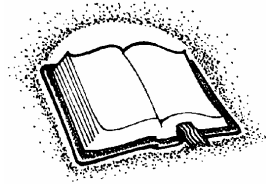


# Unlocking the Bible (8)



## READY, STEADY, GO! A look at the Book of Numbers

In our survey of the books of the Old Testament, we now come to the Book of Numbers. While Leviticus was concerned with their religious experience – the offerings and the festivals – Numbers is concerned with commitment, attitude and movement.

The material in the book is largely a catalogue of people, procedures and possessions interspersed with stories of different attitudes towards what lay ahead. It is full of lists and anecdotes.

What does it have to say to us? What can we learn from the main features of this aspect of progress in Christian experience? It can be summed up under three headings: Ready, Steady, Go!

### Ready

The first part of the book, chapters 1 – 10 is concerned with availability – registering those from each of the tribes who were able for war, the offerings which would be made available for them and the tabernacle, and those who would be available for the service of the sanctuary and all that is required for getting ready to move.

God's purpose cannot be fulfilled unless His people are ready and waiting, '*willing in the day of His power*'. Being available for God's service, in whatever role and in whichever way, is critical.

### Steady

The next section presents a series of dilemmas, each of which has the potential either to facilitate movement or to thwart it.

It is perhaps best exemplified in the issue of leadership. Leadership is crucial. It can be positive or negative, adventurous or fearful, confident or complaining, At the heart of this section is the attitude adopted by leaders to such issues as the prospect of Canaan (Twelve spies, chapter 13 & 14), the grumbling about food and conditions (chapters 11 & 20), the acceptance of divine appointment (chapter 12, 16 & 17), facing open resistance or subtle attempts to deflect God's purpose (chapters 21-25).

These are the areas where problems arise: it is here that God's work succeeds or fails. It is in this aspect that the Lord Jesus showed His distinctiveness, as described in the Gospels and summarised in that wonderful passage in Philippians 2. The early church showed the same positive attitude to opportunities and opposition in 'pressing on'. And it is important that we, too, have '*this mind, which was in Christ Jesus*'.

### Go!

Yet, only a few were prepared to go!

It is a sad fact that in Numbers, those who had the possibility failed; so there occurred another census, an inventory of a new generation. But the outstanding feature of this last section is the emphasis on personal – and local – responsibility with, for example, the requests for an inheritance (chapter 27, 36), the allocation of boundaries (chapters 31-32,34-35),and the strong sense of corporate commitment (28-30). These folks with the new attitude, being ready, and steady, eventually went.

So, taking the lessons of Numbers, the fulfilment of God's purpose entails: being available, sorting out priorities and principles, having the right attitude (*Have faith in God*), following anointed leadership as well as exercising initiative and, above all, being responsible making sure that we are committed to its outworking, each in our small corner, so that the body is '*compacted by that which every joint supplies*'.