

Message #1**Various Texts**

For those of you who don't know my testimony, I came to faith in Jesus Christ here in Kalamazoo in 1976 and now here we are 42 years later in Kalamazoo at Texas Corners Bible Church. Now the process of believing in Christ in Kalamazoo and then coming back to Kalamazoo is one long meandering, multiyear story. We left Kalamazoo and went to Grand Rapids, and then we left Grand Rapids and went to DeMotte, Indiana, and then we left DeMotte, Indiana, and went to Pocatello, Idaho. Then we left Pocatello, Idaho, and came back to Kalamazoo. This has been a long and winding road back here. Along the way there have been setbacks, failures, regroupings and reassessments. But now here we are back in the same city where it all started.

There is a story like that in the Bible. It is the story of Israel. We could say that she experienced her national salvation in about 1440 B.C.. That was the moment when Moses went and got her out of Egypt. God's plan was to take her from Egypt to the Promised Land. But along the way there were setbacks, failures, regroupings and reassessments. It was a 40 year meandering story and the story is found in a book of the Bible called Numbers.

In the next weeks, we would like to take you on a journey through this amazing book. As is our habit, we begin the study today with the goal to introduce the book to you. We do this in question answer fashion. We ask a series of questions and then answer them so we can get some perspective about where this book will take us.

QUESTION #1- Why Study the book of Numbers?

Let me give you six reasons for studying it.

Reason #1 - Because Numbers is an inspired book of God and there are only 66 of those books.

Let us always keep this in mind; Numbers is one of God's books. All Scripture is God-breathed inspired and is profitable for us (II Tim. 3:16). All Scripture is called "holy" and "sacred" (II Tim. 3:15). The inspired Scriptures have the ability to make one wise.

The fact that Numbers is an inspired book of God that belongs in the Bible has really never been questioned. It is part of the Torah (Law) and the Pentateuch, which is the first five books of the Bible written by Moses. The word "Pentateuch" comes from two Greek words "Pente" which means five and "teuchos" which can mean scroll. Origen (A.D. 185-254) was the first writer to call the first five books the Pentateuch and Numbers was one of the books. As Dr. R. K. Harrison said, Numbers is "an inseparable part of the five-volume collection known as the Torah or Pentateuch" (*Numbers*, p. 1).

The Hebrew text of Numbers is "very reliable." The O.T. Law (Torah) was revered and carefully copied and Numbers has very few issues. In fact, Dr. Ronald Allen said Numbers "seems to be cleaner than most biblical books" (*Numbers*, p. 661).

In the famous Dead Sea Scroll discovery, copies of Numbers or fragments from the book of Numbers were found in Cave 2 and Cave 4. When the manuscripts pertaining to Numbers were compared to the Hebrew Masoretic Text (vowel pointed text 10th century A.D.) and the Septuagint (Greek Text of Hebrew O.T. 2nd century B.C.), everything turned out to be a “correct reproduction of the autographs” (Norman Geisler & William Nix, *A General Introduction to The Bible*, p. 381).

What this means is that the book of Numbers is an amazing book inspired and preserved by God. When you read and study this book of Numbers, you are reading an inspired book that was actually written 1,400 years before Christ. So in 2018, what that means is you are studying a book God wants you to study that He wrote over 3,400 years ago and He preserved it so we could study it.

We waste a lot of time in life, but when we study an inspired book of the Bible, we invest our time wisely.

Reason #2 - Because Numbers is a book most of God’s people don’t study.

I’ll bet if I were to ask most believers what is your favorite book of the Bible, you wouldn’t hear someone say Numbers. Over the last 40 plus years, I have asked people that question and I have never had one say Numbers. A few weeks ago I asked our Wednesday night group what their favorite book of the Bible was and not one said Numbers.

I’ll also bet if I were to ask you when was the last time you heard an exposition of the Book of Numbers in church, most would say never. Iain Duguid said he one time told an Old Testament professor that he was preaching through Numbers and the professor said he wasn’t sure Numbers was supposed to be preached (*Numbers*, p. 13).

Now when you read through the Bible, you have to read through Numbers, but it is not one of those popular books that most spend much time analyzing. The truth is, although Numbers is one of the inspired books of God, it is mostly a neglected or forgotten book.

Now some will say, yes but Numbers is part of the O.T. law. In fact, Numbers is a book filled with some strange laws, which seem odd to me. Numbers is a book filled with numbers that really have nothing to do with me. It is a book filled with strange names and it is a book that is filled with history.

This is all true. Those things are in the book of Numbers. But I’ll give you another reason to study it.

Reason #3 - Because Paul said this book of Numbers was written for N.T. Christians.

In I Corinthians 10:1-11, the Apostle Paul specifically mentions four applications from the book of Numbers and says they are very applicable to us:

(Application #1) - What happened to Israel in the wilderness is an example to us. I Cor. 10:5-6

From the time Numbers begins until the time it ends takes about 38-40 years. During that time we track what Israel did in her formative years. We get to see how the nation organized itself; how they lived together and the beginning of how they worshipped and things started to go in a wrong direction. We don't want that same thing happening to us.

What happened to Israel in the wilderness is the story of the book of Numbers. We might be wise to take a serious look at what she did or didn't do in the wilderness because we don't want to end up not pleasing God, like she did and we certainly don't want to spend our lives craving evil things like she did.

(Application #2) - We don't want to try the Lord like Israel did and have Him destroy us.
I Cor. 10:9-10

Sure enough that story about serpents destroying Israel is in the book of Numbers.

(Application #3) - The things in the book of Numbers were written for our instruction.
I Cor. 10:11

This is an amazing statement. The things that happened to Israel in the book of Numbers were written down to give us instruction.

(Application #4) - There is a critical connection between Numbers, us and Jesus Christ.
I Cor. 10:4

There are things in the book of Numbers that clearly point to Jesus Christ. In fact, the Apostle John referred to one of the events from Numbers and specifically pointed it to the cross work of Jesus Christ (John 3:14-16). In fact, this very book of Numbers is connected to perhaps the most famous verse in the entire New Testament, John 3:16.

Reason #4 - Because Numbers is a book that teaches us much about the true character of God.

There is so much to learn about God in this book that we need to learn. It is obvious that God is a God of systematic order. He establishes leadership and he expects that leadership will follow His Word and the people will follow the leadership. God demands reverent worship.

He knows the numbers of people who are in His work. He knows each one individually. He knows who each person is and He knows what they do or don't do.

God is highly organized and a God of great detail. He knows who is able to serve Him and who isn't. He knows who is serving Him and who isn't. This book of Numbers shows us that about God. **In fact, the book of Numbers actually proves you are not just a number.**

Furthermore, this book of Numbers shows the mercy and grace of God and the severity of God. You cannot miss this about God in the book of Numbers. God has a just and righteous side to Him and He also can be gracious and merciful. He has a forgiving side to Him. Both are true.

Now if God's people push God too far, there are severe consequences. Now as we go through this book, you might be tempted to say those foolish Israelites. But before you say that, take a good honest look at yourself, because Numbers says God takes a good honest look at each of us.

Reason #5 - Because Numbers is a book that shows that God's people can fall into a trap of bad behavior.

One commentator said by the time you get done studying Numbers, you are sick and tired of Israel's bad behavior. In this book of Numbers, Israel does all kinds of bad things. Well just remember this, God gets real tired of our bad behavior and thank God that He was gracious with them and is with us. Hopefully by the time we get done with the book of Numbers, we will be sick and tired of our own bad behavior.

Reason #6 - Because Numbers is a book of our sanctification journey.

Israel was in the wilderness and was headed to the Promised Land, just like we are in the world and are headed to heaven. We are in-between Egypt—the point of our salvation and the Promised Land—heaven wandering around in the wilderness world. God's people live life in the wilderness and they need to journey through life in a sanctified way that does not displease God. Numbers will help us.

QUESTION #2 – What is the title of the book of Numbers?

The title the Jews used in their Hebrew Bibles for this book comes from the first prepositional phrase found in Numbers 1:1, “in the wilderness” (bemidbar). This is a good name for the book because the book tracks Israel through the wilderness. **Actually, the book of Numbers begins with Israel in the wilderness and it ends with them in the same wilderness. Numbers is actually the story of two generations of Israelites in the wilderness. One group got out and the other group didn't.**

Our English title “Numbers” comes from a Latin translation of the Greek Septuagint title which is the Greek word “Arithmoi” from which we get our English word “arithmetic.” The Latin Vulgate (A.D. 405) translated the Greek word “Arithmoi into the Latin word “Numeri” and for some reason the English translators stuck with the Latin and called the book Numbers. The truth is it could have been called Arithmoi and perhaps should have been.

This name Numbers was given to the book by the Septuagint translators because there are two major census calculations that Moses makes in the book. Census Calculation #1 is found in Chapters 1-4 and Census Calculation #2 is found in Chapter 26.

The two numberings of Israel take place at the beginning of the wilderness experience and then again at the end of the wilderness experience.

QUESTION #3 – Who wrote the book of Numbers?

The book of Numbers was written by Moses. That point is established by the first verse of the book Numbers 1:1. All throughout the book God speaks to Moses and by the time we get to Numbers 33:2, it is stated that Moses was the one recording all of this.

Jesus said the Law was written by Moses (Luke 24:44) and that fact was also confirmed by Philip (John 1:45). The Apostle Paul also said Moses wrote the Law (Rom. 10:5). Numbers was written by Moses.

One of the arguments that has been used against Moses writing this is Numbers 12:3, which says, “Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.” They conclude Moses would have never written this about himself.

However, this is no problem when we realize that God is the One telling Moses what to write. The very next verse says, “Suddenly the LORD said to Moses...” In Numbers 13:1, God is actually speaking to Moses and tells him what to say and write. Furthermore, in analyzing the verse, if in fact Moses did write it, he writes in the third person, not the first person. So there is humility even in that. **What this shows is that the key to being honored by God is a meek and humble spirit.**

Carefully observe what is said in Numbers 33:2: “Moses recorded...by the command of the LORD.” That settles it. Moses wrote Numbers.

QUESTION #4 – When did Moses write Numbers?

If we back track 480 years from the days of Solomon, from his fourth year of reign 966 B.C. (I Kings 6:1), we may assume that Moses went and led the children of Israel out of Egypt in 1446 B.C.. We know the Israelites were in the wilderness for 40 years (Numbers 32:13) and we also know that Moses died shortly before Israel entered the Promised Land (Deut. 34:5). Moses died somewhere near the year 1406 B.C., 40 years after leading Israel out of Egypt.

We assume that Moses was documenting things as he went along, but probably he wrote the major part of this book late in life shortly before he died. We suggest that Moses wrote Numbers somewhere near the year 1410-1406 B.C..

QUESTION #5 – What time frame does the book of Numbers cover?

When Numbers opens it is the second month of the second year after Israel had left Egypt (Numbers 1:1). When Numbers closes, the Israelites were in the tenth month of the fortieth Year (Deuteronomy 34:5). So the book of Numbers covers a time span of about 39 years.

In most of the years, what we see is a saved nation that does not trust the Word of God and most of the time doesn't obey the Word of God. They wander around in the wilderness like lost sheep for 38-39 years.

There are some believers like that, they believe in Jesus Christ but then go wandering for the next 40 years. They don't trust the Word of God and don't obey it most of the time. So God hits them with some negatives.

QUESTION #6 – What is the main theme of the book?

God gave His law, His commandments and His ordinances in written form to His people. He did not do that for the fun of it. He expected that His people would take His Word seriously and that they would obey it. **When God goes to all the trouble to give His people His Word, He expects His people to obey it.** Harrison said the character of the book of Numbers is “a manual of direction” (*Ibid.*, p. 5).

The main theme of the book of Numbers is that God's people need to obey the Word of God! God's people in any dispensation will save themselves a lot of heartache and problems if they do this.

God graciously saves people and that starts a wonderful journey in a new relationship with God. God expects His people to obey Him and if they do that, He will bless them in many wonderful ways. But if they do not do that, they are headed for a long, hard, wilderness adventure.

QUESTION #7 – What is the basic breakdown of the book of Numbers?

Thomas Constable does a really nice job giving a basic outline of the book into three simple sections: (*Numbers, An Introduction*, p. 5).

Section #1 - God gives His wilderness provisions to His chosen people. **Numbers 1-10**

During these chapters God organizes and provides for the camp and provides worship structure.

Section #2 - God demonstrates His patience with His wayward people. **Numbers 11-21**

Time and time again His people disobeyed Him and yet He did not abandon them. He disciplined them and even though He made them wander in the wilderness for 38 years, He carefully observed them and oversaw everything.

Section #3 - God shows His protection of His people and His persistence in bringing them to the land. **Numbers 22-36**

God demonstrated His faithfulness to Israel. He protected her from enemies and provided for her needs and in spite of her rebellion, he took her to the Promised Land.

Get ready to take a journey through Numbers. As I said earlier, Numbers proves you are not just a number when it comes to God. You purpose to take God's Word seriously and God will do wonderful things with you and for you.

We are living in a wilderness world and we desperately need the Word of God. Let us purpose to follow that Word and He will lead us into all His blessings.