

October to December 2011

“The Book of Numbers”

by

Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew

About the Author

Rev Dr Quek Suan Yew (BArch, BTh, MDiv, STM, ThD) is the Pastor of Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church, Academic Dean of the Far Eastern Bible College, and visiting lecturer of the Bible College of East Africa (Kenya). His preaching and teaching ministry also extends to Batam, Perth, Melbourne, and Sydney.



Married to Angelia Tan Chor Lang for the past twenty-six years, they are blessed with three children: Abigail, Alanna and Zachariah.

THE NUMBERING

Israel was camped at the foot of Mount Sinai when the LORD commanded Moses to number the people of Israel. They had left Egypt as a mob; like a mass of stragglers journeying through the wilderness without coordination. However, they were God’s people. They had to be organized and march in an orderly manner. The LORD would spend the next ten chapters of Numbers organizing His people. This numbering was only the beginning before Israel was commanded by God to march on to the Promised Land.

The numbering was more than an exercise in statistics. The guidelines for the numbering were that only the men who could go to battle, and were twenty years old and above, be included in this numbering. The people from the tribe of Levi were excluded. The Levites were the religious priesthood who were not to go to war. They were to occupy themselves with spiritual duties which only they could do. They were not to be distracted from their calling as appointed by the LORD. The rest of Israel was appointed by God to lead and defend Israel in time of need. If they failed the LORD, they would fail Israel as well. They would make decisions for the wellbeing of God’s people as they journeyed to the Promised Land. Whether they would enter the Promised Land or not depends largely on their faith and trust in the LORD.

Are you a mature Christian well versed in the knowledge of God’s Word? You have been saved and kept alive by God for a purpose. As you sojourn on this earth, on your way to heaven, how have you been serving the LORD? We all have our part in God’s church to serve Him. All believers are endowed with at least one gift from the LORD for service. There is no legitimate excuse for not serving if you are of age. Pew-warmers, you are part of the numbering. Stand and be counted for the LORD, for Jesus’ sake!

THOUGHT: Am I numbered with the army of the LORD as part of those who are able to go forth to war?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may Thou grant me strength and courage to fight God’s battle, for Jesus’ sake.

ORGANIZED CAMPING!

No tribe was allowed to argue with God. God's decision was final. The camp to the East was called the Camp of Judah, made up of the tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. They would march first. The camp facing the South was the Camp of Reuben, made up of the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Gad. They would march second. The Levites with the Tabernacle were to march next. The Camp of Ephraim faced the West, which was made up of the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin. They were to march in the third rank. Facing the North was the Camp of Dan, made up of the tribes of Dan, Asher and Naphtali. They were to go hindmost with their standard.

This orderliness was not based upon any reason that we can deduce. It was simply God's sovereign will that the camps be named in this manner. The LORD decided who should be in front and at the rear. One thing to remember is that all of them were important to God. They needed each other for the nation to be complete. They had different roles to play as determined by God. Israel was simply to obey willingly and cheerfully. Henceforth, there was an orderliness that permeated the camps. "From an experience of her childhood, Mrs Floyd Crook recalls how a great truth was impressed upon her with special meaning. She writes, 'I came home from school one day crying because I had been given only a small part in the children's program, while my playmate got the leading role. After drying my tears, my mother took off her watch and put it in my hand. 'What do you see?' she asked. 'A gold case, a face, and two hands,' I replied. Opening the back, she repeated the question. I told her I saw many tiny wheels. 'This watch would be useless,' she said, 'without every part — even the ones you can hardly see.' That object lesson has helped me all through life to see the importance of the small duties we're asked to perform.'" [Bible Illustrator]

THOUGHT: Is my life a life of discipline and orderliness for the service of the LORD?

PRAYER: May my life be used for the LORD's glory and the service of God's people till Christ's return.

RELIGIOUS DUTIES FOR RELIGIOUS MEN ONLY!

Having settled the camping positions and marching orders of the nation of Israel, the LORD turned His attention to the Levites and priests. Their duties were primarily religious. Israel was not like all other nations of the world that measured success according to political, economic and military endeavours. Israel was a spiritual nation first and always. Israel was the visible witness of God's grace and mercies to a world that was in darkness and filled with sin. If Israel were to forsake her spiritual duties and become like the rest of the nations, it would be like switching off the lights, thus plunging the world into total spiritual darkness.

Aaron had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. Nadab and Abihu were killed by the LORD for offering strange fires before the LORD (Lev 10). They had no children. Their lineage terminated with their deaths. Eleazar and Ithamar continued the lineage of the priesthood. God, not man, appointed the priests. God anointed and consecrated them to serve Him in the Tabernacle. The assistants to the priests were the Levites. They were to take care of the physical structure of the Tabernacle, and in the future, the Temple. They were to look after all the instruments in the Tabernacle. God gave the Levites to assist the priests. Their roles were not to be reversed. The Levites were not to perform the priests' duties. No stranger, including the ordinary Israelites, was allowed to come nigh the Tabernacle to do the work of the priests or Levites. They would be put to death if they disobeyed.

THOUGHT: Religious duties are for God's people only. An unbeliever has no power to do religious work. Whatever he does will not be acceptable to God, including activities like reading the Bible or attending prayer meetings. There is no such thing as a “spiritual” activity because an activity by itself has no intrinsic spiritual value. Only Christians are spiritual. Everything they do has a spiritual value. This includes even giving someone a cup of cold water.

PRAYER: Grant me clean hands and a pure heart as I serve Thee, O LORD!

DUTIES OF THE LEVITICAL CLANS

God determined the various duties of the Levitical clans, including where they should pitch their tents. They were not to quarrel or fight over this. One of the causes of disunity in a church is in-house fighting over who should do which duty. To avoid potential disaster in the Levitical camp, God had to dictate as He did for the rest of Israel in the earlier two chapters of the Book of Numbers. Levi had three sons: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. These became the names of the clans that sub-divided the Levites.

The Gershonites were to pitch their tents behind the Tabernacle, westward. They would take charge of the external coverings of the Tabernacle. The Kohathites were to pitch their tents on the south side of the Tabernacle and take charge of the ark, table, candlestick, altars and vessels of the sanctuary, and the hangings thereof. Eleazar would be overall chief of the Levite chiefs and oversee the ones who take charge of the sanctuary. The Merarites were to pitch their tents on the north side of the Tabernacle. They would take charge of the framework of the Tabernacle such as the pillars, boards and sockets. Aaron and his sons would be camped on the east side of the Tabernacle. This means that they were camped in front of the entrance of the Tabernacle since the entrance of the Tabernacle always faced eastward. Any stranger that came near their campsite would be put to death. Aaron and his sons were in charge of the whole Sanctuary and all the children of Israel.

THOUGHT: It is important for the believer to know his calling and duties. Then he will not be without purpose in life and service. He will learn not to be envious of others. He knows the purpose of his existence. He is now the "richest" man on earth, as he is aware that God has created and saved him for a purpose. If he is faithful in his calling, he will please his God and be accepted by Him on the Day of Judgment. His life has purpose and joy.

PRAYER: Help me, LORD, that I may be found faithful in giving my best to serve Thee, which is my reasonable service and sacrifice.

REPLACING THE FIRSTBORN WITH LEVITES

In the days of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job, the head of every godly home was the mediator between God and man. He sacrificed on behalf of his family and God would accept his sacrifices. He functioned as priest before the formation of the nation of Israel. In this chapter, the nation of Israel would soon be formed and complete. The role of mediator, held by the firstborn son, would be transferred to the Levitical priesthood. This chapter of the Book of Numbers describes for us the transfer process.

From this chapter onwards, the head of every godly home would not be allowed to function as the mediator. To do so would be a sin. It would be regarded as a rejection of the Levitical priesthood whom God had anointed and consecrated. The number of firstborn sons (a month old and upward) and the sons of the Levites (a month old and upward) had to be exact in this official replacement. Of the sons of the Levites: Gershon 7,500 (v 22); Kohath 8,600 (v 28); and Merari 6,200 (v 34). The total number was 22,000 (v 39). The total number of the firstborn sons was 22,273 (v 43). The difference in number was redeemed with five shekels each, making a total of 1,365 shekels. The redemption money was given to Aaron and his sons. There is a difference in the total number 22,000 (v 39) and the sum of 7,500 and 8,600 and 6,200 (22,300). The difference is 300. One explanation is that the 300 could have been the firstborn sons of the Levites who did not need to be replaced as they were also Levites. Thus, they could not be counted against the total number of the firstborn sons of the people of Israel.

THOUGHT: The LORD's precision in this replacement demonstrates the great importance of the mediator's role. Sinful man could not approach God through anyone he likes. The method and the man have to be anointed by the LORD. Genuine Christians today are the priests. Their prayers are the only prayers that God will answer. Their High Priest is Jesus Christ. They must always go to God through Christ. Hence, they must pray in Jesus' name at the end of every prayer.

PRAYER: Help me to pray without ceasing, O LORD!

DISMANTLING THE TABERNACLE

“Moving house” is a laborious task. Everything must be packed properly and labeled so that unpacking would be easy. When the Israelites were commanded by the LORD to move on, they had to bring down their tents and pack their belongings. What about the dismantling of the Tabernacle? This chapter in Numbers describes the people and the manner in which the Tabernacle was to be dismantled and carried. If the latter was done incorrectly, the Levites who were in charge would die. This was no ordinary “house move”!

Aaron and the priests were to cover all the items of worship such as the Ark of the Covenant, Table of Shewbread, Altar of Incense and Lampstand. All the items had to be carefully covered so that nothing was exposed. The veil that separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place was used to cover the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat. Then Aaron and the priests would pass all the covered items to the sons of Kohath to carry them. If the items were not covered properly and left exposed, and the sons of Kohath touched any of the items accidentally, they would die (v 15). Eleazar was put in charge of these items and oversaw the sons of Kohath in their duties. The sons of Gershon and Merari were appointed to dismantle and carry the rest of the items of the Tabernacle. Ithamar was in charge of these two groups to ensure that they carried out their duties properly. The priests’ ages ranged from thirty to fifty years. Their numbers totalled 8,580 (v 48).

THOUGHT: The LORD was very precise. Every item pertaining to His worship was carefully explained and assigned so that all was done in accordance with His holy and perfect will. The LORD regards worship very highly. So must every Christian. The worship of God is not entertainment. It must be reverential and focused upon God alone. The LORD accepts the worship of genuine Christians only, who do so with clean hands and pure hearts. True worshippers worship God in spirit (with sincerity) and in truth (according to God’s revealed Word).

PRAYER: Help me to worship Thee in spirit and in truth, O LORD.

HOLINESS IN THE CAMP

Churches today prefer to sweep sins under the carpet than to deal with them. “Peace would be destroyed if sins are dealt with” is the oft reasoning. “We are all sinners anyway, so let us live and let live!” is another argument against dealing with sin. “My neighbour is doing it and I am not as bad as he is, so why should I repent of my sins?” is the reasoning of the mind. The list goes on with many more excuses for sins not to be dealt with according to Holy Scriptures. The LORD is a holy God, and holiness must be the hallmark of a truly born-again Christian. In this chapter, unclean persons such as lepers, those with an issue (a contagious secretion probably as a result of sin), and those who had come into contact with the dead, were to be put out of the camp. Any man or woman who committed a sin had to pay restitution to the injured party. If the injured party had no kinsman, then restitution was to be paid to the LORD via the priest, coupled with a ram of atonement. Sin has its consequences. Forgiveness is given when repentance is shown but the consequences of sin committed must still be borne by the sinner.

The basis for this strict act of sanctification is so that *“they defile not their camps, in the midst whereof I (the LORD) dwell”* (v 3). It was not the saints’ feelings and consideration that the LORD was concerned with, but His own holy presence. Peace in the camp was based only upon holiness and God’s presence. God’s people must live in holiness. Christians bear Christ’s name. They must reflect His character of holiness. Peace without holiness is false peace which every true Christian must spurn. God is not deceived by man’s hypocrisy. Uncleanliness and sinful deeds must be repented of, and restitution must be made when necessary. There can be no half measures when it comes to holiness in the lives of God’s people and in God’s church.

THOUGHT: Am I holy in my dressing, thinking, words and deeds? All true Christians are holy because they are called saints, ie holy ones. It is a sin not to be holy, and an abomination in God’s sight.

PRAYER: Help me, O LORD, to be holy in all areas of my life, even as Thou art holy!

TO CATCH AN UNFAITHFUL WIFE!

If the husband suspected his wife to be unfaithful, he could not do whatever he wanted with her. He had to follow the instructions in these verses. He was to confront her with his suspicion. If the wife denied having committed any sin, she would be brought to the priest before the Tabernacle. The priest would ask her, before the LORD, whether she had sinned. If she insisted that she had not done anything wrong and the husband insisted that she had, then she would be made to drink the bitter water. The bitter water was a mixture of holy water (used by the priests) and the dust from the floor of the Tabernacle. If she was found guilty, her thigh would rot and her belly would swell. It was a very painful way to die. This was the work of the LORD. There was no magic in the water. This highlighted the gravity of the sin of adultery. If she was found innocent, then nothing would happen. She would be free and would conceive seed. The husband who brought her before the LORD would be embarrassed and humiliated. This was a very just law. In contrast, the Babylonian law allowed the husband to throw his wife, bound hand and foot, into the River Tigris. If she was not eaten by crocodiles or drowned by the fast flowing waters, that proved that she was innocent. However, if she died, that meant she was guilty and the husband was allowed to marry another. This was a most unjust law. God's law of jealousy was most fair, as He would make the final judgment.

THOUGHT: The world today is filled with immoral acts committed by sinful men and women. Fornication and adultery are no longer criminal acts in many western countries. Homosexuality is accepted as an alternate lifestyle. The days of Sodom are before us. The Bible clearly teaches that these acts are sins. Sexual purity, before and after marriage, is a great virtue that is a mark of a genuine Christian. That is why the LORD gave such a righteous law protecting the marriage relationship which is the most sacred of all human relationships. 1 Thessalonians 5:22: *"Abstain from all appearance of evil."*

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, keep me pure and holy before and after marriage all the days of my life, so as not to sin against Thee. Help me to keep the vow of purity always, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THE NAZARITE VOW

The Levitical priesthood was reserved only for the Aaronic lineage. The LORD alone decided who should be a priest. The priest's life was one of devotion and service unto the LORD only. The priests were not allowed to own any farm land or be shepherds. They were to study and teach the Word of God in Israel. Their homes were in forty-eight Levitical cities spread throughout the length and breadth of Israel. However, if there was an Israelite (male or female) who wished to separate himself unto the LORD, then he would need to make the Nazarite vow.

The length of the period of the vow was optional. It could be for a year or even for life. It was up to the individual. During this period of the vow, he had to abstain from three things – eating or drinking anything related to the vine; using a razor on his head; and going near a dead body. All the days of his separation, he was to be holy unto the LORD! He was not to drink wine so as to keep his mind alert to do holy work. Total abstinence was a safeguard against any accidental intoxication. Touching a dead body would make him unclean because death was a result of sin. Not having his hair cut or shaven was the only external sign that allowed everyone to observe that he was keeping the Nazarite vow. They would understand that his life had been consecrated unto the LORD. They would help and encourage him. God's people were not to make a vow lightly. If a Nazarite became unclean for breaking the three rules, then he had to shave his head on the first and eighth day of his period of cleansing. He also had to offer, through the priest, a sin and a trespass offering before the LORD. Thereafter, he had to start the period of his vow all over again because he had defiled himself.

THOUGHT: The LORD takes all vows seriously; how much more the vow of separation to serve the LORD! All Christians are Nazarites separated unto the LORD. Our lives are to be different from the rest of the world. We are not to follow the world's fashions and philosophies.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be holy in this world of sin, so that my life may shine for Christ. May my good works bring glory and honour to Christ everywhere and in all circumstances. For Jesus' sake, hear my humble cry. Amen.

AFTER THE NAZARITE VOW

A Nazarite did not make a vow to work for man but to serve the LORD. He could not just walk away after the period of the vow has ended. There was a religious procedure to follow. At the end of the Nazarite vow, the Israelite would be brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. He had to offer five offerings: 1) burnt offering (for atonement of sins); 2) sin offering (for purification); 3) peace offering (peace with God); 4) meat offering and 5) drink offering (thanksgiving). All the animals were to be without blemish.

The priest on duty would take all the offerings from the Nazarite. The sin offering would be offered first (purification of the altar), followed by the burnt offering (atonement of sins). Then the peace offering would be offered now that he has peace with God. To conclude the service, the thank offering to thank God for accepting and seeing him through his Nazarite service. The burnt offering pointed to the privilege of service unto the LORD. It might be voluntary service by the Nazarite, but if he was not cleansed of his sins, his sincerity to serve would not be sufficient for the LORD to accept. The shedding of blood was needed to sanctify him and his service. Shaving all the hair on his head would indicate the end of his holy service and his return to normal life. It was called the hair of the head of his separation. Human sacrifice was not required. The hair represented the whole of his body and was to be burned in the fire under the sacrifice of the peace offering as an act of devotion unto the LORD. The priest would take the remainder of the sin offering and the meat offering and wave them above his shoulder, symbolizing the completion of the Nazarite vow and God's acceptance of it. The Nazarite was then free to return to his ordinary way of life.

THOUGHT: Serving the LORD is the highest honour given to man. Because our hands are stained by sin, we cannot serve God unless the blood of Christ has washed us. From beginning to end, service must be holy and just. Only Christians are worthy of service.

PRAYER: Help me, O God, to serve Thee with all my heart and soul and might and mind. This is only my reasonable service unto Thee. Accept my service from my grateful heart, for Christ's sake. Amen.

THE BENEDICTION

A benediction means “conferring of blessings.” Instructions on the Nazarite vow had been given. It seemed to be the most appropriate time to teach the benediction to Israel. The benediction was to be uttered by the high priest and priests only. Based upon the content of the benediction, we see that only the LORD can actually bless. When the high priest or priest pronounced the benediction, it was to call upon God to bless. Whether the LORD would actually bless is the LORD’s prerogative. From this passage of God’s Word, God assured His priests that He would bless. The content of the benediction comprises blessing and keeping. This refers to God’s provision and protection. God will give to His children all that they need, and will keep them in His loving care always. We must not think that God’s provision means that there will be plenty of food to eat all the time. There will be times of testing and fasting. God’s keeping does not mean that believers can never get hurt or sick and die. It means that believers’ souls are saved, and they will keep the faith and not fall. To have the LORD’s face shine on His people means that God will give to His children the very best always. It might not be what they want but it will be what is best for them in the sanctification process. For the LORD to be gracious means that He will give all the blessings that His children do not deserve. They do not deserve heaven but God gives them heaven. They do not deserve the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, but God gives the Holy Spirit as a seal of their salvation, and to aid in understanding His holy Word. When the LORD lifts up His countenance, it means that He will look at His children cheerfully and declare that they are pleasing in His sight. The joy of the LORD will be their strength. They will bask in His holy and joyous presence. The LORD’s peace is the peace of God that passes all understanding that the world cannot give or understand.

THOUGHT: Christians have the power to bless. Should a Christian bless those who hate the LORD? Is bidding someone “God speed” a form of benediction?

PRAYER: Help me, Lord, to discern and bless only those who bless Thee, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

OFFERINGS UNTO THE LORD

The worship of God in Old Testament times was in spirit, in truth and in location. The place, together with all the sacrifices, was crucial. Sinful man has no power or right to determine where or how God ought to be worshipped. God alone has that prerogative. In the Old Testament, God had determined that to worship Him, the worshipper had to bring the right kind of animals (clean animals listed in Leviticus), be at the right place of worship (Tabernacle - completed in Exodus), and only the right people could offer the offerings (the Levitical priesthood). This chapter describes the function of the Levites as assistants to the priesthood. The Levites were to assist the priests in the dismantling and transportation of the Tabernacle (excluding the Most Holy Place), during their wilderness wandering. They were to assist in the assembly as well when it was time to make camp.

The princes from the twelve tribes would give them the necessary animals to help them in the transportation. The Levites were divided according to the three sons of Levi – Gershon, Merari and Kohath. The sons of Gershon and Merari were given their respective numbers of wagons and oxen according to their needs. They were assigned to carry the larger parts of the dismantled Tabernacle. The sons of Kohath were not given any animals, as they were required to carry on their shoulders the items of the dismantled Tabernacle assigned to them.

The LORD was very just and fair in the distribution of duties. The Levites were given very noble and holy duties. Their needs were taken care of by the people of God whom they ministered to. Everyone received from the LORD what was needed, no more and no less. The provision of the LORD was for service and not for personal consumption or frivolity. They were to use it for God's work.

THOUGHT: The LORD has blessed all of us. How have we used the gracious gifts that we have received from the LORD? Has it been for personal gain or God's glory?

PRAYER: Lord, grant me Thy grace and wisdom to use all things for Thy glory from henceforth and forever, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

DEDICATION UNTO THE LORD

Giving unto the LORD is always an honour and privilege. However, it was a greater honour to give unto the LORD during the wilderness wandering period. This was the first dedication given by God's people toward the LORD since the Tabernacle was constructed, dedicated and consecrated (at the end of the book of Exodus). The purpose is expressly stated in verse 11 - for the dedicating of the altar. This is the altar of burnt offering, where all the offerings were brought by the worshippers to have their sins cleansed and forgiven by the LORD. The altar was the first holy item in front of the Holy Place as the worshipper entered the tent surrounding the Tabernacle. This means that the dedicating of the altar included the dedicating of the whole Tabernacle.

All the twelve tribes were involved. They were to bring exactly the same items determined by the LORD, no more and no less. They were not allowed to change any of the items. The prince or leader represented the respective tribes. The dedicatory offering was done over a period of twelve days with one tribe bringing their offerings each day. The offering sequence was determined by the LORD to avoid arguments: Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, Simeon, Gad, Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin, Dan, Asher and Naphtali. The sequence was also according to the location of the camps (see Numbers 2). The items for offering were the meat offering, burnt offering, sin offering and peace offering. These were the same four offerings offered by Aaron and his sons at their first inaugural offering in Leviticus 9. These offerings were a complete offering: the sin offering (purification), burnt offering (atonement), peace offering (peace with God) and meat offering (thanksgiving). This dedication by the nation points to an acceptance by God's people of the entire Levitical system of worship.

THOUGHT: Today, all true worshippers must worship God in spirit (with sincerity) and in truth (according to Holy Scriptures). Both must go hand in hand for worship to be acceptable to God.

PRAYER: May I always worship God in spirit and in truth. Amen.

CONSECRATING THE LEVITES

A desire to serve the LORD is a necessity, for it helps the believer to serve with perseverance. However, desire alone is not enough. Sincerity is also indispensable in holy service, as it enables him to serve with an unfeigned faith. Then again, desire and sincerity are also grossly insufficient because the hands that serve may not be clean and made fit for service. The Levites were willing to assist the Aaronic priests, but they were not ready until they had been consecrated for service.

To consecrate is to dedicate or to be set apart for the LORD's service. There has to be no divided heart or intention. The purpose to serve God is fixed. The account in this chapter probably occurred in the evening, as Aaron was told to light the candlestick. Firstly, the Levites had to be willing to serve as assistants to the priests. Then they were sprinkled with purified water. They shaved all their bodily hair, and washed their clothes. They brought two young bullocks, one for the sin offering (purification) and the other for the burnt offering (atonement). Before these two offerings were done, the children of Israel (probably the heads or firstborn) had to lay hands on the Levites before the Tabernacle. After that, the Levites laid their hands on the two bullocks. Lastly, the Levites were presented to the Aaronic priesthood as their assistants, which signified that they were officially consecrated unto the LORD's service. Hence the phrase, “*the Levites shall be mine.*” The laying of hands by the children of Israel meant that from henceforth, they were represented by the Levites, who were willing to do so. The laying of the hands by the Levites on the two bullocks meant that the two bullocks were their sin and burnt offerings, which died in their place. Consecration has to come from the heart.

THOUGHT: Man's hands are stained by sin and cannot serve God without being washed by the blood of Christ. After salvation, his works, done in Christ's name, are received by God as a sweet savour sacrifice.

PRAYER: May my life be lived for Christ alone. As He has given His all for me, so must I return my all to Him, which is my reasonable service and sacrifice. So help me, O Lord.

HOLY MEN TO SERVE THE HOLY GOD

Before the formation of the nation of Israel, the firstborn of every godly family functioned as priest or mediator. He offered offerings on behalf of his family, as well as himself. This was what Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job did in their time. Seventy-five family members, led by Jacob (or Israel), entered Egypt. 430 years later, they became a people of more than two million. Egypt was the “womb” God used to increase the population of His people. Israel was given the Constitution, ie the Moral Law, Civil Law and Religious Law. But she was still not a nation until she entered the Land of Promise and conquered it. As the salvific plan of God unfolded, the nation of Israel was born. The combination of people, the Constitution, and the Land defined the nation. As a nation, Israel needed to have her own priesthood. The mediatorial duties of the firstborn sons were officially transferred to the Levitical priesthood in Numbers 3. Numbers 8 explains the official consecration and dedication of the Levites. The service of mediatorship was holy service. God alone has the authority to appoint those whom He considers worthy. It was not inherent worthiness, as if there was any goodness in the Levites, but only by God’s grace. Anyone who transgressed by assuming the role of the Levitical priesthood would be punished with the plague. The warning from God is *“that there be no plague among the children of Israel, when the children of Israel come nigh unto the sanctuary”* (v 19b). Moses, Aaron and the children of Israel consecrated the Levites as God had prescribed. The ages for service inside the Tabernacle were between twenty-five and fifty years. After fifty, they were to keep the charge with their brethren but would do no service. They were to be mentors teaching the younger ones. The age range was probably due to the hard labour of killing the animals and someone had to teach the younger ones to be prepared to serve when they turned twenty-five.

THOUGHT: Pastors should serve as long as the LORD gives them strength. There is no retirement in the LORD’s service.

PRAYER: Help me to begin well, and to also end well, O LORD.

KEEPING THE PASSOVER

The Passover is one of the most important religious festivals in the Jewish calendar. God instituted the Passover just before He brought Israel out of Egypt. The Israelites had to each kill a lamb, without blemish, and sprinkle the blood of the lamb onto the main door frames of their homes. The LORD passed over these homes and the firstborn male child in each of these homes was spared. Since that event, Israel was to observe the Passover annually. They were never to forget their roots, and how God delivered Israel from slavery in the land of bondage.

The LORD commanded Israel to keep the Passover again since the last time they kept it in Egypt. The date was the fourteenth day, at even, in the first month of the second year since they came out of Egypt. Israel did not keep this feast again until the days of Joshua, when they crossed the River Jordan. The people obeyed Moses' instructions. Some men who had been defiled by a dead body told Aaron and Moses that they could not keep the Passover because of their uncleanness. Moses said that he would enquire of the LORD and seek His will. The LORD's reply was that anyone who was unclean or had travelled away from home could not be excused from taking the Passover. He was, however, to keep the Passover in the same manner on the fourteenth day, at even, on the second month instead of the first. Any Israelite living in Israel who refused to keep the Passover would be cut off from his people. This could mean either ostracism or death. A stranger who desired to keep the Passover had to be circumcised, together with his family members (males only) [Exo 12:48]. The LORD wants us to learn the importance of keeping the event rather than the date. How we keep the feast of the Lord is of greater significance. However, that does not mean that the date is not important.

THOUGHT: In some countries, Sunday is a working day. Friday and Saturday are considered the weekend. Can we keep the Lord's Day on Friday or Saturday, as long as the day is kept according to Scriptures?

PRAYER: May God bless me with wisdom to understand the difference between keeping religious rites and faith in the Lord.

THE TWO PILLARS

From the very beginning, when the Tabernacle was completed and set up, there was a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night directly on top of the Tabernacle where the Holy of Holies was located. The pillar of fire would be there until sunrise, and the pillar of cloud would be present until the evening. This has been the case since the Israelites left Egypt. When the pillar of *"cloud was taken up from the tabernacle"* (v 17), it was time for Israel to break camp and move on toward the Promised Land. Where the pillar of cloud stopped, Israel was to stop and make camp. Israel was not to move or stop at will, but had to strictly follow the LORD's direction and timing. If the LORD decided to remain in one spot for weeks, then Israel would remain. The construction, erection, and dedication of the Tabernacle, the giving of the Ten Commandments, the whole book of Leviticus and up to the first ten chapters of the book of Numbers – all these occurred at the foot of Mount Sinai. In fact, up to that point in time, Israel had remained at the foot of Mount Sinai for 300 days (Exod 19:1 and Num 9:1). Israel's calendar is based upon a 360-day year.

The movement of Israel depended entirely upon the LORD. If the LORD wanted Israel to move by night, Israel would move by night. If the LORD decided to move by day, or to remain a few days, then Israel would do so. If the LORD decided to remain a month, or even a year, or for whatever length of time, then Israel would observe the LORD's timing. Israel was forbidden to move or stop on her own. Israel was to do according to Moses' instructions. The lesson here is clear. The LORD wanted Israel to learn absolute obedience; she was not to do anything on her own. She was not on any mission of her own. The LORD had called Israel out of Egypt by a mighty hand. The keeping of the feast of the Passover signified this. Israel was bound for the Promised Land with a very high spiritual purpose. God would lead her and she must follow.

THOUGHT: Are not Christians on a similar spiritual journey to their Promised Land?

PRAYER: Remind me, O LORD, to lean always on Thee, never on self, and not to take one step without Thy Help. Amen.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 18

NUMBERS 10:1-10

PSALM 18

*“...for the calling of the assembly,
and for the journeying of the camps.”*

TRUMPET SOUNDS

Trumpets are very effective instruments to get people's attention. God gave instructions to Israel on how to construct and use trumpets in Old Testament times. Two trumpets were to be made of silver and in one complete piece. The stated purpose was *“for the calling of the assembly, and for the journeying of the camps”* (v2). This ensured that Israel moved as one unit, and was prepared for worship or for battle. When both the trumpets were blown together, it was to call the entire assembly of Israel. If only one was blown, only the princes or heads were to assemble. If an alarm sound was blown, the tribes camped on the east would go first; a second alarm meant that the south side would follow after. The Tabernacle was always camped facing east, and the priests and the camp of Judah were to be located on the east side. The priests were in charge of blowing the trumpets. Israel had to follow these instructions as an ordinance forever throughout her generations. Even after they entered the Promised Land, they were to observe the trumpet alarms.

Trumpets were used in times of war when Israel came under attack. It is important to note that it was not so much a call for Israel to fight, but rather that Israel *“shall be remembered before the LORD,”* and that God would save Israel from her enemies. This was a sound of victory, and victory was assured because the LORD would fight for Israel. Trumpets were to be used *“in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months.”* Trumpets would be blown over the burnt offerings and the peace offerings as a memorial before God. These were non-negotiable as the LORD invoked the words *“I am the LORD your God.”* Israel was to fight, worship and gather as one.

THOUGHT: The LORD left nothing to “chance” or opportunities for quarrels. Unity under God's command was the rule of law in Israel. Israel had to be united and move as one, just as churches today need to protect their unity in order to move as one for God's glory.

PRAYER: May the unity in Christ prevail so that the work and will of God may flourish and Christ's name may be glorified. Amen.

BREAK CAMP

335 days after Israel made camp at the foot of Mount Sinai, the LORD called Israel to break camp and continue their march to the Promised Land. Israel had arrived at Mount Sinai as a disorganized mob of people who had fled from the clutches of the mighty Egyptians after 430 years. Now Israel would leave her base camp of almost one year as an organized people of God. They moved as one. The orderliness of their march was according to the LORD’s command and by the hand of Moses. The appointed leader was still Moses. He took charge of the march to ensure total obedience. The standards were Judah first, followed by Reuben, Ephraim and Dan. God called them “*armies*” as they marched.

Moses invited his father-in-law, Hobab, to join them. Israel would do good to Hobab. The LORD would do good to Israel. Hobab was invited to share Israel’s blessings. Hobab declined the offer and said that he would return to his own land. Moses pleaded with Hobab not to leave, and said that Hobab had good knowledge of the wilderness and he could be their eyes. Moses promised that Israel would share with Hobab whatever the LORD blessed Israel with. Hobab relented and joined Moses. The LORD was with Israel, moving ahead to ensure that Israel was well protected and cared for. Moses emphasized the presence of the LORD, and no one understood the great importance of the LORD’s presence in Israel more than Moses.

THOUGHT: The presence of the LORD in the midst of His people transformed lives from inside out. Israel was changed forever. Israel was purposeful in her direction and calling. She had a mission toward the Promised Land. The LORD was in her midst and that was all she needed. There was direction and safety in the LORD. Israel had no need to fear. All she needed to do was to obey every command of God.

PRAYER: May my life be a life of obedience, O LORD. Transform me from within, that my life be changed forever. I thank Thee, LORD, for being with me to lead, guide and protect even as Thou was with Israel. Help me to march on with purpose toward heaven in these last days, till Christ returns. Amen.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 20

NUMBERS 11:1-3

PSALM 20

*"...when Moses prayed unto the LORD,
the fire was quenched."*

TAB'E-RAH

Tab'e-rah means "burning." Soon after they marched toward the Promised Land, sin was committed in Israel. The when and what of the complaint are not stated. However, the sin committed was so serious and grievous that the judgment was swift and deadly. The word "*complained*" (v 1) has the idea of mourning, and is used only twice in the whole Old Testament. The other usage is found in Lamentations 3:39, which talks about complaining because of the punishment for sins committed.

"It displeased the LORD" (v 11). Literally, this means "it was evil in the ears of the LORD." The LORD saw the great complaint as evil. He heard it and His anger was kindled. It is likened to lighting a flame. The LORD was not angry at first, but the people in Israel committed a serious sin and lit the fire of God's anger! The people were entirely to be blamed. The fire of the LORD burned (root word for Tab'e-rah) among them and consumed those who were in the uttermost parts of the camp. From this phrase, "*uttermost parts of the camp*" (v 1), the people could have been the mixed multitude mentioned in verse 4. They were the Gentile slaves who came out of Egypt with Israel. They seized the opportunity and tagged along. They were not part of the main camp, as God did not provide them with any location for their tents. Unlike the people of Moses' father-in-law who were invited to join Israel and share the blessings, this mixed multitude was left alone. Perhaps, as a result, they felt marginalized. They did not cry directly to God but to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD and the fire was quenched. Moses named the place "Tab'e-rah" because the fire of the LORD burned among them.

THOUGHT: It is a serious sin to complain. Man will hear and the sin will spread. When the LORD hears, He will punish justly. The punishment will commensurate with the sin committed. God makes no mistake. Beware of sinning with our mouths!

PRAYER: Help me, LORD, to be quick to listen and slow to speak. Help me to keep my tongue in check, to always remember that Thou art sovereign, and to accept all things from Thee. Amen.

DIFFICULTIES IN MINISTRY ARE NOT UNCOMMON

The mixed multitude mentioned in verse 4 were the non-Israelites or Gentiles (Exod 12:38). They had followed Israel's escape from Egypt. Their murmurings and unhappiness affected the Israelites. They caused Israel to sin with them. They did not complain that there was no food, but they were dissatisfied with the manna God had provided. They remembered the good food in Egypt. There is nothing wrong with eating good food. There is also nothing wrong with remembering. Their sin was that they forgot about the miracles that the LORD had effected to take them out of Egypt. Israel's great sin was in losing sight of her spiritual status and in thinking like other Gentile nations. Israel had become carnal!

The people of Israel were mourning because they did not like the menu! God was very angry with Israel. Moses became discouraged and was tired of caring for such a rebellious people. Moses cried that he was *"not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me"* (v 14). Moses even asked the LORD to take his life if this was the manner of his ministry. These were God's people, not his. Moses was feeling helpless and alone, and he needed God to provide help for him.

God's ministry can be a very heavy burden to carry sometimes. Cries for help like Moses' are not uncommon. But just because they are not uncommon does not mean that God's servants should indulge in them. This is often the result of leaning on one's own strength to do God's work rather than leaning on God. Self-pity sets in when things become too heavy to bear. Moses did right by crying out to God. He did not scold the Israelites. He prayed to God. God heard and answered accordingly.

THOUGHT: If all ministries were easy, would we still need God and look to Him in prayer? Thank God for trials and adversities in ministerial life, but let us ensure that they are not a result of our sins or our wrongdoings.

PRAYER: Help me, LORD, to pray without ceasing, in Jesus' name. Amen.

EASIER TO TAKE ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT THAN TO TAKE EGYPT OUT OF ISRAEL!

The LORD granted Moses his two requests. The first was to provide him with seventy helpers. They were chosen and anointed by God in front of the Tabernacle. They were also endowed by God with the same spirit that Moses possessed. This is crucial in ministry, especially for leaders. They must seek the same goal, and that is to glory Christ in all they decide and do. They must be steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the LORD. The second request was to provide food for the people of Israel who had complained about the manna that God had provided for them. It was not that they had no food. They murmured against God because they did not like the food. They had complained again to Moses, in verse 13, and demanded that he gave them flesh to eat.

The LORD told Moses to inform the people to sanctify themselves, because the next day they would eat flesh. The LORD had heard their cry. The flesh would not be eaten for one day, or two days, or five or ten days, or even twenty days. Israel would eat flesh for an entire month (thirty days). Since God did not say that He would provide the flesh, Moses asked God whether he was to kill the flocks and herds, including the fish from the sea, to feed 600,000 footmen. Even then, Moses said, it might still not be enough to feed so many for thirty days! The LORD said to Moses, *"Is the LORD's hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not"* (v 23). Moses was given another lesson on faith and trust in God. When God asks his servant to convey a truth and to do something, He will also enable. Nothing that God asks His servant to do or say is beyond His ability to fulfill. God's arm is never too short!

THOUGHT: Believers must know the difference between genuinely asking God for help and complaining to Him. Moses asked for help and it was granted. The people's complaints resulted in a very different outcome!

PRAYER: Help me to have godliness with contentment, LORD, for that is truly great gain. Amen.

APPROVAL AND APPROVAL?

Moses told the people what God had said, that they would have flesh to eat the next day, and that they needed to sanctify themselves first. The "approval" from the LORD to give them flesh to eat was not a good kind of approval. Israel would be punished severely by the LORD for their complaints. Why then did God give to them what they wanted? When sinful man insists on wanting something that is not good for him, God sometimes gives it to him. This does not mean that He approves or is pleased, as this incident demonstrates. God has revealed His teachings in His holy and perfect Word, and when sinful man insists on going his own way against God's truth, God will not send lightning and thunder from heaven to stop him. He made man in His image, not robots with no mind or will. Sinful man will be judged for his sinful actions and wilful disobedience against His holy Word. The sovereignty of God is not diminished in the slightest way, even when sinful man is allowed to do his evil. God's will will always reign supreme.

God approved Moses' request for help. This was a good approval. Moses gathered the seventy men before the Tabernacle for the LORD to bless. After the LORD blessed them, they started prophesying and did not stop. The content of their prophesying was not revealed. The act of prophesying is the focus, rather than the content. God gave the ability to prophesy. This was God's way of showing Moses and all the people that these seventy men were indeed chosen by God to assist Moses. Out of these seventy men, two of them did not go to the Tabernacle to be blessed. But they also prophesied. Joshua asked Moses to stop them. Moses' reply was, if only God would cause all Israel to prophesy, or be chosen for service! Moses was not envious of spiritual men. His desire was to see more men grow in grace and knowledge of God. If all were serving God faithfully, there would not be time to murmur or complain!

THOUGHT: If all were serving God faithfully in my church, what would my church be like?

PRAYER: Make me a servant, O LORD, all my days, for serving Thee is the highest honour bestowed upon sinners saved by grace. Amen.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 24

NUMBERS 11:31-35

PSALM 24

*"... the wrath of the LORD was kindled
against the people, and the LORD smote
the people with a very great plague."*

KIB'ROTH-HAT-TA'A-VAH!

Murmuring is a serious sin. When the murmuring is against God's providential care for His people, it is an even greater sin. Israel had manna from the LORD every morning on a daily basis since they came out of Egypt. Israel had food but did not like the menu. They were unhappy and wanted to eat Egyptian food (cf 11:5). For this sin, the LORD punished them.

The LORD gave them quails to eat. The wind from the LORD blew the quails from the sea, which fell into the camp of the Israelites. The amount of quails was to a depth of two cubits (three feet or about one meter), and the length and breadth was a day's journey in all directions. This amount of food would more than satisfy many a hungry Israelite. In fact, the Israelites were so greedy that they stood up all night and all day, even the next day, to gather as many quails as possible. The least amount gathered was ten homers (ten heaps or ass loads). Such a collection reflected the Israelites' greed and faithlessness. God had been teaching them the importance of a daily walk of faith through the daily provision of manna. However, like all sinful men, they had to have more as reserves to feel "safe." The LORD punished Israel's act of faithlessness. While they were eating the quails, and even before they could chew the meat, the LORD's wrath was kindled against them. The LORD smote them with a very great plague. The ones who lusted died and were buried. The name of the place where they were buried was called Kib'roth-hat-ta'a-vah, which means "the graves of lusts." Israel's sin was not just being dissatisfied with the food that the LORD provided for them; they failed to realize that they were a chosen nation on a spiritual mission. All they cared about were their stomachs and how to excite their taste buds. They murmured against God and died for their sins.

THOUGHT: *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."* (Matt 6:33)

PRAYER: Help me, O LORD, to have godliness with contentment which is great gain. May I never murmur, for all that Thou hast provided will always be the best for me. Help me for Christ's sake.

MORE THAN A FAMILY FEUD

Jealousy is a serious sin. It is never more serious than when the sin is leveled against God's chosen servant. In this case, it was against Moses. The culprits were Moses' older brother Aaron, and sister Miriam. Miriam was the eldest of the three. Their charge was, *“Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us?”* (v 2). The basis of their charge was that Moses had married an Ethiopian woman. This was no family affair because this was not a family business. Moses was on the King's business. Anyone who threatens God's servant threatens God! Moses did not utter a word in his own defence. He was very meek. The Bible says that his meekness was *“above all the men which were upon the face of the earth”* (v 3). The LORD heard Aaron's and Miriam's "rebellion" and intervened. The LORD chided them. With other prophets God spoke through an intermediary, such as visions and dreams. However, with Moses, God spoke face to face, directly. This was the highest honour given to any man! The conclusion of the matter was that the anger of the LORD was kindled against them. Immediately after that, the LORD departed. The matter ended there without further argument or debate.

The LORD struck Miriam with leprosy. Leprosy was a deadly disease. There was no cure unless the LORD granted healing. Aaron appealed to Moses on her behalf. He confessed their sin and said that they had acted foolishly. Moses cried to the LORD and Miriam was healed. She had to go through the seven-day period of cleansing before she was allowed to return to camp. The LORD's chastisement was known to the entire camp. They did not travel until Miriam was cleansed at the end of the seven days. Miriam was probably the main instigator in this grievous sin, as she alone was punished.

THOUGHT: God is no respecter of persons. Miriam was a leader and a believer, and yet when she sinned she was justly punished.

PRAYER: Help me to realize, O God, that a higher standard of holiness is expected of all believers, especially church leaders. Humble me that I may serve with contentment always. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26

NUMBERS 13:1-20

PSALM 26

*"...And be ye of good courage,
and bring of the fruit of the land..."*

TO SPY OUT THE LAND

Finally, Israel arrived at the southern entrance of the Promised Land. The people had said to Moses that they would send out the twelve spies (Deut 1:22-23). Moses probably asked the LORD, and here in Numbers 13, the LORD consented. The mission of these spies was clear: they were to search the land of Canaan that God had given to them. The decision to enter or not to enter was not theirs to make. They were to collect data about the Promised Land. One representative from each tribe was chosen. Since there were twelve tribes, there were twelve spies. The mixed multitude that came out with Israel was not included. This was a spiritual exercise to be done by the people of God.

Their names were mentioned as these were the men who would impact the lives of all the people of Israel for the next forty years of their existence. Verses 17 to 20 describe the blueprint of their mission in detail. They were to enter from the south. They were to find out if the people were strong or weak, few or many; the land was good or bad; what the living conditions were like; and whether the land was fat or lean. Moses reminded them to be of good courage when they entered the Land. Again, for the second time just before they left, they were told to collect accurate data. **They were not supposed to make any decision about entering the Land.**

In the business of the Kingdom of God, there are duties that may be insignificant. What is also true is that one's duties will affect the lives of many. Even more so the duties of these twelve spies. They might not have been aware of it yet but the results of their mission, and their reaction to it, could be either a blessing or a curse. They were the only eye-witnesses of the Promised Land. Their report carried great weight in influencing the lives and faith of the people of God.

THOUGHT: My words and actions can change lives. Is it for the better or for worse?

PRAYER: May my life be a sacrifice unto Thee, O Lord, and sanctify my lips, my heart and my hands that my all may be to Thy glory! Amen.

HOW DO YOU SEE YOURSELF?

The twelve spies returned and brought back a report that changed the course of Israel's history. The Land that they surveyed was precisely what the LORD had told them. It was a land flowing with milk and honey. They brought the evidence of great abundance when they carried one cluster of grapes between two persons on a staff. They also brought back pomegranates and figs. The evidence proved that the LORD was true to His word and had told Israel the truth. Therefore, Israel had no reason not to trust God when He said explicitly that they would enter the Promised Land! Nevertheless, the spies gave two very contradicting reports. The ten spies (the majority) argued convincingly that the land was occupied by many warlike people such as *“the Amalekites ... in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, ... in the mountains: and the Canaanites ... by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan”* (v 29). Israel was outnumbered and outsized by the people of Canaan. They concluded that there was no way Israel could enter the Promised Land and not be killed. The minority voice came from remaining two spies, Joshua and Caleb. They challenged the people of Israel to enter the Promised Land at once and not to hesitate. They said that Israel had the strength and ability to possess the Land of Promise!

The ten spies countered by saying with the same strength of conviction that Israel did not have the power to possess the Land. They gave the reason that the enemies were too powerful for Israel! They added that based upon their eyewitness account, the Land would literally eat Israel alive. The enemies were great in stature and were like giants, whereas Israel was like grasshoppers! The faithlessness of the majority condemned the whole!

THOUGHT: Truth and the life of faith are never dependent upon the majority. More often than not, the Bible teaches that the majority is often against God and Christ! Beware of the majority mentality.

PRAYER: Help me, O Lord, to always live according to Thy Truth, and not be swayed by the voice of the majority. Amen.

THE POWER OF SPOKEN WORDS!

This chapter records the impact of the words of the ten faithless spies. Their words would live in infamy as long as Israel exists. The names of these ten spies are recorded for our learning. They will never be forgotten for eternity. Their words evoked cries of hopelessness. The reaction of the people of Israel evidenced their sorrow. Their longing for a land filled with milk and honey since they left Egypt less than a year and a half ago were dashed to pieces. All seemed lost. They could not return to Egypt! They could not go forward, and they did not want to wander in the wilderness. There was only one thing left to do for faithless people.

They took it out on the leaders who had brought them out of Egypt and into this “dead end”! Moses and Aaron received the brunt of their anger and wrath! They said it would have been better to die in Egypt or to die in the wilderness. Now they would all die by the sword, and their wives and children would become slaves. Why had God brought them to this land to die this way? Was it not better to return to Egypt? These harsh words would surely condemn them. To make matters worse, they wanted to elect new leaders to lead them back to Egypt! This was not just a rejection of God who had brought Israel out of Egypt for a spiritual purpose. Israel had just slapped God in the face and charged Him with making a blunder and breaking His promises! Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before Israel. They could not say anything as they had not seen the Promised Land. Joshua and Caleb did see, and they courageously and rightly intervened. They told the people not to be afraid. The Land was rich and ready for possession if the LORD would help Israel. Do not rebel! But Israel did not listen. They wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb. The glory of God appeared and stopped them.

THOUGHT: Israel had sinned because they listened to the wrong voice! The voice of faith versus the voice of fear is a daily choice! Which voice do I listen to in my life?

PRAYER: Grant me discernment to obey the voice of faith, O Lord, that I might not sin against Thee! Amen.

THE POWER OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER

No sinner should want to anger God so much that He has to intervene personally and come down to the earth to punish. In this instance, the LORD came down. Israel's sin was very grievous, as seen by the reaction of the LORD. The LORD declared to Moses that He had had enough of Israel's rebellion, especially after all the miracles wrought in their presence. God would send a pestilence to destroy and He would disinherit all of them. He would start a new nation through Moses! If Moses had been a self-seeking leader, this would have been a golden opportunity to have a nation named after him. Thank God that Moses was a godly leader who was concerned only for the LORD's honour and glory.

His intercessory prayer before the LORD on behalf of Israel did not have any focus on Israel at all. The focus was all on the LORD. Firstly, God's name was at stake. The Egyptians knew that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt into the wilderness. They would have told the inhabitants of Canaan that the LORD had been with Israel continuously. Now if the LORD were to destroy Israel, they would say that the LORD was not able to bring Israel into the Promised Land, and so He had to kill them. God's honour and glory were on the line. However, the power of the LORD was great. Secondly, Moses appealed to God's mercy. The LORD was longsuffering. Moses asked God to forgive those who had repented or were not guilty of the sin of these men. If God were to wipe out the people of Israel, then the children would be destroyed too. Thirdly, Moses appealed to God's justice. He was not defending the unrepentant sinners or asking that God remove the consequences of sin. The guilty must be punished. Finally, he cried for God's mercy again, which He had shown to Israel since the day they came out of Egypt. Moses did not deny the guilt of Israel or minimize the sin of Israel. He only appealed to God's glory and mercy. This is the heart and essence of intercessory prayer.

THOUGHT: Why would God answer prayers for rebels and unbelievers? For the sake of Christ, God hears the prayers of His saints who pray for others!

PRAYER: O merciful God, hear me when I pray, for Jesus' sake.

CONSEQUENCES OF SINS COMMITTED

Serious actions have serious consequences. The LORD heard Moses' intercessory prayer and answered. The LORD pardoned according to Moses' prayer. However, this does not mean that there are no consequences for our sinful actions on this earth. The reason is that as long as the LORD lives (and He lives forever), all the earth shall be filled with His glory. This means that sinners will pay for their sins including the people of Israel. All the men who had seen the miracles of God and did not obey His Word would not see the Land of Promise. The LORD will bring Caleb, God's servant, who had another spirit and followed God fully, into the Promised Land. The LORD told Moses to bring the people of Israel into the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea as the Amalekites and Canaanites were still in the valley. All those who were numbered earlier, twenty years and upwards and who had murmured against the LORD, would die in the wilderness. They would surely not enter the Land of Promise, except for Joshua and Caleb. All the children of Israel would bear the whoredom of the adults and wander in the wilderness for forty years until all the carcasses of these men were wasted. For every day the twelve spies had taken to spy out the Land, Israel would wander in the wilderness one year. The spies had taken forty days to spy out the Land, and so Israel would wander forty years in the wilderness. The LORD Himself would carry this death sentence in the wilderness against them. He had put His holy name on the line. His plan would not fail. Israel had been murmuring against the LORD since she came out of Egypt. The LORD had patiently provided all that they needed. Now the people of Israel had sinned against God for the last time. They would surely die. Forgiveness from the LORD does not negate consequences on earth. If this is not true, then sinners will sin with impunity, and then ask for forgiveness with frivolity. May be the consequences for sins committed keep us from sinning.

THOUGHT: The thinking that there are no consequences for sins committed is often an unstated belief that has caused many to sin.

PRAYER: Help me, O God, to sin less and to live in holiness more. Sanctify my mind and heart by Thy Word, for Thy Word is truth.

TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE!

God meted out immediate judgment upon the ten faithless spies whose words condemned a nation. Caleb and Joshua lived still. They had spoken the truth, even though Israel rejected it. So God honoured them for speaking the truth. After that, Moses told the people of Israel the LORD's judgment against all of them. The people mourned greatly. They were so close to the Promised Land and yet so far! They would lose it all because they listened to the voice of faithlessness. The ten spies died by the hand of God. The people of Israel realized how serious their situation was. They would all wander and die in the wilderness for the next forty years.

The next morning, Israel decided to enter the Promised Land. They climbed to the top of the mountain and said that they had decided to enter the Land that God had promised them. They thought that all was well again with the LORD. However, all was not well. Moses chided them for transgressing against God's commandment. They would perish in the wilderness. Moses declared to them that they would fail miserably. Using two more strong prohibitions, Moses told them not to go up because the LORD was not with them, so that they would not die by the hands of their enemies. They did not listen and disobeyed God's commandment again. Moses and the Ark of the Covenant remained in the camp. The rebels went alone without God's help. The Amalekites and Canaanites soundly defeated them even unto Hormah. Hormah means “devoted or accursed.” Anything that is accursed or devoted unto the LORD must be destroyed so that man may not take or use it, like the city of Jericho in Joshua 6. What a tragedy that befell the thousands who had so much to claim as their blessings from the LORD. They threw everything away because they did not believe!

THOUGHT: Without faith, it is impossible to please God. It is by faith that I believe that Christ came and died for my sins, and that He rose from the dead for my justification.

PRAYER: Give me faith that I may believe Thy Word, O God. May my sojourn on earth be from faith to faith till I see Thee face to face.

WHEN YE BE COME INTO THE LAND

Immediately after the LORD's punishment, the people of Israel needed encouragement. They were probably very distraught by the finality of the punishment that all the adults who were twenty years old and above (except for Joshua and Caleb) would die in the wilderness. Those who tried to enter the Promised Land without God's help were killed by the Canaanites.

Their hope lay in the promises of God and His assurance that entrance into the Land of Promise was certain. The fear of rejection and to be marginalized by God were something the younger generation had to contend with, because of the failure of their fathers. The LORD reassured them that they would definitely enter the Promised Land! The forty years of wilderness wandering would not destroy the nation. The LORD had not rejected them. The LORD's plan for them remained intact. This is seen in the use of the phrase “*when ye be come into the land of your habitations.*” It is not a question of “if” but “when.” God gave the certainty. The LORD would give the Land to them. They did not earn or deserve the Land. It was a privilege to receive such a great gift from the LORD! They would worship the LORD in the Land. All sorts of offerings would be offered in the Land. These offerings included burnt offering (for atonement of sin); freewill offering (thanksgiving); meat offering (thanksgiving); drink offering (thanksgiving); and peace offering. These were part of the feasts of celebration that Israel would offer unto the LORD **when** they entered the Land.

God has forgiven us but sometimes we cannot forgive ourselves. After we have sinned against the LORD, we may feel that God has cast us aside and does not want to use us anymore. The feeling of being rejected and dejection can be overwhelming and most discouraging. However, hope is not lost as we trust in Him. Never give up, always look up.

THOUGHT: Do I find it hard to forgive myself even after God has forgiven me? Keep serving the LORD.

PRAYER: Lift up my spirit, O God, as I cry to Thee for help. Without Thee I am nothing and can do nothing.

ONE LAW AND ONE MANNER FOR ALL

The different offerings were to be offered by the people of Israel as sweet savour sacrifices unto the LORD. Israel was never like other nations of the world. Israel was a spiritual nation designed by the LORD for the salvation of the world. Jesus had to come from a nation. However, all the other nations originated from sinful man and were full of sin. The nation of Israel came from God through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. From a mere family of seventy-five, God increased it to more than two million over a period of 430 years. God gave Israel her constitution and system of worship. However, Israel was not a nation until she was given her own land.

When Israel entered and conquered the Land of Promise, the third piece of the three-piece puzzle that made up a nation (people, constitution, and land) would be complete. Israel would thank God according to the manner in which God had stipulated through the many types of offerings. When Israel came out of Egypt, slaves from other nations came out with Israel as well. The Bible calls them the mixed multitude. They were also to worship the LORD like Israel. No idolatrous worship was allowed in the Land. One law, one ordinance, and one manner of worship had to be applied throughout the Land.

This is symbolic of the one way of salvation through Jesus for all mankind. Jesus was a Jew but He was not sent by God to save the Jews only. He was to be the Saviour of the whole world! Jesus had to come from a nation. That nation was Israel. Israel was the chosen people of God from where the Messiah would come, but salvation has always been for the whole world. There is only one mediator between God and man. He is the man Christ Jesus. Everyone in the Land was to worship God in the same way. There is only one way to salvation.

THOUGHT: Because of the first Adam, sin came into the world. Because of the second Adam, Jesus Christ, salvation is given to the whole world!

PRAYER: O God, my soul yearns to worship Thee in spirit and in truth! Receive my worship for Jesus' sake. Amen.

GIVING THANKS TO GOD

The LORD instructed Moses to teach the people of Israel that when they entered the Promised Land, they were to offer thanksgiving unto the LORD. The supply of manna would cease and Israel would eat the fruit of the Land. When Israel ate the fruit of the Land, she should offer a heave offering. This is more than just raising the meal heavenward. This offering means that an amount of Israel's harvest is to be given unto the LORD. Since the priests had the LORD as their inheritance, the heave offering was given to the priests. The percentage was not stated; the offering was to be given from the heart. According to Jewish tradition, the amount was about twenty-five percent of the first dough that was kneaded.

If Israel were to forget to obey any of God's commandments, then she had sinned against God. It was considered a national sin. The congregation as a whole, including strangers in the Land, would have to offer a sin offering unto the LORD for the purification of sin. This was a non-negotiable commandment from the LORD.

Ignorance is no excuse when it comes to worshipping the LORD. Failure to give thanks to God, even in ignorance, is no excuse. The command to give thanks to God for all that they ate in the Land of Promise was to remind Israel of where they obtained life and every blessing – from the LORD who had brought them out of the land of bondage. For believers in the twenty-first century, gratitude is expressed by thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is more than just saying “thank you” to God. It must be expressed in concrete terms through our tithes and offerings unto the LORD on a regular and continual basis. Ignorance is no excuse also for us when it comes to giving thanks to God.

THOUGHT: Is it easier to say, “I give my life to God,” than to actually give of my tithes and offerings to God on a weekly or monthly basis?

PRAYER: Make my life a life of sacrifice unto Thee, O LORD! All that I have and am are because of Thy grace, mercy, and goodness. They come from Thy good hand through Jesus Christ my LORD. Grant me a grateful heart all my days, O God. Amen.

PRESUMPTUOUS SIN IS SERIOUS

Yesterday, the sin discussed was national. Today’s reading refers to a personal sin. If an Israelite commits a sin because of ignorance, God will regard the sin in a very different light. Please note that verse 28 makes it very clear that the sin of ignorance is committed before the LORD, and not before man. God determines whether it is truly ignorance or a presumptuous sin. The sinner brings the sin offering to the priest and an atonement will be made for him. The LORD, who knows every heart, will decide whether it is really a sin of ignorance or not. The Bible says that after the sin offering is made, the LORD will forgive. There is one law for both the Israelite and the stranger in the Land. This teaches us that there is only one salvation through Jesus Christ for all mankind. In the eyes of God, there are only two groups of people on earth – the Israelites and the non-Israelites or Gentiles (strangers).

If a sinner (Israelite or stranger) commits a sin presumptuously, that is deliberately and with pre-meditation, then he will certainly be cut off (mentioned twice – verses 30 and 31, with an emphatic usage of the verb “*cut-off*” in verse 31) from his people by the LORD. The reason for such a firm action is that by breaking God’s commandment, the sinner has despised the Word of the LORD. To be “*cut off*” could mean to be killed by God or to be ostracized from the people of God. Either punishment is bad for that person. To be ostracized is to have no fellowship with spouse, parents, children, siblings and friends. He is treated as one who is dead! In this context, “*cut off*” means to be stoned to death (vv 32-36). Knowledge of the Word of God delivers us from ignorance. It requires us to obey all of God’s Word. When we do sin, may it be because of weakness and not presumption. Presumptuous sins are pre-meditated, which involve plotting and planning to sin. God knows and is never mocked by such professing believers.

THOUGHT: Will a genuine believer commit a presumptuous sin?

PRAYER: Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts, that there be no wickedness in me. Lead me to Thy throne of grace through Christ Jesus my LORD. Amen.

BREAKING THE SABBATH DAY

Today, we live in an age when keeping the Sabbath Day holy has become outdated. On one end, we have the legalists who teach that we cannot even buy lunch or take a taxi on the Sabbath Day because we will cause or encourage the unbelievers to sin if we do business with them on the Sabbath Day. On the other end, we have the antinomians who believe that the Sabbath Day law is outdated. It was only for the nation of Israel and is no longer applicable to Christians today. These antinomians give God their two hours on the Sabbath Day, and thereafter do what they want the rest of the day.

For the Christian, the Sabbath Day is now the Lord's Day (Sunday) in light of the resurrection of Christ on the third day. The New Testament church met on the first day of the week, which is a Sunday (Acts 20:7). The purposes of the Sabbath Day must be observed throughout the ages, and not just in Old Testament times. The day was changed to Sunday but the principles have not been dispensed with. The principles are that the Sabbath Day is a day of rest from our labour (not because we are tired). It is a day for God's people to remember the LORD's goodness through the past week. The devotion of one day out of seven days in a week unto the LORD is for our good. It helps us to remember our eternal home in heaven, and not to be caught up in the affairs of this world. The lust of the eyes and flesh and the pride of life can beset all of us. When we come together for worship, we are to worship God, give thanks to Him and encourage one another in our sojourn on this earth. When this Israelite broke the Sabbath Day, it was to challenge God. He had sinned presumptuously and had to be cut off. He was stoned to death! God condemned the sinner very emphatically by saying that he must surely die! Not keeping the Sabbath means a lack of faith and trust in God to provide for our daily needs. Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

THOUGHT: Is God pleased with how I am keeping the Lord's Day holy?

PRAYER: Not my will but Thine be done, O LORD! Amen.

TO ASSIST IN REMEMBRANCE

Ignorance is not bliss when it comes to spiritual matters. We commit the sins of ignorance. Forgetfulness is a worse excuse when it comes to obeying the commandments of God! We know the commandments of God but in our state of forgetfulness we sin against God by breaking His Word. The LORD had devised a marvelous way to remind the Israelites of the importance of remembering His many commandments, and obeying them. To remember is more than just recalling them in our minds. It means to remember and to live them out in our lives. The method God devised was that *"they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue"* (v 38b). The purpose was *"that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them"* (v 39a). Firstly, we observe that it is to be done throughout their generations in Israel. Parents had to pass this on to their sons, and their sons to their sons. This provides a perpetual manner of dress. Secondly, the fringes in the borders of their garments were external, which meant that they could not be hidden. It would be noticeable if anyone did not have them done since this was to be a national practice. The blue-coloured ribband against the white background of their garments was very striking. Blue was also the colour of the sky. This obviously reminded them of the glory of God in heaven. The third purpose was that Israel would obey the Word of God and not rely on themselves or other gods, and thus not sin against the LORD. This would keep Israel holy as they lived a life in obedience to God's perfect Word. Israel was not to forget that the LORD was the One who brought them out of Egypt, the land of bondage! When all of Israel dressed in this manner, they would see the blue ribband on the borders of the garments of others. In this way, they would be reminding one another to be holy!

THOUGHT: What do we have today to remind us not to forget the LORD and to obey His commandments?

PRAYER: Help me to be holy, as Thou art holy, by obeying all Thy commandments, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THEY CHALLENGED GOD!

Fools really believe that they can hinder or stop the work of God. They dare to challenge God's servants. When they challenge the servants of God, they are actually challenging God. Korah, Dathan and Abiram led 250 princes against Moses and Aaron. The charges were that Moses and Aaron made themselves leaders of Israel. They further argued that since all the people of Israel were holy, and the LORD was among them, Moses and Aaron had no right to lift themselves above the congregation of the LORD.

Moses' reaction was to fall upon his face, probably to pray and ask the LORD for help. Then he spoke to Korah, the leader of the rebellion. The LORD would decide the next day who the real leaders of Israel should be. Moses warned Korah and his followers that they demanded too much for themselves. God had assigned the task of assisting the priesthood to the Levites, and now they wanted to take over the priesthood as well! This was not at all a challenge against Aaron, but against the LORD.

It might have appeared that Moses and Aaron were in collusion with each other because they were brothers. Some time must have passed whereby the princes and leaders in Israel had tasted the power of leadership and thus demanded a review of the leadership. They had the people on their side. Moses and Aaron were the minority. This challenge was not against man but against God. Any Christian anointed by God to do His work is God's servant. Those who hinder and "attack" him are "attacking" God and hindering God's work. God will deal with them in His time.

THOUGHT: Does this mean that we should not question the pastor in all that he does? What if he has committed a sin, or has erroneously taught the Word of God? Should we correct him?

PRAYER: Humble me always, O LORD, to do Thy will, and to honour and pray for all those whom Thou has anointed for Thy service. Help me for Jesus' sake. Amen.

GOD WILL VINDICATE!

Challenging the leadership of God is a serious sin. Immediate judgment fell upon the rebels. There was no delay in judgment because of the urgency of the situation; God’s plan of salvation for mankind could be jeopardized if Israel did not enter the Promised Land and perished in the wilderness. Dathan’s and Abiram’s audacious challenge against Moses was clear in their use of the clause *“We will not come up”* (vv 12, 14). They emphatically rejected Moses’ request for them to gather the next morning for the LORD to decide who the anointed one was. They said that Moses had failed to bring them into the Promised Land and only wanted to kill them all in the wilderness. This was a blatant lie and they knew it. They failed to enter because of their unbelief (Num 14). Moses was very angry with their lies and false allegations against him. Moses asked the LORD to reject their offering; and he declared to the LORD that he had taken nothing from the people of Israel for personal gain. Korah and 250 princes gathered with their individual censers, with fire and incense in them, before the tabernacle of the LORD the next day. The LORD said to Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from Korah and the rebels. God was about to consume them and the congregation who were on their side. Instead of dancing with joy in victory, Moses and Aaron reacted as godly pastors. They fell upon their faces and pleaded with the LORD not to destroy the congregation because of the sin of one man. The LORD’s servants must not panic, but need to be still and know that God will vindicate in His time. This does not mean that they will always find justice on earth. As long as they do not compromise, they have already won the battle.

THOUGHT: Why is it that evil men can still “win” and take over churches and seminaries if the LORD will surely vindicate? Does defeat on earth equal defeat in heaven? What is true victory in Christ?

PRAYER: Strengthen me, O LORD, that I may not compromise my faith and trust in Thee. For true victory before Thee is to believe in Thy holy and perfect Word and to obey it no matter what man might say. Save me, O LORD, for Thy holy service all my days, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9

NUMBERS 16:23-35

PSALM 40

*“...Depart, I pray you,
lest ye be consumed in all their sins.”*

ALL THE REBELS DIED!

At times, God delays His judgment to give sinners more time to repent. Delay in judgment does not mean that God does not see or care about sin. He can bring judgment swiftly. In Numbers 16, God’s judgment against Korah and his rebels were immediate.

The LORD commanded Moses to inform the congregation to separate themselves from the tabernacle (tent) of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the leaders of the rebels. The judgment against the rebel leaders and their entire families was public. The elders of the people stood with Moses. In no uncertain terms, Moses commanded the congregation to depart from all that the rebels possessed, lest the one who stood near them be consumed as well. Korah and his gang and their families were standing at the door of their tents when the earth opened up and swallowed all of them alive, together with all their possessions. They had no fear of God in their hearts! They refused to repent or bow down in humility! Their standing revealed the arrogance of their hearts. All who stood nearby fled for their lives. God then turned His attention on the 250 princes and fire came down and consumed them.

The wrath of God came upon Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families, including their children. God destroyed all that they possessed. However, God consumed only the 250 princes and not their families! Apparently, the entire family of the three men was involved in this rebellion. Since the 250 princes were followers rather than leaders, their families were probably not involved. Their lives were spared. God is very just and merciful. If Korah and gang had succeeded, God’s plan of salvation for mankind would be thwarted.

THOUGHT: Beware of the sin of rebellion. Going against the Lord’s anointed is to go against God Himself!

PRAYER: May I fear Thee that I might not sin against Thee, O LORD! I pray for my church leaders, that they might be faithful in doing Thy holy work. Amen.

MEMORIALS ARE IMPORTANT

The LORD instructed Moses to inform Eleazar, the son of Aaron, to collect all the censers belonging to the rebels. But first, he had to remove all the fire from the censers by disposing them outside the camp, as the fire was holy in the sight of God. Then he had to beat the censers into flat plates as coverings for the altar. The reason for this move was that these had been offered unto the LORD and they were holy in God's sight. The altar is where offerings were burnt. The fire on this altar was never put out. This altar was made of shittim wood and overlaid with brass. These plates gave added strength to the altar when placed on top of the existing brass.

The beaten brass was a sign to the Israelites. Whenever they brought their offerings, they would see the beaten brass on the altar of burnt offering, and be reminded of the rebellion of Korah and his gang! The exact reason was *“that no stranger, which is not of the seed of Aaron, come near to offer incense before the LORD; that he be not as Korah, and as his company”* (v 40a).

Forgetfulness is a serious problem when the result is sin. Korah and his gang committed a very serious sin against God. The LORD did not want this sin to be repeated in Israel. He loved Israel. He wanted the best for Israel! This is the purpose of a memorial – to keep God's people from sin. Our New Testament memorial is the Lord's Supper. It is to be taken in remembrance of our salvation in Christ Jesus. It will remind us to love God and Christ with all our heart, soul, strength and mind. By remembering our salvation, we will walk the path of righteousness in a world that loves to see us fall into sin and bring shame to the Name of our Saviour.

THOUGHT: Are there other memorials in the believer's life that remind him of God's grace, mercies and goodness? Is it wrong to have such “extra” memorials?

PRAYER: Remember me, O LORD I pray, for I am weak and without Thee I will fall. May I never forget Thee and Thy goodness and grace in my life, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

THEY NEVER LEARN!

What would cause a congregation of people who had witnessed a double miracle of gigantic proportion to sin against God again? It is unfathomable! The earth had opened up the day before and swallowed up Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families, and fire consumed the 250 princes. In today's verses, we learn about the sin of the congregation against God the very next day. They charged Moses and Aaron for killing the people of the LORD. Moses and Aaron did not say a word, or do anything because the LORD did everything.

The cloud covered the tabernacle and the glory of the LORD appeared. Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation. The LORD told Moses to get away from the congregation so that He could consume them in a moment! Immediately, Moses and Aaron fell upon their faces to intercede for them before the LORD. Moses commanded Aaron to quickly make an atonement on behalf of the people before the LORD, for the plague had begun. Moses used four imperative verbs to emphasize the urgency for Aaron's intercessory action as the high priest of the people of Israel. Aaron obeyed and ran into the midst of the congregation, and put on incense and made atonement for the people. In spite of their quick actions to stop the plague, 14,700 rebels died.

Sinful actions spawn more sinful actions! Our lives affect the lives of others, especially the less discerning. Let the impact be for good and not evil. Let us learn from the mistakes of others, that we do not repeat their sins! The price is too costly.

THOUGHT: Has my life influenced others for good or evil? Do I usually learn from the mistakes of others?

PRAYER: May I be teachable, O LORD, and help me not to sin against Thee. Grant me discernment to follow righteousness, and not turn to the right or left, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

BUDDING OF AARON’S ROD

The final confirmation of the LORD’s choice is seen in the budding of Aaron’s rod. Twelve rods were taken according to the twelve tribes of Israel. The LORD said that the person whose rod budded would be the one chosen to do the work of the priests. The names of the leaders of the tribes were written on the respective rods. Aaron’s name was written on the rod of Levi. Moses laid all the twelve rods in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, probably referring to the ark of the testimony located inside the Most Holy Place. This means that the twelve rods were possibly placed in front of the veil that divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. The next day, Moses went into the tabernacle of witness and found that only the rod of Aaron had budded. It brought forth buds, bloomed blossoms and yielded almonds! This was indeed a miracle. The LORD affirmed the call of the Aaronic priesthood in very definitive terms. Moses brought out all the twelve rods. They looked, and took every man his own rod.

The LORD told Moses to take Aaron’s rod, and to place it into the ark of the testimony, to be kept as a sign against the rebels and that Moses had taken away their murmurings from the LORD that they did not die. The children of Israel became very fearful; they said that they would surely perish and die. Their fear was unfounded. The test of the twelve rods was initiated by the LORD and did not stem from any act of rebellion. The LORD had to stop this challenge forever so that no one would die any more. This was to protect future generations from transgressing against the most holy office (the priesthood), which was established by the LORD. In the previous incident (chapter 16), the rebels challenged the LORD, so they died. The pastoral ministry must not be entered into unadvisedly if one is not called. This would result in grievous consequences. Conversely, the one who is called must not run away.

THOUGHT: Can we do something similar, like the budding of Aaron’s rod, to find out who God’s anointed is? Is election a proper substitute?

PRAYER: I thank Thee, O LORD, for saving me for service. May I be faithful unto death. Amen.

THE LEVITICAL CHARGE

God always stretches out His omnipresent hand of restoration after punishment or discipline. Israel had fallen very badly in the previous two chapters and had learnt painful lessons. Now she must move on and not allow the past mistakes or sins to haunt and cripple her. The LORD had to deal with any hard feelings immediately. He did that in verse one and two. In verse 1, we learn that Aaron and his sons would do the work of the sanctuary (take charge of the physical structure – the tabernacle) and the priesthood (the sacrificial offerings of the people). In verse 2, the Levites would assist the Aaronic priesthood. They would minister unto the priests who ministered unto the LORD before the tabernacle of witness. Here, it is called the tabernacle of witness because of the challenge on the priesthood. The additions to the altar of burnt offerings (beaten censers and the rod of Aaron that budded) evidenced this witness so that such a rebellion would not occur again in the future.

The duties of the Levites remained the same before and after their rebellion. This clear injunction from the LORD stopped any priest from replacing the Levites. The LORD had not disqualified them even though they had sinned terribly. No stranger (non-Levites) was allowed to do their work. The LORD reminded the Levites never to transgress again by doing the work of the priests. The mediators before the LORD and the rest of the world were the Aaronic priests only and no one else! The root meaning of “priest” is holiness or sacredness. Man is born in sin. A sinner is not qualified to appoint a priest who is supposed to be holy. God alone, who is inherently perfectly holy, can! Therefore, Aaron and the Levites had to fulfil their unique God-given duties well for the sake of all sinners. No one could replace them.

THOUGHT: If the priests sinned, who were their mediators? Who are the priests today? All born-again believers are priests today.

PRAYER: Sanctify me, O LORD, that I may approach Thee with clean hands and a pure heart, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

WHAT BELONGED TO THE PRIESTS

The priests did not own any real estate in the Land of Promise. They could not farm the Land or shepherd any flock. They were to focus on their duties as priests. How then, did they put food on the table for their families? This passage in Numbers 18 reveals God's provision for His servants. Since the priests' inheritance was the LORD, they would receive the people's items of offering on behalf of the LORD. The offerings were only for the priests and their sons to consume, in the inner court, so that there was no abuse of this privilege. However, the heave offering and the wave offering could be given to both the sons and daughters as long as they were not unclean. All the firstfruits of the land and firstborn animals were included in the heave and wave offerings (for thanksgiving). The unclean animals that were redeemed with money would also belong to the priests. All the clean animals that were offered would be killed, and their blood sprinkled upon the altar, and their fat offered unto the LORD, and the priests may eat the flesh with their families. This was to be a statute forever in Israel so that the priests and their families would be provided for and they would not neglect their spiritual duties.

In the New Testament church, the application is the same. All those who are called into the full-time ministry are to serve the LORD with complete devotion, without being entangled in the affairs of worldly business. The exception is when the church is small and cannot provide for the pastor's needs. The apostle Paul worked as a tent maker for a short season because the churches failed to support him. The pastor who preaches the gospel should live of the gospel (1Cor 9:14). Any distraction would affect his ministry and the flock would inevitably suffer spiritual starvation.

THOUGHT: Is my pastor involved in business outside the church, not to make ends meet but only to make extra cash? Do I mind?

PRAYER: Lord, remind me always to pray for my pastor, that he will be faithful in caring, protecting, and feeding the flock of Jesus Christ. Help me to do my part to support my pastor. Amen.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15

NUMBERS 18:21-32

PSALM 46

*“Out of all your gifts ye shall offer
every heave offering of the LORD...”*

THE LEVITES HAD TO GIVE TITHES

The rest of the Levites who were not priests would assist the priests and serve the LORD in other areas. They were given one tenth in Israel for their inheritance. Their service was also full time in nature, and they also served in the tabernacle of the congregation. The LORD looked after their physical needs as well. The children of Israel were reminded not to take over the duties of the Levites who assisted the priests. The Levites were also to bear the iniquity of the children of Israel. This was a statute to be kept forever among the children of Israel. The Levites were not given any land, like the priests. The LORD also considered the children of Israel's tithes as heave offerings (thanksgiving offerings). These were for the Levites.

From the ten percent that they received from the people, the Levites were to give their tenth to the LORD. Aaron would receive them on behalf of the LORD. This ten percent was applied to all that the Levites received from the people. This was the heave offering of the Levites unto the LORD. All that the Levites received from the people were the rewards for their service in the tabernacle of the congregation. If the Levites followed this principle of “receiving and giving,” they would then bear no sin and would not pollute the holy things of the children of Israel. The punishment for not having clean hands whenever they assisted the priests in the work of the tabernacle was death!

All full-time workers in the church today must give to God tithes and offerings of what they receive. There is no exception. This is part of their holiness when they serve the LORD. The LORD knows the clean hands and pure heart of every believer. Believers work and are fed spiritually. The full-time workers receive the tithes and offerings of the believers and serve the LORD in the study and teaching of God's perfect Word with complete focus.

THOUGHT: Should a pastor do secular work? What does it mean to be a tent maker?

PRAYER: Help me to give of my tithes and offerings unto Thee with a loving heart, and to give of myself to serve Thee all my days. Amen.

WATER OF SEPARATION

Water has cleansing power. Water washes away the dirt from our bodies. The water of separation has the spiritual purpose of washing away sin and the stain of sin (ie guilt). This water of separation must be prepared according to God's instructions (vv 1-10). The priest takes the red heifer outside the camp and another will kill it in front of him. The priest will dip his finger into the blood of the red heifer and sprinkle the blood before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times. The entire red heifer will then be burnt in front of the priest. The priest will take cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet and cast them into the midst of the burning of the heifer. After that, the priest shall wash himself and his clothes and return to the camp, and will be considered unclean until evening (the start of a new day). The one who assists the priest in burning the red heifer will also have to wash himself and his clothes and be unclean till the evening. Then another man who is clean will gather the ashes and place them in a clean place, kept for the children of Israel, to be used in preparing the water of separation. This person will have to wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening. Verses 11-22 describe the application of the water of separation on one who is unclean because he has encountered a dead person. He shall be unclean for seven days. He shall purify himself on the third day so that he will be clean on the seventh day. If he does not purify himself and defiles the tabernacle, he will be cut off from Israel because his uncleanness is still upon him. Objects inside a tent where death has occurred are considered unclean. The person who enters into a tent where someone has died will be unclean seven days. A clean person will take the water of separation (running water mixed with the ashes of the heifer) and sprinkle it on the person or items that are unclean on the third day. Then they will all be considered clean on the seventh day. On the seventh day, the clean person who did the sprinkling will be unclean; he will need to wash himself and his clothes, and be unclean until the evening. This cleansing is important, as the person who is unclean cannot participate in any spiritual feasts or gatherings.

THOUGHT: Has the blood of Christ washed me and made me clean? There is no other but Christ who can wash away all my sins.

PRAYER: Wash me, O LORD, and I shall be clean. Amen.

WHEN THE MAN OF GOD SINS!

Miriam died and was buried. The people of Israel were in the wilderness. They had no water. They chided Moses and said that they would rather have died with their brethren, whom the LORD had killed earlier because they had sinned. They blamed Moses for taking them out of Egypt into this evil place which has no figs or vines or pomegranates, and there was not even water to drink! Moses and Aaron left the complaining people and went before the LORD. They fell upon their faces and the glory of the LORD appeared to them. The people of Israel had sinned a great sin as they failed to see the spiritual significance of their exodus and their duties as the chosen people of God. They were bellyaching because their tongues were thirsty and their bellies empty! They were carnal.

The LORD told Moses to take the rod and gather the assembly, and to speak to the rock, after which water would come forth for all of them to drink, including the beasts. Moses and Aaron obeyed and gathered the people before the rock as the LORD commanded. However, Moses and Aaron did not speak to the rock. Instead, Moses smote the rock twice with the rod. Water still came out in abundance for the people and beasts. However, Moses and Aaron had sinned against the LORD.

The LORD's judgement was immediate and fair. Their sin was that both of them as leaders did not sanctify the LORD in the eyes of the people. They were therefore not allowed to enter the Promised Land. The place was named Meribah (ie to strive), because the children of Israel strove with the LORD. A higher standard of holiness is expected of God's leaders, like Moses and Aaron. They sinned a grievous sin against God as seen by the punishment they received. God is no respecter of persons in all His dealings. Every leader must realize that God is watching, and when he sins, God will punish.

THOUGHT: The LORD demands holiness, not perfection.

PRAYER: Sanctify me, O LORD, by Thy truth. Thy Word is Truth.

FACING DISAPPOINTMENTS

The Edomites were related to Israel. The founder of the Edomites was Esau, the older twin brother of Jacob. Israel was the new name given to Jacob by the LORD. This means that the Edomites and the Israelites were like first cousins. Moses needed to lead Israel across the land of the Edomites, otherwise they would have to take a long roundabout route to the Promised Land. Hence, his approach was cordial and gentle. Moses described themselves as brothers to the Edomites. He also said that they were aware of their many hardships. Moses traced the history of Israel from the time of their sojourn into Egypt led by Jacob and his family. They lived in Egypt for a long time and the Egyptians persecuted them. They cried to the LORD who heard them and brought them out of Egypt, and now they were in the wilderness in the city of Kadesh, located in the uttermost border of Edom. Moses pleaded with them to let Israel pass through their country. They would neither pass through their fields nor through their vineyards nor drink the water of their wells. In short, the Edomites need not worry about their crops and grapes being eaten or destroyed, or their wells being emptied by the people of Israel. Moses said they needed to reach the king's highway through the shortest route and would not turn to the left or to the right. The Edomites emphatically told Moses that they were NOT allowed to pass through. If they tried to enter, the Edomites would attack them with the sword. The children of Israel urged the Edomites to let them pass. They were prepared to pay for the water that their beasts drink. However, the Edomites were very adamant. They refused to let Israel pass. The Edomites came out in large numbers to stop Israel from forcing their way in. Israel had no choice but to turn away and take the roundabout route to the Promised Land. Facing disappointments is part of life. It cannot be avoided. However, the knowledge of the sovereignty of God in our lives brings comfort and the assurance that nothing happens by chance, and He will not allow His people to be tempted above what they are able to bear.

THOUGHT: When temptations come, do I murmur, or pray and rest in the LORD's provision to see me through?

PRAYER: Strengthen me, O LORD, for the trials that come my way.

CHANGING THE PRIESTLY GUARD

The passing away of God's servant always produces a mixed feeling. It is a sad thing because a great servant of God has departed from this world. At the same time, one feels happy because he has finished his service and has gone home to be with the LORD. It was time for Aaron to leave Israel. He had completed his service unto the LORD. As the high priest, he would be formally replaced by the LORD. God told both Moses and Aaron that Aaron would die. He would not enter the Promised Land because of his rebellion at Meribah. Eleazar his son would replace him. This handing over of the high priestly office would be done in Mount Hor where Aaron was to die and be buried.

Aaron, Eleazar and Moses went up to Mount Hor together in full view of the people of Israel. Moses stripped Aaron of his priestly garments and put them upon Eleazar. Moses and Eleazar came down from Mount Hor without Aaron. When the people of Israel saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for him thirty days. They loved him very much. It is always difficult to say goodbye to a loved one, even more so when that loved one was a devoted servant of God who had done so much for God's people.

Death cannot be avoided. The moment we are born, we begin to die. The clock ticks but soon it will stop. Time on earth is very precious, especially to the child of God who is serving faithfully. He knows that the time for service is very limited. Miriam and Aaron had completed their service and were called home to be with the LORD. In the case of Aaron, it was due to his rebellion that he was forbidden to enter the Promised Land. Aaron began well in the ministry but did not end well. To pass the baton to a new servant of the LORD has to be by God's appointment. In this case, Aaron's surviving elder son, Eleazar, was appointed. The LORD had killed his two older sons because of their sin. Aaron handed over a ministry that was healthy and stable.

THOUGHT: Are successors ordered by man or God?

PRAYER: Keep Thy church faithful, O LORD, by sending faithful servants to feed, protect and comfort Thy flock with Thy Word.

WHEN A VOW WAS MADE AND KEPT

Obeying the will of God is to do His work, but enemies will abound. Israel was on a mission to occupy the Promised Land with the purpose of completing the final piece of the puzzle that completed the nationhood of Israel. Israel had the people and the constitution already but not the land. The enemies were the Canaanites who lived in the south of the Promised Land. After thirty-eight years, Israel found herself back at the same spot where Moses first sent out the twelve spies, which is why it was called the way of the spies. It was located near the wilderness of Zin. King Arad the Canaanite defeated Israel and took some of them as prisoners. This was a test sent by the LORD to prepare Israel for many more future battles when she entered the Promised Land. A life of service unto the LORD will be fraught with one battle after another. The end comes when the servant goes home to be with the LORD.

Israel responded correctly in faith when she made a vow unto the LORD. Israel did not murmur or complain. She vowed that if the LORD gave them victory over King Arad and the Canaanites, she would utterly destroy them. The LORD heard Israel's vow and delivered the Canaanites into her hands. Israel kept her vow and utterly destroyed the Canaanites and their cities. The name of the place was called Hormah, which comes from the root verb that means "utterly destroy." Israel had been complaining throughout her forty years of wilderness wandering. For her to taste a bit of victory, through faith, must have been most encouraging. By faith in Him, victory was hers. This was a precious lesson for Israel to learn in order to succeed. Her conquest was not a short one. The enemies were powerful, well protected and equipped. Their soldiers were seasoned warriors, whereas the men of Israel had no military training at all and had been slaves for centuries. However, they had the One living and true God on their side. They were on a spiritual mission. They could not fail.

THOUGHT: Is my life a life of obedience or disobedience?

PRAYER: Undergird me, O LORD, that I might walk the straight and narrow path, and not turn to the left or to the right, for Christ's sake. Amen.

LIFTING UP THE FIERY SERPENT

Sadly for Israel, her experience of God’s power and provision was shortlived. She sinned against her LORD again because of the inconvenience of having to re-route, by journeying south toward the Gulf of Aqaba. The Edomites had forbidden them to cross Edom. Israel had no choice; the LORD had told her that she was not to touch the Edomites because of her relationship with her via Esau. The Bible describes them as being “*much discouraged*” because of the way. The phrase “*much discouraged*” is also used to describe “reaping in time of harvest.” In short, the souls of the Israelites were cut into two with discouragement. This time, they murmured very badly against God and Moses. They complained that God and Moses had brought them out of Egypt to die in the wilderness because there was no bread and water. They hated the manna that the LORD had provided for them on a daily basis soon after they left Egypt. Note that it was not really a matter of NO bread but that Israel DID NOT LIKE the bread that God had given to them.

The LORD sent serpents into the midst of the people and many of them were bitten and died. The people came to Moses confessing that they had sinned against God and Moses. They pleaded with Moses to pray to the LORD to take away the serpents. This was God’s method to heal Israel: Moses was to make a fiery serpent out of brass. It was to be set on a pole and lifted, and whoever looked at the serpent would be healed. Moses obeyed the LORD. Those who were bitten and looked at the fiery serpent on the pole were healed. Those who were bitten but did not look at the fiery serpent were not healed. In John 3:14-15, Christ used this incident to describe His own crucifixion. Salvation is not automatic. The sinner must in faith turn to Christ in order to be saved. Universalism is a wrong doctrine. We are all in sin, a state worse than being bitten by serpents. We need Christ, who was lifted up at Calvary, to save us from our sins.

THOUGHT: Have I looked unto Christ in faith?

PRAYER: Thank You, LORD, for sending Jesus to die on Calvary’s cross for me. Take my life and use it for Thy glory. Amen.

GOOD PROGRESS IN THE LORD

The progress was good after the fiery serpent incident. Israel had completed her long re-routing and arrived safely by the side of the brook of Arnon at the border of Moab (between Moab and the Amorites). The book of wars of the LORD records the works of the LORD from the time of the parting of the Red Sea to the events that occurred at the brook of Arnon. Arnon was a river that flowed into the Dead Sea. From here they moved on to Be'-er where the LORD told Moses to gather the people and He would give them water.

Israel sang a song that described the provision of the LORD. She delighted in the water that God provided. Princes and nobles dug the well according to the direction of the lawgiver who was none other than Moses. Then they moved on to Mattanah to Nahaliel to Bamoth in the valley, to the top of Pisgah which looked toward Jeshimon, i.e. the wilderness. Israel's sojourn in the wilderness was nearly over. She had survived the long march and was at the brink of the Promised Land. Israel had much to rejoice. Manna continued to come down from heaven daily. She could see across the River Jordan into the Promised Land.

The progress was good and the end was near. All was well. Israel rejoiced because she had experienced the goodness of the LORD. She had come very far. In spite of the many trials and loss of lives throughout the forty-odd years of wandering in the wilderness, Israel had made it, or at least the generation born in the wilderness. The life of every believer is likened to the life of Israel in the wilderness. He will face many enemies, from without and within the church. However, the LORD will see him through. The LORD will never fail, even though the believer fails the LORD many times.

THOUGHT: Trials may come and go, but my faith in Christ must never waver. I must remain steadfast and strong through every trial!

PRAYER: Make me strong and faithful in the LORD, that I will not stray from Thee, O LORD, but remain by Thy side all my days.

DEFEATING SIHON AND OG

Israel wanted peace and not war against any of the inhabitants in the Transjordan area. She sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, to seek permission to pass through their land. The request was similar to the one Moses made to the Edomites. Like the Edomites, Sihon refused passage of entry. Instead, Sihon gathered his men to fight against Israel. Israel defeated Sihon and possessed his land from the brook Arnon to the brook Jabbok. Moses captured many cities belonging to Sihon, the major city being Heshbon. It was in this city that Sihon had boasted of his power over the Moabites. He had captured many cities from the Moabites and also humiliated their god. His victory over the Moabites from the city of Heshbon had become a proverb (vv 27-29). Verse 30 is a refrain by the Israelites, adding their destruction of Sihon. Sihon had defeated Moab, and Israel defeated Sihon, which meant that Israel was more powerful than the Amorites!

Israel next faced Og, the king of Bashan. The LORD reassured Moses not to be afraid of Og. The LORD had already delivered him, all his people and his land into the hand of Moses. Moses will soundly defeat Og, just as he defeated Sihon. True to God's word, Og and all his people were utterly destroyed by Moses so that none were left! Some might feel that this is a bit savage and unjust, as all of them were utterly destroyed. Could not Moses, or rather the LORD, in mercy leave some of them alive? It is precisely because the LORD is gracious and merciful that the people of Sihon and Og had to be utterly destroyed. The LORD was preparing Israel to save the world through Christ. Israel needed a Land in order to be a nation. In this Land, Israel was to be a spiritual national witness to the world that is in sin and darkness. The LORD was thinking in terms of eternity. Furthermore, the sins of the Amorites were full, and thus they had to be utterly destroyed (Gen 15:16).

THOUGHT: Dare sinful men second guess God, and chide Him for being unmerciful? God forbid. Let God be true and every man a liar. God's ways are always higher than man's.

PRAYER: May I always submit to Thy holy ways, O LORD!

GOD’S PEOPLE CAN NEVER BE CURSED

Israel remained in Moabite territory after conquering the cities that once belonged to Sihon and Og. Balak, the king of Moab, saw all that the Israelites had done to the Amorites and was sore afraid. Balak’s people were also afraid of the Israelites camped next to their border. The assessment by the Moabites was that Israel had licked up all the cities of the Amorites, like an ox licks up the grass of the field, and they wanted to get Israel out of their territory. They asked prophet Balaam to curse Israel so that Balak might drive Israel out of the land. Balak acknowledged that Balaam was a real prophet, for whomever he blessed, was blessed, and whomever he cursed, was cursed. The elders of Moab and Midian went to see Balaam with their rewards for divination. They told Balaam Balak’s words. Balaam told them to stay the night and he would bring word to them from the LORD.

That same night, God asked Balaam who were with him that night. Balaam related to God who the men were and what they wanted. Using two strong prohibitions, “*not go*” and “*not curse*,” God’s message to Balaam was certain beyond doubt and God would NOT change His mind. God told Balaam that Israel was blessed. Balaam’s reply to Balak’s messengers was very revealing. He emphatically told the messengers to return home. However, his reason for not going with them was weak and incorrect, and left room for misunderstanding. To say that “*the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you*” kept the door open for further discussion and perhaps a change of mind. The princes returned to Balak with the news that Balaam refused to come. Note that Balaam used the name of the LORD, but the LORD did not use His covenantal name to address Balaam. “*God*” addressed Balaam, who was a false and unfaithful prophet, even though the LORD spoke to him. No one could curse the people of God, and they were continually blessed.

THOUGHT: The Holy Spirit in the believer is stronger than the enemies that are around him, including Satan.

PRAYER: Give me courage and strength, O LORD, that I might not fear man, not even the evil one. Keep me in Thy path of righteousness for Christ’s sake, that deceit will depart from my lips.

MANIPULATING THE WILL OF GOD

Balaam's greed was his destruction. Balak thought the problem was one of inadequate reward offered to Balaam. Therefore, he upped the ante. Men more honourable were sent to demonstrate greater honour to Balaam, in the hope that he would agree to curse Balak's enemies, Israel. Balaam was promised personal promotion and could ask whatsoever he wanted. In false humility, Balaam said that even if Balak were to give him his house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the word of the LORD his God. If these words were sincere, then Balaam would not have asked the LORD again if he was allowed to curse Israel! God's reply was firm and irrevocable. God would never change His mind to curse Israel, for He would be going against His own promise to be with Israel. Balaam asked Balak's men to tarry one night so that he could ask the LORD again, to see if there was MORE from the LORD. There will be no more. God said to Balaam that if the men came to him, he was to go with them, but the word that God said to him he must do.

Why did God tell Balaam to go when earlier, He specifically told him not to go? God knows the deceptive hearts of men like Balaam. Balaam was already determined to go. He was the kind who would ask and keep on asking until he got what he wanted. Prayer or seeking God's will is a sham to the Balaams of this world. They have the appearance of godliness but they deny the power thereof. They possess a façade of holiness but inwardly they are ravening wolves seeking whom they can devour. They care only for their own bellies, and the work of God is a cover-up for their greed and sin. They would manipulate the will of God till their satisfaction is met. Such men desire to be seen as spiritual men and at the same time lust after carnality! Sadly, many of such men are found in churches today.

THOUGHT: Do I manipulate the will of God to suit my own will? Fasting and praying till I get what I want is manipulation.

PRAYER: Humble me, O LORD, that I will always submit to Thy holy will for my life, thus bringing glory to Thy holy name. Amen.

WHEN OBEDIENCE IS DISOBEDIENCE

God was greatly displeased with Balaam's pretentious spirituality. Uttering the name of the LORD but not wanting to obey His word is great hypocrisy. God was angry with Balaam because he went. Nevertheless, the LORD was gracious to intervene in Balaam's life one last time. The angel of the LORD stood in his way to prevent him from going to his destruction. Balaam could not see the angel of the LORD, but his ass did. Three times Balaam's ass shied away from the angel of the LORD who stood in Balaam's way. Balaam beat the ass for refusing to move forward. Finally, after the third time, the LORD opened the mouth of the ass to rebuke Balaam. The ass told Balaam that it had been always obedient to him; why then did Balaam want to kill it now? The LORD opened Balaam's eyes, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in his way for the first time. Balaam acknowledged his sin to the LORD as he did not know that the LORD stood in the way. He then said "if" (v 34) it displeased the LORD, he would return and not go. This shows that Balaam's repentance was not sincere. He knew that what he was doing displeased the LORD, but he insisted on going to curse Israel for filthy lucre. When God told Balaam to go, in verse 35, God was telling him to go to his death! His obedience was in fact disobedience. Balaam was still holding on to his appearance of a righteous prophet when he told Balak that he would only speak the words that God puts into his mouth. So Balaam went with Balak, and Balak offered oxen and sheep, probably to appease his Baal gods. Balak took Balaam to the high places of Baal that he might see the utmost part of the people of Israel. The stage was set for the cursing to begin. Stubbornly holding on to our heart's desire, even though we know that it is against the will of God, is foolishness and will surely lead to our own destruction.

THOUGHT: Let the perfect Word of God rule in my heart that I might not sin against Him. Self-delusion is deception and death, and destruction are her strange bedfellows.

PRAYER: Save me from myself, O LORD, for my heart is deceitful above all else, and who can know it except Thee. Break and mould me that I will always desire to please Thee only, and never self. Amen.

DIFFERENT PLACES, SAME RESULTS

One of the problems in religion is the concept of a localized God. The Edomites believed that their god was the god of the mountains because they lived in the mountains. The Philistines believed that their god was the god of the sea because they lived next to the Mediterranean Sea and depended upon it for survival. Different localities, different power and different abilities characterized these gods. Balaam changed locality, hoping that the LORD would also change His mind regarding Israel. Balaam told Balak to build seven altars and offer seven oxen to the LORD at the high places of Baal, and to wait for him as he consulted the LORD about cursing Israel. God appeared to Balaam, and the word from the LORD was the same. Israel would be blessed and not cursed. Balak was angry at Balaam for blessing Israel. Balak told Balaam to try again at another place. They went to the top of Pisgah in the field of Zophim. Balak offered the seven oxen on the seven altars as before, and waited while Balaam asked the LORD. The result was the same. There was no sin in Israel. Therefore, God would protect Israel.

Balak was not happy with the same reply from God to Balaam. He moved to another location again. He brought Balaam to the top of Peor that looked toward Jeshimon (the wilderness). Again, Balak built seven altars and offered seven oxen. The consistency of the LORD's word to Balaam was more than enough to warn Balaam to stop testing God. God was very clear in His protection of Israel. Israel would never be cursed but blessed by the LORD. Balaam should have known better. For him to go with Balak from place to place, with the hope of changing the word of God was ludicrous. Balaam was bent on receiving the promotions and wealth promised if he cursed Israel. But all his many attempts were to no avail. God is not man's servant nor is He at man's disposal. In fact, man is always God's servant and must either do His will or pay the price for disobedience. God is not a localized God but the God of heaven and the whole earth!

THOUGHT: The absolute sovereignty of God is the foundation for the doctrine that our God is the God of the whole earth and universe.

PRAYER: Thank You, LORD, for who Thou art, and for Thy protection.

THE SPIRIT OF GOD COMES UPON ...

The Bible often describes the two functions of the Holy Spirit as filling and coming upon. The Holy Spirit does not baptize but rather the Lord Jesus Christ baptizes the believer with the Holy Spirit when he receives Christ. The filling of the Holy Spirit takes place only in believers' lives as they serve God or live holy lives. In the case of the Holy Spirit coming upon someone, that person could be a believer or an unbeliever. In today's passage, the Holy Spirit came upon Balaam, who was definitely an unbeliever, in order for him to give the Word of God. Balaam was a man much like Balak. He thought that by changing his "method" of approaching God, then perhaps the message from God would be different. Balaam badly wanted to curse Israel for filthy lucre!

The Holy Spirit came upon Balaam, who had no say in the matter. The LORD in His sovereignty did it. Balaam was in a trance but his eyes were open. He was aware of what was happening but was helpless to do anything about it. The message from God regarding Israel was the same as in chapter 23. Israel would be blessed and not cursed, and she would become a powerful people with kings whose reigns would exceed that of Agag. Israel's kingdom would be exalted. She would have the strength of a unicorn (probably referring to the rhinoceros). Israel would subdue nations. She would be like a great lion resting and no one would dare to stir her at all. The message from the LORD to Balaam was similar to the previous two messages, but with additional information after each revelation. Balaam could not curse Israel at all. The LORD was in total control of his heart, speech and actions. Balaam wanted to manipulate the LORD to do his own will. But the LORD was in total control and protected Israel. Israel at this time was oblivious of the LORD's protection and the spiritual warfare. Balaam wanted to curse and destroy her. He failed miserably and received nothing for all his trouble.

THOUGHT: The LORD protected His own even when His own did not know or realize it. This is still true today.

PRAYER: Make me trust Thee more each day, O LORD, for I know that no harm can come to me without Thy permission.

WHEN EVIL MEN SPEAK GOD'S WORD

A person who speaks the word of God is not necessarily a believer. He may preach, and even defend God's Word, but he may not be saved. Salvation is of the LORD. Salvation must not be confused with service, and vice versa. Balak rebuked Balaam because he did not curse Israel. Balak told Balaam to go home; he would not be promoted to great honour. The LORD had kept him from being honoured.

Balaam's reply was consistent with what he had said earlier. He could only speak what the LORD told him to speak. Even if Balak were to give him a house full of silver and gold, he could not go beyond the commandment of the LORD. Balaam's façade of spirituality was his death and destruction, as it prevented him from true repentance. He deceived himself by his continuous charade. The parable that Balaam gave to Balak against the Moabites, Edomites, Amalekites, and Kenites was of little consequence. As long as Balaam did not acknowledge that he had sinned, he would not repent. All his prophesying did not matter because he did not believe in any of them. If he really believed in all that the LORD had spoken through him, he would have repented and returned home, and not have anything to do with Balak. Very often, we confuse the preaching of God's Word with the person's relationship with God. There are many instances in the Bible where the LORD appeared to unbelievers and it had nothing to do with their personal salvation. These unbelievers would include kings and princes. Believers must not be naïve to think that such self-deceivers do not exist. They can even be found in seminaries and churches all over the world. Like Balaam, their god is their belly, for they prophesy or preach God's Word for filthy lucre and the accolades of the world. Like Balaam, they possess a façade of holiness but they may not even be born again.

THOUGHT: Am I like Balaam? Am I living in denial, pretending to be someone that I am not every Lord's Day?

PRAYER: Save me, O LORD, from self-delusion. May I be true to Thee that I might not be found a castaway at the end of my life.

SIN AND DEATH IN THE CAMP

The LORD is almighty. There are no enemies on earth stronger or more powerful than the LORD. When the LORD says that He is with Israel, it means that Israel is invincible. Israel's enemies will have to go through the LORD to get to Israel. There are no enemies so deceptive and cunning that the LORD cannot protect Israel. The LORD is all-knowing and all-seeing. Israel can never be hurt or lose any battle.

However, Israel can hurt herself when she sins against the LORD. This incident in Baal-peor resulted in the death of 24,000 Israelites. The sins were fornication and adultery, both physical and spiritual. Numbers 31:16 reveals that Balaam counseled Balak to send the daughters of Moab into the camp of Israel to cause Israel to sin against the LORD. Balaam knew his theology but he used it against Israel. Sexual sin led to the worship of idols. The LORD was angry with Israel and commanded Moses to hang all the heads of the people before the LORD. Immediately, Moses ordered the judges to begin slaying those evil men who had sinned against the LORD. One of the evil Israelites even brought a Midianitish woman to the door of the tabernacle in the sight of Moses and the congregation, and while the children of Israel were weeping! He was extremely audacious. His impudence demanded a just response from God's people. Phinehas pierced them through with a javelin; and the plague was stayed. Very often, the sorrows we face in life are self-inflicted. Our sin and rebellion are the cause of our problems. If God is for us, no man can be against us. However, if we are against God, anyone can hurt us.

THOUGHT: Is there sin in my life or in the church that needs dealing with? Repentance unto Christ is the only way.

PRAYER: Remember me, O LORD, and make me fear Thee all my days that I might not sin against Thee. For with Thee on my side, all things will work together for good to those who love Thee. Amen.

STANDING IN THE GAP

Men of knowledge are easier to be found in churches today than men of courage and strength. Phinehas was a man of courage who did what was right in the eyes of the LORD. He was zealous for the LORD's sake. His act of killing the Israelite prince from the tribe of Simeon and the Midianitish princess was for the glory of God. How could such a heinous sin be committed in front of the tabernacle of the congregation? The LORD rewarded Phinehas with His covenant of peace. This unique covenant is explained in verse 13. It was made with Phinehas and his seed after him, because of his zeal for his God and because he had made an atonement on behalf of his people Israel. The LORD saw it as such. This covenant is also called the covenant of an everlasting priesthood. What a tremendous perspective of life and sin that we must take care to note in these last days.

God mentioned the names of the two sinners. They were Zimri and Cozbi. These were very important people in their respective societies. However, God is no respecter of persons, and His servants must not be as well! Sinners must be dealt with judiciously and in obedience to God's holy and perfect Word. The judgment meted out by Phinehas was just and equitable. The punishment fit the sin. Moses was commanded by the LORD to vex and smite the Midianites because they vexed Israel with their wives by sending evil women into the camp to cause Israel to sin. The LORD of Moses and Israel demanded just retribution. It was not a personal matter that called for "turning the other cheek." If Israel was destroyed, then the plan of the LORD in saving the world from sin through Jesus Christ would have been affected. The man who stands in the gap for the cause of Christ must be strong, courageous and just in all his ways. He must defend the honour of Christ and God at all cost. He must not flinch and must not yield to sin.

THOUGHT: Have I ever defended Christ's name and cause?

PRAYER: May I never fail Thee, O LORD, in the cause of Christ in these last days. Grant me courage and strength to be zealous for Thee all my days that Christ may be glorified in my life. Amen.

THE SECOND NUMBERING

The generation that rebelled against the LORD had died in the wilderness. The first numbering had 603,550 males aged twenty and above and able to go to war (cf Num 1:46). The second numbering had 601,730 Israelites who were also twenty years and older, and able to go to war (cf Num 26:51). Both these numberings did not include the Levites, who were numbered separately as they would not be given a portion of the Land of Promise for their inheritance. The first numbering of 603,550 men died in the wilderness except for Joshua and Caleb, and Moses (who was still alive then) would soon be called home to glory by the LORD.

The second numbering was done immediately after the Baal-peor incident where 24,000 Israelites died because of their sexual sin and idolatry. This is significant because the numbering would be an encouragement to all who did not sin. They were the ones who must carry on what the LORD had intended for Israel in His plan of salvation for man. Their ancestors had failed the LORD. They were so close to entering the Promised Land, but their faithlessness caused them the privilege and honour that should have been theirs. This new generation must not repeat the same mistake. All who were from age twenty to forty were born in the wilderness. They had neither seen the miracles in Egypt nor participated in the crossing of the Red Sea. Those who were forty-one years and above were born in Egypt, and some of the older ones would probably remember the incident of Israel's failure very vividly. The new leaders or elders must now guide the younger ones. They must be reminded of their high calling and the LORD's holiness. There is nothing wrong with recording numbers in the church as long as the numbers are not used to measure obedience or success in the LORD's vineyard.

THOUGHT: Am I discouraged when the numbers drop for the morning worship service or prayer meeting?

PRAYER: Let my eyes be fixed on Thee always, O LORD, and not on the size of the congregation, for my encouragement should be in Thee alone and not in numbers. Amen.

INHERITANCE BY LOT

The LORD’s principle in the division of the land was simple. The land was to be divided according to the numbers in each of the twelve tribes. The greater numbers would be given more inheritance. The lesser numbers would receive less inheritance. This is simple logic and most equitable.

Every tribe would receive land by lot. This would be portioned out according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. Since it was by lot, and the LORD was the one in control of the lot, therefore it was understood that the LORD would determine which tribe would be located in which part of the Promised Land. It would not be Joshua’s decision as he had no control over the lot. Therefore, he could not be charged with prejudice as he too would have to live with his own tribe, Ephraim. This division by lot proposed by the LORD was extremely significant, as the LORD had anticipated the problems that would arise in the division of the land. The various tribes might argue and even end up fighting among themselves if some were to choose coastal regions and not want to live in the mountains or the plains; each one would have his preference. However, the wisdom of the LORD is much greater than man’s. He thought of all the details so that Israel would learn to accept God’s will and NO TRIBE was allowed to leave the allotted portion of the Promised Land. To do so would be to rebuff the LORD and His choice! The Levites were numbered separately as they would not inherit the land by lot. They numbered 23,000 males from one month old and upward, unlike the children of Israel who numbered theirs from twenty years and upward. The Levites were to be teachers of God’s Word. After the conquest of the Promised Land, Israel became a theocratic nation: a people with its own constitution, in its own land, under the leadership of God.

THOUGHT: Do I quarrel with friends or my siblings over what is to be shared? Should Christians “fight” over an inheritance?

PRAYER: Let godliness with contentment be my daily portion, O LORD, that I might not sin against Thee. Amen.

PASSING ON THE INHERITANCE

Unlike other nations, Israel had a spiritual purpose for her existence. The Messiah would be born an Israelite. The nation of Israel must exist until that very day and her people must remain in the Land of Promise. The law of inheritance availed this provision and protection for Israel. However, in the event that a family has no sons, how ought the inheritance be passed on to the next generation? The daughters of Zelophehad faced such a problem. Their father did not die with the rebels, even though he died in the wilderness because of his own sin. They reasoned that the name of their father should not be forgotten just because he had no sons. At that juncture, no decision had been made regarding this problem. Israel had not entered the Promised Land yet, but it was good to deal with this problem early. Moses brought the problem to the LORD.

The solution was just. The daughters of Zelophehad would be given the portion of the Land that belonged to their father. This would become law for all Israelites. If a man dies without any sons, he shall pass his inheritance to his daughters. If he has no daughters, then he shall pass it to his nearest next of kin. This is a judgment from the LORD and must be observed throughout the Land of Promise. This became the basis for the kinsman-redeemer which is mentioned in the book of Ruth. In this manner, the nation of Israel is preserved. Israel must remain in her Land. Israel cannot be destroyed, for to destroy Israel as a nation is as good as destroying God's plan of salvation for man. The Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem Judah.

THOUGHT: Is the local church like the nation of Israel? What are the differences and similarities between the nation of Israel and the local church?

PRAYER: Protect Thy church, O LORD, that she may remain faithful and true to the Lord Jesus Christ. Many churches have fallen and lost their witness in these last days. Help and preserve Thy people for Christ's sake. Amen.

PASSING ON THE BATON

It is easier to begin well than to end well in the LORD's ministry. One of the things a servant of the LORD has to do is to pass the baton of leadership to the next generation. This is a most difficult task especially if the incumbent leader is still able in body, mind and spirit. In the case of Moses, God's faithful servant for over thirty-nine years, the LORD told him that it was time for him to be *"gathered unto his people."* This was the consequence of his rebellion against the LORD at the water of Meribah in Kadesh. The LORD is no respecter of persons when it comes to obedience according to His standard of holiness. Moses realized his sin and accepted the LORD's judgment.

Moses was a man of God who wanted what was best for the people of Israel and God's glory. Moses asked the LORD to find a replacement for him. He had to be a man of God who would *"go out before them, ... go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in."* He would never desert them in the face of danger. He would be a courageous leader and would lead in front of Israel. He would be in their midst knowing their fears and sorrows. He would be there for Israel at all times. Moses' concern was that *"the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd."* Moses was able to initiate this handing over of the leadership so graciously and willingly because he never saw Israel as his personal fiefdom. He knew that Israel was always the congregation that belonged to the LORD. Moses had always wanted what was best for Israel, and not for himself. On that one occasion when Moses failed to do this, he sinned against the LORD and was barred from entering the Promised Land. One of the hallmarks of a godly pastor should be that he cares more for God's glory and God's people than for himself.

THOUGHT: Do I know of someone in this present day who typifies a true shepherd like Moses?

PRAYER: Give me, O LORD, a shepherd's heart like that of Moses. May I never see any ministry as mine but always the LORD's, that I may be ready to pass the baton when it is time. Amen.

A MAN IN WHOM IS THE SPIRIT

A desire to pass the baton to a new leader is one thing, but to pass it to the right leader is another. What qualifications ought a leader to have to take care of God's people? The LORD accepted Moses' proposal of a new leader. His name was Joshua, the son of Nun. He was a man *"in whom is the spirit"* and Moses was to lay his hand upon him. What is the meaning of *"in whom is the spirit"*? Firstly, it has to mean that Joshua was born again, ie he had the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9). Secondly, he was filled with the Holy Spirit whereby he sought to do the will of God with God's enabling. Thirdly, he was a leader like unto Moses who sought not his own glory but the LORD's, and the blessing of Israel. This is a key spiritual qualification that every leader must possess in order to serve the LORD faithfully.

Moses took him and set him in front of Eleazar (the new high priest who had replaced Aaron) and the congregation of Israel and gave him a charge in their sight. Moses was to anoint Joshua personally as his successor in front of all the people and the high priest. There was to be no private or secret anointing. This would cut off all backbiting or any striving to become Moses' successor. Furthermore, all the people needed to see that Moses willingly handed over his leadership to Joshua and that Joshua did not take it away from Moses. To ensure this, Moses was to put his honour on Joshua. The laying on of hands signified this handing over of power. "To lay hands" means to "lean forward and press one's hand." This was a sign of identification and acceptance of Joshua as Moses' successor to lead Israel into the Promised Land. The transition of power was not one of pride and promotion but responsibility and calling. The LORD who had called Moses at the burning bush nearly forty years ago had now called Joshua. No leader in today's church can afford not to comprehend this basic truth in Christian leadership.

THOUGHT: A church is not a dynastic rule. Every elder and deacon must possess the biblical qualifications for leadership.

PRAYER: Give to Thy church godly leaders in whom is the spirit, O LORD, that we might not faint in times of battle. Amen.

OFFERINGS ARE COMPULSORY

In the Old Testament time, offerings of clean animals unto the LORD were compulsory. There was not a day when an animal was not offered unto the LORD. Immediately after the official replacement of Moses by Joshua, it was time to rehearse to a new generation that was born in the wilderness in summary form the types of offerings. The details of the offerings are mentioned in the book of Leviticus which includes a summary of the significance and importance of the offerings. These offerings were types of Christ. If believers today want to understand how Christ is their offering, a study of the book of Leviticus would shed much light.

The injunction is clear from verse 2 that these offerings must be offered unto the LORD in their due season. It was not optional. Until the first coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, these offerings functioned as means that provided a picture of Christ's future death and sacrifice on Calvary's cross. These animal offerings had power to cleanse the believers then of their sins (externally only) because of what Christ would do in the future (cf Heb 9:13-14). They were not to be seen as mere rituals without any significance. These offerings when done correctly, and with the right heart condition, would be a sweet savour unto the LORD, which meant that the LORD would be pleased. Burnt offerings, meat offerings and drink offerings were to be done daily unto the LORD by the priests. However, on the Sabbath Day, two lambs of the first year without spot and two-tenth deals of flour for a meat offering mingled with oil, as well as the drink offering must be offered. On top of the continual burnt offering in verses 2 to 8, the priests were to offer the above every Sabbath Day. Burnt offerings were for the atonement of sins. The priests could not perform their God-assigned duties until they had their own sins cleansed. Thus the need to do it continually and daily. The offerings on the Sabbath Day were for all Israel.

THOUGHT: Should I bring offerings to God every Lord's Day when I worship? What are some of the offerings?

PRAYER: May I never come before Thee empty-handed, O LORD. Take my life as a living sacrifice for Thy use. Amen.

A REMINDER TO BE GRATEFUL

The beginning of each month was also known as the new moon. This was celebrated with the blowing of the trumpet over the burnt offerings as a memorial before the LORD (cf Num 10:10). The burnt offerings for the new moon were very expensive as they included two young bullocks, one ram and seven lambs of the first year without spot. Accompanying the bullock, ram and lamb offerings were flour and oil in their respective portions as revealed in verses 12 and 13. These were to be a sweet savour sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD. On top of the flour and oil, drink offerings also accompanied the bullock, ram and lamb offerings. These were the burnt offerings of each month throughout the year. The sin offering, which was to be offered first, is mentioned last. One kid of the goats was offered as a sin offering to accompany the burnt and drink offerings.

The new moon was celebrated on the first day of every month when the new moon appears. On that day, after the blowing of the trumpets, all labour was suspended except for the domestic duties of the women (see Amos 8:5). It was a public worship (2 Kgs 4:23) where families came together for a feast (cf 1 Sam 20:5). The significance of this remembrance was to thank God for what they were about to receive. The sowing, harvesting, shepherding and all their labours were from the hand of a gracious God. Without the LORD's blessing, they would not be able to do anything; Israel would not be in the Promised Land. It was important for God's people to acknowledge this. This was to instil gratitude and thanksgiving in them. Israel was not to forget the purpose of her spiritual existence. Israel had a spiritual responsibility to fulfil before God and for the sake of all men.

THOUGHT: Why do believers pray and give thanks to God before every meal?

PRAYER: Remind me, O LORD, that my very existence comes from Thy loving and gracious hand. May I never forget Thy goodness and daily provision for my family and me, for Christ's sake. Amen.

A REMINDER OF THE DELIVERANCE

Israel was delivered out of Egypt, the land of bondage, by God's almighty hand. On the day when Israel left Egypt, the LORD commanded all Israel to keep the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month of every new year and to eat only unleavened bread for seven days immediately following the Passover Feast (fourteenth to twenty-first day of the first month, read Exod 12:1-20). Israel did it in their respective homes where they were to kill an unblemished lamb and sprinkle blood on their doorposts and lintel. However, after they entered the Promised Land, Israel was to keep the Passover Feast in the place where the LORD would place His tabernacle or temple (Deut 16:2).

From Numbers 28:16-25, we see that the LORD has magnified the significance of the Passover Feast, when Israel must bring these expensive offerings daily throughout the period of the Passover Feast and Feast of Unleavened Bread. It was called a holy convocation before the LORD and no man was allowed to do any servile work. The priests would have to work by presenting all these offerings. Burnt, meat and sin offerings were to be made daily. This was done on top of the daily burnt and drink offerings. The Passover Feast and Feast of Unleavened Bread were to remind Israel of her deliverance from the bondage of slavery by the LORD. Unleavened bread represented holiness where sins had been dealt with in the lives of every Israelite. To remember the LORD's great deliverance would naturally instil humility, gratitude and thanksgiving. Believers today have been delivered from the greater bondage of sin. We have to thank God for our health, daily provision and safety, friends and family, strength to generate wealth, our lives and our eternal home in heaven. To remind us of this, the LORD has given us the Lord's Supper.

THOUGHT: What comes to mind when I take the Lord's Supper? Do I think about my sins, and Christ?

PRAYER: Forgive me, O LORD, of all my sins, especially the sin of an unforgiving heart, and cleanse me with the blood of Christ that I might be right with Thee always. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

A REMINDER OF DAILY PROVISION

Thanking the LORD for the harvest is of utmost importance. The farmer can do everything right by tilling their ground and planting their crops at the right time, but if the LORD does not send the early and latter rain at the designated time, their crops would fail. Or the LORD might send locusts, or hailstorms to destroy the crops, especially when they are ripe and ready to harvest. All would be lost and the farmers would suffer greatly, not only for that particular year but also the year after that. They would have no seed for planting the following year and no food to eat. And they would have no money to buy more seed. They would perish and lose everything if the good LORD does not graciously supply all that the farmers need to survive. This is also true of shepherds who depend upon the LORD for copious amount of food and water for their animals, and their animals to give birth to their young. The firstfruits offerings were offerings of thanksgiving and an acknowledgment of Israel's total and absolute dependence upon the LORD for livelihood and their sustenance. Without Him, Israel would die.

The Feast of Firstfruits was a holy convocation unto the LORD and they were not to do any servile work. They were to offer the same number of animals as the previous feasts of new moon and Passover. This means that the Feast of Firstfruits had the same significance as the other two. The offerings of the Firstfruits Feast were also to be presented in addition to the continual daily burnt and meat offerings. This was a one-day event. The significance must not be lost for us today. We must not think that because we are not farmers and shepherds, we are not in dire circumstances. The factors that are beyond our control, but are in God's absolute control, are innumerable; especially when the world's economies are intricately intertwined. If one market falls, the world's economies fall with it. We depend on God today more than ever!

THOUGHT: Who holds my job? Is it God, my boss or I?

PRAYER: To lean on Thee alone, O LORD, is my heart's cry, as I sojourn in this world of sin and darkness. Hear me, for Christ's sake.

A REMINDER OF THE LORD'S MERCIES

The most number of religious observances can be found in **the seventh month** of the Jewish calendar. The first day of the month was called the "*day of blowing the trumpets.*" The Israelites were to prepare for the seventh day: the only day of the year when the high priest was allowed to enter into "*the Holiest of all*" (Heb 9:3) to perform his duties (Lev 23). The mercies of the LORD were the focus. On the tenth day, the Day of Atonement is observed. The "*feast of tabernacles*" (Lev 23:34) was held on the fifteenth day, when the Israelites were to stay in makeshift "*booths*" (Lev 23:42) made from "*the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook*" (Lev 23:40). They were to live like this on top of their flat roofs for seven days. During these seven days, they were to make offerings as described in Numbers 29:17-35. The animals they offered were all the same except for the number of bullocks. It started with thirteen bullocks on the fifteenth day, and the number was reduced by one the following day until the seventh day, which was the twenty-second day when the number of bullocks offered was seven. On the eighth day, which was the twenty-third day of the seventh month, a final offering (the sin offering) of one bullock, one ram, seven lambs and one goat was made (similar to the offering on the first day of the seventh month). All these were to be done in conjunction with the daily offerings.

God's mercy in saving Israel and using her to be the light in a dark world was demonstrated by these offerings during the seventh month. Living in booths reminded Israel of her life as a stranger and pilgrim on this earth. Israel had a spiritual privilege and responsibility to the rest of the world. Her inhabitants had no right to live for self-gratification. The churches today have the same responsibility!

THOUGHT: Does the light of Christ emanate from my church, that all who come in will find true salvation?

PRAYER: May my life be the lesser light to reflect the Greater Light, which is my Lord Christ Jesus. Help me, O God, for Christ's sake. Amen.

KEEP YOUR VOW ALWAYS!

Making vows in the name of the LORD is not a game. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 point out clearly that *“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.”* Vows are optional, and not a must. The Bible is never against the making of vows. In fact, believers are encouraged to make vows but are to make them with utmost care and consideration. Vows made in the name of the LORD must be kept. Therefore, vows must never be made foolishly or wrongly. Wrong vows include criminal acts, sinful deeds, and anything that is unbiblical. Foolish vows are those made in haste without proper contemplation and prayer, as well as those that are beyond one’s ability to keep. Invoking the Name of the LORD who is the living and true God is no laughing matter. The LORD hears every word uttered by His children. Vows made by unbelievers who have not heard of the LORD or do not know the LORD are not applicable here. The Scriptures refer to vows that are made unto the LORD! These are vows made by people who have been taught the Word of God and claim to know the LORD.

The strong prohibition from the Word of God is that one must not break one’s word! He must do according to all that comes out of his mouth! The teaching here does not mean that when a believer is not making a vow, it is legitimate for him not to keep his word. The Bible does not teach such a false conclusion. In fact, the LORD makes it clear that every believer is to let his yea be yea, and his nay be nay, for whatsoever that is more than this comes from evil (Matt 5:37). The word of the believer is extremely important. If his words cannot be trusted, he becomes a liar! The devil is a liar. Our heavenly Father cannot lie. He is characterized by truth. His children must be like Him and be characterized by truth as well.

THOUGHT: Are Christians supposed to take an oath in man’s court of law before he gives his testimony?

PRAYER: My word must be my bond, O LORD. May my vows be kept with Thy enabling, O LORD, that I might not sin against Thee.

VOWS THAT CAN BE BROKEN!

In Numbers 30:3-8, the LORD gives two scenarios where vows may be broken and He will not punish. This does not mean that vows are to be taken lightly as these two circumstances are unique in themselves, and are based upon a very just biblical explanation. Other than these two instances, there can be no justification for making rash vows or not keeping our vows. The first case is when a female (youth or child) makes a vow unto the LORD in her father's house. When her father hears her vow and holds his peace, then her vow stands. However, if her father disallows her from making or keeping the vow within the same day that he hears it, she is not bound to keep the vow. The LORD forgives her because of her father's disapproval. The second case is when a married woman makes a vow, and her husband hears her and holds his peace within the day that he hears it, then she shall keep her vow. However, if he disallows her, then she is not bound by it and the LORD forgives her for not keeping her vow. The reason is that the head of the home in both cases is not the woman. In the first instance, it is the father and in the second the husband. The God-appointed structure in every Christian home is that the man is the head and God will hold him accountable for the spiritual and physical well-being of his home. If the woman is allowed to make vows and not be subject to the man's final word, there would be chaos and the biblical structure for a godly home would be compromised.

It is important to keep our vows unto the LORD, but they are to be made and kept within the biblical guidelines that the LORD has stipulated. In the Christian home, the father or the husband, as the case may be, is the head and will have the final say in all affairs of the home, including the vows made by the children and the wife.

THOUGHT: Today's homes are easily destroyed because the structure of the home is broken. In our fragmented and immoral society, the man allows the woman to take over, and pays the price for it.

PRAYER: Come, LORD, that this world of sin will cease, and Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Amen.

THE POWER IN THE HEAD OF THE HOME

A widow or a divorcee is duty bound to keep her vows (made when her husband was around) if her husband did not disallow it. When the husband heard the vow and held his peace, and did not disallow her, then all her vows and every bond wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. However, if her husband utterly made them void on the day that he heard them, whatsoever she has vowed or bound herself to would not stand, and the LORD would forgive her. Verses 13 - 15 is the rule of God's law. These are the statutes that the LORD commanded Moses.

God establishes the role for the head of the house. No one has the power to overturn or reverse the role; if he disobeys, he will suffer the consequences. The LORD made this absolutely clear for God's people. Society will have its subjective guidelines and call it equality between men and women, but the LORD will not allow His rule of law to change. God made man and woman with their respective roles in order to have a harmonious home, and so that societies might not disintegrate into debauchery and lasciviousness. The reason for the broken world that we are living in today is because right has become wrong and wrong becomes right. Errors have replaced God's truth, with irreparable damage to our children's minds and hearts. Families are destroyed without any hope of turning around as the problem is global, and too corrupt and too big to reverse. It is only a matter of time before our world enters what the Bible calls the age of Sodom and Gomorrah, and then Christ will return!

THOUGHT: Is my home a place where the man is the head? If it is not, what is the reason?

PRAYER: Help me to make Christ known to this world that is in darkness and sin. Save my loved ones and friends for Jesus' sake, O LORD.

VENGEANCE IS THE LORD'S!

The Midianites sent their women into the camp of Israel in Baal-peor and caused Israel to sin. The LORD wanted Israel to execute His justice upon them. This passage in Numbers must not be construed as a nation seeking to destroy another for territorial and material gain. Verses 1 and 2 made this very clear. The LORD who is the Judge of the whole earth commanded it. The Midianites tried to destroy God's work by destroying God's people, Israel, who had a mission. Moses finished this task before the LORD took him home to heaven. 1,000 men were taken from each of the twelve tribes to punish the Midianites. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar the high priest, accompanied them with the holy instruments. The trumpets were blown during the battle. Israel defeated the Midianites and burned all their cities where they dwelt. They killed all the males and took as spoil all the women, children and beasts. They brought all these spoils of war to Moses and Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the children of Israel in the plains of Moab, next to the River Jordan facing the city of Jericho which was located across the River.

The enemies of God's people are also the enemies of God. Those who hinder the work of God are attacking God's Word. Those who attack God's Word are in fact attacking God. The LORD knows, and in His time He will judge as we see in today's passage from Numbers. The LORD had dealt with His own people after the incident at Baal-peor. The LORD then turned His attention to the Midianites, to punish them. He used Israel as His instrument of punishment, just as He used the Assyrians and Babylonians in later years to punish Israel when Israel sinned. The LORD as Creator is the God of the whole earth, including all heathen nations. He has the right to judge whenever He wills and using whom He likes! He does not need to ask man for permission when He judges.

THOUGHT: Are the superpowers of today under the same rule of judgment from God? Christians have no need to fear any man!

PRAYER: Teach me to keep peace with all man, to know that vengeance is the LORD's and that Thou will judge in Thy time. Amen.

PARTIAL OBEDIENCE IS TOTAL DISOBEDIENCE

It is true that the LORD's instruction to punish the Midianites did not include total destruction. Nevertheless, Israel was not allowed to spare or kill whoever they wanted and according to their own discretion. Israel was on a mission from the LORD as His instrument of justice. She had to punish the Midianites according to God's justice which is always equitable. When Moses and Eleazar and all the princes went to meet the returning soldiers and their captains, Moses was very angry with them because they had spared the women and killed only the men. Women were sent from Midian to tempt Israel into sinning against the LORD, which resulted in the plague and deaths of the congregation of the LORD. Moses deliberately did not address them as Israelites but the congregation of the LORD! These captains must realize that they were on an official business of the LORD, and not on a personal vendetta to do what they wanted. Moses instructed them to kill all the male children, including all the male babies and infants, and every woman who had known man. But the female children who were virgins could be kept alive for Israel.

From man's perspective, this may seem to be a harsh judgment. However, we are not to judge from a sentimental perspective but from the LORD's perspective. Our perspective of life and death must be biblical and not carnal. The believer should not see death as a curse but as the end of a life of service, and as returning home to God. In the case of unbelievers, death is indeed punishment for sins committed. The justice of God demands that sinners be punished. In this instance, all males had to be killed. The reason for this is not expressly stated. However, the Judge of all the earth shall do what is right! Man must humble himself and accept the sovereign will of God, and must see the biblical perspective of life and death. The LORD gives life, and He can take life, according to His holy, just and sovereign will.

THOUGHT: Every child who dies before the age of accountability will go to heaven because of the imputed righteousness of Christ.

PRAYER: May I have the mind of Christ to view all things as Thou would view all things, O LORD. Amen.

PURIFICATION

Uncleanness is part and parcel of life on this sin-sick earth. The uncleanness the Bible speaks of is spiritual. The Israelites were commanded by the LORD to war against their enemies to punish them. Anyone in Israel who went to battle and had killed someone or had touched a dead body was declared unclean before the LORD. He had to purify himself. This also included Israel's captives who might have killed or touched a dead body. They were to remain outside the camp for seven days. On the third and seventh days, they were to purify themselves. All their raiment, including everything made of skins and goats' hair, and all things made of wood must be purified. Israelites and Gentiles must go through this process before they could enter the camp. This was an ordinance of the law that the LORD had commanded. This rule was not negotiable. All other materials such as gold, silver, brass, iron, tin, lead and other things that could withstand fire had to be passed through fire for them to be cleansed. In addition, they must all be purified with the water of separation, including those things that did not pass through the fire. After the people have washed their clothes on the seventh day, they were considered clean and were then allowed to enter the camp.

In the covenantal relationship between the LORD and His people, great emphasis is placed on spiritual cleansing. This was evident in Old Testament times, and still is in the New Testament times. The cleansing process for every believer is now done only through the blood of Christ. The Old Testament method of cleansing represented the blood of Christ purifying God's people of all the stains of sin. Every item of their possessions and every part of their bodies which was unclean must be cleansed. The completeness of the cleansing process signifies the completeness of the cleansing power of the blood of Christ.

THOUGHT: There must not be an iota of sin in the believer's life when he prays, worships and serves the LORD.

PRAYER: Cleanse me, O God, of every wickedness and sin by the precious blood of Christ, that I might approach Thee accepted. Amen.

EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION

Fairness in the distribution of the spoils is very important. Moses was told by the LORD to take the sum of the spoils of war of both man and beast, and he and Eleazar and the chief fathers of the congregation would see to the division and distribution. The total amount was divided equally into two portions and distributed between two groups. The groups were those who went to war and those who did not go to war. The ratio was 1 in 500 of all the spoils from the half for the men who went to war to be given to the priests. A ratio of 1 in 50 from the other half meant for the rest of the congregation who did not go to war was given to the Levites. Moses divided the spoils accordingly. There was no complaint from anyone. This was a just distribution as those who went to war had risked their lives and therefore, more was given to them. Since the LORD was the one who gave them the victory, He had every right to decide on the ratio for distribution.

The officers over thousands and the captains over hundreds came to Moses and gave of their free-will offering on top of what the LORD had stipulated. They wanted to make an atonement for their souls before the LORD. This spiritual gesture reflected well their spiritual well-being. They knew how to be grateful on their own. This was a mature generation of leaders that must have encouraged Moses who had heard so many murmurings and complaints those past forty years. To witness such an act of gratitude to the LORD is the kind of reward that parents and pastors long to see in their children and congregations respectively. To return thanks to the LORD is a mark of gratitude and a true reflection of one's genuine faith.

THOUGHT: My tithes and offerings unto the LORD reflect the reality and maturity of my faith.

PRAYER: Help me, O LORD, to give of my substance even as I learn daily to give of myself unto Thy service. May I do so with joy from my heart, freely and willingly, constrained by Christ's love. Amen.

GRACIOUS REQUEST

The children of Reuben and Gad had a very great multitude of cattle. They saw the land of Jazer and Gilead, in the Trans-Jordan area, and realized that this was a good place for cattle. This land was previously owned by kings Sihon and Og. The people of Israel had soundly defeated them. The children of Reuben and Gad approached Moses, Eleazar and the princes of the congregation, and made a sincere request for the piece of land. They described the cities located in the land and said that it was a land for cattle and they have cattle. If the children of Gad and Reuben have found grace in Moses' sight, let this land be given to them for a possession. They asked that they not go over the River Jordan to the Cis-Jordan part of the Promised Land.

They did not demand but asked if this was agreeable in their sight, then only would they remain in Trans-Jordan. They called themselves servants before Moses, Eleazar and the princes of the congregation. Such humility is needed for people of God to work together. Living and serving together in a Christian context does not mean that making personal requests is forbidden. The important thing to note is the manner in which these requests are made. In this case, the children of Gad and Reuben asked their leaders to grant their request only if they were all agreeable. They wanted to seek the will of God for themselves as well as for the rest of the people of Israel, because they were part of the people of Israel. Their decision would surely affect everyone. They understood this very well as the succeeding verses revealed.

Our requests for personal benefit do have some impact on others, especially when we are part of a larger whole. In a church or home, we must always consider others' welfare when a decision is made. Demanding our own rights is wrong. Requests should be made instead.

THOUGHT: Do I demand things at home and in church when I work with others? Am I a considerate person?

PRAYER: May I always look unto the things of others, O LORD, even as I serve Thee at home and in church. Amen.

EVERY ACTION HAS REACTIONS

Moses was wroth because he thought this request from the tribes of Gad and Reuben might incite another rebellion. Moses' reasoning was logical and sound. If the tribes of Gad and Reuben were to remain in the land of the Trans-Jordan that all Israel helped to conquer, and leave the rest of Israel to cross over to conquer the land of the Cis-Jordan, then the other tribes might also wish to remain and not cross. If that happens, then the plan of God for Israel, which included crossing the River Jordan to conquer Cis-Jordan, would be thwarted. The LORD would definitely be angry with Israel! Moses cited the Kadesh-barnea incident of the ten faithless spies to support his case (Num 13, 14). The LORD's judgment then was severe. All who were twenty years and above perished in the wilderness during those past forty years. Moses' charge against the tribes of Gad and Reuben was that they were doing the same by their request to remain in Trans-Jordan. If this request from Gad and Reuben turned away the heart of Israel from the LORD, then the LORD would yet again leave Israel in the wilderness. Gad and Reuben would be blamed for destroying Israel.

Moses did not mince his words. He could not afford to, for the existence of Israel was at stake! Moses had seen the death of more than 600,000 Israelites because of their sins at Kadesh-barnea. He knew that another wilderness wandering would be the end of Israel. This was a serious transgression if what Moses warned came to pass. Moses felt that this request by the Gadites and Reubenites was not fair. He did not say that they had no right to ask for the land in Trans-Jordan. Moses was concerned with the completion of the plan of God in Israel's life. They must enter and conquer the Promised Land located in Cis-Jordan. They were so close to completing this final piece of the puzzle. They were prepared with a new high priest and a new leader to lead Israel across the River Jordan. This request could throw all into sin and the LORD would surely punish!

THOUGHT: My actions affect others. For good or bad?

PRAYER: May my decisions and actions, O LORD, be for the blessing of others and for the glory of God always. Amen.

ALL FAIR AND SQUARE

The counter proposal of the Gadites and Reubenites was more than reasonable. It allayed all of Moses' fears. Their proposal ensured the obedience of all Israel and the fulfilment of God's plan of salvation for mankind. The intention of the Gadites and Reubenites was not to bring death and destruction upon Israel. Their proposal supported this intention. They proposed that they first settled their cattle and children by building sheepfolds for the cattle and cities for their little ones. Secondly, they would go over the River Jordan ready armed before the children of Israel. They would not return until they had helped the rest of Israel to conquer their land. 40,000 out of a total of 110,580 armed men went across the River Jordan to help (Josh 4:13; Num 26). The remaining 70,580 men stayed behind to protect their cattle, women, children and old folks from the inhabitants of the land such as the Edomites, Ammonites and Moabites who were still in Trans-Jordan. Thirdly, they promised not to return until the children of Israel had inherited every man their inheritance. This means that the Gadites and Reubenites would help to conquer and wait until after the division of the land had been completed before they would return to Trans-Jordan. Fourthly, they said that they would not inherit with the rest of Israel the land in Cis-Jordan. They would only inherit the land in Trans-Jordan.

This proposal answered all the arguments of Moses. There would be no injustice done to Israel. This proposal removed all fears as to why Gad and Reuben wanted to remain in Trans-Jordan. God's plan remained intact. All would be more than satisfied with this proposal from the Gadites and the Reubenites. Their own people could not complain for they would be protected. Everything was fair and square. More importantly, God's plan was honoured.

THOUGHT: Be just and fair in my dealings with all people even though they might not be fair and just in their dealings with me.

PRAYER: May I be true, O LORD, to my Christian principles as a child of God, that Thy name may be glorified. Amen.

UNITY AND HARMONY IN ACTION

Moses accepted the proposal of the Gadites and Reubenites. He repeated what they had said just to make sure that there was no misunderstanding on this very important matter. If this was carried out, Israel would be separated from these two tribes by the River Jordan for as long as they remained in the Promised Land. Moses took their word and sealed it with a warning in verse 23. Moses gave them permission to build cities for their little ones and folds for their cattle and to do what they had proposed before they crossed the River Jordan with the rest of the people of Israel. Moses knew that this proposal of the Gadites and Reubenites would be carried out after his death. He passed on this charge to Eleazar, Joshua and the chief fathers of the tribes to make sure that the Gadites and Reubenites kept their word. Otherwise they would not be allowed to remain in Trans-Jordan, and would have to cross the River Jordan and occupy the land in Cis-Jordan with the rest of Israel. They were not to be destroyed. No matter what, Israel had to cross the River Jordan. The Gadites and Reubenites invoked the name of the LORD (vv 31-32) and made an oath that they would accompany the rest of Israel across the River Jordan and keep their word. Moses then gave the land of Trans-Jordan to the tribes of Gad, Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh. They began to build their cities and sheepfolds as agreed.

The decision was very important. All parties had to honour their word. They were on a spiritual mission as God's people. If one party did not do its part, the plan of God to save the world through Christ would be in jeopardy. This was not a carnal agreement between two Gentile nations. The will of God must not be put at risk in order to fulfil one's desire. The desire of the two and one-half tribes was granted only if they carried out God's will. All of them agreed.

THOUGHT: What unity and harmony in Israel's history! To be able to cooperate and work together to do God's will is wonderful to see.

PRAYER: Let unity and harmony prevail, O LORD, in my life as I work with others for Thy glory. Amen.

THE HISTORICAL JOURNEY

This passage of forty-nine verses may seem meaningless to many of us. It simply relates the time of Israel's journey in the wilderness to their present camp in the plains of Moab. However, on closer examination, this passage is one of the most important passages in the entire book of Numbers.

Firstly, it is the LORD who commanded that this historical account be written. It is not mere history, but inspired Scriptures. Secondly, the reality (not a myth) of Israel's forty years of wilderness wandering and how they came out of Egypt by God's mighty hand has historical evidence. We have on record the burial of the Egyptians' firstborn sons due to the tenth plague. Thirdly, Israel did not enter the Promised Land by slow emigration as some liberals suggest, but Moses and Aaron led Israel out of Egypt. Furthermore, the listing of these places that Israel stopped at over the course of forty years is clear evidence of the historicity of Israel's wilderness wanderings. Fourthly, to every Israelite, these places will bring back many memories, some good and some bad. For example, it was in Kib'-roth-hat-ta'a-vah that the people of Israel lusted for food. The LORD had sent quails in great abundance. And as they were eating, the LORD sent a plague and many died. These names of places are like memorials to remind Israel of the LORD's mercies. We too have many reminders of past mercies that we experienced from the LORD. They keep us humble, for without the LORD's mighty hand protecting us, we would have been consumed as well. Forty years had gone by so quickly for Israel, and now she was on the brink of crossing the River Jordan. A new generation would complete the journey started by previous leaders and a previous generation.

THOUGHT: Every generation has its own battles to fight. The battles of the LORD will end when He returns.

PRAYER: Grant me, O LORD, strength and courage to fight on till Thou return in the clouds of glory!

ISRAEL'S SPIRITUAL MISSION

The sovereignty of God does not negate human responsibility. The Promised Land was given to Israel. There was no doubt that Israel would conquer and inherit the Land. That is why the LORD used “*when*” in verse 51 and not “*if*.” However, Israel had to do her part in order for the inheritance to become a reality. Israel had to enter and conquer the Land according to the LORD’s command as she was on the LORD’s mission. Israel had to drive out all the inhabitants of the Land, destroy all their pictures and their molten images, and pluck down all their high places. Not a single shred of their idolatrous way of life and worship was to remain! It was to be a total and complete removal and destruction of everything idolatrous. Israel would dispossess (expel) them and take over the ownership of all their lands, cities and homes. The reason is that the LORD had given them the Land to possess it.

The Land would be divided according to the size of the tribes. Tribes with a larger population would be given more and tribes with a smaller population would be given less. The location of the division would be done by lot. However, if Israel would not drive out the inhabitants of the Land, then the ones who remained would be pricks in Israel’s eyes and thorns in Israel’s sides. They would vex Israel all the days of her existence in the Land. Moreover, the LORD would do to Israel what He would do to the Canaanites. The LORD commanded Israel to carry out His spiritual missions. If Israel did not, then she would be committing spiritual adultery. This command was for Israel’s own protection so that the world will have a light. Every believer has a spiritual mission from the LORD to be a light in this world of darkness. The cost of obedience is high. Sacrifices have to be made to shine for Christ. And there is a price to pay for disobedience. We become a stumbling block and the LORD will deal with us for our sin.

THOUGHT: Obeying the LORD can cost us. Have you counted the cost before you received Christ as your Lord and Saviour?

PRAYER: Help me to bear the cost of obeying Thee, O LORD, for Christ has set the example for me to follow by giving His all. Amen.

DIVIDING THE PROMISED LAND

When the LORD talks about entering the Promised Land, He always uses the preposition "WHEN" and not "IF." The certainty of entering the Land is emphasized because it is the all-powerful LORD who would bring Israel into it. This chapter describes the boundaries of the Land of Promise for the nine and one-half tribes, excluding the tribes of Gad and Reuben and Manasseh who had already received their portion in Trans-Jordan. The size of the land in Cis-Jordan stretched southward to as far as the borders of Edom, all the way to the Nile River of Egypt as it flowed into the Great Sea. The western border was the Great Sea itself. The northern border stretched along the coast of the Great Sea pointing toward Mount Hor. This was not the Mount Hor on which Aaron died because that Mount Hor was located next to the border of Edom in the Dead Sea region. The Mount Hor here was probably Mount Hermon. Literally, the word for "Hor" means "mountain." Mount Hor means "mountain of mountains." This stretched to Ha'zar-e'nan, ie the city of Damascus (see Ezek 47:17), probably next to the River Euphrates (see Gen 15:18). The eastern border was from Ha'zar-e'nan downwards to the side of the Sea of Chinnereth, ie the Sea of Galilee, and down to the River Jordan ending at the Dead Sea. These were the boundaries of the Cis-Jordan region of the Promised Land for the nine and one-half tribes that would be divided by lot for them to dwell in.

A similar description of the entire Promised Land is found in Genesis 15:18-21. This has yet to be fulfilled as the nation of Israel had never in her existence, from the time of Joshua's conquest, ever occupied the Land of Promise as described by the LORD. In short, this prophecy would only be fulfilled in the time of the millennium (Ezek 40-48) which describes the boundaries of Israel and the new Jerusalem, when Christ will rule in the new heaven and new earth.

THOUGHT: Will God ever break His promises? If He does, He will cease to be God!

PRAYER: Help me, O LORD, to believe in all Thy promises and that every one of them will surely be fulfilled in Thy time. Amen.

LEADERS FOR THE DIVISION

The names of all the leaders who would assist in the division of the Promised Land is recorded for us. The persons in charge would be Joshua (the successor of Moses) and Eleazar (the successor of Aaron). The leaders were from the nine and one-half tribes only. Each of them was a prince. They would represent their respective tribes in the apportioning of the Land of Promise. Whatever was decided by lot in the days of Joshua was final. There was to be no exchange or fighting over who should get which part of the Promised Land. The lot was in the Almighty God's control. Therefore, the LORD would decide which tribe would get which part of the Land. The portions were to be kept for perpetuity as long as Israel remained in the Land.

The mention of the leaders' names was to give them their due. Future generations would know that God had appointed their ancestors to decide for them the location of their inheritance. They were not allowed to move or sell their Land. Israel was not the owner. The Owner was the LORD. Israel was the tenant who lived in the LORD's Land. Israel was to bear a good testimony of the LORD's goodness so that the Gentiles would see Christ in them and glorify God by believing in the LORD as well. By naming these princes to represent their tribes, the LORD had wisely averted a potential problem of bickering about who should represent their tribes in the casting by lot. Furthermore, complaints on the location were also averted. Those who liked to live near the sea could not gripe and say that they did not like to live on the mountains! It was not man's choice but the LORD's. Israel was on a spiritual mission and not a carnal one. Such physical matters should not be the focus. The LORD was indeed very wise to choose the princes for the division of the Land.

THOUGHT: Fighting or quarrelling over who should be first in matters of carnality is common at home and even in church among believers. To esteem others better than ourselves is a Christian virtue which we must have so that we do not sin against the LORD.

PRAYER: Humble me, O LORD, that I would consider the welfare of others before my own, so that Christ may be glorified in me. Amen.

CITIES OF REFUGE ASSIGNED

After the LORD had carefully arranged the division of the Land, He turned His attention to the Levites who were not allowed to own any part of the Land as their inheritance was the LORD. They were to be guardians and teachers of God's Word to the people of God and, therefore, could not be encumbered with the problems of farming and shepherding. In order to fulfil this purpose, they would be given forty-eight Levitical cities spread throughout the length and breadth of Israel, on both sides of the River Jordan. These cities were to be taken from the tribes. Out of these forty-eight Levitical cities, six of them would be called cities of refuge. A suburb or distance of 1,000 cubits (approximately 1,500 feet or 460 meters) around these Levitical cities would belong to the Levites for them to keep their flock and cattle outside these Levitical cities. Added to these 1,000 cubits is another 1,000 cubits all around these Levitical cities to act as a buffer between the Levitical cities and the surrounding areas owned by the Israelites. This would be no-man's land whereby the one who has killed a person and fled to the cities of refuge for safety would be considered safe the moment he entered into this suburb of the city of refuge.

The Levites were the spiritual hands and feet of the LORD who ruled Israel under a theocracy, before Israel became a monarchy in the days of Samuel. Their duties were spiritual and they were not to be preoccupied with looking for food to feed their families. They were to trust in the LORD to provide as they focused on studying and teaching God's Word to God's people. When they fulfil their spiritual responsibilities, Israel would be spiritual and would give unto the LORD via tithes and offerings. Israel would be blessed of God. Should the Levites fail, Israel would fail and be carnal.

THOUGHT: The pastor must fully concentrate on his spiritual duties to feed the flock of God with God's Truth.

PRAYER: Give to us faithful preachers and teachers of God's Word, O LORD, that they might feed Thy flock, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

WHAT CONSTITUTES MURDER?

The cities of refuge functioned as prisons in Old Testament times. They were not meant to protect murderers but only slayers who had killed accidentally and were being pursued by an avenger. They were called cities of refuge because they provide refuge and protection. Three cities of refuge were located in Cis-Jordan and the remaining three in Trans-Jordan. These cities provided refuge to all, including Israelites, strangers and sojourners. Verses 16 to 21 describe the scenarios that constitute murder. It is murder when someone smites with an instrument that could kill, and the person who is struck dies. Throwing a stone wherewith the stone could kill and the person is killed, is also murder. Any form of hatred or ambush, which results in killing, is also murder. The avenger who finds these murderers has the law on his side to take the murderer's life. This is based upon the law of equitable justice, a life for a life. However, if it can be proved that there was no enmity, that it was accidental when a life was taken, the slayer will be granted refuge in the city of refuge. The slayer will remain in the city of refuge that he has fled to for protection until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.

Nevertheless, a life has been taken and the slayer cannot be allowed to go free if he has killed someone, albeit accidentally. The period of self “incarceration” in the city of refuge is in the hands of the LORD; the death of the high priest is in God's control. This was a just law. A life for a life is God's justice. This law of God places the highest regard for life. Those who reject capital punishment have a low view of life! All believers should believe in capital punishment because God believes in it. He commanded it for all to enforce proper justice.

THOUGHT: Our depraved society is paying the price today for not practising capital punishment.

PRAYER: Help me, O LORD, as a Christian to have the highest regard for life by believing in capital punishment. Amen.

POLLUTE NOT THE LAND

The pollution of the land is not physical but spiritual. When sins are not dealt with in Israel, the land becomes polluted. This is God's standard from the beginning of the Fall. Therefore, it is very important to God that truth, righteousness and justice be found in the lives and conduct of God's people. Murderers will not be protected by God but must pay for their crime. However, slayers who killed by accident will be protected as long as they remain in the city of refuge of their choice. If the slayer decides to leave the city of refuge, then he will be at the mercy of the avenger. The avenger is allowed by law to kill him and he will not be guilty of murder. The reason is that the slayer must remain inside the city of refuge until the death of the high priest before he can leave and return to his family and the normalcy of regular life. The person who is charged with murder shall be put to death if he is found guilty. However, there must be at least two witnesses against him in order for a guilty verdict to be rendered. The guilty murderer cannot buy his way out with money or other forms of restitution. He must be put to death! This is also applicable to the slayer who is in the city of refuge. He cannot shorten his "incarceration" with monetary payment or other forms of restitution. He must remain there until the high priest dies. This law is just because the rich cannot use money to help them get away with murder or killing. When blood is shed, it pollutes the land. It is also by the shedding of blood that the land can be cleansed from this pollution. There is no other way! This is the high regard the LORD has for human life. If this law of just retribution is not enforced in Israel, then the LORD will regard the land as defiled.

This is also true for our earth. When blood is spilled and the death penalty is not enforced, the LORD would consider the earth as defiled. He will come and bring judgment upon this earth.

THOUGHT: Defilement is when sin is not washed by the blood of Christ. Christ's blood is the only "solvent" that can wash away sins.

PRAYER: Let the justice of God be my justice, O LORD. May Thy justice be found in Thy church in these last days. Amen.

LAW OF INHERITANCE IN THE LAND

The leaders of the sons of Joseph, in particular the half tribe of Manasseh, who dwelt in Trans-Jordan, had noted an important point. There appeared to be two laws passed down by the LORD that were at variance. The first law was that whatever portion of the land that was assigned to the tribes by lot should remain in that tribe's possession for perpetuity. They were not allowed to sell it. They could, however, rent it out, as it were, if they were in debt. The creditor would take their land and make money from it until the debt was paid. Then the land would be returned to the original owner. However, another law also allowed the daughters of any family who had no sons to inherit their father's inheritance, as was the case with the daughters of Zelophehad. What would happen to the inheritance if the daughter married someone from another tribe? Would she take her father's inheritance with her when she marries? If she has sons, will the inheritance be given to her sons who are now born to another man from another tribe? If the inheritance is allowed to be taken away, then the tribe's property will shrink. In the year of jubilee, all debts are cancelled and all properties must be returned to their original owners. However, in this instance, the jubilee year would also have no effect since the law has been passed that the daughters can inherit their father's inheritance. Will this second law of allowing daughters to inherit their father's inheritance contradict the first law of inheritance by lot for the tribes?

This dilemma might appear trivial, but on closer examination it is a serious issue. Unhappiness might ensue when the land of the tribes shrink due to inter-tribal marriages. God's Word must guide in this matter before it erupts. The sons of Manasseh wisely brought this matter up before they entered the Promised Land. We must also anticipate problems and resolve them before they arise.

THOUGHT: Small matters can become big problems if they are not resolved justly and to the glory of God.

PRAYER: Grant me wisdom and grace, O LORD, to resolve potential problems before they erupt. Amen.

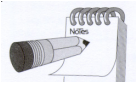
MARRIAGE WITHIN THE TRIBE

Moses commended the sons of Joseph for raising an important issue that could cause problems after they entered the Promised Land. The daughters of Zelophehad were allowed to marry whomever they pleased as long as the husbands were from the family of the tribe of their father. This would ensure that the inheritance of their father remains within the same tribe. There would be no inter-tribal transfer of property. The portion of the land chosen by the LORD for each tribe would not be lost. This law was to remain intact. This ruling ensured that all Israel enjoyed their allotted portions of the Promised Land. The very existence of Israel as a nation depended on this. Israel had a spiritual mission from the LORD to keep herself faithful and was to remain in existence until the day when the Messiah was born of the virgin Mary in Bethlehem Judah. Also, the law of inheritance for daughters was not vitiated by Moses' solution to a potential problem. Wisdom from the LORD helped maintain both laws and resolved any potential problems! There was no variance at all between the two laws given by the LORD.

The daughters married within their own tribes as declared by Moses. There was no problem of inward breeding as all the tribes had thousands of people. The inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's family by their marriage. Obedience to God's Word is always the key to solving or avoiding potential problems. Churches today can also avoid many potential problems if the Word of God is obeyed. Many of the problems in churches today are the result of man's disobedience to God's Word and man's sins which are not dealt with. If believers who are called by Christ's name would obey the LORD the way these daughters of Zelophehad did, half the problems easily in our churches could be avoided or at least be resolved easily!

THOUGHT: Obedience to God's Word is the solution to our society's ills as well as our churches' problems.

PRAYER: Take my life and let it be consecrated, LORD, to Thee. For my heart's desire is to obey the whole counsel of God and to live unto Thy glory. Amen.



RPG Subscription Form

To: **Tabernacle Books**

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

Tel: (65)-6560 1111 Fax: (65)-6561 1861 Email: rpg@calvarypandan.org

Read Pray Grow (RPG) is a Daily Devotional Guide published quarterly by Calvary Pandan B-P Church and distributed free-of-charge by Tabernacle Books. If you have been blessed by this Devotional Guide, you may wish to subscribe to it for yourself or for your loved ones and friends by filling in the form below.

1. Please send me:

____ years' subscription of ____ copies per issue of RPG

____ years' subscription of ____ copies per issue of Teenz RPG

____ years' subscription of ____ copies per issue of Junior RPG

____ years' subscription of ____ copies per issue of Chinese RPG

starting from month: JAN / APR / JUL / OCT _____ (year)

2. Name: (Dr/Rev/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Mdm/Ms) _____

Address: _____

Country: _____ Postal Code: _____

Tel no.: _____ (H/O) _____ (Mobile)

Email : _____

No. of copies per issue	Postage & handling cost for 4 issues per year				
	Singapore	Malaysia/Brunei	Asia	Other Countries	
	Local Mail	Airmail	Airmail	Surface Mail	Airmail
1 copy	S\$6.00	S\$8.00	S\$15.00	S\$8.00	S\$20.00
2 copies	S\$7.00	S\$12.00	S\$23.00	S\$12.00	S\$31.00
5 copies	S\$10.00	S\$23.00	S\$50.00	S\$24.00	S\$67.00
10 copies	S\$15.00	S\$40.00	S\$93.00	S\$40.00	S\$130.00

Love Gift: RPG ministry welcomes love gifts from readers to help meet the cost of publishing and distribution. The ministry also sends these devotional guides to readers in poor countries. Hence, your generous support is much needed and greatly appreciated.

"Freely ye have received, freely give." (Matthew 10:8)

Enclosed is my love gift of S\$

International subscribers please make payment by Bank Draft in Singapore Dollars drawn on a Singapore Bank. For foreign cheques, please add S\$25.00 for bank charges.

Please make all payments payable to: Calvary B-P Church (Tabernacle Books)



读祷长订阅单

To: **Tabernacle Books**

Calvary Pandan B-P Church

201 Pandan Gardens, Singapore 609 337

电话: (65)-6560 1111 传真: (65)-6561 1861 电邮: rpg@calvarypandan.org

《读祷长》（读经、祷告、长进）每日灵修辅助本是班丹加略定期出版的免费季刊。如果阅读了这灵修辅助本而获益，你只要填妥以下的表格，就可以为你自己或你的朋友订阅这季刊。

1. 请寄:

_____ 份 _____ 年数量之英文版读祷长

_____ 份 _____ 年数量之少年版读祷长

_____ 份 _____ 年数量之小学生版读祷长

_____ 份 _____ 年数量之中文版读祷长

从 _____ 年 一月/四月/七月/十月 起分发

2. 姓名: (Dr/Rev/Mr/Mrs/Miss/Mdm/Ms) _____

地址: _____

国家: _____ 邮区: _____

电话: _____ (H/O) _____ (手提电话)

电邮: _____

一年四期的邮费及运送费

每期的数量	新加坡	马来西亚/汶来	亚洲	其他国家	
	本地邮费	空运	空运	平邮	空运
1 份	S\$6.00	S\$8.00	S\$15.00	S\$8.00	S\$20.00
2 份	S\$7.00	S\$12.00	S\$23.00	S\$12.00	S\$31.00
5 份	S\$10.00	S\$23.00	S\$50.00	S\$24.00	S\$67.00
10 份	S\$15.00	S\$40.00	S\$93.00	S\$40.00	S\$130.00

爱心奉献: 读祷长事工欢迎读者的爱心奉献以资助印刷与运送费。这些灵修辅助本也分送到一些贫穷国家的读者。因此，我们需要您的慷慨奉献与帮助，并谨此献上感谢。“你们白白地得来，也要白白地舍去。”（马太福音10:8）

随单送上爱心奉献 S\$

海外订阅可以向新加坡银行以新币兑现银行汇票来付款。

若是海外支票请附加 S\$25.00 银行手续费。

支票付款请注明收款人: **Calvary B-P Church (Tabernacle Books)**

