

## Winchester Evangelical Church

### Bible Study 4- Numbers

*Key Words* : Service, Work, War, Wandering

*Key Verses* : Numbers 6:24-26 - **The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.**

Numbers 12:6-8 - **When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?**

Numbers 14:30-34 - **Not one of you will enter the land I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder, I will bring them in to enjoy the land you have rejected. But you – your bodies will fall in this wilderness. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. For forty years – one year for each of the forty days you explored the land – you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.**

*Message* : The Redeemed are Saved to Serve and must Beware of Unbelief

This book records two numberings of Israel - at Sinai (chapter 1) and in Moab (chapter 26), hence the English name of the book. **The writer states why these censuses should be taken - You and Aaron are to count according to their divisions all the men in Israel who are twenty years old or more and able to serve in the army. (1:3)**

**Total number 603,550 (1:46) excluding the Levites who were to serve God in the Tabernacle.**

**Final number 601,730 (26: 51) excluding the Levites - 1820 fewer**

**The large number of fighting men (20 years and over) means that there were probably about 2 million people who came out of Egypt and entered the Promised Land - What a God who can look after that number of people on the road. It has been pointed out that 70 members of Jacob's family went into Egypt. It is not unlikely that after 400 years there would be 2 million family members - enough to out-number the Egyptians and worry Pharaoh!**

In the Hebrew Bible it is called B'midbar - 'In the wilderness'. This title covers all the events of the book - wanderings and experiences in the wilderness. It is the book of the wilderness.

The book is partly historical and partly legislative. It is the book of pilgrimage, of warfare, service, and, also, of failure.

The book has a three-fold message:

1. Service - the Lord's people are saved to serve

Genesis - Man ruined

Exodus - Man redeemed

Leviticus - Man worshipping

Numbers - Man in service

**This is the Divine order - only a saved and worshipping soul is qualified for God's service.**

2. Order in service - **Order is Heaven's first law** - God has given us an order how to live for him - the camp and the tabernacle are so well ordered in the way they operate.

3. The failure of Israel - **The failure of Israel looms large as we read the pages of this book** - failure due to unbelief.

Thankfully, **it was not all failure** - at the end of the book we see Israel victorious owing to their restoration to God's favour.

There are three main sections:

### **A) Orderly Service in the Wilderness (Chapters 1-10)**

This section is at Sinai and lasts about 20 days.

*The Lord's Service:*

In battle (1) **as shown by the counting of the men aged 20 years and over**

In a well-ordered camp (2) - **Where the various tribes would camp around the Tabernacle**

In the Tabernacle (3-4) - **The Levites are counted and given their roles in the Tabernacle**

In a pure camp (5) - **Keeping the camp free from infection and wrongs**

In a Nazirite life (6) - **a person who wants to give themselves over to God for a period (Samson)**

In gifts for the Tabernacle (7) - **The various gifts brought by each tribal leader**

In Aaronic and Levitical service (8) - **Aaron and the Levites were set apart for God's work**

*Other Matters:*

Passover legislation (9:1-14) **Rules about the Passover and when it could be eaten if a person was ceremoniously unclean of the correct day**

Guiding Cloud (9:15-23) - **God would lead the people and show them when to set out and when to stay in camp**

Trumpet Legislation (10) - **The way of getting messages to the whole community**

### **B) Failure in the Wilderness (Chapters 9-20, chapter 21:5-9 and chapter 25)**

This section is from Sinai to Kadesh and lasts about 37 years and 11 months.

Eight Murmurings:

Against the WAY God led them (11:1-3) - **Not easy living in a close tented community not knowing when they would move on**

The FOOD He fed them with (11:4-35) - **They missed the fresh food they had in Egypt - God gave them quail and manna**

Against the LEADER He set over them (12) - **Aaron and Miriam oppose Moses**

Against the LAND He promised them (13-14) - **The 12 spies report back**

Against God's righteous VERDICT pronounced on them (14:39-45) - **The people try to take Canaan after God had told them they would wander for 40 years in the wilderness**

Against His APPOINTMENTS (16-17) - **Korah's rebellion - the earth opens and takes the rebels**

Against their THIRST (20:2-13) - **Water from the rock according to God's command**

Because of God's PROVISION (21:4-9) - **Complaining about food and water - the bronze snake**

## C) Victories in the Wilderness (Chapter 12:1-4 and 10 to chapter 36)

This section is in Moab and lasts about 9 months and 10 days.

Victory and some failures:

Victory over King Arad (21:1-3) - Vow of the people to destroy their cities if God gives them victory

Victory over King Sihon and King Og (21:21-35) - They wouldn't let Israel pass through their land so fought them instead and lost

Balaam and Balak (22-25) - Balak hires Balaam to curse Israel, but Balaam blesses them four times

Second Census (26) - decrease of 1820 people - Before entering the Promised Land

The Law of Inheritance (27) - Zelophehad's five daughters - inheritance to daughters if no sons to keep name and land alive

Joshua to succeed Moses (28) - Moses asks God to appoint his successor - God chooses Joshua

Orderings of Offerings and Vows (28-30) - Instructions about the various offerings to be made to God and the festivals - rules regarding vows made by girls and women - fathers or husbands can negate the vows

Victory over Midian (31) - God orders vengeance on the Midianites - and rules regarding the spoils of war

Preparations to Enter the Land (32-34) - The land on the east of Jordan to the two and a half tribes as long as they go over the Jordan first to battle

Cities of Refuge (35) - Cities for the Levites to live in amongst the other tribes and places where those who have killed someone accidentally may flee

Zelophehad's daughters (36) - They marry within their tribes according to the instructions given to Moses

## Questions on Numbers 21:4-9

1. Why were the people of Israel wandering in the desert? They had disobeyed God and had lack of faith when the spies returned from the Promised Land
2. Why did they complain? Fed up with lack of bread and water - they detest the manna
3. What made this grumbling so bad? They were grumbling against God and Moses
4. What did it show about their attitude to God and the rescue from Egypt? They thought their life in Egypt had been so good
5. What was God's response and why did he do it? Poisonous snakes - teach them a lesson - punish them
6. How do the people react to these poisonous snakes and what do they acknowledge? They ask Moses, whom they had grumbled against, to speak to God - they admitted their sin
7. How might Moses point forward to Jesus in his role in approaching God? Interceding on our behalf with God
8. How does God respond to their repentance? Tells Moses to put a golden model of a snake on a pole and set it up high
9. What do the people have to do to survive? Look at the snake - not offer their own sacrifices, or do anything else
10. Why do this rather than just heal them on the spot or kill the snakes? See their faith - faith is looking away from yourself towards something/someone else
11. How does the bronze serpent show God's mercy and grace to them? If they look to the snake, therefore God's salvation, they were showing faith
12. How does the story of the bronze serpent help us understand more about what Jesus has come to do? Jesus came to be lifted up on a cross - we have to look to him in faith for salvation