

5. From Complaints to Apostasy (4Q 2009—People on the Move: The Book of Numbers)

Biblical material: Numbers 11–14.

Quotes

- The silent, lethal creep of apostasy began uneventfully. His quest for holiness had morphed into a mere pursuit of happiness. He never discerned it, nor would anyone else. He was a materialist now—just one of the well-respected selectmen who quelled controversy at the expense of progress..... *Steve Wallace*
- We seldom lose our faith by a blowout, usually it's just a slow leak. *Unknown*
- It's his right to choose what religion he believes in. Apostasy is not recognized in international law. People have the right to have freedom of conscience. *Brad Adams*
- If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there. *Lewis Carroll*
- Religion is to do right. It is to love, it is to serve, it is to think, it is to be humble. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- Faith does not give you the answers, it just stops you asking the questions. *Frater Ravus*

Questions

What is the main message in this passage? How does God come across? How would you have responded to the complaints of the people? Why is Moses' defense of God's reputation so significant as part of the issues in the great controversy? What can we learn about trust and confidence in God from this story?

Bible discussion

Numbers 11 details the complaints of the people—sounding all too familiar, just like us! They don't like the food, even though the manna tastes like pastries made with olive oil (sounds good to me!). They'd rather be slaves eating good food than free people in the desert with the manna. How quickly they forgot the abuse they received at the hands of their masters...

So Moses in turn complains to God, concluding "If this is how you intend to treat me, just go ahead and kill me. Do me a favor and spare me this misery!" (11:15 NLT). God responds saying that if they want meat, he will send them so much they will gag on it... This interchange tells us much about the kind of people God is dealing with.

Then Moses is attacked on another front—from within the family (Numbers 12). His sister and brother complain about his marrying a "foreign" woman. God has to intervene here too, and defend his friend Moses.

The scouts go out to see what Canaan is like (Numbers 13 and 14). They come back with a split decision: 10-2. The majority report leads to dejection, and a loss of confidence in Moses and Aaron (and by implication, God himself). The rebels complain, saying they'd be better off dead. So God tells Moses he's giving up on the people, and will produce a new people from Moses.

Moses objects—because of God’s reputation. His concern: what will the Egyptians think of God? Knowing God as he does, Moses pleads for the people, and asks God to show them his love. God relents, and yet still has to punish Israel so they can learn.

They get the message—and then try to do things their own way yet again...

Comment

The ongoing battle reveals that lies, deceptions, innuendoes, gossip, misrepresentations all require much time to refute. And to refute the charges against His character, God could not simply say, “They’re not true!” To prove the charges false, God has to show His true nature in practice over time, to reveal to everyone that the Devil is wrong in his accusations.

Especially when the Rebel has clearly stated that you are a vindictive and arbitrary dictator, who would just love the opportunity to destroy his created beings. How do you deal with such charges of being unloving, merciless and dictatorial and show yourself to be a truly loving Father? How can you make sure your created children worship you from love and not fear? Only by fully demonstrating your true character, and allowing the Rebel to demonstrate what he is really like—and what his way leads to. While God wants trustworthy friends, the Devil enslaves those he forces to submit to his demands. “God seeks comrades and claims love, The Devil seeks slaves and claims obedience,” says Rabindranath Tagore.

As a consequence of Lucifer’s “disinformation campaign,” God is feared and distrusted. Tragically, broken trust takes a long time to mend and restore...

Ellen White Comments

It is only by a clear discernment of spiritual things that the original apostasy can be understood. The controversy in heaven began with selfish strife for position, a desire on the part of Lucifer to be equal with God. The disaffection of Satan in entertaining the thought that he should stand as head of the heavenly order at first seemed a small thing, but by dwelling upon this thought, it was strengthened. Step by step he miscalculated the position that had been assigned him by God, to be maintained only in God, until he finally came to look with enmity upon everything coming from Jesus Christ. Satan rebelled against the laws governing the heavenly intelligences; and by representing these in a deceptive light, by his unbelief and complaints, he drew others with him into rebellion. {RH, May 30, 1899}

It is the Lord that has saved us from rebellion and apostasy. We cannot fall as long as we hope and trust in God. Let every soul of us, ministers and people, say, as did Paul, “I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air,” but with a holy faith and hope, in expectation of winning the prize. Say to your soul, “Hope thou in God; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance and my God.” By precept and example encourage faith, confidence, assurance. This is the work of the Comforter, and it is your work to co-operate with God’s agencies. A discouraged man can do nothing to uplift others. A discouraged church can only sow doubts, complaints, and disaffection. {SpTA01b 29-30}