

The Gospel of the Kingdom

Week 3 - Day 3: Israel on the Move

“How much longer?” “This sucks.” “I’m so bored.” “Do I have to?” Whether you have grandchildren, children, nieces or nephews, you’ve probably heard these words before. Maybe it was during a family vacation, dinner at home, at a party, or on the way to church. If we’re honest, we’ve not only said these words as kids but even as adults. It can be easy to think that those who complain are just being ungrateful, impatient, stubborn or immature.

Though that definitely maybe the case, it may be a symptom of a deeper reality that people struggle with. That we are often disappointed and unsatisfied with our current circumstances. We feel a sense of regret and that we’re missing out on something better. We begin to become frustrated with the people we are with and with the places we are at.

After all of the amazing things that we have seen God do for His kingdom people up to this point, we find Israel still disappointed and unsatisfied in much of the book of Numbers.

Israel ends their one year stay at Mount Sinai and they head out into the wilderness on their way to the kingdom land that God promised to Abraham. The people are sorted according to their tribe with the tabernacle at the center, the symbol that God’s holy space resides with His people. God gives additional laws to help His people live by His holiness so that His presence may dwell with them. There’s much hope, anticipation and optimism. But once the people leave Mount Sinai to go towards the Promised Land, their obedience and dependence on God starts to unravel.

Numbers 11:1, 4-6 Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused...

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!”

This family trip is not off to a good start! The Israelites convince themselves that there was more security in Egypt than with God in the wilderness and start to complain. They forget that God had freed them from Egypt, was bringing them to a new land, and had provided for their every need.

In the same way, when we start to complain about what we don’t have rather than gratitude for what we do have, we begin to feel discontent. We start to unrealistically compare our past with the present.

Despite their failings, the Israelites eventually arrived in the desert of Paran, which was halfway to the Promised Land.

Numbers 13:1-3, 27-28, 31-32; 14:1-4 The Lord said to Moses, “Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.” So at the Lord’s command Moses sent them out from the Desert of Paran. All of them were leaders of the Israelites...

They gave Moses this account: “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey! Here is its fruit. But the people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large. We even saw descendants of Anak there...

...“We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are” And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored.

That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, “If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn’t it be better for us to go back to Egypt?” And they said to each other, “We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

What already consisted of a rocky start on this trip, a full family fight ensues! Finger pointing, and arguing over who’s right or wrong becomes the focus. What should’ve been a joyous and bonding moment of seeing the Promised Land for Israel turns into chaos and divisiveness. They are discontent with God’s provision and timing in the wilderness. They are disappointed that this Promised Land is full of difficulty and challenges. Their complaining now turns into resentment and rebellion.

Like the Israelites, we often fail to see the bigger picture. That God is faithful to fulfill his promises, but not without difficulty and discouragement along the way.

Because Israel continually chose not to trust God, he allowed them to face the consequences of their choices.

Numbers 14:11, 20-23, 33-34 The Lord said to Moses, “How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the signs I have performed among them?...

The Lord replied, “I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me

and tested me ten times— not one of them will ever see the land I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it...

“Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness. For forty years—one year for each of the forty days you explored the land—you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have me against you.”

Thankfully, the peacemaker of the family steps in, brings some perspective and accountability! Time after time, God allowed the people to rebel and face the consequences of their choices. Their constant rebellion is met by God's justice and mercy. 11 days of travel in the wilderness would turn into 40 years because of their lack of trust, and only their children would enter the Promised Land. Despite their disobedience we see God remain faithful to his people, as he continues to protect and bless them.

As Israel moves into the land of Moab, King Balak sees these foreigners as a growing threat and hires a pagan sorcerer named Balaam to pronounce curses on them.

Numbers 23:7-8, 18-21 Then Balaam spoke his message: “Balak brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. ‘Come,’ he said, ‘curse Jacob for me; come, denounce Israel.’⁸ How can I curse those whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom the Lord has not denounced?”

Then he spoke his message: “Arise, Balak, and listen hear me, son of Zippor. God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? I have received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot change it. “No misfortune is seen in Jacob, no misery observed in Israel. The Lord their God is with them; the shout of the King is among them.”

No misfortune seen in Jacob? How can that be based on what we just read? Here we see Israel totally unaware that up in the hills God is protecting and blessing them even in their worst moments. Even as the king of Moab pays Balaam to curse Israel, three times he blesses them as God directs.

Despite our failures and evil's best attempts, God will continually be faithful to His kingdom purposes of restoration through Abraham's family! This is His promise! We see this truly revealed in Balaam's final vision and blessing on Israel.

Numbers 24:17,19 I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near. A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel... A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city.

Balaam sees a vision of a future Israelite king who will rule over the nations!

This is the same ruler that we have been searching for throughout the scriptures up to this point! Even when God disciplines His people, He continues to work behind the scenes to accomplish His **kingdom purposes**: to save His kingdom family of people from an oppressive rule and bring them under His authority in His space so that they might bring God's blessing and glory to the ends of the earth!

-Ryan Gee

Share the Gospel: Despite our failures and evil's best attempts, God will continually be faithful to His promises and people. He will not only bring discipline but blessing and restoration to His people.

Personal Observations, Reflections, and Prayers: