

## WRITER

Moses is the undisputed writer who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to inscribe the words of this book (See intro. to Gn). The phrase, "*The Lord spoke to Moses*" is used over 40 times in the book to introduce chapters and sections of divine instruction for the nation of Israel.

Because this book explains much of the work of Moses on behalf of Israel, it is sometimes referred to by scholars as the "Book of Moses." Moses is pictured in the book as the lawgiver, counselor, provider, intercessor, peacemaker, religious and civil leader, and the servant of God on behalf of Israel. The focus of the book is God working through Moses in order to lead His people to the promised land.

The key verse of the book would be 10:29: "*We are journeying to the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you.' Come with us and we will do good to you. For the LORD has spoken good concerning Israel.*"

Numbers is a record of the many times the Israelites complained about their predicament throughout their wanderings from Egypt to Canaan. They had forgotten the suffering of their Egyptian bondage, but not the fine things they enjoyed in Egypt. When in times of struggles, the mind often forgets past struggles by focusing on the good times of the past. This natural forgetfulness of the struggles they had in Egypt made it possible for the Israelites to murmur concerning their predicament in the wilderness. Their complaints digressed from complaining against Moses to complaining directly against God. The results of their attitude of complaint was that they were condemned to forty years of wandering in the wilderness, wherein all who were twenty years of age and over at the time of the exodus from Egypt were not allowed to enter the promised land. We would assume, therefore, that this record of their complaints, and subsequent punishments by God, was written in order to remind the generations of Israel to trust in God by forsaking their culture of complaining. Their trust would be revealed by their lack of complaining.

**BOOK**

The first numbering (census) of Israel at the foot of Mt. Sinai was made in order to establish and organize the tribal families for an income for the Levitical priesthood (Ex 30:11-16). Recorded in this book is another census that was taken before Israel left Sinai in order to determine the military personnel of the nation (chs 1-4). Immediately before Israel entered the land of Canaan, a third census was taken (See ch 26). Because of the numbering of Israel upon which focus is made in this book, Bible students have assigned the book with the title, "Numbers."

"Numbers" is the traditional name of the book. We take this name from the name that was assigned to it by Jerome in the Latin Vulgate (*Numeri*). However, Jerome took the name from the Septuagint. The Hebrew name for the book is *B'midbar*, which means "in the wilderness" since the book covers Israel's history from Mt. Sinai to the time of their entrance into Canaan.

The book continues the history of Israel that was concluded with the book of Exodus. In order to understand Numbers, therefore, one must have a good understanding of history that is revealed through both Genesis and Exodus, for the book of Numbers adds a vital link in Israel's history from the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt to the time of the nation's entrance into and settlement in the land of promise.

**DATE**

The events of the book occurred about eleven months after the Israelites arrived at the foot of Mt. Sinai. If we accept the date of the exodus from Egypt to be around 1,445 B.C., then Numbers was probably written sometime around 1,400 B.C. However, a later date has also been proposed. Some Bible historians have felt that the best evidences establish the time for the exodus from Egypt to be around 1,300 B.C. There are various reasons for this date. The Hyksos Dynasty, a dynasty of Pharaohs who were not Egyptian, probably existed previous to 1,300 B.C., and thus this dynasty was in existence when Joseph, who was also not an Egyptian, was a ruler in Egypt. He

would have been allowed to be a great ruler in Egypt during the Hyksos Dynasty, whereas during the dynasties of the Egyptian-born Pharaohs he would not have been allowed to rule in Egypt. There is also archaeological evidence that many cities suddenly appeared in the land of Canaan during the time following 1,300 B.C., which cities could have been built by the newly settled Israelites in the land.

The book was probably written a short time before Israel entered Canaan. It thus covers a period of about 39 years that started with Israel's leaving Mt. Sinai, wandering in the wilderness, and to the time they prepared to enter Canaan.

### Preparation To Leave Mt. Sinai

(1:1 – 9:23)

**Outline:** (1) The first census of Israel (1:1 – 2:34), (2) Support for the Levites (3:1 – 4:49), (3) The purity of society (5:1-31), (4) The Nazarite vow (6:1-21), (5) Benediction on the Israelites (6:22-27), (6) Offerings by the princes of Israel (7:1-89), (7) Cleansing of the Levites (8:1-26), (8) Movement of the camp (9:1-23)

## Chapter 1

### THE FIRST CENSUS OF ISRAEL

**1:1-3 Take a census:** Various reasons have been given for the numbering of the nation. Some have felt that the numbering at this time in the history of Israel was for the purpose of emphasizing for later generations God's promise that He would multiply the nation as was promised to Abraham. Another purpose for the numbering of those over the age of twenty would have been a record that, except for Joshua and Caleb, no one over this age entered the promised land because of their sin in refusing to enter Canaan immediately upon God's instructions. **Every male:** Since the census was of the males only, then we would assume that this census was for military purposes in order to determine how many men were in Israel who could go to war.

**1:4-19** The numbering was conducted according to the heads of the tribes, families and households of Israel. The number according to the families made it possible for future generations to trace back to these families

those who came out of Egyptian captivity.

**1:20-46** Only those men who were 20 years of age and older were to be counted. The total number from this census was 603,550 men of war. Later in chapter 26 the census would reveal that there were 601,730. By figuring according to this number of men in Israel, Bible students have estimated that the population of Israel at this time in history, including women and children, to be anywhere from two million to a maximum of three million.

**1:47-54** The Levites were excluded from the numbering of men for war. God had earlier separated them for spiritual service to the nation. Their primary work was to maintain the tabernacle and the sacrificial services for the people. The Levites were thus subject to a different census because they were not to receive a possession in the land (See 3:1 – 4:49).

## **Chapter 2**

**2:1-34** Described in this chapter is the organization of the tribes of Israel in reference to the movement and setting up of the tabernacle. The center of reference for the settlement of the people was the tabernacle. The reason for the location of each tribe according to the setting of the tabernacle was for the purpose of contact and communication. People could be located and a plan for marching with the tabernacle could be carried out in an orderly manner. The moving and setting up of the tabernacle was as a moving city. Since the tabernacle was situated where it was the center of the settlement, every tribe had frontal property that was connected to the tabernacle. The settlement of the people in reference to the tabernacle symbolically connected all tribes together as one nation with their focus on the presence of God. When the tabernacle was moved among the possessions, no one tribe could claim ownership of the tabernacle, and thus unity was to prevail among the tribes.

## **Chapter 3**

### **SUPPORT FOR THE LEVITES**

**3:1-4** Kohath was probably a cousin of Moses. The Kohathites served in taking care of the ark and ceremo-

nial utensils. But the sons of Aaron, Moses' brother, were specifically consecrated to the Lord as the high priests. From Aaron priests were to come to minister the services of the tabernacle, whereas the Kohathites were to be responsible for the transportation of the ark and ceremonial utensils. **Nadab and Abihu:** These two sons of Aaron sinned against the Lord, and subsequently were struck dead (See comments Lv 10:1,2). Some have speculated that the sons of Levi helped in their duties as priests with the sons of Aaron (See Jg 17:5,10,13).

**3:5-13 Tribe of Levi:** It is apparent that those of the tribe of Levi were assistants to the sons of Aaron. It was at this time that the tribe of Levi was separated from the other tribes of Israel in order to minister to the spiritual needs of the nation. Those of the tribe of Levi thus functioned full-time on behalf of Israel. **Alien ... put to death:** No unauthorized or unclean person was allowed to function in the capacity for which the sons of Levi were to perform. If someone other than a Levite attempted to function as a priest, that person was to be put to death. **I have taken the Levites:** God had hallowed the firstborn of Israel at the time of the exodus from Egypt (See Ex 13:2,11,12). In this context He hallowed the sons of Levi with all their livestock. Instead of taking all the firstborn of Israel, He took only the sons of Levi.

**3:14-39** The census included numbering all the male children who were over one month old. It also included numbering the children between the ages of 30 and 50. Those between 30 and 50 would care for the tabernacle under the supervision of the sons of Aaron. The numbering included the Gershonites, Kohathites, Merarites, with Moses and Aaron. The total number of males one month and older was 22,000. The total number that is given in verse 39 does not include an additional 300. The 300 were possibly the firstborn of the Levites, and thus did not need to be counted with the total number since they were already consecrated to the Lord. The total number of the males between 30 and 50 was 8,580 (4:48). We must keep in mind that when analyzing these numbers we cannot be meticulous in the final figures. The final tally was meant to be a figure from which to begin

the services of the tabernacle with reference to the total population of Israel.

**3:40-51** There was a difference of 273 between the final tally of the firstborn and the total of the tribe of Levi. In order to make up this difference there was a plan of redemption (payment). Instead of the firstborn of all the nation being given for service to the Lord, an offering of five shekels was given for each one. This amount was possibly taken from the tribal treasuries and given to the priests.

### Chapter 4

**4:1-20 Sons of Kohath:** The Kohathites, as well as the Gershonites and Merarites, were given specific duties in reference to the tabernacle. The Kohathites were given the duty of taking care of the utensils of worship (the table, the vessels, the altars, and all the service pieces). They were to function under the direction of Eleazar, the priest (3:32). Since they were under more strict regulations than either the Gershonites and Merarites, they had the greater responsibility in their service to the tabernacle. With their more significant work came greater responsibility.

**4:21-28 Sons of Gershon:** The sons of Gershon had the responsibility of the tent structure which included the curtains and draperies (See 3:25,26).

**4:29-33 Sons of Merari:** The sons of Merari were responsible for the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, and the solid parts of the curtains (3:36,37). They were to carry out their responsibilities under the supervision of the priest, Ithamar, who had the responsibility of organizing the construction of the tent of meeting (Ex 38:21).

**4:34-49 Thirty ... fifty:** The age at which one was to assume his priestly responsibilities was 30. This provides some commentary on why Jesus began His earthly ministry at about 30 (Lk 3:23). At the age of 50, the sons of Levi and the priests could retire from their responsibilities of serving the people in their God-ordained duties. Their service was from 30 to 50, after which they could live in their own dwellings for the rest of their lives.

## Chapter 5

## THE PURITY OF SOCIETY

**5:1-4** If the total count of the Israelites was around three million at the time they were at the foot of Mt. Sinai, then there would be some social and cleanliness issues for such a large group of people in one place in the wilderness. There would be challenges of cleanliness, honesty and morality for the society of Israel as they dwelt in the wilderness on their way to Canaan. In reference to cleanliness, they would have a problem with sanitation when camped in close proximity to one another, though while in the wilderness, the tribes probably camped at a greater distance from one another than we might suppose. Just prior to their entrance into the land of Canaan, 20:1 seems to indicate that after 38 years there was a coming together of the tribes from their disbursed locations in the wilderness in order to make final plans to enter Canaan. Behind the laws concerning contact with the dead and lepers, there were certainly connotations concerning health and sanitation. Though three specific cases of uncleanness are mentioned (leprosy, discharges from infection, and contact with a dead body), the general instructions in reference to any of these cases would be applicable to any disease (See Lv 13:3; 15:2; 21:1). **Outside the camp:** In order to prevent epidemics, the instruction would be isolation outside the camp of the people. Though the people did not understand the contamination that would come from viruses and germs that would be spread from one person to another, quarantine was the precaution given when symptoms of disease were seen. God wanted His people to behave after a manner of cleanliness because they were a holy people. Cleanliness and holiness were connected in the sense that if one violated the laws concerning cleanliness, he would be violating the law of God, and thus be unholy before God. The laws concerning cleanliness were from God, as well as all moral laws. Violation of any law from God was a violation of the whole law of God.

**5:5-10 Make restitution:** The second sin that is emphasized in this chapter in reference to the social structure of Israel, is in reference to honesty. The principle

that one's property be secure within a society must be maintained in order that citizens of the society dwell in peace with one another. If something was stolen, twenty percent was to be added to the value of that which was stolen with the restitution of that which was stolen. In the matter of righting the wrong that was done, repentance was required and manifested through the action of restitution. The wrong was to be righted by the action of the restitution. After the restitution was made, there was to be reconciliation with God by the man who made the restitution. This was accomplished by the offering of a ram for atonement.

**5:11-31 Any ... wife ... commits a trespass:** The third challenge to maintain order in the camp of Israel's society was in reference to morality. The matter here discussed would not be adultery, for which the death penalty was given (Lv 20:10). The matter here would be when a wife's conduct would spark suspicion of infidelity which could not be proved. If the husband were suspicious of his wife's behavior, he could take her before the priest for judgment. Since there is no example of this law being carried out in Scripture, the giving of the law greatly prevented the problem. It was a law that was certainly meant for the time Israel was wandering in the wilderness. The principle of the law was that no wife should act in a flirtatious manner with anyone other than her husband. If she did, then she could be taken before the priest for judgment. The desire of married women, therefore, must be totally to their husbands lest they give the impression that they are seeking affection outside their marriage union. Marital fidelity is the foundation of any society, and thus it must never be compromised by the illicit behavior of either the husband or wife. **Holy water ... dust:** The embarrassment and humiliation of going through such a trial to determine the judgment of the woman's innocence certainly encouraged the wives not to involve themselves in any flirtatious behavior with men other than their husbands. If the woman was guilty of infidelity, the drinking of the bitter water would cause serious reactions in her female organs. However, if she was innocent, the bitter water would cause her to bear children.



## Chapter 6

## THE NAZARITE VOW

**6:1-8** The vow of a Nazarite could be taken by anyone of Israel, both men and women. The Hebrew word for "Nazarite" (*nazir*) means "to separate." By taking the vow one was separating himself or herself for a specific cause for the Lord. **Drink no ... strong drink:** The Nazarite was to drink nothing that would be intoxicating. Vinegar was made by the Hebrews in a manner that it would intoxicate, and thus was prohibited for the Nazarite. The Nazarite was essentially prohibited from eating or drinking anything that was produced from the grapevine. **No razor:** Not cutting of one's hair was an outward symbol of having taken the Nazarite vow. The outward symbol of the vow was necessary in order that others not offer the Nazarite something that would contradict his vow. **He will not come near a dead body:** Lest he become unclean, the Nazarite was not even to help in the burial of his own family members. He was to be a person separated for the Lord, and thus committed to the Lord's service.

**6:9-12** Since the Nazarite was human, he could inadvertently violate his vow. For this reason, atonement could be made by shaving his head. He would then bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest for an offering.

**6:13-21** **The days:** The Nazarite vow was for a specific period of time. The vow was for no less than one year. At the end of the vow the Nazarite would bring offerings before the priest in order to conclude the time of the vow. Once the priest performed the appropriate ceremonies to conclude the vow, the head was shaved in order to reveal to the public that the individual had concluded the time of the vow.

## BENEDICTION ON THE ISRAELITES

**6:22-27** This blessing of the priest was a benediction for blessing a consecrated people. By exalting the character of God before the people, the people were encouraged to live holy lives before God who was holy. The blessing was meant to inspire the people to behave according to

the will of God. The blessing reassured the people (See Ps 91; Jn 17:9-15; 1 Th 5:23), reminded them that God's favor was with them (See Ps 21:6; 34:15), gave them assurance of God's peace (See Jn 14:26-27), and gave them confidence in that God had claimed His people by putting His name on them (See Jn 14:26,27). They could thus go forth with the confidence that God was with them. As long as they stayed close to the commandments of God, God would stay close to them. But if they forsook the commandments, they would be forsaken (Hs 4:6).

## Chapter 7

### OFFERINGS BY THE PRINCES OF ISRAEL

**7:1-9 Wagon ... oxen:** The tabernacle was constructed for constant movement throughout the wanderings of Israel. The sons of Merari and Gershon were thus provided with wagons and oxen in order to transport the furnishings and structure of the tabernacle throughout the wilderness wanderings. The sons of Kohath had the responsibility of transporting the ark and sacred utensils of the ceremonies surrounding the offerings. Provisions were also made in order to transport the tabernacle from one region to another when Israel eventually came into the land of promise.

**7:10-89** The offering of each prince was the same. The offering was one silver plate, one silver basin, and one gold dish. Each brought a grain offering, burnt offering, sin offering, and a peace offering. Other than the burnt offering, the offerings were for a meal of celebration for the dedication of the tabernacle. All the offerings were in the context of dedicating the tabernacle for its use. This onetime event would dedicate the tabernacle for centuries to come. There would never again be such a dedication for the tabernacle. We would assume, therefore, that the tabernacle was to be God's center for religious reference for Israel throughout their history in the land of Palestine. The temple of Jerusalem came about 400 years later in the history of Israel when men desired to have a building in the midst of Palestine that represented their center of spiritual connection with God. The implications from this context of the dedica-

tion of the tabernacle, however, would indicate that God intended that the tabernacle alone be God's symbol among the people that He was in their midst. The problem with the temple that came later, was that it was situated in one location, and thus could not be moved around from one tribal possession to another as the tabernacle. Jerusalem, therefore, became a unique city in Israel. However, in these original laws in reference to the tabernacle it was not in the mind of God. In fact, when these laws were given, Jebus (later, Jerusalem) was only an insignificant settlement in the land of Canaan. God only allowed the temple, and the city of Jerusalem, to become the center of Jewish religious emphasis because of the desires of men who followed the temple worship of the nations around them. We must never underestimate man's desire to construct a building in which he seeks to place his god and religious service.

## Chapter 8

### CLEANSING OF THE LEVITES

**8:1-4 Light the lamps:** This action possibly signified that the priests were ready to offer sacrifices for the people (See Ex 40:4). The significance was at least a signal that the consecration of the tabernacle was finished, and thus, God wanted the people to know of His continuing presence with the people and their opportunity to offer sacrifices.

**8:5-19 Cleanse them:** In order to do the holy work of the tabernacle the priests themselves had to be separated from the people for the purpose of spiritual ministry. The instructions here were given as rites of purification in order to set forth the priests as holy workers before God on behalf of the people. There were rites given for the physical cleansing of the priests, as well as the legal purification of their work. **Put their hands on the Levites:** We are not told exactly how this was done, but the symbolism is significant. By putting their hands on the Levites, the people were signifying that they would accept the Levites for the uniqueness of their God ordained function among the people. They were also stating that they would support the Levites as a tribe that was sepa-

rated from Israel as special priests for the sake of Israel. Though all Israel was a nation of priests, God had ordained that the Levites function within Israel as priests to the nation of priests. Even God's appointed workers must have spiritual help from those whose work it is to encourage the saints. Simply because one is a spiritual leader of the people does not assume that he has no spiritual struggles within his own life.

**8:20-26** After the ceremonies of purification, and the peoples' commitment to provide for the Levites, the Levites assumed their function. All Levite males from the ages of 25 to 50 assumed their duties, on behalf of the people, to attend to the tabernacle and the spiritual needs of the people. In 4:3 the age at which the Levite was to start his service is given as 30. The difference between the two ages, 25 and 30, would possibly be answered in the fact that there was a period of five years for apprenticeship before the Levite began his official duties. At least we could conclude that he did not go immediately into the priesthood without a mentor to prepare him.

## **Chapter 9**

### **MOVEMENT OF THE CAMP**

**9:1-14** See comments Exodus 12:1-27. Since the Israelites had arrived at the foot of Mt. Sinai over a year before, they had not observed the Passover. God's command that they observe it now was to inaugurate their departure from Sinai. Because of the struggles that they were about to endure, they needed to be reminded of the struggles they went through in captivity and their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt. They needed to be reminded continually of their struggles they had in Egypt since in their own struggles in the wilderness they would seek to return to Egypt. Added to the instructions of Exodus 12:1-27 are two more specific commands here in reference to who could keep the Passover. Those who had come into contact with a dead body or had been on a far off journey could keep the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month. There is also given in this context provisions for the alien. Reference here is to the proselyte. This was one who had determined to set-

tle with Israel and accept the religious ceremonies of the law of God. These first instructions to Israel concerning the alien reminded Israel that they were not to be a nation that excluded people from the law of God, but one that included everyone who would desire to be obedient to the law of God. God's laws for Israel were never meant to be laws that would exclude others from coming to God through obedience to His will.

**9:15-23 Cloud... fire:** Since their departure from Egypt, Israel had enjoyed the comfort of God's presence as it was manifested through the pillar of cloud by day and the fire by night (Ex 13:21). They were reassured in this context that the same would stay with them throughout their journey as they set out from Sinai. However, His presence would be manifested through the tabernacle.

### Leaving Mt. Sinai

(10:1 – 14:45)

**Outline:** (1) Movement of the Israelite camp (10:1-36), (2) Complaints of the people (11:1-9), (3) Burden of leadership on Moses (11:10-17), (4) God's promise of food (11:18-23), (5) Giving of the Spirit (11:24-30), (6) Giving of the quail (11:31-35), (7) Sin of Miriam (12:1-16), (8) Surveying the promised land (13:1-33), (9) Negative response of the people (14:1-10), (10) God's judgment of the nation (14:11-45)

## Chapter 10

### MOVEMENT OF THE ISRAELITE CAMP

**10:1-10 Calling of the assembly:** The movement of the camp of Israel was no small challenge. In order to rally the people for movement, Moses was commanded to make trumpets that would be blown to call the attention of the people. These trumpets were to be made of silver, and thus different from the ram's horn trumpets that were used in reference to worship. The sounding of these trumpets signaled that the entire assembly should gather. The sounding of one trumpet called the princes of the tribes together. The continuous sound signaled that the camp should begin its march. The trumpets were also used to call the armies to war and to celebrate certain feast days. The sounding of the trumpets for these purposes was to continue throughout the history of Israel.

**10:11-36** *The cloud was taken up:* This was the signal that it was time to move. With great anticipation the people surely waited for this day, since they had been at the foot of Mt. Sinai for about a year (See Ex 19:1). *In the first place:* The listing of the tribes by their leaders was to set the order of their march throughout the wilderness. *Hobab:* Jethro (Reuel), Moses' father-in-law, eventually returned to Midian. Hobab, one of Jethro's sons, however, stayed with the Israelites while they were at Mt. Sinai. But when the Israelites were moving on, Hobab also decided to return to his father's house in Midian. Moses, however, wanted him to go with Israel because of his knowledge of the wilderness areas into which they were going. Though Hobab wanted to return to Midian, it seems that Moses' persistence convinced him to stay with Israel, since his descendants are mentioned to be living in Canaan many years later (See Jg 1:16; 1 Sm 15:6). *Ark of the covenant:* The ark was carried before the people (See Ja 3:6). The fact that it was carried before the people symbolized God's leadership of the people and their willingness to follow. *Rise up, O Lord:* Moses' prayer was that the enemies of Israel be scattered before their march. As long as Israel was obedient to the will of God, this prayer was answered. When the ark was settled in a specific place, the prayer was that God remain among His people. This He did, but only when they lived according to His commandments. The condition for the answered prayer was the obedience of the people.

## Chapter 11

### COMPLAINTS OF THE PEOPLE

**11:1-3** The complaints of the people are an indication of their difficulty in dealing with the struggles of their present circumstances. The Israelites had learned a culture of complaint while slaves in bondage in Egypt. They continued this complaint culture in their journey to Mt. Sinai (Ex 14:11,12; 15:24,25). And now they were again complaining. The attitude of complaint must be replaced by total dependence on God. We would assume that God knew that this culture of complaining had to be taken out of the nation as a whole. Much of it was

with the death of those of the age of 20 and over during the 40 years of wilderness wanderings. By the time the nation came to the east of the Jordan River to enter into Palestine, they had been humiliated and humbled by their wilderness exile. There was no complaining after they crossed the Jordan. **Fire of the Lord:** The answer to complaint was discipline from the Lord. In this case, the punishment was immediate. The discipline was stopped only when Moses interceded for the people. Moses knew that if the punishment continued, Israel would be totally destroyed. As a leader of the people, therefore, he knew the judgment of God, and thus pled on behalf of the people for their survival from the punishment of God.

**11:4-9 Meat to eat:** Their craving for meat reminded them of their life in Egypt. Their appetites for meat, therefore, caused them to forget their struggles in bondage. It seems that they had spoiled themselves with a diet of meat in Egypt, for at this time the manna was not enough (See Ex 16:14-36). The miracle of the presence of the manna was not enough to reassure them that God was taking care of their need for food. One point is at least proved in reference to miracles. Men become accustomed to every evidence of the presence of God, and thus continue to complain in reference to the struggles of life. In this case, the manna miracle did not increase their faith. They still complained. A constant witness of miracles, therefore, is not sufficient to produce a strong faith. Only when one lives in the absence of miracles, and in the midst of struggle, is his faith increased. Miracles initiate faith, but do not sustain or build faith. Great faith can be developed only outside the presence of miracles. Only when walks by faith, not by sight, will his or her faith grow.

### BURDEN OF LEADERSHIP ON MOSES

**11:10-17 The people weep:** The people were organized in their protest in that every man wept at the door of his tent. The punishment by fire among them did not stop their complaining. **Afflicted your servant:** Because of Moses' despair, he thought that he had done something wrong in reference to his leadership of the peo-

ple. There may be some complaint on the part of Moses for God laying the burden of leading the people on his shoulders. Moses' complaint, therefore, was that he was not able to lead such a people. If he trusted in his own leadership skills, he could not lead the people. God allowed the burden of leadership to weigh heavy on Moses. It was heavy to the point that Moses realized that he must trust in God to carry him through the task of leading the people. God leads His leaders into realizing that they alone cannot lead His people. Only those who trust in the power of God in their lives can effectively lead God's people to where He wants them. **Kill me:** Moses' despair was so great that he knew that he could not go on with the complaining of the people. **Seventy men:** In order to relieve some of the responsibility of the burden of leadership, God instructed Moses to delegate responsibility to the elders. This had been done before as a result of Jethro's counsel (Ex 18:17-26). However, in this case the emphasis is on the spiritual leadership of the people. Good leadership does not focus the attention of the people exclusively on one person, but on the many who stand up to lead the people. Centralized leadership will always lead to the downfall of the people.

### GOD'S PROMISE OF FOOD

**11:18-23 Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow:** God would provide the meat through the giving of the quail. However, there is some punishment in the giving of the quail in that the people would initially be overwhelmed by one month's quail in one day. The people could not eat their own flocks and herds which were meant for sacrifices and daily milk. **Despised the Lord:** This was the sin of the people, not the complaining. The complaining was only an indication of a greater problem among the people. They followed their lusts for the pleasures of Egypt rather than the will of the Lord. They wanted to trust in the security of their life in Egypt, rather than put their faith in God. **Lord's hand too short:** In order to prove that God can care completely for His people, in one day He produced a month's worth of quail for the people. They were overwhelmed by the quail, and thus taught



that God's provision for His people is not inadequate. God can care for His people far beyond their dreams.

### GIVING OF THE SPIRIT

**11:24-30 *The Spirit rested on them:*** The Holy Spirit came on the elders as He was upon Moses. Their inspired praises of God and prophesying the will of God was a witness to the faithfulness and presence of God. Through this miraculous event the people were encouraged by the presence of God. ***Eldad ... Medad:*** We are not told if these two elders were present at the tabernacle. Regardless of their presence at the tabernacle, the Lord poured out the Spirit on them. Though Joshua recommended that they not be allowed to prophesy, Moses counselled that regardless of where they were, they were to be allowed to do the work of God (Compare Lk 9:49,50). God works in order to include, not exclude those who seek to do His will. ***Would that all ... were prophets:*** In Moses's response to Joshua he affirmed that it would be good that everyone speak the praises of God and teach His will. In this way the work of God would continue to all nations. We see in this act of prophesying that God wanted His prophets not to isolate their work to themselves, but they teach the nations the wonderful works of God.

### GIVING OF THE QUAIL

**11:31-35 *Quail from the sea:*** In reference to the location of the camp of Israel, this would have been from the Gulf of Aqaba, or the Red Sea. The quail could easily be caught, so the one who caught the least caught ten homers, or approximately 65 bushels. ***A very great plague:*** That which was to be a blessing, was also a curse. Because of their complaints, the quail was given. However, the quail was given in a manner that resulted in a sickness among the people. As a result, many in the camp died. They thus reaped the result of their sin of desiring the material security of Egypt over trust in the Lord. When people seek to trust in things of this world, they will reap the consequence of a weak relationship with God. One cannot have a great faith in God when he has a great faith in the things of the world. Faith in God that is

based on one's faith in the things of this world is a weak faith.

## Chapter 12

### SIN OF MIRIAM

**12:1-16 Miriam ... Aaron:** It seems that Miriam, the prophetess (Ex 15:20,21), initiated the complaint on this occasion. Aaron, on the other hand, was the follower who succumbed to the presumption of his older sister. They both complained about Moses marrying a foreigner, Zipporah. And more serious, they complained about Moses being the sole leader of the people. Moses had been married to Zipporah for many years by the time this complaint arose, for he married Zipporah sometime during the forty years he was in exile in Sinai (Ex 2:21). In the controversy here among brothers and sister (Miriam, Aaron, and the younger, Moses), God ignored what seemed here to be a racial complaint in reference to Zipporah. God focused on the complaint concerning the challenge of Moses' authority. God considered this very serious, for He knew that this challenge would come again with the rebellion of Korah. **The Lord spoke suddenly:** Questioning the authority of God's anointed representative was serious, and thus needed an immediate response. God spoke indirectly to other prophets through visions and dreams, but with Moses He spoke mouth to mouth, face to face. His relationship with Moses was personal. Moses was God's mediator between Himself and the people. Moses became the example of how God would relate to all men personally through the mediatorship of Jesus (See Hb 3:2-6). Under no circumstances, therefore, was Moses' position to be challenged. **Leprous:** God's punishment of the instigator of the complaints was immediate. The punishment of Miriam was not only in being stricken with the horrible disease of leprosy, but the social implications of the disease, that she would be driven from social contact with Israel (See Lv 13,14). Her sin was in thinking that she could be elevated to the position and function of Moses, and thus be exalted before the people. But her pride resulted in her humiliation and banishment from the people (See

Pv 16:18; Is 10:33). **Moses ... my lord:** Upon seeing the sudden affliction of his sister, Aaron's attitude changed immediately in that he addressed his younger brother, Moses, as lord. His recognition of Moses' mediatorship with God was the only thing that would save his sister, Miriam. **Seven days:** This period of time was sufficient to chastise one who had sought to question God's anointed authority among the people. We see in the incident that God's authority among His people must not be questioned. Because there was no written word by which this authority could be stated to the people, in this historical case it was revealed directly through Moses. Some thus assumed that Moses made himself who he was. God's authority today is through His word, not man. Because of this incident we know that the authority of His word must not be questioned (Compare Jn 12:48; Gl 1:6-9; Rv 22:18,19). **Wilderness of Paran:** This would be Kadesh-barnea (Dt 1:18).

## Chapter 13

### SURVEYING THE PROMISED LAND

**13:1-16 Send men:** At this time a scouting party was commissioned to spy out the land of promise in order to make plans for immediate conquest. One man was taken from each tribe in order to form the party. Ephraim and Manasseh represented the descendants of Joseph. The Levites were separated from the other tribes, and thus were not included. The descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh completed the twelve tribes of Israel. **By the commandment of the Lord:** When comparing the statement of Deuteronomy 1:19-23 with this context, it seems that the "commandment of the Lord" here refers only to God allowing the people to do what they sought to do, that is, spy out the land. God wanted them to fully trust in Him, not in the report of spies. Moses' account in Deuteronomy indicates that God initially wanted the people to go immediately to engage the occupants of the land of Canaan, without seeking reassurance from a scouting party. So their lack of faith in the power of God to be with them in the immediate conquest was manifested in their sending of a scouting party. On this occasion, we

must view God's command to send the scouting party only as an appeasement of the peoples' lack of faith. But as history unfolded in reference to the events that took place, the scouting party only increased their doubts and lack of faith in God. Their lack of faith subsequently led to their humiliation of wandering in the wilderness for almost forty years.

**13:17-25 *Spy out the land:*** The normal requests for information was made by Moses in order to reassure the strength of the people of Canaan, as well as reconfirm their goal of dwelling in a land that flowed with milk and honey. All the requests were indications of Israel's lack of faith in trusting God to take the land, as well as trusting in God's promise of what was waiting for them when they possessed the land. We must keep in mind that Moses did not need this information. He only asked the spies to bring the information back in order to reassure the people to go up and take the land immediately.

**13:26-33** The report of the spies confirmed the fact that Canaan was a land of milk and honey (See Ex 3:8). But in the minds of the spies, the land was filled with a strong people who lived in fortified cities. It is certain that not all the people were giants in the land, nor all the land was desolate. The negative spies simply picked the points on which they wanted to focus in order to give a discouraging report. In this sense, therefore, their report was not completely true. By being selective in what they reported, they discouraged the people. ***Grasshoppers:*** Other than Caleb and Joshua, the weakness of the faith of the other spies was revealed by the comparison of themselves with the occupants of the land. Instead of giving their weak faith an opportunity to grow by trusting in God, the spies discouraged the people from going up immediately to take the land. It is possible that the spies believed that dwelling in the wilderness was better than taking the land, for they gave no encouragement to the people to prepare to take the land. Since they were not willing to take the land immediately as God wanted, then at least some of them were thinking about returning to Egypt. We assume that God knew that they would rebel against immediately taking the land. Nevertheless,

He offered them the opportunity in order to test their faith.

## Chapter 14

### NEGATIVE RESPONSE OF THE PEOPLE

**14:1-10** *The people wept:* Their lack of faith in God moved them to quickly accept the pessimistic report of the spies who also focused on the negative aspects of the land (See Dt 1:27). **Return to Egypt:** Total rebellion had now set in. In their minds they had forgotten the struggles of bondage in Egypt. They knew they could not survive in the wilderness, and thus they formed a plan to return to Egypt. The plan, however, was a rebellion against God. **Joshua ... Caleb ... tore their clothes:** Leadership demands a positive attitude. These two had also gone with the spies. They had the same information as the other spies about desolate parts of the land and the strong stature of some of the inhabitants. However, they knew through faith that the land could be taken. The leadership of Joshua and Caleb was manifested at this time of social chaos among the people, for they focused on the positive and not the negative. Negative spirited people cannot be leaders for God. And when times of social chaos prevail, leaders must be positive for God. **Stone them:** Leaders who stand with God and for that which is right will often be rejected by the people (See At 6:8 - 7:60). And thus, if one is not able to stand against the erroneous beliefs and practices of the masses in order to do that which is right, he or she cannot be a leader for God. Rocks will always be thrown at leaders, but leaders who stand on the rock of God will always overcome. In this case, God directly intervened by appearing at the tabernacle for all to see in order to pronounce judgment on a nation of little faith that stood against His will and His leaders.

### GOD'S JUDGMENT OF THE NATION

**14:11-45** *I will make of you a greater nation:* On this occasion that would have been a turning point in the history of the world, God first addressed Moses. In the address God referred to the signs that the people had

seen. But in seeing these signs, they still did not believe to the point of fully trusting in God. The fact is that the miracles did not produce the faith that was necessary for the people to follow the commandments of the Lord into great conflict with the forces of evil. In fact, the more one depends on the miracles as his or her foundation of faith, the less one seeks to follow the commandments of God in facing the wiles of the devil. Miracles stimulate an initial faith, but as in the case of the entire nation of Israel, the initial spark of faith must only be the point from which one grows in a faith that will move mountains. Faith that moves mountains no longer needs miracles to reconfirm it (See comments Jn 20:26-31). In fact, the faith that is necessary to move the mountains cannot be built on the continual experience of miracles. Strong faith is a faith that does not walk by sight (miracles), but by trusting in the presence of God's promises through His word. Israel had been given the word of promise (to receive the land), and the word of conquest (they could take the land). But they refused to follow through by growing in faith. Because they did not follow the word of promise, God was willing to scrap the entire nation and start again to fulfill the seedline promise to Abraham. He was willing to fulfill the promise by building another nation through Moses. We must not forget, that it was God's eternal plan to bring Jesus into the world for the salvation of all those who walk by faith. If this could not be fulfilled through Israel, then God was willing to wait until after building another nation through Moses. ***I beseech You:*** As the mediator between the Israelites and God, Moses here assumed his example of what Christ would do in the centuries to come. Moses pled Israel's case on the foundation of God's attributes. God is longsuffering, merciful and forgiving. For the sake of a faithless nation, Moses pled that God manifest the attributes of His character in forgiving their sin. ***I have pardoned:*** Though there was forgiveness, there had to be punishment. Except for Joshua and Caleb, all among the people who were twenty years of age and older would not see the land of promise. The period during which this death would take place was according to the number of days the spies were in the land,

that is forty years for forty days. This was the time for a generation to pass away, and thus there was mercy in the punishment. Instead of striking this generation dead immediately, they were at least allowed to live out their lives in the wilderness. Only the unbelieving spies died by a plague. **The people mourned greatly:** It is not that the people refused to believe the word of God. They did not believe to the point of taking the land immediately. However, they did believe concerning their fate to dwell in the wilderness for forty years, for they all mourned. It is possible that the plague that immediately killed the spies was evidence that God meant what He said. **We will go up:** Regardless of the pronouncement of God's judgment that they could not take the land, the people sought to go on their own without the blessing of God. Unfortunately, man by his own works cannot atone for his own sin. Israel had to pay the price for her rebellion, and thus could not change God's punishment by seeking to walk alone in her presumptuous efforts to conquer the land. The fact that they were beaten back by the Amalekites and the Canaanites proved that without God they could not take the land. Their children would remember well this event when they would seek to take the land forty years later under the command of Joshua. They would know that they must go with both the blessing and help of God. When they eventually took the land, therefore, they had to believe that they did so because of God's help.

### From Wilderness Wandering To Initial Conquest

(15:1 - 21:35)

**Outline:** (1) Review of the law (15:1-41), (2) The rebellion (16:1-50), (3) Confirmation of the priesthood (17:1-13), (4) Duties of the priests and Levites (18:1-32), (5) Ordinances of purification (19:1-22), (6) Moses' sin in providing water (20:1-13), (7) Refusal of passage by Edom (20:14-21), (8) Succession of Eleazar to be high priest (20:22-29), (9) The brazen serpent (21:1-9), (10) Conquest of the Amorites (21:10-35)

## Chapter 15

### REVIEW OF THE LAW

This section of the book begins with Israel's leaving Mt. Sinai. It gives little information concerning the al-

most 38 years that Israel was in the wilderness. The little information that is given concerning the wilderness wanderings is as if Moses did not want to record these sad years of punishment and humiliation, assuming that Israel's legacy of sin should never be repeated. However, God did not forsake His people during this period of wandering. He continued to feed them with manna and quail. The people also had the continuing miracle that their clothes did not wear out, nor did their shoes wear from their feet (Dt 8:2-6; 29:5,6). It is also interesting to note that during this period they did not circumcise their babies (Ja 5:2-8). Joshua reveals that they did not celebrate the Passover during this period (Ja 5:10), though they continued to observe the laws in reference to the Sabbath (Nm 15:32-36). After the wandering, Moses revealed that the period of wandering was for the purpose of humbling Israel to trust totally in God (Dt 8:2,3).

The manner by which Israel lived in the wilderness is not revealed. However, from Numbers 20:1 we could assume that they did not remain in the organized manner that they were in when at the foot of Mt. Sinai. We could assume that the tribes scattered somewhat throughout Sinai, but in 20:1 they all came together again in the desert of Zin at the time of Miriam's death.

**15:1-21 Sweet savor to the Lord:** These repeated instructions concerning offerings to the Lord are made to emphasize the worshiper's desire to please the Lord. The metaphor that the Lord smells the offering means that when one makes the offering, the Lord is pleased with the contrite heart of the worshiper. The point here is that when one makes an offering he is to make it according to the will of God. One does not have the choice to determine his own way of offering since it is to the Lord that the offering is made. The lesson is that the worshiper does not have a choice as to how he would worship God, for it is God's choice as to how He wants to be worshiped (See comments Mk 7:1-9). **Bread of the land:** With the blessings that come from the Lord are the responsibilities to remember from whom they come. **Offerings:** The laws concerning the offering of the first-fruits here included that which was done in the home



(See also Lv 2:14). There were two reasons for the offering of the firstfruits. (1) The offering expressed the people's thanksgiving to God for all that He had done for them. (2) The offering of the firstfruits was a means by which the Levites were supported to work on behalf of the spiritual needs of the people.

**15:22-36 Done unintentionally:** This would be sin committed out of ignorance by either the entire nation or by an individual. Atonement could be made for such a sin. **Does anything presumptuously:** This would be sin that was committed out of defiance of God's will. The one who sins willfully would be cut off from the people because he despised the word of God. The example of the one who was stoned for picking up sticks on the Sabbath illustrated the presumptuous sin. The individual knew the law that had previously been given (Ex 31:14,15; 35:2,3). Nevertheless, the individual ignored the word of God, and committed a defiant act against the law of God. This context, therefore, illustrates God's grace toward those who sin out of ignorance, but manifests His judgment against those who willfully defy His law.

**15:37-41 Tassels in the borders:** These would be fringes on the borders of their clothing in order to remind them of the laws of God. By remembering the laws of God, they would guard themselves from sinning ignorantly against God. **Do not seek after your own heart:** This is the spirit of idolatry within man to create a god after his own image, and then a religion after his own desires. When men forget the law of God, they will create their own gods and laws to soothe their own consciences. When one is ignorant of the law of God, he will create his own religious laws, and then digress from the true God of heaven to a god he creates after his own imagination.

## Chapter 16

### THE REBELLION

**16:1-19** It is in the context of this event that the authority of Moses was challenged. The subsequent punishment of the conspirators reveals God's harsh judgment against any who would seek to defy His anointed leaders. **Korah:** Korah was a Levite of the family of Ko-

hathites, a cousin of Moses and Aaron. He was joined by Dathan, Abiram and On who were of the tribe of Reuben. Korah recruited 250 fellow conspirators from the tribe of Levi. **You take too much on you:** Their error was in their self appointment to leadership. In doing such, they questioned the God-appointed leadership of both Moses and Aaron. They sought to set aside God's appointed leadership in order to set themselves up as leaders. It was true that they were part of the holy assembly of Israel, but they were wrong in assuming that being a part of the holy assembly gave them a right to set aside the leadership of both Moses and Aaron. They presumptuously thought that they could assume leadership as priests among the people. **You assume too much:** Moses' words were a rebuke, but also a repetition of what Korah had said to Aaron and himself. In seeking the priesthood of Aaron, Korah was seeking the spiritual leadership of the people. He was involved in a sin of arrogance. Dathan and Abiram were challenging the civil leadership of Moses by ignoring the fact that they could not go into the land of milk and honey because of their own rebellion against God. This generation of leaders was barred by God from entering the land of promise, and thus at this time they thought they would set aside God's appointed leadership. **You make yourself a prince:** They were accusing Moses of making himself a dictator over the people. They had forgotten that Moses was directly appointed by God. Moses' reply was that he had not led them for the purpose of gain, nor did he lead them in a harsh manner. He was not a dictator or a self-appointed leader. Their accusations against Moses, therefore, were only for the purpose of justifying their mutiny against God's appointed authority. Their accusations, therefore, we launched against Moses on the basis of political reasons.

**16:20-40** Because of the pleas of Moses and Aaron, the entire assembly of Israel was not destroyed by God because of the sin of one man. However, the families of Korah, Dathan and Abiram were destroyed with their fathers as the judgment of God came upon them and the 250 other conspirators. The judgment did not come as a

result of a civil war that could have broken out between the followers of Moses and the followers of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. The judgment was direct from God as Moses here indicated. The judgment was swift and definite in that the conspirators were swallowed up by the earth. The gravity of the sin was manifested in the fact that there was no time made for repentance and sacrifices. This was sin against God's anointed leadership, as well as defiance against the law of God. For this reason the judgment was given in a manner that it struck fear in the hearts of all Israel. Since God knew that such mutinous behavior would eventually come in the future of Israel, He wanted this illustration of judgment to be known among all Israel so that there would be no doubt concerning His attitude toward those who would act in a mutinous way against His anointed leaders.

**16:41-50 Israel murmured:** The ignorance of the people prevailed over common sense. They held Moses and Aaron personally responsible for the judgment that came upon the conspirators. It is evident, therefore, that the schemes of Korah, Dathan and Abiram were also in the hearts of many of the people of Israel. God's judgment, therefore, was again unleashed against the nation to the point that 14,700 perished from a plague that He sent among the people. The plague was stopped only when Aaron made atonement for Israel.

## Chapter 17

### CONFIRMATION OF THE PRIESTHOOD

**17:1-13** The confirmation of the priesthood of Aaron was to prevent others from assuming the position. **Staff:** Aaron's staff was a symbol of the tribe of Levi. This miraculous action was to prove to all Israel that the sons of Aaron and the Levites were chosen by God and separated from Israel for the spiritual service of the nation. They were thus not self-appointed. **Kept for a sign:** Or, it was kept for a sign of the God-appointment of Aaron and his sons and the tribe of Levi as the priestly tribe of Israel. The exercise confirmed the priesthood of the Levites at this time. Nevertheless, the staff was to be kept in the ark of the covenant for all time in order to remind the

people that Aaron, his sons, and the tribe of Levi were the God-appointed priests of Israel. No one was to presume to be a high priest of Israel other than those who descended from Aaron.

## Chapter 18

### DUTIES OF THE PRIESTS AND LEVITES

**18:1-7** These instructions in this historical context reemphasize the sacred duties of the priests (See 3:1 – 4:49). If Israel rejected or struggled against God's official appointment of Aaron, his sons and the Levites, then they were actually struggling against God and rejecting His will. At the same time, the Levites were warned to assume the responsibilities of their appointment, being cautious that they follow God's instructions (See 17:13).

**18:8-32** *I have given them to you as a portion:* Aaron is here reminded that he, his sons and the Levites, as the spiritual leaders of Israel, were to be supported by all Israel. Since they were to function on behalf of Israel in spiritual matters, it was the obligation of those for whom they ministered before God, to fully support them. Because they could not work as all Israel in order to provide for their families, it was the responsibility of the rest of Israel to support them. We understand from these instructions that the priests were to take a portion of all that was offered for the sacrifices (See comments 1 Co 9:1-14). *Covenant of salt:* It was a covenant that would not be dissolved, but would last throughout the generations of Israel. Only when the generations of Israel ended in Christ would the Levitical priesthood cease. *Tithe:* The priests were to receive a tenth from the nation, but they in turn were to offer a tenth of the tithe as an offering to the Lord. The priests, therefore, were not without their responsibility of offering to the Lord. The lesson is that no one is exempt from making an offering to the Lord. Though the priests worked full-time because of the offerings of the people, they were also to tithe to the Lord that which they received from the people. No one was to rob God by keeping back offerings (Ml 3:8-10). Those who presume to worship without offerings are deceiving themselves.

## Chapter 19

## ORDINANCES OF PURIFICATION

**19:1-10 Ordinance of the law:** This unique phrase here indicates the cleansing of Israel after the great plague that had just happened. Their defilement because of their rebellion had to be cleansed in order for them to stand again before God. There was the need for national cleansing in order to be a holy people before God. Though hygienic and spiritual cleanliness were different, the two were related in reference to Israel's acceptance before God. Hygienic cleanliness was in reference to their social contact with one another, whereas spiritual cleanliness was in reference to their connection with God. In this context, their cleansing is in reference to their contact with the many who had died during the plague (See also Lv 12-15). The laws on physical and spiritual cleanliness were from God. For one to be spiritually clean, therefore, he had to be obedient to all the laws of God in reference to cleanliness. **Water of separation:** Prepared before the need arose, this water was used for the ceremony of cleansing those who were impure from the defilement of sin. During the ceremony for cleansing that took place on this occasion, a heifer without blemish was presented to Eleazar. This heifer was slain outside the camp (See Ex 29:14; Lv 4:11,12,21). After the sprinkling of the blood of the heifer, the animal was completely consumed on the altar of sacrifice. The ashes were mixed with the water of separation that was used for the removal of sin.

**19:11-22** There were many in the camp of Israel who were unclean because they had come into contact with those who died from the plague. Though people could become unclean for other reasons (see vs 14-16), the primary reason in this context was the necessity to be cleansed because of their contact with those who died from the plague. The ceremonial procedures that were to be observed here went deeper than the ceremony. There is always the need for the people of God to cleanse themselves before God. God's people must be cleansed of defiled hearts and rebellion against His law (See Dt 6:4,5; 30:6). They must be a people who are filled with the Spirit of God, and thus continually living with a contrite heart

before God (See Ez 36:25-38). **Defiles the tabernacle:** This indicates that there is a connection between physical cleanliness and spiritual cleanliness. The physical cleanliness according to God's law was an outward manifestation of one's inner self. If one was not physically clean according to the law, then his heart of rebellion against God's law was revealed. In this context where Israel was given the laws of physical cleanliness, those who refused to submit to such laws were cut off from Israel. God's forgiveness was thus conditioned on the willingness of the individual to submit to the will of God. There was no grace without obedience to the will of God. God's grace will not save the willful sinner.

## Chapter 20

### MOSES' SIN IN PROVIDING WATER

**20:1-13 Kadesh:** This was the end of the wilderness wandering. At this point the tribes reassembled for entrance into the land of promise. From how this text reads, it seems that the tribes did not wander in the wilderness according to the organized manner they were in 38 years before this meeting at the desert of Zin. They could have been wandering separately from one another, and then organized together at this point. At this time their organizing together probably took from three to four months in order that this new generation of Israelites reacquaint themselves with one another, and then make plans to take the land. There was also the mourning of Miriam and communication with the Edomites. **There was no water:** It is possible that the springs had dried up. Or, it could have been that there was not enough water in the area for the assembly of this great multitude of approximately three million people. **Egypt:** The younger generation had not experienced Egypt. They had possibly heard of Egypt from their fathers who by this time died in the wilderness. It was for them easy to complain about going somewhere they had never been before. Their murmuring, however, is the result of people who have no vision for the future. **Speak to the rock:** These two leaders knew the consequences of murmuring against the care of the Lord. In his frustration, Moses did not

follow the exact instructions of the Lord. He struck the rock instead of speaking to it, following the instructions that had previously been given many years before when he was instructed by God to bring forth water from the rock in Meribah (Ex 17:1-7). This one error cost him his entrance into the land of promise. **Must we bring forth water:** This statement of Moses and Aaron did not bring glory to God. It was not by the power of Moses and Aaron that the water was to be provided. The water came forth by the power of God, to whom they should have given credit on this occasion (See Lv 10:3; Ps 99:5,9). **You did not believe:** Belief is always manifested in our actions. It was not that Moses had no faith in God. Moses allowed his frustrations with the people to cloud his actions in reference to what God commanded. This is often a problem with frustrated leaders. They act contrary to the will of God when the people do not obey according to the will of God. Frustrated leaders often become rebellious when proclaiming the people to be rebellious. The sin of leadership is when leaders behave in a sinful manner in order to keep the people from sin.

### REFUSAL OF PASSAGE BY EDOM

**20:14-21** Moses had assumed that conquest of the land could not happen by entering from the south. His strategy, therefore, was to divide and conquer. If the Israelites entered into the land through Jericho, then the inhabitants of the land could not assemble a great army together against them. His strategy, therefore, meant that they would have to pass through the land of Edom. **Your brother Israel:** The Edomites were the descendants of Esau, the brother of Jacob who was the father of the Israelites. Whether the Edomites still practiced circumcision after the custom of Abraham, we do not know. But as one of the buffer nations to what would become the land promised to Abraham, the great grandfather of both Esau and Jacob, we would have assumed that the Edomites would have allowed Israel the right of passage through their land. **The king's highway:** Moses reassured the king of Edom that the Israelites would not plunder Edom on their journey through the land. They would

travel the normal trade route all travelers took as they passed through Edom. **Edom refused:** The king of Edom mustered his forces to block the passage of Israel through the land. This was a fatal error on his part, as history would judge the Edomites with extinction from history because of these actions. Moses would not lead the Israelites in conflict with the descendants of the brother of Jacob. So he turned his forces away from Edom. The judgment of Edom would come later in history.

### SUCCESSION OF ELEAZAR TO BE HIGH PRIEST

**20:22-29** You rebelled against My word: Both Moses and Aaron were not allowed to enter Canaan because of their rebellion at the waters of Meribah. Both were at least 120 years old at this time, and their leadership of Israel was now coming to an end. Aaron, who was older than Moses, was to die first. **Bring them up to Mt. Hor:** There was to be no elaborate funeral ceremony over this great leader. As people sometimes get caught up in the ceremonies of the funeral of their leaders, the death of Aaron was to be quiet and obscure on a mountain, away from the ceremonies of any funeral service. Lest people lose their confidence in the leadership of God by focusing on the leadership of man, it was best that this great spiritual leader die in the obscurity of a mountain scene. When Moses and Eleazar descended from the mountain, the people saw that the spiritual leadership of Israel now rested on Eleazar. They knew that Aaron had died, and thus mourned his death for the customary thirty days.

## Chapter 21

### THE BRAZEN SERPENT

**21:1-3 Arad the Canaanite:** It may have been that Moses planned this attack into Canaan from the south, the original plan of God to enter into Canaan. However, King Arad heard of the plan, and thus routed the Israelites, taking some of them captive. **Utterly destroy:** From what the Israelites vowed, it would seem that their original plan was not to utterly vacate the Canaanites from the land. This was contrary to the plan of God to rid the land of the wicked Canaanite culture.



**21:4-9 *There is no bread:*** This, of course, was not true since God was supplying them with manna and quail. It was that they had not received the bread of Egypt which their fathers had received. They were possibly still living on the word-of-mouth communication from their fathers who had formerly lived in Egypt. The problem here was that their complaints originated from their lack of faith that God would continue to supply them while they resided in the wilderness. ***Fiery serpents:*** The bite of these serpents probably resulted in death from a burning poisonous venom. ***We have sinned:*** They at least recognized that it was sin to speak against God and His designated leader, Moses. ***Serpent of brass:*** God was establishing a foundation for symbolism that would later find substance in the sacrificial death of Jesus who would be lifted upon the cross for the spiritual healing of all men (See Jn 3:14,15; compare Is 53:5,6; Rm 8:3; 2 Co 5:21). All that people had to do in this case was to look upon the brass serpent. If they did, they would be healed. The spiritual significance in reference to Jesus on the cross would be that all men must look to Jesus for healing. It was supernatural that the fiery serpents were sent among the people. It was supernatural that the people were cured when they looked upon the brass serpent. In all that happened incident God supernaturally reaffirmed His presence with the people, and thus answered their complaints with His presence. He would remain in their presence if they would remain faithful to His law.

### CONQUEST OF THE AMORITES

**21:10-20** Other than Moab to the east of the Jordan River, the locations through which Israel journeyed are not found on our modern maps. ***Book of the wars:*** These uninspired records were kept of Israel's military exploits, especially the military conquest of the land of Canaan. These records do not exist today. ***Dug the well:*** This is the transition of the people into the land where they would provide for themselves after the miraculous provision of God during their wilderness wanderings. In this incident the Lord said He would give them water, but

they had to dig the well. God will not do for man what man can do for himself.

**21:21-35 *The Amorites:*** The Amorites were one of the primary cultural groups of the Canaanites (See Gn 10:16). The name was sometimes used to refer to all the Canaanites of the region (See Dt 1:7,19,27). At the time Israel arrived, Sihon was ruling over a part of the Amorites to the east of the Jordan River. It was not Moses' original plan to war against the Amorites on the east side of the Jordan. Because Sihon would not allow Israel to pass, but came out to fight against Israel, Israel fought against the Amorites and Sihon was defeated. Israel subsequently occupied all the cities of the Amorites (See Dt 2:30-37).

***Chemosh:*** This was the imagined god of the Moabites. The fact that Israel defeated the Amorites, who had previously defeated the Moabites, was a testimony that the imagined god of the Moabites could not deliver them from the one true and living God in which Israel believed. Though the Amorites had a great faith in their own god, their god was only imagined. They were thus trusting in themselves and the power of human faith in one's own created god. But this belief was not strong enough to stand against the one true and living God who defeated the Amorites through the proxy of the Israelite armies. Israel's victories over all the armies of the Canaanites is a testimony to the fact that God was at work among the Israelites. ***Og:*** Og was one of the last of the tribes of giants in Canaan. He was the king of a warrior nation that dwelt within walled cities. Because of the pasture lands of the territory of Og, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half the tribe of Manasseh desired to dwell in this land (See Dt 3:15-17). ***Do not fear:*** God encouraged Moses and Israel by giving them victory over the nations that would border the land of Canaan. Though inexperienced in battle, the Israelite army was successful in battles against every nation. God thus proved that He was with Israel. We would assume that Israel's confidence grew as they approached the walled cities that were within the land of Canaan. ***Heshbon:*** This city's name means "city of daughters" or "the mother city." It is significant that the people of this region had for centuries been nomadic, traveling from

one location to another. However, archaeologists have confirmed that sometime prior to the arrival of Israel to this region, the Canaanites began building cities in order to settle down in the region. Some of the cities were without walls (Dt 3:5), indicating that the people had peace with one another. When Israel arrived in the region, many of the cities were still without walls, and thus easy to conquer. With little effort they could take the land, especially since God would be fighting to strengthen them.

### Conflict With The Moabites

(22:1 - 25:18)

**Outline:** (1) Balak's efforts to curse Israel (22:1-41), (2) Balaam's curse turned to blessing (23:1 - 24:25), (3) Sin of Israel at Baal-peor (25:1-18)

## Chapter 22

### BALAK'S EFFORTS TO CURSE ISRAEL

**22:1-20 Balaam:** This incident is injected in the account of Israel's historical venture into the land of Canaan in order to give us information that their battle was not only with armies, but also with maintaining their morality among pagan nations. Balaam was a Gentile who was at least known by Balak, the king of Moab. Balaam was a religious leader about whom we know little, other than the fact that he seems to have been one of questionable character whose gift of preaching was for hire (See Jd 11; Rv 2:14). **Balak:** The news of Israel's conquests had by this time been circulated throughout the Palestinian region. Fear gripped the hearts of the Canaanites and surrounding countries, for they saw no one who could defeat the armies of Israel. It was at this time in history that the Canaanites were evidently at peace with one another, for they built cities in which to settle in the region. However, they were not at peace with one another to the extent of organizing their armies together to fight against the army of Israel. Though Moab was not one of the countries that was to be destroyed by Israel, Balak, in ignorance of this fact, sought a well-known religious personality to curse the Israelites. **Rewards of divination:** Balaam is known for being the preacher who preached for pay. He was out for hire from the highest giver (Jd

11). **You will not go:** God's answer to the messengers of Balak, was that Balaam not go in answer to the plea of Balak. Unfortunately, the appeal of the money was too great for Balaam, and eventually he succumbed to the pleas of the Moabite king. **Princes ... more numerous and ... distinguished:** There was more involved in this situation than the bribe in getting Balaam to come to the aid of Balak. Man's desire to be involved with the rich and famous was also used to entice Balaam. The thirst to become involved in the political life of those who are in power is a tremendous temptation for those who seek to be important in a world of poverty. The desire for notoriety often prevails over nobility. **House full of silver and gold:** In view of Balaam's character that we understand from Jude 11, we would interpret this statement as a subtle attempt by Balaam that he was out for hire to the highest bidder. God gave him permission to go, but God also knew the character of Balaam, that it would eventually be revealed through his lust for money. We would interpret Balaam's initial refusal to receive the silver and gold as a flippant statement to clear his name before the messengers. In actuality, however, he went for the silver and gold with which he was hired to curse Israel.

**22:21-41** God approached Balaam in three ways in order to remind him of his position in relation to Balak and the Israelites. **Angel ... standing in the way:** The first obstacle to Balaam going to Balak in fulfillment of his desires for hire came from an angel who could be seen only by the donkey. The angel stood in the road in order to restrict the passage of Balaam. **A path in the vineyard:** The second effort to dissuade Balaam was when the angel stood in the road in the vineyard in order to block again the passage of Balaam. **In a narrow place:** The third effort of God to stop Balaam was when the angel stood in a narrow passage where it was impossible for the donkey to pass. Throughout all this resistance to block Balaam by the angel standing in the way of the donkey, Balaam complained to the donkey and unmercifully struck his donkey, for he had not seen the angel. At this point is recorded a case where an animal talked by the power of the Lord. **Your way is perverse:** It is here that we understand

that the motive for Balaam going to Balak was because of his lust of money. If the donkey had not turned from the path of the angel, the angel would have slain Balaam. Balaam eventually went to Balak, and subsequently was later slain in Moab's battle with Israel. **Promote you with honor:** Balaam's lust for pomp, position and power made his motives perverse before the Lord. This is good advice for both politicians and preachers who seek the same for themselves at the expense of the people they serve.

## Chapter 23

### BALAAM'S CURSE TURNED TO BLESSING

**23:1-12** After Balak had built the seven altars, and the sacrifices were made, Balaam could only bless Israel, and not curse the nation as Balak had requested. Within the pronouncements made by Balaam, God spoke of the uniqueness of the nation of Israel. **The people will dwell alone:** Because of Israel's belief in the one true and living God, she would dwell alone among the nations who had created gods after their own imagination. She would be alone throughout the centuries because of her belief. **Who can count the dust of Jacob:** Balaam prophesied that throughout the centuries to come, Israel would grow into a mighty people as was promised to Abraham (See Gn 12:1-3). **The righteous:** Israel was a nation of good people, and thus did not deserve to be cursed by a pagan nation. **What have you done to me:** Balak's reaction to Balaam's blessing of Israel was his realization that Israel would be against him. To his reaction Balaam reminded Balak that he could only pronounce that which God put in his mouth. Of course, the blessing was indirectly a curse of Balak, which curse he suffered in the near future by his death.

**23:13-26** The same preparations and offerings were again made as were done for the first pronouncement of Balaam. In this prophecy, God spoke directly to Balak. **God is not a man:** The God of Israel was not created after the imagination of the Israelites. For this reason, He cannot tell a lie as Balak demanded. Neither could the destiny of Israel be changed, as men change their minds according to their own desires. The God of Israel was not

a god who could be manipulated by the whims of men as could the god of the Moabites. This pronouncement of Balaam was the preacher's lesson to an idolater who controlled his people by manipulating their religious beliefs concerning their false god, Chemosh. **God is with him:** Through Balaam, God reminded Balak that He had proved many times that He would be with His people. They were thus a strong and confident people with the strength of an ox. The nation of Israel existed because of God, not because of the leadership of any man. The existence of Moab depended on the power of King Balak. But the existence and power of Israel rested in God. **A people will rise up:** This prophecy that was surely well-known by every Israelite, spoke of the nation of Israel. She would rise up as a lion and eat until the prey was consumed. No enemy, therefore, would be able to stand against her. If Balak would be the enemy of Israel, therefore, then the nation of Moab would be eaten as the prey of Israel. **Do not curse them:** Balak's frustration is revealed in these words. Since Balaam could not curse Israel, then he asks that he say nothing. Balaam reminded Balak that he could only say what the Lord put in his mouth. But this was not sufficient for Balak since Israel posed a great threat to him. He wanted divine help in defeating the threat of Israel.

### Chapter 24

**23:27 – 24:14** Israel dwelling in tents according to their tribes: This was surely an awesome sight to behold. All the nation of Israel that would change the world forever was dwelling in one place at this time in history, a moment that would never be repeated again. Balaam could see the people around whom the history of the world would be made and the people through whom God would eventually bring the Redeemer into the world. For centuries God had worked to bring this people to the brink of the Jordan River in order to possess the land of Canaan. Centuries later He would through Israel bring the Son of God to the cross for the redemption of mankind. Neither Balak nor Balaam understood any of this, and thus Balaam could only bless the heritage of God. **Vi-**

**sion of the Almighty:** When the Spirit came upon Balaam, he pronounced the purpose and will of God through Israel. This was the oracle of God, the blessing of His people who would bring about His eternal purpose. **Blessed is he who blesses you:** Unfortunately, Balak could not see the work of God in Israel. He, as many other nations, did not see the eternal plan of God to work through Israel to bring the Messiah into the world. Through this nation that now rested in the valley, God was continuing the seedline of woman who would crush the head of Satan (See Gn 3:15). Those who would support Israel in God's plan to settle the nation in the land of Canaan, would be blessed. However, those who would work against Israel, would find themselves working against the plan of God.

**24:15-19** In this pronouncement of Balaam, he told Balak what Israel would do to Moab. **Star:** A king would come out of Israel who would bring judgment upon Moab. Though Balaam was speaking of earthly events among nations, some have concluded that a secondary reference here is to the star that appeared during the time of the birth of the Messiah. **Scepter:** Reference here is to the rule of kings. A ruler would arise in history who would crush the rule of Moab. He would have dominion over his enemies. Again, some have assumed that reference is to the rule of King Jesus over His enemies. In the centuries after this event, Jesus did reign over his enemies (See comments Dn 2:44; 7:13,14; Ph 2:5-11; Rv 2:27; 3:21). But in the context of these immediate events, the kings of Israel would eventually rule over Moab in the centuries to come.

**24:20-25** In this final discourse, Balaam turned his prophecy toward the nations. Edom would become the possession of Israel, which prophecy came true during the reign of David. Because of their spiteful actions against Israel when they initially came out of Egypt, they would be destroyed forever as a people. The Kenites would be taken into captivity. Asshur and Eber would, as the Edomites, perish forever. Thus ended the final pronouncements of God through Balaam, after which both Balak and Balaam went their way.

## Chapter 25

## SIN OF ISRAEL AT BAAL-PEOR

**25:1-5** *The people began to play the harlot:* This moral and spiritual apostasy on the part of Israel may seem incomprehensible in view of the many struggles through which God had brought them. But it revealed the continual problem they had in dwelling among other people (See Ex 34:12-16; Dt 7:1-6). Led by the daughters of Moab, Israelite men succumbed to the lure of bowing themselves to false gods. The seriousness of the matter was manifested in the sternness of the punishment for their immoral actions. The leaders of the people whom God held responsible, were first hanged. People are directed by their leaders, and thus if the leaders do not lead people to God, they are responsible. The second action that had to be done was to rid the nation of those who had committed the sin. And thus the judges executed those who had joined themselves to women who worshiped the Baal of Peor.

**25:6-18** The brazen sin permeated the camp of Israel to the point that one without shame brought a Midianite woman before the assembly in the sight of Moses. This woman was brought into the camp even while supplications were being made to stop the plague that was ravaging through Israel. **Phinehas:** On this occasion, the righteous indignation of Phinehas moved him to take immediate action. Both Zimri and Cozbi were thrust through with a spear. Because he acted quickly, Phinehas and his heritage were rewarded with a covenant of perpetual priesthood in Israel. **Hostile ... with their tricks:** Deception was apparently part of the problem in reference to Israel's sin with the Midianites. It may have been that the innocence of Israel was exploited by the Midianites. Nevertheless, though the Israelites were innocently tricked or deceived, they were still responsible for their sin. The Midianites paid the price for the sin in that God judged them through the proxy of the Israelite army (See ch 31). It seems that Balaam played some part in this moral destruction of Israel in that he condoned or counselled both the Israelite men and Moabite women to commit fornication (See 31:16; compare Rv 2:14).



## Preparations For Entering Canaan

(26:1 – 36:13)

**Outline:** (1) Second census of Israel (26:1-65), (2) Inheritance laws for women (27:1-11), (3) Joshua anointed as leader (27:12-23), (4) Repetition of offering laws and holy days (28:1 – 29:40), (5) Laws concerning vows (30:1-16), (6) War with the Midianites (31:1-54), (7) Assigning of land east of the Jordan (32:1-42), (8) Israel's camps from Egypt to Canaan (33:1-49), (9) Instructions concerning land allotments (33:50 – 35:34), (10) Laws concerning the inheritance of daughters (36:1-13)

## Chapter 26

## SECOND CENSUS OF ISRAEL

**26:1-65** This was the second census taken of the nation of Israel. The laws for taking the census were given in Exodus 30:12. The purpose of the first census was to determine the number of males for war (1:28). This second census was to prepare the people for occupation of the land of Canaan. In this census, only those who were 20 years old and older were counted. The total number was 601,730, which was slightly less than the census of males that was taken in chapters 1 & 2. **The land will be divided:** The allotment of the land was to be according to the size of the tribes, and then according to the casting of lots. The larger portions of land were probably first determined for the larger tribes, and then lots were cast for the land (33:54). The casting of the lots made sure that no nepotism or favoritism was practiced in the distribution of the land. **The Levites:** No land inheritance was given to the Levites. They were allocated cities within the land. **They will surely die:** It was a new nation that was entering the land. During the time of the rebellion when they refused to enter Canaan 38 years before, those who were of the age of 20 and older had died in the wilderness. This was a new generation. They were not responsible for the sins of their fathers, and thus were ready to enter the land that was promised to their fathers. Only Joshua and Caleb of the older generation were allowed to enter. They were allowed to enter because of their faith 38 years before when they wanted, against the counsel of the other spies, to go up immediately take the land. They were able to enter the land by faith.

## Chapter 27

## INHERITANCE LAWS FOR WOMEN

**27:1-11 *Our father died in the wilderness:*** The father of the daughters of Zelophehad was not of the rebellion of Korah, and thus died a natural death. But he had no sons through whom inheritance traditionally came (See Dt 25:5-10). The request of these daughters was valid, and thus inheritance was given to them. If a man died without a son, then the right of inheritance was passed through the daughters. This law of inheritance advanced the womanhood of Israel, for it gave women legal rights that previously they did not have in reference to inheritance laws.

## JOSHUA ANOINTED AS LEADER

**27:12-23 *Mt. Abarim:*** From this mountain God showed Moses the land of milk and honey. Though he was not allowed to enter because of his sin at Meribah (20:1-13), he was allowed to see the land. It was now time for Moses to transfer leadership to one who could lead Israel to the completion of God's promise. ***Joshua:*** God saw in Joshua the one who could lead Israel in the conquest of the land. He was thus set before the assembly of Israel, and then charged and designated the successor of Moses. He, as Caleb, proved his leadership 38 years before when he disagreed with the other ten spies who discouraged the people. He was willing to speak against that which was wrong, and thus manifested one of the first qualifications that a leader must have. Though the majority might consent to that which is wrong, God's leaders must be willing to stand alone for that which is right. ***Judgment of Urim:*** Moses spoke face to face with God. However, God's communication with His primary leader was now changing. Joshua must go before the priest who would make judgments in reference to the Urim and Thummim. These were two small objects in the ephod that was worn by the priests. The objects were used for determining judgments from God (Ex 28:30). Joshua thus assumed the position of a military leader, for from this time forward Israel needed such a leader in the conquest of the land.

**Chapter 28****REPETITION OF OFFERING LAWS & HOLY DAYS**

**28:1-15** Before Israel entered Canaan, it was necessary to remind the people of their daily, weekly, monthly and yearly offerings in worship to God. These offerings were necessary in order that the people be reminded of the One who brought them into the land and sustained them there if they remained faithful to God. Though the instructions concerning these offerings might be confusing to us, they were understood by Israel in the context of the rural setting of the nation when the people settled throughout the land. There was no "general assembly" for worship in the instructions concerning worship and offerings, and thus the families of Israel settled in the country on small farms that were scattered from one another throughout the land. Their offerings, therefore, were the occasion for them to worship God in a family setting. Every offering that was to be eaten by the family was an opportunity for the parents to teach the children concerning the significance of the offering. We must understand the context of these offerings, therefore, in reference to the rural setting in which Israel lived in Canaan. We must be careful not to read into the context of the worship of Israel our worship culture of general assemblies in designated places of worship, which thing was foreign to the worship of the families of Israel.

**28:16-31** The Passover had not been observed throughout the wilderness wanderings. But now it was time to rehearse the laws concerning the time and event of the Passover (See Ex 12:16; Lv 23:7,8). Immediately after the Passover, the feast of unleavened bread was to begin (See Lv 23:5,6). This feast lasted for seven days and was the offering of the firstfruits of the harvest (Ex 34:22).

**Chapter 29**

**29:1-6** The feast of trumpets was so named because the trumpets were blown throughout the land. This feast was conducted in the middle of the Jewish year. Blowing of the trumpets was Israel's means of national communication. They could know when the trumpets were blown by the blowing of the ram's horn throughout the land.

We are not told exactly how this was done. However, we would assume that every rural family had a ram's horn that was to be blown when signaled by the blowing of the horn by the residents of an adjoining farm. The signal could thus be relayed throughout the land that the trumpets had been blown by the priests.

**29:7-11** The day of atonement was the day when an offering was made for the sins of the people. This was an annual event wherein the high priest entered into the holy of holies of the tabernacle to make atonement for the nation as a whole.

**29:12-40** The feast of tabernacles (booths or tents) lasted for seven days. The people dwelt in tents during this time in order to commemorate their wandering in the wilderness. It was a time to be thankful to God for bringing them into the land of Canaan wherein they could dwell in their own houses. All of the offerings and feasts were in thanksgiving to God for His grace in bringing them into the land of milk and honey. If such were required of Israel in order to thank God for the material blessings they had received, then certainly the Christian should be more thankful for the spiritual salvation that he has received in Christ. For this reason, the Christian is a priest of God on duty continually, offering up his entire life in gratitude to God (Rm 12:1,2; 2 Co 4:15).

## Chapter 30

### LAWS CONCERNING VOWS

**30:1-16** *He will not break his word:* Vows were made both to God and man. When a man spoke the word of his vow, it was binding on him as a self-imposed law. No written contract had to be made for a man was to be good for his word. But this was not the case with certain women. A woman's vow had to be certified by the man to whom she was responsible. There were different vows made in this context, one in reference to general vows and the other which was more specific as the vow of a Nazarite (See ch 6). *Woman ... in her youth:* If a daughter was still living with her father, then her vow had to have the approval of her father. *If she should marry:* If a woman was under a vow at the time of her marriage, then her

husband had the authority to either ratify or annul the vow. If a woman made a vow after she was married, then the husband could either allow or nullify the vow. If the husband did not allow the vow, then she was not obligated to keep it before the Lord. **A widow and a divorced woman:** In this case, the vows of those who had no man to whom account was to be given were based on the laws that applied to men in the making of their vows.

## Chapter 31

### WAR WITH THE MIDIANITES

**31:1-24** What is recorded here is Moses' obedience to the will of God to make war with the Midianites (25:17,18). **Take vengeance:** Because the command to go to war with the Midianites was from God, this was the vengeance of God against those who had deceived His people. God's vengeance upon Midian must be understood from a greater perspective than punishing Midian for seducing Israel to sin. We must always keep in mind that Israel was the seedline nation through whom God would bring the Redeemer into the world. Any nation that set itself against Israel was setting itself against the redemptive work of God. We must understand that Satan was working behind the scenes to destroy the seedline promise that was initiated in Genesis 3:15 and continued through God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Satan also worked behind the scenes to destroy the seedline, and thus destroy the work of God to crush his head. In order to warn all nations against devising any plots to destroy Israel, they were given another example through the destruction of Midian not to interfere with God's people, and thus seek to interfere with the seedline work of God. **They warred against the Midianites:** With only 12,000 men, Israel caught the Midianites by surprise and slew all their males and five of their kings. Balaam was among the slain because he counselled the women of Midian to seduce the men of Israel. **Moses was angry:** He was angry because the army had saved alive the women and children. He subsequently ordered that the older women be killed, as well as all the male children. The Israelite men had forgotten that it was the Midian women who

had deceived them into committing fornication. It could have been, therefore, that the men with whom some had committed fornication sought to keep alive some of the women with whom they had sinned. Though we view this judgment as harsh, we must keep in mind that God was clearing an immoral culture from the path of Israel. When they entered Canaan, Israel was to cleanse the land of corrupted cultures that were bent on immorality. The wickedness of the Canaanites had at this time grown to the point of no moral return, and thus, as with Sodom and Gomorrah, they had to be judged with annihilation. No adult was to be left alive who could infest Israel with immoral behavior. God did not want Israel to go in the way of Genesis 6:5 where every imagination of man was continually evil.

**31:25-54** After the battle, they were to first take a count of all the spoils that had been taken from their enemies. After this, they were to divide the spoils in half, half going to the soldiers who actually went to war, and half for the rest of the people who stayed at home and watched the camp. One fifth of one percent of what was given to the soldiers was to be given to Eleazar the priest. Two percent of the half that was given to the people was to be given to the Levites. Because the soldiers were thankful that none of them had lost their lives in the war, they brought all the jewels of gold to the tabernacle to be offered as an atonement for themselves. These jewels of gold were stored in the tabernacle as a reminder of the great victory that God had given them over the Midianites.

## Chapter 32

### ASSIGNING OF LAND EAST OF THE JORDAN

**32:1-42** *Let this land be given to your servants:* This was the land east of the Jordan River that had been taken from the Amorites and Og. It was good pasture land, and thus Reuben and Gad, who were later joined by half of the tribe of Manasseh, requested of Moses that they possess this land. This request was innocent on the surface, but there were some flaws in the reasoning of these tribal groups. It was a request based on pure economics, for they were ignoring the destiny of Israel, that they pos-

sess the land of milk and honey according to the promise of God. It was the will of God that all the tribes work together to take the land of Canaan and settle therein. The request also ignored the duties of these tribes to help their brothers to conquer the land of Canaan. It seems that they did not want to cross the Jordan, and thus assume their military responsibilities with the other tribes. **Will you sit here:** Moses interpreted their request to be an effort to shun their responsibilities to fulfill the will of God. **You have risen up in your father's place:** Moses' statement was direct and true if Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh were planning to forego their military responsibilities to help the others conquer Canaan. It was simply not right for part of the people to do the work for all the people. Everyone must be involved in the work of God. **We ourselves will go ready armed:** Realizing that their request was either misunderstood, or assumed to be an effort to settle against the will of God, the leaders of Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh quickly responded that they would go with their brothers into battle against the Canaanites. They did not want to repeat the consequences of their fathers' rebellion almost forty years before by refusing to take the land immediately on the command of God. As a result of that refusal, all Israel had to pay the price. Because they committed themselves to remain militarily with the army of Israel, Moses called Eleazar and Joshua in order that their commitment be confirmed before all. The people needed to know that they had taken ownership of their leadership.

### Chapter 33

#### ISRAEL'S CAMPS FROM EGYPT TO CANAAN

**33:1-37** *The journeys of the children of Israel:* In giving this log of Israel's travels from Egypt to Moab, Moses listed forty locations where Israel camped. Since almost all the places are unknown to us today, we would assume that the names were given to the places by Israel at the time when they camped at the location. The locations were probably given the names listed in this chapter according to some experience that Israel had at the loca-

tion. Though we may be frustrated because we do not know the exact locations, the purpose for giving the list in this chapter was not to recount a road map of travels. The listing here was for Israel in order that their experiences through the wilderness be made known to following generations.

**33:38-49** There is a difference between this record and the one given in 21:4-20, which account can be better understood if we assume that the tribes were somewhat scattered throughout the wilderness until they came together at Kadesh (20:1). If the tribes were dwelling at different places in the wilderness, then different names would have been given. We must not assume that any list of the names is complete. Each list was given to highlight the experiences of any number of the tribes at the time they were at any particular campsite.

#### INSTRUCTIONS CONCERNING LAND ALLOTMENTS

**33:50-56** *Drive out ... destroy ... pictures ... molten images ... high places:* The reason for the command to destroy these things was for the preservation of this segment of human society, the nation of Israel. If they did not follow this command, the immoral and idolatrous culture of the Canaanites would infect Israel. They would then digress to a low moral level where they themselves would be driven from the land. Unfortunately, they disobeyed this command. They subsequently digressed to the moral level of the Canaanites they drove out of the land. In the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities centuries later, Israel too was driven out of the land of Palestine. When they were driven from the land, God then worked with only a remnant in order to bring the Messiah into the world. When interpreting any instructions that God gave to Israel in reference to the land of Canaan, the interpreter must always keep in mind the eternal purpose of God. It was not that God chose Israel because they were a righteous people. They were stiffnecked and often rebellious. But God knew that such a people were necessary in order to survive the ancient world and fulfill the promise made to Abraham, that in him all nations of the world would be blessed through the coming of the



Savior into the world. The nation of Israel was only the vehicle through whom God brought the Savior into the world. At the cost of the existence of the Canaanites who had given up on God, Israel was to be preserved for the eternal purpose of God. Though Israel as a whole fell away in apostasy, God still worked through a remnant of Israel to accomplish His eternal plan of redemption.

### **Chapter 34**

**34:1-15** God drew the borders of the land that Israel would possess. The south began at the southern end of the Dead Sea, which border extended to Edom and Kadesh-barnea. From Kadesh-barnea it extended along the river of Egypt (a dry river called "Wadi el-Arish"). It then extended to the Mediterranean Sea. The western border was the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. We do not know exactly how far north this border extended. Some have suggested that it extended north to the southern part of the Lebanon Mountains. The northern border reached from the Mediterranean Sea to Mt. Hor, and then to Hamath, Zedad and Hazar-enan. The present location of all three cities is uncertain. The eastern border ran from Hazar-enan south to the Sea of Galilee (Sea of Chinnereth), then south along the Jordan River, and eventually to the Dead Sea. What is significant about these borders is that Israel for centuries never truly possesses all this land. The borders are mentioned in Joshua 15 – 19 and Ezekiel 47:13-20; 48:28,29.

**34:16-29** Since Israel had waited for centuries to possess the land, the division of the land according to tribes was a historical moment for everyone. Because of the seriousness of the event, a special committee of men was chosen to allot the land to each tribe according to the size of each tribe.

### **Chapter 35**

**35:1-5** Because the Levites were given no inheritance of land, they were given cities in which to dwell and pasture lands that surrounded the cities.

**35:6-15** Forty-eight cities were given to the Levites. Though the Levites never truly possessed all these cities,

the command that they be given such was valid throughout the history of Israel. Refuge cities were established in reference to the civil laws of the nation. Six of the cities that were given to the Levites were designated as refuge cities. Three were on the west side of the Jordan and three were on the east side. These cities were places to which a manslayer who unintentionally killed someone could flee for safety from the vengeance of a near kinsman of the person who was accidentally killed. The principle of the refuge cities was based on the law of the avenger who could avenge the death of a kinsman who was killed. The next of kin had the right to avenge the death of a kinsman. Unless the avenging kinsman acted out of the heat of the moment when a kinsman was unintentionally killed, the assailant could escape to a city of refuge until a judgment could be made.

**35:16-25** In this context, definitions are given for those who had a right to flee to the cities of refuge. There was a difference between a manslayer, someone who accidentally killed someone, and a murderer. The difference between the two is based on intent. The murderer was one who intentionally killed someone. The manslayer was one who had no such intent, but inadvertently did kill someone. Only the manslayer was able to flee to the cities of refuge. Other laws applied to the one who intentionally murdered another. **A murderer:** One of the evidences that a murder took place was the use of a weapon. The weapon could be of iron, stone or wood. If a murder took place, the avenger could slay the murderer on the spot. This same law applied to those who out of hatred killed another. **Thrust ... without enmity:** The manslayer, or the one who killed someone unintentionally, fell under different rules. This person could flee to the city of refuge in order to escape the vengeance of a near kinsman. However, if one exercised the privilege of escaping to a refuge city, then he had to stay in the city until the high priest died.

**35:26-34** If the manslayer did venture outside the borders of the refuge city before the death of the high priest, then the near kinsmen of the one who was slain, could kill him without guilt. If the high priest died, the

manslayer could return to his family, and the near kinsmen had no right to avenge the death of his kinsman. **Mouth of witnesses:** Capital punishment could be carried out only when more than one witness could testify to the fact that murder was committed. No amount of money could be paid to free the one who was guilty of murder, neither could any amount of money be paid in order that a manslayer leave a city of refuge before the death of the high priest. **Do not defile the land:** The death penalty was given in order to keep society pure of the sickness of murderers. Once one murders another, then the land is defiled by those who have no value for life. The death penalty, therefore, was God's means by which to keep society cleansed of moral decay in reference to those who had no value for life. Once a society gives up its value for life, then it has digressed to a state of corruption in which God has no favor toward it. When one intentionally murders another, he has given up his right to life for he has proved that he does not value the right of others to live. It is for this reason that societies must allow the teaching of moral principles to their citizens. And in teaching moral principles, there must be a standard for judgment that is greater than the desires of men. Men will digress to the point of genocide. For this reason there must be a standard for moral judgment that is greater than man himself. Only God can offer this standard by which men make moral laws.

## Chapter 36

### LAWS CONCERNING THE INHERITANCE FOR DAUGHTERS

**36:1-13** The laws that are given here must be viewed in reference to the laws that were given in 27:1-11 concerning the inheritance of the daughters of Zelophehad. In the case here, if a daughter of one tribe was married to another, then the wife did not have permanent rights to the land of her husband if he died. During the year of Jubilee all land was to revert back to the original tribe. This law restricted the ownership of land to move from one tribe to another when a man married the daughter of another tribe. The purpose of the law was to prevent

the subdividing of the land among the tribes throughout the generations of Israel. The title deed of the land was always in the name of the man, and thus during the year of Jubilee, all land was returned to the male descendants of each particular tribe. In reference to the daughters of Zelophehad, their original allotment of land was in the name of their father. Though they married outside their tribe, the land remained in the name of their father, and thus the inheritance of their land remained with their father's tribe. It was not passed on to the tribe of their husbands. One of the key principles concerning the laws of God for Israel is revealed in the giving of this law. God's laws were fair and just. They were laws that proved that they could not have come from man, but from God Himself.

Commentary by Roger E. Dickson

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**

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