

# Numbers DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

## OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to 'follow' Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

*"This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did."* **1 John 2:5,6**

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids'** environments, **men's/women's** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

**Lifegroup 12s**

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

**Lifegroup 3s**

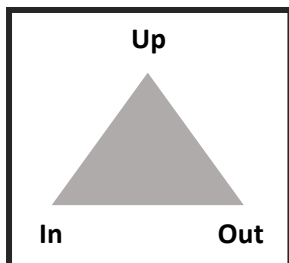
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

## A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

### Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

### In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

### Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

# HOW TO USE THE BOOK

## First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

## Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

## Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

## Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

**This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.**

## INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS

The intention of the Torah, the five-part book of Moses (of which this is number four), was to make present the unique history and identity of the people of God for every generation. The book of Numbers records the events of the Israelites' last days at Mount Sinai and their wilderness wandering after their failure to trust God and take possession of the Promised Land. Thus, the book covers about a thirty-nine-year period.

One of the themes present in the book of Numbers is the cost of rebellion against the authority of God's ordained leaders, those responsible for ministering to God's chosen community. Depending on how you count it, there are six or seven rebellions against Moses' leadership during the years covered in the book of Numbers. In Psalm 139 we are challenged to uproot rebellion. Let's pray it today...

*"You have searched me, LORD, and You know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; You perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; You are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue You, LORD, know it completely. You hem me in behind and before, and You lay Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain ... Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any rebellious way in me and lead me in the way everlasting."*

Okay, gang, let's go. Bible, pen, journal, and your coffee/tea ready.

Love you all,  
Phil

## Live

While the book of Exodus covers a year in time and Leviticus covers a month, the book of Numbers takes in more than 38 years. This book is all about God's people in the wilderness – how they got there, how God dealt with them there, and how He brought them out to the Promised Land. The wilderness was never meant to be Israel's destination. God's desire was to bring them into the Promised Land of Canaan. The wilderness was intended as a temporary place, a place to move through, not to live in. When we are in the wilderness, we are tempted to launch a hundred different schemes and plans to escape, but only God's way really works. The book of Numbers gives us God's way. The idea that the LORD spoke to Moses is repeated more than 150 times and in more than 20 different ways in Numbers.

The Promised Land has been mentioned before now during the exodus, but the focus was on getting to Mount Sinai and receiving the Law. That was just the beginning. Now the focus turns towards taking the Promised Land and recognising it will be a battle. Israel take a census, a count was made by their families, by their fathers' houses. Every family would know preparation was being made for war. God wanted the count made by families because the strength of Israel was determined by looking at the strength of individual families. How beautiful is that!

As recorded in the book of Exodus, Israel escaped slavery in Egypt. God miraculously set them free from hundreds of years of bondage. They came through the Red Sea and saw God provide for them throughout the desert wilderness. They came to Mount Sinai where God appeared to them in a spectacular way and where Moses went to meet with God and receive the Law. At Mount Sinai, Israel also embraced an idolatrous image of a golden calf and was corrected by God.

## Pray

Father, the only reason I may fail in spiritual battle is because I do not take an honest inventory about where I am spiritually. May I realise today and every day hereafter that You, oh God, are my shield, my strength, my glory, and the lifter of my head. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

When my kids were small, we used to camp each summer. Picking your spot, setting up camp, and all the prep was part of the adventure and fun. Today, we see this huge army of people begin their camp life. I don't know of any other journey so meticulously managed. The divinely orchestrated plan for the camping of the tribes is unbelievably well put together. In the middle of all this was the tabernacle where God would dwell among them, the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night assuring them of the presence of a higher power. It is very significant that the tabernacle sat right in the centre of the camp of Israel. God desired to be at the centre of the nation, the centre of the hearts of these people. Every man in Israel had his tent pitched so when he got up in the morning and walked out of the tent door, looking to the centre of the camp he would see the cloud resting upon the tabernacle and he was reminded of God among them.

When a nation is centred around God, that nation is destined for greatness. As long as there is consciousness of God at the centre of a people, there is potential for greatness. It is when people lose that centrality of the concepts of God that the nation is in decline, and you don't need me to alert you to the condition of not just our own nation but oh so many today. It is a travesty and a tragedy that nations no longer look to God but to themselves. They cast off the very morals that made them great, they kill their unborn children, and worship anything but the real thing. How God has been grieved and quenched. As we celebrate and find comfort in God's sovereignty seen in the order of worship around the tabernacle, why should we struggle with it anywhere else? Why are we even tempted to reverse roles and make ourselves the potter and treat God like malleable clay? Why would we ever prefer our way instead of Yahweh?

### Pray

Father, give me joy in simply being the clay. You've placed the incredible treasure of Jesus in this jar of clay to prove Your all-surpassing power in making all things new. You truly do all things well, even when You don't do all things easy. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

The tribe of Levi was not for fighting but for holy service. These people were chosen over the first-born males for this incredible task. They were divided into three groups by families and they would camp west, north, and south of the tabernacle. Notice as you read today how each Levite had a specific role in tabernacle duties. When the cloud or the fire moved, they had to jump into service, and, believe me, the service was holy because it took care of the tabernacle of the testimony of God. The tabernacle with all its furnishings and the altar where the priests ministered were types and shadows of Christ in all His rich aspects. This is why so much value was laid upon this, all was pointing to Jesus and the New Covenant.

Let's examine the camp layout a little further. Immediately to the west of the tabernacle we have the family of Gershon. And then immediately to the south was the family of Kohan. To the north was the family of Merari. Right in front of the entrance to the east side was Moses and Aaron and his sons. If you were in a helicopter looking down on the camp of Israel, you would see the shape of a cross. With the tabernacle right in the centre, the tribe of Levi encamped immediately around it, and then the other tribes were around the tabernacle further out. How incredibly significant and powerful is that! God had the New Covenant in mind even throughout the wilderness wanderings. Every single time they set up camp, all of heaven would see the cross.

What's not to love about this God we serve, standing in awe of His redemption plan that was always before Him! I'm reminded of how Jesus said He had set His face as a flint to go to Jerusalem. The more we come to Him, the more we realise that it's God who is always coming to us first.

**Pray**

Father, I exalt You and delight in You. The more precious You become to me, the more I watch my shame melt away. The more I see You for who You really are, the more I see all other precious currencies as fool's gold. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

God gives instructions for setting out and who would carry what from the tabernacle. When the camp was ready to move forward, Aaron and his sons were to come in and delicately take down the instruments to a divinely explicit order. They were to cover all these things, wrap them up, and get them ready to carry. Then some chappies would come in and just pick up the sticks to carry them as porters, not touching the instruments. They weren't to touch the Ark of the Covenant even though it was covered with skins, nor were they to look upon it. And so, when Israel got up in the morning and the cloud had lifted and was moving, Aaron and his sons would have to hurry in. They would start taking the veil apart, using it to cover the Ark of the Covenant. Then they put over the cloth of blue, then the badgers' skin. All of the instruments within the tabernacle were wrapped up. This was the duty of the sons of Kohath whenever the call came to move. They were not to look upon the objects of the tabernacle, but Eleazar was to direct them and show them how to carry it so those men would not die.

In the Old Testament, God could move by Himself without man. For instance, when God created the heavens and the earth, there was no need of man to match Him. In the New Testament, God does nothing without man. Man must be one with God. 1 Corinthians 6:17 says, "*He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit*". This implies that in the New Testament, God's design has bound us together with Him. He is willing to be bound to us. God now moves not only with us but also within us. He refuses to move without us. This is why God never preaches the gospel directly to anyone Himself, instead, He preaches the gospel through us. Wow!

### Pray

Father, help me to want Your purposes to stand more than I want life not to be messy. Help me to glory in Your pleasure. Help me to accept disruption as a necessary part of transformation. There is no comfort like the comfort that comes from knowing You as "*Abba, Father*". In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

In this chapter, the people are told to cleanse the camp by putting out every leper and those who had any issue in their body. It's amazing that God didn't want any type of defilement in the camp where He dwelt. They put out those who were leprous, those who had any runny type of sores and those who had been defiled by touching dead bodies. Talking about purity in the camp, God then goes on to deal with issues of the heart and soul, speaking about affairs and jealousies that can come after the affair. He even deals with how a spirit of jealousy would come suddenly on a husband, and he wondered whether or not his wife was really being faithful to him. This husband was to bring his wife before the priest with an offering for her. The priest set her before the Lord and the woman had to drink bitter water and then wait for the consequences. If her stomach swelled then she was considered guilty and was put out, but if there was no ill effect, she was considered innocent and her husband's jealousy was unfounded. It would be awful if you had an extremely jealous husband and you had to drink this bitter water all the time! You would be ready for the hills, as my granny used to say! Women have definitely come a long way from this stuff.

According to Old Testament teaching, leprosy came mainly from rebellion against God's authority. The first illustration of this was the case of Miriam and Aaron who rebelled against God's authority set in Moses. By rebelling against God's authority, Miriam became leprous and Moses had to pray for her to be restored. The rebellious nature is within all our blood and nature, as Romans reminds us, *"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God"*. It is only in Christ that we find ourselves washed and made right for heaven. I am so thankful for the grace of God that covers me. While the Old Testament sacrifices covered sin, Jesus' blood takes away my sin, removing it from me forever. How cool is that!

### Pray

Father, only Your love is better than life; only Your love will never let go of me; only Your love can fill the emptiness, heal the brokenness, and break the imprisoned-ness of my soul. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Today we have the rules for taking the vow of a Nazarite which was a vow of consecration to God. If you wanted to make a special consecration of yourself to God for a period of time, you could enter into this vow during which you were not allowed to drink any wine or grape juice or eat any grapes or even raisins. During the time of the vow, you wouldn't shave or cut your hair. This was the vow that Samson was to observe from his birth. In the story in Judges, an angel appeared to Manoah's wife who was barren and informed her that she was going to have a son. She was told to not bring a razor to his head and not allow him to drink anything from the vine. Through him, God would begin to deliver the Israelites from the Philistines. In the process of time, Samson became involved with Delilah who constantly pressed him for the secret of his strength. In a moment of weakness, he said, *"A razor has never come upon my head, for I have been a Nazirite to God from my mother's womb. If my head is shaved, then my strength will leave me, and I shall become weak and be like any other man."* (Judges 16:17)

Samson's strength wasn't in his hair but rather his strength lay in his consecration to God. The absence of his hair was a sign of the broken commitment. Any man who will consecrate his life to God has a source of strength and power. But with a broken vow, a broken covenant, you become as weak as any other man. In the New Covenant, believers serve God in our vow of holiness as we offer our lives as a living sacrifice in service to God. *"I urge you, then, brothers, remembering the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, dedicated and acceptable to God; that is the kind of worship for you, as sensible people."* Romans 12:1

### Pray

Father, sometimes I feel like the prodigal son and elder brother wrapped up in one. I come to worship You from the faraway land of my unrighteousness, and from the nearby district of my self-righteousness. I own and grieve the many ways I try to make my life work on my terms, rather than by Your grace. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

All of the gifts were offered to the Lord for His pleasure. Having been in the haulage business when I was younger, I love how there are practical minds at work here; they bring a good old team of carts and oxen to do the transport work of shifting this thing around.

My mind did a little meander today as I read the last verse which talks about God's tent, the special place where God met with the Israelites. We know that God does not live in one place only but He is everywhere. God spoke to Moses in this tent when Moses stood by the Ark, however, although the Ark was very holy, God did not live inside it! When God spoke, His voice came from above the Ark. Gold covered the Ark inside and outside. On the lid, there was a model of an angel cherub at each end. God's voice came from between these angels. Today, we don't have to go to a special place to meet God. We can meet God by means of His Son, Jesus Christ, wherever we are and at any time, yet we should not approach Him with any less reverence than what we would have had in Moses' day.

Because God is the First and the Last, we don't have to be afraid of anything in between. After all, He is very God, and we are very not. He never has to say "Oops" about anything in world history or in our life. He never attempts anything as though He could fail. God never has to pace anxiously in heaven, scratch His head in confusion or resort to plan 'B'. He perfectly executes His sovereign will ... from naming the stars to numbering our hairs and days. Because He holds the keys to death and hell and to everything else, we don't have to be afraid to die or live. Jesus robbed the grave of its victory, removed the sting of death, and defeated the powers of darkness. We don't have to be afraid of people or aging, failing or forgetting, international terror or heart messes. Pretty cool!

### Pray

Father, I know You'll never leave or forsake me and I know I'm in the palm of Your hand. Free me more fully from my fears that I might live more fully to Your glory. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

The lampstand was very important because it was a symbol of Christ and His people. Remember how Jesus said in John 15 that He is the vine and we, His people, are the branches? The branches stay strong and alive because they are part of the vine. The branches cannot live away from the vine, nor have they the ability to produce fruit. The job of the branch is to bear fruit; the produce comes from the vine itself. The branch remains and bears fruit in season. This is what we are called to do. I love how Israel made the main part of the lampstand and its branches from one piece of metal. How significant is that! This reminds us that we are one with Christ and we can't do God's work if we are not united with Christ.

Next we have the setting apart of the Levites. This is like the laying on of hands in the New Testament, separating those who were going to minister. We see this in Acts 13 with Paul and Barnabas. The tribe of Levi were brought before the tabernacle and the congregation of Israel gathered around them and laid their hands on them, endorsing these men to minister for them in spiritual things. Then the Levites would lay their hands on the heads of bullocks; they were to offer one for a sin offering, and one for an offering of consecration to the Lord. This is how they were to begin their ministry and service unto God for the people. From twenty-five years old and upwards, they had to go in and wait on the service of the tabernacle on behalf of all the congregation. Then, at age fifty, they had to retire from service. They were still allowed to assist in the ministry with their brothers in the tabernacle, but they were not allowed to do the work or to take the charge. Interesting. Worthy of note and study.

**Pray**

Father, this is how You love each of Your followers, all of Your disciples. You've made me Your own at the price of Jesus' blood. I've been redeemed from sin and death and placed into Your righteousness and embrace. Absolutely nothing can separate me from Your love. I have been made one with Jesus. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

The Passover meal was meant to be a reminder of God's "passing over" Israel in the judgment of the firstborn at the exodus from Egypt. You will remember how the blood of the lamb, applied to the doorposts and lintel of the home, would be seen by the angel of God's judgment. He would "pass over" and spare the home covered by the blood. Passover was a continual reminder of this occasion of being spared judgment and the deliverance that followed. Of course, we realise how Jesus fulfilled the Passover sacrifice by His death on the cross. Paul reminds us of this in 2 Corinthians 5:7. The covering of His blood causes the judgment of God to "pass over" us. This is why I love each Lord's day to remember Jesus' work on the cross through the Lord's Supper, to remember being spared judgment and the deliverance that followed.

When the tabernacle was built, God blessed it by showing His presence in the form of a cloud by day and fire by night. This cloud of God's *shekinah* glory was evident at different times in Israel's history. When Solomon built the temple, the cloud of glory filled the temple (1 Kings 8:10-11), but when Israel apostatised, the cloud of glory departed (Ezekiel 10:3-4, 18-19). I often wonder which would be worse ... to have never seen such an amazing visual emblem of God's presence and glory, or to have seen it and then watch it depart? The fire at night was obviously a comfort to Israel in the midst of a dark cold wilderness, and the cloud by day was shade from the hot wilderness sun. It was pretty cool that these people didn't need to decide when to march or who to fight as the pillar of cloud did all this for them. Does this still work today? A resounding YES! Commit your way to the Lord and He will direct your path.

### Pray

Father, the older I get the more I care about finishing this life well. As hard as it is to imagine, especially in my times of weakness, one day Jesus will present me before Your glorious presence without fault and with great joy. How many times do I have to say that for my heart to really believe it? Help me to follow the cloud of Your presence in my life. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

The two silver trumpets were used in directing the movement of the camps – for marching, for battle, and also for gathering the nation together. One can only imagine how you would rally over two million people to do what you needed them to do! The trumpets were essential tools for the journey to the Promised Land. Without them, it would be very difficult to assemble the nation and march towards the destination. Distinctive trumpet sounds were made to indicate gathering for a meeting, going for lunch, marching out, or going to battle. God also promised to hear the trumpet of Israel when they were in battle and to act on their behalf. I also love how trumpets were to be sounded *“on the day of your gladness”*; they were a way of celebrating God’s people coming together and the presence of the Lord with them. The book of 1 Thessalonians says that God will use the sound of a trumpet to gather His people for the ultimate assembling together – to meet Him in the air.

As the cloud began to move, one might imagine the huge sense of excitement that flowed through the people. Now they were on their way to the Promised Land! They had been fully prepared to walk as Promised Land people. They were ordered and organised, they were cleansed and purified, they were set apart and blessed. They were taught how to function as priests. And they were made to remember how judgment was spared and deliverance was received. They were given God’s presence as a guide and given all the tools needed to lead the people. One would be tempted to think that after such extensive preparation, after a transformation from slave people to Promised Land people, that the actual entering into the Promised Land would be easy. Oh, if only! Ahead of them were the greatest challenges, challenges that could only be met by faith. Let’s live by faith and be prepared, for life has a way of throwing challenges at us!

### Pray

Father, since You desire the fullness of Your joy to be in me, I will live with anticipation and hope. Fill me afresh with the inexpressible and glorious joy that comes from living in union and communion with You. Help me on this journey called ‘life’. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Live

Note how this chapter presents itself, *“Now when the people complained...”* These chosen people of God, having been ordered, organised, cleansed, separated, blessed, taught how to give, reminded of God’s deliverance, given God’s presence and the tools to advance to the Promised Land are now on the march to Canaan and three days into the journey, the people complained. God had to send some fire among them to rattle their cage a little and show them who was in control. Then they moaned about the manna. They were missing their fish and chips back in Egypt! At this point, Moses is struggling; he couldn’t do it alone anymore, so God told him to pick seventy people in whom he had seen leadership and bring them to the tent of meeting. God would take of the Spirit that was upon Moses and place the same upon the seventy elders. For this expanded leadership to do the job, they needed to have an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they needed the same spirit that Moses had. They needed to have his vision, his heart, and his attitude, for more than one vision is di-vision.

If a person does not have the Holy Spirit flowing in power in their life and the same spirit as those whom the Lord has put in authority over them, they are unequipped to serve as they should and will end up being a hindrance, not a blessing. When God gave His Spirit to the seventy leaders, they all prophesied, including Eldad and Medad, who had stayed in the camp. It is not clear why they had stayed there but they began to prophesy too. Joshua, Moses’ helper, was worried about what was happening, maybe thinking things were getting out of control but Moses was happy that the Spirit of God was contagious in the camp. This is why Paul tells the church at Corinth to seek prophecy above all else. It edifies God and kills all moaning. You can’t prophesy and moan!

## Pray

Father, I praise You that the gospel doesn’t call me to hope in hope but to hope in You. You have made promises You alone can keep. You are faithful and You are loving, and that’s all I really need to know. Not hoping is not an option. Help me to not be a moaner and complainer. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

The previous chapter kicked off with the people complaining; today we have a more serious issue, a “staff infection” as someone once called it. The leaders are in mutiny against their leader! We are told, *“Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses”*. It seems strange that Moses’ sister and brother, his own family, would be the source of such criticism. We might expect them to be his greatest supporters but often these things come from our closest quarters. I love the little phrase at the end of verse 2, *“And the Lord heard it.”* Of course God heard it! He always does, and He deals with it according to His own hand. Miriam and Aaron, as is often the case, were accusing Moses of the very same sin motivating them to make the accusation, pride. Moses wasn’t the one with the pride problem, quite the contrary, his accusers were the ones with this problem. Moses was a humble man and only the humble, those who are genuinely others-centred, can be responsible with such communion with God.

God appeared to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam declaring that He spoke to prophets by means of dreams and visions, but Moses was different. God spoke to Moses *“face to face, as a man speaks to a friend”* (Exodus 33:11). How beautiful is that! So God punished Miriam and gave her the disease of leprosy. Why Miriam and not Aaron one can only surmise; she may have been the ringleader, the spokesperson; her name does appear first, suggesting as much. Moses had to beseech God on her behalf and, of course, God heard the prayer, but Miriam had to stay outside the camp for a week because she was deemed unclean. Everyone in the camp knew that Miriam had done something to make God angry. I wish I could tell you that all is about to change, that these people have now learned their lesson in rebellion against God and His authority, but not so. Are you harbouring pride today? Root it out before God has to deal with it.

### Pray

Father, help me to walk humbly before You with all integrity and love. You know my heart and frame so well, even better than I do, so help me examine my innermost being today and confess all pride. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

These men were on a reconnaissance mission to observe the land of Canaan and bring back a report to the nation. It is worth asking if they really needed to go on this mission. Deuteronomy 1:20-25 suggests the plan to send spies did not originate from God or from Moses, but came from the people. Moses simply told them to go and take the land and the people then suggested this plan. But the expedition had an unfortunate result. The Israelites reached the borders of the Promised Land but didn't get to enter it for another forty years! There were twelve men chosen to go as spies but only two of these leaders entered the Promised Land, Joshua and Caleb.

The spies visited Hebron where the graves of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lay. They didn't seem to notice this, instead, they noticed that the people were huge and they compared Hebron with Zoan, a city in Egypt. Alarmed by the size of the people, they all too quickly forgot God's promise that He would give this country to them. The soil of the country was very good and the men cut huge bunches of grapes as proof. This was truly a land flowing with milk and honey, as promised. When the twelve men returned, they gave a report to Moses and the people. They started with good news – the soil and the crops. But, alas, it drifted to all the bad things – the people who lived there were strong and the buildings were fortresses.

The sin of the people against God was becoming worse. In chapter 11, it was greed; in chapter 12, it was jealousy against Moses; in this chapter, it is downright disobedience and mistrust. They were rejecting the land that God had given to them. Caleb encouraged them to enter the land because he believed God's promises. He was humble and he trusted God completely. With God, it is possible to do anything. Like Caleb, we must trust God and we must obey Him always.

**Pray**

Father, this portion of Your Word greatly encourages me to pray for a wide array of people I love. How I long for You to be gracious on behalf of my family and friends. Grant me strength to engage and stay present, but to follow You with steadfast vision. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

In many of these chapters, the first lines set up the story for us. Today, we find the whole nation weeping aloud! The unbelief of the ten spies truly represented the unbelieving heart of the nation. Israel wept that night upon hearing that the enemies in Canaan were too big. This mourning had a distinct character. It was mourning because God would not make it all easy. We often expect that of God and resent adversity in our lives, forgetting the example of Jesus who had it harder than any one of us and whom we are not above. This was mourning filled with a resentful attitude towards God, blaming Him for their “problem” and denying that He is a loving Father who cares for His children. God was trying to cause something to die – the flesh, the sin-nature, the old man, and Israel mourned because they wanted the old man to live. This situation upset Moses and Aaron very much and they lay down with their faces to the ground. They knew that God had to punish the people. Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes and tried to encourage the people to trust God, saying that the country was good and the Lord would lead them into it. But the cancer of unbelief had set in and instead, the people became angrier, wanting to kill Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb.

Then, suddenly, God turns up and speaks to Moses (not to the people, which I find interesting). In this next section, we have one of the most profound examples of intercessory prayer. Moses stands in the gap between a rebellious nation and a holy God, a God who happened to be filled with a righteous anger that could burn this lot up with a word from His mouth. Because of Moses, God turned from His anger and instead of destroying the rebellious people, He stripped their inheritance from them. Apart from Joshua and Caleb, none of the people over forty would so much as smell the land. So sad!

**Pray**

Father, as I read this passage today, yet again I am convicted of the times I have disbelieved and gone back to the flesh. As I ponder it now, it makes me uncomfortable and I repent freshly to You, my King. Help me to put to death the things of the flesh and live unto righteousness. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

I love the start of this chapter, *“Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them...”* Israel was at one of its lowest points in history. It had just rebelliously rejected God’s offer to bring the nation into the Promised Land. God consigned the people to wander in the wilderness for 38 years until the unbelieving generation had perished and a new generation of faith rose up to take the Promised Land. Yet, immediately after this rebellion and stinging chastisement from the Lord, Israel received precious tokens of God’s mercy, care, and help. This is what I love about God who is ever gracious and long-suffering. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us, not waiting for us to clean up our act. I have to say it again, I love this!

As we move into this chapter about offerings and other laws, at first I thought it was strangely placed. Should this not be at the beginning of the book? Situated here, it nearly seems as if nothing bad had happened. Then I got to thinking ... even though the people rebelled and were denied access to the Promised Land, God’s plan would go ahead, a people would enter in. Always remember this, delay is not denial. God will always get His will accomplished, if not through you, then through somebody. If He has to wait a generation to do so, well and good. He is, after all, the Creator of everything, including time, which obviously doesn’t apply to God like it does to us. So in this chapter today, God just takes Moses back into preparation-to-take-the-land mode. Oh my word, this is so good! There are offerings for unintentional sins, how to make an atonement, what to do with Sabbath breakers (they had to be stoned, by the way), right down to details about the tassels on their garments and the colour of thread that would attach them. Don’t ever tell me that God is not a God of order.

### Pray

Father, I now live in a story of redemption and restoration. All of history is bound up with Your commitment to redeem Your people from the nations and to make all things new. I praise You for rescuing me from a little story of self-fulfilment to a big story of kingdom advancement. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

The tassels detailed in chapter 15 were to remind the people of God's promises. Obviously Korah had ignored the significant meaning of the tassels. Even if Korah was right in his accusations, this was the wrong way to approach the problem. A power play like this was not the way to remove a leader like Moses. The methods of Korah (accusation, intimidation, the gathering of a rival following) revealed his rebellious, divisive heart. It is unbelievably easy for the Korahs of this world to sit back and say, "If I was leading the nation at Kadesh Barnea, I would have done it this way and definitely not that way." But Korah was not leading the nation. Men of his type rarely do.

If you encounter ungodly, divisive leadership, you should do what the 250 followers of Korah did not do. The right thing to do is, if possible, remove yourself from such leaders without becoming rebellious and divisive. If this is not possible, leave it to God to deal with (as David allowed God to deal with Saul instead of taking matters into his own hands).

It seems that Korah had left his 250 followers and was standing next to Dathan and Abiram. Moses told the people to move away from the tents of these three wicked men. The next thing that happens is the ground opens up and these three boys with their families and possessions fall into a hole in the ground. And for a follow up, fire falls and consumes the 250 followers. Talk about a clear message from God about who the leader is! It's a brutally sad story, but these men had opposed God, which is dangerous ground to be on. For them, the shaky ground was literal as it opened up and swallowed them alive. They had loads of opportunities to repent but thought they knew better. Once they overstepped God's line, it was the point of no return.

**Pray**

Father, the only way I can get right with You is by faith in Jesus Christ. Even though my conscience accuses me of having grievously sinned against all Your commandments, and even though I am still inclined toward all evil, nevertheless, without my deserving it, out of sheer grace, You grant and credit to me Your perfect salvation. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

This is the third story to prove that Aaron was God's high priest. These sticks were not branches that people had just cut off a tree; they were the special sticks that the leaders carried, dead sticks that obviously could not grow leaves. Moses told each leader to write his name on his stick, like a kid writes his name on his stuff at school, so there could be no mistake about who owned each stick. Moses put all the sticks close to the Ark of the Presence of God and then returned the next day to collect them. Aaron's stick had leaves, and not only leaves but flowers and nuts as well! Only God can make a dead stick grow again. This proved that He had chosen Aaron to be His high priest and now nobody could doubt it.

God told Moses to keep Aaron's stick in front of the Ark always. The place where it found life is the place it must remain. What a lesson we have in this today. Where we found life is where we must remain. Stay near the Presence always! Not only was this a miraculous sign, the blossoming of dead wood also spoke of fruitfulness. Miraculous fruitfulness is present when godly authority and leadership is practised.

God says to Moses, *"So, I will rid Myself of this constant grumbling against you."* This did not mean that the children of Israel would never complain again, but God, having demonstrated more than sufficient evidence to the murmurers, would no longer regard their complaining. Actually, He would judge it. Complainers are rarely satisfied by evidence or the resolution of one issue. Complainers are not issue motivated (though they claim to be); they are heart motivated. They murmur because they have discontented hearts. The complaining heart is demonstrated when people murmur about one issue after another, never being satisfied. Does this ring true to you today?

### Pray

Father, You created the waves crashing on the shoreline and the mesmerising sparkle in a child's eyes. You hand paint every Brown and Rainbow Trout in the world. You are the envy of every artist who studies sunrises and sunsets, some of your best and most daily work. Help me to never complain again. Turn my eyes to Jesus, to the cross, to redemption. In Jesus' name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

God never gives authority without accountability; the two always go together. If God gives someone headship and expects others to submit to them in His order, He also has a special accountability for that person. Those who are supported through the giving of God's people should not expect to have the best of both worlds; they will not be super wealthy in this life, though they should be comfortable. It is wrong for the congregation to keep the leader humble through poverty, and just as wrong for the leader to use the gifts of God's people to live above God's people. One thing the Levites were held accountable for was the protection of God's Tent. If anyone from Levi's tribe came too near the sacred objects, God would punish both the people from Levi's tribe and the priests. It was the priests' fault if this happened.

God did not allow the priests to own any property or land. Instead, He promised to provide what they needed by means of the people's gifts. This passage describes which parts of the sacrifices belonged to the priests. There were two types of offerings. Firstly, the 'most holy things' which were the sin offering, guilt offering, and grain offering. God allowed only the priests to eat parts of these offerings. Secondly, there were the 'holy things'. The priests could share parts of these offerings with their families, though anyone who ate them had to be clean because this food had been offered to God first. The priests also received money – payments for the first-born sons and first-born male animals. Please note, people didn't give their first-born sons to the priests, instead, they paid five pieces of silver, the amount of money a person would earn in six months. God promised to provide everything the priests and their families needed. Maybe today you need to reach out in faith for God to provide. Don't forget, He still is Jehovah Jireh, the Lord my provider!

**Pray**

Father, when the battle rages most fiercely and the schemes of Satan seem to be winning the day, grant me Your peace that passes all understanding. I boldly ask not just for surviving grace, but for thriving grace until the Day You return to finish making all things new. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

One could wonder why the Law made touching a corpse a defiling thing. Maybe because the wages of sin are death. The Law could not conquer death nor abolish it, but our beautiful gospel fully does, by bringing life and immortality to light and so introducing a better hope, as the writer to the Hebrews reminds us. As the ashes of the heifer signified the merit of Jesus, so the running water signified the power and grace of the Spirit who is compared to rivers of living water. It is by His work that the righteousness of Christ is applied to us for our cleansing. I love this, don't you?

It is easy to understand an intentional sin, but what is an unintentional sin? To touch a dead body was an unintentional sin as it couldn't be helped. People who touched a dead body had to make themselves clean and this chapter describes what they had to do. The first part of the chapter describes the first part of the ceremony. An ordinary person who wasn't a priest could kill an animal, but it had to be outside the camp. The people burned the blood with the rest of the beast's body. The priest put cedar wood, hyssop, and red wool into the fire and offered it to God. The priest and his helper then had to wash themselves along with their clothes, symbolic of washing away the sins. Someone put the ashes outside the camp where they had to mix them with water for the next part of the ceremony.

Due to the people's rebellion in not moving into the Promised Land, God had ordained that these couple of million plus people would die in the wilderness over the next thirty-eight years, thus, the issues around touching a dead person were very real. They would be doing weekly funerals. Don't you just love how God covers all! He crosses all the t's and dots the i's.

### Pray

Father, I am reminded of Graham Kendrick's words, "Only by grace can we enter. Only by grace can we stand. Not by our human endeavour, but by the blood of the Lamb. Into Your presence You call us, You call us to come. Into Your presence You draw us, and now by Your grace we come." In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

This was the fortieth year since Israel had started their journey. Now we have these people with no water and, of course, it is apparently Moses' fault. Moses first reacted in an impeccable way. He heads to the tent of meeting to talk this over with God. Step one gives him top marks. God told him what to do, 'Moses, go grab your stick and speak to the rock.' This is important. He had struck the rock once before and because of the symbolism, he must never strike it again. By symbolism I mean this: the Rock spoke of Christ who journeyed through the wilderness with them, and remember, Jesus was struck once at Calvary, never to be repeated. By this act of anger, striking the rock twice, Moses was defying everything the New Covenant would stand for. You can now see the seriousness of his act.

Through all my studies of my hero Moses, it does seem evident that he had an anger problem that he never got hold of, from killing an Egyptian in earlier years to this incident today. I find it interesting, though, that God still provided water from the rock. However, He punished Moses and Aaron for Moses' disobedience; they would not lead the people into the Promised Land. There's no joy in being left out, especially when you feel you've earned something. Imagine how Moses must have felt. For nearly forty years he had led the Israelites through the wilderness, often serving as the only influence for godly obedience but here he discovers he will never realise his goal. What sin could be great enough to bear such a price? This chapter reveals the answer – disobedience. What is your greatest personal dream? What would happen if you were told you would never attain it? Take some time to reflect on the current pressures and conflicts in your life and acknowledge God as sovereign over them. Thank Him for giving you wisdom to handle these situations and ask Him to especially guard your spirit.

**Pray**

Father, today's passage arouses so many questions in my heart but I have come to the conclusion that You don't tolerate disobedience in our lives. Please help me today in the things I know I am being disobedient in, to bring them in line with Your Word and direction. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Live

As Israel begin their approach to the Promised Land, the new generation encounters their first hostile army, Arad the Canaanite. They were on the threshold of the Promised Land, closer than the previous generation of unbelief had been, and now they were beginning to act with the same unbelief, or worse, it would seem! Something drastic had to be done to combat this and so verse 16 tells us, *“the LORD sent fiery serpents”*. God commanded Moses to make a serpent out of bronze and set it on a pole so that those who looked upon it could be saved. I find it interesting that God did not remove the snakes, instead, He provided a way to cure every person whom the snakes had bitten. But each person had to do something. They had to look up at the bronze snake on the pole, and live, or don’t, and die! Jesus referred to this when He spoke to Nicodemus about His death in John 3. He compared Himself with the bronze snake on the pole and sin like the poison. God doesn’t remove all sin from the world, rather, He provides a way to cure every person from the results of sin through the cross of Christ.

It is good to thank God for what He provides. Let’s look at a few types and shadows of things we are given. God provided manna for Israel just like He gives us our daily bread. More importantly, in Jesus, we have the *“bread of life”* (John 6). Only Jesus can satisfy our spirits. God provided the cure for the snakes’ poison and He gives us the cure for our sin, Jesus’ death on the cross. God provided water for Israel and Jesus gives us the water that gives life, according to John 7:37-39. The Holy Spirit makes us alive in our spirits and helps us to live in the way we ought.

## Pray

Father, forgive me for the times in my life when I have taken my eyes off You. You alone are my Jehovah Jireh, the Lord my Provider. The writer caught it well when he penned in 2 Samuel 7, *“How great You are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like You, and there is no God but You, as we have heard with our own ears.”* In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

I have to say, this is one of my favourite stories. It highlights the fact that God can use anyone and anything to do His will. This is the story of the talking donkey, so here goes! Israel was, at this point, on the move as they had essentially finished their 38-year wandering in the wilderness and were progressing towards the Promised Land. Suddenly, Balaam appears in the story. We're not sure how he came to be known as a prophet or a man with spiritual powers, but Balak certainly knew of his reputation and sent to hire him. It is clearly wrong, then and now, to be a prophet for hire. God knew that Balaam wasn't the real deal and that he was greedy for money. Balaam was probably hoping to persuade God to allow him to curse the Israelites, then Balak would pay him a shedload of money. Although God allowed Balaam to go with Balak's officials, Balaam's real reason for his journey was wrong and God was going to let him know that in a very weird yet powerful way. Remember that God was not trying to punish His prophet; He wanted to persuade Balaam to do the right thing. I love this about God, He is always pushing us onto the better things.

The donkey was more spiritually alert than the prophet at this point. It was the donkey that saw the angel and refused to pass, not once but three times. The prophet loses his temper with his disobedient beast and starts beating the poor thing. So, God intervenes and opens the donkey's mouth. The donkey challenges Balaam by reminding him how many times it had obeyed him previously, so funny. Balaam then sees the angel with the sword and falls down in total fear. The angel tells Balaam that the donkey had saved his life and that his attitudes were wrong. Interesting to note that instead of turning Balaam back, God allows him to go on, but with a fresh allegiance to speak only the word of the Lord.

### Pray

Father, I want to be true to Matthew 6:33, to seek first Your kingdom and all Your righteousness, and ALL these things shall be added to me. The amazing truth is that "*all these things*" can be had if I just put them in the right place and perspective. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Balaam and Balak built seven altars to sacrifice bulls and male sheep. It was a strange mixture of true worship and pagan ideas. Balak chose the sacred place of his god, Baal, even though he knew that his gods were too weak against the Lord's power. Balaam made the ceremony like one the Israelites offered, using clean animals so God would accept them. In pagan worship, people usually sacrificed pigs which were unclean, but Balaam was offering this sacrifice to the Lord whether Balak realised it or not.

It seems surprising that God spoke to and through someone as obviously careless as Balaam. But this shows us that spiritual giftedness does not equal spiritual maturity or holiness of life. God had ordered Balaam to bless the Israelites and no one, not even Balak, could make God change His decision. Balaam reminded Balak that God had rescued the Israelites and displayed His power on their behalf. Egypt was a very powerful nation but when God stepped in to deliver His people, they had melted like wax in the wilderness. Is it any wonder Balak became afraid of these people? Balaam said they would destroy their enemies completely, like lions that eat all of their prey. I suppose this was why Balak wanted them cursed, so it would disempower them, but Balaam was under strict instructions from the Almighty and he couldn't obey Balak. Actually, Balaam began to *bless* the children of Israel.

Balak took Balaam to another high place. He set up the same ceremony, building seven altars and sacrificing seven bulls and seven male sheep. Balak still hoped he could persuade God to change His decision about the Israelites, but all to no avail. God rebuked Balak and taught him about the divine nature, that He is not a man, that He does not lie or change His mind, that He always performs His word, and that He has all strength – a lesson we would do well to get into our little minds.

### Pray

Father, fear and discouragement, panic and hiding are not the order of the day; faith and peace are. When I'm under attack by the seducer, accuser, and condemner of the brethren, once again let me see Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of my faith. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Live

At the suggestion of Balaam, Balak offered 7 bulls and 7 rams. By now, he had given 21 bulls and rams, plus Balaam's pay. Balak definitely put his money where his mouth was in order to see Israel cursed. We must credit Balak for one thing – he knew where the strength of Israel lay. He did not seek to defeat Israel through military strategy or new weapons. He knew it was a spiritual battle and if Israel won the spiritual battle, they would certainly win the military battle. Such a timely lesson. We should walk in the same awareness; if we did, we would give more time and attention to building our spiritual strength and having a close walk with Jesus. We should not allow Balak to be more perceptive about spiritual things than we are.

On the previous occasions, Balaam went to a private place in order to enquire of God but now it seems he just knew what God would say. God gave him a vision which showed the future when the Israelites would live in the Promised Land, emphasising that they would have plenty of water – something precious in the wilderness. People need water to drink and live, but they also need a good supply of water to produce crops. The Israelites would have all the water they needed, which was a great blessing.

Next, Balaam emphasised the military power of the Israelites by prophesying about their future king. This king would be greater than the king of Israel's enemies, the Amalekites. Israel would continue to defeat all who fought against them; their strength and power is compared to that of a wild cow and a lion. Balak could not persuade Balaam to do anything except bless these people, even if he offered a small fortune. All of Balaam's prophecies came to pass over the next three hundred years. Some commentators, however, believe these prophecies also refer to the Messiah, who would be the King of all kings and the Author and Finisher of our faith. I love this!

## Pray

Father, You have had mercy on me according to Your steadfast love. I know that in Jesus, all of my sins have already been blotted out and forgiven: past, present, and future; sins of thought, word, and deed. May I humble myself and ask forgiveness of those I fail and hurt. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

What an enemy could never accomplish against Israel, Israel did to itself through disobedience. The same principle works among the people of God today. The mightiest attack of Satan against us can never do as much damage as our own sin and rebellion against the Lord. Phinehas was probably not the only one to make such a stand for righteousness, but his was the singular act that stopped the plague. We may think our particular stand for righteousness makes no difference in the awesome tide of sin around us, but God can honour just one righteous act and cause it to make the difference.

It's not until we get to chapter 31 that we begin to see the wickedness and deceit of this man, Balaam. He couldn't curse Israel himself but he knew that if he led them astray, God would curse them and he would get his big pay-out from Balak. Now, how insidious is that! The Moabites and Midianites began to tempt the Israelites to worship their gods and this chapter describes what happened as a result of Balaam's plan. The Moabites used sex, food, and anything else they could to attract the men to worship their gods. God sent disease into the camp to punish the people and Moses had to execute the leaders who had led the Israelites to sin. It's unbelievable how out of hand and frantic the sin became as these Israelites flaunted sexual acts in public. Phinehas takes a spear and drives it through two offenders who were blatantly defiling the camp, and this stops the hand of God's judgment on the people. One wonders, if Phinehas hadn't taken this step, would the 24,000 dead have been 240,000 or more? God was pleased because Phinehas was loyal to Him and He promised that both he and his descendants would be priests always. If there is one glaring lesson in this chapter, it is that God is a holy God and we must worship Him only.

### Pray

Father, I praise You today for Your commitment to keep me, because I am prone to wander and stray. Keep running after me, please, when I drift naively or when I run scared or when I am hiding in my pride. May the assurance of Your love and protection free me for loving others as You love me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Some forty years earlier, at the beginning of this book of Numbers, while Israel still camped at Mount Sinai, God commanded them to take a census. Throughout all the years that followed, Israel was organised enough to take the Promised Land, they just did not have enough faith. Organisation is good, and the work of God can suffer from a lack of it, but the best organisation can never replace bold trust in God. The old generation, the generation of unbelief, perished in the wilderness with no inheritance. They got the bare minimum – daily food, a decent clothes supply – but they had no inheritance in the Promised Land, except for Caleb and Joshua who had held on to God throughout.

The reason for both censuses was to count all the men who could be soldiers. This was very important because the Israelites were preparing to enter the Promised Land. But there was another reason for this second census. The people were entering the Promised Land to settle there, so Moses had to divide the land between the tribes and he needed to know the size of each tribe to divide it fairly. Apart from Caleb and Joshua, all the Israelites that Moses had counted in the first census had died. They would never enter the Promised Land, only their children would get the land for themselves.

Most of the tribes increased in size during the forty years in the wilderness, however, the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Ephraim, and Simeon had become smaller. One can only imagine this was because of God's judgment; the people who were judged for disobedience had, for the most part, come from these tribes. God wanted Moses to divide the land fairly. A massive task was underway to figure out the amount of land each tribe received and in which part of Canaan each tribe would have their share. You've got to love how God is so detailed and fair.

### Pray

Father, cause my heart to grow stronger and stronger in Your grace. For surely, the more my heart is strengthened by Your grace, the more it will beat for Your honour, the less room there will be for idols, and the more room there will be for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

Here we have the ladies taking a stand for their rights before God. There was a huge law change – in a case where there was no surviving son, the daughter would be eligible for the inheritance. Next, Moses is told of his fate and God announces Joshua as the new leader. Joshua’s time as Moses’ humble servant had prepared him to take the leadership he was now called to. The laying on of hands let the whole nation know that Joshua was now the leader and they should follow him. Every great leader must first be a great follower, and Joshua is an incredible example of submission to godly authority.

God allowed Moses to see the Promised Land but he had been told that he would never enter it because of what happened at Meribah. So, like the rest of his generation, Moses would die before he could enter the Promised Land. I love how Moses did not argue with God, instead, he asked God to choose a new leader for the Israelites. He knew that they would have to fight in the new land and they needed a strong and powerful leader. God chose Joshua to lead after Moses’ death. He had been Moses’ assistant for a long time and had already led the Israelites in battle. Also, he had actually been in the Promised Land, along with eleven other men, so he knew the place. Joshua would not have the same authority as Moses, which is interesting. Actually, there would never be another leader who would be like Moses. When Moses wanted to ask God a question, he went to the Tent, he spoke to God and God answered him. Joshua would not be able to speak to God like this; he received God’s instructions through Eleazar the priest. Eleazar would not speak to God face to face either; he used objects called the Urim and the Thummim, possibly two precious stones, one of which would illustrate ‘yes’ and the other ‘no’.

**Pray**

Father, everything I call beautiful is a mere hint and quiet whisper of the beauty found only in You. I love beauty because I was made by You and for You. It will take all of eternity just to begin fathoming the spectacle of Your beauty and taste the full measure of Your love. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

The Israelites were preparing to enter the Promised Land and this begins with new ceremonies and festivals to learn and carry out. The reason for these was to remind the new generation that they must worship God every single day (not a bad thing to do, I might add, and a lesson we should all take to heart!) It was very important to remember everything that God had done on their behalf. They had to thank Him for all His good gifts, especially the Promised Land. They must never forget they were God's chosen people. They were commanded to bring a male lamb to the Lord every morning and every evening. Each day began and ended with this statement of the need for atonement by sacrifice and an expression of devotion to the Lord. This reminds us that it is appropriate to begin and end our day with a statement of trust in God's atonement and expression of our devotion to Him. The Passover was very significant as it reminded them that God had rescued them from Egypt and from slavery. The festival of bread without yeast lasted for seven days, reminding them of when they left Egypt in a hurry with no time to make yeasted bread. The Harvest Festival was an opportunity to thank God for the grain harvest. I have added some verses in the prayer today for your daily thanksgivings.

### Pray

Father, today I want to be like the psalmist and seek You in the morning:

*"My voice You shall hear in the morning, O LORD, in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up."* (Psalm 5:3)

I want to be like the psalmist and seek You in the evening:

*"Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice."* (Psalm 141:2)

I want to be like the psalmist and seek You all the time:

*"Evening and morning and at noon I will pray, and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice."* (Psalm 55:17)

You are my strong tower and today I run into You. In Jesus' strong name.  
Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest (Aaron was the first high priest and then his descendants after him) entered the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle to offer ceremonial sacrifices for the forgiveness of the people. That Old Testament observance was a direct fore-picture of Jesus Christ, our High Priest (Hebrews 9:11), who, after His sacrifice, entered the very throne room of God the Father in heaven to make atonement for all humanity (Hebrews 9:11-12). This is beautiful. During this very special day, people did not eat anything. It was a holy day; they wouldn't do any work and literally set this day aside to only worship God. The high priest entered the Most Holy Place alone and sprinkled blood from the sacrifices. Then he took a live goat, known as the 'scape goat', and laid his hands on its head, transferring all the sins of the people onto its head. Then a young man took the goat a few days' journey into the desert and left it there, signifying the taking away of the sins of the people.

The Festival of Shelters was to celebrate the harvest of grapes and olives. It was the greatest of the Jewish festivals, often referred to as 'the Festival of the Lord'. It reminded Israel about their journey to the Promised Land through the wilderness when they did not live in proper houses but in tents or shelters so they could travel easily. During the Festival of Shelters, the priests sacrificed more bulls and male sheep than during all other festivals. Bulls and male sheep were the most valuable animals so it was an expensive time. The large number of expensive sacrifices and offerings emphasised the gratefulness of the people to the Lord. Nothing was held back. I love the book of Hebrews which tells of a better sacrifice, a better covenant, and definitely a much better outcome for you and me.

### Pray

Father, there's none so kind, so merciful, and so very close as You. The broken-hearted don't need to be brave when in Your company. The crushed in spirit don't need to pull themselves together, as though You would be greatly disappointed to find us less than conquerors. I praise You that the gospel declares the end to all posing and pretending. In Jesus' name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

### Live

All of these last few chapters are a preparation to enter the long-awaited Promised Land. Moses is still in charge. Even knowing he is not going to lead them in, he is ever faithful to the end. This is why I love this man so much. After all the ceremony preparation and all the remembrance pieces, now we come to keeping our word. It's been a long time since I've heard a sermon preached on 'keeping your word'. Vows among family members were regarded as sacred because the family itself is a living portrait of the family God is creating. Men had no 'out' for any vow or pledge that they made. Vows made by a never-married or married woman could be over-ruled by her father or husband respectively, but a widow or divorced woman was personally responsible for her vow, the same as a man. I suppose you could say our word is our bond!

Making a promise to God is a very serious matter. In fact, it is better to not make any promise at all if you don't intend to keep it. The Israelites were forever making promises to God of things they would do, or not do, and were constantly running into diffs with their words. Scripture clearly tells us that life and death are in the power of the tongue and that our words can wound those around us. The charge today is to guard our tongues. James refers to our tongue like a rudder on a ship or a kindling stick that lights a forest fire. While our tongues are one of the smallest members in our body, they have the ability to do so much hurt. A word spoken in haste can never be taken back. My mum taught me a little rhyme when I was a boy, "If your lips you'd keep from slips, five things observe with care: of whom you speak, to whom you speak, and why, and when, and where!"

### Pray

Father, forgive me for having a quick memory loss for my own sins, but perfect memory when it comes to remembering the sins of others. Convict me deeply when my attitude reveals more irritability than patience and more self-righteousness than Christ-righteousness. Help me to steward my freedom and stand in grace today in a world of broken people and messy relationships. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

## Live

We are generally uncomfortable with the idea of vengeance because it doesn't seem consistent with God's love. Yet, in the right context, vengeance is something good. The Scriptures speak repeatedly of the vengeance of God as a positive thing. Evil comes when we take vengeance into our own hands. In today's chapter, Israel was in a unique place with a special call to be an instrument of God's vengeance. This is something no person should take upon themselves today. Ancient Israel had this unique place in God's plan. When God-ordained instruments of authority, such as governments, take vengeance on evildoers, we, as Christians, can be at peace.

Chapter 25 describes the Midianites causing the Israelites to worship their god, Baal, a history that creeps back into chapter 22 with Balaam and Balak. Today, we begin with God's command to Moses to attack and defeat the Midianites. This would be Moses' last battle before he died. Israel's army destroyed the Midianites' towns and camps, took their possessions and animals, and captured the women and children. The soldiers expected Moses to be happy with them because they had defeated the Midianites. Instead, he was angry because they had brought back the women. Remember, it was the women who had caused the Israelites to worship Baal in the first place. Moses had ordered the soldiers to kill all the Midianites, women included. So, now Moses orders them to kill the women and their sons. He allows the young girls who were sexually pure to live; they were young and had not caused the Israelites to sin at Peor; they could marry the Israelites and learn to worship the one true God. This may all seem cruel to us and we may find it hard to pair this vengeance with the God of John 3:16, but this was a holy war and the Midianites had caused the Israelites' sin. God was redeeming back to Himself a people. Desperate times demand desperate measures.

## Pray

Father, thank You for sanctifying me, for transforming me through and through. You're not impatient in the process. You don't roll Your eyes or furrow Your brow when You think about me. I will be fully made whole when Jesus returns because He took my blame upon the cross. In His name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

Now Israel is ready to move into the land. This had been the longing of the nation for some 400 years, ever since Jacob moved the family into Egypt to find relief from famine. In this chapter, Moses hits another bump in the road as the tribes of Reuben and Gad want to settle on the east side of the river, which meant not going over. They had captured this land from King Og and King Sihon; it had much grass, so was good for cows and sheep. But Moses wasn't a happy chappy. If he granted this request, maybe the other tribes would not want to enter the Promised Land either. He reminded them that their ancestors had been afraid to enter the Promised Land, and that God had given this land to them, so it was a serious sin to refuse to enter it. Reuben's and Gad's tribes emphasised that their men would enter the Promised Land with the other tribes; they were not afraid of the people who lived there. They promised to fight with the other tribes to defeat their enemies, but first, they wanted to build towns on the east side of the river. Then, after they had fought alongside the other tribes, they wanted to return to their own land which was outside Canaan.

Moses agreed to grant the request of the two tribes on the grounds that if they did not fight with the other tribes, they would receive a punishment for their sin. It is a terrible thing to be used by the devil to discourage other believers from walking deeper and further with the Lord. We should ask God to guard us from ever discouraging the heart of another child of God. These two tribes did what they promised and helped the other tribes to fight for their land until those battles were over. Then they returned to their homes on the east side of the Jordan. You can read the rest of this story in Joshua chapter 22.

**Pray**

Father, I'm feeling pulled in a myriad of directions with a big school of little piranha nibbling away at my energy and focus. I so long for the day when all things in heaven and on earth will be brought together in You. You are my life and my joy, my anchor and my hope. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

This passage mentions no less than forty places where the Israelites camped on their journey from Egypt to Moab. One per year, one might think! This passage is more than a list of places; it is a reminder that God had guided them on their journey for forty years, protecting them from all enemies. In the end, they arrived at the Promised Land because that was God's plan for them. This is one of my favourite passages in the Old Testament, taking us right back to the start of the journey. Verse 3 says, "*The children of Israel went out with boldness in the sight of all the Egyptians*". Though they were slaves, they did not shrink out of Egypt; God gave them boldness to leave as conquerors, not as escaping slaves. The next portion of the journey from Sinai took some forty years, not because the distance was so long, but because the generation of unbelief had to die in the wilderness before a generation of faith could be raised up to take possession of the Promised Land. Oh, the deception and destruction of disobedience and disbelief. Root it out of your heart today.

Now Israel is camping on the border of the Promised Land, preparing to enter and settle there. God gives exact instructions to Moses about how to do this. He orders the Israelites to force out the inhabitants of Canaan and completely destroy all the idols. They could not mingle with these people; they had to root them out. Remember the Midianites and the Moabites of chapter 25, how they pulled the chosen people of God into idolatry? God wasn't taking that chance again; the inhabitants of Canaan had to go, along with all traces of their religion! Israel didn't obey God completely in this and centuries later were taken into captivity to Babylon – all because they allowed some people to stay in their land and then they slipped into false worship with them. We all know its easier to slip down than climb up!

**Pray**

Father, tenderise my heart with Your grace. Bring the resources of Your Word to bear upon my unsettled heart. Bring the power of resurrection to bear upon my untamed tongue. Bring the hope of the new heaven and new earth to bear upon my impatient attitude. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.



**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

In this chapter, God is about to describe the borders of the Promised Land to Moses and the children of Israel. Though the lands on the eastern side of the Jordan River belonged to Israel (and two and a half tribes settled there), those lands were not considered “the Promised Land” which refers to Canaan. Israel was going to have to take control of the Promised Land by conquest. They would have to drive out the Canaanites, yet, they should never consider that they earned the land. It was freely given by God as an inheritance. Inheritances are given, not earned, a lesson we should all remember. This land was a gift from God and if they kept all the rules of ownership, it would be theirs for good.

God wanted the Israelites to divide the land fairly, so, He chose men from each tribe to help Eleazar and Joshua. This was going to be a pretty strenuous job trying to keep everyone happy and stopping anyone thinking they got stitched while someone else got better. No wonder these top two men were chosen for the task. I love this guy Eleazar whom we seldom recognise. When his brothers went rogue, he remained the faithful son of Aaron. He had a son named Phineas, who also served the Lord faithfully, as we picked up in chapter 25.

Caleb was one of the men who had gone into the Promised Land many years before. He and Joshua were the only people from the first generation who remained alive. God had promised in Numbers 14:30 that Caleb and Joshua would enter the Promised Land. This was because they remained loyal to God and didn't allow disobedience and the fear of man to rule in their lives. Joshua and Caleb were both around eighty years old by now. They had seen a complete generation wiped out and watched a new generation of faith arise. This must have been a momentous and emotional time for them.

**Pray**

Father, help me to grasp Your grasp of me. I'm kept both by You and for You. Nothing can pull me from Your hand. At times this seems too good to be true, especially when I'm most aware of my weaknesses, but those weaknesses are precisely why Your grip is so strong and grace-full. In Jesus' name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

When the leaders divided the country between the tribes, Levi's tribe did not receive any particular area. God had ordered that this tribe be priests unto the Lord, but they needed a place to live. So, God gave instructions that Levi's tribe should have forty-eight towns to live in. They did not own these towns; the tribes who gave them still owned them. These towns were scattered throughout the land, a total of forty-eight, six of which were places of refuge. We see the wisdom of God in not making a Levitical state that others would have to go to. God intended these ministers to go out among the people and influence them for the Lord. In the same way today, God does not intend that there be a Christian country where all the Christians live together in spiritual bliss and say to the world, "Come and join us if you'd like." Instead, God wants Christians to be sprinkled throughout the whole world, influencing people for Jesus Christ.

As I say, six of these towns were called 'safe towns'. If a person had killed someone, he could run to one of these. This was necessary because the redeemer of blood had a right to kill that person. This was the law passed in Genesis 9, therefore, people expected it to happen. Here, God gave a new law, He allowed any person who had killed another person by accident to go to a safe town. Then, the people there would arrange a fair trial. At the trial, they would decide whether the person had intended to kill, and if not, he was not guilty of murder. If the person had caused someone's death on purpose, the redeemer of blood had to kill the murderer; this was right and fair. This new law protected people who had caused someone's death by accident. It also showed that it was a serious matter to cause a person's death, even by accident.

**Pray**

Father, You are, as always, in control, and only Your kingdom will endure forever. You're the King who totally loves and thoroughly protects me. You are working all things together after the counsel of Your will, working in all things for my good and Your glory. Right now, You are my city of refuge into whom I can run. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

**Live**

I'm sure you will remember a few chapters back to the issue surrounding women receiving an inheritance. Zelophehad's daughters came to Moses because their father had no sons. They asked if they could inherit their father's land instead. God allowed this and the new law was established. However, this new law caused a problem. When a woman married, her land became her husband's property, so if her husband belonged to a different tribe, her tribe would lose that land. The only way around this was for Zelophehad's daughters to marry men from their own clan, then their land would remain the property of their own tribe. This illustrates an important principle: there are rarely perfect solutions to problems; there are usually answers that require trade-offs in other areas. Maturity is the ability to make and accept the right solutions even when they aren't perfect. I use a little question help me in church life; I continually ask myself, "Is this a problem to solve or a tension to manage?" It's usually the latter.

The book of Numbers ends with laws about the land the Israelites were preparing to enter. They had lived in the desert for forty years, but God had guided and protected them. He had brought them to the land He promised to give them. When the Israelites left Egypt, they owned no land; they had been sojourners up to now, but all was about to change; they would walk into their inheritance, receiving the promise of God.

I trust you have enjoyed this book as much as I have enjoyed studying and commenting on it. I love how God always comes through. The biggest lesson I take from this book is this: the love of God is unconditional; there is nothing that can make Him love us any less or any more; but the blessings of God are conditional. Israel had received from the hand of God, but only obedience would keep that blessing in their grip. A subtle lesson for us all.

**Pray**

Father, the government of all things is presently resting on Your broad shoulders. Your kingdom is the only unshakable and eternal kingdom. Indeed, of the increase of Your government and peace there will be no end. I humble myself before You as my Sovereign King. In Your strong name. Amen.

**REFLECT**

What is God saying to me?

**RESPOND**

What am I going to do about it?

