

## NUMBERS

# The Story of Redemption

*Thoughts and Comments*

**"God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Num. 23:19)**

*favorite verse*

## NUMBERS 5

## False Accusations

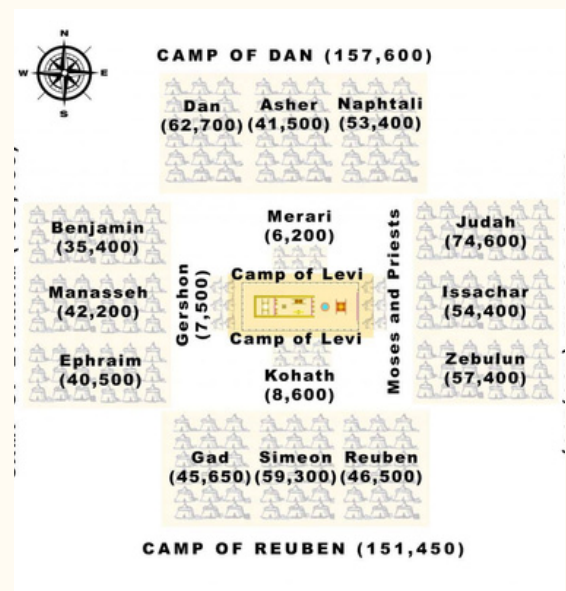
This chapter is strange to read. If a husband accuses his wife of adultery and there are no witnesses and no evidence, then he is instructed to bring his wife to the priests. She is to drink some sort of concoction of water. If she is innocent, nothing will happen. If she is guilty, by divine judgement, she will have disease or rot in her thigh or belly.

Some readers may read this and think it's unfair that it's just the woman who has to undergo this ritual. But it's actually a protection for the woman. Because it's far more likely that 'nothing will happen' and she will be found publicly innocent. It would take a lot for a husband's accusation of her to amount to guilt.

## NUMBERS 1 &amp; 2

## Tribe Numbers

Numbers begins with a census of the people of Israel according to their clans. It is followed by the arrangement of the camp. I found this chart to help us visualize what is described in these two chapters.



Numbers is more than just lists though. One main theme of this book is seeing that there are two generations-- the unbelieving generation (ch 1) that did not obey God when he commanded them to enter the Promised Land, and the second generation (ch 26), led by Joshua who had faith and was allowed to see their inheritance.

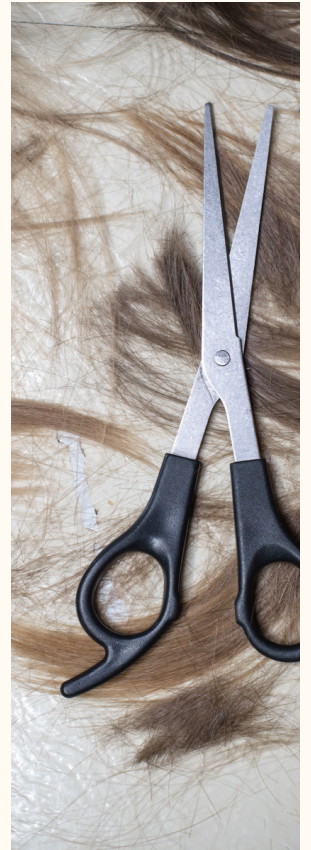
## NUMBERS 6

# Nazirite Vow

Anyone could take a Nazirite vow. It was voluntary and marked that person as separate for God. They abstained from three things: cutting their hair, coming into contact with the dead, and alcohol.

These vows typically lasted 30-100 days. However, there are three people in Scripture who took this vow for life: Samson (Judges 13), Samuel (1 Sam 1), and John the Baptist (Lk 1:15).

Death is associated with sin so to avoid corpses was to visibly set them apart from sin. I think it's interesting that the abstaining from alcohol is included in this vow. Drinking alcohol is not a sin. However, I think it's telling that God requires this of this vow. Scripture doesn't give an explicit explanation but knowing the effects of alcohol on a person's mind and demeanor, it makes sense that someone devoted to the Lord would keep a clear mind and derive pleasure and peace from the Spirit, not a drink.



## NUMBERS 9

# At His Command

I am amazed when I reflect on the fact that God dwelt WITH the Israelites. And it was a visible presence. There was a cloud resting over the tabernacle. I don't know how big the cloud was, but it had to be a pretty significant display.

And not only did this cloud rest over the tabernacle, but it commanded the Israelites when to leave and when to stay. The cloud would lift and they would follow the command to move.

Verse 22 says the cloud was 'abiding' there. I can't help but think of John 15 and how we are to abide in Christ and he in us. Abide means to endure, to bear with. The Israelites were wandering in the wilderness and depended on God to guide them.

Do we wait on the guidance of God to move us? Are we abiding in him and trusting him to move us where we need to go?



# Where's the Meat?

Even though they had witnessed God do incredible things in rescuing them from Egypt, even though he guided them by cloud, dwelt with them in their tabernacle, and fed them miraculously from the sky every day, the people were dissatisfied.

And not just a little whiny... they claimed it would be better to be back in slavery where they could eat all the foods they craved. Can you imagine? In their eyes, oppression and slavery seemed better than the providence and presence of the Lord.

I can see why God's anger would burn against them! What more could he do to show them his love? We are a fickle and sinful people. We have what we need but we beg for what we want and blame God for our dissatisfaction.

Finally God gave in and gave them quail-- the 'one thing' they didn't have. But it came with a cost. It came with a plague. Sometimes the thing we think we need isn't what we need at all and we pay the consequences.

I thought it was interesting when reading Eve in Exile, that Rebekah Merkle referred to this event when speaking about women who resist God's design for the church-- that pastors and elders are to be male. That women are not to teach or hold authority over men.

Women can teach and serve and do ministry in pretty much ANY other way except the one thing- teaching men. And yet, many women are dissatisfied with that. They believe if they could just have that quail, life would be more fulfilling. But perhaps, God's design, his provision, and what we are given in Scripture is enough and is best.





## NUMBERS 15

# I Didn't Mean To!

Among the many laws stated in the book of Numbers, this chapter talks about atonement for unintentional sin. This is contrasted with sin done with 'a high hand.' A high hand is a defiant, intentional act.

As with the whole Old Testament we are regularly reminded of the seriousness of sin and the holiness of God. We excuse sin in a lot of ways or diminish our offenses.

But this chapter reminds us that even unintentional sins require atonement. Even if our motives have some good to them (I'm not sure if we can ever have wholly pure motives) our sin is still against a holy and infinite God and requires atonement.

Thanks to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross we are forgiven our sins, both intentional and not, when we repent.

But we should also recognize the serious offense of high-handed sin. In this chapter we see a man stoned to death for gathering sticks on the Sabbath. to us, that seems harsh. It's just sticks, we think. But it is described as a high-handed sin. A defiant act of mockery of the law God put in place. Sabbath. And what was Sabbath for? A time to remember how God rescued them from Egypt. To deliberately sin against God is a blatant disregard that God can justly punish with death if he so chooses. The man gathering sticks was not an innocent bystander.

Consider these words from Hebrews 10:26-31--

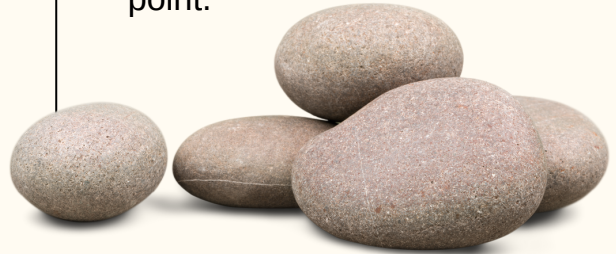
*"For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?... It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."*

## NUMBERS 13

# Nephilim

There is much debate on what the Nephilim are. Some say they are descendents of Seth, others say they are fallen angels. I'm not sure which is correct. But either way, the Nephilim represent wickedness.

They were also mentioned in Genesis 6. What's interesting about them being mentioned again in Numbers is that it means they existed after the flood. That means Noah's family and descendants turned away from God at some point.



## NUMBERS 20

# Two Strikes, You're Out

Before we jump to conclusions for assuming God's punishments against people in Scripture are too harsh, we must make sure we study properly.

When we see Moses punished for striking the rock instead of speaking to it in this chapter, again we may feel 'just striking the rock' isn't a big deal.

But let's look closer. Moses was instructed to strike the rock in Exodus (17) and it was a representation of Jesus, the Rock, who was struck down for our sins. ONCE for all.

(See also 1 Corinthians 10:1-4)

Moses striking the rock again distorted this symbolism. Jesus does not need to be sacrificed more than once for our sins. Once was enough for all.

To preserve the correct picture of salvation, this act of disobedience needed to be challenged.



## NUMBERS 23

# If He Wills, He Can

My favorite verse in Numbers is 23:19 as stated above. It reminds me of Isaiah 55:11 that says, *"so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."* (cont'd)

## NUMBERS 21

# Lifted Up

The event of the bronze serpent is a well-known passage in the book of Numbers. The symbolism is pretty clear that the serpent that is lifted up is Jesus, who would be lifted up on the cross for our sins.

With all the rebellion of the Israelites, we finally see some repentance here. All they needed to do was to gaze up at the serpent and they would be healed.

Forgiveness and healing is a gift from God and they come to us simply by repentance and looking to our Savior. We don't earn it, we receive it.



*"And so Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." (Jn 3:14-15)*

*"Jesus answered... 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.'" (Jn 12:32)*

(cont'd)

It also reminds me of the faith of the leper in Matthew 8 who says to Jesus, *'If you will, you can.'*

Is there any evidence in Scripture that supports the claim that God cannot do what he wants, cannot accomplish what he says? No, there is only evidence to the contrary. Even Balak who commissions Balaam to curse the Israelites is mystified that Balaam only speaks the blessings God puts in his mouth. And God just made Balaam's donkey talk. Is there anything impossible with God?

Why should we question him? God promised many things to the Israelites and he can use any thing or person for his purposes. He is constant, reliable. *'Has he said, and will he not do it?'*

Praise God that we can trust his Word and his purposes-- if He wills, he can! Let's ask boldly like the leper and trust in whatever answer God gives, for his plan WILL come to pass and it will be better than anything we could imagine ourselves.



---

**NUMBERS 27, 33, 36**

## **In All Fairness**

There are many who claim that the Bible is not good for women. That it is oppressive to women. But time and time again we've already seen in the Old Testament how God puts laws in place that protect women in a culture and time period that did not offer them much stability or voice.

We see his provision for women again in this chapter as he allows the daughters of Zelophehad to take their father's inheritance in the absence of male heirs. God heard them, he listened to them, and he provided for them. The Lord cares for all of his people. Women are not inferior in the eyes of the Lord but precious and meant to be cared for.

We see his fairness further on in this book in chapter 36 as we revisit these sisters in their marriages. God wants to hold the land equity between the tribes in balance. The Lord commands the daughters to marry whom they think is best as long as it's within the same tribe lest the land pass through families and other tribes gain more and more land making the divisions unequal.

A further example of provision and fairness are the cities of refuge He instructed to be put in place among the land to protect those who have killed with no evil intent. Even though we understand that unintentional sin still requires atonement, God still shows compassion and offers grace in this way that they would not lose their life in an act of self-defense. The sin is still a sin and there are still natural consequences for our actions, but the Lord still shows mercy and protection.

# Breached Boundaries

Numbers 34 describes in detail what the borders should be for all the tribes. I found the map (right) that is helpful in visualizing it.

But, unfortunately, the land promised to these tribes didn't fully come to be. The Jewish people never occupied all of this land because they did not obey God's command to drive out all the people.

There were several reasons that God required this of them. For one, mixing with a pagan people would allow wickedness a foothold. It would draw the Israelites into sin. This happened in many ways and led the Israelites into idol worship. Allowing sin a comfortable place in our lives will lead to hardship and heartache and even greater sin.

Just like the Israelites were instructed to drive out wickedness from the Promised Land, we need to drive out sin in our own lives and have nothing to do with it. This is also why being yoked with unbelievers is a dangerous thing.

Another reason for driving out all wickedness was that the Promised Land was meant to be a glimpse of the new heaven and new earth-- a land free of all false gods.

We have yet to see a land of purity and goodness in its entirety. We get to anticipate that in the future where we will get our full inheritance. Come Lord Jesus.



## Looking Ahead

*Next up... Deuteronomy 28*