

Book of Numbers

I was lost in a hiking trip one time. I went into a place with bushes and rocks like wilderness. Many people try to find the way out with their own ways, and often remain lost. They might be wandering around and around for a long time. They can be very frustrated. However, I used my cell phone (GPS guidance) to find my way back. I just follow the reliable direction and eventually back to my parked car with ease. The Israelites in the book of Numbers had somewhat similar experience with those that tried to use their own ways to the destination. They rebelled from following God and wandered for about 40 years.

Book of Numbers is the continuation of the journey of Israelites in Exodus. The title Numbers is from the two counting of people for army as mentioned in the book. The Hebrew title of the book is “in wilderness” that matches better with the content of the book, and also stated in the first verse of the book (Numbers 1:1).

The first ten chapters are about the preparation of the Israelites to depart from Sinai. These events covered about 19 days. It includes the first census for people that can serve in military. Chapters 10 to the end of 14 is about the journey from Sinai to Kadesh. This section covers the account of quail punishment due to ungrateful and lustful hearts, Miriam and Aaron’s rebellion against Moses and the mission of the spies.

Chapters 15 to 19 are about the wanderings in the desert. These chapters cover about 37 years, from the end of the 2nd year to the beginning of the 40th year.

Chapter 20 to the end covers the 40th year which started with arrival at Kadesh till they reached the plains of Moab by Jordan across from Jericho. These chapters also cover the record of Balaam, the zeal of Phinehas, the second counting of people, the appointment of Joshua as Moses’ successor, the war with Midian, etc.

1) What caused their wandering

a. Not satisfy with what God has given and signs performed

One generation of people wandering in wilderness for 40 years is a long time. The distance from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea is about 200 miles. It should take the Israelites about 2 months to get there but it took them about 37

years for this section of their trip. Although the Sinai Peninsula is a desert of rocks that is not comfortable for people to live, God did provide the needs of the Israelites. They complained a lot like water and living condition. The Lord said "How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them? (Numbers 14:11) Finally, God told them they are sentenced to death in Numbers 14:29-30.

b. Rebellious against God's will

Israelites were keeping doing rebellious acts even though God had levied a death sentence to them as stated in Numbers 14. As in Numbers 16, key leaders (Korah led group) and 250 community leaders were rebellious, and were opposing Moses and Aaron. God finally made the ground crack (earthquake) and the earth swallowed the entire rebel group.

2) The need for repentance from disobedience

God through Moses have talked to and warned them about the grumbling and disobedience. It is important for us to repent once we know we have sinned. You might have listened to wrong leaders or peers like those Israelites. However, we have to close to God in prayer and study His word to know who and what is right and wrong. Followed the wrong leader or group and sinned do not excuse you from punishment and consequences.

3) God's ultimate plan and guidance

As stated in later chapters of Numbers, first generation Israelites were dead. Only Joshua and Caleb survived (Numbers 14:38). God's purposes have not been changed. There were victories on the second generation, and they finally entered the promised land (Canaan) as stated in the early chapters in the book of Joshua (Joshua 6:24, 8:28, 11:13, etc.). God kept His promise and guided and protected His obedient Israelites. As a note, people in Canaan are idol worshipers and done a lot of sinful acts (Deut. 18:9-13).

In conclusion, the Israelites were wandering in wilderness due to disobedience. How often do we wander around in our lives and not able to get out of our situations due to not following God? One needs to follow God, similar to my hiking trip where I need to follow the reliable source to find my way out. It would be frustration and be doomed without God and with ease by obedience in God.