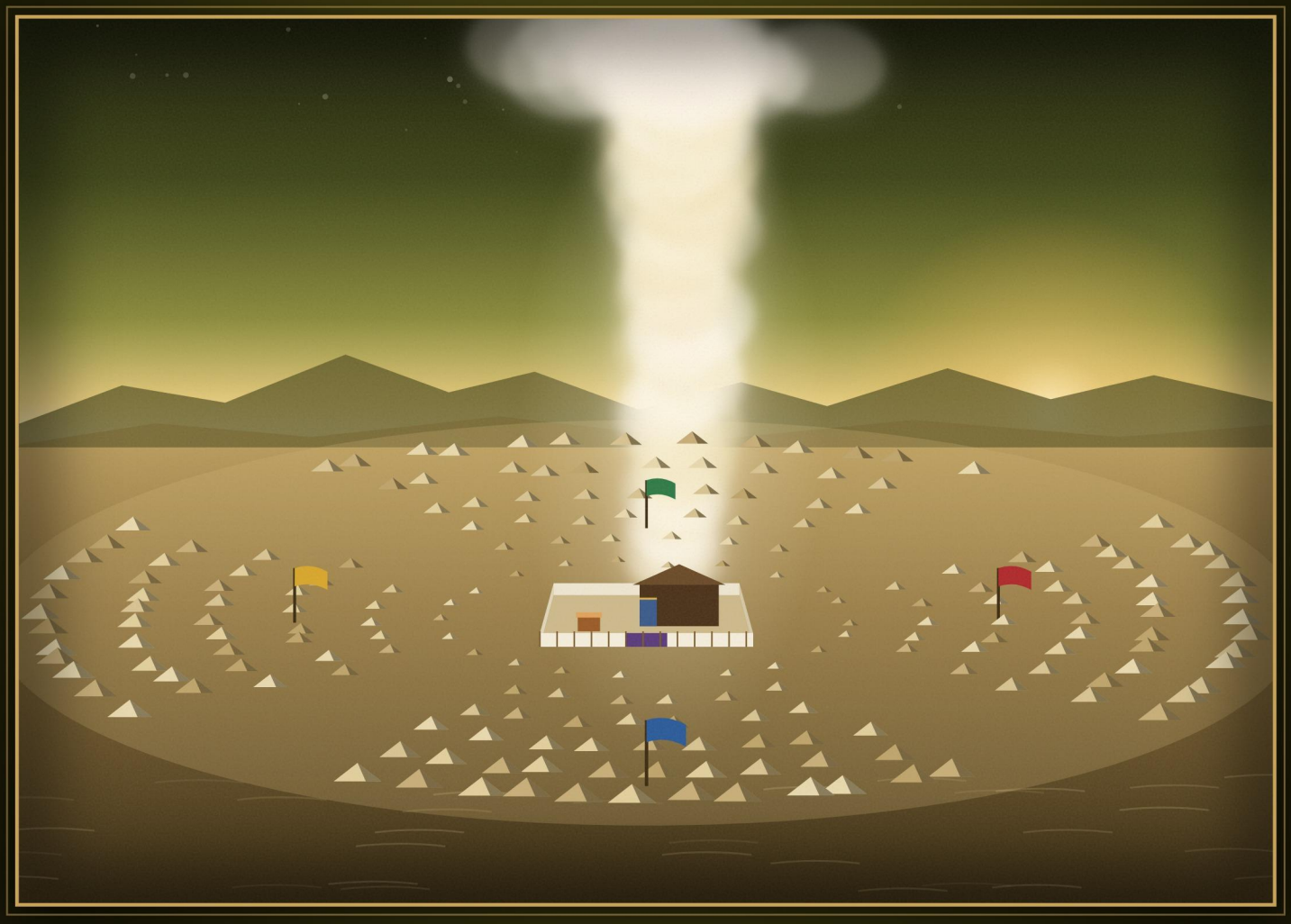
NUMBERS

BIBLE STUDY

A Verse-by-Verse Study



Forty years in the wilderness with a faithful God:
the camp, the cloud, the spies, and the bronze serpent

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TRINFINITY
Enterprises

Numbers Bible Study

A Verse-by-Verse Study

Andrew Dominguez

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Numbers Bible Study: A Verse-by-Verse Study

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Study

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this study direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Introduction

Welcome, and thank you for taking the time to work through this verse-by-verse study of the book of Numbers. My purpose in writing this study guide is the same as it was for my study of Revelation: to bring you closer to our Creator and to give you a way to grow in your Christian walk.

I have run in circles for years. God called me to drop what I was doing and follow Him, and I kept ignoring that call. Israel wandered forty years that did not have to happen. I understand that better than I would like to.

Numbers is the book of the wilderness. It tells how God led His people from Mount Sinai to the edge of the promised land, how a whole generation refused to trust Him and died in the desert, and how He stayed faithful to their children. It has census lists and camp rules, but it also has some of the most human stories in the Bible: grumbling, jealousy, rebellion, a talking donkey, and a God who keeps blessing a people who keep failing. I do not claim to be an authority on the Bible or on Numbers. I am simply someone like you who wants to grow closer to God and understand His Word. Before you read any part of this book, or any part of Scripture, I ask that you pray, asking God:

- For the Holy Spirit to be present, to help open your eyes and your heart (Psalm 119:18, 119:105)
- For discernment and knowledge (Psalm 119:66, James 1:5)

2 Timothy 2:15 (SLB)

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker not needing to be ashamed, cutting straight the word of truth."

The Bible is God's Word to us (2 Timothy 3:16), given for training in righteousness. If we cannot understand what it says, we cannot apply it to our lives or help build God's kingdom.

So how do we go about understanding God's Word?

The first rule is context. You may have heard the saying "Context is King," but what does that mean? Every word, sentence, and passage helps explain the ones around it. Before we read any passage, we should ask a few simple questions: Who wrote it? Who was it written to? What came right before it? Knowing the answers gives us a clearer picture of what God is saying, both in general and to each of us personally.

Context matters a great deal in Numbers. It picks up right where Exodus and Leviticus leave off. Israel has been camped at Mount Sinai for about a year. God has given them His Law, the tabernacle has been built, and the priests have been ordained. Now it is time to march. If we forget that, the lists at the start of the book look like dry paperwork. Read in context, they are an army being organized around the presence of God, getting ready to go and take the land He promised to Abraham.

Exegesis, Eisegesis, and Hermeneutics

People typically interpret the Bible using one of two methods, Exegesis or Eisegesis. Both are explained below, along with a third word, Hermeneutics. Sometimes people use both methods to "make their case" for the interpretation they want. These definitions are based on www.merriam-webster.com, with my own notes added.

Exegesis means explaining a text, especially a passage of Scripture. Exegesis is reading and interpreting the full text of a passage, and drawing out what it is actually saying.

Eisegesis means reading your own ideas into a text. This happens when we try to find something in the text that really isn't there. It can lead to many errors, especially when we bring assumptions to a passage that aren't actually in it. This method can be used to justify a behavior, position, or belief that goes against what the text originally meant.

Hermeneutics is the study of the principles used to interpret a text, such as the Bible. "Hermeneutics" and "Exegesis" are sometimes used to mean the same thing. The difference is that Exegesis is the work of explaining a passage, while Hermeneutics is the set of principles that guides that work. In Biblical Hermeneutics, the Bible should be read literally unless the text itself gives us a different meaning.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (SLB)

"16 Every Scripture ***is*** God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training which ***is*** in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work."

This passage tells us plainly that the writers of Scripture were inspired by God. Every passage in the Bible came from God and was written down by man. These are not fairy tales or made-up stories. They are God's own breath, given to us so we can be equipped and ready to do good work.

Because every word was inspired and breathed by God, I believe we must let God's Word interpret itself. We must study the Bible using Exegesis, drawing out what the text says, guided by sound Biblical Hermeneutics.

We should study God's Word using the Golden Rule of Interpretation, as Dr. David L. Cooper stated it:

"When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."

(http://www.biblicalresearch.info/page55.html)

I read the Bible as it is written. Numbers is history, and this study takes Moses at his word: God really did lead Israel by a cloud and fire, feed them with manna, give them water from the rock,

and keep them alive for forty years in the desert. The New Testament reads it the same way. Paul says these things happened to Israel as examples and were written down to warn and teach us (1 Corinthians 10:1-11), and Jesus compared His own death to the bronze serpent Moses lifted up (John 3:14-15). A note on the name of God: in the SLB, when you see "LORD" in capital letters, it stands for God's personal name, Yahweh (often written YHWH), which He made known to Moses (Exodus 3:14-15). When you see "Lord" in regular letters, it translates a word that means master. When you see "God," it usually translates Elohim, the general Hebrew word for God.

This study uses the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB) unless I note otherwise. To better understand the original Hebrew, I also used The Interlinear Bible (Jay P. Green Sr., ISBN 1-56563-977-4).

How This Study Is Laid Out

Each chapter of this study follows the same pattern as my study of Revelation:

- Scripture: the full text of the chapter, broken into sections, so you can read it straight through first.
- Preview: a short look at what the chapter covers.
- Study: the chapter again, verse by verse, with my notes on what each verse says and what it means for us.
- Summary: the main points of the chapter in a few lines.
- People and Places: in chapters that bring in many new names, a short list explaining the people, places, and terms.
- Study Questions: questions for personal study or a small group, from simple fact questions to questions about how we live. Some of them are personal. In a group, no one should ever have to answer one aloud, and what is shared in the group stays there.

Some chapters of Numbers are long lists: the counts of the tribes (chapters 1 to 4 and 26), the order of the camp, the gifts of the twelve leaders (chapter 7), the offerings for the feasts (chapters 28 and 29), the stops on the journey (chapter 33), and the borders of the land (chapter 34). In those chapters I group the verses into larger sections and say what the list is, why God put it there, and what it teaches us, rather than commenting on every name and number.

Using This Study With a Group

This study works for one person or for a group. Numbers has 36 chapters, so here are two ways a group can pace it:

- One chapter a week: thirty-six weeks, or about nine months. If you like, add a first meeting to read the Introduction and the Background together.
- A faster pace of about twenty-six weeks: take the list chapters two at a time (chapters 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 7 and 8, 28 and 29, 33 and 34) and the rest one at a time.

For each meeting, I suggest reading the Scripture out loud together first, straight through, before anyone comments. In the list chapters you may want to read only the first and last verses of each section aloud. Then walk through the Study section, stopping where the group has questions, and

finish with the Study Questions and prayer. The first questions in each list can be answered from the text. The later ones are more personal, and no one should feel pressed to answer them aloud.

Some parts of Numbers are hard to read. The test for a wife suspected of unfaithfulness (5:11-31) touches marriage, jealousy, and trust. God's judgments on His own people are severe: the plague after the quail (11:33-34), the man put to death for breaking the Sabbath (15:32-36), the earth opening under Korah (16:31-35), the serpents (21:6), and the plague at Peor (25:1-9). The laws on vows made by wives and daughters (chapter 30) need careful reading, and the war against Midian (chapter 31) raises hard questions about God's judgment. If you lead a group, read those sections ahead of time and be ready to listen. Some people in your group may carry wounds from an unfaithful marriage, a harsh father, or a church that used God's name to control them. If someone shares something that puts them or another person in danger, help them get help right away.

I look forward to walking with you through the book of Numbers. If you'd like to share feedback, please email me at andrew@trinfinityenterprises.com.

May God bless you and your time studying and getting to know Him better.

Overview of Numbers

Numbers is the fourth book of the Bible and the fourth of the five books of Moses, often called the Law or the Torah. It sits between Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Our English name comes from the Greek and Latin titles, which named the book after the two counts of the people in chapters 1 and 26. The Hebrew title is a word from the first verse, Bemidbar, which means "in the wilderness." Both names fit. The book counts God's people, and it follows them through the desert.

In Israel's history, Numbers covers the time between Sinai and the conquest. Exodus told how God brought Israel out of Egypt and made His covenant with them at Mount Sinai. Leviticus gave the laws for worship at the tabernacle. Numbers opens one month after the tabernacle was set up and ends almost forty years later on the plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho. Deuteronomy, Joshua, and the rest of Israel's story pick up from there.

The book tells the story of two generations. The first generation, the people who came out of Egypt, was counted, organized, and led to the border of Canaan in a few months. There, at Kadesh, they believed the bad report of ten spies and refused to go in (chapters 13 and 14). God sentenced them to wander in the wilderness until that generation died. Only Joshua and Caleb, who trusted the LORD, were allowed to enter. The second generation, their children, was counted again (chapter 26) and made ready to take the land. In between we see grumbling and rebellion, and we also see God feeding, leading, protecting, and blessing His people, even when they did not deserve it.

The theme of Numbers is God's faithfulness to His promise in spite of His people's unbelief. When the king of Moab hired Balaam to curse Israel, God put this word in Balaam's mouth:

Numbers 23:19 (SLB)

"God ***is*** not a man, that He should lie, and a son of mankind, that He should relent. Has He said, and will He not do ***it***? And has He spoken, and will He not establish it?"

Numbers has 36 chapters and 1,288 verses. Here is its structure:

Part One: Getting Ready at Sinai (chapters 1 to 10)

- Chapter 1: The First Census of Israel
- Chapter 2: The Order of the Camp
- Chapter 3: The Levites and the Firstborn
- Chapter 4: The Duties of the Levite Clans
- Chapter 5: A Clean Camp and the Test for Jealousy
- Chapter 6: The Nazirite Vow and the Priestly Blessing
- Chapter 7: The Leaders' Gifts for the Altar
- Chapter 8: The Lampstand and the Cleansing of the Levites
- Chapter 9: The Passover and the Cloud

- Chapter 10: The Silver Trumpets and Leaving Sinai

Part Two: From Sinai to Kadesh (chapters 11 to 14)

- Chapter 11: Complaining, Quail, and the Seventy Elders
- Chapter 12: Miriam and Aaron Speak Against Moses
- Chapter 13: The Twelve Spies
- Chapter 14: Israel Refuses the Land

Part Three: The Wilderness Years (chapters 15 to 20)

- Chapter 15: Laws for Offerings in the Land
- Chapter 16: The Rebellion of Korah
- Chapter 17: Aaron's Rod Buds
- Chapter 18: The Duties and Portions of Priests and Levites
- Chapter 19: The Red Heifer and the Water of Cleansing
- Chapter 20: Water from the Rock and the Death of Aaron

Part Four: On to Moab (chapters 21 to 25)

- Chapter 21: The Bronze Serpent and the First Victories
- Chapter 22: Balak Sends for Balaam
- Chapter 23: Balaam's First Two Oracles
- Chapter 24: Balaam's Last Oracles and the Star from Jacob
- Chapter 25: Sin at Peor and the Zeal of Phinehas

Part Five: The New Generation Made Ready (chapters 26 to 36)

- Chapter 26: The Second Census
- Chapter 27: The Daughters of Zelophehad and Joshua Appointed
- Chapter 28: Daily, Sabbath, and Feast Offerings
- Chapter 29: The Offerings of the Seventh Month
- Chapter 30: The Law of Vows
- Chapter 31: War Against Midian
- Chapter 32: The Tribes East of the Jordan
- Chapter 33: The Journeys from Egypt to the Jordan
- Chapter 34: The Borders of the Land
- Chapter 35: Levite Cities and Cities of Refuge
- Chapter 36: The Inheritance of Zelophehad's Daughters

Where this book points to Christ: the New Testament itself draws several lines from Numbers to Jesus. Jesus said that as Moses lifted up the bronze serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man

must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him would have eternal life (John 3:14-15; Numbers 21:8-9). He called Himself the true bread from heaven, greater than the manna (John 6:31-35). Paul says the rock that gave Israel water was Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Hebrews compares Moses, faithful as a servant in God's house, with Christ, faithful as a Son over it (Hebrews 3:1-6; Numbers 12:7), and it uses the ashes of the red heifer to show how much more the blood of Christ cleanses us (Hebrews 9:13-14; Numbers 19). Hebrews 3 and 4 also use Israel's failure at Kadesh to warn us not to harden our hearts in unbelief. Many Bible teachers also see the star from Jacob in Balaam's last oracle (24:17) as a prophecy of the Messiah, the King who will rule. All through the book, the priests, the sacrifices, and the cloud of God's presence in the middle of the camp point ahead to the One who would come and dwell among us.

Background of the Book

Author: Jewish and Christian tradition have long held that Moses wrote Numbers, along with the other four books of the Law. The book itself says that Moses wrote down the stages of the journey at the command of the LORD (33:2), and over and over it says the LORD spoke to Moses. Jesus spoke of the Law as the writings of Moses (Luke 24:44; John 5:46-47). Moses usually speaks of himself as "Moses" rather than "I," which was a common way to write history in the ancient world. A few lines, such as the note that Moses was the most humble man on earth (12:3), may have been written by Moses under the Spirit's guidance or added by a later inspired hand such as Joshua. Many modern critical scholars believe Numbers was put together from several sources long after Moses. I take the book at its word: it presents itself as the record of what God said to Moses and what Israel did in the wilderness, and Jesus and the apostles treated it that way.

Who it was written to: The people of Israel, and especially the second generation, camped on the plains of Moab. Their parents had died in the wilderness. Numbers told them why, and it prepared them to trust God and take the land their parents had refused.

Setting: The book moves from the wilderness of Sinai (chapters 1 to 10), north through the wilderness of Paran to Kadesh on the southern edge of Canaan (chapters 10 to 20), then around the lands of Edom and Moab to the plains of Moab east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho (chapters 21 to 36).

When it was written: Near the end of Moses' life, about 1405 B.C., while Israel was camped on the plains of Moab. This follows the date of about 1446 B.C. for the exodus from Egypt, based on 1 Kings 6:1. Some scholars place the exodus in the 1200s B.C.

When the events happened: The book opens on the first day of the second month of the second year after the exodus (1:1), about 1445 B.C. It reaches the fortieth year (33:38), about 1406 B.C., just before Israel crossed the Jordan. It covers almost thirty-nine years, though most of those years pass in silence between chapters 14 and 20.

The large numbers: The first census counts 603,550 fighting men (1:46), and the second counts 601,730 (26:51). With women, children, and the Levites, that points to a people of two million or more. I take the numbers as written. Exodus 12:37 gives about the same number of men leaving Egypt, and Exodus 38:26 gives the exact number of 603,550 for the silver collected at the census. Some scholars read the Hebrew word for "thousand," eleph, as a clan or a military unit in these lists, which would make the numbers much smaller. I mention it so you know the view exists, but the totals add up as thousands, and I believe God was able to keep that many people alive in the desert, which is exactly the point of the manna, the quail, and the water from the rock.

Purpose: To record how God organized His people around His presence, how the generation that came out of Egypt lost the land through unbelief, and how God kept His promise by raising up their children to enter it. Numbers warns every generation not to grumble against God or doubt His word, and it shows that He disciplines His people but does not abandon them. Paul gives the

purpose plainly for us: these things were written for our instruction (1 Corinthians 10:11; Romans 15:4).

Chapter 1: The First Census of Israel

Scripture

1:1-19 And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on ***day*** one of the second month, in the second year of their going out from the land of Egypt, saying, "Take the sum of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, every male, by their heads, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war in Israel; you shall enroll them by their armies, you and Aaron. And with you there shall be a man, a man for each tribe, each man the head of the house of his fathers. And these ***are*** the names of the men who shall stand with you: for Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur; for Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai; for Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab; for Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar; for Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon; for the sons of Joseph: for Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud; for Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur; for Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni; for Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai; for Asher, Pagiel the son of Ochran; for Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel; for Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan." These ***were*** the called ones of the congregation, the leaders of the tribes of their fathers; they ***were*** the heads of the thousands of Israel. And Moses and Aaron took these men who had been designated by names. And all the congregation they assembled on ***day*** one of the second month, and they registered their descent by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, by their heads. Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so he enrolled them in the wilderness of Sinai.

1:20-35 And the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, were—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, by their heads, every male from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Reuben ***were*** forty-six thousand and five hundred. Of the sons of Simeon—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, its enrolled ***men***, by the number of names, by their heads, every male from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Simeon ***were*** fifty-nine thousand and three hundred. Of the sons of Gad—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Gad ***were*** forty-five thousand and six hundred and fifty. Of the sons of Judah—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Judah ***were*** seventy-four thousand and six hundred. Of the sons of Issachar—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Issachar ***were*** fifty-four thousand and four hundred. Of the sons of Zebulun—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Zebulun ***were*** fifty-seven thousand and four hundred. Of the sons of Joseph, of the sons of Ephraim—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Ephraim ***were*** forty

thousand and five hundred. Of the sons of Manasseh—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Manasseh ***were*** thirty-two thousand and two hundred.

1:36-54 Of the sons of Benjamin—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Benjamin ***were*** thirty-five thousand and four hundred. Of the sons of Dan—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Dan ***were*** sixty-two thousand and seven hundred. Of the sons of Asher—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Asher ***were*** forty-one thousand and five hundred. The sons of Naphtali—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war— their enrolled ***men*** of the tribe of Naphtali ***were*** fifty-three thousand and four hundred. These ***are*** the enrolled ***men*** whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel enrolled, twelve men; each was one man for the house of his fathers. And all the enrolled ***men*** of the sons of Israel were, by the house of their fathers, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out ***to*** war in Israel— and all the enrolled ***men*** were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty. And the Levites, by the tribe of their fathers, were not enrolled among them. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not enroll, and their sum you shall not take among the sons of Israel. And you, appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its articles, and over all that belongs to it; they, they shall carry the tabernacle and all its articles, and they, they shall minister to it, and they shall camp all around the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle sets out, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle camps, the Levites shall set it up; and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death. And the sons of Israel shall camp, each man by his camp and each man by his standard, by their armies. And the Levites shall camp all around the tabernacle of the testimony, and ***there*** shall not be wrath on the congregation of the sons of Israel; and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of the testimony." And the sons of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did.

Chapter 1 Preview

Numbers opens with a count. God tells Moses and Aaron to number every man in Israel twenty years old and up who is able to go to war, tribe by tribe. A leader from each tribe stands with them. The result is given tribe by tribe, and the total is 603,550 men.

Why start a book this way? Because Israel is about to march to the promised land, and an army has to be organized before it moves. But this is not only a military roll call. It is God taking account of His people by name, one family at a time. The chapter ends by setting the tribe of Levi apart. The Levites are not counted with the soldiers, because their work is to care for the tabernacle, the tent where God dwelt among His people.

Chapter 1 Study

1:1-3 *And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on **day** one of the second month, in the second year of their going out from the land of Egypt, saying, "Take the sum of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, every male, by their heads, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war in Israel; you shall enroll them by their armies, you and Aaron.*

"And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting." That phrase, "the LORD spoke to Moses," opens this book and runs all through it. Numbers is not Moses' plan for Israel. It is God's word to Israel through Moses.

The date is exact: "on day one of the second month, in the second year of their going out from the land of Egypt." The tabernacle had been set up on the first day of the first month of that year (Exodus 40:17). So this is one month later. Israel had been camped at Sinai for almost a year. The tent of meeting is another name for the tabernacle, the portable tent where God met with Moses and where His presence rested over the ark.

God says, "Take the sum of all the congregation." The count is of every male "from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out to war in Israel." This is a list of fighting men. Women, children, and the Levites are not in it. God was getting His people ready to take the land He had promised them.

1:4-16 *And with you there shall be a man, a man for each tribe, each man the head of the house of his fathers. And these **are** the names of the men who shall stand with you: for Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur; for Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai; for Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab; for Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar; for Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon; for the sons of Joseph: for Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud; for Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur; for Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni; for Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai; for Asher, Pagiel the son of Ochran; for Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel; for Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan." These **were** the called ones of the congregation, the leaders of the tribes of their fathers; they **were** the heads of the thousands of Israel.*

A man from each tribe was to help Moses and Aaron, "each man the head of the house of his fathers." Verses 5 to 15 list twelve leaders. We will see these same names again in chapter 2 (the camp), chapter 7 (the gifts for the altar), and chapter 10 (the march). Nahshon the son of Amminadab, the leader of Judah, is also named in the family line of King David and of Jesus (Ruth 4:20; Matthew 1:4).

Notice that Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are counted as two tribes (1:10). Jacob had adopted them as his own sons (Genesis 48:5). Levi is left off this list, so there are still twelve tribes in the count.

These men were "the called ones of the congregation, the leaders of the tribes of their fathers" (1:16). God works through leaders, and He chose them by name. A census like this would take a lot of help. Moses could not do it alone, and he was not asked to.

1:17-19 *And Moses and Aaron took these men who had been designated by names. And all the congregation they assembled on **day** one of the second month, and they registered their descent by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, by their heads. Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so he enrolled them in the wilderness of Sinai.*

Moses and Aaron gathered the whole congregation "on day one of the second month," the same day God gave the command, and the people "registered their descent by their clans, by the house of their fathers." Each man had to show which tribe and family he belonged to. That mattered, because the land would later be divided by tribe and clan.

"Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so he enrolled them." Moses did not delay. This little phrase, or one like it, comes again and again in the first ten chapters (1:54; 2:34; 3:16, 51; 4:49). Before Israel's failures begin in chapter 11, we see a people doing what God said. Obedience is how the journey starts.

1:20-43 *And the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, were—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, by their heads, every male from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Reuben **were** forty-six thousand and five hundred. Of the sons of Simeon—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, its enrolled **men**, by the number of names, by their heads, every male from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Simeon **were** fifty-nine thousand and three hundred. Of the sons of Gad—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Gad **were** forty-five thousand and six hundred and fifty. Of the sons of Judah—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Judah **were** seventy-four thousand and six hundred. Of the sons of Issachar—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Issachar **were** fifty-four thousand and four hundred. Of the sons of Zebulun—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Zebulun **were** fifty-seven thousand and four hundred. Of the sons of Joseph, of the sons of Ephraim—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Ephraim **were** forty thousand and five hundred. Of the sons of Manasseh—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Manasseh **were** thirty-two thousand and two hundred. Of the sons of Benjamin —their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Benjamin **were** thirty-five thousand and four hundred. Of the sons of Dan—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Dan **were** sixty-two thousand and seven hundred. Of the sons of Asher—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Asher **were** forty-one thousand and five hundred. The sons of Naphtali—their generations, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war— their enrolled **men** of the tribe of Naphtali **were** fifty-three thousand and four hundred.*

Now the count comes, tribe by tribe, in the same words each time: "by their clans, by the house of their fathers, by the number of names." Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, is first with 46,500. Judah is the largest tribe with 74,600 (1:27). Manasseh is the smallest with 32,200 (1:35).

The repeated wording may feel slow to us, but it makes a point. Every tribe was counted the same way, and every man counted. No tribe was left out, and none was more than a number in God's book. God knew His people "by the number of names."

Why does Judah lead? Jacob had prophesied that the scepter would not turn aside from Judah (Genesis 49:10). Judah will camp first, march first, and give first (2:3; 7:12; 10:14). From Judah would come David, and from David, Jesus Christ, "the Lion who is of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5).

1:44-46 *These **are** the enrolled **men** whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel enrolled, twelve men; each was one man for the house of his fathers. And all the enrolled **men** of the sons of Israel were, by the house of their fathers, from a son of twenty years and upward, everyone who goes out **to** war in Israel— and all the enrolled **men** were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.*

"All the enrolled men were six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty." That is 603,550 men of fighting age. When God called Abraham, he had no children. God promised to make his descendants as many as the stars (Genesis 15:5). Now, about 645 years after that promise, Abraham's family has grown into a nation that could field more than six hundred thousand soldiers. God keeps His word.

I take the number as written. It fits Exodus 12:37, which says about six hundred thousand men on foot left Egypt, and Exodus 38:26, which gives this exact number for the silver collected at the count. Some scholars think the Hebrew word for "thousand," eleph, sometimes means a clan or a military unit, which would make the army much smaller. But the totals in this chapter add up as thousands and hundreds, and Scripture presents a God who fed and watered this many people for forty years.

1:47-54 *And the Levites, by the tribe of their fathers, were not enrolled among them. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not enroll, and their sum you shall not take among the sons of Israel. And you, appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its articles, and over all that belongs to it; they, they shall carry the tabernacle and all its articles, and they, they shall minister to it, and they shall camp all around the tabernacle. And when the tabernacle sets out, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle camps, the Levites shall set it up; and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death. And the sons of Israel shall camp, each man by his camp and each man by his standard, by their armies. And the Levites shall camp all around the tabernacle of the testimony, and **there** shall not be wrath on the congregation of the sons of Israel; and the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of the testimony." And the sons of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did.*

"The Levites, by the tribe of their fathers, were not enrolled among them." Levi was the tribe of Moses and Aaron. God had other work for them: "appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony" (1:50). The tabernacle of the testimony is called that because it held the ark with the tablets of the Law, God's testimony to Israel. The Levites would carry it, take it down, set it up, and camp all around it.

"The stranger who comes near shall be put to death" (1:51). The word stranger here means anyone who was not a Levite, even an Israelite. God is holy. A holy God living in the middle of a sinful people was a great gift and a great danger. The Levites camped around the tabernacle as a

living wall, "and there shall not be wrath on the congregation" (1:53). Their presence protected the people from coming near God carelessly and being judged.

That shows us how serious it is to come near to God. And it makes the New Testament all the more amazing. Through the blood of Jesus we now have confidence to enter the holy places by a new and living way (Hebrews 10:19-20). We do not come carelessly. We come through Christ, our High Priest.

The chapter ends where it began, with obedience: "the sons of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they did."

Chapter 1 Summary

One month after the tabernacle was set up, the LORD told Moses and Aaron to count every man in Israel twenty years and older who could go to war. A leader from each tribe helped them, and the men registered by tribe, clan, and family. The tribes were counted one by one, with Judah the largest, and the total came to 603,550 men. The tribe of Levi was not counted with the others. God set the Levites apart to carry and guard the tabernacle and to camp around it, so that God's wrath would not fall on a people coming near Him carelessly. Israel did all that the LORD commanded.

People and Places

- Wilderness of Sinai: the desert around Mount Sinai, where Israel had camped for about a year and received the Law.
- Tent of meeting: the tabernacle, the tent where God met with Moses and dwelt among His people.
- Nahshon son of Amminadab: the leader of Judah, an ancestor of David and of Jesus (Ruth 4:20; Matthew 1:4).
- Levites: the tribe of Levi, set apart to serve at the tabernacle and not counted as soldiers.

Chapter 1 Study Questions

1. When and where did the LORD tell Moses to count the people? (1:1)

2. Who was counted, and who was left out of the count? (1:2-3, 47)

3. Why do you think God wanted a leader from every tribe to help Moses and Aaron? (1:4-16)

4. Which tribe was the largest, and what do Genesis 49:10 and Revelation 5:5 tell us about that tribe? (1:27)

5. How many fighting men were counted in all, and how does that number show God keeping His promise to Abraham? (1:46; Genesis 15:5)

6. Why were the Levites not counted with the soldiers? (1:49-50)

7. Why did the Levites camp all around the tabernacle? (1:53)

8. God counted His people "by the number of names." What does it mean to you that God knows you by name?

9. Hebrews 10:19-20 says we can come near to God through the blood of Jesus. How should that change the way you pray and worship?

10. Israel began this journey by doing exactly what God said. What is one thing God has made clear in His Word that you need to obey this week?

Chapter 2: The Order of the Camp

Scripture

2:1-17 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Each man by his standard, with the signs of the house of their fathers, the sons of Israel shall camp; at a distance, all around the tent of meeting, they shall camp. And those who camp eastward, toward ***the*** sunrise, ***shall be*** the standard of the camp of Judah by their armies; and the leader of the sons of Judah ***shall be*** Nahshon the son of Amminadab, and his army and their enrolled ***men are*** seventy-four thousand and six hundred. And those who camp next to him ***shall be*** the tribe of Issachar; and the leader of the sons of Issachar ***shall be*** Nethanel the son of Zuar, and his army and his enrolled ***men are*** fifty-four thousand and four hundred. ***Then*** the tribe of Zebulun; and the leader of the sons of Zebulun ***shall be*** Eliab the son of Helon, and his army and his enrolled ***men are*** fifty-seven thousand and four hundred. All the enrolled ***men*** of the camp of Judah ***are*** one hundred thousand and eighty thousand and six thousand and four hundred, by their armies; they shall set out first. The standard of the camp of Reuben ***shall be*** southward by their armies; and the leader of the sons of Reuben ***shall be*** Elizur the son of Shedeur, and his army and his enrolled ***men are*** forty-six thousand and five hundred. And those who camp next to him ***shall be*** the tribe of Simeon; and the leader of the sons of Simeon ***shall be*** Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, and his army and their enrolled ***men are*** fifty-nine thousand and three hundred. And the tribe of Gad; and the leader of the sons of Gad ***shall be*** Eliasaph the son of Reuel, and his army and their enrolled ***men are*** forty-five thousand and six hundred and fifty. All the enrolled ***men*** of the camp of Reuben ***are*** one hundred thousand and fifty-one thousand and four hundred and fifty, by their armies; and they shall set out second. And the tent of meeting shall set out, the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps; just as they camp, so they shall set out, each man in his place, by their standards.

2:18-34 The standard of the camp of Ephraim by their armies ***shall be*** westward; and the leader of the sons of Ephraim ***shall be*** Elishama the son of Ammihud, and his army and their enrolled ***men are*** forty thousand and five hundred. And next to him ***shall be*** the tribe of Manasseh; and the leader of the sons of Manasseh ***shall be*** Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, and his army and their enrolled ***men are*** thirty-two thousand and two hundred. And the tribe of Benjamin; and the leader of the sons of Benjamin ***shall be*** Abidan the son of Gideoni, and his army and their enrolled ***men are*** thirty-five thousand and four hundred. All the enrolled ***men*** of the camp of Ephraim ***are*** one hundred thousand and eight thousand and one hundred, by their armies; and they shall set out third. The standard of the camp of Dan ***shall be*** northward by their armies; and the leader of the sons of Dan ***shall be*** Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, and his army and their enrolled ***men are*** sixty-two thousand and seven hundred. And those who camp next to him ***shall be*** the tribe of Asher; and the leader of the sons of Asher ***shall be*** Pagiel the son of Ochran, and his army and their enrolled ***men are*** forty-one thousand and five hundred. And the tribe of Naphtali; and the leader of the sons of Naphtali ***shall be*** Ahira the son of Enan, and his army and their enrolled ***men are*** fifty-three thousand and four hundred. All the enrolled ***men*** of the camp of Dan ***are*** one hundred thousand and fifty-seven thousand and six hundred; they shall set out last, by their standards." These ***are*** the enrolled ***men*** of the sons of Israel by the house of their

fathers; all the enrolled ***men*** of the camps by their armies ***were*** six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty. And the Levites were not enrolled among the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And the sons of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards, and so they set out, each man by his clans, by the house of his fathers.

Chapter 2 Preview

Chapter 1 counted the army. Chapter 2 tells them where to camp and in what order to march. The twelve tribes are placed in four groups of three, one group on each side of the tabernacle: Judah's camp on the east, Reuben's on the south, Ephraim's on the west, and Dan's on the north. Each group has a lead tribe, a banner, and a place in the line of march. The Levites camp in the middle, around the tabernacle.

This is another list, and the numbers repeat what we read in chapter 1. But the picture it paints is beautiful. God's presence is at the center of His people. Every tribe faces the tent of meeting, every tribe has its place, and no one is left out. A people that had been slaves in Egypt a year before is now an ordered nation, gathered around their God.

Chapter 2 Study

2:1-2 *And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Each man by his standard, with the signs of the house of their fathers, the sons of Israel shall camp; at a distance, all around the tent of meeting, they shall camp.*

"Each man by his standard, with the signs of the house of their fathers, the sons of Israel shall camp." A standard is a banner or flag carried on a pole. Each group of tribes had its own, and each family had its own signs. In a camp of hundreds of thousands, you needed to know where you belonged. Scripture does not tell us what the banners looked like, so I won't guess.

They were to camp "at a distance, all around the tent of meeting." The space between the tribes and the tabernacle was filled by the Levites (1:53). God was near, in the middle of the camp, but He was holy, and the people were to keep a respectful distance.

God had said, "they shall make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in their midst" (Exodus 25:8). Chapter 2 shows what that looked like on the ground. Everything in Israel's life was arranged around the presence of God.

2:3-9 *And those who camp eastward, toward **the** sunrise, **shall be** the standard of the camp of Judah by their armies; and the leader of the sons of Judah **shall be** Nahshon the son of Amminadab, and his army and their enrolled **men are** seventy-four thousand and six hundred. And those who camp next to him **shall be** the tribe of Issachar; and the leader of the sons of Issachar **shall be** Nethanel the son of Zuar, and his army and his enrolled **men are** fifty-four thousand and four hundred. **Then** the tribe of Zebulun; and the leader of the sons of Zebulun **shall be** Eliab the son of Helon, and his army and his enrolled **men are** fifty-seven thousand and four hundred. All the enrolled **men** of the camp of Judah **are** one hundred thousand and eighty thousand and six thousand and four hundred, by their armies; they shall set out first.*

"Those who camp eastward, toward the sunrise, shall be the standard of the camp of Judah." The east side was the side of the tabernacle's entrance (3:38). Judah camped there with Issachar and Zebulun, all three of them sons of Leah. Together they numbered 186,400, the largest of the four camps, and "they shall set out first" (2:9).

Again Judah leads. This is the tribe of the promised King (Genesis 49:10). When Israel moved, the tribe of Judah went first, and the rest followed. That is a small picture of what the whole Bible teaches: the King from Judah goes before His people.

2:10-16 *The standard of the camp of Reuben **shall be** southward by their armies; and the leader of the sons of Reuben **shall be** Elizur the son of Shedeur, and his army and his enrolled **men are** forty-six thousand and five hundred. And those who camp next to him **shall be** the tribe of Simeon; and the leader of the sons of Simeon **shall be** Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, and his army and their enrolled **men are** fifty-nine thousand and three hundred. And the tribe of Gad; and the leader of the sons of Gad **shall be** Eliasaph the son of Reuel, and his army and their enrolled **men are** forty-five thousand and six hundred and fifty. All the enrolled **men** of the camp of Reuben **are** one hundred thousand and fifty-one thousand and four hundred and fifty, by their armies; and they shall set out second.*

"The standard of the camp of Reuben shall be southward." Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, led the south side with Simeon and Gad, 151,450 men. They would "set out second."

Reuben was the firstborn, but he did not lead the whole camp. He had lost his place by his sin against his father (Genesis 35:22; 49:3-4). Even so, God gave his tribe an honored place. Sin has consequences, but God does not throw people away.

The leader of Gad is called "Eliasaph the son of Reuel" in verse 14, while 1:14 and 7:42 call his father Deuel. In Hebrew the letters for d and r look very much alike, and the same man is meant. The SLB follows the Hebrew text in each place.

2:17 *And the tent of meeting shall set out, the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps; just as they camp, so they shall set out, each man in his place, by their standards.*

This verse sits right in the middle of the chapter, and that fits, because it describes the middle of the camp. "And the tent of meeting shall set out, the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps." On the march, two camps went before the tabernacle and two came after it. Chapter 10

will show that some Levites went ahead with the frame so the tent could be set up before the holy things arrived (10:17, 21).

"Just as they camp, so they shall set out, each man in his place." God was not only with them when they rested. He was in the middle of them when they moved. That is still true for His people. Jesus promised to be with us always, and where His people gather in His name, He is in their midst (Matthew 18:20; 28:20).

2:18-24 *The standard of the camp of Ephraim by their armies **shall be** westward; and the leader of the sons of Ephraim **shall be** Elishama the son of Ammihud, and his army and their enrolled **men are** forty thousand and five hundred. And next to him **shall be** the tribe of Manasseh; and the leader of the sons of Manasseh **shall be** Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, and his army and their enrolled **men are** thirty-two thousand and two hundred. And the tribe of Benjamin; and the leader of the sons of Benjamin **shall be** Abidan the son of Gideoni, and his army and their enrolled **men are** thirty-five thousand and four hundred. All the enrolled **men** of the camp of Ephraim **are** one hundred thousand and eight thousand and one hundred, by their armies; and they shall set out third.*

"The standard of the camp of Ephraim by their armies shall be westward." Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, the descendants of Rachel, camped together behind the tabernacle. They numbered 108,100 and would "set out third." Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph, leads here instead of Manasseh, just as Jacob had crossed his hands and blessed the younger above the older (Genesis 48:17-20).

2:25-31 *The standard of the camp of Dan **shall be** northward by their armies; and the leader of the sons of Dan **shall be** Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, and his army and their enrolled **men are** sixty-two thousand and seven hundred. And those who camp next to him **shall be** the tribe of Asher; and the leader of the sons of Asher **shall be** Pagiel the son of Ochran, and his army and their enrolled **men are** forty-one thousand and five hundred. And the tribe of Naphtali; and the leader of the sons of Naphtali **shall be** Ahira the son of Enan, and his army and their enrolled **men are** fifty-three thousand and four hundred. All the enrolled **men** of the camp of Dan **are** one hundred thousand and fifty-seven thousand and six hundred; they shall set out last, by their standards."*

"The standard of the camp of Dan shall be northward." Dan, Asher, and Naphtali, the sons of Jacob's two servant wives, camped on the north with 157,600 men. "They shall set out last." Dan's camp was the rear guard (10:25). The last place is still a place of trust. Someone has to guard the back of the line, and God gave that job to a whole camp.

Every tribe had a place. The sons of Leah, the sons of Rachel, and the sons of the servant women were all included and all placed around the same tabernacle. In the church it is the same. God has set the members in the body, each one of them, just as He willed (1 Corinthians 12:18). No one is in the wrong place if God put them there.

2:32-34 *These **are** the enrolled **men** of the sons of Israel by the house of their fathers; all the enrolled **men** of the camps by their armies **were** six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty. And the Levites were not enrolled among the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And the sons of Israel did according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards, and so they set out, each man by his clans, by the house of his fathers.*

The total is the same as in chapter 1: "six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty" (2:32). The four camps add up exactly: 186,400 and 151,450 and 108,100 and 157,600 make 603,550. "And the Levites were not enrolled among the sons of Israel" (2:33).

The chapter closes with obedience again: "so they camped by their standards, and so they set out." God is "not a God of disorder but of peace," Paul wrote about the church (1 Corinthians 14:33). Israel's camp showed the same thing. Order was not a cold rule. It was the way a holy God made room for a huge family to live near Him in peace.

Chapter 2 Summary

The LORD told Moses and Aaron how Israel should camp and march. The tribes were arranged in four camps of three tribes each, on the four sides of the tabernacle, each under its own banner. Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun camped on the east and marched first; Reuben, Simeon, and Gad on the south marched second; the Levites with the tabernacle came next; Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin on the west marched third; and Dan, Asher, and Naphtali on the north marched last. The totals matched the census of chapter 1, 603,550 men, with the Levites counted separately. Israel did as the LORD commanded, with His presence at the center of the camp.

Chapter 2 Study Questions

1. What did each tribe camp by, and where were they to camp in relation to the tent of meeting? (2:2)

2. Which camp was on the east side, and why do you think it was given the place of honor? (2:3-9)

3. Reuben was the firstborn, but Judah led. What do Genesis 49:3-4 and 49:10 tell us about why? (2:10)

4. Where did the tabernacle and the Levites go when the camp moved? (2:17)

5. Which camp marched last, and what job did that give them? (2:31; 10:25)

6. Do the four camps add up to the total in verse 32? What does that careful counting tell you about how God sees His people?

7. Everything in Israel's camp was arranged around God's presence. What is at the center of your life and your schedule right now?

8. Every tribe had its place, whether it came from Leah, Rachel, or the servant women. How does 1 Corinthians 12:18 encourage you about your place in the church?

9. Jesus promised to be in the midst of His people (Matthew 18:20). How should that shape the way your church gathers?

10. Is there a last-in-line job God has given you that feels small? How can you do it faithfully this week?

Chapter 3: The Levites and the Firstborn

Scripture

3:1-13 And these ***are*** the generations of Aaron and Moses on the day the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. And these ***are*** the names of the sons of Aaron: the firstborn Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These ***are*** the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whose hand he filled to serve as priests. And Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they brought near strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no sons; and Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the presence of Aaron their father. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Bring near the tribe of Levi, and you shall make it stand before Aaron the priest, and they shall minister to him. And they shall keep his charge and the charge of all the congregation before the tent of meeting, to serve the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the articles of the tent of meeting, and the charge of the sons of Israel, to serve the service of the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; given, given they ***are*** to him from the sons of Israel. And Aaron and his sons you shall appoint, and they shall keep their priesthood; and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death." And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "And I, look, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel in place of every firstborn, the one opening a womb, from the sons of Israel; and the Levites shall be Mine. For every firstborn ***is*** Mine; on the day I struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified for Myself every firstborn in Israel, from man to livestock; they shall be Mine. I ***am*** the LORD."

3:14-26 And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying, "Enroll the sons of Levi by the house of their fathers, by their clans; every male from a son of a month and upward you shall enroll them." And Moses enrolled them at the mouth of the LORD, just as he had been commanded. And these were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon and Kohath and Merari. And these ***are*** the names of the sons of Gershon by their clans: Libni and Shimei. And the sons of Kohath by their clans: Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. And the sons of Merari by their clans: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites by the house of their fathers. To Gershon ***belonged*** the clan of the Libnite and the clan of the Shimeite; these are the clans of the Gershonite. Their enrolled ***men***, by the number of every male from a son of a month and upward, their enrolled ***men were*** seven thousand and five hundred. The clans of the Gershonite shall camp behind the tabernacle, westward. And the leader of the father's house of the Gershonite ***was*** Eliasaph the son of Lael. And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting ***was*** the tabernacle and the tent, its covering, and the screen of the entrance of the tent of meeting, and the hangings of the courtyard, and the screen of the entrance of the courtyard which ***is*** by the tabernacle and by the altar all around, and its cords, for all its service.

3:27-39 And to Kohath ***belonged*** the clan of the Amramite and the clan of the Izharite and the clan of the Hebronite and the clan of the Uzzielite; these are the clans of the Kohathite. By the number of every male from a son of a month and upward, eight thousand and six hundred ***were*** keepers of the charge of the holy place. The clans of the sons of Kohath shall camp on the side of the tabernacle, southward. And the leader of the father's house of the clans of the Kohathite ***was*** Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. And their charge ***was*** the ark and the table and the lampstand and the altars, and the articles of the holy place with which they minister, and the screen, and all its

service. And the leader of the leaders of the Levites ***was*** Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, ***with*** the oversight of the keepers of the charge of the holy place. To Merari ***belonged*** the clan of the Mahlite and the clan of the Mushite; these are the clans of Merari. And their enrolled ***men***, by the number of every male from a son of a month and upward, ***were*** six thousand and two hundred. And the leader of the father's house of the clans of Merari ***was*** Zuriel the son of Abihail; they shall camp on the side of the tabernacle, northward. And the oversight of the charge of the sons of Merari ***was*** the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its bases and all its articles and all its service, and the pillars of the courtyard all around, and their bases and their pegs and their cords. And those who camp before the tabernacle eastward, before the tent of meeting toward ***the*** sunrise, ***were*** Moses and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the sons of Israel; and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death. All the enrolled of the Levites whom Moses and Aaron enrolled at the mouth of the LORD by their clans, every male from a son of a month and upward, ***were*** twenty-two thousand.

3:40-51 And the LORD said to Moses, "Enroll every firstborn male of the sons of Israel from a son of a month and upward, and take the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for Me—I ***am*** the LORD—in place of every firstborn among the sons of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites in place of every firstborn among the livestock of the sons of Israel." And Moses enrolled, just as the LORD had commanded him, every firstborn among the sons of Israel. And every firstborn male by the number of names, from a son of a month and upward, by their enrolled ***men***, was twenty-two thousand, two hundred and seventy-three. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the Levites in place of every firstborn among the sons of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites in place of their livestock; and the Levites shall be Mine. I ***am*** the LORD. And ***for*** the ransom of the two hundred and seventy-three of the firstborn of the sons of Israel who are in excess beyond the Levites, and you shall take approximately 2 ounces (five shekels) apiece for each head; by the shekel of the holy place you shall take ***it***; the shekel ***is*** approximately 2/5 ounce (twenty gerahs). And you shall give the money to Aaron and to his sons, the ransom of those who are in excess among them." And Moses took the money of the ransom from those who were in excess beyond the ransomed of the Levites. From the firstborn of the sons of Israel he took the money, approximately 34 pounds (one thousand and three hundred and sixty-five ***shekels***), by the shekel of the holy place. And Moses gave the money of the ransom to Aaron and to his sons at the mouth of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Chapter 3 Preview

Chapter 1 left the tribe of Levi out of the army count. Chapter 3 tells us why. The chapter opens with the family of Aaron, the priests, and a sad reminder of his two sons who died. Then God gives the Levites to Aaron as helpers, and He explains that He is taking the Levites as His own in place of every firstborn son in Israel.

The Levites are counted by their three clans, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, every male a month old and up. Each clan gets a side of the tabernacle to camp on and a part of the tent to care for. Then the firstborn sons of Israel are counted. There are 273 more firstborn than Levites, so each of the extra firstborn is bought back with five shekels of silver. It is a chapter about substitution and redemption, two ideas that run all the way to the cross.

Chapter 3 Study

3:1-4 *And these **are** the generations of Aaron and Moses on the day the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. And these **are** the names of the sons of Aaron: the firstborn Nadab, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These **are** the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whose hand he filled to serve as priests. And Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they brought near strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai, and they had no sons; and Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the presence of Aaron their father.*

"These are the generations of Aaron and Moses." Aaron's sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar, "the anointed priests." A priest was a man God appointed to stand between Him and the people, to offer sacrifices and to teach God's Law. In Israel only Aaron and his sons could be priests.

Then comes a hard sentence: "Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they brought near strange fire before the LORD." Leviticus 10:1-2 tells the story. They offered fire God had not commanded, and fire came out from the LORD and consumed them. They died with no sons, so their line ended.

Why put that in a family list? Because it was a warning every priest needed to remember. God is holy, and He must be worshiped His way. Moses said at the time that God would be treated as holy by those who come near Him (Leviticus 10:3). We do not get to make up our own way to God. He has given us one way, through His Son (John 14:6). Eleazar and Ithamar went on serving "in the presence of Aaron their father," and we will meet both again.

3:5-10 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Bring near the tribe of Levi, and you shall make it stand before Aaron the priest, and they shall minister to him. And they shall keep his charge and the charge of all the congregation before the tent of meeting, to serve the service of the tabernacle. And they shall keep all the articles of the tent of meeting, and the charge of the sons of Israel, to serve the service of the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; given, given they **are** to him from the sons of Israel. And Aaron and his sons you shall appoint, and they shall keep their priesthood; and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death."*

"Bring near the tribe of Levi, and you shall make it stand before Aaron the priest, and they shall minister to him." The Levites were not priests. They were helpers to the priests. They guarded the tabernacle, carried it, and did the heavy work of its service.

"Given, given they are to him from the sons of Israel" (3:9). The word is doubled for emphasis. The Levites were a gift to Aaron. Then the warning from 1:51 comes again: "the stranger who comes near shall be put to death" (3:10). Each person had a role, and no one was to take the role God had not given him. We will see what happens when someone tries in chapter 16.

3:11-13 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "And I, look, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel in place of every firstborn, the one opening a womb, from the sons of Israel; and the Levites shall be Mine. For every firstborn* ***is*** *Mine; on the day I struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified for Myself every firstborn in Israel, from man to livestock; they shall be Mine. I* ***am*** *the LORD."*

Here is the heart of the chapter. "I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel in place of every firstborn." Why the firstborn? "For every firstborn is Mine; on the day I struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified for Myself every firstborn in Israel."

On the night of the Passover, God struck the firstborn of Egypt but passed over the houses marked with the blood of the lamb (Exodus 12). Israel's firstborn lived because a lamb died in their place. From then on, God said, every firstborn belonged to Him (Exodus 13:2, 15). Now He takes the whole tribe of Levi in their place. The Levites stand in for the firstborn, and they serve God for them.

This is substitution, one taking the place of another. Paul tells us that Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us (1 Corinthians 5:7). Hebrews speaks of the "church of the firstborn who are enrolled in the heavens" (Hebrews 12:23). We belong to God because Someone took our place.

3:14-20 *And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying, "Enroll the sons of Levi by the house of their fathers, by their clans; every male from a son of a month and upward you shall enroll them." And Moses enrolled them at the mouth of the LORD, just as he had been commanded. And these were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon and Kohath and Merari. And these* ***are*** *the names of the sons of Gershon by their clans: Libni and Shimei. And the sons of Kohath by their clans: Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. And the sons of Merari by their clans: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of the Levites by the house of their fathers.*

God tells Moses to count the Levites "from a son of a month and upward." The army count started at twenty years. This count starts at one month, because the Levites were being counted as a substitute for every firstborn, and that included baby boys.

Levi had three sons, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, and each became a clan (Exodus 6:16-19). Moses and Aaron came from Kohath's line through Amram (Exodus 6:18-20). Moses counted them "at the mouth of the LORD, just as he had been commanded."

3:21-26 *To Gershon **belonged** the clan of the Libnite and the clan of the Shimeite; these are the clans of the Gershonite. Their enrolled **men**, by the number of every male from a son of a month and upward, their enrolled **men were** seven thousand and five hundred. The clans of the Gershonite shall camp behind the tabernacle, westward. And the leader of the father's house of the Gershonite **was** Eliasaph the son of Lael. And the charge of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting **was** the tabernacle and the tent, its covering, and the screen of the entrance of the tent of meeting, and the hangings of the courtyard, and the screen of the entrance of the courtyard which **is** by the tabernacle and by the altar all around, and its cords, for all its service.*

The Gershonites numbered 7,500. They camped "behind the tabernacle, westward." Their charge was the fabric parts: the tabernacle curtains, the tent and its coverings, the screen at the entrance, and the hangings and screen of the courtyard with their cords. When the camp moved, these were their responsibility.

3:27-32 *And to Kohath **belonged** the clan of the Amramite and the clan of the Izharite and the clan of the Hebronite and the clan of the Uzzielite; these are the clans of the Kohathite. By the number of every male from a son of a month and upward, eight thousand and six hundred **were** keepers of the charge of the holy place. The clans of the sons of Kohath shall camp on the side of the tabernacle, southward. And the leader of the father's house of the clans of the Kohathite **was** Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. And their charge **was** the ark and the table and the lampstand and the altars, and the articles of the holy place with which they minister, and the screen, and all its service. And the leader of the leaders of the Levites **was** Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, **with** the oversight of the keepers of the charge of the holy place.*

The Kohathites numbered 8,600 and camped on the south side. They had the most holy work: "the ark and the table and the lampstand and the altars, and the articles of the holy place." The ark of the covenant was the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the Law, with the mercy seat and the two cherubim on top. It was the place where God met with His people.

Eleazar, Aaron's son, was "the leader of the leaders of the Levites" (3:32) and oversaw those who kept the holy place. The closer the work was to the presence of God, the more carefully it was guarded.

3:33-37 *To Merari **belonged** the clan of the Mahlite and the clan of the Mushite; these are the clans of Merari. And their enrolled **men**, by the number of every male from a son of a month and upward, **were** six thousand and two hundred. And the leader of the father's house of the clans of Merari **was** Zuriel the son of Abihail; they shall camp on the side of the tabernacle, northward. And the oversight of the charge of the sons of Merari **was** the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its bases and all its articles and all its service, and the pillars of the courtyard all around, and their bases and their pegs and their cords.*

The Merarites numbered 6,200 and camped on the north side. They had the heavy frame of the tabernacle: "the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its bases," and the pillars, bases, pegs, and cords of the courtyard. It was the least glamorous job, the heavy lifting. But without the boards and the pegs, there was no tabernacle. God saw their work as His service just as much as the work around the ark.

3:38-39 *And those who camp before the tabernacle eastward, before the tent of meeting toward* ***the*** *sunrise,* ***were*** *Moses and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary for the charge of the sons of Israel; and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death. All the enrolled of the Levites whom Moses and Aaron enrolled at the mouth of the LORD by their clans, every male from a son of a month and upward,* ***were*** *twenty-two thousand.*

The east side, in front of the entrance, belonged to "Moses and Aaron and his sons, keeping the charge of the sanctuary." The priests guarded the door. Anyone who wanted to approach God had to come by the way God appointed.

The total of the Levites is given as 22,000 (3:39). If you add the three clans (7,500, 8,600, and 6,200), you get 22,300. Bible teachers have offered two main explanations. Some think the 300 were the Levites' own firstborn, who could not stand in for anyone else since they already belonged to God. Others think a copyist misread one letter in the Kohathite number (8,300 would make the total come out even). Scripture doesn't tell us which, and the difference does not change anything the chapter teaches.

3:40-43 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Enroll every firstborn male of the sons of Israel from a son of a month and upward, and take the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for Me—I* ***am*** *the LORD—in place of every firstborn among the sons of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites in place of every firstborn among the livestock of the sons of Israel." And Moses enrolled, just as the LORD had commanded him, every firstborn among the sons of Israel. And every firstborn male by the number of names, from a son of a month and upward, by their enrolled* ***men****, was twenty-two thousand, two hundred and seventy-three.*

Now God tells Moses to count "every firstborn male of the sons of Israel from a son of a month and upward." Moses did, and the count came to 22,273. The livestock of the Levites was also taken in place of Israel's firstborn animals (3:41).

Some have asked how a nation of over 600,000 men could have only 22,273 firstborn sons. Many teachers think this count included only firstborn sons born since the exodus, when God first claimed the firstborn (Exodus 13:2). Others think it counted only the firstborn who were still minors living in their father's house. The text does not explain it, so I hold those ideas loosely.

3:44-51 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the Levites in place of every firstborn among the sons of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites in place of their livestock; and the Levites shall be Mine. I **am** the LORD. And **for** the ransom of the two hundred and seventy-three of the firstborn of the sons of Israel who are in excess beyond the Levites, and you shall take approximately 2 ounces (five shekels) apiece for each head; by the shekel of the holy place you shall take **it**; the shekel **is** approximately 2/5 ounce (twenty gerahs). And you shall give the money to Aaron and to his sons, the ransom of those who are in excess among them." And Moses took the money of the ransom from those who were in excess beyond the ransomed of the Levites. From the firstborn of the sons of Israel he took the money, approximately 34 pounds (one thousand and three hundred and sixty-five **shekels**), by the shekel of the holy place. And Moses gave the money of the ransom to Aaron and to his sons at the mouth of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.*

There were 273 more firstborn than Levites. Those 273 had no Levite to take their place, so God told Moses to "take approximately 2 ounces (five shekels) apiece for each head" (3:47). A shekel was a weight of silver, not a coin, and the shekel of the holy place was the standard weight used at the tabernacle. Five shekels each for 273 firstborn came to 1,365 shekels, about 34 pounds of silver, and Moses gave it to Aaron and his sons.

The word ransom runs through these verses. A ransom is the price paid to set someone free. Every one of the 273 was covered, either by a Levite or by silver. No firstborn was left unredeemed, and God made sure the numbers came out exactly right.

Peter tells us that we were not redeemed with silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish (1 Peter 1:18-19). Israel's firstborn could be bought back with five shekels. Our ransom cost the life of God's own Son. You were bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20), and that is why we belong to Him.

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 lists the family of Aaron, the anointed priests, and remembers that Nadab and Abihu died for offering strange fire. God gave the tribe of Levi to Aaron as helpers for the work of the tabernacle and took the Levites as His own in place of every firstborn son of Israel, whom He had claimed since the Passover in Egypt. The Levites were counted from one month old by their clans: the Gershonites camped on the west and cared for the curtains and coverings, the Kohathites camped on the south and cared for the ark and the holy furniture, and the Merarites camped on the north and cared for the frame. Moses and the priests camped on the east, at the entrance. The firstborn of Israel numbered 22,273, which was 273 more than the Levites, so those 273 were ransomed with five shekels each, and the money was given to the priests.

Chapter 3 Study Questions

1. Who were the sons of Aaron, and what happened to Nadab and Abihu? (3:2-4; Leviticus 10:1-2)

2. What was the difference between the priests and the Levites? (3:3, 6-10)

3. Why did God say every firstborn in Israel belonged to Him? (3:13)

4. What were the three clans of Levi, and what part of the tabernacle did each care for? (3:25-26, 31, 36-37)

5. Who camped on the east side, in front of the entrance, and why does that matter? (3:38)

6. How were the 273 extra firstborn redeemed, and what did the money pay for? (3:46-51)

7. The Levites took the place of the firstborn. How does that help you understand what Jesus did for you?

8. The Merarites carried boards and pegs, while the Kohathites carried the ark. Do you ever feel your service to God is less important than someone else's? How does this chapter answer that?

9. Peter says we were redeemed, not with silver or gold, but with the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). How should knowing what your redemption cost change the way you live this week?

10. Nadab and Abihu came to God in a way He had not commanded. In what ways are people tempted today to come to God on their own terms?

Chapter 4: The Duties of the Levite Clans

Scripture

4:1-20 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes into the duty to do work in the tent of meeting. This ***is*** the service of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting: the holy of holies. And Aaron and his sons shall go in when the camp sets out, and they shall take down the veil of the screen, and they shall cover the ark of the testimony with it. And they shall put on it a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall spread a cloth entirely of blue over ***it*** from above, and they shall put in its poles. And over the table of the Presence they shall spread a cloth of blue, and they shall put on it the dishes and the pans and the bowls and the jugs of the drink offering; and the continual bread shall be on it. And they shall spread over them a cloth of crimson scarlet, and they shall cover it with a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put in its poles. And they shall take a cloth of blue, and they shall cover the lampstand of the light and its lamps and its tongs and its fire pans and all its oil vessels with which they minister to it. And they shall put it and all its articles into a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put ***it*** on the carrying frame. And over the altar of gold they shall spread a cloth of blue, and they shall cover it with a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put in its poles. And they shall take all the articles of ministry with which they minister in the holy place, and they shall put ***them*** into a cloth of blue, and they shall cover them with a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put ***them*** on the carrying frame. And they shall clear the ashes from the altar, and they shall spread over it a cloth of purple. And they shall put on it all its articles with which they minister at it: the fire pans, the forks and the shovels and the bowls, all the articles of the altar; and they shall spread over it a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put in its poles. And Aaron and his sons shall finish covering the holy thing and all the articles of the holy thing when the camp sets out; and after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry ***them***; and they shall not touch the holy thing, and die. These ***are*** the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting. And the oversight of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest ***is*** the oil of the light and the incense of the spices and the continual grain offering and the oil of the anointing, the oversight of all the tabernacle and of all that ***is*** in it, in the holy place and in its articles." And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Do not cut off the tribe of the clans of the Kohathite from among the Levites. And this do for them, and they shall live and not die when they draw near to the holy of holies: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and they shall appoint them, each man to his service and to his burden. And they shall not go in to see the holy thing for an instant, and die."

4:21-33 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the sum of the sons of Gershon, them also, by the house of their fathers, by their clans. From a son of thirty years and upward until a son of fifty years you shall enroll them, everyone who comes to perform duty, to serve the service in the tent of meeting. This ***is*** the service of the clans of the Gershonite, for serving and for burden: And they shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting, its covering and the covering of dolphin ***skin*** which ***is*** on it from above, and the screen of the entrance of the tent of meeting, and the hangings of the courtyard, and the screen of the entrance of the gate of the courtyard which

by the tabernacle and by the altar all around, and their cords and all the articles of their service, and all that is to be done for them; and they shall serve. At the mouth of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonite, in all their burden and in all their service; and you shall assign to them as a charge all their burden. This ***is*** the service of the clans of the sons of the Gershonite in the tent of meeting; and their charge ***is*** in the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. The sons of Merari, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, you shall enroll them. From a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years you shall enroll them, everyone who comes into the duty to serve the service of the tent of meeting. And this ***is*** the charge of their burden for all their service in the tent of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its bases, and the pillars of the courtyard all around and their bases and their pegs and their cords, for all their articles and for all their service; and by names you shall assign the articles of the charge of their burden. This ***is*** the service of the clans of the sons of Merari, for all their service in the tent of meeting, in the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."

4:34-49 And Moses and Aaron and the leaders of the congregation enrolled the sons of the Kohathite by their clans and by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes into the duty for service in the tent of meeting. And their enrolled ***men*** by their clans were two thousand, seven hundred and fifty. These ***were*** the enrolled of the clans of the Kohathite, everyone who serves in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses. And the enrolled of the sons of Gershon, by their clans and by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes into the duty for service in the tent of meeting, and their enrolled ***men***, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, were two thousand and six hundred and thirty. These ***were*** the enrolled of the clans of the sons of Gershon, everyone who serves in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled at the mouth of the LORD. And the enrolled of the clans of the sons of Merari, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes into the duty for service in the tent of meeting, and their enrolled ***men*** by their clans were three thousand and two hundred. These ***were*** the enrolled of the clans of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses. All the enrolled whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel enrolled, the Levites, by their clans and by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes to serve the service of service and the service of burden in the tent of meeting, and their enrolled ***men*** were eight thousand and five hundred and eighty. At the mouth of the LORD he enrolled them by the hand of Moses, each man to his service and to his burden; and his enrolled ***ones were*** as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Chapter 4 Preview

Chapter 3 counted every Levite male from one month old. Chapter 4 counts the working Levites, the men from thirty to fifty years old, and gives each clan its job for moving day. Before the Kohathites carry the holy furniture, Aaron and his sons must go in and wrap each piece in its coverings, so that no Levite sees or touches the holy things and dies. The Gershonites carry the curtains and coverings, and the Merarites carry the frame, both under the oversight of Ithamar the priest.

The chapter ends with the totals: 2,750 Kohathites, 2,630 Gershonites, and 3,200 Merarites, 8,580 men in all. It reads like a packing list, and in a way it is. But it is a packing list for the house of God, and it teaches us that God cares how His holy things are handled and that every job in His service matters.

Chapter 4 Study

4:1-4 *And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Take the sum of the sons of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes into the duty to do work in the tent of meeting. This **is** the service of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting: the holy of holies.*

God tells Moses and Aaron to count the Kohathites "from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes into the duty to do work in the tent of meeting." This was the age of full service, a man's strongest years.

Chapter 8:24 sets the starting age at twenty-five. Many teachers think the Levites began at twenty-five as a time of training and took on the full work of carrying at thirty. Later, when David organized the Levites for the temple and the carrying was over, the age was lowered to twenty (1 Chronicles 23:24-27).

The Kohathites served "the holy of holies," meaning the most holy things of the tabernacle (4:4). They are listed first, even though Gershon was the oldest son of Levi, because their work was closest to God's presence.

4:5-15 *And Aaron and his sons shall go in when the camp sets out, and they shall take down the veil of the screen, and they shall cover the ark of the testimony with it. And they shall put on it a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall spread a cloth entirely of blue over* ***it*** *from above, and they shall put in its poles. And over the table of the Presence they shall spread a cloth of blue, and they shall put on it the dishes and the pans and the bowls and the jugs of the drink offering; and the continual bread shall be on it. And they shall spread over them a cloth of crimson scarlet, and they shall cover it with a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put in its poles. And they shall take a cloth of blue, and they shall cover the lampstand of the light and its lamps and its tongs and its fire pans and all its oil vessels with which they minister to it. And they shall put it and all its articles into a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put* ***it*** *on the carrying frame. And over the altar of gold they shall spread a cloth of blue, and they shall cover it with a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put in its poles. And they shall take all the articles of ministry with which they minister in the holy place, and they shall put* ***them*** *into a cloth of blue, and they shall cover them with a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put* ***them*** *on the carrying frame. And they shall clear the ashes from the altar, and they shall spread over it a cloth of purple. And they shall put on it all its articles with which they minister at it: the fire pans, the forks and the shovels and the bowls, all the articles of the altar; and they shall spread over it a covering of dolphin skin, and they shall put in its poles. And Aaron and his sons shall finish covering the holy thing and all the articles of the holy thing when the camp sets out; and after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry* ***them****; and they shall not touch the holy thing, and die. These* ***are*** *the burden of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting.*

When the camp was ready to move, "Aaron and his sons shall go in" first (4:5). They took down the inner veil and used it to cover the ark. Over that went a covering of "dolphin skin," and over that a cloth "entirely of blue." The SLB translates the Hebrew word tachash as dolphin skin. Other translations say porpoise skin, goatskin, or fine leather. Scripture doesn't say exactly what animal it was, only that it made a tough outer covering.

Each piece was wrapped in turn: the table of the Presence with its dishes and "the continual bread" (4:7), the lampstand, the golden altar of incense, the utensils, and the bronze altar of sacrifice, which was cleared of ashes and covered with purple (4:13). Then poles were put in place, and only then did the Kohathites come to carry it all. "They shall not touch the holy thing, and die" (4:15).

Why so much care? Because these things belonged to God and pictured His holiness. Later, in David's day, the ark was carried on an ox cart instead of on the shoulders of the Levites, and when Uzzah reached out and took hold of it, God struck him dead (2 Samuel 6:6-7). David learned from that, and he said that no one but the Levites should carry the ark (1 Chronicles 15:2). God's instructions here were not fussy. They protected the people who served Him.

4:16 *And the oversight of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest **is** the oil of the light and the incense of the spices and the continual grain offering and the oil of the anointing, the oversight of all the tabernacle and of all that **is** in it, in the holy place and in its articles."*

Eleazar, Aaron's son, had the oversight of "the oil of the light and the incense of the spices and the continual grain offering and the oil of the anointing," and of the whole tabernacle and all that was in it. He carried the personal responsibility for the most precious items. Eleazar would one day take his father's place as high priest (20:28).

4:17-20 *And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Do not cut off the tribe of the clans of the Kohathite from among the Levites. And this do for them, and they shall live and not die when they draw near to the holy of holies: Aaron and his sons shall go in, and they shall appoint them, each man to his service and to his burden. And they shall not go in to see the holy thing for an instant, and die."*

"Do not cut off the tribe of the clans of the Kohathite from among the Levites" (4:18). God gives this command to keep the Kohathites alive. Their job was dangerous, so He told Aaron and his sons to go in first and assign "each man to his service and to his burden." The Kohathites were not to "go in to see the holy thing for an instant, and die" (4:20).

This is God's mercy inside His holiness. He did not want His servants to die. He gave a way for them to serve Him safely. That is the same kind of mercy He shows us in Christ. We have a High Priest who has gone before us, so that we may come with boldness to the throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16).

4:21-28 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the sum of the sons of Gershon, them also, by the house of their fathers, by their clans. From a son of thirty years and upward until a son of fifty years you shall enroll them, everyone who comes to perform duty, to serve the service in the tent of meeting. This **is** the service of the clans of the Gershonite, for serving and for burden: And they shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting, its covering and the covering of dolphin **skin** which **is** on it from above, and the screen of the entrance of the tent of meeting, and the hangings of the courtyard, and the screen of the entrance of the gate of the courtyard which **is** by the tabernacle and by the altar all around, and their cords and all the articles of their service, and all that is to be done for them; and they shall serve. At the mouth of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonite, in all their burden and in all their service; and you shall assign to them as a charge all their burden. This **is** the service of the clans of the sons of the Gershonite in the tent of meeting; and their charge **is** in the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.*

The Gershonites, from thirty to fifty years old, were counted next. Their burden was "the curtains of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting, its covering and the covering of dolphin skin which is on it from above" (4:25), the entrance screen, and the courtyard hangings and cords. "At the mouth of Aaron and his sons shall be all the service of the sons of the Gershonite" (4:27), and they worked under the direction of "Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest" (4:28).

Chapter 7 tells us the Gershonites were given two carts and four oxen for their load (7:7). The Kohathites were given none, because they carried the holy things on their shoulders (7:9).

4:29-33 *The sons of Merari, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, you shall enroll them. From a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years you shall enroll them, everyone who comes into the duty to serve the service of the tent of meeting. And this **is** the charge of their burden for all their service in the tent of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its bases, and the pillars of the courtyard all around and their bases and their pegs and their cords, for all their articles and for all their service; and by names you shall assign the articles of the charge of their burden. This **is** the service of the clans of the sons of Merari, for all their service in the tent of meeting, in the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest."*

The Merarites, also from thirty to fifty, carried "the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its bases" and the courtyard pillars, bases, pegs, and cords. "By names you shall assign the articles of the charge of their burden" (4:32). Each man was told by name which pieces he would carry. Nothing was lost, and no one was confused.

That detail shows us something about God. He does not hand out work in a vague way. He knows each servant and gives each one a real task. Paul says there are different kinds of service but the same Lord (1 Corinthians 12:5).

4:34-49 *And Moses and Aaron and the leaders of the congregation enrolled the sons of the Kohathite by their clans and by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes into the duty for service in the tent of meeting. And their enrolled **men** by their clans were two thousand, seven hundred and fifty. These **were** the enrolled of the clans of the Kohathite, everyone who serves in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses. And the enrolled of the sons of Gershon, by their clans and by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes into the duty for service in the tent of meeting, and their enrolled **men**, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, were two thousand and six hundred and thirty. These **were** the enrolled of the clans of the sons of Gershon, everyone who serves in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled at the mouth of the LORD. And the enrolled of the clans of the sons of Merari, by their clans, by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes into the duty for service in the tent of meeting, and their enrolled **men** by their clans were three thousand and two hundred. These **were** the enrolled of the clans of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron enrolled at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses. All the enrolled whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel enrolled, the Levites, by their clans and by the house of their fathers, from a son of thirty years and upward and to a son of fifty years, everyone who comes to serve the service of service and the service of burden in the tent of meeting, and their enrolled **men** were eight thousand and five hundred and eighty. At the mouth of the LORD he enrolled them by the hand of Moses, each man to his service and to his burden; and his enrolled **ones were** as the LORD had commanded Moses.*

Moses, Aaron, and the leaders counted the working men of each clan: 2,750 Kohathites (4:36), 2,630 Gershonites (4:40), and 3,200 Merarites (4:44), "eight thousand and five hundred and

eighty" in all (4:48). Each section ends with the same words, that they were enrolled "at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses."

Interestingly, the Merarites were the smallest clan in chapter 3 but have the most working men here. They also had the heaviest load to carry. God supplied the strength where the work needed it.

The chapter's last verse sums it up: "each man to his service and to his burden" (4:49). Every Levite had a job, and every job mattered, from the man who carried the ark to the man who carried tent pegs. The same is true in the body of Christ. Whatever you do, Paul says, do it from the heart, as to the Lord and not to men (Colossians 3:23).

Chapter 4 Summary

God told Moses and Aaron to count the Levites from thirty to fifty years old who would do the work of the tent of meeting. Before each move, Aaron and his sons covered the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the holy utensils with cloths and skins and put in their poles. Only then did the Kohathites carry them, without touching or seeing the holy things, so that they would not die. Eleazar oversaw the oil, incense, grain offering, and anointing oil. The Gershonites carried the curtains and coverings and the Merarites carried the frame, both under Ithamar. The working Levites numbered 2,750 Kohathites, 2,630 Gershonites, and 3,200 Merarites, 8,580 in all, each assigned to his service and his burden.

Chapter 4 Study Questions

1. What ages of Levites were counted in this chapter, and why do you think those ages were chosen? (4:3)

2. What did Aaron and his sons have to do before the Kohathites could carry the holy things? (4:5-15)

3. What would happen if the Kohathites touched or looked at the holy things? (4:15, 20)

4. What did Eleazar oversee? (4:16)

5. Who supervised the Gershonites and the Merarites? (4:28, 33)

6. What does 2 Samuel 6:6-7 teach about why God gave such careful instructions for carrying the ark?

7. How does God's command not to "cut off" the Kohathites show His mercy as well as His holiness? (4:18-20)

8. Each Merarite was assigned his load "by names" (4:32). What task do you believe God has given you in His church right now?

9. Some jobs in God's house are seen and some are hidden. How can you do a hidden job "as to the Lord" this week? (Colossians 3:23)

10. Do you treat the things of God, His Word, His worship, and His people, with the honor they deserve? Where could you grow in that?

Chapter 5: A Clean Camp and the Test for Jealousy

Scripture

5:1-10 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the sons of Israel, and let them send out from the camp everyone leprous and everyone with a discharge and everyone unclean by a corpse. From male to female you shall send ***them*** out; to the outside of the camp you shall send them out, and they shall not make their camps unclean, in the midst of which I am dwelling." And the sons of Israel did so, and they sent them out to the outside of the camp; just as the LORD had spoken to Moses, so the sons of Israel did. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel: 'A man or a woman, when they do any of all the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully ***in*** unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that soul is guilty, then they shall confess their sin which they have done; and he shall repay his guilt in its principal, and let him add its fifth to it, and he shall give ***it*** to ***the one*** against whom he was guilty. And if the man has no redeemer to repay the guilt to him, the guilt that is repaid ***shall be*** the LORD's, for the priest, besides the ram of the atonement with which he shall make atonement for him. And every contribution of all the holy things of the sons of Israel which they bring near to the priest, it shall be his. And each man's holy things shall be his; whatever a man gives to the priest, it shall be his.'"

5:11-31 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them: 'Any man, when his wife turns aside and acts unfaithfully ***in*** unfaithfulness against him, and a man lies with her ***with*** a lying of seed, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and she is concealed, and she has made herself unclean, and there is no witness against her, and she was not caught, and a spirit of jealousy passes over him, and he is jealous of his wife, and she has made herself unclean; or a spirit of jealousy passes over him, and he is jealous of his wife, and she has not made herself unclean, then the man shall bring his wife to the priest, and he shall bring her offering for her, approximately 2 quarts (a tenth of the ephah) of barley flour; he shall not pour oil on it, and he shall not put frankincense on it, for it ***is*** a grain offering of jealousies, a grain offering of remembrance, bringing iniquity to remembrance. And the priest shall bring her near, and he shall make her stand before the LORD. And the priest shall take holy water in an earthenware vessel, and some of the dust which is on the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and he shall put ***it*** into the water. And the priest shall make the woman stand before the LORD, and he shall let loose the head of the woman, and he shall put on her palms the grain offering of remembrance—it ***is*** a grain offering of jealousies—and in the hand of the priest shall be the waters of bitterness that bring a curse. And the priest shall make her swear, and he shall say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you, and if you have not turned aside ***to*** uncleanness under your husband, be free from these waters of bitterness that bring a curse. And you, if you have turned aside under your husband, and if you have made yourself unclean, and a man besides your husband has put his lying in you—" then the priest shall make the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman, "May the LORD make you a curse and an oath in the midst of your people, when the LORD makes your thigh fall and your belly swollen; and these waters that bring a curse shall go into your inward parts to make ***your*** belly swell and ***your*** thigh fall." And the woman shall say, "Amen, amen." And the priest shall write these curses in the scroll, and he shall wipe ***them*** off into the waters of bitterness. And he

shall make the woman drink the waters of bitterness that bring a curse, and the waters that bring a curse shall go into her for bitterness. And the priest shall take from the hand of the woman the grain offering of jealousies, and he shall wave the grain offering before the LORD, and he shall bring it near to the altar. And the priest shall take a handful from the grain offering, its memorial portion, and he shall make ***it*** smoke on the altar; and afterward he shall make the woman drink the waters. And he shall make her drink the waters; and it shall be, if she has made herself unclean and has acted unfaithfully ***in*** unfaithfulness against her husband, then the waters that bring a curse shall go into her for bitterness, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall fall, and the woman shall become a curse in the midst of her people. And if the woman has not made herself unclean, and she ***is*** clean, then she shall be free, and she shall be sown ***with*** seed. This ***is*** the law of jealousies, when a wife turns aside under her husband and makes herself unclean, or a man when a spirit of jealousy passes over him, and he is jealous of his wife; then he shall make the woman stand before the LORD, and the priest shall do to her all this law. And the man shall be free from iniquity, and that woman shall bear her iniquity.'"

Chapter 5 Preview

The camp has been counted and arranged around the tabernacle. Now God turns to the life of the people inside it. If the holy God lives in the middle of the camp, the camp must be kept clean. Chapter 5 gives three laws. First, people with certain kinds of uncleanness must live outside the camp for a time. Second, a person who wrongs someone else must confess, pay it back, and add a fifth. Third, a husband who suspects his wife of unfaithfulness, with no proof, must bring the matter to the LORD at the tabernacle, and God Himself will judge it.

That last law is one of the strangest in the Bible to modern readers, and it needs careful reading. Read in its setting, many Bible teachers believe it protected a wife from a jealous husband as much as it exposed hidden sin. All three laws teach the same thing: God cares about purity, about honest dealings between neighbors, and about trust in marriage, because He dwells among His people.

Chapter 5 Study

5:1-4 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the sons of Israel, and let them send out from the camp everyone leprous and everyone with a discharge and everyone unclean by a corpse. From male to female you shall send **them** out; to the outside of the camp you shall send them out, and they shall not make their camps unclean, in the midst of which I am dwelling." And the sons of Israel did so, and they sent them out to the outside of the camp; just as the LORD had spoken to Moses, so the sons of Israel did.*

God commands that "everyone leprous and everyone with a discharge and everyone unclean by a corpse" be sent out of the camp. The word leprous in the Bible covers a range of skin diseases, not only what we call leprosy today (Leviticus 13). A discharge refers to the bodily conditions in Leviticus 15. "Unclean by a corpse" means unclean from touching a dead body. The Hebrew word here is the word usually translated soul, which can also mean a dead person.

Clean and unclean are not the same as good and evil. In the Law, being unclean meant a person was not fit for a time to come near God's tabernacle or live in the camp around it. Most kinds of uncleanness were not sins at all. They were part of living in a fallen world of sickness and death. God used these laws to teach Israel that sin and death do not belong in His presence.

Why? "They shall not make their camps unclean, in the midst of which I am dwelling" (5:3). That is the key. The rule was about God's presence, not about despising sick people. The Law also provided ways for the unclean to be cleansed and come back (Leviticus 14; Numbers 19).

When Jesus came, He did something no one under the Law could do. He touched a leper, and instead of Jesus becoming unclean, the leper was made clean (Mark 1:41). Today the church is God's temple, and His Spirit dwells in us (1 Corinthians 3:16). God still calls His people to be clean, not by sending the sick away, but by turning away from sin.

5:5-8 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel: 'A man or a woman, when they do any of all the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully **in** unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that soul is guilty, then they shall confess their sin which they have done; and he shall repay his guilt in its principal, and let him add its fifth to it, and he shall give **it** to **the one** against whom he was guilty. And if the man has no redeemer to repay the guilt to him, the guilt that is repaid **shall be** the LORD's, for the priest, besides the ram of the atonement with which he shall make atonement for him.*

"A man or a woman, when they do any of all the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully in unfaithfulness against the LORD." This law is about wronging a neighbor, by stealing, cheating, or lying about property (Leviticus 6:1-7). Notice that God calls it unfaithfulness against Him. When we wrong another person, we sin against God, who made that person and gave the law.

Three things were required. First, "they shall confess their sin which they have done." Second, he must repay what he took in full. Third, "add its fifth to it," that is, twenty percent more. Then he brought a ram to the priest for atonement. Atonement means the covering of sin, so that the guilty person is made right with God.

What if the person wronged had died and had "no redeemer," no close relative to receive the payment? Then it went to the LORD, for the priest (5:8). A redeemer, in Hebrew go'el, was the nearest relative, who had the right and duty to buy back land, free a family member, or receive what was owed. The debt did not disappear just because the victim was gone.

This is real repentance. It is not enough to feel bad or even to say sorry to God. Where we have wronged someone, we make it right. Zacchaeus did this when he met Jesus and promised to repay four times over (Luke 19:8). Jesus said to leave your gift at the altar and first be reconciled to your brother (Matthew 5:23-24). Our forgiveness comes from Christ alone, but true faith makes things right with people where it can.

5:9-10 *And every contribution of all the holy things of the sons of Israel which they bring near to the priest, it shall be his. And each man's holy things shall be his; whatever a man gives to the priest, it shall be his.'"*

"Every contribution of all the holy things of the sons of Israel which they bring near to the priest, it shall be his." What was given to God for the priest belonged to the priest, and no one could take it back. These two verses connect to the one before: the money paid for a wrong when no relative remained also went to the priest.

God provided for those who served Him through the gifts of His people. Paul uses the same principle for those who preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). And verse 10 adds, "each man's holy things shall be his." A man chose freely what to give, and once given, it was the priest's.

5:11-14 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them: 'Any man, when his wife turns aside and acts unfaithfully **in** unfaithfulness against him, and a man lies with her **with** a lying of seed, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and she is concealed, and she has made herself unclean, and there is no witness against her, and she was not caught, and a spirit of jealousy passes over him, and he is jealous of his wife, and she has made herself unclean; or a spirit of jealousy passes over him, and he is jealous of his wife, and she has not made herself unclean,*

Now comes the law of jealousy. A husband suspects his wife of adultery. Maybe she did, "and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband," with "no witness against her" (5:13). Or maybe she did not. Verse 14 gives both cases. The husband may be jealous and "she has made herself unclean," or he may be jealous and "she has not made herself unclean."

That second case matters. The law assumes a husband might be jealous of a wife who is completely innocent. In the ancient world, a suspicious husband often had all the power. He could divorce her, beat her, or stir up others against her, with no proof at all. Jealousy is a terrible force. Proverbs says, "who will stand before jealousy?" (Proverbs 27:4).

God did not let the husband settle it himself. He had to bring the matter to the priest, before the LORD. The case was taken out of the husband's hands and put into God's.

5:15-18 *then the man shall bring his wife to the priest, and he shall bring her offering for her, approximately 2 quarts (a tenth of the ephah) of barley flour; he shall not pour oil on it, and he shall not put frankincense on it, for it* ***is*** *a grain offering of jealousies, a grain offering of remembrance, bringing iniquity to remembrance. And the priest shall bring her near, and he shall make her stand before the LORD. And the priest shall take holy water in an earthenware vessel, and some of the dust which is on the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and he shall put into the water. And the priest shall make the woman stand before the LORD, and he shall let loose the head of the woman, and he shall put on her palms the grain offering of remembrance—it* ***is*** *a grain offering of jealousies—and in the hand of the priest shall be the waters of bitterness that bring a curse.*

The husband brought "her offering for her," a tenth of an ephah, about two quarts, of barley flour, with no oil and no frankincense. Barley was the grain of the poor, and oil and incense were signs of joy and pleasing worship. This was "a grain offering of jealousies, a grain offering of remembrance, bringing iniquity to remembrance" (5:15). It was a sober offering for a sad situation.

The priest took "holy water in an earthenware vessel" and added "some of the dust which is on the floor of the tabernacle." He loosened the woman's hair, a sign of shame or mourning, and put the offering in her hands (5:18).

Notice what is in the cup: holy water and dust from God's own house. There was nothing in it that could hurt anyone by itself. This was not a trial by poison. If anything happened to the woman, it would be because God acted, not because of what she drank.

5:19-22 *And the priest shall make her swear, and he shall say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you, and if you have not turned aside* ***to*** *uncleanness under your husband, be free from these waters of bitterness that bring a curse. And you, if you have turned aside under your husband, and if you have made yourself unclean, and a man besides your husband has put his lying in you—" then the priest shall make the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman, "May the LORD make you a curse and an oath in the midst of your people, when the LORD makes your thigh fall and your belly swollen; and these waters that bring a curse shall go into your inward parts to make* ***your*** *belly swell and* ***your*** *thigh fall." And the woman shall say, "Amen, amen."*

The priest put the woman under an oath. First he said the good outcome: "If no man has lain with you," then "be free from these waters of bitterness that bring a curse" (5:19). Then the other: if she had been unfaithful, "May the LORD make you a curse and an oath in the midst of your people" (5:21). The curse would show in her body. Bible teachers differ on what "your thigh fall and your belly swollen" meant. Many believe it described the loss of her ability to bear children. Scripture does not explain it further, and I won't guess beyond that.

"And the woman shall say, Amen, amen" (5:22). Amen means so be it, or let it be true. She agreed to put herself in God's hands. For an innocent woman, this was a way to be cleared in public, before the whole community, by God Himself.

5:23-28 *And the priest shall write these curses in the scroll, and he shall wipe **them** off into the waters of bitterness. And he shall make the woman drink the waters of bitterness that bring a curse, and the waters that bring a curse shall go into her for bitterness. And the priest shall take from the hand of the woman the grain offering of jealousies, and he shall wave the grain offering before the LORD, and he shall bring it near to the altar. And the priest shall take a handful from the grain offering, its memorial portion, and he shall make **it** smoke on the altar; and afterward he shall make the woman drink the waters. And he shall make her drink the waters; and it shall be, if she has made herself unclean and has acted unfaithfully **in** unfaithfulness against her husband, then the waters that bring a curse shall go into her for bitterness, and her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall fall, and the woman shall become a curse in the midst of her people. And if the woman has not made herself unclean, and she **is** clean, then she shall be free, and she shall be sown **with** seed.*

The priest wrote the curses in a scroll and washed the ink off into the water (5:23). The woman drank it. The priest also burned a handful of the grain offering on the altar as "its memorial portion" (5:26).

Then the result: if she was guilty, the curse would come on her. "And if the woman has not made herself unclean, and she is clean, then she shall be free, and she shall be sown with seed" (5:28). An innocent wife would go home cleared, free to bear children, and her husband's suspicion answered by God.

Think of the difference this made. An innocent wife who might otherwise have been sent away or harmed on rumor now had God's own verdict on her side. Scripture never records a case of this test being used, so we cannot say how often it happened. But the law made clear that a wife's guilt or innocence belonged to God to decide, not to an angry man.

5:29-31 *This **is** the law of jealousies, when a wife turns aside under her husband and makes herself unclean, or a man when a spirit of jealousy passes over him, and he is jealous of his wife; then he shall make the woman stand before the LORD, and the priest shall do to her all this law. And the man shall be free from iniquity, and that woman shall bear her iniquity.'"*

"This is the law of jealousies." The closing verses repeat both possibilities, a wife who has gone astray or a husband who is simply jealous. "And the man shall be free from iniquity, and that woman shall bear her iniquity" (5:31). If the husband brought the case honestly, he was not guilty for having done so. If his wife had sinned, she bore the consequences of her sin before God.

What does this mean for us? This law was given to Israel under the Mosaic covenant, and it is not practiced in the church today. Christ fulfilled the Law (Matthew 5:17), and He "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13). But the heart of the law still speaks. God takes marriage seriously: "Marriage is to be honorable among all, and the bed undefiled" (Hebrews 13:4). He also cares about the person falsely accused. A husband today is called to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25) and not to be harsh with her (Colossians 3:19). If trust has been broken in a marriage, the answer is to bring it before the Lord, honestly and with help, not to take matters into our own hands.

Chapter 5 Summary

God commanded Israel to keep the camp clean because He dwelt in it, so those with skin disease, discharges, or contact with the dead were to live outside the camp for a time. Anyone who wronged a neighbor was to confess, repay in full, add a fifth, and bring a ram for atonement; if there was no relative to receive the payment, it went to the priest. The holy gifts given to the priests belonged to them. When a husband suspected his wife of hidden adultery with no witness, he was to bring her to the priest, who had her drink holy water mixed with dust from the tabernacle floor under an oath. If she was guilty, God would bring the curse on her body; if she was innocent, she would be cleared and able to bear children. The verdict was left to God, not to the husband.

There are people I have wronged that I need to make things right with. Sometimes it will not happen, because the other person is not open to it. That does not mean I am not sorry. I can do my part, and I leave the rest with God.

Chapter 5 Study Questions

1. Who was to be sent outside the camp, and why? (5:2-3)

2. What three things did a person have to do when he had wronged someone? (5:6-8)

3. Who received the payment if the person wronged had no redeemer? (5:8)

4. What two possibilities does verse 14 describe, and why does it matter that the law includes an innocent wife?

5. What was in the water the woman drank, and what does that tell you about who decided the outcome? (5:17)

6. What happened to an innocent woman after the test? (5:28)

7. Jesus touched a leper and made him clean (Mark 1:41). What does that show you about Him compared to the Law?

8. Is there someone you have wronged that you need to make things right with? What would adding a fifth look like in your situation? (5:7; Luke 19:8)

9. Jealousy can destroy a marriage or a friendship. How can you bring your suspicions and fears to God instead of acting on them yourself? (Proverbs 27:4)

10. How does Hebrews 13:4 call you to honor marriage, whether you are married or not?

Chapter 6: The Nazirite Vow and the Priestly Blessing

Scripture

6:1-12 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them: 'A man or a woman, when he makes ***it*** extraordinary to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate ***himself*** to the LORD, from wine and strong drink he shall separate himself; vinegar of wine and vinegar of strong drink he shall not drink, and any juice of grapes he shall not drink, and grapes, fresh and dried, he shall not eat. All the days of his separation, from anything that is made from the vine of the wine, from seeds even to skin, he shall not eat. All the days of the vow of his separation a razor shall not pass over his head; until the days are fulfilled which he separates ***himself*** to the LORD, he shall be holy, letting the locks of the hair of his head grow. All the days of his separating ***himself*** to the LORD, he shall not go in to a dead soul. For his father and for his mother, for his brother and for his sister, he shall not make himself unclean for them at their death, for the separation of his God ***is*** on his head. All the days of his separation he ***is*** holy to the LORD. And if a dead ***one*** dies beside him in an instant, suddenly, and he makes the head of his separation unclean, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it. And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young of the dove to the priest, to the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the priest shall offer one for a sin offering and one for a burnt offering, and he shall make atonement for him, because he sinned by the corpse; and he shall sanctify his head on that day. And he shall separate ***himself*** to the LORD ***for*** the days of his separation, and he shall bring a male lamb, a son of its year, for a guilt offering; and the former days shall fall, for his separation became unclean.

6:13-27 And this ***is*** the law of the Nazirite: on the day the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall bring him to the entrance of the tent of meeting. And he shall bring near his offering to the LORD: one male lamb, a son of its year, without blemish, for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb, a daughter of its year, without blemish, for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings, and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread smeared with oil, and their grain offering and their drink offerings. And the priest shall bring ***them*** near before the LORD, and he shall offer his sin offering and his burnt offering. And the ram he shall offer ***as*** a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread; and the priest shall offer its grain offering and its drink offering. And the Nazirite shall shave the head of his separation ***at*** the entrance of the tent of meeting, and he shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and he shall put ***it*** on the fire which ***is*** under the sacrifice of the peace offerings. And the priest shall take the boiled arm from the ram, and one cake of unleavened bread from the basket, and one wafer of unleavened bread, and he shall put ***them*** on the palms of the Nazirite after he has shaved his separation. And the priest shall wave them ***as*** a wave offering before the LORD; it ***is*** holy for the priest, with the breast of the wave offering and with the thigh of the contribution. And afterward the Nazirite may drink wine. This ***is*** the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to the LORD for his separation, besides what his hand attains; according to the mouth of his vow which he vows, so he shall do, according to the law of his separation.'" And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel, saying to them: "May the LORD bless you, and may

He keep you; may the LORD make His face shine toward you, and may He be gracious to you; may the LORD lift up His face toward you, and may He set peace for you."' And they shall put My name on the sons of Israel, and I, I will bless them."

Chapter 6 Preview

Chapter 6 opens a door for ordinary Israelites. Only the sons of Aaron could be priests, and only the Levites could serve at the tabernacle. But any man or woman in Israel could choose to set apart a time of life wholly to the LORD by taking the vow of a Nazirite. For the days of the vow, the Nazirite gave up everything from the grapevine, let his hair grow, and stayed away from dead bodies. The chapter explains what to do if the vow is broken by accident and how to end it properly with offerings.

Then the chapter closes with one of the best-known passages in the Old Testament, the blessing God gave Aaron and his sons to speak over the people: "May the LORD bless you, and may He keep you." After all the rules about holiness, God shows us His heart. He wants to bless His people, to shine His face on them, and to give them peace.

Chapter 6 Study

6:1-2 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them: 'A man or a woman, when he makes **it** extraordinary to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate **himself** to the LORD,*

"A man or a woman, when he makes it extraordinary to vow a vow of a Nazirite, to separate himself to the LORD." The word Nazirite comes from the Hebrew nazir, which means one who is separated or consecrated. The vow was open to men and women alike, and it was voluntary. No one was required to take it. It was a special act of devotion, for a set time, beyond what the Law required of everyone.

The SLB's word "extraordinary" fits well. This was an unusual vow. It is the Hebrew word often used for doing something wonderful, out of the ordinary.

6:3-4 *from wine and strong drink he shall separate himself; vinegar of wine and vinegar of strong drink he shall not drink, and any juice of grapes he shall not drink, and grapes, fresh and dried, he shall not eat. All the days of his separation, from anything that is made from the vine of the wine, from seeds even to skin, he shall not eat.*

First, the Nazirite gave up the vine: "from wine and strong drink he shall separate himself." Not only wine, but vinegar, grape juice, fresh grapes, and raisins, "from seeds even to skin." Wine was not sinful in itself. It was part of normal life and even of Israel's offerings (15:5). But wine stood for the joys and comforts of settled life in the land. The Nazirite gave up a good thing to show that his joy and devotion were in the LORD alone.

That is worth thinking about. Sometimes God's people set aside good things for a season, not because they are wrong, but to give God their full attention. Fasting works the same way.

6:5 *All the days of the vow of his separation a razor shall not pass over his head; until the days are fulfilled which he separates **himself** to the LORD, he shall be holy, letting the locks of the hair of his head grow.*

Second, "a razor shall not pass over his head." The Nazirite let his hair grow long for the whole time of the vow. Everyone could see it. Long hair was the public mark that this person belonged to God in a special way. "He shall be holy."

Samson is the best-known Nazirite. His mother was told before his birth that no razor should touch his head, for he would be a Nazirite from the womb (Judges 13:5). Hannah promised the same for Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11). For them it was lifelong, chosen by God or by a parent, but the rules came from this chapter.

6:6-8 *All the days of his separating **himself** to the LORD, he shall not go in to a dead soul. For his father and for his mother, for his brother and for his sister, he shall not make himself unclean for them at their death, for the separation of his God **is** on his head. All the days of his separation he **is** holy to the LORD.*

Third, the Nazirite "shall not go in to a dead soul," that is, he must not come near a dead body. Not even for "his father and for his mother, for his brother and for his sister" (6:7). That is a hard command. It was the same rule given to the high priest (Leviticus 21:11). For the time of the vow, an ordinary Israelite was held to the holiness of the high priest.

Why? "For the separation of his God is on his head." The long hair was a crown of devotion, and death was the sign of sin's curse. The one set apart to the God of life was to keep away from death. "All the days of his separation he is holy to the LORD" (6:8).

6:9-12 *And if a dead **one** dies beside him in an instant, suddenly, and he makes the head of his separation unclean, then he shall shave his head on the day of his cleansing; on the seventh day he shall shave it. And on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young of the dove to the priest, to the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the priest shall offer one for a sin offering and one for a burnt offering, and he shall make atonement for him, because he sinned by the corpse; and he shall sanctify his head on that day. And he shall separate **himself** to the LORD **for** the days of his separation, and he shall bring a male lamb, a son of its year, for a guilt offering; and the former days shall fall, for his separation became unclean.*

What if someone dies "beside him in an instant, suddenly"? The Nazirite had not sinned on purpose, but his vow had been defiled. He was to shave his head on the seventh day, bring two birds on the eighth day for a sin offering and a burnt offering, and start the vow again from the beginning. "The former days shall fall" (6:12). They did not count.

A sin offering was a sacrifice that dealt with sin and uncleanness. A burnt offering was wholly burned on the altar, showing full surrender to God. The Nazirite also brought a lamb for a guilt offering, a sacrifice for a wrong that needed to be made right.

This seems strict, since it was an accident. But it teaches that defilement is serious even when we don't mean it. Sin and death touch us in a fallen world in ways we don't choose. The good news is

that God provided a way to be made clean and start again. In Christ, we have that way. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us and cleanse us (1 John 1:9).

6:13-17 *And this **is** the law of the Nazirite: on the day the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall bring him to the entrance of the tent of meeting. And he shall bring near his offering to the LORD: one male lamb, a son of its year, without blemish, for a burnt offering, and one ewe lamb, a daughter of its year, without blemish, for a sin offering, and one ram without blemish for peace offerings, and a basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread smeared with oil, and their grain offering and their drink offerings. And the priest shall bring **them** near before the LORD, and he shall offer his sin offering and his burnt offering. And the ram he shall offer **as** a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, with the basket of unleavened bread; and the priest shall offer its grain offering and its drink offering.*

When the days were complete, the Nazirite came to the tabernacle with a full set of offerings: a male lamb for a burnt offering, a ewe lamb for a sin offering, a ram for peace offerings, a basket of unleavened bread, and grain and drink offerings. A peace offering was a sacrifice shared between God, the priest, and the worshiper, a meal of fellowship with God.

Notice that even after a vow kept faithfully, the Nazirite brought a sin offering. Even our best devotion needs God's forgiveness. No one is ever holy enough by his own effort to come to God without a sacrifice.

6:18-20 *And the Nazirite shall shave the head of his separation **at** the entrance of the tent of meeting, and he shall take the hair of the head of his separation, and he shall put **it** on the fire which **is** under the sacrifice of the peace offerings. And the priest shall take the boiled arm from the ram, and one cake of unleavened bread from the basket, and one wafer of unleavened bread, and he shall put **them** on the palms of the Nazirite after he has shaved his separation. And the priest shall wave them **as** a wave offering before the LORD; it **is** holy for the priest, with the breast of the wave offering and with the thigh of the contribution. And afterward the Nazirite may drink wine.*

The Nazirite shaved his head at the entrance of the tent and put the hair "on the fire which is under the sacrifice of the peace offerings." The hair that had marked his vow was given to God. The priest put the boiled shoulder of the ram and some bread in the Nazirite's hands and waved them before the LORD, a wave offering, lifted up and presented to God before being given to the priest. "And afterward the Nazirite may drink wine" (6:20). The vow was over, and ordinary life could begin again.

6:21 *This **is** the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to the LORD for his separation, besides what his hand attains; according to the mouth of his vow which he vows, so he shall do, according to the law of his separation.'"*

"This is the law of the Nazirite." A Nazirite could promise more than the minimum, "besides what his hand attains," and if he did, he had to do what he promised: "according to the mouth of his vow which he vows, so he shall do."

God takes our promises to Him seriously. Ecclesiastes says it is better not to vow than to vow and not pay (Ecclesiastes 5:5). Jesus said to let our yes be yes (Matthew 5:37).

In the New Testament, John the Baptist lived under a Nazirite-like rule (Luke 1:15), and Paul took a vow and shaved his head (Acts 18:18; 21:23-26). People sometimes confuse Nazirite with Nazarene. Jesus was called a Nazarene because He grew up in the town of Nazareth (Matthew 2:23). He was not a Nazirite. He drank wine and touched the dead to raise them. But He was holy, innocent, and separated from sinners in a way no Nazirite ever was (Hebrews 7:26). Paul calls every believer now to present our bodies "as a living, holy sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). We do not need long hair to show it, but our whole lives belong to God.

6:22-23 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel, saying to them:*

God told Moses to speak to Aaron and his sons: "Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel." The priests did more than offer sacrifices. They spoke God's blessing over His people. The blessing was given to them word for word, so it was God's own blessing, not a priest's good wishes.

6:24 *"May the LORD bless you, and may He keep you;*

"May the LORD bless you, and may He keep you." To bless is to give good, to cause to flourish. To keep is to guard and protect, like a shepherd watching over his flock. The blessing is spoken to "you" in the singular in Hebrew. It was spoken over the whole nation, but it reached each person.

6:25 *may the LORD make His face shine toward you, and may He be gracious to you;*

"May the LORD make His face shine toward you, and may He be gracious to you." When a person's face shines on you, they are pleased with you and turned toward you with favor. A face turned away means rejection. To be gracious is to give kindness that is not earned. This blessing asks God to look on His people with a smile they did not deserve. Paul says God has shone in our hearts the light of the knowledge of His glory "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6).

6:26 *may the LORD lift up His face toward you, and may He set peace for you."'*

"May the LORD lift up His face toward you, and may He set peace for you." To lift up one's face toward someone is to give them full attention and approval. Peace, in Hebrew shalom, means more than the absence of war. It means wholeness, well-being, everything as it should be. That kind of peace comes from being right with God. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1).

The name of the LORD is spoken three times in this blessing. Many Christians have seen in that a hint of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and Paul's blessing at the end of 2 Corinthians names all three (2 Corinthians 13:14). The text itself does not explain the threefold name, so I offer that as something many have noticed, not something the passage teaches directly.

6:27 *And they shall put My name on the sons of Israel, and I, I will bless them."*

"And they shall put My name on the sons of Israel, and I, I will bless them." The priests spoke the words, but God did the blessing. To put God's name on someone is to mark them as His, His own possession under His care.

The last thing Jesus did on earth before He went up to heaven was to lift up His hands and bless His disciples (Luke 24:50-51). And in the end, God's servants "will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads" (Revelation 22:4). The blessing Aaron spoke will be fully true for every believer forever.

Chapter 6 Summary

God gave Israel the vow of the Nazirite, a voluntary vow by which any man or woman could separate himself to the LORD for a time. The Nazirite gave up everything from the grapevine, let his hair grow uncut, and stayed away from dead bodies, even of his closest family. If someone died suddenly near him, he shaved his head, brought offerings, and started his vow again. At the end of the vow he brought burnt, sin, and peace offerings, shaved his head, and burned the hair under the peace offering, and then he could drink wine again. The chapter ends with the blessing God gave Aaron and his sons to speak over Israel, asking the LORD to bless and keep His people, make His face shine on them, be gracious to them, and give them peace. By it God put His name on His people and promised to bless them.

Chapter 6 Study Questions

1. Who could take the vow of a Nazirite, and was it required? (6:2)

2. What three things did a Nazirite give up or avoid during the vow? (6:3-7)

3. What happened if someone died suddenly beside a Nazirite? (6:9-12)

4. Why do you think a Nazirite still brought a sin offering after keeping the vow faithfully? (6:14)

5. What is the difference between a Nazirite and a Nazarene? (Matthew 2:23)

6. What are the six things the priestly blessing asks the LORD to do? (6:24-26)

7. Who actually blesses the people, according to verse 27?

8. The Nazirite gave up good things to show his devotion. Is there a good thing God may be asking you to set aside for a season to focus on Him?

9. What does it mean to you that God wants to make His face shine on you and give you peace? (6:25-26; Romans 5:1)

10. Who could you speak a blessing over this week, in your family, church, or workplace?

Chapter 7: The Leaders' Gifts for the Altar

Scripture

7:1-17 And it was on the day Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, and he anointed it and sanctified it and all its articles, and the altar and all its articles; and he anointed them and sanctified them. And the leaders of Israel, the heads of the house of their fathers, brought near— they ***were*** the leaders of the tribes; they ***were*** those who stood over the enrolled— and they brought their offering before the LORD: six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for two of the leaders and an ox for one; and they brought them near before the tabernacle. And the LORD said to Moses, saying, "Take ***them*** from them, and they shall be for serving the service of the tent of meeting; and you shall give them to the Levites, each man according to the mouth of his service." And Moses took the carts and the oxen, and he gave them to the Levites. Two of the carts and four of the oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to the mouth of their service; and four of the carts and eight of the oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to the mouth of their service, in the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. And to the sons of Kohath he did not give ***any***, for the service of the holy thing ***was*** on them; on the shoulder they carried ***it***. And the leaders brought near the dedication of the altar on the day it was anointed; and the leaders brought near their offering before the altar. And the LORD said to Moses, "One leader for the day, one leader for the day, they shall bring near their offering for the dedication of the altar." And the one who brought near his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah. And his offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadab.

7:18-41 On the second day Nethanel the son of Zuar, the leader of Issachar, brought near. He brought near his offering: one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Nethanel the son of Zuar. On the third day, the leader of the sons of Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Eliab

the son of Helon. On the fourth day, the leader of the sons of Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Elizur the son of Shedeur. On the fifth day, the leader of the sons of Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.

7:42-65 On the sixth day, the leader of the sons of Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Eliasaph the son of Deuel. On the seventh day, the leader of the sons of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Elishama the son of Ammihud. On the eighth day, the leader of the sons of Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. On the ninth day, the leader of the sons of Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces

(ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Abidan the son of Gideoni.

7:66-89 On the tenth day, the leader of the sons of Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. On ***the*** eleventh day, the leader of the sons of Asher, Pagiel the son of Ochran. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Pagiel the son of Ochran. On ***the*** twelfth day, the leader of the sons of Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan. His offering ***was*** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the offering of Ahira the son of Enan. This ***was*** the dedication of the altar, on the day it was anointed, from the leaders of Israel: twelve dishes of silver, twelve bowls of silver, twelve pans of gold; the one dish of silver approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty ***shekels***), and the one bowl approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy ***shekels***); all the silver of the vessels approximately 60 pounds (two thousand and four hundred ***shekels***), by the shekel of the holy place; twelve pans of gold full of incense, approximately 4 ounces (ten ***shekels***) apiece per pan, by the shekel of the holy place; all the gold of the pans approximately 3 pounds (one hundred and twenty ***shekels***); all the cattle for the burnt offering, twelve young bulls, twelve rams, twelve male lambs, sons of a year, and their grain offering; and twelve male goats of the goats for a sin offering; and all the cattle of the sacrifice of the peace offerings, twenty-four young bulls, sixty rams, sixty male goats, sixty male lambs, sons of a year. This ***was*** the dedication of the altar after it was anointed. And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, then he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat which ***was*** on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and He spoke to him.

Chapter 7 Preview

Chapter 7 is the longest chapter in the books of Moses, with 89 verses. It steps back in time to the day Moses finished setting up the tabernacle (Exodus 40), a month before the census of chapter 1. The twelve tribal leaders we met in chapter 1 bring gifts. First they give six covered carts and twelve oxen, which Moses gives to the Levites to help carry the tabernacle. Then, over twelve days, one leader each day brings an offering for the dedication of the altar.

Every leader brings exactly the same gift, and Moses records every gift in full, word for word, twelve times. Then he adds them all up. The repetition can seem tiring to us, but it was not wasted ink. God wanted every tribe's gift remembered by name. The chapter ends with Moses going into the tent of meeting and hearing the voice of God speaking to him from above the mercy seat.

Chapter 7 Study

7:1-3 *And it was on the day Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, and he anointed it and sanctified it and all its articles, and the altar and all its articles; and he anointed them and sanctified them. And the leaders of Israel, the heads of the house of their fathers, brought near— they **were** the leaders of the tribes; they **were** those who stood over the enrolled— and they brought their offering before the LORD: six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for two of the leaders and an ox for one; and they brought them near before the tabernacle.*

"On the day Moses finished setting up the tabernacle." That was the first day of the first month of the second year (Exodus 40:2, 17). Chapters 7 to 9 go back to that month, before the census in chapter 1 began. Moses arranged the book by subject, not always in strict date order.

Moses anointed the tabernacle and its altar and furniture with oil, setting them apart as holy. Then the leaders, "the heads of the house of their fathers," brought "six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for two of the leaders and an ox for one." This was a practical gift. A tabernacle had to be moved, and moving it took transport.

7:4-9 *And the LORD said to Moses, saying, "Take **them** from them, and they shall be for serving the service of the tent of meeting; and you shall give them to the Levites, each man according to the mouth of his service." And Moses took the carts and the oxen, and he gave them to the Levites. Two of the carts and four of the oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to the mouth of their service; and four of the carts and eight of the oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to the mouth of their service, in the hand of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. And to the sons of Kohath he did not give **any**, for the service of the holy thing **was** on them; on the shoulder they carried **it**.*

God told Moses to accept the gift and give the carts and oxen to the Levites, "each man according to the mouth of his service" (7:5). The Gershonites got two carts and four oxen for the curtains and coverings. The Merarites got four carts and eight oxen for the heavy boards, bars, pillars, and bases. The heavier the load, the more help God gave.

"And to the sons of Kohath he did not give any, for the service of the holy thing was on them; on the shoulder they carried it" (7:9). The ark and the holy furniture were never to be put on a cart. Years later David forgot this, and it cost Uzzah his life (2 Samuel 6:3-7). God gives His people what they need for the work He assigns, and He also sets limits on how holy things are to be handled.

7:10-11 *And the leaders brought near the dedication of the altar on the day it was anointed; and the leaders brought near their offering before the altar. And the LORD said to Moses, "One leader for the day, one leader for the day, they shall bring near their offering for the dedication of the altar."*

Then the leaders brought another offering, "the dedication of the altar on the day it was anointed." To dedicate something is to set it apart for God's use. God said, "One leader for the day, one leader for the day, they shall bring near their offering." Twelve leaders, twelve days. Each tribe had its own day.

Why not let them all come at once? I believe the answer is honor. Each tribe had its own day before the LORD, and no tribe's gift was lost in a crowd.

7:12-17 *And the one who brought near his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah. And his offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadab.*

"The one who brought near his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah." Judah again comes first, as in the camp (2:3).

Here is the gift, which will be repeated eleven more times. One silver dish weighing 130 shekels, about 3 1/4 pounds. One silver bowl weighing 70 shekels, about 1 3/4 pounds. Both were "full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering." One gold pan of 10 shekels, about 4 ounces, "full of incense." Then the animals: one young bull, one ram, and one male lamb for a burnt offering; one male goat for a sin offering; and for peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five male lambs.

The gift covered the whole range of worship. A grain offering was a gift of flour and oil given in thanks to God. Incense pictured prayer rising to God. The burnt offering stood for full surrender, the sin offering dealt with sin, and the peace offerings were shared in a fellowship meal. Each leader came with all of it.

7:18-41 *On the second day Nethanel the son of Zuar, the leader of Issachar, brought near. He brought near his offering: one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Nethanel the son of Zuar. On the third day, the leader of the sons of Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Eliab the son of Helon. On the fourth day, the leader of the sons of Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Elizur the son of Shedeur. On the fifth day, the leader of the sons of Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai.*

Day two, Nethanel of Issachar (7:18-23). Day three, Eliab of Zebulun (7:24-29). Day four, Elizur of Reuben (7:30-35). Day five, Shelumiel of Simeon (7:36-41). The order follows the camp: the three tribes on the east side first, then the south side.

Every gift is exactly the same, and every gift is written out in full. Wouldn't it have been simpler to say the other eleven leaders brought the same? Yes. But God did not want it said that way. Each gift is recorded as if it were the only one. The tribe of Zebulun's offering was written down with the same care as Judah's.

7:42-65 *On the sixth day, the leader of the sons of Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Eliasaph the son of Deuel. On the seventh day, the leader of the sons of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Elishama the son of Ammihud. On the eighth day, the leader of the sons of Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. On the ninth day, the leader of the sons of Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Abidan the son of Gideoni.*

Day six, Eliasaph of Gad (7:42-47). Day seven, Elishama of Ephraim (7:48-53). Day eight, Gamaliel of Manasseh (7:54-59). Day nine, Abidan of Benjamin (7:60-65). Now the tribes of the west side come, the sons of Rachel.

No tribe gave more than another, and none gave less. The large tribes and the small tribes brought the same gift. Manasseh, the smallest tribe in chapter 1, stood before the altar with the same offering as Judah, the largest. In worship, every tribe stood equal before God.

7:66-83 *On the tenth day, the leader of the sons of Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. On **the** eleventh day, the leader of the sons of Asher, Pagiel the son of Ochran. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Pagiel the son of Ochran. On **the** twelfth day, the leader of the sons of Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan. His offering **was** one dish of silver, its weight approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), one bowl of silver, approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy shekels), by the shekel of the holy place, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; one pan of gold, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**), full of incense; one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, one male lamb, a son of its year, for a burnt offering; one male goat of the goats for a sin offering; and for the sacrifice of the peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the offering of Ahira the son of Enan.*

Day ten, Ahiezer of Dan (7:66-71). Day eleven, Pagiel of Asher (7:72-77). Day twelve, Ahira of Naphtali (7:78-83). The last tribes of the camp, the north side, the rear guard, bring their gifts too. Naphtali came on the twelfth day, but his gift is described with every detail, just like the first.

This is how God sees what His people give. Hebrews says God is not unjust to forget your work and the labor of love you have shown toward His name (Hebrews 6:10). Jesus said even a cup of cold water given in His name will not lose its reward (Matthew 10:42). Your gift does not vanish into a total. God sees it, and He remembers it by name.

7:84-88 *This **was** the dedication of the altar, on the day it was anointed, from the leaders of Israel: twelve dishes of silver, twelve bowls of silver, twelve pans of gold; the one dish of silver approximately 3 1/4 pounds (one hundred and thirty **shekels**), and the one bowl approximately 1 3/4 pounds (seventy **shekels**); all the silver of the vessels approximately 60 pounds (two thousand and four hundred **shekels**), by the shekel of the holy place; twelve pans of gold full of incense, approximately 4 ounces (ten **shekels**) apiece per pan, by the shekel of the holy place; all the gold of the pans approximately 3 pounds (one hundred and twenty **shekels**); all the cattle for the burnt offering, twelve young bulls, twelve rams, twelve male lambs, sons of a year, and their grain offering; and twelve male goats of the goats for a sin offering; and all the cattle of the sacrifice of the peace offerings, twenty-four young bulls, sixty rams, sixty male goats, sixty male lambs, sons of a year. This **was** the dedication of the altar after it was anointed.*

"This was the dedication of the altar, on the day it was anointed, from the leaders of Israel." Then Moses adds it all up: twelve silver dishes, twelve silver bowls, and twelve gold pans. The silver came to 2,400 shekels, about 60 pounds, and the gold to 120 shekels, about 3 pounds. For the burnt offerings, twelve bulls, twelve rams, and twelve lambs; for the sin offerings, twelve goats; and for the peace offerings, twenty-four bulls, sixty rams, sixty male goats, and sixty lambs. The numbers add up exactly.

So God records the gifts both ways: each one by itself, and all of them together. Each giver mattered, and so did the whole people giving as one. That is how the church is meant to give, each one as he has decided in his heart (2 Corinthians 9:7), together for the work of the Lord.

7:89 *And when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, then he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat which **was** on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; and He spoke to him.*

After all the gifts, this verse is like the quiet at the end of a long service. "When Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, then he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat which was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim."

The mercy seat was the gold lid of the ark. On the Day of Atonement the high priest spattered blood on it to cover the sins of the people (Leviticus 16:14-15). God had promised He would meet Moses there and speak from above it (Exodus 25:22). Now He does.

Notice where God speaks from: the place of blood and mercy. God speaks to sinful people from the place where sin is covered. Paul uses this same idea when he says God set forth Christ "as a propitiation through faith in His blood" (Romans 3:25). The Greek word there is the same word used for the mercy seat in the Greek Old Testament. Jesus is where God meets us. In these last days God has spoken to us in His Son (Hebrews 1:1-2).

Chapter 7 Summary

On the day Moses finished setting up and anointing the tabernacle, the twelve leaders of Israel brought six covered carts and twelve oxen. Moses gave them to the Gershonites and Merarites for carrying the tabernacle, but none to the Kohathites, who carried the holy things on their

shoulders. Then, for twelve days, one leader each day brought an identical offering for the dedication of the altar: a silver dish, a silver bowl, and a gold pan, with flour, oil, and incense, and animals for burnt offerings, a sin offering, and peace offerings. Each gift is recorded in full, in the order of the camp, beginning with Judah and ending with Naphtali, and then all the gifts are added up together. When Moses went into the tent of meeting, he heard God's voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat, between the cherubim.

Chapter 7 Study Questions

1. What did the leaders give first, and who received it? (7:3-8)

2. Why did the Kohathites receive no carts or oxen? (7:9)

3. Why do you think God told the leaders to bring their offerings one tribe per day? (7:11)

4. What did each leader bring for the dedication of the altar? (7:13-17)

5. Did the large tribes bring more than the small tribes? What does that teach about worship? (7:12-83)

6. From what place did Moses hear God's voice, and why is that important? (7:89; Exodus 25:22)

7. How does Romans 3:25 help you see Jesus in the mercy seat?

8. God recorded every gift in full, even though they were all the same. How does Hebrews 6:10 encourage you about the things you have done for the Lord that no one noticed?

9. The leaders gave practical gifts (carts and oxen) as well as gifts for worship. What practical gift could you give to help your church's work?

10. Paul says God loves a cheerful giver (2 Corinthians 9:7). How would you describe your own giving right now, and what would you like to change?

Chapter 8: The Lampstand and the Cleansing of the Levites

Scripture

8:1-14 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron, and you shall say to him, 'When you raise the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light toward the front of the face of the lampstand.'" And Aaron did so; toward the front of the face of the lampstand he raised its lamps, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And this ***was*** the work of the lampstand: hammered work of gold; to its base ***and*** to its blossom it ***was*** hammered work. Like the appearance which the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and you shall purify them. And thus you shall do to them to purify them: spatter on them water of sin offering, and they shall cause a razor to pass over all their flesh, and they shall wash their clothes, and they shall purify themselves. And they shall take a young bull, a son of the herd, and its grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil; and a second young bull, a son of the herd, you shall take for a sin offering. And you shall bring the Levites near before the tent of meeting, and you shall assemble all the congregation of the sons of Israel. And you shall bring the Levites near before the LORD, and the sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites. And Aaron shall wave the Levites ***as*** a wave offering before the LORD from the sons of Israel, and they shall be ***for*** serving the service of the LORD. And the Levites shall lay their hands on the head of the young bulls; and offer the one ***as*** a sin offering and the one ***as*** a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. And you shall make the Levites stand before Aaron and before his sons, and you shall wave them ***as*** a wave offering to the LORD. And you shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine.

8:15-26 And after that the Levites shall go in to serve the tent of meeting; and you shall purify them, and you shall wave them ***as*** a wave offering. For they ***are*** given, given to Me from among the sons of Israel; in place of the opening of every womb, the firstborn of all from the sons of Israel, I have taken them for Myself. For every firstborn among the sons of Israel ***is*** Mine, among man and among livestock; on the day I struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself. And I have taken the Levites in place of every firstborn among the sons of Israel. And I have given the Levites ***as*** given ***ones*** to Aaron and to his sons from among the sons of Israel, to serve the service of the sons of Israel in the tent of meeting and to make atonement for the sons of Israel, and there shall not be a plague among the sons of Israel when the sons of Israel draw near to the holy place." And Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the sons of Israel did to the Levites according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites; so the sons of Israel did to them. And the Levites purified themselves from sin, and they washed their clothes; and Aaron waved them ***as*** a wave offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to purify them. And after that the Levites went in to serve their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron and before his sons; just as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "This ***is*** what ***is*** for the Levites: from a son of twenty-five years and upward he shall go in to perform duty in the service of the tent of meeting. And from a son of fifty years he shall return from the duty of the service,

and he shall not serve again. And he shall minister with his brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep charge, and service he shall not serve. Thus you shall do to the Levites in their charges."

Chapter 8 Preview

Chapter 8 has two parts. First, a short word to Aaron about the golden lampstand in the holy place: its seven lamps must shine toward the front, so the light falls where it should. Second, the ceremony that set the Levites apart for their work. They were sprinkled with water, shaved, and washed. The people laid hands on them, Aaron presented them before the LORD as a wave offering, and sacrifices were made to atone for them. Only then could they begin to serve.

The chapter ends with the ages of Levite service, from twenty-five to fifty, and a gentle rule for older Levites, who could still help their brothers after their working years were over. It is a chapter about being made fit to serve. God does not use people who clean themselves up on their own. He cleanses them, sets them apart, and gives them to His work.

Chapter 8 Study

8:1-4 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron, and you shall say to him, 'When you raise the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light toward the front of the face of the lampstand.'" And Aaron did so; toward the front of the face of the lampstand he raised its lamps, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And this **was** the work of the lampstand: hammered work of gold; to its base **and** to its blossom it **was** hammered work. Like the appearance which the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.*

"When you raise the lamps, the seven lamps shall give light toward the front of the face of the lampstand." The lampstand stood on the south side of the holy place, the first room of the tabernacle, across from the table of bread. It had no windows. Without the lampstand, the room was dark.

Aaron was to set the lamps so the light fell forward, toward the front, lighting up the room and the table. A light is meant to shine on something, not just to burn. "And Aaron did so" (8:3).

The lampstand was "hammered work of gold" from base to blossom, made "like the appearance which the LORD had shown Moses" (8:4). It was beaten out of a single piece of gold (Exodus 25:31). Moses did not design it. He copied what God showed him.

Why place this here, before the Levites? I think the reason is that the light in the holy place was the light of God's house, and the Levites were about to give their lives to serving that house. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). He also told His disciples, "You are the light of the world" (Matthew 5:14). In Revelation, the churches are pictured as golden lampstands, with Christ walking among them (Revelation 1:12-13, 20). The lamp was there to shine forward, so others could see. So are we.

8:5-7 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and you shall purify them. And thus you shall do to them to purify them: spatter on them water of sin offering, and they shall cause a razor to pass over all their flesh, and they shall wash their clothes, and they shall purify themselves.*

"Take the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and you shall purify them." Before they could serve, the Levites had to be cleansed. The priests in Leviticus 8 had been washed, robed, and anointed with oil and blood. The Levites' ceremony was simpler, but it followed the same idea.

First, Moses was to "spatter on them water of sin offering," water used for cleansing from sin and uncleanness. Then "they shall cause a razor to pass over all their flesh," shaving their whole bodies. Then "they shall wash their clothes, and they shall purify themselves" (8:7).

Every step pictured a fresh start. Old dirt removed, a clean body, clean clothes. Paul says God saved us "through the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). We cannot make ourselves clean enough to serve God, but He can wash us.

8:8-11 *And they shall take a young bull, a son of the herd, and its grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil; and a second young bull, a son of the herd, you shall take for a sin offering. And you shall bring the Levites near before the tent of meeting, and you shall assemble all the congregation of the sons of Israel. And you shall bring the Levites near before the LORD, and the sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites. And Aaron shall wave the Levites **as** a wave offering before the LORD from the sons of Israel, and they shall be **for** serving the service of the LORD.*

The Levites brought two young bulls, one for a burnt offering with its grain offering, and one for a sin offering. Then Moses gathered "all the congregation of the sons of Israel" in front of the tent of meeting (8:9).

"The sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites" (8:10). Laying on of hands is a sign of identifying with someone and setting them apart. Most likely the leaders or elders did this for the whole people. It said, in effect: these men stand in for us. Remember from chapter 3 that the Levites took the place of Israel's firstborn. Now the people formally handed them over to God.

"And Aaron shall wave the Levites as a wave offering before the LORD from the sons of Israel" (8:11). We do not know exactly how this was done with thousands of men. Some think they were led back and forth before the altar, or that they were presented in a symbolic motion. The point is clear: the Levites were a living offering, presented to God by the people.

8:12-14 *And the Levites shall lay their hands on the head of the young bulls; and offer the one **as** a sin offering and the one **as** a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. And you shall make the Levites stand before Aaron and before his sons, and you shall wave them **as** a wave offering to the LORD. And you shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine.*

"The Levites shall lay their hands on the head of the young bulls." Now the Levites placed their hands on the animals. The bulls stood in for the Levites, one as a sin offering and one as a burnt

offering, "to make atonement for the Levites" (8:12). The people laid hands on the Levites, and the Levites laid hands on the bulls. Substitution runs through the whole ceremony.

"You shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine" (8:14). The Levites were set apart in three ways: cleansed by water, given by the people, and covered by blood.

Paul calls every believer to present our bodies "as a living, holy sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Romans 12:1). Peter says believers are "a holy priesthood" (1 Peter 2:5). The Levites' service was limited to one tribe. In Christ, every believer has been washed, set apart, and covered by His blood to serve God.

8:15-19 *And after that the Levites shall go in to serve the tent of meeting; and you shall purify them, and you shall wave them **as** a wave offering. For they **are** given, given to Me from among the sons of Israel; in place of the opening of every womb, the firstborn of all from the sons of Israel, I have taken them for Myself. For every firstborn among the sons of Israel **is** Mine, among man and among livestock; on the day I struck every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself. And I have taken the Levites in place of every firstborn among the sons of Israel. And I have given the Levites **as** given **ones** to Aaron and to his sons from among the sons of Israel, to serve the service of the sons of Israel in the tent of meeting and to make atonement for the sons of Israel, and there shall not be a plague among the sons of Israel when the sons of Israel draw near to the holy place."*

"After that the Levites shall go in to serve the tent of meeting." First cleansing, then service. God repeats why: "For they are given, given to Me from among the sons of Israel; in place of the opening of every womb, the firstborn of all from the sons of Israel, I have taken them for Myself" (8:16). Again He points back to the night He struck the firstborn of Egypt (8:17).

Then God gives the Levites as a gift to Aaron and his sons, to help them serve and "to make atonement for the sons of Israel, and there shall not be a plague among the sons of Israel when the sons of Israel draw near to the holy place" (8:19). The Levites were a protection. By guarding the holy things and doing the work properly, they kept the people from coming near carelessly and being struck down.

8:20-22 *And Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the sons of Israel did to the Levites according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites; so the sons of Israel did to them. And the Levites purified themselves from sin, and they washed their clothes; and Aaron waved them **as** a wave offering before the LORD, and Aaron made atonement for them to purify them. And after that the Levites went in to serve their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron and before his sons; just as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.*

"Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the sons of Israel did to the Levites according to all that the LORD had commanded." The ceremony was done just as God said. "The Levites purified themselves from sin, and they washed their clothes," Aaron waved them before the LORD and made atonement for them, and "after that the Levites went in to serve" (8:21-22).

The order is the lesson: cleansed, offered, atoned for, and then serving. We are not saved by serving. We serve because we have been cleansed and made His. Good works follow salvation. They never buy it.

8:23-26 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "This **is** what **is** for the Levites: from a son of twenty-five years and upward he shall go in to perform duty in the service of the tent of meeting. And from a son of fifty years he shall return from the duty of the service, and he shall not serve again. And he shall minister with his brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep charge, and service he shall not serve. Thus you shall do to the Levites in their charges."*

"From a son of twenty-five years and upward he shall go in to perform duty in the service of the tent of meeting" (8:24). Chapter 4 said thirty. As I noted there, many teachers think the Levites began at twenty-five with a time of training and took up the full work, including carrying, at thirty.

"From a son of fifty years he shall return from the duty of the service, and he shall not serve again" (8:25). The heavy work of carrying the tabernacle was for younger men. But notice verse 26. An older Levite was not thrown away. "He shall minister with his brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep charge." He could still guard, help, and teach. He just did not carry the heavy loads.

That is a wise and kind rule. God does not waste His older servants. They may step back from some kinds of work, but they still have a place among their brothers. If you are older, your service is not over. If you are younger, look for the older believers who have walked with God a long time and learn from them.

Chapter 8 Summary

The LORD told Aaron to set up the seven lamps of the golden lampstand so they would give light toward the front, and Aaron did so; the lampstand was hammered from gold according to the pattern God showed Moses. Then God told Moses to cleanse the Levites for service. They were sprinkled with the water of cleansing, shaved, and washed. The people laid their hands on them, and Aaron presented them before the LORD as a wave offering. The Levites laid their hands on two bulls, which were offered as a sin offering and a burnt offering to make atonement for them. God took the Levites as His own in place of Israel's firstborn and gave them to Aaron and his sons to serve at the tent of meeting and protect the people. Moses, Aaron, and the people did all that God commanded. Levites served from age twenty-five to fifty, and after that they could still help their brothers by keeping watch.

Chapter 8 Study Questions

1. Which way were the lamps of the lampstand to shine, and why does that matter in a room with no windows? (8:2)

2. Who designed the lampstand, and how was it made? (8:4)

3. What three things were done to cleanse the Levites? (8:7)

4. Who laid hands on the Levites, and who did the Levites lay hands on? (8:10, 12)

5. Why were the Levites given to Aaron and his sons, according to verse 19?

6. At what ages did the Levites serve, and what could they still do after age fifty? (8:24-26)

7. Jesus said both "I am the light of the world" and "You are the light of the world" (John 8:12; Matthew 5:14). How can your life shine light where others can see it?

8. The Levites were cleansed before they served. Why is it important that our service to God comes after we have been made clean by Him, not before? (Titus 3:5)

9. Romans 12:1 calls us to be a living sacrifice. What part of your life do you find hardest to hand over to God?

10. Older Levites still had a place among their brothers. Who is an older believer you could learn from, or a younger one you could encourage?

Chapter 9: The Passover and the Cloud

Scripture

9:1-14 And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the second year of their going out from the land of Egypt, in the first month, saying, "And let the sons of Israel observe the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day in this month, between the two evenings, you shall observe it at its appointed time; according to all its statutes and according to all its judgments you shall observe it." And Moses spoke to the sons of Israel to observe the Passover. And they observed the Passover in the first ***month***, on the fourteenth day of the month, between the two evenings, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did. And there were men who were unclean by the corpse of a man, and they were not able to observe the Passover on that day; and they drew near before Moses and before Aaron on that day. And those men said to him, "We ***are*** unclean by the corpse of a man. Why are we held back so as not to bring near the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the sons of Israel?" And Moses said to them, "Stand, and let me hear what the LORD will command concerning you." And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Any man, any man, if he is unclean by a corpse, or on a distant journey, of you or of your generations, then he shall observe a Passover to the LORD. In the second month, on the fourteenth day, between the two evenings, they shall observe it; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. They shall not leave over ***any*** of it until morning, and a bone they shall not break in it; according to every statute of the Passover they shall observe it. And the man who ***is*** clean and was not on a journey, and fails to observe the Passover, that soul shall be cut off from its peoples; for he did not bring near the offering of the LORD at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin. And if a sojourner sojourns with you and observes a Passover to the LORD, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its judgment, so he shall do; one statute shall be for you, and for the sojourner, and for the native of the land.'"

9:15-23 And on the day of setting up the tabernacle, the cloud covered the tabernacle of the tent of the testimony; and in the evening it would be over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. So it would be continually: the cloud would cover it, and the appearance of fire ***by*** night. And according to the taking up of the cloud from over the tent, after that the sons of Israel would set out; and in the place where the cloud would settle, there the sons of Israel would camp. At the mouth of the LORD the sons of Israel would set out, and at the mouth of the LORD they would camp; all the days that the cloud would settle over the tabernacle they would camp. And when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle many days, the sons of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and they did not set out. And there were ***times*** when the cloud would be a few days over the tabernacle; at the mouth of the LORD they would camp, and at the mouth of the LORD they would set out. And there were ***times*** when the cloud would be from evening until morning, and the cloud was taken up in the morning, and they set out; or a day and a night, and the cloud was taken up, and they set out. Or two days, or a month, or days, when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle to settle over it, the sons of Israel would camp and would not set out; and when it was taken up, they would set out. At the mouth of the LORD they would camp, and at the mouth of the LORD

they would set out; they kept the charge of the LORD at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

Chapter 9 Preview

One year after God brought Israel out of Egypt, He tells them to keep the Passover again, at its appointed time, there in the wilderness of Sinai. But some men cannot keep it, because they have touched a dead body and are unclean. They come to Moses with an honest question: why should we be left out? Moses takes it to the LORD, and God gives a second chance, a Passover one month later for those who were unclean or away on a journey. He also makes it clear that anyone who simply refuses to keep it will be cut off, and that a foreigner living among them may keep it too.

The second half of the chapter describes the cloud over the tabernacle. By day it was a cloud, by night it looked like fire. When it lifted, Israel moved. When it settled, they camped. Sometimes it stayed one night, sometimes a month or more. The people did not decide when to go. They followed the LORD.

Chapter 9 Study

9:1-5 *And the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the second year of their going out from the land of Egypt, in the first month, saying, "And let the sons of Israel observe the Passover at its appointed time. On the fourteenth day in this month, between the two evenings, you shall observe it at its appointed time; according to all its statutes and according to all its judgments you shall observe it." And Moses spoke to the sons of Israel to observe the Passover. And they observed the Passover in the first* ***month****, on the fourteenth day of the month, between the two evenings, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did.*

"In the second year of their going out from the land of Egypt, in the first month." This is before the census of chapter 1, which began in the second month. The Passover was the feast that remembered the night God passed over the houses of Israel marked with the blood of the lamb and struck the firstborn of Egypt (Exodus 12). It was kept "on the fourteenth day in this month, between the two evenings" (9:3), meaning at twilight.

This was Israel's first Passover since leaving Egypt, and the only one recorded during the forty years in the wilderness. Joshua 5:10 records the next one, after they crossed into the land. "So the sons of Israel did" (9:5). They kept it as God commanded.

The Passover points straight to Jesus. John the Baptist called Him "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Paul says, "our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7). Jesus died at Passover time, and His death is the true rescue the first Passover pictured.

9:6-8 *And there were men who were unclean by the corpse of a man, and they were not able to observe the Passover on that day; and they drew near before Moses and before Aaron on that day. And those men said to him, "We **are** unclean by the corpse of a man. Why are we held back so as not to bring near the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the sons of Israel?" And Moses said to them, "Stand, and let me hear what the LORD will command concerning you."*

"There were men who were unclean by the corpse of a man, and they were not able to observe the Passover on that day." Touching a dead body made a person unclean for seven days (19:11). Perhaps they had buried a family member. They had not sinned, but the Law kept them away from the feast.

They came to Moses and Aaron and asked, "Why are we held back so as not to bring near the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the sons of Israel?" I love their question. They were not looking for a way out of worship. They wanted in. They did not want to miss the remembrance of what God had done.

Moses did not guess. "Stand, and let me hear what the LORD will command concerning you" (9:8). That is a good example for every leader. When you don't know the answer, say so, and go to God.

9:9-12 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'Any man, any man, if he is unclean by a corpse, or on a distant journey, of you or of your generations, then he shall observe a Passover to the LORD. In the second month, on the fourteenth day, between the two evenings, they shall observe it; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. They shall not leave over **any** of it until morning, and a bone they shall not break in it; according to every statute of the Passover they shall observe it.*

God answered with a gracious provision. Anyone "unclean by a corpse, or on a distant journey" could keep the Passover a month later: "In the second month, on the fourteenth day, between the two evenings" (9:11). This is sometimes called the second Passover.

It was to be kept the same way: "with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it." Unleavened bread recalled the haste of leaving Egypt, and bitter herbs recalled the bitterness of slavery. "They shall not leave over any of it until morning, and a bone they shall not break in it" (9:12).

That last detail is quoted in the New Testament. When Jesus died on the cross, the soldiers broke the legs of the two men crucified with Him but did not break His, because He was already dead. John says this happened "so that the Scripture might be fulfilled, A bone of His will not be broken" (John 19:36; Exodus 12:46). Jesus was the true Passover Lamb, down to the smallest detail.

God made a way for those who wanted to come but couldn't. That is His heart. He does not shut out people who long for Him. He makes a way.

9:13 *And the man who **is** clean and was not on a journey, and fails to observe the Passover, that soul shall be cut off from its peoples; for he did not bring near the offering of the LORD at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin.*

But there is a warning beside the grace. "The man who is clean and was not on a journey, and fails to observe the Passover, that soul shall be cut off from its peoples." To be cut off meant to be removed from the community of God's people, and in some cases it may have meant death at God's hand. Teachers differ on exactly what it involved.

The difference is the heart. The unclean men wanted to come and couldn't. This man could come and wouldn't. To refuse the Passover was to say that you did not need what God had done for you. That is still the most serious sin anyone can commit: to turn away from the Lamb God has provided.

9:14 *And if a sojourner sojourns with you and observes a Passover to the LORD, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its judgment, so he shall do; one statute shall be for you, and for the sojourner, and for the native of the land.'"*

"If a sojourner sojourns with you and observes a Passover to the LORD," he was to keep it the same way: "one statute shall be for you, and for the sojourner, and for the native of the land." A sojourner was a foreigner living among Israel. Exodus 12:48 adds that he had to be circumcised first, joining himself to the covenant.

Even in the Law, God's door was open to outsiders who would come to Him on His terms. In Christ that door is wide open. Paul says Gentile believers are "no longer strangers and resident aliens, but fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God" (Ephesians 2:19).

9:15-16 *And on the day of setting up the tabernacle, the cloud covered the tabernacle of the tent of the testimony; and in the evening it would be over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning. So it would be continually: the cloud would cover it, and the appearance of fire **by** night.*

Now the chapter turns to the cloud. "On the day of setting up the tabernacle, the cloud covered the tabernacle." This is the same moment described in Exodus 40:34-38, when the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. "In the evening it would be over the tabernacle like the appearance of fire until morning" (9:15).

"So it would be continually" (9:16). For forty years, day and night, God's presence was visible over His dwelling. It led them, shaded them by day, and lit up the camp at night. No one in Israel could ever say God had left them alone.

9:17-18 *And according to the taking up of the cloud from over the tent, after that the sons of Israel would set out; and in the place where the cloud would settle, there the sons of Israel would camp. At the mouth of the LORD the sons of Israel would set out, and at the mouth of the LORD they would camp; all the days that the cloud would settle over the tabernacle they would camp.*

"According to the taking up of the cloud from over the tent, after that the sons of Israel would set out; and in the place where the cloud would settle, there the sons of Israel would camp." The

phrase "at the mouth of the LORD" appears again and again in these verses. It means at the LORD's command.

Israel did not have a map or a schedule. They had God's presence. When it moved, they moved. When it stopped, they stopped. That is what it means to be led by God.

9:19-23 *And when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle many days, the sons of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and they did not set out. And there were **times** when the cloud would be a few days over the tabernacle; at the mouth of the LORD they would camp, and at the mouth of the LORD they would set out. And there were **times** when the cloud would be from evening until morning, and the cloud was taken up in the morning, and they set out; or a day and a night, and the cloud was taken up, and they set out. Or two days, or a month, or days, when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle to settle over it, the sons of Israel would camp and would not set out; and when it was taken up, they would set out. At the mouth of the LORD they would camp, and at the mouth of the LORD they would set out; they kept the charge of the LORD at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses.*

These verses describe the different ways the cloud moved. Sometimes it "lingered over the tabernacle many days" (9:19). Sometimes it stayed "a few days" (9:20). Sometimes only "from evening until morning" (9:21). Sometimes "two days, or a month, or days" (9:22).

Think about what that meant. You might unpack the tent, set up the cooking fire, and wake up to find the cloud lifting. Or you might be eager to move on and have to wait a month in a dry, hot place. Both took faith. Moving when God moves is hard. Waiting when God waits can be harder.

"At the mouth of the LORD they would camp, and at the mouth of the LORD they would set out; they kept the charge of the LORD" (9:23). The whole section says the same thing over and over, because it is the lesson God wanted them to learn.

We do not have a cloud over our house today. But we have something better. God's Spirit lives in every believer, and we have His written Word. Paul says that as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God (Romans 8:14). The Spirit leads through the Scriptures, through prayer, through wise counsel, and sometimes by closing doors, as He did for Paul (Acts 16:6-7). Our part is the same as Israel's: watch, wait, and go when He says go.

Chapter 9 Summary

In the first month of the second year, the LORD told Israel to keep the Passover at its appointed time, and they did. Some men who were unclean from touching a dead body asked why they should be kept from the LORD's offering, and Moses asked the LORD. God allowed anyone unclean by a corpse or away on a journey to keep the Passover one month later, in the same way, without leaving any until morning or breaking any bone. A clean person who refused to keep the Passover would be cut off, and a foreigner could keep it under the same rules. From the day the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered it, looking like fire by night. When the cloud lifted, Israel set out, and where it settled, they camped, whether for a night or for many days, always at the LORD's command.

Chapter 9 Study Questions

1. When and where did Israel keep the Passover in this chapter? (9:1-5)

2. Why couldn't some men keep the Passover, and what did they ask Moses? (9:6-7)

3. What did Moses do when he did not know the answer? (9:8)

4. What provision did God make for those who were unclean or away on a journey? (9:10-11)

5. How does John 19:36 connect verse 12 to Jesus?

6. What was the difference between the men who couldn't keep the Passover and the man who wouldn't? (9:7, 13)

7. How did Israel know when to move and when to stay? (9:17-23)

8. The unclean men wanted to worship, and God made a way. Is there something keeping you from worship or fellowship right now? How might God be making a way for you?

9. Which is harder for you: moving when God says go, or waiting when God says stay? Why?

10. How does the Holy Spirit lead you today, and how can you pay closer attention to His leading this week? (Romans 8:14)

Chapter 10: The Silver Trumpets and Leaving Sinai

Scripture

10:1-10 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Make for yourself two trumpets of silver; ***of*** hammered work you shall make them; and they shall be for you for the calling of the congregation and for the journeying of the camps. And they shall blow with them, and all the congregation shall gather to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting. And if they blow with one, then the leaders, the heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather to you. And you shall blow an alarm, and the camps that camp eastward shall set out. And you shall blow a second alarm, and the camps that camp southward shall set out; an alarm they shall blow for their journeys. And when assembling the assembly, you shall blow, and you shall not sound an alarm. And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be for you for a statute forever throughout your generations. And when you go ***to*** war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies. And on the day of your gladness, and at your appointed times, and at the beginnings of your months, then you shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be for you for a memorial before your God. I ***am*** the LORD your God."

10:11-28 And it was in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth ***day*** in the month, the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle of the testimony. And the sons of Israel set out by their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud settled in the wilderness of Paran. And they set out for the first ***time*** at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses. And the standard of the camp of the sons of Judah set out first by their armies; and over its army ***was*** Nahshon the son of Amminadab. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Issachar ***was*** Nethanel the son of Zuar. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Zebulun ***was*** Eliab the son of Helon. And the tabernacle was taken down, and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari, the bearers of the tabernacle, set out. And the standard of the camp of Reuben set out by their armies; and over its army ***was*** Elizur the son of Shedeur. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Simeon ***was*** Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Gad ***was*** Eliasaph the son of Deuel. And the Kohathites, the bearers of the sanctuary, set out; and they set up the tabernacle until their coming. And the standard of the camp of the sons of Ephraim set out by their armies; and over its army ***was*** Elishama the son of Ammihud. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Manasseh ***was*** Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Benjamin ***was*** Abidan the son of Gideoni. And the standard of the camp of the sons of Dan set out, the rear guard of all the camps, by their armies; and over its army ***was*** Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Asher ***was*** Pagiel the son of Ochran. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Naphtali ***was*** Ahira the son of Enan. These ***are*** the journeys of the sons of Israel by their armies; and they set out.

10:29-36 And Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, the father-in-law of Moses, "We ***are*** setting out 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." And he said to him, "I will not go; but rather to my land and to my kindred I will go." And he said, "Please do not leave

us, for inasmuch as you know our camping in the wilderness, and you shall be for eyes for us. And it shall be, if you go with us, and it shall be, that good which the LORD will do good with us, and we will do good to you." And they set out from the mountain of the LORD a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD ***was*** setting out before them a journey of three days to seek out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the LORD ***was*** over them by day when they set out from the camp. And it was, when the ark set out, and Moses said, "Rise up, LORD, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee from before You." And when it rested, he said, "Return, LORD, ***to*** the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel."

Chapter 10 Preview

Israel's time at Sinai is ending. Before they leave, God gives Moses one more tool: two silver trumpets. The priests would blow them to call the people together, to signal the camps to march, to sound the alarm in war, and to celebrate at the feasts. God's people would move and gather at His signal.

Then, on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifts, and Israel sets out from Sinai for the first time, in the order God laid out in chapter 2. Moses asks his relative Hobab to come along and be their guide in the desert. The chapter closes with the ark going ahead of them and Moses' prayers each time it set out and each time it rested. After ten chapters of getting ready, the journey begins.

Chapter 10 Study

10:1-3 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Make for yourself two trumpets of silver; **of** hammered work you shall make them; and they shall be for you for the calling of the congregation and for the journeying of the camps. And they shall blow with them, and all the congregation shall gather to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting.*

"Make for yourself two trumpets of silver; of hammered work you shall make them." These were not rams' horns (the shofar). They were long, straight metal trumpets, hammered out of silver. They were "for the calling of the congregation and for the journeying of the camps" (10:2).

"And they shall blow with them, and all the congregation shall gather to you at the entrance of the tent of meeting" (10:3). In a camp of more than two million people, you could not send runners to every tent. The trumpet carried the message to everyone at once.

10:4-7 *And if they blow with one, then the leaders, the heads of the thousands of Israel, shall gather to you. And you shall blow an alarm, and the camps that camp eastward shall set out. And you shall blow a second alarm, and the camps that camp southward shall set out; an alarm they shall blow for their journeys. And when assembling the assembly, you shall blow, and you shall not sound an alarm.*

The trumpets had different signals. If only one was blown, "the leaders, the heads of the thousands of Israel," gathered (10:4). An alarm, a different kind of blast, told the camps on the east to set out (10:5). A second alarm moved the camps on the south (10:6). The other camps

followed in turn. "When assembling the assembly, you shall blow, and you shall not sound an alarm" (10:7). The people had to learn to tell the difference.

God's people need to know His voice. A trumpet that gives an uncertain sound helps no one (1 Corinthians 14:8). Israel listened for the signal and acted on it. We too need to learn to listen to God's Word so well that we know what He is calling us to do.

10:8-10 *And the sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets; and they shall be for you for a statute forever throughout your generations. And when you go **to** war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies. And on the day of your gladness, and at your appointed times, and at the beginnings of your months, then you shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be for you for a memorial before your God. I **am** the LORD your God."*

"The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow with the trumpets." The signal came through God's appointed priests, and it was "a statute forever throughout your generations" (10:8).

The trumpets had two more uses once Israel was in the land. In war, "you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you shall be remembered before the LORD your God, and you shall be saved from your enemies" (10:9). The trumpet was a cry to God for help. Years later, when Judah faced a larger army, the priests sounded the trumpets and God gave the victory (2 Chronicles 13:12-15).

And in joy: "on the day of your gladness, and at your appointed times, and at the beginnings of your months" (10:10), the trumpets were blown over the offerings "for a memorial before your God." They called God's people to remember Him, and they called on God to remember His people.

The Bible ends its story with a trumpet too. Paul says the Lord Himself will come down from heaven "with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16), and that at "the last trumpet" we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:52). I believe that trumpet will call the church up to meet the Lord before the Tribulation. Israel's silver trumpets gathered God's people and set them moving toward the promised land. That is a picture of the day God's trumpet will gather His people home.

10:11-13 *And it was in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth **day** in the month, the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle of the testimony. And the sons of Israel set out by their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud settled in the wilderness of Paran. And they set out for the first **time** at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses.*

"In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day in the month, the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle of the testimony." Israel had been at Sinai about eleven months (Exodus 19:1). Now God said, time to go.

"The sons of Israel set out by their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai; and the cloud settled in the wilderness of Paran" (10:12). The wilderness of Paran is the large desert region north of Sinai,

between Sinai and Canaan. "They set out for the first time at the mouth of the LORD by the hand of Moses" (10:13). Everything up to now had been preparation. Now it was real.

Deuteronomy 1:2 says the trip from Sinai to Kadesh, on the border of Canaan, took eleven days. If Israel had trusted God, they could have been in the land within weeks. Instead it took forty years. That is what the rest of this book is about.

10:14-17 *And the standard of the camp of the sons of Judah set out first by their armies; and over its army **was** Nahshon the son of Amminadab. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Issachar **was** Nethanel the son of Zuar. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Zebulun **was** Eliab the son of Helon. And the tabernacle was taken down, and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari, the bearers of the tabernacle, set out.*

"The standard of the camp of the sons of Judah set out first." Nahshon led the march, with Issachar and Zebulun behind. Then "the tabernacle was taken down, and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari, the bearers of the tabernacle, set out" (10:17). They carried the frame and curtains ahead, so the tent could be set up before the holy things arrived.

10:18-21 *And the standard of the camp of Reuben set out by their armies; and over its army **was** Elizur the son of Shedeur. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Simeon **was** Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Gad **was** Eliasaph the son of Deuel. And the Kohathites, the bearers of the sanctuary, set out; and they set up the tabernacle until their coming.*

The camp of Reuben went next, with Simeon and Gad. "And the Kohathites, the bearers of the sanctuary, set out; and they set up the tabernacle until their coming" (10:21). The SLB wording means the Gershonites and Merarites would have the tent standing by the time the Kohathites arrived with the ark and holy furniture. Everything worked just as God had planned it in chapters 2 to 4. No one stood around wondering what to do.

10:22-28 *And the standard of the camp of the sons of Ephraim set out by their armies; and over its army **was** Elishama the son of Ammihud. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Manasseh **was** Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Benjamin **was** Abidan the son of Gideoni. And the standard of the camp of the sons of Dan set out, the rear guard of all the camps, by their armies; and over its army **was** Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Asher **was** Pagiel the son of Ochran. And over the army of the tribe of the sons of Naphtali **was** Ahira the son of Enan. These **are** the journeys of the sons of Israel by their armies; and they set out.*

Then the camp of Ephraim with Manasseh and Benjamin, and last, "the rear guard of all the camps," the camp of Dan with Asher and Naphtali (10:25). "These are the journeys of the sons of Israel by their armies; and they set out" (10:28).

What we read as lists in chapters 1 and 2 now come to life. Each name has a place in a moving column. It must have been a remarkable sight. God's people on the march, His presence in the middle, the cloud overhead.

10:29-32 *And Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, the father-in-law of Moses, "We **are** setting out 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." And he said to him, "I will not go; but rather to my land and to my kindred I will go." And he said, "Please do not leave us, for inasmuch as you know our camping in the wilderness, and you shall be for eyes for us. And it shall be, if you go with us, and it shall be, that good which the LORD will do good with us, and we will do good to you."*

Moses spoke to "Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, the father-in-law of Moses." Exodus calls Moses' father-in-law Reuel (Exodus 2:18) and also Jethro (Exodus 3:1). Bible teachers read this verse two ways. Many think Hobab was Reuel's son, Moses' brother-in-law. Others note that Judges 4:11 calls Hobab himself Moses' father-in-law and think the Hebrew word may mean a relative by marriage. Either way, he was family.

Moses invited him warmly: "Come with us, and we will do good to you, for the LORD has spoken good concerning Israel" (10:29). Hobab said no; he wanted to go back to his own land. Moses asked again, "Please do not leave us," because Hobab knew where to camp in the wilderness, "and you shall be for eyes for us" (10:31).

Did Moses lack faith in the cloud? I don't think so. God led by the cloud, but a man who knew where the water and grazing were could still be a real help. Trusting God does not mean refusing wise human help. Moses also offered Hobab a share in the good God would give Israel. That is evangelism: come with us, and share in what God has promised. Judges 1:16 suggests that Hobab's family did go along and settled in the land with Judah.

10:33-34 *And they set out from the mountain of the LORD a journey of three days; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD **was** setting out before them a journey of three days to seek out a resting place for them. And the cloud of the LORD **was** over them by day when they set out from the camp.*

"They set out from the mountain of the LORD a journey of three days." Sinai is called "the mountain of the LORD." They had met God there. Now they carried His presence with them.

"The ark of the covenant of the LORD was setting out before them a journey of three days to seek out a resting place for them" (10:33). Chapter 2 placed the Levites in the middle of the march. Here the ark goes ahead. Most teachers think this was a special case on this first leg, or that the ark's place shifted as needed. Either way, the picture is beautiful. God went ahead of His people to find them a place to rest. Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us (John 14:2-3). "The cloud of the LORD was over them by day" (10:34).

10:35-36 *And it was, when the ark set out, and Moses said, "Rise up, LORD, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee from before You." And when it rested, he said, "Return, LORD, **to** the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel."*

Every time the ark set out, Moses said, "Rise up, LORD, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee from before You." Every time it stopped, he said, "Return, LORD, to the ten thousands of the thousands of Israel."

These were prayers for the road. Moving out, Moses asked God to go before them and deal with their enemies. Settling down, he asked God to stay among His people. David later took up the first prayer in Psalm 68:1. It is a good pattern for us. When you start something, ask God to go before you. When you rest, ask Him to stay near. If God is for us, who can be against us (Romans 8:31)?

Chapter 10 Summary

The LORD told Moses to make two silver trumpets for calling the people together and signaling the camps to move. One trumpet called the leaders; an alarm set the camps marching; and in the land the trumpets would sound in battle and at the feasts as a memorial before God. On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year, the cloud lifted, and Israel set out from Sinai for the first time, tribe by tribe, in the order God had given, with the Levites carrying the tabernacle and the holy things. Moses urged his relative Hobab to come with them and be their eyes in the wilderness. They traveled three days from the mountain of the LORD, with the ark going ahead to find them a resting place. Whenever the ark set out, Moses prayed for the LORD to rise and scatter His enemies, and whenever it rested, he prayed for the LORD to return to His people.

People and Places

- Wilderness of Paran: the large desert region north of Sinai, toward Canaan.
- Hobab: the son of Reuel the Midianite, a relative of Moses by marriage, who knew the wilderness.
- Reuel: Moses' father-in-law, also called Jethro (Exodus 2:18; 3:1).
- Mountain of the LORD: Mount Sinai, where God gave the Law.

Chapter 10 Study Questions

1. What were the silver trumpets used for in the camp? (10:2-7)

2. Who was to blow the trumpets, and for how long was this rule to last? (10:8)

3. What would the trumpets do for Israel in war and on feast days? (10:9-10)

4. When did Israel leave Sinai, and where did the cloud settle? (10:11-12)

5. Why did the Gershonites and Merarites go ahead of the Kohathites? (10:17, 21)

6. What did Moses ask Hobab to do, and what did he offer him? (10:29-32)

7. What did Moses pray when the ark set out and when it rested? (10:35-36)

8. Israel had to learn to tell the difference between trumpet signals. How are you learning to recognize God's voice in His Word?

9. Moses trusted the cloud but still asked Hobab for help. How do you balance trusting God with accepting wise help from people?

10. Paul says God's trumpet will sound one day to gather His people (1 Thessalonians 4:16). How does that hope change the way you live now?

Chapter 11: Complaining, Quail, and the Seventy Elders

Scripture

11:1-15 And the people were like those who complain ***of*** evil in the ears of the LORD; and the LORD heard, and His anger burned, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed in the outskirts of the camp. And the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down. And he called the name of that place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them. And the rabble that ***was*** in their midst craved a craving; and the sons of Israel also wept again, and they said, "Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish which we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic. And now our soul ***is*** dried up; ***there is*** nothing at all except the manna before our eyes." And the manna ***was*** like coriander seed, and its appearance ***was*** like the appearance of bdellium. The people went about and gathered ***it***, and they ground ***it*** in the mill or pounded ***it*** in the mortar, and they boiled ***it*** in the pot and made it ***into*** cakes; and its taste was like the taste of cake of oil. And when the dew came down on the camp ***at*** night, the manna came down on it. And Moses heard the people weeping by their clans, each man at the entrance of his tent; and the anger of the LORD burned exceedingly, and in the eyes of Moses ***it was*** evil. And Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You done evil to Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your eyes, that ***You*** put the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Or did I give birth to it, that You should say to me, 'Carry it in your bosom, just as the foster father carries the nursing child,' to the land which You swore to its fathers? From where ***is there*** meat for me to give to all this people? For they weep to me, saying, 'Give us meat, and let us eat.' I am not able, I alone, to carry all this people, for ***it is too*** heavy for me. And if thus You are doing to me, kill me, please, outright, if I have found favor in Your eyes; and let me not look on my evil."

11:16-35 And the LORD said to Moses, "Gather to Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know that they are the elders of the people and its officers; and you shall take them to the tent of meeting, and they shall station themselves there with you. And I will come down, and I will speak with you there; and I will take away some of the Spirit which ***is*** on you, and I will put ***it*** on them; and they shall carry the burden of the people with you, and you shall not carry ***it***, you alone. And to the people you shall say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, "Who will feed us meat? For ***it was*** good for us in Egypt." And the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat not one day, and not two days, and not five days, and not ten days, and not twenty days, ***but*** until a month of days, until it comes out from your nose and it becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who ***is*** in your midst, and you have wept before Him, saying, "Why ***is*** this ***that*** we came out from Egypt?"'" And Moses said, "Six hundred thousand on foot ***are*** the people in whose midst I ***am***; and You have said, 'I will give them meat, and they shall eat a month of days.' Shall flock and herd be slaughtered for them, and it be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered for them, and it be enough for them?" And the LORD said to Moses, "Is the hand of the LORD short? Now you shall see whether My word will happen to you or not." And Moses went out, and he spoke the words of the LORD to the people; and he gathered seventy men from the elders of the people, and he stationed them all around the tent. And the LORD came down in the

cloud, and He spoke to him; and He took away some of the Spirit which ***was*** on him, and He put ***it*** on the seventy men, the elders; and it was, when the Spirit rested on them, and they prophesied, and they did not ***do it*** again. And two men had remained in the camp; the name of the one ***was*** Eldad, and the name of the second ***was*** Medad; and the Spirit rested on them, and they ***were*** among those written, but they had not gone out to the tent; and they prophesied in the camp. And the young man ran, and he told Moses, and he said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." And Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses from his youth, answered, and he said, "My lord Moses, restrain them." And Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for me? And who will grant ***that*** all the people of the LORD ***were*** prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!" And Moses was gathered to the camp, he and the elders of Israel. And a wind set out from the LORD, and it brought quails from the sea, and it let ***them*** fall on the camp, about a day's journey this way and about a day's journey that way, all around the camp, and approximately 3 feet (two cubits) above the face of the ground. And the people rose up all that day and all the night and all the next day, and they gathered the quail; the one who gathered least gathered approximately 60 bushels (ten homers); and they spread ***them*** out for themselves, spreading ***them*** all around the camp. The meat ***was*** still between their teeth, before it was chewed, and the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who craved. From Kibroth-hattaavah the people set out ***to*** Hazeroth, and they were at Hazeroth.

Chapter 11 Preview

Only three days after leaving Sinai, the trouble starts. The people complain, and fire from the LORD burns the edge of the camp until Moses prays. Then a mixed crowd among them begins to crave meat, and soon all Israel is weeping for the fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic of Egypt. They are tired of manna. Moses, worn out, tells God the burden is too heavy and asks to die.

God answers both complaints. To Moses He gives seventy elders to share the load, and He puts some of the Spirit that was on Moses on them, so that they prophesy. When two of them prophesy in the camp, Joshua wants them stopped, but Moses wishes all God's people were prophets. To the people God gives meat, a flood of quail, a month's worth. But while the meat is still in their teeth, God strikes them with a plague. The place is named Graves of Craving. Ten chapters of obedience give way to a long story of grumbling.

Chapter 11 Study

11:1-3 *And the people were like those who complain **of** evil in the ears of the LORD; and the LORD heard, and His anger burned, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed in the outskirts of the camp. And the people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down. And he called the name of that place Taberah, because the fire of the LORD had burned among them.*

"The people were like those who complain of evil in the ears of the LORD." We are not told what they complained about. Maybe the heat, the walking, or the dust. It was not a cry for help. It was grumbling, and God heard it.

"His anger burned, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed in the outskirts of the camp." The judgment fell on the edges of the camp, not the center. It was a warning. "The people cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD, and the fire died down" (11:2). The place was named Taberah, which means burning.

Why does God take grumbling so seriously? Because complaining against God's care is unbelief. It says God is not good and not enough. Paul uses this very chapter to warn the church: do not grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed (1 Corinthians 10:10). He tells us to "do all things without grumblings and disputes" (Philippians 2:14).

11:4-6 *And the rabble that **was** in their midst craved a craving; and the sons of Israel also wept again, and they said, "Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish which we ate in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic. And now our soul **is** dried up; **there is** nothing at all except the manna before our eyes."*

"The rabble that was in their midst craved a craving." The rabble were the mixed crowd of non-Israelites who came out of Egypt with Israel (Exodus 12:38). Their craving spread, "and the sons of Israel also wept again." Sin is contagious. One group's discontent infected the whole camp.

"Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish which we ate in Egypt for nothing" (11:4-5). For nothing? They were slaves in Egypt! Their memory had become selective. They remembered the food and forgot the whips and the murdered baby boys. Discontent always rewrites the past to make it look better than it was.

"And now our soul is dried up; there is nothing at all except the manna before our eyes" (11:6). Nothing but a daily miracle of bread from heaven! They had grown so used to God's provision that it bored them.

11:7-9 *And the manna **was** like coriander seed, and its appearance **was** like the appearance of bdellium. The people went about and gathered **it**, and they ground **it** in the mill or pounded **it** in the mortar, and they boiled **it** in the pot and made it **into** cakes; and its taste was like the taste of cake of oil. And when the dew came down on the camp **at** night, the manna came down on it.*

Moses stops to describe the manna. It "was like coriander seed, and its appearance was like the appearance of bdellium." Bdellium was a pale, clear resin. The people ground it or pounded it,

boiled it, and baked it into cakes, "and its taste was like the taste of cake of oil" (11:8). It came down with the dew every night (11:9).

These verses quietly answer the complaint. Manna was good food. It could be cooked in many ways. It was free, and it never failed. The problem was not the manna. The problem was their hearts.

Jesus said the manna pointed to Him. Moses did not give the true bread from heaven; the Father does, and "I am the bread of life" (John 6:32, 35). When we grow bored with Jesus and long for what the world offers, we are doing what Israel did.

11:10-15 *And Moses heard the people weeping by their clans, each man at the entrance of his tent; and the anger of the LORD burned exceedingly, and in the eyes of Moses **it was** evil. And Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You done evil to Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your eyes, that **You** put the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Or did I give birth to it, that You should say to me, 'Carry it in your bosom, just as the foster father carries the nursing child,' to the land which You swore to its fathers? From where **is there** meat for me to give to all this people? For they weep to me, saying, 'Give us meat, and let us eat.' I am not able, I alone, to carry all this people, for **it is too** heavy for me. And if thus You are doing to me, kill me, please, outright, if I have found favor in Your eyes; and let me not look on my evil."*

"Moses heard the people weeping by their clans, each man at the entrance of his tent." It was a public, family-by-family pity party. "The anger of the LORD burned exceedingly, and in the eyes of Moses it was evil" (11:10).

Then Moses pours out his heart to God, and it is raw. "Why have You done evil to Your servant?" (11:11). "Did I conceive all this people? Or did I give birth to it?" (11:12). He felt like a father carrying a crying baby he never asked for. "I am not able, I alone, to carry all this people, for it is too heavy for me" (11:14). Then, "kill me, please, outright" (11:15).

Moses was burned out. He is not the only one. Elijah asked God to take his life (1 Kings 19:4). Notice that God does not strike Moses for speaking this way. He listens and answers. It is far better to bring our exhaustion and even our anger honestly to God than to grumble against Him behind His back, as the people did. The difference between Moses and the people is that Moses brought his complaint to God.

If you are a pastor, a leader, or a parent, and you feel like Moses here, you are not alone, and you are not meant to carry it alone.

11:16-17 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Gather to Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know that they are the elders of the people and its officers; and you shall take them to the tent of meeting, and they shall station themselves there with you. And I will come down, and I will speak with you there; and I will take away some of the Spirit which* ***is*** *on you, and I will put* ***it*** *on them; and they shall carry the burden of the people with you, and you shall not carry* ***it****, you alone.*

God's answer: "Gather to Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know that they are the elders of the people and its officers." These were men already known and trusted. Jethro had advised something similar back in Exodus 18:13-26, but these seventy were given a different gift.

"I will take away some of the Spirit which is on you, and I will put it on them; and they shall carry the burden of the people with you, and you shall not carry it, you alone" (11:17). The work of leading God's people is spiritual work, and it needs the Spirit of God. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came on certain people for certain tasks. God did not take anything away from Moses. He shared the gift so the load could be shared too.

The early church did the same when the apostles were overloaded and chose seven men full of the Spirit and wisdom to help (Acts 6:3). Paul tells us to bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2).

11:18-20 *And to the people you shall say, 'Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, "Who will feed us meat? For* ***it was*** *good for us in Egypt." And the LORD will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat not one day, and not two days, and not five days, and not ten days, and not twenty days,* ***but*** *until a month of days, until it comes out from your nose and it becomes loathsome to you, because you have rejected the LORD who* ***is*** *in your midst, and you have wept before Him, saying, "Why* ***is*** *this* ***that*** *we came out from Egypt?"'"*

To the people God said, "Sanctify yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat." But there was a sting in it. "You shall eat not one day, and not two days, and not five days, and not ten days, and not twenty days, but until a month of days, until it comes out from your nose and it becomes loathsome to you" (11:19-20).

Why? "Because you have rejected the LORD who is in your midst, and you have wept before Him, saying, Why is this that we came out from Egypt?" (11:20). Their craving for meat was really a rejection of God Himself. They regretted being saved.

Sometimes the worst thing God can do is give us what we demand. Psalm 106:15 says it well: "He gave them their request, and He sent leanness into their soul."

11:21-23 *And Moses said, "Six hundred thousand on foot **are** the people in whose midst I **am**; and You have said, 'I will give them meat, and they shall eat a month of days.' Shall flock and herd be slaughtered for them, and it be enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered for them, and it be enough for them?" And the LORD said to Moses, "Is the hand of the LORD short? Now you shall see whether My word will happen to you or not."*

Moses could not see how. "Six hundred thousand on foot are the people in whose midst I am" (11:21). Should all the flocks and herds be slaughtered? All the fish of the sea? It was a fair math question, and Moses was doing math instead of trusting.

"Is the hand of the LORD short?" (11:23). That is one of the great questions of the Bible. The answer is no. God's arm is not too short to do what He has promised. Isaiah says the same thing hundreds of years later (Isaiah 59:1). "Now you shall see whether My word will happen to you or not."

What need in your life seems too big for God to meet? He still asks Moses' question.

11:24-25 *And Moses went out, and he spoke the words of the LORD to the people; and he gathered seventy men from the elders of the people, and he stationed them all around the tent. And the LORD came down in the cloud, and He spoke to him; and He took away some of the Spirit which **was** on him, and He put **it** on the seventy men, the elders; and it was, when the Spirit rested on them, and they prophesied, and they did not **do it** again.*

Moses gathered the seventy elders around the tent. "The LORD came down in the cloud, and He spoke to him; and He took away some of the Spirit which was on him, and He put it on the seventy men, the elders" (11:25). When the Spirit rested on them, "they prophesied, and they did not do it again."

To prophesy here means they spoke under the power of the Spirit, perhaps praising God or declaring His word. It was a sign, given once, that God had chosen and equipped them. It did not happen again, but their work of helping Moses went on.

11:26-29 *And two men had remained in the camp; the name of the one **was** Eldad, and the name of the second **was** Medad; and the Spirit rested on them, and they **were** among those written, but they had not gone out to the tent; and they prophesied in the camp. And the young man ran, and he told Moses, and he said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." And Joshua the son of Nun, the minister of Moses from his youth, answered, and he said, "My lord Moses, restrain them." And Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for me? And who will grant **that** all the people of the LORD **were** prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!"*

Two men, Eldad and Medad, had stayed in the camp. They were "among those written," on the list of the seventy, but had not gone out to the tent. Yet "the Spirit rested on them," and "they prophesied in the camp" (11:26). A young man ran to tell Moses.

Joshua, "the minister of Moses from his youth," said, "My lord Moses, restrain them" (11:28). Joshua was loyal and protective. He did not want anyone to rival Moses.

Moses' answer shows his heart: "Are you jealous for me? And who will grant that all the people of the LORD were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit on them!" (11:29). Moses was not threatened. He wanted more of God's Spirit among God's people, not less.

Jesus taught the same lesson when John wanted to stop a man casting out demons in His name: "Do not forbid him" (Mark 9:38-39). And Moses' wish came true in a new way at Pentecost, when Peter quoted Joel: God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh, sons and daughters alike (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28). Today every believer has the Holy Spirit living in him.

11:30-32 *And Moses was gathered to the camp, he and the elders of Israel. And a wind set out from the LORD, and it brought quails from the sea, and it let **them** fall on the camp, about a day's journey this way and about a day's journey that way, all around the camp, and approximately 3 feet (two cubits) above the face of the ground. And the people rose up all that day and all the night and all the next day, and they gathered the quail; the one who gathered least gathered approximately 60 bushels (ten homers); and they spread **them** out for themselves, spreading **them** all around the camp.*

Then "a wind set out from the LORD, and it brought quails from the sea, and it let them fall on the camp." They covered the ground "about a day's journey this way and about a day's journey that way" (11:31). The SLB says they were about three feet above the ground. Some teachers think the birds were piled that high. Others think they flew low, about waist high, tired from the wind, so they were easy to catch.

"The people rose up all that day and all the night and all the next day, and they gathered the quail" (11:32). The one who gathered least gathered ten homers, about sixty bushels. They worked two days and a night without stopping. That is the picture of greed: grabbing far more than anyone could need.

11:33-35 *The meat **was** still between their teeth, before it was chewed, and the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who craved. From Kibroth-hattaavah the people set out **to** Hazeroth, and they were at Hazeroth.*

"The meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, and the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very great plague." Scripture does not tell us how many died. Psalm 78:30-31 says God's anger came on them while the food was still in their mouths.

The place was named "Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who craved" (11:34). The name means graves of craving. That is a sobering name for a campsite.

Paul names this exact sin as a warning for us: these things happened as examples, "so that we would not be desirers of evil things, as they also desired" (1 Corinthians 10:6). Wanting meat was not evil in itself. But a craving that rejects God and despises His gifts leads to death. The answer is contentment. Paul learned to be content in every situation (Philippians 4:11), and he wrote that godliness with contentment is great gain (1 Timothy 6:6).

From there, Israel moved on to Hazeroth (11:35).

Chapter 11 Summary

Soon after leaving Sinai, the people complained, and fire from the LORD burned the edge of the camp until Moses prayed; the place was called Taberah. Then the mixed crowd and the Israelites craved meat, remembered the food of Egypt, and despised the manna. Moses, overwhelmed, told the LORD the burden was too heavy and asked to die. God told him to gather seventy elders, and He put some of the Spirit that was on Moses on them, and they prophesied. When Eldad and Medad prophesied in the camp, Joshua wanted them stopped, but Moses wished all the LORD's people were prophets. God promised meat for a whole month, and when Moses doubted, God asked whether His hand was too short. A wind brought quail around the camp, and the people gathered huge amounts, but while the meat was still in their teeth the LORD struck them with a plague. The place was named Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried those who craved.

People and Places

- Taberah: the place where the fire of the LORD burned; the name means burning.
- The rabble: the mixed crowd of non-Israelites who left Egypt with Israel (Exodus 12:38).
- Eldad and Medad: two of the seventy elders who prophesied in the camp.
- Joshua son of Nun: Moses' assistant from his youth, who will later lead Israel into the land.
- Kibroth-hattaavah: the place where those who craved were buried; the name means graves of craving.
- Hazeroth: Israel's next camp after Kibroth-hattaavah.

Chapter 11 Study Questions

1. What happened when the people complained at Taberah, and how did it stop? (11:1-3)

2. What did the people remember about Egypt, and what did they forget? (11:4-6)

3. How does Moses describe the manna, and what does that tell you about the people's complaint? (11:7-9)

4. What did Moses say to God when he felt overwhelmed? (11:11-15)

5. What did God do to lighten Moses' burden? (11:16-17, 24-25)

6. How did Moses respond when Joshua wanted Eldad and Medad stopped? (11:28-29)

7. What question did God ask Moses in verse 23, and how would you answer it about your own situation?

8. Israel grew bored with the manna. In what ways can we grow bored with Jesus or with God's daily gifts? (John 6:35)

9. Moses brought his burnout honestly to God. Is there a burden you need to bring to Him, or share with others, instead of carrying it alone?

10. What is one area of your life where you need to learn contentment instead of craving? (1 Corinthians 10:6; Philippians 4:11)

Chapter 12: Miriam and Aaron Speak Against Moses

Scripture

12:1-16 And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had taken; for he had taken a Cushite woman. And they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Has He not also spoken by us?" And the LORD heard. And the man Moses ***was*** very humble, more than any man who ***was*** on the face of the ground. And the LORD said suddenly to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." And the three of them went out. And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and He stood ***at*** the entrance of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam; and the two of them went out. And He said, "Hear, please, My words: If there is a prophet of the LORD among you, in the vision I make Myself known to him; in the dream I speak with him. Not so My servant Moses; in all My house he ***is*** faithful. Mouth to mouth I speak with him, and ***in*** appearance, and not in riddles; and the form of the LORD he beholds. And why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?" And the anger of the LORD burned against them, and He went. And the cloud turned aside from over the tent, and look, Miriam ***was*** leprous like snow; and Aaron turned to Miriam, and look, ***she was*** leprous. And Aaron said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not, please, lay sin on us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned. Please let her not be like the dead, whose flesh is half eaten when he comes out from his mother's womb." And Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "God, please heal her, please." And the LORD said to Moses, "And ***if*** her father had spat, spat in her face, would she not be put to shame seven days? Let her be shut up seven days outside the camp, and after ***that*** she shall be received." And Miriam was shut up outside the camp seven days; and the people did not set out until Miriam was received. And afterward the people set out from Hazeroth, and they camped in the wilderness of Paran.

Chapter 12 Preview

The grumbling of chapter 11 now reaches Moses' own family. His sister Miriam and his brother Aaron speak against him. The excuse is his Cushite wife, but the real issue comes out in their next words: "Has the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses?" They want the same standing he has.

God hears, and He calls all three to the tent of meeting. There He says that He speaks to prophets in visions and dreams, but to Moses He speaks "mouth to mouth," because Moses is faithful in all His house. When the cloud lifts, Miriam is white with a skin disease. Aaron begs Moses for mercy, and Moses, the man they had attacked, cries out to God to heal her. God has her shut outside the camp seven days, and the whole people wait for her before they move on. The chapter is short, but it says a lot about jealousy, humility, and how God defends His servants.

Chapter 12 Study

12:1 *And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had taken; for he had taken a Cushite woman.*

"Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had taken." Miriam is named first, and in Hebrew the verb is feminine, so she likely led the attack. Miriam was a prophetess who led Israel in song after the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20). Micah names her with Moses and Aaron as leaders God sent (Micah 6:4). She was no small figure.

Who was the Cushite woman? Cush usually means the land south of Egypt, what is now Sudan and Ethiopia. Bible teachers hold two main views. Some believe this was Zipporah, Moses' Midianite wife (Exodus 2:21), since an old poem puts Cushan and Midian side by side (Habakkuk 3:7). Others believe Zipporah had died and Moses had married a second wife from Cush. Scripture doesn't say which.

Either way, Miriam and Aaron used Moses' wife as an excuse. God does not even answer the complaint about her. People often attack a leader's family when their real problem is with the leader.

12:2 *And they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Has He not also spoken by us?" And the LORD heard.*

"Has the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? Has He not also spoken by us?" Here is the real issue. It was jealousy and pride. They wanted equal authority with Moses. It was true that God had spoken through them. But God had given Moses a unique role, and they resented it.

"And the LORD heard." Four short words. They may have said this privately, but God heard. Nothing we say about others is hidden from Him.

12:3 *And the man Moses **was** very humble, more than any man who **was** on the face of the ground.*

"And the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the ground." This explains why Moses did not defend himself. To be humble is to have a right view of yourself before God, not to fight for your own position.

Some ask how a humble man could write this about himself. Moses may have written it under the Spirit's guidance as a plain fact needed to explain the story. Or, like the account of his death (Deuteronomy 34), it may have been added by a later inspired writer, such as Joshua. Either way, it is God's Word, and it is true.

Jesus said, "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matthew 11:29). Humility does not mean weakness. Moses stood before Pharaoh. But he did not fight for his own honor. He left that to God.

12:4-5 *And the LORD said suddenly to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." And the three of them went out. And the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and He stood* ***at*** *the entrance of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam; and the two of them went out.*

"The LORD said suddenly to Moses and to Aaron and to Miriam, Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting." God did not wait. He called a meeting. "The LORD came down in a pillar of cloud, and He stood at the entrance of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam" (12:5). The two of them stepped forward. They had spoken against Moses, and now they had to face God.

12:6-8 *And He said, "Hear, please, My words: If there is a prophet of the LORD among you, in the vision I make Myself known to him; in the dream I speak with him. Not so My servant Moses; in all My house he* ***is*** *faithful. Mouth to mouth I speak with him, and* ***in*** *appearance, and not in riddles; and the form of the LORD he beholds. And why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?"*

"Hear, please, My words: If there is a prophet of the LORD among you, in the vision I make Myself known to him; in the dream I speak with him." That is how God usually spoke to prophets. Miriam and Aaron were included in that.

"Not so My servant Moses; in all My house he is faithful" (12:7). God's house here means His people, His household. Moses was trusted with the whole of it.

"Mouth to mouth I speak with him, and in appearance, and not in riddles; and the form of the LORD he beholds" (12:8). God spoke with Moses directly and clearly, "face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). No other Old Testament prophet had that kind of closeness (Deuteronomy 34:10).

"And why were you not afraid to speak against My servant, against Moses?" They should have been afraid. When you speak against the one God has chosen, you are speaking against God.

Hebrews picks up verse 7 and says Moses was faithful in all God's house "as a servant," but Christ is faithful "as a Son over His house" (Hebrews 3:5-6). Moses spoke with God face to face. Jesus is the very Word of God who was with God and is God. If it was serious to speak against Moses, how much more serious is it to reject Jesus?

12:9-10 *And the anger of the LORD burned against them, and He went. And the cloud turned aside from over the tent, and look, Miriam* ***was*** *leprous like snow; and Aaron turned to Miriam, and look,* ***she was*** *leprous.*

"The anger of the LORD burned against them, and He went." The cloud lifted from the tent, "and look, Miriam was leprous like snow." Her skin turned white with disease. Aaron turned and saw it.

Why Miriam and not Aaron? Most likely because she led the attack. Aaron was the high priest, and if he had been struck, he could not have served. Scripture doesn't say for certain. Miriam had wanted to be seen as Moses' equal. Now she would be sent outside the camp, cut off from the

people for a time. Pride goes before a fall (Proverbs 16:18). Deuteronomy 24:9 tells Israel to remember what the LORD did to Miriam.

12:11-12 *And Aaron said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not, please, lay sin on us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned. Please let her not be like the dead, whose flesh is half eaten when he comes out from his mother's womb."*

Aaron's tone changed at once. "Please, my lord, do not, please, lay sin on us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned" (12:11). A moment ago he was claiming equal standing with Moses. Now he calls his younger brother "my lord" and begs for help. He confessed it plainly: we acted foolishly, and we sinned.

"Please let her not be like the dead, whose flesh is half eaten when he comes out from his mother's womb" (12:12). Aaron's words are painful. He saw his sister wasting away like a stillborn child. He could not fix it. Only God could.

12:13 *And Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "God, please heal her, please."*

"Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, God, please heal her, please." This is one of the shortest prayers in the Bible, and one of the most beautiful. The man they attacked is the first to pray for her. He did not say she deserved it. He did not make her wait. He cried out.

Moses' humility in verse 3 shows up here in action. He did not defend himself, and now he does not hold a grudge. Jesus taught us to pray for those who mistreat us (Matthew 5:44), and on the cross He prayed for those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Moses is a picture of Christ here, the one who was wronged praying for those who wronged him. And Jesus is the greater Mediator, who always lives to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25).

12:14-15 *And the LORD said to Moses, "And **if** her father had spat, spat in her face, would she not be put to shame seven days? Let her be shut up seven days outside the camp, and after **that** she shall be received." And Miriam was shut up outside the camp seven days; and the people did not set out until Miriam was received.*

God answered, but with a lesson. "If her father had spat, spat in her face, would she not be put to shame seven days?" In that culture, if a father spat in his daughter's face, it was a public shame, and she would stay away for a time. If that was true for an earthly father's rebuke, how much more for God's?

"Let her be shut up seven days outside the camp, and after that she shall be received" (12:14). God healed her, but she still had to bear the shame for seven days, as the Law required for skin disease (Leviticus 13:4-5). Forgiveness does not always remove every consequence. But notice the promise: "she shall be received." She would come back.

"The people did not set out until Miriam was received" (12:15). The whole nation waited for her. That is grace. God did not leave her behind, and neither did His people. When someone among us falls and repents, we wait for them and welcome them back. We do not march on without them.

12:16 *And afterward the people set out from Hazeroth, and they camped in the wilderness of Paran.*

"Afterward the people set out from Hazeroth, and they camped in the wilderness of Paran." The wilderness of Paran is the region near Kadesh, on the southern edge of Canaan. They are now at the door of the promised land. The next chapter will tell whether they will walk through it.

Chapter 12 Summary

Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses, using his Cushite wife as an excuse, but really claiming that the LORD spoke through them as much as through him. Moses was the most humble man on earth and did not defend himself. The LORD called all three to the tent of meeting and told Miriam and Aaron that He spoke to prophets in visions and dreams, but to His faithful servant Moses He spoke mouth to mouth, and they should have been afraid to speak against him. When the cloud lifted, Miriam was white with a skin disease. Aaron confessed their sin and pleaded with Moses, and Moses cried out to God to heal her. God had her shut outside the camp for seven days, and the people waited for her before setting out from Hazeroth to the wilderness of Paran.

People and Places

- Miriam: the sister of Moses and Aaron, a prophetess who led Israel's women in song at the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20).
- The Cushite woman: Moses' wife, either Zipporah or a second wife from Cush.
- Cush: the land south of Egypt, roughly modern Sudan and Ethiopia.
- Hazeroth: the camp where this happened, on the way from Sinai to Paran.

Chapter 12 Study Questions

1. What reason did Miriam and Aaron give for speaking against Moses, and what was the real issue? (12:1-2)

2. What does verse 3 say about Moses, and how does that explain why he did not defend himself?

3. How did God say He spoke to prophets, and how was Moses different? (12:6-8)

4. What happened to Miriam, and how did Aaron respond? (12:10-12)

5. What did Moses pray for Miriam? (12:13)

6. How long was Miriam kept outside the camp, and what did the people do while she was gone? (12:14-15)

7. How does Hebrews 3:5-6 compare Moses with Jesus?

8. Jealousy often hides behind another complaint, as it did here. Is there someone whose position or gifts you have resented? What would it look like to give that to God?

9. Moses prayed at once for the sister who had attacked him. Who is someone who has wronged you that you could pray for this week? (Matthew 5:44)

10. The whole camp waited for Miriam to be restored. How can your church welcome back someone who has fallen and repented?

Chapter 13: The Twelve Spies

Scripture

13:1-16 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Send for yourself men, and let them spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the sons of Israel; one man, one man for the tribe of his fathers you shall send, every one a leader among them." And Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the mouth of the LORD; all of them ***were*** men, heads of the sons of Israel ***were*** they. And these ***are*** their names: for the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; for the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; for the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; for the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; for the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun; for the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; for the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; for the tribe of Joseph, for the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi; for the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; for the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; for the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; for the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi. These ***are*** the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua.

13:17-33 And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and he said to them, "Go up this ***way*** into the Negeb, and you shall go up ***into*** the hill country. And you shall see the land, what it ***is***, and the people who dwell on it, whether it ***is*** strong ***or*** feeble, whether it ***is*** few or many, and what the land ***is*** in which it dwells, whether it ***is*** good or bad, and what the cities ***are*** in which it dwells, whether in camps or in fortresses, and what the land ***is***, whether it ***is*** fat or lean, whether there is wood in it or not. And you shall show yourselves strong, and you shall take some of the fruit of the land." And the days ***were*** the days of the first ripe grapes. And they went up, and they spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, ***at*** Lebo Hamath. And they went up into the Negeb, and he came to Hebron; and there ***were*** Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak. And Hebron was built seven years before Zoan of Egypt. And they came to the wadi of Eshcol, and they cut down from there a branch and one cluster of grapes, and they carried it on the pole between two, and some of the pomegranates and some of the figs. That place he called the wadi of Eshcol because of the cluster which the sons of Israel cut down from there. And they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days. And they went, and they came to Moses and to Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and they showed them the fruit of the land. And they recounted to him, and they said, "We came into the land to which you sent us; and also it ***is*** flowing ***with*** milk and honey, and this ***is*** its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who dwell in the land ***are*** strong, and the cities ***are*** fortified ***and*** very large; and also we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek ***is*** dwelling in the land of the Negeb; and the Hittite and the Jebusite and the Amorite ***are*** dwelling in the hill country; and the Canaanite ***is*** dwelling by the sea and along the side of the Jordan." And Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and he said, "We shall surely go up, and we shall take possession of it, for we shall surely prevail over it." And the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for it ***is*** stronger than we." And they brought out a bad report of the land which they had spied out to the sons of Israel, saying, "The land through which we passed to spy it out ***is*** a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in its midst ***are*** men of ***great*** stature. And there we

saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, from the Nephilim; and we were in our own eyes like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes."

Chapter 13 Preview

Israel has reached the wilderness of Paran, on the southern edge of the promised land. The LORD tells Moses to send twelve men, one leader from each tribe, to spy out Canaan. Moses gives them their orders: look at the land, the people, the cities, and the crops, and bring back some fruit. For forty days they walk the land from the far south to the far north. They come back carrying a cluster of grapes so big it takes two men and a pole.

Then comes the report. All twelve agree that the land is good, flowing with milk and honey. But ten of them say the people are too strong and the cities too large, and they spread a bad report through the camp. Only Caleb speaks up: "We shall surely go up." The other ten say they felt like grasshoppers. The same facts led to two very different conclusions, because one man looked at God and the others looked only at the giants.

Chapter 13 Study

13:1-3 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Send for yourself men, and let them spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the sons of Israel; one man, one man for the tribe of his fathers you shall send, every one a leader among them." And Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the mouth of the LORD; all of them **were** men, heads of the sons of Israel **were** they.*

"Send for yourself men, and let them spy out the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the sons of Israel." Notice what God says first. He is giving them the land. The spies were not sent to find out whether Israel could win. God had already promised the land to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 15:18-21). They were sent to see what God was giving and to plan the way in.

Deuteronomy 1:22-23 adds that the people came to Moses and asked to send men ahead, and the idea pleased Moses. So the request started with the people, and God allowed it and directed it. That may hint that their faith was already shaky.

Each spy was "a leader among them" (13:2), a head of his tribe. These were not the same leaders named in chapter 1, but they were men of standing. Their report would carry weight, for good or for evil.

13:4-16 *And these **are** their names: for the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; for the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; for the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; for the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; for the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun; for the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; for the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; for the tribe of Joseph, for the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi; for the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; for the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; for the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; for the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi. These **are** the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua.*

The list gives one man from each of the twelve tribes. Levi is not on it, since Levi would have no land of its own, and Joseph is counted as two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh (13:8, 11).

Most of these names appear nowhere else in the Bible. Ten men had the chance to be heroes of faith, and history remembers them only for their unbelief. Two names stand out. "For the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh" (13:6). "For the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun" (13:8).

"And Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun Joshua" (13:16). Hoshea means salvation. Joshua means the LORD is salvation, or the LORD saves. Moses put God's name into his assistant's name. The Greek form of Joshua is Jesus. The man who would lead Israel into the land carried the same name as the One who leads us into eternal life (Matthew 1:21).

13:17-20 *And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and he said to them, "Go up this **way** into the Negeb, and you shall go up **into** the hill country. And you shall see the land, what it **is**, and the people who dwell on it, whether it **is** strong **or** feeble, whether it **is** few or many, and what the land **is** in which it dwells, whether it **is** good or bad, and what the cities **are** in which it dwells, whether in camps or in fortresses, and what the land **is**, whether it **is** fat or lean, whether there is wood in it or not. And you shall show yourselves strong, and you shall take some of the fruit of the land." And the days **were** the days of the first ripe grapes.*

Moses told them to go up "into the Negeb," the dry southern country, and then "into the hill country," the central highlands. He gave them a list of things to look for: "whether it is strong or feeble, whether it is few or many" (13:18), whether the land was "good or bad" (13:19), whether the cities were open camps or fortresses, whether the soil was "fat or lean" (13:20).

These were fair questions. Faith does not mean closing our eyes to facts. God wanted them to see the land clearly. The problem would not be what they saw but what they did with it.

"And you shall show yourselves strong, and you shall take some of the fruit of the land." It was "the days of the first ripe grapes," which in that land is about late July. Moses wanted the people to taste the promise before they took it.

13:21-22 *And they went up, and they spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob,* ***at*** *Lebo Hamath. And they went up into the Negeb, and he came to Hebron; and there* ***were*** *Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak. And Hebron was built seven years before Zoan of Egypt.*

They went "from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, at Lebo Hamath" (13:21). That is the whole length of the land, from the southern desert to the far north, a walk of about 250 miles one way. They saw it all.

At Hebron they saw "Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the descendants of Anak" (13:22). The Anakim were a people known for their great size. Hebron mattered to Israel. Abraham had lived there and bought the cave where he, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob were buried (Genesis 23:19; 49:31). The spies stood near the graves of their fathers, at the very place God had made His promises, and they were afraid.

Moses adds that "Hebron was built seven years before Zoan of Egypt." Zoan was a city in the Nile delta. The note tells the reader that Hebron was an old and settled city, not a new camp.

Years later Caleb asked for Hebron as his inheritance, and he drove out these same three sons of Anak (Joshua 14:12-14; 15:14). The giants who scared ten men were defeated by the one man who trusted God.

13:23-25 *And they came to the wadi of Eshcol, and they cut down from there a branch and one cluster of grapes, and they carried it on the pole between two, and some of the pomegranates and some of the figs. That place he called the wadi of Eshcol because of the cluster which the sons of Israel cut down from there. And they returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days.*

In "the wadi of Eshcol," a valley that has water in the rainy season, they cut "a branch and one cluster of grapes, and they carried it on the pole between two" (13:23). They also brought pomegranates and figs. Eshcol means cluster, and the valley was named for this cluster.

That one bunch of grapes was a sign of how rich the land was. God had not exaggerated. He never does.

"They returned from spying out the land at the end of forty days" (13:25). Remember that number. In chapter 14 God will turn each of those forty days into a year in the wilderness.

13:26-29 *And they went, and they came to Moses and to Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and they showed them the fruit of the land. And they recounted to him, and they said, "We came into the land to which you sent us; and also it **is** flowing **with** milk and honey, and this **is** its fruit. Nevertheless, the people who dwell in the land **are** strong, and the cities **are** fortified **and** very large; and also we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek **is** dwelling in the land of the Negeb; and the Hittite and the Jebusite and the Amorite **are** dwelling in the hill country; and the Canaanite **is** dwelling by the sea and along the side of the Jordan."*

They came back "to the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh," also called Kadesh-barnea, an oasis on the southern border. They gave their report to Moses, Aaron, and "all the congregation" (13:26), and they showed the fruit.

The report started well: "it is flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit" (13:27). Milk and honey meant good pasture for herds and plenty of flowers for bees. Everything God said about the land was true.

Then came the word that turned everything: "Nevertheless" (13:28). The people are strong. The cities are fortified and very large. "We saw the descendants of Anak there." Then they named the nations: Amalek in the south, the Hittite, the Jebusite, and the Amorite in the hills, and the Canaanite by the sea and the Jordan (13:29). It sounded like enemies on every side.

Every word of it was true. That is what makes it so dangerous. A report can be accurate in its facts and still be unbelief, if it leaves God out. The ten spies told the truth about the land and the people, but they did not say one word about the LORD who had promised it.

13:30 *And Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and he said, "We shall surely go up, and we shall take possession of it, for we shall surely prevail over it."*

"And Caleb quieted the people before Moses." The crowd was already stirring. Caleb stood up and said, "We shall surely go up, and we shall take possession of it, for we shall surely prevail over it."

Caleb saw the same walls and the same giants. He did not deny them. But he measured them against God, and next to God they were small. Forty-five years later Caleb said that he had "followed fully after the LORD my God" (Joshua 14:8). That is the difference. Faith is not pretending problems are small. Faith is knowing God is bigger.

Joshua stood with Caleb (14:6), but here Caleb speaks first, perhaps because Joshua, as Moses' assistant, might have been seen as speaking for Moses.

13:31-33 *And the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for it **is** stronger than we." And they brought out a bad report of the land which they had spied out to the sons of Israel, saying, "The land through which we passed to spy it out **is** a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in its midst **are** men of **great** stature. And there we saw the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, from the Nephilim; and we were in our own eyes like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes."*

The other men said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for it is stronger than we" (13:31). They were right in one sense. Israel was not strong enough. But that was never the point. The LORD was strong enough.

Then they went further and "brought out a bad report of the land" (13:32). Now they twisted the facts. The land that flowed with milk and honey had become "a land that devours its inhabitants." The tall men had become "the Nephilim, the sons of Anak, from the Nephilim" (13:33). The Nephilim were the mighty men before the flood (Genesis 6:4). The flood had wiped them out. The spies used the name to make the Anakim sound like monsters. Fear makes the enemy bigger every time we tell the story.

"We were in our own eyes like grasshoppers, and so we were in their eyes." Notice the order. First they saw themselves as grasshoppers. Then they assumed everyone else did too. But we learn later from Rahab that the people of Canaan were terrified of Israel, because they had heard what the LORD did at the Red Sea (Joshua 2:9-11). The spies were wrong about what the enemy thought. They were most wrong about what God could do.

How do you see yourself when you face something hard? If we measure ourselves against the problem, we will always feel like grasshoppers. If we measure the problem against God, we will say with Paul, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Chapter 13 Summary

At the LORD's command, Moses sent twelve leaders, one from each tribe, from the wilderness of Paran to spy out Canaan. He renamed Hoshea son of Nun as Joshua. The spies were to see the land, its people, its cities, and its crops, and bring back fruit. For forty days they walked the land from the wilderness of Zin to Lebo Hamath. At Hebron they saw the descendants of Anak, and at the valley of Eshcol they cut a cluster of grapes so large two men carried it on a pole. They returned to Kadesh and reported that the land flowed with milk and honey, but that the people were strong and the cities fortified. Caleb quieted the people and said they could surely take the land. The other spies said they could not, spread a bad report, and said they felt like grasshoppers beside the giants.

People and Places

- Wilderness of Paran: the desert south of Canaan where Israel camped after leaving Sinai.
- Kadesh: an oasis on the southern border of Canaan, also called Kadesh-barnea; Israel's base for much of the wilderness years.

- Caleb son of Jephunneh: the spy from Judah who trusted the LORD and urged Israel to go up.
- Joshua son of Nun: the spy from Ephraim, Moses' assistant, whose name Moses changed from Hoshea.
- The Negeb: the dry country in the south of Canaan.
- Hebron: an old city in the hill country of Judah, near the burial cave of Abraham's family.
- The descendants of Anak: a people of great size living around Hebron.
- Wadi of Eshcol: a valley near Hebron; the name means cluster.
- Nephilim: the mighty men of Genesis 6:4; the ten spies used the name for the Anakim.

Chapter 13 Study Questions

1. Who sent the spies, and what had God already said about the land? (13:1-2)

2. What new name did Moses give Hoshea, and what does it mean? (13:16)

3. What did Moses tell the spies to look for? (13:17-20)

4. What did the spies bring back, and what did it show about the land? (13:23-27)

5. What word turned the report from good to bad, and what followed it? (13:28-29)

6. What did Caleb say, and why could he say it? (13:30; Joshua 14:8)

7. How did the ten spies change the facts in their bad report? (13:32-33)

8. The ten spies told the truth about the giants but left God out. When have you looked at a problem and left God out of the picture?

9. The spies saw themselves as grasshoppers. How does the way you see yourself affect your faith? (Romans 8:31)

10. Caleb stood almost alone. Is there a place in your life where God is asking you to speak up for trusting Him when others are afraid?

Chapter 14: Israel Refuses the Land

Scripture

14:1-10 And all the congregation lifted up and gave forth their voice, and the people wept that night. And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron; and all the congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or in this wilderness, if only we had died! And why ***is*** the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones shall become plunder. ***Is it*** not good for us to return to Egypt?" And they said, each man to his brother, "Let us appoint a head, and let us return to Egypt." And Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they said to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy it out, the land ***is*** very, very good. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows ***with*** milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and you, do not fear the people of the land, for they ***are*** our bread. Their shade has turned aside from over them, and the LORD ***is*** with us; do not fear them." And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

14:11-25 And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, with all the signs which I have done in their midst? I will strike them with pestilence, and I will dispossess them; and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they." And Moses said to the LORD, "And Egypt will hear ***it***, for You brought up this people by Your strength from their midst, and they will say ***it*** to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, ***are*** in the midst of this people, that eye to eye You, LORD, are seen, and Your cloud stands over them, and in a pillar of cloud You go before them by day and in a pillar of fire ***by*** night. And ***if*** You put this people to death as one man, then the nations who have heard Your report will say, saying, 'Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which He swore to them, He has slaughtered them in the wilderness.' And now, please let the strength of the Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, 'The LORD ***is*** slow to anger and great in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will surely not clear ***the guilty***, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons, on the third and on the fourth ***generation***.' Forgive, please, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your steadfast love, and just as You have forgiven this people from Egypt and until now." And the LORD said, "I have forgiven according to your word. But indeed, ***as*** I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD; for all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tested Me these ten times, and have not listened to My voice, they shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers; and all who spurn Me shall not see it. But My servant Caleb, because another spirit has been with him and he has fully followed after Me, I will bring him into the land into which he went, and his seed shall possess it. And the Amalekite and the Canaanite ***are*** dwelling in the valley. Tomorrow turn, and set out for yourselves ***into*** the wilderness ***by*** the way of the Red Sea."

14:26-45 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "How long ***shall I bear*** with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? The grumblings of the sons of Israel, which they are grumbling against Me, I have heard. Say to them, '***As*** I live,' declares the LORD, 'surely just as you have spoken in My ears, so I will do to you. In this wilderness your corpses shall fall, and all your enrolled ***men***, according to all your number, from a son of twenty years and upward, who have grumbled against Me. You shall surely not come into the land ***concerning*** which I lifted up My hand to make you dwell in it, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. And your little ones, who you said would become plunder, I will bring them in, and they shall know the land which you have rejected. But you, your corpses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and they shall bear your harlotries until your corpses are finished in the wilderness. According to the number of the days which you spied out the land, forty days, a day for the year, a day for the year, you shall bear your iniquities forty years, and you shall know My opposition. I, the LORD, have spoken; surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me; in this wilderness they shall come to an end, and there they shall die.'" And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, and who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing out a bad report on the land, and the men who brought out the evil report of the land died by the plague before the LORD. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh lived, of those men who went to spy out the land. And Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, and the people mourned exceedingly. And they rose early in the morning, and they went up to the top of the hill country, saying, "Look, we ***are here***, and we will go up to the place which the LORD said, for we have sinned." And Moses said, "Why ***is*** this ***that*** you are transgressing the mouth of the LORD? And it shall not succeed. Do not go up, for the LORD ***is*** not in your midst, that you may not be struck down before your enemies. For the Amalekite and the Canaanite ***are*** there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; inasmuch as you have turned back from after the LORD, and the LORD will not be with you." And they presumed to go up to the top of the hill country; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD and Moses did not depart from the midst of the camp. And the Amalekite and the Canaanite who dwelt in that hill country came down, and they struck them, and they crushed them as far as Hormah.

Chapter 14 Preview

This is one of the saddest chapters in the Old Testament. After the bad report, the whole nation weeps all night. They wish they had died in Egypt, they talk of choosing a new leader to take them back, and when Joshua and Caleb plead with them to trust the LORD, the people pick up stones to kill them. Then the glory of the LORD appears.

God says He will strike the people and make a new nation from Moses. Moses pleads for them on the basis of God's own name and His steadfast love, and God forgives. But forgiveness does not erase the consequences. Every adult who refused the land will die in the wilderness over the next forty years, one year for each day the spies were in the land. Only Caleb and Joshua will enter, along with the children the people said would be victims. The ten spies die by a plague. The next morning the people try to go up and fight anyway, without the LORD, and they are beaten back. Hebrews 3 and 4 use this chapter to warn us not to harden our hearts.

Chapter 14 Study

14:1-4 *And all the congregation lifted up and gave forth their voice, and the people wept that night. And all the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and against Aaron; and all the congregation said to them, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or in this wilderness, if only we had died! And why **is** the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones shall become plunder. **Is it** not good for us to return to Egypt?" And they said, each man to his brother, "Let us appoint a head, and let us return to Egypt."*

"The people wept that night." It was not repentance. It was despair. They had believed the bad report over God's promise.

"If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or in this wilderness, if only we had died!" (14:2). Be careful what you wish for. God will take them at their word in verse 28.

"Why is the LORD bringing us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones shall become plunder" (14:3). Now they blamed God directly. They spoke as if the God who had crushed Egypt had brought them all this way to have them killed. That is what unbelief does. It turns God's love into a trap in our minds.

"Let us appoint a head, and let us return to Egypt" (14:4). That would mean rejecting Moses, rejecting the LORD, and walking back into slavery. Nehemiah 9:17 says they did appoint a leader to return to their bondage. Sin can look like a way back to comfort, but it always leads back to chains.

14:5-10 *And Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who spied out the land, tore their clothes; and they said to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy it out, the land **is** very, very good. If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land which flows **with** milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the LORD; and you, do not fear the people of the land, for they **are** our bread. Their shade has turned aside from over them, and the LORD **is** with us; do not fear them." And all the congregation said to stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.*

"Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly." This was not fear of the people. It was a plea, a picture of grief and prayer before God.

Joshua and Caleb "tore their clothes" (14:6), a sign of deep sorrow. Then they spoke: "the land is very, very good" (14:7). "If the LORD delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us" (14:8). Everything depended on the LORD, not on Israel's strength.

"Only do not rebel against the LORD; and you, do not fear the people of the land, for they are our bread" (14:9). We will eat them up like bread, they meant. "Their shade has turned aside from over them." Their protection is gone. "And the LORD is with us; do not fear them." Notice that Joshua and Caleb named the real sin. This was not caution. It was rebellion against God.

The answer of the crowd: "all the congregation said to stone them with stones" (14:10). They wanted to kill the only two men telling them the truth. Just then, "the glory of the LORD appeared at the tent of meeting." God stepped in before a stone was thrown.

14:11-12 *And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, with all the signs which I have done in their midst? I will strike them with pestilence, and I will dispossess them; and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they."*

"How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, with all the signs which I have done in their midst?" (14:11). God names the root problem: unbelief. They had seen the plagues in Egypt, the Red Sea split, manna every morning, water from a rock, and the cloud over their heads. They still did not believe.

"I will strike them with pestilence, and I will dispossess them; and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they" (14:12). God made the same offer at the golden calf (Exodus 32:10). Was God going to break His promise? No. Moses was from Abraham's line, so the promise would still stand through him. The offer tested Moses and showed his heart.

14:13-19 *And Moses said to the LORD, "And Egypt will hear **it**, for You brought up this people by Your strength from their midst, and they will say **it** to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, LORD, **are** in the midst of this people, that eye to eye You, LORD, are seen, and Your cloud stands over them, and in a pillar of cloud You go before them by day and in a pillar of fire **by** night. And **if** You put this people to death as one man, then the nations who have heard Your report will say, saying, 'Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which He swore to them, He has slaughtered them in the wilderness.' And now, please let the strength of the Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, 'The LORD **is** slow to anger and great in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will surely not clear **the guilty**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the sons, on the third and on the fourth **generation**.' Forgive, please, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your steadfast love, and just as You have forgiven this people from Egypt and until now."*

Moses did not take the offer. He prayed for the people who had just tried to stone his friends.

His first argument was God's name among the nations. Egypt had heard. The people of Canaan had heard that the LORD was "in the midst of this people," that He was seen "eye to eye," and that His cloud went before them (14:14). If God destroyed Israel now, the nations would say, "Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which He swore to them, He has slaughtered them in the wilderness" (14:16). Moses cared more about God's glory than his own greatness.

His second argument was God's own character. Moses quoted back what God said about Himself at Sinai (Exodus 34:6-7): "The LORD is slow to anger and great in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will surely not clear the guilty" (14:18). Steadfast love is hesed, God's loyal, covenant love that does not quit. Moses held both halves together. God forgives, and God also does not pretend sin is nothing.

"Forgive, please, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your steadfast love" (14:19). Moses asked God to act like Himself.

This is how to pray for others. Pray God's promises back to Him. Pray for His glory. Pray on the basis of who He is. And Moses points us to a greater intercessor. Jesus is "always living to intercede" for those who come to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25).

14:20-25 *And the LORD said, "I have forgiven according to your word. But indeed,* ***as*** *I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD; for all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tested Me these ten times, and have not listened to My voice, they shall not see the land which I swore to their fathers; and all who spurn Me shall not see it. But My servant Caleb, because another spirit has been with him and he has fully followed after Me, I will bring him into the land into which he went, and his seed shall possess it. And the Amalekite and the Canaanite* ***are*** *dwelling in the valley. Tomorrow turn, and set out for yourselves* ***into*** *the wilderness* ***by*** *the way of the Red Sea."*

"I have forgiven according to your word" (14:20). God answered Moses' prayer. The nation would not be wiped out.

"But indeed, as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD" (14:21). God's plan would not fail. His glory would fill the earth, and that promise still waits for its full answer when Christ reigns (Habakkuk 2:14).

Forgiveness did not cancel the consequences. The men who saw God's glory and signs "and have tested Me these ten times, and have not listened to My voice" (14:22) would not see the land. Ten times may be a count of their rebellions since Egypt, or a way of saying again and again. Either way, God had been patient for a long time.

"But My servant Caleb, because another spirit has been with him and he has fully followed after Me, I will bring him into the land" (14:24). Caleb had a different spirit, a heart that trusted and obeyed. Joshua is named with him in verse 30.

Then came the order to turn back: "Tomorrow turn, and set out for yourselves into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea" (14:25). They were standing at the door of the promise, and they were sent back into the desert.

14:26-35 *And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "How long **shall I bear** with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? The grumblings of the sons of Israel, which they are grumbling against Me, I have heard. Say to them, '**As** I live,' declares the LORD, 'surely just as you have spoken in My ears, so I will do to you. In this wilderness your corpses shall fall, and all your enrolled **men**, according to all your number, from a son of twenty years and upward, who have grumbled against Me. You shall surely not come into the land **concerning** which I lifted up My hand to make you dwell in it, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. And your little ones, who you said would become plunder, I will bring them in, and they shall know the land which you have rejected. But you, your corpses shall fall in this wilderness. And your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and they shall bear your harlotries until your corpses are finished in the wilderness. According to the number of the days which you spied out the land, forty days, a day for the year, a day for the year, you shall bear your iniquities forty years, and you shall know My opposition. I, the LORD, have spoken; surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me; in this wilderness they shall come to an end, and there they shall die.'"*

"How long shall I bear with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me?" (14:27). Now God gives the sentence, and it matches their own words. They had said, "If only we had died in the land of Egypt, or in this wilderness" (14:2). God said, "surely just as you have spoken in My ears, so I will do to you" (14:28).

"In this wilderness your corpses shall fall, and all your enrolled men, according to all your number, from a son of twenty years and upward" (14:29). These are the same men counted in chapter 1, the 603,550. The army God had organized for the conquest would be buried in the sand. The second census in chapter 26 shows that this is exactly what happened (26:64-65).

"And your little ones, who you said would become plunder, I will bring them in" (14:31). The children they used as an excuse for unbelief were the very ones God would bless. God's grace reached the next generation.

"Your sons shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and they shall bear your harlotries" (14:33). Harlotry is a picture of unfaithfulness to God. The children would suffer the effects of their parents' sin, though not its guilt. Ezekiel 18:20 makes clear that each person answers for his own sin.

"According to the number of the days which you spied out the land, forty days, a day for the year," God said, "you shall bear your iniquities forty years" (14:34). The forty years include the time already spent since Egypt, so about thirty-eight more years remained (Deuteronomy 2:14).

Is this too harsh? It is hard to read. But we should see what God did not do. He did not destroy them that day. He kept feeding them manna, kept the cloud over them, and kept their clothes from wearing out (Deuteronomy 8:4). He kept caring for a generation under judgment. And He kept His promise to their children. Psalm 95:10-11 looks back on this and says God was grieved forty years with that generation and swore they would not enter His rest.

Hebrews 3:17-19 draws the lesson for us: "whose corpses fell in the wilderness." Why? "They were not able to enter in because of unbelief." Hebrews 4:2 says they heard the good news, but it was "not being mixed with faith in those who heard." The writer pleads with us: today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts (Hebrews 3:7-8). This does not mean the people who died in the wilderness were all lost forever. Moses and Aaron also died outside the land. The judgment was the loss of the land God had offered. The warning for us is that hearing God's promise is not enough. We must trust Him.

14:36-38 *And the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land, and who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing out a bad report on the land, and the men who brought out the evil report of the land died by the plague before the LORD. And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh lived, of those men who went to spy out the land.*

The ten spies who "made all the congregation grumble" by their bad report "died by the plague before the LORD" (14:36-37). They were judged first, because they led the rest astray. Leaders are held to a higher standard (James 3:1). Words have power to spread fear or faith through a whole people.

"And Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh lived" (14:38). Twelve went in. Ten died at once. Two lived, and those two would be the only adults of that generation to walk into Canaan forty years later.

14:39-45 *And Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, and the people mourned exceedingly. And they rose early in the morning, and they went up to the top of the hill country, saying, "Look, we **are here**, and we will go up to the place which the LORD said, for we have sinned." And Moses said, "Why **is** this **that** you are transgressing the mouth of the LORD? And it shall not succeed. Do not go up, for the LORD **is** not in your midst, that you may not be struck down before your enemies. For the Amalekite and the Canaanite **are** there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; inasmuch as you have turned back from after the LORD, and the LORD will not be with you." And they presumed to go up to the top of the hill country; and the ark of the covenant of the LORD and Moses did not depart from the midst of the camp. And the Amalekite and the Canaanite who dwelt in that hill country came down, and they struck them, and they crushed them as far as Hormah.*

When Moses told the people, "the people mourned exceedingly" (14:39). Then they changed their minds. "Look, we are here, and we will go up to the place which the LORD said, for we have sinned" (14:40).

That sounds like repentance, but it was not. God had just told them to turn back into the wilderness. Now they wanted to go forward. Yesterday's obedience is not today's obedience. True repentance submits to what God says now, even when it hurts.

Moses warned them: "Why is this that you are transgressing the mouth of the LORD? And it shall not succeed" (14:41). "Do not go up, for the LORD is not in your midst" (14:42).

"They presumed to go up" (14:44). That word is the key. They went in their own strength. "The ark of the covenant of the LORD and Moses did not depart from the midst of the camp." The ark of the covenant was the gold-covered chest that held the tablets of the Law, the place of God's presence. It stayed behind. They went without God.

"The Amalekite and the Canaanite who dwelt in that hill country came down, and they struck them, and they crushed them as far as Hormah" (14:45). The same people who could have been defeated with God now defeated Israel without Him.

Unbelief came in two forms in this chapter. First they refused to go when God said go. Then they went when God said do not go. Both were the same sin: doing what they wanted instead of what God said. The answer is not more courage or more effort. It is trusting and obeying the LORD.

Chapter 14 Summary

After the bad report, all Israel wept through the night, grumbled against Moses and Aaron, wished they had died, and spoke of choosing a leader to return to Egypt. Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and urged the people not to rebel or fear, because the LORD was with them, but the congregation wanted to stone them. The glory of the LORD appeared. God said He would strike the people and make a greater nation from Moses, but Moses pleaded for them on the basis of God's reputation and His steadfast love, and the LORD forgave. Yet He declared that every man twenty years and older who had grumbled would die in the wilderness during forty years of wandering, one year for each day of spying, except Caleb and Joshua. Their children would enter the land. The ten spies died by a plague. The next morning the people tried to go up into the hill country without the LORD and without the ark, and the Amalekites and Canaanites beat them back to Hormah.

People and Places

- Hormah: a place in the south of Canaan where Israel was beaten back; the name sounds like the Hebrew word for destruction (see 21:3).
- The ark of the covenant: the gold-covered chest holding the tablets of the Law, kept in the tabernacle; it stood for God's presence with Israel.

Chapter 14 Study Questions

1. What did the people wish for, and what did they want to do? (14:1-4)

2. What did Joshua and Caleb tell the people, and how did the people answer? (14:6-10)

3. What two reasons did Moses give God for sparing the people? (14:13-19)

4. God forgave the people. What consequence still came? (14:20-23, 28-35)

5. What did God say about Caleb, and why? (14:24)

6. What happened to the ten spies? (14:36-38)

7. Why did the people's attempt to go up the next day fail? (14:40-45)

8. The people's own words came back on them (14:2, 28). What does that teach you about grumbling and careless words?

9. Moses prayed for people who had treated him badly. Who is someone you need to pray for that way? (Hebrews 7:25)

10. Hebrews 3:7 warns, "today, if you hear His voice." Is there something God has asked you to trust Him with that you have been putting off?

Chapter 15: Laws for Offerings in the Land

Scripture

15:1-16 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'When you come into the land of your dwellings, which I am giving to you, and you make a fire offering to the LORD, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow, or in a freewill offering, or at your appointed times, to make a soothing aroma to the LORD from the herd or from the flock, then the one who brings near his offering shall bring near to the LORD a grain offering, fine flour, approximately 2 quarts (a tenth ***of an ephah***), mixed with approximately 1 quart (the fourth of the hin) of oil; and wine for the drink offering, approximately 1 quart (the fourth of the hin), you shall offer with the burnt offering or for the sacrifice, for the one lamb. Or for the ram you shall offer a grain offering, fine flour, approximately 4 quarts (two tenths ***of an ephah***), mixed with oil, approximately 1 1/3 quarts (the third of the hin); and wine for the drink offering, approximately 1 1/3 quarts (the third of the hin), you shall bring near, a soothing aroma to the LORD. And when you offer a son of the herd ***as*** a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow, or ***as*** peace offerings to the LORD, then he shall bring near with the son of the herd a grain offering, fine flour, approximately 6 quarts (three tenths ***of an ephah***), mixed with oil, approximately 2 quarts (half of the hin); and wine you shall bring near for the drink offering, approximately 2 quarts (half of the hin), a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD. Thus it shall be done for the one bull, or for the one ram, or for the one of the flock, among the lambs or among the goats. According to the number which you offer, thus you shall do for the one, according to their number. Every native shall do these ***things*** thus, to bring near a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD. And when a sojourner sojourns with you, or whoever ***is*** in your midst throughout your generations, and he offers a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD, just as you do, so he shall do. ***As for*** the assembly, one statute ***shall be*** for you and for the sojourner who sojourns, a statute forever throughout your generations; as you ***are***, ***so*** the sojourner shall be before the LORD. One law and one judgment shall be for you and for the sojourner who sojourns with you.'"

15:17-31 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'When you come into the land into which I am bringing you, and it shall be, when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall lift up a contribution to the LORD. ***Of*** the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake ***as*** a contribution; like the contribution of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up. Of the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD a contribution throughout your generations. And when you err, and do not do all these commandments which the LORD has spoken to Moses, all that the LORD has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the LORD commanded and onward throughout your generations, then it shall be, if it was done unintentionally, away from the eyes of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bull, a son of the herd, for a burnt offering, for a soothing aroma to the LORD, with its grain offering and its drink offering according to the ordinance, and one male goat of the goats for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it ***was*** an error; and they have brought their offering, a fire offering to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their error. And it shall be forgiven to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and to the sojourner who sojourns in their midst, for to all the

people ***it was*** in error. And if one soul sins unintentionally, then it shall bring near a female goat, a daughter of its year, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for the soul that goes astray, when it sins unintentionally, before the LORD, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. For the native among the sons of Israel and for the sojourner who sojourns in their midst, one law shall be for you, for the one who acts unintentionally. And the soul that acts with a raised hand, whether of the native or of the sojourner, he blasphemes the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from the midst of its people. For he has despised the word of the LORD, and he has broken His commandment; that soul shall surely be cut off; its iniquity ***shall be*** on it.'"

15:32-41 And the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, and they found a man gathering sticks on the day of the Sabbath. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him near to Moses and to Aaron and to all the congregation. And they placed him in custody, for it had not been made clear what should be done to him. And the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." And all the congregation brought him outside the camp, and they stoned him with stones, and he died, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And the LORD said to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'And they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their clothes throughout their generations, and they shall put on the tassel of the corner a cord of blue. And it shall be for you for a tassel, and you shall see it, and you shall remember all the commandments of the LORD, and you shall do them; and you shall not go about after your heart and after your eyes, after which you are acting as harlots, so that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy to your God. I ***am*** the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be God to you. I ***am*** the LORD your God.'"

Chapter 15 Preview

Right after the disaster at Kadesh, God gives Moses laws that begin with these words: "When you come into the land." That is grace. The generation that refused the land would die in the desert, but God was still talking about the day His people would live there. He gives rules for the grain and wine to go with each sacrifice, for a gift from the first of the bread dough, and for offerings when the people sin by mistake. Sojourners, foreigners living among Israel, are to follow the same law as the native-born.

Then the chapter draws a sharp line between sins done without knowing and sins done with a raised hand, in open defiance of God. A story shows what that means: a man is found gathering wood on the Sabbath, and at God's command he is put to death. The chapter ends with the command to wear tassels with a blue cord, so that every time the people looked at their clothes they would remember God's commands and be holy to Him.

Chapter 15 Study

15:1-5 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'When you come into the land of your dwellings, which I am giving to you, and you make a fire offering to the LORD, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow, or in a freewill offering, or at your appointed times, to make a soothing aroma to the LORD from the herd or from the flock, then the one who brings near his offering shall bring near to the LORD a grain offering, fine flour, approximately 2 quarts (a tenth **of an ephah**), mixed with approximately 1 quart (the fourth of the hin) of oil; and wine for the drink offering, approximately 1 quart (the fourth of the hin), you shall offer with the burnt offering or for the sacrifice, for the one lamb.*

"When you come into the land of your dwellings, which I am giving to you" (15:2). After chapter 14, these words are a promise. God had not given up on His plan. The children would enter.

The law covers "a fire offering to the LORD, a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow, or in a freewill offering, or at your appointed times" (15:3). A burnt offering was wholly burned on the altar as a gift to God. A sacrifice here means a peace offering, which the worshiper shared in a meal. A vow was a promise to God, and a freewill offering was a gift given just because the worshiper wanted to. The appointed times were the feasts.

With every lamb came a grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, about two quarts of flour and one quart of oil, and a drink offering of about one quart of wine poured out (15:4-5). These were the foods of a settled farming people. Flour, oil, and wine meant fields, olive groves, and vineyards. In the desert they had none of those. God was telling them what life would look like in the land.

The goal was "a soothing aroma to the LORD" (15:3). That phrase means an offering God accepts with pleasure. Paul uses the same picture for Christ, who gave Himself for us as a fragrant offering to God (Ephesians 5:2).

15:6-12 *Or for the ram you shall offer a grain offering, fine flour, approximately 4 quarts (two tenths **of an ephah**), mixed with oil, approximately 1 1/3 quarts (the third of the hin); and wine for the drink offering, approximately 1 1/3 quarts (the third of the hin), you shall bring near, a soothing aroma to the LORD. And when you offer a son of the herd **as** a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a vow, or **as** peace offerings to the LORD, then he shall bring near with the son of the herd a grain offering, fine flour, approximately 6 quarts (three tenths **of an ephah**), mixed with oil, approximately 2 quarts (half of the hin); and wine you shall bring near for the drink offering, approximately 2 quarts (half of the hin), a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD. Thus it shall be done for the one bull, or for the one ram, or for the one of the flock, among the lambs or among the goats. According to the number which you offer, thus you shall do for the one, according to their number.*

The bigger the animal, the bigger the grain and wine offering. For a ram, about four quarts of flour and about one and a third quarts of oil and wine (15:6-7). For a bull, about six quarts of flour and two quarts of oil and wine (15:8-10). "Thus it shall be done for the one bull, or for the one ram, or for the one of the flock" (15:11), and for as many animals as were offered (15:12).

What did this teach Israel? That worship involves the whole of life. The animal from the herd and the bread and wine from the fields all went up together. God was Lord of the barn and the field and the vineyard.

These offerings were fulfilled in Christ. The Law was a shadow of the good things to come, and the sacrifices could never take away sins (Hebrews 10:1, 4). Jesus offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 10:10). We do not bring flour and wine to an altar today. But we still give our whole lives to God as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1).

15:13-16 *Every native shall do these **things** thus, to bring near a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD. And when a sojourner sojourns with you, or whoever **is** in your midst throughout your generations, and he offers a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD, just as you do, so he shall do. **As for** the assembly, one statute **shall be** for you and for the sojourner who sojourns, a statute forever throughout your generations; as you **are**, **so** the sojourner shall be before the LORD. One law and one judgment shall be for you and for the sojourner who sojourns with you.'"*

"Every native shall do these things thus" (15:13). Then God adds the sojourner, the foreigner who lived among Israel: "just as you do, so he shall do" (15:14).

"One law and one judgment shall be for you and for the sojourner who sojourns with you" (15:16). This is a remarkable word. From the beginning, God welcomed outsiders who wanted to worship Him. They were not second-class worshipers. Rahab of Jericho and Ruth of Moab would later join God's people and become part of the family line of Jesus (Matthew 1:5).

The New Testament takes this further. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, for we are all one in Him (Galatians 3:28), and Gentile believers are no longer strangers but fellow citizens with the saints (Ephesians 2:19).

15:17-21 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'When you come into the land into which I am bringing you, and it shall be, when you eat of the bread of the land, you shall lift up a contribution to the LORD. **Of** the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake **as** a contribution; like the contribution of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up. Of the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD a contribution throughout your generations.*

"When you eat of the bread of the land, you shall lift up a contribution to the LORD" (15:19). A contribution was a gift set aside for God, which went to the priests. "Of the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake as a contribution" (15:20).

Every time an Israelite family baked from the first of a new harvest, they would set aside a loaf for God first. This was like the firstfruits of the threshing floor. It said, God gave us this bread, and He gets the first of it.

That is a good habit for us too. God does not need our bread. But giving Him the first, not the leftovers, reminds us who provides it. Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us today our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). Paul also uses the first of the dough as a picture: if the first part is holy, so is the whole lump (Romans 11:16).

15:22-26 *And when you err, and do not do all these commandments which the LORD has spoken to Moses, all that the LORD has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the LORD commanded and onward throughout your generations, then it shall be, if it was done unintentionally, away from the eyes of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bull, a son of the herd, for a burnt offering, for a soothing aroma to the LORD, with its grain offering and its drink offering according to the ordinance, and one male goat of the goats for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it* ***was*** *an error; and they have brought their offering, a fire offering to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their error. And it shall be forgiven to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and to the sojourner who sojourns in their midst, for to all the people* ***it was*** *in error.*

Now God speaks about failure. "When you err, and do not do all these commandments" (15:22). To err here means to sin without meaning to, through ignorance or a mistake.

If the whole congregation sinned this way, "away from the eyes of the congregation," without knowing it, then they were to bring "one young bull" for a burnt offering, with its grain and drink offering, "and one male goat of the goats for a sin offering" (15:24). A sin offering was a sacrifice to cleanse from sin and restore fellowship with God.

"The priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them" (15:25). Atonement means covering sin so that a guilty people can be at peace with God. The word means to cover. It was forgiven "to the sojourner who sojourns in their midst" too (15:26).

God knew His people would fail without even realizing it. So He made a way back before they needed it. Even our hidden faults need forgiveness. David asked who can discern his own errors, and he prayed to be acquitted "from hidden faults" (Psalm 19:12). The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin as we walk in the light (1 John 1:7).

15:27-29 *And if one soul sins unintentionally, then it shall bring near a female goat, a daughter of its year, for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for the soul that goes astray, when it sins unintentionally, before the LORD, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. For the native among the sons of Israel and for the sojourner who sojourns in their midst, one law shall be for you, for the one who acts unintentionally.*

The same was true for one person: "if one soul sins unintentionally, then it shall bring near a female goat, a daughter of its year, for a sin offering" (15:27). A daughter of its year means a female goat one year old.

"The priest shall make atonement for the soul that goes astray, when it sins unintentionally," and "it shall be forgiven him" (15:28). Again the law was the same for the native and the sojourner (15:29).

These laws repeat what Leviticus 4 taught, now applied to life in the land. They show God's patience. An honest mistake was still sin and needed a sacrifice, but there was a sure way to be forgiven.

15:30-31 *And the soul that acts with a raised hand, whether of the native or of the sojourner, he blasphemes the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from the midst of its people. For he has despised the word of the LORD, and he has broken His commandment; that soul shall surely be cut off; its iniquity* ***shall be*** *on it.'"*

Now the contrast. "The soul that acts with a raised hand, whether of the native or of the sojourner, he blasphemes the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from the midst of its people" (15:30).

A raised hand is a picture of a fist shaken at God. It means sin done on purpose, knowingly, in open defiance. "For he has despised the word of the LORD, and he has broken His commandment" (15:31). There was no sacrifice in the Law for that kind of sin. To be cut off meant to be removed from God's people, and it could include death at God's hand.

Does this mean that every sin we do on purpose is unforgivable? No. David sinned on purpose with Bathsheba, and when he confessed, God forgave him (2 Samuel 12:13; Psalm 51). The point is a heart that despises God's word and refuses to turn. The Law had no sacrifice for that heart. Only the grace of God through Christ can change it. Hebrews 10:26-29 gives a similar warning about turning away from Christ, the one sacrifice for sins. The way back is always open to the one who repents. The danger is the one who will not.

15:32-36 *And the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, and they found a man gathering sticks on the day of the Sabbath. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him near to Moses and to Aaron and to all the congregation. And they placed him in custody, for it had not been made clear what should be done to him. And the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." And all the congregation brought him outside the camp, and they stoned him with stones, and he died, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.*

Here is the example. "They found a man gathering sticks on the day of the Sabbath" (15:32). The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, which God set apart as a day of rest for Israel, a sign of His covenant with them (Exodus 31:13-17). The law had already said that no fire was to be kindled on the Sabbath (Exodus 35:3) and that the one who worked on it would be put to death (Exodus 31:14-15).

The man was brought to Moses, Aaron, and the congregation, and they "placed him in custody, for it had not been made clear what should be done to him" (15:34). They knew it was wrong. What they did not know was how the penalty was to be carried out. So they waited for God.

"The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp" (15:35). And it was done "just as the LORD had commanded Moses" (15:36).

This is hard to read. Why such a severe punishment for gathering wood? The story is placed right after the verses about sinning "with a raised hand," and that is the key. This man was not ignorant or forgetful. The law was clear, the whole camp knew it, and he went out openly and worked anyway. It was defiance of God at the start of Israel's life under the covenant. Like the death of Nadab and Abihu at the start of the priesthood (Leviticus 10), and Ananias and Sapphira at the start of the church (Acts 5:1-11), God showed at the beginning how serious it is to despise His word.

This was a law for Israel under the Mosaic covenant, judged by God's own direct word. It gives no one the right to punish anyone today for religious failures. And all of us have broken God's law in some way. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). What this man received is what we all deserve. Jesus took that death in our place, and He was also led "outside the camp" to suffer for us (Hebrews 13:12-13).

What about the Sabbath for believers today? Jesus called Himself "Lord even of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:8), and Paul says no one should judge us about Sabbaths, which "are a shadow of the things coming, but the body is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17). Christians differ on how the Sabbath applies now. Some keep Saturday. Many see the Lord's Day, Sunday, as a day of worship and rest. Others see Christ Himself as our rest (Hebrews 4:9-10) and treat every day as His. All of us can learn from this story that God's word is not to be treated lightly.

15:37-41 *And the LORD said to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'And they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their clothes throughout their generations, and they shall put on the tassel of the corner a cord of blue. And it shall be for you for a tassel, and you shall see it, and you shall remember all the commandments of the LORD, and you shall do them; and you shall not go about after your heart and after your eyes, after which you are acting as harlots, so that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy to your God. I* ***am*** *the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be God to you. I* ***am*** *the LORD your God.'"*

"They shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their clothes throughout their generations, and they shall put on the tassel of the corner a cord of blue" (15:38). A tassel was a fringe of twisted threads. Blue dye was costly, the color of royalty and of the cloths in the tabernacle.

Why? "You shall see it, and you shall remember all the commandments of the LORD, and you shall do them" (15:39). It was a reminder they wore every day. "You shall not go about after your heart and after your eyes, after which you are acting as harlots." The heart and the eyes had just led Israel astray at Kadesh. The spies trusted what their eyes saw more than what God said. The tassels gave the eyes something better to look at.

"So that you may remember and do all My commandments, and be holy to your God" (15:40). "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt" (15:41). Obedience grows out of remembering who God is and what He has done.

Jesus wore these tassels. A sick woman touched "the fringe" of His garment and was healed (Matthew 9:20). He also warned the Pharisees, who "enlarge the fringes of their garments" to be seen by men (Matthew 23:5). A reminder can become a show. We do not wear tassels today, but we still need reminders, Scripture on our hearts, the Lord's Supper, the fellowship of believers, to keep our eyes from wandering.

Chapter 15 Summary

The LORD gave laws for the time when Israel would live in the land. Each burnt offering or peace offering was to come with a grain offering of flour and oil and a drink offering of wine, larger for a ram and larger still for a bull. The same law applied to the sojourner as to the native-born. The people were to give a cake from the first of their dough to the LORD. When the congregation or one person sinned unintentionally, a sin offering was brought, the priest made atonement, and they were forgiven. But the one who sinned with a raised hand, despising the word of the LORD, was to be cut off. A man was found gathering sticks on the Sabbath, and at the LORD's command the congregation stoned him outside the camp. Finally, the people were to wear tassels with a blue cord on the corners of their clothes, to remember and do all God's commandments and be holy to Him.

Chapter 15 Study Questions

1. What do the first words of this chapter promise, right after the judgment of chapter 14? (15:2)

2. What three things went with every animal offering, and what did they say about life in the land? (15:4-10)

3. How was the sojourner to be treated in worship? (15:14-16)

4. What were the people to do with the first of their dough? (15:19-21)

5. What was the difference between unintentional sin and sin with a raised hand? (15:27-31)

6. Why was the man gathering sticks put to death? (15:30-36)

7. What were the tassels for? (15:38-40)

8. God made a way for forgiveness of sins people did not even know they had done. How does that encourage you? (Psalm 19:12; 1 John 1:7)

9. Is there a place where you have been treating God's word lightly, knowing what it says and doing your own thing anyway?

10. What reminders help you keep your heart and eyes from wandering from God? What new reminder could you add this week?

Chapter 16: The Rebellion of Korah

Scripture

16:1-15 And Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, took ***men***, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben; and they rose up before Moses, and men from the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty, leaders of ***the*** congregation, called ones of ***the*** meeting, men of name. And they assembled against Moses and against Aaron, and they said to them, "Enough for you! For all the congregation, all of them ***are*** holy, and the LORD ***is*** in their midst. And why do you exalt yourselves over the assembly of the LORD?" And Moses heard, and he fell on his face. And he spoke to Korah and to all his company, saying, "***In the*** morning, and the LORD will make known who ***is*** His, and who ***is*** holy, and He will bring ***him*** near to Himself; and the one whom He chooses, He will bring near to Himself. Do this: take censers for yourselves, Korah and all his company, and put fire in them, and set incense on them before the LORD tomorrow; and it shall be ***that*** the man whom the LORD chooses, he ***is*** the holy ***one***. Enough for you, sons of Levi!" And Moses said to Korah, "Listen, please, sons of Levi: ***Is it too*** small ***a thing*** for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to Himself, to serve the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, and He has brought you near, and all your brothers, the sons of Levi, with you? And you seek the priesthood also! Therefore you and all your company ***are*** those gathered together against the LORD; and Aaron, what ***is*** he, that you grumble against him?" And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; and they said, "We will not come up. ***Is it too*** small ***a thing*** that you have brought us up from a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey to put us to death in the wilderness, that you should also surely make yourself ruler over us? Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing ***with*** milk and honey, and given us an inheritance of field and vineyard. Will you put out the eyes of those men? We will not come up!" And Moses burned ***with anger*** exceedingly, and he said to the LORD, "Do not turn to their offering. Not one donkey have I taken from them, and I have not harmed one of them."

16:16-35 And Moses said to Korah, "You and all your company, be before the LORD, you and they and Aaron, tomorrow. And take each man his censer, and you shall put incense on them, and you shall bring near before the LORD each man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; and you and Aaron, each man his censer." And they took each man his censer, and they put fire on them, and they set incense on them, and they stood ***at*** the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Moses and Aaron. And Korah assembled all the congregation against them to the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation. And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Separate yourselves from the midst of this congregation, and I will consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces, and they said, "O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will You be angry with all the congregation?" And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Withdraw from around the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'" And Moses rose up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel went after him. And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Turn away, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and do not touch anything that ***is*** theirs, lest you be swept away in all their sins." And they withdrew from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, from

all around; and Dathan and Abiram came out, standing ***at*** the entrance of their tents, and their wives and their sons and their little ones. And Moses said, "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for ***it is*** not from my ***own*** heart. If these die like the death of all mankind, and the visitation of all mankind is visited on them, the LORD has not sent me. And if the LORD creates a creation, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them and all that ***is*** theirs, and they go down alive to Sheol, then you shall know that these men have spurned the LORD." And it happened, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground which ***was*** under them split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and every man who ***belonged*** to Korah, and all the property. And they and all that ***was*** theirs went down alive to Sheol; and the earth covered them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. And all Israel who ***were*** around them fled at their voice, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us!" And fire came forth from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men bringing near the incense.

16:36-50 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, and let him take up the censers from between the burning, and scatter the fire far away, for they are holy— the censers of these sinners against their own souls—and they shall make them into hammered plates ***as*** an overlay for the altar, for they brought them near before the LORD, and they are holy; and let them be for a sign to the sons of Israel." And Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers which those who were burned had brought near, and they hammered them out ***as*** an overlay for the altar, a memorial for the sons of Israel, so that a stranger who ***is*** not of the seed of Aaron may not come near to burn incense before the LORD, and may not be like Korah and like his company, just as the LORD had spoken to him by the hand of Moses. And all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled on the next day against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "You have put to death the people of the LORD." And it happened, when the congregation assembled against Moses and against Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and look, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. And Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Get yourselves up from the midst of this congregation, and I will consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces. And Moses said to Aaron, "Take the censer, and put fire on it from on the altar, and set incense ***on it***, and carry ***it*** quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them; for the wrath has gone out from before the LORD; the plague has begun." And Aaron took ***it*** just as Moses had spoken, and he ran into the midst of the assembly, and look, the plague had begun among the people; and he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was restrained. And those who died by the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, besides those who died on account of Korah. And Aaron returned to Moses to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and the plague had been restrained.

Chapter 16 Preview

Now the rebellion comes from inside the leadership. Korah, a Levite from the same clan as Moses and Aaron, joins with Dathan, Abiram, and On from the tribe of Reuben, and with 250 well-known leaders. They accuse Moses and Aaron of lifting themselves above everyone else. Korah wants the priesthood. Dathan and Abiram refuse even to come when Moses calls, and they call Egypt the land of milk and honey.

Moses sets a test. Tomorrow each man will bring a censer with incense before the LORD, and God will show whom He has chosen. The ground opens and swallows the households of Dathan and Abiram and the men who belonged to Korah, and fire from the LORD burns up the 250 men offering incense. Their bronze censers are hammered into a covering for the altar as a warning. The very next day the whole congregation blames Moses and Aaron for the deaths, and a plague breaks out. Aaron runs into the crowd with incense and stands between the dead and the living until the plague stops. Few chapters show more clearly both how God judges rebellion and how He provides a mediator.

Chapter 16 Study

16:1-3 *And Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, took **men**, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben; and they rose up before Moses, and men from the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty, leaders of **the** congregation, called ones of **the** meeting, men of name. And they assembled against Moses and against Aaron, and they said to them, "Enough for you! For all the congregation, all of them **are** holy, and the LORD **is** in their midst. And why do you exalt yourselves over the assembly of the LORD?"*

"Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi." Korah was a Kohathite, the Levite clan that carried the holiest things of the tabernacle (4:4-15). He was Moses' and Aaron's cousin (Exodus 6:18-21). He had a high calling already.

With him were "Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben" (16:1). Reuben was Jacob's firstborn. Perhaps the Reubenites resented that the leadership had gone to Levi and that Judah led the march. On is never mentioned again. Some think he dropped out.

They gathered "two hundred and fifty, leaders of the congregation, called ones of the meeting, men of name" (16:2). This was not a fringe group. These were respected leaders.

Their charge: "Enough for you! For all the congregation, all of them are holy, and the LORD is in their midst. And why do you exalt yourselves over the assembly of the LORD?" (16:3). It sounded godly. It was true that God had called all Israel to be a holy nation (Exodus 19:6). But they used that truth to tear down the leaders God had appointed. Moses had not exalted himself. God had chosen him, and Moses had tried to refuse (Exodus 4:13). Pride often dresses itself in talk about equality.

16:4-7 *And Moses heard, and he fell on his face. And he spoke to Korah and to all his company, saying, "**In the** morning, and the LORD will make known who **is** His, and who **is** holy, and He will bring **him** near to Himself; and the one whom He chooses, He will bring near to Himself. Do this: take censers for yourselves, Korah and all his company, and put fire in them, and set incense on them before the LORD tomorrow; and it shall be **that** the man whom the LORD chooses, he **is** the holy **one**. Enough for you, sons of Levi!"*

"Moses heard, and he fell on his face" (16:4). His first response was to go to God, not to defend himself.

Then he answered: "In the morning, and the LORD will make known who is His, and who is holy, and He will bring him near to Himself" (16:5). Moses put the matter in God's hands. Paul quotes this verse in 2 Timothy 2:19: "The Lord knew those who are His." God knows who truly belong to Him, even when false teachers look like leaders.

The test was to "take censers" and "put fire in them, and set incense on them before the LORD tomorrow" (16:6-7). A censer was a small pan for carrying hot coals. Burning incense before the LORD was the work of the priests alone (Exodus 30:7-8). Moses was inviting them to do the very thing they wanted to do, and to let God answer. Every Israelite remembered what happened when Nadab and Abihu offered fire God had not commanded (Leviticus 10:1-2). Then Moses turned their own words back on them: "Enough for you, sons of Levi!"

16:8-11 *And Moses said to Korah, "Listen, please, sons of Levi: **Is it too** small **a thing** for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to Himself, to serve the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them, and He has brought you near, and all your brothers, the sons of Levi, with you? And you seek the priesthood also! Therefore you and all your company **are** those gathered together against the LORD; and Aaron, what **is** he, that you grumble against him?"*

"Listen, please, sons of Levi." Moses spoke to Korah and the Levites with him. "Is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to Himself, to serve the service of the tabernacle of the LORD" (16:9)?

The Levites had a great privilege. They were near to God, serving His house and ministering to His people. "And you seek the priesthood also!" (16:10). Korah was not content with the honor God had given him. He wanted the role God had given someone else.

"Therefore you and all your company are those gathered together against the LORD; and Aaron, what is he, that you grumble against him?" (16:11). Here is the heart of it. When we fight against the place God has given others, we are fighting God.

Discontent with our own calling is a quiet danger in churches too. Paul says the body has many members, each placed by God as He wished (1 Corinthians 12:18). Every gift matters, and no one needs to grab someone else's.

16:12-15 *And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; and they said, "We will not come up. **Is it too** small **a thing** that you have brought us up from a land flowing **with** milk and honey to put us to death in the wilderness, that you should also surely make yourself ruler over us? Moreover, you have not brought us into a land flowing **with** milk and honey, and given us an inheritance of field and vineyard. Will you put out the eyes of those men? We will not come up!" And Moses burned **with anger** exceedingly, and he said to the LORD, "Do not turn to their offering. Not one donkey have I taken from them, and I have not harmed one of them."*

Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, and they said, "We will not come up" (16:12). Then they said something shocking: "you have brought us up from a land flowing with milk and honey to put us

to death in the wilderness" (16:13). They called Egypt, the land of slavery, the land of milk and honey. They had turned God's words about Canaan into words about Egypt.

"That you should also surely make yourself ruler over us?" (16:13). They blamed Moses for the wilderness, when it was their own unbelief at Kadesh that kept them out of the land. "Will you put out the eyes of those men?" (16:14) means, Do you think you can blind people to what you are doing? They accused Moses of fooling everyone.

"Moses burned with anger exceedingly" (16:15), and he told the LORD, "Do not turn to their offering. Not one donkey have I taken from them, and I have not harmed one of them." Moses had not used his position to enrich himself. Samuel would say much the same at the end of his life (1 Samuel 12:3). A leader who has nothing to hide can stand before God with a clear conscience.

16:16-19 *And Moses said to Korah, "You and all your company, be before the LORD, you and they and Aaron, tomorrow. And take each man his censer, and you shall put incense on them, and you shall bring near before the LORD each man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; and you and Aaron, each man his censer." And they took each man his censer, and they put fire on them, and they set incense on them, and they stood* ***at*** *the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Moses and Aaron. And Korah assembled all the congregation against them to the entrance of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation.*

The next day they came. Korah's 250 men each took a censer, put fire and incense in it, "and they stood at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and Moses and Aaron" (16:18).

"Korah assembled all the congregation against them to the entrance of the tent of meeting" (16:19). Korah had stirred up the whole nation. The people who had refused the land were ready to follow another rebellion.

"And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation." As at Kadesh (14:10), God showed Himself just as the crowd turned against His servants.

16:20-24 *And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Separate yourselves from the midst of this congregation, and I will consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces, and they said, "O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will You be angry with all the congregation?" And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Withdraw from around the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.'"*

"Separate yourselves from the midst of this congregation, and I will consume them in a moment" (16:21). God's anger was against the whole assembly, because they had joined Korah.

Again Moses and Aaron fell on their faces, and they prayed: "O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will You be angry with all the congregation?" (16:22). The God who gives life and breath to every person knows each heart. Moses and Aaron asked Him to judge the leaders of the rebellion and spare the people who had been misled.

God listened. "Withdraw from around the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram" (16:24). The judgment would be narrowed to those who led it and those who stood with them. Like Abraham

praying for Sodom (Genesis 18:25), Moses appealed to the Judge of all the earth to do right, and He did.

16:25-30 *And Moses rose up and went to Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel went after him. And he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Turn away, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and do not touch anything that **is** theirs, lest you be swept away in all their sins." And they withdrew from the dwelling of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, from all around; and Dathan and Abiram came out, standing **at** the entrance of their tents, and their wives and their sons and their little ones. And Moses said, "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these works, for **it is** not from my **own** heart. If these die like the death of all mankind, and the visitation of all mankind is visited on them, the LORD has not sent me. And if the LORD creates a creation, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them and all that **is** theirs, and they go down alive to Sheol, then you shall know that these men have spurned the LORD."*

Moses went to Dathan and Abiram's tents, since they would not come to him, "and the elders of Israel went after him" (16:25). He warned the people: "Turn away, please, from the tents of these wicked men, and do not touch anything that is theirs, lest you be swept away in all their sins" (16:26). There are times to get away from rebellion so we are not caught in it.

The people withdrew. "Dathan and Abiram came out, standing at the entrance of their tents, and their wives and their sons and their little ones" (16:27). They stood in defiance with their families around them.

Then Moses set the sign. If these men died a natural death, "the LORD has not sent me" (16:29). "And if the LORD creates a creation, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them and all that is theirs, and they go down alive to Sheol, then you shall know that these men have spurned the LORD" (16:30). Sheol is the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, the grave. Moses staked everything on God doing something new, something no one had seen before.

16:31-35 *And it happened, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground which **was** under them split open; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and every man who **belonged** to Korah, and all the property. And they and all that **was** theirs went down alive to Sheol; and the earth covered them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. And all Israel who **were** around them fled at their voice, for they said, "Lest the earth swallow us!" And fire came forth from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men bringing near the incense.*

"It happened, as he finished speaking all these words, that the ground which was under them split open" (16:31). "The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and every man who belonged to Korah, and all the property" (16:32). "They and all that was theirs went down alive to Sheol; and the earth covered them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly" (16:33).

This is a terrible scene, and Scripture tells it plainly without dwelling on it. "All Israel who were around them fled at their voice" (16:34). Then "fire came forth from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men bringing near the incense" (16:35).

Why were the families included? This is hard. We should notice that the families stood with Dathan and Abiram in open defiance after they were warned to move away (16:27). And we should notice a quiet mercy: Numbers 26:11 tells us "the sons of Korah did not die." They must have stepped away from their father's sin. Their descendants became temple singers and wrote eleven of the psalms (Psalms 42, 44-49, 84-85, 87-88). One of them says, "I have chosen to stand at the threshold in the house of my God rather than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Psalm 84:10). The sons of Korah knew what it meant.

The New Testament points to this rebellion as a warning. Jude says false teachers "perished in the rebellion of Korah" (Jude 1:11). Rejecting God's appointed authority and grasping for what God has not given leads to ruin.

16:36-40 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, and let him take up the censers from between the burning, and scatter the fire far away, for they are holy— the censers of these sinners against their own souls—and they shall make them into hammered plates **as** an overlay for the altar, for they brought them near before the LORD, and they are holy; and let them be for a sign to the sons of Israel." And Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers which those who were burned had brought near, and they hammered them out **as** an overlay for the altar, a memorial for the sons of Israel, so that a stranger who **is** not of the seed of Aaron may not come near to burn incense before the LORD, and may not be like Korah and like his company, just as the LORD had spoken to him by the hand of Moses.*

God told "Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest" to take up the censers "from between the burning" and scatter the coals, "for they are holy" (16:37). The censers had been brought before the LORD, and so they belonged to Him, even though the men were wicked.

They were hammered into "plates as an overlay for the altar" (16:38), the bronze altar of burnt offering in the courtyard. The censers became "a sign to the sons of Israel," "a memorial for the sons of Israel, so that a stranger who is not of the seed of Aaron may not come near to burn incense before the LORD, and may not be like Korah and like his company" (16:40).

Every time an Israelite brought a sacrifice, he would see that bronze covering and remember. God turned the tools of rebellion into a warning for the next generation. King Uzziah later forgot this lesson. He went into the temple to burn incense and was struck with a skin disease (2 Chronicles 26:16-21).

16:41-45 *And all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled on the next day against Moses and against Aaron, saying, "You have put to death the people of the LORD." And it happened, when the congregation assembled against Moses and against Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and look, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. And Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Get yourselves up from the midst of this congregation, and I will consume them in a moment." And they fell on their faces.*

You would think the people had learned. "All the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled on the next day against Moses and against Aaron, saying, You have put to death the people of the

LORD" (16:41). Hard as it is to believe, they blamed Moses for what God had done, and they called the rebels "the people of the LORD."

When they gathered, "the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared" (16:42). Once more God said, "Get yourselves up from the midst of this congregation, and I will consume them in a moment" (16:45). Once more, "they fell on their faces."

16:46-50 *And Moses said to Aaron, "Take the censer, and put fire on it from on the altar, and set incense **on it**, and carry **it** quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them; for the wrath has gone out from before the LORD; the plague has begun." And Aaron took **it** just as Moses had spoken, and he ran into the midst of the assembly, and look, the plague had begun among the people; and he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was restrained. And those who died by the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, besides those who died on account of Korah. And Aaron returned to Moses to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and the plague had been restrained.*

Moses acted fast. "Take the censer, and put fire on it from on the altar, and set incense on it, and carry it quickly to the congregation, and make atonement for them; for the wrath has gone out from before the LORD; the plague has begun" (16:46).

Look at the contrast. The day before, 250 men had offered incense God did not ask for, and they died. Now Aaron, the priest God chose, took fire from God's own altar and brought incense God commanded, and it saved lives.

"Aaron took it just as Moses had spoken, and he ran into the midst of the assembly" (16:47). Aaron was an old man, over eighty, and he ran into the middle of the plague for the people who had just accused him. "He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was restrained" (16:48).

That is one of the great pictures in the Old Testament. God's high priest stood in the gap, with death on one side and life on the other. It points us to Jesus, our great High Priest. He did more than stand between. He took the judgment Himself and gave His life so we could live. There is "one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5), and He "is also able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him" (Hebrews 7:25).

"Those who died by the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, besides those who died on account of Korah" (16:49). As with the other numbers in Numbers, I take the figure as written. "And Aaron returned to Moses to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and the plague had been restrained" (16:50).

Chapter 16 Summary

Korah, a Levite of the clan of Kohath, joined with Dathan, Abiram, and On of the tribe of Reuben and 250 respected leaders to accuse Moses and Aaron of exalting themselves, since all the congregation was holy. Moses fell on his face and told them to bring censers with incense before the LORD the next day so God could show whom He had chosen. He rebuked the Levites for seeking the priesthood. Dathan and Abiram refused to come and called Egypt a land of milk and

honey. When Korah gathered the congregation, the glory of the LORD appeared, and Moses and Aaron pleaded that God would not judge all for the sin of a few. The people moved away, and the ground opened and swallowed the households of Dathan and Abiram and the men of Korah, and fire from the LORD consumed the 250 men. Their censers were hammered into a covering for the altar as a warning. The next day the people blamed Moses and Aaron, and a plague began. Aaron ran into the assembly with incense, made atonement, and stood between the dead and the living until the plague stopped, after 14,700 had died.

People and Places

- Korah: a Levite of the clan of Kohath, cousin of Moses and Aaron, who led the rebellion.
- Dathan and Abiram: brothers from the tribe of Reuben who joined Korah and refused to come to Moses.
- On son of Peleth: a Reubenite named at the start of the rebellion and not again.
- Eleazar: Aaron's son and the priest who will follow him as high priest.
- Sheol: the Hebrew word for the place of the dead, or the grave.
- Censer: a small pan for carrying hot coals and burning incense.

Chapter 16 Study Questions

1. Who was Korah, and who joined him? (16:1-2)

2. What did Korah and his company accuse Moses and Aaron of doing? (16:3)

3. What test did Moses propose, and why did he leave it to the LORD? (16:5-7)

4. What did Moses say to the Levites about their calling? (16:8-11)

5. What did Dathan and Abiram call Egypt, and why is that so striking? (16:12-14)

6. How did Moses and Aaron pray when God threatened to consume the whole congregation? (16:22)

7. What happened to the censers, and why? (16:36-40)

8. What did Aaron do when the plague began, and how does it point to Jesus? (16:46-48; Hebrews 7:25)

9. Korah was not content with the honor God had given him. Is there a calling or place God has given you that you have been looking past, wishing for someone else's?

10. Aaron ran into the crowd for people who had accused him. Who might God be asking you to stand in the gap for in prayer?

Chapter 17: Aaron's Rod Buds

Scripture

17:1-13 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and take from them a rod, a rod for each father's house, from all their leaders according to the house of their fathers, twelve rods. Each man's name you shall write on his rod. And the name of Aaron you shall write on the rod of Levi; for one rod ***is*** for the head of the house of their fathers. And you shall deposit them in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you. And it shall be ***that*** the man whom I choose, his rod will bud; and I will make the grumblings of the sons of Israel, which they are grumbling against you, subside from on Me." And Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, and all their leaders gave him a rod for one leader, a rod for one leader, according to the house of their fathers, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron ***was*** in the midst of their rods. And Moses deposited the rods before the LORD in the tent of the testimony. And it happened on the next day, and Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and look, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had budded, and it had brought forth buds and blossomed blossoms and ripened almonds. And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the sons of Israel; and they saw, and they took each man his rod. And the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony for keeping, for a sign to the sons of rebellion, and you shall make their grumblings subside from on Me, and they will not die." And Moses did ***so***; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did. And the sons of Israel said to Moses, saying, "Look, we expire, we perish, all of us perish! Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, dies. Are we finished, to expire?"

Chapter 17 Preview

After Korah's rebellion and the plague, God settles the question of the priesthood once and for all, and He does it without another death. Each tribe's leader brings a rod, a wooden staff, with his name written on it. Aaron's name goes on the rod of Levi. The twelve rods are laid in the tent of meeting before the ark overnight. God says the rod of the man He chooses will sprout.

In the morning Aaron's rod has done more than sprout. It has buds, blossoms, and ripe almonds, all at once. A dead stick has come to life. God tells Moses to keep the rod before the ark as a sign to the rebels. The chapter ends with the people crying out in fear that anyone who comes near the tabernacle will die. Their question leads straight into chapter 18, where God answers it.

Chapter 17 Study

17:1-5 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, and take from them a rod, a rod for each father's house, from all their leaders according to the house of their fathers, twelve rods. Each man's name you shall write on his rod. And the name of Aaron you shall write on the rod of Levi; for one rod **is** for the head of the house of their fathers. And you shall deposit them in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you. And it shall be **that** the man whom I choose, his rod will bud; and I will make the grumblings of the sons of Israel, which they are grumbling against you, subside from on Me."*

"Take from them a rod, a rod for each father's house, from all their leaders according to the house of their fathers, twelve rods" (17:2). A rod was a walking staff, and a leader's staff was a mark of his authority. "Each man's name you shall write on his rod."

"The name of Aaron you shall write on the rod of Levi" (17:3). Aaron stood for the whole tribe of Levi, including Korah's clan. The question was not only which tribe but which man.

The rods were laid "in the tent of meeting before the testimony, where I meet with you" (17:4). The testimony means the tablets of the Law inside the ark. The rods were placed right before God's presence, where no human hand could touch them in the night.

"The man whom I choose, his rod will bud; and I will make the grumblings of the sons of Israel, which they are grumbling against you, subside from on Me" (17:5). Notice the purpose. God wanted to end the grumbling. The last two answers to grumbling had been fire and plague. This time God chose a sign of life. He was being merciful, giving a clear answer so no more people would die.

17:6-9 *And Moses spoke to the sons of Israel, and all their leaders gave him a rod for one leader, a rod for one leader, according to the house of their fathers, twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron **was** in the midst of their rods. And Moses deposited the rods before the LORD in the tent of the testimony. And it happened on the next day, and Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and look, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had budded, and it had brought forth buds and blossomed blossoms and ripened almonds. And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD to all the sons of Israel; and they saw, and they took each man his rod.*

The leaders gave their rods, "twelve rods; and the rod of Aaron was in the midst of their rods" (17:6). Moses laid them "before the LORD in the tent of the testimony" (17:7).

"Moses went into the tent of the testimony, and look, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had budded, and it had brought forth buds and blossomed blossoms and ripened almonds" (17:8). A dry stick, cut off from any tree, had in one night gone through every stage of growth. Only God could do that.

The almond tree is the first tree to bloom in that land, in late winter. Its Hebrew name, shaqed, sounds like the word for watching or waking (Jeremiah 1:11-12 plays on this). The almond blossom was also the pattern for the cups of the golden lampstand in the tabernacle (Exodus 25:33-34). The rod fit the priest who served in the holy place.

Moses brought out the rods "to all the sons of Israel; and they saw, and they took each man his rod" (17:9). Every leader could see his own rod was still a dead stick. No argument was needed. God had spoken.

God's authority is not taken. It is given. Hebrews 5:4 says no one takes the honor of high priest for himself, but receives it when called by God, as Aaron was.

17:10-11 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony for keeping, for a sign to the sons of rebellion, and you shall make their grumblings subside from on Me, and they will not die." And Moses did* ***so****; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did.*

"Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony for keeping, for a sign to the sons of rebellion" (17:10). It was kept with the ark. Hebrews 9:4 lists what was in or with the ark: "a golden jar having the manna, and the staff of Aaron which budded, and the tablets of the covenant." Each one was a reminder. The manna recalled God's care. The tablets recalled His law. The rod recalled His chosen priest, and the rebellion that rejected him.

"You shall make their grumblings subside from on Me, and they will not die." God's goal in the sign was life, not death.

"Moses did so; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did" (17:11).

Many Christians have seen in this rod a picture of Christ. Like a dead stick that came to life, Jesus was cut off and placed in the tomb, and on the third day He rose. His resurrection is God's proof that He is the High Priest God chose (Romans 1:4; Hebrews 7:16, 24-25). The New Testament does not make this link to the rod directly, so I hold it as a picture, but it is a beautiful one. God's priest is the one who lives.

17:12-13 *And the sons of Israel said to Moses, saying, "Look, we expire, we perish, all of us perish! Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, dies. Are we finished, to expire?"*

"Look, we expire, we perish, all of us perish!" (17:12). The people had swung from arrogance to terror. A few days before, they had said everyone was holy enough to come near. Now they cried, "Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, dies. Are we finished, to expire?" (17:13).

Their fear was not foolish. They had just seen the earth open, fire fall, and a plague sweep the camp. They had learned that God is holy and that sinners cannot just walk into His presence. But they did not know how to come near Him safely.

That is the question every person must answer. How can a sinful person come near a holy God and live? Chapter 18 gives God's answer for Israel: the priests and Levites would guard the tabernacle and bear the responsibility. For us the answer is Jesus. Through His blood we have confidence to enter the holy place by "a new and living way" (Hebrews 10:19-20). The fear of chapter 17 is answered by the grace of the High Priest God chose.

Chapter 17 Summary

To end the people's grumbling against Aaron, the LORD told Moses to take a rod from the leader of each tribe, write each man's name on his rod, and write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi. Moses laid the twelve rods before the testimony in the tent of meeting. The next day Aaron's rod had sprouted, budded, blossomed, and produced ripe almonds. Moses showed the rods to all Israel, and each leader took his own back. The LORD told Moses to keep Aaron's rod before the testimony as a sign to the rebels, so that their grumbling would end and they would not die. The people cried out in fear that everyone who came near the tabernacle would die.

Chapter 17 Study Questions

1. What was each tribe's leader to bring, and what was written on it? (17:2-3)

2. Where were the rods placed overnight, and why there? (17:4, 7)

3. What did God say would happen to the rod of the man He chose? What was the purpose? (17:5)

4. What had happened to Aaron's rod by the next morning? (17:8)

5. Where was the rod kept afterward, and what was it a sign of? (17:10; Hebrews 9:4)

6. How did the people respond at the end of the chapter? (17:12-13)

7. How is God's answer in this chapter different from His answers in chapters 11, 14, and 16?

8. Hebrews 5:4 says the priesthood is received, not taken. Where are you tempted to grab for honor instead of waiting for God?

9. The people asked how anyone could come near God and live. How would you answer that question for a friend today? (Hebrews 10:19-20)

10. What dead thing in your life do you need to bring before the God who can make a dry stick bloom?

Chapter 18: The Duties and Portions of Priests and Levites

Scripture

18:1-19 And the LORD said to Aaron, "You and your sons and the house of your father with you shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. And also your brothers, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, bring near with you, and let them be joined to you, and let them minister to you; and you and your sons with you ***shall be*** before the tent of the testimony. And they shall keep your charge and the charge of all the tent; only to the articles of the holy place and to the altar they shall not draw near, and they shall not die, both they and you. And they shall be joined to you, and they shall keep the charge of the tent of meeting, for all the service of the tent; and a stranger shall not draw near to you. And you shall keep the charge of the holy place and the charge of the altar, and there shall not be wrath again on the sons of Israel. And I, look, I have taken your brothers the Levites from the midst of the sons of Israel; to you ***they are*** a gift, given to the LORD, to serve the service of the tent of meeting. And you and your sons with you shall keep your priesthood for every matter of the altar and for within the veil, and you shall serve; ***as*** a service of gift I give your priesthood; and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death." And the LORD spoke to Aaron, "And I, look, I have given to you the charge of My contributions, of all the holy things of the sons of Israel; to you I have given them for an anointed portion, and to your sons, for a due forever. This shall be yours from the holy of holies, from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering of theirs and every sin offering of theirs and every guilt offering of theirs which they render to Me, ***is*** a holy of holies for you and for your sons. In the holy of holies you shall eat it; every male shall eat it; it shall be holy to you. And this ***is*** yours: the contribution of their gift, of all the wave offerings of the sons of Israel; to you I have given them, and to your sons and to your daughters with you, for a due forever; every clean ***person*** in your house shall eat it. All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the new wine and grain, the first of them which they give to the LORD, to you I have given them. The first fruits of all that ***is*** in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours; every clean ***person*** in your house shall eat it. Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. Every ***one*** opening the womb, of all flesh, which they bring near to the LORD, of mankind and of livestock, shall be yours; only you shall surely redeem the firstborn of mankind, and the firstborn of the unclean livestock you shall redeem. And ***as for*** its redemption price, from a son of a month you shall redeem ***it***, by your valuation, approximately 2 ounces (five shekels) of silver, by the shekel of the holy place; it ***is*** approximately 2/5 ounce (twenty gerahs). Only the firstborn of an ox or the firstborn of a sheep or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they ***are*** holy. Their blood you shall sprinkle on the altar, and their fat you shall make smoke ***as*** a fire offering for a soothing aroma to the LORD. And their flesh shall be yours; like the breast of the wave offering and like the right thigh, it shall be yours. All the contributions of the holy things which the sons of Israel offer up to the LORD I have given to you and to your sons and to your daughters with you, for a due forever; it ***is*** a covenant of salt forever before the LORD for you and for your seed with you."

18:20-32 And the LORD said to Aaron, "In their land you shall not have an inheritance, and a portion shall not be yours in their midst; I ***am*** your portion and your inheritance in the midst of the sons of Israel. And to the sons of Levi, look, I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance,

in return for their service which they serve, the service of the tent of meeting. And the sons of Israel shall not draw near again to the tent of meeting, to bear sin, to die. And the Levite, he shall serve the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; ***it is*** a statute forever for your generations; and in the midst of the sons of Israel they shall not inherit an inheritance. For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer up to the LORD ***as*** a contribution, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, 'In the midst of the sons of Israel they shall not inherit an inheritance.'" And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "And to the Levites you shall speak, and you shall say to them, 'When you take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given to you from them for your inheritance, and you shall offer up from it the contribution of the LORD, a tithe from the tithe. And your contribution shall be reckoned to you like the grain from the threshing floor and like the fullness from the winepress. Thus you also shall offer up the contribution of the LORD from all your tithes which you take from the sons of Israel; and you shall give from it the contribution of the LORD to Aaron the priest. From all your gifts you shall offer up every contribution of the LORD, from all its best, its holy part from it.' And you shall say to them, 'When you offer up its best from it, and it shall be reckoned to the Levites like the produce of a threshing floor and like the produce of a winepress. And you shall eat it in every place, you and your household; for it ***is*** wages for you in return for your service in the tent of meeting. And you shall not bear sin on account of it when you offer up its best from it; and the holy things of the sons of Israel you shall not profane, and you shall not die.'"

Chapter 18 Preview

At the end of chapter 17 the people cried out, "Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, dies" (17:13). Chapter 18 is God's answer. He speaks directly to Aaron and lays out who may come near and who must guard the way. Aaron and his sons, the priests, will bear the responsibility for the sanctuary and serve at the altar and inside the veil. Their brothers the Levites will help them and guard the tent, but must not touch the holy things. If they keep their places, "there shall not be wrath again on the sons of Israel."

Then God tells how the priests and Levites will live. They will have no land of their own. Instead, God gives the priests parts of the offerings, the firstfruits, and the firstborn, and He gives the Levites the tithe, a tenth of Israel's produce. The Levites in turn give a tenth of their tithe to the priests. Over it all stands one great promise to Aaron: "I am your portion and your inheritance."

Chapter 18 Study

18:1-7 *And the LORD said to Aaron, "You and your sons and the house of your father with you shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. And also your brothers, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, bring near with you, and let them be joined to you, and let them minister to you; and you and your sons with you* ***shall be*** *before the tent of the testimony. And they shall keep your charge and the charge of all the tent; only to the articles of the holy place and to the altar they shall not draw near, and they shall not die, both they and you. And they shall be joined to you, and they shall keep the charge of the tent of meeting, for all the service of the tent; and a stranger shall not draw near to you. And you shall keep the charge of the holy place and the charge of the altar, and there shall not be wrath again on the sons of Israel. And I, look, I have taken your brothers the Levites from the midst of the sons of Israel; to you* ***they are*** *a gift, given to the LORD, to serve the service of the tent of meeting. And you and your sons with you shall keep your priesthood for every matter of the altar and for within the veil, and you shall serve;* ***as*** *a service of gift I give your priesthood; and the stranger who comes near shall be put to death."*

"You and your sons and the house of your father with you shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary; and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood" (18:1). To bear the iniquity means to carry the responsibility and the guilt if anything went wrong. If anyone violated the holiness of the tabernacle, the priests would answer for it. This was the answer to the people's fear. The priests stood between the people and the danger.

The Levites, "the tribe of your father," were to be "joined to you" and "minister to you" (18:2). There is a wordplay here. The name Levi sounds like the Hebrew word for joined (Genesis 29:34). The Levites would guard and serve, but "only to the articles of the holy place and to the altar they shall not draw near, and they shall not die, both they and you" (18:3). This was the line Korah had tried to cross.

"There shall not be wrath again on the sons of Israel" (18:5). The order God set was for the people's protection.

"I have taken your brothers the Levites from the midst of the sons of Israel; to you they are a gift, given to the LORD" (18:6). The Levites were God's gift to the priests. And the priesthood itself was a gift: "as a service of gift I give your priesthood" (18:7). Serving God is not a burden we earn. It is a gift He gives.

"The stranger who comes near shall be put to death." A stranger here means anyone not a priest. The law was strict because God is holy.

What does this mean for us? Jesus is our High Priest, and through Him every believer has access to God (Hebrews 4:14-16). Peter calls all believers "a royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9). The old line between priest and people has been opened in Christ, not because God became less holy, but because Jesus bore our iniquity for us.

18:8-13 *And the LORD spoke to Aaron, "And I, look, I have given to you the charge of My contributions, of all the holy things of the sons of Israel; to you I have given them for an anointed portion, and to your sons, for a due forever. This shall be yours from the holy of holies, from the fire: every offering of theirs, every grain offering of theirs and every sin offering of theirs and every guilt offering of theirs which they render to Me,* ***is*** *a holy of holies for you and for your sons. In the holy of holies you shall eat it; every male shall eat it; it shall be holy to you. And this* ***is*** *yours: the contribution of their gift, of all the wave offerings of the sons of Israel; to you I have given them, and to your sons and to your daughters with you, for a due forever; every clean* ***person*** *in your house shall eat it. All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the new wine and grain, the first of them which they give to the LORD, to you I have given them. The first fruits of all that* ***is*** *in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours; every clean* ***person*** *in your house shall eat it.*

Now God speaks of the priests' share. "I have given to you the charge of My contributions, of all the holy things of the sons of Israel," God said, and they were "for a due forever" (18:8). A due is a fixed portion that belongs to someone by right.

From the "holy of holies," the most holy offerings, the priests received "every grain offering of theirs and every sin offering of theirs and every guilt offering of theirs" (18:9). These were eaten only by the males of the priestly families, in the holy place (18:10). The parts not burned on the altar fed God's servants.

The wave offerings could be eaten by the priest's whole household, sons and daughters, as long as they were ceremonially clean (18:11). A wave offering was a portion lifted or waved before the LORD as a sign it was given to Him, then given back to the priest. Clean means fit to take part in worship, not under any ceremonial uncleanness.

"All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the new wine and grain, the first of them which they give to the LORD, to you I have given them" (18:12). The firstfruits, the first of each harvest, also went to the priests (18:13). The people gave the best to God, and God gave it to His servants.

18:14-19 *Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. Every* ***one*** *opening the womb, of all flesh, which they bring near to the LORD, of mankind and of livestock, shall be yours; only you shall surely redeem the firstborn of mankind, and the firstborn of the unclean livestock you shall redeem. And* ***as for*** *its redemption price, from a son of a month you shall redeem* ***it****, by your valuation, approximately 2 ounces (five shekels) of silver, by the shekel of the holy place; it* ***is*** *approximately 2/5 ounce (twenty gerahs). Only the firstborn of an ox or the firstborn of a sheep or the firstborn of a goat you shall not redeem; they* ***are*** *holy. Their blood you shall sprinkle on the altar, and their fat you shall make smoke* ***as*** *a fire offering for a soothing aroma to the LORD. And their flesh shall be yours; like the breast of the wave offering and like the right thigh, it shall be yours. All the contributions of the holy things which the sons of Israel offer up to the LORD I have given to you and to your sons and to your daughters with you, for a due forever; it* ***is*** *a covenant of salt forever before the LORD for you and for your seed with you."*

"Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours" (18:14). A devoted thing was something set apart wholly to God, which could not be taken back (Leviticus 27:28).

"Every one opening the womb, of all flesh, which they bring near to the LORD, of mankind and of livestock, shall be yours" (18:15). The firstborn belonged to God since the night He spared Israel's firstborn in Egypt (Exodus 13:2, 15). But a firstborn son was to be redeemed, bought back, for five shekels of silver, about two ounces, when he was a month old (18:16). Unclean animals, like a donkey, were also redeemed.

The firstborn of an ox, a sheep, or a goat was not redeemed. "They are holy" (18:17). They were sacrificed, and the meat went to the priests (18:18).

"It is a covenant of salt forever before the LORD for you and for your seed with you" (18:19). Salt preserves and does not decay. Salt was also shared at meals when people made agreements. A covenant of salt meant a lasting, unbreakable agreement. God promised to provide for His priests for as long as the priesthood stood. Later Scripture says God gave the kingdom to David and his sons as "a covenant of salt" (2 Chronicles 13:5).

Every redeemed firstborn son was a reminder that each family owed God a life. And it points us to the price of our own redemption: not silver or gold, but the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19).

18:20-24 *And the LORD said to Aaron, "In their land you shall not have an inheritance, and a portion shall not be yours in their midst; I **am** your portion and your inheritance in the midst of the sons of Israel. And to the sons of Levi, look, I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they serve, the service of the tent of meeting. And the sons of Israel shall not draw near again to the tent of meeting, to bear sin, to die. And the Levite, he shall serve the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; **it is** a statute forever for your generations; and in the midst of the sons of Israel they shall not inherit an inheritance. For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer up to the LORD **as** a contribution, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said to them, 'In the midst of the sons of Israel they shall not inherit an inheritance.'"*

"In their land you shall not have an inheritance, and a portion shall not be yours in their midst; I am your portion and your inheritance in the midst of the sons of Israel" (18:20).

Every other tribe would get land. Aaron would get God. That sounds like the short end of the stick until you think about it. The land would fail in times of drought and be lost in times of war. God never fails. David understood this when he wrote, "The LORD is the portion of my share and my cup" (Psalm 16:5).

"To the sons of Levi, look, I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service" (18:21). A tithe means a tenth. Every Israelite would give a tenth of his crops and herds, and it would support the Levites, who served in the tent of meeting.

"The sons of Israel shall not draw near again to the tent of meeting, to bear sin, to die" (18:22). The Levites would "bear their iniquity," carrying the responsibility so that the people would be safe (18:23). This was "a statute forever for your generations," that is, for as long as that covenant order stood.

What does this teach us? God takes care of those who serve Him. Paul uses this very principle: those who served at the altar shared in the altar, and "So also the Lord prescribed for those who proclaim the gospel to live from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:13-14). The tithe was Israel's law under the Mosaic covenant. Believers today are not under that law, but the New Testament calls us to give generously, cheerfully, and in proportion to what God has given us (2 Corinthians 9:6-7; 1 Corinthians 16:2). Christians differ on whether the tenth is still the right measure.

18:25-32 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "And to the Levites you shall speak, and you shall say to them, 'When you take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given to you from them for your inheritance, and you shall offer up from it the contribution of the LORD, a tithe from the tithe. And your contribution shall be reckoned to you like the grain from the threshing floor and like the fullness from the winepress. Thus you also shall offer up the contribution of the LORD from all your tithes which you take from the sons of Israel; and you shall give from it the contribution of the LORD to Aaron the priest. From all your gifts you shall offer up every contribution of the LORD, from all its best, its holy part from it.' And you shall say to them, 'When you offer up its best from it, and it shall be reckoned to the Levites like the produce of a threshing floor and like the produce of a winepress. And you shall eat it in every place, you and your household; for it* ***is*** *wages for you in return for your service in the tent of meeting. And you shall not bear sin on account of it when you offer up its best from it; and the holy things of the sons of Israel you shall not profane, and you shall not die.'"*

Then God speaks to the Levites through Moses. They too had to give. "You shall offer up from it the contribution of the LORD, a tithe from the tithe" (18:26). A tenth of what the Levites received went to Aaron the priest (18:28).

"Your contribution shall be reckoned to you like the grain from the threshing floor and like the fullness from the winepress" (18:27). The Levites did not farm. But God counted their tithe the same as a farmer's harvest. Their giving was as real as anyone else's.

They were to give "from all its best, its holy part from it" (18:29). Not the leftovers, but the best.

Once they had given the tithe of the tithe, the rest was theirs. "You shall eat it in every place, you and your household; for it is wages for you in return for your service in the tent of meeting" (18:31). It was not a holy offering any longer, so it could be eaten anywhere. "You shall not bear sin on account of it when you offer up its best from it" (18:32).

No one in God's service is above giving. The ones who received gifts also gave gifts. That is a good word for pastors and church workers. Giving is not only for the people in the pews. It is part of worship for all of us.

Chapter 18 Summary

The LORD told Aaron that he and his sons would bear the responsibility for the sanctuary and the priesthood, serving at the altar and within the veil. The Levites would be joined to them to guard and serve the tent, but must not come near the holy articles or the altar, so that no wrath would fall on Israel again. The priesthood and the Levites were God's gifts. God gave the priests the most

holy offerings, the wave offerings, the best of the oil, wine, and grain, the firstfruits, every devoted thing, and the firstborn, with firstborn sons and unclean animals redeemed for five shekels. This was a covenant of salt forever. Aaron would have no land, because the LORD was his portion and inheritance. The Levites received the tithe of Israel in return for their service, and they were to give a tenth of that tithe, from the best, to the priest. The rest was their wages to eat anywhere.

Chapter 18 Study Questions

1. What did it mean for Aaron and his sons to "bear the iniquity of the sanctuary"? (18:1)

2. What were the Levites to do, and what were they not to touch? (18:2-4)

3. What does God call the priesthood in verse 7, and why does that matter?

4. What offerings and gifts were given to the priests? (18:8-19)

5. How was a firstborn son redeemed, and what does that point to? (18:15-16; 1 Peter 1:18-19)

6. What was Aaron's inheritance instead of land? (18:20)

7. What did the Levites receive, and what did they have to give? (18:21, 26)

8. How does Paul use this chapter to teach about supporting those who serve in the gospel? (1 Corinthians 9:13-14)

9. God told Aaron, "I am your portion." What would it look like in your life to treat God as your portion, more than your money, home, or plans? (Psalm 16:5)

10. The Levites gave from the best, not the leftovers. What is one way you can give God your best this week?

Chapter 19: The Red Heifer and the Water of Cleansing

Scripture

19:1-10 And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "This ***is*** the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel, and let them bring to you a red heifer, unblemished, in which ***there is*** no blemish, on which a yoke has not come up. And you shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and he shall bring it out to the outside of the camp, and ***one*** shall slaughter it before him. And Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and he shall spatter some of its blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times. And ***one*** shall burn the heifer before his eyes; its skin and its flesh and its blood, with its dung, he shall burn. And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet of the worm, and he shall throw ***them*** into the midst of the burning of the heifer. And the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; and the priest shall be unclean until the evening. And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and he shall be unclean until the evening. And a clean man shall gather the ashes of the heifer, and he shall deposit ***them*** outside the camp in a clean place; and it shall be for the congregation of the sons of Israel for keeping, for water of impurity; it ***is*** a sin offering. And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and he shall be unclean until the evening; and it shall be for the sons of Israel and for the sojourner who sojourns in their midst for a statute forever.

19:11-22 The one who touches the dead, of any soul of mankind, and he shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself from sin with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean; and if he does not purify himself from sin on the third day and on the seventh day, he shall not be clean. Everyone who touches the dead, the soul of the man who dies, and does not purify himself from sin, has made the tabernacle of the LORD unclean; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel; because the water of impurity was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness ***is*** still on him. This ***is*** the law: when a man dies in a tent, everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who ***is*** in the tent shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel which has no cover of cord on it, it ***is*** unclean. And everyone who touches, on the face of the field, one slain by a sword or a dead ***one*** or a bone of a man or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. And they shall take for the unclean ***one*** some of the dust of the burning of the sin offering, and he shall put living water on it in a vessel. And a clean man shall take hyssop, and he shall dip ***it*** in the water, and he shall spatter ***it*** on the tent and on all the vessels and on the souls who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the slain or the dead or the grave. And the clean ***one*** shall spatter on the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and he shall purify him from sin on the seventh day, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and he shall be clean in the evening. And a man who is unclean and does not purify himself from sin, and that soul shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, for he has made the sanctuary of the LORD unclean; the water of impurity has not been sprinkled on him; he ***is*** unclean. And it shall be a statute forever for them; and the one who spatters the water of impurity shall wash his clothes, and the one who touches the water of impurity shall be unclean until the evening. And all that the unclean ***one*** touches shall be unclean, and the soul who touches ***it*** shall be unclean until the evening.'"

Chapter 19 Preview

After the plague of chapter 16, death was everywhere in the camp. And for the next thirty-eight years, a whole generation would die in the wilderness. Under the Law, touching a dead body made a person unclean, unfit to come to the tabernacle. How could Israel stay clean in a camp full of funerals? This chapter gives God's answer.

A red heifer, a young cow with no defect that had never worn a yoke, was to be killed outside the camp and burned completely, with cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet thread. Its ashes were stored and mixed with fresh water when needed. Anyone who touched a dead body was sprinkled with this water on the third and seventh days, and then washed. Anyone who refused would be cut off. Hebrews 9:13-14 uses this very law to show how much more the blood of Christ cleanses our conscience.

Chapter 19 Study

19:1-6 *And the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "This **is** the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel, and let them bring to you a red heifer, unblemished, in which **there is** no blemish, on which a yoke has not come up. And you shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and he shall bring it out to the outside of the camp, and **one** shall slaughter it before him. And Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger, and he shall spatter some of its blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times. And **one** shall burn the heifer before his eyes; its skin and its flesh and its blood, with its dung, he shall burn. And the priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet of the worm, and he shall throw **them** into the midst of the burning of the heifer.*

"This is the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded" (19:2). A statute is a fixed rule. Jewish teachers have long called this one of the hardest laws to understand, because of the strange details. But its main point is clear.

"Let them bring to you a red heifer, unblemished, in which there is no blemish, on which a yoke has not come up." A heifer is a young female cow. It had to be without defect and never used for work. Red may point to the color of blood, though Scripture does not explain it.

"You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and he shall bring it out to the outside of the camp" (19:3). Eleazar, not Aaron, did this, since the high priest had to stay clean for his work at the tabernacle. The heifer was killed outside the camp, the place of the unclean.

Eleazar spattered some of its blood "toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times" (19:4). Seven is the number of completeness. The sacrifice was offered toward God's presence even though it took place outside.

Then the whole animal was burned, "its skin and its flesh and its blood, with its dung" (19:5). This was unusual. Normally the blood went on the altar and the hide went to the priest. Here everything was burned to make a large store of ash.

The priest threw in "cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet of the worm" (19:6). Scarlet of the worm means scarlet thread, dyed with a red dye from an insect. The same three things were used in cleansing a person healed of a skin disease (Leviticus 14:4-6). Cedar does not rot. Hyssop was a small plant used for sprinkling, as on the night of the Passover (Exodus 12:22). Scarlet was the color of blood. All of them spoke of cleansing and life.

19:7-10 *And the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; and the priest shall be unclean until the evening. And the one who burns it shall wash his clothes in water, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and he shall be unclean until the evening. And a clean man shall gather the ashes of the heifer, and he shall deposit* ***them*** *outside the camp in a clean place; and it shall be for the congregation of the sons of Israel for keeping, for water of impurity; it* ***is*** *a sin offering. And the one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and he shall be unclean until the evening; and it shall be for the sons of Israel and for the sojourner who sojourns in their midst for a statute forever.*

"The priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp; and the priest shall be unclean until the evening" (19:7). The same was true for the man who burned the heifer (19:8) and the "clean man" who gathered the ashes and stored them "outside the camp in a clean place" (19:9-10).

Here is the strange part. The ashes made the unclean clean, but handling them made the clean unclean. How can that be? The heifer carried uncleanness away from the people. Whoever dealt with it shared in that uncleanness for a time. Sin and death are not cleaned up without a cost to someone.

The ashes were "for water of impurity; it is a sin offering" (19:9). The water of impurity means water to remove impurity. It was a sin offering in the sense that it dealt with defilement and restored a person to fellowship with God.

"It shall be for the sons of Israel and for the sojourner who sojourns in their midst for a statute forever" (19:10). Jewish tradition says only a handful of red heifers were ever needed in all of Israel's history, because the ashes of one went a long way.

19:11-13 *The one who touches the dead, of any soul of mankind, and he shall be unclean seven days. He shall purify himself from sin with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean; and if he does not purify himself from sin on the third day and on the seventh day, he shall not be clean. Everyone who touches the dead, the soul of the man who dies, and does not purify himself from sin, has made the tabernacle of the LORD unclean; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel; because the water of impurity was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness* ***is*** *still on him.*

"The one who touches the dead, of any soul of mankind, and he shall be unclean seven days" (19:11). Why was a dead body unclean? Not because touching the dead was sin. Burying the dead was a duty and a kindness. But death is the result of sin (Genesis 2:17; Romans 5:12). God is the living God. Everything connected with death was kept away from His presence, to teach Israel that death does not belong with Him.

"He shall purify himself from sin with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean" (19:12). Two sprinklings, and then he was clean.

"Everyone who touches the dead, the soul of the man who dies, and does not purify himself from sin, has made the tabernacle of the LORD unclean; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel" (19:13). To ignore God's cleansing was to bring defilement into God's house. "His uncleanness is still on him." God provided the way. Refusing it left a person in his uncleanness.

19:14-16 *This **is** the law: when a man dies in a tent, everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who **is** in the tent shall be unclean seven days. And every open vessel which has no cover of cord on it, it **is** unclean. And everyone who touches, on the face of the field, one slain by a sword or a dead **one** or a bone of a man or a grave, shall be unclean seven days.*

"This is the law: when a man dies in a tent, everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who is in the tent shall be unclean seven days" (19:14). Even "every open vessel which has no cover of cord on it" (19:15) was unclean.

In the open field, touching "one slain by a sword or a dead one or a bone of a man or a grave" made a person unclean seven days (19:16). Death defiled wherever it was found.

Think about what this meant in a camp where a whole generation was dying. Every family would need this cleansing again and again. The law was a daily reminder of the cost of unbelief at Kadesh, and of God's mercy that kept making a way for His people to come back to Him.

The Pharisees in Jesus' day whitewashed tombs each spring so that pilgrims would not touch them by accident. Jesus used that picture: they were like whitewashed tombs, clean outside but full of dead men's bones inside (Matthew 23:27).

19:17-22 *And they shall take for the unclean **one** some of the dust of the burning of the sin offering, and he shall put living water on it in a vessel. And a clean man shall take hyssop, and he shall dip in the water, and he shall spatter **it** on the tent and on all the vessels and on the souls who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the slain or the dead or the grave. And the clean **one** shall spatter on the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and he shall purify him from sin on the seventh day, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe in water, and he shall be clean in the evening. And a man who is unclean and does not purify himself from sin, and that soul shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, for he has made the sanctuary of the LORD unclean; the water of impurity has not been sprinkled on him; he **is** unclean. And it shall be a statute forever for them; and the one who spatters the water of impurity shall wash his clothes, and the one who touches the water of impurity shall be unclean until the evening. And all that the unclean **one** touches shall be unclean, and the soul who touches **it** shall be unclean until the evening.'"*

"They shall take for the unclean one some of the dust of the burning of the sin offering, and he shall put living water on it in a vessel" (19:17). Living water means running water, from a spring or a stream.

"A clean man shall take hyssop, and he shall dip it in the water, and he shall spatter it on the tent and on all the vessels and on the souls who were there" (19:18). On the third and the seventh day

the clean person spattered the water on the unclean one. Then he washed his clothes and bathed, "and he shall be clean in the evening" (19:19).

The warning comes again: the one who will not be purified "shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, for he has made the sanctuary of the LORD unclean" (19:20). And even the one who spattered the water would be unclean until evening (19:21-22).

Here is where the New Testament speaks. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of the Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13-14).

The red heifer was without blemish, and so was Christ (1 Peter 1:19). The heifer died outside the camp, and Jesus "suffered outside the gate" (Hebrews 13:12). The water of the heifer cleansed the body from contact with death. The blood of Jesus cleanses the conscience from dead works, everything we did in our sin, so that we can serve the living God. The water had to be sprinkled again every time someone touched death. Jesus offered Himself once for all (Hebrews 10:10).

And notice: Jesus did what no Israelite dared to do. He touched the dead. He took a dead girl by the hand and said, "Little girl, I say to you, arise" (Mark 5:41). He touched the coffin of a widow's son (Luke 7:14). Instead of becoming unclean, He gave life. "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

Do you feel the weight of guilt from past sins? The water of the heifer could not reach that. The blood of Christ can.

Chapter 19 Summary

The LORD gave Moses and Aaron a statute for cleansing from contact with the dead. A red heifer with no blemish, never yoked, was to be slaughtered outside the camp before Eleazar the priest, who spattered its blood toward the tent of meeting seven times. The whole heifer was burned with cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet thread, and a clean man stored the ashes outside the camp for the water of impurity. Those who handled the heifer and its ashes became unclean until evening. Anyone who touched a dead body, or was in a tent where someone died, or touched a bone or a grave, was unclean seven days. He was to be sprinkled with the water of ashes and running water using hyssop on the third and seventh days, then wash and be clean. Anyone who refused to be cleansed defiled the sanctuary and was cut off. Hebrews 9:13-14 shows that the blood of Christ cleanses far more deeply than the ashes of the heifer.

Chapter 19 Study Questions

1. What kind of animal was required, and what were its marks? (19:2)

2. Where was the heifer killed, and who oversaw it? (19:3-4)

3. What was burned with the heifer, and where else are these things used in the Law? (19:6; Leviticus 14:4-6)

4. Why did the people who handled the heifer and ashes become unclean? (19:7-10)

5. What made a person unclean, and for how long? (19:11, 14-16)

6. What happened to someone who refused to be cleansed? (19:13, 20)

7. How does Hebrews 9:13-14 compare the ashes of the heifer with the blood of Christ?

8. Why do you think God connected death with uncleanness? What does that teach about sin? (Romans 5:12; 6:23)

9. Jesus touched the dead and gave life (Mark 5:41). Where do you need His life in a place that feels dead?

10. Is there guilt you still carry that you need to bring to Christ, whose blood cleanses the conscience? (Hebrews 9:14)

Chapter 20: Water from the Rock and the Death of Aaron

Scripture

20:1-13 And the sons of Israel, all the congregation, came ***to*** the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and she was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation; and they assembled against Moses and against Aaron. And the people quarreled with Moses, and they said, saying, "And if only we had died when our brothers died before the LORD! And why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness to die there, we and our livestock? And why have you brought us up from Egypt to bring us to this evil place? ***It is*** not a place of seed and fig and vine and pomegranate, and there is no water to drink." And Moses and Aaron went from before the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they fell on their faces; and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes, and it shall give its water; and you shall bring out water for them from the rock, and you shall give drink to the congregation and their livestock." And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him. And Moses and Aaron assembled the assembly before the face of the rock, and he said to them, "Listen, please, you rebels! From this rock shall we bring out water for you?" And Moses raised his hand, and he struck the rock with his rod twice; and much water came out, and the congregation and their livestock drank. And the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron, "Because you did not believe in Me, to treat Me as holy in the eyes of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given to them." These ***are*** the waters of Meribah, where the sons of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and He showed Himself holy among them.

20:14-29 And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom: "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has found us: and our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt many days, and Egypt did evil to us and to our fathers. And we cried out to the LORD, and He heard our voice, and He sent a messenger and brought us out from Egypt; and look, we ***are*** in Kadesh, a city ***at*** the edge of your territory. Please let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field and vineyard, and we will not drink water of a well; we will go ***by*** the way of the king; we will not turn aside ***to the*** right and ***to the*** left until we have passed through your territory.'" And Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword to meet you." And the sons of Israel said to him, "We will go up by the highway; and if we drink your water, I and my livestock, and I will give its price. Only ***it is*** nothing; let me pass through on my feet." And he said, "You shall not pass through." And Edom came out to meet him with a heavy people and with a strong hand. And Edom refused to permit Israel to pass through its territory; and Israel turned aside from it. And they set out from Kadesh, and the sons of Israel, all the congregation, came ***to*** Hor the mountain. And the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron at Hor the mountain, on the border of the land of Edom, saying, "Aaron shall be gathered to his peoples, for he shall not go into the land which I have given to the sons of Israel, because you rebelled against My mouth at the waters of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up ***to*** Hor the mountain; and strip Aaron of his garments, and you shall clothe Eleazar his son ***with*** them; and Aaron shall be gathered, and he shall die there." And Moses did just as the LORD had

commanded; and they went up to Hor the mountain before the eyes of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and he clothed Eleazar his son with them; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. And Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. And all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, and they wept for Aaron thirty days, all the house of Israel.

Chapter 20 Preview

Almost forty years have passed in silence since chapter 14. Now Israel is back at Kadesh, and the first generation is nearly gone. The chapter is full of endings. Miriam dies and is buried. The people quarrel again because there is no water, using almost the same words their parents used. God tells Moses to take his rod and speak to the rock. Instead Moses calls the people rebels, says "shall we bring out water," and strikes the rock twice. Water pours out, but God tells Moses and Aaron that because they did not treat Him as holy, they will not lead Israel into the land.

Then Edom, the nation descended from Jacob's brother Esau, refuses to let Israel pass through its land. Israel turns away rather than fight a brother. At Mount Hor, Moses takes Aaron's priestly garments off him and puts them on his son Eleazar, and Aaron dies on the mountaintop. All Israel mourns him thirty days. Even the greatest leaders of the old generation could not enter, but God's priesthood went on.

Chapter 20 Study

20:1-5 *And the sons of Israel, all the congregation, came **to** the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and she was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation; and they assembled against Moses and against Aaron. And the people quarreled with Moses, and they said, saying, "And if only we had died when our brothers died before the LORD! And why have you brought the assembly of the LORD into this wilderness to die there, we and our livestock? And why have you brought us up from Egypt to bring us to this evil place? **It is** not a place of seed and fig and vine and pomegranate, and there is no water to drink."*

"The sons of Israel, all the congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month" (20:1). The year is not given here, but comparing 33:36-39 shows this is the fortieth year after the exodus, since Aaron dies later that year. The thirty-eight years of wandering are behind them.

"And Miriam died there, and she was buried there." One short line for the woman who watched over baby Moses in the Nile (Exodus 2:4), led the women in song at the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20-21), and later spoke against Moses (chapter 12). She did not see the promised land.

"There was no water for the congregation; and they assembled against Moses and against Aaron" (20:2). This was a new generation, but they sounded just like their parents. "If only we had died when our brothers died before the LORD!" (20:3). "Why have you brought us up from Egypt to bring us to this evil place?" (20:5). Most of them had been children in Egypt or born in the desert. They learned the grumbling from the generation before.

Their complaint was not all wrong. There really was no water, and that is serious in the desert. But instead of asking God, they attacked their leaders.

20:6-9 *And Moses and Aaron went from before the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they fell on their faces; and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes, and it shall give its water; and you shall bring out water for them from the rock, and you shall give drink to the congregation and their livestock." And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him.*

Once again "Moses and Aaron went from before the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they fell on their faces; and the glory of the LORD appeared to them" (20:6). They took the problem to God.

"Take the rod, and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and speak to the rock before their eyes, and it shall give its water" (20:8). Which rod? Verse 9 says Moses took it "from before the LORD," so this may have been Aaron's rod that budded, kept before the ark (17:10). Or it may have been Moses' own staff, the "staff of God" (Exodus 4:20). Scripture doesn't say for certain.

The command was clear: speak to the rock. Forty years earlier at Rephidim, God told Moses to strike a rock (Exodus 17:6). This time God said speak.

"Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him" (20:9). So far, so good.

20:10-11 *And Moses and Aaron assembled the assembly before the face of the rock, and he said to them, "Listen, please, you rebels! From this rock shall we bring out water for you?" And Moses raised his hand, and he struck the rock with his rod twice; and much water came out, and the congregation and their livestock drank.*

"Listen, please, you rebels! From this rock shall we bring out water for you?" (20:10). Moses had carried these people for forty years, and here his temper broke. He spoke in anger. And he said "we," as though he and Aaron were the ones giving the water.

"Moses raised his hand, and he struck the rock with his rod twice; and much water came out" (20:11). God still gave the water. God's grace to the people did not depend on Moses getting it right. But Moses did not do what God said.

Psalm 106:32-33 looks back on this and says it went badly for Moses because of the people, for they made his spirit bitter, and he spoke rashly with his lips. That is a warning for every leader. Other people's sin can provoke us to sin too.

20:12-13 *And the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron, "Because you did not believe in Me, to treat Me as holy in the eyes of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given to them." These **are** the waters of Meribah, where the sons of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and He showed Himself holy among them.*

"Because you did not believe in Me, to treat Me as holy in the eyes of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given to them" (20:12).

That seems severe. Moses had served God faithfully for forty years. Why lose the land over one moment? God named the sin: unbelief, and failing to treat Him as holy before the people. Moses was the leader everyone watched. He showed them a God who was angry and harsh, when God had promised to give water freely. He took glory that belonged to God. And he did it in front of the whole nation. To whom much is given, much is required (Luke 12:48).

Even so, God did not stop loving Moses. Moses was not lost. He would see the land from Mount Nebo (Deuteronomy 34:1-4), and centuries later he stood in the promised land on the mountain with Jesus at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:3).

Paul tells us "the rock was the Christ" (1 Corinthians 10:4). Christ was the source of the water Israel drank in the desert. Many Bible teachers see more in the two rocks. In Exodus 17 the rock was struck once, a picture of Christ, struck once for our sins (Isaiah 53:5; Hebrews 9:28). In Numbers 20 the rock only needed a word. Christ does not need to be struck again. We come and ask, and He gives the water of life (John 7:37-38). If that picture is right, Moses' striking spoiled the picture God was painting. The New Testament does not say that part directly, but it fits what it does say.

"These are the waters of Meribah" (20:13). Meribah means quarreling. It is also where "He showed Himself holy among them." God showed His holiness by providing water and by judging His own servant.

20:14-21 *And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom: "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has found us: and our fathers went down to Egypt, and we dwelt in Egypt many days, and Egypt did evil to us and to our fathers. And we cried out to the LORD, and He heard our voice, and He sent a messenger and brought us out from Egypt; and look, we **are** in Kadesh, a city **at** the edge of your territory. Please let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field and vineyard, and we will not drink water of a well; we will go **by** the way of the king; we will not turn aside **to the** right and **to the** left until we have passed through your territory.'" And Edom said to him, "You shall not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword to meet you." And the sons of Israel said to him, "We will go up by the highway; and if we drink your water, I and my livestock, and I will give its price. Only **it is** nothing; let me pass through on my feet." And he said, "You shall not pass through." And Edom came out to meet him with a heavy people and with a strong hand. And Edom refused to permit Israel to pass through its territory; and Israel turned aside from it.*

Now Israel moves toward the land, and the direct road ran through Edom, south of the Dead Sea. Moses sent messengers: "Thus says your brother Israel" (20:14). The Edomites came from Esau,

Jacob's twin brother (Genesis 36:1). Moses reminded them of Israel's suffering in Egypt and how "we cried out to the LORD, and He heard our voice, and He sent a messenger and brought us out from Egypt" (20:16).

He asked politely and promised not to touch their fields or wells: "we will go by the way of the king" (20:17). The King's Highway was the main road running north and south east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea.

"You shall not pass through me, lest I come out with the sword to meet you" (20:18). Israel offered to pay even for water (20:19). Edom refused again and came out "with a heavy people and with a strong hand" (20:20).

"Israel turned aside from it" (20:21). God had told Israel not to fight Edom, because He had given Mount Seir to Esau (Deuteronomy 2:4-6). So Israel took the long way around. Obeying God sometimes means the longer road.

The bitterness between these brother nations ran for centuries. Obadiah's whole prophecy is about Edom's pride and its cruelty to Judah. But Israel here did not take revenge. Paul says to leave room for God's wrath (Romans 12:19).

20:22-29 *And they set out from Kadesh, and the sons of Israel, all the congregation, came **to** Hor the mountain. And the LORD said to Moses and to Aaron at Hor the mountain, on the border of the land of Edom, saying, "Aaron shall be gathered to his peoples, for he shall not go into the land which I have given to the sons of Israel, because you rebelled against My mouth at the waters of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up **to** Hor the mountain; and strip Aaron of his garments, and you shall clothe Eleazar his son **with** them; and Aaron shall be gathered, and he shall die there." And Moses did just as the LORD had commanded; and they went up to Hor the mountain before the eyes of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and he clothed Eleazar his son with them; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. And Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. And all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, and they wept for Aaron thirty days, all the house of Israel.*

"They set out from Kadesh, and the sons of Israel, all the congregation, came to Hor the mountain" (20:22), on the border of Edom. There God told Moses that "Aaron shall be gathered to his peoples" (20:24). To be gathered to one's people was a way of speaking of death, of joining those who had gone before. God gave the reason plainly: "because you rebelled against My mouth at the waters of Meribah."

"Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up to Hor the mountain; and strip Aaron of his garments, and you shall clothe Eleazar his son with them" (20:25-26). Picture the three men climbing the mountain "before the eyes of all the congregation" (20:27). Moses, the brother who had stood with Aaron before Pharaoh, removed the high priest's robes one by one and placed them on Aaron's son. Then "Aaron died there on the top of the mountain" (20:28). Two came down.

Aaron had his failures. He made the golden calf (Exodus 32) and spoke against Moses (chapter 12). But he also ran into the plague with incense and stood between the dead and the living (16:48). God used a flawed man as His priest for forty years.

"They wept for Aaron thirty days, all the house of Israel" (20:29). It was right to grieve. Grief is not a lack of faith.

The handing on of the garments teaches us something. The priesthood did not end with Aaron. It went on through Eleazar. But every high priest died, and the work had to be handed to another. Hebrews 7:23-25 makes this point: the former priests were many, because death kept them from continuing, but Jesus, "always living to intercede for them," holds His priesthood permanently. He will never need to hand His robes to anyone else.

Chapter 20 Summary

In the first month of the fortieth year, Israel came to Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, and Miriam died and was buried there. When there was no water, the people quarreled with Moses and Aaron and wished they had died. Moses and Aaron fell on their faces at the tent of meeting, and the LORD told Moses to take the rod and speak to the rock. Instead Moses called the people rebels and struck the rock twice, and water came out. The LORD told Moses and Aaron that because they did not believe Him or treat Him as holy before the people, they would not bring Israel into the land. The place was called Meribah. Moses asked the king of Edom to let Israel pass along the King's Highway, but Edom refused and came out armed, so Israel turned away. At Mount Hor, Moses took Aaron's garments and put them on Eleazar, and Aaron died on the mountaintop. All Israel mourned for him thirty days.

People and Places

- Wilderness of Zin: the desert region around Kadesh on the southern edge of Canaan.
- Miriam: the sister of Moses and Aaron, a prophetess.
- Meribah: the place of the water from the rock; the name means quarreling.
- Edom: the nation descended from Esau, Jacob's brother, living south and southeast of the Dead Sea.
- The King's Highway: the main road running north and south east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea.
- Mount Hor: a mountain on the border of Edom where Aaron died.
- Eleazar: Aaron's son, who became high priest after him.

Chapter 20 Study Questions

1. Who died at Kadesh, and what do you remember about her life? (20:1; Exodus 2:4; 15:20)

2. What did the people say when there was no water? How did it sound like their parents? (20:2-5; 14:2)

3. What exactly did God tell Moses to do, and what did Moses do instead? (20:8-11)

4. Why did God say Moses and Aaron would not enter the land? (20:12)

5. What does Paul say about the rock? (1 Corinthians 10:4)

6. How did Israel respond when Edom refused to let them pass? (20:14-21)

7. What happened on Mount Hor, and how did Israel respond? (20:25-29)

8. How does Aaron's death show the difference between the old priesthood and Jesus' priesthood? (Hebrews 7:23-25)

9. Moses let the people's sin provoke him into sin. When have other people's words pushed you into anger? What helps you respond in a way that honors God?

10. Moses took credit that belonged to God ("shall we bring out water"). Where are you tempted to take credit for what God has done?

Chapter 21: The Bronze Serpent and the First Victories

Scripture

21:1-9 And the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who dwelt ***in*** the Negeb, heard that Israel had come ***by*** the way of the Atharim, and he fought against Israel, and he took captive from it ***some*** captives. And Israel vowed a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities ***to destruction***." And the LORD listened to the voice of Israel, and He gave up the Canaanite; and it devoted them and their cities ***to destruction***; and ***one*** called the name of the place Hormah. And they set out from Hor the mountain ***by*** the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became short on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? For ***there is*** no bread, and ***there is*** no water, and our soul loathes the worthless bread." And the LORD sent the fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many people from Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and they said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD, and let Him remove the serpents from on us." And Moses prayed for the people. And the LORD said to Moses, "Make for yourself a fiery ***serpent***, and set it on a standard; and it shall be ***that*** everyone who is bitten and sees it shall live." And Moses made a serpent of bronze, and he set it on the standard; and it happened, if the serpent had bitten a man, and he looked to the serpent of bronze, and he lived.

21:10-20 And the sons of Israel set out, and they camped in Oboth. And they set out from Oboth, and they camped at Iye-abarim, in the wilderness which ***is*** on the face of Moab, toward the rising of the sun. From there they set out, and they camped in the wadi of Zered. From there they set out, and they camped on the other side of Arnon, which ***is*** in the wilderness that goes out from the border of the Amorite; for Arnon ***is*** the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorite. Therefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, "Waheb in Suphah, and the wadis of Arnon, and the slope of the wadis which extends to the dwelling of Ar, and leans to the border of Moab." And from there to Beer; that ***is*** the well where the LORD said to Moses, "Gather the people, and let Me give them water." Then Israel sang this song: "Spring up, O well! Sing to it! A well the leaders dug, the nobles of the people dug it, with the scepter, with their staffs." And from the wilderness ***to*** Mattanah, and from Mattanah ***to*** Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel ***to*** Bamoth, and from Bamoth ***to*** the valley which ***is*** in the field of Moab, ***at*** the top of the Pisgah, and it looks down over the face of the wasteland.

21:21-35 And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorite, saying, "Let me pass through your land; we will not turn aside into field and into vineyard; we will not drink water of a well; we will go by the way of the king until we have passed through your territory." And Sihon did not permit Israel to pass through his territory; and Sihon gathered all his people, and he went out to meet Israel toward the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz, and he fought against Israel. And Israel struck him by the mouth of the sword, and it took possession of his land from Arnon to Jabbok, to the sons of Ammon; for the border of the sons of Ammon ***was*** strong. And Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorite, in Heshbon and in all its daughters. For Heshbon ***was*** the city of Sihon king of the Amorite, and he had fought against the former king of

Moab, and he had taken all his land from his hand as far as Arnon. Therefore those who speak proverbs say, "Come ***to*** Heshbon; let it be built, and let the city of Sihon be established. For fire went out from Heshbon, a flame from the town of Sihon; it consumed Ar of Moab, the lords of the high places of Arnon. Woe to you, Moab! You have perished, O people of Chemosh! He has given his sons ***as*** fugitives, and his daughters into captivity, to the king of the Amorite, Sihon. And we shot at them; Heshbon has perished as far as Dibon; and we have laid waste as far as Nophah, which ***is*** as far as Medeba." And Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorite. And Moses sent to spy out Jazer, and they captured its daughters, and he dispossessed the Amorite who ***were*** there. And they turned, and they went up ***by*** the way of the Bashan; and Og the king of the Bashan went out to meet them, he and all his people, for the battle ***at*** Edrei. And the LORD said to Moses, "Do not fear him, for into your hand I have given him and all his people and his land; and you shall do to him just as you did to Sihon king of the Amorite, who was dwelling in Heshbon." And they struck him and his sons and all his people, until ***one*** had left him no survivor; and they took possession of his land.

Chapter 21 Preview

This chapter turns a corner. For the first time in Numbers, Israel wins battles. The king of Arad attacks them and takes some captives, and Israel vows to the LORD and defeats him at Hormah, the same place where their parents were beaten (14:45). But on the long road around Edom, the people grow impatient and speak against God and Moses again. God sends fiery serpents, and many die. When they confess their sin, God tells Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it on a pole, so that anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. Jesus said this was a picture of Himself lifted up on the cross (John 3:14-15).

Then Israel marches north along the edge of Moab. God gives them water at a well, and they sing. When Sihon, king of the Amorites, refuses to let them pass and comes out to fight, Israel defeats him and takes his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok. Then they defeat Og, king of Bashan. The new generation is learning to trust God in battle.

Chapter 21 Study

21:1-3 *And the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who dwelt **in** the Negeb, heard that Israel had come **by** the way of the Atharim, and he fought against Israel, and he took captive from it **some** captives. And Israel vowed a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities **to destruction**." And the LORD listened to the voice of Israel, and He gave up the Canaanite; and it devoted them and their cities **to destruction**; and **one** called the name of the place Hormah.*

"The Canaanite, the king of Arad, who dwelt in the Negeb" heard Israel was coming "and he fought against Israel, and he took captive from it some captives" (21:1). Arad was a city in the south of Canaan.

Notice what Israel did this time. Their parents went into battle on their own (14:40-45). This generation turned to God first. "Israel vowed a vow to the LORD, and said, If You will indeed give

this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction" (21:2). To devote to destruction (herem in Hebrew) meant to give something wholly to God by destroying it, keeping nothing as plunder. It was a solemn act of judgment, not a raid for gain.

"The LORD listened to the voice of Israel, and He gave up the Canaanite" (21:3). The place was called Hormah, which sounds like the Hebrew word for devoted to destruction. The place of their parents' defeat became the place of their children's first victory.

Why did God order such judgment on the Canaanites? Scripture says their sins had grown full over centuries (Genesis 15:16), including child sacrifice (Leviticus 18:21-25; Deuteronomy 12:31). God had waited four hundred years. This was His judgment on a specific people at a specific time, given by His direct command. It was never a license for any nation to make war in God's name today.

21:4-5 *And they set out from Hor the mountain **by** the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the soul of the people became short on the way. And the people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? For **there is** no bread, and **there is** no water, and our soul loathes the worthless bread."*

"They set out from Hor the mountain by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom" (21:4). Since Edom would not let them through, they had to go south toward the Gulf of Aqaba and then north again. It was a long, hot detour, and it felt like going backward.

"The soul of the people became short on the way." That means they lost patience. Have you ever felt that way when God's road seemed to go in the wrong direction?

"The people spoke against God and against Moses, Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, and there is no water, and our soul loathes the worthless bread" (21:5). There was no bread? They had manna every morning! What they meant was they hated the manna. They called the bread from heaven worthless. This was the same sin as Kibroth-hattaavah (11:4-6), now forty years later.

21:6-7 *And the LORD sent the fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many people from Israel died. And the people came to Moses, and they said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD, and let Him remove the serpents from on us." And Moses prayed for the people.*

"The LORD sent the fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many people from Israel died" (21:6). They are called fiery likely because their bite burned, with venom that caused fever and pain. The desert south of the Dead Sea still has venomous snakes. Deuteronomy 8:15 reminds Israel that God had led them through a wilderness of fiery serpents and scorpions. Until now He had been protecting them from those dangers all along.

Paul warns us with this very event: "Nor let us put the Christ to the test, as some of them also tested Him, and were destroyed by the serpents" (1 Corinthians 10:9). Notice that Paul says they tested Christ. The One who led Israel in the wilderness was the Son of God.

This time the people responded rightly. "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD, and let Him remove the serpents from on us" (21:7). That is real confession. They named their sin and asked for prayer. "And Moses prayed for the people." Once more Moses stood for the people who had spoken against him.

21:8-9 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Make for yourself a fiery **serpent**, and set it on a standard; and it shall be **that** everyone who is bitten and sees it shall live." And Moses made a serpent of bronze, and he set it on the standard; and it happened, if the serpent had bitten a man, and he looked to the serpent of bronze, and he lived.*

God did not take the serpents away right then. He gave a remedy. "Make for yourself a fiery serpent, and set it on a standard; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten and sees it shall live" (21:8). A standard was a pole, like a flagpole.

"Moses made a serpent of bronze, and he set it on the standard; and it happened, if the serpent had bitten a man, and he looked to the serpent of bronze, and he lived" (21:9).

Think about how simple that was. The cure was not medicine, or a sacrifice, or a long ritual. It was a look. Anyone could do it, young or old, strong or dying. The only one who died was the one who refused to look. But it took faith. A man could think, how can looking at a piece of bronze save me? The ones who trusted God's word and looked, lived.

Why a serpent? The very thing that was killing them was lifted up, made harmless, on a pole. Jesus explained it: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The very next verse is John 3:16.

On the cross, Jesus was made sin for us, though He knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21). He became a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). Sin, the poison killing us, was judged in Him, lifted up on a pole. And the cure is the same: look to Him in faith and live. Not by working, not by trying harder, but by trusting God's remedy. Jesus said, "And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:32).

Have you looked to Jesus? If you have been bitten by sin, and all of us have, there is one cure. Look to the One lifted up on the cross, and live.

Sadly, Israel later kept this bronze serpent and began to worship it. Seven hundred years later, King Hezekiah "crushed to pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel were burning incense to it" (2 Kings 18:4). The gift became an idol. We must never worship the means God uses instead of God Himself.

21:10-20 *And the sons of Israel set out, and they camped in Oboth. And they set out from Oboth, and they camped at Iye-abarim, in the wilderness which **is** on the face of Moab, toward the rising of the sun. From there they set out, and they camped in the wadi of Zered. From there they set out, and they camped on the other side of Arnon, which **is** in the wilderness that goes out from the border of the Amorite; for Arnon **is** the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorite. Therefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, "Waheb in Suphah, and the wadis of Arnon, and the slope of the wadis which extends to the dwelling of Ar, and leans to the border of Moab." And from there to Beer; that **is** the well where the LORD said to Moses, "Gather the people, and let Me give them water." Then Israel sang this song: "Spring up, O well! Sing to it! A well the leaders dug, the nobles of the people dug it, with the scepter, with their staffs." And from the wilderness **to** Mattanah, and from Mattanah **to** Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel **to** Bamoth, and from Bamoth **to** the valley which **is** in the field of Moab, **at** the top of the Pisgah, and it looks down over the face of the wasteland.*

Now Israel moves north along the east side of the Dead Sea, through Oboth, Iye-abarim, and the wadi of Zered, to "the other side of Arnon" (21:10-13). The Zered was the brook between Edom and Moab. The Arnon was a deep canyon on the border between Moab and the land of the Amorites. Crossing the Zered marked the end of the thirty-eight years of wandering (Deuteronomy 2:13-14).

Verses 14 and 15 quote "the book of the wars of the LORD." This was an old book, now lost, that recorded Israel's battles in poems or songs. Moses used it as a source. The Bible names several such books (Joshua 10:13 names the book of Jashar). Inspiration does not mean the writers never used records. It means God guided what they wrote.

"And from there to Beer; that is the well where the LORD said to Moses, Gather the people, and let Me give them water" (21:16). Beer means well. This time there was no complaining. God gave water before they asked, and "Israel sang this song: Spring up, O well! Sing to it!" (21:17). The leaders dug it "with the scepter, with their staffs" (21:18). It is a picture of the new generation's change of heart: from grumbling about water to singing for it.

They traveled on through Mattanah, Nahaliel, and Bamoth to "the top of the Pisgah" (21:18-20), the range of hills overlooking the Jordan valley and the Dead Sea. From there Moses would later see the land (Deuteronomy 34:1).

21:21-26 *And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorite, saying, "Let me pass through your land; we will not turn aside into field and into vineyard; we will not drink water of a well; we will go by the way of the king until we have passed through your territory." And Sihon did not permit Israel to pass through his territory; and Sihon gathered all his people, and he went out to meet Israel toward the wilderness, and he came to Jahaz, and he fought against Israel. And Israel struck him by the mouth of the sword, and it took possession of his land from Arnon to Jabbok, to the sons of Ammon; for the border of the sons of Ammon* ***was*** *strong. And Israel took all these cities, and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorite, in Heshbon and in all its daughters. For Heshbon* ***was*** *the city of Sihon king of the Amorite, and he had fought against the former king of Moab, and he had taken all his land from his hand as far as Arnon.*

"Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorite" (21:21). They made the same polite request they made to Edom: "Let me pass through your land" (21:22), keeping to the King's Highway and touching nothing.

"Sihon did not permit Israel to pass through his territory." He gathered all his people, came to Jahaz, "and he fought against Israel" (21:23). Sihon attacked first.

"Israel struck him by the mouth of the sword, and it took possession of his land from Arnon to Jabbok" (21:24). The Jabbok is a river flowing west into the Jordan, about halfway between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. "Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorite, in Heshbon and in all its daughters" (21:25). The daughters were the small towns around a main city.

Edom was a brother nation, and God told Israel not to fight it. The Amorites were not. They were among the nations whose land God had promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:16, 21). Deuteronomy 2:30 says God hardened Sihon's spirit so that He could give his land into Israel's hand.

Verse 26 explains that Heshbon had been Sihon's city since he took it from "the former king of Moab." This matters because later Moab and Ammon claimed this land. Jephthah answered that claim three hundred years later by pointing to these very events (Judges 11:15-26).

21:27-30 *Therefore those who speak proverbs say, "Come* ***to*** *Heshbon; let it be built, and let the city of Sihon be established. For fire went out from Heshbon, a flame from the town of Sihon; it consumed Ar of Moab, the lords of the high places of Arnon. Woe to you, Moab! You have perished, O people of Chemosh! He has given his sons* ***as*** *fugitives, and his daughters into captivity, to the king of the Amorite, Sihon. And we shot at them; Heshbon has perished as far as Dibon; and we have laid waste as far as Nophah, which* ***is*** *as far as Medeba."*

"Therefore those who speak proverbs say" (21:27). This is a taunt song, a poem of victory. It first remembers how Sihon's fire went out from Heshbon and "consumed Ar of Moab" (21:28). "Woe to you, Moab! You have perished, O people of Chemosh!" (21:29). Chemosh was the god of Moab. He could not save his people from Sihon. Then the song ends with Israel's victory over Sihon: "Heshbon has perished as far as Dibon" (21:30).

The point is clear. Sihon had conquered Moab. Israel conquered Sihon. Chemosh could do nothing, and the LORD gave His people the victory. Jeremiah quotes this old song in his prophecy against Moab (Jeremiah 48:45-46).

21:31-35 *And Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorite. And Moses sent to spy out Jazer, and they captured its daughters, and he dispossessed the Amorite who **were** there. And they turned, and they went up **by** the way of the Bashan; and Og the king of the Bashan went out to meet them, he and all his people, for the battle **at** Edrei. And the LORD said to Moses, "Do not fear him, for into your hand I have given him and all his people and his land; and you shall do to him just as you did to Sihon king of the Amorite, who was dwelling in Heshbon." And they struck him and his sons and all his people, until **one** had left him no survivor; and they took possession of his land.*

"Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorite" (21:31). They also took Jazer (21:32). Then they turned north toward Bashan, a rich high plateau east of the Sea of Galilee, famous for its cattle and oaks.

"Og the king of the Bashan went out to meet them, he and all his people, for the battle at Edrei" (21:33). Og was a giant, the last of the Rephaim, and his iron bed was about thirteen and a half feet long (Deuteronomy 3:11). A generation earlier, the spies said they were like grasshoppers next to such men.

"Do not fear him, for into your hand I have given him and all his people and his land" (21:34). God spoke the very words their parents had needed to hear at Kadesh: Do not fear. This time Israel believed. "They struck him and his sons and all his people," and "they took possession of his land" (21:35).

Israel never forgot these two victories. They are sung in Psalm 135:10-12 and Psalm 136:17-22, "for His steadfast love is forever." Rahab in Jericho heard about them, and so did all of Canaan (Joshua 2:10). The giants were real. So was God. The same faith their parents lacked was now winning the battles.

Chapter 21 Summary

The Canaanite king of Arad attacked Israel, and Israel vowed to devote his cities to destruction, and the LORD gave them the victory at Hormah. On the long journey around Edom the people grew impatient and spoke against God and Moses, calling the manna worthless. The LORD sent fiery serpents, and many died. When the people confessed their sin, Moses prayed, and the LORD told him to set a bronze serpent on a pole, so that anyone bitten who looked at it would live. Israel traveled north past the Zered and the Arnon, and at Beer God gave them water, and they sang. Sihon king of the Amorites refused them passage and attacked, but Israel defeated him and took his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, including Heshbon. A taunt song celebrated the victory. Then Israel defeated Og king of Bashan at Edrei and took his land.

People and Places

- Arad: a Canaanite city in the Negeb.

- Hormah: the place of Israel's defeat in 14:45 and victory in 21:3; the name sounds like devoted to destruction.
- The bronze serpent: the image Moses set on a pole; later called Nehushtan and destroyed by Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4).
- Zered and Arnon: two valleys east of the Dead Sea; the Zered was Edom's border with Moab, the Arnon was Moab's border with the Amorites.
- The book of the wars of the LORD: an ancient book of Israel's battle songs, now lost.
- Beer: a well where God gave water; the name means well.
- Pisgah: the hills overlooking the Jordan valley.
- Sihon: king of the Amorites, ruling from Heshbon.
- Chemosh: the god of Moab.
- Og: king of Bashan, the last of the giant Rephaim.
- Bashan: a fertile plateau east of the Sea of Galilee.

Chapter 21 Study Questions

1. How was Israel's response to Arad different from their parents' response in 14:40-45? (21:1-3)

2. What did the people complain about on the way around Edom? (21:4-5)

3. What did the people do after the serpents came? (21:7)

4. What did God tell Moses to make, and what did a bitten person have to do? (21:8-9)

5. How did Jesus explain the bronze serpent? (John 3:14-15)

6. What happened to the bronze serpent later, and why? (2 Kings 18:4)

7. What did God say to Israel before the battle with Og, and why was that word so important? (21:34; 14:9)

8. The cure was to look in faith. How would you explain that to someone who thinks they must work to be saved? (John 3:14-16)

9. The people lost patience on a long detour. Where in your life does God's road seem to be going the wrong way? How can you trust Him there?

10. Is there something good God gave you that has started to take His place in your heart, as the bronze serpent did for Israel?

Chapter 22: Balak Sends for Balaam

Scripture

22:1-20 And the sons of Israel set out, and they camped in the plains of Moab, across the Jordan ***from*** Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorite. And Moab was very afraid because of the people, for it ***was*** numerous; and Moab felt dread because of the sons of Israel. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now the assembly will lick up all that ***is*** around us, as the ox licks up the green growth of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor ***was*** king of Moab at that time. And he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, to Pethor, which ***is*** by the River, ***in*** the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Look, a people has come out from Egypt; look, it has covered the eye of the land, and it is dwelling opposite me. And now, please come, curse this people for me, for it ***is*** mightier than I; perhaps I shall be able ***that*** we may strike it, and I may drive it out from the land; for I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse is cursed." And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian went, and divinations ***were*** in their hand; and they came to Balaam, and they spoke to him the words of Balak. And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you just as the LORD speaks to me." And the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. And God came to Balaam, and He said, "Who ***are*** these men with you?" And Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me: 'Look, the people that has come out from Egypt, and it has covered the eye of the land; now come, curse it for me; perhaps I shall be able to fight against it, and I will drive it out.'" And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for it ***is*** blessed." And Balaam rose in the morning, and he said to the princes of Balak, "Go to your land, for the LORD has refused to permit me to go with you." And the princes of Moab rose, and they went to Balak, and they said, "Balaam has refused to come with us." And Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honored than these. And they came to Balaam, and they said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Please do not be held back from coming to me; for I will surely honor you greatly, and all that you say to me I will do; and please come, curse this people for me.'" And Balaam answered, and he said to the servants of Balak, "If Balak gives me the fullness of his house ***of*** silver and gold, I am not able to pass beyond the mouth of the LORD my God, to do ***anything*** small or great. And now, please stay here, you also, tonight, and let me know what more the LORD will speak with me." And God came to Balaam ***at*** night, and He said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; and only the word which I speak to you, it you shall do."

22:21-41 And Balaam rose in the morning, and he saddled his donkey, and he went with the princes of Moab. And the anger of God burned because he was going; and the angel of the LORD stationed himself in the way for an adversary to him. And he ***was*** riding on his donkey, and his two servants ***were*** with him. And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and the donkey turned aside from the way, and she went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey to turn her ***to*** the way. And the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path of the vineyards, a wall on this ***side*** and a wall on this ***side***. And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, and she pressed herself against the wall, and she pressed the foot of Balaam against the wall; and he struck her again. And the angel of the LORD went on further, and he stood in a narrow place where ***there was*** no way to turn aside ***to the*** right and ***to the*** left. And the

donkey saw the angel of the LORD, and she lay down under Balaam; and the anger of Balaam burned, and he struck the donkey with the staff. And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me! If only there were a sword in my hand, for now I would have killed you." And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden from your existence until this day? Have I indeed been accustomed to do thus to you?" And he said, "No." And the LORD uncovered the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed, and he bowed down on his face. And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Look, I have come out for an adversary, for ***your*** way is reckless before me. And the donkey saw me, and she turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from before me, surely now I would have killed even you, and her I would have kept alive." And Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way to meet me. And now, if ***it is*** evil in your eyes, I will return for myself." And the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men; and only the word which I speak to you, it you shall speak." And Balaam went with the princes of Balak. And Balak heard that Balaam had come, and he went out to meet him to the city of Moab which ***is*** on the border of Arnon, which ***is*** at the end of the territory. And Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not surely send to you to call you? Why did you not come to me? Am I really not able to honor you?" And Balaam said to Balak, "Look, I have come to you. Now, am I at all able to speak anything? The word which God puts in my mouth, it I shall speak." And Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. And Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and he sent ***some*** to Balaam and to the princes who ***were*** with him. And it happened in the morning, and Balak took Balaam, and he brought him up ***to*** Bamoth-baal, and he saw from there the edge of the people.

Chapter 22 Preview

Israel is now camped on the plains of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho. Balak, king of Moab, has seen what happened to Sihon and Og, and he is terrified. He cannot beat Israel with swords, so he tries something else. He sends for Balaam, a famous diviner from far away by the Euphrates River, and offers to pay him well to curse Israel. God tells Balaam not to go, because Israel is blessed. When Balak sends more important men with a bigger offer, Balaam asks God again, and God lets him go, but only to speak what God tells him.

On the road, the angel of the LORD stands in the way with a drawn sword. Balaam cannot see him, but his donkey can. Three times the donkey turns aside, and three times Balaam beats her. Then the LORD opens the donkey's mouth, and she speaks. When God opens Balaam's eyes, he sees the angel and bows down. The man who claimed to see what others could not had been shown up by his donkey. Chapters 22 to 24 make one story, and through it God shows that no one can curse the people He has blessed.

Chapter 22 Study

22:1-4 *And the sons of Israel set out, and they camped in the plains of Moab, across the Jordan **from** Jericho. And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorite. And Moab was very afraid because of the people, for it **was** numerous; and Moab felt dread because of the sons of Israel. And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now the assembly will lick up all that **is** around us, as the ox licks up the green growth of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor **was** king of Moab at that time.*

"The sons of Israel set out, and they camped in the plains of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho" (22:1). This is where Israel will stay for the rest of Numbers and all of Deuteronomy. The promised land is just across the river.

"Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorite" (22:2). Moab had lost land to Sihon, and Israel had beaten Sihon easily. "Moab was very afraid because of the people, for it was numerous" (22:3). Moab had no reason to fear. God had told Israel not to attack Moab, because He had given Moab its land as descendants of Lot (Deuteronomy 2:9). But Balak did not know that, or did not trust it.

Moab spoke to "the elders of Midian" (22:4). The Midianites were a desert people, descendants of Abraham through Keturah (Genesis 25:1-2), and some of them lived near Moab. They joined Moab in this plan. "Now the assembly will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the green growth of the field." That is a farmer's picture of a herd eating a field bare.

22:5-7 *And he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, to Pethor, which **is** by the River, **in** the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Look, a people has come out from Egypt; look, it has covered the eye of the land, and it is dwelling opposite me. And now, please come, curse this people for me, for it **is** mightier than I; perhaps I shall be able **that** we may strike it, and I may drive it out from the land; for I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse is cursed." And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian went, and divinations **were** in their hand; and they came to Balaam, and they spoke to him the words of Balak.*

Balak "sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, to Pethor, which is by the River" (22:5). The River in the Old Testament usually means the Euphrates. Pethor was in northern Mesopotamia, some four hundred miles away. Deuteronomy 23:4 says Balaam came from Pethor of Mesopotamia. A trip each way would take weeks. Balaam's fame had reached far.

Who was Balaam? He was a diviner, a man who sought hidden knowledge through omens and signs (Joshua 13:22). He knew of the LORD and spoke of "the LORD my God" (22:18), but he was not a prophet of Israel. He seems to have been a pagan seer who knew enough about the true God to use His name. In the ancient world people believed a seer's curse could bring real harm. An inscription found at Deir Alla in Jordan, from several centuries later, even mentions a seer named Balaam son of Beor.

"Please come, curse this people for me" (22:6). Balak said, "I know that whom you bless is blessed, and whom you curse is cursed." But God had said to Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you,

and the one who disdains you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3). Balak was about to find out whose word stands.

"The elders of Moab and the elders of Midian went, and divinations were in their hand" (22:7). That means the fee for divining. They came with money.

22:8-14 *And he said to them, "Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you just as the LORD speaks to me." And the princes of Moab stayed with Balaam. And God came to Balaam, and He said, "Who **are** these men with you?" And Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent to me: 'Look, the people that has come out from Egypt, and it has covered the eye of the land; now come, curse it for me; perhaps I shall be able to fight against it, and I will drive it out.'" And God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for it **is** blessed." And Balaam rose in the morning, and he said to the princes of Balak, "Go to your land, for the LORD has refused to permit me to go with you." And the princes of Moab rose, and they went to Balak, and they said, "Balaam has refused to come with us."*

"Lodge here tonight, and I will bring back word to you just as the LORD speaks to me" (22:8). Balaam knew he needed God's permission. But a man who truly feared God would have sent them home at once. He wanted to keep the door open.

"God came to Balaam, and He said, Who are these men with you?" (22:9). God was not asking for information. Like His question to Adam, "Where are you?", it was a question to make Balaam face what he was doing.

God's answer was plain: "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for it is blessed" (22:12). Three things: do not go, do not curse, and the reason why. Israel was blessed. God had already decided.

Balaam told the princes, "the LORD has refused to permit me to go with you" (22:13). Notice what he left out. He did not say Israel was blessed. He made it sound as if he wanted to go but was not allowed. The princes reported, "Balaam has refused to come with us" (22:14), and Balak took that as a bargaining move.

22:15-20 *And Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honored than these. And they came to Balaam, and they said to him, "Thus says Balak the son of Zippor: 'Please do not be held back from coming to me; for I will surely honor you greatly, and all that you say to me I will do; and please come, curse this people for me.'" And Balaam answered, and he said to the servants of Balak, "If Balak gives me the fullness of his house **of** silver and gold, I am not able to pass beyond the mouth of the LORD my God, to do **anything** small or great. And now, please stay here, you also, tonight, and let me know what more the LORD will speak with me." And God came to Balaam **at** night, and He said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; and only the word which I speak to you, it you shall do."*

"Balak again sent princes, more numerous and more honored than these" (22:15). "I will surely honor you greatly, and all that you say to me I will do" (22:17). That is a blank check.

Balaam's answer sounds noble: "If Balak gives me the fullness of his house of silver and gold, I am not able to pass beyond the mouth of the LORD my God" (22:18). But then: "please stay here, you also, tonight, and let me know what more the LORD will speak with me" (22:19). God had already spoken. Why ask again? Because Balaam hoped God would change His mind. When we keep asking God about something He has already made clear, it is usually because we want something else.

"If the men have come to call you, rise, go with them; and only the word which I speak to you, it you shall do" (22:20). God let Balaam go. Sometimes God lets us have what our hearts are set on, so that we learn.

The New Testament names Balaam's real problem. Peter says he "loved the wage of unrighteousness" (2 Peter 2:15). Jude says false teachers "rushed into the error of Balaam for reward" (Jude 1:11). He wanted Balak's money and honor, and he was hoping for a way to get it without openly disobeying God.

22:21-22 *And Balaam rose in the morning, and he saddled his donkey, and he went with the princes of Moab. And the anger of God burned because he was going; and the angel of the LORD stationed himself in the way for an adversary to him. And he **was** riding on his donkey, and his two servants **were** with him.*

"Balaam rose in the morning, and he saddled his donkey, and he went with the princes of Moab" (22:21).

"And the anger of God burned because he was going" (22:22). How could God be angry when He had just said go? This puzzles many readers. The answer is in Balaam's heart. God permitted the trip, but Balaam went with the wrong motive, wanting the reward and perhaps hoping to find a way to curse. The angel will say his way was "reckless" (22:32). God's permission is not the same as God's approval.

"The angel of the LORD stationed himself in the way for an adversary to him." The word adversary is satan in Hebrew, here used in its plain sense, one who opposes. The angel of the LORD is a messenger from God who often speaks as God Himself (Genesis 16:13; Exodus 3:2-6). Many Bible teachers believe the angel of the LORD was the Son of God appearing before He was born in Bethlehem. Here he speaks with authority and later gives Balaam God's words to speak (22:35).

22:23-27 *And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and the donkey turned aside from the way, and she went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey to turn her **to** the way. And the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path of the vineyards, a wall on this **side** and a wall on this **side**. And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, and she pressed herself against the wall, and she pressed the foot of Balaam against the wall; and he struck her again. And the angel of the LORD went on further, and he stood in a narrow place where **there was** no way to turn aside **to the** right and **to the** left. And the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, and she lay down under Balaam; and the anger of Balaam burned, and he struck the donkey with the staff.*

"The donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand" (22:23). The donkey turned into a field. Balaam beat her back to the road.

Next, in "a narrow path of the vineyards, a wall on this side and a wall on this side" (22:24), the donkey pressed against the wall and crushed Balaam's foot (22:25). He beat her again.

Then the angel stood "in a narrow place where there was no way to turn aside" (22:26). The donkey lay down under Balaam. "The anger of Balaam burned, and he struck the donkey with the staff" (22:27).

Each place was tighter than the one before: an open field, a narrow lane, then no way out at all. That is often how God deals with us when we are heading the wrong way. He closes the road a little more each time. Balaam, the famous seer, could not see what his donkey could see. Greed blinds.

22:28-30 *And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" And Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me! If only there were a sword in my hand, for now I would have killed you." And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden from your existence until this day? Have I indeed been accustomed to do thus to you?" And he said, "No."*

"And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" (22:28).

This really happened. The Bible presents it as history, and Peter treats it so: "a mute donkey, having spoken with a man's voice, restrained the madness of the prophet" (2 Peter 2:16). The God who made the donkey and gave man his voice can make a donkey speak. The question is not whether God could do it, but why He did.

The strange thing is that Balaam answered her. He was so angry he did not seem surprised. "Because you have made a fool of me! If only there were a sword in my hand, for now I would have killed you" (22:29). He wanted a sword. The angel standing right in front of him had one.

"Am I not your donkey, on which you have ridden from your existence until this day? Have I indeed been accustomed to do thus to you?" "No" (22:30). The donkey made more sense than the prophet.

22:31-35 *And the LORD uncovered the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed, and he bowed down on his face. And the angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Look, I have come out for an adversary, for **your** way is reckless before me. And the donkey saw me, and she turned aside before me these three times. If she had not turned aside from before me, surely now I would have killed even you, and her I would have kept alive." And Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way to meet me. And now, if **it is** evil in your eyes, I will return for myself." And the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men; and only the word which I speak to you, it you shall speak." And Balaam went with the princes of Balak.*

"The LORD uncovered the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand; and he bowed, and he bowed down on his face" (22:31).

"Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Look, I have come out for an adversary, for your way is reckless before me" (22:32). The donkey had saved Balaam's life. "If she had not turned aside from before me, surely now I would have killed even you, and her I would have kept alive" (22:33).

"I have sinned," Balaam said, "for I did not know" (22:34). Then, "if it is evil in your eyes, I will return." It was a half confession. He blamed his ignorance, not his heart.

"Go with the men; and only the word which I speak to you, it you shall speak" (22:35). God would now use Balaam as a mouthpiece, whether he liked it or not. God can speak truth even through a greedy man, just as He spoke through a donkey. That does not make the man good. It shows that God's word does not depend on the messenger.

22:36-41 *And Balak heard that Balaam had come, and he went out to meet him to the city of Moab which **is** on the border of Arnon, which **is** at the end of the territory. And Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not surely send to you to call you? Why did you not come to me? Am I really not able to honor you?" And Balaam said to Balak, "Look, I have come to you. Now, am I at all able to speak anything? The word which God puts in my mouth, it I shall speak." And Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. And Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and he sent **some** to Balaam and to the princes who **were** with him. And it happened in the morning, and Balak took Balaam, and he brought him up **to** Bamoth-baal, and he saw from there the edge of the people.*

Balak went out to meet Balaam at the border, at the Arnon (22:36). "Did I not surely send to you to call you? Why did you not come to me? Am I really not able to honor you?" (22:37). Balak thought only in terms of money and honor.

Balaam answered, "The word which God puts in my mouth, it I shall speak" (22:38). That was the truth, and Balak did not want to hear it.

Balak "sacrificed cattle and sheep" (22:40), likely to his own gods, and shared the meat with Balaam and the princes. In the morning he took Balaam up "to Bamoth-baal" (22:41), which means the high places of Baal. A high place was a hilltop shrine used for worship, often of false

gods. Baal was the chief god of the Canaanites, the storm god they believed brought rain and crops. From there Balaam could see "the edge of the people," part of Israel's camp spread out below.

Balak thought he had hired a spiritual weapon. He did not understand that the LORD was not a tribal god who could be bought. Can anyone curse those God has blessed? The next two chapters answer: no.

Chapter 22 Summary

Israel camped on the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho. Balak king of Moab, afraid after Israel's victories over the Amorites, joined with the elders of Midian and sent messengers with payment to Balaam son of Beor at Pethor by the Euphrates, asking him to curse Israel. God told Balaam not to go, because the people were blessed. When Balak sent more honored princes and promised great honor, Balaam asked God again, and God let him go on the condition that he speak only God's word. God was angry because Balaam went, and the angel of the LORD stood in the road with a drawn sword. The donkey saw him and turned aside three times, and Balaam beat her each time. The LORD opened the donkey's mouth to rebuke Balaam, and then opened Balaam's eyes to see the angel, who told him his way was reckless. Balaam admitted he had sinned and was told to go on and speak only God's word. Balak met him, offered sacrifices, and took him up to Bamoth-baal to look down on Israel.

People and Places

- Plains of Moab: the lowland east of the Jordan, across from Jericho, Israel's last camp before entering Canaan.
- Balak son of Zippor: king of Moab.
- Moab: the nation descended from Lot, living east of the Dead Sea.
- Midian: a desert people descended from Abraham through Keturah.
- Balaam son of Beor: a famous diviner from Pethor in Mesopotamia.
- The angel of the LORD: a messenger from God who speaks as God; many believe he was the Son of God before His birth.
- Bamoth-baal: the high places of Baal, a hilltop shrine in Moab.
- Baal: the chief god of the Canaanites, worshiped as the giver of rain and crops.

Chapter 22 Study Questions

1. Why was Balak afraid, and what did he decide to do? (22:2-6)

2. What three things did God tell Balaam the first time? (22:12)

3. What did Balaam leave out when he sent the first princes home? (22:13)

4. Why did Balaam ask God a second time, and what does the New Testament say about his motives? (22:19; 2 Peter 2:15)

5. Why was God angry when Balaam went? (22:22, 32)

6. How did the places where the angel stood get tighter each time? (22:23-27)

7. What did the donkey say, and what did the angel say about her? (22:28-33)

8. Balaam kept asking God about something God had already answered. Is there something in your life God has made clear that you keep hoping He will change?

9. God closed Balaam's road a little at a time. Has God ever used closed doors to turn you from a wrong path?

10. Balaam wanted the reward. How can the love of money or honor blind us to what God is doing? (1 Timothy 6:10)

Chapter 23: Balaam's First Two Oracles

Scripture

23:1-12 And Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." And Balak did just as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered up a bull and a ram on ***each*** altar. And Balaam said to Balak, "Station yourself beside your burnt offering, and let me go; perhaps the LORD will come to meet me; and the word of whatever He shows me, I will tell you." And he went ***to*** a bare height. And God met Balaam, and he said to Him, "The seven altars I have arranged, and I have offered up a bull and a ram on ***each*** altar." And the LORD put a word in the mouth of Balaam, and He said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak." And he returned to him, and look, he ***was*** standing beside his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab. And he took up his oracle, and he said, "From Aram Balak has led me, the king of Moab from the mountains of the east: 'Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!' How shall I curse ***whom*** God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce ***whom*** the LORD has not denounced? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I observe him. Look, a people ***that*** dwells alone, and among the nations it does not reckon itself. Who has counted the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let my soul die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!" And Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? To curse my enemies I took you, and look, you have surely blessed ***them***!" And he answered, and he said, "Must I not take care to speak that which the LORD puts in my mouth?"

23:13-30 And Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place from where you may see it; only its edge you shall see, and all of it you shall not see; and curse it for me from there." And he took him ***to*** the field of Zophim, to the top of the Pisgah, and he built seven altars, and he offered up a bull and a ram on ***each*** altar. And he said to Balak, "Station yourself here beside your burnt offering, and I, I will meet ***Him*** there." And the LORD met Balaam, and He put a word in his mouth, and He said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak." And he came to him, and look, he ***was*** standing beside his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab ***were*** with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the LORD spoken?" And he took up his oracle, and he said, "Rise, Balak, and hear; give ear to me, son of Zippor! God ***is*** not a man, that He should lie, and a son of mankind, that He should relent. Has He said, and will He not do ***it***? And has He spoken, and will He not establish it? Look, I have received ***a command*** to bless; and He has blessed, and I will not turn it back. He has not looked on evil in Jacob, and He has not seen trouble in Israel; the LORD his God ***is*** with him, and the shout of a king ***is*** in him. God ***is*** bringing them out from Egypt; like the horns of a wild ox ***are*** to him. For ***there is*** no enchantment in Jacob, and no divination in Israel; at ***this*** time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'What God has done!' Look, a people rises like a lioness, and like a lion it lifts itself up; it shall not lie down until it devours prey and drinks the blood of the slain." And Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse it at all, nor bless it at all!" And Balaam answered, and he said to Balak, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'All that the LORD speaks, it I will do'?" And Balak said to Balaam, "Please come; I will take you to another place; perhaps it will be right in the eyes of God, and you will curse it for me from there." And Balak took Balaam ***to*** the top of the Peor, which looks down over the face of the wasteland. And Balaam said to Balak, "Build for

me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." And Balak did just as Balaam had said, and he offered up a bull and a ram on ***each*** altar.

Chapter 23 Preview

Balak has paid for a curse, and he is about to get a blessing. Twice he builds seven altars and offers a bull and a ram on each one. Twice Balaam goes off alone to meet God, and twice the LORD puts a word in his mouth. The first oracle says Balaam cannot curse whom God has not cursed, and that Israel is a people set apart, as countless as dust. The second says God is not a man that He should lie, that He has commanded a blessing and Balaam cannot reverse it, and that Israel rises like a lion.

An oracle is a solemn message from God, often in poetry. These oracles are poems. Hebrew poetry rhymes ideas instead of sounds. A line says something, and the next line says it again in other words or adds to it. This is called parallelism. "How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?" Watch for that pattern as you read. And watch Balak grow more and more frustrated. He keeps changing locations, as if a new view will change God's mind.

Chapter 23 Study

23:1-6 *And Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." And Balak did just as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered up a bull and a ram on* ***each*** *altar. And Balaam said to Balak, "Station yourself beside your burnt offering, and let me go; perhaps the LORD will come to meet me; and the word of whatever He shows me, I will tell you." And he went* ***to*** *a bare height. And God met Balaam, and he said to Him, "The seven altars I have arranged, and I have offered up a bull and a ram on* ***each*** *altar." And the LORD put a word in the mouth of Balaam, and He said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak." And he returned to him, and look, he* ***was*** *standing beside his burnt offering, he and all the princes of Moab.*

"Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams" (23:1). Seven was a number of completeness. Balaam was following the customs of pagan divination, trying to win a god's favor by a big offering. "Balak and Balaam offered up a bull and a ram on each altar" (23:2).

"Station yourself beside your burnt offering, and let me go; perhaps the LORD will come to meet me" (23:3). Balaam went off "to a bare height," likely to look for omens (24:1 says that was his habit).

"God met Balaam" (23:4), and Balaam reminded God of the altars, as if God owed him something. God did not answer that. "The LORD put a word in the mouth of Balaam, and He said, Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak" (23:5). Balaam would say exactly what God gave him.

You cannot bribe God. He does not answer to the size of our gifts. Balak's fourteen animals bought him nothing.

23:7-10 *And he took up his oracle, and he said, "From Aram Balak has led me, the king of Moab from the mountains of the east: 'Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!' How shall I curse* ***whom*** *God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce* ***whom*** *the LORD has not denounced? For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I observe him. Look, a people* ***that*** *dwells alone, and among the nations it does not reckon itself. Who has counted the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let my soul die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!"*

"From Aram Balak has led me, the king of Moab from the mountains of the east" (23:7). Aram is the region of Syria and northern Mesopotamia. Balaam begins by saying why he came: "Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!"

"How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?" (23:8). That is the heart of the whole story. No one can curse those God has blessed.

"For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I observe him. Look, a people that dwells alone, and among the nations it does not reckon itself" (23:9). Israel was set apart. They were not just another nation. God had chosen them for Himself (Deuteronomy 7:6). That has been true all through history. Israel has been scattered and persecuted, and yet the Jewish people are still a people, set apart, because God keeps His word.

"Who has counted the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel?" (23:10). God had promised Abraham that his descendants would be like the dust of the earth (Genesis 13:16; 28:14). Balaam, looking down at the huge camp, saw that promise kept. Israel camped in four groups around the tabernacle (chapter 2), so even one quarter of the camp was beyond counting.

"Let my soul die the death of the upright, and let my end be like his!" Balaam wanted to die like the righteous. But he did not want to live like them. He died fighting against Israel, among the Midianites (31:8). Wishing for a good end is not the same as walking with God. Have you made that choice, or only wished for it?

23:11-12 *And Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? To curse my enemies I took you, and look, you have surely blessed* ***them****!" And he answered, and he said, "Must I not take care to speak that which the LORD puts in my mouth?"*

"What have you done to me? To curse my enemies I took you, and look, you have surely blessed them!" (23:11). Balak was furious.

"Must I not take care to speak that which the LORD puts in my mouth?" (23:12). Balaam had no choice. When God decides to bless, no amount of money can buy a curse.

23:13-17 *And Balak said to him, "Please come with me to another place from where you may see it; only its edge you shall see, and all of it you shall not see; and curse it for me from there." And he took him **to** the field of Zophim, to the top of the Pisgah, and he built seven altars, and he offered up a bull and a ram on **each** altar. And he said to Balak, "Station yourself here beside your burnt offering, and I, I will meet **Him** there." And the LORD met Balaam, and He put a word in his mouth, and He said, "Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak." And he came to him, and look, he **was** standing beside his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab **were** with him. And Balak said to him, "What has the LORD spoken?"*

Balak thought maybe the view was the problem. "Please come with me to another place from where you may see it; only its edge you shall see, and all of it you shall not see; and curse it for me from there" (23:13). Perhaps a smaller view of Israel would make them seem less blessed.

He took him "to the field of Zophim, to the top of the Pisgah" (23:14). Zophim means watchers, a lookout point. Pisgah is where Moses would later look over the promised land before he died (Deuteronomy 34:1). Seven more altars, seven more bulls, seven more rams.

"The LORD met Balaam, and He put a word in his mouth" (23:16). Balak, standing by his offering, asked, "What has the LORD spoken?" (23:17). Even Balak knew by now whose word mattered.

23:18-20 *And he took up his oracle, and he said, "Rise, Balak, and hear; give ear to me, son of Zippor! God **is** not a man, that He should lie, and a son of mankind, that He should relent. Has He said, and will He not do **it**? And has He spoken, and will He not establish it? Look, I have received **a command** to bless; and He has blessed, and I will not turn it back.*

"Rise, Balak, and hear; give ear to me, son of Zippor!" (23:18).

"God is not a man, that He should lie, and a son of mankind, that He should relent. Has He said, and will He not do it? And has He spoken, and will He not establish it?" (23:19). This is the key verse of Numbers. People lie. People change their minds. Balak hoped that, like a man, God could be talked into changing His plan. He cannot. What God has said, He will do.

Does that mean God never relents? Scripture sometimes says God relented from a judgment He had announced, as with Nineveh (Jonah 3:10). Those warnings carried a condition: if the people repented, God would show mercy. That is part of His unchanging character. What God never does is break His promise or change His purpose. Hebrews 6:17-18 says it is impossible for God to lie, and that His promise and oath give us strong encouragement.

"Look, I have received a command to bless; and He has blessed, and I will not turn it back" (23:20). Balaam could not undo what God had done. That is good news for every believer. If God has blessed you in Christ (Ephesians 1:3), no one can reverse it. "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

23:21-24 *He has not looked on evil in Jacob, and He has not seen trouble in Israel; the LORD his God **is** with him, and the shout of a king **is** in him. God **is** bringing them out from Egypt; like the horns of a wild ox **are** to him. For **there is** no enchantment in Jacob, and no divination in Israel; at **this** time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'What God has done!' Look, a people rises like a lioness, and like a lion it lifts itself up; it shall not lie down until it devours prey and drinks the blood of the slain."*

"He has not looked on evil in Jacob, and He has not seen trouble in Israel" (23:21). How can that be? We have read eight chapters of Israel's sin. This is not saying Israel was sinless. It means God did not see in Israel a reason to curse them. They were His covenant people, and their sins were dealt with by His provision of sacrifice and His mercy. In the same way, God sees believers in Christ, clothed in His righteousness. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1). God is not blind to our sin. He disciplines His children. But He does not curse them.

"The LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is in him." The shout of a king is the cheer a people gives its king. The LORD Himself was Israel's King.

"God is bringing them out from Egypt; like the horns of a wild ox are to him" (23:22). The wild ox was one of the strongest animals known. God's strength was with Israel.

"There is no enchantment in Jacob, and no divination in Israel" (23:23). Enchantment and divination were Balaam's trade. They would not work against Israel. The words can also mean that Israel did not use such things, because God spoke to them directly. "At this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, 'What God has done!'" The nations would look at Israel and give God the credit.

"Look, a people rises like a lioness, and like a lion it lifts itself up" (23:24). Moab feared Israel would lick up the land like an ox (22:4). Balaam said they were a lion. That was the opposite of what Balak paid for.

23:25-30 *And Balak said to Balaam, "Neither curse it at all, nor bless it at all!" And Balaam answered, and he said to Balak, "Did I not speak to you, saying, 'All that the LORD speaks, it I will do'?" And Balak said to Balaam, "Please come; I will take you to another place; perhaps it will be right in the eyes of God, and you will curse it for me from there." And Balak took Balaam **to** the top of the Peor, which looks down over the face of the wasteland. And Balaam said to Balak, "Build for me here seven altars, and prepare for me here seven bulls and seven rams." And Balak did just as Balaam had said, and he offered up a bull and a ram on **each** altar.*

"Neither curse it at all, nor bless it at all!" (23:25). Balak was saying, if you cannot curse them, at least stop blessing them!

"Did I not speak to you, saying, 'All that the LORD speaks, it I will do'?" (23:26).

Balak tried once more. "Please come; I will take you to another place; perhaps it will be right in the eyes of God, and you will curse it for me from there" (23:27). He still thought God could be moved by a better view. He took Balaam "to the top of the Peor, which looks down over the face of

the wasteland" (23:28). Peor was a mountain with a shrine to the god Baal of Peor. Remember that name. In chapter 25 Israel will sin at that very place.

"Build for me here seven altars" (23:29). And Balak did it all again (23:30). Some people keep looking for a place where God will tell them what they want to hear. They change churches, teachers, or Bible verses until they find it. But God's word does not change with the view.

Chapter 23 Summary

Balaam had Balak build seven altars and offer a bull and a ram on each, then went off alone, and the LORD put a word in his mouth. In his first oracle Balaam said he could not curse those God had not cursed, that Israel was a people dwelling alone, as countless as dust, and he wished to die the death of the upright. Balak complained that Balaam had blessed his enemies. Balak took him to the field of Zophim on Pisgah, built seven more altars, and the LORD gave Balaam a second word: God is not a man that He should lie or change His mind; He had commanded a blessing that could not be reversed; He saw no cause to curse Israel; the LORD was with them as King; no divination would work against them; and they would rise like a lion. Balak told Balaam neither to curse nor bless, then took him to the top of Peor and built seven altars a third time.

Chapter 23 Study Questions

1. What did Balaam have Balak build, and why do you think he did that? (23:1-2)

2. Where did Balaam's words come from? (23:5, 16)

3. What did Balaam say about cursing Israel in his first oracle? (23:8)

4. What does it mean that Israel is "a people that dwells alone"? (23:9; Deuteronomy 7:6)

5. Why did Balak keep moving Balaam to new places? (23:13, 27)

6. What does verse 19 say about God, and how is God different from people?

7. How can God say He has not looked on evil in Jacob? (23:21; Romans 8:1)

8. Balaam wanted to die the death of the upright but did not want to live like them. What is the difference between wishing for heaven and following Jesus?

9. Romans 11:29 says God's gifts and calling are irrevocable. How does knowing no one can reverse God's blessing change how you face fear or attack?

10. Have you ever kept looking for someone to tell you what you wanted to hear instead of what God said? What did you learn?

Chapter 24: Balaam's Last Oracles and the Star from Jacob

Scripture

24:1-14 And Balaam saw that it was good in the eyes of the LORD to bless Israel, and he did not go, as time after time, to meet omens; and he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes, and the Spirit of God came on him. And he lifted up his oracle and said, "The utterance of Balaam son of Beor, and the utterance of the man whose eye ***is*** opened, the utterance of one who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, and uncovered of eyes: How good are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! Like wadis they are stretched out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes ***that*** the LORD has planted, like cedars beside waters. Water will flow from his buckets, and his seed ***will be*** in many waters; and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God ***is*** bringing him out from Egypt; like the horns of a wild ox ***are*** to him; he will eat up nations, his adversaries, and their bones he will crush, and his arrows he will shatter. He crouched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will rouse him? Those who bless you ***are*** blessed, and those who curse you ***are*** cursed." And the anger of Balak burned against Balaam, and he clapped his hands; and Balak said to Balaam, "To curse my enemies I called you, and look, you have surely blessed ***them*** these three times. And now, flee for yourself to your place. I said, 'I will surely honor you,' and look, the LORD has withheld you from honor." And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, 'If Balak gives to me the fullness of his house ***of*** silver and gold, I will not be able to pass beyond the mouth of the LORD, to do good or bad from my ***own*** heart; what the LORD speaks, that I will speak'? And now, look, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you ***of*** what this people will do to your people at the end of the days."

24:15-25 And he lifted up his oracle and said, "The utterance of Balaam son of Beor, and the utterance of the man whose eye ***is*** opened, the utterance of one who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High; he sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, and uncovered of eyes: I see him, and not now; I observe him, and not near. A star will march forth from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel, and it will shatter the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Seth. And Edom will be a possession, and Seir, his enemies, will be a possession; and Israel ***is*** doing valiantly. And one from Jacob will have dominion, and he will destroy the survivor from ***the*** city." And he saw Amalek, and he lifted up his oracle and said, "The first of the nations ***was*** Amalek, and his end ***is*** to destruction." And he saw the Kenite, and he lifted up his oracle and said, "Enduring ***is*** your dwelling, and set in the rock ***is*** your nest. Yet Kain shall be for burning. Until when will Assyria take you captive?" And he lifted up his oracle and said, "Woe! Who will live when God sets it? And ships ***will come*** from the side of Kittim, and they will afflict Assyria, and they will afflict Eber; and he also ***is*** to destruction." And Balaam arose and went and returned to his place; and Balak also went on his way.

Chapter 24 Preview

On the top of Peor, Balaam stops looking for omens. He looks out over Israel's camp, tribe by tribe, and the Spirit of God comes on him. His third oracle is the richest blessing yet: Israel's tents are like gardens by a river, its king will be exalted, and "those who bless you are blessed, and those

who curse you are cursed." Balak claps his hands in anger and tells Balaam to go home without his reward.

Before he leaves, Balaam gives one more oracle, without being asked, about what Israel will do to Moab "at the end of the days." He sees a figure far off in the future: "A star will march forth from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel." That ruler will crush Moab and Edom and have dominion. Then come short words about Amalek, the Kenites, Assyria, and ships from Kittim. Many Bible teachers, Jewish and Christian, have read the star and scepter as a prophecy of the Messiah, the promised King. Balak hired Balaam to curse Israel, and God used him to announce Israel's King.

Chapter 24 Study

24:1-2 *And Balaam saw that it was good in the eyes of the LORD to bless Israel, and he did not go, as time after time, to meet omens; and he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes, and the Spirit of God came on him.*

"Balaam saw that it was good in the eyes of the LORD to bless Israel, and he did not go, as time after time, to meet omens" (24:1). Omens were signs a diviner looked for in nature, the flight of birds or the shape of an animal's liver, to learn the will of the gods. Balaam had been doing that. Now he gave it up. God's will was plain.

"He set his face toward the wilderness." He looked down at the camp. "Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel dwelling according to its tribes" (24:2). Each tribe was camped in its place around the tabernacle, just as God ordered in chapter 2.

"And the Spirit of God came on him." This is striking. The Spirit came on a pagan diviner. The Spirit of God can use anyone to speak His word. That does not mean Balaam was saved or godly. King Saul also prophesied by the Spirit (1 Samuel 19:23-24), and Caiaphas the high priest prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation (John 11:49-52). God's gift of a message is not the same as a changed heart. Jesus warned that some who prophesied in His name He never knew (Matthew 7:22-23).

24:3-9 *And he lifted up his oracle and said, "The utterance of Balaam son of Beor, and the utterance of the man whose eye **is** opened, the utterance of one who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, and uncovered of eyes: How good are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel! Like wadis they are stretched out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes **that** the LORD has planted, like cedars beside waters. Water will flow from his buckets, and his seed **will be** in many waters; and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. God **is** bringing him out from Egypt; like the horns of a wild ox **are** to him; he will eat up nations, his adversaries, and their bones he will crush, and his arrows he will shatter. He crouched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will rouse him? Those who bless you **are** blessed, and those who curse you **are** cursed."*

"The utterance of Balaam son of Beor, and the utterance of the man whose eye is opened" (24:3). He was "one who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, and

uncovered of eyes" (24:4). The Almighty is Shaddai, the name by which God made Himself known to Abraham (Genesis 17:1). Falling down may mean Balaam fell into a trance, or fell on his face as he did before the angel.

"How good are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel!" (24:5). Jewish worshipers still use this verse when they enter the synagogue. Balaam saw a camp of tents in the desert and called it beautiful.

"Like wadis they are stretched out, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that the LORD has planted, like cedars beside waters" (24:6). The pictures are all of water and growth. A people who had complained about water for forty years were described as a garden by a river. That is how God saw them. Psalm 1:3 uses the same picture for the righteous man, like a tree planted by streams of water.

"Water will flow from his buckets, and his seed will be in many waters" (24:7). Plenty of water meant plenty of life and descendants.

"His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted." Israel had no king yet. Agag may have been a royal title among the Amalekites, as Pharaoh was in Egypt. About four hundred years later, King Saul defeated Amalek and its king named Agag (1 Samuel 15:8). God was already pointing toward Israel's kingdom.

"He will eat up nations, his adversaries, and their bones he will crush" (24:8). The God who brought Israel out of Egypt would give them victory over their enemies.

"He crouched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lioness; who will rouse him?" (24:9). This echoes Jacob's blessing on Judah (Genesis 49:9). Then the climax: "Those who bless you are blessed, and those who curse you are cursed." These are almost the words God spoke to Abraham: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who disdains you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3). Balak had said Balaam's curse worked (22:6). God said His own word works. Balak had put himself on the wrong side of that promise.

God has not cancelled His promises to Abraham's descendants (Romans 11:28-29). Nations and people who have tried to destroy the Jewish people have found that out.

24:10-14 *And the anger of Balak burned against Balaam, and he clapped his hands; and Balak said to Balaam, "To curse my enemies I called you, and look, you have surely blessed **them** these three times. And now, flee for yourself to your place. I said, 'I will surely honor you,' and look, the LORD has withheld you from honor." And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not also speak to your messengers whom you sent to me, saying, 'If Balak gives to me the fullness of his house **of** silver and gold, I will not be able to pass beyond the mouth of the LORD, to do good or bad from my **own** heart; what the LORD speaks, that I will speak'? And now, look, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you **of** what this people will do to your people at the end of the days."*

"The anger of Balak burned against Balaam, and he clapped his hands" (24:10), a gesture of scorn. "To curse my enemies I called you, and look, you have surely blessed them these three times."

"Flee for yourself to your place. I said, 'I will surely honor you,' and look, the LORD has withheld you from honor" (24:11). Balak blamed the LORD for keeping Balaam from his pay. He was right, though not in the way he meant.

Balaam reminded him of what he had said from the start: "If Balak gives to me the fullness of his house of silver and gold, I will not be able to pass beyond the mouth of the LORD" (24:13).

"Come, I will advise you of what this people will do to your people at the end of the days" (24:14). The end of the days is a phrase for the future, sometimes far future. Jacob used it in his blessing of his sons (Genesis 49:1), and the prophets use it for the days of the Messiah (Isaiah 2:2). Balaam was about to look far ahead.

24:15-17 *And he lifted up his oracle and said, "The utterance of Balaam son of Beor, and the utterance of the man whose eye **is** opened, the utterance of one who hears the words of God, and knows the knowledge of the Most High; he sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, and uncovered of eyes: I see him, and not now; I observe him, and not near. A star will march forth from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel, and it will shatter the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Seth.*

Balaam opens the fourth oracle as he did the third. This time he adds that he "knows the knowledge of the Most High" (24:16). The Most High is God over all nations, the name Melchizedek used (Genesis 14:19).

"I see him, and not now; I observe him, and not near" (24:17). Balaam is looking at a person far in the future, not in his own day.

"A star will march forth from Jacob, and a scepter will arise from Israel." A star in the ancient world was a picture of a king. A scepter is a royal staff, the sign of a ruler. Jacob had said "The scepter will not depart from Judah" (Genesis 49:10). Here the King comes out of Israel.

"It will shatter the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Seth." Moab was Balak's own nation. The sons of Seth may mean the people around Moab, or a tribe by that name, or since Seth was Adam's son, all mankind. The point is that this King will rule over Israel's enemies.

Who is the star? There was a first fulfillment in David. He came from Jacob, he ruled with a scepter, and he defeated Moab and made Edom his servants (2 Samuel 8:2, 14). But David was only a picture of the greater King to come from his line.

Many Bible teachers, Jewish and Christian, have read this verse as a prophecy of the Messiah. Ancient Jewish interpreters took it that way. In A.D. 132, a Jewish rebel leader was even called Bar Kokhba, son of the star, because people hoped he was the one. He was not. Many Christians link this prophecy with the star the wise men followed, which led them to the One "born King of the Jews" (Matthew 2:2). The New Testament does not quote Numbers 24:17 directly, but Jesus calls Himself "the root and the offspring of David, the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16), and He is the King who holds the rod of iron (Revelation 19:15).

I believe this points to Jesus Christ, the Son of David. He came the first time as a humble servant to die for our sins. He will come again visibly at the end of the Tribulation to defeat His enemies and rule as King over all the earth for a thousand years (Revelation 19:11-16; 20:4-6). The full crushing of Israel's enemies that Balaam saw far off waits for that day. Some teachers read these promises as fulfilled spiritually in Christ's reign now through the church. I believe Scripture points to a real reign of Christ on the earth, when God keeps His promises to Israel.

24:18-19 *And Edom will be a possession, and Seir, his enemies, will be a possession; and Israel **is** doing valiantly. And one from Jacob will have dominion, and he will destroy the survivor from **the** city."*

"Edom will be a possession, and Seir, his enemies, will be a possession" (24:18). Seir was the mountain country of Edom. The nation that refused Israel passage (20:14-21) would one day be ruled by Israel's King. David conquered Edom (2 Samuel 8:14), and the prophets say Edom will be judged again in the last days (Isaiah 63:1-6; Obadiah 1:15-21).

"Israel is doing valiantly." "And one from Jacob will have dominion" (24:19). The words point to one ruler from Jacob's line whose rule nothing can stand against.

24:20-25 *And he saw Amalek, and he lifted up his oracle and said, "The first of the nations **was** Amalek, and his end **is** to destruction." And he saw the Kenite, and he lifted up his oracle and said, "Enduring **is** your dwelling, and set in the rock **is** your nest. Yet Kain shall be for burning. Until when will Assyria take you captive?" And he lifted up his oracle and said, "Woe! Who will live when God sets it? And ships **will come** from the side of Kittim, and they will afflict Assyria, and they will afflict Eber; and he also **is** to destruction." And Balaam arose and went and returned to his place; and Balak also went on his way.*

Balaam then looked at other nations. "The first of the nations was Amalek, and his end is to destruction" (24:20). Amalek was the first nation to attack Israel after the exodus (Exodus 17:8-16). Amalek's end came in the days of Saul and David and finally Hezekiah (1 Samuel 15; 30; 1 Chronicles 4:43).

The Kenites lived in the rocky heights: "set in the rock is your nest" (24:21). Kenite sounds like the Hebrew word for nest. Yet they would not be safe forever: "Until when will Assyria take you captive?" (24:22). Assyria, the great empire of the north, would carry many peoples away centuries later, including the northern tribes of Israel in 722 B.C.

"Woe! Who will live when God sets it?" (24:23). That is, who can survive when God does these things?

"Ships will come from the side of Kittim, and they will afflict Assyria, and they will afflict Eber; and he also is to destruction" (24:24). Kittim first meant Cyprus and then the lands of the west across the sea. Daniel 11:30 speaks of ships from the same place (the SLB has "ships of Cyprus" there), sent by a power from the west, which many identify as Rome. Eber was an ancestor of Abraham, and his name may stand for the peoples beyond the river. Even the powers that afflict

Assyria would themselves come to destruction. Every empire rises and falls. Only God's kingdom lasts forever (Daniel 2:44).

"Balaam arose and went and returned to his place; and Balak also went on his way" (24:25). It sounds like the end of the story, but it was not. In chapter 25 we will see what Balaam did next. Numbers 31:16 tells us that Balaam advised Moab and Midian how to bring Israel down another way, by leading them into sin. Balaam could not curse Israel, so he taught Balak to tempt them (Revelation 2:14). And he died among the Midianites (31:8).

Chapter 24 Summary

Seeing that the LORD wanted to bless Israel, Balaam stopped seeking omens. He looked out over Israel camped by tribes, and the Spirit of God came on him. His third oracle praised Israel's tents as gardens by a river, promised a king higher than Agag and victory over enemies, and ended with the words that those who bless Israel are blessed and those who curse Israel are cursed. Balak angrily sent Balaam home without honor. Before leaving, Balaam gave a fourth oracle about the end of the days: a star would come from Jacob and a scepter rise from Israel to crush Moab and possess Edom, and one from Jacob would rule. He added words about Amalek's destruction, the Kenites being taken by Assyria, and ships from Kittim afflicting Assyria and Eber. Then Balaam and Balak went their ways.

Chapter 24 Study Questions

1. What did Balaam stop doing in this chapter, and why? (24:1)

2. What happened when Balaam looked at Israel's camp? (24:2)

3. What pictures does Balaam use to describe Israel in his third oracle? (24:5-7)

4. How does verse 9 echo God's promise to Abraham? (24:9; Genesis 12:3)

5. What did Balak say about the LORD and Balaam's honor? (24:11)

6. Whom did Balaam see far off, "not now" and "not near," and what would He do? (24:17)

7. How was this prophecy first fulfilled in David, and how does it point beyond David? (2 Samuel 8:2, 14; Revelation 22:16)

8. The Spirit came on Balaam, but his heart was not changed. Why is a spiritual gift or experience not the same as knowing Christ? (Matthew 7:22-23)

9. God described a grumbling people as gardens by a river. How does it encourage you that God sees you in Christ, not only in your failures?

10. Jesus is called "the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22:16). What does it mean to you that He is coming back as King?

Chapter 25: Sin at Peor and the Zeal of Phinehas

Scripture

25:1-18 And Israel dwelt in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab. And they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined itself to Baal-peor, and the anger of the LORD burned against Israel. And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the heads of the people and impale them to the LORD before the sun, so that the burning of the anger of the LORD may turn back from Israel." And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Kill, each man, his men who have joined themselves to Baal-peor." And look, a man from the sons of Israel came and brought near to his brothers the Midianite ***woman***, before the eyes of Moses and before the eyes of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and they ***were*** weeping ***at*** the entrance of the tent of meeting. And Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw ***it***, and he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand. And he went after the man of Israel into the chamber, and he pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman, into her belly. And the plague was restrained from the sons of Israel. And those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My rage from the sons of Israel, in his being zealous ***with*** My zeal in their midst, and I did not make an end of the sons of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, 'Look, I am giving to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and for his seed after him a covenant of priesthood forever, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.'" And the name of the man of Israel who was struck down, who was struck down with the Midianite ***woman***, ***was*** Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's house of the Simeonites. And the name of the woman who was struck down, the Midianite ***woman***, ***was*** Cozbi the daughter of Zur; he ***was*** head of the peoples of a father's house in Midian. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Be hostile to the Midianites, and you shall strike them down; for they ***are*** hostile to you with their deceptions with which they have deceived you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was struck down on the day of the plague on account of the matter of Peor."

Chapter 25 Preview

Balaam could not curse Israel. But what no curse could do, sin did. While Israel was camped at Shittim, the men began to commit sexual sin with the women of Moab. The women invited them to the sacrifices of their gods, and the men ate and bowed down. Israel joined itself to Baal of Peor, the very god of the mountain where Balaam had just blessed them. The LORD's anger burned, and a plague broke out.

Then an Israelite leader brought a Midianite woman into his tent in full view of Moses and the people, while they were weeping at the tabernacle. Phinehas, Aaron's grandson, took a spear and killed them both, and the plague stopped after 24,000 had died. God made with Phinehas a covenant of peace, a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for God. Numbers 31:16 tells us who was behind it all: Balaam. This is a hard chapter. It shows how seriously God takes idolatry

and sexual sin among His people, and it warns us that the enemy who cannot curse us may try to lead us astray instead.

Chapter 25 Study

25:1-3 *And Israel dwelt in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab. And they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined itself to Baal-peor, and the anger of the LORD burned against Israel.*

"Israel dwelt in Shittim, and the people began to commit harlotry with the daughters of Moab" (25:1). Shittim means acacia trees. It was the last camp before the Jordan crossing (Joshua 2:1; 3:1). Israel was within sight of the promised land.

"They invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods" (25:2). The two sins went together. Sexual sin led to idol feasts, and idol feasts led to worship of false gods. The Bible often links the worship of false gods with sexual sin (Hosea 4:13-14).

"Israel joined itself to Baal-peor" (25:3). Baal means lord or master, and it was the name of the Canaanite storm god, worshiped for rain and crops. Baal of Peor was Baal as he was worshiped at Mount Peor. To be joined means to be yoked, bound together. Israel, who was bound to the LORD in covenant, bound itself to another god. That is why the Bible calls it harlotry. It was unfaithfulness to the God who was like a husband to them.

"And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel."

Where did this come from? Numbers 31:16 says the Midianite women did this "by the word of Balaam." Revelation 2:14 says Balaam "taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality." Balaam knew he could not curse Israel. So he told Balak to get Israel to bring God's judgment on themselves. It was a devilish plan, and for a while it worked.

The enemy of our souls works the same way. He cannot undo God's blessing on His people. But he can tempt us into sin that brings discipline and pain.

25:4-5 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the heads of the people and impale them to the LORD before the sun, so that the burning of the anger of the LORD may turn back from Israel." And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Kill, each man, his men who have joined themselves to Baal-peor."*

"Take all the heads of the people and impale them to the LORD before the sun, so that the burning of the anger of the LORD may turn back from Israel" (25:4). The heads of the people are the leaders who had taken part in the sin. Verse 5 makes clear that it was those who had "joined themselves to Baal-peor." To impale means to put to death and publicly display the bodies in the daylight, "before the sun," as a warning to all. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 says a body hung on a tree was under God's curse and had to be buried before night.

Moses told the judges of Israel, "Kill, each man, his men who have joined themselves to Baal-peor" (25:5). Each judge was responsible for those under him.

This is very hard to read. Why was God so severe? Israel was about to enter a land full of Baal worship. If they began their life in the land by bowing to Baal, the whole nation would be lost. And in fact, Baal worship was the sin that would later bring the northern kingdom to ruin. The leaders had led their people into idolatry, so they were judged first. This was God's direct command to Israel under the covenant, for a sin that threatened the life of the nation. It is never permission for anyone to take a life in God's name today.

Paul adds that Christ "redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us" (Galatians 3:13), quoting Deuteronomy 21:23. The death these men deserved for idolatry, Jesus took for every sinner who trusts Him. He was hung on a tree for us.

25:6-9 *And look, a man from the sons of Israel came and brought near to his brothers the Midianite **woman**, before the eyes of Moses and before the eyes of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and they **were** weeping **at** the entrance of the tent of meeting. And Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw **it**, and he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand. And he went after the man of Israel into the chamber, and he pierced both of them, the man of Israel and the woman, into her belly. And the plague was restrained from the sons of Israel. And those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.*

"And look, a man from the sons of Israel came and brought near to his brothers the Midianite woman, before the eyes of Moses and before the eyes of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and they were weeping at the entrance of the tent of meeting" (25:6).

Picture it. The plague was raging. The people were weeping and praying at the tabernacle. And this man walked past them all with a Midianite woman and took her into his tent. It was open, defiant sin, done with a raised hand (15:30), in front of God's house.

"Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, and he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand" (25:7). He went into the chamber and "pierced both of them" (25:8). "And the plague was restrained from the sons of Israel."

"Those who died by the plague were twenty-four thousand" (25:9). Paul refers to this in 1 Corinthians 10:8: "Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them committed sexual immorality, and in one day twenty-three thousand fell." Why the difference? The common explanation is that Paul says "in one day," and Numbers gives the total, including those who died on other days and the leaders who were executed. Others suggest both are round numbers. Either way, Paul's lesson is the same.

Was Phinehas acting as a vigilante? No. Moses had just ordered the judges to put to death those who joined Baal of Peor (25:5). Phinehas was a priest, the son of the high priest, and he acted in the open, in line with God's command, at a moment of national crisis. God Himself approved what he did (25:11). This was not a private man taking the law into his own hands, and it is no pattern

for anyone today. In the church the answer to sin is confession, discipline, and restoration (Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1), never violence.

25:10-13 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My rage from the sons of Israel, in his being zealous **with** My zeal in their midst, and I did not make an end of the sons of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, 'Look, I am giving to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be for him and for his seed after him a covenant of priesthood forever, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.'"*

"Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My rage from the sons of Israel, in his being zealous with My zeal in their midst" (25:11). Phinehas was zealous with God's own zeal. Zeal is a burning concern for God's honor. Phinehas cared about what God cared about. He could not stand by while God's name was dishonored in front of His house.

"Look, I am giving to him My covenant of peace" (25:12). In Hebrew, peace is shalom, which means wholeness and well-being, being right with God. "It shall be for him and for his seed after him a covenant of priesthood forever, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel" (25:13). Phinehas' act brought atonement in the sense that it turned away God's wrath from the nation by judging the sin.

God kept this promise. Apart from a time when Eli's family, from Aaron's other son Ithamar, served as priests, the high priests came from the line of Phinehas. Zadok, the high priest of Solomon's temple, came from him (1 Chronicles 6:4-8). Ezra the scribe was also a descendant (Ezra 7:1-5). Psalm 106:30-31 remembers this day: "And Phinehas stood up and intervened, and the plague was restrained. And it was reckoned to him for righteousness, to generation and generation, until forever." That is the same language used of Abraham's faith (Genesis 15:6). Phinehas' zeal came from a heart that trusted and honored God.

Jesus showed this kind of zeal when He drove the money changers out of the temple. His disciples remembered the Scripture that says zeal for God's house would consume Him (John 2:17; Psalm 69:9). And Jesus is the one who truly made atonement and brought us peace with God, not by taking a life, but by giving His own (Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:14).

25:14-18 *And the name of the man of Israel who was struck down, who was struck down with the Midianite **woman**, **was** Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's house of the Simeonites. And the name of the woman who was struck down, the Midianite **woman**, **was** Cozbi the daughter of Zur; he **was** head of the peoples of a father's house in Midian. And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Be hostile to the Midianites, and you shall strike them down; for they **are** hostile to you with their deceptions with which they have deceived you in the matter of Peor, and in the matter of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister, who was struck down on the day of the plague on account of the matter of Peor."*

Now we learn the names. The man was "Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's house of the Simeonites" (25:14). The woman was "Cozbi the daughter of Zur; he was head of the peoples of a father's house in Midian" (25:15). These were not ordinary people. They were both from leading families. That made the sin more public and more dangerous. Zur was one of the five kings of

Midian killed later (31:8). It is worth noting that the tribe of Simeon dropped from 59,300 men in the first census to 22,200 in the second (1:23; 26:14). Many think a large number of those who died in this plague were from Simeon.

"Be hostile to the Midianites, and you shall strike them down; for they are hostile to you with their deceptions with which they have deceived you in the matter of Peor" (25:17-18). Midian had plotted to destroy Israel, not by war but by seduction. God named it what it was: deception. That judgment will be carried out in chapter 31.

What do we learn from this chapter? Sin is often most dangerous right after a great blessing. Israel had just been blessed four times on the mountain above them, and they did not even know it. Down below, they were falling into sin. Paul says these things were written as examples for us (1 Corinthians 10:11), and he adds, "let the one who thinks he stands watch, lest he fall" (1 Corinthians 10:12). He tells us to flee sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18) and to flee from idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:14). If you are caught in sin like this, there is hope. Confess it to God and turn from it. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous so that He may forgive us the sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Chapter 25 Summary

While Israel was camped at Shittim, the people began to commit sexual sin with the women of Moab, who invited them to the sacrifices of their gods, and Israel ate and bowed down and joined itself to Baal of Peor. The LORD's anger burned, and He told Moses to execute the leaders publicly, and Moses told the judges to kill those who had joined Baal of Peor. While the people wept at the tent of meeting, an Israelite brought a Midianite woman into his tent before them all. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the priest, took a spear and killed them both, and the plague stopped after 24,000 had died. The LORD said Phinehas had turned back His wrath by being zealous with His zeal, and He gave him a covenant of peace, a lasting priesthood for him and his descendants. The man was Zimri, a Simeonite leader, and the woman was Cozbi, daughter of a Midianite leader. The LORD told Moses to treat the Midianites as enemies, because they had deceived Israel at Peor.

People and Places

- Shittim: Israel's camp on the plains of Moab; the name means acacia trees.
- Baal of Peor: Baal as he was worshiped at Mount Peor in Moab.
- Phinehas: son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron, a priest.
- Zimri son of Salu: a leader in the tribe of Simeon.
- Cozbi daughter of Zur: a Midianite woman from a leading family.

Chapter 25 Study Questions

1. What two sins did Israel fall into at Shittim, and how were they connected? (25:1-3)

2. Who was behind this plan, according to Numbers 31:16 and Revelation 2:14?

3. What did God command about the leaders who joined Baal of Peor? (25:4-5)

4. What made Zimri's sin so open and defiant? (25:6, 14)

5. What did God say about Phinehas, and what did He give him? (25:11-13)

6. How does Psalm 106:30-31 remember what Phinehas did?

7. How does Paul use this event to warn the church? (1 Corinthians 10:8, 11-12)

8. Israel fell right after God had blessed them on the mountain above. Why do you think we are often most open to temptation after times of blessing?

9. The enemy could not curse Israel, so he tried to lead them into sin. Where might the enemy be trying to draw you away instead of attacking you head on?

10. Phinehas cared about what God cared about. What would it look like for you to have zeal for God's honor in a way that reflects Jesus? (John 2:17; 1 John 1:9)

Chapter 26: The Second Census

Scripture

26:1-22 And it came about after the plague, and the LORD said to Moses and to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying, "Take the sum of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, from a son of twenty years and upward, by the house of their fathers, everyone who goes out ***to*** war in Israel." And Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan ***at*** Jericho, saying, "From a son of twenty years and upward," just as the LORD commanded Moses and the sons of Israel who came out from the land of Egypt. Reuben, the firstborn of Israel; the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, the clan of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the clan of the Palluites; of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the clan of the Carmites. These ***are*** the clans of the Reubenites; and their enrolled ***men*** were forty-three thousand and seven hundred and thirty. And the sons of Pallu: Eliab. And the sons of Eliab: Nemuel and Dathan and Abiram. This ***is*** the Dathan and Abiram, the called ones of the congregation, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they strove against the LORD; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and Korah, when the company died, when the fire consumed two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign. And the sons of Korah did not die. The sons of Simeon by their clans: of Nemuel, the clan of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the clan of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the clan of the Jachinites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites; of Shaul, the clan of the Shaulites. These ***are*** the clans of the Simeonites: twenty-two thousand and two hundred. The sons of Gad by their clans: of Zephon, the clan of the Zephonites; of Haggi, the clan of the Haggites; of Shuni, the clan of the Shunites; of Ozni, the clan of the Oznites; of Eri, the clan of the Erites; of Arod, the clan of the Arodites; of Areli, the clan of the Arelites. These ***are*** the clans of the sons of Gad by their enrolled ***men***: forty thousand and five hundred. The sons of Judah: Er and Onan; and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Judah by their clans were: of Shelah, the clan of the Shelanites; of Perez, the clan of the Perezites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites. And the sons of Perez were: of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the clan of the Hamulites. These ***are*** the clans of Judah by their enrolled ***men***: seventy-six thousand and five hundred.

26:23-51 The sons of Issachar by their clans: Tola, the clan of the Tolaites; of Puvah, the clan of the Punites; of Jashub, the clan of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the clan of the Shimronites. These ***are*** the clans of Issachar by their enrolled ***men***: sixty-four thousand and three hundred. The sons of Zebulun by their clans: of Sered, the clan of the Sardites; of Elon, the clan of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the clan of the Jahleelites. These ***are*** the clans of the Zebulunites by their enrolled ***men***: sixty thousand and five hundred. The sons of Joseph by their clans: Manasseh and Ephraim. The sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the clan of the Machirites; and Machir fathered Gilead; of Gilead, the clan of the Gileadites. These ***are*** the sons of Gilead: Iezer, the clan of the Iezerites; of Helek, the clan of the Helekites; and Asriel, the clan of the Asrielites; and Shechem, the clan of the Shechemites; and Shemida, the clan of the Shemidaites; and Hepher, the clan of the Hepherites. And Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons, but daughters; and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad ***were*** Mahlah and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. These ***are*** the clans of Manasseh; and their enrolled ***men were*** fifty-two thousand and seven hundred. These ***are*** the sons of Ephraim by their clans: of Shuthelah, the clan of the Shuthelahites; of Becher, the clan of

the Bachrites; of Tahan, the clan of the Tahanites. And these ***are*** the sons of Shuthelah: of Eran, the clan of the Eranites. These ***are*** the clans of the sons of Ephraim by their enrolled ***men***: thirty-two thousand and five hundred. These ***are*** the sons of Joseph by their clans. The sons of Benjamin by their clans: of Bela, the clan of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the clan of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the clan of the Ahiramites; of Shephupham, the clan of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the clan of the Huphamites. And the sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: the clan of the Ardites; of Naaman, the clan of the Naamites. These ***are*** the sons of Benjamin by their clans; and their enrolled ***men were*** forty-five thousand and six hundred. These ***are*** the sons of Dan by their clans: of Shuham, the clan of the Shuhamites. These ***are*** the clans of Dan by their clans. All the clans of the Shuhamites by their enrolled ***men***: sixty-four thousand and four hundred. The sons of Asher by their clans: of Imnah, the clan of the Imnites; of Ishvi, the clan of the Ishvites; of Beriah, the clan of the Beriites. Of the sons of Beriah: of Heber, the clan of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the clan of the Malchielites. And the name of the daughter of Asher ***was*** Serah. These ***are*** the clans of the sons of Asher by their enrolled ***men***: fifty-three thousand and four hundred. The sons of Naphtali by their clans: of Jahzeel, the clan of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the clan of the Gunites; of Jezer, the clan of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the clan of the Shillemites. These ***are*** the clans of Naphtali by their clans; and their enrolled ***men were*** forty-five thousand and four hundred. These ***are*** the enrolled ***men*** of the sons of Israel: six hundred thousand and a thousand, seven hundred and thirty.

26:52-65 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance by the number of names. To the many you shall make its inheritance great, and to the few you shall make its inheritance small; to each according to his enrolled ***men*** his inheritance shall be given. Only by lot shall the land be divided; by the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. According to the lot its inheritance shall be divided between the many and the few." And these ***are*** the enrolled ***men*** of the Levites by their clans: of Gershon, the clan of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the clan of the Kohathites; of Merari, the clan of the Merarites. These ***are*** the clans of Levi: the clan of the Libnites, the clan of the Hebronites, the clan of the Mahlites, the clan of the Mushites, the clan of the Korahites. And Kohath fathered Amram. And the name of the wife of Amram ***was*** Jochebed the daughter of Levi, whom she bore to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram Aaron and Moses and Miriam their sister. And to Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. And Nadab and Abihu died when they brought near strange fire before the LORD. And their enrolled ***men*** were twenty-three thousand, every male from a son of a month and upward; for they were not enrolled among the sons of Israel, because an inheritance was not given to them among the sons of Israel. These ***are*** the enrolled ***men*** of Moses and Eleazar the priest, who enrolled the sons of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan ***at*** Jericho. And among these there was not a man of the enrolled ***men*** of Moses and Aaron the priest, who enrolled the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. For the LORD had said of them, "They shall surely die in the wilderness." And not a man was left of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

Chapter 26 Preview

"After the plague" at Peor, God tells Moses and Eleazar to count the people again. Almost forty years have passed since the first census in chapter 1. The men counted then have died in the

wilderness, just as God said they would. Now their sons are counted, tribe by tribe and clan by clan, on the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho. The total is 601,730 men, almost the same as before.

This is a list chapter, so I group the verses and say what the list shows. The new count does two things. It shows God keeping His word in judgment, because not one man from the first count is left except Caleb and Joshua. And it shows God keeping His word in mercy, because the nation has not shrunk away to nothing. A new generation stands ready, and the land will be divided among them by these very numbers.

Chapter 26 Study

26:1-4 *And it came about after the plague, and the LORD said to Moses and to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying, "Take the sum of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, from a son of twenty years and upward, by the house of their fathers, everyone who goes out **to** war in Israel." And Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan **at** Jericho, saying, "From a son of twenty years and upward," just as the LORD commanded Moses and the sons of Israel who came out from the land of Egypt.*

"And it came about after the plague." The plague at Peor killed 24,000 (25:9). It was the last judgment on the old generation. Now God starts over with a count, the same way He started the book.

This time the LORD speaks "to Moses and to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest." Aaron had died on Mount Hor (20:28), and Eleazar his son now served as high priest. The command is the same as in 1:3: every man "from a son of twenty years and upward," everyone able to go out to war.

The place is new. The first census was taken "in the wilderness of Sinai" (1:1). This one is taken "in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho." The first count was an army leaving for the land. This count is an army on the doorstep of the land.

26:5-11 *Reuben, the firstborn of Israel; the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, the clan of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the clan of the Palluites; of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the clan of the Carmites. These **are** the clans of the Reubenites; and their enrolled **men** were forty-three thousand and seven hundred and thirty. And the sons of Pallu: Eliab. And the sons of Eliab: Nemuel and Dathan and Abiram. This **is** the Dathan and Abiram, the called ones of the congregation, who strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they strove against the LORD; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and Korah, when the company died, when the fire consumed two hundred and fifty men; and they became a sign. And the sons of Korah did not die.*

Reuben, "the firstborn of Israel," comes first, with 43,730 men, a little less than the 46,500 of the first count (1:21). Each tribe is now listed by its clans, the family groups that came from Jacob's grandsons. Genesis 46 gives most of these same names among the seventy who went down to Egypt. God kept the families intact through four hundred years in Egypt and forty years in the desert.

In the middle of Reuben's list comes a reminder. Dathan and Abiram were from this tribe, and they "strove against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah" (26:9). The earth swallowed them, "and they became a sign" (26:10). Their sin is written into the family record so that no one would forget.

Then a short line of grace: "And the sons of Korah did not die" (26:11). Korah's sons did not join their father's rebellion. Their descendants became singers in the temple, and eleven psalms carry their name, among them Psalms 42, 46 and 84. A father's sin does not have to decide his children's future.

26:12-22 *The sons of Simeon by their clans: of Nemuel, the clan of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the clan of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the clan of the Jachinites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites; of Shaul, the clan of the Shaulites. These **are** the clans of the Simeonites: twenty-two thousand and two hundred. The sons of Gad by their clans: of Zephon, the clan of the Zephonites; of Haggi, the clan of the Haggites; of Shuni, the clan of the Shunites; of Ozni, the clan of the Oznites; of Eri, the clan of the Erites; of Arod, the clan of the Arodites; of Areli, the clan of the Arelites. These **are** the clans of the sons of Gad by their enrolled **men**: forty thousand and five hundred. The sons of Judah: Er and Onan; and Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Judah by their clans were: of Shelah, the clan of the Shelanites; of Perez, the clan of the Perezites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites. And the sons of Perez were: of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the clan of the Hamulites. These **are** the clans of Judah by their enrolled **men**: seventy-six thousand and five hundred.*

Simeon has 22,200 men. In the first census it had 59,300 (1:23). It lost more than half its men, the biggest drop of any tribe. Zimri, the leader killed at Peor, was a Simeonite (25:14), and many think a large share of those who died in that plague came from his tribe. Scripture does not say so directly, but the number stands out.

Gad has 40,500, down from 45,650. Judah is still the largest tribe, with 76,500, up from 74,600. The list notes that Er and Onan, Judah's first two sons, "died in the land of Canaan" (26:19), which takes us back to Genesis 38. The line went on through Perez, and from Perez came Boaz, David, and at last Jesus Christ (Ruth 4:18-22; Matthew 1:3).

26:23-37 *The sons of Issachar by their clans: Tola, the clan of the Tolaites; of Puvah, the clan of the Punites; of Jashub, the clan of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the clan of the Shimronites. These **are** the clans of Issachar by their enrolled **men**: sixty-four thousand and three hundred. The sons of Zebulun by their clans: of Sered, the clan of the Sardites; of Elon, the clan of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the clan of the Jahleelites. These **are** the clans of the Zebulunites by their enrolled **men**: sixty thousand and five hundred. The sons of Joseph by their clans: Manasseh and Ephraim. The sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the clan of the Machirites; and Machir fathered Gilead; of Gilead, the clan of the Gileadites. These **are** the sons of Gilead: Iezer, the clan of the Iezerites; of Helek, the clan of the Helekites; and Asriel, the clan of the Asrielites; and Shechem, the clan of the Shechemites; and Shemida, the clan of the Shemidaites; and Hepher, the clan of the Hepherites. And Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons, but daughters; and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad **were** Mahlah and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. These **are** the clans of Manasseh; and their enrolled **men were** fifty-two thousand and seven hundred. These **are** the sons of Ephraim by their clans: of Shuthelah, the clan of the Shuthelahites; of Becher, the clan of the Bachrites; of Tahan, the clan of the Tahanites. And these **are** the sons of Shuthelah: of Eran, the clan of the Eranites. These **are** the clans of the sons of Ephraim by their enrolled **men**: thirty-two thousand and five hundred. These **are** the sons of Joseph by their clans.*

Issachar grows to 64,300 and Zebulun to 60,500. Joseph's two sons are listed with Manasseh first this time, and Manasseh has grown from 32,200 to 52,700, the largest gain of any tribe. Ephraim has dropped from 40,500 to 32,500.

Watch for one name in Manasseh's line: "Zelophehad the son of Hepher had no sons, but daughters" (26:33). Their names are given: "Mahlah and Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah." Women are rarely named in a census of fighting men. These five are named because their story is coming in the next chapter, and again in the last chapter of the book. The census is not only about soldiers. It is about who will inherit the land.

26:38-51 *The sons of Benjamin by their clans: of Bela, the clan of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the clan of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the clan of the Ahiramites; of Shephupham, the clan of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the clan of the Huphamites. And the sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: the clan of the Ardites; of Naaman, the clan of the Naamites. These **are** the sons of Benjamin by their clans; and their enrolled **men were** forty-five thousand and six hundred. These **are** the sons of Dan by their clans: of Shuham, the clan of the Shuhamites. These **are** the clans of Dan by their clans. All the clans of the Shuhamites by their enrolled **men**: sixty-four thousand and four hundred. The sons of Asher by their clans: of Imnah, the clan of the Imnites; of Ishvi, the clan of the Ishvites; of Beriah, the clan of the Beriites. Of the sons of Beriah: of Heber, the clan of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the clan of the Malchielites. And the name of the daughter of Asher **was** Serah. These **are** the clans of the sons of Asher by their enrolled **men**: fifty-three thousand and four hundred. The sons of Naphtali by their clans: of Jahzeel, the clan of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the clan of the Gunites; of Jezer, the clan of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the clan of the Shillemites. These **are** the clans of Naphtali by their clans; and their enrolled **men were** forty-five thousand and four hundred. These **are** the enrolled **men** of the sons of Israel: six hundred thousand and a thousand, seven hundred and thirty.*

Benjamin has 45,600, Dan 64,400, Asher 53,400, and Naphtali 45,400. Dan's whole tribe comes from one clan, the Shuhamites, yet it is the second largest tribe. Asher's list names a daughter, Serah (26:46), the same Serah listed in Genesis 46:17.

"These are the enrolled men of the sons of Israel: six hundred thousand and a thousand, seven hundred and thirty" (26:51). That is 601,730, only 1,820 fewer than the 603,550 of the first census (1:46). As in chapter 1, I take the numbers as written. Some scholars read the Hebrew word eleph, "thousand," as a clan or unit here, which would make the army much smaller, but the totals add up as thousands.

Think about what this means. Forty years of desert, judgment after judgment, and the nation is almost exactly the same size. God had disciplined the parents, but He had not let the people disappear. The promise to Abraham still stood.

26:52-56 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance by the number of names. To the many you shall make its inheritance great, and to the few you shall make its inheritance small; to each according to his enrolled **men** his inheritance shall be given. Only by lot shall the land be divided; by the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. According to the lot its inheritance shall be divided between the many and the few."*

Now we see why God counted. "To these the land shall be divided as an inheritance by the number of names" (26:53). A larger tribe would get a larger share, and a smaller tribe a smaller share (26:54).

"Only by lot shall the land be divided" (26:55). A lot was something like marked stones drawn or cast to reach a decision. In Israel it was not chance. Proverbs 16:33 says the lot is cast into the lap, but every decision is from the LORD. The size of each tribe set the size of its share, and the lot, under God, set where it would be. Joshua 14 to 19 tells how this was carried out. No tribe could say Moses played favorites. The land was God's gift, and He gave it out.

26:57-62 *And these **are** the enrolled **men** of the Levites by their clans: of Gershon, the clan of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the clan of the Kohathites; of Merari, the clan of the Merarites. These **are** the clans of Levi: the clan of the Libnites, the clan of the Hebronites, the clan of the Mahlites, the clan of the Mushites, the clan of the Korahites. And Kohath fathered Amram. And the name of the wife of Amram **was** Jochebed the daughter of Levi, whom she bore to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram Aaron and Moses and Miriam their sister. And to Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. And Nadab and Abihu died when they brought near strange fire before the LORD. And their enrolled **men** were twenty-three thousand, every male from a son of a month and upward; for they were not enrolled among the sons of Israel, because an inheritance was not given to them among the sons of Israel.*

The Levites are counted on their own. Their clans come from Levi's three sons, Gershon, Kohath and Merari. The line narrows to Amram and his wife Jochebed, and to their children, "Aaron and Moses and Miriam their sister" (26:59).

Two more names bring a sober reminder: "Nadab and Abihu died when they brought near strange fire before the LORD" (26:61; Leviticus 10:1-2). Even in the priestly family, sin was remembered.

The Levites number 23,000, "every male from a son of a month and upward" (26:62), a little more than the 22,000 of 3:39. They were counted differently because they did not go to war, and "an inheritance was not given to them." Their inheritance was the LORD Himself and the gifts of the people (18:20-24).

26:63-65 *These **are** the enrolled **men** of Moses and Eleazar the priest, who enrolled the sons of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan **at** Jericho. And among these there was not a man of the enrolled **men** of Moses and Aaron the priest, who enrolled the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. For the LORD had said of them, "They shall surely die in the wilderness." And not a man was left of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.*

The chapter closes with the most important line in it. "Among these there was not a man of the enrolled men of Moses and Aaron the priest, who enrolled the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai" (26:64). Every man counted in chapter 1 was gone. The LORD had said of them, "They shall surely die in the wilderness" (26:65; 14:29).

"And not a man was left of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun." The two men who trusted God at Kadesh were still standing.

God's word came true to the letter, both in judgment and in promise. That should sober us and comfort us. Hebrews 3:17-19 says the ones whose bodies fell in the wilderness could not enter because of unbelief. But God was faithful to the children, and He is faithful to us. What He says, He will do (23:19).

Chapter 26 Summary

After the plague at Peor, the LORD told Moses and Eleazar the priest to count Israel again, every man twenty years and older who could go to war. The tribes were counted on the plains of Moab by their clans. Some tribes grew, such as Manasseh and Issachar, and some shrank, especially Simeon. The record recalls Dathan and Abiram, the survival of Korah's sons, Er and Onan, and the five daughters of Zelophehad. The total was 601,730 men, almost the same as the first census. The land would be divided by the size of each tribe and by lot. The Levites, 23,000 males from one month old, were counted separately because they had no land. Not one man from the first census was left except Caleb and Joshua, just as the LORD had said.

Chapter 26 Study Questions

1. When and where was the second census taken, and who helped Moses take it? (26:1-3)

2. What do we learn about Korah's sons in this chapter? (26:11)

3. Which tribe lost the most men since the first census, and what may explain it? (26:14; 1:23; 25:14)

4. Why are the daughters of Zelophehad named in a list of fighting men? (26:33)

5. How was the land to be divided among the tribes? (26:53-56)

6. Why were the Levites counted separately? (26:62)

7. Who were the only two men left from the first census, and why? (26:64-65; 14:24, 30)

8. The total was almost the same after forty years. What does that show you about God's faithfulness, even when He disciplines?

9. Korah's sons did not follow their father into rebellion. How can a person break with the sins of their family and follow God?

10. God's word came true to the letter for Israel. Which of God's promises do you need to trust more this week?

Chapter 27: The Daughters of Zelophehad and Joshua Appointed

Scripture

27:1-11 And the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the clans of Manasseh the son of Joseph, drew near; and these ***are*** the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest and before the leaders and all the congregation, ***at*** the entrance of the tent of meeting, saying, "Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not among the company that gathered together against the LORD in the company of Korah; for in his own sin he died, and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be withdrawn from among his clan because he has no son? Give to us a possession among the brothers of our father." And Moses brought near their case before the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, saying, "The daughters of Zelophehad are speaking right. You shall surely give to them a possession of an inheritance among the brothers of their father, and you shall make the inheritance of their father pass over to them. And to the sons of Israel you shall speak, saying, 'If a man dies and he has no son, then you shall make his inheritance pass over to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the brothers of his father. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his relative who is near to him from his clan, and he shall possess it.' And it shall be for the sons of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD commanded Moses."

27:12-23 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go up into this mountain of the Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the sons of Israel. And you shall see it, and you shall be gathered to your peoples, you also, just as Aaron your brother was gathered; because you rebelled against My mouth in the wilderness of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify Me at the waters before their eyes." They ***are*** the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, ***in*** the wilderness of Zin. And Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out before them and who will come in before them, and who will lead them out and who will bring them in; and the congregation of the LORD shall not be like sheep which have no shepherd." And the LORD said to Moses, "Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom ***is the*** Spirit, and you shall lay your hand on him; and you shall make him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and you shall commission him before their eyes. And you shall put some of your majesty on him, so that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may hear. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his mouth they shall go out, and at his mouth they shall come in, he and all the sons of Israel with him, and all the congregation." And Moses did just as the LORD commanded him; and he took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the LORD spoke by the hand of Moses.

Chapter 27 Preview

Five sisters step forward at the tabernacle with a problem. Their father, Zelophehad, died in the wilderness with no sons. The land is about to be divided by families, and under the custom of the day his name and his share would disappear. They ask Moses for a possession among their father's relatives. Moses brings their case to the LORD, and God says, "The daughters of Zelophehad are speaking right." He gives them the inheritance and makes a lasting law for every family in Israel.

In the second half, God tells Moses to climb a mountain and look at the land he will not enter. Moses does not argue for himself. He asks God to give the people a shepherd. God names Joshua, "a man in whom is the Spirit," and Moses lays his hands on him before Eleazar and the whole congregation. The chapter is about how God cares for the overlooked and how He provides leaders for His people.

Chapter 27 Study

27:1-4 *And the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the clans of Manasseh the son of Joseph, drew near; and these **are** the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Tirzah. And they stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest and before the leaders and all the congregation, **at** the entrance of the tent of meeting, saying, "Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not among the company that gathered together against the LORD in the company of Korah; for in his own sin he died, and he had no sons. Why should the name of our father be withdrawn from among his clan because he has no son? Give to us a possession among the brothers of our father."*

"The daughters of Zelophehad" came forward and "drew near" (27:1). Their family line is given in full, back to Manasseh the son of Joseph. That was the line through which land would be counted. Their names are given again: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah.

They came to the right place and did it the right way. They "stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest and before the leaders and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting" (27:2). This was not a quarrel. It was a case brought openly before the leaders and before God.

Their case was simple. "Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not among the company that gathered together against the LORD in the company of Korah; for in his own sin he died" (27:3). They mean he died in the wilderness for his own sin, as one of the generation judged at Kadesh, but he was not one of Korah's rebels, whose families were cut off. So his family had not lost its place.

"Why should the name of our father be withdrawn from among his clan because he has no son?" (27:4). In Israel the land was passed down through sons. A man's land carried his name. Without a son, his share would be lost and his name forgotten. "Give to us a possession among the brothers of our father."

Notice their faith. Israel did not own one acre of Canaan yet. These women were asking for a share of land still held by the enemy. They believed God would give it.

27:5-7 *And Moses brought near their case before the LORD. And the LORD said to Moses, saying, "The daughters of Zelophehad are speaking right. You shall surely give to them a possession of an inheritance among the brothers of their father, and you shall make the inheritance of their father pass over to them.*

"And Moses brought near their case before the LORD" (27:5). Moses did not know the answer, and he did not pretend to. He took it to God. That is a good model for every leader. When a hard question comes, take it to the Lord and to His Word before you answer.

God's reply is warm and direct: "The daughters of Zelophehad are speaking right" (27:7). They were right. God told Moses, "You shall surely give to them a possession of an inheritance among the brothers of their father, and you shall make the inheritance of their father pass over to them."

This is a striking moment. In a world where women usually could not hold land, God Himself took the side of five unmarried women. He saw them. He honored their request. The God of Israel is the God who defends the fatherless (Psalm 68:5). Nothing in His law was meant to leave anyone without a place among His people.

27:8-11 *And to the sons of Israel you shall speak, saying, 'If a man dies and he has no son, then you shall make his inheritance pass over to his daughter. And if he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. And if he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the brothers of his father. And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his relative who is near to him from his clan, and he shall possess it.' And it shall be for the sons of Israel a statute of judgment, just as the LORD commanded Moses."*

Then God made their case into a law for everyone. "If a man dies and he has no son, then you shall make his inheritance pass over to his daughter" (27:8). If he had no daughter, the land went to his brothers. If no brothers, to his father's brothers. If none of those, "to his relative who is near to him from his clan" (27:11).

The purpose was to keep each family's land within its clan and tribe. The land was the LORD's, given to each family as a trust (Leviticus 25:23). This order of heirs kept the gift from being lost. It also stands behind the work of the kinsman-redeemer, the near relative who could buy back land or a family name, which we see later in Ruth (Ruth 4:1-10).

God calls this "a statute of judgment," a standing rule for deciding cases. Five women asked one question, and their faith brought help to every family in Israel after them. The story is not finished. Chapter 36 adds one more piece.

For us, this passage shows a God who listens. He is not bothered by honest questions brought to Him in faith. In Christ every believer, male and female, is an heir: "you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise" (Galatians 3:28-29). Our inheritance is "imperishable and undefiled and unfading, reserved in the heavens for you" (1 Peter 1:4).

27:12-14 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Go up into this mountain of the Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the sons of Israel. And you shall see it, and you shall be gathered to your peoples, you also, just as Aaron your brother was gathered; because you rebelled against My mouth in the wilderness of Zin, in the strife of the congregation, to sanctify Me at the waters before their eyes." They **are** the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, **in** the wilderness of Zin.*

"Go up into this mountain of the Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the sons of Israel" (27:12). The Abarim are the mountains east of the Dead Sea. Deuteronomy 34:1 names the peak as Mount Nebo. From there Moses would see the land of promise.

"And you shall see it, and you shall be gathered to your peoples, you also, just as Aaron your brother was gathered" (27:13). To be gathered to your peoples means to die and join those who went before. It speaks of something beyond the grave, not only of a burial place, since Moses would be buried alone.

God reminded Moses why: "you rebelled against My mouth in the wilderness of Zin," when He had called Moses "to sanctify Me at the waters before their eyes" (27:14). This was the sin at Meribah, when Moses struck the rock and spoke harshly instead of honoring God before the people (20:10-12). It is hard to read. Moses had served God faithfully for forty years, and one public sin kept him out of the land. Leaders are held to a higher standard because their example shapes many (James 3:1). But God was not finished with Moses. Centuries later Moses stood on a mountain in the land with Jesus at His transfiguration (Matthew 17:3).

27:15-17 *And Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out before them and who will come in before them, and who will lead them out and who will bring them in; and the congregation of the LORD shall not be like sheep which have no shepherd."*

How did Moses answer? He did not complain. He prayed for the people. "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation" (27:16). The God who made every human spirit knows every heart. He knows who is fit to lead.

Moses asked for a man "who will go out before them and who will come in before them, and who will lead them out and who will bring them in" (27:17). That is a picture of a leader who goes ahead of his people in war and in daily life. His reason: "the congregation of the LORD shall not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

Jesus used those same words. When He saw the crowds, He felt compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34). He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11). Moses asked God for a shepherd, and in the end God gave His own Son.

27:18-21 *And the LORD said to Moses, "Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom **is the** Spirit, and you shall lay your hand on him; and you shall make him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and you shall commission him before their eyes. And you shall put some of your majesty on him, so that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may hear. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his mouth they shall go out, and at his mouth they shall come in, he and all the sons of Israel with him, and all the congregation."*

"Take for yourself Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and you shall lay your hand on him" (27:18). Joshua had served at Moses' side since the exodus. He fought the Amalekites (Exodus 17:9-14), stayed near the tent of meeting (Exodus 33:11), and with Caleb stood for God at Kadesh (14:6-9). But the reason God gives is the Spirit. Leadership among God's people starts with God's Spirit in a person.

Laying on of hands was a public sign. It marked Joshua as the one chosen and passed the work to him before everyone. Moses was to "commission him before their eyes" (27:19) and "put some of your majesty on him" (27:20). Some of Moses' honor and authority was to pass to Joshua, so that the people would listen to him. Not all of it. Moses was unique (12:6-8; Deuteronomy 34:10).

There was also a difference in how Joshua would hear from God. Moses spoke with God face to face. Joshua would "stand before Eleazar the priest, and he shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD" (27:21). The Urim was kept in the high priest's breastpiece and was used to seek God's answer on a question (Exodus 28:30). Scripture does not tell us exactly what it looked like or how it worked. The point is that Joshua would lead under God's direction, working alongside the priest, not on his own.

27:22-23 *And Moses did just as the LORD commanded him; and he took Joshua and made him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the LORD spoke by the hand of Moses.*

"And Moses did just as the LORD commanded him" (27:22). He took Joshua, stood him before Eleazar and all the people, "and he laid his hands on him and commissioned him" (27:23). There was no jealousy and no delay. Moses gladly handed the work to the next man.

What does this teach us? God's work does not depend on any one person. Moses would die, but God's people would have a shepherd. A wise leader plans for the one who comes after him and builds him up in front of others. Paul did the same with Timothy (2 Timothy 2:2). And every human leader, however good, points beyond himself. The name Joshua means the LORD saves, and it is the Hebrew form of the name Jesus. Joshua would lead God's people into the land. Jesus leads His people into God's rest (Hebrews 4:8-9).

Chapter 27 Summary

The five daughters of Zelophehad came before Moses, Eleazar, the leaders and the congregation at the tent of meeting. Their father had died in the wilderness with no sons, and they asked for a share of land so his name would not be lost. Moses brought their case to the LORD, who said they

were right and gave them their father's inheritance. God then made a lasting law: if a man had no son, his land went to his daughter, then to his brothers, then to his father's brothers, then to his nearest relative in the clan. Next, the LORD told Moses to go up into the Abarim mountains to see the land, because he would die and not enter it on account of his sin at Meribah. Moses asked God to appoint a leader so the people would not be like sheep without a shepherd. God chose Joshua, a man in whom was the Spirit. Moses laid his hands on him before Eleazar and all the people and commissioned him, just as the LORD commanded.

People and Places

- Zelophehad: a man of the tribe of Manasseh who died in the wilderness with five daughters and no sons.
- Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah: the daughters of Zelophehad.
- Abarim: the mountain range east of the Dead Sea; Mount Nebo is one of its peaks (Deuteronomy 34:1).
- Meribah of Kadesh: the place where Moses struck the rock and was told he would not enter the land (20:1-13).
- Urim: a means kept by the high priest for seeking God's answer (Exodus 28:30).

We recently moved, so I am looking for the next people God wants me to encourage and help raise up in the faith. Moses gladly handed his work to Joshua. I want to be ready to do the same when God shows me who.

Chapter 27 Study Questions

1. What did the daughters of Zelophehad ask for, and why? (27:3-4)

2. What did Moses do with their case, and what did God say about it? (27:5-7)

3. What order of heirs did God set for a man who died without a son? (27:8-11)

4. Why was Moses not allowed to enter the land? (27:14; 20:10-12)

5. What did Moses ask God for when he heard he would die? (27:16-17)

6. Why did God choose Joshua, and what did Moses do to commission him? (27:18-20)

7. How would Joshua seek God's direction, and how was that different from Moses? (27:21; 12:6-8)

8. The five sisters believed God would give them land that was still in enemy hands. What promise of God are you asked to believe before you can see it?

9. Moses took a hard question to God instead of guessing. What question do you need to bring to God in prayer and in His Word?

10. Moses thought of the people, not himself, and gladly handed his work to Joshua. Who is someone you could encourage or train to serve after you? (2 Timothy 2:2)

Chapter 28: Daily, Sabbath, and Feast Offerings

Scripture

28:1-15 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'My offering, My food for My fire offerings, My soothing aroma, you shall take care to bring near to Me at its appointed time.' And you shall say to them, 'This ***is*** the fire offering which you shall bring near to the LORD: lambs, sons of a year, without blemish, two for the day, a burnt offering continually. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the second lamb you shall offer between the two evenings; and approximately 2 quarts (a tenth of the ephah) of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with approximately 1 quart (a fourth of the hin) of beaten oil. ***It is*** a continual burnt offering, which was made at Mount Sinai for a soothing aroma, a fire offering to the LORD. And its drink offering ***shall be*** approximately 1 quart (a fourth of the hin) for the one lamb; in the holy place pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD. And the second lamb you shall offer between the two evenings; like the grain offering of the morning and like its drink offering you shall offer ***it***, a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD. And on the day of the Sabbath, two lambs, sons of a year, without blemish, and approximately 4 quarts (two tenths ***of an ephah***) of fine flour, a grain offering mixed with oil, and its drink offering: ***this is*** the burnt offering of the Sabbath on its Sabbath, besides the continual burnt offering and its drink offering. And at the beginnings of your months you shall bring near a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, sons of the herd, and one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and approximately 6 quarts (three tenths ***of an ephah***) of fine flour, a grain offering mixed with oil, for the one young bull; and approximately 4 quarts (two tenths ***of an ephah***) of fine flour, a grain offering mixed with oil, for the one ram; and approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth ***of an ephah***) of fine flour, a grain offering mixed with oil, for the one lamb; a burnt offering, a soothing aroma, a fire offering to the LORD. And their drink offerings shall be approximately 2 quarts (half of the hin) for the young bull, and approximately 1 1/3 quarts (the third of the hin) for the ram, and approximately 1 quart (the fourth of the hin) for the lamb, ***of*** wine. This ***is*** the burnt offering of a month in its month, for the months of the year. And one male goat of the goats for a sin offering to the LORD; besides the continual burnt offering it shall be offered, and its drink offering.

28:16-31 And in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, ***is*** a Passover to the LORD. And on the fifteenth day of this month ***is*** a festival; seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten. On the first day ***is*** a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor. And you shall bring near a fire offering, a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, sons of the herd, and one ram, and seven lambs, sons of a year; they shall be without blemish for you. And their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths ***of an ephah***) for the young bull, and approximately 4 quarts (two tenths ***of an ephah***) for the ram you shall offer; approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth ***of an ephah***) you shall offer for the one lamb, for the seven lambs; and one male goat ***for*** a sin offering, to make atonement for you. Besides the burnt offering of the morning, which ***is*** for the continual burnt offering, you shall offer these. Like these you shall offer for the day, seven days, the food of a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD; besides the continual burnt offering it shall be offered, and its drink offering. And on the seventh

day you shall have a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor. And on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring near a new grain offering to the LORD at your Weeks, you shall have a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor. And you shall bring near a burnt offering for a soothing aroma to the LORD: two young bulls, sons of the herd, one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths ***of an ephah***) for the one young bull, approximately 4 quarts (two tenths ***of an ephah***) for the one ram, approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth ***of an ephah***) for the one lamb, for the seven lambs; one male goat of the goats, to make atonement for you. Besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, you shall offer ***them***; they shall be without blemish for you; and their drink offerings.

Chapter 28 Preview

Israel is about to enter the land, and God gives them a calendar of worship. Chapters 28 and 29 belong together. They list the public offerings the priests were to make for the whole nation: every day, every Sabbath, every new month, and at each of the yearly feasts. Leviticus 23 told the people when the feasts were. These chapters tell the priests what to offer on each one.

This is a list chapter, so I group the verses and explain the pattern. Chapter 28 covers the daily offering, the Sabbath, the first day of each month, Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Weeks. The list is repetitive on purpose. Worship was not left to feeling or chance. It was regular, costly and ordered by God, and every piece of it pointed ahead to the one sacrifice of Christ.

Chapter 28 Study

28:1-2 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the sons of Israel, and you shall say to them, 'My offering, My food for My fire offerings, My soothing aroma, you shall take care to bring near to Me at its appointed time.'*

"My offering, My food for My fire offerings, My soothing aroma, you shall take care to bring near to Me at its appointed time" (28:2). God calls these offerings "My food." He did not need food (Psalm 50:12-13). The words picture the offerings as a meal shared at God's table, a sign of fellowship between God and His people. A fire offering is one burned on the altar. A "soothing aroma" means God was pleased to accept it.

"At its appointed time." The new generation had grown up in the wilderness. Now God was setting the rhythm of their life in the land around Him.

28:3-8 *And you shall say to them, 'This **is** the fire offering which you shall bring near to the LORD: lambs, sons of a year, without blemish, two for the day, a burnt offering continually. The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the second lamb you shall offer between the two evenings; and approximately 2 quarts (a tenth of the ephah) of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with approximately 1 quart (a fourth of the hin) of beaten oil. **It is** a continual burnt offering, which was made at Mount Sinai for a soothing aroma, a fire offering to the LORD. And its drink offering **shall be** approximately 1 quart (a fourth of the hin) for the one lamb; in the holy place pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD. And the second lamb you shall offer between the two evenings; like the grain offering of the morning and like its drink offering you shall offer **it**, a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD.*

The daily offering came first: two lambs a year old without blemish, one "in the morning" and one "between the two evenings," that is, toward evening (28:4). A burnt offering was an animal burned whole on the altar, given entirely to God. With each lamb came a grain offering of flour and oil and a drink offering of wine poured out. The SLB gives the amounts in modern measures: about two quarts of flour, about one quart of oil, and about one quart of wine.

This was "a continual burnt offering" (28:6), the same one first commanded "at Mount Sinai" (Exodus 29:38-42). Every other offering in these two chapters was "besides the continual burnt offering." The daily lambs never stopped for a feast. They were the base of Israel's worship, morning and evening, every day of the year.

What does that teach us? Our walk with God is built on daily faithfulness, not only special days. And the daily lamb points to Jesus, "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The priests stood day after day offering the same sacrifices, which could never take away sins, but Christ offered one sacrifice for sins for all time (Hebrews 10:11-12).

28:9-10 *And on the day of the Sabbath, two lambs, sons of a year, without blemish, and approximately 4 quarts (two tenths **of an ephah**) of fine flour, a grain offering mixed with oil, and its drink offering: **this is** the burnt offering of the Sabbath on its Sabbath, besides the continual burnt offering and its drink offering.*

"And on the day of the Sabbath, two lambs" (28:9), with their grain and drink offerings. This was added to the daily offering, so on the Sabbath the altar received double. The Sabbath was the seventh day of the week, a day of rest God gave Israel as a sign of His covenant with them (Exodus 20:8-11; 31:13). Israel was to give God more on His day, not less.

Believers today differ on how the Sabbath applies to us. Some keep a Sabbath day, many set apart Sunday, the Lord's day, because Jesus rose on the first day of the week, and others see the Sabbath fulfilled in the rest we have in Christ (Colossians 2:16-17; Hebrews 4:9-10). All agree that God's people need regular rest and regular worship.

28:11-15 *And at the beginnings of your months you shall bring near a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, sons of the herd, and one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and approximately 6 quarts (three tenths **of an ephah**) of fine flour, a grain offering mixed with oil, for the one young bull; and approximately 4 quarts (two tenths **of an ephah**) of fine flour, a grain offering mixed with oil, for the one ram; and approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth **of an ephah**) of fine flour, a grain offering mixed with oil, for the one lamb; a burnt offering, a soothing aroma, a fire offering to the LORD. And their drink offerings shall be approximately 2 quarts (half of the hin) for the young bull, and approximately 1 1/3 quarts (the third of the hin) for the ram, and approximately 1 quart (the fourth of the hin) for the lamb, **of** wine. This **is** the burnt offering of a month in its month, for the months of the year. And one male goat of the goats for a sin offering to the LORD; besides the continual burnt offering it shall be offered, and its drink offering.*

"At the beginnings of your months" (28:11), the day of the new moon, came a large offering: two young bulls, one ram and seven lambs, with grain and drink offerings for each. Israel's months followed the moon, so this marked each new month. Numbers 10:10 says the trumpets were blown over these offerings.

For the first time in the list a sin offering appears: "one male goat of the goats for a sin offering to the LORD" (28:15). A sin offering was made to cover sin and cleanse the people. Even in a month of ordinary days, Israel had sinned and needed atonement. So do we. Each new month began with a reminder that God's people live by His mercy.

The pattern of two bulls, one ram, seven lambs and one goat repeats through most of the feasts that follow. Seven is the number of fullness in Scripture.

28:16-25 *And in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, **is** a Passover to the LORD. And on the fifteenth day of this month **is** a festival; seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten. On the first day **is** a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor. And you shall bring near a fire offering, a burnt offering to the LORD: two young bulls, sons of the herd, and one ram, and seven lambs, sons of a year; they shall be without blemish for you. And their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths **of an ephah**) for the young bull, and approximately 4 quarts (two tenths **of an ephah**) for the ram you shall offer; approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth **of an ephah**) you shall offer for the one lamb, for the seven lambs; and one male goat **for** a sin offering, to make atonement for you. Besides the burnt offering of the morning, which **is** for the continual burnt offering, you shall offer these. Like these you shall offer for the day, seven days, the food of a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD; besides the continual burnt offering it shall be offered, and its drink offering. And on the seventh day you shall have a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor.*

"In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, is a Passover to the LORD" (28:16). Passover remembered the night God brought Israel out of Egypt and the lamb's blood on the doorposts (Exodus 12). Each family killed its own lamb, so no public offering is listed here.

The next day began the Feast of Unleavened Bread, seven days of eating bread made without yeast (28:17), recalling the haste of leaving Egypt. The first and seventh days were each "a convocation of holiness" (28:18, 25), a holy gathering when no regular work was done. Each of the

seven days had the same offering as the new moon: two bulls, one ram, seven lambs and a goat for a sin offering "to make atonement for you" (28:22).

Paul makes the link to Christ plain: "For also our Passover was sacrificed for us: Christ" (1 Corinthians 5:7). He tells us to keep the feast "with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:8). Yeast here stands for sin. The redeemed are called to clean lives.

28:26-31 *And on the day of the firstfruits, when you bring near a new grain offering to the LORD at your Weeks, you shall have a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor. And you shall bring near a burnt offering for a soothing aroma to the LORD: two young bulls, sons of the herd, one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths **of an ephah**) for the one young bull, approximately 4 quarts (two tenths **of an ephah**) for the one ram, approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth **of an ephah**) for the one lamb, for the seven lambs; one male goat of the goats, to make atonement for you. Besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, you shall offer **them**; they shall be without blemish for you; and their drink offerings.*

"On the day of the firstfruits, when you bring near a new grain offering to the LORD at your Weeks" (28:26). The Feast of Weeks came seven weeks after the Passover season (Leviticus 23:15-16). It celebrated the first of the wheat harvest. Later it was called Pentecost, from the Greek word for fiftieth. It was one day, a holy gathering, with the same offerings again: two bulls, one ram, seven lambs and a goat "to make atonement for you" (28:30).

On that very feast, fifty days after Jesus rose, God poured out the Holy Spirit on the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 2:1-4). Three thousand were saved that day, the first fruits of the great harvest of the gospel.

"They shall be without blemish for you" (28:31). God wanted the best. Our worship should never be leftovers. And every spotless animal pointed to Christ, who "offered Himself unblemished to God" (Hebrews 9:14).

Chapter 28 Summary

The LORD told Moses to command Israel to bring His offerings at their appointed times. Every day the priests were to offer two lambs as a continual burnt offering, one in the morning and one in the evening, with grain and drink offerings. On each Sabbath two more lambs were added. On the first day of each month they offered two young bulls, one ram, seven lambs and a male goat for a sin offering. Passover came on the fourteenth day of the first month, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread followed for seven days, with the same offerings each day and holy gatherings on the first and seventh days. On the day of firstfruits at the Feast of Weeks they offered the same again. All of these were besides the continual burnt offering, and all the animals were to be without blemish.

Chapter 28 Study Questions

1. What did God call these offerings, and when were they to be brought? (28:2)

2. What was offered every morning and evening, and when had it first been commanded? (28:3-6)

3. What was added on the Sabbath? (28:9-10)

4. What was offered at the beginning of each month, and why do you think a sin offering was included? (28:11-15)

5. Which feasts are covered in this chapter, and when did each one fall? (28:16-17, 26)

6. How does Paul connect Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread to Christ and to us? (1 Corinthians 5:7-8)

7. What happened on the Feast of Weeks in Acts 2?

8. The daily offering never stopped, even on feast days. What does daily faithfulness to God look like in your life?

9. Israel gave God more on the Sabbath, not less. How do you set aside time for rest and worship?

10. Hebrews 10:11-12 says Christ's one sacrifice did what the daily sacrifices never could. How does that give you peace when you think about your sin?

Chapter 29: The Offerings of the Seventh Month

Scripture

29:1-11 'And in the seventh month, on the first ***day*** of the month, you shall have a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor; it shall be a day of a loud blast for you. And you shall offer a burnt offering for a soothing aroma to the LORD: one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths ***of an ephah***) for the young bull, approximately 4 quarts (two tenths ***of an ephah***) for the ram, and approximately 2 quarts (one tenth ***of an ephah***) for the one lamb, for the seven lambs; and one male goat of the goats ***for*** a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering, and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a soothing aroma, a fire offering to the LORD. And on the tenth ***day*** of this seventh month you shall have a convocation of holiness, and you shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work. And you shall bring near a burnt offering to the LORD, a soothing aroma: one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year; they shall be without blemish for you; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths ***of an ephah***) for the young bull, approximately 4 quarts (two tenths ***of an ephah***) for the one ram, approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth ***of an ephah***) for the one lamb, for the seven lambs; one male goat of the goats ***for*** a sin offering, besides the sin offering of atonement, and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings.

29:12-40 And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor, and you shall celebrate a festival to the LORD seven days. And you shall bring near a burnt offering, a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD: thirteen young bulls, sons of the herd, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year; they shall be without blemish; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths ***of an ephah***) for the one young bull, for the thirteen young bulls; approximately 4 quarts (two tenths ***of an ephah***) for the one ram, for the two rams; and approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth ***of an ephah***) for the one lamb, for the fourteen lambs; and one male goat of the goats ***for*** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering. And on the second day: twelve young bulls, sons of the herd, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat of the goats ***for*** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and their drink offerings. And on the third day: eleven young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat ***for*** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering. And on the fourth day: ten young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat of the goats ***for*** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering. And on the fifth day:

nine young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat ***for*** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering. And on the sixth day: eight young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat ***for*** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offerings. And on the seventh day: seven young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to their ordinance; and one male goat ***for*** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering. On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall not do any work of labor. And you shall bring near a burnt offering, a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD: one young bull, one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat ***for*** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering. These you shall offer to the LORD at your appointed times, apart from your vows and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings and for your grain offerings and for your drink offerings and for your peace offerings.'" And Moses said to the sons of Israel according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses.

Chapter 29 Preview

Chapter 29 finishes the calendar begun in chapter 28. It is all about the seventh month, the busiest month of Israel's year of worship. On the first day came the day of the loud blast, often called the Feast of Trumpets. On the tenth day came the Day of Atonement, when the people afflicted their souls. On the fifteenth day began the Feast of Booths, eight days of joy at the end of the harvest, with more sacrifices than any other feast.

This is another list chapter. The Feast of Booths has a pattern worth noticing: the number of bulls starts at thirteen and goes down by one each day to seven, for a total of seventy. The chapter ends by reminding Israel that all of this was besides their own vows and freewill gifts. God's people were to live a life ordered around Him all year long.

Chapter 29 Study

29:1-6 *'And in the seventh month, on the first **day** of the month, you shall have a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor; it shall be a day of a loud blast for you. And you shall offer a burnt offering for a soothing aroma to the LORD: one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths **of an ephah**) for the young bull, approximately 4 quarts (two tenths **of an ephah**) for the ram, and approximately 2 quarts (one tenth **of an ephah**) for the one lamb, for the seven lambs; and one male goat of the goats **for** a sin offering, to make atonement for you; besides the burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering, and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a soothing aroma, a fire offering to the LORD.*

"In the seventh month, on the first day of the month," Israel was to hold a holy gathering, and "it shall be a day of a loud blast for you" (29:1). The seventh month came in early autumn. The day opened with the sound of trumpets or rams' horns (Leviticus 23:24). It called the nation to get ready for the holy days that followed.

The offering was one young bull, one ram, seven lambs and a goat for a sin offering (29:2-5). This was "besides the burnt offering of the new moon" and "the continual burnt offering" (29:6). So on this day the altar carried three sets of offerings at once: the daily, the monthly and the feast.

Many Bible teachers see the trumpet blast as a picture of the trumpet that will sound when the Lord comes for His church (1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:52). The New Testament does not tie those verses to this feast, so I offer it only as a picture.

29:7-11 *And on the tenth **day** of this seventh month you shall have a convocation of holiness, and you shall afflict your souls; you shall not do any work. And you shall bring near a burnt offering to the LORD, a soothing aroma: one young bull, a son of the herd, one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year; they shall be without blemish for you; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths **of an ephah**) for the young bull, approximately 4 quarts (two tenths **of an ephah**) for the one ram, approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth **of an ephah**) for the one lamb, for the seven lambs; one male goat of the goats **for** a sin offering, besides the sin offering of atonement, and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings.*

"On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a convocation of holiness, and you shall afflict your souls" (29:7). This is the Day of Atonement, described in full in Leviticus 16. To afflict your souls means to humble yourself before God, usually by fasting. It was the most solemn day of the year. On it the high priest went into the Most Holy Place with blood to make atonement for the whole nation. Atonement means covering sin so a holy God and a sinful people can be at peace.

Here Numbers lists only the public burnt offerings, one bull, one ram and seven lambs, and a goat for a sin offering, "besides the sin offering of atonement" (29:11), the special sacrifices of Leviticus 16.

Hebrews explains how this day points to Jesus. The high priest went in once a year with blood that was not his own. Christ entered once for all into heaven itself, "through His own blood," and obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:7, 12). What the Day of Atonement did every year, Christ finished forever.

29:12-16 *And on the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a convocation of holiness; you shall not do any work of labor, and you shall celebrate a festival to the LORD seven days. And you shall bring near a burnt offering, a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD: thirteen young bulls, sons of the herd, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year; they shall be without blemish; and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: approximately 6 quarts (three tenths* ***of an ephah****) for the one young bull, for the thirteen young bulls; approximately 4 quarts (two tenths* ***of an ephah****) for the one ram, for the two rams; and approximately 2 quarts (a tenth, a tenth* ***of an ephah****) for the one lamb, for the fourteen lambs; and one male goat of the goats* ***for*** *a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering.*

"On the fifteenth day of the seventh month," God said, "you shall celebrate a festival to the LORD seven days" (29:12). This is the Feast of Booths, also called Tabernacles. The people lived in booths made of branches to remember that God made Israel live in booths when He brought them out of Egypt (Leviticus 23:42-43). It came at the end of the harvest, and it was a time of great joy (Deuteronomy 16:13-15).

The first day's offering was huge: "thirteen young bulls, sons of the herd, two rams, fourteen lambs" (29:13), with grain and drink offerings for each, and a goat for a sin offering. That is far more than any other day.

29:17-34 *And on the second day: twelve young bulls, sons of the herd, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat of the goats **for** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and their drink offerings. And on the third day: eleven young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat **for** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering. And on the fourth day: ten young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat of the goats **for** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering. And on the fifth day: nine young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat **for** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering. And on the sixth day: eight young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat **for** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offerings. And on the seventh day: seven young bulls, two rams, fourteen lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, by their number, according to their ordinance; and one male goat **for** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering.*

Day by day the pattern holds. Two rams and fourteen lambs each day, with a goat for a sin offering. Only the bulls change: twelve on the second day, then eleven, ten, nine, eight, and "seven young bulls" on the seventh day (29:32).

Add the bulls and you get seventy for the week, along with fourteen rams and ninety-eight lambs. Why seventy? Scripture does not explain it. Jewish teachers later linked the seventy bulls to the seventy nations listed in Genesis 10, as if Israel offered for the whole world. That is an interesting thought, but it is tradition, not something the text says. What the text does show is a feast of joy marked by lavish giving. In a time of plenty, God's people gave much.

29:35-38 *On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall not do any work of labor. And you shall bring near a burnt offering, a fire offering of a soothing aroma to the LORD: one young bull, one ram, seven lambs, sons of a year, without blemish; their grain offering and their drink offerings for the young bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, by their number, according to the ordinance; and one male goat **for** a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering.*

"On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly" (29:35). After the seven days came one more holy day. The offering went back to one bull, one ram and seven lambs, like the first and tenth days of the month. It closed the feast season of the year.

On "the last day, the great day of the feast" of Booths, Jesus stood up in the temple and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). John explains that He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him would receive (John 7:39). The feast that remembered God's care in the desert pointed to the living water only Christ can give.

Zechariah 14:16 also says that in the kingdom to come the nations will go up to Jerusalem year by year to keep the Feast of Booths. The feast that looked back to the wilderness also looks forward to the day when Christ reigns and God dwells with His people.

29:39-40 *These you shall offer to the LORD at your appointed times, apart from your vows and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings and for your grain offerings and for your drink offerings and for your peace offerings.'" And Moses said to the sons of Israel according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses.*

"These you shall offer to the LORD at your appointed times, apart from your vows and your freewill offerings" (29:39). Everything in chapters 28 and 29 was the nation's regular, required worship. On top of it came each person's own gifts: vows, freewill offerings, and peace offerings, which were shared meals of thanks and fellowship with God.

If you add up the public offerings for a year, it comes to more than a thousand lambs alone. All of it could not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4). It covered sin and taught the people, until the true Lamb came. "And Moses said to the sons of Israel according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses" (29:40). Moses passed on every word.

In the Hebrew Bible, verse 40 is counted as the first verse of chapter 30. The SLB follows the English numbering.

Chapter 29 Summary

The seventh month held three holy times. On the first day came a day of the loud blast, with one bull, one ram, seven lambs and a goat for a sin offering, besides the new moon and daily offerings. On the tenth day came the Day of Atonement, when the people afflicted their souls and did no work, with the same public offerings besides the special sin offering of atonement. On the fifteenth day began the Feast of Booths, seven days of offerings: thirteen bulls on the first day, one fewer each day down to seven on the seventh, with two rams, fourteen lambs and a goat every day. On the eighth day came a solemn assembly with one bull, one ram and seven lambs. All of these were Israel's appointed offerings, apart from personal vows and freewill gifts, and Moses told the people everything the LORD had commanded.

For me, communion Sunday at church is my Day of Atonement. That is when I dig deep and ask God for forgiveness. I do not want to come to His table carelessly. It is a time set apart to be honest with Him.

Chapter 29 Study Questions

1. What three holy times fell in the seventh month, and on which days? (29:1, 7, 12)

2. What were the people to do on the tenth day of the month? (29:7)

3. How many bulls were offered on each day of the Feast of Booths, and what was the total? (29:13-32)

4. What did the eighth day of the feast look like? (29:35-36)

5. What other offerings could the people give besides these appointed ones? (29:39)

6. How does Hebrews 9:7-12 show that Christ finished what the Day of Atonement pictured?

7. What did Jesus say on the last day of the Feast of Booths, and what did He mean? (John 7:37-39)

8. The Day of Atonement was a day to humble yourself before God. When was the last time you set aside time to confess your sin and seek Him?

9. The Feast of Booths was a time of joy and generous giving after the harvest. How do you respond to God when He has blessed you?

10. All these sacrifices could not take away sin, but Christ's one sacrifice did (Hebrews 10:4, 10). How does knowing that change the way you worship?

Chapter 30: The Law of Vows

Scripture

30:1-16 And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, "This ***is*** the word which the LORD has commanded: If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind an obligation on his soul, he shall not profane his word; according to all that goes out from his mouth he shall do. And if a woman vows a vow to the LORD and binds an obligation in the house of her father in her youth, and her father hears her vow and her obligation which she has bound on her soul, and her father keeps silent toward her, then all her vows shall stand, and every obligation which she has bound on her soul shall stand. And if her father forbids her on the day he hears, all her vows and her obligations which she has bound on her soul shall not stand; and the LORD will forgive her, because her father forbade her. And if she surely belongs to a husband, and her vows ***are*** on her, or the rash utterance of her lips which she has bound on her soul, and her husband hears, on the day he hears, and keeps silent toward her, then her vows shall stand, and her obligations which she has bound on her soul shall stand. And if on the day her husband hears he forbids her, then he shall break her vow which ***is*** on her and the rash utterance of her lips which she has bound on her soul; and the LORD will forgive her. And the vow of a widow and a divorced ***woman***, all that she has bound on her soul shall stand against her. And if she vowed ***in*** the house of her husband, or bound an obligation on her soul with an oath, and her husband hears and keeps silent toward her, does not forbid her, then all her vows shall stand, and every obligation which she has bound on her soul shall stand. And if her husband surely breaks them on the day he hears, anything that goes out of her lips for her vows and for the obligation of her soul shall not stand; her husband has broken them, and the LORD will forgive her. Every vow and every oath of obligation to afflict a soul, her husband may make it stand, and her husband may break it. And if her husband surely keeps silent toward her from day to day, then he makes all her vows stand, or all her obligations which ***are*** on her; he has made them stand, because he kept silent toward her on the day he heard. And if he surely breaks them after he has heard, then he shall bear her iniquity." These ***are*** the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses between a man and his wife, between a father and his daughter in her youth ***in*** the house of her father.

Chapter 30 Preview

Chapter 29 ended by mentioning vows and freewill offerings. Chapter 30 gives the law of vows. A vow was a solemn promise made to God, often to give Him something or to hold back from something. The first rule is plain and covers everyone: if a man makes a vow to the LORD, "he shall not profane his word." What you promise God, you do.

Most of the chapter deals with a young woman living in her father's house and a married woman. In that world a daughter or wife was part of a household that the father or husband was responsible for. A vow she made could bind the whole family's goods. So God let the head of the house cancel the vow, but only on the day he heard it. If he kept silent, it stood. If he cancelled it later, the guilt was his. A widow or divorced woman answered for her own vows. This chapter needs careful reading, because it can be twisted. Read in context, it guards women from being trapped by a rash promise and it holds men responsible for how they use their authority.

Chapter 30 Study

30:1-2 *And Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, "This **is** the word which the LORD has commanded: If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind an obligation on his soul, he shall not profane his word; according to all that goes out from his mouth he shall do.*

Moses spoke this law "to the heads of the tribes" (30:1). The leaders would need it to settle cases.

"If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind an obligation on his soul, he shall not profane his word; according to all that goes out from his mouth he shall do" (30:2). A vow was a promise to do something for God. An oath "to bind an obligation" was a promise to hold back from something, such as fasting or giving up some pleasure. To profane your word means to treat it as common and empty, to break it.

God takes our words seriously. Nobody had to make a vow. It was freely chosen. But once made, it had to be kept. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 says it is better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Jesus went further and told His followers to be people whose plain yes means yes and whose no means no (Matthew 5:33-37; James 5:12). A believer's ordinary word should be as good as an oath.

30:3-5 *And if a woman vows a vow to the LORD and binds an obligation in the house of her father in her youth, and her father hears her vow and her obligation which she has bound on her soul, and her father keeps silent toward her, then all her vows shall stand, and every obligation which she has bound on her soul shall stand. And if her father forbids her on the day he hears, all her vows and her obligations which she has bound on her soul shall not stand; and the LORD will forgive her, because her father forbade her.*

"If a woman vows a vow to the LORD and binds an obligation in the house of her father in her youth" (30:3). This is an unmarried young woman still living under her father's care.

If her father heard and "keeps silent toward her, then all her vows shall stand" (30:4). Her vow was real. God received it. Women in Israel could and did make vows to God, as Hannah did when she prayed for a son (1 Samuel 1:11).

"And if her father forbids her on the day he hears," her vows "shall not stand; and the LORD will forgive her, because her father forbade her" (30:5). The father was responsible for the household. A rash vow could commit family property or bind a daughter in ways she did not see coming. This rule protected her. If her father stopped it, she was not guilty before God for leaving it undone. "The LORD will forgive her" means God would not hold it against her.

30:6-8 *And if she surely belongs to a husband, and her vows **are** on her, or the rash utterance of her lips which she has bound on her soul, and her husband hears, on the day he hears, and keeps silent toward her, then her vows shall stand, and her obligations which she has bound on her soul shall stand. And if on the day her husband hears he forbids her, then he shall break her vow which **is** on her and the rash utterance of her lips which she has bound on her soul; and the LORD will forgive her.*

Next comes a woman who marries while a vow is still on her, "or the rash utterance of her lips which she has bound on her soul" (30:6). Maybe she made it before the wedding. When her husband hears of it, he has the same choice as a father, and the same time limit: "on the day he hears" (30:7-8). If he keeps silent, it stands. If he forbids it that day, it is broken, "and the LORD will forgive her" (30:8).

The words "rash utterance" show part of the purpose. People sometimes make promises to God in a moment of strong feeling, in fear or excitement, without thinking them through. Scripture warns us about this. Jephthah made a rash vow that ended in great sorrow (Judges 11:30-35). This law gave a way out of a rash vow before it did harm.

30:9 *And the vow of a widow and a divorced **woman**, all that she has bound on her soul shall stand against her.*

"And the vow of a widow and a divorced woman, all that she has bound on her soul shall stand against her." A woman with no husband or father over her household answered to God for herself, just like a man. Her vows were as binding as any man's.

This line matters. It shows the law was not saying women could not be trusted with vows. The difference was about who was responsible for a household, not about a woman's worth or her standing before God.

30:10-12 *And if she vowed **in** the house of her husband, or bound an obligation on her soul with an oath, and her husband hears and keeps silent toward her, does not forbid her, then all her vows shall stand, and every obligation which she has bound on her soul shall stand. And if her husband surely breaks them on the day he hears, anything that goes out of her lips for her vows and for the obligation of her soul shall not stand; her husband has broken them, and the LORD will forgive her.*

Now the case of a wife who makes a vow while married, "in the house of her husband" (30:10). The rule is the same. If her husband "hears and keeps silent toward her, does not forbid her, then all her vows shall stand" (30:11). If he breaks them "on the day he hears," they do not stand, "and the LORD will forgive her" (30:12).

In ancient Israel the husband was head of the household and answered for its goods and its life before God. A wife's vow to give a field or a large gift would affect the whole family. This law kept the household from being pulled two ways, and it kept the wife from bearing guilt for a vow her husband would not allow.

30:13-15 *Every vow and every oath of obligation to afflict a soul, her husband may make it stand, and her husband may break it. And if her husband surely keeps silent toward her from day to day, then he makes all her vows stand, or all her obligations which **are** on her; he has made them stand, because he kept silent toward her on the day he heard. And if he surely breaks them after he has heard, then he shall bear her iniquity."*

"Every vow and every oath of obligation to afflict a soul, her husband may make it stand, and her husband may break it" (30:13). To afflict a soul means self-denial, such as fasting.

Then the key limit: if he "keeps silent toward her from day to day, then he makes all her vows stand" (30:14). His silence was his consent. He could not let her go on and then change his mind weeks later when it suited him.

"And if he surely breaks them after he has heard, then he shall bear her iniquity" (30:15). If a husband cancelled a vow after the day he heard it, the guilt of the broken vow moved from her to him. God held the man responsible. The authority God gave him came with accountability.

30:16 *These **are** the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses between a man and his wife, between a father and his daughter in her youth **in** the house of her father.*

"These are the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses between a man and his wife, between a father and his daughter in her youth in the house of her father." The chapter closes by naming the relationships it covers: a family, with a father or husband answering to God for his house.

What do we take from this today? We are not under the Law of Moses as a covenant, and the rules about vows belonged to Israel's household life. But the heart of it still speaks. First, God hears our promises and expects us to keep them. Second, God gives authority in the home for protection, not control. The New Testament tells husbands to love their wives "even as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25), and fathers not to provoke their children (Ephesians 6:4). Anyone who uses this chapter to bully a wife or daughter has turned it upside down. Third, men and women stand equal before God as His children and heirs (Galatians 3:28; 1 Peter 3:7). If you have made a rash promise to God, bring it to Him honestly. He is a forgiving Father.

Chapter 30 Summary

Moses told the leaders of the tribes what the LORD commanded about vows. A man who made a vow or an oath to the LORD had to keep his word. If a young woman living in her father's house made a vow, it stood unless her father forbade it on the day he heard it, and then the LORD would forgive her. The same rule applied to a woman who married with a vow still on her, and to a wife who made a vow in her husband's house: her husband could confirm it by keeping silent or cancel it on the day he heard. A widow or divorced woman was bound by her own vows. If a husband cancelled a vow later, after first keeping silent, he would bear her guilt. These were the statutes for a man and his wife and for a father and his daughter in his house.

Chapter 30 Study Questions

1. What was the rule for a man who made a vow to the LORD? (30:2)

2. What could a father do about a vow made by a daughter living in his house, and when did he have to do it? (30:3-5)

3. What happened to a vow when a father or husband heard it and kept silent? (30:4, 7, 14)

4. Who was bound by her own vows with no one to cancel them? (30:9)

5. What happened if a husband cancelled a vow after he had already let it stand? (30:15)

6. What does Jesus teach about oaths and keeping our word? (Matthew 5:33-37)

7. How does Ephesians 5:25 shape the way a husband should use any authority he has in the home?

8. Have you ever made a promise to God in a moment of fear or excitement? What did you do with it?

9. Is your plain yes or no as good as a promise? Where do you need to be more careful with your words?

10. This law held men responsible before God for how they treated the women in their house. How can you use whatever authority you have to protect and serve others rather than control them?

Chapter 31: War Against Midian

Scripture

31:1-24 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Avenge the vengeance of the sons of Israel from the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your peoples." And Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Be armed, men from among you, for the war, and let them be against Midian, to give the vengeance of the LORD on Midian. A thousand for the tribe, a thousand for the tribe, of all the tribes of Israel, you shall send to the war." And ***there*** were selected from the thousands of Israel a thousand for the tribe, twelve thousand armed ***men*** of war. And Moses sent them, a thousand for the tribe, to the war, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, and the vessels of the holy place and the trumpets of the alarm ***were*** in his hand. And they waged war against Midian, just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every male. And the kings of Midian they killed besides their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; and Balaam the son of Beor they killed with the sword. And the sons of Israel took captive the women of Midian and their little ones; and all their beasts and all their livestock and all their wealth they plundered. And all their cities in their dwelling places and all their encampments they burned with fire. And they took all the plunder and all the booty, among man and among beast. And they brought to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel the captives and the booty and the plunder, to the camp, to the plains of Moab, which ***are*** by the Jordan ***at*** Jericho. And Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them, to the outside of the camp. And Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of the thousands and the commanders of the hundreds, who were coming from the war of the battle. And Moses said to them, "Have you let every female live? Look, they themselves were ***the cause*** for the sons of Israel, by the word of Balaam, to commit unfaithfulness against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and the plague was among the congregation of the LORD. And now, kill every male among the little ones, and every woman who has known a man by the lying of a male, kill. And all the little ones among the women who have not known the lying of a male, keep alive for yourselves. And you, encamp outside the camp seven days; everyone who has killed a soul and everyone who has touched the slain, purify yourselves on the third day and on the seventh day, you and your captives. And every garment and every article of skin and every work of goats' ***hair*** and every article of wood, you shall purify." And Eleazar the priest said to the men of the army who had gone to the battle, "This ***is*** the statute of the law which the LORD commanded Moses: Only the gold and the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, every thing that goes into the fire, you shall make pass through the fire, and it will be clean; nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of impurity. And all that does not go into the fire, you shall make pass through the water. And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and you will be clean, and afterward you may come into the camp."

31:25-54 And the LORD said to Moses, saying, "Take the sum of the booty of the captives, among man and among beast, you and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers of the congregation. And you shall divide the booty in half between those who handled the battle, who went out to the war, and all the congregation. And you shall raise a tax for the LORD from the men of the battle who went out to the war: one soul out of five hundred, from man and from the cattle and from the

donkeys and from the flock. From their half you shall take ***it***, and you shall give ***it*** to Eleazar the priest ***as*** the contribution of the LORD. And from the half of the sons of Israel you shall take one taken out of the fifty, from man, from the cattle, from the donkeys, and from the flock, from all the beasts; and you shall give them to the Levites who keep the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD." And Moses and Eleazar the priest did just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And the booty, the remainder of the plunder which the people of the army had plundered, was: flock, six hundred thousand and seventy thousand and five thousand, and cattle, seventy-two thousand, and donkeys, sixty-one thousand, and the souls of mankind, from the women who had not known the lying of a male, all the souls, thirty-two thousand. And the half, the portion of those who had gone out in the war, was: the number of the flock, three hundred thousand and thirty thousand and seven thousand and five hundred; and the tax for the LORD from the flock was six hundred and seventy-five. And the cattle ***were*** thirty-six thousand, and their tax for the LORD ***was*** seventy-two. And the donkeys ***were*** thirty thousand and five hundred, and their tax for the LORD ***was*** sixty-one. And the souls of mankind ***were*** sixteen thousand, and their tax for the LORD ***was*** thirty-two souls. And Moses gave the tax of the contribution of the LORD to Eleazar the priest, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And from the half of the sons of Israel, which Moses had divided off from the men who had waged war, and the half of the congregation was: from the flock, three hundred thousand and thirty thousand, seven thousand and five hundred; and cattle, thirty-six thousand; and donkeys, thirty thousand and five hundred; and souls of mankind, sixteen thousand. And Moses took from the half of the sons of Israel the ***ones*** taken, one out of the fifty, from man and from beast, and he gave them to the Levites who keep the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And the officers who ***were*** over the thousands of the army, the commanders of the thousands and the commanders of the hundreds, drew near to Moses, and they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken the sum of the men of the battle who ***were*** in our hand, and not a man is missing from us. And we have brought near the offering of the LORD, each man what he found, articles of gold, armlet and bracelet, signet ring, earring, and ornament, to make atonement for our souls before the LORD." And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, every article of work. And all the gold of the contribution which they raised for the LORD was approximately 420 pounds (sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels), from the commanders of the thousands and from the commanders of the hundreds. The men of the army had taken plunder, each man for himself. And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and they brought it into the tent of meeting ***as*** a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD.

Chapter 31 Preview

This is one of the hardest chapters in the Bible to read. God tells Moses to carry out His judgment on Midian for what they did at Peor, when the Midianites deliberately led Israel into idolatry and sexual sin to bring God's curse on them (25:16-18). It is Moses' last task before he dies. Twelve thousand men go out, a thousand from each tribe, with Phinehas the priest. They kill the men of Midian, including five kings and Balaam, and bring back the women, the children and the livestock.

Then Moses is angry, because the women who led Israel astray at Peor have been spared. He orders the death of the boys and of the women who had been with a man, and only the young girls are kept alive. I will not soften what the text says, and I will not try to make it easy. I will try to explain it honestly, in its context. The rest of the chapter tells how the soldiers were cleansed, how the plunder was shared, and how the officers, finding that not one of their men was lost, brought a gift of gold to the LORD.

Chapter 31 Study

31:1-2 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Avenge the vengeance of the sons of Israel from the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your peoples."*

"Avenge the vengeance of the sons of Israel from the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your peoples" (31:2). God had already said in 25:17 to treat the Midianites as enemies. Now He gave the order to act.

The word is vengeance, but notice whose it is. In verse 3 Moses calls it "the vengeance of the LORD on Midian." This was not Israel settling a score. It was God's judgment on a people who had set out to destroy His people by leading them into sin. Twenty-four thousand Israelites had died in the plague that followed (25:9). God, who says vengeance belongs to Him (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19), chose to carry out this judgment through Israel.

This would be Moses' last work. After it, he would die.

31:3-6 *And Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Be armed, men from among you, for the war, and let them be against Midian, to give the vengeance of the LORD on Midian. A thousand for the tribe, a thousand for the tribe, of all the tribes of Israel, you shall send to the war." And* ***there*** *were selected from the thousands of Israel a thousand for the tribe, twelve thousand armed* ***men*** *of war. And Moses sent them, a thousand for the tribe, to the war, them and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war, and the vessels of the holy place and the trumpets of the alarm* ***were*** *in his hand.*

Moses told the people to arm "a thousand for the tribe" from every tribe (31:4), "twelve thousand armed men of war" in all (31:5). Every tribe had a share. No tribe could say this was someone else's battle.

Moses sent "Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest" with them, and "the vessels of the holy place and the trumpets of the alarm were in his hand" (31:6). Phinehas was the priest who had stopped the plague at Peor (25:7-8). The trumpets were the silver trumpets God commanded for war, so that Israel would be remembered before the LORD (10:9). The presence of the priest and the holy things showed that this was not a raid for plunder. It was a war under God's command, with God at its center. Scripture does not tell us exactly which holy vessels are meant.

31:7-12 *And they waged war against Midian, just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every male. And the kings of Midian they killed besides their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; and Balaam the son of Beor they killed with the sword. And the sons of Israel took captive the women of Midian and their little ones; and all their beasts and all their livestock and all their wealth they plundered. And all their cities in their dwelling places and all their encampments they burned with fire. And they took all the plunder and all the booty, among man and among beast. And they brought to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel the captives and the booty and the plunder, to the camp, to the plains of Moab, which* ***are*** *by the Jordan* ***at*** *Jericho.*

"They killed every male" (31:7). This means every man of fighting age in the Midianite groups that had joined Moab against Israel. It does not mean the whole Midianite people died out. The Midianites were spread across a wide area, and they show up again in Judges 6 as a strong nation.

"The five kings of Midian" were killed, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba (31:8). Zur was the father of Cozbi, the woman killed with Zimri at Peor (25:15). Joshua 13:21 calls these men chiefs who were allied with Sihon.

"And Balaam the son of Beor they killed with the sword." Balaam had blessed Israel with his mouth, but then he gave the counsel that led Israel into sin (31:16; Revelation 2:14). He had once said, "Let my soul die the death of the upright" (23:10). He did not. He died with the enemies of God. It is possible to say beautiful things about God and still love money more than Him (2 Peter 2:15).

The army took the women and children captive, took the livestock and goods, and "all their cities in their dwelling places and all their encampments they burned with fire" (31:10). They brought everything to Moses, Eleazar and the congregation "to the plains of Moab" (31:12).

31:13-18 *And Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them, to the outside of the camp. And Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of the thousands and the commanders of the hundreds, who were coming from the war of the battle. And Moses said to them, "Have you let every female live? Look, they themselves were* ***the cause*** *for the sons of Israel, by the word of Balaam, to commit unfaithfulness against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and the plague was among the congregation of the LORD. And now, kill every male among the little ones, and every woman who has known a man by the lying of a male, kill. And all the little ones among the women who have not known the lying of a male, keep alive for yourselves.*

Moses, Eleazar and the leaders went out of the camp to meet the army. Then "Moses was angry with the officers of the army" (31:14). He asked them, "Have you let every female live?" (31:15).

His reason is given in verse 16: "Look, they themselves were the cause for the sons of Israel, by the word of Balaam, to commit unfaithfulness against the LORD in the matter of Peor, and the plague was among the congregation of the LORD." These were the very women who had been sent to seduce Israel's men into idol worship. The army had brought them back into the camp. The danger that had just cost twenty-four thousand lives was now standing inside Israel's tents.

Then comes the command that is so hard for us: "And now, kill every male among the little ones, and every woman who has known a man by the lying of a male, kill" (31:17). "All the little ones among the women who have not known the lying of a male, keep alive for yourselves" (31:18).

I want to be honest. This passage is troubling, and if it troubles you, that is not a lack of faith. It should trouble us. The death of children is a terrible thing. Scripture does not hide it, and neither should we. So what can we say?

First, this was God's judgment, given by God's command, for a specific sin. Midian had chosen to destroy Israel by seduction (25:18). The women who had been with men were those who had taken part, or could have, in the plot at Peor. This was the same kind of judgment God brought in the flood and on Sodom, when whole communities, including children, died under His hand. God alone is the giver and the taker of life (Deuteronomy 32:39), and Abraham's question still stands: will not the Judge of all the earth do what is right (Genesis 18:25)? I believe He does, even when I cannot see all of His reasons.

Second, why the boys? Scripture does not tell us. Many think it was so that this branch of Midian, which had set out to destroy Israel, would not rise again to do it. We should be careful not to say more than the text says.

Third, what about the girls who were kept alive? The words "keep alive for yourselves" do not give permission for abuse. The Law set strict limits. A man who wanted to marry a captive woman had to give her a full month to mourn her family, had to take her as a true wife, and could never sell her or treat her as a slave if he later sent her away (Deuteronomy 21:10-14). Many of these girls would have been raised in Israelite homes as servants and later as wives, and some may have come to trust the God of Israel. Scripture does not tell us their stories.

Fourth, this was never a pattern for anyone today. It was a one-time command from God, through His prophet Moses, for Israel under the covenant at a single moment in history. Even Israel's own laws of war were different in normal times (Deuteronomy 20:10-14). No church, nation or person may ever point to this chapter to take a life in God's name. When Peter drew a sword, Jesus told him to put it away (Matthew 26:52). Our battle "is not against blood and flesh" (Ephesians 6:12).

And last, this chapter shows how serious sin is to God. The sin at Peor was not a small thing, and its judgment was not small. Every one of us deserves God's judgment for our own sin. The only reason any of us can stand before Him is that Jesus took that judgment on Himself at the cross. There we see God's justice and His mercy meet (Romans 3:25-26). If you know a little child who has died, I believe you can trust that same God with that child. David said of his own son who died, "I am going to him" (2 Samuel 12:23).

31:19-24 *And you, encamp outside the camp seven days; everyone who has killed a soul and everyone who has touched the slain, purify yourselves on the third day and on the seventh day, you and your captives. And every garment and every article of skin and every work of goats' **hair** and every article of wood, you shall purify." And Eleazar the priest said to the men of the army who had gone to the battle, "This **is** the statute of the law which the LORD commanded Moses: Only the gold and the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin, and the lead, every thing that goes into the fire, you shall make pass through the fire, and it will be clean; nevertheless it shall be purified with the water of impurity. And all that does not go into the fire, you shall make pass through the water. And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day, and you will be clean, and afterward you may come into the camp."*

Even after a war God commanded, the soldiers were not clean. "Encamp outside the camp seven days; everyone who has killed a soul and everyone who has touched the slain, purify yourselves on the third day and on the seventh day, you and your captives" (31:19). This is the cleansing with the water of the red heifer from chapter 19. To be unclean meant being unfit for a time to come near God's worship, not being guilty of sin.

Clothing, leather, goat's hair and wood had to be cleansed too (31:20). Eleazar added that metal things "that goes into the fire" were to pass through fire and be washed with "the water of impurity," and everything else through water (31:23). After washing their clothes on the seventh day, they could come back into the camp (31:24).

What does that tell us? Life is sacred. Even when God ordered a judgment, taking life and touching death left a mark that had to be dealt with before God. War, even a war God commanded, was never treated as a light thing.

31:25-31 *And the LORD said to Moses, saying, "Take the sum of the booty of the captives, among man and among beast, you and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers of the congregation. And you shall divide the booty in half between those who handled the battle, who went out to the war, and all the congregation. And you shall raise a tax for the LORD from the men of the battle who went out to the war: one soul out of five hundred, from man and from the cattle and from the donkeys and from the flock. From their half you shall take **it**, and you shall give **it** to Eleazar the priest **as** the contribution of the LORD. And from the half of the sons of Israel you shall take one taken out of the fifty, from man, from the cattle, from the donkeys, and from the flock, from all the beasts; and you shall give them to the Levites who keep the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD." And Moses and Eleazar the priest did just as the LORD had commanded Moses.*

Next, God gave rules for sharing the plunder. Moses, Eleazar and the heads of the families were to count it all and "divide the booty in half between those who handled the battle, who went out to the war, and all the congregation" (31:27). The soldiers took the risk, but the whole people shared the gain. David later made the same kind of rule for those who guarded the baggage (1 Samuel 30:24-25).

From the soldiers' half, one out of every five hundred went to Eleazar the priest "as the contribution of the LORD" (31:29). From the people's half, one out of every fifty went to the

Levites (31:30). Those who served at the tabernacle had no land and depended on these gifts. Everyone gave back to God from what He had given.

31:32-47 *And the booty, the remainder of the plunder which the people of the army had plundered, was: flock, six hundred thousand and seventy thousand and five thousand, and cattle, seventy-two thousand, and donkeys, sixty-one thousand, and the souls of mankind, from the women who had not known the lying of a male, all the souls, thirty-two thousand. And the half, the portion of those who had gone out in the war, was: the number of the flock, three hundred thousand and thirty thousand and seven thousand and five hundred; and the tax for the LORD from the flock was six hundred and seventy-five. And the cattle **were** thirty-six thousand, and their tax for the LORD **was** seventy-two. And the donkeys **were** thirty thousand and five hundred, and their tax for the LORD **was** sixty-one. And the souls of mankind **were** sixteen thousand, and their tax for the LORD **was** thirty-two souls. And Moses gave the tax of the contribution of the LORD to Eleazar the priest, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. And from the half of the sons of Israel, which Moses had divided off from the men who had waged war, and the half of the congregation was: from the flock, three hundred thousand and thirty thousand, seven thousand and five hundred; and cattle, thirty-six thousand; and donkeys, thirty thousand and five hundred; and souls of mankind, sixteen thousand. And Moses took from the half of the sons of Israel the **ones** taken, one out of the fifty, from man and from beast, and he gave them to the Levites who keep the charge of the tabernacle of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.*

These verses give the count. There were 675,000 sheep and goats, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys, and 32,000 girls (31:32-35). Each half was 337,500 sheep and goats, 36,000 cattle, 30,500 donkeys and 16,000 persons. The LORD's share from the soldiers was 675 sheep and goats, 72 cattle, 61 donkeys and 32 persons (31:37-40).

The persons given to the Levites and to the priest were not offered on the altar. Human sacrifice was forbidden in Israel (Leviticus 18:21). They would have served at the tabernacle, as the Gibeonites later did (Joshua 9:27).

The numbers are large. As elsewhere in Numbers, I take them as written. They show how wealthy these Midianite groups were from herding and trade, and how complete the victory was. Moses did "just as the LORD had commanded Moses" (31:41, 47).

31:48-54 *And the officers who **were** over the thousands of the army, the commanders of the thousands and the commanders of the hundreds, drew near to Moses, and they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken the sum of the men of the battle who **were** in our hand, and not a man is missing from us. And we have brought near the offering of the LORD, each man what he found, articles of gold, armlet and bracelet, signet ring, earring, and ornament, to make atonement for our souls before the LORD." And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, every article of work. And all the gold of the contribution which they raised for the LORD was approximately 420 pounds (sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels), from the commanders of the thousands and from the commanders of the hundreds. The men of the army had taken plunder, each man for himself. And Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the commanders of the thousands and of the hundreds, and they brought it into the tent of meeting **as** a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD.*

Then the commanders came to Moses with surprising news: "Your servants have taken the sum of the men of the battle who were in our hand, and not a man is missing from us" (31:49). Twelve thousand men went to war, and every one came home. That was God's doing, not theirs.

So they brought an offering of gold, armlets, bracelets, rings, earrings and other ornaments, "to make atonement for our souls before the LORD" (31:50). Why atonement? Exodus 30:12 says that when Israel was counted, each man was to give a ransom for his life so that no plague would come. The officers had just counted their men. They may also have felt that they had no right to live when so many had died at Peor. Their gift was thanks and humility together.

The gold weighed "sixteen thousand seven hundred and fifty shekels," about 420 pounds (31:52). Moses and Eleazar "brought it into the tent of meeting as a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD" (31:54). It stood as a reminder that God had given the victory.

The ordinary soldiers kept their own plunder (31:53), but the leaders gave theirs to God. That is a fitting end to a dark chapter. When God protects us and brings us through, the right answer is gratitude. "Not a man is missing." The Good Shepherd says the same of all who are His: no one will snatch them out of His hand (John 10:28).

Chapter 31 Summary

The LORD told Moses to carry out His vengeance on the Midianites before Moses died. Twelve thousand men, a thousand from each tribe, went out with Phinehas the priest, the holy vessels and the trumpets. They killed the men of Midian, including five kings and Balaam, burned their towns, and brought the women, children, livestock and goods to the camp. Moses was angry that the women who had led Israel into sin at Peor had been spared, and he ordered the boys and the women who had been with men to be killed, while the young girls were kept alive. The soldiers and captives stayed outside the camp seven days to be cleansed, and everything taken was purified by fire or water. The plunder was counted and divided in half between the soldiers and the congregation, with a share for the priest and a share for the Levites. The commanders found that not one Israelite soldier was missing, and they gave about 420 pounds of gold to the LORD as atonement, which was placed in the tent of meeting as a memorial.

People and Places

- Midian: a people descended from Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:2), spread over a wide desert area; these were the Midianite groups allied with Moab.
- Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba: the five kings of Midian killed in the battle.
- Balaam son of Beor: the diviner from Pethor hired to curse Israel, who later gave the counsel that led Israel into sin at Peor (31:16).
- Phinehas: the priest who went with the army, son of Eleazar.

Chapter 31 Study Questions

1. Whose vengeance did Moses say this war was, and why was it being carried out? (31:2-3; 25:16-18)

2. Who went with the army, and what did he carry? (31:6)

3. What happened to Balaam, and why is that fitting? (31:8, 16; 23:10)

4. Why was Moses angry when the army came back? (31:14-16)

5. Why did the soldiers have to stay outside the camp, and what does that teach about life and death? (31:19-24)

6. How was the plunder divided, and who received a share? (31:27-30)

7. What did the officers find when they counted their men, and how did they respond? (31:49-50)

8. This chapter is hard to read. How does it help you to know that Scripture does not hide hard things, and that it is all right to bring your questions to God?

9. Balaam said beautiful things about God but led others into sin. How can you guard your heart so that your life matches your words? (2 Peter 2:15)

10. The cross shows God's justice and mercy together. How does knowing that Jesus took God's judgment for you change the way you see your own sin? (Romans 3:25-26)

Chapter 32: The Tribes East of the Jordan

Scripture

32:1-15 And much livestock belonged to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad, very numerous; and they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, and look, the place ***was*** a place of livestock. And the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben came and said to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, "Ataroth and Dibon and Jazer and Nimrah and Heshbon and Elealeh and Sebam and Nebo and Beon, the land which the LORD struck before the congregation of Israel, it ***is*** a land of livestock, and your servants have livestock." And they said, "If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not make us pass over the Jordan." And Moses said to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben, "Shall your brothers go to the battle, and you, shall you sit here? And why do you discourage the heart of the sons of Israel from passing over into the land which the LORD has given to them? Thus your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. And they went up to the wadi of Eshcol and saw the land, and they discouraged the heart of the sons of Israel so as not to go into the land which the LORD had given to them. And the anger of the LORD burned on that day, and He swore, saying, 'The men who came up from Egypt, from a son of twenty years and upward, shall surely not see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, because they have not fully followed after Me, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, because they have fully followed after the LORD.' And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done the evil in the eyes of the LORD was finished. And look, you have risen up in place of your fathers, a brood of sinful men, to add still more to the burning of the anger of the LORD against Israel. For if you turn back from after Him, then He will again leave it in the wilderness, and you will destroy all this people."

32:16-32 And they drew near to him and said, "Folds of flock we will build for our livestock here, and cities for our little ones. And we, we will arm ourselves, hurrying before the sons of Israel, until we have brought them to their place; and our little ones will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our houses until the sons of Israel have inherited, each man his inheritance. For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has come to us on the other side of the Jordan eastward." And Moses said to them, "If you will do this thing, if you will arm yourselves before the LORD for the battle, and every armed ***man*** of you passes over the Jordan before the LORD until He has dispossessed His enemies from before Him, and the land is subdued before the LORD, then afterward you may return, and you will be guiltless toward the LORD and toward Israel, and this land will be yours for a possession before the LORD. And if you do not do so, look, you have sinned against the LORD; and know your sin, that it will find you. Build for yourselves cities for your little ones and folds for your flock, and what has gone out from your mouth you shall do." And the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben said to Moses, saying, "Your servants will do just as my lord commands. Our little ones, our wives, our livestock, and all our beasts shall be there in the cities of the Gilead; and your servants will pass over, every armed ***man*** of war, before the LORD to the battle, just as my lord says." And Moses commanded concerning them Eleazar the priest and

Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the sons of Israel. And Moses said to them, "If the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben pass over the Jordan with you, every armed ***man*** for the battle before the LORD, and the land is subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of the Gilead for a possession. And if they do not pass over armed with you, then they shall take possession among you in the land of Canaan." And the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben answered, saying, "What the LORD has spoken to your servants, so we will do. We, we will pass over armed before the LORD ***into*** the land of Canaan, and the possession of our inheritance ***will be*** with us on the other side of the Jordan."

32:33-42 And Moses gave to them, to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben and to half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorite and the kingdom of Og king of the Bashan, the land with its cities, with ***their*** territories, the cities of the land all around. And the sons of Gad built Dibon and Ataroth and Aroer, and Atroth-shophan and Jazer and Jogbehah, and Beth-nimrah and Beth-haran, fortified cities, and folds of flock. And the sons of Reuben built Heshbon and Elealeh and Kiriathaim, and Nebo and Baal-meon, changed ***in*** name, and Sibmah; and they called by names the names of the cities which they built. And the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, and dispossessed the Amorite who ***was*** in it. And Moses gave the Gilead to Machir the son of Manasseh, and he dwelt in it. And Jair the son of Manasseh went and captured their villages, and he called them Havvoth-jair. And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its daughters, and he called it Nobah, by his own name.

Chapter 32 Preview

Israel has conquered the lands of Sihon and Og east of the Jordan (21:21-35). The tribes of Reuben and Gad have large herds, and they see that this land is good grazing country. They ask Moses to let them settle there instead of crossing the Jordan. Moses hears in their request an echo of Kadesh forty years before, and he warns them sharply. Are they going to sit here while their brothers fight?

The two tribes answer with a fair offer. They will build pens for their flocks and towns for their families, and then every fighting man will cross the Jordan and fight in front of the other tribes until the land is won. Moses agrees, but he gives them one of the best known warnings in the Bible: "know your sin, that it will find you." The chapter ends with the land given to Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh, and the towns they built and captured.

Chapter 32 Study

32:1-5 *And much livestock belonged to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad, very numerous; and they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, and look, the place **was** a place of livestock. And the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben came and said to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, "Ataroth and Dibon and Jazer and Nimrah and Heshbon and Elealeh and Sebam and Nebo and Beon, the land which the LORD struck before the congregation of Israel, it **is** a land of livestock, and your servants have livestock." And they said, "If we have found favor in your eyes, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not make us pass over the Jordan."*

"Much livestock belonged to the sons of Reuben and to the sons of Gad, very numerous" (32:1). They saw "the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead," the high grassy country east of the Jordan, and saw that it was "a place of livestock." Gilead was known for its pasture.

They came to Moses, Eleazar and the leaders and named the towns, ending with, "it is a land of livestock, and your servants have livestock" (32:4). Then the request: "let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not make us pass over the Jordan" (32:5).

Was this wrong? Not in itself. God had given Israel this land when He defeated Sihon and Og. But the request came at a dangerous time, right before the conquest, and it seemed to put their herds ahead of their brothers. Their eyes were on what was good for business. Lot made a choice like this when he looked at the well-watered plain and chose for himself (Genesis 13:10-11).

32:6-15 *And Moses said to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben, "Shall your brothers go to the battle, and you, shall you sit here? And why do you discourage the heart of the sons of Israel from passing over into the land which the LORD has given to them? Thus your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. And they went up to the wadi of Eshcol and saw the land, and they discouraged the heart of the sons of Israel so as not to go into the land which the LORD had given to them. And the anger of the LORD burned on that day, and He swore, saying, 'The men who came up from Egypt, from a son of twenty years and upward, shall surely not see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, because they have not fully followed after Me, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, because they have fully followed after the LORD.' And the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation that had done the evil in the eyes of the LORD was finished. And look, you have risen up in place of your fathers, a brood of sinful men, to add still more to the burning of the anger of the LORD against Israel. For if you turn back from after Him, then He will again leave it in the wilderness, and you will destroy all this people."*

Moses answered hard. "Shall your brothers go to the battle, and you, shall you sit here?" (32:6). "And why do you discourage the heart of the sons of Israel from passing over into the land which the LORD has given to them?" (32:7).

Then he reminded them of Kadesh. "Thus your fathers did" (32:8). The spies saw the land and "discouraged the heart of the sons of Israel" (32:9), and God swore that the men who came out of Egypt would not see it, "except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of

Nun, because they have fully followed after the LORD" (32:12). The whole generation died in the wilderness over forty years (32:13).

"And look, you have risen up in place of your fathers, a brood of sinful men" (32:14). Moses feared the new generation was about to repeat the old one's sin. If two tribes held back, others might lose heart too. "For if you turn back from after Him, then He will again leave it in the wilderness, and you will destroy all this people" (32:15).

Moses was not being harsh for no reason. He had buried a generation. He knew what unbelief costs. One group's choices can weaken the faith of everyone around them.

32:16-19 *And they drew near to him and said, "Folds of flock we will build for our livestock here, and cities for our little ones. And we, we will arm ourselves, hurrying before the sons of Israel, until we have brought them to their place; and our little ones will dwell in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our houses until the sons of Israel have inherited, each man his inheritance. For we will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has come to us on the other side of the Jordan eastward."*

The two tribes came back with a plan. "Folds of flock we will build for our livestock here, and cities for our little ones" (32:16). Then, "we, we will arm ourselves, hurrying before the sons of Israel, until we have brought them to their place" (32:17). They would not only go along. They would go in front, as the first troops into battle.

"We will not return to our houses until the sons of Israel have inherited, each man his inheritance" (32:18). They would not take their own rest until their brothers had theirs.

This showed that their heart was not in rebellion after all. They wanted the land on the east side, but they were not refusing to fight for God's people. It is good when we can answer a fair rebuke with a humble, honest offer rather than with anger.

32:20-24 *And Moses said to them, "If you will do this thing, if you will arm yourselves before the LORD for the battle, and every armed* ***man*** *of you passes over the Jordan before the LORD until He has dispossessed His enemies from before Him, and the land is subdued before the LORD, then afterward you may return, and you will be guiltless toward the LORD and toward Israel, and this land will be yours for a possession before the LORD. And if you do not do so, look, you have sinned against the LORD; and know your sin, that it will find you. Build for yourselves cities for your little ones and folds for your flock, and what has gone out from your mouth you shall do."*

Moses accepted, with conditions. If they would "arm yourselves before the LORD for the battle" (32:20) and cross the Jordan "before the LORD until He has dispossessed His enemies" (32:21), then they would be "guiltless toward the LORD and toward Israel" (32:22). Notice how often Moses says "before the LORD." This was not just a deal between tribes. It was a promise made in God's sight.

"And if you do not do so, look, you have sinned against the LORD; and know your sin, that it will find you" (32:23). People often quote this verse about any hidden sin. That is true; God sees everything, and sin has a way of coming to light. But here it has a particular point. Breaking a

promise to God and to His people is sin against the LORD, and it will catch up with you. Galatians 6:7 says the same: whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

"What has gone out from your mouth you shall do" (32:24). This sounds like chapter 30. Keep your word.

32:25-32 *And the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben said to Moses, saying, "Your servants will do just as my lord commands. Our little ones, our wives, our livestock, and all our beasts shall be there in the cities of the Gilead; and your servants will pass over, every armed* ***man*** *of war, before the LORD to the battle, just as my lord says." And Moses commanded concerning them Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the sons of Israel. And Moses said to them, "If the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben pass over the Jordan with you, every armed* ***man*** *for the battle before the LORD, and the land is subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of the Gilead for a possession. And if they do not pass over armed with you, then they shall take possession among you in the land of Canaan." And the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben answered, saying, "What the LORD has spoken to your servants, so we will do. We, we will pass over armed before the LORD* ***into*** *the land of Canaan, and the possession of our inheritance* ***will be*** *with us on the other side of the Jordan."*

"Your servants will do just as my lord commands" (32:25). Their families and herds would stay in the towns of Gilead, and every armed man would cross over "before the LORD to the battle" (32:27).

Because Moses would not be there to see it, he gave the order to "Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun and the heads of the fathers of the tribes" (32:28). If the two tribes kept their word, they would receive Gilead. If not, they would have to take land with the others in Canaan (32:29-30).

The tribes said it again: "What the LORD has spoken to your servants, so we will do" (32:31). And they did. Joshua 1:12-18 shows them ready to cross, and Joshua 22:1-6 shows Joshua sending them home years later, praising them for keeping their promise. A promise made before God was kept.

32:33-42 *And Moses gave to them, to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben and to half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorite and the kingdom of Og king of the Bashan, the land with its cities, with **their** territories, the cities of the land all around. And the sons of Gad built Dibon and Ataroth and Aroer, and Atroth-shophan and Jazer and Jogbehah, and Beth-nimrah and Beth-haran, fortified cities, and folds of flock. And the sons of Reuben built Heshbon and Elealeh and Kiriathaim, and Nebo and Baal-meon, changed **in** name, and Sibmah; and they called by names the names of the cities which they built. And the sons of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead and captured it, and dispossessed the Amorite who **was** in it. And Moses gave the Gilead to Machir the son of Manasseh, and he dwelt in it. And Jair the son of Manasseh went and captured their villages, and he called them Havvoth-jair. And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its daughters, and he called it Nobah, by his own name.*

"And Moses gave to them, to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben and to half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph," the old kingdoms of Sihon and Og (32:33). Half of Manasseh is mentioned here for the first time. Their part was the north, in Gilead and Bashan.

Verses 34 to 38 list the towns that Gad and Reuben rebuilt, such as Dibon, Aroer, Heshbon and Nebo. Some towns were "changed in name" (32:38), perhaps because their old names honored false gods, like Nebo and Baal-meon. Dibon is the place where the Moabite Stone was found, a well-known ancient inscription that mentions Israel and the tribe of Gad.

Machir, Jair and Nobah, from the tribe of Manasseh, captured the northern lands and named them (32:39-42). Havvoth-jair means the tent villages of Jair.

What should we learn from the east side tribes? Their choice worked out for a time, but it put the Jordan River between them and the rest of Israel. Joshua 22 shows how quickly that led to misunderstanding. Later these tribes were the first to be carried into exile by Assyria (1 Chronicles 5:25-26). Choices made for comfort and gain can have long effects. Still, God honored their promise, and they kept it.

Chapter 32 Summary

The tribes of Reuben and Gad, who had many herds, saw that the land of Jazer and Gilead was good for livestock and asked Moses to give it to them instead of land across the Jordan. Moses warned them that they were acting like their fathers at Kadesh, who discouraged Israel from entering the land and brought forty years in the wilderness. The two tribes promised to build towns for their families and pens for their flocks and then to cross the Jordan armed, in front of the other tribes, until all Israel had its inheritance. Moses agreed, warning that if they failed, their sin would find them. He gave the command to Eleazar, Joshua and the tribal leaders. Moses gave the kingdoms of Sihon and Og to Gad, Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh, and they rebuilt and named their towns, while men of Manasseh captured Gilead and the northern villages.

People and Places

- Gilead: the high grazing land east of the Jordan River.
- Jazer: a town and region in the land taken from Sihon, north of the Arnon River.

- Sihon and Og: the Amorite kings east of the Jordan defeated by Israel in chapter 21.
- Machir, Jair and Nobah: men of the tribe of Manasseh who captured land in Gilead and Bashan.

Chapter 32 Study Questions

1. Why did Reuben and Gad want the land east of the Jordan? (32:1-5)

2. What did Moses fear their request would do to the rest of Israel? (32:6-9, 15)

3. What earlier event did Moses remind them of, and what did it cost? (32:8-13)

4. What did the two tribes promise to do? (32:16-19)

5. What warning did Moses give if they did not keep their word? (32:23)

6. Who besides Gad and Reuben received land east of the Jordan? (32:33, 39-42)

7. How do Joshua 1:12-18 and 22:1-6 show whether these tribes kept their promise?

8. Moses said one group's choices could discourage everyone else. How do your choices affect the faith of the people around you?

9. Reuben and Gad answered a hard rebuke with an honest offer instead of anger. How do you respond when someone challenges you?

10. Is there a promise you made before God that you have not kept? What would it take to keep it now? (32:23-24)

Chapter 33: The Journeys from Egypt to the Jordan

Scripture

33:1-15 These ***are*** the journeys of the sons of Israel, who went out from the land of Egypt by their armies, by the hand of Moses and Aaron. And Moses wrote down their goings out according to their journeys at the mouth of the LORD; and these ***are*** their journeys according to their goings out. And they set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the sons of Israel went out with a raised hand before the eyes of all Egypt, and Egypt were burying those whom the LORD had struck among them, every firstborn; and on their gods the LORD had executed judgments. And the sons of Israel set out from Rameses and encamped at Succoth. And they set out from Succoth and encamped at Etham, which ***is*** on the edge of the wilderness. And they set out from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which ***is*** before Baal-zephon; and they encamped before Migdol. And they set out from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness; and they went a journey of three days in the wilderness of Etham and encamped at Marah. And they set out from Marah and came to Elim; and at Elim ***were*** twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there. And they set out from Elim and encamped by the Red Sea. And they set out from the Red Sea and encamped in the wilderness of Sin. And they set out from the wilderness of Sin and encamped at Dophkah. And they set out from Dophkah and encamped at Alush. And they set out from Alush and encamped at Rephidim; and there was no water there for the people to drink. And they set out from Rephidim and encamped in the wilderness of Sinai.

33:16-36 And they set out from the wilderness of Sinai and encamped at Kibroth-hattaavah. And they set out from Kibroth-hattaavah and encamped at Hazeroth. And they set out from Hazeroth and encamped at Rithmah. And they set out from Rithmah and encamped at Rimmon-perez. And they set out from Rimmon-perez and encamped at Libnah. And they set out from Libnah and encamped at Rissah. And they set out from Rissah and encamped at Kehelathah. And they set out from Kehelathah and encamped at Mount Shapher. And they set out from Mount Shapher and encamped at Haradah. And they set out from Haradah and encamped at Makheloth. And they set out from Makheloth and encamped at Tahath. And they set out from Tahath and encamped at Terah. And they set out from Terah and encamped at Mithkah. And they set out from Mithkah and encamped at Hashmonah. And they set out from Hashmonah and encamped at Moseroth. And they set out from Moseroth and encamped at Bene-jaakan. And they set out from Bene-jaakan and encamped at Hor-haggidgad. And they set out from Hor-haggidgad and encamped at Jotbathah. And they set out from Jotbathah and encamped at Abronah. And they set out from Abronah and encamped at Ezion-geber. And they set out from Ezion-geber and encamped in the wilderness of Zin, that ***is*** Kadesh.

33:37-56 And they set out from Kadesh and encamped at Hor the mountain, on the edge of the land of Edom. And Aaron the priest went up to Hor the mountain at the mouth of the LORD, and he died there, in the fortieth year of the going out of the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt, in the fifth month, on the first ***day*** of the month. And Aaron ***was*** a son of a hundred and twenty-three years when he died on Hor the mountain. And the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who was dwelling in the Negeb in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the sons of Israel. And they set

out from Hor the mountain and encamped at Zalmonah. And they set out from Zalmonah and encamped at Punon. And they set out from Punon and encamped at Oboth. And they set out from Oboth and encamped at Iye-abarim, on the border of Moab. And they set out from Iim and encamped at Dibon-gad. And they set out from Dibon-gad and encamped at Almon-diblathaim. And they set out from Almon-diblathaim and encamped in the mountains of the Abarim, before Nebo. And they set out from the mountains of the Abarim and encamped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan ***at*** Jericho. And they encamped by the Jordan from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab. And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan ***at*** Jericho, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you are passing over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and you shall destroy all their carved images, and all their images of molten metal you shall destroy, and all their high places you shall demolish. And you shall take possession of the land and dwell in it, for to you I have given the land to possess it. And you shall inherit the land by lot according to your clans; to the many you shall make his inheritance large, and to the few you shall make his inheritance small; wherever the lot comes out for him, there it shall be his; according to the tribes of your fathers you shall inherit. And if you do not dispossess the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be ***that*** those whom you leave of them ***will be*** as thorns in your eyes and as pricks in your sides, and they will show hostility to you in the land in which you are dwelling. And it shall be ***that*** just as I intended to do to them, I will do to you.'"

Chapter 33 Preview

Before Israel crosses the Jordan, Moses writes down every place they camped from Egypt to the plains of Moab. The list runs from Rameses, where they set out the day after the first Passover, to the banks of the Jordan across from Jericho, forty years later. There are forty-one camps after Rameses. Some names we know well, like the Red Sea, Sinai and Kadesh. Many appear nowhere else in the Bible.

This is a list chapter, so I group the stops and say what they show. The list is a record of God's faithfulness. Every name was a place where God had led them by the cloud and kept them alive. Then the chapter turns to the future. God commands Israel to drive out the people of Canaan and destroy their idols, and He warns that if they do not, those people will become thorns in their eyes and their sides.

Chapter 33 Study

33:1-4 *These **are** the journeys of the sons of Israel, who went out from the land of Egypt by their armies, by the hand of Moses and Aaron. And Moses wrote down their goings out according to their journeys at the mouth of the LORD; and these **are** their journeys according to their goings out. And they set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover the sons of Israel went out with a raised hand before the eyes of all Egypt, and Egypt were burying those whom the LORD had struck among them, every firstborn; and on their gods the LORD had executed judgments.*

"These are the journeys of the sons of Israel, who went out from the land of Egypt by their armies" (33:1). This is a travel record.

"And Moses wrote down their goings out according to their journeys at the mouth of the LORD" (33:2). Moses wrote this list because God told him to. It is one of the places in the Law where Scripture says plainly that Moses wrote.

The story starts with the exodus. They left Rameses "on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the Passover" (33:3). They went out "with a raised hand," boldly, in the open, "before the eyes of all Egypt." Meanwhile the Egyptians were burying their firstborn, "and on their gods the LORD had executed judgments" (33:4). The plagues were not only against Pharaoh. They showed that the gods of Egypt were nothing before the LORD (Exodus 12:12).

33:5-15 *And the sons of Israel set out from Rameses and encamped at Succoth. And they set out from Succoth and encamped at Etham, which **is** on the edge of the wilderness. And they set out from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which **is** before Baal-zephon; and they encamped before Migdol. And they set out from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness; and they went a journey of three days in the wilderness of Etham and encamped at Marah. And they set out from Marah and came to Elim; and at Elim **were** twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they encamped there. And they set out from Elim and encamped by the Red Sea. And they set out from the Red Sea and encamped in the wilderness of Sin. And they set out from the wilderness of Sin and encamped at Dophkah. And they set out from Dophkah and encamped at Alush. And they set out from Alush and encamped at Rephidim; and there was no water there for the people to drink. And they set out from Rephidim and encamped in the wilderness of Sinai.*

The first stretch goes from Egypt to Mount Sinai. These are the stops told in Exodus 12 to 19: Succoth, Etham, the camp by Pi-hahiroth, the crossing "through the midst of the sea" (33:8), Marah with its bitter water, Elim with its "twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees" (33:9), the wilderness of Sin where the manna began, and Rephidim, where "there was no water there for the people to drink" (33:14) and God gave water from the rock.

Moses does not retell the stories. He names the places and lets them speak. Anyone who heard "Marah" or "Rephidim" would remember what happened there. Dophkah and Alush (33:12-13) are not named in Exodus.

33:16-36 *And they set out from the wilderness of Sinai and encamped at Kibroth-hattaavah. And they set out from Kibroth-hattaavah and encamped at Hazeroth. And they set out from Hazeroth and encamped at Rithmah. And they set out from Rithmah and encamped at Rimmon-perez. And they set out from Rimmon-perez and encamped at Libnah. And they set out from Libnah and encamped at Rissah. And they set out from Rissah and encamped at Kehelathah. And they set out from Kehelathah and encamped at Mount Shapher. And they set out from Mount Shapher and encamped at Haradah. And they set out from Haradah and encamped at Makheloth. And they set out from Makheloth and encamped at Tahath. And they set out from Tahath and encamped at Terah. And they set out from Terah and encamped at Mithkah. And they set out from Mithkah and encamped at Hashmonah. And they set out from Hashmonah and encamped at Moseroth. And they set out from Moseroth and encamped at Bene-jaakan. And they set out from Bene-jaakan and encamped at Hor-haggidgad. And they set out from Hor-haggidgad and encamped at Jotbathah. And they set out from Jotbathah and encamped at Abronah. And they set out from Abronah and encamped at Ezion-geber. And they set out from Ezion-geber and encamped in the wilderness of Zin, that **is** Kadesh.*

The second stretch runs from Sinai to Kadesh. Kibroth-hattaavah, which means the graves of craving, was where the quail came and the plague struck (11:34). Hazeroth was where Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses (11:35; 12:1).

Then come eighteen stops we know almost nothing about, from Rithmah to Ezion-geber (33:18-35). Most Bible scholars think these belong to the long years of wandering after Israel refused the land at Kadesh. Ezion-geber was at the north end of the Gulf of Aqaba, where Solomon later built ships (1 Kings 9:26). Then they came to "the wilderness of Zin, that is Kadesh" (33:36), where the story picks up again in chapter 20.

Think about those names no one remembers. Thirty-eight years went by in places like Haradah and Mithkah, with little to record but daily manna, daily water, and the cloud moving on. Hidden years are still years under God's care. Deuteronomy 8:4 says their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell in those forty years.

33:37-49 *And they set out from Kadesh and encamped at Hor the mountain, on the edge of the land of Edom. And Aaron the priest went up to Hor the mountain at the mouth of the LORD, and he died there, in the fortieth year of the going out of the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt, in the fifth month, on the first* ***day*** *of the month. And Aaron* ***was*** *a son of a hundred and twenty-three years when he died on Hor the mountain. And the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who was dwelling in the Negeb in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the sons of Israel. And they set out from Hor the mountain and encamped at Zalmonah. And they set out from Zalmonah and encamped at Punon. And they set out from Punon and encamped at Oboth. And they set out from Oboth and encamped at Iye-abarim, on the border of Moab. And they set out from Iim and encamped at Dibon-gad. And they set out from Dibon-gad and encamped at Almon-diblathaim. And they set out from Almon-diblathaim and encamped in the mountains of the Abarim, before Nebo. And they set out from the mountains of the Abarim and encamped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan* ***at*** *Jericho. And they encamped by the Jordan from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab.*

The last stretch runs from Kadesh to the Jordan. At Mount Hor "on the edge of the land of Edom" (33:37), Aaron died "in the fortieth year of the going out of the sons of Israel from the land of Egypt, in the fifth month, on the first day of the month" (33:38). He was 123 years old (33:39). This is the only place the Bible gives the date of Aaron's death. Verse 40 recalls the king of Arad, who attacked Israel and was defeated (21:1-3).

From there they went around Edom, by Zalmonah, Punon and Oboth, to "Iye-abarim, on the border of Moab" (33:44), then north to Dibon-gad and the mountains of Abarim "before Nebo" (33:47). Finally they "encamped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho" (33:48), stretched out "from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim" (33:49). Abel-shittim is the Shittim of 25:1.

The journey that could have taken weeks took forty years. Unbelief made it long. But God brought them all the way. What He starts, He finishes (Philippians 1:6).

33:50-53 *And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan* ***at*** *Jericho, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you are passing over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and you shall destroy all their carved images, and all their images of molten metal you shall destroy, and all their high places you shall demolish. And you shall take possession of the land and dwell in it, for to you I have given the land to possess it.*

Now God looks ahead. "When you are passing over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall dispossess all the inhabitants of the land from before you" (33:51-52). To dispossess means to drive out and take the place of. Israel was to "destroy all their carved images," and "all their high places you shall demolish" (33:52). A high place was a hilltop shrine where people worshiped false gods.

Why so complete? The Canaanite religions included the very sins Israel had just fallen into at Peor, and worse, such as burning children as offerings (Deuteronomy 12:31). God had waited for centuries, until their sin was full (Genesis 15:16). This was His judgment on them, carried out

through Israel, and it was tied to that time and that land. "For to you I have given the land to possess it" (33:53). The land was God's gift, and He had the right to give it.

33:54-56 *And you shall inherit the land by lot according to your clans; to the many you shall make his inheritance large, and to the few you shall make his inheritance small; wherever the lot comes out for him, there it shall be his; according to the tribes of your fathers you shall inherit. And if you do not dispossess the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be* ***that*** *those whom you leave of them* ***will be*** *as thorns in your eyes and as pricks in your sides, and they will show hostility to you in the land in which you are dwelling. And it shall be* ***that*** *just as I intended to do to them, I will do to you.'"*

The land would be given "by lot according to your clans" (33:54), as in 26:53-56.

Then a warning. "If you do not dispossess the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall be that those whom you leave of them will be as thorns in your eyes and as pricks in your sides" (33:55). And worse: "just as I intended to do to them, I will do to you" (33:56).

Sadly, that is just what happened. Israel did not finish driving them out (Judges 1:27-36), and the gods of those nations became a snare to them (Judges 2:1-3). In the end God removed Israel from the land in exile, just as He warned (2 Kings 17:7-18).

For us, the battle is not with people but with sin. What we tolerate in our hearts we will one day battle. Paul says to put to death what is earthly in us (Colossians 3:5). Do not leave the thorns to grow.

Chapter 33 Summary

Moses wrote down at the LORD's command all the stages of Israel's journey from Egypt. They left Rameses boldly the day after the Passover while Egypt buried its firstborn. The list traces their camps to Mount Sinai, then on through many places in the wilderness to Kadesh, then to Mount Hor, where Aaron died at 123 years old in the fortieth year, and around Moab to the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho. The LORD then told Israel to drive out the people of Canaan when they crossed the Jordan, destroy their idols and high places, and divide the land by lot. He warned that any people they left would be thorns in their eyes and sides, and that He would do to Israel what He had planned to do to them.

Chapter 33 Study Questions

1. Who wrote down this list of journeys, and why? (33:2)

2. How did Israel leave Egypt, and what were the Egyptians doing at the time? (33:3-4)

3. What happened at Marah, Elim and Rephidim? (33:8-9, 14; Exodus 15-17)

4. Where and when did Aaron die, and how old was he? (33:38-39)

5. What did God command Israel to do when they entered Canaan? (33:51-53)

6. What did God warn would happen if they did not drive out the people of the land? (33:55-56)

7. How do Judges 1-2 show that this warning came true?

8. If you wrote down the stages of your own journey with God, what would some of the names be, and what did God do at each one?

9. Most of the wilderness stops are forgotten names. How does it encourage you that God cares for His people in ordinary, unseen years?

10. What sin are you tempted to tolerate in your life instead of putting it to death? What would it look like to deal with it now? (Colossians 3:5)

Chapter 34: The Borders of the Land

Scripture

34:1-15 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you are coming into the land, Canaan, this ***is*** the land which shall fall to you as an inheritance, the land of Canaan according to its borders. And the south side shall be for you from the wilderness of Zin alongside Edom; and the south border shall be for you from the end of the Salt Sea eastward. And the border shall turn for you on the south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and it shall pass on to Zin; and its extremities shall be on the south of Kadesh-barnea; and it shall go out to Hazar-addar, and it shall pass on to Azmon. And the border shall turn from Azmon to the brook of Egypt, and its extremities shall be at the sea. And ***as for*** the west border, the Great Sea shall be for you, and ***its*** border; this shall be the west border for you. And this shall be the north border for you: from the Great Sea you shall mark out for yourselves ***a line to*** Hor the mountain. From Hor the mountain you shall mark out ***a line*** to the entrance of Hamath, and the extremities of the border shall be at Zedad. And the border shall go out to Ziphron, and its extremities shall be at Hazar-enan; this shall be the north border for you. And you shall mark out for yourselves for the east border from Hazar-enan to Shepham. And the border shall go down from Shepham to the Riblah, on the east of the Ain; and the border shall go down and reach to the shoulder of the sea of Chinnereth eastward. And the border shall go down to the Jordan, and its extremities shall be at the Salt Sea. This shall be the land for you according to its borders all around.'" And Moses commanded the sons of Israel, saying, "This ***is*** the land which you shall inherit by lot, which the LORD has commanded to give to the nine tribes and the half of the tribe. For the tribe of the sons of the Reubenites by the house of their fathers and the tribe of the sons of the Gadites by the house of their fathers have taken ***it***, and the half of the tribe of Manasseh have taken their inheritance. The two tribes and the half of the tribe have taken their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan ***at*** Jericho, eastward, toward the sunrise."

34:16-29 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "These ***are*** the names of the men who shall apportion the land to you for inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun. And one leader, one leader from ***each*** tribe, you shall take to apportion the land for inheritance. And these ***are*** the names of the men: of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; and of the tribe of the sons of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Ammihud; of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon; and of the tribe of the sons of Dan, a leader, Bukki the son of Jogli; of the sons of Joseph: of the tribe of the sons of Manasseh, a leader, Hanniel the son of Ephod; and of the tribe of the sons of Ephraim, a leader, Kemuel the son of Shiphtan; and of the tribe of the sons of Zebulun, a leader, Elizaphan the son of Parnach; and of the tribe of the sons of Issachar, a leader, Paltiel the son of Azzan; and of the tribe of the sons of Asher, a leader, Ahihud the son of Shelomi; and of the tribe of the sons of Naphtali, a leader, Pedahel the son of Ammihud." These ***are those*** whom the LORD commanded to apportion the inheritance to the sons of Israel in the land of Canaan.

Chapter 34 Preview

God now draws the map. Before Israel has taken a single town west of the Jordan, He tells them exactly where the borders of their land will be: south, west, north and east. The land west of the

Jordan will go to nine and a half tribes, since Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh already have their land on the east side.

Then God names the men who will divide the land. Eleazar the priest and Joshua will lead, with one leader from each of the ten tribes on the west side. Only one name on that list comes from the old generation: Caleb. This is a list chapter, so I group the borders and the names and say what they teach. The main lesson is simple. God speaks of the land as already given. His promise is as sure as a deed.

Chapter 34 Study

34:1-2 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you are coming into the land, Canaan, this **is** the land which shall fall to you as an inheritance, the land of Canaan according to its borders.*

"When you are coming into the land, Canaan, this is the land which shall fall to you as an inheritance, the land of Canaan according to its borders" (34:2). God speaks before the conquest has begun. He does not say it might be theirs if they manage to take it. He says it "shall fall to you." The borders were drawn by the Owner.

This is the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18-21) and to his son and grandson. Now, more than six hundred years later, God marks its lines.

34:3-5 *And the south side shall be for you from the wilderness of Zin alongside Edom; and the south border shall be for you from the end of the Salt Sea eastward. And the border shall turn for you on the south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and it shall pass on to Zin; and its extremities shall be on the south of Kadesh-barnea; and it shall go out to Hazar-addar, and it shall pass on to Azmon. And the border shall turn from Azmon to the brook of Egypt, and its extremities shall be at the sea.*

The south border ran from the south end of "the Salt Sea," which we call the Dead Sea, west through the wilderness of Zin. It passed below "the ascent of Akrabbim," which means the scorpions' pass, and south of Kadesh-barnea, then on "to the brook of Egypt," and ended "at the sea" (34:4-5). The brook of Egypt is usually taken to be the Wadi el-Arish, a dry streambed in the northern Sinai, not the Nile. A wadi is a valley that fills with water only in the rainy season.

Kadesh is on the southern edge. The place where the old generation refused to go in now marks the border of the land their children will receive.

34:6 *And **as for** the west border, the Great Sea shall be for you, and **its** border; this shall be the west border for you.*

"And as for the west border, the Great Sea shall be for you." The Great Sea is the Mediterranean. Israel's land had the sea on the west, the desert on the south and east, and mountains on the north. God placed His people at the crossroads of the ancient world, where the nations would pass through and see them.

34:7-9 *And this shall be the north border for you: from the Great Sea you shall mark out for yourselves* ***a line to*** *Hor the mountain. From Hor the mountain you shall mark out* ***a line*** *to the entrance of Hamath, and the extremities of the border shall be at Zedad. And the border shall go out to Ziphron, and its extremities shall be at Hazar-enan; this shall be the north border for you.*

The north border ran from the Mediterranean to "Hor the mountain" (34:7). This is a different Mount Hor from the one where Aaron died, which was on the border of Edom in the south (33:37). This northern one was probably a peak in the Lebanon range. Scripture does not tell us which. The line went on "to the entrance of Hamath," a pass leading toward the city of Hamath in Syria, and ended at Hazar-enan (34:8-9). Some of these towns are not known for sure today.

34:10-12 *And you shall mark out for yourselves for the east border from Hazar-enan to Shepham. And the border shall go down from Shepham to the Riblah, on the east of the Ain; and the border shall go down and reach to the shoulder of the sea of Chinnereth eastward. And the border shall go down to the Jordan, and its extremities shall be at the Salt Sea. This shall be the land for you according to its borders all around.'"*

The east border ran from Hazar-enan south by Shepham and Riblah to "the shoulder of the sea of Chinnereth" (34:11). Chinnereth is the Sea of Galilee, named for its harp-like shape in some explanations. From there the border followed the Jordan River down to the Salt Sea (34:12).

"This shall be the land for you according to its borders all around."

Did Israel ever hold all of it? Under David and Solomon they came close, and Solomon's rule reached to the entrance of Hamath (1 Kings 8:65). But Israel never fully held the land God described, and they lost it through sin. God's promise to Abraham was an everlasting covenant (Genesis 17:8). Bible teachers read this promise in different ways. Some believe it was fulfilled under Joshua (Joshua 21:43-45) or under Solomon (1 Kings 4:21), and others see it taken up into the new heavens and new earth. I believe it still stands, and that Israel will possess the land in full when the Messiah reigns in His kingdom (Ezekiel 47:13-21; Romans 11:28-29). Ezekiel 47 gives borders much like these for that day.

34:13-15 *And Moses commanded the sons of Israel, saying, "This* ***is*** *the land which you shall inherit by lot, which the LORD has commanded to give to the nine tribes and the half of the tribe. For the tribe of the sons of the Reubenites by the house of their fathers and the tribe of the sons of the Gadites by the house of their fathers have taken* ***it****, and the half of the tribe of Manasseh have taken their inheritance. The two tribes and the half of the tribe have taken their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan* ***at*** *Jericho, eastward, toward the sunrise."*

Moses told the people, "This is the land which you shall inherit by lot, which the LORD has commanded to give to the nine tribes and the half of the tribe" (34:13). The other two and a half tribes "have taken their inheritance on the other side of the Jordan" (34:15), as chapter 32 told us.

The land would be divided "by lot." The lines on the outside were set by God, and the shares on the inside would be set by God too. Psalm 16:6 puts it beautifully: the lines have fallen to me in pleasant places. Every Israelite family could look at its fields and say, God gave me this.

34:16-29 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "These **are** the names of the men who shall apportion the land to you for inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun. And one leader, one leader from **each** tribe, you shall take to apportion the land for inheritance. And these **are** the names of the men: of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; and of the tribe of the sons of Simeon, Shemuel the son of Ammihud; of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon; and of the tribe of the sons of Dan, a leader, Bukki the son of Jogli; of the sons of Joseph: of the tribe of the sons of Manasseh, a leader, Hanniel the son of Ephod; and of the tribe of the sons of Ephraim, a leader, Kemuel the son of Shiphtan; and of the tribe of the sons of Zebulun, a leader, Elizaphan the son of Parnach; and of the tribe of the sons of Issachar, a leader, Paltiel the son of Azzan; and of the tribe of the sons of Asher, a leader, Ahihud the son of Shelomi; and of the tribe of the sons of Naphtali, a leader, Pedahel the son of Ammihud." These **are those** whom the LORD commanded to apportion the inheritance to the sons of Israel in the land of Canaan.*

"These are the names of the men who shall apportion the land to you for inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun" (34:17). The priest and the leader worked side by side, as in 27:21. With them was "one leader from each tribe" (34:18).

The first name is "of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh" (34:19). Almost forty years earlier he had stood at Kadesh and said, "We shall surely go up, and we shall take possession of it" (13:30). Now, close to eighty years old, he was one of the men who would hand out the land he had trusted God for. Joshua 14:6-14 tells how, at eighty-five, he asked for the hill country of Hebron, giants and all. Faith that waits is never wasted.

The other nine names are all new men (34:20-28). None of the leaders from chapters 1, 7 and 13 is here. The old generation was gone. Simeon's leader is "Shemuel the son of Ammihud" in the SLB, a form of the name Samuel. Notice that Reuben and Gad are missing, because they had their land already.

"These are those whom the LORD commanded to apportion the inheritance to the sons of Israel in the land of Canaan" (34:29). God chose the borders, the method, and the men.

What does this mean for us? God's promises are specific. He did not give Israel a vague hope of land somewhere. He drew the lines. In the same way, Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2). Our inheritance is real, and it is kept for us (1 Peter 1:4).

Chapter 34 Summary

The LORD told Moses the borders of the land of Canaan that Israel would inherit. The south border ran from the south end of the Salt Sea through the wilderness of Zin, south of Kadesh-barnea, to the brook of Egypt and the sea. The west border was the Great Sea. The north border ran from the sea to Mount Hor, the entrance of Hamath and Hazar-enan. The east border came down by Riblah to the Sea of Chinnereth and along the Jordan to the Salt Sea. This land would be divided by lot among the nine and a half tribes, since Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had their land east of the Jordan. The LORD named Eleazar the priest and Joshua to divide the land, with one leader from each tribe, starting with Caleb of Judah.

People and Places

- Salt Sea: the Dead Sea.
- Great Sea: the Mediterranean Sea.
- Brook of Egypt: a wadi on the edge of Sinai, usually taken as the Wadi el-Arish.
- Sea of Chinnereth: the Sea of Galilee.
- Entrance of Hamath: a pass in the north leading toward Hamath in Syria.

Chapter 34 Study Questions

1. When did God give Israel the borders of the land, before or after the conquest, and what does that tell you? (34:1-2)

2. What were the four borders of the land? (34:3-12)

3. Which tribes received land west of the Jordan, and why not all twelve? (34:13-15)

4. Who were the two main leaders who would divide the land? (34:17)

5. Which leader on the list was from the old generation, and why is that fitting? (34:19; 13:30; 14:24)

6. How do Ezekiel 47:13-21 and Romans 11:28-29 speak of God's promises to Israel for the future?

7. What does John 14:2 promise about our own inheritance?

8. God spoke of the land as already given. Which of God's promises can you treat as already settled, even before you see it?

9. Caleb waited forty-five years in all (Joshua 14:10) for what God promised. How do you handle waiting on God?

10. Psalm 16:6 speaks of lines falling in pleasant places. What has God given you that you can thank Him for today?

Chapter 35: Levite Cities and Cities of Refuge

Scripture

35:1-15 And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan ***at*** Jericho, saying, "Command the sons of Israel, and they shall give to the Levites from the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and pasture land for the cities all around them you shall give to the Levites. And the cities shall be theirs to dwell in, and their pasture lands shall be for their beasts and for their goods and for all their living things. And the pasture lands of the cities which you shall give to the Levites ***shall be*** from the wall of the city and outward approximately 1,500 feet (a thousand cubits) all around. And you shall measure from outside the city, the east side, approximately 3,000 feet (two thousand by the cubit), and the south side, approximately 3,000 feet (two thousand by the cubit), and the west side, approximately 3,000 feet (two thousand by the cubit), and the north side, approximately 3,000 feet (two thousand by the cubit), and the city ***shall be*** in the middle. This shall be theirs, the pasture lands of the cities. And the cities which you shall give to the Levites ***shall be*** the six cities of refuge, which you shall give for the manslayer to flee there; and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities. All the cities which you shall give to the Levites ***shall be*** forty-eight cities, them and their pasture lands. And the cities which you shall give ***shall be*** from the possession of the sons of Israel; from the many you shall increase, and from the few you shall decrease; each according to his inheritance which they inherit shall give some of his cities to the Levites." And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you are passing over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall select for yourselves cities; cities of refuge they shall be for you, and a manslayer who strikes a soul unintentionally may flee there. And the cities shall be for you as a refuge from the avenger, and the manslayer shall not die until he stands before the congregation for judgment. And the cities which you shall give, six cities of refuge, shall be for you. The three cities you shall give on the other side of the Jordan, and the three cities you shall give in the land of Canaan; cities of refuge they shall be. For the sons of Israel and for the sojourner and for the resident among them, these six cities shall be for a refuge, for anyone who strikes a soul unintentionally to flee there.

35:16-34 And if he struck him with an instrument of iron, and he died, he ***is*** a manslayer; the manslayer shall surely be put to death. And if he struck him with a stone in the hand, by which he may die, and he died, he ***is*** a manslayer; the manslayer shall surely be put to death. Or ***if*** he struck him with an instrument of wood in the hand, by which he may die, and he died, he ***is*** a manslayer; the manslayer shall surely be put to death. The avenger of blood, he shall put the manslayer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. And if he pushed him in hatred, or threw ***something*** at him while lying in wait, and he died, or in enmity struck him with his hand, and he died, the one who struck shall surely be put to death; he ***is*** a manslayer. The avenger of blood shall put the manslayer to death when he meets him. And if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw any instrument at him without lying in wait, or with any stone by which he may die, without seeing ***him***, and made ***it*** fall on him, and he died, and he ***was*** not his enemy and not seeking his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the one who struck and the avenger of blood according to these judgments. And the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the

hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to his city of refuge, where he had fled; and he shall dwell in it until the death of the high priest, whom ***one*** anointed with the holy oil. And if the manslayer ever goes out beyond the border of his city of refuge, where he has fled, and the avenger of blood finds him outside the border of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, ***there is*** no blood ***guilt*** for him. For he shall dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest; and after the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession. And these shall be for you a statute of judgment throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. Anyone who strikes a soul, at the mouth of witnesses one shall kill the manslayer; and one witness shall not testify against a soul to ***cause him to*** die. And you shall not take a ransom for the life of a manslayer who ***is*** guilty to die, for he shall surely be put to death. And you shall not take a ransom for fleeing to his city of refuge, to return to dwell in the land until the death of the priest. And you shall not pollute the land in which you ***are***; for the blood, it pollutes the land, and for the land atonement shall not be made for the blood which is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. And you shall not make unclean the land in which you are dwelling, in the midst of which I dwell; for I, the LORD, dwell among the sons of Israel.'"

Chapter 35 Preview

The Levites would have no tribal land of their own. So God tells Israel to give them forty-eight cities, spread through all the tribes, with pasture land around each one. Six of these cities are set apart as cities of refuge, three on each side of the Jordan. A person who killed someone by accident could flee to one of them and be safe from the avenger of blood until his case was heard.

The second half of the chapter is a careful law about killing. It separates murder, done with hatred or by lying in wait, from killing that happens by accident. The murderer must die. The one who killed by accident must stay in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. No ransom could be paid to get around the law, because shed blood pollutes the land where God lives. This is a hard and serious passage. It shows how much God values human life, and it gives us a picture of the refuge we have in Christ.

Chapter 35 Study

35:1-5 *And the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan **at** Jericho, saying, "Command the sons of Israel, and they shall give to the Levites from the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and pasture land for the cities all around them you shall give to the Levites. And the cities shall be theirs to dwell in, and their pasture lands shall be for their beasts and for their goods and for all their living things. And the pasture lands of the cities which you shall give to the Levites **shall be** from the wall of the city and outward approximately 1,500 feet (a thousand cubits) all around. And you shall measure from outside the city, the east side, approximately 3,000 feet (two thousand by the cubit), and the south side, approximately 3,000 feet (two thousand by the cubit), and the west side, approximately 3,000 feet (two thousand by the cubit), and the north side, approximately 3,000 feet (two thousand by the cubit), and the city **shall be** in the middle. This shall be theirs, the pasture lands of the cities.*

"They shall give to the Levites from the inheritance of their possession cities to dwell in; and pasture land for the cities all around them" (35:2). The Levites had no share of land as a tribe (18:20-24). They lived on the tithes of the people. But they still needed homes and room for their animals.

The pasture land reached out "approximately 1,500 feet (a thousand cubits)" from the wall (35:4), and verse 5 sets a square of about 3,000 feet on each side. The two measures are hard to fit together, and Bible teachers explain them in different ways. The simplest reading is that verse 4 gives the distance out from the wall and verse 5 gives the length of each side of the outer square. The point is clear either way: the Levites had a set area for their herds and gardens, and no one could take it from them.

35:6-8 *And the cities which you shall give to the Levites **shall be** the six cities of refuge, which you shall give for the manslayer to flee there; and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities. All the cities which you shall give to the Levites **shall be** forty-eight cities, them and their pasture lands. And the cities which you shall give **shall be** from the possession of the sons of Israel; from the many you shall increase, and from the few you shall decrease; each according to his inheritance which they inherit shall give some of his cities to the Levites."*

"All the cities which you shall give to the Levites shall be forty-eight cities" (35:7). Six were the cities of refuge, and forty-two more were added. Joshua 21 lists them all. Each tribe gave cities in proportion to its size: "from the many you shall increase, and from the few you shall decrease" (35:8).

Why scatter the Levites through the land? Jacob had said of Simeon and Levi, "I will scatter them in Israel" (Genesis 49:7), as a judgment on their violence. God turned that judgment into a blessing. The Levites, who taught God's Law (Deuteronomy 33:10), would live among every tribe, so that no part of Israel would be far from someone who could teach them God's Word. That is still a good pattern. God puts His people in every place so that His Word is near to everyone.

35:9-15 *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you are passing over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall select for yourselves cities; cities of refuge they shall be for you, and a manslayer who strikes a soul unintentionally may flee there. And the cities shall be for you as a refuge from the avenger, and the manslayer shall not die until he stands before the congregation for judgment. And the cities which you shall give, six cities of refuge, shall be for you. The three cities you shall give on the other side of the Jordan, and the three cities you shall give in the land of Canaan; cities of refuge they shall be. For the sons of Israel and for the sojourner and for the resident among them, these six cities shall be for a refuge, for anyone who strikes a soul unintentionally to flee there.*

"You shall select for yourselves cities; cities of refuge they shall be for you, and a manslayer who strikes a soul unintentionally may flee there" (35:11). A manslayer is anyone who killed another person. The cities gave a safe place "from the avenger" (35:12), and the one who fled "shall not die until he stands before the congregation for judgment."

Who was the avenger? In Hebrew he is the go'el, the near relative, the same word used for a kinsman-redeemer. When a man was killed, his nearest relative had the duty to see that his blood was answered for. In a land with no police force, this kept murder from going unpunished. But anger can run ahead of the facts. The cities of refuge made sure no one was killed in the heat of grief before his case was heard.

There were six cities, "three cities you shall give on the other side of the Jordan, and the three cities you shall give in the land of Canaan" (35:14). Joshua 20:7-8 names them: Kedesh, Shechem and Hebron west of the Jordan, and Bezer, Ramoth and Golan east of it. They were spread out so that one was within reach from anywhere in the land.

The refuge was for everyone, "for the sons of Israel and for the sojourner and for the resident among them" (35:15). A sojourner was a foreigner living in Israel. God's justice did not change with a person's family or nation.

35:16-21 *And if he struck him with an instrument of iron, and he died, he **is** a manslayer; the manslayer shall surely be put to death. And if he struck him with a stone in the hand, by which he may die, and he died, he **is** a manslayer; the manslayer shall surely be put to death. Or **if** he struck him with an instrument of wood in the hand, by which he may die, and he died, he **is** a manslayer; the manslayer shall surely be put to death. The avenger of blood, he shall put the manslayer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death. And if he pushed him in hatred, or threw **something** at him while lying in wait, and he died, or in enmity struck him with his hand, and he died, the one who struck shall surely be put to death; he **is** a manslayer. The avenger of blood shall put the manslayer to death when he meets him.*

Now God defines murder. If a man struck someone "with an instrument of iron," or "with a stone in the hand, by which he may die," or with a wooden weapon, "and he died, he is a manslayer; the manslayer shall surely be put to death" (35:16-18). The kind of weapon showed what he meant to do.

Intent mattered most. If he "pushed him in hatred, or threw something at him while lying in wait" (35:20), or "in enmity struck him with his hand" (35:21), he was a murderer. "The avenger of blood shall put the manslayer to death when he meets him."

This is hard for us to read. Why such a strict law? Because God made man in His image. After the flood God said that whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for God made man in His image (Genesis 9:6). To murder a person is to attack the image of God. This law did not treat life as cheap. It treated it as so precious that taking it on purpose cost the murderer his own.

In Israel this was carried out under the covenant, after a judgment by the congregation and on the word of more than one witness (35:24, 30). It was never private revenge. In the New Testament, God gives the sword of justice to governing authorities (Romans 13:4), while He tells each of us never to take revenge ourselves (Romans 12:19). Christians differ on whether and when the death penalty should be used today. All agree that murder is a terrible sin against God and against a person made in His image.

35:22-25 *And if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw any instrument at him without lying in wait, or with any stone by which he may die, without seeing **him**, and made **it** fall on him, and he died, and he **was** not his enemy and not seeking his harm, then the congregation shall judge between the one who struck and the avenger of blood according to these judgments. And the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood, and the congregation shall return him to his city of refuge, where he had fled; and he shall dwell in it until the death of the high priest, whom **one** anointed with the holy oil.*

Then the other case. If he "pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw any instrument at him without lying in wait" (35:22), or dropped a stone on someone "without seeing him," and "he was not his enemy and not seeking his harm" (35:23), it was an accident. Deuteronomy 19:5 gives an example: an axe head flies off the handle and kills a man's friend.

"The congregation shall judge between the one who struck and the avenger of blood" (35:24). If it was an accident, "the congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the avenger of blood" and send him back to the city of refuge (35:25). There he was to stay "until the death of the high priest, whom one anointed with the holy oil."

Why did an innocent man have to stay in the city? Because a life had still been lost. Blood had been shed, even by accident. The years in the city of refuge showed that every human life matters to God. It also protected the man from a relative who might not accept the verdict.

35:26-28 *And if the manslayer ever goes out beyond the border of his city of refuge, where he has fled, and the avenger of blood finds him outside the border of his city of refuge, and the avenger of blood kills the manslayer, **there is** no blood **guilt** for him. For he shall dwell in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest; and after the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession.*

If the manslayer left the city before the time was up, and the avenger found him outside its border and killed him, "there is no blood guilt for him" (35:27). Safety was inside the city, not outside it.

"After the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession" (35:28). The high priest's death set him free. Scripture does not explain why. Many see it as the end of an era, a kind of amnesty, as if the high priest's death closed the matter for the nation.

Here I see a picture of Christ, and I want to say plainly that it is a picture. The New Testament does not call the cities of refuge a type of Christ. But Hebrews uses the same idea when it speaks of "we who have fled for refuge" taking hold of the hope set before us (Hebrews 6:18), and in the next verses it names Jesus as our High Priest forever (Hebrews 6:19-20). We are all guilty, not by accident but by our own sin. We have no safe place in ourselves. But we can run to Christ, and in Him we are safe from judgment (Romans 8:1). And it was the death of our High Priest that set us free. Unlike the man in the city of refuge, we do not wait for that death. It has already happened, once for all, and He lives forever to intercede for us (Hebrews 7:25).

35:29-32 *And these shall be for you a statute of judgment throughout your generations in all your dwelling places. Anyone who strikes a soul, at the mouth of witnesses one shall kill the manslayer; and one witness shall not testify against a soul to* ***cause him to*** *die. And you shall not take a ransom for the life of a manslayer who* ***is*** *guilty to die, for he shall surely be put to death. And you shall not take a ransom for fleeing to his city of refuge, to return to dwell in the land until the death of the priest.*

"These shall be for you a statute of judgment throughout your generations" (35:29).

Two more safeguards follow. First, "at the mouth of witnesses one shall kill the manslayer; and one witness shall not testify against a soul to cause him to die" (35:30). No one could be put to death on the word of one person. Deuteronomy 17:6 and 19:15 say the same, and Jesus and Paul used the same rule for settling matters in the church (Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1).

Second, "you shall not take a ransom for the life of a manslayer who is guilty to die" (35:31). In many ancient nations, a rich murderer could pay the family and go free. Not in Israel. Life could not be bought. Even the one who killed by accident could not pay to leave the city early (35:32). Justice was the same for rich and poor.

35:33-34 *And you shall not pollute the land in which you* ***are****; for the blood, it pollutes the land, and for the land atonement shall not be made for the blood which is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it. And you shall not make unclean the land in which you are dwelling, in the midst of which I dwell; for I, the LORD, dwell among the sons of Israel.'"*

"You shall not pollute the land in which you are; for the blood, it pollutes the land, and for the land atonement shall not be made for the blood which is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it" (35:33). Innocent blood left unanswered defiled the land itself. Abel's blood cried out from the ground (Genesis 4:10).

Then the reason behind the whole chapter: "for I, the LORD, dwell among the sons of Israel" (35:34). The land was holy because God lived there. Murder was not only a crime against a neighbor. It was an offense in the presence of God.

This verse also shows why the gospel is such good news. The blood of the murderer could cleanse the land of that one crime. But the blood of Jesus "speaks better things than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24). His blood does not cry out for judgment. It speaks forgiveness for all who come to Him.

Chapter 35 Summary

The LORD told Moses that Israel was to give the Levites forty-eight cities with pasture lands around them, from every tribe in proportion to its size. Six of these were to be cities of refuge, three on each side of the Jordan, where anyone who killed a person by accident, whether Israelite or foreigner, could flee from the avenger of blood until the congregation judged the case. Anyone who killed with a weapon, in hatred, or by lying in wait was a murderer and was to be put to death by the avenger of blood. If the killing was an accident, the congregation was to protect the manslayer and send him back to the city of refuge, where he had to stay until the high priest died; outside the city he was not protected. No one could be put to death on the word of one witness, and no ransom could be taken for a murderer or for leaving the city early, because blood pollutes the land, and the LORD dwelt among His people.

People and Places

- Levites: the tribe set apart to serve at the tabernacle and teach the Law, who received cities instead of a tribal territory.
- Cities of refuge: six Levite cities where a person who killed by accident could find safety (Joshua 20:7-8).
- Avenger of blood: the nearest relative of a person who was killed, with the duty to see that the killing was answered (Hebrew go'el).
- Manslayer: anyone who killed another person, whether by murder or by accident.

Chapter 35 Study Questions

1. How many cities were the Levites to receive, and how were they to be chosen? (35:6-8)

2. What were the cities of refuge for, and who could use them? (35:11-15)

3. How did the law tell the difference between murder and an accidental killing? (35:16-23)

4. How long did a person who killed by accident have to stay in the city of refuge, and what happened if he left? (35:25-28)

5. What safeguards did God give to keep the innocent from being put to death? (35:24, 30-31)

6. Why did murder pollute the land, according to verses 33-34?

7. How does Genesis 9:6 explain why God took murder so seriously?

8. The Levites lived among all the tribes so God's Word would be near everyone. How can you help bring God's Word near to the people around you?

9. Hebrews 6:18 speaks of those who "have fled for refuge." Have you run to Christ for refuge from your sin? What does it mean to you to be safe in Him?

10. The blood of Jesus "speaks better things than that of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24). Is there something you have done that you think is too great to be forgiven? What does this verse tell you?

Chapter 36: The Inheritance of Zelophehad's Daughters

Scripture

36:1-13 And the heads of the fathers of the clan of the sons of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the clans of the sons of Joseph, drew near, and they spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the heads of the fathers of the sons of Israel. And they said, "The LORD commanded my lord to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the sons of Israel; and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters. And ***if*** they become wives to one of the sons of the tribes of the sons of Israel, then their inheritance will be withdrawn from the inheritance of our fathers and will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they will belong; and from the lot of our inheritance it will be withdrawn. And if the jubilee of the sons of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they will belong; and from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers their inheritance will be withdrawn." And Moses commanded the sons of Israel at the mouth of the LORD, saying, "The tribe of the sons of Joseph is speaking right. This ***is*** the word which the LORD has commanded concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, 'To the one ***who is*** good in their eyes let them become wives; only to the clan of the tribe of their father shall they become wives.' And the inheritance of the sons of Israel shall not go around from tribe to tribe; for the sons of Israel shall cling, each man to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance from the tribes of the sons of Israel shall become wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father, so that the sons of Israel may possess, each man, the inheritance of his fathers. And an inheritance shall not go around from a tribe to another tribe; for the tribes of the sons of Israel shall cling, each man to his own inheritance." Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so the daughters of Zelophehad did. And Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, became wives to the sons of their uncles. Of the clans of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph they became wives, and their inheritance was with the tribe of the clan of their father. These ***are*** the commandments and the judgments which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to the sons of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan ***at*** Jericho.

Chapter 36 Preview

Numbers ends where chapter 27 left off, with the daughters of Zelophehad. This time the leaders of their clan come to Moses with a concern. God gave the five sisters their father's land. But if they marry men from other tribes, the land will pass to their husbands' tribes, and Manasseh's share will shrink for good.

Moses brings the LORD's answer: "The tribe of the sons of Joseph is speaking right." The daughters may marry whomever they choose, as long as it is within their father's tribe, so that each tribe keeps its inheritance. The sisters do just as the LORD commanded and marry their cousins. It may seem a quiet way to end a book full of rebellion and wandering. But it ends with a family obeying God and planning for life in a land they have not yet entered. That is faith.

Chapter 36 Study

36:1-4 *And the heads of the fathers of the clan of the sons of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the clans of the sons of Joseph, drew near, and they spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the heads of the fathers of the sons of Israel. And they said, "The LORD commanded my lord to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the sons of Israel; and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters. And **if** they become wives to one of the sons of the tribes of the sons of Israel, then their inheritance will be withdrawn from the inheritance of our fathers and will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they will belong; and from the lot of our inheritance it will be withdrawn. And if the jubilee of the sons of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they will belong; and from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers their inheritance will be withdrawn."*

"The heads of the fathers of the clan of the sons of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh," came and "drew near" (36:1). These were the leading men of Zelophehad's own clan. They came before Moses and the leaders of Israel, just as the daughters had done in 27:2.

Their concern was fair. "The LORD commanded my lord to give the land as an inheritance by lot to the sons of Israel; and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters" (36:2). They did not question God's ruling. But they saw a problem. If the daughters married into another tribe, "their inheritance will be withdrawn from the inheritance of our fathers and will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they will belong" (36:3). In that culture a woman's land would pass to her husband and children, so it would go to his tribe.

They even thought about the jubilee (36:4). The jubilee came every fiftieth year, when land that had been sold went back to the family that first owned it (Leviticus 25:10-13). But land passed on by marriage and inheritance was not sold, so the jubilee would not bring it back. It would be lost to Manasseh forever.

The men were not trying to take anything from the sisters. They wanted to protect what God had given their tribe. That is a right concern.

36:5-9 *And Moses commanded the sons of Israel at the mouth of the LORD, saying, "The tribe of the sons of Joseph is speaking right. This **is** the word which the LORD has commanded concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, 'To the one **who is** good in their eyes let them become wives; only to the clan of the tribe of their father shall they become wives.' And the inheritance of the sons of Israel shall not go around from tribe to tribe; for the sons of Israel shall cling, each man to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. And every daughter who possesses an inheritance from the tribes of the sons of Israel shall become wife to one of the clan of the tribe of her father, so that the sons of Israel may possess, each man, the inheritance of his fathers. And an inheritance shall not go around from a tribe to another tribe; for the tribes of the sons of Israel shall cling, each man to his own inheritance."*

"Moses commanded the sons of Israel at the mouth of the LORD," and the answer was, "The tribe of the sons of Joseph is speaking right" (36:5). God said the same of the daughters in 27:7. Both sides were right. God's answer honored both.

"To the one who is good in their eyes let them become wives; only to the clan of the tribe of their father shall they become wives" (36:6). The daughters were free to choose their husbands. That is worth noticing. They were not handed off. The only limit was that the husband must be from their father's tribe.

The reason: "the inheritance of the sons of Israel shall not go around from tribe to tribe; for the sons of Israel shall cling, each man to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers" (36:7). The rule then became a law for any daughter who inherited land (36:8-9). The land was God's gift to each tribe, and the tribes were to hold on to it.

Why did this matter so much? Because the land was part of God's promise. Each tribe's portion was a sign that God had kept His word to them. Later, when King Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard, Naboth refused because it was the inheritance of his fathers (1 Kings 21:3). That was faithfulness, not stubbornness.

This law was for Israel's land and tribes. It is not a rule for Christian marriage today. But the New Testament has its own word for believers: marry "only in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 7:39). Whom we marry matters to God, and it affects the inheritance we pass on in faith to our children.

36:10-12 *Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so the daughters of Zelophehad did. And Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, became wives to the sons of their uncles. Of the clans of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph they became wives, and their inheritance was with the tribe of the clan of their father.*

"Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so the daughters of Zelophehad did" (36:10). Their names are given one last time: "Mahlah, Tirzah, and Hoglah, and Milcah, and Noah" (36:11). They "became wives to the sons of their uncles," their cousins, men from their own clan. "Their inheritance was with the tribe of the clan of their father" (36:12).

These five women show up in Numbers three times (26:33; 27:1-11; 36:1-12), and once more in Joshua. When the land was divided, they came before Eleazar and Joshua and reminded them of

what the LORD had commanded, and they received their land (Joshua 17:3-6). Their faith held all the way from the plains of Moab to the fields of Manasseh.

Think about what they did. They asked God for what He had promised. When God set a limit, they accepted it gladly. They trusted Him with their marriages and their future. In a book where so many complained and rebelled, these sisters believed and obeyed.

36:13 *These **are** the commandments and the judgments which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to the sons of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan **at** Jericho.*

"These are the commandments and the judgments which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses to the sons of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho." This is the closing line of the book. It sums up the laws given on the plains of Moab, from chapter 22 on.

Numbers began at Sinai with a count of the first generation. It ends on the plains of Moab with the second generation counted, organized, and ready. The old generation died in the wilderness because of unbelief. Their children stand at the Jordan, looking across at the land. The same God who judged the parents has kept His word to the children.

That is the message of Numbers. God is faithful even when His people are not. "God is not a man, that He should lie" (23:19). He finished what He started. And He still does. The same God who brought Israel through the wilderness will bring all who trust in Jesus Christ home to the inheritance He has prepared for them (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Chapter 36 Summary

The leaders of the clan of Gilead from the tribe of Manasseh came to Moses with a concern. If the daughters of Zelophehad married men from other tribes, the land God gave them would pass to those tribes, and even the jubilee would not bring it back to Manasseh. Moses gave the LORD's answer: the clan was right. The daughters could marry whomever they chose, but only within their father's tribe, and this became the rule for every daughter who inherited land, so that each tribe would keep its own inheritance. The daughters of Zelophehad did as the LORD commanded and married their cousins, and their land stayed in Manasseh. The book closes by saying these were the commandments and judgments the LORD gave through Moses on the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.

Chapter 36 Study Questions

1. Who came to Moses in this chapter, and what was their concern? (36:1-3)

2. Why would the jubilee not solve the problem? (36:4; Leviticus 25:10-13)

3. What did the LORD say about the clan's concern? (36:5)

4. What freedom did the daughters have, and what limit did God set? (36:6)

5. What did the daughters of Zelophehad do, and whom did they marry? (36:10-12)

6. How does Joshua 17:3-6 show that God kept His promise to these sisters?

7. How does the end of Numbers show God keeping His word to the second generation? (36:13; 26:64-65)

8. God said both the sisters and the clan leaders were right. How can you look for God's answer when two people both have a fair point?

9. The daughters accepted God's limit gladly. Where is God asking you to trust Him with a choice about your future?

10. Numbers ends with God's people at the edge of His promise. What promise of God are you standing on today, and how can you keep trusting Him until you see it? (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Conclusion

Numbers is the story of a journey that should have taken weeks and took forty years. It begins at Mount Sinai with a nation counted, organized, and camped around the presence of God. Within months that nation stood at the edge of the promised land, and then it refused to go in. The rest of the book follows a generation that died in the wilderness, and a God who never stopped feeding them, leading them, and bearing with them. It ends on the plains of Moab with their children counted, a new leader in place, the borders of the land drawn, and five sisters planning for life in a land they had not yet seen.

As I said at the start of this study, the guiding principle throughout has been to read God's Word plainly, as it is written, and let Scripture explain Scripture. Read that way, Numbers gives us a true and sobering account. Israel's problem was never the giants in the land. It was unbelief. Hebrews says it plainly: "we see that they were not able to enter in because of unbelief" (Hebrews 3:19). Grumbling, rebellion, and the sin at Peor all grew from the same root, a heart that did not trust God. Paul tells us why the record was kept: "all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition" (1 Corinthians 10:11). We are not better than they were. We need the same warning.

Numbers also shows us a God who keeps His word. Balaam was hired to curse Israel, and God turned every curse into a blessing, saying that He is not a man, that He should lie (23:19). He disciplined His people, but He did not abandon them. He gave them manna, water from the rock, the cloud by day and fire by night, a priesthood to stand between them and His holiness, and cities of refuge for the guilty to run to. Caleb and Joshua, who "fully followed after" the LORD, entered the land (32:12). God was faithful to the children of the very people who had doubted Him.

I hope this study has done what I set out to do: bring you closer to God, help you grow in your walk with Him, and encourage you to trust Him in your own wilderness. Every part of this book points ahead to Jesus Christ. He is the bread from heaven, the rock that was struck, the High Priest who lives forever to intercede for us, and the refuge we run to. Jesus Himself took the clearest picture in the book and applied it to the cross: "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-15). The Israelites who were bitten only had to look and live. The only thing required of us to spend eternity with God is to receive His Son, Jesus, as our Lord and Savior.

If you haven't yet entered into a relationship with Jesus, or if you want to deepen the one you already have with Him, I invite you to pray this prayer with me:

Lord Jesus, You are the Savior of the world, and You forgive all who come to You. I come before You to confess that I have sinned against You. I have rebelled against You and put myself first above You and all others. I want to have a deep, meaningful relationship with You where I can show others by my demeanor and character that You are first in my life. I am asking for Your forgiveness for all my sins. You died for me on the cross so that I could be forgiven and made right with God. Please help me not forget that You gave Your very life for me. I am asking that You take control of

my life and make a new creature out of me and into the person You want me to be. I thank You, Lord, and I love You. Amen.

If you prayed this prayer, tell another believer, ask a pastor about being baptized, and find a church where you can grow and where believers "exhort one another every day" (Hebrews 3:13), so that you keep trusting God all the way into the rest He has promised.

Bibliography

The following source was consulted throughout this study. The commentary reflects my own study and convictions, and any direct quotation from an outside source is identified and cited at the point where it appears.

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