testament. The word is often translated "host", "army", "battle", or even "war." Levi was not spared from battle, they were called to fight on a different plane. While the other tribes went to the battlefield, Levi was to daily fight for the nation at the Tabernacle. It seems that God picked the bravest and the most intense tribe in all of

Israel to go into ministry. Levi was not overlooked because they were not tough enough for warfare, but because their commitment to Him demonstrated they were tough enough for ministry.

An Application

If you are seeking to be used by the God let me encourage you to become skilled in the use of the “sword of the Spirit.” Get to know the Word. There is no area of ministry where rightly handling the Word of Truth is unnecessary. When writing to Titus, Paul spoke concerning the “Bishops” or pastors:

Titus 1:9

“**holding fast the faithful word** as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict”

But he also wrote concerning “deacons” or those who come along to assist in the work of the ministry, the usher, greeter, janitor, and backup singer in the worship team:

1 Tim 3:9

holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.

The Hebrew Christians were rebuked for their lack of the use of the sword.

Heb 5:12-14

2 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Whatever area of service you think the Lord may be calling you, your focus needs to be on getting to know the Word.

Numbers 2

PREPARING THEM FOR WAR

GET UNDER A BANNER - Fellowship first

Chapter 2. Verse 1:

¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: ² “Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside **the emblems** of his father’s house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting. ³ On the **east** side, toward the rising of the sun, those of **the standard of** the forces with **Judah** shall camp according to their armies;

He goes on to list those who camped with Judah. Then in 2:10

¹⁰ “On the **south** side *shall be* the standard of the forces with **Reuben** according to their armies, and the leader of the children of Reuben *shall be* Elizur the son of Shedeur.”

He goes on to list those who camped with Reuben. Then in verse 18:

¹⁸ “On the west side *shall be* the standard of the forces with **Ephraim** according to their armies,

He goes on to list those who camped with Ephraim. Then in verse 25:

²⁵ “The standard of the forces with **Dan** *shall be* on the north side according to their armies,

³⁴ “Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded

Moses so they camped by the their standards and so they broke camp each on by his family, according to their father's house"

Camping:

After speaking to the armies and those called to ministry, the purpose of this next section is to address the congregation as a whole and explain to them about where and how they should camp. This passage reveals much about what the focus of the home life of Israel was supposed to be like. In the center of camp was the tabernacle and around the camp were 4 banners and under the banners were the 12 tribes. We learn a couple of things.

Number 1, the central focus in the camp is the tabernacle. Keep in mind that the central purpose of the Tabernacle was a place to enjoy fellowship with God. When they camped, the central focus was to be the LORD. They were to fellowship with Him and His people.

Application:

The interpretation is very simple; each tribe camped around the Tabernacle under a particular banner. The application is also very clear. We need to keep the Lord at the center of our lives. When that is out of balance our whole lives will be affected. When we start to notice things unraveling around us it is a good idea to go back to the foundation of life and be sure that things are in the proper order in our relationship with Christ. Jesus spoke to the people of His day and warned them that they were guilty of rejecting the chief cornerstone. In other words they were building their lives on an unstable foundation. Life must be built on the bedrock of Christ and obedience to His word. For Israel to do this they had to get under the proper banner. No one was to camp alone. They were part of the community of believers and if Jesus is to be the center of our lives we must do the same. We must choose to set up our lives under the banner of a local church. Over the years I have met many Christians who for a variety of reasons have neglected to camp within a local, Bible teaching church. For some they have had

their feelings hurt at church, for others they have chosen music style, a children's program or a more aesthetically pleasing environment over Bible teaching. It is even common today for people to stay at home, fire up the computer and be part of an Internet fellowship. While I am pleased with all the great teaching available to the child of God in so many different mediums, none will replace the need for fellowship with the saints.

Fellowship is an important part of every believers walk with God. God created us with a need for fellowship. The evidence for this is overwhelming. A casual observance of human behavior reveals that we are social beings and need to be part of a community. The Bible also warns us against fulfilling this need in an unhealthy way. Solomon wrote:

Proverbs 12:26

The Righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Marching:

God was interested in how they camped and how they marched. Judah's camp would head out first followed by Reuben, then the Tabernacle, then Ephraim and finally Dan. Notice the tabernacle was at the center when they camped and as they marched. It is clear that God wants to be at the center, the focal point of all that we do in life. Recently we had a family at our church find a nice new house to move into. They were so excited. The problem was it was pretty far from a good Bible teaching church. It was sad to watch as their attendance became less and less regular and finally they stop coming altogether settling for reading the Bible together on Sunday mornings and neglecting the gathering together of the saints.

We need to keep our relationship with Christ at the center of our lives. Remember, God is preparing a people for battle. He's preparing us to go out and further His kingdom. If we want to be battle ready it is important that we are part of a local

Bible teaching church. Let me add one more thought. People often leave fellowship because their feelings were hurt. I want to suggest that this is part of God's design. The church is made up of fallen people who do not always act in a godly manner. There are times when we are mistreated and we are supposed to learn how to love those who are unkind to us. Instead of running and hiding because your feelings were hurt, how about learning how to crucify your flesh with its desires and allow God to work His purposes in your life?

PREPARING FOR WAR

Chapter 3

¹ Now these *are* the records of Aaron and Moses when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. ² And these *are* the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.

⁴ Nadab and Abihu had died before the LORD when they offered profane fire before the LORD in the Wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests in the presence of Aaron their father.

⁵ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ⁶ **“Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him.”** ⁷ And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. ⁸ Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. ⁹ And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they *are* given entirely to him^[a] from among the children of Israel. ¹⁰ So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”

From this point on if I were preparing a people for battle, once I had numbered the people and got them in the camps, I would have set up training centers with walls to climb over, tires to run through, sword drills, spear contests, and bow and arrow, training. Perhaps we would even get some of those big puffy suits that make you look like a “sumo wrestler” to work on balance. But God’s ways are not our ways. In order to prepare the nation for battle, He focuses on the ministry of the Levites. This chapter and the next will focus upon appointing the Levites to assist the priests in the work of

Tabernacle ministry. Again, we find a great parallel between what God does here and what we find regarding the ministry of the church. God's primary means of reaching the world is through the church. There are a few interesting illustrations regarding church ministry found in this text.

The word "serve" is often translated as "war." It is quite common for people get excited when they initially get involved in ministry. This changes pretty rapidly when we are faced with the reality of how much work ministry can often become. We are tempted to ask, " isn't there something easier that I can do?" The simple answer is, No, there isn't. Ministry is a battle, when you step into a place of serving the LORD; you step into a place where will experience battle because the enemy doesn't want you to serve the LORD.

A buddy of mine in Southern California was going to a Missions Conference to teach on Spiritual Warfare. He called me during the week to pray for him, his is week was crazy, one thing after another happened in the church and with his family. It was horrible. But when he arrived at the conference he was ready to speak on spiritual warfare because he had been in the middle of it for a week. When serving Christ, we are stepping into a battlefield. I do not say this to discourage you, but to give you resolve. Paul exhorts us to be "steadfast and immovable always abounding in the work of the Lord..."

I notice something else kind of interesting, Moses discovered there were 22,000 Levites. That's a lot of Levites. You might think they probably didn't have to work very hard, there were 22,000 of them. Until you estimate that there were as many as 3 million Israelite. That turns out to be about 150 people that each Levite is responsible for. Those of you that serve in the children's ministry know how difficult that would be. You may have 15 kids in your class but when class is over you walk out with your hair tangled and your battle sores and you're thinking, "Praise the LORD, I'm not in there for another month." Imagine if there were 150 children.

Let's look at 14 - 17

¹⁴ Then the Lord spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying:

¹⁵ Number the children of Levi by their fathers houses, by their families; you shall number ever male from a month old and above

¹⁶ So Moses numbered them according to the word of the Lord, as he was commanded.

¹⁷ These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

Once chosen and numbered the Levites were divided into three divisions. Each division was given a specific role in ministry. The purpose was to assist the Priests and serve the people. Gershon's role would be to carry the exterior coverings of the tabernacle. Kohath's, role was to carry the utensils, the ark and the table of showbread and the lamp stand etc. And Merari's responsibility was to carry all the heavy stuff; the silver blocks the gold plated walls...

If you couldn't be a priest for sure coolest role would be to carry the utensils. However, as time goes on we find that Kohath complains about their role in the ministry. They were unhappy with the role they were called to play and began to covet the ministry of the priests.

Sadly this happens often in the church. A person called by God to a particular area of ministry becomes envious of someone else's position. This attitude leads to neglect and division. There could be no tabernacle ministry without the carrying of the blocks or the care of the articles of worship. If you are discouraged in your service allow me encourage you not to look for a new ministry but to look at how you might be more faithful in what you are doing. If you are a greeter, exercise the gift of hospitality and love each person that comes in the door of the church. Did you know that the word "hospitality" means "to love strangers?" Make them feel welcomed and comfortable that when the Bible is taught they might receive what God has for them. If you serve as a children's church leader, be a diligent student of the Word and come prepared to teach the kids in a way that would turn them on to the Lord and His Word. There is no better training ground for the pulpit than the children's classes.

Jesus taught us a very important principle of ministry; He said that those who were faithful in little will be faithful in much. This is one of the most important principles to learn if you are seeking to be used by God. Our church grew very slowly. When I arrived there were approximately 15 people, almost five years later there were 30 of us.

It wasn't because we were doing the wrong things but because God had to do a work in me before He could work through me. I had to learn to love, care for and minister to 15 sheep before the Lord would give me the care of more. That is the same for all of us. We need to learn to be faithful in the little things and remember that promotion comes from the Lord.

Numbers 4

CHAPTER 4 - Being Holy

Chapter four repeats much of what we saw in chapter Three. There are just a few key thoughts I want to draw your attention to before we move on. You'll notice that the Levites are being counted again. But this time there is a difference. In chapter three every Levite from 1 month old and above was counted. Now in chapter four only those 20 - 50 years old are counted.

Num 4:4-6

4 "This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things: 5 When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. 6 Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles.

In 4:4 - 20 the ministry of the sons of Kohath is described as "*relating to the most holy things.*" After priests covered the furnishing the sons of Kohath carried them. They started by using the veil of the temple to cover the Ark of the covenant. Exodus 25:10-15 tells us that the ark was a wooden box covered in gold upon which sat the "Mercy Seat." In the ark they kept the 10 commandments, a jar of "Manna" and later they included Aaron's rod. After covering the Ark with the veil they would then cover it with "badger skin" or "porpoise skin" which was a gray in color and probably the same material used for the people's tents because it was durable and waterproof. As you read

through the rest of the chapter you will notice that all the furnishings had a final covering of the “badger skin” except the Ark. According to 4:6 its final covering was blue in color and would make the Ark stand out from all of the other furnishings. When they traveled you would always know where the Ark was. It was a blue sheet standing out in a sea of gray. I will leave you to your own applications from this but I do find it very interesting that the attention would be drawn to that which symbolized the presence of God and His mercy.

Num 4:15-16

15 And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die.

These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.

NKJV

After covering the Ark the priests would continue through the Holy Place covering the Table of showbread, the Lampstand, the Incense Altar then out the door to cover the Wash Basin and finally the Altar. Now take a look at the warning that is given in 4:15. “...*they shall not touch any holy thing lest they die.*” God wants the people to understand that his holiness is not to be treated lightly. Actually this is one of the main points of chapter 4. God is Holy and must be regarded as holy by all who come to Him. This is perhaps one of the most neglected aspects of God’s character. After we fail we are quick to remind ourselves of God’s mercy. And we should. But if we took the time before we sin to remember that God is holy we would avoid much of the things that lead us into sin. Proverbs 8:13 reminds us that “*the fear of the Lord is to hate evil...*” in other words if I truly am afraid of God I will in fact flee from sin. The problem is that I am often not really afraid of God. Remember, our covenant has changed. We do not relate to God the same way the children of Israel did. But that does not mean God has

changed. In fact He is the same yesterday, today and forever. It would benefit all of us if we were to reflect a little more on the holiness of God. Hebrews 12:29 tells us that, "*our God is a consuming fire.*" The closer we get to Him the more His holiness will consume. Our sin will be like the guards who threw Shadrac and company into the burning fiery furnace and were consumed. As we spend time drawing near to a Holy God not only will we fear Him more but the very desires for sin will be consumed in His holiness. Part of being battle ready is to never forget the holiness of God.

. Num 4:17-20

17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: 18 "Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites; 19 but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and **appoint** each of them to his service and his task. 20 But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die."

NKJV

Along with reminding the Levites that their task is holy because their God is holy they are also reminded that God has appointed them. The word "appoint" in 4:19 means to place, the Lord had placed them into that particular area of ministry. It is the same word that is used of placing the coverings on the furnishings of the Tabernacle. As a blue cloth was chosen and placed upon the Ark, a scarlet cloth on the Table of Showbread and a purple cloth for the Altar so each of the Levites were chosen by God and placed into the ministry. The same is true of us in the church today. A careful look at 1Corinthians 12 will reveal that regarding the gifts and ministries in the church, there are a variety of gifts and a variety of ministries. But that God is sovereign in choosing who gets what gifts.

If Tabernacle ministry was to function properly each of the Levites had to do their part. In the same way if the church is going to function as a light to a dying world

each member must do his or her part. Paul exhorted the Romans:

Rom 12:6-8

Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; 7 or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; 8 he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.

Whatever God has appointed you to, get involved in doing it. If he has called you to teach don't wait for the pastor to resign and the board to ask you to take over. Start teaching. It has been my experience that there is always availability in the children's ministry for a person who wants to love the children and teach them the simple truths of the Word. In fact my training for the ministry was not in seminary but in junior high ministry. A friend encouraged me that if I could learn to teach the Bible in a way that junior high kids understood it I could teach anyone.

Also notice that no role in the Tabernacle ministry was less important than any other. No clan was more loved than another. But God had given different roles to different people for the purpose of both completing a work through and completing a work through them. Later in Numbers when Korah, Dathan, Abiram and On complained about their role in the ministry Moses responded:

Num 16:9-10

9 Is it a small thing to you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, **to bring you near to Himself**, to do the work of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to serve them; 10 and that He has brought you near to Himself, you and all your brethren, the sons of Levi, with you?

That is really God's purpose in using us in the ministry. It is to draw us near to Himself and to do a work through us. I want to encourage you to be faithful to what God has called you to. Serve Him and look for what He is desiring to do in your life as you serve.

Numbers 5

Preparing for Battle

When you think of the book of Numbers, you probably don't think "war." The narrative records around five battles the word "War" is used more times in the Numbers than any other book in the Bible. This is because Numbers is about organizing the people to get them ready for battle. They are going to the Promised Land where they will be involved in battle to further the kingdom.

This serves as a good way to illustrate the role of the believer and the church. God has called us to be involved in the furtherance of the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus told us to pray 'Our Father which art in Heaven.... **Your Kingdom come** .' In other words, we are asking God to bring people that don't know the Christ to salvation to help Christians grow in Christ and become more like Him.

¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: ² "Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. ³ You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell." ⁴ And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the LORD spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did.

Purity is an important part of ministry. If we are going to be effective in serving the Lord we must remove the things that defile us. Here we see that concept vividly illustrated. *That which is defiled must be kept away from that which is sanctified.* Another way of saying the same things is that *what is holy must be not come into contact with that which is unclean.* Much of Chapter 5 is about purity or remaining holy.

Moses instructs Israel to remove from the camp those who have leprosy (a

communicable skin disorder), a discharge (perhaps a reference to a sexually transmitted disease), and those who have been defiled by a corpse. He says in verse 3, “you shall put them out, *that they may not defile their camps.*” Those with leprosy need to be removed because if their disease could be caught by others. That is always the case with things that defile, they end up contaminating the person that has them as well as those around them. The solution is always to remove that which defiles.

The New Testament teaches the same thing. In Hebrews chapter 12 the believer is told to “*lay aside every weight and sin that so easily ensnares us.*” The writer makes a distinction between sin and weights. Sin is anything that violates the law of God, weights might be best understood as things that defile or things that lead to sin. If Israel was to remain pure, they had to remove the things that could contaminate them. The same truth applies to us. If we allow things to remain in our lives that leave an open door toward sin, it will not be long before we walk through that door and find ourselves defiled. When Israel was strong they kept the enemy at bay instead of driving them out of Canaan. When Israel was weak those same enemies overtook them.

If we’re going to remain pure, we need, at this very moment, to remove sin, and anything that may defile us later. There is nothing more valuable than your relationship with Jesus, everything else we do in this life is passing . Jesus told us that if we are trying to save our lives by holding on to the things He has told us to remove we are in fact losing our life. But when we will abandon all for Christ, when we will begin to experience the height of abundant life.

⁵ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁶ “Speak to the children of Israel: ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty... ⁷ then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. **He shall make restitution** for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give *it* to the one he has wronged.

God did not expect perfection out of Israel and He set up a system for dealing with sin. The first step to having sin forgiven is confession. The same is true under the New Covenant. When a person trusts Christ for salvation their sins are removed. We saw a picture of that in the book of Leviticus when a goat was selected to be sacrificed and another was chosen to be released into the wild. As the goat ran off into the distance it was a vivid picture of how sin is removed from the life of the believer. But what about the sins we commit after coming to Christ? How are we supposed to deal with those? One thing to keep in mind is that sinning as a believer does not mean you are no longer a child of God, but it does mean that fellowship with God can be broken. The first step to restoring that fellowship is confession

1 John 1:9

If we **confess** our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse

Sin is cleansed through confession. This is possible because Christ already paid the penalty at Calvary. The word "cleanse" means to remove or to take it away. The New Testament word "confess" actually means "to agree with." Here's how it works. When we sin our first reaction is often denial. We will commonly make excuses for our actions, blame someone else or attempt to justify what we done based upon our circumstances or our humanity. We end up sounding a lot like Adam who blamed Eve, or like Eve who in turn blamed the serpent. None of those things are confession. Confession is agreeing with the LORD that what HE calls sin is sin and that we are guilty. This is the first step to the restoring of relationship with God. But it is not the only step, we must move on to step two: repentance. Repentance means to change or to turn around and walk in the opposite direction. True repentance is seen when we walk away from sin, and the things that led us to sin

⁷ then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. **He shall make restitution** for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give *it* to the one he

has wronged.

Sin is committed against both God and others. When David slept with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah His sin was clearly against God, but it also affected others. In fact David's sin devastated many families. Moses instructed Israel that the road to restoration involved making restitution with those we have wronged. This seems to be a missing element today. When a person hurts another believer, we ask God to forgive us and think that is all that is required. Perhaps it is time to go to the person you have wronged, a son, daughter, parent, spouse or co-worker and admit your fault and ask for their forgiveness.

Israel's army would have little effectiveness in battle if those within that encampment are fighting among themselves and the same is true of the church. Jesus explained that the world would know we are His disciples by our love for each other and on the night before His death He took time to pray that we would be one.

On the other hand if someone has committed a sin that's affected you, your responsibility is to forgive him or her. If they don't ask for forgiveness, if they don't take any steps towards showing that they're sorry, your response is still to forgive. If another believer has hurt you and you are waiting for them to admit their fault and ask for your forgiveness, I think it is time to let it go before your hurt begins to become a root of bitterness. Bitterness will never produce any good fruit. It is always destructive. There is a great illustration of this in the life of Moses. Shortly after crossing the Red Sea the children of Israel ran out of water and began to complain to Moses and even threaten his life. Moses went to the Lord and was told to take his rod, strike the Rock and water was provided for the people. When it came time to name the place Moses called it Massah and Meribah meaning "Tempted and Contention." The people had sinned, by complaining and threatening Moses, but why not name the place "Provision" or "Water World" or something like that. Certainly the work that God did was greater than the sin the people committed. 38 years later, Moses found himself in a similar situation. The

nation was once again out of water, this time the Lord told him to simply speak to the Rock and water would be provided. Instead Moses struck the rock and yelled at the people. It may have been that he was so angry because he never truly forgiven the people.

Bitterness will never produce good fruit. If someone has sinned against you, forgive them. In fact treat them as though they had never done it. James tells us “the wrath of man will not produce the righteousness of God.”

¹¹ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹² “Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘If any man’s wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him, ¹³ and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself, and *there was* no witness against her, nor was she caught— ¹⁴ if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself—

¹⁵ then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it *is* a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance.

¹⁶ ‘And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD. ¹⁷ The priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put *it* into the water. ¹⁸ Then the priest shall stand the woman before the LORD, uncover the woman’s head, and put the offering for remembering in her hands, which *is* the grain offering of jealousy. And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse. ¹⁹ And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, “If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness *while* under your

husband's *authority*, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse. ²⁰ But if you have gone astray *while* under your husband's *authority*, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you" — ²¹ then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman—"the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the LORD makes your thigh rot and your belly swell; ²² and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make *your* belly swell and *your* thigh rot."

Then the woman shall say, "Amen, so be it."

²³ 'Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape *them* off into the bitter water. ²⁴ And he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her *to become* bitter. ²⁵ Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, shall wave the offering before the LORD, and bring it to the altar; ²⁶ and the priest shall take a handful of the offering, as its memorial portion, burn *it* on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water. ²⁷ When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her *and become* bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people. ²⁸ But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children. ²⁹ 'This *is* the law of jealousy, when a wife, *while* under her husband's *authority*, goes astray and defiles herself, ³⁰ or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife;

This section addresses the subject of marital problem. Israel is given instruction on what to do if a husband suspects his wife of infidelity. Needless to say, this is a very interesting passage of Scripture. The process was as follows. If a man suspected his wife

he was to bring her to the priest and the priest was to make a concoction for her to drink. This concoction consisted of holy water, dirt and dried ink. If she was guilty her thigh will rot and her belly will swell. If she were innocent, the drink would have no adverse affect upon her health.

The Code of Hammurabi is a law code that dates back to near the time of Abraham. It is believed that this code governed the pagan people in the area known as Mesopotamia. In this code, there is something very similar to what is recorded here/ According to Hammurabi if a woman was suspected of infidelity she was thrown into the river, if she survived, she was innocent, and if she drowned, she was guilty. Other cultures had similar rites in order to determine guilt or innocence. They might throw them in a pit of poisonous snakes or alligators the guilty would die but the innocent would survive. Remember when Paul was bitten by the poisonous snake the pagans believed it was because he was guilty of a crime worthy of death.

At first glance Numbers 5 sounds similar to those pagan rituals. But there is a striking difference; drinking dirty water will never make your thigh rot or your belly swell. It might not taste good but it's not going to kill you. The difference between Numbers 5 and pagan ritual is that in this case the woman is presumed innocent. She was not thrown into a pit of poisonous snakes or a raging river, where 99% of the time the person would be killed. Instead, she was put into a circumstance where it's physically impossible for a cup of dirty water to cause your belly to swell and your thigh to rot.

That being said there is more here to consider. Remember the purpose of Numbers is to prepare Israel for battle. If they were going to be ready to further the kingdom they must make sure things are as they should be in the home. If a woman is out cheating on her husband, there is something wrong in the home. Or if the man is so jealous that he accuses his wife of committing adultery even when she hasn't, then there is something wrong in that home. I think it is important for us to understand that our

relationship with the LORD has to impact the way we behave in our house. You can be under the banner, in the right camp, you can be marching with the tabernacle in the center, you can remove the lepers, and even confess your sin but if things aren't right in the home, then the army's not ready for battle.

God's solution for the marital problems was for Israel to take their marital problem to the LORD. Often we feel like there is no solution for the problems in our marriages. We even think if we bring them up things will only get worse. Notice in the case before us that it was a problem only the LORD could decipher. The husband was accusing the wife without proof and the wife was not denying the accusations. When we face a problem without solution the solution is often to take it to the Lord. Sadly, especially when it comes to marriage the Christian is guilty of looking to the world for answers. The problem is that the world's answers are often in violation to the teaching of Scripture. We hear things like, "*get divorced you were never in love in the first place*", or "*separate for a while you need some 'me time'*." And we think these solutions are viable not realizing they are almost as ludicrous as "*throw her in a pit of snakes and see if she was guilty.*" Christian, the world does not have the answer. If we want to see our marriages resurrected we must go to the Lord and His word and put those truths into practice. Difficulties in marriage are not reasons to give up on marriage but are rather opportunities for the husband and wife to seek the Lord together and see God accomplish the miraculous. Whatever problems you may be facing humble yourself, go to your spouse and begin with your spouse to seek the Lord to heal and restore.

People who are willing to remove sin from their personal lives, live in a loving relationship with one another and take their Christianity home are people who will be used to further the kingdom. Let me encourage you if the Lord is speaking to you do business with Him right now. Get alone with the Lord, confess and repent and allow God to make you into the person He desires to use.