

NUMBERS

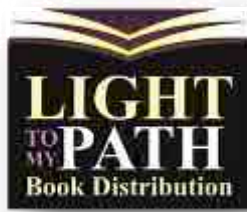
The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a vast desert landscape. In the foreground, there are dark, jagged, reddish-brown rock formations. Beyond them is a wide, sandy desert floor. In the distance, a range of mountains is visible under a bright blue sky with wispy white clouds. The overall scene is arid and expansive.

A Devotional Look at
How God Led Israel
Through the Wilderness

F. WAYNE MAC LEOD

Numbers

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F. Wayne MacLeod

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INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS

Author:

Moses is traditionally considered to be the author of the book of Numbers. While the book does not clearly state this, the phrases, “the Lord spoke to Moses,” or “the Lord said to Moses,” occurs about seventy times in Numbers, indicating that the material for the book came from Moses and his conversations with God. Numbers 33:2 is also strong evidence of Moses being the author when it states:

At the Lord’s command Moses recorded the stages of their journey. This is their journey by stages.

In this verse, we not only have the command of God given to Moses to record the journey of the people of Israel through the wilderness but also evidence that Moses obeyed that command and put it in writing. While it is certainly possible that Moses had a secretary to help write the material, the content of this book comes from Moses who faithfully recorded what God had given him.

Background:

The book likely gets its name from the various censuses taken in the book. Chapter 1 begins with a census of the people who had come out of Egypt. Chapter 2 lists the number of people by tribal divisions. Chapters 3 and 4 give

the number of Levites in the service of the Lord. Finally, chapter 26 contains a census of the number of people who were ready to go into the land of Canaan thirty-eight years later.

Numbers begins in the second year of Israel's release from captivity in Egypt (1:1). It is a record of Israel's wandering in the wilderness and God's requirements for them at this time. The book not only gives us a sense of the number of people who were in the nation at the time but also their character. Israel is portrayed as a complaining people, discontent with the purpose of God. The book ends with the people of God camped beside the Jordan River ready to enter the land God had promised their fathers.

Throughout the book, we catch a glimpse of the requirements of God for His people and although they often failed Him, God continued to walk with them, provide for them and watch over their needs.

Importance of the Book for Today:

Numbers has much to teach us about God. In the arrangement of the Israelite camp we see that He is a God of order who has a purpose for each of His children. As we note the size of the nation through the censuses taken in the book, we are conscious of His unlimited resources as He provided food and provisions for each Israelite. We see His justice when He punishes those who rebel against Him and His chosen leadership. The book gives us a better understanding of the mercy of God when we see Him patiently endure the grumbling of His people on an ongoing basis. His protection is evident in the victory over Balaam and King Balak who wanted to curse Israel. We understand more of His power as we watch Him use Israel to overcome nations more skilled at war than themselves.

Demonstrating incredible generosity and favour, God uprooted nations and gave their land to His people. He provided them with a means of forgiveness and intimacy with Him through the sacrifices and vows He ordained; showing His people the wonderful love He had for them despite their unworthiness.

The favour of God rested on a grumbling and disobedient people. He brought Israel from the land of their captivity, through the wilderness, to the border of the land He had promised their fathers. Israel often chose to walk away from God's purpose. They would suffer the consequences of their disobedience and many would die in the wilderness without ever seeing the land God had promised; but God was still faithful to His word.

We can see ourselves in this book. We too have often fallen short of God's standard but He does not give up on us. Sometimes, like Israel, through our disobedience, we have lost opportunities and blessings but God continues to work in our lives drawing us day by day closer to His side and His purposes for our lives. The book of Numbers speaks of lost opportunities, consequences of sin, and judgment. It also speaks to us about a God of mercy who proves faithful even when we have failed.

1

A CENSUS IS TAKEN

Read Numbers 1:1-54

The book of Numbers continues the story of God leading His people on the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. As we begin the book of Numbers, the Lord is speaking to Moses. Verse 1 gives us some important details about the timing of events that take place in the book. The Israelites were camped in the Desert of Sinai on their way to the land God had promised their fathers. They were two years into a journey that would take forty years to complete.

Notice in verse 1 that Moses was in the Tent of Meeting or the Tabernacle when the Lord spoke to him. Moses had a very important role to play in leading the people to the Promised Land, and he would often come to the Tabernacle to hear from God. Moses did not trust in his own wisdom. It was in this place of quiet with God that Moses would find the wisdom and direction he needed to lead the people.

On this occasion, the Lord told Moses that He wanted him to take a census of the Israelite community, “listing every man by name, one by one” (verse 2). Moses and his brother Aaron were to count all the men in Israel twenty

years of age and older who could serve in the army (verse 3). This reveals the purpose of the census. It was to determine how many men were able to fight for Israel. Every healthy man over the age of twenty was a candidate for the army. Notice that there was no option for these men. They were to serve their country and be ready to lay down their lives for their people.

What are you willing to lay down your life for today? These men were expected to be ready to serve the Lord by advancing His purpose for His people. There would be difficult times coming for the people of God and these men would be required to stand firm against the enemy to protect their families and bring God's people to the place He had prepared for them. In the spiritual battle before us, God is looking for men and women who will do the same.

Moses could not take this census alone. In verses 4-15 God told him that one man from every tribe in Israel, the head of his family, was to help him. The following chart shows who God chose from each tribe to help Moses with this census.

Tribe	Family Head
Reuben	Elizur, son of Shedeur (verse 5)
Simeon	Shelumiel, son of Zurishaddai (verse 6)
Judah	Nahshon, son of Amminadab (verse 7)
Issachar	Nethanel, son of Zuar (verse 8)
Zebulun	Eliab, son of Helon (verse 9)
Ephraim	Elishama, son of Ammihud (verse 10)
Manasseh	Gamaliel, son of Pedahzur (verse 10)
Benjamin	Abidan, son of Gideoni (verse 11)
Dan	Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai (verse 12)
Asher	Pagiel, son of Okran (verse 13)

Gad	Eliasaph, son of Deuel (verse 14)
Naphtali	Ahira, son of Enan (verse 15)

All of the men chosen by God to help Moses were leaders of their tribes and heads of the various clans of Israel (verse 16).

The census was taken on the first day of the second month (verse 18). The whole community was called together at that time. As they came, they were asked to give their family details (tribe, clan and family names). They were to inform the head of the tribe how many men over twenty years of age there were in their family. These names were listed one by one. Verses 20-46 give the results of this census. The following chart summarizes these findings:

Tribe	Men Over 20 years of age
Reuben	46,500 (verses 20-21)
Simeon	59,300 (verses 22-23)
Gad	45,650 (verses 24-25)
Judah	74,600 (verses 26-27)
Issachar	54,400 (verses 28-29)
Zebulun	57,400 (verses 30-31)
Ephraim	40,500 (verses 32-33)
Manasseh	32,200 (verses 34-35)
Benjamin	35,400 (verses 36-37)
Dan	62,700 (verses 38-39)
Asher	41,500 (verses 40-41)
Naphtali	53,400 (verses 42-43)
TOTALS	603,550

All of these men were twenty years old or more and were fit to serve in Israel's army.

Notice in verse 47 that the tribe of Levi was not counted with the others. The Levites were excluded from military service. They were instead to work with the priests and had various responsibilities in the care of the tabernacle and its furnishings. They were not to leave their responsibilities to go to battle. The worship of the Lord was not to be neglected in time of battle.

How easy it is for us to neglect our spiritual responsibilities when things get busy or when we are facing struggles in life. The Levites were to maintain the worship of God at all times. This was one matter that was never to be neglected. They were excused from military duty to care for the things of the Lord. In reality, their role was just as important as the role of those who went to battle. We see throughout the history of Israel that when her spiritual duties and worship of God were neglected, she did not have victory over her enemies. The role of maintaining the tabernacle and the worship of God was vital if Israel was going to be victorious. The same principle applies today. We dare not neglect our spiritual walk and our time with God. If we are to be all that God wants us to be, worship and obedience is essential.

For Consideration:

- We see in this passage how Moses spent time with the Lord seeking His wisdom and guidance to lead the people. How important is your time with the Lord? Do you find direction and guidance in the Lord for your life and ministry in that time?

- God chose men to help Moses in taking a census. Who are those who stand with you in your service of the Lord?
- The men of Israel were to be ready to lay down their lives for their country and the purpose of God. What are you willing to lay down your life for today?
- We see in this passage the importance of not neglecting our spiritual responsibilities. What keeps us from our time with the Lord? Have you ever found yourself so busy that you did not seem to have time with God? What was the result?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He desires to give us wisdom and guidance for our lives and ministries.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the people He has put on your path who have helped and encouraged you.
- Ask the Lord to help you to spend the time you need with Him in worship and seeking His wisdom. Ask Him to help you not to neglect this time.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have failed to see the importance of your time with God. Ask Him to forgive you when you have not sought His heart in the situations you encountered in life.

2

THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE CAMP OF ISRAEL

Read Numbers 2:1-34

Have you ever wondered if God has a special purpose for you in your daily activities? Is He interested in the ordinary, everyday affairs of your life? In chapter two, we learn of the special arrangement of the tribes and how they were to camp as they wandered through the desert. God had a special place for each family to camp. While the details of this arrangement may not be particularly interesting to the modern reader, it does show us that God is concerned for even the seemingly small details of our lives.

In verses 1 and 2, the Lord told Moses and Aaron that He wanted the Israelites to camp all around the Tent of Meeting or the Tabernacle. In other words, the Tabernacle was to be in the centre of their camp. The importance of this cannot be overlooked. God's desire was to be the centre of Israel's life. God expects nothing less in our day.

Notice from verse 2 that while the Israelites were to camp all around the Tent of Meeting, they were also required to be "some distance from it." We need to understand that

the Tabernacle was holy and God's people were to hold it in high regard. The people of Israel were not perfect. They were often guilty of complaining against God or disobeying His commands. The people of God were to camp some distance from the tabernacle so they did not defile it by their evil. There was a distance between Israel and their God. Their sins kept them from being in His presence, but His mercy kept His presence in their midst.

Notice also from verse 2 that God wanted each family to identify themselves with a family banner. This implies that each extended family unit had a banner that represented them. Families would camp together under that banner.

In verses 3-4, God commanded Moses to place each tribe in a specific place around the tabernacle. The arrangement of the tribes is shown below in the following chart:

Asher		DAN		Naphtali	
Benjamin	Levi	Levi	Moses & Aaron	Issachar	
EPHRAIM		TABERNACLE		JUDAH	
Manasseh		Levi		Zebulun	
Gad		REUBEN		Simeon	

Notice that the Levites were to live next to the tabernacle on three sides. According to Leviticus 3:38, Moses and Aaron lived on the east side of the camp in front of the tabernacle entrance.

Notice also how the Lord provided for the organization of the camp. It appears the twelve tribes were organized into

four camps. Each camp had a leader and one tribe out of the three was chosen to be the head tribe.

Camp	Tribes	Tribal Leader	Head Tribe
Eastern Camp	Judah Issachar Zebulun	Nahshon Nethanel Eliab	Judah (2:9)
Southern Camp	Reuben Simeon Gad	Elizur Shelumiel Eliasaph	Reuben (2:16)
Western Camp	Ephraim Manasseh Benjamin	Elishama Gamaliel Abidan	Ephraim (2:24)
Northern Camp	Dan Asher Naphtali	Ahiezer Pagiel Ahira	Dan (2:31)

This arrangement of the tribes was particularly useful when the people of God were moving from one place to another in the wilderness. God designed a particular order for the tribes to set out when He called them to move to another location. When the Lord led His people to pack up and move to another location, the eastern camp led by Judah (Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun) would be the first to leave (2:9). The southern camp led by Reuben (Reuben, Simeon and Gad) would follow (2:16). Then the tribe of Levi would follow carrying the tabernacle and all its furnishings. The western camp led by Ephraim (Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin) would follow behind the Levites (2:24). The northern camp led by Dan (Dan, Asher and Naphtali) would be the last camp to move out (2:31). As they moved, each tribe would carry a standard to identify itself.

The results of the census showed that the total number of men over twenty ready to fight was 603,550. Not included

in this number were men who were too old to fight, women and children, and the Levites who were not counted (verse 33). We can safely assume that there were at least two million people travelling through the wilderness with their animals and supplies. It was important that they be organized so that the move from one place to another would flow smoothly.

All the details of how Israel was to camp in the wilderness, the order in which they would travel, and who would be their leaders had been carefully worked out by God. The Israelites were careful to follow these directions and did everything as God commanded Moses (verse 34).

This chapter shows us that the Lord God is concerned about our daily lives. He does have a purpose for us. He is a God of order and it is important that we seek Him and His purpose in all we do, just as Israel did in this chapter.

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about God and His purposes? Does God have a purpose and plan for your life?
- Each tribe and family in Israel had its place to camp. Are you in the place God has designated for you?
- The tabernacle was to be in the centre of the camp of Israel. How important is it that the worship of God and obedience to Him be at the centre of our lives?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to show you if you are where He wants you to be. Ask Him to show you if you are doing what He has called you to do.
- Thank the Lord that He has a purpose and plan for your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to make worship and obedience to Him more central in your life.
- Thank the Lord for brothers and sisters around you who all have a role to play in the advancing of God's kingdom.

3

THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES

Read Numbers 3:1-51

We have seen that the tabernacle was located in the middle of the camp of Israel. Worship and obedience to the Lord God were to be central in the lives of God's people. The work of the tabernacle was done by the priests and Levites. Chapter 3 introduces us to these important men.

God chose Moses' brother Aaron and his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar to serve as priests. Verse 4 reminds us, however, that Nadab and Abihu died when they made an offering using incense that was not authorized by the Lord. According to Leviticus 10:1-2, fire came down from the Lord and consumed them. As a priest of God, Aaron knew what it was like to have rebellious children who wandered from the Lord and His ways. Aaron's two remaining sons Eleazar and Ithamar would serve with him as priests.

While Aaron and his sons served as priests, they were assisted by the descendants of Levi. Verses 6-9 tell us that the tribe of Levi assisted Aaron and his sons in a variety of roles at the tabernacle. This included taking care of the temple furnishings (verse 8) and a number of other service duties we will examine at a later point in this chapter.

Although the Levites assisted Aaron and his sons, they could not approach the inner part of the tabernacle or they would be put to death, like Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu (verse 4). This role was reserved for the priests alone. Each person knew their place and the role God had given him.

Verses 11-13 show us why God chose the Levites to be servants at the tabernacle. According to verse 12, God's choice went back to the days when the Israelites were in Egypt. At that time, the Lord moved over the land of Egypt destroying every firstborn male child. Only those families who had painted their doorposts with the blood of a lamb were saved from this terrible devastation. This story is recorded in Exodus 12. Instead of killing the firstborn male of each Israelite, God asked that the descendants of Levi be set aside in their place to serve Him. Notice from verse 13 that even the firstborn of every animal was to belong to the Lord because He had spared their firstborn through the blood that was painted on the doorposts.

The Lord commanded Moses to count the Levites by families and clans. While the census of the other Israelite men was of men twenty years of age and older (ready to be a soldier), every male descendant of Levi one month old or more was to be included in this census (verse 15).

Levi had three sons. Their names were Gershon, Kohath and Merari. From the descendants of these three sons of Levi came a number of clans. A clan can be defined as a group of related families. Verses 18-20 give the names of these various clans and related families.

Aaron's Son	Clan Name	Related Families
Gershon	Gershonites	Family of Libni (verse 18) Family of Shimei (verse 18)
Kohath	Kohathites	Family of Amram (verse 19) Family of Izhar (verse 19) Family of Hebron (verse 19) Family of Uzziel (verse 19)
Merari	Merarites	Family of Mahli (verse 20) Family of Mushi (verse 20)

Notice from verses 21-37 that God had a special role for each clan to play. He also told Moses where each clan was to set up their tents. Verses 21-37 can be summarized in the following chart:

Clan	#	Camp	Leader	Responsibility
Gershonites (vs. 21-)	7,500	West behind tabernacle	Eliasaph	Tabernacle, coverings and curtains
Kohathites (vs. 27-32)	8,600	South of tabernacle	Elizaphan, Eleazar	Ark, table, lampstand, altars and inner curtain
Merarites (vs. 33-37)	6,200	North of tabernacle	Zuriel	Crossbars, posts, bases, tent pegs, ropes

Verses 21-37 tell us that there were a total of 22,300 Levite males devoted to the service of the tabernacle. While many of these were much too young to serve (as the census was of males one month of age and older) it does give

us a sense of the number of active Levites involved in the care of the Tabernacle on a daily basis.

Aaron and his sons camped to the east side in front of the main entrance, along with Moses. They served as priests. Verse 38 makes it clear that these priests were given a special responsibility before God on behalf of the Israelites. They were responsible for the general care of the sanctuary. Anyone else who dared to approach this innermost sanctuary was to be put to death. One thing that is quite clear from these verses is that the work of God was to be done in a particular way by those who had been called of God for that purpose.

After the Levites had been counted, God then told Moses to count the firstborn Israelite males one month old or more and make a list of their names (verse 40). For every firstborn male Israelite child there was to be a Levite who represented him in the service of the Lord. Notice also that the firstborn of all livestock was to be counted and there was to be an animal in the Levite herd for every firstborn of the livestock of Israel (verse 41).

Moses obeyed and discovered that there were 22,273 firstborn Israelite males (verse 43) compared to 22,000 Levites in the service of the Lord (see verse 39). This meant that there were 273 firstborn males in Israel not represented by a Levite. The Lord told Moses that he was to collect 5 shekels for each of the 273 remaining firstborn males in Israel. This money was to be given to the Lord and His service to cover the firstborn not represented by a Levite (verses 49-51).

God demanded precision. Every firstborn male was to have his debt to God covered down to the last one. A special offering was required for those who were not covered

by a Levite in the service of the Lord. Not a single one was to be missed. This precision on the part of God is important for us to notice. He was concerned for each individual. No sinner would be ignored. No righteous person would be forgotten. He sees every sin, every sinful attitude and demands that payment be made to cover each one.

For Consideration:

- In the camp of Israel, every Levite had a special role to play. In fact, they risked death if they chose to do what God had reserved for someone else. Does God have a specific role for us to play in His kingdom today? Have you discovered what He has called you to do?
- Aaron's sons died because they offered unauthorized incense to the Lord. Does God have principles today that we need to live by? What are some of those principles?
- Aaron's sons rebelled against the Lord, but God still chose Him to be the High Priest. Do children of Christian leaders rebel against the Lord today? Can God still use a leader whose children are not following Him?
- Every firstborn needed to be represented either by a Levite in the service of the Lord or by an offering given to the Lord. What does this tell us about God's concern for every person? Does God care for you particularly?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to see the importance of worship and obedience. Ask Him to help you to keep Him central in your life each day.
- Ask the Lord to show you His purpose for you in particular. Ask Him to help you to be obedient to that purpose.
- Take a moment to pray for the families of Christian leaders. Ask that God would touch the lives of their children so that they walk with Him.
- Thank the Lord that He is concerned for each individual. Thank Him that He is interested in you personally.

4

A CENSUS OF THE LEVITES

Read Numbers 4:1-49

The descendants of Levi had the responsibility to help as servants to the priests in the work of the tabernacle. Levi's three sons Kohath, Gershon, and Merari were all heads of their families and their descendants were chosen by God for various roles in the work of the tabernacle. In this chapter God commanded Moses and Aaron to do a census of the Levites. They were to count all the Levite men thirty to fifty years of age who were able to serve in the tabernacle.

The purpose of the census seems to be to organize and instruct each family with regard to their responsibilities when the camp of the Lord moved from one place to another. This would insure that there was no confusion and that the tabernacle articles were treated with respect and dignity.

Kohathites

The descendants of Kohath were the first to be counted (verse 2). Verse 15 tells us that their responsibility was to carry the sacred articles of the tabernacle from one place to another. In verses 15 and 20, God warned the

Kohathites that if they touched these articles or even looked at them they would die. This was a clear reminder to them of the tremendous responsibility they had been given as God's servants. The priests were to carefully wrap up each of the holy articles so that they could be carried by the Kohathites without actually being touched.

Aaron and his sons were to take down the curtain in front of the Holy of Holies and use it to wrap around the ark and its covers. They were then to cover this with hides of sea cow and a solid blue cloth. When the ark and its cover were wrapped, the priests were to put the long poles in place that had been designed to carry the ark. In this way the Kohathites could carry the ark without seeing it or even touching it.

The next piece of furniture prepared was the Table containing the bread. The priests were to spread a blue cloth over the table and put the dishes, bowls and jars on it. Notice that the bread was to remain on the table while it was being transported (verse 7). A scarlet cloth was used to cover the table and its articles. Over that the priests were to put a hide of sea cows. The poles were then put in place so that the table could be carried without touching it or seeing it.

Next, the priests covered the lampstand and all its accessories with a blue cloth (verse 9). It was put on some kind of carrying frame (verse 10) and covered with a hide of sea cows. The lampstand and its accessories were carried in this way by the Kohathites.

The golden altar used for incense was also covered with a blue cloth and a hide of sea cows (verse 11). Poles were put into place and the Kohathites would carry the altar by the poles without touching it or even seeing it. All the other

articles used for ministering in the Holy Place were wrapped in blue cloth and a hide of sea cows and put on a carrying frame to be transported by the Kohathites (verse 12).

The larger bronze altar used for sacrifices was covered with a purple cloth (verse 13). All the utensils used with the altar were carefully placed on the altar (firepans, meat forks, shovels, sprinkling bowls). They were covered with a hide of sea cows. As with the other articles, poles were put in place so that the ark could be carried by the Kohathites.

Aaron's son Eleazar was to be in charge of the oil for the light, the incense, the grain offering and the anointing oil. He was to supervise all that took place with these holy articles. The Kohathites would be directly responsible to him.

Moses and Aaron were to warn the Kohathites of their responsibility before the Lord with these holy articles. If they dared to come near them or touch them they would die. If they dared even to look at the articles covered by the cloths and hides they would die. All these articles were carried with great dignity and respect.

How important it is for us today to carry the name of the Lord God with respect and dignity as well. We are temples of the Holy Spirit. The Lord has set us apart as representatives of His name. We must respect the name we represent.

The Gershonites

The next family to be counted was the family of Gershon. Moses and Aaron were to count the number of men between the ages of thirty and fifty (verses 21-22). The Gershonites had the responsibility of carrying the tabernacle curtains and coverings (verses 25-26). Aaron's son Ithamar was to oversee their work, so they were directly responsible to him (verse 28).

Merarites

The Merarites, descendants of Aaron's son Merari, were also counted. Their obligation was to carry the poles, frames, bases, crossbars and posts that held up the tabernacle. They were under the direction of Ithamar, Aaron's son (verses 29-33).

Moses and Aaron, with the help of the community leaders, counted the number of Levites in each family. The following chart shows their findings:

Family	Totals: 30-50 years old
Kohathites	2,750 (verses 34-37)
Gershonites	2,630 (verses 38-41)
Merarites	3,200 (verses 42-45)
TOTAL	8,580 (verses 46-49)

There are a couple of important details we need to see from this passage. Notice first how God required that His people treat His holy things with respect. The Kohathites, in particular, had an awesome privilege of carrying the holy articles, but they were not to take their responsibility lightly.

God was a holy God and they needed to respect Him as such. To touch or even look at the articles they transported from place to place was an offense punishable by death. The Lord God is still holy. He still demands respect. To dishonour Him is a serious matter. In a day when we have begun to lose sight of the holiness and majesty of God, we would do well to consider the teaching of this passage again.

Notice also that the Lord God is a God of order. Each Levite family had a specific responsibility. This was given to them by God. They were under the responsibility of the priests and were accountable to them for their actions. In a similar way, we are to work together as the body of Christ. Each person has a special role to play and is accountable to each other for the good of the body as a whole. In this way the Lord God is honoured.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about treating the things of God with respect? How do we show respect for God, His servants and His purposes?
- What does this passage teach us about how God has given us each different responsibilities and called us to work together for His glory? What part does He want you to play?
- God placed the Levites under the responsibility of the priests. How important is it for us to be responsible to each other in the body of Christ? What happens if we choose not to be responsible to each other?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the spiritual leaders He has given you. Ask God to lead and direct them for His glory.
- Ask God to show you His particular purpose for your life. Ask Him to help you to be faithful to that purpose.
- Ask God to help you to know how to work more effectively with your brothers and sisters for the expansion of His kingdom.
- Thank the Lord that He is a God of order.

5

PURITY IN THE CAMP

Read Numbers 5:1-31

In the first part of this book we saw how the Lord organized the camp of Israel. As we move into chapter 5 we see that order is not enough. God also expected that the camp be pure and undefiled. It is good for local assemblies of believers to be well organized with each person knowing his or her responsibility, but God also expects that those who serve Him be right with Him and live lives that are compatible with His holiness.

Ceremonial Uncleaness

In verses 1-2, the Lord commanded Moses to send anyone with an infectious skin disease or discharge from their body away from the camp. The same was true for anyone who was ceremonially unclean because they had touched a dead body. These individuals were to live outside the camp as long as they were impure so that they did not defile the camp where God had chosen to dwell (verse 3).

Notice that while God is everywhere, His presence was particularly evident in the camp of Israel. He chose to reveal Himself in a special way within the camp. God will

make His presence known to us in special ways. Because God's presence was evident in their midst, the people of God needed to exercise special care not to offend Him. They were to respect Him and remove anything that was offensive to His character. The place where God dwelt was to be holy. God's people were to walk in respect and honour of His name. No unclean or unholy thing was allowed in His presence. In a similar way, we who are now God's children need to exercise great caution not to offend His Holy Spirit who is present in our lives and ministries. It is God's desire to dwell with us, but we must walk in holiness and purity before Him if we are to make Him welcome in our midst.

Personal Relationships

Purifying the camp required the removal of anyone who was ceremonially unclean but this was not the only thing that needed to be addressed in the camp if it was to remain pure. God also expected that any broken relationship between His children would be addressed. Notice what God says in verse 6:

Say to the Israelites: 'When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the LORD, that person is guilty

It is particularly important that we see from this verse that when we hurt a brother or sister in any way we sin against God. He holds us accountable for any sin against our brother or sister.

Notice that God required two things from those who had wronged a brother or sister. The first requirement is found in verse 7. Those who wronged another were to confess the sin they had committed. This meant admitting to what

they had done. In some cases this would require naming the sin before the person they had offended. You can't truly confess something and hide it at the same time. True confession requires honesty and understanding our sin. It is to recognize that we have wronged someone in a particular area and an admission of our guilt before that person.

Notice from verses 7-10 that confession was not enough. Something had to be done to make restitution. In other words, the person who had offended or wronged another needed to make things right again. Admittedly, there are times when it is impossible to repair the damage our sins have caused. The reality of the matter, however, is that the Lord required that steps be taken to this end. The guilty person needed to pay for what he or she had done. In this case, the guilty party was to calculate how much damage had been done, pay for that damage and add one-fifth more (verse 7). In the event that the person who was wronged died and had no relative to receive the restitution, the contribution was given to the Lord and would belong to the priest (verse 8). Notice that the individual who had wronged another was not only to pay for what he or she had done but also bring a ram to the Lord to cover their offence (verse 8). Restitution was not only to be made to the person offended but also to the Lord God.

If the camp was to be pure before the Lord then sins against brother and sister were to be confessed and relationships repaired. In doing this, God's people would continue to walk in purity and God's presence would not be offended.

Marriages

The third area that needed to be addressed in the camp of Israel had to do with marriage relationships. Verses 12-13

speak of suspected unfaithfulness between a wife and another man. In the illustration given in these verses, a husband suspected that his wife has been unfaithful but had no witnesses to prove it. The tension in the marriage would be obvious and the problem needed to be resolved. Notice that the issue is not just about unfaithfulness, which was an obvious sin, but also about trust between the husband and the wife.

It was the desire of God that a man and his wife walk in harmony, trust and mutual respect. If the camp of Israel was to be pure, then husbands and wives needed to walk in faithfulness and live with confidence and trust in each other as God intended. This shows us not only how much God values marriage but also the importance He places on husbands and wives living in harmony with each other. For the camp to be pure, the relationship between husband and wife needed to be strong.

In verses 14-31 the Lord shows Moses what the priest was to do in the case of a husband suspecting his wife of unfaithfulness. The ceremony involved a number of steps. When a husband suspected his wife of unfaithfulness he was not to allow this to continue. Verse 15 tells us that he was to take his wife with him to see the priest so that the matter could be resolved. It is the intention of God that husbands and wives deal with the conflicts that exist between them. Any unresolved matters in their relationship were to be resolved between them. If these matters could not be resolved then they were to be taken to the priest who would help them to work them out. How easy it is to allow matters to come between us as married couples. The challenge of this verse is to deal with anything that comes between us.

When the husband came with his wife to the priest he was to bring an offering. It was the husband who was to bring the offering on his wife's behalf. His concern was for his wife and her purity before God. According to verse 15, the offering was not to have oil or incense on it because it was an offering brought to the Lord as a result of jealousy and possible infidelity.

The woman was to stand before the Lord (verse 16). This was not taken lightly. Standing in the presence of the Lord, she would be aware that He would be her judge. He knew all about her and nothing could be hidden from Him.

As the woman stood in the presence of the Lord, the priest would put some holy water (possibly from the basin in the outer court used for washing) in a clay jar. He would then gather dust from the floor of the tabernacle and put it in the water. It is unclear why dust from the tabernacle floor was put in the jar.

The priest would approach the woman and let down her hair so that it fell on her shoulders and back (verse 18). Many women spent time preparing their hair. In fact, in Bible times a woman's hair was a symbol of honour. Here in this situation the woman would stand with humility before God. Her hair would not be done up nicely but would hang down uncombed as a symbol of her humility before God.

As the woman stood in the presence of the Lord, the priest would put the grain offering in her hands. With the grain offering in her hands, the priest would place the woman under an oath before God (verse 19). The oath stated that if she had been faithful to her husband then nothing would happen to her. If, however, she had been unfaithful to her husband by sleeping with another man, then her people would curse and denounce her, and the water she was

about to drink would cause her thigh to waste away and her abdomen swell. The woman was to agree to this curse by saying "Amen. So be it."

The priest would then write the words of the curse on a scroll and wash them off into the water mixed with dust from the tabernacle floor (verse 23). By washing off the words of the curse into the water, the priest was in reality placing the curse in the water the woman was about to drink.

The offering would then be taken from the woman's hands, waved before the Lord and offered on the altar as a sacrifice for sin (verses 25-26). The woman was given the water to drink. Verse 24 tells us that it would enter her and cause bitter suffering (if she had been unfaithful). If, however, she was not guilty, the Lord would protect her and she would be clear of all guilt. Verse 28 tells us that she would be able to have children if she was cleared of guilt. This may be because the Lord would bless her for her faithfulness and normal relations would be restored between her and her husband.

Notice one final matter in verse 31. If the woman was found guilty, she would suffer the consequences for her sin, but her husband would be innocent. From the beginning of time people have tried to put the blame for their actions on others. Adam did this in the Garden of Eden when he told the Lord that his wife gave him the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. We are not told why the woman was unfaithful to her husband. Maybe he did not care for her and her needs as he should have. What is clear, however, is that her husband's possible neglect did not excuse the wife's unfaithfulness. This principle is the same for men. We cannot excuse our actions by

blaming them on someone else. God calls us to be accountable for our own sins.

Purity in the camp of Israel required that God's people keep themselves from sin. It also required healthy and trusting relationships between friends and loved ones. It is not enough to have a well-run church. God also expects holiness in our relationship with Him and with others.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about God's expectation for us to walk in purity before Him? Are you walking in purity before God today?
- How do our sins against each other affect our relationship with God?
- What are the two steps required in this passage for restoring relationships with our brothers and sisters?
- How important is it that we deal with problems in our marriage? What is God's expectation for us as marriage partners in this passage?
- Have you ever blamed someone else for your sinful actions? What do we learn in this passage about this?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there is anything in you that offends His presence in your life. Confess that sin and ask Him to give you complete victory over it.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have wronged a brother or sister in Christ.
- Ask the Lord to help you to confess your sins to your brother or sister and show you how to make restitution for the things you have done.
- Take a moment to pray that the Lord would reveal any issues in your marriage or other significant relationships that need to be resolved. Ask God to show you how those problems can be resolved so that your marriage brings honour to His name.
- Ask for forgiveness for any time you have tried to justify your sin by blaming someone else.
- Thank the Lord that He is a holy God. Ask Him to give you grace to walk in purity and holiness before Him.

6

NAZIRITE VOWS

Read Numbers 6:1-27

There are times in the life of the believer when he or she feels compelled to draw closer to the Lord for a period of time. This may be for the purpose of seeking deeper intimacy with Him or for seeking His wisdom or favour about a particular situation in life. The Old Testament provided a means by which God's people could draw closer to Him for this purpose. A special vow of separation could be made for a period of time. While this vow was made freely and the individual could fix the time and the duration of the vow, certain requirements still had to be met. A person taking such a vow was called a Nazirite.

Notice in verse 1 that the Nazirite vow could be made by either a man or a woman. Verse 1 calls the Nazirite vow a "vow of separation." This implies that the individual would separate himself or herself from certain things for the duration of the vow with the purpose of seeking the Lord.

Verses 3-8 tell us that the Nazirite was to abstain from three things during the period of the vow.

First, the Nazirite was to abstain from wine or any fermented drink. He or she was not to eat or drink vinegar, grape juice, or eat grapes or raisins. The Nazirite was to abstain from anything that came from the grapevine. The fruit of the vine was a wonderful blessing for the people of God. We can only imagine what it would have been like to have tasted grapes as they wandered through the wilderness. Wine was used in celebrations with family and friends. All these luxuries were sacrificed by Nazirites as they turned their attention to God.

The second requirement of God for those under a Nazirite vow was that no razor be used on their head (verse 5). This meant that their hair was to grow long. This long hair identified them as Nazirites. As long as they were under their vow their heads would be covered with this long hair.

The third requirement God had for the Nazirites was that they never go near a dead body. To go near a dead body would make them ceremonially unclean. This rule applied even when the Nazirite's immediate family died (verses 6-8). Their obligation to God at this time was more important than their obligation to their own families.

If someone died suddenly in the presence of one who was under such a vow, verse 9 tells us that his or her hair would be defiled. This shows us that the long hair was a symbol of their vow. In this situation, the Nazirite was to go through a seven day ceremonial purification. On the seventh day, the individual was to shave his or her head. Two doves or two young pigeons were brought to the priest on the eighth day and offered as a sin offering to the Lord (verse 11). The priest would then set the Nazirite apart again for his or her vow with the sacrifice of a one year old male lamb as a guilt offering (verse 12). The Nazirite was then cleansed from his or her defilement and could start the vow

all over again. The time spent prior to defilement by the dead body could not be counted toward the time vowed to the Lord.

When the time of the vow was over the Nazirite was to bring offerings to the priest at the entrance of the tabernacle. These offerings were to include the following:

- A one year old male lamb without defect for a burnt offering
- A one year old ewe lamb without defect for a sin offering
- A ram without defect for a fellowship offering
- Grain offerings
- Drink offerings
- A basket of bread made without yeast, cakes made with fine flour mixed with oil and wafers spread with oil

Verses 16-17 tell us that the priest would present these offerings to the Lord. The Nazirite would have his or her hair cut and put on the fire, offering it to the Lord (verse 18). The priest would place a boiled shoulder of the ram, a cake and a wafer in the hands of the Nazirite and wave them before the Lord as a token of giving them to Him. Only when this ceremony was completed could the Nazirite drink wine and return to his or her regular lifestyle (verse 20). While the vow was a voluntary one, God still expected that Nazirites be faithful to their promises and act in accordance to His requirements (verse 21).

Chapter 6 concludes with a blessing that God gave to the priests to be said over the people at special times. The blessing communicates the heart of God for His people.

Notice that the blessing contains three separate statements.

The Lord Bless you and Keep you

By speaking this blessing over the people of God, the priests were in reality praying that the Lord would bless His people with all good things. Notice also that the priests were to ask the Lord to keep His people. God would keep them from harm. He would protect them and keep them as His own, surrounding them with His care and provision.

The Lord Make his Face Shine Upon you and be Gracious to You

The second part of the blessing asks God to make His face shine on His people. When the Lord's face shines on someone, He is in reality showing them His favour. The request is that the Lord would be gracious, kind and compassionate toward His people and that He would prosper them in their ways.

The Lord Turn his Face toward you and Give you Peace

Finally, the blessing calls for God to turn His face toward His people and give them peace. When the Lord turns His face toward someone He is turning His attention to them. He is seeing their needs and reaching out to them. The opposite of turning ones face toward someone is to turn ones back. By turning His face toward His people God reaches out to them and ministers to their needs. He strengthens them in the face of their enemies. With God's face turned toward them, God's people would have nothing to fear. They could live at peace.

Notice from this that it is the heart of God to bless His people. He wants to provide for their needs and show them His favour. He wants to care for them in the presence of their enemies and give them peace.

This chapter shows us how God wanted to bless and favour His people. He also provided a way for His people to draw nearer to Him through a Nazirite vow. He is a very personal God who delights in fellowship with His people.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever felt the need to take time apart to be with the Lord in a special way? What was it that brought you to that place in your life?
- The Lord provided a means by which His people could voluntarily commit their time to seeking Him in a special way. What does this tell us about God's desire for deeper fellowship with us?
- What does the blessing God gave to Aaron teach us about the desire of God for us?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He delights to draw close to us.
- Ask the Lord to strengthen you in your relationship with Him. Ask Him to show you what you can do to strengthen your relationship with Him.

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for how He has blessed you in your life.
- Thank the Lord for the times He has turned His face toward you and kept you from spiritual, emotional and physical harm.
- Ask the Lord to continue to keep you as you face the difficulties that this life will bring.

7

THE DEDICATION OF THE ALTAR

Read Numbers 7:1-89

When the tabernacle was set up, Moses anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils. To celebrate this occasion, the family heads of Israel brought gifts for the Lord. From verse 2 we understand that each tribe gave an ox and every two tribes gave a cart load of offerings. All these gifts were brought to Moses at the tabernacle (verse 3).

The Lord was pleased with the gifts brought to Him and told Moses to accept them for the work of the tabernacle. He was to divide the gifts received among the Levites, as their work required (verses 4-5).

Moses divided the gifts as follows among the Levite family clans:

Levite Family	Carts	Oxen
Gershonites	2	4
Merarites	4	8
Kohathites	0	0

Notice that each Levite family received a different amount. This was due to the responsibilities that had in the tabernacle. Verse 9 tells us that the Kohathites did not receive any of these gifts because their responsibility was to carry the holy things on their shoulders and so their responsibilities did not require these offerings from the people. Each of us has a different responsibility before God. God gives us what we need for the responsibilities He has given us.

Verses 10-88 describe for us what took place when the altar for sacrifices was dedicated to the Lord. The dedication took twelve days and on each of those days the leader of one of the tribes of Israel brought an offering to the Lord and presented it before the altar (verses 10-11). Verses 10-88 can be summarized in the following chart:

Day	Who Brought Offering	Tribe	Offered by Each Tribe
1	Nahshon	Judah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 silver plate - 1 silver bowl of flour & oil - 1 gold dish of incense - 1 young bull - 1 ram - 1 male lamb a year old - 1 male goat (sin offering) - 2 oxen - 5 rams - 5 male goats
2	Nethanel	Issachar	
3	Eliab	Zebulun	
4	Elizur	Reuben	
5	Shelumiel	Simeon	
6	Eliasaph	Gad	
7	Elishama	Ephraim	
8	Gamaliel	Manasseh	

9	Abidan	Benjamin	- 5 male lambs a year old
10	Ahiezer	Dan	
11	Pagiel	Asher	
12	Ahira	Naphtali	

Notice that each tribe brought their offering on a different day. The offering was brought by the leader of the tribe. Each tribe brought the same offering. Verses 84-88 gives us an account of the total number of gifts brought for the dedication of the altar over those twelve days. These verses can be summarized as follows:

Article	#	Weight	Purpose
Silver plates	12	2,400 shekels	Filled with flour/oil for grain offering
Silver Sprinkling bowls	12		
Gold dishes	12	120 shekels	Filled with incense
Young bulls	12		Burnt offering
Rams	12		
1 year old male lambs	12		
Male goats	12		Sin offering

Oxen	24		Fellowship offering
Rams	60		
Male Goats	60		
1 year old male lambs	60		

In those twelve days 252 animals were sacrificed on the altar at the tabernacle. These offerings were for the sins of the people and expressed their worship and thankfulness to God for His forgiveness and mercy in their lives.

It is important that we note the importance of the altar in the life of the Old Testament believers. The dedication of the altar took twelve days and involved a significant number of sacrifices. It was by means of this altar that sins would be cleansed and people restored to a right relationship with God. This altar pointed to the even greater sacrifice that would be made by the perfect Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus, who died for our sins on the cross of Calvary, ending forever all further sacrifice for sin.

Notice how verse 89 concludes the chapter. Moses entered the tabernacle and heard the Lord speaking to him from between the two carved cherubim on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. God's presence came down to the tabernacle. What made this tabernacle special was not all the sacrifices and service that took place there but the presence of the Lord who spoke to His people through Moses from between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. In the midst of a chapter that counts the number of sheep and goats that were offered to God and weighs the amount of gold and silver that was contributed, it is

refreshing to see that this chapters ends by focusing our attention on what is most important, the Lord God and His presence in the midst of His people. May that be our focus in ministry as well.

For Consideration:

- Each tribe of Israel was expected to contribute to the work of the Lord and the dedication of the altar. What does this tell us about the importance of our contribution to the work of the Lord today? How have you been contributing to the expansion of God's kingdom?
- Each Levite family clan was given a different amount of the offering contributed by God's people. God gave each one according to His need. What does this tell us about God's desire to provide all you need to accomplish the purposes He has for you? How has God been providing for your need?
- The dedication of the altar took twelve days and required a significant number of animal sacrifices. What does this tell us about the importance of the altar for Israel?
- The chapter ends with a statement about how God revealed His presence in the tabernacle between the wings of the carved angels on the Ark of the Covenant. How easy is it for us to get caught up in counting people and offerings? What does the conclusion of this chapter teach us about what is really important?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you what he wants you to contribute toward the work of His kingdom.
- Thank the Lord that He is willing to provide all that you need for the ministry and life He has called you to live.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord that He came to be the final sacrifice for sin. Thank Him that His sacrifice paid for your sins in full.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times your ministry has been focused on numbers and not on the Lord and His presence.

8

THE DEDICATION OF THE LEVITES

Read Numbers 8:1-26

As we begin chapter 8, the Lord is speaking to Moses and giving him instructions about the lampstand in the Holy Place of the tabernacle. Moses was to instruct his brother Aaron to be sure to set the lamps on the stand in such a way that they would light up what was in front of the lampstand (verse 2). We need to remember that the Holy Place where the lampstand was located contained a table on which bread was placed and an altar of incense. The Holy Place was very dark as there were no windows, and thick curtains kept any outside light from coming in. The only light in the Holy Place was from the lamp which was to be kept burning at all times. Aaron was to be careful in how he placed the lamps in the lampstand.

Aaron placed the lights in the lampstand so they gave the best possible light to the Holy Place. The lampstand on which those lights shone was made of a piece of hammered gold decorated with carved golden flower blossoms (verse 4).

It is interesting to note that this chapter begins with a comment about the importance of the lamps on the lampstand shining as brightly as possible in the holy place. The chapter continues to speak about the Levites who were God's representatives in the worship of the tabernacle. Just as the lamp was to shine brightly in the presence of the Lord in the Holy Place, so the Levites were to shine brightly and purely for the Lord they represented.

If the Levites were to shine brightly for the Lord and be His true servants in the tabernacle they would need to be set aside in a special way for the Lord and His purposes. In this chapter, the Lord gives instructions to Moses concerning His requirements for the dedication of a Levite to the service of the Lord.

All serving Levites were to be made ceremonially clean (verse 6). Several things needed to happen for this to take place. Notice first in verse 7 that they were to be sprinkled with "the water of cleansing." Leviticus 19:1-10 speaks about the water used for purification. A red heifer was slaughtered. The priest placed cedar wood, hyssop and a scarlet thread on the sacrifice and burned it all to the Lord. The ashes were then gathered, put in water and used to sprinkle the people. The Levites were sprinkled with this water that represented the sacrifice made for their sin.

When the Levite had been sprinkled with water he was to shave his whole body and wash his clothes. Notice in verse 7 that these Levites were to "purify themselves." What is interesting about this is that the water of purification had already been sprinkled on them, but they were still required to wash and purify themselves. This is a picture of our salvation. The Lord Jesus has died and our sins are forgiven through his work on the cross, but we are still required to live each day in victory over our sins. We are to

purify ourselves and discipline ourselves to live in the reality of what He has done. By washing themselves and shaving their bodies, the priests were agreeing to live in what God had done by cleansing them with the water of purification.

In verse 8, two young bulls and a grain offering were brought to the Lord. The Levites came and stood in the front of the tabernacle and the people of Israel stood around them (verse 9). Those who gathered would lay their hands on the Levites in the presence of the Lord. Aaron presented them to the Lord as a wave offering. A wave offering was brought to the Lord and waved before Him as a reminder that it belonged to Him. By laying their hands on the Levites, the people recognized them as their representatives.

The Levites then laid their hands on the heads of the bulls that had been brought. One of the bulls was sacrificed as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to the Lord. By laying their hands on the heads of these bulls, the Levites were recognizing that these bulls were being sacrificed for them and because of their sins.

The ceremony for dedicating a Levite was important because of what it symbolized. These Levites were sprinkled by the water of purification and set apart for God and His service. As His servants, they were to be clean before Him, walk in His forgiveness and represent His people well.

Speaking to the people in verses 15-19, the Lord reminded them of how He had chosen the tribe of Levi to represent them. When Israel was in Egypt, the Lord struck down every firstborn male child in the land. Only those whose door posts had been painted with the blood of a lamb were spared. At that time, God claimed the firstborn of every

animal and Israelite male child as His own (verse 17). Instead of taking the firstborn from every family, however, God chose to have one tribe represent them. The Levites were chosen as His servants in the place of the firstborn from every family. Their role was an important one. They were to help the priests in their daily responsibilities at the tabernacle and to make atonement for the people. In other words, they were to make the necessary sacrifices so that the holy and just anger of God against the sin of His people would be kept from them.

Notice in verse 19 that the priests, assisted by the Levites, were the only ones who could approach the Holy Place and perform the duties required by God for the cleansing of His people's sin. Anyone else who dared to perform these sacred duties or approached the Holy Place would bring a plague on the nation.

Moses and the Levites did everything God had commanded them to do. The Levites purified themselves, washed their clothes and Moses presented them before the Lord and offered the sacrifices required for their sin. Only when a Levite was ceremonially clean and dedicated to the service of the Lord could he begin his work in the tabernacle. He would begin his work at the age of twenty-five and serve until he was fifty. At the age of fifty a Levite was required to retire from service. During their retirement, they could assist their brothers but they could not be responsible themselves (verse 26). They were to be willing to hand over the responsibility to the next generation to carry on for the glory of God.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about our responsibility to be a light for the Lord God?
- The Levites were to be ceremonially clean as they served Him in the tabernacle. How important is it that we, as God's servants, walk in purity? What happens when God's servants are not walking in obedience and truth?
- What role has God given you in His kingdom? Have you been faithful in what He has called you to do? Have you been serving Him with a clean and pure conscience?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to shine brightly for Him. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have not been the witness you should have been.
- Ask the Lord to show you what role He has for you. Ask him to help you to be faithful in that role.
- Thank God that He has provided a way for you to be forgiven and cleansed of your sin.
- Take a moment to pray for your spiritual leaders. Ask the Lord to strengthen them and help them to be faithful servants for His glory.

9

THE PASSOVER AND GOD'S LEADING

Read Numbers 9:1-23

As we begin chapter 9 we discover that it was now the second year since the people of Israel had come out of Egypt. The Lord spoke to Moses at that time and told him that the people were to celebrate the Passover. As you will recall, the Passover looked back to the escape from Egypt and how the angel of the Lord had “passed over” the land of Egypt and struck the firstborn of each home. The firstborn male children of Israel were spared by painting the blood of a lamb on their doorposts. That act of judgment caused the Pharaoh to give permission for the Israelites to leave his country. The Passover was a celebration of God’s goodness and compassion toward His people in setting them free from their bondage. God reminded Moses that His people were to be careful to celebrate this Passover exactly as He had commanded from twilight on the 14th day of that month.

God knows how easy it is for us to forget His goodness in our lives. The Passover was a reminder of what the Lord had done for His people. It caused them to remember their

obligation to God for what He had done for them. God gave His people special times in their calendar year to stop and remember their God and His goodness. It is good for us as well to stop what we are doing for a time to remember God and His work in our lives. These times help us to refocus our priorities and remember who and why we are serving.

From verses 4-5 we see that on the 14th day of the 1st month, Israel stopped its normal activities and took the time in the Desert of Sinai, to celebrate the Passover in remembrance of the goodness and compassion of God.

We see in verse 6 that a problem arose. Some of the people were not ceremonially clean because they had touched a dead body. They wanted to bring their offerings to the Lord but could not do so because of this uncleanness. These individuals came to Moses to see what they were to do (verses 6-7).

Moses told the individuals concerned to wait until he had consulted the Lord to see what He said about their problem. It is important that we see what Moses is doing here. He is seeking the will of the Lord for the situation. He could have made a decision himself based on what he felt would be to the glory of God but he didn't. He wanted to know the heart of God. All too many decisions are made in human wisdom and not according to the clear teaching of the Word of God or the leading of His Spirit. Moses leaves us with a powerful example here. He wanted to know God's will for this situation and so he spent time with God seeking His will.

God honoured Moses' decision to seek Him in this matter and responded to his prayer. God told him that when an Israelite was unclean or away on a journey at the time of

the Passover, he was to celebrate it on the 14th day of the 2nd month (one month later). They were to do everything as God required. They were to eat the lamb with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. No bone was to be broken and nothing was to be left over until the morning (verses 11-12).

Notice that while God made provision for those who were unclean to celebrate the Passover at a later date, His people were to be careful not to neglect this celebration. If a person failed to celebrate the Passover at the appointed time he would be cut off from the people of God and would be guilty of serious sin (verse 13). God makes provision for our weaknesses and obligations but we must be sure that these weaknesses and earthly obligations do not provide us with an excuse to ignore our spiritual obligations.

Notice also in verse 14 that the foreigner living in Israel who wanted to celebrate the Passover was permitted to do so; provided that he did so in accordance with all the rules and regulations God had given Moses. They were not permitted to celebrate the Passover in any other way. This was particularly important for the foreigner who may have been tempted to add things from his own cultural background or add significance to the celebration other than what was originally intended.

What we see from this is that the Lord wanted the Passover celebration to be kept pure and undefiled. God knew that there would be a temptation for His people to neglect the celebration of this important day. He also knew that they would be tempted to add or take away from the purpose of that day. For this reason He demanded that it be celebrated exactly as He had prescribed on the day and time He prescribed. We are left to wonder if we have been guilty of adding or taking away from God's Word and His

purpose for His kingdom. Have we, like Moses, been seeking God's will, and doing exactly what He desires or have we been seeking to advance His kingdom in our own ways and for our own purposes? Moses was careful to do exactly what God required. In the same way, the Word of God must also be our guide in all things. We must never compromise or follow our own wisdom.

In verse 15, the Lord's presence came down and covered the tabernacle. His presence was revealed in the form of a great fiery cloud (verses 15-16). When God wanted His people to move from their camp to another location, He would lift up the cloud and the people would follow it (verse 17). The people of God stayed wherever that cloud was whether it was for a prolonged period of time or for a few days only (verses 18-23).

There are some important truths in these verses for us to grasp. God's people followed His leading. Notice that God did not stay in one place. Sometimes His presence would remain in a place for a few days and other times for longer periods of time. In the course of my life God has led me to different places and given me different opportunities to serve. It is easy for us to get settled into one thing and believe that this is what God wants us to do forever, but God sometimes has different purposes for us. He may use us for a time in one way and then move us to something completely different. We need to be ready always for whatever He leads us to do.

Notice also that the people of God were not in control of their own future. I find it interesting how many Christian workers set out their goals and plans for ministry and expect God to submit to their human agendas. This is not how it was for the people of Israel. They submitted to the purpose and plan of God. They did not set the agenda;

they only listened to God and followed His leading. When God moved, they moved with Him. When God stayed, they stayed. We need to understand that more than anything else we need people who will put aside their own plans and simply follow the leading of the Lord.

Sometimes we fail to move when God moves. There are churches that continue to exist even when the presence of the Lord has been removed. There are Christian workers who stubbornly persevere in ministry when God's presence has moved somewhere else. These ministries are often without power. They are maintained in human strength and vision but are not under the direct blessing and presence of the Lord. God is calling for a people who will follow His leading. He is looking for a people who will set aside their own goals and agenda and seek Him and His will. We would do well to examine our lives and ministries in light of the teaching of this passage.

For Consideration:

- What was the Passover? What did it celebrate?
- How important is it that we stop and take time to remember the goodness of God?
- God expected His people to follow His purposes exactly as He had commanded. How often have we been tempted to compromise in our spiritual life? How often have we done things in our own wisdom without following the clear teaching of the Word of God?

- What do we learn here about the importance of following the Lord's leading?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider the goodness and compassion of the Lord in your life. Thank Him for what He has done for you?
- Ask the Lord to help you to put aside your own goals and plans. Ask Him to help you to follow His leading. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have been slow to follow His leading.
- Take a moment now to ask the Lord to show you His purpose for your life and ministry. Ask Him to show you if you are where He wants you to be and under His blessing and presence.

10

LEAVING SINAI

Read Numbers 10:1-36

In the last chapter, we saw how the presence of the Lord came down in the form of a fiery cloud that covered the tabernacle. As long as the presence of God was over the tabernacle, the people of God stayed where they were. When God's presence moved, they moved with it.

The Lord commanded Moses to have two silver trumpets made to let the people know when it was time to move (verse 1). If both of the trumpets were sounded, the people would gather together in front of the tabernacle for instructions (verse 3). If just one of the trumpets were sounded, only the leaders (the heads of the clans) would gather (verse 4).

When the people were packed and ready to leave, a first trumpet sounded. When they heard this trumpet, the tribes camping on the east were to set out. When the second trumpet sounded, the camps on the south were to follow (verses 5-6). It should be noted from verse 7 that there were different types of trumpet blasts. The call for leaving the camp was different from the call to assemble before the tabernacle.

Verse 8 tells us that Aaron's sons were to sound the trumpet. Not only would they do so when it was time for the people to leave the camp but, according to verse 9, they would also sound the trumpets to call the people to war. Notice particularly in verse 9 that when the priest sounded the call to battle, the Lord would remember His people and rescue them from their enemies. Verse 10 tells us that the priests would also sound the trumpet to call people together for times of rejoicing.

It is interesting to note the role God gave the priests in these verses. They were to help the people to know the leading of the Lord. When the presence of the Lord rose from the tabernacle and moved elsewhere, the priests were to sound the trumpet. The priests were to lead the people of God into His will and purpose. This meant seeking the purpose of God and watching always for His leading. Their role was to discern where God was leading His people and summon them to follow that will.

Second, the priests were to discern the heart of God regarding the enemies that surrounded them. When it was time to take up arms against the enemy, the priest would sound the trumpet. When the enemy was attacking, the priest would warn the people. There are many enemies for the people of God today. God's servants need to be always watching out for those enemies. Pastors and Christian workers need to be a people who are ready to sound the alarm when the enemy comes to harm or weaken the faith.

Finally, notice the priests were to sound the trumpet to bring people to worship and rejoicing. They would call them to worship God. They would encourage them in glorifying His name and enjoying Him. As Christian workers today, our purpose is to lead people into the celebration

and worship of the Lord God who is worthy of all praise and adoration.

Verse 11 tells us that on the twentieth day of the second month (two years after leaving Egypt), the cloud lifted from the tabernacle. The people of God set out from the Desert of Sinai and followed the cloud until it came to rest in the Desert of Paran. The Desert of Paran was about 160 kilometres (100 miles) north of the Desert of Sinai.

Verses 14 to 28 describe the way in which the people of God left the Desert of Sinai. Each tribe knew its place and time to leave. Everything was done in order. The following chart summarized verses 14-28 and shows how the camp of Israel left and moved from Sinai to the Desert of Paran.

Departure	Division Head	Tribes in Division	Tribal Leaders	Task
1 st	Judah	Judah Issachar Zebulun	Nahshon Nethanel Eliab	
2 nd		Levi	<i>Gershonites</i> <i>Merarites</i>	Take down tabernacle, carry it and set it up again.
3 rd	Reuben	Reuben Simeon Gad	Elizur Shelumiel Eliasaph	
4 th		Levi	<i>Kohathites</i>	Carry holy things
5 th	Ephraim	Ephraim Manasseh Benjamin	Elishama Gamaliel Abidan	
6 th	Dan	Dan Asher Naphtali	Ahiezzer Pagiel Ahira	

As Moses prepared to leave the region of Sinai he spoke with his father-in-law Hobab. Hobab was a Midianite. It may be that he felt somewhat out of place in all the preparations because he was not an Israelite. Moses reassured him, however, that if he came with them he would be treated well and would prosper. Moses reminded his father-in-law that God had promised good things for His people and that he could be part of those blessings (verse 29).

Hobab did not want to go with Moses and the Israelites. He chose to return to his own land and live out the rest of his days with his own people (verse 30). Moses did not accept his answer and pleaded with him not to leave them. Notice how Moses told Hobab in verse 31 that because he was a Midianite he would be able to show the people of God where to camp. Obviously, Hobab had experience in living in the desert that Moses felt he needed. He promised him again that if he came with them, he would share in all the good things the Lord had promised to give His people (verse 32). It is hard to know if this shows something of Moses' lack of confidence as he leads the people into the desert. God would certainly have led and directed Moses even without the experience of Hobab; but Moses felt that he needed the experience of another human being on this journey.

God's leading and direction in our lives does not mean that we never have to listen to advice or counsel from those who have had more experience than us. Moses would follow the leading of the Lord but he would also listen to the experience of his father-in-law.

Led by God, the people set out from the mountain of Sinai and travelled three days. The Ark of the Covenant went before them and the cloud of the Lord was over them leading them all the way (verse 34). Notice in verse 33 that it

was the Ark of the Covenant that went before them “to find a place to rest.” It would not be Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses who would lead them by his experience, but the Lord God.

Whenever the people of God would rise in the morning to follow the cloud and the Ark of God, Moses would pray:

Rise up, O LORD!
May your enemies be scattered;
may your foes flee before you. (verse 35)

His prayer was that the Lord God would go before them to protect them from any enemy they might encounter on the way. When they came to rest Moses would pray:

Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel. (verse 36)

In praying this, Moses was asking God to come and be in their presence, protecting and keeping them as they waited on Him for the next step. Moses' confidence was in the Lord. He knew the dangers that were before them and felt inadequate to protect and guide the people himself. He also knew, however, that the Lord was big enough to care for him and all the people that had been placed under his care.

The Lord will often call us to something that is bigger than our wisdom and resources. He does not leave us to fend for ourselves, however, but promises to provide all we need to do his will and purpose. Moses knew the immensity of the task before him, but he also knew that God would provide all he needed. He lived in total dependency on God for the task he had been called to do.

For Consideration:

- This chapter shows us how the camp of Israel was ordered and how each tribe knew its place and time to leave. How important is it that the body of Christ have this same order? What happens when there is no order in a church?
- What does this chapter teach us about the role of the priests? If you are a spiritual leader take a moment to consider if you are following the example given in this chapter.
- How did Moses see the role of his father-in-law? Does God give us people to encourage and help us along the way? What is the difference between accepting the encouragement and advice of a brother and trusting in them and not in God? How do you find the balance between accepting the advice of a brother or sister and trusting in God's leading?
- As Moses set out from Sinai, he was fully aware of his inability to lead the people in his own strength. Has God brought you to a point where you knew that your own strength or resources were inadequate for the task?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you your place and role in the body of Christ. Thank Him that He has a particular purpose for you.
- Take a moment to pray for your spiritual leaders, that they would be able to guide those under them in seeking the will of the Lord, warn them of the dangers before them and encourage them to be true worshippers of God.
- Thank the Lord for those who have been an encouragement and support in your life.
- Ask the Lord to increase your faith and confidence in Him. Ask Him to give you faith to trust Him to do what seems impossible with human strength and wisdom.

11

ISRAEL COMPLAINS

Read Numbers 11:1-35

As the people of Israel wandered through the wilderness, the Lord provided for their daily needs. That is not to say, however, that they did not have difficulties along the way. The desert is not a place of plenty. God's people lived in tents and did not have the luxuries of other nations. They also did not know when the cloud would move and they would have to pack their tents and follow the leading of the Lord.

The Christian life will certainly not always be easy. God may move us from our comfort zones. He may stretch us in ways we have never been stretched before. The great comfort we have in these times is that the Lord God will never leave us and will provide all we need to accomplish what He calls us to do.

At this point in the life of Israel, however, they were not seeing things from God's perspective. They felt the hardships of the desert and did not like them. In fact, in verse 1 we read that they began to complain about their hardships before the Lord. The Lord became so angry with them that fire came down and burned the outskirts of the

camp (verse 1). The people were afraid and cried out to Moses. He prayed to the Lord and the fire stopped.

There are several things we need to understand from this verse. First, we need to recognize that the Lord God is God. This means that He has the right to do as He pleases. We have no right to grumble and complain about His purposes as if He owes us something. The fact that we are alive and that He hasn't destroyed us because of our sin is a sign of His great mercy and compassion. What right do we have to complain because He hasn't made our life easier?

God's people had lost sight of what God had done for them already. He had set them free from the bondage of Egypt and the cruelties of that nation toward them. He had opened the hearts and hands of the people of Egypt to bless them with much wealth as they left the land. He had given them victory over Pharaoh's army. He had opened the sea for them so that they could walk across on dry ground. He had placed His presence among them and led them personally step by step through the desert. He provided them with food to eat every day so that they were not hungry. Now Israel was complaining because their lives were not easier. By complaining against God, they failed to appreciate what He had already done.

By complaining, Israel failed to recognize that God had their best interests in mind. He knew His people better than they knew themselves. He loved them and had clearly demonstrated his love for them. His people did not understand that love. They felt He didn't love them because He didn't give them more. In fact, they were making their comfort more important than God and His purposes. Instead of trusting God and worshipping Him for His care and provision, they set their hearts on the pleasures and comforts

of this world. These things angered God and so He sent his fire as a warning to them.

Notice from verse 3 that the place where God sent His fire against the camp was called Taberah. The word itself means “burning.” This name would be a reminder to the people of what God did when they complained against Him.

Lessons are not easily learned. We see in verse 4 that God’s people still longed for greater things. They had been eating manna every day and were growing tired of it. They craved other food. Notice the use of the word “wailing” in verse 4. This is a strong word. God’s people wailed for other food. They cried out for meat to eat. They remembered the fish they had enjoyed in Egypt as well as the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic (verses 5-6). All they had to eat now was manna.

The manna God provided would be gathered, ground, cooked in a pot or made into cakes. Verse 8 tells us that it tasted like something made with olive oil. It was gathered each morning.

According to verse 10, Moses heard the people of “every family” wailing at the entrance of his tent. The whole nation was unhappy with the provision of the Lord. It wasn’t that they didn’t have enough to eat; it was that they didn’t have the kind of things they wanted to eat. As one voice they lifted up their cry of discontent to God, longing for the days when they had been in the bondage of Egypt and had what they wanted to eat. Their perspective was very shallow. They were not looking at anything beyond their present appetite. They could not see what God was planning for them. They could not focus on His promises and what He

was doing through them. All they could think about was their stomachs.

God became “exceedingly angry” at what He saw in the camp of Israel (verse 10). Moses also became very troubled. He understood the holiness and justice of God. He knew that God could wipe out His people in an instant. Notice what Moses says to God in verse 12-15:

(12) Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? (13) Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ (14) I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. (15) If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now — if I have found favour in your eyes — and do not let me face my own ruin.”

What does Moses do in response to his people’s complaining? He complains! In verses 12-15, he questions God about why He had brought this trouble to him and why He had given him such a heavy burden to bear. He questions God’s wisdom in choosing him to carry the nation to the land promised to their forefathers. He questions whether God was able to provide meat for this people to eat. He literally told God that if that was how He was going to treat him, he didn’t want the job anymore. He would rather die.

The whole nation is cast into confusion. From the leaders down to the members of each family there is discontent with God and His purposes.

Notice how God responds to the complaint of Moses and the people. He commanded Moses, in verse 16, to bring seventy of Israel's elders to the tabernacle (verse 16). He would meet with them and put the Spirit that was on Moses on these leaders as well so that they could help him to carry the burden. God recognized Moses' complaint and did something about it. Moses had been carrying a heavy burden. God now provides him with seventy Spirit empowered men to help.

With regard to the people, God told Moses that He would provide them with the meat they wanted the very next day. He had heard their complaining. He would give them what they longed for, not just for one or two days but for a whole month (verses 19-20). They would have more meat than they could ever want. In fact, they would eat that meat until they hated it as much as they hated the manna. God would use this abundance of meat to teach His people an important lesson.

Have you ever longed for something but were disappointed when you finally got it? One of the great lessons we need to learn as believers is contentment. God wanted to show His people that earthly things can never truly satisfy. They believed that if they had meat then things would be better for them. God was showing them that they could become tired of eating meat just as they had become tired of eating manna. Instead of complaining and longing for something more, they needed to learn to be content with what God had given them. The secret was not in having more, but in being satisfied with what they had.

When Moses heard God say that his people would eat meat for a whole month, he questioned God. He could not imagine where they would be able to find a month's supply of meat for 600,000 men (as well as women and children).

He reminded God that even if they slaughtered all their flocks and herds it would not be enough. He could not even imagine being able to catch that many fish in the sea. Moses was trying to understand things from a human perspective. From a human point of view, what God was suggesting was impossible.

Very likely Moses feared to go to the people to tell them what God had said. He feared because he knew the people were angry. Perhaps he feared their response. Would they feel he was mocking them? What would happen if God did not provide all the meat He had promised? What would the people do to him? Moses lacks faith at this point in his life. He seems to be feeling tired and overwhelmed with the responsibilities God has given him.

In verse 23, however, the Lord reminded Moses that His arm was not too short. In other words, He was able to reach down to him at this time. He was fully capable of meeting the needs of His people. He would do everything He said he would do. Nothing was impossible for Him. God told Moses that he would see that what He said would come true.

With that assurance from God, Moses went to the people and told them what the Lord said. He also brought seventy elders before the Lord at the tabernacle as the Lord had requested. The Spirit of the Lord came down and spoke to them. That day the Spirit came on the seventy elders in a very special way to equip them for the ministry God had for them. When the Spirit of God came on them, verse 25 tells us that they prophesied. Notice that this was a one-time event. They prophesied the day the Spirit came on them but never did so again. The passage does not explain the nature of this prophesying. Obviously, the words spoken were special words given to them by the Spirit of

God. They may have been words of praise and thanksgiving to God as their hearts were touched and moved by his Spirit. They may have come in the form of songs of praise sung spontaneously to the Lord in worship. Though the Spirit of God rested on them for ministry, this particular type of prophesying would not be repeated in their lives.

Notice also in verse 26 that two of the seventy men chosen did not come to stand before the Lord in the tabernacle. We are not told the reason why they did not join the others. Eldad and Medad, however, were among those chosen by God to lead the people. While they were not present with the others in the tabernacle, the Spirit of God fell on them where they were. They, too, began to prophesy just like the others.

A young man noticed what had happened to Eldad and Medad and ran to Moses to speak to him about it. We understand from this that what was happening that day was unusual. This young man did not know what to do when he saw Eldad and Medad responding as they did. When Joshua, Moses' aid heard the young man's report, he asked Moses to stop them from prophesying (verse 28). Joshua was uncomfortable with what was happening that day.

Moses understood that what was happening was from the Lord. He told Joshua that he wished that every person in Israel could experience what these men were experiencing that day. We will not always understand God's ways. Sometimes we will find ourselves fighting like Joshua against the purposes of God. Moses had enough discernment, however, to recognize that these strange events were truly from the Lord.

With regard to God's promise of meat, that day God sent a wind that drove large quantities of quail from the sea to the camp. Verse 31 tells us that so many quail had been driven by the wind into the camp that they were piled on top of each other to a height of about three feet for a distance of a day's walk in every direction of the camp. The Israelites gathered these quail all day and night, prepared them and spread them out around the camp (possibly to dry). Notice in verse 32 that no Israelite gathered less than ten homers of quail (500 gallons or 2,200 litres). This was a phenomenal amount of quail all at one time and enough for them to eat for a month.

Notice in verse 33 that while God provided the people with the food they longed for, before all the quail had been eaten, a plague struck the camp and many died. It is likely that the plague was the result of the large amounts of quail in the camp. These quail may have brought diseases with them. It may be that the meat had gone bad and bred bacteria. What is clear from verse 34 is that many people died from the plague that broke out because of the quail. The Israelites named that location Kibroth Hattaavah with literally means "graves of craving."

We need to see from this that very often the things we crave for in our human flesh can destroy us. How many people, craving for the things of this world, have fallen and lost their way. This story is repeated in our day as even God's people set their eyes on things God has not provided. Not content with the provision of God, these individuals seek their pleasure and fulfilment in the things of this world only to become destitute in the end. May God help us to see that His ways are right and best for us. May we learn to be content with what He gives, understanding that there is reason in what He does.

For Consideration:

- What struggles have you had to face in your Christian life? What was your response to those struggles?
- How does complaining show our lack of trust in God and His purposes? Have you ever complained about God's purpose for your life?
- How does Moses demonstrate a lack of faith in this chapter? Have you ever found yourself in what appeared to be an impossible situation? How did you respond?
- How did God equip the 70 elders in this chapter? How important is the Holy Spirit in the Christian ministry?
- How did Joshua fight against what God was doing in this chapter? Have you ever fought against God's purpose because you did not understand it?
- What do we learn in this chapter about the importance of contentment?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He knows what is best for you and provides you with all you need to accomplish His purposes.

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times when you have complained about His purpose for your life.
- Ask the Lord to teach you to be more content with what He has provided.
- Thank the Lord that He has given His Holy Spirit to us to guide and enable us in our ministry and life.
- Ask the Lord to increase your faith so that you will not give up when things become difficult.

12

MIRIAM AND AARON

SPEAK AGAINST MOSES

Read Numbers 12

The ministry the Lord gave Moses was certainly not an easy one. As the leader of God's people, he was not always respected. In chapter 12, we read of an occasion where Moses' brother and sister spoke out against him.

Notice the accusation of Miriam and Aaron in verse 1. They complained because of his "Cushite" wife. The region of Cush was located just south of Egypt and is generally connected with the country of Ethiopia. While the name of Moses' wife is not given, the fact that she was a foreign wife would have certainly been an issue. It was God's intention that His people marry people of their own faith so as not to be influenced by the gods of the foreign nations. On the other hand, however, the Lord did make provision for foreign women to marry Israelites and become part of the Israelite nation. Consider the words of Deuteronomy 21:10-13 in this regard:

(10) When you go to war against your enemies and the LORD your God delivers them into your

hands and you take captives, (11) if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. (12) Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails (13) and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife.

What is interesting here is that while they were using the fact that Moses was married to a Cushite woman as an excuse, in reality they seemed to be complaining about something else. Listen to what they were complaining about in verse 2:

“Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?” they asked. “Hasn't he also spoken through us?”

Miriam and Aaron seem to be jealous that Moses was getting all the attention. People were coming to Moses and seeking the will of the Lord. Miriam and Aaron seemed to be left out. They felt they were just as good as their brother and resented the fact that he seemed to have so much power and authority in the nation. They felt they deserved some attention as well.

Aaron and Miriam appeared to understand that it would not look very spiritual if they complained that God was speaking to Moses more than to them. If they expressed their grievance this way it would become quite obvious that they were jealous and things would look bad for them. They began to look for something to use to accuse Moses and bring him down. They took advantage of the fact that he was married to a Cushite woman and used that against him. We are not sure how far their words travelled. The

intent of the words, however, was obviously not the glory of God but to damage Moses' reputation in the eyes of the people.

Notice in verse 3 that Moses was a very humble man. In fact, the verse tells us that there was no one as humble as Moses on the face of the earth. This leads us to believe that Moses did not seek to get even or to defend himself in the eyes of his brother or sister. God, however, heard what Miriam and Aaron had said and told them to meet Him in the tabernacle. When they had gathered, the presence of the Lord came down in a pillar and cloud and stood at the entrance of the tabernacle as if to guard it against anyone approaching. Moses had experienced this before, but this was likely a new experience for Aaron and Miriam. They were perhaps quite afraid.

When the presence of the Lord descended on the tabernacle, God called Miriam and Aaron to step forward. Obviously, they were to step closer into His presence where God would speak to them. This was their complaint in verse 2. Now God was going to give them what they wanted. He was going to speak to them.

In verses 6-8, we have the words of God to Miriam and Aaron in the presence of Moses. Notice that God reminds Miriam and Aaron that His usual way of speaking to prophets was through dreams and visions. It was through these dreams and visions that He would reveal His purposes. Often these dream and visions had to be interpreted to make sense.

Things were different with Moses, however. God spoke to Moses face to face. Notice in verse 7 that God reminded Miriam and Aaron that Moses was faithful in his house. In other words, he was living in obedience and walking with

God. God does not condemn him for his Cushite wife. God chose to speak to Moses face to face. He did not speak in riddles that needed to be interpreted. He spoke clearly and plainly as a friend would speak to a friend. He did this even though he had a Cushite wife.

This fact alone should have caused Miriam and Aaron to fear speaking out against Moses as God's servant. God had chosen him from among his people. They were not merely complaining against Moses but against God's decision to use him.

How often have we complained against others? Maybe they belong to another church and have a different understanding of Scripture. Maybe their background has been less than ideal. God's servants do not look the same. They come from various theological positions and backgrounds. The early church had a problem accepting the apostle Paul because of his anti-Christian background. Some may have had problems with Peter preaching the sermon at Pentecost because he had denied the Lord three times. How easy it is for us to stand in judgement of others. Often we do this not because we are concerned for the glory of God but because we want to look good ourselves. God spoke clearly to Miriam and Aaron about their sin.

Verse 9 tells us that the anger of the Lord "burned" against Miriam and Aaron and he left them. It is unclear what verse 9 means when it says that the Lord left them. It may simply be that his presence left that tabernacle. On the other hand, there may have been a sense of His blessing being removed for a time due to their evil attitude toward Moses.

In the case of Miriam, we see that when the cloud lifted from the tabernacle, she was leprous. Leprosy, in the Bible can refer to any number of skin problems. In this case,

Miriam's skin was white as snow. This meant that she was unclean and needed to be separated from the rest of the community where she would live in isolation. This was clearly a judgement of God against her for her complaining and angry words against Moses.

It is unclear why Aaron did not receive the same judgement. It is interesting, however, to note the order in which the names appear in this chapter and in the rest of Scripture. In verses 4 and 5 Aaron's name is mentioned first. This is true also in Micah 6:4:

I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.

The only time in Scripture where Miriam's name is mentioned first is found in Numbers 12:1. There may be some significance to this. This has led some to assume that the reason for this was that Miriam was the one who initiated the criticism of Moses and Aaron simply followed along. If this is the case, then this may explain why Miriam was punished and Aaron escaped without harm.

Notice in verse 11 that while Miriam was the one to be judged by God, Aaron recognized his part in the evil as well. In the verse, he pleaded with Moses not to hold this sin *they* had so foolishly committed against them. Aaron does not excuse himself from this sin, even though he may not have started it. He pleaded with Moses to do something for Miriam and her condition. In turning to Moses, he is recognizing his position before God and that he has sinned against him by going along with Miriam in her complaint.

Moses cried out to God for his sister. He does not hold her words against her. He does not want to see her suffer for the things she has said about him and his wife. He pleads with God to heal her. God heard Moses but demanded that Miriam be punished for her evil words.

God reminded Moses in verse 14 that if Miriam's father had spit in her face she would have been in disgrace for seven days according to the Jewish law. What she had done, however, made her even more unclean than if someone had spit in her face. God demanded that she be confined outside the camp for seven days for her evil. After those seven days she could return to her family. God would heal her of her leprosy. According to verse 15, the people did not move from the camp until Miriam had completed her seven days of punishment. There are three things we need to see from this.

First, God did not leave Miriam behind. The people stayed in their place as long as Miriam was in confinement. Verse 16 tells us that as soon as Miriam was restored, the Lord led them on to another region. God did not reject Miriam or her position as a prophetess in the community. God did not remove her from the community or her ministry because of her sin. She needed to learn a lesson, but God still had a purpose for her and a role for her in the community. How often do we reject people who fall when God still has a purpose for them? God does not leave her behind or reject her.

Second, notice how God used this situation to teach the people of God a lesson. In some ways, the whole community was held back because of Miriam's sin. During those seven days the whole nation of Israel was forced to see what God had done to Moses' sister who dared to complain and question the authority of the leader God had

placed over them. Miriam's situation would be a warning to everyone in the nation who dared to complain against God's choice of leader.

Finally, notice that the community could not move forward until Miriam's sin had been addressed. God held the whole community back until Miriam's judgement had been completed. Because of her uncleanness, she would have to bring her sacrifices before the Lord and Aaron would offer them to the Lord. She would then have to be ceremonially cleansed again before being restored to the community of God's people. Only when she was cleansed again could the community move from where they were to the next location God had for them (see verse 16). We are left wondering what it is in our lives that holds back our brothers and sisters.

For Consideration:

- Did Miriam and Aaron have a legitimate complaint against Moses for marrying a foreign wife?
- What was the real reason for the grumbling of Miriam and Aaron?
- Does God's opinion of people differ from ours? Does He use people we feel are unworthy of their position?
- What evidence is there that Miriam may have been the person to lead the complaint against Moses?
- How does God show mercy and compassion on Miriam?

- What was the effect of Miriam's sin on the nation as a whole?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to set you free from any form of jealousy or envy.
- Take a moment to consider the people around you and the ministries God has given them. Thank the Lord for the various ways He is using your leaders and friends to expand His kingdom.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be content with the role He has given you.
- Ask God to give you greater acceptance of people around you.
- Ask God to show you if there is any way you have been holding the community of God's people back. Ask Him to show you what you need to do to make things right.

13

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

Read Numbers 13:1-33

In the last chapter, we saw how the Lord punished Miriam and Aaron for complaining against Moses. After these events, the Lord led His people into the Desert of Paran to the north.

When they arrived in the Desert of Paran, the Lord told Moses to send men into the land of Canaan to explore it. He was to send leaders from each tribe. It was God's intention, according to verse 2, to show these leaders the land He was giving to them. As they walked through the land, they would see the wonderful blessings He was going to give. This should have been a real encouragement to a people who had been wandering through the desert living on manna. What an encouragement this should have been to these leaders to think that this was going to be their new home. It should have stirred their faith and produced praise and deep thanksgiving to God in their hearts for His grace and generosity.

In obedience to the Lord's command, Moses chose men from each tribe to explore the land. The following chart lists the names of the leaders by tribe who were chosen to explore the land of Canaan:

Tribe	Leader
Reuben	Shammua
Simeon	Shaphat
Judah	Caleb
Issachar	Igal
Ephraim	Hoshea (Joshua)
Benjamin	Palti
Zebulun	Gaddiel
Manasseh	Gaddi
Dan	Ammiel
Asher	Sethur
Naphtali	Nahbi
Gad	Geuel

Moses gave these leaders some special commands as he sent them to explore the land. He told them to go through the Negev and the hill country and see what the land and the people were like. Moses wanted to know if there were many people in the land and if they were strong. He also asked them to see what their towns were like. Did they live in walled cities? Was the land fertile and were there trees in the region? Notice in verse 20 that he also asked the men to bring back some of the fruit of the land.

While the passage does not speak about the reason for Moses giving these particular commands; we understand that as the leader of the nation he had some very particular concerns. As leader, he assumed that he was going to have to lead the people into the land and help them to settle. As any good leader, he likely wanted to know what was ahead of him. His concern seems to be about the type of obstacles they would have to face as they followed the Lord into the land. Likely his request for fruit from the land was an indication that he longed to have fresh produce to

eat as he and his people had only been eating manna through their time in the wilderness.

In verse 21, the men went out as the Lord commanded. When they reached a certain valley in the region they cut off a single cluster of grapes that took two men to carry. They also brought back pomegranates and figs. They called that valley Eshcol which literally means “cluster” in reference to the large cluster of grapes they had found there. Altogether they spend 40 days exploring the land before they returned to the Israelite camp.

The men brought their report to Moses and the camp of Israel, showing them the fruit they had brought back (verse 26). They reported that the land was flowing with milk and honey (verse 27). In other words, it was a land of plenty. Notice also, however, from Numbers 13:28 that they reported that the people were powerful and their cities fortified and large. They found many different nations in the region. The Amalekites lived in the Negev, the Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites lived in the hill country and the Canaanites lived near the sea (13:28-29). They also reported that they saw the descendants of Anak in the region (verse 28). From Numbers 13:33 the descendants of Anak were also called the Nephilim. We first read about the Nephilim in Genesis 6:4:

The Nephilim were on the earth in those days — and also afterward — when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

Genesis 6:4 describes these men as “heroes of old” and “men of renown.” In other words, they came from a long line of brave and mighty warriors. The leaders who returned from exploring the land of Canaan described

themselves as “grasshoppers” compared to these mighty men (verse 33). That is to say, they were small and insignificant before them.

Obviously what the leaders were reporting was beginning to discourage the people. The Lord had promised this land to Israel, but the report of fortified cities with mighty fighting men much superior in strength was causing the people to wonder if it was even possible to obtain this land. Caleb, the representative from Judah seemed to see what was happening and silenced the other leaders. He told them that it was his opinion that they should go up and take possession of the land. He was sure that God would give it to them (verse 30).

Caleb saw what the other leaders saw, but his confidence was in the Lord God and His promise. He believed that God would give them this land. He knew that there were obstacles to overcome but he believed what God had promised and was willing to take a step of faith. The other leaders, however, did not see things that way. They saw an enemy army that was stronger than their army. They saw fortified cities that were well protected. They saw the descendants of Anak, who were famous and mighty warriors. They believed that they would be devoured by the people of the land if they attempted to take it from them. Notice in verse 32 that they “spread a bad report” about the land among the Israelites discouraging them from even attempting to settle in the land.

We cannot read this passage without seeing the difference of perspective here. Caleb saw the same obstacles as the other leaders, but his focus was on the promise of God. God had promised them this land and despite the obstacles, Caleb knew that God would be faithful to His word. He was willing to stand up against greater enemies

because he believed what God said was true. The other leaders knew the promise of God concerning the land but focused on their own wisdom, experience and understanding more than God's promise. They were unwilling to risk everything on God's promise.

As believers today, there are two roads before us; the road of faith in God's promise and the road of human wisdom, reason and experience. What road will we take? God's promises will not always come easy. There will be obstacles to overcome and enemies to fight. Sometimes the path of faith will not make sense to our human minds. As we examine the picture before us, we see a people who refused to take hold of the promise of God because they were afraid. Before them was a land filled with more blessings and riches than they had ever experienced. God was offering it to them but they would not take it. They turned their back on His blessing because they were unwilling to take the risk of trusting His word. Will we take that risk?

For Consideration:

- What did the leaders find in the land of Canaan? What were the blessings? What were the obstacles?
- How was Caleb's perspective different from that of the other leaders?
- Does the promise of God come without struggle? What are some of the obstacles you had to overcome to see the promise of God fulfilled in your life?

- Have you ever trusted human wisdom and experience more than God's promise? How does ministry suffer when it is based on human wisdom and experience?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for His promises. Thank Him that He is always faithful to those promises.
- Ask the Lord to give you more of Caleb's perspective. Ask God to help you to trust in Him and His Word more than in your own human wisdom.
- Take a moment to pray for your spiritual leaders. Ask God to help them to be more like Caleb, trusting in His promises.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there is any way that you need to be more like Caleb in your ministry or Christian life. Ask God to give you more confidence in His leading and promises.

14

OBEDIENCE TOO LATE

Read Numbers 14:1-45

In chapter 13, we saw how the leaders of the twelve tribes came back from exploring the land of Canaan. They had seen the blessings in the land but they had also seen the enemy's powerful armies and their fortified cities. While Caleb wanted to go into the land and take it over, the other leaders refused, discouraging the people.

Notice the response of the people when they heard the report from their leaders. Verse 1 tells us that they wept aloud and grumbled against Moses and Aaron, telling them that they wished they had died in Egypt. They questioned why the Lord would bring them out of Egypt only to let them be killed by the sword of a more powerful enemy who would have their wives and children taken as plunder (verse 3). In fact, they even spoke in verse 4 about choosing another leader to take them back to Egypt.

All this grumbling about Moses and Aaron comes in the context of chapter 12 where Miriam was struck by God with leprosy for speaking out against Moses. While the people had seen what had happened to her, they did not learn a lesson from it. The fault lies not only with the people but

also with the leaders who discouraged them because of their lack of faith in God's promise to give them the land.

We can only imagine what an insult this would have been to God who had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt and promised them their own land. They refused to take the land, preferring instead to return to the place of their bondage. How often has this been repeated in our day? How often do we see those who have been set free from the bondage of sin, secretly lust after it again? We see this temptation in our own hearts.

When Moses and Aaron heard what the people were saying, they fell face down in front of them. Obviously, they were pleading with God to forgive them for their attitude. Joshua and Caleb, who had explored the land with the other leaders, tore their clothes in a sign of mourning. They reminded the people that the land they had explored was a rich land filled with blessings. They knew that if the Lord was pleased with them, He would give it to them. They pleaded with the people not to rebel against the Lord. The land was theirs because God was with them and He would give it to them as He had promised.

Despite their pleading, the people refused to listen to Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua. In fact, the "whole assembly" spoke of stoning them. Notice the use of the phrase "whole assembly." This implies that there was a general agreement among the people that they no longer wanted these men of God to lead them. They wanted to go in another direction. They were no longer happy with the Lord and His purposes and wanted to do things their way instead. The fact that they actually spoke of stoning these men shows how strongly they felt.

We get the impression that were it not for the fact that God came down into their midst, the people would have carried through with their plan to stone Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua. As they were speaking about these things, however, the glory of God appeared at the tabernacle in the sight of the whole nation. The presence of God that day would certainly have brought an end to the discussion.

That day the Lord spoke to Moses and asked:

(11) The LORD said to Moses, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?
(12) I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them, but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they." (Numbers 14:11-12)

The Lord said three things to Moses that day. First, He told him that the people were treating Him with contempt (verse 11). The word used here is a strong word that could also be translated by "provoke," "despise" or "blaspheme". In other words, by refusing to trust in God's promise, rejecting what He had done for them and threatening to kill His servants, they were provoking the Lord and blaspheming His character and purpose for their lives. This was the most serious crime a Jew could be guilty of committing and was worthy of death.

Second, God accused His people of refusing to believe all the signs He had performed in their midst. This is not the same as not believing because they had never seen evidence. This was not the case for the people of Israel in the days of Moses. They had seen miraculous demonstrations of God's power and love. He provided for every need. They had witnessed the destruction of the nation of Egypt at

God's hands. They saw the fall of the Egyptian army when God drowned them in the sea. God had provided for them and overcame every enemy in their path. The people of that day did not have an excuse. Their unbelief was not rooted in a lack of understanding but a wilful choice not to believe.

Finally, notice what God intended to do. In verse 12, He told Moses that He was going to send a plague to destroy the people and make another nation from his descendants that would be greater and stronger. This shows us just how angry God was at His people. He wanted to destroy them completely.

When Moses heard of God's intentions in verse 12, he cried out to God on behalf of the nation. He reminded the Lord of what the Egyptians would say when they heard what had happened to the people of God in the desert. The people would say that the Lord was not able to bring them into the land He had promised so He killed them in the desert (verses 14-16). Moses' concern here seems to be for what the people of other nations would think about the Lord God. In this, he demonstrates a true missionary heart, desiring that every nation see and understand the glory of God.

For the sake of God's name, Moses pleads with Him to demonstrate His great strength by forgiving His people's rebellion. Notice the connection between forgiveness and strength (verses 17, 18). It takes much more strength of character to forgive than to punish. Moses pleads with God to demonstrate that strength of character and forgive His people just as He had done many times since their release from Egypt (19).

God heard Moses' request that day and forgave His people for testing him "ten times" (verse 20). We should not necessarily see here that God was counting the number of times His people had tested Him. Most commentaries agree the reference to "ten times" simply is God's way of saying that His people had tested Him many times. While God would forgive His people and refrain from sending the plague He had spoken of, they would pay for their evil and rebellion. In verse 22, God told Moses that not one person who saw His miraculous signs in Egypt would see the Promised Land. Every person twenty years old and over would die in the desert (verses 28-29). An exception is made for Caleb in verse 24 and 30 because he wanted to follow the Lord in taking the land. An exception is also made for Joshua in verse 30. God would not give the land to those who treated Him with contempt (verse 23). Instead, it would go to the children born to Israel during their wandering in the wilderness (verse 31).

For forty years Israel would live in the desert. Their children would suffer for the unfaithfulness of the parents in rejecting the land God offered them (verses 31, 33). Notice in verse 34 that their punishment was to spend one year in the desert for every day their leaders spent in the land God had promised them. During that time, every person twenty years of age and over would die. Only then would God set them free to inherit the land.

Notice also that the sin of the parents had an impact on the lives of their children. Because the parents rejected the Promised Land, the children had to live in the desert. Our sins do not affect us alone. Our children and those around us will suffer the consequences of our unfaithfulness.

As for the leaders who discouraged the people, verses 36-38 tell us that the Lord struck them with a plague. With the

exception of Caleb and Joshua all the other leaders died from that plague. God held these leaders accountable for misleading His people.

When the people heard the judgement of God they “mourned bitterly.” They saw the price they had to pay for their rebellion. The next morning, they confessed that they had sinned and decided to go up and take the land (verses 39-40). Notice, however, that Moses told them that it was too late. Because they had rejected the Lord, He would not go with them. Moses warned them that if they did try, they would be slaughtered (verse 43). The people did not listen to Moses. When the Amalekites and the Canaanites saw them in their land they attacked and defeated them, and Israel was chased out in shame.

There was no going back now. Though Israel tried to make things right, their sentence had already been passed. They tried to obey, but it was too late for that because the damage had been done. God’s presence had been removed. What a sad picture we have here. The opportunity for victory had been passed by and though they sought it now they could not have it.

By their rebellion and refusal to obey when God called them, Israel forfeited the blessing and opportunity before them. This is a warning for all of us. The challenge of this passage is for us to be faithful to the Lord when He calls us. There are opportunities that will never come again. God is a forgiving God but we have much to lose by our unfaithfulness.

In verse 25, God commanded Moses to take the people from the border of the land of Canaan back into the desert where they were to travel along the route to the Red Sea. There they would wander for the next forty years.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever found yourself grumbling and complaining about your spiritual leaders or the situations that God has placed in your life? Why is it a serious matter to grumble and complain about God's purposes?
- Moses interceded for his people and God saved them from the plague He spoke of sending among them. What does this teach us about the importance of prayer?
- Does forgiveness mean that we do not have to suffer the consequences of our sin?
- What were the consequences of the sin of God's people on their children? How do our sins affect our children and those around us?
- God's people missed an opportunity to enter the Promised Land. Are their opportunities in your life that you missed?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to accept the circumstances He brings into your path without grumbling and complaining.
- Take a moment to intercede and pray for those who are now under God's judgement. Ask Him to open their eyes to the truth before it is too late.

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to forgive us for our sins.
- Ask the Lord to help you to obey Him when He calls so that you will not miss out on opportunities for service. Ask Him to give you grace to walk faithfully with Him.

15

OFFERINGS, SINS AND TASSELS

Numbers 15:1-41

The people of God had refused to enter the land that God had given them as an inheritance. They did not trust the Lord to protect and strengthen them. As a result, everyone over twenty years of age would die in the wilderness and never see the land of Canaan. God would, however, give the land to their children.

Notice as we begin that the Lord expected that when their children entered the land He had promised, they would worship Him in a prescribed way. The Lord told Moses that the Israelites were to bring a grain offering and a drink offering with every burnt sacrifice they presented to the Lord. God describes in verses 3-12 what He expected for each offering brought. The following chart summarizes verses 3-12:

Verse	Animal	Grain Offering		Drink Offering
		Flour	Oil	
3-5	Lamb	1/10 ephah (2 quarts or 2 litres)	¼ hin (1 quart or 1 litre)	¼ hin (1 quart or 1 litre)
6	Ram	2/10 ephah (4 quarts or 4.5 litres)	1/3 hin (1 ¼ quarts or 1.2 litres)	1/3 hin (1 ¼ quarts or 1.2 litres)
8-12	Bull	3/10 ephah (6 quarts or 6.5 litres)	½ hin (2 quarts or 2 litres)	½ hin (2 quarts or 2 litres)

Notice that the larger the animal, the more grain and drink offerings were required. God makes it quite clear in verses 13-16 that every native-born Israelite as well as every foreigner living with them was to present these grain and drink offerings with their sacrifices to the Lord. The rules for the offerings were to apply to both the native-born Israelite and the foreigner living with them.

It is interesting to note that God accepted the offerings of the foreigner living in Israel who truly wanted to worship Him. God's heart has always been for the whole world. He has always accepted people of all nationalities who come to Him with a sincere heart.

On top of these regular grain and drink offerings the Lord also expected that when the Israelites entered the land He had promised, they would make a cake with the first grain ground on the threshing floor and present it to Him (verses

17-21). This offering was in recognition of the fact that He was the provider of the harvest. It was offered in thanksgiving for His gracious provision.

God knew that His people would sin against Him and in His mercy and justice He provided a means by which those sins could be forgiven. Sin against a holy God was a serious matter, worthy of death. Instead of taking the life of the person who committed the sin, God allowed for an animal to be sacrificed in his or her place. In verses 22-27, God lays out His requirements for the sacrifices made for unintentional sin.

Notice in verses 22-27 that the Lord speaks of sacrifices for “unintentional” sins. This is distinguished from “intentional” sins in verse 30-31. Unintentional sins were committed without the person being aware that he or she has sinned. For example, an Israelite may have touched something unclean without knowing it. An unintentional sin might also be committed due to lack of understanding. Maybe an individual did not have enough understanding of the requirements of God to know they were sinning. Unintentional sins could also be committed by accident or due to circumstances. Imagine a Jewish man working with an axe and the axe head comes off the handle striking another man and killing him. He is guilty of killing his brother but it was not his intention to do so. He is guilty of an unintentional sin. Human weakness might also cause an individual to commit an unintentional sin. Maybe because of sickness a man is unable to meet his obligations. This too would fall under the category of an unintentional sin.

What is important for us to understand is that a sin does not have to be intentional to be a sin. Even unintentional sins needed to be confessed to God and required forgiveness.

Notice in verses 22-27 that the requirements of God varied depending on the person or persons committing the sin. There was one requirement for the sin of an entire community and another for an individual. The following chart summarized God's requirements as laid out in verse 22-27.

Who Sinned?	Offering Required	Purpose
Community	Bull Male Goat Flour and Wine	Burnt offering Sin offering Grain offering
Individual	1 yr. Female goat	Sin offering

While there were sacrifices for the forgiveness of unintentional sins, intentional sins were quite different. Verses 30-31 tell us that anyone who sinned intentionally (defiantly, NIV) was to be cut off from his people. Intentional sins were those sins committed wilfully and rebelliously against God, with full knowledge of the sin. There was no sacrifice for anyone who committed an intentional sin. They were to be cut off from the people of God.

We have an example of intentional sin in verses 32-36. The Israelites found a man gathering wood on the Sabbath day. They confined him until Moses had consulted the Lord to see what to do with him. God told Moses in verse 35 that the man had to die. He was to be taken outside the camp and stoned to death. This was a clear example of a man who, knowing the command of God regarding the Sabbath, chose to ignore it and wilfully defied God and His purposes for that day. There was no sacrifice for his sin. He was to be killed for wilfully defying the Lord God.

Chapter 15 concludes with a statement about the garments the Israelites were to wear. God told Moses in verse 38 that the Israelites were to make tassels for their garments from blue cord. It is significant that these tassels were to be blue in colour. Blue cloth was used to wrap the Ark of the Covenant when it was transported from one place to another (Numbers 4:6). The curtain separating the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place was to be made entirely of blue cloth (Exodus 26:31-33). The priestly ephod was to be made of blue cloth (Exodus 28:31). The colour blue seemed to be used for the holy things of God.

Notice that the purpose for the blue tassels hanging from their garments was so the people of Israel would remember the commands of God and not prostitute themselves by going after the lusts of their own heart (verse 39). These blue tassels on their garments reminded them that they were a people set apart for God. As they went about their daily routine and were tempted to compromise in their faith, those blue tassels swinging from their garments reminded them that they belonged to God and needed to follow His commands and ordinances.

God expected His people to walk in obedience. He provided forgiveness for those times when human weakness and circumstances caused them to fall. He challenged them to wear tassels on their garments to remind themselves of their obligation to His law. He also required the most severe punishment for those who ignored and wilfully defied Him. As the people of God left the border of Canaan to wander for forty years in the desert, God reminded them afresh of His requirement of obedience and the consequences of disobedience. He reminded them also, however, that through the sacrifices He had provided they could be forgiven and restored to Him.

For Consideration:

- God had specific requirements for how His people were to bring their offerings. How important it is that we follow the requirements of God as laid out in the Bible today? How easy it is for us to do what we feel best and ignore the clear teaching of Scripture?
- What is the difference between unintentional sin and intentional sin? Give some examples of each.
- Is a person guilty of sin even if what he or she did was not intentional?
- Why did the people of Israel wear tassels? What can you do to remind yourself of your obligation to God?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to follow the requirements of His Word. Ask Him to forgive you for times you have chosen to ignore His Word in favour of your own way.
- Ask the Lord to protect you from intentional sin and wilful disobedience.
- Thank the Lord that He has chosen you to belong to Him. Ask Him to remind you of your obligation to Him and His Word on a daily basis.

16

A LESSON NEVER LEARNED

Read Numbers 16:1-50

One of the great sins of God's people in the wilderness was their grumbling and complaining against God and His purposes. Moses and Aaron, as God's representatives, often became the target of this grumbling. As you will recall, God judged Miriam for this sin when she spoke out against her brother Moses in Numbers 12. While the Israelites saw the judgement of God on Miriam, it did not stop them from repeating her sin.

In Numbers 16, we read of how a man by the name of Korah rose up against Moses. We discover from verse 1 that Korah was a Levite from the Kohathite clan. As a Kohathite, he was responsible for transporting the holy articles (lampstand, Ark of the Covenant, altars, etc.) when the Israelites moved camp. Korah, with the help of two others (Dathan and Abiram) gained the support of 250 well known community leaders (verse 2). Together these men approached Moses and challenged his authority.

Notice their argument in verse 3:

You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the LORD is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the LORD's assembly?

The argument is theological in nature, although it may have been more about jealousy than theology. Korah's argument was that no one person should be considered more holy than another. Everyone in the community belonged to God and on an equal standing with each other. They rejected the idea of one man holding so much power and believed that everyone who belonged to God should have the same privilege as Moses.

When Moses heard their complaint, he fell face down (verse 4). The passage does not tell us why he did this. Moses knew, however, what God felt about this kind of grumbling and may have been asking the Lord to spare these individuals from judgement.

Moses told Korah and his followers that he would bring this matter to the Lord for His decision. In the morning, they were all to bring a censer, put fire and incense in them and stand before the Lord God. We need to understand that the offering of incense was a task that only the priest was to perform. Korah and his followers believed that they had the right to be priests before the Lord and so Moses challenged them to see what the response of the Lord would be if they took on this responsibility.

Notice in verse 6, however, that Moses did warn Korah and the other Levites with him that they had gone too far. God had separated the Levites from the rest of the community and given them a particular task in the tabernacle. These men were not content with their roles, however, and wanted to be priests as well (verse 10). Moses reminded

them in verse 11 that their complaint was against the Lord and His will for their lives.

Korah and his followers wanted to be priests. This was the highest position in Israel. It was a position of respect and honour in the community. These Levites wanted position and respect more than they wanted God's will for their lives. This is a common temptation. Often our desires and ambitions in life clash with God's purposes. We can fool ourselves into believing that what we want is for the glory of God. Korah justified his actions stating that all of God's chosen people were holy and had the privilege of serving Him as priests. He placed his personal theology and his ambitions ahead of God's call and purpose.

Moses understood that this revolt did not only come from Korah, but also from Dathan and Abiram, ordinary citizens of Israel. In verse 12, he summoned them to speak about this matter. Dathan and Abiram refused to come before Moses. Notice their response to him in verse 13-14:

(13) Isn't it enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to kill us in the desert? And now you also want to lord it over us? (14) Moreover, you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey or given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Will you gouge out the eyes of these men? No, we will not come!"

Dathan and Abiram had clearly rejected Moses and his leadership. In these two verses they accused him of taking them from a land of milk and honey and bringing them into the desert to kill them. They accused him of "lording it over" them and failing to bring them to the land of Canaan. In their eyes, Moses was a failure as a leader and they would have nothing to do with him. They failed to see their own

sin. It was because they had rejected God and that they had not been given the land of Canaan. They chose to blame their leaders for their own sin and rebellion.

When Moses heard their response to his summons he became angry with Dathan and Abiram. They opposed him and the position of leadership the Lord had given him. Verse 15 tells us that he became so angry with them that he asked the Lord not to accept their offering. If the Lord did not accept their offering there would be no forgiveness for them. In reality, Moses was sentencing these two men to death without the forgiveness of God.

Notice also in verse 15 that Moses reminded the Lord that he had not taken so much as a donkey from these men or wronged them in any way. Moses had a clear conscience before God with regard to his leadership. Moses knew before God that he had led his people with honesty and sacrifice. He left all judgement in the hands of the Lord God.

While Dathan and Abiram refused to appear before Moses, Korah and his followers were quite free to do so. They came to the tabernacle with their censers in hand. They prepared their incense and put fire in the censers and stood with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. About 250 men stood with their censers burning before the Lord (verses 17-18).

While Korah and his followers stood at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the glory of the Lord appeared over the people. God spoke to Moses and Aaron and told them to separate themselves from the people so that He could kill them (verse 21). When Moses heard this, he fell face down and begged the Lord to forgive the nation. He reminded him that the sin was the sin of Korah and his followers and not the sin of the entire nation (verse 22). While, in a

sense, it was Korah who had led this revolt against Moses, the heart of the nation was not pure either. God saw the attitude of the entire nation. These people had the same heart as Korah and often grumbled and complained about Moses and Aaron (see Exodus 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Numbers 14:2; 14:27; 14:36).

While the whole nation was guilty, God did listen to Moses. In verse 24, the Lord told Moses to have the people move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Moses went to the place where these families were camped and told everyone to move away from them. As they did, Dathan and Abiram came out of their tents and stood there with their wives and children, separated from the rest of the people of Israel (verse 27).

Moses then made a prophetic declaration before all the people, saying:

This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: (29) If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the LORD has not sent me. (30) But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt. (Numbers 16:28-30)

Verse 31 tells us that as soon as Moses had made this declaration the ground opened up underneath the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and the people fell alive into the great hole with all their earthly possessions. The screams of those falling into this great opening created

terror throughout the camp. Many people fled from the scene, believing that they too would be swallowed alive (verse 34). When all these families had been swallowed, the earth closed over them, sealing their fate forever (verse 33).

While this was happening at the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the two hundred and fifty men were still standing with their censers in hand before the Tent of Meeting. The Lord judged them as well. Verse 35 tells us that fire came down from the Lord and consumed all of them.

As a reminder of what had happened that day, the Lord asked Moses to get Eleazar the priest to gather the censers “out of the smouldering remains” and scatter the coals that were in them some distance away from the Tent. He was then to have the censers hammered into sheets and use those sheets to overlay the altar. Verses 38 and 40 tell us that these sheets overlaying the altar were to be a sign to the people that no one except a descendant of Aaron should burn incense before the Lord. If they did, they would be punished and suffer the same fate as Korah and his followers.

What is particularly striking about this story is the response of the people to what had happened that day. Verse 41 tells us that the community grumbled and complained against Moses and Aaron saying: “You have killed the Lord’s people.” You would have thought that the incidents of that day would have taught them a lesson, but it didn’t. They still grumbled and complained against God’s servants. Some lessons are never learned. Had the Lord not opened our eyes, we, too, would certainly be like those people.

We understand from verse 42 that the people of God gathered together to voice their discontent with Moses and Aaron. We are not told what their intention was when they gathered. There had been other times when they spoke of stoning Moses (see Exodus 17:4; Numbers 14:10). Whatever their intention was at that moment, it was interrupted by the glory of God. A great cloud suddenly appeared over the Tent of Meeting and the Lord told Moses to get away from the people so he could kill them (verse 44).

When the Lord spoke to Moses, he and Aaron fell face down on the ground, likely grief stricken and crying out to God on behalf of their people. Immediately the judgement of God seemed to fall on the nation and a great plague broke out. Moses told Aaron to take his censer, put incense and fire in it and make atonement for the people. The intention here was to appease the wrath of God on the nation. Notice in verse 47 that Aaron ran into the midst of the people with his censer in an attempt to cover their sins and seek God's forgiveness. Verse 48 tells us that Aaron stood between the living and the dead and stopped the plague through the incense he offered to the Lord. Before the plague stopped and the wrath of God was appeased, however, 14,700 people lay dead before the Lord (verse 49). Were it not for Moses and Aaron who sought the favour of God for these rebellious and complaining people, many more would have died. We are left to wonder how many people God will spare because of our prayers for them.

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about respecting those the Lord has put over us? Have you ever

been guilty of grumbling or complaining about your spiritual leaders?

- Are you content with the role God has given you and the circumstances He has put you in today?
- Does God still call people to a particular service? Are you where God wants you to be today? How can you know God's will for your life?
- Have you ever felt jealous about the ministry God has given to someone else?
- Are there lessons you have trouble learning? What are they?
- Aaron stood between the "dead and the living" seeking to save his people. Are there people for whom you need to pray and seek God? Who are they?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you the ability to honour those He has placed in authority over you.
- Ask the Lord to show you His purpose for your life. Ask Him to help you to be faithful and content in that purpose.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who is currently under the judgement of God. Ask God to forgive and restore that person to Himself.

17

CONFIRMATION OF AARON AS PRIEST

Read Numbers 17:1-18:32

At this time in the nation of Israel, there was much dissatisfaction with the leaders God had given His people. Miriam had spoken out against Moses (chapter 12). Korah and his followers had rebelled against both Moses and Aaron, resulting in the anger of God destroying their families (chapter 16). Also in the final section of Numbers 16, we read about how the nation as a whole was punished because of their grumbling about Moses and Aaron as leaders.

We can only imagine what it was like for Aaron and Moses as leaders of God's people to have so many people dissatisfied with their leadership. Certainly, if I were in their situation, I would be asking the Lord if I was really where He wanted me to be. In these times, as leaders we often need a confirmation from the Lord of His purpose for our lives and ministries. It is interesting to note in Numbers 17 that the Lord speaks directly to this need in Aaron and the leaders.

As we begin chapter 17, we see that God spoke to Moses and asked him to tell the leaders of each tribe to get a staff and write their names on it. They were to bring these staffs to the tabernacle and place them in front of the Ark of the Covenant in the presence of God. God would look at these staffs and cause the one belonging to the person He had chosen to be priest to bud. Notice that the purpose of this demonstration was to get rid of the constant grumbling against Moses and Aaron by the Israelites (17:5).

God was concerned about what the people were saying about Moses and Aaron. He wanted all this grumbling to stop. He wanted to confirm them in their calling before the eyes of the nation. We can only imagine how encouraging this must have been to Moses and Aaron at this time in their lives.

In obedience to the Lord, the leaders of the twelve tribes each brought a staff and placed it before the Lord in the tabernacle. These staffs were left in the presence of the Lord overnight.

The next day, Moses entered the tabernacle to examine the staffs. He noticed that the staff which represented the tribe of Levi had not only sprouted but budded, blossomed and produced almonds. There could be no doubt that this was a miracle from God. Notice that God did far more than cause the staff to bud. He went beyond what was necessary to communicate to the people His purpose for this family. There could be no doubt that Aaron was to be His representative before the people.

Aaron's staff is a picture of what the Lord wants to do through each person He calls. He wants to place His life in them so that they can blossom and produce fruit for His name.

God told Moses to put Aaron's staff in front of the Ark of the Covenant so that it would be a sign to all who grumbled and complained about Aaron and his position. Notice in Numbers 17:10 that the punishment for continuing to grumble about the Lord's choice of servants was death. To grumble and complain about the servants that God had chosen was to take a stand against God Himself.

Notice the response of the Israelites to this powerful sign in Numbers 17:12-13:

(12) The Israelites said to Moses, "We will die! We are lost, we are all lost! (13) Anyone who even comes near the tabernacle of the LORD will die. Are we all going to die?"

What they saw that day struck them powerfully. They realized that they had been wrong and that Aaron was indeed God's chosen servant. They feared for their lives because they had stood against God.

It was clear that God had chosen Aaron and his sons to be His representatives. God's call came with its privileges and obligations. In Numbers 18, the Lord spoke to Aaron and his sons about those privileges and obligations. Notice in Numbers 18:1-7 that Aaron and his sons had a two-fold obligation.

Care for the Holy Things

In Numbers 18:1, the Lord reminded Aaron and his sons that, as His chosen representatives, they were to bear the responsibility for any offences against the tabernacle or priesthood. They had a God-given obligation to see that the tabernacle, its objects and its servants were honoured

by God's people and that God's purposes were being accomplished through them. God would hold them accountable for any offences against His holy things. Aaron and his sons were to be assisted by the Levites in this ministry (18:2, 4). The Levites, however, were not to go near the furnishings of the Holy Place or the Most Holy Place lest they die. That privilege was reserved for Aaron and his sons alone.

God calls us to take seriously the name of the Lord and His word. He gave Aaron and his sons the responsibility to care for the holy things. They were responsible for offences against everything God had set apart for His name.

In our day we too are called to lift high the things of God. How often have we seen His Word depreciated or ignored in our churches? How often has His name been blasphemed in word and deed? How often has His Spirit been grieved in our midst? Has God not called us to stand up for these holy things in our day as well? All who are called by God to minister in His name would do well to honour these holy things.

Ministry to the People

God reminded Aaron and his sons in Numbers 18:5 that they also had a responsibility for the work of the sanctuary and the altar so that His wrath would not fall on the Israelites. This clearly involved the sacrifices that were made on behalf of the people for the forgiveness of sin. As priests, they stood between God and sinful Israel. Their role was to assure that the people of Israel were walking in forgiveness and purity before God. This continues to be a vital role for the spiritual leaders of our day. What is our obligation as spiritual leaders before the people we serve? Is it not to help them to walk in forgiveness of sin? It is not

to teach and train God's people to walk in victory and righteousness? Aaron and his sons were responsible for the care of the holy things of God and to minister to the people so that they were living in the experience of God's forgiveness and victory.

For their service, Aaron and the Levites would receive a portion of the offerings brought by God's people. Their needs would be provided for through the people they served. In verses 8-32 God tells Aaron what offerings he and the Levites could keep for themselves and the needs of their families. Below is a summary in chart form of the offerings kept by Aaron and the Levites for their personal needs.

Verse	Offering	Who Benefited	Restrictions
8-10	Grain offering, Sin offering, Guilt offering	Aaron and his sons only	Could only eat the portion that was not required to be sacrificed to God
11	Wave offering	Priest's household	Must be ceremonially clean
12-13	Firstfruits of oil, wine and grain	Priest's household	
14-16	Firstborn male child	Priest's	Owner of the firstborn male child or animal needed to buy it back from the priests at 5

	and unclean male animal	household	shekels of silver. This money belonged to the priests and their families
17-19	Firstborn ox, sheep and goat	Priest's household	The fat and blood was placed on the altar but the remainder of the animal belonged to the priest and his family
25-32	Tithes	Priest's household	The priests needed to give a portion of the tithe and the rest belonged to them. The tithe they gave back to the Lord needed to be the "best part."

The priests were well provided for through the gifts of God's people. Notice, however, in Numbers 18:30-32, that God expected that His servants the priests be generous in their giving as well. God required that they give a portion of every tithe given to them. God makes it clear that they were to present the "best part" of their tithe to the Lord. In fact, God tells the priests that if they did not present the "best part" of their tithe to Him they would be guilty of defiling the holy things of God and die (18:32).

The tribe of Levi would not receive any inheritance of land. They were to be content to serve the Lord as His priests and devote themselves to this work alone. As they devoted themselves to the work of the tabernacle, God would provide for all their needs through the gifts of His people. Any other Israelite who approached the tabernacle to serve the Lord as a Levite would be struck dead by the Lord God.

God has a plan for the worship of His name. He has called out a certain people to be His servants. He has honoured those people and expects that those to whom they were ministering would honour them. The calling of priest was a serious calling and required the complete dedication of their lives, but God would enable and provide for their every need as they served Him faithfully.

For Consideration:

- In this passage the Lord God confirms His call to Aaron, His sons, and the Levites. Have you ever needed God to confirm your calling because of difficulties or obstacles that came across your path? How did God confirm you in your calling and ministry?
- Why was it important that the Lord confirm Aaron and the Levites in their calling before the people? How important is it that we respect those called of God to be our leaders?
- The priests and the Levites had the responsibility to care for the holy things of God. Are the holy things of God being despised today? Explain.
- The priests and the Levites were called by God to help the people of their nation walk in the forgiveness of God and victory over their sin. Do you know individuals who are not walking in the forgiveness of God and victory over their sin? What can you do to help them?

- God provided for the needs of His servants through His people. Are the needs of your spiritual leaders being cared for? What sacrifices do you need to make for your spiritual leaders so that their needs are met?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you clearly His plan for your life and ministry.
- Thank the Lord for your spiritual leaders. Ask Him to show you how you can be more respectful of them. Ask Him to show you if there is anything you can do to provide for their needs.
- Ask the Lord to help you to walk in victory over sin and temptations in your life.
- Ask the Lord to teach you how to give Him the “best part” of all you have.

18

THE WATER OF CLEANSING

Read Numbers 19:1-22

In the Old Testament, it was important that an individual remain ceremonially clean before the Lord. Uncleanness could come in many different forms, but Numbers 19 deals with uncleanness caused by touching a dead body. When a person touched a dead body, he or she was required to follow a procedure set out by God to become clean again. In this chapter, we discover that an unclean person could be restored by being sprinkled with special water.

The water of cleansing was a mixture of water, blood, ashes and wool. In verses 1-10, the Lord instructed Moses and Aaron on how they were to make this water of cleansing. A red heifer (cow), without defect which had never been placed under a yoke, was to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in the presence of the priest (verse 2-3). Notice that the heifer needed to be red. The passage does not tell us why it had to be this colour.

Notice also that the animal was not slaughtered in the tabernacle courtyard but outside the camp. This heifer was to be used for the cleansing of those who were unclean and who would normally be forbidden access to the tabernacle because of their uncleanness. It is interesting to note that

the Lord Jesus came to identify with us as sinners. He left the glories of the heavenly tabernacle to be slaughtered on the cross on this sinful earth for us. He identified with us by going “outside the camp,” to the place where He was crucified for our uncleanness. This heifer, slaughtered outside the camp, in some ways, is a picture of what the Lord Jesus did for us.

When the heifer had been slaughtered, Eleazer the priest was to put some of the blood on his finger and sprinkle it seven times toward the Tent of Meeting (tabernacle). While the sacrifice took place outside the camp, it was still a holy sacrifice and the blood was sprinkled toward the Tent of Meeting in a gesture of offering to the Lord. In a similar way, although the Lord Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem in the place where unclean criminals were killed, His sacrifice was pleasing to the Father who accepted it for the sins of His people.

Notice also that the heifer was to be completely burned. Normally the blood of the animal sacrificed on the altar was spilled out at the base of the altar. The hide, flesh and dung were cleaned out of the corpse before it was burned in the presence of the Lord. This is not the case here. Verse 5 tells us that the entire animal was burned with its blood, flesh, hide and dung. Possibly this was the reason why the sacrifice could not take place in the tabernacle.

As the animal was being burned, the priest would put some cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet wool on the fire. This would mix in with the ashes that fell to the ground. It is interesting to note the requirements of God for the cleansing of a disease of the skin in Leviticus 14:1-4:

(1) The LORD said to Moses, (2) “These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of

his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: (3) The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, (4) the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed.

Notice the use of cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop. It is obvious from this that the ashes of the heifer mixed with the cedar, scarlet yarn and hyssop were to be used for the cleansing of an unclean person.

When the sacrifice had been made, the priest and the man who burned the heifer were to wash their clothes and bathe themselves in water to remove any impurities. They were to remain ceremonially unclean until evening and as such would not be able perform any more duties until the next day (verses 7-8).

Another man, who was ceremonially clean, would then gather the ashes that remained after the animal had been completely burned. These ashes were to be placed in a ceremonially clean place outside the camp. They would be kept for use in the water of cleansing. When the man, who had gathered up the ashes, had completed his task, he was to wash himself and his clothes and, like the other men, was considered unclean until the evening (verse 10).

The focus of Numbers 19 is on the ceremonial cleansing of a person who came into contact with a dead body. Even an indirect contact with a dead body would make a person unclean. For example, if a person died in a tent and someone went into that tent, they would be considered unclean because they had entered the place where a person had died (verse 14). The law of God stated that even the

contents of an open jar found in a room where a person died was unclean (verse 15). A person touching a dead body, whether the person had died of natural causes or in a battle, was unclean.

Anyone who touched a human bone or a grave where a dead person was buried needed to separate themselves from the whole community of Israel for seven days (verses 11, 16). On the third day of separation, the individual was to purify himself with the water of cleansing (the mixture of the ashes of the red heifer and water). He was to do the same thing on the seventh day (verse 12). Without this water of cleansing, the person would not become clean. In fact, if he did not use this water of cleansing to purify himself, he would be cut off from Israel (verse 13).

We learn from verse 17 that the ashes from the red heifer were put in a jar and fresh water was poured over them. Someone who was ceremonially clean would take a branch of hyssop, dip it in the water and sprinkle the tent, its furnishings and every person who lived in it. He was also to sprinkle the individual who had been defiled by the dead body (verses 17-18). The unclean person was to be sprinkled in this manner on the third and the seventh day of his separation. When the seven-day period of separation was over the individual concerned was to wash his clothes and wait until the evening when he could be ceremonially clean again. The person who sprinkled the tent and the unclean person was himself unclean until the evening.

What is important for us to note here is that there was a means provided by God for the cleansing of an individual defiled through the touching of a dead body. An animal was sacrificed outside the camp to cover this defilement. Because there was provision made for the cleansing of this

defilement, God expected His people to take advantage of this to live lives that were pure and undefiled before Him.

There are many things that can defile us in our day. We can speak hurtful words that defile our mouths. We can think sinful thoughts that defile our minds. We can do sinful things that defile our hands. We can watch things that defile our eyes. There is a provision made for these defilements. The Lord Jesus died outside the camp and His blood is sufficient to cleanse us from the daily defilements of life. How important it is that we walk daily in the cleansing He provides. Each day we need to trust in His sacrifice to cover our defilements. It is by means of His blood that we can walk each day in purity and holiness before the Father, cleansed of all our defilements and sins.

For Consideration:

- How is the red heifer, offered in this chapter, a picture of Jesus and His work for us?
- What kinds of things defile us today?
- How important was it for the children of Israel to take advantage of the provision of God for their cleansing?
- Do you know people who have turned their backs on the forgiveness of the Lord? What keeps them from accepting His cleansing?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the fact that He has provided for your cleansing.
- Ask the Lord to help you to live in His forgiveness and cleansing on a daily basis.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who has not yet accepted the offer of forgiveness through the Lord Jesus. Ask God to open their hearts to receive His forgiveness and cleansing.

19

TROUBLE IN THE DESERT

Read Numbers 20:1-2

There are times in our life when it seems that everything is going wrong. Sometimes all these things seem to come at once. Numbers 20 speaks of such a time in the life of Moses. Even as the chosen servant of God, he was not free from pain and regret in life.

Numbers 20 begins with the sad news of Miriam's death. Miriam was the sister of Moses and a very important female leader in Israel. This would have been a very sad occasion for both Moses and his brother Aaron.

At the time of Miriam's death the nation was in the Desert of Zin in the region of Kadesh. Verse 2 tells us that there was no water in that region and the community gathered "in opposition to Moses and Aaron" (verse 2). This would have made their grieving for Miriam even worse.

Notice in verse 3 that the people "quarrelled" with Moses. They were angry with him for leading them into a region where there was no water. In fact, they told Moses that they would prefer to be dead like their brothers rather than to be in this place without water. The reference to their

dead brothers is likely a reference to the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram in Numbers 16. After Korah and his followers revolted against Moses, the Lord opened up the ground and swallowed them alive. The people who came to Moses that day were openly defying God. They came in rebellion against the leadership of Moses just as their brothers who had been killed by God, only they didn't care whether they died or not. In fact, they almost dared God to take their lives because they detested their circumstances and did not like where He had led them.

Notice in verses 4-5 that the people questioned why Moses had brought them out of Egypt only to die in the desert. They described the place where God had led them as a "terrible place" (verse 5, NIV). It was a place where there was no grain, grapevines or pomegranates and certainly no water to drink. They hated this place.

After the death of Miriam, the grumbling and rebellion of the people would have been particularly difficult for Moses. As he usually did, Moses went to the Lord to seek His wisdom. Where would we be if we could not, like Moses, go to the Lord for wisdom? Notice that when Moses went to the Lord, the Lord appeared to him and told him what he was to do (verse 6). All too often we try to bear our burdens alone. We try to figure things out in our own wisdom. Moses knew his wisdom was insufficient and chose to go to the Lord. God met him and counselled him. He will do the same for us if we wait on Him and seek His wisdom.

The solution to the problem the people were facing was really quite simple, but it was not a solution that would ever have been discovered by human wisdom. The Lord told Moses to take his staff and assemble the people before a certain rock. Moses was to speak to the rock in front of the people and God promised that when he did, water would

pour out from the rock and provide all the people and their livestock could drink.

In obedience to the Lord, Moses called the people to assemble before the rock in Meribah. When everyone had gathered, Moses addressed them: "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" Notice two things about these words of Moses in verse 10.

First, Moses calls the people rebels. He was angry with the people for their rebellion against God. The people did not want God's plan for them. They were wandering in the desert because they had refused to take the land God had promised them. They were grumbling against the leaders God had given them. They longed to be back in the land of Egypt. These things angered Moses and so he spoke of his people as rebels against God.

Notice second, that Moses asked the people if he would have to bring water out of the rock for them to drink. In saying this, Moses seems to be reminding the people that the Lord God they served was fully able to provide their needs. He had given them manna each day. He had delivered them from their enemies. He could now even bring enough water out of a rock to quench the thirst of every person and animal in the entire nation. God was the God of the impossible. Nothing was too difficult for him. Moses was going to show his people just what God could do.

In verse 11, Moses raised his arm and struck the rock two times with his staff and water gushed out. The whole community and their animals drank. This was a tremendous blessing for the nation, but by striking the rock instead of speaking to it, Moses had disobeyed the Lord's direct command. This angered God, and Moses and Aaron would suffer the consequences of their disobedience. God told

them in verse 12 that because they did not trust Him enough to honour Him as holy before the Israelites, they would not bring the nation into the Promised Land.

We can only imagine what this must have been like for Moses and Aaron. They would die in the wilderness without ever stepping foot inside the land God had promised His people. They would not see their people settle in the land of Canaan. They would live out their days leading the people of God in the wilderness. We all want to be able to see the fruit of our labours. Imagine working all your life and never seeing the fulfilment of your dream. Imagine working for over forty years on a project and not seeing it completed. Imagine knowing that your whole ministry would be spent in a desert wasteland. This is what the Lord was telling Moses would happen to him because he had not honoured Him before the people that day.

So far in this chapter, we have seen how Moses had lost his sister, had to deal with the rebellion of the whole nation against his leadership, and now God told him that he would live out his days in the barren wilderness and never physically enter the land God had promised his fathers. This would have caused any normal person to give up and walk away. Moses does not do this. He continues to serve faithfully despite these tremendous discouragements.

Moses' problems did not end there. In verses 14-21, Moses sent a message to the king of Edom requesting permission for his people to pass through their territory. He promised the king that they would simply pass through the land but they would not drink water from their wells or go through their vineyards (verse 17). Their intention was simply to pass through the land. Moses also reminded the king of how difficult things had been from them in Egypt but the Lord had sent His angel to deliver them (verse 15).

The king of Edom responded harshly toward Moses, telling him that if he passed through his land, he would attack them with his army (verse 18). When Israel heard this response they told the king of Edom that if their animals even drank water from their land they would pay for it. They only wanted to pass through their land and nothing else (verse 19). The Edomites again refused to let the Israelites pass through their land. This time, to make sure the Israelites understood that they were serious, they sent out their powerful army against them; forcing Israel to turn away and go around their territory (verse 21).

What is interesting to note here is that the God who brought water out of the rock refused to give them favour with the Edomites or victory over their army. While Moses and the Israelites wanted to pass through this territory, the Lord had a different plan. There are times when we make our own decisions and expect the Lord will bless what we have decided. There was no question that the Lord could have given the Israelites victory over the Edomites. He could have miraculously defeated Edom's powerful army and demonstrated His strength and mercy toward His people. This was not his purpose. The unbelieving Edomites would watch God's people retreat and go deeper into the desert. There are times when we will have to retreat.

Moses led his unhappy people into the wilderness. This would be a tremendous challenge for him. They had already been complaining about his leadership and this would certainly not make things any easier.

The community set out from Kadesh and headed eastward toward Mount Hor (verse 22). When they arrived in Mount Hor, the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron. That day, he told them that Aaron would die. Notice that the reason Aaron would die was because of his part in what had happened

at Meribah when Moses struck the rock twice (verse 24). They were to take Aaron's son Eleazar and go up Mount Hor. Moses was then to take Aaron's priestly garments and put them on his son Eleazar who would take his place in the service of the Lord (verse 26).

Moses obeyed the Lord and the three men went up the mountain in the sight of all the people. There Moses put the priestly garments on Eleazar, and Aaron died. It appears that they left Aaron on the mountain and Moses and Eleazar returned alone. When the people of Israel heard that Aaron had died, they mourned for him for thirty days (verse 29).

Consider what Moses has been going through in these days. He has lost his sister. As he mourned for the death of his sister, the whole community of Israel turned against him, telling him that they would rather see God strike them dead than continue under his leadership. On top of that, God told Moses that he would not let him go into the Promised Land but that the rest of his ministry would be in the desert with a grumbling people. This was due to a failure on the part of Moses to honour God before the people. If you ever experienced public failure you know something of how humbling this can be. The king of Edom refused to give them any support or encouragement and stood against them, forcing the people to detour into the desert. Moses is forced to walk away in what may have seemed to be defeat. Now on top of this, the Lord took Aaron, his brother, co-worker and faithful companion of many years. These were difficult days for Moses. Many lesser men would have given up. Moses, however, continued to walk faithfully and humbly before his God. He is a powerful example for us in the trials we face in our day.

For Consideration:

- Consider the response of the people in this passage to the difficulties they were facing. Compare their reaction to that of Moses. What is the difference?
- Moses was guilty of not following the Lord's instructions completely. This led to God's refusal to allow him to enter the Promised Land. What does this teach us about the importance of walking in complete obedience to the Lord?
- Despite Moses' disobedience, the Lord still provided water for His people. What does this teach us about the mercy and compassion of the Lord?
- Does God promise that things will always be easy for us? How do you respond when things are difficult? How is Moses' example an encouragement to you?
- Have you ever found yourself asking God to bless your plans and agendas instead of asking Him to lead you in His? Explain.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to walk faithfully with Him even when things are difficult.
- Confess to the Lord the times when you have not always listened to Him and have chosen to walk in your own way. Ask Him to help you to walk in complete obedience.

- Thank the Lord that despite the fact that we have often failed Him, He still blesses us despite the consequences of our sin.

THE CONQUEST EAST OF THE JORDAN

Read Numbers 21:1-35

News of Israel's presence in the desert spread. The people of the region saw them as a threat and took an active stand against them. We have an example of this in verse 1. When the king of Arad heard that Israel was in his region, he attacked and was successful in capturing some of them.

This attack caused the people to cry out to the Lord. That day, they made a vow to Him saying that if He gave them victory over Arad and his people, they would completely destroy their cities. God heard their cry and gave them the victory they sought. Israel was faithful to their promise and destroyed the people and their town. The place where Israel won this battle would become known as Hormah which means "destruction."

It is interesting to note that the attack of Arad caused God's people to turn to Him. God was pleased to show His power through His people that day and give them the victory. Sometimes God needs to allow problems to come our way

before we seek Him and His victory. God's people saw evidence of the power of God at work. This was a foretaste of the great things He would continue to do in them.

After that victory over King Arad, the Lord led His people along the route to the Red Sea. Notice that it was God's purpose that Israel travel around Edom (verse 4). God gave His people victory over Arad but did not want them to fight Edom. We cannot assume that we know God's purpose. We need to seek His direction for each new situation we encounter.

Notice also in verses 4-5 that the people of Israel grew "impatient on the way." This impatience revealed itself in their speaking out against Moses. What is important for us to note is that not only was it important for the people of God to see Him for each situation they encountered on their way through the desert, but it was also important for them to wait on God's timing. Here in this verse, we see that the people of God were following the leading of the Lord but they were not happy with His timing. How easy it is for us to fall into this same trap.

As we seek to walk with the Lord, we must be careful not only to follow His direction but also submit to His timing. While Israel was going in the direction the Lord wanted them to go they failed because they were not willing to wait on Him for His timing. All too many servants of God become impatient with the Lord's timing and fail to experience the fullness of His blessing. Often their impatience will cause them to move from God's purpose and seek their own solution.

As we see from the context of this chapter, Israel's impatience caused her to become bitter with the Lord and Moses, His servant. In verse 5, they grumbled against Him

and expressed their discontent by speaking out against both God and Moses saying:

Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!

Israel should have known better than to grumble and speak out against the Lord and His servant. They had seen the Lord's judgement in previous times against this particular sin. Their impatience, however, caused them not to care about this judgement. In their impatience, they carelessly risked their lives.

In response to the complaints of God's people, the Lord sent poisonous snakes into their camp. These snakes bit the people and many of them died. Seeing what was happening, the people cried out to God confessing their sin and pleading with Him to take away the snakes. It is significant that the people notice that the presence of these snakes was actually in punishment for their sin. Their eyes were at least open to the fact that they were being punished. The people knew that these snakes were from the Lord.

Moses prayed to the Lord for the people and the Lord told him what he was to do. He commanded Moses to make a snake from bronze and put it on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten and looked up to that pole would live (verse 8-9). It is interesting that these snakes represented the judgement of God on His people. A snake, as a symbol of God's judgement was to be lifted up on a pole so that anyone who looked to it would be healed and live. This is in reality a wonderful picture of what the Lord Jesus did for us. He took our judgement on Himself. He was lifted up on a pole (cross) carrying our sins and died so that anyone

who looked to Him could be saved. In John 3:14-15, Jesus compared his crucifixion to the snake that Moses lifted up that day in the wilderness:

(14) Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (15) that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

While many did die as a result of these snakes, those who looked to the snake on the pole were healed and experienced the forgiveness of the Lord.

God led His people from that place northward. They camped at Oboth, Iye Abarim and the Zered Valley as they moved northward toward the territory of the Moabites and the Amorites to the southeast of the land God had promised them. A record of this route was found in a book called the Book of the Wars of the Lord (verse 14). While this book was not part of Israel's Scriptures, it was obviously a reliable source of information on this account.

From the Valley of Zered, God led His people to the region of Beer where He provided them water to drink (verse 16). It appears that Israel was quite content to find water and so they sang a song about it. Notice that the song tells us in verse 18 that the princes and nobles dug this well with sceptres and staffs. We don't have any clear indication as to why this well was dug with sceptre and staffs, but it may be an indication of how easy it was to find water in that region. Those digging did not have to use shovels but were able to find the water close to the surface by uncovering it with their staffs. This was indeed a real blessing from the Lord.

From the region of Beer, the Israelites continued to travel northward through the desert and the regions of Mattanah and Hahaliel, finally arriving at Bamoth in the valley of Moab. From there, they could see the top of Mount Pisgah on the eastern side of the Jordan River across from the city of Jericho (verses 19-20). They were now approaching the region of the Amorites under the leadership of King Sihon.

As they arrived in the region of the Amorites, Israel sent messengers to their king asking permission to pass through his country. They promised that they would not take or eat anything from the fields or vines in his country as they passed through nor would they drink water from any well. They were simply passing through his country by way of the king's highway northward (verses 21-22).

When King Sihon heard that Israel wanted to pass through his land he gathered his army and marched out against them (verse 23). A battle took place in the region of Jahaz. That day, the Lord gave victory to Israel and they defeated Sihon and his army and took control of a territory from the Arnon River to the River Jabbok (a piece of land about 80 kilometres or 50 miles north to south on the east side of the Jordan River). Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites and their surrounding settlements. They put King Sihon to death and occupied the city of Heshbon where he had lived.

It should be noted that Sihon had fought against the nation of Moab (to the south) and had successfully taken this piece of land for his own people (see verse 26). A poem was written about the victory of Sihon over the king of Moab. That poem is recorded in verses 27-30

Come to Heshbon and let it be rebuilt;
let Sihon's city be restored.
Fire went out from Heshbon,
a blaze from the city of Sihon.
It consumed Ar of Moab,
the citizens of Arnon's heights.
Woe to you, O Moab!
You are destroyed, O people of Chemosh!
He has given up his sons as fugitives
and his daughters as captives
to Sihon king of the Amorites.
But we have overthrown them;
Heshbon is destroyed all the way to Dibon.
We have demolished them as far as Nophah,
which extends to Medeba.

This poem was written to honour King Sihon and his great victory over Moab. It speaks of how Sihon went out like a great fire and consumed Moab, destroying the people who worshipped the god Chemosh. He took their sons and daughters captive and overthrew the king of Moab demolishing any resistance and taking over his land. It was this great king, of whom songs were written, that Israel conquered that day. God gave them victory not over an insignificant king but one who had already demonstrated his power and might in that region.

God also gave Israel victory over the Amorites who lived in the region of Jazer (verse 32). They continued northward toward the region of Bashan. When Og, the king of Bashan, heard that Israel was marching toward his land he sent out his army against them as well. He reached them in region of Edrei (verse 33).

God promised Moses that He would give Israel victory over Og and his army. Israel was to do to Og what he had done

to Sihon, completely destroying him (verse 34). By completely destroying this people, they would not be a temptation to Israel. Verse 35 tells us that Israel obeyed the Lord in this matter and struck down the army of Og, leaving no survivors. They then took possession of his land extending the territory they controlled possibly another 80 kilometres (50 miles) northward on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

For Consideration:

- In this chapter, we see how the Lord God gave His people victory over three nations (Arad, Amorites, and Bashan). On each occasion it was the will of the Lord that the Israelites completely destroy these nations. Why do you suppose it was so important for Israel to completely destroy their enemies?
- How important is it that we seek complete victory over our sin and its strongholds in our lives? Is God willing to give you more victory than you have right now?
- We learn in this passage that not only is it important that we follow the direction of the Lord but also that we learn to wait on His timing. Have you ever become impatient as you waited on the Lord? What is the temptation when we become impatient?
- How was the bronze snake Moses put on the pole a symbol of the Lord Jesus and His work?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you if there are areas in your life where you need further victory. Ask Him to give you that victory.
- Ask the Lord to give you more patience as you wait on His timing in your life.
- Thank the Lord that He took our judgement on Himself and went to the cross so that we could be forgiven and healed from the consequences of sin.

21

BALAK AND BALAAM

Read Numbers 22:1-41

The Israelites continued their journey on the eastern side of the Jordan River where they camped just across the Jordan from Jericho in the plains of Moab (verse 1). Their presence did not go unnoticed by Balak the king of Moab. He had seen how Israel had defeated the Amorites and was very afraid. It should be remembered that the Amorite king Sihon had defeated Moab and taken their land. Now that Israel had defeated Sihon, Balak had cause for fear. In fact, we read in verse 3 that the whole nation of Moab was afraid because of the presence of Israel in their midst. They feared that Israel was going to gobble them up like an ox eating grass. They knew they would not be able to stand against the Israelites and feared that they would lose their land and their lives. The people of Moab expressed this fear to their leaders (verse 4)

King Balak believed he could not fight the Israelites and win. He had seen how they had destroyed their enemy, the Amorites and did not want to engage them in battle. He decided, therefore, to take another path. He sent messengers to a pagan prophet by the name of Balaam who lived in the region of Pethor. He told his messengers to tell Balaam that a people had come out of Egypt and had settled

next to him. He wanted Balaam to come and curse the people because they were too powerful for him to defeat. Verse 6 tells us that the reasoning behind putting a curse on the people of Israel was to gain an advantage over them so that Balak could drive them out of the country. Balak shows his confidence in Balaam's spiritual powers when he told him: "For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed."

Apparently Balaam was a well-known and respected prophet in the region. As a prophet or holy man, he had likely been hired to pronounce blessings or put curses on a number of people. He had obviously gained a reputation in the region for his craft.

Notice in verse 7 that the elders of Moab and the region of Midian went to find Balaam and brought with them "the fee for divination." We should notice two things here. First, Balaam made his money by blessing or cursing people. Second, the term "divination" shows us the nature of what Balaam did. Throughout the Old Testament the word is connected with witchcraft, sorcery and magic. In fact, in Leviticus 19:26, God gave strict orders not to practice divination. We see from this, therefore, that Balaam made his money by practicing something that God strictly forbade in His law.

When the messengers arrived and brought the message from King Balak, Balaam told them that he would consult the Lord, bring them back and answer (verse 8). While it was likely that Balaam had consulted many different gods in his career as a diviner, it is interesting to note that he chooses to consult the God of the nation he was going to curse before responding to King Balak's messengers.

While Balaam was not a true prophet of the Lord, the Lord did appear to him. God was certainly concerned about His people and what King Balak intended to do to them. When He appeared to Balaam, God asked Him what these men had come to him about (verse 9). Balaam explained that Balak had asked him to curse the Israelites so he would be able to drive them away (verse 11). God told Balaam that he was not to go with Balak's messengers or put a curse on Israel. Balaam listened to the Lord God and the next morning told Balak's messengers that he would not return with them to the king (verse 13). The men returned to King Balak with Balaam's response (verse 14).

Balak was not happy with Balaam's refusal and sent a larger and more distinguished group of princes and leaders to see him again. These distinguished messengers showed Balaam just how important it was that he return with the king. The security of the nation of Moab was at stake. King Balak told Balaam that he was not to let anything keep him from coming to him. He promised that he would pay him very well for his services (verses 15-17). King Balak stood against the Lord God of Israel in this statement. It was the Lord who told Balaam not to return. The king is literally telling Balaam to ignore the word of the Lord and come anyway.

Notice the response of Balaam to this important delegation that had been sent to him. In verse 18, he told them that even if King Balak gave him his palace filled with gold and silver he would not do anything contrary to the command of the Lord God. He asked the messengers to stay there that night until he could again consult the Lord (verse 19).

That night, the Lord God appeared again to Balaam. This time God told him that he was to go with them but he was to be careful only to do what the Lord told him to do. Notice

the words of the Lord here, "Since these men have come to summon you, go." We get the impression that it was because of King Balak's insistence that God allowed Balaam to go. There are times God will give us what we insist on having. He gave Israel an earthly king when He wanted to be their King Himself. He did this after they insisted that they needed to have a king like the rest of the nations. He allowed His people to reject Him as King and gave them what they asked for, but Israel paid the price for their rebellion. King Balak would receive what he asked for, but things would not turn out the way he expected.

In the morning, Balaam saddled his donkey and went with the messengers from Moab (verse 21). Notice, however, in verse 22 that the Lord was very angry when he went and sent an angel to oppose him. We are left to wonder why the Lord was angry. One thing is sure, while God allowed Balaam to go, He was not pleased with the reason King Balak had called for him. God did not make the way easy for Balaam and the king's servants as they returned. The Lord sent an angel to "oppose him." The opposition here was not because God had changed His mind but because he wanted to teach Balaam a lesson.

Balaam was riding his donkey. The angel of the Lord stood in the road with a sword in his hand. When the donkey saw the angel, it turned off the road and went into the field. Balaam did not see the angel and was angered because his donkey had strayed from the path. He beat her to get her back on the road (verse 23).

The angel then moved from that place to a narrow path between two vineyards with walls on both sides. As Balaam and his donkey continued their route, they arrived at this second place where the angel of the Lord stood. Again Balaam did not see the angel but the donkey did. This

time, to avoid the angel of the Lord, the donkey pressed close to the wall crushing Balaam's foot. Again Balaam became very angry with the donkey and beat her (verses 24-25).

As he did the first time, the angel of the Lord moved again to another location farther down the road. This time the angel stood in a very narrow place where there was no room for the donkey to turn off the road or to get around him (verse 26). When Balaam and the donkey arrived at this third location the donkey saw that there was no way of getting around the angel so she lay down on the road and refused to move forward. Again Balaam did not see the angel of the Lord and became very angry with the donkey. For the third time he beat her with his staff.

It is interesting to note that as a prophet and diviner, Balaam did not see the angel. It is also interesting to note that he did not read anything from the fact that the donkey had turned from the path and now was refusing to move forward. As a diviner, he interpreted strange events and occurrences but here for some reason his eyes were closed and he could not see any significance to what the donkey had been doing.

God made things clearer to Balaam in verse 28 by opening the mouth of his donkey so that she spoke to him. The donkey asked Balaam why he had beaten her these three times. Balaam told her that it was because she had made a fool of him and if he had a sword he would have killed her (verse 29). Verse 21 tells us that Balaam was travelling with the princes of Moab. He also had some servants with him. It may be that Balaam was quite embarrassed before these important officials by the behaviour of his donkey.

In verse 30, the donkey asked Balaam if she had ever behaved this way before. Balaam knew that his donkey usually was a well behaved donkey and responded by saying, "No." This would have given Balaam occasion to think. Why had the donkey been acting so strangely? What did all of this mean as he embarked on this journey to Moab?

As Balaam reflected on these things, the Lord opened his eyes so he could see the angel of the Lord standing on the road with his sword drawn. When he saw this, he fell face down before the angel (verse 31).

As Balaam lay face down on the ground, the angel of the Lord spoke to him. He asked him why he had beaten his donkey those three times. The angel told Balaam that he had come to oppose him because the path he was on was a "reckless one." The angel went on to tell Balaam that the donkey had actually saved his life because if she had approached the angel, Balaam would have been killed. When Balaam heard this, he confessed that he had sinned because he did not know the angel had been in the road opposing him. He told the angel that if he was displeased with his path, he would even now return home (verse 34).

There are some very important details we need to see here in these verses. Notice that the angel opposed Balaam. Balaam had left, according to verse 20, with the Lord's permission and direction. God told him to go with the princes of Moab. Balaam had made it quite clear to them in verse 18 that he would not go with them unless the Lord made it clear that this is what he was to do. Even in verse 34, when his eyes were opened to see the angel opposing him, he told the Lord that he would return to his home without going to see King Balak; if this is what he was asking him to do. The angel of the Lord, however, told Balaam that he was to continue his path but only speak what God told him

to speak. From this, we understand that Balaam was following what he knew to be the will of the Lord by going to see King Balak. The question we need to answer here is why then did the angel of the Lord oppose him?

Some have suggested that it was because Balaam was greedy or because he secretly wanted to curse the Israelites. This does not seem to be the case as Balaam had clearly refused the messengers who came the first time and told the second group that even if the king offered them his palace filled with gold and silver he would not go unless the Lord God told him to go. After meeting the angel of the Lord, Balaam seemed to be quite willing to return to his home and not follow the leaders of Moab. This indicates that he wanted to do what God told him to do and was not rebelliously going to Moab because of any secret desire to curse God's people.

The opposition from the angel of the Lord and the incident with the donkey seem to be God's way of reminding and warning Balaam of the dangerous path he was on. King Balak was expecting him to stand against God and his people. Balak would offer Balaam great riches and wealth if he would curse the Israelites. Balaam would have a place of honour in Moab if he obeyed the king and Israel was successfully driven out of the land. There would be great temptations ahead for Balaam. If he gave in to those temptations, he would face the anger of the angel of the Lord who opposed him.

Sometimes God calls us into dangerous situations. This is the nature of spiritual battle. There are times when we will have to face serious temptations in life. In these times, we are going to have to be very strong and cling to the Lord and His Word. Sometimes we will have to tread on Satan's territory and we will face his opposition and temptations.

Balaam was going into enemy territory. We can be sure that Satan was very much aware of King Balak's desire to curse the people of Israel. He would do his utmost to bring that about.

In times of temptation and difficulty, many have fallen. We see David standing on the balcony of his palace looking down at Bathsheba and lusting after her. We see Peter denying Jesus before the group warming themselves at the fire during Jesus' trial. These men faced serious temptation and dishonoured their Lord by falling. God was sending Balaam into the midst of a great spiritual battle and the temptations would be great. God did not send His angel to keep Balaam from going to Moab but to warn him of the seriousness of not doing and saying exactly what God gave him to say.

King Balak was very happy to hear that Balaam had agreed to come to see him. In fact, he was so happy to see him that he went out to meet him. This was not the usual behaviour for a king. Generally the person invited would meet the king on his own terms. Balak does not wait for Balaam to come to him. He goes out to meet him personally at the border of his territory.

Notice that Balak questions Balaam about why it took him so long to come to him and why he had refused to come the first time. It appears from this that King Balak is very worried about the presence of Israel. Notice also that Balak reminds Balaam that he was able to reward him for his work. Balaam would receive a very rich reward for his services in cursing the people of Israel. This would be a temptation for many to compromise, but Balaam makes it quite clear to the king that he could only speak what the Lord put on his mouth to speak (verse 38).

On that day, Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep and gave the meat to Balaam and those who had been travelling with him. They would obviously be hungry from their trip. The next morning, Balak took Balaam to the region of Bamoth Baal where he could see part of the nation of Israel camped in the distance (verse s 40-41). The test of whether Balaam would obey the Lord was about to take place.

For Consideration:

- Notice Moab's fear of the people of God when they recognized that the favour of God was on them. Do people see the favour of God on you today? Is there evidence that God is with you?
- Balaam sought the Lord's will before going with the messengers from Moab. Do you seek the will of the Lord in what you do? How easy is it for us to do what will work best for us without seeking the Lord's will?
- Did Balaam disobey the Lord by going with King Balak's messengers? Why did the angel of the Lord oppose Balaam?
- What are the temptations you face in your life and ministry?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He loves you and has forgiven your sin. Ask Him to enable you to demonstrate His love and power through your life.
- Are you where God wants you to be? Ask the Lord to show you His clear purpose for your life. Ask Him to help you to walk faithfully in that purpose.
- Ask the Lord to show you the areas where you have been compromised in your walk with Him and in your ministry. Ask Him to give you victory over the temptations you face so that you can be a faithful servant.

22

BALAM'S PROPHECIES

Read Numbers 23:1-24:25

Balaam was now with King Balak of Moab. He had been invited to curse the nation of Israel. It was Balak's hope that if Balaam cursed Israel, he would be able to drive them away from his country.

In Numbers 22:41, King Balak took Balaam to the region of Bamoth Baal. The name literally means "the high places of Baal." Balak takes Balaam into a place obviously known for its worship of the god Baal.

When they arrived in Bamoth Baal, Balaam asked King Balak to build him seven altars and prepare a bull and a ram for each altar. When sacrifices were also offered in the worship of God, they were done only by the priest. The sacrifice offered here was not in accordance with the Law of Moses but was likely intended to gain some favour with God.

When the rams and the bulls had been offered to the Lord, Balaam told King Balak to remain beside the offerings while he went to meet with the Lord. He told the king that he would tell him whatever the God of Israel revealed to

him. Balaam then left the king and went off to a barren place to see what God would tell him (verse 3).

God did meet with Balaam. In verse 4, Balaam told the Lord that he had prepared seven altars for Him and he had offered a bull and a ram on each one. While we have no record of God saying anything about the offerings, He did give Balaam a message for the king (verse 5).

When Balaam returned to the king, who was waiting with his officials by the altars, Balaam opened his mouth and spoke what the Lord had given him. We have a record of this in verses 7-10. In these verses, Balaam speaks of how King Balak had brought him from his place in Aram to curse the people of Israel. Balaam told King Balak and his officials that day that he could not curse those whom God had not cursed (verse 8). In fact, Israel was blessed by God in number and their end would be glorious. Balaam only wished that his life would end with the blessing God's people would experience (verse 10).

Obviously, these were not the words that King Balak and his officials wanted to hear. Balak was angry with Balaam, telling him that he had brought him to Moab so he could curse his enemies but he had only blessed them. Balaam reminded the king, however, that he could only speak what the Lord gave him to speak.

King Balak decided to take Balaam to another place where he would only see part of the nation of Israel. He took him to the field of Zophim on top of Mount Pisgah. There they built another seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on each of them as before (verses 13-14).

As he did the first time, Balaam told the king and his officials to remain beside the altar while he went to meet with

the Lord God. For the second time, God gave Balaam a message to bring back to the king. When Balaam returned, Balak was anxious to hear what the Lord had said this time.

Balaam's answer is found in verses 18-24. In these verses, Balaam told King Balak that the Lord God did not lie or change His mind (verse 18). He had received a command to bless Israel and he could not change that (verse 20). There was no misfortune seen for Israel. Their God was with them (verse 21). He had brought them out of Egypt and made them as strong as a wild ox (verse 22). There would be no sorcery against them (verse 23). In fact, as a people they were like a lioness who would wake up and hunt down its prey until she had completely devoured them (verse 24).

Once again Balak is frustrated with Balaam. Balaam remains firm, however, and reminded the king that he would only speak what the Lord God told him to speak (verse 26).

King Balak was not willing to give up. He decided that he would take Balaam to a third location. This location was on the top of Mount Peor and overlooked a wasteland (verse 28). Obviously, the king believed that if he could get the circumstances right, God would give Balaam another message. He was hoping that seeing the wasteland would inspire Balaam to bring a curse on Israel.

For the third time seven altars were built and another seven rams and bulls were offered on those altars (verses 29-30). This time, however, Balaam did not go aside to consult the Lord. Notice in Numbers 24:1 that he did not resort to sorcery as he had done the other times when he spoke to the Lord. We are not told what Balaam did or what the nature of that sorcery was but it is astonishing that the

Lord seemed to overlook those things to communicate His message to Balaam.

This time Balaam turned his face toward the desert and tribes of Israel camped there. As he looked out over them the Spirit of God came on him and he spoke to Balak for the third time. He reminded King Balak that as a prophet he could see clearly the purpose of the Lord for His people (verses 3-4). They were a beautiful people blessed of God. They spread out like fertile valleys and well-watered gardens planted by the Lord (verse 5-6). Their king would be greater than King Agag (a well-known and powerful Amalekite king) and the nation of Israel would be exalted (verse 7). The God of Israel had brought them out of Egypt and He had given them the strength of an ox. They would devour nations, breaking their bones in pieces and pierce them with their arrows (verse 8). Balaam compared Israel to a sleeping lion. Whoever dared to wake such a lion would suffer the consequences. Anyone who blessed Israel would be blessed but anyone who cursed them would themselves be cursed (verse 9).

When he heard these words of Balaam, King Balak was very angry with him. Striking his hands together in anger, Balak reminded Balaam that he had asked him to curse his enemy but he had blessed them three times. He told him to leave, reminding him that the Lord had kept him from receiving the rich reward he was going to give him for cursing Israel. Balaam, reminded the king, however, that he had already told his messengers that even if the king had offered him his palace filled with gold and silver he would not speak contrary the command of the Lord. He could only speak what God had given him to speak (23:12-13). Before leaving the king, however, Balaam prophesied to him about what the Israelites would do to him in the days to come. In this prophecy, he also has words to speak to a

number of nations in that region. Let's take a look at this prophecy as recorded in verses 15-24.

Prophecy about Moab (24:15-17)

In verses 15-17, Balaam spoke to King Balak and told him what would happen to his nation in the future. He began by reminding the king that as a prophet he saw these things clearly (verse 15-16). Notice in verse 17 that the prophecy would not be fulfilled for some time. The time was coming when a "star" or "sceptre" would come out of Jacob and crush the foreheads of Moab and the skulls of the sons of Sheth (believed to be a Moabite leader). In other words, a great leader would come from Israel and conquer the nation of Moab. Throughout the history of Israel in the Old Testament there would be war between Israel and Moab. God promised, however, that His people would one day defeat them.

Prophecy about Edom (24:18-19)

Speaking about the nation of Edom (the descendants of Esau), Balaak prophesied that they would be conquered, while Israel would grow stronger. A ruler would come out of Israel and destroy the survivors of their city. We read in 2 Samuel 8:14 that King David would eventually bring Edom into submission:

(13) And David became famous after he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. (14) He put garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David. The LORD gave David victory wherever he went.

Prophecy about Amalek (24:20)

In verse 20, Balaam spoke about Amalek the leader of the Amalekites and told him that while he had occupied an important position among the nations he would come to ruin. This nation had attacked God's people as they wandered in the desert. The Amalekites would be a constant enemy to Israel throughout a good part of the Old Testament. 1 Samuel 14:47-48 recounts how Saul fought and defeated the Amalekites. King David also fought against the Amalekites. It would not be until the reign of Hezekiah however that the Amalekites would be completely destroyed (see 1 Chronicles 4:41-43) just as Balaam had predicted.

Prophecy about the Kenites (24:21-22)

Balak prophesied in Numbers 24:21-22 about the Kenite people. He told them that while their dwelling place was secure and they lived in the rocks, they would be taken captive by Asshur. Asshur was the son of Shem whose descendant would become known as the Assyrians. These Assyrians would conquer the Kenites and take them captive with them back to their nation.

Prophecy about Asshur (24:23-24)

The final prophecy Balaam spoke was about Asshur or the Assyrians who would capture the Kenites. He prophesied that the day was coming when ships would come from Kit-tim (located in the Mediterranean Sea in the region of Greece and Italy. These ships would subdue Asshur (Assyrians) so that they too would come to ruin. Historically, the Greeks and the Romans would conquer the Assyrians. Notice, however, that those nations that destroyed Assyria (Greeks and Romans) would themselves come to ruin (verse 24).

Balaam's prophecy predicted the ruin of many nations. These prophecies would come true just as he predicted. When he had finished speaking, Balaam left King Balak and returned to his home. He received no payment for his services but he had faithfully proclaimed the truth that God had given him to speak.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have in these chapters that Balaam was not familiar with the laws of God? Despite his lack of understanding and his pagan ways, how does God use him?
- Is God restricted to only using people whose lives are completely in tune with His purposes?
- What risk does Balaam take in speaking only the truth of God's word to King Balak? What does he sacrifice for speaking the truth? Are you willing to take such risks and make the same sacrifices?
- What do Balaam's prophecies teach us about how God sees and cares for His people? Were the Israelites always walking in obedience to the Lord God? How would you describe their spiritual lives at this time? What does this teach us about God's faithfulness despite our unfaithfulness?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is willing to use us even when our lives are not perfect.

- Ask the Lord to give you more courage to speak and live out His truth in your life, even when it costs you something to do so.
- Thank the Lord for His wonderful purpose and protection. Thank Him for His mercy and that He continues to be faithful to us even when we fail Him.

23

SIN, JUDGMENT AND BLESSING

Read Numbers 25:1-26:65

Through Balaam, the Lord God had promised great blessing for His people. They would become a powerful nation. Balaam had seen God's blessing on the Israelites. It is important that we realize that while the blessing of God was indeed on His people, they were far from perfect. After the glorious picture of Israel painted by Balaam we see deeper into the reality of what the nation was really like in chapter 25.

While in the region of Shittim, the Israelite men became involved in sexual immorality with the Moabite women. These women invited them to make sacrifices to their gods. As a result, the people of Israel turned from the true God to eating food sacrificed to idols. It is interesting to note Revelation 2:14 in this regard. Speaking to the church in Pergamum the Lord Jesus said:

Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to

sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

There are two important details we need to see from this passage in Revelation. First, notice that Numbers does not present the whole picture of what Balaam did. He was not as honest a man as we may have pictured from his story in Numbers 23-24. Revelation 2:14 tells us that he taught King Balak how to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and committing sexual immorality. What was taking place in Israel now was the fruit of Balaam's efforts.

Notice second that Israel, who was blessed by God and about whom Balaam had prophesied a glorious future, was unworthy of such blessing. As a nation they often fell into sin and rebellion against God. The blessing of God on their lives was unmerited. Despite their shortcomings, the Lord God had a wonderful plan for them. He would be faithful to His promise even when they were unfaithful to Him.

While God's blessing was on the nation, their sin and rebellion did anger Him. God would judge them severely for turning from Him to worship the Baal of Peor. In verse 4, the Lord told Moses to kill the leaders who had turned from Him and expose their dead bodies to the nation in broad daylight (verse 4). These leaders were turning God's people from Him. The exposing of their bodies would be a reminder to the people of their sin and God's judgement. We learn also from verse 9 that the Lord sent a plague against His people. While the leaders were killed by the sword, the people themselves were dying as a result of the plague. Verse 9 tells us that this plague killed 24,000 people before it was stopped.

This great judgement of God brought the people to their knees. In verse 6, they gathered at the entrance to the tabernacle and wept. As they grieved over the judgement of God for their sin, an Israelite, by the name of Zimri took a Midianite woman and brought her into his tent (likely to have a sexual relation with her). The context tells us that he did this in front of Moses and the assembly that had gathered that day. Zimri was the head of the Simeonite family (verse 14). He was an important leader in the nation. As leader, he should have been with the people of God seeking forgiveness, but he chose to openly defy the Lord. The Midianite woman he was with that day was Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite tribal chief. She too was a person of influence.

When Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, saw what Zimri and Cozbi were doing, he followed them into the tent. He then drove the spear through Zimri and into Cozbi's body, killing them both (verse 7). His action stopped the plague against Israel and appeased the wrath of God (verses 8-9). We should note that killing these two individuals would not be a simple matter. Phinehas was killing a tribal leader in Israel and the daughter of a tribal leader in Midian. He did not know what the consequences would be, but he knew that they were openly defying the Lord God and needed to be stopped.

God was pleased with Phinehas. He saw how zealous he was for the glory of God and promised that His peace would be on him and his family. The actions of Phinehas actually saved the nation from greater destruction. Who knows how many more people would have died had Phinehas not acted for the glory of God in this matter.

It is one thing for us to grieve over the judgement of God and quite another to do something about it. As Israel

grieved, the sin and immorality continued in their camp, driving away the presence of God and continuing to stir up His anger. Something needed to be done to stop the sin. Phinehas not only grieved about the evil in the camp, he took action to stop it. There are times when we need to do more than just repent and grieve over the condition of our nation. Sometimes God calls us to do something to stop the things that grieve His heart.

It is uncertain what the response of Cozbi's father, the tribal leader of Midian was to Phinehas. It is interesting to note, however, that the Lord told Moses that Israel was to treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them. They had deceived and mislead Israel into sin (verses 16-18). Israel was to completely cut off all ties with the Midianites, treat them as enemies and destroy them because they had been turning them away from their God.

After the plague had stopped, the Lord asked Moses and Eleazar the priest to take a census of all the Israelite families. They were to count those who were twenty years old and older (26:1-4). This is now the second census Moses took. The first census was in Numbers 1 when the people began their journey. Notice what this second census revealed.

Tribe	Verse	2nd Census	1st Census	Comment
Reuben	5-11	43,730	46,500	Some descendants were lost when the earth swallowed them (see Numbers 16)
Simeon	12-14	22,200	59,300	

Gad	15-18	40,500	45,650	
Judah	19-22	76,500	74,600	
Issachar	23-25	64,300	54,400	
Zebulun	26-27	60,500	57,400	
Manasseh	28-34	52,700	32,200	Zelophehad had no sons so his daughters are listed in verse 33
Ephraim	35-37	32,500	40,500	
Benjamin	37-41	46,500	35,400	
Dan	42-43	64,400	62,700	All the descendants of Dan numbered were from one clan (the Shuhamites)
Asher	44-47	53,400	41,500	
Naphtali	48-51	45,400	53,400	
TOTALS		601,730	603,550	

Overall, the number of men 20 years and older had declined by 1,820 over their years of wandering in the desert. Much of this had to do with the judgement of God on them for their sin and rebellion.

The census of men over twenty years of age was to determine how many men were able to fight for Israel. God was going to take His people across the Jordan into the land

He had promised and so these men were counted and made ready for the battles that would be coming. God told Moses in verses 52-56 that when He took the people across the Jordan to conquer the land of Canaan, the territory would be given to each tribe based on this census. The larger tribes would receive a larger portion and the smaller tribes would receive a smaller piece of land.

The Levites were counted separate from the rest of the people because they were not to be part of the army. They were to devote themselves to the service of the Lord at the tabernacle. When a census was taken of the Levites every male one month of age and older was numbered (as opposed to 20 years old for the rest of the tribes). The total number of Levites counted at that time was 23,000 (verse 62).

One of the punishments God imposed on His people was that not one of them aged twenty and up would ever see the land He had promised their fathers (see Numbers 14:20-23). When the census was completed, it was discovered that not one of those numbered in the first census was alive, with the exception of Caleb and Joshua. All had been fulfilled as God had said and now He was preparing His people to inherit their land.

What is particularly interesting about these two chapters is that they remind us of the true nature of the people God was going to bless with this land. They were like their parents who had sinned against God and died in the desert. They fell into idolatry and sexual immorality. They were easily tempted to stray from God and His principles. Despite their failures, God was going to do a wonderful work in their midst. He would bless them even though they were unworthy of that blessing.

For Consideration:

- We discover that Balaam taught King Balak how to entice Israel to sexual immorality and idolatry. Is this a problem among believers today? What does idolatry look like today?
- In this chapter, how does God punish His people for their sin? Did this punishment mean that He had forsaken His people and His promises toward them as a nation?
- Does God punish us for our sins today? Is there evidence of this in your society?
- Do God's blessings depend on our worthiness to receive them? Have you experienced God's blessing in your unworthiness.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to protect you from immorality and idolatry in all its forms.
- Thank the Lord that He does not forget His promises when He punishes us for our sin.
- Thank the Lord that His blessings do not depend on our worthiness to receive them.
- Thank the Lord that despite our failures, He is still able to use us.

- Ask the Lord to help you to learn the lessons He wants to teach you through His discipline and punishment of sin.

MOSES PREPARES TO DIE

Read Numbers 27:1-22

In Numbers 20:12, the Lord told Moses that he would not be the one to lead the people into the land he had promised their fathers. The time was fast approaching when God would bring His people into that land. Before this happened, however, there were a few more things Moses needed to do.

In Numbers 27, the daughters of Zelophehad came to Moses with a particular problem they felt needed to be resolved. The daughters of Zelophehad were from the tribe of Manasseh (verse 1). Their names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. Notice in verse 2 that Eleazar the priest and the leaders were all present that day when they came with their problem to Moses.

In verse 3, the ladies explained that their father had died in the desert. While he had not been among the followers of Korah, who revolted against Moses, he suffered a similar fate because of his own sin against God. When he died, he had no male heir. In Old Testament times, the father's inheritance was passed on to his sons. Daughters did not receive an inheritance. This meant that their father's property would be taken from them and given to the nearest

male relative. There would be no more remembrance of their father's name in the land and his daughters would be left with nothing.

In verse 4, the daughters of Zelophehad pleaded with Moses to allow them to have some property in the land; not only to carry on their father's name but also so that they would not be taken from their home and land.

It was quite important in Old Testament times that every family line continue. Each family was important and it was a terrible thing to have any family die without descendants. The name of the family continued through the sons and through the property they held in the family name. While there were no more sons to carry on Zelophehad's name, the desire of his daughters was that their father's name continue by means of his property.

Moses brought the case of Zelophehad's daughters to the Lord in verse 5. The Lord told him that what these women were saying was right. They were to have their father's property as their inheritance (verse 7). That day, the Lord gave Moses a law regarding the transfer of inheritance when a father died without a son.

God told Moses that if a man died without a son, his inheritance was then to be turned over to his daughters (verse 8). If there were no daughters then the following rules were to be applied:

- If a man had no son, the inheritance was to go to his daughter (verse 8)
- If a man had no son or daughter, the inheritance would go to his brothers (verse 9)

- If a man had no brothers, the inheritance would go to his uncles (verse 10)
- If a man had no uncles, the inheritance would go to the nearest relative in his clan (verse 11)

We can only imagine how encouraging this would have been for these women. God had seen their need and responded to their request. They were important in His eyes and so was their family. Admittedly, their father had died because he had sinned against the Lord, but the Lord had not forgotten them. Through Moses, God provided for the needs of these women and every woman in a similar situation after them.

The daughters of Zelophehad give us an example to follow. They came to Moses and to the Lord with their need. They could have just simply accepted the way things were, but they didn't. They wanted to see a change and so they stood before Moses and the leaders of their community and presented their case. They did not riot or revolt, they simply presented their case and God answered.

We need to understand that this law regarding the right of the daughter was not something God had overlooked. God knows all things and is concerned for every person in society and their needs. He also expects that we have a role to play as well, however. He did not give this law to protect the rights of these women until the women came to Him and presented their case. James 4:2 tells us that we often do not have because we do not ask. There are things that God wants to give but He will not do so until we come to Him and ask. There are things that God intends to do, but He will not do so until we step out in faith. This is often how God works. We have the privilege, like the daughters of Zelophehad, of taking steps of faith and watching God

work in response. May God give us more believers today like these daughters of Zelophehad.

In verse 12, God told Moses to go up on the mountain in the Abarim range. On that mountain he would look down on the Promised Land. God told Moses that when he had seen the land he would be “gathered to his people.” In other words, he would die. Moses would not take his people into the land because he had disobeyed God at Meribah in the Desert of Zin (see Numbers 20).

Moses offers no complaint to God about his coming death. Notice his great concern, however, in verse 16. He asked the Lord God to appoint a man over the nation to lead and be a shepherd to them. Moses had spent the last forty years being a shepherd to these people. He knew their heart. He knew that they would wander from the Lord and His laws. When he asked the Lord for a shepherd for his people, he was asking a big thing. He was asking for someone who would keep the people of God on the right path and minister to them when they were hurting. This was a task that could only be done in the power of the Spirit of God. It was essential for the spiritual health of the nation that God provide them with such a leader.

God answered Moses’ prayer. He told him to take Joshua and set him aside. Notice in verse 18 that the Spirit of God was on Joshua. Moses was to have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire nation. He was to lay hands on him and pass on to him some of his authority. He was to do this before the nation so that the people would see that he was the Lord’s choice to lead them and that God’s authority was on him. To assure the people that Joshua was the leader God had chosen for them, Eleazar the priest was to inquire of the Urim before the Lord.

We read about the Urim and the Thummim in Exodus 28:30:

Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the LORD. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD.

The Urim and the Thummim were likely two stones used by the priests of the Old Testament. Exodus 28:30 tells us two things about these stones. First, they were kept in the breastplate that Aaron and his sons wore. Second, they were a means of making decisions for the Israelites. It is uncertain how these stones were used but the practice was something like the casting of lots (see Leviticus 16:8-10; Acts 1:26). The Jewish people believed that the Lord God was a sovereign God who had control over all things. They believed that when they cast lots or used the Urim and Thummim stones, the Lord determined the outcome. This is very evident in Proverbs 16:33:

The lot is cast into the lap,
but its every decision is from the LORD.

God told Moses in verse 21 that Eleazar the priest was to determine the will of the Lord by means of the Urim stone in the presence of the people. By using the Urim stone, the people would know that the decision was from the Lord and not a human decision. It was by this means that Joshua was chosen to be the successor of Moses. He would lead the people into the land God had promised their ancestors (verse 21). Moses laid hands on Joshua in front of all the people and commissioned him to be his successor.

Notice that God had a purpose for each person. It was not his will that Moses lead the people into the Promised Land. Moses was to take them to the border and then hand the rest over to Joshua. We can only imagine how difficult this must have been for Moses, who had led these people for over forty years. Sometimes we want to go farther than God wants us to go. Moses prepared the people for going into the land, but it would be Joshua who would take them in. Are you content to simply be a link in the chain? Are you ready to let God use someone else to harvest the crop you planted? How often has God's work been hindered by men and women who were not willing to step down and let God use someone else?

Moses needed to be humble enough to let God use Joshua to harvest what he had so diligently cared for in the desert. He needed to learn to be content to do what God had called him to do. Now that Moses was completing the work God had called him to do, God would take him to be with Himself. May we complete what God has called us to do before God takes us.

For Consideration:

- What problem did the daughters of Zelophehad bring to Moses? Why do you suppose God waited until they came with their problem to do something about it? Are there things God wants to do but waits until we ask or step out in faith?
- What does the law God gave Moses in this chapter teach us about the importance God places on individuals (even when they have sinned)? How do you treat those around you who have fallen?

- Why was it important that the Lord publicly confirm the leadership of Joshua?
- How important is it that we understand the role God has given us in this life? Have you ever been tempted to go beyond what God has called you to do?
- Are you willing to hand over to others the harvest you have planted? Do you have enough humility to let God choose whoever He wants to complete the work He has begun through you?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you courage to step out more boldly like the daughters of Zelophehad in this chapter. When do we simply do what has always been done and when do we seek a change?
- Thank the Lord for those He has placed in authority over you. Take a moment to pray that the Lord would bless and give them wisdom for the task He has called them to do.
- Ask God to help you to understand more clearly the role He has for you. Ask Him to give you humility to be content with that role. Ask Him to give you grace to hand over your responsibilities to others when the need arises.

25

ISRAEL'S OFFERINGS

Read Numbers 28:1-29:40

The people of Israel were required to offer regular sacrifices to the Lord. These sacrifices were for the sins of the people and in gratitude for God's forgiveness and compassion toward them. While it was possible for an individual to offer a sacrifice at any time, there were special sacrifices required at regular times in the year. In Numbers 28-29 we have a summary of the sacrifices and offerings God required of His people in the course of a given year. I will summarize these offerings in the form of a chart.

Occasion	Type	Animal	Comments
Daily (28:1-7)	Burnt offering	1 lamb	Offered in the morning with flour, olive oil and fermented drink offering
		1 lamb	Offered at twilight with flour and olive oil and a fermented drink offering

Sabbath (28:9-10)	Burnt offering	1 lamb	Offered in morning as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		1 lamb	Offered at twilight as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		2 lambs	As a special Sabbath offering brought with grain and drink offerings
Monthly (28:11-15)	Burnt offering	1 lamb	Offered in the morning as the daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		1 lamb	Offered at twilight as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		2 bulls	Offered with a grain offering of flour, oil and a drink offering of wine
		1 ram	
		7 male lambs	
	Sin offering	1 male goat	
Passover or Feast of Unleavened Bread (28:16-25)	Burnt offering	1 lamb	Offered in morning as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		1 lamb	Offered at twilight as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		2 bulls	Offered with grain offerings of flour and oil
		1 ram	
		7 lambs	
	Sin offering	1 male goat	

Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (28:26-30)	Burnt offering	1 lamb	Offered in the morning as the regular offering with grain and drink offerings
		1 lamb	Offered at twilight as the regular offering with grain and drink offerings
		2 bulls	Offered with a grain offering of flour and oil and a drink offering
		1 ram	
		7 lambs	
	Sin offering	1 goat	
Feast of Trumpets (29:1-6)	Burnt offering	1 lamb	Offered in the morning as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		1 lamb	Offered at twilight as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		1 bull	Offered with a grain offering of flour and oil and a drink offering
		1 ram	
		7 lambs	
	Sin offering	1 goat	
	Burnt offering	2 bulls	Because this was at the time of the regular monthly offerings, these regular monthly sacrifices were also offered
		1 ram	
		7 lambs	

Day of Atonement (29:7-10)	Burnt offering	1 lamb	Offered in the morning as the regular offering with grain and drink offerings
		1 lamb	Offered at twilight as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		1 bull	Offered with a grain offering of flour and oil and a drink offering
		1 ram	
		7 lambs	
	Sin offering	1 male goat	
	Burnt offering		An additional burnt offering was brought on this special day accompanied with a grain and drink offering (verse 11)
	Sin offering		An additional sin offering was brought on this day accompanied with its grain and drink offering (vs. 11)
Feast of Tabernacles (8 days) (29:11-38)		8 lamb	1 lamb offered on each of the 8 days in the morning as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		8 lamb	1 lamb offered on each of the 8 days at twilight as the regular daily offering with grain and drink offerings
		71 bulls	Offered over the 8 days beginning with 13 bulls sacrificed on the first day and decreasing one bull each day

	Burnt offering		until the seventh day. One final bull was sacrificed on the 8 th day. Each bull was offered with a grain offering of flour and oil and drink offering
		15 rams	Two rams were sacrificed each day for seven days and one final ram on the 8 th day. Offered with grain and drink offerings.
		105 lambs	14 lambs besides the regular daily offering were sacrificed each day for 7 days and 7 lambs on the 8 th day.
	Sin offering	8 male goats	1 male goat was sacrificed on each of the 8 days
Freewill offerings (29:39)	Burnt, Grain, Drink or Fellowship offerings		Whatever the Lord put on an individual's heart could be brought to the tabernacle as an offering.

There are several things we need to learn from this list of offerings and sacrifices.

First, notice that every day (both morning and evening) sacrifices needed to be made for God's people. This was a regular requirement to appease the wrath of God for sin. God's people were in need of daily, regular cleansing for their sins. While the Lord Jesus has removed the requirement of animal sacrifice, we still need to be cleansed of

our sins against Him daily. His blood covers all our sin and keeps us clean before the Father on a daily basis.

Second, notice that these sacrifices were required of God from His people. Sacrifice is a common theme in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Every day required a sacrifice. In the New Testament, while we no longer offer our sacrifices of animals, God still requires us to take up our cross daily to follow Him. This requires the daily sacrifice of our time, effort and ambitions. Are we ready to make these sacrifices each day? God required them of His people in the Old Testament and He requires the surrender of our lives to Him each day as well.

Notice finally, that there were special occasions in the life of Israel where they were called to remember God's goodness toward them. The Passover looked back to their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt and God's protection on their lives. Other celebrations gave thanks to God for His bounty in the harvest. God called His people to remember what He had done for them with thankfulness and gratitude. Their thankfulness to God was shown by their sacrifice and offerings to Him in return. Whether it was by bringing a grain offering as the first part of their harvest or a free will offering for something else, God took delight in receiving these tokens of thanksgiving from His people.

For Consideration:

- Are you trusting in the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross for your forgiveness? Have you come to Him for forgiveness for your sin? How does His work end all animal sacrifice?

- Does the church of our day understand the concept of sacrifice (not the sacrifice of animals but of our lives)? What sacrifices are we making for the cause of the Lord and His kingdom?
- What are you thankful to the Lord for today? Take a moment to consider the goodness of God in your life? What can you do to express your gratitude to Him for His goodness?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for you. Thank Him that His sacrifice covers all your sins.
- Ask the Lord to cleanse and forgive you for the sins of this day. Ask Him to help you to live in His forgiveness and cleansing.
- Ask the Lord to show you if there are any sacrifices you could make for His kingdom.
- Take a moment to express your gratitude to the Lord for the good things He has done for you.

26

V O W S

Read Numbers 30:1-16

There were many reasons why a person in Israel might make a vow to the Lord God. We have the case of Jephthah in Judges 11:30-31, who promised that if the Lord gave him victory over the Ammonites, he would sacrifice whatever came out of the door of his house when he returned. Hannah also made a vow promising that if the Lord gave her a son, she would give him back to serve Him all the days of his life (see 1 Samuel 1:10-11). Even the Apostle Paul made a vow to the Lord in Acts 18:18.

A vow is a promise or commitment. God expected that those who made commitments and promises to Him be true to their word and fulfil their vows. This is quite clear in Deuteronomy 23:21-23:

(21) If you make a vow to the LORD your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the LORD your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. (22) But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. (23) Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth.

There was no obligation to making a vow to the Lord. Vows were generally made freely by individuals who wanted to express their gratitude to God in a very practical way. Those who did make a promise or vow to the Lord, however, placed themselves under an obligation to fulfil that vow.

In Numbers 30, the Lord speaks to Moses about vows. According to verse 1, we see that the Lord expected that when a man made a vow to the Lord he was not to break his word. The Lord took what an individual promised to Him very seriously.

We need to consider this briefly before proceeding. In our day, we still make vows before the Lord. The most common is the marriage vow spoken before God and His people. We promise to love, honour and cherish our partner until death parts us. How seriously have we taken this vow? Do we truly love our partners, not just in word but also in action? Are we showing honour by our words and actions? Remember that the wedding vows we made were before God and He takes them seriously.

Wedding vows are not the only vows we make before the Lord. For those who practice believer's baptism, remember the promise you made to walk with the Lord and serve Him? Or when you joined your church, remember the promise you made to be faithful with your gifts and resources? What about the promises we make to the Lord in the quiet of our own homes. There have been times in my life that I have offered myself afresh to the Lord to serve Him with all my heart or to follow Him wherever He would lead. God expects us to be true to our word. He hears our promises and expects that we do what we promised. Numbers 30:1 makes it quite clear that when a man made a vow to the Lord he obligated himself to do what he said.

There are times when we make promises to God without thinking. Sometimes our immaturity or lack of experience in life will make us promise things that are unreasonable. The Lord made provision for these types of vows in the law.

Overruling the Vows of Children (verses 3-5)

Consider, for example, the case of a young unmarried girl living with her parents at home. She is still under her father's care. Any vow she made to the Lord would have to be approved by her father before she would be held accountable to it. If she made a vow and the father heard about it and let it stand, she would be obligated to fulfil what she promised before the Lord. If on the other hand, when her father heard about her vow, he spoke out and forbade it, she would be released from any obligation to fulfil what she promised. In this case, the father is acting as a guardian for his daughter and protecting her interests. He was responsible for her well-being before God and as such had authority to break any vows she might make that were not for her good.

In our day, we often have to do this for our children. God expects us to watch out for their interests. Sometimes they commit themselves to things that are not in their best interest. Sometimes as parents, we have to step in and overrule the decisions of our children because we know they are not for their good. God gives us this right and obligation as parents for the good of our children.

Overruling the Vows of a New Wife (verses 6-8)

What was true of a father's obligation in verses 3-5 was also true for a husband. A husband had an obligation before God to care and provide for his wife. If a man married

a young girl who had made vows prior to being married, he had the right to cancel those vows so that she would no longer be responsible for their fulfilment. On the other hand, if he said nothing, the young wife was required to follow through with her promises before the Lord.

The idea here is that there may be vows that were made by the wife that would hinder their relationship as a couple. It was the obligation of the husband to deal with anything that would be detrimental to their marriage.

As a husband today, are you doing everything you can to assure that nothing stands in the way of your marriage being what God intended? God's desire is that as husbands we take this role seriously. God's desire is for strong marriage relationships.

The Vows of a Divorced Woman or Widow (verse 9)

Notice in verse 9 that the vows of a widow or a divorced woman were binding. That is to say, they were responsible for their own actions and promises. It is important for us to note that God took the vows of women seriously. They had as much a right to make a vow as a man and were accountable to God for their fulfilment.

The Vows of a Married Woman (verses 10-15)

In the final section of chapter 30, God speaks to Moses about the vows of a wife living with her husband. If a wife made a vow and her husband heard about it and did not forbid it, her vow would stand and she would be obligated to fulfil it. If on the other hand, when he heard about it he forbade it, her vow would be cancelled and God would release her from it. Verse 13 makes it clear that a husband

was given the right to confirm or cancel any vow his wife might make.

The husband was accountable to God for the well-being of his wife and family. Part of that responsibility was the right to cancel any vow he did not feel was for her good or the good of the family. The husband would have to answer to God for his family. With this responsibility came the right to make or cancel decisions made by his family that he did not feel were in their best interest. The family was expected to submit to his leadership as he sought to honour God.

A husband needed to act immediately when he felt that a vow had been made that was not in the best interest of the family or his wife. If he said nothing, he confirmed his wife's vow by his silence. If later he decided to cancel her vow, he would be held responsible for her guilt in breaking it (verses 14-15).

What is important to note here is that when a husband confirmed his wife's vow, he was entering that vow with her. He could not simply pass off the blame to her when she did not fulfil her vow. When he confirmed her vow, he obligated himself to seeing that it was fulfilled. It was as if he co-signed the agreement and legally would be responsible for any failure to fulfil the terms.

How easy it is to promise God that we will do something and not follow this through. God expects that every promise we make will be fulfilled and He will hold us accountable for each one.

The other important detail we see in this chapter is the obligation and responsibility of the father or husband toward his family. God expects that men will take their role as

husbands and fathers seriously. They are given the authority from God to intervene when they feel things are not for the good of their family. They are to take the role of provider and caregiver seriously. God expected that men be spiritual leaders who were concerned for the well-being of their families. He also expected that they intervene when things were not as they should be.

God is looking for fathers who will take an interest in the decisions made by their children and who addresses those issues when they are not wise. He is looking for husbands who will do all they can to be sure that nothing stands in the way of a good relationship with their wives. How easy it is for a man to leave the care of the family to his wife. God, however, has called fathers and husbands to take seriously their role in the family and care for their wives and children. He will hold them accountable for any failure in this regard. They will have to answer to God for the condition of their families.

For Consideration:

- Have you ever made a promise or vow to the Lord? What was that promise? Have you been faithful to your promise?
- Have your children made wrong decisions and commitments? What is your obligation toward them?
- Are there things in your marriage that do not honour God or your partner? What do you need to do about these things?

- What do we learn here about the obligation of a father or husband in his family?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for vows and promises you have not fulfilled. Ask Him to show you what He would have you do.
- Take a moment to pray for your children, the decisions and commitments they have made. Ask the Lord to show you how you can help them to walk more fully with Him.
- Pray that the Lord would remove any obstacles in your marriage that do not bring Him glory and honour.
- Ask the Lord to give us men who will be the fathers and husbands God wants them to be.

27

THE DEFEAT OF THE MIDIANITES

Read Numbers 31:1-54

As we begin Numbers 31, the Lord speaks to Moses and tells him that one of his last tasks before dying would be to take vengeance on the Midianites for what they had done to His people (verse 1). It is important, in this context, for us to understand what the Midianites had done to Israel.

In Numbers 22:4-7 we read how King Balak hired Balaam to curse the people of Israel. While Balak was the king of the Moabites, the passage tells us that the Midianites joined him in his effort to curse the people of God. Midian sent their elders along with the elders of Moab to Balaam.

The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for divination. When they came to Balaam, they told him what Balak had said.
(Numbers 22:7)

When we come to Numbers 25 we discover that the Israelites fell into the sin of idolatry and sexual immorality with the Moabite women. God judged them for their sin by

sending a plague which would ultimately destroy about 24,000 people. As the people gathered before the Lord God at the tabernacle to repent of this great sin, Zimri, the leader of the Simeonites took a Midianite woman in his tent to have sexual relations with her. He did this in front of those who were repenting of this very sin (see Numbers 25:6-9). We see from this that the Midianites were a great temptation for God's people. They were leading them away from God and the requirements of His law and turning them to sexual immorality and idol worship. God's anger and jealousy burned so deeply that He commanded His people to treat the Midianites as enemies.

(16) The LORD said to Moses, (17) "Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them, (18) because they treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the affair of Peor and their sister Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, the woman who was killed when the plague came as a result of Peor." (Numbers 25:16-18)

It is quite clear from these verses that the reason the Midianites were to be destroyed was because of how they were drawing God's people away from Him by their evil ways. God wanted to get rid of this temptation for His people.

In obedience to the command of the Lord, Moses ordered the Israelites to gather their men and go to war against the Midianites. One thousand men from each tribe were to go out against the Midianites (12,000 men in total). Also with them was Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest who took with him trumpets for signalling and some articles from the tabernacle (verses 5-6). The presence of the priest would be a reminder to the people that the battle was a spiritual one. They were fighting to remove evil from their midst.

We can only imagine what it would have been like for the men of Israel to fight this enemy. They had been tempted by their women and some may have worshipped their gods. The Lord God was calling them to take a stand now against this great temptation. Sometimes we need to deal with sin and temptation very severely. Perhaps as you read this, the Lord is speaking to you about a sin in your life. He is asking you now, just as He did the Israelite men in Moses' day, to stand firm against this temptation and cut off all ties. This would not be easy for the men of Israel who were strongly tempted by these Midianite woman and their gods.

Verse 7 tells us that the Israelites fought against Midian and killed every man. Included in those who were killed were five kings of Midian. Notice that Balaam was also killed with the sword (verse 8). The killing of Balaam seems to indicate that while he refused to curse God's people in front of King Balak, he was not innocent. Verse 16 tells us that he advised Israel's enemies in how to turn them against their God and bring His curse on them. God judged him for his evil and he too was killed by the sword.

What is particularly striking in this passage is how the soldiers took the Midianite women and children captive. They burned all their towns and camps, took their wealth and returned with all their women and children (verses 9-12). We need to be reminded that it was the women who had been a temptation for the men of Israel. It was with these women they had committed sexual immorality. It was these women who were leading them away from God and into the worship of idols. The army of Israel went out to battle against the Midianites. They took over their territory and destroyed their men but returned to camp without dealing with the actual source of temptation.

What would it have been like for Moses to go out to greet the returning army only to find that they had brought all the women back with them? Verse 14 tells us that when Moses saw this he was angry. "Have you allowed all the women to live?" he asked in verse 16. Notice how he reminded the men that these women had followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning Israel away from the Lord. In verse 17, Moses commanded that all the male children be killed along with every woman who had ever slept with a man. Only the young virgin girls were to be saved (verse 18). These women would very likely have to go through a special ceremony before they could be accepted as Israelites and permitted to marry. Deuteronomy 21:10-13 describe what these Midianite women would have to do before being accepted as part of the nation of Israel:

(10) When you go to war against your enemies and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, (11) if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. (12) Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails (13) and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife.

In reality, these young girls would renounce their former nation and ways and be accepted into the nation of Israel. As such, they would be required to follow the ways of the Lord and turn from their former gods.

When the men returned from battle, Moses required that anyone who had killed anyone in that battle or even those who had touched someone who had killed another person

was to remain outside the camp of Israel for a period of seven days. They were to purify themselves according to the law. This was to be done by sprinkling themselves with a special water on the third and the seventh days (see Numbers 19:11-13). Every garment or anything made of leather, goat hair or wood was also to be purified (verses 19-20). Gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, lead or anything that could withstand fire was to be melted down and purified by the water of cleansing. Whatever could not withstand fire was to be washed thoroughly in water (verses 21-23). Nothing could be brought into the camp without first being purified. On the seventh day, the men were to wash their clothes and only then could they return to their homes to be with their families (verse 24). All this shows us the requirements of God for His people. They were to be pure and clean before Him with nothing that would offend Him. What a contrast we seen here between the requirements of God for the purification of the soldiers returning from battle and the picture of the men returning with all the women who had led them astray.

Verses 25-26 describe how the plunder brought back from the battle was divided. They were to count up the number of people and animals that had been captured. One half of the plunder was to go to the soldiers who fought the battle and the other half to the rest of the community. The Lord would also receive a portion of each half. From the half that went to the soldiers, the Lord required 1 out of every 500, whether people, cattle, sheep goats or other animals (verse 28). This was to go to Eleazar the priest (verse 29). From the half that went to the community, the Lord required 1 out of every 50, whether people, sheep, goats or other animals. This was given to the Levites (verse 30). The following chart summarizes how the plunder of war was divided according to verses 32-47.

Plunder	Total Cap-	Sol-dier's	Community Portion	Lord's Portion	
				From Sol-	From Commu-
Sheep	675,000	337,500	337,500	675	6750
Cattle	72,000	36,000	36,000	72	720
Don-keys	61,000	30,500	30,500	61	610
Virgin women	32,000	16,000	16,000	32	320
			Given to:	Eleazar	Levites

Notice in verse 48 that the officers who were in charge of the army counted the soldiers under their command and found that not one of them was missing. This would have been a significant undertaking as it required counting all 12,000 men who went to battle. Generally a census was only taken at the command of the Lord. David was severely punished by the Lord for taking a census in 1 Chronicles 21. This may have been because God wanted the people to learn to trust in Him for their victories and not in their numbers.

When the officers discovered that not a single person was missing and there was not one single death in this battle against the Midianites, two things happened to them. First, they realized that the victory had been miraculously given to them by the Lord who had protected every man in a wonderful way. Second, they seemed to come under conviction for thinking that their numbers had anything to do with their victory. As a result they decided to bring another offering to the Lord, likely out of gratitude, but also to make atonement for their sin of trusting themselves and taking the glory from God. They came, therefore, with gold articles that had acquired from the plunder and presented them to the Lord (verses 49-50). Moses and Eleazar the

priest accepted their offerings. The total weight of their offerings was 16,700 shekels of gold (420 pounds or 190 kilograms).

The chapter shows us that there are times when we need to deal harshly with sin. God expects that those who serve Him would walk in purity of life and thought. We are challenged here to examine our lives and remove any impurity that would hinder us in our walk with the Lord.

For Consideration:

- What was the sin of the Midianites that God would require that they be destroyed
- What did the Israelite men have with them when they returned from battle? What was the response of Moses to this? What temptations still remain for you? How would the Lord have you to deal with these temptations?
- For seven days after their return from battle the soldiers purified themselves and everything they had brought back with them. What does this tell us about the importance of walking in purity before God?
- As an act of gratitude, the people offered back to the Lord a portion of what He had given them. How do you express your gratitude to the Lord for the victories He gives you?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you courage to take action against your temptations today.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to desire His will in your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to walk each day in purity before Him.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the victories He has given you. Ask Him to help you to be more thankful for those victories.

28

LAND ALLOTTED TO GAD AND REUBEN

Read Numbers 32:1-42

The people of Israel were on the eastern side of the Jordan River. They had conquered Sihon of the Amorites, Og of the Kingdom of Bashan, and had been proven to be superior to Balak of Moab. With God's strength, Israel had taken over the region east of the Jordan, causing all the nations to fear them. When the tribes of Reuben and Gad saw that the land was very good, they decided that this was the land they wanted as their portion.

In verses 1-5 they approached Moses, the priests and the community leaders and asked to be given possession of a number of cities on that side of the Jordan. Notice in verse 5 that they asked Moses and the leaders not to make them cross the Jordan. There are some important details we need to see in this statement.

Remember that before the people of God could settle in the land west of the Jordan (the land promised to them), they had to overcome the people living in the land. There would be great battles and loss of lives ahead before Israel

could inherit the land God had promised them. By asking for an inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan River, Gad and Reuben may have also been trying to avoid the battles that they would have to fight across the river. They had already fought and overcome their enemies in the east and now they simply wanted to settle down and live in peace. Their request shows that they were content with what had already been conquered. It also shows that their concern was not for their brothers and sisters who had not yet received a portion of land.

When Moses heard the request of the Gadites and Reubenites, he became very angry with them. He challenged their selfish attitude in verses 6-7 by saying:

Shall your countrymen go to war while you sit here? Why do you discourage the Israelites from going over into the land the LORD has given them?

Gad and Reuben were, in reality, discouraging the people of God by their selfish attitude. Not only this, they were also encouraging them to settle for something far less than what God had for them. They were saying: "Why go over and risk our lives when we can have what we have already conquered on this side of the Jordan?" How often have we been content with far less than God's purpose for our lives? Like the Gadites and Reubenites, we are happy with where we are in our relationship with God. We settle down and don't grow any more. There is no new fruit being produced in our lives. If we are going to become all that God wants us to become and produce the fruit he wants us to produce, there will be battles to fight. Many people are unwilling to face these struggles and content themselves with where they are. They find a comfortable spot on the way to the Promised Land and settle there. There they will stay.

Moses rebukes this attitude. He reminded the Gadites and the Reubenites that this was the sin of their fathers who had explored the land of Canaan and discouraged the people from taking it in Numbers 13. Because the people refused to enter the land, God's anger had burned against them and He told them that not one person over twenty years of age would enter the land He had promised their fathers except Caleb and Joshua (verses 10-11). As a result of this sin, God's people had to wander for forty years in the desert (verse 12). Moses spoke harshly to the Gadites and Reubenites that day calling them a "brood of sinners." He told them that they were repeating the sin of their fathers. He warned Gad and Reuben in verse 15 that if the Israelites turned away from God's purpose as a result of their proposal, God would leave them in the desert until they were destroyed.

These are very serious words. Gad and Reuben did not fully realize the implications of their actions. They may have simply wanted to settle down and be at peace. They had wandered for forty years in the desert and here was a land that was good for their herds. They may have seen the land as the blessing of the Lord. They were thinking of themselves and not of the rest of the community. Their actions could have meant the destruction of the entire nation. Our actions can have a profound effect on those around us.

To the credit of Gad and Reuben, when they heard what Moses said, they modified their request. In verse 16, they told Moses that they would build pens for their livestock and cities for their women and children on the eastern side of the Jordan, but they were willing to take up arms and fight so that their brothers could also have land on the western side of the river. They requested, however, that their wives and children be allowed to stay in the east and

live in fortified cities for protection from their enemies until they returned from conquering Canaan with their brothers. They promised Moses that they would not return home to their wives and children until every tribe had received its inheritance (verse 18-19).

Moses told the Gadites and the Reubenites in verses 20-22 that their request for this portion of land would be granted them only on the condition that they armed themselves for battle and went with the other tribes over the Jordan to conquer the land. Notice from verse 22 that this was their “obligation” to the Lord and to their brothers. How easy it is to see anything we do for our brothers and sisters as something extra we do out of the goodness of our hearts. We expect that they will in turn be indebted to us for our kindness to them. What we see here, however, challenges this attitude. Moses was telling the Reubenites and the Gadites that they had an obligation to their brothers and sisters. None of us are to live for ourselves and our own comforts alone. God had given us gifts that we are to use for the good of our brothers and sisters. If we love God we will also love His children.

Moses made it clear to the Reubenites and Gadites that if they failed to help their brothers conquer the land, they would be sinning against the Lord and they would be judged by God (verse 23). Moses told Reuben and Gad that they could build their cities and pens for their flocks, but warned them very clearly that they were to do what they had promised to help their brothers (verse 24).

Reuben and Gad gave their word to Moses that while their wives and children would live on the east side of the Jordan, every man would fight with their brothers to conquer Canaan. There was a certain risk in this for Reuben and Gad. They were leaving their wives and children without

any soldiers to protect them while they were away. They were willing to entrust them into the Lord's hands, however, to do what He required of them.

Moses knew that he would not be allowed to see the land God had promised His people and would not live to see that Gad and Reuben fulfilled their promise. Knowing this, he gave orders to Eleazar the priest and Joshua his successor. He told them that if Reuben and Gad were faithful to what they had promised that day then they were to give them the land of Gilead (east of the Jordan) as they requested. If they failed to keep their promise, they were to live with the rest of their brothers in the land of Canaan (verses 29-30). That day, before God, Moses, Eleazar, Joshua and the leaders of Israel, Gad and Reuben promised to cross the Jordan and fight with their brothers. On the condition that they kept their promise, Moses gave Gad, Reuben and Manasseh the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan. This would become their inheritance (verse 33). The following chart lists the cities that each tribe built for their families on the eastern side of the Jordan River:

Tribe	Cities	Verses
Gad	Dibon Ataroth Aroer Atroth Shophan Jazer Jogbehah Beth Nimrah Beth Haran	Verses 34-36
Reuben	Heshbon Elealeh Kiriathaim Nebo	Verses 37-38

	Baal Meon Sibmah	
Manasseh	Gilead Havvoth Jair Kenath (Nobah)	Verses 39-42

For Consideration:

- Have you ever become content with less than the purpose of God for your life? Does God have something greater for your ministry and personal life?
- How can our actions and attitudes discourage others in their walk with God?
- What obligation do we have toward our brother and sister? Have you been living your life for yourself alone? What concern do you have for your brother or sister?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to not be content with anything less than His will and purpose for your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to be a good example to your brothers and sisters. Ask Him to open your eyes more to their needs.
- Ask God to give you faith to step out into the greater things He has for your life and ministry.

THE WAY TO THE PROMISED LAND

Read Numbers 33:1-56

Numbers 33 traces the route of the children of Israel over the forty years they wandered through the desert. Many of these locations are unknown to us today, so the exact route the Israelites took is somewhat debated. It was important for the Lord, however, to record the names of these locations. In this chapter, 42 locations are mentioned. While we don't want to make too much of this number, it is interesting to note that this number does occur elsewhere in the Scriptures.

Matthew groups the ancestors of the Lord Jesus into three groups of 14 names each. This is a total of 42 names listed as Jesus' ancestors (see Matthew 1:1-17). It is also interesting to note that the beast of Revelation 13 is given 42 months to make war against the saints (see Revelation 13:5-8). My purpose here is not to say that there is any connection between these passages as the Bible itself does not connect them. It is merely of interest to note that the number 42 does occur several times in the Scriptures.

Verses 1-2 introduce us to the content of the chapter. Here the author tells of the various stages in the journey of Israel from Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Verse 2 makes it clear that the Lord commanded Moses to record the stages of this journey. This means that this list was inspired by God, who led Moses to write it down for the people of God to remember.

It is important that we also remember the way God has led us in our lives. We must never forget where we have come from and how He has led us. The lessons learned at each stage of our life are all too easy to forget. God's purpose in having these details recorded was so that His people not forget their time in the wilderness.

For the people of God, this time in the wilderness was one they would have liked to forget. It was not an easy time. They often grumbled and complained about God's purposes for them. There were memories of rebellion against God and His servants. While in the desert, they had made a golden calf and bowed down to it. They had also fallen into immorality and Baal worship. They had failed God by refusing to enter the Promised Land. Some of them had lost their lives through plagues, fire, or on one occasion when the earth opened up and swallowed them alive.

While there had been failures in the wilderness, God's people had also experienced tremendous blessings. They had seen God provide their daily food and water. He had given them miraculous victories over their enemies and led them day by day by means of a pillar of fire. Through Moses, He had given them His law and organized them into a nation. These days of wilderness wanderings were very important for the people of God.

It was God's intention that His people remember their failures and their victories. He did not want them to forget the lessons learned in the wilderness. By writing down the names of their camps, God led Moses to keep a record for his people of these important times in their lives. Let me summarize the details of verse 3-56 by means of a chart.

Verse	Camp	Comments
3-4	Ramses	Location where they left Egypt in full view of the Egyptians
5	Succoth	
6	Etham	This was on the edge of the desert
7	Pi Hahiroth	They camped near Migdol
8	Marah	To get to this location they passed through the sea
9	Elim	God blessed them at this camp with 12 springs and 70 palm trees
10	Red Sea	
11	Desert of Sin	
12	Dophkah	
13	Alush	
14	Rephidim	No water for the people to drink
15	Desert of Sinai	
16	Kibroth Hattaavah	
17	Hazeroth	
18	Rithmah	
19	Rimmon Perez	
20	Libnah	
21	Rissah	
22	Kehelathah	
23	Mount Shepher	
24	Haradah	

25	Makheloth	
26	Tahath	
27	Terah	
28	Mithcah	
29	Hashmonah	
30	Moseroth	
31	Bene Jaakan	
32	Hor Haggidgad	
33	Jotbathah	
34	Abronah	
35	Ezion Geber	
36	Kadesh	This was in the Desert of Zin
37-40	Mount Hor	Aaron died here in this region forty
41	Zalmonah	
42	Punon	
43	Oboth	
44	Iye Abarim	This was on the border of the country of Moab
45	Dibon Gad	
46	Almon Diblathaim	
47	Abarim	They camped near Nebo
48-49	Plains of Moab	This camp was across the Jordan River from the city of Jericho

While the Israelites were in the Plains of Moab, across the Jordan from the Promised Land, the Lord spoke to Moses and told him what He required for those who would cross the Jordan to inherit the land. In verses 52-55, God tells His people that they were to do three things when they crossed the Jordan.

First, they were to drive out the inhabitants, destroying their images and idols and demolishing all their high places

(where they worshipped their pagan gods). There was to be no mercy shown. The pagans living in the land were to be driven out and everything that remained of their pagan religion was to be destroyed. God made it clear in verse 55 that if the inhabitants of the land were not driven out they would be a constant thorn in their sides. Notice also in verse 56 just how serious God was about this matter. He told His people that if they did not do so, He would do to Israel what He planned to do to the nations. That is to say, He would drive them out and destroy them as a nation. God expects us as His people to renounce sin in our lives and society.

Second, God told His people that when they entered the land they were to take possession of it and settle in it (verse 53). To possess is to take control and be responsible for something. Driving out and destroying the idols of the people who lived in the land was only the first step. God also expected that His people take control of the land. They were to bring it into submission to the Lord and His laws. In a similar way, the Lord calls us to bring our lives under submission to His purpose and plans. This will mean surrendering each day to Him. It will mean forsaking our evil thoughts and attitudes and bringing them into submission to the Lord. This is an ongoing battle for the believer.

Finally, the people of God were to distribute the land by lot according to their clans. Each tribe was to receive a portion in accordance with its size (verse 54). God is asking His people to share their victory with each other. Each person was to have what they needed for their families. No one person was to have it all. What has the Lord given you? Has He blessed you with spiritual gifts? Those gifts are not for you alone. There are others in the body of Christ who need you to use those gifts for their benefit. Is there a brother or sister in need? God is calling you to share what

He had given you with them so that they, too, will have enough. The people of God were to be sure that everyone had what they needed. This meant moving away from thinking only about themselves to thinking about each other. As God gave them victory, they were to share the fruits of that victory with their brothers and sisters so that everyone had all they required.

For Consideration:

- Take a moment to consider the path God has laid out for your life. What lessons has God taught you in your life?
- Are there things in your life that still need to be conquered? Are there sins you need to renounce? What are they?
- Are you living each day in victory? Are you “taking possession” of your attitudes and actions and submitting them to the will of the Lord?
- How have you been sharing the blessings God has given you with others?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the many lessons He has been teaching you in life. Thank Him for the path He has laid out for you.
- Ask God to give you courage and strength to conquer anything that does not bring honour to His name.

- Ask the Lord to show you how you can use what He has given you to bless others.

THE ALLOTMENT OF THE LAND OF CANAAN

Read Numbers 34:1-35:34

The nation of Israel was preparing now to enter the land the Lord had promised their ancestors. Moses has been preparing the people for the months of conflict that were about to come. Here in Numbers 34-35, he tells them about the boundaries God had set for them and what God was willing to give them. It is important for us to note that God had a place for His people. They were to take what He had given them and possess that land, but they were to be content with the boundaries He had set. In a similar way, it is important for us to seek the Lord regarding what He has for us, and then possess that territory with contentment and obedience. Sometimes we want what God has not given us. Sometimes we have not truly possessed what He has given. It is up to us to seek God's purpose and learn to be everything He wants us to be within the boundaries He has set for us.

Notice how God describes in great detail the limits of Israel's boundaries in verses 3-12. The details here show us

that God knew exactly what He wanted to give His people. I have summarized these boundaries in the following chart:

Border	Description
Southern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the Desert of Zin along the border of Edom • From the Salt Sea, south of Scorpion Pass to Zin • South of Kadesh Barnea to Hazor, Addar and Azmon • To the Wadi of Egypt and ending at the Sea
Western	Great Sea (Mediterranean)
Northern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From Great Sea to Mount Hor • From Mount Hor to Lebo Hamath • To Zedad past Ziphron to Hazar Enan
Eastern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From Hazar Enan to Shepham • Down from Shepham to Riblah east of Ain • Along the slopes east of the Sea of Kin-nereth • Along the Jordan River to the Salt Sea

The land described in the chart above was to be assigned to nine and a half tribes. The other two and a half tribes (Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh) were to receive their inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan River as had been agreed (verses 13-15).

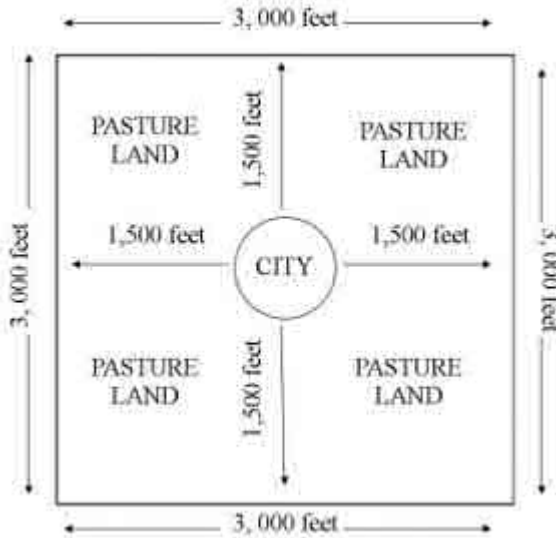
Moses appointed Eleazar, the priest and Joshua to be sure that the land was divided fairly among the nine and a half tribes. They were to be assisted by one leader from each tribe (verses 16-19). The following is a list of those

appointed from each tribe for the task of helping Joshua and Eleazar divide the land:

Tribe	Leader
Judah	Caleb
Simeon	Shemuel
Benjamin	Elidad
Dan	Bukki
Manasseh	Hanniel
Ephraim	Kemuel
Zebulun	Elisaphan
Issachar	Paltiel
Asher	Ahihud
Naphtali	Pedahel

These men would work together to assure that each tribe had the territory they needed.

As for the Levites, they did not inherit land of their own as the other tribes. Instead they were given towns throughout Israel with pastureland for their cattle, flocks and livestock (35:1-3). Notice from Numbers 35:4 that the Lord placed a limit on the amount of land the Levites could have. Their pasture land around the town could extend out fifteen hundred feet from the town wall on each side, giving them 3,000 feet on the outskirts of their pasture land. The best way to understand this is by means of this illustration:



In total, the Levites were to be given forty-eight towns throughout the territory of Israel. The larger the tribe, the more towns they were to give to the Levites within their territory (35:8). Of those forty-eight towns, six were to be set aside as cities of refuge (35:6). Three of these cities were to be on the eastern side of the Jordan and three in Canaan (35:14).

The purpose of these cities of refuge was to protect a man or woman in the case of unintentional sin. If an Israelite or someone living in Israel accidentally killed another person, they could flee to one of these towns where they would be protected from anyone who wanted to avenge their death until they were brought to trial (35:12).

The cities of refuge were not intended to protect murderers or those who struck another person with intent to kill. Verses 16-25 make a distinction between a murderer and

someone who killed another without intent. If a person struck someone with an iron object, a stone or a piece of wood and he died, that person was guilty of murder and would be put to death by an avenger of blood (35:16-18). The avenger of blood would likely be a relative. It was only common sense that if you strike someone with this kind of object the intent is to seriously harm or kill them. This was punishable by death if the person died as a result of the blow.

Another example of murder would be if someone pushed another, threw something at them intentionally or struck them with their fist so that the person died. In this case the individual would be guilty of murder and as such punished by death (35:20-21). Again, we can see that the intention is quite obviously to harm or kill the victim.

Not all deaths were the result of intentional murder. Imagine two young men playing together and one pushed the other without any intention of harming him and he died. A person might also toss something to someone without any intent to kill but the object strikes that person in such a way that it kills them. Maybe a stone was dropped on someone without the person who dropped it even being aware that there was a person below. In these cases, the deaths were accidental. There was no hatred or intent to harm involved.

When a case was tried and the death judged to be accidental, the guilty person was to be protected from anyone who would seek to avenge the blood of the one he had killed. For their protection, such individuals were sent to a city of refuge where they would stay until the death of the High Priest (35:25). If at any time the person left the city of refuge and the avenger of blood killed him outside the city, he would not be guilty of murder. The only protection for the one who accidentally killed someone else was to

remain inside the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest. Only then could he return to his own property.

Murder was punishable by death, but only when there was more than one witness to prove the guilt of the murderer (35:30). No one was to be put to death for murder based on the witness of only one person.

When a person was judged guilty of murder, he or she was to be put to death. God's people were never to accept money to release a murderer or spare him or her from death (35:31). Even if the death was ruled accidental, a person could not pay to return to his own land. He was to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. God made it clear to His people that money was never to corrupt their decisions. They were to do what was right and never allow themselves to be swayed for personal gain.

Notice in Numbers 35:33-34 that the reason God demanded punishment for death was because bloodshed polluted the land. The only way the land could be purified again was through the blood of the person who had murdered another human being. The land the Lord was giving His people was to remain pure. They were not to defile that land, and if it was defiled by murder, they were to purify it by punishing the murderer. It is our responsibility to keep what God has given us pure.

For Consideration:

- What has God called you to do? What are the boundaries He has given you? Have you been content with those boundaries?

- How important is it that we know the boundaries God has placed on our ministries? Have you ever tried to go beyond what God has asked you to do?
- How does the establishing of cities of refuge show God's protection and mercy toward those who were guilty of unintentionally killing another human being?
- While those who unintentionally murdered another were protected from the avenger of blood, they were still guilty and had to remain in the city of refuge. Do we still have to suffer the consequences even when we didn't intend to sin?
- How does money corrupt judgement? What does God say about not allowing money to keep us from doing right?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to teach you how to be content with His purpose for your life and ministry. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you tried to go beyond His purpose.
- Thank the Lord that He protects us even when we fall short of His standard.
- Ask the Lord to give you courage to face the consequences for your sins, whether they be intentional or unintentional.
- Ask God to keep you from being influenced by the things of this world to turn from the path He has set out for you.

31

THE PROBLEM OF ZELOPHEHAD'S DAUGHTERS

Read Numbers 36:1-13

In Numbers 27, the daughters of Zelophehad, the descendants of Makir of Manasseh came to Moses with a problem. Their father had died without leaving any sons to inherit his land. To that point, the inheritance had been given only to male descendants. This meant that their father's land would be taken from them and given to someone else. When Moses consulted the Lord about this, the Lord told him that when a man died without having any sons, the inheritance would be passed on to his daughters (Numbers 27:8).

In Numbers 36, the family heads of the clan of Gilead came to Moses with a problem regarding the law that gave an inheritance to a daughter when there was no son. The problem related particularly to the daughters of Zelophehad. Let's say that the daughters of Zelophehad were to marry men from another tribe. The children born to that union would belong to the tribe of their father. These children, now belonging to another tribe, would inherit their mother's land. This meant that the land would be

transferred from the mother's tribe to the fathers through these children. The territory allotted to that tribe by God would be taken away from them by marriage.

Moses brought the matter to the Lord. The Lord told Moses that in this case the daughters of Zelophehad were free to marry anyone they pleased as long as they married within the tribal clan of their father. Any daughter who inherited her father's land was to marry within her tribe so that the land would remain in the possession of that tribe. No inheritance was to be passed on from one tribe to another (verses 6-9). In this case, the daughters of Zelophehad married their cousins on their father's side and their inheritance remained in the tribe of Manasseh (verses 10-12).

There are several details we should examine in this short chapter. First, notice that the leaders brought their problem to the Lord. Obviously, God was very much aware of this problem even before the leaders brought it to Him. As the sovereign and all-knowing God, nothing takes Him by surprise. It is impossible to think that the God who formed the world failed to see this problem.

We will have to come to God on a regular basis for guidance and direction in the various issues that present themselves each day. Just as God gave manna each day to the children of Israel, He also provides us with what we need for each day. The leaders came to Moses that day for wisdom and direction from God for the problem they were facing, and God had the answer they needed. We need to make it a habit to come to Him regularly for guidance and solutions to the issues we face each day.

Notice in verse 6 that the Lord told Moses that the daughters of Zelophehad were free to marry anyone they wished, provided it was someone from their father's clan. God gave

these women freedom to choose within boundaries. They could choose to marry any man they desired. God was willing to bless their choice of husband, however, there were some restrictions. In this case, the husband they married needed to be from the clan of their father. We see from this that God does give us freedom as believers. He allows us to choose and make decisions and He will bless those decisions as long as they are within the boundaries He has set for us in His Word.

The daughters of Zelophehad had received the inheritance of their father and as such were responsible to God for that inheritance. This meant certain sacrifices for them. They were not free to marry someone outside their family tribe. They could not allow their father's inheritance to be lost. With every blessing comes obligation and responsibility. A new child brings new responsibilities. A greater blessing on our ministry means great obligation before God. Sacrifices will be required of us. Zelophehad's daughters were responsible to God for their inheritance and needed to do all they could to keep it in their family line. This meant sacrificing the privilege of marrying someone outside their clan.

Notice, finally, that the allotment of God for each tribe could not be passed on to anyone else. It was for that tribe alone. In a similar way, what God has given to us is for us alone. He has particularly prepared us for the ministry to which He has called us. No one else can do what God has called you to do. He has placed you where you are. He has gifted you for a particular purpose. He has made you the kind of person you are for a reason. He has a purpose and place for each of us. This is not something we can hand off to someone else. God expects us to be faithful with what He has called us to do.

The chapter ends in verse 13 with the words:

These are the commands and regulations the LORD gave through Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho.

These were the last commands God would give to Moses for the people. God had told him that He would not allow him to go into the land. He would die before the people entered Canaan. God had set a boundary for Moses as well. He had reached the border of that boundary and now the ministry was to be handed over to someone else. Moses had accomplished what God had given him to do. He had finished his work. We can only pray that we would be as faithful as Moses in doing what God has called us to do.

For Consideration:

- How would the land given to the daughters of Zelophehad be lost through their marriage to men of other tribes?
- The men of the clan of Gilead came to Moses with a problem related to his ruling on the matter of the daughters of Zelophehad. What does this teach us about how God reveals His purposes to us? Why do you suppose God reveals His purposes a bit at a time?
- Zelophehad's daughters had freedom to marry within certain boundaries. What freedom has God given us? What are the boundaries of that freedom?

- What sacrifices were the daughters of Zelophehad required to make because of the inheritance they received? What sacrifices does God expect you to make because of His calling on your life?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to be faithful to His calling on your life. Ask Him to show you clearly what He has given you to do.
- Ask God to help you to walk within the boundaries He had given you, and in accordance with the teaching of His Word.
- Ask God to give you grace to make the necessary sacrifices in your life so that His calling and purpose for you will be accomplished.
- Thank the Lord for the example of Moses in this book. Ask God to help you to be faithful as he was to the purpose of God for your life.

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