

## SEVERITY OF GOD DEMONSTRATED IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

Romans 11:22

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. **2** In our studies in the Old Testament we've seen many times that the vast majority of people had the wrong concept of God.
  - A. The natives of the land of Canaan made idols because that was their concept of "god" (e.g., god of the mountains, god of the plains, god of the valley, etc.).
  - B. These false concepts of God, unfortunately, rubbed off on the Israelites.
    - (1) Through the influence of Solomon's pagan wives and other "foreign" wives, such as Jezebel.
    - (2) Through the influence of militarily superior nations (e.g., Assyrian influence on King Ahaz).
2. Idols were gods the people created in their own image; they fashioned them according to their own wants and desires.
3. **3** Modern man is no different. Many claim to follow the God of the Bible, but in reality they do not.
  - A. Like their ancient ancestors they, in reality, have abandoned the God of the Bible and replaced Him with a god of their own making.
  - B. In the minds of most the God of the Bible is a doting, grandfatherly figure that indulges His children and is subject to their every whim.
  - C. Such "Christians" believe they can do anything they deem appropriate and the god they've created must accept what they offer, no questions asked (sincerity is all that matters!).
  - D. This false god they've created makes no demands upon man nor does He condemn sin or judge man.
  - E. They claim that God is a god of love, which is very true (**1 Jn. 4:8**: "...for God is love."; also 1 Jn. 4:16), but the problem is this: their "god" is a "god" of love only.
4. But this is a very one dimensional view of God; for God is also a God of wrath, condemnation (of sin), judgment, punishment, etc.
5. The apostle Paul admonished the Romans, "*Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God...*" (Romans 11:22).
6. Paul also said "*whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*" (Rom. 15:4)
7. **4** With this in mind, the "severity of God" is graphically demonstrated time and again throughout the book of Numbers; let's turn there and learn some important lessons about the "severity of God."

### II. DISCUSSION:

1. **5** When the Fire of the Lord Burned Among the People.
  - A. In Numbers 11 the children of Israel had escaped Egyptian bondage and were in the wilderness of Sinai.
    - (1) They had received the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments and had been now almost two months free from the tyranny of Egypt.
    - (2) The tabernacle had been built and the sons of Levi and Aaron were serving the people.
    - (3) According to the Lord's instructions they packed up the tabernacle (Merari, Gershon, Kohath):

**Num. 10:33-34:** *“So they departed from the mountain of the LORD on a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD went before them for the three days' journey, to search out a resting place for them. 34 And the cloud of the LORD was above them by day when they went out from the camp.”*

- B. “So far, so good.” But it only took three short days for the people to become dissatisfied: **Num. 11:1:** *“Now when the people complained,”*
- (1) We are not told what the complaining was about; the text simply says *“the people complained.”*
  - (2) Unfortunately many today are like the Israelites; it doesn't take much of anything for them to complain to God (every little bump in the road of life they blame on the Lord; blame catastrophes on God, blame rape and murder of a little girl on God, etc.).
- C. Numbers 11:1 records, *“And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord: and the Lord heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.”*
- (1) Who? Don't know.
  - (2) How many? Don't know.
  - (3) I would just speculate, with some measure of confidence, that the “complainers” were those consumed by the fire.
- D. How about you? What does it take for you to become dissatisfied with the Lord? To become a complainer? Not much like the Israelites?
- E. \*\* The next time you are tempted to complain remember Paul's words: *“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God...”* (Rom. 11:22); remember the “severity of God” as demonstrated in Numbers 11.

2. 6 When the Lord Smote the People with a Very Great Plague.

- A. Next the Lord's people became dissatisfied with the Lord's provisions and began complaining about their food:
- Num. 11:4-6:** *“Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: ‘Who will give us meat to eat? 5 We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!’”*
- Num. 11:10:** *“Then Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, everyone at the door of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased.”*
- B. These people just didn't seem to have the vision to see the “big picture” (i.e., deliverance from Egyptian bondage, great nation, travelling to the Promised Land, God's special people, etc.).
- C. So the Lord caused a wind to bring quails from the sea to fall by the camp; be careful what you ask for, you just may get it!
- D. The people gathered and ate the quails. *“And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague”* (Numbers 11:33).
- (1) Who? V. 34: *“So he called the name of that place Kibroth Hattaavah (i.e., graves of greediness), because there they buried the people who had yielded to craving.”*
  - (2) How many? Don't know.
- E. How about you?

- (1) Does being a Christian get you down, crimp your style, cause you to long greedily for the things of the world (e.g., alcohol, pornography, etc.).
- (2) Do you find being a Christian boring and unexciting?
- (3) Do you forget the greatness of God's promise as the Israelites did? Titus 1:2
- F. \*\* The next time you find being a Christian boring and unexciting you need to remember God's promises to you and "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God..." (Rom. 11:22); remember the "severity of God" as demonstrated in Numbers 11.

### 3. 7 When Miriam and Aaron Spoke Against Moses.

- A. Miriam and Aaron became upset at Moses because of his wife: **Num. 12:1**: "Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman."
- B. But I think there was even more to it; I think Miriam and Aaron used this as an excuse to vent their jealousy of Moses:  
**Num. 12:2**: "So they said, 'Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?' And the LORD heard it."
- C. I think the text makes it abundantly clear that Moses didn't deserve such criticism. I can never recall a time when Moses "threw his weight around" so to speak. The text says: **Num. 12:3**: (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.)
- D. Furthermore, the Lord makes it perfectly clear Moses had a special place in God's scheme of things: **Num. 12:3-8**
- E. The Lord then called Moses, Aaron, and Miriam out unto the tabernacle, His anger was kindled against Miriam and Aaron for speaking against Moses, and "Miriam became leprous" (Numbers 12:10).
  - (1) Moses, perfectly in character, intercedes for his sister: **Num. 12:13**: "So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, 'Please heal her, O God, I pray!'"
  - (2) The Lord heeded Moses' pleading and heals Miriam (vv. 14-15).
- F. Do you think the Lord was too harsh toward Miriam?
  - (1) She (and Aaron) were rejecting Moses' leadership!
  - (2) By doing so they were also rejecting the Lord's leadership!
- G. How about you? Do you accept the Lord's leadership regardless of the sacrifices he calls on you to make? For example, time (attendance, helping others), money (giving on first day of the week and helping others), effort (Bible study), etc.
- H. \*\* The next time you find accepting the leadership of the Lord irritating (including elders, preachers, teachers) remember Miriam and "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God..." (Rom. 11:22); remember the "severity of God" as demonstrated in Numbers 12.

### 4. 8 When Israel Was Made to Wander Forty Years, and Men Died By the Plague.

- A. Recall that in Numbers 13 the Lord instructed Moses to send twelve men to "spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the children of Israel" (Num. 13:1).
- B. Ten of the twelve spies "brought up an evil report..." (Num. 13:32).
- C. Remember the effect that "evil report" had on the people? **Num. 14:1-4, 10**
- D. The Lord was rightly upset: **Num. 14:11-12**

(1) Once again Moses intercedes: **Num. 14:13-19**

(2) The Lord relents, at least partially and does not destroy the people; but sentences them to “wander in the wilderness forty years...” (v. 33), and “...those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the Lord” (v. 37).

E. How about you? Do you trust in the Lord’s promises even when the odds seem overwhelmingly against you? Do you take the love, mercy and grace of God for granted?

(1) It’s easy to be overwhelmed by the world; sometimes it seems as if God is not there!

(2) But God is there! And His ability is far greater than we can even imagine! Remember, He “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think” (Eph. 3:20).

F. \*\* The next time you feel your trust in God waning and you’re thinking of just giving up remember the children of Israel and those 10 unfaithful spies and “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God...” (Rom. 11:22); remember the “severity of God” as demonstrated in Numbers 14.

#### 5. **9** When a Stick-Gathering Man Was Stoned.

A. God set the Sabbath day aside for the children of Israel as a special day of observance wherein no work was to be done (Exodus 20:8-11).

B. In Numbers 15 we have what we may call a “test Sabbath.” However, one man failed the test as he was found gathering sticks upon the Sabbath day as recorded (Num. 15:32-36).

(1) Such a minor thing...right?

(2) After all, I’m sure he was sincere in what he did. As long as you’re sincere God accepts what you do...right?

C. Is that what the Lord thought about the situation?

(1) It was a serious offense to the Lord!

(2) **Num. 15:35-36:** “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘The man must surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.’ 36 So, as the LORD commanded Moses, all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him with stones, and he died.”

D. How about you? Do find some of God’s ways trivial and unworthy of your attention and obedience? You know, “I’ll obey the Lord as long as it’s convenient for me.”

E. \*\* The next time you feel that way about God’s ways the man that gathered sticks on the Sabbath and “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God...” (Rom. 11:22); remember the “severity of God” as demonstrated in Numbers 15.

#### 6. **10** When the Earth Opened Her Mouth.

A. When Korah and his company led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron saying:

**Num. 16:3:** “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?”

B. This demonstrated that the works of Moses were of the Lord and not of his own mind.

**Num. 16:28:** “And Moses said: ‘By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for I have not done them of my own will.’”

C. The end of Korah and his followers:

**Num. 16:32:** “and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods.” Also, “...there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense” (Numbers 16:35).

- D. Some folks always chafe when confronted by authority (e.g., rampant civil disobedience to police in our country!).
- E. How about you? Do you chafe against authority? Against God's authority?

**2 Tim. 4:2-4:** *"Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; 4 and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables."*

**Heb. 13:17:** *"Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you."*

- F. \*\* The next time you feel yourself chafing against God's authority remember Korah and his followers and *"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God..."* (Rom. 11:22); remember the *"severity of God"* as demonstrated in Numbers 16.

## 7. **11** When 14,700 Died in a Plague.

- A. The day following the earth swallowing incident:

**Num. 16:41:** *"On the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel complained against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You have killed the people of the LORD.'"*

- (1) These folks had the audacity to side with Korah and his company!
- (2) Some people just can't seem to learn a lesson even when it is right square in front of their face!
- (3) This is so characteristic of today's society (e.g., legalizing marijuana, divorce, children out of wedlock, etc., etc.).
- B. How did the Lord react to that? Wrath went out from the Lord and *"...they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah"* (Numbers 16:46-49).
- C. How about you? Do find you fail to learn the lessons God is trying to teach you? Are you an obstinate butthead? **Heb. 12:5-11**
- D. \*\* The next time you fail to respond to the Lord's chastening remember the 14,700 who died in the plague and *"Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God..."* (Rom. 11:22); remember the *"severity of God"* as demonstrated in Numbers 16.

## 8. **12** When Moses and Aaron Were Denied Entrance into the Promised Land.

- A. In Numbers 20 to provide water for the Lord's people, Moses and Aaron were instructed, *"...speak ye unto the rock..."* (Numbers 20:8).
- B. Moses *"...spake unadvisedly with his lips"* (Psalm 106:33) and *"...struck the rock..."* (Numbers 20:11).
  - (1) No big deal...right? Moses was just trying to do what the Lord wanted! The ends justifies the means...right?!
  - (2) After all, didn't the Lord allow Moses to get water for the people earlier by striking a rock? Ex. 17:6
- C. The Lord thought it was a big deal! The Lord said, *"Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them"* (Numbers 20:12).
- D. Moses was allowed to *"...see the land..."* (Numbers 27:12), but did not step foot in the land. How sad!

- E. How about you? Do you pay close attention to all of God's commands? Do you respect everything He commands? Everything His word teaches?
- F. \*\* The next time you are about to say "what difference does it make" remember Moses and the rock and "*Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God...*" (Rom. 11:22); remember the "severity of God" as demonstrated in Numbers 20.

9. **13** When the Lord Sent Fiery Serpents Among the People.

- A. When the Lord's people became discouraged and started complaining (again!):  
**Num. 21:4-5:** "*Then they journeyed from Mount Hor by the Way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became very discouraged on the way. 5 And the people spoke against God and against Moses: 'Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread.'*"
- B. To say the least the Lord was not pleased: **Num. 21:6:** "*So the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died.*"
- C. BTW: once again Moses intercedes on behalf of the people:  
**Num. 21:8-9:** "*Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live.' 9 So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.*"
- D. How about you? Do you get discouraged and complain? It seems that the children of Israel were constant complainers. Does that describe you?
- E. \*\* The next time you become discouraged and complain remember the fiery serpents and "*Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God...*" (Rom. 11:22); remember the "severity of God" as demonstrated in Numbers 21.

10. **14** When 24,000 Died in a Plague.

- A. In Numbers 25 the children of Israel "*began to commit harlotry with the women of Moab*" (Num. 25:1).
  - (1) "The Lord had defended His people Israel from Balaam's curse; but the Israelites themselves, instead of keeping the covenant of their God, fell into the snares of heathen seduction" (Keil & Delitzsch)
  - (2) "Whilst encamped at Shittim, in the steppes of Moab; they accepted the invitations of the latter to a sacrificial festival of the gods, took part in their sacrificial meals, and even worshipped the gods of the Moabites, and indulged in their licentious worship of *Baal-peor*." (Keil & Delitzsch)
  - (3) Baal-peor took his name from Mount Peor (Num. 23:28).
- B. This is one of the low points of Israel's history:  
**Hos. 9:10:** "*I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the firstfruits on the fig tree in its first season. But they went to Baal Peor, and separated themselves to that shame; they became an abomination like the thing they loved.*"
- C. Naturally this kindled the Lord's wrath:
  - (1) Some were executed by hanging (Num. 25:3-5).
  - (2) But others died in a plague: "*And those who died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.*" (Num. 25:9)
- D. How about you? Do you think you can worship or serve God in any way that pleases you and then He has to accept that worship or service?

- E. \*\* The next time you begin to think that way remember the 24,000 who died in the plague and *“Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God...”* (Rom. 11:22); remember the *“severity of God”* as demonstrated in Numbers 25.

### III. CONCLUSION:

1. God is strict. God is stern. God is severe.
2. The Hebrew writer speaks of the future Sabbath (rest) God’s faithful will experience: *“Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it”* (Hebrews 4:1).

Adapted from an article by John Isaac Edwards in *The Terre Haute Speaker*.