

God's Order in Wilderness Disorders

by H.J. Vine

The Book of Numbers shows how God's order triumphs over human failure and disorder, and how the redeemed can learn valuable lessons from the wilderness experiences of the Israelites.

Scripture: Numbers 14:18, Numbers 21:17, John 3:14, John 6:35, Hebrews 1:2

Topics: "Divine Order", "Faith Growth"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches on the Book of Numbers, highlighting the journey of the redeemed towards heaven and the divine order and grace of God in the midst of murmurings and disorders. The book typifies the triumph of God in Christ Jesus, emphasizing the importance of faith, wisdom, and beauty in divine order. Through wilderness schooling, believers learn deeper lessons, growing in the knowledge of God and experiencing His faithfulness and consistency.

Transcript

A Brief Study of the Book of Numbers

Rich with instruction for the redeemed of the Lord, who are journeying heavenward, is this Book of Numbers, the fourth book of the inspired Word of God. It unveils the resource and grace of God in carrying out His designs with ordered consistency when murmurings, revoltings and disorders amongst His people seemed to ensure the complete overthrow of those designs. The evident failure on man's part, however, only brings into clearer relief the triumph of God in Christ Jesus, which is typified in this Book, so that the keen vision of faith views with pleasure the grace, wisdom and beauty of divine order, gaining thereby present help in the pathway and beholding the predestinated glory of the future. The gains of wilderness schooling are great indeed, as the shining lamp of God's Word shows us His way.

"Light divine surrounds thy going,

God Himself shall mark thy way;

Secret blessings richly flowing,

Lead to everlasting day."

Still deeper lessons are learned in the precious exercises divinely granted to the Calebs and Joshuas of today as Numbers indicates, for the sinful murmurings and misdemeanours of those who are outwardly in

the same path cause them to turn the more wholeheartedly to God Himself, who gives them to appreciate His own faithfulness and unfailing consistency. They grow in the knowledge of Himself and that in an experimental manner.

"In the desert God shall teach thee
What the God that thou hast found,
Patient, gracious, powerful, holy,
All His grace shall there abound."

The full knowledge of God for faith's appropriation is found in the Son of God--"He has declared Him"--and a four-fold view of Himself is given in the four Gospels. A fifth unfolding is shown in Acts, added to "the former treatise." A similar order is discerned in the early books of the Old Testament. The first four make God known in distinct ways, and Deuteronomy--meaning second law--is added with the land's possession in view. Acts shows the possession secured in Christ exalted and glorified at God's right hand. The fourth book, however, of both Testaments shows how life is made ours when the springs are poisoned and death otherwise prevails. For the brazen serpent, the Son of Man, is lifted up (Numbers 21 and John 3); the springing well, the water of life, too, uprises in scenes of need (Numbers 21:17 and John 4); the Lamb is preserved without a bone being broken (Numbers 9 and John 19), the word of God is expressed in the tabernacle (Numbers 1:1 and John 1:14, where "dwelt" should read "tabernacled"); the Bread from heaven is brought right down to men where they are (Numbers 11:9 and John 6); but it is despised (Numbers 21:5 and John 6:41); nevertheless God was known, as both books show, in measure in Numbers 14:18, but fully in John 17:25-26 and elsewhere in the fourth Gospel.

In Leviticus 1:1 we read of God speaking out of the tabernacle, in Numbers 1:1 of His doing so in it, but in these last days He has not only spoken to us by but "in His Son" (Heb. 1:2). The Son of God has spoken "the truth" to us, but He is Himself the truth. He has spoken the word to us truly, but He is Himself the Word who "became flesh and tabernacled among us" today we have the embodiment as well as the expression of the mind of God in Him for He is the Logos--THE WORD.

Special prominence is given to the Levites and their sanctuary service as joined to Aaron, the high priest, who represented God's people in His immediate presence, a precious type of the way Christ bears His own up before God today, without a break, without ceasing. "Levi", meaning joined or united (Gen. 29:34), was divinely marked out for this (Num. 18:2, 4), and the Levites were taken by Jehovah "for all the firstborn of the children of Israel" (8:18) to be represented before Him in sanctuary nearness. In Christ Jesus today the uniting of the saints is still more intimate, for they are "members of His body," He Himself being the glorified Head of that body. Aaron entered the holiest. Jesus is in all the sunshine and favour of the Father's presence, and we are received into favour in Him. However distressful the disorders of the desert might appear, the arrangement and maintenance of order according to God is understood in the sanctuary.

The thought of uniting or joining together is clearly discernible in the first four books of the Bible. The little conjunction "AND" connects the one to the other, for the "NOW" of Exodus 1:1 is the same word "AND" which commences Leviticus, and that again which unites Numbers to it. The Holy Spirit's use of this little word in the early scheme of inspiration thus is big with interest and meaning before faith's vision. The taches of gold and the loops of blue for the coupling together of the "curtains of fine twined linen, and blue,

and purple, and scarlet, with cherubims of cunning work," were necessary to form the divinely designed tabernacle. God's order is delighted in by those who "have the mind of Christ." Apart from correct adjustment in regard to Him, men's minds however much they be educated, are incapable of appreciating the universal order typically set forth in this inspired part of the Bible.

Chapter 14 shows an outbreak of murmuring and revolt against the Lord. They wanted a leader to take them back to Egypt! Many today desire to forsake the path of faith for the ground of nature and the activities of seducing spirits. Joshua and Caleb pleaded with the people, and Moses pleaded with the merciful and long-suffering Lord for pardon, who said, "I have pardoned according to thy word: but as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord" (v. 21). They would fail Him if His designs for world-wide blessing were entrusted into their hands, but verse 10 indicates His unchanging thoughts at the very moment when the people were about to stone the men of faith with stones, for we read:

"THE GLORY OF THE LORD APPEARED IN THE TABERNACLE."

Seen there, then, His promise for the future is given:

"ALL THE EARTH SHALL BE FILLED WITH THE GLORY OF THE LORD."

Great things are opened before the eyes of faith for those who are going through the world as a wilderness, and they rejoice in the truth of God's Word: all the promises of God in Christ are yea, and in Him, Amen. Perplexities vanish, even when surrounded by contradictions, as faith discerns the mind of God in Christ Jesus.

The name of the book indicates the two numberings of the people, the first being given in chapters 1 and 2, the second in chapter 26; but as to the first we read, "they perished in the wilderness," and "there was not left a man of them" save Caleb and Joshua. The second was made up of the "little ones," which they said in their murmurings should be a prey; they were brought into the land of promise by the Lord. This teaches the same lesson--the old fails and perishes, the new is brought into abiding blessing! The "old man is crucified with Christ. If any man be in Christ there is a new creation: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." Priests, princes and people, may all fail, but the subjects of divine love and saving grace in Christ, rejoicing, render as redeemed glory to the Prince of the kings of the earth, and sing, "Unto Him that loves us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." He shall be supreme, but along with Him, it is said, "We shall reign over the earth." God's ordering graciously triumphs.

The song of redemption shall not die out because Miriam fails and dies (Num. 12 and 20), for the redeemed sing a new song (Rev. 5:9). The high priesthood does not disappear because of the gainsaying of Korah (Num. 16) and Aaron's own failure, for within the second veil was laid up the rod of Aaron that budded, pointing eloquently to Christ's high priesthood after the "power of an indissoluble life" (Heb. 7:16, N.Tr.), a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Moses may fail to enter in, but Christ has gone into heaven itself after having secured eternal redemption, eternal salvation, and eternal inheritance for us; and, being Surety and Mediator of the new covenant, He has given it the stamp of His own character, so it is called now the eternal covenant, while the first is made old by His bringing in the new!

Hope is fostered and flourishes by desert dealings. It enters in where Christ has already gone, and rejoices in what will presently come out in public display. The tabernacle of testimony was known in the

midst of Israel in the wilderness, and now God shows the heirs of promise what they are going on to; and if cities of refuge were marked out in Numbers 35, those who have fled for refuge today lay hold of the hope set before us, which hope enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered Forerunner for us (Heb. 6:20).

"And we our great Forerunner see,

In His own glory there,

Yet not ashamed with such as we,

As Firstborn all to share."

Even Balaam, the advanced but unrighteous clairvoyant and prophet of Numbers, was made by the Lord to foretell the future prosperity and blessing of God's people (chap. 22-24) in spite of Balak hiring him for other reasons, yet he gave counsel to corrupt them at Peor and was slain with the sword consequently (31:8-16). Dark powers may energize against those who are blessed in Christ Jesus as we see in Ephesians 6; they may ensnare them, but they cannot bring curse upon them; moreover, like the grapes of Eshcol, the first-fruits of the Spirit give a foretaste of the inheritance before it is reached, and hope rejoices; being sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the earnest of our inheritance to the redemption of the purchased possession, we shall be to the praise of God's glory then (Eph. 1:14), even as present grace has glorified its exceeding riches by taking us into everlasting favour now. What a picture of it the evil but able spiritualist is forced to describe in Numbers 24, "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes, which the Lord has planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters." Yet wilderness disorders were there, but only God's order was to be seen from beside that which typified Christ's death and ascension.

There are many fine examples of the prosperity of hope in desert surroundings. No sooner do we see "life for a look" at what sets forth the Son of Man lifted up, than we view those who journeyed onward pitch their camp "toward the sun-rising" (21:11)! The Sun of righteousness shall soon arise with healing in His beams! The coming of the Lord draweth nigh! How beautifully becoming too is the way the flourishing of hope is illustrated in the very last chapter of desert testings, in the triumph of the faith of Zelophehad's daughters. The promised inheritance is secured before their feet touch its soil and that in spite of peculiar difficulties. The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from among the dead has begotten us unto a living hope, to an incorruptible and fadeless inheritance reserved in heaven for us! Blessed for ever be our God and Father who preserves us on the way!

Precious qualities and distinctions of a personal character are also increased by wilderness experiences. Boldness of faith shows itself in Caleb and Joshua before the defection of the multitude. The knowledge of God's mind and obedience along with patience are increasingly seen in their long journey with impatient and murmuring companions. Temperance and forbearance along with dependence on God also increase. The wisdom of distrusting one's own understanding and relying entirely on the Word of God is learned, while meekness is a quality of rich distinction added. In Moses it shone resplendent when Miriam and Aaron spoke against him: "The man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (12:3). Nevertheless, although this pre-eminence belonged to Moses then, a greater than Moses, the coming King, shall surpass Him in this as well as in every other moral glory, for it is said, "THY KING COMETH MEEK!" and when He first came as the lowly Saviour, the Son, He could say, "I am meek." How fitting it is for those who are His through sovereign grace at the present time to be exhorted

as the elect of God, holy and beloved, to put on not only kindness, lowliness and forbearance, but also meekness. It is a divine distinction seen in the Son, a royal distinction seen in the King. Another divine distinction expressed in Jesus and to be shown by the redeemed who are now priests to God today is graciously expressed in chapter 6:22-27. "Blessing" is to mark them! "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee" is to be their language. The Lord says, "I WILL BLESS THEM!"

This brings out a most wonderful unfolding of God's order in the following verses. No sooner are the blessings from God through Aaron and his sons pronounced, and His Name put upon His people, than the abundant response to God is so rich from the princes of Israel day after day in silver, gold, incense, oxen, bullocks, rams, lambs, kids, and he goats offered to the Lord, that we are shown a crowning scene of holy nearness and intimacy illustrating Christ's place before God now as our ascended Leader: "When Moses was gone into the tabernacle of the congregation to speak with Him then he heard the voice of One speaking unto him from off the mercy seat that was upon the ark of testimony, from between the two cherubims: and he spake unto HIM" (7:89). Although our feet still press the desert sand our faith may nevertheless value God's sanctuary order, for "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24).

The Lord Jesus Himself is personally pointed on to in a special manner in Numbers. We see Moses superseded by Joshua, whose name is the same as Jesus, meaning, Jehovah Saviour. Aaron is superseded by Eleazar, meaning, God has helped, for "We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the majesty in the heavens." The Passover lamb pointed on to "Christ our Passover" sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7), and the serpent of brass spake of the lifted up Son of Man that we might have everlasting life, as we have seen. The manna which fell upon the dew and was as coriander seed and in colour as bdellium, told of the Bread come down from heaven; and being gathered, ground in mills, baken and made into cakes, tasting fresh and sweet, eloquently prefiguring the varied and precious ways Christ, the food of the saints of God, may be appropriated and appreciated. Of old, too, we read, "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). Much might be said of the Shekinah glory, the resting and guiding cloud of the mercy seat and the ark, but it should be noted specially when the ark set forward it was said, "Rise up, Lord" (10:35)! So Psalm 68 begins, "Let God arise!" and verse 18 tells as Ephesians 4:8, of Christ ascending on high, going above all heavens in triumph, giving gifts to effect the perfectness already prefigured.

"Our Lord, our Life, our Rest, our Shield,

Our Rock, our Food, our Light;

Each thought of Thee does constant yield

Unchanging, fresh delight."

The ashes of an heifer, as we see in Numbers 19, might mean much to a godly soul, but the antitype who offered Himself without spot to God, has by His own blood entered the holy place, having secured eternal redemption and our place in the brightest glory. Moreover, being the Mediator of a better covenant than the old, based upon better promises, He has, blessed be His holy Name, through His own death, made an eternal inheritance ours, as we have said; but it is Himself, HIMSELF, HIMSELF to whom our gladdened gaze is turned by the inspired records, "In all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27)! It was that which made the heart burn with holy joy (Luke 24:32)! Numbers 1:1 tells us of God speaking in

the wilderness, "in the tabernacle!" but Hebrews 1:2 tells how in the end of these days He has spoken "to us in Son" (N.Tr.); and again and again the Word is divinely urged, "HEAR HIM!" Wilderness disorders may abound around us, but the more glorious shall we behold God's order in Him as we walk by faith while here below.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/hj-vine/gods-order-in-wilderness-disorders/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net