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Numbers 20-21

This week at MRC after a weeks rest we continued our journey through Numbers and zoomed in on 5 little accounts from near the end of their time in the wilderness.

We looked at them through a pastoral lens asking 'why'? Why can it be so hard to live as a Christian? Why so much difficulty and frustration?

We saw 3 reasons from these short accounts...

... Because we can be so slow to learn (20v1-13)

The first 13 verses highlight the rebellion of Moses and Aaron that ends up with them being barred from the Promised Land. The verses might seem very familiar and that's because they are. They mirror a similar account at Meribah back in Exodus 17. Here in Numbers, once again, Gods people are moaning about lack of water and food - God promises to provide for them but Moses and Aaron, rather than speaking to the rock as commanded, strike it (as in Exodus) and judge the people. They do not obey God - perhaps as they set themselves up as judges (in calling them rebels), or as deliverers (as they say 'must we' v10) - or perhaps even because they seek to do things as last time as they consider they have God sussed. Regardless of why, God sees it as rebellion.

We noted that in a similar way our inability to learn the lessons of history often cause us ongoing pain and suffering. In fact the bible writers use this example in both Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3 to warn the people of God to harden hearts but to listen and trust him daily. We can be both encouraged as Christ was obedient for us - he passed where the wilderness generation failed, but also challenged to keep on trusting him and not harden our hearts as they did.

...Because of others (20v14-21 and 21v1-3)

We noted secondly that often hardships come because of other people. For the Israelites in these verses it's through 2 enemy nations

- **Edom** (as they seemingly seek to sneak into the land straight after God has told Moses and Aaron they're not going in!) who blocks them and
- **Aran** (whom they defeat - a first victory against Caananites)

Again we noted that people who seek to oppose is can make living for Christ hard. We noted that both Jesus' foundation and example are the remedy to continue despite opposition.

...Because of the Lords discipline (20v22-29 and 21v4-9)

We saw thirdly that Israelite hardship also came from the discipline of the Lord - not as punishment, but discipline to mould and shape us. This happened as both Aaron was replaced and the people were struck by a plague of snakes following yet more grumbling.

Each time the Lord brought about judgment, he provided what they needed too:

- they needed a priest

As the Lords judgment against Aaron is enacted so he dies (note also Miriam's death in 20v1) and is defrocked and yet we see mercy as he is replaced by his son Eleazar. Again note the need for a priest who can live forever and will never sin like Aaron.

- they needed a saviour

Following yet another bout of grumbling and wishing they were back in Egypt, God provides venomous snakes to judge them (possibly as the symbol for Egypt was a snake - do they really want to go back there?! Really??!!) and yet his mercy is seen in a bizarre and outrageous manner. Through a snake on a pole! When the people look at it they can be rescued. It's bizarre for a couple of reasons - partly because snakes were dirty and unclean, but also because they were not allowed to make graven images. Essentially they are to look at something unclean and sinful to rescue them. Jesus uses this image about himself in John 3 - likening himself as the Son of Man lifted up on the cross. Again something unclean that looks foolish yet gives life.

Questions - as always adapt as needed.

- Summarise Numbers so far
- Re-tell the 5 accounts
- why do you think Moses and Aaron are banned from entering the Land? Do you think it's fair? Why? Why not?
- What is Moses' response to being told he won't enter the Land? Why do Edom seem to block the Israelites in ch 20 yet when they are opposed by Aran in ch 21 they are victorious?
- Look at Psalm 95 and Hebrews 3. What does it mean to harden your hearts? How does the obedience of Jesus help us find assurance when we read these verses?
- Where do we see both Gods judgment and mercy in these verses?
- Explain how Jesus in John 3 picks up the snake on a pole story from Numbers 21. Why does he use this story? Why did God not just 'unswarm' the snakes? Why a snake on a pole?
- Where do we see mention of the glory of God in these verses?