

Principles of Pursuing God's Mission For Us

From The Book of Numbers

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God called a people from the descendents of Abraham (beginning in Genesis 12) and established them as his nation through the hardships of slavery in Egypt, His miraculous deliverance through the Red Sea, and His revelation at Sinai of His covenant with them (Exodus 1-24).

The last section of the Book of Exodus describes the Lord establishing the place of His presence on earth as the **Tabernacle** in the midst of Israel. The tabernacle was the moveable, tent-like, structure the LORD had Israel build for the place where He would receive worship, allow His presence to be experienced, and offer forgiveness of sin and guidance to His people. It was His “headquarters”—His throne—on earth. It taught that there is One Way to the presence of the Holy God—the way He provides—ultimately Christ.

Then, **Leviticus** is His instruction on holiness and how to continue to live with the Holy God of all the universe in their midst.

The Book of **Numbers** is about the journey of God's people Israel, after their salvation from Egypt and being established as His holy, covenantal nation at Sinai, through the wilderness to the Promised Land, their mission field.

The **Promised Land**, in the Old Testament, functioned as the “place” of spiritual inheritance and ministry in this world, where God's people could most effectively accomplish His saving purpose.

I believe the Lord wants us to see the principles in this book and apply them, as appropriate, to our journeys in Christ today. These principles can help us each, as individuals, and collectively, as congregations, to move toward the “land”—the fulfillment of God's mission for us.

The book divides into three sections:

- I. Numbers **1:1-10:10**—Preparing for the journey
- II. Numbers **10:11-25:18**—Responding to His leading through various trials on the journey
- III. Numbers **26-36**—Preparing to occupy the land—our mission field

I. The **first section**, Numbers 1:1-10:10, involves the principles of: Preparing for the Journey through instruction for how to function together as God's holy people on His mission.

A. Numbers **1-4** contains the first “numbering,” which was a census of the men who could fight for Israel. Then the tribes were organized around the tabernacle, especially the Levites, who were dedicated to assisting the priests in the ministry of the tabernacle.

These chapters teach that we should pay attention to who is on the journey with us and organize around the presence/revelation of the LORD through His provided mediators (which looked forward to the one Mediator, Christ), with everyone having a responsibility, and recognizing the seriousness of this due to God's holiness.

Holiness is being separated from the world's use and dedicated to the LORD, reflecting in every area of one's life His values and awesome character.

B. Numbers **5:1-9:14** covers instructions on holiness of the camp and dedication of the Tabernacle, altar, and Levites, and the Passover.

These chapters teach God's people to respond His way to His holy presence in their midst by showing His attitude toward sin and dedication to Him.

C. Numbers **9:15-10:10** is instructions on communication for the march and other situations. The principles are *to follow the LORD's leading and communicate with one another*.

II. The **second section**, Numbers 10:11-25:18, involves responding to His leading through various trials on the journey, developing a walk of faith by the Spirit.

- A. Numbers 11—In dealing with the challenges keep letting the Holy Spirit empower more leaders and workers to help us and the congregation to accomplish God's mission.
- B. Numbers 12—Don't covet other's gifts and ministries; appreciate what God has given you.
- C. Numbers 13-14—Keep focusing on God's promises and character and keep trusting and obeying in the face of fearsome looking opposition.
- D. Numbers 15—Keep up disciplined, daily, devotions emphasizing humble submission, and grateful dependence on the Lord to avoid rebellion, which is death.
- E. Numbers 16-18—Do not compare other's positions of authority or experiences in the Lord to yours. Do not usurp God's delegated authority. Realize the difference between your relationship with God and your delegated role among his people.
- F. Numbers 19-20—Take God's holiness very seriously, especially in public leadership. Be careful not to dishonor God by proud, angry, condemning, unbelieving, disobedient, speech. Teach others to take God's presence very seriously and that death is its opposite, and the blood of Christ is God's provision for cleansing.

G. Numbers 21-25—Deal with opposition God’s way. (also 20:14-21, and chap. 31)

- 1) Avoid conflict where unnecessary, especially with “brothers and sisters.”
- 2) When attacked the Lord will give victory if we are totally dedicated to Him.
- 3) Be careful not to get impatient with “going the extra mile” to avoid a conflict. Keep acknowledging your need of and belief in His provision.
- 4) Don’t fear; trust and obey the Lord’s voice. Be thankful that the Lord even protects from spiritual attacks we know nothing about. If we stay true to Him, He will enable us to fulfill His mission for us.
- 5) However, be aware that the most effective attacks are often the religious/idolatrous and sensual/lustful temptations, especially when we are tired.
- 6) God may use us to execute judgment on His enemies but these are people who have (or will try to) willfully deceive God’s people into idolatry and unfaithfulness to the truth of God. *We must be zealous for the Lord’s honor.* We must also handle the results and any gains God’s way. And we must take the loss of human life very seriously. Death is the ultimate result of human sin. *God comes into this fallen world to redeem us from sin and death and restore His relationship and presence with whomever will receive Him with repentance and faith.*

The **third section**, Chapters 26-36, involves the new beginning with the next generation after the old has finally all died. It is about preparing to occupy the land—the mission field God has for His people—through disciplined obedience, valuing each member and their ministry, and dealing with problems in His wisdom.

A. Numbers 26—(the second census)—Take a fresh look at and appreciate whom the Lord has brought together to this point.

B. Numbers 27—(Zelophehad's daughters' concern, and commissioning Joshua)—Deal with issues so that each person has their place—their inheritance and ministry—in Christ. *Listen to each other.* Also, make arrangements for the smooth transition of leadership.

C. Numbers 28-29—(calendar of offerings)—Practice spiritual disciplines that keep one focused on God's gift of salvation in Christ.

D. Numbers 30—(vows)—Be accountable for one's commitments to God with consideration for one's family and its unified testimony.

E. Numbers 31—(judgment on Midianites)—Obey the Lord when He says to deal decisively with His enemies who lead His people to unfaithfulness.

F. Numbers 32—(tribes settling across the Jordan)—Appreciate and help each member have the place of ministry God intends for them, without comparing to your own.

G. Numbers 33:1-49—(journey review)—Remember one's journey with the Lord to get here and be warned and encouraged from it.

H. Numbers 33:50-35:5—(the land, their inheritance)—Follow God’s arrangement for each member’s place of ministry.

I. Numbers 35:6-34—(cities of refuge)—Deal with problems God’s way, carefully applying justice, respect for life, and respect for God’s holy presence.

J. Numbers 36—(Zelophehad’s daughters and heiresses to marry within their tribe)—Value each person’s place in God’s work and the mission He has for His people.

Moses gives his farewell address in **Deuteronomy** reaffirming the covenant between God and His people Israel and instructing them how to live as His people in the Promised Land. Then, **Joshua** leads them in possessing the land.

In **summary**, Numbers teaches the following principles for our journey to the Promised Land—our mission field:

Keep focused on God’s priorities

Practice spiritual disciplines

Be careful to always honor our holy Lord by our words, and our attitudes, as well as our actions.

Be alert for the enemy’s temptations.

Remember no one is immune to falling.

Adjust our attitudes because they are very important to God.

Keep praying for and helping one another.

Value every individual.

Deal with issues and communicate.

Deal with opposition God’s way.

So, focus on the Lord and be in awe of His holiness, repent and believe, trust and obey, *take the land He has for each and appreciate all God’s people*, give thanks and rejoice in His promise.

Fulfill His mission in this world to offer this relationship to everyone.