

# Commentary Notes - Numbers

by Walter Beuttler

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*Walter Beuttler's sermon on Numbers emphasizes the themes of service, worship, and the consequences of unbelief in Israel's journey through the wilderness.*

**Scripture:** Numbers 2:1

**Topics:** "Wilderness Journey", "Christian Service"

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## Description

Walter Beuttler preaches on the book of Numbers, which continues the history of Israel from where Exodus left off, focusing on the wilderness journey and the theme of service. The book emphasizes that the redeemed are saved to serve, with acceptable service being an act of worship. It highlights the importance of order in service and warns against unbelief. The sermon delves into various sections of Numbers, such as Israel's organization for war, the sanctity of the camp, the separation of the Levites, and the significance of the offerings and sacrifices.

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## Transcript

### A. THE HOOK OF NUMBERS

1. Its name is derived from the fact that it records the numbering of Israel at Sinai and in Moab
2. It continues the history of Israel where Exodus had left it
3. Numbers is distinctly the book of the wilderness and is partly historical and partly legislative
4. The name of this book in the Hebrew Bible means "in the wilderness"
5. In Genesis we see man ruined, in Exodus redeemed, in Leviticus worshipping, and in Numbers serving
6. The key word of the book is "service"

### B. THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK

1. The redeemed are saved to serve
2. Acceptable service must be an act of worship
3. Order is indispensable to service

4. The redeemed must beware of unbelief

ISRAEL AT SINAI, 1:1-10:10

A. ISRAEL'S SERVICE, 1:1-8:26

1. To what purpose was the numbering in 1:1-46? To organize the people for war

2. Who were excepted in 1:47-54 and why? The Levites, for they were to keep charge of the tabernacle

3. Point out the implication of the arrangement of the camp in 2:1-34: God was to be the center of Israel's military, civil, and religious life

4. To what purpose was the numbering in 3:1-4:49? To organize the Levites to do the service of the tabernacle

5. What is the subject matter of:

(1) 5:1-31? The sanctity of the camp

(2) 6:1-21? The separation of the Nazarite, outwardly characterized by:

a. Abstention from the fruit of the vine (symbol of mere natural joy, Psa. 104:15), in any form

b. Long hair, sign of willingness to bear reproach for God's sake, I Cor. 11:14; Heb. 11:25; 13:13

6. Observe the beautiful benediction in 6:22-27

7. With respect to the offerings of the princes in 7:1-89, what may be learned from the fact that:

(1) Each prince brought his offering on a separate day? Each offerer is accepted only as an individual and not as a member of a group

(2) Each prince's offering is minutely described? God is cognizant of the minutest detail in the offering of each individual

8. What is described in:

(1) 8:1-4? The lighting of the lamps, for in that light alone the priests were to serve God

(2) 8:5-26? The separation of the Levites, partly wrought upon them, and partly by them, v. 7

9. Note the provision made for the Levites in 8:23-26: At the age of fifty they were placed in a supervisory position without manual labor

10. Note the Hebrew rendering in 8:25: "They shall return from the warfare of the service thereof"

B. SUNDRY MATTERS, 9:1-10:10

1. Give the subject of 9:1-14: Directions for the keeping of the passover which they kept without being aware that it was their last, except for Caleb and Joshua

2. What is foreshadowed in 9:12? The death of Christ in which, contrary to custom, his legs were not broken, John 19:31-36

3. The description in 9:15-23 deals with what? God's leading of Israel by a supernatural phenomenon

4. Make some observations from:

(1) 9:17-23 - Being guided by the cloud involved the recognition of the sovereignty of God and consequently the surrender of their own

(2) 9:17a - They had to journey when the cloud moved, irrespective of their own preference

(3) 9:17b - They had to stay whenever the cloud rested, whether they wanted to or not

(4) 9:21 - They had to move whenever the cloud moved, whether it was convenient or not

(5) 9:22 - They had to stay as long as the cloud rested, whether they liked the place or not

(6) 9:23 - The cloud was their guide for rest as well as for activity

5. What is instituted in 10:1-10? The ordinance concerning the use of the trumpets for the start of the journey of each tribe in its proper order

FROM SINAI TO KADESH, 10:11-15:41

A. THE PEOPLE'S COMPLAINTS, 10:11-12:16

1. What does 10:11-36 record? The order of the march and Israel's departure from Sinai after having been there for twenty days, 10:11; 1:1

2. About what did Israel murmur in:

(1) 11:1-3? About the way in which God led them, probably because of the fatigue, anxieties and rigors of the lengthy march occasioned by the difficult and very trying terrain

(2) 11:4-9 - About the food which God gave them for they were "not estranged from their lust," Psa. 78:30

3. Comment on:

(1) 11:4 - The discontent and murmuring against God's provision began with the mixed multitude

(2) 11:5- Although the people had come out of Egypt, Egypt had not come out of them

(3) 11:10-15 - Moses, vexed and discouraged, exaggerates his burdens and responsibilities and loses sight of his God-given enablement

(4) 11:16-17; 24-25 - God responded to Moses' complaint by not only distributing his burden, but also the power which had all along been in proportion to his need

(5) 11:18-23; 26-35 - God might acquiesce to our desire, but also to our hurt, Psa. 106:15

4. What takes place in 12:1-2? Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses, "And the Lord heard it"

5. How does God vindicate Moses in 12:3-9?

(1) God attests to the faithfulness of Moses

(2) God speaks to Moses directly and not indirectly as with the other prophets, (Ex. 19:19)

(3) God has Moses in such high regard that he permits him to see God's form ("shape")

(4) Moses' relationship to God should have caused Miriam and Aaron to fear to speak against him

6. What occurred in 12:9-16? Miriam, responsible for this incident, suffers the stigma of divine displeasure by religious and social excommunication

#### B. ISRAEL'S MURMURINGS, 13:1-15:41

1. Against what does Israel murmur in 13:1-14:38? Against the land which God gave them

2. Comment on the report of the spies in 13:1-33: Their unbelief and consequent fear exaggerated the facts and excluded God

3. Comment on 14:1-4: The reaction of the people to the report of the spies demonstrates the infectious blindness and unreasonableness of unbelief

4. How is the people's attitude described in:

(1) 14:9? As rebellion against God

(2) 14:11, 22? As provoking and tempting God

5. Comment on:

(1) 14:11-20 - This demonstrates the power of intercession by a righteous man, (James 5:16b)

(2) 14:17-19 - Moses uses his revelation of God, (Ex. 34:5-7), in the interest of the people

(3) 14:28-29 - God in his wrath fulfills the people's prediction concerning themselves, (14:3)

6. Explain 14:34: They would know by sad experience the consequences of their disobedience, which they would wrongfully regard as God's breach of promise

7. For what did the people mourn in 14:35-39? Not for their sins, but for the consequences

8. Wherein should 14:39-45 be a warning? Against presuming upon the help of God which has been forfeited by disobedience and unbelief

9. What is remarkable about 15:1-41? That God gives directions for the promised land which was still forty years away and to a congregation that was not to enter the land

#### ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS, 16:1-36:13

##### A. VINDICATION OF MOSES AND AARON, 16:1-17:13

1. Give the general content of 16:1-17:13: The gainsaying of Korah, (Jude 11), which was a challenge to the authority of Moses, 16:13, and an attempted intrusion into the priest's office, 16:10
2. Who was Korah and his company, 16:1-2? An influential group of ambitious and envious men, 16:9; Psa. 106:16
3. Comment on 16:3, 7, 14: They accused Moses for that for which they themselves were guilty and blamed him for the consequences of their own unbelief
4. What does God do in 16:15-40? He vindicates Moses and Aaron as the appointed servants of God
5. Note an outstanding fact from:
  - (1) 16:41-42 - The incredible persistence of sin
  - (2) 16:43-47 - The fearful wrath of God
  - (3) 16:48 - The efficacy of intercessory mediation
  - (4) 16:49-50 - The justice and mercy of God
6. What does God do in 17:1-13? He seeks to prevent any recurrence of the previous events by an unmistakable attestation to Aaron's divine appointment

#### B. SERVICE OF PRIESTS AND LEVITES, 18:1-19:22

1. Explain the statement that Aaron and the priests:
  - (1) "Shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary," 18:1? They were to be responsible for anything causing displeasure to God in connection with the sacred things
  - (2) "Shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood," 18:1? They were to be responsible for all of the sinful acts of omission and commission in their priestly service, as well as for any failure in personal holiness
2. Give the general content of:
  - (1) 18:2-7 - The distinction between the responsibilities of the priests and those of the Levites
  - (2) 18:8-32 - The service and support of the priests and Levites, (I Cor. 9:13; 10:18)
3. What is described in 19:1-22? The ordinance of the red heifer, a type of Christ as the ground of the believer's cleansing from worldly defilement

#### C. THE NEW GENERATION, 20:1-21:35

1. Comment on 20:1: After some thirty-eight years of wandering they found themselves in the same place, no nearer to the promised land
2. Give the significance of the murmuring in 20:2-6: This is the first recorded trial and failure of the new generation, showing that they were no better than their fathers
3. What light is shed on 20:7-13 by:

(1) I Cor. 10:4? That this rock was a type of Christ, I Pet. 2:6-8; John 4:13-14; 7:37-39

(2) Ex. 17:5-6? In smiting the rock at Kadesh-Barnea, Moses ruined the type of Christ who, once smitten (crucified), needs not to be smitten again, Heb. 9:28; 10:10

(3) Psa. 106:32-33? That Moses spoke in the heat of his spirit as though he were the primary object of their murmurings

(4) 20:12? That Moses sought the vindication of himself as the servant of God, rather than the vindication of God (5) 20:8, 12? Since Moses smote the rock in anger and selfwill instead of speaking to it in faith and obedience, God was compelled to vindicate himself by using Moses as an example instead of an instrument

4. What accounts for Edom's attitude in 20:14-22? Esau's grudge against Jacob for stealing his birthright, Gen. 27:1-41

5. What does 20:23-29 record? The premature death of Aaron because he, like Moses, failed to sanctify God by his unbelief, 20:12

6. Against what do the people murmur in:

(1) 21:1-4? Against the way in which God led them

(2) 21:5? Against the food which God gave them

7. In the light of John 3:14-17, the serpent of brass, 21:6-9, is a type of what? Of Christ crucified "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"

8. What effect did the bite of the serpent have upon the people, 21:6-7? It brought them to a sense of sin and a state of repentance

9. Participation in God's provision by means of the serpent was contingent upon what, 21:8-9? Upon the response of the sufferer in faith and obedience

10. Observe a remarkable change of the people in:

(1) 21:10-20 - They now traversed the tedious terrain on a monotonous journey without being "discouraged because of the way"

(2) 21:16-18 - When they needed water, they now resorted to singing instead of murmuring

(3) 21:21-35 - They now had a series of victories in faith and obedience instead of a series of defeats through unbelief and disobedience

(4) 21:31 - They now possessed the land which they could have had nearly forty years before

D. BALAAM'S ERROR, 22:1-40

1. In the light of II Pet. 2:15-16, who was Balaam? A prophet of the Lord who sought to prostitute his prophetic gift for personal gain

2. Why did Balak, king of Moab, request Balaam to curse God's people, 22:1-7? In the belief that this would render Israel subject to defeat

3. Why did Balaam ask the Lord the second time for permission, 22:8-19? Because his heart was bent on going to obtain the promised reward

4. Explain God's action in 22:20 in view of 22:12: God was now setting the stage to deal with the covetous prophet

5. Account for God's anger in 22:20-22: Balaam knew that God had not changed his mind, but merely let him have his own way

6. In the light of II Pet. 2:5-16, what did God do in 22:22-34? He rebuked Balaam for his madness in pursuing a course in opposition to God's known will

7. Comment on:

(1) 22:20-26 - God knows how to corner a man and bring him to terms, for even our disobedience is under the control of God

(2) 22:22-33 - Men are sometimes indebted to despised agencies for saving them from the consequence of their blind folly

(3) 22:27, 33 - Balaam the "seer" was nevertheless so blind that he failed to see his own danger

(4) 22:31 - A person blinded by greed needs divine enlightenment to see his need

(5) 22:34-35 - God may compel a man to continue on the course he took in self-will, even if the man offers to turn back

8. Make some general observations from Balaam:

(1) It is possible to possess high spiritual gifts without possessing a sanctified life

(2) It is possible to have profound spiritual insight, and yet be blind to one's own state

(3) By attempting to change the ways and will of God, we are changing ourselves for the worse by a process of deterioration

(4) Failure to give the first temptation a decisive refusal will lead to eventual submission. If Satan sees that we give him a hesitating "no," he will know at once that we desire to say "yes." Convinced of our susceptibility, he will offer a greater reward

(5) Balaam illustrates the practice of exercising a gift where it pays the most

(6) If Balaam had loved righteousness more than gain, he would not have been tempted by Balak's offer

(7) Balaam was one of those who seeks to circumvent the will of God so as to obtain his own ends without open disobedience

E. BALAAM'S PROPHECIES, 22:41-24:25

1. Why did Balak take Balaam to a high place, 22:41? Because it was held necessary that the subject of the curse should be in the view of the "seer"

2. Point out the essence of Balaam's prophetic utterances in:

(1) 23:1-12 - Israel's separateness from other nations, yet comprising a great multitude

(2) 23:13-26 - Israel's justification before God and her great influence among the nations

(3) 23:27-24:14 - Israel's beauty and strength to prevail over her enemies

(4) 24:15-25 - Israel's coming King and his Messianic kingdom

3. What is revealed in 23:19? The immutability of the character and word of God

4. What is declared in 23:23? The ineffectiveness of heathen enchantments and divination against Israel because God himself will fulfill his word and manifest his mighty acts on behalf of Israel

#### F. THE DOCTRINE OF BALAAM, 25:1-18

1. Give the general content of:

(1) 25:1-6 - The sin of Israel

(2) 25:7-18 - The atonement of Phinehas

2. Of what did the sin of Israel consist in:

(1) 25:1? Of whoredom with the Moabite women

(2) 25:2? Of social intercourse with idolaters

(3) 25:2-3? Of participation in idolatry

3. Why did the judgment in 25:4 fall on the heads (chiefs) of the people? Because they countenanced such monstrous irregularities by making no effort to prevent them

4. What testifies to the gravity of this sin in the eyes of God? The fact that twenty and four thousand died of the plague, 25:9, of whom three and twenty thousand died in one day, I Cor. 10:8

5. Wherein is God's satisfaction with the act of Phinehas seen in:

(1) 25:8? In the fact that it appeased the wrath of God and stayed the plague

(2) 25:10-13? In the high commendation and reward bestowed upon Phinehas by God

6. Of what did the reward of Phinehas in 25:12-13 consist? Of a covenant of peace and an everlasting priesthood, i.e., his posterity should have power with God forever to make peace between heaven and earth

7. Point out the cause of the smiting of the Midianites in 25:16-18 in the light of 31:16 and Rev. 2:14: Balaam advised the Midianite rulers to use their women in a deliberate plot to entangle the Israelites in immorality so as to bring them into

the disfavour of God. What Balaam could not accomplish by cursing, he sought to accomplish by seduction

8. How can we reconcile the pronouncements of God in 23:1-24: 25 with the state of Israel in 25:1-18: In Balaam's utterances God looks at Israel's position through his promises; now we see her in her present state

#### G. PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAND, 26:1-36:13

1. For what purpose was the numbering of the people in 26:1-65? To make preparation for the division of the land

2. What do we learn from 26:9-10?

(1) That Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed up the same time that Korah's company was consumed by fire

(2) That this judgment became a sign, i.e., a warning to the rest of the people

3. Note the difference in the number of the population since the first census, 26:51; 1:46: That almost as many were born as had died in the wilderness

4. What does 26:64-65 show? That in accordance with God's pronouncement in 14:21-30, none of the old generation remained, save Caleb and Joshua

5. Comment on the petition of the daughters of Zelophehad in 27:1-11:

(1) They believed in the certainty of the promised inheritance

(2) They presented what they believed to be their rightful claims with admirable persistence

(3) They received the reward of their faith in a possession in the land of promise

6. Note Moses' attitude in 27:15-23:

(1) He utters not a word of complaint at his punishment, especially painful so near the land

(2) He offers no resistance to the transfer of his office to someone else

7. Comment on 27:17: Joshua was not only to be a warrior, but also a shepherd of God's people by:

(1) Going before them when leading them "out"

(2) Going before them when leading them "in"

8. What is described in 28:1-29:40? The routine of the sacrificial offerings to be followed after their settlement in the land

9. Suggest the implication of the repeated use of the personal pronoun in 28:2:

(1) That these are God's offerings and therefore must be presented in thoughtful reverence, and not in thoughtless formality

(2) Since they are for a sweet savour unto God, they must be offered for his pleasure and not for our own gratification

10. Point out the general subject matter of:

(1) 30:1-16 - Legislation concerning vows

(2) 31:1-24--Expedition against the Midianites

(3) 31:25-54 - Distribution of the Midianites' prey

(4) 32:1-42 - Request of the children of Reuben and Gad to settle east of Jordan

(5) 33:1-49 - Summary of Israel's journeys from Egypt to Jordan

(6) 33:50-56 - Instructions for possessing the land

(7) 34:1-29 - Division of the land among the tribes

(8) 35:1-8 - Provisions for the Levites

(9) 35:9-34 - Provisions for cities of refuge

(10) 36:1-13 - Legislation concerning inheritance

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