

A Study of
The Book of Numbers
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Some Things on Numbers 5-6

Tommy Peeler

Text: Numbers 5-6

Numbers 5

5:1-4 Do not defile the camp where I dwell in your midst

5:1 The LORD spoke to Moses (**5:1, 5, 11; 6:1, 22**). In **Numbers 4:1, 17, 21**.

5:2 God speaks to Moses and then Moses commands (**5:2**) or speaks to the sons of Israel (**5:6, 12; 6:2, 23**).

Three types of uncleanness are specified and the people so contaminated are sent away from the camp. They are not permitted to camp around the tabernacle as described in **Numbers 2**.

These groups are:

1. Send away every leper (**Lev. 13:46; Num. 12:10, 14-15**). The four lepers of **II Kings 7:3-4** seem to be living outside the city.
2. Everyone who has a discharge (**Lev. 15:2-3, 19, 25**)
3. Send away the one unclean because of contact with the dead (**Lev. 21:1-14; Num. 6:6-9; 9:6-10**)

These restrictions about uncleanness shed light on other passages of the OT:

I Samuel 21:1-9, especially vs. 4-5;

II Samuel 11:11. To approach God in such a situation of uncleanness was dangerous (**Lev. 7:20-21; 22:3; Numbers 19:13**).

5:3 so that they do not defile the camp where I dwell in their midst (**Lev. 26:12; Numbers 35:34**).

Leviticus 15:31 “Thus you shall keep the sons of Israel separated from their uncleanness, so that they will not die in their uncleanness by their defiling My tabernacle that is among them.” The day of atonement, among other things, cleansed or purified the altar from defilement in **Lev. 16:16, 18, 20**.

5:4 **The sons of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp** - The people are obedient to the LORD.

Just as the LORD had spoken to Moses - the same basic idea appears in **4:41, 45, 49, 49**.

What would be the indications that these instructions about the clean/unclean are not binding upon us?

Leprosy in the Old Testament: **Exodus 4:6-8; Lev. 13-14; 22:4; Num. 5:1-4; 12:9-16; Deut. 24:8; II Sam. 3:29; II Kings 5; 7; 15:5; II Chron. 26.** Jesus' cleansing lepers is recorded in **Matt. 8:2-4/Mk. 1:40-45/Lk. 5:12-16; Matt. 11:5/Lk. 7:22; 17:11-19.** In sending the twelve on the limited commission He said "cleanse the lepers" **Matt. 10:8.**

Jesus healed the woman with the issue of blood, a discharge in **Matt. 9:20-22; Mk. 5:25-34; Lk. 8:43-48.**

Jesus raised the dead and touched them, their coffin (**Matt. 9:23-26, esp. vs. 25; Mk. 5:21-43, esp. vs. 41; Luke 8:41-56, esp. vs. 54; Luke 7:11-17, esp. vs. 14.** **John 11:1-44,** Jesus does not touch Lazarus, but He does come to the tomb **vs. 38.** "In these ways He declared that those conditions which for centuries had separated even the elect people from God no longer mattered. God has Himself drawn nigh. The kingdom of heaven is now open to all who repent and believe the gospel" Wenham, 78.

What are we to learn from them?

While uncleanness was never sin, it is a picture of sin (**II Cor. 6:16-17; 7:1** in the bigger context of **II Cor. 6:14-7:1**). "Patristic commentators also saw the passage as justifying the excommunication of heretical or immoral church members" Wenham, 78; DeVaux, 91. In **Rev. 21:3-4** heaven is pictured as the tabernacle of God being among men. He dwells among them, and all uncleanness is excluded from His presence (**Rev. 21:17; 22:15**).

5:5-10 A man or woman acts unfaithfully they are to make restitution and offer a sacrifice

Several things suggest that this was a guilt or trespass offering as described in **Lev. 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10.**

- 5:6** The sin is described as acting unfaithfully (**vs. 12, 27**). This expression was used with the trespass offering in **Lev. 5:15; 6:2.** The kind of offense under discussion seems described in **Lev. 6:1-5.** He has taken something to which he has no right and has lied about it (**Lev. 6:3**).
- 5:7** The man is to confess his sin. He must make restitution by adding 1/5 to the value of what he took (**Lev. 5:16; 6:5; 22:14**). This is "an invitation to all those who have stolen things, or otherwise defrauded their neighbors, to put things right" Wenham, 78-79.

The restitution is made to the one against whom the sin was committed. However, if the man was not alive and none of his relatives were then restitution is made to the priests (**vs. 8-10**).

- 5:8** The animal offered for sacrifice is a ram (**Lev. 5:16, 18; 6:6**) and it makes atonement (**Lev. 5:16, 18; 6:7**).

The word translated “the wrong” in **5:8, 8** is the word used for the guilt offering in **Lev. 5:16; 7:1-2; 14:13, 14, 17, 24, 25, 25, 28; 19:22; I Sam. 6:4; Ezek. 46:20.**

What is the context for these laws?

“Israel had been drawn up in battle array to march toward the promised land. But their unity would be shattered if they were squabbling among themselves and taking God’s name in vain” Wenham, 79

Is there a principle to apply to us today? (Matt. 5:23-26; Luke 19:8; I Cor. 6:7).

5:11-31 The “adultery test”

In this context a husband believes that his wife has committed adultery. He has no proof, so He brings her to the priest and the tabernacle to let God decide.

Key expressions in this section:

- “goes astray” (**5:12, 19, 20, 29**)
- “unfaithful” (**5:12, 27**)
- “man has intercourse with her” (**5:13, 19, 20**)
- “defiled/defiles” (**5:13, 14, 14, 20, 27, 28, 29**)
- “jealous/jealousy” (**5:14, 14, 29, 30**)
- “offering of jealousy” (**5:15, 18, 25**)
- “stand before the LORD” (**5:16, 18, 30**)
- “water of bitterness” (**5:18, 19, 23, 24**)

Connection to the context:

- The word “*defiled/defiles*” is the same root word used in **5:3**. If these forms of uncleanness defile, how much more does adultery defile?
- The word “*unfaithful*” in **vs. 12, 27** is the same word used in **5:6**. If these acts described in **5:6** demonstrated unfaithfulness, how much more does adultery?

This is a case ensuring community purification and demonstrating that “Marital fidelity is foundational to societal wellbeing” Cole, 113.

“Throughout the ancient Near East, adultery was conceived as a crime not just against the husband but also against the gods. Within three Genesis narratives: **Gen. 20:6; 26:10; 39:9** not only do all of them specify that adultery is a sin against God but the specification itself is made to or by a non-Israelite. Thus, the narrator assumes that Israel shared with its neighbors the conviction that adultery was an affront to the deity” Milgrom, 348.

“Yet despite the fact that the ancient Near Eastern laws regard adultery as a religious sin, they all- except the Bible- allow the husband to mitigate or even waive the death penalty against the adulterer (e.g. Hammurabi, 129; Middle Assyrian Laws; 14-16; Hittite law, 192; ANET, 171, 181, 196).” Milgrom, *Numbers*, 349.

“Theologically one must affirm the theocentricity of this passage in order to keep it from slipping into the realm of magic. It would be an erroneous reading of the present text to affirm that these *marim* waters functioned in a magical way, i.e., by themselves and apart from divine action. The whole of the ritual is God’s revelation (**v. 11**); it is to God that the woman is brought (**vv. 16, 18, 30**); it is God who metes out punishment to the guilty (**v. 21**); and it to God that the meal offering is given. The potion is made up of holy water (so called because it has taken from God’s presence in the tabernacle), plus dust from the tabernacle floor (hence also from the realm of the holy), plus the words of a negative oath (curse) sworn before God. God is the major actor in this ritual drama and none of it take place without Him” Ashley, 124. “To call this ritual an ordeal, however, is misleading and confusing” Ashley, 124.

This passage is the basis for the tractate Sotah in the Mishnah. “The Mishnah contains the Jewish oral law. It was written down by the end of the second cent. A.D. The traditions upon which the Mishnah is based are of unknown age, but parts may easily predate the written text by several centuries” Ashley, 119.

5:12 A man suspects his wife of adultery.

Goes astray

The verb is used in **Prov. 4:15** encouraging the son to “turn away (seteh) from it: pass it by!” **Prov. 7:25** the word warns the naïve man not to wander after the adulterous. “A context of impropriety always seems to be associated with the verb s-t-h, a straying from the true path” Levine, 192.

Unfaithful

“This is the only time that the term ‘ma’al’ is used outside the sacred sphere of sancta and oath violations, where the object of ma’al is invariably the Deity” Milgrom, 37.

“The same phrase is used both in **vv. 6** and **12** for transgressing against someone. These words are a verbal link between the previous passage and the present one. Both misappropriation and adultery can be seen as transgression (ma’al)” Ashley, 125.

5:13 There are no witnesses to the adultery.

Notice how frequently and in how many ways this is said:

- “**it is hidden from the eyes of the husband,**” (**4:13; 5:2**)
- “**she is undetected,**”
- “**there is no witness against her,**”

- “and she has not been caught in the act.”

“It is unlikely that the woman is visibly pregnant at the time of the ritual since this would hardly be ‘undetected.’” Ashley, 126.

Milgrom, 37, translates the last phrase of the text as “without being forced” on the basis of the use of the last word of the verse being used in **Deut. 22:28**.

Levine, 193, acknowledges that this translation is a possibility but also says, “One questions, however, whether such a qualification would have been stated, for a rape victim was never held accountable for her consequent defilement.” If we follow the traditional translation it emphasizes “that no testimony against her was available” Levine, 193.

5:14 The **spirit of jealousy** is translated by Milgrom, 38, as a fit of jealousy. Ashley, 117-118, translates this as a spirit of suspicion.

The same Hebrew word is translated *jealousy* in **Prov. 6:34**.

The two possibilities are the wife is guilty (**she has defiled herself**) or she is innocent (**she has not defiled herself**) are presented here.

Compare the *Code of Hammurabi*, Laws 131-132, ANET, 171.

While this code has similarities to **Num. 5**, in the Law Code the public points the finger at the suspected wife while Numbers discussed no community suspicion-Ashley, 125.

Was he suspicious but lacked knowledge of her adultery and did he feel he could only divorce her on this basis? Levine, 193-194.

5:15 “The suspicious husband may (i.e., he is not forced to) bring his wife.” Ashley, 127.

If he does, he must bring his wife to the priest.

“Only the husband can press charges, not the community as in Hammurabi’s code” Milgrom, 38.

The husband also brings the offering. If the wife is guilty, she is “a brazen, unrepentant sinner (and) is not qualified to bring her own sacrifice (**cf. Num. 15:30**)” Milgrom 38.

The regular grain offering was made of fine flour (**Lev. 2:1, 4, 5, 7; 6:20; 14:20, 21, etc.**). This is the only time *barley* is mentioned in the Pentateuch as an offering.

“In the present case cheaper and coarser barley flour is utilized instead of the finely ground wheat flour, and the barley flour is not to be mixed with oil or incense” Cole, 116.

“Barley, being much cheaper than wheat (**e.g. II Kings 7:1**), was a staple of the poor (**Ruth 2:17**), as well as of animals (**I Kings 5:8 (4:28 in English Bibles); vs. 2**)” Milgrom, 38.

There was one-tenth of an ephah mentioned (**Numbers 15:4; 28:13; Exodus 29:40**).

No oil or frankincense is placed upon it

contrast **Lev. 2:1, 2, 15, 16** and how these were parts of the normal grain offering.

Psalms 45:7; 104:15 describes “the oil of joy” so oil is often associated with celebration.

The sin offering of those who could not afford two turtledoves or two pigeons in **Lev. 5:11-13** was also without oil or incense.

That case in **Lev. 5:11-13** is the “only other dry meal offering” in the Pentateuch- Ashley, 127.

Grain offering for jealousy

Prov. 6:32-35 He will not allow any ransom nor agree to any bribe. **Isaiah 1:13** speaks of a grain offering of falsehood- see Levine, 194.

A reminder of iniquity

While other offerings are said to atone for sin or forgive sin, this one is said to remember it (I Kings 17:18).

What does this mean? “This offering, then, is meant to bring the husband’s suspicion of his wife’s protentional sin into Yahweh’s presence” Ashley, 128.

5:16 To stand before the tabernacle was to **stand before the LORD (vs. 18, 30; I Kings 8:31-32)**

5:17 Dust that is **on the floor of the tabernacle** is placed in an **earthenware vessel** of water.

The **holy water** was probably taken from the bronze laver in the tabernacle courtyard, used by the priests for ritual purification (**Exod. 30:17-21**)” Cole, 116.

The key to the dust is that it is taken from the tabernacle and therefore is taken from sacred space- Levine, 196.

Dust was used in curses (**Genesis 3:19; II Sam. 16:13**) and mourning (**Joshua 7:6; Ezek. 27:30**) and those ideas may be significant here.

5:18 hair of the woman’s head go loose

In **Lev. 13:45** hair of leper uncovered and in **Lev. 10:6; 21:10-11; Ezek. 24:17** it seems to associate uncovering one’s head with mourning.

Bitter water (Exodus 15:23).

Ashley, 118, translates it **waters of distress**. This may not refer to the taste of the water but the results of drinking if she is guilty.

“According to the Mishnah (Sotah 3:3, 6) the suspected adulteress could refuse to continue the procedure at certain points, and perhaps these preliminary ‘visual aids’ were to force a confession from the guilty party before a curse was actually pronounced and the woman was brought into contact with holy water” Ashley, 131.

5:19-22 “The central moment comes when the woman takes an oath before the priest and before God, who is the only one who knows the truth of the situation and who must ultimately mete out the appropriate justice” Cole, 116.

Some have pointed out that this is “the sole example in biblical legal literature where the adjudication of a case rests upon God’s ability to perform a miracle” Cole, 119.

There were similar things in the literature from Mari and from Babylon. In these nations, however, the trial was inherently dangerous.

Ashley, 123, gives four reasons how **Num. 5** and what God speaks differs from ancient Near Eastern trials by ordeal.

“First, in the Ancient Near Eastern ordeal the agent of the ordeal (the fire, water, etc.) was dangerous to the innocent and guilty alike. Here the water poses no threat at all to the innocent party. Second, in the ordeal the accused had to survive something inherently harmful. If the accused was harmed by an inherently harmful agent, that person was guilty. Thus the accused was guilty until proven innocent. Here the case is genuinely open as **vv. 12-14** show. Perhaps the woman is guilty, perhaps she is not. Third, in the ancient Near East ordeals the guilt of the party was determined by the ordeal procedure, but the punishment was pronounced separately by the court. Injury to the guilty party was separate from the legal penalty. Here the penalty is the outcome of the ritual. Finally, the punishment in the ancient Near Eastern ordeal is manifest immediately. Here we have no statement on how long it will take for the liquid to do its work: Ashley, 123.

5:19, 28 If she drinks the water and is innocent no harm results and she conceives children.

Not having children was viewed as a curse (**Gen. 20:17-18; Lev. 20:20; I Sam. 1:5-6; Luke 1:25**), while children are viewed as a blessing (**Gen. 33:5; Ps. 127:3-5**).

What if she confessed her sin at this time?

“Rabbis claim that the only legal consequence she would suffer would be that her husband would be obligated to divorce her immediately” Milgrom, 40; M. Soto 1:5.

5:20-22, 24, 27

If she has defiled herself her **abdomen swells** and **thigh wastes away** (**5:21, 22, 27**). An Aramaic Targum convey the idea her intestines are swollen- Levine, 198.

“It is not certain what the combined effects of a swollen belly and sagging thighs mean, in medical terms. It is logical to interpret them as indicating a miscarriage, as may be concluded from the contrast between the stated outcome when the woman is guilty and the outcome when she is innocent, as expressed in **vs. 28** below” Levine, 198.

However, it is most likely that the penalty is not a miscarriage but is an inability to have children.

“Since the blessing connected with the innocent woman is the ability to bear children (**v. 28**), most commentators connect the verse with the stoppage of childbearing” Ashley, 132; Milgrom, 41, Milgrom, *Adultery in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Numbers*, 350.

5:21 The LORD will make you a curse and an oath among your people... (**Isaiah 65:15; Jer. 29:22**; also see **Deut. 28:37; I Kings 9:7-8; Jer. 19:8; 24:9; 25:9; 29:18**).

“Twice God is the subject who acts in punishment” Ashley, 131.

5:22 The word “**stomach**” can indicate “womb” (**Genesis 25:23**), but that is not certain and there will be more on this word later.

This is the first time the word “Amen” is used in the Bible and it is repeated twice for emphasis- Cole, 117.

The statement of *Amen* in response to curses is found in **Deut. 27:15-26; Neh. 5:13**.

5:23 The priest writes the curses on a scroll.. (**Jeremiah 51:59-64**).

5:25 wave the grain offering

“A special dedicatory rite, *tenufah*, whereby the offering is brought to the special attention of God (**cf. Lev. 14:12, 24**) before it can be brought to the altar” Milgrom, 41.

5:26 What is done with the grain offering is the same as happens with the grain offering in **Lev. 2:2**.

5:27 When he has made her drink the water

“This clause is omitted in the Septuagint and the Syraic and looks like an accidental repetition (dittography) of **vs. 26b**. However, once **verses 27-28** are understood an editorial summation of the prognosis, it is not superfluous” Milgrom, 42.

5:28 If she is innocent, she will experience no harm.

5:29 This is the torah of...

Lev. 7:37-38; 11:46-47; 12:7b; 13:59; 14:54-57; 15:32-33 are similar summaries.

5:31 husband is **free from guilt** but the woman, if guilty, **shall bear her guilt**. Does this mean the husband is free of guilt only if she is convicted, or was he also free if she was found innocent?

Milgrom, 43, refers to Sif. Numb. 21 and states the husband is unpunished even if the wife is innocent.

“His suspicions will either be proved or laid to rest” Milgrom, 43.

But that woman **will bear her guilt-**

“It is a reminder to the husband and the community that if the adulteress is convicted by the ordeal, her punishment rests solely with God” Milgrom, 43.

“The community has no role in determining the punishment. Thus, time alone will suffice to mark out the guilty party, and God alone will suffice to punish her” Ashley, 135.

What does this tell us about God?

“What then is the essence of religious ritual in the Bible? It is a means of communication between God and man, a drama on a stage watched by human and divine spectators. Old Testament rituals express religious truth visually as opposed to verbally. These are the ancient equivalent of television” Wenham, 29.

“These actions underline the seriousness of the suspected fault. The ritual gives public expression to the national and the divine abhorrence of adultery. It is both a prayer to God for judgment if she is guilty and a warning from him that she will not escape” Wenham, 29.

God sees all. He knows who is guilty and who is innocent. God punishes wrong. The guilty will not escape God’s wrath. God vindicates the righteous.

The seriousness of marriage in Israel (**Ex. 20:14; Lev. 20:10; Prov. 2:17; Ezek. 16:8; Malachi 2:13-16**).

The sin of adultery (**Jer. 5:7-9; 7:9; 29:23; Hos. 4:2**).

The defiling nature of sexual sins is clearly spelled out in **Lev.18:24-30; Ezek. 18:6, 11, 15; 22:11; 33:26**.

God is Israel’s husband. Does He not have the right to expect faithfulness and fidelity from His wife?

“The unfaithful wife is a recurring prophetic image for Israel’s infidelity to God (**Hos. 2:4-22; Jer. 3:8f; Ezek. 23:37**). This sin calls forth God’s wrath (**Ps. 106:39**). Moreover, *ma’al* is used in priestly text for idolatry (**cf. Lev. 26:40; Num. 31:16**). Since *ma’al* denotes straying after other goes its extension to straying after other men in obvious” Milgrom, 37.

The curse pronounced has power because of the God who gives it (**Zech. 5:1-4**).

Is Numbers 5:11-31 sexist?

“On the opposite gender side of the issue, the wife had no reciprocal proviso for bringing charges against a suspected unfaithful husband. Several Pentateuchal passages address issues in which women have legal recourse against men. In **Deut. 25:5-10** a woman could bring a case against a brother-in-law who failed to fulfill his wife in Levirate marriage. A violated virgin would be especially provided for by an abusive male (**Deut. 22:28-29**)” Cole, 114.

Deuteronomy 22:25-27

Were there any safeguards in the adultery test?

Rabbinic writings mention “that she be previously warned by her husband in the presence of two witnesses against secluding herself with her suspected paramour” M. Sot 1:1; Sif. Num. 7, Num R. 9:29. Milgrom, 38.

“Philo requires that both husband and wife argue their case before the high court in Jerusalem, thus enabling the wife to refute her husband’s charges and thereby circumvent the ordeal” 3 *Special Laws* 53-54.

“In the present case, the whole matter, from beginning to end, is placed in God’s hands. There is no human punishment on top of divine punishment. ...Neither the term adulteress nor the death penalty is mentioned here... **It prevents a jealous husband from punishing his wife on the basis of suspicion alone.** The complex ritual must be exactly performed (**v. 30b**) so that the woman might be protected from a husband’s whim in an age where protections for women were admittedly few and far between” Ashley, 124.

Hosea 4:14

In light of this verse “rabbis limited the efficacy of the ordeal to the case of an impure wife of a sexually pure husband. Similar reasoning prompted Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai to abolish the ordeal even while the Temple still existed” Milgrom, 43.

I Corinthians 5:1

Focus on the man’s adultery and not the woman’s adultery. I assume the man was a Christian and the woman is not.

How does Numbers 5:11-31 apply to abortion?

This “raises the question of abortion, because it would be authorize administering the ordeal even if it might terminate a pregnancy and cause the loss of a fetus” Levine, 203.

Levine makes many such reckless statements on pages 203-204, 212. His exegesis of the text on pages 192-199 is more careful while his comments on this subject and this “magic” practice on pages 200-212 should be read with great caution.

The word translated *abdomen* **5:21, 22, 27** in the NASB is the Hebrew word נֶטֶן. The word is used 72 times in the Hebrew OT and the New American Standard translates it *womb* 31 of those 72 times.

In some cases, *womb* is clearly the idea like **Genesis 25:23, 24; 30:2; 38:7; Judges 13:5, 7**. There may be something to that here- Ashley, 132.

However, sometimes it does not always work. This word describes the part of the body in which *Eglon* was stabbed in **Judges 3:21, 22** and he does not have a womb. The word is used in **Ezekiel 3:3** and **Habakkuk 3:16** and has the idea of *belly* or *inward parts* and is even used of *Sheol* in **Jonah 2:2**.

This “is a general time for internal organs” Ashley, 132.

The word for swell is only used three times in the whole OT and those three occasions are here (**Numbers 5:21, 22, 27**).

The word translate *thigh* is used 34 times in the OT.

It can refer to the base of the lamp stand in the tabernacle in **Exodus 25:31; 37:17; Num. 8:4** or to a side of the tabernacle in **Exodus 40:22, 24; Numbers 3:29, 35** or the side of the altar in **Lev. 1:11; II Kings 16:14**.

It seems to be a person’s *thigh* in **Genesis 32:24, 31, 32; Exodus 28:42; 32:27; Judges 3:16, 21; Psalm 45:3; Ezekiel 21:12**.

It is reasonable to think that *thigh* means *thigh* here. But it is also possible that this is used euphemistically as is possible in **Genesis 24:2, 9** and **Exodus 1:5**.

When there is good evidence for a literal reading in a difficult passage then it seems reasonable to me to default to that position if one is seeking to understand. This may indicate some physical disfigurement which is evidence of guilt.

The word for *waste away* as in the thigh *wasting away* is the word *fall* and it is used over 400 times in the OT including the walls of Jericho falling in **Joshua 6:5, 20**. It is such a common word that it is hard to gain much insight from it as I can tell.

It seems like including this in the abortion discussion makes several leaps.

1. It assumes that the woman has become pregnant from her sexual immorality. Nothing clearly states that in the text, and we know that does not always happen.

2. It assumes that penalty for her adultery involves a miscarriage of her child. Again, this is not clearly stated in the context, but may be inferred. When the Bible wants to talk about miscarriage, it can do so clearly (**Hosea 9:14**). Sometimes punishment for the people for serving fertility gods was that they would have no fertility (**Deut. 28:18; Hosea 9:16**). Sometimes the punishment for certain sins was childlessness (**Lev. 20:20**). “There is, however, no evidence that this ritual was given (at least exclusively) to pregnant women” Ashley, 130.
3. If the woman did lose her child as a result, does that prove it is not a child?? In **II Samuel 12** David’s son dies because of his sin. **Hosea 9:16** also says even if they bear children, God will slay them. God is giver of life, and He has the right to take it. It is different when we simply decide who lives or dies when the victim has committed no crime.

Numbers 6

6:1-21 Nazirites

“The Nazirites were the monks and nuns of ancient Israel, lay men or women who consecrated themselves to the total service of God” Wenham, 85.

“The role of Nazirite was a votary, a sacred person who was consecrated to divine service for a specific period of time as the result of a vow and as an expression of special commitment to God” “Nazirites” by R.K. Harrison in *ISBE*, vol. 3, 501.

The term itself may mean “one consecrated, a devotee” *ISBE*, 501.

Key words:

- Nazirite (vs. 2, 13, 18, 19, 20, 21)
- separate/abstain (vs. 2, 3, 5, 6, 12)
- his separation/dedication (vs. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 18, 18, 19, 21, 21)

All of these are from the same Hebrew root word.

“The English word Nazirite (2, 13, 18-21) transliterates the Hebrew nazir, meaning ‘set apart.’ Negatively the Nazirites were separated (hiphil of *nazar*, verse 3) from wine, grape products, and dead bodies. Positively, they were separated to the LORD (2, 5, 6, 12). He was holy to the LORD (8). The same root *nezer* translated separation (7) and consecrated (head) (9), denotes the characteristic mark of the Levites, his uncut hair. The same term is used of high priest’s diadem and anointing oil and the royal crowns (**Lev. 8:9; 21:12; II Kings 11:12**). The Nazirite’s long hair is regarded as God’s special gift to him (**Jdg. 16:17, 22**) which had to be returned to God in the sacrificial fire when the vow was completed (vs. 18)” Wenham, 86-87.

The word nazir is used of the “untrimmed vines” of **Lev. 25:11**.

“The vine was deliberately left untended for the first few years of its life so that thereafter its fruit would be mature. The Nazirite’s entire body, including the hair, belonging to God, and if the hair remained untrimmed it would serve as a witness against any who shaved the head in the service of pagan deities” *ISBE*, 502.

Lev. 21:5; Deut. 14:1; Ezek. 44:20

- Defiled (**vs. 7, 9, 12**); This was key in **Num. 5:3, 13, 14, 14, 20, 27, 28, 29**.
- Holy (**Num. 6:5, 8, 20**, verb **vs. 11**)
- Head (**Num. 6:5, 5, 7, 9, 9, 11, 18, 18**)

Why was this section placed here?

“The nation is being organized as the holy people of God. Israel was called to be ‘a kingdom of priests’ (**Ex. 19:6**)” Wenham, 85.

The Nazirites exemplify the holy calling of the nation.

6:1 The LORD spoke to Moses (5:1, 6, 11; 6:22)

6:2 Speak to the sons of Israel (5:2, 6, 12)

When a man or woman

The Nazirite vow applied to a “man or woman.” This certainly makes Nazirites distinct from the priests who were exclusively male- Ashley, 141. Though this applied to both sexes, the Hebrew uses masculine pronouns throughout the section.

The separation or dedication of this section is to have as its object the LORD (**vs. 2, 5, 6, 12**), God (**vs. 7**).

The woman would need the consent of her father or husband according to **Num. 30**.

“At the end of the Second Temple period, many women took the vow, which accounts for the technical term for the female Nazirite, nezirah, and for the many laws pertaining to her status” Milgrom, 44.

Bernice who appears in **Acts 25:13-26:32** and was the sister of Agrippa II took the vow after she recovered from an illness (**Josephus, Wars, 2.15.1**). Milgrom, 358, lists several Nazirite women of the diaspora.

Makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite

Vows were normal in Israel (**Gen. 28:20-22; Lev. 27; Judges 11:30ff; I Sam. 1:11ff; Psalm 66:13f; Jonah 1:16; Acts 23:12ff**). Wenham, 86.

The word translated *special* in the NASB is a verb “related to the word (a noun) *pele*, ‘miracle,’ ‘wonder,’ which indicates something out of the ordinary” Ashley, 141.

What did the Nazirite vow involve? Three specific things are emphasized in the text.

Here this one was not named a Nazirite by God- as Samson- or by a parent- like Samuel- but one who “enter(s) into a relationship with God in full awareness of what would be involved” ISBE, 501.

6:3-4 The Nazirite was to abstain from wine or strong drink.

Priests were to avoid drinking before their service in the tabernacle (**Lev. 10:9; Ezek. 44:21**). However, this was more demanding in that the Nazirite was to totally abstain from what the priest avoided in the service in the tabernacle- Milgrom, 44. This “a prohibition that worked some hardship in land where clean water was scarce and fermented drinks were the normal adult beverage” ISBE, 501.

While the priests could not drink while on service on the tabernacle, the Nazirite was also to avoid any grape juice or grapes- whether fresh or dried. He is to eat nothing that comes from grapes- whether seeds or skins. The words for seeds and skins are used only here and their meaning is derived via context- Cole, 122. All products “must be avoided, right down to the most minute parts of the grape” Ashley, 142.

The holiness demanded of the Nazirite was higher than that required of the regular priest. Milgrom, 355, draws comparisons between all the things required of Nazirites and also the high priests.

All the days of his separation (vs. 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 12, 13, 18, 18, 19, 21, 21).

This along with the sacrifices that are offered at the end of his vow in **vs. 13-21** indicate that the Nazirite vow was usually temporary. Some like Samson and Samuel seem to have been life-long Nazirites.

What is the reason for this prohibition? It is difficult to recapture. Wine and vineyards are often “used as a standard image for divine blessing in the OT which is strange if they are to be rejected by those truly consecrated to God” Ashley, 142.

I Kings 4:25; Amos 9:14; Isaiah 36:17; 65:21; Ezek. 28:26; Neh. 9:25.

He shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine (Judges 13:14)

6:5 No razor was to come on his head. He is to be holy and let the locks of his hair grow long. Compare what is said of the priests in **Ezekiel 44:20**.

“It is interesting that both the high priest’s diadem (**Ex. 29:6; 39:40; Lev. 8:9**) and the Nazirite’s hair are called *nezer* (lit., consecration’). Both the diadem and the hair are special marks of the wearer’s consecration to Yahweh” Ashley, 143.

Later in Israel’s history, the word is also used of the king’s crown (**II Sam. 1:10; II Kings 11:12; II Chron. 23:11**).

He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD (vs. 8).

They were set apart as a special sign of dedication to the LORD. He is set apart for the Lord's service.

“The hair can be seen as the most visible badge of the Nazirite” Ashley, 143.

“It is the uniqueness of his uncut hair that is the mark of the Nazirite and the part of him that is truly holy, to judge by the treatment of the hair when the Nazirite period is accidentally aborted or successfully terminated” Milgrom, 44.

He shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long

Milgrom, 43, connects this with the hair of the woman in **5:18**. The verbs translated *hang loose* in **5:18** is the same root for the noun *locks* in **6:5**.

6:6-8 He is not to go near a dead person. He is not even to make himself unclean for the closest family members- father, mother, brother, or sister- **vs. 7**. This is the same kind of thing required of the high priest in **Lev. 21:10-14**.

The separation of God is said to be on his head (**vs. 7**). He is holy to the LORD (**vs. 5, 8**).

The regular priest could participate in the burial of his closest relatives (**Lev. 21:1-9**) but not the holy priests (**21:10-15**).

“The restrictions placed on Nazirites suggest that their sanctity exceeded that of the ordinary priests and resembled that of the high priests” Wenham, 87.

6:9-12 What happens if the Nazirite is beside one and he suddenly dies in midst of the Nazirite's vow?

The accidental nature of this is shown by a person dying by him suddenly. This brings to mind the guilt offering for unintentional sins against holy things in **Lev. 5:14-16**.

6:9 But if a man dies very suddenly beside him

Milgrom, 46, emphasizes that the text does not specifically say that the Nazirite touched the dead man but only that he was near them. He uses this to argue for the greater demands of holiness on the Nazirite than even the priests.

Coming in contact with a dead body made one unclean for seven days and the way to cleanse that uncleanness is revealed in **Num. 19:11-20**. Most people were sprinkled with water on the third and seventh days of their uncleanness.

For someone to die beside him defiles his dedicated head. After he is clean, he shaves his head (**vs. 9**).

He brings two birds to the priest—the one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering. These birds will make atonement for him and he shall consecrate his head (**vs. 10-11**). **Num. 19:11-20** does not call for a sacrifice. The word *nephesh*- person, soul, being- obviously means dead person from the context like in **5:2**. He also brings a year-old lamb for a guilt offering.

“This sacrifice was reserved for severe infringements of God’s right” Wenham, 87.

His vow is void and apparently, he starts again (**vs. 12**).

6:10 He shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons

“These birds are found together as sacrificial victims in **Lev. 1:14; 5:7, 11; 12:6, 8; 14:22, 30; 15:14, 29**” Ashley 144.

These are “the most inexpensive animal offerings (**Lev. 5:7; 12:8**)” Milgrom, 47.

“The Mishnah originated about 200 or shortly thereafter. It comprises sixty-three tractates (massekoth) arranged in six divisions or orders (Sedarim) dealing respectfully with law...” Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 493.

“The Mishnah is primarily interpretation of the legal and cultic laws of the Pentateuch” Ferguson, 495.

The Mishnah relates how Queen Helena had almost completed a seven-year Nazirite vow and she was defiled in such a way and she had to start over again (Nazir, 3:6) Wenham, 87-88. She was queen of Abiabene who took the vow on the condition that her son return safely from war- Milgrom, 44.

6:11 The priest shall offering one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering and make atonement for him concerning his sin

His accidental encounter with a person who dies is described as a sin from which he needs to be cleansed. But some state, this “does not imply sin but failure, as in **Judges 20:16**: ‘sling a stone at the a hair and not *miss*” Milgrom, 47.

6:12 shall bring a male lamb a year old for a guilt offering

“The reparation offering of a male yearling lamb is unique. Elsewhere, when a lamb is offered it is a female (**Lev. 5:6**), or the age of the male animal is not stated (**Lev. 14:21**)” Ashley, 144.

Is there are break in these sacrifices and what is the order of offerings? See Milgrom, 47. After these sacrifices are offered he resumes his Nazirite vow.

6:13-21 What happens when he completes his vow?

When the Nazirite vow was completed, “the Nazirite had to offer the same range of sacrifices as Aaron did at his ordination” Wenham, 87.

Aaron offered

- a sin offering (**Lev. 8:14-17**)
- a burnt offering (**Lev. 8:18-21**)
- a ram of ordination as a peace offering (**Lev. 8:22-29**)

6:13 Now this is the law of the Nazirite (**Num. 5:29; Lev. 7:37-38; 11:46-47; 12:7b; 13:59; 14:54-57; 15:32-33**)

When the days of his separation are fulfilled

This does not demand the vow end and prohibit a life-long Nazirite, but it does assume that for most the service as a Levite is temporary- Ashley, 145.

He shall bring his offering to the doorway of the tent of meeting (vs. 10)

6:14 He presents a lamb for a burnt offering, a ewe lamb for a sin offering, and a ram for peace offering.

“The difference is that whereas the former rituals climaxed in a reparation offering to compensate for the Nazirite’s defiled hair and vow, the present ritual climaxes in the joy of the so-called peace offering (**v. 14**)” Ashley, 146.

6:15 A basket of unleavened cakes and wafers are offered, and he offers both grain and drink offerings.

Grain and drink offerings are mentioned in **Ex. 29:23, 40-41 (Lev. 8:26** Aaron’s ordination). **Lev. 23:13** gives amounts of the grain and drink offerings that accompany the whole burnt offering. Also see **Lev. 23:18, 37**. Detailed legislation about grain and drink offerings are not given in Numbers until **Numbers 15**.

“On a literary level one must not assume that because a text does not speak of something until later it was unknown earlier” Ashley, 147.

6:16-17 The priest offers his sin, burnt, peace, grain and drink offerings.

6:18 At the completion of the vow, the Nazirite shaves his dedicated hair and puts it on the fire under the peace offerings. The burning of his hair was considered an offering to God (M. Nazir 4.7).

“It resembles the uneaten portion of the well-being offering, which similarly must be burnt (**Lev. 7:17; 19:6**) because it is holy (**Lev. 19:8**)” Milgrom, 49.

6:19-20 The priest presents the Nazirite's offerings and after that he may drink wine.

The Nazirites did not get a portion of Israel's sacrifices like the priests did. **Verses 19 and 20** emphasize these portions of the sacrifices were "holy to the LORD."

The Nazirites gave a greater portion of the sacrifice than was normally given as peace offerings (**Lev. 7:28-36**). The added portion is the shoulder (**vs. 19**). This illustrates that Nazirites showed an extra level of devotion to God (**Deut. 18:3**).

And shall put them on the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his dedicated hair

Placing them in the Nazirite's hands indicates they are his to donate (Milgrom, 50).

6:21 This is the law of the Nazirite (**vs. 13**).

In addition to what else he can afford

"There are instances in Roman times when kings and aristocrats undertook to pay for the offerings of Jewish Nazirites" Milgrom, 50.

Acts 21:24; Josephus, Antiquities 19.6.1, Mish. Naz. 2:5; Sif. Zut. 6:13; TJ Naz 5:3

Nazirites in Israel's history

Judges 13-16

The angel of the LORD tells Samson's mother that he is to be a Nazirite (**13:5, 7**). He is to be a Nazirite from the womb till the day of his death (**13:5, 7**). His mother is therefore told not to drink wine, strong drink or eat anything unclean (**13:4, 7, 14**). Samson later tells Delilah that he has been a Nazirite to God from his mother's womb and a razor has never come on his head (**16:17**). Then in **Judges 16:22** we are told that "the hair of his head began to grow after it was shaved off."

I Samuel 1:11

Hannah promises that she will give her son to the LORD all the days of his life and "a razor will never come on his head." Samuel is not directly called a Nazirite in our text of **I Samuel**.

"In a fragmentary recension of I Samuel recovered from 4Q, the phrase, 'he shall be a nazir for ever' had been omitted from the Hebrew of **I S. 1:22** due to haplography" Frank M. Cross, *BASOR*132 (Dec, 1953, 15).

"In the Hebrew recension of Sir. 46:13, discovered in the Ezra synagogue in Cairo in 1897, Samuel was described as a 'Nazirite of God.' *ISBE*, 502.

Levites are also "given" to God (**Num. 8:16**) and Samuel cut Agag in pieces (**I Sam. 15:33**) and that does not seem to fit the requirement to abstain from a dead body.

Amos 2:11-12 in context is speaking of all God did for Israel. “I raised up some of your sons to be prophets and some of your young men to be Nazirites...but you made the Nazirites drink wine, and you commanded the prophets saying, ‘You shall not prophesy!’”

I Maccabees 3:49 “They also brought the garments of the priesthood and the first fruits and the tithes, and they stirred up the Nazirites who had completed their days.”

Luke 1:15

Zacharias is told before John is born “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor...while yet in his mother’s womb”

Acts 18:18

In Cenchrea, Paul had cut his hair “for he was keeping a vow.”

Acts 21:23-26

The elders of Jerusalem suggest Paul purify himself with four men who are under a vow and pay their expenses for sacrifice.

Josephus, *Antiquities*, 19.6.1 (Vol. 4, p, 99-100 of Whisten) talks about many Nazirites in the days of Claudius Caesar (41-54 AD).

A Nazirite group as well as a man named Bannus was a mentor of Josephus- *ISBE*, 502

Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 2.23.3) mentions James, the brother of Jesus, belonging to a.

The word for “dedicate” in **Num. 6:12** in the Septuagint is the same word translated “sanctified” of Jesus in **John 10:36**.

6:22-27 The priestly blessing

The LORD (vs. 22, 24, 25, 26); bless (vs. 23, 24, 27). The priestly blessing was a reminder of the people’s complete dependance on God and the need of thanks for every good gift received.

“Grammatically, there is no need to repeat God’s name, but the repetition emphasizes that the LORD is the source of all Israel’s benefits, as does the last clause I will bless them” Wenham, 90.

“Each line has the LORD as its subject and is followed by two verbs, the second of which expands on the first; bless, keep; shine, be gracious; lift up, give peace” Wenham, 90.

In light of all the Bible, should the three-fold mention of “the LORD” remind us of the Trinity?

“The Aaronic blessing concludes the section of the text dealing with the bulk of Israel’s priestly legislation, and, implicitly promises that If these are kept, the blessing of God will follow” Ashley, 150-151.

6:22 The LORD spoke to Moses (5:1, 5, 11; 6:1).

God is the source of blessing and Moses is the mediator- Ashley, 150. This emphasizes the Divine author and human mediator of the instruction.

6:23 Speak to Aaron and to his sons (5:2, 6, 12)

Moses has taken God’s words and spoken them to the sons of Israel but here he speaks to Aaron and his sons.

The priest blessed in God’s name (**Lev. 9:22; Deut. 21:5; I Chron. 23:13; II Chron. 30:27; Ecclesiasticus 45:15**).

6:24 The LORD bless you and keep you

“The verses get progressively longer (in Hebrew 3, 5, and 7 words respectively). Thus the impression of a stream of blessing that beings as a trickle but flows more strongly” Ashley, 151.

Bless you (Ps. 128:5; 133:3; 134:3)

Keep you (Ps. 121:3, 4, 5, 7, 7, 8)

6:25 Make His face to shine (Ps. 67:1; 80:3, 7, 19)

“This vivid metaphor, likening God to light, is characteristic of the biblical picture of God” Wenham, 90.

See similar statements about the king’s face in **Prov. 16:14, 15**.

And be gracious to you

“‘Grace’ describes the attitude that issues in kindly action of a superior party to an inferior one in which the inferior has no claim on the superior” Ashley, 152

“More than forty times verb forms of נָחַם have Yahweh as their subject (41x in the qal). See **Gen. 33:5, 11; 43:29; Exod. 33:19; I Sam. 12:22; II Kings 13:23; Ps. 4:1; 6:2; 9:13; 25:16; 26:11; 27:7; 30:10; 31:9; 41:4, 10; 51:1; 56:1; 57:1; 59:5; 67:1; 77:9; 86:3, 16; 102:3; 119:29, 58, 132; 123:2, 3**” Cole, 130.

6:26 The LORD will lift up His countenance on you

This is the opposite of God hiding His face (**Job 13:24; Ps. 13:1; 89:46; 104:29**).

and give you peace (122:6-8; 125:2, 5; 128:5-6; 133:1)

Peace “means well-being, health, prosperity, and salvation: in short, the sum total of all God’s good gifts to his people” Wenham, 90.

It “is fundamentally not merely the absence of conflict, although that may be a part of it. In essence, *shalom* means fulness and life and wholeness in all areas of life” Ashley, 153.

6:27 So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel (II Chron. 7:14)

And I will bless them

The *I* is emphatic, I, I will bless them.

“This construction is emphatic because the personal pronoun I is not grammatically necessary in Hebrew” Ashley, 151.

God is the source of every blessing.

How does Jesus fulfill the priestly blessing?

“In Jesus the full meaning of peace is revealed: He gave peace, made peace, and is our peace (**John 14:27; Eph. 2:14ff**)” Wenham, 91.

The LORD is a God who desires to bless (**Genesis 12:1-3**).

Sirach 50:20 Simon is the leader of his brethren and the pride of his people. He is the high priest (**Sirach 50:1**). He was high priest about 219-196 BC. The passage itself says, “The Simon came down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, to pronounce the blessing of the LORD with his lips, and to glory in his (His) name.” **II Enoch 56:1; 57:2; 64:4** the priest blessed in His name.

The gospel of Luke begins and ends with the temple

Luke 1:22 and context

“Most likely he (Zecharias) was silent as the other priests gave the Aaronic blessing (**Num. 6:24-26**) required by Jewish practice” Bock, 94.

Luke 24:50-53 Jesus lifted up His hands and was blessing them.

Luke does not put strong emphasis on Jesus as priest but notice how the book begins and ends. It begins in the temple (**1:8**)... and ends in the temple (**24:53**). Zecharias comes to bless the people and cannot speak but Jesus blesses the people. Could this be an indication of the priesthood shifting from the family of Aaron to Jesus?

Ketef Hinnom silver scrolls-

“Among the remains recovered was a phylactery containing two silver scrolls the size of a small cigarette, upon which were written two versions of the priestly blessing. These had been used as amulets during the lives of the individuals interred there or as burial pendants. The text of the larger one is nearly identical to that of the Masoretic text, and an abbreviated version of the second and third blessings was written on the smaller” Cole, 128; also see Milgrom, 361.

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The Camp of Israel

Cameron Piner

Text: Numbers 1-2, 4, 10:1-10

Introduction

- Numbers... Numbers... Numbers...
 - There are a variety of names for this book, but the main three titles are based on the 1st, 5th, & 20th/ 28th words in the book.
 - “Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, “Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their families, by their father’ households, according to the number of names...” (Num. 1:1-2, NASB95).
 - The early Hebrew name for the book used the first word of the book, וַיְדַבֵּר - *wayedabbēr* – “[YHWH] spoke [to Moses]”, to emphasis the aspect of the book being the words spoken by God.
 - The later Hebrew title for the book uses the fifth word of the book, במדבר - *bemidbar* – “in the wilderness”, to emphasis the geographical aspect of the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for forty years.
 - But, the Septuagint, Vulgate, & English instead used the 20th/ 28th word (or the 31st/ 41st word in the Greek), ἀριθμῶν - *arithmon* - “number”, naming the book: *Arithmi / Numeri / Numbers*, which emphasizes the census taking of the book.
 - While these three titles each describe a different aspect of what is found within this book, the one that is most common is probably the least appealing and least effective title.
 - As, G. B. Gray puts it (and Cole quotes, pg. 23), “As indicative of the contents of the book, the title Numbers is not aptly chosen; for it is only a small part of the book (chap. 1-4, 26) that is concerned with the numbers of the Israelites.”
 - That being said... The small part of the book that the name “Numbers” does describe, happens to be the section of the book that I am supposed to discuss.
- Nevertheless, numbers and lists of names don’t have to be viewed as a boring part of text that we are tempted to skip past. Instead, these kinds of texts can be thrilling to explore, because in these lists of names we can learn so much about our God and about His people.
 - God left us many powerful and exciting lists of names in the scriptures (e.g. Gen. 5; Neh. 3; 1 Chron. 1-9; Matt. 1; Rom. 16; etc.). So, if God viewed these lists of names as worth writing, then we can view them as worth reading, studying, and teaching.

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- Numbers 1:1-2 also reminds us of the location of the Israelites at the beginning of the book, which begins the geographical divisions of the book.
 - Numbers 1:1-10:10 takes place “in the wilderness of Sinai” (1:1), as they organize before departure.
 - Numbers 10:11-22:1 – The Israelites journey from the wilderness of Sinai to “the plains of Moab” (22:1), stopping various places along the way.
 - Numbers 22:1-36:13 takes place “in the plains of Moab” (22:1), as they organize before conquering the land.
 - To break that outline down a bit further and focus on the text assigned for this presentation:
 - Numbers 1-4 deals with censuses.
 - Ch. 1 – Census of the people for military purposes.
 - Ch. 2 – Instructions for the arrangement & movement of the camp (military emphasis).
 - Ch. 3 – Censuses of the Levites & firstborn for redemption purposes.
 - Ch. 4 – Census of mature and capable Levites for purposes of service, and more instructions for the movement of the camp (emphasis on Levite responsibilities).
 - Numbers 5-9 deals with cleansings and dedications.
 - Numbers 9:15-10:10 deals with more instructions for movement of the camp.
 - Numbers 9:15-23 – Moving according to the command of the LORD as seen in the cloud & fire.
 - Numbers 10:1-10 – Moving according to the command of the LORD as heard through the silver trumpets.
 - Numbers 10:11-36 – The Israelites set out from the wilderness of Sinai – “they move out for the first time according to the commandment of the LORD through Moses” (10:13).
 - Numbers 18 – More instructions on the duties of the Levites.
 - Numbers 26 – Censuses of the next generation.
 - Numbers 26:1-56 – Census of the people for military and inheritance purposes.
 - Numbers 26:57-62 – Census of the Levites for city allotment purposes – “since no inheritance was given to them among the sons of Israel” (26:62).
 - Numbers 26:63-65 – Summary of the two censuses of the next generation.
 - In this presentation, we will be specifically focusing on Numbers 1-4, 10, & 26.
 - We will start by considering the censuses of the book of Numbers.
 - Next we will discuss the arrangement and movement of the camp.
 - Finally, we will conclude by considering some of the take-aways – What do all of these “numbers” teach us about our God?
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The Seven Censuses

Introduction

- On first glance, it may appear that there are only two censuses taken in the book of Numbers, one in chapters 1-4 and one roughly 40 years later in chapter 26. However, a closer look will show a different story.
 - In chapters 1-4, the Levites are specifically stated to have not been counted among the others (1:47), and then the Levites are separately counted twice with different methods and results (3:39; 4:46-49). There is also a census of only the firstborn among the military tribes (3:40-43).
 - Similarly, in chapter 26, the Levites are specified to not be counted among the other tribes and so they are counted separately (26:62).
 - But, the censuses of the book of Numbers are not the first counting of the people which occurred in the wilderness of Sinai. About six months previously, the LORD had Moses number all the people by having them give half a shekel as a contribution to the LORD (Exod. 30:11-16; Exod. 38:25-26).
 - So, in total (if we include the census from Exodus), we have seven censuses to discuss. One numbering of everybody, one of the non-Levite firstborn, two of the non-Levite tribes, one of the Levites from one month old and up, and two of the working Levites (from 20-50 years old).
- But, before we break down the seven censuses, let us first consider some overall points about these censuses.

Who Commanded These Numberings of the People?

- The book begins by stating, “The LORD spoke” (1:1), which is not only an introduction to the entire book (Brown makes that point this way – “This initial statement is characteristic of the entire book, where over 150 times and in about twenty different ways are told that Israel’s God said something special to his people.” – pg. 27), but it is also specifically an introduction to the LORD’s command for Moses to “Take a census of the congregation of the sons of Israel...” (1:2).
 - Which is also the way that all of the other censuses were introduced (Exod. 30:11-12; Num. 1:1-2, 48; 3:14-15, 40; 4:1-2, 21-22; 26:1-2; etc.).
- The God of the Israelites (in contrast to the “gods” of the nations) was not silent. The fact that the Almighty Creator has chosen to communicate with mankind is an incredible blessing that we shouldn’t take for granted. Rather, we should eagerly and reverently listen to every word that He has spoken and carefully obey His every command.

Who Did the Counting of the People?

- God told them to count, but God would already know the exact number. Nevertheless, God didn’t just tell them the number, but had the people do the counting.

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- There are a lot of things that God could easily accomplish without our help, but He instead chooses to involve us in the work. The tasks that He gives us may at times feel mundane or monotonous, but what a blessing to be involved in His work.
 - God specified who was to do the counting of the people – he picked various leaders to lead in these projects.
 - Moses was assigned the role of numbering in most of these censuses (Exod. 30:11-12; Num. 1:1-4,17-19, 44; 3:14-15, 39, 40-42; 4:1-2, 21-22, 29,34, 37, 41, 45, 49; 26:1-4, 63-64).
 - In most of those numberings, Moses was joined in the work by Aaron (1:3, 17-19, 44; 3:39; 4:1-2, 34, 41, 45; 26:64), or Aaron’s son, Eleazar (26:1-4, 63).
 - However, for the numbering of the military force in chapter 1, the LORD picks twelve leaders (one from each tribe) to join with Moses & Aaron in the numbering of the people (1:4-19).
 - These twelve men are used here to assist in arranging and numbering the military forces. They will be mentioned again in 2:3-31, where they will be leading in the camping arrangements and movements of their tribes. Then they are mentioned in 7:10-83, when leading in the tribal offerings for the altar. Finally, they are mentioned in 10:14-27, as they lead the tribes out from the wilderness of Sinai.
 - “These men functioned as representatives for their ancestral tribes in matters of military conscription, worship leadership, and general administration” (Cole, pg. 70).
 - Most of the names of these twelve (and their fathers) have meanings which express various recognitions of God’s character. These names don’t necessarily reflect the character of these men (though perhaps God specifically chose them for their good character and reflection of who He is), but it does reflect the focus of the community in (at least) their naming conventions.
 - Translations of these names vary slightly, so I will simply present the suggested translations by R. Dennis Cole (pg. 71):

Vs.	Tribe	Name	Meaning
5	Reuben	Elizur	(My) God is a rock, is strong (God of strength)
5		ben Shadeur	Shaddai is a flame (fire, light)
6	Simeon	Shelumiel	(My) Peace is God
6		ben Zerishaddai	(My) Strength is Shaddai, (My) rock is Shaddai
7	Judah	Nahshon	Serpent
7		ben Amminadab	(My) People are noble
8	Issachar	Nathanel	Gift of God
8		ben Zuar	Little One
9	Zebulun	Eliab	(My) God is Father
9		ben Helon	Rampart??
10	Joseph: Ephraim	Elishama	(My) God hears, has heard
10		ben Ammihud	(My) People are majestic
10	Joseph: Manasseh	Gamaliel	Reward of God
10		ben Pedahzur	Ransomed rock, strength
11	Benjamin	Abidan	(My) Father is judge
11		ben Gideoni	(My) Hewer
12	Dan	Ahiezer	(My) Brother is a helper
12		ben Ammishddai	(My) People of Shaddai
13	Asher	Pagiel	Encountered by God, met by God
13		ben Ocran	Troubled
14	Gad	Eliasaph	(My) God has added, multiplied, enriched
14		ben Deuel	Knowing God
15	Naphtali	Ahira	(My) Brother is evil
15		ben Enan	One who sees

- These twelve names are listed in various orders in the four places they are mentioned (see Extra Charts for a chart of the various orders of lists of the 12 tribes throughout the entire Bible). In this text they are laid out in birth order, based on the tribe's birth mother (with two exceptions).
 - The first five are the children of Jacob by Leah: 1. Reuben; 2. Simeon; [3. Levi]; 4. Judah; 5. Issachar; 6. Zebulun; [7. Dinah] (Genesis 29:31-35; 30:17-21).
 - The next three are the children of Jacob by Rachel: 1. Joseph – 1a. Ephraim, 1b. Manasseh (These two are swapped in birth order, likely due to Jacob's reversed order of blessings – Gen. 48:8-22); 2. Benjamin (Gen. 30:22-24; 35:16-18; 41:50-52).
 - The final four are all the children of Jacob by the concubines – By Leah's maid, Zilpah: 1. Gad; 2. Asher – And by Rachel's maid, Bilhah: 1. Dan; 2. Naphtali (Gen. 30:1-13).
 - However, two of the tribes have swapped places for unknown reasons. If the order continues in the above Leah-Rachel order (this time with their respective maids), then Gad and Dan are swapped. If the order simply goes by birth order among children of the concubines, then Naphtali and Asher are swapped.

They Were To Count Every Individual

- “Head by head” - 1:2, 18, 20, 22 (Exod. 38:26).
- “According to the number of names” (1:2) / “make a list of their names” (3:40) – 1:2, 17, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42; 3:2, 3, 17, 18, 40, 43; 26:53.
- Each census calls for counting specific categories of the people and in various groupings, but each time they are not merely estimating, rather they are concerned about counting the individuals and writing down each one’s name.
 - God could have told them the exact number, and the number really wouldn’t matter too much in most situations, because God was on their side. But, God told them to count every individual and write down their name one by one. I would imagine that this would have an impact on the leaders who were writing down the names of their people, and an impact on the people who are being individually valued by their leaders and by their God.
 - It is a comforting thought to see God’s care for each individual. Jesus could have healed large crowds at once from a distance, but He often spent the time and effort to lay His hands on each one to heal them individually (e.g. Luke 4:40). Jesus also tells us that God knows how many hairs are on our heads, and that God values each person more than the sparrows that He cares for (Luke 12:7). And we are told that God knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19). We are individually valued and cared for by God!
- However, while they counted each individual “head” and wrote down each person’s name, the results of the numbering are not presented to us with specifics. Instead, we are given rounded numbers of the totals.

What Is Going On With All These Large Numbers?!

- Many have asked and will continue to ask this question, because there is not a clear satisfactory answer to this question. However, there are plenty of proposed solutions to these confusing numbers.
- There are several problems that arise if we are to take the numbers from the censuses at face value.
 1. Too many people to survive in the wilderness.
 - The totals presented in the censuses are: 603,550 (Exod. 38:26; Num. 1:46; 2:32) and 601,730 (Num. 26:51) – And those do not include women or children, nor do those censuses in Numbers include the Levites. When you include all the Israelites, the estimates based on those totals would add up to around 2-2.5 million Israelites wandering in the wilderness.
 - “The Bedouin population of modern Sinai amounts to only a few thousand; and until relatively recent Jewish immigration into Israel, the total population of Palestine, a much larger and more fertile area, was only just over a million” (Wenham, pg. 70).

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2. Those numbers conflict with the numbers of firstborn children.
 - The number of firstborn males from a month old and upward totaled 22,273 (3:43). Since families can only have one firstborn male, that means that each family had to have at least 28 non-firstborn males per one firstborn male (581,277 / 20,273). And the firstborn males were counted from a month old versus the twenty years and up for the 603,550, so really the equation should result in an even worse ratio. Add in the female children, and each family would have to average around 50 children.
 3. Other scriptures assume a much smaller population.
 - Exod. 23:29-30 (and Deut. 7:22) implies that the Israelites did not have enough people to fully inhabit the land of Canaan – But, as mentioned earlier, the entire land of Palestine was inhabited by fewer than half that amount up until very recently. 2-2.5 Million Israelites would have easily filled the land enough to keep the wild animals from growing out of control.
 - Deut. 7:7-22 (esp. 7, 17, 19) – God describes Israel as not having more people than other nations, but being “fewest of all peoples”; and they were terrified of the armies of Egypt and Canaan, because “These nations are greater...” – However, if the Israelites’ army did have 603,550 men, then it would greatly outnumber the estimated 200,000 males in the Canaanite population and the less than 20,000 Egyptian army (Cole, pg. 79).
 - The size of the armies represented later would then be incredibly small portions of what they should have had available. Only 30,000 men sent to conquer Ai (Josh. 8:3), out of the possible 601,730 (Num. 26:51); only 10,000 (Judges 4:6, 10, 14) or 40,000 (Judges 5:8) mustered from two or six tribes by Deborah/ Barak, when almost any one of those tribes would have had more than that on their own in Numbers 26; only 600 men of Dan were mustered (Judges 18:11-17), as compared with the 64,400 men at the last census (Num. 26:42-43).
 4. A mathematical oddity.
 - “Not only are most of the figures rounded off to the nearest hundred, the hundreds tend to be bunched: 200, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700 occur but never 000, 100, 800, or 900. This concentration of hundreds between 200 and 700 suggests the totals are not random as might have been expected in a census” (Wenham, pg. 70).
 - There are several proposed solutions to this question about the large numbers, all of which have their own strengths and weaknesses.
 1. The census figures are literal and accurate.
 - Those who take the numbers as literal and accurate would argue that God could provide miraculously for any amount in the wilderness. And the land was more fertile in those days than it is today.
 - As for the later small armies, those would only be a small representative portion that was sent into those battles. Rather than the total amount that they would have had available.
 - Wenham cites Keil as arguing “that the number of the first-born refers to those born *since the exodus*” (Wenham, pg. 70). Meaning that the 600,000 couples gave birth to the 22,273 firstborn boys in the 13 months since leaving Egypt.
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- However, Wenham argues that, “most of the towns in the Bible excavated by archaeologists contained hundreds rather than thousands of people. In the Armana letters (14th century BC) Canaanite kings have but a few hundred men in their armies, while in the great battle at Qadesh between the superpowers of Egypt and the Hittites (13th century), both armies mustered at most 20,000 men” (Wenham, pg. 71).
2. The census figures are literal and accurate, but are taken from a later time period.
 - Most proponents of this view would suggest that these figures were taken from the time period of David and then placed into the narrative about the wilderness wanderings.
 - However, these numbers would still be large for the estimates of the Davidic empire, and the treatment of tribes like Simeon would be surprising from a time period where Simeon has mostly lost its individual status.
 3. The census figures are symbolic.
 - One symbolic approach claims the numbers are mathematical calculations based on the Hebrew alphabet (aka Gematria). - G. Fohrer suggested that 603, 551 is derived from the phrase, “sons of Israel” (603) and “every head” (551), and then rounded to 603,550 (Cole, pg. 80).
 - However, there is no evidence for this being a regularly used device at the time, nor does that approach work for the numbers of the tribes or Levites.
 - Another symbolic approach claims that the numbers are calculated based on Mesopotamia mathematics and astronomy. The census figures when divided by 100 can relate to various astronomical periods.
 - Wenham explains Barnouin’s suggestion and then argues that, “it does not necessarily follow that because numbers are symbolic, they cannot also be historical... Since these numbers claim to be census figures, the natural presumption is that they are to be taken literally, and that their symbolic significance is a matter of divine providence” (Wenham, pgs. 74-75).
 - There are numerous challenges with this approach, including that the Israelites would not have understood these connections in the wilderness, the correlation doesn’t work with Gad’s numbers or Reuben’s in the second census. Nor does it match the census of the Levites at all.
 4. The tribal numbers are a poor translation of *‘elep* and the totals are due to textual corruption that added those numbers together with that incorrect translation.
 - The word, אֶלֶף – *‘elep*, could be translated as “thousand” (as it is translated in these numbers), or it could be translated as, “family”, “clan”, “contingent”, “family leader”, etc.

- Klatz uses other scriptures (Exod. 15:15; Gen. 36:15-30; Josh. 22:14; Judges 6:15; Micah 5:1) to illustrate that *'elep* is not always best translated as a literal “thousand”, but instead as “troop”, “clan”, or “contingent”. He then argues, “Recognizing the military nature of the census, I believe it is still possible to translate *אלף* as “contingents” by understanding the two phrases—the one that precedes the word *אלף* and the one that follows it—as two different kinds of measurement. Thus, to take Numbers 1:21 (the fighting men of Reuben) for example: תִּרְאֵם שְׂמַחוּ הָלֵא מִיַּעֲבָרְאֵו הַשָּׁשׁ וּבֹאֵר הַטָּמֵל סְהִידָקָם: Instead of translating 46 *אלף* and 5 hundred as “46,500”, it could be translated as “46 contingents, or [i.e., equaling] 500 [men].” Standard concordances list “or” as one of the meanings for a connecting vav, as in Exod. 21:17 “He who curses his mother or his father shall surely be put to death.”” (Klatz, thetorah.com).
- The proposed totals vary slightly depending on method of re-translating *'elep*, but below is Klatz’ proposed numbers:

Tribe	<i>'elep</i> as 1,000	<i>'elep</i> as contingents	No. men	Approx. No. of Men/ contingent
Reuben	46,500	46	500	11
Simeon	59,300	59	300	5
Gad	45,650	45	650	14
Judah	74,600	74	600	8
Issachar	54,400	54	400	7
Zebulun	57,400	57	400	7
Ephraim	40,500	40	500	13
Menashe	32,200	32	200	6
Benjamin	35,400	35	400	11
Dan	62,700	62	700	11
Asher	41,500	41	500	12
Naphtali	53,400	53	400	8
Totals:	603,550	598	5,550	9 (average)

Levitical Clan	<i>'elep</i> as 1,000	<i>'elep</i> as contingents	No. of men	Approx. No. of Men/ contingent
Gershon	7,500	7	500	71
Kehat	8,300 / 8,600 (manuscript differences)	8	300/ 600 (manuscript differences)	38/75
Marari	8,200	6	200	33
Total Levites:	22,000	21	1000/1300	48/62
Total First born	22,273	21	1273	61

- There are other variations of this concept (Cole, pgs. 80-81; Wenham, pgs. 71-73), which lead to army totals such as: 5,550, 72,000, or 140,000.
 - Then the totals would have been a textual corruption, due to earlier scribes also mistranslating *'elep* and then “correcting” what they saw to be poor math and presenting the new totals, based on the higher numbers.
 - However, there is no manuscript evidence for an earlier different reading of the total numbers.
5. The census numbers are an intentional hyperbole.
- “The large numbers in the census lists in the Book of Numbers are deliberately and purposefully exaggerated as a rhetorical device to bring glory to God, derision to enemies, and point forward to the fulfillment of God’s promise to the fathers that their descendants will be innumerable as the stars” (R.B. Allen, quoted by Wenham, pg. 81).
 - The general idea here is that the census totals, when written down, were exaggerated and magnified rhetorically by a factor of 10. That would mean that the actual totals would have been 60,355 and 60,137 (with a total population of around 250,000, instead of the 2-2.5 million).
 - Wenham argues that this would fit evidence of other ancient Near Eastern military censuses employing hyperbole, and he says, “The hyperbolic use of numbers was not for misrepresentation but for powerful demonstration of Yahweh’s continuing blessing upon Israel...” (Wenham, pg. 82).
 - A challenge might be that the censuses of the Levites and firstborn would not be hyperbolic, which would mean (in the argument’s favor) that the total male population of 60,355 would result in a much more likely average family size of 2.5-3.0 male children.
- As you can see, there are multiple issues with the large numbers presented in these censuses, but there are also multiple possible solutions. None of them are fully without challenge, but the existence of possible solutions can help assuage the concern over the seemingly inaccurate account of numbers.

The Census of the Nation (Exodus 30, 38)

- This census doesn’t actually occur in the assigned text or even in the book that we are working through. However, it does have enough similarities to the censuses of Numbers to warrant a brief look.
- In Exodus 30:11-16, the LORD gives instructions to Moses about how to take a census of the sons of Israel. Then in Exod. 38:25-28, we are given the results of the census.
- The scope of this census was “of the sons of Israel” (30:12) or “of the congregation (38:25); specifically, those who were “twenty years old and over” (30:14; 38:26).
 - This does not specify that the Levites are excluded from this count, so unless you view this as being the same census as the one in Numbers 1, then the Levites would be included in this numbering.

- The method of counting was: “each of them shall give a ransom for himself to the LORD” (30:12); specifically, “half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary” (30:13) aka “a beka a head” (38:26), whether you were rich or poor (30:15). Moses was to take that money and “give it for the service of the tent of meeting...” (30:16).
 - Some, like Yehuda Altein (chabad.org), claim that this method was used in order to avoid directly counting the people. Their view is that directly counting the people would bring wrath on them, which is why David received wrath for his census (2 Sam. 24), and it is why many censuses are often conducted indirectly among Jews today.
 - However, numbering the people through the means of gathering the beka had more to do with the purpose of this particular census than it had to do with indirectly numbering the people. And there is no specification to indirectly number the people in Numbers, in fact it says to do so “head by head” (Num. 1:2).
- The purpose of this census was for each one to “give a ransom for himself to the LORD...” (30:12), “as a contribution to the LORD” (30:13, 14, 15), “to make atonement for yourselves” (30:15, 16), “that it may be a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD” (30:16), and the silver was used “for casting the sockets of the veil” (38:27) and to make “hooks for the pillars and overlay their tops and made bands for them” (38:28).
- The result of this census was that 100 talents of silver and 1,775 shekels were gathered to atone for the people and it was used in the sanctuary. The count of the people being: 603,550 men.
 - That is the exact same count as the total of the warriors in Numbers 1:46.
 - Because of that similarity, some people argue that this is the same census as occurred in Numbers 1. Ellicot Commentary for English Readers puts it this way, “The taking of the census occupied several months, during which the money was gradually collected, the sockets, &c., made, and the Tabernacle [*sic*] set up. The registration was deferred, and took place on a single day, when Moses and Aaron went round the tribes, received the results from their hands, and entered them in a book. It appears from Numbers 1:47 that the Levites were not counted in the sum total, no atonement money being taken from them” (accessed via biblehub.com).
 - Alternatively, those who argue that these are two separate censuses would argue that “Perhaps the number was lost in this place, and restored from Numbers 2:32, without its being recollected that the Levites were not included in that reckoning” (Excell, The Pulpit Commentary, accessed via biblehub.com).
- God wanted involvement from all Israel, and He took it seriously that they did this in the way that He specified (“...so that there will be no plague among them when you number them.” – 30:12).
 - Today, God still wants involvement from all of us, and everyone must contribute in the way(s) that God has specified.

The Census of the Warriors (Ch. 1)

- The purpose of the census in Numbers 1 is to prepare for war.
 - To count “whoever was able to go out to war in Israel” (1:3, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 45).
 - And to divide them into their genealogical family clans (1:2, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 45; *see also* chapter 2) and “number them by their armies” (1:3), and they were led by their tribal representative who was contributing in the counting (1:4-17, 44; *see also* 2:3-31; 7:10-83; 10:14-27).
- Therefore, they were only to count those who were old enough for war; that is, “from twenty years old and upward” (1:3, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 38, 40, 42, 45).
 - And they were to not number the Levites among them, because the Levites were set apart to not serve in the military. They had a different role, so they were not counted among the warriors (1:47-53; 2:33; etc.).
- The results of this census are presented by tribe in almost the same order that the leaders were presented in 1:5-15 (which was roughly birth order by the different mothers).
 - However, Gad has been moved from the section of concubine children to third in the order. Maybe that new placement is in order to align them with the tribes from Leah that Gad will be camping and moving with (Ch. 2, 7, 10). Even though that group of three (Reuben, Simeon, Gad) will be shifted down three spots behind Judah’s section (Judah, Issachar, Zebulun).
 - The LXX places Gad in verses 36-37, right after Benjamin. That would place Gad back with the other concubine children, but would have them out of order by birth order and by birth mother.
- So, the warriors have been counted in their clans in preparation for war... but what war? This census anticipates what the Israelites were supposed to be doing very soon, conquering the promised land. This should have been a list of the future war heroes who conquered the promised land... but it ends up being a list of people who fell short of their potential.
 - “Sadly, these prospective soldiers died in the wilderness; it is the book’s second census (26:1-65) that preserves the names of those who entered Canaan. The first list became a tragic catalogue of grumblers, doubters, and rebels, people who did not fulfil their potential, a sad reminder of life’s lost opportunities” (Brown, pg. 29).
 - Paul compares Christians to soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3-4; Phil. 2:25; Phlm. 1:2; etc.). It is a high privilege to be soldiers in God’s army, numbered with our “family clans” and leaders, as we march to enter the promised land. Let us not fall short of our potential in the Lord’s army.
 - “To be given a place in the life of God’s people is an immense privilege, but Scripture constantly emphasizes that it is also a costly experience... Paul told the early Christian people that they must fight as well-equipped soldiers committed to arduous conflict” (Brown, pg. 29).

The Census of the Next Generation of Warriors & For The Divisions of Their Inheritance (Ch. 26)

- About forty years after the military census of chapter 1, the people have still not conquered the land. They never were supposed to wander for forty years, they were supposed to go conquer the land. Instead, they grumbled, doubted, and rebelled; so, God had them wander in the wilderness and die. So, the book of Numbers ends up being about censuses and senseless wanderings.
 - Nevertheless, now that the rebellious generation has all died in the wilderness, it is time to number the next generation. This time it takes place while they are “in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho” (26:3, 63).
- The census in Numbers 26 has a two-fold purpose:
 1. To number the warriors in preparation for war.
 - This is the same reason as the census in chapter 1, and very similar language/methodology is used:
 - “from twenty years old and upward, by their fathers’ households, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel” (26:2).
 - And the Levites were once again not numbered with the warriors (26:62).
 - This time, they are to prepare for war because the LORD had just finished telling them to “be hostile to the Midianites and strike them” (25:17).
 - And they are also preparing for war because they are once again about to march to conquer the promised land. In fact, this time they are camping across the Jordan from the land that they were to soon conquer (26:3, 63).
 2. To divide the land “for an inheritance according to the number of names” (26:52-56).
 - This time they are actually about to enter and possess the land, and the land is going to be divided among the people by lots to the tribes and families. Giving more land to the larger clans and less to the smaller clans.
 - The Levites are not to be included in the numbering for the purpose of inheritance, “for they were not numbered among the sons of Israel since no inheritance was given to them among the sons of Israel” (26:62).
 - Since this census is largely about the inheritance in the promised land, they are listed not just by tribe, but by family clans within the tribes.
 - These clans are roughly the same as were listed in Genesis 46, when they went into Egypt (the differences likely amount to variant spellings and children who did not end up establishing a clan - see Extra Charts for a chart comparing the names of Genesis 46 with Numbers 26).
 - In fact, Numbers 26:4 emphasizes this connection to Egypt by starting the census results by saying, “Now the sons of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt were:...” This next generation were to consider themselves the ones that God delivered out of Egypt, and to recall the 70 that went into Egypt in Genesis 46.

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- Another notable difference in the presentation of these two censuses would be that the census of Numbers 26 includes various asides.
 - One aside points forward to the discussion of chapter 27, about the daughters of Zelophehad.
 - 26:32-33 – “...and of Hephher, the family of the Hephherites. Now Zelophehad the son of Hephher had no sons, but only daughters; and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah.”
 - Two asides, and the summary conclusion, point backward to remind the people of the danger of being unfaithful, which serves as a warning to not imitate the failings of their fathers.
 - 26:9 – “...and Dathan and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram who were called by the congregation, who contended against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the Lord, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured 250 men, so that they became a warning. The sons of Korah, however, did not die.”
 - 26:19 – “The sons of Judah were Er and Onan, but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan.”
 - 26:64-65 – “But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest, who numbered the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. 65 For the Lord had said of them, “They shall surely die in the wilderness.” And not a man was left of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.”
 - The chart below compares the results of the census in chapter 1 with the results of the census in chapter 26. Comparisons have been provided for both interpretations of translating the *‘elep* as “1,000” or as “contingent” (e.g. “46 contingents, numbering 500 total warriors” – 1:21). The change in number of contingents has not been listed, but can be easily deduced by only comparing the digits to the left of the commas.

Tribe	<i>Ch. 1</i> <i>'elep as</i> 1,000	<i>Ch. 26</i> <i>'elep as</i> 1,000	<i>Change</i>	<i>Ch. 1</i> <i>'elep as</i> contingents	<i>Ch. 26</i> <i>'elep as</i> contingents	<i>Change</i>
Reuben	46,500	43,730	-2,770	500	730	+230
Simeon	59,300	22,200	-37,100	300	200	-100
Gad	45,650	40,500	-5,150	650	500	-150
Judah	74,600	76,500	+1,900	600	500	-100
Issachar	54,400	64,300	+9,900	400	300	-100
Zebulun	57,400	60,500	+3,100	400	500	+100
Ephraim	40,500	52,700	+20,500	500	700	+200
Manasseh	32,200	32,500	-8,000	200	500	+300
Benjamin	35,400	45,600	+10,200	400	600	+200
Dan	62,700	64,400	+1,700	700	400	-300
Asher	41,500	53,400	+11,900	500	400	-100
Naphtali	53,400	45,400	-8,000	400	400	=
Totals:	603,550	601,730	-1,820	5,550	5,730	+180

- When you compare the results of the two censuses, a few things stick out:
 - Some tribes gained people (7 with the traditional numbers: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Benjamin, Dan, Asher; 5 with the “contingents” translation: Reuben, Zebulun, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin).
 - Some tribes lost people (5 with the traditional numbers: Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Manasseh, Naphtali; 6 with the “contingents” translation: Simeon, Gad, Judah, Issachar, Dan, Asher – Naphtali stayed the same).
 - But, overall, the number of the Israelites stayed almost the same, despite an entire generation dying off in the wilderness.
 - God faithfully took care of His people. You can choose to not participate in God’s work and victory, but God will still accomplish His plans. – “God’s promises to the patriarchs may be delayed by human sin, but they are not ultimately frustrated by it” (Wenham, pg. 213).
 - If you take the traditional large numbers, then there is a striking drop in Simeon’s numbers (they still decrease in the other interpretation, but not as strikingly). This would possibly be due to their participation in the sin of Peor (Numbers 26).
 - A similar thing could be said of the Reubenites and the sin of Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16).
 - The order that the tribe results are presented is the same as chapter 1, with one exception. Joseph’s sons are swapped back into their birth order. Maybe this has something to do with using the clan divisions from when they moved down to Egypt (Gen. 46), which was before their blessings got switched (Gen. 48).

The Censuses of the Firstborn and Levites For The Redemption (Ch. 3)

- Matt Ness has been assigned chapter 3 and will present on the topic of redeeming the firstborn. Therefore, I will not unpack chapter 3 in any detail, but only comment briefly on the censuses that take place in chapter 3.
- The Levites were not to be numbered with the rest of the tribes, because the census in chapter 1 was for a military purpose and the tribe of Levi were set apart for a different role (1:47-53; 2:33).
 - However, the Levites were still numbered. In fact, they were counted twice in chapters 3-4. Each time with different measurements and for different purposes.
- Chapter 3 begins with a reminder of the roles of Aaron and his descendants as priests, but also with a warning by reminding them of the sin and death of Nadab and Abihu (3:1-5).
 - Those who God sets apart for special roles are not above the commandments nor do they get a free pass when they sin. In fact, they are often held at a stricter standard, because they have a special blessing and responsibility of representing God.
- Then the LORD has the tribe of Levi brought before Aaron and He gives them to Aaron and his sons, in order that they may serve them. But the priests are still reminded that their role was separate even from the Levites. So, they must keep their priesthood, guarding the layman from defiling it and being put to death for their trespassing (3:5-13).
 - Even when God gives certain people a special role, it is important to stay within the boundaries of what God has assigned you to do.
- Then the LORD has Moses number the Levites by their father's households and by their families. Which he does and we have the results listed with preview hints at their various roles in service to the LORD (3:14-39)
 - This time (unlike with the numbering of the warriors in chapters 1 and 26, and the numbering of the Levites in chapter 4), Moses was to count all the males "from a month old and upward" (3:15, 22, 28, 34, 39).
- The purpose of this census was because the LORD was going to take "the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of every firstborn, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall be Mine" (3:12, 41, 45).
- In order to compare the Levites to the firstborns whom they were replacing, another census of the other tribes had to be conducted. This census was just of the firstborn males of the other tribes, and this time the count was to be "from a month old and upward, and make a list of their names" (3:40).
 - This was not a military census, like the censuses in chapters 1 and 26, so the count didn't start at the age of being able to go to war.
- The results of these two censuses are: 22,000 Levites and 22,273 firstborn males (or 1,000 Levites and 1,273 firstborn, if you take the *'elep* as "contingent" interpretation).
 - The fact that there were more firstborn males than there were Levites to replace them was resolved by paying five shekels per head for the additional 273 Levites.

The Census of the Next Generation of Levites For The “Inheritance” (Ch. 26)

- Similar to the censuses of the first generation in chapters 1-4, the censuses of chapter 26 numbers the Levites separately. This is partially because this is once again a military census and the Levites would still be set apart for a different role than military conquest.
 - However, the censuses of chapter 26 are also for the purpose of assigning the inheritance of the land. So, this time the Levites are specified to be counted separately “for they were not numbered among the sons of Israel since no inheritance was given to them among the sons of Israel” (26:62).
- The purpose of this census of Levites is not specified, but the methodology was the same as the census of chapter 3 (in contrast to that of chapter 4), by counting “every male from a month old and upward” (26:62). - However, there is not another census of the firstborn and there doesn’t appear to be another redemption of the firstborn.
 - Likely, this was also a census concerned with dividing the population by size to assign inheritance. However, the Levites didn’t receive an inheritance among the sons of Israel. Nevertheless, in Joshua 21, the other tribes were to give the Levites cities from their own inheritances. Those cities were given by lot, just as the Israelites inheritance was given. So, it is likely that this numbering of the Levites was for the same purpose of assigning inheritance (indirectly) by size of family clan.

The Census of the Levites For Their Duties (Ch. 4)

- The census of the Levites in chapter 4 is concerned with the duties of the Levites – “all who enter the service to do the work in the tent of meeting” (4:3, 23, 30, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 47, 49).
 - Because this was only numbering those able to serve, they only were to number those “from thirty years upward, even to fifty years old” (4:3, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47).
 - Numbers 8:23-26 specifies that the Levites were to retire at the age of fifty, but they could continue to assist their brothers while doing no work themselves.
 - Numbers 8:23-26 also specifies that their work was to start at age 25, instead of the age 20 of chapter 4. The LXX harmonizes this by having the age 25 in chapter 4, while “Jewish commentators suggest that Levites served an apprenticeship for the first five years” (Wenham, pg. 110).
 - 1 Chronicles 23:24-32 refines the work assigned to the Levites, as well as broadening the age to being from twenty years old and upward. That is due to their role change from carrying the tabernacle to assisting in worship in the permanent temple.
- The results of the census are presented in 4:34-49. And verses 4-33 specify what the duties of the specific tribes are, which were hinted at in chapters 2-3.
- The Levites had two main roles/ sets of duties in the wilderness. Those would later be changed once the temple is built and in a permanent location (1 Chronicles 23:24-32), but in the wilderness their roles are to “perform the duties” and “to do the service” (3:5-10).

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- “The Hebrew phrases *šāmar mišmeret* (here translated by the RSV *perform duties*) and *‘ābad ‘ābōdā* (*minister*) are translated so vaguely in the various English versions, that the reader may well be left wondering what exactly the duties and ministry of the Levites consisted of. In fact the Hebrew phrases have quite a precise meaning in these chapters; they specify the two main functions of the Levites, to ‘keep guard’ (*šāmar mišmeret*), and ‘to do the heavy work’ of dismantling, transporting and erecting the tabernacle (*‘ābad ‘ābōdā*)” (Wenham, pg. 79).
1. Keep Guard.
 - This role of the Levites is not the primary focus of the census in chapter 4, but I am going to go ahead and discuss this duty of the Levites here.
 - While the other role (that of the heavy work of moving the tabernacle) was only to be done while the camp of Israel was on the move, this one was to be their constant duty.
 - God is holy, and is to be treated as such. For a holy God to dwell among His people is a wonderful blessing, but a dangerous thing for anyone who does not treat Him as holy. So, the Levites were selected to serve as a buffer zone between God and the layman. They were responsible for guarding the holy place of the tabernacle, both to protect the tabernacle from being defiled and to protect the layman from bringing much harm to the nation.
 - They were to accomplish this by camping around the tabernacle (1:50, 53; 2:17; 3:23, 29, 35, 38), and by putting to death any layman who came near (1:51; 3:10, 38; 4:15, 17-20; 18:7).
 - This is shown to be valuable in chapters 17-18. After grumbling against God’s specified roles, and God had Aaron’s sprouted rod set up “as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to the grumbings against Me, so that they will not die” (17:10).
 - Then the people respond by crying out, “Behold, we perish, we are dying, we are all dying! Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the Lord, must die. Are we to perish completely?” (17:12-13).
 - The people realized the danger of coming near to the tabernacle and perishing; so, chapter 18 reminds the people that there was already a solution proposed for that specific issue. God had picked Aaron’s family (the priests) and the Levites to be a buffer zone between the layman and the holy dwelling place of God. Which is what they had been grumbling against, but now they see the need for such a buffer, and the high responsibility that came with the blessing of being chosen for that purpose.
 2. Do The Heavy Work of Packing, Transporting, and Setting Up The Tabernacle.
 - This role was not done constantly, but it was done every time that the Israelites moved around in the wilderness. Every time the tabernacle was going to be moved, the Levites had to carefully fulfill this role.
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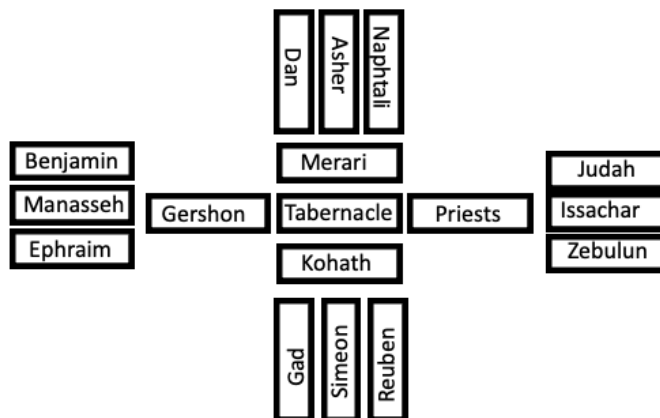
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- The Levites were appointed “over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its furnishings and over all that belongs to it. They shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall take care of it; they shall also camp around the tabernacle. So when the tabernacle is to set out, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle encamps, the Levites shall set it up... So the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the testimony” (1:50-51, 53 – *see also* 2:17; 3:7-8, 25-26, 31, 36-37; Chs. 4, 10).
 - The duties of the Levites in packing, transporting, and setting up the tabernacle were further divided among the family division of Levi (and even assigned by name – 4:32), with specified overseers, and very specific instructions for how they were to go about fulfilling this role.
 - Kohath was assigned the holy objects and the furniture (3:31-32; 4:4-20).
 - However, they were not allowed to look at or touch the holy objects... which would make it difficult to transport them... So, the LORD had the priests go in first and carefully wrap the various holy objects with multiple layers of color coded materials (colors pairing with the holiness of objects, and making it clear which item was which), then attach poles to them, which the Kohathites would use to carry the holy objects without any carts. Then the priests would unpack the items upon arrival.
 - This was all to be done under the supervision of the priests (specifically, Eleazar).
 - Gershon was assigned the coverings and cords for the tabernacle (3:25-26; 4:21-28).
 - They were allowed to pack up these items and transport them on carts, but they were also to be under the supervision of the priests (specifically, Ithamar).
 - Merari was assigned the pillars and structure of the tabernacle (3:36-37; 4:29-33).
 - They were also allowed to pack up these items and use carts to transport them, but they were to be under the supervision of the priests (specifically, Ithamar), and they were to each be assigned by name a specific object that was their responsibility.
 - They are given the carts for their duties of transporting the tabernacle in 7:1-9. Gershon received 2 carts and 4 oxen (they only have the softer lighter materials). Merari was given 4 carts and 8 oxen (they have the heavier and bigger materials). While Kohath was given no carts or oxen (they were to carry the holy objects on their shoulders).
 - The people were given various specific but different roles. Every member of God’s nation had a role to play, and the nation would only progress through the wilderness smoothly if every person fulfilled their part.
 - The same is true in Christ’s body today. The church is made up of various individuals who are placed in the body to accomplish various roles. It is in working together by accomplishing our part that allows the whole body to move smoothly through the wilderness on our way to the promised land (1 Corinthians 12).
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The Arrangement & Movement of the Camp

The Arrangement of the Camp (Ch. 2)

- The military census of chapter 1 was immediately applied in chapter 2. The LORD carefully arranged the numbered armies, with their tribal leaders (who helped count the soldiers - 1:4-16, 44), in a specific arrangement around the tabernacle.
- God is in the center. The entire nation of Israel is camped around the tabernacle, where God's presence was shown to be dwelling with them.
 - God is the king. Egyptian armies, in the 13th century BC, also arranged themselves in a square, and in the center of their army was their king. Similar things were done by other ancient Near East armies as well, with their king in the center (Wenham, pg. 76). The Israelite King is also in the center of His army.
 - God dwells with His people. God was near to His people (though with some buffer space and people for protection from His holiness). He had a close relationship with His people, living with them as they marched toward the promise land, and as they wandered in the wilderness. He was at the center of their army, but also at the center of their every day lives.
- The Levites camped around the tabernacle. On all four sides of the tabernacle, the Levites dwelt between the Israelites and the tabernacle.
 - The Levites were a buffer zone and a guard. We've already discussed that the constant role of the Levites was to be a guard and a buffer zone between God's holy presence and the layman, putting to death any layman who came too near. This was a blessing and protection for the nation (e.g. Chs. 17-18), but also a privilege and serious responsibility for the Levites.
 - Moses and the priests (sons of Aaron) lived to the East (3:38), which is the priority side of the camp and the entrance to the tabernacle. An honor, but also a responsibility to guard both the nation and the Levites from coming too close to the holy place. This also provided them with the best access to the tabernacle to fulfill their functions as priests.
 - The family of Kohath were to camp to the South (3:29), which would be the second best spot (as evidenced by the order that they are to move out). Kohath is likely upgraded in priority over the tribe his older brother (Gershon) because of their relationship with Moses and Aaron (who were from the Kohathite tribe).
 - The family of Gershon were to camp to the West (3:23), the third position. They were the firstborn tribe, but the priests and the family clans of Moses and Aaron outranked them.
 - The family of Merari camped to the North (3:35), the final position. Youngest in birth order was given the least honored task and the least honored camping position among the Levites.

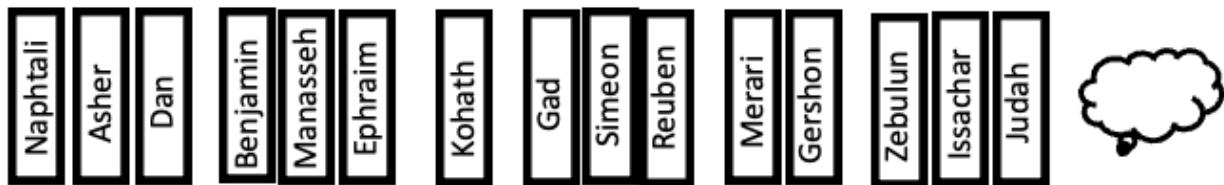
- The Israelite armies camped around the outside, three tribes per side, with the Levites between them and the tabernacle. One leader tribe per side.
 - In the favored leader position to the East of the tabernacle: Judah was the leading tribe, joined by Issachar and Zebulun.
 - This group supplants the group of Reuben, Simeon, and Gad that came first in the census of the previous chapter (the rest will be in the same order as the census). Judah also supplants Reuben and Simeon in the birth order.
 - Reuben was demoted from firstborn status because he slept with his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22). So, Jacob's final blessing said, "...you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch" (Gen. 49:3-4). 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 finishes the transition of preeminence from Reuben to Joseph to Judah: "Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright. Though Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came the leader, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph)..."
 - Simeon and Levi should have come next, but they were demoted after they slaughtered Shechem's house (Gen. 34; 49:5-7). Levi was also later given a different role altogether.
 - And so, we find the 4th, 5th, and 6th children of Jacob (by Leah) are dwelling in the primary position to the sunrise in the East. Judah as the leader.
 - To the South in the secondary position, Reuben (as leading tribe) and Simeon are then placed as the two oldest of Jacob's children and the last ones from Leah (beside Levi who has a new role). They are joined by Gad, who is the oldest child from Leah's maid.
 - To the West in the third position are the tribes of the children of Rachel – Joseph received two tribes, and Jacob swapped their order of blessing (Gen. 48). So, Ephraim is the leader, and they are joined by Manasseh and Benjamin.
 - Finally, to the North are the remaining children of the concubines. Dan is the oldest, so they become the leaders, and for some unknown reason Asher comes before Naphtali (though this does match the census order from chapter 1).



The Movement of the Camp (Chs. 2, 9, 10)

- The Israelites have been camping in the wilderness of Sinai, but the LORD is now preparing them with marching orders to move out.
- The LORD leads through the cloud – What was briefly stated in Exodus 30:34-38, is expanded on in Numbers 9:15-23. God’s presence was visibly illustrated through the cloud and the fire. And whenever they moved, they were to move or camp at the command of the LORD. One way that God commanded and led them was through the demonstration of His presence moving in the cloud and fire.
 - After repeatedly saying that they were guided by the cloud and fire, and repeatedly saying that they would move/ camp following the command of the LORD, then the chapter ends by saying, “At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out; they kept the LORD’s charge, according to the command of the LORD through Moses” (9:23).
 - They were following God’s command and God’s presence, but God specified those commands through Moses. The only way that the entire multitude was going to march in their carefully orchestrated order, was for a more precise means of direction to be employed as well. One of the ways that He practically did that was through the use of trumpets.
- The LORD leads through the silver trumpets. – In Numbers 10:1-10, the LORD gives instructions for making two silver trumpets, and then the various ways to use those trumpets to guide the people.
 - These trumpets were used to gather the people to the tent of meeting (10:2-4, 7). One trumpet blown gathered everyone; both trumpets blown would gather just the leaders.
 - And these trumpets were used to signal the movement of various sections of tribes (10:2, 5-6). The first alarm signaled for those on the East to move, the second alarm signaled for those on the South to move.
 - The priests were the ones who were to blow these trumpets (10:8).
 - These trumpets would be used for war (10:9) and for worship (10:10) – Either way they would be a reminder of the LORD their God.
- The order of movement would pretty much be the order of their camping arrangements in chapter 2 (with some exceptions).
 1. The cloud moved (9:15-23; 10:11, 34).
 2. Moses said, “Rise up, O Lord! And let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You” (10:35).
 3. The ark of the covenant was out front (10:33; Josh. 3:3-4).
 4. The trumpets alarm (10:5).
 5. Judah with Issachar and Zebulun (2:9; 10:14-16).
 - The largest army marches out first (2:9) – Protection in the front.

6. The sons of Gershon and Merari take down the tabernacle and set out under the guidance of the priests and Ithamar (4:21-33).
 - This is out of order for the camp arrangement, but for practical reasons. They will now arrive before the Kohathites, who are carrying the holy objects/ furniture. So, they will be able to set up the tabernacle before the Kohathites arrive with the holy objects/ furniture (10:21).
7. The trumpets alarm the second time (10:6).
8. Reuben with Simeon and Gad (2:16; 10:18-20).
9. The Kohathites set out carrying the holy things (with the exception of the ark, which is out in front – 10:33; Josh. 3:3-4), which were already wrapped by the priests, guided by the priests and Eleazar (2:17;4:5-20; 10:21).
 - This would be at the center of the marching army. The holy things travel in the center. So, God is leading (through the cloud and ark), but is also still at the center of the army (through the holy objects).
10. Ephraim with Manasseh and Benjamin (2:24; 10:22-24).
11. Dan with Asher and Naphtali (2:31; 10:25-27).
 - The second largest army marches out last (2:31) – Protection in the back.
12. When everyone came to rest, Moses would say, “Return, O Lord, To the myriad thousands of Israel” (10:36).



Conclusion – What Does All Of This Teach Us About Our God?

- Our God speaks.
 - Those who follow false gods are forced to wonder, guess, or make up what their “god” wants; because they do not speak (Isa. 44:6-20). But, our God spoke to the Israelites and instructed them on what to do, how to do it, who was to do it, and when to do it. He even often told them why they were to do things in a certain way. And they obeyed the voice/ commands of the LORD (at least in the first 10 chapters...).
 - Hebrews 1:1-2 – “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”

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- Today, our God has spoken to us in His Son. And the Holy Spirit brought the apostles into remembrance of all that Jesus said and guided them into all truth (John 14:25-26; 16:12-15). The scriptures that we read today are breathed out by God “and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that they man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
 - So, let us listen to Him. Let us spend much time in His word. And let us obey His voice/ commands.
 - Our God cares about the individual and the collective.
 - The LORD had the people of Israel counted “head by head”, He listed their names, He even assigned individuals to their specific roles by name. He was concerned about the individuals of His people.
 - But, the LORD also was concerned about the collective, about the entire camp of Israel. He numbered them by their families, clans, armies, and tribes. He organized the collective camp of Israel, structuring them into a unified nation. They had various roles within the camp, but each role was valued, valuable, and built up the whole. Only when all the individuals worked together were they going to be effective as the people of God.
 - Today, God knows and cares about individuals. He knows/ “numbers” the very hairs of your head (Luke 12:6-7). We have various roles within the body, with varying gifts/ graces given to each of us, and every individual is valued and valuable in God’s church.
 - But, God is also concerned about the collective, about His church, about His body, about His people. We are each to contribute our part to build up the whole, and we will only function smoothly as the Lord’s body if we are united as one. – 1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12; Eph. 4; etc.
 - Our God is a God of order.
 - If you have learned anything from Numbers 1-4, 10, & 26, then it should at least impress you the order that God was structuring and requiring.
 - Our God does not change, so He is still a God of order. - So, we must live orderly lives (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 2 Thess. 3:11-12; Gal. 5:22-23; etc.), and our worship must also be done in order (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).
 - Don’t get so focused on order that we lose track of reflecting God’s nature. But, don’t get so loose that you no longer reflect the nature of God’s orderliness.
 - Our God cares about the details.
 - Many would skip Numbers 1-4, 10, & 26 because of its detail and specificity. But, our God didn’t skip that detail and specificity. He is the One who spoke it and demanded it. Details matter to the LORD. – Do details matter to us?

- Our God assigns roles as He sees fit.
 - God didn't pick every Israelite man to be one of the tribe leaders. God didn't make every tribe the leading tribe of the army. He didn't choose every tribe as His special tribe. He didn't pick every Levite to carry the holy objects. He didn't assign every Levite the role of being a priest. He didn't let every priest serve as the high priest. God assigned different roles to different people as He saw fit.
 - And when people disagreed with God's assignments and said to Moses and Aaron, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the Lord?" (16:3), then God did not take that lightly. He dealt powerfully with those who tried to take on roles that God hadn't assigned to them (Numbers 16-17), and then reminded them about who He had chosen to be a buffer zone that put to death any layman who came too close (18:1-7).
 - Today, God has assigned us to various roles, whether it be in the homes, in the church, etc. Let us take those roles seriously and never get too big a head that we step beyond the boundaries that God has set.
- Our God is King.
 - Kings would camp in the center of the army. They would march out in front of the army, or guide them from the center of the army. Armies move at the king's commands, settle at the king's commands, gather at the king's commands to hear the king's instructions. – The LORD dwelt in the center of the camp of Israel. The LORD marched out in front and in the middle of the camp. The Israelites moved and camped at the guidance of the LORD. The Israelites gathered at the commands of the LORD to hear the instructions of the LORD. The LORD was the King of Israel.
 - Today, God is still our King. He is the King of kings. So, He has every right to assign us our various roles, to instruct us on how to live and worship Him, and to give us armor to put on. And He leads us into battle.
- Our God dwells with His people. Our God is near.
 - God chose to dwell among His people. His presence entered the tabernacle and then He placed the tabernacle at the center of the camp.
 - Later, God went a step further in dwelling with His people by coming to this earth. Immanuel – God with us. And He brought us near to Him – "But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ... for through Him we both have our access in one Spirit to the Father" (Ephesians 2:13, 18). And we are now His tabernacle/ temple, and He is dwelling in us (Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:4-10; 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 6:16).
- Our God is holy and to be revered.
 - God dwelt with the Israelites, but they needed to leave some space between them and God. They needed the priests to be a guard, who killed any layman who came too near. They needed the Levites to be a buffer zone and put to death any layman who came too near. They needed purification and God told them "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). God deserved and demanded to be treated as holy, to be honored, to be revered.

- If God is going to dwell in and among us, then we too must be holy (1 Pet. 1:16). – “Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. “Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean; And I will welcome you. “And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” Says the Lord Almighty. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 6:16-7:1).

Extra Charts

Comparison of The Family Divisions In Genesis 46 & Numbers 26

Son/ Tribe (Mother)	Sons In Gen. 46	Sons/ Clans In Num. 26
Reuben (L)	Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, Carmi	Hanoch, Pallu (Eliab – Nemuel, Dathan, Abiram), Hezron, Carmi
Simeon (L)	Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, Shaul	Nemuel, Jamin, Jachin, Zerah, Shaul
Levi (L)	Gershon, Kohath, Merari	[Numbered Separately]
Judah (L)	Er, Onan , Shelah, Perez (Hezron, Hamul), Zerah	Er, Onan , Shelah, Perez (Hezron, Hamul), Zerah
Issachar (L)	Tola, Puvvah, Iob, Shimron	Tola, Puvah, Jashub, Shimron
Zebulun (L)	Sered, Elon, Jahleel	Sered, Elon, Jahleel
Gad (Z)	Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, Areli	Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ozni, Eri, Arod, Areli
Asher (Z)	Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah (Heber, Malchiel), Serah [a daughter]	Imnah, Ishvi, Beriah (Heber, Malchiel), Serah [a daughter]
Joseph (R)	Manasseh,	Machir (Gilead – Iezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Shemida, Hephher)
	Ephraim	Shuthelah (Eran), Becher, Tahan,
Benjamin (R)	Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, Ard	Bela (Ard, Naaman), Ashbel, Ahiram, Shephupham, Hupham
Dan (B)	Hushim	Shuham
Naphtali (B)	Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, Shillem	Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, Shillem

19 Times The Bible Lists The Tribes (from versenotes.org)

["https://versenotes.org/assets/images/tribes-of-israel-chart.png"](https://versenotes.org/assets/images/tribes-of-israel-chart.png)

Birth Order	Genesis 30	Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin*
List of Sons	Genesis 35	Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Gad, Asher
Jacob Blesses His Sons	Genesis 49	Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Benjamin
Israel Enters Egypt	Exodus 1	Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph**
First Census	Numbers 1	Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Levi†
Census Results	Numbers 1	Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Levi†
Camp Arrangement	Numbers 2	Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Levi†
Offerings	Numbers 7	Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali
Marching Order	Numbers 10	Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali
Spying Out Canaan	Numbers 13	Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Ephraim, Zebulun, Joseph, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali, Gad
Second Census	Numbers 26	Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, Benjamin, Dan, Asher, Naphtali
Dividing the Land	Numbers 34	Judah, Simeon, Benjamin, Dan, Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim, Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, Naphtali
Blessing and Cursing	Deuteronomy 27	Simeon, Levi, Judah, Joseph, Benjamin, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali
Moses's Blessing	Deuteronomy 33	Reuben, Judah, Levi, Benjamin, Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh, Zebulun, Issachar, Gad, Dan, Asher, Naphtali
Chronicle of the Sons of Israel	1 Chronicles 2	Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Asher
Amies Come to David	1 Chronicles 12	Judah, Simeon, Levi, Benjamin, Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, Zebulun, Naphtali, Dan, Asher, Reuben, Gad
David's Census	1 Chronicles 27	Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan
Ezekiel's Vision	Ezekiel 48	Reuben, Judah, Levi, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Simeon, Issachar, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Naphtali
John's Vision	Revelation 7	Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin

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* Benjamin is not born until Genesis 35
 ** Joseph was already in Egypt
 † Levi is explicitly excluded; see Numbers 1:47-53



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The Redemption of the Firstborn

Matthew Ness

Text: Numbers 3

Definition of redeem (Merriam-Webster)

re·deem (ri-'dēm)

redeemed; redeeming; redeems

transitive verb

1.

a: to buy back : REPURCHASE

b: to get or win back

2. : to free from what distresses or harms: such as

a: to free from captivity by payment of ransom

b: to extricate from or help to overcome something detrimental

c: to release from blame or debt : CLEAR

d: to free from the consequences of sin

3. : to change for the better : REFORM

4. : REPAIR, RESTORE

5.

a: to free from a lien by payment of an amount secured thereby

b: (1): to remove the obligation of by payment

the U.S. Treasury redeems savings bonds on demand

(2): to exchange for something of value

redeem trading stamps

c: to make good : FULFILL

6.

a: to atone for : EXPIATE

redeem an error

b: (1): to offset the bad effect of

(2): to make worthwhile : RETRIEVE

redeemable (ri-'dē-mə-bəl) adjective

Examples of redemption in The Law (Leviticus 25:25-28/47-55)

– 25:25-28 Kinsman redeeming the house on behalf of the poor Israelite.

□ The responsibility falls on the kinsman first, then the poor brother.

– 25:47-55 Kinsmen is to take the poor Israelite's debt upon himself.

□ In both instances the redeemer does not obtain his kinsmen or their house.

Stories of redemption by substitution in The Law

The offering of Isaac (Genesis 22)

- 22:7-8 Isaac's question and Abraham's reply.
- 22:13-14 Abraham's takeaway.
 - We can see ourselves in Isaac, and Christ in the ram

Judah offering himself (Genesis 43-45)

- 43:9 Judah offers himself as responsible for Benjamin.
- 44:30-34 Judah offers himself instead of Benjamin.
- 42:36 / 43:23 / 45:1-3 From Israel's perspective, Judah's offering of himself in place of Benjamin, brought back Benjamin, Simeon and Joseph.

God redeeming the firstborn of Israel with the tribe of Levi

The reason why the firstborns needed redeeming (Exodus 13:1-2,11-16)

- 13:1-2 Post passover, God declared that all firstborns belong to Him.
- 13:11-16 Unredeemed firstborn male animals are sacrificed, less information is given about Israel's firstborn sons, except that they will be redeemed.

The numbering of the firstborn and Levi (Numbers 3)

- 3:1-10: God claiming the tribe of Levi, and giving them to Aaron.
- 3:11-13: This is in exchange for the firstborns of Israel.
- 3:14-39: God has Moses count the Levites.
- 3:40-51: Designation and the difference given in money.
- The number problem of Verses of 22, 28, 34, 39
 - Either a rounding of numbers or a scribal mistake.

The offering of Levi (Numbers 8)

- 8:5-13 Purification and preparation to be given as an offering.
 - The laying of hands on head (Leviticus 16:19-22 / Leviticus 4).
- 8:14-19 Levites given to God, who gives them to Aaron, to do the service for Israel.
 - Serving Aaron would have been the duty of the firstborns.
 - (Also see Numbers 18:15)

- What God was owed is payed to satisfaction with this.
- In their service to God, they serve those who they have substituted.
- 8:20-22 They do exactly as God has commanded.

The relationship between the redeemers and redeemed (Numbers 18)

- 18:1-7 They are a gift to protect the priests, as the priests protect the people.
 - Also see 18:21 and 22
- 18:15-18 Though Levi has taken their place, firstborns must still be redeemed.
 - There is still a condition of redemption Israel is responsible for.
 - It does not mention Christ's parents doing this in Luke 2.
 - Perhaps because He was actually given to God?
- 18:21-23 Responsibilities and guilt specifically defined for each group.
 - Levi has taken to serve in place of the firstborn, but the firstborns still need to serve God.

Applications for our redemption in Christ

Comparing and Contrasting with Christ

- Christ and Levi took the debt of the redeemed, and serve the redeemed: Hebrews 7:25.
 - Levi took the firstborn's duty owed Aaron, Christ, our guilt: Isaiah 53:1-12.
- The substitutes serve the redeemed at the tabernacle, so the redeemed can safely serve: Hebrews 9:11-28 / 10:19.
 - Difference being, unlike Israel, we can enter the sanctuary.
- The substitutes can sympathize with the one's whom place they have taken: Hebrews 4:14-16 / 5:1-3.
 - Except Christ is perfect and sinless.

Helpful principles concerning substitution

- God's gifts of redemption can come with conditions.
 - God provided a ram for Abraham, but Abraham still had to offer Isaac first.
 - God took Levi in place of the first born, but Israel still needs to pay 5 silver.
 - Jesus died so we can be forgiven, but we must still have obedient faith.

-
- When God uses a substitute, He is able to be selective about the substitute takes on:
 - Concerning Israel, Levi took the firstborn's duty to serve Aaron.
 - The firstborn's still needed to serve God.
 - Levi was not on the hook for the firstborn's guilt.
 - Christ took our sin debt, not our bad attitudes, temptations, weaknesses that lead to sin.
 - He can and will HELP us by His word and spirit: Philippians 2:12-13.

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Rebellious People

Darryl Smelser

Text: Numbers 10-21

Introduction

At the scene of the burning bush, the LORD told Moses that He had come down to “bring them up from that land (Egypt -dbs) to a good and spacious land, to a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8). Milk requires cows or goats, and cows and goats require good, healthy grass. Honey requires bees, bees require the pollen of flowers, and flowers require good healthy plants from which to blossom. A land that flows with milk and honey is a good land.

But a Great and Terrible Wilderness Lay Between

At the end of their journey, Moses reminded Israel what they had come through after Sinai: “Then we set out from Horeb, and went through all that great and terrible wilderness which you saw” (Dt. 1:19).

He further characterized that territory: “He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water” (Dt. 8:15).

Another description is found in Jeremiah: “through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and pits, through a land of drought and deep darkness, through a land that no one crossed and where no man dwelt” (Jer. 2:6).

Regarding that last line about the uninhabited nature of the wilderness:

Archaeologists often disagree with one another. But on one fact they seem to agree. During the period when the Exodus was supposed to have occurred, there is no evidence of occupation in the entire Sinai Peninsula.

(Hershel Shanks, Biblical Archaeology Society,
“Kadesh-Barnea – In the Bible and on the Ground” Sept/Oct 2015).

As a side note, “no evidence” doesn’t necessarily mean no one at all was ever there. It just means there were never enough people settled there to leave evidence. Ishmael at least for a time lived in the wilderness of Paran (Gen. 21:20-21), which seems to have been south of Kadesh-barnea.

From that same BAS article:

Harvard’s Frank Moore Cross, who died in 2012, was America’s leading Biblical scholar, archaeologist and paleographer for a generation; he persuasively argued that even if the Israelites on the Exodus had included only a few hundred people, “They could not have survived for a generation in uninhabited Sinai—unless one takes at face value the legend of the heavens raining manna and the migration with miraculous frequency of myriads of quail.”

Today’s climate in the region indicates daily high temperatures in the mid 60’s during the winter. During the summer months however, daily highs average about 90 degrees, with no sources of

shade. One writer says, “I thought I understood the wilderness wanderings of Israel. Then I traveled through the wilderness. On my summer visits there, I never had to check the forecast. It only fluctuated from blistering to broiling” (Wayne Stiles, The Wilderness of Zin – “Inspiring Awe But Not Obedience To God,” waynestiles.com).

It is no wonder that the Israelites didn’t find it a pleasant journey.

An Anecdotal Comparison

In 2007 I led a group of friends hiking into Havasu Canyon, a side canyon to the Grand Canyon in Arizona, in the summertime. To avoid the worst of the heat, we waited until dusk to begin the trek. Six miles in, we reached a clear-water stream. We had started with water, but that was long exhausted at this point. We had also read strict warnings beforehand not to drink water from this stream, as it was contaminated by a horse farm upstream. I knew well what the person in authority had said. To put it in phrasing appropriate for our study, “Thou shalt not drink from the stream, for it is defiled.” But craving water, three or four of us immediately knelt down beside the stream and greedily drank thereof. That was after a brief 2-3 hours, protected from the sun by the night sky above us. Forty years is a fearsome thought.

We don’t excuse disobedience to God, but we miss part of the lesson if we overlook the very real challenges of the great and terrible wilderness.

Our text for this study takes us from Mt. Sinai to the Plains of Moab, opposite Jericho. We’ll divide the journey into three major sections, and then conclude with a fourth section:

From Sinai to Kadesh-barnea
From Kadesh-barnea and Back to Kadesh-barnea
From Kadesh-barnea to the Plains of Moab
Symbolism of the Journey as a Whole

From Sinai To Kadesh-barnea: A Direct Path To The Promised Land (10:11 – 14:45)

Israel’s departure from Mt. Sinai is recorded in Ex 10:11-12 and 10:33.

To Taberah

Israel journeys for three days, seeking a resting place. The people set up camp, and “became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the LORD” (11:1). This is not a promising start. Fire comes from the LORD and consumes some of the outskirts of the camp. Probably surprised, with no right to be, the people cry out to Moses, Moses prays to the LORD, and the fire dies out. They name the place Taberah, or “Burning” (11:3).

To Kibroth-hattaavah

There is no mention of travel before this next incident, but the people give a different name to its location, so it is considered here as a new location (although some believe it to be the same as Taberah).

Having arrived here, the people focus on the food they miss from life in Egypt, rather than on the land of milk and honey ahead: “Who will give us meat...we remember the fish...the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic!” They finish with a derisive swipe at the unappreciated manna. Ignoring the fact that God had delivered them from the Egyptians who “made their lives bitter with hard labor” (Ex. 1:14), they ungratefully add “We were well off in Egypt” (11:18).

Let’s say you adopt some kids from an abusive foster home. When you allow them challenges for their growth, they say “You never give us anything good, we were better off in the foster home! We want X!” – some thing they miss. How much better it would go if the Israelites learned to say “Thank you for all the good things you do for us. Today, could you give us some X?”

With such bitter attitudes under his charge, Moses feels the burden of leadership to the degree that he prefers to die if things are to continue in the same way (11:15). The LORD gives Moses 70 men to share the burden, a helpful blessing, and says He will send an overabundance of meat until it comes out of the people’s nostrils, an unpleasant blessing for them.

The surroundings of the camp are soon buried deep in quail, but as the people begin to eat, a severe plague breaks out, with some of the people dying. Israel names this place Kibroth-hattaavah, “Graves of Greediness” (11:34).

To Hazeroth

They remain here for some time (11:35), and here Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses for his Cushite wife; Miriam is struck with leprosy, and then healed.

To Kadesh-barnea in the Wilderness of Paran

Here the people camp (12:16), and from here the 12 spies will be sent north into Canaan. (13:1ff). It was 11 travel days from Sinai to Kadesh-barnea (Dt. 1:2), though the total days elapsed would be more than 11, since for example they remained at Hazeroth for some time.

At first, this destination is identified only as somewhere in the Wilderness of Paran (12:16), rather than as Kadesh-barnea specifically. Nevertheless, it is indeed Kadesh-barnea (cf. 13:25-26, Dt. 9:22-23).

Location of Kadesh-barnea

Today, a small Israeli town named Kadesh Barnea (population c. 300) sits immediately adjacent to the current Israeli-Egyptian border, but it holds no discernible likelihood of being the location of the ancient Kadesh-barnea.

About 23 miles south-southeast of modern Kadesh Barnea is a small spring known as Ain Qedeis (“ain” = “spring”). The name preserves an approximation of the name Kadesh (“Qedeis” – spellings in English vary, but q-d-s is common to them). Ain-Qedeis is located alongside a wadi with trees and other vegetation. Some argue this is the ancient Kadesh-barnea.

Within a broader valley about 18 miles nearly due south of the modern town of Kadesh Barnea, runs Wadi el-Qudeirat. Within this wadi is Ain el-Qudeirat, a spring with considerably more water flow than Ain Qedeis has. Although neither of these springs supply abundant year-round flow, Ain el-Qudeirat provides water for *lush* vegetation by wilderness standards, and that throughout a whole valley. This site has attracted the most support for being the Biblical Kadesh-barnea, and is the site mapped in this presentation.

About a mile down the wadi from the spring is a mound, Tell el-Qudeirat, indicating very early settlement – very early by Sinai standards anyway (see “Kadesh-Barnea – In the Bible and on the Ground,” Biblical Archaeology Society, September/October 2015). Visible on the surface are the remains of a “rectangular fortress erected in the last decades of the eighth century” B.C., about the time Assyria was carrying the Northern Kingdom of Israel into captivity. Below that surface level was an earlier oval-shaped fortification dating to the 10th to 9th centuries B.C. – the period of the early Divided Kingdom. Below the oval-shaped fortress are indications of an earlier settlement which unfortunately does not (as concluded by one Rudolph Cohen) provide information that could date the settlement. Lily Singer-Avitz, however, highlights a particular kind of pottery found at the site, known to be from the 11th to 12th centuries BC, “about the time of the Exodus from Egypt” – although that’s assuming an Exodus date later than the 1445-1405 date I prefer.

Although the indications at Tell el-Qudeirat don’t quite reach back to the late 1400’s, they do demonstrate the preeminence of this location as a waystation in the region, and the valley in which the wadi runs would serve as a ground for encampment much more effectively than other locations. Consequently this location is herein (and broadly among scholars) assumed to be our Kadesh-barnea.

Faithless Spies

From Kadesh-barnea, the LORD tells Moses to send 12 spies north into the land of Canaan, on a 40-day quest. Moses instructs these 12 men to bring back a report of the qualities of the land and its fruit, but also concerning “whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many,” and whether their cities are “like open camps or with fortifications.” If this instruction is from the LORD, it would raise the question as to why this needs to be investigated. God already knows the answer. The purpose would be in the Israelites themselves knowing the obstacles ahead.

There is reason to consider future challenges. One recalls the teaching of Jesus to count the cost and consider whether one is strong enough for battle or for serving Jesus (Lk. 14:26-35).. Are you ready for this, to carry your cross, to deem your own concerns as less important than the goal ahead? Are you ready to trust the Lord to carry you through the challenges so that you successfully obtain the inheritance reserved for you, remembering that you are “protected by the power of God through [*your -dbs*] faith”? (1 Peter 1:4-5)

The Israelites’ faith doesn’t rise to the occasion. Ten of the twelve spies (excluding Joshua and Caleb) report that the land “certainly does flow with milk and honey,” but conclude “we are not able...they are too strong for us” (13:31). They had seen the plagues in Egypt, the Red Sea divided, the defeat of Pharaoh’s army, the quaking and smoking mountain, but now they see only the earthly challenge, their own lack of earthly strength, and not the power of God. They still have no real trust in Him.

We see this weakness plaguing man, in scripture and in lives today. A problem presents itself, we don't see in our own abilities any way to survive it or overcome it, and so we excuse ourselves from obedience and success. We back away from it entirely, or we manage it with compromise. When Saul saw Goliath he froze, because he knew neither he nor his men could defeat the giant on their own. But David knew his own power wasn't the solution – the power of God was. The ten spies were like Saul. How easy it is to think we can't get through something, and then compromise our service due to this same problem!

The people as a whole agree with the ten faithless spies, and suggest a man be chosen to lead them back to Egypt! When Joshua and Caleb urge them to trust the LORD, the people prepare to stone them to death. Suddenly the glory of the LORD appears in the tabernacle, in view of all, and the people learn that instead of immediately obtaining the promised land, they will now wander in the wilderness for a total of 40 years while all the men over 20 years of age who doubted will fall as corpses in the desert. Their wives and children will be given the land without them. The 10 faithless spies would die first – they die then and there by a plague (14:36-37).

Having absorbed some perspective, the people reconsider, and decide to take the Promised Land after all, departing the next morning against the counsel of Moses, “Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD ...the LORD is not with you!” (14:39-45). They go regardless, while Moses and the ark of the covenant remain at Kadesh-barnea. They are soundly defeated by Amalekites and Canaanites.

From Kadesh and Back To Kadesh: Uncertain Itineraries (15:1 – 20:1)

Chapter 14 concluded the story concerning the 12 spies and Israel's faithless response in Kadesh-barnea. Now, chapters 15-19 reveal no destinations nor travel away from Kadesh-barnea, yet at some point in these chapters Israel must have left Kadesh-barnea, because we read in 20:1 that “Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the Wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed at Kadesh.” We don't know what directions they went from Kadesh-barnea, but we know they went, and later returned.

We have here in chapters 15-19:

- various instructions and laws
- the account of the man caught gathering wood on the Sabbath
- more instruction and law
- Korah's rebellion
- more instruction and law.

Where Israel was at any point in these chapters (15:1 to 19:22) is a mystery. We have location names from this period in a summary of their journeys in Numbers 33, but nearly all of those place names are unidentifiable.

There is no apparent way to know how long after the spy incident they remained in Kadesh-barnea before leaving (months, years, decades?), or how long they were away before returning (months, years, decades?). This period of wandering from Kadesh and back to Kadesh may have been a large part of the 40 years, or it may have been a relatively short portion thereof.

LOCATIONS, FROM SINAI TO PLAINS OF MOAB

Narrative Num. 10-22

List Num. 33

10:33	Mount of the Lord/Sinai	15	Sinai
11:3	Taberah	16	Kibroth-hattaavah
11:34	Kibroth-hattaavah	17	Hazeroth
11:35	Hazeroth	18	Rithmah
12:16/13:26	Wilderness of Paran/Kadesh	19	Rimmon-perez
		20	Libnah
		21	Rissah
		22	Kehelathah
		23	Mt Shepher
		24	Haradah
		25	Makheloth
		26	Tahath
		27	Terah
		28	Mithkah
20:1	Wilderness of Zin/Kadesh	29	Hashmonah
20:22	Mount Hor (Aaron dies)	30	Moseroth
21:1	the Way of Atharim	31	Bene-jaakan
21:3	Hormah	32	Hor-haggidgad
21:4	the Way of the Red Sea	33	Jotbathah
21:10	Oboth	34	Abronah
21:11	Iyeabarim	35	Ezion-geber
21:12	Wadi Zered	36	Wilderness of Zin / Kadesh
21:13	beyond the Arnon	37	Mt Hor (Aaron dies)
21:16	Beer	41	Zalmonah
21:18	Mattanah	42	Punon
21:19	Nahaliel	43	Oboth
21:19	Bamoth	44	Iyeabarim
21:20	valley in Moab near Pisgah	45	Dibon-gad
21:23-25	Jahaz, Heshbon, etc.	46	Almondiblathaim
21:33-35	Edrei, Bashan, etc.	47	Abarim/Nebo (cf. 27.12-13)
22:1	Plains of Moab	48	Plains of Moab

One *known* location just before the return to Kadesh is indicated in the Numbers 33 list of (mostly *unknown*) encampments. Just before returning to Kadesh, Israel “camped in Ezion-geber; and they journeyed from Ezion-geber, and camped in the Wilderness of Zin, that is, Kadesh” (33:35-36). Ezion-geber was at the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqabah (eastern branch of the Red Sea).

There are two factors which might make a person wonder if there were two locations known as Kadesh. One factor is that sometimes we read of Kadesh, and other times Kadesh-barnea. These

two names are used interchangeably for the same location. See for example 13:26 which tells us the spies returned to camp in “Kadesh” after scouting the land, and Joshua 14:6 which mentions that God told Moses in “Kadesh-barnea” that Joshua and Caleb would not die in the wilderness like the rest over 20 years of age. They are the same location.

The other factor is that different passages indicate that the site was in either the Wilderness of Paran or else in the Wilderness of Zin. Perhaps then there had to be two places named Kadesh? That seems to be an unnecessary inference. The exact areas of both these wildernesses are not precisely known today, and furthermore we should not suppose that wildernesses ever had precisely surveyed and demarcated borders. One very plausible explanation is that the Wilderness of Paran lies roughly to the south of Kadesh, and the Wilderness of Zin lies roughly to the north, with Kadesh lying in the general area where one would roughly consider himself leaving one wilderness area and entering the other (though not, as far as I know, at a precise line on the map). Thus sometimes Kadesh-barnea is placed in the Wilderness of Paran, and sometimes in the Wilderness of Zin. Some argue this. Others say that Zin was a much larger wilderness and that Paran lay within Zin, so that a location could be described as in both of them. Still others argue the opposite, that Paran was larger, and that Zin lay within Paran. With our current knowledge, or lack thereof, none of this necessitates two locations named Kadesh as part of the wilderness wandering.

Korah’s Rebellion (16:1 – 18:7)

It is unclear whether Korah’s rebellion occurred in Kadesh-barnea during the initial encampment there or during the wanderings after leaving Kadesh-barnea. Nevertheless, we will deal with that episode here in this section From Kadesh to Kadesh, since that encompasses all three possibilities.

Wherever it took place, we find Korah, a relative (possibly a first cousin) of Moses and Aaron, rebelling against them and challenging their divinely arranged leadership. “Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of *Kohath*,” (16:1) was of the tribe of Levi. Similarly, Moses and Aaron were of the tribe of Levi, sons of Amram, who was also a son of *Kohath* (Ex. 2:1-10, 6:18,20).

Korah takes with him Dathan, Abiram, and On, these last three from the tribe of Reuben. They tell Moses and Aaron the two had gone far enough, and that Moses and Aaron had no right to exalt themselves above the assembly, since all the congregation was holy, “every one of them” (16:3). Korah and the three Reubenites are joined in this rebellion by 250 leaders of the people.

In so doing, Korah and the Levites who were among the 250 leaders despised the special and proximal role the LORD had given them to serve at the tabernacle. Moses turns their accusation around, telling them *they* have gone far enough, and he raises the issue of despising their assigned and privileged role (16:9-10). At some point following, in the abbreviated description of events, Dathan and Abiram have returned to their own tents, and when they are summoned by Moses, they refuse to come back, but include a complaint in their reply: that instead of bringing Israel to a land flowing with milk and honey, Moses had “brought (them) up OUT of a land flowing with milk and honey” – Egypt – to “die in the wilderness!” Moses demands the presence of all of them on the following day. When Korah assembles them, the glory of the LORD appears, and Moses tells the rest of the people to withdraw and stand back, away from the households of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Moses says that if Korah, Dathan, and Abiram die the death of all men, the conclusion would be that Moses was not sent by God to lead them, but that if their death is “an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them,” then Israel would know that these men had “spurned the LORD.” Of course, the ground splits open and swallows them immediately. Fire

then comes forth from the LORD and consumes the 250 men who had supported them.

Regarding the opening ground and the consuming fire, R.K. Harrison, in his Introduction to the Old Testament (pp 629-630), offers the explanation of one Greta Hort, as to how these events happened. I find it to be a very unnecessary approach to the earth opening up and the fire that consumed the 250, but thought it worthy to be included in *an outline about people who forget the power of God*. Harrison says:

Of the various explanations offered for the phenomenon of the earth's swallowing up of the rebels, an attractive one (*really? -dbs*) has been proposed by Hort, who located the incident in the Arabah between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah. In several parts of this region are to be found mud flats in various stages of development, the upper layers of which are formed of mud, clay, and salt. When dry such a structure can be crossed readily, but when wet it will not bear weight to any significant extent. Hort has supposed that the Israelites withdrew from the tents of the rebels just before a storm approached. The latter weakened the crust of the ground to the point where it collapsed, and during the storm the two hundred and fifty princes were struck by lightning. While in the nature of the case it is impossible to say precisely what happened on that occasion, the physical conditions that obtain in specific areas of the Sinai peninsula need not be regarded in any sense as incompatible with the tenor of the narrative.

It can also be suggested that the God who turned the Nile to blood, caused three days of total darkness, and divided the Red Sea could cause the earth to split open even if it were made of tempered steel, without being "incompatible with the tenor of the narrative." It's that last line that is so objectionable. Harrison, lacking appreciation for God accomplishing whatever He desires to accomplish, borders on being as faithless as the Israelites who thought victory over the Canaanites was "incompatible with the tenor of the narrative!"

Korah's rebellion was a grab for authority, probably in general, but also for Aaron's priestly authority. We see this in Moses' question "And are you seeking for the priesthood also?" (16:10), and in the events which follow:

- (1) The censers of all these men are to be hammered into plating for the altar, as a reminder that laymen are not to "come near to burn incense before the LORD," (16:38-40) but only the descendants of Aaron (Korah was a Levite, but not descended from Aaron).
- (2) Afterward 12 rods are brought, one for each tribe, with Aaron's name inscribed on the rod for the Levites, and it was Aaron's rod that sprouted, blossomed, and bore almonds, with the LORD declaring that Aaron's rod was to be kept "as a sign against the rebels" (17:1-11).
- (3) In the following chapter, Aaron is further confirmed as chosen by the LORD, with the message that it is he (with his descendants) who shall "attend to the obligations of the tent of meeting and the obligations of the altar," and who "shall attend to (their) priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil...but the outsider who comes near (*non-Aaronite Levites, -dbs*) shall be put to death." The other Levites are to "serve" Aaron and his sons, and are a "gift" to Aaron and his sons (18:1-7). The Levites had to understand that they belong to Aaron, and are not his equals.

The Levites could have profited by the example in Jude 6, about angels who "did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode."

In the midst of all this episode, there is another moment of rebelliousness (16:41-50). On the day after the sudden live burial of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and the burning of the 250, all the

congregation grumble against Moses and Aaron, saying “You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD’s people!” – as if the congregation is on the LORD’s side, defending the LORD’s interests and His people, but it’s evil Moses and evil Aaron who ... miraculously caused the ground to open and swallow those three men and their households? The people then turn to the tent of meeting as the glory of the LORD once again appears. The LORD again seems ready to destroy the whole assembly. A plague begins among the people, and Moses directs Aaron to put fire from the altar in his censer and to bring it and make atonement for the people. The plague is checked, but not before 14,700 more die there.

Rebellious people will rebel and all the while make it seem like they are on the side of God and righteousness.

There is still another question to mention in the Korah episode. What happened with On the son of Peleth??

When Korah first rose up against Moses and Aaron, he had with him Dathan, Abiram, and On. Further into the story we continue to see Korah, and also Dathan and Abiram. When the latter two don’t appear at the tent of meeting at a later point, they are sent for and they reply. Eventually, they share the same fate as Korah: sucked alive into the earth. But On disappears from the text as soon as we move past verse 1. So as asked time and again by curious people, what happened to On the son of Peleth?

I have found two explanations, neither of which seem likely, but I include them here.

Staff editors of TheTorah.com (“Where Did On Disappear to?”) write that “scholars have suggested a solution based on the genealogy” in Numbers 26, hypothesizing a scribal error in 16:1. That passage in our accepted text reads:

“Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth”

Numbers 26:8-9 tells about the same Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and adds the fact that Eliab’s father was Pallu. The supposition is that there never was any “On” nor his father “Peleth;” that “Peleth” is a scribal error where Pallu was supposedly written in original text, and that the text should read:

“Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, son of Pallu”

The Hebrew characters that vary between Pallu and Peleth do not so closely resemble each other as to easily cause the kind of misreading that leads to common scribal errors. But more significantly, even with the confusion between Peleth and Pallu, “and On” would still be in the reading! The scribe would have had to make two errors in the same phrase, because if this hypothesis is correct, “and On” simply disappears from the reading without explanation. If the scribe merely substituted Peleth in place of Pallu we would suppose the original to read:

“Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On the son of Pallu”

So we would still be wondering “What happened to On the son of *Pallu* in this rebellion?”

The Talmud offers a different explanation, crediting On's wife with pulling him out of the situation. In the tractate Sanhedrin, chapter 11 includes the following scenario:

Rabh said: The wife of On ben Peleth saved him from being among the congregation of Korah. She said to him: What is the difference to you? If Moses will be master, you are only a follower, and the same will be for you if Korah will be the master. And to his answer: What shall I do, I was with them in consultation, and swore to take part with them? she said: I know that the whole congregation is holy, as it reads [Num. xvi. 3]: "For the whole of the congregation are all of them holy;" remain in your house and I will save you. She made him drink wine to intoxication, and she made him sleepy in the house, and she herself sat outside at the entrance of the house, uncovered her head and dishevelled her hair. And every one coming to his house, to call upon On, when he saw the uncovered head of the woman, returned. She, however, continued to sit there, till the congregation was swallowed.

The needle on the credibility meter hovers at the low end. There doesn't seem to be a good explanation available to us for what happened with On after the initial protest.

Kadesh I and Kadesh II – Two Failures at Kadesh-barnea

Having returned to Kadesh-barnea in 20:1, our next episode is that of Moses' sin in connection with the water-giving rock (20:2-13). Since another speaker has the topic "Moses, Aaron, and Miriam," and is assigned this passage, this episode will be mostly reserved for that presentation. However, here in written form, we'll address one aspect of it.

Earlier, during Israel's initial encampment at Kadesh-barnea, 10 of the 12 spies and most of Israel failed to trust the power of the LORD. They failed to have faith that the LORD could and would carry them through to conquer the Promised Land. Consequently, they would die rather than enter the Land.

Now in Israel's later encampment at Kadesh-barnea, Moses is commanded to take his rod, and speak to the rock. Instead, he struck the rock. He failed to faithfully obey what the LORD commanded to be done. Consequently, he too would die rather than enter the Land.

These are two kinds of failure: failure to trust the LORD's power and help in otherwise difficult situations, and failure to obey what the LORD commanded. The result was the same.

From Kadesh to the Plains of Moab: Approaching the Promised Land (20:14 – 22:1)

An attempt had been made to head directly from Sinai to the Promised Land, but faithlessness and rebellion at Kadesh-barnea scuttled that plan. Afterward they remained in Kadesh (how long, we don't know, but it was "many days" Dt. 1:46), and afterward wandered about from place to place, and eventually returned to Kadesh once again. At some point after returning to Kadesh, and after Moses' rod-and-rock-and-water incident, it is time to once again head for the Promised Land.

A request for peaceably passing through Edomite territory is sent from Kadesh-barnea (20:14-21). It is rejected. Israel heads east anyway, and comes to Mt. Hor, as close as one can get without

actually entering Edom. Mt. Hor rises from the depths of the Arabah, immediately next to Petra. The camp was likely situated in the Arabah below the mountain. Here the LORD tells Aaron he must die on this mountain, because of rebellion against God in the incident of providing water from the rock – presumably because Aaron was standing there with Moses, participating with him in that event.

Nevertheless, now heading for the final approach to the Land, it seems Israel gains courage. When a Canaanite king from the Negev attacks and takes some captives, Israel vows to the LORD, “If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities.” And so they did (21:1-3).

Sometimes when the reward for faithfulness is far away, we don’t have the courage to keep faith, but when the goal is closer, our courage and faith increase. May we keep faith no matter how distant the goal may be.

But then, as Elijah suffered discouragement right after a remarkable victory, Israel soon becomes discouraged – and rebellious – again.

The Fiery Serpents (21:4-9)

Setting out from Mt. Hor, they traveled some distance south along the Way of the Red Sea (21:4), either right through the Arabah or along its side. This doesn’t mean they went *to* the Red Sea, but only far enough south along the road called such, in order to reach the southern limit of Edomite territory so they could turn east and go around Edom. These first two directions they go, south and then east, are both heading *away* from the Promised Land. For this or other reasons, impatience appears again.

They 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 we loathe this miserable food!” – the manna He gifted them.

Again and again, His people fail to lovingly thank the LORD for what He gives, and to kindly ask for the thing perceived to be needed. Instead, it’s not spoken to the LORD at all, it’s just an impatient exclamation of how terrible everything is. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Ph’s 4:6).

In response to their complaints, The LORD brought “fiery serpents” into their camp. Many were bitten, and many died.

We’ve already seen that Dt. 8:15 described the “great and terrible wilderness” as a place of “fiery serpents and scorpions.” Secular sources comment on the number of snakes, and venomous snakes in particular, that dwell in these lands today. Alfred Edersheim ([Bible History - Old Testament](#), p. 264) quotes from Kurtz’ [History of the Old Covenant](#):

The sand on the shore (*of the Gulf of Aqaba, -dbs*) showed traces of snakes on every hand. They had crawled there in various directions. Some of the marks appeared to have been made by animals which could not have been less than two inches in diameter. My guide told me that snakes were very common in these regions. Another traveler on exactly the route of the children of Israel states: “In the afternoon a large and very mottled snake was brought to us, marked with fiery spots and spiral lines,

which evidently belonged, from the formation of its teeth, to one of the most poisonous species....The Bedouins say that these snakes, of which they have great dread, are very numerous in this locality.”

Various positions are taken on why the serpents are described as fiery: the color of the serpents, the fierceness of their attack, a resulting red inflammation after a bite, or a burning sensation and/or fever after a bite. As a remedy, the LORD told Moses to “make a fiery,” our translations adding *serpent* to the phrase. The Hebrew *saraph* (fiery), incidentally, is the same word translated *seraphim* in Isaiah 6, and is nearly identical to the common Hebrew word “burn” (only the length of the second vowel differentiates between the two). The fact that the metallic serpent Moses was to craft is also called fiery might indicate that the word refers not to physical symptoms of a bite, nor to how the living serpents attacked, but to the appearance of the creatures, i.e. their color. As the text moves on to the finished sculpture, our translations render it made of the alloys bronze or brass, but the Hebrew word here can easily be translated “copper” as in Dt. 8:9, where copper is spoken of as being dug from the ground, and which, even if the people didn’t have copper items at hand, is in supply in this wilderness region.

Of the venomous snakes currently living in the region, *Echis coloratus* (known as the Painted Saw-scaled Viper and other common names) has coloring very similar to the bright copper of a new penny (although it can change to a browner appearance depending on the color of rocks around it – yet there is plenty of coppery colored rock found in this region). If this or a similar snake were the culprit, it would make sense to make a fiery colored image, and to use copper to do so.

At any rate, after the infestation of fiery serpents, the people quickly take a more humble attitude than that represented by their complaint, and say, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD that He may remove the serpents from us!” At the LORD’s direction to craft the fiery (21:8), Moses made a copper serpent (21:9) and placed it on a standard for the people to look to, and live.

As Jesus speaks to Nicodemus (John 3:14-15), He says “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes may in Him have eternal life.” An unclean serpent makes for a curious parallel with Christ. Gordon Wenham comments on this (The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, “Numbers,” pp. 157-158):

I suggest that the clue to the symbolism should be sought in the general principles underlying the sacrifices and purificatory rites in the Old Testament. Animals are killed, so that sinful men who deserve to die may live. Blood which pollutes when it is spilled can be used to sanctify and purify men and articles. The ashes of a dead heifer cleanse those who suffer from the impurity caused by death. In all these rituals there is an inversion: normally polluting substances or actions may in a ritual context have the opposite effect and serve to purify. In the case of the copper serpent similar principles operate. Those inflamed and dying through the bite of living snakes were restored to life by a dead reddish-coloured snake. It may be that copper was chosen not only because its hue matched the inflammation caused by the bites (or due to the color of the snakes, -dbs), but because red is the colour that symbolizes atonement and purification.

Spilt blood, which is unclean, cleanses. Dead animals, which are unclean, atone. The unclean serpent (also with a psychological aspect of evil from the beginning), lifted on a standard, heals. And Christ, lifted on the cross and representing sin and impurity, saves.

Beyond Edom and Moab, Heading Northward

Rounding the southern territory of Edom, the Israelites camp successively at Oboth, Iyeabarim at the border of Moab, and in the wadi Zered. From there they cross the Arnon which divides Moab from Amorite territory, and camp on the north side of the Arnon. Several other encampment locations are mentioned in Numbers 21, leading eventually to “the valley that is in the land of Moab, at the top of Pisgah, which overlooks the wasteland” (21:20).

From here Israel marches north and takes the entire east bank of the Jordan, the land of the Amorites and the Bashanites (21:21-35). Having accomplished that, they come down and camped in the Plains of Moab, next to the Jordan River, across from Jericho (22:1).

At last they have arrived at the doorstep to Canaan. Their long journey, the great and terrible wilderness, the days of wandering, the 40 years, are all in the past. Moses will not enter the Land, but the rest of the nation is ready to cross the Jordan, to enter the Promised Land, and enjoy the blessings of the land of milk and honey.

Symbolism of the Journey as a Whole

The apostle Paul explains (1 Cor. 10:1-12) that the events in that wilderness happened to Israel for us, that we should learn.

The typology of the OT certainly points us toward understanding God’s deliverance of Israel from slavery, to be His people in the promised land of milk and honey, as a foreshadowing of God’s deliverance from slavery to sin, to be His saved people in His presence, eventually in Heaven.

Crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites were saved from their slave masters and from their slavery. Then crossing the Jordan, they entered into their Promised Land. That second crossing is (as far as I’ve found) not identified in the NT as parallel to our leaving this life and passing into the presence of God, at least not in any explicit way. The typology suggests it though, and it’s appropriate that we sing songs comparing the crossing of the Jordan to our own future crossing from this physical world into the promised Heavenly land we’ve been craving as we traverse this life.

“On Jordan’s stormy banks I stand
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan’s fair and happy land
Where my possessions lie”
– On Jordan’s Stormy Banks

“When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious fears subside;
Bear me through the swelling current,
Land me safe on Canaan’s side”
– Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah

“And when my task on earth is done,
When by Thy grace the vict’ry’s won
E’en death’s cold wave I will not flee,
Since God through Jordan leadeth me”
– He Leadeth Me

The first crossing, the crossing of the Red Sea, is in fact highlighted by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:1-2, where he calls their crossing a *baptism* into Moses in the sea. They’ve been brought out of slavery and they accept God’s law in a covenant relationship. Correspondingly, when we are buried with

Christ through baptism, we are no longer to be slaves to sin (Rom. 6:4-6) and enter into a covenant with our Lord.

If the Red Sea crossing foreshadows our deliverance from slavery at the time of our baptism into Christ, and if the Jordan crossing foreshadows our final entry into all that God has planned for us, then the 40 years of wandering in the great and terrible wilderness, with all its difficulty, foreshadows our Christian walk in this world. We sing about this too:

“Here we are but straying pilgrims; Here our path is often dim”

“Guide me O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land”

Perhaps we don’t like to think our earth-bound walk in Christ should be foreshadowed by that hot, dry, difficult, unpleasant trek through a great and terrible wilderness. Yet, it is.

Jesus warns us, “In this world you will have tribulation” (Jn. 16:33). Paul writes to the Thessalonians about “your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure” (2 Th. 1:4). When the Corinthians are acting like they are superior and distinguished like kings, Paul characterizes his own life, “we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure,” and then says, “be imitators of me!” (1 Cor. 4:7-16). Paul tells Timothy, “Suffer hardship with me” (2 Tim. 2:3).

It’s doubtful for sure, but I like to think the words “tent” and “walk” in 2 Cor 5:1-7 were included with the wilderness journey in mind: “For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God...for indeed in this one we groan...we walk by faith...”

We groan. Who among us does not have to deal with difficulties? We go through seasons when the temperature of our lives is 90, with the heat of pain and difficulty radiating down on us all the day long, yet we have to keep walking. We thirst for relief from church problems, family or extended family problems, economic problems, health problems, personal faith problems, etc. Difficulties can be painful, sorrowful, and debilitating. To quote R.E.M., “Everybody hurts.”

We might react to all this by echoing the Israelites, complaining, thinking it’s all unfair, acting rebelliously. We might even miss the days when we enjoyed freedom from some of these difficulties, forgetting that those were days of slavery. We might go so far as to say, “We were well off” before we accepted this journey.

Israel’s journey through the great and terrible wilderness teaches us to understand that life in this world is not Eden. We proved ourselves unworthy and lost that. **Expect a wilderness.**

There is another side to all this.

At the Plains of Moab, Moses reminded the people (Dt. 2:7) of the LORD’s presence with them:

the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing.

Again (Dt. 29:5) we read:

I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot.

The Psalmist concurs (Ps.78):

He divided the sea and caused them to pass through...He led them with the cloud by day, and all the night with a light of fire...He split the rocks in the wilderness and gave them abundant drink like the ocean depths...He rained down manna upon them to eat...man did eat the bread of angels...He, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them, and often He restrained His anger.

Yes, it was still hot, and long, and exhausting, and lacked the dietary variety that might be had elsewhere, and would have been this way even without their rebelliousness.

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance” (Js. 1:2).

“It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ...shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live? ...He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness....Therefore, *strengthen the hands that are weak, and the knees that are feeble, and make straight paths for your feet*” (Heb. 12:7-13).

The Israelites, however, thought it was too much. They didn't have faith that God would provide their needs when they needed them. They didn't have faith that God would deliver the walled cities of Canaan to them. And they didn't want to endure sacrifice in order to gain what was promised.

May we be better! God knows our wanderings and blesses us! He'll provide the true needs of His faithful children, and He is just as powerful to help us through whatever challenges we face, as He was to deliver the walled city of Jericho.

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Moses, Aaron, & Miriam

Don Bunting

Text: Numbers 12 & 20

Introduction

“Hear now My words:
 If there is a prophet among you,
 I, the Lord, make Myself known to him in a vision;
 I speak to him in a dream.
 Not so with My servant Moses;
 He is faithful in all My house.
 I speak with him face to face,
 Even plainly, and not in dark sayings;
 And he sees the form of the Lord.
 Why then were you not afraid
 To speak against My servant Moses?”

Numbers 12:6-8

This will be a discussion of spiritual leaders who work as servants, servants of God, but servants responsible to the Lord. The people for whom they minister are children of God wandering in a wilderness of testing. It is a stressful journey for everybody. What is needed will be a merciful God and a humble leader. I would like to bring this message to our lives and our work.

I will be talking about Moses, Aaron and Miriam. My key texts will be Numbers chapters 12 and 20. That includes:

- Num. 12 - Moses' unique relationship with God. Aaron & Miriam's complaint.
- Num. 20 - the consequence for Moses and Aaron.

Numbers 12:6-8 defines a unique and special relationship God has with Moses and indicates there is significant history in this relationship (*Aaron and Miriam should have known better*). Moses' unique relationship with God begins in Exodus and is developed through the entire Pentateuch.

Exodus sets the stage in Egypt and introduces God's main character: Moses.

- called to lead (*joined by Aaron, Ex. 4:14-17, 1st mention, 83*)
- faces a reluctant people with the promise of deliverance
- meets Pharaoh with God's demand – *let my people go*
- baptized in the Red Sea and saved (*Miriam's prophecy, 1st mention, Ex 15:20-21*)

God already has a special relationship with Moses.

- stands before God at Sinai – Exodus 19
- plead for the people already – Exodus 32-34
- Exodus 39 & 40: "Lord spoke to Moses and Moses did accordingly" *19 times*

Moses and the Lord in Numbers: Speaks God's Word to the People.

- A. First words in the book: "The Lord spoke to Moses..."
Num. 1-18 – (1/2 of the book) words repeated 50 times
In contrast: Moses & Aaron -- 9 times in whole book
- B. God spoke from the Mercy Seat – Num. 7:89...8:1-3
And Moses speaks His word to Aaron (the High Priest)
- C. Moses inquires of God re. “special circumstances” – Num. 9:8-9
If there are exceptions, God will make and reveal them
- D. God spoke detailed instructions – Num. 10:1-10 -- *I AM the Lord your GOD*
Things we may consider to be insignificant

What can we do with the word?

Change? Ignore? Edit? Contradict? Alter? Update? Supplement?
Modernized? Dismissed?

What if we do not understand? Not agree? Not like? Not heard before?

Can we really know God's will/intention?

Moses and the People in Numbers: Speaks Peoples' Complaint to God.

- A. Moses' song of praise – *appropriate praise and prayer* – Num. 10:35-36
- B. Lord hears the peoples' complaint -- Num. 11:1
- C. As the people cry out to Moses -- Num. 11:2-3
- D. Influence of the *rabble* -- Num. 11:4-6 -- affects Israelites -- reinterprets God's truth
- E. Moses is displeased, complains - overreacting? -- Num. 11:10-15, 21-23
- F. God's solution / help -- 70 Elders, God's message, meat given -- Num. 11:16-24
- G. Jealousy in leadership -- Num. 11:25-30
 - a. v. 25 -- never again ... *not allowed or not desire?*
 - b. v. 26-30 -- they not doing it right? *Moses wishes all were prophets*
 - c. v. 31-35 -- God dealt properly with the people, holiness prevails

Moses, Miriam and Aaron in Numbers: Meekest Man in All the Earth.

Micah 6:4 – Mos. Aar. & Mir.
“sent before you”

- A. Accusation against Moses -- Num. 12:1-2
 - a. because of his foreign wife! Prejudiced & Jealous!
 - b. *“God speaks through us, too!” – you are not better.*
 - c. older brother & (sister) were tired of following baby brother (?)
- B. Reaction of Moses to this treachery -- Num. 12:3 -- *what reaction?*
- C. God’s reckoning -- Num. 12:4-10 – sounds like the “Father”
 - God explains Himself with clear endorsement of Moses (6-8)
 - What has been threatened? What might be lost?
 - The authority of God in His chosen messenger(s) - immutable!
- D. Judgment -- Remorse -- Intercession -- Mercy – Forgiveness
 - a. God leaves angry (9)
 - b. Miriam alone is punished, leprosy (10)
 - c. Aaron intercedes for her through Moses (11-12)
 - d. Moses keeps on being the meekest man in all the earth (13-16)

Moses and The Rebellious People: Leads in Humble Righteousness, Mostly.

- A. Refuse to enter the land after the spies report -- Num. 14
 - 1. Moses intercedes for the people -- Num. 14:11-20
 - 2. Undying devotion to God, His plan, His unworthy people
- B. Korah's rebellion against Moses and Aaron -- Num. 16
 - 1. Rebellion with a claim of reputation and holiness -- Num. 16:1-3
 - 2. Moses strong passive stand -- Num. 16:4-14
 - 3. Moses is angry with the people before God -- Num. 16:15-16
 - 4. Moses acting on behalf of the congregation -- Num. 16:17-19
 - 5. God's test to identify His leaders -- Num. 16:20-40
 - 6. Next day complaints of the people -- Num. 16:41-45
 - 7. Moses and Aaron save the people -- Num. 16:46-50
 - 8. Aaron's rod buds -- Num. 17:1-13

[Miriam's Death -- Num. 20:1]

- C. Rebellion at the Waters of Meribah -- Num. 20
 - 1. People gathered together against Moses and Aaron -- Num 20:2-5
 - 2. Moses and Aaron appeal to the Lord -- Num 20:6-8
 - 3. Moses and Aaron sin -- Num. 20:9-11
 - Must we bring water for you out of this rock?
 - Strike the rock? (speak to the rock)
 - Resentful, self-seeking anger? [*Righteous Indignation*] Moses got mad.
 - Rebelled against my word – Num. 20:24

4. God judges Moses and Aaron -- Num. 20:12-13
Because you did not believe Me to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel,
therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.

[Aarons' Death -- Num. 20:22-29]

Moses at the End of Life: Has Nothing if Not for God's Mercy.

- * Moses pleads with God to enter the land -- Deut. 3:23-29 – do your job.
- 1. Moses to see the land -- Num. 27:12-14
- 2. Moses concerned for the people -- Num. 27:15-19
- 3. Joshua chosen to receive *some* of the authority of Moses -- Num. 27:18-23
- 4. Moses ... get back to work – Num. 28:1...36:13

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Balaam

Nathan Quinn

Text: Numbers 22-31

Introduction

Key background texts in the account of Balaam:

Genesis 12:1-3 *“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; **And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse.** And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.’”*

Genesis 13:16 *“**I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth,** so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered.”*

Genesis 28:14 *“**Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth,** and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”*

Genesis 49:9-10 *“**Judah is a lion’s whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”**”*

At the heart of the events surrounding Balaam are the promises that God made to the Patriarchs and God’s promise to bless them. We often speak of the 3 promises made to Abraham: the land promise, the nation promise, and the seed promise. While these are the three major promises Abraham is given more promises which are to some extent extensions of the three. For example, Abraham would be given a great name. Another example, and the one most relevant to our study of Numbers 22-24, is how God would respond to those who “bless” Abraham and those who “curse” Abraham.

The books of the Law as well as the Bible on a whole are very much about who God will bless and who are cursed. The Bible opens with God blessing humanity (Genesis 1:28, 5:2), and tragically the world is quickly stained by the curses of sin (Genesis 3:14-19, 4:11). One of the final sections of the books of the Law contains the blessings and the curses of the Law (Deuteronomy 28). God placed blessings and curses before them (Deuteronomy 30:1). God alone has the authority to determine the criteria and bring about the fulfillment of the blessings offered. His proclamations are immutable. There is no power of man that can undo what God has decreed. This generation in the plains of Moab is a blessed generation.

The Setting - Numbers 22:1

The events in the plains of Moab immediately precede the entering into the land of Canaan. The 40 years of the wilderness wandering are coming to an end. The sons of Israel are camped beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho. The book of Deuteronomy will end with Moses traveling up from the plains of Moab to die on the top of Mount Pisgah, and Israel mourning the loss of Moses in these plains (Deuteronomy 34:1,8).

As the Israelites come to the plains of Moab, the old generation has died off. On their way to the plains, Moses is provoked and speaks rashly with his lips. Aaron and Miriam are recently deceased. There is continued complaining. There are fiery serpents and the bronze serpent. While there are some recent victories that the Lord has granted them over their opponents, overall, things have gone really badly for this newly born nation. While the wilderness is a place of God's providence, it is also a discouraging place. It had been a long, difficult 40 years. Could Abraham's descendants be a blessed people? It is hard to appreciate what may have been going through the mind of these Israelites after such a time. Yet the blessings of God bestowed on this generation is a sure thing; they would not become prey in the wilderness (Numbers 14:31). So sure are these blessings that even a famous wicked prophet hired to curse them could not keep from blessing them.

Balak - Numbers 22:2-6

Balak's Concern

- Balak saw what Israel had done to the Amorites.
 - The role of *sight* plays a major part in the account of Balaam.
 - Balak has seen “a people came out of Egypt” and reported what he saw to Balaam (22:11).
 - “Seeing” is significant with Balaam and his donkey.
 - Sight is emphasized in all the oracles. Sight is even emphasized in the location the oracles are given in that it gives Balak and Balaam a prominent view of the people.
 - Balaam sees a portion of the people (22:41).
 - Balak says “come where you may see them” (23:13).
 - Balaam's oracles and what he sees (23:9, 24:4, 24:16).
 - Balaam says “I see him now” (24:17).
- Balak and his people along with the elders of Midian fears what Israel would do to them.
 - Moab and Midian are distant relatives of the chosen people (22:3-4).
 - The Moabites; Lot's oldest daughter named her son Moab (“from my father”) (Genesis 19:37).
 - The Midianites; descendants of Keturah (Abraham) (Genesis 25:4)
 - These two groups conspire together as to what ought to be done to oppose the children of Israel and ultimately oppose God's promise to bless them.

Balak's (Moab and Midian's) Worry was Misinformed

- Balak's worries are unnecessarily fearful and wrong; he misinterprets what he sees.
 - Perhaps he failed to realize that Israel had requested to pass through the Amorites' land peacefully with a commitment to not eat the food or drink the water. However, Sihon gathers his people together and goes out against Israel (Numbers 21:21-24).
 - The same is true for Og and the people of Bashan. Israel is not the aggressor.
- Israel's battle is also not with the Moabites (Deuteronomy 2:8-9,19).

- One must never let *any* potential or legitimate fear keep him from trusting in God or committing sin.
- As a result of Balak’s unfounded worries, he reaches out to the well known diviner Balaam to curse Israel.
 - Notice Balak “knows” that whoever Balaam blesses is blessed and whoever Balaam curses is cursed (22:6).
 - It is uncertain whether his reputation is accurately represented or not.
 - However, what he believed about Balaam, in reality, is only true of the Lord. No diviner is able to reverse the blessings and curses that God pronounces. God can undo Balaam’s intentions, but Balaam cannot undo the intentions of God.
 - If only Balak would have known this about the Lord and not erringly attributed it to Balaam.

Balaam

- Balaam is a surprisingly significant figure in the Bible. Not only is he a major character in Numbers, but he is also mentioned in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Nehemiah, Micah, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation. The narrative portion of Balaam’s account evokes some natural questions while inspired commentary elsewhere more clearly defines the character of Balaam.

Balaam’s occupation

- Balaam is apparently famous.
 - Balaam lived in Pethor, by the river (Euphrates) over 400 miles north of Moab (22:5).
 - Archaeological evidence of Balaam has been found.
 - The Tell Deir ‘Allah dates to the 8th century BC containing ancient local history. It mentions Balaam son of Peor and describes him as a “seer to the gods.”
 - Though the archaeological oracle is quite incomplete, its existence speaks to the fame of Balaam. There is a reason Balak sends messengers that far away with such a lucrative offer for Balaam. Balak feels he is in desperate times.

Balaam is an Evil, Non Jew Pagan

- Initially in the text, it is difficult to know what to make of Balaam’s character.
 - Balaam knows who the Lord is.
 - It is surprising to see that Balaam has a knowledge of the true and living God and is able to seek an audience with God.
 - What exactly Balaam knew of Abraham and the children of Israel can not be proven one way or the other.
 - Balak’s messengers introduce the Israelites to Balaam as “a people who come out of Egypt”, and Balaam refers to them in the same way when speaking to God. Even though he knows of God, it would seem he has no prior knowledge of Israel.
- God speaks through Balaam.

- “The word God puts in my mouth, I will speak” (22:38) “Put a word in His mouth” (23:16).
 - Balaam meets the most straightforward criteria of a prophet (Exodus 7:1-2).
- “Whatever He (God) shows me I will tell you” (23:3).
 - “The oracle of the man whose eye is opened” (24:3-4,15-16).
 - He sees and speaks of many wonderful things which God shows him.
 - Balaam sounds very committed to the Lord and His message. It is for this reason, some see Balaam is a faithful servant of Yahweh.
- However, his methods are clearly condemned in Scripture.
 - The fee is for divination (22:7). He is a diviner who seeks omens (Numbers 23:23, 24:1).
 - Divining and seeking omens are spoken against in the Law and Prophets (Deuteronomy 18:10, Ezekiel 13:6, Micah 3:7,11).
 - Inspired commentary on Balaam unequivocally condemns his wicked heart.
 - New Testament commentary helps to explain some of the details in the narrative that reveals Balaam’s true character.
 - Balaam is a renown, wicked pagan prophet, yet God will make a Moses out of him and give him His (Yahweh’s) words; Balaam’s eyes would be opened to witness some truly incredible truths. What he speaks has a significant impact both for the generation at Moab and in the story of Scripture.

Balaam Meets the Messengers

- Balaam meets Balak’s messengers with the fee in this hand, and he asks God’s permission to go.
 - “God comes to Balaam” (22:9).
 - The first messages God reveals to Balaam (22:12).
 - “Do not go with them”; “Don’t curse them”; “They are blessed”.
 - In other words, God said “no”. This is unfortunate news for Balaam. However, Balaam accepts God’s answer, though most likely begrudgingly.
- Balak responds by sending more messengers who are more distinguished with greater promises of reward (15).
 - Balaam sees the sweetened deal and asks again. Despite God’s previous answer, this is an opportunity too good to pass up.
- God says, “rise up and go”.
 - Why does God say “yes”? Does God change his mind? Does it please God for Balaam to go?
 - God gave Balaam over to his own wishes. It does not end well for Balaam.
 - God intervenes and uses Balaam’s selfish and wicked desire to instead declare His blessings upon His people, demonstrating His unchangeable purpose.
- As Balaam goes, God is angry (21-22).
 - God’s anger towards Balaam reveals something amiss in his heart. As committed to God as he seems, he is actually only committed to the wages.

Balaam and the Donkey Angel

- This is the most entertaining and memorable part of the account of Balaam and possibly in the entire book of Numbers. It is full of irony and humor, but also highlights Balaam's commitment to his wages. There are appropriate applications from the donkey, the greater focus should be on the angel of the Lord, sword in hand, standing in Balaam's way.
- "The donkey saw" (22:23,25,27). Balaam saw (22:31).
 - "Seeing" and Understanding
 - The donkey saw and immediately knew exactly what the vision of the angel meant (22:23,25,27).
 - Balaam's eyes are finally opened (22:31).
 - It is only after striking the donkey three times and arguing with the donkey does Balaam see what the donkey saw all along.
 - This man is known internationally for his insight and perception, but he is blind.
 - The angel's message to Balaam
 - "I have come as your adversary" (32). The donkey sees and turns aside (22:33).
 - "I would have killed you" (33).
- So Balaam "sees" but does he see? What does Balaam do next?
 - Balaam confesses, but doesn't repent (turn back).
 - Balaam's statement: "If it is displeasing to you, I will turn back" (22:34).
 - It is amazing in one moment Balaam humbly bows with his body, humbly confesses with his mouth, all while making it evident there is no bowing of his heart. His eyes may be opened and he sees the armed angel, yet he still does not see even what a donkey has seen.
 - Could God have shown Balaam any clearer about His displeasure in what Balaam is doing?
- The seer is blind to the blatantly obvious. Why is he blind?
 - Balaam's motivation is clear. Peter's words, as well as John and Jude's words, remove any possible question as to Balaam's motivation. He is motivated by greed.
 - Balaam is going to give his best attempt to fulfill Balak's wishes and attempt to manipulate Yahweh.
 - Balaam values Balak's offer so much he was going to continue to pursue it, not because of God's will, but despite it.
- Further insight to Balaam's intentions are given in Deuteronomy 23:5 and Joshua 24:9-10. These texts reveal that God overrides Balaam's wicked desire and at the same time, encourages His people at crucial times.
 - God "turned his curse into a blessing".
 - Balaam goes with every intention to curse Israel regardless of what God has told him; God has other plans.
 - Before the conquest, Moses encouraged Israel by recalling for them what God did through Balaam. Since "the Lord your God was not willing to listen to Balaam", He "turned the curse into a blessing because He loves you" (Deuteronomy 23:5).

- After the conquest, Joshua encourages Israel by reminding them of the Balaam incident just before his famous and powerful call to choose to serve the Lord (Joshua 24:9-10). They were reminded “but I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I delivered you from his hand.”, thus encouraging them in their opportunity to be blessed by God.
 - Live by faith. Choose God. Seize the blessings God has promised.
- Israel is offered a choice between the blessing and the curse (Deuteronomy 30:1), but the blessing offered to them is unchangeable. God wants them to have this blessing. This makes their future rejection of God’s blessing all the more tragic.

The Oracles of Balaam

- The most memorable part of the account of Balaam is the exchange with the donkey, but the most significant are the oracles. In the blessings God pronounces through the mouth of Balaam, both the current, rich blessings of Israel as well as insight into the future reign of the Messiah are found.

First Oracle: You Cannot Curse These People

- Setting: the high places of Baal where he could see a portion of the people.
 - Location, location, location (22:41)
 - Sacrifices offered
- Oracle
 - “come curse Jacob” (23:7) Balaam recognizes he simply cannot curse them.
 - Israel is a unique, set apart people.
 - “Who can count the dust of Jacob” (see Genesis 13:16).
 - “Let me die the death of the righteous” (23:10).
 - Balaam, like Esau, catches a glimpse into the inheritance of the righteous, but will eventually despise it.

Second Oracle: The Unchangeable Promises and Blessings of God

- Balak suggests another place (23:13).
 - The field of Zophim at the top of Pisgah
 - Same sacrifices repeated
- God keeps His Word.
- God’s blessings are irrevocable and God has commanded a blessing.
- “The shout of a king is among them” (23:21).
- “God brings *them* out of Egypt” (23:22).
 - Balak, Moab and Midian have failed to understand what God is doing with His people who had come out of Egypt (1:1, 23:22, 24:8).
 - The oracles of Balaam show, in a profound way, just what God is going to accomplish for the people He brought out of Egypt.

- No omen or divination will prevail against them.
- A people as a lioness devours his prey (23:24)
 - Balak was worried about an ox licking up dust. Now as a result of his attempt to curse Israel he has roused a lion.

Third Oracle: Out of Egypt Comes a King

- Balak suggests another new place (23:27-28).
 - The top of Peor overlooking the wilderness and wasteland.
- Balaam tells them to prepare the sacrifices (23:29).
 - Balaam set his face toward the wilderness; there are no omens this time (24:1).
- The nation of Israel is beautiful to behold. "How fair our your tents".
 - Israel is blessed like valleys and gardens (aloes, cedars, water, seed like flowing water).
 - A king and kingdom exalted.
- "God brings *him* (this king) out of Egypt" (There is a shift from them 23:22).
 - There is a shift from the nation to an individual.
 - What God does for the nation God will do for the king.
 - What God intends Israel to be the Messiah will be.
 - If God calls His son Israel out of Egypt, God will also one day call His Son, the Messiah, out of Egypt.
 - Balaam's oracle demonstrates the legitimacy of Matthew's application of Hosea's words to Jesus (Pickup).
- "He couches like a lion" (Genesis 49:9).
 - "He will devour the nations", "will crush their bones", "shatter them with his arrows" (Numbers 24:8).
- Everyone who blesses Him will be blessed; everyone who curses Him will be cursed.

Fourth Oracle: God's King and Dominion are Sovereign Forever; Nations will Rise and Fall

- There are no new sacrifices nor a new location chosen. Balaam is caught up in how good it is to behold and proclaim the word of the Lord.
- While some of this oracle is difficult to interpret, a picture of a future, conquering king is clearly seen. All the surrounding, rebellious nations, will one day be subjected by the dominion of this king.
- "I see him" (Numbers 24:17). The oracle predicts a king who will come long after Israel leaves the wilderness and conquers the land of Canaan.
- "His scepter shall not depart" (Genesis 49:10, Numbers 24:17). This oracle continues where the last oracle left off.
- "Crush through the forehead of Moab" (Numbers 24:17). Why? Moab tried to curse Israelites.
 - "The Lord is at Your right hand; He will *shatter* kings in the day of His wrath" (Psalm 110:5).

- “You struck the head of the house of the evil” (Habakkuk 3:13).
- “Bruise you on the head” (Genesis 3:15)
- “Edom shall be a possession” (Numbers 24:18, Amos 9:11-12).
 - All nations will be subject to Him. One may stand in His way and be conquered, or he can humbly submit to the king and to His dominion.
 - Where is hope found? The charismatic, famous seer Balaam? A military leader or a political leader? Or is hope found in the God of the heavens and in the king whose scepter would rise out of Judah?

The Advice of Balaam

- The illuminating oracles tragically did not teach Balaam to honor God above wealth.
 - All that Balaam sees does not sway his evil, covetous heart.
 - Being able to behold wondrous things from God’s plan does not replace an unwillingness to love the Lord with heart, soul, and mind.
 - Seeing the truth does Balaam no good.
- With money on his mind, Balaam concocts a scheme with Balak and the daughters of Midian to lure the sons of Israel to immorality and idolatry, thus leading them away from God’s protective care (Numbers 25).
 - If he could not speak a curse against the blessing of God, could Balaam get Israel to choose a curse for themselves? Could their hearts be turned to idolatry and immorality?
 - Balaam’s creativity and persistent show why he was the best. While Balaam’s role in this is not obvious. Numbers 31:16 reveals Balaam gave counsel in Peor to Moab on how to cause Israel to sin.
 - Balaam’s advice reveals his desire to please his employer.

The Death of Balaam

Numbers 31:8; Joshua 13:22 Balaam is slain along with the Midianites.

- Balaam was motivated by a reward which apparently he never had the opportunity to enjoy. While moth and rust will consume every earthly treasure, the case of Balaam clearly demonstrates the foolishness of materialism.
- Esau foolishly sells his birthright for a bowl of soup. Balaam’s price may be higher, but his position is no better.
- Tragically, he has seen the value of the death of the righteous (23:10), but he chooses pleasing an earthly master over seeking to please the heavenly One. Despite what Balaam has “seen” and “spoken”, his love of the world costs him eternal life.

Lessons and Applications

- What can Bible teachers learn from Balaam?
 - 2 Peter 2:15-16 *“forsaking the right way, they have gone astray, having followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he received a rebuke for his own transgression, for a mute donkey, speaking with a voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet.”*

- Jude 11 *“Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.”*
- Revelation 2:14 *“But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.”*
- What should Balaam have said to Balak?
 - What Balak wanted Balaam to say is known, and it is also known that God revealed the truth about Israel to Balaam from the beginning. They are not to be cursed, for they are blessed (Numbers 22:12).
 - What Moab should have done for Israel (Nehemiah 13:2; Deuteronomy 23:3-4):
 - Moab should have blessed Israel with bread and water as Israel passed through the land. This is the appropriate way to treat someone passing through who is blessed by God.
 - This story could be drastically different if Balaam counseled Balak to bless the descendants of Abraham instead of curse them. The promise to Abraham is that God would bless those who bless him and curse those who curse him. God would have blessed the sons of Moab instead of cursing them.
 - An imagined message from Balaam to Balak:
 - God is blessing these people. He will bless those who bless them and curse those who curse them.
 - Therefore, you do not want to fight them. You are seeing this wrong. They are not a threat to you. Bring them some bread and water and wish them well along their journey. Pray for them. Show them kindness. You will be blessed by God if you do.
- Possible results:
 - Balak does not want to hear this “good news”. Balaam could have been persecuted, mocked, fired, sent away empty handed, or put to death for this advice. A disappointing pay cut, a loss of fame, a loss of other opportunities, falling out of good favor with the union of diviners also could be the result, but would not that be worth it to give Balak and the people this powerful, life changing opportunity?
 - If this message is rejected:
 - Balak and Moab would still be judged, but the blood would have been on their own hands. Instead Balaam now shares their guilt.
 - Balaam himself would not be caught up in the judgment or succumbed to the curses incurred by cursing those who God blesses.
 - Balaam could have gone down on the pages of Scripture as a great example of faithfulness;, withstanding the temptations of worldliness. Teachers of God’s word would meditate on how to be more like Balaam with a to preach repentance instead of tickling ears.
 - Balak could have responded to the truth, repented, and blessed the sons of Israel.
 - Balak blesses the children of Jacob and in turn is blessed by God.
 - The sons of Moab are not welcomed into the presence of the assemblies because of what Balak’s actions.

- “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord; none of their descendants, even to the tenth generation, shall ever enter the assembly of the Lord, because they did not meet you with food and water on the way when you came out of Egypt, and because they hired against you Balaam the son of Beor from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.” (Deuteronomy 23:3-4).
- Would Moab’s future and their relationship to the sons of Israel be dramatically altered if they had blessed the sons of Israel in the ways described in Nehemiah 13 and Deuteronomy 23?
 - This story could have been dramatically different if Balaam was motivated by truth instead of wealth.
- A job opportunity or a passion for God?
 - Balaam’s story represents a struggle one might have who is blessed with the opportunity to teach and especially when he is financially supported to do so.
 - Balaam has a job opportunity, not a passion for God. His objective is to please his earthly audience and to get paid for it. His reward is paid in full.
 - Is there a fire within that compels the truth to be spoken in love regardless of how it is received? Or is the primary goal to keep the supporters happy?
 - Those who regard the task as a job opportunity will speak a message that ensures their employment. Those who regard the task with a passion for God will speak the truth even when it is hard or unwelcome. They will do so even with the risk of losing their support.
 - There will be times when speaking the truth in love, yet with boldness and clarity will cost one his job, but one who has a passion for God values Him more than any amount of money that might be offered.
- A sober reality of Balaam’s wickedness:
 - Someone may behold the wonderful things of God yet still chooses the world.
 - Friends and family members may have spent years learning the truth, but in their pursuit of pleasure still walk away from the Lord. In life there will be Balaams.
 - Am I guarded from worldliness? Even if I have deep insight into the wonderful things God has done, this will bring me no profit if I have a love for the world (1 John 2:15-17).
- The perseverance of Balaam:
 - May we be more motivated than Balaam in pleasing our Lord than he was in pleasing Balak!
 - Balaam does not let an angel of the Lord standing in his way stop him from pleasing Balak.
 - If Balaam is so motivated by worldly gain, how much more should we be motivated to please God and to persevere in speaking His message?
 - Are we quick to give up on people or are we patient enough to give them time to see and respond to the truth? If the message is rejected in one place, will we continue to speak it in another?
 - If Balaam’s pursuit of an *earthly reward* empowers him to set aside God’s clear desire for him and compels him to stop at nothing in order to please Balak, then may our pursuit of a *heavenly reward* empower us to overcome threats and temptations from the world to compromise the message. May we stop at nothing to please the one who has the power to bless and curse.

- The treasures of Balaam:
 - Beware. There are treasures on this earth that are tangible and can be measured.
 - A bank account can be monitored. A contract can be signed. Investments can be made and their growth can be watched. The equity of a house can be calculated.
 - These treasures are measurable, but their benefit is temporal. These can present an eternal stumbling block. They can blind one from what is actually important and what has eternal value.
 - There are also treasures that are not tangible on this earth, but are *immeasurable*.
 - Eternity is immeasurable.
 - Never exchange what is measurable for what is immeasurable and priceless.
 - Speaking the truth in love, yet with boldness and clarity may cost something that can be tangibly measured, but the cost of failing to speak the truth will be immeasurable and eternal.

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