

Sermon #01 — *Christ in Numbers*

Title:                    **NUMBERS**  
**OUR FAILURE AND GOD'S FAITHFULNESS**

Text:                Numbers 1:1-36:13

Subject:        *Christ in the Book of Numbers*

Date:            Tuesday Evening — December 3, 2019

Readings:    *Lindsay Campbell and Rex Bartley*

Introduction:

I want to begin an exposition of the Book of Numbers tonight. The title of my message is **OUR FAILURE AND GOD'S FAITHFULNESS**. My text will be the Book of Numbers — **OUR FAILURE AND GOD'S FAITHFULNESS** (Numbers 1:1-36:13).

If you read the Old Testament as nothing more than a history of ancient events concerning people who lived a long, long time ago, it is just about as boring as a textbook on mathematics. If you read it as nothing more than a book of hidden prophetic mysteries, it may be more interesting, but it is still a book with no meaning to you personally. However, if you read the Old Testament as a picture of what is happening in your own life experience of redemption and grace, it becomes lively and fascinating. If you

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see in the Old Testament pictures of Christ and his great work of redemption, pictures of his love for and grace to your soul, it becomes precious beyond description.

So, when we read about and study the history of the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, we must constantly remind ourselves that the Lord our God is not here giving us the history of a quaint little nation in a remote part of the world. **God's interest in and purpose for the nation of Israel was singular.** — He raised up and used that nation as a vehicle for the accomplishment of his purpose of grace and redemption in Christ, no more and no less.

**The Pentateuch** (the first five books of the Bible) and the Book of Joshua symbolically display every believer's experience of grace and salvation in and by the Lord Jesus Christ. **In these first six Books of Inspiration we see how the Lord our God brings us from the bondage and curse of sin and death sin into "the glorious liberty of the sons of God."**

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The whole Old Testament was written so that we might see in vivid types and shadows and pictures what the New Testament reveals clearly — The salvation of God's elect in and by our Lord Jesus Christ. All those things that happened to Israel in the Old Testament came to pass and were written down in the Old Testament for our instruction and learning. This is precisely what the Holy Spirit tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:11.

(1 Corinthians 10:11) Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

- Genesis, the Book of Beginnings, shows us our great need of redemption and grace.
- Exodus, the Book of Deliverance, displays our experience of grace in redemption.
- Leviticus, the Book of the Priesthood, typifies our atonement by Christ, which is the basis and effectual cause of deliverance.

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- Numbers, the Book of Numbering, displays our (the believer's) weakness, unbelief, and failure in this world.
- Deuteronomy, the Book of the Law, shows us God's immutability and his faithfulness to his covenant people in the second giving of his law.
- Joshua, the Book of Conquest, displays our entrance into and everlasting possession of all the blessings of grace and glory in eternal, resurrection glory with and by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's read just one, small portion of the Book for our starting point.

(Numbers 21:4-9) And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. (5) And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For *there*

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*is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. (6) And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. (7) Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. (8) And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. (9) And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.*

Now, listen to our Savior's explanation of this event.

(John 3:14-16) And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son

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of man be lifted up: (15) That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

**PEOPLE NUMBERED**

This fourth Book of Moses is called “Numbers” because it opens with the numbering of the children of Israel (1:1-49) and concludes with the numbering of the people again (26:1-65). Both numberings were done by the express command of God.

If you read through the first five Books of the Bible at one sitting, it appears that Leviticus might be out of sync with the others, because it interrupts the historic narrative. That is because the Book of Leviticus is a parenthetical explanation of God’s work with his people. Genesis shows us our great need of redemption and grace. Exodus displays our

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experience of salvation in time. Leviticus shows us, in type and picture, that God deals with us in grace upon the basis of Christ's finished work of atonement as our Substitute. Then, the Book of Numbers picks up the historic narrative, a narrative portraying our struggles as believers in this world with the world, the flesh, and the devil, assuring us that God still continues to deal with his covenant people in grace upon the basis of Christ's finished work, not upon the basis of our experience.

**The Book of Numbers covers most of the period of Israel's forty years in the wilderness and the events connected with their wilderness journey.** It begins with the numbering of the children of Israel. It describes the divine order by which the camp of Israel was arranged and the order of their movement from one place to another, as they marched through the wilderness toward Canaan for forty years, until all the adults (those twenty years old and upward) who came out of Egypt died. — Someone suggested that

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Israel's wilderness journey was the longest funeral procession in history.

**Those forty years in the wilderness were the result of the nation's unbelief, specifically their refusal to believe the report of Joshua and Caleb after the twelve spies had spied out the land of Canaan.**

Because they chose to follow the lead of the unbelieving spies, God judged the nation and that generation entered not into the land of promise but died in the wilderness, because of unbelief. The only adults who left Egypt and entered the land of Canaan were Joshua and Caleb. Once the old generation was dead, God commanded that the new generation, that generation to be led by Joshua into the land of promise, be numbered. So, we have the second numbering of Israel at the close of the Book.

**OUR UNBELIEF**

Now, let's see what the message of this Book of Numbers is. I don't mean, Let's see what we can use



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in Numbers to teach the Gospel of Christ. I mean, Let's see what the message of the Book of Numbers is. How does God the Holy Spirit here teach us the Gospel?

**In these thirty-six chapters we are confronted with that which may be the most difficult thing for us to learn as God's people in this world.** We are confronted head-on with that which causes us more trouble than anything else in this life — **OUR OWN UNBELIEF!** It is ever the tendency of our fallen nature to lean unto our own understanding, if not our own to someone else's. The Book of Numbers teaches us that we must believe our God, that we must trust and follow Christ in all things, not human reason — our own or someone else's (Proverbs 3:5-6)!

**This is where I struggle most.** I suspect it is the same with you. How we dishonor our God by unbelief! We all foolishly imagine that what we want to do and the way we want to do it is the right way.

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Oh, we say, “The Lord knows best.” But rarely do we act like he does. **Like these ancient Jews, you and I must learn that God really does know best.** He knows what he is doing when he acts. He knows what he is talking about when he speaks. What he tells us is the truth. All that he says, all that he does, and all that he requires of us is always for our good and his glory.

**How I wish I could learn to live as a man who really believes that! — God's way is always right. — Our way is always wrong.** With regard to all things, Solomon's word is true, no matter what friends, family, the world, and our own proud flesh may think to the contrary. — *“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death”* (Proverbs 14:12). The book of Numbers is a picture of that fact experience in the believer.

Here we have a picture of a people. It is a picture of people who have come out of Egypt and have crossed

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the Red Sea believing God. They have seen Pharaoh and his armies drowned in the sea. They are going to the land of Canaan, believing God's promise to give it to them for an inheritance. But they have not yet reached the land. They are pressing toward the mark; but they have not yet attained the prize. They had the faith to follow God out of the bondage and slavery and darkness; but they have not yet come into the fullness of liberty and rest in Christ. How much like them we are!

- We believe on the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We trust him for the forgiveness of our sins.
- We have seen Satan cast out and our sins drowned beneath the blood of Christ.
- We are moving toward heavenly glory.
- But we have great trouble trusting our Savior to provide for, protect, and guide us in our daily lives and through our daily struggles.

**OUR FAITHFUL GOD**

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But, blessed be his name, our God is faithful still! His faithfulness, his mercy, his grace, his provision is never altered by our experience. He deals with us upon the basis of his covenant and the accomplished redemption of our souls by the sacrifice of his dear Son.

**2 Timothy 2:13** If we believe not, *yet* he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

**2 Timothy 2:19** Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let everyone that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

**Psalms 103:8-14** The LORD *is* merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. (9) He will not always chide: neither will he keep *his anger* forever. (10) He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. (11) For as the heaven is high above

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the earth, *so* great is his mercy toward them that fear him. (12) As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath he removed our transgressions from us. (13) Like as a father pitieth *his* children, *so* the LORD pitieth them that fear him. (14) For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we *are* dust.

**Isaiah 43:1-7** But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine. (2) When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. (3) For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. (4) Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee,

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and people for thy life. (5) Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; (6) I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; (7) *Even* everyone that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.

**We see this fact of God's faithfulness, faithfulness in spite of our horrid unbelief, when we get to the latter part of the Book of Numbers** (chapters 21-35). **Here we see Israel triumphing over their enemies by the hand of God.** Their many enemies surround them. The outward forces of Kings Arad, Sihon, and Og, the King of Bashan, and the attempts of Balaam, the false prophet to try to undermine the purpose of God, all resulted only in greater blessedness of Israel. — Let every ransomed soul proclaim with Jeremiah, "*Great is thy faithfulness!*"

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**The Book of Numbers tells us, in the most vivid language God himself can find, that though we are disobedient, though we are rebellious, though we are so full of unbelief and sin, though we barrenness and emptiness of soul year after year after year in this waste and howling wilderness, our great God will never leave us nor forsake us** (Hebrews 13:5) Even in the midst of our weakness, he is our Strength. Even when we fall, he protects us, lifts us up, and holds us in the hands of his omnipotent mercy and immutable grace!

**PICTURES OF CHRIST**

There are four distinct and direct pictures of our Lord Jesus Christ in this Book.

1. **Aaron's Rod that Budded** (17:1-13) — This was a picture of life out of death by which God identified Aaron as his servant. So, too, the Lord Jesus Christ was publicly owned as and declared

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to be the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:3-4).

2. **Water Flowing from the Smitten Rock** (20:1-13 and 1 Corinthians 10:4) was a vivid picture of Christ and our salvation by him. As the rock brought forth water, only after it was smitten by Moses, so the Son of God yields the water of life to chosen sinners only by being smitten to death, to the full satisfaction of divine justice, by the rod of God's holy law.
3. **The Brazen Serpent** (21:1-9) was another clear type and picture of our great Savior (John 3:14-16). Because the children of Israel murmured against him, in judgment the Lord God sent fiery serpents upon them. The poisonous venom from those fiery serpents killed many. When Moses prayed for the people the Lord commanded him to make a serpent of brass and lift it up upon a pole, promising, "*everyone that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live...And it came to*



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*pass that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.”*

Gospel preachers are like the pole to which Moses fastened the brazen serpent. Our only function is to hold up Christ crucified before sinners. The gospel we preach is Jesus Christ. We do not merely preach a Christ centered gospel. Christ is the gospel we preach. There is a huge difference.

Pastor Roger Ellsworth, in his excellent book, *The Guide*, suggests that the brazen serpent (God's remedy for Israel's ruin) typified the Lord Jesus in six ways. He wrote...

- The remedy was not Moses' idea but God's. Salvation from sin is not produced by men, but only by God.
- The remedy consisted of Moses making a serpent in the form of the poisonous serpents. The Lord Jesus Christ was made in the form of sinful men (Philippians 2:8).

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- As the serpent of brass had no venom, so Christ had no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).
- As the serpent of brass was lifted up on a pole, so Christ was lifted up on the cross (John 3:14).
- All that was necessary for the people to be healed was to look at the brass serpent, and all that is necessary for healing of sin is to look at Christ.
- As there was only one remedy for the people of Israel, the serpent on the pole, so there is only one way of eternal salvation, Jesus Christ.

Many other important points of similarity between Christ and the brazen serpent have been made by others. (John Gill, in his commentaries on Numbers and John, gave many excellent comparisons.) There is one other comparison that must be added. It is very important, but often overlooked. – All who looked upon the brazen serpent were immediately healed of

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their plague, and every sinner who looks to Christ by faith is immediately made whole.

4. **The Cities of Refuge** (35:9-34) were also typical of our Lord Jesus Christ, the refuge of our souls, the refuge of salvation. Believers are men and women who have fled for refuge unto him, like the manslayer in the Old Testament fled for refuge to one of the cities of refuge. Even the names of the cities were typically significant and instructive (Exodus 21:13; Numbers 35:6, 11, 14; Deuteronomy 21:2, 9; Joshua 20:1-9).

- *Kedesh* means, "holy." Christ is holy, both as God and man; and he is our holiness before God, that "*holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.*"
- *Shechem* means, "the shoulder." Christ not only bore our sins in his own body on the tree, he bears and carries his people and the government of his church and kingdom is on his shoulders. There, on his omnipotent shoulders, we are safe and secure.

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- *Hebron* means, "fellowship." Believers have fellowship with Christ and with the Father in him; and in him we have fellowship with one another.
- *Bezer* means, "a fortified place." Christ is our stronghold, our high tower, and our place of defense. To him we run; and in him we are safe.
- *Ramoth* means, "exaltations." Our Lord Jesus Christ is exalted at God's right hand; and in due time he will exalt those that trust in him.
- *Golan* means "manifested." Christ is God "*manifest in the flesh.*" The Son of God was manifest to take away our sins and destroy the works of the devil. And he will be gloriously manifest and revealed at the last day.

**In addition to these types, our Lord Jesus Christ is clearly spoken of prophetically by the false prophet Balaam** (24:17-19 — Compare John 11:47-52). So great is our God that he uses both Balaam's ass and false prophets like Balaam (men far beneath

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Balaam's ass) to deliver his message when he is pleased to do so.

(Numbers 24:17-19) "I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. (18) And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. (19) Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city."

Christ is that Star coming out of Judah and that Scepter (Law Giver) out of Israel. His birth was announced by a star put in the sky by God's hand (Matthew 2:2). He is called "*the Bright and Morning Star*" (Revelation 22:16). And he is the Deliverer (the Scepter) who comes out of Zion for the salvation of his people.

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(Romans 11:26) “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:”

**THE LESSONS**

Now, let me show you some of the lessons the Spirit of God would have us learn from this Book.

1. **There is nothing so dishonoring to our God and so harmful to us in this world as unbelief.**

We see this clearly in the major theme of the Book of Numbers. God sent Israel in to spy out the land of Canaan, but they believed not God (chapters 13 and 14). Therefore, the Lord God set upon them forty years of judgment, forty years (one year for every day the spies were in the land of Canaan) of wandering from place to place in the wilderness.

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Perhaps, you are thinking, “Bro. Don, haven’t you been telling us that God’s favor is never determined by our experience?” I have indeed. But, as God judged Israel for their unbelief, he chastens us for ours, to teach us to believe him. That is a great **blessing. Yet, the Word of God is crystal clear. — We rob ourselves of much blessedness in this world by our unbelief.**

(Isaiah 48:17-19) “Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I *am* the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way *that* thou shouldest go. (18) O that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments! Then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the sea: (19) Thy seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of thy bowels like the gravel thereof; his name should not have been cut off nor destroyed from before me.”

“Of all sad words of tongue or pen,

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The saddest are these: "It might have been."

(John 11:40) "Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?"

(Matthew 23:37-38) "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not! (38) Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."

2. **God almighty demands that those who speak for him be heard and obeyed** (11:1-17:13).

The lessons of God's judgment upon the sons of Korah need to be learned. God's ambassadors are God's ambassadors! God's ambassadors are God's ambassadors. Hear them, and you hear God. Refuse and disobey them, and you refuse and disobey God.



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3. **Multitudes, like the sons of Korah and the mixed multitude in Israel, have a barren familiarity with the things of God.**

J. C. Ryle wrote, "Nothing so hardens the hearts of men as a barren familiarity with the things of God." A barren familiarity with Christ and his gospel is damning and will bring, at last, God's most severe wrath to eternity.

4. **The most deadly thing in this world is the error of Balaam.**

(Jude 1:11-14) "Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. (12) These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds *they are* without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead,

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plucked up by the roots; (13) Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. (14) And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints,”

- Serving God for Hire (Numbers 22:7) — Covetousness!
- Mixing the Worship of God with the Worship of Idols.

(Numbers 25:1-3) “And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. (2) And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. (3) And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.”

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**5. There is but one remedy for human sin, but one way of salvation and eternal life.**

The only way Israel could be saved from the fiery serpents was by looking to that brazen serpent Moses lifted up before them. And the only way you and I can be saved is by looking to Christ, our crucified Savior.

(John 3:14-16) “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: (15) That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life. (16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

(John 12:32) “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me.”

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(John 14:6) “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

(Isaiah 45:20-25) “Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, ye *that are* escaped of the nations: they have no knowledge that set up the wood of their graven image, and pray unto a god *that* cannot save. (21) Tell ye, and bring *them* near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? *Who* hath told it from that time? *Have* not I the LORD? And *there is* no God else beside me; a just God and a Saviour; *there is* none beside me. (22) Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else. (23) I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth *in* righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. (24) Surely, shall *one* say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength: *even* to him shall *men* come; and all that are

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incensed against him shall be ashamed. (25) In the LORD shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.”

Amen.