

04 - Numbers - A Journey Through the Wilderness

1:1-36:13

Key Verse: 10:35,36

INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS

The book of Numbers is the fourth book of Moses. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt. The mighty hand of the Lord delivered them from bondage in Egypt and brought them on eagle's wings across the Red Sea, through the wilderness to Mount Sinai. There, God revealed his purpose for his people: He wanted them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Ex 19:6). So, at Sinai God gave Moses the Law, the core of which is the Ten Commandments. God also gave instructions for the construction of the sanctuary so that he might dwell in the midst of his people. Finally, the tabernacle was finished, and the glory of the Lord filled it. The book of Numbers begins here, at the foot of Mt. Sinai. God led them through the wilderness with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

This journey to the promised land should have taken only two weeks, but it took forty years. They were free from bondage in Egypt, but still bound by their slave mentality. They were full of complaints and a spirit of rebellion. They needed God's training. It was hard; most of them died in the desert. But this training made them a great people. The Hebrew title for this book means "in the wilderness." There are two census lists (1,26)--hence the name, "Numbers."

Here is the general outline:

1:1-10:10--Instructions--preparing to depart

10:11-21:35--From Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab

22:1-25:18--Israel's seduction by the Moabites

26:1-36:13--How to conquer and live in the promised land

READY TO FIGHT

Numbers 1:1-54(Read 1-19;44-54)

Key Verse: 1:53

1. Number the fighting men (1-46)

Moses and the people were getting ready for the long march to the promised land. There would be enemies along the way, so they needed an army. The Lord commanded Moses to take a census of the Israelite community. He was to list every man by name, one by one. Every person is important. Those who were twenty years old or more and able to fight were all included in the

army. There are many spiritual battles which we must fight as we travel through a wilderness world to the heavenly kingdom. Satan attacks within and without. We must be ready.

2. Protect the sanctuary (47-54)

The men of the tribe of Levi were omitted from the roster of fighting men. They were appointed to protect and care for the tabernacle of testimony. This was the nations' heart. It represented God himself in the midst of his people. The heart of a nation or a person should be guarded with great diligence.

Prayer: Lord, help me to fight the good fight of faith and keep my heart for you.

One Word: Guard your heart (Pr 4:23)

READY TO MARCH

Numbers 2:1-34

Key Verse: 2:17

1. Camp around the tent of meeting (1-8)

God dwelt in the midst of his people. When they camped or when they marched, his sanctuary was in the center. In the heart of the sanctuary was the Bible. God established order in this undisciplined bunch of slaves. Each tribe was assigned a definite place to camp. The sanctuary was in the center, and the Levites were stationed around it. Four tribes were designated as leading tribes and were assigned positions: Judah on the east, Reuben on the south, Ephraim on the west and Dan on the north. The other tribes were arranged under these. When God dwells in our midst, there is spiritual order in our human relations.

2. Marching orders (9-34)

When they set out, Judah's division broke camp and set out first, their banner unfurled above them; then, Reuben and his divisions. The Levites carrying the tent of meeting marched in the middle. After them followed the remaining six tribes.

Prayer: Lord, help us to keep you in the center of our lives when we camp and when we march.

One Word: God dwells with his people

THEY ARE MINE

Numbers 3:1-51 (Read 1-13)

Key Verse: 3:13

1. The Levites are mine (1-4)

Aaron and his descendants were ordained to serve as priests. They alone could enter the sanctuary to offer sacrifices for sin and to pray for the people. In Leviticus 10, Aaron's two eldest sons took their privilege lightly and died.

2. The firstborn are mine (5-51)

At the time of the Exodus, the angel of the Lord had passed through Egypt, striking down the firstborn. The firstborn of Israel were spared, not because they were righteous, but because the Israelites had obeyed God by faith, and smeared the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts. Thus, God redeemed the firstborn of Israel by the blood and claimed them for his own. Moses counted the firstborn. Then, God appointed the Levites to serve him as substitutes for the firstborn. There were more firstborn Israelites than there were Levites, so redemption money had to be paid for the Israelites leftover. God demanded a strict accounting.

Prayer: Lord, I belong to you, for you redeemed me with the blood of Jesus. Help me to serve you with awesome respect.

One Word: "I am the Lord; you are mine"

DON'T INDULGE IRREVERENT CURIOSITY

Numbers 4:1-49 (Read 1-33)

Key Verse 4:20

1. The task of the Kohathites (1-20)

When the Israelites broke camp to continue their journey, Aaron and his sons (Kohathites) were to dismantle and wrap the sacred things in the tabernacle. The Kohathite clan was given the awesome task of carrying the sacred objects of the Tent of Meeting. However, they were not to look at the holy things or touch them--on pain of death. Curiosity that makes one invade things that are sacred and holy is a sin before God. When people do not respect God, they do not respect other people or themselves.

2. The task of the other Levites (21-49)

Levi, son of Jacob, had 3 sons--Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Moses and Aaron were descendants of Kohath. These three clans were given the responsibility of caring for the sanctuary. During the journey to the Promised Land, these Levites were responsible for packing and moving the tent of meeting and its furnishings. God himself assigned the tasks.

Prayer: Lord, help us to combat the irreverence of our times by surrendering our inordinate curiosity.

One Word: Be humble, not curious

A HOLY GOD; A PURE PEOPLE

Numbers 5:1-31

Key Verse: 5:6,7

1. Because the Holy God dwells among you (1-10)

God wanted his people to be pure in body and in heart. So the camp must be kept clean, and hearts defiled by sin must be purified. Sin must be confessed, restitution made to the person who was injured, and a blood sacrifice offered to God for atonement. A man who wrongs another and does not set it right is unfaithful to the Lord.

2. The law of jealousy (11-15;29-31)

A person who is unfaithful to his or her marriage vows is defiled. A jealous heart also defiles a person, for jealousy makes it impossible for one to see himself and others from God's point of view. The Law of jealousy was given to remove jealousy from a person's heart. If there is a legitimate reason for jealousy, then the person who has been unfaithful must be punished. If there is no reason for being jealous, then the jealous person must repent and cast jealousy out of his or her heart.

Prayer: Lord, purify my heart. Remove all jealousy and anger and bitterness from my heart, so that you may dwell with me.

One Word: A holy God; a pure heart

THE NAZIRITE VOW AND THE BLESSING

Numbers 6:1-27

Key Verse: 6:24-26

1. A vow of separation (1-21)

There are times when God's people need to set aside a time for spiritual discipline and special fellowship with God. We do not need to follow in detail the rules for taking a Nazirite vow, but some kind of discipline that leads to separation from the world for a time can be very helpful in spiritual growth. There are several people in the Bible who seemed to have taken a Nazirite vow: Samson and John the Baptist are two; perhaps Paul took such a vow on two occasions (Acts 18:18; 21:24-26).

2. The priestly blessing (22-27)

We may succeed in all our plans and accomplish our goals, and even have beautiful families. But if there is no blessing of God in our lives, there is no peace and no meaning. To have God's blessing, we must be God's people--we must bear his name.

Prayer: Lord, I want to belong to you. Help me to spend time with you in spite of the busy rush of the world. Bless me and I will be blessed--and make me a blessing.

One Word: The Lord bless you and keep you

DEDICATION OF THE TABERNACLE

Numbers 7:1-89 (Read 1-17,89)

Key Verse: 7:89

1. As each man's work requires (1-9)

The tabernacle and altar were finished and set up according to God's instructions. First, the tribal leaders brought six carts and twelve oxen. These were given to the three Levite clans to be used in caring for and transporting the various parts of the sanctuary. The Kohathites didn't need carts because they carried the ark on their shoulders.

2. The fellowship offering (10-89)

When the altar was dedicated, each of the twelve tribal leaders brought an offering. Each brought the same items. The bowls and plates, the grain and oil and incense and the animals were all used in making burnt offerings on the altar. The burnt offerings were called fellowship or peace offerings. The blood shed on the altar was for the forgiveness of sin, which brings peace with God and enables sinful man to have fellowship with him. These sacrifices looked forward to Jesus, the perfect sacrifice (Ro 5:1).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for providing a way of forgiveness and peace.

One Word: Jesus, our peace offering

THE LAMPS AND THE LEVITES

Numbers 8:1-26

Key Verse: 8:18,19

1. Setting up lamps (1-4)

The seven lamps represented God's presence. God is light; in him there is no darkness.

2. The Levites set apart (5-26)

All Israel belonged to God; the firstborn males belonged to him in a special way. He had saved them from death in Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb. Later, he appointed the Levites to substitute for the firstborn, and he set them apart to do the work at the Tent of Meeting on behalf of all the Israelites. They would offer sacrifices to make atonement for the sins of the people. The priests were direct descendants of Aaron, a Levite. The Levites were set apart by a blood sacrifice and by a special washing ceremony. All the Israelites laid hands on them to dedicate them to God. Someday all God's people must be a kingdom of priests to bring the gospel to a sinsick world.

Prayer: Lord, help us to live as your own people, a holy nation and a kingdom of priests to share the gospel with the world.

One Word: Given wholly to God

THE PASSOVER

Numbers 9:1-14

Key Verse: 9:2

1. Celebrate at God's time, in God's way (1-5)

Celebrating the Passover was to remember God's grace and protection when he brought them out of Egypt. As the tenth and final act of God's judgment, the angel of death passed through Egypt, striking the firstborn in every household. But the angel "passed over" the homes of Israelites who had obeyed God by killing a lamb and sprinkling its blood on the doorframes. This event struck terror in the hearts of the Egyptians, so they almost drove the Israelites out of Egypt. God's people must remember that God hates sin, but loves and saves sinners who trust and obey him. We must remember his grace and have a sense of history.

2. Everyone must participate (6-14)

There were certain circumstances which prevented a person from celebrating the Passover at the proper time. God gave a second chance, for everyone should participate. This was a declaration of identity as an Israelite, as one of God's people. We, too, must have identity as part of the body of Christ.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember your grace, and to identify with your people.

One Word: Remember the grace of God

THE CLOUD AND FIRE

Numbers 9:15-23

Key Verse: 9:23

1. God dwells with his people (15-16)

On the day the tabernacle was completed, the glory of the Lord filled it. The tabernacle was built and the sacrificial system given so that God might dwell with his people. This points to Jesus' perfect sacrifice. Because he died for our sins and rose from death, the Holy Spirit comes to indwell the hearts of believers (Jn 7:39).

2. God leads his people (17-23)

God is not a spectator. He leads his people. The cloud which led Israel looked like a fire at night and a bright cloud by day. This teaches us about God's leading. When the cloud lifted, the Israelites set out on their journey. When the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. They never knew how long they would stay in one place or how long they would travel. They never knew just what direction they would take. Our journey to the Promised Land of heaven is such a pilgrimage. He leads us by his word and by his Spirit.

Prayer: Lord, lead me throughout my earthly journey.

One Word: Don't calculate; pray and obey God

SILVER TRUMPETS

Numbers 10:1-36

Key Verse: 10:9

1. The trumpet call (1-10)

Two silver trumpets blasted to call the people to rise up and march; they sounded to assemble the people; they rallied the army to battle; and they were sounded when burnt offerings were made to God. A trumpet blast is like a shout of victory. God's people should live victorious lives. The trumpet blast unified the people. God wants his people to pray and act as one man and win the victory over Satan. The trumpet must not give an uncertain blast.

2. The Israelites leave Sinai (11-36)

Everything was in place and ready. The trumpets sounded, and the people set out for the Promised Land. Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, made a decision of faith to leave his own land and people to go with God's people and share God's blessing. The people set out in order and marched together toward the Promised Land. The ark of the covenant went before them.

Prayer: Lord, let me be one of your people and follow your leading all the way to the promised land.

One Word: When the trumpet sounds, obey

MOSES' BURDEN

Numbers 11:1-35

Key Verse: 11:17,29

1. Complaining people (1-15)

One mark of a slave mentality is a complaining spirit. The people of Israel had been delivered from bondage by the almighty power of God, but they forgot God and complained about the food. They wanted an easy and secure life, even if it were a life of slavery. A complaining mind is sin. God's will for his people is that they be thankful in all circumstances (1Th 5:18). Moses didn't know what to do, so he prayed. He laid his burden before the Lord.

2. God's answer (16-35)

God established and empowered under-shepherds who could share the burden of responsibility with Moses. Moses was glad that God gave his Spirit to the seventy elders. Then God worked a great miracle. He gave the complaining people so much meat that it ran out their noses. However, he punished the greedy people with a plague.

Prayer: Lord, give me a thankful heart for your grace, and give me your Spirit so that I can serve you as a responsible shepherd.

One Word: O that all the Lord's people were prophets!

MOSES' HUMBLENESS

Numbers 12:1-16

Key Verse: 12:3

1. Miriam and Aaron oppose Moses (1-3)

Moses' wife Zipporah was not an Israelite. Miriam and Aaron despised her. "Cushite" suggested that her skin was dark. But their real problem was their jealousy of Moses' spiritual power and authority. They had become very proud and humanistic. Moses didn't defend either himself or his wife. He let God solve the problem. This is true humility.

2. God establishes Moses' leadership (4-16)

Moses' authority did not come from superior ability or human genius, but from a close walk with God. Aaron and Miriam made a big mistake when they looked at God's servant from a human point of view. Moses' true humility is seen in his faithfulness as God's servant in God's house (Heb 3:5). God taught Miriam and Aaron that it is a sin to speak against the Lord's servant; Miriam was struck with leprosy. Moses cried out to the Lord, asking him to heal her.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to walk with you until I learn the humbleness of my Lord Jesus; teach me to recognize and respect your servants whom you are using.

One Word: True humility

SPYING OUT THE LAND

Numbers 13:1-33

Key Verse: 13:27,28

1. Explore the land (1-25)

The Israelites reached the border of the land God had promised them. At the Lord's command, Moses sent twelve spies, one from each tribe, to explore the land from one end to the other. They were to find out about the land and its people. God had promised to give Canaan to the Israelites, but they had to go in and take it. It requires faith, obedience and action to claim God's promises.

2. The spies' report (26-33)

The land was good, but the people were fearsome. The spies brought back a cluster of grapes so big that two of them had to carry it on a pole. They also brought back figs and pomegranates. Indeed, it was a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord had promised. However, the people of the land were giants; their cities were large and well-fortified. Ten spies reported to Moses, "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them. It is impossible to take this land." But Caleb said, "We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can do it." He believed God's promise.

Prayer: Lord, give me faith to claim your promises.

One Word: Go up and take the good land

DO NOT BE AFRAID

Numbers 14:1-9

Key Verse: 14:9

1. Let's go back to Egypt! (1-4)

When the people heard the reports of the spies, they forgot the power and promises of God and fell into fear. Fear is unbelief. This was not the first time, but this time was critical, for it was the time of decision. Instead of looking at God, they looked at the powerful enemy and at themselves. They said, "We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes...Let's go back to Egypt." Those who have been delivered from bondage by the power of God must live by faith from first to last. To go back to the old life is death.

2. Only do not rebel (5-9)

Caleb and Joshua also had seen the powerful enemies, but they believed that the Lord would give them the good land if they pleased him. They begged the people not to be afraid and not to rebel. Fear and rebellion displease God. The Israelites could conquer the land because the Canaanites had no protection, and the Lord was with his people Israel (9). If we trust and obey God, he will give victory and success.

Prayer: Lord, drive out the fear which is the seed of rebellion; help me to live by faith.

One Word: "We will swallow them up!"

MOSES PLEADS FOR THE PEOPLE

Numbers 14:10-19

Key Verse: 14:19

1. I will make you a great nation (10-12)

God was angry at the people's unbelief. He had poured out his grace on them, but they rebelled against him and treated him with contempt because of their fear and unbelief. God offered Moses an easy way out of a hard job. He would destroy the rebels with a plague and start over again with Moses' family. He would make a greater nation. Moses could forget about the rebels and raise his own sons.

2. Moses' prayer (13-19)

Moses did not accept God's offer. He had a shepherd's heart for these people, and he loved God. God's honor was at stake. God had brought the people out of Egypt with his mighty hand and led them through the desert with cloud and fire; if he put them all to death, the godless nations of the world would mock God. So Moses asked God to forgive the people one more time--because of his great love.

Prayer: Lord, help me to know your mind and heart, love you more and pray for your people and your redemptive work.

One Word: Love God and pray for his people

GOD'S ANSWER

Numbers 14:20-45

Key Verse: 14:24

1. Caleb has a different spirit (20-35)

God relented. He would give them the land--but they must receive desert training for 40 years--until the men who disobeyed God's command in unbelief all died in the desert. There were two men with a different spirit--Caleb and Joshua. They were men of faith and obedience who followed God wholeheartedly. They would enter the land. God still blesses and uses people who trust and obey him.

2. Presumptuous people (36-45)

The explorers who had planted doubt and fear in the people all died. Moses delivered God's word to the people. They regretted their unbelief. They confessed their sin, but still they did not obey God's word. They decided to enter the land. Moses told them clearly that this was disobedience and that God would not be with them. But they disobeyed and went, and they were terribly defeated.

Prayer: Lord, keep me from presumptuous sins that arise from fear and unbelief. Help me to follow you wholeheartedly. Help me to plant faith in others.

One Word: Don't regret--repent

DELIVERED FROM SLAVERY TO BELONG TO GOD

Numbers 15:1-41

Key Verses: 15:39-41

1. After you enter the land (1-21)

After disobedience and utter defeat, the people were sent back to the wilderness for 40 years of training. They must have felt hopeless despair. So God spoke to plant hope in their hearts. He taught them how to worship and thank God "after you enter the land." (2) Both aliens and Israelites must worship God in God's way--not according to their own customs or feelings. They were to offer their firstfruits with thankful hearts.

2. To atone for unintentional sin (22-36)

The sin problem is not resolved by excuses, but by repentance and forgiveness. Sin brings spiritual death. Under the Law, one who sins deliberately must be cut off. The man who broke the Sabbath law was stoned to death. One who sins in ignorance can find forgiveness through a sacrifice of atonement.

3. We belong to God (37-41)

God delivers us from bondage so that we may belong to him. We must not follow the lust of our eyes, but remember and obey his commands.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for giving hope and forgiveness to sinners.

One Word: Follow God's word, not feelings

REBELLION AGAINST GOD'S SERVANT

Numbers 16:1-35

Key Verse: 16:11

1. The whole community is holy! (1-11)

Korah was a Levite; he envied Aaron, and he wanted to be a priest. Dathan and Abiram were not Levites. They didn't see why everyone had to obey Moses--after all, the whole nation was holy! Those involved in this rebellion were leaders. They were men with responsibility and power--and they wanted more. They saw God's servants from a human point of view. They did not realize that their rebellion was against God.

2. The Lord sent me--it was not my idea! (12-35)

Moses brought this matter to God--he did not try to solve it in a human way. The Lord was angry; he wanted to destroy the whole nation. Moses averted disaster by proposing a terrible test, a test which proved that the Lord God had established Moses as leader of his people (28-34).

Prayer: Lord, help me to respect the leaders whom you have appointed and through whom you are working. Help me to grow in faith through obedience which keeps spiritual order.

One Word: Respect God's servants

AARON SAVES THE PEOPLE

Numbers 16:36-50

Key Verse: 16:48

1. A sign of holiness (36-40)

The malignant spirit of rebellion that erupted almost destroyed the people. Moses and Aaron worked to restore spiritual order. The censers of the dead rebels were holy, for they had paid for their rebellion with their lives. Eleazar hammered them out and overlaid the altar. The people must remember that God is holy. He must be worshiped in his way.

2. Standing between the living and the dead (41-50)

The people did not repent of their rebellious spirit. They ignored God's hand of judgment and blamed Moses and Aaron for the deaths of their 250 leaders. Suddenly, God's wrath and glory burst forth from the cloud and a terrible plague began. Aaron rushed into the midst of the people

with a censer of incense from the altar. He stood between the living and the dead and made atonement for them--and the plague stopped.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for interposing the blood of Jesus between my rebellious spirit and your judgment.

One Word: Rebellion leads to death

AARON'S STAFF THAT BUDED

Numbers 17:1-13

Key Verse: 17:5

1. A staff for the head of each tribe (1-7)

The rebellion against Aaron (16:10,11) had been quelled, but people continued to question his spiritual authority and grumble against him. God wanted to rid himself of the grumbling (5). The head of each tribe was to bring his staff, and the 12 staffs, including Aaron's staff, were placed before the Lord in the Tent of Meeting, in front of the ark of the Testimony. God would make the staff of his chosen servant sprout.

2. Aaron's staff (8-12)

In one night, Aaron's staff sprouted, budded, blossomed, and produced almonds! God displayed his resurrection power and confirmed Aaron as the servant whom he had chosen. Only the Creator God can give life to the dead. Aaron's staff in front of the ark of the Testimony reminded the people that God is the living God and that Aaron is a leader because God appointed him. The grumblers were terrified, for they realized that they had been opposing God.

Prayer: Lord, display your resurrection power in the lives of changed men. Teach us to respect the leaders whom you have chosen.

One Word: God is the Author of life; obey him

RESPONSIBILITIES AND PRIVILEGES

Numbers 18:1-32

Key Verses: 18:5,20b

1. God's gift--great responsibility (1-7)

God gave to Aaron and his descendants the responsibility of offering sacrifices and caring for the sanctuary. Other Levites could help, but only Aaron and his sons could go near the altar and the inner sanctuary. Priestly work is an awesome responsibility; the priest must stand between sinful

man and the holy God; he brings men to God and God to men. Jesus is our great high priest--the one mediator between God and men. We are called to be a kingdom of priests--to bring God's gospel to a sinful world (1Ti 2:5; 1Pe 2:9,10; Ex 19:5,6).

2. The inheritance of priests (8-32)

God's servants were promised the best inheritance--God himself. They were given no land in Canaan. Their needs were abundantly provided for from the tithes and offerings, and they too were to tithe. If we belong to God and God belongs to us, we have everything.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the privilege of being one of your people. Help me to bear the blessing and responsibility of sharing the gospel with the world.

One Word: God is my inheritance

PURIFICATION FROM SIN

Numbers 19:1-22

Key Verse: 19:9c

1. Ashes of sacrifice (1-10)

Sin is serious. It separates us from God (Isa 59:2). The Israelites' life of slavery had made them insensitive to sin. So God taught them that sin cannot be treated lightly. The water for cleansing was prepared from the ashes of a blood sacrifice. These verses prescribe the preparation of the special water to be used in purification from sin (9c; Heb 9:22). The blood sacrifices look forward to Jesus. Jesus on the cross reveals how much God hates sin.

2. Seven days of purification (11-22)

Coming in contact with death required special cleansing. These regulations remind us that death is an enemy that only the resurrection of Christ defeats. A person who becomes unclean must purify himself, or he will be cut off from the people. Sin separates people from people. The blood of Christ cleanses us so that we may serve the living God (Heb 9:13,14).

Prayer: Lord, thank you for cleansing me from sin and setting me free from the power of death by the blood of Jesus (1Jn 1:7).

One Word: Jesus' blood cleanses

THE WATERS OF MERIBAH

Numbers 20:1-29

Key Verse: 20:12

1. Milestones of history (1,14-29)

This chapter begins with the death of Miriam and ends with the death of Aaron. Their deaths mark the end of an era, for this is the beginning of Israel's last year in the wilderness. The Edomites refused Israel passage through their territory. In their narrow-minded selfishness, they rejected God's blessing and brought God's curse on themselves.

2. God rebukes Moses (2-13)

In their ingratitude, the people continually grumbled about life in the desert. They blamed Moses when they ran out of water. Moses and Aaron prostrated themselves before God, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. God told Moses to speak to the rock, and water would pour out before their eyes. In anger, Moses struck the rock twice. Water came out, but the Lord rebuked Moses for acting as though the holy God were not there. We must honor God by acknowledging him in every circumstance.

Prayer: Lord, these days many people respect nothing and no one. Help me to remember your holy presence in every situation.

One Word: Honor the Lord as holy

LOOK UP IN FAITH AND LIVE

Numbers 21:1-35

Key Verse: 21:9

1. The first battle with Canaanites (1-3)

The king of Arad provoked the battle by attacking the Israelites. The Israelites prayed, made a vow and asked God for victory. The Lord heard them and gave them victory.

2. The bronze snake (4-9)

The Edomites had refused them passage through their land, so they turned south to go around Edom. This was frustrating; the people became impatient; they complained about the food, and they blamed Moses. God doesn't like complainers. So God disciplined them with deadly snakes. They repented, and God provided a way of forgiveness and healing. Anyone who believed God's promise and looked up at Moses' bronze snake would live (Jn 3:14,15).

3. The defeat of the Amorites (10-35)

They traveled along the eastern border of Moab, and God gave them water. When they were denied passage through Amorite territory, they fought Sihon and Og and took the land on the east side of the Jordan. This began the conquest of Canaan.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to claim your victory by faith.

One Word: Faith is the victory

MOAB HIRES A FALSE PROPHET

Numbers 22:1-20

Key Verse: 22:12

1. Those whom God blesses are blessed (1-13)

Israel's thoroughgoing defeat of the Amorite kings struck terror in the hearts of the Moabites. So the Moabite king Balak hired Balaam to put a curse on Israel. Balaam was a compromising prophet with spiritual gifts but no truth in his heart. When Balaam prayed, God told him not to go with Balak's emissaries and not to curse Israel, for God had blessed them. So Balaam sent the Moabite emissaries away.

2. God grants Balaam's heart desire (14-20)

The king of Moab sent more emissaries and more money to Balaam. Balaam really wanted to go with them. His words of refusal were clear (18), but his actions were not clear. He invited them to spend the night, and then he asked God again. God lets people do what they really want to do. He wants us to be responsible for our choices. So God gave Balaam conditional permission to go.

Prayer: Lord, give me a wholehearted desire to please you. Keep me from asking again for what I know does not please you.

One Word: Don't have a compromising heart

BALAAM'S DONKEY

Numbers 22:21-41

Key Verse: 22:32

1. Balaam's wise donkey (21-27)

Balaam knew that God did not want him to go to Balak—even though God had given him permission. Balaam was greedy for the gold that Balak had offered him—so he was spiritually blind. He did not see the angel with the drawn sword, but his donkey did. When she went off the road to avoid the angel of death, Balaam beat her. He beat her again when she refused to go forward and crushed his foot against the wall. The donkey saw the angel of death blocking the narrow path, so she lay down in the path. He beat her again.

2. Balaam's eyes are opened (28-41)

When Balaam beat his donkey a third time, she rebuked him. His spiritual eyes were opened and he saw the angel with the drawn sword. He repented and offered to return. (He should have returned without asking.) His strong desire for Balak's reward was still there, so God let him go on.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me for my strong desires to do what I should not do. Give me at least as much sense as Balaam's donkey.

One Word: Be at least as smart as a donkey

SEE WHAT GOD HAS DONE!

Numbers 23:1-26

Key Verse: 23:23b

1. A people who are different--1st oracle (1-12)

Balak realized that Israel was protected by the power of God, so he hired a false prophet, Balaam, to put a curse on Israel. When Balaam tried to curse Israel, he found that he couldn't. When he came near God, God put a blessing in his mouth. He saw that God's people were different from the people of the world (9). They kept their identity. When Balaam briefly saw the world from a spiritual point of view, he longed to be like God's people. He longed to die the death of the righteous. This was not to be! (31:8)

2. See what God has done!--2nd oracle (13-26)

Balaam was a materialist. He still hoped to make some money. So, at Balak's urging, he tried again to curse Israel. Again the Lord put words of blessing in his mouth. He could not but proclaim the faithfulness of God and his sure blessing on Israel. No demonic power is effective against the people whom God protects.

Prayer: Lord, protect your people from Satan's attack. Help us to keep our identity as your people. Help us to see what you have done.

One Word: See what God has done!

BALAAM'S BEAUTIFUL VISION

(3rd oracle)

Numbers 23:27-24:11

Key Verse: 24:5

1. A vision from the Almighty (23:27-24:7)

This time Balaam gave up trying to use sorcery. He looked and saw Israel encamped in the plains below him and the Spirit of God came upon him. He saw the beauty of the people whom God had blessed. They bore the marks of 40 years of desert life--they were travel-worn, dusty and full of problems--but Balaam saw them with God's eyes. He saw beauty and hope and abundance. God's people are beautiful when we see them with God's eyes.

2. God brought them out of Egypt (24:8-11)

The theme of Balaam's prophecy is found in verses 23:22 & 24:8. God's grace had been poured out on Israel. So they became a special people to him. They would surely defeat their enemies. And God would bless those who blessed them and curse those who cursed them. Balak was angry at these words, and he sent Balaam home with no reward.

Prayer: Lord, give me spiritual eyes to see your people. Thank you for the grace of redemption which makes your people beautiful.

One Word: How beautiful are God's people!

A STAR FROM JACOB

Numbers 24:10-25

Key Verse: 24:17

1. I could not go beyond God's command (10-14)

Balaam had come to curse God's people, but he found that he could only bless them. He lost a lot.

2. The fourth oracle (15-19)

His fourth oracle points to King David, who crushed Moab and Edom (2Sa 8:2,14). And it looks beyond David to the Christ, the true star of Jacob, who would come to destroy his enemy the devil. God changed the curse into a blessing and planted hope in his people. The star that came from Jacob is still the star of hope that rises in the hearts of people who have faith in God (2Pe 1:19).

3. Who can live when God does this? (20-25)

Balaam saw that nations rise and fall according to God's sovereign hand. Balaam did not satisfy Balak, who wanted to use him to break down Israel's wall of spiritual protection. He only proclaimed God's sovereignty and blessed God's people and left.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for Jesus, the Morning Star. Protect us from the attacks of Satan.

One Word: The star of hope

ZEALOUS FOR THE HONOR OF GOD

Numbers 25:1-18

Key Verse: 25:13

1. Israel seduced by Moabite women (1-5)

Balaam could not defeat Israel with a curse, so he made another suggestion--that the Moabites use women (31:16). They followed his advice. The Moabite women seduced the men of Israel to participate in Baal worship--especially free sex. Many Israelites were deceived by their own physical desires. God was angry, so he ordered Moses to put to death those who had joined in Baal worship. He also sent a plague among the people and 24,000 died (9).

2. The zeal of Phinehas (6-18)

When Moses told the judges to put to death those who joined in Baal worship, no one moved. Then a tribal leader openly brought the daughter of a Moabite chief into his tent. Phinehas could take it no longer. He was zealous for the Lord's honor. He followed them into the tent and drove a spear through them both. God stopped the plague because of Phinehas (Ps 106:28-31), and he made a covenant with the house of Phinehas.

Prayer: Lord, in these relativistic times of moral anarchy, teach me how to be zealous for your honor.

One Word: Zeal for God's honor

THE SECOND CENSUS

Numbers 26:1-11;52-56;62-65

Key Verse: 26:1,2

1. Take a census of fighting men (1-51)

Forty years had passed since the Israelites left Egypt. They were now on the plains of Moab, just across the river from Jericho. They had defeated the Amorite kings east of the Jordan, but had been defeated by the women of Moab. God had purified them with a plague. Now the time had come to enter and conquer the promised land. The census was to count the men who could fight, and to remind them of the failures that had come from rebellion, disobedience and unbelief. The cowards of forty years before were all dead (64-65). The irreverent sons of Aaron and the rebels who joined Korah were dead (8-10; 61). No one should repeat the mistakes of the past.

2. To divide the inheritance (52-65)

This census was also a basis for dividing the land after the conquest. It planted in their hearts a sure hope of victory. God who promised them the land would give it to them when they boldly claimed it. They would begin the battle confident of victory.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your discipline which trains us to fight the good fight of faith.

One Word: Ready to fight and win

A SHEPHERD FOR GOD'S PEOPLE

Numbers 27:1-23

Key Verse: 27:16,17

1. Women's rights (1-11)

In a time when women had no legal rights to inherit property, the five daughters of Zelophehad brought their case to Moses. When Moses prayed about it, the Lord taught him the importance of respecting the rights of women. He established inheritance laws that helped build a just society. Moses was a prayerful and humble shepherd for God's people. He prayed about every problem.

2. God appoints a shepherd for his people (12-23)

Once, in the desert Moses lost his temper and failed to honor God as the holy God (Nu 20:7-12). So, although God permitted him to see the promised land, he couldn't enter it. Moses prayed that God would raise up a shepherd to take his place, for people who have no shepherd lose direction and become the prey of evils within and without. God appointed Joshua and instructed Moses to establish him as the leader and shepherd of God's people.

Prayer: Lord, in these days of "my own man" mentality, people are lost. Raise up shepherds who can lead your people to the Good Shepherd.

One Word: People need good shepherds

WORSHIP GOD AT THE APPOINTED TIMES

Numbers 28:1-31

Key Verse: 28:1,2

1. Daily, Sabbath and Monthly offerings (1-15)

God wanted his people to worship him each morning and evening, each Sabbath and each month. Through the regular offering of sacrifices him, God's people acknowledged his goodness and his sovereignty. God wants us to thank him. The animal sacrifices were for the atonement of sin. They point to Jesus the Lamb of God. His death for the sins of the world validates all past blood

sacrifices and makes future ones obsolete. The animals offered to God were to be without defect (31c). God does not want leftovers--he wants the best. Jesus was the sinless Lamb without blemish (Jn 1:29; 1Pe 1:18,19).

2. The Passover and the Feast of Weeks (16-31)

These two great feast days taught the people to have a sense of history and a thankful heart. The Passover was a celebration of their deliverance from Egypt; the Feast of Weeks (later called the feast of Pentecost) was to thank God and offer to him the firstfruits of the harvest. God's people should come together to worship him.

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember your grace and give thanks to you every day.

One Word: Worship and thank God daily

THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Numbers 29:1-11 (1-40)

Key Verse: 29:1b

1. A day to sound trumpets (1-6)

The 7th month was an important month in the spiritual life of Israel, for it was the month in which the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) was celebrated. It was fitting that this month be heralded by trumpets (This is Rosh Hashanah--Jewish New Year's Day).

2. The Day of Atonement (7-11)

(See Lev 16;23:26-32.) To make atonement means to make peace with God. This is done only by a blood sacrifice. On the Day of Atonement, the high priest took the blood of an animal sacrificed on the altar, entered the Most Holy Place and sprinkled the blood on the atonement cover of the ark (Heb 9:6-8a). It was time to repent, receive God's forgiveness, and have peace with God. Jesus is our High Priest. His blood cleanses us from sin once for all (Heb 9:12; Ro 3:23-25a). The Feast of Tabernacles (12-40) began on the 15th day and lasted seven days. It was a time to remember God's grace in the wilderness.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for Jesus whose blood cleanses me from sin. Help me to remember your grace and worship and thank you daily.

One Word: Peace with God through the blood

KEEPING ONE'S WORD

Numbers 30:1-16

Key Verse: 30:2

1. A man must not break his word (1-2)

God is faithful to keep his promises. So God's people must also keep their word, whether it be a vow to God or a pledge to another person.

2. Some exceptions (3-16)

It is not always easy to keep one's word. It becomes more complicated for a person to keep a vow when he or she has an obligation to a spouse or parent. In Moses' day, a woman was under the authority of her father or husband, and he could nullify her vow. A person cannot ignore the consequences of his or her vow on others, so the law releases a woman whose father or husband decides to nullify her vow. Thus, the law emphasizes the seriousness of making vows, and the importance of keeping the vows we make. Jesus sets us free from the law. He tells us not to make vows, but to keep our word anyway--even though it might be costly. (Mt 5:33-37)

Prayer: Lord, help me to keep my promises, even if I lose a lot. Raise up faithful men for these faithless times.

One Word: God is faithful; we must be too

THE LORD'S VENGEANCE

Numbers 31:1-54

Key Verse: 31:1,16

1. God's judgment on the Midianites (1-18)

Just before Moses' death, God commanded him to carry out the Lord's vengeance on the Midianites. The Midianites (Moabites) had followed Balaam's advice. Their women seduced the Israelite men and led them to Baal worship. The seeds of Baal worship which they planted almost destroyed the spiritual life of the nation. God called Moses to be an instrument of his judgment. They killed Balaam and all those who had been involved in his evil plot. Those who corrupt the mind and heart are most evil.

2. After the battle (19-54)

The killing was not taken lightly. The soldiers had to purify themselves and all their plunder and captives before coming into the camp (19-24). The spoils of war were divided fairly between the soldiers who fought and the rest of the community (25-47). The commanders reported that none of their men were lost. They offered to the Lord all the gold articles which they had acquired (48-54).

Prayer: Lord, spiritual corruption destroys a people. Purify our land and turn our people back to you.

One Word: Spiritual corruption leads to death

WHY DO YOU DISCOURAGE YOUR BROTHERS?

Numbers 32:1-42

Key Verse: 32:6,7

1. Do not make us cross the Jordan (1-15)

The time had come to cross the Jordan and conquer the promised land. But the tribes of Reuben and Gad wanted to settle down on the east side of the Jordan. The task of conquering the land was one which demanded wholehearted commitment from everyone. Moses rebuked the two tribes. "Shall your countrymen go to war while you sit here?" Selfishness is a sin that spreads quickly. 40 years before a whole generation had died because a few men had discouraged them. Now, again there was a danger of a few selfish people planting seeds of discouragement. God's people must choose the hard way of obedience, not the easy way of self-indulgence.

2. We will go ahead of the others to fight (16-42)

These two tribes insisted that they were not running away from the fight--they just wanted to settle on the east bank. They volunteered to lead the way across the Jordan to the battle. So Moses agreed.

Prayer: Lord, we are in a great battle with Satan. Help me not to look for an easy way, but to fight the good fight to the end.

One Word: Everyone must fight

GOD'S JUDGMENT ON IDOLATRY

Numbers 33:1-56

(Read 1-4; 36-56)

Key Verse: 33:3,4

1. A review of the history of deliverance (1-4)

Verses 1-48 review Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the stages of their journey through the wilderness to the Plains of Moab. Aaron's death is a landmark of history (38). Israel's deliverance from Egypt was God's judgment on the gods of Egypt. God struck Egypt's heart, and the

Egyptians buried their firstborn as Israel marched out (3,4). It was only by God's grace that Israel escaped God's judgment.

2. Destroy all idols; drive out idolaters (36-56)

Idolatry is man's futile attempt to ignore God and make his own religion. There are ancient and modern examples of this. God does not want his people to compromise with idolatry, or to fellowship with idolaters. He told his people to root idolatry out of Canaan. If they allowed any remnants of idol worship to remain, God would do to Israel what he planned to do to the godless Canaanites.

Prayer: Lord, tear all idols from my heart and dwell within me as my only Lord, Ruler of my heart.

One Word: God hates idolatry

INHERITING THE LAND

Numbers 34:1-35:34

(Read 34:1,2; 35:1,2,9-34)

Key Verse: 35:33,34

1. Boundaries of Canaan (34:1-29)

Even before the land was conquered, God established the boundaries of each tribe's inheritance. They entered the land with a sense of victory--it was already theirs. God made provision for his servants, the Levites, and provided a way to defuse the spirit of revenge which can destroy a people. God's people must live together in peace with one another.

2. Cities of refuge (35:9-34)

Six of the towns given to the Levites were called cities of refuge. A man who killed someone accidentally could flee to one of these cities and find asylum until the time of his trial. God punishes sinners and protects the innocent. Human life is of great value to him, for we are created in his image. Bloodshed pollutes the land (33), and atonement should be made. The guilty must be punished, but a spirit of revenge destroys. God does not want the land where he lives to be defiled (34).

Prayer: Lord, teach me your mercy. Dwell with me and make me pure. Purge bloodshed and revenge from our hearts and from our land.

One Word: God dwells with his people

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN OF "RIGHTS"

Numbers 36:1-13

Key Verse: 36:10

1. Our tribe will lose its inheritance (1-4)

Zelophehad's five daughters had received permission from Moses to inherit their father's land (Nu 27). This seemed just. But the heads of their tribe, the tribe of Manasseh, saw one problem. If these five girls inherited their father's share of their tribe's land, then married outside of their tribe, then that property would pass from their tribe. Sometimes one person's rights run counter to what is right and just for whole community.

2. Let them marry within their tribe (5-13)

Moses prayed and the Lord solved the problem. He commanded these five girls to marry within their tribe. They accepted God's direction and married cousins on their father's side. Marriage belongs to God. A marriage should bring joy and encouragement to God's people, as well as joy to the new couple. A marriage surrendered to God's will is blessed. It strengthens and encourages all of God's people.

Prayer: Lord, give your people the faith to surrender marriage to you, so that they may live under your blessing and be blessed.

One Word: They did as the Lord commanded