

### **What does God expect of us after we become a Christian?**

- Can we do what we want?
- Obviously, the answer is “no” but how do we become the people God wants us to be?
- In our lesson today we’ll look at the mistakes of Israel and a proven way to grow in our Christian lives in our lesson entitled.....

## **The book of Numbers: *Bad Choices, Tragic***

*Consequences, and how Spiritual Disciplines Can Help Avoid Them*

### **More than history—helpful lessons for our journey**

- What Ray Steadman said about Numbers:
- ***If you read the Old Testament as nothing but a history of ancient events concerning people who have long since disappeared, it will be the dullest, most boring reading you can find. However, if you read it as a picture of what is happening in your life, vividly displayed in terms of these people of old, you will find fascinating reading indeed.***
- 1 Cor 10 tells us that these stories were recorded for us, so we don’t make the same mistakes.
- Bible commentators through the years have likened the stories from the Exodus to the Promised Land as a picture of the Christian life from our salvation to Christian maturity.
- Numbers is a book that is often used to illustrate this as it exemplifies what happens if we don’t trust God on our journey AND how He continues to love and care for us anyway—let’s look at it—

### **The beginning and importance of Numbers**

- The book begins by telling us that it starts “The first day of the second month, in the second year” since the Children of Israel left Egypt.
- A lot has happened during this time, and the book itself ***it is a pivotal one, a crossroads in the history of Israel.***
- It is pivotal, because it illustrates forcefully how even though a people and a person can be saved, that if they do not trust God and live obediently, their life can be one of wilderness wandering in circles.
- It may be a literal wilderness as the children of Israel experienced or an emotional and spiritual one that many wander in today.
- But regardless, we don’t want to do that, so let’s look carefully at Numbers and applications from it that I trust you will find significant we learn how to live the purposeful life Jesus planned for us.

### **To review, first, the Exodus**

- It was one of the most extraordinary events of Biblical and human history.
- People who were slaves for over 400 years were freed from the control of one of the most powerful nations on earth, after God’s demonstrations of His power in the Plagues and finally in the death of the first born.
- That was followed by further deliverance from Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea.
- The Exodus is often used as a picture of our salvation, where we were rescued from a life as slaves to sin and are now alive to God—but we are not home yet, not in our Promised Land of Heaven and they weren’t there yet either.
- God was preparing them and us for an eternal destiny. I don’t think we

consider it enough but let's keep that in mind as we go through this book that a great destiny, a promised land ahead doesn't mean an easy journey to get there.

#### **After Egypt, they travel until they arrive at Mt. Sinai**

- Where they will receive God's laws—once we are delivered, we need to know how God wants us to live and how to worship Him.
- **\*\*WE DON'T know this on our own!**
- God also reminds them of the Covenant—an agreement between God and His people.
- The Covenant is a continuation of the one given to Abraham, when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, promised to give him the land, and that through his people all the nations of the earth would be blessed.
- Here is how the giving of the Covenant is recorded for this new generation of God's people:

#### **In Exodus 19:1-8**

- On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. . . .
- <sup>3</sup>Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, *"This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: <sup>4</sup>'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup>Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, <sup>6</sup>you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."
- <sup>7</sup>So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. <sup>8</sup>The people all responded together, *"We will do everything the Lord has said."* So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord.
- **God gave them conditions of obedience and they promised to obey.**

#### **God continues with more promises**

- In summary, God also promised that His Angel would lead them and that God will wipe out their enemies; that He will hand the land over to them and that God will send terror ahead to frighten their enemies.
- **NOTE: they were promised victory long before the battles.**
- And once again the people respond, twice, "Everything the Lord says, we will do." **REMEMBER this as the entire rest of the OT happens the way it does because they didn't do what they promised.**
- **This is the pattern of covenants during those times. The powerful ruler goes over the history of what He has done, makes promises, and the people promise to obey. But a covenant was a serious and binding agreement, with consequences if it was broken.**
- Application: **we are quick to accept God's promises, but how easily we forget our obligations. Especially if we think God doesn't do what we want, when we want it. Let's look at how that worked out for them.**

#### **Moses goes up on the mountain for more instructions—an immediate test if they will do what they promised**

- The people get impatient—they think Moses is taking too long.
- Application note here—some (if not most) of the greatest sins we see in the

Bible (and often in our lives) is because we get impatient for God to act.

- We'll see that again and again in the Bible and as we do in our lives.
- ***We'd do well to get used to the reality that God ALWAYS takes longer than we want—that is part of a test of trust that never ends.***
- In this instance, because they couldn't wait for Moses' return, they construct a Golden Calf and worship it.
- That didn't go well—Moses comes down, breaks the tablets of the law, grinds the Golden Calf into powder, makes the people drink it; plus, God sends a plague and 3,000 die.
- They sin; they complain; God forgives, this pattern continues for two years, while they build the Tabernacle and learn God's laws.

#### **In spite of all their complaining and sin, they arrive at the border of the land**

- God has done ALL He said He would do—they have no reason to doubt He will continue to keep His Word.
- 12 spies are sent in to check it out the land.
- When they returned, their report started out this way,
- *"We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit."* Numbers 13:27
- If only they continued trusting God, based on His repeated promises—that HE was giving them the land, that HE would conquer for them—they would have had all they wanted to eat, a land of their own, rest from their wandering in the desert.

#### **But that didn't happen**

- Despite Caleb and Joshua telling reminding the people what God would do, here is their response:
- Exodus 13: 31-33 MSG *But the others said, "We can't attack those people; they're way stronger than we are." [yes, but not stronger than God] They spread scary rumors among the People of Israel. They said, "We scouted out the land from one end to the other—it's a land that swallows people whole. Everybody we saw was huge. Why, we even saw the Nephilim giants (the Anak giants come from the Nephilim). Alongside them we felt like grasshoppers. And they looked down on us as if we were grasshoppers."*
- Their times of grumbling, of not trusting God caught up with them and **God had had enough.**

**God threatened to destroy them on the spot, Moses intervened, and they were forgiven....but the consequences stood**

- <sup>20</sup> *The Lord replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked.*
- *... "How long will this wicked community grumble against me? I have heard the complaints of these grumbling Israelites. <sup>28</sup> So tell them, 'As surely as I live, declares the Lord, I will do to you the very thing I heard you say: <sup>29</sup> In this wilderness your bodies will fall—every one of you twenty years old or more who was counted in the census and who has grumbled against me. <sup>30</sup> 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.*
- <sup>34</sup> *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.'*
- <sup>35</sup> *I, the Lord, have spoken, and I will surely do these things to this whole*

***wicked community, which has banded together against me. They will meet their end in this wilderness; here they will die.”***

#### **Many applications to consider here**

- “Little” sins (that really aren’t so little) like grumbling, can set a pattern in our lives that is difficult to break— and the cumulative result can have big, and unexpected consequences.
- At their core, any kind of complaining, grumbling, or whining expresses a lack of trust in God.
- The children of Israel were PROMISED certain things—in this instance God had repeatedly told them He would take them into the land and conquer their enemies.
- He did not promise an easy journey or gourmet meals along the way and that they’d like all the leadership decisions their God-appointed leaders made.
- He did promise He would conquer their enemies and bring them into the land, and they didn’t believe Him.

#### **A comment about the manna**

- I was wondering why God gave them such a boring diet for 40 years.
- If He could send them manna, couldn’t He have sent them other food as well? ***But then I realized,***
- ***They weren’t supposed to eat manna for 40 years.***
- It was supposed to be a temporary provision.
- They were promised a land, “flowing with milk and honey” a rich productive land where the grapes were so huge, they had to carry a bunch of them back on a pole. That’s what God planned for them.
- But unfortunately, they had little but manna to eat for 40 years because ***they didn’t trust God.***
- We need to be thankful for what we have NOW and not complain like a petulant child until God gives us what we think we deserve.
- We must train ourselves to be thankful and content for God’s current provisions, because if we aren’t thankful now, we may not get additional blessings.

#### **What we consider a “little sin,” or bad spiritual habit can grow into a major transgression**

- And it can have major consequences.
- As shown in the story of Israel in Numbers.
- After God pronounced judgement on them, they said they were sorry and tried to go into the land on their own and failed.
- The very sad truth is that though God always forgives if we ask for it, He does not always remove the consequences of sin.
- Sometimes “I’m sorry” doesn’t work; sometimes there are no do overs.
- And sometimes people don’t learn from their mistakes.
- This pattern of sin, saying “sorry” and not meaning it will continue through the Old Testament and ultimately judgement will come when Israel is removed from the land.

#### **As they wander, God continues to take care of them, and they continue to sin**

- There is a rebellion against Moses and the earth opens up and swallows the rebels, Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.
- More grumbling continues; snakes are sent to afflict them; Moses lifts up

the snake and all who look at it are saved—this incident becomes a picture of Jesus and image of healing.

- The very odd story of Balaam and his talking donkey takes place—Balaam was sent to only say what God said and instead of a curse prophesied blessings and protection for Israel, but later encouraged sin with Moabite women—he was finally destroyed with them.
- Sadly, this pattern of not trusting God can happen to anyone—troubles will come, we choose our response.

#### **At any time in life, regardless of age or circumstances, previous trials don't give you a pass**

- Once again in Numbers 20, the people didn't have water to drink.
- After many years of wandering, of seeing God care for their needs, do they look with anticipation for what God will do to meet this need once again?
- **Exodus 20:**<sup>3</sup> *They quarreled with Moses and said, "If only we had died when our brothers fell dead before the Lord! <sup>4</sup> Why did you bring the Lord's community into this wilderness, that we and our livestock should die here? <sup>5</sup> Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to this terrible place? It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates. And there is no water to drink!"*

#### **Once again, God is gracious**

- And He tells Moses and Aaron to gather the people and **speak** to the rock **and water will flow out.**
- They gather the people. But Moses is angry and says, **"Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?"**
- And he takes his staff and strikes the rock.
- God is merciful and He gives the people water.
- But Moses was fed up with their complaining and in response dishonored and disobeyed God.

#### **The consequence of that bad decision to react in anger**

- God punished Moses by not allowing him to enter the Promised Land.
- It seems incredibly harsh, but some applications from it:
- As mentioned earlier, we are never too old or too mature in our Christian lives or have suffered too much, to be past challenges and trials, temptations to sin.
- **Or are we ever in a position where there won't be consequences to sinful actions.**
- Some people think they can do things or get away with things because of age or the position they are in—and they may for a time, but no one ultimately gets away with sin or hurting others.

#### **Essential applications us all**

- It will serve us well to root out character flaws as early as possible or at whatever time we can in life we recognize them so that as we age or if we are in a situation where we simply react, we don't automatically react sinfully based on previous patterns.
- **Moses, it seems did not do that.** He killed a man in anger when he was young; some of his actions as he got older, though they may have been what we might call "righteous anger" were certainly actions of anger—making Israel drink the water with the powdered remains of the Golden Calf mixed in comes to mind, quickly accusing Aaron of sin.
- Anger it seems was a continuing issue for him.

- Now he is older and obviously tired and fed up with their complaining.
- And so, he reacts from a well of untamed anger with the result of grave consequences—

#### **A C. S. Lewis quote applies here**

- *If there are rats in the cellar **you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly.** But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way the suddenness of the provocation does not make me an ill-tempered man; it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am.*
- We must continuously work on killing the rats in the cellars of our hearts, such as reacting with anger, feeling God owes us, resentments, etc., so our actions and words when we are under stress and not in control will flow from a pure heart that is at peace and trusts God.
- We know it is never a valid excuse to say we are tired, or stressed, or whatever and so it is OK to sin—we know we need to stop reacting.
- **The question is HOW DO WE DO THAT?**  
**How do we change the besetting sins in our life, big and little things we want to change, but seem to have no power over?**

#### **Value of spiritual disciplines**

- “Spiritual Disciplines” are often defined as practices we cultivate in our Christian lives to help us deal with a sin that we cannot conquer directly.
- As such they often seem like practices (especially things like fasting, solitude, meditation, etc.) something only for the super spiritual or like some sort of spiritual magic (fast for 2 weeks and automatically you’ll rid yourself of anger).
- And so, we ignore them and stumble along.
- But let’s look at them more closely.

#### **A very brief overview of a very complex subject**

- I strongly recommend additional study and reading on this topic
- Two classics—Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*
- Dallas Willard, *the Spirit of the Disciplines*
- **HIGHLY Recommended—Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for The Christian Life***
- Contemporary take on them, John Mark Comer, *Practicing the Way*

#### **To begin, change the idea of discipline from a negative to a very positive one**

- Dallas Willard points out that the Bible reminds us **“His commands are not burdensome.” John 5:3, and in Ps. 16:11, it reminds us: You will make known to me the way of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy.**
- It seems like spiritual discipline might be difficult, but it is much easier in the end than—the end result of living a life of instant gratification and sin which results in chaos, and spiritual death.
- Proverbs 13:15 reminds us that *“the way of the transgressor is hard.”*
- As anyone who has had a hangover from a night of “partying” or the fallout of a broken relationship by giving in to meanness or anger can verify that a bit of self-control would have had a much more positive result.
- Or as the Children of Israel found out when they didn’t trust God—yes, they would have to fight when they went into the land, but as you go through Numbers, they still had battles, but instead fighting in the land God promised, they fought in a desert, ate little but manna, and wandered in

circles for 40 years.

- So, what should we do?

### **Perhaps change the label from Spiritual Disciplines to Spiritual HABITS**

- They are in practice, the underlying habits of life that will enable God to totally change your heart and from that your behavior will change.
- John Mark Comer does this in his book, where he talks about a “rule of life.” As he says *“By learning to rearrange our days, we can follow the Way of Jesus. We can be with him. Become like him. And do as he did.”*
- From the futility of will power and “I won’t do that, I won’t do that.”
- ***To the idea of training as an athlete would.***
- An athlete doesn’t simply decide one day to sign up for a marathon and win the race by determining to do it.
- He or she trains for years to do it—diet, sleep, working out, running, using a coach—lots of time alone training hard prior to the big race.
- What are some of the areas of training for us spiritually?

### **There are traditional lists of Spiritual Disciplines/Habits—pick any to work on**

- Again, reading books and more study is highly recommended, in his book, Dallas Willard has two lists:
- **Disciplines of Abstinence:** solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, sacrifice.
- **Disciplines of Engagement:** study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, submission.
- ***Whatever you choose to practice, be sure you ground it in God’s Word as any of them can be incompletely understood or misused.***
- Also—consider the ***Navigator’s Wheel illustration***—Spiritual Disciplines/Habits on a more beginner level and highly recommended as a way to start.
- It formed unbreakable habits in my life.

### **The Wheel Illustration from the Navigators**

#### **Practicing these habits daily will make a huge life difference**

- ***Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible. C.S. Lewis***
- The example of Israel in Numbers is a dreary one, of making the bad decisions of what probably seemed to many, a little sin of grumbling and complaining and allowing it to grow into the rebellion of not trusting God to take them into the Promised Land.
- This little sin, full grown, led to the consequence of wandering in the desert for 40 years until they died.
- In contrast, practice spiritual discipline/habits, (Wheel to start) and grow your trust in God and the lifestyle actions that reflect it, so that in your daily walk and when big tests come, you’ll respond in ways for your good and God’s glory.

### **A moment to commend you because you are already doing this!!!!!!**

- For all involved in reading through the Bible in a year chronologically!
- You have completed one of the HARDEST parts, and part of the Bible many Christians do not read in their entire life—to their loss as they do not understand the foundation of the rest of it.
- You'll next read Deuteronomy, the last of the Pentateuch, the first 5 books of the Bible written by Moses—the Law for Israel.
- I trust you have learned much from it and will continue as we continue through the Bible. You've developed the discipline of daily Bible reading and plan to keep doing it for the rest of your earthly pilgrimage.
- ***But take a minute to celebrate how far you've come on the journey!***

### **The end of their story isn't punishment, but an example of God's grace**

- Despite all their doubting, grumbling, and sin; despite the consequences and just punishment for their sins,
- God remained faithful to the Covenant.
- They had food and water; their clothes and shoes did not wear out during their 40 years of wandering.
- Even more wonderful, though they continuously broke faith with Him,
- God kept His promise to bring them into the Promised Land.
- In our lesson on Deuteronomy, we'll hear four final sermons from Moses as they get ready to cross over into the land.

### **One last encouragement**

#### **to us in that no matter how much or little progress we make....**

- Again, from C.S. Lewis –
- *No amount of falls will really undo us if we keep on picking ourselves up each time. We shall of course be very muddy and tattered children by the time we reach home. But the bathrooms are all ready, the towels put out, and the clean clothes are in the airing cupboard.*  
C.S. Lewis
- No matter how we stumble on our journey from salvation to the Promised Land, no matter how many bad choices we make and the consequences we suffer, we will be welcomed home and into our eternal destiny.

### **Go to [www.Bible805.com](http://www.Bible805.com) for links to:**

- Podcasts, blogs, and eBooks
- Chronological Bible-reading schedules