

Arresting Allegories

Chapter 5

Audio Lesson: Old Testament Survey lesson 19



Objective: to explore the allegories found in the book of Numbers and to learn how to apply them to our lives.



Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. . . . These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come.

—1 Corinthians 10:6, 11

Numbers is filled with powerful metaphors and allegories. It is true history, and God wants to use the historical events of His people to illustrate His plans and purposes for our lives. The apostle Paul wrote that we should look for examples and warnings when we read the historical narratives of Scripture.

A cloud covered the tabernacle in the wilderness by day, and whenever the cloud moved, the people followed it. At night it took the appearance of fire. This miracle symbolizes divine guidance, the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and the anointing of the Spirit upon us. If we have the faith to believe and claim all the blessings God has for us and accept His good and perfect will for our lives, then He can lead us into our spiritual Promised Land. He can place blessings upon us and lead us into the very center and heart of His will for our lives. But, if we do not believe, then we will not find our spiritual Promised Land.

Several stories in Numbers illustrate Israel's unbelief. Most of the spies who went into Canaan were intimidated by the people there and did not think God could take them into the Promised Land, even though they all reported favorably about the land. God did not let that generation enter the land and they wandered in the desert for 40 years until all but two had died.

While in the desert the people also complained often about the food God had provided for them and about Moses' leadership. God sent snakes to bite the grumblers, and then told Moses to hold up a serpent of brass for them to look at and be healed. Those who looked and believed lived, but those who didn't died. These stories demonstrate how God feels about complaining and faithlessness.



1. True or false? God makes us do what He wants us to do. We have no choice.
2. True or false? Our unbelief can limit what God wants to do through us.

Unless otherwise noted, choose one answer for each question.

3. What is the “level of decision” taught in Numbers?
 - a. The point in time when one must decide to fully commit or refuse God’s plan
 - b. A floor of the tabernacle where the committed people could go
 - c. The commitment a man could make to become a priest
 - d. An age at which young men chose to fight in Israel’s battles
4. What was the cloud that covered the tabernacle?
 - a. A sign of God’s judgment
 - b. The smoke from all the sacrifices
 - c. God’s visible presence
 - d. A term used for the many people who flocked to the tent
5. What does the Hebrew word “manna” mean?
 - a. “Bread from heaven”
 - b. “Dew”
 - c. “God will provide.”
 - d. “What is it?”
6. What is Egypt a symbol of?
 - a. All the riches God wants us to have
 - b. Our old life in sin
 - c. False religion
 - d. The Promised Land

7. Read Psalm 106:15. What principle can we learn from this verse?
- God always protects us from our own desires.
 - God will sometimes fulfill our wrong desires, but we will not prosper in them.
 - God always gives us whatever we want, even when it is bad for us.
 - We should always pray for what we want even if it is wrong.
8. Why was God grieved when some Israelites wanted to return to Egypt?
- He had gone to a lot of trouble to deliver them from Egypt.
 - He was jealous because Egypt was really better than the Promised Land.
 - They were lusting for their old life of sin.
 - He would be embarrassed when the Egyptians saw Israel return.
9. What did God do when the Israelites complained? (circle all that apply)
- He said it was ok and they could go back to Egypt.
 - He sent poisonous vipers to bite all who complained.
 - He forgave them because He is forgiving.
 - He provided salvation from death if they would look upon a brass serpent.
10. How many of the 12 spies came back with a good report about how good the Promised Land looked?
- None of them
 - Two
 - Ten
 - All of them
11. How many of the 12 spies came back believing that God was stronger than the people in the Promised Land?
- None of them
 - Two
 - Ten
 - All of them
12. What did most of the spies say about the Promised Land?
- It did not look very good.
 - It looked good, but they were not strong enough to take it.
 - It looked good, and they could take it if God helped them.
 - It looked good, and they could take it all by themselves.
13. When God let the entire generation die in the wilderness except for Caleb and Joshua, what message did He give us?
- He enjoys punishing people who do not believe Him.
 - He is very hard to please.
 - Only two out of every two million people will receive God's promises.
 - Two people with faith are more precious to Him than two million people without faith.

“He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.”
—Psalm 106:15

14. Read John 3:14-15. What event in Jesus' life was illustrated by Moses lifting up the serpent for people to be healed from a curse?

- a. His temptation
- b. His baptism
- c. His crucifixion
- d. His ascension

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

—John 3:14-15



Do you struggle with grumbling and complaining? Do you struggle with unbelief? What issues in your life do you need to trust Him to resolve?



Talk to God about any times when you have found it hard to trust Him. Tell Him you want to be a person of great faith, and ask Him to help you. Thank Him for all the things He has already done in your life.



Going Deeper

1. As recorded in the third chapter of the Gospel of John, how did Jesus apply an allegory from the book of Numbers? What was the essential meaning of the allegory? _____

2. Is your own personal faith demonstrated by the ten spies who saw the giants, or in the faith of Joshua and Caleb, who saw the Lord and believed that He could help them conquer Canaan? Explain your answer. _____

3. What was so appalling to God about the fact that the children of Israel longed for Egypt and wanted to return there? _____

4. What do we learn about the values of God when we read that only two adult people were permitted to enter into the land of Canaan? _____

5. What do we learn in this book about the way God deals with us when we do not want to do His will? (Consider Psalm 106:15) _____

6. How do you apply to your life the truth that was symbolized by the cloud that covered the tent by day and the pillar of fire by night? _____

7. How can you apply to your life the reality that

- a. God sent snakes to bite gripers? _____
- b. He miraculously provided manna to feed His people? _____
- c. He rewarded faith? _____
- d. His wrath was poured out on unbelief? _____
