

THRU THE BIBLE SYNTHESIS
"Part V: Numbers - Of Spiritual Casualties And Conquerors"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

(1) One of my classmates at seminary went to the mission field, intending to be a teacher in the ECWA Theological Seminary in Igbaja, Nigeria. Instead, after a while, he was transferred to a bush station where he was miserable and felt unfulfilled. He complained, and soon left the mission. Today, he is working in a secular job somewhere here in the States, not using his training to its fullest! **How could he have washed out of serving the Lord after having gone through seminary preparation?!**

(2) Some years ago, we had a dedication right here at Nepaug Church for a couple who had been discipled in our Church and trained in seminary to go to the mission field. We had special speakers and representatives of other churches here and the ceremony ended up with our Board laying hands on the couple to commit them to the Lord.

Today, the couple is out of the missionary service. In fact, they are no longer even married! **Why--what happened?! After so many years of preparation, what went wrong?!**

(3) The pastor who baptized Rev. Pat Cate, the minister who brought Nepaug into the Evangelical mainline doctrinally, that minister who baptized Rev. Cate is now no longer in the ministry due to his committing sin. He ran off with a young woman, leaving his wife and children to leave the area confused, hurt and reeling! **Why?! How could this man get so badly sidelined from serving God?!**

(4) A former attender of our Church left because he could not believe our doctrine of the rapture of the Church. To him it seemed too fanatical to believe that people would rise out of the grave to meet the Lord in the air, only to be gathered together with us who remain!

Years later, at a Memorial Day parade in Torrington, I saw him walking along the street with a lady escort who was not his wife! He saw me and looked away and down, but kept on walking with his escort! I wondered at the time, **how does one go from simply denying the doctrine of the rapture to being unfaithful to his wife like that?! What ever happened?!**

(We turn to the "Need" section of the message . . .)

Need: "I have seen a number of apparently exemplary Christians go down into spiritual defeat, so I feel uneasy about MY OWN welfare! What causes such failure? Is there a remedy, an antidote for this?!"

I. **The book of Numbers reveals an individual spiritual battle to REMAIN productive in God's advancing earthly program.**

A. **God's plan to promote His rule on earth versus Nimrod's apostasy was spiritually defied at the personal level in Israel's wilderness journey:**

1. **Though God created the world with man as ruler, sin caused chaos and Satan ended up the god of this world, Gen. 1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4.**
2. **God renewed history through the Noahic flood, Gen. 6:1-9:17.**
3. **Yet, Noah's descendant, Nimrod began an apostasy, Rev. 17:5-6.**
4. **God thus chose Abraham to start a nation that would influence the world to check Nimrod's apostasy, Gen. 12:1-3.**
5. **After serious challenges, God took Abraham's seed as a **nation** from Egypt into the Sinai to head for Canaan, Gn. 12:4 - Leviticus.**
6. **Yet, individual **unbelief** en route blocked God's use of Israel, threatening to upset God's plan to rule the earth, Ex. 32:9-10.**

B. **Numbers faces this concern and gives God's solution as follows:**

1. **Many in Israel viewed the barren wilderness travel from the earthly perspective and thus often doubted God's ever fulfilling His Abrahamic Covenant of getting them INTO Canaan!**

- a. They doubted God's military protection en route, Ex. 14:11-12.
 - b. They doubted God's providing safe water en route, 15:23-24.
 - c. They doubted His providing food along the way, Ex. 16:2.
 - d. When God gave them manna, some feared that He wouldn't resume giving or preserve what He had given, Ex. 16:20, 27.
 - e. They doubted God's providing any water en route, 17:1-3.
 - f. At Sinai they doubted His care would last & made an idol, 32:7.
 - g. They fussed about hardships in their travels, Nu. 11:1-3.
 - h. They murmured about God's manna being too plain, Nu. 11:4.
 - i. They doubted God's help to defeat Canaan's giants, 13:31-14:3.
2. **After these 10 events of unbelief, God FINALLY discarded the doubters, condemning many to die in the desert, 14:22-23.**
3. **Thus, Israel kept going, but not without serious casualties!**
- a. God told Moses of His wish to destroy the whole nation, 14:11. In doing so, He gave Moses the chance to intercede for Israel to protect God's reputation of making Israel a victor, 14:12-19.

- b. Moses prayed, so God chose to discard those who doubted but take a new generation & Caleb (& Joshua) to Canaan, 14:20-24.
- c. God kept on purging unbelieving parties out of Israel as spiritual casualties: He removed those who doubted God's choice of human leaders (Nu. 16-17), those who were dismayed at travel hardships (21:4-9) and those who fell for Balaam's sexual seduction plot (Nu. 22-25; 31:16). He even sentenced **Moses** to die in the wilderness for **his** faithless exasperation, Nu. 20:1-13!

II. Numbers adds to the "thread of redemption" by predicting God's getting Israel beyond all of her unbelief to a Messianic Kingdom!

- A. Balaam's oracles, given in the witchcraft format to curse Israel, were powerfully overridden by God so as to bless Israel's future, Nu. 22-24!
- B. In those oracles, God revealed His resolve to advance Israel to a **Messianic Kingdom** in spite of Israel's **future, outrageous unbelief!**
 - 1. Oracle 1 tells of Israel's growth as a nation (in spite of the rejection of Joseph by the brothers in Jacob's house), Num. 23:9-10.
 - 2. Oracle 2 relays her exodus and land conquests (in spite of her 40 years of wilderness wanderings due to unbelief), Num. 23:18-24.
 - 3. Oracle 3 predicts her future dominance as a monarchy (in spite of Saul's unbelief and efforts to annihilate David), Num. 24:3-9.
 - 4. Oracle 4 predicts Messiah's Bethlehem star, a symbol in sorcery of a king's birth beneath a new star's sky quadrant (to settle Israel's monarchy defeat of a Babylonian exile), 24:15ff (Z.P.E.B., V, 513)
 - 5. Oracle 5 predicts the distant future **antichrist's** (Rome's) coming (**due to** Israel's **rejection** of her **Messiah**, Zech. 11:1-17) and his fall (that **finally** ushers in the Messianic Kingdom), Num. 24:21-25!

Application: *To remain a victor in Christian living, we need God's mindset to view life's events by faith, 1 Co. 2:14-15. (1) We obtain it by believing on Christ as Savior from sin to receive the Holy Spirit (Jn. 1:11-13; Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 2:12). (2) Then, we use the Spirit's mindset (a) by confessing sins that obstruct His ministry to us (1 Jn. 1:9 with 1 Cor. 2:14) and (b) by relying on Him (Gal. 5:16-23) to (c) interpret and BELIEVE Scripture without adopting faithless viewpoints of life's events, 1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:12-17. (3) Then in REACTIONS to life's events, we STAY victors instead of becoming spiritual casualties where God "shelves" us as unproductive people, cf. 1 Cor. 9:27! (4) If we note that we now use a faithless view of life's events, repent while God grants us time, using "2, a-c" above!*

Lesson: *God always advances His Kingdom, but only those who trust this fact instead of using a faithless view of temporal events STAY productive!*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the lesson . . .)

At the beginning of this sermon we mentioned a colleague of mine at seminary who washed out of missionary service due to being placed in a backwoods, bush station with his Master's degree in Theology, thinking that the work was below him and discouraging.

We have an illustration how faith in God's placement, no matter how discouraging it may appear, always causes triumph.

A number of years before World War II, a missionary named Earl Lewis was assigned the job of evangelizing the Wolaitta people on the backside of distant, undeveloped, bush land Ethiopia. As he ministered in this forsaken land, he faced terrible disappointments in the discipling process, often having to spend nights in prayer for the Wolaitta people. At one point, he lost his son, David, and had to bury him in Soddo, Ethiopia. Eventually, there were 10 believers among the Wolaitta tribe before World War II came and the missionaries were expelled by the invading Axis powers.

Thus, after losing and burying a son, after numerous trials and sleepless nights of prayer vigils, Earl Lewis left 10 believers due to the orders of Mussolini's army in World War II.

The September, 1995 SIM Now magazine reports that Mr. Lewis' other son, Phil Lewis, recently returned to the Wolaitta people scheduled to do some speaking to them. Years before, Phil was born in Soddo and he wondered what had become of the 10 believers his father had won to Christ there almost 60 years before!

Phil Lewis was utterly shocked to speak to a gathering of 45,000 Wolaitta believers! They came to hear the son of the man who had first evangelized them! Some had walked for three days to hear the Word preached. All day they sat there, listening and only once, in the middle of the day, did they break for lunch. Phil reported, "It was as if God were saying, 'Remember what I have already done in this country. I have multiplied 10 Wolaitta believers into 400,000. Now, be bold and very strong. There is still much work to do.'"

Back in the thirties, Earl Lewis chose to believe the eternal plan of God even though, at the time, his efforts to promote that Kingdom seemed too foolhardy to make a difference. But he believed God's program of advancing His Kingdom, and, in time, God abundantly blessed his life's work! Earl Lewis by faith became a spiritual conqueror instead of a casualty!