

Date : 20 August 2023

Theme : Journey of the new generation

Topic : How to experience God's goodness in your journey of faith

Passages : Numbers 21

Key Verse : ...The Lord listened to Israel's plan and gave the Canaanites over to them...
Numbers 21:3

Introduction

Numbers 21 records an exciting time for the new generation. They were on the verge of reaching a long-awaited goal. Through a series of short episodes strung together, the Holy Spirit, as Author, would frame a basic truth – God has invested interest in helping His people's success – but are we desiring His inheritance enough to do it His way by obeying His commands.

When we are angled to do things God's way – we find that God is there 100% to help us succeed. Numbers 21 reiterates the principle of experiencing God's goodness or God's severity through our journey of faith. Who will receive God's grace or judgement depends on our own attitudes toward Him. Whether God is with us or not will determine the outcome of life's journey.

Who will see God's goodness on the journey?	Who will see God's severity on the journey?
Attitudes which please God. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Humble• Submissive• Repentant• Reverence (treat God as Holy)• Receive forgiveness	Attitudes which alienate God from us. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Proud• Defiant (disagree with God)• Indifferent• Contempt for God (despise, no respect)• Will not be forgiven Numbers 12:15

God is ready, willing and eager to work in and through His covenant people. The repetition of this truth is needed because stubborn unbelief (leading to defiance against God) must be battled. God will not be a party to self-centred prayers from a selfish heart. He will help us do what He had already instructed – according to His will.

God was committed to the success of the new generation to enter the land that had been promised to them through their forefathers 430 years earlier, beginning with Abraham. He was keenly aware that they were untried and untested in battle, a people who had only known the rigors of desert life.

Whether they could move into the land under Moses depended on whether they accepted the Lord's terms. Would they appreciate the great blessing of receiving that which their fathers (the old generation) did not, would depend on how they viewed their relation with God and His appointed leader.

1. God promised victory to the humble and submissive Numbers 21:1-3

(God will work through you if you are willing and available to Him)

a) God exposed them to a training situation.

Their first skill training was taking on the Canaanite King of Arad.

(Arad was the nearest city to Mt. Hor. They had travelled from Kadesh to Mt. Hor).

- The problem encountered

First timers make mistakes. They faced the loss of their brothers in a hostage situation. Forced to fight or surrender, the people turned to God.

b) God must be revered in their attitude and to have faith in God.

They sought God in harmony...*they made a vow to the Lord... Numbers 21:2*

As a people, they made a vow of commitment to the Lord to fight all the way.

Vow making is made in the context of covenantal relationships.

- The Lord graciously listened to their plea. It was the Lord who gave total victory.

c) God reversed the defeat at Hormah for those who would do exactly as He told them.

...*they made a vow to the Lord: If You will deliver these people into our hands, we will totally destroy their cities Numbers 21:2.*

When the new generation responded in humility, God listened to their prayer for help.

What a difference our attitude can make, whether we see the goodness or severity of God!

- Application

Take the first baby steps of obedience

New Christians who are in warfare against the kingdom of darkness begin simply – by seeking the Lord's help and pleading with Him. He always listens when we walk in submission to His Lordship. When God fights for you, expect victory.

- Their place of victory was Hormah. God gave the Canaanites over to them. But Hormah was a place of defeat for the old generation.

(Why was the old generation defeated at Hormah 38 years earlier Numbers 14:45?)

- Because they attempted to fight the enemy their way instead of God's way.

The old generation believed the false report of the 10 spies that Canaan was too strong to be conquered instead of trusting God's promises. By their unbelief, they were persuaded that God was doing evil to them *Numbers 14:3*. Instead of submission, they rebelled against God and despised God's promised land. Then later, they attempted to do it their way. Despite Moses' warning that the Lord was not with them, they foolishly ventured into battle.

- The attitude of the old generation was one of pride and defiance before God and His leader.

God had said in *Numbers 14:11* ...*How long will these people treat Me (God) with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in Me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?*

In contrast, how blessed was the new generation when the Lord listened to their plea.

The battle, at that moment in time, is when we need God's help; and the victory of that moment depends on our regular walk of obedience.

2. God stalled all progress for those with self-centred attitudes.

The lesson of the fiery serpent was the needed discipline before they could make further progress. Instead of praising God for their initial victory, the people became rebellious and began to despise God's care and provision. ...*we detest this miserable food... Numbers 21:5*

a) They were rebellious

Numbers 21:4 tells us that the Israelites had become impatient because of the long detour.

(They went south from the Negev to the Red Sea (now the Gulf of Aquaba) and turned up north by the King's Highway, skirting round the Edomite kingdom. They had travelled on the eastern border of Edom, adding an extra 250km).

In life, God sometimes may lead us through the longer route. It may be the only way to learn patience, instead of taking short cuts and finding loopholes to skip certain steps.

- God is in the business of shaping our attitudes through discipline.

Instead of fighting with others which the shorter route may entail, God's way to keep the peace meant that the longer route required more effort. However, once we have acquired the discipline of patience, we will be able to possess our inheritance.

...*you need to persevere (patience KJV), so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what He has promised... Hebrews 10:36 NIV*

...*so do not throw away your confidence, it will be richly rewarded... Hebrew 10:35 NIV*

b) They complained against the leadership and God because they did not have the wisdom to understand God's purpose.

...they spoke against God and against Moses...why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food... Numbers 21:5

- They had become complacent after receiving nutritious food for 40 years.

About this matter, God revealed His purpose in *Deuteronomy 8:3*. *...He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord...*

c) God sent fiery serpents

(The wilderness, through which they had passed, was infested with these fiery serpents. The biting inflamed the body with high fever and insatiable thirst. Hitherto, God had preserved His people from being hurt by them).

- God disciplined them with fiery serpents at this critical point in their journey to Canaan (because they were beginning to take possession).
If they continued in their unbelief, they would never take the land.
- *...where is love?* People cry out 'foul!' because God does not fit in their view of love, nor their misshapen definition of 'tolerance'.
- We blame God for putting them in harm's way when that was their own selfish choice. People blame God but ignore the core problem – rejection of God's truth. We create a community / nation of victims when we refuse to take responsibility for our choices. God's promised protection is only if they kept the covenant.
- However, when they repented, the Lord instructed Moses to mount a bronze serpent on a pole so that anyone bitten would look by faith on this object and be healed. When we repent, we will always receive God's forgiveness.

This is the picture which, 1,400 years later, our Lord Jesus used to describe how He would be crucified on the cross. Anyone who would look to His finished sacrifice could be saved.

John 3:14,15

3. God gave progress and victory to grateful people. *Numbers 21:10-36*

...the children of Israel set forward (KJV, move on...NIV)

As they journeyed through the great wilderness, they had to skirt around Moab and move along the north side of the Arnon River *Numbers 21:13-15*. They were now in enemy territory when they ran out of water.

a) God's perspective of these years

...The Lord your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands. He has watched over your journey through this vast desert. These 40 years the Lord your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything. Deuteronomy 2:7 NIV

...He knows your trudging through this great wilderness... Deuteronomy 2:7 NKJV

- God supplied water by bringing them to the place of wells. This time, they did not complain. They showed gratitude by singing a song of thanksgiving. *Numbers 21:16-20*
- God gave victory over the Amorites. *Numbers 21:21-31*
Despite Moses' peace making efforts, King Sihon of the Amorites launched an attack.
 - By God's grace, victory was won. In one swoop, Israel gained the entire Amorite Kingdom from the rivers Arnon to the Jabbok – 90km x 35km. (God had given the Amorites 450 years to repent but they did not).
- God was revered on the journey
 - The Israelites showed gratitude with songs of thanksgiving, contrasting the might of the Amorites who had earlier defeated the Moabites, with their defeat by the Israelites.
 - They kept a memoir of God's favours in victory.
At such a time and at such a place, to be distinctly remembered.
...the book of the wars of the Lord... Numbers 21:14

- They sang of God's supply given in love
...Israel sang this song...spring up, O well! Sing about it... Numbers 21:17

This joyful song referred to the occasion when the leaders of Israel used their staves (=rods, staff, symbol of honor and power) to help dig wells. The community as one put their hands to the work. Moses did not strike the ground as before, but gave the elders direction to do it, in preparation for the time when he should leave them.

- b) They were submissive to God who then gave amazing victory even over giants.
 Giants are no match for us when God is not with us.

Moving northwards by the highway to Bashan, they were suddenly attacked by King Og of the Bashan Kingdom. God graciously helped them in battle. Og's people were giants. The Lord said to Moses *...Do not be afraid of him, I have handed him over to you, with his whole army and his land... Numbers 21:34.* Again they experienced favour.

Their territories now stretched all the way to Mount Hermon in the north.

This chapter shows how the new generation tasted initial success when they were obedient. Then, after being disciplined with the bronze serpent incident, Israel repented and continued to walk in obedience before God. They began to take possession of the land which God had promised.

Application

- a) Why is the Lord Jesus Christ not mentioned in all our weeks of studies of the Old Testament?

The Old Testament have many symbolic teachings which are designed to turn our hearts and minds to the Lord Jesus for our deliverance.

These stories point to our Lord Jesus who satisfies, not just our physical needs but spiritually as well; examples are:

- Manna in the desert is bread from heaven. The Lord Jesus Himself said He is Bread from heaven *John 6:35*. He is the Bread of Life and the Word of God which satisfies our soul.
- The Rock that Moses struck *Exodus 17:5* is Christ – from which water flowed and the children of Israel drank. *...they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4*
- The Bronze serpent points to Jesus our sacrifice, His crucifixion brings healing and redemption. *John 3:14*. God has provided a way to take away the sting of sin and death – but men must respond. Their response would determine their healing.

- b) Share with someone in your cell, what you have learnt to see God's goodness in your life.