

Wanderings: Israel on a Road Trip

The Story—part 6

October 16, 2016

DAY 1: The sin of complaining; rarely happy with what God has provided.

1. God has delivered the Israelites out of slavery, out of the hands of Pharaoh and the Egyptian army, has given them the Ten Commandments and laws to begin life as a new nation, “moved in” with them in the Tabernacle, and set up the sacrificial system to allow the people to properly deal with their sins and stay in right relationship with God. No other nation had had such privileges!

2. How would they respond? Grateful? Obedient? Loyal? Under each of the following verses, jot down the sins the people committed.

Numbers 11:1 And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes; and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them, and consumed some outlying parts of the camp.

Numbers 11:4 The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, "If only we had meat to eat! ⁵ We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. ⁶ But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!"

Numbers 11:10 Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled.

Numbers 12:1 Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. ² "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this.

3. sometimes sin looks like spoiled brat teenagers that have been given every advantage and still find ways to avoid responsibility and complain about the smallest of things. Which of these sins relates to you?

DAY 2: 12 spies, and the effect of our outlook and words...

1. The Israelites crossed the Sinai desert and came up on the east side of the Jordan River just opposite the Promised Land, a promise God gave to Abraham over five centuries before!
2. Moses picks twelve men to spy out the land, a forty-day mission, before the invasion.
3. When the twelve spies came back to report, there were two very different reports!
4. Here's an excerpt from the first report, given by ten of the spies:

Numbers 13:27 They gave Moses this account: "We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. ²⁸ But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there....³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are." ³² And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, "The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. ³³ We saw the Nephilim there.... We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."

5. The effects of that report from the ten spies was deadly! Here's what happened:

Numbers 14:1 That night all the people of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. ² All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this desert! ³ Why is the LORD bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" ⁴ And they said to each other, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

6. What seemed to be the worst effects of the report of the ten spies?

7. Here is an excerpt from the report of the two spies: Joshua and Caleb.

*Numbers 14:5 Then Moses and Aaron fell facedown in front of the whole Israelite assembly gathered there. ⁶ **Joshua** son of Nun and **Caleb** son of Jephunneh, who were among those who had explored the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to the entire Israelite assembly, "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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."*

8. What things strike you about Joshua and Caleb's report?

9. Do you tend to see your world more like the ten spies or more like Joshua and Caleb? What effects do you imagine you have on the people around you?

DAY 3: The people turn away from God and from following Him. Disaster ensues...

1. The competing reports reached a national crisis. Fear swept the day. Here is the sad tale.

Numbers 14:10a But the whole assembly talked about stoning them...

2. Imagine! Stoning Moses who led the people out of slavery and into freedom, and Joshua and Caleb who saw the culmination of God's promises in this time, right now!

3. At this critical moment God intervened!

Numbers 14:10b Then the glory of the LORD appeared at the Tent of Meeting to all the Israelites. (11) (God speaks) "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?"

4. How would God respond? How in the world could even He build a nation that worships Him when they cannot see His great and mighty deeds right in front of them? Moses intercedes for forgiveness for the people.

Numbers 14:20 The LORD replied, "I have forgiven them, as you asked. ²¹ Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the LORD fills the whole earth,

²² not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times--

²³ not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their forefathers. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it.

²⁴ But because my servant Caleb has a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to, and his descendants will inherit it.

5. God's response of mercy to a miserable people is welcomed by Moses, but their sin comes at a great price! The whole nation would wander in the Sinai Desert for FORTY years, until every last person aged twenty and older is dead, except Joshua and Caleb! Here is His final statement to Moses on the matter...

Numbers 14:35 "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 desert; here they will die."

6. We rarely see the effects of our sin in real time. The book of Numbers tells, "Be sure, your sin will surely find you out."

7. This is a sobering moment in the nation. It is sobering to read these chapters. What sticks with you as you read this story?

DAY 4: The book of Numbers: presumption and unbelief

1. The rest of the book of Numbers chronicles some of the events of the next forty years.

The Israelites faced Balak and the prophet Balaam (Num. 22) and had a running encounter with Balaam, the false prophet, until they arrived at Moab (Num. 22-25).

The second census was taken; Joshua, Caleb, and Moses were the only adults who had survived from the first count (Num. 26).

Joshua was appointed as Moses' successor (Num. 27).

The laws relating to burnt offerings, the Sabbath, and the Passover were restated (Num. 28).

Israel's victory over the Midianites (Num. 31).

Three of the twelve tribes of Israel. Reuben, Gad and Manasseh settled for a tract of land on the east side of Jordan River (Num. 32).

Israelite history was reviewed (Num. 33)

A formula for dividing the land was worked out (Num. 34).

2. The book of Numbers ends with the nation back where they were forty years previously, on the banks of the Jordan River, just outside the promised land, and directly across from the city of Jericho.

3. What are we to learn from Numbers? The following are some of my takeaways:

a. Don't be surprised by sin in your life and sin in the life of others.

b. Disappointments in this life are not unusual. In fact, they are to be expected! Why? Our human nature continually finds something or someone in which to place our greatest hopes for happiness other than God and His purposes. When we do that we will put undue pressure on others and ourselves to "get it right," which sinks hope of finding the fulfillment for which we long. In this sense, disappointment turns out to be our strange friend! Why? It leads us back to God and to placing our ultimate hopes for this life and the next with Him! (Jesus' narrow road of Matthew 7:13-14)

c. Sometimes, God's work in our lives *requires* His "severe mercy."

d. If my real ultimate objective is "to make life work" how I want, I am no different than the Israelites upon hearing the report of the ten spies.

e. Our struggles with doubt and unbelief are usually centered in the sin of presumption: that God ought to make my life work. When my life doesn't play out how we want, of course we will deal with doubt and unbelief. Our problem is not "a lack of faith." The root cause is our presumption about making life about me more than Him.

4. A lot to read through today. What strikes you most from today's reading? Why?

DAY 5: Deuteronomy: We will fail God, but He will never fail us!

1. The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' last sermon. Not surprisingly, the people don't "get it."
2. What should they have gotten most from Deuteronomy? Let me highlight three things.
 - a. There really isn't any other "god" in which to place their ultimate hopes for this life or the next. To think there is will be to miss real life, to miss knowing God and finding a joy that can be found in NOTHING else.

Deuteronomy 6:4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

- b. God brought us out to bring us in. He brought the Israelites out of slavery into freedom. God is bringing us out of the bondage to living with self at the center of life instead of the freedom we can know when God is the center of our life and loving others (as opposed to being loved) becomes the point of life.

Deuteronomy 6:23 But he brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land that he promised on oath to our forefathers.

- c. What does it mean to love God? It includes respecting Him for who He is, following where He leads us, serving Him with our whole hearts, and obeying His commands.

Deuteronomy 10:12 And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, ¹³ and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?

3. **Don't be surprised** if you find those things sometimes impossible to do!

Deuteronomy 30:6 (MSG) God, your God, will cut away the thick calluses on your heart and your children's hearts, freeing you to love God, your God, with your whole heart and soul and live, really live.

4. The book of Deuteronomy ends with the death of Moses, just before Joshua leads the people into the promised land.

5. Which of the summary points of Deuteronomy strikes you most? Why?