Alright, welcome to the Bible in Five. You are going to be spending two, count them, two weeks reading the book of Numbers. With a title like that, you know what I mean, you can just tell it's going to be a page turner, right? Actually the book of Numbers is really fascinating. I think of it as the in between book of the Torah because it has to do with the movement of the people of Israel from Mount Sinai into the wilderness as they're on their way to the Promised Land.

So if you recall from the book of Exodus, chapter nineteen, they camped out at Mount Sinai after coming out of Egypt. They stayed there, by the dates in the in the Torah, for one year. Most of the book of Exodus, all of the book of Leviticus, and through chapters one through ten of the book of Numbers, they're still camped at Mount Sinai.

The main part here is that Israel has shown themselves to be very rebellious and very kind of a broken corrupt people. So the whole book of Leviticus you’ll recall is about dealing with the people’s sin and commanding or requiring that they be God’s holy people. A lot of what numbers chapters one through ten is sort of like shaping up the people to get them ready to leave Sinai and go to the Promised Land.

There are a lot of lists of numbers, like numbering the tribes, ordering them, talking about the Levites who are supposed to be arranged in certain positions around the tent and the tabernacle and so on. You’re probably going to find chapters one through ten kind of boring and that's okay but just get the main idea here that God is shaping up his people to get ready to get them fit to go.

In chapter ten they leave Mount Sinai and they head out into the wilderness and the wilderness is where the main body of the book takes place. In these center chapters, chapters eleven through twenty one, the theme is really clear what's going on. What I've marked here by having some red, some clear, some red, some clear, some red, some clear, is there's a pattern at work. The author has structured this section of the book with a
clear pattern. It begins in chapter eleven with the people grumbling and complaining in the wilderness. “We don't have any food, it’s hot out here,” and they start saying, “why did the Lord bring us out of Egypt in the first place?” They say they want to go back to Egypt. What these red sections of the book indicate is that over and over in these chapters, the people rebel, they grumble, they rebel against Moses, they rebel against Aaron, they say, “Why did God ever bring us out of Egypt?” They have this complaint like three or four times as you read through the chapters. So what happens is there's multiple stories of the people's rebellion and grumbling and wondering why God brought them into the wilderness.

What happens is usually there’s some form of justice brought against Israel’s sin. Then what these clear sections indicate is usually after a narrative about the people’s sin there are new laws given to the people, laws about sacrifices to take away their sins, laws about the feast days that are supposed to remind them about God's faithfulness and so on.

This is the big pattern. The more the people sin, the more laws they're given. It's kind of like you know in any culture in any society or school or something like that. The more the people break the laws, the more laws they are given. It’s sort of like they're just gluttons for punishment. They keep rebelling against God so God keeps giving them more laws to help them know what exactly they're supposed to do and not supposed to do.

This is kind of a depressing section, but it is trying to ground the main idea for you as the reader, that God called these people to be a holy people, and they're failing. They can't do it. They're unable. There’s something broken about their hearts that they can't truly obey God. They keep failing.

What happens after this long section of sin, and rebellion, and more laws, is a set of stories here at the last section of the book; especially chapters twenty-two to twenty five. There are these kind of bizarre stories about this Gentile prophet named Balaam. The king of Moab, where the people are heading to, hires this prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel. After reading through this section we're going, “yeah, totally, that’s exactly what these people deserve, is a curse.” What happens is that God shows amazing
grace to his rebellious people. He doesn't allow Balaam and utter a word of curse. In fact, he turns every single word of Balaam into a word of blessing on these people. After reading these chapters you’re just like, “Oh my gosh, this is such a God of grace who speaks blessing over his people, even though they've just spent the last ten chapters rebelling against him.” This is a really cool set of stories highlighting God’s grace towards his rebellious people as they're on the way to the Promised Land.

The last section of chapters have to do with the people start coming into the Promised Land and they begin to come into conflict with the people who are living there, the Canaanites. Mostly it's the Canaanites attacking Israel. It's like a band of escaped slaves coming through the desert, they want to enter the land and a number of the Canaanite people just totally pounce on them and try to take advantage of them. So these are stories about a number of the battles that took place as the people of Israel enter into the Promised Land.

On the whole, the book of Numbers is about a book about a journey, and in many ways it's the journey of God’s people as they come out from God's presence. They fail, and they rebel, but ultimately God is going to work out his blessing no matter what.

So that's kind of the shape of the book of Numbers. I hope that helps you kind of to guide your way through it as you read your way through the book of Numbers. Thanks, see you next time.

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