

Introduction

Numbers

Is God faithful?

The children of Israel were first-hand witnesses of God's amazing faithfulness. He had led them out of slavery in Egypt and opened up the Red Sea for them to cross. By Numbers chapter 10, the Israelites were about to leave Mount Sinai and God was with them: 'By day the pillar of cloud did not fail to guide them on their path, nor the pillar of fire by night to shine on the way they were to take. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them' (Nehemiah 9:19–20).

The future looked bright. Yet, despite all the evidence of God's faithfulness, the rest of the book of Numbers is a catalogue of grumbling, in-fighting and rebellion by God's ungrateful people. Instead of embracing freedom, they longed for the food they ate in slavery and wanted to return to Egypt (chapter 11). There was division at the very heart of the nation's leadership, and factions emerged jockeying for status and ambition, with complete disregard for humility or holiness (chapters 12 and 16). Fear

and unbelief stoked rebellion among the people, and they refused to enter Canaan (chapters 13–14).

Such rebellion was not without its consequences. God took the people at their word and a whole generation died in the wilderness, never setting foot in the Promised Land. However, despite these repeated failures, God remained faithful. He even used the pagan seer, Balaam, to affirm his determination to bring Israel to the land of promise, highlighting in glorious technicolour that his blessing on Israel rested not on her faithfulness but on his sovereign will (chapters 22–24).

Like the Israelites, God's people still fail him and test his patience. But nothing – not our sin, the circumstances of our lives, nor the anti-Christian agenda growing in the West – will thwart God's redemptive plan. Though we face danger, suffering and even death, we can be sure of God's ultimate protection and eternal blessings.

These selected readings from the book of Numbers testify to God's faithfulness and invite us to trust him for today and all our tomorrows.

Day 1

Read Numbers 10:11–13, 29–36

Key verses: Numbers 10:29–31

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²⁹Now Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, 'We are setting out for the place about which the LORD said, "I will give it to you." Come with us and we will treat you well, for the LORD has promised good things to Israel.' ³⁰He answered, 'No, I will not go . . .' ³¹But Moses said, 'Please do not leave us. You know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you can be our eyes.'

What a difference a year makes!

It had been almost exactly a year since the Israelites left Egypt and arrived at Mount Sinai. And in that time they had experienced the miracles over Egypt as they left, the Passover, the great crossing at the Red Sea and the making of the covenant at Mount Sinai. There had been the terrible time when they had rebelled against God and almost been destroyed, but had received God's

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forgiveness. Then they spent some months building the Tabernacle. But now it was time to move on: 'The LORD our God said to us at Horeb, "You have stayed long enough at this mountain"' (Deuteronomy 1:6).

In Numbers 10:29, Moses turns to the family who had first welcomed him to Sinai: the family of Jethro, who was now his father-in-law (see Exodus 18). Moses speaks to Hobab, who was most probably Jethro's son and therefore Moses' brother-in-law, and invites him to accompany him on his journey. Hobab initially declined, but it seems that he eventually agreed because he turns up in Judges chapters 1 and 4. We also read about the Canaanite people of this particular community, later called the Kenites, subsequently being among the Israelites.

So, who was really leading the people at this point? God? Yes: we are told in verse 33 that the Ark of the Covenant, representing the very presence of God, was going before them as they moved, and the cloud of God's presence was seen by day and the pillar of fire by night. God was in charge. What about Moses? In verse 35, he was appointed by God and he had the authority to say when they were going to leave and where they would stop and camp. So what about Hobab? In verse 31, Moses says to him, 'You will be our eyes. You know where the

water is, you know where the oasis is; you have the local expertise.'

Moses had God's authority, God's presence and God's guidance, yet he asks for Hobab's eyes. He is confident in God but doesn't despise human expertise and wisdom.

∴ God has given each of us a work to do for him. Perhaps, ∴ like the Israelites, he is calling you to begin a new ∴ venture. Spend time in God's presence, seek his guidance. But remember, God has strategically placed ∴ mature believers in your life so you can learn from their ∴ wisdom and experience. Be humble, be ready to learn ∴ from others, recognize that 'You are Christ's body – ∴ that's who you are! . . . Only as you accept your part ∴ of that body does your "part" mean anything' ∴ (1 Corinthians 12:27, MSG).