

## Overview

### I. Introduction

Up to this point, the Lord has been at work constituting His people as a new body according to His word. He has set them apart from the world by entering into covenant with them. He has condescended to dwell among them in the tabernacle. He has made them a reflection of the hosts of heaven. Having accomplished all of this, the people are now prepared to enter into the land of God's promise. God will lead them to the land for them to enter. However, despite all that God has done for these people, there is still a very great remnant of sin in them. Although God has acted in wonderful grace, this section of Numbers gives us account after account of the people rebelling against Him. The faithlessness of God's people is set as a stark contrast with the faithfulness of the Lord.

### II. Themes in this Section

- A. Rebellion
  1. Against God's providence and provision
  2. Against God's authority structures
  3. Against God's will and guidance
- B. God's response to the rebellion of His people
  1. He provides and gives authority
  2. He rebukes and punishes
  3. He curses and condemns but shows mercy in response to repentance
- C. The Holiness of God
  1. Although the people have been constituted as a holy nation, their conduct is not holy
  2. God still displays His holiness and calls the people to be holy as well

### III. Outline<sup>1</sup>

**A 10:11-36** – Journey begins: departure from Sinai

↑ **B 11** – Complaint about hardship, manna, and no food

↑ **C 12** – Miriam punished for her sin (with Aaron): leprosy

↑ **D 13-14** – Rebellion at Kadesh (in Wilderness of Zin). People will not enter the land.

↑ **E 15** – Ritual regulations

↑ **F 16** – Holiness of Aaron above Levites challenged

↓ **X 17** – CENTER: Budding of Aaron's rod

↓ **F' 18** – Holiness of Aaron above Levites explained

↓ **E' 19** – Ritual regulations

↓ **D' 20:1-21** – Rebellion at Kadesh (in Wilderness of Zin). Moses & Aaron will not enter the land.

↓ **C' 20:22-29** – Aaron punished for his sin: death

↓ **B' 21:1-9** – Complaint about hardship, manna, and no food

**A' 21:10-20** – Journey ends: arrival at plains of Moab

<sup>1</sup> Taken from *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* by David A. Dorsey

## Specific Instances of Rebellion

### I. *Complaint Against the Manna (11)*

- A. **The rebellion:** The people complain that they don't have meat like they did in Egypt.
- B. **The punishment:** God plagues the people.
- C. **God's grace:** God gives elders to help Moses deal with the people.
- D. **Notes:** The importance of this rebellion is the appeal to Egypt. Their attitude is that slavery to Egypt was preferable to freedom under the Lord. This rebellion is a rejection of the exodus.

### II. *Miriam's Rebellion (12)*

- A. **The rebellion:** Miriam and Aaron challenge to Moses' place as prophet and spokesman for God.
- B. **The punishment:** Miriam made a leper and removed from the camp 7 days (**Lev. 13:5-6; 15:13**).
- C. **God's grace:** God vindicates Moses. God heals Miriam's leprosy.
- D. **Notes:** God identifies Moses as His special prophet, who is above even the other prophets who shall come after him because of the way in which God communicates with him. God will choose His messengers, it is not something that people can simply take to themselves. This rebellion is a rejection of God's covenant delivered by Moses.

### III. *Refusal to Enter the Land (13-14)*

- A. **The rebellion:** The people refuse to enter the land out of fear.
- B. **The punishment:** God will cause this generation to wander and die in the wilderness.
- C. **God's grace:** Joshua and Caleb will enter. God's covenant still extends to the next generation.
- D. **Notes:** The people have forgotten the power of God and so fear for their lives before the Canaanites. This rebellion is a rejection of God's planned future for His people.

### IV. *Reuben and Korah Rebellion (16-18)*

- A. **The rebellion:** Reuben and Korah challenge Aaron's unique holiness as high priest.
- B. **The punishment:** God destroys the rebels.
- C. **God's grace:** God will continue to bless the people through Aaron's ministry.
- D. **Notes:** The rebellion against Aaron is the height of the people's rebellion. God has established His covenant, law, dwelling, and camp, but this rebellion is against all of these things. This rebellion is tantamount to saying that they don't want to be God's people.

## The Fear of Man vs. the Fear of God

Throughout all of these instances of rebellion, we observe that the people of Israel exhibit little fear of God but a great fear of man. They have no respect for transgressing God's covenant or institutions but are terrified to incur the wrath of the nations. Numbers illustrates this in the relation of the people's refusal to enter the land with the rebellion of Korah. The people would not dare incur the wrath of the Canaanites but seemed to think it was no big deal to draw near to God's holy presence according to their own authority. So, we need to beware when we are more fearful of incurring the wrath of the world than we are of transgressing God's law.