

# Moving On

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 February 2018

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're looking tonight, if you would turn with me please, to Numbers chapter 21 and the passage we read there from verse 10.

Down to the end of the chapter, we're looking at the main features of that passage from Numbers 21 and from verse 10 onwards. The people of Israel set out and camped in Oboth and they set out from Oboth and camped at Iyabaram in the wilderness that is opposite Moab.

From there they set out and camped in the valley of Zeret and so on down through the chapter. Now there are many geographical details given us in the chapter here. It's actually really almost like one of those videos that you see nowadays using drones as is commonly and increasingly the case when you find a territory or so whatever and a drone going across and broadcasting a live video or taking still photos of whatever it is.

And you get all of that channeled back and you have a sense of that panorama and of the features of the place and so on and it's all fed back to you. Well, the passage here is something like that in a way in a spiritual sense because as you go through it you can see that all of these different emphases in it geographically are there just so that it comes across to us as a very real passage, if you like.

You know, it's the word of God but as you look at it there God has actually given that detail to us so that we follow on the steps that Israel took and that we actually join with them in this very racy narrative as they go from one place to another and as they settle in certain of the cities as they take on or at least they're taken on by Sihon and then by Og and defeat them both.

[ 1 : 47 ] So all of that provides us with such a rich narrative and if I could just read it better than I'm able to an expert reader could probably convey that much better to you in a way that shows how the passage itself just races along and presents us with this vivid imagery and it's for good reason.

Of course it's not the geographical emphasis in the passage, it's not the main emphasis. The main emphasis is theological, not geographical. It relates to the people of God under God's leadership as they now come to move on in their journey through the desert as they've come to this point and now they're moving from place to place onwards towards their final place of living in the land of Canaan. And not only is there a very vivid narrative and all these geographical features but you actually see throughout the passage all of these, the variety you've got there of different tasks or different activities as you go through it.

Here's a passage that deals, well in many ways it's a script writer's dream, isn't it? Because you've got there things such as digging a well, singing a song, poetic composition, envoys sent out on behalf of the people to try and engage in negotiations with the Ammonites, with the king there, and then there's soldiers, so there's poets and then there's spies.

There's a whole host of things together crammed into this very racy passage and as you read through it you get the impression that, well this is really something that captures for us so many things that are important in our own journey and in our own guidance under God as he leads us through the various experiences of life and as he actually brings us to engage in the very different variety of activities that belong to the Church of God.

[ 3 : 44 ] Three things really to focus on that we'll use as our headings tonight. First of all, the passage deals with what we can call the paternity of God, his fatherly guidance of the people at this stage in their journey.

Now of course it doesn't speak of God as a father, but in a sense we're shining the light of the New Testament where his fatherliness is very much more obvious and more revealed to us, but we're taking that light and you can shine that back into these sort of passages in the Old Testament where God leads his people onwards through different experiences and you can see that the way

he's arranged things for them, the things he's doing for them, the way especially he himself goes before them and looks after them, well it's really in a sense his paternity, it's his fatherly care as he actually gives them this guidance through this part of the territory.

Secondly, we'll look at the provision of God because you find here that he gives them water in the desert. And then thirdly, the power of God as he brings victory to them over these opponents that have come out against them.

Israel, as we'll see, didn't actually seek conflict, they actually sought peace. But Sihon and Og, these kings and their peoples, were determined not to let Israel pass.

And of course when you refer to Moab, as you discover there the references to Moab, you understand that it's in keeping with the references to Moab in the Old Testament who were themselves set on the destruction of Israel.

[ 5 : 22 ] And therefore when you think of Israel resisting them and going to war against them, it's really a self-preservation on their part because their enemies are determined to wipe them out. Or if you go into the next chapter or two, you'll find the king of Moab hiring Soothsayer Balaam with a specific intention of cursing these people of Israel so that that will be the end of them as far as he's concerned.

So let's look at these three emphasis this evening. The paternity of God in the way that he guides them or leads them in fatherly guidance through this territory.

Verses 10 to 15 there especially. And as we said, you have the reference there to the emphasis there of moving from place to place, camping in one place, moving on to the next place.

And the Lord is really saying to them, this is the time to move on from where you are. But where are they? What has happened just before this?

What's happened before this is that they have actually been engaged in gross sin against the Lord. They've been complaining against the Lord and against his provision.

[ 6 : 35 ] And the Lord sent these fiery serpents into their midst and many of the people died, as you see in the passage before that, until the Lord instructed Moses to meet that situation by making a brazen or bronze serpent, setting it up on a pole, so that whoever looked at it would be cured of the serpent bite that had injected them with poison.

Now that's not far-fetched. The New Testament picks that up in the Gospel of John, where you find the reference there to, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so, said Jesus, the Son of Man must be lifted up, that whoever believes in him would not perish.

Chapter 3 of John. So that's the passage just before this. And the trauma of that situation, just think of yourselves and myself as part of the people at that time.

Build yourself into what's said there, what we're being told. And the people there are in a great crisis. It's a traumatic situation for them.

They've rebelled against the Lord to the extent that he has sent these fiery serpents biting the people, and many of them died in verse 6. And they come to Moses and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord and against you.

[ 7 : 53 ] Pray to the Lord that he take away the serpents from us. That's such a serious business that they have actually had this laid upon them by God in response.

But then the next thing you read of is that God is actually going to lead the people onwards from that point. So there's a sense there on in which the Lord is saying, Yes, I know what you've done, and I've reacted to that.

But now I'm going to lead you on to further experiences of me, and I'm going to lead you on further towards the land that I have promised. And there's that sense of purpose and of movement in the narrative, as we said, that fits in with what God is now saying to the people.

In other words, we're told, or we can take from this, that when we have God as our Father, it doesn't in any way minimize the seriousness of what they did and of the Lord's response.

But when we have the Lord looking after us, and the Lord as our Father, then the Lord will in His own way say to us now, I want you to think of the gain that's ahead of you as you move on, as you learn from this.

[ 9 : 07 ] I want you to think of the gain that's ahead of you more than the loss that you're leaving behind. They left many people dead at this point. They died because of the snake bites.

But the Lord is saying to them, Far as I'm concerned, that's in the past. And now I'm taking you on from here. And you'll learn more of me as you go on from here.

He's going to give them this guidance, this fatherly direction, as He gives to ourselves. Every one of us here tonight, myself, no least, no, no, not less, knows of mistakes.

Knows that daily we do things which we, if not regret, then we know certainly that it's something we need to actually confess to the Lord. We're all prone to mistakes, to failure, to impatience, to grumbling, as we heard in prayer.

In fact, both prayers tonight remarkably really picked up aspects of this passage. And I can assure you, I didn't tell Ali or Ewing what I was going to preach this evening. Maybe the Lord told them, I don't know, but it was quite remarkable and encouraging for me that they actually took in their prayer things which were features of this passage and of the theme of the passage.

[10:25] But in any case, what God is saying is, we need to move on. Whatever our past has been, whatever our recent past has been, whatever mistakes we've made, He knows all that.

His forgiveness is greater than all of that. His purpose in leading us home is greater than that. It all fits into that purpose of God. And so He's saying, it's now time to move on.

It's time to build on what has happened. It's time to actually address again issues so that you gain further from moving on with God and not sit and actually think upon whatever has happened as something that will inevitably keep you back from now on.

What are you saying? Yes, I know what you've done, He's saying to the people, but it's the Lord who actually directs Moses as they move on to the next stage. And it's interesting that it's God who's actually leading them.

Go back to chapter 9 and you'll find something very significant there in chapter 9 where we read that the people of Israel moved whenever the cloud that was over the tabernacle actually moved.

[11:39] It was like the appearance of fire by night until the morning. So it was, in verse 16, so it was always. The cloud covered it by day and the appearance of fire by night.

And whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent, after that the people of Israel set out and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the people of Israel camped.

Now there's a principle for us, though we're no longer under the same conditions of a cloud and a pillar of fire or a cloud by fire by night. That was literally the case with Israel and camped in the wilderness.

But the principle of it still remains because the Lord still guides His people and now it's not that sort of cloud. We have His Word. We have His Spirit living within us.

And what the Lord is saying is, when I speak to you through my Word, it is still the same God who is speaking to us. Sometimes we don't hear His voice.

[12:39] Sometimes we read the Word of God and we don't actually find the guidance that we're praying for and leading for. We have to wait for it. But the Lord still addresses us through His Word.

The principles of our following Him are there in His Word. And by the blessing of His Spirit, we come to learn increasingly of what it means to follow the Lord and to have Him as our Father through the wilderness journey that we're on.

Well, you can follow that through more for yourselves. The paternity of God and His fatherly guidance in the passage here and elsewhere as the journey of Israel is described.

And that's one of the great things about the book of Numbers. It's really very much about that journey. And it's about the various features of that journey and how they related to God and God to them during that journey on until they had reached the place that God had promised.

That's the first thing then. The paternity of God is fatherly guidance. Secondly, the provision of God where He gives them water in the desert. Verses 16 through to 18 especially.

[13:46] And from there, they continued to bear, that is, the well of which the Lord said to Moses, gather the people together so that I may give them water. But go back to verse 5.

What do you find in verse 5? The people spoke against God and against Moses. Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water and we loathe this worthless food.

That's their complaint. That's their grumbling. That's why the Lord, as it says in verse 6, sent these fiery serpents among them. It was their grumbling against God. It was their dissatisfaction with God's provision.

It wasn't that they spoke unknowingly against God. This is what they were saying. They spoke against God and against Moses. Why have you brought us up here to die? There's no food.

There's no water. We hate this worthless food. This was special food from heaven, the manna that God provided. That's how they're speaking about it. And you might imagine that God would say, well, that's it.

[14:53] I've had enough of these people. They're rebellious. They're disobedient. They're ungrateful. They don't listen to my word. They go after other gods.

They would rather be back in Egypt. Yet what does he say? Gather the people together so that I may give them water.

Isn't that such a wonderful emphasis? Isn't that such a comforting emphasis for ourselves? Isn't that amazing in the context of the passage we read previously regarding the rebellion and their grumbling that there was no water?

And when you would expect that God would be done with them, what is he saying? No, I'm committed to these people. I'm committed to bring them into the land I've promised. Their inheritance is not going to be given to any other people.

It's theirs. I've made up my mind. I've promised it in covenant to them. They're going in there. I'm going to take them in there. And not even these serious incidents in the wilderness and these grumbings are going to stand against me taking these people into the land I've promised them.

[16:01] So gather them together so that I may give them water. See, they didn't know that there's probably the streams running underground which were completely unknown to the people probably.

but of course the Lord knew how he could get water from there if they dug a well and that the well once dug was actually going to produce water from them. They came to this place of Beir, the well of which the Lord said to Moses, gather them together that I may give them water.

Then Israel sang this song, spring up, O well, sing to it the well that the princes dug. But you see, the emphasis is on God actually giving them the water.

Gather them together that I may give them water. And when that water came through the well to slake their thirst, when that fresh water touched their lips, they were not allowed to think, I've done this myself.

It's my ingenuity that's done this. They weren't allowed to think of it from any other source but God's goodness. Gather them together that I may give them water.

[17:13] God gave them the water. They didn't produce it for themselves. And how often the Lord needed to remind them of that right through into the time that they were going to enter the promised land.

They were to remember as God reminded them in Deuteronomy, the final chapters there before they proceeded into the promised land. When you come to inhabit this land and you take over these fields and these vineyards and these dwelling places, then you shall not forget the Lord your God. You shall not think, by my own hand I have produced these. For it is the Lord that has given them to you. And so it is with ourselves. What do we have tonight? As self-produced blessings?

None. What do we have of advantages that we have created for ourselves? None. Where do we get our sustenance from during this wilderness journey? Do we produce it ourselves?

No. It comes from the Lord. This is God's constant word to his people in all our circumstances as he moves them on. As he moves them on, leave behind whatever things they've been engaged in.

[18:24] Prior to that, he's saying, I'm moving you on and I want to gather you together so that I will give you water. His sustenance is from himself. And you've come here tonight to be fed by God.

To have your thirst quenched by God through his truth. Not by a human being speaking and giving you something in the way of words. Yes, that's part of it. But who's feeding your soul?

It's not me. It's God. And that's how it is always through our desert journey. And we must never forget that. But there's something else along with that.

Yes, he said to them, gather them together so that I may give them water. And then when you come to the song they sang, spring up, oh well, sing to it.

The well the princes dug and the nobles of the people delved with the scepter and with their staffs. Well, that's interesting, isn't it? On the one hand, God is saying, I'm going to give them this water.

[19:25] But you have to dig for it. You have to dig down into the ground until the water actually comes to the surface and you discover it and it comes to be usable. And that principle runs right through Scripture as well.

It's always God who is the source of our blessings. But sometimes and oftentimes we have to dig down through the hard crust of providence.

And it may not be obvious to us at all that there's any water there. In fact, we might say, how can any benefit come from this? How can I find sustenance through such difficulties, through such hard surfaces as I'm experiencing at the moment in my Christian life?

But the Lord says, you need to dig down and you will find it. Psalm 84 is very similar. We'll sing it in conclusion in a moment.

Where the psalmist, of course, is talking there about his love for God, for the courts of God and so on. And then he talks about those people who are blessed, those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

[ 20 : 40 ] As they go through the valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs or of wells. The early rain also covers it with pools.

They go from strength to strength. You find the same kind of imagery there where the Lord is leading them onwards and where they've come to the valley of Baca, which most commentators think is a reference to dryness, to a desert-like valley where there isn't much sign of water.

But you see what he's saying is they make it a place of springs. The water is actually there below the surface. You can't actually see it to begin with, but if you do dig down, he's saying, the water will actually appear.

So there's the principle for us tonight as well. Maybe there's something in your own life tonight and you feel, there doesn't seem to be much water here for me and my soul is feeling very dry.

And I'd love to have some more of this water of the gospel and the water of God's blessing come into my experience right now.

[ 21 : 52 ] Well, the Lord is saying, dig for it, wait for it. Dig for it by reading his word, by prayer, by waiting, by prayer, by reading, by waiting.

But sometimes we come to our difficulties and we're all too ready just to throw away the spade and not bother to dig down. As if the blessing in the water was just going to come to the surface of its own accord.

Other times we realize, yes, I know it's difficult, I know I have to dig down and use his word and pray and all the rest of it, but we find ourselves really just jabbing the surface, going through the motions, whereas God is saying, no, dig, get into the digging mode and you'll reach the water.

I will bring that water to you. So the two things really go together. The emphasis on God himself actually bringing the water, giving them the drink, but they have to have their own share of the activity that's there in digging so that they actually come to actually have that experience of water in the desert.

And that's very often how it must be for ourselves. And of course, one of the benefits from that is that God strengthens us, strengthens our faith and our sense of God himself being the one who knows best for us where the water is and why he's brought the tough times to us.

[ 23 : 28 ] So there's two points. The paternity of God, his fatherly guidance, the provision of God, water in the desert, and that point is finished off by the singing. Then Israel sang this song.

It's not clear that they were actually singing while they were digging out the well. And it's very difficult at times, isn't it, really to sing, certainly to sing with joy when you're still in the process of digging and you haven't yet come to experience the water and the blessing and the comfort that you pray for from God.

But once it's come and once the water has come into your soul, then you certainly come to give thanks. Spring up, oh well. well. And they sang this song and it does appear as if they were actually doing it during the digging because they're calling while the princes and the nobles are digging the well, delving into the ground, they're saying, spring up, oh well, spring up, sing to it, bring its water to the surface, but while they're doing it, we'll actually sing praise to God.

Difficult. But singing is a great privilege. Even if you say, I don't have much of a voice to sing, you can sing with your soul silently. You can express your joy in God and in his provision for you even while you're waiting because you know the promise is true and his word will never fail.

So the provision of water in the desert. Finally, the power of God, victory over the enemies from verse 19 right through there really to 35 at the end of the chapter.

[ 25 : 11 ] Now, Israel had tried peace. It's very obvious from the passage that it wasn't really Israel who instigated the conflict. He sent messengers, Israel sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, saying, let me pass through your land.

We're not going to use your field, your fields or vineyards, we're not going to drink the water of any of your wells, we'll just go on the main road on the king's highway until we have passed through your territory.

That's our promise. all we want is just a passage through, then we'll leave you alone. They wouldn't do that. They turned against them. He came out to fight against him, and Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok.

You'll find the same thing then in the final part of the passage from verse 31, where Og, king of Bashan, they turned, went, by the way to Bashan, and Og, the king of Bashan, came out against him.

He and all his people to battle at Edrei. But amusing in a sense, if you go to Deuteronomy in chapter 3, one of the things that's described there is the size of Og's bed.

[ 26 : 26 ] It's not obvious why it was described as such and such a size, but if you look at the cubits and work fairly accurately, from what we're told in the way that you convert cubits into feet or meters, it appears that his bed was about 11 feet long and 6 feet wide.

That's super king's eyes. And it would probably be part of his prestige. It might have been that he was an immensely big man, who knows, but certainly this was something deliberately described there in Deuteronomy 3 in the Bible.

Why? Probably because it presents us with Og as a man of great power and prestige and influence, and who thought that he could certainly stand against these Israelites who were traveling to his territory.

But so he came out to fight against them. And the Lord said to Moses, do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand and all his people and all his land, and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites.

Now you notice what it's saying. The Lord didn't say to Moses, don't fear him, for I will give him into your hand. The Lord is saying, I've already done that. It's accomplished in my plan, and therefore, that's how it will come to pass.

[ 27 : 53 ] And when you and I fear the forces that are against us today, and perhaps lose sight of the fact that in God's plan, they're all defeated already, however many times in this life the church of God may be brought under times almost of captivity, times of restriction, times when the gospel is not effective as we would pray for, but who ultimately is going to be the victor?

Well, go to the last book of the Bible, because the last book of the Bible, Lord, has many passages that are rather difficult and mysterious, and some of them virtually impossible to interpret and be sure about.

It is about one thing and one thing only, that the Lamb and his people prevail, that Christ the conqueror at the head of his people is saying, you will undoubtedly prevail over all that stands against you, ultimately, in the ultimate sense.

We may leave this world and never see the church revived. We may leave this world lamenting how little influence the gospel has. We may leave this world praying to God for revival, that we will never see ourselves.

But the Lord is saying, don't you fear that? I have given him, I have given the world into your hand. Which is why in the New Testament, you find such a lot of emphasis on the fact that God's people will reign with Christ.

[ 29 : 29 ] And that means reign in the sense of presiding, reigning over all things with him, even to the extent of judging angels, however that will be.

So tonight, you may find that things are against you, that you find the church in such a perilous condition. You may think that the tide of secularism and humanism and atheism is just increasingly coming and threatening to really just overwhelm the church.

And you may think that even locally, and there are indeed so many threats and so many things as we've mentioned tonight to pray about and to pray against, but God is saying, ultimately, don't be afraid of them.

Victory is on your side. Truth is on your side. I'm on your side. And it's to encourage us, and to encourage us further. You see, what God is saying is, well, this actually came to be a great victory. You look all the way through the Old Testament and the Psalms and elsewhere, where you find Sihon and Og and the defeat by them of Israel, again and again mentioned as items of praise.

[ 30 : 42 ] It featured in the history of Israel, and at this stage in their journey, God is saying this to them so that they will be persuaded of this, that the God who has done this for them on this side of

the Jordan will do the same for them on the other side.

They are not going to fail when they meet other opponents, when they have to fight their way further forward. The same God is not going to fail them there either, and neither will he ever fail us.

We always have his paternal guidance. We always have his provision of sustenance for us in our journey.

And we always have his power, even if at times we don't see it displayed as we would like.

Nevertheless, it's still on our side, and God will never be anything else but on the side of his people and of his truth.

May God bless these thoughts to us. Let's pray. Lord, our gracious God, we acknowledge tonight that we are a needy people, that each of us is needy in our individual lives too.

[ 31 : 59 ] We acknowledge, oh Lord, our comfort from your word and the assurance that you give us, that as we take you as our God and as you take us as your people, so you promise to go before us, to provide direction for us, to protect us on the way, to enable us ultimately to overcome.

And we give thanks for that great assurance that you bring to us in your word, that those who overcome, to them you will give to sit with you on your throne, even as you overcame and have sat down with the Father in his throne.

Make us thankful, we pray, for all the things that we receive from you daily, and all the things that are promised, that you will yet do and give to your people. Hear us, we pray, for your name's sake.

Amen. Let's conclude then this evening in Psalm 84. Psalm 84 from the Scottish Psalter. So that's on page 338, verses 4 to 9.

Blessed are they in thy house that dwell, they ever give thee praise. Blessed is the man whose strength thou art, and whose heart are thy ways, who passing through a bacchus vale, therein do dig up wells, also the rain that falleth down the pools with water fill.

[ 33 : 21 ] So through to verse 9 from verse 4. Blessed are they in thy house that dwell. Blessed are they in thy hosts that dwell, they ever give thee praise.

Blessed is the man whose strength thou art, in whose heart are thy ways.

Who passing through, who bake us vale, therein do dig up well. Blessed are they in thy house that dwells, and the world of the world of the world of the world of the world of the world of the world of the world.

And the rain that falleth down, the pools with water fill. So they from strength and weary go, till forth and to strength, till forward and to strength, until in Zion they appear, before the Lord Lord Lord God of hosts my prayer near, O Jacob's God give ear.

Lord God of hosts my Lord give ear. Seek God our shield, look on the face of thine anointed dear.

[ 34 : 56 ] If you let me get to the main door please after the benediction. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always. Amen.

Boyabo