

Numbers

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: 09 May 2021

Preacher: Alex Caulk

[0 : 00] So, I think we can go ahead and get started. I'll just take one minute.

I'm not sure I've met everybody in the room here. My name's Alex Cox. So, if I haven't met you before, I'll come say hello after the class.

But thanks for joining today. I'll just take a second to open us up in prayer before we dive in. Father, we thank you for this morning and the opportunity to be together.

We thank you for your word. We thank you that you desire to make yourself known to us. And we just pray that you would open our hearts and minds this morning as we seek to know you better by diving into your word.

We pray these things in your son's name. Amen. All right. So, we're going through numbers today. And I'll just, for a quick recap, tell you what others have told you over the last three weeks.

[1 : 00] We've heard that the Pentateuch is God's self-revelation to ancient Israel in the beginning of the story of God redeeming and restoring his fallen creation. So, in the first week, Luke discussed Genesis and covered God's creation of the world, original sin, and the fall of humanity, as well as God's covenant promise to Abraham and his descendants.

And those promises will come into play later on in the class. Tim then covered in the next two weeks Exodus and Leviticus, which details the enslavement of the Israelites, God's miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt, as well as his covenant establishment at Mount Sinai. Which included instructions for the tabernacle and giving of the civil, ceremonial, and cultic laws. So, that brings us to the book of Numbers. And we'll take a look today at that kind of next installment.

So, to start, if you haven't read it in a while, or maybe you've never read it, if you take a stroll through the book of Numbers, a few things that might jump out to you at first would be things like fiery serpents, miraculous healings, entire people groups devoured by the earth, food falling from the sky, water flowing from rocks, talking donkeys, many things like that.

So, there are lots of fantastical claims that are existing in this book. But interspersed among those things are long stretches of kind of rote information, lots of laws that are being given, dividing of the land, things like that.

[2 : 28] So, in looking at these kind of unbelievable, seemingly unbelievable historical events, together with this kind of foreign information, many of us might look at this and say, how can this possibly be relevant for modern society today?

Or even for me as a modern Christian reader. So, hopefully, by taking a 40,000 foot view of the book today, we can try to answer those questions a little bit better. So, we'll start first with the title and purpose of the book.

Numbers is the English translation of the Greek title of the book, which is derived from, you guessed it, the very specific focus on numbers in the book, primarily relating to the censuses that are taken at a couple of points in the book.

But the Hebrew title of the book, Bemidbar, I'm certain I'm mispronouncing that. But at any rate, that translates in the wilderness and is probably the more appropriate summary of the content as we'll be looking at the Israelites as they journey through the wilderness on their way to see the promised land that God promised to Abraham back in Genesis.

So, as we're looking through this, I think there are a couple of contrasting themes that will come up. We'll see God's justice and his mercy existing together, and we'll see that God is both sovereign and personal.

[3 : 51] And I think if we focus on those things, it'll kind of help us codify the message of numbers. So, structurally, again, numbers picks up right after Leviticus, at which point God has delivered

Israel from Egypt by miraculously leading the entire nation out of Egypt and across the Red Sea to Mount Sinai.

And this is the point where God is establishing his covenant with the nation. He provides the framework that's necessary for him to dwell with his people. And Numbers picks up here with Israel encamped at Mount Sinai.

And you have a kind of map on your handout that you can use if you want to generally follow the path that we'll be observing today. But Numbers kind of begins at Mount Sinai with taking a census of the warrior aged men in the nation in preparation for the conquest of the land that was promised to Abraham.

So we're looking at Canaan in that. Following the census, the Israelites march from Mount Sinai to Kadesh, where they remain for a period of time to provide opportunity to spy out the land that God promised to them.

And then after a flagrant display of unfaithfulness, God sentences the Israelites to wander the wilderness of Kadesh for 40 years. And then they march to the plains of Moab, finally, where they're overlooking the promised land.

[5 : 08] So the breakdown of the book can be summarized in five sections that are either law giving or journeying. So they start at Sinai where they're receiving laws.

They take a census that goes through Numbers, chapter 10, verse 10. They then pick up from Sinai and journey to Kadesh. That goes through chapter 12, verse 16.

They then settle down at Kadesh for a while through chapter 19, verses 22, where they'll receive more laws. They then pick up from Kadesh, go to Moab through chapter 22, verse 1.

And then for the rest of the book, they're in Moab receiving more laws and regulations that they need to enter the promised land. So those are kind of the five sections of the book.

Generally speaking, it's obviously a little bit more complex than that, but I think we can think about it that way. So when we move into looking at the themes of the book, I do want to say that law giving is a significant component of the book and serves in many ways to reveal God's character and plan.

[6 : 19] But today, for the purposes of time, I'll just focus on the narrative components, which are going to highlight the attitudes and actions of the Israelites during their journeying throughout the wilderness.

And throughout their wandering, I think that there are two fundamental themes that we can focus on. So one, sin is serious and invites just punishment from a perfect and holy God.

And two, God's plan is not thwarted by our sin. And by his grace, his promises provide for us a way out of sin and into his rest.

So the first major component that we're going to focus on is sin and its consequences. And that's a bullet on your handout. And I should say, I included a table in the handout that has each of the individual events that we'll go through in the narrative.

If you want to try to follow along, we'll cover them in various levels of detail. But if you want to kind of see where we're going and wonder when we're going to be done with the narrative, you can see on the table.

[7 : 20] But so first, let's let's take a look at sin and its consequences by examining these kinds of series of grumbings by the Israelites throughout the book. First, we're starting out on our way to Kadesh.

So we're essentially skipping that first section of the book where they're taking a census and receiving a bunch of laws. We're already journeying to Kadesh. And on the way, there are three protests in three days that each, I think, say something different about our sin and about God's character.

The first is just a general complaint. We don't know exactly what the complaint is, but what this will serve to do, I think, is highlight the framework of what we're going to see throughout the entire book. Essentially, Israel complains. God responds. In this case, there's a fire consuming the outer part of camp. Somebody intercedes. Usually it's Moses or Aaron, but there are others.

And then God eventually there's a resolution in most cases where God relents of his wrath. And that happens here. Moses intercedes when he sees the fire and God stops.

[8 : 27] But in the very next day, in chapter 11, verse 4, we see that Israelites have a more specific complaint. They say, oh, that we had meat to eat.

The manna that God had provided so miraculously wasn't enough anymore. They start to remember the better days of their time in Egypt when they were enslaved. But yet they had things like fish.

They had mango. They had garlic and other kinds of things to satiate their physical cravings. So they say, but now our strength has dried up and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at. Chapter 11, verse 6. So ultimately, in his grace, God provides quail in plenty for the Israelites to eat. But they're so overcome by their greed and gluttony that people were collecting roughly 480 dry gallons of quail each for themselves.

And we look at this and the abuse of such a gift in this case is addressed by God through a very great play that strikes down many people in the camp, quote, while the meat was yet between their teeth.

[9 : 32] Chapter 11, verses 33. So already we're seeing that sin in the lives of the Israelites and again as well in our own lives, sin is very serious and invites punishment from God.

But God does relent. He does not destroy the entire nation. The plague affects only those that are actually having the cravings. So in his mercy, he still is preserving the Israelite nation.

So after that, Miriam, Moses' sister, and Aaron grumble against Moses in the third complaint of this series. They grumble against Moses because of the uniqueness of his authority.

So they say, has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also? Chapter 12, verse 2. After God reiterates Moses' unique stance before him, God then inflicts Miriam with leprosy, requiring that she be shut outside the camp for seven days to abide by ritual purification laws.

So again, there's a sin. There is a consequence. But there is a consequence. But there is a resolution in that after seven days, Miriam is permitted to reenter the camp after she's gone through the purification process.

[10 : 46] So in just three days, we already have three instances of complaints, including discontent, fear and anxiety, greed and gluttony, and pride mixed with selfish ambition.

And already we see that the consequences are severe as evidenced by death by plague as well as exile by leprosy and uncleanness. But we also see here that God's holiness requires purity.

And that because his holiness also includes his perfect and righteous justice, any and all sin has to be dealt with in order for God to be able to dwell with his chosen people.

So we say here that God is just to punish sin. And that's the first point in the handout. And we'll see this continuing throughout the series. So at this point, Israel is now in Kadesh.

They're settling down. And we see that after they've reached Kadesh, we get to one of the most recognized events in numbers where God instructs Moses to send out spies to evaluate the land of Canaan that he's promised.

[11 : 51] So a representative of each tribe is appointed to go to Canaan to check things out for 40 days. And at the end of the 40 days, the spies return to the camp and report that there is absolutely no way we're getting into the land.

And they say that they're so scared of what they saw that they actually it's suggested that they kind of embellish what what they saw, saying that Canaan is a land that devours its inhabitants with people who were of great height, quote, even referencing the legendary Nephilim of Genesis chapter six, verse four.

So by the end of this, the spies are reporting this very dire situation. They say we're not going to be able to enter and the people believe them and they rebel against Moses and God by seeking to return to Egypt for safety, at which point God sentences the current Exodus generation to die in the wilderness so that only their children, the next generation, will receive the promised land.

I think what's interesting about this passage is that the consequence of wandering and death in the wilderness is actually it's a result of God's mitigated wrath.

In this result, we're told that God actually pardons the unfaithful generation at Moses's behest. So, again, Moses intervenes and says, please pardon them according to your steadfast love.

[13 : 11] And God does it. So he reduces their sentence from utter destruction to a delayed entrance into the promised land. So, again, we see this kind of contrast between the severity of sin and its consequences, but also God's mercy in the context of his justice.

So while they're still in Kadesh, we have another instance, the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who are all Kohathites, which means they were Levites, but they weren't actually priests.

They mount a rebellion against Moses and Aaron on the basis that all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them. And that's chapter 16, verse 3. This probably sounds similar to the complaint of Miriam and Aaron in the beginning of this series, where they're complaining about Moses's position of authority.

But this time, God intends to consume the offenders in the earth. He tells the entire Israelite nation, or he tells Moses to tell the nation, get out of the way of the camp of these three people.

I'm going to swallow them up. And he does. He does that also consuming another 250 people who align themselves behind Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

[14:31] And at this point, ironically, it's ironic that God is telling everybody to get out of the way. He's warning them so that innocent people are not taken up in the process of this.

But the day after that happens, the Israelites actually complain to Moses about the result of that rebellion. They complain and say, I can't believe that these people had to die for this. What's going on?

So God, at that point, intends to consume the camp of the plague. But Aaron leverages his divine appointment to minister atonement on behalf of the people by burning incense throughout the camp.

So he lights incense. He literally runs through the camp to stop the plague that's going throughout the nation. Ultimately, 14,700 people still died by plague.

But presumably, that number would have been significantly higher had Aaron not so quickly taken action to minister atonement for the nation.

[15:35] So those are the key stories that happened while the Israelites are in Kadesh. Again, we still see that kind of theme where sin is occurring.

Sin is being punished. But God does relent. He desires to relent when people seek to pray on behalf of other people.

So we then move on to the next section of the Israelites traveling from Kadesh to Moab.

This begins in chapter 20, verses 2 through 13. Despite Israel's persistent lack of faith, God remains faithful and continues to lead the nation across the wilderness to the plains of Moab, overlooking the promised land.

So during this journey, we see that even Moses, despite his unique standing with God, isn't exempt from the consequence and effects of sin in his life. After another characteristic episode of grumbling by the Israelites, again, it's about a lack of water in the wilderness.

[16:42] God instructs Moses to speak to a rock to bring forth water. This probably sounds similar to something we heard about in Exodus as well. Moses, however, stands at the rock and speaks to the nation, not the rock.

He says, here now, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock? Chapter 20, verse 10. And he strikes the rock twice to bring forth water abundantly. After this, God subsequently sentences Moses and Aaron to die in the wilderness with the rest of the nation because they, quote, did not believe in him and did not uphold him as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel.

Chapter 20, verse 12. So that probably sounds at face value like a pretty severe consequence in a context where the sin maybe to us didn't seem that severe.

And there are a few different possibilities that are suggested regarding why that consequence matched the sin. One is that very simply, he just didn't follow instructions and that in the high priests following instructions was very, very important because those are the instructions that allow God to dwell with his people.

So any deviation in obedience could have resulted in a very severe consequence. Others suggest it could be a display of anger. Moses was angry when he struck the rock.

[18:04] Others say it could be pride and arrogance because he says, shall we bring forth the water, not God? So it could be any one of those things. I don't actually know. But I think the point in all of this is that, again, the resolution we see is that these are the waters of Meribah where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord.

And through them, he showed himself to be holy. So in short, God's holiness includes both his faithfulness and justice, which exists simultaneously in an equal measure.

So God is still providing water for the people in this case, which is an example of his grace. Sin still has to be dealt with. We don't know the exact reasoning, but we know that God in the end still shows himself to be holy, even if we don't fully understand it.

So this theme continues with with another instance. Again, a complaint from the Israelites about a lack of food and water. This time, God sends fiery serpents to bite and kill the people in response to their complaint.

So in this, this is a there. There are interesting differences in this story. The people go to Moses this time and say, we have sinned for we have spoken against the Lord and against you.

[19 : 22] Pray to the Lord that he takes away the serpents from us. Chapter 21, verse seven. So after Moses intercedes again on behalf of Israel, God actually doesn't grant the exact nature of the request.

He doesn't just take away the serpents from the camp. The serpents are still there. What he does, though, is he makes a way for them to be delivered from the effects of the bite by having Moses set up a bronze serpent that's raised up in the camp.

And anybody who has faith enough in God to look at that bronze serpent after they've been bitten will be healed of the effects or prevented from experiencing the effects of the bite.

Importantly, this looks forward to Jesus as the one who would be lifted up on the cross so that anybody who would look to him in faith could receive eternal life. That's John chapter three, verses 14 through 15.

And we've heard a little bit about that in our current sermon series as well. The key difference in this passage that stuck out to me in reading through this is the reported repentance of the people.

[20 : 24] And I think this kind of eloquently sums up this contrast that we've been talking about that's illustrated throughout the book of Numbers. And that's this. Just as God is just to punish sin, so also is he merciful, desiring to forgive sin and relent of his wrath.

That's a second point on your on your handout. So God's mercy abounds throughout the stories that we've been discussing so far. But his mercy is primarily invited by usually Moses or Aaron interceding on behalf of the people when we don't really know if they're repenting of their sin. Moses and Aaron are just saying they love God and they love the people. And they say, God, please forgive them. And God does because he loves them. But in this case, the people actually repent.

They say we've sinned. And in this case, Moses isn't the one that's directly interceding for people. God creates a very personal way for people to look on this bronze serpent in faith and experience that that restoration for themselves.

So we see that God's responses to the request save the nation from its collective sinful behavior when when Moses is interceding on behalf of the people.

[21 : 33] But we also see that God's responses to the faith of individuals can save them from a perilous situation. So I think lucky for us with Jesus as our high priest, we have both our mediator and our source of redemption all in one place.

So we're we're now getting to the section where we're in the plains of Moab. So we're almost coming to the end of the narrative of the sins.

And the final major set of narratives in the in the book of Numbers describes a kind of miraculous display of God's faithfulness to preserve the Israelites through a pagan seer named Balaam.

This is interesting because during this story, Israel is simultaneously giving themselves over to other gods at a place called Beor.

So but the first one that we'll talk about is the story of Balaam's donkey, which is probably another on its own recognizable story from the book of Numbers.

[22 : 38] And I don't want to go into too much detail here. But the gist of the story is that the king of Moab is scared of Israel because of their size and recent military success. Again, taking the promised land was supposed to be a military conquest.

And we see elements of that playing out in numbers as they conquer the Amorites. So the king of Moab hires Balaam to curse the nation of Israel.

And God initially says, no, Balaam, don't go do that. But after some back and forth, he finally says, OK, Balaam, you can go. But you have to do what I'm going to say. And the key here is that it's not totally clear at this point in the story that Balaam is actually going to do what God is going to say. But Balaam gets on his faithful donkey. They start traveling to go see the king of Moab. And on his way, the faithful donkey sees the angel of the Lord standing in her way.

And she stops in her tracks. And at this point, Balaam begins beating the donkey, says, why are you stopping? I need you to go. And he's beating the donkey. And eventually, God opens the mouth

of the donkey to audibly speak to Balaam.

[23 : 43] And she says, why are you beating me? Now, I think there's a little bit of humor in this story, ironically, because to me, I'm looking at Balaam and I'm thinking, if I'm Balaam sitting on this donkey, I'm probably going to get off the donkey because the donkey's talking to me out loud.

Or I might fall off because I'm so scared of what's happening. But Balaam doesn't skip a beat. He just says, you're making a fool out of me. So his donkey turns around and says, why are you beating me?

He says, you're making a fool out of me. Get going. So at any rate, maybe it's not supposed to be funny. But to me, it at least comes off a little bit humorous. But they seem to work it out by the end. And eventually, God actually reveals the angel of the Lord to Balaam as well. And Balaam sees the angel. He says, OK, I understand what's going on now. God is really telling me that I need to do what he wants me to do when I go to see the king of Moab.

And that is to not curse Israel. So Balaam finally, they continue traveling. He finally gets to the king and the king asks him to curse Israel, as we know is expected.

[24 : 53] And there's there's also to me a little bit of humor in here because I think Balaam knows what's going to happen. And he says he says the word that God puts in my mouth, that must I speak.

Chapter 22, verse 38. But he tells the king to go ahead and build the altar and we'll give it a try anyway. So the king builds him an altar. This happens three times. And he goes to the altar. He goes through everything.

And then he ends up blessing Israel. And the king of Moab is saying, what are you doing to me? I need you to curse them, not bless them. And so he does it once. And he says, maybe it was the location.

Let's go try another location and see if that helps. So they move to another location, build another altar. And the same thing happens. And that actually happens three times. So, again, maybe it's not intended to be humorous.

But for me, it was a little bit funny. But amidst what is maybe a little bit funny, I think there's, I think, a very important message in magnifying God's holiness here.

[25 : 51] Ultimately, we see. Sorry, I've lost my plates in my notes here because I went off my notes. We see the important fact that God is actually preserving the nation of Israel through Balaam, a pagan seer, somebody that really shouldn't have had anything positive to say about God or Israel.

And we even see reinforcing statements about God's character coming from Balaam. In his blessings of Israel, he says, God is not man that he should lie or a son of man that he should change his mind.

Chapter 23, verse 19. And later, his king shall be higher than Agag and his kingdom shall be exalted. Chapter 24, verse 7. So we see elements of God's promises kind of being reinforced by a pagan seer here.

And the real sadness of this story is that while God is speaking these blessings through this pagan seer, his chosen people are simultaneously at Peor giving themselves over to other gods in kind of the greatest display of apostasy throughout the book.

And that, to me, I think it's a really sad state. And again, we see we see that there is a consequence to that sin. God sends a plague.

[27 : 01] He even tells Moses that the chiefs need to be executed. And ultimately, in sending the plague to the entire nation, Phineas, Aaron's grandson, executes a particularly flagrant offender in his zeal for the Lord.

And God then relents of his of the plague at that point. In this case, it actually kills 24,000 people. So that's the the last element in the narrative.

So what are we kind of to make of all this? There are a lot of displays of sin with some very severe consequences in the form of death, destruction and isolation. But I think there's an important theme here that involves a warning against sin that also magnifies the holiness of God.

I think throughout the book, what we see is a God who of his own volition commits himself to a sinful people and desires to fulfill his promises to them. But he has to continuously deal with their lack of faithfulness.

And I think the Psalms pick up on this quite nicely. If we look at Psalm 95 verses 8 through 11, it says, Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day at Massa in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.

[28 : 15] For 40 years, I loathed that generation and said, they are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways. Therefore, I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my rest.

It's referencing that they had to die in the wilderness after their sin. This passage is quoted and discussed extensively in chapters 3 and 4 of Hebrews.

If you don't take anything away from my lesson, you should just know you can go read Hebrews and know a lot more about numbers at the end of it. But Hebrews 3, chapter 3, verse 12 says, Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart leading you to fall away from the living God.

The implication here is that we, just like the Israelites, are bent towards sin and need constant reminding that God is where we find our rest. And I think it's easy to read through this and look at the Israelites and say, how could you possibly have responded like that?

You just saw all these great miracles that God is performing for you. He parted the Red Sea. He's giving you manna. He's sustaining you in the wilderness. So we can kind of look at it and say, I can't believe them.

[29 : 22] But I think the more appropriate way to read through this is to see this sort of state of humanity and see in ourselves a tendency to forsake God in our own wilderness.

And I think that the author of Hebrews saw this coming because in chapter 12, verse 25, it says in Hebrews, See that you do not refuse him who is speaking, for if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

So I think the idea is we have witnesses to the greatest miracle in history, the resurrection of Jesus. But we still have to guard against our own tendency, even in the context of such a miracle.

We need to recognize that we have that same tendency to fall away. And the author of Hebrews is warning us against that. So the second component that we wanted to talk about is we've covered sin and its severe consequences.

But we also want to take some time to discuss God's faithfulness and his covenantal promises, which is another theme throughout the book and another bullet on your handout. So I think in looking at these covenantal promises, we see that God's love for his creation is magnified, but it specifically points forward to his ultimate plan of redemption through Jesus Christ.

[30 : 52] And I think we can start by recalling back to Genesis 12, where God makes a covenant promise to Abraham in which he promises three things. He promises land to Abraham's descendants.

He promises that Abraham's descendants will be many. And he promises that his descendants will be blessed and will bless the nations. So in those three promises, I think we can see elements of those throughout the book of Numbers.

And I think in looking at this, we want to understand that God is sovereign and his plans are not thwarted by our sin.

So I think in God keeping his promises, we can see that God is in control despite the sin of the Israelites. And he's in control of our lives despite our own sin as well. So first, land, we see that God's faithfulness is in keeping his promise to provide a holy land to Abraham's descendants, which ironically, we don't see this promise play out directly in the book of Numbers because the Exodus generation is sentenced to die in the wilderness.

And we don't need to spend too much time on this. But I think the bottom line here is that the promise is so secure and it's so specific that despite the fact the Exodus generation is sentenced to die in the wilderness, God goes ahead with delivering the rest of the relevant sacrificial and civil laws that are to be kept when they enter the land.

[32 : 19] So he tells the Exodus generation, you're not going to see this land, but I promise the next generation will. And here are the laws that you need to know. And actually, here's how you're going to divide the land when they get there.

So we see again in God's sovereignty, he's promised the land all the way back to Abraham. And despite the sin of the Israelites, he's still intending to fulfill that promise as well.

Second, in his numerous descendants, we see in the very first chapter of Numbers, there's a census that counts 603,550 men aged 20 to 60.

These were men of fighting age. Again, the census was meant to understand their ability to take Canaan by conquest, military conquest. So some historians have noted that if you extrapolate this out to the entire nation, this comes out to something like 2 million people.

So we already see that promise sort of fulfilled that Abraham's descendants now number 2 million people that God is sustaining as they're wandering through the wilderness. We even hear Balaam actually affirm this in one of his oracles, which is great.

[33 : 30] He says, who can count the dust of Jacob or number the fourth part of Israel, chapter 23, verse 10. And again, even in the midst of spectacular displays of sin, God's promise does not waver.

Fast forward to chapter 26 for the second census after the Exodus generation has died, and we see essentially the same number of people still existing, 601,000, some change, fighting age men. There is some scholarly debate about how to interpret these numbers. I don't, for time's sake, want to go into too much detail about it, but some scholars say these numbers you can take at face value because it's a census.

Others say there was some scribal misunderstanding. Others say the numbers need to be taken symbolically, and maybe the actual number of Israelites was something like 20,000.

I don't actually know, but I think the point here is that regardless of what the number is, it's still miraculous that any amount of people were sustained in the wilderness for such an extended period of time in the fashion that God did it, providing manna, providing water, providing all the sustenance that they need.

[34 : 37] So I don't think we need to get bogged down in the details of the scholarly debate, but in case anybody's interested, it does exist. So last, on this focus, I think we can examine the fulfillment of these first two promises to understand not only that God is sovereign, but also that he's personal, which means that his plans graciously include responding to our prayers and intercessions.

That's another point on your handout. So, of course, the sovereign and all-powerful God of the Bible could have kept his promise to Abraham in any way that he wanted, but in his mercy, his plan included sustaining the entire nation of Israel through the intercessions of particular individuals like Moses and Aaron and others.

So what a comfort it is to us that God is so powerful that his promises can't fail regardless of our sin, but how comforting is it also that he uses his created beings, sinful though we are, to accomplish the purpose of his will.

So we see that God is sovereign. He is in control, but in his mercy and in his grace, he also opts to be personal with his creation, which I think is a great comfort for us.

So that last promise to Abraham, blessings, this is where we start to make our kind of gospel connections from the book of Numbers. And again, it's a lot of Hebrews.

[36 : 28] So Moses, the man with such a unique standing with God that he was able to literally behold the form and figure of God himself was yet nothing in his standing compared to Jesus's standing with God.

So consider Hebrews chapter three verses, verse five, which says, Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant to testify to the things that were to be spoken later.

But Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house. If indeed we hold fast our confidence and are boasting in our hope. So where Moses, the faithful servant, is interceding on behalf of Abraham's physical descendants, Jesus, the son of God and our perfect savior intercedes on our behalf and on behalf of the true spiritual descendants of Abraham.

So that's Jesus as the greater Moses. We also see Jesus as the perfect sacrifice. Moses's responsibilities didn't end in a simple verbal intercession, but rather required very detailed attention to ritual sacrifices that were intended to cleanse and purify the nation after after instances of sin.

We see another parallel and contrast here, I think, because Moses and the priests offered their continual sacrifices to atone for sin. But Jesus fulfills God's plan by suffering the agony of the crucifixion as the perfect, sufficient and final sacrifice to atone for sin.

[38 : 01] So it's once and for all. Again, Hebrews eloquently states this, I think, in chapter two, verse 10, saying, for it was fitting that he for whom and by whom all things exist in bringing many sons to glory should make the founder and salvation, the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.

So God delivers the Israelites from the bondage of slavery in Egypt. But I think Numbers makes it clear here that they were still in bondage to sin and death and that there wasn't any mere ritual sacrifice that was going to help them through that.

It points forward to Jesus so that we know we need Jesus for our ultimate saving from sin and death. And lastly, I think we can look to Jesus as the author and perfecter of our faith.

I think many of us might find ourselves in the midst of a very real spiritual wilderness that often is laden with temptation to forsake God and seek refuge in other things.

So this could be some sin in our own lives that's wreaking havoc. It could be substance abuse. It could be infidelity. It could be deceit. And maybe like the Israelites, we're suffering through the natural consequences of our decisions.

[39 : 16] But I think there are other cases, too, where the wilderness might not be some we might not be able to see in our wilderness a specific sin that caused it. Or maybe it was the sin of somebody else or some natural evil.

It could be somebody suffering from a terminal illness. Maybe a friend or loved one has deceived you, betrayed you, and you're feeling lonely and isolated.

Or maybe it's not something specific and the wilderness is just a feeling that you're wandering through arid and lonely and isolated times in your life.

I think the natural response when facing these kinds of evils is a natural and understandable response to seek an end to real and understandable grief.

But the temptation in that is always to seek a quick and easy resolution apart from God. And I think that's something that we see throughout the book of Numbers.

[40 : 18] And while suffering and seeking the end of grief is a very real and complex reality that certainly I cannot claim to have all the answers for, I do believe that the Bible directs our focus toward the one who responded in perfect obedience under temptation in the wilderness.

We remember that Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and that he was perfectly obedient. We also know that he, in perfect love, entered into our suffering with us. So we are not alone in our suffering because we have a Savior who suffered the agony of the crucifixion.

And we know that in perfect power, ultimately, he conquers suffering and death through his resurrection after his death. So, as the book of Hebrews says, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

That's Hebrews chapter 12, verse 1 through 2. So we have, just to quickly summarize everything we've been through, we're looking at the kind of contrast in God's justice and mercy and the contrast in his sovereignty and his personal nature.

Sin is very real and it's very severe and invites just punishment from a perfect and holy God. But in that justice, God also desires to be merciful and he desires to relent of his wrath in the context of sin.

[42 : 03] And that points forward to Jesus when he ultimately is able to do that because of what Jesus did for us. We also see that God is sovereign and personal. God is in control, will always fulfill his promises, regardless of the sin in our lives and in the sin of other people's lives.

But in his sovereignty, he desires to be personal with his creation and he desires to accomplish his plan using his sinful creation in his mercy and grace.

So in summary, read Numbers. If you really like Numbers, read Hebrews and you'll get a very good idea of how the New Testament picks up on that.

So I think that is all I have. And I can take any questions or comments. Anybody in the audience or on Zoom, if you want to unmute yourself and ask a question or type it in the chat, that's that's OK, too.

Thank you. I saw the good, fascinating point, how you brought out how the wilderness is full of temptations and numbers sort of emphasizes how they give way to those temptations.

[43 : 38] And there's also a bit, but then there's the sort of contracting emphasis is there's other books in scripture like Hosea that talk about the wilderness where God sort of threw the people of Israel close to himself.

And so it's interesting to think about our own lives, sort of when our wilderness experiences can be both full of temptations, but also an invitation to draw folks to the Lord and really know intimacy with

him.

Yeah, that's a that's a great point. And for for those on Zoom, if you weren't able to hear, Pastor Greg is just making a point that we focus really heavily in Numbers on the temptations in the wilderness.

But books like Hosea offer a complimentary perspective in that God is also drawing us to himself in the wilderness. And I think that's that's also a great point. So thanks for sharing.

Yes. I know you said that the numbers are kind of arbitrary, you know, the population of census numbers, but why do you think that that type of thing is included?

[44 : 42] Sometimes I read it and I think I just read it because I'm reading words and then I feel bad. It's like, is God telling me something and I don't know what he would be telling me through the specifics of the numbers?

Yeah, that's a great question. Again, for the Zoom folks, the question is, what what is God trying to tell us through the specifics of the numbers that we see in the book of Numbers?

And I think that's pretty that that can be a little bit difficult to answer. You know, I think in the scholarly debate that kind of goes on there, that there is a debate over what the exact number is. So to me, and this is just my personal opinion, but it seems intuitive that if the text is telling you it's a census, that doesn't feel symbolic to me. A census is just a census. And they're probably I think I think some of the argument there comes from the fact that some scholars say it's totally unbelievable that two million people would be sustained in the wilderness.

And so that's kind of presupposing that God couldn't or wouldn't do that. So there must be another explanation of why they're saying there were 603,000 people.

[45 : 59] So I don't know, you know, in looking at the specific number, 603,000, I don't know that that number is intended to communicate something very specific to us.

But I do think it's meant to be an illustration of God fulfilling his promises to Abraham, because he promises Abraham that his descendants will be very, very many.

And even if it's 603,000 here or some other number, we see that promise being fulfilled in how many descendants God has sovereignly provided for Abraham.

So I think I think it's just an affirmation of God's sovereignty and fulfilling his promises. But there may be better answers out there. But yeah.

Yes. So you may have referred to this, but if you did, I missed it, that the word for thousand, that's part of the debate.

[47 : 07] Yes. Is it, you know, a specific number corresponding to our thousand or is it a unit, you know, a company of people or something like that?

But one thing that I see in the numbers is that, you know, the numbers at the end of the 40 years are very similar to the numbers, whatever they mean at the beginning.

So God's sustaining them through that very difficult period. He was able to do that. He was faithful. Yeah, that's that's a great point.

I didn't bring up the the minutia of the of the scholarly debate, partially because I'm not one of those scholars and I'm not able to speak to it very well.

But there are debates on on what the actual word for thousands means and whether it really is thousands or if it is supposed to translate some some other way.

[48 : 13] And again, I don't have any insight into that, but I think it's a great point that you make that from the first census to the second census, the numbers in the population are are nearly identical.

So they wander the wilderness for 40 years. God sentences the entire Exodus generation to die in the wilderness minus two faithful spies. And yet at the end of that, the population of Israel is essentially the same.

So for 40 years, he's sustaining these this huge population in the desert. It's miraculous and it's faithful and it's it's encouraging, I think. I don't see any questions on the chat.

So we have about 10 minutes to the sermon. So maybe I can just close this and pray real quick. I'll hang out for a few minutes if anybody else wants to talk. But thanks for joining today. Father, we thank you again that you desire to make yourself known to us through your word.

We thank you that you are just God and that you're holy, God. But we thank you also that you're merciful to relent from your wrath.

[49 : 29] And we thank you that you provided Jesus who could ultimately atone for for our sinful state, God. And we thank you also that you're sovereign. We thank you that you're in control and that and that in your sovereignty, you desire to have a personal relationship with us.

And would you just remind us of that as we move through our weeks together? We pray for for the pastors this morning as they bring us the word and and pray that you would speak through them.

And we just thank you and love you. And it's in your son's name we pray. Amen. All right. Thanks, everyone, for joining. Thanks.

Thanks.