

## Numbers: The Book Of Judgment

### Wilderness Wanderings

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Whenever any of us is beginning a trip of more than usual distance, we almost invariably make sure that we have a map to the location that we are going to drive to. This is especially true if we have never been to that location before.

God makes clear in a number of places in the New Testament that we are to consider ourselves as pilgrims. I Peter 2:11 is a familiar scripture in this regard and then it is reinforced in a place like Philippians 3:20 where he makes our detachment from this world and the earth's society even more pronounced by telling us that our citizenship is in heaven, not in an earthly country. So we are pilgrims and technically we are not even citizens of this nation that we love and respect.

Now He undoubtedly does this at least partly in order to help us to focus on the job at hand. He has called us out of this world in order to prepare for being in the Kingdom of God. And we have to make sure that we do not allow ourselves the luxury of taking side trips, excursions, to the world.

If you understand the way the Bible uses the term sin, you will also understand that several of the definitions or usages of sin in the Bible involve turning aside, going off the path, or missing the mark; as though we were aiming in one place, but we somehow or another did not shoot our arrow in that direction. The Israelites' journey is frequently referred to as a wandering. I looked up this word "wandering" in *Strong's Concordance* and it was kind of interesting because he did not use one word, but there were several words that were translated into the word one English word wandering.

But I want to make sure that we understand that the situation that we find ourselves in is somewhat different from the Israelites. They wandered, but we are a pilgrim. There is a difference, and the difference is that a pilgrim *knows* absolutely where he is headed, and he is consciously moving himself,

willing himself, driving himself purposely, following a route in order to arrive at that direction. Now the Israelites, we all know, zigzagged all over the place, and we can follow that kind of an approach and maybe we can make it to the Kingdom of God in that way. But I think that God also shows us that that is really not the way that He necessarily wants us to go. He wants to make our pilgrimage in as direct a route as we possibly can with very few excursions off to the side.

Usually a pilgrimage in this world is made for spiritual reasons. Jews, I should say Israelites, but mostly it is a record of the Jews when they were scattered throughout the Roman and Greek Empires, they still tried as much as they could, as much as lay within them, to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Hopefully they can do it once a year, but maybe they could do it three times a year. So wherever the person was, the faithful Israelite would begin a journey and he would arrive in Jerusalem in time for Passover and Unleavened Bread, Pentecost, and then the fall feasts as well.

I do not know how many were actually able to do that, but there are some records that indicate from Josephus that during the festival season the population of Jerusalem would swell by four or five times so that there were anywhere from 2 to 2 and a half million pilgrims who made their way to Jerusalem in order to keep the Feast, with some people doing that every year. We have people today of the Islamic faith who make pilgrimages to places like Mecca and they set their destination to arrive there. But in their case they feel required to do it only one time in a lifetime. But nonetheless, they make that pilgrimage for spiritual reasons.

Now you might recall that as Israel was making their triumphant exodus from Egypt during the "Ten Commandments" movie, the music is swelling and the people are marching out and everybody has got a big smile on their face. They are leaving the land behind and all the lambs and the cows and all the ducks and geese and everything are going out. And the cynical Dathan, played by Edward G. Robinson, at one point he says, "Hey, where are we going?" "Does anybody know where we're going?" And he did not get any answer. In the movie they depicted Moses in a way that gave the indication that he was not quite sure exactly where they were going. But I think that the real Moses surely knew where they were going. And not only that, I think that most Israelites knew where they were going as well.

However, even someone like Moses, as close as he was to God, could not possibly have known the numerous twists and turns that their journey was going to take, or how long it was going to take. Nor did he know that most of those twists and turns were going to be occasioned by Israel's rebellious conduct along the way.

Let us turn to Hebrews the 11th chapter, verse 8 and we will reflect on the father of the faithful, Abraham.

**Hebrews 11:8** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out [look at that next phrase], not knowing where he was going.

**Hebrews 11:10** [we find] . . . for he waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

That almost seems like a contradiction. On the one hand, he did not know where he was going. On the other hand, he was looking for a city. He did not know where he was going, but yet he was looking for something very specific. Now, there is no contradiction there, as I am going to show you in a moment or two. But there is a very important principle in regard to faith that we always need to remember.

The place or the time that Paul is speaking about here is from Genesis the 12th chapter. Whenever God called Abraham none of the promises that we know that God made to him were made. We also know from Abraham's life that he had been reared and that he conducted his life and his business in the great metropolitan centers of his day. And when God called him, he did not know that he was going to be led to Canaan. That had not been stipulated at all. You look back there in Genesis, God simply said "leave and go to a place *I* will show you."

So, Abraham had to step out into the unknown. He had to do that trusting God. He literally did not know where he was going to end up. He did know in general that if God gave him a command, then there was going to be something good in it, that God would not just lead him out and abandon him.

There would be a result, that result would be good, and Abraham would end up at some place. Thus he trusted the One who gave him the commandment.

In some ways this is similar to exploring for gold. A person may have a general idea that there is gold somewhere in the hills. And he may set out full of confidence about finding it, not knowing his exact route that his search is going to take, or where he will finally end up finding gold. Now, if we look a little bit further in Hebrews 11 to verse 13. He says,

**Hebrews 11:13-15** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.

And so not only Abraham, but every single one of us who are the children of Abraham by faith, have set out on a journey about which we know very little, as we are going to see as we go along here. And what does that do? What good thing does that do? It forced by faith. Where we have something specific that we are looking for, but we do not know very much about the route we are going to have to take in order to finally arrive at that destination.

Let us go back to the Exodus account in Exodus the 13th chapter.

**Exodus 13:17-18** Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt." So God led the people around by way of the wilderness of the Red Sea. And the children of Israel went up in orderly ranks out of the land of Egypt.

To me, the very fact that this verse is part of the record shows me that somebody knew where they were going. They expected to go in a certain direction, but they did not go that way. It shows me that they expected to cut directly across the southern tip of the Mediterranean Sea and go right to the

land of their inheritance. They were not so dumb as to not know where Abraham journeyed from, where Isaac journeyed from, and where Jacob journeyed from. Every one of them left the land of Canaan and journeyed down into Egypt. Only Jacob remained and stayed there until this time. They knew where their forefathers came from. And so when they did not go the most direct route to the, shall we say the Kingdom of God, it registered surprise because they expected to be taken right there.

Now, where did that put Israel? Well, in much the same position that we are in today. We know where we are going, that is, we know in a way, in the same way that Abraham knew. We look for a city whose builder and maker is God, but we do not know the specifics of exactly what route we are going to follow in order to get there.

Let us go back again to the New Testament, this time in I Corinthians the 13th chapter, the love chapter, and look at a comment that the apostle Paul made there. Notice what Paul said, it is quite an admission, but it is one that I think that every one of us can assent to.

**I Corinthians 13:9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

Is there any one of us who knows perfectly and completely the mind of God? Is there any one of us who knows perfectly and completely the true doctrines of God? We have pretty good ideas, but we do not have them nailed down. I mean, all of them absolutely and perfectly. We only know in part, we are not mature enough, we do not understand it, we do not know the Word of God in the way that we should. We have to *grow* to perfection. Then Paul even says we prophesy, we preach in part. The ministry does not know. They do not know everything perfectly.

**I Corinthians 13:10-11** But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part [or imperfect] shall be done away. [Then in verse 11, he gives the illustration that I am talking about here.] When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

We are in a process of growing in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. We are coming to more thoroughly understand things and as we grow and perfection is added to what we previously had, then it is almost like a snake shedding skin. We are renewed in knowledge and that knowledge is greater.

**I Corinthians 13:12** For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I am also known.

There is much about this way that we do not know. And so again, this forces us, it demands of us that we live by faith.

You see, in that sense, we are in a wilderness and I mentioned before that God did not use just one word for wilderness. He used several words for wilderness. There is a basic similarity in all of them and that is that it is a place where people do not live. If people do not live there, there may not even be roads, maybe some paths. Do you remember how the Moses asked Hobab to go along with them to point out the way through the wilderness? Kind of interesting that they had the cloud, they had the pillar of fire and yet he still asked someone who lived in the general area, Hobab, to go with them and convinced him somehow to go with them the whole time. He spent his whole time going with the Israelites through the wilderness!

I have been leading to this. In that sense, every one of us is essentially in uncharted territory. Remember the verse, "When I was a child I spoke as a child?" Were you ever an adult before? Had you ever reached this point of your life, in your lifetime right now, before? You never have. Now, a more serious question. Have you ever been converted before? In one sense, every step we take in conversion is into uncharted territory for us. Have you gone this way before? Have you marked the way as you went before? Did you blaze the trail? Did you mark it? Why did not you mark it? Because you have never been this way before! You are in virgin territory for you.

Now, one thing is sure: that the way that we are going is not the way of the world. That way is well charted. We walk to the beat of a different drummer. We are to walk by faith and not by sight, and often brethren, there is nothing visible to guide us. But there is good news and that is that God has not left us

without guidance. In fact, through His Word, He has blazed a fairly clear trail that contains at least basically the events and the significance of those events to us as we travel along the way to the Promised Land.

I remember reading a biography of Harry Truman and in it was a statement that was attributed to him. "There is nothing new in the world except the history that you do not know." It is sort of a take off on Solomon's "There is nothing new under the sun." Now what President Truman meant is that names and locations throughout history change, but the events do not. He meant that history keeps repeating itself.

Think of this. God never changes. Satan never changes. Neither does human nature ever change. And it is these three factors that makes the Bible always relevant, regardless of what time in history that a person lives. And so God has given us a record that we know is going to be repeated.

Let me give you a very clear example. Most of us have expressed at one time or another, at some time during the last several years, regarding what is happening in the Worldwide Church of God, we said, I never knew it would be this way. I never thought it would happen this way. Brethren, were we not stupid? We should have known it was going to happen this way because it is already written in the Book. This is exactly what happened in the first century. The church was destroyed, if I can put it that way, from inside. They came in amongst us, the apostles wrote. And they just did not write it one time. Paul wrote it, Peter wrote it, Jude wrote it, John wrote it. There is four pretty good witnesses. We should have known. And some of those witnesses did not write it one time, but several times! We should have known better.

This is what I mean. You see, someone has been this way before, and someone has recorded faithfully to you and me what is going to happen. And the only things that are new to us is the history that we do not know. But now we are living in it and I and II Peter, I, II, and III John, Jude, begin to really become alive! We should have known. We should have known what Paul meant in II Thessalonians 2 when he talked about apostasy, and the people departing from the truth—not from the church there, departing from truth. And the thing that is going to separate people is whether or not they love truth, and whether they are willing to live by it.

So, the Bible is always relevant regardless of when a person lives. And I can confidently say before you that what we are experiencing now is what occurred century after century. That God would raise somebody up. He would restore the church to a former glory, give it His truth, and then the church would begin to be destroyed. Especially as the second generation began to come along, things would begin to get watered down and the church would be destroyed from within, and it would disintegrate almost to nothing. But He is faithful. He said it would not die out. Then He would revive it again. That has happened over and over again.

Of course, I guess every generation, every time that that has occurred, the people like you and me hoped—in many cases hoped against hope—that this was the last time that it was ever going to occur. And then Jesus Christ would return and He would restore the government of God on earth and we would not see things like this happen again. You know what, brethren? Even after Jesus returns, it is going to happen again. Revelation 20 tells me that.

Let us go to I Corinthians 10, and we are going to read the first thirteen verses there.

**I Corinthians 10:1-6** Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. But with most of them God was not well pleased, for they were scattered in the wilderness. Now all these things became our examples . . . ,

Do you think things do not keep happening over and over again? Can you already begin to see what Paul is leading to? What was happening in the church at Corinth? Almost exactly the same things that happened in the wilderness. How else could they be examples?

**I Corinthians 10:6-13** . . . to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted. [notice that: as they also lusted] And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, "The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play." Nor



let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell; nor let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed by serpents; nor complain, as some of them also complained and were destroyed by the destroyer.

Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man [it keeps happening over and over again]; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

All the events recorded here but one took place in one Old Testament book, and that is the book of Numbers. That book is pretty much of a road map for those of us who are journeying in the wilderness of this world, and it is given so that we would at the very least have an overview of what to expect.

Now, remember two factors. First of all, that we are individual entities, and we are judged individually according to our works. But collectively, we are also a body moving towards a goal, and sometimes our trials are individual ones, and sometimes they are trials of the Body, and we are judged according to our reactions to the Body's trials. So we have two factors working here at the same time: Our own individual life, and then our life within the Body. So we have an individual life and God is seeing how we fit collectively together. And in each case, He is judging.

Numbers overall theme has been described as wilderness wandering and that is because Moses wrote of significant events as Israel moved towards the Promised Land. But it could also be titled, God's Judgments, because that is frequently what he is showing in the book. He is showing how God judged the body, he is showing how God judged individuals. And while He is doing this it is providing us with a road map, but the road map is not over geographic territory, but spiritual, moral, governmental, and social territory significant for our understanding and developing.

Remember God was using that journey for Israel to prepare them for living in the Promised Land. God is using our pilgrimage to prepare us for living in the Kingdom of God. The overall purpose is in its intent. It is the same. The only difference is one was a physical preparation for living in a physical land. The other is a spiritual preparation for living in the spiritual Kingdom of God. But the overall theme is preparation. And so in order to prepare us, brethren, please understand this: God has to constantly judge. We will get into this just a little bit more as to why He has to do this.

God shows that these people had problems with lusting, idolatry, fornication, tempting God, and murmuring. Now they probably had other things as well, but these are the ones He chose to write on. And I would say that any one of these categories can cause us trouble as well. Now it is good for us to note that he really did not focus on the event itself, but rather its significance because really that thing was written for us so that we could get the spiritual significance. And so Moses does not give us a blow-by-blow account of what went on. So each one of these events was significant in its own right. We also have to understand that they overlapped and frequently the one event or the one sin led to another.

Let us go to Numbers 9. I want to use this verse to establish a principle. (I hope you will forgive my coughing, but I have to do this to keep my voice going.)

**Numbers 9:17-20** Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents. At the command of the Lord the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the Lord they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped. Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the Lord and did not journey. So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of the Lord they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the Lord they would journey.

I could go on there, but I want you to see this, that God actively led His people. He did not force them into situations—they made their own choices—but all the while they were making their choices, He was also leading as well.

Now He may seem to us from time to time to have gone far off. But that is belied by what He has written in the wilderness experience. He was always there. He never once, not even one time, ever abandoned them. He was either in the cloud or He was in the pillar of fire and from time to time, He was actually in the Tabernacle. Now they might have thought He was gone off somewhere but He never was. Please apply that to our pilgrimage. He is a God at hand. He is leading. He does not make every decision for us, He leads us. He is there! He allows us to make the choices. So He is not detached from His work. *We* are His work. And He says that He is working salvation in all the earth.

Let us go back to the New Testament to a very familiar scripture in I Peter 4.

**I Peter 4:17** For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

So judgment is now on you and me.

Please understand that God does not judge to condemn. Sometimes we get a wrong picture of judgment. Sometimes the judgment *is* unto damnation, that is unto destruction, to perdition, but that is not God's intent. He judges His people for a different reason altogether. He evaluates us in order to make the most of us. To judge means to evaluate, weigh evidence, to do this in order to reach an opinion. Sometimes, then, He exercises His authority to carry His judgment out. God judges His people in order to correct. That is the purpose of His judgment.

God sent His Son into the world not to condemn the world, but rather that through Him the world might be saved. All judgment has been given to Jesus Christ, and when God judges, He is doing it for the purpose to determine what is the best way that He can correct us in order that we can make the most out of our free moral agency. So from these experiences, then, He gives

us understanding. He tests us to see where we stand and to promote our growth so as to save us. It is His will that we be perfected as we will allow Him. It is not His will to lose us.

Now this all has to do with the book of Numbers, because this has to do with judgment.

**I Peter 1:17** And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear.

God judges everybody, I will say from top to bottom (that is a good way of putting it), without respects of persons. He is not impressed by men in the way that we tend to be. His judgments are absolutely righteous. They are made without any favoritism; there is no prejudice, there is no lack of facts. There is discernment, perfect discernment and understanding in every opinion that He reaches. All of the weaknesses that we are able to perceive with men's judgment, not a one of them is a factor in God's judgment. The psalmist put it this way: that His eyelids test the sons of men. See, nobody escapes His piercing gaze.

And so when He looks upon man, He looks at their works, He looks at their heart. He looks at their attitude, He looks at their integrity. Everything gets thrown into one hopper and He mixes it all together in order to evaluate, "How can I help this person? What can I do that will give this person understanding? What can I do that will help them to see the way more clearly? What can I do to make an adjustment in their attitude? What can I do to to remove some ignorance, that gives them a better chance to make a better choice?" That is why He tests. It is always to produce something better.

Let me put this into a little bit better picture. Maybe when we are attending school, we all have a fear of tests. Why do we fear the test? Because we are afraid it is going to reveal to us how little we know. Let us turn that a little bit. Why does the teacher give a test? For exactly the same reason that God judges. So the teacher can understand what the student is getting and what the student is not getting. So that the teacher can make a good judgment as to

how he or she can help the student. The test is given so that the student will see what they know and what they do not know so that the student then is able to make more application in those areas that are weak.

That is exactly the reason God judges. The judgment is not to fail. The judgment is to produce a better student. And right now God is judging the church. It is on us now because we are in our own wilderness heading toward the Kingdom of God.

Let us go to Numbers 11 again, verses 33 and 34. What we are going to see here, beginning with this scripture, is a series of judgments that came either upon an individual or a group of people. We are just not going to concentrate too much on exactly what occurred.

**Numbers 11:33-34** But while the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord struck the people with a very great plague. So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who yielded to craving.

If we have to look at the spiritual type here, they were lusting for the kind of spiritual diet that they had in Egypt and they were rejecting the dull, boring, plain, bland diet that God had given them. Well, you can see God's reaction. They were rejecting His Word is what they were doing. Food was the issue but the real issue to you and me was His Word.

**Numbers 14:36-37** Now the men which Moses sent to search the land, who returned and made all the congregation to complain against him by bringing a bad report of the land, those very men who brought the evil report about the land, died by the plague before the Lord.

Here the judgment is against tribal leaders. As you see, as we progress here, God judges everybody—top to bottom. Everybody gets a fair judgment from Him. He judges without respect of persons.

So here we have tribal leaders who went into the land, gave an exaggerated report against the great promises and the faithfulness of God. What they said

was, "Yeah, it's a good looking land all right, and it really does produce. But the trials of overcoming the present residents and their fortified cities is not worth making." They said, "Those people look too strong and entrenched." They were calling God into account! They were saying that He was lying. Think of yourself as we go along here.

**Numbers 14:33-35** "And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and bear the brunt of your infidelity, until your carcasses are consumed in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for each day you shall bear your guilt one year, namely forty years, and you shall know My rejection. I the Lord have spoken this. I will surely do so to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die."

Do you know what the sin was here? They believed the evil report. That is a sobering one.

The very fact that Joshua and Caleb were not judged in the same way shows that God was judging each person individually. Now, this one has very serious ramifications. How many people do you know who are going along with the church in today's trial, believing an evil report? Are they aware of what is written in this book of judgments about their personal responsibility?

**Numbers 16:1-3** Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men; and they rose up before Moses with some of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, representatives of the congregation, men of renown. They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?"

This time the judgment was against the ministry, or at least its equivalent, and those who sympathize with them in their attack against Moses, which was viewed by God as an attack against Him.

**Numbers 20:2** Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and Aaron.

**Numbers 20:7-12** Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; thus you shall bring forth for them water out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." So Moses took the rod from before the Lord as He commanded him. And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. Then the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

God mercifully supplied the water, but He judged and He punished Moses. Moses lost his temper because his faith wavered for a period of time, and he doubted that if he did not speak to the rock as God commanded, and instead he struck it twice. That was the same as reaching out and striking Christ! Do you ever lose your temper? Moses had to live with that failure. To whom much is given much is required.

You see what I mean? God judges from top to bottom, without respect of persons, without prejudice. He considers all the facts.

Now, in chapters 22 through 25 of Numbers, we find that God punished the persecutors of His work as well. Balak tried in the hardest way to get Balaam to curse Israel, but Balak was thwarted at every turn. Every time Balaam tried to curse Israel, a prophecy for good came out and I am sure that it frustrated Balak no end because he wanted these people to be put out of the

way because he was afraid of them. And so God judges everybody and He will judge the persecutors too.

Let us go back to I Corinthians 10. Please do not lose the opening of this sermon. We have a road map here. We see things that are going to happen in our lives individually, or we see things that are going to happen within the church. The weakness in the church may not always be exactly the same, but the principle is going to be the same. Now here in I Corinthians 10 notice how Paul extracted lessons for the people here in Corinth, and for you and me as well.

**I Corinthians 10:1-2** Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all of our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

He begins by using the Exodus experience of Israel when writing to the Corinthians during or right prior to or during the period of the Days of Unleavened Bread. Now, the fact that he does this shows its relevance to the Christian church, those who have made the New Covenant. Why would he even use the experience if the Days of Unleavened Bread had no meaning any further? There is a powerful lesson there for the New Covenant Christian. It would be dumb to use an experience like that if they no longer had to celebrate them, if there was no lesson that could be learned from them, if they were not relevant to a Christian's life. They are relevant, though.

Not only that, he makes an instruction that these people were baptized. Now that hits right at home, because these people were not really baptized the way the Christians were baptized. But you see what he is doing, he is using that as an example that the going through the sea was the same as getting baptized. Now who is this instruction for? It is for those who are baptized—for you and me.

He reinforces that both in verse 6 and verse 11 by drawing attention that these things were examples to us. Now the cloud signifies both guidance and protection. It protected them from the heat of the sun, but it also guided them and led the way on the path.



**I Corinthians 10:4** and drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

Verse 4 makes it abundantly clear that there is a spiritual Source supplying our needs along the way. And Paul makes abundantly clear that the Corinthians and we know that the God of the Old Testament who was in the cloud was none other than our Savior. Another connection. Then in verse 5 comes a stunning warning. I mean staggering when you consider its implications.

**I Corinthians 10:5** But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.

Of the original group who left only two men and their families survived! Only two men and their families made it through without perishing. By now, Paul ought to have everybody's attention. The unspoken word is: do you want to repeat the same errors that killed them on their journey?

My King James said that they were overthrown in the wilderness. That indicates that God took action against them as if they were fighting. See, that is what a wrestler does, he overthrows somebody. So it was something that God took very personal interest in. It was not something that He just sort of gave the order and then He stepped back and watched somebody else do it. He was judging each of these people personally, within the framework of the entire body.

Most modern translations say that they were scattered or they were strewn, and whether it is overthrown or scattered or strewn they all indicate something being forcefully tossed aside. Remember I told you God actively leads His people and He judges and He does not want to lose people. He wants to save them.

Now, God, the Rock mentioned earlier, is the same One that we actively are involved with. He is the same One who is leading us on our journey through the wilderness. I wonder if you ever thought about what kind of a witness this was to that second generation in the wilderness. Let us think about this for just a second. The figures that I am going to give you, I feel, are on the

conservative side. But the Bible tells us that there were 603,550 men above 20 who comprised Israel's army. Assume that there were an equal number of women the same age and most armies do not have anybody any older than about 50 years of age fighting within them.

In order to make the figure a little bit less conservative, we will just factor in an additional 300,000 men and women above the age of 50. So that brings us to 1,500,000 men and women. Now in 38 years, including leap years, there are 13,879 days. And from that you will find that *every single day* in the wilderness, at least somewhere around 108 people died.

These were God's people. These were the people that He intended to make a holy nation of. These were people that God wanted to save! These were people though that He could not save because they would not let Him; because they insisted on using their free moral agency to do things that were not right and good, that could never serve as a witness for Him in this world. And that was a grim and daily reminder of God's judgment.

Now, the point of Paul's effort is to help the Corinthians and us to see that, even though the Israelites were recipients of God's daily provision—the water came out of the rock, the food came down from heaven, God protected them from the heat, God protected them from their enemies, God kept the clothes on their back, the shoes on their feet, He did virtually everything He could to assist those people into making it into the Promised Land—we find in Hebrews the fourth chapter that they never made it because they disbelieved and their disobedience gave evidence of their unbelief.

You connect that with what Paul said in I Corinthians 10:2 about the baptism and you see here the powerful sobering lesson that baptism does not guarantee eternal life.

Now, what were the sins? First of all, coveting. This is extracted from Numbers 11:4-6. One of the interesting things about this is that what they lusted for was food. Tell me, brethren, what is there that is evil about food? It says they lusted for evil things. Well, there is nothing evil about food, but their attitude caused something that God created for good to be seen in an evil light by God. Now you think this is impossible today?

**Titus 1:15** To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving [Why did Israel in the wilderness fail? Their lack of faith. They did not believe God.] nothing is pure.

You see, our attitude can turn good things into instruments of evil. These people had the most helpful and tasteful food available. A little bit later a psalmist called it angels food. They had plenty of it. They seem to have plenty of strength to be able to walk. They had plenty of strength to complain too. Moses seemed to get along just fine on it. But you see, their attitude made it seem bland and insufficient.

There is a lesson here. Human nature can never be satisfied. I mean, that is a fact of life. It cannot be satisfied, even when God is the provider. That is how perverse, how twisted, how deceitful it is. A person's perspective makes all the difference in the world. And these people were very quickly developing what I have called in the past, the welfare mentality. They looked upon themselves as victims being taken advantage of. It was impossible for them to have better protection, better food, better water, clothing that never wore out, shoes that did not wear out.

It was not enough. They began looking at themselves as victims instead of thankfully accepting their lot in life as so much better than what it had been just a few months before when they were slaves without hope of any betterment of life. They allowed their emotions to whipsaw them into feeling sorry for themselves because they had less than they thought they deserved.

So the combination of their perspective and their lack of emotional control killed them. Did you hear what I said? *Killed them*. There is much discouragement that is caused by an unrealistic, deceptive, and self-centered evaluation that does not factor in the big picture, which includes God in His purpose in our lives.

The second thing was idolatry and this is the only one of the five that was not taken from Numbers. It is taken from Exodus 32:1-6. We all know that idolatry is putting something before the true God and serving it. Now, what is so interesting about that case there, that event recorded in Exodus 32, is the reason they gave for doing what they did. It is so interesting to you and me. "We know not what has happened to this Moses." Can you think of the

New Testament parallel to that? I will tell you what it is, "My lord delays his coming." So what did the people do? They sat down to eat and then they rose up to play. In neither case was it a good thing.

You see, again their reasoning reflects a lack of faith. They had an "out of sight, out of mind" approach that justified to them the reason for serving a god that was inferior even to themselves! I mean they were worshipping a stupid, dumb piece of gold and wood. They did not even make an idol of a human being, did not even make an idol or a god of a living leader. You think there would be more excuse or more justification for something like that. And then to have Aaron say, "Well, I just threw the gold into the fire and this is what came out."

You can see that their thinking was not all that good. I mean Aaron's mind was out of town. I do not know where it was, but it was not in the right place. Now we can chuckle at that, but are our justifications any better? They are not. Human nature can come up with oodles of justifications for why it does what it does.

Let us look at I Corinthians 9. Notice the difference between Paul and the people that he is describing here that we just saw in Exodus 32.

**I Corinthians 9:25-27** And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainly. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air [Paul did not shadow box, Paul did not go about life aimlessly]. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

So he ran with all of his might and he was anticipating the return of Jesus Christ. But whether Christ came or not made no difference to him. He was not going to allow himself to fall into idolatry.

The next one was fornication. This is extracted from Numbers the 25th chapter. The reference here is to more than fornication. We tend to be very specific about that as being premarital sex. Most of the time the word fornication appears in the Bible it is much broader than that and includes a

wide variety of sexual sins. In the New Testament it simply means sexual immorality and can include adultery and homosexuality, bestiality as well.

Now one of the major things about this particular sin is that the sin did not remain in the sexual mode, but rather it led to idolatry. It was the entranceway into idolatry. Do you remember what happened to Solomon in his old age? His wives led him to worship Baal, Chemosh, Molech, Ashtoreth, and on and on. Well that is what happened with Israel. Their sexual sins lead them to the worship of Baal Peor.

The chain of events shows what a persuasive pull that sex has on the direction of a person's life. But I will tell you I do not think that it was sex, per se, but rather the sense of well being and satisfaction that results when everyone is being paid attention to, loved, taken care of, we might say. We all desire greatly to be loved and we will allow ourselves to do much that is wrong in order to get it. But we have to watch out here, because there is a spiritual principle that is involved here. It says in the book, does it not, that the world loves its own. And it is very attractive.

Now, if you are with me, you understand that God divorced Israel because of their what? Their fornication and adultery. With whom? The world!

The lesson here is that this is not the way to seek this sense of well being because God's Word shows very well and so does man's history, so does current history show, it destroys the social fabric of a society through the destruction of family trust. And when that trust is broken, the family begins to divide, because the members begin to feel less responsible to each other and crime begins to rise.

In Jeremiah 3:6-8 we can learn that a stable and a safe and a prosperous society revolves around tight families who feel responsible for protecting the integrity of all of the family's well being, and fornicating and committing adultery is not being your brother's keeper. So why was God concerned? Because it was going to destroy Israel through the destruction of the family.

The next one was tempting God. The direct reference is to Numbers 21:4-6. It says in verse 4 that the reason that people did what they did was because they were discouraged about the difficulty of the way. And so again, they raised the issue of food.

Now, this was far from being a singular occasion, I mean this tempting God thing. If you look in Psalm 78:40-42 and Exodus 17:2 and 7, in both of those places it says that the reason Israel provoked God was because they remembered not His hand, and they doubted whether God was really with them. That seems almost nonsensical to us. They knew He was in the cloud, they knew He was in the pillar of fire. And yet human nature is so tricky, it convinced these people that God was not really there.

In addition to that, they began to disbelieve that He really split the Red Sea. They began to disbelieve that the manna was not coming from Him. They no longer believed that water was coming out of the rock whenever Moses spoke to it. That seems almost too far out to believe. And yet it is what happened. It is no wonder God got provoked.

So they disbelieved the mercy and goodness of God by forgetting the miracles by which He freed them, then questioned whether He was with them. And so they took it upon themselves to presume to tell Him how He should serve them. That is certainly not a "Thy will be done" attitude. It was not yielded. It was not humble but a smart-alecky type, like a kid telling the sage what and how to do.

Every parent has had to deal with a child who gets smart-alecky and snaps back at them and calls them into account. And perhaps there is hardly anything in life that is more exasperating than that. To give a child birth, to supply them with the best you can, and then have them call you into account because they want more and better. How quickly they forget that they owe their very existence to you. It was one of these occasions that God said to Moses, "Stand aside! I'm going to wipe them out."

The next one was murmuring. That is taken from Numbers 14:2 and verses 26 and 27 and many other times. That is just one example of a constantly recurring problem. This is very closely related to the preceding one of

tempting God. Israel always seemed to be dissatisfied unless God had done something awesomely spectacular just about three minutes before. There is instructions for you and me in the book of Philippians in chapter 2.

**Philippians 2:14** Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may be blameless . . .

Have you done any complaining lately? Was God within the framework of that complaint? I have complained about my lot in life. I have had to repent of that. Evelyn and I have wondered whether my voice problems are not a direct result of that. I need not have complained. I *should not* have complained. I should not feel sorry for myself. So I am paying for it; I am being judged, and I have to feel thankful that He has not taken my voice completely away. Then again, maybe you wish He would! (laughter)

You know, it is very easy for us to get discouraged. It might be very easy for us to get discouraged about what is going on in the church. But sad though it is, we have to understand God has to permit a trial of this nature to come upon His people. Do you know why? So He can find out where we stand. It has to be done. We are not going to go into the Kingdom of God untested and unjudged. God has to judge us in order to refine us. And there is nothing like a test of this nature for discovering where our faith lies—whether our faith is in truth, or whether our faith is in men. Whether we really love the truth.

We could throw up our hands in despair as Israel so frequently did. But what does that reveal about the depth of our faith? We have to remind ourselves from time to time that God is still on His throne, everything is under control. With our limited vision, with our limited knowledge, our limited understanding, and our limited discernment it may look as those things are in chaos everywhere! But is God in heaven? Is God on His throne? Is God running the ship? Hey, everything is alright. I mean, it is going to work out alright—things could not be in better hands.

Remember God judges *all*. And He is going to judge the Tkach's for what they have done, and He is going to judge you and me, and when He judges,

if we respond to that judgment, we are going to be better for it than had it never occurred. He can take care of His church as He showed abundantly through the history of Israel.

As we conclude, I wonder if we can have faith in four simple statements that do not even require any expounding.

The first one is back in the book of Genesis.

**Genesis 18:14** Is anything too hard for the Lord?

Statement number one. You have to answer these things.

The next one is taken from I Corinthians 10. This ought to be in our scriptural vocabulary.

**I Corinthians 10:13** No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way to escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Number three is from Philippians 4. It is another simple statement.

**Philippians 4:19** And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

And the fourth one is also found in Philippians.

**Philippians 1:6** being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Now, despite Israel's manifold weaknesses, God did manage to get them to the Promised Land and God judged His people along the way. And so there is both comfort and admonishment within that. The stakes are infinitely higher for us and God is going to make every effort to save His people. And if God for us then who can stand against Him?



He tells us to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. And He means, be serious about it, be responsible, govern yourself, guard your lives—because the end is not that far off.

There are two additional thoughts as we close here that I think are worth considering. Somebody, I do not know who it was, but in my research many, many years ago, this person was led to understand that most of Israel's recorded troubles occurred in the summer. Summer is lazy time, perhaps the time of the year that we are most likely to let down. So many things to do. So much light. So much time.

It was also found, and this one is exceedingly interesting. The only time there appears to have been no trouble at all was when they built the Tabernacle. In other words, they were constructing, strengthening, and beautifying the church. Their mind was on the accomplishment of a great work and making a gift, I might say, to God. When they got their minds off themselves, the kind of judgments that we see in the book of Numbers never occurred.

There is a powerful lesson in that, and I hope that is something that we learn well, as we go along the way.