

# The Christian Arsenal

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## NUMBERS 10:11-14:45

As we look at the Book of Numbers today, I want to just remind you of the historical setting of this book:

God has miraculously delivered the children of Israel from Egypt. God led them to Sinai where He gave the Law to Moses...in fact, that's what Exodus 16 through Numbers 10:10 covers.

The children of Israel were at Sinai about a year and the first ten chapters of Numbers down through verse 10 of chapter 10 cover the last few weeks of their stay there. The beginning of the Book of Numbers begins 13 months after the deliverance from Egypt and extends up to the point of their entrance into the Promised Land.

I said all that to simply say this...the main timeframe of this book is the period of what we commonly call "the wilderness wanderings."

The wilderness wanderings has been called "the longest funeral procession in history" and we'll see why later in today's lesson.

This is really an exciting book of God's Word. My only regret is that we're going to have to "fly" through it. My prayer is as we go through the Book of Numbers that the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to write some 3 millennia ago, that we will see truth after truth that apply to our lives today.

We've mentioned this before...but there are "types" all in the Old Testament. In our study of Leviticus, we mentioned that Egypt is always a type of the world...Well, let me just say that Canaan is always a type of the Christian life. Many of our old hymns convey the thought that Canaan is a type of heaven...but that's not so. And the reason we know that is that there were battles to be fought in Canaan and there will be no battles for us to fight once we get to heaven...however...I believe we would all agree that there are definitely battles to be fought in the Christian life!!

The reason I mentioned that is that I want you to remember that as we go along...I want you to remember that Canaan is a picture or a type of the Christian life...with all its battles and all its crossroads and all its pitfalls and all its decisions of whether to follow God's will or our own.

One more thing before we get into today's text...

I want us to have this question ever before us as we do our Numbers study: "Am I a Canaan conqueror or a wilderness wanderer?"

I struggled with this lesson. In fact, when I got to chapters 13 and 14, I realized I had spent far too much time on chapters 10-12. As I really got into chapters 13 and 14, I was convinced that a clear understanding of these chapters is absolutely vital to the understanding of the rest of the Old Testament.

**So, we're just going to do a very brief overview of chapters 10-12.** (You know God's Word truly deserves much more than a brief overview.)

### Chapter 10

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In this chapter, the folks have been numbered and organized by tribes for encampment and for marching. God doesn't do anything haphazardly and this was not just a mob of people marching through the wilderness...it was a very organized group of people.

The priests and the Levites have been numbered and organized.

The camp has been cleansed.

Many instructions have been given.

The silver trumpets have been made and they've been blown,

**and now the people are ready to move out to begin their journey to Canaan.**

They began their journey with a good start!! Verses 33 and following of chapter 10 tell us of three significant things...

- 1) The Ark of the Covenant was **before** them.
- 2) The cloud of the presence of Jehovah was **over** them.
- 3) The prayer of Moses was **surrounding** them.

Wouldn't you think they would be so excited? After all, they and their ancestors had spent 400 years in bondage in Egypt...then, they had spent a year at the foot of Mt. Sinai and **finally**...they are on their way to the land of milk and honey God had promised them.

But...look at

## Chapter 11

Verses 1-3...

I tried to put myself in these folks' sandals this past week. I don't take well to change. I prefer the status quo. So...maybe this is how these folks felt...maybe they had gotten comfortable at Mt. Sinai.

Many times the more comfortable we become, the less we welcome change...and yet there's no growth without challenge and there's no challenge without change. Comfort leads to complacency and complacency is really the enemy of character and spiritual growth.

When challenge and change come, one of two things happen...

- 1) we trust God and He brings out the best in us.
- 2) we disobey God and Satan brings out the worst in us.

Look at verses 1-3...and tell me what they complained about.

It doesn't say, does it? But, whatever it was, God send down His fire...and you know, if I saw the literal fire of God, I don't believe I'd be so quick to complain again, but look at verses 4-6...

They were complaining because they were not getting to eat the "gourmet" foods they enjoyed when they were slaves in Egypt. They complained that all they were getting was the manna that God was providing for them.

So, Moses went to God and really **Moses** complained...He said in essence...

"God, I didn't ask for this job. You called me to take care of this bunch of whiners and now You're not helping me do it!

Why should I have to play nursemaid to these folks? They're

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asking for meat and Lord, I don't have any meat. I can't take care of these folks and meet their needs all by myself, so if You aren't gonna help me, Lord...why don't You just go ahead and put me out of my misery and kill me right now!"

And what did God do? God gave the people what they wanted...He gave them more than they wanted. God gave the people so much meat it made them sick...The psalmist says in Psalm 106...

"God gave them what they asked for, but sent a plague along with it." (NAS)

"...He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul." (KJV)

What made their desire for meat so bad? Well, I'm so glad you asked... Remember our "types"? Manna represented the **very will, the very provision** of God. God had given them bread from heaven...bread they didn't even have to work for...all they had to do was go out and gather it daily. They had a variety of ways they could prepare it, but they didn't want it.

Beloved, **God's will** for the people was that they eat the manna, but **their will** was for meat. God's will for the people was that they forget the things of Egypt, but their will was to remember...and they had "selective memory," didn't they? They don't seem to be remembering all the oppression they were under back in Egypt. I mean, I don't hear them praising God for their freedom. I only hear them griping because of His provision for them.

Many times, God allows us to have exactly what we desire...even more than we desire...to teach us a lesson. Remember that as we go along this morning!

## Chapter 12

We won't spend a lot of time here, but basically, in this chapter, we see Miriam and Aaron speaking against Moses because he had married a Cushite woman. Now, I believe the interesting thing to notice here is that **God didn't speak out against Moses.**

This was really a smokescreen, anyway. What Miriam and Aaron were really doing was challenging the authority of their brother...they were challenging the leadership of Moses.

**WHO HAD PLACED MOSES IN AUTHORITY? GOD HAD!!**

And, in questioning Moses' authority and God's will, Miriam and Aaron were acting just like the people of Israel.

Do you see a pattern developing here? I mean, you don't have to be a rocket scientist to see that no one so far has been interested in following God's will. I imagine poor old Moses was about at his wits' end. I've often said that it was probably a relief for Moses the day that God said he wouldn't have to put up with this bunch of crybabies anymore...even if it DID mean he would miss out on the Promised Land.

Well, I believe the fact that Miriam was struck with leprosy conveys to us that God takes very seriously when folks speak out against His appointed leaders. And, may I add that the very fact that this was Moses' own brother and sister doing the questioning here must have hurt

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Moses even worse than if it had been some of the rabble or some of the other Jewish people. **Why is it that the most harm done in our churches are from our own church members...not the world outside?**

Well, let's get to chapters 13 and 14. In these chapters we're going to see the reason the wilderness wanderings is called "the longest funeral procession in history."

In these two chapters we're going to see:

- 1) The Doubting of God's Word
- 2) The Discouraging of God's People
- 3) The Defying of God's Will
- 4) The Disobeying of God's Command

## Chapter 13

### 1) The Doubting of God's Word

*Verses 1-3; 17-20*

Now, when you look at verse 1, all by itself, you would think that God is the One who initiated this spy episode, wouldn't you? But, look over at Deuteronomy 1:22-23.

**When we look at the whole counsel of God...I believe we can safely conclude that the sending of the spies was the idea of the people...approved by Moses and allowed by God.**

Listen, God had already promised the land to these folks...and God's promise was all Israel needed – but they doubted God's Word and they were walking by sight and not by faith.

I believe this was another case of God allowing the Jews to have their own way...not because their way was the right way, but because He wanted to teach them a lesson. They needed to learn to trust the Word of God and do the will of God, **His way, not their way**. And we're going to see them learn a very hard lesson indeed.

I believe if God' perfect will was for Moses to send in spies, He would have made certain Moses selected 12 Joshuas and Calebs, instead of just two.

Well, Moses selects one man from each tribe and among them were Joshua and Caleb. These men traveled 500 miles during their 40 day survey of the land of Canaan, and guess what...

**they discovered nothing that God had not already told them!**

He had **already** told them the names of the folks who lived their...

He had **already** told them it was a good land, and rich land, flowing with milk and honey.

Well, I guess the survey of the land seemed like a great idea from a conventional, secular, human of view...but not from a spiritual point of view...not from God's point of view.

God had already given them the land and had commanded them to go in and take it. He had promised to go before them and to scatter their enemies...

But His people had to follow by faith...

And, that was where they failed...they doubted that God would be able to keep His promise. "Faith is the substance of things of hoped for, the evidence of things not seen...."

I want to ask you...is there an area of your life that God has already promised you victory? Yet, you're doubting that God can keep His promise?

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Well, if there is...I hope you'll remember this...the Bible says that God's promises are "yea and amen" and they are "yes in Christ Jesus." If God has called you to do something on faith and you have doubted or even refused...I hope you'll learn a lesson from this today.

Doubt is contagious and it also spreads, because not only do we see the doubting of God's Word, but we also see

## 2) The Discouragement of God's People

Someone has defined a committee as **"a group of people who individually can do nothing and collectively decide nothing can be done."**

Ten of these men on this committee of 12 came back and gave a negative report...verses 25-29

Notice "the land where you sent us" v. 27

"the land through which we have gone" v. 32

Notice they didn't say "the land the Lord our God has given us"...

Verses 30-33...

Ten of these men were walking by sight, not by faith...

They looked at the people and they saw giants...

They looked at the cities and they saw high walls and locked gates...

They looked at themselves and they saw grasshoppers...

If only they had looked by faith to God, they would have seen the One whom Isaiah tells us sees the nations of the world as grasshoppers...

Now, let's just think about this for a minute...

God had called Abraham out of the Ur of the Chaldees to be the father of the Jewish nation and when He called him He told him He would give his descendants a land...

The very day God made this covenant with Abraham, He gave the geographical boundaries of that land. He had repeated this promise over and over to Isaac and to Jacob and to all the patriarchs and again to Moses and to the people.

Just think how vividly their forefathers must have described it to them. In fact the Book of Deuteronomy tells us that the reason God delivered these folks from Egypt in **the first place** was so He could bring them into the Land of Promise...

"And He brought us out from there (Egypt), that He might bring us in, to give us the land which He swore to our fathers." Deut. 6:23

Well, not only do we see doubt and discouragement, but we also see

## 3) The Defiance of God's Will

14:1-4...

Ten came back and scared these folks to death...they're so scared they want to go back to Egypt.

Unbelief and discouragement spread like wildfire from heart to heart and before long "all the congregation lifted up their voice and cried...and the people wept that night."

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The next day, the whole congregation criticized Moses and Aaron. You know, when your eyes are on **yourself and your circumstances**, you lose your perspective and you say and do ridiculous things, don't you?

Verses 5-9...

Joshua and Caleb did their best to encourage the people...but the people chose **discouragement by the majority rather than encouragement by the minority.**

**These folks were chronic complainers...and you know why?**

It's because they were seldom in the will of God.  
When the child of God is in the will of God, there is no place for whining and complaining...even if the circumstances **are** very difficult.

"The will of God will never lead us where the grace of God cannot provide for us and the power of God cannot protect us."

If our daily prayer is "Thy will be done" and if we walk in obedience to God's will...then what is there to complain about?

The will of God is the expression of the love of God for His people.  
The will of God isn't punishment...it's not painful chains that shackle us...  
The will of God is loving cords that tie us to the heart of God so that He can lead us in the right way...the way that's best for us.

God wants us to **know** His will, to **understand** His will, to **delight** in His will, and to **obey** His will...and let me just say this...

The more we **obey** God's will, the more we'll **know** His will.

Why should He reveal any more of His will to us if we're not willing to follow what we already know?

Verses 11-12...

In verses 13-19 we see Moses once again interceding for the people. For a second time, God offered to make a new nation out of Moses and to destroy the Israelites and again Moses refused. (This had happened once before when the Israelites had worshiped the golden calf.)

Moses reasoned with God and he said...

- 1) the nations would say God brought the people out of Egypt but He couldn't bring them into Canaan...Moses wanted Jehovah to be glorified...(15-16)
- 2) Moses reminded God of the covenant God had made with the patriarchs years before...(16)
- 3) Moses pointed to the very character of God and reminded Him that because He is a holy God, He must punish sin but because He is a gracious and merciful God, He also forgives sin. (17-18)

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Moses also offered one final argument...

4) that God had forgiven His people many times before (19)

verses 20-22...

God assured Moses that He did indeed pardon their sin but that He would not prevent their sin from working out its terrible destructive consequences...

God's judgment was three-fold...

- 1) the nation would wander for 40 years in the wilderness – one year for each day the spies explored the land.
- 2) during that time, the older generation...20 years and upward, would die and not enter the land, except for Joshua and Caleb.
- 3) the 20 unbelieving spies would die because of the evil report they delivered...

Our God is sovereign, folks, and He does what He will among the hosts of the heavens and the inhabitants of the earth...and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, "what hast Thou done?"

The Jews had cried that their children would perish in the land of Canaan but God declared that their **children would live** in Canaan and the **adults would die** in the wilderness!!

Out of their own mouths, God passed judgment...

Be careful...be very careful what you say to God when you complain, be very careful of the excuse you give...because He might just take you up on it!!

We've said it before...God's greatest judgement many times is to let people have their own way. These folks didn't want to go into the land so God said, "Okay, don't go in..."

Let's quickly look at the last point and then we'll wind this down...

## 4) The Disobeying of God's Command

The day after their great failure...the Jews were supposed to start on their long march through the wilderness...but they got the bright idea that they would run over and attack the enemy real quick and that would make everything alright.

Verse 30 says "they mourned greatly" when Moses spoke all God's words to them...but this wasn't true repentance. They were sorry for the consequences God had just laid down, and they were seeking to avoid those consequences.

But when they went on their little escapade, neither Moses nor the ark left the camp...the cloud didn't move...and the silver trumpets didn't blow.

They went on ahead without the presence of Moses or the ark, without the permission and the presence and the power and the protection of God...

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Man's efforts without God's blessings do more harm than good...Jesus said, "Without Me, you can do nothing."

Well, with all that...let me ask you...

Is there anything God has called you to do that you've said,  
"No, Lord, I don't believe You're really that serious about my doing  
Your will...I don't believe it's really that important...  
I don't believe Your grace will sustain me in it...  
therefore, I'll not do Your will...or I'll **sort of** do Your  
will, but I'll do it my way..."

How many of you have taken Experiencing God? Do you remember the seven realities that we learned? Do you remember that some of them were that **God invites us to become involved in His work** and **that invitation always lead you to a crisis of belief that requires both faith and action** and that **we must make major adjustments in our lives in order to join God in what He is doing?**

The children of Israel **failed their crisis of belief**, didn't they? **Their faith and action failed**...and **they were not willing to make major adjustments in their lives**, were they? Things could have been so different...a trip that should have taken these folks 11 days took them 40 years!!

Beloved, God doesn't allow sin to go unpunished...  
That's the bad news, but let me give you the good news...

During these 40 years, they had all their needs met...

During these 40 years, **God went before them** in a pillar of fire by night and a pillar of cloud by day...

During these 40 years, **they didn't lack a thing**...

During these 40 years, their **clothes did not wear out** on their bodies,  
and their **sandals did not wear out** on their feet...(their feet didn't even swell).

It's easy for us to look at these folks and cluck our tongue and say, "Well, I just don't know how they could have been so stubborn and so stupid" isn't it?

But, you know, I wandered around in the wilderness...not for 40 years...but for far, far too many years. All that time, God provided for my needs and I praise Him that He didn't just let me die in the wilderness...I surely deserved it. But, He brought me out of that wilderness into the land of Canaan...into the Promised Land! I still have battles to fight and sometimes I falter and stumble and fail and disappoint Him, but God is so faithful to me!

What's the lesson here for us?

I believe the lesson for you and me today is this...and it sounds so simple, but I believe the lesson is...

TRUST GOD!! Take Him at His Word...

What God has promised, He is able to perform!

When discouragement and doubt creep in, confess that to the Lord, but don't let **doubt** and **discouragement** lead to **defiance** and **disobedience**.

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Know God's Word...you know faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God...So know God's Word so well that you can by faith claim all His promises...

Why do I stress Bible Study and daily Bible reading and daily quiet time? Because if faith comes by hearing the Word of God...we can only assume that doubt comes if we don't hear the Word of God.

Faith is simply taking God at His Word and proving it by obeying what He tells us to do...**even when it looks like an impossibility...**

**Even when it looks like there are giants all around us...**

When God's people trust and obey, the Lord delights in doing wonders for them...Why? Because in their obedience they glorify God's name!

The people of Israel saw **giants** and **grasshoppers**, but **they left out God!** If only they had put Him in, what a different story it would have been...

That's where Israel failed...Let's not follow their example!