

NUMBERS

The descendants of Jacob had been in Egypt for four hundred years. They became slaves to a new Pharaoh dynasty. At God's direction, Moses led them from Egypt through the Red Sea to Sanai. They

- a. Were protected from the Egyptian army who were pursuing them.
- b. Crossed the Red Sea on dry land with all their animals.
- c. Witnessed Pharaoh and his army destroyed in the sea.
- d. Came to Mt Sanai shuddered at God's appearance and voice.
- e. Received from Moses God's Commandments, rules and regulations.

For about one year they camped near Mt. Sanai. God began to organize and prepare them to go to land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. So, "The Lord spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt. He said: 'Take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families, listing every man by name, one by one. You and Aaron are to number by their divisions all the men in Israel twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army. One man from each tribe, each the head of his family, is to help you.'" (Num 1:1-4)

Moses, Aaron, and the twelve leaders of Israel, each one representing his family counted all the Israelite men twenty years old or more who were able to serve in Israel's army were counted according to their families. The total number was 603,550 excluding the tribe of Levi. ... The Levites were to be in charge of the Tabernacle of the Testimony and over all its furnishings and everything belonging to it. (Num 1:44-47, 50)

Comment: Assuming the men counted were married averaging 3.5 children per family, then there were over 3, 000,000 Israelites camped at Mt. Sanai.

The Lord said to Moses, "Bring the tribe of Levi and present them to Aaron the priest to assist him. They are to perform duties for him and for the whole community at the Tent of Meeting by doing the work of the Tabernacle." (Num 3:5-7)

Comment: God specified the duties and functions the priests were to perform. Now those in Christ are priests with functions to perform.

The Lord said to Moses, "Command the Israelites to send away from the camp anyone who has an infectious skin disease or a discharge of any kind, or who is ceremonially unclean because of a dead body. Send away male and female alike; send them outside the camp so they will not defile their camp, where I dwell among them." (Num 5:1-3)

Comment: God knows the importance of quarantining for communicable and infectious diseases in the physical life and the importance of quarantining sin among those in Christ's Body.

When a man or woman wrongs another in any way or is unfaithful to the Lord, that person is guilty and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one-fifth to it, and give it all to the person he has wronged. (Num 5:6-7)

Comment: "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother." (Matt 18:15)

“The Lord said to Moses ‘If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the Lord as a Nazirite, he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins.’” (Num 6:1-4)

Comment: The Nazirite vow requires one to consecrate himself or herself by self-imposed discipline for the purpose of some special service. (International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia)

When Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle, he anointed it, and consecrated it and all its furnishings. He also anointed and consecrated the altar and all its utensils. Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of families who were the tribal leaders in charge of those who were counted, made offerings. (Num 7:1-3) For twelve days, one leader each day brought his offering for the dedication of the altar. So, the tabernacle was dedicated. (Num 7:11)

“The Lord spoke to Moses in the Desert of Sinai in the first month of the second year after they came out of Egypt. He said, ‘Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. ... they did so in the Desert of Sinai at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. The Israelites did everything just as the Lord had commanded Moses.’” (Num 9:1-2; 5)

“Some came to Moses and Aaron that same day and said to Moses, ‘We have become unclean because of a dead body, but why should we be kept from presenting the Lord's offering with the other Israelites at the appointed time?’ Moses answered them, ‘Wait until I find out what the Lord commands concerning you.’” (Num 9:6-8)

Comment: Many problems would be avoided if we waited until we knew what God says.

The Cloud Covering the Tent of the Testimony

“On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning, the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped.” (Num 9:15-18)

“On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle of the Testimony. Then the Israelites set out from the Desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the Desert of Paran.” (Num 10:11-12)

“Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them his anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. When the people cried out to Moses, he prayed to the Lord and the fire died down.” (Num 11:1-2)

Moses's Complaint

“The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing. ... Moses heard the people of every family wailing, each at the entrance to his tent. The Lord became exceedingly angry, and Moses was troubled. Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised

on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, ‘Give us meat to eat!’ I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now — if I have found favor in your eyes — and do not let me face my own ruin.” (Num 11:4; 11-15)

Comment: Even the very righteous become stressed by constant quarreling and complaining. Their faith is being tested by Satan.

God Organizes Leadership

“The Lord said to Moses: ‘Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone.’” (Num 11:16-17)

“Now the Lord will give you meat, and you will eat it. You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten, or twenty days, but for a whole month — until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it — because you have rejected the Lord.” (Num 11:18-20)

Family Jealously

“Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of the Cushite he married. ‘Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?’ they asked. ‘Hasn’t he also spoken through us?’ ... The anger of the Lord burned against them, and he left them. When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam — leprous. Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back. So, Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.” (Num 12:1-2; 9-10; 14-15)

Exploring the Promised Land

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Send some men to explore the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelites. From each ancestral tribe send one of its leaders.’ ... Go up through the Negev and on into the hill country. See what the land is like and whether the people who live there are strong or weak, few or many. What kind of land do they live in? Is it good or bad? What kind of towns do they live in? Are they unwalled or fortified? How is the soil? Is it fertile or poor? Are there trees on it or not? Do your best to bring back some of the fruit of the land. ... At the end of forty days, they returned from exploring the land. They came back to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the Desert of Paran. There they reported to them and to the whole assembly and showed them the fruit of the land. The people who live there are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large.” (Num 13:1-2; 17-20; 25-28)

“Caleb silenced the people before Moses and said, ‘We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.’ But the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We can’t attack those people; they are stronger than we are.’ And they spread among the Israelites a bad report about the land they had explored. They said, “The land we explored devours those living in it. All the people we saw there are of great size. We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them.” (Num 13:30-33)

More Quarreling and Complaining

“All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, ‘If only we had died in Egypt!’ ... Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and said to the entire Israelite assembly, “The

land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good. If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them." But the whole assembly talked about stoning them." (Num 14:2; 6-10)

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

"Moses pleaded with God not to destroy them. 'In accordance with your great love, forgive the sin of these people, just as you have pardoned them from the time, they left Egypt until now.' The Lord replied, 'I have forgiven them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of the men who saw my glory and the miraculous signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times — not one of them will ever see the land I promised.'" (Num 14:19-23)

"How long shall this wicked congregation grumble against me?" ... "All your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun." ... "The men who brought up a bad report of the land— died by plague before the Lord." (Num 14:27; 29-31; 37-38)

Offering Sacrifices

"If a stranger is sojourning with you, or anyone is living permanently among you, and he wishes to offer a food offering, with a pleasing aroma to the Lord, he shall do as you do. For the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you, a statute forever throughout your generations. You and the sojourner shall be alike before the Lord. One law and one rule shall be for you and for the stranger who sojourns with you." (Num 15:14-16)

But if you sin unintentionally without the knowledge of the congregation, all the congregation shall offer one bull from the herd for a burnt offering, they shall be forgiven, because it was a mistake. "But anyone who sins defiantly, whether native-born or alien, blasphemes the Lord, and that person must be cut off from his people. Because he has despised the Lord's word and broken his commands, that person must surely be cut off; his guilt remains on him." (Num 15:22, 24-25; 30-31)

Comment: Sin without regard to God's love and commands was not tolerated under the Old Covenant nor is it to be tolerated in the New Covenant. Paul said turn over to Satan and do not associate with an unrepentant brother intentionally sinning. (1 Corinthians 5) "Cut off from his people" and "turn over to Satan" removes sin from the congregation of God's people.

A Revolt Against Moses

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram along with 250 community leaders came as a group to oppose Moses. They were to come before the Lord for Him to choose His leader. Dathan and Abiram refused staying at their tents. God then opened the ground as their grave consumed them and all their possessions including family. Then fire from the Lord consumed the 250 followers.

“The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. ‘You have killed the Lord’s people,’ they said. But when the assembly gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron and turned toward the Tent of Meeting, suddenly the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared. Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and the Lord said to Moses, ‘Get away from this assembly so I can put an end to them at once.’ And they fell facedown. Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘Take your censer and put incense in it, along with fire from the altar, and hurry to the assembly to make atonement for them. Wrath has come out from the Lord; the plague has started.’ So, Aaron did as Moses said, and ran into the midst of the assembly. The plague had already started among the people, but Aaron offered the incense and made atonement for them. He stood between the living and the dead, and the plague stopped. But 14,700 people died from the plague, in addition to those who had died because of Korah. Then Aaron returned to Moses at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, for the plague had stopped.” (Num 16:41-50)

Aaron Staff Blooms and God assigns Responsibilities

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and get twelve staffs from them, one from the leader of each of their ancestral tribes. Write the name of each man on his staff. On the staff of Levi write Aaron’s name, for there must be one staff for the head of each ancestral tribe. Place them in the Tent of Meeting in front of the Testimony, where I meet with you. The staff belonging to the man I choose will sprout, and I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites.’ ... “The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Testimony and saw that Aaron’s staff, which represented the house of Levi, had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds. Then Moses brought out all the staffs from the Lord’s presence to all the Israelites. They looked at them, and each man took his own staff. The Lord said to Moses, “Put back Aaron’s staff in front of the Testimony, to be kept as a sign to the rebellious. This will put an end to their grumbling against me, so that they will not die.” (Num 17:1-5; 8-10)

Comment: God chose Aaron as His Priest under the Old Covenant. Christ is the High Priest in the New Covenant.

God assigns responsibilities to the Levites in regard to the Tent of Meeting. The Lord said to Aaron, “You, your sons, and your father’s family are to bear the responsibility for offenses against the sanctuary, and you and your sons alone are to bear the responsibility for offenses against the priesthood. Bring your fellow Levites from your ancestral tribe to join you and assist you when you and your sons minister before the Tent of the Testimony. They are to be responsible to you and are to perform all the duties of the Tent, but they must not go near the furnishings of the sanctuary or the altar, or both they and you will die. They are to join you and be responsible for the care of the Tent of Meeting - all the work at the Tent - and no one else may come near where you are.” (Num 18:1-4)

Aaron and Moses Sinned

“The whole Israelite community arrived at the Desert of Zin, and they stayed at Kadesh. There Miriam died and was buried. Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron. They quarreled with Moses The Lord said to Moses. ... ‘Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water.’ ... Moses said to them, ‘Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?’ Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them.’” (Num 20:1-3; 7-8; 10-12)

Approaching the Promised Land

“Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, saying: ‘This is what your brother Israel says: You know about all the hardships that have come upon us. ... Please let us pass through your country. We will not go through any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway and not turn to the right or to the left until we have passed through your territory.’ But Edom answered: ‘You may not pass through here.’ ... Then Edom came out against them with a large and powerful army. Since Edom refused to let them go through their territory, Israel turned away from them. ... The whole Israelite community set out from Kadesh and came to Mount Hor.” (Num 20:14, 18, 21, 22)

Aaron Dies and God Appoints Eleazar

“At Mount Hor, near the border of Edom, the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Aaron will be gathered to his people. He will not enter the land I give the Israelites, because both of you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. Get Aaron and his son Eleazar and take them up Mount Hor. Remove Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar, for Aaron will be gathered to his people; he will die there.’ Moses did as the Lord commanded: They went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole community. Moses removed Aaron's garments and put them on his son Eleazar. And Aaron died there on top of the mountain.” (Num 20:23-28)

The Conquest of the Promised Land Begins

“The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev (south), attacked the Israelites and captured some of them. Then Israel made this vow to the Lord: ‘If you will deliver these people into our hands, we will totally destroy their cities.’ The Lord listened to Israel's plea and gave the Canaanites over to them. They completely destroyed them and their towns.” (Num 21:1-3)

“They traveled from Mount Hor along the route to the Red Sea, to go around Edom. But the people grew impatient on the way; they spoke against God and against Moses, and said, ‘Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? There is no bread! There is no water! And we detest this miserable food!’ Then the Lord sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, ‘We sinned when we spoke against the Lord and against you. Pray that the Lord will take the snakes away from us.’ So, Moses prayed for the people. The Lord said to Moses, ‘Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.’ So, Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, he lived.” (Num 21:4-9)

Comment: Recall Jesus said, “when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.” He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die. (John 12:32-34) His atoning sacrifice would heal the souls of all who trust Him to do His will.

“‘Let us pass through your country. We will not turn aside into any field or vineyard, or drink water from any well. We will travel along the king's highway until we have passed through your territory.’ But Sihon would not let Israel pass through his territory. He mustered his entire army and marched out into the desert against Israel. When he reached Jahaz, he fought with Israel. Israel, however, put him to the sword and took over his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, but only as far as the Ammonites, because their border was fortified. Israel captured all the cities of the Amorites and occupied them, including Heshbon and all its surrounding settlements. Heshbon was the city of Sihon king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken from him all his land as far as the Arnon.” (Num 21:22-26)

“Then the Israelites traveled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho. Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites, and Moab was terrified because there were so many people. Indeed, Moab was filled with dread because of the Israelites. The Moabites said to the elders of Midian, ‘This horde is going to lick up everything around us, as an ox licks up the grass of the field.’ ... The elders of Moab and Midian left, taking with them the fee for divination. When they came to Balaam, they told him what Balak had said. ... God said to Balaam, ‘Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed.’” (Num 22:1-4, 7, 12)

“Balaam went even after God told him not to go. Four times Balaam attempted to curse them and four times he uttered blessings. Balak’s anger burned against Balaam. Now leave at once and go home! I said I would reward you handsomely, but the Lord has kept you from being rewarded.” ... Then Balaam got up and returned home and Balak went his own way.” (Num 24:10-11; 25)

“An Israelite man brought to his family a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand, and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear through both of them — through the Israelite and into the woman’s body. ... The Lord said to Moses, ‘Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. Therefore, tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.’” (Num 25:6-8; 10-13)

Time to Occupy the Promised Land

“The Lord said to Moses and Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, ‘Take a census of the whole Israelite community by families — all those twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army of Israel.’ So, on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them and said, ‘Take a census of the men twenty years old or more.’” (Num 26:1-4)

“Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go up this mountain in the Abarim range and see the land I have given the Israelites. After you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, for when the community rebelled at the waters in the Desert of Zin, both of you disobeyed my command to honor me as holy before their eyes.’ (These were the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Desert of Zin.) Moses said to the Lord, ‘May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all mankind, appoint a man over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.’ So, the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest and the entire assembly and commission him in their presence. Give him some of your authority so the whole Israelite community will obey him.’” (Num 27:12-20)

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Give this command to the Israelites and say to them: See that you present to me at the appointed time the food for my offerings made by fire, as an aroma pleasing to me.’ ... Moses told the Israelites all that the Lord commanded him.” (Num 28:1-2; 29:40)

“The Lord commands: When a man makes a vow to the Lord or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said.” (Num 30:2)

Comment: Vows and covenants are very important, and not to be made or taken lightly. They are committed to the Lord.

“The Lord said to Moses, ‘Take vengeance on the Midianites for the Israelites. After that, you will be gathered to your people.’ So, Moses said to the people, ‘Arm some of your men to go to war against the Midianites and to carry out the Lord's vengeance on them. ... They fought against Midian, as the Lord commanded Moses, and killed every man.’ ... ‘Have you allowed all the women to live?’ he asked them. ‘They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and were the means of turning the Israelites away from the Lord in what happened at Peor, so that a plague struck the Lord's people. Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man.’” (Num 31:1-3; 7, 15-17)

Comment: The influence of evil including idol worship must be removed. Retaining any evil influence brings temptations and desires that lead to sin.

“On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho the Lord said to Moses, ‘Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. Distribute the land by lot, according to your clans. To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one. Whatever falls to them by lot will be theirs. Distribute it according to your ancestral tribes. But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live. And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them.’” (Num 33:50-56)