

## **One-Way God**

Have you ever seen a flock of birds all rise from a field at once as though they were doing a choreographed dance? Or thousands of one species of fish swimming in the ocean, turning and diving as if they were connected with invisible thread?

Well, researchers at Leeds University in England verified that people display exactly the same synchronicity. They put dozens of individuals into a large hall and told them to just walk around aimlessly. But they gave just a few people detailed instructions on precisely where they should walk. When the researchers observed the resulting behavior, they found that no matter how large or small the group, everyone blindly followed that handful of people who appeared to have some idea where they were going.

As one researcher put it, “Humans flock like sheep and birds, subconsciously following a minority of individuals.” They found that it takes a mere 5% of “informed individuals” to influence the direction of a crowd of up to two hundred people.<sup>i</sup> Isn’t that a fascinating statistic? Just 5% can lead a crowd in either a good or a bad direction.

Over the next three months we’re going to study the book of Numbers. As odd as it may sound, this book really has nothing to do with math or statistics. The Hebrew name for this book is “In the desert” and it’s not talking about a place to spend your vacation. It’s talking about a place where God sent His chosen people as a result of disobedience they were led into by eight men. Even so, His grace never left them and His redemptive purpose was not thwarted. How could they experience both God’s wrath and His grace at the same time? That’s what we’re going to explore over the next 12 weeks. Today we see first that, in the book of Numbers...

### **I. There’s Only One Way to Come to God.**

The common opinion in our culture today regarding all religions is that while they have their differences, they all basically lead people to the same place. They’re like different paths up the same mountain. Pick whichever path suits your fancy, but don’t be surprised when you end up at the same destination.

In a recent Pew Research study, 70% of Americans who claimed a religious affiliation believed that many religions can lead to eternal life. And 52% of Americans who claim to be Christians say that at least one non-Christian faith can lead you to eternal life.<sup>ii</sup> That’s what people say, but what does the God of the Bible say?

First of all, who is this God of the Bible and how can we know Him? How can we know God?

The first five books of the Bible were written by Moses. Moses wrote only what God told him to write, which gives us a huge hint as to how we can know God – we can know God ONLY because He has chosen to reveal Himself to us. We could not find Him, discover Him or know Him if He didn’t want us to. But He DOES want us to know Him. A simple definition of biblical revelation is this one by C. M. Home:

Revelation is God's disclosure of Himself through creation, history, the conscience of man and Scripture. It is given in both event and word. <sup>iii</sup>

So, the revelation of God is both "general" – through nature, historical events, etc. – and "special" – through Scripture and His Son, Jesus. As I said, Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible – Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These five books together are known in the Bible as "The Law." Moses says throughout these five books that these are not his ideas or in some cases even his words, but God's. He repeatedly says in all five books:

**And God spoke all these words... (Ex. 20:1)**

Some scholars have claimed that Moses didn't write all of these books but there were as many as four different authors. But God Himself says that Moses was the only author of all five of these books when He said to Joshua:

**Be careful to obey ALL THE LAW my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. (Josh. 1:7)**

And Jesus said Moses was the author of all five books. In Mark 12:26 Jesus said, "...have you not read in the book (singular) of Moses..." And in Luke 24:44 Jesus says, "...Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law (again, singular) of Moses..." The first five books of the Bible are really five chapters of ONE BOOK, known throughout the rest of Scripture as "The Law" or "The book of Moses." Two hundred twenty two times in these five books, it says, "The Lord said to Moses." One hundred forty six times it says, "God said..." In the last book of the Pentateuch (another name for these first five books), in the last chapter, it says this:

**Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face... (Deut. 34:10)**

Why am I making such a big deal about these first five books of the Bible? Here's why: in these five books, God makes it very, very clear that there are no other gods but Him. The very first commandment says:

**And God spoke all these words:**

**"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:1-3)**

When did God tell the Israelites this? He told them this in their first year after they left Egypt, while they were camping at the base of Mount Sinai, which is where the book of Numbers begins. So, they had just come out of Egypt, where people worshipped many gods, where they believed that there were many roads up the mountain to god and Jehovah says to them, through Moses, "No!!! There are no other gods. That never was true and it never will be true! There is only one God and it's Me, the One who just rescued you from Egypt!" God said emphatically, "There's only One God." (By the way, those ten plagues that God performed to get Pharaoh to release the Jews? Each one was targeted at one of the false Egyptian gods.)

God also said through Moses, "And there's only One Way to know Me." That's what the book of Leviticus is about, the path to knowing God. Now, this is where some people get confused because they look at the Old Testament "way to God" and they look at the New Testament "way to God" and they think, "Whoa! Those are two very different ways! One has all these priests and sacrifices and offerings and the other is just Jesus. So, pastor, how can you say there is only one way to God and

there has never been another way? Isn't there at least an Old Testament way and a New Testament way?"

No, there's just one way. We have a One-Way God. The difference between the Old Testament way to God and the New Testament way to God is only a matter of timing. One way is literally BC, Before Christ, and the other is AD which is the Latin abbreviation for *anno Domini*, which means *in the year of our Lord* or, we might say, "since Christ was born."

Before Christ came, the One, True God created a system of worship that was like a symbolic drama to teach people the only way to God. It clearly announced what separated us from God - disobedience to God's way of living, i.e., sin. And it also demonstrated that for sin to be removed, forgiven, a life would have to be sacrificed. This is nothing more and nothing less than what Rom. 3:23 and Rom. 6:23 say in the New Testament:

Rom. 3:23: **...All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...**

Rom. 6:23: **For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

So, to dramatize this truth that sin separates, God had the people in the Old Testament offer sacrifices to "atone" for their sins. (Atone means to separate the obstacle and "make as one" again.) The culmination of all these sacrifices was that the High Priest performed an animal sacrifice and took the blood into the Holy of Holies once a year on the Day of Atonement and sprinkled the blood on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. Who told him to do this? God told him to do it!!

When were they told to do this? AFTER they had been miraculously rescued from Egypt and God's wrath by performing the ritual of Passover. What exactly was that? At Passover, they slaughtered a lamb and smeared the blood on the doorposts of their house and when the angel of death came by, he "passed over" their house.

So, here are two pictures, two dramas that God gave that basically had the same message from Him: "You can't get close to Me, unless an innocent life is sacrificed." Why? "Because your sin makes you unclean and only life-blood can cleanse you."

But no human life is innocent and no animal life is sufficient. That's what the Bible says. So, once Adam sinned, God knew there would be only one way for people to come to Him - He'd have to send His own, sinless Son as a sacrifice. That's what the Old Testament dramatized; that's what the New Testament realized. Rom. 5:8:

**But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

The Old Testament animal sacrifices did not remove one sin. They only pointed to the sacrifice that WOULD remove sin: Jesus' death. Old Testament and New Testament people are saved in the same way, through faith in the blood of Jesus. He always has been, always will be a One-Way God.

In the first nine chapters of Numbers, what do we find? We see God telling Moses how to organize the people. He organizes them for battle, he organizes them for travel and he organizes them for camping. They didn't just throw up their tents anywhere. There were over two million of them! There was a very distinct plan. So, how did God organize them? Check this out:

[Show image of Tabernacle with tents around it].

God organized the nation of Israel with the Tabernacle, the place where sins were forgiven, in the middle. The Tabernacle symbolized the way TO God and the ways OF God. The Tabernacle was in the center of the community and in the center of the Tabernacle was what? The Ark of the Covenant. And in the Ark, beneath the Mercy Seat, was what? Three articles: A bowl of manna (representing God's Provision), Aaron's rod that budded (representing God's High Priest – Jesus), and the Tablets of Stone, the Ten Commandments (representing God's Path.) By the way their community was organized, they were reminded daily of their highest priority: keeping God in the center of their lives.

What do you do to remind yourself of that fact? How do you organize your life? Do you set your family schedule around worshipping God on the weekend or do you move around the time you worship (or even IF you worship) depending on your schedule? Is your giving to God's work built around your living or is your living built around your giving – giving to God first and then living on the rest? Do you judge your success in life by the standards of God's Path as revealed in His Word or by the standards of this world: money, fame and power? How have you organized your life? What's at the center?

We serve a One Way God. The terms of friendship with Him are NOT negotiable because sin is what keeps us from having a friendship with God and there's only one way to remove sin – Jesus' blood. But we must also notice that...

## **II. Our One-Way God Is Also a "Second-Chance" God.**

In the passage we read today from Numbers 9, we see this: God is describing to Moses exactly how the people are to celebrate the Passover. God says:

**Celebrate it at the appointed time, at twilight... in accordance with all its rules and regulations.** (Num. 9:3)

Have you read the list of Passover regulations? Oy vey! Clean the house of all yeast, don't eat bread with yeast for seven days, eat all the meat in one night, don't break any bones, etc., etc., etc. So, Moses tells the Israelites and, (verse 5):

**The Israelites did everything just as the LORD commanded Moses.**

So, they "...did EVERYTHING just as the LORD commanded..." Wonderful! Excellent! Next verse...

**But some of them could not celebrate the Passover on that day because they were ceremonially unclean...** (Num. 9:6)

Wait! I thought they did EVERYTHING as the LORD commanded them? Well, some couldn't because they had done something (touched a dead body) that made them unclean and when you're unclean, you can't come before God.

Now, you might be thinking, "This is just Old Testament stuff, right? I mean, there aren't any regulations like this in the New Testament, are there? I mean, Hebrews says we should '...approach the throne of grace with confidence...' so, we can't do anything that would 'disqualify' us from worship, can we?"

Actually, as New Testament Christians, we can. You can't be an elder in the church if you're "given to drunkenness... a violent man, quarrelsome or a lover of money." We're warned not to receive communion in "an unworthy manner" or we will bring judgment on ourselves. In First Corinthians, Paul tells the church to exclude a man (kick him out of the church!) because he was sinning sexually. Yes, as Christians we can do things that will disqualify us from ministry.

And let's talk about that Hebrews passage for a minute. Hebrews is not saying that just anyone can saunter into the throne room of God. No, the only reason we can go into the presence of God is if Jesus Christ is our High Priest. In other words, if we've asked Him to sprinkle our lives with His blood sacrifice, then we've met the requirement. Heb. 10 gives this pre-requisite before we enter the throne room with confidence. Listen: (Heb. 10: 19, 21, 22)

**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus... and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.**

The bad news is that a Christian's sin can disqualify him from ministry and even from some parts of worship, like receiving communion. But the good news is this: you can be restored! In Numbers 9, God provides a way for the unclean people to be cleansed and then to celebrate Passover. They have to wait one month, not do anything else that would make them unclean and then still "...follow all the regulations." In other words, there's still just one way to come to God but there's not just one time. Our One-Way God is also a Second Chance God.

Dead center in the middle of the Israelite community was the Tabernacle and in the Tabernacle were the Ten Commandments, the Law that was written to show us our sin. But above the tablets was the Mercy Seat. And God said to Moses:

**There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you... (Ex. 25:22)**

If God thought we could live this life without sinning, without messing things up, why would He want to meet at a place called "The Mercy Seat"? Most of God's greatest leaders messed up:

Abraham doubted God's promise and had a child with his wife's maid...

David committed adultery, murder and tried to cover it up...

Jacob cheated his brother and father...

Moses killed a man...

Peter became a disloyal traitor to Jesus...

And what happened to these "disqualified" sinners?

Abraham received mercy and became the Father of Faith.

David received mercy and was known as "a man after God's own heart."

Jacob received mercy and reconciled with his brother.

Peter received mercy and Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep."

And Moses, the murderer who was exiled to the desert for 40 years, received mercy and was called by God to lead 2 million of His rebellious children through the same desert to the Land of Promise.

Is there anyone here today in need of a second chance with God? You only need one trait to qualify. You need to be a sinner who can say with the Prodigal Son:

**...Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. (Luke 15:21)**

And your heavenly Father will smile and say: (Luke 15:22-24)

**Quick! Bring the best robe... Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.**

We have a One-Way God with a One Track Mind... He wants to see you come home.

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<sup>i</sup> Martin Lindstrom, *Brainwashed* (Crown Business, 2011), p. 104-108

<sup>ii</sup> “Many Americans Say Other Faiths Can Lead to Eternal Life,” *The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life*, Dec. 18, 2008

<sup>iii</sup> C. M. Home, “Revelation,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 5:86