

Bible Companion Commentary: Numbers

Bible Companion Commentary, Volume 4

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BIBLE COMPANION COMMENTARY: NUMBERS

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PREFACE

This commentary is based around the New European Version of the Bible, which is generally printed with brief commentary on each chapter. This commentary is the hard copy of the more detailed commentary found on the *Bible Companion* app.

Are there errors of thought and intellectual process in these volumes? Surely there are. Let me know about them. But don't fail to see the wood for the trees. Never let the wonder of the simple, basic Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom become obscured by all the angst over correctly interpreting this or that Bible verse. Believe it, respond to it, be baptized into Him, and let the word become flesh in you as it was so supremely in Him.

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Duncan Heaster

NUMBERS CHAPTER 1

Num 1:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying,-

This was 54 weeks, just over a year, since leaving Egypt (Ex. 12:18). The tabernacle had been erected a month before (Ex. 40:1) and they had been now at Sinai around 11 months (Ex. 19:1).

Num 1:2 Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, every male, one by one-

Much of the later reasoning of the law assumed that each Israelite family would receive a unique land inheritance in the Kingdom, just as we shall each have a unique nature of inheritance in the future Kingdom. Therefore such a list of all Israel was required, and had to be constructed before leaving Sinai to enter the land- for that was the intention, although the people turned away from it when they heard the report of the spies.

Num 1:3 from twenty years old and upward, all who are able to go out to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their divisions-

The disorganized mass of people who had fled Israel were now prepared for military action- for it was God's

intention that once numbered, they should leave Sinai and enter Canaan. He makes so much effort to set people up for inheriting the Kingdom, acting in full trust that their faith will remain strong—although as with Israel believing the spies, so many turn away and refuse to enter the Kingdom. The implication was that every male citizen of military age was going to be a soldier. Although they would not be used to fight in reality, for Yahweh would give them the victory [at least that was what He intended] they had to be absolutely prepared to fight for the Kingdom.

Num 1:4 With you there shall be a man of every tribe; each one the head of his fathers' house—

The previous census was made by the Levites, but now God wanted the heads of families to take responsibility for their families; for the land was to be divided up by families, as God is a family God. See on :2.

Num 1:5 These are the names of the men who shall stand with you: Of Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur—

The list of tribes here is in the order of their later encampment—south, east, west and north. Gad is however displaced. "Elizur", 'God is my rock', is a name indicating faith that God would indeed be a rock to Israel. And probably these were names which were taken by choice rather than birth names. But Israel turned back from entering Canaan; their leaders had the names of faith but in reality their faith was weak. And we must ask ourselves whether that is the case with us, having a name that we spiritually live when we are dead.

Num 1:6 of Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai-

"God's peace" son of "The Almighty is my rock" could reflect a faithful family, especially considering that Israel were idolaters in Egypt, and carried the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (Ex. 20:6-8) and also the tabernacle of Moloch as well as that of Yahweh, the star of Remphan as well as the standards of their tribes (Acts 7:43).

Num 1:7 of Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab-

He was brother-in-law of Aaron (Ex. 6:23), and yet also married to Rahab in order to be the ancestor of David and the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:4). He was one of the points at which the lines of Judah and Levi converged in the Lord's genealogy, appropriate for Him as a king-priest.

Num 1:8 of Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar-

'God has given' suggests that he was named in faith that the promised land would indeed be given to Israel.

Num 1:9 of Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon-

We note how most of the names feature the 'El' suffix and not 'Yah' or 'Iah'. This is understandable, for Moses declared the Name of Yahweh to the people after most of these men had been born. This kind of artless internal corroboration is to me one of the strongest arguments for the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Num 1:10 of the children of Joseph, of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud, of Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur-

Elishama was Joshua's grandfather (1 Chron. 7:26). "God who hears" reflects Moses' message that God had indeed heard the crying of the Israelites in Egypt. This was likely a name change after acceptance of Moses' teaching.

"Gamaliel" is 'God is my reward', named in hope that the promised reward of the Kingdom would indeed be given.

Num 1:11 of Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni-

The names associated with the leadership of Benjamin and Naphtali (:11,15) stand out as not having any spiritual reference in them. Israel were very spiritually weak as they left Egypt and it is likely that the more spiritual names we read of in this list were the result of name changes. But the leaders of these two tribes didn't do that.

Num 1:12 of Dan, Abiezer the son of Ammishaddai-

"Ammishaddai" means 'People of the Almighty', using the term *shaddai* which is often associated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He may well have been one of the faithful few who kept perceiving the vital separation of God's people from Egypt, whereas the majority in their hearts returned to Egypt and wished to assimilate with them in order to escape persecution and have what they imagined was a good life.

Num 1:13 of Asher, Pagiel the son of Ochran-

Pagiel ['accident of God'] was son of Ochran, 'muddler'. As discussed on :15, people had multiple names and were known by the 'name' they carved for themselves in life, and the attitudes they had. God makes

no accidents; so maybe in depression and bitterness this man felt like this, and was known for it. Hardly a great example to the tribe he was supposed to be leading. And indeed Asher all but disappears from Israel.

Num 1:14 of Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel-

Deuel of Num. 1:14 is better Reuel as in Num. 2:14. The Hebrew letters for 'D' and 'R' are easily confused; so here we have an example of slight copying errors in the original texts. But these in no way negate the overall Divine inspiration of the texts.

Num 1:15 of Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan-

What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names. The names associated with the leadership of Benjamin and Naphtali (:11,15) stand out as not having any spiritual reference in them. Israel were very spiritually weak as they left Egypt and it is likely that the more spiritual names we read of in this list were the result of name changes. But the leaders of these two tribes didn't do that.

Num 1:16 These are those who were called of the congregation, the princes of the tribes of their fathers; they were the heads of the thousands of Israel-

The term "thousands" is not to be taken literally. It effectively refers to a group of families within a tribe; perhaps "clan" would be an appropriate translation.

Num 1:17 Moses and Aaron took these men who are mentioned by name-

Although some of their names reflected spiritual inappropriacy, as noted especially on :13,15, God wanted to use them. And to build out of them and their children and families a fighting force which would inherit the Kingdom.

Num 1:18 They assembled all the congregation together on the first day of the second month; and they declared their ancestry by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, one by one-

The implication is that every single Israelite was part of a family. In such a large community there inevitably would have been some who had no family. In commenting upon the Exodus, Ps. 68:6 observes that God set the lonely in families. This may have happened at this point. Those who had no family were arranged into one, so that God's people moved through the wilderness in family units. In this we see how God is a family God; the family is His desired way of human organization, and we should seek to preserve it.

Num 1:19 As Yahweh commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai-

The numbering was done by Moses' representatives but is spoken of as his work. This principle of representation is throughout the Bible. It comes to full term in the way the Lord Jesus functions as God and is spoken of in language appropriate to that function- without being God Himself personally, as the Trinity wrongly states. Just as those who numbered the tribes were not Moses personally.

Num 1:20 The children of Reuben, Israel's firstborn, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, one by one, every male from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war-

"The number of the names" implies there was a written list. Moses had been educated in Egypt and therefore would've been able to write (Acts 7:22). We should use what worldly wisdom we have in the service of God's people.

Num 1:21 those who were numbered of them of the tribe of Reuben, were forty-six thousand five hundred-

The Hebrew word translated as "thousand" can mean a family, or some other administrative division. Many of the 'number problems' in the Hebrew Bible are only really resolvable using this approach. And that may be in view in the census of Israel taken in Num. 1, and in the statement that six hundred 'thousands' of footmen left Egypt (Ex. 12:37). The census of Num. 1 gives figures such as those in Num. 1:21 for Reuben, which could be rendered: "forty six families ['thousands'] and five hundred (men)". Although a "hundred" might also refer to an administrative division. The total in Num. 1 would then be 598 families with a total of 5550 men. The sum given in the second census in Num. 26 comes out as roughly the same, with 596 families amounting to 5730 men. On this basis, the total population (including women and children) would be anything between 20,000 to 40,000. This would enable us to make better sense of the statements that Israel were the smallest

numerically of all the surrounding peoples (Dt. 7:1,7; 11:23; 20:1). If we insist upon taking "thousand" literally in Ex. 12:37, then 600,000 male foot soldiers would imply a total population of between two and six million. The population density would have been intense, and far greater than that of many modern nations. Estimates of global population at the time suggest it was only about 40 million, and the population of Egypt was a maximum of three million (probably far less). If the Israelites were smaller than the other nations, and they numbered say 5 million, then the total population of the seven peoples of Canaan would have been at least 40 million. The territory of Canaan could not have supported such numbers. Only 70 Israelites came into Egypt with Jacob. Expansion over 430 years to several million is not realistic. This approach helps us better understand how all the men of war marched around Jericho (Josh. 6:3). If there were literally 600,000 men then the city would have had to be many kilometers in circumference for them all to march around it seven times in one day. Archaeological evidence from Jericho simply doesn't support the idea of such a vast city. If Israel numbered say 5 million people, and recall there was also a "mixed multitude" with them, then if they marched 10 abreast this would require a column stretching around 1000 kilometers. Their promises to Edom and the Amorites to march only along a highway and not spill over it (Num. 20:17; 21:22) is unrealistic if they had such huge numbers. A figure of 600 family units leaving Egypt is more realistic; otherwise we start to wonder how ever all the Israelites, millions of them,

came to be in one place at one time on Passover night. This would then make better sense of Ex. 23:30 GNB: "I will drive them out little by little, until there are enough of you to take possession of the land". This indeed sounds as if Israel were the smallest of the nations, and not a huge nation comprising several million people.

Num 1:22 Of the children of Simeon, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, those who were numbered of it, according to the number of the names, one by one, every male from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war-

"One by one" reflects the value and meaning attached to the human person by God. Practically this would have meant their names were written down.

Num 1:23 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Simeon, were fifty-nine thousand three hundred-

Simeon's 59,300 fell to 22,200 by the end of the wilderness wanderings, according to the second census in Num. 26. This suggests a huge apostacy amongst the Simeonites, resulting in such a dramatic fall. Not all the failures and punishments of Israel are recorded in the record. The plague of Num. 25 killed 24,000 people for committing fornication with the Moabites (Num. 25:9); but the ringleader of that had been Zimri, a Simeonite prince (Num. 25:14). It's likely therefore that he led his tribe into the orgy with the Moabites, which resulted in so many of them being killed.

Num 1:24 Of the children of Gad, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the

number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war-

"All who were able to go out to war" is not reflective of the Hebrew text. Translators added "able to" because they balked in disbelief at the idea that every citizen was to be a soldier. What about the handicapped, the mentally weak...? The idea was that all who were numbered and named were soldiers- in God's eyes. He wasn't interested in their secular, physical ability, because He was going to fight for Israel and give them the victories. He was interested in the names, in the people as individuals- for they were all soldiers from His perspective.

Num 1:25 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Gad, were forty-five thousand six hundred and fifty-

A "fifty" may not be a literal number, but a technical term for a group; see on :23. We recall groups of soldiers called a "fifty" being sent to capture Elijah.

Num 1:26 Of the children of Judah, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war-

"The number of the names" is the phrase used in Acts 1:15 of the very early church. The idea was that the fledgling Christian church was now the new Israel of God, who were to go out and do spiritual warfare in conquering the world for Christ.

Num 1:27 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Judah, were sixty-four thousand six hundred-

Here is a comparison of the numbers given in the first census of Num. 1, and those given at the end of the wilderness journeys in Num. 26:

1. Judah 74,600 rose to 76,500
2. Dan 62,700 rose to 64,400
3. Simeon 59,300 fell to 22,200
4. Zebulun 57,400 rose to 60,500
5. Issachar 54,400 rose to 64,300
6. Naphtali 53,400 fell to 45,400
7. Reuben 46,500 fell to 43,730
8. Gad 45,650 fell to 40,500
9. Asher 41,500 rose to 53,400
10. Ephraim 40,500 fell to 32,500
11. Benjamin 35,400 rose to 45,600
12. Manasseh 32,200 rose to 52,700

Total 603,550 in the first census, but 601,730 by the end of the 38 years wanderings in Num. 26. But see on :30.

If we are to understand blessing under the old covenant as related to numbers of children, then there may be the hint that Judah were the most faithful. We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the

point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others. Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 1:28 Of the children of Issachar, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war-

The mention of "generations" suggests that some kind of genealogy was developed and recorded at this time. This would have been important because the intention was that each family were to inherit a specific lot of land; they were to therefore place great value upon genealogies in the future.

Num 1:29 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Issachar, were fifty-four thousand four hundred-

This tribe increased by about ten thousand during the wilderness journeys. Other tribes decreased. It was God's intention that the seed of Abraham should multiply. And yet some tribes multiplied by different amounts, and others decreased. We see that the promises to Abraham will have different levels of fulfillment for those who are faithful; and no fulfillment for some who are technically the seed, but don't walk in the steps of faith of Abraham. And so it is today. Some will make more of God's truth than others; some multiply their talents more than others, in terms of the Lord's parable. And so some stars will shine brighter than others in God's Kingdom.

Num 1:30 Of the children of Zebulun, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war-

The emphasis of this census was upon those who could go to war, whereas the later census at the end of the wanderings includes the Levites because it was not so focused upon forming a military organization. It could be that the comparison with the numbers in Num. 26 is somewhat fallacious, because Num. 1 is a census of those of military age whereas that of Num. 26 appears to be of the entire tribes. In which case the numbers would have decreased sharply for all the tribes due to their failure to be Abraham's ever multiplying seed, and due to the judgments they all experienced in the wilderness.

Num 1:31 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Zebulun, were fifty-seven thousand four hundred-

Zebulun increased by a minimal amount over the course of the wilderness journey (see on :27). As discussed on :29, this is rather like the person who receives the talent of God's truth and keeps it but doesn't develop it much. We get this same impression of Zebulun in 2 Chron. 30:18.

Num 1:32 Of the children of Joseph, of the children of Ephraim, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war-

Ephraim is placed before Manasseh although he was not the firstborn. This reflects Joseph's wish to continue

the Divine theme of blessing the firstborn less than the other son, which is so typical of how He despises secular advantage.

Num 1:33 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Ephraim, were forty thousand five hundred-

We note the huge growth of Manasseh during the wilderness journeys, 32,200 rose to 52,700; whilst Ephraim's 40,500 fell to 32,500. This would appear to contradict Joseph's desire to bless Ephraim more than Manasseh (Gen. 48:14). It shows that the utterances of a patriarch were not determinate. For under the old covenant, numbers of children were related to obedience to the covenant. Prophecy was and is not determinate, but always conditional upon human response. Hence not all the blessings of the tribes uttered by Jacob came true; because the potential wasn't realized by the descendants. And so it is sadly true of so many people who turn away from the Kingdom promises.

Num 1:34 Of the children of Manasseh, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war-

20 years old was the age at which someone could be dedicated to the Lord's service (Lev. 27:3). The idea may be that simply by reason of being in Israel, these men were therefore automatically counted as able for active service- regardless of their state of health and strength. And the Lord counts His people likewise. There are to be no passengers amongst God's people. We are called to active service.

Num 1:35 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Manasseh, were thirty-two thousand two hundred-

We note the huge growth of Manasseh during the wilderness journeys, 32,200 rose to 52,700; whilst Ephraim's 40,500 fell to 32,500. This would appear to contradict Joseph's desire to bless Ephraim more than Manasseh (Gen. 48:14). It shows that the utterances of a patriarch were not determinate. For under the old covenant, numbers of children were related to obedience to the covenant. Prophecy was and is not determinate, but always conditional upon human response. Hence not all the blessings of the tribes uttered by Jacob came true; because the potential wasn't realized by the descendants. And so it is sadly true of so many people who turn away from the Kingdom promises.

Num 1:36 Of the children of Benjamin, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war-

For "generations", see on :28; for "number of the names", see on :26; for "able to go out to war", see on :3,24; for "from twenty years old", see on :34.

Num 1:37 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Benjamin, were thirty-five thousand four hundred-

Benjamin's 35,400 rose to 45,600 by the end of the wilderness journeyings. We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400

rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others. Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 1:38 Of the children of Dan, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go forth to war-

For "generations", see on :28; for "number of the names", see on :26; for "able to go out to war", see on :3,24; for "from twenty years old", see on :34.

Num 1:39 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Dan, were sixty-two thousand seven hundred-

We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others.

Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 1:40 Of the children of Asher, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go forth to war-

For "generations", see on :28; for "number of the names", see on :26; for "able to go out to war", see on :3,24; for "from twenty years old", see on :34.

Num 1:41 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Asher, were forty-one thousand five hundred-

We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others. Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 1:42 Of the children of Naphtali, their generations, by their families, by their fathers' families, according to the number of the names, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go forth to war-

For "generations", see on :28; for "number of the names", see on :26; for "able to go out to war", see on :3,24; for "from twenty years old", see on :34.

Num 1:43 those who were numbered of them, of the tribe of Naphtali, were fifty-three thousand four hundred-

Naphtali's 53,400 fell to 45,400 by the end of the wilderness journeys, a decrease by a ratio of 0.85; very similar to how Gad's 45,650 fell to 40,500, a decrease by a ratio of 0.88. See on :41.

Num 1:44 These are those who were numbered, whom Moses and Aaron numbered, and the princes of Israel, being twelve men: they were each one for his fathers' house-

It could be that we are to understand from this, as do the Rabbis, that Moses personally numbered each person. They all passed before him and were individually known by him, looking forward to the personal knowledge of the Lord Jesus of all God's people.

Num 1:45 So all those who were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers' families, from twenty years old and upward, all who were able to go out to war in Israel-

For "families", see on :28; for "able to go out to war", see on :3,24; for "from twenty years old", see on :34.

Num 1:46 even all those who were numbered were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty-

Over a period of 430 years (Gen. 15:13; or perhaps 215 years, see on Ex. 12:40), the Israelites grew from 70 people (Gen. 46:27; Dt. 10:22) to a great number. This was a primary fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, that his descendants would greatly multiply (Gen.

22:17; Heb. 11:12). We who are in the same covenant relationship with God will experience some element of blessing and fulfillment of the covenant promises in this life too. The large numbers may also have been due to the Egyptians joining the people of Israel.

Num 1:47 But the Levites after the tribe of their fathers were not numbered among them-

Num. 14:29 says that "Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and all who were numbered of you". This excluded the Levites, as they were not numbered. Robert Roberts rightly described the generation that was under twenty years old on leaving Egypt as the most faithful of all Israel's generations. The faithful element with whom God so 'fell in love' was not just comprised of the 'under 20s'. Joshua and Caleb also featured amongst them, as did the Levites (who the curse of destruction in the wilderness did not apply to: Num. 14:29 cp. 1:47). There would have been a bond between those younger people and the Levites. Numerically, the largest of these three groups who constituted the 'faithful element' was the under 20s. It is fitting, therefore, that this faithful remnant are personified as a young person. Thus God reflected to Hosea: "When Israel was a child (s.w. "young man"), then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hos. 11:1).

Num 1:48 For Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The Levites were not numbered in the first census, but they were at the end of the wilderness journey. The number of 23,000 given in Num. 26:62 makes them one of the smallest tribes. If we are to understand bless-

ing under the old covenant as related to numbers of children, then there may be the hint that Judah were the most faithful and Levi and Simeon the least, in line with Jacob's curse of those two sons for what they did at Shechem. But it was from this spiritually weak group of Levites that God wished to raise up a priesthood to spiritually guide His people. This is typical of His counter instinctive way of working with people.

Num 1:49 Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, neither shall you take a census of them among the children of Israel-

We have an example here of how we must read the Bible in context and never forget the primary context of the words we read. For a census was taken of the Levites in Num. 26 at the end of the wilderness journey. So this verse here means that they were not to take a census of the Levites at that time only. Or it could be that God revised His intentions about the Levites and later did command a census; for His purpose is to some extent open ended and He is not ashamed to change in accordance with human responses to Him.

Num 1:50 but appoint the Levites over the Tabernacle of the Testimony, and over all its furnishings, and over all that belongs to it. They shall carry the tabernacle, and all its furnishings; and they shall serve it, and shall encamp around it-

We are a new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5). The spirit of the Levites should be ours. As they encamped around the tabernacle, having it as the center of their lives, so the things of God's ecclesia, His church, should be central to

our lives and have far more importance to us than our careers and associations in this world. We note that repeatedly the tabernacle is defined in terms of the testimony, the tables bearing the ten commandments: "the ark of the testimony" (Ex. 25:22), the "tablets of the testimony" (Ex. 31:18), the "veil of the testimony" (Lev. 24:3). We would likely have defined it in terms of the shekinah glory there; but for God, His word of command to His people is of the essence, and is at the core of His holiness and intimacy with man.

Num 1:51 When the tabernacle is to move, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The stranger who comes near shall be put to death-

LXX "Who advances to touch it", as if touching it in a conscious and defiant way. Hence the command for some Levites to be as sentries guarding the tabernacle (Num. 3:32). Although 'coming near' is a Hebraism for coming near to Yahweh in worship and service.

Num 1:52 The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man by his own standard, according to their divisions-

And yet Israel carried the star of their god Remphan with them through the wilderness (Acts 7:43) as they carried the tabernacle of Moloch and the idols of Egypt (Ez. 20:6-8). The star of Remphan would have been similar to the standards of their tribes. Their loyalties were divided from the start. Their standards reflected the cherubim of Divine manifestation, and yet whilst externally they pitched their tents in conformity to that

(see on :54), this was mere religious appearance. In their hearts they were following the standards of their false gods, and their hearts were in Egypt. In our wilderness journey we have to ask ourselves how relevant this is to ourselves.

Num 1:53 But the Levites shall encamp around the Tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall be responsible for the Tabernacle of the Testimony-

Wrath would come upon all Israel if the Levites weren't encamped around the tabernacle. In this we see the power of human behaviour- we can really affect others. The wellbeing of others is dependent upon our efforts. If we don't do our part for them, we cannot assume that God will raise up someone else. There really can be Divine wrath on others because of our lack of attention to them.

The LXX implies the Levites were to guard the tabernacle with literal weapons, hence the command in :51 to kill any Gentile who attempted to come and touch it: "But let the Levites encamp round about the tabernacle of witness fronting it, and so there shall be no sin among the children of Israel; and the Levites themselves shall keep the guard of the tabernacle of witness".

Num 1:54 Thus the children of Israel did. According to all that Yahweh commanded Moses, so they did-

But as discussed on :52, this was mere surface level conformity. Their hearts were in Egypt and with their gods.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 2

Num 2:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying-

Encamping around standards and by their tribes was different to how they had filed out of Egypt as one long stream of humanity (Ex. 13:18). After our exodus from the world through our Red Sea baptism, we find our place within the larger family of God. Their sense of which tribe they belonged to had probably been eroded in the 430 years they spent in Egypt; now even the isolated and lonely were given family groups to belong to (Ps. 68:6; see on Num. 1:18).

Num 2:2 The children of Israel shall encamp every man by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' families: at a distance from the Tent of Meeting shall they encamp around it-

The standards of the tribes were a pole with a symbol upon it. Israel marched through the wilderness towards the promised land, as we walk through the wilderness of life towards the Kingdom, carrying and walking behind poles- foreshadowing the cross or stake of Christ, which we are asked to daily pick up and walk behind. Is. 11:10-12 speaks of the cross of Christ as a standard lifted up, to which the believing Gentiles come and camp around- as if they take their place in the Israel of God.

Num 2:3 Those who encamp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the standard of the camp of Judah, according to their divisions, and the prince of the children of Judah shall be Nahshon the son of Amminadab-

Three tribes camped on each of the four sides, around the tabernacle. This place of meeting with God was to be central to the community. It is the things of Christ and our relationship with God which should be at the core of the Christian community; we're not held together by geography, personal friendship or shared denominational history. We are to be Christ centered. The language of the numbering of Israel according to how many fighting men there were in each tribe, and the ideas of encamping and breaking up, all suggest that Israel were God's army on earth. According to Jewish tradition, Judah carried a lion emblem on their standard, Reuben a man, Joseph an ox, and Dan an eagle. In this case, the cherubim vision of Ezekiel 1 would allude to Israel, as if to say that above them there hovered an Angelic army organized the same way, and the armies of God's people on earth were a reflection of them. The tent of meeting in the midst of the troops of Israel would've been understood in military terms as the tent or pavilion of a general in the centre of an army. But there was nobody within that pavilion- just the presence of God over the sprinkled blood. We aren't just sitting around waiting for Christ's return; we are God's army in this world, with a very present although invisible Heavenly commander in our midst. But His invisibility led Israel many times to ask 'Is the Lord among us?', and we face the same doubt in our weak moments. But this is the essence of faith.

Num 2:4 His division, and those who were numbered of them, were seventy-four thousand six hundred-

Although Reuben was numbered first as the first-born (Num. 1:20), Judah had first place in the positioning. For Reuben had been demoted by Jacob and replaced by Judah.

Num 2:5 Those who encamp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar, and the prince of the children of Issachar shall be Nethanel the son of Zuar-

Although the inheritances for the location of the tribal cantons were drawn by lot, it is clear the hand of God was in it. For the inheritances were appropriate to the people given them. Issachar's lot for possession of the land was next to Judah and Zebulun (Josh. 19:17), with whom Issachar had lived and journeyed side by side during the wilderness years (Num. 2:5; 10:15). This opens up the question as to whether we should also draw lots in this age. For God worked through them clearly enough in Joshua's time.

Num 2:6 His division, and those who were numbered of it, were fifty-four thousand four hundred-

The children of Leah camped together, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. The meaning of their names is prophetic: Praise (the Son), he will reward with an inheritance.

Num 2:7 The tribe of Zebulun, and the prince of the children of Zebulun shall be Eliab the son of Helon-

We note how most of the names feature the 'El' suffix and not 'Yah' or 'Iah'. This is understandable, for Moses declared the Name of Yahweh to the people after most of these men had been born. This kind of artless internal

corroboration is to me one of the strongest arguments for the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Num 2:8 His division, and those who were numbered of it, were fifty-seven thousand four hundred-

Zebulun increased by a minimal amount over the course of the wilderness journey (see on Num. 1:27). As discussed on Num. 1:29, this is rather like the person who receives the talent of God's truth and keeps it but doesn't develop it much. We get this same impression of Zebulun in 2 Chron. 30:18.

Num 2:9 All who were numbered of the camp of Judah were one hundred eighty-six thousand four hundred, according to their divisions. They shall set out first-

"Divisions" is a military term. All Israel were to be part of God's army, even though they would not necessarily have to fight. Their health or strength didn't factor in this- He counted all of them as His troops.

Num 2:10 On the south side shall be the standard of the camp of Reuben according to their divisions. The prince of the children of Reuben shall be Elizur the son of Shedeur-

There are evident similarities between Ezekiel's cherubim, the encampment in the wilderness and the four living creatures of Rev. 4. They are both described as "full of eyes" (Ez. 1:18 = Rev. 4:6), with four very similar faces (lion, calf, man, eagle in Rev. 4:7 = lion, ox, man, eagle in Ez. 1:10); and both have wings (Rev. 4:8 = Ez. 1:8). Yet the living creatures of Revelation speak of being redeemed by the blood of Christ and made king-priests in God's Kingdom (Rev. 5:8-10)- as if they are

the redeemed people of God. The four faces are likely to be connected with the four standards of the tribes of Israel (Lion = Judah, Man = Reuben, Ox = Ephraim, Eagle = Dan). Each of those tribes had two other tribes assigned to them in the encampment procedures of Num. 2. There is extra-Biblical tradition that the cherubim in Solomon's temple had the same four faces which Ezekiel saw on the cherubim- lion, ox, man and eagle. Those to whom Ezekiel related his vision would have immediately understood the point- that the earthly sanctuary was a reflection of the Heavenly, and that above that was a huge Angelic system operating, which also represented God's people- them. But that huge system was to remove to Babylon, and then the final visions of Ezekiel show that glory returning. Ezekiel, as the representative "son of man" as he's so often styled, was caught up within that system and transported at ease between Babylon and Jerusalem- and those who wanted to opt in with God and His Angels could likewise be taken to Babylon and returned. Those who chose to remain in Babylon were therefore resisting being part of an awesome system of God manifestation and Angelic operation. We have that same choice in things great and small today.

The Kohathites camped on the south side of the tabernacle, which is where Reuben, Simeon and Gad camped (Num. 2:10; 3:29). The proximity of the Kohathites and Reubenites would explain why some of the family of Kohath joined with some of the Reubenites during Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1). Quite simply, we are influenced by those we mix with.

Num 2:11 His division, and those who were numbered of it, were forty-six thousand five hundred-

The Hebrew word translated as "thousand" can mean a family, or some other administrative division. Many of the 'number problems' in the Hebrew Bible are only really resolvable using this approach. And that may be in view in the census of Israel taken in Num. 1, and in the statement that six hundred 'thousands' of footmen left Egypt (Ex. 12:37). The census of Num. 1 gives figures such as those in Num. 1:21 for Reuben, which could be rendered: "forty six families ['thousands'] and five hundred (men)". Although a "hundred" might also refer to an administrative division. The total in Num. 1 would then be 598 families with a total of 5550 men. The sum given in the second census in Num. 26 comes out as roughly the same, with 596 families amounting to 5730 men. On this basis, the total population (including women and children) would be anything between 20,000 to 40,000. This would enable us to make better sense of the statements that Israel were the smallest numerically of all the surrounding peoples (Dt. 7:1,7; 11:23; 20:1). If we insist upon taking "thousand" literally in Ex. 12:37, then 600,000 male foot soldiers would imply a total population of between two and six million. The population density would have been intense, and far greater than that of many modern nations. Estimates of global population at the time suggest it was only about 40 million, and the population of Egypt was a maximum of three million (probably far less). If the Israelites were smaller than the other nations, and they numbered say 5

million, then the total population of the seven peoples of Canaan would have been at least 40 million. The territory of Canaan could not have supported such numbers. Only 70 Israelites came into Egypt with Jacob. Expansion over 430 years to several million is not realistic. This approach helps us better understand how all the men of war marched around Jericho (Josh. 6:3). If there were literally 600,000 men then the city would have had to be many kilometers in circumference for them all to march around it seven times in one day. Archaeological evidence from Jericho simply doesn't support the idea of such a vast city. If Israel numbered say 5 million people, and recall there was also a "mixed multitude" with them, then if they marched 10 abreast this would require a column stretching around 1000 kilometers. Their promises to Edom and the Amorites to march only along a highway and not spill over it (Num. 20:17; 21:22) is unrealistic if they had such huge numbers. A figure of 600 family units leaving Egypt is more realistic; otherwise we start to wonder how ever all the Israelites, millions of them, came to be in one place at one time on Passover night. This would then make better sense of Ex. 23:30 GNB: "I will drive them out little by little, until there are enough of you to take possession of the land". This indeed sounds as if Israel were the smallest of the nations, and not a huge nation comprising several million people.

Num 2:12 Those who encamp next to him shall be the tribe of Simeon. The prince of the children of Simeon shall be Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai-

"God's peace" son of "The Almighty is my rock" could reflect a faithful family, especially considering that Israel were idolaters in Egypt, and carried the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:6-8) and also the tabernacle of Moloch as well as that of Yahweh, the star of Remphan as well as the standards of their tribes (Acts 7:43).

Num 2:13 His division, and those who were numbered of them, were fifty-nine thousand three hundred-

Simeon's 59,300 fell to 22,200 by the end of the wilderness wanderings, according to the second census in Num. 26. This suggests a huge apostacy amongst the Simeonites, resulting in such a dramatic fall. Not all the failures and punishments of Israel are recorded in the record. The plague of Num. 25 killed 24,000 people for committing fornication with the Moabites (Num. 25:9); but the ringleader of that had been Zimri, a Simeonite prince (Num. 25:14). It's likely therefore that he led his tribe into the orgy with the Moabites, which resulted in so many of them being killed.

Num 2:14 The tribe of Gad, and the prince of the children of Gad shall be Eliasaph the son of Reuel-

Deuel of Num. 1:14 is better Reuel as in Num. 2:14. The Hebrew letters for 'D' and 'R' are easily confused; so here we have an example of slight copying errors in the original texts. But these in no way negate the overall Divine inspiration of the texts.

Num 2:15 His division, and those who were numbered of them, were forty-five thousand six hundred and fifty-

A "fifty" may not be a literal number, but a technical term for a group; see on :11. We recall groups of soldiers called a "fifty" being sent to capture Elijah.

Num 2:16 All who were numbered of the camp of Reuben were one hundred fifty-one thousand four hundred fifty, according to their armies. They shall set out second-

"Set out" is literally 'to pull up the tent pins'. This could mean that they were to keep the tents up until the whole preceding division had moved out.

Num 2:17 Then the Tent of Meeting shall set out, with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps. As they encamp, so shall they march out, every man in his place, by their standards-

Our attitude and position at rest or leisure is to be our attitude when on the move for Christ.

Num 2:18 On the west side shall be the standard of the camp of Ephraim according to their divisions, and the prince of the children of Ephraim shall be Elishama the son of Ammihud-

Ps. 89:12 shows how God reckons the points of the compass with reference to Jerusalem: "The north and the south thou hast created them: Tabor and Hermon shall rejoice". Likewise "the sea" is often used to show that the west is intended, the Mediterranean being to the west of Jerusalem (Num. 2:18; Josh. 16:5,6; Ez. 42:19). "The east" is put for Persia, Media and the lands east of Jerusalem (Ez. 25:4; Mt. 2:1); "the south" for Egypt, south of Canaan (Jer. 13:19; Dan. 11:5), or for the Negev, the hill country south of Jerusalem (Gen. 12:9; 13:1,3; Ez. 20:46,47); "the north" is put for Babylon (Jer.

1:13-15 etc.). God is believer centric in His view of things on planet earth.

Num 2:19 His division, and those who were numbered of them, were forty thousand five hundred-

We note the huge growth of Manasseh during the wilderness journeys, 32,200 rose to 52,700; whilst Ephraim's 40,500 fell to 32,500. This would appear to contradict Joseph's desire to bless Ephraim more than Manasseh (Gen. 48:14). It shows that the utterances of a patriarch were not determinate. For under the old covenant, numbers of children were related to obedience to the covenant. Prophecy was and is not determinate, but always conditional upon human response. Hence not all the blessings of the tribes uttered by Jacob came true; because the potential wasn't realized by the descendants. And so it is sadly true of so many people who turn away from the Kingdom promises.

Num 2:20 Next to him shall be the tribe of Manasseh, and the prince of the children of Manasseh shall be Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur-

Gamaliel" is 'God is my reward', named in hope that the promised reward of the Kingdom would indeed be given.

Num 2:21 His division, and those who were numbered of them, were thirty-two thousand two hundred-

We note the huge growth of Manasseh during the wilderness journeys, 32,200 rose to 52,700; whilst Ephraim's 40,500 fell to 32,500. This would appear to contradict Joseph's desire to bless Ephraim more than Manasseh (Gen. 48:14). It shows that the utterances of

a patriarch were not determinate. For under the old covenant, numbers of children were related to obedience to the covenant. Prophecy was and is not determinate, but always conditional upon human response. Hence not all the blessings of the tribes uttered by Jacob came true; because the potential wasn't realized by the descendants. And so it is sadly true of so many people who turn away from the Kingdom promises.

Num 2:22 The tribe of Benjamin, and the prince of the children of Benjamin shall be Abidan the son of Gideoni-

The names associated with the leadership of Benjamin and Naphtali (:22,29) stand out as not having any spiritual reference in them. Israel were very spiritually weak as they left Egypt and it is likely that the more spiritual names we read of in this list were the result of name changes. But the leaders of these two tribes didn't do that.

Num 2:23 His army, and those who were numbered of them, were thirty-five thousand four hundred-

Benjamin's 35,400 rose to 45,600 by the end of the wilderness journeyings. We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the point is that amongst the children

of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others. Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 2:24 All who were numbered of the camp of Ephraim were one hundred eight thousand one hundred, according to their divisions. They shall set out third-

"All who were numbered" could suggest, as the Rabbis like to think, that they were each personally numbered by Moses. This personal connection between Moses and each Israelite therefore looked ahead to the personal relationship between the Lord Jesus and each of His people.

Num 2:25 On the north side shall be the standard of the camp of Dan according to their divisions, and the prince of the children of Dan shall be Abiezer the son of Ammishaddai-

"Ammishaddai" means 'People of the Almighty', using the term *shaddai* which is often associated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He may well have been one of the faithful few who kept perceiving the vital separation of God's people from Egypt, whereas the majority in their hearts returned to Egypt and wished to assimilate with them in order to escape persecution and have what they imagined was a good life.

Num 2:26 His division, and those who were numbered of them, were sixty-two thousand seven hundred-

We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise

Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others. Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 2:27 Those who encamp next to him shall be the tribe of Asher, and the prince of the children of Asher shall be Pagiel the son of Ochran-

Pagiel ['accident of God'] was son of Ochran, 'muddler'. As discussed on :29, people had multiple names and were known by the 'name' they carved for themselves in life, and the attitudes they had. God makes no accidents; so maybe in depression and bitterness this man felt like this, and was known for it. Hardly a great example to the tribe he was supposed to be leading. And indeed Asher all but disappears from Israel.

Num 2:28 His division, and those who were numbered of them, were forty-one thousand and five hundred-

We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to

45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others. Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 2:29 The tribe of Naphtali, and the prince of the children of Naphtali shall be Ahira the son of Enan-

What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names. The names associated with the leadership of Benjamin and Naphtali (:22,29) stand out as not having any spiritual reference in them. Israel were very spiritually weak as they left Egypt and it is likely that the more spiritual names we read of in this list were the result of name changes. But the leaders of these two tribes didn't do that.

Num 2:30 His division, and those who were numbered of them, were fifty-three thousand four hundred-

Naphtali's 53,400 fell to 45,400 by the end of the wilderness journeys, a decrease by a ratio of 0.85; very similar to how Gad's 45,650 fell to 40,500, a decrease by a ratio of 0.88. See on :28.

Num 2:31 All who were numbered of the camp of Dan were one hundred fifty-seven thousand six hundred. They shall set out last by their standards-

And yet Israel carried the star of their god Remphan with them through the wilderness (Acts 7:43) as they carried the tabernacle of Moloch and the idols of Egypt (Ez. 20:6-8). The star of Remphan would have been similar to the standards of their tribes. Their loyalties were divided from the start. Their standards reflected the cherubim of Divine manifestation, and yet whilst externally they pitched their tents in conformity to that (see on Num. 1:54; :34), this was mere religious appearance. In their hearts they were following the standards of their false gods, and their hearts were in Egypt. In our wilderness journey we have to ask ourselves how relevant this is to ourselves.

Num 2:32 These are those who were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers' families. All who were numbered of the camps according to their armies were six hundred and three thousand five hundred and fifty-

The size of Israel's encampment would've been huge-maybe twenty square kilometers, like a moveable city, with streets and lanes. The continual commands to move on, to follow the leading of the Angel in the pillar of fire and cloud, would've likely been received without enthusiasm because the breaking of camp would've been a long and tedious process. Yet as with us, God works things so that His people are always on the move. God looked down upon their orderly encampment and thought His people were beautiful (Num. 24:5,6). Perhaps Paul al-

ludes to their order when he says that the body of Christ should likewise be characterized by orderliness when they are beheld by others (Col. 2:5).

Num 2:33 But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel; as Yahweh commanded Moses-

A census was taken of the Levites in Num. 26 at the end of the wilderness journey. So this verse here means that they were not to take a census of the Levites at that time only. Or it could be that God revised His intentions about the Levites and later did command a census; for His purpose is to some extent open ended and He is not ashamed to change in accordance with human responses to Him.

Num. 14:29 says that "Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and all who were numbered of you". This excluded the Levites, as they were not numbered. Robert Roberts rightly described the generation that was under twenty years old on leaving Egypt as the most faithful of all Israel's generations. The faithful element with whom God so 'fell in love' was not just comprised of the 'under 20s'. Joshua and Caleb also featured amongst them, as did the Levites (who the curse of destruction in the wilderness did not apply to: Num. 14:29 cp. 1:47). There would have been a bond between those younger people and the Levites. Numerically, the largest of these three groups who constituted the 'faithful element' was the under 20s. It is fitting, therefore, that this faithful remnant are personified as a young person. Thus God reflected to Hosea: "When Israel was a child (s.w. "young

man"), then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hos. 11:1).

Num 2:34 Thus the children of Israel did. According to all that Yahweh commanded Moses, so they encamped by their standards, and so they marched out, everyone by their families, according to their fathers' families-

And yet Israel carried the star of their god Remphan with them through the wilderness (Acts 7:43) as they carried the tabernacle of Moloch and the idols of Egypt (Ez. 20:6-8). The star of Remphan would have been similar to the standards of their tribes. Their loyalties were divided from the start. So as discussed on :31, this was mere surface level conformity. Their hearts were in Egypt and with their gods.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 3

Num 3:1 Now this is the history of the generations of Aaron and Moses in the day that Yahweh spoke with Moses in Mount Sinai-

No genealogy of Moses is given here; "the generations of" seems to mean 'the history of'. Or perhaps Moses as the author, with typical humility, didn't record the account of his own family. He didn't want to set up any dynasty of leadership, for his humility was such that he recognized that he had been raised up as a leader, and such Divine callings are to individuals and not to dynasties. The phrase is effectively a Hebraism for 'an account of the life' of someone, e.g. Noah (Gen. 6:9). Yet the Hebrew for "generations" means just that. We expect to now encounter a list of children, grandchildren etc. Instead we read a summary of Aaron and Moses' actions, or in Gen. 6:9 we read of the character of Noah. His children, his offspring, his memorial in this earth, was not his children, but rather his character. This is comfort for the childless. Our characters are our generation. This is what shall remain beyond the grave; for our spirit, the personality we develop, abides with God after our death and shall live eternally as 'us' at the Lord's return to earth. So often, individual character development becomes subsumed beneath the pressures of childrearing. But our ultimate "generation" is us, our personality and character.

Num 3:2 These are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar-

We note the lack of emphasis upon the children of Moses and Miriam, the great wilderness leaders of Israel. There was to be no cult of personality nor nepotism, no riding on the name of a forefather in order to be a leader of God's people. Spiritual leadership in the Bible was intended to be based upon spiritual qualification. This also continues the major Biblical theme, that the firstborn is often not used by God and is replaced. This is His style, to exalt the underdogs.

Num 3:3 These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the priests who were anointed, whom he consecrated to minister in the priest's office-

The Lord died that He might "consecrate" or "sanctify" us to God. This is the word used by the LXX to describe the consecration of the priests to service of the body of Israel (Ex. 28:41). If we reject the call to priesthood today, we reject the point of the Lord's saving suffering for us. The Septuagint word used for 'anointing' here occurs in the New Testament in 1 Jn. 2:20,27, where we read that we have each been anointed. The idea of anointing was to signal the initiation of someone. I'd therefore be inclined to see 1 Jn. 2:20,27 as alluding to baptism; when we become in Christ, in the anointed, then as 2 Cor. 1:21 says, we too are anointed in a sense. We're given a specific mission and purpose. "The anointing that you received" would therefore refer to our commissioning at baptism. It seems to imply a one time act of being anointed / commissioned / inaugurated for ser-

vice. Baptism isn't therefore merely an initiation into a community; it's a specific commissioning for active service, in ways which are unique to us. We do well to bring this point out to those we prepare for baptism. The words for 'anointing' are unique to 1 John but they occur in the LXX to describe the anointing / initiation of the priests, and of the tabernacle / dwelling place of God (e.g. Ex. 29:7; 35:14,28). John sees us as the dwelling place / tabernacle of the Father, and specifically as the priests.

Num 3:4 Nadab and Abihu died before Yahweh, when they offered strange fire before Yahweh in the wilderness of Sinai-

Strange or "gentile" fire was fire other than that fire which was perpetually burning on the altar. The fire of the altar was ideally intended to be that kindled at the time of Lev. 9:24 when the tabernacle was consecrated. It was to be kept perpetually burning by the sacrifices being continually placed upon it, a lamb every morning and every evening. The fire which never went out or was 'quenched' (Lev. 6:13). is a double symbol. The phrase is used multiple times with reference to the wrath of God in condemning sinners; it is the basis of the idea of eternal fire which will not be quenched. Rather like the cup of wine from the Lord being a symbol of either condemnation or blessing. So we have a choice- be consumed by the eternal fire now as living sacrifices, or be consumed by it anyway at the last day.

And they had no children. Eleazar and Ithamar ministered in the priest's office in the presence of Aaron their father-

That is, no children who ministered as priests. Ultimately, from the perspective of the Kingdom, if our children don't serve God it will be as if we have no children. Hence the need in this life to train them up to be God's servants. 1 Chron. 24:2 alludes here: "But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and had no children; therefore Eleazar and Ithamar executed the priest's office". Despite having gone up Sinai and witnessing the theophany of Ex. 24:9, their desire to 'play God' for personal power had been stronger than their awe at God's presence and majesty. Visible acts of God are often desired by His servants, but they do not of themselves inculcate spirituality. The language here clearly alludes to Num. 3:4: "Nadab and Abihu died before Yahweh... and they had no children". But "Before Yahweh" is replaced with "before their father". Aaron was the manifestation of Yahweh and is thus spoken of as Him, just as the Lord Jesus can be spoken of likewise. The other references to their death repeatedly speak of it as being 'before Yahweh'. Why does Chronicles alone imply that Aaron was present with them when they made the offering? Perhaps it is to highlight the weakness of Aaron and indeed of the whole priesthood; for these genealogies were likely prepared whilst Judah were in captivity and the priesthood no longer functioned because of their sins. "And had no children" may not be intended literally. The genealogy is speaking of the Levites who did Divine ser-

vice, and the idea is that their children did not serve God. And so we see His perspective on family life over the generations of history- if our children don't enter into His service, it's as if we had no children.

Num 3:5 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The appointment of Aaron's sons as priests meant that Moses' sons were Levites and not priests, and were given to serve Aaron's sons. Yet Moses time and again is revealed as the undoubted leader of the people, and more spiritually mature and committed than Aaron. Verse 38 could imply that Moses even camped separately to his children. There were no special privileges for the children of the leader, and Moses' humility would have been exercised by seeing his sons serve Aaron's sons. If all we want to see is God's work go forward, we will likewise not become resentful of such things as they work out in church life today.

Num 3:6 Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minister to him-

The Hebrew term "bring near" is that translated "offer". The idea is that the Levites were to be living sacrifices to Yahweh. This idea is applied to all in Christ in Rom. 12:1. The New Testament presents all in Christ as the equivalent of the Levites, a new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5). None of us can therefore pass off spiritual responsibility to someone else; for we are all priests.

Num 3:7 They shall keep his requirements, and the requirements of the whole congregation before the Tent of Meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle-

The idea of Num. 3:7 may be that *they*, the Levites, shall keep the commandments which the congregation were required to keep. In this sense the Levites carried the sin of the people (Num. 18:1); according to Num. 1:53, the Levites must be obedient "that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel". God typically operates on a basis of representative atonement; the Lord Jesus died as our representative rather than our substitute. Moses' offer to be a substitute for Israel, offering His eternal salvation for theirs, was not accepted. But such was the weakness of Israel, and His desire to save His people, that God at some times and in some ways does effectively accept a substitutionary salvation, where the obedience of X saves disobedient Y.

Num 3:8 They shall keep all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, and the obligations of the children of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle-

Again we see that the Levites were to keep "the obligations" of the other Israelites; see on :7.

Num 3:9 You shall give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons. They are wholly given to him on the behalf of the children of Israel-

See on Jn. 17:6. "The men which You gave me out of the (Jewish) world... they have kept Your word" (Jn. 17:6) compares with the Levites being "given" to Aaron / the priesthood out of Israel (Num. 3:9; 8:19; 18:6); at the time of the golden calf they "observed thy word, and kept thy covenant" (Dt. 33:9), as did the disciples. The relationship between Moses and the Levites was there-

fore that between Christ and the disciples- a sense of thankfulness that at least a minority were faithful.

Num 3:10 You shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall keep their ministry. The stranger who comes near shall be put to death-

The phrase "keep their ministry" from the Septuagint version is quoted by Paul about our service of the ecclesia / church today (Rom. 12:7). Whatever day job or career we have in this world, our real work is our ministry to God's people.

Num 3:11 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

Jn. 17:9 alludes to the Levites in saying that all in Him are "those whom You have given me; for they are Yours". The disciples were given to the Lord out of the Jewish world, as the Levites were. As the Levites were God's (Num. 3:12,13,45; 8:14), so are the believers. The Levites represent us (Dt. 33:9); the relationship between Moses and the Levites represents that between the Lord and us. Moses' thankfulness that they remained faithful during the golden calf crisis, that sense of being able to rely on them, will be reflected in the Lord's feelings toward the faithful.

Num 3:12 Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn who open the womb among the children of Israel; and the Levites shall be mine-

The priests weren't part-timers. They gave their lives to God in recognition of the fact that God had saved the lives of the firstborn at the Passover and Red Sea deliverance (Num. 3:12). Our deliverance from the world

at baptism was our Red Sea. We have been saved. Those firstborns represent us, the ecclesia of firstborns (Heb. 12:23 Gk.). We are now being led towards that glorious Kingdom, when by rights we ought to be lying dead in that dark Egyptian night. The wonder of it all demands that like the Levites, we give our lives *back* to God, in service towards His children.

Num 3:13 for all the firstborn are mine. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I made holy to me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and animal. They shall be mine. I am Yahweh-

Those who had been spared from death by the blood of the lamb on Passover night weren't just free to do as they wished with their saved lives, but were to be devoted to God. We are those who have likewise been spared from eternal death by Christ's blood, and we are therefore not to see ourselves as having merely escaped eternal death but must go further to perceive ourselves as thereby dedicated to God's service. Hence the Christian community is called "the church of the firstborn" (Heb. 12:23)- we are all as it were the firstborn who were saved by grace on Passover night, because we are in Christ, the firstborn (Col. 1:18).

Num 3:14 Yahweh spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying-

This is significant; the purpose with Levi was not revealed whilst Moses was in the mountain, but after he had returned and some Levites had resisted the apostacy of the golden calf. We marvel at the way the Divinely inspired record consistently consistent.

Num 3:15 Count the children of Levi by their fathers' families, by their families. You shall count every male from a month old and upward-

This could be read as a command to Moses to personally number all the people of his own tribe, Levi. This looks ahead to the similar personal relationship between the Lord Jesus and His people.

Num 3:16 Moses numbered them according to the word of Yahweh, as he was commanded-

The obedience of Moses is constantly emphasized. It looked ahead to the total obedience of the Lord Jesus to the Father's word.

Num 3:17 These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari-

"Gershon" means 'expelled', maybe meaning that like Reuben he was expelled from the role of firstborn [he is mentioned first as if he was the firstborn]. This is a theme of the Genesis record. But perhaps because of these weaknesses, the line to the high priest ran through Kohath.

Num 3:18 These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei-

We note that both Moses and Aaron had sons called Gershon (Ex. 2:22). Such repetition of names within families and in the same generation was quite common, and is one thing which makes the study of the genealogies difficult in places.

Num 3:19 The sons of Kohath by their families: Amram, and Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel-

We note the lack of emphasis upon the children of Moses and Miriam, the great wilderness leaders of Israel. There was to be no cult of personality nor nepotism, no riding on the name of a forefather in order to be a leader of God's people. Spiritual leadership in the Bible was intended to be based upon spiritual qualification.

Num 3:20 The sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their fathers' families-

"Mahli" and "Mushi" mean 'sickly' and 'sensitive' respectively. This confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

Num 3:21 Of Gershon was the family of the Libnites, and the family of the Shimeites: these are the families of the Gershonites-

For :21-39 see on Num. 1:1. We have a choice between understanding the Hebrew *elep* as meaning a literal number, or a "thousand" in the sense of a family group. In this case, the number following the word "thousand" would refer to the number of males amongst that number of families. This makes a more realistic number of Levites (see on :39,43). Although it means that as discussed on :22, the total number of Israelites who left Egypt was not as huge as often imagined.

Thus the numbers would work out like this:

Gershon 7,500, or 7 families with 500 males, making 71 males / family group.

Kohath 8,600 or 8 families with 600 males, making 75 males / family group.

Merari 6,200 or 6 families with 200 males, making 33 males / family group.

This would make a total of 22,300 if we take "thousand" literally; or a total of 21 families [7+8+6] and 1300 males, making a total of 48 males per family group. See on Num. 4:36.

Num 3:22 Those who were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, even those who were numbered of them were seven thousand five hundred-

This could mean 'seven families, with 500 men'. The Hebrew word translated as "thousand" can mean a family, or some other administrative division. Many of the 'number problems' in the Hebrew Bible are only really resolvable using this approach. And that may be in view in the census of Israel taken in Num. 1, and in the statement that six hundred 'thousands' of footmen left Egypt (Ex. 12:37). The census of Num. 1 gives figures such as those in Num. 1:21 for Reuben, which could be rendered: "forty six families ['thousands'] and five hundred (men)". Although a "hundred" might also refer to an administrative division. The total in Num. 1 would then be 598 families with a total of 5550 men. The sum given in the second census in Num. 26 comes out as roughly the same, with 596 families amounting to 5730 men. On this basis, the total population (including women and

children) would be anything between 20,000 to 40,000. This would enable us to make better sense of the statements that Israel were the smallest numerically of all the surrounding peoples (Dt. 7:1,7; 11:23; 20:1). If we insist upon taking "thousand" literally in Ex. 12:37, then 600,000 male foot soldiers would imply a total population of between two and six million. The population density would have been intense, and far greater than that of many modern nations. Estimates of global population at the time suggest it was only about 40 million, and the population of Egypt was a maximum of three million (probably far less). If the Israelites were smaller than the other nations, and they numbered say 5 million, then the total population of the seven peoples of Canaan would have been at least 40 million. The territory of Canaan could not have supported such numbers. Only 70 Israelites came into Egypt with Jacob. Expansion over 430 years to several million is not realistic. This approach helps us better understand how all the men of war marched around Jericho (Josh. 6:3). If there were literally 600,000 men then the city would have had to be many kilometers in circumference for them all to march around it seven times in one day. Archaeological evidence from Jericho simply doesn't support the idea of such a vast city. If Israel numbered say 5 million people, and recall there was also a "mixed multitude" with them, then if they marched 10 abreast this would require a column stretching around 1000 kilometers. Their promises to Edom and the Amorites to march only along a highway and not spill over it (Num. 20:17; 21:22) is unrealis-

tic if they had such huge numbers. A figure of 600 family units leaving Egypt is more realistic; otherwise we start to wonder how ever all the Israelites, millions of them, came to be in one place at one time on Passover night. This would then make better sense of Ex. 23:30 GNB: "I will drive them out little by little, until there are enough of you to take possession of the land". This indeed sounds as if Israel were the smallest of the nations, and not a huge nation comprising several million people.

Num 3:23 The families of the Gershonites shall encamp behind the tabernacle westward-

The word for "west" in Hebrew is the same for "sea", often used with reference to the Mediterranean. We see how the whole structure of God's language was based around Israel. He was and is believer centric, His focus in this world is upon His people- into whom there is an open invitation to enter.

Num 3:24 The prince of the fathers' house of the Gershonites shall be Eliasaph the son of Lael-

We note how most of the names feature the 'El' suffix or prefix and not 'Yah' or 'Iah'. This is understandable, for Moses declared the Name of Yahweh to the people after most of these men had been born. This kind of artless internal corroboration is to me one of the strongest arguments for the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Num 3:25 The duty of the sons of Gershon in the Tent of Meeting shall be the tabernacle, and the tent, its covering, and the screen for the door of the Tent of Meeting-

This was no small task. It has been estimated that there were 14 tons 266 lbs. [about 14000 kg. or 14

tonnes] of metal used in the tabernacle, besides the huge weight of the skins, hangings, cords, boards, and posts.

Num 3:26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the door of the court, which is by the tabernacle, and around the altar, and its cords for all of its service-

See on :25. The Gershonites took care of the cords of the Tabernacle; the Merarites did so for the cords of the court (:37). Ex. 27:9 speaks of "hangings for the court of fine twined linen one hundred cubits long for one side". The "fine twined linen" was given to them on leaving Egypt, as it was characteristic of Egypt ("fine twined linen from Egypt" Ez. 27:7). It was apparently only in Egypt at that time that such fine linen was "made from yarn of which each thread was composed of many delicate strands". We see that the best wealth we take from Egypt / the world is to be devoted to the Lord's work. It perhaps appropriately designated the boundary between the believer and the world, represented by the linen fence which marked the enclosure of the tabernacle. 100 cubits is 58 yards or 53 meters.

Num 3:27 Of Kohath was the family of the Amramites, and the family of the Izharites, and the family of the Hebronites, and the family of the Uzzielites: these are the families of the Kohathites-

We note that there was only one of these names which has 'God' in it. I discuss on :43 how Levi was perhaps the spiritually weakest of the tribes at this point-and yet were the ones chosen by God to be His special servants.

Num 3:28 According to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, there were eight thousand six hundred, keeping the requirements of the sanctuary-

Some original manuscripts read 8,300. This could solve the apparent discrepancies in the numbers later on. The difference between the Hebrew letters for 8,300 and 8,600 is miniscule. Although the word of God itself is inspired and infallible, this isn't to say that there aren't minor errors of copyists as the manuscripts were passed on over the generations.

Num 3:29 The families of the sons of Kohath shall encamp on the south side of the tabernacle-

The Kohathites camped on the south side of the tabernacle, which is where Reuben, Simeon and Gad camped (Num. 2:10; 3:29). The proximity of the Kohathites and Reubenites would explain why some of the family of Kohath joined with some of the Reubenites during Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:1). Quite simply, we are influenced by those we mix with.

Num 3:30 The prince of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites shall be Elizaphan the son of Uzziel-

Elizaphan means 'God of treasures', perhaps with reference to the Divine treasures of :31 they looked after. This is an example of where names were given to people in reflection of their life experience, rather than being their birth names. Perhaps Korah led the rebellion against Moses because he objected to how Elizaphan son of Uzziel had been appointed over the Kohathites (Num. 3:30). Kohath had four sons, Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel (Ex. 6:18). Amram's sons, Moses and Aaron, had

already received high honour in ruling over all Israel. So Korah, as the firstborn son of the next born son Izhar, thought that he ought to have been over the Kohathites. But instead, the son of Uziel, Kohath's youngest son, had been made prince of the Kohathite clan. This is typical of how God appoints those who are least qualified and strong in secular terms. But Korah disliked this. He felt he was next in line to be the leader of the Kohathites.

Num 3:31 Their duty shall be the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the vessels of the sanctuary with which they minister, and the screen, and all its service-

We note in this list the progression outward from the ark in the most holy, to the table of shewbread, lampstand and incense altar in the holy place, to the altar of burnt offering in the court. Man first had to bow his head to enter the court, referring to humility. Then there was accepting the principle of sacrifice at the altar, followed by baptism in the laver- and then entry to the holy place, where there was the incense altar [prayer- Ps. 141:2; Rev. 8:3,4], the table of shewbread [the breaking of bread] and candlestick [church life], shining light towards the entrance to the most holy place where God dwelt between the cherubim.

Num 3:32 Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be prince of the princes of the Levites, with the oversight of those who keep the requirements of the sanctuary-

Eleazar was to replace Aaron as priest, and in this sense looked ahead to the Lord Jesus. "The requirements" is better translated "watch" in the military sense of sentry duty. The Levites were to literally guard the

tabernacle, against any "Who advances to touch it" (Num. 1:51 LXX), as if touching it in a conscious and defiant way. Hence the command for some Levites to be as sentries guarding the tabernacle (Num. 3:32).

Num 3:33 Of Merari was the family of the Mahlites, and the family of the Mushites. These are the families of Merari-

"Mahli" and "Mushi" mean 'sickly' and 'sensitive' respectively. This confirms the suggestion I have often made, that names were given in response to later character and life experience. Sometimes in these genealogies we read the birth names, at others, the names they were given later in life. And therefore the same person can have more than one name.

Num 3:34 Those who were numbered of them, according to the number of all the males, from a month old and upward, were six thousand two hundred-

"Those who were numbered of them" could imply that not all were numbered. We are given the number of those who allowed themselves to be numbered. This might explain why the tribe of Levi is apparently so numerically small- not all the various families wished to be numbered for priestly service. Which would be another indication that the tribe chosen for special service was very spiritually weak. But that is God's style.

Num 3:35 The prince of the fathers' house of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail. They shall encamp on the north side of the tabernacle-

Again we note how many of the names feature the 'El' or 'Il' suffix or prefix and not 'Yah' or 'Iah'. This is un-

derstandable, for Moses declared the Name of Yahweh to the people after most of these men had been born. This kind of artless internal corroboration is to me one of the strongest arguments for the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Num 3:36 The appointed duty of the sons of Merari shall be the tabernacle's boards, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, all its instruments, all its service-

Nearly all the features of the tabernacle suggest parts of the body. The girl in Solomon's song portrays her lover as having "legs as pillars [s.w. "pillars" here] set upon sockets [s.w. "sockets" here, meaning "bases"] of gold" (Song 5:15). The pillars therefore correspond to legs, and the bases / "sockets" to feet. It was as if the tabernacle was surrounded by men's legs and feet, holding hands with each other.

Num 3:37 the pillars of the court around it, their sockets, their pins, and their cords-

The Gershonites took care of the cords of the Tabernacle; the Merarites did so for the cords of the court (:37). The "pins" were the tent pegs, made of brass and heavy (Ex. 27:19).

Num 3:38 Those who encamp before the tabernacle eastward, in front of the Tent of Meeting toward the sunrise, shall be Moses and Aaron and his sons, keeping the requirements of the sanctuary for the duty of the children of Israel. The stranger who comes near shall be put to death-

See on :6. Moses speaks of himself in the third person. Thus we see his selfless and humble approach to the business of relaying God's inspired word. He makes no

mention of his own sons, only of Aaron's sons. Humanly speaking, it must have been hard for him to see his own sons ignored, when by all accounts Moses was spiritually stronger than Aaron. This was all part of the Divine process which made Moses the humblest man on earth at the time.

Num 3:39 All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of Yahweh, by their families, all the males from a month old and upward, were twenty-two thousand-

38,000 Levites were numbered by David in 1 Chron. 23:3, although "thousand" may mean a division rather than a literal 1000. At the time of Num. 4:47,48 there were only 8,580. And Levite males from a month old were 22,000 in Num. 3:39 and 23,000 at the time of Num. 26:62. This suggests a great increase in the number of Levites by David's time; or perhaps he more generously counted who was a Levite, because he wanted to have as many as possible involved in his grandiose plans for the temple services. There was no need for such large numbers of Levites in order to serve God effectively, for there were far fewer Levites at the time of the figures given in the book of Numbers, and the sanctuary and Divine service still continued.

Num 3:40 Yahweh said to Moses, Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names-

"The number of the names" is the phrase used in Acts 1:15 of the very early church. The idea was that the fledgling Christian church was now the new Israel of God, who were to go out and do spiritual warfare in conquering the world for Christ.

Num 3:41 You shall take the Levites for Me (I am Yahweh) instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel-

The number of cattle was not counted, unlike the numbers of firstborn compared to the number of Levites; rather the Levite's cattle were just accepted for those of the Israelites. Ex. 13:13 and Num. 18:17 taught that the firstborn of clean animals were to be sacrificed; although the firstborn of unclean donkeys were to be redeemed. The teaching was that God's redeemed were as unclean donkeys. But the sacrificing of the firstborn of all clean animals may well have been now considered by God as too difficult for the Israelites. Their devotion to Him was sadly not to that standard. And so He upheld His basic principle but reduced the demand, by accepting the Levite's cattle at this point in place of the firstborn of the clean animals of the Israelites. We see here God's flexible attitude, because He so wanted to save His people and have relationship with them even on a lower level than ideal. And in Deuteronomy, the second law, we will see many examples of amelioration of the laws.

Num 3:42 Moses numbered, as Yahweh commanded him, all the firstborn among the children of Israel-

This could be read as a command to Moses to personally number all the firstborn. This looks ahead to the similar personal relationship between the Lord Jesus and His people.

Num 3:43 All the firstborn males according to the number of names, from a month old and upward, of those who were numbered of them, were twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three-

There are various possibilities here. Because the combined number of the male Levites was only 22,000 (:39), although the actual total of the figures in Num. 3:22,28,34 is 22,300. There were apparently not enough Levites to cover all the Israelite firstborn. I go along with the standard Rabbinic suggestion that the difference between the figure of 22,000 in :39 and the sum of 22,300 in :22,28,34 is because there were 300 Levites who were firstborn. This, however, requires us to understand "thousand" as referring to a family, followed by the number of males. Thus "twenty-two thousand two hundred and seventy-three" would mean 22 families and 273 males. I have argued on :22 that the number of Israelites who left Egypt was probably far smaller than usually imagined, because the term for "thousand" usually means 'family' or 'group'. If there were only 300 Levite firstborn amongst 22,300 Levites, this means only one in 74 were firstborns. That is unrealistic- unless in fact most of their firstborn were slain at Passover for disobedience. If however we understand the figure as 21 families and 1300 makes, we get a figure of 1 firstborn to every 4.3, which is far more realistic.

The number of firstborn males after Israel left Egypt was remarkably small (around 20,000, Num. 3:43). Women in most primitive societies have an average of 7 births. this would mean that given a total population of around 2,800,000 on leaving Egypt (Ex. 12:37), there should have been around 400,000 firstborn males. But instead, there is only a fraction of this number. Why? Did all Israel eat the Passover? Were many in fact slain. My suggestion- and this is well in the category of things you will never know for sure and can only ponder- is that many Hebrew firstborns died on Passover night. Israel were warned that if they did not properly keep the Passover, “the Destroyer” Angel would kill their firstborn (Ex. 12:23). “The Destroyer” is mentioned in 1 Cor. 10:10: “Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the Destroyer” (*olothreutes*; this is a proper noun in the Greek). Who was the Destroyer? If Scripture interprets Scripture, it was the ‘Destroyer’ Angel of Passover night. In similar vein Heb. 11:28 speaks of “He (the Angel) that destroyed (Gk. *olothreuo*) the firstborn”. Israel were side-tracked from what should have been the central object of their attention: the blood of the lamb. They were disobedient from the day God knew them, i.e. Passover night (Dt. 9:24).

Levi was by far the smallest tribe- the numbers of the males over 20 in the other tribes (as recorded in Num. 1) is far larger than the number of males of the tribe of Levi. God uses as His special workers those who are weakest in human terms. It could be argued that Levi grew less in

number than the other tribes because of some spiritual weakness- for at this time, Divine blessing was reckoned in terms of number of offspring. So perhaps spiritually as well as numerically they were the weakest, yet were chosen by God for His special work. God seems to love to work in this way.

However as noted elsewhere, "thousand" is not to be read as a literal number but as referring to a family grouping. If there were 22,273 male firstborns, then we can assume that the number of families in which the first-born child was a female would be about the same, making a total of 44,546 families. If there were literally 600,000 fighting men (Ex. 12:37; Num. 11:21) then the total population would have been in the millions, requiring an average of about 50 children to a family. It is far better to understand "thousand" as a term for a group and not a number.

The Levites encamped around the tabernacle can be compared to the number of Angels encamped around Israel in their cherubim chariots as being 'in the twenty thousands,' AV "twenty thousand, even thousands of Angels" (Ps. 68:17,18). Both the priests and the Angels are called *elohim*. The idea of Angels encamped around the tabernacle led to the connection of the cherubim faces with the encamped tribes of Israel.

Num 3:44 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The inadequacy of the Levites to totally redeem all the firstborn is now addressed. And it looked ahead to how the priesthood could redeem but not totally redeem Israel. Just as Moses could see into the promised

land, but not enter it. It all reflects the ultimate inadequacy of the Mosaic system, requiring the redeeming work of the Lord Jesus.

Num 3:45 Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock; and the Levites shall be Mine. I am Yahweh-

The Levites were God's (Num. 3:12,13,45; 8:14), and the Lord alludes to this: "I pray not for the (Jewish) world, but for them (the disciples, cp. the Levites) which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (Jn. 17:9). The Levites represent us (Jn. 17:6 = Dt. 33:9); the relationship between Moses and the Levites represents that between Christ and us. Moses' thankfulness that they remained faithful during the golden calf crisis, that sense of being able to rely on them, will be reflected in the Lord's feelings toward the faithful.

Num 3:46 For the redemption of the two hundred and seventy-three of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who exceed the number of the Levites-

273 is the numerical value of "Abram", and this group represent all the redeemed- those who could not be redeemed by the Levitical system, but are redeemed in Christ. And they are Abraham's seed.

Num 3:47 you shall take five shekels for each one; after the shekel of the sanctuary you shall take them (the shekel is twenty gerahs)-

273 firstborns needed redemption at five shekels / head, requiring a total payment of 1365 shekels or 5,460 pieces of silver. Five shekels was 20 pieces of silver, the

price of a slave, paid for Joseph. These who could not be redeemed by the Levites represent all of us, saved by the work of the Lord Jesus and not the Levitical priesthood. We wonder at the similarity with the 276 people in the boat saved by Paul, who was accompanied by Luke and Aristarchus (Acts 27:37). This meant that there were 273 unbelievers redeemed in that ship, and that whole incident was representative of Christ's salvation of His people.

Num 3:48 and you shall give the money, with which their remainder is redeemed, to Aaron and to his sons-

The obvious thought was that the blood of the Passover lamb had effectively redeemed them. But for that to be ultimately effective, there was to be a sense of giving to God in response to that. Whether through the substitution of the Levites or giving the redemption money, there had to be response to the work of that blood. Just as there must be response from us to the blood of the Lord Jesus.

Num 3:49 Moses took the redemption money from those who exceeded the number of those who were redeemed by the Levites-

Again we see that the "redemption" by the Levitical system was incomplete. It was a case of "almost but not quite", and as with many aspects of the Mosaic system, it pointed forward to the ultimate inadequacy of that system in relation to ultimate redemption. The redemption of the Lord Jesus was required.

Num 3:50 from the firstborn of the children of Israel he took the money, one thousand three hundred and sixty-five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary-

There were various other definitions of a shekel, but as ever, it is by God's standards and not secular standards that we must take our reference point.

Num 3:51 and Moses gave the redemption money to Aaron and to his sons, according to the word of Yahweh, as Yahweh commanded Moses-

The obedience of Moses is constantly emphasized. It looked ahead to the total obedience of the Lord Jesus to the Father's word.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 4

Num 4:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying-

Kohath wasn't the firstborn nor the senior born amongst the three sons listed here, but the Kohathites are numbered first and had the greatest responsibility. Again we see how God prefers to work not with the humanly best, strongest or most senior.

Num 4:2 Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' families-

"From among" is literally 'from the midst', and Kohath was the middle son out of Gershom, Kohath and Merari. He is perhaps listed first here because his family carried the ark.

Num 4:3 from thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all who enter into the service, to do the work in the Tent of Meeting-

David numbered the Levites from 30 years old (1 Chron. 23:3), in accordance with the law which said Levites were to serve between the ages of 30 and 50 (Num. 4:3,23,35,39). But in 1 Chron. 23:24 we are told that David numbered the Levites from 20 years old. We note in Num. 8:23 that there appeared some flexibility within the Mosaic law; the Levites could be numbered from 25 years old. This is one of many examples of how the Mosaic law was not set in stone. It was principle and spirit rather than letter of the law, and within it there are examples of where one law overrode another, or one

principle overrode letter of the law. The law was not designed as a simple test of obedience, for it was far more detailed than that. It was designed to inculcate a spirit of living which looked forward to the spirit of the Lord Jesus. And so David felt free to number the Levites from 20 years old, even though we also read that he numbered 'the Levites from 30 years old', suggesting that this was a technical term rather than a literal description. This would go toward explaining why 38,000 Levites were numbered by David, although "thousand" may mean a division rather than a literal 1000. At the time of Num. 4:47,48 there were only 8,580.

Num 4:4 This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the Tent of Meeting, in the most holy things-

"Enter into the service" in Hebrew has a military connotation. Whatever our occupation in this world, we are to see ourselves as soldiers fighting for the only truly good and worthy cause on earth. There should therefore be in our lives an element of discipline, regimentation and focus on specific objectives. The New Testament is full of military metaphors (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:4).

Num 4:5 When the camp moves forward, Aaron shall go in, and his sons, and they shall take down the veil of the screen, and cover the ark of the Testimony with it-

The taking down of the tabernacle is turned by Paul and Peter into a metaphor for our death (2 Cor. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:14). The implication is that all the valuable things within the tabernacle through which God was manifest can on one level be interpreted as our lives. In this

metaphor alone we see the immense value and meaning of human life if it is lived in God's service.

Num 4:6 and shall put a covering of sealskin on it, and shall spread over it a cloth all of blue, and shall put in its poles-

The continual mention of rings and poles is because all the tabernacle had to be portable, as Israel were constantly on the move. This is proof enough that much of the "law of Moses" was only relevant to the wilderness generation. God's desire to be continually on the move, dwelling in a tent, was still evident at the time when Israel settled in the land. For He told David that He didn't want a temple because He was dynamic, always moving on. But the way of religion is to have a permanent, stable closed system, rather than the dynamic way of the Spirit and true spirituality. "Rings" in Hebrew is literally 'that which sinks in', and refers to a signet ring. If a literal ring was solely in view, a different word would have been used. It was as if this mobile, ever moving onwards style of the tabernacle was the signature or hallmark of God.

Num 4:7 On the table of show bread they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the spoons, the bowls, and the cups with which to pour out; and the continual bread shall be on it-

The bread and wine which we take are antitypical of the Old Testament sacrifices; and they were repeatedly described as "Yahweh's food", laid upon the altar as "the table of Yahweh" (Lev. 21:6,8; 22:25; Num. 28:2; Ez. 44:7,16; Mal. 1:7,12). And it has been commented: "Current translations are inaccurate; *lehem panim* is the

'personal bread' of Yahweh, just as *sulhan panim* (Num. 4:7) is the 'personal table' of Yahweh". This deeply personal relationship between Yahweh and the priests eating the bread is continued in the breaking of bread. For we are all priests (1 Pet. 2:5).

Num 4:8 They shall spread on them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of sealskin, and shall put in its poles-

Sealskins were presumably taken by the Israelites from the shores of the Red Sea? Whatever we pick up along the wilderness journey of life we are to give to God's service.

Num 4:9 They shall take a blue cloth, and cover the lampstand of the light, and its lamps, and its snuffers, and its snuff dishes, and all its oil vessels, with which they minister to it-

Ex. 25:38 says that "Its snuffers and its snuff dishes shall be of pure gold". Gold wasn't the strongest or most practical material for these instruments. But it represents faith (1 Pet. 1:7). We aren't the best instruments for God to use in His house, but He prefers to use the soft and those who aren't humanly qualified for His work- because He works by faith in us, and by our faith in Him rather than our human strength

Num 4:10 They shall put it and all its vessels within a covering of sealskin, and shall put it on the frame-

They would have gathered these sealskins from the shores of the Red Sea and taken them with them. The lesson is that what we pick up along life's way we are to dedicate to the Lord's service.

Num 4:11 On the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of sealskin, and shall put in its poles-

"Pole" is s.w. "strength". There is again a juxtaposition of ideas- the weak acacia wood (Ex. 27:6), which is no more than a thorn bush, was to be turned into God's strength through being overlaid with precious metal. "Acacia" is literally "thorns". It is translated "thorns" in Josh. 23:13. It refers to the common thorn bushes found in the scrubland they were passing through in the desert. Thorns were part of the curse in Eden. But from this weak material which was very difficult to work with, brittle, fragile and very weak, God covered this weak, difficult wood with gold and constructed a system with it where His glory might dwell. It all speaks of how He uses us. And we connect this with how God speaks of His people are wood from a vine tree, which is not used by anyone else for making anything; but He uses it for His work (Ez. 15:1-6). We shouldn't be surprised at the brittle nature of the folk with whom God works, their difficulty in binding together and resistance to being worked with- this is as it were all God has to work with. It was a surprising choice of material to be used in God's dwelling place. But His choice of *us* with all our weakness and dysfunction, the common, weak stuff of the wilderness, is no less surprising. The choice of acacia wood for constructing the tabernacle is one of several points in the whole enterprise where it seems a less than ideal material was chosen, from a construction point of view. This aspect emphasizes that God prefers to work

with the soft, weak and easily broken in order to do His work.

Num 4:12 They shall take all the vessels of ministry, with which they minister in the sanctuary, and put them in a blue cloth, and cover them with a covering of sealskin, and shall put them on the frame-

"Frame" is better "pole". These things were all to be carried by poles on the shoulders. When David brought the ark to Zion, he paid no attention to this repeated emphasis. The man who claimed to study God's word and law all the day... missed an obvious emphasis, and considered that his 'keeping the spirit of the law' enabled him to disobey God's basic principles. And there is clear warning for us in all ages.

Num 4:13 They shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth on it-

Purple cloth was a sign of royalty, and these cloths were likely given to the Israelites by the leaders of Egypt when they left Egypt. And so there is a juxtaposition of ideas between the glory of secular royalty, and the usage of it to cover the ashes of Yahweh's altar. The world's greatest honours are as nothing to God and are here used for the lowest work.

Num 4:14 They shall put on it all its vessels, with which they minister for it, the fire pans, the flesh hooks, the shovels, and the basins; all the vessels of the altar; and they shall spread on it a covering of sealskin, and put in its poles-

Jewish tradition has it that the fire which came down from Heaven in Lev. 9:24 remained burning; and this fire was preserved burning all night and day. Hence the

need for "fire pans" (Ex. 27:3) to keep the fire burning whilst the altar was being cleaned or the remains of sacrifices removed from it. But the fact these fire pans were packed away and transported raises some difficulties for this idea.

Num 4:15 When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary, and all the furniture of the sanctuary, as the camp moves forward; after that, the sons of Kohath shall come to carry it: but they shall not touch the sanctuary, lest they die. These things are the burden of the sons of Kohath in the Tent of Meeting-

In 2 Sam. 6:8, God slew Uzzah because he touched the ark when David brought it back to Jerusalem on a cart. Yet the Law clearly stated that the ark was to be carried only by the Levites, and was to be carried on poles rather than on a cart. Throughout Ps. 119, David declares how he loves God's law and studies and recites it by day and night. That surely included this passage in Numbers 4. But we have a tendency to read God's word, to know it well, speaking of it to others- and yet somehow assume that it doesn't apply to us personally, and we can take shortcuts as convenient to us. If righteous David did this, how much more should we be aware of our temptation to fail in the same way.

There were very specific laws about the transportation of the ark, which David disobeyed in 2 Sam. 6:2-5. It was to be carried on poles on the shoulders of not just Levites but specifically the sons of Kohath (Num. 4:15); and Abinadab's family were not the right people to carry it. David claims in Ps. 119 to have studied God's law all

the day whilst on the run from Saul, reciting it to himself. Perhaps he forgot these details in Numbers 4. But I suggest because he came to see that God wanted the spirit and not letter of the law to be followed, he came to totally place himself above Divine law. We face the same temptation. And it was this which led David into his sin with Bathsheba. Shaving off bits and pieces of God's laws and principles, on the basis that we are above His law, leads to the final catastrophe of David's sin with Bathsheba. Instead of following God's laws about the transportation of the ark, it seems David instead followed the pattern of the Philistines, who also transported the captured ark on a cart (s.w. 1 Sam. 6:10,11). And considered that having built a new cart, never used before, he was in his own way showing respect to it.

Num 4:16 The duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest shall be the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the continual grain offering, and the anointing oil, the requirements of all the tabernacle, and of all that is in it, the sanctuary, and its furnishings-

There is no suggestion that this was to be the duty of every High Priest. Eleazar is mentioned as he was to replace Aaron. So much of the Mosaic law was only for the generation who were to march through the wilderness to the promised land, where God had in view another worship system. All claims that any law of God is eternally binding must be considered in this context. It is simply not the case.

Num 4:17 Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying-

The family of Kohath were to bear the ark, and so they had greater responsibility and greater risk of destruction for inappropriate behaviour. If we love God, we will not shy away from intimacy with Him. But it is also true that knowledge brings responsibility to act the more appropriately.

Num 4:18 Don't cut off the clan of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites-

By Moses' inattention, a whole group of people could have died. Our sensitivity, or lack of it, to others' likely failings can lead to their losing their part amongst the family of the redeemed. We can't reason that human failure is simply their fault; we also bear some responsibility if we don't do what we can to mitigate against it.

Num 4:19 but thus do to them, that they may live, and not die, when they approach to the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and appoint them each one to his service and to his burden-

Not touching holy things connects with the command not to touch the forbidden fruit of Eden (Gen. 3:3). Time and again, Adam's sin is presented (by way of such allusions) as the sin of everyman; elements of it are to be found in all human sin, and therefore we can never blame Adam as the source of our present discomfort under the curse; for we would have done the same. In this sense, all humanity sinned as it were in Adam (Rom. 5:12 Gk.). It's no bad exercise to analyze our own sins in the light of Adam's failure and see wherein are the essential similarities.

Num 4:20 but they shall not go in to see the sanctuary even for a moment, lest they die-

This law was applied even to Gentiles who looked into the ark (1 Sam. 6:19). God still feels sin as a committed offence against Him personally, even when it's performed by those not responsible to His law. It must be hard being God, seeing and feeling so much offence against Him every moment. In this we see not only His sensitivity to sin, but His grace in allowing the whole of human society to exist in its disobedient, sinful state, minute by minute. And thereby we can appreciate more fully the way that He delays judging this world and ending sin, all because He is so earnest that we and others might come to repentance and salvation (2 Pet. 3:9).

Num 4:21 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The census of Israel required that a half shekel of redemption money be offered to Him. We wonder whether this census of the Levites required the same; for we have just read in Num. 3:49-51 of how they had been given the redemption money for the 273 firstborns they had failed to substitute for. They were being tested as to whether they would give it back to God. Just as we are by any receipt of wealth.

Num 4:22 Take a census of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers' families, by their families-

Gershon was the firstborn but he was not given any particular honour for that, and Kohath had the honour of bearing the ark and is mentioned first in this list. This is typical of how God often doesn't choose the firstborn,

those with secular advantage, but delights to work otherwise. See on :24.

Num 4:23 you shall count them from thirty years old and upward until fifty years old; all who enter in to wait on the service, to do the work in the Tent of Meeting-

The fact the Lord Jesus began His service at age 30 therefore presents Him as the ideal priest; although He was not of Levi but from Judah, His ministry was effectively a priestly service.

Num 4:24 This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and in bearing burdens-

Bearing burdens is the language of the lowest servant, although Gershon was the firstborn; see on :22.

Num 4:25 they shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle, and the Tent of Meeting, its covering, and the covering of sealskin that is above it, and the screen for the door of the Tent of Meeting-

These are the coverings of Ex. 26:14: "You shall make a covering for the tent of rams' skins dyed red, and a covering of sea cow hides above". They were dyed red to represent how the blood of Christ is the covering for God's people.

Num 4:26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the door of the gate of the court, which is by the tabernacle and around the altar, and their cords, and all the instruments of their service, and whatever shall be done with them. In this will be their service-

These are the "hangings" of Ex. 27:9: "You shall make the court of the tabernacle: for the south side southward there shall be hangings for the court of fine twined linen one hundred cubits long for one side".

The "fine twined linen" was given to them on leaving Egypt, as it was characteristic of Egypt ("fine twined linen from Egypt" Ez. 27:7). It was apparently only in Egypt at that time that such fine linen was "made from yarn of which each thread was composed of many delicate strands". We see that the best wealth we take from Egypt / the world is to be devoted to the Lord's work. It perhaps appropriately designated the boundary between the believer and the world, represented by the linen fence which marked the enclosure of the tabernacle. 100 cubits is 58 yards or 53 meters.

Num 4:27 At the commandment of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their burden, and in all their service; and you shall appoint their duty to them in all their responsibilities-

As the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5), we too have specific service intended for us. Eph. 2:10 alludes to this: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God beforehand prepared that we should walk in them". Man is never better than when working at what is clearly his calling and empowered by God in doing so. We need to pray that God will reveal to us what are those specific works which He has prepared for us to do- and make them the thrust of our lives. For it's unlikely that His intention and hope was that we should get qualified, climb the career ladder, im-

prove our homes, go up the ladder of cars, holiday homes and expensive gadgets... and die in a comfortable nursing home leaving what was left over to our kids or someone else as a kind of short cut towards that same sad life we thought we did so well in. Entry into Christ, therefore, is a beginning and not an end. Nor is it merely an assent to the correctness of a set of theological truths. Rather is it an opening of ourselves to His workmanship upon us, and working for Him. See on :32.

Num 4:28 This is the service of the families of the sons of the Gershonites in the Tent of Meeting: and their duty shall be under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest-

The Levites were under the command of the priests. Eleazar was to succeed Aaron as High Priest, and so he was placed over the Kohathites as they carried the ark; Ithamar, his younger brother, commanded the Gershonites and Merarites (Num. 4:33).

Num 4:29 As for the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families, by their fathers' families-

It is likely that a sense of genealogy had been somewhat lost during the time spent in Egypt. There was huge emphasis on genealogies at Sinai, because God is a family God and wanted the people to be arranged by families. God set even the solitary in families at this time (Ps. 68:6)- those without any family were assigned to one. This looks ahead to God's desire that His people should not be solitary individuals but organized ideally in spiritual family groups, what we would call churches.

Num 4:30 you shall count them from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who enters on the service, to do the work of the Tent of Meeting-

"The service" translates a word usually used for a military group. The idea was that they were to do God's work as soldiers grouped for battle, disciplined and with respect for authority and specific ends in view. As the new priesthood, we should have a similar disciplined approach. Not just drifting into church life and remaining in it as spectators at a show, as mere religion, but specifically aware that we are called to personal engagement, participation and action. See on :31.

Num 4:31 This is the duty of their burden, according to all their service in the Tent of Meeting: the tabernacle's boards, its bars, its pillars, its sockets-

As discussed on :30, "duty" is likewise a military term, something similar to 'sentry duty'. These are the boards of Ex. 26:16: "Ten cubits shall be the length of a board, and one and a half cubits the breadth of each board". As discussed on :11, acacia bushes don't grow so long nor straight. These boards would have been very difficult to construct, and would have involved much joining together of pieces of wood which were difficult to work with. It was an appropriate symbol for the kind of human material which goes to make up God's dwelling place. For God dwells in the community of His people, and not within wood and stone. The materials of the tabernacle therefore represent us His people.

Num 4:32 and the pillars of the court around it, and their sockets, and their pins, and their cords, with all their

instruments, and with all their service: and by name you shall appoint the instruments of the duty of their burden-

GNB "Each man will be responsible for carrying specific items". Again we have the sense that each Levite had specific responsibilities, looking ahead to how we in the new priesthood have specific callings unique to each of us. See on :27.

Num 4:33 This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service, in the Tent of Meeting, under the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest-

"The service... their service" continues the theme of each group and individual having a specific service or ministry intended for them. See on :27,32.

Num 4:34 Moses and Aaron and the princes of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families, and by their fathers' families-

There is repeatedly specific priority and emphasis given to the Kohathites, although Kohath was not the firstborn. They were chosen to carry the ark, and we see God's repeated theme of not choosing the firstborn or those with secular advantage for His most significant work. And that is His abiding style to this day.

Num 4:35 from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered into the service, for work in the Tent of Meeting-

The grammar of the original doesn't have to mean that every male between 30 and 50 was in "the service". Rather those numbered were between those ages, who had entered into the service. This suggests an element

of freewill agreement to serve- without which they were not numbered within Israel.

Num 4:36 Those who were numbered of them by their families were two thousand seven hundred and fifty-

The Kohathites had 2,750 men able to serve, 5,850 unable or unwilling to serve, making a total of 8,600

The Gershonites had 2,630 men able to serve, 4,870 unable or unwilling to serve, making a total of 7,500

The Merarites had 3,200 men able to serve, 3,000 unable or unwilling to serve, making a total of 6,200.

We can conclude from this that there was a higher level of relative commitment amongst those of Merari. The Kohathites, given the highest honour of carrying the ark, were in fact the least committed. And yet God often gives a high calling to those apparently least spiritually qualified, to inspire them. We think of the entire choice of the tribe of Levi as the priestly tribe, the calling of Saul son of Kish and many others.

Num 4:37 These are those who were numbered of the families of the Kohathites, all who served in the Tent of Meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of Yahweh by Moses-

Num. 3:15 could be read as a command to Moses to personally number all the people of his own tribe, Levi. And he did so. His obedience is constantly stressed. This looks ahead to the similar personal relationship between the Lord Jesus and His people.

Num 4:38 Those who were numbered of the sons of Gershon, by their families, and by their fathers' families-

"Gershon" means 'expelled', maybe meaning that like Reuben he was expelled from the role of firstborn [he is mentioned first as if he was the firstborn]. This is a theme of the Genesis record. But perhaps because of these weaknesses, the line to the high priest ran through Kohath.

Num 4:39 from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered into the service, for work in the Tent of Meeting-

God met with Israel over the ark in the most holy place (Ex. 25:22; 30:6; Num. 17:4). But they were never allowed there. And so He also "met" (s.w.) with Israel at the door of the tabernacle, and spoke with them there (Ex. 29:42,43; 30:36). But the word for "meet" is used in Am. 3:3, where God laments that Israel had not "met" with Him and therefore they could not walk further together. The idea of the "meeting" was that God's word might be revealed, so that the people could walk with Him in His ways. It was an awesome invitation, to be able to meet with the God who only otherwise met with His people in the glory of the most holy place, over the ark. He as it were came out of that most holy place and met with them at the door of the tabernacle. But they weren't interested. Just as so many today.

Num 4:40 even those who were numbered of them, by their families, by their fathers' families, were two thousand six hundred and thirty-

We have a choice between understanding the Hebrew *elep* as meaning a literal number, or a "thousand" in the sense of a family group. In this case, the number fol-

lowing the word "thousand" would refer to the number of males amongst that number of families. This makes a more realistic number of Levites (see on Num. 3:39,43). Although it means that as discussed on Num. 3:22, the total number of Israelites who left Egypt was not as huge as often imagined.

Thus the numbers would work out like this:

Gershon 7,500, or 7 families with 500 males, making 71 males / family group.

Kohath 8,600 or 8 families with 600 males, making 75 males / family group.

Merari 6,200 or 6 families with 200 males, making 33 males / family group.

This would make a total of 22,300 if we take "thousand" literally; or a total of 21 families [7+8+6] and 1300 males, making a total of 48 males per family group.

Num 4:41 These are those who were numbered of the families of the sons of Gershon, all who served in the Tent of Meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of Yahweh-

As discussed on :40 and Num. 3:22,39,43, this numbering of families rather than individuals could suggest that the "thousands" we read of refer to families rather than literal numbers. This makes more sense, as otherwise thousands of men would each be involved in carrying something- although the structure may just about have given each of them something to carry, and they may have taken turns in carrying the poles when on the march.

Num 4:42 Those who were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, by their families, by their fathers' families-

The Merarites had 3,200 men able to serve, 3,000 unable or unwilling to serve, making a total of 6,200. We can conclude from this that there was a higher level of relative commitment amongst those of Merari. See on :36.

Num 4:43 from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered into the service, to do work in the Tent of Meeting-

The Israelite males were to be counted as able to fight from 20 years old (Num. 1:3). The higher age limit of 30 for priestly service therefore suggests that a greater maturity was required for their work.

Num 4:44 even those who were numbered of them by their families, were three thousand two hundred-

The Merarites had 3200 workers out of a total of 6200. Although they were the smallest of the three families, they had the most number of workers (Gershon had 2630 out of 7500; Kohath 2750 out of 8600). This may have been for various reasons, but it's also a fact that the smaller the group, the higher percentage are willing to work. God doesn't need great numbers to do His work. See on :36.

Out of 22,000 Levites, a total of 8580 were apparently between 20 and 50 years old and able or willing to serve. This is a reasonable proportion if we accept these numbers as literal. But the numbers are so rounded that

one suspects that as often, the term "thousand" is used not as a number but as a reference to a group; and likewise a "hundred" and a "fifty". See on Num. 3:21.

Num 4:45 These are those who were numbered of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of Yahweh by Moses-

"These are those" could suggest that a written list was produced of all the names, although it is not included in the inspired record at this point.

Num 4:46 All those who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the princes of Israel numbered, by their families, and by their fathers' families-

Although Moses was personally commanded to number the Levites, seeing they were his own tribe, he may have used the princes of the other tribes of Israel to participate or be present, to provide a level of integrity to his counting. This wasn't commanded, but it was typical of his humility that he did this.

Num 4:47 from thirty years old and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered in to do the work of service, and the work of bearing burdens in the Tent of Meeting-

38,000 Levites were numbered by David in 1 Chron. 23:3, although "thousand" may mean a division rather than a literal 1000. At the time of Num. 4:47,48 there were only 8,580. And Levite males from a month old were 22,000 in Num. 3:39 and 23,000 at the time of Num. 26:62. This suggests a great increase in the number of Levites by David's time; or perhaps he more gener-

ously counted who was a Levite, because he wanted to have as many as possible involved in his grandiose plans for the temple services. There was no need for such large numbers of Levites in order to serve God effectively, for there were far fewer Levites at the time of the figures given in the book of Numbers, and the sanctuary and Divine service still continued.

Num 4:48 even those who were numbered of them, were eight thousand five hundred and eighty-

As discussed on :40 and Num. 3:22,39,43, this numbering of families rather than individuals could suggest that the "thousands" we read of refer to a level of clan rather than literal numbers, and likewise "hundred".

Num 4:49 According to the commandment of Yahweh they were numbered by Moses, everyone according to his service, and according to his burden. Thus were they numbered by him, as Yahweh commanded Moses-

Each man having his own burden to bear is an idea picked up in the New Testament (Gal. 6:5). We are each asked to carry the cross of Christ, and yet that cross is articulated in unique ways for each of us. Just as each Levite had some specific part of the tabernacle to carry.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 5

Num 5:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying,

Numbers 5 contains three related pieces of legislation: 1) Removing lepers from the camp 2) Making reconciliation to your brother 3) The trial of jealousy. Chapter 4 is about the numbering of the Levites, and chapter 6 goes on to a new topic- the Nazarite vow. We are therefore to understand the three pieces of legislation in Numbers 5 as related to each other. The common theme they all have is that interpersonal issues must be addressed- the lepers who had been concealed in the camp were to be removed, brethren reconciled with, and unfaithfulness or jealousy issues faced up to and permanently resolved. Time never really heals but rather does it allow issues to fester until major spiritual and interpersonal breakdown occurs. That's one simple and very relevant lesson to take from this chapter.

Num 5:2 Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, and everyone who has an issue, and whoever is unclean by the dead-

The fact the people responded by removing such persons from the camp (:3) suggests that those who concealed their skin diseases or the fact they had touched dead relatives had somehow been allowed to remain within the camp. The theme of the chapter is that such private issues must be faced and openly resolved.

Those suffering with the "discharge" are parallel with 'lepers' in Num. 5:2 as needing to be put out of the camp.

I suggested on Lev. 13:1 that "lepers" doesn't refer to those with Hansen's disease, but to those struck down by Divine judgment. Those with a "discharge", literally a 'flowing', were in the same category. In neither case is involuntary disease or human bodily situation a reason for moral uncleanness. Just as human nature of itself doesn't separate between God and man; for all we posit about human nature, we say about the undefiled Lord Jesus who fully had that same human nature.

Num 5:3 Both male and female you shall put outside of the camp that they not defile their camp, in the midst of which I dwell-

The Lord Jesus suffered and died, shedding the blood of atonement, "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13). We are bidden go forth to the Lord Jesus "outside the camp", just as those who "sought Yahweh" did when there was no tabernacle (Ex. 33:7). The people watching Moses as he walked out to it, without the camp, therefore looks ahead to a faithless Israel lining the via Dolorosa and watching the Lord walk out to His place of crucifixion. And we are to get behind Him and follow Him there, stepping out from the mass of Israel. As the Lord Jesus suffered "outside the camp", so various parts of the Mosaic sacrifices were to be burnt there (Lev. 4:12,21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27); and yet it was the blood of those sacrifices which achieved atonement (Heb. 13:11; Num. 19:3,9). "Outside the camp" was the place of excluded, condemned sinners (Lev. 13:46; 24:14; Num. 5:3,4; 15:35,36; 31:13,19), and it was here that the Lord Jesus died, in identification with us.

Num 5:4 The children of Israel did so, and put them out outside of the camp; as Yahweh spoke to Moses, so did the children of Israel-

Israel's obedience was mainly when it came to disciplining others, giving materially and making things. But the Pentateuch emphasizes their disobedience when it came to personal morality, internal spirituality and worshipping God alone rather than any idols. We must analyze our own acts of obedience and see if they follow a similar pattern. To be externally religious isn't difficult, indeed we can rather enjoy being like that.

Num 5:5 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

See on :1 for the connection between the three pieces of legislation in this chapter.

Num 5:6 Speak to the children of Israel: 'When a man or woman commits any sin that people commit, so as to trespass against Yahweh, and that soul is guilty-

The trespass was "against Yahweh"- but the sins in view were against other members of God' people; :7 makes it clear that it was individuals who had been trespassed against. Sin against each other is sin against God; how we treat each other is how we treat God. This sets the scene for the trial of jealousy section which follows. We would expect to read in :7 that reconciliation must be achieved with the offended person *and* an offering made to God. But assuming :7 refers to an offering to be made only if there was no living person to reconcile with, that is not stated here- because the impression we are left with is that sin against another is sin against God, and

reconcillation with man is in that sense reconcillation with God.

Num 5:7 then he shall confess his sin which he has done, and he shall make restitution for his guilt in full, and add to it the fifth part of it, and give it to him in respect of whom he has been guilty-

Both confession and restitution were required. These two elements are still required if we are to truly resolve broken relationships. Praise is related to the realization that sin has been forgiven. Hezekiah's praise on realizing God's mercy to him was expressed in a desire to walk in quiet fellowship with God for the rest of his life. There is no suggestion that praise was some kind of ecstatic exuberance of emotion. The normal Hebrew word translated "praise" is also translated "confess" in the context of confessing sin (Lev. 5:5; 16:21; 26:40; Num. 5:7). Contrition of heart because of appreciating our own failures is therefore one way of praising Yahweh's Name. So often does the word "praise" occur in the context of praising the *Name* of Yahweh, or the praising of "the God of Israel", i.e. Yahweh.

The idea of restitution for guilt could mean that once the sin had been dealt with, so had the guilt. There need be no abiding sense of guilt if we believe in forgiveness. David's later Psalms have little indication of any such sense of abiding guilt concerning his sins with Bathsheba and Uriah.

Num 5:8 But if the man has no kinsman to whom restitution may be made for the guilt, the restitution for guilt which is made to Yahweh shall be the priest's; besides

the ram of the atonement, by which atonement shall be made for him-

"When a man or woman commits any sin... he shall confess... the man" (:6-8) is proof that the Bible often uses the masculine singular to mean 'any person', of either gender. As discussed on :7, it is important to note that atonement is intended to deal with guilt. Indeed, Divine forgiveness is really the only way to ultimately deal with guilt.

Num 5:9 Every heave offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they present to the priest, shall be his-

The portion to be waved was placed on the priests hands (Ex. 29:25), and then 'waved' or 'swung' towards the altar and then back- not from right to left. The idea was that the offerings were first given to God, recognizing they should be consumed on the altar to God; but then given back to the priest by God. So they ate them having first recognized that their food was really God's, all was of Him, and He had given it back to them to eat. This should be our spirit in partaking of any food, as we are the new priesthood. Our prayers of thanks for daily food should include this feature. All things are God's and anything we 'offer' to Him is only giving Him what He has given to us (1 Chron. 29:14,16).

Num 5:10 Every man's holy things shall be his: whatever any man gives the priest, it shall be his'-

The emphasis here upon how the priest represented God is to pave the way for the manifestation of God in the priest which we will read of in the next section about the trial of jealousy.

Num 5:11 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

There were various possibilities for how a man should respond in this situation. He could have his wife stoned; divorce her; put her through this 'trial of jealousy'; or simply forgive her. We too have a range of options open to us when wrong is done to us or when we suspect it has been. The very existence of these options encourages us to think through our responses, and surely inspires us to choose the way of grace over the way of personal revenge or justification.

See on :1 for the connection between the three pieces of legislation in this chapter. See on :1 for the connection between the three pieces of legislation in this chapter.

Num 5:12 Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them: 'If any man's wife goes astray, and is unfaithful to him-

AV "And commit a trespass against him". The whole trial of jealousy tends to assume guilt, hence the water is described immediately as "bitter water" (:18), even though the water only *became* bitter if she was guilty (:24). There were various teachings in the Law of Moses about sexual immorality- the woman could have been killed (Lev. 20:10), but the varying options were to encourage thoughtful response. It would be facile to think that there can only be one disciplinary response to sexual

failure in the church today. We have options, and the process of choice is to exercise our grace.

Num 5:13 and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and is kept close, and she is defiled, and there is no witness against her, and she isn't taken in the act-

If a man's wife committed adultery he could have her killed; or he could put her through the trial of jealousy of Num. 5, with the result that she would become barren; or he could divorce her (Dt. 22:19; 24:1 RV; Lev. 21:14; 22:13). Within a Law that was holy, just and good (Rom. 7:12), unsurpassed in its righteousness (Dt. 4:8; and let us not overlook these estimations), there were these different levels of response possible. But there was a higher level: he could simply forgive her. This was what God did with His fickle Israel, time and again (Hos. 3:1-3). And so the Israelite faced with an unfaithful wife could respond on at least four levels. This view would explain how divorce seems outlawed in passages like Dt. 22:19,29, and yet there are other parts of the OT which seem to imply that it was permitted. It should be noted that there were some concessions to weakness under the Law which the Lord was not so willing to make to His followers (e.g., outside the marriage context, Dt. 20:5-8 cp. Lk. 9:59-62; 14:18,19). He ever held before us the Biblical ideal of marriage.

Num 5:14 and the spirit of jealousy comes on him, and he is jealous of his wife, and she is defiled: or if the spirit of jealousy comes on him, and he is jealous of his wife, and she isn't defiled;-

Jealousy is not sinful of itself- God portrays Himself as a God jealous over us. It is a function of deep love. The Law of Moses upheld the position of women far more than contemporary legal codes. The man who falsely accused his wife would've been deeply shamed- see on :31. The innocent woman had the promise [or was it a command?] of :28 that she would conceive seed- the greatest honour for any Hebrew woman. As to why the woman had no power to accuse the man- that remains a difficult question, but I would suggest that in a society where polygamy was accepted and even seen as desirable by women [as it is in many parts of Africa today], the fact her husband slept with another woman was not necessarily seen as it is in Western society today. I have personally heard middle aged African women boasting of how many young women their husband gets to sleep with.

This provision for the trial of jealousy appears to have been a concession to human weakness, in this case, male weakness. For the New Testament outlaws envy (the Hebrew word translated "jealousy" here has this sense): Rom. 1:29; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4; Tit. 3:3. It could be that James 4:5 alludes to the spirit of male jealousy which this legislation sought to make a concession to (:14). The simple lesson for us can be that God does indeed make concessions to our human weakness; but we are to use them sparingly, and realize that their very existence is actually intended to inspire us *not* to make use of them but to serve God on the highest level we can.

Num 5:15 then the man shall bring his wife to the priest, and shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part

of an ephah of barley meal. He shall pour no oil on it, nor put frankincense on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of memorial-

Oil and frankincense made the offering smell attractive and gave the flame a pleasant colour. But these were not to be added- because this was a jealousy offering. The hint was that this was not pleasing to God. He allowed, and still allows, men to act in their hot blooded jealousy regarding others' actual or perceived sins against them. But He is warning that this is not pleasing to Him; just as we can operate a policy of forgiving others only if they repent, but this is a lower level compared to forgiving without repentance, and operating such a policy puts us in an impossible position. The man who made use of Numbers 5 likewise put himself in a lose-lose position. We note here that there appears no historical example of the legislation ever being used in practice, perhaps exactly because of this.

Bringing iniquity to memory- Time and again, these Hebrew words are used in appeals to God *not* to bring our sin to remembrance (Ps. 79:8; Is. 64:9; Jer. 31:34). And Paul surely alludes to the same idea in teaching that the way of love does not keep a record of wrong, it doesn't bring others' sin to remembrance (1 Cor. 13:5). By offering this sacrifice, the man was asking that God would remember her sin against her. And he had to bring the offering for her. No spiritually minded man would want God to remember sin against anyone. The whole structure of the legislation is geared against the man doing these things.

Num 5:16 The priest shall bring her near, and set her before Yahweh-

The language of being brought near and set before Yahweh is precisely that of the priests being anointed and consecrated (Num. 3:6; 16:9; Ez. 44:15). The idea may be to suggest her acceptability before God in His service if she were innocent. Being before Yahweh may mean that she as a woman was allowed to come right up to the door of the tabernacle- something a chauvinist ancient society would have struggled with. Again, everything in this legislation is really geared against the man treating the woman like this.

Num 5:17 and the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel; and of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water-

The earthen vessel and dust are references to the creation of man and woman from the dust. Perhaps this was to serve as a gentle reminder to all involved that we are all but dust. Dust and water are all that a human being is- the woman was to have the curses for her sin removed not on the basis of the shedding of blood, for she had committed a sin requiring death- but the punishment for that sin could be obliterated on the basis of her humanity. We are being taught here to cut others some slack, even when they have sinned, and certainly when we merely suspect them of sin, on the basis that they [along with us] are merely dust and water, human.

Num 5:18 The priest shall set the woman before Yahweh, and let the hair of the woman's head go loose, and put the grain offering of memorial in her hands, which is the

grain offering of jealousy. The priest shall have in his hand the water of bitterness that brings a curse-

A woman's hair was seen as her glory, and a covered head was associated with shame. It could be argued that the woman was being treated as innocent until proven guilty, and even invited to openly display her glory. The uncovering of the woman's head was a form of shaming (as in 1 Cor. 11:5,6). She had to be shamed whether or not she was guilty; and this led the man to a lose-lose scenario. If she was innocent, then he had needlessly shamed him, she would likely not love him in future, and he had to bear the sin of doing that (:31). If she were guilty, then he had to support a barren wife for the rest of her life, seeing the curses about killing or divorcing her were to be blotted out.

The allusion here in 1 Cor. 11:5,6 is only one of several such allusions to Numbers 5 in 1 Corinthians 11. The idea there of drinking unto condemnation or blessing / justification simply has to be understood in the Numbers 5 context. And it is no accident that the language of a woman having an uncovered head also occurs. What's the connection and the bigger picture? I suggest that what was happening in Corinth was that members who had sinned were being publically shamed before the congregation by e.g. the sinful sisters being made to sit in the meeting with uncovered heads. In Middle Eastern societies today, forcing a woman to uncover her head is a source of shame. Paul is saying that paradoxically, such misbehaviour in the Corinth ecclesia was actually 'shaming' those demanding it; "I speak this to your shame"

(1 Cor. 6:5; 11:22; 15:34). The allusions to Numbers 5 would therefore be saying: 'You are publically shaming some sisters by making them remove their veils / head coverings in your meetings; and by the way in which you eat the Lord's supper, you are also purposefully shaming some (:22). Instead, *you* should be the ones in shame for your behaviour. By doing so, even if indeed those sisters have sinned, you are acting like the husband who uses the Numbers 5 legislation. Instead, whenever you drink the cup, examine *yourselves* and not others, and remember that you are the one who is being tested by the Lord's cup- either to your condemnation or justification'.

Num 5:19 The priest shall cause her to swear, and shall tell the woman, If no man has lain with you, and if you haven't gone aside to uncleanness, being under your husband, be free from this water of bitterness that brings a curse-

Many primitive societies have some such ritual. In Islam in such a case, the suspected woman must vow that if she is guilty, then she will die and lose her children, preferably going to Mecca to make the vow. In some African societies, a woman must jump into water etc. The existence of the law of jealousy was therefore a concession to human weakness and psychological need.

Num 5:20 But if you have gone astray, being under your husband, and if you are defiled, and some man has lain with you besides your husband-

The man is described as having lain with the woman, rather than the woman laying with the man. Even though a woman is spoken of as taking sexual initiative

in 'laying down with' a partner in Lev. 20:16. So again we get the impression that the legislation somehow pities the woman, describing her as having gone astray and implying her sexual partner had taken the initiative.

Num 5:21 then the priest shall cause the woman to swear with the oath of cursing, and the priest shall tell the woman, Yahweh make you a curse and an oath among your people-

God prefers not to condemn people, but to allow them to condemn themselves in their own words. For sin is its own condemnation. His passion rather is to save.

When Yahweh allows your thigh to fall away, and your body to swell;-

This phrase is notoriously difficult to interpret. The swelling of the belly could mean that even though she had avoided getting pregnant by her adultery, her body would swell in an imitation pregnancy- but she would not have a child. The NEB seems to get it right in rendering it 'have a miscarriage'. This would appear to be the meaning of the idiom. If the woman was visibly pregnant and her husband wondered how the child could be his, then he would naturally feel jealous. The immorality in view had been hidden from him (:13), so the only reason he would have to doubt her was when she was noticeably pregnant. Most women who are say 4 months pregnant (i.e. visible) carry their pregnancy to term, so the loss of the child would've been seen as the direct curse of God. Women in those days were surely stronger than today, therefore the termination of a pregnancy after four months from natural causes would've been most unusual

and seen as God's hand. This of course provides yet another of many windows onto the vexed question of abortion. It was not that the dusty water itself made her lose the child- the loss of the child was from God's hand. And yet it was her husband who was responsible for the decision, because there were a variety of ways prescribed in the Law for dealing with sexual failure. He didn't have to put her through the trial of jealousy- indeed, Hosea did not when Gomer bore Lo-Ammi ['not my people']. He forgave her, rather than using the Numbers 5 legislation.

Num 5:22 and this water that brings a curse will go into your bowels, and make your body swell, and your thigh fall away. The woman shall say, Amen, Amen-

"Thigh", "bowels" and "body" appear to refer to her reproductive organs; barrenness was to be the judgment for her sin. Perhaps we can infer from this that she had slept with another partner in order to get pregnant, as perhaps her husband was apparently infertile or impotent. So her motive may not have been simply sexual lust. Therefore the judgment was bareness- appropriate to the nature of her sin, seeing she had slept with the other partner specifically in order to get pregnant. The jealous husband would have to be married for the rest of his life to this barren woman, which was seen as a terrible situation to be in; it would be better, therefore, not to make her barren, and not to go down the path of this trial of jealousy. But rather to simply forgive her.

Num 5:23 'The priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall blot them out into the water of bitterness-

The curses were that if a woman committed adultery, she could be killed or divorced. But if the jealous husband made use of this legislation, then those curses were removed. If she was guilty, he could not kill or divorce her. She would be barren, but he would have to support her for the rest of her life. And their relationship would not be up to much because of the public humiliation. And if she was innocent, then he had alienated her by shaming her, and (:31 implies) he would have to bear his iniquity for the rest of his life. So to apply the Numbers 5 legislation was a lose-lose scenario. The idea was that the only sensible way out was to curb the hot blood of jealousy, and forgive, whether the sin was real or imagined. This is a powerful lesson to us.

The water *became* bitter only if the woman was guilty (:24). The curses of condemnation were written by the priest [an interesting incidental reference to the literacy of at least some in early Israel]- but removed by the bitter water. The implication could be that condemnation is removed by condemnation; we must face our sins and be condemned for them in this life if we are to be saved from condemnation. If we would condemn ourselves in this life, we shall not be condemned at the last day. The serpent on the pole was a symbol of sin, and yet it was this which leads to our salvation from condemnation. The whole trial of jealousy is often alluded to by God in His jealousy over unfaithful Israel; He promises to "blot out" their sin after they have experienced condemnation (Is. 43:25). The *curses* written in the *book* were to be given to Israel because God was

jealous (Dt. 29:20); this is another allusion to these laws, showing that God is the ultimately jealous husband of Israel.

Num 5:24 He shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that causes the curse; and the water that causes the curse shall enter into her and become bitter-

The water at that stage was only water, it "*became bitter*" to her if she was guilty. There is surely some connection with our drinking the Lord's cup. To drink a cup of wine from the Lord is elsewhere used as a metaphor of condemnation. This is the great paradox of the breaking of bread meeting- by accepting the cup of condemnation, it becomes the cup of blessing to us. The Corinthians were told that they would "provoke the Lord to jealousy" by breaking bread and yet also worshipping idols (1 Cor. 10:22). This is surely an allusion to the "trial of jealousy". A curse was recited and then the believer drunk a cup; if they were unfaithful, they drunk to their condemnation. Paul's allusion suggests that each day we break bread and drink the cup, we as the bride of Christ are going through the trial of jealousy. Brutal honesty and self-examination, and not merely of our lives in the last few days, is therefore crucial before drinking the cup.

Num 5:25 The priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy out of the woman's hand, and shall wave the grain offering before Yahweh, and bring it to the altar-

For "wave", see on :9. "Out of..." can as well be translated "above". The idea seems to be that the priest placed his hands upon her hands as they swung the offering before Yahweh. It all sounds like a kind of peace offering.

Perhaps the idea was that the woman was to be at peace with God whatever happened- either through being declared innocent, or through repentance.

Num 5:26 The priest shall take a handful of the grain offering, as its memorial, and burn it on the altar, and afterward shall make the woman drink the water-

The "memorial portion" of the offerings was to serve as a reminder to God, as it were, of the covenants which He "remembered". He of course doesn't forget His covenant but ever remembers it (Ps. 105:8 etc.), yet He is presented in human terms as having His memory rekindled, as it were, by human prayer, faith, situations and sacrifices so that He "remembers the covenant" (Gen. 8:1; 9:15; Ex. 2:24; 6:5; Lev. 26:42,45; Num. 10:9 and often). The regular sacrifices were such a "memorial" or 'reminder'- both to God and to His people. The place of prayer, regular sacrifice of giving, breaking of bread at the "memorial meeting" etc., are all equivalents for us under the new covenant.

Num 5:27 When he has made her drink the water, then it shall happen. If she is defiled, and has committed a trespass against her husband, that the water that causes the curse will enter into her and become bitter, and her body will swell, and her thigh will fall away; and the woman will be a curse among her people-

This is all the language of infertility. See on :22. If the woman became widely known as a curse, this was really bringing the name of her husband into dishonour. Again, it seems all is geared against the man subjecting

his wife to this process- if he didn't forgive her, he stood to lose so much himself.

Num 5:28 If the woman isn't defiled, but is clean; then she shall be free, and shall conceive seed-

A prophecy or a command? If a command, then this would require her husband to resume relationship with her after his outbreak of baseless jealousy.

Num 5:29 This is the law of jealousy, when a wife, being under her husband, goes astray, and is defiled-

The Corinthians were told that they would "provoke the Lord to jealousy" by breaking bread and yet also worshipping idols (1 Cor. 10:22). This is surely an allusion to the "trial of jealousy". A curse was recited and then the believer drunk a cup; if they were unfaithful, they drunk to their condemnation. Paul's allusion suggests that each day we break bread and drink the cup, we as the bride of Christ are going through the trial of jealousy. Brutal honesty and self-examination, and not merely of our lives in the last few days, is therefore crucial before drinking the cup.

Num 5:30 or when the spirit of jealousy comes on a man, and he is jealous of his wife; then he shall set the woman before Yahweh, and the priest shall execute on her all this law-

The Hebrew word translated "zeal" in the context of God's zeal for us (Is. 9:7) really means the jealousy which flares up in a man for a woman (the same word is in Num. 5:14,15; Prov. 6:34; Song 8:6 etc.). That jealousy burning like fire (Ps. 79:5) is His passion for us His people. He is a jealous God in His zeal for us; and there-

fore any other relationships with the things of this world cannot be contemplated by us. That zeal of God will be poured out upon us at the second coming, resulting in a consummation with Him as the wife of His covenant (Is. 42:13,14; 64:1).

Num 5:31 The man shall be free from iniquity, and that woman shall bear her iniquity'

What was the man's iniquity? The implication is that if the woman was innocent, then the husband was guilty of sin. But what sin? I can only conclude: 'The sin of slandering someone on the basis of jealousy'. The hint is that until she were proven guilty, then he was guilty of this sin of slander. Only her being proven guilty released him from that guilt. So often, slander is on the basis of jealousy. The legislation ends at this point; there is no demand for a sacrifice from him. If he was genuinely repentant, he could of course offer a freewill offering and seek to obey the spirit of the earlier legislation in this chapter about personal offence against another (:6-8). The silence of the record about this perhaps implies that if a person does create slander against another on the basis of jealousy, then they have to go away and live with that, and there is no specifically prescribed, enforced ritual of atonement for it.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 6

Num 6:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

Any Israelite could vow him or herself to special service to God; we too shouldn't see our service to God in terms of doing the minimum. Realizing the wonder of His grace and the certainty of our eternal life in His Kingdom, we should be moved to special devotions. In this vow, the ordinary Israelite willingly submitted to some of the regulations specific to the priests on duty. The growing of long hair could be seen as an imitation of the High Priest's mitre. They were not to see the priesthood as something reserved just for specialists, those born into it; nor were they to see the High Priest as so distant from themselves that he could never be imitated, in spirit at least. We likewise can take to ourselves some aspects of the personal work of the Lord Jesus; for all that is true of Him becomes true of us who are baptized into Him. As He was the light of the world, so are we to be.

Num 6:2 Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them: 'When either man or woman shall make a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to Yahweh,-

See on Dt. 6:23. The vow of Naziriteship was voluntary, and yet Am. 2:11 says that God raised up young men to be Nazirites. Here we see the profound interplay between human freewill and Divine intervention, setting up possibilities for our freewill response which are effectively a calling to specific acts of freewill obedience.

And the most well known Nazirites, Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11) and Samson (Jud. 13) were chosen to be Nazirites before their birth.

A woman could also be a Nazirite. For a woman to shave her head was otherwise understood as an act of shame (cp. Num. 5:18; 1 Cor. 11:6). But making this freewill commitment involved them doing something which in the eyes of society was shameful and foolish. The essence of that is seen to this day- to give your savings to another is seen as foolish, to fellowship with the despised and rejected is seen as shameful.

Num 6:3 he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink. He shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of fermented drink, neither shall he drink any juice of grapes, nor eat fresh grapes or dried-

This was the requirement for priests on duty (Lev. 10:9). Through Naziriteship, the ordinary Israelite, including women, could act as the priests. And further, the long hair recalled the High Priestly mitre- the invitation was to act in the spirit of the High Priest, just as we are asked to replicate the essence of the saving, mediatorial work of Jesus in our lives and service. The word for the "crown" of the High Priest is from the same root, *nzr*, as the word 'Nazirite'.

The Nazarite was separated *from* wine, because he was separated *unto* the Lord (Num. 6:2,3). The meaning of 'holiness' is both to be separated *from* and separated *unto*. Separation isn't only something negative; it's more essentially something positive. We are separated *from* this world because we are separated *unto* the things of

God's Kingdom; the separation *from* is a natural, unpretended outcome of our involvement in the things of God's Kingdom. It's not part of a cross which the believer must reluctantly, sacrificially bare.

Num 6:4 All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is made of the grapevine, from the seeds even to the skins-

See on :3. The grapes had no alcohol content. The same is true of the seeds or skins. But here is the classic fence around the law, forbidding something which is not wrong of itself in order to prevent developing even the mental association with the sinful / forbidden, or the suggestion of it. And here we see a bridge across the centuries to our age- in seeking to avoid temptation or disobedience, we are to carefully avoid those things which may suggest the temptation to us. What we watch or read therefore becomes no innocent choice for any of us. The same fence around the law is seen in the command to Samson's mother not to drink wine because her son was to be a Nazirite and bound by the same law. The behaviour of the mother in pregnancy was therefore seen as a possible influence upon the behaviour of the as yet unborn child (Jud. 13:7).

To view these regulations as irritating fences around a law is however somewhat negative, true enough as it is. Making vows was part of most of the surrounding religions, many of which involved extreme asceticism, with those making the vows seeking to outdo each other with the extremity of their self-denial. It has never been God's intention that serving Him should mutate into religious

extremism and fanatic asceticism. The regulations upon the Nazirite could therefore be seen as a wise limitation upon the human tendency towards religious extremism. In comparing with other religious vows of the time, they nearly all involved abstinence from sex and time spent daily in religious devotions and rituals. It's significant that the Nazirite vow contrasts sharply with this- for there is a notable absence of any such regulations or demands. God intended that the spirit of special devotion to Him should be lived out within the course of normal, daily human life- rather than some special hived-off existence with a focus upon ritual and externalities.

Num 6:5 All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall come on his head, until the days are fulfilled, in which he separates himself to Yahweh. He shall be holy-

The word for 'Nazirite' can mean 'crowned' and the long hair on the crown of his head was to be seen as a connection with the mitre / crown of the High Priest. This ability to rise up to the spirit of the High Priest himself looks ahead to our ambition to be as the Lord Jesus in this world- devoted to bringing about the salvation of others. The height of the calling is far beyond mere religion, whereby we are mere spectators at a show. We are to have the spirit of Christ, to be as Him to this world.

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

LXX "cherishing the long hair of the head". Samson ultimately cherished or valued his relationship with Delilah above the hair of his Nazirite vow. The Hebrew can imply 'growing wild'. Hair styling was important for

ancient people; the idea was that what looks unattractive to man is often what is attractive to God, and the sign we are dedicated to Him. And that is an abiding principle.

Num 6:6 All the days that he separates himself to Yahweh he shall not go near a dead body-

The Nazirite was not only to not touch a corpse, but not to go near one, because they were acting like priests (Lev. 21:10-22); likewise they were not only to not drink wine, but to not drink grape juice nor eat seeds or skins of grapes, from which wine is made. This is the classic 'hedge around the law' - forbidding something not because it is unlawful of itself but because the associations may lead to breaking an actual law. We in Christ are freed from all legalism and casuistry; and yet in our daily struggle against temptation, it's no bad idea to remove far from us those things, subliminal associations, images etc. which may stimulate temptation and the power of sin. However we note that Samson touched dead bodies and yet his Nazirite vow was apparently not thereby broken. Constantly we see that the spirit of the law overrode the letter of it.

Num 6:7 He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die-

The Nazirites is again under the same legislation as the High Priest (Lev. 21:11), to whom he was aspiring. We too are asked to aspire to the Lord Jesus; the veil was torn down so that we might enter in to the most holy, just as the High Priest did. And we do so as he did, for the sake of seeking the salvation of others. The usual

form of mourning involved embracing the corpse of the deceased. Hence this would make the person unclean. The Lord seems to allude to this in Mt. 10:37. Devotion to Him must come before family relationships. It's as if He saw the spirit of the Nazirite vow as characterizing all who would believe in Him. We are all to go forward and serve God on our own initiative.

God doesn't advertise His concessions to human weakness (and neither should we). He leads men to attempt life on the highest level. And so Num. 6:7 speaks as if a man *couldn't* make himself unclean and end his vow, whereas in fact there was legislation which allowed him to take this lower level. But the Father doesn't want us to be minimalists, serving Him at the lowest level; quite to the contrary.

Because his separation to God is on his head-

A woman could also be a Nazirite. So she was to wear her hair in such a way that indicated she was allowing her hair to grow long. This was a sign she was consecrated to the Lord; and Paul seems to reapply this to Christians in 1 Cor. 11:10, assuming that all God's people were effectively Nazirites. The Christian woman in Corinth was to have long hair as a sign she was under devotion to her husband, who represented the Lord Jesus.

Num 6:8 All the days of his separation he is holy to Yahweh-

Paul was called to be a preacher of the Gospel, and yet he speaks of his work as a preacher as if it were a Nazirite vow- which was a totally voluntary commitment. Consider not only the reference to him shaving

his head because of his vow (Acts 18:18; 21:24 cp. Num. 6:9-18), but also the many descriptions of his preaching work in terms of Naziriteship: Separated unto the Gospel's work (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:15; Acts 13:2); "I am not yet consecrated / perfected" (Phil. 3:12)- he'd not yet finished his 'course', i.e. his preaching commission. He speaks of it here as if it were a Nazarite vow not yet ended. Note the reference to Paul's 'consecration' in Acts 20:24. His undertaking not to drink wine lest he offend others (Rom. 14:21) is framed in the very words of Num. 6:3 LXX about the Nazarite. Likewise his being 'joined unto the Lord' (1 Cor. 6:17; Rom. 14:6,8) is the language of Num. 6:6 about the Nazarite being separated unto the Lord. The reference to having power / authority on the head (1 Cor. 11:10) is definitely some reference back to the LXX of Num. 6:7 about the Nazarite. What are we to make of all this? The point is perhaps that commitment to active missionary work is indeed a voluntary matter, as was the Nazarite vow. And that even although Paul was called to this, yet he responded to it by voluntarily binding himself to 'get the job done'. And the same is in essence true for us today in our various callings in the Lord's service.

Num 6:9 If any man dies very suddenly beside him, and he defiles the head of his separation, then he shall shave his head in the day of his cleansing. On the seventh day he shall shave it-

LXX "And if any one should die suddenly by him, immediately the head of his vow shall be defiled; and he shall shave his head in whatever day he shall be pu-

rified: on the seventh day he shall be shaved". The idea seems to be that he sinned in connection with the death of the person, "the things wherein he sinned respecting the dead body" (:11 LXX). I suggest the idea is that he touched a dead body in ignorance. The 'sin' was like the sin of ignorance- he had promised a certain period of service, and he couldn't fulfil it. The idea is that sins of ignorance are still sins; and this is an abiding principle, which inspires us to ever seek to know the Lord's mind and will the more. Although in this case we note that he didn't have to offer an animal for a sin offering but just birds (:10). We wonder however whether Samson's contact with dead bodies negated his Naziriteship; for he told Delilah that he had always been a Nazirite. It seems Samson thought that he was within the spirit of the law in this matter although he broke the letter of it. That was true, as it was with David acting as a priest... but unrestrained, that principle led both Samson and David into actual sin.

Num 6:10 On the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the door of the Tent of Meeting-

Even within the bird offerings there was a gradation. Turtledoves were larger than pigeons and more valuable, but they are only in Israel at certain times of the year; whereas pigeons are in Israel all year round, were easier to catch and were therefore cheaper. The various possible levels within God's law reflect our opportunities to serve on different levels, just as the good soil of the sower parable brings forth different amounts. Some will make more

of God's truth than others. The very existence of these levels, rather than a simple binary demand of obedience / disobedience, pass / fail, of itself inspires us to serve God as extensively as we can. For who can be a minimalist in response to His love.

Num 6:11 The priest shall offer one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, and make atonement for him, because he sinned by reason of the dead, and shall make his head holy that same day-

It hardly sounds sinful for a person who has made a special dedication to God to be made unclean by a person unexpectedly falling dead next to him or her. But in this legislation God is seeking to teach us how sensitive He is to uncleanness. This principle can carry over into our lives today; if we love to view, read and talk about unclean things, even if we don't do them, then we are not respecting the distance which God seeks to set between the clean and unclean, right and wrong, good and evil.

Num 6:12 He shall consecrate to Yahweh the days of his separation, and shall bring a male lamb a year old for a trespass offering; but the former days shall be void, because his separation was defiled-

This was to remind them that the Passover deliverance through the lamb was effectively ongoing. The Passover lamb was likewise to be a year old (Ex. 12:5). We too are to live constantly under the impression of the Lord's sacrifice and redemption of us. Israel were asked to use a lamb of the first year to record various times when they should be thankful for God's redemption of them in the events which comprise life (Lev. 9:3; 12:6;

23:12,18,19; Num. 6:12,14; 7:15,17,21; 28:3,9,11,19; 29:2,8,13). This was to continually recall to them the events of their great redemption through the Red Sea. And the essence of our redemption, our baptism and salvation through the blood of the lamb, must likewise be brought ever before us.

Num 6:13 This is the law of the Nazirite: when the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall be brought to the door of the Tent of Meeting,-

The laws concerning breaking the Nazirite vow are detailed, and the sacrifices required were expensive with no legislation allowing a cheaper offering if the Nazirite was poor. The lesson can simply be that the fact we make what appears to be an 'extra' commitment to God's service doesn't thereby free us from being obedient to His principles in other areas. Our commitments are all the same to be governed by His principles. The costly sacrifice required at the end of the Nazirite vow was perhaps to teach that the person wishing to take the vow must take this into account to begin with when considering making the vow- hence the teaching that a vow should not be made rashly (Prov. 20:25). The sin offering (:14) suggests the principle of Lk. 17:10 was being taught here- "When you shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants". There was to be no spiritual pride in commitment made apparently over and above God's minimal requirements. The language of "have done all those things which are commanded" recalls the language of the priests and Moses doing all things which were commanded them

under the old covenant (Ex. 29:35; Lev. 8:36; Dt. 1:18). Lk. 17:10 would therefore be hinting that even complete obedience to God's law was not of itself enough to make a man profitable unto God, which was something Job likewise concluded (Job 22:2). And the legislation about concluding the Nazarite vow was teaching the same. Over Israel's extra-Biblical history, the Nazirite vow became abused into part of a bargain with God. Josephus records: "It is customary for those suffering from illness or other affliction to make a vow to abstain from wine and to shave their head during the thirty days preceding that on which they must offer their sacrifices" (*Wars* 2.15.1). And our mentality can be the same- we do freewill work or commitment to the Lord but with the unspoken understanding that if we do this, then He is somehow bound to help us in our need. But the spirit of the vow is of voluntary devotion to the Lord from a pure motive of gratitude.

Num 6:14 and he shall offer his offering to Yahweh, one male lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb a year old without blemish for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings-

No animal actually is without blemish. God recognizes that we will not attain perfection in this life, but we are to do our best towards it; and His love imputes righteousness to us, counting us as unblemished because of our status in Christ. For only Christ was the sacrifice totally without moral blemish (1 Pet. 1:19). So this looked ahead to the unblemished character of the Lord Jesus.

The offering of sacrifices "without blemish" uses a word which is used about Abraham and Noah being "without blemish" (AV "perfect") before God (Gen. 6:9; 17:1). Although the word is used about the sacrifices, it is really more appropriate to persons- "you shall be perfect with Yahweh your God" (Dt. 18:13), "serve Him in sincerity (s.w. "without blemish")" (Josh. 24:14). The idea, therefore, was that the offerer was invited to see the animal as representative of himself. Our lives too are to be as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1). And yet in practical terms, no animal is without blemish. They were to give the best they could, and God would count it as without blemish; as He does with us. David frequently uses the term in the Psalms about himself and the "upright", even though he was far from unblemished in moral terms.

Num 6:15 and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and their grain offering, and their drink offerings-

These points are laboured, lest the Nazirite think that because he had made a freewill devotion to God, he was somehow free to make the offerings at the end of the period in a slapdash way. This is quite a theme of the Mosaic law, and is an abiding principle- that freewill 'extra' devotions to the Lord don't free us from observing His standards and requirements.

Num 6:16 The priest shall present them before Yahweh, and shall offer his sin offering, and his burnt offering-

The need for a sin offering at the end of his period of dedication was maybe to remind him that his extra special devotion didn't take away his sin and need for grace;

for relationship with God depends upon this rather than upon our works and special efforts. Again, we can take that principle to ourselves in our age.

Num 6:17 He shall offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings to Yahweh, with the basket of unleavened bread. The priest shall offer also its grain offering, and its drink offering-

Judaism allowed people to enable others to be Nazirites by bearing the expenses of these sacrifices. It could be argued that this was a departure from the letter of the law here. But Paul went along with it (Acts 21:23-26) because it was in the spirit of the law.

Num 6:18 The Nazirite shall shave the head of his separation at the door of the Tent of Meeting, and shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and put it on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings-

"The fire" refers to the fire of the altar which was ideally intended to be that kindled at the time of Lev. 9:24 when the tabernacle was consecrated. It was to be kept perpetually burning by the sacrifices being continually placed upon it, a lamb every morning and every evening. The fire which never went out or was 'quenched' (Lev. 6:13). is a double symbol. The phrase is used multiple times with reference to the wrath of God in condemning sinners; it is the basis of the idea of eternal fire which will not be quenched. Rather like the cup of wine from the Lord being a symbol of either condemnation or blessing. So we have a choice- be consumed by the eternal fire now as living sacrifices, or be consumed by it anyway at the last day.

Num 6:19 The priest shall take the boiled shoulder of the ram, and one unleavened cake out of the basket, and one unleavened wafer, and shall put them on the hands of the Nazirite, after he has shaved the head of his separation-

The idea is that the priest's hands were to be over the hands of the offerer when these things were waved or swung before Yahweh; see on :20.

Num 6:20 and the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before Yahweh. This is holy for the priest, together with the breast that is waved and the thigh that is offered. After that the Nazirite may drink wine-

The portion to be waved was placed on the priests hands (Ex. 29:25), and then 'waved' or 'swung' towards the altar and then back- not from right to left. The idea was that the offerings were first given to God, recognizing they should be consumed on the altar to God; but then given back to the priest by God. So they ate them having first recognized that their food was really God's, all was of Him, and He had given it back to them to eat. This should be our spirit in partaking of any food, as we are the new priesthood. Our prayers of thanks for daily food should include this feature. All things are God's and anything we 'offer' to Him is only giving Him what He has given to us (1 Chron. 29:14,16).

Num 6:21 This is the law of the Nazirite who vows, and of his offering to Yahweh for his separation, besides that which he is able to put his hand on. According to his vow which he vows, so he must do after the law of his separation'-

The implication might be that a person was to do as undertaken in the Nazirite vow. Likewise we read of detailed consequences if a person vowed to Yahweh and then changed their mind. Commitment to Him was not to be entered into lightly, and never for the sake of mere appearance before men.

Num 6:22 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

Within the Pentateuch, the idea of blessing creation paves the way for God promising to “bless” the children of Abraham, and the blessings upon them with which Deuteronomy concludes (see too Lev. 9:22; Num. 6:22-24). The pagan creation stories sometimes spoke of the things created by the gods then blessing *them*. The Sumerians recorded that at ‘creation’, “The whole universe, the people in unison, to Enlil in one tongue gave praise”. But the true God, the God of all grace, not only creates His people and other creatures, but then blesses *them*! And the spirit of that grace should be seen in all our relationships. The Sumerian and Babylonian myths speak of people being created in order to serve the gods, “to bear the yoke of the gods” (S.G.F. Brandon), to relieve them in their everyday work. But the Genesis creation has God creating man and giving him great freedom, and blessing him.

Num 6:23 Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, ‘This is how you shall bless the children of Israel’. You shall tell them-

Prayer is no simply specific words of request to God. When the priests in Hezekiah's time blessed the people, “their prayer came up to (God), even unto heaven” (2

Chron. 30:27). But the blessing of the people was not a prayer to God, but words spoken by the priests to the people: "(May) The Lord bless you, and keep you: the Lord make his face shine upon you..." (Num. 6:24,25). Yet God saw these words of the priests as a prayer. It's rather like us saying 'God bless you' to a brother as we leave his house; God may read this as a prayer, and do something about it. But this isn't how *we* conceive of prayer. Consider too how the faithful speaking spiritually *to each other* was treated by God as a prayer to Him (Mal. 3:16).

The following blessing could be understood as a specific blessing upon the Nazirite, and yet it appears a standard blessing of all the people. This was because it was God's intention that all the people should be as Nazirites to Him. And the allusions to the Nazirite vow in the New Testament likewise suggest all Christians are to live in the spirit of the Nazirite vow.

Num 6:24 'Yahweh bless you-

Blessing is so often associated with forgiveness of sins, and 'keeping' often refers to being kept in the way to life. We see here the possibility of forgiveness for the sake of the prayer and blessing of a third party, in this case the priests who were blessing the people. There's another example in Mk. 2:5; James 5:20. It could be that the reference to blessing is a desire for the promised blessings to Abraham to come true, and they involved keeping Israel in the way to the Kingdom, and giving them grace. This is how those promises are often interpreted in the New Testament.

And keep you-

This is the word so often used for "diligently observing" Yahweh's commandments is from the word meaning a thorn hedge; the idea originally was to hedge in. Taking this too literally led Judaism to all their endless fences around the law, i.e. forbidding this or that because it might lead to doing that or this, which in turn would then lead to breaking an actual commandment. And those various fences become elevated to the level of commandments. But this is not the idea. We are indeed to hedge ourselves in ("take heed to yourself", Dt. 11:16; 12:13,19,30,32 s.w.), so that we may keep / hedge ourselves in to keep the commandments of God (Lev. 18:4,5,26,30; 19:19,37; 20:8,22; 22:9,31; 25:18; 26:3; Num. 28:2; Dt. 7:11,12; 8:1,11 [s.w. "beware"]; 10:13; 11:1,8,22,32; 12:1; 13:4,18; ; 15:5,9 ["beware"]; 17:19; 19:9; 23:9 ["keep yourself"]; 24:8; 26:16-18; 27:1; 28:1,9,13; 29:9; 30:10,16; 31:12; 32:46). And without falling into the legalism of Judaism, self discipline does require a degree of fencing ourselves in to the one way. Thus the man struggling with alcoholism avoids the supermarket where alcohol is pushed in front of the eyes of the shoppers; the married woman struggling with attraction to another man makes little laws for herself about avoiding his company. And if we do this, then the Lord will "keep" us, will hedge us in to keeping His way (s.w. Num. 6:24).

Num 6:25 Yahweh make His face to shine on you, and be gracious to you-

God's face shining suggests fellowship and acceptance with Him. The receipt of God's grace can therefore be possible on account of the work and wish of a third party; see on :24. This has huge implications for our pastoral work and prayer life in connection with others.

Moses couldn't see the direct glory / face of God, he was covered by God's hand and only saw God's back. Perhaps this in turn is reflected by how God hid His glory from Israel through the veil on Moses' face. But thereby they were encouraged to aspire to the place of Moses on the mountain, hidden from God's full glory but nonetheless seeing some of it. It cannot be that the High Priestly blessing lacks reference to Moses' shining face: "May Yahweh make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you" (Num. 6:25). The shining of His face spoke of the experience of grace, just as the revelation of God's Name and physical glory to Moses had spoken of His grace to Israel, forgiving the impenitent, those who had committed adultery on their wedding night to Yahweh. And He thereby gave them peace, the peace from knowing His grace and forgiveness. Ps. 80:4 connects the shining of God's face with restoration and salvation- which is the exact context here, where the covenant has been restored by grace and Israel saved from destruction as God's people: "O God, restore us! And make your face shine that we might be saved!". But the vision of that face, that grace, was veiled to them. The High Priestly blessing was therefore a wish that they would see beyond the veil to Yahweh's actual glory, and not be scared by grace. This wish and intention comes to

full term in our beholding with unveiled face the glory of the Lord Jesus, far greater than the glory Moses saw.

Num 6:26 Yahweh lift up His face toward you, and give you peace'-

Peace is so often peace with God through forgiveness, as a result of which Yahweh's face can as it were be felt. But this was due to the blessing of third parties, the priests. See on :24,25. Moses had been shown that Yahweh's face could not be seen. But here and in :25 there is the promise of beholding His face. Perhaps there is therefore implicit in this language the promise of being blessed and directed on their daily journeys to the end that finally, in the Kingdom, they would literally behold His face. This is the end destination of our every step through the wilderness.

Num 6:27 So they shall put My name on the children of Israel; and I will bless them-

As noted on :24-26, the priests were wishing for Israel to be blessed with forgiveness and thereby fellowship with God, and His final salvation- seeing His face. But this would only be due to righteousness being imputed to them. All the great things of His Name, His characteristics, were to be counted to them, through His Name being placed upon them. We experience the same through baptism into the Name and abide in it.

The vulnerability and sensitivity of God is reflected in the way that He is concerned that His covenant people, His wife, who bears His Name, might profane His Name (Lev. 19:12; Ex. 20:7; Dt. 5:11). His repeated concern that His Name be taken in vain doesn't simply

refer to the casual use of the word "God" as an expression of exasperation. God is concerned about His people taking His Name upon themselves (Num. 6:27) in vain—i.e., marrying Him, entering covenant relationship with Him, taking on His Name— but not being serious about that relationship, taking it on as a vain thing, like a woman who casually marries a man who loves her at the very core of his being, when for her, it's just a casual thing and she lives a profligate and adulterous life as his wife. When God revealed His Name to His people, opening up the very essence of His character to them, He was making Himself vulnerable. We reveal ourselves intimately to another because we wish for them to make a response to us, to love us for what we revealed to them. God revealed Himself to Israel, He sought for intimacy in the covenant relationship, and therefore was and is all the more hurt when His people turn away from Him, after having revealed to them all the wonders of His word (Hos. 8:12).

NUMBERS CHAPTER 7

Num 7:1 It happened on the day-

"Day" can mean the general time; because the tabernacle was first set up on the first day of the first month of the second year after the exodus (Ex. 40:2). In this case, these events would follow on from the end of Lev. 9:24. We note from Num. 1:1 that the events in Numbers apparently occurred after this point; but Hebrew writing is rarely chronological in a linear sense. But the Rabbis like to think that it was erected several times, and even claim that the tabernacle at this point assembled itself. Heb. 8:2 could perhaps allude to that belief.

That Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, and had anointed it and made it holy, with all its furniture, and the altar with all its vessels, and had anointed and sanctified them-

Raising up or setting up the tabernacle is an idea used by the Lord Jesus with reference to His resurrection (Jn. 2:19). Just as the setting up of the tabernacle elicited freewill offerings, recorded in great detail in this chapter, so we should likewise respond with freewill offerings because of His resurrection. This continues the theme of Num. 6 which is also of freewill devotion. The imagery of setting up a tabernacle could suggest that Israel were now the bride of God beneath the marriage canopy.

Num 7:2 that the princes of Israel, the heads of their fathers' families, offered. These were the princes of the tribes. These are they who were over those who were numbered-

Continuing the voluntary spirit of the Nazirite vow explained in chapter 6, we read that the heads of the tribes now offered a voluntary offering. They weren't commanded to bring these things; they chose to bring them. The constant repetition of chapter 7 can seem boring, but the point is that God remembered their freewill offerings, in every detail; and recorded and preserved them for millennia. He likewise remembers all our sacrifices for His sake (Ps. 20:3). These princes of the tribes were the same officers over Israel who were beaten by the Egyptians for failing to produce the required number of bricks.

Num 7:3 and they brought their offering before Yahweh, six covered wagons, and twelve oxen - a wagon for every two of the princes, and for each one an ox - and they presented them before the tabernacle-

The six rather than twelve wagons could be a reflection of the difficulty in making wheels and wagons given their limited resources in the desert. "Before Yahweh" is parallel with "before the tabernacle"; to come 'before Yahweh', as we learn in Job 1, doesn't refer to Heaven itself. His representatives and place of manifestation are 'Him', although not He Himself in person. Hence the Lord Jesus functioned as God's representative and presence, the true tabernacle which God pitched and not man (Heb. 8:2), without being God Himself in a Trinitarian sense.

Num 7:4 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

"Accept these..." (:5) could be a signal from God that the wagons could be used for transporting parts of the

tabernacle, rather than always carrying everything on poles on shoulders. For most parts of the tabernacle were designed to be carried on poles [not just the ark]. But that concession to human weakness, as so often, was abused by David and Uzzah when the ark was brought to Zion. And that is the problem of making eager use of concessions to human weakness.

Num 7:5 Accept these from them that they may be used in doing the service of the Tent of Meeting; and you shall give them to the Levites, to every man according to his service-

This suggests the wagons were used to carry the heavier items, because they were according to the ministry needs of the Levites. And yet the ark was not to be carried on a wagon but on poles carried on the shoulders. Perhaps David willfully misinterpreted this as allowing him to transport the ark upon a wagon.

Num 7:6 Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites-

The same words for wagon and oxen are used of how David allowed the ark to be carried on a wagon pulled by oxen (2 Sam. 6:3), and was judged harshly for this. See on :9. The Philistines also used wagon and oxen to transport the ark (1 Sam. 6:8-14) but there is no recorded judgment upon them for doing so, although this was not God's requirement. The ark was to be carried, not placed on a wagon (:9). We see here the principle that knowledge brings responsibility to Divine judgment.

Num 7:7 He gave two wagons and four oxen to the sons of Gershon, according to their service-

They had fewer wagons because they 'only' had to carry the curtains and hangings (Num. 4:25). God foresees the needs we will have in doing our intended service for Him, and provides- but He provides what is needed and not a luxurious life.

Num 7:8 and he gave four wagons and eight oxen to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest-

They had more wagons because they had to carry heavier items (Num. 4:31,32). See on :7.

Num 7:9 But to the sons of Kohath he gave none, because the service of the sanctuary belonged to them: they carried it on their shoulders-

Significantly, David carried the ark on a wagon rather than have it carried on shoulders as commanded. One wonders whether his slip in this matter was because the Kohathites had resented seeing how their brothers got to transport their parts of the tabernacle in wagons, whereas they had to carry their parts on their shoulders; and therefore they began to use wagons, because their brother did. We can also too easily do what our brothers do, and for us it can become sin, because we each have an individual calling. What may be permissible for them may not be for us. The fact they do it doesn't mean we can, because our context and calling is different from theirs.

Num 7:10 The princes gave offerings for the dedication of the altar in the day that it was anointed, even the princes gave their offerings before the altar-

See on :10. They originally all wanted to offer on the altar on that same first day. The altar had been anointed and sanctified by God (:1); they desired to dedicate it by responding to that. It's not that it was not sanctified without their offerings. It was ready for use. God doesn't require sacrifice in that sense; all was prepared. But our response to that it is to sacrifice.

Num 7:11 Yahweh said to Moses, They shall offer their offering, each prince on his day, for the dedication of the altar-

The implication could be that they all wanted to offer their offering on the altar on the same day; but God didn't want there to be a group psychology in devotion to Him, and so He made them each offer quite separately from each other, on separate days. We must ask how much group psychology there is in our Christian lives. Did we get baptized because a whole group did? Did we pledge financial support to an appeal because others were doing so? Do we attend church because that is what our social group do?

Num 7:12 He who offered his offering the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah-

He was brother-in-law of Aaron (Ex. 6:23), and yet also married to Rahab in order to be the ancestor of David and the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:4). He was one of the points at which the lines of Judah and Levi converged in the Lord's genealogy, appropriate for Him as a king-priest.

Num 7:13 and his offering was: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one

silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering

The "plate" was more likely a bowl, full of flour.

Num 7:14 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

The word for "spoon" also means a censer, which is why it had incense in it. But gold was not a good material for a censer. Yet they wanted to serve God to as high a quality as possible. This would be another instance of where the materials of the tabernacle, such as acacia wood and gold censers, were not the most functional by secular standards. But this isn't how God operates. He uses the dysfunctional, the hard to work with, in order to do His work in this world. Just look at you and me if you need any more evidence of that.

Num 7:15 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

This was to remind them that the Passover deliverance through the lamb was effectively ongoing. The Passover lamb was likewise to be a year old (Ex. 12:5). We too are to live constantly under the impression of the Lord's sacrifice and redemption of us. Israel were asked to use a lamb of the first year to record various times when they should be thankful for God's redemption of them in the events which comprise life (Lev. 9:3; 12:6; 23:12,18,19; Num. 6:12,14; 7:15,17,21; 28:3,9,11,19; 29:2,8,13). This was to continually recall to them the events of their great redemption through the Red Sea. And the essence of our redemption, our baptism and sal-

vation through the blood of the lamb, must likewise be brought ever before us.

Num 7:16 one male goat for a sin offering-

Just as the Nazirite had to make a sin offering at the end of his period of devotion (Num. 6:16). The need for a sin offering at the end of the special freewill devotion was maybe to remind them that their extra special devotion didn't take away the reality of sin and need for grace; for relationship with God depends upon this rather than upon our works and special efforts. Again, we can take that principle to ourselves in our age.

Num 7:17 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadab-

The usual order of offering was sin offering, then burnt offering [speaking of subsequent dedication to God for His grace in forgiving the offerer] and then the peace offering to celebrate peace with God. But here the order is different. The burnt offering was representative of the freewill gift being made to God; but then there was to be the sin offering, reminding them of the reality of human sin regardless of our freewill devotion to God; and then the peace offering celebrating peace with God on that basis.

Num 7:18 On the second day Nethanel the son of Zuar, prince of Issachar, gave his offering-

'God has given' suggests that he was named in faith that the promised land would indeed be given to Israel.

Num 7:19 He offered for his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

The plate / dish and bowl were full of flour. This was offered on their initiative. But they were perhaps out of step with how in the tabernacle, the beakers, cups and vessels on Yahweh's table remained empty (Ex. 25:29); the wine was poured out onto the sacrifices and vaporized; the priests ate the shewbread. There was no pretence that Yahweh was a hungry god who needed to be fed by His worshippers. To the pagan mind, this would've meant that if He didn't eat, He wasn't actually around nor powerful. Again, the difference and similarities were intentional, in order to point up the need for faith in the power and existence of Yahweh. Yahweh had a "table". The Mesopotamian gods likewise had a table (*passuru*) upon which food was placed as a meal for the god (as in Is. 65:11), on the assumption that their god was hungry.

Num 7:20 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

It could be that they brought to the altar all the various categories of things which would be offered to God in the tabernacle.

Num 7:21 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

The princes all offered identical offerings, perhaps because God wanted them to understand that they all had a sense of equal gratitude to Him.

Num 7:22 one male goat for a sin offering-

If as suggested on :23 each prince resourced these offerings themselves, then the identical offerings were commanded by God- lest there should arise any competition between the princes, with one prince offering more than another.

Num 7:23 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Nethanel the son of Zuar-

It could be reasoned from "this was the offering of..." that the princes made these offerings not on behalf of the tribes, but from their own wealth.

Num 7:24 On the third day Eliab the son of Helon, prince of the children of Zebulun-

We note how most of the names feature the 'El' suffix and not 'Yah' or 'Iah'. This is understandable, for Moses declared the Name of Yahweh to the people after most of these men had been born. This kind of artless internal corroboration is to me one of the strongest arguments for the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Num 7:25 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was a hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

The idea of the bowl may have been that it could later be used for receiving the blood of the sacrifices. But

Yahweh had stipulated precisely all that was needed for His tabernacle. This was at this initiative.

Num 7:26 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

If the various gifts were all representative of the kinds of gifts which would be offered upon the altar they were now dedicating (:11), we wonder why they brought incense- because that was only to be offered upon the altar of incense, not that of burnt offering. Perhaps they were suggesting that incense would also be offered with the sacrifices made on the altar of burnt offering, an example of going beyond the letter of the law to a higher level.

Num 7:27 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

Had all the animals been offered on the same day as the princes initially desired (:10,11), then these animals would not have all been eaten by the serving Levites as there would have been too many. Pointless huge generosity is not particularly what God is looking for; He wanted the Levites to eat well over this 12 day period in symbol of His acceptance of His people and fellowship with their offerings.

Num 7:28 one male goat for a sin offering-

A goat being chosen for the sin offering tempts us to think of the Lord's usage of sheep and goats as representing the righteous and the sinners. The Lord Jesus, the ultimate sin offering, was in one sense the spotless Passover lamb of God; in another sense, He was totally identified with the goats- sinful, rejected humanity. Likewise He was represented by the serpent lifted up on the pole.

Num 7:29 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Eliab the son of Helon-

Each prince offered 21 animals in total, and there were 12 princes, making a total of 252 animals. When the princes rebelled, the 250 rebellious princes were asked to bring their censers before Yahweh, along with the censers of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:17), making a total of 252 censers. That this number is again associated with the princes of Israel cannot surely be chance. There is the simple message that the hand of God was present throughout the whole narrative. See on :62.

Num 7:30 On the fourth day Elizur the son of Shedeur, prince of the children of Reuben-

"Elizur", 'God is my rock', is a name indicating faith that God would indeed be a rock to Israel. And probably these were names which were taken by choice rather than birth names. But Israel turned back from entering Canaan; their leaders had the names of faith but in reality their faith was weak. And we must ask ourselves whether that is the case with us, having a name that we spiritually live when we are dead.

Num 7:31 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

There were various definitions of a shekel; our valuation and weighting of things is to be by His standards and not those of the secular world.

Num 7:32 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

Incense represented prayer (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 8:3,4), which is to accompany all our freewill offerings and initiatives in God's service.

Num 7:33 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

According to Num. 28:14 these would have been accompanied by "Half a hin of wine for a bull, and the third part of a hin for the ram, and the fourth part of a hin for a lamb".

Num 7:34 one male goat for a sin offering-

The extreme repetition in the record is perhaps reflective of God's sensitivity to freewill offerings; and perhaps this is why the account concludes with the otherwise apparently disjointed account of His speaking from the mercy seat with His own voice (:89) in response to all this.

Num 7:35 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Elizur the son of Shedeur-

The order in which the tribes offered is according to their encampment around the tabernacle, passing east, south, west and finally north: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun (East), Reuben, Simeon, Gad (south), Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin (west), Dan,

Asher and Naphtali (north).

Num 7:36 On the fifth day Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, prince of the children of Simeon-

"God's peace" son of "The Almighty is my rock" could reflect a faithful family, especially considering that Israel were idolaters in Egypt, and carried the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:6-8) and also the tabernacle of Moloch as well as that of Yahweh, the star of Remphan as well as the standards of their tribes (Acts 7:43).

Num 7:37 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

130 shekels weighed only 3.2 lbs. (1.5 kg.), so it was a relatively small plate / dish.

Num 7:38 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

Ten shekels weighed only 2 lbs. or 100 grams. So this refers to the weight of the incense not the spoon.

Num 7:39 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

The lamb was to be male because the male was of higher value on the secular market- not because God Himself valued females less. Likewise the bull was to be "young", not because God values older things or people less, but quite simply the young bull was worth more in secular terms than an older bull.

Num 7:40 one male goat for a sin offering-

AV "one kid of the goats". "Of the goats" continues the common Mosaic theme, that the animal was not to be raised specially for sacrifice but was to be taken out of the herd, it was one "of" them. This looks ahead to the human nature of the Lord Jesus as one of us, taken "of" the herd of humanity.

Num 7:41 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai-

If we take the order of the tribes as listed in this chapter [which follows the order of encampment], the meaning of their names makes a sentence, which H.P. Mansfield suggests as follows: "Praise Him! for the reward of dwelling with Him, in seeing the Son, of hearing him in company of firstborns (double fruit), who forgetting the flesh join the Son of the right hand. At the judgment he will confer blessings upon those who have wrestled successfully".

Num 7:42 On the sixth day, Eliasaph the son of Deuel, prince of the children of Gad-

Deuel is better Reuel as in Num. 2:14. The Hebrew letters for 'D' and 'R' are easily confused; so here we have an example of slight copying errors in the original texts. But these in no way negate the overall Divine inspiration of the texts.

Num 7:43 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctu-

ary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

70 shekels weighed only 1.7 lbs. (0.8kg.), so it was a relatively small bowl.

Num 7:44 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

The incense, representing prayer (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 8:3,4), would have been burnt on the incense altar. The smell would have come through to the most holy place, where Yahweh dwelt between the cherubim. This symbolized how prayer enters into heaven itself, into the very presence of God. Passing through the veil suggests the role of the Lord Jesus in our prayers (Heb. 10:20).

Num 7:45 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

We must remember that "In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure" (Heb. 10:6). Perhaps God came to change His attitude about the sacrifices as time went on and Israel refused to learn from them. Or perhaps He felt like this all along, but only instituted them as a concession to the weakness of Israel's religious conscience. They were used to religion, having lived so long in Egypt; and He wished to give them something which met their religious conscience and desire to sacrifice, even if it was far from what He Himself personally wished for. Such is His sensitivity and deep concession to human weakness.

Num 7:46 one male goat for a sin offering-

The male element in sacrifice was not because God considered the female as lesser. The fact was, male an-

imals were worth more than female, and so God goes along with that and they offer the more expensive to Him. Just as we are to offer what is seen as best within our own worldview and social situation.

Num 7:47 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Eliasaph the son of Deuel-

Apart from what is noted on :46, the male nature of the sacrifices could be because they pointed forward to the Lord Jesus.

Num 7:48 On the seventh day Elishama the son of Ammihud, prince of the children of Ephraim-

This day, or at least one of these days, would have been the Sabbath. But God is no literalist nor legalist, and there is no note to the effect that this work was not done on the Sabbath.

Num 7:49 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

As noted on :37,38,43, these items were not that heavy nor large. The princes of the tribes were making moderate offerings, because God didn't want huge amounts of things, but rather sincere heartfelt freewill from a person, regardless of their wealth.

Num 7:50 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

The continual burning of incense, night and day, was a reminder that prayer (cp. incense, Rev. 8:3,4) was a way of life, not only specific statements. David's references to making constant prayer (e.g. Ps. 88:1) may allude to the constant rising up of the incense. We cannot be literally praying all the time, but our basic spirit of life can rise up as a prayer to God constantly. Our lives are, in a sense, our prayer.

Num 7:51 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

How are we to square God's apparent pleasure in sacrifices with Heb. 10:6 "In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure"? God did require them and was pleased they were given, but He had no desire for them in response to David's sin. David is everyman, worthy of death because of our wretched failure, with no animal sacrifice or ritual to save us. God did want sacrifices, but not for the sins David had committed concerning Uriah and Bathsheba. Heb. 10:8 explains further: "First he said: Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor did You have pleasure in them (all of which are offered according to the law)". Paul perceives that firstly, there was the statement that God did not desire animal sacrifices of themselves in order to remove sin; and secondly, the Lord Jesus came to do God's will, in a way which animals simply could not do. This division into first and second is pressed into a similarity with the first and second covenants, as noted on Heb. 9:1. God's desire was that sacrifice should be offered under the Old Covenant, but

this could not take away sin of itself. What He desired far more ['not A but B' can mean 'not so much A as B'] was the sacrifice of the One who did His will perfectly.

Num 7:52 one male goat for a sin offering-

See on :51.

Num 7:53 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Elishama the son of Ammihud-

Elishama was Joshua's grandfather (1 Chron. 7:26). "God who hears" reflects Moses' message that God had indeed heard the crying of the Israelites in Egypt. This was likely a name change after acceptance of Moses' teaching.

Num 7:54 On the eighth day Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, prince of the children of Manasseh-

"Gamaliel" is 'God is my reward', named in hope that the promised reward of the Kingdom would indeed be given.

Num 7:55 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

The spoon of "incense" which is described as following this (:56) may have been required in the spirit of Lev. 2:1: "When anyone offers an offering of a grain offering to Yahweh, his offering shall be of fine flour; and he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it". Frankincense was a type of incense which would have given a

pleasing smell to the burning flour. This represented how pleased God was with the offering even of a handful of flour (see on :67). Small sacrifices please Him immensely. And they are what comprise daily life.

Num 7:56 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

The commands for making this incense were very strict: "Yahweh said to Moses, Take to yourself sweet spices, gum resin, and onycha, and galbanum; sweet spices with pure frankincense: there shall be an equal weight of each; and you shall make incense of it, a perfume after the art of the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy: and you shall beat some of it very small, and put some of it before the testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be to you most holy. The incense which you shall make, according to its composition you shall not make for yourselves: it shall be to you holy for Yahweh. Whoever shall make any like that, to smell of it, he shall be cut off from his people" (Ex. 30:34-38). We wonder whether the princes really followed this in their enthusiasm to offer an impressive offering. But God still accepted their offering.

Num 7:57 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

As noted on :49, the items were not that heavy nor large; nor were the collective numbers of sacrifices that huge, and nothing compared to the huge slaughter of animals made by Solomon when he dedicated the temple. The princes of the tribes were making moderate offerings, because God didn't want huge amounts of things,

but rather sincere heartfelt freewill from a person, regardless of their wealth. Solomon failed to realize this, and can be read as wanting to purposefully far exceed what was offered here when the tabernacle was first dedicated.

Num 7:58 one male goat for a sin offering-

The Hebrew for "sin offering" is the same word translated "punishment". Atonement theories involving punishment, substitution etc. often go wrong and fail to adequately reflect the extent of God's grace. But it must never be overlooked that sin does require response; and the punishment for the sin was indeed placed upon the goat as a kind of substitute for the sinner in Old Testament times. But the far more effective sacrifice was that of the Lord Jesus, who died for sinners as a representative rather than a substitute.

Num 7:59 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Gamaliel the son of Pedabzur-

The Rabbis suggest Gamaliel may mean 'God liberated me from prison'. Manasseh was a grandson of Joseph, so perhaps his experiences are in view, as well as the liberation of Israel from Egypt.

Num 7:60 On the ninth day Abidan the son of Gideoni, prince of the children of Benjamin-

The names associated with the leadership of Benjamin and Naphtali (:78) stand out as not having any spiritual reference in them. Israel were very spiritually weak as they left Egypt and it is likely that the more

spiritual names we read of in this list were the result of name changes. But the leaders of these two tribes didn't do that.

Num 7:61 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

Such high value tableware may well have been given to the princes when they left Egypt. Whatever wealth they were then given was given them by God, and they were to give it back to God through the service of the tabernacle. And it's the same with whatever we may pick up from Egypt / the world.

Num 7:62 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

If indeed "spoon" effectively means a censer, then we have another connection between the princes, censers and incense- which all came to a head in their rebellion of Num. 16. See on :29.

Num 7:63 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

The Hebrew for "burnt offering" means literally 'a going up'. The word is used nearly 1000 times for people 'going up' in various ways. There were surely other words which could have been used to convey the idea of a burnt offering. But this one is used because it was ever God's intention to lead His people towards the understanding that the offerings represented them. Like us today, they were to be as living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1,2).

Num 7:64 one male goat for a sin offering-

The attitude of the Lord Jesus was that "Sacrifice and offering You did not want, but a body did You prepare for me. In whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure. Then said I: Behold, I come (in the roll of the book it is written about me) to do Your will, O God. First he said: Sacrifice and offering, burnt offerings, and offerings for sin You did not desire, nor did You have pleasure in them (all of which are offered according to the law)" (Heb. 10:5-8). This is strong language considering God did in fact require such offerings, and in practice He did offer forgiveness in response to them. Perhaps God came to change His attitude about the sacrifices as time went on and Israel refused to learn from them. Or perhaps He felt like this all along, but only instituted them as a concession to the weakness of Israel's religious conscience. They were used to religion, having lived so long in Egypt; and He wished to give them something which met their religious conscience and desire to sacrifice, even if it was far from what He Himself personally wished for. Such is His sensitivity and deep concession to human weakness.

Num 7:65 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Abidan the son of Gideoni-

Although peace offerings were completely voluntary, the legislation stressed they were not to think that therefore they could not respect God's holiness and give Him that which was second best (Lev. 3:6 etc.) or offer it

where they liked. Many of the sacrifices we make to God are likewise not compulsory, but the spirit of giving God the best which permeates the Law of Moses should remain with us. We may be able to deduce that peace offerings could be offered in other places, and there appear to be examples of that in later scripture; but if a lamb was offered, it must be "before Yahweh", seeing that the lamb particularly looked ahead to the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus "before Yahweh".

Num 7:66 On the tenth day Abiezer the son of Ammishaddai, prince of the children of Dan-

"Ammishaddai" means 'People of the Almighty', using the term *shaddai* which is often associated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He may well have been one of the faithful few who kept perceiving the vital separation of God's people from Egypt, whereas the majority in their hearts returned to Egypt and wished to assimilate with them in order to escape persecution and have what they imagined was a good life.

Num 7:67 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

Lev. 2:3 notes: "That which is left of the grain offering shall be Aaron's and his sons'. It is a most holy thing of the offerings of Yahweh made by fire". The language of "most holy" is juxtaposed against the fact that this was referring to a simple grain offering, a 'little something' offered by literally anyone within Israel (see on Lev. 2:1).

But such tiny offerings were "most holy" to God; we think of the Lord's attitude to the widow offering her two small coins. See on :55.

Num 7:68 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

The higher value of gold perhaps means that the spoons or censers with incense in them were of more value to God than the utensils for sacrifice which were donated; for they were made of silver. Because prayer is to Him of more value than sacrifice.

Num 7:69 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

The burnt offerings were to be of "a male without blemish" (Lev. 1:3). No animal actually is without blemish. God recognizes that we will not attain perfection in this life, but we are to do our best towards it; and His love imputes righteousness to us, counting us as unblemished because of our status in Christ. For only Christ was the sacrifice totally without moral blemish (1 Pet. 1:19). The thoughtful Israelite would have perceived that all the animals offered were not totally without blemish-for none was, upon minute examination. The requirement for a male sacrifice was not because God considered the female gender inferior; rather was it because He was asking that they offer their most valuable animal to Him, and not their least valuable. And male animals were more valuable than female.

Num 7:70 one male goat for a sin offering-

The sin offering required that the offerer placed his hand upon the head of the goat. But 'to lay the hand up-

on' is a phrase which means more than merely touching the head, but implies leaning upon or pushing upon. It is rendered "lean his hand [upon a wall]" (Am. 5:19). It was an act of very conscious identity. The same phrase is used of how God's hand upholds those who spiritually fall (Ps. 37:24). So we see the mutuality of relationship between God and man. We strongly place our hand upon the offering of the Lord Jesus, and God places His hand upon us. Paul may have this idea in view when he speaks of how he grabs hold of Jesus and is grabbed hold of by Jesus (Phil. 3:12); just as the Lord seized hold of Peter drowning in the lake, as Peter grabbed hold of Him. That incident surely was a mini parable of our redemption.

Num 7:71 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Abiezer the son of Ammishaddai-

The peace offering was the "food (also translated "bread") of the offering made... unto the Lord" (Lev. 3:11). The peace offering was therefore God's food, or bread. Yet the offerer was invited to eat the bread of God. This implied that when the offerer sat down to eat the food, as it were, God was sitting with him, also eating of it. This was symbolized in human terms by the fact that the priest, as God's representative, ate part of the peace offering, while the offerer ate the other part. Presumably they sat down together to do this. The closeness of God which this implies is almost beyond our comprehension. We are invited to see the exquisite beauty of

true fellowship with God. The idea of eating the bread of God, the sacrifice which represents His son, and thereby having fellowship with Him, should send our minds forward to John 6. "The bread of God is He which comes down from heaven", i.e. our Lord Jesus (Jn. 6:33). Not for nothing do some Rabbis speak of 'eating Messiah' as an expression of the fellowship they hope to have with Him at His coming.

Num 7:72 On the eleventh day Pagiel the son of Ochran, prince of the children of Asher-

Pagiel ['accident of God'] was son of Ochran, 'muddler'. As discussed on :78, people had multiple names and were known by the 'name' they carved for themselves in life, and the attitudes they had. God makes no accidents; so maybe in depression and bitterness this man felt like this, and was known for it. Hardly a great example to the tribe he was supposed to be leading. And indeed Asher all but disappears from Israel.

Num 7:73 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

Paul writes of the church in Corinth that God has "tempered" the whole body together (1 Cor. 12:24). This is alluding to the way in which the unleavened cakes of flour were "mixed" or "tempered" with the oil (cp. the Spirit) in order to be an acceptable offering (Lev. 2:4,5; 7:10; 9:4 etc.). Paul has already likened his Corinthian ecclesia to a lump of unleavened flour (1 Cor. 5:7); he

is now saying that they have been "tempered" together by the oil of God's Spirit. If we break apart from our brethren, we are breaking apart, or denying, that "tempering" of the body which God has made.

Num 7:74 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

The higher value of gold perhaps means that the spoons or censers with incense in them were of more value to God than the utensils for sacrifice which were donated; for they were made of silver. Because prayer is to Him of more value than sacrifice.

Num 7:75 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

The burnt offering was to be "without blemish" (Lev. 1:3). "Without blemish" was how Noah was (s.w. Gen. 6:9), and how God wished Abraham and all his seed to be (s.w. Gen. 17:1). We all fail to be perfect; blemishes remain. So perhaps the idea was that the animal represented how the offerer wished to be; but it was only an animal, not a man. And therefore the thought would have arisen that it must surely look forward to some perfect, unblemished human who was the representative of all men. And that was the need which was met in the death of the Lord Jesus. Lev. 1:3 continues about the burnt offering- the offerer personally "shall offer it at the door of the Tent of Meeting, that he may be accepted before Yahweh". The offerer personally was to bring it. It was not to be brought by someone else, for sacrifice was to involve personal engagement and not be performed as mere tokenistic ritual through a third party. And that

is an abiding principle. The offerer firstly had to enter through the gate into the court, before approaching the altar. The height of the gate meant that most would had to bow their heads. Humility was the first requirement, and this is what made sacrifice acceptable.

Num 7:76 one male goat for a sin offering-

The sin offering required that the offerer placed his hand upon the head of the goat. But 'to lay the hand upon' is a phrase which means more than merely touching the head, but implies leaning upon or pushing upon. It is rendered "lean his hand [upon a wall]" (Am. 5:19). It was an act of very conscious identity. The same phrase is used of how God's hand upholds those who spiritually fall (Ps. 37:24). So we see the mutuality of relationship between God and man. We strongly place our hand upon the offering of the Lord Jesus, and God places His hand upon us. Paul may have this idea in view when he speaks of how he grabs hold of Jesus and is grabbed hold of by Jesus (Phil. 3:12); just as the Lord seized hold of Peter drowning in the lake, as Peter grabbed hold of Him. That incident surely was a mini parable of our redemption.

Num 7:77 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Pagiel the son of Ochrans-

The peace offering was "the food of the offering made by fire to Yahweh" (Lev. 3:11). The metaphor invites us to see the altar as God's table, at which He as it were ate the sacrifices. At the breaking of bread service,

we come to the table of the Lord (1 Cor. 10:21); the offering we bring is ourselves. And yet God has placed on the altar, on the table before us, the sacrifice of His Son, and invites us to eat with Him there. Eating with someone was understood as a sign of religious fellowship. At the breaking of bread, we are therefore celebrating our living fellowship with God Himself.

Num 7:78 On the twelfth day Ahira the son of Enan, prince of the children of Naphtali-

What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names. The names associated with the leadership of Benjamin and Naphtali (:60) stand out as not having any spiritual reference in them. Israel were very spiritually weak as they left Egypt and it is likely that the more spiritual names we read of in this list were the result of name changes. But the leaders of these two tribes didn't do that.

Num 7:79 gave his offering: one silver plate, the weight of which was one hundred and thirty shekels, one silver bowl of seventy shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering-

The continual stress upon the usage of oil [*shehmen*] in the grain offerings (Lev. 2:7 etc.) may look ahead to the *meshiach*, the Christ, the anointed one. All aspects of the offerings looked ahead to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Num 7:80 one golden spoon of ten shekels, full of incense-

The higher value of gold perhaps means that the spoons or censers with incense in them were of more value to God than the utensils for sacrifice which were donated; for they were made of silver. Because prayer is to Him of more value than sacrifice.

Num 7:81 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb a year old, for a burnt offering-

The laws about the offerer of a burnt offering in Lev. 1:6 were presumably followed: "He shall flay the burnt offering, and cut it into pieces". Every part of our lives, including our most inward parts, are to be offered to God. The process of splitting the offering into its parts speaks of our self-examination, defining each part of our lives and offering them to God consciously.

Num 7:82 one male goat for a sin offering-

The sin offering required that the offerer placed his hand upon the head of the goat. But 'to lay the hand upon' is a phrase which means more than merely touching the head, but implies leaning upon or pushing upon. It is rendered "lean his hand [upon a wall]" (Am. 5:19). It was an act of very conscious identity. The same phrase is used of how God's hand upholds those who spiritually fall (Ps. 37:24). So we see the mutuality of relationship between God and man. We strongly place our hand upon the offering of the Lord Jesus, and God places His hand upon us. Paul may have this idea in view when he speaks of how he grabs hold of Jesus and is grabbed hold of by Jesus (Phil. 3:12); just as the Lord seized hold

of Peter drowning in the lake, as Peter grabbed hold of Him. That incident surely was a mini parable of our redemption.

Num 7:83 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two head of cattle, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs a year old. This was the offering of Ahira the son of Enan-

David rejoiced in God's mercy to him, perhaps in the context of his sin with Bathsheba. He asks: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his (spiritual) benefits toward me?". He decides that he will offer a peace offering: "I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving (the peace offering; Lev. 7:12)... I will take the cup of salvation... I will pay my vows... in the presence of all his people... in the courts of the Lord's house". As we sit "before the Lord" at the memorial meeting, beholding the cross of Christ and the blood of Calvary, we should be intensely aware of God's great benefits towards us: our salvation assured, sin forgiven, peace with God. Our response should be to renew our vows joyfully, in the ecclesia, God's house, in the presence of His people, as we eat the peace offering, the sacrifice of thanksgiving. As the peace offering was to be offered publicly, "before the tabernacle of the congregation" (Lev. 3:13), so in the sight of each other we too renew our vows and express our peace with God. And if we are all at peace with God, we should therefore be at peace with each other.

Num 7:84 This was the dedication of the altar, on the day when it was anointed, by the princes of Israel: twelve silver plates, twelve silver bowls, twelve golden spoons-

The higher value of gold perhaps means that the spoons or censers with incense in them were of more value to God than the utensils for sacrifice which were donated; for they were made of silver. Because prayer is to Him of more value than sacrifice.

Num 7:85 each silver plate weighing one hundred and thirty shekels, and each bowl seventy; all the silver of the vessels two thousand four hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary-

The extreme repetition in the record is perhaps reflective of God's sensitivity to freewill offerings; and perhaps this is why the account concludes with the otherwise apparently disjointed account of His speaking from the mercy seat with His own voice (:89) in response to all this.

Num 7:86 the twelve golden spoons, full of incense, weighing ten shekels apiece, after the shekel of the sanctuary; all the gold of the spoons weighed one hundred and twenty shekels-

They were either very small spoons, or the weight refers to the amount of incense rather than the spoons themselves. Ten shekels of the sanctuary weighed only 2 lbs. or 100 grams.

Num 7:87 All the cattle for the burnt offering: twelve bulls, the rams twelve, the male lambs a year old twelve, and their grain offering; and the male goats for a sin offering twelve-

The apparent tension with the statements that God took no pleasure in animal sacrifice is discussed on :44,45,51.

Num 7:88 and all the cattle for the sacrifice of peace offerings: twenty-four bulls, the rams sixty, the male goats sixty, the year old male lambs sixty. This was the dedication of the altar, after it was anointed-

The apparent tension with the statements that God took no pleasure in animal sacrifice is discussed on :44,45,51.

Num 7:89 When Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with Yahweh, he heard His voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the Testimony, from between the two cherubim: and He spoke to him-

The blood of Christ speaks a message, better than that of Abel. It is a voice that shakes heaven and earth (Heb. 12:24,26). This is after the pattern of how the commanding voice of Yahweh was heard above the blood sprinkled on “the atonement cover of the ark of the Testimony” (Num. 7:89 NIV). It shows forth, as a voice, God’s righteousness (Rom. 3:25,26 RV).

The blood of atonement, pointing forward to the blood of Christ, was permanently on the mercy seat, i.e. the cover of the ark of the covenant, with the Angel-like cherubim peering down onto it. There in that most Holy of places, God spoke. The fact that the voice of God was associated with the blood which represented the blood of His Son is alluded to in Heb. 12:24-26, which likens the blood of Christ to a voice more powerful than the sound which accompanied the shaking of Sinai. God’s word becomes powerful to us over the blood of Christ in that beholding Him there, we cannot walk away pas-

sively. We are spurred to action. Yet as we behold His blood in our mind's eye, in our reconstruction of how it all maybe happened on Golgotha, we face an insistent question: What can I do, what must I do, in response to this? That question is answered in God's word, and it is in this sense that His word becomes of especial power to us over the blood of Christ. In this sense He is that word made flesh, supremely in His time of dying.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 8

Num 8:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

This commandment to the tribe of Levi follows straight on from the description in Num. 7 of the other tribes dedicating the altar. Now the tribe of Levi were to play their part.

Num 8:2 Speak to Aaron, and tell him, 'When you light the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light in front of the lampstand'-

The lampstand faced towards the most holy place. There was no natural light in the tabernacle. The lampstand is used as a symbol of the church in Rev. 1:20. We are "the light of the world" in that we provide light which points men towards entrance into the holiest. Hence the lamps were to give light "in front of the lampstand", pointing toward the holiest and the veil which was later brought down at the Lord's death. Now the tabernacle had been set up, this command to light the lamps was equivalent to "Let there be light" at creation.

Num 8:3 Aaron did so. He lit its lamps to light the area in front of the lampstand, as Yahweh commanded Moses-

"The candlestick" or menorah is only ever spoken of in the law of Moses in the singular, but in 1 Chron. 28:15 David decided there were to be multiple such candlesticks. By doing so, he ignored the symbolism of the one candlestick, the one people of God; such was his obsession with mere religion. The lampstand represents

God's people (Rev. 1:20), and it had seven lamps; the six branches and the central stem, upon which there was also a lamp. Seven is the number of wholeness and completion. Perhaps the idea is that there is to be a complete manifestation of God through the witness of His people, burning the oil of the Spirit. Each component member witnesses to Him in a slightly different way, not only in this life but throughout the generations of God's people. Likewise the body of Christ in the same way manifests Christ to the world. The *menorah* or "candlestick" is from a root meaning to yoke. In the Christian context, the yoke, the uniting power, is the Lord Jesus (Mt. 11:30). He is the unique power which binds together His otherwise disparate people into one candlestick. Thereby Christian unity becomes a witness to the world, at least that is the intention. All disunity between believers therefore causes the candlestick not to function, and the light of witness is thereby the less.

Num 8:4 This was the workmanship of the lampstand, beaten work of gold-

The candlestick represents the assembly of believers (Rev. 1:20). It was made of beaten work, representing how all those in the true church will be beaten into a shape through which they can be lights for God. "Hammered" or "beaten" suggests that through blow by blow on material heated in the furnace of affliction (Is. 48:10), God works out a place where His glory may be revealed. And that place is our lives.

From its base to its flowers, it was beaten work: according to the pattern which Yahweh had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand-

The lampstand represents God's people (Rev. 1:20), but it is presented here as a tree with branches, buds and blossoms (Ex. 25:33). In this sense the ecclesia, the community of believers, is to be as the tree of life to others by their words (Prov. 3:18; 11:30; 15:4).

The "flowers" were almonds (Ex. 25:33). The almond is the first tree in Palestine to bud, so it means literally the watching tree, as if it were alive and eager to come to life. So it is appropriate for the candlestick, which represented God's people. Jeremiah sees the branch of an almond tree and is comforted that "I watch over My word to perform it" (Jer. 1:11,12). The word translated 'hasten' or "watch over" is very similar to the word for 'almond'. Almonds are associated with God's eyes; the bowls of the lampstands were almonds (Ex. 25:33,34). Zech. 4:2 talks about these almond bowls on the candlestick, and Zech. 4:10 interprets them as the "eyes of the LORD which run to and fro through the whole earth". 2 Chron. 16:9 talks about the Angels in the same way; "the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him". Similarly in Rev. 4:5 the lamps in the bowls of almond are equated with the "seven spirits (or Angels) of God". Rev. 5:6 equates the seven eyes with the seven spirits. Thus the almond rod which Jeremiah saw represented God's eyes or Angels who would watch over the word of God which Jeremiah was to speak to

perform it. And He does likewise with the witness of all those represented within the candlestick.

Num 8:5 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

This gives more detail about the dedication of the Levites in Num. 3:5-13.

Num 8:6 Take the Levites from among the children of Israel, and cleanse them-

The Levites and priests weren't part-timers. They gave their lives to God in recognition of the fact that God had saved the lives of the firstborn at the Passover and Red Sea deliverance (Num. 3:12). Our deliverance from the world at baptism was our Red Sea. We have been saved. Those firstborns represent us, the ecclesia of firstborns (Heb. 12:23 Gk.). We are now being led towards that glorious Kingdom, when by rights we ought to be lying dead in that dark Egyptian night. The wonder of it all demands that like the Levites, we give our lives *back* to God, in service towards His children.

Num 8:7 You shall do this to them, to cleanse them: sprinkle the water of cleansing on them, let them shave their whole bodies with a razor, and let them wash their clothes, and cleanse themselves-

Washing and becoming like new born children, with no body hair, looks forward to baptism. We're not baptized just for the sake of it; we do this so that we may be made holy or separated unto the service of God. We are God's, just as they were (:14).

The water of cleansing is literally "water of sin", i.e. 'water that washes away sin'. We note that the Levites were only sprinkled, whereas the priests were completely

washed (Ex. 29:4; Lev. 8:6). The idea may be that the more public was the ministry, the deeper sense of personal sin was required.

Num 8:8 Then let them take a young bull, and its grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil; and another young bull you shall take for a sin offering-

Just as the Nazirite had to make a sin offering at the end of his period of devotion (Num. 6:16), and the princes who offered voluntary offerings had to add a sin offering to them (Num. 7:16). The need for a sin offering at the end of special devotion was maybe to remind them that their extra special devotion didn't take away the reality of sin and need for grace; for relationship with God depends upon this rather than upon our works and special efforts. Again, we can take that principle to ourselves in our age.

Num 8:9 You shall present the Levites before the Tent of Meeting. You shall assemble the whole congregation of the children of Israel-

Now that the tabernacle had been erected, the Levites were now to come out from the various other tribal encampments where they had been living (:6), and establish their tents around the newly erected tabernacle. But firstly they stood as a group before the tent.

Num 8:10 You shall present the Levites before Yahweh. The children of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites-

God intended Israel to be "a Kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6). "All the people of Israel" were the builders of the spiritual house of God, i.e. His people (Acts

4:10,11). All Israel were to lay their hands on the Levites to show that they were truly Israel's representatives (Num. 8:10). When Israel were rejected, they were told that they as a nation could no longer be God's priest (Hos. 4:6). By baptism, we become spiritual Israel; and this idea is relevant to us too. Peter picks up these words in Exodus and applies them to every one of us: "You also are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices" (1 Pet. 2:5,9).

"Come near before Yahweh" is usually translated "offer [sacrifice] before Yahweh", and is translated that way multiple times. Although rarely (Ex. 16:9; Lev. 9:5) it is used of the congregation coming near before Yahweh. But the congregation didn't generally want to come before Yahweh, and so He chose just the Levites to come before Yahweh (Num. 8:10; 16:9 s.w.). It was God's intention that all Israel should be His servants, a nation of priests. But He changed and amended His approach, and chose just the Levites for this. We see here how open God is to change, so that by all means He may have relationship with His people. Under the new covenant, all believers are part of a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5) as He initially intended even under the old covenant. And yet there is always the tendency to leave the priestly work to specialists rather than perceiving our personal call to do it.

Num 8:11 and Aaron shall offer the Levites before Yahweh for a wave offering, on the behalf of the children of Israel, that it may be theirs to do the service of Yahweh-

The portion to be waved was placed on the priests hands (Ex. 29:25), and then 'waved' or 'swung' towards the altar and then back- not from right to left. The idea was that the offerings were first given to God, recognizing they should be consumed on the altar to God; but then given back to the priest by God. So they ate them having first recognized that their food was really God's, all was of Him, and He had given it back to them to eat. This should be our spirit in partaking of any food, as we are the new priesthood. Our prayers of thanks for daily food should include this feature. All things are God's and anything we 'offer' to Him is only giving Him what He has given to us (1 Chron. 29:14,16).

Num 8:12 The Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, and you shall offer the one for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering to Yahweh, to make atonement for the Levites-

The sin offering always preceded the burnt offering. Dedication to God, represented by the burnt offering, is on the basis of our recognizing first of all our sinfulness and need for His grace. This is why the sin offering always precedes the burnt offering in the Mosaic rituals. We too have been cleansed by the blood of Christ in order to serve Him and His Father (Heb. 9:14; 1 Thess. 1:9).

Num 8:13 You shall set the Levites before Aaron, and before his sons, and offer them as a wave offering to Yahweh-

The idea of all believers being a living sacrifice alludes here (Rom. 12:1,2). For we are all called to be the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5).

Num 8:14 Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the children of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine-

The Levites were God's (Num. 3:12,13,45; 8:14), and the Lord alludes to this: "I pray not for the (Jewish) world, but for them (the disciples, cp. the Levites) which thou hast given me; for they are thine" (Jn. 17:9). The Levites represent us (Jn. 17:6 = Dt. 33:9); the relationship between Moses and the Levites represents that between Christ and us. Moses' thankfulness that they remained faithful during the golden calf crisis, that sense of being able to rely on them, will be reflected in the Lord's feelings toward the faithful.

Num 8:15 After that, the Levites shall go in to do the service of the Tent of Meeting: and you shall cleanse them, and offer them as a wave offering-

Although the Levites had been set apart for Divine service immediately after God's meeting with Israel at Sinai, as outlined in Leviticus and Numbers, it seems that not until Aaron died at the end of the 40 years wandering did they actually in practice begin to serve as intended (Dt. 10:8). It could be that the reason was that the Levites were ever slow to accept their responsibilities. And they generally failed in their calling over Israel's history, climaxing in the priests arranging the murder of God's own Son.

Num 8:16 For they are wholly given to Me from among the children of Israel; instead of all who open the

womb, even the firstborn of all the children of Israel, I have taken them to Me-

The Levites were separated unto God's service; it wasn't so much that they were separate *from* others in a negative sense; rather they were positively separated *unto* God's service. We shouldn't see holiness as negative- that we can no longer do certain things; but instead focus on what positively we have been separated *unto*.

Num 8:17 For all the firstborn among the children of Israel are Mine, both man and animal. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified them for Myself-

It had been God's intention that the Levites were "His" from Passover night. But it was their actions at the time of the golden calf which as it were operationalized this, so that this intended "blessing" of being sanctified for God was realized in practice: "The sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. Moses said, Consecrate yourselves today to Yahweh, yes, every man against his son, and against his brother; that He may bestow on you a blessing this day" (Ex. 32:28,29). And this is how God works with us. A potential blessing and sanctification unto Himself is planned, but we have to consecrate ourselves in order to realize that potential. And so much potential is wasted and left unrealized. By so many people, and by us in so many aspects of our potential ministry.

Num 8:18 I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel-

"The men which You gave me out of the (Jewish) world... they have kept Your word" (Jn. 17:6) compares with the Levites being "given" to Aaron / the priesthood out of Israel (Num. 3:9; 8:19; 18:6); at the time of the golden calf they "observed thy word, and kept thy covenant" (Dt. 33:9), as did the disciples. The relationship between Moses and the Levites was therefore that between Christ and the disciples- a sense of thankfulness that at least a minority were faithful.

Num 8:19 I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the Tent of Meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come near to the sanctuary-

The spiritual and physical wellbeing of others can depend upon third parties, in this case the faithfulness of the Levites. Others can suffer because of our lack of diligence; it's not that if we don't do our part for them, then God will raise up others to do what we ought to have done. He *may* do this, as He was prepared to at the time of Esther, but He wishes us to see the eternal consequence of our actions upon others.

Num 8:20 Moses, and Aaron, and all the congregation of the children of Israel did so to the Levites. According to all that Yahweh commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so the children of Israel did to them-

What Israel did to them is recorded in :10,11. They placed their hands upon the Levites as if they were their representative sacrifice.

Num 8:21 The Levites purified themselves from sin, and they washed their clothes; and Aaron offered them for a wave offering before Yahweh; and Aaron made atonement for them to cleanse them-

This reference to purification could refer to a ritual purification. But the word for "purified themselves" is used of actual rather than general sin (Lev. 19:22). I have noted earlier that the small size of the tribe of Levi is one of a number of indications that they were not spiritually strong at this time. Seeing that idolatry was rife in Israel at this time (Ez. 20:6-8; Acts 7:43), it could be that there is reference here to something more than a purification ritual- an actual separation from idolatry or other sin which required a personal atonement to be made for them.

Num 8:22 After that, the Levites went in to do their service in the Tent of Meeting before Aaron, and before his sons, as Yahweh had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them-

"After that" connects with the repentance and forgiveness of the Levites in :21. it demonstrates that acceptable service to God is only possible once personal sin and failure has been faced and dealt with.

Num 8:23 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying,-

David numbered the Levites from 30 years old (1 Chron. 23:3), in accordance with the law which said Levites were to serve between the ages of 30 and 50 (Num. 4:3,23,35,39). But in 1 Chron. 23:24 we are told that David numbered the Levites from 20 years old. We note in Num. 8:23 that there appeared some flexibility

within the Mosaic law; the Levites could be numbered from 25 years old. This is one of many examples of how the Mosaic law was not set in stone. It was principle and spirit rather than letter of the law, and within it there are examples of where one law overrode another, or one principle overrode letter of the law. The law was not designed as a simple test of obedience, for it was far more detailed than that. It was designed to inculcate a spirit of living which looked forward to the spirit of the Lord Jesus. And so David felt free to number the Levites from 20 years old, even though we also read that he numbered 'the Levites from 30 years old', suggesting that this was a technical term rather than a literal description. This would go toward explaining why 38,000 Levites were numbered by David, although "thousand" may mean a division rather than a literal 1000. At the time of Num. 4:47,48 there were only 8,580.

Num 8:24 This is that which belongs to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall go in to serve in the service in the work of the Tent of Meeting-

"This is that which belongs to the Levites" is a reference to the fact the Levites had no possessions of land within Israel. What belonged to them was the honour of serving God; whether or not we own property in this present age, our eternal possession is the honour of being God's servants. To be a servant, in a world where perceived 'freedom' is so cherished, is to be our greatest possession.

Num 8:25 and from the age of fifty years they shall cease waiting on the work, and shall serve no more-

The Levites were counted as fit for service from 30 years old in Num. 4:3, here from 25 to 50, and later from 20 years old with no maximum age (1 Chron. 23:27). We see here how the law of Moses was not a set of statutes which were set in stone for all time. There was constant flexibility of the letter of the law, in harmony with the spirit of the law. All suggestions that God's statutes once given can never be changed are simply failing to actually read the law of Moses and spot the intentional conflicts between the letters of the law. God is not a legalist nor a literalist, and His law was open to interpretation and amendment, as we see in the 'second law' given in Deuteronomy. This was because He wanted His people to thoughtfully reflect upon His statutes, and to see them not as chain or leash, but as a springboard to personal relationship with Him.

Num 8:26 but shall minister with their brothers in the Tent of Meeting, to perform the duty, and shall do no service. You shall do thus to the Levites concerning their duties-

"Service" is the word for military service; as "To wait upon the service" (:24) is literally "to war the warfare". The Levites were to see themselves as on constant, active service for Yahweh in the endless battle against sin and the flesh- which with their help was to move constantly towards the ultimate victory in the Lord Jesus.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 9

Num 9:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying-

This was therefore before the census which was taken, and is evidence that the book of Numbers [as much of the historical record] is not strictly chronological. Possibly it is arranged around geographical themes rather than chronological.

Num 9:2 Moreover let the children of Israel keep the Passover in its appointed season-

This may have been to clarify the earlier statements that they were to keep Passover in the land of promise (Ex. 12:25; 13:5). In which case we note that God's law was ever open to interpretation and clarification. But it could be that it was God's intention that Israel left Egypt and immediately journeyed to Canaan and kept the next Passover there, within 12 months of Passover night in Egypt. But again, His purpose is open ended and flexible; He perceived that they weren't ready for this, and especially after the apostasy with the golden calf, they needed more time to prepare them. This same principle accounts for the flexible date of the Lord's second coming, and all attempts to construct sequences of latter day events are all doomed because of this failure to accept that God's program is flexible and responsive to human response to it.

Num 9:3 On the fourteenth day of this month, at evening, you shall keep it in its appointed time. According to all its statutes, and according to all its ordinances, you shall keep it-

This raises the question as to where Israel got so many lambs from in the desert. Clearly in their situation they kept the spirit of it, and this was counted as keeping it according to all the legal requirements of it. Perhaps the commandments to "keep it" were given because of the logistical concerns as to whether they were able to keep it precisely as they had done on leaving Egypt.

Num 9:4 Moses spoke to the children of Israel, that they should keep the Passover-

See on :2,3 for reasons why they had to be encouraged to keep it.

Num 9:5 They kept the Passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at evening, in the wilderness of Sinai. According to all that Yahweh commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did-

The people of Israel as a body were going through the death and resurrection experience of the Lord Jesus, through the process of the Passover and Exodus through the Red Sea. Israel ate Passover (Ex. 12:6) [14th Abib], as the Lord died on the cross as the Passover lambs were slain; Israel left Egypt the next day (Num. 33:3) [15th Abib] and journeyed three days (Ex. 8:27) [15th-17th Abib], and the Lord Jesus was three days in the tomb. Israel then came through the Red Sea [17th Abib], connecting with the Lord's being resurrected. As we come out of the baptismal water, we really are united with the

resurrected Lord- a new creation. His newness of life, His deliverance and successful exodus from the world- all this becomes ours.

Num 9:6 There were certain men, who were unclean because of the dead body of a man, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day, and they came before Moses and before Aaron on that day-

Perhaps these men were Mishael and Elizaphan, who had recently (Lev. 9:1; 10:4) been defiled by burying their cousins Nadab and Abihu. These men are similar to us. We wish to keep the Passover, which for us is the breaking of bread service (1 Cor. 5:8), but we feel the burden of our uncleanness. But this is no barrier to God; He found a way for them to keep it, so eager was He for fellowship with His people. In our times, God has likewise found a way- and that way is through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus which cleanses us and enables us to legitimately have fellowship with God. This desire of God to 'find a way' for His weak people to approach Him is found throughout the Law of Moses, e.g. in the possibility for a very poor person to offer a flour sacrifice rather than a blood one requiring an animal. This is a comfort to us, and should also be a pattern for us in how we deal with the weakness of others.

There is a telling allusion to the provision of Numbers 9 in 2 Chron. 30:3, which states that the majority of people came to keep Passover in the second month "because they could not perform it at that time". This is repeating the essence of Num. 9:6, "and they could not perform the Passover on that day" because they were un-

clean from touching a dead body. But Hezekiah extrapolates further, and prays that those who were actually unclean could still acceptably partake of the Passover. This is not to say that we can extrapolate the essence of things to allow anything. But clearly we are meant to see that even being unclean doesn't stop fellowship with God, and His desire to fellowship the unclean. His beloved Son likewise broke His bread with the unclean.

This is not the only concession to weakness within the Mosaic law. The intention was that there would be a single sanctuary where sacrifices were to be brought and offered. But there is also provision for local sacrifice of animals (Dt. 12:20–28; compare Ex. 20:22–26; Lev. 17:1–7); and tithes could be sold for money and that money used to buy sacrifices nearer to the sanctuary (Dt. 14:22–26). The overall impression is of a God eager if not desperate for His people to engage with Him, even if His ideal principles and intentions are compromised. We think of the Lord's teaching that the one talent man should've lent his money out on interest, even though that was contrary to the teaching of the Mosaic law. And that God hasn't changed to this day.

Num 9:7 Those men said to him, We are unclean because of the dead body of a man. Why are we kept back, that we may not offer the offering of Yahweh in its appointed time among the children of Israel?-

"Kept back" in Hebrew has the idea of "diminished". The subtext of these men may be that they considered it unreasonable that God had diminished them by the death of their relatives (see on :6), and now as it were

added insult to injury by forbidding them participation in the Passover because they had buried their relatives and were therefore unclean. They of course need not have touched the dead bodies of their relatives; they could have put Passover importance in first place. They chose not to. And yet God graciously allows them a way to still keep the Passover, despite recognizing their uncleanness. See on :9. Their attitude was perhaps not the best- they knew the unclean couldn't eat Passover, but they challenge this, having made themselves unclean. But still God finds a way.

Num 9:8 Moses answered them, Wait, that I may hear what Yahweh will command concerning you-

The command had in a sense already been given- they were unclean, and so were not to partake. But Moses senses that God is beyond legalism and literalism, and is open to fellowship with all- including the difficult and the unclean. And He is aware that God's law is open to reinterpretation and reapplication, and is not at all 'set in stone'.

Num 9:9 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

Joseph of Arimathea personally took the Lord's body down from the cross and buried it. His contact with the body meant that he couldn't keep the Passover (Num. 9:9,10). The people would have watched incredulous as one of the leaders of Israel openly showed his preference for the crucified Nazarene as opposed to keeping the Mosaic Law. The phobia for cleanliness at Passover time would have meant that everyone was extremely sensitive to what Joseph did. And these men

could have done what he did and accepted that they therefore couldn't partake of the Passover. But they appear to have had another agenda and an objection to God's ways.

Num 9:10 Say to the children of Israel, 'If any man of you or of your generations is unclean by reason of a dead body, or is on a journey far away, he shall still keep the Passover to Yahweh-

It seems from Num. 9:10,13 and the examples of Hezekiah and Josiah's Passovers, that it was more important to keep the Passover even if not everything was being done exactly in order, even if there was a sense of unworthiness, than to not do it at all. This should be borne in mind when some feel 'unworthy' to take the emblems, or where there are genuine problems in obtaining wine.

Unintentional defilement and also consciously choosing not to keep the feast, by going on a journey at that time, are covered here. After all, the travellers could've just planned not to be on a journey at Passover time. God wanted to make a way for both conscious and unconscious failure. He by all means wants to find a way to as it were break bread with us. That stands in sharp contrast to the way so many churches use access to the bread and wine as a form of judgment and reserve it only for their most tried and trusted members.

Rituals were typically associated with specific dates-and if the date was missed, the ritual was not valid. There was no point, to a religious mindset, of keeping the ritual on another date or in an ammended way. We see here how even within the structure of the Mosaic law, spiritu-

ality and the essence of things trumped religion and externalities. After all, Passover was to be the beginning of Israel's year. "This month is hereby for you the first of the months; it is the first, for you, of all the months of the year" (Ex. 12:1). Content triumphed over form, whereas in 'religion,' form so often eclipses content. Otherwise, it would have been taught that anyone who missed Passover was to be cut off from his people. We think of how Hezekiah held a delayed Passover in 2 Chron. 30, and asked the Lord to pardon those who kept it "other than it is written", including those who kept it unclean. By contrast, Hittite law specifically forbade keeping any ritual on any other date, for example, if a man was "on a journey": "You who (are) the temple officials: If you do not perform the festivals at the time of the festivals; (if) you do the spring festival in fall, (or) the fall festival in spring, (or) if the right time for doing the festival (has) arrived, and he who is to do it comes to you... and he seizes your knees, (saying) "The harvests (are) before me," or a marriage *or a journey or some other matter*. "Let me off. Let that matter finish for me, and when that matter is finished for me, I will do the festival thus": Do not do according to the wishes of (that) man. He must not persuade you. Do not conduct business concerning the will of the gods" ["Instructions to Priests and Temple Officials, 9," *in The Context of Scripture, Volume One: Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr.; trans. G. McMahon; Leiden: Brill, 2003) pp. 217–21].

"He shall still keep the Passover" implies the person was to keep it individually. Yet some aspects of the Passover legislation required a collective, communal setting in order to be obeyed. Not least the command to take a lamb large enough for the entire household, to search the family home for yeast etc. We can only conclude that such an individual keeping of Passover was not therefore going to involve strict obedience to all the legislation. The breaking of bread is the new covenant equivalent to Passover. We see here an insight into how God wants man to perceive the essence of things, and to personally engage with this personal remembrance of salvation. It's why it's quite legitimate to break bread alone, even to baptize oneself. Only the religious and unspiritual mindset will protest against such ideas. None of this takes away from the ideal requirement stressed in Num. 9:2, to keep the feast at the "appointed time... the appointed meeting... in the appointed place". God's ideal intentions must never be forgotten.

We may note that impurity by a dead body could have been dealt with another way. "Those who touch the dead body of any human being shall be unclean seven days. They shall purify themselves with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, and so be clean" (Num. 19:11,12). But here in Numbers 9, this possibility is apparently not mentioned. The idea perhaps is that a recognition of impurity was required- and then the Passover could be kept a month later. Following another ritual in order to get clean... isn't actually required, at least it isn't mentioned.

So we see God so eager to not let human weakness stop His engagement with man. And yet He does ask that the Passover be kept according to its ordinances. We must never allow any kind of reductionism, reducing to the essence, to lead us to think that His demands need not be taken seriously. The men were likely unclean because of a relative's death and burial. The Lord Jesus told the man who wanted to first attend his father's funeral: "Let the dead bury their dead". And demanded the man pick up the cross and follow Him. On one hand, God is very demanding. On the other, He asks for the essence and not the letter.

Num 9:11 In the second month, on the fourteenth day at evening they shall keep it: they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs-

The Passover, as the prototype breaking of bread, featured bitter herbs to remind Israel of their bitter experience in Egypt (Ex. 1:14). The breaking of bread should likewise focus our attention on the fact that return to the world is a return to bondage and bitterness, not freedom. Israel didn't learn this lesson, they forgot the bitterness of Egypt, and longed to return to it. The idea was that the sweetness of the lamb's roasted meat was to assuage the bitterness of the herbs; and we see here prefigured the intended effect of the Lord's sacrifice.

Num 9:12 They shall leave none of it until the morning-

Ex. 12:10 adds: "You shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; but that which remains of it until the morning you shall burn with fire".

There is the possibility of living before God on different levels. Hence nothing was to remain, but God foresaw that some would allow part of the sacrifice to remain. This was a concession to human weakness, and reflects God's awareness of human liability to failure.

Nor break a bone of it. According to all the law of the Passover they shall keep it-

Jn. 19:36 stresses that not a bone of the Lord Jesus was broken when He was crucified. We are the Lord's body, of His flesh and bones (Eph. 5:30). Crucifixion was designed to torture the bones; and yet none was broken. We suffer in Him, but shall not be finally broken. As the Passover lambs were being killed, the Lord died; and it was critical that not a bone of the Passover lambs be broken (Ex. 12:46; Num. 9:12). John seems so keen to point out that the Lord died as the Passover lamb, and Paul perceives this when stating that He is "our Passover" (1 Cor. 5:7). For no bone of the Lord to be broken, the nails driven through His hands [the Greek can refer to the arms or wrists too] would not have been large, and would probably have been driven through the 'Destot gap', the set of nerves in between the large wrist bones. The pain would have been intense at that point. The rough hammering of the nails through that point would have paid no attention to detail; but those hammer blows were Divinely guided so that no bone broke. And this would have been even more amazingly guided for the nails driven through the feet not to break a bone. It was only by the Lord refusing to relieve

the pain by pushing down on the sedile that He avoided breaking any bones.

The stress upon the Lord's unbroken bones and His garment not being rent contrasts with the language of crushing, breaking, bruising etc. found in Is. 53, and the breaking of the bread as the symbol of His body broken for us (1 Cor. 10:16), prefigured in the breaking of the bread to feed the multitudes. That breaking, therefore, refers to the breaking of the Lord's heart and mind. He thereby becomes the focus for all the broken hearted.

Num 9:13 But the man who is clean, and is not on a journey, and fails to keep the Passover, that soul shall be cut off from his people. Because he didn't offer the offering of Yahweh in its appointed time, that man shall bear his sin-

There are no examples of God slaying those who didn't keep the Passover. So this cutting off was in His mind. But we note how seriously He viewed not keeping Passover. Those who exclude others from the breaking of bread [the equivalent of Passover under the new covenant] must ponder the position in which they place those whom they cut off. They are hurting them, perhaps eternally. "Shall bear his sin" means to suffer the consequences of his sin (Num. 18:22,32; Lev. 19:17; 20:20; 22:9; 24:15; Ez. 23:49). But the consequence of that sin was in the mind of God, even if it was not shown at the time. Does this mean that those who don't break bread, as the new covenant equivalent of Passover, are rejected by Him? Not necessarily. But the essence of Passover is indeed critical to salvation, and that is, to consciously remember the price paid for our redemption. Otherwise

we are trying to bear our sin ourselves, rather than accepting that the blood of the Lamb bears that sin. For clearly it is the Lord on the cross, to whom the Paschal lamb pointed forward, who is the sin bearer. Being "cut off from Israel" may not mean that the person must be slain. For then the phrase "cut off from the earth" would have been used (as in Prov. 2:22 and often). The idea is that the person who ate leaven (Ex. 12:15) or was not circumcised (Gen. 17:14) was excluded from the community of God's people because they had broken or despised the covenant which made them His people. But there is no record of Israel keeping a list of 'cut off from Israel' Israelites and excluding them from keeping the feasts. So we conclude this means that God would consider such persons as cut off from His people. He would do the cutting off, and not men. In His book, they were "cut off". But there was no legal nor practical mechanism provided to Israel to manage the 'cutting off from Israel' of those who despised the covenant. The cutting off was done in God's eyes, in Heaven's record, and the Israelites were intended to continue to fellowship with such persons at the feasts. This is a strong argument for an open table, and for not seeking to make church excommunication the equivalent of this cutting off of the disobedient from the people of Israel. This explains why being "cut off from Israel" is the punishment stated for doing things which man could not see and judge- secretly breaking the Sabbath (Ex. 31:14), eating peace offerings whilst being unclean (Lev. 7:20- for how were others to know whether someone had touched the unclean, or was expe-

riencing an unclean bodily emission), eating meat with blood still in it (Lev. 17:10,14), not adequately humbling the soul (Lev. 23:29), not keeping Passover (Num. 9:13), being presumptuous (Num. 15:30,31- only God can judge that), not washing after touching a dead body (Num. 19:13,20). This is why Lev. 20:6 makes it explicit that "I [Yahweh personally] will set My face against that person, and will cut him off from among his people". It is Yahweh who does the cutting off and not men (also 1 Sam. 2:33). Here, being cut off from the people meant 'bearing his sin'- at the last day, before God.

Num 9:14 If a foreigner lives among you, and desires to keep the Passover to Yahweh according to the statute of the Passover, and according to its ordinance, so shall he do. You shall have one statute, both for the foreigner, and for him who is born in the land'-

The Passover was open to Gentiles who wished to identify themselves with Israel, and to see in the Red Sea deliverance something of their own deliverance from this world. We should not be exclusive but rather inclusive when it comes to the breaking of bread service which was typified by the Passover. It has been argued that the breaking of bread is the equivalent of the Jewish Passover, and Ex. 12:48 says that only the circumcised could eat of it. Here are a few comments:

- Whatever interpretation we wish to place upon Ex. 12:48, we have to reconcile it with the above evidence for the openness of the Lord Jesus with regard to His table fellowship, using it to bring people to Him, rather

than as a test of fellowship or intellectual / moral purity of understanding or living.

- Peter ate with the uncircumcised- and got into trouble with the Judaist brethren exactly because the Law had forbidden the uncircumcised from eating the first Passover (Acts 11:3). The Jews had put a [very large!] hedge around this law by forbidding Jews from eating with Gentiles period. Yet Peter was taught that this was wrong- and he ate with Gentiles, it seems even before they were baptized. But the point is, he had been taught by the vision that all the old Mosaic category distinctions of clean / unclean, circumcised / uncircumcised, had now been ended. It seems this was as large a challenge to the church in the 1st century as it is in the 21st.

- Although the Passover and memorial meeting are related, the relation is at times by way of contrast rather than only similarity; e.g. in the first Passover, the families were to provide a lamb; whereas in the antitype, the Lord Jesus is the lamb of Divine and not human provision. The Paschal lamb of God takes away the whole world's sin, rather than just providing blood for the temporal redemption of Israel's firstborn, etc.

- Circumcision under the new covenant doesn't refer to anything outward, visibly verifiable. For now "he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Rom. 2:29)- seeing we can't judge the secret things of others' hearts, how can we tell who is circumcised in heart or not? The 'sealing' of God's people today, the proof that they are

the Lord's (2 Tim. 2:19), is not anything external, but the internal matter of being sealed with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:13; 4:30), or being sealed with a mark in the mind / forehead, as Revelation puts it (Rev. 7:3; 9:4).

- The Gentiles in Israel, circumcised or not, could keep the feast of unleavened bread (Ex. 12:17-20) which was related to the Passover.

- If Ex. 12:48 is read on a literalistic level, i.e. that only the circumcised could eat the Passover, this would surely mean that no female could eat it? Yet this was not the case.

- It's Num 9:14 which speaks in more general terms of whether or not a Gentile could partake of the Passover- and here it's made clear that yes he/she could, and no mention is made of being circumcised: "And if a stranger shall sojourn among you, and will keep the Passover unto the Lord; according to the statute of the Passover, and according to the ordinance thereof, so shall he do: ye shall have one statute, both for the stranger, and for him that is born in the land".

- Commands that were intended for subsequent generations often include the kind of rubric we meet in Ex. 12:14,17: "And this day shall be unto you for a memorial, and ye shall keep it a feast to the Lord: throughout your generations ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever... therefore shall ye observe this day throughout your generations by an ordinance for ever". But we don't meet that 'throughout your generations' with regard to the uncircumcised men not being allowed to eat it.

- Israel were told specifically that the Passover lamb must be roasted and not boiled (Ex. 12:9 uses two distinct words for 'boiled' and 'roasted'). But the word used in Ex. 12:9 for "boiled" is that used in Dt. 16:7 of how the Passover could be boiled, although many Bible versions misleadingly translate the word there as "roast". The translators need not have feared such contradiction. For it is the contradiction of grace. Here we have another example of where the Passover regulations given in Exodus were specific only to that time at the exodus. Thus a foreigner was not allowed to eat of that sacrifice, but foreigners were welcome to eat of the Passover later.

- So my suggestion is that the command of Ex. 12:48 that no uncircumcised could eat of the Passover, and that the Gentiles amongst the people should be circumcised if they wanted to eat it, was specific to that first Passover. As Israel and the mixed multitude that went with them sat in Egypt under threat of losing their firstborn sons, they could find salvation by keeping the Passover and entering into covenant with God through circumcision. Both Jewish tradition and the implication of Moses not circumcising his sons is that the Jews in Egypt weren't circumcised; yet "all the people that came out were circumcised: but all the people that were born in the wilderness by the way as they came forth out of Egypt, them they had not circumcised" (Josh. 5:5). Implication would be that many were circumcised in order to keep the first Passover according to the command given them in Ex. 12. We could therefore take Ex. 12:48 as a specific command for those who kept the first Passover to be cir-

cumcised, rather than an ongoing principle. The Jewish sage Maimonides (A Guide For The Perplexed Vol. 3 ch. 46) explains: "The reason of the prohibition that the uncircumcised should not eat of it (Exod. xii. 48) is explained by our Sages as follows: The Israelites neglected circumcision during their long stay in Egypt".

- This approach would explain why Num. 9:14 doesn't demand that Gentiles be circumcised to keep future Passovers; why there's no comment that the exclusion of the uncircumcised should be kept "throughout your generations"; and why Ex. 12:50 speaks as if Israel fully obeyed the command about circumcision and Passover eating in a once-off sense when they kept that first Passover. And of course this is the reason for many branches of Judaism welcoming uncircumcised Gentiles to the Passover celebration- for they don't understand Ex. 12:48 to preclude it, but rather Num. 9:14 encourages it.

- This approach also helps answer a difficult question: Why was the lamb or kid kept for four days (Ex. 12:2,6)? If the effects of circumcision take three days to wear off (Gen. 34:25), it could be that the uncircumcised males were intended to circumcise themselves, chose the lamb, and then keep the Passover four days later. Some Jewish commentators claim that God fell in love with Israel whilst she was still in her blood (Ez. 16:6) in that some Jews circumcised themselves at the time of the first Passover- hence one Rabbi speaks of the blood of circumcision and the blood of the first Passover running together.

Num 9:15 On the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, even the Tent of the Testimony, and at evening it was over the tabernacle as if it were the appearance of fire, until morning-

This was "the cloud" which had covered Sinai (s.w. Ex. 24:15,16). Both holy place and most holy were filled. The glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle when it was erected (Ex. 40:34), as it would later fill the temple (2 Chron. 7:1). But it was God's intention that His glory should fill all the earth; the same words are used in Num. 14:21. The apparently intense manifestation of Himself in a specific place was only a foretaste of what He wished to bring about in "all the earth". And yet Judaism misread this as meaning that His glory was there alone in a specific holy place. They failed to perceive that it was merely a localized foretaste of His intention to make this a universal experience, and the tearing down of the veil at the Lord's death was evidence enough of the progression of this plan. When exiled from the sanctuary, David in his Psalms often perceives that God's glory fills and shall fill all the earth (Ps. 72:19; Hab. 2:14).

Num 9:16 Thus it was continually. The cloud covered it, and the appearance of fire by night-

See on :21. The "pillar of fire" was only "as it were the appearance of fire" (Num. 9:15) but the record elsewhere speaks of it as "fire", because that's what it looked like to the Israelites. The Scriptures speak of how a pillar of fire was with Israel in the wilderness (Ps. 105:39). But actually when it first appeared, it was described as "*the appearance of fire*" (Num. 9:15). It wasn't fire, it ap-

peared as fire. And yet it's spoken of later simply as "fire". There's no inspired footnote reminding us that, well, actually, it wasn't really fire. Likewise "the mount [of Sinai] burnt with fire" (Dt. 9:15). The mountain didn't catch fire. But that's how it looked to the Israelites from a distance; and so that's how it's described.

Num 9:17 Whenever the cloud was taken up from over the Tent, then after that the children of Israel took their journey; and in the place where the cloud remained, there the children of Israel encamped-

"Took their journey" is Heb. 'to pull up', alluding to the pulling up of tent pegs. The process of moving onward would have been a major, regular upheaval. They would've preferred to stay where they were. And this is a feature of our wilderness journey after our Red Sea baptism; we are always being moved on further, in various ways. And this goes right against the conservatism which is such a major part of the human condition.

Num 9:18 At the commandment of Yahweh the children of Israel travelled, and at the commandment of Yahweh they encamped. As long as the cloud remained on the tabernacle they remained encamped-

The pillar of cloud was vertical as it stood above the tent of meeting when they encamped, but was spread out as a plume over them as they travelled, shielding them from the desert heat. We could deduce from Num. 10:34,35 that the cloud rose up when Moses commanded it to. They journeyed according to Yahweh's commandments to Moses, and it was he who in turn uttered that commandment to Israel and to the cloud: "The

cloud of Yahweh was over them by day, when they set forward from the camp. It happened, when the ark went forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Yahweh" (Num 10:34,35). It wasn't therefore the case that Moses had no idea as to when they were to travel, and that he only knew when the cloud lifted up and went forward. It was rather he who commanded the cloud to do that. Representing the Lord Jesus, he was in this sense in a position of control over the Angel within the cloud. The idea was that their journey was in response to God's spoken word of command. And we must ask how much our Bible reading influences actual decision making and choices and directions on our journey.

Num 9:19 When the cloud stayed on the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept Yahweh's command, and didn't travel-

To not do something, to sit still, perhaps in a place they would rather leave, is presented as active obedience to a commandment. And in a sense our faithfulness to the Lord Jesus and His return is in some way a waiting game. And we are to wait faithfully.

Num 9:20 Sometimes the cloud was a few days on the tabernacle; then according to the commandment of Yahweh they remained encamped, and according to the commandment of Yahweh they travelled-

The mention of such short stays at one place (here and in :21) was in praise of their obedience. For the work of setting up tents and the tabernacle was significant. To set them up and then immediately have to take them down involved huge effort. There weren't many times

during the wilderness journey when this happened; "sometimes" is an example of the generosity of the Divine record towards His people. It was in fact very rare throughout the 38 years wandering.

Num 9:21 Sometimes the cloud was from evening until morning; and when the cloud was taken up in the morning, they travelled: by day and by night, when the cloud was taken up, they travelled-

Ex. 13:21 says that there was a pillar of cloud in the day time and a pillar of fire by night. But at the time of the Exodus, there was a pillar of cloud for the Egyptians and a pillar of fire to give light in the night for the Israelites (Ex. 14:20,24). Could this mean that the meaning of time was collapsed at this time? It was night for the Israelites but daytime for the Egyptians? Is. 42:16, amidst many exodus / Red Sea allusions, speaks of how God makes the darkness light before His exiting people. The many Johanine references to the Lord Jesus being a light in the darkness for His followers would then be yet more elaborations of the idea that the Lord Jesus is the antitype of the Angel that led Israel out of Egypt (Jn. 8:12; 12:35,46). Num. 9:21 says that the pillar of cloud was with the Israelites at night, and sometimes it was taken up in the night and they therefore had to move on. Does this mean that there were times when the meaning of time was collapsed during their journey, and the night was made as the day (perhaps Ps. 139:12 alludes to this experience)? When Yahweh came down on Sinai, He was enveloped in a *cloud of fire*- suggesting that there was no day and night for Him (Ex. 24:15-17; Dt. 5:22).

Num 9:22 Whether it was two days, or a month, or a year that the cloud stayed on the tabernacle, remaining on it, the children of Israel remained encamped, and didn't travel; but when it was taken up, they travelled-

There was no prior warning how long they were to remain in any one place; sometimes they stayed a year in one place, at other times they had to travel even by night. This was all at the commandment or word of the Lord. If the Red Sea deliverance represents our baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2), the wilderness journey is like our journey through life towards the promised land of God's Kingdom. We are led by an Angel, and the path we take is determined by God. Sometimes we are suddenly and unexpectedly asked to move forward; sometimes quickly, travelling by night, as it were; other periods of our lives can appear static and leading nowhere. But in all these situations we are still being led- if we remain obedient to the word of God. They didn't know their itinerary ahead of time, each day and night they would've wondered whether they'd be called to move on or not. Their lives in this sense had no stability. If the Red Sea crossing represents our baptisms then this speaks of our lives afterwards being under God's leadership and guidance, we in that sense cannot map out how we would wish our journey to be.

Num 9:23 At the commandment of Yahweh they encamped, and at the commandment of Yahweh they took up their journey. They kept Yahweh's command, at the commandment of Yahweh by Moses-

A very large community of people would've been very hard to organize; setting up and breaking camp demanded a huge amount of time and effort. When they only remained a short time, even a day, in one place, the tendency would've been to complain 'Must we really break camp and move on so quickly?'. We too are tempted to resent the unstable nature of our lives; for those whose lives are led by the Spirit, as the Angel was in a sense the Spirit of God (Ps. 104:4), life will never be static and boring; even if we geographically remain in one place all our lives, we are being actively led forward by God's direction.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 10

Num 10:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The exercise of prayer is for our benefit. Israel were told to blow trumpets at their feasts, representing prayer, in order that God would hear their prayer and sacrifice, and remember them / take notice of them (Num. 10:10). The blowing of the trumpets didn't of itself remind God about His people; it was an exercise for their benefit. And the God who knows before we ask evidently doesn't need our prayers as a means of information transfer.

Num 10:2 Make two trumpets of silver. You shall make them of beaten work. You shall use them for the calling of the congregation, and for the journeying of the camps-

"Calling of the congregation" is LXX *ekklesia*. This is the word rendered "church" in the New Testament. We could reason from this therefore that "church" specifically refers to a gathering of God's people. At that time and during those moments, they are a church. When the entire community of believers is referred to as "church", this is how God views them- as if they are all gathered together at a gathering or convocation before Him. The word in its Biblical usage therefore doesn't refer to what we might call a denomination or fellowship. The trumpets weren't necessarily identical- see on :3.

The sons of Aaron were to blow the trumpets (:8). There were only two sons of Aaron left at this time,

Eleazar and Ithamar. So that might explain why there were only two. In the time of Joshua and David there were seven trumpets used by the priests (Josh. 6:4), and 120 trumpets in Solomon's time (1 Chron. 15:24; 2 Chron. 5:12). So again we see that the command to make two trumpets was not set in stone. It was a principle open to interpretation and development. For again we must note that the law was not a leash, a chain, but rather a springboard towards serving God on our own initiative and interpretation of His basic principles. Although not of course in contradiction to those principles.

Num 10:3 When they blow them, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the door of the Tent of Meeting-

The idea is that both of them were blown (cp. :4). This would have made a different sound to just one of them being blown, so we can conclude the trumpets were not identical in sound, and when blown together, produced a very distinctive sound.

Num 10:4 If they blow just one, then the princes, the heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather themselves to you-

"Thousands" is again not a literal numerical term but means "families". This fact means that the 600 "thousands" of men who left Egypt may not mean 600,000. If there were a congregation totalling a few million, two trumpets would not have been heard by them all. I have argued elsewhere that the size of the congregation was much smaller than that.

Num 10:5 When you blow an alarm, the camps that lie on the east side shall go forward-

Lead therefore by Judah who was effectively the first-born, and from whom the Lord Jesus was to come.

Num 10:6 When you blow an alarm the second time, the camps that lie on the south side shall go forward. They shall blow an alarm for their journeys-

LXX adds "And when you blow the third alarm, the camps on the west shall begin their march; and when ye blow the fourth alarm, the camps on the north shall begin their march".

Num 10:7 But when the assembly is to be gathered together, you shall blow, but you shall not sound an alarm-

"Blow" here implies short, staccato notes. This looks ahead to the blowing of the trumpet associated with the gathering together of all God's people at the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:52), and moving forward into the Kingdom.

Num 10:8 The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets. This shall be to you for a principle forever throughout your generations-

See on :2. If Israel were obedient, they were promised that they would live *in their land* in peace with no oppressors; they would only be oppressed if they were disobedient. So here we have another reflection of God's sensitivity to the weakness of His people; the very structure of His law foresaw their likely weakness, and offered a way out. In this case, it was through the blowing of the trumpets. The perceptive Israelite would have seen that the same blowing of trumpets was what had been done to command Israel to move forward during

their wilderness journey (:5). Even in the settled existence in Canaan, they were to still see themselves as on a wilderness journey- just as we should in our settled lives. And when we fail, we are to rally ourselves and move onwards, rather like a 'Play on!' command in some sports, when a player has tumbled and fallen. We have to move on, as quickly as possible.

Num 10:9 When you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets. Then you will be remembered before Yahweh your God, and you will be saved from your enemies-

The "memorial portion" of the offerings was to serve as a reminder to God, as it were, of the covenants which He "remembered". He of course doesn't forget His covenant but ever remembers it (Ps. 105:8 etc.), yet He is presented in human terms as having His memory rekindled, as it were, by human prayer, faith, situations and sacrifices so that He "remembers the covenant" (Gen. 8:1; 9:15; Ex. 2:24; 6:5; Lev. 26:42,45; Num. 10:9 and often). The regular sacrifices were such a "memorial" or 'reminder'- both to God and to His people. The place of prayer, regular sacrifice of giving, breaking of bread at the "memorial meeting" etc., are all equivalents for us under the new covenant.

Num 10:10 Also in the day of your gladness-

The trumpet call was an appeal to God. It wasn't only to be made in times of crisis (:9), but in good times

too. We shouldn't treat God as someone we rush to only in times of crisis, but should share with Him our good times as well as the bad times. The day of gladness could specifically refer to the days when they offered the burnt and peace offerings. Because of its association with the celebration of the forgiveness of sins, the peace offering brought together a variety of emotions, blending joy, sober recognition and gratitude. We therefore find it being offered in both days of gladness and solemnity (Num. 10:10). But normally there is at least some mention of joy connected with the records of the peace offering (2 Chron. 29:35,36; Dt. 27:7).

And in your set feasts, and in the beginnings of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be to you for a memorial before your God. I am Yahweh your God-

Moses speaks in Ex. 18:16 of how "I judge between a man and his neighbour, and I make them know the statutes of God, and His laws". Those laws were not given at the time of Ex. 18, so the passage there is out of chronological order. For the people only arrived at Horeb ("the mountain of God", Ex, 18:5) at the time of Ex. 19:1,2. It was only when they left Horeb on the 20th day of the 2nd month of the 2nd year that Moses established the system of judges as Jethro had advised (Dt. 1:12-15). At the time of Num. 10:11,29, Moses asks Jethro ["Hobab"] to remain with the people as a guide through the desert. I suggest that the events of Ex. 18 should be inserted after Num. 10:10 and before

Num. 10:11. In this case the argument between Moses, Aaron and Miriam about Zipporah in Num. 12:1 would have occurred after Zipporah had been accepted again by Moses as his wife.

Num 10:11 It happened in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, that the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle of the testimony-

The tent of meeting is sometimes called the tent of the "testimony", a reference to God's word on the tables of stone which were within the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place. Out of all the tabernacle furniture, the symbol of God's word was seen as central. God's word- the Bible, in our times- is to be utterly central to our lives and collective sense of community.

Num 10:12 The children of Israel went forward according to their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud stayed in the wilderness of Paran-

"The LORD came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from Mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of His saints (Angels): from His right hand (i.e. the Angels- they ministered the Law) went a fiery law for them" (Dt. 33:2); whilst earlier we only read "And the children of Israel took their journeys out of the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud rested in the wilderness of Paran" (Num. 10:12). The passage in Dt. 33 almost seems a direct comment on this earlier description.

Num 10:13 They first went forward according to the commandment of Yahweh by Moses-

I will discuss on :34,35 how Yahweh commanded Moses whenever they had to move on or rest, and he as it were commanded the Angel in the cloud. The cloud therefore rose up and then rested over the tent of meeting at the command of Moses, who was repeating the commandment of Yahweh to him.

Num 10:14 First, the standard of the camp of the children of Judah went forward according to their armies. Nahshon the son of Amminadab was over his army-

He was brother-in-law of Aaron (Ex. 6:23), and yet also married to Rahab in order to be the ancestor of David and the Lord Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:4). He was one of the points at which the lines of Judah and Levi converged in the Lord's genealogy, appropriate for Him as a king-priest.

Num 10:15 Nethanel the son of Zuar was over the army of the tribe of the children of Issachar-

'God has given' suggests that he was named in faith that the promised land would indeed be given to Israel. Although the inheritances for the location of the tribal cantons were drawn by lot, it is clear the hand of God was in it. For the inheritances were appropriate to the people given them. Issachar's lot for possession of the land was next to Judah and Zebulun (Josh. 19:17), with whom Issachar had lived and journeyed side by side during the wilderness years (Num. 2:5; 10:15). This opens up the question as to whether we should also draw lots in this age. For God worked through them clearly enough in Joshua's time.

Num 10:16 Eliab the son of Helon was over the army of the tribe of the children of Zebulun-

We note how most of the names feature the 'El' suffix and not 'Yah' or 'Iah'. This is understandable, for Moses declared the Name of Yahweh to the people after most of these men had been born. This kind of artless internal corroboration is to me one of the strongest arguments for the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Num 10:17 The tabernacle was taken down, and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari, who bore the tabernacle, went forward-

The visual image of the tabernacle being taken down stuck in the Lord's mind, and He saw it as a picture of His death on the cross (Jn. 2:19). And the raising up of the tabernacle was to be true in the restoration of "the temple of His body" (Jn. 2:21). We think of Joseph of Arimathea bearing away the Lord's body from the cross.

Num 10:18 The standard of the camp of Reuben went forward according to their armies. Elizur the son of Shedeur was over his army-

"Elizur", 'God is my rock', is a name indicating faith that God would indeed be a rock to Israel. And probably these were names which were taken by choice rather than birth names. But Israel turned back from entering Canaan; their leaders had the names of faith but in reality their faith was weak. And we must ask ourselves whether that is the case with us, having a name that we spiritually live when we are dead.

Num 10:19 Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai was over the army of the tribe of the children of Simeon-

"God's peace" son of "The Almighty is my rock" could reflect a faithful family, especially considering that Israel were idolaters in Egypt, and carried the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:6-8) and also the tabernacle of Moloch as well as that of Yahweh, the star of Remphan as well as the standards of their tribes (Acts 7:43).

Num 10:20 Eliasaph the son of Deuel was over the army of the tribe of the children of Gad-

Deuel is better Reuel as in Num. 2:14. The Hebrew letters for 'D' and 'R' are easily confused; so here we have an example of slight copying errors in the original texts. But these in no way negate the overall Divine inspiration of the texts.

Num 10:21 The Kohathites set forward, bearing the sanctuary. The others set up the tabernacle before they arrived-

"The sanctuary" is put for the especially holy items of furniture within it; for the actual structure of the sanctuary was carried by others (:17).

Num 10:22 The standard of the camp of the children of Ephraim set forward according to their armies. Elishama the son of Ammihud was over his army-

Elishama was Joshua's grandfather (1 Chron. 7:26). "God who hears" reflects Moses' message that God had indeed heard the crying of the Israelites in Egypt. This was likely a name change after acceptance of Moses' teaching.

Num 10:23 Gamaliel the son of Pedabzur was over the army of the tribe of the children of Manasseh-

"Gamaliel" is 'God is my reward', named in hope that the promised reward of the Kingdom would indeed be given.

Num 10:24 Abidan the son of Gideon was over the army of the tribe of the children of Benjamin-

The names associated with the leadership of Benjamin and Naphtali (:24,27) stand out as not having any spiritual reference in them. Israel were very spiritually weak as they left Egypt and it is likely that the more spiritual names we read of in this list were the result of name changes. But the leaders of these two tribes didn't do that.

Num 10:25 The standard of the camp of the children of Dan, which was the rear guard of all the camps, set forward according to their armies. Abiezer the son of Ammishaddai was over his army-

"Ammishaddai" means 'People of the Almighty', using the term *shaddai* which is often associated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He may well have been one of the faithful few who kept perceiving the vital separation of God's people from Egypt, whereas the majority in their hearts returned to Egypt and wished to assimilate with them in order to escape persecution and have what they imagined was a good life.

Num 10:26 Pagiel the son of Ochran was over the army of the tribe of the children of Asher-

Pagiel ['accident of God'] was son of Ochran, 'muddler'. As discussed on :27, people had multiple names and were known by the 'name' they carved for themselves in life, and the attitudes they had. God makes

no accidents; so maybe in depression and bitterness this man felt like this, and was known for it. Hardly a great example to the tribe he was supposed to be leading. And indeed Asher all but disappears from Israel.

Num 10:27 Ahira the son of Enan was over the army of the tribe of the children of Naphtali-

What mother would have named her child Nabal (fool), or Ahira (brother of evil), or 'sickness' or 'wasting' (Mahlon and Chilion)? These names were either given to them by others and the use adopted by God, or simply God in the record assigned them such names. The names associated with the leadership of Benjamin and Naphtali (:24,27) stand out as not having any spiritual reference in them. Israel were very spiritually weak as they left Egypt and it is likely that the more spiritual names we read of in this list were the result of name changes. But the leaders of these two tribes didn't do that.

Num 10:28 Thus were the travels of the children of Israel according to their armies, and they went forward-

LXX "These are the armies of the children of Israel; and they set forward with their forces". The military analogies are continual. It was God's ideal intention that they should now march to Canaan and enter it as an army. The fact they turned away from this potential was tragic. So much Divine hope and carefully prepared potential was wasted, just as it is in so many lives. We marvel at His patience in continuing to try with so many people.

Num 10:29 Moses said to Hobab, the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, We are journeying to the

place of which Yahweh said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us, and we will treat you well; for Yahweh has spoken good concerning Israel-

Num. 10 and 11 seem to portray Moses in weakness. He pleads with his brother in law not to leave them, because without him they would not know where to camp in the wilderness; "thou mayest be to us instead of eyes". Yet the Angels are God's eyes, they were seeking out resting places for Israel in the wilderness; the record reminds us of this straight afterwards (Num. 10:33). Jethro elsewhere suggested that Moses needed more help in leading the people because otherwise fading thou wilt fade away' (Ex. 18:18 A.V.mg.); at the end of his days, the record seems to highlight the untruth of this by commenting that his natural strength was not faded (Dt. 34:7). So Jethro's advice wasn't always spiritual.

10:31 suggests Moses saw Jethro's knowledge of the desert as better than the Angelic "eyes" of Yahweh (2 Chron. 16:9; Prov. 15:3) who were going ahead of the camp to find a resting place (Num. 10:33 cp. Ex. 33:14 cp. Is. 63:9). It seems Moses recognized his error in this on the last day of his life, when he admits Yahweh, not Jethro's wisdom, had led them (Dt. 1:33). Likewise Paul in his final communication comments on the way that Mark with whom he had once quarrelled was profitable to him (2 Tim. 4:11).

Num 10:30 He said to him, I will not go; but I will depart to my own land, and to my relatives-

There's something very sad about this; Hobab could've identified himself with Israel and shared a place

in the promised land with them, if he had travelled with them through the wilderness. But he preferred his own family rather than God's family, and so he turned back. We too invite people to share our future hope, but they turn back, even if they journey with us for a while as Hobab did with Israel. See on :32.

Num 10:31 He said, Don't leave us, please, because you know how we are to encamp in the wilderness, and you can be to us instead of eyes-

This may have been a moment of weakness in Moses, for the Angel went before Israel to find them camping places (:33), and the Angels are God's eyes (2 Chron. 16:9; Rev. 4:6-8). Like Moses, we tend to seek for human guidance in our wilderness journey, rather than trusting in God's Angelic Spirit guidance of us.

In this time of final spiritual maturity, Moses was keenly aware of his own spiritual failings (as Paul and Jacob were in their last days). This is one of the great themes of Moses in Deuteronomy. He begins his Deuteronomy address by pointing out how grievously they had failed thirty eight years previously, when they refused to enter the good land. He reminds them how that although God had gone before them in Angelic power (Dt. 1:30,33), they had asked for their spies to go before them. And Moses admits that this fatal desire for human strength to lead them to the Kingdom "pleased me well" (Dt. 1:23). It seems to me that here Moses is recognizing his own failure. Perhaps he is even alluding to his weakness in wanting Jethro to go before them "instead of eyes", in place of the Angel-eyes of Yahweh

(Num. 10:31-36). Moses at the end was aware of his failures. And yet he also shows his thorough appreciation of the weakness of his people. Moses admits at the end that Israel's faithless idea to send out spies "pleased me well"- when it shouldn't have done (Dt. 1:23,32,33). He realized more and more his own failure as he got older.

Num 10:32 It shall be, if you go with us, yes, it shall be, that whatever good Yahweh does to us, we will do the same to you-

Rom. 11:22 may allude here: "Towards you goodness, if you continue in His goodness". The context is likewise- Gentiles being invited to share in the goodness planned for Israel. And refusing it, for the most part, as Hobab did. See on :30.

Num 10:33 They set forward from the Mount of Yahweh three days' journey. The ark of the covenant of Yahweh went before them three days' journey, to seek out a camping place for them-

Both the ark and the cloud with the Angel in it went before them. The Angel was clearly personally associated with the shekinah glory between the cherubim over the ark, and the departure of the glory from the temple in Ezekiel's time is described in terms of the Angel cherubim leaving. See on :29; Ps. 132:8. The Angels have worked out every victory for us in prospect- we have to have the faith to go ahead and act, believing that they have acted, even when there is no visible evidence. Our works must therefore repeat those which our Angels have done previously- hence their great interest in us. The Angel brought Israel "forth out of the land of

Egypt into a land that I had espied for them" (Ez. 20:6); the Angel in the ark "went before them in the three days journey to search out a resting place for them" (Num. 10:33). Yet Israel still had to send out human spies, and carefully "describe the land in a book" (Josh. 18:4-8).

But the Angel and the glory of Yahweh clearly looked ahead to the Lord Jesus. He didn't exist at that time, and was greater than Angels; Heb. 1 is clear that He was not an Angel. "I go to prepare a place for you" (Jn. 14:1,2) clearly alludes to the scene here. The Lord went to the cross, and thence to Heaven, to prepare us the rest / camping place which Joshua couldn't ultimately give Israel in Canaan (Heb. 4:8). "Camping place" is s.w. "rest", used of Canaan (Dt. 12:9; Gen. 49:15). The ultimate resting place of God's glory, in those days manifest in an Angel, will be in the Kingdom of God upon earth at the Lord's return (s.w. Is. 11:10 "His rest shall be glorious"; Is. 32:18). But even in this life, the resting place of God is in hearts which have come under the dominion of the King, becoming thereby His Kingdom (s.w. Is. 66:1).

In their faithlessness, Israel failed to learn the lesson from the ark and cloud going before them to search or spy out their resting place. They wanted human eyes to "spy out" the land (Num. 13:2). "Spy out" is the word used of how the ark and Angel in the cloud were ever going before Israel to "search out a resting place" (Num. 10:33; Dt. 1:33), and that resting place ultimately referred to the inheritance of Canaan. It was God Himself who had spied out the land for them (Ez. 20:6 s.w.). But

they insisted upon empirical, human spying out. This insistence upon empirical evidence is not the stuff of faith, and led to their spiritual failure in this context. "Of every tribe" excluded Levi, because they were not going to inherit any land possession.

The cloud was both in front of them and over them (:34), because it was over the ark which moved in the midst of them; just as Yahweh is both in the present and in the future, as His Name suggests. "Camping place" is literally "rest", a term used for inheritance of the Kingdom and land. Deuteronomy often speaks of Israel entering their "rest". The entire journey through the desert, every step of the way, every point of the itinerary, was intended to lead Israel to enter their "rest". The fact they chose not to enter the rest was therefore a waste of all the work the Lord had done with them on the journey.

Num 10:34 The cloud of Yahweh was over them by day, when they set forward from the camp-

The pillar of cloud was vertical as it stood above the tent of meeting when they encamped, but was spread out as a plume over them as they travelled, shielding them from the desert heat. We could deduce from Num. 10:34,35 that the cloud rose up when Moses commanded it to. They journeyed according to Yahweh's commandments to Moses, and it was he who in turn uttered that commandment to Israel and to the cloud: "The cloud of Yahweh was over them by day, when they set forward from the camp. It happened, when the ark went forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Yahweh" (Num 10:34,35). It wasn't therefore the case that Moses had

no idea as to when they were to travel, and that he only knew when the cloud lifted up and went forward. It was rather he who commanded the cloud to do that. Representing the Lord Jesus, he was in this sense in a position of control over the Angel within the cloud. This command over the Angel was part of the same theme that we see in how Moses negotiated with God over the salvation of Israel. See on :36.

Num 10:35 It happened, when the ark went forward, that Moses said, Rise up, Yahweh-

David thought that the bringing of the ark to Zion could have been its' final homecoming- although Solomon his son let everything down in reality. "Arise O Lord into Your rest" in Ps. 24:8 alludes to "Rise up, O Lord" in Num. 10:35. The travelling of the ark was intended to have come to a permanent rest in the sanctuary. But David and Solomon failed to appreciate that God preferred to keep on the move, and not to be tied down by mere religion.

It's unclear if the final verses of this chapter refer just to the initial journey of Israel with the ark until they came to the borders of the land. It's tempting to see them as a general statement of what happened throughout the 38 years journey. In which case we marvel at God's grace- that the condemned were still led by the cloud, their feet didn't swell, they were still protected from the sun by day and the cold at night. How God treats the condemned is truly the measure of Him.

And let your enemies be scattered! Let those who hate you flee before you!-

The fleeing of the Egyptians from Israel in the midst of the Red Sea (Ex. 14:25,27) was to be repeated in all Israel's conflicts with their enemies; every time, the essence of the Red Sea deliverance [which was by grace alone, as Israel then were so weak spiritually] was to be repeated throughout the history of God's people (Num. 10:35; Dt. 28:7).

We would rather there were a third way. But *as far as God is concerned*, there is none. None would say they hate God; not even the atheist. Yet God sees those who love the world as hating Him. Likewise the Bible speaks of the world as being sinful and actively hating God, whereas to human eyes the world is for the most part ignorant. Thus the Canaanite nations did not know much about the God of Israel, and yet they are described as actively hating Him (Num. 10:35 NIV; Ps. 68:1).

Num 10:36 When it rested, he said, Return, Yahweh, to the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel-

As discussed on :34, this could be read as Moses commanding the spread out cloud which went before them to return to the camp and make them rest there. But they journeyed "at the commandment of Yahweh" to Moses, and his commanding the Angel in the cloud to stop and start was therefore reflective of the commandment he had received from God.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 11

Num 11:1 The people started complaining in the ears of Yahweh-

The phrase "the people" is almost always used about Israel in their weak sinfulness. This is a classic example. Which highlights God's grace in telling Pharaoh "Let My people go... he did / did not let the people go". Weak as they were, God was still intent on delivering them.

They doubtless grumbled amongst themselves. But what we say secretly, as we think, to ourselves and to each other is spoke right into the ears of God Himself. What they said is recorded in Ps. 78:19,20, although this is probably the record of how God interpreted their thoughts, rather than their actual words, which is what He does to us to, looking to the implication of our positions: "They spoke against God. They said, Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? Behold, He struck the rock, so that waters gushed out, and streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Will He provide flesh for His people?". For sure they didn't think they were whispering this in God's ears. You speak in another's ear when you are privately whispering. They whispered to each other in their "murmuring in their tents", but God saw this as whispering in His ear. This is how closely God listens to every conversation and secret thought. This lack of ultimate privacy is a great comfort to the spiritual person. We have His ear, we have the intimacy of someone who

knows another well enough to whisper a private thought into their ear.

Their complaint was that they had no meat. But this is related to their wilful memory that they had eaten flesh to the full by the flesh pots of Egypt. Their complaint wasn't so much that they wanted a more varied diet, but that they wanted the life and food of Egypt (:20), and were looking for any excuse to legitimize the fact that they had in their hearts returned to Egypt.

When Yahweh heard it, His anger was kindled; and Yahweh's fire burnt among them, and consumed some of those in the outskirts of the camp-

The implication could be that it was those who camped furthest away from the tabernacle who complained. An encampment of very many people (:21) would've been large, and for them to walk to the tabernacle would've been quite a journey. If we are wholeheartedly devoted to God, we won't want to be on the edge of God's people, just peripherally associated with the things of God. The fire represented their own lust. They were consumed with their lusts, and their consumption by Divine fire mirrored that.

Num 11:2 The people cried to Moses, and Moses prayed to Yahweh, and the fire abated-

The people cried... Moses prayed- and the Divine plague ceased. This is exactly the sequence of activity during the plagues- Moses had learnt previously about such intercession for others suffering the result of sin, and now that lesson was being used in the personal growth plan God had for Moses. We too find that situ-

ations are arranged by providence to test what we learnt at some earlier point. In this case, however, the people of the Lord were acting the same as Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The thoughtful Israelite would've perceived this, and realized that Israel's salvation was grace indeed, seeing that they were behaving in the same way as the Egypt which they had been saved out of.

AV "the fire was quenched". Fire which is *not* quenched represents total destruction in condemnation (Is. 66:24; Jer. 17:27; Mk. 9:43). The idea therefore is that thanks to Moses' intercession, these people were saved from what would otherwise have been eternal condemnation. Those whose faith is commended for quenching fire (Heb. 11:34) are those who quenched what would otherwise have been permanent condemnation of others. We therefore conclude that to some extent, some can be saved from a condemnation they would otherwise experience- by the intercession of others (Jude 23). It was because of the faith of the friends that the paralyzed man was forgiven his sins (Mk. 2:5). In some cases, we can play the critical factor in saving a person from eternal condemnation as Moses did here.

Num 11:3 The name of that place was called Taberah, because Yahweh's fire burnt among them-

As explained on :2, the burning of Yahweh's fire represented condemnation. And third parties can save others from this- in some cases, by Yahweh's grace.

Num 11:4 The mixed multitude that was among them lusted exceedingly; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who will give us flesh to eat?-

This group are spoken of as if they were separate from "Israel". The Israelites camped according to their tribes, and therefore this group perhaps camped and travelled separately. But their attitude rubbed off upon the main Israelite group. For this incident is spoken of as the lust of *Israel* (Ps. 78:30). The lusts [Heb. 'coveting'] of others became the lusts of Israel. And we see a clear bridge over the centuries to our own day, where the fads and passions of our fellows so easily come to be ours. The essence of their complaint was seen as effectively saying "Why did we leave Egypt?" (:20). Their complaint about a boring diet was essentially a desire to return to Egypt. And in any case, they are recorded as having huge herds when they left Egypt (Ex. 12:38; 17:3) and also when they entered the land (Num. 32:1). At Sinai they were warned not to let their herds come near the mountain (Ex. 19:13; 34:3). They had meat to eat. But they were saying they expected it from God. They were making an excuse to return to Egypt.

Num 11:5 We remember the fish-

"Remember" is nearly always used of remembering Yahweh and His work in Egypt, and of His remembrance of Israel. But memory is selective, and they preferred to "remember the fish", one of the few good experiences out of a host of awful experiences in Egypt. They were commanded instead to "remember" their affliction in Egypt (s.w. Dt. 5:15; 7:18; 8:2; 15:15; 16:3). But out of that mass of memories, they chose to "remember" the fish and they forgot their God. Perceptions are selective, and those who turn away from God do so because

they focus upon one small aspect of experience or memory, and ignore the vast majority of the data. God's commandments to "remember" their affliction rather than "the fish" indicates that we are not powerless in the formation of memory and understanding. We can play a conscious role in the formation of our own memory and understanding- if we have a heart for God and His ways rather than for Egypt.

Which we ate in Egypt for nothing-

It was only free because they were given it to eat in their slave camps whilst doing brutal labour. This is as bizarre as a concentration survivor remembering the 'free' food they were given whilst incarcerated. Truly, human beings tend to focus on one aspect and forget the rest. They weren't even given straw to make bricks, so it was only a highly selective memory that focused on some occasion when they got free fish in Egypt. The only other reference to fish in Egypt is when the river stunk with dead fish at the time of the plague of Ex. 7:17. Maybe the Hebrews ate them. But this is how wrong and faithless narratives are constructed in the human mind- focusing upon a single incident and extrapolating it to be a general rule of how things were or how a person was. Again, the Bible's psychological credibility and reality is remarkable.

We noted on :4 that the attitude of the "mixed multitude" spread to the Israelites. Perhaps it has been "well" for them in Egypt, and perhaps indeed they had eaten fish for free. But that wasn't the case for the Hebrews. But the Hebrews had adopted the narrative of the free-

born Egyptians as their own, because it was convenient for them and their own agenda of returning to Egypt. Again we see the psychological credibility of the text. For we see all around us individuals absorbing the narrative of others, and making it their own. Rather than factoring their own actual historical narrative in the context of their relationship with their loving God.

The cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic;-

Their argument was that they missed the diversity of diet in Egypt. The singular "manna" stands in contrast to the diversity they liked to imagine they had experienced in Egypt. The argument for diversity is so often from the flesh- e.g. rather than monogamous marriage, the flesh argues for diversity of sexual experience. Rather than God's word being our ultimate standard of truth, the flesh wants a wide variety of 'truths'. See on 2 Pet. 2:1. They forgot their misery in the slave camps of Egypt, and imagined life had been much better there than it was. In our weakness, there are times on our wilderness journey towards the Kingdom when we look back to this world and think it was all far better than it was. The Passover was to be eaten with bitter herbs to remind them of the bitterness of Egypt / the world. But because they weren't living in the spirit of the Passover, they liked to imagine that Egypt had in fact not been bitter but instead spicy and sweet.

The illogicality of going back to the world is brought out by the illogicality of Israel's rejection of Moses. Israel rejected Moses because it was easier to stay where they

were. Such is the strength of conservatism in human nature; such is our innate weakness of will and resolve. They rejected the idea of leaving Egypt because they thought it was better than it was, they failed to face up to how much they were suffering (Num. 11:5). And our apathy in responding to Christ's redemptive plan for us is rooted in the same problem; we fail to appreciate the seriousness of sin, the extent to which we are in slavery to sin- even though the evidence for this is all around us.

Num 11:6 but now we have lost our appetite-

This is typical whining. They had lost their appetite, and yet they considered the food of Egypt to be so desirable. They were insatiable, as spoilt children. AV "our soul is dried away" could imply the manna was dry. But this was just their pouting complaint, for it tasted creamy, like fresh oil (:8).

There is nothing at all except this manna to look at-

In the same way as Israel became ungrateful for the manna and became bored with it, so we can become bored with God's word in Christ which it represents (Jn. 6:63 and context). It all can become the same old scene- unless we remember the daily miracle God is performing in giving us His word and guiding us as Israel were daily guided by the fire and cloud, with His presence clearly amongst them. These things were soon taken for granted by them. We at times long for a more visible declaration of God's presence in our lives; but Israel had this daily, and yet it didn't result in their faith remaining. For faith isn't related to what we can see with our eyes (Heb. 11:1,2).

Num 11:7 The manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like the appearance of bdellium-

This description of the manna is an answer to their complaint that the manna was dry and not appealing visually (:6). It was moist, tasting like cream with fresh oil, and had a wonderful appearance. The idea may be that it was like a crystal, hard on the outside; but in fact soft inside (:8). The manna represents both the Lord Jesus and God's word; apparently hard on the outside to the eyes of the cynic, but in fact fresh oil within (:8). "Manna", literally "What is it?", suggests they never really grasped what it was. It was the revelation of Yahweh's grace to them, in that despite their deep apostasy and unbelief, He was daily feeding and saving them. And so the Lord Jesus likens Himself to the manna in Jn. 6, seeing that He was likewise not comprehended by Israel. The colour would have been as GNB "whitish yellow".

Num 11:8 The people went around, gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in mortars, and boiled it in pots, and made cakes of it. Its taste was like the taste of fresh oil-

The freshness of the taste was to demonstrate that it had been created specifically for them every morning. This is in commentary upon their complaint in :6 AV "our soul is dried away", which could imply the manna was dry. But this was just their pouting complaint, for it tasted creamy, like fresh oil.

Num 11:9 When the dew fell on the camp in the night, the manna fell on it-

The word for "fell" is that used of God Himself coming down (Num. 11:17,25; 12:5). They were rejecting God's coming down to them through His daily provision. To reject the manna was to reject God. "Fell on" is the idea used by the Lord Jesus when He speaks of how as the manna came down from Heaven, so did He. But just as the manna "fell [down]", so did the dew. And dew doesn't float down from Heaven, it is formed upon earth. So it was with the manna, and so also with the Lord Jesus. He was "from" Heaven in that He was sent from God, but He didn't personally pre-exist, and His 'coming down from Heaven' like the manna doesn't at all imply that He personally floated down from Heaven, nor that He existed physically before His birth.

Num 11:10 Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, every man at the door of his tent; and the anger of Yahweh was kindled greatly; and Moses was displeased-

The idea is as in GNB "Moses heard all the people complaining as they stood around in groups at the entrances of their tents. He was distressed because the LORD had become angry with them". The time of Num. 10 and 11 was a spiritually low period for Moses. Consider Num. 10:30; 11:11-13,22,23. Yet in these very chapters there seems almost an emphasis on the fact that God was manifest in Moses: "Moses heard the people weep"; but they wept in the ears of Yahweh (Num. 11:10,18); "it displeased the Lord; and the anger of the Lord was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased" (11:1,10) shows the connection between them; God has

asked Moses to carry Israel “as a nursing father... unto the land” (11:12), although Yahweh was their father who would carry them to the land (Dt. 32:6; Hos. 11:1). That Yahweh is manifest in His servants *even in their times of weakness* is both comforting and sobering. It is because of this principle that an apostate Israel caused Yahweh’s Name *which they carried* to be mocked in the Gentile world (Ez. 20:39; 36:20; 39:7; 43:8). Yahweh did not take that Name away from them the moment they sinned. Having been baptized into the Name, our behaviour in the world, whether they appreciate it or not, is therefore a constant exhibition of the Name.

Num 11:11 Moses said to Yahweh, Why have You dealt with Your servant so badly? Why haven’t I found grace in Your sight- for You lay the burden of all this people on me?-

Moses argues that because God had laid the burden of His people on his shoulders, this was such a curse as to disprove God’s claim to have lavished grace upon Moses (Num. 11:11). But the language of God’s people being laid upon a man’s shoulders as a burden is in fact the language of the cross. Moses was therefore rejecting the cross. He bitterly complains that the people are God’s, not his, and therefore it is unreasonable for God to expect Moses to carry them and feed them (:11-13). He didn’t want to manifest God, nor do the work of Messiah (Is. 40:11), even though he was intended to be the prophet like unto Messiah (Dt. 18:18).

Moses earlier had had the same doubt, as to whether he had really found grace in God’s sight; and God had

magnificently assured Moses that indeed he had (Ex. 33:13-17). Yet Moses still struggled to accept this; the complex difficulties of his life coupled with what appears to have been some form of depression led him to again doubt it. We too struggle with accepting our salvation by pure grace; one moment we may grasp it, but life's difficulties trigger again the old doubt. Only perhaps at the day of judgment, as he see ourselves as it were from outside of ourselves, standing in the promised land of God's Kingdom, shall we finally realize that all is ultimately OK, His grace to me is for real.

Earlier, Moses had complained about this burden, and the answer had been to follow Jethro's advice in appointing a huge number of elders and judges. The same word for "burden" is used in Dt. 1:12: "How can I myself alone bear your encumbrance and your burden and your strife?". He had felt in Dt. 1:9 that "I am not able to bear you myself alone. And so Jethro had advised Moses to appoint elders so that "they shall bear the burden with you" (s.w. Ex. 18:22).

Jethro had observed how stressed Moses was with the burdens of the people, and we get the sense that they were at constant strife amongst themselves. Moses' sense of inability to bear the effects of the sins of the people could be read as a desire for the Messianic figure who would bear those sins and their effects; which was to come to full term in the sin carrying of the Lord Jesus on the cross. For the "burden" was of sin (s.w. Ps. 38:4). These feelings of Moses were not of themselves to be read as frustration or weakness; for the same words are

used of how God Himself was weary of bearing the "encumbrance" of His people (s.w. Is. 1:14). Moses was sharing God's feelings.

But Moses didn't respond to this burden as he might have done; for now in frustration he asks God to slay him, as he just couldn't bear the "burden" of the people (s.w. Num. 11:11). God responded at that point by giving 70 Spirit endowed elders to assist Moses (Num. 11:16), and we can assume this was because the sharing of the "burden" with a system of many elders (as suggested by Jethro and as described in Dt. 1:13-16) hadn't worked. Because those men were themselves weak and unspiritual.

Moses had asked the same question in Ex. 5:22. He struggled with God not doing what He promised straight away. He wanted it right away, and failed to see that any delay which allowed evil to continue could be legitimate. This question lurked within Moses, and it seems at times he only wanted to be part of God's plan if it was going to work out when and how he expected and assumed. This is why Israel rejected a suffering Messiah, and why so many stumble at God today. Because they lack the humility to trust in God and accept their own assumptions of how things should be may be very wrong and short termist.

We note the continued complaint about "all this people". Moses uses the term in :11,12,13 and :14. He is again repeating the words of Jethro in Ex. 18:23, who urged Moses to appoint many judges so that "all this people" could have peace. But Jethro's advice was wrong and

didn't work. Jethro had told Moses that he couldn't do it and would wear away... and now Moses feels like this. He allowed Jethro's perception of him to become reality, just as so many people do. In his maturity in Dt. 1:12 [see comments there], Moses accepts he had made the mistake of absorbing Jethro's view that he could not carry the people alone, and had become suicidal about it [as recorded here in Num. 11]. But later in Dt. 1 he glories in the way that *God* had "carried" the people. He ought to have trusted in him, rather than the impractical advice of his father in law. We note he likewise wanted Jethro to lead Israel through the desert and to be to them "instead of eyes"; when the Angel eyes of Yahweh were to guide them through the desert. He was clearly wrong influenced by this mere man, just as many are, and come to see themselves as others see them.

Num 11:12 Have I conceived all this people? Have I brought them forth, that You should tell me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing infant', to the land which You swore to their fathers?-

This very much sounds as if Moses sees himself as a childminder who is being unreasonably asked to bear with a difficult child. And he is handing back the child to the parent, as if to say "You get on with it, I'm done". Clearly he has the sense that Yahweh has been unreasonable in His expectations of Moses; and yet the next chapter will tell us Moses was earth's humblest man, or made humble, through such struggles with depression. His distancing from the people contrasts with how when *God* decides to disown His people, it is Moses who offers his

own salvation for the people in order to change God's desire to destroy them. We see here the amazing mutuality between God and Moses. They each get to a point where they want to disown Israel and give up, and at that point they encourage each other to endure.

Moses is depressed by Israel complaining at how boring the manna was. He doubts God's earlier promises to him: "Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight (God said he had, in Ex. 33:17)... have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto them, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child unto the land which thou swearest unto their fathers (not "our"-notice the uncharacteristic separation between Moses and Israel). Whence should I give flesh unto all this people... if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in the sight (as God had earlier promised him that he had)" (Num. 11:12). God was the father and conceiver of Israel, the one who would carry them to the land (Ex. 19:4; 33:15; Dt. 32:11,12; Hos. 11:1); it is as if Moses is saying: They're your children, you look after them, don't dump them on me. Although compare this with his earlier love for them, willing to sacrifice himself for them. God then says that He will provide more food for Israel. But Moses almost mocks God: "Shall the flocks and herds be slain for them, to suffice them?". And the Angel angrily replied: "Is the Lord's hand waxed short? thou shalt see whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not". If he had

faith, Moses surely would have realised that if God could provide manna, he could provide any food. Moses seems to have suffered from fits of depression and also high spirituality.

We note the alternative reading of the LXX, quoted in Acts 13:18: "as a nursing father He [God] carried them in the wilderness". It was God who carried the people, but Moses had been trying to do it in his own strength, without sharing it fully with God. We note how God is likened to a woman, a nursing mother, of a very difficult infant child; although as God He is presented as a "father". In those days it was common for a wealthy woman to employ another woman to be a 'nursing mother' for her infant child. But God likens Himself to such a woman, or to a poor woman who couldn't afford to hire such a woman.

Num 11:13 From where can I get meat to give to all this people? For they weep to me, saying, 'Give us meat, that we may eat'

The disciples had the same question- from where to find food to feed a great multitude in the desert (Mk. 8:4). If their minds had been more spiritually attune, they would have perceived that they were in essence in the same situation as Moses- and God would likewise provide. The more we are familiar with Scripture, the more we will realize that our life situations and the crises we face have in fact been faced and overcome, in essence, in previous Biblical situations.

Num 11:14 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me-

This complaint of Moses had supposedly been answered by Jethro's suggestion to appoint elders "to share the load with you" (Ex. 18:22); and I suggested that Ex. 18 is out of chronological sequence, and should be inserted between Num 10:10 and Num. 10:11 (see note there). But in reality, Jethro's secular advice hadn't worked. Moses accepts Jethro's advice on the basis that he will "surely wear away"; even though his natural strength never abated (Dt. 34:7), and God surely would not have asked him to do the impossible. So Jethro is presented as wrong on this point, and perhaps Moses need not have taken his advice. Jethro at this time seems to have seen Yahweh as only one of many gods; he was a pagan priest. He prophesied that if Moses followed his advice, "all this people shall go to their place in peace"(Ex. 18:23)- which they didn't.

Depression is not a sin. Moses was depressed and suicidal in Num. 11:14,17 but there is no word of rebuke from God. He saw why Moses was like that- because of an over-extension of himself in doing his Father's work. Depression may bring about an inability to feel, which makes the prayers of David seem so far removed from us. Yet again, depression isn't a sin. It's how we are at some times. It shouldn't be allowed to hinder us from praying.

Num 11:15 If You treat me this way, please kill me right now, if I have indeed found grace in Your sight; and don't let me see my wretchedness-

"If You..." definitely uses the female rather than male form of "You", as the rabbinic commentaries note often. It seems Moses is saying that God has given birth to Is-

rael, so He as their mother should carry them and not palm off the work onto Moses. To use the female form for God in this context is therefore highly sarcastic if not blasphemous.

Here we surely have Moses in depression; but God doesn't seem to rebuke him (although He does rebuke him for other failures at other times). He recognizes our humanity with incredible sensitivity; and depression isn't sin. Despite Moses' anger with God- GNB "so that I won't have to endure your cruelty any longer". God likewise overlooked similar statements by Job. We also need to cut folk some slack when they come out with such statements under duress.

Num 11:16 Yahweh said to Moses, Gather to me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you-

The Hebrew officers of Ex. 5:15 refused to beat their brethren and so were beaten. In Num. 11:16, a point soon after the time of the exodus in Ex. 5:15, there is the assumption that there was already a group of 70 elders or officers over Israel. Presumably these 70 were the 70 Hebrew officers who were placed over the Israeli team slaves. So their taking beating for their brethren became the qualification for eldership in the new Israel who emerged from the Red Sea. This is the real qualification for leadership...

Possession of the Spirit did not mean that someone was necessarily acceptable in God's sight, e.g. Saul possessed it for a time (1 Sam. 10:10) as did the judges of

Israel (Num. 11:17) although they were not righteous; they did not believe the report of Joshua and Caleb and therefore were condemned to die like the other Israelites, despite their having the Spirit - Psalm 82:1-7 says as much.

The system proposed by Jethro didn't really work, because Moses again felt the burden was too great for him (see on Num. 11:11), and so these 70 Spirit filled elders were appointed (Num. 11:16). But this too didn't really work; because in Dt. 17:11; 21:5 we seem to read of the priests effectively being the judges, under the direct control of Moses and Aaron.

Num 11:17 I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit which is on you, and will put it on them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you not bear it yourself alone-

In Rom. 8:26, Paul writes of how the Spirit "helps our infirmities". The Greek word for "helps" occurs in the LXX of Ex. 18:22 and Num. 11:17, where Moses is the one helped. Paul is suggesting that each believer can rise up to the pattern of Moses; he was no longer to be seen by Jewish believers as some distant, untouchable, stellar example of devotion. He was a pattern that through the Spirit could be realistically attained; although the point is being cleverly made that he too had weakness that needed Divine help.

When we read that God will not place too great a burden upon us, but will provide a way of escape so that we are able to bear the burden (1 Cor. 10:13), the allusion is clearly to Num. 11:17 LXX, where Moses is pro-

vided with helpers so that he will be able to bear the burden of the people.

Num 11:18 Say to the people, 'Sanctify yourselves against tomorrow, and you will eat flesh; for you have wept in the ears of Yahweh, saying, Who will give us flesh to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt. Therefore Yahweh will give you flesh, and you will eat-

This command to sanctify themselves may be somehow sarcastic. Because the flesh they were being given to eat was effectively their condemnation. They were given flesh to eat as they desired, and it was to be their destruction. This is typical of how God condemns people-He gives them what they themselves desire, so that they condemn themselves. For His focus is upon saving and not condemning. The Lord Jesus may allude here in saying that He was offering *His* flesh to eat, and through absorbing Him, there would be no hunger nor desire to please the flesh.

"It was well with us"- in a land where they been abused, raped and murdered. Here we see how human memory is so biased. We create narratives about the past, our own past and that of others, even a very recent past as in this example, which may be absolutely untrue. Yet we are utterly convinced of them. Moses has just stated that God intends to do "good", s.w. "well", to Israel (Num. 10:29,32). But they were perhaps sarcastically rebuffing the promise of the "good land" of Canaan, instead wanting to see Egypt as the "good" land. Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses urges them to see the land as "good" and God's intentions for them as "good"; whereas

their Egyptian past was not "good" or "well". They were doing what many do today- despising their redemption. We noted on :4 that the attitude of the "mixed multitude" spread to the Israelites. Perhaps it has been "well" for them in Egypt, and perhaps indeed they had eaten fish for free. But that wasn't the case for the Hebrews. But the Hebrews had adopted the narrative of the free-born Egyptians as their own, because it was convenient for them and their own agenda of returning to Egypt.

Num 11:19 You will not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days-

This could be an idiom, for each figure is double that of the previous number. God would as it were add on continually, until they were overcome with this meat. But if we add up 30 [a month] +20 +10 +5 +2 we come to 67, the number of feast days in the sacred calendar of Israel, including the Sabbaths. "You will not eat one day" would then refer to the Day of Atonement, when they fasted. They ought to have eaten meat or special food sparingly and in order to celebrate on special occasions. But God gave them all that meat on consecutive days and it was finally nauseous to them (:20). If we constantly over indulge, then there is no sense of special celebration.

Num 11:20 but a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it is loathsome to you-

The idea is that the very smell of meat would make them nauseous. The implication of :33 is that immediately the people ate the flesh of the quails, they were smitten. This would mean that the intended period of

one month eating quail was either figurative; or God cut short that particular plan and instead operated according to a different one, which was to slay them immediately. This would explain also why the people didn't apparently stay long at this place, but instead moved on quickly instead of being there for at least a month as required by a literal reading of :20.

Another idea may be that the plague caused by the quail meat resulted in chronic vomiting, so strong that vomit was ejected through the nose. "Loathsome" is translated "nauseating" in some versions e.g. NEB, GNB. This is how strongly they would come to hate that which they once lusted after. Hating the object of lust is absolutely psychologically credible, and we see it in the behaviour of Amnon, Potiphar's wife, Judas despitely throwing down his silver pieces etc. It will be seen in the rejected of the last days, hating the objects of their materialism, casting their idols to the bats, which they now see had precluded them from salvation.

Because that you have rejected Yahweh Who is among you, and have wept before Him, saying, Why did we come out of Egypt?'

GNB presents their words as more than a question: "This will happen because you have rejected the LORD who is here among you and have complained to him that you should never have left Egypt". Yahweh who was among refers to the Angel of the presence, whom Moses had begged to go "among them". Indeed God had originally said that the Angel of the Presence should not go amongst them exactly because of their provocative be-

haviour; and it was Moses who had begged for Yahweh's presence "among them". We see therefore that God was almost as it were persuaded against His own will and better knowledge, rather like the Father in the parable of the prodigal.

Their rejection of the manna was effectively their rejection of Yahweh. The essence of their problem was the essence of so many such cries today- that God's provision for us in this wilderness journey isn't enough and is not to our taste.

Num 11:21 Moses said, The people, among whom I am, are six hundred thousand men on foot; and you have said, 'I will give them flesh, that they may eat a whole month'-

The Hebrew word translated as "thousand" can mean a family, or some other administrative division. Many of the 'number problems' in the Hebrew Bible are only really resolvable using this approach. And that may be in view in the census of Israel taken in Num. 1, and in the statement that six hundred 'thousands' of footmen left Egypt (Ex. 12:37). The census of Num. 1 gives figures such as those in Num. 1:21 for Reuben, which could be rendered: "forty six families ['thousands'] and five hundred (men)". Although a "hundred" might also refer to an administrative division. The total in Num. 1 would then be 598 families with a total of 5550 men. The sum given in the second census in Num. 26 comes out as roughly the same, with 596 families amounting to 5730 men. On this basis, the total population (including women and children) would be anything between

20,000 to 40,000. This would enable us to make better sense of the statements that Israel were the smallest numerically of all the surrounding peoples (Dt. 7:1,7; 11:23; 20:1). If we insist upon taking "thousand" literally in Ex. 12:37, then 600,000 male foot soldiers would imply a total population of between two and six million. The population density would have been intense, and far greater than that of many modern nations. Estimates of global population at the time suggest it was only about 40 million, and the population of Egypt was a maximum of three million (probably far less). If the Israelites were smaller than the other nations, and they numbered say 5 million, then the total population of the seven peoples of Canaan would have been at least 40 million. The territory of Canaan could not have supported such numbers. Only 70 Israelites came into Egypt with Jacob. Expansion over 430 years to several million is not realistic. This approach helps us better understand how all the men of war marched around Jericho (Josh. 6:3). If there were literally 600,000 men then the city would have had to be many kilometers in circumference for them all to march around it seven times in one day. Archaeological evidence from Jericho simply doesn't support the idea of such a vast city. If Israel numbered say 5 million people, and recall there was also a "mixed multitude" with them, then if they marched 10 abreast this would require a column stretching around 1000 kilometers. Ex. 13:18 seems to say they marched five abreast. Their promises to Edom and the Amorites to march only along a highway and not spill over it (Num. 20:17; 21:22) is unrealistic

if they had such huge numbers. A figure of 600 family units leaving Egypt is more realistic; otherwise we start to wonder how ever all the Israelites, millions of them, came to be in one place at one time on Passover night. This would then make better sense of Ex. 23:30 GNB: "I will drive them out little by little, until there are enough of you to take possession of the land". This indeed sounds as if Israel were the smallest of the nations, and not a huge nation comprising several million people.

Num 11:22 Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to be sufficient for them? Shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to be sufficient for them?-

Moses almost mocks God: "Shall the flocks and herds be slain for them, to suffice them?". And the Angel angrily replied: "Is the Lord's hand grown short? thou shalt see whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not". If he had faith, Moses surely would have realised that if God could provide manna, he could provide any food. Moses seems to have suffered from fits of depression and also high spirituality. But he was perhaps thereby made the humblest man on earth through his struggles with depression. There are similarities with the anger of the disciples with the Lord Jesus when He suggested feeding the crowd. This anger is because faith had been challenged; and we can find ourselves reacting likewise.

Moses may have been saying that even if they were given all possible meat, they would still not be "sufficed", their lust was such that it wouldn't be satisfied. Because their real agenda wasn't what was on the menu, but to re-

turn to Egypt. And a later Psalm confirms this, by noting that despite being fed with so much flesh, "they were not estranged from their lust".

Num 11:23 Yahweh said to Moses, Has Yahweh's hand grown short? Now you will see whether My word will happen to you or not-

The idea is that God's ability to act is somehow limited. The same phrase was used to the exiles (Is. 50:2; 59:1) who likewise disbelieved that God could bring about the salvation of Israel and bring them in to the promised land and Kingdom. Any disbelief that we will actually be brought into God's Kingdom is really a belief that God's hand is limited. Our lack of faith is not just a failure within our own minds; it is saying and implying something about God personally.

Num 11:24 Moses went out, and told the people the words of Yahweh; and he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and set them around the Tent-

Moses went out of the tabernacle, where this discussion had been happening. Presumably he went out when the cloud ascended; for the Angel in the cloud descends again in :25.

Num 11:25 Yahweh came down in the cloud, and spoke to him-

God Himself is spoken of as coming, descending etc. when He 'preaches' to humanity (e.g. Gen. 11:5; Ex. 19:20; Num. 11:25; 2 Sam. 22:10). In Jer. 39:16, the imprisoned Jeremiah is told to "go, tell Ebed-melech..." a word from the Lord about him. Jeremiah couldn't have literally left prison to do so- but the idea is that a person

encountering the Lord's word has as it were experienced the Lord 'going' to him or her. And in this sense the message of the Lord Jesus (in its essence) could 'go' to persons without Him physically going anywhere or even existing consciously at the time (1 Pet. 3:18-21).

And took of the Spirit that was on him, and put it on the seventy elders: and it happened that when the Spirit rested on them, they prophesied, but they did so no more-

This was presumably done in some visible way. They prophesied briefly as an external witness to the fact that they now had the Spirit. Such brief supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit are recorded several times in the New Testament, where again they are evidences of the receipt of the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is essentially an internal gift. Just as here, the Spirit given to the elders was to empower them in their minds to be able to lead the people and assist Moses in practically guide the people to Canaan.

We read no more of these 70 elders, although Judaism has laid great store on them. It appears to have been a one time event, because there is no mechanism for the 70 to pass on the Spirit to successors. They prophesied at this point and "did so no more" (:25; AV "and did not cease" is quite wrong here). I wonder if they were given to Moses in the same spirit as the quail were-Israel like Moses were given what they lusted after, but that wasn't actually the answer. The gift of quail was in fact together with Divine judgment. Trust in God and acceptance of His provision was the answer. We note the parallel- some of the 72 prophesied "in the camp"

and others outside the camp, just as the quail fell both in the camp (Ps. 78:27) and outside it (Num. 11:31), if we compare the Numbers and Psalms comments. Both 'gifts' come from the *ruach*, the wind [for the quails], and the wind / Spirit [s.w.] for the 70 elders. The record of the gift of quail and of the 70 elders is absolutely interwoven. Just as Israel were given their lust in abundance, with heaps of quails, so Moses was given his desire- 70 "helpers" who I suggest didn't help at all to carry Israel through the desert. Moses in maturity in Dt. 1 reflects that he indeed could not bear / carry the people- but God did. Not the 70 elders. And in any case, the system of Levites and priests was God's answer to administrative issues, not these 70 elders. The point is, that sometimes we are given what we crave, so that we might learn that it is not the answer. As Israel were "not estranged from their lust" by gorging on the flesh. Giving in to lust isn't the path. We see in these things part of a major Biblical theme- that God in fact gives man what he wants, what is his heart's desire. The prodigal received what he asked for, Adam and Eve had their eyes opened. But often it is to man's curse. If our core heart desire is for the Kingdom, that likewise will be answered.

Num 11:26 But two men remained in the camp. The name of one was Eldad, and the name of the other Medad: and the Spirit rested on them; and they were of those who were written, but had not gone out to the Tent; and they prophesied in the camp-

Perhaps this incident happen to confirm Moses' desire expressed in :29 that all Israel would have the gift

of the Spirit. He wanted to see the whole camp and not just the tabernacle area filled with the Spirit in people; and the fact two of them prophesied in the camp rather than in the holy space around the tabernacle was therefore indicative of what was potentially possible for all the people. "Eldad", 'loved by God', was perhaps to represent all the people. The concern of the young man in :27 was that in addition to the 70, now another two were prophesying. If God had given the Spirit to 70, then surely these other two were fake; they were "in the camp" and not where the Spirit had apparently been given to the other 70. But their prophesying was legitimate and they were counted amongst the prophets even though they received the Spirit differently. Their names alone are recorded. It's as if Israel were being taught that relationship with Him and receipt of His Spirit directly, and not just part of Moses' spirit, was possible. And possible outside the apparently 'religious' set up. They represented the possibility for all Israel, as Moses says in :29. We note the same confusion of 70 and 72 in the NT texts of the numbers of apostles sent out by the Lord Jesus.

Num 11:27 A young man ran, and told Moses, and said, Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp!-

Joshua appears to have been only one of a group of Moses' "young men", who moved around the camp running his errands (Ex. 24:5; Num. 11:27,28); as a similar group did for Nehemiah and Paul years later. The young men of the New Testament were also characterized by their love of the word (1 Jn. 2:14). Moses would have had a special fondness for this generation who were to

enter the land. A large part of the Law was concerned with Israel's behaviour after they had settled in the land; these would only have been relevant to that younger generation. It is fitting that both Moses and Caleb (and Joshua?) maintained their youthful vigour right up to their death (Dt. 34:7; Josh. 14:11). But it was particularly young men who were stricken down at this time because of their unbridled lust (Ps. 78:30). These young men contrast with those of :33. The lesson for youth is that you have to watch your friends, even amongst the people of God.

Num 11:28 Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his chosen men, answered, My lord Moses, forbid them!-

Joshua urged Moses to "forbid" or [Heb.] 'imprison' Eldad and Medad for prophesying (Num. 11:28). He fell into the mistake so many have done; shut up or silence a genuine man of God, for fear that the institution, the existing administration, would be undermined. We see something similar in Mk. 8:38,39. Perhaps they were prophesying of Moses' death? Whatever, Moses' refusal to shut them up seems to indicate an openness to God's Spirit and way of working, even if it threatened to undermine his authority. He shows such a genuine spirit when he replies that he wished that all God's people were the spiritual leaders.

Num 11:29 Moses said to him, Are you jealous for my sake?-

GNB "Are you concerned about my interests?". Joshua wanted Moses to be the sole channel of the Spirit

and to have no rival; but Moses in his great humility wanted the Spirit to be shared as widely as possible. These other two men had received the Spirit directly from God, whereas the 70 had received part of Moses' spirit. Joshua was concerned that Moses was being bypassed as a mediator, but Moses in typical humility realizes that he is not indispensable, but others can have direct connection with God apart from through him and without him as their spiritual mentor. A lesson that many authoritarian Christians need to learn.

I wish that all Yahweh's people were prophets, that Yahweh would put His Spirit on them!-

This incident has similarities with the disciples asking Jesus to forbid the disciples of John the Baptist from using the Spirit (Mk. 9:40). Because other believers aren't with us or in our group, we aren't to forbid them. This isn't to say that unity amongst God's people isn't important; but where there is fracture amongst them, this doesn't mean that God only works with one of the groups.

Num 11:30 Moses went into the camp, he and the elders of Israel-

They would obviously have done this anyway at some point. So it is recorded intentionally, and as discussed on :26 it could be that the idea is that Moses and the now Spirit filled elders walked around the camp demonstrating their Spirit given authority. And perhaps as an advertisement for the fact that actually anyone could be filled with the Spirit if they wished.

Num 11:31 A wind from Yahweh went out and brought quails from the sea-

Ps. 78:26 adds: "He caused the east wind to blow in the sky, by His power He guided the south wind". The idea may be that the quails were blown in by a south easterly wind. He had likewise caused the east wind to operate in bringing locusts upon Egypt and in causing the miracle at the Red Sea. The Hebrew idea of "spirit" and "wind" is connected, and God makes His Angels winds (Ps. 104:4). Clearly He was using Angels to bring about these miracles with winds; and the food is called the bread of Angels in Ps. 78:23.

And let them fall by the camp, about a day's journey on this side, and a day's journey on the other side, around the camp-

"The quail was among the ancient Egyptians the emblem of safety and security". In which case we marvel at God's grace; assuring His rebellious people of their security at the very point of their rebellion against Him. Ps. 78:28 stresses that God thoughtfully made the birds settle immediately around their tents, interpreting "By the camp" as "in the midst of the camp" - as if delivering food to their door, showing such grace at the very time of their murmuring against Him.

We have noted how Angel-winds had brought the plagues and driven back and forth the waters of the Red Sea. They were being taught how the essence of God's previous work for them (at their deliverance from the world and Red Sea baptism) was continuing for them.

And about two cubits above the surface of the earth-

The idea may be that they were two cubits apart from each other, which apparently is how flocks of quail are when they land on the ground. GNB: "flying three feet above the ground", as if they flew literally into the outstretched hands of the people. They didn't have to even bend down to pick them up.

Num 11:32 The people rose up all that day, and all the night, and all the next day, and gathered the quails. He who gathered least gathered ten homers, and they spread them all abroad for themselves around the camp-

GNB "They spread them out to dry all around the camp". We get the impression of a mad abandon in amassing as much meat as possible. It was perhaps because of this unbridled lust that God decided to immediately judge them rather than after 30 days; see on :33. His intention had been that seeing so much meat would 'estrangle' them from their lust (Ps. 78:30); but it didn't.

Num 11:33 While the flesh was yet between their teeth, before it was chewed-

The implication of :33 is that immediately the people ate the flesh of the quails, they were smitten. This would mean that the intended period of one month eating quail was either figurative; or God cut short that particular plan and instead operated according to a different one, which was to slay them immediately. This would explain also why the people didn't apparently stay long at this place, but instead moved on quickly instead of being there for at least a month as required by a literal reading of :20.

Some have suggested the translation "before it ran out" instead of "before it was chewed". This enables us to stick with the idea that they ate for a month but before the quail supply was exhausted, they were struck down.

The anger of Yahweh was kindled against the people, and Yahweh struck the people with a very great plague-

Ps. 78:31 adds the detail that those who were killed were the "fattest" - those who weren't really hungry, but simply wanted a better life in the wilderness with the delicacies of Egypt, rather than the basic provision of daily food which God had faithfully promised His people. This attitude can easily happen amongst us - discontent because we seek both eternity in the future, and the life of Egypt right now too. Jesus clearly teaches that we must carry the cross in this life before we can enter the eternal joys of His future Kingdom. It was particularly young men who were stricken down at this time because of their unbridled lust (Ps. 78:30). These young men contrast with those of :27. The lesson for youth is that you have to watch your friends, even amongst the people of God.

We note the goodness and severity of God. His grace [in judging them immediately rather than after 30 days as planned] was displayed at the same time as His wrath. But in the end, as we see in Hosea, His grace triumphs over His necessary wrath. Notice how His wrath is expressed at the very same time as His grace. Human wrath is typically expressed just as wrath; any amelioration of it, any apology, any rectification of the outburst of anger typically comes at a later point. But with God, His wrath

and saving grace are fused perfectly together within the very texture of His being and personality. Exactly as expressed in the meaning of the Yahweh Name given in Ex. 34. We have another example of this in Num. 12:10.

Num 11:34 The name of that place was called Kibroth Hattaavah, because there they buried the people who lusted-

1 Cor. 10:6 is clear that this speaks to us, that we should not lust after evil things as they lusted. It is a theme of the Bible that in essence, God gives men their own desires, just as the prodigal son was given what he wrongfully demanded. Here, Israel lusted (s.w. Ps. 78:29) and God gave them what they lusted after. Those who lusted for meat were given it; yet “they were not estranged from their lust” (Ps. 78:30 AV). Sin never satisfies. Giving in to temptation will not lead to the craving being permanently resolved. This is to point up the huge importance of our innermost desires, our heart, our dominant passions- being upon the things of God and His Kingdom. David could say that all his desire was for the things of God (s.w. Ps. 38:9; Is. 26:8). More than anything else we should desire to please Him and be in His Kingdom. And all who thus love the Lord's appearing will be eternally with Him (2 Tim. 4:8).

Num 11:35 From Kibroth Hattaavah the people travelled to Hazeroth, and they stayed at Hazeroth-

I suggested on :33 that they did not in fact stay as long in the area as originally planned, but God moved them on quicker. The resumed journey from Hazeroth is picked up in Num. 12:16, so this 'staying at Hazeroth'

will now be explained in Num. 12 as relating to the time needed to disciple Miriam. The delays in their wilderness journey were all related to their own sins, as in our own.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 12

Num 12:1 Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married; for he had married a Cushite woman-

Moses' own law contains legislation that prohibits marriages to other nations (Dt. 7:1–3, 16; Ex. 34:16). He broke that law, and this was used as an excuse to question his authority. But Yahweh came to His rescue in very forthright fashion. He simply hates this kind of politics. Miriam considered her sister in law as outside the people of God- but because of that, she herself is placed outside the camp for seven days.

The tensions between Aaron and Moses were already apparent. Aaron had been appointed the spokesman of Moses, but Moses himself soon speaks for himself and Aaron is redundant. Then at the incident of the golden calf, Aaron gives in to the masses and isn't faithful to Moses nor Yahweh, making very lame excuses to Moses. Then in Lev. 10 we read of how Moses snaps at Aaron after Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu are killed for offering strange fire; Moses complains that Aaron's other sons Eleazar and Ithamar hadn't eaten the sin offering and had left it to burn to ashes; and he puts the blame for that on Aaron, who replies that it wasn't an appropriate thing to do given the context. In the immediate context, Moses has complained in Num. 11 that he has nobody to help him. Aaron as High Priest and Miriam as leader of the women were surely intended as

his helpers, but Moses complains he has absolutely nobody to help him. This was in fact an implied criticism of Aaron and Miriam. Again we see the psychological credibility of the Biblical record. Tensions between siblings simmer... and then explode, with an issue like "You married a woman unworthy of you and your position" becoming the excuse to unseat the senior sibling from their position of authority. Aaron was the firstborn, but God had chosen Moses as His number one man... and that was always going to be hard for Aaron to cope with. We see him pressed on one hand by normal sociological pressures, and on the other, by the need to accept God's choice and not be jealous of another man's relationship with God, and to get on with our own calling to serve Him. And Aaron at this point gives in.

Moses "took" (not married) another woman, an Ethiopian- probably a slave woman, or possibly a cheap woman. Moses' brother and sister were ashamed that their brother was involved with a woman like this. Whoever she was, Moses was under the one man: one woman standard of the garden of Eden. At the time of Num. 10:11,29, Moses asks Jethro ["Hobab"] to remain with the people as a guide through the desert. I have suggested that the events of Ex. 18 should be inserted after Num. 10:10 and before Num. 10:11. In this case the argument between Moses, Aaron and Miriam about Zipporah in Num. 12:1 would have occurred after Zipporah had been accepted again by Moses as his wife. But "Cushite" is a strange term for Zipporah. Perhaps this Cushite was one of the "mixed multitude" who left

Egypt, and was taken after his divorce with Zipporah. For the Israelite leader to marry a black woman would have been rather like an apartheid era white South African premier marrying a black servant woman. It demonstrated Moses' humility, and also his attraction to the idea of non-Israelites entering the community of God's people. This would have made Moses a case of divorce and remarriage. It was certainly no barrier to his public service.

But it seems to me that they were using his marriage as an opportunity to bring him down, as they had their own agenda regarding the leadership of the nation. If you feel you have been slandered by gossip in the church, remember that almost every servant of God has been through this at the hands of those they counted as their brethren: Joseph, Moses, Job, David, Jeremiah, Nehemiah, Paul, and above all the Lord Himself. Miriam and Aaron implied Moses (their own brother!) was immoral (Num. 12:1). The comment that Moses was the humblest man on earth is made in the very context of his enduring unjust criticism in a spiritual way (Num. 12:3). The way Paul commanded Timothy not to even *consider* a complaint against an elder unless another two or three had been eye-witnesses (1 Tim. 5:19) is proof enough that he expected elders to be slandered from within the ecclesia. The more you read between the lines of Paul's letters, the more evident it is that his very own brethren almost unbelievably slandered him.

Num 12:2 They said, Has Yahweh indeed spoken only with Moses? Hasn't He spoken also with us? And Yahweh heard it-

It is a theme of the record of the wilderness journeys that God heard the thoughts and secret complaints of His people. His total knowledge and sensitive awareness of every word and thought of our wilderness journey should have an abiding impression on how we think and talk. Likewise we wonder whether they "said" these things in so many words. The implications of their self talk were seen by Yahweh as their actual words, just as ours are. The idea is that indeed God had spoken through Aaron and Miriam as prophets but just at specific times (Ex. 4:15; 15:20). But with Moses He was in open, face to face relationship. He strongly objects to anyone somehow devaluing His intimate relationship with others. But that is just what happens when those in close relationship with Him are judged by others as in fact not having that relationship.

It's possible that they were twisting Moses' recent words: "Would that all the Lord's people were

prophets, that the Lord would put His spirit upon them" (Num. 11:29). As if to say: 'OK, so you're saying that having a prophetic relationship with Yahweh isn't that unique nor important, so therefore, you have no right to be the leader just because you are Yahweh's prophet'. This again is psychologically credible in that it is typical of what happens in power struggles- words are twisted and used as a pretext for one's own agenda.

"They said... and Yahweh heard it" is similar to what we several times read of how the private or even internal mutterings of the Israelites were spoken in Yahweh's ears (Num. 11:1). Perhaps all this that follows is a rebuke of their private thoughts or mutterings of siblings to each other in their tent. It is not stated to whom they spoke.

Num 12:3 Now the man Moses was very humble, above all the men who were on the surface of the earth-

The Hebrew for "meek" means one brought down; he was made meek. The word can also mean 'depressed'. His struggles with depression were used by God to bring him to this acme of humility. Thus the man Moses was *made* very meek, until he was the meekest man alive on earth (Num. 12:3 Heb.). Moses appears to have been very angry at times, but this may be understandable in terms of his depression, and this great commendation, that he was the humblest person, must be allowed its full weight in our interpretation of his character. True greatness is in humility, as the New Testament often teaches. Moses was the leader because he was the most humble.

"A stuttering shepherd, shy of leadership and haunted by his crime of passion" in slaying the Egyptian... these things developed this in him. Remember that Moses himself wrote this. It's an autobiographical comment, reflecting of course the Spirit of Him who knows every heart, and could make such a statement. And yet he writes it in recording how God had rebuked Aaron and Miriam for criticizing him, and how He had told them that He spoke with Moses alone face to face. We can imagine Moses blushing, with hung head. And then

he makes the comment, that he was made the most humble man... Appreciating the honour of seeing so much of God, when he himself was a sinner, was part of that humbling process. All Israel will ultimately go through this when they face up to the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ: "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of man shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day" (Is. 2:10,11). This certainly reads like an allusion to Moses' cowering in the rock, humbling himself in the dust, before the glory of Yahweh. Our glimpses of the wonder of the Father's character should have the same effect upon us, just beholding the glory of God, i.e. the manifestation of His perfect character is Christ, should change us into the same image (2 Cor. 3:18- another invitation to see ourselves as Moses). What a compliment! The most humble man that was then alive; and humility is of great value to God, according to the Proverbs and 1 Pet. 3:4. That the leader of possibly 3 million people for forty years could be the meekest man is a sure wonder. Perhaps this comment is made at this point because Moses' weakness in the previous chapter had perhaps further developed his humility. He truly cries unto God to heal Miriam of the punishment she was given for criticizing him.

God's comment on Moses was: "the man Moses was very great" (Ex. 11:3). Yet it is also written here that "the man Moses was very meek" (Num. 12:3). Putting the two passages together we have the clear lesson that he

who humbles himself is made great. Miriam and Aaron try to humiliate Moses because of the Ethiopian woman he had palled up with in earlier days. But his response was humility itself; so much so that the record comments: "The man Moses was very meek (some suggest the Hebrew implies 'made very meek', as a process), above all the men which were upon the face of the earth".

Num 12:4 Yahweh spoke suddenly to Moses, to Aaron, and to Miriam, You three come out to the Tent of Meeting! The three of them came out-

God's sudden response appears to be because Moses was "humble" (:3). He made no response. But God did. This is a powerful encouragement to self control. It shows for all time that we do not have to always justify ourselves nor answer criticism. Even though at other times it may be necessary. Moses' silence was perhaps because he recognized that his marriage "out" to a non Hebrew was not totally justifiable. Neither was his divorce and remarriage... seeing Zipporah had not committed adultery against him. God sees these situations, when a man indeed may be in the wrong but has a heart for Him. And He is so eager to get involved and justify that man. These ancient records are so relevant to life today. Imagine a group of believers on a committee discussing an issue, and a conservative cuts down a liberal with the comment "You're divorced and remarried". The brother blushes and goes silent. We want to hug the brother and slap his critic, just as God did.

The glory of the "similitude of the Lord" that Moses saw and reflected (Num. 12:4) is likened to "the glory

of Christ, who is the likeness of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Like Moses, Jewish people have that glory, but they have it veiled; they potentially have it, but it is hidden, because their minds are veiled. This could possibly suggest that Paul saw more potential in the Jewish mind for Christ than other races; thus he speaks in Rom. 11 of how the natural branch which has been cut off [Israel] will be more effectively grafted back into the olive tree than the wild Gentile branches. This of course has similarities with the Lord's teaching about Himself as the vine, whose unfruitful branches had been cut off (Jn. 15:2). Israel "much more" than the Gentiles can be grafted back in, whereas Gentile converts do this "against nature" (Rom. 11:24).

Yahweh asked the three of them to come to Him, but then revealed Himself to just Miriam and Aaron. Perhaps He invited Moses too so that Moses could intercede for them so that they not be slain. We see how He so wants to show mercy, He wants to hear an advocate on our behalf. And we have that in the Lord, supremely.

Num 12:5 Yahweh came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the door of the Tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward-

"A pillar" rather than "*the* pillar" could suggest that this was an especially intense manifestation of God through an Angel. God is extremely sensitive to the slander of His people, and has an especial interest in preserving the truly humble.

Num 12:6 He said, Hear now My words. If there is a prophet among you, I Yahweh will make Myself known to him in a vision. I will speak with him in a dream-

Heb. "please listen" shows God's humility and passion to save Miriam and Aaron.

Heb. 1:1 states that God spoke to the prophets in various manners. We can understand by this that inspiration took various forms. Here God tells Moses and Aaron that [at that time] He reveals Himself to prophets by dreams and visions, but with His prophet Moses, He uses another method- He spoke with Moses "mouth to mouth". Whilst all prophets spoke God's word, they each had different processes of inspiration at work. God had indeed spoken to Miriam and Aaron, but in a one off sense. They are being told here that they are wrong to assume that they are regularly being given revelations from God. The fact they received God's word in the past at specific times didn't mean they were justified in their claims to leadership.

Num 12:7 My servant Moses is not so. He is so faithful in all My house-

Paul quotes this in Heb. 3:2,5, but making the point that Moses' technical obedience to all the commands about building the tabernacle, the house or dwelling place of Yahweh, was nothing compared to the work of the Lord Jesus. For He was not only legally obedient, He developed a character far beyond that. And on the basis of that utter perfection was able to build an eternal dwelling place of God in a group of redeemed persons. God appeared to prophets in visions regarding specific

things at specific times (:6). But He spoke with Moses regularly, face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. That source of regular, ongoing revelation was infinitely higher than the occasional revelations to Aaron and Miriam in visions in the past.

The idea is "Faithful in all My household". The context is Miriam and Aaron complaining that Moses had divorced Zipporah for reasons other than adultery, and had remarried- and outside the covenant people. Their implication was that Moses had not been faithful in his own household affairs, so how could he be the leader in God's household. God's response is to comment that Moses has been faithful in all God's household. He thereby overlooks the possibly legitimate hints that Moses' own family management hadn't been that great- but then, it would seem that God accepted that the marriage breakup was perhaps due to factors beyond Moses' control. Not least Zipporah's faithfulness to her pagan father, who did not want to unite with the people of God.

Num 12:8 that with him I will speak mouth to mouth, even plainly, and not in riddles; and he shall see Yahweh's form. Why then were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?-

God spoke to Moses "mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of Yahweh shall he behold" (Num. 12:8) is the basis of 1 Cor. 13:12: "Now (in the period of the Spirit gifts) we see through a glass darkly; but then (in the dispensation of the completed word) face to face: now I know in part

(from the ministry of the gifts); but then shall I know, even as also I am known". The point of this connection is simply this: The close relationship between God and Moses is now available to us through the word. But do we feel God speaking to us face to face, as a man speaks to his friend (Ex. 33:11)? For this is how close God and Moses came through the word. Yet it is possible. An *urgent* devotion to the word is needed by us as a community. This is what we really need exhortation about.

Paul speaks as if he has in one sense matured into "love", no longer a child but a man; yet he writes as if he is still in the partial, immature phase, seeing in a mirror darkly, waiting for the day when he would see "face to face". Likewise "Now I know in part, but then shall I know..." (1 Cor. 13:12). It's the 'now but not yet' situation which we often encounter in Scripture. In a sense we have attained to the mature state of love; in reality, we are still far from it. Paul is alluding to Num. 12:8 LXX, where God says that He spoke with Moses face to face and not in dark similitudes. Paul felt that he wasn't yet as Moses, encountering God 'face to face' in the life of mature love. He was still seeing through a glass darkly. But some time later, Paul wrote to the Corinthians that he was now beholding the glory of the Lord's face [as it is in Christ] just as Moses did, "with unveiled face", and bit by bit, that glory was shining from him (2 Cor. 3:18 RV). And hopefully we feel the same- that bit by bit, we are getting there. So let's take Paul's urging seriously: to grasp the utter supremacy of the life of love, to "follow

after love", to press relentlessly towards that state of final maturity which *is* love (1 Cor. 14:1).

The extent of inspiration is revealed by the way that God says He spoke with Moses "mouth to mouth"- not 'mouth to ear', as if Moses just sat and listened; but mouth to mouth in the sense that God placed His words inside the mouth of Moses (Num. 12:8). Thus what Moses spoke forth wasn't merely the memory of what his ears had heard from God's mouth; rather it was God's own words put somehow within him. "Mouth to mouth" rather than "mouth to ear" reflects the mutuality of relationship between them. Moses not only listened but spoke back and even changed God's intentions. "Why then...?" suggests that it is so wrong to disregard the fact another man has a deeply intimate personal relationship with the Lord. But the lines drawn by denominational Christianity do this all the time.

Num 12:9 The anger of Yahweh was kindled against them; and He departed-

The departure of Yahweh is parallel with the departure of the cloud (:10), again showing that there was an Angel within the cloud which ascended and descended. The implication of :10 could be that the conversation enveloped them all in the cloud, and when the cloud departed, Miriam stood there stricken white as snow.

The same words are used in Ex. 4:14 of God's anger burning against Moses. He too had once been stricken leprous and had been healed. So his mediation for others was based on his own experience of grace, just as ours should be.

Num 12:10 The cloud departed from over the Tent; and behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow. Aaron looked at Miriam, and behold, she was leprous-

Leprosy was a symbol of sin. Moses had himself had the experience of being struck leprous "as white as snow" and then quickly healed from it (Ex. 4:6). He was thus shown that human sin and weakness were not going to stop God's purpose going forward. Moses would have been able to see her leprosy with the eye of faith, remembering his own experience; and Miriam likewise would have been encouraged by Moses' experience to believe that the affliction could quickly be healed. If she perceived the similarities between herself and her brother. And we likewise can take encouragement from others' experiences, insofar as we are thoughtful about life. And if we are familiar with the Biblical records and biographies of the lives of God's previous servants.

"Snow white" leprosy was a sign the leprosy was over (Lev. 13). So she was stricken with the appearance of having been judged for sin, but the judgment was over at the point of it being inflicted. It's as if God foresaw the intercession of Moses and Aaron for her, and Aaron's statement of repentance, and factored this in at the time of the judgment. Perhaps we can understand our own judgment for sin in a similar way. We see something similar in the way she is punished by being shut out of the camp for seven days, when the law required 14 days for those who had been leprous (Lev. 13:13-17). The law

was ameliorated, to again show that in wrath God remembers mercy- at one and the same time. Just as we saw in Num. 11:33, where the intended 30 days judgment of lustful Israel was reduced, so that they were plagued as soon as the quail meat was between their teeth. God's judgment and His mercy are seen at one and the same time, unlike in human judgment and wrath.

Num 12:11 Aaron said to Moses, Oh, my lord, please don't count this sin against us, in which we have done foolishly, and in which we have sinned-

Aaron's language here clearly places Moses as his superior, and he as the far inferior. This is a far cry from the original attempt he made to place himself on at least an equal level with Moses, and to bring Moses down from his exalted status. Effectively, these words are repentance for his previous position. Perhaps this is why Aaron is not punished whereas Miriam is [what other explanation is there for that?]. He makes no specific apology nor statement of repentance, but he does speak of "this sin" and the implication of his words is that he regrets what he said. But clearly his motivation is also fear that he may also be struck with the terrible disease his sister had. We note the contrast in how Aaron cries out to Moses to help, whereas Moses cries out to God. LXX implies Aaron was not fully repentant: "Do not lay sin upon us, for we were ignorant wherein we sinned". God would not have been so angry if this were a genuine sin of ignorance. But despite their fearing the results of sin more than repenting from the heart, Moses still intercedes and is heard. If this is how eager God is to per-

ceive repentance, despite impure motivation, we should likewise, rather than demanding specific apologies. We note too that Aaron's penitence here is greater than it was over the golden calf incident. Acceptance of guilt is indeed a sign of spiritual growth.

Aaron doesn't instinctively pray for his own self-preservation- that the leprosy didn't also break out upon him. Instead he prays for his sister's healing. "Don't count this sin..." is "lay not the sin upon us.... which we sinned". To carry sin therefore is not the same as the sin. To carry sin is to bear the result and consequence of sin. This was what Jesus bore on the cross. Therefore the consequence of every sin is crucifixion, death by torture. And Jesus took this for us. He knew from Isaiah 53 that He was to bear Israel's sins, that the judgments for their sins were to fall upon Him. Israel 'bore their iniquities' by being condemned for them (Num. 14:34,35; Lev. 5:17; 20:17); to be a sin bearer was therefore to be one condemned. To die in punishment for your sin was to bear you sin. There is a difference between sin, and sin being laid upon a person. Num. 12:11 brings this out: "Lay not the sin upon us... wherein we have sinned". The idea of sin being laid upon a person therefore refers to condemnation for sin. Our sin being laid upon Jesus therefore means that He was treated as if He were a condemned sinner. He briefly endured within Him the torment of soul which the condemned will feel.

Often the Spirit points out that the sinner is only harming himself by his actions- and yet he earnestly pursues his course, in the name of self-interest and self-ben-

efit (Num. 16:38; Prov. 19:8; 20:2; Hab. 2:20; Lk. 7:30). Sin is therefore associated by God with utter and derisible foolishness (e.g. Num. 12:11; 2 Tim. 3:9); but this isn't how man in his unwisdom perceives it at all. Indeed, to him self-denial is inexplicable folly and blindness to the essentials of human existence. "This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah (pause to meditate)" (Ps. 49:13). The *folly* of sin is only *fully* evident to God.

Num 12:12 Let her not, I pray, be as one dead, of whom the flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb-

The description of Miriam in Num. 12:12 LXX is quoting from Job 3:16 LXX; as if both Job and Miriam represented apostate Israel. This description of Miriam indicates that the "leprosy" was not Hansen's disease, leprosy as we now know it. For leprosy doesn't begin with such dramatic manifestations. See on :14.

We note the sad state of Miriam's skin, white as snow. Perhaps this was some Divine justice for her dislike of Moses' Cushite, Gentile wife because she was a woman of black skin. Miriam's white skin was now shown to be shameful and repulsive to everyone.

Num 12:13 Moses cried to Yahweh, saying, Heal her, God, I beg You!-

AV "Heal her now" was not totally answered, as God wanted her to be quarantined for seven days first. Moses was surely motivated by his own experience in Ex. 4:6

of being struck "leprous like snow" because he had also resisted God's prophetic purpose. Awareness of our own failures motivates us to pray for others in theirs. We note Moses refers to Miriam as "her" rather than mentioning her name. He knows that God intimately knows the situation he stands in.

Faith is inculcated by an appreciation of the height of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. He now has all power in Heaven and in earth, and this in itself should inspire us with faith in prayer and hope in His coming salvation. On the basis of passages like Ex. 4:7; Num. 12:10-15; 2 Kings 5:7,8, "leprosy was regarded as a "stroke" only to be removed by the Divine hand which had imposed it". The leper of Mk. 1:40 lived with this understanding, and yet he saw in Jesus nothing less than God manifest. Inspired by the height of the position which he gave Jesus in his heart, he could ask him in faith for a cure: "If you will, *you can* [as only God was understood to be able to] make me clean".

Num 12:14 Yahweh said to Moses, If her father had but spit in her face, shouldn't she be ashamed seven days? Let her be shut up outside of the camp seven days, and after that she shall be brought in again-

The idea is that she had done something which would justify her father spitting in her face, i.e. disowning her or spitting in her face and making her sleep outside his house for a period. Dt. 25:9 explains spitting in the face as a sign of deep disdain. This is an unusually passionate example of God's specific anger with His daughter Miriam. The image of a father spitting in his

daughter's face is extreme. She must have really behaved awfully. This is how much He hates racism, judging a man on his apparent marital failures, and seeking to politically machinate for power amongst God's people by bringing another man down. God absolutely hates and despises those who do such things in His family. Yet those who do them often consider themselves somehow more mature than those they abuse. I suggested on Lev. 13:1 that the plague of leprosy was not Hansen's disease as we now know it. See on :12. The Hebrew for "leprosy" is literally 'a stroke', and here we have an example of a person being struck down and then isolated for a period of repentance. Leprosy as we know it would not have been cured so quickly. Leprosy had no cure in the ancient world. And yet the legislation in Lev. 13,14 sounds as if after a relatively short time, the affliction could be lifted- and then a sin offering had to be made. The decisions and diagnosis of the affliction was to be made by the priests, not physicians. I conclude therefore that we should pay more attention to the Hebrew word here translated "leprosy". It is the same word as used for the "stroke" of Divine judgment. This makes more sense throughout the legislation. God could smite sinners with this affliction, mistranslated as "leprosy". If the sinner repented sufficiently, it would be lifted. But the priest would judge that, and therefore sin offerings were required to complete the cleansing process. It is no sin to get sick with leprosy; but if we understand this affliction as a Divine stroke, then it all makes so much more sense.

Num 12:15 Miriam was shut up outside of the camp seven days, and the people didn't travel until Miriam was brought in again-

The overall progress of God's people is hindered by the unresolved sin of their leadership. This isn't the same as the false notion of 'guilt by association'. There is also the idea present here that true spiritual progress of God's people towards His Kingdom will not be achieved by abandoning smitten sinners in the desert. They must be "brought in again". We think of how during Paul's final shipwreck, salvation was made conditional upon all abiding in the ship.

Num 12:16 Afterward the people travelled from Hazeroth, and encamped in the wilderness of Paran-

Num. 33:18 says that "They departed from Hazeroth, and pitched in Rithmah", whilst Num. 12:16 has "the people travelled from Hazeroth, and encamped in the wilderness of Paran". Rithmah was in the wilderness of Paran, which covered a large area. The intellectual desperation of Bible critics in raising this kind of supposed "contradiction" speaks more about them than anything else. Such intellectual desperation is symptomatic of a struggling, uneasy conscience.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 13

Num 13:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

This was in response to Israel's desire to send men to spy out the land (Dt. 1:22). Had they believed God's promises, they wouldn't have needed this human reassurance. But because that was what they wanted, like the Father giving the prodigal son what he wanted, God gave it to them. Even though it was to lead to their collapse of faith and rejection. In essence, we often get what we want. The critical thing is therefore to desire the right things. Because Divine concessions to human weakness often only lead us into more acute temptation. But He makes the concessions because that is what we ask for. And we get what we want, in essence. If we wish to be in the Kingdom above all, then we shall be.

Num 13:2 Send men, that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I give to the children of Israel. Of every tribe of their fathers, you shall send a man, every one a prince among them-

"Which I give..." was God's desperate attempt to remind them that whatever the spies reported about the nature of the land, God would give it to His people. "Spy out" is the word used of how the ark and Angel in the cloud were ever going before Israel to "search out a resting place" (Num. 10:33; Dt. 1:33), and that resting place ultimately referred to the inheritance of Canaan. It was God Himself who had spied out the land for them (Ez. 20:6 s.w.). But they insisted upon empirical, human

spying out. This insistence upon empirical evidence is not the stuff of faith, and led to their spiritual failure in this context. "Of every tribe" excluded Levi, because they were not going to inherit any land possession.

Num 13:3 Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran according to the commandment of Yahweh: all of them men who were heads of the children of Israel-

Dt. 33:2 comments about this incident, that Yahweh "shone forth from Mount Paran, He came with ten thousands of holy ones". They failed to walk in step with the Spirit. There were ten thousands of Angels going with them in glory in order to give them the Kingdom, but they were faithless and turned back. It is stressed that Yahweh commanded this- but as discussed on :1, it was in confirmation of their own weakness of faith in wanting spies to go and check out God's word of promise- instead of believing it without empirical evidence.

Num 13:4 These were their names. Of the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur-

None of these names occur elsewhere, except those of Caleb and Joshua. They were to be chosen by the initiative of Israel (:2). And because unbelief was never far from the hearts of the people, we suspect they chose men who were not known for their faith nor leadership; but who rather were likely to speak to the unarticulated fears of the people.

Num 13:5 Of the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori-

The names of the unfaithful spies are very negative, e.g. Shaphat ben Hori is understood by Jewish midrash

as meaning 'Judge of a hole in the ground'. And I will generally give the meaning of the names of the unfaithful spies as found in the midrash. I have often commented that the names we read of in the Old Testament are often reflective of later developed character and historical actions in the lives of the person. They are not therefore their birth names, and often a person would have more than one name. The fact these names of the unfaithful spies aren't found elsewhere would confirm my suggestion that these were the names they came to be known by after their terrible faithlessness. And likewise Hoshea was renamed to Joshua (:16) after his faithfulness.

Num 13:6 Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh-

Caleb was head of a household within the tribe of Judah. It could be argued that he was directly related to Judah through Hezron and Pharez (1 Chron. 2:5,18,25). But "Kenizzite" (Josh. 14:6; Num. 32:12) could refer to the Gentile tribe of Gen. 15:19; or to a man called Kenaz, memorialized by Caleb naming his son with that same name (1 Chron. 4:15). And Jud. 1:13 could mean that Caleb's father was called Kenaz. Caleb means "dog", and this is apparently alluded to when he is commended for faithfully following Yahweh, as a dog would follow its master (Josh. 14:8; Num. 14:24). The genealogies are constructed in such a way that they don't preclude Caleb having been a Gentile who was fully accepted into the tribe of Judah

Num 13:7 Of the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph-

"Igal", 'putter forth of evil speech'. See on :5. They slandered the land.

Num 13:8 Of the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun-

Hoshea, 'saver', was changed to 'Joshua', 'Yah's salvation' (:16). His faith was that Yahweh would save. Despite all the obstacles to attaining the Kingdom, he believed that Yahweh would save from them all. And this is the essence of faith in Jesus, the Greek form of 'Joshua'.

Num 13:9 Of the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu-

'Remover of good deeds', son of 'weak hands'. See on :5.

Num 13:10 Of the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi-

'Harsh words'; for he slandered the land. See on :5.

Num 13:11 Of the tribe of Joseph, of the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi-

'Thrower of words, son of grief'. Several of these names have reference to words, because these men became known for their slander of the land. See on :5. As so often, the word of man triumphed over the word of God in the minds and fears of men.

Num 13:12 Of the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli-

'Soured strength' (cp. Num. 13:31). See on :5.

Num 13:13 Of the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael-

'Contradictor', for his lack of faith contradicted the Divine promise of the Kingdom; see on :5.

Num 13:14 Of the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi-

'Hider of the truth'. The ultimate truth was and is that God's people can inherit the Kingdom; see on :5.

Num 13:15 Of the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi-

'The majesty of God [Geuel] now pining away [Machi]'. See on :5.

Num 13:16 These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun 'Joshua'-

As discussed on :5, the idea may be that these are the names they became known by, just as Hoshea was now to be renamed Joshua. See on :8. In Dt. 1:23, Moses seems to admit he had been unwise in this: "The thing pleased me well and I took twelve men of you, one man for every tribe". In this time of final spiritual maturity, Moses was keenly aware of his own spiritual failings (as Paul and Jacob were in their last days). This is one of the great themes of Moses in Deuteronomy. He begins his Deuteronomy address by pointing out how grievously they had failed thirty eight years previously, when they refused to enter the good land. He reminds them how that although God had gone before them in Angelic power (Dt. 1:30,33), they had asked for their spies to go before them. And Moses admits that this fatal desire for human strength to lead them to the Kingdom "pleased me well". It seems to me that here Moses is recogniz-

ing his own failure. Perhaps he is even alluding to his weakness in wanting Jethro to go before them "instead of eyes", in place of the Angel-eyes of Yahweh (Num. 10:31-36). Moses at the end was aware of his failures. And yet he also shows his thorough appreciation of the weakness of his people. Moses admits at the end that Israel's faithless idea to send out spies "pleased me well"-when it shouldn't have done (Dt. 1:23,32,33). He realized more and more his own failure as he got older.

Num 13:17 Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, Go up this way by the South, and go up into the hill country-

If their intention was genuine military reconnaissance, they would have focused upon the areas immediately in front of them. And this is where Moses sent them, to the hill country of Judah which was immediately where they would enter Canaan. But by going instead throughout the entire land, they were showing they wanted to check out God's word of promise about the land- they wanted empirical evidence rather than showing faith. See on :25.

Num 13:18 and see the land, what it is, and the people who dwell therein, whether they are strong or weak, whether they are few or many;-

These requests seem to be Moses' weakness or at least, concession to Israel's weakness. God told them to simply search the land, presumably in order to be able to divide it up for conquest and inheritance. Moses instead asks the spies to assess whether the land is good or not, how strong the opposition will be, etc. And this weak-

ness was the undoing of Israel. Indeed Dt. 1:22 says that Israel asked God to send out the spies before them- even though God had promised that the Angel in the pillar of cloud would go ahead of them. God grants such concessions to human weakness, but making use of them often leads us into greater openness to temptation and likelihood of failure. Or Moses may have asked them to go and check that indeed the land was full of "many" people, as God had said; and that they were now weakened. But asking people to check God's word against empirical evidence tends towards unbelief, as we see here. This has relevance to the various invitations made to check the claims of God and His word against "science" and empirical evidence.

Time and again in the Biblical record, Abraham is held up as a very real example, in whose steps all God's people are to tread. For example, as Abraham was bidden leave Ur and go and "see" the "land" of promise which God would "give" him (Gen. 13:15), so the spies were told to go and "see" the "land" which God had "given" them (Num. 13:18; 32:8,9- the same three words as in the promises to Abraham)- yet they lacked the faith of Abraham to believe that really, they could possess that land. They did "see" the land, yet they were punished by being told that they would not now "see the land" (Num. 14:23; Dt. 1:35). They saw it, but they didn't "see" it with the eyes of Abraham. And so it can be with our vision of God's Kingdom. Remember that Moses was the author of both Genesis and Numbers- such connections aren't incidental. Moses wished the people to see themselves as

going forward in the spirit of Abraham- and hence he wrote up the Genesis record for Israel's benefit an inspiration.

Num 13:19 and what the land is that they dwell in, whether it is good or bad; and what cities they are that they dwell in, whether in camps, or in fenced cities-

They disbelieved God's simple statement that He was bringing them to a "good land" (Ex. 3:8 s.w.). They felt they had to check out the truth of His word for themselves; and concluded the land was "evil"; see on :32. God's clear statements and promises must be allowed to trump our own perceptions and empirical conclusions. This is what faith is all about.

Num 13:20 and what the land is, whether it is fat or lean, whether there is wood therein, or not. Be courageous, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the first-ripe grapes-

But this appeal to "be courageous" was not an appeal for the courage of faith; see on :19. It was a merely human, secular appeal. The courage asked of Joshua later was to believe it was God's good pleasure to give His people the Kingdom (Lk. 12:32). The note about time means this would have been in early August.

Num 13:21 So they went up, and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, to the entrance of Hamath-

As discussed on :17, they were asked to explore just the area immediately ahead of the Israelite advance. Instead they explored all of Canaan. This is a parade ex-

ample of when a concession is made to human weakness (see on :1), we tend to misuse and abuse it.

Num 13:22 They went up by the South, and came to Hebron; and Abiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were there-

Although not recorded in Num. 14:24; Dt. 1:36, it appears Caleb was specifically promised Hebron at that time. Caleb had explored that area as a spy (Num. 13:22) and taken a special liking to it. We see therefore his spiritual ambition; 'this shall one day be mine'. And we can do the same, as we in this life spy out our future inheritance.

Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt

The idea may be that it was "built up" seven times greater than Zoan, which the Hebrews may well have laboured as slaves to build up.

Num 13:23 They came to the valley of Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a staff between two. They also brought some of the pomegranates and figs-

The idea seems to be as GNB "as far as Eshcol". Perhaps the two who carried this were the faithful Joshua and Caleb. The valley of Eshcol is near Hebron, which was visited by Caleb (see on :22). So it seems quite safe to assume that he brought back this cluster of grapes from the area he had fallen in love with and had been promised. "Staff" is s.w. "bar" used of how the tabernacle fittings were carried (Num. 4:10). They saw in this a kind of tabernacle. If they also carried pomegranates and figs,

we can assume they had no room to carry much else, including weapons. They went in faith.

Num 13:24 That place was called the valley of Eshcol because of the cluster which the children of Israel cut down from there-

The faith and vision of Joshua and Caleb (see on :24) is graciously counted to all Israel. The Biblical record constantly reflects the grace of its ultimate author. The valley of Eshcol may well have been named after Abraham's supporter (Gen. 14:24), but the meaning of the name now became reflective of the cluster of grapes found there.

Num 13:25 They returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days-

I have made the point that they were originally told just to explore a limited area in southern Canaan (:17). But by going instead throughout the entire land, they were showing they wanted to check out God's word of promise about the land- they wanted empirical evidence rather than showing faith. And because of this more extensive searching of all Canaan, it took them 40 days. And they suffered for this, because on the basis of a day for a year, they had to wander 40 years in the desert.

Num 13:26 They went and came to Moses and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, to the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh, and brought back word to them, and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land-

To 'bring back a word' is used of communicating God's word (Num. 22:8; 23:5,16; Josh. 22:32). The

word of God was clear- they could enter the land and take it. But here we have the word of man being allowed to triumph over the word of God in the hearts of men, as happens so often. To return a word also means to answer a question- s.w. "what answer shall I return" (2 Sam. 24:13; 1 Kings 12:6; Neh. 2:20). There was a question as to whether they could inherit the Kingdom- and that question should never have been, if they had believed God's word.

Num 13:27 They told him, and said, We came to the land where you sent us and surely it flows with milk and honey and this is its fruit-

Israel came to describe the Egypt they had been called out from as the land flowing with milk and honey (Num. 16:12), and denied that it was possible for to enjoy this in the Kingdom of God. And so we have the same tendency to be deceived into thinking that the kingdoms of this world, the world around us, is effectively the Kingdom of God, the only thing worth striving after. And His Kingdom is somehow unattainable.

Num 13:28 However the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. Moreover, we saw the children of Anak there-

Rahab informed the later spies that the cities were fortified from fear of Israel, and the Canaanites were weak and fearful before Israel at this time (Josh. 2:10,11). Those obstacles to our inheritance of the Kingdom which seem to us huge and too strong for us may actually be very weak and far easier to overcome than we imagine. The spies were sent to find out whether the peo-

ple in the land were many or few. But they were being asked to confirm the truth of God's statement that although the people were indeed many, God would give Israel victory against them (Dt. 9:1,2). But they focused upon the obstacle rather than the solution- which is the way of the flesh in every context.

Num 13:29 Amalek dwells in the land of the South; and the Hittite, and the Jebusite, and the Amorite, dwell in the hill country; and the Canaanite dwells by the sea, and along by the side of the Jordan-

As noted on :28, they focused upon the obstacle rather than the solution- which is the way of the flesh in every context. And they almost relish in giving all the details of those obstacles. There was not a word of faith from the ten spies.

Num 13:30 Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it-

The Bible often records the immediacy of response in faithful people. Procrastination and endlessly weighing up the difficulties often leads to failure to act as we should.

Num 13:31 But the men who went up with him said, We aren't able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we-

Caleb and Joshua perceived that Israel were "well able" to overcome the tribes and inherit the land, seeing that the Angel-hornet had gone ahead and prepared the way; and yet due to Israel's disabling of this possibility at the time, it was in some ways so that God Himself

was "not able" to give them the inheritance, because *they* judged that *they* were "not able" to take it (Num. 13:30,31; 14:16).

Num 13:32 They brought up an evil report of the land which they had spied out to the children of Israel, saying-

The Hebrew word for "spied out" in Dt. 1:24 also means 'to slander' (s.w. 2 Sam. 19:27; Ps. 15:3). Their slander of the land was in that they misrepresented the strength of the people there, who were in fact fearful of the Israelites. They brought up an evil report of the land (Num. 13:32), characterizing it as not "good" but "evil", as if inhabited by insuperable forces of cosmic evil. They disbelieved God's simple statement that He was bringing them a "good land" (Ex. 3:8). Moses therefore repeatedly calls the land a "good land", denying their wrong idea that the land was inhabited by 'evil spirits' (Dt. 3:25; 4:21,22; 6:18; 8:7; 9:6; 11:17). We see here how belief in 'evil spirits' or 'demons' militated against their faith in God and His eagerness to give His good Kingdom to His people. That continues to be His "good pleasure" (Lk. 12:32) toward us, but like Israel, we are tempted to disbelieve this and allow our own perceptions and empirical conclusions to lead us away from simple faith in this.

If their intention was genuine military reconnaissance, they would have focused upon the areas immediately in front of them. But by going throughout the entire land, they were showing they wanted to check out God's word of promise about the land- they wanted empirical evidence rather than showing faith.

The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that eats up its inhabitants; and all the people who we saw in it are men of great stature-

This was effectively calling God's descriptions of the promised land untrue. If we don't believe we can inherit the Kingdom prepared for us (Mt. 25:34), then we are effectively calling God a liar. Ps. 106:24 says that they didn't believe God's word of promise that they would possess the land (Gen. 15:18; 17:8; Ex. 23:30). These promises were clear and unambiguous; but the immediate and the visible seemed more true to them than the promises of God's word. Perhaps they had forgotten those promises, not recited them to themselves, not bothered to attend Moses' sessions of instruction, of which the Pentateuch is likely a transcript. Unless God's words of promise are regularly in our consciousness, we will likewise fail to believe it when we come up against the human obstacles in our paths.

If they had accepted the power of God, then *whatever* 'adversary' was in the land, in whatever form, was ultimately of no real power (Num. 13:32; 14:36; Dt. 1:25). And yet it was not God's way to specifically tell the people that there was no such dragon lurking in the land of Canaan – instead He worked with them according to their fears, by making the earth literally open and swallow up the apostate amongst them (Num. 16:30) – emphasizing that by doing this, *He* was doing "a new thing", something that had never been done before – for there was no dragon lurking in any land able to swallow up people. And throughout the prophets it is emphasized

that *God* and not any dragon swallowed up people – “The Lord [and not any dragon] was as an enemy; *He* has swallowed up Israel” (Lam. 2:5 and frequently in the prophets). The people of Israel who left Egypt actually failed to inherit Canaan because they believed that it was a land who swallowed up the inhabitants of the land (Num. 13:32), relating this to the presence of giants in the land (Num. 13:33). As Joshua and Caleb pleaded with them, they needed to believe that whatever myths there were going around, God was greater than whatever mythical beast was there. And because they would not believe that, they failed to enter the land, which in type symbolized those who fail to attain that great salvation which God has prepared.

Num 13:33 There we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, who come of the Nephilim, and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight-

They made the common mistake of assuming that our view of ourselves is how others also see us. The Israelites were seen as grasshoppers by their enemies- and so this is how they came to perceive themselves (Num. 13:33). Prov. 23:7 RV observes: “As he reckons within himself, so is he”. We are defined by our own self-perception. We must come in the end to perceive ourselves from God’s perspective and not according to how men perceive us. We must see ourselves from outside ourselves, and thereby “guide your own heart in the way” (Prov. 23:19). According to how they felt that the world perceived them to be, so they felt themselves to be. As it happened, they were wrong; the Canaanite nations were

terrified of them, according to Rahab's inside account. If Israel had perceived themselves as those made strong by the Lord, more than conquerors, so indeed they would have been. Self-perception was and is vital for God's Israel.

The people were frightened by the "giants" they met in the land of Canaan (Num. 13:33), likely connecting them with superhuman beings. These *nephilim* [LXX *gigantes*] had their origin explained by Moses in Genesis 6 (see on Gen. 6:4)- the righteous seed intermarried with the wicked, and their offspring were these *nephilim*, mighty men of the world. Note in passing how Ez. 32:27 LXX uses this same word *gigantes* to describe pagan warriors who died- no hint that they were superhuman or Angels. According to Jewish traditions (as reflected in 1 Enoch and the *Book of Jubilees*), the supposedly sinful Angels ("the Watchers") morally corrupted human beings in the lead up to the flood by teaching them to do evil, astrology, weapon making and the use of cosmetics (1 Enoch 7-8, 69; 10; 21.7-10; 64-65; 69; Jub. 5:16-11; 8:3). Yet the Genesis record simply states that the descendants of Cain started to do all those things, their wickedness increased, and so they were punished through the flood (Gen. 4:20-22). Constantly in the Jewish Apocryphal writings there is a shifting of blame from humanity to Angelic beings.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 14

Num 14:1 All the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night-

This incident looks ahead to the bitter weeping of those rejected at the day of judgment (Mt. 8:12), at the borders of the Kingdom. But their weeping was self-inflicted and unnecessary if they had had faith.

Num 14:2 All the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would that we had died in this wilderness!-

Israel continually "murmured" against Moses (Ex. 15:24; 16:2,7,8; 17:3; Num. 14:2,27,29 cp. Dt. 1:27; Ps. 106:25; 1 Cor. 10:10). Nearly all these murmurings were related to Israel's disbelief that Moses really could bring them into the land. Likewise Israel disbelieved that eating Christ's words (Jn. 6:63) really could lead them to salvation; and their temptation to murmur in this way is ours too, especially in the last days (1 Cor. 10:10-12).

They wished they had died in the desert, and this was to be their judgment. We see so clearly that the condemned are self-condemned. "All who love His appearing" will be accepted, and those who think and act as if they don't want the Kingdom- won't have it.

Num 14:3 Why does Yahweh bring us to this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will be a prey: wouldn't it be better for us to return into Egypt?-

They recognized the Lord had brought them out of Egypt. Their lack of faith was not the same as atheism, rather was it a lack of faith in the possibilities of the God they believed in. There should be no question amongst us, not in our deepest heart, about returning to the world / Egypt, the life we knew before our baptism (cp. the Red Sea crossing, 1 Cor. 10:1,2). If we do allow this question, then it will lead to actually doing this in practice (:4).

Dt. 1:27 adds: "And you murmured in your tents and said, Because Yahweh hated us He has brought us forth out of the land of Egypt to deliver us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us". We marvel at how the passionate love of God for Israel at this time, falling in love with them and not beholding iniquity in Jacob, could be perceived now as hatred for Israel. It is a psychological classic, revealing the fickleness of the human mind when it is not firmly based in faith in God's stated words.

We notice their concern for their children and wives, implying this was the males who were speaking. But they want to return to Egypt, where their children had been killed at birth. And where they as males had been made to make bricks without straw and were beaten. Such is the nature of selective memory once a narrative is espoused. The psychological credibility of the record is very impressive. The plagues on Egypt and the Red Sea crossing were recent memories, and the provision of manna and Angelic guidance was ongoing. Miracle doesn't elicit faith. The power of believed narratives is

overpowering; as we see in migrants risking all for the sake of a narrative about a certain country. Our dream destination is to be God's Kingdom, and that narrative is the only true one. All else will fade before it.

Num 14:4 They said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt-

Human beings so want human leadership. God through Moses was their captain, but they wanted a leader who would lead them where *they* wanted. The large number of human religions and religious leaders is proof enough of this desire for human leadership. Israel actually made a captain and set about to return to Egypt (Neh. 9:17). But this is omitted in the historical record; it simply says that this is what they *thought* of doing (Num. 14:4). The depth of their apostasy is graciously unrecorded. or perhaps this is another example of the thought being counted as the action.

Num 14:5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel-

We note Aaron had a part in this. We are to intercede for others on the basis of our experience of the Lord's intercession for us. Job prays for his friends, he mediates for them, after gratefully realizing that his own search for mediation with God in order to obtain forgiveness had somehow been answered, by grace (Job 42:6,8). After the same pattern, Aaron ought to have died for his flouting of the first commandment in making the golden calf; but Moses' intercession alone saved him. And afterwards, deeply conscious of his experience,

Aaron made successful intercession for the salvation of others (Num. 14:5; 16:22). The way he holds the censer with fire from the altar of incense, representing his prayers, and "stood between the dead and the living [as a mediator]" (Num. 16:48) is a fine picture of the height to which he rose.

Num 14:6 Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, who were of those who spied out the land, tore their clothes-

Dt. 1 records how Moses also pleaded with Israel at this time. Their grief was that of God, who millions of times sees people come to the brink of His Kingdom and turn away from it. And it should be a tragedy we too share.

Num 14:7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the children of Israel, saying, The land which we passed through to spy it out is an extremely good land-

They reminded the people of God's simple statement that He was bringing them to a "good land" (Ex. 3:8 s.w.). But the land was "extremely good", better even than God had implied, over and above all they could ask or think. God's description of the land had been true. And so His promise that they could attain it was therefore likewise going to be true. That "good land" was to be given them not for the sake of their righteousness (Dt. 9:6), but simply so- by God's sovereign grace. But faith in grace has never come easy to men.

Num 14:8 Since Yahweh delights in us, then He will bring us into this land, and give it to us-

The issue came down to faith in grace, and His desire to give us the Kingdom. So it is to this day. God not only forgives, but He delights in doing so (Is. 62:14; Mic. 7:18); the way He is spoken of as 'delighting' in spiritually weak Israel is part and parcel of Him lavishing grace as He does (Num. 14:8). It must be so awful to have such a wonderful spirit of lavishing grace and love, consciously giving out life and patient forgiveness to so many; and yet not be appreciated for it, to have puny humans shaking their fist at God because they die a brief moment of time sooner than they think they should, to have tiny people arrogantly questioning His love.

The Hebrew for "delights" is only elsewhere used in the Pentateuch of a man delighting in a woman to marry her (Gen. 34:19; Dt. 21:14; 25:7,8). And the prophets portray God as having fallen in love with Israel in the wilderness and entering into a marriage covenant with her at Sinai. Joshua and Caleb perceived this love of God. But Israel didn't. That such love should go unperceived, and that God at this point should be accused of hating Israel (Dt. 1:27), was tragic indeed. And His love so often goes unperceived and unrequited. This is the tragedy of God's relationship with His people. At least we have perceived it, and seek to respond.

The Lord spoke of us all as a little flock, fearing it is *not* the Father's pleasure / will to give us the Kingdom (Lk. 12:32). In doing so, He was as ever drawing on the language of the OT. Joshua-Jesus encouraged Israel that Yahweh delighted / willed that they should enter the land (Num. 14:8); but instead, they were too

caught up with doubts... doubt about salvation, about what they could eat and drink day by day, and the giants in the land. This is the very context in which the Lord was speaking- fearing "the nations of the world", doubting where food and clothes would come from, just as Israel did (Lk. 12:22-29). Yet the pleasure / will of Yahweh is that we should share His Kingdom, and that pleasure / will prospered through the cross (Is. 53:10).

A land which flows with milk and honey-

Israel came to describe the Egypt they had been called out from as the land flowing with milk and honey (Num. 16:12), and denied that they could experience this in the Kingdom of God. And so we have the same tendency to be deceived into thinking that the kingdoms of this world, the world around us, is effectively the Kingdom of God, the only thing worth striving after.

Num 14:9 Only don't rebel against Yahweh, neither fear the people of the land; for they are bread for us. Their defence is removed from over them, and Yahweh is with us. Don't fear them-

To fear and be faithless is to actively rebel against Yahweh. The word for "rebel" is nearly always used about rebelling against a king. They didn't want Him as their king, and so at this very time they made themselves another captain to return to Egypt (see on :4). To pull away from God's program to lead us to inherit His Kingdom is to reject Him as King, and to thereby rebel. To be in the shadow [s.w. "defence"] of someone was to be a subsidiary nation under the protectorate of a great empire (s.w. Ez. 31:6,12,17). The nations of Canaan had been

under the protectorate of Egypt and the Philistines, but that had now been withdrawn. And they were terrified of the Israelites, as Rahab testified.

Num 14:10 But all the congregation threatened to stone them with stones. The glory of Yahweh appeared in the Tent of Meeting to all the children of Israel-

We now understand why the account of Num. 13,14 follows on from that of the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron in Num. 12. For this was exactly how He had acted at the time of that rebellion. Stoning with stones was usually for religious heresy. So we can imagine that the idolatrous people now turned to the gods they had carried with them out of Egypt (Ez. 20:6-8; Acts 7:43) and accused Joshua and Caleb of some kind of religious apostasy. But the basis of their anger was that they subconsciously knew that Joshua and Caleb were telling the truth, although it was not a truth they wished to hear.

In the surrounding cultures, stoning was a punishment for those who bore false witness. This is how the Israelites judged those who preached the good news of the Kingdom. They considered it a false Gospel. The language used of their rejection of that Gospel is quite severe. To disbelieve God is to "rebel" against Him (:9). The ruling principle of their lives was to be that they would inherit the Kingdom. To disbelieve our salvation is to "despise" God (:11). To reject the Gospel is to consider the preachers of it "false witnesses". Paul uses the same term when he tells the Corinthians he would be a "false witness" if the Lord had in fact not risen. Their desire to kill the messenger because they didn't accept the

message is psychologically credible. The real desire was for a different leadership, who would lead them back to Egypt rather than out of it.

The book of Numbers features the record of incidents whilst the people were "in the wilderness", and also the giving of extra laws. But those extra laws are to be related to the incidents recorded. Num. 15 will go on to talk about presumptuous sins. We can conclude that that legislation was given in the context of Israel's presumption in rejecting the Kingdom and calling God a liar. And the implication is that we can all in principle commit that same sin. It is unforgivable insofar as the sin itself means we refuse to believe in God's grace and salvation, and reject it as fake. Whilst that's our position, salvation is impossible- by our own choice. The issue of whether we believe we will be saved therefore assumes critical place in the psychology and worldview of all God's people, at all times.

Num 14:11 Yahweh said to Moses, How long will this people despise Me?-

"How long...?" could suggest 'Seeing they will never be otherwise, I will destroy them'. This could be a way of God asking Moses not to pray for more time, to as it were leave God alone to destroy Israel. He is saying that this situation cannot continue any longer. Just as He asked Moses in Ex. 32:10. But Moses knew God well enough to still intercede, and change the intention of God to disinherit the people at this time. See on :23. The idea of "provoke" is to scorn, to blaspheme, and this is what we do to God if we doubt we shall inherit the

Kingdom. The language used about Israel's lack of faith is extreme. They "despised" the land (:32) even though it seems they didn't doubt it was a good land, they just doubted whether they could. They gathered together against God (:35). The language all shows that the most fatal error is to not believe we will be saved- this is far and more fundamentally worse than any sin of hot blood. See on Jn. 12:37.

And how long will they not believe in Me, for all the signs which I have worked among them?-

It's not that the people were atheists. They speak about the existence of Yahweh quite freely (:3). But to not believe that He will give us the Kingdom, the promised land, is to effectively be in denial of Him. We too can be effective atheists when we doubt our salvation by grace.

Or we can read "How long...?" as a desperate hope for the time to more quickly come when the people would believe. The pain of God leads Him to hope, even desperate hope; and again that hope is expressed and felt in terms which are relative to our kind of time. Hence His many questions relating to 'How long?': "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe me?" (Num. 14:11,27); "How long will it be till they are pure?" (Hos. 8:5; Jer. 4:14; 13:27). These aren't merely rhetorical questions. There's an element of literality about God's question- He doesn't know how long it will be, He can only imagine and hope- for Israel has free will, and will not turn to Him just when He says so. For He is in covenant relationship with them, He

loves them, and as we've emphasized, that must involve each party allowing the other to function independently and to have their own time and free choice for returning. These questions, and other similar statements from God, are almost God's probing of possible paths into the future- the future which He could, of course, choose to know, but it seems He chooses not to fully know.

One wonders whether the questions God asks at times are in fact only merely rhetorical; perhaps some of them are genuine reflections of how He has restrained His foreknowledge in order to become vulnerably in love with His people. For example: "How long will these people treat me with contempt?" (Num. 14:11). I'm aware that by saying these things, I'm pushing a view of God that is quite different to that held by many believers. My comment is that the view of God widely held in Christianity has its roots in Plato's philosophy that God is totally without emotion and unable to be touched by our situation on earth in a passionate manner. The very first clause of the 39 Articles of the Church of England reads: "God is without body, parts, and passions". The Westminster Confession of Faith says the same- God is "without passions". Frankly I find it incredible that this kind of thing can be said, when the Bible is so utterly full of examples of God's passionate response to human grief upon earth. It seems clear enough to me that those churches founded upon such suppositions are simply flatly in contradiction to clear Bible teaching, and reflect their roots in pagan philosophy rather than God's word. Rather than in any sense bringing God 'down', it seems

to me that by assigning to Him the characteristics and possibilities which His own word so often speaks of, we are in fact elevating His awesomeness and wonder.

Num 14:12 I will strike them with the pestilence-

The "pestilence" which was the plague upon Egypt (Ex. 9:3) was to come upon a hard hearted Israel (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Num. 14:12; Dt. 28:21; Jer. 21:6). The plagues upon Egypt form the basis for the vials and seals of Revelation, which speak of judgment to come upon the land of Israel. It is a theme with God that His apostate people are "condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11:32). If their hearts are really with Egypt / the world, then they will share the judgments of this world. The time for separation is now, just as the Egyptians had to identify with Israel if they wished to escape the plagues.

And disinherit them-

This is the same word translated "inherit" or "possess" in Num. 13:30 ; 14:24. The word also means 'to destroy'. We are God's inheritance- we are to be totally devoted to Him. If we don't want to be, then He will inherit / destroy us anyway. This is the logic of total devotion- we are devoted to Him, and must willingly go along with this or else He will destroy us. The idea is alluded to in Num. 14:22- because God's glory must fill the earth, therefore the sinners would be destroyed. And again in Num. 14:33,35 we read of the sinners being "consumed", a Hebrew word meaning to be perfected or even cleansed.

And will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they-

The same three words used of how God would make Abraham's seed a great and mighty nation (Gen. 18:18). God was alluding to that intention, but saying that He could cease fulfilling it the way He had been working on, and do it another way- through Moses. They would then have become as He intended- a nation of Levites. God's purposes are therefore open ended to some extent.

And this wasn't the first time God had thought to do this, and Moses had persuaded Him otherwise (Ex. 32:10). The intimacy of Moses' intercession with God Almighty... is amazing. No wonder Judaism rightly respects Moses. The verbs "I will strike them... I will disinherit them" are cohortatives, and effectively can be translated "Let Me strike... let Me disinherit them". But Moses as it were doesn't give permission. Man is allowed to foil God Almighty. All that stood between Yahweh and the destruction of His people were words, the words of a fallible weak man, Moses, who comes to his climax in :19 with the simple request in one word: "Pardon". And God heard. And even this is but a dim shadow of the Lord's for us. Truly we have a great High Priest.

Num 14:13 Moses said to Yahweh, Then the Egyptians will hear it; for You brought up this people in Your might-

To have done this would've resulted in God changing His stated purpose with Israel. He is prepared to alter His intentions, according to human behaviour. And He shows Himself here open to dialogue, to persuasion, from His faithful children like Moses who reason according to a desire to see *God's* glory rather than their

own glory. It may be that it becomes clear that God intends to do something- perhaps to end a life, to relocate us geographically, to close one road and open another. Our prayers shouldn't be simply asking Him to do or not do something. Rather should we reason with Him, giving our reasons as to why we wish Him to act in the way we are asking. This is for our benefit and reveals our motives to ourselves; and also deepens our faith that we are really asking according to God's will as revealed in His word.

Moses seems to have shared the primitive idea that a god rose or fell according to the fortunes of his worshippers, when he asks God to not cut off Israel in case the nations mock Yahweh. Yahweh could have responded that this was far too primitive and limited a view. But no, He apparently listens to Moses and goes along with his request!

From among them-

"From their midst". It is stressed that Israel were taken out from the "midst of Egypt" (Dt. 4:34; 1 Kings 8:51). The plagues and wonders were done in "the midst of Egypt" (Ex. 3:20; Dt. 11:3). The midst of Egypt appears to be defined in Ps. 135:9; Is. 19:3; Ez. 29:3 as being Pharaoh and his servants. The narrative therefore stresses so much his response to the plagues. God's especial focus had been upon his conversion, and yet he refused. Israel were taken out right from under his nose, from the very heart of Egypt. Ez. 20:8 reveals what is not recorded in the historical record; that because the Israelites were so devoted to Egyptian idolatry still, His

thought had been to destroy them "in the midst of the land of Egypt" (Ez. 20:8). But God's pole of grace overcame the pole of necessary judgment. He tolerated them and saved them, with enthusiasm, by the grace which comes from love- love taken to its ultimate, saving term. The whole narrative speaks as if the Hebrews were all at one place at one time and left "the midst of Egypt" together. Although unrecorded in the historical narrative, this would have meant that they gathered together "in the midst of Egypt" with Moses, who was not in Goshen but in the locality and presence of Pharaoh.

Num 14:14 and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, Yahweh, are in the middle of this people; for You, Yahweh, are seen face to face, and Your cloud stands over them and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day, and in a pillar of fire by night-

It was only Moses who saw Yahweh face to face. But his personal relationship with God had been shared not only with Israel, but somehow the Gentile world of Canaan had got to hear about it. If we have a close relationship with God, we will not need to boast of this to others, it will become apparent, and the knowledge of it will somehow spread widely.

God had 'gone before' Israel through the Angel which was to lead them through the desert (s.w. Ex. 23:23). But as with all religious but not spiritual people, they wanted a visible leader. And so when Moses apparently disappeared in the mountain, they demanded that gods be made to "go before us". It was only by grace that God responded that despite their apostacy, He would

still "go before you" through the Angel (Ex. 32:34; 33:14). Even the Gentile world had more faith than Israel in this; they believed that Yahweh "went before" His people in an Angel (Num. 14:14). But Israel themselves at the time of the golden calf didn't believe that. Moses in his final speech therefore urges the people to believe that indeed the Angel was going before them (Dt. 1:30,33; 31:6,8).

We see here God's sensitivity to how the Gentiles perceive Him, and this has big implications for how we act before them. For we are God's representatives, and how we represent Him before the world is so significant to Him. For effectively we are Him in this world, and it is our living example far more than our doctrinal explanations which will convert others to Him.

Num 14:15 Now if You killed this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of You will speak, saying-

God could have given legitimate answers to each of Moses' objections; for there were indeed times when He did not turn from the fierceness of His wrath (Ex. 32:12)- such as Jer. 4:8; 2 Kings 23:26. He intended to fulfill the promises to Abraham, but through Moses. But such is His sensitivity and pure pity that He accepted Moses' pleas.

Num 14:16 'Because Yahweh was not able to bring this people into the land which He swore to them, therefore He has slain them in the wilderness'-

Caleb and Joshua perceived that Israel were "well able" to overcome the tribes and inherit the land, seeing

that the Angel-hornet had gone ahead and prepared the way; and yet due to Israel's disabling of this possibility at the time, it was in some ways so that God Himself was "not able" to give them the inheritance, because *they* judged that *they* were "not able" to take it (Num. 13:30,31; 14:16).

The way Moses pleaded with God to change His mind and not destroy Israel for the sake of what the surrounding nations would say is indeed inspirational to us all. It surely inspired David to pray likewise- for "wherefore should the heathen say, Where is now their God?" (Ps. 115:2).

Num 14:17 Now please let the power of the Lord be great, according as You have spoken, saying-

The power of God was understood by Moses as coming to its ultimate term in His grace and pity to hardened sinners. The awesome physical power we see in the natural creation is encouragement that His saving grace is of an even greater order. The same power which had done the miracles in Egypt was to be manifest in His forgiveness and salvation of His people from their sins (s.w. :13). This is why the book of Job concludes with manifestations of God's literal power- in order to persuade Job and the friends of His power to save sinners.

Num 14:18 'Yahweh is slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, forgiving iniquity and disobedience; and that will by no means justify the guilty-

Moses asked to know God deeper in Ex. 33 and 34, and was subsequently given an inspiring theophany in which the Name of Yahweh was declared. This wasn't

just a piece of exquisite intellectual stimulation for Moses. He quoted that very theophany, the things he had there learned of the essentially merciful character of God, in his matchless prayer of Num. 14:17-19, where he pleads with God not to destroy Israel and not to glorify him as God had offered. All we learn of the Father, the richness of the vision we see in Christ, all this cannot remain within us, as jottings in our Bible margins, as notes of addresses, as dimly recollected ideas in brain cells. If we have really seen, there must, inevitably and naturally, be a giving out of the vision.

Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and on the fourth generation?

This is cited by Moses as a reflection of "the greatness of Your grace" (:19). Sadly, the words are often wrested by those who don't want to see God's grace. The grace in it is that the sins of a man are not necessarily visited upon him and his family- until the third generation. They have three generations to repent of what he did. And if the second and third generations don't repent, then the fourth generation reap the judgment for the sin of the ancestor, if they too don't repent. This is exactly relevant here. For Yahweh does agree to Moses' request and forgives on these terms (:20), but with the understanding that indeed He will visit the iniquity that had been done later on, if there was no real repentance.

Num 14:19 Please pardon the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your grace, and according as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now-

"According to the greatness of Your grace" is matched in :20 by "according to your word". The implication could be that it was Moses' vision of the extent of God's grace which enabled, prescribed and defined the realization of His grace in practice. David perceived this when he asked in Ps. 33:22 "Let Your grace be on us, Yahweh, according as we have hope in You". Likewise if Abraham had continued bargaining with God about Sodom and asked for it to be saved if only one righteous were to be found there, then we can assume God would have heard him. But he failed to hope for grace as far as he might have done, and so it didn't happen.

Num 14:20 Yahweh said, I have pardoned according to your word-

See on :18,19. Others can be forgiven because of our intercession (see too Mk. 2:5,6). This has huge implications; for in this case we should be praying constantly for others, if the prayers of a third party can have such power in another's life. Thanks to Solomon's prayer, and *if* he had been obedient, all Israel would have been blessed and experienced Yahweh dwelling amongst them (1 Kings 6:12,13). Moses prayed for God to forgive Israel; and He responded: "I have pardoned, according to *your* word" (Num. 14:20) rather than according to their repentance and prayer. Indeed it would seem from Heb. 11:28 that Israel were delivered from the Egyptians due to *Moses'* faith in the Christ whom the sprinkled Passover blood pointed forward to.

This "pardon" didn't remove the consequence of not entering the land (:23). They were forgiven- and not

merely saved from immediate destruction, nor simply experiencing the delay of their destruction by some years. Seeing they died some years later than originally decreed, in what then was the significance of their "pardon"? Surely forgiveness involves some restoration of previous relationship, and not merely deferral of judgment? What cash value does this "pardon" have it meant merely the delay of condemnation by a few years? Although they are seen in the New Testament as representative of the rejected at the last day, we could think that they were forgiven even that, saved from condemnation personally, thanks to Moses' intercession. In which case we marvel that His intercession saved even from condemnation, and did not merely achieve a deferral of their judgment by up to 38 years. Perhaps we are to conclude that although that generation were to die in the wilderness, they would die pardoned and could therefore look forward to future eternal inheritance of the Kingdom. But they despised even that. They wanted it right away, and tried to enter it immediately. And for that they really were condemned. We marvel at how men could be condemned, saved from it by amazing intercession- and still prefer condemnation. We are to accept that will rightly die in the desert, have some sand kicked over us and the rest move on, following the Angel to the same end. But we have that priceless pardon, and the sure hope of resurrection and eternal inheritance of the land. And that is wonderful by me. But they were so immediate that they wanted the Kingdom right now, or no deal. And so they got nothing. In his autobiography in Deuteronomy,

Moses makes no mention of his successful intercession at this point. Because it was a redemption refused, a salvation spurned, a great intercession wasted.

Num 14:21 but in very deed, as I live-

To doubt God's word in practice is to belie His very Name and being. This is why God assures us of the certainty of both His salvation and also His judgment of sin by saying that "As I live, says Yahweh..." (Ez. 20:31,33; Is. 49:18; Num. 14:21). As surely as He who is, really is, so surely His words of promise and judgment will be fulfilled. His Name therefore confirms the reality of His words. LXX "But as I live and my name is living". The Name of Yahweh is not therefore simply a title or lexical item, a mere word. God's personality and characteristics are expressed in His Name, and all His constant action in the world and in human hearts is in order to articulate that Name. Thus it becomes a living Name.

And as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of Yahweh-

The glory of Yahweh filled the tabernacle when it was erected (Ex. 40:34), as it would later fill the temple (2 Chron. 7:1). But it was God's intention that His glory should fill all the earth; the same words are used in Num. 14:21. The apparently intense manifestation of Himself in a specific place was only a foretaste of what He wished to bring about in "all the earth". And yet Judaism misread this as meaning that His glory was there alone in a specific holy place. They failed to perceive that it was merely a localized foretaste of His intention to make this a universal experience, and the tearing down of the veil at the

Lord's death was evidence enough of the progression of this plan. When exiled from the sanctuary, David in his Psalms often perceives that God's glory fills and shall fill all the earth (Ps. 72:19; Hab. 2:14).

The surrounding verses are all using *eretz* ("earth") specifically about the land promised to Abraham, not the whole planet (:2,3,6,7,9,14,16,23,24,30,31). God's foremost intention was to fill His land with His glory, and through this, secondarily, the whole planet.

If God had let that generation enter the land, then the earth / land would not have been full of His glory. For they had seen His glory (:22) but not reflected it back as intended. But their pardon meant they would in the Kingdom. But they refused even that.

Num 14:22 because all those men who have seen My glory and My signs which I worked in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have tempted Me these ten times, and have not listened to My voice-

"Ten times" may not be a literal number, as in Gen. 31:7; Lev. 26:26; Job 19:3. Or we could calculate the ten times as twice at the Red sea, twice concerning the manna, twice concerning the quail, twice concerning lack of water, once with the golden calf and once in this refusal to enter the land.

Num 14:23 surely they shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers, neither shall any of those who despised Me see it-

Time and again in the Biblical record, Abraham is held up as a very real example, in whose steps all God's people are to tread. For example, as Abraham was bidden

leave Ur and go and "see" the "land" of promise which God would "give" him (Gen. 13:15), so the spies were told to go and "see" the "land" which God had "given" them (Num. 13:18; 32:8,9- the same three words as in the promises to Abraham)- yet they lacked the faith of Abraham to believe that really, they could possess that land. They did "see" the land, yet they were punished by being told that they would not now "see the land" (Num. 14:23; Dt. 1:35). They saw it, but they didn't "see" it with the eyes of Abraham. And so it can be with our vision of God's Kingdom. Remember that Moses was the author of both Genesis and Numbers- such connections aren't incidental. Moses wished the people to see themselves as going forward in the spirit of Abraham- and hence he wrote up the Genesis record for Israel's benefit an inspiration.

"Despised" as in Num. 14:11 is s.w. provoke or blaspheme. It is specifically associated with turning to other gods (Dt. 31:20; 32:19; Is. 1:4). And that appears to be the context. The Israelites decided not to enter the land and instead to follow the gods of Egypt back to Egypt (Num. 14:11,23).

Num 14:24 But My servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and has followed Me faithfully, him will I bring into the land into which he went; and his seed shall possess it-

Caleb was head of a household within the tribe of Judah. It could be argued that he was directly related to Judah through Hezron and Pharez (1 Chron. 2:5,18,25). But "Kenizzite" (also Num. 32:12) could re-

fer to the Gentile tribe of Gen. 15:19; or to a man called Kenaz, memorialized by Caleb naming his son with that same name (1 Chron. 4:15). And Jud. 1:13 could mean that Caleb's father was called Kenaz. 'Caleb' means 'dog' in Hebrew, and God alludes to this in describing Caleb as His faithful follower. The intimacy between a man and his dog can be seen between God and His man. The genealogies are constructed in such a way that they don't preclude Caleb having been a Gentile who was fully accepted into the tribe of Judah.

We must consider at this point Caleb's words of Josh. 14:12 "Now therefore give me this hill country, of which Yahweh spoke in that day; for you heard in that day how the Anakim were there, and great and fortified cities". Although not recorded in Num. 14:24, it appears Caleb was specifically promised Hebron at that time. Caleb had explored that area as a spy (Num. 13:22) and taken a special liking to it. We see therefore his spiritual ambition; 'this shall one day be mine'. And we can do the same, as we in this life spy out our future inheritance.

Joshua allowed the leaders of Israel to lead him into wrong decisions about the initial attack on Ai, and also into being deceived by the Gibeonites. And yet as a younger man, he had boldly stood up to the peer pressure of the princes of Israel in faithfully declaring that Israel could and should go up into Canaan; when the other princes must have put huge pressure upon him to agree with them. He is described as maintaining "another spirit" to theirs (Num. 14:24). The resolution of youth seems to have been somewhat lost as he grew older.

Joshua and Caleb were characterized by the comment that they "wholly followed the Lord" when they went to spy out Canaan (Num. 14:24; 32:11,12; Dt. 1:36; Josh. 14:8,9,14), and urged Israel to go up and inherit it. This refers to the way that the Angel had gone ahead of them, and they faithfully followed where the Angel had gone, and believed that Israel could follow that Angel wherever it led. When Israel finally did go into the land, they were told that Joshua would 'go before' them, and they were to follow him and thereby inherit the land (Dt. 31:3). From this we see that circumstances repeat in our lives. As Joshua had been told to be strong good courage in order to take the land, so he had to tell others (Josh. 10:25). As God charged him to be courageous and obedient to the book of the Law, so Joshua on his deathbed charged his people (Josh. 1:7,8 cp. 23:6).

Caleb had a spirit "with him". This helps us understand the sense in which the word or *logos* of Jesus was "with God" without implying personal pre-existence. We must not read the New Testament through Greek / Western eyes, but rather try to understand it against its original Jewish / Hebrew background of thought. It's a failure to do this which has given rise to trinitarianism and its associated misconceptions. Thus when we read of Jesus being "with" God, the Greek / Western mind can assume this means sitting literally together with Him. But time and again in the Hebrew Bible, the idea of being "with" someone means [according to the Brown, Driver and Briggs *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 768] to "be in one's consciousness, whether of knowledge, memory or pur-

pose". Thus Job speaks of how what God plans to do to him is "with God", i.e. in His purpose (Job 23:14); David is spoken of as having the idea about building a temple "with" him (1 Kings 8:17; 2 Chron. 6:7)- and there are multiple other examples (Num. 14:24; 1 Kings 11:11; 1 Chron. 28:12; Job 10:13; 15:9; 23:10; 27:11; Ps. 50:11; 73:23). It is this refusal to read the Bible within its own Hebraic context which has led to so much misunderstanding, and adopting of doctrines and positions which simply don't stand up to closer Biblical scrutiny.

Num 14:25 Now the Amalekite and the Canaanite dwell in the valley. Tomorrow, turn and go into the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea-

They were getting what they wanted. They wanted to turn away from their enemies, and so God turned them away. This is the significance of the statement that the Canaanite lived in the valley, and they were told to turn away from them. We get what we really want. This looks ahead to the terrible sending away of the rejected from the judgment seat at the last day. "Turn" is s.w. "turn away". They had turned away from God in their time of opportunity, and often wished to return to Egypt. And so it was appropriate for them to be told to return / turn away from the Kingdom. Condemnation is really self chosen, and will be a living out of the decisions already taken by the condemned. Truly "we make the answer now"; the essence of judgment is now.

Num 14:26 Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying-

It was as if God needed someone to talk with, to share His feelings of frustration...

Num 14:27 How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, that murmur against Me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against Me-

For "how long...?", see on :11. The Hebrew for "murmur" is the word for "stop", and is usually translated in that way. The idea is that they didn't want to go further on the journey; they wanted to return to Egypt. Despite the wonder of the Red Sea deliverance. Their hearts truly were in Egypt. This sense of not wanting to go onwards towards the Kingdom, to put a brake on God's saving process, is the same temptation which in essence afflicts all God's people who have started the journey with Him.

An example of the Lord's perhaps unconscious usage of His Father's words is to be found in His exasperated comment: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" (Mt. 17:17). Of course the Lord would have spoken those words and expressed those ideas in Aramaic- but the similarity is striking with His Father's Hebrew words of Num. 14:27: "How long shall I bear with this evil congregation...?". As a son comes out with phrases and word usages which 'Could be his father speaking!', so the Lord Jesus did the same thing. What I am saying is that the Lord was not merely quoting or alluding to the Father's Old Testament words, in the way that, say, Paul or Peter did. As the Father's Son, He was speaking in the same way as His Father, no doubt saturated with the writ-

ten record of the Father's words, but all the same, there were those similarities of wording and underlying thinking which are only seen between fathers and sons. And His words of Mt. 17:17 = Num. 14:27 seem to me to be an example of this.

Num 14:28 Tell them, 'As I live, says Yahweh, surely as you have spoken in My ears, so will I do to you-

But the people thought they were only quietly murmuring (:27). God hears our inaudible grumblings and faithless doubts, just as He did Sarah's. We have here an example of where those who are condemned have in fact desired that and chosen that outcome. God is more concerned with saving people than condemning them, and any condemnation is essentially self inflicted rather than inflicted by God.

Num 14:29 Your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness; and all who were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against Me-

The idea of carcasses falling suggests they were already carcasses. They were the living dead. Robert Roberts rightly described the generation that was under twenty years old on leaving Egypt as the most faithful of all Israel's generations. The faithful element with whom God so 'fell in love' was not just comprised of the 'under 20s'. Joshua and Caleb also featured amongst them, as did the Levites (who the curse of destruction in the wilderness did not apply to: Num. 14:29 cp. 1:49). Numerically, the largest of these three groups who constituted the 'faithful element' was the under 20s. It is fit-

ting, therefore, that this faithful remnant are personified as a young person. Thus God reflected to Hosea: "When Israel was a child (s.w. "young man"), then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hos. 11:1).

Num 14:30 surely you shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore that I would make you dwell therein, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun-

This promise was solemnly made, with uplifted hand as it were, to that generation who left Egypt (Ex. 6:8). But they did not enter the land, as Num. 14:30 makes clear. This was because Israel broke their side of the covenant, and did not in fact want to enter the land; and continued serving the idols of Egypt, which they took with them through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:8; Acts 7:43). But that promise was guaranteed by the fact that "I will bring you into the land... I am Yahweh" (Ex. 6:8). The very essence of Yahweh, that 'I will' save, as surely as 'I will be who I will be', a saviour God, was fought against by Israel's idolatry and unfaithfulness to the covenant. And because 'Yahweh' involves His character, which includes His judgment of sin and not turning a blind eye to it (Ex. 34:4-6), human intransigence and faithlessness was allowed to as it were even counteract His most essential 'being' a saviour God for His beloved people.

Num 14:31 But your little ones, that you said should be for a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which you have rejected-

In the end, God gives us our dominant desire. Israel in the wilderness "despised the land of desire, they be-

lieved not his word” of promise, that they would enter it (Ps. 106:24 AVmg.). They didn’t really desire the land, so they didn’t receive it. Israel both despised the land, and they despised their God (Num. 14:11,23,31 RV). They rejected the land and so were rejected from it; just as all the condemned are actually receiving that which they themselves really want. Our attitude as to whether or not we want to be in the Kingdom is essentially our attitude to God. This has far reaching implications. Ps. 107:30 likewise speaks of how the faithful are brought to the haven of their desire (RVmg.). All those who truly love the Lord’s appearing- with all that implies in practical life and belief- will be accepted (2 Tim. 4:8). And yet Israel didn’t have the dominant desire to be in the Kingdom, as Joshua and Caleb had. Why didn’t they? It is vital that we understand the reasons for their failure – such an understanding will be a safeguard to help prevent us from making the same mistake (Rom. 15:4).

The whole people of Israel would have been left in the wilderness and now allowed to enter the land, if Gad and Reuben refused to cross the Jordan river (Num. 32:15). But this would have broken the Divine promise of Num. 14:31 that all those under 20 would enter the land. Even that promise, therefore, had unstated conditions attached to it. And yet God had yet another option- if they refused to go over Jordan, then they would forfeit their land and receive a different inheritance (Num. 32:30). The complexities of these conditions are of course beyond us, because we are seeing only a part of the working of God’s infinite mind. The point is, there

are conditions attached to God's promises which aren't always made apparent to us.

Num 14:32 But as for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness-

We must consider the tone of voice in which God said this, and His feelings as He did. For God grieved over the carcasses of those wretched men whom He slew in the wilderness for their thankless rebellions against Him their saviour (Heb. 3:17). The apostle makes the point: "With whom was He grieved?". Answer: with the wicked whom He slew! A human God or a proud God would never grieve over His victory over His enemies.

Num 14:33 Your children shall be wanderers in the wilderness forty years, and shall bear your prostitution, until your dead bodies be consumed in the wilderness-

Their desire was to make them a captain and return to Egypt, and Neh. 9 says they did make a captain, to replace Moses. So their judgment was to wander, shepherdless, in the desert. Their concern about their children being killed by the Canaanites was only an excuse—their children ended up bearing their sins, i.e. bearing the consequence of them. The figure of 'carrying iniquity' means 'carrying the consequence of sin'; which is what the Lord did on the cross. Others suffer the consequence of our sin; and the consequence of sin can be carried by Jesus.

To disbelieve we will enter the promised land of God's Kingdom is effectively prostitution against God. The Bible often describes unfaithfulness in terms which are startling to us, but this is to show how serious is

unbelief. LXX "And they shall bear your fornication", which usually refers to idolatry. This implies idolatry as the underlying reason why they refused to enter Canaan and wanted to return to Egypt, the land of their gods. For they had taken the gods of Egypt with them (Ez. 20:6-8; Acts 7:43). Likewise Num. 14:43 LXX "because ye have disobeyed the Lord and turned aside"; and turning aside is usually turning aside from God unto idols.

Num 14:34 According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, even forty days, for every day a year, you will bear your iniquities, even forty years-

The Lord Jesus on the cross was a sin bearer (Is. 53:11); and the idea of sin bearing was almost an idiom for being personally guilty and sinful (Num. 14:34; Ex. 28:43). The Lord was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless.

And you will know the altering of My purpose'-

That God can change His mind is an indication of the extreme sensitivity He has to human behaviour. The only thing in which He is unchanging is His patience with sinners (Mal. 3:6). He had promised to bring Israel in to the promised land. But He destroyed that generation- "and ye shall know my breach of promise" (AV), or, "the altering of my purpose" (RVmg.). God's purpose can change. Because God can change His mind. He says so Himself. Such is His desire to save. The only element in which he does not change is in not consuming the sons of Jacob, by grace alone. There is a gap between Yahweh's prophetic pronouncements, and their fulfillment. And in that gap there is the possibility for repentance.

This is what gives intensity to our prayers and repentance, knowing we too live in such a gap.

Num 14:35 I Yahweh have spoken, surely this will I do to all this evil congregation, who are gathered together against Me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die-

Heb. 3:11 says that "I swore in My anger: They shall not enter into My rest". God has emotion. The generation that were promised the rest, permanence and stability of the promised land were not given it, because in their hearts they wandered. And this, as noted on Heb. 3:10, was reflected in their wandering in the wilderness. This implies that God changed His mind about letting Israel enter the land; for He had promised that generation "rest" in that He promised them the land (Josh. 1:15). Or as Num. 14:34 (A.V. mg.) says: "Ye shall bear your iniquity, even forty years, and ye shall know the altering of My purpose". These were the words of the Angel to Moses. The apparent change of plans could be seen as more appropriate if it concerned the Angel which led them; and yet the Angel all the same was manifesting God. This oath they would not "enter into My rest" was solely because they did not believe (Heb. 3:18) in their hearts (Heb. 3:12. The immorality, idolatry etc. were relatively incidental to the essential issue- that they did not believe He would give them rest in the promised land. And therefore He did not give it to them. The context of all this is Paul's appeal for confident hope in our future salvation (Heb. 3:6). It is unbelief and a constant

demand for 'proof' which was their problem which cost them salvation.

Num 14:36 The men, whom Moses sent to spy out the land, who returned and made all the congregation to murmur against Him, by bringing up an evil report against the land-

Had they believed in the power of God, then *whatever* 'adversary' was in the land, in whatever form, was ultimately of no real power (Num. 13:32; 14:36; Dt. 1:25). And yet it was not God's way to specifically tell the people that there was no such dragon lurking in the land of Canaan – instead He worked with them according to their fears, by making the earth literally open and swallow up the apostate amongst them (Num. 16:30) – emphasizing that by doing this, *He* was doing "a new thing", something that had never been done before – for there was no dragon lurking in any land able to swallow up people. And throughout the prophets it is emphasized that *God* and not any dragon swallowed up people – "The Lord [and not any dragon] was as an enemy; *He* has swallowed up Israel" (Lam. 2:5 and frequently in the prophets). The people of Israel who left Egypt actually failed to inherit Canaan because they believed that it was a land who swallowed up the inhabitants of the land (Num. 13:32), relating this to the presence of giants in the land (Num. 13:33). As Joshua and Caleb pleaded with them, they needed to believe that whatever myths there were going around, God was greater than whatever mythical beast was there. And because they would not believe that, they failed to enter the land, which in type

symbolized those who fail to attain that great salvation which God has prepared.

The Hebrew seems to mean that the unfaithful spies now again bring up an evil report upon the land. This verse appears unnecessary until we get the sequence of events:

The people wanted to return to Egypt and not enter Canaan

God condemned them to instant death and destruction as a nation

Moses intercedes and God pardons them

The "pardon" meant that although they would die in the desert, they would rise again to eternally inherit the land

The ten spies then made another attempt to persuade the people of how bad the land was and were condemned

The people weren't interested in future eternal inheritance, and wanted to enter the land immediately

They were therefore punished with absolute condemnation; Moses' amazing intercession and achievement was refused by them.

Num 14:37 even those men who brought up an evil report about the land, died by the plague before Yahweh-

Their "evil report about the land" is twice stressed (:36). They had agreed that the land was indeed a good land. The evil report was in their false claims about the apparently invincible inhabitants, and the implication that the people therefore should return to Egypt. To 'bring up an evil report' is to slander, and the word is al-

ways elsewhere used about the slander of persons. It is a strange term to use about a land. But effectively "the land" is being put for God's promise about entering the land. It was God whom they were slandering. And so do we if we refuse to believe we shall enter His Kingdom.

Num 14:38 But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive out of those men who went to spy out the land-

The implication is that the twelve men were standing "before Yahweh" (:37) and ten of them were struck down dead, and only Joshua and Caleb were left standing.

Num 14:39 Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly-

This incident looks ahead to the bitter weeping of those rejected at the day of judgment (Mt. 8:12), at the borders of the Kingdom. But their weeping was self inflicted and unnecessary if they had had faith.

Num 14:40 They rose up early in the morning, and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, Behold, we are here, and will go up to the place which Yahweh has promised; for we have sinned-

These Israelites who had crossed the Red Sea (cp. our baptism) and were now rejected from God's Kingdom, because they themselves had said they didn't want to inherit it, now wanted more than anything else to be there. This is a major Biblical theme- that the rejected will desperately ask to be allowed in to God's kingdom; the foolish virgins will knock on the closed door begging for it to be opened (Mt. 25:11; Lk. 13:25). Our ultimate destiny is to stand before the Lord wanting to enter His King-

dom with every fiber in our being. But this must be our attitude now, for then it will be too late to change anything.

We note how one moment they were talking of returning to Egypt, and then in a moment they change and want to desperately enter Canaan. This instability was what reflected their lack of any deep faith or conviction, neither towards Yahweh nor their Egyptian gods. Hence the misery of the uncommitted, wandering to their deaths.

Num 14:41 Moses said, Why now do you disobey the commandment of Yahweh, since disobedience shall not prosper?-

Those rejected by God at His judgment still desperately want to enter His Kingdom (Mt. 25:11). In that day of final judgment, all present will desperately want only one thing- to enter the Kingdom. Nothing else will matter. We should have that spirit with us now. This was the sin of presumption (Dt. 1:43) which Num. 15:30 will now go on to condemn.

Num 14:42 Don't go up, for Yahweh isn't among you; that you not be struck down before your enemies-

"Go not up, for the Lord is not among you... but they presumed to go up... nevertheless, the ark of the covenant of the Lord (which the Angel had made with them) departed not" (:42-44)- as if to imply that the Lord (the Angel) was in the ark, and therefore did not go up with them because the ark did not. See on Ps. 78:60.

Num 14:43 There the Amalekite and the Canaanite are before you, and you shall fall by the sword, because you

are turned back from following Yahweh; therefore Yahweh will not be with you-

The comment of :33 LXX "And they shall bear your fornication" implies that the refusal to enter the land was connected with idolatry. For "fornication" in a national sense usually refers to idolatry. This implies idolatry as the underlying reason why they refused to enter Canaan and wanted to return to Egypt, the land of their gods. For they had taken the gods of Egypt with them (Ez. 20:6-8; Acts 7:43). Likewise Num. 14:43 LXX "because ye have disobeyed the Lord and turned aside"; and turning aside is usually turning aside from God unto idols. Yahweh would not be with them because they had chosen not to have Yahweh with them.

Num 14:44 But they presumed to go up to the top of the mountain; nevertheless the ark of the covenant of Yahweh and Moses didn't depart out of the camp-

David's bringing up / going up / ascending of the ark (2 Sam. 6:2) recalls how the ark did not go up into Canaan in Num. 14:44 (s.w.); for the land was not to be given to Israel. But when the time came, the ark was brought up into Canaan (Josh. 4:16,18 s.w.). And so now, the land was being given to them again. David felt as if he was as Joshua reconquering Canaan in fulfilment of the promises. This may explain why Paul in Acts 13:21 parallels the 40 years wandering of Israel with the 40 year reign of Saul; and he may speak of Saul reigning 40 years because of this, even if it was not literally true. It creates big chronological problems if we read that 40 year reign of Saul literally.

Num 14:45 Then the Amalekite came down, and the Canaanite who lived in that mountain, and struck them and beat them down, even to Hormah-

Dt. 1:44 "The Amorites who lived in that hill country came out against you and chased you, as bees do, and beat you down in Seir, even to Hormah". It was as if the Israelites had knocked the bee hive, and provoked the bees to attack them; hence the Amorites chased Israel "as bees do" (Dt. 1:44). The hornet had been sent ahead of Israel to as it were chase out the Amorites; but now it was as if this was reversed, and they chased the Israelites. For in their hearts they were no better than the Amorites.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 15

Num 15:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

This may be intentionally positioned here after the tragic record of how Israel didn't want to enter the land and returned in their hearts to Egypt. The regulations here stress that they would enter the land (:2), and when there, would offer freewill offerings (:3). It was to encourage the younger generation, and also to show the faithful few that God's saving purpose would come true. And there would be in Israel people who loved God so much that they made freewill offerings; whereas the people had just been claiming that Yahweh hated them, and they wanted to follow their Egyptian idols back to Egypt. See on :31.

Num 15:2 Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them, 'When you have come into the land of your habitations, which I give to you-

See on :1. "Habitations" may imply that each family would have their own specific area which they were to possess and inhabit. Just as we each have specific intended futures and roles within the Kingdom of God, both now and eternally. But it is s.w. "sojournings". Even life in Canaan was to be a sojourning, a passing through, because the Kingdom was in view still as the permanent dwelling for God's people. This leads right on from the comment in Num. 14 that the generation over 20 would not enter the land. It could be that now Moses is specifically addressing and encouraging the younger genera-

tion. But these laws go on in :24,25 to speak of how forgiveness was possible for the entire body of Israel if sin was committed in ignorance. We wonder whether this was a hint that even then Israel could be forgiven if they recognized they had sinned, and God would have been prepared to accept they had done so "in ignorance" of the real implications. We recall that God graciously excused the murder of His own son as a sin "done in ignorance" (Acts 3:17 "Through ignorance you did it as did also your rulers"). The same word is translated "deceived" in Job 12:16: "The deceived and the deceiver are His". If they recognized that they had been deceived by the 10 spies, could they then have been forgiven? Perhaps recognition of sin means that the sin was previously done in ignorance. The otherwise strange laws inserted into the law of Moses about the "red heifer" offering for all Israel may likewise have been intended as a nudge towards all this. A way was being made for all Israel to be forgiven- and these laws had not previously been given. God led the condemned generation "to see what was in their hearts"- why do that, if they were merely being led to their deaths? Is there not a hint that God was looking at any possible heart change that might enable Him to forgive and eternally save them, even if they had to die in the wilderness? For Moses too couldn't see nor enter the promised land, and yet will be saved. He sinned at Kadesh (Num. 20:1), exactly where Israel did (Num. 13:25). Both Moses and Israel are charged with the sins of "disbelief" (Num. 14:11; 20:12) and "rebellion" (Num. 14:9; 20:24) and are banned from en-

tering the land. But Moses had hope of resurrection to eternal inheritance. "Presumption"(:30) is literally 'with upraised hand'. And this was how Moses had sinned at Kadesh, lifting his hand and then striking the rock. But even that was forgivable in terms of salvation. They were to see in Moses a possible pattern for themselves. The ten unfaithful spies were smitten with death; but the condemned generation were kept alive. Whilst there is life there's hope, and surely man is always capable of repentance whilst still alive. And I suggest God was nudging even that condemned generation towards that. He had sworn they would die in the wilderness, but still they could be resurrected to eternal inheritance of the land if they repented. Moses committed the sin of high handed presumption, literally lifting his hand before striking the rock (see on Nun. 20:11); David likewise committed the sin of presumption by despising God's word in sinning with Bathsheba. But both were still forgiven, although they had to take the consequences in this life. So the sin of presumption can be forgiven, by ceasing to be presumptuous. Just as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit can be forgiven once it stops.

The commands of :3-6 are an expansion upon the laws given in Leviticus. Once in the land, they were to additionally offer grain, oil and wine with their sacrifices. This reinforces what we have read in Num. 14- that the land was "good" and was flowing with blessing of grain, oil and wine. They were therefore reminded that once in the land under the covenant, they would have abundance of these things and would add them to

the offerings, further to what had been commanded in Leviticus. They were being focused upon the abundance of the future Kingdom.

"I am giving you... into which I am bringing you" (:17) encouraged them that their wanderings were not aimless, but were part of being brought to the Kingdom. We can take comfort in the counterpart to this in our own wilderness wanderings.

Num 15:3 and will make an offering by fire to Yahweh, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice, to accomplish a vow, or as a freewill offering, or in your set feasts-

See on :1. The Hebrew word here for "freewill" carries the idea of spontaneity. This is the clear implication of its usage in places like Ex. 35:27; 36:3; Jud. 5:2,9; 1 Chron. 29:5,9; 2 Chron. 35:8; Ps. 54:6. There is a strong sense of immediate emotion attached to the word (Hos. 14:4). And there was a major emphasis in the law of Moses upon freewill offerings (Lev. 7:16; 22:18,21,23; 23:38; Num. 15:3; 29:39; Dt. 12:6,17; 16:10; 23:23). The other legal codes of the nations around Israel were all about rituals; whereas Yahweh's law encouraged spontaneous giving as part of the way of Yahweh. For He is not a God of rituals, but of relationship. The way of the Spirit is the same today; spontaneous, emotional, personal response to God's grace, responding to Him on our own initiative and in our own way, in addition to obeying His specific requirements.

To make a pleasant aroma to Yahweh, of the herd, or of the flock-

"Of the herd" continues the common Mosaic theme, that the animal was not to be raised specially for sacrifice but was to be taken out of the herd, it was one "of" them. This looks ahead to the human nature of the Lord Jesus as one of us, taken "of" the herd of humanity. And all sacrifice is to be from out of our normal lives, making time in lunch breaks to read the Bible and pray, things like that, rather than occasional consciously prepared 'gifts' to God.

Num 15:4 then he who offers his offering shall offer to Yahweh a grain offering of a tenth part of an ephah of fine flour mixed with the fourth part of a hin of oil-

This section seems to be reminding Israel of the need not to forget to offer a grain offering at the same time as a major sacrifice; as if to underline that God is magnified in the little things of life, and these shouldn't be left outside the sphere of His influence just because we consider we have made a major sacrifice to Him.

Num 15:5 and wine for the drink offering, the fourth part of a hin, you shall prepare with the burnt offering, or for the sacrifice, for each lamb-

Bread (:4) and wine were effectively offered with the lamb. The Lord's choice of symbols for the breaking of bread surely had this in mind. They are but the side offerings, as it were, compared to the lamb. To take bread and wine would beg the question: 'And where is the slain offering?'. And the answer to that at the breaking of bread is 'Here in our midst'.

Meal [bread], wine and oil are associated with what people ate at their own tables: Jud. 9:9, 13 (oil and

wine), 1 Sam. 1:24; 10:3 (meal and wine), Hos. 9:4 (wine), Mic. 6:7 (oil). The idea was that in sacrifice, one was at the Lord's table and eating with Him. This is our experience not only at the memorial meeting, but in all experience of sacrifice to Him. We fellowship with Him.

Num 15:6 Or for a ram, you shall prepare for a grain offering two tenth parts of an ephah of fine flour mixed with the third part of a hin of oil-

These commands were for when Israel were in the land, as the amounts of oil and wine required would've been hard to find in the desert. Indeed it is an open question as to whether the laws of sacrifice were kept whilst in the desert. It was by grace that God would have overlooked this. I suggest that it is to this which Am. 5:25 refers, challenging Israel to remember that God had accepted them in the wilderness by grace alone, as they were unable to keep His ideal requirements: "Did you bring Me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness?"

Num 15:7 and for the drink offering you shall offer the third part of a hin of wine, for a pleasant aroma to Yahweh-

"A pleasant aroma" is a very common phrase. This concept is important to God. It first occurs in Gen. 8:21 where it means that God accepted Noah's sacrifice and vowed that the pole of saving mercy in His character was going to triumph over that of necessary judgment. Under the new covenant, it is persons and not sacrifices or incense which are accepted as a "pleasant aroma" (Ez. 20:41). The word for "pleasant" means strong delight;

this is how God's heart can be touched by genuine sacrifice. Those pleasing offerings represented us, the living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). And so it is applied to us in 2 Cor. 2:15- if we are in Christ, we are counted as a pleasant aroma to God. The offering of ourselves to Him is nothing of itself, but because we are in Christ and counted as Him, we are a delight to God. Hence the colossal importance of being "in Christ". "Aroma" or "smell" is a form of the Hebrew word *ruach*, the word for spirit or breath. God discerns the spirit of sacrifices, that was what pleased Him rather than the burning flesh of animals. Our attitude of mind in sacrifice can touch Him. Sacrifice is therefore accepted, Paul says, according to what a person has to give, but the essence is the attitude of mind behind it. We think of the two coins sacrificed by the widow.

Num 15:8 When you prepare a bull for a burnt offering, or for a sacrifice, to accomplish a vow, or for peace offerings to Yahweh-

The sacrifices were to be accompanied by oil, bread [flour] and wine. They were to give to God the same food which they would eat at their own table; oil and wine (Jud. 9:9,13); meal / bread and wine (1 Sam. 1:24; 10:3; wine (Hos. 9:4) and oil (Mic. 6:7). They were to see themselves as eating at His table, sharing a meal with their invisible God. The same idea is behind the Lord's table which we share at the breaking of bread meeting. And this theme was developed at this point, because Israel had just been condemned to 40 years wandering. But God was urgent in His desire to remain in fellow-

ship with them. Permanently depriving a sinner of the Lord's table was not His way at all, indeed the very opposite. See on :12.

Num 15:9 then shall he offer with the bull a grain of fering of three tenth parts of an ephah of fine flour mixed with half a hin of oil-

One of the most obvious similarities between the peace offering and the breaking of bread is that they both feature bread and wine, associated with a slain animal in the midst (Num. 15:9,10; 2 Sam. 6:17- 19). And further, both require the eating of the sacrifice by the offerer. The peace offering and Passover (also typical of the memorial meeting) featured the offerer eating the sacrifice "before the Lord". This phrase "before the Lord" is continually emphasized in the records of the peace offerings. I guess we would all admit that our sense of the presence of the Father and Son at our memorial meetings has much room for improvement. We really are "before the Lord" as we sit there. God came unto men when they offered acceptable peace offerings (Ex. 20:24), as He is made known to us through the breaking of bread.

Num 15:10 and you shall offer for the drink offering half a hin of wine, for an offering made by fire, for a pleasant aroma to Yahweh-

This had only previously been required in the specific case of Ex. 29:40 but was now being made applicable to every sacrifice. After the rejection of the people in Num. 14, God wanted them to have this extra feature in relationship with Him. I see it that way, rather than Him

as it were punishing them with more legislation. For that was not at all the purpose of any of His Mosaic laws.

Num 15:11 Thus shall it be done for each bull, or for each ram, or for each of the male lambs, or of the young goats-

See on :12. The repetition of "each" stresses that each animal was to be accompanied by the required side offerings.

Num 15:12 According to the number that you shall prepare, so you shall do to each one according to their number-

It was important that each animal sacrifice was individually accompanied by the side plates, as it were, of bread, wine and oil. As explained on :8, each animal was to be seen as a meal enjoyed with God, with the altar as the table at which it was 'eaten'. The way Solomon and others offered vast numbers of animal sacrifices at one go was therefore completely missing the point of personal relationship with God- and reducing it to mere religion. For God wanted individuals to dine with Him, and not rivers of blood flowing from huge numbers of sacrifices, as the prophets make clear.

Num 15:13 All who are native-born shall do these things in this way, in offering an offering made by fire, for a pleasant aroma to Yahweh-

The reference to "native-born" was again an encouragement to an Israel just rejected from the land that one day, they would be there. And they would have children who were born in that land. Constantly God likewise en-

courages us, directly and indirectly, that we shall indeed one day inherit the Kingdom.

Num 15:14 If a stranger lives as a foreigner with you, or whoever may be among you throughout your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, for a pleasant aroma to Yahweh; as you do, so he shall do-

The Law of Moses constantly envisaged that Gentiles would live amongst Israel at all points in their history, "throughout your generations". The intention was that Israel in their land would be the light of the Gentile world around them, and Gentiles would come to that light, and also come to worship Yahweh. Israel's apostasy on one hand and arrogant xenophobia on the other meant that this was never realized. The intention has been deferred and reinterpreted in the later prophecies which speak of Gentiles coming to Zion's light.

Num 15:15 For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who lives as a foreigner, a statute forever throughout your generations: as you are, so shall the foreigner be before Yahweh-

As explained on :14, the intention was always that Gentiles would come to Israel and live there, and thereby come to Yahweh. They too could be "before Yahweh". This was sadly ignored and misinterpreted by Israel, to the point that notices were erected in the temple effectively warning Gentiles not to come "before Yahweh" on pain of death. There was a riot in Jerusalem just at the thought that Paul might just possibly have brought Gentiles into the temple area "before Yahweh".

Num 15:16 One law and one ordinance shall be for you, and for the stranger who lives as a foreigner with you'

This is stressed so many times. See on :29. The law of Moses was the contract of the covenant between God and Israel. But the Gentiles were invited to come under that law, indeed it was required of them. This was therefore an open invitation and even requirement that Gentiles enter covenant relationship with Yahweh. God's definition of "Israel" as His people was from the start geared towards inclusiveness of all races- and thereby against all forms of racially based patriotism and xenophobia.

Num 15:17 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The Law of Moses, like the whole of God's word, is studded with incidental reminders that truly we shall enter the promised land.

Num 15:18 Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them, 'When you come into the land to which I bring you-

God had just condemned Israel to 40 years wandering in the desert outside of His land (Num. 14). But right at the start of it, He emphasizes that He is still earnestly operating His program to "bring" them into that land, seeing they of themselves hadn't wished to enter it. And so even when it seems a man way be walking away from the Kingdom, even by his own choice, Yahweh is ever seeking to "bring" him somehow, eventually, back to it. Those who "leave" are still the subjects of His efforts to "bring" them there.

Num 15:19 then it shall be that when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall offer up a wave offering to Yahweh-

Again we note the continual encouragement, after the events of Num. 14, that they would enter the land / Kingdom one day. There is no recorded evidence that Israel ever obeyed what they were commanded here.

Num 15:20 Of the first of your dough you shall offer up a cake for a wave offering: as the wave offering of the threshing floor, so you shall heave it-

The portion to be waved was placed on the priests hands (Ex. 29:25), and then 'waved' or 'swung' towards the altar and then back- not from right to left. The idea was that the offerings were first given to God, recognizing they should be consumed on the altar to God; but then given back to the priest by God. So they ate them having first recognized that their food was really God's, all was of Him, and He had given it back to them to eat. This should be our spirit in partaking of any food, as we are the new priesthood. Our prayers of thanks for daily food should include this feature. All things are God's and anything we 'offer' to Him is only giving Him what He has given to us (1 Chron. 29:14,16).

Num 15:21 Of the first of your dough you shall give to Yahweh a wave offering throughout your generations-

Cain's sacrifice wasn't accepted because of his lack of faith in the principles of blood offering, and because of his hatred of his brother. For it was not impossible for God to accept non-blood sacrifices (Num. 15:17-21; 18:12,13; Dt. 26:1-4). Cain, the epitome of 'the devil'

(Jn. 8:44), was characterized by the attitude that he was not his brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9). But the Lord Jesus perhaps offered a commentary on the incident when he said that our offering can only be accepted if we are first reconciled to our brother (Mt. 5:24). Cain's insistent lack of responsibility for his brother was the real sin, and therefore his sacrifice wasn't accepted by God. He wanted to serve God his own way, disregard his brother, justify his disagreement with him... to be a private person. But this was the basis of his rejection.

Num 15:22 When you shall err, and not observe all these commandments which Yahweh has spoken to Moses,-

At times Moses lost the sense of his own personality, so strong was his inspiration by God: "All these commandments, which the Lord has spoken unto Moses" (Num. 15:22,23); these words were actually said by Moses (:17). Jeremiah spoke "from the mouth of the Lord" and yet the Lord spoke "by the mouth of Jeremiah" (2 Chron. 36:12,22) - this is how close was the relationship between God and the men He spoke through. Their mouth was His mouth, and they were subsumed beneath that awesome reality. Thus John the Baptist described himself as merely "a voice" when he was asked who he was.

Num 15:23 even all that Yahweh has commanded you by Moses, from the day that Yahweh gave commandment, and onward throughout your generations-

There is clearly the recognition here that the law given at Sinai was not as it were set in stone. In an "onward" sense there was to be progressive revelation; and

we have an example of this in :34. This flexibility means that we are more open to the idea that finally the entire Law was abrogated in the Lord Jesus; and there were evident variations allowed to it when Israel were in exile. The law was the contract forming the basis of Yahweh's covenant relationship with His people; and yet that contract was clearly flexible. If it could be added to by God, parts could also be amended. We see this quite early on, for the 'second law' in Deuteronomy, given at the end of the wilderness wanderings, has some amendments to the earlier law given.

Num 15:24 then it shall be, if it be done unknowingly, without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bull for a burnt offering, for a pleasant aroma to Yahweh, with the grain offering of it, and the drink offering of it, according to the ordinance, and one male goat for a sin offering-

Sins of ignorance still required atonement. The passage of time doesn't work a quasi-atonement for our sins; confession of sin and earnest searching of our lives, both past and present, is one of the disciplines which characterize the spiritually healthy believer. It's likely we will come to the day of judgment with sins of ignorance still counted to us, and yet we believe God will forgive them—hence we ask to be forgiven for such sins which aren't perceived by us (Ps. 19:12). This means we will be forgiven without repentance. If we look forward to such forgiveness, we should show it to our brethren today, forgiving without demanding their repentance, hoping that

they will later on in their journey perceive things more maturely.

Num 15:25 The priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the children of Israel, and they shall be forgiven; for it was an error, and they have brought their offering, an offering made by fire to Yahweh, and their sin offering before Yahweh, for their error-

James may have sins of ignorance in mind when he says that obeying all the law but breaking just one commandment will lead to condemnation (James 2:10). His argument becomes all the more powerful if he is alluding here, for the point is then made that this holds true even if that one commandment is broken in ignorance. Clearly the only way to justification with God is through faith in the Lord Jesus.

"All the congregation of the children of Israel" is the very phrase repeatedly used in Num. 13:26; 14:2,5,10,27 of how "all the congregation of the children of Israel" had disbelieved the two spies and preferred to spurn God's Kingdom; and how God's wrath was with "all the congregation of the children of Israel". They were all guilty of the presumptuous sin, but didn't all die. Because they were forgiven. "They shall be forgiven" is literally "They shall be pardoned". This is exactly what Moses had achieved in his intercession for the people for their sin of rejecting the promised land. They had been pardoned. The sin had been treated as one of relative "ignorance" or 'deception' [s.w.], in that they had believed the false report of the ten spies. Their presumptuous sin had been to go up into Canaan anyway, unwilling to accept death

in the wilderness and future resurrection. Some of them died in that endeavour, but the rest of that generation lived on and died in the desert. But during that time, they had the chance to repent. Whilst there's life there's always hope for repentance, surely. For can a living man be precluded from repentance?

Num 15:26 And all the congregation of the children of Israel shall be forgiven, and the stranger who lives as a foreigner among them; for in respect of all the people it was done unknowingly-

The sin of crucifying the Lord Jesus is very generously presented as a sin of ignorance by the Lord's saying that "they know not what they do", confirmed by Peter's appeal to repent although "Through ignorance you did it" (Lk. 23:34; Acts 3:17). Repentance was therefore encouraged on the basis of having had sin made known to them. And the offering for that sin had already been made, in the Lord's death. Their sin of [apparent] ignorance was therefore in fact the forgiveness for their sin if they actualized it by recognition and repentance.

Num 15:27 If one person sins unknowingly, then he shall offer a female goat of a year old for a sin offering-

The ruler was to offer a male (Lev. 4), but the common person was to offer a female. It may simply be because female animals cost less, and the ruler was to realize that he had greater responsibility in his failure and needed to show this in the kind of sacrifice he made.

Num 15:28 The priest shall make atonement for the soul who errs when he sins unknowingly, to make atonement for him before Yahweh; and he shall be forgiven-

We note that the legislation about the cities of refuge likewise reflected God's special concern about unintentional sin. He recognizes that there are different kinds of sin. And in this we see His sensitivity, for the other legal codes at the time saw everything in black and white terms of obedience or disobedience to legal statutes. The word for "unknowingly" or "unintentionally" is s.w. 'deceived' (Job 12:16). It could be that God also recognizes that some are deceived into sin, and therefore treats those who lead into sin more severely than those who are led into sin. Likewise the New Testament condemns false teachers, but seems to be more acceptive of the falsely taught, the misguided.

Num 15:29 You shall have one law for him who does anything unknowingly, for him who is native-born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger who lives as a foreigner among them'

The implication therefore was that any Gentile living in Israel was under the Mosaic law. And that law was the contract forming the basis of the covenant. They were therefore to enter covenant with Yahweh if they lived in Israel. The law continually envisages Gentiles living in Israel, as if they were going to be attracted by Israel and come and live in the land having entered covenant with Yahweh. God's definition of "Israel" as His people was from the start geared towards inclusiveness of all races-and thereby against all forms of racially based patriotism and xenophobia. See on :16.

Num 15:30 'But the soul who does anything in presumption, whether he is native-born or a foreigner, the

same blasphemes Yahweh; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people-

David murdered, committed adultery and even the deadly sin of presumption (2 Sam. 12:9 cp. Num. 15:31). Yet these were overlooked by God *as if* they were 'surface' sins; the real man David was accepted by God and held up as a wondrous example to all the faithful. Such is His softness towards us, and more essentially, His earnest desire to save men who may not 'make it' on the basis of straight obedience. The context here in the previous chapter is of Israel having been presumptuous in trying to enter Canaan when told they now could not do so (Dt. 1:43). If God is eager to see presumptuous sins as sins of ignorance, so that He might still save at least some... we also should take as generous a view as possible of others' sins.

"Presumption" is literally 'with upraised hand'. The idea is of willful defiance; thus Israel left Egypt with a high hand and therefore the Egyptians pursued them (Ex. 14:8; Num. 33:3). And this was how Moses had sinned at Kadesh, lifting his hand and then striking the rock. But even that was forgivable in terms of salvation. In the next chapter, Num, 16, we will read of Korah and his followers standing proudly before their tents, as if this too was sin with upraised, defiant hand. The book of Numbers features the record of incidents whilst the people were "in the wilderness", and also the giving of extra laws. But those extra laws are to be related to the narrative incidents recorded. Num. 15 follows on from Num. 14, and therefore talks about presumptuous sins.

This means to "despise" God's word of promise (:31), and Num. 14 records Israel 'despising' both God and the promised land. Whilst they continued in that, there was no atonement possible. We can conclude that that legislation was given in the context of Israel's presumption in rejecting the Kingdom and calling God a liar. And the implication is that we can all in principle commit that same sin. It is unforgivable insofar as the sin itself means we refuse to believe in God's grace and salvation, and reject it as fake. Whilst that's our position, salvation is impossible- by our own choice. The issue of whether we believe we will be saved therefore assumes critical place in the psychology and worldview of all God's people, at all times. The context continues in Num. 16, where the rebellion of Korah is again a sin of presumption that was met with immediate destruction- just as the ten spies were destroyed. Again we are left with the impression that presumptuous sin leads to immediate destruction. For those left alive, especially the condemned generation in the desert, there was still some potential for repentance, pardon and future salvation through resurrection.

Num 15:31 Because he has despised the word of Yahweh, and has broken His commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be on him'

Being "cut off from Israel" may not mean that the person must be slain. For then the phrase "cut off from the earth" would have been used (as in Prov. 2:22 and often). As noted on :30, David committed this sin but was spared. The idea is that the person who ate leaven (Ex. 12:15) or was not circumcised (Gen. 17:14) was exclud-

ed from the community of God's people because they had broken or despised the covenant which made them His people. But there is no record of Israel keeping a list of 'cut off from Israel' Israelites and excluding them from keeping the feasts. So we conclude this means that God would consider such persons as cut off from His people. He would do the cutting off, and not men. In His book, they were "cut off". But there was no legal nor practical mechanism provided to Israel to manage the 'cutting off from Israel' of those who despised the covenant. The cutting off was done in God's eyes, in Heaven's record, and the Israelites were intended to continue to fellowship with such persons at the feasts. This is a strong argument for an open table, and for not seeking to make church excommunication the equivalent of this cutting off of the disobedient from the people of Israel. This explains why being "cut off from Israel" is the punishment stated for doing things which man could not see and judge- secretly breaking the Sabbath (Ex. 31:14), eating peace offerings whilst being unclean (Lev. 7:20- for how were others to know whether someone had touched the unclean, or was experiencing an unclean bodily emission), eating meat with blood still in it (Lev. 17:10,14), not adequately humbling the soul (Lev. 23:29), not keeping Passover (Num. 9:13), being presumptuous (Num. 15:30,31- only God can judge that), not washing after touching a dead body (Num. 19:13,20). This is why Lev. 20:6 makes it explicit that "I [Yahweh personally] will set My face against that person, and will cut him off from among his

people". It is Yahweh who does the cutting off and not men (also 1 Sam. 2:33).

"Despised the word" is the term used about David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:9,10). But God's grace is such that even in this case, when David deserved to die for knowingly doing wrong, still a way was found for David to live. We are all in essence in the same situation, for our sins are often knowingly done.

As discussed on :1, the immediate context of these commandments is the presumptuous sin of Israel, in turning away from the Kingdom, and then presuming to try to enter it when they had been barred from it. Despising the word of the Lord is alluding to how the faithless spies and their followers did just this in Num 14:36,37.

Num 15:32 While the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day-

The inheritance of the land is elsewhere described as a keeping of a Sabbath rest. The Sabbath was a looking forward to resting from the labour of Egypt in the salvation of the promised land: "You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm, therefore Yahweh your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day" (Dt. 5:15). Quite often, inheritance of the land is described as "rest": "You haven't yet come to the rest and to the inheritance which Yahweh your God gives you... dwell in the land which Yahweh your God causes you to inherit, and He

gives you rest" (Dt. 12:9,10). Paul in Hebrews develops this point, based upon the statements in Ps. 95:8-11 that God had sworn that the condemned generation would not enter the "rest" of the promised land. This man who broke the Sabbath rest intentionally therefore becomes similar to those who willfully refused to enter the land, which has just been recorded in Num. 14. He gathered sticks just as the Hebrews gathered straw in Egypt; rather than rest from that labour. And that is the context for these laws.

As discussed on :1, the context here is Israel's rejection because they had willfully disobeyed Yahweh and blasphemed Him (Num. 14:11). This man was similar, and perhaps that is why his case is recorded here. He is an example of the presumptuous sin just spoken of in :30. The mention that Israel were in the wilderness when this happened may appear to be stating the obvious. But many of the laws, including those so far in this chapter, had been prefaced with the comment that they were to be observed when Israel were in Canaan. Perhaps there was a willful misunderstanding of the Sabbath law as only applicable in Canaan. I say willful misunderstanding, because the man was judged as guilty of the sin of presumption (:30,31). So often, caviling over legalistic interpretation of the law is because we are seeking to simply ignore God's law and go our own way; see on :33.

The only other occurrence of the Hebrew phrase "gathering sticks" is in the description of the widow woman of 1 Kings 17:10. We wonder whether she was doing so on the Sabbath; and yet Elijah was taught that

he had to depend upon this for him to have food to remain alive. Just as unclean ravens brought him his food. We are likewise taught the same at times.

The repeated occurrence of the phrase "in the wilderness" in Num. 15:32; 27:3 leads the Rabbis to identify the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath as Zelophehad, who therefore "died in his own sin", an allusion to Num. 15:31 which uses this term in prefacing the incident of gathering sticks. Although it is then noteworthy that he had apparently faithful daughters.

Num 15:33 Those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron, and to all the congregation-

Firewood would have been scarce in the wilderness, so this man perhaps found some and wanted to gather it on the Sabbath before anyone else could. The motive for reporting him would therefore have been jealousy and anger, rather than pure concern that the Sabbath had been broken. So often those who report others breaking God's laws have their own agendas.

Num 15:34 They put him in custody, because it had not been declared what should be done to him-

A similar incident was dealt with the same way in Lev. 24:12. As discussed on :23, there was an element of progressive revelation in God's law, and not every situation was legislated for. Probably they realized he deserved the death penalty, but the question may have been how he should be put to death.

Num 15:35 Yahweh said to Moses, The man shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp-

Heb. 13:12 stresses that the Lord Jesus died in the same place, outside the camp of God's people. Although Jesus never sinned, in His time of dying He so closely identified with condemned sinners that even in our moments of sin He can still identify with us (Gal. 3:13). The people who gathered manna on the Sabbath were not dealt with like this, although it was an equally clear breaking of specific laws. We can only conclude that people may sin in the same external way, but God knows the heart and in this case, the man was guilty of the sin of presumption (:30,31) rather than a lesser level of disobedience. But only God can judge these things. All we see is the external actions and sin. We cannot therefore "judge" because we fail to see the heart behind the wrong action. And clearly God does judge identical actions differently, as we see by comparing this man with those who gathered manna.

The capital punishment for gathering on the Sabbath begs for comparison with the way some tried to gather manna on the Sabbath but were not so harshly punished. Surely the point is, in the context of Num. 15, that he had sinned presumptuously whereas the manna gatherers were merely opportunistic. And possibly hungry. Whereas this man apparently knew that the sabbath was the sign of the covenant (Ex. 31:12) but rejected that covenant. Perhaps this is why the judgment was to

be stoned outside of the camp, reflecting his conscious rejection of his place in the camp of God's people.

Num 15:36 All the congregation brought him outside of the camp, and stoned him to death with stones, as Yahweh commanded Moses-

The Lord Jesus suffered and died, shedding the blood of atonement, "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13). We are bidden go forth to the Lord Jesus "outside the camp", just as those who "sought Yahweh" did when there was no tabernacle (Ex. 33:7). The people watching Moses as he walked out to it, without the camp, therefore looks ahead to a faithless Israel lining the via Dolorosa and watching the Lord walk out to His place of crucifixion. And we are to get behind Him and follow Him there, stepping out from the mass of Israel. As the Lord Jesus suffered "outside the camp", so various parts of the Mosaic sacrifices were to be burnt there (Lev. 4:12,21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27); and yet it was the blood of those sacrifices which achieved atonement (Heb. 13:11; Num. 19:3,9). "Outside the camp" was the place of excluded, condemned sinners (Lev. 13:46; 24:14; Num. 5:3,4; 15:35,36; 31:13,19), and it was here that the Lord Jesus died, in identification with us.

Num 15:37 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The provision for Naziriteship encouraged the average Israelite to enter into the spirit of the High Priest by imposing some of the regulations governing his behaviour upon them. *All* Israel were bidden make fringes of blue, in conscious imitation of the High Priest to whose spirit they all were intended to attain (Num. 15:38).

But we are bidden now "come boldly unto the throne of grace (cp. the mercy seat in the Most Holy)... boldness to enter into the holiest" (Heb. 4:16; 10:19): to do what only the High Priest could do under the Old Covenant.

Num 15:38 Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them that they should make themselves fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put on the fringe of each border a cord of blue-

People touched the hem of Jesus' garment, the fringes mentioned here, in search of healing (Mt. 9:20; 14:36). By doing so, they were recognizing that their healing was possible because of His righteous obedience to the Father's commandments. His power to heal has a basis- not merely that He is powerful of Himself, but because of His moral obedience.

Fringes of blue were the sign of royalty. We recall David cutting off the hem of Saul's garment, and Saul's conclusion that this meant that David would replace him as king and his kingship had been cut off by David. The point was that all Israel were kings, they were a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Reminding ourselves of God's Kingship over us in daily life is what qualifies us as His Kings.

Num 15:39 and it shall be to you for a fringe, that you may look on it, and remember all the commandments of Yahweh, and do them; and that you do not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you use to play the prostitute-

If there is an external being who makes us sin, surely he would have been mentioned extensively in the Old

Testament? But there is a very profound and significant silence about this. The record of the Judges period, or Israel in the wilderness, show that at those times Israel were sinning a great deal. But God did not warn them about some powerful supernatural being or force which could enter them and make them sin. Instead, He encouraged them to apply themselves to His word, so that they would not fall away to the ways of their own flesh (e.g. Dt. 27:9,10; Josh. 22:5). Num. 15:39 is especially clear about our innate sinful tendencies: "Do not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, which you are inclined to go after wantonly" (Heschel's translation). In some Orthodox Jewish liturgies, this verse is to be repeated twice each day. And so it should be by us all. For this is the heart of the matter, the essence of the believer's struggle against sin within.

AV "That ye seek not after your own heart" uses the same word for "search" as recently used about the spies searching out the land, but with the heart of disbelief. Again we see how the commands here are directly related to the preceding historical narrative. The reason they failed the test of faith was because of lack of daily, moment by moment attention to God's ways and words. For this was what the fringe was intended to teach.

Ecc. 11:9 alludes to Num 15:39: "Rejoice, young man, while you are young, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Follow the inclination of your heart and the desire of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment". The way of the world is to just do whatever our heart tells us,

to follow our heart. But the Biblical view of the heart radically clashes with this. We are to control our heart, not do what is intuitive, and allow the heart to be regenerated. But the context of Num. 15 is that we have in that chapter a set of laws relevant to Israel's belief of the ten spies and their rejection of entering the promised land. The spies had judged after the sight of their eyes and followed their heart rather than God's leading. They had "seen" giants and they seemed in their own eyes as grasshoppers compared to them (Num. 13:32,33; 14:33).

Num 15:40 that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy to your God-

The Jewish commentator Rashi claims that the numerical value of "fringes" by gematria is 613, the number of Mosaic commandments. So there is an appropriacy in the fringe being intended to help Israel remember all those 613 commandments.

Num 15:41 I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. I am Yahweh your God-

This reminder was pertinent at the time, for they had just been told to return towards the Red Sea and the border with Egypt (Num. 14:25). They were being reminded that even in what appear to be steps backward, God is still at work to bring us out of Egypt and into His Kingdom. There is perhaps the hint here to the condemned generation that Yahweh still sought to be their God. They would die in the desert, but like Moses, they could

be pardoned and resurrected to eternal inheritance of the land, and have Yahweh as their God.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 16

Num 16:1 Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men-

Korah is presented as the ringleader of the rebellion (Jude 11). But his sons apparently survived, dissociating themselves from their father, becoming the "sons of Korah" who were musicians in the sanctuary. As we see throughout the Biblical records, good men have bad sons and vice versa. Spirituality is in the end totally individual and personal. The Kohathites pitched on the same side of the tabernacle as the Reubenites. So we see the simple takeaway lesson- watch whom you mix with, even amongst the people of God. For people tend to lead each other into sin.

Initially God's intention was that the firstborn of all Israel would be priests (Ex. 13:2; 19:6). But after the golden calf, they were replaced by the Levites (Num. 3:12). The priestly work was split up among Levi's four sons: Aaron, Kohath, Merari, and Gershon (Num. 3:17,38; 1 Chron. 23:12,13). But the most senior role was given to Aaron, passing over Kohath (Ex. 28:1; Num. 17:1-10). And Kohath's family had to be supervised by Eleazer, a son of Aaron (Num. 3:32). This is typical of how God doesn't always honour the firstborn, as we see from the Abraham, Isaac and Jacob family stories. In this case, the discontented fed off each others' discontent; for the Levites were led by Elizaphan, the son of

Kohath's fourth son (Num. 3:30). Aaron was the son of Amram, Kohath's firstborn. Korah was the son of Kohath's second son Izhar. Korah was the firstborn son of Izhar, so he was a firstborn; but his father was not a firstborn. He was younger brother to Amram, Moses' father. Making Korah a cousin to Moses. He clearly was discontented that he as a firstborn didn't have more seniority. He obviously felt that he ought to lead the Levites. The Reubenites were the deposed firstborns just as the Kohathites thought they were. Again we see how the Biblical record is so psychologically credible; for we see discontented people feed off each other all the time.

Dathan and Abram were from Reuben, the deposed firstborn. So we see men with a chip on their shoulder, wanting power. The record is so psychologically credible. They failed to learn the lessons from the Jacob story, nor that of Ex. 13:2, where all firstborn had to be sanctified by an offering because they were not sanctified merely by means of being firstborn. God in fact was at pains to show that firstborn status meant nothing to Him of itself.

Num 16:2 and they rose up before Moses with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation, men called to lead the assembly, men of renown-

We note that Korah was a firstborn, and Reuben was a deposed firstborn. Possibly there was some discontent about the firstborn of Israel being exchanged for the

Levites. The rejected Israelites had wanted a captain to lead them back to Egypt. We are told that they in their hearts returned there. So it is likely that this putsch was in order to take Moses and Aaron out of leadership positions, so that the people could be led back to Egypt.

Num 16:3 They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said to them, You take too much on yourself, since all the congregation are holy, each one of them, and Yahweh is among them. Why then lift yourselves up above the assembly of Yahweh?-

The complaint may have been that Moses was exalting his own immediate family to the priesthood, and Korah and the Levites were subservient to them. Perhaps Korah led the rebellion against Moses because he objected to how Elzaphan son of Uziel had been appointed over the Kohathites (Num. 3:30). Kohath had four sons, Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uziel (Ex. 6:18). Amram's sons, Moses and Aaron, had already received high honour in ruling over all Israel. So Korah, as the firstborn son of the next born son Izhar, thought that he ought to have been over the Kohathites. But instead, the son of Uziel, Kohath's youngest son, had been made prince of the Kohathite clan. This is typical of how God appoints those who are least qualified and strong in secular terms. But Korah disliked this. He felt he was next in line to be the leader of the Kohathites.

Aaron had made this same complaint against Moses in Num. 12 and now he experiences the same. As God was gracious to him then, thanks to Moses' intercession, so Aaron is going to reflect that grace to others. He was

falsely accused as he had falsely accused Moses. This kind of thing often happens, for our spiritual growth and our ability to enter into the mind of others and pity them—not simply as some kind of "measure for measure" justice.

The comment that "all the congregation are holy" alludes to the preceding statement in Num. 15:40, that all Israel were to wear tassels to remind them that they were holy to their God. Here we see again how the incidents and laws of Numbers are all interconnected and are not random events.

The congregation had "gathered themselves together against" Aaron at the time of the golden calf (Ex. 32:1), and he gave in to them. He appears to have progressed here, because he doesn't give in to them but rather intercedes for them. Circumstances repeat in our lives, so that we learn to respond better.

Num 16:4 When Moses heard it, he fell on his face-

We see here his humility. A challenge to power and status is usually met by anger and a show of force. But Moses falls on his face in humility and in pleading with them not to sin.

Num 16:5 and he spoke to Korah and to all his company, saying, In the morning Yahweh will show who are His, and who is holy, and will cause him to come near to Him. Even him whom He shall choose He will cause to come near to Him-

LXX implies that God had already made the choice of Moses: "And he spoke to Core and all his assembly, saying, God has visited and known those that are his and who are holy, and has brought them to himself;

and whom he has chosen for himself, he has brought to himself". This is alluded to in 2 Tim. 2:19 "the Lord knows them that are His". Paul is therefore arguing that all God's people are now as Moses was personally. He often does this- for Moses was seen in Judaism as an unapproachable icon, whereas Paul wants every Christian convert to see Moses as a pattern to be realistically followed.

Paul in 2 Tim. 2:24,25 makes a series of allusions to Moses, which climax in an invitation to pray like Moses for the salvation of others:

"The servant of the Lord [A very common title of Moses] must not strive [As Israel did with him (Num. 26:9)] but be gentle unto all [The spirit of Moses] apt to teach [As was Moses (Ex. 18:20; 24:12; Dt. 4:1,5,14; 6:1; 31:22)], patient [As was Moses], in meekness [Moses was the meekest man (Num. 12:3)] instructing those that oppose themselves [at the time of Aaron and Miriam's self-opposing rebellion] if God peradventure will give them repentance [i.e. forgiveness] ["Peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30)]"- and he prayed 40 days and nights for it. And note too: 2 Tim. 2:19 = Num. 16:5,26; 2 Tim. 2:20 = Num. 12:7; 2:21 = Num. 16:37; 2 Tim. 2:22 = Num. 12:2; 16:3; 2 Tim. 2:26 = Num. 16:33. This is quite something. The height of Moses' devotion for His people, the passion of his praying, shadowing as it did the matchless intercession and self-giving of the Lord, really is our example. It isn't just a height to be admired. It means that we will not half-heartedly ask our God to 'be

with' brother x and sister y and the brethren in country z, as we lie half asleep in bed. This is a call to sustained, on our knees prayer and devotion to the salvation of others. For the Judaists, an appeal to be like Moses, to emulate him in teaching, was blasphemous; for they considered Moses at such a level that he could never be imitated. Yet Paul urges timid Timothy and all teachers to realistically be Moses to our audience.

Num 16:6 Do this: take censers, Korah, and all his company-

Surely they were supposed to see the similarity with what had happened in Lev. 10:1: "The sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, each took his own firepan, and they placed coals in them and they placed incense upon them, and they brought before Yahweh a foreign fire, which He did not command them". Here and in Lev. 10, the rebellious incense offerers were destroyed by fire from Yahweh. Censers were for offering incense, which was exactly how Nadab and Abihu were slain (Lev. 10:2). So this was the kind of leading into temptation which we are to pray shall not happen to us (Mt. 6:13). Their path to repentance was being offered to them, but the consequences of refusing it were now higher. The intended response was 'No. We give in. To offer incense like that and come near to the incense altar in the holy place is not for us. We would rightly be slain for doing so. So, we give in and retreat from our position'. But human pride was in the way. And they took up the offer, leading to their justifiable destruction. For by knowingly doing what they knew would lead to destruction, they

were committing the sin of presumption which forms a context to this account (Num. 15:30,31). Balaam was put in a similar position- he was told to go with the elders of Moab, but only speak God's word. The intention was that he fall down and repent, and refuse to go with them. But he went with them, ostensibly in obedience to God's word of command which was leading him to self destruction. See on :29.

Num 16:7 and put fire in them, and put incense on them before Yahweh tomorrow; and it shall be that the man whom Yahweh chooses, he shall be holy. You have gone too far, you sons of Levi!-

As explained on :6, they were being invited to either repent, or go forward to self destruction. The Hebrew seems to imply that Yahweh had already chosen a holy one, and it was not them. The command to "put fire in them" was because they had "gone too far". So that they were being led down the path to destruction, unless they dropped everything and repented. God likewise works with people today.

It has been suggested that the words "Enough you sons of Levi!" cannot be addressed to Korah's company, since they are laymen who are objecting to the claims of the Levites. They must be addressed by Korah's company to Moses and Aaron, and may have fallen out of their right place at the end of Num. 16:3.

Num 16:8 Moses said to Korah, Hear now, you sons of Levi!-

As discussed on :6,7, they were on a fast track to self destruction. And so Moses desperately appeals to them:

"Hear now...", i.e. 'Be obedient to God's word'. For that is the sense of the word for "hear". And it was urgent-"now", because they had been commanded to offer incense when doing so would lead to their destruction. They needed to urgently repent.

Num 16:9 Is it a small thing to you, that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of Yahweh, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them-

They didn't consider servanthood within the family of God to be a very great honour; they wanted leadership and personal honour from those they would be over. This is the great paradox, the acme of humility, that serving is actually an honour. But there are so few who really grasp this. Leadership, like respect, is something which can never be demanded nor sought after if we are truly God's people. Notice that to serve others in God's family is to come "near to [God] Himself".

"Come near before Yahweh" is usually translated "offer [sacrifice] before Yahweh", and is translated that way multiple times. Although rarely (Ex. 16:9; Lev. 9:5) it is used of the congregation coming near before Yahweh. But the congregation didn't generally want to come before Yahweh, and so He chose just the Levites to come before Yahweh (Num. 8:10; 16:9 s.w.). It was God's intention that all Israel should be His servants, a nation of priests. But He changed and amended His approach, and chose just the Levites for this. We see here how open God is to change, so that by all means He may have re-

lationship with His people. Under the new covenant, all believers are part of a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5) as He initially intended even under the old covenant. And yet there is always the tendency to leave the priestly work to specialists rather than perceiving our personal call to do it.

They didn't appreciate the wonder of the fact that the Levites had been taken by God as the firstborns instead of the firstborn of Israel. And this was in order to save Israel from destruction. Israel's salvation is presented as dependent upon them: "I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the children of Israel, to do the service of the children of Israel in the Tent of Meeting, and to make atonement for the children of Israel that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come near to the sanctuary" (Num. 8:19). Likewise "the Levites are the ones who will serve in the service of the tent of meeting; they are the ones who will bear their guilt" (Lev. 18:22,23). We too can fail to appreciate the hugely significant role we play in saving others. We should need nothing else.

Num 16:10 and that He has brought you near, and all your brothers the sons of Levi with you? Do you seek the priesthood also?-

Coming near to Yahweh was something which should have been done on will and initiative of the people. But just as God brought Israel out of Egypt when they wanted to remain there, so He caused the Levites to come near to Him. This is an example of how His Spir-

it works upon human lives, to bring people unto Him when otherwise they would not have made the required distance of movement towards Him.

Num 16:11 Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against Yahweh; and Aaron, who is he that you murmur against him?-

See on Num. 26:9. Israel's rejection of Moses was a rejection of the God who was working through Moses to redeem them. Thus Korah and his followers "strove against Moses... when they strove against Yahweh" (Num. 26:9 cp. 16:11). Moses understood that when Israel murmured against him, they murmured against Yahweh (Ex. 16:2,7; Num. 17:5; 21:5). They thrust Moses away from them (Acts 7:27,39) - yet the same word is used in Rom. 11:2 concerning how God still has not cast away Israel; He has not treated them as they treated Him through their rejection of Moses and Jesus, who manifested Him.

Num 16:12 Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; and they said, We won't come up-

They perceived that by offering incense they were indeed on a path to self destruction, as Nadab and Abihu had been. See on :6,7. So they wanted to pull back from that, and yet wanted to save face. And so they twist the turn of their argument. But repentance in this case simply had to involve loss of face. And there was no way it could be compromised as they wished.

Num 16:13 Is it a small thing that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey, to kill us

in the wilderness, but you must also make yourself a prince over us?-

Stephen in Acts 7 stresses the way in which Moses was rejected by Israel as a type of Christ. At age 40, Moses was "thrust away" by one of the Hebrews; and on the wilderness journey the Jews "thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt" (Acts 7:27,35,39). This suggests that there was far more antagonism between Moses and Israel than we gather from the Old Testament record- after the pattern of Israel's treatment of Jesus. It would seem from Acts 7:39 that after the golden calf incident, the majority of Israel cold shouldered Moses. Once the point sank in that they were not going to enter the land, this feelings must have turned into bitter resentment. They were probably unaware of how Moses had been willing to offer his eternal destiny for their salvation; they would not have entered into the intensity of Moses' prayers for their salvation. The record seems to place Moses and "the people" in juxtaposition around 100 times (e.g. Ex. 15:24; 17:2,3; 32:1 NIV; Num. 16:41 NIV; 20:2,3; 21:5). They accused Moses of being a cruel cult leader, bent on leading them out into the desert to kill them and steal their wealth from them (Num. 16:13,14)- when in fact Moses was delivering them from the house of bondage, and was willing to lay down his own salvation for theirs. The way Moses submerged his own pain is superb; both of their rejection of him and of God's rejection of him from entering the Kingdom. The style of Moses' writing in Num. 20:12-14 reveals this submerging of his own pain. He

speaks of himself in the third person, omitting any personal reflection on his own feelings: "The Lord spake unto Moses... Because you believed me not... you shall not bring the congregation into the land... and Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the King of Edom...". Likewise all the references to "the Lord spake unto Moses" (Lev. 1:1). Moses submerged his own personality in writing his books.

Num 16:14 Moreover you haven't brought us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor given us inheritance of fields and vineyards-

Israel came to describe the Egypt they had been called out from as the land flowing with milk and honey, and denied that they could experience this in God's Kingdom in Canaan. And so we have the same tendency to be deceived into thinking that the kingdoms of this world, the world around us, is effectively the Kingdom of God, the only thing worth striving after. We marvel at how quickly they adopted the narrative that Egypt was good and Canaan was bad. A complete change to the narrative they had held just a few years previously.

Will you put out the eyes of these men? We won't come up-

GNB "And now you are trying to deceive us", understanding this as an idiom for covering the eyes of another in deception.

Num 16:15 Moses was very angry, and said to Yahweh, Don't respect their offering-

Yet he was the humblest man on planet earth at the time (Num. 12:3). Anger isn't advisable for us, as

it can easily lead us into sin; but of itself, anger isn't necessarily incompatible with humility. Yet later Moses' faith slipped for a moment; because his spirit was provoked by Israel, so that he spoke unadvisedly with his lips and was therefore barred from entering the land (although maybe such an apparently temporary slip was the reflection of deeper problems?). Yet it does seem uncharacteristic, a tragic slip down the graph of ever rising spirituality. There must have almost been tears in Heaven. Being easily provoked was one of Moses' characteristics; consider how he turned himself and stormed out from Pharaoh (Ex. 10:6; 11:8); how his anger waxed hot when he returned from the mount, how he went out from Pharaoh in great anger, how he first of all feared the wrath of Pharaoh and then stopped fearing it; how Moses was "very wroth" at Israel's suggestion that he was appropriating the sacrifices for himself; how he was "angry" with Eleazer (Ex. 32:19; 11:8; Num. 16:15; Lev. 10:16,17). This temperament explains his swings of faith. Was the Lord Jesus likewise afflicted?

I have not taken one donkey from them, neither have I hurt one of them-

Paul alludes to these words: "I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel" (Acts 20:33); and Paul maybe had these words in mind again in 2 Cor. 7:2: "We have hurt no man... we have defrauded no man". Always we are to be looking out for similarities between our experiences and those of Biblical characters. For it is in this way the we through patience and comfort of the scriptures have hope; and the Bible becomes a living word speak-

ing to us directly. LXX "I have not taken away the desire of any one of them" could mean they were implying he had messed with their wives (Ez. 24:16). Sexual slander is always a cheap shot taken at any religious leader, and Moses was surely liable to it, seeing the people hated him so much and were always murmuring at him.

The insistence Moses had not taken a donkey from them was effectively saying that he had not exercised the power of a ruler. Saul as king of Israel did just this (1 Sam. 12:3).

Num 16:16 Moses said to Korah, You and all your company go before Yahweh, you, and they, and Aaron, tomorrow-

As explained on :6,7 this was effectively a command which would lead them to their deaths. For there were many commands about the incense and who could offer it, warning that any who offered otherwise or who weren't priests, or came near to offer incense when they weren't qualified, were to die. Their path to repentance was being offered to them, but the consequences of refusing it were now higher. The intended response was 'No. We give in. To offer incense like that and come near to the incense altar in the holy place is not for us. We would rightly be slain for doing so. So, we give in and retreat from our position.' But human pride was in the way. And they took up the offer, leading to their justifiable destruction.

Num 16:17 and let each man take his censer, and put incense on them, and each man bring before Yahweh his

censer, two hundred and fifty censers; you also and Aaron, each his censer-

Each prince offered 21 animals in total at the dedication of the altar in Num. 7, and there were 12 princes, making a total of 252 animals. When the princes rebelled, the 250 rebellious princes were asked to bring their censers before Yahweh, along with the censers of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:17), making a total of 252 censers. That this number is again associated with the princes of Israel cannot surely be chance. There is the simple message that the hand of God was present throughout the whole narrative.

Num 16:18 They each took his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood at the door of the Tent of Meeting with Moses and Aaron-

As discussed on :6,7,16 they refused to back down and were now committing the sin of presumption, challenging God to strike them down.

Num 16:19 Korah assembled all the congregation against them to the door of the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the congregation-

"The congregation" therefore refers to all Israel and it was therefore all of Israel who were to be slain (:21).

Num 16:20 Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying-

Moses and Aaron know Yahweh well enough to as it were disobey the command to separate themselves from the condemned sinners. They do not do so immediately, but instead beg Him not to destroy all the congregation.

Num 16:21 Separate yourselves from among this congregation that I may consume them in a moment!-

Twice in quick succession God wishes to do this and is talked out of it, as it were, by Moses' intercession (:21,45). We get the impression of a fast moving, intense relationship between God and Moses. "This congregation" apparently referred to all Israel (:19); because in :22-26 we see the intercession of Moses and Aaron, and their obtaining of deliverance for "this congregation" so long as they literally separated themselves from the rebels. God wished to destroy the entire congregation, as He wished to at the time of the golden calf and also at the time of their refusal to enter Canaan in Num. 14. But again, the intercession of Moses leads to a radical change of heart in God Almighty. Such is the power of prayer and intercession for others. The power of Moses' intercession contrasts with the far greater power of that of the Lord, whose intercession was not with words alone but backed up by His blood, His sacrifice.

If Yahweh had destroyed Israel, then it would have left just Moses and Aaron. Clearly He still has in mind what He did in Ex. 32:10 where He told Moses "I will

become furious with them and consume them, and I will make you into a great nation". We observe how God is willing to move down one track, but is persuadable to move down another even if that is not His ideal.

"In a moment" is literally 'in the twinkle of an eye'. God was a fraction of a second away from destroying all the people; the intercession of Moses was immediate, and was immediately effective. We see how intense was

that mediation, and how immediate was God's response to Moses. And Moses' mediation is a dim shadow of the Lord's for us. At the time of the golden calf it had been the same: "I will come up in the midst of you in a moment" (Ex. 33:5 s.w.). The sons of Korah remembered this when they used the word in Ps. 73:19: "How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment they are utterly consumed". They perceived that this sudden destruction did come upon their family, although Israel as a whole, including themselves, were saved from it by grace.

Num 16:22 They fell on their faces, and said, God, the God of the spirits of all flesh-

Biblically, a man or woman is identified with their spirit in the sense of their mind or way of life. Heb. 12:23 speaks of the spirits of just men, with whom the believer ought to associate. This means that we ought to identify ourselves with the way of life, the spirit of life, of "just men" of the past. God is "the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num. 16:22; 27:16) in the sense that He is the God of all humanity. So "spirits in prison" can refer to people who, in their spiritual lives, are imprisoned.

Moses is seeking to touch a Divine nerve by reminding Him of how all He intended destroying were in fact energized by His Spirit. So often David appeals to Yahweh as our creator and maker as the basis for Him to show grace and pity to man in his weakness. To this day He has a desire to the work of His hands in pity. We note that Moses had saved Aaron's life at the time of the golden calf, and now Aaron in turn intercedes for others.

Our own experience of having been interceded for leads us to intercede for others.

Shall one man sin, and will You be angry with all the congregation?-

It's clear from the record in this chapter that the architect of the rebellion was Korah, the "one man" whom Moses referred to (see too :40,49; Jude 11 "the gain-saying of Korah"). But he influenced others to sin, and they were still guilty for their sin. Although God doesn't count people as guilty merely by association, He expects us not to identify ourselves with sinful behaviour- hence verses 23-25 are God's response to Moses' concern that God might be indiscriminately applying the unfair principle of 'guilt by association'. Moses is pleading with God in the spirit of Abraham, who likewise pleaded for a change in the outworking of God's purpose and stated intentions- on the same basis, that the innocent should not perish with the righteous. But Moses here seems over generous in considering that Korah was the "one man" who had sinned; those who had followed him into the sin of presumption still had to be punished. The result of the amazing intercession was that only the rebels were punished, even though God judged the entire congregation as guilty for going along with them. 'Going along' with the sins of leaders is therefore here seen as a capital offence. The problem with religion and mere denominationalism is that the sins of leaders are hothummed and legitimized by the congregation. We note again that this amazing atonement was achieved without the shedding of blood, without which there was techni-

cally no remission of sins. Likewise Yahweh had noted in Num. 14 that he saved Israel from destruction and pardoned according to the mere *word* of Moses- without shedding of blood. For there was no time for an animal to be offered. It makes us reflect how much more powerful is the Lord's intercession for us, based upon His blood.

Num 16:23 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

As at the time of the golden calf, God had likewise insisted that He would destroy the congregation of Israel and make a great nation from Moses. Situations at times repeat in our lives, and here Moses again is called to intense, immediate intercession in order to avert this. And Aaron joins in this time; it was God's intention that he should rise up to the intensity of Moses, and indeed Aaron saved Israel again when the plague broke out which would otherwise have destroyed the congregation. This is the power God is willing to give to the prayers of third parties for others' salvation. There is a gap between Yahweh's prophetic pronouncements, and their fulfillment. And in that gap there is the possibility for repentance. This is what gives intensity to our prayers and repentance, knowing we too live in such a gap. And here again, God 'repents' of His intention to destroy the entire congregation, and instead tells them to get away from the tabernacle of Korah and thereby be saved from the threatened destruction (:24).

Num 16:24 Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get away from around the tent of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram!'-

The usage of the word "tent" here is misleading. The word *mishkan* is used, the usual term for the tabernacle, and a different word for ordinary dwelling tents is used in :26,27. It seems that Korah had his own religious system which he had established near to the tabernacle of Yahweh. The singular "tent / tabernacle" cannot refer to the ordinary tent of the three men, for they would not all have normally lived in the same tent. Acts 7:43 informs us that Israel carried the tabernacle of other gods with them through the wilderness, as well as Yahweh's tabernacle. So we see the extent of the apostasy. The desire to replace the leadership of Moses and Aaron was of the same spirit as the desire to appoint another "captain" who would lead them and their pagan tabernacle back to Egypt where they had taken it from. It could be that whilst this showdown was happening at the tabernacle of Yahweh, the "congregation" were worshipping idols at the apostate tabernacle of Korah. I will suggest on Num. 18:1; 19:7,11 that in fact the priests bowed to pressure and allowed some of the rebellious Levites and even other Israelites to enter the sanctuary at this time, and this required the red heifer ritual to be cleansed from. Perhaps they took part of the furnishings of the true tabernacle and erected them in their own tabernacle.

Num 16:25 Moses rose up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him-

We note that Moses went to Dathan and Abiram, not Korah. Clearly this was one last desperate appeal to them; for as noted on :22, Moses had the impression that Dathan and Abiram had been drawn into the sin of

"one man", Korah. But it seems they still didn't heed even the desperate appeals of Moses. Korah himself went to the tabernacle and was offering fake incense there.

Num 16:26 He spoke to the congregation, saying, Depart, I beg you, from the tents of these wicked men-

This is the normal word for "tents", as in tents which are lived in; hence the plural. And it is a different word to the word for "tabernacle", in the singular, used in :24. That word refers to some paganistic, idolatrous *mishkan*, a fake tabernacle. "I beg you" shows Moses' earnest desire for the salvation of those who despised him, grumbled about him constantly, and at times sought to slay him and certainly depose him from leadership.

And touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins!-

"Touch" is better 'to lay the hand on'. The idea was that the others were not to grab hold of any of the idols in the tents of these men, associated with their paganistic tabernacle discussed on :24. The idea is not of 'guilt by association' through touch, but rather of actual participation in idolatry. Especially since idols were often made from precious stones and metals, and would have been valuable. If they did, then they would "be consumed in [the coming judgment for] all their sins". We each stand in the position of that surrounding congregation; for 2 Cor. 6:17 alludes to this historical moment in bidding each believer to "touch not" idolatry and the things of the temple / tabernacle of idols. The later psalms of the sons of Korah, who were saved, often reflect upon the fallacy of materialism in the face of sheol, the word used

here for the "pit" where their relatives were destroyed and into which they entered but were saved (:30). The materialism of Korah is also hinted at here in that people are warned not to touch the possessions of Korah, which presumably were significant. We note :32 also speaks of "their goods" being destroyed.

Num 16:27 So they went away from the tent of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side; and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood at the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little ones-

The genealogy of the sons of Korah, the gatekeepers of the temple, is recorded in 1 Chron. 9:17-19. It can be shown from the genealogies that they were brought up by their second cousin, Phinehas. They obeyed the command to leave the tents of their father Korah when he was consumed in the earthquake. Num. 16:27 mentions Dathan and Abiram's children standing outside their tents at this time, but there is the pointed omission of Korah's children; they had left the tents. We can therefore build up a picture of Phinehas as a zealot for the purity of God's Truth (Num. 25), yet mixed with compassion, as shown by the way he took those children of Korah under his wing, and brought them up soundly in the Truth, with the result that wrote at least 11 of the Psalms and protected the purity of temple worship. It should be noted that Samuel was a Korahite (1 Chron. 6:33-38).

Their standing in their tent doors could be seen as an example of the presumptuous sin of the preceding chapter, literally 'to uplift the hand'.

Num 16:28 Moses said, Hereby you shall know that Yahweh has sent me to do all these works; for they are not from my own mind-

Num. 16:28 LXX: "Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the Lord hath *sent me* to do all these works; for I have not done them *of myself*". The ideas of *know*, *sent me*, *do these works*, *not of myself* are so frequent in John's Gospel and are alluding here: Jn. 13:35; 8:28,42; 7:3,28; 5:30,36; 10:25,37; 14:10; 15:24; 17:4. "The works... The Son can do nothing *of himself*" recalls Moses' words: "All these works... I have not done them of my own mind" (Num. 16:28 AV). The Lord was claiming to be as Moses, and a prophet greater than Moses; but not God. This verse is the basis of "I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me" (Jn. 8:28).

"They are not from my own mind" may mean that Moses is saying that He was propelled to leadership by God and not at all according to his own wish. Paul likewise writes of how his ministry was given to him against his own will. Any ministry is a gift from God, as the Lord's parables teach. There can be no room for any spirit of careerism in Christian ministry. The need is the call, and we are to follow it, having surrendered to the Lord's leading and not seeking any leadership position "from my own mind" as Moses here puts it. We are to aspire to serve, not to be masters.

Num 16:29 If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then Yahweh hasn't sent me-

This describes "the common death of all men" as being "visited after the visitation of all men"; visiting is very much Angelic language, and thus indicates that an Angel consciously causes a man to die (by taking his breath away). This happened with Moses.

As discussed on :6,7, the idea was that these men had been challenged by God through Moses to offer incense with their censors, which was priestly work, to which these men claimed to be fitted. If they did, then they would be slain, according to the law. Their only alternative was to either go ahead and do so to their destruction; or fall on their faces and repent. And so Moses is alluding to this when he says that if they were slain by direct Divine action, then his whole position about them would be justified. If they weren't, then they were indeed qualified to be priests, even though Moses' law said they weren't. and Moses would have been a false prophet of God's words.

Ps. 106:18 says that God kindled a fire to destroy them, but in reality, they kindled that fire themselves (Is. 9:18; Hos 7:6). Lev. 10:2 uses the same term for fire from Yahweh devouring Nadab and Abihu as in Num. 16:35 about the destruction of Korah's rebels. They were clearly aware of what had happened to those rebels, and were daring God to repeat it. It was truly the sin of presumption.

Clearly they didn't believe in Moses. But earlier they had been given signs "that they may believe you for ever" (Ex. 19:9). We see here the conditional nature of how

God works with man. Reason to believe is given, but man must still exercise his choice.

Num 16:30 But if Yahweh make a new thing, and the ground open its mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain to them, and they go down alive into Sheol-

"Make a new thing" is literally 'create a new creation'. Even in the destruction of the wicked, there is something of a new creation. So that others may emerge into His creation. Sin and condemnation thereby become positive, within the Divine ecology.

"The Angels that sinned" in 2 Pet. 2:4 allude to these men. "Angel" can mean "minister", "messenger" (as John's disciples were messengers or ministers to him, Lk. 7:24). Numbers 16:9 describes the rebels as "ministers" of the congregation. The Septuagint uses the word *aggelos* for "ministers", which is the same Greek word translated "Angel" in 2 Peter 2:4. They left their first, or original, "principality" (Jude 6, A.V. margin); the rebels were princes, but wanted to be priests as well (Num. 16:2,10). Because of this, the ground opened and swallowed them (Num. 16:31-33), as a dramatic example to everyone of the fate of those who rebel against the Word of God. It was especially dramatic in that it is emphasized that this was the first time that such a thing had happened (Num. 16:30). Thus they are now dead, "in everlasting chains under darkness", in the heart of the earth, to be resurrected and judged at "the judgment of the great day". Jude 8 implies that "likewise", i.e. like the angels that sinned, the Judaizers "speak evil of dignities", e.g. Jesus and Paul. The rebels spoke evil of Moses and Aaron (Num. 16:11-14).

A case could be made that the whole record of Israel's rejection from entering the land of Canaan is framed to adduce a reason for this as the fact they chose to believe that the land was inhabited by an evil dragon who would consume them there. This was a slander of the good land, and the whole point was that if they had believed in the power of God, then *whatever* 'adversary' was in the land, in whatever form, was ultimately of no real power (Num. 13:32; 14:36; Dt. 1:25). And yet it was not God's way to specifically tell the people that there was no such dragon lurking in the land of Canaan – instead He worked with them according to their fears, by making the earth literally open and swallow up the apostate amongst them (Num. 16:30) – emphasizing that by doing this, *He* was doing "a new thing", something that had never been done before – for there was no dragon lurking in any land able to swallow up people. And throughout the prophets it is emphasized that *God* and not any dragon swallowed up people – "The Lord [and not any dragon] was as an enemy; *He* has swallowed up Israel" (Lam. 2:5 and frequently in the prophets). The people of Israel who left Egypt actually failed to inherit Canaan because they believed that it was a land who swallowed up the inhabitants of the land (Num. 13:32), relating this to the presence of giants in the land (Num. 13:33). As Joshua and Caleb pleaded with them, they needed to believe that whatever myths there were going around, God was greater than whatever mythical beast was there. And because they would not believe that, they failed to enter the land, which in type

symbolized those who fail to attain that great salvation which God has prepared.

Then you shall understand that these men have despised Yahweh-"Despised" as in Num. 14:11 is s.w. provoke or blaspheme. It is specifically associated with turning to other gods (Dt. 31:20; 32:19; Is. 1:4). And that appears to be the context. The Israelites decided not to enter the land and instead to follow the gods of Egypt back to Egypt (Num. 14:11,23). The language of 'despising' is that of the presumptuous sin spoken of in the previous chapter; it was the sin of Israel who wanted to enter Canaan without God's blessing.

Num 16:31 It happened, as he made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground split apart that was under them-

Mot, the god of death, was thought to have jaws encompassing the earth and swallowing up people at their death into the underworld. But Job rejected that myth – he saw God as the swallower, and death as a return to the dust, albeit in hope of bodily resurrection at the last day (Job 19:25–27). Perhaps Job is also alluding to the myths about Mot when he speaks of how "Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering" (Job 26:6 R.S.V.); and in that context speaks as if God is the real attacker, not, therefore, Mot or any other such being. Note too how Num. 16:31–35 describes *God* as swallowing up Korah, Dathan and Abiram into death in the earth – as if to deconstruct the idea that Mot did things like this.

Num 16:32 and the earth opened its mouth, and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who appertained to Korah, and all their goods-

Korah's sons didn't die (Num. 26:11); they separated themselves from their father and his supporters in time. My suggestion is that they along with the others "went down alive into sheol" but were rescued out of it, possibly "in the morning" as one of their Psalms speaks of deliverance from sheol "in the morning". The double note that people "went down alive into sheol" may be intended to help us see this possibility. They were saved from condemnation, from sheol, by grace. No wonder they spent their lives writing Psalms praising God's grace in saving them from sheol. Their names were Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph (Ex. 6:24)- 'Prisoner', 'God will obtain for me' and 'father of gatherers'. We could possibly see reflected here Korah's sense that his family were imprisoned by their inferior [as he saw it] position, but would obtain and gather more for themselves. And yet these sons of Korah separated from their bad background, they rose above the 'chip on a shoulder' mentality, and became the authors of many Psalms. Throughout the psalms of the sons of Korah, we can detect allusion to the events of Num. 16: "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10); "Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed" (Ps. 46:2). Many of these Psalms were clearly rewritten under inspiration and applied to crises such as the Assyrian invasion of Judah and the Babylonian exile; because the "sons of Ko-

rah" become programmatic for us all. They all have a theme of telling the Gentiles of Yahweh's grace, and this was how the historical sons of Korah would've felt after their deliverance from death.

The Psalms of the sons of Korah have 'deliverance from sheol' as a major theme, especially Ps. 49. Not only does this reference resurrection, but is a reflection of their own deliverance from the 'sheol' where their relatives died. They glory that God saved them from this—even though it was their own decision, they are glorifying the way in which even our own decisions for salvation are of Him and He is to be praised for them. And yet they perceive that the death of their families was in fact the death of all men. For all have sinned: "Like sheep dragged to Sheol, death shall graze on them; the upright shall rule them in the morning". And yet the sons of Korah realized that they were in essence no better than their rebellious ancestors who went to sheol; for they too would go to sheol, but be saved from it by the grace of resurrection: "But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol". The Korah Psalms often reflect that human wealth and ambition ends in sheol, along with man's wealth; therefore we can conclude that the desire for power and leadership was motivated by material ambition.

Psalm 88 is another psalm of the sons of Korah, whose father and relatives perished in sheol. But they recognize that this was their rightful end to, and they can only be saved from it by grace: "My soul has come to Sheol... I am reckoned with those [Korah and his re-

bellious family] that descend to the Pit...like the pierced-through [the rebels in the family of Korah] who lie in the grave... You have laid me in the Pit below, in darkness, in the depths... separated from my companions [family members]". They felt their death was in essence that of their rebellious relatives. They were no better, but saved by grace. We see here their humility in recognizing that as the Lord put it in Lk. 14, the dramatic death of some doesn't mean that we ourselves are not also sinners who shall also die. Only grace can save us, and they came to that conclusion.

Psalm 46 is a Korah Psalm, so we note the references to rebels falling alive into the depths with a roaring underworld beneath them (Ps. 46:2-7). The allusion is to what happened to the father, brothers, sisters and relatives of the "sons of Korah". But the Psalm goes on to talk of how "we" will not fear because ultimate salvation for "us" is certain. We have an insight into the mind of Korah's sons.

There is a notable stress in Num. 16:32 and :33 on their households, and "all the men who appertained to Korah". This surely includes the sons of Korah. But Num. 26:11 is clear that the sons didn't "perish". Perhaps this means the sons of Korah were swallowed into sheol but were redeemed from it immediately so they didn't perish. Redemption from sheol by grace is a big theme of the psalms written by the sons of Korah. This fits the theme developed in the preceding Num. 13-15- that condemned men can be saved. Israel were condemned to destruction and replacement by Moses, but were saved

out of that. Then they were condemned to die without entering Canaan, as was Moses. But they were pardoned, and I have argued that this meant that although they died in the desert they could have the hope of resurrection to eternal inheritance of the land.

There are times when our loyalty to the Lord will result in us having to experience some kind of separation from family members who choose not to go the Lord's way; Jesus foretold this would happen frequently (Mt. 10:34-37). The men who "appertained to Korah" were therefore his religious followers rather than his immediate sons and family. "Their goods" may well have involved idol worship paraphernalia; see on :26.

It seems likely that Korah was not present with his family when they were swallowed up into the earth. He and the 250 rebels were at the sanctuary offering their unacceptable incense, which is why other scriptures speak of Dathan and Abiram being swallowed up- but not Korah (Dt. 11:6; Ps. 106:16-18). Num. 26:10 RSV seems to make this clear: "The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men".

Num 16:33 So they, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into Sheol; and the earth closed on them, and they perished from among the assembly-

"Chains of darkness" is rendered "pits of darkness" in 2 Pet. 2:4 R.V., which is a New Testament commentary upon this. The Greek word *serius* (pits) indicates an underground granary or prison, which corresponds

with Dathan and Abiram's destruction when they "went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them; and they perished" (Num. 16:33). I suggested on :32 that "all that appertained to them" referred to their religious followers and idol worship paraphernalia; see on :26.

Num 16:34 All Israel that were around them fled at their cry; for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up!-

These people who "were around them" were saved by grace, considering the warning of :24-26, that whoever stood near those men would also perish. All the time in the Old Testament we are seeing examples of people breaking God's law and yet being saved by grace.

Num 16:35 Fire came forth from Yahweh, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men who offered the incense-

Destruction by fire was an appropriate judgment for those who had offered strange fire. Judgment is related to the crime because men are self condemned more than being condemned by God. For saving, rather than destroying, is God's passion. Ps. 106:18 says that God kindled a fire to destroy them, but in reality, they kindled that fire themselves (Is. 9:18; Hos 7:6). Lev. 10:2 uses the same term for fire from Yahweh devouring Nadab and Abihu as in Num. 16:35 about the destruction of Korah's rebels. They were clearly aware of what had happened to those rebels, and were daring God to repeat it. It was truly the sin of presumption. See on :6,7,29.

It could be argued that the destruction of the incense offerers vindicated Aaron as the high priest, and

the destruction of Korah into the earth justified Moses as the political leader. But we recall how Aaron sinned at the time of the golden calf, and was only saved by Moses' intercession. The Levites went out to slay their brethren who were guilty of the apostacy, killing 3000. But Aaron was spared- because of Moses' intercession. That God would now go to such lengths to justify Aaron shows how he was truly forgiven and accepted again as the high priest.

We note the similarity with Elijah standing alone before 450 apostate priests: "A fire of Yahweh fell and consumed [the offering]" (1 Kings 18:38) just as here "Fire came forth from Yahweh, and devoured the two hundred and fifty men who offered the incense".

Num 16:36 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The command to Eleazar (:37) was presumably because Aaron as High Priest ought not to defile himself with dead bodies.

Num 16:37 Speak to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter the fire yonder, for they are holy-

They were "holy" in the sense that they were dedicated or set apart for a specific purpose, i.e. plating upon the altar (:38). They were not to be taken by the people and used for secular purposes.

Num 16:38 even the censers of these sinners against their own lives-

Often the Spirit points out that the sinner is only harming himself by his actions- and yet he earnestly pursues his course, in the name of self-interest and self-ben-

efit (Num. 16:38; Prov. 19:8; 20:2; Hab. 2:20; Lk. 7:30). Sin is therefore associated by God with utter and derisible foolishness (e.g. Num. 12:11; 2 Tim. 3:9); but this isn't how man in his unwisdom perceives it at all. Indeed, to him self-denial is inexplicable folly and blindness to the essentials of human existence. "This their way is their folly: yet their posterity approve their sayings. Selah (pause to meditate)" (Ps. 49:13). The *folly* of sin is only *fully* evident to God. Note that Ps. 49 is a psalm of the "sons of Korah".

Let them be made beaten plates for a covering of the altar; for they offered them before Yahweh, therefore they are holy; and they shall be a sign to the children of Israel-

That they were destroyed and were not left alive is shown by a comment on this incident in Psalm 73. Here Asaph describes how "my steps had well nigh slipped" (v. 2) because the wicked seemed to be prospering so much. Then, "I went into the sanctuary (tabernacle) of God; then understood I their end" (v. 17). This was because the brass censers of the 250 rebels were melted down after their death and beaten into plates with which the altar was covered – another example of the angels that sinned being publicly "set forth as an example" (Jude 7). Asaph would have seen these and reflected on the fate of the wicked men. Thus he reflects upon the rebels, the angels that sinned, "surely thou didst set them in slippery places: Thou castedst them down (by the earth swallowing them) into destruction" (v. 18) – therefore they are not alive, but in the same way as Sodom was destroyed with eternal fire, i.e. totally, so, too, were these "angels"

(Jude 6,7). The example of sinners from previous generations ought to be a warning to us. Asaph in Psalm 73 explains how he struggled with the fact that sinners appear to have a blessed life and the righteous suffer; but when he entered the sanctuary, "then understood I their end" (Ps. 73:17), probably a reference to him beholding the plates on the altar made from the censers of these sinners.

Num 16:39 Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers, which those who were burnt had offered, and they beat them out for a covering of the altar-

It was a Divine principle that the altar should be made of earth and not of any human craftsmanship (Ex. 20:21). If the plates were fixed onto the sides of the altar, then every thoughtful Israelite would have wondered whether this was a contradiction of the spirit of the commandments about altars. And the answer would be that this was an exception in order to remind everyone of the sin of Korah and his followers. Or we can understand "covering" as referring not to plates on the sides of the altar, but a kind of canopy over the altar, perhaps to shield the sacrifices from wind and rain. So we see again how God's word and law is a progressive revelation; constantly there are exceptions made by Him to His own law, and this is to pave the way to understand His glorious grace in the Lord Jesus.

Num 16:40 to be a memorial to the children of Israel, to the end that no stranger, who isn't of the seed of Aaron, comes near to burn incense before Yahweh; that he not be

as Korah, and as his company - as Yahweh spoke to him by Moses-

Uzziah expressly ignored this warning and offered incense (2 Chron. 26:19). The lesson of the copper plates was lost on him; he saw them as mere history and refused to learn the intended lessons as he offered his incense. Uzziah is typical of so many. There is a deep sense in human beings that history is bunk, or at best of merely passing historico-cultural interest, which the hurrying man of modern life has little serious time for. This is where Biblical history is so different; and it's why God's word in the Bible is in a sense all history, a living word speaking to us. But it is history to live by, moment by moment.

Num 16:41 But on the next day all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, You have killed Yahweh's people!-

The Hebrew for "murmur" is the word for "stop", and is usually translated in that way. The idea is that they didn't want to go further on the journey; they wanted to return to Egypt. Korah's plan had been to lead the people back to Egypt, and they were angry that Moses had 'stopped' the people doing what they wanted to. Despite the wonder of the Red Sea deliverance. Their hearts truly were in Egypt. This sense of not wanting to go onwards towards the Kingdom, to put a brake on God's saving process, is the same temptation which in essence afflicts all God's people who have started the journey with Him.

Num 16:42 It happened, when the congregation was assembled against Moses and against Aaron, that they

looked toward the Tent of Meeting; and behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of Yahweh appeared-

LXX has: "And it came to pass when the congregation combined against Moses and Aaron, that they ran impetuously to the tabernacle of witness; and the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord appeared".

Num 16:43 Moses and Aaron came to the front of the Tent of Meeting-

The Angel stood there or just inside the veil of the tent. It was to this Angel that they returned after interceding; see on :50.

Num 16:44 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

God again wants to destroy Israel and make of Moses' family a new people. Again, for the third time, Moses knows God well enough, he has enough faith, enough humility and enough true love for Israel... to again ask God- successfully- to relent from this. That God wanted to do this three times shows His great love for Moses.

Num 16:45 Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment!-

Twice in quick succession God wishes to do this and is talked out of it, as it were, by Moses' intercession (:21,45). The same words were used at the time of the golden calf (Ex. 33:5), and Moses had learned from that that God was open to intercession and changing His expressed intentions. We get the impression of a fast moving, intense relationship between God and Moses.

They fell on their faces-

Moses was specifically told to go away from the congregation, and yet he ran towards them in order to make atonement for them (Num. 16:45,47). Moses was so close to God that he could apparently 'disobey' Him because Moses knew there was a chance of changing God's intentions. He was so close to God- and in this case, God did indeed change His intentions. He had only just changed them over another matter, in relenting from destroying all Israel due to Korah's rebellion- because Moses prayed for the people (Num. 16:21,22).

Num 16:46 Moses said to Aaron, Take your censer, and put fire from off the altar in it, and lay incense on it, and carry it quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them; for wrath has gone out from Yahweh! The plague has begun-

The fire of the altar was ideally intended to be that kindled at the time of Lev. 9:24 when the tabernacle was consecrated. It was to be kept perpetually burning by the sacrifices being continually placed upon it, a lamb every morning and every evening. The fire which never went out or was 'quenched' (Lev. 6:13). Unquenched fire is a double symbol. The phrase is used multiple times with reference to the wrath of God in condemning sinners; it is the basis of the idea of eternal fire which will not be quenched. Rather like the cup of wine from the Lord being a symbol of either condemnation or blessing. So we have a choice- be consumed by the eternal fire now as living sacrifices, or be consumed by it anyway at the last day. Wrath, the command to destroy, had gone forth from Yahweh- but in the gap between the statement of

destruction and the execution of it, God is open to persuasion to change. This points up the power and possibilities in intense mediation before Him.

Num 16:47 Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and behold, the plague has begun among the people: and he put on the incense, and made atonement for the people-

See on :45. The NT not only encourages us to all be priests; but we can even aspire to the High Priesthood, in a certain sense. The veil was torn down so that we might all enter in to the most holy, doing the work of the High Priest for others. James 5:16 speaks of the need to pray for one another, that we may be healed. This is an undoubted allusion back to mighty Moses praying for smitten Miriam, and to Aaron staying the plague by his offering of incense / prayer (Num. 16:47). Surely James is saying that every one of us can rise up to the spirit of the High Priest in this way. The provision for Nazirite-ship encouraged the average Israelite to enter into the spirit of the High Priest by imposing some of the regulations governing his behaviour upon them. We again note that atonement was made here by incense and not blood, without which there was to be no remission of sin. Likewise Yahweh pardoned merely according to Moses' word in Num. 14. How much more powerful is the intercession of our Lord, based upon His own blood.

"Atonement for the people" is the very phrase used in the preceding chapter, when there was the possibility for "atonement for all the congregation" if they had sinned in ignorance (Num. 15:27). As discussed on Numbers

15, we have here another example of a sin of presumption being treated as a sin of ignorance. And I suggest this is how we have to understand the Lord's plea for forgiveness of His crucifiers "for they know not what they do"; and Peter's appeal for repentance because he considers that "in ignorance" Israel had crucified their Messiah. This likewise can be our pattern; by seeing sins against us as sins of ignorance, we are not downgrading sin, but rather are seeking to forgive and cleanse those who sin against us as far as possible. For it is true that just as Israel on one hand knew what they were doing in crucifying the Lord, on another they had no perception of the magnitude of the crime. Those who sin against us may likewise have no real understanding of all the dimensions of the damage they do to us. And because of recognizing that, seeing their sin as one more of relative ignorance, our path towards forgiving them is eased.

Num 16:48 He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stayed-

Aaron ought to have died for his flouting of the first commandment in making the golden calf; but Moses' intercession alone saved him. And afterwards, deeply conscious of his experience, Aaron made successful intercession for the salvation of others (Num. 14:5; 16:22). The way he holds the censer with fire from the altar of incense, representing his prayers, and "stood between the dead and the living [as a mediator]" (Num. 16:48) is a fine picture of the height to which he rose. We too are to intercede for others on the basis of our experience of the Lord's intercession for us.

Num 16:49 Now those who died by the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, besides those who died about the matter of Korah-

We get the impression that these people died very quickly (:46,47). The plague must have been spreading fast and would indeed have consumed all Israel had not Aaron interceded. I have discussed elsewhere how the terms "thousand" and "hundred" may refer to groups of people, especially families, rather than being numerical values.

Num 16:50 Aaron returned to Moses to the door of the Tent of Meeting, and the plague was stayed-

Again we see Moses acting on his own initiative to persuade God to change His intended plan. Moses and Aaron could only have brought about this change of mind in God by intense, fervent prayer and desire- and it was for people who had just tacitly supported a revolution against them. No matter how much we are slandered and manipulated against by our brethren, they are still God's people and we should respect them and intercede for them as that.

We enquire why we read that "the plague was stayed" when Aaron and Moses were together again at the door of the tabernacle. For it was "stayed" by Aaron earlier. Perhaps the reference of "the plague" here is to the Angel of death who was in the tabernacle, who stood at the door of it in :43, and who now was finally restrained by Moses and Aaron. Such is the power God allows to the prayers and intercession of men.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 17

Num 17:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

God's efforts here were so that the leadership of Moses and Aaron would be accepted, so that others wouldn't be slain for pretending to the priesthood (:9). We marvel at His grace. The people had returned to Egypt in their hearts, and were looking to overthrow the leadership so they could appoint a captain who would lead them back there. It was only God's desire to finally save His resistant people that meant He went to this effort to preserve the spiritual leadership of Aaron. Truly God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather ever seeks to save.

Num 17:2 Speak to the children of Israel, and take of them rods, one for each father's house, of all their princes according to their fathers' families, twelve rods. Write every man's name on his rod-

The names written were presumably the names of the heads of the tribes (:3). "Rods" can also mean "tribes", so a rod was an appropriate symbol for a tribe (Gen. 49:10). This incident is really a commentary on the rebellion of chapter 16. Just as Korah and the rebels had come "before Yahweh" to offer their incense, so the rods were placed before Yahweh. Aaron's rod was chosen, and was returned to permanent status "before Yahweh", just as Aaron and the Levites were confirmed as the priestly tribe. The process with the budding rod took took two

days (Num. 17:33), just as the trial of Korah did (Num. 16:16).

We marvel that despite the dramatic judgements of Num. 16, people still doubted God's choice of Levi. Aaron had sinned badly at the time of the golden calf and in trying to grab power from Moses. In any human organization, Aaron would not have been used as a leader or High Priest. But Moses' intercession was so powerful and Divine forgiveness and restoration so total, that God now treats Aaron as High Priest and strongly justifies him as such. And yet the rod of Aaron pointed forward to the Lord Jesus, as if to teach that although indeed God had chosen Aaron, the ultimate High Priest was not him but the Lord Jesus Messiah. It is surely the choosing of Aaron in this chapter that is alluded to in Heb. 5:4: "One does

not take the honor upon himself, but he that is called by God, just as Aaron was".

Num 17:3 You shall write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi; for there shall be one rod for each head of their fathers' families-

The exercise was in order to declare the spiritual leader of the people, and so Aaron's name was placed on Levi's rod; for Aaron was, as it were, the candidate God was putting forward.

The rods likely had the names of the princes of the tribes written on them, just as Levi's rod had the name of Aaron on it. Aaron is here chosen as the head of his ancestor Levi's families. But Aaron was descended from Levi's second born Kohath, not his firstborn (Gershon).

So clearly God is again showing that He prefers working through the second born, not through the firstborn, whom secular culture and wisdom would have made leader. We think of the Jacob-Esau drama.

Num 17:4 You shall lay them up in the Tent of Meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you-

God met with Israel over the ark in the most holy place (Ex. 25:22; 30:6; Num. 17:4). But they were never allowed there. And so He also "met" (s.w.) with Israel at the door of the tabernacle, and spoke with them there (Ex. 29:42,43; 30:36). But the word for "meet" is used in Am. 3:3, where God laments that Israel had not "met" with Him and therefore they could not walk further together. The idea of the "meeting" was that God's word might be revealed, so that the people could walk with Him in His ways. It was an awesome invitation, to be able to meet with the God who only otherwise met with His people in the glory of the most holy place, over the ark. He as it were came out of that most holy place and met with them at the door of the tabernacle. But they weren't interested. Just as so many today.

Num 17:5 It shall happen, that the rod of the man whom I shall choose shall bud; and I will make to cease from Me the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against you-

See on Num. 26:9. Israel's rejection of Moses was a rejection of the God who was working through Moses to redeem them. Thus Korah and his followers "strove against Moses... when they strove against Yahweh" (Num. 26:9 cp. 16:11). Moses understood that when Is-

rael murmured against him, they murmured against Yahweh (Ex. 16:2,7; Num. 17:5; 21:5). They *thrust* Moses away from them (Acts 7:27,39) - yet the same word is used in Rom. 11:2 concerning how God still has not *cast away* Israel; He has not treated them as they treated Him through their rejection of Moses and Jesus, who manifested Him.

The Hebrew for "murmur" is the word for "stop", and is usually translated in that way. The idea is that they didn't want to go further on the journey; they wanted to return to Egypt. Despite the wonder of the Red Sea deliverance. Their hearts truly were in Egypt. This sense of not wanting to go onwards towards the Kingdom, to put a brake on God's saving process, is the same temptation which in essence afflicts all God's people who have started the journey with Him. Their murmuring against Moses was a murmuring against God; our attitude to our brethren is our attitude to God. See on :12,13.

Num 17:6 Moses spoke to the children of Israel; and all their princes gave him rods, for each prince one, according to their fathers' families, even twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was among their rods-

Or, 'was a part of their rods'. Perhaps to achieve fairness, one long rod was cut up into twelve smaller sections. This meant that presumably the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh were counted as one tribe, as there were to be 12 rods. However, the fact the tribes were each invited to give a rod suggests that the rods were the existing symbols of eldership possessed by the princes of the tribes. Aaron's rod has featured previously (Ex.

7:8-10,19-21; 8:5,6). And it could be argued that in the Exodus record, Moses' rod is functionally the same as that of Aaron.

Num 17:7 Moses laid up the rods before Yahweh in the tent of the testimony-

All the rods were cut off and dry, unable to produce fruit. The fact Aaron's rod budded and bore fruit was therefore evidence of God's grace through the Spirit, giving life and fruit to that which was otherwise unable to bear fruit. The idea was that Aaron and his descendants were not intrinsically better than the other tribes; for this was the impression which the other tribes had. He was simply the chosen channel for the Spirit in the particular work of priesthood. And it is the same with any used by God in public ministry. The rod had previously been a serpent but had been transformed from that. That's the message of how completely God can cleanse and then use and then justify a sinful man like Aaron. A pattern for us.

Num 17:8 It happened on the next day that Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and put forth buds, and produced blossoms, and bore ripe almonds-

The language of budding, blossoming and bearing fruit is used in Is. 27:6 about *all* Israel. God's gracious restoration of Aaron is a pattern for all. That's why the language of Aaron's budding rod is used of all the righteous: "They are planted in Yahweh's house [as the rod was left in the ark], they will blossom [s.w.] in our God's courts" (Ps. 92:13); "the righteous shall blossom as a

branch / rod" (Prov. 11:28). The initial hearers of Isaiah's words would have thought back to how Aaron's rod budded, blossomed and bore fruit as a sign that God had chosen that family and not all Israel. However, Is. 27:6 makes it clear that God's ideal intention was that all Israel would be a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6). This came to fulfilment in essence with the end of the Levitical priesthood and the establishment of all those in Christ as a new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5).

The "almond is the first tree of spring in the Near East" and "the last to shed its leaves". It was the watching tree ["almond" and "watching" are related words], and is used like that in Jeremiah 1:11. The almond tree therefore suggested speed of judgment. This is a commentary upon the speed of judgment in Num. 16 upon those who resisted the choice of the Levites. We think too of how Uzziah was struck down immediately for offering incense when not a Levite (2 Chron. 26:18). The large blossoms were the pattern for the bowls of the lamps on the candlestick (Ex. 25:33,34). It was perhaps seen as symbolic of the tree of life. The priesthood could be a tree of life to Israel, but only insofar as it pointed forward to the Lord Jesus, the ultimate priest.

The almond is the first tree in Palestine to bud, so it means literally the watching tree, as if it were alive and eager to come to life. The High Priests were to pronounce the blessing that Yahweh would bless and watch over His people (Num. 6:24). They were the channel for that blessing. The idea is that the fruit on the almond was a kind of firstfruit, with promise of further fruit

amongst other trees. It had always been God's intention that all Israel should be a nation of priests. The fruit was a sign of what the work of the priests should achieve for all Israel; the essence was not the rod but the fruit. God wanted Israel as a whole to be fruitful; He wanted them all to blossom, bud and fill the earth with fruit (Is. 27:6). The priesthood were to be but a foretaste and firstfruit of a far greater blossoming of all Israel. And yet this remained God's intention only. The whole idea was reapplied and reinterpreted for fulfilment in the Lord Jesus and all in Him.

The candlestick is described in similar terms, having bowls like almonds, flowers [s.w. "buds"] and blossoms (Ex. 25:31-34). The idea was that the priesthood should be like the candlestick, giving light in the darkness of the tabernacle where there was no natural light, and illuminating the way towards the most holy place and fellowship with Yahweh Himself. The people were bidden see Aaron's budded, blossoming rod as a kind of candlestick. For that was how the priesthood was to be through the teaching of God's word to Israel and bringing them towards fellowship with God. Hence the imagery of the candlestick is later applied to all believers (the church is the candlestick, Rev. 1:20), for it is God's intention now that all believers are priests (1 Pet. 2:5).

Num 17:9 Moses brought out all the rods from before Yahweh to all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod-

God's interpretation of the almond rod in Jer. 1:11,12 was that "I watch over My word to perform it".

The word translated 'hasten' or "watch over" is very similar to the word for 'almond'. Almonds are associated with God's eyes; the bowls of the lampstands were almonds (Ex. 25:33,34). Zech. 4:2 talks about these almond bowls on the candlestick, and Zech. 4:10 interprets them as the "eyes of Yahweh which run to and fro through the whole earth". 2 Chron. 16:9 talks about the Angels in the same way; "the eyes of Yahweh run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him". Similarly in Rev. 4:5 the lamps in the bowls of almond are equated with the "seven spirits (or Angels) of God". Rev. 5:6 equates the seven eyes with the seven spirits. Thus the almond rod which Jeremiah saw represented God's eyes or Angels who would watch over the word of God which Jeremiah was to speak to perform it. Jeremiah was a priest, and this was to have been true for all the priests. Their most important role was to teach God's word. They are called *elohim* just as are the priests. All Israel could have been priests, that was God's original intention; but they failed, and so He had chosen a specific family to do this work. But it was ever His intention to make all Israel blossom and bud (see on :8).

The triumph of Aaron's rods over the other rods is what had happened in Ex. 7:12, when Aaron's rod had swallowed up the other rods of Egypt's leaders. The situation is so similar that we are obviously led to understand that God saw an apostate Israel as no better than Egypt- to where anyway they wished to return, and had returned in their hearts. God's apostate people are often

likened to the world, and in the last day will be judged with the world whom they have failed to separate from, even perhaps being sent back into the world to share their judgments.

Num 17:10 Yahweh said to Moses, Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the children of rebellion; that you may make an end of their murmurings against me, that they not die-

GNB "It is to be kept as a warning to the rebel Israelites that they will die unless their complaining stops". LXX "a sign for the children of the disobedient; and let their murmuring cease from me". It seems that this is directed at the family members of those slain in Korah's rebellion and the plague which followed. Despite the dramatic deaths of around 15,000 people (Num. 16:32,49), it seems that their relatives were still murmuring and were likely to also be slain. Aaron had successfully interceded for the plague to be stopped and for all Israel not to be destroyed as God had intended. And yet despite such grace and all that empirical, visible evidence, they still wanted to overthrow Moses and have a captain to take them back to Egypt. For they had returned there in their hearts. It was only God's desire to ultimately save His people which meant that He persevered with His plan, and therefore went to the trouble of giving further evidence that Moses and Aaron were His chosen leaders. And He did this "that they not die". He didn't want to slay anyone. We note that the "they" whom God didn't want to die were at this point largely the condemned generation. They were condemned to die in the desert,

but God had pardoned them according to Moses' word. He therefore planned to save them ultimately, as He did Moses who likewise was denied entry to the land. But they were set against that plan, and God is trying still to make it work.

The chosen rod was specifically that of Aaron, it had his name written on it, just as the other rods had the names of the tribal leaders and not the tribes written on them. The selected rod showed "the man I choose" (:5, not "the tribe"). The rod that blossomed was the chosen High Priest. Aaron had been the salvation of sinful Israel through his powerful intercession in the previous chapter. His rod represented that indeed he and his priesthood were the channel God had chosen rather than the rest of Israel. But Aaron was himself sinful. His rod had once become a serpent earlier (Ex. 7:8-10). But now it blossomed eternally [the blossoms apparently didn't wither, speaking of "fruit that remains" eternally] with the buds of new resurrection life coming from the dead wood. This all looked forward to the Lord Jesus, "the man I choose" (:5, not "the tribe") who was the ultimate high priest who would save. His fruit, like ours, will eternally abide. Unlike all fruit of secular life. Despite having once been human [cp. the rod once being a serpent]. There were buds, blossom and fruit on the rod. We see in this the way the Lord had His own fruit but also promise of future fruit through us. Although there is also the idea of judgment: "Behold, the day, behold, it comes: your doom is gone forth; the rod has blossomed, pride has budded... The rod of My son condemns every

tree" (Ez. 7:10; 21:10). Aaron's rod had specifically been used to bring some of the plagues of judgment upon Egypt. So the rod was both a token of judgment to rebellious people, as :10 states, and also the guarantee of their salvation, "that they not perish". This is what we see in the Lord Jesus- the token of both judgment and salvation. It's why the cup of wine from the Lord's hand is a double symbol, of both judgment and salvation. For there shall only be one of two possible exits from the day of judgment. The Lord is called "the rod" from the stem of Jesse (Is. 11:1). The dry tree branch would blossom / flourish (s.w., Ez. 17:24), words applied by the Lord to His own death and resurrection. The menorah lampstand likewise had buds and blossoms (Ex. 25:31-36) looking ahead to the Lord Jesus as the light / lampstand of the world (Jn. 8:12). The wood of blessing clearly also speaks of the stake of wood upon which the Lord was crucified. A rod was a symbol of kingship, whereas here it is the symbol of priesthood. We can discern therefore that a future High Priest is being spoken of, who would be a king-priest- the Lord Jesus. Almond blossom is white but some argue that the almonds in the desert had red blossom, possibly hinting at the Lord's blood being the basis of the true High Priesthood.

Later in Num. 20:9 Moses is asked to take this rod from "before Yahweh" and speak to the rock, so that water would flow for them. The rod being "before Yahweh" refers back to how Aaron's rod that budded was placed before Yahweh (Num 17:22). So it was that rod which was used, and abused. The symbol of God's choice of

Aaron was abused by Moses as if it had power of itself. We note that "his [Moses'] rod" in Num. 20:11 is lacking in the LXX and Vulgate, rendering simply "the rod". They used this symbolic piece of wood as if it had power in itself, just as some consider the physical wood of the Lord's cross to have some magic power. And they were condemned for doing so. The same error occurred with the bronze serpent. Moses was asked to hold the rod because it was the symbol of warning to a rebellious people; in both passages the people are called "rebels".

Num 17:11 Moses did so. As Yahweh commanded him, so he did-

The obedience of Moses is stressed throughout the records, and is used to present him as a type of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 3:2,5). The point here may be that Moses as a non priest, a Levite and not the High Priest, had entered the most holy place before the "testimony" and the very presence of God, and then re-entered it a second time and had not been slain. Because God is not a literalist nor legalist. It would not have been appropriate if Aaron had done this, as he was as it were one of the candidates. Constantly we see God overriding the letter of His own law in order to keep the Spirit of it.

Num 17:12 The children of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, Behold, we perish! We are undone! We are all undone!-

Their sense that they are condemned and liable to destruction comes right after the declaration of Aaron's family as the rightful priests. We wonder why they now feared so much. Presumably they had continued some

plan to take over the tabernacle service and leadership; see on :5,13. Isaiah quotes these words when he feels he has come too close to God's presence (Is. 6:5). It would seem that despite the mass destruction of 15,000 such rebels in Num. 16, many still wanted to rebel, and had come too close to the tabernacle; hence :13 LXX laments that whoever touched the tabernacle would die. Perhaps there was yet another [unrecorded] outbreak of judgment after Aaron's rod was revealed, and now the rest of Israel are recoiling from it, fearing that they will "all perish" (:13). Their declaration of fear here and in :13 can be taken as a complete lack of faith in the work of Aaron and the intimated future Messiah to save them. They may allude to "It is to be kept as a warning to the rebel Israelites that they will die unless their complaining stops" (:10 GNB). Their comment is as if they were saying that they were going to continue complaining, and so they expected to die.

Num 17:13 Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of Yahweh, dies! Will we all perish?-

LXX "Who touches...": it would seem that they had touched the tabernacle or had attempted to "come near" to Yahweh as the priests alone were to "draw near" to Him. The subsequent warning in Num. 18:3 of death for doing this would imply that this was said by the Levites. Likewise Num. 18:22 "Henceforth the children of Israel shall not come near the Tent of Meeting, lest they bear sin, and die". This is clearly given in the context of the rebellions of Num. 16,17, where the Israelites had tried to do this. And indeed it seems they had come near the

tent of meeting and touched the holy things, and it was of grace that more of them had not been slain for doing so.

It seems they still refused to accept they could not do the work of the priests, and therefore Num. 18 warns them yet again. Despite the fearful events of Num. 16, with the destruction of 15,000 people who had tried to revolt against Moses and Aaron, it seems that some were still "murmuring" against them and seeking to take over the tabernacle. Hence their deep fear when Aaron's family were confirmed as priests; see on :12,13. Tragically it seems that no matter how much God speaks and demonstrates His will, people will still rebel against Him. Empirical evidence seems to have no value, compared to the power of a heart which has returned to Egypt and away from God. The answer to "Will we all perish?" is left hanging- because the real answer is 'You should have done, but Moses and Aaron whom you so despised interceded for you, and you did not perish by grace alone'.

The people feared they would perish after Aaron's rod was chosen because the whole congregation had backed Korah's attempt to share the priesthood amongst the whole people. But the comfort was that it was in fact through the mediation of a Levite, Aaron, that they were saved from this [repeated in Num. 18:1]. Although as with the Lord's sacrifice, they didn't appreciate this. They feared judgment rather than seeing salvation by grace. There was no need for this fear of perishing- if he believed.

Another take is that until this point, access to the tabernacle had been open. Hence Num. 18:22 "Henceforth the children of Israel shall not come near the Tent of Meeting, lest they bear sin, and die". Leviticus only stipulated that the Levites must offer sacrifices. But now there appeared to be some increasing barriers between the people and the sanctuary. Possibly they had not taken the commands about the Levites' role seriously [the change to Levites from firstborns as priests had only happened recently, after the golden calf]. Therefore the people had in practice enjoyed free access to the tabernacle; and now they realized that this was going to cease and the Levites' role was to be enforced. Just as God's initial plan in Ex. 19 had been that the entire nation be priests. Initially all the firstborn were priests. But after the golden calf, only the Levites were to be priests. And now they perceive a further distancing of the people from the sanctuary. This all mirrors Adam's exit from the intimacy of Eden.

"Will we all perish" is literally "shall we be consumed with dying?". Their allusion was to the recent statement that "In this wilderness they shall be consumed" (Num. 14:35). The reality of condemnation had not sunk in until now. Hence their lack of appreciation of how they had been saved from it ultimately by Moses' amazing intercession. Likewise it is only by appreciating that indeed we are condemned that we appreciate the Lord's work.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 18

Num 18:1 Yahweh said to Aaron, You and your sons and your fathers' house with you shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood-

We must bear one another's burden, as the priesthood bore the burden of Israel's iniquity (Num. 18:1,23). This is the meaning of priesthood. But here to bear iniquity seems to specifically mean to have responsibility for sin (as in Num. 30:15), if unqualified people were to enter the sanctuary or do the work of the priesthood. For that has been the theme of the last two chapters. It could be that Aaron and the priesthood had given in to the pressure of the rebellious Levites and allowed some of them to come near to the sanctuary, and they had to bear guilt for this sin (Num. 18:1). Hence the commandment at this point that now they should never again allow Levites to come into the sanctuary (Num. 18:3,5). This makes better sense of the "henceforth..." in Num. 18:22: "Henceforth the children of Israel shall not come near the Tent of Meeting, lest they bear sin, and die". This is clearly given in the context of the rebellions of Num. 16,17, where the Israelites had tried to do this. And indeed it seems they had come near the tent of meeting and touched the holy things, and it was of grace that more of them had not been slain for doing so. I suggest that the priests had allowed the Levites and Israelites to come close to the sanctuary; they were not to

ever do so again, and I suggest the unique cleansing sacrifice of the red heifer in Num. 19 was in order to cleanse them from this sin. According to the repeated teaching in Num. 18, the entire priesthood were worthy of death because of allowing the non priests into the sanctuary. But the red heifer ritual cleansed them from this sin unto death, and therefore becomes a powerful type of the Lord's stoning sacrifice for us as condemned sinners.

Num 18:2 Your brothers also, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, bring near with you, that they may be joined to you, and minister to you; but you and your sons with you shall be before the tent of the testimony-

The last two chapters have recorded an attempted putsch by the Levites against the priests. Here the priests are being told to "bring near" and be "joined with" their Levite brethren, living up to the name of their tribe Levi, 'joined together'. It would have been a hard call to obey, given the behaviour of the Levites just recently, resulting in at least 15000 people being slain in the recent events recorded in Num. 16,17

Num 18:3 They shall keep your commands, and the duty of all the Tent; only they shall not come near to the vessels of the sanctuary and to the altar, that they not die, neither they, nor you-

The Levites would die for touching the vessels, and the priests for letting the Levites touch them. Num. 17:13 has just described the rebellious Levites still refusing to accept they couldn't be as the priests. They lamented: "Everyone who comes near, who comes near

to the tabernacle of Yahweh, dies! Will we all perish?". LXX has "Who touches...". It would seem that they had touched the tabernacle or had attempted to "come near" to Yahweh as the priests alone were to "draw near" to Him. The subsequent warning in Num. 18:3 of death for doing this would imply that this was said by the Levites. It seems they still refused to accept they could not do the work of the priests, and therefore Num. 18 warns them yet again.

Num 18:4 They shall be joined to you, and keep the responsibility of the Tent of Meeting, for all the service of the Tent, and a stranger shall not come near to you-

Despite the very clear distinction of duties between priests and Levites, they were to be "joined", a play on the meaning of "Levi". And this is the same basic teaching of Paul about the nature of the body of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament. The clear distinction of duties and roles within the body was not at all to take away from the "joining" of unity between all the members.

Num 18:5 You shall perform the duty of the sanctuary, and the duty of the altar, that there be no more wrath on the children of Israel-

As explained on :1, if the priests allowed others to come into the sanctuary, then there was going to be wrath upon all Israel. The outcomes of others are to some extent delegated into the hands of third parties. This is the whole idea of God working through personal evangelism, and it is so that we all live life with a greater sense of responsibility. Eph. 4:16 may even allude here: "By him all the parts of the body fit and are knit [AV

"joined"] together, with every joint supplying something according to its unique purpose, thus making the body grow as it builds up itself in love". For we are the new priesthood.

Num 18:6 I, behold, I have taken your brothers the Levites from among the children of Israel. To you they are given as a gift, given to Yahweh, to do the service of the Tent of Meeting-

"The men which You gave me out of the (Jewish) world... they have kept Your word" (Jn. 17:6) compares with the Levites being "given" to Aaron / the priesthood out of Israel (Num. 3:9; 8:19; 18:6); at the time of the golden calf they "observed thy word, and kept thy covenant" (Dt. 33:9), as did the disciples. The relationship between Moses and the Levites was therefore that between Christ and the disciples- a sense of thankfulness that at least a minority were faithful. The Levites were given to God, through having been given to the priests. What we give to God's people we give to God (see too on Num. 17:5). Constantly we are being taught to see God as manifest in His people, and to treat them appropriately.

Num 18:7 You and your sons with you shall keep your priesthood for everything of the altar, and for that within the veil; and you shall serve. I give you the priesthood as a gift, and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death-

Serving God is presented as an honour, a gift from God (see on Num. 16:9). Although the Levites had no physical land inheritance amongst the people of Israel, this was compensated for by being given the gift of serv-

ing God. Of course, this would only have been perceived as a gift by the more spiritually minded. We are to see service to God even in repetitive things as a gift we have been given to do.

Num 18:8 Yahweh spoke to Aaron, I, behold, I have given you the responsibility for My wave offerings, even all the holy things of the children of Israel. To you have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to your sons, as a portion forever-

For all offerings, "the front leg, the two jaw-bones, and the rough stomach of ruminants, in which the digestion is completed" was to be given to the priest (Dt. 18:3). These were thought to be the best parts of an animal; and additionally a leg (Lev. 7:32) and the breast (Lev. 7:31) of the offering were also to be given to the priest if it was a peace offering (Num. 18:11).

Num 18:9 This shall be yours of the most holy things from the fire: every offering of theirs, even every grain offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs, which they shall render to Me, shall be most holy for you and for your sons-

"The fire" refers to the fire of the altar which was ideally intended to be that kindled at the time of Lev. 9:24 when the tabernacle was consecrated. It was to be kept perpetually burning by the sacrifices being continually placed upon it, a lamb every morning and every evening. The fire which never went out or was 'quenched' (Lev. 6:13). is a double symbol. The phrase is used multiple times with reference to the wrath of God in condemning sinners; it is the basis of the idea of eternal fire which will

not be quenched. Rather like the cup of wine from the Lord being a symbol of either condemnation or blessing. So we have a choice- be consumed by the eternal fire now as living sacrifices, or be consumed by it anyway at the last day. Once the fire had consumed the fat, which burnt before the meat, then the meat was to be the priest's.

Num 18:10 You shall eat of it like the most holy things. Every male shall eat of it. It shall be holy to you-

Lev. 7:6 says it should be eaten "in the holy place". But here, AV and LXX have "In the most holy place". And the Hebrew supports this. When eating these most holy things, the holy place became as it were the most holy. It was as if they were in the very presence of Yahweh. Likewise the breaking of bread meeting, which is the new covenant's equivalent of eating the holy things, gives us some special sense of God's presence. I suggest that may be behind the otherwise enigmatic reference to the presence of the Angels in 1 Cor. 11:10- a passage in the context of the breaking of bread meeting.

Num 18:11 This is yours, too: the wave offering of their gift, even all the wave offerings of the children of Israel. I have given them to you, and to your sons and to your daughters with you, as a portion forever. Everyone who is clean in your house shall eat of it-

The theme of giving gifts continues; what was given as a gift to God, He gave as a gift to the priests. See on :6. The command that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel is referring back to how the priests had no material inheritance but lived off the sacrifices (Num.

18:11). And for us, the honour and wonder of preaching Christ should mean that we keep a loose hold on the material things of this life. And as we are *all* priests, we are all preachers.

What is specifically in view here are the sacrifices of the people which were of a lower level of sanctity than those earlier described, which could only be eaten by the males in the holy place (:10).

Num 18:12 All the best of the oil and all the best of the vintage and of the grain, the first fruits of them which they give to Yahweh, to you have I given them-

It was not impossible for God to accept non-blood sacrifices (Num. 15:17-21; 18:12,13; Dt. 26:1-4). Cain was rejected not because of this, but because he refused to accept the principle of the blood being God's, and because he hated his brother. Cain, the epitome of 'the devil' (Jn. 8:44), was characterized by the attitude that he was not his brother's keeper (Gen. 4:9). But the Lord Jesus perhaps offered a commentary on the incident when he said that our offering can only be accepted if we are first reconciled to our brother (Mt. 5:24). Cain's insistent lack of responsibility for his brother was the real sin, and therefore his sacrifice wasn't accepted by God. He wanted to serve God his own way, disregard his brother, justify his disagreement with him... to be a private person. But this was the basis of his rejection.

Num 18:13 The first-ripe fruits of all that is in their land which they bring to Yahweh shall be yours. Everyone who is clean in your house shall eat of it-

There is no mention in Num. 18:12,13 of the first fleece being given to the priests. But it is mentioned in Dt. 18:4, and is an example of where Deuteronomy, 'the second law', is in places more demanding and in others more understanding.

Num 18:14 Everything devoted in Israel shall be yours-

This refers to general freewill devotion of things to God (e.g. Lev. 27:21).

Num 18:15 Everything that opens the womb, of all flesh which they offer to Yahweh, both of man and animal shall be yours; nevertheless you shall surely redeem the first-born of man, and you shall redeem the firstborn of unclean animals-

Num. 3:41 seems to have been given at a later point. There, the Levite's cattle were just accepted for those of the Israelites. Ex. 13:13 and Num. 18:17 taught that the firstborn of clean animals were to be sacrificed; although the firstborn of unclean donkeys were to be redeemed; a moderation of the command here that all unclean first-born animals were to be redeemed. The teaching was that God's redeemed were as unclean donkeys. But the sacrificing of the firstborn of all clean animals may well have been now considered by God as too difficult for the Israelites. Their devotion to Him was sadly not to that standard. And so He upheld His basic principle but reduced the demand, by accepting the Levite's cattle at this point in place of the firstborn of the clean animals of the Israelites. We see here God's flexible attitude, because He so wanted to save His people and have relationship with

them even on a lower level than ideal. And in Deuteronomy, the second law, we will see many examples of amelioration of the laws.

Num 18:16 You shall redeem those who are to be redeemed of them from a month old, according to your estimation, for five shekels of money, after the shekel of the sanctuary (the same is twenty gerahs)-

This required the Levites to have money of their own. But it seems the tithes weren't paid, and so they didn't. And so as noted on :15, these laws were later amended in accordance with the reality of Israel's effective spiritual situation.

Num 18:17 But you shall not redeem the firstborn of a cow, or the firstborn of a sheep, or the firstborn of a goat. They are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar-

To sprinkle blood upon something didn't necessarily mean the object was forgiven. For an inanimate altar didn't need forgiving. The blood of the covenant was sprinkled (s.w.) upon the people as a sign of their involvement with the covenant process of salvation, rather than as a statement of their forgiveness (Ex. 24:8). Likewise with the sprinkling of the blood of the Passover lamb (2 Chron. 35:11). This was an act of identification rather than forgiveness of sin. The function of the altar was valid before God, or efficacious, because of its association with the blood of Christ; for the blood of the animals slain upon it couldn't bring salvation of itself, but only through God's way of looking at that blood is looking ahead to that of His Son (Heb. 10:4). And so the al-

tar was associated with the blood which represented His blood.

And shall burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a pleasant aroma to Yahweh-

"A pleasant aroma" is a very common phrase. This concept is important to God. It first occurs in Gen. 8:21 where it means that God accepted Noah's sacrifice and vowed that the pole of saving mercy in His character was going to triumph over that of necessary judgment. Under the new covenant, it is persons and not sacrifices or incense which are accepted as a "pleasant aroma" (Ez. 20:41). The word for "pleasant" means strong delight; this is how God's heart can be touched by genuine sacrifice. Those pleasing offerings represented us, the living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). And so it is applied to us in 2 Cor. 2:15- if we are in Christ, we are counted as a pleasant aroma to God. The offering of ourselves to Him is nothing of itself, but because we are in Christ and counted as Him, we are a delight to God. Hence the colossal importance of being "in Christ". "Aroma" or "smell" is a form of the Hebrew word *ruach*, the word for spirit or breath. God discerns the spirit of sacrifices, that was what pleased Him rather than the burning flesh of animals. Our attitude of mind in sacrifice can touch Him. Sacrifice is therefore accepted, Paul says, according to what a person has to give, but the essence is the attitude of mind behind it. We think of the two coins sacrificed by the widow.

*Num 18:18 Their flesh shall be yours, as the wave of-
fering breast and as the right thigh, it shall be yours-*

The portion to be waved was placed on the priests hands (Ex. 29:25), and then 'waved' or 'swung' towards the altar and then back- not from right to left. The idea was that the offerings were first given to God, recognizing they should be consumed on the altar to God; but then given back to the priest by God. So they ate them having first recognized that their food was really God's, all was of Him, and He had given it back to them to eat. This should be our spirit in partaking of any food, as we are the new priesthood. Our prayers of thanks for daily food should include this feature. All things are God's and anything we 'offer' to Him is only giving Him what He has given to us (1 Chron. 29:14,16).

Num 18:19 All the wave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel give to Yahweh, have I given you and your sons and your daughters with you as a portion forever. It is a covenant of salt forever before Yahweh to you and to your seed with you-

The altar was understood as the table of Yahweh, where He ate together with the offerer. To eat bread and salt was a sign of fellowship and acceptance in covenant, and the presence of salt in the sacrifices was therefore insisted upon (Lev. 2:13). A "covenant of salt" was an eternal covenant (Num. 18:19). The reminder therefore was that our relationship with God is eternal, not a passing phase in our lives, nor just a mere religious crutch to help us get through this life. For truly, God is man's friend and accepts us at His table. The salt represents gracious speech (Col. 4:6) and peace with one another (Mk. 9:50); without these things, no matter how great

our sacrifice, it cannot be accepted by God. Hence Jesus taught that we should not offer our sacrifices to God until we have done what we can to get at peace with our brother (Mt. 5:24). Salt was a symbol of covenant relationship with God; yet in the NT this salt stands for love, peace and kind speaking the one to the other (Mk. 9:50; Col. 4:6). This is the result of true membership in covenant relationship; a true and abiding love for all others in covenant.

Num 18:20 Yahweh said to Aaron, You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel-

The Levites had no material inheritance because "the sacrifices of Yahweh the God of Israel... are his inheritance... Yahweh God of Israel was their inheritance" (Josh. 13:14,33; Num. 18:20; Dt. 10:9; 18:2). Notice how "Yahweh" is put for what is sacrificed to Him. His very existence is an imperative to sacrifice to Him, despising all material advantage in doing so. Job comments that to make gold our hope and wealth our confidence is to deny "the God that is above" (Job 31:24,28). To trust in material wealth is effectively to proclaim ourselves atheists. We are described as the new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5), so all that was true for the Levites becomes true for us. We are not to seek material inheritance. God will provide for us in ways other than our possessing land

and leaving an inheritance to our children. The wonder of serving Him is to more than compensate for this.

The Levites had no land nor great material wealth to leave to their children; but they had this unique relationship with God to pass on. Jeremiah in depression, having lost all he had, concludes that God is his portion (Lam. 3:24), clearly alluding to this verse. Even if materially we lose all we have- our relationship with God is our true portion and inheritance, which we will eternally receive in the Kingdom. The writers of the Psalms, some of whom like David weren't Levites, could use the same Hebrew word to describe how God was their "portion" and inheritance (Ps. 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5). This should be our self-perception, whether or not we leave any material inheritance to anyone or not. Not for us the obsession with building up ownership of property, under the excuse we want to leave something to our children. Our service of God and His people is our inheritance, which we shall eternally receive back at the resurrection and the time of the Kingdom of God on earth. The priests and Levites were provided with enough to eat, but no great wealth. So it should be for all full time servants in God's house. By contrast, the priests of the surrounding tribes were generally more wealthy than the other people, and owned land, which was seen as especially holy (see Gen. 47:22).

Num 18:21 To the children of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, even the service of the Tent of Meeting-

But God's giving to the Levites depended upon Israel's giving to them. Israel didn't tithe, and so the Levites had no income and had to work in secular occupations. We think of the wandering Levites of the book of Judges, going around Israel looking for work. And so the Lord's promise that those who sacrifice to Him shall receive brothers, sisters and blessing in this life is dependent upon them finding this within the ecclesia. And because of human dysfunction, they may not always find it (Mk. 10:30).

Num 18:22 Henceforth the children of Israel shall not come near the Tent of Meeting, lest they bear sin, and die-

This is clearly given in the context of the rebellions of Num. 16,17, where the Israelites had tried to do this. And indeed it seems they had come near the tent of meeting and touched the holy things, and it was of grace that more of them had not been slain for doing so. I suggested on :1 that the priests had allowed the Levites and Israelites to come close to the sanctuary; they were not to ever do so again, and I suggest the unique cleansing sacrifice of the red heifer in Num. 19 was in order to cleanse them from this sin.

Num 18:23 But the Levites shall do the service of the Tent of Meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations. Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance-

The early church began by having all things common, in imitation of how the priests had "like portions to eat" (Dt. 18:8). Notice the stress on the equality of the priests and the studied irrelevance of their personal

wealth (1 Chron. 24:31; 25:8; 26:12). The Law was geared around the assumption that the priests would be so caught up in Yahweh's work that they would never be rich (consider Dt. 14:29), and the wonder of doing His work would compensate for their lack of physical possessions (Num. 18:23). Yet the early church couldn't sustain the intensity of their initial realization of these things.

Num 18:24 For the tithe of the children of Israel, which they offer as a wave offering to Yahweh, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, 'Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance'

The contrast is between having a land inheritance, which was intended to produce food, and receiving the tithes of the harvest from the rest of Israel. Including Levi, there were 13 tribes in Israel. Ten percent of all the harvests from the other 12 tribes would have amounted to more than ten percent of the total agricultural production. Although the Levites had to in turn give a tithe of that to the priests. Additionally, they were to have portions from the sacrifices and also the freewill offerings. We could see this as God's assumption that actually not strictly ten percent would be paid as tithe; or, as His desire to give the Levites more than average. Hence the constant emphasis that they were more than compensated for not having a land inheritance, remembering anyway that the land was ultimately Yahweh's and the other tribes only had it, as it were, on permanent leasehold. And there were to be super abundant harvests, if Israel were faithful to the covenant. The generosity to

the Levites becomes even more marked when we recall that at this time they were the smallest of the tribes; there was to be a superabundance of provision per head of population within the tribe. See on :26.

Num 18:25 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The Levites were to receive the tithe, but were not to assume that they were therefore not required to personally donate (:25). The need to give was required even of the recipients. And that is an abiding principle for all who receive support from others, in whatever form. For personal generosity out of what we have is to be a characteristic of all God's people.

Num 18:26 Moreover you shall speak to the Levites, and tell them, 'When you take of the children of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall offer up a wave offering of it for Yahweh, a tithe of the tithe-

The Levites numbered 22,000 males over one month old (Num. 3:34); they were to receive the tithe of 600,000 grown men from the other tribes (Num. 1:46). This may appear to mean that the Levites were to be extremely well provided for. However it's more likely that this is an example of where God foresaw the likely failure of His people to obey His Law fully, and built into that very Law some provision for this. In this we see His sensitivity to our human failure. See on :25.

Num 18:27 Your wave offering shall be reckoned to you, as though it were the grain of the threshing floor, and as the fullness of the winepress-

The Septuagint uses the word translated "imputed" in the NT with regard to sacrifices [symbolic of Christ's death on the cross] being "reckoned" to a person (Lev. 7:18; Num. 18:27,30); and of Shimei asking David not to "reckon" his guilt to him, to judge him not according to the obvious facts of the case (2 Sam. 19:20). The Old Testament is at pains to stress that Yahweh will *not* justify the guilty (Ex. 23:7; Is. 5:23; Prov. 17:15). This is where the unique significance of Jesus comes in. Because of *Him*, His death and our faith in it, our being in Him, God can justify the wicked in that they have died with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6:3-5), they are no longer, they are only "in Christ", for them "to live is Christ". They are counted as in Him, and in this way sinners end up justified.

Num 18:28 Thus you also shall offer a wave offering to Yahweh of all your tithes, which you receive of the children of Israel; and of it you shall give Yahweh's wave offering to Aaron the priest-

The idea seems to be that the Levites tithed to the priests, who tithed to the High Priest.

Num 18:29 Out of all your gifts you shall offer every wave offering of Yahweh, of all its best, even the holy part of it out of it'-

"The best" is not defined. So much of the Mosaic legislation was an appeal to the conscience. What seems best and most desirable will differ between individuals, and over time. But we are to give what in our context is "the best" to Him. But "best" is s.w. "fat", and this may be

a reference to the need never to take the fat for themselves but always to offer it to God.

Num 18:30 Therefore you shall tell them, 'When you heave its best from it, then it shall be reckoned to the Levites as the increase of the threshing floor, and as the increase of the winepress-

The tithes were to be paid to the Levites, not the priests. The priests survived by eating the sacrifices made by Israel. It's therefore incorrect for modern church leaders to demand a tithe be paid to them because they are equivalent of the priests. In any case, we are to be a community of priests (1 Pet. 2:5). The tithes were produce from the land, not money; although seeing money existed in some form, God could have commanded money to be given them. But the tithe was of agricultural produce, simply so that the Levites would have something to eat as they concentrated on God's service- not in order to make them wealthy.

Num 18:31 You shall eat it in every place, you and your households; for it is your reward in return for your service in the Tent of Meeting-

"Reward for service" is the phrase used in Ez. 29:18 for how God considered that even Gentile Nebuchadnezzar was worthy of a reward / wage for his service for God against the king of Tyre. This sense of some immediate recompense for service rendered to God is a major theme. And yet in the Christian dispensation, the reward for service is not now but at the Lord's coming, indeed this is one reason why there will be a day of judgment (Rev. 22:12).

Num 18:32 You shall bear no sin by reason of it, when you have heaved from it the best of it, and you shall not profane the holy things of the children of Israel, that you not die'-

They were not to fear eating the tithe, and yet they were to ensure that the wrong people didn't eat holy things. Although the Hebrew word for "holy things" can equally mean the holy place. Or the reference may specifically be to the tithe of the tithe, which would be profaned if they kept it for themselves and didn't give it to the priests. The principle may be that we can only enjoy anything if we have first subjected it and our lives to the spirit of giving.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 19

Num 19:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying-

This sacrifice was to provide purification from death through its ashes, which were to be mixed with water (:9), perhaps the running water from the rock, which water followed them through the wilderness- for what other source of “running [Heb. ‘springing’] water” (:17) could they have had in the wilderness? It speaks very clearly of Christ’s death; for He was without blemish and never came under the yoke of sin; He too was killed outside the camp of Israel (:3 cp. Heb. 13:12). Heb. 9:13 specifically alludes to how the ashes of this heifer were typical of Christ’s sacrifice.

The material in Num. 19 is in a block of material which follows on from Num. 15. There we read of the presumptuous sin, and there have been examples of this in Israel’s presumptuous entry into the land in Num. 14 and the various rebellions of Israel against God’s grace. Pardon was obtained for these at times by Moses’ word alone [“I have pardoned according to your word”], or by the incense offered by Aaron. All these were ‘last minute’ interventions by Moses and Aaron when God had already determined to destroy Israel. I have noted earlier that these atonements were not made on the basis of blood, without which there can be no remission of sin, according to God’s own principle. They were the result of grace. I suggest that now God is asking Eleazar to make a time specific opportunity for forgiveness and

cleansing to be obtained through this red heifer. Lest Israel assume that forgiveness for condemnation was too automatic and painlessly granted. All such Old Testament forgiveness was in any case only made possible for the sake of the Lord's future sacrifice. And so the red heifer ritual in particular looks ahead to that. We note that the legislation about the red heifer was the last command given to Israel before they died in the desert. It was the chance for that generation to be cleansed of their sin and join Moses in hope of ultimate salvation, even if they couldn't enter the land in this life.

The red heifer was a "sin offering" (:9). But for what kind of sin? So far in Mosaic law, there had already been sacrifices prescribed for sins of human frailty, and for sins of ignorance. The only other kind of sin defined was that of presumption, from which some in Israel had received forgiveness by grace. I suggest the red heifer ritual was to explain that in these cases, the forgiveness was still related to the shedding of blood- but of a future sacrifice, of Messiah. However it has been apparent that even God's forgiveness of presumptuous sin, by grace, didn't achieve transformation of those thus benefitted. The red heifer sacrifice therefore had a function of purification, looking ahead to how the Lord's sacrifice according to Hebrews not only forgave, but empowered purification of the spirit.

Num 19:2 This is the statute of the law which Yahweh has commanded: Speak to the children of Israel, that they bring you a red heifer without spot, in which is no blemish-

No animal actually is without blemish. God recognizes that we will not attain perfection in this life, but we are to do our best towards it; and His love imputes righteousness to us, counting us as unblemished because of our status in Christ. For only Christ was the sacrifice totally without moral blemish (1 Pet. 1:19). So this looked ahead to the unblemished character of the Lord Jesus. The offering of sacrifices "without blemish" uses a word which is used about Abraham and Noah being "without blemish" (AV "perfect") before God (Gen. 6:9; 17:1). Although the word is used about the sacrifices, it is really more appropriate to persons- "you shall be perfect with Yahweh your God" (Dt. 18:13), "serve Him in sincerity (s.w. "without blemish")" (Josh. 24:14). The idea, therefore, was that the offerer was invited to see the animal as representative of himself. Our lives too are to be as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1). And yet in practical terms, no animal is without blemish. They were to give the best they could, and God would count it as without blemish; as He does with us. David frequently uses the term in the Psalms about himself and the "upright", even though he was far from unblemished in moral terms.

The red heifer appears to have been the source of the water of cleansing which was required by many situations envisaged under the Mosaic law. But it is unclear whether multiple red heifers were to be slain to provide enough ashes to create such water, or whether this was a one off sacrifice and cleansing ritual to be done only in the wilderness. It is a deconstruction of the Egyptian sacrifice of a spotless red bull to Typhon, the god of evil,

broadly equivalent to the [mis]conception of 'satan' held by many. It was deconstructed by this ritual, in that the red bull was to be offered to Yahweh, not a satan being; and would bring forgiveness and cleansing rather than safety from a 'satan' being. For human uncleanness rather than the supposed machinations of a 'satan' figure is where our focus should be.

And which was never yoked-

The red heifer as the source of cleansing through water [cp. baptism] looked ahead to the Lord Jesus. The naturalness which Jesus had with people reflects His respect for the freedom which God has given His people to chose for themselves. He was Himself supremely free, due to His pure conscience before the Father. He was typified by the red heifer "upon which never came yoke" (Num. 19:2). We were set free from sin by Christ through "freedom" (Gal. 5:1 RV). But we were set free by Him as a person. His freedom, His freedom from sin and the freedom that must have characterized His person, is what liberates us too. And it is the experience of that freedom, the freedom from sin that comes through forgiveness (Jn. 8:32), which can be 'used' to love others (Gal. 5:13).

Num 19:3 You shall give her to Eleazar the priest, and he shall bring her forth outside of the camp, and one shall kill her before his face-

The Red Heifer was to be slain before the face of the priest, "as he watches" (Num. 19:3-5 NIV), pointing forward to the Lord's slaughter in the personal presence of the Father. The Lord Jesus suffered and died, shedding

the blood of atonement, "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13). We are bidden go forth to the Lord Jesus "outside the camp", just as those who "sought Yahweh" did when there was no tabernacle (Ex. 33:7). The people watching Moses as he walked out to it, without the camp, therefore looks ahead to a faithless Israel lining the via Dolorossa and watching the Lord walk out to His place of crucifixion. And we are to get behind Him and follow Him there, stepping out from the mass of Israel. As the Lord Jesus suffered "outside the camp", so various parts of the Mosaic sacrifices were to be burnt there (Lev. 4:12,21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27); and yet it was the blood of those sacrifices which achieved atonement (Heb. 13:11; Num. 19:3,9). "Outside the camp" was the place of excluded, condemned sinners (Lev. 13:46; 24:14; Num. 5:3,4; 15:35,36; 31:13,19), and it was here that the Lord Jesus died, in identification with us.

NEB however takes "before its face" to mean "to the east of it", referring to the camp. The location of Golgotha is anyone's guess, but a case can be made that it was east of the temple in a public place on the east-west road along which the Romans often crucified people as a public warning. We note that Aaron camped to the east of the tabernacle (Num. 3:38). Eleazar then sprinkling the blood toward the front of the tent of meeting (:4) would then be more natural, if the heifer was slain to the east of it, facing toward it.

The specific mention of Eleazar leads us to think that this entire ritual was time limited, just for that generation. Possibly it was a ritual specifically to cleanse Israel

from the sin of the golden calf [since Aaron was guilty of that sin, his son Eleazar had to perform the ritual], or more likely from the many dead bodies resulting from the 14,700 slain at the time of the rebellion in Num. 16. Possibly Aaron wasn't to do it because of the principle that he was not to depart from the sanctuary (Lev. 21:12), and this sacrifice was to be made outside the entire camp. We note that the animal was not to be sacrificed upon an altar- it was done outside the camp. It was a sacrifice quite unlike the previously explained sacrifices. The fat was not to be eaten, the offering priest was defiled by the ritual, the ashes have the power to cleanse going forward rather than the sacrifice needing to be repeated etc.

Num 19:4 Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle her blood toward the front of the Tent of Meeting seven times-

The implication is that this process of cleansing from the results of death was to be permanent; but the whole style of the command for Eleazar to kill the red heifer in :2,3 sounds as if only one red heifer was killed for all time. See on :11. I suggested on Lev. 1:1 that all of Leviticus may be referring just to the ceremony of the sanctification of the priests when the tabernacle was first built, and this section in Num. 19 may be the same. There is no command as to continuing to kill a red heifer, nor by whom or how often it should be done. The record may be framed to present the result of the red heifer's sacrifice as if it were eternal, clearly typifying Christ's sacrifice. Another option is that this entire ritual is to be

understood in the context of the death of so many Israelites in the rebellion described in chapter 16. Chapters 17 and 18 provide the answer to the peoples' concerns arising out of that incident, and chapter 19 may also be in that context- describing how to avoid defilement by all the dead bodies which died in the plague. The specific mention of Eleazar, rather than a more generic reference to the High Priest or his son, could suggest that this red heifer ritual was a one off cleansing for the time. See on :11.

Num 19:5 One shall burn the heifer in his sight: her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn-

No part of the animal was to be kept and eaten by the priests or Levites. I will suggest on :11 that the entire ritual was a one off situation, providing cleansing for those who were now going to bury the 15000 people slain as a result of the rebellion against Moses and Aaron in Num. 16; and this would have included many Levites, who had aspired wrongly to the priesthood. So it would have been inappropriate if they had eaten of the sacrifice themselves.

The ritual was intended to recall that of the Day of Atonement, when the sacrifices "shall be carried forth outside the camp; and they shall burn their skins, their flesh, and their dung with fire. He who burns them shall wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp" (Lev. 16:27,28). Again the person associated with the offering is made unclean. The idea is that the red heifer ritual was to pro-

duce an atonement, it was a "sin offering" (:9), but I have suggested that it was a one-time ritual and we never hear of it being practiced in any ongoing sense in Biblical history. The atonement I suggest was for the presumptuous sins that had been forgiven without the shedding of blood. For every other kind of sin already had a sacrifice stipulated for it in Leviticus. It is the ritual of atonement for the unforgiveable and the condemned, and points ahead to the Lord's work on the cross.

Num 19:6 and the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer-

All associated with the crucifixion of Christ. The Lord was intensely intellectually conscious throughout His sufferings. His mind was evidently full of the word, He would have seen the symbolism of everything far more than we can, from the thorns in His mock crown, to the hyssop being associated with Him at the very end (the hyssop was the fulfilment of types in Ex. 12:8,22; Lev. 14:4,6,49-52; Num. 19:6,18).

Cedar, hyssop and scarlet are all associated with the cleansing of leprosy, which I suggest was not Hansen's disease but a specific "stroke" of judgment. Miriam had been saved from this by Moses' intercession, she was as a walking corpse "like one who is dead" (Num. 12:12) as were the condemned Israelites in the desert whose corpses fell when they died; and the people had likewise been smitten but saved from it. Now they were being taught that these pardons still had to have their basis in the shedding of blood, even if the sacrifice was now of-

fered some time later. And that is exactly how the Lord's later supreme sacrifice functioned, and for whose sake forgiveness was given in Mosaic times.

We note the dominance of the colour red. The red heifer, scarlet, the red cedar wood- and possibly hyssop too was a dark red colour. All this was to point up the huge significance of the blood in the cleansing- looking ahead to the blood of the Lord Jesus. A red heifer would have been rare and hard to find, again pointing forward to the Lord.

Num 19:7 Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the evening-

The defilement of the priest by the sacrifice is unique amongst all the offerings commanded. On one hand, it looks ahead to how the Lord Jesus died on the cross, and "cursed is every one who hangs on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). He was not made personally sinful by the process of His death, but He was thereby definitely associated with all that is unclean. We think of 2 Cor. 5:21 AV: "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him". But in the immediate context, I suggest that these rituals were for the cleansing of the priesthood as well as the living supporters and relatives of those slain in the rebellion of the Levites in Num. 16. It could be that Aaron and the priesthood had given in to the pressure of the rebellious Levites and allowed some of them to come near to the sanctuary, and they had to bear guilt for this sin (Num.

18:1). Hence the commandment at this point that now they should never again allow Levites to come into the sanctuary (Num. 18:3,5). This makes better sense of the "henceforth..." in Num. 18:22: "Henceforth the children of Israel shall not come near the Tent of Meeting, lest they bear sin, and die". This is clearly given in the context of the rebellions of Num. 16,17, where the Israelites had tried to do this. And indeed it seems they had come near the tent of meeting and touched the holy things, and it was of grace that more of them had not been slain for doing so. I suggest that the priests had allowed the Levites and Israelites to come close to the sanctuary; they were not to ever do so again, and I suggest the unique cleansing sacrifice of the red heifer in Num. 19 was in order to cleanse them from this sin. According to the passages in Num. 18, the entire priesthood were worthy of death because of allowing the non priests into the sanctuary. But the red heifer ritual cleansed them from this sin unto death, and therefore becomes a powerful type of the Lord's stoning sacrifice for us as condemned sinners.

One great mystery of the red heifer ritual is that it made unclean those who performed it. Rabbinic interpretation likes to stress the paradoxes within the red heifer ritual and leave them as intentional paradoxes. That approach may have some mileage, in that atonement is ultimately a mystery. However the simpler reading may be that the red heifer incident specifically points forward to the Lord Jesus, and those who were involved in His death [especially the priesthood] were themselves made unclean by it. But the simple picture is that the

red heifer ritual purified the defiled, and defiled the pure. And this is really what happens when human beings encounter the Lord's sacrifice. Some will insist they don't need it because they are already pure, considering they are healthy and don't need a doctor, as the Lord put it. And they, the pure in their own eyes, are thereby defiled. And yet it cleanses those who accept they are defiled.

Num 19:8 He who burns her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the evening-

The ashes of the red heifer purified the impure / unclean, but defiled the clean. This is an intentional paradox, and is meant to highlight how the Lord's work can only benefit those who recognize their uncleanness. He is a doctor, and cannot heal those who consider they need no doctor. As explained on :7, the immediate context seems to be that the priesthood had been defiled by allowing the Levites to pressurize them to allow them to come close to the sanctuary; and this explains why there is so much uncleanness upon the Levites and priests associated with this sacrifice.

Num 19:9 A man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up outside of the camp in a clean place; and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water for impurity. It is a sin offering-

We may well enquire what particular sin had been committed. Cleansing from impurity which arose from touching dead bodies didn't require a sin offering. I have suggested on :7 that the sin in view could be the way

the priesthood had bowed to pressure from the Levites and allowed them to enter the sanctuary. But more likely the sin is the presumptuous sins of the recent rebellions which had been forgiven at the time by grace and without the shedding of blood.

Num 19:10 He who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the evening. It shall be to the children of Israel, and to the stranger who lives as a foreigner among them, for a statute forever-

I have discussed on :8 why there is so much uncleanness upon the Levites and priests associated with this sacrifice. But the reference to "a statute forever" could admittedly tend against my suggestion that this was a one time sacrifice to deal with the uncleanness and sin associated with the events of Num. 16,17. But "a statute for ever" is the term used about the regular annual keeping of the Passover and other annual feasts (Ex. 12:14,17,43) so the idea may be that the gross sin of the priests in allowing the Levites and others into the sanctuary was to be remembered each year in the red heifer ritual. Or "a statute forever" could as well mean that this is a law about a sacrifice with eternal effect and consequence.

Num 19:11 He who touches the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days-

There was already ritual provided to deal with being unclean from touching a corpse. The red heifer ritual is therefore relating to some specific one time defilement by corpses. The context is the death of so many rebels in Num. 16. "Tent" in :14 again suggests this was not a ritual for all time, but specific to them at that point liv-

ing in tents. The whole camp was thereby unclean. Their relatives wanted to bury them, but they all had to therefore engage with the red heifer ritual. Or perhaps this is mentioned because this was an example of how the water of cleansing, made from the ashes of the red heifer, could be used. But if it were to be used every time there was a death, then it would've required many ashes from red heifers. We wonder therefore if these commands are specifically for the Levites at the sanctuary. Otherwise, there would need to be red heifer sacrifices and ashes made throughout Israel. I discussed on :4 how the impression could be taken that this was to be one sacrifice for all time (another element of how it typified the Lord's death), and that therefore it would only have been applicable to the wilderness situation. Perhaps what was specifically in view was the cleansing required for the 15000 people who had just been slain in the events of Num. 16,17, and who were now going to be buried. There would have been mass defilement of people during the burial and mourning process, and these people were sinners. Therefore there was this special cleansing ritual foreseen.

Num 19:12 The same shall purify himself with water on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean; but if he doesn't purify himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean-

This may have hints of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus on the third day, leading to our complete cleansing

on the seventh day- God's Kingdom established on earth. See on :16.

The word *chata* "purify" occurs often here (:12,13,19,20). But this is the usual word translated 'sin' [or equivalent] about 200 times in the Hebrew Bible. Here the verb occurs in the piel and not the qal form. The sense is literally 'to un-sin'. No sacrifice in the Mosaic legislation so far could de-sin or un-sin a person. Such a word is hardly found in any other language, although German *entsündigen* may have something of the idea or English 'exonerate'. We have here a profound insight into the deep cleansing work of the Lord's sacrifice, a deep cleansing of the conscience beyond forgiveness. Truly here is a case where the closer one looks at God's word, the deeper is the beauty. We struggle with this experience because human forgiveness is not like this. It is at best a 'play on', an emotional position adopted by the forgiver, but the grant of human forgiveness cannot touch the conscience of the forgiven nor cleanse them before God. Only God's Son can say as He did to the woman in John 8, "I do not condemn you", and then speak of how that truth makes us free, we shall be "free indeed". Although the wonder of these things only has any moment if we are convicted of our sin first. Only then will our cleansing and freedom result in a flame of passionate devotion for Him who freed us.

And the wonder of it all is that the Lord's sacrifice is far more powerful than that of the red heifer: "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying

of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God" (Heb. 9:13,14). The use of *chata* here may be intended to suggest that this red heifer ritual pointed ahead to a sacrifice which would un-sin to the point of cleansing the conscience.

Num 19:13 Whoever touches a dead person, the body of a man who has died, and doesn't purify himself, defiles the tent of Yahweh; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel. Because the water for impurity was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet on him-

This could mean that the dead bodies were of those who had defiled the tabernacle, referring to those of Korah's rebellion.

The sacrifice of the red heifer, like that of Christ, became meaningful and effective for the individual when mixed with water, which could suggest our need to appropriate the sacrifice of Christ to ourselves through baptism. This appears a very strict judgment for touching a corpse and then not having the red heifer ash water sprinkled. What if the red heifer hadn't been slain by the priest, what if the water wasn't available immediately, especially if the person was far from the sanctuary? But I have suggested on :7,11 that this is all in the specific context of the events of Num. 16,17; it was a one off requirement that those who were unclean because of those events should make use of the cleansing offered through the red heifer, or die in their sins. Likewise see on :20. There are many Biblical examples of men touching dead

bodies, but there is never any future reference to the red heifer ritual. I suggest therefore that the dead bodies in view are specifically those of the slain rebels, and the red heifer legislation was uniquely relevant to them.

Being "cut off from Israel" may not mean that the person must be slain. For then the phrase "cut off from the earth" would have been used (as in Prov. 2:22 and often). The idea is that the person who ate leaven (Ex. 12:15) or was not circumcised (Gen. 17:14) was excluded from the community of God's people because they had broken or despised the covenant which made them His people. But there is no record of Israel keeping a list of 'cut off from Israel' Israelites and excluding them from keeping the feasts. So we conclude this means that God would consider such persons as cut off from His people. He would do the cutting off, and not men. In His book, they were "cut off". But there was no legal nor practical mechanism provided to Israel to manage the 'cutting off from Israel' of those who despised the covenant. The cutting off was done in God's eyes, in Heaven's record, and the Israelites were intended to continue to fellowship with such persons at the feasts. This is a strong argument for an open table, and for not seeking to make church excommunication the equivalent of this cutting off of the disobedient from the people of Israel. This explains why being "cut off from Israel" is the punishment stated for doing things which man could not see and judge- secretly breaking the Sabbath (Ex. 31:14), eating peace offerings whilst being unclean (Lev. 7:20- for how were others to know whether someone had touched the unclean,

or was experiencing an unclean bodily emission), eating meat with blood still in it (Lev. 17:10,14), not adequately humbling the soul (Lev. 23:29), not keeping Passover (Num. 9:13), being presumptuous (Num. 15:30,31- only God can judge that), not washing after touching a dead body (Num. 19:13,20). This is why Lev. 20:6 makes it explicit that "I [Yahweh personally] will set My face against that person, and will cut him off from among his people". It is Yahweh who does the cutting off and not men (also 1 Sam. 2:33).

Num 19:14 This is the law when a man dies in a tent: everyone who comes into the tent, and everyone who is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days-

Once settled in the land, people would generally live in houses and not tents. We enquire why this particular reference to tents. I suggested on :4,7,11 that the specific reference of this whole ritual is to those made unclean and condemned to death because of the events of Num. 16. Therefore the reference to tents is specifically to the tents of the rebels and their supporters (Num. 16:26).

Num 19:15 Every open vessel, which has no covering bound on it, is unclean-

This hyper strictness is explained on :8.

Num 19:16 Whoever in the open field touches one who is slain with a sword, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days-

The seven day period is that of :12. The dead bodies and bones in view are specifically of the recently slain rebels. See on :4,7,11.

The enigmatic Jn. 7:38 alludes here: "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly ("innermost being", NIV) shall flow rivers of living (Gk. spring) water". What "scripture" did the Lord have in mind? Perhaps the references to spring water being used to cleanse men from leprosy and death (Lev. 14:5; 15:13; Num. 19:16). Out of the innermost being of the true believer, the spring(ing) water of the Gospel will *naturally* spring up and go out to heal men, both now and more fully in the Kingdom, aided then by the Spirit gifts. The believer, *every* believer, *whoever* believes, will preach the word to others *from his innermost being*, both now and in the Kingdom - without the need for preaching committees or special efforts (not that in themselves I'm decrying them). The tendency is to delegate our responsibilities to these committees. There is no essential difference between faith and works. If we believe, we will do the works of witness, quite spontaneously. And note how the water that sprung out of the Lord's smitten side is to be compared with the bride that came out of the smitten side of Adam. We, the bride, are the water; thanks to the inspiration of the cross, we go forth in witness, the water of life to this hard land in which we walk.

Num 19:17 For the unclean they shall take of the ashes of the burning of the sin offering; and running water shall be put thereto in a vessel-

The Lord taught that He was the rock, and we like Israel drink of what came out of Him. The Law of Moses included several rituals which depended upon what is called " the running water" (Lev. 14:5,6,50-52; 15:18;

Num. 19:17). "Running" translates a Hebrew word normally translated "living". This living water was what came out of the smitten rock. The Lord taught that the water that would come out of Him would only come after His glorification (Jn. 7:38)- an idea He seems to link with His death rather than His ascension (Jn. 12:28,41; 13:32; 17:1,5 cp. 21:19; Heb. 2:9). When He was glorified on the cross, then the water literally flowed from His side on His death. The rock was "smitten", and the water then came out. The Hebrew word used here is usually translated to slay, slaughter, murder. It occurs in two clearly Messianic passages: "...they talk to the hurt of him [Christ] whom thou hast smitten" (Ps. 69:26); "we esteemed him [as He hung on the cross] smitten of God" (Is. 53:4). The living waters were representative of the Holy Spirit which is given to us- not the miraculous gifts, but the power of God within the human spirit, to bring us to have His Spirit and mind which was in Christ. It is this which now is the cleansing agent, making our sacrifices acceptable, cleansing our motives in a way in which we cannot do, at least not by any conscious intellectual process.

Num 19:18 and a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it on the tent, and on all the vessels, and on the persons who were there, and on him who touched the bone, or the slain, or the dead, or the grave-

We note the association of hyssop with the Lord's death on the cross (Jn. 19:29). That hyssop had been dipped in red wine, representing blood, and the Lord

surely saw the relevance to Himself. "I am that hyssop", He would have thought. On the cross, He was the door (Jn. 10:9), and He experienced hyssop with red wine (representing blood) brushed against Him. Just as the doors at Passover had blood brushed onto them using a hyssop plant, and this was the basis of Israel's salvation.

The "clean person" and "they" of :17 could be anyone. The red heifer cleansing differs from any other Mosaic ritual in that it didn't need to be administered by priests. This speaks of how the Lord's work for us, and the sovereign forgiveness of God, is ministered directly and without any priesthood as an interface. This is some kind of a foil to the recent declaration of Aaron and the Levites as God's method of priesthood (Num. 16,17). Ultimate forgiveness and total pardon was not actually achieved through them.

Num 19:19 The clean person shall sprinkle on the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day, and on the seventh day he shall purify him; and he shall wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at evening-

The importance of self examination at the breaking of bread is indirectly hinted at in Jn. 13:10: "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet". This is surely a reference to how Num. 19:19 prescribed that a Levite was required to take a plunge bath in order to be clean. The Lord is therefore saying that *all* His people, when they partake of His feast, are to present themselves as cleansed Levites. He understood His people as *all* being part of a priesthood. Additionally, we need to bear

in mind that the Lord spoke those words just before the breaking of bread, in response to how Peter did not want to participate in the Lord's meal if it meant the Lord washing him. Surely the Lord was saying that baptism is a one time event- he has been thus bathed does not need to wash again, or be re-baptized. But, he does need to periodically wash his feet, which I would take to be a reference to the breaking of bread which Peter seemed to want to avoid. Thus whilst forgiveness is not mystically mediated through the bread and wine, there is all the same a very distinct connection between the memorial meeting and forgiveness, just as there is between baptism and forgiveness. To not break bread is to walk away from that forgiveness in the blood of Jesus, just as to refuse baptism is to do the same.

Num 19:20 But the man who shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of Yahweh. The water for impurity has not been sprinkled on him: he is unclean-

This appears a very strict judgment for touching a corpse and then not having the red heifer ash water sprinkled. What if the red heifer hadn't been slain by the priest, what if the water wasn't available immediately, especially if the person was far from the sanctuary? But I have suggested on :7,11 that this is all in the specific context of the events of Num. 16,17; it was a one off requirement that those who were unclean because of those events should make use of the cleansing offered through the red heifer, or die in their sins.

Num 19:21 It shall be a perpetual statute to them. He who sprinkles the water for impurity shall wash his clothes, and he who touches the water for impurity shall be unclean until evening-

The "water of separation" granted cleansing, in prophecy of the effect of the blood of Christ (Num. 19:21). But the Hebrew for "separation" is also translated 'uncleanness' (Lev. 20:21; Ezra 9:11; Zech. 13:1). Touching this water for any other reason made a man unclean. Only if used in the right context did it make him clean (Num. 19:21). This is why it is described with a word which has these two meanings. Thus the RSV gives "water of impurity", the LXX 'water of purifying'. And so it is with our contact with the work of the Lord, symbolized in the emblems. We are made unclean by it, we drink damnation to ourselves, if we don't discern it. Only if we properly discern it are we cleansed by it. The idea of the breaking of bread becoming a place of condemnation for the unworthy is to be found in Ps. 69:22, where those who crucify Messiah afresh are warned that their table will become a snare to them, and their own sense of peace will trap them.

I have discussed on :8 why there is so much uncleanness upon the Levites and priests associated with this sacrifice. But the reference to "a statue forever" could admittedly tend against my suggestion that this was a one time sacrifice to deal with the uncleanness and sin associated with the events of Num. 16,17. But "a statute for ever" is the term used about the regular annual keeping of the Passover and other annual feasts (Ex. 12:14,17,43)

so the idea may be that the gross sin of the priests in allowing the Levites and others into the sanctuary was to be remembered each year in the red heifer ritual.

Num 19:22 Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean; and the soul that touches it shall be unclean until evening-

I have discussed on :8 why there is so much uncleanness upon the Levites and priests associated with this sacrifice.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 20

Num 20:1 The children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people stayed in Kadesh. Miriam died there, and was buried there-

"The whole congregation" or "all the congregation" is a phrase used always in the context of Israel's complaints or rebellions. The implication therefore is that those who still survived of the condemned generation (see on :3) and those of the younger generation- all failed now at the very border of the Kingdom of God. We can also infer that the complaints were not from a disgruntled minority, but were the spirit of the entire community. "The first month" when these things happened at Kadesh would appear to be in year 40 of the "journey", comparing with the itinerary in Num. 33:36-38.

Despite all the visible wrath of God against those who rebelled in Num. 16 with 15000 dying, the condemnation of the priesthood to death and then their being saved by the unique, saving provision of the red heifer (see on Num. 19:4,7,11)... the people still rebelled. This is all a classic case of where visible, empirical evidence doesn't of itself elicit true faith in God. And those who base their faith upon 'scientific evidence' on one hand or Pentecostal claims of miracles... need to be warned by this. We wonder whether the death of Miriam was related to her abiding sense of rebellion against her brothers Moses and Aaron. Perhaps the root of her

name, Mara [bitter] became sadly true for her in her older age.

"The waters of strife in Kadesh" were the borders of the land, as defined in Ez. 47:19; 48:28. On the borders of the Kingdom, they rebelled and Moses sinned and disbelieved. The rest of Numbers will be taken up with accounts of their failures right at the end. We marvel at this failure at the very end of the journey [for the record of the death of Aaron in the 40th year runs straight on from this narrative as if it was now the 40th year since leaving Egypt]. But it is of the same nature as the great apostacy foretold by the New Testament on the eve of the second coming, leading the Lord to muse as to whether He would find faith on the earth at His return.

Num 20:2 There was no water for the congregation. They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron-

Stephen in Acts 7 stresses the way in which Moses was rejected by Israel as a type of Christ. At age 40, Moses was "thrust away" by one of the Hebrews; and on the wilderness journey the Jews "thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt" (Acts 7:27,35,39). This suggests that there was far more antagonism between Moses and Israel than we gather from the Old Testament record- after the pattern of Israel's treatment of Jesus. It would seem from Acts 7:39 that after the golden calf incident, the majority of Israel cold shouldered Moses. Once the point sank in that they were not going to enter the land, this feelings must have turned into bitter resentment. They were probably un-

aware of how Moses had been willing to offer his eternal destiny for their salvation; they would not have entered into the intensity of Moses' prayers for their salvation. The record seems to place Moses and "the people" in juxtaposition around 100 times (e.g. Ex. 15:24; 17:2,3; 32:1 NIV; Num. 16:41 NIV; 20:2,3; 21:5). They accused Moses of being a cruel cult leader, bent on leading them out into the desert to kill them and steal their wealth from them (Num. 16:13,14)- when in fact Moses was delivering them from the house of bondage, and was willing to lay down his own salvation for theirs. The way Moses submerged his own pain is superb; both of their rejection of him and of God's rejection of him from entering the Kingdom. The style of Moses' writing in Num. 20:12-14 reveals this submerging of his own pain. He speaks of himself in the third person, omitting any personal reflection on his own feelings: "The Lord spake unto Moses... Because you believed me not... you shall not bring the congregation into the land... and Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the King of Edom...". Likewise all the references to "the Lord spake unto Moses" (Lev. 1:1). Moses submerged his own personality in writing his books.

"Assembling together against Moses" is the same phrase used in the record of Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:3,19,42) and the golden calf (Ex. 32:1). Likewise they "quarreled with" Moses (:3) is the same word used of how they did this in the previous rebellion about water in Ex. 17:2,7. "Why have you brought the Lord's congregation into this wilderness for us... to die?" (:4) repeats

the words of the rebellions by the previous generation: at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:11), at Kadesh (Num. 14:2) and in Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:13). No lessons had been learnt from all the salvations by grace at those times. "Why did you make us leave Egypt?" (:5) recalls the pining for all things Egyptian which characterized the previous generation, at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:11), when they complained and were given Manna (Ex. 16:3), in Num. 11:5 at Kibroth-hattaavah, when the spies returned and they refused to enter Canaan (Num. 14:2), and at Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:13). In :4 they complain there are no figs, pomegranates nor vines in the desert. These were the very things brought back from Canaan as encouragement to persevere with Yahweh's path to enter it (Num. 13:23). This was an expression of serious doubt as to whether they would in fact enter the Kingdom. It was a very serious sin. We wonder why in the incident that follows, God appears to be very harsh in the level of judgment given to Moses. But we wonder whether in fact behind that there was not a desire to place their rightful judgment- of telling them "Well OK don't enter Canaan"- upon Moses. He bore their sin as ever.

This generation were just as rebellious as the previous one; that's the point of these connections. All the grace shown previously, the salvation from condemnation by desperate intercession, just had left no lasting mark on the people. Numbers seems to record what happened at the very start of the journey, the first year or so, and then from Num. 20 what happened in the last year or so. If the "whole assembly" (:1) here were mostly

or exclusively those under 20 on leaving Egypt, we marvel that those about to enter the Kingdom actually didn't want to. What we will read for the rest of Numbers is a terrible spurning of grace and salvation. We see a studied repetition of the failures of the first generation as *they* approached the borders of the land. This new generation were no better, but were saved by grace.

Num 20:3 The people strove with Moses and spoke, saying, We wish that we had died when our brothers died before Yahweh!-

Israel "chode with Moses... they strove with the Lord" (Num. 20:3,13) uses the same Hebrew word for both "chode" and "strove". To strive with Moses was to strive with the Lord- i.e. with the guardian Angel that was so closely associated with Moses? Num. 20:4 continues rather strangely with the Israelites addressing Moses in the plural: "The people chode with Moses, saying... Why have ye [you plural] brought up...". Could it be that even they recognized his partnership with God? Likewise Num. 21:5: "And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye [plural] brought us up out of Egypt to die?". "Our brothers" shows that the people were at one with the rebels who had died in the events of Num. 16, and hence Moses addresses them all as "rebels" (:10). He was on one hand full of spiritual perception, but lack of faith and unwise words on the other. This kind of terrible mixture of flesh and Spirit is sadly to be found in all God's children, even the very best of them like Moses.

The mention of brothers rather than fathers might suggest this complaint came from the last remnant of the condemned generation. The judgments at Kibroth-hattaavah (Num. 11:34) and Kadesh (Num. 14:37) had been upon not their brothers but their fathers. They were bitter and complaining to the end, for at this point they are nearing the end of the 40 years wandering. Just like many elderly folk today who refuse to get it. But the stress on how the "whole congregation" were involved (:1) suggests more that the younger ones were referring to the previous generation as their "brothers" to show solidarity with them. Rather than being grateful that they were going to enter the land whereas that generation didn't. They who were about to enter the land lament that they hadn't died with earlier rebels. They had been told that the wanderings would be for 40 years, but now the time was coming to an end, they still rebelled and just didn't want the Kingdom. There is no sense of tip top joyful expectancy. The blindness of man to the soon possibility of God's Kingdom is likewise amazing.

Num 20:4 Why have you brought the assembly of Yahweh into this wilderness that we should die there, we and our animals?-

The obvious answer was that not Moses but God had brought them into the wilderness, they had went the way they were led by the Angel going before them in the pillar of cloud and fire. But they didn't want to accept that as any evidence. Again, as discussed on :1, visible, empir-

ical evidence didn't persuade anyone of anything much. In their hearts they had returned to Egypt (Acts 7:39), and so they would see everything through the lens of their desire to return there. And so it is with those who love the world and simply do not want the things of the Kingdom. The manna was being given, but they disregarded it, and assumed they would die without the luxury foods of :5. We have a powerful insight into the mentality of so many. They are not satisfied with food and clothing, and for them, life is "death" without all the "extras".

The test as to "What shall we drink?" was a repeat of that in Ex. 15 and Ex. 17. The same basic test, although in regard to "What shall we eat?", was repeated in Ex. 16. The Lord alludes to this when warning us not to ask what we shall eat or drink but to live life trusting in God's provision. And this is how life goes- tests repeat, in essence, and we are intended to learn from how God provides and acts in earlier tests in our lives. And also from how He has provided historically, in the Biblical record. It's the same with how God had carefully instructed Moses how to use his rod, and therefore his failure with his rod was seen as so culpable.

These are the words of the rebellion in Ex. 17:3. Many had been saved by grace from the results of that rebellion. But even now in their old age (see on :3), all the grace meant nothing, and they learnt nothing from history. Thus is man without trust in Divine grace.

Num 20:5 Why have you made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in to this evil place? It is no place of seed,

or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink-

Their idea was that the desert was no place to plant seed. The idea may have been that they had camped for some time where they had planted seeds. But now they were in a desolate area. God's later comment upon this is "Have I been a wilderness to Israel?" (Jer. 2:31). They totally ignored God's hand and leadership in all this, taking out their anger with God upon His representatives-as happens to this day.

The answer was obviously 'Because you sinned'. But they totally discounted this, as many do today. They were bitter at the consequence of sin. Living in a fallen world becomes so depressing and bitter until we accept the huge significance of human sin.

Num 20:6 Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the door of the Tent of Meeting, and fell on their faces, and the glory of Yahweh appeared to them-

When faced with unreasonable criticism and aggression, even from those amongst the people of God, our response should be not to argue back immediately, but take the situation to God. Moses' humility is surely revealed here; for he doesn't make the obvious responses to them which he could have made. Instead he falls on his face in appeal to God not to slay them. This points up the way that his sin in hitting the rock was indeed a very momentary and uncharacteristic failure. Although one take away from this sad narrative is that such failures are still sin and liable to judgment. "He just snapped..." is

not in fact an excuse for sin, regardless of the provocation.

Num 20:7 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The invitation to take the rod naturally suggested that Moses was to use it as previously commanded. But this was a test as to whether Moses would serve God on the basis of careful obedience to His word; or upon the assumption that he would just repeat his previous obedience in a relatively mindless way. And he failed it. This incident therefore has powerful relevance to those who regularly attend church meetings and tend to go through the same spiritual patterns in their lives, repeating what they did previously. The command for Moses to take the rod which budded meant that he entered into the most holy, when this was only for Aaron to do once / year at the day of Atonement. So Moses was being encouraged to pay careful attention to God's specific words and act only upon them. The rod was the symbol that Moses and Aaron were indeed chosen by God.

Num 20:8 Take the rod and assemble the congregation. you and Aaron your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it give forth its water; and you shall bring forth to them water out of the rock; so you shall give the congregation and their livestock drink-

Note carefully the process of failure here. Moses and Aaron were told to *both* speak to the rock, and this would result in Moses personally bringing forth water: "Gather thou [singular] the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye [plural- both of them] unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth

his water, and thou [Moses personally] shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink" (Num. 20:8). But Moses seems to have dismissed Aaron's intended involvement and assumed that he alone could bring the water out with his rod. Yet Aaron was also condemned for this incident- presumably because he didn't speak to the rock but just let Moses smite the rock with his silence meaning consent.

"Speak to the rock" can as well be translated "speak upon the rock", or near the rock. The same construction is in the following: "Before the rock" (:10), "upon the rock" (Jud. 6:20; 7:25; 2 Sam. 21:10), "against the rock" (Ps. 137:9).

It could be that Moses was called to address the complaining Israel, perhaps "before the rock", with an assurance of grace. He does address them before the rock (:10 s.w. "to the rock"). But not with words of grace. And water would have flowed out as he did so. Instead he gave his own speech of condemnation of Israel, and hit the rock.

We note Moses was asked to do five things: "take the staff," "assemble the congregation," "speak to the rock," "bring forth water" and "let the congregation drink". In response, Moses (a) took the staff (b) assembled the people (c) spoke to the people (d) lifted up his hand (e) hit the rock twice. Instead of speaking *to the rock* he spoke *to the people*. It could be argued that he was being asked to provide them with water, by grace. Despite their nasty accusations and complaints. But instead of showing that

intended grace, he addresses the people as "rebels"; and he raised his hand in defiance, defiance of God's grace. In this way he failed to sanctify God in that he refused to reflect His grace to the people; and he disbelieved God in that he disbelieved that God could show such grace to the people.

Moses was asked to *throw down* wood into the waters (Ex. 15:25). His staff, also made of wood, had to be *lifted up* in order to open the Red Sea. He was being taught careful obedience to commandment about wood, and yet he failed to learn- for the sin which excluded him from entering Canaan was that of not obeying commandment about his rod / the wood. He was told to take the rod in his hand but not use it. This may explain the apparent harshness of God's condemnation of him over this incident.

Num 20:9 Moses took the rod from before Yahweh as He commanded him-

The rod being "before Yahweh" refers back to how Aaron's rod that budded was placed before Yahweh (Num 17:22). So it was that rod which was used, and abused. The symbol of God's choice of Aaron was abused by Moses as if it had power of itself. We note that "his [Moses'] rod" in Num. 20:11 is lacking in the LXX and Vulgate, rendering simply "the rod". They used this symbolic piece of wood as if it had power in itself, just as some consider the physical wood of the Lord's cross to have some magic power. And they were condemned for doing so. They were asked to hold the rod because it was the symbol of warning to a rebellious people.

The first time Moses struck the rock, he was standing in the presence of the Angel- "Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock" (Ex. 17:6), but it would seem that the second time Moses took the rod "from before the LORD (the Angel)" (Num. 20:9) and went alone to the rock; this lack of Angelic presence perhaps accounts for his rashness at this time.

Paul in 1 Cor. 10:4 alludes to a Jewish tradition that the rock followed Israel through the wilderness, always giving water. Some traditions suggest Miriam carried it; the supposed "Rock of Moses" is a piece of rock which could have been carried. Paul emphasizes that the point of his allusion is that the water which they drank of represented "Christ", the strength which comes from Him as the smitten rock; he alludes to the tradition just as he quotes pagan poets and makes a point out of their words (Acts 17:28). The Bible often features this kind of thing; and God isn't so paranoiac and apologetic that He as it were has to footnote such things with a comment that "of course, this isn't true".

But the rock following them likely means that the water from the smitten rock followed them. Israel's complaint that they had no water was therefore really complaining that they didn't have any more water than that. Moses' failure to believe that from another rock could flow water (which is one possible reading of :10) was therefore indeed a terrible lack of faith (:12). For there was every evidence, provided 24/7, that God could provide water from a rock.

Num 20:10 Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock and he said to them, Hear now, you rebels; shall we bring water out of this rock for you?-

We are left to imagine in what tone of voice Moses said that, and compare it with the tone of voice he used when at the end of his life reminding them of how they had been rebellious. Israel had rebelled against the commandment of Yahweh through disbelief, and therefore couldn't enter Canaan (Dt. 1:26; 9:7,23,24; 31:27; Num. 27:4); they were as the rebellious son who rebelled against his father's commandment (s.w. Dt. 21:18,20). For Moses himself had rebelled against the commandment of Yahweh and because of this was also barred from entering Canaan (Num. 20:24; 27:14). One reason for this was that he had called the Israelites "rebels" (Num. 20:10), and no sooner had he done so, than he himself rebelled against Yahweh's commandment just like them, but in a different way. He saw the whole congregation as no better than the rebels who had perished previously, 15000 of them, in the rebellion of Num. 16 which Israel were now in essence repeating.

The essence of the sin was lack of faith (:12), not simply striking the rock; for only Moses struck it, but Aaron was equally punished. The emphasis is perhaps upon "this rock" rather than "we". As if they didn't believe that from that rock could possibly flow water, although God had worked in that way before. Perhaps this is why he struck it once, and no water came, as if in demonstration of his point. And he struck it again- and God an-

swered a fool according to his folly, and God made water come out of it.

Or we can read this as Moses not sanctifying God (:12) by speaking as if he could bring the water out of the rock alone, in his own strength. The people had just fired a series of questions at him, asking why *he* had brought them out of Egypt and led them through the desert. The obvious answer to their questions was that it was not Moses who had done these things, but God working through Moses. They failed to see God manifest in Moses, and looked at him merely as acting in his own strength. And it could be that in this moment, he came to see himself as they saw him. He sinned terribly because he allowed others' perceptions of him to become his own self perception. And we can take that lesson to ourselves in every generation.

Num 20:11 Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his rod twice: and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock-

Moses lifted his hand and then struck the rock. The action of lifting the hand could be in defiance. He was 'high handed'. This was the sin of high handed presumption (s.w.), but still he was saved from it ultimately. Despite his disobedience, the grace of it all was that water came out- and abundantly! Moses unfaithfulness and lack of grace contrasts with Yahweh's grace and faithfulness in the face of disobedience. Although we note that unlike at Rephidim 38 years earlier this was a one off. In Num. 21 we find the people again complaining about lack of water.

Moses had previously struck the rock and water came out (Ex. 17:6), but this time he was asked to speak to it- yet instead, he struck it. He was perhaps acting on autopilot, assuming things would repeat as they did before; he had used the rod in other miracles involving water, both in Egypt and in the desert (Num. 7:20; 14:16). Just as we can. And God counted this as a major sin. We think of how David's battle plans in 2 Sam. 5:19-23 were subtly altered to test his obedience. He was told to "go up" against the Philistines by frontal assault and he successfully did so. But in the second battle he was told not to "go up" but to wait until he heard the sound of the Angels above him, and to attack from behind. See on :10. Smiting the rock, which represented Christ (1 Cor. 10:4), could be understood as effectively crucifying Him, twice over (Heb. 6:6). Perhaps he became over familiar with God, assuming he could do as he wished without careful respect for God's word. He failed to believe in the power of the spoken word (:12), effectively he rebelled against the commandment (Num. 27:14); he assumed that detailed obedience wasn't necessary to God's commandment; and he gave the impression that he rather than God was giving the water ("shall *we* bring you water...?", :10). One angry sentence can reveal so much about our attitudes. Moses had earlier asked that he be excluded from entering the land so that Israel might enter (Ex. 32:32- see note there). In a strange way, that prayer was heard. Although Moses sinned, repeatedly we read that he didn't himself enter the land for Israel's sake (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21). They are blamed for

provoking him to speak poorly (Ps. 106:33). God works through our sins in a strange way; and what we ask for in prayer, we have a way of receiving, in essence.

Moses was willing to give his physical and eternal life for Israel's salvation (Ex. 32:32). In a sense, his desire was heard. Because of the sin of a moment, caused by the provocation of the people he loved, God decreed that he could not enter the land of promise. For *their* *sakes* he was barred from the land; this is the emphasis of the Spirit (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21); and Ps. 106:32,33 says that Moses was provoked to sin because Israel angered God, and that therefore "it went ill with Moses for their sakes". Truly, God by grace works through sinful man to achieve His glory. Thus Moses says that he must die "Because ye [plural] trespassed against me" (Dt. 32:51). This all helps explain why the Lord Jesus Christ had to die, apart from the fact that He was mortal. He died the death of a sinner for our salvation, He felt all the emotions of the rejected, the full weight of God's curse; for "cursed is every one that hangs on a tree" in crucifixion (Gal. 3:13). Moses is a superb and accurate type of the Lord Jesus. Therefore Moses in his time of dying must grant us insight into the death of our Lord, the prophet like him (Dt. 18:18).

The fact Aaron was also equally punished indicates that the essence of the sin was not striking the rock. For only Moses struck the rock. It was lack of faith (:12). God sees through to the essence of sin. Aaron inwardly assented to the language and conduct with which he was outwardly associated and was judged for it. And that is

a challenge to good men who do nothing but go along with what they may say they disagree with. We note that "Speak [you both speak] to the rock" is in the plural; both of them were to speak to the rock. "Take the rod... assemble the people" are addressed to a singular individual, but to speak to the rock was a command to both Moses and Aaron. Aaron said nothing, and Moses instead spoke to the people not to the rock. We see here the weight of sins of omission.

Why did Moses strike the rock twice? Presumably if water had come out of the rock the first time, he wouldn't have needed to strike a second time. Presumably nothing, or very little, came out after the first strike. This surely was God trying to restrain him. But he drove right over the red light and insisted in more disobedience by hitting it again. And God heard that disobedience and gave water from the rock. Perhaps this is how Yahweh sanctified Himself in this incident, through glorifying His grace.

Num 20:12 Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, Because you didn't believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them-

Disbelief in God was the reason Israel too were barred from entering Canaan (s.w. Dt. 1:32). When Moses reminded them of this in Dt. 1:32, he was alluding to how he was in essence no better than them, having also been rejected from entering Canaan for disbelief (Num. 20:12). So we wonder in what tone of voice he reminded them of this. For he appealed to them as a fellow

sinner, in this sense no better than them. And this was the potential power of his appeal.

Although Moses didn't believe in God as he should have done, God still did the miracle. He is prepared to accept even imperfect faith. For Moses' faith slips for a moment; his spirit is provoked by Israel, so that he speaks unadvisedly with his lips and is therefore barred from entering the land (although maybe such an apparently temporary slip was the reflection of deeper problems?). Yet it does seem uncharacteristic, a tragic slip down the graph of ever rising spirituality. There must have almost been tears in Heaven. Being easily provoked was one of Moses' characteristics; consider how he *turned himself* and stormed out from Pharaoh (Ex. 10:6; 11:8); how his anger waxed hot when he returned from the mount, how he went out from Pharaoh in great anger, how he first of all feared the wrath of Pharaoh and then stopped fearing it; how Moses was "very wroth" at Israel's suggestion that he was appropriating the sacrifices for himself; how he was "angry" with Eleazer (Ex. 32:19; 11:8; Num. 16:15; Lev. 10:16,17). This temperament explains his swings of faith. Was the Lord Jesus likewise afflicted?

Moses doubtless had faith of a sort to hit the rock, having gathered all Israel there, and expect water to come out. Indeed, the water did come out, the miracle happened... but God's ultimate comment was that in that event, Moses actually did not have faith.

The style of Moses' writing in Num. 20:12-14 reveals a submerging of his own pain. He speaks of himself in

the third person, omitting any personal reflection on his own feelings: "The Lord spake unto Moses... Because ye believed me not... ye shall not bring the congregation into the land... and Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the King of Edom...". Likewise all the references to "the Lord spake unto Moses" (Lev. 1:1). Moses submerged his own personality in writing his books. See on Acts 7:39.

We may feel the judgment was extreme, for a few rash words uttered under huge provocation (Ps. 106:32,33). But studded throughout the Bible are examples of where apparently heavy judgments are given for what we might consider minor infringements: Eating the fruit when told it was OK to do so by the serpent, the disobedient prophet who was told by another prophet he could eat and drink when God had told him not to, Moses and Aaron barred from entering the land because Moses hit the rock as he did previously, rather than speaking to it [and Aaron "only" just said nothing], Ananias and Sapphira for exaggerating their generosity. The rest of the Biblical narrative is full of God tolerating a huge amount of sin. But these incidents are scattered throughout the Bible to remind us of the seriousness of sin. We commit these kinds of sins, of omission, of silence when we should speak, of being misled... multiple times / day.

God led the condemned generation "to see what was in their hearts"- why do that, if they were merely being led to their deaths? Is there not a hint that God was looking at any possible heart change that might enable

Him to forgive and eternally save them, even if they had to die in the wilderness? For Moses too couldn't see nor enter the promised land, and yet will be saved. He sinned at Kadesh (Num. 20:1), exactly where Israel did (Num. 13:25). Both Moses and Israel are charged with the sins of "disbelief" (Num. 14:11; 20:12) and "rebellion" (Num. 14:9; 20:24) and are banned from entering the land. But Moses had hope of resurrection to eternal inheritance. They were to see in Moses a possible pattern for themselves. The ten unfaithful spies were smitten with death; but the condemned generation were kept alive. Whilst there is life there's hope, and surely man is always capable of repentance whilst still alive. And I suggest God was nudging even that condemned generation towards that. He had sworn they would die in the wilderness, but still they could be resurrected to eternal inheritance of the land if they repented.

What is the element of disbelief, of lacking faith? The sin was not so much in technical disobedience to commands [to strike the rock rather than speaking to it]. If this were all God were concerned with, then He would've punished only Moses and not Aaron. For only Moses actually hit the rock rather than speaking to it. Although we could argue that passive 'going along' with sin, as Aaron did, is highly culpable. We think of the holocaust, and above all the decision to crucify the Lord. Ultimately, sin is unbelief, not trusting in God's grace to save. The sin in Eden was essentially disbelief rather than merely an act of disobedience. Perhaps his calling them "rebels" suggested his disbelief in God's gracious plan

to save them through resurrection at the last day, even though they must die in the desert. And so Moses was appropriately punished. He too was to die in the desert, to be resurrected by the grace which he was unwilling to believe in for the condemned generation. Dt. 1:37 has Moses recalling how he was not to enter the land because of his failure towards the end of the 40 years, but he inserts that memory in the midst of recounting how Israel had been banned from entering the land at the start of the 40 years. Both incidents occurred at Kadesh. The point is that Moses was experiencing their condemnation although he would be saved out of it. Although the Lord didn't personally sin, He also experienced the condemnation of being the sinner who hung upon a tree, and felt forsaken by God as do those separated from God.

It is this disbelief in God's grace which failed to sanctify God. Israel didn't enter the land because they disbelieved (Num. 14:3), and so now Moses and Aaron will not because they disbelieved that the people could still be ultimately saved. The entire Israelite congregation at this time were still seen as without sin by God, according to what we will soon read in Balaam's speeches. To deny Him this grace, to consider Him an angry God who lashes out at sinners without any grace nor intention of ultimate salvation... This is to make Him common and to fail to honour His sanctity, the holiness of His grace. The word which they rebelled against in :24 was therefore not just the command to speak to the rock, but the whole word or plan of salvation of the lost generation. 2

Chron. 20:21 praises God for the beauty of His holiness and His hesed, His grace to save His people. Ps. 138:2 urges us to praise God in His holiness for His mercy / hesed / grace. So to disbelieve that grace is to as it were un holy God, to not sanctify Him. What makes Yahweh uniquely separate / holy from other gods is His amazing grace. The mistake is often made of thinking that allowing His grace to other sinners is to somehow infringe or desecrate His holiness. But by perceiving His grace we are actually appreciating and glorifying His holiness. His Name is holy as we are often reminded, but His Name as declared to Moses was all about salvation by grace.

We note that three times, Moses claims at the end of his life that his ban from entering Canaan was the fault of the people (Dt. 1:37-40; 3:23-29; 4:21-24). And yet the record three times states it was his fault (Num. 20:1-13, 27:12-14; Dt. 32:48-52). We conclude that even at the end of his life, Moses was imperfect- he wouldn't accept full guilt for his behaviour. And yet without doubt he will be saved. We are not to expect perfection by the end of our lives, neither from ourselves nor from others. For we are all saved by grace. Another take on this apparent contradiction is that some do cause others to stumble, but the stumbler is still culpable as well as them. Reflect too that the Divinely given reason as to why Moses would not enter the land was given to Moses and Aaaron privately. The people at no point knew. All they knew was from the public speech of Moses in Deuteronomy, where he pinned the blame on them. We see here a fleck of pride in Moses, in not telling

the people what had actually been said by God to him. Yet he was the meekest man, in God's view. Despite flecks of pride, God viewed him so positively. By grace and through love.

The ban on entering the land was really a way of fulfilling Moses' earlier request, that his name be removed from the book [cp. entry to the land, Ez. 13:9 "they shall not be in the assembly of my people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel"] so that Israel might enter. Yahweh worked through Moses' own weakness to make that actually happen. Through Moses' representative death, the whole congregation (:1) who had rebelled were allowed to enter the land.

As the narrative now approaches the end of the 40 years, it's as if the scale of Israel's failure increases. They have failed as a congregation, the Levites have failed in the events of Num. 16,17; and now Moses and Aaron fail. All this highlights Israel's entry to the land was a salvation by grace. And it encourages us that we too will enter that land by that same grace.

Yahweh was not sanctified by Moses in that on this occasion, unlike in previous incidents, he didn't intercede for their salvation but calls them "rebels". He gave Yahweh's grace no chance to be revealed, so the Name was not sanctified. For the Yahweh Name has salvation by grace at its core. And this disbelief in the extent of God's grace led to his ban from entering the land. And yet Num. 12:3 has stated God's opinion, that there was not a man on earth who was as faithful, full of faith, and

also humble... as Moses. This incident shows an uncharacteristic pride and lack of faith. But still God's judgment of him stands, for Hebrews quotes it in the New Testament as still standing, Moses was faithful in all God's house, and Hebrews 11 highlights his faith. God clearly overlooks lapses although in this case judged Moses for them.

A simpler reading would be that getting water out of rocks with magic sticks, divining rods, was common claim amongst the nomads. Moses was perhaps making out that he could do this by magic, rather than giving all glory for it to a Yahweh miracle. Even in that case, his rash behaviour was a denial of God's grace.

Num 20:13 These are the waters of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with Yahweh, and He was sanctified in them-

Somehow God is never beaten; man can do nothing against the Truth, only for it (2 Cor. 13:8). He wasn't beaten when Moses failed to sanctify Him (:12); He sanctified Himself through His judgment of that failure: "Ye believed me not, *to sanctify me* in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and *he was sanctified* in them" (Num. 20:12,13). And 'sanctified' is from the same root as 'Kadesh' where they were encamped. Perhaps it was later named that to memorialize how God all the same was sanctified. Somehow God's word never returns unto Him void, somehow the lost sheep is always found.

These are not just expressions of the essential hopefulness of the Father and Son (although this in itself is something to be truly inspired by); these are statements which reflect the way in which within God's scheme of working, everything works out to His glory.

God was sanctified or declared His holiness. Kadesh means holiness. How was God sanctified in what happened? How was His holiness displayed and how did Moses not sanctify Him, limiting the manifestation of that holiness? By considering the people "rebels" (LXX 'disobedient'), Moses was assuming they could not now receive the grace of Divine salvation ultimately. I discussed on :12 the connection between holiness and grace. How then did God still declare His holiness? Perhaps in that although Moses was to die without entering the land, by grace he would still be saved even though he failed to reflect that grace shown to him. Perhaps grace to the ungracious is the supreme holiness of Yahweh. Perhaps His holiness was shown [He was sanctified] through the grace of still giving them water anyway, despite Moses' disobedience. The water was still given even though Moses didn't do as commanded for it to appear. This was grace and thus God was sanctified / declared Himself holy despite Moses not being willing to sanctify Him. For holiness isn't a bright light or awesome visual representation. It is something moral, and all God's morality comes to a climax in grace.

Num 20:14 Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, saying: Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the travail that has happened to us-

"Esau is Edom". God always had a strange and strong respect for Esau as also in some kind of potential covenant relationship with Him (Dt. 2:2-4; 23:7; Am. 1:9,11; Obadiah 10,12; Mal. 1:2). Israel had initially approached Canaan from the south, but now they were being sent far to the east and north to enter across the Jordan opposite Jericho. It could possibly be that God's intention was that Esau would not only allow Israel easier passage there, but even join them and also inherit the land which was promised to them- if they wished to accept the covenant. But they refused, satisfied with what they already had in the desert.

Esau is Edom and so this meeting with Esau clearly recalls Jacob's meeting with Esau and salvation by grace. But it seems that grace from Esau was now as it were denied. For the condemned generation had made it plain they didn't want to enter the land but preferred to return to Egypt. And they were counted as having done so in their hearts.

Num 20:15 how our fathers went down into Egypt, and we lived in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and our fathers-

These incidents are now at the end of the wanderings. "With us" would have referred to those under 20 on leaving Egypt, and to Moses and Aaron personally.

Num 20:16 and when we cried to Yahweh, He heard our voice, and sent an angel, and brought us forth out of Egypt; and behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost extremity of your border-

This message was on behalf of all Israel (:14). But they had just been bitterly complaining that it was Moses personally who had brought them out of Egypt (:5), and not God. So their words here are somewhat insincere, as in their hearts they had returned to Egypt. We see how forms of words can be used as statements of faith, when our hearts are far from believing them.

Num 20:17 Please let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field or through vineyard, neither will we drink of the water of the wells. We will go along the king's highway. We will not turn aside to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed your border-

Their confidence that they didn't need any water was because the water from the rock was following them (1 Cor. 10:4). This points up Moses' lack of faith in :10,11 that the rock in question could give water. We see how even in the best of us like Moses, faith can go up and down very quickly.

Their promises to Edom and the Amorites to march only along a highway and not spill over it (Num. 20:17; 21:22) is unrealistic if they had such huge numbers as implied if we read the 600 thousands of Ex. 12:37 literally. A figure of 600 family units leaving Egypt is more realistic; otherwise we start to wonder how ever all the Israelites, millions of them, came to be in one place at one time on Passover night. The Hebrew word translated as "thousand" can mean a family, or some other administrative division. Many of the 'number problems' in the Hebrew Bible are only really resolvable using this approach. And that may be in view in the census of Israel

taken in Num. 1, and in the statement that six hundred 'thousands' of footmen left Egypt (Ex. 12:37). The census of Num. 1 gives figures such as those in Num. 1:21 for Reuben, which could be rendered: "forty six families ['thousands'] and five hundred (men)". Although a "hundred" might also refer to an administrative division. The total in Num. 1 would then be 598 families with a total of 5550 men. The sum given in the second census in Num. 26 comes out as roughly the same, with 596 families amounting to 5730 men. On this basis, the total population (including women and children) would be anything between 20,000 to 40,000. This would enable us to make better sense of the statements that Israel were the smallest numerically of all the surrounding peoples (Dt. 7:1,7; 11:23; 20:1). If we insist upon taking "thousand" literally in Ex. 12:37, then 600,000 male foot soldiers would imply a total population of between two and six million. The population density would have been intense, and far greater than that of many modern nations. Estimates of global population at the time suggest it was only about 40 million, and the population of Egypt was a maximum of three million (probably far less). If the Israelites were smaller than the other nations, and they numbered say 5 million, then the total population of the seven peoples of Canaan would have been at least 40 million. The territory of Canaan could not have supported such numbers. Only 70 Israelites came into Egypt with Jacob. Expansion over 430 years to several million is not realistic. This approach helps us better understand how all the men of war marched around Jericho

(Josh. 6:3). If there were literally 600,000 men then the city would have had to be many kilometers in circumference for them all to march around it seven times in one day. Archaeological evidence from Jericho simply doesn't support the idea of such a vast city. If Israel numbered say 5 million people, and recall there was also a "mixed multitude" with them, then if they marched 10 abreast this would require a column stretching around 1000 kilometers.

Num 20:18 Edom said to him, You shall not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword against you-

These words were said with hearts melting with fear of Israel (Ex. 15:16). Dt. 2:4 was but a conditional promise: "Command the people saying, 'You are to pass through the border of your brothers the children of Esau, who dwell in Seir, and they will be afraid of you'. For in Num. 20:18 we learn that "Edom said to him, You shall not pass through", and they came out against them. I suggest that instead of believing these words, and the promise that the hearts of all would fear them (Ex. 15:16), the Israelites feared Esau- just as faithless Jacob had done. And so things were transferred the other way around. Esau was not afraid of Israel, as potentially they could have feared.

Dt. 2:29 says that the Edomites and Moabites sold Israel food and water as they passed through. But Dt. 23:3,4 says that the Moabites didn't do this and were cursed because of it. Perhaps a few Moabites did do so, but Moab generally didn't. Or perhaps the sense of Dt. 2:29 is that Moab and Edom did let Israel pass through

without harassing them, hence GNB "All we want to do is to pass through your country... The descendants of Esau, who live in Edom, and the Moabites, who live in Ar, allowed us to pass through their territory". But Edom didn't let Israel pass through (Num. 20:18). So the point of Dt. 2:29 may be that Sihon was warned that Edom and Moab had been asked to do this but had not done so, and Sihon was to take warning from this, to learn from the mistakes of others. However, we should note that Dt. 2:29 speaks of "the children of Esau who dwell in Seir". These Edomites perhaps did let Israel pass through, whereas the Edomites in the Kadesh area didn't.

Num 20:19 The children of Israel said to him, We will go up by the highway; and if we drink of your water, I and my livestock, then will I give its price. Let me only, without doing anything else, pass through on my feet-

Dt. 2:4,6 sounds like definite prophecy: "Command thou the people, saying, Ye are to pass through the coast of your brethren the children of Esau... and they shall be afraid of you...ye shall buy meat of them for money.... ye shall also buy water of them for money". And yet when Israel came to these people and tried to pass through, and offered them money for bread and water, they were rejected by them (Num. 20:16-21; Jud. 11:17). The condition- that Edom had the freedom to reject them- isn't mentioned, but it nonetheless stood. Prophecy is an imperative to action- it isn't just a fascinating study of how predictions have been matched with reality.

Num 20:20 He said, You shall not pass through. Edom came out against him with many people, and with a strong hand-

We must put this together with Ex. 15:15 "Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed the way". So when Edom "refused to give Israel passage through his border" (Num. 20:21), their refusal was because they were "dismayed" and terrified, not because they had some non-chalant confidence against Israel. This is an example of where we must place scripture together to get an accurate picture.

Num 20:21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border, so Israel turned away from him-

Soon after this incident, Israel were commanded not to despise an Edomite (Dt. 23:7)- although this is just what Edom had done to them. We aren't to treat others as they treat us, but leave their judgment with God. These incidents took place in the 40th year of their wanderings (Num. 33:38), and the commands of Deuteronomy were given at the same time. Moses could have reasoned that "the elder (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob)" (Gen. 25:23) and engaged him in battle. But the way of wisdom is to always walk away from conflict with our brethren, even if they are unreasonable.

Num 20:22 They travelled from Kadesh: and the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, came to Mount Hor-

"Even the whole congregation" may suggest that by this point, all the rebels and those over the age of 20 on leaving Egypt had now died (Dt. 4:4). Or perhaps the

idea is that there was not a single person lost as a result of the confrontation with Edom.

Num 20:23 Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the border of the land of Edom, saying-

"Hor" and "mount" are the same word in Hebrew. Dt. 10:6 defines the point as "Moserah". "Moserah" means 'place of chastisement / correction'. Aaron and Moses will be in the Kingdom despite their sin, but it needed Aaron's death for them to be corrected. And perhaps it was only in his time of dying that Aaron was fully corrected. The form of our death can be used by God to bring us to the spiritual point He wishes us to reach. The punishment was therefore their correction, and was not the angry lashing out of an offended Deity. Moses only mentions this place name at the end of his life, indicating how he looked back and perceived that indeed he had been corrected and learned his lesson, even if it cost him his life.

Num 20:24 Aaron shall be gathered to his people; for he shall not enter into the land which I have given to the children of Israel, because you rebelled against my word at the waters of Meribah-

Disbelief in God's word (Num. 20:12) was rebellion against it. The point is made that they were wrong to address Israel as "rebels" (:10) for they were no better. Perhaps it is only in our time of dying that we fully realize our sinfulness, and that we are no better than other sinners; see on :23.

Num 20:25 Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Mount Hor-

The death of Aaron was typical of the end of the Mosaic system and priesthood, able to only bring Israel to see the Kingdom, but unable to enable them to enter it. That was the work of Joshua / Jesus. Eleazar could be seen then as the priest who replaced Aaron, and also a type of the Lord Jesus. Aaron, an apparently Egyptian name with no clear meaning and not used about any other Biblical character, was replaced by Eleazar, 'helped by God' or 'helper of God', seeing that God was ultimately Israel's saviour. The numerical value [gematria] of "Eleazar the priest" is the same as "Joshua", the Greek form of which is "Jesus".

Num 20:26 and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron shall be taken, and shall die there-

It was a sad moment, but surely these men had faith in the implication of the promises to Abraham, that they would be resurrected to eternal inheritance of the land which Moses and Aaron couldn't enter. The Hebrew phrase for stripping off garments is that earlier used of Aaron in Lev. 16:23. He was to do this during the ritual of the Day of Atonement, as if in some sense he was the priest who was dying in order to make atonement.

Num 20:27 Moses did as Yahweh commanded; and they went up into Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation-

Just as Aaron had sinned in the sight of all the congregation, so he was to die in their sight. The harsh condemnation of Moses and Aaron was evidence for all time

that sins of stress, however momentary, are felt by God and judged by Him.

Num 20:28 Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them on Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain; and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain-

The strict obedience of Moses is stressed; cp. :26 and :28. Moses' great level of obedience looked forward to that of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 3:2,5).

Num 20:29 When all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they wept for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel-

"All the house of Israel" is noted because we have been reading over the last few chapters of consistent and deep opposition to Aaron's priesthood. But the man's basic integrity made even his critics and pretenders bow their heads in respect when he died.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 21

Num 21:1 The Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the South-

This may not be in chronological order; it could be that in these chapters we have a series of conflicts with the surrounding tribes at the start of the journey. It could also be that this defeat by Arad was part of a series of defeats of those who insisted on trying to enter the land after they had been told they must wander in the wilderness for a generation. It would be as if they tried to go by the 'way of the spies' again, but how at Arad their way was finally blocked. In this case, the victory against the Canaanites of :3 would refer to a later victory against them.

Heard tell that Israel came by the way of Atharim-

Heb. 'the way of the spies'. History was being intentionally repeated, in the hope that the Israelites would learn the lesson, reflecting that they were taking the same road the spies had taken, and challenging themselves to have more faith than they did. And history likewise repeats in our lives for the same reason.

And he fought against Israel, and took some of them captive-

The promise that an obedient Israel would make their enemies flee before them was not operational here. The conclusion is surely that Israel had sinned and therefore were defeated. These words are frequently used about Israel's judgment at the hand of their enemies be-

cause of their sinfulness. All this lends weight to the conclusion that this was another attempt by Israel to enter Canaan as happened immediately after the news of their rejection (Dt. 1:44). Those rejected from the Kingdom at judgment day will likewise desperately want to be there, nobody will be passive in that day, nor shrugging their shoulders as people do today when encountering the possibility that they may not be there. The wilderness journey speaks of our lives after baptism. It's not a story of glorious victory after glorious victory. There are defeats and failures, partly from our failures, and partly because God in His wisdom knows that this too is part of our path towards the Kingdom. The initial defeat was required in order to make the people trust in Yahweh for victory (:2); and we have multiple such experiences in life.

Num 21:2 Israel vowed a vow to Yahweh, and said, If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities-

The Hebrew for "utterly destroy" means to devote. Whatever comes into our hands during our wilderness journey should be devoted to the Lord. But it was in any case a command to "utterly destroy" the Canaanites (Dt. 7:2; 12:2; 20:17). We shouldn't consider that which is our duty to do as some kind of special dedication to God which deserves His reward. But so eager is God for relationship with His people that He all the same agreed (:3).

Just as all the animals and everything in the *eretz* promised to Abraham was 'delivered into the hands' of

Noah (s.w. Gen. 9:2), so the nations of that *eretz* were delivered into the hands of Israel (s.w. Ex. 6:8; 23:31; Dt. 2:24; 3:2,3; 7:24; 21:10; Josh. 2:24; Jud. 1:2). Tragically, like Adam in Eden [perhaps the same *eretz* promised to Abraham] and Noah in the new, cleansed *eretz*, Israel didn't realize this potential. What was delivered into the hand of Joshua (Josh. 2:24) actually wasn't delivered into their hand, because they disbelieved (Jud. 2:23); and this looks ahead to the disbelief of so many in the work of the Lord Jesus, who has indeed conquered the Kingdom for us. They considered the promise of the nations being delivered into their hand as somehow open to question, and only a possibility and not at all certain (Jud. 8:7; Num. 21:2 cp. Num. 21:34). Some like Jephthah (s.w. Jud. 11:32; 12:3), Ehud (Jud. 3:10,28), Deborah (Jud. 4:14), Gideon (Jud. 7:15) did, for a brief historical moment; but as individuals, and their victories were not followed up on. Instead they were dominated by the territory. And so instead, they were delivered into the hands of their enemies within the *eretz* (s.w. Lev. 26:25; Jud. 13:1).

Num 21:3 Yahweh listened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. The name of the place was called Hormah-

Hormah means 'devoted', LXX 'Anathema'. Paul spoke of those who leave the faith as 'Anathema' (1 Cor. 16:22), but the idea was likely that we should consider even those we separate from as 'devoted' to the Lord. We do not condemn, but pass them to the Lord, in the hope

that they will finally be devoted to Him. There's a powerful logic in all this- we are to be devoted to the Lord in any case, either by condemnation or by willing devotion of ourselves to Him in this life, that we might be eternally devoted to Him. The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof- and all finally returns to Him in any case. This idea sheds light on the reference in 1 Cor. 5:5 to delivering a wrongdoer to "Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved". The idea of delivering over in Hebrew thought was understood as delivering over to God. The 'satan' may therefore refer to a Divine Angel or some other Divine agent who would attempt to work to bring back the straying sheep, that it might be saved at the end. All separation, therefore, should be in a spirit of desiring the individual's salvation, and not as an expression of our own personal anger or dislike.

Num 21:4 They travelled from Mount Hor by the way to the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom; and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way-

"Much discouraged" is Heb. 'reaped down', the same word used about how they felt in Egypt (Ex. 6:9). They adopted the same attitude they had in Egypt, ever searching for something better, and now not wanting to accept what God had planned for them, not looking at the end of their journey but just caught up in the immediacy of their daily feelings. Yet they had just had the exhilaration of having made a vow to God about the cities of Canaan, obeying it, and seeing God answer them. Before that, they had sinned (see on :1). And now, they were again discouraged and low. This is the yo-yo path

through the wilderness we all experience. It's not going to be entirely positive. They likely reasoned that God should have spared them this awful part of the journey because they had just been obedient to Him. But that's not how the path to the Kingdom is. The sequence in this chapter so far was: Disobedience- Cursing - Obedience - Blessing- Cursing. And sometimes [as in the blessing of Isaac materially after his lying about his wife] the sequence can be: Disobedience- Blessing- Blessing. There is no clear connection between obedience and immediate blessing or cursing. God sees a far wider and longer picture and perspective than we do.

Their route took them back on themselves at this point, heading back towards Egypt. This may have been the psychological trigger for their desire to be back in Egypt (:5). We must try to avoid things and situations which may stimulate a desire to leave the way to the Kingdom and return to the world.

"Because of the way" reflects how this was indeed geographically one of the worst parts of Israel's journey, through shifting sands blown by the strong sirocco winds. Only camels can survive here, so it's likely that the sheep and oxen Israel had brought from Egypt would've died at this point. And this was just immediately prior to their entry of Canaan (Num. 33:41, so this may look forward to the final tribulation for His people before the Lord's return.

There is in the Hebrew text of Jud. 10:16 something which defies translation. We read there that God was so hurt by Israel's sufferings that in sympathy with them,

"His *nephesh* ["soul"] was shortened" or expended. The phrase is used in Num. 21:4 and Jud. 16:16 about death or the diminishment of life. God's pain was such that this was how He felt, because He so internalized the sufferings of His people. And how much more in the death of His Son?

Num 21:5 The people spoke against God, and against Moses, Why have you brought us up out of Egypt-

See on Num. 20:3. Israel "chode with Moses... they strove with the Lord" (Num. 20:3,13) uses the same Hebrew word for both "chode" and "strove". To strive with Moses was to strive with the Lord- i.e. with the guardian Angel that was so closely associated with Moses? Num. 20:4 continues rather strangely with the Israelites addressing Moses in the plural: "The people chode with Moses, saying... Why have ye [you plural] brought up...". Could it be that even they recognized his partnership with God? Likewise Num. 21:5: "And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye [plural] brought us up out of Egypt to die?"

To die in the wilderness-

This was the punishment and consequence of their own sins; but we easily blame others, and even God, for the consequence of our own sins.

For there is no bread, and there is no water-

An exaggeration, because they go on to say that they hated the "light bread", the manna, which they were given. We can likewise assume we have nothing when in fact we do have God's basic provision. Likewise "no water" was surely untrue- the water from the rock followed

them (1 Cor. 10:10). But they forgot God's daily material blessings and felt they had nothing at all. For good reason should we regularly give thanks for our food and not forget that we are daily loaded with His material blessings. See on 21:16 *I will give them water*.

It would seem from Dt. 8:2,3 that Israel went hungry- because they refused to eat the manna. How God works through sin is revealed in the way that although God always provided food for Israel in the wilderness, He 'suffered them to hunger' for 40 years, in order to try to teach them that man lives not by bread alone, but by God's word (Dt. 8:2,3). The Jews in the wilderness despised the food God gave them as worthless; they went hungry not literally, but in the sense that they despised the manna of God's provision. And He allowed them to have that hunger, in order that He might [try to] teach them about the value of His word. He didn't simply punish them for their ingratitude. He sought to work through it in order to teach them something. Even the process of rejection results in the victims coming to 'know the Lord'.

And our soul loathes this light bread-

The Hebrew translated "light" is usually used in the sense of 'cursing', which in Semitic thought means to make light of a person or thing. They felt the bread was inadequate for their needs, and it was a sign of their cursing by God. So easily do men come to the same attitude towards the manna we are given in the wilderness- the word of the Lord Jesus. They accept it is given, but consider it inadequate for their needs.

Num 21:6 Yahweh sent fiery snakes among the people, and they bit the people; and many people of Israel died-

Again we find the Bible written from the perspective of how people felt at the time [hence the language of demons in the New Testament]. The fire was in the feeling of fire within the person bitten and injected with venom, which would have felt like fire. It wasn't that the snakes literally breathed fire.

This incident is interpreted in Jn. 3:14-16 as a symbol of Christ lifted up on the pole at His death; looking toward the snake is seen as faith in Him; and healing from the snake bite as eternal life. This is another reason for thinking that the 'cross' of Christ wasn't as traditionally understood; the Greek word *stauros* translated "cross" means a tree trunk or pole. The snake was a symbol of sin- but it was as it were dead in Christ. As He hung there, He was so deeply identified with our sins (despite never sinning personally) that a snake can legitimately be used as a symbol for Him there. We are in the position of the Israelites feeling the poisonous venom rising within them, knowing they had limited time left in this life, recognizing they had indeed sinned and deserved death and yet didn't wish to die. In an encampment of over three million people living in single storey dwellings, i.e. tents, it would have taken some people several kilometers walk to get to the bronze snake. To walk when you have been bitten by a snake is dangerous; you shouldn't let your heart work any more than necessary so that the venom isn't spread. So they were commanded to do that which is counter-instinctive, what is

totally against worldly wisdom and sense. Our faith in Christ is similar. But it could be that the people were told about the existence of the bronze snake, and had to look toward it in faith from where they were, believing it was there, although not seeing it. This would be similar to our faith in Christ's death. We didn't see it, there is no physical representation of it within our sight, but we look to it from far away in time, space and understanding, and believe it was there- and believe that really, 2000 years ago, on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, on a hill outside Jerusalem, it really did happen. We can imagine the relief of the people as they felt the temperature subside, the fever go; and their gratitude afterwards, their eager vowing to give their saved lives to God and not rebel again. These should be our emotions as we reflect on our salvation in Christ.

Various parts of the Bible become better understandable once we enquire about perspective. The "fiery serpents" of Num. 21:6 are not described from the perspective of observers or us as the audience- they didn't literally spit fire. They are described from the perspective of the bitten person, for whom their bite would have felt like fire. The parables especially repay helpful reflection when we read them asking ourselves 'From whose perspective is this?'. But the perspective can change in almost mid-sentence. The Lord comments on the parable of the lost sheep that there is joy in Heaven over the one who repents rather than over the "ninety nine just persons who need no repentance" (Lk. 15:7). They were *not* justified, and they also needed to repent. But the Lord

speaks from their perspective; they *thought* they were justified and without need of repentance.

Num 21:7 The people came to Moses and said, We have sinned, because we have spoken against Yahweh, and against you. Pray to Yahweh, that He take away the serpents from us. Moses prayed for the people-

The people again complain, and God punishes them with serpents; Moses' prayer for them is accepted. These prayers for others' salvation must have required intense faith and acceptability to be heard. "We have sinned... pray for us... taken away..." [the plague] is all language reminiscent of Pharaoh's dialogue with Moses. They are presented in the record as no better than Pharaoh; they had been brought out of Egypt but the spirit of Egypt remained with them. You can take a man out of Egypt but you can't always take the Egypt out of the man.

Previously in such situations, God had just accepted Moses' prayer. But now He asked the people to additionally make some personal effort to demonstrate their faith. Quickly dashing off a request for Christ's mediation in the case of sin may sometimes be met by God seeking to convict us more deeply of our sin and asking us to make some more concrete effort. But yet again we see how the power of a third party's mediation can bring about forgiveness, as in Mk. 2:5; James 5:20. This is endless encouragement to intercede for others.

Num 21:8 Yahweh said to Moses, Make a fiery snake, and set it on an ensign pole; and it shall happen, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks to it, shall live-

With the sun reflecting upon it, the bronze image would've looked like the snakes. The Lord clearly states that the serpent lifted up represented Him on the cross. But just as the crucifix has been misused and turned into a talisman, so was this brass snake in Israel's later history (2 Kings 18:4). Israel were to believe that the snake was dead- if they looked upon it in faith. Likewise the power of sin, which seems so powerful to us, is actually dead- in the crucified, human Jesus. But they had to drag themselves into sight of it, rather than trusting in family and friends or the various cures against snake bites which primitive cultures are full of. The power of the cross is foolishness to unbelievers. The serpent was a symbol of healing and good luck in the surrounding cultures, as can be seen even today in the symbol displayed by some dispensing chemists; but for God's people, starting in Gen. 3:15, the snake was to be understood as a symbol of sin and evil.

"As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up" (John 3:14). It was the serpent which gave salvation to sin-stricken Israel, not Moses; and the serpent represented Christ in this case. Moses "lifted up" the serpent in the same way as the Jews "lifted up" Christ in crucifying him (Jn. 8:28). Moses drew attention to serpent and it's power to save, in the same way as his Law drew attention to how sin would be condemned in Christ as the means of our salvation. The connection between Moses "lifting up" Christ and Israel doing likewise is another indicator of how Moses was representative of Israel (cp. Christ).

The command to look upon a snake was counter intuitive for people of that age. As in many primitive societies today, there was the belief that after a snakebite, looking upon a snake would cause death. They were told that having been bitten by a snake, they were to look upon a snake to be healed. And this is the same counter instinctive message of the cross.

Num 21:9 Moses made a snake of brass, and set it on the ensign pole; and it happened, that if a snake had bitten any man, when he looked toward the snake of brass, he lived-

Another reason for thinking the 'cross' was a stake of wood rather than a crucifix. The lifting up of Christ on the pole resulted in all men being drawn unto him (Jn. 12:32); but this is taking language from Isaiah's prophecies of how the Lord Jesus at His return would be raised up like an ensign (s.w. pole, Num. 21:9), and all people would be gathered to Him for judgment (Is. 5:26; 11:10; 18:3; 49:22; 62:10). There is evidently a connection between the Lord's lifting up on the pole / cross and gathering all men to Him, and the way in which all men will be gathered to Him at His return. His cross was a foretaste of the judgment. Our feelings before His cross *now* will be those we experience before Him at the final judgment. Jn. 3:14 uses the Greek word *semeion* for the standard / pole on which the serpent was lifted up, representing as it did the cross of Christ. But *semeion* is the word which John seven times uses to describe the sign-miracles worked by the Lord in His ministry. Interestingly, the Jewish Midrash on Num. 21:9 likewise associ-

ates the pole with something miraculous: "Moses made a serpent of brass, and set it up by a miracle. He cast it into the air and it stayed there" (Soncino translation). Surely John's point is the same as Paul's in 1 Cor. 1:22-25: the Jews want signs / miracles, but Christ crucified is the power of God, the greatest sign. And maybe this is why John alone of the Gospel writers doesn't record any miracle within the narrative of the crucifixion. The simple, actual death of Jesus was and is the greatest and most convicting sign.

There are many allusions to the serpent on the pole in John's Gospel. Take Jn. 6:40: "And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day". This is similar language to that concerning the lifted up snake, where everyone who "looked upon the serpent of brass... lived" (Num. 21:9). God's will is that we should look upon the cross, with the faith that comes from a true understanding, and accept that great salvation. This is why the cross must be central to our whole living and thinking and conception of our faith and doctrine.

Num 21:10 The children of Israel travelled, and encamped in Oboth-

Heb. 'water skins'. One wonders whether they had to take the water from the rock with them in skins; and we note the later provision of water at 21:16, as if the water in their water skins had now run out. Perhaps they were being shown that in essence they were no better than Hagar (Gen. 21:15), whose line of descent they were by

grace separate from and superior to in spiritual covenant terms. Or perhaps just as they despised the manna and wanted additional food, so they despised the water from the rock which followed them, and wanted flavoured spring water which they took with them in skins.

Num 21:11 They travelled from Oboth, and encamped at Iyeabarim, in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrise-

Iyeabarim means heaps or ruins. Perhaps now as they approached the promised land, they were being encouraged that once mighty civilizations all rise and fall, so nothing is invincible- even if at one stage it may appear that way. We too are constantly given encouragement, even if apparently obliquely, along the route of our journey towards the Kingdom.

Num 21:12 From there they travelled, and encamped in the valley of Zered-

Or, 'by the brook Zered'. This was a tiny brook that could be walked over easily without hardly getting the feet wet. The idea is that they had been unable to cross this tiny river which was seen as the boundary of the promised land- for 38 years (Dt. 2:14). The tiny brook is given such significance to demonstrate to them how easy entrance into the land really was. It seems this was when the manna and water from the rock ceased (hence the need to buy water soon afterwards, Dt. 2:28).

Num 21:13 From there they travelled, and encamped on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness, that comes out of the border of the Amorites (for the Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites)-

The Arnon river at this point is very difficult to cross. Num. 21:14 AV connects crossing the Arnon with crossing the Red Sea, so perhaps there was a similar miracle here; preparing the people to have faith that God would also bring them across the Jordan into Canaan. We continually have encouragements and situations in our journey which are preparations for the next stage. The fact Sihon had recently crossed into Canaan and conquered the area around Jericho was likewise encouragement for Israel that they could do the same.

Num 21:14 Therefore it is said in the book of the Wars of Yahweh, Vaheb in Suphah, the valleys of the Arnon-

AV "What He did in the Red Sea and at the brooks of Arnon". The suggestion could be that here was another miraculous water crossing, just as there was at the Red Sea. The essence of the Red Sea deliverance continues throughout our wilderness journey, just as the cloud of water which enveloped them at the Red Sea actually continued over them throughout the journey.

The book of the wars of Yahweh may be a book written especially by Moses for Joshua's encouragement, a kind of spiritual diary kept by the two men (Ex. 17:14-16) and continued later by Joshua (Josh. 10:13).

Num 21:15 the slope of the valleys that incline toward the dwelling of Ar, leans on the border of Moab-

This was the capital of Moab at the time (Is. 15:1). The victory here made the Moabites fear (Num. 22:3) and this led to them seeking the help of Balaam to curse Israel.

Num 21:16 From there they travelled to Beer; that is the well of which Yahweh said to Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water-

This would suggest that they did not have provision of water continually, or that the water and manna ended when they reached Zered; see on :12; Dt. 2:14. And yet 1 Cor. 10:10 seems to say that water from the rock followed them. Perhaps it was that they did have water but wanted more, or fresher, cooler water- see on :5. Or maybe they had to ask for water, or the flow of water from the rock which "followed them" did at times dry up?

Num 21:17 Then sang Israel this song: Spring up, O well; sing to it:-

Marvin Vincent [*Vincent's Word Studies*] comments: "Paul appears to recall a rabbinic tradition that there was a well formed out of the spring in Horeb, which gathered itself up into a rock like a swarm of bees, and followed the people for forty years; sometimes rolling itself, sometimes carried by Miriam, and always addressed by the elders, when they encamped, with the words, "Spring up, O well!" (Num. 21:17)". Whether this is true or not, Paul is alluding to this idea in 1 Cor. 10:10- hence the rather awkward idiom to non-Jewish readers.

Num 21:18 the well, which the princes dug, which the nobles of the people dug-

Digging was not usually for princes, so perhaps the idea is that the princes did the work which usually only manual workers did. We recall how the man in the parable was ashamed to dig, as it was the lowest work (Lk.

16:3). Perhaps this song was sung or chanted during the digging work. It has a rhythmic quality to it.

With the sceptre-

Or, "by the direction of the lawgiver", Moses.

And with their poles. From the wilderness they travelled to Mattanah- Moses had used his staff to strike the rocks previously in order to get water. The association between staves and the provision of water continues, but the idea is that the elders were being trained up to take over from Moses; and he lead them in this process. Thus God provided water for Israel in various ways, and the variation in His methods was in order to try to instruct them. His ways likewise vary in the way He leads and provides for us.

It's worth noting that a group of men would not in practice dig a well with poles or scepters. These are not digging instruments. The idea may just be that these men, princes who were not manual labourers, used what they had, and all the same it was blessed by God and water was found- encouragement for white collar workers who feel that they are hopelessly inadequate at practical service for their Lord. Or it could be that we are intended to make the fairly obvious connection between those poles / scepters and the divining rods used to locate water and sink wells. Many desert peoples had pagan ideas about how to locate water, and it could be in this case that God worked through the pagan ideas- just as He did with Jacob through the myths relating to animal conception before rods.

Num 21:19 and from Mattanah to Nahaliel; and from Nahaliel to Bamoth-

From the 'valley / streams of God' to Bamoth, 'the high places'. Probably Bamoth-Baal (Num. 22:41; Josh. 13:17), which is mentioned on the Moabite stone.

Num 21:20 and from Bamoth to the valley that is in the field of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which looks down on the desert-

Literally, "the Pisgah". This "seems to have been the name applied to the broken edge of the Moabite plateau where it falls steeply to the Dead Sea and the Jordan valley; and 'the top, or head, of the Pisgah' (Num. 23:14, Dt. 3:27; 34:1) is a collective term for the projections or promontories slightly lower than the main plateau.

Num 21:21 Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, saying-

This situation repeats that in Num. 20 with Edom. But the outcome was different- they did fight with the Amorites, whereas they didn't with Edom. On our wilderness journey we likewise find situations repeating, to reinforce lessons and give us a chance to practice what we have learned. But the outcome of the situations is often different each time.

Num 21:22 Let me pass through your land. We will not turn aside into field, or into vineyard; we will not drink of the water of the wells; we will go by the king's highway, until we have passed your border-

Their confidence that they didn't need any water was because the water from the rock was following them (1 Cor. 10:4). This points up Moses' lack of faith in Num.

20:10,11 that the rock in question could give water. We see how even in the best of us like Moses, faith can go up and down very quickly. But the water may have finished at Zered (see on :12); but it seems the sequence of events recorded here is not strictly chronological.

Their promises to Edom and the Amorites to march only along a highway and not spill over it (Num. 20:17; 21:22) is unrealistic if they had such huge numbers as implied if we read the 600 thousands of Ex. 12:37 literally. A figure of 600 family units leaving Egypt is more realistic; otherwise we start to wonder how ever all the Israelites, millions of them, came to be in one place at one time on Passover night. The Hebrew word translated as "thousand" can mean a family, or some other administrative division. Many of the 'number problems' in the Hebrew Bible are only really resolvable using this approach. And that may be in view in the census of Israel taken in Num. 1, and in the statement that six hundred 'thousands' of footmen left Egypt (Ex. 12:37). The census of Num. 1 gives figures such as those in Num. 1:21 for Reuben, which could be rendered: "forty six families ['thousands'] and five hundred (men)". Although a "hundred" might also refer to an administrative division. The total in Num. 1 would then be 598 families with a total of 5550 men. The sum given in the second census in Num. 26 comes out as roughly the same, with 596 families amounting to 5730 men. On this basis, the total population (including women and children) would be anything between 20,000 to 40,000. This would enable us to make better sense of the statements that Israel

were the smallest numerically of all the surrounding peoples (Dt. 7:1,7; 11:23; 20:1). If we insist upon taking "thousand" literally in Ex. 12:37, then 600,000 male foot soldiers would imply a total population of between two and six million. The population density would have been intense, and far greater than that of many modern nations. Estimates of global population at the time suggest it was only about 40 million, and the population of Egypt was a maximum of three million (probably far less). If the Israelites were smaller than the other nations, and they numbered say 5 million, then the total population of the seven peoples of Canaan would have been at least 40 million. The territory of Canaan could not have supported such numbers. Only 70 Israelites came into Egypt with Jacob. Expansion over 430 years to several million is not realistic. This approach helps us better understand how all the men of war marched around Jericho (Josh. 6:3). If there were literally 600,000 men then the city would have had to be many kilometers in circumference for them all to march around it seven times in one day. Archaeological evidence from Jericho simply doesn't support the idea of such a vast city. If Israel numbered say 5 million people, and recall there was also a "mixed multitude" with them, then if they marched 10 abreast this would require a column stretching around 1000 kilometers.

Num 21:23 Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his border; but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness, and came to Jahaz; and he fought against Israel-

"Jahaz" is the word for 'threshing floor,' and suggests the victory was therefore a foretaste of judgment upon the tribes opposing Israel. But they could have avoided that condemnation- for peace was offered to them first (:26).

Num 21:24 Israel struck him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from the Arnon to the Jab-bok, even to the children of Ammon; for the border of the children of Ammon was strong-

Israel had first asked to pass through Sihon's territory in peace. But Dt. 2:24 commanded: "Rise up, take your journey and pass over the valley of the Arnon. Behold, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite king of Heshbon and his land; begin to possess it and contend with him in battle". The implication could be that Moses was disobedient to this and tried to avoid confrontation with him (Dt. 2:27). But we can't ultimately avoid the confrontations which God at times puts in our path (Dt. 2:32). Moses seems to express his own weakness in his final speeches to Israel in Deuteronomy. He recalls how even towards the end of the wilderness journey, God told him to contend with Sihon in battle (Dt. 2:24); and yet Moses admits: "I sent messengers out of the wilderness of Kedemoth unto Sihon king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying, Let me pass through thy land: I will go along by the highway, I will turn neither unto the right hand nor to the left. Thou shalt sell me food for money, that I may eat; and give me water for money, that I may drink: only let me pass through on my feet" (Dt. 2:26-28). And yet God by

grace to Moses hardened Sihon's heart so that there was a battle in which, again by grace, he gave Israel victory. "Was strong" is LXX "at Jazer".

Num 21:25 Israel took all these cities; and Israel lived in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all its towns-

This would have been Israel's first experience of major battle, victory and possession of conquered cities. It was in order to encourage them that the opposition in Canaan would likewise crumble before them. We continually sense His hand working to educate us in the path of faith.

Num 21:26 For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even to the Arnon-

Again this was encouragement to Israel, even on a subliminal level, that conquest of others' territory was possible. And they had Yahweh behind them. Constantly we are encouraged that inheritance of the Kingdom is really possible. The events of this time were to become a point of contention with the Ammonites in Jud. 11:13-19. Jephthah's response reflected a fluent knowledge of these verses now before us. This man who had to make a living as a highwayman and robber, the son of a whore who had been rejected by his father's sons, had turned to the scriptures because of his experiences. We cannot judge people. We simply don't know who deep down is searching for God, nor what thief or lowlife is secretly reading the Bible on their phone

Num 21:27 Therefore those who speak in proverbs say, Come to Heshbon. Let the city of Sihon be built and established-

I suggest that all the verbs in the following song should be read in the past tense. It is a taunt song by the Israelites, as if "Why do you not come and rebuild your fallen capital, for you shewed prowess enough in the past when you conquered Moab!".

Num 21:28 for a fire has gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon. It has devoured Ar of Moab, The lords of the high places of the Arnon-

This taunt song, about what Sihon had done to Moab, is pretty much quoted in Jer. 48:45. But it is there quoted as a prophecy about what would happen to Moab again at the last day, when the Lord Jesus as the "star out of Jacob" will destroy the latter day equivalent of Moab, and any Jews who have taken refuge with her. It is mixed together with the prophecy of Num. 24:17. We have an example here of how God's word is reused, reapplied and reinterpreted by Him over time. This is why many quotations of the Old Testament in the New Testament are apparently cited in a context which is out of step with their original context.

Num 21:29 Woe to you, Moab! You are undone, people of Chemosh! He has given his sons as fugitives, and his daughters into captivity, to Sihon king of the Amorites-

This taunt song mocks Chemosh, god of the Moabites; but that same god was called Molech by the Ammonites. Yet Israel carried the tabernacle of Moloch / Chemosh with them on their wilderness journeys

(Acts 7:43), and it seems continued worshipping this god even once settled in Canaan. So we can take a powerful contemporary lesson: we may sing [even with great zest] words in hymns and worship songs, which in our personal lives we deny. And live exactly the opposite to. For this is what Israel were doing at this point.

Num 21:30 We have shot at them. Heshbon has perished even to Dibon. We have laid waste even to Nophah, which reaches to Medeba-

LXX "And their seed shall perish from Esebon to Daebon; and their women have yet farther kindled a fire against Moab". The idea was that 'even' women won victories against Moab. Or "we have wasted even unto Nophah- with fire unto Medeba". Again this was encouragement to Israel, even on a subliminal level, that conquest of others' territory was possible. And they had Yahweh behind them. Constantly we too are encouraged that inheritance of the Kingdom is really possible.

Num 21:31 Thus Israel lived in the land of the Amorites-

All this happened quite soon before the conquest of Canaan. Even on our wilderness journey, before we have possessed the Kingdom, we do have some foretastes of that Kingdom; in the same way as Israel began to possess the promised land in some limited sense whilst still in the desert.

Num 21:32 Moses sent to spy out Jazer; and they took its towns, and drove out the Amorites who were there-

"Drive out" is s.w. "possess". We must note the difference between the Canaanite peoples and their kings be-

ing "struck" and their land "taken" by Joshua-Jesus; and the people of Israel permanently taking possession. This is the difference between the Lord's victory on the cross, and our taking possession of the Kingdom. Even though that possession has been "given" to us. The word used for "possession" is literally 'an inheritance'. The allusion is to the people, like us, being the seed of Abraham. The Kingdom was and is our possession, our inheritance- if we walk in the steps of Abraham. But it is one thing to be the seed of Abraham, another to take possession of the inheritance; and Israel generally did not take possession of all the land (Josh. 11:23 13:1; 16:10; 18:3; 23:4). The language of inheritance / possession is applied to us in the New Testament (Eph. 1:11,14; Col. 3:24; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Pet. 1:4 etc.). Israel were promised: "You shall possess it" (Dt. 30:5; 33:23). This was more of a command than a prophecy, for sadly they were "given" the land but did not "possess" it. They were constantly encouraged in the wilderness that they were on the path to possessing the land (Dt. 30:16,18; 31:3,13; 32:47), but when they got there they didn't possess it fully.

Num 21:33 They turned and went up by the way of Bashan; and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei-

As noted on Dt. 3:4,10, some of the places they had known in their wilderness journeys (cp. our life now after baptism, which is like crossing the Red Sea, 1 Cor. 10:1,2) were revisited and taken by Joshua (Josh. 12:4), and incorporated into God's Kingdom. Perhaps situa-

tions and places we know in this life will then become eternally ours when we possess them in God's Kingdom.

Og lived in Ashtaroth (Dt. 1:4). Ashtaroth was the name of one of the deities which the surrounding tribes worshipped; Edrei means "strength". The message is that the apparent strength of the idols and those who trusted in them had been overcome. And having won victories which were foretastes of those Israel would win in Canaan, Moses now urges the people to go forward in faith. In Yahweh's strength, they could overcome the idol worshipping tribes, despite their apparent strength. But Israel still kept those idols with them.

Num 21:34 Yahweh said to Moses, Don't fear him; for I have delivered him into your hand, and all his people, and his land; and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon-

Fear is always the antithesis of faith. God is often called an "awesome God" (Dt. 7:21 etc.). The Hebrew word for "awesome" is that for 'fear' (s.w. Gen. 3:10; 15:1; 18:15 etc.). The idea is that God's people are to be in such fear / awe of Him that they fear / are in awe of nothing else. Hence Dt. 7:21 says that Israel should "not be scared of" their enemies, because their God is "awesome", He is the one to be feared.

Moses seems to have appreciated fully his representative role when he addressed Israel: "The Lord said unto me... I will deliver [Og] into thy [singular] hand... so the Lord our God delivered into *our* hands Og" (Dt. 3:2,3). David recognized this unity between Moses and Israel; David describes both Israel and Moses as God's chosen

(Ps. 16:5,23). All these things looked forward to our victory on account of being "in" Christ; through baptism, and then through a life lived in Him and in identity with Him.

Num 21:35 So they struck him, and his sons and all his people, until there was none left him remaining; and they possessed his land-

Yet Israel presumably moved on from this land. We too have some foretaste of the possession of the Kingdom in this life, but the full literal fulfilment of it all is yet future. These victories were surely to develop the faith of the Israelites and to show them that military conquest of the promised land was far from impossible for them.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 22

Num 22:1 The children of Israel travelled, and encamped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho-

To describe the Israelite encampment as beyond Jordan implies the author is west of Jordan. Moses' writing here may well have been edited under inspiration later.

Num 22:2 Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites-

"Zippor" is the male form of Zipporah, the wife of Moses, who was also from Midian. It seems Balak was a Midianite who was asked to become king of Moab, who had been left weakened by their conflicts with the Amorites. Balak knew Balaam, and we can deduce that Balaam may have picked up his knowledge of Yahweh from Moses whilst Moses lived in Midian married to Zipporah. Who may even have been Balak's sister.

Num 22:3 Moab was very afraid of the people, because they were many; and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel-

The fear of the tribes surrounding Israel is stressed in the record, yet Israel were so fearful of *them*. The obstacles to our inheriting the Kingdom aren't as insurmountable as they appear.

Num 22:4 Moab said to the elders of Midian, Now this multitude will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field-

God had specifically told Moses not to fight with Moab (Dt. 2:9), and I have suggested on :2 that there

was some contact between Balak and Moses. When Israel passed along the highways, they had been careful not stray from the route and had not drunk from the wells of those whom they passed through. Moab need have had no fear that Israel would lick up all around. It was only those who came out against Israel in battle who had been defeated, and Balak would have been wiser to learn from this. But God gave them according to their fears by saying He would make Israel like a powerful ox (Num. 23:22).

Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time-
"Was king of Moab" supports the idea that Balak was a Midianite who was ruling Moab "at that time".

Num 22:5 He sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, to Pethor, which is by the River, to the land of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people who came out from Egypt. Behold, they cover the surface of the earth, and they are staying opposite me-

LXX "to Phathura, which is on a river of the land of the sons of his people". Balak was a Midianite elder who was now appointed king of Moab; see on :2. He sends for Balaam whom he knew from Midian. Moses had also lived in Midian, for 40 years, and his estranged wife was there. So he figures Balaam was the best positioned to curse the people of Moses.

Num 22:6 Please come now therefore and curse this people for me; for they are too mighty for me. Perhaps I shall prevail, that we may strike them, and that I may drive them out of the land-

The path of Israel was clear- they were not seeking to antagonize anyone, were careful to not stray from the highway, promised not to eat food or drink well water without paying for it; and had only fought with those who attacked them. Balak would have been far better not to let fear so dominate him, but rather to believe that it was Canaan who needed to fear Israel- and not himself. As so often happens, it was fear which led to unwise decisions which were to his damnation.

For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed-

This is so similar in wording to the promise of Yahweh's blessing upon Israel and cursing of those who curse them. It sets up a great standoff- between the word of Yahweh and the word of Balaam. Yahweh says He will curse whoever curses Israel. And Balak wants Balaam to curse Israel- and risk being cursed by Yahweh. That Balaam so earnestly wants to risk doing this reflects the depth of his love of wealth (Jude 11).

Num 22:7 The elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards for the divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam, and spoke to him the words of Balak-

The simple lesson is that God's blessing is one of those things which money can't buy. The zoom of the Divine cameraman is close up- we see these men leaving with bags of precious stones, gold etc. in their hands. Although LXX "their divining instruments were in their hands".

Num 22:8 He said to them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as Yahweh shall speak to me. The princes of Moab stayed with Balaam-

He should surely have immediately sent them away. He knew that whoever cursed Abraham's seed would be cursed, and had had experience of this (:6; Gen. 12:3). The longer we keep the possibility of sinning before us, the more likely it is that we shall fall into it. As we read the Biblical narratives, we are invited by the nature of the text to ask questions such as "What should he have said / done at this point?". And this is a clear example.

Num 22:9 God came to Balaam and said, Who are these men with you?-

God knew. It was a rhetorical question, designed to make Balaam reflect that here in his home he had the enemies of God's people. To invite someone to stay was an act of fellowship- with those who wanted him to curse Israel. Knowing that whoever cursed Israel would be cursed by Yahweh. God likewise at times makes us stop and think, sometimes making us put into words out loud the situation we are really in.

This is the same question in the same context given to Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20:14. He failed to see the similarity and learn the lesson. Both men were flattered that a king had sent messengers to him. They valued standing before men more than standing before God. Likewise he failed to see the similarities between himself and Jacob, on the same journey, meeting an Angel etc.

Num 22:10 Balaam said to God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has said to me-

"God" is clearly God's representative in an Angel or prophet. The one who functions as God can be spoken of as God, but this doesn't mean they are God Himself; and of course this applies especially to the Lord Jesus. Failure to understand this has led to so much misunderstanding of Him, and the false doctrine of the Trinity.

Num 22:11 'Behold, the people that has come out of Egypt, it covers the surface of the earth. Now, come curse me them; perhaps I shall be able to fight against them, and shall drive them out'

Dt. 5 says that Balaam's request for a curse wasn't answered by God because He so loved Israel; and his curse was turned by God into a blessing. But here in Num. 22, Balaam simply states what Balak has told him. He asks for nothing. But we don't need to specifically verbalize requests in order for God to perceive the request. God's answer in :12 reflects how He perceived this apparent statement as in fact a request for permission to go with the men and curse Israel. God reads our attitudes as prayers, and sees the requests implicit in our words. "I, even I only am left" was Elijah's cry to God as he realized the depth of Israel's apostasy (1 Kings 19:10). But this was interpreted by God as a prayer for God to condemn Israel (Rom. 11:2,3). God read what was in Elijah's heart, and counted this as his prayer. Elijah prayed to God against Israel when he told Him that he alone was left faithful- i.e. he was asking God to destroy the nation now. Our essential feelings are read by the Father as prayers.

Balaam alters Balak's words to try to make the request not include cursing. But he shows a pathetic failure to accept that God sees and knows all. Balaam changes Balak's "a people" to "the people" when he tells God what Balak had said. This is a tacit recognition that he understood Israel to be the sole people of Yahweh .

Num 22:12 God said to Balaam, You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people; for they are blessed-

When Balaam was determined to curse Israel, the spirit of God made him speak out a blessing on them instead (Num. 24:1-13 cf. Dt. 23:5). He could not 'escape from' God's word (Num. 22:12 Heb.). Jude says that he intended to write a letter about a totally different theme to the one he ended up writing about, because "I was constrained to write..." (Jude 3 RV)- by the Holy Spirit inspiring him.

Num 22:13 Balaam rose up in the morning, and said to the princes of Balak, Go to your land; for Yahweh refuses to permit me to go with you-

There's a hint of resentment against God here; and Balaam should've told them direct that he was not going to curse God's people. It's rather like us excusing ourselves from doing something sinful by telling people that our "stupid religion" doesn't allow it- rather than personally identifying ourselves with the reason why we will not do it.

"To go with you" may have been said by Balaam with the emphasis on "you". Because Balak's response is to send more powerful princes with greater offers of reward. Perhaps Balaam spun the prohibition to go with

them into "I cannot go with you" lesser princes. We have an insight here into how many seek to wriggle around God's word, to support what they would like to be true.

Num 22:14 The princes of Moab rose up, and they went to Balak, and said, Balaam refuses to come with us-

The repetition of "rose up" in :13,14 may be to hint that in fact Balaam and the princes were of one heart together, despite Balaam's negative response.

Num 22:15 Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they-

We see here the desperate power of man's religious need; by absolutely all means, Balak wanted to have a 'man of God' blessing him and cursing his enemies. Deuteronomy says Balaam was called from Mesopotamia- a 400 mile journey each way.

Num 22:16 They came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, 'Please let nothing hinder you from coming to me-

"Hinder" is the word used in Num. 24:11 for how "Yahweh has kept you back [s.w.] from honour". Repeatedly, God is the one who hinders or keeps back (Gen. 30:2; 1 Sam. 25:26,34; Neh. 9:20 etc.). Balak seems to be effectively saying 'Don't let Yahweh hinder you'. Balak recognizes that it was Yahweh and not Balaam who had hindered, and his words are really a lament that Yahweh had kept back Balaam. He knew that Balaam was eager for it. "Don't let your God / religion stop you..." is the call of temptation which the world makes to God's people of every generation. And heeding it is to go in the way of Balaam.

Num 22:17 for I will promote you to very great honour, and whatever you say to me I will do. Please come therefore, and curse this people for me'-

But Balaam was aware that he could only *do* according to what God *said* (Num. 23:26). Balak says that whatever Balaam *says*, he will *do* (Num. 22:17). He is therefore inviting Balaam to play God, to give words of command to be obeyed, to receive the greatest honour / glory, and to be the ultimate source of blessing and cursing for Israel and the nations. This temptation to play God was at the root of the situation in the garden of Eden, and it continues to be at the root of all temptation.

Num 22:18 Balaam answered the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I can't go beyond the word of Yahweh my God, to do less or more-

The term Yahweh occurs 13 times in the Balaam story; even Balak uses it in asking Balaam to get Yahweh to curse His people. "Yahweh my God" indicates that Balaam was a prophet of Yahweh and considered Yahweh his God. His behaviour therefore is all the more reprehensible. But in the very similar statement Balaam makes in Num. 24:13 he omits reference to Yahweh as "my God". Balaam knew that when Divine words of prophecy came to him, he had to speak them out, and could not add to or diminish from them (Num. 22:18) nor add any good or bad to them according to what was in his own mind (Num. 24:13). This is all a helpful insight into what it meant for a prophet to be Divinely inspired. The words they uttered were from God and were not their

own opinions at all. For Balaam would dearly loved to have cursed Israel and not to have uttered the words of blessing which he did.

Literally, I cannot transgress the word. Perhaps he felt that he had no concept nor possibility of personal sin because he was speaking God's word.

Num 22:19 Now therefore, please wait also here this night, that I may know what Yahweh will speak to me more-

Clearly Balaam wanted to go with them, because he loved the idea of getting the promised wealth (2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11). If he had sent them away immediately, the spiritual crisis would've passed. And that is what he should have done. Any idea of cursing God's people, when God had made it clear to Abraham that he would curse whoever cursed them, should have been unthinkable to Balaam. But instead, God confirmed Balaam in the sinful way he wished to go- for He now permitted Balaam to go with them, but to only speak His word (:20). By going with them- and it was a very long journey- Balaam was going deeper into temptation. This is an example of how whilst the process of temptation is internal (James 1:13-15), God can lead sinful people further into situations of temptation if this is what they wish in their hearts. Hence we should pray that God will not lead *us* into temptation (Mt. 6:13). Hence God was angry with Balaam because he went (:22), even though God told him to go (:20)- God led him further into temptation, but was angered that Balaam went that way.

It's rather like the Father giving the prodigal son the things he asked for.

Num 22:20 God came to Balaam at night, and said to him, If the men have come to call you, rise up, go with them; but only the word which I speak to you, that you shall do-

Balak sent a messenger to ask Balaam to come to him. Balaam asked God whether he should go. The answer was that he should not go. Then the messenger came again; and this time, God told Balaam to go with them, but only to speak God's word. It was as if God was pushing Balaam down the road to spiritual ruin. The end result of Balaam meeting Balak was that he advised Balak to make Israel sin with his women, which would mean that God would curse Israel. And for this Balaam was condemned. If Balaam had not gone with the messengers in the first place, he would not have fallen into this sin. But God told him to go with them (Num. 22:20).

Num 22:21 Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his donkey, and went with the princes of Moab-

Balaam was told to go with the elders of Moab, but only speak God's word. He was told to go (:20) but God was angry that he did (:22). The intention was that he fall down and repent, and refuse to go with them. But he went with them, ostensibly in obedience to God's word of command which was leading him to self destruction. The rebels in Num. 16:6 were in a similar position. They were told to take censers and offer incense, which was exactly how Nadab and Abihu were slain (Lev. 10:2). So

this was the kind of leading into temptation which we are to pray shall not happen to us (Mt. 6:13). Their path to repentance was being offered to them, but the consequences of refusing it were now higher. The intended response was 'No. We give in. To offer incense like that and come near to the incense altar in the holy place is not for us. We would rightly be slain for doing so. So, we give in and retreat from our position'. But human pride was in the way. And they took up the offer, leading to their justifiable destruction. For by knowingly doing what they knew would lead to destruction, they were committing the sin of presumption which forms a context to that account (Num. 15:30,31). The command to "put fire in them" was because they had "gone too far" (Num. 16:7). So that they were being led down the path to destruction, unless they dropped everything and repented. God likewise works with people today.

The detail that he rose and saddled his donkey is the cameraman of Divine inspiration zooming in close. We see him going forth on a path that he had been warned not to. The text is clearly quoting Gen. 22:3 where Abraham arises, saddles his ass, and goes on a journey of obedience. Also with two servants, as Balaam did (:21,22). Again, an Angel and a sword are to feature in it. Although Balaam was also from Mesopotamia as was Abraham, he is set up as the very inverse of Abraham's seed.

Num 22:22 God's anger was kindled because he went; and the angel of Yahweh placed himself in the way for an

adversary against him. Now he was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him-

The Hebrew word for adversary is “satan”. Good people, Angels, even God Himself, can be ‘satans’ or adversaries. ‘Satan’ carries no bad connotation of itself as a word; it has been loaded with this meaning by the wrong idea that there is a personal ‘satan’ out in the cosmos who is in radical opposition to God. This isn’t a Biblical idea. The wicked Balaam was opposed by an Angel of God, who stood in the walled path as an adversary, or *Satan* to him, so that his donkey couldn’t pass by (Num. 22:22). This shows that a good being can act as a Satan to a person. Interestingly, the Septuagint translates this with the word *endiaballein*, ‘to set something across one’s path’; a *diabolos* is a person who performs this act. The same idea repeats in the New Testament, where Peter is described by Jesus as a stumbling block across His path to the cross, and thus Peter is a ‘Satan’ (Mt. 16:23).

Num 22:23 The donkey saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the way, with his sword drawn in his hand; and the donkey turned aside out of the way, and went into the field. Balaam struck the donkey, to turn her into the way-

The two times Balaam faces the Angel, albeit unknowingly, refer to the two times that Balak’s messengers had come to him. Balaam didn’t see God in it all; and he was angry with the donkey for perceiving God in a situation where he himself couldn’t perceive God. The triple meetings of the Angel with Balaam may reflect how God deals with those who go against His word. The first en-

counter blocks their path, but gives them an option to pass around the blockage, in Balaam's case, through the field. There is no pain, just some inconvenience and frustration. Then if the path continues, there is a blockage of the way which causes personal pain- Balaam's foot crushed against the wall. And if the person still continues, then there is the meeting with God in condemnation, where there is no way to turn. And Balaam was saved from that by grace alone.

Balaam was finally slain with a sword, Num. 31:8; Josh. 13:22. But God's patience in warning him ahead of time was amazing.

Num 22:24 Then the angel of Yahweh stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side-

Num. 22:22 describes how an Angel of God stood in a narrow, walled path before Balaam, so that his donkey fell down beneath him. That Angel is described as a "satan", an adversary, to Balaam. Job comments how the sufferings which the 'Satan' brought upon him were God 'walling up my way that I cannot pass' (Job 19:8). The connection is clear- and surely indicates that Job's satan was a satan-Angel, acting as an adversary to Job just as such an Angel did to Balaam. See on Job 1:6. Job and Balaam have certain similarities- both were prophets (in Job's case see Job 4:4; 23:12; 29:4 cp. 15:8; Amos 3:7; James 5:10,11); both had genuine difficulty in understanding God's ways, but they to varying degrees consciously rebelled against what they did understand; both thus became angry with God (in the Angel), and were

reproved by God through being brought to consider the Angel-controlled natural creation. What happened at this point was what later happened to Judah (Hos. 2:6), and like Balaam they insisted on pressing on when God had closed in their path. For the significance of the path through the vineyards, see on :26.

In these three encounters, the Angel as it were retreats ["went forward" in :26 really means 'he proceeded to...' rather than being a statement of moving physically forward]. And so in a sense does God, in desperate attempts to bring us to our senses, seeking not to hurt us, but often having to put us in a position where we can't go forward further.

Num 22:25 The donkey saw the angel of Yahweh, and she thrust herself to the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall; and he struck her again-

It would seem that the natural creation may see the Angels when they are invisible to us- thus Balaam's donkey saw the Angel standing in the way and was too frightened by the realness of it to go further (Num. 22:25). This was to teach Balaam that he ought to have seen the Angelic presence at work without having his eyes specially opened to see the Angel, in the same way as the ass didn't need it's eyes opened to see the Angel.

"Crushed" is the word used throughout the Pentateuch for the 'oppression' of Israel in Egypt, and most of the other occurrences speak of Israel's oppression by the Gentiles. Balaam was representative of Israel, going against what God wanted, and being oppressed /

crushed in order that they might stop in their tracks and repent. But they generally refused.

Num. 23:3 [Hebrew] describes Balaam as lame or limping. Presumably from this incident. He was following the path of Jacob returning to Canaan from the east, who likewise met an Angel and became lame. But Balaam failed to learn from this precedent and refused to humble himself and resign his hope for material blessings as Jacob had done.

Num 22:26 The angel of Yahweh went further, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left-

The New Testament describes Balaam as rushing headlong on this journey, running greedily for the money (Jude 11), in “madness” (2 Pet. 2:15). This is the effect which the hope of wealth can have upon people. Finally God brings people to confrontation with Him, when there is no possibility of avoiding the issues. The very same phrase for not turning aside to the right nor left has just been used about Israel's path towards Canaan, also passing through vineyards as Balaam did in :24 (Num. 20:17; 21:22). Clearly Balaam is being set up as representative of Israel, who also had an Angel involved with them on their journey. The intention of their being closed in on their path was that they would not turn to the right nor left before God, and that figure is used to describe apostacy.

If he could not go forward nor turn to either side, the only way out was back. But Balaam urged the donkey forward. He was intended to turn back, but his words to

the Angel showed only half hearted commitment to this option. He refused to repent and so he was told to go forward.

Num 22:27 The donkey saw the angel of Yahweh, and she lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff-

This suggests association with Moses in anger wrongly striking the rock, leading to his condemnation. A donkey laying down is the very phrase used in Ex. 23:5 of a donkey collapsing under a burden too heavy for it, imposed by a cruel master. The donkey collapsed under the weight of Balaam's refusal to stop and turn back.

Num 22:28 Yahweh opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?-

The Angel repeats these words in :32, asking why Balaam smote the donkey three times. This was to show that the donkey was speaking from God. Why had he beaten the donkey? Because he was spiritually blind. So he should not claim to have any special spiritual revelation from God. This was a call for humility. But instead he madly continues, hoping he can somehow get a word from Yahweh to curse Israel. The fury of Balaam with the donkey, because he three times sees what he doesn't, is the fury of Balak with Balaam when he obstinately [apparently] blesses Israel rather than curses them, because his eyes have been opened. But additionally, Balaam's anger was kindled with the donkey (:27) just as God's anger had been with Balaam(:22). Again Balaam is being identified with the donkey. Both Balaam and the

donkey are inspired with God's word [the Angel repeats these words in :32, asking why Balaam smote the donkey three times]. Again Balaam is being asked to identify with the donkey; he refuses to at this point, but he has to see the similarity in the end. "Balak said to Balaam, What have you done to me?" (Num. 23:11), reflecting the words of the donkey to Balaam "What have I done to you?" (Num. 22:28). Again Balaam is being led to see himself as the donkey he had so despised. The Hebrew word for "struck" is that used in Num. 22:6 "that we may strike them". Balaam is being shown that any attempt to strike Israel was as foolish as his striking of his donkey. But he refuses to 'get it' because he is obsessed by the scent of wealth if he can in fact curse Israel so that Moab strikes them.

2 Pet. 2:16 comments: "But he was rebuked for his own transgression: a dumb ass spoke with a man's voice and hindered the madness of the prophet". Peter was unafraid to rebuke the high flying intellectuals who were wrecking the first century ecclesia. He likens his rebuke of them to the "dumb ass speaking with man's voice" which rebuked Balaam. This was what he chose to identify himself with; that inspired donkey. There was no great trained intellect in Peter; yet his zeal for God's word puts us to shame. As the time of the end progresses, it seems that more and more of Christ's church (in the Western world) are educated people. In this I see a tremendous danger. A man who could probably not read, who probably wrote his inspired letters by dictation because he couldn't write himself, had a zeal for un-

derstanding which puts us to shame. Paul correctly made the point (and who more aware that his intellectuality could run away with him than Paul) that God has chosen the weak things to confound the mighty; He has chosen the simple of this world to confound the wise (1 Cor. 1 and 2). I get some kind of intuitive feeling that Paul had Peter at the back of his mind as he wrote this letter to working class Corinth (1 Cor. 1:26). The deep mutual respect between theologian Paul and fisherman Peter is a real working model for our ecclesias.

The dumb ass was speaking God's word. But that word was spoken in order to save Balaam from destruction at the hand of the Angel who stood in front of him. We see here God's justice and grace working together. God made the Angel go out to kill Balaam; and made the ass speak to Balaam and collapse beneath him so that this didn't happen. It's rather like the Angel of death going out to destroy all the firstborn on Passover night, including that of the Israelites; but turning away from the houses over which the Passover Angel hovered. Thus one Angel delivered people from another Angel. There is no contradiction here; rather an insight into the careful balance within all God's operations with men. He doesn't simply operate on auto-pilot.

The donkey resisted three times, but so far Balaam has resisted God only twice. But we will go on to read that Balaam three times gives oracles which he hoped would be against Israel- if we read Numbers 24 as just one oracle [Balak laments that Balaam has blessed Israel three times]. The hope was that Balaam would look back

and perceive that he had three times resisted God, just as he had done when riding his donkey against the Angel with drawn sword. The legendary stubbornness of the donkey, which Balaam despised, was to be understood as the stubborn obedience to God's will which He asks of His people. All that Balaam despised in the donkey was actually how he should have been behaving spiritually.

Num 22:29 Balaam said to the donkey, Because you have mocked me, I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would have killed you-

Moments later, Balaam sees the Angel with a sword in his hand, thinking of killing him, but refraining by grace. God was trying to teach Balaam that He is indeed gracious, far more than Balaam was. But Balaam was so madly obsessed with trying to obtain more material wealth, even though he had servants and donkeys and a house fit to entertain princes, that he paid no attention to things like God's grace and hand in his life.

Num 22:30 The donkey said to Balaam, Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden all your life long to this day? Was I ever in the habit of doing so to you? He said, No-

The donkey had not literally carried Balaam all his life, as donkeys don't have such long life spans. Balaam was clearly intended to see a similarity between his God and his donkey, who had faithfully been there for him all his life long, and had never been unreasonable to him. The humility of God was not ashamed to compare Himself to the humble beast of burden, ridden, used and abused by His people. "Was I ever in the habit of doing

so to you?" is LXX "did I ever do thus to thee, utterly disregarding thee?". Balaam was so blinded by his desire for wealth that he disregarded his donkey, his God, his people and even the Angel clearly opposing him. This is the power of human desire for wealth.

Num 22:31 Then Yahweh opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the way, with his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed his head, and fell on his face-

His eyes were opened to the Angel blocking his way, and when he realized how he had closed his spiritual vision to the Angel trying to stop him going to Balak, he fell down on his face. But when he is later given a vision of Balak's judgment, the vision which Balaam didn't want to see, he describes himself as "the man whose eye was closed" and yet had to see the vision with his eyes open (Num. 24:3,4 RV). He didn't learn the lesson. He closed his eyes so as not to see the vision, and yet God forced him to open his eyes and see it. And again, he fell down upon his face (Num. 24:4,16 RV), as he had when the Angel blocked his path earlier. He wouldn't learn his lesson, he wouldn't perceive how circumstances were being repeated in God's desperate effort to get him to repent.

Num 22:32 The angel of Yahweh said to him, Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come forth as an adversary, because your way is perverse before me-

Balaam "ran" for reward, so wanting to do Balak's will in order to receive the promised "hire" (Jude 11);

and the Angel and donkey tried to arrest him in his headlong rush. He paid no attention, just as the efforts of Jude and Peter to arrest the madness of these men were not being heeded. The language of a righteous Angel coming forth as a satan / adversary is similar to the scene in Job. The questions were to elicit the answer 'I kept hitting the donkey because I was paying no attention to God's hand in my life, I was obsessed with running in the wrong way'. But there was apparently no answer from Balaam, and so after the silence, the Angel continues- explaining that indeed "your way is perverse before Me". Balaam's way was before Yahweh. God saw every part and aspect of it.

"Because your way is perverse" could be translated "Although..." (s.w. Gen. 48:14). In this case the sense is that the Angel was standing as an adversary to Balaam in order to save him from destruction and eternal judgment; and the Angel did this kindness, even though Balaam's way was perverse and obnoxious to the Angel.

Num 22:33 and the donkey saw me, and turned aside before me these three times. Unless she had turned aside from me, surely now I would have killed you, and saved her alive-

The Jewish commentators insist that this should be translated as in LXX "And if she had not turned out of the way, surely now, I should have slain thee, and should have saved her alive". The implication is that the Angel killed the donkey for having turned out of the way when first confronted by the Angel. This turning out of the way was seen as wrong; the donkey should have fallen

down in awe and reverence. Turning out of the way is a common figure for apostasy. The Angel is by all means trying to show Balaam that his life had been saved by grace. He ought to have died; but his donkey did, because like him, it had turned out of the way the first time instead of falling down in fear and respect. Perhaps when it fell down, it never arose; for the Angel slew it. Being deprived of his means of transport was surely also a sign to Balaam that he was intended to return. The death of his faithful, loyal donkey in order to save him, the just for the unjust, looked ahead to the spirit of the death of the Lord Jesus. It is intended to elicit in us repentance. But so many are untouched with it, as was Balaam, because of the madness of their headlong obsession with themselves and wealth.

Num 22:34 Balaam said to the angel of Yahweh, I have sinned; for I didn't know that you stood in the way against me. Now therefore, if it displeases you, I will go back again-

Still Balaam doesn't get it. Surely he knew his journey was displeasing to God. Sometimes people are pulled up by God in their path- and still they refuse to understand. They are blinded by the headlong desire for material things, rather than seeing God's perspective. Balaam's claim that "I didn't know..." of God's opposition to his journey to curse Israel was untrue (Num. 22:34); so he is made to say in prophecy that he did know God's will (Num. 24:16). "I have sinned" recalls the same words on the lips of Pharaoh and Saul, again insincerely. Confession of sin can so easily be mere words. Balaam

immediately goes on with a qualification of why he had sinned- and claims that he did so in ignorance. Confession of sin is to have no qualifications added to it.

This appears untrue because in Num. 24:16 he is inspired to state that he did know God's will. We can know but choose not to know. He claims he has sinned but in ignorance, when this was not true.

Num 22:35 The angel of Yahweh said to Balaam, Go with the men; but only the word that I shall speak to you, that you shall speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak-

Again God leads him further into temptation, seeing he didn't himself decide to return home. God was pushing him onwards down the destructive road he so eagerly chose to go, headlong. That way was perverse to God and "contrary to Me" (:32), but He pushed him along it as that was the path he chose. The dynamic in both the downward and upward spiral is the Spirit of God, an evil spirit from the Lord or the Holy Spirit, the spirit of holiness. We could translate "But only whatever I shall speak, that you will speak", as if God is not commanding him anything but rather warning him that he is going to be overtaken by His Spirit to utter blessings and not curses upon Israel- which is exactly what happened.

Num 22:36 When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him to the City of Moab, which is on the border of the Arnon, which is in the utmost part of the border-

That Balak came out to meet Balaam again reflects his desperate desire to have this religious man on his side.

We see here the power of the human need for religion. Rather like a terrible criminal somehow needs the religious man at his side as he finally comes to his deathbed in prison.

Num 22:37 Balak said to Balaam, Didn't I earnestly send to you to call you? Why didn't you come to me? Am I not able indeed to promote you to honour?-

Balak sees himself as the ultimate source of blessing and promotion. But like Balaam, he was playing God by saying this. He assumed Balaam's delay in coming was because he doubted whether Balak had the resources to reward him. He refused to accept that Balaam was circumscribed by Yahweh.

Num 22:38 Balaam said to Balak, Behold, I have come to you. Have I now any power at all to speak anything? The word that God puts in my mouth, that shall I speak-

As discussed on :35, this can be read not as a statement of obedient loyalty to God, but rather informing Balak that God's Spirit would come upon him and make him speak what He wished; and that, unfortunately, he had no power over that process. As often in reading the Bible, we do well to reflect in what tone of voice Balaam said these things to Balak, and what additional, unrecorded things he said.

Num 22:39 Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath Huzoth-

LXX "and they came to the cities of streets".

Num 22:40 Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes who were with him-

The idea was that eating sacrifices together was a statement of religious unity and fellowship. Balaam on one hand could speak of Yahweh as "my God" (:18) and yet on the other, eagerly accept fellowship with idolatry.

Num 22:41 It happened in the morning, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal; and he saw from there the utmost part of the people-

LXX "And brought him up to the pillar of Baal". The significance of "he saw from there..." was that Balak expected to use the "evil eye" upon Israel. But as he began to do this, God's Spirit took him over and made him bless them. It would be an example of where the Bible deconstructs belief in things like the evil eye and other connections with a supposed supernatural source of evil. Even if these things were true, then God's Spirit power was far greater than them. This would then be the significance of the descriptions of Balaam as "the man whose eye was closed". We note "eye" in the singular, not the plural. The idea may be that Balaam had tried to use superstitions about the 'evil eye' against Israel and had lifted up his eyes against Israel in this way (see on Num. 24:2). But his [evil] eye had been closed by God and he was now taken over by God's Spirit in order to bless Israel.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 23

Num 23:1 Balaam said to Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bulls and seven rams-

The number seven may have been a reference to the seven planets which were then known. This was a mixture of Yahweh worship and paganism, performed at the site of a Baal sanctuary (Num. 22:41).

Num 23:2 Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bull and a ram-

We note the eager obedience of Balak to Balaam, recorded several times. There is an earnest desire to perform religious ritual, give money or whatever the modern equivalents are- and we see the power of religiosity so strongly in Balak.

Num 23:3 Balaam said to Balak, Stand by your burnt offering, and I will go. Perhaps Yahweh will come to meet me; and whatever He shows me I will tell you. He went to a bare height-

They were on the heights or high places of Baal (Num. 22:41), and Balaam tells Balak that he must remain by the altars, whilst Balaam goes off for a walk on his own to meet Yahweh. Surely he was intending to pretend he had met Yahweh and then return to Balak by the altars and then to utter some words of cursing, supposedly from Yahweh.

"He went to a bare height" is only one of many possible translations of a difficult Hebrew expression. Some Rabbis offer "He limped". Presumably from the incident

of the donkey crushing his leg against the wall. He was following the path of Jacob returning to Canaan from the east, who likewise met an Angel and became lame. But Balaam failed to learn from this precedent and refused to humble himself and resign his hope for material blessings as Jacob had done.

Num 23:4 God met Balaam, and he said to Him, I have prepared the seven altars, and I have offered up a bull and a ram on every altar-

I suggest on 1 Sam. 28 that the witch of Endor was intending to give Saul some general message supposedly from Samuel, but of her own device. But then she screams in genuine fright when Samuel himself is actually resurrected. And so it was here. Balaam walks off further up the mountain, intending to return pretending he had met God and received a message from Him. But he does actually meet God, just as he had run into "God" in the Angel on his way to Balak. Rather flustered, Balaam claims he has just offered sacrifice to Yahweh, even though he was there standing at the high places of Baal (Num. 22:41) intending to curse Israel. And it is stressed that Balak had offered some of the sacrifices (:2,6).

Num 23:5 Yahweh put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak-

As discussed on 3,4, Balaam indeed returns to Balak having had a meeting with Yahweh and having received a message.

To have spiritual gifts doesn't mean that a person is spiritual or Godly. Men and women will claim to have prophesied and done great works in the Lord's Name-

but in fact they never knew Him (Mt. 7:22,23). Caiaphas and Balaam uttered prophecies but that doesn't mean they were spiritual people. Balaam did actually curse Israel, but what came out of his mouth was blessing of them (Dt. 23:5; Josh. 24:10; Neh. 13:2). This is so emphasized. We see here the real nature of Divine inspiration. Balaam was forced to speak a message, including statements about himself, that he of himself didn't want to.

Num 23:6 He returned to him, and behold, he was standing by his burnt offering, he, and all the princes of Moab-

The cameraman is zoomed close in. We see Balak standing obediently by the altar where he had offered his offering, with the princes of Moab having now appeared. And they await with eagerness Balaam's return. As he walks toward them, they are all set up to hear the expected words of curse upon Israel.

Num 23:7 He took up his parable, and said, From Aram has Balak brought me, the king of Moab from the mountains of the East. Come, curse Jacob for me, come, defy Israel-

As discussed on :3,4,6, Balak had gone away from the group further up the mountain, planning on returning claiming he had met Yahweh and then uttering curses upon Israel. But instead, he does actually meet Yahweh, and a word from Him is put in his mouth which he inevitably had to speak to the eager group of leaders... who were awaiting the pronouncement of a curse upon Israel.

Very often, the name Jacob is associated with the way that God sees His people of Jacob / Israel as righteous when in fact they are not (Num. 23:7,10,21; 24:5; Ps. 47:4; 105:6; 135:4; Is. 41:8). The names "Jacob" and "Israel" are often used together (e.g. Hos. 12:12) to show how God saw the Jacob as Israel, without forgetting he was still Jacob. That is especially true with Balaam; he is inspired to use the names in parallel on many occasions (Num. 23:7,10,21,23 [twice]; 24:5,17,18,19). The idea is that God sees Jacob as Israel, just as He so loved and counted righteous the historical Jacob.

Num 23:8 How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? How shall I defy whom Yahweh has not defied?-

"Defy" is LXX "devote", the idea being that Israel was to be devoted to destruction, just as Yahweh Himself had several times stated He wished to do. The same Hebrew word is used of God's anger with His people in the wilderness (Ps. 78:49 "He threw on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, trouble"). Perhaps Balak and Balaam had used this in the complex self justification of how they could try to curse Israel, when God had said that whoever cursed Israel would be cursed. But now God says that He has not defied / devoted His people to destruction. But He had done. The contradiction is intentional; for what comes out of Balaam's prophecies is the theme of imputed righteousness. God passionately loved Israel, and counted them as spotless, especially in defending them to the world. Just as the Lord Jesus was very positive about His disciples to the world, although very critical of them when they were with Him.

The Abrahamic blessing is in a sense irrevocable. It is in this sense that God's salvation was declared to be "for ever", despite the apostasy of the exiles at the time of Is. 51:6-8. Recall Isaac's comment about Jacob "yes, he shall be blessed" (Gen. 27:33). Nothing at all, not the will of Isaac nor Esau, could change it. And we have received that blessing. Thus :19 says that God will never change His intention to bless Israel. This is the idea in Mic. 6:8 where the incident is cited as evidence of God's absolute grace to Israel.

Num 23:9 For from the top of the rocks I see him, from the hills I see him-

The significance of "I see him" is that his intention to 'see' Israel with the supposed 'evil eye' was being turned right around. See on Num. 22:41 He was instead 'seeing' blessing for them, from "the top of the rocks", the promontory to which he had climbed up in :3.

Behold, it is a people that dwells alone and shall not be reckoned among the nations-

We could translate Num. 22:35 "But only whatever I shall speak, that you will speak", as if God is not commanding him anything but rather warning him that he is going to be overtaken by His Spirit to utter blessings and not curses upon Israel- which is exactly what happened. But Balaam was to seek to work against this statement that Israel "shall not be reckoned among the nations" by encouraging Israel to unite with Moab in the adultery of Beth Peor, so that they would be united with the nations and so God's words would become untrue- and curse rather than blessing would come. For Balaam per-

ceived that these words speak of God's intentions from His side; Israel themselves still had to choose not to be reckoned amongst the nations.

These words are so true of all God's true Israel, no matter how surrounded they are by family and society. "The people shall dwell alone". It is our lead characteristic. Balaam tried to undo this by getting the men of Israel to join with Moab in sex and idolatry. Yet still God saw them as separate. The people dwelling alone could possibly mean that Israel alone would inherit the eternal Kingdom, when God has made an end of all nations apart from them (Jer. 30:11; 46:28; Dt. 32:12). This is why Balaam says in :10 that he wants to die the death of Israel, counted righteous and assured of future salvation.

The very phrase about dwelling alone is that used in Lev. 13:46 of how the leper shall dwell alone outside the camp. Israel's unique specialness was perhaps in that they as sinners had such unique love lavished upon them. And that is the theme of these oracles; that God so loves sinful, weak Israel that He will not allow any curse to harm them because He counts them as righteous. Israel was thus unique amongst the nations, as is the new Israel, because of her experience of Divine grace.

Num 23:10 Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous! Let my last end be like his!-

The multiplication of Abraham's seed was promised in the same breath as the warning that whoever cursed Israel would be cursed. Here, Balaam is being made to say that the Abrahamic promises were all still valid, the

covenant was in force. And likewise the curses upon those who cursed Israel. This was surely a sign to Balaam to retreat, to go back, to give up. But his headlong rush to try to attain wealth, and also his pride, would not be arrested. He was made to express his wish that he might die "righteous" or upright [Heb.], to die as a true Israelite- who were counted righteous by grace, to be part of that "dust cloud of Jacob", the innumerable seed like the dust of Gen. 13:16.

Num 23:11 Balak said to Balaam, What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them altogether-

Dt. 23:5 LXX speaks of Balaam's plural curses being turned into plural blessings, because God refused to listen to Balaam. We learn from this that Balaam wanted to curse Israel [for he so loved the money being offered for doing so], indeed he perhaps began to utter curses, but the Spirit of God overpowered him and made him utter blessings instead. We learn from this that the Spirit of God working upon a person is no guarantee of their personal acceptance with Him. And we marvel at how the love of money drove Balaam to attempt to do what he was clearly not intended to, i.e. to curse Israel. Maybe his unexpressed desires were read by God as a prayer, and to that prayer "Yahweh your God wouldn't listen" (Dt. 23:5). Prayer is therefore not just in the form of spoken words; for then the more verbally articulate would be, as it were, better at prayer. God reads situations and unspoken desires as prayers. For this is what prayer "in the spirit" is all about.

"Balak said to Balaam, What have you done to me?" (Num. 23:11), reflecting the words of the donkey to Balaam "What have I done to you?" (Num. 22:28). Again Balaam is being led to see himself as the donkey he had so despised.

Num 23:12 He answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which Yahweh puts in my mouth?-

Clearly Balaam didn't want to say the words he did. The process of Divine inspiration means that men spoke God's word even against their will; they were moved, carried along, by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:15,16). The Bible is therefore not the words of men but those of God, and the fact some of those who gave the original words did so *against their own will* – and Balaam would be a classic example- is proof that it is indeed the word of God and not of men.

Num 23:13 Balak said to him, Please come with me to another place, where you may see them. You shall see but the utmost part of them, and shall not see them all; and curse me them from there-

The place from where Balaam saw Israel was felt to be significant because they were intending for Balaam to use the supposed evil eye against Israel. But as he began to do this, God's Spirit took him over and made him bless them. It would be an example of where the Bible deconstructs belief in things like the evil eye and other connections with a supposed supernatural source of evil. Even if these things were true, then God's Spirit power was far greater than them. This would then be the significance of the descriptions of Balaam as "the man whose

eye was closed". We note "eye" in the singular, not the plural. The idea may be that Balaam had tried to use superstitions about the 'evil eye' against Israel and had lifted up his eyes against Israel in this way (see on Num. 24:2). But his [evil] eye had been closed by God and he was now taken over by God's Spirit in order to bless Israel.

Num 23:14 He took him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered up a bull and a ram on every altar-Literally, "the Pisgah". This "seems to have been the name applied to the broken edge of the Moabite plateau where it falls steeply to the Dead Sea and the Jordan valley; and 'the top, or head, of the Pisgah' (Num. 23:14, Dt. 3:27; 34:1) is a collective term for the projections or promontories slightly lower than the main plateau.

Num 23:15 He said to Balak, Stand here by your burnt offering, while I meet over there-

He repeats what was tried previously, in the hope that Yahweh will not meet him as He had done before. Surely he was intending to pretend he had met Yahweh and then return to Balak by the altars and then to utter some words of cursing, supposedly from Yahweh. He omits reference to "God" ["while I meet over there"], perhaps thinking that this was what had led Yahweh to actually meet him.

Num 23:16 Yahweh met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Return to Balak, and say this-

I suggest on 1 Sam. 28 that the witch of Endor was intending to give Saul some general message supposedly

from Samuel, but of her own device. But then she screams in genuine fright when Samuel himself is actually resurrected. And so it was here. Balaam walks off further up the mountain, intending to return pretending he had met God and received a message from Him to curse Israel. But he does actually meet God, just as he had run into "God" in the Angel on his way to Balak.

Num 23:17 He came to him, and behold, he was standing by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. Balak said to him, What has Yahweh spoken?-

Balak specifically wants a message from Yahweh against Israel, rather than some general cursing of them-which any of his magicians could have arranged. This was why he was so insistent that Balaam, as a prophet of Yahweh, should come and utter this curse from Yahweh. This makes Balaam's behaviour the more culpable and awful. That he continued in it provides us with a warning as to the tremendous power of human hungering for wealth.

Num 23:18 He took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to Me, you son of Zippor-

"Zippor" is the male form of Zipporah, the wife of Moses, who was also from Midian. It seems Balak was a Midianite who was asked to become king of Moab, who had been left weakened by their conflicts with the Amorites. Balak knew Balaam, and we can deduce that Balaam may have picked up his knowledge of Yahweh from Moses whilst Moses lived in Midian married to Zipporah. Who may even have been Balak's sister. Yahweh may

be appealing to Balak, warning him that he had responsibility to Him because he was not ignorant of His ways.

Num 23:19 God is not a man, that He should lie, nor the son of man, that He should change His mind-

God does change His mind about some things due to His great sensitivity to His people; but He will not change His basic love for them (Mal. 3:6). He will not arbitrarily decide now to curse His beloved people. Balak specifically wanted a word from Yahweh to the effect that Israel were now cursed; see on :17. But Yahweh tells him that He will not change from blessing to cursing His people just like that, because Balak has paid Balaam money to do so. By baptism, the same blessings are made to us. They cannot be revoked by man; and whilst this doesn't mean 'once saved always saved', if we abide in the seed, the Lord Jesus, the assured blessing cannot be changed. Hence in :20 Balaam laments that the blessing simply cannot be revoked by him, try as he may.

“God is not a man” (Num. 23:19; Hos. 11:9); yet the Lord Jesus Christ was clearly “the Son of man” or, as He is called in the New Testament, “the *man* Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 2:5). The Trinity is a very wrong understanding of the Father and Son. For clearly enough, the Lord Jesus is not therefore God. The Greek text calls Him “son of *anthropos*”, i.e. of mankind, rather than “son of *aner*” [husband, man]. In Hebrew thought, “the Son of man” meant an ordinary, mortal man (Is. 51:12). “For since by man [Adam] came death, by man [Jesus] came also the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor. 15:21).

Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?-

God had promised to give His people the promised land, as He has promised to give us the Kingdom, and there is no way He will renege on that promise.

Num 23:20 Behold, I have received a command to bless. He has blessed, and I can't reverse it-

Balaam may mean that he had tried to "reverse it", knowing that God is indeed open to persuasion and willing to change, as the record of Moses demonstrates. But, Balaam laments that he had been unable to "reverse it".

Num 23:21 He has not seen iniquity in Jacob, neither has He seen perverseness in Israel. Yahweh his God is with him, the shout of a king is among them-

This statement comes sandwiched between the apostasy of Num. 21 and that of Num. 25. But God was intent on bringing His people in to Canaan it seems regardless of their desire to return to Egypt. Imputed righteousness is the key to our salvation by grace. When Balaam tried to curse Israel, it was impossible because God saw them as righteous, even though they were not: "He has not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has He seen perverseness (Jacob-ness) in Israel". God overlooked Jacob's natural characteristics. It is no accident that God repeatedly described His people at this time with the title of 'Jacob' (Num. 23:7,10,21,23; 24:5,17,19).

There was indeed much iniquity in Jacob- notice how Jacob's old name is used rather than the new name, Israel. They took with them the gods of Egypt (Ez.

20:7,8), and the tabernacle of another god as well as that of Yahweh (Acts 7:43). But God did not 'see' that sin; this is an Old Testament presentiment of the 'imputed righteousness' of which Paul speaks in the New Testament. God doesn't count sin, doesn't 'see' it, in His people; for this really is what love is about, seeing someone in a positive light and not imputing their weakness to them.

God saw no iniquity in Israel (Num. 23:21). He fulfilled His promise at Sinai that if they were obedient, He would make them His people; and He did, counting them as obedient. Yet the events of the intervening forty years hardly sound like Israel being obedient; He "suffered their manners" forty years (Ps. 95:10; Acts 13:18). Yet this is how they were counted (Ex. 19:5 cp. Dt. 27:9). He saw them as a young woman 'going after' Him in the wilderness years, attracted to Him (Jer. 2:2). Even when we do read of the sin of Israel at this time, God *grieved* over the carcasses of those He slew (Heb. 3:17).

Balaam's response to this truth which he was made to utter was to make Israel fall into sin. For he correctly figured that God's imputation of righteousness cannot mean that He makes willfully wicked and sinful people somehow whitewashed so that they can continue in sin and unfaithfulness to Him.

The reason Yahweh did not see iniquity or deceit, Jacob, in Israel was that Yahweh his God is with him. This is Emmanuel, God with us, a prediction of the Lord Jesus. We could translate "He does not see the iniquity that is in Jacob".

Num 23:22 God brings them out of Egypt, he has as it were the strength of the wild ox-

But Israel had felt so weak before the apparent strength of the Canaanites. They believed the faithless words of the ten spies. They failed to appreciate their potential strength. In Num. 22:4 we learn that the Moabites feared that "Now this multitude will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field". God had specifically told Moses not to fight with Moab (Dt. 2:9), and I suggested on Num. 22:2 that there was some contact between Balak and Moses. When Israel passed along the highways, they had been careful not stray from the route and had not drunk from the wells of those whom they passed through. Moab need have had no fear that Israel would lick up all around. It was only those who came out against Israel in battle who had been defeated, and Balak would have been wiser to learn from this. But God gave them according to their fears by saying He would make Israel like a powerful ox (Num. 23:22).

Here and in Num. 24:8 we read that God *is bringing* Israel out of Egypt. And yet even the generation of under 20s at the time of the Exodus apparently didn't want to enter Canaan, but liked the idea of returning to Egypt. We see again here God's grace in almost forcing through His plan to save His people.

Or we may translate "He [God] is for them like the horns of the wild ox", repeated in Num. 24:8. Balak's fears that Israel would act like an ox were groundless if he had accepted God's word for Israel to ignore Moab. But

seeing Moab wanted conflict, then his fears would come true- and Yahweh would empower Israel to act as an angry ox.

Num 23:23 Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob; neither is there any divination possible against Israel-

All attempts to use divination were vain. There was no power in these practices; and even if people insisted that there were supernatural cosmic powers of evil, they were irrelevant to the people of God.

Now it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What has God done!-

The salvation of Israel was indeed by grace, given their great spiritual weakness. It was the doing of God by grace and not the work of man, and indeed was to be praised as such. Or we could translate "It shall be told to Jacob and to Israel what God works", i.e. His plans would be revealed to His people by the prophets.

Num 23:24 Behold, the people rises up as a lioness, as a lion he lifts himself up. He shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain-

As noted on :22, this all refers to their potential strength. They were in God's eyes potentially as strong as a lion against all the others 'beasts of the land', the other tribes there. But Israel feared the Canaanites and submitted to them, just as they had believed the faithless words of the ten spies. They failed to appreciate their potential strength.

Num 23:25 Balak said to Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all-

Balak clearly had the idea that Balaam was still somehow in control of what he was saying. He had never seen true Divine inspiration at work before. For a person was totally taken over by the Spirit in order to speak forth the inspired word.

Num 23:26 But Balaam answered Balak, Didn't I tell you, saying, 'All that Yahweh speaks, that I must do?'

Again there is a resentment in Balaam, repeating God's word to others but not personally identifying with it, bemoaning the limitations of it. Balaam was aware that he could only *do* according to what God *said* (Num. 23:26). Balak says that whatever Balaam *says*, he will *do* (Num. 22:17). He is therefore inviting Balaam to play God, to give words of command to be obeyed, to receive the greatest honour / glory, and to be the ultimate source of blessing and cursing for Israel and the nations. This temptation to play God was at the root of the situation in the garden of Eden, and it continues to be at the root of all temptation.

Num 23:27 Balak said to Balaam, Come now, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse me them from there-

Balaam ought to have recognized that the geographical location of a prophet was not going to affect whether or not a curse was successful. But they were both clinging on to the hope that from some location, Balaam might be able to use the supposed power of the 'evil eye'; see on :13.

Num 23:28 Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, that looks down on the desert-

LXX Phogor; which Eusebius says was a mountain opposite Jericho. They were literally on the borders of entry into Canaan. Peor was associated with Baal worship (Num. 25:3,5). It was whilst here that Balaam formed his plan- to use the sexual rites associated with the Baal or Peor to seduce the Israelites to sin, and thereby bring curses upon themselves rather than blessings. We noted on :17 that Balak wants blessing from Yahweh; but he takes Balaam to sites of idol worship in order to get it. This mixture of true and false worship was the abiding characteristic of Israel, and it remains in essence are major temptation.

Num 23:29 Balaam said to Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bulls and seven rams-

We are given the impression that Balak [or his men] now did all this somewhat wearily.

Num 23:30 Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered up a bull and a ram on every altar-

Balak and Balaam have just heard God's warning that no form of enchantment will work against Israel (:23). And that Yahweh is not going to change His mind about blessing them. Despite all that, they still go ahead with their attempt at Yahweh worship. What emerges from the record is the way that despite every evidence, men choose to disregard God's clearest statements in His inspired word. Because they are obsessed by their own fears (in Balak's case, even irrational ones), and addictions to wealth and power, as in Balaam's case.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 24

Num 24:1 When Balaam perceived that it pleased Yahweh to bless Israel, he didn't go as at the other times to meet with enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness-

The blessing was in that God was imputing righteousness to Israel, covering their sins, and seeing them as saved- despite their weaknesses. The connection between blessing and forgiveness / salvation is widespread throughout Scripture: Dt. 33:23; Ps. 5:12 (blessing = grace) Dt. 30:19; Ps. 3:8; 24:5; 28:9; 133:3 (= salvation); Ex. 12:32; 32:29; Num. 24:1; 2 Sam. 21:3; Ps. 67:1 (cp. context); Lk. 6:28; Acts 3:26; Rom. 4:7,8; 1 Cor. 10:16; Gal. 3:14 (= forgiveness). The setting his face to the desert rather than looking at Israel appears another desperate attempt to make the "evil eye" myth work (see on :2,3).

Num 24:2 Balaam lifted up his eyes-

This could be understood as meaning that he began to pray to God, seeking for a curse upon Israel. A feature of Biblical prayers is the way they start with some reference to God, often involving several clauses. This is to be connected with the idea of lifting the eyes to Heaven at the start of a prayer (Ps. 121:1; 123:1; Ez. 23:27; Dan. 4:34; Lk. 16:23; 18:13; Jn. 11:41; 17:1). There are enough of these references to make us wonder whether other references to lifting up the eyes to Heaven is an idiom for prayer. This seems likely in Num. 24:2; Josh.

5:13; Jud. 19:17 and 1 Chron. 21:16 among others. The simple implication of all this is that we should begin our prayers with a conscious imagination and personalization of the Father to whom we pray; "Our Father, *who is in Heaven*" says it all.

And he saw Israel dwelling according to their tribes; and the Spirit of God came on him-

The lifting up his eyes could be a reference to Balaam trying to use the belief in the 'evil eye' upon Israel. But as he began to do this, God's Spirit took him over and made him bless them. It would be an example of where the Bible deconstructs belief in things like the evil eye and other connections with a supposed supernatural source of evil. Even if these things were true, then God's Spirit power was far greater than them. See on :3.

Num 24:3 He took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor says, the man whose eye was closed says-

The idea may be that Balaam had tried to use superstitions about the 'evil eye' against Israel and had lifted up his eyes against Israel in this way (see on :2). But his [evil] eye had been closed by God and he was now taken over by God's Spirit in order to as it were have his eye opened to bless Israel. We note "eye" in the singular, not the plural. But he was being directed to remember how his eyes had been closed to the Angel standing in the way, opposing him. And then they had been opened. He was still being nudged towards repentance, despite committing the presumptuous sin of trying to curse God's people, knowing that whoever cursed them would be cursed. These considerations explain the similarity and

confusion within the Hebrew word for "closed" and "opened" used here.

Num 24:4 he says, who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, and having his eyes open-

His eyes were opened to the Angel blocking his way, and when he realized how he had closed his spiritual vision to the Angel trying to stop him going to Balak, he fell down on his face (Num. 22:31). But when he is later given a vision of Balak's judgment, the vision which Balaam didn't want to see, he describes himself as "the man whose eye was closed" and yet had to see the vision with his eyes open (Num. 24:3). He didn't learn the lesson. He closed his eyes so as not to see the vision, and yet God forced him to open his eyes and see it. And again, he fell down upon his face (Num. 24:4,16 RV), as he had when the Angel blocked his path earlier. He wouldn't learn his lesson, he wouldn't perceive how circumstances were being repeated in God's desperate effort to get him to repent.

The idea was that Balaam shut his eyes and fell down so as not to see or receive the oracle of Divine blessing, but notwithstanding, his eyes were opened and he was made to speak out blessing rather than the curse that he so wanted to pronounce.

Num 24:5 How beautiful are your tents, Jacob, and your tents, Israel!-

But in their tents they sinned, "they murmured in their tents, and didn't listen to Yahweh's voice" (Ps. 106:25). But they were counted righteous. The repeated

parallel of Jacob and Israel was to reflect how God imputed righteousness to the historical Jacob, changing his name in recognition of it, and He was doing the same to Israel's people. God is described in the prophets as being in love with Israel at this time (Ez. 16:8), just as He is with us on our wilderness journey towards His Kingdom. He didn't 'see' their sin (see on Num. 23:21). Very often, the name Jacob is associated with the way that God sees His people of Jacob / Israel as righteous when in fact they are not (Num. 23:7,10,21; 24:5; Ps. 47:4; 105:6; 135:4; Is. 41:8). The names "Jacob" and "Israel" are often used together (e.g. Hos. 12:12) to show how God saw the Jacob as Israel, without forgetting he was still Jacob.

Num 24:6 As valleys they are spread forth, as gardens by the riverside, as aloes which Yahweh has planted-

Or, as the tents which the Lord has pitched (s.w. :5). 'Planted' is an image frequently used about how God would plant His people permanently in Canaan, and the figure is sometimes used along with the idea of 'never to be removed' (Ex. 15:17; 2 Sam. 7:10; Ps. 44:2; 80:8,15; Is. 5:2; Jer. 2:21). As Yahweh planted the garden of Eden, so He speaks here of how He had already planted His people- the first step towards a potential restoration of Eden (Gen. 2:8). But the reality was that at the time Balaam was speaking, the people of Israel were in tents, waiting to enter the land. But God saw them as if they were already there and established- just as He sees us even in our wilderness years as His Kingdom, even though it is not yet literally established.

The picture of Israel as luxuriant trees planted by abundant waters was of course very different to how they were at that point in the dry desert. But it was how God saw them.

As cedar trees beside the waters-

The repeated use of the idea of "as" was perhaps to reflect how God saw them- as if they were righteous. Mic. 6:4,5 records God's response to Balak and Balaam is a parade example of His saving grace to Israel, which was intended to encourage the Israel of Micah's day. Hos. 9:10 speaks of this time- God "found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree at its first season; but they came to Baal Peor, and consecrated themselves to the shameful thing". God saw them as if they were so wonderful- but they turned to worship Baalpeor (Num. 25:3). Our response to imputed righteousness must not be the same.

Unless we read "palms" for "cedar trees", we must note that cedars do not grow beside water; although cedars were considered to have been planted by Yahweh (Ps. 104:16). This would then connect with the earlier thought about the aloes, that they were planted "contrary to nature" by God in Canaan.

Gen. 2:5 explains how God created "every plant of the field before it was in the earth / eretz / land [promised to Abraham]". Quite simply, the plants Israel knew had been made by God and somehow transplanted or moved into the land, just as one does when developing a garden. It was Moses' understanding that on entering the land, God would be planting Israel there (Ex.

15:17; Num. 24:6), just as God had planted in Eden (Gen. 2:8 s.w.). The "gardens" may be an intensive plural- the great garden, of Eden, which Yahweh had planted. We note that here there is reference to trees planted by a river, which is again the language of Eden, repeated in Revelation 21. The reference in :17 to the crushing of enemies by the star / Messiah figure is an allusion to Gen. 3:15. God saw Israel as His undefiled garden of Eden, just as we are the Kingdom in embryo.

Num 24:7 Water shall flow from his buckets, his seed shall be in many waters, his king shall be higher than Agag; his kingdom shall be exalted-

"His King" is Israel's King. There is here an intimation that Israel's seed and king- Messiah would have personal conflict with 'Gog', a leader of a coalition of surrounding nations. Throughout the chapter, a total of nine neighbouring nations are mentioned, under the leadership of a tenth individual- Agag / Gog. Such victories never happened in Israel's history because they failed to live up to the potential power they were given in this prophecy, but the essence will come true in Messiah's latter day victories against another group of nine Arab nations headed up by a Gog / Agag figure, as outlined in Ez. 38. See on :24. "Agag" was a generic name for the kings of Amalek, rather like 'Abimelech', 'Caesar' or 'Pharaoh'.

The seed in many waters may refer to how seeds such as rice multiply and thrive when underwater, under ample irrigation.

Num 24:8 God brings him out of Egypt; he has as it were the strength of the wild ox-

But Israel had felt so weak before the apparent strength of the Canaanites. They believed the faithless words of the ten spies. They failed to appreciate their potential strength. In Num. 22:4 we learn that the Moabites feared that "Now this multitude will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field". God had specifically told Moses not to fight with Moab (Dt. 2:9), and I suggested on Num. 22:2 that there was some contact between Balak and Moses. When Israel passed along the highways, they had been careful not stray from the route and had not drunk from the wells of those whom they passed through. Moab need have had no fear that Israel would lick up all around. It was only those who came out against Israel in battle who had been defeated, and Balak would have been wiser to learn from this. But God gave them according to their fears by saying He would make Israel like a powerful ox (also Num. 23:22).

Here and in Num. 23:22 we read that God is bringing Israel out of Egypt. And yet even the generation of under 20s at the time of the Exodus apparently didn't want to enter Canaan, but liked the idea of returning to Egypt. We see again here God's grace in almost forcing through His plan to save His people.

Or we may translate "He [God] is for them like the horns of the wild ox", repeated in Num. 23:22. Balak's

fears that Israel would act like an ox were groundless if he had accepted God's word for Israel to ignore Moab. But seeing Moab wanted conflict, then his fears would come true- and Yahweh would empower Israel to act as an angry ox.

He shall eat up the nations his adversaries, shall break their bones in pieces and pierce them with his arrows-

The shame was that God saw Israel as triumphing over their enemies- but instead, they were beguiled by them, slept with their women and worshipped their idols. They were to "pierce them through with [their] arrows" - and Phinehas therefore pierced through the Midianite woman with a javelin (Num. 25:8), just as Levi was to pierce through his enemies (Dt. 33:11).

Num 24:9 He couched, he lay down as a lion, as a lioness; who shall rouse him up?-

The past tenses suggest God saw Israel as already having entered and possessed Canaan; He likens them to a lion which couched down before it sprung in to Canaan and destroyed the tribes. But the sad record of Joshua and Judges is that Israel feared their enemies and were oppressed by them. The great potential didn't come true. It was so sad for God, and is the understandable basis for His anger in chapter 25 when Israel did the very opposite and joined themselves in sexual and moral submission to the Baal of Peor. These prophecies would come to have their ultimate fulfilment in the Lord Jesus as the lion of Judah; for Israel didn't have the boldness of a lion when they entered Canaan.

"Who shall rouse him up?" begs the answer: 'A fool'. And that was what Balak was seeking to do.

This is a quotation from Gen. 49:9 about the lion of Judah, the Lord Jesus. The reference to a scepter in :17 likewise alludes to the scepter not departing from Judah (Gen. 49:10). The idea seems to be that the blessing of Abraham, cited in the next sentence, was operative on account of the future seed, the Lord Jesus. And so we have in essence the idea we encounter in Romans and Galatians, that those in Christ, the seed, are the seed of Abraham- and are blessed, regardless of all other curses that may come upon us for our disobedience. What is critical is abiding in the covenant. Human sinfulness will not break that covenant relationship of itself.

Everyone who blesses you is blessed, everyone who curses you is cursed-

This was a sober reminder to Balaam, out of his own mouth, that whoever cursed Israel as he was trying to do- would be cursed. We too are in the Abrahamic covenant by baptism. The blessing upon us cannot be taken away, even by our sin, as long as we abide in the covenant. This is what faith / trust is about. Belief we are loved, faith is not simply vague hope that requests we pray for will possibly be given in the short or medium term of human life. More essentially, faith is belief and trust that we will be saved.

Num 24:10 Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, I called you to curse my enemies, and, behold, you have altogether blessed them these three times-

Balaam ought to have perceived that each time he tried to curse Israel and ended up blessing them, it was like him trying those three times to ride his donkey down the lane with God standing in the way to block him. The same phrase "these three times" occurs three times in that record (Num. 22:28,32,33).

Num 24:11 Therefore now flee you to your place! I thought to promote you to great honour; but, behold, Yahweh has kept you back from honour-

"Kept you back" is the word used in Num. 22:16 for how Balak urged Balaam initially: "Please let nothing hinder you [s.w.] from coming to me". Repeatedly, God is the one who hinders or keeps back (Gen. 30:2; 1 Sam. 25:26,34; Neh. 9:20 etc.). Balak seems to be effectively saying 'Don't let Yahweh hinder you'. Balak recognizes that it was Yahweh and not Balaam who had hindered, and his words are really a lament that Yahweh had kept back Balaam. He knew that Balaam was eager for it. "Don't let your God / religion stop you..." is the call of temptation which the world makes to God's people of every generation. And heeding it is to go in the way of Balaam.

Num 24:12 Balaam said to Balak, Didn't I also tell your messengers whom you sent to me, saying-

"Messengers" is the Hebrew *malak*, the same word translated "Angels". The Angels as in supernatural beings cannot sin. They are of Divine nature. Any passengers which appear to talk of Angels sinning are using *malak* in the sense it is used here, of human beings who were messengers or servants. The idea is that Balaam should

have turned back from them as He turned back from Yahweh's Angel whom he encountered.

Num 24:13 'If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I can't go beyond the word of Yahweh, to do either good or bad of my own mind. I will say what Yahweh says?'

Clearly Balaam really wanted the promised reward from Balak. He wanted God to curse Israel; Dt. 23:5 and Josh. 24:10 state that God did not hear Balaam's prayers about this. But there is no record that he prayed to God to curse Israel. But clearly his unspoken desires were read by God as a prayer, just as Elijah's feelings about Israel were read as his making intercession to God against Israel. Likewise our ability to verbalize is not the same as ability in prayer. Our deepest, unspoken feelings are seen by God as prayer. Neh. 13:2 goes so far as to say that God turned Balaam's curse into a blessing- implying Balaam's thoughts were read by God as asking Him to curse Israel. See on 25:11.

Peter alludes here in his defence: "We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). He told the Sanhedrin that to make true Christians agree not to preach was simply an inappropriate suggestion, because "we cannot but speak" out- it was something which went part and parcel with the experience of the risen Lord Jesus. Peter was not just an illiterate fisherman; so many of his words and phrasing indicate a thorough familiarity with the Greek Old Testament. Here, he seems to have Num. 24:13 at the back of his mind; Balaam says that although Balak is forbid-

ding him to speak, he cannot but speak what God has inspired him with, even if it is intensely unpopular with those around him.

In the very similar statement Balaam makes in Num. 22:18 he speaks of Yahweh as "my God". Now he omits reference to Yahweh as "my God". Balaam knew that when Divine words of prophecy came to him, he had to speak them out, and could not add to or diminish from them (Num. 22:18) nor add any good or bad to them according to what was in his own mind (Num. 24:13). This is all a helpful insight into what it meant for a prophet to be Divinely inspired. The words they uttered were from God and were not their own opinions at all. For Balaam would dearly loved to have cursed Israel and not to have uttered the words of blessing which he did.

Num 24:14 Now, behold, I go to my people. Come, I will inform you what this people shall do to your people in the latter days-

Balaam understood the 'last days' to be when the Davidic dynasty would arise (Num. 24:14 cp. Is. 2:2; Mic. 4:1)- and so I take this as another indication that in some sense, Solomon could have been the Messiah of the 'last days'. But he like many such figures, failed to live up to the potential possible. This is the tragic story of so many lives.

Num 24:15 He took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor says, the man whose eye was closed says-

This may imply he was a 'seer' who didn't want to see. He was seeing and stating that which was not at all what he wanted to. See on :1-4.

Num 24:16 he says, who hears the words of God, knows the knowledge of the Most High, and who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, and having his eyes open-

Balaam's claim that "I didn't know..." of God's opposition to his journey to curse Israel was untrue (Num. 22:34); so he is made to say in prophecy that he did know God's will (Num. 24:16).

We can know but choose not to know. He claimed he had sinned but in ignorance, when this was not true.

See on :1-4. Falling down with open eyes is to direct Balaam back to how he had fallen down before the Angel with his eyes now open to the Angel. We marvel at how God was continually trying to nudge him even at this stage towards repentance.

Num 24:17 I see him, but not now; I see him, but not near-

The idea is 'I see him (Israel), but not (as he is) now; I see him, but not (camped as he is now) near (to me)'. This is quite the argument against Messiah's literal pre-existence. As Adam Clarke put it, "I shall see him, but he is not now. I shall behold him, but not nigh - I shall have a full view of him, but the time is yet distant. That is, The person of whom I am now prophesying does not at present exist".

A star will come out of Jacob, a sceptre will rise out of Israel, and shall strike through the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Sheth-

This star and sceptre would seem to refer to Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus. There are many Biblical connections between Messiah and a star, reflected in the Bar-Kochba revolt, a false Messiah claiming to be the Messianic star. It seems He will yet win a resounding victory against Israel's Arab enemies, represented here by Moab, and be higher than Agag (:7), or Gog. Ez. 38:1-7 speaks of Christ's latter day conflict with Gog. It seems there will be a final conflict around the time of Christ's return, in which He will finally save Israel from all their surrounding enemies. The wise men said that they had seen the star of the King of Israel and were following it—they were clearly alluding to this prophecy, and the Star was therefore ultimately the Lord Jesus. "Corners" can also be rendered "forehead", so we have an allusion to Gen. 3:15. Moab are being presented as the seed of the serpent, to be crushed before the seed of the woman, Israel's Messiah. But the immediate idea is that the victory of the seed of the woman is counted to all Israel weak as they were spiritually. And this points forward to the Lord's victory being counted to us as Abraham's weak seed.

Moab had begun by wanting to curse Israel. Their desire was counted as if they had cursed Israel, even though Balaam never actually got to utter any curses. And so true to the Abrahamic covenant, he who cursed Israel was now being cursed. And the whole sad history

would've been avoidable had men just humbly accepted God's word to Moses, not to interfere with Moab. Moab had nothing to fear, but their fears led them to try to curse Israel and that led to their being cursed. We note that Balaam curses Edom too, whom Israel likewise had been told not to fight with. Perhaps they too had some input into the desire to curse Israel at this time, again from needless fear.

The future king was to be totally out of Israel, an Israelite indeed. This is an eloquent prophecy of the Lord's human nature and lack of any personal pre-existence. Likewise :19, He was to "arise out of Jacob". See on Num. 21:28. David was the future king who would smite Moab (2 Sam. 8:2), so we look forward to David's great Messianic son doing this- the Lord Jesus.

Num 24:18 Edom shall be a possession. Seir, his enemies, also shall be a possession, while Israel does valiantly-

Despite occasional victories against these powers, Israel never possessed them and they revolted against Israel repeatedly (under Solomon, 1 Kings 11:14; Joram, 2 Kings 8:20; Ahaz, 2 Chron. 28:17 and during the Babylonian invasion, Ez. 35:15; Obad. 10,13). Yet total dominion over them was potentially possible for Israel. These things will only come fully true in the last days. Edom in the last days will be possessed by their enemies, i.e. Christ and his true Israel, referring back to the promise that Abraham's seed would physically and spiritually possess the gates of his enemies (Num. 24:18 cp. Gen. 22:17,18).

As noted on :17, there is an incipient fulfilment of these things in David, to whom Edom became servants (2 Sam. 8:14). So we are bidden to look forward to David's great Messianic son doing this- the Lord Jesus. Obadiah 21 seems to specifically apply this to the Lord's latter day victory over Israel's neighbours, as the shorter term possibilities were not realized to the extent they could have been: "And saviours shall come upon Mount Zion to judge the Mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's".

Num 24:19 Out of Jacob shall come one who shall have dominion, and shall destroy the remnant from the city-

Perhaps the city in view immediately was "Ar" which means "the city". Had Moab not hired Balaam, then God's original intention that Moab not be touched would have come true (Dt. 2:9). We see here the open nature of God's purpose, ever able to change according to human response and behaviour. But the idea was that a Messianic figure would appear at that time. I have suggested on Joshua 1 that Joshua was that figure, and his name is the Hebrew equivalent of "Jesus". But he didn't live up to his potentials. And so he became but a type of the future Lord Jesus Christ.

Or we can read this as "And dominion will be exercised out of Jacob, and the remnant (of Israel's enemies) will be destroyed out of the city". In this case, "out of Jacob" is parallel with "out of the city", and in a latter day context this would apply to Zion and the emergence from there of the Lord Jesus against Israel's enemies.

Num 24:20 He looked at Amalek and took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations, but his latter end shall come to destruction-

The "latter end" may refer to a specific fulfilment in the last days or some latter day equivalent of Amalek. There were various fulfillments at the time of Saul (who also took Agag prisoner, 1 Sam. 15:7,8), David (1 Sam. 27:8) and Hezekiah (1 Chron. 4:41-43). But all those kings of Judah failed to fully live up to the Messianic potential they had. So they became types of the final latter day fulfilment in the Lord Jesus. Amalek was "first of the nations" in that they were the first to attack Israel (Ex. 17:8-16). We are seeing in these prophecies how all who cursed Israel were going to be cursed. The Abrahamic covenant still stood despite Israel's moral weakness at the time; and that is the comfort for we who are also sinners but who are in the same covenant by baptism into the Lord Jesus.

Num 24:21 He looked at the Kenite, and took up his parable and said, Your dwelling place is strong, your nest is set in the rock-

There is a word play upon the very similar words for "nest" and "Kayin" or "Kain", whence "Kenite". Moses' first wife Zipporah was the daughter of a Kenite (Jud. 1:16). Balak was the son of Zippor, the male form of Zipporah. Balaam was known to them. I have earlier suggested that they knew of Yahweh from the 40 years Moses lived with them, and now after his divorce with Zipporah, they had turned against Israel. And because of their knowledge of Yahweh and wilful attempt to curse

His people, they had more responsibility and were to be judged severely. The word for "Kayin" or "Kain" can mean a smith, "the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron" (Gen. 4:22). And so they are presented as the descendants of unrighteous Cain.

Num 24:22 Nevertheless Kain shall be wasted, until Asshur carries you away captive-

The Assyrians and Babylonians took the ten tribes and Judah into captivity, and we assume the Kenites were taken with them- for there were Kenites amongst the Jewish exiles who returned from Babylon (1 Chron. 2:55). This kind of internal corroboration within the records is to me the most powerful evidence of the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Num 24:23 He took up his parable and said, Alas, who shall live when God does this?-

Heb. "On account of God appointing him", referring to Asshur. "Who shall live...?" was a rhetorical question which begged the answer 'Those who repent'. And as noted on :22, some Kenites apparently did. At this point in time, these people were trying to curse Israel, fully aware that he who curses Israel shall be cursed. We marvel at God's patient desire for their repentance.

Num 24:24 But ships shall come from the coast of Kittim; they shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber. He also shall come to destruction-

Balaam's prophecy about Israel's final destiny speaks of how finally both Assyria and Eber will be judged for their abuse of Israel in the last days. "Eber" is 'the other side', a similar meaning as the words 'Syria' and 'Aram'

in Hebrew, and effectively referring to Syria; or to those 'on the other side' of the Euphrates, namely Iran. They are mentioned together because they will be operating together- and now we see that they actually are coming together (Num. 24:24). Whilst we must remember that Syria and Assyria were historically different, the current talk of a 'Greater Syria' and 'The Islamic state of Iraq and Greater Syria' is nothing less than Biblical 'Assyria' born again.

Kittim or Kitti was a town in Cyprus. Because it became a naval base, it came to be put for powers further to the west whose ships used it. Thus it was a term used for Greece (1 Maccabees 1:1; 8:5 and cp. Gen. 10:4 where Kittim is a son of Javan / Greece) and also for Rome (Dan. 11:30); hence the Vulgate here reads "Italia" for "Kittim". Kittim became a general term for maritime powers to the west of Israel (Jer. 2:10; Ez. 27:6). Something similar happened to the term "Tarshish", which originally referred to the maritime port of Tyre, just as "Kittim" was originally Kitti in Cyprus. But "Tarshish" then came to apply to various maritime powers to the west of Israel, and doesn't have just one specific application to any single power.

The ships from Kittim may simply speak of Western powers afflicting Eastern powers (Assur and Eber). Then the Western powers too will finally be destroyed.

Num 24:25 Balaam rose up and went and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way-

Balaam figured that if Israel sinned against their God, then the prophecies of blessing and victory would

not come true. He understood prophecy as conditional. He advised Balak to tempt Israel to commit fornication with the pagan gods so that the prophecies would not come true (Num. 31:16; Rev. 2:14). Balaam is seen as the prototypical false teacher *within Israel* in 2 Pet. 2:15 and Jude 11. It could be that he entered the camp of Israel and told them the prophecies he had been inspired to make- and this would explain the [human] source of this material which Moses incorporated in Numbers- and having gotten their confidence, then encouraged them to commit fornication with Moab. This rings true, in that then Balaam was exactly prototypical of the false prophets *within the first century Israel of God* who were also teaching the new Israel to commit fornication and worship idols, having credibility because they had also uttered true prophecies. The latter day equivalent to this may be specific temptations for God's people in the very last days, on the borders of the Kingdom, which will involve sexual and idolatry issues.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 25

Num 25:1 Israel stayed in Shittim; and the people began to play the prostitute with the daughters of Moab-

We learn from Num. 31:16 and Rev. 2:14 that at this time, Balaam advised Balak to entice Israel with Moabite prostitutes, so that the people would be cursed by their God for immorality. The events of chapter 25 were therefore on Balaam's advice. This desperate strategy reflects how headlong was Balaam's desire to receive the wealth promised him, and how he sacrificed the welfare of God's people upon that altar. In essence we can do the same today. We note that Israel are called prostitutes because they slept with the Moabite prostitutes. They had committed prostitution against Yahweh. For the covenant at Sinai was their marital covenant.

We enquire why the reason for the sin isn't revealed at this point; for only later do we learn that this prostitution was on Balaam's advice. Possibly this is because God wants to show how sin is sin regardless of the reason. This was Adam and Eve's problem- when confronted over their sin, excuses and reasons for sin trumped the simple confession of sin which God looks for. And so it is almost always in human sin and failure. The reasons for sin assume huge proportion and dwarf the simple fact of sin. Perhaps that's why the reasons for the sin aren't mentioned at this point.

Num 25:2 for they called the people to the sacrifices of their gods; and the people ate, and bowed down to their gods-

Israel bowed down to the gods of Moab (Num. 25:1). But Israel were potentially *above* the Midianites (24:7,18); the Midianites vexed *them* (Num. 25:18) when Israel had been prophesied as vexing *them* (hence they were told to now *vex* the Midianites in :17).

Ps. 106:28 adds: "They joined themselves also to Baal Peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead". To join one-self is the language of marriage. To eat sacrifice was a sign of fellowship with the god at whose table you were eating. And by doing these things they were effectively breaking their covenant relationship with Yahweh. But despite that, He still worked to save them and to preserve them nationally as His people. His grace is the more amazing, because He disregarded even their breaking of covenant with Him- because He was and is so passionate to save.

We see the connections between eating in spiritual fellowship with idols, and prostitution. These connections continued, and were the root reason why the church at Corinth came to have sexual immorality and inappropriate feasting and alcoholic drinking happening at the breaking of bread service. They turned the Christian fellowship meal into an idol feast.

Num 25:3 Israel joined himself to Baal Peor, and the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel-

Baal Peor refers to the Baal who was worshipped at the town of Peor, near where they were now encamping

(Dt. 3:29; 4:46). Each town and geographical area had its own gods, rather like today there is a geography to religion, different parts of the world or even areas within a country tend to have their local religions. The true God and His Truth is the same worldwide, which allows a unique international bond between those who know Him and are in His Son.

"Israel *joined* himself unto Baalpeor" (Num. 25:3) in a sexual context, and by doing so they were being unfaithful to Yahweh as their husband; see on :1. Hos. 9:10 comments on this as meaning that Israel "Separated themselves unto" Baalpeor. We cannot be 'joined to' something unless we are 'separated from' something else, and in this case, they were thereby separating themselves from Yahweh. If we are truly joined to Christ and each other, we *must* be separated from idolatry. It is impossible to experience this 'joining' with believers who are not 'separated'- one cannot be 'joined' in intercourse to more than one person. We *cannot* serve two masters without *hating* God.

Paul's selfless relationship with Corinth was inspired by that of Moses with Israel. Thus Paul warns Corinth not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14), or else he would come to them and not spare. He is quoting the LXX of Num. 25:3 concerning how Israel joined themselves to Baal-peor, resulting in Moses commanding the murder of all those guilty- just as Paul later did to Corinth.

The earlier cases of Israel's apostacy all featured the account of their sin, the anger of Yahweh arising- and

then Moses makes intercession to save them. But he doesn't do so now. It seems that after his own rejection from entering the land he became bitter with Israel, accusing them of being the reason he wasn't entering. And so his desire to intercede for them waned. And thus we see him come to his end somewhat lower than the spiritual peaks that he had reached at previous points of intercession. And this seems quite a theme- that God's people often die at spiritual points below the finest moments they achieved during their lives. Gideon, Noah, Samson, David, Elijah all come to mind.

Num 25:4 Yahweh said to Moses, Take all the chiefs of the people, and hang them up to Yahweh before the sun, that the fierce anger of Yahweh may turn away from Israel-

It seems that because Phinehas turned away God's wrath (:11), this command was not actually obeyed. Deuteronomy says that all who worshipped Baal Peor were destroyed, so these who were saved from that destruction although deserving it, had righteousness imputed to them.

The wrath of God can be turned away by the actions of those He is angry with (Num. 25:4; Dt. 13:15-17; Ezra 10:14; Jonah 3:7,10; 2 Chron. 12:7; Jer. 4:4; 21:12). And yet that wrath can also be turned away by the prayers of a third party (Ps. 106:23 "He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, so that He wouldn't destroy them"; Jer. 18:20 "I stood before You to speak good for them, to turn away Your wrath from them"; Job 42:7 "Yahweh said to Eliphaz the

Temanite, My wrath is kindled against you... My servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept him, that I not deal with you according to your folly"). This means that in some cases, our prayers for others can be counted as if they have repented. We can gain our brother for God's Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7). That all the tribal chiefs were to be executed shows the need for a purge of the leadership, and how widespread was idolatry. LXX "and make them examples of judgment for the Lord".

Ezra 10:14 speaks of God's wrath turning away because those who had married Gentile women divorced them. God's wrath is also turned away by the death of the sinner- the heads of the sinners in Num. 25:4 were to be 'hung up' before the Lord so that His wrath would turn away. A similar example is to be found in Josh. 7:26. Jeremiah often comments that God's wrath is turned away by the execution of judgment upon the sinner (e.g. Jer. 30:24). In this sense His anger and wrath are poured out or 'accomplished', i.e. they are no more because they have been poured out (Lam. 4:11). The Lord's death on the cross as a representative of sinners therefore achieved the same. We are saved from wrath through Him.

Num 25:5 Moses said to the judges of Israel, Everyone kill his men who have joined themselves to Baal Peor-

This command perhaps didn't need to be carried out, because Phinehas took the initiative in killing the chief offenders (:7,8) and this act so impressed God that the plague was ended (:11). Here we have an example of how God sets up one plan or purpose, but is prepared

to amend or change it according to human initiative suggesting another one, as Moses did several times. We see here therefore how open God is to dialogue, to living relationship with His people. Or it could be that we have in :5 an explanation of how :4 came about; the princes of Israel were slain by the judges of Israel.

The whole situation is so similar to that with the golden calf. Yahweh's anger burns (:2) as it did then (Ex. 32:10 "let My anger burn against them"). On both occasions there was a plague (Ex. 32:35 = Num. 25:9). "Let each man slay his men who attached themselves to Baal Peor" (Num. 25:5) is the call to Levi of Ex. 32:27: "Let each man slay his brother, and each man his neighbor, and each man him who is close to him". As the Levites were rewarded with their ministry, so is Phinehas. The reward is in fact to continue serving God's people. Yahweh's anger waxes hot but is appeased, this time by Phinehas rather than Moses. Moses then sought to "make an atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32:30), as Phinehas did: "And he atoned for the children of Israel" (Num. 25:13). Moses presents here as passive whereas with the golden calf, he was proactive. We sense his enthusiasm had waned for yet another intercession for the people. He died somewhat weaker in passion than in his earlier days- but will still be ultimately saved. Indeed a case could be made that Moses was being disobedient here. He had been commanded to execute the chiefs of the people and hang up their heads; instead he tells the leadership of Israel to murder their people who had joined themselves to Baal. Moses' anger seems against

the people; and he repeatedly blames his ban on entering Canaan upon "the people". He invites a far greater slaughter than Yahweh had initially envisaged. Although as noted, the initiative of Phinehas meant that these executions didn't happen.

Num 25:6 Behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought to his brothers a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, while they were weeping at the door of the Tent of Meeting-

Seeing that multiple Israelites slept with Moabites, there must have been particular significance in this man and woman. The whole incident is called "the matter of Cozbi the daughter of the prince of Midian" (:18). The weeping at the tabernacle door was presumably in repentance "before Yahweh", the Angel of the presence within it. Moses was present there, and then the Israelite man and Moabite leader appear and enter "into the chamber" (:8). I suggest the implication is that they entered the holy place or even the most holy, and there they were slain. They intended to perform a sexual ritual to Peor in the tabernacle of Yahweh. Hence the urgent need Phinehas felt to immediately stop this. But the awful nature of the sin was that Israel were repenting, but Zimri was urging them against repentance and seeking to demonstrate that sin was not sin and should be indulged in. It is causing others to sin which is so abhorrent to God.

Num 25:7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest saw it, he rose up from the midst of the congregation, and took a spear in his hand-

We note from Ex. 6:25 that "Eleazar Aaron's son took one of the daughters of Putiel as his wife; and she bore him Phinehas". Putiel isn't mentioned elsewhere, but it appears to be a common Egyptian name. So the mother of Phinehas was an Egyptian, whom his father ought not to have married. Although we could argue the other way- that for an Egyptian to marry one of the slave Hebrews could be a reflection of this woman's acceptance of Yahweh as her God, even though most of His people were very far from Him. Perhaps this explains how incensed he was to see Israel returning to idolatry.

Again we wonder why Phinehas and not Moses did this. Moses of course had himself married a Midianite woman and lived many years in Midian. But all the same we are left with the impression that his zeal had somewhat abated.

Num 25:8 and he went after the man of Israel into the pavilion and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman through her body. So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel-

It seems from 1 Chron. 9:19,20 ["the Korahites, were over the work of the service, keepers of the thresholds of the tent. Their fathers had been over the camp of Yahweh, keepers of the entry. Phinehas the son of Eleazar was ruler over them in time past, and Yahweh was with him"] that it was at the door of the tabernacle / tent of the congregation that Phinehas stopped the apostasy of Israel. LXX "into the chamber". I have suggested on :6 that they entered the holy place or even the most holy, and there they were slain. They intended to per-

form a sexual ritual to Peor in the tabernacle of Yahweh. The vagueness of the word used for "pavilion" or "chamber" is perhaps to avoid the apparent blasphemy of having to admit that such acts had been performed in the holy place. We note that in this case, Phinehas would have charged in to sacred space with no regard for his ritual cleanliness, especially if he entered the most holy. But as ever, the spirit of the law triumphed over the letter.

It seems from Num. 25:6-8 that the Midianite woman and the Israelite were having sex within "the tent", the tabernacle. Phinehas was remembered for this by his descendants directing the guards at the door of the tent (1 Chron. 9:19,20). The actions of the couple were therefore intended to turn the holy place into a place where Yahweh was supposedly worshipped through sex with prostitutes, exactly the way of pagan religions, and which was a problem in the churches at Corinth and Ephesus. The woman was a cult prostitute, and the man of Israel was not only having sex with her from a carnal perspective, but was demonstrating the union of Israel with the Moabite Baal Peor. Ps. 106:28 adds the detail that the sacrifices eaten by the people at Baal-Peor were made 'to the dead' which suggests this was an attempt to terminate the plague through a pact with Baal Peor. The fact they were both from high ranking families in Israel and Midian would suggest this was an attempt to weld the two nations together, because intermarriage of princely families was how that was done at the time.

The spear connecting Jew and Gentile in death could be seen as pointing forward to the cross of Christ. The

Moabite woman and the Israelite man were representative of the Moabite women and the Israelite men who sinned; they were slain as representatives, as it were on a stake. And just as the Lord died as representative of all sinners, male and female, tempted and tempter alike. "Cozbi" means "deceiver" and easily represents the great deceiver, the false accuser, the Biblical devil which was slain by the Lord in His death. Just as the original idea of hanging up the heads of the slain rebels was also an echo of the idea of crucifixion and "cursed is every one who is hung on a tree". What Phinehas did saved Israel and led to imputed righteousness for Israel and the turning away of God's wrath from His people. Surely Paul has this incident in mind when he writes that "we are saved from wrath through Him".

Num 25:9 Those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand-

Some editions of the LXX, followed by Paul in 1 Cor. 10:8, gives 23,000. Dt. 4:3 implies that all who followed Baal Peor were destroyed, and only those who "were faithful" to Yahweh survived (Dt. 4:4). But Num. 25:9,11 suggests that virtually all Israel went after Baal Peor and would all have been destroyed, had not Phinehas and his men slain 24,000 of them. What Phinehas did therefore had real and absolute meaning for God—those who did follow Baal Peor were counted as if they hadn't done so. This was imputed righteousness, and looks forward to the even greater effect of the intercession of the Lord Jesus for us.

Perhaps the key to understanding the difference is the phrase "in one day". Num. 25:9 says that 24,000 died as a result of a plague sent to punish them- but it is not recorded how quickly they died from the plague. We can assume that a "plague" took some time period to kill them. But Num. 25:4,5 records that immediately, that day, the judges of Israel were commanded to kill by the sword those who had committed the fornication, and Phinehas arose in response. Those deaths by the sword were different to those from the plague- perhaps 23,000 died that day from these executions, and then 24,000 died from the plague subsequently. Another option is to note that there were 23,000 Levites (Num. 26:62). If each Levite killed a man (which Num. 25:5 "Let every one kill his man" might imply, cp. Ex. 32:27), this would mean 23,000 died in that one day, and if 1,000 died subsequently from the plague, we then have the 24,000 of Num. 25:9. Or it may be that 1 Cor. 10:8 is actually continuing to refer to the golden calf incident mentioned in :7; for Ex. 32:28 LXX says that 23,000 died at that time. The Masoretic text says 3,000. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that Ex. 32:28 specifically states that this slaughter happened in one day.

The 24,000 slain here contrasts with 3000 slain at the time of the golden calf. Was this really because the sin here was so much greater? Or because the intercession of Moses was quicker and more powerful than that of Phinehas here?

Num 25:10 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

Had Phinehas not killed the man who was teaching that marriage out of the Faith was quite acceptable, God would have punished *all the people of Israel* (Num. 25:11). God is a jealous God, and Phinehas is commended for his jealousy for God in terms of separating from that false teacher. We naturally turn away from the seriousness of these things. Within our humanity, we would rather God were not like this. But there is a harder side of God, a side which we come to know, to respect, understand and appreciate as we grow spiritually. We see here the power of intercession, and how the actions of one person can save others (as in Mk. 2:5 James 5:20). This came to full term in the work of the Lord Jesus.

Num 25:11 Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest has turned My wrath away from the children of Israel-

He was perhaps inspired by how Moses had turned away Yahweh's wrath from Israel (s.w. Ps. 106:23). Others likewise tried to turn away God's wrath from Israel (s.w. Jer. 18:20; Dan. 9:16). The fact is, His emotions concerning a person or nation can change in accordance with the reasoning with Him of a third party. This is the whole basis of the Lord's intercession for us with the Father. With Phinehas, it was his actions more than his words; whereas with Moses, Jeremiah and Daniel, it was more a matter of words. The actions of the Lord on the cross, along with His ongoing words of intercession, achieve the same end for us.

In that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I didn't consume the children of Israel in My jealousy-

Phinehas "executed judgment and the plague was stayed" (Ps. 106:30). The Hebrew for "executed judgment" is the same word more usually translated to pray or entreat. His actions were understood by God as a prayer, just as our actions and situations can be understood as a prayer- see on Num. 24:13. God's feelings are to be ours; Phinehas "was jealous with My jealousy". His colossal love for His people means that He is also therefore jealous over their devotions to any other god.

Elijah's description of himself in his prayer as being very jealous / zealous for God (1 Kings 19:10,14) is an allusion of his to Phinehas, whose zeal in destroying the apostate in Israel saved the nation (Num. 25:11,13). But Elijah is praying against Israel, for their total destruction, and making only a surface level allusion back to Phinehas. And likewise, much of the unbrotherly behaviour that has divided our own community has been justified by half-baked allusions to Biblical examples of 'defending the faith'.

We can deduce the tension between human initiative and Divine commandment. God's original plan was for the sinners to have their heads displayed crucified on stakes to turn away His wrath, but Phinehas took the initiative and was blessed. He wasn't asked to do what he did. And he is held up as an example, indeed as a type of the Lord Jesus who likewise offered Himself on His own will more than as simple obedience to commandment.

Num 25:12 Therefore say, 'Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace-

The priests "corrupted the covenant of Levi" (Mal. 2:8), in that they married out of the Faith (Neh. 13:29), thus violating the Spirit of the Levitical covenant- which was given in recognition of zealous action against relationships with Gentile women (Num. 25:12,13). A number of prophets condemn the priests for sexual malpractices.

Ps. 106:31 slightly extends this reward: "That was credited to him for righteousness, for all generations to come". Psalm 106 is a list of examples of grace. The grace of this was in that righteousness was counted to Phinehas. For none are righteous in their own strength; as Paul explains in Romans, it is credited to us by grace through faith. But how was it eternally credited to him? For descendants aren't counted righteous just because of their ancestors. The implication would therefore be that this imputed righteousness meant that he would therefore not die eternally; but be resurrected to life eternal. And this again is nothing but pure grace. This however opens the issue of whether God will save a person for just one act of righteousness. Indeed it seems there are several examples of men who will be saved because of faithfulness in their youth or middle age, even if the last stretch of their race wasn't that great spiritually (Samson, Jacob, Moses, Gideon, David...).

Num 25:13 and it shall be to him, and to his seed after him, the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he

was jealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel'-

It was God's intention that all Israel should be His servants, a nation of priests. But He changed and amended His approach, and chose just the Levites for this. And then out of them He chose just the descendants of Phinehas to be the priests. We see here how open God is to change and recalculation, so that by all means He may have relationship with His people. Under the new covenant, all believers are part of a royal priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5) as He initially intended even under the old covenant. And yet there is always the tendency to leave the priestly work to specialists rather than perceiving our personal call to do it.

The Sabbath is described as a perpetual, eternal ordinance between God and His people (Ex. 31:16). Yet in the New Testament we read that the Old Covenant has been done away; and the Old Covenant clearly included the ten commandments (Dt. 4:13), one of which was concerning the Sabbath. For this reason the New Testament is at pains to explain that Sabbath keeping is not now required of God's people (Col. 2:14-17; Rom. 14:1-3). Indeed, the whole Law of Moses is described as an everlasting covenant (Is. 24:5; Dt. 29:29), but it has now been done away (Heb. 8:13). The feasts of Passover and Atonement were to be "an everlasting statute unto you" (Lev. 16:34; Ex. 12:14); but now the Mosaic feasts have been done away in Christ (Col. 2:14-17; 1 Cor. 5:7). The Levitical priesthood was "the covenant of an everlasting priesthood" (Ex. 40:15; Num. 25:13), but

“the priesthood being changed (by Christ’s work), there is made of necessity a change also of the law” (Heb. 7:12). There was an “everlasting covenant” between God and Israel to display the shewbread in the Holy Place (Lev. 24:8). This “everlasting covenant” evidently ended when the Mosaic Law was dismantled. But the same phrase “everlasting covenant” is used in 2 Samuel 23:5 concerning how Christ will reign on David’s throne for literal eternity in the Kingdom. In what sense, then, is God using the word *olahm*, which is translated “eternal”, “perpetual”, “everlasting” in the Old Testament? James Strong defines *olahm* as literally meaning “the finishing point, time out of mind, i.e. practically eternity”. It was God’s purpose that the Law of Moses and the associated Sabbath law were to continue for many centuries. To the early Israelite, this meant a finishing point so far ahead that he couldn’t grapple with it; therefore he was told that the Law would last for ever in the sense of “practically eternity”. For all of us, the specter of ultimate infinity is impossible to intellectually grapple with. We may glibly talk about God’s eternity and timelessness, about the wonder of eternal life. But when we pause to really come to terms with these things, we lack the intellectual tools and linguistic paradigms to cope with it. Therefore there is no Hebrew or Greek word used in the Bible text to speak of absolute infinity. We know that death has been conquered for those in Christ, therefore we have the hope of immortal life in his Kingdom. But God speaks about eternity very much from a human viewpoint.

Phinehas already was a priest by reason of his family ancestry. So perhaps the idea is that despite of that, he is being given a personal ministry. Again we see personal relationship with God trumping the inheritance of any kind of mere religion. The eternal nature of the covenant was conditional. The covenant with Levi had likewise been eternal (Ex. 29:9), but Mal. 2:8 says that this eternal covenant was "corrupted": "You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says Yahweh". From God's side it was eternal. But man can break the covenant.

Num 25:14 Now the name of the man of Israel that was slain, who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a father's house among the Simeonites-

These two are named, showing they were more than just random examples of the many who had sinned that day. Their intention was to perform a sex ritual to Peor in Yahweh's tabernacle; and they were both in leadership positions.

Phinehas was brave in killing the son of a senior leader, especially as he risked vengeance for blood from the family.

Num 25:15 The name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi, the daughter of Zur: he was head of the people of a fathers' house in Midian-

Cozbi means "liar", the daughter of "the rock" (Zur)- a fake god. For Yahweh alone is a rock to His people. Her message was indeed a huge lie: that Yahweh and Baal worship could be fused through her as a leader of Midian openly performing a sex act with a similarly ranking

leader of Israel. In the tabernacle of Yahweh. Zur was one of the five leading princes of Midian who was later slain along with Balaam (Num. 31:8). Balaam and Zur were clearly associated. And so it seems that Balaam suggested that Zur's daughter Cozbi be used to lead Israel into sin, so that their God would curse them- and Balaam would get his coveted reward which he so obsessed about.

Num 25:16 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

Initially, God didn't want Israel to interfere with Moab but rather to leave them in peace (Dt. 2:9). But Moab had become obsessed with cursing Israel and leading them away from Yahweh so that He would curse Israel; and so God's purpose and plans again changed, and He now commands Israel to fight them; for Moab and Midian were united at this time, and the "wiles" of the Midianites in :18 are clearly those used by the Moabites in :1. Balak was a Midianite but king of Moab at the time. God's purpose is so deeply responsive to human behaviour, and takes it all into account.

Num 25:17 Harass the Midianites, and strike them-

LXX "Plague the Madianites as enemies, and smite them, for they are enemies to you". This clear definition of Midian as enemies was necessary; for Moses had been married to a Midianite and had lived there for 40 years. His Midianite father in law had once been well respected within Israel. This all would have been hard for Moses because he had lived for 40 years in Midian and the

Midianites had accepted him as an asylum seekers from Egypt.

Num 25:18 for they harassed you with their wiles, with which they have deceived you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi the daughter of the prince of Midian their sister, who was slain on the day of the plague in the matter of Peor-

"Harassed" is "vexed". Israel bowed down to the gods of Moab (Num. 25:1). But Israel were potentially *above* the Midianites (24:7,18); the Midianites vexed *them* (Num. 25:18) when Israel had been prophesied as vexing *them* (hence they were told to now *vex* the Midianites in :17). "The matter of Cozbi the daughter of the prince of Midian" shows the particular significance of this woman; see on :14,15.

We now have to apparently wait until Num. 31 to read of Israel actually going to war with Midian. But the intervening chapters cover events which happened perhaps only within days after the point in Num. 25:18 where Yahweh tells Israel to attack Midian. In Num. 26 they are to take a military census in preparation for the battle. Then chapter 27 records the issue of Zelophehad's daughters, who present as faithful to Yahweh and unlike their unbelieving father who died in the desert for his sin of not believing he could enter the land. Remember Israel are now 40 years after leaving Egypt, and about to enter Canaan despite their last minute apostasy and lack of faith. Those daughters are presented as examples of the faithful remnant within Israel. Numbers 28 commands that various daily sacrifices be offered once Is-

rael are in the land. Numbers 29 then calls for a day of atonement to be held, followed by the feast of booths five days after the atonement feast finished. This would be an apparently needless repetition of previously given legislation- unless we understand that it was a specific call to keep the feast of atonement at that time. This would have been in our September / October. A few months later, Israel entered the land around Passover time, with Moses dying about 30 days before that [seeing they mourned 30 days for him]. We note Num. 25:1 says that the people "abode" or settled for some time at this location, Shittim. This would also explain why Num. 29 doesn't describe the other feasts but only the day of Atonement and the related feast of booths [tabernacles]. The language of "a" rather than "the" holy gathering could suggest that a specific event is being commanded rather than simply repeating the legislation about the intended annual day of atonement ["In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy gathering", Num. 29:1]. This would also make sense of the word "this" in Num. 29:7: "On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy gathering". That sounds as if the audience were at that point in the seventh month. Numbers 30 then speaks about "father's houses" and yet the context of Num. 25 is that both Zimri and Cozbi were from "father's houses" and it seems Zimri had made a vow of loyalty to Baal Peor which is father had given silent consent to. And Num. 25:4 has in fact commanded the execution or beheading of all the chiefs of father's households. See on Num. 30:1.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 26

Num 26:1 It happened after the plague, that Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying-

Atonement money had to be paid whenever a census was taken (Ex. 30:12). Perhaps God wanted the people to appreciate more how they had been saved by His grace after the awful apostasy of Num. 25. He wanted them to reflect upon the atonement they had received, and that was one function of ordering a census.

Num 26:2 Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, from twenty years old and upward, by their fathers' families, all who are able to go forth to war in Israel-

This numbering of the people just before they entered the promised land perhaps looks forward to the way that God will be aware of the exact number of those who will enter His Kingdom at the day of judgment when Christ returns. Ps. 87:6 appears to speak of a 'writing up of the people' in the last day. Perhaps too there is the idea that Moses as a shepherd had been given the sheep of God's flock when they left Egypt, and now He is handing them back at the end of his life, and counting them.

Num 26:3 Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho saying-

The purpose of the census may have been not so much to know numbers, but to define the Israelites into clear family units; for it was God's intention that each

unit should have a specific inheritance in the land they were now going to enter. We likewise will each have a specific, unique nature of inheritance in the future Kingdom of God.

Num 26:4 Take a census, from twenty years old and upward; as Yahweh commanded Moses and the children of Israel. These are those that came out of the land of Egypt-

"Came out" is s.w. "brought forth". Israel were "brought forth" from Egypt by God; they had been unwilling to leave Egypt, preferring to serve the Egyptians rather than Yahweh (Ex. 14:12). God had as it were forced through His project of saving Israel by bringing them out of Egypt. And He had done so largely for the sake of Moses, by whose faith the Red Sea parted and they were delivered (Heb. 11:28,29). Therefore Yahweh's bringing Israel out of Egypt was what He did for Moses, and only thereby for His people. We too are brought out of this world towards God's Kingdom by His grace alone, with His consistently taking the initiative in our hearts and life circumstances, in accord with the loving intercession of the Lord Jesus [represented by Moses]. Thus Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 18:1; 19:1; Lev. 23:43; 25:55; Num. 26:4; 33:1,3,38; Dt. 4:45,46), but Moses did (Ex. 3:10,11).

Num 26:5 Reuben, the firstborn of Israel; the sons of Reuben: of Hanoch, the family of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the family of the Palluites-

Hanoch [s.w. Enoch] was named after the son of Cain (Gen. 4:17) and means "initiated", rather hinting at unspirituality and paganism.

Num 26:6 of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the family of the Carmites-

"Carmi" means "vinedresser", but there had been no viticulture possible during the wilderness wanderings. He may have been named in faith that this is what he would do once in the promised land. Or perhaps this is an example of where names are given to people in later life, in accordance with their secular work experience- and these stick with their descendants. Names like Smith, Tanner etc. would be examples in English. Hence people in the Bible often have various names.

Num 26:7 These are the families of the Reubenites; and those who were numbered of them were forty-three thousand seven hundred and thirty-

Here is a comparison of the numbers given in the first census of Num. 1, and those given at the end of the wilderness journeys in Num. 26:

1. Judah 74,600 rose to 76,500
2. Dan 62,700 rose to 64,400
3. Simeon 59,300 fell to 22,200
4. Zebulun 57,400 rose to 60,500
5. Issachar 54,400 rose to 64,300
6. Naphtali 53,400 fell to 45,400
7. Reuben 46,500 fell to 43,730
8. Gad 45,650 fell to 40,500
9. Asher 41,500 rose to 53,400
10. Ephraim 40,500 fell to 32,500
11. Benjamin 35,400 rose to 45,600
12. Manasseh 32,200 rose to 52,700

Total 603,550 in the first census, but 601,730 by the end of the 38 years wanderings in Num. 26.

Num 26:8 The sons of Pallu: Eliab-

"Pallu", meaning severed / differentiated, is the word used to describe how Israel were separated from amongst the Egyptians at the Exodus (Ex. 8:22; 9:4; 11:7). Probably he picked up this name (see on :6) in reference to this; perhaps he had been severed from the Egyptians in some spectacular way.

Num 26:9 The sons of Eliab: Nemuel, and Dathan, and Abiram. These are that Dathan and Abiram, who were renowned in the congregation, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they strove against Yahweh-

Israel's rejection of Moses was a rejection of the God who was working through Moses to redeem them. Thus Korah and his followers "strove against Moses... when they strove against Yahweh" (Num. 26:9 cp. 16:11). Moses understood that when Israel murmured against him, they murmured against Yahweh (Ex. 16:2,7; Num. 17:5; 21:5). They *thrust* Moses *away* from them (Acts 7:27,39) - yet the same word is used in Rom. 11:2 concerning how God still has not *cast away* Israel; He has not treated them as they treated Him through their rejection of Moses and Jesus, who manifested Him. Moses manifested Yahweh and in this sense whatever was done to him was done to Yahweh. This doesn't mean that Moses was Yahweh Himself in person. Likewise Jesus carried the Name of God (Jn. 5:43) but wasn't God in person. We who are baptized into the Name are in the

same situation- whatever is done to us is done to God, and our attitudes to those in His Name are our attitudes to Him (Mt. 25:40,43).

Num 26:10 and the earth opened its mouth, and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died-

It seems likely that Korah was not present with his family when they were swallowed up into the earth. He and the 250 rebels were at the sanctuary offering their unacceptable incense, which is why other scriptures speak of Dathan and Abiram being swallowed up- but not Korah (Dt. 11:6; Ps. 106:16-18). Num. 26:10 RSV seems to make this clear: "The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up together with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men".

A case could be made that the whole record of Israel's rejection from entering the land of Canaan is framed to adduce a reason for this as the fact they chose to believe that the land was inhabited by an evil dragon who would consume them there. This was a slander of the good land, and the whole point was that if they had believed in the power of God, then *whatever* 'adversary' was in the land, in whatever form, was ultimately of no real power (Num. 13:32; 14:36; Dt. 1:25). And yet it was not God's way to specifically tell the people that there was no such dragon lurking in the land of Canaan – instead He worked with them according to their fears, by making the earth literally open and swallow up the apostate amongst them (Num. 16:30) – em-

phasizing that by doing this, *He* was doing “a new thing”, something that had never been done before – for there was no dragon lurking in any land able to swallow up people. And throughout the prophets it is emphasized that *God* and not any dragon swallowed up people – “The Lord [and not any dragon] was as an enemy; *He* has swallowed up Israel” (Lam. 2:5 and frequently in the prophets). The people of Israel who left Egypt actually failed to inherit Canaan because they believed that it was a land who swallowed up the inhabitants of the land (Num. 13:32), relating this to the presence of giants in the land (Num. 13:33). As Joshua and Caleb pleaded with them, they needed to believe that whatever myths there were going around, God was greater than whatever mythical beast was there. And because they would not believe that, they failed to enter the land, which in type symbolized those who fail to attain that great salvation which God has prepared.

At which time the fire devoured two hundred and fifty men-

Destruction by fire was an appropriate judgment for those who had offered strange fire. Judgment is related to the crime because men are self condemned more than being condemned by God. For saving, rather than destroying, is God's passion. Ps. 106:18 says that God kindled a fire to destroy them, but in reality, they kindled that fire themselves (Is. 9:18; Hos 7:6). Lev. 10:2 uses the same term for fire from Yahweh devouring Nadab and Abihu as in Num. 16:35 about the destruction of Korah's rebels. They were clearly aware of what had hap-

pened to those rebels, and were daring God to repeat it. It was truly the sin of presumption.

And they became a sign-

In that their censers became plates on the altar as warning against apostacy and rebellion. The example of sinners from previous generations ought to be a warning to us. Asaph in Psalm 73 explains how he struggled with the fact that sinners appear to have a blessed life and the righteous suffer; but when he entered the sanctuary, "then understood I their end" (Ps. 73:17), probably a reference to him beholding the plates on the altar made from the censers of these sinners.

Num 26:11 Notwithstanding, the sons of Korah didn't die-

The inspired titles of the Psalms sometimes mention that the Psalm was written by the sons of Korah. They therefore dedicated themselves to God's service, not following the bad example of their father. We in Christ are a new creation, and not inevitable victims of our upbringing or bad parental example. There are times when our loyalty to the Lord will result in us having to experience some kind of separation from family members who choose not to go the Lord's way; Jesus foretold this would happen frequently (Mt. 10:34-37).

Their names were Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph (Ex. 6:24)- 'Prisoner', 'God will obtain for me' and 'father of gatherers'. We could possibly see reflected here Korah's sense that his family were imprisoned by their inferior [as he saw it] position, but would obtain and gather more for themselves. And yet these sons of Korah sep-

arated from their bad background, they rose above the 'chip on a shoulder' mentality, and became the authors of many Psalms. Throughout the psalms of the sons of Korah, we can detect allusion to the events of Num. 16: "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps. 84:10); "Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed" (Ps. 46:2). Many of these Psalms were clearly rewritten under inspiration and applied to crises such as the Assyrian invasion of Judah and the Babylonian exile; because the "sons of Korah" become programmatic for us all. They all have a theme of telling the Gentiles of Yahweh's grace, and this was how the historical sons of Korah would've felt after their deliverance from death.

The Psalms of the sons of Korah have 'deliverance from sheol' as a major theme, especially Ps. 49. Not only does this reference resurrection, but is a reflection of their own deliverance from the 'sheol' where their relatives died. They glory that God saved them from this—even though it was their own decision, they are glorifying the way in which even our own decisions for salvation are of Him and He is to be praised for them. And yet they perceive that the death of their families was in fact the death of all men. For all have sinned: "Like sheep dragged to Sheol, death shall graze on them; the upright shall rule them in the morning". And yet the sons of Korah realized that they were in essence no better than their rebellious ancestors who went to sheol; for they too would go to sheol, but be saved from it by the grace of resurrection: "But God will redeem my soul

from the power of Sheol". The Korah Psalms often reflect that human wealth and ambition ends in sheol, along with man's wealth; therefore we can conclude that the desire for power and leadership was motivated by material ambition.

Psalm 88 is another psalm of the sons of Korah, whose father and relatives perished in sheol. But they recognize that this was their rightful end to, and they can only be saved from it by grace: "My soul has come to Sheol... I am reckoned with those [Korah and his rebellious family] that descend to the Pit...like the pierced-through [the rebels in the family of Korah] who lie in the grave... You have laid me in the Pit below, in darkness, in the depths... separated from my companions [family members]". They felt their death was in essence that of their rebellious relatives. They were no better, but saved by grace. We see here their humility in recognizing that as the Lord put it in Lk. 14, the dramatic death of some doesn't mean that we ourselves are not also sinners who shall also die. Only grace can save us, and they came to that conclusion.

Psalm 46 is a Korah Psalm, so we note the references to rebels falling alive into the depths with a roaring underworld beneath them (Ps. 46:2-7). The allusion is to what happened to the father, brothers, sisters and relatives of the "sons of Korah". But the Psalm goes on to talk of how "we" will not fear because ultimate salvation for "us" is certain. We have an insight into the mind of Korah's sons.

There is a notable stress in Num. 16:32 and :33 on their households, and all the men who appertained to Korah". This surely includes the sons of Korah. But Num. 26:11 is clear that the sons didn't "perish". Perhaps this means the sons of Korah were swallowed into sheol but were redeemed from it immediately so they didn't perish. Redemption from sheol by grace is a big theme of the psalms written by the sons of Korah. This fits the theme developed in the preceding Num. 13-15- that condemned men can be saved. Israel were condemned to destruction and replacement by Moses, but were saved out of that. Then they were condemned to die without entering Canaan, as was Moses. But they were pardoned, and I have argued that this meant that although they died in the desert they could have the hope of resurrection to eternal inheritance of the land.

Num 26:12 The sons of Simeon after their families: of Nemuel, the family of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the family of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the family of the Jachinites-

But according to 1 Chron. 4:24,25, it was not through these sons but rather through the line of Shaul, born from Simeon's relationship with a Gentile woman, that the line of Simeon continued. Again we see God's style of working through human weakness, and the fact that Israel were not at all ethnically pure.

Num 26:13 of Zerah, the family of the Zerahites; of Shaul, the family of the Shaulites-

Gen. 46:10 shows that Shaul was Simeon's son by a wrong, casual relationship with a Gentile. But ethnic purity was never made a condition of belonging to Israel.

It was later Judaism which became obsessed with this. Rather God's people were to be open to the Gentiles. And so the family of Shaul are counted as members of Israel.

Num 26:14 These are the families of the Simeonites, twenty-two thousand two hundred-

All these figures may seem irrelevant, but analyzing them provides confirmation that the Bible we read is indeed God's inspired word, because there is so much incidental confirmation of the truth of the record provided. The sum total of Israel at the end of their wilderness wanderings was 1,820 less than it had been at the beginning, nearly 40 years previously. But the tribe of Simeon had decreased by 37,100 (cp. Num. 1:23). The plague of chapter 25 had killed 24,000 people for committing fornication with the Moabites (Num. 25:9); but the ring-leader of that had been Zimri, a Simeonite prince (Num. 25:14). It's likely therefore that he led his tribe into the orgy with the Moabites, which resulted in so many of them being killed.

Num 26:15 The sons of Gad after their families: of Zephon, the family of the Zephonites; of Haggi, the family of the Haggites; of Shuni, the family of the Shunites-

We notice the complete absence of any prefix or suffix referring to God in many of these names. Israel were not spiritually strong when entered the Kingdom. And perhaps we can take courage from that.

Num 26:16 of Ozni, the family of the Oznites; of Eri, the family of the Erites-

The seven sons of Gad differ in just one name from the list in Gen. 46:16: "The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli". Ezbon ['quick to understand'] has been replaced by Ozni ['quick ears']. The similar meanings of the names suggest these were just different forms of the same word.

Num 26:17 of Arod, the family of the Arodites; of Areli, the family of the Arelites-

"Arodi" is "wild ass man", a similar idea to the description of Ishmael in Gen. 16:12, who chose to go away from covenant relationship with God. We simply do not get a great impression of the family; and that is the point. Israel were not morally better than the surrounding nations, many of whom were descended from Abraham too. They were saved by grace.

Num 26:18 These are the families of the sons of Gad according to those who were numbered of them, forty thousand five hundred-

The Hebrew word translated as "thousand" can mean a family, or some other administrative division. Many of the 'number problems' in the Hebrew Bible are only really resolvable using this approach. And that may be in view in the census of Israel taken in Num. 1, and in the statement that six hundred 'thousands' of footmen left Egypt (Ex. 12:37). The census of Num. 1 gives figures such as those in Num. 1:21 for Reuben, which could be rendered: "forty six families ['thousands'] and five hundred (men)". Although a "hundred" might also refer to an administrative division. The total in Num. 1 would then be 598 families with a total of 5550 men.

The sum given in the second census in Num. 26 comes out as roughly the same, with 596 families amounting to 5730 men. On this basis, the total population (including women and children) would be anything between 20,000 to 40,000. This would enable us to make better sense of the statements that Israel were the smallest numerically of all the surrounding peoples (Dt. 7:1,7; 11:23; 20:1). If we insist upon taking "thousand" literally in Ex. 12:37, then 600,000 male foot soldiers would imply a total population of between two and six million. The population density would have been intense, and far greater than that of many modern nations. Estimates of global population at the time suggest it was only about 40 million, and the population of Egypt was a maximum of three million (probably far less). If the Israelites were smaller than the other nations, and they numbered say 5 million, then the total population of the seven peoples of Canaan would have been at least 40 million. The territory of Canaan could not have supported such numbers. Only 70 Israelites came into Egypt with Jacob. Expansion over 430 years to several million is not realistic. This approach helps us better understand how all the men of war marched around Jericho (Josh. 6:3). If there were literally 600,000 men then the city would have had to be many kilometers in circumference for them all to march around it seven times in one day. Archaeological evidence from Jericho simply doesn't support the idea of such a vast city. If Israel numbered say 5 million people, and recall there was also a "mixed multitude" with them, then if they marched 10 abreast this would require a col-

umn stretching around 1000 kilometers. Their promises to Edom and the Amorites to march only along a highway and not spill over it (Num. 20:17; 21:22) is unrealistic if they had such huge numbers. A figure of 600 family units leaving Egypt is more realistic; otherwise we start to wonder how ever all the Israelites, millions of them, came to be in one place at one time on Passover night. This would then make better sense of Ex. 23:30 GNB: "I will drive them out little by little, until there are enough of you to take possession of the land". This indeed sounds as if Israel were the smallest of the nations, and not a huge nation comprising several million people.

Num 26:19 The sons of Judah: Er and Onan; and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan-

In the context of taking a census at this point in Israel's history, we enquire why the deaths of these men "in the land of Canaan" over 400 years ago is now mentioned. I suggest it was a warning- that even when they entered the land, they would still be subject to Divine law and would be judged for their sin. Presence in the land of Canaan was not to be seen as a kind of covering for their sin.

Num 26:20 The sons of Judah after their families were: of Shelah, the family of the Shelanites; of Perez, the family of the Perezites; of Zerah, the family of the Zerahites-

Gen. 38:29 gives the background: "It happened, as he drew back his hand, that behold, his brother came out, and she said, Why have you made a breach for yourself? Therefore his name was called Perez". The theme of

the second born being the chosen one continues. It was accepted that Perez was the one in the line of the Messianic seed and that this pregnancy was of God (Ruth 4:12), even though he was not technically the firstborn. "Made a breach" is literally 'to spread abroad', and is the word used in the promises of how the Messianic seed was to break forth or spread abroad (Gen. 28:14).

Num 26:21 The sons of Perez were: of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the family of the Hamulites-

"Hamul" means 'The one who was spared', which rather suggests he too had sinned like Er and Onan (:19), but was spared by grace. Again, we hardly get a very positive spiritual impression of Jacob's family. They were saved by grace.

Num 26:22 These are the families of Judah according to those who were numbered of them, seventy-six thousand five hundred-

If we are to understand blessing under the old covenant as related to numbers of children, then there may be the hint that Judah were the most faithful. We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the

point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others. Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 26:23 The sons of Issachar after their families: of Tola, the family of the Tolaites; of Puvah, the family of the Punites-

What mother would call her child 'worm' ["Tola"]? Clearly people were given names, or became known by names, other than their birth names- and these names stuck with them. There are many other examples of this, like Mahlon and Chilion. This explains why people could have far more than one name, and that must be remembered when comparing the genealogies.

Num 26:24 of Jashub, the family of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the family of the Shimronites-

"Jashub" means 'he will return'. A faithful parent may have named him this in faith that Israel would one day return from Egypt to Canaan. Even when any ultimate change of circumstances may seem unlikely for us, we are to remember the final perspective- the fulfilment of the promises of the Kingdom in our lives.

Num 26:25 These are the families of Issachar according to those who were numbered of them, sixty-four thousand three hundred-

This tribe increased by about ten thousand during the wilderness journeys. Other tribes decreased. It was God's intention that the seed of Abraham should multiply. And yet some tribes multiplied by different

amounts, and others decreased. We see that the promises to Abraham will have different levels of fulfillment for those who are faithful; and no fulfillment for some who are technically the seed, but don't walk in the steps of faith of Abraham. And so it is today. Some will make more of God's truth than others; some multiply their talents more than others, in terms of the Lord's parable. And so some stars will shine brighter than others in God's Kingdom.

Num 26:26 The sons of Zebulun after their families: of Sered, the family of the Seredites; of Elon, the family of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the family of the Jahleelites-

Elon's name means 'grove of oaks', clearly with reference to pagan practices. The reference is maybe to the judge of this name (Jud. 12:12). The fact he is not recorded as having renamed himself could suggest that he remained an idolater, although was used by God to deliver Israel. Being used by God doesn't mean we are therefore faithful to Him and assured of His acceptance.

Num 26:27 These are the families of the Zebulunites according to those who were numbered of them, sixty thousand five hundred-

Zebulun increased by a minimal amount over the course of the wilderness journey (see on :22). As discussed on :25, this is rather like the person who receives the talent of God's truth and keeps it but doesn't develop it much. We get this same impression of Zebulun in 2 Chron. 30:18.

Num 26:28 The sons of Joseph after their families: Manasseh and Ephraim-

Ephraim was the younger son, whom Jacob had made the firstborn, much to Joseph's disagreement. But here the two sons are listed according to their birth order. For all angst endured by the patriarchs about the question of who was the firstborn, the subsequent Biblical records make clear that this was of no real meaning.

Num 26:29 The sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the family of the Machirites; and Machir became the father of Gilead; of Gilead, the family of the Gileadites-

Machir was Manasseh's son by a Gentile woman (1 Chron. 7:14). 1 Chron. 2:21 adds: "Afterward Hezron went in to the daughter of Machir the father of Gilead, whom he took as wife when he was sixty years old; and she bore him Segub". We again have the theme of marital and sexual weakness in the family of Israel. Machir was Manasseh's oldest son by a Syrian, Gentile woman. It was the Divine intention that marriage should be within the tribes of Israel so as to keep the inheritance which God intended. But here we have Manasseh and Judah intermarrying.

Num 26:30 These are the sons of Gilead: of Iezer, the family of the Iezerites; of Helek, the family of the Helekites-
"Iezer" is the Abiezer of Josh. 17:2 and the Gideon story.

Num 26:31 and Asriel, the family of the Asrielites; and Shechem, the family of the Shechemites-

There are quite different numbers of families recorded within each tribe, and the genealogies in Chronicles are in places more detailed, mentioning other children and families. This may be because at this point not all

chose to pay the atonement money required for the census (:1) and so were not numbered amongst Israel.

Num 26:32 and Shemida, the family of the Shemidaites; and Hepher, the family of the Hepherites-

"Hepher" means 'shame', and was surely not his birth name; see on :23.

Num 26:33 Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons, but daughters; and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah-

The fact God allows His children to live His truth on different levels needs to be grasped firmly by us, lest we become discouraged that others live on an apparently lower level than we do in some aspects of life. Being surrounded by 'lower levels' ought to inspire us to the higher levels. Zelophehad had only daughters; usually, in his context, a man would have taken concubines in order to produce sons. The record of his only having daughters is presented in the context of genealogies which show that many Israelite men had more than one wife (1 Chron. 7:15). But Zelophehad wasn't dragged down by this; God inspired him to maintain the higher level which he had chosen to live by. He didn't use the principle of Jephthah's vow. And his daughters likewise refused to be limited by their status as females, but obtained an inheritance amongst their brethren (Num. 27:1-7)

Num 26:34 These are the families of Manasseh; and those who were numbered of them were fifty-two thousand seven hundred-

We note the huge growth of Manasseh during the wilderness journeys, 32,200 rose to 52,700; whilst Ephraim's 40,500 fell to 32,500. This would appear to contradict Joseph's desire to bless Ephraim more than Manasseh (Gen. 48:14). It shows that the utterances of a patriarch were not determinate. For under the old covenant, numbers of children were related to obedience to the covenant. Prophecy was and is not determinate, but always conditional upon human response. Hence not all the blessings of the tribes uttered by Jacob came true; because the potential wasn't realized by the descendants. And so it is sadly true of so many people who turn away from the Kingdom promises.

Num 26:35 These are the sons of Ephraim after their families: of Shuthelah, the family of the Shuthelahites; of Becher, the family of the Becherites; of Tahan, the family of the Tahanites-

We notice the lack of any spiritual reference in the meaning of these names. "Becher", 'camel man', would be a strange name for someone who respected the law's pronouncement of the camel as an unclean animal.

Num 26:36 These are the sons of Shuthelah: of Eran, the family of the Eranites-

A total of 57 families are mentioned in this list, excluding Levi. But only three families of Ephraim, and then one family from a grandson. It would seem they had chosen not to pay the atonement money required at the census (see on :1), and those who didn't want to make this acceptance of atonement were not numbered amongst Israel.

Num 26:37 These are the families of the sons of Ephraim according to those who were numbered of them, thirty-two thousand five hundred. These are the sons of Joseph after their families-

We note the huge growth of Manasseh during the wilderness journeys, 32,200 rose to 52,700; whilst Ephraim's 40,500 fell to 32,500. This would appear to contradict Joseph's desire to bless Ephraim more than Manasseh (Gen. 48:14). It shows that the utterances of a patriarch were not determinate. For under the old covenant, numbers of children were related to obedience to the covenant. Prophecy was and is not determinate, but always conditional upon human response. Hence not all the blessings of the tribes uttered by Jacob came true; because the potential wasn't realized by the descendants. And so it is sadly true of so many people who turn away from the Kingdom promises.

Num 26:38 The sons of Benjamin after their families: of Bela, the family of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the family of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the family of the Ahiramites-

The simple truth is that Benjamin, the "little one" (Gen. 44:20), has more descendants listed to his name in the Chronicles genealogies than any of the brothers. Is. 60:22 clearly alludes to this- "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation". It is the theme of the patriarchal family; the firstborns are deposed, the elder serves the younger, the weak become strong, the little one becomes mighty.

Num 26:39 of Shephupham, the family of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the family of the Huphamites-

"Shephupham" means 'serpent like' and was surely not his birth name; see on :23. This family got this name from a corrupt ancestor. But they paid their atonement money (see on :1) and were numbered amongst Israel. Bad background is no reason a person cannot be numbered amongst God's people.

Num 26:40 The sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: the family of the Ardites; of Naaman, the family of the Naamites-

Gen. 46:21 says that Benjamin had ten sons when the Jacob family moved into Egypt, but here seven of them are in fact his grandsons. Benjamin was hardly a child when the brothers came to buy corn. He was in his 20s, and according to the Hebrew text he had ten sons already, and presumably some daughters; perhaps suggesting that his father's favouritism and obsession with him had not been helpful morally, and had resulted in him having multiple relationships from a young age. However, the LXX lists only three sons, and makes the rest of the list the sons of Bela. And yet Benjamin would not have been old enough to have been a grandfather. So it could be that he had married a woman who had children of her own who became Benjamin's, or that he somehow adopted these children. There would have been a very large extended family around Jacob, and maybe these children were simply under the care of Benjamin. However, the genealogy in Num. 26:40 appears to support the LXX text here, with Ard and Naaman given as grandsons of Benjamin and not sons. We must remember that genealogies, numbers and dates are not

used in Semitic languages in the strictly literalistic way in which they are in European languages. Heb. 7:10 can therefore argue that Melchizedek blessed Levi because he blessed Abraham, and Levi was a descendant of Abraham, "yet in the loins of his father". And this establishes Melchizedek as greater than Levi, and in turn, the priests descended from him. That argument may appear very stretched and even technically inaccurate to European ears. But it had absolute validity in Hebrew thought. And so the grandchildren of Benjamin, yet unborn, could be listed as being in existence when Benjamin went into Egypt, and even be numbered amongst the group at that time. This is why the grandchildren of the maids are counted as if they are the direct children of the maids; see on Gen. 46:9,18. We likewise read that Jacob brought his twelve sons out of Mesopotamia, including Benjamin (Gen. 35:24,26). But Benjamin was born later, in Canaan. But on this basis of being counted as "in the loins of" an ancestor, Benjamin could also be presented as having come out of Mesopotamia. If this kind of thing were better appreciated by Bible readers, it would be better understood that there was no personal pre-existence of the Lord Jesus in actuality, although He is spoken of as existing prior to His birth.

Num 26:41 These are the sons of Benjamin after their families; and those who were numbered of them were forty-five thousand six hundred-

Benjamin's 35,400 rose to 45,600 by the end of the wilderness journeyings. We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased

by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others. Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 26:42 These are the sons of Dan after their families: of Shuham, the family of the Shuhamites. These are the families of Dan after their families-

Shuham is called "Hushim" in Gen. 46:23, which means "hasty", not a particularly spiritual characteristic. As noted earlier, Hebrew names are not necessarily birth names, but the names by which people came to be known, reflective of their personalities or experiences. However he is here called "Shusham", "humble". So maybe his over hasty actions humbled his descendants in due course.

Num 26:43 All the families of the Shuhamites, according to those who were numbered of them, were sixty-four thousand four hundred-

Dan had only one son and yet by this time had become the second largest tribe in Israel. Benjamin had ten sons (Gen. 46:21) but was one of the smallest tribes. Again we see how God doesn't work through human

strength or advantage; the passage of time reveals over the generations that human blessing soon fades away.

We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others. Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 26:44 The sons of Asher after their families: of Imnah, the family of the Imnites; of Ishvi, the family of the Ishvites; of Beriah, the family of the Berites-

All the names here are absolutely secular in their meaning and have no hint of spirituality. The consistent impression is that Israel were a secular, unspiritual people who were saved by grace. Even other nations tended to have the names of their gods mixed in with their personal names; but the list we have here has very little of that.

Num 26:45 Of the sons of Beriah: of Heber, the family of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the family of the Malchielites-

We note how most of the names which reference God feature the 'El' suffix or prefix and not 'Yah' or 'Tah'. This is understandable, for Moses declared the Name of Yahweh to the people after most of these men had been born. This kind of artless internal corroboration is to me one of the strongest arguments for the Divine inspiration of the Bible.

Num 26:46 The name of the daughter of Asher was Serah-

The mention of women in such lists is unusual, and I suggest that the names are of those who became heads of family clans within the tribes. So the mention of Serah would mean that she became a head of family; although rare or unknown in the world around them, this was not totally unheard of in the Jacob family and we see in this the respect of women amongst the people of God.

Num 26:47 These are the families of the sons of Asher according to those who were numbered of them, fifty-three thousand and four hundred-

We note that Judah increased by a ratio of 1.02, 74,600 rose to 76,500. Dan also increased by exactly the same ratio of 1.02, 62,700 rose to 64,400. Likewise Benjamin increased by a ratio of 1.28, 35,400 rose to 45,600; and Asher also increased by the same ratio of 1.28, 41,500 rose to 53,400. Quite what we are to make of that isn't clear, although the figures are so exact that clearly God was in it. If the idea is that number of children is associated with blessing under the old covenant, perhaps the point is that amongst the children of God, some will respond to exactly the same extent as others.

Others just marginally more than others- thus Zebulun increased by a ration of 1.05, 57,400 rose to 60,500. Whereas others respond markedly more, or less.

Num 26:48 The sons of Naphtali after their families: of Jahzeel, the family of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the family of the Gunites-

"Jezer" (:49) means "image", "Guni" means "painted with colours", both suggestive of idolatry. If the people were fully committed to Yahweh, we would expect them to have removed all associations with idolatry from their names. For I have noted repeatedly that people often changed their names or became known by other names.

Num 26:49 of Jezer, the family of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the family of the Shillemites-

Gen. 46:24 lists Jezer (see on :48) and Shillem as also sons of Naphtali.

Num 26:50 These are the families of Naphtali according to their families; and those who were numbered of them were forty-five thousand four hundred-

Naphtali's 53,400 fell to 45,400 by the end of the wilderness journeys, a decrease by a ratio of 0.85; very similar to how Gad's 45,650 fell to 40,500, a decrease by a ratio of 0.88. See on :47.

Num 26:51 These are those who were numbered of the children of Israel, six hundred and one thousand seven hundred and thirty-

We must remember that "thousand" can refer to a group rather than a literal number. Perhaps in commentary upon the temptation to trust in numbers now that the number had been taken, Moses says that the number

of Israel was "as numerous as the stars in heaven" (Dt. 1:10). And yet they went into Canaan knowing they were not the most numerous of the tribes there (Dt. 7:1,7; 11:23; 20:1). So Moses may have in view Angels as stars, the idea being that whatever number Israel were on earth, they had the hosts of Angels in Heaven fighting on their side, an Angel for each of them. For all trust in numbers is not the approach of faith.

Num 26:52 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The purpose of the census may have been not so much to know numbers, but to define the Israelites into clear family units; for it was God's intention that each unit should have a specific inheritance in the land they were now going to enter. We likewise will each have a specific, unique nature of inheritance in the future Kingdom of God. But those who refused to pay the atonement money were not numbered (see on :1). The inheritance of the Kingdom requires our acceptance of the atonement and response to it.

Num 26:53 To these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names-

"The number of the names" is the phrase used in Acts 1:15 of the very early church. The idea was that the fledgling Christian church was now the new Israel of God, who were to go out and do spiritual warfare in conquering the world for Christ. The idea of inheriting our "lot" is often applied to our inheritance in the Kingdom (Eph. 1:14,18; Col. 1:12; Dan. 12:13).

Num 26:54 To the more you shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer you shall give the less inheritance:

to everyone according to those who were numbered of his family shall his inheritance be given-

We would expect the quality of the land to be factored in. But instead, land area was to be simply proportionate to the size of the family. God's ideal intention was that Israel would be obedient and experience the blessings of the covenant outlined in Lev. 26, which would include huge fecundity of the land- even on the top of the mountains there was to be corn. But they failed, and so these blessings didn't come about; and perhaps the actual division of the land was therefore based on more secular and spiritually realistic assumptions.

Num 26:55 Notwithstanding, the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit it-

The living inherit from the dead, but this is phrased in the Hebrew to imply that the dead "fathers" were being given an inheritance by the living. This is flagging attention to something. The idea was perhaps that the promised inheritances were going to be eternally experienced by those dead "fathers", as they along with the patriarchs were to be resurrected to inherit the land.

Num 26:56 According to the lot shall their inheritance be divided between the more and the fewer-

As discussed on :54, there was initially the ideal assumption that Israel's obedience would lead to huge agricultural blessing in the land, of a supernatural degree. Therefore the quality of the land, in a secular, agricultural sense, was not taken into account.

Num 26:57 These are those who were numbered of the Levites after their families: of Gershon, the family of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the family of the Kohathites; of Merari, the family of the Merarites-

"Gershon" means 'expelled', maybe meaning that like Reuben he was expelled from the role of firstborn [he is mentioned first as if he was the firstborn]. This is a theme of the Genesis record. But perhaps because of these weaknesses, the line to the high priest ran through Kohath.

Num 26:58 These are the families of Levi: the family of the Libnites, the family of the Hebronites, the family of the Mahlites, the family of the Mushites, the family of the Korahites. Kohath became the father of Amram-

The Levites were not numbered in the first census, but they were at the end of the wilderness journey. The number of 23,000 given in :62 makes them one of the smallest tribes. If we are to understand blessing under the old covenant as related to numbers of children, then there may be the hint that Judah were the most faithful and Levi and Simeon the least, in line with Jacob's curse of those two sons for what they did at Shechem. But it was from this spiritually weak group of Levites that God wished to raise up a priesthood to spiritually guide His people. This is typical of His counter instinctive way of working with people.

Num 26:59 The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt: and she bore to Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister-

Amram lived to the same age as Levi (Ex. 6:16,20). Numbers and ages are used in Semitic literature often in a non literal sense, in order to make some point. Perhaps the idea here is that Amram was indeed a true son of Levi; despite Israel's general apostasy in Egypt, he married within his own tribe, as if seeking to keep the spirit of the later legislation to this effect. Moses' father Amram had married his father's sister (Ex. 6:20), thus disobeying the principle of Lev. 18:20. The founding fathers of Israel broke these very principles, showing how the whole nation was built upon Divine grace rather than obedience.

Num 26:60 To Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar-

We note the lack of emphasis upon the children of Moses and Miriam, the great wilderness leaders of Israel. There was to be no cult of personality nor nepotism, no riding on the name of a forefather in order to be a leader of God's people. Spiritual leadership in the Bible was intended to be based upon spiritual qualification. This also continues the major Biblical theme, that the firstborn is often not used by God and is replaced. This is His style, to exalt the underdogs.

Num 26:61 Nadab and Abihu died, when they offered strange fire before Yahweh-

"The fire" refers to the fire of the altar which was ideally intended to be that kindled at the time of Lev. 9:24 when the tabernacle was consecrated. It was to be kept perpetually burning by the sacrifices being continually placed upon it, a lamb every morning and every

evening. But they offered strange or Gentile fire, other than from that fire. The fire which never went out or was 'quenched' (Lev. 6:13). is a double symbol. The phrase is used multiple times with reference to the wrath of God in condemning sinners; it is the basis of the idea of eternal fire which will not be quenched. Rather like the cup of wine from the Lord being a symbol of either condemnation or blessing. So we have a choice- be consumed by the eternal fire now as living sacrifices, or be consumed by it anyway at the last day.

Num 26:62 Those who were numbered of them were twenty-three thousand, every male from a month old and upward; for they were not numbered among the children of Israel, because there was no inheritance given them among the children of Israel-

38,000 Levites were numbered by David in 1 Chron. 23:3, although "thousand" may mean a division rather than a literal 1000. At the time of Num. 4:47,48 there were only 8,580. And Levite males from a month old were 22,000 in Num. 3:39 and 23,000 at the time of Num. 26:62. This suggests a great increase in the number of Levites by David's time; or perhaps he more generously counted who was a Levite, because he wanted to have as many as possible involved in his grandiose plans for the temple services. There was no need for such large numbers of Levites in order to serve God effectively, for there were far fewer Levites at the time of the figures given in the book of Numbers, and the sanctuary and Divine service still continued. See on :58.

Num 26:63 These are those who were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho-

Aaron was now dead, so the record is careful to say that Moses and Eleazar numbered the people at the end of their wanderings, whilst Moses and Aaron numbered them at the start of their wanderings. Having studied every verse of the Bible over the course of many years, the lack of contradiction in the text is such an impressive sign of Divine inspiration.

Num 26:64 But among these there was not a man of them who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest, when they numbered the children of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai-

The point may be that the Levites were not numbered then, and we have just read that they *were* numbered at the *end* of the wilderness journey. This would explain why Eleazar and Phinehas were not slain. The Rabbis like to suggest that "a man" refers to males and females were not included in the condemnation, but I cannot find reason to be certain about that.

Num 26:65 For Yahweh had said of them, They shall surely die in the wilderness. There was not left a man of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun-

Num. 14:30 adds: "Surely you shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore that I would make you dwell therein, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun". This promise was solemnly made, with uplifted hand as it were, to that generation

who left Egypt (Ex. 6:8). But they did not enter the land, as Num. 14:30 makes clear. This was because Israel broke their side of the covenant, and did not in fact want to enter the land; and continued serving the idols of Egypt, which they took with them through the Red Sea (Ez. 20:8; Acts 7:43). But that promise was guaranteed by the fact that "I will bring you into the land... I am Yahweh" (Ex. 6:8). The very essence of Yahweh, that 'I will' save, as surely as 'I will be who I will be', a saviour God, was fought against by Israel's idolatry and unfaithfulness to the covenant. And because 'Yahweh' involves His character, which includes His judgment of sin and not turning a blind eye to it (Ex. 34:4-6), human intransigence and faithlessness was allowed to as it were even counteract His most essential 'being' a saviour God for His beloved people.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 27

Num 27:1 Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad the son of Hepher the son of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah-

The names of these women all feature the 'Yah' suffix. This is unusual as most of the names we read at this time at best have 'el' for God, or are just of secular meaning. All these women had accepted the revelation of the Name of Yahweh given by Moses. I say they accepted it because it is clear that many people didn't keep their birth names but acquired other names later in their lives, reflective of their life experience and developed beliefs.

Num 27:2 They stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation at the door of the Tent of Meeting, saying-

Examples of spiritual ambition are inspirational; just as soldiers inspire each other by their acts of bravery. Achsah followed her father Caleb's spiritual ambition in specifically asking for an inheritance in the Kingdom (Josh. 14:12; 15:18); and this in turn inspired the daughters of Zelophehad to ask for an inheritance soon afterwards (Josh. 17:4). And so it ought to be in any healthy congregation of believers. Ponder the parallel between Is. 51:1 and 7: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord... hearken unto me, ye that know righteousness". To know God's right-

eousness is to seek / follow it; of itself, it inspires us to ambitiously seeking to attain it.

Num 27:3 Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against Yahweh in the company of Korah; but he died in his own sin, and he had no sons-

The repeated occurrence of the phrase "in the wilderness" in Num. 15:32; 27:3 leads the Rabbis to identify the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath as Zelophehad, who therefore "died in his own sin", an allusion to Num. 15:31 which uses this term in prefacing the incident of gathering sticks. Although it is then noteworthy that he had apparently faithful daughters.

Num 27:4 Why should the name of our father be taken away from among his family, because he had no son? Give to us a possession among the brothers of our father-

Considering the low status of women at that time, we see here a commendable spirit of initiative and spiritual ambition for these women to dare ask a male dominated society to change their rules to allow them to have an inheritance. We see too how God and Moses weren't at all anti-women, and responded positively. Note how the women were allowed to come directly to the decision makers, without needing to appoint a male representative for their case, as was common in surrounding cultures. The value of the human person is consistently seen throughout the Pentateuch. They asked about this matter *before* the land had been possessed, reflecting their strength of faith that God would fulfil His promise of giving His people the Kingdom; they imagined what it

would be like there, and acted accordingly even before they got there, as if the land was already theirs in possession- just as we should.

Num 27:5 Moses brought their cause before Yahweh-

This is not the only example of where the Mosaic law was structured so as to intentionally need further interpretation and clarification. It was designed to provoke relationship with God, rather than as a legalistic total statement of how to live in every part of life. See on :11.

Num 27:6 Yahweh spoke to Moses saying-

In most societies of the time, a woman didn't get her father's inheritance, but instead was intended to marry into another family. The inheritance of land passed through the male line. But these women were perceptive, and realize that the inheritance was going to be eternal, and so they wanted their father to have his name preserved in association with his inheritance- otherwise he would as it were lose his inheritance because he had no sons. And so they were granted their request. We see from Ezra 2:61 another case of how this worked out in practice. God cannot be accused of being against women; His legislation valued every human person to a degree unseen in any contemporary legislation.

Num 27:7 The daughters of Zelophehad speak right. You shall surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brothers; and you shall cause the inheritance of their father to pass to them-

The fact God allows His children to live His truth on different levels needs to be grasped firmly by us, lest we become discouraged that others live on an apparently

lower level than we do in some aspects of life. Being surrounded by 'lower levels' ought to inspire us to the higher levels. Zelophehad had only daughters; usually, in his context, a man would have taken concubines in order to produce sons. The record of his only having daughters is presented in the context of genealogies which show that many Israelite men had more than one wife (1 Chron. 7:15). But Zelophehad wasn't dragged down by this; God inspired him to maintain the higher level which he had chosen to live by. He didn't use the principle of Jephthah's vow. And his daughters likewise refused to be limited by their status as females, but obtained an inheritance amongst their brethren (Num. 27:1-7).

Num 27:8 You shall speak to the children of Israel saying, 'If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter-

See on :6. For land inheritance to pass on through the female was unheard of in contemporary legal codes. We are all somewhat in Zelophehad's position. He sinned and died for it, but he has the hope still of eternal inheritance in the Kingdom at the resurrection- in his own name.

Num 27:9 If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers-

What was important was that the man's inheritance should pass on in his own name, or that of his family. As discussed on :6, the reasoning behind this was because it was God's intention that Israel should eternally inherit their allotments in the land, at the time of resurrection.

Num 27:10 If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers-

As discussed on :6,8,9, this was not a case of male preference. It was so that the land allotment which God had given to each family remained in the name of that family.

Num 27:11 If his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his kinsman who is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it; and it shall be to the children of Israel a statute and ordinance, as Yahweh commanded Moses'-

One wonders why this statute had not been included within the Law of Moses. Perhaps God had reserved it in potential, waiting the initiative of these women? See on :5.

Num 27:12 Yahweh said to Moses, Go up into this mountain of Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the children of Israel-

In Jn. 3:3,5, the Lord speaks of how a man must be born again in order to see and enter the Kingdom. He parallels seeing the Kingdom with entering it. Moses saw the land of the Kingdom of God, but couldn't enter it. This is surely behind the Lord's words here. Given the many allusions to Moses in John's Gospel, I submit that the Lord was surely saying something about Moses' seeing of the land before he died (Num. 27:12). It's as if He felt that Moses' seeing the land meant that he would ultimately enter it. To be enabled to see the land, with 'born again' special eyesight, was therefore a guarantee that Moses would enter the Kingdom. And Is. 33:17 speaks

of beholding the King in his beauty and seeing "the land that is very far off" [an obvious allusion to Moses seeing the land] as a picture of ultimate salvation.

Moses seeing the Kingdom but being unable to enter it, nor himself lead God's people into it, points forward to how the law of Moses gave a vision of the Kingdom, but was unable to bring us into it. That required the work of Joshua / Jesus. "Abarim" means 'the regions beyond'. Moses and his law gave an insight into the Kingdom, the region beyond him. For the culture of grace and kindness, centered around the sacrificed future Messiah, the Lord Jesus, was the outcome of the law. But it was unattainable by weak men.

Num 27:13 When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was gathered-

Moses seeing the promised land but being unable to enter it himself points to how the Law of Moses gave a view of salvation, but couldn't bring people into it. He had specifically asked to be able to "see" and enter the land (Dt. 3:25-27), and God's response was to agree to let him "see" it, but He did not agree that Moses could enter it. So we have highlighted the difference between seeing and entering the Kingdom.

Num 27:14 because you rebelled against My word in the wilderness of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify Me at the waters before their eyes. (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin)-

Israel had rebelled against the commandment of Yahweh through disbelief, and therefore couldn't enter

Canaan (Dt. 1:26; 9:7,23,24; 31:27; Num. 27:4); they were as the rebellious son who rebelled against his father's commandment (s.w. Dt. 21:18,20). For he himself had rebelled against the commandment of Yahweh and because of this was also barred from entering Canaan (Num. 20:24; 27:14). One reason for this was that he had called the Israelites "rebels" (Num. 20:10), and no sooner had he done so, than he himself rebelled against Yahweh's commandment just like them, but in a different way.

Num 27:15 Moses spoke to Yahweh, saying-

Moses did not get bitter at his rejection, nor disinterested in Israel's future because he would not be with them in the land. He asked God to provide a replacement for him. We see here Moses' selflessness, his concern was always for the wellbeing of God's people rather than his own status. He didn't ask for one of his own family members to take over the leadership; for he realized that spiritual leadership must be based upon spiritual qualification, not family connection.

Num 27:16 Let Yahweh, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation-

Biblically, a man or woman is identified with their spirit in the sense of their mind or way of life. Heb. 12:23 speaks of the spirits of just men, with whom the believer ought to associate. This means that we ought to identify ourselves with the way of life, the spirit of life, of "just men" of the past. God is "the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num. 16:22; 27:16) in the sense that He is the

God of all humanity. So “spirits in prison” can refer to people who, in their spiritual lives, are imprisoned.

Num 27:17 who may go out before them, and who may come in before them, and who may lead them out, and who may bring them in-

This effectively meant 'to lead them in battle' (Josh. 14:11).

That the congregation of Yahweh be not as sheep which have no shepherd-

Quoted by Jesus about the crowds of Israelites in the first century (Mt. 9:36). He clearly saw those confused and misguided people, with all their wrong beliefs and attitudes, as still the congregation of God. We also learn from what Moses says and the Lord's approval of it that God's people need shepherds. There is an undoubted teaching regarding the need for leadership / shepherding throughout the Bible. When God's people are leaderless, they go astray.

Moses sought for a prophet / successor like unto him, who would lead out and bring in the sheep of Israel (Num. 27:17,21). The descriptions of the good shepherd not losing any sheep (Jn. 10:28; 17:12) perhaps allude to the well known Jewish stories about Moses being such a good shepherd that he never lost a sheep. L. Ginzberg, *Legends Of The Jews* has a section on 'Moses as faithful shepherd' (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1910) Vol. 2 pp. 300-316).

Moses was a shepherd for 40 years, and then for 40 years he put this into practice by leading Israel as God's shepherd for 40 years in the same wilderness (Num.

27:17; Ps. 80:1; Is. 63:11). As Moses was willing to sacrifice his eternal life for the salvation of the sheep of Israel (Ex. 32:30-32), so Christ gave his life for us. John's Gospel normally shows the supremacy of Christ over Moses. In this connection of them both being shepherds willing to die for the flock, Moses is not framed as being inferior to Christ- in that in his desire to die for Israel, he truly reached the fullness of the spirit of Christ. "The good shepherd" was a Rabbinical title for Moses; Christ was saying "I am Moses, in his love for your salvation; not better than him, but exactly like him in this". In a sense, Moses' prayer was heard, in that he was excluded from the land for their sakes (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21; Ps. 106:33); they entered after his death. This was to symbolize how the spirit of his love for Israel was typical of Christ's for us.

Num 27:18 Yahweh said to Moses, Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him-

Because Joshua had the Spirit, Moses was told to lay his hand on him. Yet Dt. 34:9 says that Moses laid his hand on him so that Joshua might receive the Spirit. Here we see the upward spiral of spirituality at work- those who are of the Spirit are made more spiritual and confirmed in their spirituality.

Num 27:19 and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and commission him in their sight-

"Commission" carries the idea of practically commanding him. A similar public transference of authority from Moses had happened in Num. 11:17.

Num 27:20 You shall put of your honour on him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may obey-

Num. 27:20 LXX says that Moses put or gave of his glory upon Joshua- and this passage is alluded to by the Lord in Jn. 17:22: "The glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them". Note that the Lord's prayer of John 17 is full of allusion to Moses. So the disciples, indeed all those for whom the Lord prayed in His prayer, are to see themselves as Joshua. Further, in the same context, the Lord washed the disciples' feet. This would've been understood by the disciples as an allusion to a well known Jewish legend that in Num. 27:15-23, Moses acted as a servant to Joshua by preparing a basin of water and washing Joshua's feet. And the LXX of Moses' final charge to Joshua in Dt. 31:7,8 ["fear not, neither be dismayed"] is quoted by the Lord to His disciples in Jn. 14:1,27.

Num 27:21 He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before Yahweh. At his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation-

The contrast with Moses was that God communicated directly with him face to face with the Angel, whereas He would communicate with Joshua through the High Priest. The Urim and Thummim were apparently stones in the breastplate which flashed out binary yes / no re-

sponses to questions. "Breastplate" is LXX "oracle", as if the judgment flashed out from the Urim and Thummim associated with the breastplate was God's word or oracle to His people. After the time of David, we don't hear of them being used- perhaps because the ministry of the prophets became God's chosen way of communicating His word to His people.

Num 27:22 Moses did as Yahweh commanded him; and he took Joshua, and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation-

Perhaps the obedience of Moses is stressed because it would have been absolutely normal for a leader of his magnitude to assume that his sons, or at least the sons of his brother Aaron, should take over from him. But instead a man from another tribe is chosen. And Moses in characteristic humility and desire to see God's work done and His glory achieved... has therefore no objection to this and submits to it.

Num 27:23 and he laid his hands on him, and commissioned him, as Yahweh spoke by Moses-

The obedience of Moses to God is continually emphasized, and he thereby became a type of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 3:2-5).

NUMBERS CHAPTER 28

Num 28:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The commands about the continual burnt offering are repeated more frequently and in more detail in the Law of Moses than those about anything else or any other offering. It's as if God perceived the likely tendency of His people to forget the regular sacrifices and focus instead on the occasional ones; and to disregard the commands about the grain offering, which was so small and yet so valuable to God. It is likewise continually stressed in the legislation that these continual sacrifices were "a pleasant aroma to Me" (:2). Spirituality is about daily discipline, not occasional acts of devotion; hourly prayer, daily Bible reading, constant spiritual mindedness, rather than occasional attendance at a church meeting. When God later asked Israel "Did you offer unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?" (Am. 5:25; Acts 7:42), the answer implied is that no, they did not. Hence this repetition here at the end of the wilderness journey. The whole purpose of their being given Canaan was so that they would have an environment in which to keep God's laws (Ps. 105:45). Likewise with us- if we're not interested in keeping God's principles in this life, there will be little point in our being given the Kingdom, which is likewise an arena in which we can live perfectly according to His principles.

Num 28:2 Command the children of Israel, and tell them, 'My offering, My food for My offerings made by fire of a pleasant aroma to Me, you shall observe to offer to Me in their due season'-

Paul saw the sacrifices of Israel as having some relevance to the Christian communion meal. He comments: "Are those who eat the victims not in communion with the altar?" (1 Cor. 10:18); and the altar is clearly the Lord Jesus (Heb. 13:10). Eating of the communion meal was and is, therefore, fundamentally a statement of our fellowship with the altar, the Lord Jesus, rather than with others who are eating of Him. The bread and wine which we consume thus become antitypical of the Old Testament sacrifices; and they were repeatedly described as "Yahweh's food", laid upon the altar as "the table of Yahweh" (Lev. 21:6,8; 22:25; Num. 28:2; Ez. 44:7,16; Mal. 1:7,12). And it has been commented: "Current translations are inaccurate; *lehem panim* is the 'personal bread' of Yahweh, just as *sulhan panim* (Num. 4:7) is the 'personal table' of Yahweh". This deeply personal relationship between Yahweh and the offerer is continued in the breaking of bread; and again, the focus is upon the worshipper's relationship with Yahweh rather than a warning against fellowshiping the errors of fellow worshippers through this action. What is criticized in later Israel is the tendency to worship Yahweh through these offerings at the same time as offering sacrifice to other gods.

Num 28:3 You shall tell them, 'This is the offering made by fire which you shall offer to Yahweh: male lambs

a year old without blemish, two day by day, for a continual burnt offering-

No animal actually is without blemish. God recognizes that we will not attain perfection in this life, but we are to do our best towards it; and His love imputes righteousness to us, counting us as unblemished because of our status in Christ. For only Christ was the sacrifice totally without moral blemish (1 Pet. 1:19).

Num 28:4 You shall offer the one lamb in the morning and you shall offer the other lamb at evening-

The continual sacrifice of lambs was to remind them that the Passover deliverance through the lamb was effectively ongoing. The Passover lamb was likewise to be a year old (Ex. 12:5). We too are to live constantly under the impression of the Lord's sacrifice and redemption of us. Israel were asked to use a lamb of the first year to record various times when they should be thankful for God's redemption of them in the events which comprise life (Lev. 9:3; 12:6; 23:12,18,19; Num. 6:12,14; 7:15,17,21; 28:3,9,11,19; 29:2,8,13). This was to continually recall to them the events of their great redemption through the Red Sea. And the essence of our redemption, our baptism and salvation through the blood of the lamb, must likewise be brought ever before us.

Num 28:5 with the tenth part of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with the fourth part of a hin of beaten oil-

The law of Moses was not an iron law which had to be obeyed in every context. Clearly this law (first given at Sinai at the start of their journeys) about oil and

wine being offered with the daily sacrifices would have been practically impossible to keep during the forty years wandering. And likewise during the time of initial conquest of Canaan. Every day, half a hin (1.8 liters, 3.8 pints, around half a gallon) of olive oil and the same of wine would have been required. And this was just for the daily offerings; there were many days when more sacrifices were offered. It was by grace that God would have overlooked this. I suggest that it is to this which Am. 5:25 refers, challenging Israel to remember that God had accepted them in the wilderness by grace alone, as they were unable to keep His ideal requirements: "Did you bring Me sacrifices and offerings during the forty years in the wilderness?"

Num 28:6 It is a continual burnt offering, which was ordained in Mount Sinai for a pleasant aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh-

"A pleasant aroma" is a very common phrase. This concept is important to God. It first occurs in Gen. 8:21 where it means that God accepted Noah's sacrifice and vowed that the pole of saving mercy in His character was going to triumph over that of necessary judgment. Under the new covenant, it is persons and not sacrifices or incense which are accepted as a "pleasant aroma" (Ez. 20:41). The word for "pleasant" means strong delight; this is how God's heart can be touched by genuine sacrifice. Those pleasing offerings represented us, the living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). And so it is applied to us in 2 Cor. 2:15- if we are in Christ, we are counted as a pleasant aroma to God. The offering of ourselves to Him is

nothing of itself, but because we are in Christ and counted as Him, we are a delight to God. Hence the colossal importance of being "in Christ". "Aroma" or "smell" is a form of the Hebrew word *ruach*, the word for spirit or breath. God discerns the spirit of sacrifices, that was what pleased Him rather than the burning flesh of animals. Our attitude of mind in sacrifice can touch Him. Sacrifice is therefore accepted, Paul says, according to what a person has to give, but the essence is the attitude of mind behind it. We think of the two coins sacrificed by the widow.

Num 28:7 Its drink offering shall be the fourth part of a hin for the one lamb. You shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to Yahweh in the holy place-

Bread (:4) and wine were effectively offered with the lamb. The Lord's choice of symbols for the breaking of bread surely had this in mind. They are but the side offerings, as it were, compared to the lamb. To take bread and wine would beg the question: 'And where is the slain lamb?' And the answer to that at the breaking of bread is 'Here in our midst'.

Num 28:8 The other lamb you shall offer at evening. As the grain offering of the morning, and as the drink offering of it, you shall offer it, an offering made by fire, of a pleasant aroma to Yahweh-

Literally "between the two evenings", as at Passover night (Ex. 12:6). See on :4.

Num 28:9 On the Sabbath day two male lambs a year old without blemish, and two tenth parts of an ephah of

fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, and the drink offering of it-

This looked ahead to the unblemished character of the Lord Jesus. The offering of sacrifices "without blemish" uses a word which is used about Abraham and Noah being "without blemish" (AV "perfect") before God (Gen. 6:9; 17:1). Although the word is used about the sacrifices, it is really more appropriate to persons- "you shall be perfect with Yahweh your God" (Dt. 18:13), "serve Him in sincerity (s.w. "without blemish")" (Josh. 24:14). The idea, therefore, was that the offerer was invited to see the animal as representative of himself. Our lives too are to be as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1). And yet in practical terms, no animal is without blemish. They were to give the best they could, and God would count it as without blemish; as He does with us. David frequently uses the term in the Psalms about himself and the "upright", even though he was far from unblemished in moral terms.

Here for the only time in the Law it is pointed out that the Sabbath sacrifices must include a grain offering, although this principle had been given in Num. 15:3. The theme of this chapter is that the small offerings mustn't be forgotten nor minimized in importance.

Num 28:10 this is the burnt offering of every Sabbath, besides the continual burnt offering, and the drink offering of it-

There are great implications of the little word "besides". There was the warning not to let the offering of other sacrifices tempt the people to think that the "con-

tinual burnt offering" was therefore not to be taken seriously on those days. The regular, purposeful beginning and ending of each day with devotion to the Lord is something which nothing else should ever displace. I was recently working with a group of fine brothers and sisters trying to plaster and paint a house against a deadline. We worked day and night quite literally- and afterwards confessed to each other that in those days, our prayer and Bible reading had taken a major slip. Of course at the time, we all told ourselves that we were about the Lord's work... which we were. But my point is that the "continual burnt offering" of devotional 'quiet time' with the Lord, prayer and Bible reading, really must not slip. I challenge us to start each day with some "quiet time", to make Him our arm every morning, to strive the harder for a more disciplined life- with the dynamic in it all being the transfixing experience of knowing Jesus as our finest friend, inspiring brother, matchless Saviour, Son of God.

Num 28:11 In the beginnings of your months you shall offer a burnt offering to Yahweh: two young bulls, and one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish-

This was to remind them that the Passover deliverance through the lamb was effectively ongoing; see on :4. The Passover lamb was likewise to be a year old (Ex. 12:5). We too are to live constantly under the impression of the Lord's sacrifice and redemption of us. Israel were asked to use a lamb of the first year to record various times when they should be thankful for God's redemption of them in the events which comprise life

(Lev. 9:3; 12:6; 23:12,18,19; Num. 6:12,14; 7:15,17,21; 28:3,9,11,19; 29:2,8,13). This was to continually recall to them the events of their great redemption through the Red Sea. And the essence of our redemption, our baptism and salvation through the blood of the lamb, must likewise be brought ever before us.

Num 28:12 and three tenth parts of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; and two tenth parts of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram-

The new moon festival was to effectively be a Sabbath of rest and worship (Is. 66:23; Ez. 46:1; Am. 8:5), a time for worship and teaching of the law (2 Kings 4:23). Most of the surrounding nations worshipped the moon whenever there was a new moon (Dt. 4:19; Job 31:26,27; Jer. 8:2). God saw that this was going to be part of the religious need of people at that time, and He makes a kind of concession to that weakness and need. Israel were to keep a new moon festival- but dedicate it to Him. We marvel at His awareness of human needs within the cultures they live in.

Num 28:13 and a tenth part of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering to every lamb; for a burnt offering of a pleasant aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh-

Paul writes of the church in Corinth that God has "tempered" the whole body together (1 Cor. 12:24). This is alluding to the way in which the unleavened cakes of flour were "mixed" or "tempered" with the oil (cp. the Spirit) in order to be an acceptable offering (Lev. 2:4,5; 7:10; 9:4 etc.). Paul has already likened his Corinthian

ecclesia to a lump of unleavened flour (1 Cor. 5:7); he is now saying that they have been "tempered" together by the oil of God's Spirit. If we break apart from our brethren, we are breaking apart, or denying, that "tempering" of the body which God has made.

Num 28:14 Their drink offerings shall be half a hin of wine for a bull, and the third part of a hin for the ram, and the fourth part of a hin for a lamb: this is the burnt offering of every month throughout the months of the year-

This had only previously been required in the specific case of Ex. 29:40 but in Num. 15:10 was then made applicable to every sacrifice. After the rejection of the people in Num. 14, God wanted them to have this extra feature in relationship with Him. I see it that way, rather than Him as it were punishing them with more legislation. For that was not at all the purpose of any of His Mosaic laws.

Num 28:15 One male goat for a sin offering to Yahweh; it shall be offered besides the continual burnt offering, and the drink offering of it-

The fact they were offering 'extra' offerings was not to take them away from realizing their sin and need for atonement. Such reminders are always necessary. The offering of other sacrifices was not to tempt the people to think that the "continual burnt offering" was therefore not to be taken seriously on those days. The regular, purposeful beginning and ending of each day with devotion to the Lord is something which nothing else should ever displace.

Num 28:16 In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, is Yahweh's Passover-

The people of Israel as a body were going through the death and resurrection experience of the Lord Jesus, through recalling the process of the Passover and Exodus through the Red Sea. Israel ate Passover (Ex. 12:6) [14th Abib], as the Lord died on the cross as the Passover lambs were slain; Israel left Egypt the next day (Num. 33:3) [15th Abib] and journeyed three days (Ex. 8:27) [15th-17th Abib], and the Lord Jesus was three days in the tomb. Israel then came through the Red Sea [17th Abib], connecting with the Lord's being resurrected. As we come out of the baptismal water, we really are united with the resurrected Lord- a new creation. His newness of life, His deliverance and successful exodus from the world- all this becomes ours.

Num 28:17 On the fifteenth day of this month shall be a feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten-

These seven days were to recall the seven days of creation; for the exodus was a new creation of Israel, out of the water of the Red Sea.

Num 28:18 In the first day shall be a holy gathering: you shall do no servile work-

Work was obviously required in order to keep the Passover; the "work" in view is therefore secular work. The repeated emphasis upon this is to demonstrate that blessing and salvation was to be by grace and not works. They were to cease from their own works. And this repeated lesson taught to them is likewise taught to us in different ways.

Num 28:19 but you shall offer an offering made by fire, a burnt offering to Yahweh: two young bulls, and one ram, and seven male lambs a year old; they shall be to you without blemish-

No animal actually is without blemish. God recognizes that we will not attain perfection in this life, but we are to do our best towards it; and His love imputes righteousness to us, counting us as unblemished because of our status in Christ. For only Christ was the sacrifice totally without moral blemish (1 Pet. 1:19).

Num 28:20 and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: you shall offer three tenth parts for a bull, and two tenth parts for the ram-

For "mixed", see on :13. One of the most obvious similarities between these offerings and the breaking of bread is that they both feature bread and wine, associated with a slain animal in the midst (Num. 15:9,10; 2 Sam. 6:17- 19). And further, both require the eating of the sacrifice by the offerer. The peace offering and Passover (also typical of the memorial meeting) featured the offerer eating the sacrifice "before the Lord". This phrase "before the Lord" is continually emphasized in the records of the peace offerings. I guess we would all admit that our sense of the presence of the Father and Son at our memorial meetings has much room for improvement. We really are "before the Lord" as we sit there. God came unto men when they offered acceptable peace offerings (Ex. 20:24), as He is made known to us through the breaking of bread.

Num 28:21 You shall offer a tenth part for every lamb of the seven lambs-

The sacrifices on each of the seven days were two young bullocks, one ram and seven lambs for a burnt offering, with the accompanying meat offerings, and one goat for a sin offering (Num. 28:19-24). This explains why the Jews at the time of the Lord's death were careful about not being defiled so that they might eat the Passover (Jn. 18:28). The reference is not to the Passover lamb, but to these sacrifices which began the seven day feast of unleavened bread which followed the Passover feast, which only last one day.

Num 28:22 and one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you-

A goat being chosen for the sin offering tempts us to think of the Lord's usage of sheep and goats as representing the righteous and the sinners. The Lord Jesus, the ultimate sin offering, was in one sense the spotless Passover lamb of God; in another sense, He was totally identified with the goats- sinful, rejected humanity. Likewise He was represented by the serpent lifted up on the pole.

Num 28:23 You shall offer these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a continual burnt offering-

The offering of other sacrifices was not to tempt the people to think that the "continual burnt offering" was therefore not to be taken seriously on those days. The regular, purposeful beginning and ending of each day with devotion to the Lord is something which nothing else should ever displace.

Num 28:24 In this way you shall offer daily, for seven days, the food of the offering made by fire, of a pleasant aroma to Yahweh. It shall be offered besides the continual burnt offering, and the drink offering of it-

It is so often stressed, both in this chapter and elsewhere, that these continual offerings mustn't be forgotten about at the time of the greater festivals. See on :1. But these "continual" offerings were designed to provoke the question in the heart of all thoughtful believers: 'Does God really want all these animals?'. David at the time of his sin with Bathsheba was taught that God didn't actually want them so much as He wanted a contrite heart which throws itself upon Him. He did not so much require the continual burnt offerings, but rather "Offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, pay your vows to the Most High" (Ps. 50:8,15). Heartfelt praise was what God hungered for, not ritualistic sacrifice. To this day, He is thrilled by from the heart thanksgiving, and actions of gratitude for what He has done ["pay your vows"].

Num 28:25 On the seventh day you shall have a holy gathering: you shall do no servile work-

"Gathering" is LXX *ekklesia*. This is the word rendered "church" in the New Testament. We could reason from this therefore that "church" specifically refers to a gathering of God's people. At that time and during those moments, they are a church. When the entire community of believers is referred to as "church", this is how God

views them- as if they are all gathered together at a gathering or convocation before Him. The word in its Biblical usage therefore doesn't refer to what we might call a denomination or fellowship.

Num 28:26 Also in the day of the first fruits, when you offer a new grain offering to Yahweh in your feast of weeks, you shall have a holy gathering; you shall do no servile work-

The celebration of harvest was typically a celebration of the fruits of human labour. But God's people were to be careful to realize that any harvest blessings were ultimately of God and not of their labour. At the time when every hour of the day was used to bring in the harvest, the people were to have a break from their labours.

Num 28:27 but you shall offer a burnt offering for a pleasant aroma to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old-

The usual pattern for the offerings was sin offering, burnt offering [dedication to God on the basis of being reconciled from sin] and then peace offerings, celebrating the resultant peace with God. But here the burnt offering comes first (:27), with the sin offering as a kind of afterthought (:29). The idea is that the harvest must be dedicated to God and accepted as His blessing and gift. But there was to be the awareness that they were all sinners and this gift had been by grace.

Num 28:28 and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil, three tenth parts for each bull, two tenth parts for the one ram-

The continual stress upon the usage of oil [*shehmen*] may look ahead to the *meshiach*, the Christ, the anointed one. All aspects of the offerings looked ahead to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Num 28:29 a tenth part for every lamb of the seven lambs-

Frankincense was to be added to the flour (Lev. 2:1). This was a type of incense which would have given a pleasing smell to the burning flour. This represented how pleased God was with the offering even of a handful of flour (Lev. 2:2). Small sacrifices please Him immensely. And they are what comprise daily life.

Num 28:30 one male goat, to make atonement for you-

See on :27. The total number of animals offered therefore comes to 13 (10 in :27, one in :30, two in :31). This perhaps refers to the 13 tribes, including Levi.

Num 28:31 Besides the continual burnt offering, and the grain offering of it, you shall offer them (they shall be to you without blemish), and their drink offerings-

Every animal is blemished in some way, but they were to offer that which in their eyes ("to you") was without blemish. Whilst we are to offer our best, it's only the best in our eyes, and is only accepted by grace.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 29

Num 29:1 In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy gathering. You shall do no servile work: it is a day of blowing of trumpets to you-

This was the first day of their civil year; the religious year began with Passover. Neh. 8:2 records that this feast was used in order to teach the law to the assembled people. It was a lead up to the affliction of souls on the tenth day of that month at the day of atonement. There is repeated emphasis upon not working whilst remembering God's saving work. Throughout the Mosaic law, there was the clear teaching that it was God's work and not that of man which was to be celebrated and was to be the basis of relationship with God.

Num. 25:18 commands Israel to attack the Midianites for what they did to them in seducing them to idolatry. But we have to apparently wait until Num. 31 to read of Israel actually going to war with Midian. But the intervening chapters cover events which happened perhaps only within days after the point in Num. 25:18 where Yahweh tells Israel to attack Midian. In Num. 26 they are to take a military census in preparation for the battle. Then chapter 27 records the issue of Zelophehad's daughters, who present as faithful to Yahweh and unlike their unbelieving father who died in the desert for his sin of not believing he could enter the land. Remember Israel are now 40 years after leaving Egypt, and about to enter Canaan despite their last minute apostacy and

lack of faith. Those daughters are presented as examples of the faithful remnant within Israel. Numbers 28 commands that various daily sacrifices be offered once Israel are in the land. Numbers 29 then calls for a day of atonement to be held, followed by the feast of booths five days after the atonement feast finished. This would be an apparently needless repetition of previously given legislation- unless we understand that it was a specific call to keep the feast of atonement at that time. This would have been in our September / October. A few months later, Israel entered the land around Passover time, with Moses dying about 30 days before that [seeing they mourned 30 days for him]. This would also explain why Num. 29 doesn't describe the other feasts but only the day of Atonement and the related feast of booths [tabernacles]. The language of "a" rather than "the" holy gathering could suggest that a specific event is being commanded rather than simply repeating the legislation about the intended annual day of atonement ["In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a holy gathering", Num. 29:1]. This would also make sense of the word "this" in Num. 29:7: "On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy gathering". That sounds as if the audience were at that point in the seventh month.

As discussed above, the material in Num. 26-30 is all relevant to the historical situation described in Num. 25. Moab took Balaam's advice and encouraged the men of Israel to sleep with Moabite prostitutes, and to make a religious covenant with Baal. This was at the end of the

40 year wandering, with Israel about to enter the Kingdom of God, the promised land. Num. 28 is not just a random repetition of the law about the day of Atonement. Rather was it a specific appeal for Israel to then keep it- hence the language in this chapter of keeping it "this month", and a calling of "a holy gathering" rather than "the holy gathering". It's why the other feasts aren't mentioned- only the Day of Atonement and the connected feast, of Tabernacles, which began a week later. And this explains some of the differences we will note between the commandments about the Yom Kippur rituals in Num. 28 and the more generic ones in Lev. 16.

The Yom Kippur ritual has its context in the death of Aaron's sons for desecrating the tabernacle (Lev. 16:1). The cleansing of not only the sins of the people, but also the tabernacle, was therefore in the context of Israel's desecration of the tabernacle- and not because physical bits of furniture somehow became unclean of themselves without human fault. This introductory verse, leading on as it does to the Day of Atonement ritual, raises the question of whether it was intended as an annual feast or rather an emergency ritual to be used when presumptuous sins had been committed and the tabernacle defiled. The only time in the Bible we read of the feast being called is in Num. 29, when the tabernacle had indeed just been defiled by Cozbi and Zimri and then by Phinehas bursting in to the most holy place to slay them. Lev. 16:29 says that the fasting aspect was to indeed be observed on the 10th day of the 7th month, but this is *af-*

ter the commands about the scapegoat- which I suggest were for emergency use.

Num 29:2 You shall offer a burnt offering for a pleasant aroma to Yahweh: one young bull, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish-

This looked ahead to the unblemished character of the Lord Jesus. The offering of sacrifices "without blemish" uses a word which is used about Abraham and Noah being "without blemish" (AV "perfect") before God (Gen. 6:9; 17:1). Although the word is used about the sacrifices, it is really more appropriate to persons- "you shall be perfect with Yahweh your God" (Dt. 18:13), "serve Him in sincerity (s.w. "without blemish")" (Josh. 24:14). The idea, therefore, was that the offerer was invited to see the animal as representative of himself. Our lives too are to be as "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1).

The laws of Lev. 16:32,33 required that the atonement was made by a consecrated High Priest: "The priest who is anointed and who is consecrated to be priest in his father's place shall make the atonement, and shall put on the linen garments, even the holy garments.

Then he shall make atonement for the Holy Sanctuary; and he shall make atonement for the Tent of Meeting and for the altar; and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly". There is no mention of Eleazar nor Phinehas being consecrated after the death of Aaron. We wonder whether this is why there is no repetition of those commands at this time. God wanted the people to do their best to keep their own day of Atonement; which is why we read that "you"

are to make the offerings including the atonement sacrifice. This is the same "you" who are told in :1 to "do no servile work".

Num 29:3 and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil, three tenth parts for the bull, two tenth parts for the ram-

Paul writes of the church in Corinth that God has "tempered" the whole body together (1 Cor. 12:24). This is alluding to the way in which the unleavened cakes of flour were "mixed" or "tempered" with the oil (cp. the Spirit) in order to be an acceptable offering (Lev. 2:4,5; 7:10; 9:4 etc.). Paul has already likened his Corinthian ecclesia to a lump of unleavened flour (1 Cor. 5:7); he is now saying that they have been "tempered" together by the oil of God's Spirit. If we break apart from our brethren, we are breaking apart, or denying, that "tempering" of the body which God has made.

The continual stress upon the usage of oil [*shehmen*] may look ahead to the *meshiach*, the Christ, the anointed one. All aspects of the offerings looked ahead to the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is fair to enquire whether the wheat / flour and oil were not in fact offered separately, but rather the idea is that a cake was to be baked. Because that is the idea of oil and flour being together. In this case we have the common idea of bread accompanying a meal. The sacrifice was a meal between the invisible God and His people. And thus they all looked forward in essence to the breaking of bread meeting, where the bread and wine

[the side dishes to a meal] are present, and so is the meat / lamb / sacrifice- in the invisible but present Lord Jesus.

Num 29:4 and one tenth part for every lamb of the seven lambs-

Frankincense was to be added to the flour (Lev. 2:1). This was a type of incense which would have given a pleasing smell to the burning flour. This represented how pleased God was with the offering even of a handful of flour (Lev. 2:2). Small sacrifices please Him immensely. And they are what comprise daily life.

Num 29:5 and one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you-

This was to prepare them for the upcoming day of atonement. We note from Zech. 8:19 that the fast of the seventh month, which clearly refers to this fasting at the day of atonement, was to be a time of joy and cheerful feasting once Israel were assured of their forgiveness. And this was fulfilled to a limited extent when the exiles [apparently on the day of atonement] mourned in conviction of their sins, and then with their eyes streaming with tears, were told to go and rejoice with a feast (Neh. 8:10). It was this spirit which was to be found in the subsequent feast of tabernacles, which was to commemorate and rejoice in sin forgiven. But there is reason to think that the exiles on that occasion were told to in fact celebrate on that very day of atonement; another indication that God never intended His law to be eternally fixed and literally unchanging. Although it is worth considering whether in fact the law was actually requiring fast-

ing; rather was the emphasis upon affliction of souls after conviction of personal sin.

Num 29:6 besides the burnt offering of the new moon, and the grain offering of it, and the continual burnt offering and the grain offering of it, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a pleasant aroma, an offering made by fire to Yahweh-

"A pleasant aroma" is a very common phrase. This concept is important to God. It first occurs in Gen. 8:21 where it means that God accepted Noah's sacrifice and vowed that the pole of saving mercy in His character was going to triumph over that of necessary judgment. Under the new covenant, it is persons and not sacrifices or incense which are accepted as a "pleasant aroma" (Ez. 20:41). The word for "pleasant" means strong delight; this is how God's heart can be touched by genuine sacrifice. Those pleasing offerings represented us, the living sacrifices (Rom. 12:1). And so it is applied to us in 2 Cor. 2:15- if we are in Christ, we are counted as a pleasant aroma to God. The offering of ourselves to Him is nothing of itself, but because we are in Christ and counted as Him, we are a delight to God. Hence the colossal importance of being "in Christ". "Aroma" or "smell" is a form of the Hebrew word *ruach*, the word for spirit or breath. God discerns the spirit of sacrifices, that was what pleased Him rather than the burning flesh of animals. Our attitude of mind in sacrifice can touch Him. Sacrifice is therefore accepted, Paul says, according to what a person has to give, but the essence is the attitude

of mind behind it. We think of the two coins sacrificed by the widow.

Lev. 16:31 calls the day of Atonement a "sabbath of solemn rest", a kind of super-sabbath. Although the other feasts also required "rest", this was to be a day of "solemn rest". This was to highlight the need for absolute focus upon the significance of having sin totally forgiven on the basis of grace and not works. This feast also featured the requirement that every Gentile in the land also observe it "the native-born, or the stranger who lives as a foreigner among you" (Lev. 16:29). This would be relevant to an Israel who at this time kept the virgin females of Moab for themselves (Num. 31:18). They too were to accept the need for atonement.

The day of Atonement likewise cleansed the Most Holy place and the tabernacle. This was relevant to the fact that Zimri and Cozbi had defiled the tabernacle by their sex act there, and Phinehas had charged in there to murder them.

Num 29:7 On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy gathering; and you shall afflict your souls. You shall do no kind of work-

This was the day of atonement. "Afflict your souls" is the word used of how the Egyptians had afflicted the Hebrews (Ex. 1:11,12). Repeatedly, Israel were taught that they were to remember the state they had been in prior to their redemption from affliction; and redeem others from their affliction on that basis, and never to afflict people as Egypt had done to them. All this is an abiding principle for us. True redemption of others has

to be rooted in an awareness of our own affliction. This is particularly necessary for those who were as it were schooled into Christ by reason of their upbringing. And we are either beat up by the flesh, by Egypt; or we beat ourselves up for our sins.

All Israel's "transgressions" were forgiven by the day of Atonement, or we could instead say that the fact they had been forgiven them by grace already was celebrated then. The word "transgressions" in the Day of Atonement ritual in Lev. 16:21 etc. translates *pehshah*, a rather uncommon word in the Mosaic law. We read in Ex. 23:21 that Israel should not rebel against their guardian Angel because He would not pardon their *pehshah* (Ex. 23:21), even though God was capable of forgiving *pehshah* (Ex. 34:7 "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving... transgression"). That capability was due to His extreme grace, and this was celebrated by the forgiveness of transgression achieved and memorialized on the day of atonement. The word is often used by David about his sin with Bathsheba, which was the presumptuous sin for which there was no forgiveness under the Mosaic rituals. But such transgression was dealt with by the Day of Atonement just as it was by the grace shown to David (Ps. 25:7; 32:1,5; 39:8; 51:1,3). David defines "the sin of presumption" as "the great transgression" (Ps. 19:13), and yet from such "transgression" the blood of the day of Atonement could cleanse. The same word is used in Is. 53:5,8 of how the Lord's death was "for our transgressions... for the transgressions of My people was He stricken". Thus when the modified day of Atonement was

kept in Num. 29 before Israel entered Canaan and after their shameless transgression with Midian, they were being reminded that all their transgressions / rebellions had been forgiven on account of the Atonement blood-which was looking forward to that of the Lord who died for the transgressions of His people.

Num 29:8 but you shall offer a burnt offering to Yahweh for a pleasant aroma: one young bull, one ram, seven male lambs a year old (they shall be to you without blemish)-

No animal actually is without blemish. God recognizes that we will not attain perfection in this life, but we are to do our best towards it ["to you without blemish"]; and His love imputes righteousness to us, counting us as unblemished because of our status in Christ. For only Christ was the sacrifice totally without moral blemish (1 Pet. 1:19).

The slight differences with the Day of Atonement and Tabernacles ritual in Lev. 16 are because here in Num. 28 we have a one time special day of Atonement. Here they are told to offer a bullock, a ram and seven lambs as a burnt offering, whereas in Lev. 16:5 only one ram was to be offered as the burnt offering. Likewise :11 seems to speak of an additional sin offering when compared with Lev. 16. It's as if the weight of their sin is now being emphasized.

Num 29:9 and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil, three tenth parts for the bull, two tenth parts for the one ram-

Ez. 16:13,19 speak of how God fed Israel with fine flour and oil. These things are only mentioned together (43 times!) with reference to the sacrifices which Israel were to offer to God. But God says that He had given these things to Israel, and even fed them with them. The idea therefore was that they were giving back to God what He had first given them. And this must be remembered in all our sacrificing.

Num 29:10 a tenth part for every lamb of the seven lambs-

We note the lack of mention of the drink offering, of wine, which usually accompanied all sacrifices. Unless it is mentioned in :11. I suggest this omission may have been to signpost attention towards the huge significance of the blood of the day of atonement sacrifice.

Num 29:11 one male goat for a sin offering; besides the sin offering of atonement, and the continual burnt offering, and the grain offering of it, and their drink offerings-

This additional sin offering on the day of Atonement isn't mentioned in the previous legislation about the day of Atonement in Lev. 16. Because Israel had failed to keep the sacrifices during the wilderness journey as they should have done (so Am. 5:25 implies), God now at the end of the wilderness journey added more sacrifices to be kept. Perhaps the Israelite was to see in this male goat a symbol of himself, worthy only of rejection- the goat being a symbol of the rejected in Mt. 25:33; and the "sin offering of atonement" as representative of the whole community's unforgiven sins. This is the great paradox- that

those who consider themselves rejected will be accepted, and those who think of themselves as accepted in their own strength will be rejected. The Lord's right hand is our left hand, and vice versa, if we imagine ourselves standing before Him. Those who put themselves to *their* right hand, i.e. justify themselves, are putting themselves at His left hand; and vice versa (Mt. 25:34).

We note that the term *azazel*, scapegoat, is not mentioned here in Num. 29. Nor is there any repetition of the material in Lev. 16 about the significant rituals connected with it. We wonder whether in this version of the day of atonement, there was no scapegoat released. Possibly because they were to understand that Moses had fulfilled that role in not being allowed to enter the land.

Num 29:12 On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy gathering. You shall do no servile work, and you shall keep a feast to Yahweh seven days-

"Gathering" is LXX *ekklesia*. This is the word rendered "church" in the New Testament. We could reason from this therefore that "church" specifically refers to a gathering of God's people. At that time and during those moments, they are a church. When the entire community of believers is referred to as "church", this is how God views them- as if they are all gathered together at a gathering or convocation before Him. The word in its Biblical usage therefore doesn't refer to what we might call a denomination or fellowship.

The feast of Tabernacles or booths now described only mentions the offerings to be made. Yet elsewhere it is described as a feast of joy, rejoicing in the ingathered

harvest and dwelling in tents looking back to the wilderness years, reminding them that even in a settled prosperous life, they were still pilgrims. Dt. 16:14 Heb. says that they were to be made glad, and this was the result of the Yom Kippur experience. We enquire why the sense of joy, and the command to dwell in tents, is not here recorded. It could be that this was a specific command for the feast of Tabernacles to now be kept after the day of Atonement- to Israel at that point in the desert. They had no harvest to gather, and they were still living in tents anyway. But the idea was that after the sober facing up to sin of the Day of Atonement, the people were now to rejoice in God's grace.

But in the immediate context of Israel at the point of Num. 29, they were to remember that their joy still involved sacrifice, their joy in God's grace couldn't be real without some sense of sacrifice- and a sin offering was still required, to ever remind them of the price paid for human redemption. In fact there were more offerings made in the feast of Booths than in any other feast. They had to give something in response to His grace, not 'appear empty handed', and this should be our sense too. In all this we see taught our response to the Lord's achievement of atonement for us.

Elsewhere we read the command to rejoice, or [Heb.] to be made to rejoice. This meant that they were not to fast nor hold funerals during this feast. The achievement of the day of Atonement was to be understood in terms of not only forgiveness, but the ultimate conquest of death. They were also to present the

fruits of the harvest before God and to make booths to live in. The feast of Tabernacles is called the feast of ingathering in Exodus- it celebrated the gathering in of the harvest. This is all alluded to in the visions of Rev. 7:9-17; 14:1-5: "A great crowd, which no one could number, out of every nation, comprised of all tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes and with palms in their hands". The palm fronds suggest the feast of tabernacles; and we see the connection with the 70 bullocks offered during the feast, representing the 70 Gentile nations of Gen. 10. The feast spoke of the climax of God's harvest of people- and His joy in us. Revelation often uses Feast of Tabernacles language, especially playing on the word *skene*, which the LXX uses for the booths of the feast of booths / Tabernacles. Thus Rev. 21:3,4: "The home [*skene*] of God is among mortals. He will dwell [*skenoō*] with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away". All this alludes to the joy which was to characterize the feast.

"Servile work" specifically means 'work as a slave'; the term is used multiple times in describing Israel's servitude in Egypt, and for the "service" of the tabernacle and of Yahweh generally. They changed masters but their servitude remained. So slaves were given a holiday at this feast. The people together were to remember that they had all been freed from Egypt by grace, and freed from

the servitude to sin by the Day of Atonement which preceded this feast. We live in a world where people rich and poor are alike in slavery to the flesh. We are freed from this "servile" life and are to rejoice in it. The Truth has made us free- the truth of sin forgiven and dealt with, and calm assurance of eternal salvation.

Num 29:13 You shall offer a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, of a pleasant aroma to Yahweh: thirteen young bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old; they shall be without blemish-

In total, the feast of Tabernacles required 70 oxen to be sacrificed. Far more animals were sacrificed in this feast than for any other. Yet this was the feast of joy-teaching that true happiness is related to sacrifice to God, rather than keeping for ourselves.

It has been observed: "The number of the burnt-sacrifices, each kind by itself or all of them together, is always divisible by the sacred number seven. We have for the week 70 bullocks, 14 rams, and 98 (14×7) lambs, or altogether 182 animals (26×7). To these must be added 336 (48×7) tenths of ephahs of flour for the cereal-offering. The sacred number seven appeared at the Feast of Unleavened Bread only in the number of its days, and at Pentecost in the timing of its observance (7×7 days after Passover). But by contrast the Feast of Tabernacles lasted seven days, took place in the seventh month, and as we have seen had the number seven impressed in a remarkable manner on its characteristic sacrifices". It is also the seventh feast: Shabbat, Passover, Firstfruits, the Feasts of Weeks (Pentecost), the Feast of Trumpets, Yom Kippur

and then Tabernacles. This could be because the feast looked forward to the time of completion or perfection of all things in the Kingdom, when the full harvest of the Gospel has been brought in. The rituals in Ezekiel's temple seem to require seven bullocks to be offered every day, as if the time of completion has come. The 70 bullocks clearly suggest the 70 nations listed in Gen. 10.

"Without blemish" doesn't mean perfect or spotless- no animal nor human body is literally without blemish. The Hebrew word is also translated 'sincere'. Israel are asked to be "perfect [s.w.] with your God". Moral perfection isn't in view- rather the idea is of wholeness or completeness. It could even be argued that "whole burnt offerings" are what are in view- perhaps this is how we are to understand the animals being without blemish (Mk. 12:33; Heb. 10:6). The idea is that every part of our lives is to be offered to God, and not just the religious external appearance, or some dimensions of our lives but not others.

Num 29:14 and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil, three tenth parts for every bull of the thirteen bulls, two tenth parts for each ram of the two rams-

13 bullocks were to be sacrificed on the first day, and the number of bullocks decreased by one every day until seven bullocks on the last day. Additionally there were to be two rams and fourteen lambs. The sin offering on each day was one kid of the goats. On the eighth day the burnt offering consisted of one bullock, one ram, seven lambs, and the sin offering of one kid of the goats. Over the eight days, this made a total of seventy-one bullocks,

fifteen rams, one hundred and five lambs and eight kids plus meat and drink offerings. This was to celebrate the joy of forgiveness received at the day of Atonement. The communal nature of it was in order to provide an opportunity for the generosity to others which was intended to arise from personal experience of God's gift of salvation and forgiveness.

Num 29:15 and a tenth part for every lamb of the fourteen lambs-

The handful of flour was to be given for every individual lamb, and not as some blanket amount to cover all 14 lambs. God wanted them to realize that their joy and celebration was to always have embedded within it an awareness of their forgiveness and Passover deliverance. And to this day, this is to be the basis for our joy.

Num 29:16 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, the grain offering of it, and the drink offering of it-

The offering of other sacrifices was not to tempt the people to think that the "continual burnt offering" was therefore not to be taken seriously on those days. The regular, purposeful beginning and ending of each day with devotion to the Lord is something which nothing else should ever displace.

We note that the commands about the feast of Tabernacles in Lev. 23 omit this reference to a sin offering. Again we conclude that the situation in Num. 29 was unique to that occasion. The people had seriously sinned and they were to be reminded of this. Even in their joy in atonement.

Num 29:17 On the second day you shall offer twelve young bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish-

This was to remind them that the Passover deliverance through the lamb was effectively ongoing. The Passover lamb was likewise to be a year old (Ex. 12:5). We too are to live constantly under the impression of the Lord's sacrifice and redemption of us. Israel were asked to use a lamb of the first year to record various times when they should be thankful for God's redemption of them in the events which comprise life (Lev. 9:3; 12:6; 23:12,18,19; Num. 6:12,14; 7:15,17,21; 28:3,9,11,19; 29:2,8,13). This was to continually recall to them the events of their great redemption through the Red Sea. And the essence of our redemption, our baptism and salvation through the blood of the lamb, must likewise be brought ever before us.

Num 29:18 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, according to their number, after the ordinance-

The continual offering of bread [flour] and wine with each animal looked ahead to the breaking of bread meeting. The sacrificed animal is present in the form of the now living Lord Jesus.

All up, 98 lambs were to be sacrificed, possibly alluding to the 98 curses for breaking the covenant listed in Dt. 28. Those curses were removed by the lambs who looked ahead to the Lord's work on the cross. This was relevant to Israel at this point as they had broken the covenant.

Num 29:19 and one male goat for a sin offering; besides the continual burnt offering, and the grain offering of it, and their drink offerings-

Each day of their rejoicing in God's grace toward them, Israel were to offer a sin offering as a reminder of the fact they were sinners, and all God's blessings toward them were given to a sinful people. We must never let slip our recognition of our sinfulness before God, and unworthiness in ourselves of His blessings.

Num 29:20 On the third day eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish-

The decreasing number of bullocks may have been in order to highlight the final offering, of the significant number of seven bullocks.

Num 29:21 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, according to their number, after the ordinance-

All the sacrifices were to be made upon the basis that the offerer was giving back to God what God had given him. That included the grain ["meal"] and drink offerings. Thus the same words are found in Joel 2:14: "Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meal offering and a drink offering to Yahweh, your God". The sense may therefore be: "The one who experiences this, will experience a God who turns and relents, and goes even further- He will restore you grain and wine. But you are to use that blessing of grace by offering it to Yahweh, your God".

Num 29:22 and one male goat for a sin offering; besides the continual burnt offering, and the grain offering of it, and the drink offering of it-

A goat being chosen for the sin offering tempts us to think of the Lord's usage of sheep and goats as representing the righteous and the sinners. The Lord Jesus, the ultimate sin offering, was in one sense the spotless Passover lamb of God; in another sense, He was totally identified with the goats- sinful, rejected humanity. Likewise He was represented by the serpent lifted up on the pole.

Num 29:23 On the fourth day ten bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish-

The decreasing number of bullocks was perhaps related to the symbolism of the bullock for strong, powerful labour. This was to decrease, until the final sacrifice of seven bullocks was understood as the power of the work of the future Messiah, the Lord Jesus.

Num 29:24 their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, according to their number, after the ordinance-

The Hebrew *mishpat*, "ordinances", has a wide range of meaning. The idea is of judgment, as if God and His Angels gave these laws as their considered judgment after considering the human condition, and Israel were to abide by them. But the word also the idea of a right or privilege; and that is how we should see God's laws. They are only felt as a burden because of human hardness of neck towards God's ways. His laws are not of themselves burdensome, but rather a privilege and blessing. The law was indeed "holy, just and good" (Rom. 7:12), designed

to inculcate a holy, just and good life (Tit. 1:8), a way in which a man should "walk" in daily life (Lev. 18:4), a culture of kindness and grace to others which reflected God's grace to man. If we dwell upon the idea of "rights" carried within the word *mishpat*, we note that the law begins in Ex. 21:1,2 (also Dt. 15:12-18) with the rights of a slave- those considered to have no rights in the society of that day. The "rights" to be afforded by us to others are the essence of God's rightness / justice.

Num 29:25 and one male goat for a sin offering; besides the continual burnt offering, the grain offering of it, and the drink offering of it-

Female animals were also accepted for sacrifice. The male animals however were worth more than female ones on the secular market, and so the insistence upon male offerings was not because God favours males over females; but simply because He was asking for the most valuable to be given to Him.

Num 29:26 On the fifth day nine bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish-

Perhaps just as the glory of the Mosaic system was always fading on Moses' face, the lesson is that the entire Mosaic system was decreasing rather than increasing- for it was to come to an end in the Lord Jesus.

Num 29:27 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, according to their number, after the ordinance-

Grain and wine offerings were used in pagan worship (s.w. Is. 57:6), just as feasts were kept to celebrate the new moon. The nature of the law of Moses was de-

signed by God to accept the people's religious need to make such offerings and celebrate such regular events-but it was turned towards the worship of Yahweh rather than idols and gods. We marvel at God's sensitivity to the psychological needs of His people, according to the time and culture in which they live.

Num 29:28 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, and the grain offering of it, and the drink offering of it-

The feast of trumpets featured both conviction of sin and also joy in God's salvation and forgiveness; the same strange mixture of emotions we see in the record of its observance in Neh. 8:1-10, and which we experience in our own lives. And this was all to prepare for the same mixture of emotions at the day of Atonement which followed straight on.

Num 29:29 On the sixth day eight bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish-

And yet in practical terms, no animal is without blemish. They were to give the best they could, and God would count it as without blemish; as He does with us. David frequently uses the term in the Psalms about himself and the "upright", even though he was far from unblemished in moral terms.

Num 29:30 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, according to their number, after the ordinance-

Part of the grain / flour / cake was typically burnt upon the altar and the wine poured out upon it (Gen. 35:14; Ex. 30:9; 2 Kings 16:13,15); and part of it was

eaten by the priests, representing God's acceptance of it, and how He was dining with the offerers at His table, represented by the altar.

Num 29:31 and one male goat for a sin offering; besides the continual burnt offering, the grain offering of it, and the drink offerings of it-

This laboured, repeated reminder is required in essence today- we are never to think that our daily, morning and evening personal devotions to God are overridden by some special project or obviated by the fact we are e.g. going to church or a church function that day.

Num 29:32 On the seventh day seven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish-

A total of 70 bulls were offered at the feast of ingathering. Rev. 5:9 presents us with the picture of men and women redeemed from *every* kindred [tribe / clan], tongue [*glossa*- language], people [a group of people not necessarily of the same ethnicity] and nation [*ethnos*-ethnic group, lit. 'those of the same customs']. This means that, e.g., not only redeemed 'Yugoslavs' will stand before the throne in the end; but Macedonians, Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrans, Bosnians... every ethnic group, with every custom, will have representatives who will have believed the Truth and been saved. This idea is confirmed by considering how 70 bullocks had to be sacrificed at the feast of ingathering (Num. 29), prophetic as it was of the final ingathering of the redeemed. But 70 is the number of all Gentile nations found in Gen. 10. And it is written: "When he separated

the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Dt. 32:8). A total of 70 went down with Jacob into Egypt; and thus 70 seems an appropriate number to connect with the entire Gentile world. My point is, representatives of *all* of them will be finally ingathered. It could be that this conversion of all men occurs during the final tribulation (Rev. 14:6); but it seems to me that the context demands that people from every nation etc. are already redeemed in Christ and await His return.

Num 29:33 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, according to their number, after the ordinance-

The idea may be that each animal was to be individually accompanied by the flour and wine. Each animal was to be seen as an individual meal offered to God and shared with Him. There was to be no blanket offering of flour and wine in one go, lest this wonderful reality be somehow obscured.

Num 29:34 and one male goat for a sin offering; besides the continual burnt offering, the grain offering of it, and the drink offering of it-

All these "continual" offerings were designed to provoke the question in the heart of all thoughtful believers: 'Does God really want all these animals?'. David at the time of his sin with Bathsheba was taught that God didn't actually want them so much as He wanted a contrite heart which throws itself upon Him. He did not so much require the continual burnt offerings, but rather "Offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, pay your

vows to the Most High" (Ps. 50:8,15). Heartfelt praise was what God hungered for, not ritualistic sacrifice. To this day, He is thrilled by from the heart thanksgiving, and actions of gratitude for what He has done ["pay your vows"].

Num 29:35 On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly: you shall do no servile work-

Work was obviously required in order to keep the Passover; the "work" in view is therefore secular work. But the Hebrew phrase "regular work" is that repeatedly used for "the work of the service" of the tabernacle, performed by the Levites (Ex. 35:21,24; 36:1,3,5; 1 Chron. 9:13,19; 23:24; 25:1 etc.). Perhaps this command in Leviticus was specifically addressed to the Levites, and the idea was that at the times of the festivals, the Levites were to focus upon keeping them in their own families and not be unduly taken up with the work of the sanctuary beyond what was required by the Mosaic law. The principle is that we must not be so taken up with religious duty that we neglect our own personal worship, especially in our own families.

Num 29:36 but you shall offer a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, of a pleasant aroma to Yahweh: one bull, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish-

Perhaps the whole purpose of the decreasing number of bullocks over the previous days was to teach that there was only one bull ultimately required by God- pointing forward to the future perfect sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

Num 29:37 their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, shall be according to their number, after the ordinance-

As the numbers of bullocks decreased, so did the number of the grain and drink offerings. A human religious system would likely have increased the numbers of sacrifices each day, leading up to a crescendo of mass offerings. But Israel were taught by the decreasing number of sacrifices that God didn't actually require sacrifices, but rather one specific sacrifice- which was to be the Lord Jesus.

Num 29:38 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, and the grain offering of it, and the drink offering of it-

There are connections between the various sections of Revelation and the Jewish feasts. Here's a summary:

Revelation 5 Passover Rev. 5:x6,9 = Ex. 12:13

Revelation 7 Tabernacles Rev. 7:9,15,16 RV = Ex. 23:16; 34:22; Zech. 14:16-20

Revelation 8,9 Day Of Atonement Lev. 16:31; more detailed links in Harry Whittaker, Revelation: A Biblical Approach pp. 104,105.

Revelation 11 Dedication & Purim The Torah readings for these feasts were Num. 7 and Zech. 2- 4 about the dedication of the temple; Rev. 11:10 = Esther 9:19,22. The period from Tabernacles to Purim is exactly 5 months- as mentioned in Rev. 9:5

Revelation 12 Pentecost & Passover The Jews traditionally ask: "On this Sabbath, shall I reap?"

Revelation 14 Tabernacles

Revelation 15 + 16 Atonement & Passover Lev. 16;
Ps. 118 the Hallel Psalm

Revelation 19 Passover Ps. 113, 114 Passover Psalms

Revelation 21, 22 Tabernacles

Laying out the material chronologically, we have:

Chapter 5: Passover

6 months

Chapter 7: Tabernacles

Chapters 8 & 9: Atonement and Tabernacles

1 year

Chapter 11: Dedication 5 months (Rev 9:5)

Chapter 11: Purim

Chapter 12: Passover and Pentecost

Chapter 14: Tabernacles

1 year

Chapter 15: Atonement

Chapter 16 & 19: Passover

Chapter 21 & 22: Tabernacles

1 year

The conclusion would therefore be that we have in the book of Revelation a literal account of the three and a half years tribulation, with the Jewish feasts being the key marker points. And it would appear there will be an especial period of five months tribulation as described between Revelation chapters 9 and 11.

Num 29:39 You shall offer these to Yahweh in your set feasts, besides your vows, and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings, and for your grain offerings, and for your drink offerings, and for your peace offerings'-

God envisaged that at the time the whole community were engaged in extra special devotion to Him, the individual might still wish to make a private sacrifice. We can't ride into God's Kingdom on the back of others, e.g. our family members or our church. Our collective devotions shouldn't lead us to think that God doesn't seek our private freewill dedication to Him.

The Hebrew word here for "freewill" carries the idea of spontaneity. This is the clear implication of its usage in places like Ex. 35:27; 36:3; Jud. 5:2,9; 1 Chron. 29:5,9; 2 Chron. 35:8; Ps. 54:6. There is a strong sense of immediate emotion attached to the word (Hos. 14:4). And there was a major emphasis in the law of Moses upon freewill offerings (Lev. 7:16; 22:18,21,23; 23:38; Num. 15:3; 29:39; Dt. 12:6,17; 16:10; 23:23). The other legal codes of the nations around Israel were all about rituals; whereas Yahweh's law encouraged spontaneous giving as part of the way of Yahweh. For He is not a God of rituals, but of relationship. The way of the Spirit is the same today; spontaneous, emotional, personal response to God's grace, responding to Him on our own initiative and in our own way, in addition to obeying His specific requirements.

Num 29:40 Moses told the children of Israel according to all that Yahweh commanded Moses-

The obedience of Moses to God is continually emphasized, and he thereby became a type of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 3:2-5).

NUMBERS CHAPTER 30

Num 30:1 Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the children of Israel, saying, This is the thing which Yahweh has commanded-

The address to the tribal elders was perhaps because these issues of dedicating things were largely about dedicating property. The difficult area was when a person who was not the head of a family tried to dedicate property to the Lord. God had given each family a specific inheritance and wanted that to remain within the family name. So in practice, it was the elders of the tribes who were going to deal with these issues.

I have shown throughout Numbers that we have historical incidents followed by laws which were given in relation to those incidents. Num. 25:18 commands Israel to attack the Midianites for what they did to them in seducing them to idolatry. But we have to apparently wait until Num. 31 to read of Israel actually going to war with Midian. But the intervening chapters cover events which happened perhaps only within days after the point in Num. 25:18 where Yahweh tells Israel to attack Midian. In Num. 26 they are to take a military census in preparation for the battle. Then chapter 27 records the issue of Zelophehad's daughters, who present as faithful to Yahweh and unlike their unbelieving father who died in the desert for his sin of not believing he could enter the land. Remember Israel are now 40 years after leaving Egypt, and about to enter Canaan despite

their last minute apostasy and lack of faith. Those daughters are presented as examples of the faithful remnant within Israel. Numbers 28 commands that various daily sacrifices be offered once Israel are in the land. Numbers 29 then calls for a day of atonement to be held, followed by the feast of booths five days after the atonement feast finished. This would be an apparently needless repetition of previously given legislation- unless we understand that it was a specific call to keep the feast of atonement at that time.

Now in Numbers 30 we have some laws given specifically to "the heads of the tribes" explaining how young women's vows were to be treated, and the responsibility of their fathers for them if they were still in their father's household. This is relevant to the situation in Numbers 25- where Phinehas had saved Israel by spearing to death Zimri, the apostate son of one of "the heads of the tribes" as he had sex with Cosbi, the daughter of one of the "heads of the tribes" of Midian. Num. 25:14 speaks of "Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a father's house among the Simeonites". Num. 30 has several references to the father's house. The idea seems to be that the father's house was responsible for vows made by those within it. Although it is women who are specifically mentioned, it seems the same principle would be true for male minors still in their father's house. The principle was that if the father "altogether hold his peace at her from day to day, then he establishes all her vows, or all her bonds which are on her. He has established them, because he held his peace at her in the day that he heard

them". Silence from the head of the household meant consent. And this is all in the context of Numbers 25 speaking of the sins of the young people within their "father's house". This legislation may have been to protect Phinehas from blood vengeance from Zimri's family. It would therefore appear likely that he and Zimri had made some kind of vow loyalty to Baal Peor, and Zimri's family had from day to day ignored that. And so they were responsible for it.

Num 30:2 When a man vows a vow to Yahweh, or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth-

This was to guard against the temptation to make a vow which was publically impressive before men, but then not to pay it. Any attempt to garner kudos for our spiritual devotion is absolutely wrong; such spiritual pride is the worst. God would therefore "require it" and severely judge those who did this (Dt. 23:21). Not being slack to pay a vow (Dt. 23:21) fits in with a wider Biblical theme of being quick in responding to God. It comes to full term in the New Testament accounts of immediate baptisms straight after people had grasped the basic message of the Gospel. "Yes straight away" is what God really seeks from His children. Israel were not to delay in offering their firstfruits to God (Ex. 22:29), lest their intentions weren't translated into practice. The disciples immediately left the ship, simply put their nets down and followed (Mt. 4:20,22); Matthew left his opened

books and queue of clients in the tax office and walked out never to return (Lk. 5:17,18 implies).

Num 30:3 Also when a woman vows a vow to Yahweh and binds herself by a bond, being in her father's house in her youth-

Girls married young in Semitic cultures of the time, usually in their teens. God here foresaw the possibility of a young girl wanting to do something extra special for Him. In contemporary religions, active participation in religion was typically something for older males. But such is God's value of the human person that He eagerly anticipated young people, even children, making a special act of devotion to Him on their own initiative. Mary's teenage ambition to become the mother of Messiah is the supreme example to today's youngsters, growing up as they do in a world where selfish ambition is the order of the day as never before.

Num 30:4 and her father hears her vow and her bond with which she has bound her soul, and her father holds his peace at her; then all her vows shall stand, and every bond with which she has bound her soul shall stand-

The insistence that the male head of the family had to agree was because the vow was likely to give part of the family property to Yahweh. The land had specifically been given to families as inheritances, and it usually passed on through the male line, to keep the name of the family identified with the inheritance. So the woman had no right to promise to give it away, without first having the agreement of her husband or male head of family.

Num 30:5 But if her father disallow her in the day that he hears, none of her vows or of her bonds with which she has bound her soul shall stand; and Yahweh will forgive her, because her father disallowed her-

Women got married young. But here is envisaged a situation where a girl promises something to Yahweh, before she gets married. The idea is that children too were in relationship with God, and could make a voluntary dedication to Him. The idealism and ambition of youth were to be channeled towards God's service. And these regulations show that the law of Moses expected this kind of commitment from youth.

Num 30:6 If she has a husband while her vows are on her, or the rash utterance of her lips with which she has bound her soul-

The spirit of this legislation seems to assume that vows would be made rashly, and therefore these laws were required. The Lord Jesus therefore commanded that we should not swear at all, but rather just live integrity before God (Mt. 5:34-36). This was an indication of how well the Lord understood human nature, since He also had it. He knew that vows and oaths were likely to be broken; and so we should accept our humanity and simply not make such vows.

Num 30:7 and her husband hears it, and hold his peace at her in the day that he hears it; then her vows shall stand, and her bonds with which she has bound her soul shall stand-

The simple principle established here is that there are times when silence means consent. The Proverbs

wisely advise us not to meddle in others' business and to hold our tongue in some cases. But there are other times when not to speak up can have damaging consequences upon others, especially those less mature than ourselves.

Num 30:8 But if her husband forbids her in the day that he hears it, then he shall make void her vow which is on her, and the rash utterance of her lips with which she has bound her soul; and Yahweh will forgive her-

"Rash utterance" is the same word as used to describe how Moses "spoke rashly with his lips" (Ps. 106:33). He was denied entrance to the kingdom of God on earth because of that. That seems a rather heavy judgment for rash speaking. But here again, rash speaking in promising to give something and then not giving it- is presented as an unforgivable sin. People of the time were apparently used to making various exaggerated promises to God. And these were abhorrent to Him. He wishes those in relationship with Him to be serious and committed to Him, and to realize the extraordinary value He places upon human usage of words and language. This is reflected in the New Testament teaching about the power and eternal consequences of human words. See on :12.

Num 30:9 But the vow of a widow, or of her who is divorced, everything with which she has bound her soul, shall stand against her-

A divorced woman was counted as genuinely single; the sin of marriage breakup is in the factors leading to the breakup of the marriage, but afterwards the person is seen by God as single. Divorce under the Law of Moses was possible only for adultery, and adultery was pun-

ishable by death. Yet God foresaw that there would be women who had done this and yet remained alive by grace, or who had been falsely accused; and correctly imagined that such women would love to make a freewill dedication of themselves to Him.

Num 30:10 If she vowed in her husband's house or bound her soul by a bond with an oath-

A vow appears to refer to a promise to give or dedicate something to God, whereas an oath tends to refer to an undertaking not to do something.

Num 30:11 and her husband heard it, and held his peace at her, and didn't disallow her; then all her vows shall stand, and every bond with which she bound her soul shall stand-

Silence means consent (Num. 30:12,15). This is a huge principle which challenges us in so many areas.

Num 30:12 But if her husband made them null and void in the day that he heard them, then whatever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand. Her husband has made them void; and Yahweh will forgive her-

To make a vow and not perform it was a sin. The implication is that it was only forgivable if a woman had vowed property over which her husband had a say, and he had disallowed it. We note that it is a vow and not an oath which is in view; a vow was associated with giving property to Yahweh, whereas an oath was a promise not to do something. Given the very serious nature of vowing and not performing it, apparently an unforgivable sin, we wonder why people would vow when it was not

obligatory? The reasons appear here to be in the area of "rash utterance", getting carried away with words; or possibly pride. Contrary to what is the habit in some parts of Christianity, giving is never to be done under duress of whatever kind, nor 'rashly'. God wants us to give to Him on the basis of sober, reasoned commitment rather than the emotion of a moment. See on :8.

Num 30:13 Every vow and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it or her husband may make it void-

"Afflict your souls" is the word used of how the Egyptians had afflicted the Hebrews (Ex. 1:11,12). The woman might vow to go through a period recalling how Israel had been in Egypt; but as this had huge domestic implications in an agrarian society, she could only do so if her husband agreed. Repeatedly, Israel were taught that they were to remember the state they had been in prior to their redemption from affliction; and redeem others from their affliction on that basis, and never to afflict people as Egypt had done to them. All this is an abiding principle for us. True redemption of others has to be rooted in an awareness of our own affliction. This is particularly necessary for those who were as it were schooled into Christ by reason of their upbringing.

Num 30:14 But if her husband altogether hold his peace at her from day to day, then he establishes all her vows, or all her bonds which are on her. He has established them, because he held his peace at her in the day that he heard them-

To vow and then not give to God was a major sin, and as her vow involved dedication of property under his control, he shared in that sin, or, in the blessing of dedication.

Num 30:15 But if he shall make them null and void after that he has heard them, then he shall bear her iniquity-

Here to bear iniquity seems to specifically mean to have responsibility for sin (as in Num. 18:1). "Bear iniquity" is therefore an idiom for being personally guilty. Yet the idiom is used about the Lord Jesus Christ in His bearing of our iniquity on the cross (Is. 53:11). The Lord Jesus was our sin bearer and yet personally guiltless. This is the paradox which even He struggled with, leading to His feeling of having been forsaken by God (Mt. 27:46). This means that although Christ never sinned, He knows the feelings of sinners, because His identity with us was so deep and complete.

Num 30:16 These are the statutes, which Yahweh commanded Moses, between a man and his wife and between a father and his daughter, being in her youth, in her father's house-

This legislation may well have arisen in response to some specific cases which were not covered in the law given at Sinai. The Mosaic law was not designed as a deterministic legislation over every imaginable area of life. It was intended as a springboard towards personal relationship with God. And therefore it required interpretation and reverent engagement with God for help in understanding, and receipt of progressive revelation.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 31

Num 31:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

Yahweh was to be avenged upon Midian (:3), and so was Israel (:2). Yahweh is His people and what is done to His people is done to Him. Just as the Lord Jesus asked Saul to stop persecuting *Him*. The Father and Son feel all done to their people as done to them. For the nature of true love is that identifies with others.

Num 31:2 Avenge the children of Israel for the Midianites. Afterward you shall be gathered to your people-

But in :3 we read of avenging Yahweh. The insults against God's people are against Him. Many of His children struggle today with a sense of justice not having been done to them, and a desire to see some level of justice or vengeance against their abusers. This day will come, if indeed the injustice has been done to us because of our devotion to God; because whatever is done to God's people is done to Him.

Num 31:3 Moses spoke to the people, saying, Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian, to execute Yahweh's vengeance on Midian-

See on :2,3. This conflict was apparently just before the people entered the land of promise and approached Jericho. So this was to provide them with battle experience, and more especially with experience of God's saving grace; for not one of them was to perish in the conflict. The victory was to so clearly be from God.

Moses personally was commanded to destroy the Midianites and then die. But he sends Phinehas to do this job, possibly reflecting his continued struggle with God's command to die without entering Canaan. Perhaps Moses ordered only 12000 men to go war against a much larger enemy because he hoped they would be defeated and thus delay his death. They took 32000 virgin women prisoner, so the combined force of the enemy would have been huge. Israel had 600000 soldiers available according to the census. We likewise might probe why in :2 God tells Moses to avenge Israel against Midian, whereas here in :3 Moses tell Israel that they are going to war only because Yahweh wants His vengeance against Midian- possibly making Yahweh out to be a vengeful God. In all this we see how Moses was weak at the very end, and yet still saved. Like Gideon, Samson, Jacob, David etc.

Num 31:4 Of every tribe one thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, you shall send to the war-

A "thousand" is not necessarily 1,000, but can refer to a group, family or military regiment. See on :5.

Num 31:5 So there were delivered out of the thousands of Israel a thousand of every tribe, twelve thousand armed for war-

12,000 was a small army compared to what could have been raised- for there were over 600,000 fighting men numbered amongst Israel at this time. But throughout His military history, God has taken special pleasure in using small numbers to defeat far larger ones, and that principle continues in how He works today. However,

12,000 fighting men may be a way of describing a particular kind of military division, as it occurs later in Jud. 8:25; 21:10; 2 Sam. 10:6; 17:1 and Ps. 60:1.

Num 31:6 Moses sent them one thousand of every tribe to the war, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand-

God chose Phinehas the priest to be the army commander, whereas Joshua was the more obvious human choice for that job at this time. But God wished to demonstrate that it is spiritual principle which must lead His people rather than human strength and appropriacy. It was Phinehas who had so well perceived the spiritual danger of the Moabites earlier (Num. 25:7).

Num 31:7 They warred against Midian, as Yahweh commanded Moses; and they killed every male-

The idea is every adult male, for the children were initially taken captive (:9). There is no record given of the strategy for the battle. The fact there was not a single Israelite casualty all contributes towards the impression that this was an unusual and Divine deliverance. It was given to them to encourage them that the whole of Canaan could be conquered in this way. For from this point they were based opposite Jericho, poised to enter Canaan.

Num 31:8 They killed the kings of Midian with the rest of their slain: Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian: Balaam also the son of Beor they killed with the sword-

Zur's daughter Cozbi means "liar", the daughter of "the rock" (Zur)- a fake god. For Yahweh alone is a rock to His people. Her message was indeed a huge lie: that Yahweh and Baal worship could be fused through her as a leader of Midian openly performing a sex act with a similarly ranking leader of Israel. In the tabernacle of Yahweh (see on Num. 25:6,8). Zur was one of the five leading princes of Midian who was later slain along with Balaam. Balaam and Zur were clearly associated. And so it seems that Balaam suggested that Zur's daughter Cozbi be used to lead Israel into sin, so that their God would curse them- and Balaam would get his coveted reward which he so obsessed about.

Num 31:9 The children of Israel took captive the women of Midian and their little ones; and all their livestock, and all their flocks, and all their goods, they took for a prey-

They were criticized for taking the women alive (:14,15). Although the more specific commandments about engagement with enemies are given in Deuteronomy, just a short time later, they were expected to use sanctified common sense. They ought to have realized that the women who had led them into sin in Num. 25 needed to be destroyed and not taken as trophies. Whilst there was no specific command about this, they were expected to have perceived it. We see again that the law of Moses was not presented as a legal code to be obeyed in a literalistic way, but rather as a source of principle intended to guide behaviour in matters not specifically covered by the law.

Num 31:10 All their cities in the places in which they lived, and all their encampments, they burnt with fire-

The phrase "burnt with fire" is used many times in the Pentateuch and nearly always about sacrifices. These were to be offered to God rather than lived in by the Israelites; for it was God's intention that all Israel should go over Jordan, although He later made concessions to those who wanted to inherit east of Jordan. But the destruction of the cities east of Jordan reflects His desire that the people should not inherit there at that time; the promise of Canaan was that they would live in the houses which they had not built (Josh. 24:13).

Num 31:11 They took all the spoil and all the prey, both of man and of animal-

"The prey" is literally "the jaws", and refers to the animals; "the spoil" refers to the men. As the male adults were all killed, this must refer to the underage males who would have been seen as good potential slaves and were therefore "spoil". But they were later rebuked for this (:17). They were intended to have worked out how to behave in this matter, despite the lack of specific commandment. But the people failed to use the law of Moses as it was intended to be- a springboard towards personal engagement and relationship with God. Instead at best they used it as a mere legal code. The areas where the law was silent were intended to be those areas where the Israelites worked out the implications of God's revealed will, and saw for themselves how to behave.

Num 31:12 They brought the captives and the prey and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and to

the congregation of the children of Israel, to the camp at the plains of Moab which are by the Jordan at Jericho-

Eleazar had now effectively replaced the aged Phinehas. We note that Israel were encamped opposite Jericho when they won this amazing victory. It was clearly intended to encourage them that this is how all their conflicts could go in Canaan. We too are given encouragement for later trials and situations we will experience. Life is not at all a random path. All is designed to confirm us in an upward spiral of faith and spiritual achievement.

Num 31:13 Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the princes of the congregation went forth to meet them outside of the camp-

The Lord Jesus suffered and died, shedding the blood of atonement, "outside the camp" (Heb. 13:13). We are bidden go forth to the Lord Jesus "outside the camp", just as those who "sought Yahweh" did when there was no tabernacle (Ex. 33:7). The people watching Moses as he walked out to it, without the camp, therefore looks ahead to a faithless Israel lining the via Dolorosa and watching the Lord walk out to His place of crucifixion. And we are to get behind Him and follow Him there, stepping out from the mass of Israel. As the Lord Jesus suffered "outside the camp", so various parts of the Mosaic sacrifices were to be burnt there (Lev. 4:12,21; 8:17; 9:11; 16:27); and yet it was the blood of those sacrifices which achieved atonement (Heb. 13:11; Num. 19:3,9). "Outside the camp" was the place of excluded, condemned sinners (Lev. 13:46; 24:14; Num.

5:3,4; 15:35,36; 31:13,19), and it was here that the Lord Jesus died, in identification with us.

Num 31:14 Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds who came from the service of the war-

As discussed on :9, they were intended to have worked out for themselves, despite the lack of specific commandment, that taking these women was wrong and a way of entering into temptation; see on :16. Moses' anger was with the captains because this was a conscious policy decision they had made, and it would lead the people into sin (:16).

Num 31:15 Moses said to them, Have you saved all the women alive?-

Moses was distressed that the Israelite army had failed to perceive the spiritual reason for the battle- it was to stop the Midianites posing a temptation to Israel with their women as they had in chapter 25. Sometimes God's people can fight His battles and even be given victory, whilst failing to perceive the spiritual intent behind the war.

Num 31:16 Behold, these caused the children of Israel through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against Yahweh in the matter of Peor, and so the plague was among the congregation of Yahweh-

"These..." could suggest that these were the very women who had offered their bodies to the Israelites in return for worship of Baal Peor. They were cult prostitutes and should have been destroyed.

Num 31:17 Now therefore kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man by lying with him-

There is a harder side of God, the side we'd rather not see. God almost seems to underline the hardness of it in the way He records His word; thus He emphasizes that the "little ones" of the Canaanite cities were to be killed by the sword (Dt. 2:34), the male babies of the Midianites were to be killed by God's command (Num. 31:17; which was exactly what Herod ordered). The unfulfilled believer will accept the gracious side of God (which is undoubtedly the aspect more emphasized in the Bible), but refuse to really accept this other side, while passively admitting that this harder aspect of God is revealed in His word. But it's all or nothing. We either accept the self-revelation of God in the Bible, or we reject it- that's how *He* sees it. Our temptation is to think that God sees things as we see them, to think that God is merely an ideal human being. But the day of judgment will reveal otherwise (Ps. 50:21). He is God, not man. It is not for us to set the terms.

Num 31:18 But all the girls, who have not known man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves-

God makes concessions to human weakness. Having reminded Israel of how they sinned with the Midianites, He allows them to keep unmarried Midianites as wives (Num. 31:16,18).

Num 31:19 Encamp outside of the camp seven days: whoever has killed any person and whoever has touched

any slain, purify yourselves on the third day and on the seventh day, you and your captives-

This all rather sounds like the laws for purification from 'leprosy', which I elsewhere suggested was not Hansen's disease but a specific stroke from God. This legislation was also geared against the men immediately sleeping with the young women whom they had captured. They were to enter into serious relationship with them, and not use them as sexual trophies in hot blood. See on :46.

Num 31:20 As to every garment, and all that is made of skin, and all work of goats' hair, and all things made of wood, you shall purify yourselves-

As noted on :19, this recalls the legislation about 'leprosy', which I have suggested was a specific stroke of Divine judgment. Their taking of the Midianite women was seen by God as a serious sin, and they had as it were been stricken with judgment for this and had to be cleansed from it.

Num 31:21 Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who went to the battle, This is the statute of the law which Yahweh has commanded Moses-

They had been expected to follow the principles inculcated by the law, although they hadn't been given specific legislation about spoil at this point. But they had failed to grasp this and so now they were given laws to precisely govern their behaviour. But these laws could have been given before the event. They were given after it. Because it was God's intention that Israel ought to have perceived the right course of action on the basis of

the principles so far revealed, rather than needing endless sets of laws to define behaviour in every life situation. But they failed in this, and so further law was given. See on :28.

Num 31:22 whatever gold, silver, brass, iron, tin and lead-

There appears to be an allusion to this passage in 1 Cor. 3:11-15: "For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ. But if anyone builds on the foundation gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, stubble, each man's work shall be revealed. For the day of judgment shall declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire itself shall test each man's work of what sort it is. If anyone's work shall endure which he built thereon, he shall receive a reward. If anyone's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet as having passed through fire". Paul doesn't really quote in direct context, but uses words and phrases apparently out of context, which was typical of Jewish midrash. 1 Cor. 3:12-15 likens all the faithful to material which can pass through the fire of judgment- and this surely is a reference to the way that Jericho was burnt with fire, and only the metals along with Rahab and her family came through that fire to salvation (Josh. 6:24). And it's the same idea here with the spoils from the Midianites. They represent our converts in the war of preaching the gospel. Their worth will be revealed at the last day. The fire of condemnation will as it were burn at them and remove all their surface spiritu-

ality. And as through death comes life, so through condemnation of the flesh comes salvation of the spirit.

Num 31:23 everything that may withstand the fire you shall make to go through the fire, and it shall be clean; nevertheless it shall be purified with the water for impurity; and all that doesn't withstand the fire you shall make to go through the water-

"The fire" refers to the fire of the altar which was ideally intended to be that kindled at the time of Lev. 9:24 when the tabernacle was consecrated. It was to be kept perpetually burning by the sacrifices being continually placed upon it, a lamb every morning and every evening. The fire which never went out or was 'quenched' (Lev. 6:13). is a double symbol. The phrase is used multiple times with reference to the wrath of God in condemning sinners; it is the basis of the idea of eternal fire which will not be quenched. Rather like the cup of wine from the Lord being a symbol of either condemnation or blessing. So we have a choice- be consumed by the eternal fire now as living sacrifices, or be consumed by it anyway at the last day. "The water" may refer specifically to the water of separation made from the ashes of the red heifer.

Num 31:24 You shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and you shall be clean; and afterward you shall come into the camp-

Lev. 14:9, 15:13 uses this as the ritual for the cleansing of the leper. The people had been smitten with a stroke of punishment, which is what 'leprosy' was rather than what we now know as leprosy. And they were to repent and go through the cleansing process.

Num 31:25 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The principle is that the fighters / achievers must not keep their achievements for themselves but share them. This has never been popular, and so at David's time it was as if this law was instituted for the first time (1 Sam. 30:21-25).

Num 31:26 Take the sum of the prey that was taken, both of man and of animal, you, and Eleazar the priest, and the heads of the fathers' households of the congregation-

We note that the booty was not to be numbered (:32). The idea was that people and animals could be used in the service of God in the tabernacle. Whereas the general booty couldn't be.

Num 31:27 and divide the prey into two parts between the men skilled in war who went out to battle, and all the congregation-

This kind of policy of sharing the spoils of war with the congregation was repeated in Israelite history (1 Sam. 30:24,25; Ps. 68:12). It ensured that the minority called upon to do highly visible and humanly heroic work didn't do it for themselves nor to settle their own scores, but always with an eye to benefitting the community of God's people.

Num 31:28 Levy a tribute to Yahweh of the men of war who went out to battle: one soul offive hundred, of the persons, of the cattle, of the donkeys, and of the flocks-

The idea of giving a portion of the spoils of war to Yahweh was taught by Abraham's example (Gen. 14:20). I suggested on :21 that they had been expected to follow the principles they already knew, without being given

specific laws for every situation. Perhaps they likewise should have worked this out from Abraham's pattern of tithing the spoils of war. But they didn't make the connection, and so had to be given this specific legal command. See on :48.

Num 31:29 Take it of their half, and give it to Eleazar the priest, for Yahweh's wave offering-

The portion of meat to be waved was placed on the priests hands (Ex. 29:25), and then 'waved' or 'swung' towards the altar and then back- not from right to left. The idea was that the offerings were first given to God, recognizing they should be consumed on the altar to God; but then given back to the priest by God. So they ate them having first recognized that their food was really God's, all was of Him, and He had given it back to them to eat. This should be our spirit in partaking of any food, as we are the new priesthood. Our prayers of thanks for daily food should include this feature. All things are God's and anything we 'offer' to Him is only giving Him what He has given to us (1 Chron. 29:14,16). As people and live animals were involved, this waving or swinging before God must have been done in spirit.

Num 31:30 Of the children of Israel's half, you shall take one drawn out of every fifty, of the persons, of the cattle, of the donkeys, and of the flocks, of all the livestock, and give them to the Levites, who perform the duty of the tabernacle of Yahweh-

"Duty" is a military term, implying warfare. They were therefore to be given the spoils of war, as their regimented, disciplined devotion to serving God was to be

seen as a kind of military service. Just as we too fight the good fight of faith (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 1:18; Heb. 13:17).

Num 31:31 Moses and Eleazar the priest did as Yahweh commanded Moses-

The obedience of Moses to God is continually emphasized, and he thereby became a type of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 3:2-5).

Num 31:32 Now the prey over and above the booty which the men of war took, was six hundred and seventy-five thousand sheep-

The numbers given here are huge. We must remember that the term "thousand" doesn't have to mean 1,000 as a number, but can refer to a group or subdivision of some sort.

Num 31:33 seventy-two thousand head of cattle-LXX "Oxen".

Num 31:34 sixty-one thousand donkeys-

We can summarize the distribution:

675000 Sheep: 337500 to the soldiers, 337500 to the congregation; 675 to God, 6750 to the Levites

72000 Oxen; 36000 to the soldiers, 36000 to the congregation; 72 to God, 720 to the Levites

61000 Donkeys; 30500 to the soldiers, 30500 to the congregation; 61 to God, 610 to the Levites

32000 People [virgin women and young girls]; 16000 to the soldiers, 16000 to the congregation; 32 to God, 320 to the Levites.

Num 31:35 and thirty-two thousand persons in all, of the women who had not known man by lying with him-

This would indicate a huge number of the Midianites in total. To have slain say 100,000 men without a single casualty (:49) was the kind of miracle possible only in God's strength. But I have noted that "thousand" and "hundred" may be technical terms for groups or subdivisions rather than literal numbers.

Num 31:36 The half, which was the portion of those who went out to war, was in number three hundred and thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep-

The apparently pointless repetition of the figures was perhaps to show that indeed, not one person nor animal went missing, but the division of the prey was made precisely as commanded. For at times like these, things do tend to 'go missing'. But there was absolute integrity at this point.

Num 31:37 and Yahweh's tribute of the sheep was six hundred and seventy-five-

We wonder whether this tribute given "to Yahweh" was the number of animals sacrificed to Him, or whether they too were given to the Levites.

Num 31:38 The cattle were thirty-six thousand, of which Yahweh's tribute was seventy-two-

We wonder if the Lord had this in mind when sending out the otherwise strange number of 72 apostles. They were "Yahweh's", dedicated to Him, to serve as oxen in His service.

Num 31:39 The donkeys were thirty thousand five hundred, of which Yahweh's tribute was sixty-one-

The donkey was an unclean animal, and yet God was still able to find a use for 61 unclean donkeys. We all

have some way of being useful for Him whatever our status.

Num 31:40 The persons were sixteen thousand, of whom Yahweh's tribute was thirty-two persons-

32 to God, 320 to the Levites makes 352 Midianite females devoted to God. This is the numerical value of the word "Hebrew". These women were to become true Hebrews, again indicating that racial purity was never significant to God in defining His people.

Num 31:41 Moses gave the tribute which was Yahweh's wave offering to Eleazar the priest, as Yahweh commanded Moses-

Again the obedience of Moses to God is continually emphasized, and he thereby became a type of the Lord Jesus (Heb. 3:2-5).

Num 31:42 Of the children of Israel's half, which Moses divided off from the men who warred-

Sharing the results of our own labour has never been popular, it's why people don't like paying taxes. The ideal principle was as in 1 Sam. 30:21-25, that those who fought should have the same part as those who didn't. But in this case there was a large concession to human weakness; for the division was not proportionate per head of population. There were far more people in Israel than the 12,000 soldiers who fought, and per head, they each received far more than the other Israelites.

Num 31:43 (now the congregation's half was three hundred and thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep-

We enquire how exactly such a huge number of animals was divided amongst them. If proportionately, then

each family would likely have received a few sheep. So they each individually felt and saw the blessing of the victory God had given.

Num 31:44 and thirty-six thousand head of cattle-

Or, oxen. The only time we read the figure 36,000 again is in the number of soldiers in Issachar in 1 Chron. 7:4. But Issachar was a strong ox (Gen. 49:14 LXX). I see no great semantic moment in this connection. But as with many such connections which appear to have no great interpretive significance, we sense here the same Divine mind throughout all Scriptural revelation.

Num 31:45 and thirty thousand five hundred donkeys-

This huge number of donkeys implied they would be doing a lot of travelling and transporting. And indeed this was the intention- for they were about to enter Canaan and go to their specific inheritances. Although many of the people didn't do so, and were satisfied just with a bit of fertile land wherever they found it, this was the Divine intention which He empowered potentially to be fulfilled.

Num 31:46 and sixteen thousand persons)-

We wonder why the term "persons", literally *nephesh adam*, is used rather than "virgin females" or something similar. I suggest it is in order to remind the Israelites that these females were persons and should be valued as such; see on :19.

Num 31:47 even of the children of Israel's half, Moses took one drawn out of every fifty, both of man and of animal, and gave them to the Levites, who performed the

duty of the tabernacle of Yahweh; as Yahweh commanded Moses-

"The duty" is "the warfare". They were therefore to be given the spoils of war, as their regimented, disciplined devotion to serving God was to be seen as a kind of military service. Just as we too fight the good fight of faith (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 1:18; Heb. 13:17).

Num 31:48 The officers who were over the thousands of the army, the captains of thousands, and the captains of hundreds, came near to Moses-

They had been commanded by God to give part of the spoils of war in terms of the women and animals captured. The idea of giving a portion of the spoils of war to Yahweh was taught by Abraham's example (Gen. 14:20). I suggested on :21 that they had been expected to follow the principles they already knew, without being given specific laws for every situation. Perhaps they likewise should have worked this out from Abraham's pattern of tithing the spoils of war. But they didn't make the connection, and so had to be given this specific legal command to share out the people and animals. But now they get the point, and of their own initiative come to Moses and offer the rest of the spoils of war, apart from the people and animals. The law of God is not a chain, a leash, for man is not a dog ever seeking freedom from the Divinely imposed ties that bind. Rather is His law a springboard to the freedom of serving God upon our own initiative. And here we have a rare example of where men 'got it' and did just that. See on :53.

Num 31:49 and they said to Moses, Your servants have taken the sum of the men of war who are under our command, and there lacks not one man of us-

It's usual for military men to consider themselves as an elite in their own right. But these leading military leaders considered themselves as nothing but servants to their spiritual leader. Humility in leadership is vital amongst God's people. That such vast numbers had been slain without a single Israelite casualty was clear evidence that this very large scale victory was of God. The victory was to encourage them that they could likewise conquer Canaan in God's strength.

Num 31:50 We have brought Yahweh's offering, what every man has gotten, of jewels of gold, armlets, and bracelets, signet rings, earrings, and necklaces-

Even in times of spiritual victory, we are to never lose sight of our basic sinfulness and need for atonement with God. The situation is similar to that at the exodus, when the wealth of Egypt was taken by the Israelites and then given back to God for the construction of the tabernacle.

To make atonement for our souls before Yahweh-

They are clearly aware of their serious failure in taking the Midianite women, which had resulted in their being stricken down in some way (see on :19,24). But we wonder whether they had made the mistake which many make- thinking that material wealth and donating it can somehow atone fore sins. When it was the shedding of blood, and faith in the Lord's future sacrifice foreshad-

owed in it, which alone is the basis for atonement (Lev. 17:11).

Num 31:51 Moses and Eleazar the priest took their gold, even all the worked jewels-

I suggested on :50 that this donation of wealth was given under the misunderstanding that gold could atone for sin; when it was faith in God's grace and His purification which was required. But despite that misunderstanding, God still accepted their offering. As He accepts all those who truly love Him, despite their misunderstandings.

Num 31:52 All the gold of the wave offering that they offered up to Yahweh, of the captains of thousands and of the captains of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels-

This was a significant amount, likely around 200 kg. of gold and jewels (:51). They were so deeply moved by the principle of giving to Yahweh they had just been taught, that they now of their freewill offered this to Him. See on :48.

Num 31:53 (The men of war had taken booty, every man for himself)-

I suggested on :48 that the way they now offer that booty to God was an act of repentance, realizing that indeed all they had taken "every man for himself" should not have been taken "for himself". Rather it was to be shared back to God as the giver of all. And they came to this position on their own initiative.

Num 31:54 Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold of the captains of thousands and of hundreds and brought

it into the Tent of Meeting, for a memorial for the children of Israel before Yahweh-

Likewise the bronze from the censers of the rebels were made a memorial for Israel "before Yahweh" by being made into plates around the altar. So we can assume that something was made from this gold and it remained in the tabernacle.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 32

Num 32:1 Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of livestock. When they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead that behold, the place was a place for livestock-

The record sounds as if it were only these tribes; it is Reuben and Gad who make the agreement to not return to the land East of Jordan until the other tribes are settled (:25). But the bad attitude spread to Manasseh, according to Josh. 22; at this time, only three individuals from Manasseh were given an inheritance East of Jordan (32:40-42). But this spread to half the tribe wanting such an inheritance there. A theme of this chapter is how bad attitudes spread so easily.

The frequent command "You shall not covet" (Ex. 20:17 etc.) uses the same Hebrew word translated "desire" when we read of how Eve "desired" the fruit (Gen. 3:6); yet Israel "desired" the wrong fruit (Is. 1:29). As Eve saw the fruit and fell for it, so the people of Reuben and Gad saw the land East of Jordan and imagined how good it would be to have it, despite having been given 'all the land' West of Jordan to enjoy [cp. Adam and Eve's dominion in Eden] (Num. 32:1,2,7). In all these allusions [and they exist in almost every chapter of the Bible] we are being shown how human sin is a repetition in essence of that of our first parents. The insistent emphasis is that we should rise above and *not* be like them. And yet this call for personal effort and struggle with ourselves in or-

der to overcome sin is muted and misplaced by all the stress upon a supposed Devil tempting Eve, pushing the blame onto him, and thereby de-emphasizing our role in overcoming sin within ourselves. And so we see so many loud-mouthed condemners of the Devil totally not 'getting it' about the need for personal self-control and spiritual mindedness in daily life and private character.

A very great multitude of livestock- Remember that wealth in those days was not measured by bank accounts but by animals. They had worked hard for this because many animals would have died at some points in the wilderness journey- see on Num. 21:4. Their temptation to seek the Kingdom now arose from being wealthy; they saw a good place for their animals and they wanted the Kingdom right away. The Lord in the wilderness faced the same essential temptation- to take the Kingdom now. This was what first century Israel wanted, and it led them to reject their Messiah. And it's what we all would like. To have our nice homes and villas now, rather than bear the cross before the eternal crown.

Num 32:2 The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the princes of the congregation, saying-

Gad are repeatedly mentioned as leading this request. And it seems Dt. 33:21 LXX comments upon this in Moses' blessing of Gad: "And he saw his first-fruits, that there the land of the princes gathered with the chiefs of the people was divided; the Lord wrought righteousness, and his judgment with Israel". The reference may be to how Gad was apparently the leader of the

"heads of the people" of Gad, Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh who wanted to take their inheritance east of Jordan (Num. 32:2,6,25). The idea therefore was that they were told by Moses to see the inheritance they were allowed east of Jordan as merely a firstfruit of greater inheritance. Just as we are invited to receive firstfruit of inheritance of the Kingdom through the gift and experience of the Holy Spirit. But as with so many today, the first fruit was treated as the full experience, with no spiritual ambition to inherit more. "He executed the righteousness of Yahweh, His ordinances with Israel" would then be a very positive take on how the men of Gad apparently obeyed the agreement to go over Jordan and help their brethren inherit the Kingdom.

Num 32:3 Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Sebam, and Nebo, and Beon-

These place names occur in the later Old Testament, but always with reference to the fact that Gentiles lived there. So Reuben and Gad's short term desire for inheritance didn't last for long; subsequent generations lost those lands. Although they changed the names of these cities (:38), their original names evidently stayed with them because the Gentiles re-took them from Reuben and Gad.

Num 32:4 the land which Yahweh struck before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock-

We have just read in Num. 31 of the huge amount of livestock they had received after the amazing victory

over the Midianites. The records corroborate so perfectly, as we would expect from their having one ultimate Divine author.

Num 32:5 They said, If we have found favour in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession. Don't bring us over the Jordan-

They said this to Moses, who so dearly wished to enter the land but wasn't able to. The paradox is obvious and intentional; Moses could easily have answered their request with reference to it, but he omits all personal reference, in his selfless way; and focuses instead on the impact their choice would have on God's people as a whole. For their salvation and not his own was uppermost in his mind.

They were intended to themselves go over Jordan into the promised land of Canaan. But they speak as if they are being brought over by Moses, as if against their will, or at best, as a result of their submission to a will more powerful than their own. This is not how we should see our journey to the Kingdom. We ourselves should want to enter the land. This could be read as meaning that they despised the land promised. Although comparing the various definitions of that land, it is so that the territory was open to re-definition according to Israel's strengths and weaknesses. The final crossing over Jordan as recorded in Joshua 4 is however clearly typical of our final entry into the Kingdom, and to opt out of it can be therefore read quite negatively. 'Crossing over Jordan to enter Canaan' is seen in the Bible as the point of entering the land of Canaan, which had effectively

become the promised land for Israel (e.g. Num 33:51; 35:10; Dt. 2:29 "I shall pass over Jordan into the land the Lord gives us"). Not going over Jordan was the punishment given to Moses in excluding him from the land (Dt. 3:27; 4:21,22). To not wish to do so was therefore voting themselves out of the land of Canaan. But the Eastern bank of Jordan was within the land promised to Abraham. So I would conclude that they were using a Biblical argument to justify their desire for an immediate Kingdom, and this is just how the flesh justifies our weaknesses.

Num 32:6 Moses said to the children of Gad and to the children of Reuben, Shall your brothers go to the war, and shall you sit here?- You sit here- The contrast is between 'sitting', being passive and sedentary, and 'possessing' Canaan (:5)- the Hebrew meaning to seize. We are to seize the Kingdom, not passively; we are to by all means lay hold upon it (Phil. 3:12), taking the Kingdom as storm troopers (Mt. 11:12). They wanted the easier way- dwelling in an area which was apparently offering less opposition than the land West of Jordan. We likewise can take the easy way to the Kingdom [or so it seems], taking the path there which appears the way of least resistance, convenience and passivity.

Num 32:7 Why do you discourage the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which Yahweh has given them?-

Our attitude to the Kingdom has far greater influence on others' hearts / thinking than we realize. The Hebrew is usually translated "disallow" or once "break"

(Ps. 141:5); attitude is hereby described in proactive terms. We can break others' hearts without saying a word to them- by our attitude. And the final equilibrium of God's judgment will take this into account. It's not so much what laws we broke, but the effect we had upon others which is to be so significant in that day. Our attitudes to possessing the Kingdom affect others; if we don't want to go over ourselves, we will discourage others. The power of example is far greater than we realize. Jesus may have referred to this incident when He condemned the Pharisees for not entering the Kingdom of God themselves and not sending forth others on their way there either (Mt. 23:13 Gk.).

Num 32:8 Your fathers did so when I sent them from Kadesh Barnea to see the land-

The Gaddites and Reubenites didn't say a word to the others, didn't at all in so many words discourage them from entering the land. But in essence, their attitude was as bad as what their fathers did in stating that the land was too hard to possess. It could be that Moses' perceived that really, they were fearful of the opposition in the land, just as their fathers had been. And again we can infer that the land East of Jordan was perceived as not giving any insurmountable opposition to them.

Num 32:9 For when they went up to the valley of Eschol, and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which Yahweh had given them-

Time and again in the Biblical record, Abraham is held up as a very real example, in whose steps all God's

people are to tread. For example, as Abraham was bidden leave Ur and go and "see" the "land" of promise which God would "give" him (Gen. 13:15), so the spies were told to go and "see" the "land" which God had "given" them (Num. 13:18; 32:8,9- the same three words as in the promises to Abraham)- yet they lacked the faith of Abraham to believe that really, they could possess that land. They did "see" the land, yet they were punished by being told that they would not now "see the land" (Num. 14:23; Dt. 1:35). They saw it, but they didn't "see" it with the eyes of Abraham. And so it can be with our vision of God's Kingdom. Remember that Moses was the author of both Genesis and Numbers- such connections aren't incidental. Moses wished the people to see themselves as going forward in the spirit of Abraham- and hence he wrote up the Genesis record for Israel's benefit an inspiration.

Num 32:10 Yahweh's anger was kindled in that day, and He swore, saying-

If God's wrath burns hot against people, it means death for them (s.w. Ex. 22:24; Num. 11:1,33; 22:22; 25:3; Dt. 6:15; 31:17). But Moses averted this at the time of Ex. 32:10 by his intercession. He likewise averted it to some extent in that God's intention was to destroy all Israel immediately, but instead Moses' intercession changed the outworking of God's kindled wrath- for Israel continued, the unbelievers over 20 died in the desert, but the younger ones survived to enter Canaan. We see here how open God is to the mediation of third parties, and how open ended therefore is His purpose.

Num 32:11 'Surely none of the men who came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me -

'Caleb' can mean 'dog', and so this is appropriate. Joshua and Caleb were characterized by the comment that they "wholly followed the Lord" when they went to spy out Canaan (Num. 14:24; 32:11,12; Dt. 1:36; Josh. 14:8,9,14), and urged Israel to go up and inherit it. This refers to the way that the Angel had gone ahead of them, and they faithfully followed where the Angel had gone, and believed that Israel could follow that Angel wherever it led. When Israel finally did go into the land, they were told that Joshua would 'go before' them, and they were to follow him and thereby inherit the land (Dt. 31:3). From this we see that circumstances repeat in our lives. As Joshua had been told to be strong good courage in order to take the land, so he had to tell others (Josh. 10:25). As God charged him to be courageous and obedient to the book of the Law, so Joshua on his deathbed charged his people (Josh. 1:7,8 cp. 23:6).

Num 32:12 except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun, because they have followed Yahweh completely'

Caleb was a Gentile (Josh. 15:17; Jud. 1:13; Gen. 36:11); and yet in Num. 13:6; 34:19 his descendants are incorporated into the tribe of Judah. Likewise Samuel, an Ephraimite (1 Sam. 1:1), was counted as a Levite (1 Chron. 6:16-28). Indeed it would appear that 'genealo-

gies' in the Bible very often reflect themes of associations rather than being literal accounts of blood descent.

Caleb was head of a household within the tribe of Judah. It could be argued that he was directly related to Judah through Hezron and Pharez (1 Chron. 2:5,18,25). But "Kenizzite" (also Num. 32:12) could refer to the Gentile tribe of Gen. 15:19; or to a man called Kenaz, memorialized by Caleb naming his son with that same name (1 Chron. 4:15). And Jud. 1:13 could mean that Caleb's father was called Kenaz. Caleb means "dog", and this is apparently alluded to when he is commended for faithfully following Yahweh, as a dog would follow its master (Num. 14:24). The genealogies are constructed in such a way that they don't preclude Caleb having been a Gentile who was fully accepted into the tribe of Judah.

Num 32:13 Yahweh's anger was kindled against Israel, and He made them wander back and forth in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, who had done evil in the sight of Yahweh, was consumed-

That generation disbelieved that they could enter the land. They didn't 'do' any evil but their mental attitudes, their heart, was counted as doing evil. This continues the theme noted on :7 and :8; mental attitudes are counted as actions.

Num 32:14 Behold, you have risen up in your fathers' place, an increase of sinful men-

As noted on :7,8,13,15 and elsewhere, a theme of this incident is that mental attitudes are counted as proactively sinful behaviour. They were an "increase" or

descendants of the sinful men mentioned in :8, their 'fathers' who had likewise not wanted to enter the land. Again their motives are being revealed as identical to that of their fathers- fear of opposition, and preferring to sacrifice the Kingdom for the sake of non-action. The particular "fathers" (:8) and "sinful men" in view would have been the princes of Reuben and Gad who had reported that the land was unable to be possessed: Shammua son of Zaccur [of Reuben] and Geuel son of Machi [of Gad] (Num. 13:4,15). The sin of those two men appears the worse when we see it twice mentioned here that their attitude had influenced a whole generation of their tribal descendants.

To augment yet the fierce anger of Yahweh-

God's anger had been kindled 38 years ago over this matter of not having faith to enter the Kingdom He had prepared. By not learning the lesson of our fathers' failures, and repeating in essence their sin, we provoke that anger yet more. Failure to learn from history is therefore highly significant before God; and this is where the historical record which is the Bible becomes of such supreme importance. There are degrees of sin. Paul seems to reason that sexual sin involving the body of God's creation is especially culpable. And here Num. 32:14 speaks of 'augmenting yet the fierce anger of the Lord' by premeditated sin, as if there is a scale of offence to God.

Num 32:15 For if you turn away from after Him-

They would have argued that all they were doing was asking for what seemed a logical, practical concession.

But because of the attitudes underlying it, they are spoken of as having actually done the most awful things in practice. See on :14. Turning away from behind God is the language of :11- not wholly following God into the promised land. He is leading us into His Kingdom- it is wilful pulling out of that program which will provoke His anger. And if we remain within the path lead by Him, we shall surely get there. He is not passive. He has not merely enabled a future Kingdom and remained willing to give it to whoever makes the journey. He is leading us there, going before us, dragging us there...

He will yet again leave them in the wilderness-

Yet God had earlier implied that after that previous generation had died, then the next generation, their children, would enter the land. He had apparently limited the time that Israel would remain in the wilderness- to 40 years (Num. 14:33,34). But here we see that once again, God's purpose is conditional and can change; even if there are no hints of the conditions at earlier points. The forty year time period had the possibility of becoming longer. This reflects God's sensitivity to human behaviour. We who pray so half-heartedly for victory against temptation, who so easily assume that God will understand that we can't fully change... need to realize that extreme sensitivity which He has to our choices and thoughts. Let's get it clear: the whole people of Israel would have been left in the wilderness and not allowed to enter the land, if Gad and Reuben refused to cross the Jordan river (Num. 32:15). But this would have broken the Divine promise of Num. 14:31 that all those under

20 would enter the land. Even that promise, therefore, had unstated conditions attached to it. And yet God had yet another option- if they refused to go over Jordan, then they would forfeit their land and receive a different inheritance (Num. 32:30). The complexities of these conditions are of course beyond us, because we are seeing only a part of the working of God's infinite mind. The point is, there are conditions attached to God's promises which aren't always made apparent to us.

"Yet again" may refer to God's temporary desire to leave Israel in the wilderness and make of Moses a new nation, at the time of the golden calf apostasy.

And you will destroy all this people-

This may sound extreme language, but this is the theme of the chapter: internal attitudes have huge affect upon others. We must again remember that the area they wished to possess was still part of the land promised to Abraham, although not strictly part of the land of Canaan which God wished to take His people to. They had a quasi-Biblical justification for their attitude. At first sight this may appear unreasonable- that the whole community would be punished for the sake of the sin and short-termist thinking of two tribes. But the eternal wellbeing of others is in our hands in that our example can discourage others from entering the Kingdom, and God may not compensate for our causing them to stumble.

Num 32:16 They came near to him, and said, We will build sheepfolds here for our livestock, and cities for our little ones-

We shouldn't seek isolation from our brothers and sisters; we should seek to be with them and interact with them. Gad, Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh didn't want to go over Jordan and be with their brethren; they chose the good pasturelands East of Jordan to live in because it was good cattle country. But in later Scripture, every reference to the towns they settled in records those towns (Dibon, Ataroth, Heshbon etc.) as being in Gentile hands (Num. 32:33-38); and it would seem from the 1 Chron. 5 genealogies that they went off into Assyria and assimilated into the tribes there. By choosing separation from God's people, they drifted off with the world. See on :24.

Num 32:17 but we ourselves will be ready armed to go before the children of Israel, until we have brought them to their place, and our little ones shall dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land-

This contrasts favourably with their attitude that *they* were being *brought* to Canaan (:5). It could be argued from the positive attitude of the Gaddites and Reubenites (and the way in which things were resolved in Joshua 22) that actually they were brought around to a more spiritual attitude by Moses' challenge. Such spiritual success and response to challenge is rare, but perhaps at least that generation did positively respond. But their misjudgment still had a terrible effect upon future generations, because it's clear that the Israelite population soon effectively died out of the areas they were so keen to inherit.

They thought that their human strength would give Israel their inheritance, whereas God had promised that *He* and not they (*“we”*) would give the inheritance. Moses therefore corrects them by saying that *God* will drive out “His enemies from before Him” (:21). It was exactly because they failed to believe that *God* would do this that they preferred to stay the other side of Jordan and not enter Canaan; and they wished to share that attitude with others.

Num 32:18 We will not return to our houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance-

The “houses” probably refer to their families. We too cannot enjoy our own “house” if we have paid no attention to the inheritance of others in God’s Kingdom. Yet all too often, family is elevated to a status which means that the needs and inheritance of others is ignored.

Num 32:19 For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan, and forward, because our inheritance is fallen to us on this side of the Jordan eastward-

This was how they wanted it, but God confirmed it. We to some extent can choose out our eternal inheritance, and yet in another sense God chooses it for us. This is the playful yet constructive tension which there is between freewill and predestination.

Num 32:20 Moses said to them, If you will do this thing, if you will arm yourselves to go before Yahweh to the war,-

Moses had told the Reubenites and Gadites that they could return to their possessions when “the Lord have given rest unto your brethren, and they also possess

the land" (Dt. 3:20). But Joshua tells them to go to their possessions simply because their brethren were now at "rest" (Josh. 22:4). He significantly omits the proviso that their brethren must also possess the land- because much of the land wasn't possessed. Was this Joshua getting slack, thinking that the main thing was that people were living in peace, even though they weren't possessing the Kingdom? Or is it a loving concession to human weakness? Indeed, the conditions of Dt. 3:20 were in their turn an easier form, a concession to, the terms of the initial agreement in Num. 32:20-32.

Moses stresses four times (:20,21,27,29) that they should go over armed "before the Lord". The Hebrew translated "before" doesn't have to mean 'in front of', because :11 and :15 [see notes there] have spoken of the need to *follow* Yahweh into Canaan. The idea is rather of 'before the face of', i.e. 'in the presence of' (this is how it is used in :22 "a possession before Yahweh"). God was going to drive out His enemies from before Him, i.e. from His presence (:21), and if Israel were in God's presence, this meant that the tribes would be driven out from before them.

Num 32:21 and every armed man of you will pass over the Jordan before Yahweh, until He has driven out His enemies from before Him,-

The Hebrew means 'prepared' rather than referring to men literally carrying military equipment. The tension is between them being armed / prepared, and then the later part of the verse which states that *God* would do the driving out of the Canaanite tribes. But what was re-

quired was a preparedness and willingness to be used in whatever capacity.

But not "every armed man of you" passed over. The offer they made was fulfilled but far from all their men went with the rest of Israel. The census of Num. 26 shows that the tribe of Reuben had 43,730 men of military age; Gad, 40,500; Manasseh, 52,700; the half of which is 26,350, making 110,580. But only 40,000 went with the Israelites (Josh. 4:13), and the land was never fully subjugated, so they were released to return by grace alone.

Num 32:22 and the land is subdued before Yahweh; then afterward you shall return, and be guiltless towards Yahweh, and towards Israel; and this land shall be to you for a possession before Yahweh-

The same Hebrew words are found in Gen. 1:28, where the land / earth was to be "subdued" before man. It's as if it was God's intention to re-establish Eden in Israel; indeed, a case can be made that Eden *was* the geographical land promised to Abraham, or Canaan, although the flood changed the location of the rivers mentioned in early Genesis. The later casting of sinful Israel out of the land is likewise replete with reference to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden. Joshua 22 says that the deal was kept, and the men from these tribes were allowed to return. And yet the land was hardly subdued; "I will give you rest", the Angel had said (Ex. 33:11,14). But they did not enter that rest- Heb. 4:8,10. "Rest" was defined as the land being subdued before God with all the tribes driven out (Josh. 1:13,15; 1 Chron.

22:18). This being conditional on Israel's faithfulness, we conclude that when the Angel said "I will give thee rest" He was speaking of what was possible in prospect; or perhaps He over-estimated Israel's obedience, or was unaware of the degree to which their entering the rest was conditional on their obedience. Or perhaps simply by grace, the land was counted as being subdued and at rest when it was not.

As Adam and Eve failed to "subdue" the garden of Eden (Gen. 1:28), so Israel failed to fully "subdue" [s.w.] the tribes of the land (Num. 32:22). They subdued a few local to them; but they never really rose up to the reality of being able to have the whole land area promised to Abraham subjected to them. And so Lev. 26 and Dt. 28 promised a curse to come upon the land [of Eden / Israel] for their failure within it, just as happened to Adam and Eve; and of course ultimately they were driven out of the land just as Israel's very first parents had been. As the *eretz* / earth / land was initially "without form and void", so the same term is used of the land of Israel after the people had been driven out of it (Jer. 4:23). As thorns and thistles came up in the land [and those plants are unknown in some parts of the planet], so they did again when Israel were driven from their land (Gen. 3:18; Hos. 10:8). As Adam was punished by returning to dust, so Israel would be destroyed by dust (Dt. 28:24).

Num 32:23 But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against Yahweh; and be sure your sin will find you out-

The sense is more that you will know / find your sin. The LXX has "ye shall know your sin, when afflictions shall come upon you". We can willfully make ourselves ignorant of sin; but in suffering for it, we come to realize it. Therefore, Moses is saying, there's no point in pretending we don't see a problem with our behaviour. We will know it, when we suffer for it. We shall not be left ignorant of our sin, and so we shouldn't allow our own deceitful flesh to kid us that we are ignorant of it. Adam likewise confessed his sin as a result of God's questioning (Gen. 3:10). Realization of sin will finally be elicited (Ez. 6:9; Jude 15).

When they are appointed their portion with the hypocrites and there is wailing and gnashing of teeth, *then* shall the Kingdom be likened unto the five wise and five foolish virgins. *Then* the rejected will understand the principles of that parable, crystal clearly. Members of the ecclesia of Israel will say "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord"- but be rejected (how else to understand Mt. 23:39?). Likewise the Egyptians, fleeing in the mud from Yahweh as they vainly hoped against hope that the returning waters wouldn't somehow reach them...they came to know Yahweh (Ex. 14:18). It could well be that this knowing of Yahweh involves a desperate recounting of their sins, seeing that one of the purposes of condemnation is to make men aware of their sinfulness and the depth of God's grace. Num. 32:23 prophesied of Israel in their time of condemnation: "You will be sensible of your sin when evil overtakes you" (LXX).

Num 32:24 Build cities for your little ones, and folds for your sheep; and do that which has proceeded out of your mouth-

And notice how Gad asked for permission to build dwellings East of Jordan "for our cattle and for our children / little ones", but God gave them permission to build such dwellings "for your little ones and for your cattle" (Num. 32:16,24). Gad and co. put cattle before kids; God put kids before cattle. And how many times have we seen this come true- those who move away from fellowship with their brethren drift off to the world, they put cattle before kids, materialism before raising a Godly seed... And of course we can go far from our brethren in many ways other than geographically moving away from them; there can be a distance within us from them which is just the same. And time and again one sees the same nexus of thought playing itself out- people put their cattle, their materialism, before their children. And God wants it the other way around. Working mothers, late working fathers, kids in day care from babyhood- all so the family can live here and not there, have this car rather than that one, holiday here rather than stay at home, have the latest toys and gadgets... all, of course, in the name of 'for the sake of the kids'; when it's actually cattle before kids. Interestingly, the names of the towns which Reuben and Gad built, the territory they so desired, only occur in later Scripture in the context of their being part of Gentile territories (Is. 15:4; 16:8-9; Jer. 48:2, 45; 1 Chron. 19:7). So they never ultimately kept hold of that for which they sacrificed the promised in-

heritance of Canaan. God in His total love and grace was willing to go along with their weakness- He compromised, as it were, by saying they could have that coveted territory if they helped their brethren totally inherit their possessions West of Jordan. Ultimately this never happened, as not all the Canaanite territory was possessed; yet still God allowed Reuben and Gad to have their part of the deal which they never fully kept. And there's great grace in the way that Dt. 3:19 records God saying to them at this time: "I know that you have much cattle". God knew their weakness. He knew they'd never even seen the wonders of the promised land, which was far more fertile than the land East of Jordan. But He went along with them, so much did He thirst for relationship with them. And so it is with our cattle-before-kids materialism. God may not cast us off because of it in itself. His grace and love is too strong for that. But by permitting us the compromise, we find ourselves in a far harder situation and a path which long term won't lead to permanent inheritance of the promised land, just as it didn't for Reuben and Gad. See on :16.

Num 32:25 The children of Gad and the children of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying, Your servants will do as my lord commands-

But as explained on :27, they didn't. And yet God kept His side of the agreement, and didn't punish them directly for their disobedience.

Num 32:26 Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock, shall be there in the cities of Gilead-

Num. 31:9 uses this same phrase "flocks and livestock" for the vast numbers of such animals captured from the Midianites. This material blessing of God was not responded to wisely by the two and a half tribes. They became obsessed with planning how they could keep and maintain for themselves all that huge blessing. Rather than perceiving that this was God's unexpected gift of grace, and they had received it despite the majority of them not having laboured for it. And so it often happens with God's material blessing; the recipient becomes obsessed with madly preserving it, even if as with the two and a half tribes, they make decisions to effect this which are spiritually damaging to them in the long term. One wonders why God ever grants material blessing to His children when He clearly knows that it usually leads to their spiritual declension. We can only conclude that He does so because He simply loves us as a doting Father.

Num 32:27 but your servants will pass over, every man who is armed for war, before Yahweh to battle, as my lord says-

But not "every armed man of you" passed over. The offer they made was fulfilled but far from all their men went with the rest of Israel. The census of Num. 26 shows that the tribe of Reuben had 43,730 men of military age; Gad, 40,500; Manasseh, 52,700; the half of which is 26,350, making 110,580. But only 40,000 went with the Israelites (Josh. 4:13), and the land was never

fully subjugated, so they were released to return by grace alone.

Num 32:28 So Moses commanded concerning them to Eleazar the priest, and to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' households of the tribes of the children of Israel-

Moses was aware that he would not be alive once Israel were in Canaan. Instead of getting bitter about this, in characteristic humility he accepts it. He asks them to ensure that indeed "every man who is armed" from these tribes would pass over Jordan (:29), but in reality this never happened; see on :27. The record breathes God's grace at every point.

Num 32:29 Moses said to them, If the children of Gad and the children of Reuben will pass with you over the Jordan, every man who is armed to battle, before Yahweh, and the land shall be subdued before you; then you shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession-

The command to subject the animals in Eden [the land promised to Abraham?] corresponds to later commands to subject the tribes living in the land (Gen. 1:28 = Num. 32:22,29; Josh. 18:1). The "fear and dread" of humans which fell on the animals after the flood is clearly linkable with the "fear and dread" which was to come upon the inhabitants of Canaan due to the Israelites (Gen. 9:2 = Dt. 1:21; 3:8; 11:25).

Num 32:30 but if they will not pass over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan-

The location and nature of their possession in the Kingdom depended upon them and their choices. And the same is true with us. This is an insight into the tremendous significance of life, our attitudes and decision making. We are affecting how we shall eternally be, the nature of our eternity and inheritance.

The whole people of Israel would have been left in the wilderness and now allowed to enter the land, if Gad and Reuben refused to cross the Jordan river (Num. 32:15). But this would have broken the Divine promise of Num. 14:31 that all those under 20 would enter the land. Even that promise, therefore, had unstated conditions attached to it. And yet God had yet another option- if they refused to go over Jordan, then they would forfeit their land and receive a different inheritance (Num. 32:30). The complexities of these conditions are of course beyond us, because we are seeing only a part of the working of God's infinite mind. The point is, there are conditions attached to God's promises which aren't always made apparent to us.

Num 32:31 The children of Gad and the children of Reuben answered saying, As Yahweh has said to your servants, so will we do-

Moses had told the Reubenites and Gadites that they could return to their possessions when "the Lord has given rest unto your brethren, and they also possess the land" (Dt. 3:20). But Joshua tells them to go to their possessions simply because their brethren were now at "rest" (Josh. 22:4). He significantly omits the proviso that their brethren must also possess the land- because

much of the land wasn't possessed. Was this Joshua getting slack, thinking that the main thing was that people were living in peace, even though they weren't possessing the Kingdom? Or is it a loving concession to human weakness? Indeed, the conditions of Dt. 3:20 were in their turn an easier form, a concession to, the terms of the initial agreement in Num. 32:20-32.

Num 32:32 We will pass over armed before Yahweh into the land of Canaan, and the possession of our inheritance shall remain with us beyond the Jordan-

The idea is [see AV] 'so that the possession....' Our receipt of the inheritance is related to others receiving their inheritance; just as in Paul's shipwreck, all had to remain in the ship if all were to be saved. This apparently strange condition of salvation is surely to emphasize that whilst salvation is in one sense individual, it is in another sense collective. And that collective dimension to it cannot be simply ignored.

Num 32:33 Moses gave to them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and to the half-tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land according to its cities and borders, even the cities of the surrounding land-

In later Scripture, every reference to the towns they settled in records those towns (Dibon, Ataroth, Heshbon etc.) as being in Gentile hands (Is. 15:4; 16:8-9; Jer. 48:2, 45; 1 Chron. 19:7); and it would seem from the 1 Chron. 5 genealogies that they went off into Assyria and

assimilated into the tribes there. By choosing separation from God's people, they drifted off with the world.

Num 32:34 The children of Gad built Dibon, and Ataroth, and Aroer-

They didn't want to go over Jordan and be with their brethren; they chose the good pasturelands East of Jordan to live in because it was good cattle country. But in later Scripture, every reference to the towns they settled in records those towns (Dibon, Ataroth, Heshbon etc.) as being in Gentile hands (Num. 32:33-38); and it would seem from the 1 Chron. 5 genealogies that they went off into Assyria and assimilated into the tribes there. By choosing separation from God's people, they drifted off with the world.

Num 32:35 and Atrothshophan, and Jazer, and Jogbehah-

It is often not appreciated that the extent of the area given to the two and a half tribes on the east of Jordan, as defined in Josh. 13:10-12, was roughly the same as the entire territory given to the nine and a half tribes on the west of Jordan. The two and a half tribes saw good pasture land and wanted it there and then, as a king of short cut to the Kingdom of God. But there are no short cuts to the Kingdom. The conditions they were given demanded even more faith from them. Their men had to leave their flocks and families unprotected on the east of Jordan whilst they fought in the front line vanguard of Joshua's army to secure the territory on the west of Jordan. And the territory they were asked to possess was huge, far larger than the pasture lands they initially cov-

eted, and inhabited by giants (see on Josh. 13:30)- which they probably didn't realize at the time.

Num 32:36 and Beth Nimrah, and Beth Haran: fortified cities, and folds for sheep-

Beth Haran means 'house of the high places' and clearly has reference to idolatrous high places. Beth Nimrah, house of the leopard, likely has similar reference; for "house" probably referred to an idol shrine. But although the Israelites changed some names, e.g. in :42, they often left the names connected with idolatry. They at best allowed the subliminal associations with idolatry to remain, and likely in practice they used these idol shrines. See on :38.

Num 32:37 The children of Reuben built Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Kiriathaim-

Elealeh means literally the 'going up' of God, 'El'. The same word for 'going up' is used of Israel's 'going up' to inherit Canaan (Dt. 1:21,26,28 and very often). So it seems that some faithful ones did rename the towns with spiritual, Godly names. But see on :36,38.

Num 32:38 and Nebo, and Baal Meon, (their names being changed), and Sibmah; and they gave other names to the cities which they built-

There is no record at all of Israel's obedience to the commands to destroy the local idols of the land. Instead the historical record is full of evidence that they worshipped these gods. Although the name of Baal Meon had been changed in Num. 32:38, by the time of Josh. 13:17 the old name was still being used. Clearly Israel did not detest idolatry as they ought to have done. Just

as the names of idols should not have passed the lips of Israel, so for us, the things of sexual impurity are not to be named amongst us (Eph. 5:3). The allusion shows how Paul understood such things to be the equivalent of idolatry in his day, and that remains a fair interpretation even in our age.

Nebo and Baal were the names of Canaanite gods, and Yahweh forbade His people to even mention their names (Ex. 23:13; Hos. 2:17). The principle for us is that we shouldn't surround ourselves with things which even suggest or stimulate the idea of being anything other than totally dedicated to the one true God, or which may trigger the idea of idolatry.

Num 32:39 The children of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead and took it, and dispossessed the Amorites who were therein-

See on :40. Machir's family wanted to inherit the Kingdom, whereas many others were just initially happy to farm whatever land they could and weren't bothered about the inheritance God had given them. The daughters were keen to maintain their father's name (Num. 27:1; 36:1). There was even a child named "Gilead" in the family (Num. 26:29). And so God confirmed their desire for Gilead by giving it to them (Dt. 3:15), even though inheritance east of Jordan was not God's ideal intention for them. But He encouraged them in the way they wished to go. And so He will with us.

Num 32:40 Moses gave Gilead to Machir the son of Manasseh, and he lived therein-

Num. 32:39 describes how the tribes of Gilead were displaced by Machir; but Num. 32:40; Dt. 3:15 says that God through Moses "gave Gilead to Machir". The land they took was not therefore taken so much by their human effort, swords and bows, even though they played a role- but by the gracious gift of God. And it's the same with our inheritance of the Kingdom. We note that it was God's intention that Israel lived permanently in the promised land. Yet their specific inheritances were related to their behaviour during the time when they took the kingdom; thus Machir received the territory which he had ethnically cleansed. And so our eternal inheritances, the nature of our eternity, will be a direct reflection of our work in this life. It's not that works can save us. Salvation itself is the gift of grace, represented by how Gilead was given to Machir by God. But it is so that the nature of our eternity will be forged by our experiences and spiritual intentions now. We are right now shaping the nature of our eternal future.

Num 32:41 Jair the son of Manasseh went and took his towns, and called them Havvoth Jair-

Some claim that the Bible doesn't recognize genealogy through women, and find some problem in the Lord Jesus being descended from Abraham and David through a woman. But there are Biblical examples of genealogy being reckoned through a woman. We have one here. Jair's father was of the tribe of Judah (1 Chron. 2:22); yet in Num. 32:41 he is described as "the son of Manasseh", showing that his mother must have been

of the tribe of Manasseh. His descent was reckoned for some reason through his mother rather than his father.

Num 32:42 Nobah went and took Kenath, and its villages, and called it Nobah, after his own name-

We note that Nobah changed the name of this town-although "Kenath" simply means "possession". This thereby throws into a worse light the way that the Israelites often didn't change the names of areas which had associations with idols, even though changing the names was within their power. See on :36,38. We ought to do all within our power to remove even subliminal reminders of sin and temptation. And that principle has huge practical moment in our lives in this world.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 33

Num 33:1 These are the journeys of the children of Israel, when they went forth out of the land of Egypt by their armies under the hand of Moses and Aaron-

Israel moved only 33 times in the first 39 years of wandering, meaning that they stayed on average for over a year in each of their resting places. Yet in the fortieth, final year, Israel moved nine times- and at least eight of those moves were in the last seven months of the fortieth year (:38). The tempo of God's activity increases towards the end of our lives and in the final entry period into God's Kingdom during the tribulation. The tempo is also strong at the start of our journey- the first nine stops on the journey were relatively soon after leaving Egypt, within the first year.

Num 33:2 Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of Yahweh, and these are their journeys according to their goings out-

Heb.: "Moses recorded the starting points of their various marches as directed by the Lord; their marches, by starting point, were as follows". Each stage of the journey [Heb. 'departure'] was a starting point- each day is the first day of the rest of our lives. Israel perhaps wanted to move on from a sense of boredom, a desire for something new- just as many do today, kidding themselves that this is a spiritual 'journey'. For those truly on a journey to the Kingdom, our moving on is "at the commandment of the Lord" (Ex. 17:1).

Moses kept this record of their journeys in the spirit of how God commanded His people to each one remember the way by which God had brought them out from Egypt to Canaan (Dt. 8:2). We need to keep at least a mental diary of how God has led us in our lives, to look back with feelings of gratitude and grace as we see how He has led us, how life for us is no mere succession of chance events, but has a definite direction and end point in entering the Kingdom.

"Goings out"[AV] suggests that each stage of our journey, even if it at times seems two steps back and three forward, is in fact a 'going out' from Egypt. And yet we know from Acts 7 and Ez. 20 that Israel took the idols of Egypt with them and in their hearts turned *back* to Egypt (Acts 7:39), even though the external journey was a going out, away from Egypt. And so our church life can have the same semblance, whilst in our hearts we have turned back.

The Hebrew word is used about the entire 'going out' of Israel from Egypt to the promised land. Our total journey from the world through the Red Sea of baptism to the Kingdom of God involves much wandering, backwards and forwards (32:13). But it's all under God's control and part of our total exodus from Egypt to the Kingdom. Although humanly the journey was a zigzag and circular route, it is described in Ps. 107:7 as a "right" or 'straight' way- from God's perspective.

God wanted Moses to record the journey so that Israel could recount it when they entered the land: "You shall remember [Heb. 'to recount', to mark] all the way

which Yahweh your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Dt. 8:2). The command to recount the way was perhaps a command to recite Numbers 33. In the type, it may well be that in the Kingdom age we look back on this brief life so that we never forget 'how we got here'. What may seem now an endless chasing of our tails in a desert we will then perceive to have been purposeful strides towards the Kingdom. There *is* meaning attached to event in our lives, even if we will only perceive that meaning when the record is written up.

Num 33:3 They travelled from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the next day after the Passover the children of Israel went out with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians-

Israel crossing the Red Sea is one of the most well-known types of baptism / the new creation (1 Cor. 10:1). They were being chased by the Egyptians, and were trapped against the sea. The only way of escape was for that water to open and allow them to go through it. If any Israelite had refused to go through, there would have been no salvation.

The people of Israel as a body were going through the death and resurrection experience of the Lord Jesus, through the process of the Passover and Exodus through the Red Sea. Israel ate Passover (Ex. 12:6) [14th Abib], as the Lord died on the cross as the Passover lambs were slain; Israel left Egypt the next day (Num. 33:3) [15th

Abib] and journeyed three days (Ex. 8:27) [15th-17th Abib], and the Lord Jesus was three days in the tomb. Israel then came through the Red Sea [17th Abib], connecting with the Lord's being resurrected. As we come out of the baptismal water, we really are united with the resurrected Lord- a new creation. His newness of life, His deliverance and successful exodus from the world- all this becomes ours.

Num 33:4 while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom Yahweh had struck among them. On their gods also Yahweh executed judgments-

Each of the plagues targeted a specific Egyptian god, and it seems that on Passover night something dramatic happened to all the gods- maybe the idols to them fell over or were destroyed. Yet Israel still took the gods of Egypt with them through the Red Sea and worshipped them on the wilderness journey (Ez. 20:7; Acts 7:43). The pull of idolatry is against all reason, and yet there is such a strong tendency within us not to devote ourselves to only one God.

"Against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am Yahweh" (Ex. 12:12; 15:11; Num. 33:4). The "gods" are spoken of for a moment as real and existing, in order to show Yahweh's total superiority over them to the point that they didn't exist. Note how it was the Egyptian people who were judged (Gen. 15:14); their idols ("gods") are used by metonymy to stand for those who believed in them. Likewise "demons" is sometimes put by metonymy for those who believed in them (e.g. Mk. 2:32,34). The judgment upon Egypt's gods is

brought out by an otherwise obscure reference in Ex. 7:19 to how “there shall be blood in all the land of Egypt on wood and in stone”. “Wood and stone” is a term usually used in the Bible for idols; and “the Egyptian priests used

The plagues specifically targeted Egyptian gods: Nile water turned to blood = HAPI – the god of the spirit of the Nile; Frogs = HEKOT – the goddess of magic who had a frog's head; "The dust of the land" turned to lice or gnats (Ex. 8:16) = SEB – god of the dust of the earth; "Swarms of beetles" (Ex. 8:21 Hebrew) = RA and the forerunner of BEELZEBUB were likened to beetles; much pagan Egyptian jewelry features beetles; Murrain of cattle = APIS – the sacred bull god; Boils (Ex. 9:8–9) = NEIT – the queen of the heavens; Thunder and hail = SHU – god of the atmosphere; Darkness = RA – the sun god; Locusts = SERAIJA – protector of Egypt from locusts.

Num 33:5 The children of Israel travelled from Rameses, and encamped in Succoth-

The distance was about 120 miles. It would appear there was no stopping place. The longest segment of their journey was immediately after they left Egypt and had started upon the salvation journey. It's tempting to imagine that Rameses was the city which they were employed building by slave labour, and it was named after the Pharaoh called Rameses. But Egyptology and Egyptian chronology is hopelessly confused. But we note the similarity between "Rameses" and "Meses", the Egyptian name for Moses. And thus we perceive how the two men were set up in antithesis to each other- Moses / Meses, the one drawn out by Yahweh, and Ra-Meses, the man drawn out to Ra, the Egyptian sun god.

Num 33:6 They travelled from Succoth, and encamped in Etham, which is in the edge of the wilderness-

It could be that Etham is a form of Khetam, fortress, which was part of the great wall of Egypt. In this case, there was another deliverance or miracle involved in that the people were allowed through it.

Num 33:7 They travelled from Etham, and turned back to Pihahiroth, which is before Baal Zephon: and they encamped before Migdol-

The "turning back" is typical of how our path towards the Kingdom makes no sense in secular terms. There are points at which we turn back upon ourselves, and wonder why we weren't led more directly to the destination. We shall never be able to fully attach meaning to event in this life, and only in the Kingdom will we realize how there could have been no other way.

Num 33:8 They travelled from before Hahiroth, and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness; and they went three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham, and encamped in Marah-

Their dramatic passage through the Red Sea is described in the same way as any other stage on their journey; our baptism into Christ is our Red Sea crossing (1 Cor. 10:1,2), but the other stages of our journey are no less led by God and part of our final deliverance into His Kingdom.

Num 33:9 They travelled from Marah, and came to Elim. In Elim were twelve springs of water, and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there-

There were twelve wells- one for each of the tribes. The lesson was that God had foreseen Israel's need for water long ago, and arranged those wells for them. As for

us in our wilderness journeys. Yet 70 is the number of the Gentile nations in Gen. 10. They were being shown that God's intention was to combine Israelites and Gentiles within a new multiethnic people of God. Perhaps this arrangement of 12 springs and 70 palms was to help Israel to better incorporate the "mixed multitude" amongst them, as being equally God's people. Hence "Elim" implies "holy trees", or "trees of God", as if to remind Israel that He accepted the mixed multitude of Gentiles as equally His redeemed people.

Num 33:10 They travelled from Elim, and encamped by the Red Sea-

This stop next to the Red Sea was perhaps to help them reflect further upon the wonder of their deliverance through that sea. And God arranges our wanderings likewise.

Num 33:11 They travelled from the Red Sea, and encamped in the wilderness of Sin-

This was the point at which they murmured against Moses and were given manna (Ex. 16:1,2). But there's no mention of that, nor of other events on the journey which we might consider significant. And so it is with our own journeys to the Kingdom. There are things we might consider highly significant towns along the way; but in God's spiritual mapping of our lives they weren't that significant. And what we considered insignificant was to His mind highly significant.

Ex. 15:22 adds: "Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found

no water". "Shur" means 'the wall', and may refer to the wall built to define the boundary of Egypt by an earlier dynasty. Num. 33:8 defines the part of the wilderness as being near Etham, where there was a garrison of Egyptians (see on Ex. 13:20). It had been God's intention that they would go three days journey from Egypt into the wilderness and then worship Him (Ex. 8:27). But they didn't. It seems God purposefully didn't provide water for them- because this great trial was intended to lead them to worship and faith. But instead they rebelled, and His intention they would worship Him then didn't come to fruition. How many billions of such plans are made and frustrated each day by human short-sightedness... We note that very soon after their baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2), they ran into testing. Just as the Lord did, and as we do.

Num 33:12 They travelled from the wilderness of Sin, and encamped in Dophkah-

Dophkah means to knock, beat or hit hard. Clearly enough a message that the school of hard knocks is required to lead us to the Kingdom. Through much tribulation we shall enter the kingdom (Acts 14:22).

Num 33:13 They travelled from Dophkah, and encamped in Alush-

The exodus through the Red Sea represented our baptism into Christ, and so the wilderness journey to the Kingdom represents our journey there (1 Cor. 10:1,2). We can therefore legitimately look for meaning in the names of the places they camped in. But the 42 stopping places may connect as well with the 42 generations to

the birth of Jesus recorded in Matthew's genealogy. This means that the wilderness journey looks ahead somehow to Israel's intended journey to the Lord Jesus.

Num 33:14 They travelled from Alush, and encamped in Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink-

The events of Ex. 17 are the basis for Ps. 95. This is largely a Psalm of praise for what God did for Israel in the wilderness, whilst also commenting on the way they tragically put God to the test, and complained about His care for them. Now the words of Ps. 95:7- 11 are directly quoted in Heb. 3:7- 11 concerning the experience of the new Israel. The simple conclusion from this is that we are really intended to see the events of Ex. 17 as directly relevant for us.

Num 33:15 They travelled from Rephidim, and encamped in the wilderness of Sinai-

Ex. 19:2 adds: "When they had departed from Rephidim, and had come to the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped in the wilderness; and there Israel encamped before the mountain". We are intended to connect this with how they had arrived in Rephidim and rebelled (Ex. 17:1). They moved on from there apparently repentant, and now encamp before Yahweh in the mountain. The impression is of a repentant people, now suitably humble to receive God's law. At least that is the idealized picture given. For God fell in love with Israel in the wilderness and spread His skirt over them at Sinai, accepting them as His wife, despite all their idolatry and weakness.

Num 33:16 They travelled from the wilderness of Sinai, and encamped in Kibroth Hattaavah-

No mention is made of the giving of the law and entry into covenant with Yahweh. We could conclude that this itinerary actually focuses upon their weaknesses, building up the impression that this is an account of God's patience and grace which had led them all the way to the Kingdom.

Num 33:17 They travelled from Kibroth Hattaavah, and encamped in Hazereth-

"The graves of lust". It is a theme of the Bible that in essence, God gives men their own desires, just as the prodigal son was given what he wrongfully demanded. Here, Israel lusted (s.w. Ps. 78:29) and God gave them what they lusted after. Those who lusted for meat were given it; yet "they were not estranged from their lust" (Ps. 78:30 AV). Sin never satisfies. Giving in to temptation will not lead to the craving being permanently resolved. This is to point up the huge importance of our innermost desires, our heart, our dominant passions- being upon the things of God and His Kingdom. David could say that all his desire was for the things of God (s.w. Ps. 38:9; Is. 26:8). More than anything else we should desire to please Him and be in His Kingdom. And all who thus love the Lord's appearing will be eternally with Him (2 Tim. 4:8).

Num 33:18 They travelled from Hazereth, and encamped in Rithmah-

Num. 33:18 says that "They departed from Hazeroth, and pitched in Rithmah", whilst Num. 12:16 has "the people travelled from Hazeroth, and encamped in the wilderness of Paran". Rithmah was in the wilderness of Paran, which covered a large area. The intellectual desperation of Bible critics in raising this kind of supposed "contradiction" speaks more about them than anything else. Such intellectual desperation is symptomatic of a struggling, uneasy conscience.

Num 33:19 They travelled from Rithmah, and encamped in Rimmon Perez-

Rithmah is identified by some with Kadesh Barnea, to where the spies returned with their evil report of the land. "Rithmah" means "juniper", a symbol of bitterness and hard words (Job 30:4; Ps. 120:4). Perhaps because this itinerary focuses upon their sins, it is given this name rather than Kadesh Barnea, which means 'the sanctuary of the wandering son'. See on :20.

Num 33:20 They travelled from Rimmon Perez, and encamped in Libnah-

Libnah is perhaps that of Josh. 10:29, between Kadesh-Barnea and Gaza. This confirms the idea that Rithmah is Kadesh Barnea (:19).

Num 33:21 They travelled from Libnah, and encamped in Rissah-

The continued stress upon the word "encamped" is perhaps alluded to in the later comment that believers are like the patriarchs and always on the move, having "no continuing city" in this life (Heb. 13:14)- even if we

lived all our days in the same house in which we were born.

Num 33:22 They travelled from Rissah, and encamped in Kehelathah-

Khelathah is 'place of gathering / assembly', and is the word commonly used for how the congregation gathered themselves together before the tent of meeting. Perhaps there was some significant gathering held at this place. See on :25.

Num 33:23 They travelled from Kehelathah, and encamped in Mount Shepher-

The 42 stopping places were not necessarily the only places they stopped at. In Revelation, the faithful are to be 42 months or three and a half years in the wilderness (Rev. 11-13), and 42 is 12 [the number of tribes, God's people] times three and a half. And 42 months are three and a half years. This is clearly a period associated with testing and tribulation. And so Israel's 42 stopping places in the wilderness are likely selected in order to develop the number 42.

Num 33:24 They travelled from Mount Shepher, and encamped in Haradah-

"Haradah" is 'place of fear / trembling'. As the theme seems to be the failures of Israel, this may refer to some place where they greatly feared / trembled before God. Perhaps this is one of the many scenes of failure the details of which aren't recorded in the other records.

Num 33:25 They travelled from Haradah, and encamped in Makheloth-

'Makheloth' is a form of 'Kehelathah' (:22). It could mean that that they returned to this point, having travelled in a circle. Just as our wilderness journeys feature an element of going in circles. Although the word means 'assembly / gathering', so perhaps these place names were both memorializing some significant gathering of the people.

Num 33:26 They travelled from Makheloth, and encamped in Tahath-

Looking back on all these various moves and places, Moses in his final maturity concluded that Yahweh "went before you in the way, to seek you out a place to pitch your tents in, in fire by night to show you by what way you should go, and in the cloud by day" (Dt. 1:33). "Pitch your tents" is s.w. "encamped". The wanderings even of the condemned generation were not random. All was part of God's progressive intention to bring the body of His people to His Kingdom.

Num 33:27 They travelled from Tahath, and encamped in Terah-

"Terah" could mean 'wild goat', and goats are associated with rejection. Again we have the impression that this itinerary reflects the guidance of God of His people, even through the history of their failures and rejection.

Num 33:28 They travelled from Terah, and encamped in Mithkah-

"Mithkah" is 'place of sweetness', as if God was giving them some respite in the otherwise harsh environment. In wrath with His people [for their wanderings were a

result of His judgment], He still remembered mercy. We see here His essentially kind and gracious nature.

Num 33:29 They travelled from Mithkah, and encamped in Hashmonah-

'Hashmonah' can mean pleasant or fertile place; see on :28. It was a sign of God's grace to them even in their experience of condemnation.

Num 33:30 They travelled from Hashmonah, and encamped in Moseroth-

'Moseroth' is 'place of correction'. As if it was God's intention that the condemned generation would still be corrected, so that ultimately they could be resurrected to eternal inheritance of the Kingdom.

Num 33:31 They travelled from Moseroth, and encamped in Bene Jaakan-

Dt. 10:6 comments about Moseroth that "There Aaron died and there he was buried". "Moserah" means 'place of chastisement / correction'. Aaron and Moses will be in the Kingdom despite their sin, but it needed Aaron's death for them to be corrected. The punishment was therefore their correction, and was not the angry lashing out of an offended Deity. Moses only mentions this place name at the end of his life, indicating how he looked back and perceived that indeed he had been corrected and learned his lesson, even if it cost him his life.

Num 33:32 They travelled from Bene Jaakan, and encamped in Hor Haggidgad-

'Haggidgad' is literally 'water holes', and is called "Gudgodah" in Dt. 10:7. "A land of brooks of water" is precisely the phrase used of Canaan (Dt. 8:7). They were

constantly given foretastes of the Kingdom before entering it, just as we are on our wilderness journey

Num 33:33 They travelled from Hor Haggidgad, and encamped in Jotbathah-

Dt. 10:8 comments about Jotbathah that "At that time Yahweh set apart the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, to stand before Yahweh to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day". Although the Levites had been set apart for Divine service immediately after God's meeting with Israel at Sinai, as outlined in Leviticus and Numbers, it seems that not until Aaron died at the end of the 40 years wandering did they actually in practice begin to serve as intended. This might imply that Jotbathah was visited near to the end of the wanderings. Another option is that Jotbathah was visited twice, because their condemnation involved wandering in circles. It could be that the reason was that the Levites were ever slow to accept their responsibilities. And they generally failed in their calling over Israel's history, climaxing in the priests arranging the murder of God's own Son.

Num 33:34 They travelled from Jotbathah, and encamped in Abronah-

They went from "Jotbathah, a land of brooks of water (Dt. 10:7) to "Abronah", which is from the root for word for 'Hebrew', 'the place of crossing over'. So perhaps there was here some incident of crossing over water, to prepare them for the later miraculous crossing of Jordan. God continually works to prepare us for future stages in our wilderness walk.

Num 33:35 They travelled from Abronah, and encamped in Ezion Geber-

This was on the Red Sea. This was to remind them of the great work God had done in bringing them across the Red Sea. Constantly God sought to remind them of their spiritual history and beginnings, which were all of His grace. He does the same with us.

Num 33:36 They travelled from Ezion Geber, and encamped in the wilderness of Zin (the same is Kadesh)-

They appear to have visited Kadesh several times; just as we tend to revisit the same places during our wilderness wanderings.

Num 33:37 They travelled from Kadesh, and encamped in Mount Hor, in the edge of the land of Edom-

"Hor" and "mount" are the same word in Hebrew. Num. 20:20,21 comment: "He said, You shall not pass through. Edom came out against him with many people, and with a strong hand. Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border, so Israel turned away from him". We must put this together with Ex. 15:15: "Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed the way". So when Edom "refused to give Israel passage through his border" (Num. 20:21), their refusal was because they were "dismayed" and terrified, not because they had some non-chalant confidence against Israel. This is an example of where we must place scripture together to get an accurate picture. Soon after this incident, Israel were commanded not to despise an Edomite (Dt. 23:7)- although this is just what Edom had done to them. We aren't to treat others as they treat us, but leave their judgment

with God. These incidents took place in the 40th year of their wanderings (Num. 33:38), and the commands of Deuteronomy were given at the same time. Moses could have reasoned that "the elder (Esau) shall serve the younger (Jacob)" (Gen. 25:23) and engaged him in battle. But the way of wisdom is to always walk away from conflict with our brethren, even if they are unreasonable.

Num 33:38 Aaron the priest went up into Mount Hor at the commandment of Yahweh and died there in the fortieth year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt, in the fifth month, on the first day of the month-

"Come out" is s.w. "brought forth". Israel were "brought forth" from Egypt by God; they had been unwilling to leave Egypt, preferring to serve the Egyptians rather than Yahweh (Ex. 14:12). God had as it were forced through His project of saving Israel by bringing them out of Egypt. And He had done so largely for the sake of Moses, by whose faith the Red Sea parted and they were delivered (Heb. 11:28,29). Therefore Yahweh's bringing Israel out of Egypt was what He did for Moses, and only thereby for His people. We too are brought out of this world towards God's Kingdom by His grace alone, with His consistently taking the initiative in our hearts and life circumstances, in accord with the loving intercession of the Lord Jesus [represented by Moses]. Thus Yahweh brought Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 18:1; 19:1; Lev. 23:43; 25:55; Num. 26:4; 33:1,3,38; Dt. 4:45,46), but Moses did (Ex. 3:10,11).

Num 33:39 Aaron was one hundred and twenty-three years old when he died in Mount Hor-

The death of Aaron was typical of the end of the Mosaic system and priesthood, able to only bring Israel to see the Kingdom, but unable to enable them to enter it. That was the work of Joshua / Jesus. Eleazar could be seen then as the priest who replaced Aaron, and also a type of the Lord Jesus. Aaron, an apparently Egyptian name with no clear meaning and not used about any other Biblical character, was replaced by Eleazar, 'helped by God' or 'helper of God', seeing that God was ultimately Israel's saviour. The numerical value [gematria] of "Eleazar the priest" is the same as "Joshua", the Greek form of which is "Jesus".

Num 33:40 The Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the South in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the children of Israel-

Num. 21:1 adds that "he fought against Israel, and took some of them captive". Again we have the impression that this itinerary focuses upon their failures, and God's grace. The promise that an obedient Israel would make their enemies flee before them was not operational here. The conclusion is surely that Israel had sinned and therefore were defeated. These words are frequently used about Israel's judgment at the hand of their enemies because of their sinfulness. All this lends weight to the conclusion that this was another attempt by Israel to enter Canaan as happened immediately after the news of their rejection (Dt. 1:44). Those rejected from the Kingdom at judgment day will likewise desperately want to be

there, nobody will be passive in that day, nor shrugging their shoulders as people do today when encountering the possibility that they may not be there. The wilderness journey speaks of our lives after baptism. It's not a story of glorious victory after glorious victory. There are defeats and failures, partly from our failures, and partly because God in His wisdom knows that this too is part of our path towards the Kingdom. The initial defeat was required in order to make the people trust in Yahweh for victory (Num. 21:2); and we have multiple such experiences in life.

Num 33:41 They travelled from Mount Hor and encamped in Zalmonah-

Num. 21:4 again makes it clear that this was a time of spiritual weakness for the people: "They travelled from Mount Hor by the way to the Red Sea, to compass the land of Edom; and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way". "Much discouraged" is Heb. 'reaped down', the same word used about how they felt in Egypt (Ex. 6:9). They adopted the same attitude they had in Egypt, ever searching for something better, and now not wanting to accept what God had planned for them, not looking at the end of their journey but just caught up in the immediacy of their daily feelings. Yet they had just had the exhilaration of having made a vow to God about the cities of Canaan, obeying it, and seeing God answer them. Before that, they had sinned (see on :1). And now, they were again discouraged and low. This is the yo-yo path through the wilderness we all experience. It's not going to be entirely positive. They likely

reasoned that God should have spared them this awful part of the journey because they had just been obedient to Him. But that's not how the path to the Kingdom is.

Their route took them back on themselves at this point, heading back towards Egypt. This may have been the psychological trigger for their desire to be back in Egypt (Num. 21:5). We must try to avoid things and situations which may stimulate a desire to leave the way to the Kingdom and return to the world. "Because of the way" reflects how this was indeed geographically one of the worst parts of Israel's journey, through shifting sands blown by the strong sirocco winds. Only camels can survive here, so it's likely that the sheep and oxen Israel had brought from Egypt would've died at this point. And this was just immediately prior to their entry of Canaan (Num. 33:41, so this may look forward to the final tribulation for His people before the Lord's return.

Num 33:42 They travelled from Zalmonah, and encamped in Punon-

"Punon" means 'perplexity'; there should have been no such perplexity as they were now approaching Canaan. Again, we are left with the impression that this list of places in Num. 33 focuses upon incidents of their spiritual weakness.

Num 33:43 They travelled from Punon, and encamped in Oboth-

"Oboth" is 'water skins'. Perhaps here too we have a hint at their problems with water, which would have been provided by God. But they used water skins per-

haps to preserve what they saw as more tasty water at this place.

Num 33:44 They travelled from Oboth, and encamped in Iye Abarim, in the border of Moab-

Iyeabarim means heaps or ruins. Perhaps now as they approached the promised land, they were being encouraged that once mighty civilizations all rise and fall, so nothing is invincible- even if at one stage it may appear that way. We too are constantly given encouragement, even if apparently obliquely, along the route of our journey towards the Kingdom.

Num 33:45 They travelled from Iyim, and encamped in Dibon Gad-

Dibon was settled by Gad but this territory was lost to them in the long term (Is. 15:2; Jer. 48:18,22). Their short termist desire for land other than that God planned to give them in His Kingdom didn't have long term blessing. And it will be the same for us.

Num 33:46 They travelled from Dibon Gad, and encamped in Almon Diblathaim-

Diblathaim, 'place of the holy cakes', clearly has idolatrous associations. The word is used for the cakes of raisins used in idol rituals (Hos. 3:1). And it is from this word for "cakes", *dibla*, the raisin cakes used in the Baal cult, from which the word Diblaim comes, the father of Gomer. Again we have the sense of weakness at every point of their journey to the Kingdom.

Num 33:47 They travelled from Almon Diblathaim, and encamped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo-

Moses seeing the Kingdom but being unable to enter it, nor himself lead God's people into it, points forward to how the law of Moses gave a vision of the Kingdom, but was unable to bring us into it. That required the work of Joshua / Jesus. "Abarim" means 'the regions beyond'. Moses and his law gave an insight into the Kingdom, the region beyond him. For the culture of grace and kindness, centered around the sacrificed future Messiah, the Lord Jesus, was the outcome of the law. But it was unattainable by weak men.

Num 33:48 They travelled from the mountains of Abarim, and encamped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho-

"By" is "beyond" (Num. 22:1). To describe the Israelite encampment as beyond Jordan implies the author is west of Jordan. Moses' writing here may well have been edited under inspiration later. It was at this point that the apostacy connected with Balaam happened; and again we see how their faith was deeply weak and compromised at every point of their journey, right up to entrance to the Kingdom. They only entered the land by grace alone.

Num 33:49 They encamped by the Jordan, from Beth Jeshimoth even to Abel Shittim in the plains of Moab-

Beth Jeshimoth is an example of how some of the places they had known in their wilderness journeys (cp. our life now after baptism, which is like crossing the Red Sea, 1 Cor. 10:1,2) were revisited and taken by Joshua (Josh. 12:3), and incorporated into God's Kingdom. Perhaps situations and places we know in this life will

then become eternally ours when we possess them in God's Kingdom.

Num 33:50 Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying-

We wonder why the command to destroy idols etc. is here defined as specifically concerning the territory on the west of Jordan. We wonder why the same commandment wasn't given regarding the territory on the east of Jordan which the two and a half tribes had claimed. It was of course implicit in earlier statements that they were to do so there too. But the lack of specific commandment and reminder was perhaps another example of where inheritance east of Jordan wasn't God's ideal intention for Israel, and so they were making their path to eternal inheritance of the land that much harder. Any short cut to the Kingdom ends up actually making the journey far more difficult.

Num 33:51 Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them, When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan-

Despite the very long list of places where they had failed and sinned, God urges them to inherit the Kingdom and always speaks as if they are going to make it ultimately. He is similarly positive with us.

Num 33:52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their stone idols, destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places-

We must compare this command to drive out all the inhabitants of the land with the fact God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and apparently offered the local inhabitants the chance of covenant relationship with Him. Perhaps the people in view were those who had rejected that; or had refused to become tributary in the terms of Dt. 20:10,11. Or perhaps they are peoples other than the seven nations of Canaan specifically mentioned elsewhere. Or again, maybe there were some they should slay, and others they should "drive out" beyond the borders of Canaan. Or maybe Israel and the local inhabitants were given this range of outcomes- because it was God's desire they accept covenant relationship with Him. If they refused, they were to be forced to leave the land, and if they refused that, then they were to be totally destroyed as in Dt. 20:16. The Mosaic law continually assumes the presence of Gentiles within Israel on a permanent basis. So we have to really conclude that this driving out was of those who refused to repent and accept covenant with Yahweh. For it is mentioned along with the need to destroy idolatry.

Num 33:53 You shall take possession of the land and dwell therein; for I have given the land to you to possess it-

They were to possess the land because God had given them the land- we are to inherit the Kingdom because God has given it to us to inherit. Believing that God has really given us the Kingdom and accepting this is so hard to do.

Num 33:54 You shall inherit the land by lot according to your families; to the more you shall give the more inher-

itance, and to the fewer you shall give the less inheritance. Wherever the lot falls to any man, that shall be his. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers-

They were not to seek to exchange or amend the lot given them. There is an element to which our lives, our talents, our portion of intended service and inheritance is from God- and yet we so often seek to change this.

Num 33:55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those you let remain of them will be as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will harass you in the land in which you dwell-

What can appear mere harmless associations with the world can in the end destroy us. Whilst we are to be in this world in the same sense as the Lord Jesus was, mixing and identifying with them to bring them too to God, the basic principle of separation from unbelievers must never be forgotten.

Num 33:56 It shall happen that as I thought to do to them, so will I do to you-

That is, drive them out of the land. And this is what happened to Israel. There is a theme in the Bible that the judgments of this world will come upon the unfaithful amongst the children of God; there's a need to be radically different from this world or else we will share this world's condemnation (1 Cor. 11:32; Rev. 18:4).

God has had various intentions which He 'thought' to do, but because of human weakness they don't actually become reality. He told Israel about His plan / in-

tention / *logos* of driving out the Canaanites: “If ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land... I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them” (Num. 33:55,56). He ‘thought’ to do things to them through the agency of His people; but those ‘thoughts’ never became flesh. The extent to which Jesus made the word flesh needs some reflection.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 34

Num 34:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying-

The definition of Canaan stresses that "this is the land" which was their intended inheritance (:2), and it excludes the area east of Jordan which the two and a half tribes chose. Clearly this was not God's ideal intention, and yet He went along with it and worked through it. For as the Father with the prodigal son, He gives us ultimately what we truly want. And then helps us through the consequences, as far as we permit Him to. Such is His grace.

Num 34:2 Command the children of Israel, and tell them, 'When you come into the land of Canaan (this is the land that shall fall to you for an inheritance, even the land of Canaan according to its borders)-

The land promised to Abraham was from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea, but here God redefines it as much smaller. He perhaps perceived that they simply didn't have the spiritual vision to possess that vast area. There is so much made possible for us in prospect; maybe we will ultimately receive less than we could have had because of our limited vision in this life. Yet He encouraged the people to go exploring beyond the bounds which He here gave them, right up to the Euphrates, promising to give them whatever land they walked upon (Dt. 11:24). It seems none rose up to that challenge. God invites His people to assume that they would receive this land and make preparations as if they had- for

at this time they had not yet crossed Jordan into it. We are likewise asked to believe that we have been moved into the sphere of the Kingdom of God's Son, and have received an inheritance by reason of our being in Him (Col. 1:13; Eph. 1:11).

Num 34:3 then your south side shall be from the wilderness of Zin along by the side of Edom, and your south border shall be from the end of the Salt Sea eastward-

The borders of the land were rewritten by God in accordance with the spiritual vision and response of Israel. Initially the land was to be as in Ex. 23:31 "I will set your border from the Red Sea even to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River [Euphrates]". But now that is redrawn by God, especially the southern border. And when they actually inherit the land in Joshua's time, there are further redefinitions. And we note the inheritance of the two and a half tribes east of Jordan was not God's ideal intention for them, even though that territory was within that promised to Abraham. God's intentions for His people are therefore open. He desperately wants to save us, even if we turn away from the maximum extent of the great salvation He has potentially prepared.

Num 34:4 and your border shall turn about southward of the ascent of Akrabbim, and pass along to Zin; and the goings out of it shall be southward of Kadesh Barnea; and it shall go forth to Hazar Addar, and pass along to Azmon-

This implies a birds eye perspective, looking at lines on a map. The perspective is clearly God's heavenly one. See on :11.

Num 34:5 and the border shall turn about from Azmon to the brook of Egypt, and the goings out of it shall be at the sea-

The reference is not to the Nile, but to the Wady el Arish. "Egypt" is 'Mizraim' and at that time may not have referred to Egypt as we now know it, but specifically to an area to the east of Egypt.

Num 34:6 For the western border, you shall have the great sea and its border: this shall be your west border-

This simple statement was so hard for Israel to accept; because the coast line of the Mediterranean included Gaza and Ashdod, Philistine strongholds which they never really conquered until David's time.

Num 34:7 This shall be your north border: from the great sea you shall mark out for you Mount Hor-

Most commentators on :7,8 lament that "the geographical description of the northern boundary of the land of Israel is so indefinite, that the boundary line cannot be determined with exactness" (Delitzsch, typical of many). Why the unclarity? I suggest it was because as discussed on :3, the borders were still flexible and God would define them in more detail according to Israel's vision and obedience.

Num 34:8 from Mount Hor you shall mark out to the entrance of Hamath; and the goings out of the border shall be at Zedad-

As discussed on :7, the northern border is unclear, not least because it is not clear whether "Hamath" refers to the town on the Orontes river in Syria, or to a region called "Hamath", as in 2 Kings 23:33; 2 Chron. 8:4.

Num 34:9 and the border shall go forth to Ziphron, and the goings out of it shall be at Hazar Enan: this shall be your north border-

This implies detailed geographical knowledge of the area. It is doubtful anyone from Israel knew that area, and so we have here the direct transmission of fact from God to man through His word.

Num 34:10 You shall mark out your east border from Hazar Enan to Shepham-

There was an intention that some kind of border fence or marker system should be put up. This was practically important, because many of the Mosaic laws were specifically intended to be obeyed within the land of promise. But there is no evidence Israel ever obeyed this command.

Num 34:11 and the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah, on the east side of Ain; and the border shall go down, and shall reach to the side of the sea of Chinnereth eastward-

Literally, "pressed upon the shoulder of the lake of Chinnereth towards the east". The descriptions are written as if the author has a bird's eye satellite view of the topography. And so that author was ultimately only God. See on :4.

Num 34:12 and the border shall go down to the Jordan, and the goings out of it shall be at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land according to its borders around it'-

The eastern border roughly follows the river Jordan southwards from the sea of Galilee to the Dead Sea. This is significant, because it reminds us that the two and a half tribes had chosen territory to the east of that which was not God's ideal intention to give them at that stage. We are reminded of His eagerness to work with us, despite our less than ideal decisions.

Num 34:13 Moses commanded the children of Israel, saying, This is the land which you shall inherit by lot, which Yahweh has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe-

The land within God's ideal territory for Israel at the time was to be distributed to each family by lot. That lot would have been overruled by God (Prov. 16:33). Just as we each have our specific calling and eternal place in His purpose, unique to us, so Israel had a specific inheritance for each family within the land. But those who wanted their land east of Jordan didn't have this gift of individual lots to each family to inherit. They tried to arrange the Kingdom their way, and in the end, it didn't work out well for them.

Num 34:14 for the tribe of the children of Reuben according to their fathers' families and the tribe of the children of Gad according to their fathers' families, have received, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received, their inheritance-

It is often not appreciated that the extent of the area given to the two and a half tribes on the east of Jordan, as defined in Josh. 13:10-12, was roughly the same as the entire territory given to the nine and a half tribes on the west of Jordan. The two and a half tribes saw good pasture land and wanted it there and then, as a kind of short cut to the Kingdom of God. But there are no short cuts to the Kingdom. The conditions they were given demanded even more faith from them. Their men had to leave their flocks and families unprotected on the east of Jordan whilst they fought in the front line vanguard of Joshua's army to secure the territory on the west of Jordan. And the territory they were asked to possess was huge, far larger than the pasture lands they initially coveted, and inhabited by giants (see on Josh. 13:30)- which they probably didn't realize at the time.

Num 34:15 The two tribes and the half-tribe have received their inheritance beyond the Jordan at Jericho eastward, toward the sunrise-

The triple emphasis here that those who chose immediate inheritance east of Jordan had already received their inheritance may be behind Christ's triple emphasis that some "have their reward" in this life rather than waiting for the future, eternal reward (Mt. 6:2,5,16).

Num 34:16 Yahweh spoke to Moses saying-

We now have a list of the ten princes of the tribes who were to practically distribute the land allocations. Reuben and Gad aren't listed here as they had taken the land for themselves east of Jordan; and so were excluded

from the Divine system of distributing individual inheritances by lot to each family. See on :13.

Num 34:17 These are the names of the men who shall divide the land to you for inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun-

"Divided" is s.w. "inheritance" or "inherit", and also "possessed". I have noted elsewhere the difference between Joshua slaying the kings, and Israel possessing or inheriting the land- which they generally failed to do. But here we read that Joshua also 'inherited' it to them. So much was done for them. We note too the king-priest association, again looking ahead to the work and dual office of the Lord Jesus.

Num 34:18 You shall take one prince of every tribe to divide the land for inheritance-

Apart from Caleb, we don't read of these men elsewhere as leaders. They are called in Josh. 14:1 "the heads of the fathers' houses of the tribes of the children of Israel".

Num 34:19 These are the names of the men: Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh-

The order of the tribes here runs from south to north, especially if we take the tribes as being mentioned in pairs, as if this was the order in which the land was to be possessed. But the original intention to take the land from south to north wasn't followed. Israel were consistently disobedient and short termist in their approach to the conquest of Canaan.

Num 34:20 Of the tribe of the children of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Ammihud-

In contrast to previous lists of names from this period, we find the suffix 'El' common in this list of names. But we note that they had therefore failed to accept or appreciate the revelation of the Yahweh Name which Moses had given to them.

Num 34:21 Of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon-

'God of love', the son of 'hopeful'. Here we see some spiritual progress. The people had complained that Yahweh sought to slay them in the wilderness, and it seems this family had rejected that terrible idea. They were no longer just hopeful for something better, but had come to appreciate the love of God. See on :23.

Num 34:22 Of the tribe of the children of Dan a prince, Bukki the son of Jogli-

"Bukki" means 'wasteful'. Surely no mother would have named her baby that (as with Mahlon and Chilion). But the Hebrews often had several names, which were reflective of later life experience, character and achievement. So we can assume that this man became known like this, and was likely named this way because he failed to help Dan take the inheritance intended for them but rather wasted it. The name Bukki stands in sharp contrast to the spiritual meanings of the names of most of the other princes.

Num 34:23 Of the children of Joseph: of the tribe of the children of Manasseh a prince, Hanniel the son of Ephod-

'Grace of God', son of 'shortened', perhaps slain prematurely in the wilderness for his apostasy. Here we see some spiritual progress, as in :21. Hanniel realized that

the inheritance of the land was by grace alone given the people's spiritual weakness.

Num 34:24 Of the tribe of the children of Ephraim a prince, Kemuel the son of Shiphtan-

'Established by God', the same word used in Ex. 6:4 of how God established His covenant to give Canaan to Israel. The names of the princes are generally reflective of spirituality, but just as Joshua enabled their inheritance of the land, Israel as individuals still had to personally respond to spiritual leadership. And they generally didn't.

Num 34:25 Of the tribe of the children of Zebulun a prince, Elizaphan the son of Parnach-

'Hidden / treasured by God', the same word used for how Moses was hidden and preserved. Again we have the sense that this man appreciated grace, that Israel were only inheriting the land because God had preserved them to do so, despite all their catalogue of rebellions against Him.

Num 34:26 Of the tribe of the children of Issachar a prince, Paltiel the son of Azzan-

'Paltiel', delivered by God, as noted on :25, is another reflection of how God alone had delivered Israel to receive the Kingdom inheritance which they didn't deserve.

Num 34:27 Of the tribe of the children of Asher a prince, Abihud the son of Shelomi-

'Abihud' is a form of the Hebrew word often used for the glory / majesty of God. He saw the possession of the Kingdom as a manifestation of God's glory, rather than being due to Israel's obedience.

Num 34:28 Of the tribe of the children of Naphtali a prince, Pedahel the son of Ammihud-

'Pedahel' means 'God has ransomed', using the word commonly used for His ransom of Israel from Egypt (Ex. 13:13,15; 21:8 etc.). Nearly all these names reflect an awareness of God's saving grace in giving Israel the Kingdom.

Num 34:29 These are they whom Yahweh commanded to divide the inheritance to the children of Israel in the land of Canaan-

This is emphasized because it was not God's intention that the people just grabbed whatever bit of farmland appeared attractive to them. Likewise we are not to as it were decide how we would like to serve God, but to accept that we have a specific inheritance uniquely prepared for us; and to inherit that, rather than hankering for something else. For God intends only what is best for us in our latter end.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 35

Num 35:1 Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying-

The Levites had no land inheritance, only cities. Or better, towns. As explained on Lev. 25:29,30, God's intention therefore was that Israel lived in small settlements and not walled cities. Ideally, the only cities were to be those of the Levites. This detailed potential intention was never realized by Israel; just as the extensive and intricate commands about the restoration of the temple in Ez. 40-48 never were. One of the greatest tragedies for God must be all the wasted potentials He sets up in countless lives. And His joy is when we at least begin to realize them.

Num 35:2 Command the children of Israel that they give to the Levites from the inheritance of their possession some cities to dwell in, and you shall give suburbs for the cities around them to the Levites-

This meant that the Levites were divided amongst the 12 tribes of Israel, enabling them to teach God's ways to the whole nation (Lev. 10:11; Dt. 33:9,10). In this way, the curse upon Levi that his children would be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:7) turned into a blessing for all- and God so loves to work in this way, using the consequences of sin to bring about His work, purpose and glory.

Num 35:3 The cities shall they have to dwell in and their suburbs shall be for their livestock, and for their substance, and for all their animals-

Eve was "the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20), in its primary application explaining to the Israelites in the wilderness where *they* ultimately originated from. Israel were to trace their first origins and parents back not merely to Abraham, but to Adam and Eve. Num. 35:3 [Heb.] uses the term to describe the "all living" ["livestock"] of the congregation of Israel; indeed, that Hebrew word translated "living" is translated "congregation", with reference to the congregation of Israel (Ps. 68:10; 74:19). Note how the Hebrew idea of 'all living' repeatedly occurs in the account of the flood (Gen. 6:19; 8:1,17 etc.)- which I suggest was a flood local to the area which the Israelites knew and which had been ultimately promised to Abraham.

Num 35:4 The suburbs of the cities which you shall give to the Levites shall be from the wall of the city and outward two thousand cubits around it-

The measurements of the "suburbs" or agricultural land around the Levitical towns was in a square with the measurements taken from the city wall. This implies that their towns were to be built as perfect squares within a town wall. The tabernacle was rectangular, not square. So they were not being asked to imitate the tabernacle but rather the altar, which is repeatedly described as foursquare (Ex. 27:1; 38:1; 30:2 cp. Rev. 21:16). The Levites were to have towns which were effectively the local altar for the people.

Num 35:5 You shall measure outside of the city for the east side two thousand cubits, and for the south side two thousand cubits, and for the west side two thousand cubits, and for the north side two thousand cubits, the city being in the midst. This shall be to them for the suburbs of the cities-

This grant of agricultural land to the Levites was really an indication of God's tacit acceptance that the whole system was not going to work as He ideally intended. If Israel were obedient to the covenant, they would be blessed with bumper harvests, of which they would tithe 10% to the Levites, and additionally the Levites received various tithes from the offerings, and also the freewill offerings. They would have no need to work the land but could dedicate themselves completely to studying and teaching God's law to the people, which would confirm them in their obedience to the covenant and continued receipt of blessing. But God foresaw this situation would break down, and so He gave them land on which to grow their own food. His law continually reflects His gracious awareness of likely human failure.

Num 35:6 The cities which you shall give to the Levites shall be the six cities of refuge, which you shall give for the manslayer to flee to: and besides them you shall give forty-two cities-

The number 42 recalls the 42 stopping places of Israel in the wilderness, just listed in Num. 33. The idea was that the priestly cities were places of teaching which would be stages towards Israel's eternal inheritance of the Kingdom of God in its full sense. We think likewise of the 42 generations to the Lord Jesus which are listed

in Matthew' genealogy of the Lord. The Levites were to teach the people and lead them towards Christ, for the law they taught was a schoolmaster which led to Christ (Gal. 3:24).

Num 35:7 All the cities which you shall give to the Levites shall be forty-eight cities together with their suburbs-

"Suburbs" is translated by some as "cattle drives". Josh. 21:41 adds: "All the cities of the Levites in the midst of the possession of the children of Israel were forty-eight cities with their suburbs". The idea was that the Levites would live "in the midst" of the people, teaching them God's way. But Israel's apostasy is often blamed upon the failure of the priesthood; and yet that in turn was partly due to Israel not providing for the Levites.

Num 35:8 Concerning the cities which you shall give of the possession of the children of Israel, from the many you shall take many; and from the few you shall take few. Everyone according to his inheritance which he inherits shall give of his cities to the Levites-

But the reality was that many of the cities the Israelites gave the Levites were in marginal areas or areas still under Canaanite domination. Thus Kedemoth was given to the Levites (Josh. 21:37) but was in fact a town which had not been captured from the local population (Josh. 13:18). They failed to learn the principle of 2 Sam. 24:24, that we are not to apparently sacrifice to God that which cost us nothing.

Num 35:9 Yahweh spoke to Moses saying-

This legislation assumes that the revenger of blood was free to operate. The structure of the law of Moses seemed to almost encourage the idea of serving God on different levels. After much study of it, the Rabbis concluded that there was within it “a distinction between holy and holy just as much as there is between holy and profane”. They were not to avenge (Lev. 19:18). But they *could* avenge, and provisions were made for their human desire to do so (Num. 35:12; Dt. 19:6). These provisions must also be seen as a modification of the command not to murder. The highest level was *not* to avenge; but for the harshness of men's hearts, a concession was made *in some cases*, and on *God's* prerogative. *We* have no right to assume that prerogative.

Num 35:10 Speak to the children of Israel, and tell them, ‘When you pass over the Jordan into the land of Canaan-

This could imply that establishing the cities of refuge, of which we will now read, was to be immediately attended to. But there is no evidence Israel did this. They were satisfied with a bit of farmland, and showed no real interest in the development of a system of blessing and salvation as God had potentially enabled.

Num 35:11 then you shall appoint you cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person unknowingly may flee there-

But as noted several times in Josh. 19, some of these cities they had not even taken from enemy hands. "Ap-point" is the usual word for "give". The tribes were to give these cities. But several of them they had not even bothered to take from the local inhabitants. Their disobedience to these commandments made their personal salvation so much more difficult. And so we again see the upward spiral, the self reinforcing nature, of God's commandments. They were not a burden, a chain that binds, but rather an opportunity to prosper spiritually.

Num 35:12 The cities shall be to you for refuge from the avenger, that the manslayer not die until he stands before the congregation for judgment-

The word *go'el* translated "avenger" is also that translated "redeemer" or 'ransomer'. The cities of refuge are therefore understood in Heb. 6:18 as looking ahead to refuge in the Lord Jesus: "Who have fled for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us". The allusion is to how the person who found they had committed a sin worthy of death, yet without as it were wishing to have done so, could flee to a city of refuge and be saved there by the death of the high priest. The curse upon Levi was that the members of this tribe were to be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:7). However, this resulted in the cities of the Levites being scattered throughout the land, thus providing accessible cities of refuge to all who wished to escape the consequences of sin. Those cities were evidently symbolic of the refuge we have in Christ. Again and again, the curses and consequences of human sin are used by the Father to mediate blessing. It is the sure hope

before us which is our refuge. "Hope", *elpis*, is a confident knowledge of a future reality, rather than a hoping for the best. We should be confident in our salvation. The 'guilty' person was made free totally through the death of the High Priest, clearly looking forward to the significance of the death of the Lord Jesus.

Num 35:13 The cities which you shall give shall be for you six cities of refuge-

Dt. 19:7 adds that they were to do so "for yourselves", or here "for you". The emphasis was very much upon *them* making the cities of refuge, and defining the paths which led to them from all settlements in the land (Dt. 19:3): "I command you, saying, You must set apart three cities for yourselves" (Dt. 19:7). Yet the record in Joshua 18-20 shows that Israel didn't do this, because they didn't even capture all the cities which were to be cities of refuge. All God's laws are and were for the spiritual benefit of His people, rather than simple tests of obedience. Disobedience therefore harms us more than anyone.

Num 35:14 You shall give three cities beyond the Jordan and you shall give three cities in the land of Canaan. They shall be cities of refuge-

Dt. 19:8,9 make it clear that more cities would be added if Israel were obedient and their land borders were enlarged. Those cities of refuge could have been increased in number, thereby making salvation that much 'easier' or accessible; but there is no evidence Israel availed themselves of this. Israel would be provided with more cities of refuge if they were obedient; the way of es-

cape from sin would become easier, as it does for us the more we are obedient to God's principles.

Num 35:15 For the children of Israel and for the stranger and for the foreigner living among them, these six cities shall be for refuge; that everyone who kills any person unintentionally may flee there-

We are all in the position of the person who unintentionally killed another person and is therefore liable to death. We have all sinned, and yet as it were in the spirit of how Paul describes our sin in Romans 7- committed against our better intentions. Heb. 6:18 speaks of us fleeing for refuge into Christ- suggesting we are the one who flees after committing manslaughter, and becoming "in Christ" by baptism is our entry into Him as our city of refuge. But we must abide in Him- for if we leave Him then we are liable to death (:26). And our final salvation from the effects of sin is guaranteed by the death of the High Priest, the Lord Jesus (:25).

Num 35:16 But if he struck him with an instrument of iron, so that he died, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death

Dt. 19:13 expresses this as "you must put away the innocent blood from Israel". We would rather expect that guilty blood must be put away. AV has "the guilt of innocent blood", LXX "so shalt thou purge innocent blood". The idea was that the guilt for innocent blood must be purged by blood. The Lord's blood was the ultimate innocent blood, and so Israel were being prepared to accept that blood was to be shed for His blood. And thus it happened (Mt. 27:25; Acts 5:28).

Num 35:17 If he struck him with a stone in the hand, by which a man may die, and he died, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death-

The purpose of the system of cities of refuge was (Dt. 19:10) "so that innocent blood will not be shed in your land which Yahweh your God gives you for an inheritance, and so guilt for blood be upon you". Innocent blood would not be shed because there was a system of judging and punishing those who shed it (Dt. 19:12). If Israel were indifferent to preparing the way for others' salvation, then innocent blood would be shed and they would be responsible for it (Dt. 19:10). This is powerful stuff. Indifference to providing others with a way of escape from their sin and death means we are actually guilty of their lack of salvation. And yet we tend to think that committed sin is all we have to worry about / avoid. The lesson here, however, bites far more caustically and insistently into our comfort zone. If we are indifferent to marking out the way of escape for others, their blood will be upon our heads. Our chief excuses for not witnessing enthusiastically basically amount to laziness, indifference, not getting our act together because we don't see we have to... when actually, there is an intense urgency about our task.

Num 35:18 Or if he struck him with a weapon of wood in the hand, by which a man may die, and he died, he is a murderer: the murderer shall surely be put to death-

The slayer of innocent blood was to be slain without pity: "you shall put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, that it may go well with you" (Dt. 19:13).

But David seems to have stepped up to a higher level when he told the woman of Tekoah that he would protect her son from revenge murder, after he had slain another man (2 Sam. 14:8-10). The woman pointed out that if her son was slain, the inheritance would be lost in her husband's name. Here was a case where two principles seemed to be at variance: the need to slay the guilty, and the need to preserve the inheritance. The higher level was to forgive the slayer of innocent blood, even though the Law categorically stated that he should be slain.

Num 35:19 The avenger of blood shall himself put the murderer to death. When he meets him, he shall put him to death-

The idea of blood vendettas, whereby a family member of the murdered has a legal right to hunt and kill the murderer, is widespread in primitive societies. Yet the Law of Moses seems to make provision for it. Seeing that God is presented as the ultimate avenger (see on Num. 31:2), this may seem strange. Instead of grace and forgiveness being inculcated, revenge seems allowed. Yet the desire to repay murder with murder is so great within primitive society that it seems God made a concession to this weakness, and allowed it, whilst seeking to control it from being applied in any wrongful or doubtful context. The fact God makes concessions to human weakness doesn't mean we should eagerly make use of them; the spirit of all God's revelation to us in His word is that we should forgive and leave vengeance to Him.

Num 35:20 If he thrust him from hatred, or hurled at him, lying in wait, so that he died-

Dt. 19:6 defines this in more detail. The person was innocent of intentional murder "was not worthy of death because he didn't hate him in time past". We note that hatred of a neighbour was to be the reason for death. John appears to have this in mind when he reasons that hatred of our brother is effectively a living death sentence (1 Jn. 2:11; 4:20). It was to be that "whoever hates his brother is a murderer", not a manslaughterer (1 Jn. 3:15). And that hatred can be in someone's heart, even if they have not killed the object of their hatred. This is the principle which is taught here.

Num 35:21 or in enmity struck him with his hand, so that he died; he who struck him shall surely be put to death; he is a murderer. The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when he meets him-

As Hosea 'redeemed' Gomer in His attempt to force through His fantasy for her (Hos. 3:1), so Yahweh is repeatedly described in Isaiah as Israel's *go'el*, redeemer (Is. 41:14; Is. 43:14; Is. 44:6,24; Is. 47:4; Is. 48:17; Is. 49:7,26; Is. 54:5,8). The redeemer could redeem a close relative from slavery or repurchase property lost during hard times (Lev. 25:25,26, 47-55; Ruth 2:20; Ruth 3:9,12). The redeemer was also the avenger of blood (Num. 35:9-28; Josh. 20:3,9). All these ideas were relevant to Yahweh's relationship to Judah in captivity. But the promised freedom didn't come- even under Nehemiah, Judah was still a province within the Persian empire. And those who returned complained: "We are slaves this

day in the land you gave..." (Neh. 9:36). The wonderful prophecies of freedom and redemption from slavery weren't realized in practice, because of the selfishness of the more wealthy Jews. And how often is it that the freedom potentially enabled for those redeemed in Christ is in practice denied them by their autocratic and abusive brethren?

Num 35:22 But if he thrust him suddenly without enmity, or hurled on him anything without lying in wait-

As discussed on :20, the essential difference between manslaughter and murder was whether or not there was "enmity" or hatred in the heart. Time and again, God's law judges matters of the heart, in a way which no human, secular law ever could.

Num 35:23 or with any stone, by which a man may die, not seeing him, and cast it on him, so that he died, and he was not his enemy, neither sought his harm-

Secular law would go into questions as to whether the man had taken due reasonable precautions, and judge him accordingly. But that aspect isn't considered under Divine law. The simple division was over the question of whether or not the person had intentionally harmed another, and whether he had previously had hatred in his heart for the person (:22). Questions of 'But did you take precautions? Were you careful enough?' were totally made irrelevant by the immense value God gives to the question of the state of heart.

Num 35:24 then the congregation shall judge between the striker and the avenger of blood according to these ordinances-

But Israel were not to avenge (Lev. 19:18). But they *could* avenge, and provisions were made for their human desire to do so in some cases (see too Num. 35:12). These provisions must also be seen as a modification of the command not to murder. The highest level was *not* to avenge; but for the harshness of men's hearts, a concession was made *in some cases*, and on *God's* prerogative. *We* have no right to assume that prerogative. Rather than continually make use of God's many concessions to human weakness, we should seek to live on a higher level.

Num 35:25 and the congregation shall deliver the manslayer out of the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge, where he was fled. He shall dwell therein until the death of the high priest, who was anointed with the holy oil-

The death of the High Priest enabled the 'guilty' person to be totally freed because the principle that death was required to atone for death had been thus fulfilled (:33)- as if in his death, the High Priest was taking upon himself the guilt of the sin of murder, as a total representative of the sinner. In this we see foreshadowed the representative nature of Christ's death for us.

The command "You shall not kill" in Ex. 20:13 must be understood in the context of a situation where the same Law also commanded certain sinners to be put to death within the community, and at times Israel were Divinely commanded and enabled to kill others outside of the community. We have to look, therefore, for a more specific meaning for this commandment- and it seems it is speaking specifically of blood revenge, killing the

person who murdered one of your relatives. According to Num. 35:25-28, if the murder was unintentional, i.e. manslaughter rather than murder, then the person could flee to a city of refuge lest he be slain by the avenger of blood. There is no guidance for the avenger of blood in these 'cities of refuge' passages; rather is there the assumption that he might well attempt to take revenge even for manslaughter, and in this case the unintentional murderer should flee from him into a city of refuge. But clearly enough, this was not God's will- for "You shall not kill". But such is God's grace that He built into His law a recognition that His people would fail. This isn't what we would expect of a $2+2=4$ God, where broken commandments are to be punished and period. In this case, we see here a tacit recognition even within the Mosaic Law that the commandments- in this case "You shall not kill"- wouldn't always be obeyed, and therefore extra legislating was added to enable this situation to be coped with. This isn't only an example of God's sensitivity to human sin and weakness of hot blood [although it is that]. It's an insight into how the very structure of His law is such that He understands human weakness, and is eager to ensure that it hurts others as little as possible. No more human 'god' would have dreamed this up. This grace has the stamp of the ultimately Divine, and any attempt to understand it within the frames of literalistic, legalistic analysis are doomed to failure.

Num 35:26 But if the manslayer shall at any time go beyond the border of his city of refuge where he flees-

These borders are defined in :4 as 2000 cubits from the foursquare city wall of the Levitical city; and the cities of refuge were Levitical cities. The Levitical towns were representations of the altar, which is repeatedly described as foursquare (Ex. 27:1; 38:1; 30:2 cp. Rev. 21:16). The Levites were to have towns which were effectively the local altar for the people. Hence the manslayer could flee to those towns as if fleeing to an altar. And that city of refuge represents finally the Lord Jesus (Heb. 6:18). Going out from it is therefore rather like leaving Him.

Num 35:27 and the avenger of blood find him outside of the border of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kill the manslayer; he shall not be guilty of blood-

This ruling was in order to point up the importance of the cities of refuge, and the need to take manslaughter seriously. Even if in fact the avenger of blood was acting in a morally deficient way. For slaying a morally innocent man out of personal anger and blood lust, not in order to cleanse the land of innocent blood, was surely far below ideal behaviour.

Num 35:28 because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest; but after the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return into the land of his possession-

One day, the manslayer who wandered outside the city of refuge could be slain; but the next he couldn't be, because the High Priest had died. This was to point up the huge significance of the death of the High Priest. This was clearly presented as a kind of atonement

through death, and served no practical purpose apart from to point ahead to the atoning death of the great High Priest to come, the Lord Jesus.

Num 35:29 These things shall be for a statute and ordinance to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings-

"Throughout your generations" is a kind of way of saying 'for ever', but "in your dwellings" may suggest we are to interpret it as meaning 'for as long as you live in the land'. The significance of Israel being deported from their land was therefore that effectively the law of Moses had thereby been ended. And the destruction of the temple, tabernacle furnishings, the loss of the ark and Biblical priesthood, all meant that it was obvious that the law could no longer function. It effectively ended well before the death of the Lord Jesus, so the Israelite wanting relationship with God had to return to the promises to Abraham for that basis of relationship. And those promises were the essence of the new covenant. It was the Lord's death which confirmed the new covenant.

Num 35:30 Whoever kills any person, the murderer shall be slain at the mouth of witnesses; but one witness shall not testify against any person that he die-

Insisting on more than one witness before accepting the truth of an allegation meant that gossip and slander were limited; and Jesus applies this principle to dealing with disputes within His church (Mt. 18:16). Although His teaching about not condemning our brethren meant that He didn't advocate as it were 'putting to death', but rather stern rebuke and damage limitation. Those who

served other gods had to die on the testimony of two or three witnesses. This idea is twice alluded to in the New Testament in the context of making the decision to cease fellowship with someone (Mt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1). The implication is that death under the Old Covenant pointed forward to first century church discipline under the New Covenant. But we must note that the reason for this was serving other gods and wilful departing from covenant relationship with the Lord- not minor reasons. And yet the Lord appears to go a step beyond this; for I detect in Mt. 18:16 a reference to this law, but He goes on to suggest that the higher level in interpersonal offences is not to apply this but to simply forgive.

Num 35:31 Moreover you shall take no ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death; but he shall surely be put to death-

"Ransom" is the word for atonement or covering, *kapher*. There is a position where there is no atonement possible. And yet David was at this point- there was no sacrifice or fine to get him out of his guilt over the sin with Uriah. But the 'sureness' of the command here was by grace not carried out, just as the 'sure' promise of death in the day Adam ate the fruit was not carried out. Possibly God factored in the way that David had not hated Uriah in his heart in the past; see on :20,23.

Num 35:32 You shall take no ransom for him who is fled to his city of refuge, that he may come again to dwell in the land, until the death of the priest-

We died and rose with Christ, if we truly believe in His representation of us and our connection with Him,

then His freedom from sin and sense of conquest will be ours; as the man guilty of blood was to see in the death of the High Priest a representation of his own necessary death, and thereafter was freed from the limitations of the city of refuge (Num. 35:32,33).

Num 35:33 So you shall not pollute the land in which you are: for blood, it pollutes the land; and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him who shed it-

Yet see on :31. Note how blood is a symbol of both life and also death (Gen. 37:26; Num. 35:19,33; Lev. 20:9). Both the Lord's death and His life form a covenant / testament / will for us to obey- in both baptism and then in living out the death and life in our daily experience. We cannot be passive to it. Gal. 3:15; Heb. 9:16 and other passages liken the blood of Christ to a covenant; and yet the Greek word used means definitely the last will and testament of a dead man. His blood is therefore an imperative to us to do something; it is His will to us, which we must execute. Thus His death, His blood, which is also a symbol of His life, becomes the imperative to us for our lives and living in this world.

Num 35:34 You shall not defile the land which you inhabit, in the midst of which I dwell; for I, Yahweh, dwell in the midst of the children of Israel'-

The implication is that if Israel were morally defiled, then Yahweh would be unable to dwell in the midst of them. Seeing they lived in the land of Canaan, this would mean that He would have to depart from that land. And that is the significance of Ezekiel's visions of

the shekinah glory of Yahweh departing from the sanctuary and forsaking the land. The idea is not that the land of Israel was defiled in some metaphysical sense. The defilement was clearly related to the moral defilement of the people within the land. Hence Lev. 18:24,25 Don't defile yourselves in any of these things; for in all these the nations which I am casting out before you were defiled. The land was defiled; therefore I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out her inhabitants". But there was no ritual of cleansing the physical land; rather was the land intended to bring forth great harvests in reflection of Israel's obedience to the covenant.

NUMBERS CHAPTER 36

Num 36:1 The heads of the fathers' households of the family of the children of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the princes, the heads of the fathers' households of the children of Israel-

They raise the matter of the special agreement and interpretation of the law given in Num. 27. They perhaps raised it again after hearing the discussion about the dividing up of the land in Num. 35 and wished to ensure that this special clarification was going to be upheld. For as noted on :3, this was to be a departure from social norms, in allowing land to be passed on through the female line.

Num 36:2 They said, Yahweh commanded my lord to give the land for inheritance by lot to the children of Israel; and my lord was commanded by Yahweh to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters-

Examples of spiritual ambition are inspirational; just as soldiers inspire each other by their acts of bravery. Achsah followed her father Caleb's spiritual ambition in specifically asking for an inheritance in the Kingdom (Josh. 14:12; 15:18); and this in turn inspired the daughters of Zelophehad to ask for an inheritance soon afterwards (Josh. 17:4). And so it ought to be in any healthy congregation of believers. Ponder the parallel between Is. 51:1 and 7: "Hearken to me, ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord... hearken unto

me, ye that know righteousness". To know God's righteousness is to seek / follow it; of itself, it inspires us to ambitiously seeking to attain it.

I suggested on Num. 27:3 that we can identify Zelophehad as the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath.

Num 36:3 If they are married to any of the sons of the other tribes of the children of Israel, then their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of our fathers, and will be added to the inheritance of the tribe unto which they shall belong: so will it be taken away from the lot of our inheritance-

In most societies of the time, a woman didn't get her father's inheritance, but instead was intended to marry into another family. The inheritance of land passed through the male line. But these women had been perceptive, and realize that the inheritance was going to be eternal, and so they wanted their father to have his name preserved in association with his inheritance- otherwise he would as it were lose his inheritance because he had no sons. And so they were granted their request. We see from Ezra 2:61 another case of how this worked out in practice. God cannot be accused of being against women; His legislation valued every human person to a degree unseen in any contemporary legislation.

Num 36:4 When the jubilee of the children of Israel shall be, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe whereunto they shall belong: so their inheritance will be taken away from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers-

This is not the only example of where the Mosaic law was structured so as to intentionally need further interpretation and clarification. It was designed to provoke relationship with God, rather than as a legalistic total statement of how to live in every part of life. One wonders why this statute had not been included within the Law of Moses. Perhaps God had reserved it in potential, waiting the initiative of these women?

Num 36:5 Moses commanded the children of Israel according to the word of Yahweh, saying, The tribe of the sons of Joseph speaks right-

What was important was that the man's inheritance should pass on in his own name, or that of his family. As discussed on :10, the reasoning behind this was because it was God's intention that Israel should eternally inherit their allotments in the land, at the time of resurrection.

Num 36:6 This is the thing which Yahweh does command concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, Let them be married to whom they will; only into the family of the tribe of their father shall they be married-

This verse is alluded to by Paul in 1 Cor. 7:39, where we read that a Christian widow can marry whom she will but only to someone "in the Lord" - in the same way as the women here could marry whom they wished, but only in the tribe of their fathers, unless they would lose their inheritance permanently. It could be that Paul is teaching that marriage within the faith, to those also "in the Lord" by baptism into Him, is so important that doing otherwise may cause us to lose the promised inheritance of the Kingdom. Marriage within the faith

is indeed an important principle and ignoring it often has terrible spiritual consequences. But note that she was free to marry whom *she* wanted- in a culture where arranged marriage was the norm, God valued the dignity and free choice of the woman.

If we deny our covenant with God by marrying into the world, we have effectively cut ourselves off from Him. The command for widows to marry "whom she will; only in the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:39) is alluding back to the command to Zelophehad's daughters to marry "whom they think best", but *only* "in" their tribe, otherwise they would lose the inheritance (Num. 36:6,7). The implication is that those who do not marry "in the Lord" will likewise lose their promised inheritance. And this rather strange allusion indicates one more thing: the extent of the seriousness of marriage out of the Faith is only evident to those who search Scripture deeply. As man and woman within Israel were joint heirs of the inheritance, so man and wife are joint heirs of the inheritance of the Kingdom (1 Pet. 3:7).

Num 36:7 So shall no inheritance of the children of Israel remove from tribe to tribe; for the children of Israel shall all keep the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers-

The law of Moses reasons as if each family of Israel had a specific inheritance which was not to be sold or moved outside the family. Hence the sin of Ahab in obtaining Naboth's vineyard. It would seem that there was some unrecorded list made of each family and which land they were to be given. This looks forward to our very personal and unique inheritance in God's King-

dom, possibly based around spiritual family units. This was "The inheritance of fathers", "your possession" (Lev. 25:27,28; Num. 36:7,8). God had given specific inheritances to His people, that this was not to be sold or traded. The division by lot in Josh. 15:1 presumably meant that the tribal areas were defined and then distributed by lot. And then within those areas, each family was given a specific inheritance.

Num 36:8 Every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the children of Israel shall be wife to one of the family of the tribe of her father, that the children of Israel may possess every man the inheritance of his fathers-

For land inheritance to pass on through the female was unheard of in contemporary legal codes. We are all somewhat in Zelophehad's position. He sinned and died for it, but he has the hope still of eternal inheritance in the Kingdom at the resurrection- in his own name.

Num 36:9 So shall no inheritance remove from one tribe to another tribe; for the tribes of the children of Israel shall each keep his own inheritance-

This repetition of :7 is because it was so important to God that each family kept the inheritance He had spied out for them and given them. The laws about redeeming sold property at the year of Jubilee shows the same special interest of God in this matter. We need likewise to take seriously the fact that Israel's individual inheritance in the land looks ahead to the specific, unique inheritance each of us shall have in eternity. We are being developed in this life so that we can inherit it. God had

given each family a specific inheritance and wanted that to remain within the family name; see on Num. 30:1 for other legislation which defends this Divine intention. The fact the legislation about female heirs is repeated twice (here and in Num. 27) reflects the same Divine concern.

Num 36:10 The daughters of Zelophehad did as Yahweh commanded Moses-

The fact God allows His children to live His truth on different levels needs to be grasped firmly by us, lest we become discouraged that others live on an apparently lower level than we do in some aspects of life. Being surrounded by 'lower levels' ought to inspire us to the higher levels. Zelophehad had only daughters; usually, in his context, a man would have taken concubines in order to produce sons. The record of his only having daughters is presented in the context of genealogies which show that many Israelite men had more than one wife (1 Chron. 7:15). But Zelophehad wasn't dragged down by this; God inspired him to maintain the higher level which he had chosen to live by. He didn't use the principle of Jephthah's vow. And his daughters likewise refused to be limited by their status as females, but obtained an inheritance amongst their brethren (Num. 27:1-7).

Num 36:11 for Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, were married to their father's brothers' sons-

The names of these women all feature the 'Yah' suffix. This is unusual as most of the names we read at this time at best have 'el' for God, or are just of secular mean-

ing. All these women had accepted the revelation of the Name of Yahweh given by Moses. I say they accepted it because it is clear that many people didn't keep their birth names but acquired other names later in their lives, reflective of their life experience and developed beliefs.

Num 36:12 They were married into the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph; and their inheritance remained in the tribe of the family of their father-

Considering the low status of women at that time, we see here a commendable spirit of initiative and spiritual ambition for these women to dare ask a male dominated society to change their rules to allow them to have an inheritance. We see too how God and Moses weren't at all anti-women, and responded positively. Note how the women were allowed to come directly to the decision makers, without needing to appoint a male representative for their case, as was common in surrounding cultures. The value of the human person is consistently seen throughout the Pentateuch. They asked about this matter *before* the land had been possessed, reflecting their strength of faith that God would fulfil His promise of giving His people the Kingdom; they imagined what it would be like there, and acted accordingly even before they got there, as if the land was already theirs in possession- just as we should.

Num 36:13 These are the commandments and the ordinances which Yahweh commanded by Moses to the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho-

"Ordinances" is "judgments" (AV), perhaps referring to judgments expanding and further defining the law, as we have just read about the matter of female inheritance. The contrast may be with the similar comment in Lev. 27:13 concerning the laws given *at Sinai*. There was clearly some progressive revelation of God's laws and covenant, and now we will come to Deuteronomy, the second law, where again there are additions, clarifications and amendments. This reflects how the law was not a chain upon Israel, but part of a living dialogue and real relationship between Yahweh and His people. And it is even more evident under the new covenant.



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