

BIBLE CHALLENGE

A one week study of the books of Leviticus and Numbers

The story so far: The Israelites continue to be led by God and his servant Moses through the wilderness, a vision of the land God has promised still before them. We will move rather quickly through the books of Leviticus and Numbers as we continue to trace the narrative thread of the scriptures.

Monday:

Read Leviticus Chapter 16:6-16, 20-22

What to look for:

- The book of Leviticus is a law code, which explains why people find it to be a stumbling block in their attempts to read the Bible from cover to cover. It contains few stories, few characters. It is, instead, full of details about a wide variety of regulations for God's people. As Christians, we spend little time in Leviticus because we know that following the law is not what saves us; Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly in himself and so has become our salvation. Therefore, Levitical laws no longer bind us.
- What is interesting to note, however, is that the law, as found in Leviticus represents God's desire to call his people out from the culture that would surround them. God wanted his people to be distinct from the pagan society in which they would live. Having spent generations as slaves in Egypt, it was important for God's people to understand who they were, and who they were not. What does that suggest for us as we seek to be people of faith surrounded by a culture that often does not share our faith?
- This passage describes what was to happen on the Day of Atonement, the day each year on which Israel confessed their sins as a nation. This was the only day of the year in which the High Priest was allowed to enter into the most central part of the Tabernacle, called the Holy of Holies. (Remember, the Tabernacle was the place of worship which Israel carried with them through the wilderness.) The Holy of Holies was the inner sanctuary where rested the Ark of the Covenant, containing the tablets on which were written God's law.
- Note how Aaron begins by making a sacrifice for himself. He also has chosen two goats that will be involved in the process, one that will be sacrificed and one that will be used to remove the people's sin from among them. Aaron kills the goat as a sin offering for the people. Then, in vs. 21, as a most visible sign of getting sin out of their community, Aaron places both hands on the head of the second goat, "transferring" the sin of the community onto the animal, and then sending it out into the desert. Thus, the origin of the term "scapegoat". The past is gone in a very physical way, allowing the community a fresh start.

- Compare the ritual for the Day of Atonement in Leviticus with what the author of Hebrews says about Jesus: Hebrews 6:19 and Hebrews 9:11-15, 23-28. The Day of Atonement is the model for understanding the death of Jesus. Jesus is now the High Priest who enters, not an earthly Tabernacle, but into the very presence of God and sacrifices, not the blood of an animal, but his own blood on our behalf and to “cover” our sin, which is what the word “atone” means.

Tuesday:

Read Numbers 13:1-2, 21-33

What to look for:

- The book of Numbers gets its name from the fact that it lists two “numberings” or censuses of Israel while they are in the wilderness. See chapter 1:1-2 for the first census, a numbering of all the people who came out of Egypt. This listing will be important later in the book.
- Note briefly chapter 10:11-12 – the Israelites have been camped at Mt. Sinai. They are now finally ready to begin moving again. But note in chapter 11:4-6 – they’re grumbling and complaining again. Manna isn’t enough for them; they want God to vary the diet a little.
- Today’s story in Chapter 13, which we will continue tomorrow in chapter 14, forms a pivotal moment for the people of Israel. Things are about to go from bad to worse for them as a result of their lack of faith and trust in the Lord.
- This is their first peek at the land to which God has promised to lead them, the land he originally promised to Abraham, the land Abraham’s descendants have not seen for 400 years while they have been captive in Egypt. It is a picture of prosperity (there can be no question about the goodness of the land if you need two grown men to carry a bunch of grapes!)
- Note how the people respond (vs. 28, 32-33). God has shown them the goodness of the land he has promised, but they are afraid to go.

Wednesday:

Read Numbers 14:1-24

What to look for:

- Note how, in the face of the people’s rebellion, God is angry. Moses reminds God of his own promises. So, whatever God’s action will be, it will be based not on the deserving of the Israelites, but on God’s faithfulness to his own promises.
- Note how in verse 20, God does, in fact, forgive. But it doesn’t mean their sin, their actions, will have no consequences.
- God’s judgment is: “Have it your way.” The people have repeatedly wished they could die in the desert. God’s response finally is, “After all I have done for you, you still do not want the

land I have promised. So we'll do it your way." God will bring people into the land, but it will not be these people. He will allow them their wish: to die in the wilderness.

- It is said that sin is its own punishment. How do you see that applying here? In your own life?

Thursday:

Read Numbers 20:1-13, 22-29

What to look for:

- Two people close to Moses die in this passage, Miriam and Aaron.
- Note vs. 9-11. Once again the people are complaining of no water. God instructs Moses to speak to the rock and God will make it pour out water. But look closely at vs. 10 – Moses attitude is that “we”, namely he and Aaron, must bring water out of the rock. He then strikes the rock twice with his staff, as if he must accomplish this on his own. God’s response is in vs. 12: Because Moses and Aaron did not trust him, they won’t enter the promised land either.

Friday:

Read Numbers 21:4-9, 26:1-4, 63-65

What to look for:

- Compare this story, in 21:4-9, with John 3:14-17.
- 26:1-4 begins the second census, or “numbering” in this book. Recall that on Tuesday we had the first census and said it would be important later in the book. Now, with this second census, we have a record of the second generation who were born, not in Egypt, but here in the wilderness. God has kept his promise to give the people the land, but he has also kept his threat that no one who refused to enter the land when he first showed it to them will be allowed to go in. It is the next generation who will have the land. A journey, when they left Egypt, which should have taken about 14 days, has stretched, through the Israelites rebellion and faithlessness, into 40 years.