

=THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE=

Lesson 4

Numbers

Objects to have:

A simply sketched map showing Egypt, the Sinai Peninsula and Israel. Show the Sea of Galilee, the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. Place dots on the map for Jerusalem, Hebron and Kadesh-barnea.

Some grapes and figs

Your Bible.

Introducing the lesson:

(Review with the children the first three books of the Bible, their names and themes. Show the children in your Bible the fourth book—Numbers. Teach them the theme: “Counting the Israelites.” Hold up your sign that reads: Numbers—counting the Israelites.)

The Israelites were planning to move into a country that God was going to give them. Before they went, though, they had to get their army ready. They needed to know how many soldiers they had. God wanted Moses to find out, so God commanded Moses to have someone from each tribe count all the men who were 20 years old and older—men who were old enough and were well enough to fight.

Somebody from each tribe of the Israelites was given the job of counting the men in the tribe of which he was a member. God told someone to write in the Bible the names of these men who did the counting. God knows your name. He knows you, and He knows all about you, and He loves you! He knew all those millions of Israelites, and He knew all their names. The men counted the men who would become soldiers, and there were 603,500! We read about this in the book of Numbers in the Bible. The book of Numbers is the fourth book in the Old Testament of the Bible.

The book of Numbers has many, many exciting stories in it. I would not have time to tell you all those stories, but I am going to tell you one of the stories from the book of Numbers. (Put down your Bible and your sign.)

(On your map, point to the following places:) Here is where the Jewish people, the children of Israel, were at the beginning of the book of Numbers. They had started out in Egypt. They had crossed the Red Sea after they had come out of Egypt. They traveled south in the Sinai Peninsula, and then they went back north. They stopped at Kadesh-barnea. God had showed them the way they should go; every step of the way was guided by Him. See this land up here? (Indicate Canaan.) This is Canaan. God said, “Israelites, this is going to be your land. I am going to give it to you. Other people are living there now. The people who live there now will not trust Me; they worship false gods that they made up themselves. I don’t want them to live on this land any longer. You will have to go take the land of Canaan from them. Go take it. I will help you. Just trust and obey Me.” The Israelite soldiers would go to war whenever they would get into the land of Canaan. They did not have to worry about a thing, because God would give the land to them.

Telling the story:

Listen! God was talking to Moses. God said this while Moses and his people were stopped at Kadesh-barnea. “Moses, send some men into the land of Canaan. Tell them to look around. They should see what the land of Canaan looks like; that way they can make plans. They can plan how to go in to take the land which I am going to give them.”

Moses listened to God’s plan. Moses knew that he was supposed to choose 12 men. (If the children do not understand this number, count on your fingers until you get to 12, or have 12 objects of some kind to represent these men, and count those objects.) Each man was a ruler of his own tribe. He was a very important man. The names of those 12 men are listed in the book of Numbers; we know all of their names. One man’s name was Joshua. Another man’s name was Caleb. Then there were ten other men whose names we won’t say right now.

Moses sent messengers to go get the 12 men. Moses wanted those 12 men to meet with him. They came to meet with Moses. Maybe they met in a tent. Maybe as they all came in, they sat down. They were probably very quiet until everyone was seated. They were anxious to know what Moses was going to tell them. All 12 were ready to listen.

Moses talked to these 12 men. “Men, God has chosen you to be spies. You are to go into the land of Canaan. You are not to let anyone there know why you are there. You are to look around. You are to come back to tell us what the land is like so that we can make our plans to go in to take the land. You come back to tell us what the land is like. Tell us if the people are big or little. Tell us if there are many people or only a few people. Tell us if the people live in tents or if they live in houses. Tell us whether the cities have big walls around them. Bring back some of the fruit that you see growing in the land.”

The men listened to Moses with great excitement. I think their hearts beat faster as they thought of the job that Moses was giving them to do. If the people in the land of Canaan were to guess that they were spies, they could be put into prison or killed. Moses said, “Be of good courage, men. Do not be afraid. God will be with you. He will protect you and lead you. Come back to us with your report about the land. Go now.”

The 12 men left the meeting with Moses. Perhaps they went home to tell their families goodbye. Then they traveled into the land of Canaan. Some of the men might have gone this direction. (Indicate northeast as you speak.) And some of the men may have gone this direction. (Indicate northwest as you speak.) As they went, they looked around. They looked at the people. They looked at the places where the people lived. Then they had seen all they wanted to see. It was time for them to meet each other and go back to Kadesh-barnea. On their way, they stopped to pick some of the fruit which they saw growing on the trees and on the vines. They carried the fruit with them as they went on their journey back to Kadesh-barnea.

I think that on every day that the spies were gone, the boys and girls and the women and the other men all would look down the road to see whether the spies were coming back. They were probably wondering whether the men would come back safely, so they were watching for them.

“Oh, look! Here they come!” The people gathered around the 12 spies as they came to talk with Moses. They all looked at what the 12 spies had with them. Two men were carrying a great big heavy pole between them. Fastened to that pole was a huge bunch of something. It looked like grapes. (Hold up your grapes.) It was grapes, but, oh, not like any grapes we have seen! They were huge! The bunch of grapes was so big and so heavy that it took two men to carry it on a pole. People asked the spies, “Do the grapes grow like this in the land of Canaan?”

The spies said, “Yes, they do. Look! Here are some figs also, and some pomegranates. Much fruit grows in the land. The soil is good for growing lots of good food. It is a land that has lots of cows and goats for milk. In many, many places you can find honey to eat. It is a great wonderful place. We went to the sea.” (Indicate the Mediterranean Sea on your map.) “We went to the Jordan River.” (Indicate the Jordan River.) “We saw all the cities in between.” Canaan sounded like a very good country in which to live!

Then some of the spies said, “Even though the land is a wonderful land for growing food, where people can have enough to eat, it is a dangerous country. The people live in houses in cities and there are great walls around the cities. Some of the people are very much taller than we are; they are giants. Next to them, we look like grasshoppers. Because the country is so dangerous, we cannot take it.”

How disappointed the people were to hear this report! They were looking forward to going into the country that God was giving them. The people started to murmur and to cry.

Caleb, one of the spies, stepped up. “Everybody, be quiet. Look at me! Listen to me! Even though there are cities with walls, even though some of the people are very, very tall and look so very strong, we can still take the country. God will help us to do this. Let us go into Canaan. Let us start at once. We are well able to overcome it with God’s help.”

All the other spies except Joshua stopped Caleb from talking. Those ten spies said, “We cannot take the land. See. Ten of us say that we cannot take it; only two say that we can.”

The people began to cry again. They said, “Oh, how awful. God has brought us out of Egypt through the terrible wilderness to this place. We thought that we could have a country that He was giving us. Now we can’t have it.”

Joshua and Caleb kept saying, “Just trust God. He loves us. He will take care of us. He will bring us into this country. Come on, let’s go into Canaan and take it.”

The ten spies and the people said, “No!” Moses begged the people to listen to Joshua and Caleb. The people turned on Moses and started to make fun of him and to complain against him. They said, “Moses, why did you lead us to this place? Now we will all die. We can’t have this country, and we have come out of Egypt. We have no country!” How evil the people were thinking and speaking! They were committing sin!

God saw and heard all that was going on. God knew that His people did not trust Him enough to go into the land that He was giving them. Isn’t that sad? God said, “Moses, I want to kill all these people.”

Moses said, “Please, dear Lord, do not kill them.”

God said, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Moses. I will not let the Israelites go into the Promised Land yet. It will be years and years before they can go. By that time all those people who have not trusted Me will be dead. Only the children and teenagers and Caleb and Joshua will get to go into Canaan.” God told Moses, “The Israelites have to stay in the wilderness 40 whole years. The spies were gone 40 days; I will make the Israelites wander around in the wilderness for 40 years.”

Isn’t it sad that the people did not trust God? He had brought them safely to the very border of the Promised Land; they had their army all ready to go, and God had promised them that He would give them the land! God never breaks a promise, and God can do anything! He would have taken them victoriously into the land of Canaan, but they did not trust Him.

When God tells me to do something, I hope that I will always trust Him and obey Him. I hope that when God tells you to do something, you will always trust and obey Him, too. Let’s not be like most of the Israelites were. Let’s be like Caleb and Joshua and the children and teenagers of the Israelites.

LEARN OUR BIBLE VERSE: Numbers 1:2, “Take ye the sum...of the children of Israel...”