

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. Last week we learned how the book of NUMBERS came into being, its character as divine revelation, its division into three main parts and its teaching about service and complaining. Today we will learn about the main messages in the book of Numbers and about the Messiah, Jesus Christ, in the book of Numbers.

POINT 4. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF NUMBERS

The New Testament shows that certain Old Testament principles continue to exist in the New Testament teachings and practices.

First. The book of Numbers teaches that God's people are saved to serve.

Genesis teaches that man is ruined. *Exodus* teaches that man is redeemed. *Leviticus* teaches that man has the responsibility to maintain his relationship with God. *Numbers* teaches that man has the responsibility to serve God. God's people are saved in order to serve. They are only qualified to serve God after they have been saved from the slavery of their sin and their idols and maintain a relationship of love expressed in holiness towards God.

In Numbers 3 and 4 it is God who assigns the specific tasks of the priests and of the Levites. In the New Testament Christians are also *saved to serve* (Jn 12:26) and God also assigns a specific place and task of each Christian in the Church. In 1 Corinthians 3:6 the Bible teaches, "The Lord *assigned to each his task*."

Second. The book of Numbers teaches that God's people serve God in an orderly way.

In Numbers 1 God commanded that a census of Israel should be taken. The census was the execution of the command in Exodus 30:11-16 with respect to paying the tax for the upkeep of all the offerings to be made to the Lord. Another reason for the census was to show how God's promise to Abraham had been fulfilled. God had promised that he would become a great nation.

In Numbers 2, God commanded Israel to camp and to journey to the next place in an orderly manner. Notice that the Tent of Meeting was always in the centre of Israel. The lesson is that *only when God is in the centre of the Christian's life will his life be orderly*. In the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 14:33 and 40 the same truth is taught, "God is not a God of disorder but of peace." "Everything .. in the Church .. should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

Third. The book of Numbers teaches that God guides his people one step at a time.

The Israelites did not know when and where they were going. In Numbers 9:15-23 we read that the glory of God resided in a cloud above the Tent of Meeting. During the daytime it looked like a pillar of cloud and during the night-time it looked like a pillar of fire. This was the visible sign of God's reality and presence in the midst of his people. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent of Meeting, the Israelites broke camp and set out on their journey. And whenever the cloud settled over the Tent of Meeting again, the Israelites encamped. Sometimes the cloud only stayed for one or two nights at one place. At other times it would stay a month or a year in another place. As long as the cloud stayed over Tent of Meeting, the people of God obeyed God's order and stayed. The important lesson is that the people of God should *only take the next step at the command of God!*

Fourth. The book of Numbers teaches that God will supply every need of his people according to his riches.

During their journey through the desert, the number of only the men of 20 years and older in Israel was more than 600 000. Thus the total number of all the Israelites must have exceeded 2 million! For 40 long years God was able to support this vast number of people and their animals in the desert with all their basic needs, like food, water and shelter, leaders and protection from enemies.

Several times we read how God gave Israel water and food in a miraculous way. Once he turned bitter water into drinkable water (Ex 15). Six days every week he gave them manna from heaven, which functioned as bread (Ex 16). Once he gave them meat in the form of birds that were blown inland from the sea (11). And once he gave them water from a rock (20).

God gave them good leaders every time they needed them. In Numbers 11:16-17 he equipped 70 elders with his Holy Spirit to help Moses carry the burden of caring for all the people of God. In Numbers 14:6-9 he gave them two courageous men who were not afraid of the difficulties to conquer the land of Canaan. These men had faith in God's promises, presence and protection. And in Numbers 27:15-23 he gave Joshua authority to succeed Moses as leader and to lead Israel into the Promised Land.

God gave the Israelites victory over the Egyptians through ten plagues, over the Amalekites through the prayer of Moses (Ex 17), over the Canaanite king of Arad and the Amorite kings of Heshbon and Bashan through war (21), over the Moabites through fear and frustration (22-24), and finally over the Midianites through total destruction (31).

The lesson of the book of Numbers is the same as that of the New Testament in Philippians 4:19, "My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus"!

Fifth. The book of Numbers teaches that the Old Testament was written as an example and warning for Christians.

In Numbers 20 we read that Israel had hardened their hearts against God so that even their leader Moses went astray. Psalm 95:7-11 warns that God punishes unbelief. God says, "Today if you hear his voice, *do not harden your hearts* as you did at Meribah ... in the desert, where your fathers *tested and tried me*, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways. So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest'." In the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 10:5-11 we read, "God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now *these things occurred as examples* to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did – In one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did – They were killed by snakes. Do not grumble, as some of them did – They were killed by the destroying angel. *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings* for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come."

Sixth. The book of Numbers teaches that the people of God should beware of unbelief and rather trust God than fear man.

Again and again Israel failed because of their unbelief. In Numbers 14 we read that ten of the twelve explorers to the land of Canaan came back with a bad report. They said that the land cannot be conquered, because the cities were big and fortified, the people were strong and some were even giants. They said that the Canaanites would kill their men, capture their wives and children and plunder all their possessions. They advised that Israel choose a new leader and go back to be slaves in Egypt! However, two of the explorers, Joshua and Caleb, encouraged the people to go up and conquer the land.

God sets before Christians the land of possibilities and achievements. Then the giants appear. These may be giants of opposition from without or giants of fear from within. Then our faith begins to fail and we forget God. We compare our difficulties with our own strength rather than committing our difficulties to the strong arm of God. Then we turn back into the desert of half-trust and half-victory or total despair and total defeat. After Israel refused to trust God that God would enable them to conquer the land of Canaan, Israel wandered around in the desert for 38 years! Likewise, when we doubt the God of the Bible, we will feel defeated and discouraged. We will wander around aimlessly and never accomplish anything.

The important lesson is that even in situations where the majority of people seem to make a reasonable choice not to face the giants and their strong castles it is still the best to do what God says! The Israelites looked at the situation with the eyes of the ten explorers and reacted with fear, unbelief and disobedience. But Joshua and Caleb looked *at the same situation* from God's perspective and responded with faith and obedience! Caleb said, "If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them." Just like the ten explorers, also we can put our difficulties between ourselves and God and then say, "We are not able!" But we can also put God between ourselves and our difficulties and then say, "We are able!"

Seventh. The book of Numbers teaches that nothing can hinder God in accomplishing his original goal.

While Israel was at Mount Sinai, the Lord said to them that they had stayed long enough at that mountain and that they should go up and take possession of the land that the Lord had promised to give as an inheritance to Abraham (Dt 1:6-8). It was necessary for the Israelites to pass through the desert, but it was not necessary for them to spend 40 years in the desert! It was God's plan that the Israelites should go straight up into the Promised Land, but the people chose not to do this. The consequences were that they had to wander aimlessly for 38 years in the desert.

Another consequence was that not one of the adults who had refused to go into Canaan, were allowed to enter the Promised Land. They all missed God's best plan for their lives.

But according to Numbers 14:18-19, although God punishes the guilty, he is abounding in love and forgives sin and rebellion. God set before the Israelites another plan. He decided to bring their children into the land which their parents had rejected. The lesson we learn is that *God does have a second plan* and that *nothing can hinder God in*

accomplishing his original goal! God's second plan is only a different way in which he will accomplish his first plan. Whenever we repent from our sin and disobedience, then God forgives us and gives us a second plan. God can forgive us seventy times seven times. God can also give us a second plan and a third plan and many more plans! But just think of the many blessings we miss and how many burdens we bear by not accepting God's first and best plan? Think of the lost years! According to Deuteronomy 1:2 and 2:14, what could have been accomplished in eleven days, took 38 years to accomplish! God's second plan for Israel was very costly indeed! We Christians should be deeply convinced that God will accomplish what he has planned and that nothing can hinder him from accomplishing it (cf. Isa 14:24,27)!

POINT 5. THE MESSIAH, JESUS CHRIST, IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

First. Aaron's budding staff is a type or illustration of Jesus Christ as God's only choice to be the Saviour of the world.

Among the Levites, God had chosen only the descendants of Aaron to be priests. Only priests were allowed to sacrifice and burn incense. In Numbers 16 and 17 we read how Korah and about 250 other Levites rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. They said to Moses and Aaron that every Israelite is holy and can become a priest. Moses let them conduct a test to see whom the Lord had chosen to be the priests in Israel. He challenged them to burn incense in front of the Tent of Meeting together with the real priests. Then they will see for themselves whom the Lord had chosen to be his priests. After they had burned the incense, the Lord warned his people to stand away from the tents of the rebels, Korah, Dathan and Abiram. The Lord made the earth to split open and swallow up all the families of the rebels together with all their possessions. Then he sent fire from heaven to totally consume the 250 other rebels!

The Lord let the tribes conduct a second test. He commanded the leaders of Israel to each take a staff and write the name of his tribe on the staff. Moses placed all twelve staffs in the Tent of Meeting in front of the ark, that is, in God's presence. The Lord said that the staff of the man he chooses to be the high priest will sprout. In this way, God wanted to show all the people whom he *chooses* to be the high priest and thus to stop the constant grumbling against God's chosen man. The next day Moses brought out all the staffs for the people to see. The staff of Aaron had not only sprouted, but had budded, blossomed and even produced almonds! The staff of Aaron was put back in the Tent of Meeting as a sign to the rebellious people that it is *God who chooses* the high priest (17:10)!

Likewise, in the New Testament, in Hebrews 5:4-5 we read about the high priest, "No one takes this honour upon himself; he *must be called by God*, just as Aaron was. Jesus Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest." Hebrews 7:24-28 says that Jesus Christ proved in two ways why he is the only Saviour of the world.

One. All other priests and religious leaders in the world have died and have never been resurrected. They are still in their graves. But Jesus Christ has been resurrected from the dead and lives today. It says, "There were many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Thus while all authors and prophets of the religions of the world have died only Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and exalted to be our High Priest and Saviour!

Two. All other priests and religious leaders are imperfect and do not qualify to be saviours of other imperfect people in the world! Only Jesus Christ is sinless and 100% perfect. Only Jesus Christ qualifies to be the Saviour of the world! It says, "Unlike the other high priests, Jesus Christ does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, made perfect forever, exalted above the heavens!"

Second. The smitten rock is a type or illustration of Christ dying once in history to bring spiritual benefits to all his people, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

In Numbers 20 we read how Israel quarrelled with Moses because there was again no water to drink in the desert. The Israelites tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" (Ex 17:7)" So God commanded Moses to strike the rock *once* and water would come out of it (Ex 17:6). In his anger against the Israelites Moses struck the rock *twice* and water gushed out of it (Num 20:11). God punished Moses for his disobedience and said, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." (Num 20:12). This passage has a few lessons.

One. 1 Corinthians 10:4 says, "The Israelites ... drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." Jesus Christ is figuratively called the spiritual rock and he never forsook the people of God, but accompanied them everywhere they went! Jesus was already working among his Old Testament people!

Two. 1 Corinthians 10:2-4 says: All the Israelites "were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink." God's Old Testament people received the same benefits as God's New Testament people. They were baptised and they ate the spiritual food and drank the spiritual water from

God. *God's Old Testament benefits had a spiritual character, because they came from Christ.* In the New Testament 'eating the spiritual bread' symbolises coming to Jesus Christ and receiving him into your heart and life (John 6:31-37). And 'drinking the living water' symbolises receiving the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus Christ would give to everyone who believes in him (John 4:10-14; 7:37-39).

Three. Hebrews 10:10 says, "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all.*" Jesus Christ, our spiritual rock, was to be smitten *once* for our sins. He need not be smitten *twice*! When Jesus died on the cross he said that all that is necessary for the salvation of man had been finished on the cross! Nobody can add anything more to the completed work of Christ!

Third. The bronze snake lifted on a pole is a type or illustration of Jesus Christ lifted on the cross so that whoever believes in Christ will not die, but have everlasting life.

In Numbers 21:4-9 we read that the Israelites spoke against God and against Moses. They complained about their hardships, especially about the food they had to eat in the desert. The Lord heard their complaints and saw the attitude of their hearts and he punished them by sending poisonous snakes among the people. After Moses interceded for them, God commanded Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole where everybody could see it. God said that if people would look at the snake when they were bitten, they would not die, but live. However, if they refused to believe God's word and refuse to look at the bronze snake, then they would surely die.

In the New Testament, in John 3:14-16, Jesus says, "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. During the next week read Deuteronomy 9-17. Next week we will introduce the book of Deuteronomy.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and build Christ's Church" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".