

Numbers.txt  
Your God is Too Small  
Study on book of Numbers

Introduction:

In 1961, J. B. Phillips wrote a small but excellent book entitled Your God is too Small. The idea behind this book is that we have many notions of God which are simply inadequate to describe our great Jehovah. Since our ideas about God are flawed, our behavior toward Him is often equally flawed. If we see God as a benevolent grandfather, we tend to take His mercy for granted and overlook His judgment. If we think of God primarily as a stern and harsh disciplinarian, we are likely to emphasize His punishment and overlook His grace.

Perhaps the greatest problem Phillips addressed was man's tendency to make God into a bigger version of himself... we try to create God in our own image. We make him think like us and react like us and feel like us. Too often, we become the yardstick against which the character of God is measured. Our worship of this kind of "god" quickly degenerates into a worship of ourselves.

In reality, God is not that small. He is not a deluxe version of ourselves. He is different. He is distinct. The very word "holy" stresses God's separateness from anything else in His creation. The God of Abraham cannot be stuffed into a practical-sized box that keeps Him comfortably and conveniently at man's disposal. God is bigger than that.

The Israelites had the same problem with God which many of us experience. They wanted to mold God into fitting their needs rather than molding themselves to fit their God. Perhaps the major purpose of the events in Numbers is to show the Israelites that their God must be treated with respect. Numbers is the story of God teaching His people to respect and reverence Him. He is not a God of convenience but a God of power and authority. Those who forget this fact do so at their own grave risk.

I. The Israelites Underestimated God's Power (Chapters 13 & 14)

A. Coming into Canaan

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1. God's promises concerning Canaan
  - It would be a bountiful land - Ex 3:8.
  - He would give this land to Abraham and his descendants - Gen 12:5.
2. The choosing and commissioning of the 12 spies.
  - Read Nu 13:1
  - God never intended that the spies pass judgment on whether the land could be taken.
  - They were merely to see how good the land was and to determine the best way to take it.
3. The report of the spies to the people.
  - The land was bountiful - Nu 13:27
  - But it could not be taken - vs 28.

B. The Reaction of the People

1. These people had seen the power of God.
  - The 10 plagues
  - The parting of the Red Sea
  - The miraculous provision of food and water.
  - The presence of God at Mount Sinai.
2. Yet they forgot God's power when confronted with the reports about the people of Canaan.
  - a. Read Nu 14:1-4
  - b. Their God was too small.

C. The Response of God

1. Read Nu 14:10-12
  - a. "How long will these people treat me with contempt?"
  - b. Moses has to intercede in their behalf.
2. Read Nu 14:10-12
  - a. 40 years of wandering in the wilderness
    - one year for each day of the spies journey.
  - b. The unfaithful spies are struck down and killed by a plague - all but Joshua and Caleb. God was bigger than their

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understanding and faith

How Do We Underestimate God's Power?

1. Thinking God is no longer active
  - age of direct involvement is passed? NO! only age of miraculous involvement.
  - Holy Spirit not confined to words of influence, Rom 8:26-28, 13-16
  - Do you believe Satan is active? Is your God smaller than Satan?
2. By walking by sight, not faith, 2 Cor 5:7
  - Do you accept only that which is explainable in human terms?
  - Is your God no bigger than your ability to explain Him? Eph 3:20,21
  - What's keeping you from world vision? our concept of God and His ability to provide and guide.
  - Are you praying with faith? I John 5:4,5 13-15
3. By not accepting God's forgiveness "God can't forgive me" attitude.

II. The Israelites Usurped God's Leadership (Chapter 16)

A. The Rebellion of Korah

1. These events occurred during the 40 wilderness years.
2. Read Nu 16:1-3
  - Korah was first cousin to Moses and Aaron.
  - As descendants of Kohath, Korah and his immediate relatives had the highest and most sacred duties besides those carried out by Moses and Aaron.
3. The reason for the rebellion: Korah felt he should have a leadership role equal to that of Moses and Aaron. He forgot that God chose these men - they were God's men.
4. 250 men rose up with Korah against Moses and Aaron.
5. Their God was too small. "You have gone too far." (16:3)

B. The Reaction of Moses

1. Read Nu 16:4-7

-- Notice the emphasis on God choosing his own leaders.

- i. "the Lord will show..." (vs 5)
- ii. "The man he chooses..." (vs 5)
- iii. "The man the Lord chooses..." (vs 7)

-- It is God who chooses leaders for His people. They are not self-chosen. To rebel against them is to rebel against God.

-- "You Levites have gone too far." (16:7b)

2. A literal "trial by fire."

- Korah and his followers are to put fire in their censers and draw near to God.
- Aaron will do the same.
- God will show who is to serve him as high priest.

C. The Response of God

1. The next morning:

- Korah and his followers gather at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (vs 19).
- Moses warns the Israelites to move away:

i. The ground opens under Korah and his family and swallows them alive (vs 31-34).

ii. Fire comes out from the Lord and consumes the 250 men who rebelled with Korah (vs 35).

2. "These men have treated the Lord with contempt." (vs 30b)

How do we usurp God's leadership today?

III. Moses and Aaron Took God's Credit (Chapter 20)

A. The People Complain once more.

1. They are at the end of their 40 years of wandering.

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- All that time, God has supplied them with quail and manna - they've fed miraculously.
- Read Nu 20:1-5 - In spite of everything, they do not trust God to provide water.

2. Their God was too small.

B. Moses' Reaction

1. Read Nu 20:6-12

2. Moses is fed up with complaining Israelites.

- How many times has he heard this same song?
- They never seem to learn.

3. Impatience and fatigue result in sin.

- Rather than speaking to the rock, Moses strikes it with his staff - twice.
- Rather than giving God glory for making water flow from a rock, Moses includes himself in the credits - "Must we bring forth water..."

4. For one brief, unguarded moment, Moses' God was too small.

C. God's Response

1. "You did not honor me..." (vs 12).
2. The punishment of Moses and Aaron.

Conclusion

A. The Israelites miscalculated God on a number of occasions.

1. They underestimated His power.
2. They rebelled against His leadership.
3. They horned in on His credit.
4. In each case, God protected His honor.

B. How Big is Your God?  
How are we taking God's credit?

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