

INTRODUCTION: NUMBERS 1

- This week we began our verse by verse study through the Book of Numbers
- It is called the book of Numbers because there are a total of 4 census that occur...
- Numbers 1: A military census of Israel of all males from 20 to 50 years of age
- Numbers 3: A census of the family of Levi which is divided into a priestly census of Aaron's family assigned to the Tabernacle and a levite census of the rest of Levi's family assigned to assist the priests
- Numbers 26: A second military census taken after a plague kills 24,000 Israeli's for Israel's idolatry
- But the Hebrew name for the book of Numbers is Bemidbar and it means "in the wilderness"
- There is a teaching that I gave in our midweek study that is key to understanding the Book of Numbers... so much so, that I want to expound on this teaching this morning
- I believe this teaching is foundational and has far reaching implications for us today and so as I lay this foundation for Numbers

To summarize it, I compared the Book of Numbers to a betrothal

Hosea 2:14–17 (NKJV)

¹⁴ "Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Will bring her into the wilderness, And speak comfort to her. ¹⁵ I will give her her vineyards from there, And the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; She shall sing there, As in the days of her youth, As in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. ¹⁶ "And it shall be, in that day," Says the LORD, "That you will call Me 'My Husband,' And no longer call Me 'My Master,' ¹⁷ For I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, And they shall be remembered by their name no more.

In Leviticus God reveals that He desires for us to draw near to Him

- At the end of Exodus, God's Shekinah inhabits the Holy of Holies in the Tent of Meeting, the Mishkan (Tabernacle), the dwelling place of God
- God calls to Moses from the Tent of Meeting and commands Moses to invite the people to draw near
- The 5 offerings are all about drawing near to God
- As we draw near to God, there comes a point in our relationship with God that we decide to enter into a New Covenant with God, to accept His invitation to Divine Relationship and commit ourselves only to Him

- It's at this moment that we are born again and God declares us "holy," "separate," completely set apart for God alone
- When a bride is betrothed to be married, she is separated, set apart from all other brides to be married to her future husband

Betrothal is different than our concept of getting engaged

- In our modern society, an engagement is simply a promise to be married
- When a man asks a woman to marry him and the woman agrees they are engaged
- There are no guarantees and the man or the woman can change their mind and call off the wedding without consequence
- A betrothal is a covenant agreement of marriage to a man
- The betrothed woman is considered married except the marriage has not been consummated... in essence it is an incomplete marriage
- The man is called husband and the woman is called wife
- A betrothal can only be ended by divorce and if either party lays with another person during their betrothal they have committed adultery
- THUS... She is not yet a married woman, but she is no longer a single woman... she is in a state of waiting, of transition, of preparation
- During the time of waiting, the bride is to remain faithful in preparing herself for marriage

As I often say... God is a God of revelation

- Everything God says and everything God does reveals Himself to us including the order that events occur in
- Leviticus is about being separated for God alone... in essence, in Leviticus Israel is betrothed, set apart for God
- Numbers begins with separation and ends at the border of a new life, a new identity as God's people
- In between Numbers 1 and Numbers 27 is the wilderness, the place of transition and it's in the wilderness where Israel's faithfulness is tested

Now I want to pull in a teaching I did on testing from Exodus

- God invites Israel to draw near to Him at Mount Sinai
- God descends on Mt Sinai with fire, thunder, lightning flashes, smoke and the sound of a shofar and the people were terrified, some were shaking and all of them stood far away... they did not draw near
- They told Moses... you speak to God and we will listen to you... but we don't want to speak to God lest we die

Exodus 20:20 (NKJV)

²⁰ And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.”

- Moses tells the people... do not fear... for God has come to test you
- There are 2 root words for “test” in Hebrew
- “Bechinah” and “Nisayon”
- “Bechinah” is a test that is given to give insight into the skill or ability of a student... like a school test
- The second is “Nisayon” which is better seen as an experience, an obstacle, a struggle that offers the opportunity to propel the person to grow beyond his or her natural ability
- It’s an opportunity to achieve what is thought to be impossible
- It’s an opportunity to grow into something greater
- The word translated test in vs. 20 is “nas-sot” which comes from “nisayon”
- The second root word for “nas-sot” is “nes” which literally means “mast” or “flag” and it’s used to refer to a sign, something miraculous, something supernatural to show or reveal something
- Thus Moses tells the people... do not fear because God is coming to you to give you this supernatural experience, to propel you, to grow you into a supernatural relationship that is beyond your natural ability
- What is this experience that God is bringing to them... to put His fear before them, the fear of the LORD on their face
- What is the fear of the LORD? It’s the beginning of wisdom, it’s the walking in wisdom that they may not sin (translated “to miss the mark”)
- So God is giving the people a supernatural experience of His Presence that they might know and be led by His will
- When the fear of the LORD is on you, you have the wisdom to do His will... it’s simple... you don’t want to do anything to disobey God
- This is what the Book of Numbers is all about... it’s about the Test of Faith... but not the kind of test you take in school
- It’s an opportunity to grow into something greater

Now... let’s bring this into the New Testament

James 1:12–15 (NKJV)

¹² Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to

those who love Him. ¹³ Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. ¹⁴ But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. ¹⁵ Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.

- James is talking about temptation, but the word in the Greek is “peirazo” and is better translated “to be tested”
- Now we’ve been told that in the Greek, this word is better translated examination and it means to ascertain the nature of something including it’s imperfections, faults and other qualities... which is true
- But when this word is translated back to the Hebrew... what word do you think the translators used?
- Nisayon... the word used for growth, for revelation
- Every temptation is a test... an opportunity for you to grow into something greater... it is not a test that comes from God, but it is an opportunity for you to experience God’s power in your life
- If you choose to ignore God’s power, which is in you by the Holy Spirit, you will be drawn down by your desires (which is born out of unbelief), which gives birth to sin and if you continue it leads to death
- This is exactly what happened to the unbelieving generation in Numbers... they died in the wilderness

The example Hosea mentions is the Valley of Achor (Trouble)

- In Joshua 6, after the battle of Jericho, Achan from the tribe of Judah kept some of the spoils of Jericho for himself... including an idol
- In Joshua 7, when Israel fought against the city of Ai, they were defeated and God revealed it was because of Achan
- Achan’s sin was the first recorded act of disobedience after Israel crossed the Jordan and it was an act of idolatry, spiritual adultery
- Israel had just experienced the mighty power of God defeating Jericho, but one man decided to be unfaithful to God
- Remember... Israel is betrothed to God, God desires for Israel to call Him husband, to have one of the most intimate relationships a human being can have on earth with God

One more thing I want to add...

- During the betrothal, the groom goes away to prepare a place for his bride to live

- Once the place is ready, the groom returns to get his bride and bring her to the place He promised to give her

Listen to God's desire in the wilderness

Isaiah 43:18–21 (NKJV)

¹⁸ “Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹ Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness *And* rivers in the desert. ²⁰ The beast of the field will honor Me, The jackals and the ostriches, Because I give waters in the wilderness *And* rivers in the desert, To give drink to My people, My chosen. ²¹ This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.

- Listen... I am preparing a beautiful place for you... a land of milk and honey... a land of blessing... a land of abundance
- You're going to love it so much that you're going to tell the whole world
- As Jeremiah said (Jeremiah 13:11)... cling to Me that you may become My people for renown (everyone will talk about what I've done for you), for praise (you will tell the world what I've done for you) and for glory
- Glory speaking of being elevated through an encounter with the power of God... when you experience God's power it raises you up and shines through you!

NOW... catch the picture

- Israel is referred to as the Bride of God (Hosea)
- They have entered into a Covenant... God is their God and they are God's people... set apart only for Him
- God has promised to bring them into the land and for hundreds of years He's been preparing a place for them
- The wilderness is the place of preparation
- They are waiting for the groom to return to take them to the promised land... now what does this sound like?

John 14:1–4 (NKJV)

14 “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father's house are many mansions; if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, *there* you may be also. ⁴ And where I go you know, and the way you know.”

- The Bible calls Israel the bride of God, but the church is called the bride of Christ... we've been betrothed to Jesus
- This life that we live on earth is simply a time of preparation, of transition
- Since Jesus ascended to heaven, He's been preparing a place for us... a promised land... and we are here waiting for the return of the bridegroom
- Like Israel this is a time when our faith is tested... not to expose unbelief (although unbelief will be exposed) but to give us the opportunity to grow into something greater
- We are no longer single, no longer of this world... but we are not yet married... the marriage is incomplete

1 John 3:2–3 (NKJV)

² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

- I want to leave you with this...
- The parable of the 10 virgins (Matthew 25) is about 10 brides waiting for the groom to return
- 5 wise, 5 foolish... 5 is the number of grace... so both groups experienced the grace of God
- But when they went out to meet the bridegroom... the 5 foolish took no oil with them... only the 5 wise took oil in their vessels
- Oil represents the Spirit... 5 relied on the Spirit, 5 relied on their flesh
- While the bridegroom was delayed... they all fell asleep
- At midnight when the bridegroom was coming, the virgins got up, prepared their lamps... but the 5 foolish had no oil and they left to buy oil but while they were gone the bridegroom came
- And the Bible says... the 5 foolish virgins missed the coming of the bridegroom
- Listen... the bridegroom is coming... are you ready?
- Are you relying on the power of the flesh or the power of the Spirit?
- During your time in this wilderness of life... your faith will be tested
- The question is... will you take the opportunity to rely on the power of the Spirit and grow... or will you descend into your desires and risk being left behind when the bridegroom appears?