

2018 BIBLE TALKS—UNVEILING NUMBERS

Session 1

God's People Being Formed into an Army

Hymns, #1287

- 1 Let's take the land! The land that God has given us;
In all our living, Christ can be so much:
To take this land, we have th' equipment that we need—
The blood, the Word, the Spirit, and the church.

(sisters)

Let's take the land! O Christian brothers,
The land that God has given us.
Be strong and take it, for we can make it
And gain this land so glorious!

(brothers)

Let's take the land! O Christian sisters,
And to these things give earnest heed.
The Lord implores us; He's gone before us
And given everything we need!

- 2 We have the blood! Christ is our spotless offering,
Who gave Himself, our God to satisfy;
And so we come with boldness to the throne of grace,
And all day long, the precious blood apply.
- 3 We have the Word! The written Word's our daily food;
We mix this Word with faith and say "Amen!"
Then thro' the day, the spoken Word will speak to us
And regulate our living from within.
- 4 The Spirit's ours! The Spirit of reality,
He's independent of the way we feel;
He dwells in us, and teaches us to dwell in Him,
And guides us into everything that's real.
- 5 We have the church! All saints are needed to possess
The fullness of this vast reality;
Together we will gain this all-inclusive Christ,
And He to us our everything will be.

Scripture Reading: Num. 1:1— 9:14

Num. 1:1-3 Then Jehovah spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Take the sum of all the assembly of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, every male, head by head. From twenty years old and upward, all who are able to go forth for military service in Israel, you and Aaron shall number them by their companies.

I. We need to see the advancement of the divine revelation in the Bible:

- A. Genesis: God's creation and man's fall
- B. Exodus: God's salvation and the building of His habitation
- C. Leviticus: the redeemed people's worship and living
- D. Numbers: God's redeemed people being formed into His army and their journey in fighting for God

II. The general sketch, central thought, and sections of Numbers:

- A. The general sketch: the redeemed and sanctified Israelites were formed into a holy army of God, which was to proceed by following God's leading and was to fight for Him
- B. The central thought: Christ is the meaning of life, the testimony, the center of God's people, and the Leader, the way, and the goal of their journey and fighting
- C. The sections: being formed into an army, journeying, and fighting

III. The children of Israel were formed into an army:

- A. God saved His elect not only to gain a kingdom of priests to serve Him, but also to gain an army to fight for Him.
- B. The children of Israel were formed into an army:
 - 1. By their families and their leaders (Num. 1:1-16) and according to the age (vv. 20-46).
 - 2. Encamping in array—2:1-34:
 - a. Around the tent of meeting, facing the tent of meeting—with the testimony of God as the unique center and goal—Exo. 20:1; 25:10, 16.
 - b. Typifying God's redeemed people being consummated in the New Jerusalem—2:2; Rev. 21:12-13.
 - 3. Through establishing the holy service—Num. 3:1—4:49.
 - 4. Through dealing with defilement (5:1-31), including the corporate dealing (vv. 1-4) and the individual dealing (vv. 5-10).
 - 5. By being sanctified to be a Nazarite—6:1-21.

IV. God's New Testament elect, God's church, is God's habitation (Eph. 2:21-22), Christ's bride (5:25-27), and also the corporate warrior (6:10-20):

- A. Believers need the growth in life in order to be built up and formed into an army for God's move and warfare.
- B. Believers should take Christ as the center and God's testimony as the goal in their living to consummate the New Jerusalem.
- C. God desires all His people to be Nazarites, who consecrate themselves voluntarily to be sanctified unto God absolutely and ultimately for God's service, move, and warfare.

- D. God's people need to practice the vital groups and prayer groups for the preaching of the gospel and the propagation and building up of the church.

SUPPLEMENTARY READING

I. AN ADVANCEMENT OF THE DIVINE REVELATION

In the five books of Moses (the Pentateuch) many seeds of the truth are sown. Every main point of the divine truth is in these books. However, the divine revelation was not given to us once for all but progressively.

A. In Genesis

In Genesis we see God's creation and man's fall. Whereas Genesis begins with God's creation, it ends with the result of man's fall—a dead man in a coffin (50:26).

B. In Exodus

After the fall of man, God came in to save us with His wonderful redemption. This is what we see in Exodus. In the book of Exodus we have God's salvation and the building of His habitation.

God's habitation is more valuable than His creation. When God created the heavens and the earth, He was homeless. Even though man fell, God would not give up. He still went on to redeem and save fallen man that He might build up His habitation with His redeemed people.

C. In Leviticus

In Leviticus we have the redeemed's worship and living. By the time we reach Leviticus, many of the fallen people have been saved and have become God's redeemed people. Leviticus reveals that these redeemed ones need to worship God and live the life He desires.

D. In Numbers

In Numbers we see God's redeemed people being formed into His army and their journey in fighting for God. The army is for God's people to fight so that God can gain the ground on earth to build up His kingdom with His habitation.

II. A COMPARISON

At this point, I would like to make a comparison between Numbers and Leviticus. Leviticus stresses the redeemed's worship and living. Numbers stresses the redeemed's journey and fighting. In Leviticus God's redeemed were instructed in how to worship God and live a holy life. In Numbers God's redeemed were formed into an army and fought for Him throughout their journey.

In Numbers we can see three things: the formation of an army, the journeys of that army, and the fighting of the army. The formation of the army was for fighting, and the fighting required the army to journey, not to stay in one spot. Always the children of Israel were going on from place to place to gain ground that God might have a people to be built up for His kingdom and His house. For this reason, in Numbers we have the army, the journey, and the fighting. (*Life-study of Numbers*, msg. 1)

The fulfillment of God's intention to gain a people and to have them formed into an army was not a simple matter. This army was formed with twelve tribes. It is wonderful that Jacob had exactly twelve sons, who became twelve tribes. Among these twelve tribes, Levi was consecrated to God for the service of the tabernacle. As a result, there was the shortage of one tribe. However, this shortage was made up by Joseph's receiving a double

portion through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who filled the gap to keep the number of tribes at twelve. Furthermore, within the consecrated tribe of Levi was the house of Aaron, the priestly house. Levi had three sons who encamped around three sides of the tabernacle. Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons encamped at the front of the tabernacle. Such a camping of the children of Israel in array was marvelous. (*Life-study of Numbers*, msg. 1)

The children of Israel were formed into a fighting army by being numbered by their families (by their fathers' households) and leaders (vv. 1-16), i.e., by the source of life (cf. 1 Cor. 4:15) and fellowship of life (1 John 1:3) and under the leadership (authority) in life (cf. Heb. 13:17), and according to their age (vv. 20-46), i.e., according to the maturity in life (cf. 1 John 2:13). In order to be numbered the children of Israel were required to be in the fellowship of the life of their fathers' households and had to grow in life unto maturity. (Num. 1:2, footnote 2, *Recovery Version*)

[That] the children of Israel were encamped facing the Tent of Meeting indicates that the testimony of God—the Ark within the tabernacle, which contained the law as God's testimony (Exo. 25:16)—was their unique center and goal (see notes 1¹ in Exo. 20 and 10¹ in Exo. 25). This signifies that Christ, the embodiment of God, is the center and goal of God's people, who are journeying and fighting for God's testimony. (Num. 1:2, footnote 3, *Recovery Version*)

The children of Israel encamping in array typifies God's redeemed people being consummated in the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem has twelve gates, three gates on each of the four sides, with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel on them (Rev. 21:12-13). In Numbers the twelve tribes were arranged into an array, in which three tribes, each tribe being an army, were encamped on each of the four sides of the tabernacle (vv. 2-

31). Four camps of three armies each yields the number twelve. This number, composed of three multiplied by four, signifies the Triune God (three) mingled with His creatures (four), forming a unit of eternal and perfect government. (Num. 1:2, footnote 1, *Recovery Version*)

In Hebrew the word service in 4:3, 35, 39, 43 is warfare, indicating the military service. Hence, even the holy service of the priests and the Levites was in the warfare. Today as priests of the gospel of God, we should consider ourselves warriors. While we are preaching, teaching, edifying others, and building up the Body of Christ, we are fighting. The New Testament priests are warriors, and our priestly service is a fighting. (*Life-study of Numbers*, msg. 4)

The three kinds of defilement dealt with in the camp of Israel typify all the uncleanness that needs to be dealt with in the church. Leprosy signifies the evil issues of the natural man, especially in rebellion. Spiritually, discharges are the excessive, abnormal, and unrestrained issues of the natural man, signifying one's being without control, unbridled, in relation to one's self, temper, preferences, likes, and dislikes. Uncleanness through contact with the dead signifies the defilement of spiritual deadness that issues from contacting those who are spiritually dead. God's is righteous, holy, and living. Thus, these three kinds of defilement cannot be allowed to remain in God's dwelling place, army, and priesthood. (Num. 5:2, footnote 1, *Recovery Version*)

A Nazarite was sanctified by making a special vow to separate himself to God. The priests, who were such by birth, were ordained by God out of His initiation, whereas the Nazarite, who became such by a vow, was separated to God by himself out of his initiation. God's ordaining of one family (Aaron's) to be the priests excluded all others from this opportunity. But the vow of the Nazarite opens the gate, affording all the people of God an equal opportunity to be absolutely for God as a warrior (Judg. 13:5) or as a priest (1 Sam. 1:11; 2:11). Whoever is willing may take this opportunity on his own initiative. The accomplishing of God's purpose requires man's cooperation to complement God's ordination, as illustrated

by the case of Samuel, who as a Nazarite fulfilled the duty of a priest, complementing the deficient Eli, a priest ordained by God (1 Sam. 1—3). (Num. 6:2, footnote 1, *Recovery Version*)

God desires that all His people be Nazarites. To be a Nazarite is to be sanctified, separated, absolutely and ultimately to God, i.e., to be for nothing other than God. (Num. 6:2, footnote 2, *Recovery Version*)

The formed Israelites were a type of the church. Ephesians, a book on the church, reveals that the church is a corporate warrior fighting the battle for God's testimony (Eph. 6:10-20). The church is also composed of God's serving ones as the Levites. For fighting, we are a corporate warrior, and for serving we are the Levites, even the priests. (*Life-study of Numbers*, msg. 2)

Questions:

1. Please explain the general sketch, central thought, and sections of Numbers.
2. How were the Israelites formed into an army?
3. How do we apply this picture of the Israelites' being formed into an army to our living and service?