

Reformation Fellowship Notes • March 17, 2019

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Handout #6

Numbers 10:11 to 11:35

I. Introduction

A. Why teach through Numbers?

1. Cultural literacy
2. Luke 24:27 – “And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.”
 - a) I would like to have heard this.
 - b) I didn't, but I would like to have the background to be able to understand this if I did hear it.

B. Events leading into Numbers?

1. Exodus from Egypt
 - a) Plagues
 - b) Passover
 - c) Trek through the desert
2. Events at Mount Sinai
 - a) Covenant agreed to
 - b) Incident with the Golden Calf
 - (1) Reconciliation
 - (a) “God with us”
 - c) Construction of the Tabernacle
 - (1) God filled the Tabernacle as a cloud.

C. What happened in the first ten chapters of Numbers

1. Several weeks of organization and purification for the march
 - a) Census to organize the people of Israel into a military force
 - (1) Organization for marching through the desert
 - b) Census to organize the Levites to transport and care for Tabernacle
 - c) Update of the laws (law still important)
 - d) Offerings for the Tabernacle and the Levites
 - e) Levites consecrated
 - f) Celebrate Passover
 - (1) It had then been 1 year since they left Egypt.
 - g) Organize how they will coordinate their march

D. Ready to set out

II. Numbers 10:11-28

A. Second year, 20th of second month

“The departure date here is over eleven months after their arrival at the mountain, nearly fourteen months after their departure from Egypt, and nineteen days after the census of 1:1.” (Ashley, p. 193)

1. May or June when they leave Sinai
- B. Cloud leads the way
 1. Lifts from the ark of the covenant
 - a) God’s throne is on the ark of the covenant.
 2. Cloud led the way to Paran
 - a) Paran appears to identify a large desert area north of Mount Sinai.
- C. Camp moves out according to plan.
 1. East, South, Priests, West, North
 - a) However, some of the priests went earlier than was originally assigned (Gershon and Merari).
 - (1) This makes sense practically.
 - (a) They can set up the Tabernacle so that it is ready when the furniture arrives.
 - (2) We will see another change at the end of the chapter and talk about this at that point

III. Numbers 10:29-32

- A. Moses recruits Hobab to be pathfinder.
 1. Who is Hobab?
 - a) Is Hobab the father-in-law of Moses or is Reuel?
 - (1) It says in Exodus (Exod. 3:1; 4:18; 18:1–2, 5–6, 12) that Jethro is the father-in-law of Moses.
 - (2) The data in the Pentateuch is hard to sort out.
 - (3) Best solution
 - (a) Jethro is the father-in-law of Moses.
 - (b) Reuel is another name or a title for Jethro.
 - (c) Hobab is Moses’ brother-in-law.
 2. Moses encourages Hobab to come to the promised land with them.
 - a) God has given the land to the Israelites.
 - b) God has promised good to Israel.
 - c) Hobab can benefit from the good God does to Israel.
 3. Hobab declines.
 - a) He wants to return to his own land and relatives.
 4. Moses begs Hobab to come.
 - a) He knows where to camp.
 - b) He can be their eyes in the wilderness.
 - c) Moses offers to give Hobab of the blessing that God bestows on the Israelites.

5. No response is recorded.
 - a) He is not mentioned in the rest of the Pentateuch.

This text does not disclose whether Hobab was convinced by Moses' entreaties, but if Hobab's name is original to the text of Judg. 1:16, as is possible, then his descendants were still with the Israelites in the conquest period. (Ashley, p. 195)

- b) And Hobab was a Kenite.
 - (1) Some Kenites are later mentioned as part of the people of Israel.
 - c) I suspect that Hobab joined the Israelites.
6. In any case, it forms an inclusio.
 - a) Jethro advised Moses at beginning of Sinai.
 - b) Hobab was asked to advise Moses at end of Sinai.
7. Moses uses advisors to help him make decisions.
 - a) It is important to note this because Moses will soon be accused of being dictatorial.

IV. Numbers 10:33-36

- A. They set out.
 1. Ark leads the way
 - a) This is a change.
 - (1) The ark was supposed to go in the middle.
 - b) Was this a permanent change, or was it just for the first three days?
 - c) How did this change get made?
 - (1) Did God command it?
 - (2) Was it a change that the Israelites made on their own initiative?
- B. The first leg of the journey is three days.
 1. It was three days after they left Egypt that they had the first complaining.
 2. Three days after Sinai there is complaining again.
- C. Moses' statement when ark moved and stopped
 1. When it set out—God went before the people to clear the way of adversaries.
 2. When it stopped—God settled in the midst of his people.

V. Numbers 11:1-3

- A. The people started complaining.

NIV reads, "Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the LORD. . ." (11:1)

1. The people as a whole are expressing their discontent.
2. This is the theme of the next couple of chapters.
 - a) Just like when they were leaving Egypt
 - (1) But this time there will be punishments.

- B. God became angry.
 - 1. He burned the outskirts of the camp with fire.
 - a) Tumbleweeds?
 - b) Tents?
- C. The people cried out to Moses.
 - 1. Moses, the intercessor
 - 2. Moses prayed.
 - 3. The fire stopped.
- D. The place was named to memorialize the event.
 - 1. Taberah – burning
 - 2. We will see this happen with each incident.

VI. Numbers 11:4-9

- A. The riffraff complained.
 - 1. Non-Israelites who left Egypt with the Israelites
 - a) The sons of Israel are described differently.
 - 2. Had greedy desires
 - a) Desires outrun provision
 - b) Inclined to be complainers
 - 3. They instigated the rebellion.
 - a) But the Israelites joined in

The immediate context gives no cause for this murmuring; indeed, it occurs in the context of Yahweh's gracious provision for the guidance and leadership of his people on the way (esp. in 9:15–10:35). Thus the complaining is more striking and contrasts with the murmuring found in the book of Exodus (e.g., 14:11–12; 15:24; 16:2–3; 17:2–3) and that which follows in Num. 11:4–34, both of which had external causes. (Ashley, p. 201)

- 4. Complained about the lack of variety in their diet
 - a) Who will give us meat to eat?
 - (1) They are acting entitled.
 - b) We ate **free** fish in Egypt.
 - (1) They have lost sight of the fact that they were **slaves** in Egypt.
 - c) We had cucumber, melons, leeks, and garlic in Egypt.
 - (1) A wide variety of foods
 - d) Our appetite is gone.
 - (1) We no longer feel like eating.
 - (2) They aren't hungry; they are just bored.
 - e) Nothing "for our eyes"
 - f) We only have manna.
 - (1) Complete lack of gratitude for what they do have

5. About a month earlier they had eaten lots of meat as a part of the consecration ceremonies for the Tabernacle, the priests, and the Levites and the celebration of the Passover.
6. A short description of manna is included.
 - a) Description makes it sound pleasant if not fabulous.
 - b) Fell every night like clockwork—dependable

VII. Numbers 11:10-15

- A. Moses becomes aware of the complaints.
 1. Everyone is talking about it.
- B. God becomes angry at the people's attitude of ungratefulness.
- C. "It was evil in Moses' eyes."
 1. This is ambiguous.
 - a) Is Moses angry with the people?
 - b) Is Moses angry with God?
 2. Moses is angry because he has to lead this very difficult people.
 - a) This is a very understandable reaction given the history.
 - b) Moses is finding God to be the one primarily at fault.
 - (1) You gave me this burden.
 - (2) You brought forth this people.
 - (3) You charged me with leading them to the land you gave their fathers.
 - (4) How could I find them meat?
 - (5) I can't carry this people!
 3. Moses' response is probably largely disappointment.
 - a) After all that happened on Mount Sinai, he probably expected the people to change, but they didn't.
 - b) And Moses has ongoing responsibility for them.
 4. Moses would rather die than go on.
 - a) An infinitely whiney and rebellious people
 - b) Moses is constantly faced into his inadequacies.
 - c) "If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now—if I have found favor in your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin."

Moses sees his loneliness in leadership as a judgment of God, and requests that, if he has found any favor in God's sight, he be killed now rather than carrying on as he has been and being seen as inadequate to find food for the people (i.e., *my misfortune*). The reader is not told why Moses cannot share the leadership with those elders who were appointed while still at Mt. Sinai (Exod. 18:25–26). (Ashley, p. 210)

5. In Exodus, the 70 were selected to settle disputes.
 - a) His problem now is the heavy burden of leadership that he has to bare alone.
6. In Numbers, Moses is less impressive but more human than he was in Exodus.

7. In this incident we see a contrast between two different kinds of complaint?
 - a) The people are discontented and ungrateful.
 - b) Moses is emotionally exhausted.
 - c) So God will deal with them differently.

VIII. Numbers 11:16-17

- A. God responds first to Moses and then to the people.
 1. God wants to spread the burden of leadership.
- B. God tells Moses to appoint 70 elders.
 1. Gather at the tent of meeting.
 2. God will take the same spirit that is on Moses and put it on the 70.
 3. This will distribute some of the stress on to other.s

IX. Numbers 11:18-23

- A. Now God responds to the people.
 1. Consecrate yourselves.
 - a) God is going to visit them (in judgment).
 - b) The people will eat meat like they have asked.
 - c) The people have said, “We were better off in Egypt!”
 - (1) We were better off when we were slaves.
 - (2) Why did we leave Egypt?
 - d) They will eat meat for a month.
 - (1) They will eat meat till they are sick.

If one compares the two motives for Yahweh’s reaction to the people (e.g., vv. 18 and 20), what stands out in the second is the clause *you have rejected Yahweh who is in your midst* (*m^e’astem ’et-YHWH ’āšer b^eqirb^ekem*). Yahweh had come to be in the midst of his people; he desired to be there (cf., e.g., Exod. 25–30; 35–40; Num. 2:17; also Deut. 7:21), and had purposed to lead them to the new land (e.g., Num. 9:15–22; 10:33). The wish to go back to Egypt was a wish to go back to a time before Yahweh was in their midst, and thus was rebellion against him. (Ashley, p. 210)

- B. Moses responds to God’s declaration, and his weariness becomes even more apparent.
 1. Moses complains that these people can’t be pleased.
 - a) No amount of meat is enough.
 2. Moses also appears to doubt that God can produce this much meat.
 - a) There seems to be the implication that Moses does not see how God can do this.
 - (1) Even though Moses saw him provide a large amount of meat before Sinai
 - (a) But not as much as is promised here

C. God reassures Moses that He can do it.

X. Numbers 11:24-30

A. This describes how what God had said to do was done.

1. He brought the 70 men to the Tabernacle (Tent of Meeting?).
2. God's spirit came down.
 - a) God spoke to Moses.
 - b) Some of God's spirit was placed on the 70.
 - c) They prophesied.
 - (1) Evidence of the spirit having been placed on them
 - (2) But they did not do it again.
 - (a) A one-time sign
3. Two of the seventy elders did not come to the Tabernacle.
 - a) We don't know why.
 - b) The spirit came upon them even though they were not at the Tabernacle.
 - c) They prophesied as a sign that the spirit had come upon them.
4. This was reported to Moses.
 - a) Joshua advises Moses to stop them.
 - (1) He is suggesting that their power is illegitimate.
5. "Are you jealous for my sake?"
 - a) Joshua wants to protect Moses' power.
 - (1) Moses, however, is not power hungry.
 - (a) This is important to remember when we get to the next verse.
 - (2) If God has given the sign that his power is on them, that is good enough for Moses.

XI. Numbers 11:31-35

A. God drove quail to them.

1. A phenomenon that Aristotle described as happening in Egypt in ancient times
 - a) This same kind of thing happened in the book of Exodus.
2. But this time a huge number of quail
 - a) The reference to two cubits
 - (1) Depth of the quail on the ground
 - (2) Height at which they flew
3. There were so many that they dried them.
 - a) We know that the Egyptians used to do this when quail came.

B. A plague struck them.

1. Some apparently got food poisoning from improperly dried quail.

- a) Some even died from food poisoning.
 - b) The dead were buried there.
- C. God punished the people by giving them the very thing they thought they wanted.
- D. Kibroth hattaavah—graves of greediness
- E. Then they went to Hazeroth and camped there.

XII. Conclusion

- A. The significance of two details of this narrative
1. They changed the order of march.
 - a) Order of the Levites was changed.
 - (1) This made it possible to start setting up the Tabernacle as soon as the first group of Levites arrived.
 - b) The ark of the covenant went first.
 - (1) This highlighted the fact that God was leading them.
 - c) There is no indication that these changes were ordered by God.
 - d) There is no indication that these changes were disapproved by God.
 2. Moses asked Hobab to go with them because he had such good knowledge of the desert.
 - a) God was going before them in a pillar of fire.
 - (1) Why did they need a guide?
 - b) Apparently, the pillar of fire just told them they needed to get to the other side of a mountain, not which path to take to get over the mountain.
 3. God gives us general directions in life, but much is left for us to work out.
- B. There are several things that happened before Sinai that have direct equivalents after Sinai.
1. Partial list
 - a) Advice from an in-law
 - b) Three days out
 - c) “We want meat!”
 2. We are being encouraged to compare what happened before Sinai with what happened after Sinai.
 3. What does this comparison show?
 - a) Despite the making of a covenant, the people haven’t changed.
 - b) They are inveterate complainers.
 - c) God cannot convince them of his commitment to them and their well-being.
 4. This is sobering fact for all of us!