

**EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**



**Life Of Moses (Part 4)  
Numbers 13-24.**

**(HARD LESSONS ON GOD'S  
TOUGH ROUTE MARCH TO  
THE LAND OF PROMISE)**

**BY**

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## INTRODUCTION

Having entered the Sinai Peninsula the Israelites are in enemy (Egyptian) controlled territory now, and they will camp here, by the wells of Kadesh Barnea for at least forty two days, but probably twice as long as that from the Deuteronomy account (below). They will face the daily challenge to wait upon the Lord while the spies study the land and return with their reports. Faith is the test here, and the people will fail the test, just as we do all too many times. God calls them to stand for Him in the midst of the enemy and they are overwhelmed by fears and return to the Arabian Peninsula for the next thirty eight years during which all but two of this older generation will die by the wayside. As we will discover in the next book of the Pentateuch, they have failed already, even before the spies return.

Moses writes the first verses of chapter thirteen as if the Lord has directed them to send the spies, and yet we find in Deuteronomy 1:22-40, that it was the people who requested the spies, and prayed for them, and the Lord gave permission. They had already doubted the Lords directive will, and so in this whole chapter they are in the Lords permissive will. They didn't need the spies to tell them the land was good, for they had the Lord's word on it! When we ask for unnecessary things we enter the Lords permissive will, and this is always one step from disaster if we doubt the Lords words again.

The twelve tribes each select their toughest man to be their representative on the spying expedition. The criteria is that he must be able to operate as a member of a small commando, as a spy with the others, and move quietly through the land, living off the land, and staying out of the way of any local armed patrols, operating as a tight group in enemy territory.

They are to identify all cities and work out the strength of the places they see, and the fertility of the land, and the actual production of it. From the grape harvest they observe and bring evidence back of, the time is now the earliest of the autumn harvests. If they are obedient and move quickly straight in and seize the land, the food of the enemy's fields and later their granaries will be their own, but they are running late and have fatally delayed in this spying mission. They will see all the good things and they will see all the enemy forces, and their great city walls, and they will become distracted by the bad and scary things they see, and will forget that the Lord has given them this land, and that the locals are already defeated by the Lord.

As we enter this chapter let us reflect upon this issue today for ourselves. Do we see our problems from man's perspective or from God's perspective? Do we avoid following through with actions of obedience, by seeking the Lords permission for things that are not needed in the plan? No obstacle is big if the Lord has already beaten it, but the smallest problem is insoluble if the Lords plan for us, and power within us, is forgotten or rejected. When God says advance, we are in grave danger if we seek "more information" and delay obedience.

## CHAPTER 13

### **NUMBERS 13:1-33**

**13:1** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **2** Send thou men, that they may search the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel: of every tribe of their fathers shall ye send a man, every one a ruler among them. **3** And Moses by the commandment of the LORD sent them from the wilderness of Paran: all those men were heads of the children of Israel. **4** And these were their names: of the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur. **5** Of the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori. **6** Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh. **7** Of the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph. **8** Of the tribe of Ephraim, Oshea the son of Nun. **9** Of the tribe of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu. **10** Of the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi. **11** Of the tribe of Joseph, namely, of the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi. **12** Of the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli. **13** Of the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael. **14** Of the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi. **15** Of the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi. **16** These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua. **17** And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain: **18** And see the land, what it is, and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; **19** And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; **20** And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes. **21** So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath. **22** And they ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmi, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) **23** And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs. **24** The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence. **25** And they returned from searching of the land after forty days. **26** And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. **27** And they told him, and said, We

came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. 28 Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. 29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. 30 And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. 31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. 32 And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature. 33 And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.

**REFLECTIONS**

**Verses 1-3.** Notice the order of the Lord, but also remember the Deuteronomy passage. If you missed reading the first chapter of Deuteronomy during the introduction, read it now. They have asked for the spies and Moses felt it was a good idea to deal with any worry on the part of the people. He compromises at this point, rather than clarifying the Lords will and urging them forward to seize the land. The spies are to search out the land and put some information onto the Egyptian map of the place that Moses possibly has with him.

Moses has information as an ex-Egyptian general, but it is not current, and so he also feels he will benefit from additional information. He is thinking like a good general, and the Lord does not judge him for this, for it is understandable, but it is, in this case unnecessary, for the Lord will guide them step by step. They simply must follow the cloud, as we today must, step by step follow the Holy Spirits leading. We don't need "more facts", for how much is enough? We obey and move!

The spies are also to report on the state of the harvest, as well as the state of defence of the cities. The answers to these things will help them know what to pray for and how to pray regarding the invasion, although reflect again on this, for actually they don't need this information at all. All they need is the Lords assurance of victory, and then step by step, following the cloud and fire, they are to confront the obstacles one by one, and pray at each point specifically for the guidance they need then, and move forward to victory. By the time they have the spies information the harvest is likely to have been gathered in and the opportunity to seize it all is gone anyway!

The Lord makes it clear, that He has already "given them the land". Numbers 32:8-13, Deuteronomy 1:19-21, 29-33, 9:23-29. The Lord's guidance technique is to provide light to our feet, not a search light into the distance. God wants us to walk slowly forward with Him, not leap forward into the middle distance. Let us walk one step at a time, one day at a time, not seek too much information that we couldn't understand anyway. Our challenge is to advance into today and serve the Lord today. At times we seek "clear direction" and yet we have it and can advance into it, but we seek more facts than the Lord needs to give us. Psalm 119:105, Matthew 6:11, 30-34, Hebrews 3:7-15.

**Verses 4 – 16.** The list of the tribes and their chosen men is now laid before us. Two differences in the order occur in the list, from that of Numbers 1:5-15. The pairs of spies are as follows:

- |    |                               |     |                                 |
|----|-------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------|
| 1. | Shamua of the tribe of Reuben | and | Shaphat of the tribe of Simeon. |
| 2. | Caleb of Judah                | -   | Igal of Issachar.               |
| 3. | Oshea (Joshua) of Ephraim     | -   | Palti of Benjamin.              |
| 4. | Gaddiel of Zebulun            | -   | Gaddi of Manasseh.              |
| 5. | Anniel of Dan                 | -   | Sethur of Asher.                |
| 6. | Nahbi of Naphtali             | -   | Geuel of Gad.                   |

Notice first the main correction to our received wisdom from our Sunday School teachers. We have always jumped to the conclusion that these men operated in pairs, and I have grouped them above as they would be if they operated as pairs. Notice that Joshua and Caleb are not together as a pair according to this list. Manasseh and Ephraim are separated as a pair. Zebulun is separated from the other sons of Leah and linked with Manasseh, and Benjamin from the sons of Rachel is linked with Ephraim. Tribal affiliations are important, but on this mission the mixed groups will need to bind together with their opposite numbers and learn to work together.

As we will see later in this chapter, it is doubtful that they operated as pairs at all, except possibly for very short expeditions in the land. It would appear they operated as a single group. Also note, Joshua is known by two names, his given name of Oshea, meaning "help", and the name Moses calls him, Joshua, meaning, "Jehovah help". It may be that he adds this editorial comment, or it may be from the pen of Moses himself.

**Verses 17 – 20.** Moses commands to the spies are specific, but open enough for them to move out and observe most of the land and report back within forty days. They will be "on the run" living off the basic rations they can carry and the water and food they can take from the enemy, without them knowing, for this time. They are to head north, entering the land through the normal trade route from Kadesh Barnea, acting as traders, and then they are to stay in the hill country at all times, where they can be hidden from patrols and people who would report their presence.

These men will fail to report in faith, but they have no shortage of skill in this matter, for the twelve men all avoid capture, and apparently do not get spotted by the enemy at any point. These men are brave and competent soldiers, and have what it takes to be SAS commandos today, but they lack faith in the Lords plan for Israel.

They head out without full faith in the promises of God, even though Moses reminds them of these promises, and so they see the things that reinforce their basic fears, rather than heading out in faith and seeing the things that reflect the truth of God's plan for them. "As a man thinks/believes in his heart, so he is/becomes!" Proverbs 23:7. If we think with the categories and content of God's Word, so we will stand in the truth of it, and live in the blessing of it. But the opposite is also true. If we doubt, and walk in the paths of fear and worry, then we will find ourselves more and more succumbing to fear, and find it harder and harder to discover reasons for faith. James 1:2-8.

The thoughts that we feed daily are the thoughts that grow strongest. Let us feed upon the Word of God daily and grow by feeding our faith with action upon what we read. Saturation with the Word will build this. There have been some in recent days who argue that believers know enough but they don't apply enough, and so they shift from systematic biblical exposition to topical studies. It is true that we need application of what we know, but it is a dangerous error to stop systematic teaching of the Word of God.

We need to take in the counsel of the Lord daily, as we take in our daily food. It is saturation knowledge of God's Word that is required for all believers, and application will be built up daily, as the individual learns more and more of God and His Plan. We love the Lord and it is through His Word that we discover His great Love for us. For a Holy Spirit filled believer to not be hungry for daily spiritual food is a contradiction in terms!

Moses betrays his own lack of precise knowledge about the land in his instructions here also. The Egyptians had reasonably good maps, one or two of which have survived. Moses appears not to have seen the land himself, although earlier in our study I reflected that he may have led an expedition there at some point. Now it has been over forty years since he was a prince in Egypt, and possibly fifty since his work as a general, so it may be he simply wants the men to see what has changed and what the current situation is.

We cannot have a definite answer to this. The men are tasked to check on numbers of people, animals, crops, and the state of their fortifications at this time, and how many live behind walls, and how many in villages and how many in tents. This latter request indicates the reality of this time; that the Arabs would sweep into this land at times and depopulate the cities, and then form their own tent villages and live outside the ruins of the cities they had destroyed.

Moses wants to know who the people are that are living there now, and their strength now. He "wants" to know these things, but, as noted above, he doesn't need to know these things! In the Armed Forces we spoke of the distinction between, "need to know" for an operation, and "nice to know". People were only told what they absolutely "needed to know", so that security was maintained. Moses just needs to know God has given them the land, and is going before them, and he needs to get moving to bring in this year's harvest, while it is there in the fields ready to be taken. He compromises with the "need" of the people, and his own curiosity, and opens up this test.

God will use this situation, as He always does to sift the volition of the people. It will be a faith message and turning point. He encourages the men to "be of good courage", for the Lord is with them, and they are encouraged to take the produce of the land and bring some of it back with them and we are told that it is the time of the early grape variety harvest. There will still be a month or two of harvest to come, so most of the crops are in the fields at this point, but the clock is ticking for invasion this year.

**Verses 21 – 25** Moses describes their journey through the land, and it is in this description that we realize the entire group of twelve men appear to stay as one compact group, not as the pairs of men that we were told in Sunday School. They move from south to north and by moving through the hill country they avoid the attention of the enemy. They are able to see the walled cities of the plain, but they spy them from the safety of the wooded hills and take the Grapes, Pomegranates, and Figs, which they bring back from the valleys where it is easy to slip in and out of the cultivations without being spotted in the early hours of the moonlit nights.

The main feature of the journey was their observing the "Anakim", descendents of Anak, or Arba, who founded Hebron (original name was Kirjath Arba), Genesis 23:1, and Moses makes an editorial comment, that this town was established seven years before Zoan (Tanis) was built in Egypt. These mighty men of the town of Hebron had a genetic abnormality which made them very tall.

Their name means "long necked" and indicates they were tall, well above the normal height for men of their day. The majority of the spies have memories of large bunches of grapes and fruit, but even larger men, and they dwell upon the latter. The place that arrested their attention was Hebron, where Abraham and the Patriarchs dwelled, and were buried, and had great respect, and yet it appears to have become a place of giants. Is this possible?

It is five hundred years since the days of the Patriarchs, and the rulership of the Hittite Lords who ruled there in Abraham's day is apparently over, with Egypt the dominant power now. The Anakim are old inhabitants, and if Abraham wasn't bothered by them why should his more numerous descendents be? Abraham doesn't even list them on his tablets of records handed down to Moses, so little did he rate them as significant. Genesis 13:18, 15:19, 18:1, 23:1ff.

How big were these men of Hebron, the sons of Arba? As we will see, they were not big enough to frighten Joshua or Caleb at all, and may have only been around the 2 meter point, if that. It is of note that Abraham wasn't even interested in them as a people group in his day, and the Hittites ruled them, as have the Egyptians! Faith defeats the fear of giants, but lack of trust in God makes all challenges into giants! Romans 8:28-39, 14:22-23.

**Verses 26 -29.** The men return as a group to the camp at Kadesh Barnea and report to the leadership their findings, and deliver the mighty cluster of grapes they gathered at the place they named Eschol after the great bunches of grapes. Their initial report is totally positive, but then comes the “but”. They note the fruits and prosperity of the land, but note the military dangers and difficulties of seizing the land.

They are overwhelmed by their memories of the great cities that they have seen from afar. They have not entered them, nor gotten close enough to work out their real strength, nor seen their moral decay and readiness for the judgment of God to fall upon them. They have seen apparent strength and they have not compared it to that of the Lord, nor thought about what is behind the fortifications, for the morale of a people and their army is more important than their physical defences.

Throughout history great fortresses have fallen to inferior sized armies but with superior morale and leadership. The entire conquest of the Persian Empire by Alexander the Great illustrates this. These men have not seen the realities that true spies need to see and feel, and their report is superficial and false. They have seen the people groups and listed them, as Abraham did, Genesis 15:6-16, but they have not seen these people as Abraham did, nor believed the words of God about them from Moses. God’s verdict upon them is clear; their hold on the land is over, and Israel is to take over. All they need is to trust the Lord and advance, and Caleb and Joshua will say that.

**Verses 30 – 33.** There is considerable commotion after the report of the majority of the spies, and Caleb steps forward and quietens the people, as Moses ought to do. This is a clue that Moses may himself be doubting at this time. Caleb doesn’t mess around with his analysis. “Let us go up at once and take the land”, he urges, “it is ours!” Joshua stands with him in this, as we later find, but Caleb leads with the speaking. Numbers 14:6.

These men know the harvest will be fully in within a month and there will not be any food left in the fields for the picking. If they move now they will have all the food that they and their animals need for an invasion, but time is short. The spying expedition has almost run them out of time for an invasion to be successful before all the crops are inside their city walls. He is right; they must move NOW! He sees things God’s way and knows that in God’s power they can overcome the obstacles and seize the land and that the Lord will have a plan to deal with the many walled cities.

The ten men who have been frightened by what they have seen interrupt Caleb and counter his enthusiasm with defeatism. “These people are stronger than us”, they argue. Now even if this is correct, when they add in the fact that the Lord is with them, they do not have any worries about seizing the land. They expand upon their negative report and indicate that all the people they saw were giants, whereas only the few men of Anak are in this category. Their exaggeration would be humorous if it was not blasphemous. I use the word blasphemous deliberately, for when we doubt that God is able to do something we are insulting His holy name, and this is what blasphemy is. Most of us have no idea just how evil lack of faith is! Romans 14:23.

**Isaiah 40:21-31.** *“21. Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?  
22. It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in:  
23. That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.  
24. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.  
25. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One.  
26. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth.  
27. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?  
28. Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.  
29. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.  
30. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall:  
31. But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”*

**PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. God calls us to move forward into the plan for our life without the evidence in advance of its success, but with the Word of the Lord as the ground of our assurance. The Lord’s character, plan and words are our evidence. The Jewish believers of the Great Tribulation period will face exactly this test that the Exodus Generation faced, and two thirds of them will fail to grasp the promise of the Lord and seize the city of Jerusalem and hold it until the Lord, the Messiah, returns. Zechariah 12:9-14:7.

To believe God’s promises, against the visible evidence in the world, is the test of faith that the Lord calls some generations to express. He called the people of the Exodus to it and two individuals responded, and He will call those of the Great Tribulation to this same test, and one third of the population will respond and be delivered by the Lord Himself. They have the same promise of victory and future blessing as the Exodus generation did. Ezekiel 34:11-24, 25-31. When

we face such a test, it is always with the power within and the guidance in the Word to stand against doubt, and to win victory in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Lord calls us to a path to win there, and to be blessed, not ever to be defeated.

2. We are called to follow God's Directive Will, not to seek our preferences and so come under God's Permissive Will. The Lord wants to bless us as we advance and serve Him in obedience to His plan, and only our lack of faith holds the process of blessing up. Let us seek the Lord's will and apply it into the fibre of our being each day, and do what the Lord has called us to with focused concentration and Holy Spirit empowered energy.

3. A person's perspective of a thing, an event, or a person, changes the accuracy of the deductions they might draw from what they think they have seen. The ten spies bring evil reports because they see only the things of man, they do not see the land through God's Word. The great cities are ready to fall, and their strength is weak to resist, but only two of the spies see this. God calls us to divine perspective in all our assessments, and this is possible only by the application of Bible doctrines into the situation under review. Let us feed upon the Word and so grow in our knowledge, our discernment, and our faith application.

## **NOTES**

## **CHAPTER 14**

### **INTRODUCTION**

For every action there is a reaction, and for every reaction that is factually wrong there is a natural consequence that must be faced and accepted, and it will not be pleasant. There are some actions that we cannot come back from, some insults which go too far and cannot be forgiven by the person we have offended.

The ten spies who brought the "evil report" have brought evil into the camp and been its evangelists. They have actively sided with the enemy of God and Israel. In their words they have not given their "considered opinion", but simply expressed their fear based reasons for their lack of faith in God's ability to deliver and provide for them. They have given way to doubts and fear, and then preached them to others, instead of giving their fears and doubts to God in faith that He will deliver them. Their actions will lead to the Lord's ultimate discipline of them. Deuteronomy 1:26-46 summarizes the results of the actions that we read of in this chapter.

Lack of faith is sin at all times, but to proclaim lack of faith in God is to become the evangelist of evil. The spies have now left the historic faith of Israel, and are preaching defeatism, and so leading astray the people, who don't need much encouragement to fall backwards into doubt and despondency. To injure the weaker brother or sister is to join Satan himself and trample upon the weak. Our call is to encourage and strengthen the weak, never crush their faith and hope. Romans 14:23, 1 Corinthians 8:7-12, 2 Corinthians 12:19, 1 Thessalonians 5:14, James 1:3, 3:14-20, Revelation 3:2-8.

## NUMBERS 14:1-45

14:1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night. 2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness! 3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt? 4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt. 5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel. 6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes: 7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. 8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. 9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not. 10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel. 11 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? 12 I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they. 13 And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) 14 And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, 16 Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness. 17 And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my LORD be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, 18 The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation. 19 Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now. 20 And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word: 21 But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. 22 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; 23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: 24 But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it. 25 (Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwelt in the valley.) Tomorrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea. 26 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, 27 How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me. 28 Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you: 29 Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward which have murmured against me. 30 Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun. 31 But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised. 32 But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness. 33 And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. 34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise. 35 I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die. 36 And the men, which Moses sent to search the land, who returned, and made all the congregation to murmur against him, by bringing up a slander upon the land, 37 Even those men that did bring up the evil report upon the land, died by the plague before the LORD. 38 But Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of the men that went to search the land, lived still. 39 And Moses told these sayings unto all the children of Israel: and the people mourned greatly. 40 And they rose up early in the morning, and gat them up into the top of the mountain, saying, Lo, we be here, and will go up unto the place which the LORD hath promised: for we have sinned. 41 And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper. 42 Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies. 43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you. 44 But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 4.** Now, as we have seen before in the Hebrew idiom, “all the congregation”, does not mean every single person, but the vast majority. Caleb, Joshua, Moses, Aaron, his sons, and their families, and also many of the younger people do not join this weeping and wailing and gnashing of their teeth, for they do have hope and faith. The majority of the congregation weeps through the night. Why do they weep? They now believe all their hardships have

apparently been for nothing; that they have come to this point and they cannot win the victory and seize the land, and they are right, for in their own strength they can do nothing. John 15:5.

If you give way to such despair, the slide in your logic will continue to even worse conclusions, and this is what occurs here. They will awake the next morning and try to return to slavery in Egypt. Their thought pattern and prayer is, "why didn't we die in Egypt, or why didn't we die in the wilderness?" Sadly, in saying these things they have selected their own fate before the Lord who hears all our moaning. Remember the Egyptian presence is always there, and Egyptian patrols will be seen at times, and surrender to these forces and a return to slavery is apparently a very real option!

The men express their concerns as if they are for their wives and children, but they simply reflect their own lack of faith in God to defend them and their own inability to defend themselves. Their final insult to the Lord is to make plans to select a leader to surrender to the local Egyptian Governor who will then take them back to Egyptian slavery. This is not however even a realistic possibility, for the Egyptians have lost an entire army and they blame the Israelites for it. If the Israelites return to Egypt all the men will be killed this time and the women and children alone enslaved, and the nation will be no more. Psalms 78:32-42, 106:13-27, 1 Corinthians 10:10-13.

The last verses quoted here in Corinthians give the principle of deliverance that we need to claim in similar times of doubt and fear. Hebrews 10:35-39. If we draw back from the path of God, the Lord will have no pleasure in us. Let us "be of good courage" (the courage that comes from faith in the Lord's power – not our own) and advance in His plan for our life, and serve Him with all our heart and mind. Deuteronomy 31:6-7, Joshua 1:6-18, 10:25, Psalms 27:14, 31:24, Isaiah 41:6, Luke 9:61-62.

**Verses 5 – 9.** The congregation has now "crossed the line" from complaint to open rebellion against Moses and Aaron, but more importantly for them, they have openly rejected the plan of God for the tenth time! The Lord is counting! Moses and Aaron cast themselves at the feet of the murderous crowd, placing themselves at their mercy. These older men are exhausted with the rebellion of the people and are past arguing for the truth with those who do not want it. Both older men appear to be depressed and mentally and physically exhausted here, and their depression is not sinful, it is understandable. The Lord does not chide them for their state, rather He provides for them the spokesmen for truth, to argue with the people, and these two are Joshua and Caleb, both around forty years of age at this point.

The two younger men tear their clothes as a sign of greatest grief and distress. This sort of action would arrest attention and indicate the worst grief possible and the crowd hushes to hear them. The action takes place where the tabernacle is pitched, and as I noted in an earlier chapter, it would appear that the tabernacle is always pitched in a slight hollow so that all the people could stand around on low hills and hear the words of their leaders. The camp was then spread beyond on the surrounding hills, which makes the camp better for defensive purposes.

Only rolling hill country would form such a camp site, which is why on the march they did not camp, as there were not the appropriate places to do so, and for defence the best course of action was to sleep close to wagons and in ranks. All this is guess work, but the requirements for a good camp site were, an open flat area of at least 50 meters by 50 meters for the tabernacle, and a larger flat or slightly rising square area for the parade ground, and gathering area of about 250-300 meters square. It is in this area, before the tents of the people that this gathering takes place.

Caleb and Joshua make the real issue very clear to the people, when they have their attention. Caleb appears to be the spokesman here, and they appear to have the relationship that Aaron and Moses had, with Aaron being the speaker, even though Moses was the leader. Exodus 4:10-17. A very good speaking voice, with excellent projection was required to speak to the gathered crowd here, of at least 30,000 people on the low surrounding rise towards the tents of the people.

Once again we are confronted by the error of the LXX figures for the people. If there were 600,000 men under arms there would be no danger of defeat, for they could swarm over the land and take it with ease. Giants are no worry if you have 100,000 archers firing arrows at one point! No man could stand against an army of this size (6 times the size of the Persian Host later). It is the fact that they are outnumbered that creates such fear amongst the doubters in God's Word.

The figure of around 6000 men makes sense here, for they do not figure that they can seize the entire land with such a small number, given the alliances between the people of the land and their joint ability to concentrate an army of at least 10,000 at several points with the combination of a number of their cities.

We have archaeological information about the size of the great walled cities of the Canaanites. Most were cities of around 5000 people, that would be able to gather a defensive army of about 1000 men at the most for each. These were not great cities like Haran (at 250,000 population at this time) but actually quite small places, but if they combined they could field a fighting offensive army of about 500 men from each city, and that means the entire Canaanite confederation could field a single army of up to 20,000. Look up the cities mentioned later in a Bible Encyclopaedia, or on an archaeology website, and you will see that most cover only a few acres.

It is the issue of the smallness of Israel's army that creates the fear, for they all know that if the Canaanites combine their forces, they will seriously outnumber Israel. It is in this context that a few giants can seriously make the difference if they lead an attack on the line of battle, for it will collapse at their point of attack and the entire army will be disorganized and lost. Good military logic drives the fear, but there is spiritual logic that needs to be applied here and Caleb and Joshua apply that.

Their argument is flawless. **Firstly** they state that the land is good. It is worth fighting for, and this is the right time to launch the assault upon the land. **Secondly** they note that if the Lord “delights” in them, they will win! They identify that there is no danger of losing if the Lord is with them.

**Thirdly**, they recognize that the Lord has said, “Enter and seize the land”, and that not to do so, is open rebellion against a clear command of the Lord. **Fourthly** they note that the people of the land are “bread” to them. This is a very modern way of speaking! In effect Caleb says, “We will eat them for breakfast!”

They note that the morale of the people of the land is low. They note that the people of the land fear the Israelites and believe that God has given them over to destruction by the Israelites. Fear has gripped the people of the land and their armies will melt before their invasion. Even at odds of greater than two to one Caleb believes they can defeat the enemy every time.

They urge the people to leave the state of fear behind and advance with them and seize the land. Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Romans 8:28. Let us stand with Caleb and Joshua and affirm today, in the face of any accusation or difficulty we face, that the Lord will deliver us, and bring us through, because we love Him, obey Him, and He delights in us.

**Verses 10 – 12.** The response of the people is immediate; they cry out to stone Caleb, Joshua, Moses, Aaron, and their sons with stones and silence them for good. This is a serious rebellion, and the fact that this cry goes up and catches the mob’s mood tells me that the rebellion is organized. From what will happen to the ten spies who doubted God, it may be deduced that they may be behind the rebellion and that they are positioning themselves to lead the people away from the land. This is not spontaneous – few such “demonstrations” are!

The situation demands a serious intervention, and the men of God have just played their last card. They are in the Lord’s hands and the Lord answers them now, at the eleventh hour and fifty ninth minute. The glory of the Lord bursts upon the gathering before anyone can throw a stone. God’s men and women need to be ready to speak the truth and take the stones at times. These men are laying their lives on the line for truth, and so must we. Acts 7:52-59.

The Lord’s words to Moses sum up the issue that confronts the Israelites. They have no faith in their God, and simply do not trust him enough to obey and seize the land. They provoke and frustrate the Lord, and they do not believe in Him even though they have seen great miracles. Luke 16:22-31, John 10:37-42, 12:35-40, 15:24, Hebrews 3:7-19. The Lord now makes an offer to Moses that is startling. The Lord offers to make of Moses, and possibly those who stood with him, a greater nation than the Israelites, and actually kill them all right now. Is this a real offer? We must put this testing situation into the same category that the test to Abraham was, when he was asked to offer up Isaac. Genesis 22.

These people have seriously frustrated the Lord and Moses, and they have threatened to kill Moses and begun to look for rocks to throw at him. How well would you do at this point? Moses knows his own weaknesses, and has no arrogance, and so he meets this challenge and pleads with the Lord to forgive the people and move forward with them. It is exactly as the Lord wanted Moses to say. Moses must be ready to lead these people no matter how bad they are, and he must forgive them as he asks the Lord to forgive them. Matthew 6:9-15, 18:21-22, 32-35. Every pastor is so called!

**Verses 13 – 16.** Moses has been flat on his face before the tabernacle while Caleb spoke and while the Lord spoke, but he stands and answers now. He thinks in terms of Bible doctrine. He thinks in terms of the reputation of the Lord. He thinks what the pagans will say about the Lord. This man doesn’t care about what people think of him, but he does what they think of the Lord and the Lord’s plan. Moses knows what will happen with the pagans when they know the children of Israel have been destroyed or abandoned by God.

The Egyptians will find out and rejoice, for they will think their gods have won over the Lord, and they will tell the Canaanites that the God of the Israelites was not strong enough to deliver His people. Moses hates the very thought of this possibility. Moses knows that the Canaanites have heard about the cloud and the presence of the Lord amongst His people and they are seriously afraid.

All the words of Caleb are true and Moses knows it. The Canaanites have heard all that has been happening over the last year since the destruction of the Egyptian army at the Sea of Reeds. The miraculous feeding of the people and the provision of water has been reported widely, as you would expect amongst the Arab peoples, who have been watching everything, and probably expanded upon in the process. The places where Israel moved across the Sinai and into Arabia are on trade routes where many have seen them and reported the stories of them to those they trade with.

The inhabitants of the land are petrified! Now if anything happens to the people of Israel then the pagans will mock the Lord freely, and will say that He lacked the power to deliver His people. This is not true, and Moses knows the Lord will not ever act against His character, or His plan; He will deliver His people, for His character and reputation depends upon it. Deuteronomy 9:26-28, Nehemiah 9:16-21, Ezekiel 20:8-20.

**Verses 17 – 19.** Moses claims the Word of God on the matter and requests the Lord to honour his words to them and fulfil his promises. In Deuteronomy Moses sums up this principle in his speech to the people after their wanderings. Deuteronomy 3:23-24, 4:32-40, 9:25-29. Moses quotes the character of God back to God, as the reason for his faith in God. The Lord’s patience, mercy, forgiveness, cleansing power, and also His judgment, are all reasons why

the guilty should die, but the innocent, and the redeemable, should live and enter the land. Exodus 34:5-7, Psalms 103:8, 145:8, Jonah 4:2ff, Nahum 1:2-3, Romans 3:23-26, Ephesians 1:7-8.

Moses asks for pardon for the great sin of the people, not according to their deserts, but according to the greatness of the mercy of God. Moses notes that the Lord has forgiven His people many times since their leaving Egypt, and so asks that they be forgiven again. Psalms 51:1-2, Ezekiel 20:8-9, Daniel 9:19, 1 John 5:14-15.

**Verses 20 – 24.** For those who believe God is harsh in His judgments of the evil and the rebellious here, pause and reflect upon these verses. Note how many times the people have moaned and how many times they have been forgiven, and offered the path into the land still. God begins His answer by saying that He has pardoned the sins of the people. He then affirms Moses point, that the glory of the Lord WILL CERTAINLY fill all the earth. The plan will work out and the glory of the Lord will be seen by all. All will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and every knee will bow before Him. Romans 14:11, Philippians 2:5-11, Revelation 20:10-15.

The ten rebellions to date have been:

1. At the Sea of Reeds. Exodus 14:11-12.
2. At Marah. Exodus 15:23.
3. At the "Wilderness of Sin". Exodus 16:2.
4. At Rephidim. Exodus 17:1.
5. At Horeb. Exodus 32.
6. The Rebellion of Nadab and Abihu. Leviticus 10.
7. At Taberah. Numbers 11:1.
8. At the "Graves of Lust". Numbers 11:4ff.
9. By Aaron and Miriam. Numbers 12.
10. At Kadesh Barnea. Numbers 14:1.

Each time the people rebelled, the Lord forgave, and the Lord restored the people in blessing. How great has God's Grace been through these months? Psalm 103:8-16. The greatest miracle the people have seen has been the miracle of forgiveness, but the limit has been reached. The limit is not reached because the Lord has run out of mercy, but because this generation has now proved finally and fully that they have no capacity to learn and grow spiritually. They are incapable of doing what the Lord requires, because they will not be obedient to His Word.

These men who have led the rebellion here have seen the Lord's glory and His miracles, and yet they have still done this evil, so they will receive righteous judgment, for they have rejected the words of the Lord their God. All who have provoked the Lord to anger will die in the pastoral lands of Arabia and be buried by the wayside, but their children, who they piously and hypocritically said they were concerned about, their children will inherit the land. Caleb will inherit the land and he will go forward to prosper within it, as will Joshua, and the sons of Aaron.

Paul draws together the lessons from this and the other nine incidents of rebellion in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, and his ending verse is the one to note in our own difficult times. The Lord never places us in any situation to break us, but to enable us to build our faith in Him, and there will be a way through and out the other end for His glory and our blessing. Our task is to seek the Lord's answer, not the way of escape.

The way back to Egypt is the "easy way" but it leads to murder and the worst sort of slavery. Matthew 7:13-14. The Lord's path for us may be strewn with thorns, as His own was, but He is with us through it, and there is glory in the end. Let us hold our courage and advance in the Lord's path for our lives, and take up our cross daily and follow Him to glory. Matthew 10:38, 16:24.

**Verses 25 – 27.** The reference to the valley here is the valley of the land around Hebron where Caleb and his people will settle. The mightiest of the men of the land were there and Caleb wants to knock them over, and he will. Caleb sees correctly, for the morale of the people of the land is like butter that will melt as the sun of Israel rises over them. God's promise to Caleb is that he will inherit the land, but the others who doubted will certainly not. Joshua 14:6-15.

The Lord now gives instructions for Moses to lead the people back into the Arabian pastoral lands where those who will not learn and advance to glory will wait out their sentence, until all this generation who have persisted in rebellion are dead. They are to march, "by the way of the Red Sea" and enter Arabia through the trade routes to the south of the land of the Ammonites and Moabites.

The Lord then gives solemn warning to Moses and Aaron about the last chance warning to the Israelites. They have moaned one too many times, and will have their forty year sentence to learn not to moan. An entire generation is placed under the SIN UNTO DEATH here, but it is to teach them that they might come into glory in heaven, even though they have robbed themselves of the glory down here.

**Verses 28 – 35.** The message to this people is to be made very clear. They are to face the terrible truth, repent, and then learn obedience so that their children can achieve in their life times what they have denied themselves by their disobedience. We discover here the Lord's age of accountability. The Lord holds all over twenty years of age responsible for their actions and culpable for their sin of rebellion. Amongst the people, all who have rebelled will die in

the desert and only Joshua and Caleb will enter. The sons of Aaron will also enter the land, for they are not numbered with the people here. The children that these hypocritical people said they feared for, will be the ones to inherit the land.

They despised the promise and provision of the Lord, and so they will miss out on it. They will have a year of wandering for every day the spies spent in Canaan and the people sat and waited for them with their minds already made up. The Lord's words are absolute and final. The people have gone too far in rebellion this time. They are forgiven, but they cannot have the land. It is a perfect picture of the sin unto death, which means the loss of earthly blessing and eternal rewards, but not loss of salvation and heavenly citizenship.

**Verses 36 – 38.** Moses now records that the men who sinned by leading the rebellion died immediately of "the plague" that the Lord brought upon the people. Note Moses description of the actions of the men again. They sinned, in that they, made the people murmur, they slandered/blasphemed the Lord, they sowed doubts about the Lord's promises by bringing a false/evil report. Their death is immediate, but the two men who were honest, and had faith in the Lord their God, they lived on. It was clearly a judgment. Jeremiah 28:15-17, 29:30-32.

It is a dangerous thing to pretend you are a prophet or a leader of Gods people when you are not! Be careful pastor of your call and do not over-reach yourself and take another's place, for the Lord judges those who seek another man's role. James 3:1.

**Verses 39 – 40.** Moses reports the words of the Lord to the people so that they know what has happened and gossip cannot then gain a foot hold, but also so that they know why it has happened and learn from the event. Moses desire is that the people do not continue in their sins, but advance in obedience now. Sadly this hope is quickly lost. The people weep through the night about their sin and the loss, but they still don't get it, for in the morning they rise up and ascend the hills from where they can see the land of Canaan and they desire to go up and take the land now!

For forty days and nights they could have walked up that pass and stood on the hills and built their anticipation of victory, and could have reminded themselves of the promises of God regarding the land, but they did not, and now the opportunity has passed them by! Sometimes it is too late to recover after a failure and you must just walk away with the learning from the disaster. They face this hard lesson in life, but they do so reluctantly and only after casualties.

They now are ready to seize the land – or so they say! Of course they have only emotion to guide them, and that is the reason why they have been banned from the land; they gave way to their emotion rather than to doctrine! God wants us to follow His Word, not our emotion. Our emotions are to be enjoyed, or controlled, but never followed as sure guides to anything! These people are deluded and it is fatal delusion.

**Verses 41 – 45.** The people's error is to think that by military action now that they can atone for their sins over the last months, but they are disobedient, not being obedient. The Lord has made it clear that "ten strikes and they are out!" They cannot come back from this last error of judgment they have made, and that is the end of it. There is nothing they can do to be given the land, and the Lord has already forgiven them, so they do not need to atone, for the Lord has made atonement for them.

They must now show their obedience by accepting the Lords words and head into the Arabian Peninsula and take their punishment like adults, and train their children to succeed where they failed. Moses makes clear to them that they are not to go up against any town, no matter how little it is, for the Lord is not with them, and their victories are to come about because of the Lords presence with them, not their strength. They presumed to know better than Moses again.

This makes their eleventh rebellion as a people! Moses and the obedient people stay put with the Ark in the camp. The disobedient ones advance up the pass, and head into the hill country and the locals sally out and meet them in force, and coming at them at a chosen battle site, they attacked down hill breaking the Israelite line, and the Israelites panic and flee with many casualties killed. The location of Hormah is unknown today, but it appears to be well into the land. This invasion by the disobedient men was a serious affair, taking a number of days. They surged forward and may have marched up to 80 kilometres into the land just to be beaten and have to flee for many miles at the run. They return to the camp in disarray with many "missing, presumed dead".

The time of the Feast of Pentecost is now well past, and it is not mentioned by Moses in the narrative, for they will have to wait for forty years to celebrate it for the first time. Leviticus 23:9ff, Numbers 18:12-14, 28:26-31, Deuteronomy 26:1-11. The people certainly needed to remember the significance of the First fruits Offering of Pentecost at this point, for they had lost their opportunity to celebrate it for another forty years, and stood in need of revival. In grace that revival will occur, but only as the adults who failed acknowledge their sins and bring up their children to be obedient to the Word of God.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Let us be careful that we do not let our doubts infect others with disbelief. We are called to lead, and that means that we first must have applied God's Word and it's revealed plan and promises into our daily life before we stand before God's people. Let us apply our faith before calling others to faith, and let us cast our cares upon the Lord, not ever upon those who are weak.

2. There are some things that cross a line and we cannot come back from that point. If we cross a line and cannot be recovered, we are challenged to confess, receive forgiveness, and advance in the tasks that we can do, and not try to win back something that is lost forever. Patience and acceptance is required. King David was not allowed to build the Temple, even though he desired to. His hands were too blood covered. He was saddened by this verdict of the Lord, but accepted it, and prepared the material for the Temple so that his son Solomon could build it. If we cannot serve in one capacity, let us relax and serve in another, giving thanks to the Lord that we have His grace and our breath to do that.

3. If the Lord delights in us and we love and desire to serve Him, then we can claim Romans 8:28, and 1 Corinthians 10:13, and advance with courage. We are called to have "good courage", Holy Spirit empowered courage, and we will win in the Lord.

4. Let us stand like Caleb and speak the truth, even in the teeth of those who would kill us. There is a limit to the number of times people can be restored to usefulness, but we do not know this until the Lord tells us, and until then we keep calling for repentance and restoration. We keep praying for people, no matter how many times they insult and oppose us. They had opposed Moses nine times before this last event, but he still prays for their forgiveness, so must we, while speaking the truth in power.

### **REFLECTIONS UPON DOUBT**

1. When we have a doubt we must be honest with God.

2. Write your doubts out on paper clearly so that you are ready to see the answer when it comes.

3. Commit this paper before the Lord in prayer. Express it bluntly and openly and expect God to answer. Nehemiah 1:4 -11, Mark 9:24

4. The Bible tells us to cast our cares upon him, 1 Peter 4:19, 5:7. "Cares" are anything that concern us, that actually are matters of God's concerning care.

5. Use a concordance to find verses dealing with the subject which concerns you. Ask yourself the following questions:

- a) What does the Bible state about my doubt/concern?
- b) What definite statements does the Bible make about this subject?
- c) Do I believe God's word on this issue?

### **REFLECTIONS UPON THE BIBLICAL "SIN UNTO DEATH"**

1. There is a sin unto death. (1 John 5:16, 17, 1 Corinthians 11 :31,32)

2. The sin unto death is the physical death of a believer, where ultimate discipline is administered to the Christian due to unconfessed sin of a serious nature.

3. Confession of sin under the concept of 1 John 1:9 is the way to forgiveness.

4. Examples of sin unto death:-

- (a) The Corinthian Pervert - (1 Corinthians 5)
- (b) The Corinthians who habitually came to the Lord's table in an unworthy manner. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32)
- (c) Moses (Deuteronomy 32:48-52)
- (d) Achan (Joshua 7:16-26)
- (e) Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5: 1 -1 1)

5. Whilst there is a sin unto death there is no condemnation to them in Christ Jesus - all believers (Romans 8:1).

6. The effect of the sin unto death is to reduce the time which a believer can spend on earth accumulating good of eternal worth. The gold, silver and precious stones of 1 Corinthians 3:11-15.

### **NOTES**

**CHAPTER 15****INTRODUCTION**

Having failed to heed the words of Moses and Caleb, the Lord had denied this generation the land, and so the people were depressed. They were even more depressed after their thorough defeat by the enemy forces of the land when they tried to advance in their own strength. What they needed was for worship to restore their spirit and settle their hearts and mind and refocus them in the sacrificial system that spoke of God's provision for them. They need to be reminded that the Lord is their God and He will protect them and guide them through the forty years to come. They can relax in His provision for them and protection over them.

They need to pause and worship before they break camp and move back to Arabia. Remember, their scratch army has been defeated and chased and the enemy may move against them to their encampment, to follow up their victory. Although the risk is low, given it is harvest time and the men will be required in the fields, the risk of attack is now very real. At the time when to move out straight away could install more panic and fear amongst the people, the Lord calls them to pause and worship. Worship in the presence of fear builds strength. Isaiah 61;3.

The people will be obedient to the Lord's command and follow Moses back into the pastoral lands of the Arabian Peninsula, but they will worship at the altar for at least a day before breaking camp and moving out. The command was to move out the day after the rebellion, Numbers 14:20-25, but this was not followed, for that morning the rebellious army headed north, and was away for possibly up to four days. There is a pause, on their return, for worship education (what to do when they enter the land finally) and sacrifices to be offered before camp is to be broken up, and they move out. This delay will stretch out due to the next significant challenge to Moses and Aaron's leadership.

Both the worship of the people and the leadership of the people need to be re-grounded, and this will occur, I believe, in the campsite at Kadesh, before they move (Refer below to chapters 16-19). This ensures the move is orderly, and there is a focus upon the Lord's future plan for them in their marching, not a focus upon the facts of their rebellions and their awful consequences. Worship will be the key to their mental stability on what is for all the adults, their death march. Numbers 14:26-37. We must let worship stabilize our hearts, and the reality of the plan of God strengthen our minds, or we will dwell upon our failings and fears, rather than God's grace, power, and the confidence of future glory through His plan working out.

**NUMBERS 15:1-41**

**15:1** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **2** Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye be come into the land of your habitations, which I give unto you, **3** And will make an offering by fire unto the LORD, a burnt offering, or a sacrifice in performing a vow, or in a freewill offering, or in your solemn feasts, to make a sweet savour unto the LORD, of the herd or of the flock: **4** Then shall he that offereth his offering unto the LORD bring a meat offering of a tenth deal of flour mingled with the fourth part of an hin of oil. **5** And the fourth part of an hin of wine for a drink offering shalt thou prepare with the burnt offering or sacrifice, for one lamb. **6** Or for a ram, thou shalt prepare for a meat offering two tenth deals of flour mingled with the third part of an hin of oil. **7** And for a drink offering thou shalt offer the third part of an hin of wine, for a sweet savour unto the LORD. **8** And when thou preparest a bullock for a burnt offering, or for a sacrifice in performing a vow, or peace offerings unto the LORD: **9** Then shall he bring with a bullock a meat offering of three tenth deals of flour mingled with half an hin of oil. **10** And thou shalt bring for a drink offering half an hin of wine, for an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. **11** Thus shall it be done for one bullock, or for one ram, or for a lamb, or a kid. **12** According to the number that ye shall prepare, so shall ye do to every one according to their number. **13** All that are born of the country shall do these things after this manner, in offering an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. **14** And if a stranger sojourn with you, or whosoever be among you in your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD; as ye do, so he shall do. **15** One ordinance shall be both for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you, an ordinance for ever in your generations: as ye are, so shall the stranger be before the LORD. **16** One law and one manner shall be for you, and for the stranger that sojourneth with you. **17** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **18** Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land whither I bring you, **19** Then it shall be, that, when ye eat of the bread of the land, ye shall offer up an heave offering unto the LORD. **20** Ye shall offer up a cake of the first of your dough for an heave offering: as ye do the heave offering of the threshingfloor, so shall ye heave it. **21** Of the first of your dough ye shall give unto the LORD an heave offering in your generations. **22** And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the LORD hath spoken unto Moses, **23** Even all that the LORD hath commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the LORD commanded Moses, and henceforward among your generations; **24** Then it shall be, if ought be committed by ignorance without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one young bullock for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour unto the LORD, with his meat offering, and his drink offering, according to the manner, and one kid of the goats for a sin offering. **25** And the priest shall make an atonement for all the congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them; for it is ignorance: and they shall bring their offering, a sacrifice made by fire unto the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their ignorance: **26** And it shall be forgiven all the congregation of the children of Israel, and the stranger that sojourneth among them; seeing all the people were in ignorance. **27** And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. **28** And the priest shall make an

atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. 29 Ye shall have one law for him that sinneth through ignorance, both for him that is born among the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth among them. 30 But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Because he hath despised the word of the LORD, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him. 32 And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day. 33 And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. 34 And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what should be done to him. 35 And the LORD said unto Moses, The man shall be surely put to death: all the congregation shall stone him with stones without the camp. 36 And all the congregation brought him without the camp, and stoned him with stones, and he died; as the LORD commanded Moses. 37 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 38 Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them 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: 39 And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring: 40 That ye may remember, and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God. 41 I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD your God.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 - 3.** As I read these words I am struck by the apparent abrupt break in the narrative from chapter fourteen. It is almost as if we have re-entered Leviticus and principles from there are being repeated. My belief is that the Israelites, after the return of their defeated army, offered sacrifices at Kadesh on the altar before the tabernacle in their camp site, and that the Lord gave these special instructions before, or after they did so, and identified the differences that were to be put in place for each offering, once they came into the land. It is as if the Lord is reminding them of the doctrinal fact, that they will inherit the land to encourage them in their despair and defeat.

Note the Lord's words, that are repeated, "when you come into the land". There is no doubt about it, the only issue is when, and they have been told it is in nearly forty lunar years. The instructions for the basic sacrifices are given in Leviticus and these words here may appear superfluous to some, but note that they add significantly to those of Leviticus and given their placement in the book here make comment upon the events that have just occurred. The people have failed, and their army has failed, and been beaten. They are all back in camp with their tails between their legs like beaten dogs. The most appropriate thing for them all to do would be to offer the sin, burnt, and trespass offerings, and I believe that is what Aaron did.

These instructions will significantly alter these sacrifices when they enter the land, by making mandatory then and thereafter, the additional offering of meal and drink offerings at the same time as the blood sacrifices, and by setting the amounts of each to be offered. Some of the Levitical annual feasts had these added, Leviticus 23, but from the time they enter the land, all the sacrifices were to have them added to remember Kadesh Barnea. It is God's way of saying to them, "You will inherit this land; my promises will not fail even though you have failed Me and doubted my Word".

The Lord is further encouraging them by the addition of the Meal and Drink Offerings, as they are associated with the blessing of the land, and thankfulness for its prosperity. They now know the land is prosperous and a place of great blessing, but after their army's defeat it feels like a cursed place. These future offerings remind them that the sacrifices in the land will be a joy, for the Lord will turn their cursing into blessing, as they learn obedience.

Whatever Aaron offers by way of sacrifices before they march back into Arabia, it is a reminder of the joy that will be their children's as they inherit the land, and also the reminder of the debt of gratitude they owe the Lord for His grace towards them. The Lord, by giving these instructions restores hope for the future and gets them thinking forward rather than looking back to their defeat and disobedience. This remains our challenge today; to always press forward, never be looking backwards longingly. With confession of anything in the past we look forwards to what the Lord is yet to do through us, we do not look back with regrets that are unproductive. Philippians 3:12-16.

**Verses 4 - 5.** When a lamb was offered the quantities of cereal/flour and drink were to be, 1/10<sup>th</sup> "deal" of flour. This is the Hebrew measure of an "ephah", being about 7 ½ gallons (60 pints) in the English measure. An ephah equates then roughly to just over 34 litres capacity of flour, and so one tenth of an ephah was around 3.5 litres.

It was to be brought along already mixed in with a ¼ of a "hin" of oil. A hin was 1.5 gallons (12 pints), or just under 7 litres of oil. So a quarter of a hin of oil was around 1.7 litres. Now if you mix 1.7 litres of oil into 3.5 litres of flour you get a fairly solid mix of oil saturated dough.

You will read in Leviticus that the mixed Meal offering spoke of the perfection of the person of Christ, as the Saviour. It spoke of the perfect character of His humanity (the fine flour), and the perfect empowerment and purity of His unity with the Holy Spirit in His earthly ministry. We remember this at the Communion Table with the bread, but in this image here, the oil mixed in reminds us of the absolute unity of the Holy Spirit in the work of the Lord as Saviour.

Can you see that the Lord God is providing his people here, with this Meal Offering being added to the Blood Sacrifice, a powerful pointer to the Saviour who will come, as the perfect, Spirit empowered man, to give His blood for their sins as

God's provided sacrifice. The drink offering added to this was an "oblation". Wine stood for joy and the prosperity of the land to the Hebrews; it was not a symbol for drunkenness, which was a sin and forbidden to all who stood for the Lord.

The quantity of wine to be brought along for the sacrifice of a lamb was a 1/3 of a hin; about 4 pints, or 2 ¼ litres of wine. This would equate roughly to the contents of three normal (750 ml) wine bottles today. This means it was a significant amount, and speaks of the abundant attitude of the Lord towards us, and challenges the people to be abundant in their thankfulness towards Him in return. A portion of it was poured out into the earth at the foot of the altar, where the blood was also poured from the animal sacrifices. Leviticus 3:2, 4:7, 25.

The wine and the blood mingling in the earth speak of the joy of the benefits to us from the Lord's sacrifice, in willingly pouring Himself out for us abundantly. This was a powerful picture of what the Lord Jesus Christ would do in pouring out all the days of His life for mankind, as well as pouring out His blood upon the earth to redeem mankind and the earth itself from the curse that came by sin.

The libation, or "Drink Offering" is the image that Paul selects as his own, to describe his coming execution, in 2 Timothy 4:6. He says that he is "already being poured out" in these last days of his ministry upon the earth. The Roman Lictor's axe will pour the last of his blood upon the ground, but he has been doing this all his saved life and he rejoices in his daily libation offering. This is the mental attitude of the servant of the Lord; to pour out, not just a portion, but all their energy, their gifts, and all they have in the Lord's service. The abundance of these offerings speaks to Israel of the attitude they ought to have in their praise and worship of the Lord their God. They should be abundant in their thankfulness and abundant in their praise, for the Lord has been abundant in His blessing.

Remember when these sacrifices are being ordered. They are being told to do this right after their failure to advance into and seize the land. God is telling them by these additions to the Levitical Offerings, that they are not to draw back in their worship, nor draw back in their service, but rather to heal their despair with abundant praise and worship when they enter the land. They are to worship and remember the Lord's way forward for them, and for all people who would follow the Lord.

We are to be, like the Meal Offering, "Oil Saturated", that is, we are to be Holy Spirit filled. Ephesians 5:15-20. We are also to be abundant, not stingy, in our pouring out of our praise, our talents, and all of our substance to the Lord. 2 Corinthians 4:15, 7:15, 9:6-12, Philippians 1:26, 1 Timothy 1:14, Titus 3:6, 1 Peter 1:3, 2 Peter 1:11. God has been and continues to be abundant towards us, and so we are to be abundant in our ministry for Him.

**Verses 6 – 7.** For each of the offerings there was to be a slightly different amount of flour, oil and wine brought. The people were going to have to learn these quantities and record or remember them, and this was God's plan in the matter. The Lord wanted them to pause and reflect as they gathered the ingredients and identify what they might mean in the process. For the ram the offering was, 2/10 of an ephah of flour, around 7 litres capacity. To this was mixed in 1/3 of a hin of oil, or around 2 ¼ litres of oil. To this was added the same quantity of wine, about 2 ¼ litres of wine.

**Verses 8 – 11.** For the Bullock as a Burnt Offering, Peace Offering, or for a vow, they were to bring, 3/10 of an ephah of flour (10.2 litres of flour), mixed with half a hin (3.4 litres) of oil, and accompanied by a drink offering of half a hin of wine (about 4 ½ 750 ml bottles). These are significant quantities to bring with the sacrifice, and in difficult times would have been a significant offering! The Lord's point is clear to them. Because of Kadesh Barnea they are to practice more thankfulness for the grace, mercy and provision of God. They are never to doubt God's provision or His orders again, and they are to deal with doubts by more praise and worship, and through all their history they are to remember their debt of praise is being offered because of the great sin of their forefathers at Kadesh Barnea. Isaiah 61:3.

**Verses 12 – 16.** The principle behind the offerings is stated here. It is to be a lasting edict for the people in the land, and for anyone living there in the land with them, whether they are Israelite or not. There is one law for all mankind in this matter. The principles of faith, obedience, forgiveness, and the blessing of God are applicable to all men through all time. All living in Israel are to come before the Lord and remember this event at Kadesh Barnea.

They are all to recall the people's failure of faith there, and give additional thanks to God for His mercy and forgiveness, and so build up their fellowship and faith in the Lord. They are to give more to the Lord, and so receive more from the Lord. The Lord gives abundantly and so we never lose by pouring out our substance to the Lord.

It is a reminder to us, that while the revelation of the Lord was to Israel, they were meant to be a spiritual blessing to all peoples who were around about them, and the people who desired truth and drew near to them were to be entered into the worship of the nation.

**Verses 17 - 21.** Once again, the Lord speaks and reminds Moses, and he is to remind the people, that there is no doubt about the Israelites arrival in the land. They have delayed their blessing, not lost it. While we live there is hope for us. If we have gone too far and there is no chance to bring blessing back, we will know, because we will be dead! Until that moment when we see the Lord face to face, there is always a chance for us to receive more blessing from the Lord before we leave this life. Even these people will be blessed every day by the Manna from heaven, and by living fellowship with the Lord for anything from one to forty years. They will all die in the wilderness because of their sins, but before then they will be blessed as they obey, follow, and worship the Lord who has forgiven them.

When they harvest the grain for the first time in the land they are to heave up an offering of grain to the Lord on the threshing floor and scatter it to the winds in praise at the bounty of the Lord freely given. They are also to make a special little loaf/cake of the first grinding of the grain. And it is to be a heave offering also to the Lord. Lifted high above their heads and praises offered for the goodness of God in giving them the land. Even as they are kneading the dough, they are to offer it up as a heave offering. Now refer back to Leviticus 7:14-34, 10:14-15, and refer to my commentary on these passages.

The heave offering was lifted up to the Lord and then eaten. It was in effect a special grace and prayer of thanks, acknowledging the goodness of the Lord in all He has given them. They also acknowledge that all they have is the Lord's anyway and they offer it all back to Him in praise. They are lifting up their food, as they lift up themselves in service. As the Israelites lifted up their hands in worship, in effect they were offering themselves as a "heave offering" to the Lord. Let us lift holy hands to the Lord in our worship and acknowledge what it means in the prayer that accompanies this posture. 1 Timothy 2:8.

**Verses 22 – 31.** If people make a mistake in any of these matters through ignorance there is provision for them to be covered by sacrifice made especially for them, on acknowledgement of their sin of ignorance. This means that once they become aware of the requirement they immediately approach a priest and request what they might do, for they do not wish to offend the Lord in any manner at all.

It is a totally different matter for those who have a persistent attitude that they don't care a less about what God requires, for they despise the Lord and His requirements. For such a person there is no sacrifice for sin, for they refuse to bring one. This is the only reason anyone is outside God's grace and forgiveness; because they choose to be! No-one will stand before the Lord as a sinner without choosing to remain one, and without choosing to reject their need of a Saviour. Such people are then judged according to their own works, for they have rejected the Saviour's work for them on the cross. Revelation 20:11-15.

This is the hard truth about the unbelievers who will join Satan in the Lake of Fire. They have chosen to be there, because they despised God, God's Word, God's Plan, God's people, and God's holy and just demands upon their lives as His created beings. For such people there is no hope, for they have chosen to reject the only way of hope.

**Verses 32 – 41.** An example of this disregard for the Law of God is given next. This is the case of Sabbath breaking on the part of an Israelite, who is persisting in sin "with a high hand". This man persisted in sin with total disregard for the Lord and His Law, and with an arrogance towards his fellows that betrayed his heart's attitude. There was no need for gathering sticks on the Sabbath day, for no fire was to be lit that day, and if one was being kept going in the tent for warmth, the sticks had to be ready from the day before, or the fire was to go out. The punishment for this man was determined by the Lord directly, and it was not about a few sticks, it was about his attitude that indicated he despised the Lord and His Holy Word.

Remember this event occurs after the Israelites have moved off into the Arabian Peninsula, after Kadesh Barnea. With all the things that have happened, for any person to ignore or rebel against the Lord is incredible, and sadly it indicates just how deep his hatred and despising of the Lord is. The death sentence was to be administered by all the men that could gather around. All the people were to gather and observe this man's death, for they were to remember that the penalty for deliberate sin was death. The days of tolerance for any rebellion were over after Kadesh Barnea.

As an additional reminder of Kadesh Barnea the people are instructed after this execution to place fringes/tassels on their garments of twisted blue thread (it was apparently a hyacinth blue colour and resembled a fruit bud). This colour of heaven is to be a reminder to the people every time they look at their clothing that their destiny is heavenly and they are to take their instructions for living upon the earth from the Lord God of heaven and earth. The Lord was to be their focus in this life; He was to be the source of the earthly productivity and prosperity. Proverbs 3:1-7, 4:20-27. They were not to please themselves, and fulfil their emotional "needs", but to always look to the heavens and seek to please their God. John 8:29, 1 Corinthians 7:32-34, 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 2 Timothy 2:3-5.

Notice the repetition of the sentence, "I am the Lord your God". We are to be reminded of this Lord's ownership of us also. We are bought with the price and we are not here on earth to please ourselves, but the Lord who bought us with His blood. 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, Peter 1:18-19.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. There is no sacrifice that will cover the sins of a person who does not want to be covered. This has great relevance for the nature of the Atonement. The atonement is, I believe, unlimited, but any man/woman may opt out of its cover for him/her. All who resent and despise the message of the Cross do that, and if they persist in their wilful sin they die without hope and without eternal life. This is the great sadness of the lost brethren within our own community, as it was sadness for the lost of Israel. People may see all sorts of miracles and still reject the Lord God, because they simply don't want to believe they need a Saviour, and they despise those who tell them they need one.

2. How thankful are we for the grace, mercy, love, and plan of God for us? In times of bounty or in times of hardship we are challenged to be thankful to the Lord for His grace provisions for us. Let us lift up our hands in a "heave offering" daily to the Lord dedicating ourselves and all we have to the Lord. This is the true meaning behind the lifting up of hands in worship – we are offering our hands up for holy service to our Lord.

3. Israel was to remember its great failure at Kadesh Barnea by several things that would recall the truth of God's forgiveness and their stupidity, so that they firstly might be settled in praise and worship and secondly be clear about avoiding stupidity in the future. How well do we remember the importance of worship daily? How well do we remember our failures, so that we daily guard ourselves against going down the same path again?

4. The blue tassels on the corners/borders on their clothes reminded them of heaven, just as the blue bands on the flag of Israel today are her national reminder to look up to heaven, from where their Messiah came, and will come again. Zechariah 12:10ff. The Israeli flag today is a potent prophetic symbol and will become even more so in the Great Tribulation period, for the Israeli people, who meet their Messiah in faith and repentance at that time will look at their flag and remember the promise made to David, and the certainty of the deliverance of the Messiah, the Son of David, who is coming to deliver them on the appointed day.

5. Just as the offering of the meal was to be oil saturated, just so our lives are to be Holy Spirit empowered. Let us be living gift offerings to the Lord, with our energy poured out into His service in joy.

## **NOTES**

## **CHAPTER 16**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Korah, Dathan and Abiram also rebelled against Moses at some point while the people are encamped, either in Kadesh before they leave, or at a campsite during the journey. The fourth man named On, appears initially and then is not mentioned subsequently, and may have pulled back from the rebellion. Like the man collecting sticks on the Sabbath, these people are serious challengers to the authority of God and God's chosen men, and the principles here are important, for they also appear in Jude 11, linked with Cain, as an example of serious rebellion against divine authority.

Here we see the pastor being attacked from within the extended leadership. We see how far the pride of man will go amongst those who have roles and authority within the people, and what God thinks of all those who overstep their assigned boundary. This remains the saddest and most dangerous challenge to godly leadership right through history – that people who have a role desire a greater one than their gifting and spiritual status warrants. Such people are not content to be lifted up by the Lord, they seek to lift themselves up, and show their pride, and that is Satan's sin.

By Jude using the word the "gainsaying" in relation to Korah, some think that Korah and his colleagues were low rabble, as well as being evil. Now we will see that he was evil, but he was of the priestly tribe with an important role, and was a respectable man, but lust for more power allowed evil to take hold of him.

A soul in rebellion against God's will and plan is foolish, but will quickly become evil. In the church you will often find it is the good workers, and apparently trustworthy and respectable people, who rebel against authority. They are people who have great ability, and significant position before the Lord, but their pride and self righteous arrogance robs them of their chance of using their ability. Remember, the biblical notion of evil is not as the world describes it, it is the word for the policy of Satan, and at its heart is pride and self centeredness. Evil is not necessarily initially nasty, dirty or awful, for Satan is often masquerading as the "angel of light" – and it is only over time that the darkness is revealed.

Rebels against divine authority often say that it is God's will that certain things are happening, or that what they are doing is right. These are often the "super spiritual" crowd; they are people who think they have something to offer God and they cannot wait for God to open the door. They think that what they have to offer is so important that they have to break the door down and knock you out of the way to achieve the goal. It is this pride that overflows into evil acts.

## FALSE SPIRITUALITY

In verses 1-3 we have “evil words”, but they are in spiritual language as Satan’s strategies are often hidden. In the church there will always be a group of people who believe they are better than their minister. They are those who have resisted the Holy Spirit in dealing with things in their own life because they feel special and “above the crowd” in their spiritual status, and so, they will start to magnify the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers to falsely try to eliminate the authority of the divinely called, empowered, and appointed pastoral leadership.

A number of people in every congregation have been appointed shepherds of the sheep by the Lord, and they have the role with the authority that must go with it. Moses is in charge and he ruled. He is a tough man, but he is God’s man for the job until the Lord replaces him. Moses heart is not hard, but, as we have seen again and again, loving, forgiving and kind towards the people. Moses will however be very tough in this rebellion, but remember that this is the twelfth attack on the Lord’s authority in the Exodus. God has been incredibly gracious, but at this point the well overdue judgment falls.

These leaders who rebel wanted to be looked up to as the people looked up to Moses. You will find that there will be people who like the pre-eminence, and have not read or understood the words of Jesus about godly leadership. Read these passages below, for these are the ones to be read aloud to rebels, for the biblical standard is anointed, humble, servant leadership. Matthew 20:20-28, 23:1-12, Mark 9:33-37, 10:35-45, Romans 12:1-16, Philippians 2:1-8, 1 Timothy 6:3-8, 3 John 9.

Those who are affected by satanic pride do not want to help the overburdened leaders they want to replace them. It would have been tremendous if they had come and said that they wanted to help Moses. Moses was overloaded and needed help. He would have loved to have had the assistance of some of the princes of Israel, but sadly he must face their pride and rebellion. By their mental attitude they betray their heart’s desire and it is for power they cannot handle and are not gifted to exercise.

These people accuse Moses of the sin which has affected them. When people have unconfessed sin in their own life they are always the quickest to think they spot that very sin in others. If you have people attacking you and accusing you of things that are wrong in your life, and thorough analysis and prayer does not disclose this being true for you, then it is probable that you have identified their problem area of sin. In psychology this is called a “180 degree accusation”, and is common with guilty and/or personality disordered people, for they will accuse others of the very thing they are guilty of. The truth will be exactly 180 degrees from what they say!

## THE BATTLE IS THE LORD’S

Moses reaction was to fall upon his face before the people, but most importantly, before God. He did not try and defend himself. He does not say that he has done this, that, and the other for the Lord. He is however an ambassador and they are not attacking him but are attacking the Lord. He did not see it as personal but saw it through the eternal life perspective. Moses is recognizing that he is in the Lord’s hands and that it is up to the Lord to judge between them.

The one thing you can say to the person who is trying to undermine your ministry is what Moses said to these people. “Let the Lord be the judge between you and me”. Put in today’s language it can be stated, “If I am unfaithful and untrue the Lord will judge me, and if you are to be my replacement, you are welcome to the Lord’s work, and I will step aside and support you”. There is no clinging to power/position amongst the Lord’s servants, for we see that we have been lifted up, and one day we need to lay aside the burden of leadership and rejoice in our replacement. Anyone without this mental attitude is a dangerous servant of the enemy!

This is the reflection of Christ in the life; evidence of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in true meekness. We must leave our case and our defence in the Lord’s hands. Moses stresses holiness before the Lord, absolute submission to His Will and the Lord’s choice in the matter of leadership.

By application today, we have the gifts of the Holy Spirit given to all believers in 1 Corinthians 12. God decides what gifts various members of the church are going to have. 1 Corinthians 12:11. It is important that the various members of the body of Christ use their own gift, and fulfil their own anointed role in the plan of God with this gifting, and not try to undertake work allocated to others. We are rewarded eternally only on the basis of our personal part in the plan, not doing other’s work for “extra credit”, for there is no such thing, only judgment if we overstep our call.

If God has called you to be a pastor that is what you will be, and in His good time He will lift you up, and in Holy Spirit empowered obedience you will serve. 1 Peter 5:5-7. If you walk in carnality you will miss your call, or mess up your calling. God chooses, and nothing is too hard for God, and so our job is to relax in His timing for His Plan, and be obedient all the way! This means to do things God’s way, and that means living a Holy Spirit filled life.

## SPIRITUAL GIFTS

Turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12 and read this chapter, and then take time to read a good commentary on this chapter. The Corinthian believers are a little bit like the rebels in the chapter of Numbers we are studying. They want to have gifts that they have not been given; they want to minister in other areas to those the Lord has allocated to them. Paul encourages them, and us all, to find out what the Lord has chosen for us to do and do that alone, in His power and

utilizing the gifting He has given within the plan. We are soldiers of the Lord, his sheep, his ambassadors, and so we are “under orders”, and so it is not for us to decide where we serve and what we do! Let us hear the Holy Spirit.

This is why individual spirituality is the key to the spiritual power of the local church. We should not want to be anywhere other than where the Lord wants us to be. If you are in the Lord's will you are safe and you will find the joy in opportunities that come. Many elders and deacons are frustrated pastors in their own eyes, but that may not be the Lord's plan for them. You need to systematically teach this principle in your church, for there are many who are tempted in the way we will see played out in this chapter, and Jude's reference to this rebellion is a warning as to just how important this is.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 12 we have the contrast used to illustrate the principle, of the eye and the ear. The Holy Spirit, in His omniscience, and in accordance with the divine plan, allocates the spiritual gifts to cater for all the work in each local church. Every gift the church needs is somewhere out there in the church, for the Lord, from eternity past, has had every detail covered in His plan. Remember also, there are “wolves” in the flock dressed as sheep, as well as many confused sheep who don't know what they are and what they should be doing! There are many Christians who are in Christian work and ministry for their own Old Sin Nature dominating reasons, and there are people from the enemy's camp who have entered just to destroy.

We are not told what final category Korah is in; it is deliberately left open, for we don't need to know his final destiny, only learn from him. God's Plan is that we should find out where we are to serve in obedience to His Plan, and do that job as unto the Lord. If you see political manoeuvres within a church, and a lack of harmony in the leadership, you know that there are serious things that are not right there. Be very scared if you desire the so called “top job” of the church. James 3:1.

Pause immediately and check your own spiritual status out, and ensure you are a sheep, and then deal with the sin of lust, envy and whatever else has moved you towards the sin of Korah! The power is not in the person who is preaching or evangelising it is in the Word and Holy Spirit of God. Do not seek the apparently “up front” job; be lifted up always, never scramble or slither up. 1 Peter 5:5-7. Sheep hear their shepherd, only snakes slither!

In verse eight, Moses reminds some of the rebels that they are the sons of Levi, and as such they have great responsibilities and privileges, and that they serve the people and the Lord through their role in the nations worship. Different families in Israel had different responsibilities with many people having a specific area. In moving the Tabernacle all these men had vital tasks that were to be honoured and followed through on. A person might have the responsibility for a few tent pegs. When the Tabernacle was re erected the provision and placement of those tent pegs was of the greatest importance. Without them the Tabernacle would be unstable. It may be a small thing to them but whatever we do for the Lord, we are to do it to the best of your ability, for it is that task that the Lord assesses our eternal rewards upon.

If you are faithful in the little things, God may give you a bigger thing to do in His time, in his plan, but if you cannot be trusted with the small thing, why would you expect promotion into a larger role? If someone thought that the tent peg was not important the Tabernacle could fall over. Every peg is important to hold the tent down. All work for the Lord is vital. God's assessment of us is not based on the standard of the nature of the senior pastor's work; it is based upon what he required us to do!

A lot of people in the church do not think that they are doing anything important. These people may however be holding the church together by their prayers and their administration tasks. Some feel they cannot do anything, and maybe they cannot do a physical task, but the Lord has called them to be a prayer warrior for the church and they spend an hour a day in prayer. That is of vital importance. I firmly believe that in heaven I will discover that the secret to the power of the ministry the Lord has called me into, will be to the credit of those who faithfully pray for it, not because of anything in me or the others who have the so called “profile”.

No matter what the Lord has given you to do you should do it “as unto the Lord”. You may feel that your work is simply to place one tent peg in the Lord's building, but if that is your role brother, just do it! The whole place is unstable without your tent peg. You may not do things that are visible and seen by others as important, but your task well done may in heaven bring greater eternal rewards to you than were won by the pastor, who may not have been so faithful.

This principle is what Moses is going to point out to Korah; that his job is important, and that his reward will be great if he is obedient. Some people will only serve if you encourage them and Moses is going to encourage Korah. You ought to pray that they might come to trust the Lord rather than respond to the praise of man, but for young believers the praise of a godly pastor will encourage, and we are to be encouragers. Even if we are not thanked for our work here on earth, we have the encouragement that we will be thanked in heaven.

If the minister does not visit some people once a year they will not attend or contribute, and may be bitter in their hearts because their egos are not being stroked. Such people are a centimetre away from Korah! As the pastor you have to encourage these people any way you can, and seek the Lord's face, that they may see His will, and not need you so much over time. Our goal as pastors is that these dependent people might learn to trust the Lord rather than us, and be looking to Him and their eternal reward for their humble obedience.

## ATTITUDE TOWARDS GOD

These people look at the land of Egypt as the land of milk and honey. They have just had a time of asking, "Why did we want to go away from there?" Dathan and Abiram will also say, "It is too hard to stay here in the pastoral lands, away from civilization". Sometimes things get really tough on the Lord's path and we can be tempted to look at other options, but there are none that are not "cursed" paths. It is very easy to try and get popular with everybody around you and do what they want to do, but the Lord's call is to follow the path, and that means HIS "narrow/hard path", not our preferred one. Matthew 7:13-14.

Moses puts these people into the hands of God. They are going to offer sacrifices on the morrow and he asks that their prayers be not heard, and leaves the outcome with God, who they insult by this action. Moses challenges them and request of the Lord his decision. If they think that they are leaders of the congregation, then let them come before God, and let Him decide. Moses is practising his "Ambassadorship" here – the insult is to God not him. 2 Corinthians 5:20.

In verse 19 Korah gathered everybody who supports him before him, he is so proud he is still opposing Moses. He does not see this as standing against God. God tells Moses to speak to the people, and tell everyone to pull back from Dathan and Abiram. The warning is clear, "Do not touch anything of theirs as they are going to be consumed".

Moses says that he is not the leader of this congregation because he wants to be but because God has called him. Now reflect upon a scary fact; Dathan, Korah and Abiram were sincere in what they were doing. They genuinely believed they were able to replace Moses. They may have been sincere but they are sincerely wrong. What is right, is right because it is Biblical, not because you say it. If you are wrong, and you persist in the false path, you can go down to the "sin unto death", and that is what happens here. If you are going to serve the Lord, you are to be obedient to His Word. We must ascertain what the Lord wants us to do and keep our eyes on Him, obey His Word, and seek only His path for our life.

There is a very strong warning here in this chapter. God is not fooled by hypocritical good intentions motivated by Old Sin Nature pride or envy. God is only impressed by your obedience to His Will. If you want Him to say, "Well done good and faithful servant", then you must be a good and faithful servant. Moses is told to separate from them and call the people back from them. When people are in conflict with God's Word you need first to warn, but if they reject that, you are to pull back from them. Go to them to win them, go with a friend, bring them before the church. Give them opportunity to repent. Then pull back, and let the Lord deal with these people if they fail to obey. Jesus didn't chase after the rich young ruler!

After you have gone through the procedure described in the doctrinal study above, then withdraw from those who persist in active rejection of the plan and person of God. Don't get self righteous when you deal with this sort of person, but be humble and fearful of falling into a similar sin. Deal with your own mental attitude sins quickly, for if you allow them to pile up, the discipline will pile up behind them.

The evil of the rebels is the serious nature of their mental attitude sins of jealousy, pride, envy, and power lust. In light of this fact, Moses says that if they die a common death, then he was not a prophet. He says this because the rebellion is a uniquely significant one, and the Lord must certify this by means of a unique and, as we will see "surgically precise" death for the rebels. These people are going to die a different death, so different that people will know that they have been judged. There is no room for sentimentality, God is absolutely just and where the Lord judges His own, He does so in perfect justice. The sin unto death is always an awful thing, but it comes only after persistence of a person, who "sins with a high hand", just as we saw with the Sabbath Breaker last chapter.

If you make yourself right before the Lord, through confession and walking in the Spirit in obedience to the Word, then the Lord can make every day count for you upon this earth, and bless both you and your entire family. Here sadly, we see the wives and families of the three key men encouraging the rebellion. Let me tell you in advance, that not all the sons of the three rebel leaders died. In Numbers 26:11, we have a definite note that the sons of Korah did not die, and in first Chronicles we find that all of the sons that lived went on to serve the Lord, and their descendents become the singers of the Lord. They apparently pulled back from their own fathers and joined Moses when the call came to stand where God wanted them to stand.

It is of note that they enter the land, and this tells us that they were also all under twenty, whereas the rebels are all over twenty, and are the ones judged by the Lord to die in the wilderness. In days when teenagers can get a black reputation for rebellion let us remember that it is often the teenagers that lead the spiritual life of a church through their passion for the Lord! Let us encourage them in and through our teaching of the Word to them!

Spiritual passion, with the full counsel of the Word of God, is the combination God wants! Let's get busy pastors, and teach the whole Word of the Lord to all our people! The satanic counterfeit philosophy of worldliness gives our teenagers distracting nonsense to deceive themselves with, and the drugs to go with it. We are called to give truth; let us not "dumb down" the truth for them, as too many do!

As we will see below, the older age of the rebels may be a contributor to their rebellious nature, for they may have felt they had nothing to lose, as they were now denied the land, so wanted the prosperity and power they could get in the nation on the march. It is also of note that the teenagers finally stood for the Lord and opposed their parents in truth, and when the opportunity came they escaped to join their believing relatives, who stood with Moses. This is the right sort of teenage rebellion, and is encouraged by the scripture, for the day comes when a son must separate from his own father

and mother if they will not advance in the Lord! Matthew 10:34-39, 15:3-6, 19:28-30, Luke 8:19-21, 14:25-27, 18:20, John 19:25-28.

We are to look after our parents in their old age, and honour them by our loving care for them, but separate from their life style and behaviours, and even oppose them in debate, if they will not advance for the Lord, or try to make us live in sin or evil. Respect for parents and obedience to their commands has a limit, and that limit is when they call us to oppose the plan and purposes of God. Acts 5:29-32, 1 Timothy 5:8.

## NUMBERS 16:1-50

**16:1** Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: **2** And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: **3** And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD? **4** And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face: **5** And he spake unto Korah and unto all his company, saying, Even tomorrow the LORD will shew who are his, and who is holy; and will cause him to come near unto him: even him whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him. **6** This do; Take you censers, Korah, and all his company; **7** And put fire therein, and put incense in them before the LORD tomorrow: and it shall be that the man whom the LORD doth choose, he shall be holy: ye take too much upon you, ye sons of Levi. **8** And Moses said unto Korah, Hear, I pray you, ye sons of Levi: **9** Seemeth it but a small thing unto you, that the God of Israel hath separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to himself to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister unto them? **10** And he hath brought thee near to him, and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with thee: and seek ye the priesthood also? **11** For which cause both thou and all thy company are gathered together against the LORD: and what is Aaron, that ye murmur against him? **12** And Moses sent to call Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab: which said, We will not come up: **13** Is it a small thing that thou hast brought us up out of a land that floweth with milk and honey, to kill us in the wilderness, except thou make thyself altogether a prince over us? **14** Moreover thou hast not brought us into a land that floweth with milk and honey, or given us inheritance of fields and vineyards: wilt thou put out the eyes of these men? we will not come up. **15** And Moses was very wroth, and said unto the LORD, Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them. **16** And Moses said unto Korah, Be thou and all thy company before the LORD, thou, and they, and Aaron, tomorrow: **17** And take every man his censer, and put incense in them, and bring ye before the LORD every man his censer, two hundred and fifty censers; thou also, and Aaron, each of you his censer. **18** And they took every man his censer, and put fire in them, and laid incense thereon, and stood in the door of the tabernacle of the congregation with Moses and Aaron. **19** And Korah gathered all the congregation against them unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the congregation. **20** And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, **21** Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them in a moment. **22** And they fell upon their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and wilt thou be wroth with all the congregation? **23** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **24** Speak unto the congregation, saying, Get you up from about the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. **25** And Moses rose up and went unto Dathan and Abiram; and the elders of Israel followed him. **26** And he spake unto the congregation, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins. **27** So they gat up from the tabernacle of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, on every side: and Dathan and Abiram came out, and stood in the door of their tents, and their wives, and their sons, and their little children. **28** And Moses said, Hereby ye shall know that the LORD hath sent me to do all these works; for I have not done them of mine own mind. **29** If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men; then the LORD hath not sent me. **30** But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD. **31** And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: **32** And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. **33** They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation. **34** And all Israel that were round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also. **35** And there came out a fire from the LORD, and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense. **36** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **37** Speak unto Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, that he take up the censers out of the burning, and scatter thou the fire yonder; for they are hallowed. **38** The censers of these sinners against their own souls, let them make them broad plates for a covering of the altar: for they offered them before the LORD, therefore they are hallowed: and they shall be a sign unto the children of Israel. **39** And Eleazar the priest took the brazen censers, wherewith they that were burnt had offered; and they were made broad plates for a covering of the altar: **40** To be a memorial unto the children of Israel, 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: as the LORD said to him by the hand of Moses. **41** But on the morrow all the congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron, saying, Ye have killed the people of the LORD. **42** And it came to pass, when the congregation was gathered against Moses and against Aaron, that they looked toward the tabernacle of the congregation: and, behold, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the LORD appeared. **43** And Moses and Aaron came before the tabernacle of the congregation. **44** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **45** Get you up from among this

congregation, that I may consume them as in a moment. And they fell upon their faces. 46 And Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly unto the congregation, and make an atonement for them: for there is wrath gone out from the LORD; the plague is begun. 47 And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people: and he put on incense, and made an atonement for the people. 48 And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed. 49 Now they that died in the plague were fourteen thousand and seven hundred, beside them that died about the matter of Korah. 50 And Aaron returned unto Moses unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation: and the plague was stayed.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 3.** The timing of this rebellion is unclear. It certainly happens in a campsite with the tabernacle set up. Does it occur after they leave Kadesh Barnea at some point in the wilderness journey? We cannot be sure when this occurs, although Moses arrangement of material in the book would indicate to me that this is early rather than late in the journey back into Arabia and Mt Seir, and it is certainly at a camp site, for the tabernacle is raised up.

My suspicion is that it may occur even in the Kadesh campsite before they leave, as a comment made in the final summing up of the journey in Deuteronomy indicates they may have camped at Kadesh for some time after the return of the defeated rebellious army. Deuteronomy 1:41 – 2:7.

From the content of the rebels "ultimatum" I suspect they are, at this time, closer, rather than farther away from Egypt, and further away from the true "wilderness" where they will spend the next forty years. It appears that the rebels do not want to be away from "civilization" much longer. They long for the settled towns and cities to dwell in, with solid walls around them. They have only lost these things due to their lack of faith in the first place, and yet their pride is still high, and they believe that they can succeed by a management "reshuffle" where their army has failed.

As we will see, these men follow the viewpoint that is common with people who have a fatally flawed philosophy, character, and present practice, but refuse to review their lives. They argue that, "if we just re-organize, and all tried harder, we would have been alright". It is not trying harder, with managerial changes, which are needed to get to their final destination, it is accepting God's verdict and following through on God's plan in God's power alone.

The rebels are one son of Korah, a Levite, and three sons of Reuben. One of these (On) will drop out of the rebellion later and be saved from the other's fate. Turn back to Genesis 49:4. Reuben is told that he will not have the pre-eminence in the nation because of his sin of adultery with his father's concubine. His sons are denied the leadership of the nation as a whole by God's direct word to their ancestor. The prophetic word from the Lord directly through Moses has further given the verdict; they are all in tents until the forty years are up, and they are to be led by Moses, Numbers 14, and they are urged to accept this and follow Moses.

Their rebellion is serious, and involves gathering 250 "princes". Now once again the numbers here may be anywhere from 25 upwards, and for them all to be "men of renown" the smaller the number, the more likely it is to be close to the mark. These may be men who did not go up with the army in the days/weeks before and so have some "renown" as having wise counsel. Men of human renown they may be, but they are not God's men of renown! They begin at the place where we know they have not followed the Lord at all and they betray by their words and actions that they still believe in themselves, but do not have faith in God's choices and plans.

The rebellion breaks out strongly and suddenly from the leadership of the nation staging an attempted managerial "coup". Moses way of dealing with this is masterly and instructive to all of us who are in leadership positions under such attack. The "princes" of the people are the leaders of the tribes and sub groups. Remember, from them already Moses has chosen, 70 Judges, (Exodus 18:13-27), senior officers commanding each Tribal Battalion, (Numbers 2:3ff), and a managerial team of 70 Elders for governmental and leadership decision making, (Numbers 11:16ff). These men have all be chosen from a pool of men referred to as alternately, princes or Elders. The rebels, however many there may be, are drawn from this pool, and are all likely members of one of the three groups of the 152 men already in leadership.

Moses records the basics for us, as he is writing to advise later leadership on methods for dealing with rebellion, not "naming and shaming" them all here, so the only names we have are the four leaders of the revolt. The key man is Korah, who clearly lays claim to be the High Priest (verse 17) and it may be the others lay claim to be the leadership team in Moses place. Moses is a Levite and the sons of Reuben affirm their "birth right", but God has set all such things aside by his choice of Moses.

Now I am still saying "Moses records" the details here, and I will continue to do so. I still believe that Moses wrote these five books before us. I accept that Joshua, Samuel, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Ezra may have made some editorial comments in some places, but that the basic content here is that of Moses, recording leadership instruction for us. I have seriously academically studied the "hypothesis" of multiple authorship of at least five unknown writers, and still reject it, and this word by word study through the material has not shifted me in any way towards the so called "recognized academic and scholarly" opinion. I consider the "German Critics" words as pagan rubbish!

I have just read this last night a major article in the Biblical Archaeological Review by a leading Jewish Orthodox writer who argues for a composite book, certainly NOT written by Moses. I still reject his viewpoint, not by "blind faith", nor due to my ignorant fundamentalism, but because it does not ring true as I go through these books. The content makes me

conclude, they are a managerial guide for later leadership, and a record of events and teachings, essentially by one man who knew he was at a turning point in history. Through the time I have been writing the commentary on Numbers I have been reading for relaxation each evening Winston Churchill's, "History of the Second World War".

Churchill has a masterly writing style and wrote as one who also knew he stood at a turning point in history. This is how I still see the books of Moses; I see them as his books, with some editorial changes, to minister more effectively to a later generation, and possibly some additional elements by Holy Spirit empowered later leaders, but essentially as his work. The content of these books is so fundamental to faith and leadership, and they will prove so essential as a training manual for the Jewish leadership during the Great Tribulation period, that we must expect them to be attacked, with the book of Daniel and Zechariah, with unnatural vigour by those who hate the truth of the certainty of a culmination in human history coming with the return of Messiah Y'shua.

The enemy HATES these books and must undermine their credibility, and we can expect the attacks upon their authority and truth to increase in coming years. Do not be afraid of the JEPD+ "hypothesis", for hypothesis it is, and thorough study does not undermine Mosaic authorship, it supports it. The liberals attack Mosaic authorship, and even his historicity, and mock those who maintain it. Be prepared to be mocked, and learn from Moses as he is mocked in this chapter. Select your company believer – but I for one stand with the historic Moses and his authorship of these books, and I know I will not be embarrassed when I meet him in heaven. At least the German Critics wont have to be embarrassed, for they were pagans in all their works, and their Anti-Semitic viewpoint leads directly to Nazism.

**Verses 4 – 7.** Moses first response is to fall upon his face before the Lord and the company of conspirators. He adopts the posture of prayer immediately, exactly as modern Moslems do today. He prays to the Lord and places himself in the Lord's hands for safety and security, and for the answer to this problem. His solution comes to him from this prayer interchange with the Lord and he will give the Lord the opportunity to decide between them all. This remains the best approach when we face such serious rebellion. God knows those who serve him with a pure heart and he remembers them and stands with them to protect them. Malachi 3:16-18, 2 Timothy 2:15-19.

The issue is God's choice of leadership, not men's opinions. Moses recognizes this principle of godly and anointed leadership and states it bluntly. The Lord will decide who is to remain the leader, or who is to be replaced. This is the certainty that every called pastor-teacher can have. We can place ourselves in the Lord's hands at all times and leave the outcome with the Lord, for the desire of the Lord's man is always to be where HE wants us to be, and if we need to be moved, we are content with the Lord's order and will move. Moses recognizes another important principle when facing a coup, and that is to move quickly. There is a night for prayer and preparation, but no longer, lest the enemy lead more astray than have been already. Always move quickly to deal with dissension. 2 Peter 2:4-22.

Always remember that the Lord alone appoints and anoints His leadership, and there is no election by men that can create an anointed leader, only God's appointment can. Our challenge in leadership decisions is always to identify the people the Lord has brought to us for leadership, never to "make leaders". Not many leaders are needed, and not all can be leaders; this is the sovereignty of God, and those who seek such things indicate a level of pride that will be as destructive to them as it will be to any church foolish enough to appoint them.

Study and teach the following passages whenever you meet people tempted to move into roles that they do not have gifting or calling into. Jeremiah 45:1-5, Luke 12:48, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, 18, James 3:1. These men standing proudly before Moses have gone too far, but they will still have the opportunity to pull back from the judgment, even to the last minute. 1 Kings 18:17ff.

The call of Moses centres in the use of the censors and the words of Moses to the group indicate that the "sons of Levi" are seriously represented amongst the rebels, possibly even in the majority. Given the probable small numbers of the Levites, this is another comment that Moses makes that makes me think the number of rebels is smaller than the LXX translation of the numerical reference. These men however clearly believe that they are entitled to rule, and they are dissatisfied with their job description as carriers of the tabernacle and its contents. They want the role of priest and even that of High Priest. They want to wave a censor. They have chosen the task they want and so they will be judged as worthy or unworthy relating to that task!

To us this desire to wave smoke around is ridiculous, but in this day it was the sign of a special anointed person, allowed and anointed to wave the holy smoke of incense before the Lord. They are all told to get their censors (they already have them – even though they are not really entitled to own or use them) and get their incense, even though they are not supposed to have any. It may be that they were allowed to take coals from the Altar, so that the fire is holy, for that will make the contest "fair". Note that they have to deliberately break the Law to challenge Moses!

It is incredible that these men should attempt to do what Nadab and Abihu had done and been judged with death for, (although I suspect they did get their fire from the altar this time – whereas the two sons of Aaron got their own fire), and yet human nature always has the capacity to surprise us in its persistence in self centeredness, even when the evidence of its outcome is clearly and demonstrably bad. Exodus 30:7-9, 22-37, Leviticus 10:1-3, 16:11-13.

**Verses 8 - 11.** Moses solemnly and sincerely warns the rebels of their great sin before the Lord and pleads with them to see what the Lord has given them, and not lust after the power that God has given Moses. Moses is a humble enough man, that had been believed these men were the Lord's replacement for him, then he would have stepped aside, but he knows they are not and so he follows through with their challenge and challenges them.

There is a time to give way to a challenge, but it is rare, and will only be when we have failed to see the Lord telling us to stand aside earlier. In all other situations the God appointed leader is to fight and do so with spiritual weapons, even if it leads (as it always will do when the attack has satanic origins) in the splitting of a congregation. Ephesians 6:10-18.

The role these men have is a special anointed role. They have the care for the tabernacle and before the Lord this is their task, and they are to seek no other. James 4:7-17, 1 Peter 5:6-7. They have been appointed to be the servants of the priesthood and this role is both holy for them and the source of their eternal and earthly reward. They need seek no further role, for they are not to be the priests, that role is for the sons of Aaron.

Moses makes it clear that their rebellion is not against Aaron and himself, but against the Lord Himself, for it is the Lord who has chosen the men and the roles they are to fulfil. The Lord has chosen them, and they will be blessed if they fulfil their role, but to reject the Lord's call is to insult the holy character and plan of God – it is no light thing! God still does, call us to specific tasking and roles, and we are best to pay careful attention to these things!

It is also of interest that Aaron must face this rejection of his authority only a few weeks after he had rebelled against Moses himself. Numbers 12:1ff. We will often find that our own serious sin comes back to bite us, and educate us later. When this occurs we are to claim Romans 8:28, and keep moving through it, for God can turn the cursing of the consequences of sin into blessing in the godly path that we are now walking.

**Verses 12 - 14.** Korah is apparently alone, with the other rebels of Levi, when the warning is given, as Moses notes Dathan and Abiram refuse to come back to the tabernacle to hear the warning, but they send their bitter and informative message to Moses, which he records for us. Their message indicates to me that these events most likely do occur at Kadesh. They criticize Moses first for bringing them to defeat, not victory, and to a wilderness not a land of milk and honey. So their attack centres in the concept of "breach of promise" on Moses part, missing altogether the reasons within themselves for the failure to seize the land when they could have done so. Exodus 3:8, 17, 4:30-31, Numbers 14:1-5.

They fear Moses power and expect him to "put the eyes out" of his enemies, and so they will not approach the tabernacle at all. There has been no reference to "putting the eyes out" of anyone in the entire record of Moses before us, so where does this come from? It may be that the rebellious spies at Kadesh died with their eyes burning, or gripping their eyes, as if they were being cut out. Moses is not specific as to the nature of the "plague" they died suddenly of, and this may be a clue that it involved something awful happening to the eyes. That would certainly have been appropriate for the spies, as they saw good and reported evil. Numbers 14:37.

**Verses 15 – 17.** Moses was very angry, and anger is not always wrong, and it isn't wrong here. The Lord got angry, and at the same sort of hypocrisy and evil. We must however be very careful when we are angry, for we may do what is not right when overcome by emotion, and the Lord's command to us, is "be angry, but sin not!" Matthew 5:21-22, 21:12-13, Mark 3:1-5, John 2:13-17, Ephesians 4:26. Notice Moses words again here. There may be a clue as to other criticisms that were levelled against him, for what is recorded is only the tip of a significant iceberg of discontent. When people fail, they will either confront their failures and make the required life changes, or they will seek others to blame, and the leadership is the prime candidate for blame. At times it may be warranted to blame leadership, but here it is not.

Have these men accused Moses of taking animals from them as "tribute" to the leader? Has he taken an Ass to ride upon? It is not clear why Moses refers to the Ass here, but it is clear that he is able to come before the Lord and state that he has never used his position of authority to be granted favours or receive gifts. He has not behaved corruptly, and this is a solemn statement that we must be able to make before the Lord if we are to serve Him also. We will be accused of many things in our ministry, but no bad accusation must ever be true; we must be "blameless" before the Lord. 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:19.

**Verses 18 – 22.** Moses has told them to gather the following day with their censors, incense, and fire and meet at the tabernacle. The tents of Korah are on the border of the tabernacle itself, so they are not far from it, whereas the rebels from Reuben are further away. This is why when the Reubenite rebels who left the meeting the day before were able to hide in their tents a fair way away, but Korah is right there by the tabernacle wall. They all have the night to think things over, pray and repent, and change their position the next day. Their families also have the night to decide which way they are to go. Will they heed politics or will they pray and heed God?

It was normal for children to support their parents and wives to stand by their husbands, but this matter is one of worship of the Lord and the families are going to get the opportunity from the Lord to make their own minds up, and the sons of Korah at least, are not going to be standing with their father, and a number of the others are also going to leave their father's camp and stand with Moses. Korah spends the night politicking, and has his crowd by the door of the tabernacle the next day. They are there standing shoulder to shoulder with the rebel. The glory of the Lord appears and they do not move, which shows they were convinced that they were correct and Moses was wrong, and that God would side with them. There are sincere, as many rebels are, but they are sincerely wrong.

The Lord speaks to Moses and it is the message of separation from those who are standing in rebellion. The people who stand for the Lord are to draw back from those who persist in their rebellion. Sadly the vast majority of the people are standing with Korah and the Lord threatens to annihilate them all. This is a real threat, if they persist, but it is also a test again for Moses and Aaron to express their love for the foolish and unstable people they lead. Both leaders meet the

challenge and pray, interceding for the people that they might be saved. Isaiah 64:1ff. This is the challenge of leadership, to pray for those who abuse you and despitely use you. Matthew 5:44.

**Verses 23 – 27.** There is to be a volitional test for the people who have stood with the rebels, and each is to really consider their stand before the judgment will fall. On has clearly left the group by this time and the Lord does not refer to him. The rebellion appears strong but through the night many have been thinking, and most are wavering. The men at the centre of Korah's group stand firm, although the vast majority of the people pull away as the confrontation draws close.

This is a major example of the importance of standing up to rebels and coup leaders, and calling the people to stand for the truth. Most rebels are easily led fools, and if challenged will change their allegiance quickly. Never be impressed with the numbers of the coup leader's followers, for they are just "followers" and may be swung back to the truth by strength of purpose and the real leaders challenge.

The Lord tells Moses to call the people out and he does, and note that the majority of the elders have rejoined Moses and now stand firmly behind him, although sadly it is not all of them. The rebels stand firmly by their tents with their wives and children. It is clear that they have exercised their control over their little children and they are gathered in front of them, daring the Lord to judge them and their children. They are using their children to shield themselves against the divine wrath and from the results of God's judgment here the majority of the children are adults, not toddlers.

Moses approaches the tents of Reuben where those of Dathan and Abiram are located and he speaks directly to these men and their supporters again. The people are told to separate well away from them, touch nothing of theirs, and leave immediately because these people are "wicked" and will be destroyed and the majority leave. They have all seen the deaths of Nadab and Abihu and know what may come upon these people. Leviticus 10.

**Verses 28 – 33.** Moses now addresses the entire congregation as it now stands separated now from the rebels, with these wicked men by their separate tents in the areas of Levi and Reuben. It would appear that those next to these men even moved their tents at Moses warning, making a clear separation of their tent spaces. Isaiah 52:11, 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, 1 Timothy 5:20-22. Moses asks the Lord to destroy these people in an entirely different way to anything before seen, and that if they do not die in a different way, then he is not a prophet.

Moses is laying himself firmly on the line here, and must do so, for the people have clearly been very disheartened and disappointed with his leadership to get to this point, and they need a real demonstration of power to turn things around more permanently. If I am correct in my assumption that this event occurs before they leave for their forty years of wandering, this is especially important, as they all need to really commit to Moses before they break camp and head out for what will be for all the adults over twenty their death march!

The ground shakes and opens up in the two separate places and "swallows up" the people and destroys their belongings, although as Moses will note later, no-one dies at this point. Everything that pertained to these men was flattened or destroyed in an instant. It appears, at this point in the narrative, the children of the three key rebels perish with them, and this is hard for us to accept, even though we see it in our newspapers every day. As we will see below in verse 35, and in Numbers 26:11, there may be an escape for all of them, and they may not die at all. We will note that the sons of Korah particularly all live. However it is important to address this issue of the death of children due to the evil of their parent's actions.

The death of children due to the stupidity, or wickedness of their parents is a regular occurrence still, and we see this sort of report of the death of children, due to parental neglect, gross stupidity, or evil, in our newspapers. Those who seek reasons to hate God will seize upon this sort of event and any others like it from their newspapers and abuse God for this injustice. The sad truth is that since sin entered the human race in the Garden of Eden sinful man has been open to all the evils that rejection of God's way and Word brings upon them and their dependents.

The death of children is always a tragedy, but the responsibility for these deaths is the evil of the parents, not the malice of the Lord. It may be that the children were not killed here; as we will see in verses 35 below, but we must allow that some may have been; we simply cannot be sure. Evil will work out over time into great tragedy and loss for all who are seduced by it, and the innocent at times do die in the process, but the children, if they die here, are not lost forever with their parents. We have God's word upon that. They are in heaven praising God, not abusing Him for injustice. 2 Samuel 12:18-23, Matthew 18:6, 10.

This is part of the great sadness of God at the cost of man's fall. We do not pause and weep enough over the cost of sin, and because the preaching of recent years has been so weak on this subject people do not see things as God sees them. Pastors, let us preach more on the awfulness of sin, and the wonders of Heaven, for all people need to reflect upon both realities as they open their newspapers each day. Children are always in Jesus arms.

**Verses 34 – 40.** There was a tremendous and awful sound as the ground opened up and "swallowed up" some of the people who offered up the incense and claimed the priesthood without God's call to the role. Even though it would appear none were killed by this initial shock, fear gripped all those around them, and there was a panic in the camp. What appears to have happened was both an earthquake and then seconds or minutes later, fire from the Lord (lightning strikes? – We don't know exactly, but the result was terror upon all the people).

The ground had opened up in such a way that the people were not apparently killed, but scattered, and that then fire fell selectively to kill the guilty ones, and that many of the censors were still there scattered amongst the dead burned bodies. This is an awful sight, and Eleazar is asked by the Lord through Moses to go in and uplift all the censors from amongst the charred bodies and retrieve them. The earthquake may have frightened the rebels enough to break up their family groups and allow the women and children to exercise their real spiritual choice and flee to the safety of the tents of their relatives.

We know that the “Sons of Korah” all lived, Numbers 26:11, and later serve the Lord. My position above, has been that they were the teenagers, who may have separated either early from their father over the rebellion, (and that may still be so), but equally possible is the fact that this two stage judgment the Lord sends may have given all the women and children time and opportunity to escape the consequences of their father’s evil, and so express their true beliefs, and their rejection of the father’s evil. Either way the children of Korah at least are saved. We do not get told here about the sons and daughters of the other rebels.

Eleazar collects the brazen censors that the rebels had used the fire within, and has them beaten into plates to go upon the altar. They are termed “holy items”, and this indicates that the rebels did indeed use holy fire from the altar. These plates are to be used for service on the altar, possibly holding the meat portions cut from the sacrificial animals in the process of sacrifice. These rebels had used holy fire when that was forbidden to them in their area of service, and so the very items they use are now used for another holy purpose, but they themselves have ended their usefulness as servants of the Lord through their disobedience. The message is strong; what is holy is to be handled by those approved and appointed by the Lord alone, and once a thing is holy then it is to be treated this way forever. The people are to learn the “fear of the Lord”, and not trifle with the things of God ever again.

**Verses 41 – 50.** The next day the people, like all who have witnessed a traumatic event are still in a state of agitation, and shock, and they blame Moses for the deaths of the men who were burned up before the Lord. This is another serious attack upon Moses authority, the thirteenth such attack in as many months. For those who seek authority or leadership roles in the Lord’s work, pause and reflect upon the attacks that Moses has endured, and examine your own heart over this matter. How ready are you for this sort of pressure? To do great things for God, great things are expected, and great difficulties may be experienced. Great power is needed to exercise great roles, and that is only available to those who walk close to Jesus and are Spirit filled!

Many think that the path of the Lord’s will is smooth, but this study is showing us the opposite, for the truth is, all who will follow the Lord will know trouble! Matthew 7:13-23. If anyone is dumb enough to want to be an apostle, just take a look at 2 Corinthians 11:21 – 12:12, and thank God that no-one is called to this role any more! Only one of the apostles died of natural causes, and that was John, and even then, it was after exile and incarceration in jail at Patmos.

There is another test for Moses after the people “murmur” against him yet again. The Lord invites Moses to pull back from the people and for the Lord to judge them fully and finally for their persistent stupidity in the matter of faith and life! Moses meets this challenge and intercedes again on their behalf and they are spared. Moses moves quickly with his orders to Aaron to deal with the issue of unconfessed sin on the part of the people, and Aaron is quickly dispatched to make atonement for the people and then waft the censors smoke over the people.

Those who pulled back from the real sacrifice and wanted nothing to do with the atonement die of what Moses calls “the plague”. We do not know how or what they died of, except that those who died, did so because they hated the demands of God upon them and did not want to be a part of the journey for the next forty years. Their negative volition at this point was “terminal” for them, but remember again, this is the thirteenth time they have been part of rebellion against the Lord.

The details of this chapter have been hard going, but it would appear the Lord was very selective and even “surgical” in the removal of the guilty adults without hurting the children where possible, yet these people still want God’s blessing without holiness and separation from evil and sin. They want holiness without the elimination of sin, and many actually prefer sin and evil. Many say they desire holiness but want to live without the hard calls that are needed to walk away from sin, evil and compromise. The people want their relatives alive, but they cannot be unless they had repented, and three of the four would not repent of their evil, even though given time and opportunity. It is this that the people must come to terms with, and so must we.

There is a limit to the time we have upon this earth and persistent negativity to the plans of God will lead to what the bible calls the SIN UNTO DEATH. I have personally had two male friends, men I had loved from childhood days, who I believe died the “Sin Unto Death”, and each had walked away from the Lord, and stayed away, for twenty to thirty years before the Lord took them home, out of this world, (where they had long ceased to make any spiritual difference). God will judge, but all judgment is the Lord’s strange work and the Lord is very patient with us all. Let us thank God for that fact! Isaiah 28:21ff.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. There is a limit to the patience of the Lord with us, and it is when we have become “oxygen thieves”, simply taking up room here without making a difference for the Lord upon the planet. When we are of no earthly good we will be taken out! Let us come to terms with the justice and righteousness of the Lord in this matter. God is not mean or unjust, but deliberate in His decisions. We avoid judgment by obedience in the plan. Why must men and women have judgment when they could have blessing? All that separates the two situations is our obedience or our persistent disobedience!

2. To serve in a leadership role is to draw attack like a magnet draws steel. The enemy hates those who stand for God, let alone those who lead others to stand for God. Expect attack pastor and don't weep and wail when it comes; instead, pray and advance in obedient service as you see Moses doing here.

Don't take attacks personally, for the people who hate the Lord or His will must hate you if you stand for these things. Moses spends a lot of his time on his face in this chapter, and having prayed he stands and speaks the truth still. Let us spend more time at prayer, and so walk through our difficulties in the power that prayer brings.

3. Be patient in your work for the Lord and do not seek another man's role. The Lord has called us to serve Him in the place we are to stay until we receive "HIS orders" to move on. Let us be absolute in our obedience in these matters and support the pastoral team we serve within. When the Lord is ready to move us up He will. Let us relax and do our work "as unto the Lord" until then. Problems in any ministry will not be solved by managerial re-organizations, but by Holy Spirit directed wisdom that will come by means of prayer. God appoints His leaders and He removes them. Let us walk in the fear of the Lord and advance to win the crown of life ourselves in the power of the Holy Spirit and never play politics in the church.

4. Children are safe in the Lord's hands, and even if they die as a result of their parent's foolishness or evil they are safe with the Lord. We can proclaim this at any funeral we take, for we have God's Word upon it.

5. Anger is understandable but unnecessary in the Lord's work, for the Lord will sort things out. Our job is to position ourselves in the Spirit filled place and leave the Lord to lead and advise. We must always be ready to say, "the Lord judge between me and you" to any who attack us, and that means we must walk close to the Lord every day of our life and service.

### **REFLECTION UPON WHAT IS INVOLVED IN - "SHEPHERDING THE LORD'S SHEEP"**

**1Peter 5:2-4** "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; 3 neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away."

1. As pastors we are all "fellow-elders", equals before God, tried by suffering, focused and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and with a heart for service, and an expectation of glory within to drive us.

2. We are to "shepherd the flock; loving, self sacrificial service is in view here.

3. We are to feed the flock; they must not starve when they are with us.

4. They are God's flock, not ours. We have the care and responsibility, but we answer to the Lord himself for our work with the flock he has given us.

5. We are to exercise oversight, so as to receive a good report from the Lord, and we are to be focused, as we serve Him, on His well done not anything else (Matthew 25:21-23).

6. We are to serve in a free way, under the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not from any other "constraint". No compulsion is to drive us except the desire coming from within from love for our Lord.

7. We are to be as keen as a volunteer, and with all the passion that this involves.

8. Lust for money, power, authority, position, or reputation, are not to be a part of our lives at all. Such lust for power is illustrated by Diotrephes (3 John 9-10).

9. We are to be filled with passion, ready to serve, with total zeal for the task to which we are called.

10. Not lording it over the flock, as monarchs or dictators.

11. Being patterns, role models that others can follow in holy and joy filled living.

12. Being focused on winning the crown of glory, that is the eternal reward for the pastor who serves well. This involves being prepared to wear the crown of suffering in time with glory in our hearts, for they are fixed on eternal realities, where our true reward will be received.

Lazy pastors, power or money hungry pastors, are strongly rebuked here, and are reminded that the Lord's expectation of them is serious, and the consequences of failure or success (as the Lord determines it), are eternal. The Lord is the Chief Shepherd, he is the one to whom we must give account, and it is his well done that we are to focus on.

**REFLECTION UPON THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT**

1. The filling of the Holy Spirit produces fruit in the life (love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance). (Galatians 5:22-23) Note that "fruit" is singular - all the characters are produced at the same time in the filling of the Holy Spirit. Without these fruits we are suspect in our spirituality!
2. The Fruit of the Spirit is also listed as follows:-  
 Romans 14:17 - Righteousness, Peace, Joy  
 Colossians 3:12-15 - Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience, Forgiveness, Love, Peace, Thankfulness  
 1Thessalonians 1:3 - Faith, Love, Endurance, Hope
2. In principle, it is the imitation of God (Ephesians 5:1). The reason we are left on the earth after salvation is to produce fruit. (John 15:16, Philippians 4:17)
3. We produce fruit by hearing the word (Mark 4:20-28) and applying it to our lives. (Hebrews 4:2)
4. Failure to grow and produce fruit means divine discipline even to the point of the believer's early departure from this life. (Luke 13:6-9 John 15:2)
5. Rewards in eternity are distributed on the basis of faithful production. (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, 2 Corinthians 5:10)
6. Fruit is not to be confused with spiritual gifts. These are listed in (Romans 12:6-8; 15:18-19; 1Corinthians 12:8,10; 1Corinthians 12:28-30; Ephesians 4:1) and other places.
7. One can know Christians by their fruit (Matthew 7:16-20; Luke 6:43-45; 1John 3:10 & 11; John 15:8) especially by their love (John 13:35) but not by their gifts, as Satan can imitate them (2Thessalonians 2:9).
8. Three natural fruits represent some of the facets of the fruit of the Spirit: Apples - love, Grapes - Joy, Pomegranates - Peace.
9. In Galatians 5: 22-23 the fruit of the Spirit is divided into three sections
  - [a] Love, Joy and Peace towards God;
  - [b] Patience, Goodness and Kindness towards others;
  - [c] Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-control towards oneself.

**CHAPTER 17**

**INTRODUCTION**

Aaron has attacked Moses himself, and then faced the sadness of having his position attacked, and then been used by the Lord with his own censor to heal the plague of the people who attacked him, just as Moses prayers forgave him and healed Miriam after their attack upon Moses. Truly Aaron has sinned, learned, interceded, and moved on in forgiveness himself. He is an example of Romans 8:28 and 1 Corinthians 10:13. The Lord will often let us experience things, after a failure on our part, which teaches us firmly the lessons that flow from that failure. By so doing the Lord allows us to fully learn the truth to replace the Old Sin Nature stupidity that guided us, but also others are corrected in the process.

This thirteenth rebellion of the people is a serious one and must be fully played out, with all those who persist in their bad mental attitude (despising of the leadership), eliminated from the people before they march out from Kadesh Barnea. All those who have any residual doubts about their leaders, need to have them dealt with fully and finally by a demonstration of God's choice in power and miracle sign.

All the people will die over the next forty years, but these men and women who will not change are judged here, at the place of their rebellion, within days or weeks of the death of the spies who they allowed to deceive themselves. The Lord now requests Moses to complete a public ritual that will bind the survivors together again, around their spiritual leadership, ready for their march back into Arabia. They cannot move from this place of rebellion and judgment until they recognize afresh their godly and God appointed leadership. Neither can we today! Let us bow before the Lord and renew our own vows to the leadership of our local Assembly of God's people. Let us commit ourselves to faithful service and not raise our voice to criticize or mock those whom the Lord has anointed to lead our congregation forward.

## NUMBERS 17:1-13

17:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod according to the house of their fathers, of all their princes according to the house of their fathers twelve rods: write thou every man's name upon his rod. 3 And thou shalt write Aaron's name upon the rod of Levi: for one rod shall be for the head of the house of their fathers. 4 And thou shalt lay them up in the tabernacle of the congregation before the testimony, where I will meet with you. 5 And it shall come to pass, that the man's rod, whom I shall choose, shall blossom: and I will make to cease from me the murmurings of the children of Israel, whereby they murmur against you. 6 And Moses spake unto the children of Israel, and every one of their princes gave him a rod apiece, for each prince one, according to their fathers' houses, even twelve rods: and the rod of Aaron was among their rods. 7 And Moses laid up the rods before the LORD in the tabernacle of witness. 8 And it came to pass, that on the morrow Moses went into the tabernacle of witness; and, behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi was budded, and brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds. 9 And Moses brought out all the rods from before the LORD unto all the children of Israel: and they looked, and took every man his rod. 10 And the LORD said unto Moses, Bring Aaron's rod again before the testimony, to be kept for a token against the rebels; and thou shalt quite take away their murmurings from me, that they die not. 11 And Moses did so: as the LORD commanded him, so did he. 12 And the children of Israel spake unto Moses, saying, Behold, we die, we perish, we all perish. 13 Whosoever cometh any thing near unto the tabernacle of the LORD shall die: shall we be consumed with dying?

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 5.** The Lord directs Moses to gather a wooden staff from each of the princes (Leaders) of the twelve tribes of Israel, one for each tribe. Each prince of a tribe is to write/carve his name upon his staff. Now the word for rod or staff here is the Hebrew word "Matteh", and it means royal staff or sceptre of authority. It is not the long walking staff, but the short rod of authority like the sceptre of the Egyptian pharaoh, easily made from the trees around.

Are these men the rulers over the armies, or the older men who rule the judges of the tribes? Moses does not name them here so we cannot know for sure. They may have been amongst the rebels and then rejoined Moses after his challenge, or they may have been solid with Moses from the beginning. I suspect that they were initially rebels, for the Lord wants them now to have a living proof that Aaron is to be their spiritual leader in a very personal way.

These men hold their staffs of authority and ruler ship with pride, and it will be their staff of pride that will be broken here by the Lord's choice again of Aaron. All these men know Aaron failed his own brother. The events recorded in Numbers 12 were very public. This is the Lord's grace in action that we see here. Firstly, in restoring Aaron to public ministry to atone for the people, as recorded in the previous chapter, and then secondly here before us, proved to be by miracle sign, the Lord's living representative upon the earth, before all the others. All the staffs are to be laid together in the tabernacle in front of the Ark in the Holy of Holies, and the Lord promises to make the staff of His anointed leader to burst into life, blossom and bud overnight.

**Verses 6 – 8.** The miracle is one of life from death, for the rods/staffs were dead branches of trees, of grape wood, olive wood, or almond wood. Aaron's rod is of almond wood and overnight it bursts forth in blossom and several full almond fruits are formed upon it. New life has burst forth, and it has burst forth abundantly!

The evidence is clear and the implication of the demonstration of God's power is all too clear to the princes. Their rods/staffs are dead still, and Aaron's is alive. They believe that this means they are dead men! They know certainly now that they will not live if they approach the tabernacle to serve as priests again. They jump too far in their conclusions however without seeing the Lord's main point.

This is not just a demonstration of the power of God and the confirmation of the appointment of Aaron, it is the Lord's message that in Him is life alone. They are to find their own life, their abundance, and productivity, until their death, in living fellowship with God alone, and in acceptance of God's plan for them and His plan for others. John 15:1-6. Aaron is under the same judgment as them, for he also will die in the wilderness march and not see the land, but he, like them, must find their peace and focus in the Lord and draw their life from Him alone through these years.

The Jewish leadership of the Great Tribulation period will come to this place and see the One who their ancestors pierced, and see that He is indeed the One who is the resurrection and the life for them and their nation. Zechariah 12:10, John 6:32-46, 10:7-18, 11:23-27, 14:1-11. They cannot alter the fact of their past failure by acknowledging the truth, but they can change the future outcome, by their acceptance and praise for the plan of God.

We too cannot change the fact of our past failures, but we can change the outcome in our life by our commitment to the service of the Lord, for in the place of fellowship and service, any past cursing is turned to blessing. Let us choose LIFE in Him! Deuteronomy 30:19-20, Psalms 37:3-7, 39:7, Romans 8:28.

**Verses 9 – 13.** The men all look closely at their own dead staffs and then they see the rod of Aaron that has budded overnight and bourn fruit. Moses decrees that the rod of Aaron will be kept in the Ark forever as a testimony against those who murmured against the Lord's anointed, as a reminder that the ones the Lord appoints will be fruitful in ministry and no others, no matter what their qualifications, their nobility of birth or nature, or their wealth and human power. The

only fruitfulness that matters is the Holy Spirit empowered fruit that comes from position in Christ and fellowship with Him.

The words of the princes to Moses are baffling at first sight. They all cry out, prince and people, "we die, we all die". They are so convicted of their sin they see themselves as under the judgment of God. They ask whether they will all perish of the plague that has killed the others now, for they see that they were so terribly wrong in their judgment over Moses and Aaron. Their response tells me that even with the rods set aside in the tabernacle overnight, they still wondered whether the Lord would choose them!

They were still pre-occupied with their own greatness and had not fully understood that the Lord's choice of Moses and Aaron was final, and that the Lord also had forgiven them and lifted them up to lead again. They needed to learn that the Lord had in grace, love and mercy, lifted them back up also and forgiven them their sins. This will take time on the march, but at least they are now ready to move out with Moses and Aaron as their leaders.

Some spiritual lessons take time to settle into the souls of rebellious and self centred people. As a pastor do not expect an immediate and dramatic break through too often, for while they occasionally occur, the norm is a slow and steady realization of truth by God's people. Over the next years these people will accept their punishment, and by training the next generation, they will advance towards the land in faith that their children will have victory there.

### **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. The miracle of Aaron's rod budding is a "sign" miracle. It has a specific purpose, to accredit Aaron as the Lord's man to lead the people spiritually for their journey. It is to silence all criticism and finally re-establish his authority after his fall from grace in his attack upon Moses. Miracles like this are very rare, and tend to come as part of a "judgment package". These men will all die on the wilderness journey, just as Aaron will also die. They are all under judgment, but need to have evidence of the Lord's choice of Aaron, even though he is as flawed as they are.
2. The great life from death miracle that also has a forty year judgment process involved in it is the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is forty years from the time the Lord dies upon the Cross and is risen again until the fall of Jerusalem to the Roman Army and the destruction of the nation that rejected their Messiah. Aaron's rod is a prophetic picture of the resurrection, and the context of it, is a sad reminder to us (as we look back) that judgment follows rejection of the truth.
3. People today are too quick to ask for dramatic miracles without asking when and why they occur in scriptural history. The presence of a miracle should make your hair stand on end, as it does these men here, for it means God is moving to judge disobedience and work His plan out in power and with absolute authority. Let us position ourselves in living fellowship with Christ Jesus our Lord, and so experience the only "safe" miracle; that of a Holy Spirit transformed life of service to the Lord God.
4. All of us are like the rods of the princes; we are all dead branches, made alive and productive only by the power of the life giving Holy Spirit filling us for service. John 15:5. The break through to full understanding of this takes time with believers, for we can all too easily, tenaciously hold onto our own human skills and abilities, and fail to surrender to the power of the Holy Spirit as we need to. The Lord's work is done in the Lord's power only. Those who get this wrong get warning, and then, they get judgment. Let us be as scared of judgment as these people were, and so serve the Lord in His power alone. There is joy in the Lord; in all other places there is fear and expectation of terror!

### **NOTES**

**CHAPTER 18****INTRODUCTION**

After the most recent rebellion the Lord recalls Aaron and his sons to their task, and reminds them what it means for them and their relatives within the family of Levi. There is a restating of some things that have already been studied in Leviticus, and we need to remember when we read these words here that the order in which the books were written may differ to that of their arrangement in the scriptures, and the book of Numbers is most likely the one that follows Exodus in being written, but both may overlap with the writing of the content of Leviticus, which is more ordered in its explanations of the role of Aaron and his sons.

After the rebellion it is vital for Aaron and his sons to accept anew the burden of standing for the people, especially after their attack upon his and his son's roles. These words were made public, for they are for the sons of Aaron, but equally they are for all the people to remember that the Lord's provision and rules do not change because of man's disobedience. Both priesthood and people need to recommit to the statutes of the Lord in all matters of supporting the priesthood. Failure stops nothing except temporarily blessing, and confession always restores role and blessing.

**NUMBERS 18:1-32**

**18:1** And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood. **2** And thy brethren also of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of thy father, bring thou with thee, that they may be joined unto thee, and minister unto thee: but thou and thy sons with thee shall minister before the tabernacle of witness. **3** And they shall keep thy charge, and the charge of all the tabernacle: only they shall not come nigh the vessels of the sanctuary and the altar, that neither they, nor ye also, die. **4** And they shall be joined unto thee, and keep the charge of the tabernacle of the congregation, for all the service of the tabernacle: and a stranger shall not come nigh unto you. **5** And ye shall keep the charge of the sanctuary, and the charge of the altar: that there be no wrath any more upon the children of Israel. **6** And I, behold, I have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel: to you they are given as a gift for the LORD, to do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. **7** Therefore thou and thy sons with thee shall keep your priest's office for everything of the altar, and within the veil; and ye shall serve: I have given your priest's office unto you as a service of gift: and the stranger that cometh nigh shall be put to death. **8** And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Behold, I also have given thee the charge of mine heave offerings of all the hallowed things of the children of Israel; unto thee have I given them by reason of the anointing, and to thy sons, by an ordinance for ever. **9** This shall be thine of the most holy things, reserved from the fire: every oblation of theirs, every meat offering of theirs, and every sin offering of theirs, and every trespass offering of theirs which they shall render unto me, shall be most holy for thee and for thy sons. **10** In the most holy place shalt thou eat it; every male shall eat it: it shall be holy unto thee. **11** And this is thine; the heave offering of their gift, with all the wave offerings of the children of Israel: I have given them unto thee, and to thy sons and to thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: every one that is clean in thy house shall eat of it. **12** All the best of the oil, and all the best of the wine, and of the wheat, the firstfruits of them which they shall offer unto the LORD, them have I given thee. **13** And whatsoever is first ripe in the land, which they shall bring unto the LORD, shall be thine; every one that is clean in thine house shall eat of it. **14** Every thing devoted in Israel shall be thine. **15** Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem. **16** And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. **17** But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they are holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the LORD. **18** And the flesh of them shall be thine, as the wave breast and as the right shoulder are thine. **19** All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee. **20** And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel. **21** And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation. **22** Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they bear sin, and die. **23** But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance. **24** But the tithes of the children of Israel, which they offer as an heave offering unto the LORD, I have given to the Levites to inherit: therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance. **25** And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, **26** Thus speak unto the Levites, and say unto them, When ye take of the children of Israel the tithes which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then ye shall offer up an heave offering of it for the LORD, even a tenth part of the tithe. **27** And this your heave offering shall be reckoned unto you, as though it were the corn of the threshing floor, and as the fullness of the winepress. **28** Thus ye also shall offer an heave offering unto the LORD of all your tithes, which ye receive of the children of Israel; and ye shall give thereof the LORD's heave offering to Aaron the priest. **29** Out of all your gifts ye shall offer every heave offering of the LORD, of all the best thereof, even the hallowed part thereof out of it. **30** Therefore thou shalt say unto them, When ye have

heaved the best thereof from it, then it shall be counted unto the Levites as the increase of the threshing floor, and as the increase of the winepress. 31 And ye shall eat it in every place, ye and your households: for it is your reward for your service in the tabernacle of the congregation. 32 And ye shall bear no sin by reason of it, when ye have heaved from it the best of it: neither shall ye pollute the holy things of the children of Israel, lest ye die.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 7.** These words are recorded as if they happen within a very short time after the events in the previous chapter. Given their content I suspect they are received from the Lord the same day as the events occur. Note the Lord's words closely as they apply to us as pastors today in fair measure also. The first thing that Aaron (and every pastor who stands before the people in the Lord's place as His spokesman) needs to know is that he is absolutely responsible for the people before the Lord!

This is a heavy word of the Lord here and reminds us that we are in the eye of the hurricane when we lead God's people. If we remain in the centre of God's will we are in the place of calm in the storms of the enemy's making, but if we deviate outside the exact place of the Lord's will, then we are exposed to tremendous attack and all the destructive forces of the enemy are concentrated upon us. The enemy knows he must destroy the leader of the congregation and he will do anything to succeed in this evil design.

The role that Aaron had was even more spiritually crucial, for he and his sons ran the sacrificial system and they literally carried the sins of the people as they offered up the sacrifices. If they did not do their work correctly then the people were not covered! Our role means that we must teach the truth correctly and if we mislead the people we come under judgment, but the sons of Aaron had literally to fulfil rituals exactly. For the people's sake, Aaron and his sons had to get every detail correct in their work.

They also "carried the can" for any sin against the tabernacle and its contents, and were responsible to cover any sin they committed, either by omission or commission within the rituals of offering up the sacrifices. If they got anything wrong, they were responsible for offering up the sacrifice for that sin/trespass. They had to take full responsibility for anything that went wrong and take immediate action to correct it. The Lord places the full weight of the sacrificial system upon their shoulders. They have stood to defend the Lord's choice of them as His priests in the rebellion, and now they must shoulder the burden that the role entails. Personal responsibility and accountability are God's way of managing!

The Kohathites were to be their servants in carrying the items of the tabernacle and the other families the fixtures and fittings of the tabernacle, and they were all to be the sons of Aaron's servants in the tabernacle, and the sons of Aaron were to stand before the Lord for them in turn and deal with their sins on their behalf.

The Levites were to serve them and others were not to come near the tabernacle. None but the Levites were to serve the priesthood. No other people could serve, and the sons of Aaron were to value the families of Levi, and were to welcome especially the sons of the rebel leader as their servants and support them in all things they did. There was to be no rejection of the Levites because of their rebellion. They were God's choice, and they were forgiven, and the family of Aaron was to embrace them as their brothers in the Lord's work.

Things were to be done from this point onwards to limit the possibility of their being any "wrath" of the Lord upon the people. Harmony was to replace dissension, and acceptance to replace any jealousy or resentment. The sons of Aaron were to see their Levite brethren as a "gift" of the Lord for them, and were to give thanks for them each day. Their praise to the Lord for their brethren's service was to be the antidote to any bitter feelings that might remain after the rebellion. Romans 15:14-16, Hebrews 13:17.

**Verses 8 – 10.** All the "heave offerings" were given to the sons of Aaron also. These were offerings that were offered up in thanks to the Lord for blessing and then would be available for the food of the priesthood. The possibility of corruption was high here and later priests would become corrupt in these matters, taking far more than was their entitlement. The sons of Eli and those of the Lord's Day were two examples of this. 1 Samuel 2:12ff, Matthew 21:13.

The portions that were the priest of each offering were "holy"; set apart for their eating in the holy precincts of the tabernacle. They were to eat these meals every day as their testimony of faith and acceptance of their ministry, as an expression of their fellowship with the Lord, and as a thanks offering received for their blessing in their role. Deuteronomy 18:1ff.

**Verses 11 – 14.** Verses eleven makes clear that the entire family of the priests were entitled to share in the food of the tabernacle, sons and daughters. All the best of the oil, the wheat, the wine and the meat was theirs to eat. All who were "clean" according to the rule were entitled to eat and drink. This clarifies the rule on wine that forbade the priest from drinking when he was approaching the tabernacle to work. Leviticus 10:8-9. It also explains that the drink or libation offerings were not all poured out, but only a little of the significant quantities we saw in chapter fifteen were poured out, the bulk of the wine was given to the priesthood for their own use after making it a "heave offering".

Once again the temptation was to hold too much back, and offer only a little to the Lord. They were to be faithful to their calling and offer bountifully to the Lord, and enjoy the Lord's bounty through the sacrifices without any greed creating a mixed message to the Lord's people. All the Firstfruits offerings were theirs and all things that were devoted to the Lord (Leviticus 27:28) were theirs for food and provision for their family.

**Verses 15 – 19.** The first born were the priests for their support. Every firstborn animal was theirs, and theirs to keep for their own food after appropriate blood offering from it was made, although if the animal was unclean it was to be redeemed with money paid, and the money was the priest's to purchase whatever they needed for their families. Their support was the Lord's responsibility and the Law provided for their upkeep and that of their families without any shortage when the people were obedient to the Lord's Law.

The first born of all men were also to be redeemed with money. We have already seen these things in Exodus 13:12-13, Leviticus 27, Numbers 3:47. The repetition here is to remind them and the people that nothing has changed because of the rebellion, and the Lord's rules apply to all His people for all time. Man's sin does not stop the plan nor alter its provisions. These provisions are referred to as a "covenant of salt". This means that it is a covenant that cannot be broken; it is indissoluble for the entire Age of Israel, and that includes the Great Tribulation period. Keep in mind that the Church Age is inserted into the Age of Israel, and that Israel is taken up again when the church is removed, and Israel has an operational temple well before the Antichrist takes it over, and that the Age of Israel culminates in the Millennium.

**Verses 20 – 24.** Aaron is reminded that he and his sons will have no inheritance in the land at all. They will never own property as of right, as their fellow tribesmen will. The Lord's provision alone is to be his inheritance and the Lord alone is to be his reward and provision for life and health. They are to live by faith and serve the Lord on this basis, without thinking they need land to have security! What is our security today? Let us be challenged here also.

This is the Lord's challenge to us all today. Our security is not in "Real Estate", but in God's provision for us. We are not to think in terms of making money in the midst of our ministry, but to trust the Lord for His provision in the work, be it by a tent making job role, the direct offerings of the Lord's people, or by previous investments or inheritances. We are to focus upon our service, not upon building any real estate or other financial empires! As the Lord's pastors we are to serve and not be distracted by matters of finance and provision, leaving the Lord to meet our needs.

In the words of a song I have been listening to as I have been writing these words, "Only what I've done for loves report will stand the test of time". All else, other than our service for the Lord, is but a detail of life and to be left in the Lord's hands. The yearly tithe of the people was to be for all the children of Levi for their support, just as the church offering is to be the support of the pastoral staff and cover expenses for all ministry work. Matthew 10:9-10, 1 Corinthians 9:14-18, 24-27, 2 Timothy 2:1-10, 4:6-8, Hebrews 12:1-3.

**Verses 25 – 32.** The Levites will also be catered for as the priesthood is. The Levites would receive the annual tithe of ten percent from the people, and then they were to take ten percent of the total tithe and offer it up as their "heave offering" for the work of the priesthood. This was to be given to Aaron for his support and that of his family as the priesthood. Every gift the Levites received was to be for their support in their work, and for their families, to be used in their tents as unto the Lord. They were to enjoy it only after they had offered up the best of all they had received to the Lord. The best was to be offered up to the Lord as a "heave offering" and then enjoyed. All blessing was to be acknowledged as the gift of God and the Lord praised for it all.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. As the Lord's leaders we must shoulder the burden of responsibility to serve the Lord in power and with focus upon our service. We must be ready to forgive those who attack us in the church meetings and gossip about us in the café and pour out our heart and words for them whenever we are able. We must be ready to teach accurately the Word of truth and not compromise in any way upon the matters the Lord wants communicated to His people. We must take nothing personally, but give our attention to accuracy of what we do.
2. Our failure does not stop the plan of God, and if we are still alive after a time of failure or sin, we need to renew our heart and mind, focus upon the Lord's will for us, and get busy in the work in the power of the Holy Spirit once more.
3. All we have is from the Lord and all we have should first be offered back up to the Lord in thanks for His bounty towards us. Let us always say grace over every good thing we enjoy. Our grace over food is our "heave offering" and we ought to say grace over all things we enjoy, be they food, clothing, houses, cars or bicycles. We need to be more thankful for all that the Lord has done and given to us. As we praise more, so we will receive all we need in joy rather than in worry and anxiety. Let us deal with any shortage we have by praise, then prayer, and then praise again. Let Isaiah 61:3 be our daily song, as we cast our cares upon the Lord and deal with worry by praise. 1 Peter 5:6-7.
4. Preaching on the subject of giving is something that some pastors ignore or avoid. We are not to do this, for the Lord spoke much about giving and we rob people of their joy and blessing by not encouraging them to give bountifully to the Lord. The provision of the Lord's work depends upon faithful giving, and the faithful giver is blessed in their blessing of the workers of the assembly. Let us preach about giving whenever it comes up in our systematic teaching program.

## **NOTES**

**CHAPTER 19****INTRODUCTION**

We enter a chapter here that is of great significance for Israel right through to today, and when the new temple is built it will become a central issue. The big question for the building of any temple again is how do you purify the first priesthood without the direct intervention of God? The answer is through the ashes of the red heifer! Special animals for this very purpose have already been bred and are ready for use in the coming years as I write these very words.

Let's pause and reflect upon the situation of the Jewish people today before we advance into this chapter. After nearly 2000 years of separation and judgment upon the entire nation of Israel since 70AD, (for their sin of rejection of their Messiah) these rituals, described here in this chapter, will need to be used when the new temple is built, firstly for the Great Tribulation period temple, but then formally and fully in the Millennial kingdom Temple.

This chapter covers the Law surrounding the purification rituals that centre in the ashes of the "Red Heifer", which was to be used to purify the priesthood and the people from the impurity of handling the dead, when the nation was on the march. The first use of the ashes was to purify those who touched the dead rebels. The bodies of the dead rebels had to be approached and touched by Eleazar, in order to retrieve the censors. Their charred bodies had to be buried then by others and as Korah was a Levite, the Levites were effected by this. These were but the first of the entire adult population that would die over the next forty years.

The nation would be, from this time until they entered the land, on a weekly basis, burying those who had moaned and abused the Lord. All would need purification at some point, and this was the way that was to be taken to purify the people or the Levites and the priesthood after any time of ritual impurity.

On the march, when the tabernacle was not erected, and a man sinned, and then came and made confession to the priest, the ashes would be used to make "holy water", that would then be sprinkled upon him as a testimony to his confession and the reality of his forgiveness through the blood shed. This ritual, instituted here in Kadesh, would become a powerful image of confession of sin and forgiveness by faith.

Sin caused death to enter the world as a result of the events in the Garden of Eden, and death is the absolute picture of the consequences of man's sin, and so it requires special rituals of purification to cleanse from contact with the dead. Death is not meant to be anything other than awful and strange to man. The ashes of the red heifer remind the Israelites of the terrible consequences of sin, both Adam's and their own at Kadesh, and each person was to reflect upon the impurity of death, and it's origin in sin.

We are all meant to pause at a death and feel the sadness the Lord felt at the tomb of Lazarus, for He wept at the human condition. He wept at what sin had done to mankind, not for his friend, who He would raise a few seconds later. John 11:33-42. The truth of the resurrection of the dead is our hope when we face death, but this chapter reminds us that death itself is a judgment upon mankind for sin, and it is a curse, and it is correct to feel it as such when we face the death of a loved one. The curse will only be lifted by the Lord Himself on His return for us. Let us begin this study with the positive doctrine, before we plunge into this next look at the terrible cost of sin.

**NUMBERS 19:1-22**

**19:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, 2 This is the ordinance of the law which the LORD hath commanded, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring thee a red heifer without spot, wherein is no blemish, and upon which never came yoke: 3 And ye shall give her unto Eleazar the priest, that he may bring her forth without the camp, and one shall slay her before his face: 4 And Eleazar the priest shall take of her blood with his finger, and sprinkle of her blood directly before the tabernacle of the congregation seven times: 5 And one shall burn the heifer in his sight; her skin, and her flesh, and her blood, with her dung, shall he burn: 6 And the priest shall take cedar wood, and hyssop, and scarlet, and cast it into the midst of the burning of the heifer. 7 Then the priest shall wash his clothes, and he shall bathe his flesh in water, and afterward he shall come into the camp, and the priest shall be unclean until the even. 8 And he that burneth her shall wash his clothes in water, and bathe his flesh in water, and shall be unclean until the even. 9 And a man that is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer, and lay them up without the camp in a clean place, and it shall be kept for the congregation of the children of Israel for a water of separation: it is a purification for sin. 10 And he that gathereth the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even: and it shall be unto the children of Israel, and unto the stranger that sojourneth among them, for a statute for ever. 11 He that toucheth the dead body of any man shall be unclean seven days. 12 He shall purify himself with it on the third day, and on the seventh day he shall be clean: but if he purify not himself the third day, then the seventh day he shall not be clean. 13 Whosoever toucheth the dead body of any man that is dead, and purifieth not himself, defileth the tabernacle of the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off from Israel: because the water of separation was not sprinkled upon him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is yet upon him. 14 This is the law, when a man dieth in a tent: all that come into the tent, and all that is in the tent, shall be unclean seven days. 15 And every open vessel, which hath no covering bound upon it, is unclean. 16 And whosoever toucheth one that is slain with a sword in the open fields, or a dead body, or a bone of a man, or a grave, shall be unclean seven days. 17 And for an unclean person they shall take of the ashes of the burnt heifer of purification for sin, and running water**

shall be put thereto in a vessel: 18 And a clean person shall take hyssop, and dip it in the water, and sprinkle it upon the tent, and upon all the vessels, and upon the persons that were there, and upon him that touched a bone, or one slain, or one dead, or a grave: 19 And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even. 20 But the man that shall be unclean, and shall not purify himself, that soul shall be cut off from among the congregation, because he hath defiled the sanctuary of the LORD: the water of separation hath not been sprinkled upon him; he is unclean. 21 And it shall be a perpetual statute unto them, that he that sprinkleth the water of separation shall wash his clothes; and he that toucheth the water of separation shall be unclean until even. 22 And whatsoever the unclean person toucheth shall be unclean; and the soul that toucheth it shall be unclean until even.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 2.** To produce a purifying holy water, ashes are to be added, and they are to be ashes from a pure red heifer, without any defect, upon which no yolk had been laid. This was to be a young animal specially set aside, never used and worn out as a beast of burden, for its purpose is to be the means of removal of the burden of sin and death from those contaminated by contact with the dead. It will be slain as a sin offering, verses 9, 17, to remind all that, “the wages of sin is death”. Romans 6:23.

It was a female, for the woman is the “life bearer”, and due to sin’s entry into the world, the one who brings a new sinner into the world with each birth. The hope however is also in the woman, and one young woman, Mary, would bring into the world, through her obedience, a Saviour into the world to take away the penalty of sin and death. Luke 1:28-38, 46-55, Romans 6:23, 8:1-7, 1 Corinthians 15:54-56, Philippians 2:1-8, Hebrews 2:6-18.

**Verses 3 – 6.** Eleazar is to take this animal outside the camp to slay it. Hebrews 13:8-15. This is the sacrifice that is not done at the altar, but her blood is to be brought into the tabernacle and sprinkled seven times before the Lord there. The entire animal was to be carried back into the tabernacle also, probably by the Levites, and then another priest is to burn the entire animal on the altar, and add in cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet, and all is to be burned together until just ashes remain.

Eleazar is to do the killing outside the camp, but it is not 100% clear who does the burning of the animal, but the Levites who have seen Korah die, and had to watch their family members bury him are involved in carrying the offering to the altar, as they are part of this. The elements added to the sacrifice are clear pointers to the Cross, with wood, the stem of hyssop, and the red of the blood shed. The results of the Lord’s sacrifice, the ashes, then become the holy washing to cleanse us from all sin. John 13:1-8, 1 John 1:5-10.

**Verses 7 - 10.** Having done the work to prepare the heifer and burn her with the other items the priest who has taken the animal out and killed it is “unclean” and must wash his clothes and remain apart until the evening. The priest who does the burning is also unclean. Both priests (possibly the two sons of Aaron, although it requires three men to complete the ritual, so Aaron also is involved in this) are to wash their bodies and their clothes and lay aside until after 6pm of that night. A third priest is to gather the ashes of the red heifer from the altar and carry them to a clean place outside the camp, and they are to be stored there for the priest and people’s use later.

This third priest is to ensure that the place is known and able to be returned to, as these ashes will need to be carried with them as they leave Kadesh Barnea and head for the Arabian Peninsula again. Why is it that Eleazar is to take the lead here? It may be that because the rebellion was against Aaron, that his son is the one to take leadership in this matter, so that the people are prepared for his taking over later from his father. Remember, Eleazar may be in his forties or fifties at this point.

**Verses 10 – 13.** Once the ashes are stored in the clean place outside the camp, that third priest is to return to the camp and wash and set himself aside until the evening also. This routine is to be followed whenever this is done “forever”, as a lasting rule for Israel to produce the purifying ashes. The next time this is done will be for the purification rituals associated with the building of the Pre-Tribulation Temple that will be used throughout the Tribulation and destroyed after Antichrist sets up his statue there and the Lord judges it.

Those who bury the dead on the march will be unclean for seven days after the burial and they are to lay aside through that time and be unable to partake of the religious life of the nation. On the third day the person who has cared for the dead is to be sprinkled with the holy water, made of the ashes of the red heifer and then on the seventh day this will occur again, and he is declared clean and may re-enter the spiritual life of the community.

Any person not following this routine was to be exiled from the people permanently. This was a ritual that was to be taken extremely seriously. The entire nation was to use this routine every time they faced a death. The deaths on the journey are each one, reminders of their sin as a people, and so each and every death is accompanied by the seven days of mourning and separation from those burying them. Each of these people will also reflect through this time, that they also will die here and render another unclean in their caring for their body.

It was to be a week of mourning for each dead adult, and for every family they would find themselves doing this a number of times on this journey. As they did this they were to reflect on their national sin at Kadesh Barnea. Romans 5:9-14, 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1.

**Verses 14 – 16.** Because the entire older generation are to die in the wilderness journey there is the need for special instructions for the actions to be taken on the march, or in their fixed camps through this time. The rules here indicate that the “plague” that killed the people may have been a contagious disease that “plagued” them for their journey. The word means a “spot” or a “strike/blow”. The rules here would not be needed if there was no risk of infection. The simple seven days of separation and contemplation would be enough if it was just death here being reflected upon. It is not the smell of death that is being protected against, but some real and powerful contagious element.

If I am correct here (and remember, we cannot know this for sure until we get Moses briefing in heaven) then it puts a new light upon the bravery required of this older, and previously disobedient, generation. They had to care for their loved ones knowing that they too would follow them; at some point the “plague” would get them. They would be learning obedience, faith, and courage every time they approached the burial of a loved one.

There is a seven day period of separation for every person that entered into a tent where a person had died. Any vessel with food in it that was uncovered was also contaminated and to be destroyed. A covering had to be bound tightly over the lid of every vessel in the tent or it could be contaminated and would have to be destroyed.

The rule for the discovery of the dead in the field is also given, be they suddenly dead, killed in violence, or just bare bones when found. These things are more formally stated in Leviticus. Leviticus 11:24ff, 19:28, 21:1-4. It is this more formal references in that book that made me think previously that it may have been written after this section we are reading, although the absence of reference to the red heifer there, in relation to the rituals for the dead, argues against that view, and indicates that Numbers is written later than the writing of Leviticus and any subsequent re-editing did not incorporate these rules into the basic Levitical codex. The rules here modify the things that had been received and recorded as the book of Leviticus. This order in the writing remains however an open question as far as I am concerned.

There is a seven day period of separation for all people involved in a death where they were in proximity to the body. Did the entire camp stop through this time? The answer is apparently “no”; the family simply had to bury that night and apply the seven day period of separation from all their relatives and friends, with all who helped in the burial at the back of the column on the march for the period of separation.

It was a tough thing to lose a relative on the march in this day, for their bodies were literally left behind, buried alone in the pastoral lands, with no markers, on the side of the track the people took past them. The mourners had to then physically separate themselves from the rest of the people as they marched onwards for the seven days following. There could be prayers offered and they would have been as they trudged onwards, but there was no grave to return to and mourn their loss, they were gone, and the nation moved away from them, alone on the featureless wilderness.

It was an awful picture of what sin does to a people. It robs the sinner of hope, of fellowship with the Lord and with others, and it ends the plan that the Lord had for them. This rule was meant to be hard, and it was not just for the punishment of the people, but as a reflection upon the truth of all that the great evil at Kadesh had caused. Its reality burned into the lives and memories of the people when they settled, and they spent much time and effort in their burial rituals thereafter, for they never wanted to return to this terrible time, leaving their loved ones in unmarked graves by the side of a make shift road.

**Verses 17 – 19.** The ritual of cleansing (after contact with the dead) involved taking the ashes and adding them in a clean vessel to pure running water (that is water that had been drawn from a spring not a still cistern). A clean person (the priest – but it may be another – and this is the key – for it can be used to dedicate a new priest where there are none in existence – like now), then takes the ashes and the water and dips some hyssop in the mixture, and shakes it over the person who has come for cleansing, but also, upon the tent where the person died, and upon every closed vessel that was in contact with the dead. This was to be done on the third day and then again on the seventh day. There is a formal second washing of clothes and bodies on the seventh day and the person is declared clean that day. The water is the “water of life” that cleanses the man from all defilement. John 4:9-14, 7:37-43.

**Verses 20 – 22.** If a man decided that all this was too much for him to do, or that he didn’t want to do this for any reason, and he refused to follow this rule, then there was a consequence. The onerous nature of this ritual would have been a major faith and obedience test for the people. It was a hard thing to care for the dead and then endure the separation from loved ones for the next seven days. Resentment towards the Lord could build within those who were already harbouring resentful feelings towards the Lord’s holy demands upon them. It was a serious sorting test for them; would they obey or become resentful?

Those who refused to be covered by the holy water were to be exiled from the rest of the people permanently. Even the person sprinkling the water was unclean until the evening and had to wash his clothes. None could touch him without being unclean also. The man who sprinkled any other person or place would have to go and wash his own clothes and sit apart from all others until the evening also. Just to touch the ashes of the red heifer was to cleanse others but to render yourself unclean.

The entire process of this sacrifice and the resultant ashes placed great stress upon the reality of a person’s love and obedience. To care for the dead was an act of love, and one that would render you unclean, and put a burden upon you to have all these things done over the seven days afterwards. The entire ritual of the red heifer reminded the people of their great sin at Kadesh Barnea that had required this provision above and beyond the Levitical Laws.

## PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. The cost of sin is great and the sadness of the fall of man is greater. How well do we understand these things? How seriously do we feel these things? To feel and understand the penalty of sin is to realize the wonder of the sacrifice of the Lord afresh and truly appreciate the work of the Lord upon the Cross. Let us reflect upon the plan and person of the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, and praise His name more than we often do!

2. The defilement of sin and death had to be taken seriously and the washing of the holy water received by the person who was defiled. To fail to recognize defilement was to remain defiled and under the burden of sin. This remains the truth today, and sadly many choose to remain under the burden of sin rather than the grace, mercy, forgiveness, and love of God. Our challenge is to announce the forgiveness of the Lord through the blood bought way of the Cross, and so let us tell the world that the Saviour has come and that the way is open, but it is only through Him.

3. Do not get too excited about the discovery of the ashes of the last red heifer by archaeologists in the Negev desert. Do not get too excited about the breeding program for the new red heifer conducted by the American millionaire. Both "stories" are significant and remind us that we are in the last days, but remember what these things speak of; they remind us that we are entering the days of greatest testing for Israel. We are drawing near the Great Tribulation period, a time like no other upon the earth.

Whatever the ashes are used for, (and they will be used again to dedicate a new priesthood) there can only be death and despair as the result, until Messiah comes, and our message is He is coming again, and this time He will rule His people. Let us preach the prophetic messages of the scripture so that the people who read our words will know what is coming and turn to Zechariah 12:10ff and weep as they need to do.

## NOTES

**CHAPTER 20****INTRODUCTION**

There is a gap of nearly forty years from the events at the end of chapter nineteen, before Moses starts to record the events of this chapter. In chapter 33 he will remember that he has not summarized the march of the people and there he gives us a brief summary of their journeying through this time, but he will at that place also gloss over any events that occur during their nearly forty years of wandering through the pastoral lands in Arabia. Numbers 33:35-40. It is as if the wandering has never occurred and they move from Kadesh back to Kadesh, and then into the land by way of Edom and Moab.

What connects the two chapters, nineteen and twenty, is that they both occur around Kadesh Barnea, but nearly forty years lies between them. The only clue that nearly forty years has past is the reference to the month of the year in verse 1 of chapter 20 below, the reference to the age of Aaron when he died, and the summary of their years of wandering later. Numbers 33:38-39.

Why does Moses not mention anything here or later about the forty years? The answer, to most commentators, would appear to be, that nothing happened that was worth mentioning during that time. It would be wonderful if this was the case, for it would mean that the people quietly learned the Word of God from Moses and Aaron and learned to trust the Lord more through this time. Sadly we will see that while the years have been uneventful, they have been solemn, depressing, and hard, and the survivors will have a major failure of faith at Kadesh this second time the nation stays there.

Moses has waited until the events of this chapter to pick up his pen again, and as he writes these words he aches with each word written. This book is a hard one to study, and the chapter we come to here is the darkest point for Moses. The difficulty for the preacher in studying and teaching Numbers may be caused by the difficulties that Moses has through these terrible years of waiting and of death.

Moses draws a veil over this time of their wandering, for it was a time of plague and death, as we have seen. Numbers 14:29. All the older generation die through this time, and by the time the people are back at Kadesh and make camp where they had been forty years before, all those over sixty are dead, except for Miriam, Aaron, Moses, Caleb, Joshua, and possibly Hobab, and the others who were not of Israel. Numbers 10:28-36.

The people have been "marking time" under the Lord's judgment and so there is nothing to say once this is noted. They have judgment time to serve and they serve it, and all who sinned die in the pastoral country of Arabia and are buried in unmarked graves on the rolling plains and hills. Numbers 14:26-38.

Now I have been using the term "forty years" as a rounded out number for the years of wandering, from this passage in chapter fourteen, and it is important to remember that these are forty lunar years, which is roughly equivalent to 37 solar years. It is the confusion between the two ways of reckoning time that create some confusion for students. The ancient Jewish people, like the modern Arab peoples utilized a Lunar Calendar for religious purposes.

This is also probably the hardest chapter for Moses to write, for in it he records his own great failure, and it is one that costs him personally his right to enter the Promised Land. The stress of the years of wandering and the failures of the people have taken their toll on this great man and he falls at the very winning post and so misses the prize. He becomes an illustration of the "Sin unto Death" himself, but a hopeful one.

Moses clearly does not lose his salvation with his failure recorded here. He is taken home early by the Lord and misses the entry into the land, but he does not miss his eternal reward. God is merciful and gracious to believers who love him and come before him with their failures. Moses will obscure a major picture of the Lord in what he does by striking the rock here, but he is still forgiven and cursing is turned to blessing, even though he will not inherit the land.

Paul remembers this chapter as he faces his own journey of life, and he prays that he may not be disqualified in the last minute by losing the plot himself. 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. Anger, and taking insults in ministry personally have cost many servants of the Lord their best rewards in time and eternity!

Let us be careful in our walk through this life and be wary of taking anything personally in the ministry. We are the Lord's ambassadors and nothing that is said to an ambassador is to be taken personally by him, for it reflects upon his Lord alone. 2 Corinthians 5:6-11, 20.

**NUMBERS 20:1-29**

**20:1** Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. **2** And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. **3** And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD! **4** And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? **5** And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no

place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. 6 And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them. 7 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 8 Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. 9 And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. 10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? 11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. 12 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. 13 This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them. 14 And Moses sent messengers from Kadesh unto the king of Edom, Thus saith thy brother Israel, Thou knowest all the travail that hath befallen us: 15 How our fathers went down into Egypt, and we have dwelt in Egypt a long time; and the Egyptians vexed us, and our fathers: 16 And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt: and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border: 17 Let us pass, I pray thee, through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the king's high way, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed thy borders. 18 And Edom said unto him, Thou shalt not pass by me, lest I come out against thee with the sword. 19 And the children of Israel said unto him, We will go by the high way: and if I and my cattle drink of thy water, then I will pay for it: I will only, without doing anything else, go through on my feet. 20 And he said, Thou shalt not go through. And Edom came out against him with much people, and with a strong hand. 21 Thus Edom refused to give Israel passage through his border: wherefore Israel turned away from him. 22 And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh, and came unto mount Hor. 23 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron in mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying, 24 Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. 25 Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto mount Hor: 26 And strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. 27 And Moses did as the LORD commanded: and they went up into mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. 28 And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. 29 And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 2.** As we read these words we get a terrible feeling of sadness. The people are at it again; they are moaning like their fathers, and forty years have past! Have they learned anything in the wanderings? As the children of the first generation that left the land of Egypt enter Kadesh again they must have had a sense of strangeness. For all those years they had been wandering and they were now back at the place of their parent's failure to enter the land. The adults in their fifties now, were teenagers when they were there last time, but their memories of the events would have been strong, for the things that occurred were dramatic and life changing.

This was their initial invasion route, and the place where their defeated army returned, and where the ten spies and the people of Korah's rebellion, had died. The people would have varied feelings, but they must have surely anticipated that the invasion would be launched from here up the caravan route their army took last time, into the south of the land.

There is delay at the campsite, and during the time of encampment Miriam dies. Miriam's death would have been a sad day for Moses, even though she has lived to over 120 years of age! The oldest woman last century was a French woman who lived to 127 years, so do not try to explain the great age of Miriam away, for unique people live this long, and this woman was unique. Miriam was the one who saved Moses life as a baby, and looked after him later, Exodus 2:4-10, and even though she rebelled, Numbers 12:1-15, they were restored to loving fellowship. Moses loved his sister, and at whatever age, death is always sad for those left behind, with those who they loved gone.

Moses may be grieving, or it just may be that the Lord has not directed him at this point, but there is delay, and the pressure is on. The delay is crucial because it is the start of the harvest time and so it is the right time to launch an invasion, so that the crops are in the fields and is food for the invader, rather than being gathered into the cities and being food for the defenders.

Why is there this delay here? Why does the Lord leave the people without a clear direction forward for enough time to allow discontent to grow to the point of rebellion and dismay at the leadership of Moses? Moses does not excuse himself here, for it may be he was slow in speaking to the people after the death of Miriam, or slow in seeking the Lord's face. He may have been distracted by her death, and so it is only when the people "chide" him (tell him off) that he prays and moves.

As we go on through this chapter and the next we will see the reason the Lord took His time to give the people direction, and then ordered Moses to lead them the hard way into the land, rather than the more direct route they took last time directly from Kadesh. They have things to learn about toughness in battle, and obedience to leadership, and these things

will only be learned in the hard route march that the Lord will take them upon, through the lands of the Edomites, Ammonites and Moabites.

**Verses 3 – 5.** The people have not had a pleasant time in their wanderings. While nothing of note occurs that is worthy of a chapter in Moses record, the last forty years have been years of pastoral challenges as they kept their flocks and herds alive in the lands of Arabia, and years of death. They return to the place where the spies died and those who rebelled also perished, and they wonder if the last forty years have been worth it, for they are just back to where they started their painful punishment and nothing appears to have changed, except Moses and Aaron are extremely old, and now there is no water.

They start to feel that these two old men may have lost the plot as the delay drags on and Miriam dies. You can hear their “chiding” of Moses; “Why are we not moving into the land?” The young men who have grown up in the wandering time are keen for action and cannot see why they sit in Kadesh while the enemy reap their fields and harvest their vineyards. They know that the delay was fatal to their parents here, and this generation will not tolerate delay by the old men who condemned their parents to death. They are right but they are wrong – it is time for corporate prayer not mob moaning.

Now something has happened at this time to the wells of Kadesh, for there is water there still today, yet the people complain about there not being any at this time they camp there. It may be that the wells were poisoned this time by their enemies. It was a common Arab practice to kill camels and deposit them in the wells to poison them to stop their enemies drinking there. Maybe this was done here, just before the Israelites arrive, for the Canaanites are looking out for them, as we will find from Rahab when the people finally get to Jericho. Joshua 2:10-13. The Canaanites will certainly attack them in force not much later and it may be that they have poisoned the wells. Numbers 21:1-3. Whatever the reason for the water shortage, it is real and pressing, and there is apparent inaction on Moses part as far as the people are concerned.

The older generation had faced three specific water tests on the way out of Egypt, and the truth of God’s provision for them at that time should have been well known. History taught them that God could be trusted. Prayer was called for here, not complaint, but they will complain again, just as their parents did.

1. Too much water – The Yam Suf – Sea of Reeds - Exodus 14:1, 10-14, 27-31.
2. The wrong sort of water at Marah. Exodus 15:23-27.
3. Not enough water at Rephidim. Exodus 17:1-7.

It will be this last incident that will be recalled this time forty years later, as Moses faces a rock again and strikes it again, but this time he should not have done that!

**Verses 6 – 8.** Moses and Aaron do the right thing when the complaint is made, and come before the Lord, and fall upon their faces before the tabernacle. It may be that the criticism of the people jolts them both out of their grief for Miriam, and back into the leadership roles they need to take on again. Moses will almost spiritually limp through the next months, and he doesn’t hide his mistakes from us in this narrative. The next chapters are not written by the triumphant leader who has followed the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night, but by the humble and sad leader who sees the great cost of the people’s rebellion.

These last chapter read more like a tired older man who is acting more like a human leader than God’s dynamic leader of his people. Moses is facing the normal depression faced by many as they end their service and reflect upon what might have been if only God’s people had taken God at His Word. This mood is another proof that it is indeed Moses writing this, for another later writer would have kept Moses looking and feeling “heroic”.

These chapters are hard going, and anything but “heroic”. I am saddened as I see Moses fall, but I am personally uplifted by his honesty and humility here, for he does not hide his faults and omissions from us. The people who moan certainly have things to learn, and they will learn them on the route march they are to take, but the Lord does not chide them as he did their parents, and this is Moses clue to the fact that he is flagging in his leadership, and the people are not 100% to blame.

The instructions given to Moses by the Lord are clear, simple, and precise. He is to take his rod of authority and approach the great rock by the campsite, and in front of the people, so that all can hear, he is to **SPEAK** to the rock and it will gush forth water for them all. Now if the numbers of the people are as my estimate has been throughout this study, at around 30,000 total population, then a significant amount of water is required for the animals and the people, but not a mighty river. No drama is called for, just simple obedience and a word of power on Moses part.

I have visited a camp site used for the Parachute Christian Music festival in our country. It draws water for 30,000 people every day from the river that flows through the campsite. A fire hydrant sized pipe is all that is needed to carry the water required, and this flushes toilets and runs showers. A hole in the rock ten to twenty centimetres in diameter will produce this amount of water to feed this number of people and their animals. Moses can stand in one place and open up a gap in the rock by his “word of command/knowledge” so that waters can flow to quench all the people’s thirsts and ensure their animals are watered.

**Verses 9 – 11.** Moses takes his rod of authority from the tabernacle where it was apparently stored. This is his rod that he used to work miracles in the journey out of Egypt forty years before, and with which he smote the rock at Rephidim. Exodus 4:2-5, 14:16, 17:5ff. It may be that he has not handled this rod since those days, and that this is the

first time in nearly forty years that he has picked it up again. With this rod in his hand he marches out to the rock face by the campsite.

The people are gathered around and can see and hear him. He then starts to make a mistake and he records it for us to notice clearly. He is obedient in taking the rod and going out, but he “loses the plot” when he starts to speak to the people. He and Aaron are standing together before the rock, two old men who have been jolted out of their grieving by the people’s complaint, and he has been here before so many times facing people who do not believe in him, and have started to doubt the Lord their God. Moses gets angry, and that is always a bad place to be when the Lord has asked you to speak as his ambassador – for nothing is to be taken personally when you are an ambassador. Matthew 28:20, James 1:19-21,

Notice his words, and understand this man, and do not abuse him for his error here. I love Moses so deeply, and this incident is one of the key reasons, because of his brutal honesty in the way he records his great and fatal failure here – few great leaders have had his dignity and honesty. I believe Sir Winston Churchill alone as a great leader of men comes close to Moses in moral character, and I have tried to think of another, but have not identified one.

Moses takes the rebellious words of the people personally, when they are insulting the Lord not him. Moses has started to feel personal offence, and while this is understandable it is always wrong for a pastor doing the Lord’s work to take any attack upon the work personally. Notice Moses asks, “Must **WE** fetch water for you from this rock?” Now it has never been Moses and Aaron bringing anything for the people, it has always been God alone, who in power and grace, has stood by His servant and provided for His people.

He was to speak to the rock and the Lord had given him the words to say, but in the emotional overload all this is forgotten, and he not only strikes the rock, he strikes it twice! But now note the Lord’s response to His tired old servant. The water flows out abundantly from the rock and the people receive the water and drink. In grace the Lord provides even though Moses was disobedient and did something that spoiled a picture of the results of the Cross and Resurrection.

Now we are not left guessing about the significance of the rock at Rephidim and here in Kadesh. Exodus 17:1-6. Paul tells us plainly, that the rock is Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:1-6. He was bruised for us, beaten for us, and died for us, that we might live and be refreshed in fellowship with Him. Isaiah 53. The Lord was beaten for us ONCE on the Cross. Once for all time He was beaten for us. Romans 6:10, Hebrews 7:27, 9:27-28, 10:10, 1 Peter 3:18-20. He then gives us what we ask for. Matthew 7:7-11, John 11:22, 14:13-14, 15:7,16, 16:23-30. James 1:5-6, 4:2-3, 1 John 3:22, 5:14-16. Now I have given many verses here, but they are all important to read and remember, for the Lord tells us to ASK and so receive bountifully from Him.

The rock was to be struck once only, and that was at Rephidim. With the people restored to fellowship after their wandering, the rock was to be spoken to only. Moses messes up the wonderful picture that was meant to be painted for the people to remember the loving provision of the Lord through prayer. He humbly records his great failure here and we are to learn from this. We are to learn both the truth that was meant to be shown about water from the “rock”, for it remains the truth for us today, and also the truth that anger rarely honours God.

**Verses 12 – 13.** The Lord has provided the water, and while the people are distracted in their drinking the Lord speaks to Moses and Aaron. The sins they are accused of are significant ones, and we must pause here and reflect upon our own conduct in light of these words of the Lord. Moses and Aaron’s sin is disbelief in the Lord’s command that a word alone would be sufficient to open up the rock, and then a failure to sanctify the Lord in the eyes of the people.

As the Lords pastors we are called to “sanctify the Lord” before the eyes of the people every time we speak. What does this mean? It means that the Lord Almighty, our Saviour God, is lifted up in the eyes and ears of the people every time we speak of the Lord. It means that no personal issues ever cloud our proclamation of the Lord’s person, plan and purpose for His people. It means that when we speak of the Lord, we speak without anything being said that distracts from His glory and His plan.

Let us challenge ourselves with the text of scripture that is good to reflect upon every time we preach. John 12:21. “Sir, we would see Jesus!” When we preach the people do not need to see us, or anything about us, they need to see Jesus. We are heralds of the king, and our business is to portray everything that the King wants said, not anything of ourselves. Our job is to never get in the way of the message of the Lord to His people.

The punishment for both Moses and Aaron is that they will not enter the land. Their leadership role is removed from them, and others will lead the people into the land. They are relieved of their command before it is finished. This is the penalty for every person in authority who fails to follow through on their Lord’s orders. Moses accepts his punishment and records the details here for us to learn from. This is a mighty and humble man, who thinks of others now and in sadness desires that we do not follow him in this time of failure. Numbers 27:12-14, Deuteronomy 3:23-29, 32:48-52, 34:1-8.

The place where the water was provided is to be called “Meribah”. The word means the place of quarrel, strife, and rejection. Both Rephidim and Kadesh are given this name. Exodus 17:7, Numbers 27:14, Deuteronomy 33:8, Psalms 78:32-41, 81:7, Hebrews 3:7 – 4:12. From the Hebrews passage we see that the people tested the Lord; they pushed the Lord and He responded in grace and mercy. Now note the Psalmists words concerning this place. From the Lord’s

perspective, He tested them at these places, testing their faith, and demonstrating His power to deliver them. The people will learn by this incident and they will march with Moses through the next weeks until Joshua takes over.

**Verses 14 – 17.** This is a passage that tells us Moses is limping spiritually. Why does he write to the king of Edom? There is no need at all to take the action he does here and it leads to the appearance of weakness. The Edomites are relatives truly, but Moses himself has recorded the words of the Lord concerning them. Genesis 25:23, 29-34, 27:34-41. Esau's people were prophesied to serve the sons of Jacob. Edom had seen the Lord's deliverance and provision of Israel for forty years now. They had lots of opportunities to prove themselves helpful, if they were going to be, and speak with Israel if they wished to.

Moses job was not to be a diplomat, but a spiritual leader. If the cloud moved in the direction of Edom, then the people were to be led in that direction. The Israelite Army was to be ready, and if there was any talking to do, then the Edomites were to come out and do the talking, and be the ones to try to make peace. Moses is being polite and respectful, but he is taking a supplicant's position, and God's people are never to beg any favours of unbelievers. We are to do the Lord's work and not concern ourselves with the opinions or actions of those who have no part in eternal life.

This may seem harsh, but it is the only way to make the truth of God's person and plan clear to unbelievers. As they see the Lord blessing all we do, they may be convicted of their weakness, and their need for the Saviour we serve. Moses asks for things of the King of Edom that the Lord will provide as and when they are needed. He does not need to promise non-aggression, just march and let his actions do the talking. We pray and wait for the Lord's clear open door, or we march forward in the Holy Spirit's filling. There is no third diplomatic route for believers in the devil's world.

Notice what Moses does not say. He does not tell us that the cloud moved, just that he wrote the letter. If the cloud moved, then the people were to move and trust the Lord as to the direction, and for any directions the Lord may give them. Moses does not record the Lord telling him to write to Edom. He does what seems right to himself, and that is always a danger for us. We are called to "wait upon the Lord" for direction, and if none comes then we are to wait longer.

We are to ask godly people for advice, and pray alone and with godly people, but not to take the advice or direction of godless men and women. The Edomites were pagans; their nature as relatives was a total irrelevancy. Moses request was respectful but opened the door to rejection, when a march up the road would have opened the door to the Lord's direction. All Moses needed to do was follow the cloud! All we need to do today is "walk in the Holy Spirit's power and guidance".

**Verse 18.** The answer of this pagan king is understandable. To let 30,000+ people walk through his land, with 30,000 plus animals in tow, with 6000 armed men in battle order is just too great a risk from a human viewpoint. This man is not a believer and does not trust anyone's word. He has heard of the warlike nature of these people and he has made no attempt to contact and be friendly to the people of Israel before this time. Moses does not even mention his name, and that indicates no contact before this time. Moses had no right to expect any good answer here, But he wants to avoid war. His renewed request for freedom of passage is a sign of how far he is ready to go to try to work with these people in peace, if he can.

**Romans 12:17-21.** *"17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.  
18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.  
19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.  
20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.  
21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."*

**Verses 19 – 20.** Moses does not need to beg. No believer is EVER to go cap in hand to a pagan and ask for favours. The Lord's words alone are our guide and in Him alone we trust. We are to do the work we are called to do and trust the Lord to protect us. The Edomites back their second refusal with a strong army and they make it clear that they will resist with force any entry into or passage through their land. No-where here does Moses tell us that he prayed and sought the Lord's guidance, although he does record later that he received it in Deuteronomy.

The lack of mention of prayer is an indication of the state Moses is in as he records this, but later, when he records the full story in Deuteronomy he gives us the details additional omitted here. The Lord tells Moses that they are to go around the land of Edom and they are not to fight against Edom, for God has given Edom Mt Seir, and Israel is not to attack it. Deuteronomy 2:1-7. The Lord meets Israel and Moses in his actions and gives direction to protect Esau's descendants in grace also. They don't deserve it, but neither does Moses, and so God teaches grace to both groups of people.

**Verses 21 – 22.** They journey from Kadesh to Mt Hor. This mountain may be around what will become the city of Petra, but it's exact location is guesswork at this distance, and Josephus' guess of Petra is no better than any others. Moses tells us that they later went around the land of Edom, and that they went, "by way of the Red (reedy) Sea", or by heading south towards the Gulf of Aqaba. Numbers 21:4. Moses use of place names in Numbers is problematic for us, for they give us no help, except to prove that Moses is the author. Within a few centuries of his time no-one is able to locate these places, as the destruction of the communities of the areas the Israelites pass through is so complete, that none can remember old names.

This is not unique in the ancient world where the defeat of a people could mean their genocide and the total destruction of every trace of them. This was to happen to the Assyrians, who would go from ultimate power, with vast cities, and millions of people in 620 BC to elimination by 605 BC. Their destruction was such that within 150 years when a Greek traveller passes by their capital Nineveh, the locals living there at the time cannot even tell him the name of the place.

The actual site of Mt Hor appears to be placed somewhere on the west side of the Arabah, on a line of march from Kadesh towards the border of the lands of Edom and Moab. We know that the king of Edom would not let them pass and came "out" to meet them. This tells us that the Israelites did not enter into Edom proper at all, but stayed at a respectful distance. As they camped by Mt Hor for over thirty days, it must have been to the west of the Arabah, away from the Edomites, but far closer to the Dead Sea than it was to Elat, as their presence in this region draws a Canaanite attack from a king of the Negev. Numbers 21:1-4.

Actual site identification for Mt Hor is all speculation and so we won't pause here any longer, but check out your bible maps and see the difficulties with the traditional route maps, but understand just how hard it is to be certain of these places. Keep remembering climate change also. This area is all desert today, but was fertile and well settled at this time, with advanced civilizations living all around this area. The desert hills of Edom and Moab now give no clue, except to the archaeologist who knows where to look, of the large populations their then fertile valleys and wooded slopes supported. They become deserted places due to military action later, when their hills were denuded of trees by invaders and the resultant decay of the land makes it desert waste.

**Verses 23 – 29.** By the borders of Edom, probably to the west of the Arabah, the Lord speaks to Aaron and Moses and tells of Aaron's coming time of death. Moses is told to take his brother and his nephew Eleazar and go up the mountain there and strip Aaron of his robes and dress Eleazar in them. They are told that Aaron will then die and be left upon that mountain. Both men know the reason for this and I can only imagine the many mixed emotions on their journey together up that hill from which only Moses and Eleazar will return.

Moses is obedient, and the three men go up the hill in the eyes of all the people. This is a moment of private pain and yet also of joy, for both know they will be together again soon in heaven with their Lord. They both know, they are punished, but they also know that they are forgiven, and the very way the Lord has told them of the death gives assurance. This is vital for all believers to see today, for both brothers are under the "Sin Unto Death" due to their failures, but both are personally assured of their salvation and eternal destiny, and that Abraham and their other godly forefathers await them in heaven.

It is a lovely way Moses is told that Aaron is to die. He is to be "gathered to his fathers". This is a lovely way to think of death and it is the way the Lord talks about it for a believer, and so it is the way for us to see it. We are going to be with our believing relatives who have gone before us. There is no fear in going to be with the ones who led you to the Lord, or walked with you in the Lord, and who are there with the Lord already. It is reunion and joy that is the Lord's way of seeing death. It is rest from labour, and joy with all who have loved and served before you. The sadness of a believer's death is in the temporary separation from loved ones still here on earth. There is no such thing as "soul sleep" but an active engagement in eternal fellowship that is envisaged here and this is the biblical viewpoint of death for the believer.

Aaron does not die alone, but seeing his adult son Eleazar putting on his high priestly garments and having his brother beside him also. Moses' role is to take the garments off Aaron and dress Eleazar. Father and son will be overwhelmed with the emotion of this moment and Moses must be the one to guide and lead them through this dark but also joyous time, when the spiritual leadership is passed on and at the top of the mountain the old man can lay down and die quietly away from the people's gaze in privacy with the two men who love him most.

Was Aaron buried, or left at the top of the mount? Most likely the two men buried their father/brother at the top of the mount and then trudged down together. The people realized something had occurred when only the two men return, and the people mourn for Aaron for thirty days. They had moaned about this man, but he had repented of all sin, and he had gone on to stand firmly for them before the Lord for forty years, and they finally honour him for all he did for them, and in this time deal with their own sin of rejection of him through this time.

They are all ready to commit to following Eleazar when they move out again. With the days ticking onwards, the harvest time is probably well and truly over by now. The optimal time for invasion is over from a human viewpoint, and the people must trust the Lord to deliver their enemies into their hands now, not just walk into their fields and eat their crops! Faith is the test for these people and the Canaanites will give them a test quite quickly; possibly even before their period of mourning for Aaron is over.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Have you gone through a time of "wandering"? At times the Lord must discipline us for disobedience, and in such times the sooner we confess our sins, re-apply ourselves to the Word and move steadily into daily fellowship and obedience, then the sooner the time flows past and we re-enter our service. Do not be discouraged if there has been a time on the shelf for you, for if you are still alive there is still a task for you to do for the Lord. Remember Moses and Aaron, who failed terribly, but dealt with their failure, and served until their deaths with dignity, and so won eternal reward.

God is gracious, and if we still live after our great failure, there is hope for restoration of eternal blessing, even if we have lost things upon the earth. All we must do is return to full fellowship with the Lord. If this is you today, get on your knees and be restored and then claim the promises of God to turn cursing into blessing. Romans 8:28, 1 Corinthians 10:13, 1 John 1:5-10.

2. Moses gets angry, and anger on the part of a pastor towards the people the Lord has called us to lead is always wrong. Nothing is to be taken personally by us when we confront God's people over sin or error of any sort. If we find anger welling up within towards the church, then we must draw aside and confess our pride, for we are taking things personally, and as the Lord's Herald, we have no right to do this. Let us walk humbly before the Lord and act as His Ambassador, not as our own.

3. The water tests were significant in the wanderings. The Lord had led them in their journey, and as His people He was responsible to provide for them. Their learning was that He could be trusted and to relax in His love, mercy, grace and care for them. This remains our challenge in the places where there is "no water". If we face any shortage today, let us bow before the Lord and request, on the basis of the promises of the Word of God, for the Lord's solution. Let us not beat any rocks, but speak quietly in faith to the Lord who loves us and gave Himself for us, and He will answer our prayers.

4. We are to seek nothing from unbelievers except opportunities to give the Gospel message. We are to seek no favours from any pagan, but to seek the Lord's direction alone and follow His leading alone. When there is delay in the Lord's direction, we are to wait upon it in faith, through prayer and praise. Let praise and prayer transform all difficulties, and then we will get through the dark nights of the soul that we may be called to endure. Let us endure testing situations with the courage of the Lord's fully equipped soldiers.

5. There is a time to die, and for believers this is always the Lord's perfect time for us. Death is not arbitrary in the Lord. We are to seek the Lord's face in all things and relax into His plan for us. Aaron is to be "gathered to his fathers" and so are we. If we do not have any biological fathers in faith, then we have the assurance of the fellowship of the great fathers of faith of history as our companions forever.

Death is not the pagan "Hades", nor is there soul sleep, but there is active fellowship with the Lord on the instant of death. Let us celebrate and preach the realities of heaven, so that all believers know their eternal destiny. As we face darker times towards the end, believers must know that the Lord is there for them, and He waits to welcome them home to heaven. The church has become too comfortable upon the earth. Let us examine ourselves in this matter, for our treasures need to be laid up in heaven, not here upon the earth. If what we love is here alone we are most miserable as we approach death, and this is not the Christian hope. Let us preach and challenge people with the truth on the matter of death.

### **REFLECTION UPON "AMBASSADORSHIP"**

1. An Ambassador does not appoint himself, he is appointed by the nation he represents, the king he represents, the person he represents. We are appointed by God. (2 Corinthians 5:20).
2. An Ambassador does not support himself. We are sustained and protected by God (Philippians 4:19).
3. An Ambassador does not represent himself. We represent God on earth. (Matthew 28:19-20).
4. An Ambassador does not belong to the nation to which he is sent. Positionally we are in heaven, experientially we are in the world. (Philippians 3:20, John 15:19).
5. All Ambassadors have instructions in written form. We have the Word of God. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2).
6. An Ambassador representing his country does not treat any insult as personal. (Matthew 5:11-12).
7. When an Ambassador is recalled from a country it is tantamount to declaration of war. After the Rapture there will be massive warfare on earth. All Christians will be recalled at the Rapture. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

### **REFLECTION UPON "CHRIST AS THE ROCK"**

1. Christ is the rock of salvation. (Exodus 17:1-7, 1 Corinthians 10:4)
2. Christ is the rock of judgment. (Isaiah 8:14, 1 Peter 2:8)
3. Christ is the rock of provision. (Isaiah 26:3, 4) Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee because he trusteth thee. Trust ye in the Lord forever for in the Lord is the rock of ages.
4. Christ is the foundation rock. (Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22)
5. Christ is the foundation rock of the Church. (Matthew 16:16, 18, 1 Corinthians 3:11, Ephesians 2:20-22)

6. Christ is the destroying rock of the second advent. (Daniel 2:35)

**REFLECTION UPON OUR “LIVING WATER”**

**1. SCRIPTURE (John 7:37-39)**

37 “In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. 38 He that believeth on me as the scriptures hath said out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. 39 But this spake he of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive for the Holy Ghost was not yet given because that Jesus was not yet glorified.”

2. Problem: What are the rivers of living water which flow from one.

3. Evaluation - **verse 37** - “In the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying, if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.”

- a) This takes place at the end of the feast of Tabernacles. During the feast every day the golden pitcher has been taken to the water and filled. On the last day Jesus stood up and taught saying:
- b) "If " - third class condition maybe yes maybe no portrays human free will.
- c) "any man - TIS - mankind.
- d) "thirst" - present active subjunctive - shows a positive attitude towards a relationship with God. DIPSAO, the subjunctive mood goes with the third class condition active voice - the person's free will.
- e) "let him come" positive attitude at the point of gospel hearing - present active imperative.
- f) This is a syntactical answer to whether a person who desires a relationship with God will accept the gospel - the answer is yes - the subjunctive mood of 'thirst' is a potential whilst the imperative mood of 'let him come' is acceptance of the gospel.
- g) "unto " - preposition PROS plus to accusative - face to face to me.
- h) "drink " - present active imperative of PINO. To drink is non meritorious and is a picture of faith.

4. **Verse 38** - “He that believeth on me as the scriptures hath said out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”

- a) "He that believeth" is synonymous to "he that drinketh ". It is a present active participle which modifies the imperative of PISTEUO. In the Greek this shows that "he that believes " is an illustration of "he that drinks ".
- b) "as the scripture hath said" - a prophetic recognition of the New Testament canon before the NT canon was formed.
- c) "out of his " - out of the believers.
- d) "belly" - KOILIA - this word is also used for the womb or inner person.
- e) "shall flow " - future active indicative of RHEO
  - i) future tense - when the Church Age begins.
  - ii) active voice - the Holy Spirit produces the character of the absent Christ.
  - iii) indicative mood - the reality of the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age.
- f) "rivers of living" - present active participle - rivers of always living.
- g) "water" - three spiritual uses for water:-
  - i) Salvation (Isaiah 55:1, Revelation 22:17)
  - ii) the Word (Ephesians 5:26).
  - iii) the Holy Spirit (John 7:38,39).

5. **Verse 39** - “But this spake he of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive for the Holy Ghost was not yet given because that Jesus was not yet glorified.”

- a) "But thus spake he of the Holy Spirit" - the rivers of living water deals with the Holy Spirit.
- b) "speak" PHEMI - to affirm, to confirm.
- c) "of" - PERI - preposition meaning concerning.
- d) "which they that believe" - aorist tense of PISTEUO.
- e) The contrast of the present tense of PISTEUO in verse 38 which is a challenge to the people to whom Jesus is talking with the aorist tense of verse 39 where those who will believe are shown should be noted.
- f) "on him " - Jesus Christ.
- g) "should receive" - MELLO - might receive or are about to receive.
- h) This talk is some six months before the Lord's death and eight months before the start of the Church Age.
- i) This therefore deals with the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age and is the means of production of divine good.
- j) for the Holy Spirit was not yet given because Christ was not yet glorified - Christ had to be at the right hand of God before the 1st advent of the Holy Spirit for universal indwelling of believers.
- k) cf. John 14:17 "but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you (Jewish age) and shall be in you (Church Age)".

6. Conclusion

The rivers of living water represents the outpouring of good works by the believer controlled by the Holy Spirit.

**REFLECTION UPON THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF “DYING GRACE”**

1. We are all here upon the earth as in a “strange country”; we are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, and are not meant to be too comfortable here. Philippians 3:12-17, Hebrews 11:13, 1 Peter 2:11.
2. Death is the strangest thing we confront on this earth; the weirdness of being here one minute, alive, alert and warm, then a second later, dead, cooling and inert. Death is meant to appear strange to us, for it is the evidence before us that we are not permanent inhabitants here, but simply playing out a part as we pass through. This is not a place we are meant to get attached to.
3. The death of believers is a precious thing to the God who has given his life to save us from the judgment of sin and death. 1 Samuel 26:21, 2 Kings 1:13-14, Psalms 49:8, 72:14, 116:15, 1 Peter 1:7, 2:4.
4. We all must die, but that is not the end. 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 11:13. The mature believer facing death see through it, to the other side where they meet with the Lord face to face. 1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10.
5. Dying grace is provided to all believers who are looking to their Lord as they die, for his perfect provision for each of us from eternity past has everything we need provided in advance of our life, let alone our death itself. There are no surprises to God, and all things we face have provision for them there to be claimed by faith. 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 2 Peter 2:9, Jude 24-25.

**NOTES**

**CHAPTER 21****INTRODUCTION**

Arad is in the south of the land of promise and the Canaanite king of this land feels threatened by the Israelites drawing near his "sphere of influence", which may have gone to the borders of Edom and Moab. He brings out a raiding party and attacks the Israelites, possibly in their encampment during the thirty days of mourning for Aaron, and captures some of them. Moses does not mention a formal battle, and so a raid on the camp is the most likely thing being referred to here. The fate of the captives is unknown, but the normal thing in this day was that they would be killed in the temple of the gods of the Canaanite people as human sacrifices. This is the first of several contacts with naked and ugly evil.

The evil of these people and their hatred of the people of God need to be remembered as we go through the next chapters. These people stood against God and His people with a satanic inspired hatred. The Canaanite king and his army and people will be dealt with, and the people will then head south again and skirt the lands of Edom and Moab and move onto the attack again against the Ammonites. By the time the Israelites arrive at the borders of Ammon their king has secured the services of a prophet of God to work for them and curse the Israelites. We will meet him in chapters 22-24. Moses will spend more time on this prophet and his evil plot than he does describing any detail of their march from Kadesh to the borders of Ammon.

**NUMBERS 21:1-35**

**21:1** And when king Arad the Canaanite, which dwelt in the south, heard tell that Israel came by the way of the spies; then he fought against Israel, and took some of them prisoners. **2** And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. **3** And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Israel, and delivered up the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their cities: and he called the name of the place Hormah. **4** And they journeyed from mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. **5** And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? for there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. **6** And the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died. **7** Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD, and against thee; pray unto the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. **8** And the LORD said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole: and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. **9** And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived. **10** And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in Obboth. **11** And they journeyed from Obboth, and pitched at Ijeabaram, in the wilderness which is before Moab, toward the sunrising. **12** From thence they removed, and pitched in the valley of Zared. **13** From thence they removed, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, which is in the wilderness that cometh out of the coasts of the Amorites: for Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. **14** Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the LORD, What he did in the Red sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, **15** And at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab. **16** And from thence they went to Beer: that is the well whereof the LORD spake unto Moses, Gather the people together, and I will give them water. **17** Then Israel sang this song, Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it: **18** The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves. And from the wilderness they went to Mattanah: **19** And from Mattanah to Nahaliel: and from Nahaliel to Bamoth: **20** And from Bamoth in the valley, that is in the country of Moab, to the top of Pisgah, which looketh toward Jeshimon. **21** And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, saying, **22** Let me pass through thy land: we will not turn into the fields, or into the vineyards; we will not drink of the waters of the well: but we will go along by the king's high way, until we be past thy borders. **23** And Sihon would not suffer Israel to pass through his border: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel into the wilderness: and he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel. **24** And Israel smote him with the edge of the sword, and possessed his land from Arnon unto Jabbok, even unto the children of Ammon: for the border of the children of Ammon was strong. **25** And Israel took all these cities: and Israel dwelt in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all the villages thereof. **26** For Heshbon was the city of Sihon the king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab, and taken all his land out of his hand, even unto Arnon. **27** Wherefore they that speak in proverbs say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared: **28** For there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar of Moab, and the lords of the high places of Arnon. **29** Woe to thee, Moab! thou art undone, O people of Chemosh: he hath given his sons that escaped, and his daughters, into captivity unto Sihon king of

the Amorites. 30 We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon, and we have laid them waste even unto Nophah, which reacheth unto Medeba. 31 Thus Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites. 32 And Moses sent to spy out Jaazer, and they took the villages thereof, and drove out the Amorites that were there. 33 And they turned and went up by the way of Bashan: and Og the king of Bashan went out against them, he, and all his people, to the battle at Edrei. 34 And the LORD said unto Moses, Fear him not: for I have delivered him into thy hand, and all his people, and his land; and thou shalt do to him as thou didst unto Sihon king of the Amorites, which dwelt at Heshbon. 35 So they smote him, and his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him alive: and they possessed his land.”

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 4.** Arad ruled over the Negev, which is today a desert, but in this day was a fertile area with extensive settlements. The actual site of his capital may be Tell Arad about twenty miles south of Hebron. This is a small tell and the total population of the settlement there can only be around about a thousand or so people who would have lived in the surrounding hills, and come into the tell for trade, religious services, or defence only. Throughout the Negev, the total population at this time may have allowed the king to be able to field an army of a few thousand men. This raiding party attacks the Israelites camp.

This is another reminder that the numbers of the Israelites are small also, certainly not anywhere near the inflated LXX figures that have been wrongly copied into our modern versions. The figures I have worked on since the discussion of this in Exodus is around 30,000 as the total population, with around 6000 soldiers in the army. The king of Arad feels confident of his success over the Israelites and attacks and has some success.

The attack may have occurred at any time from the Israelites arrival in the area of Edom’s borders while they awaited the Edomite King’s answer, through until the thirty day mourning period for Aaron was over. The attack catches the Israelites without full preparedness. The defeat is a criticism of Moses, for his encampment should not have been caught out like this, and it is another example of his lack of focus on the task through these weeks. Moses will not make this error again and Joshua especially learns from it.

The people make a vow that they will defeat and destroy these evil people or die trying. The army then marches north and defeats the Canaanite forces in the field and destroys some of their settlements thoroughly, but Moses lack of mention of the recovery of their captives indicates that they are possibly too late to rescue their brethren from death. Joshua will complete the defeat of these people. Joshua 12:14.

They call the area Hormah, meaning, the place of the ban. It would appear that the Lord “banned” them going any further north from there and even completing their conquest of that area at this time. They have had a victory, but it is a discouraged group that heads south east again, following the cloud, and skirting the land of Edom, taking the long and hard way into the land. There is more to learn before they attack the land proper. God often takes the “long way through” with us, and we wonder why, but it is nearly always his timing, and his training that answers our questions. This is when I suspect they took the route that the railway line now follows to the east of the lands of Edom and Moab.

Why do they not go further north after the defeat of Arad? Why does the Lord not allow them to enter the land that way? It is clear that the Lord forbade it, and the cloud moved to the south-east. The result of the Lord’s direction is that the people have many weeks of hard marching through tough country and that their entry into the land is to be across the Jordan River. The Lord has deliberately ordered them to march and attack from apparently the worst possible direction. This is going to be further faith testing of the people, and the Lord’s purposes have to be accepted. We must remember at times that the Lord’s objectives in calling us to walk a certain path are often not just related to our goals but his for others also.

They are mightily discouraged by this long, hard journey, but on this journey they learn the toughness and total obedience to their leadership that they will need as they enter the land at the point where God intends them to. At that point they will gain the victories over the much larger settlements in the most fertile part of the land. Had they attacked through the Negev they would have had a few easy victories over small settlements, but the enemy would then have had the time to organize their armies further north and a vast army would have confronted them. They would have faced the full combined strength of their enemies without any major victory to hearten the Israelites and dishearten the Canaanites. God’s plan may appear to be the hard way into the land, and it is, but it is the way that will allow the Israelites to build strength and faith, and the Lord to work the miracles that will hearten them and dishearten their enemies.

**Verses 5 – 9.** The route that I have suggested is the likely one that takes the people through the area travelled by Lawrence of Arabia with his Arab army in World War 1, and it is extremely difficult country with few wells. Look at a relief map of the area and see just how tough this march would be, but see also that it was the right path, well away from their enemies and their spies. They have seen the Lord’s provision of water at Kadesh, and so they can relax in the Lord’s provision of enough water on this march.

The harvest is over in the land by this time and the weather would be harsh. From a human viewpoint the time for successful invasion is over. The direction they have taken has however baffled their enemies, for they do not have any way of knowing where the Israelites are, nor where they are heading. As far as the Canaanites are concerned, the people of Israel are discouraged, and they have headed back into the land of Midian to resume their wanderings.

Their moaning would probably have been heard by any passing caravan, for they are sick and tired of the Manna and long for real bread. They have had a taste of the food of the land in the campaign at Hormah, and may have captured good quantities of food from their enemies there. When people have had a taste of some luxury they will find it twice as hard to return to hard rations. These people need to learn not to moan, and to accept that the Lord's path is the best path, and that with the Lord there will be certain victory. Their march will teach them to relax in the Lord's provision. They will march through tough country, but they will get there alive and so will their animals. God will provide for them, and He provides for us. 1 Corinthians 10:13.

As all the travellers who have ever gone through this land will tell you, it is a favourite place for snakes. They abound in the Arabian pastoral lands. The people's moaning brings immediate judgment from the Lord upon them. He sends poisonous snakes into the camp and there is a judgment of those who moan. The people cry aloud because of the snakes, and many die. Psalms 68:6, 78:17-26. The Psalmist refers to the Manna as "angel's food", and so it was, and yet it was despised as bland against the things captured from their enemies. They will learn that in all things they are to give thanks and be content with the Lord's provision. Philippians 4:10-13, 1 Timothy 6:6-9, Hebrews 13:5-6.

The people respond correctly this time. This second generation of Israelites are fast learners, unlike their parents, and they quickly confess their sin before the Lord, and they accurately name their sin as speaking against the Lord. Psalms 78:32-39, 106:43-48.

To resolve the snake bites and heal the people who will otherwise die Moses is told by the Lord to make a brazen serpent and raise it up upon a pole, so that all who look at it will be healed and live. It is called a "fiery serpent" as newly beaten copper especially, when caught by the sun will glow and flash like fire. It will then be easily visible from any point in the campsite. Does Moses make this personally or does Bezaleel do this for him? Exodus 31:1-5. Bezaleel is of the older generation and so is likely dead by this time, and the serpent is likely cut out of a thin beaten sheet of brass, copper or bronze so that it will twirl in the wind and flash in the light, so it could be made very quickly by Moses himself.

The serpent is certainly not cast from solid metal, for people are dying of snake bites and speed is of the essence to have it up on a pole quickly. It becomes a perfect picture of looking to the sole provision of the Lord for salvation. As the serpent was the one who is embodied by Satan, and was the tempter to the sin of rejection of the plan of God, so the serpent is now the one to look to in order to be saved from the sin of moaning about the plan of God. Genesis 3:1-15.

As Moses is the one who wrote these words in Genesis he must have immediately seen the action he was asked to take was symbolic of the defeat of sin's curse by the one who later would be "lifted up" as the Saviour. Those who look to the Lord's provision are saved, but those who keep moaning about their lot, and accusing God of injustice and unfairness die. This remains the central fact of spiritual life and the choice of man today! Isaiah 43:11, 45:22-25, John 1:29, 3:14-16, 12:30-33, Acts 4:12, 16:31, Romans 8:3-4, 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, 1 Peter 2:21-24.

**Verses 10 – 16.** The actual places here are mostly unknown; only the rivers kept their names through the years, as they were the lasting features. The campsites of the people and the towns of this area were destroyed many times by many different invaders through the years. The main fact that is useful is that they were camped "towards the sun rising", which indicates that their route march did take them well east of the Kings Highway that ran through Edom and Moab.

There is an interesting record here that indicates there is further information that has not survived. Moses refers to a book, "The Book of the Wars of the Lord". He quotes a poetic passage from it, indicating it was a poetic record of their battles and may have been sung by the people as a memorial of the battles they had fought. This reference indicates there were many skirmishes and deliverances of the Lord that Moses does not mention here. It may be that they had to practice their military skills in earnest through this entire journey time frame, and be alert at all times.

After their defeat of the Amorites, the Moabites and Midianites will gather and plot against them, Numbers 22-24, and that may be because of skirmishes fought on the journey from the lower Arabah through the Arabian lands to the Arnon River. They become a strong fighting unit through these experiences. Now God is good in His training regime, and the people will be thankful of the Lord's moving training camp, for by the time they face the Amorites they are ready and able warriors with many small battles behind them. It is a veteran army that faces the Amorites not a group of raw untried recruits.

The Lord provides water through the rivers that they cross and the wells at Beer. God's provision is always enough! Praise the Lord for His perfect plan and His perfect provision within the plan for us! Let us see the "little battles" as the Lord's moving training camp for the bigger ones later and rejoice in the provision of the Lord for power and direction through them all.

**Verses 17 -20.** The song sung by the people indicates that at Beer the people dug a well and the people who did the digging were the princes of Israel. This is a real leadership training exercise, and Moses, and his men are setting the example here. In difficult situations the leadership must be ready to serve in the toughest and hardest areas and get their hands dirty. In my Naval service I trained all my young officers to serve their men and then lead them. If there was tea or coffee to be served, it was the officer's job to serve their men first, and only then have something themselves.

As the people enter the borderland area that was controlled by the Moabites we start to come across places that can be tracked with more certainty. The people are on the border of Moab and the Amorites and ready to move towards the

Jordan by the King's Highway, which is the only way through this part of the country. They must pass through the Amorite area to get to the fords of Jordan, in peace or in war, and Moses will now offer the Amorites the choice before the Lord.

He is not begging here, but speaking as God's man to those who may or may not give way. He is polite but firm. He speaks for the Lord here. Moses now knows he has permission to fight if he has to and his army is now ready to fight and destroy these people if they resist the will of the Lord. Once again, do not have sympathy for these people; they were evil, and will show just how far they will go in their genocidal plans to murder all Israelites!

**Verses 21 – 22.** The request is similar to that made to the king of Edom, with a full offer to buy meat and meal and not even drink from their wells. The people would have taken significant time to pass through, but 30,000 people are able to pass by a spot in under twelve hours, so this was not a major disruption and it avoided warfare. Refer to Moses other passage on this time in Deuteronomy 2:26-37. The message is polite but blunt; "Let us pass". It carries with it a silent threat that there will be trouble if they cannot. There is no polite and even cringing diplomacy as with Edom.

There is no other way through to the Jordan. It is crunch time for King Sihon of Heshbon and for Israel, and Israel is ready for the fight, but Sihon is not. The events that unfold over the next three chapters will unfold over time. This is slow, camel and mule diplomacy, with each group taking time to read and reply to the other as Sihon gathers his forces. He is caught out by their sudden arrival down the Arnon River and is only able to delay the Israelites with diplomacy for a time, and then get his army as far as Jahaz to fight the battle there.

If you have access to a good relief map of this area of what is modern Jordan it is interesting to see the battlefield site. We are now entering the stage of the invasion of the land where you can visit the actual sites and even be part of excavations. Go on line to [www.BIBLICALARCHAEOLOGY.ORG](http://www.BIBLICALARCHAEOLOGY.ORG) and see what excavations are on for the period April-September each year and apply and go and work on an actual site in this area. Old Moab and Ammon are regularly excavated and there are good opportunities to join these expeditions.

**Verses 23 – 26.** The battle does not go well for Sihon, and as the quote from the "proverb" states, he had an army that had recently beaten the Moabites and enslaved or murdered large numbers of them. The Israelites moved quickly and well, and advanced into the Amorite territory and chose the battlefield. For a general this is the key element in strategy. Moses did not wait at the border he advanced into the land of the enemy as soon as they got the refusal for free passage. They fought the enemy, defeated them and captured all the land of the Amorites and wiped them out as a people group in the area. They are unable to push into Ammon as their border is too well defended and the Lord does not direct them to attack these people, whose capital is modern Amman. Deuteronomy 2:19.

The survivors of the Amorites would have fled into Ammon, or north towards Damascus. The Israelites seize and will later live in their cities. For the first time in forty years the families of Israel can have a roof over their heads that is not a tent. They will not stay in these homes until they are formally allocated later, but I can imagine children and adults under forty entering the homes of their enemies, and enjoying the strange experience of being under a solid roof for the first time, even though they will remain living as a nation in their armed tent camp ready to cross the Jordan. The Moabites are revenged for the murders perpetrated upon them and the land is back with their allies, and relatives, the Israelites.

**Verses 27 – 30.** The poem or song that is recorded here is an early example of the song of the warriors who recorded the details of victories and defeats as a message to the next generation. Sihon of Heshbon had conquered the Moabites but he loses all he conquered to Israel. This is the way of the Lord with all who think that they can hold what they have unjustly seized by violence, without any right to do so. The German Army and Japanese armies of World War 2 discovered that their "great victories" in 1938-1942 were quickly lost in 1943-1945.

The Russians, who seized half of Europe also after that war discovered by the 1990s that they could not hold their conquests and the people of the nations that they had dominated threw off their oppression. All tyrants, like Sihon, Hitler, and Stalin, are undone by the Lord; it is just a matter of timing. Look up the names of the places mentioned, either on line, or in a Bible Encyclopaedia, or Bible dictionary, as a great deal is known about some of these places through archaeology.

The death of some of the children here is a concern to us today. We need to remember, or accept, one very unpleasant fact about these people that is glossed over in many commentaries, as it is simply too awful. Many of the children were to die with their parents, because they were often infected with the venereal diseases associated with their parent's pagan sexual abuse based worship system. This is played down by modern writers, but the worship of fertility gods and goddesses involved child sacrifice, homosexuality, bestiality, and ritual child sexual abuse. Sadly, due to the terrible evils of these people their children were infected with the diseases of their parents.

There was no way that a new population could be free of sexual contamination if they left any alive in their borders. In that day the elimination of the gene pool of a corrupt people who had rebelled against the Lord's standards for more than four generations was accepted as a sad necessity. It was seen as the removal of a cancer from the area, and in this case it was directly ordered by the Lord. The fate of the children was that they went to be with the Lord, just as David affirms regarding the child born of his adultery. 2 Samuel 12:13-23.

We have already seen that any children who die before the age of accountability are automatically with the Lord in heaven, so their eternal destiny is not in debate, however we still find it awful that they were killed, but some of them

were, and we must sit with this fact. We must place this fact alongside the truth of the character of God which involves love, and see that the order for the elimination of this people group was given by the Lord Himself. This is hard to take, but in heaven we will have all the answers as to why this was needed, and why it was crucial for the later survival of the Israelites. The Israelites will not follow this order through completely and will nearly be destroyed themselves due to the sexual sins and other evils of the survivors of these people and the other Canaanites. Deuteronomy 3:1-29.

**Verses 31 – 35.** There is a brief respite from wandering after the defeat of the Amorites and the Israelites are able to enjoy solid food for the first time in forty years and the freedom to walk the valleys of a land that will be their own. As Moses identifies in Deuteronomy 3:29, the people remained living together in their armed camp in a valley, and this was essential for defensive purposes. There will be no more sudden attacks catching them unawares. The lesson of the defeat by the king of Arad has been totally taken on board and it is a well defended camp that is pitched opposite Beth-peor.

Their defeat of the Amorites has been reported widely and the Canaanites of the land across the Jordan are now aware they have arrived, but still feel safe behind the swollen river. The harvest is over, the crops are in their storehouses and the river is swollen from the winter rains. They do not fear the Israelites, nor expect them to be able to cross the river before the summer. This is why the Lord has brought them the hard route and the long way around; the enemy are not expecting what will soon occur, and so they do not gather their forces in sufficient numbers to seriously oppose Israel.

From their base close to Heshbon Moses sends spies north along the river, and north-east towards and beyond Jaazer. They report the state of defences and the attack is launched and is successful. The people are driven out and probably flee to the east and the north. The Israelite Army approaches the country of Bashan, and their king Og comes out with his army to oppose them. Once again we have the evidence that the numbers of the Israelite Army are around the 6000 mark, for a larger force would have been overwhelming to these towns and they would simply have locked their gates, hidden behind their walls, and a siege would have taken much more time. The Israelite Army is small enough that these proud pagans believe they can take them on in open battle. This false confidence delivers them into Israel's hands for God is with Israel.

Once again we see Moses' strategic thinking, as he draws Og out to the place of his choosing. Og risks everything on one throw of the dice here, and brings out "all" his men for this battle, and when they lose he has none left to defend his cities and towns, and they will all fall. The battle is fought at Edrei, where Moses, having selected the place to fight, has the chance to run the battle his way, and the possibly superior Canaanite forces are obliterated. The Lord's words to Moses indicate that fear is a normal thing when facing Og's Army, indicating to me that it was superior in size and possibly had the chariot forces that the Canaanites were famous for. Moses is told to relax and encourage his men to fight, for they will win. The Israelites move forward in the confidence of the Lord against the superior forces of the enemy and they win a resounding victory and wipe out the army of Og and seize his land.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Constant vigilance is the price of freedom from the violence of evil men. The encampment of Israel was not ready for the first Canaanite attack. This was a failure of leadership, distracted by the death of Aaron, and facing the Edomites ahead of them, they did not see the Canaanites on their flank or rear. In dangerous places and at difficult times we need to be alert to the danger of evil men. We are to remember the words of Nehemiah, and make our solemn prayers, and then set our armed guards. Nehemiah 4:9-18.

2. In many ministry-mission situations the Lord will order us to take the long way around, rather than the obvious direct route to the objective. Whenever this occurs, our challenge is to get on our knees and pray, for the Lord will often train us in faith as we walk difficult and dangerous paths, and the training is always vital for our application in the objective to which we head. Human viewpoint thinking seeks the shortest route to the destination, but the Lord's plan often calls for a circuitous route. Do not get discouraged, for the Lord knows why He orders what we see as "delays". The Lord is in no rush, and His timing and His direction will alone keep us safe. Let us walk with the Lord, and let us be prayerful when we find ourselves saying, "Lord, what is going on here?" God's thoughts are not our thoughts, His plans are not our plans, but they are always the right ones. Isaiah 55:7-9.

3. The character of God remains stable throughout time. When we face difficult things, like the deaths of children, we are to rest in the certainty of the character of God and seek our answers to dilemmas there. There are some questions that will only be answered in heaven. Rest in that truth and keep advancing with the Lord's plan for your life.

4. There are only two places to be in history. The first is on the path that God has ordained for you serving Him as He has called you to. The second is to oppose the plan of God, through hatred, resentment, or just distraction with the things of this world. To stand against God is to try to stop a steam roller and you will be buried by the tide of history. The pagan kings and their people believed they could beat God; no-one can. Let us embrace reality and march forward embracing it, not satanic lies.

## **NOTES**

**CHAPTER 22****NUMBERS 22 INTERPRETED THROUGH THE BOOK OF JUDE**

In these next chapters we are introduced to an interesting character, who is a non-Israelite prophet of God. He is apparently a man of God amongst the pagans, exactly like Melchizedek was five hundred years before. Balaam apparently is the servant of the Lord, but he has a weakness. (Some commentators believe he is just a pagan "soothsayer" but I cannot see the Lord God speaking to such a man as He does to this man). He is sadly I believe, a man of God who is trying to get rich through the service of the Lord. This is a pastor who truly believes in the so called "prosperity gospel", and who is using his recognized position for personal gain. He is identified as a servant of God who has become, through his uncontrolled lust a servant of Satan.

He has apparently in the past received revelation from God, and has a reputation for accuracy of prediction, and yet worships at the shrine of lust, and is motivated by gross materialism. He will become a multi-millionaire by his devious advice to the pagan king. We need to remember in our own day, that Millionaire preachers are as old as Satan. Some of these men are evil unbelievers, but many, perhaps most, are like this man Balaam; they are believers, but they never confront their sin of carnality and it destroys the lives of many, and kills them in the end. Hebrews 11:25.

These chapters before us look at the powerfully destructive sins of money and sexual lust, and religious pride, and then gives us a case study of the subject of divine guidance. In Jude 3,4, and 11 the prophet Balaam, also shows the dangers of carnal lust leading to active apostasy, and opposition to the people and plan of God. This is the last in a line of religious servants of Satan who troubled the people of God. The earlier examples were Cain, Nadab, Abihu, Korah, Dathan and Abiram, and now Balaam. Balaam reminds us that believers who do not deal with their lusts will eventually go away from the Lord, follow their old sin nature lusts, and become enemies of the true Gospel.

Turn to the little letter of Jude and read the first twelve verses. Jude was concerned that false teaching and dangerous behaviours, just like Balaam's, were rampant in the churches of his day, and had to be opposed. He was correct then as to this danger, and the danger is even more obvious today with the prosperity preachers. Any pastor who seeks the Lord's favour must preach the Word in and out of season, rebuke, reprove, exhort and teach. 2 Timothy 2:14-18, 4:1-5. If a Balaam character enters the church, they need to be opposed and ejected quickly, for their fruit is evil indeed. Jude's words warn us that these men and women are an ever present danger to believers and to churches.

Jude did not believe in avoiding offending these people. False doctrine has to be opposed by good doctrine and strong rejection of all lying doctrines. If you do not take on falsehood and destroy it's arguments and silence it's apostles, it will infiltrate a church and pervade and pervert it. This is what has happened in many churches through the years; liberalism or libertarianism came in, it perverted the people, and it stayed until the church doors were closed. It came because the truth was either not being well taught, or because the enemies of the truth were not being thoroughly exposed. Do not be compromised by false doctrine. The pulpit is no place for a coward; you must stand against all evil that will destroy the moral fabric of God's people.

As Jude says, the Bible was once and for all given to us. It is to be our standard and our guide. If we are wrong in any matter, then we need to be ready to be convinced by the Scriptures that we are wrong. If however someone thinks they know better than God's Word, then they need to be corrected or expelled. The people who have destroyed modern denominations have done it quietly, by undermining the faith of the people in the historic Christian faith. They have done it with the ordinary church member often unaware of their assault until all the pastors have gone after falsehoods, or enough have been perverted for the organization to pass remits at their conferences that Bible believers are shocked by.

As a minister you have to be continually vigilant for those who will come in and sow seeds of temptation to lust, doubt, or any other form of falsehood. Be very careful of visiting ministers, or high profile speakers, who run seminars for "deeper life" or "prosperity", for they can be servants of disorder and evil. Matthew 7:13-23.

**NUMBERS 22**

Balaam's area of Old Sin Nature weakness was lust for money. In Jude 11 it says that he "gave himself up" to the desire for wealth. He literally surrendered to this overwhelming motivation and drive in life. He was led astray by his own lust, for he believed that happiness centred in wealth, and he wanted to be very wealthy before he died. He was an older man who had apparently served the Lord as a prophet for a considerable time. Now the prophets of the Lord do not tend to be extremely wealthy, for their hearts and mind are focused upon those they serve and they will give rather than receive.

This man however wanted money as he faced older age, and did not want the money to serve the Lord with by giving more to the needy. He could have had a desire to have money to give to missions, or care for the poor, but his desire was for a “more than comfortable” retirement. He desired a mansion upon the earth, and he did not trust the Lord to look after him in his old age. He sees an opportunity to make a great deal of money by serving Balak, the pagan king of Moab, and he “goes for it”, without heeding the Lord’s specific direction in the matter. He got a great mansion, just as Lot did in Sodom; but his great house was simply a great place to be killed in! Joshua 13:22, John 14:1ff.

It is only as you follow through on the steps that God orders, that you get your whole life sorted out and find a place of service and safety upon the earth. When you confront your lusts and temptations, you are not only confessing sin, and dealing with it, but you are noting where your areas of weakness are and so are able to avoid temptations in the future. You will identify where your Old Sin Nature is going to be most rampant. Having found that out you can set a guard against it in your soul. If you have a lust for money, you can ask the Lord to keep you from it and you can take steps to avoid known temptations.

Balaam had not dealt with sin in his life. God spoke to him and warned him to stop, and did so even through Balaam’s own donkey. He resists God’s will right the way through. Do not feel sorry for Balaam, nor for any who are judged in their persistent sins, for they have resisted for years to get God to the place where He judges them. God is gracious; remember, we must work hard to be judged! Be very scared of sin, especially the sins that wrap themselves so tightly around your soul that you no longer see them as sin, and lust of all sorts is such a sin.

This passage before us also proves the old proverb correct; “No one is an island”. What we do overflows to others. We are all members of a community. Every action that allows sin to grow will overflow to others and as it ripples out the entire society can be corrupted by the uncontrolled sin. This man did not deal with his sin and when he threw himself headlong into this sin, he caused the death of thousands of Israelites. If you do not deal with evil in your own life you will affect others.

We should avoid known areas of temptation; the alcoholic should avoid the bar, the thief avoid all jobs handling money, and those who have problems with sexual lust need to keep strong protocols to keep themselves away from places and people that open the door to sexual temptations. We must guard ourselves, for the enemy loves an unguarded believer who he can knock over. Matthew 6:25-34, James 4:7-8, 1 Peter 5:8-11.

In Numbers 22-24 we have the story of two religious men who follow their lusts, and are brought together to curse the people of God, but who both find judgment, where their inaction would have given them blessing. King Balak tries to discover a plan to morally undermine the Israelites so as to bring them under God’s judgment. His desire is to lower the sense of threat he feels from their vast encampment.

The name Balak means “empty one”, and he was the son of Zippor, meaning “little bird”. He will prove to be well named and Moses draws attention to his name and descent to underline his weakness. Balak is an unbeliever, and he is scared. He is scared of Israel and of the true God, and he knows that his own wise men and mediums are powerless against God’s people, and the God of Israel. He will not do the logical thing, which is to join with Israel and worship the true God, and so receive blessing.

The tragedy of this man is that he prefers his flawed paganism to truth, and continues to worship the gods of his people that have not protected them against the Amorites. He therefore seeks a prophet who speaks the Word of God to try to bring a curse upon the Israelites. His plans are all foolishness, for the Lord had already told the Israelites not to attack the Edomites or the Moabites. There is no threat to Moab from Israel. King Balak does not have to do anything to protect himself against the Israelites. He can be their friends, but he seeks their destruction.

They have destroyed Moab’s enemies, the Amorites, and now they are camped on the “plains of Moab”, opposite Jericho, and this area had been wrested back from the Amorites. Balak had lost this land years before to the Amorites, and so can have no legitimate concern about Israel being there. All he has to do is sit tight, talk with Moses, and be in fellowship with the people of God, but he will not, because he prefers the service of satanic deception.

Balaam’s name means “the disturber of the people” and this is what he turns out to be in a negative way. Every minister should be a disturber of the people in a positive way, and this man may have been that early in his ministry. When you teach God’s word you will disturb things. Matthew 10:34, Ephesians 6:17, Hebrews 4:12. People will be hit and cut by the Word of God and that is the purpose of God. You should disturb the people for the Lord’s glory and their blessing, as they confront sin and live for righteousness. We preach to disturb the peace of the wicked, to bless the saints of God, but not for monetary or personal gain. Balaam has lots to teach us as the Lord’s servants.

In this chapter before us King Balak has seen what has happened to the Amorites. He felt threatened by them and was beaten by them, but now he feels threatened by the Israelites. Every unbeliever is threatened by believers, especially when believers are in large numbers. King Balak told Balaam to come and curse the people because he said he knew that Balaam was a prophet whose word was correct and always came to pass. He wanted the Jews to be defeated supernaturally, for he knew he couldn’t beat them, for they had defeated the people who destroyed his army.

Now King Balak knows people’s weakness and he is able to play Balaam like a flute! Many unbelievers can be quick to spot believer’s weaknesses quicker than we can see our own if we are not alert. If you get your weaknesses sorted out you will not bring disgrace on the Lord, but if you fail to act against your area of lust, then sadly, you will end up bringing

disgrace upon the Gospel and yourself. Your only protection against the power of the Old Sin Nature, is to be walking with the Lord in the filling of the Holy Spirit, and in obedience to the Word of God.

Sin must be “declared war” upon with all your focused energy. Self examination is called for daily, and Confession of Sin is required every time mental attitude sins creep into the soul. Psalms 26:1-3, 1 Corinthians 11:28, 2 Corinthians 13:5, 1 John 1:5-10. There are always the men and women like Balak around, ready to serve Satan by ankle tapping a believer and destroying their ministry.

Does Balaam know what God wants? The answer is clear, as we will see; he knows he should reject all offers to go and curse Israel. He has nothing to say against God’s people. The correct advice to give Balak is that he should seek the peace of God and Israel’s friendship. Balaam however says he wants to seek the Lord’s face again on this, when he doesn’t need to do so.

The princes of Midian and Moab have brought large quantities of wealth as a bribe for him, so the offer of money here is high, and his response to them tells us he is looking for a loop hole in the plan of God, to try to obey the Lord, but still get the money also. He gives himself away when he says, “Even if Balak gave me a house full of silver and gold the Lord would not allow me to go”. In saying this he betrays what his “price” is, and Balak is smart enough to put up his offer to “a house full of silver and gold”! Beware of dramatic language by God’s servants, for often it discloses their “hearts desire”, and if it is rooted and grounded in lust, it will always lead to personal disaster.

Many Christians say that if God says “no” then you should persist until He changes His mind. This can be extremely dangerous, as God may give you your petition, but it will be for your discipline. If you get under the permissive will of God rather than remaining under the directive will of God you will have discipline from the Lord, and that means you will have pain in your life. If the Lord says “no” to anything, then accept it; persist in prayer only if the answer is unclear. Put yourself in the Lord’s hands and do not try to get any benefits an unbeliever offers for a compromise position.

Balaam is battering down God’s door with his prayers for a bit of flexibility on God’s part. He wants God to say “yes” as he wants the money. His focus upon the will and plan of God has been destroyed by his desire to follow his lust for money! Let us pause and reflect upon the doctrines of PRAYER, and DIVINE GUIDANCE here. Write out your own prayer requests of recent days. Now ask yourself why do you want what you are asking for? Is it to “consume it on our own lust”? James 4:1-5. What we should be concerned about is God’s plan for us, for this will always be the safest place to be, now and in eternity. Let us be very scared if we love the things of this world too much!

In verse 20 we will be reminded that the greatest danger for a believer is to be found when we get out of the directive will of God. The best that God has given you is His directive will for your life. With the permissive will of God you are not exactly where the Lord wants you; you are where you want to be. He is letting you do the thing you have asked so that you may learn something, but it will always be learning with great pain associated. Blessing is secure only when we walk with the Lord in HIS will, not our own.

Balaam is still trying throughout these chapters to work a compromise out, so that he obeys the Lord but will still get the money. This is what unconfessed sin does for you; you want both, but cannot have both. Check your motives when you face a decision, or you may be in danger of following this foolish man. Balaam wants money, and God is going to allow him to get money, and he is going to become a millionaire, and he is going to die one.

This chapter challenges us strongly regarding the prosperity gospel teaching of today. Do you want to die wealthy or do you want to live as the Lord wants you to live? Because he is compromising, Balaam goes to an adulterous and religiously evil place where a leader of the Lord should not be. He goes to the high places of the pagan religion. Balaam initially blesses Israel, and Balak is frustrated. Balaam cannot curse them from any angle. Balak then tells Balaam to go home saying that his God had kept him from great honour, but as he goes Balaam gives Balak the advice that secures him the money and later costs him his life.

It should be the blessing of God that we seek, never the blessing of man. 1 John 3:23, 2 Peter 3:18, Psalm 32:8,9; Proverbs 3:1-6, Isaiah 58:11, Romans 12:1,2. We should seek daily to be transformed in our motives and our behaviours. Make a list of things that need changing in your life regarding your priorities and desires. Romans 6:13, Ephesians 5:17,18. These verses will give you great guidance and direction for your life and genuinely rejoicing in your eternal rewards.

Balaam ended up enjoying his great wealth for a few months. He died as the “richest man in the cemetery”. This is a foolish goal, but it is the goal of the prosperity gospel proponents. They are to be resisted by God’s people as the servants of Satan that they are. They are blots on the religious landscape, just as this man was, and God will judge them. Our job is to learn Satan’s strategies so that we keep the Lord’s people safe from all such like Balaam. 1 Corinthians 10:1, 12:1, 2 Corinthians 1:8, 2:11.

**NUMBERS 22:1-28**

**22:1 And the children of Israel set forward, and pitched in the plains of Moab on this side Jordan by Jericho. 2 And Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 And Moab was sore afraid of the people, because they were many: and Moab was distressed because of the children of Israel. 4 And Moab said**

unto the elders of Midian, Now shall this company lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field. And Balak the son of Zippor was king of the Moabites at that time. 5 He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor, which is by the river of the children of his people, to call him, saying, Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me: 6 Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people; for they are too mighty for me: peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land: for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed. 7 And the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the rewards of divination in their hand; and they came unto Balaam, and spake unto him the words of Balak. 8 And he said unto them, Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the LORD shall speak unto me: and the princes of Moab abode with Balaam. 9 And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee? 10 And Balaam said unto God, Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, hath sent unto me, saying, 11 Behold, there is a people come out of Egypt, which covereth the face of the earth: come now, curse me them; peradventure I shall be able to overcome them, and drive them out. 12 And God said unto Balaam, Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed. 13 And Balaam rose up in the morning, and said unto the princes of Balak, Get you into your land: for the LORD refuseth to give me leave to go with you. 14 And the princes of Moab rose up, and they went unto Balak, and said, Balaam refuseth to come with us. 15 And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honourable than they. 16 And they came to Balaam, and said to him, Thus saith Balak the son of Zippor, Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me: 17 For I will promote thee unto very great honour, and I will do whatsoever thou sayest unto me: come therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people. 18 And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. 19 Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more. 20 And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do. 21 And Balaam rose up in the morning, and saddled his ass, and went with the princes of Moab. 22 And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. 23 And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. 24 But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. 25 And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again. 26 And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. 27 And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff. 28 And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 4.** Here we see the error of “Human viewpoint thinking”, rather than divine viewpoint thinking. Now pause and reflect upon these two phrases. Human viewpoint is looking at a situation and excluding God from the equation. When we think as God intends us to think, we are asking what the Lord is doing in each situation we need to assess. We are seeking His Will, not man's purposes. It is this that keeps us safe in all situations. King Balak is a “loser” in his life and his thinking. He has previously lost his territory and people to the Amorites and now he does not welcome the people who defeated the Amorites, rather he fears them! Notice his words, “they lick up all the land around us”. Now firstly this is not true, and secondly he ignores it is the enemies of Moab who have been destroyed.

He then seeks the company of the Midianites, who are always ready to exploit anything for raiding and loot gathering purposes, but amongst whom the Israelites have been living for the last forty years. The Midianites raided Moab whenever they could, so they were not the best of allies to have. The fact that he seeks the Midianite princes company to try to destroy Israel, and they join him, is of great interest to us. This indicates that the Midianites were not happy with Israel's sojourn amongst them for the forty years of wandering, and were quick to seek revenge upon them. Both groups do not ask what God is doing, they seek to get God to work for them even though it is clear that God is blessing Israel! Many today pray and plan this way, and ought to end their prayers, “not your will, but mine be done lord”.

**Verses 5 – 7.** At their conference about the “Israelite problem”, the elders of the two nations come up with a plan and it involves the use of the “prophet of God” against the people of God. The absolute contradiction of this plan escapes them, and they provide all the money they think that will be needed to secure a good curse upon Israel. Note this desire, for they seek to use magic against God's Plan, Person and his people! Notice the script that Balak is going to use to describe their needs to Balaam. These people “abide over against me”. He speaks as if the camp of Israel is a standing threat to Moab's existence, when it is not. The Israelites have not, and will not attack Moab until Moab proves an enemy. They have clearly been ordered by the Lord to leave Moab alone, as the descendants of their relative Lot, and they have taken great pains to walk around Moab rather than force a way through it. Deuteronomy 23:1-6.

The pagan kings know this prophet is accurate in his curses and in his blessings, and they seek his curses, and they make that quite clear in their message to him. There is no doubt about what Balaam is being asked to do here; he is to curse Israel so that Balak may “smite them”, and drive them out of the land they have taken from the Amorites. What he is being asked to do, is provide spiritual support for a plan of genocide against Israel. There is no doubt at all about what his settled answer should have been to this request. There can be no compromise with this level of evil!

**Verses 8 – 12.** Balaam asks them all to stay the night and promises to seek the Lord's face over the matter they have laid before him. The Lord asks Balaam what the men want who have come to him. Now of course the Lord knows all too well what these pagans seek, but tests Balaam as to what his answer will be. Notice his answer closely. He is accurate in his report to the Lord as to the genocidal intentions of Balak towards Israel.

The Lord gives him three clear points in answer to his words. Balaam is not to go with these men, nor is he to curse this people, for they are blessed of the Lord. Now you cannot be clearer than this. Nothing is to be done against Israel, and no bad advice is to be given regarding them. Whoever curses them, or encourages another to do evil to them is actively opposing God. There is no reason for Balaam to go any further with these men, for their plans are evil, and to be involved with them at all is to be party to their evil, and so reap its rewards and consequences. He ought to urge them to make their peace with Israel. Genesis 12:3, Deuteronomy 32:9-11.

**Verses 13 -17.** Balaam is clear in his report, but it does not go far enough, for he ought to make it clear that they must make their peace with God and His people. He orders them to leave, and tells them that the Lord has denied him permission to go with them only. He leaves the door open for a return visit. The princes of Moab pack away their wealthy presents and head back home. All this takes several weeks, so this tells us that the Israelites are camped in the plains opposite Jericho for some time. The second embassy involves the top princes of the land of Moab as Balak wants to impress the prophet with the seriousness with which he is being taken and just how important he considers him.

This flattery and the increasing size of the rewards he will receive are starting to have an effect upon Balaam and the Moabites spot this and keep pushing. The final message however remains that he is to curse the people of God. Moses is telling us the story in a way that makes the decision making issue clear to us. We are to be firm in our stand for the Lord's will and have no part in unrighteous men and their plans. 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

**Verses 18 – 19.** Now Balaam is weakening, as he sees the gold and silver that is on offer. He seeks another overnight prayer session, so he can ask a request of the Lord. He wants "more words" from the Lord. He doesn't need this, for the Lord has made His will clear, and the princes of Moab have also made their will clear. He gets up in the morning and states to the pagan princes that he cannot go beyond the Lord's words, yet he doesn't have to even speculate about what these words are, for he has them. He cannot go with people who plan the genocide of God's people, nor should he be even talking with them, other than to urge them to make their peace with God.

Why does he seek "more" words from the Lord? Sadly he seeks a way of getting the money! Philippians 4:11, 1 Timothy 6:10, Jude 11. This man has a duty of care to these unbelievers to tell them God's settled counsel and dismiss them with the "Word of the Lord" to repent and make peace with Israel. As soon as we start to try to get around a passage of scripture and make it say things that suit us, we are falling into the error of Balaam. He wants the Lord to give him a loop hole. Dr David L Cooper used to say, "When the plain sense of scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense, lest you find nonsense".

**Verses 20 – 21.** Balaam has pleaded with the Lord to be allowed to go with these men. The nature of his prayer request is indicated by the Lord's reluctant permission for him to go, and the fact that this is not the Lord's directive will is proven by the next sequence of events. Now this prophet is a "prayer warrior". He has been pleading all night with the Lord, "Please let me go with these men". The Lord grants him permission and he is relieved when he rises the next morning to be able to say, "I can come with you".

He still says that he will only say what the Lord tells him, but he omits to repeat that Israel is blessed and they cannot be cursed by him. He is quick to saddle his ass and go with the princes of Moab and Midian. The Lord's Word is clear. Do not keep company with evil men, and particularly avoid temptations where money is offered for evil deeds! Proverbs 1:7-19, 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, 2 Thessalonians 3:14. There are no exceptions to this, except to give the Word of God in power.

**Verses 22 – 28.** God has given reluctant permission, but is waiting for Balaam to respond to his direction not to go, rather than follow his lust. When the answer to prayer is, "Well, if you must do this, do it this way", we are being challenged to think again and stop our headlong dash to disaster. Balaam is keen and driven to get this money, as we will see in his treatment of his ass. The angel of the Lord stands before him in the way to block him, and to warn him to re-consider his path. God's anger is against this man for his lust filled path, for it will lead to the death of many. Who is the "Angel of the Lord"? He is the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ.

When we follow our own lusts, we become the enemy of the Lord, and He becomes our "adversary". This is not a place of blessing, but a place of cursing for us. We can learn there, and so can others, but there will be no blessing to anyone. Balaam will be allowed to go on, because he is determined to do so, and will not turn back, but his prophetic words will be of the Lord, and the Moabites will receive final warning through them of their evil also. God will use this man's lust to warn the Moabites so that they, like Balaam, are without excuse for their evil, and cannot complain about their final judgment. Galatians 4:16, James 4:4.

Balaam is riding along towards Moab, with his two servants with him to care for his every need, and carry the food he will need, and assist in carrying the loot back. This man is used to hearing the Lord, but he doesn't see the Lord before him, however his ass does. The animal sees the Lord there with sword drawn to slay them all.

The animal is smarter than the man here. The ass tries to turn away from the danger it sees, and a prophet, who is in touch with spiritual realities ought to have recognized that something weird is going on and stopped and prayed when his animal did a weird thing. He should have been spiritually in tune enough to stop, think and pray, but lust stops logical thought.

This is a warning to us all. When on journeys, pray your way to the destination. Seek the Lord's guidance at all times, and look out to the scene before you, whether it is landscape or the interior of a bus, car or plane. Be ready to be led by the Lord to speak with someone, or change your plans. Be ready to be guided. If strange or "weird" events occur, pray them through, as the Lord may be telling you something, or the enemy may be betraying his presence. Be hungry for the Lord's will at all times and be ever ready to change direction or do something on the way! Be alert also for the enemy's attacks.

Balaam's response tells us just how hungry he is for the money. He severely beats his ass and swears aloud at him. The ass heads off into the fields to get around the Lord's drawn sword, but the Lord stands now between the rows of vines that the ass has headed down. There is a stone wall at either side of the narrow path at that place and the ass presses itself against one side of the path to escape the Lord, and crushes Balaam's foot against the stones, and so he beats the animal again. The Angel of the Lord moves ahead and stands again in the pathway, this time completely blocking the way. This is the third time the Angel has appeared and the animal sees him, but the prophet is so lust filled he has no spiritual discernment and doesn't see the danger he is in.

This is the point that Moses wants us to get here. If lust controls us, we are out of fellowship with the Lord, and so do not pick up on spiritual information that we need for our survival. To be spirit filled is to be discerning of danger and opportunity, but to be lust filled is to be distracted, deceived, and vulnerable. 2 Peter 2:10-22. Put your spiritual armour on Pastor, and walk in the Holy Spirit's power and guidance, or end up like Balaam!

Balaam has been beating the animal with a stick till this point, but when the ass sees there is no way to left or right past the Lord it falls on its knees before Him. Balaam drops his stick and takes up his walking staff and begins to beat the animal severely with this significantly long and strong staff. An animal or person can be killed quite quickly with blows from a staff, and this shows just how "mad" the prophet is through his lust, and how driven he is for the money. Animal cruelty is a sign of Old Sin Nature or demonic control, and is never sanctioned by the Lord. Proverbs 12:10, 16.

The Lord now does a humorous thing by making the ass speak and rebuke the lust filled prophet. Balaam has not seen the Lord, so maybe he will now see the ass, and think about it's actions, and pay attention to the observations of the animal! It is a reminder that in the Garden of Eden the animals did speak and possibly they will again in the Millennial Kingdom. Animal behaviour ought always to be paid attention to, as they will pick up things that distracted men may ignore to their peril. Genesis 3:1ff, Isaiah 11:6-10.

## **PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. The Lord's directive will is the best path forward for us at all times. We need to be careful when our desire to do a certain thing is too strong, for it may be that lust is driving us forward to disaster. In the Lord's work we will have Holy Spirit passion for the work, but not a level of lust that creates drivenness. Be careful if you meet a driven servant of the Lord who will not listen to any objections to their chosen course of action. They may say that this is the "Lord's Will", and it may be, but be wary if they are not prayerful on the path. Never be concerned about stopping on a path of action and ordering a prayer meeting when weird things happen. God seeks for us to walk closely to Him. That is the only truly safe place. We must walk close – and always be ready to shift direction when ordered.
2. Lust is destructive, but Love is empowering and uplifting. Remember the Lord's words in Matthew 7:13ff. The fruit of a behaviour or desire will tell you a lot about its source. Guard yourself against lusts – they always kill the best in you over time.
3. Separation from evil men and evil plans is called for. Having preached the truth we depart and leave the evil people to the consequences of their evil choices, and we leave them without excuse before God. The free will of man leads to sad realities at times. Why do these men persist in their desire to destroy the Israelites? Why persist in a pagan path following gods that have let you down? Why do people persist in an error filled path that does not bring any rewards to them? Once people have made their settled choice for evil we must leave them. Do not ever accompany people once their final choice is made or you will face judgment with them. Leave them with the truth burning in their ears, but leave them! Do not keep company with evil men for any longer than it takes to give them the truth about the Lord.
4. Interpretation of scripture should be straight forward. If the plain sense of a passage convicts you, then be convicted and change your behaviour! Once you have been enlightened as to a truth, do not go back into an error, rather walk in the light of the revelation you have received. We have light upon our path through this life, through the Word of Life, and so let us walk in it.
5. Walk in the leading of the Holy Spirit at all times. Deal with any sin that separates you from fellowship with the Lord quickly. Keep in the place of active fellowship. Be led by the Holy Spirit, and be listening to the Spirit within you at all times. Follow divine viewpoint in situations you confront, rather than purely human viewpoint. Be looking in each situation you confront for what the Lord is doing within it.

**REMEMBER YOUR EVERY PRESENT – “OLD SIN NATURE”**

1. We are born with a nature, inherited from Adam, which is against God and prone to sin. (Ephesians 2:1, Romans 5:12).
2. The old sin nature is perpetuated in the human race by physical birth. (Psalm 51:5, 1 Timothy 2:13, 14).
3. We are therefore considered spiritually dead at the point of physical birth. (Romans 5:12).
4. Biblical Names for the “old sin nature” of our fallen humanity are:
  - a) Flesh - Galatians 5:16
  - b) Old Man - Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9
  - c) Carnal - Romans 7:14
  - d) Sin - Romans 5:12
  - e) Heart - Jeremiah 17:9
  - f) Member - Colossians 3:5.
5. The believer continues to have an old sin nature after salvation. (1 John 1:8, 1 Corinthians 3:1).
6. The believer under the control of their old sin nature is called carnal. (Romans 7:14, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3).
7. The old sin nature frustrates true spiritual production in the Christian life. (Romans 7:15).
8. The old sin nature has two tendencies. (Romans 6:6)
  - a) An area of weakness – which pushes us towards genetically inherited lawlessness and sins. (Hebrews 12:1)
  - b) An area of strength – which pushes us towards asceticism and self-righteous religion. (Isaiah 64:6).
9. The old sin nature is not found in the resurrection body. (1 Corinthians 15:56, Philippians 3:21, 1 Thessalonians 5:23).
10. Victory over the old sin nature is by achieved by considering your old life dead, surrendering to God, confessing sin and walking upon the filling of the Holy Spirit. (Romans 6:6,11, Colossians 3:9-10).

**NUMBERS 22:29-41**

**22:29** And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. **30** And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? And he said, Nay. **31** Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face. **32** And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me: **33** And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive. **34** And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again. **35** And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak. **36** And when Balak heard that Balaam was come, he went out to meet him unto a city of Moab, which is in the border of Arnon, which is in the utmost coast. **37** And Balak said unto Balaam, Did I not earnestly send unto thee to call thee? wherefore camest thou not unto me? am I not able indeed to promote thee to honour? **38** And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say any thing? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak. **39** And Balaam went with Balak, and they came unto Kirjathhuzoth. **40** And Balak offered oxen and sheep, and sent to Balaam, and to the princes that were with him. **41** And it came to pass on the morrow, that Balak took Balaam, and brought him up into the high places of Baal, that thence he might see the utmost part of the people.

**REFLECTIONS**

**Verses 29 – 30.** Some have said that to walk in faith is to walk absolutely without solid evidence. It is to “leap into the dark”. This is nonsense! This is not a biblical perspective upon faith and only emerges fully with a Swedish Existentialist philosopher a hundred or so years ago. Faith is never without evidence and reason behind it. Our faith is an historic faith, and it is open to the vigour of historical study, and it will prove itself under the microscope. Jude 1-3.

The ass teaches Balaam and us here on this very point. The ass calls upon the evidence that should have made Balaam stop and consider what was going on. This ass has been his for many years and has never done anything that would harm his master and has always been obedient. On the basis of the evidence of the past Balaam should have known something was going on, and he should have stopped, prayed, listened, and looked spiritually. 1 Corinthians 1:22-31.

**Verses 31 – 32.** The Lord now opens Balaam’s eyes and he sees Him standing there with sword drawn. The Lord’s message to Balaam is that his way is “perverse”; he has cast over logic and reason and is running headlong into disaster due to his lust for money. The Lord rebukes the prophet for beating the animal three times. The Lord makes it clear to this man that He is trying to stop him. The Lord’s last warning is being given here. This is the third time he has been told he ought not to be on this path. If he would only have stopped here and gone home, many lives would have been saved, including his own.

**Verses 33 – 34.** Note Balaam’s confession here, for it is neither complete, truthful or insightful. Why does he say, “If it displeases you”? It is absolutely obvious that the Lord does not want him on this path, but he is determined to try to walk here, and even in his answer to the Lord standing before him with a drawn sword, he is pleading to be able to go ahead and get the money. What would have been the appropriate faith response to this situation? After saying he had sinned, he ought to have called the princes of Moab to him and briefed them on the significance of the event; that they will all be killed if they persist in this evil path. He then should have returned to his home, having urged again the princes of Moab to repent of their evil and make peace with Israel before the Lord judges them thoroughly. Psalms 76:10. Had Balaam done this he would have saved many lives, including his own.

**Verses 35 – 36.** It is in these verses that we get Moses clue as to the route Balaam has had to take to get to Moab. He has had to travel secretly, and possibly infiltrate, or at least skirt around, Israelite lines to get here. The Israelites crossed the Arnon River to get into Moab, and are camped along the Jordan facing Jericho, and Balak goes down to the Arnon to meet Balaam. This is why the route taken is through the vineyards and up narrow country lanes. They have had to skirt the Israelite camp well into the hill country on the East of the Jordan valley to get to Moab. Balaam has had to act as if he was a spy to achieve his results. He is now an active part of the enemy’s plans. He has been allowed to come by the Lord, but the Lord has three times tried to stop him following this path, for he is now identified fully and finally by the Israelites as an enemy agent and he will pay with his life for this journey.

**Verses 37 – 39.** As we read these words a shiver should go down our spine. The only One who lifts us up is the Lord. Psalms 75:4-7, 1 Peter 5:6-7. The honour that men give is fleeting and dangerous, for it feeds pride, and pride opens us to further temptations. Balak believes that “honour” from him, (and for that word read ‘millions of dollars’), should be all that Balaam should be concerned about.

Balaam still speaks as if he will prophesy the truth from the Lord, and we will find he does do this, but with a twist in the advice he gives afterwards. Balak will take him and show him the camp of Israel from the mountains of Moab, but the prophet has already seen the lights of their camp fires from the hills he came through to get there.

**Verses 40 – 41.** It is here that we know, and Balaam should also have known, that he was in the wrong place and involved with the wrong people. The sacrifices are made to Baal. Balaam stays away and the sacrifices are brought to him, but by receiving these things he is now a partaker of the devil’s communion table and has compromised his faith. Baal worship was fertility worship and centred in sexual perversity. 1 Corinthians 8:1-13. As a man of God he should have had no part in this nor received anything from these people.

When you are out of the geographical will of God you will find yourself in the place of compromise. At this point he is too far in to withdraw without giving his prophetic words, and even then if he gives them and then goes down to the camp of Israel afterwards, and tells them all he has done, he may yet save his life.

**PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Biblical Faith is evidential. There is always evidence in history and our own lives for everything that the Lord requires us to do in obedience to His Word. Let us heed the evidence and apply it into the fabric of our daily lives.
2. No believer can be part of any pagan worship without compromise to their faith and the certainty of judgment to follow. We must have no part in any pagan ritual. Separation is to be absolute between us and everything pagan.

**Notes**

## **CHAPTER 23**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter and the next raise the questions, “why?”, and “what for?”, regarding the Lord’s direction to this prophet. God will definitely speak through this man and give true prediction and accurate doctrine. This man is no satanic inspired occultist, but a true prophet of God, but as we have seen, he is out of the Lord’s geographical will for his life, and it will cost him his life. Why does God still speak through him? What is the purpose of God in continuing to use Balaam, even though he is filled with lust for the gold and silver on offer to the person who discovers a way to curse, or bring curses upon Israel?

Many of the great commentators believe Balaam is a false prophet, and a satanically empowered occultist, and they spend many pages wiggling around the accuracy of these prophecies here. We don’t need to do this, for this man is a believer, but a totally carnal one. God breaks through his carnality to ensure His purposes are worked out in this

What is God’s purpose here? I believe we will see by the end of this chapter that God’s purpose is to convict Balak of the sin of hatred of Israel and to challenge him to become their friend, not remain their enemy. Balaam’s sin of money lust remains and will lead to his betrayal of the Israelites in the end, but the Lord will use him to bring the truth to the Moabites, even though it will be rejected by them.

We are called to preach the truth and not concern ourselves with the people’s response to it, for the Lord may be simply ensuring that these people have no excuse for their hatred before Him. God’s plan will be worked out, and our job is to do what the Lord calls us to, with a focus solely upon His face, not the faces of those who reject the truth. Jeremiah 1:17-19, Ezekiel 2:3-8, 3:4-11, 17-19, 27. Read these verses carefully and study them, for this is the call of many pastors, as it was mine on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1976.

### **NUMBERS 23:1-30**

**23:1** And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams. **2** And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. **3** And Balaam said unto Balak, Stand by thy burnt offering, and I will go: peradventure the LORD will come to meet me: and whatsoever he sheweth me I will tell thee. And he went to an high place. **4** And God met Balaam: and he said unto him, I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram. **5** And the LORD put a word in Balaam’s mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus thou shalt speak. **6** And he returned unto him, and, lo, he stood by his burnt sacrifice, he, and all the princes of Moab. **7** And he took up his parable, and said, Balak the king of Moab hath brought me from Aram, out of the mountains of the east, saying, Come, curse me Jacob, and come, defy Israel. **8** How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? or how shall I defy, whom the LORD hath not defied? **9** For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations. **10** Who can count the dust of Jacob, and the number of the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his! **11** And Balak said unto Balaam, What hast thou done unto me? I took thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast blessed them altogether. **12** And he answered and said, Must I not take heed to speak that which the LORD hath put in my mouth? **13** And Balak said unto him, Come, I pray thee, with me unto another place, from whence thou mayest see them: thou shalt see but the utmost part of them, and shalt not see them all: and curse me them from thence. **14** And he brought him into the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar. **15** And he said unto Balak, Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet the LORD yonder. **16** And the LORD met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth, and said, Go again unto Balak, and say thus. **17** And when he came to him, behold, he stood by his burnt offering, and the princes of Moab with him. And Balak said unto him, What hath the LORD spoken? **18** And he took up his parable, and said, Rise up, Balak, and hear; hearken unto me, thou son of Zippor: **19** God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? **20** Behold, I have received commandment to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it. **21** He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them. **22** God brought them out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn. **23** Surely there is no enchantment against Jacob, neither is there any divination against Israel: according to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought! **24** Behold, the people shall rise up as a great lion, and lift up himself as a young lion: he shall not lie down until he eat of the prey, and drink the blood of the slain. **25** And Balak said unto Balaam, Neither curse them at all, nor bless them at all. **26** But Balaam answered and said unto Balak, Told not I thee, saying, All that

the LORD speaketh, that I must do? 27 And Balak said unto Balaam, Come, I pray thee, I will bring thee unto another place; peradventure it will please God that thou mayest curse me them from thence. 28 And Balak brought Balaam unto the top of Peor, that looketh toward Jeshimon. 29 And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven bullocks and seven rams. 30 And Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bullock and a ram on every altar.

## REFLECTIONS

**Verses 1 – 3.** Turn back to the last chapter and re-read verse 41. Remember that this pagan king is indeed a pagan and worships Baal. He is an enemy of God and needs to be convicted of his need for a genuine Saviour and Lord. John 16:8-11. When the offerings are made as Balaam orders, they may be made to the "Lord God", but Moses leaves the question open as to which "lord" is being acknowledged. Seven new altars are built and it may be that the reason for this was that these sacrifices were to be offered to God not Baal, but the place where they are built, as indicated by the words "build them here" in verse one, refers us back to verse 41 of the previous chapter. This indicates that Balaam is using one of the high places of Baal as the site for the seven altars and so he has compromised himself immediately.

You cannot spiritualise an evil place by doing a good thing there. The places of evil are to be separated from. Now pause also and reflect upon the significance of these sacrifices. Why are they needed at all? Balaam knows the Lord's heart in this matter, and has the Lord's promise that He will give him the words to say when he needs them. Is not prayer alone called for to await the Lord's words? Numbers 22:35. Balaam is trying to reach this king, but he is playing with truth to try to get his reward of unrighteousness, and so his "witness" is not useful or powerful. In spite of his carnality he will be used and deliver the most powerful words about the destiny of Israel given in scripture, and these words will save many in the last days.

The reason for blood sacrifice is significant and useful here with this pagan king, but he will miss the point that Balaam may be trying to make. From the words Balaam uses to the Lord in verse four below it would appear that the sacrifices were offered in the name of the Lord God. The place is probably a compromise one, if it is indeed a "high place" of Baal, and may spoil the significance of the sacrifice, but it is through blood alone that man approaches God, due to the penalty of sin.

Balak needs to know this, but he also needs to know that Baal is a demon, a "nothing", and not a god at all. Psalms 96:3-6. There is one "Lord God" before all men and it is not Baal. Exodus 20:1-6, Acts 2:21, 3:6, 16, 4:12. Balaam has a role to play here in conviction, but it is not done thoroughly, because the prophet is trying to win the gold, and Balak is not convicted as he ought to be by this prophet.

**Verses 4 – 6.** Having gone apart to wait the Lord's words to him, the Lord visits Balaam. This is just a reminder that this man is the Lord's servant and the Lord will speak through him. The Lord gives Balaam the word to speak to Balak and Balaam obediently heads back to the place where Balak is standing by the seven altars with all his princes. We are not told the time frame but it may have been an overnight vigil and so the princes of Moab are keen for an answer from the prophet of God.

They are waiting for their preferred answer, but the question remains open at this point, will they change their mind when the Lord convicts them of their wrong viewpoint? The whole existence of this world we live in is about choice. The question of the Angelic Conflict is, what way will man go? Will he follow Satan and the fallen angels and reject the Creator, or will he accept the Saviour and walk with the maker of all things? Revelation 20:10-15.

**Verses 7 – 10.** This is a real and powerful prophetic word about the fate of Israel and the fate of Moab if they oppose Israel. Israel is still blessed and they will be even more blessed in the Millennial Kingdom, but Moab is no more. The only remnant of Moab will be by means of Ruth, through the line of David. They will be saved as a people by one woman who will enter the line of the Messiah by faith, through the grace of God. Matthew 1:5. This entire nation could have been blessed through their association with their relatives Israel, but they will prefer their useless paganism, and so pay the price by leaving the pages of history. The destiny of all men rests upon their choice for or against God's plan. We are either onboard with God's plan or in the dust of the earth. Isaiah 44:24-27, 47:10-15.

There is no curse that can legitimately be called upon a people that God has blessed. Proverbs 26:2. God's Word is settled about the destiny of Israel and the fate of all who oppose them, and this situation continues to this day of ours. The fate of Moab is settled when they continue to oppose Israel. Deuteronomy 32:9-12, Psalms 17:8, Zephaniah 2:8-11, Zechariah 2:5-9. None can defy the plan of God, nor oppose the march of history and live. It is the utmost foolishness to stand against the Creator, and yet that is what Balak is doing. God seeks to bless, not to curse or judge, but persistent rejection of God's Word/Way brings judgment.

God will try to get this pagan king to see this through the words of Balaam. He speaks accurately of Israel describing them as a nation apart from all others. They are a "Nation alone". All through history the Israelite people have been a nation alone; they have not "fitted in" at all, and they are not meant to. They are called out to be God's chosen people through whom He has brought the One who came as the only Saviour, and will return as the King of all kings.

The prosperity of the Israelite nation is stated, in terms that resemble the promises made to Abraham. This man, like Melchizedek, may have known of the Abrahamic covenants. Abraham certainly was well known in his day. Genesis 12:1-3, 17:1-8, 21:12. Over five hundred years have passed however since those days and Balaam may not have even known the detailed words of God to Abraham, and he does not need to, for Balaam is hearing from the Lord directly. God ensures Balaam has all the detailed knowledge he needs to fulfil his role here.

We must be careful of jumping to conclusions about the knowledge men may or may not have, and what they draw upon for their prophetic utterances. With prophetic words of knowledge the person speaking needs no naturalistic knowledge at all. He is required simply to be open to the Lord and receive what the Lord gives.

In the words he gives, Balaam details Moab's request to him, to curse and defy Jacob, and then he notes why he cannot do this. He has looked out upon the outer camp of Israel and seen their camp fires, and he knows they are blessed by the Lord. He prays that he dies the death of the blessed and righteous, and that means that he will live and die like Jacob. So far so good! Balak will not be satisfied and will order another set of seven altars on another hill and try to get the people cursed again. Each time this occurs a "high place" is used, and this tells us that the places are worship centres of Baal.

**Verses 11 – 14.** Balak cries out aloud and rebukes the prophet for not doing what he has requested. Pause a minute here again. If you ask a prophet to speak with God, you ought to be listening for what God is saying! This man wants to hear only what he delights in. He refers to Israel as his enemy and he will not accept them as his friends. This man will not be convicted of truth, for his mind is made up. The prophetic words of the Lord will be his rebuke, and because of his refusal to accept them, they will be evidence of the righteous judgment of God upon him. As I noted above, this world's test for every person is the test of choice; will we walk God's way, or will we follow our own lusts? 2 Timothy 4:1-5. This king is without excuse when he falls into Hell. Isaiah 14:9-11.

Balak's next suggestion is at first sight bizarre indeed. He will take Balaam to another place where he cannot see all the people of Israel, and by just seeing the "worst", or least significant, group of them (possibly the mixed multitude camp) he will be allowed to curse them. It may be that the information Balak has received about Israel is quite accurate, and includes evidence and information about their failings on their march, and the divisions within them. He may know that there are sections of the people who have rebelled and so he hopes those people are still rebellious, and so he can get Balaam to curse that group and so undermine the rest by a rebellion starting again. Now this is satanic cunning and it will bear fruit in the advice Balaam will later give, for this is the very thing that Balaam will advise this evil king to do.

**Verses 15 – 17.** The evil king is keen to do anything that might produce any sort of curse against Israel. He is so driven to curse the people of God that he will do anything other than admit the Lord wants a totally different thing. It is this satanic blindness that is so baffling to us, both as we study this man, and as we reflect upon people we will meet today who stand, like Balak, in total opposition to the plan and purposes of God. Those who are blinded are blinded by their own driven ness to live "their way" rather than God's way. It is sheer self centeredness that gives Satan his hold over those he eventually destroys. Let us always be guarded against any self centeredness as it opens the door to evil.

The Lord is spoken of as "hardening" their hearts in the scriptures below, as He did to pharaoh previously. This means that pressure is put on all people in rebellion against the will of God, and that pressure forces them to stand in their position or break down and repent. Some are hardened in their rebellion, and so become more and more hardened against, and blinded to truth as they go on. Those who stay in the dark long enough become unable to handle light of any sort, and so they are doubly blind. This is the sad truth regarding the lost; they reject truth, and keep on rejecting it, and so they harden into their position forever. Isaiah 6:1-4, Matthew 15:14, John 12:30-41, 2 Corinthians 3:14, 4:4, 1 John 2:9-11.

**Verses 18 – 24.** This prophetic word could not be more specific, or the warning to Balak more precise. He must hear and repent himself, for God will not repent of His plan and settled decision to bless Jacob. It is a comprehensive blessing of Israel and it's words flow down to our own day and the days to come of the Great Tribulation. These words will bring comfort in those dark days to come, as the fighters in the hills of Judea remember that the Lord will deliver them as He did Israel of old. The first words to Balak are "stand up, hear, and listen carefully!" He is being urged to really understand what is being said and the settled nature of God's words.

The first point that is to burn into his soul is that God is not a liar, nor does He change His mind over a settled part of His plan. God has said repeatedly to Balak, through Balaam, that Israel is under His protection and blessing, and this will not change at any time in history. These words find their echo throughout scripture and are the encouragement of the sons of Jacob to this very day. 1 Samuel 15:22-29, Psalms 89:30-36, Habakkuk 2:1-4, Malachi 3:6, Luke 21:33, Romans 11:26-29, Titus 1:1-4, Hebrews 6:13-20, James 1:16-21.

Notice in each of these verses, through 1500 years of redemptive history that the fate of Israel is settled; they will survive, although through dark times, and they will be God's people throughout history. Israel may be at present under discipline, but they are still blessed and protected by the Lord. Witness the last sixty years of history, where every Arab nation has been brought down that attacked them. They are under God's protection and anyone attacking Israel is foolish, as they are ignoring the clear direction of the one true God. God is not with those who assault Israel! The position is settled and will not change until the end of time. Check history, for no nation that has assaulted the Jews has been blessed after they do so. Only repentance changes their fate.

Balaam makes it clear that he has received “commandment” from God to bless and that is what he will do, for the Lord alone gives direction to His prophets. This is all he can say, for it is God’s truth. He cannot reverse this, for God has settled the matter. Now the Israelites have moaned and groaned, and complained and rebelled, so the next words about Jacob being without sin are a surprise when we read them, and the bit about the Israelites being without perversity is a real shock. They have been disobedient and rebellious all through their wilderness march, so what can these words mean? Re-read Psalm 103:6-17. Reflect upon the mercy and forgiveness of the Lord – our confessed sins are gone!

Pause and reflect upon the meaning behind the words in verse twenty one, for its truth is glorious for them and for us all. The people of Israel have indeed moaned, but their sins have been confessed, and they are all forgiven, so their sins are, from God’s perspective gone forever. Psalms 103:10-12, Ephesians 3:18-19. When we deal with sin we are forgiven and the Lord remembers our previous iniquity no more! This is the amazing thing about Gods forgiveness of us; it is permanent. Hebrews 8:12, 10:17.

The people of Israel stand as a “born again” people, and the Lord their God is with them. The shout of their king is amongst them. This is a wonderful promise that the Lord Jesus Himself is with them in the Shekinah Glory and they are, with Him invincible. Now at this point it is hard to understand why Balak does not bow before the Lord and accept the truth, yet he will not! The Lord brought them out of Egypt, and He is guiding them through their present path. The point the Lord is making, is that those who stand against the people of God on the path of God, will end up fighting God.

The unicorn referred to here was the animal that still exists in the Emirates, the powerful Oryx. It spoke of an animal of incredible power and single focus. Given the Lord’s protection over the Israelites, there is no witchcraft against Israel that will have any success. Any enchantment used against Israel will rebound upon and destroy the person uttering the curse. When people look at the survival of Israel, they will all say, “Look what God has done!” All men will acknowledge that the only reason for Israel’s survival down the centuries is God’s special care of them, so why does Balak continue to believe that he can succeed in destroying them? They will be like lions to him and they will eat him if he tries to attack them.

**Verses 25 – 30.** Balak is like the man who says, “Don’t confuse me with the facts, my mind is made up!” He will not respond to persuasion and the Lord is without any allegation of unfairness in His dealings with Moab from this point on, and they are without excuse for their evil. God cannot go further to rebuke and correct their evil, and Balak cannot go further in his rejection of the truth.

His first words to Balaam are basically “Stop talking; don’t bless, don’t curse!” He is scared what this prophet will say next. Balaam reminds him of the “deal” that he agreed to; that Balaam would only say the things the Lord told him to say. He has been faithful to his word, and it is Balak who doesn’t want to accept it. He is determined to get a curse of some sort on Israel, even though the words are absolutely clear, that there will be none. He takes him to another mountain to see the Israelites from there. Now each trip up a mountain will take a day or more of hard climbing. This is seriously rough country and involves days of travel, for they have to do all this without the Israelites seeing them.

Balaam is still hoping he can do something to win the money and so he orders another seven altars built. We have two sinful men here, but the result will be the same from God’s perspective, and will open the door for another prophetic word about the certainty of Israel’s future blessedness. God uses the sin of these men to bring glory to His name and His plan. It is interesting to reflect upon the actions of these two men, exhausting themselves doing the same thing, again and again and expecting a different result from God. One person has defined insanity as, doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different result! Truly sinful self centeredness makes us mad.

**PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. Spiritual Blindness occurs when we do not want to accept a reality. Let us be careful of this in our own lives, for it is easy to have a “Blind spot”, where we will not accept correction from God’s Word or God’s people. Let us ensure that all our life is open to rebuke and that we will accept correction in any matter that affects our walk with the Lord. Let us recognize those who are spiritually blind and pull back from them, for such people are destructive, and will lead us astray. A spiritually blind person can show us nothing!
2. Let us give thanks afresh for our great salvation that means our sins are washed away and spoken of no more. We do not praise God enough for His grace and mercy in this area. We often judge ourselves, and others, on the basis of a remembered sin from the past, whereas God sees us as cleansed people covered by the blood of the lamb. Let us see ourselves and others this way and let our dealings be transformed by this, and let our gratitude overflow to holy living and praise that is worthy of our gracious Lord.
3. There can be no compromise with pagan religion. We ought not to enter any active pagan worship site, nor share any platform with pagans in worship. There is no concourse between light and darkness, and there needs to be clear separation between ourselves and those who preach lies. Let us keep a distance so that the truth shines out and is not dimmed by evil. Balaam could not witness to Balak, and once it was clear that Balak had firmly rejected the truth all discussion should have been over, and Balaam ought to have headed home. There is a day when evangelism ends with a person and we leave them to the consequences of their choices. Let us be careful lest lust for sex, money, approval or power destroys us. Lust will keep us in a relationship that has its origin in Hell rather than Heaven.
4. The Love of money is the root of all evils. Balaam seeks a way for God to change His mind and allow him to make the money while telling the truth. This wasn’t possible, and waiting for it simply delayed the end and would lead

Balaam into greater evil. It is a dangerous thing to ask the Lord for things that He has said "NO" to, and Balaam keeps trying to get the Lord to allow him to make the money. He will get the money, as we will see, but then lose it all, and his life as well. The Lord's will alone is a safe place to be, even if the money does not appear to be great in the process. Let us remain under God's directive will and not beg God to make an exception for us, for His directive will is always best!

5. Israel is blessed by God and will end history as the Lord's people. Any nation that attacks Israel will not prosper. History teaches this, but God's Word proclaims it. Those who ignore the Word of God will perish. Pray for Israel, for the prayers will be answered. The future remains bright for them as a people, although it will be through dark days.

## **CHAPTER 24**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Balaam now casts aside any attempt to find a way to curse Israel. Moses tells us in the first verses that he had tried "enchantments" in the previous places, or different forms of spell casting used by seers at this time, but he now casts all such things aside, for he knows God is going to bless Israel and only bless them. Balak just stands sullenly by his last set of sacrifices, and watches the prophet and hears his final words.

The two men will part at the end of this third prophetic word, but what Moses does not tell us here, but identifies later, is that the prophet gave advice to the king on his departure that would give the enemy power over Israel. Balak will not be moved, nor rebuked at all by this next prophetic word of judgment, but God will be glorified by it, and it is written down and recorded for the future by the scribes present and later will fall into Moses or Joshua's hands.

### **NUMBERS 24:1-25**

**24:1** And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness. **2** And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him. **3** And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: **4** He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: **5** How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel! **6** As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters. **7** He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. **8** God brought him forth out of Egypt; he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn: he shall eat up the nations his enemies, and shall break their bones, and pierce them through with his arrows. **9** He couched, he lay down as a lion, and as a great lion: who shall stir him up? Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee. **10** And Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he smote his hands together: and Balak said unto Balaam, I called thee to curse mine enemies, and, behold, thou hast altogether blessed them these three times. **11** Therefore now flee thou to thy place: I thought to promote thee unto great honour; but, lo, the LORD hath kept thee back from honour. **12** And Balaam said unto Balak, Spake I not also to thy messengers which thou sentest unto me, saying, **13** If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the commandment of the LORD, to do either good or bad of mine own mind; but what the LORD saith, that will I speak? **14** And now, behold, I go unto my people: come therefore, and I will advertise thee what this people shall do to thy people in the latter days. **15** And he took up his parable, and said, Balaam the son of Beor hath said, and the man whose eyes are open hath said: **16** He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open: **17** I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth. **18** And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly. **19** Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city. **20** And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever. **21** And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwelling place, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock. **22** Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive. **23** And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this! **24** And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim, and shall afflict Asshur, and shall afflict Eber, and he also shall perish for ever. **25** And Balaam rose up, and went and returned to his place: and Balak also went his way.

### **REFLECTIONS**

**Verses 1 – 3.** Balaam sees that the Lord is determined to bless Israel and so he does not seek the answers to the problem he is given by the king, for he already knows the answer. He does not pray a third time for a change on the Lord's part. This is a lesson to us all. There is a limit to the patience of the Lord with us, and having prayed twice and received the same answer, we are best advised to stop that line of prayer! When the Lord's will is known, the challenge is for us to bring our lives in line with it, not try to get the Lord to change it.

He looks down to the camp of Israel by the river and sees them set out in their tribal groups ready for the invasion of the land of Canaan. The Holy Spirit comes upon him and he utters his third and last prophetic word about Israel's destiny

and blessedness. This is another reminder that this man is a believer. He is filled with lust for money at times, but at this point he is clear headed enough to hear and speak the words of God.

Notice he refers to himself as a man, "whose eyes are open". This is in marked contrast to the king who looks upon him, whose eyes are closed. It is also a reminder that carnality is not an absolute state, and that this man is apparently swaying to and fro, from obedience to the Lord, to lust for the wealth of Moab. At times he is spiritually clear and focused upon the Lord, and at other times he is lusting for money and looking for an opportunity to get the wealth the king has promised him. He swings, and sadly does not finally reject everything associated with Moab and choose the wealth of God rather than the rewards of paganism. The compromise he will make in the end will be fatal for him.

This also is a warning to us all. If we have an Old Sin Nature area of weakness that we do not deal with, then eventually we will be overwhelmed by it. Each and every moment of every day in the Angelic Conflict we face the choice – will we walk with Jesus in obedience to His Plan, or will we walk away from the plan and all blessing associated with it?

**Verses 4 – 7.** Balaam now tells us exactly how he saw the visions from the Lord and heard the words. He fell into a trance each time, and although his eyes were open, he heard words said and saw visions in his mind that were directly from the Lord. The words he has from the Lord this time will make two key points crystal clear. The first is that the family of Jacob is blessed by the Lord, and the kingdom established through Jacob's son Judah is exalted forever. The king will come from Jacob/Judah to rule the entire created world and nothing will stop the plan of God achieving this.

The second, and flow on, prophetic word involved the fate of all nations relative to Jacob. Those who bless and honour Jacob will be blessed, for in doing so they recognize the actions and plan of Almighty God. Those who curse Jacob are rebelling against the plan of Almighty God and so their curses will rebound upon themselves.

Balaam sees the camp of the Israelites in terms of a well watered orchard and a pleasant meadow land. He sees them in terms of pastoral prosperity and fruitfulness. They are a place of blessing and spiritual refreshment to all who come to them. God has planted them "beside the river", the place where they will prosper forever, and as they are God's planting, no man will tear them up permanently, for they have a fixed place in the Lord's plan. The waters of blessing will flow out from Israel and will overflow to all peoples around them who accept them. Their king will be higher than the greatest king of the day and his kingdom will be exalted (lifted up) by God above all others. God has decreed this and it will come to pass. Deuteronomy 7:1-26, Daniel 8:1-27, 9:24-27, 11:21-45.

**Verses 8 – 11.** It was God that delivered the people from Egypt, and their power as they came up from there was supernatural power. They will eat up their enemies and break their strong bones. The picture here is that of the "lion of God". They will be unstoppable because the Lord is with them. No-one exists in the land who can defeat the Israelites, for like a mighty lion he is the king of nations, and the day of the Canaanites is over. Those who bless Israel are blessed, those who curse Israel are cursed.

Balak is exceedingly angry at Balaam for this third and final blessing upon the people of Israel. He makes it clear that he wants to remain an enemy of Israel. He claps his hands together in his rage and orders Balaam to return to his country and blames the Lord for withholding honour from Balaam. In effect he encourages Balaam to reject God and accept a new God, because his God will not let him become as rich as Balak intended to make him.

**Verses 12 – 14.** When people talk quantities of wealth it is only because that is their price for betraying their beliefs. Sadly this man still has lust for the money, but he will bounce back once more into a spiritual state and deliver his final prophetic word on the destiny of the peoples around Balak. Balaam reminds the king that he told his envoys from the beginning that he would only say the things that the Lord allowed him to say. He announces that he will indeed return to his land in the north, but before he does he will tell Balak what will happen after this time.

**Verses 15 – 25.** Balaam is very direct here and separates himself from Balak, for he is the man whose eyes are open, and Balak is just the King who stands by and hears the words. He really emphasizes that he is the one who hears and sees the words and visions of God. Balaam writes this vision up and possibly leaves a copy with Moab as a lasting testimony to the future of the peoples. He directly prophesies the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ who he refers to as the "star out of Jacob", who will also emerge from Moab through the believer Ruth.

This becomes one of the clearest and earliest of the direct prophetic words about the Lord Jesus Christ. A "sceptre" will rise out of Israel and the ruler ship of the Lord will be over the entire earth. Balaam speaks of these things in a way that makes it clear that it is a long way away. Now there may be the two references here; the first to Saul and David, and then to David's descendent the Lord Jesus.

The ruler who comes will "smite the corners of Moab". The "sceptre" holder will defeat Moab, eliminate the children of Sheth (the sons of confusion – or rebellion). The Edomites will be destroyed as a people and become part of Israel's power, as will the remnant of the Moabites, Amalekites, and the Kenites. Their cities will be laid waste and they will become the place for Israel's dwelling. These are likely the Millennial Kingdom fulfilments being referred to here, when the Israelite nation will stretch right from Lebanon and Syria to Egypt and take in the Jordanian territory as well.

The next people group referred to is the Assyrians. This group was established by this time (around 1500 BC) and would exert influence through to their own final destruction in 612 (the Fall of Nineveh) and 605 BC (The Battle of Carchemish when the Egyptians and the last Assyrian army is defeated by Nebuchadnezzar). The Assyrians fell from the point of

their greatest power to nothing in under ten years. They perished “forever”, their wealth went to Babylon and Persia, their men killed, and their women passed to the Scythians. The Lord will use Daniel to complete Balaam’s vision of the future.

**PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS**

1. To fail to defeat our Old Sin Nature area of weakness is to be eventually defeated by it! Let us deal with sin and resist all temptations that draw us towards our weaknesses. If we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and in the light of God’s Word we will be restored to spiritual strength. We either grow away from our areas of weakness or we sink in the swamp that they will become within us!
2. The Lord speaks through his chosen vessels, and at times the people who the Lord uses fail Him and themselves after their service. This man Balaam fails the Lord and his ministry, and he will pass off the path of life and die the sin unto death. Let us remember this man, for he was the voice of the Lord and then died wealthy but in the place of judgment. Let us walk close to the Lord.
3. When the Lord’s plan and path for us is clear let us be obedient not prayerful for the Lord to change His mind. Once the Lord has set His decision before us, let us stop our prayers for guidance and receive that guidance, and “JUST DO IT!”
4. God’s plan for history is already written, and it is for us to decide whether we will be a part of this for blessing or oppose the inevitable and be destroyed beneath the divine steamroller of history! Let us study prophetic history and draw comfort from it, for the Lord’s plan will work out in time and the ways of man in opposition to the plan of God will be confounded.