



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



NUMBERS 1 - 6

Numbers 1

1:1 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying,"

The Book of Numbers continues the account of the Lord's purpose for His holy nation, Israel and their journey through the wilderness of Sinai on the way to the Promised Land of Canaan. The name numbers was taken from the Greek translation of the Old Testament and the name of the book in that translation from which we get our word arithmetic. The name was chosen in relationship to the focus of the first few chapters when the Lord commanded for a census to be taken of Israel. The name of the book in the Hebrew Old Testament was taken from the word in verse one, "wilderness." Wilderness is a more fitting name for the book than Numbers because the spiritual importance of the book includes, but goes far beyond the numbering of the people in the census. Many Bible readers have been discouraged from reading through the entire book for fear that the whole book is one long census of 36 chapters. The census is the primary substance of the first four chapters, but the remaining chapters give us the only detailed account of the events of Israel's wilderness journeys.

The book is divided into three main sections. The first section covers chapters 1-10 which take place within the first two years of leaving Egypt in the wilderness at Mount Sinai as Moses is organizing by the directions of the Lord, the children of Israel for the journey through the wilderness to follow. The long middle section of the book covers all of their journey through the wilderness for the remaining forty years. The final section of the book brings us through the final stage of their journey to Canaan as Israel came to camp in the plains of Moab just across the Jordan from the Promised Land. Their adventures and misadventures are meant to be more than interesting but distant history for us. The book is filled with pointed lessons for the Christian life as God used Israel and their experiences as object lessons for us of both positive and negative examples of following the Lord. We can learn from both kinds of lessons, and in Israel's time in the wilderness there are more negative examples they set than positive ones. Paul described this teaching, training purpose of their experiences in this passage.

"Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an

example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come." (I Corinthians 10:5-11).

Israel had to learn the hard way, by refusing to listen to God, obey Him and His laws. The hard way to learn is to have to go through the full experience of even the hard lessons of walking with God including the serious consequences of rebellion and disobedience. We are encouraged to gain wisdom by reading their story and avoid their many mistakes.

1:2-4 - "Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, every male, head by head from twenty years old and upward, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel, you and Aaron shall number them by their armies. With you, moreover, there shall be a man of each tribe, each one head of his father's household."

The Lord ordered a census to be taken of the men of Israel from the age of twenty and above. The census was to establish an order to their journeys and all their future camps. The order established would be according to families, households and tribes. The purpose of the order was military in nature. The Lord wanted to identify among Israel all the men that were capable of going out to war for the Lord and Israel. There are two important principles found in this. First, their journey through the wilderness for these forty years was not going to be a vacation sight seeing trip. By calling for a military count, the Lord was announcing His intention of forming all the adult men of Israel into the army of Israel. It was an army formed by God's command and so was unlike any natural army of the nations around them. This was an army with a fundamentally spiritual identify first and foremost. As an army, they would march through the wilderness and eventually into the Promised Land under the Lord's command. Since it was to be a real army, the men of Israel would live continuously under the command of the Lord. They would march when, where, and how long the Lord commanded, and they would camp when, where and for how long He commanded. It was not a democracy, in which every Israelite was given a vote on their next step. Israel's one job was to keep in step with their heavenly commander.

The second important principle revealed by this command to organize the men as armies was that it identified what was waiting ahead for them. This journey had a goal which was to enter the Promised Land. That land was not vacant, however, but was populated by seven nations. Once they arrived there, Israel would not be able to stroll in and occupy the land currently occupied by the Canaanites. The people already living there would not want to give up their land and homes. This was the Lord's early signal to Israel that serious battles await them in the Promised Land. The Lord promised they would inhabit it, but He did not promise that they would do so without a battle. Israel would have to fight and conquer Canaan. This forty year wilderness period was the Lord's extended boot

camp for Israel to prepare them for that day. They would be trained in this desert and made ready to fight when the time came.

The principle we can draw from this is that the Lord has made many wonderful promises to us like He did to Israel when He promised them the land of Canaan. Many Christians have an unrealistic and entitled perspective of the promises of God as if once He makes a promise, that ends any effort or work on our part. The Lord will choose at times to bless us with things toward which we contributed nothing to remind us that He is our provider. Yet, there are other times when the Lord will make a promise to us, and rather than just dropping the fulfillment of the promise in our lap, He will begin to train us to fight for the gaining of what was promised. Our fight in this sense is always spiritual, but the effort required is no less intense.

1:47-53 - "The Levites, however, were not numbered among them by their fathers' tribe. For the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying, "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor shall you take their census among the sons of Israel. But you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its furnishings and over all that belongs to it. They shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall take care of it; they shall also camp around the tabernacle. So when the tabernacle is to set out, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle encamps, the Levites shall set it up. But the layman who comes near shall be put to death. The sons of Israel shall camp, each man by his own camp, and each man by his own standard, according to their armies. But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there will be no wrath on the congregation of the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the testimony."

The one tribe that was exempted from the military census was the tribe of Levi. This tribe was set apart from the normal army, and were dedicated to the service of the tabernacle. They were even to camp with their tents arranged around the tabernacle to create a kind of buffer zone between the tabernacle and the rest of the camp of Israel. The Levites in this way served as a kind of royal honor guard for the King's palace, the tabernacle. It was not that the Lord needed their protection however. The idea was just the reverse. The Levites camped around the tabernacle to protect Israel from transgressing its holy boundaries. If the remainder of Israel violated the holiness of the tabernacle, they would incur the judgment of God. The Levites guarded Israel from the Lord's devastating wrath by preserving the appropriate boundaries of holiness around the tabernacle.

Numbers 2

2:1-2 - "Now the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "The sons of Israel shall camp, each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' households; they shall camp around the tent of meeting at a distance."

Following the census of the adult battle ready men of Israel in chapter one, the Lord now commands that they be arranged in a specific order for their march through the wilderness. The march ahead of them will not be marked by many battles, but reflects the Lord's purpose in preparing His people in an extended wilderness bootcamp for the future conquest of the Promised Land. Then, they will need to be a prepared army, and not a loose conglomeration of refugees from Egypt. They will camp in a specific arrangement and they will march in a specific arrangement. As the armies of the Lord, they are under the commands of the Lord and their disposition is determined by Him. As the armies of the Lord we should expect them to be organized in a way that represents the Lord's order, wisdom and blessing. God intends for His people to always follow His design of greater order in their lives both individually and corporately. "But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner." (I Corinthians 14:40).

Keep in mind that their camp situation and their marching situation were the equivalent of our home and vocation. Israel was the visible expression of the kingdom of God on earth at that time in history. Because they represented God's kingdom, personal concerns and preferences were not the priority in their life arrangement. Do you suppose that at least some of the 600,000 households in Israel would have chosen a different arrangement for themselves if they were left to make their own choice of where to set their tent in each camp and in what order to march from camp to camp? Certainly others than the tribe of Judah would have chosen to be in the lead of the march. Others would have chosen to camp in a location that might suit their own tastes better. The point of this section and the lesson we are to derive from the Lord's arrangement is that He has His own ideas about where we should live, who we are to remain connected with, and where we go and what we do each day. Our lives are not our own. "For not one of us lives for himself, and not one dies for himself; for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living." (Romans 14:7-9).

As the redeemed of the Lord it is critical that we recognize that our lives no longer belong to ourselves. Many believers live as though salvation is a favor the Lord did for them so that they can get back to their own plans for their own lives without having to worry about the issue of Hell any more. Salvation means more than a clean personal slate from which we then proceed to live as we want. The Lord's saving us means that from our salvation forward our lives are His to direct as He pleases. Where should I live? I should live where He wants me to live to

serve His purposes. My life is His. This is the proper perspective of the redeemed. Anything less is robbing God of what truly belongs to Him.

2:3-9 - "Now those who camp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the standard of the camp of Judah, by their armies, and the leader of the sons of Judah: Nahshon the son of Amminadab, and his army, even their numbered men, 74,600. Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar, and the leader of the sons of Issachar: Nethanel the son of Zuar, and his army, even their numbered men, 54,400. Then comes the tribe of Zebulun, and the leader of the sons of Zebulun: Eliab the son of Helon, and his army, even his numbered men, 57,400. The total of the numbered men of the camp of Judah: 186,400, by their armies. They shall set out first."

We have already seen that there was a purposeful military reason to arrange the camp and march of Israel in this way around the tabernacle of the Lord. However, we should expect, as with all other orderly arrangements of the Lord that here is more than only practical reasons why He did what He did in setting the tribes in this order. The principle that guides the Lord's decisions in such cases is given in the New Testament. "But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired." (I Corinthians 12:18). This passage tells us that the Lord places His people where they belong according to His own desires. Since He desired Israel to camp and march in this arrangement we can anticipate that there is some spiritual reason behind the order of the tribes along with the practical reason. One spiritual reason was that the Lord arranged the tribes in an order that fulfilled His purpose as declared by their patriarch Jacob when he blessed his 12 sons which developed into these 12 tribes (Genesis 49). The order in which the tribes are mentioned and placed reflects the blessings as pronounced through Jacob years before.

There is another very interesting symbolic element to the arrangement of the tribes around the tabernacle. It would be best if I could show this in a diagram, but I will try to describe it with words instead. In the Lord's orderly arrangement of the tribes the camp and march of Israel was in relationship to the tabernacle in the center. Then three tribes were set on each of the four sides of the tabernacle. Each tribe had a specific number of people fit for battle listed in this chapter. When set together in this arrangement the numbers resulted in this placement of the Lord. The East side had a total of 186,000 men, the West side had a total of 108,000 men, the North side had a total of 157,000 men and the South side had a total of 151,000 men. If you lay this out in a top view diagram of the camp and marching formation of Israel with the tabernacle at the center the shape that emerges is that of a cross.

The North and South sides are roughly equal in numbers and would represent the cross piece. The East side is the longest of the four sides and would correspond to the base of the cross, while the West side is the shortest which would correspond to the top of the cross. The tabernacle where the sacrifice of

the lamb of God for the atonement of the people was offered was at the center of this cross shaped formation. Wherever Israel camped their camp formed a cross, and as they marched they marched in a cross formation. The Lord does not say that this was His intention in this order He commanded, but if not, it would be an amazing coincidence.

2:17 - "Then the tent of meeting shall set out with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camps; just as they camp, so they shall set out, every man in his place by their standards."

The arrangement of both the camp of Israel and the march of Israel through the wilderness was to maintain the right relationship of Israel to the house of God, the tabernacle. At all times, the tabernacle was in the center of Israel. As they camped and as they marched, they surrounded the tabernacle of the Lord. There is a clear declaration of the Lord in this relationship between the tribes of Israel and the tabernacle of God. The declaration was that God was always to be at the center of their lives. This was true as a nation and for every tribe, family, household, and individual within the nation. The Lord still wants this exact kind of relationship with His people in the New Covenant. He wants to be at the center of everything we do. If any human being demanded to be at the center of every situation we would identify them as selfish and proud. When the Lord puts Himself at the center of His people, there is nothing inappropriate about doing so. The reason is that first of all, He is perfect and we are not. Second, He is doing us a great favor to be at the center of our lives because if He is not, then some imperfect created thing will be at the center instead of Him. There is no other possible center for our lives that is appropriate. Any attempt to replace the Lord with anything or anyone else results in idolatry and is doomed to ruin our lives. Our lives are designed to be centered around Him alone.

Numbers 3

3:1-3 - "Now these are the records of the generations of Aaron and Moses at the time when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. These then are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests. But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron."

Chapter three is concerned with the special role in God's purpose for the tribe of Levi. This one tribe was set apart from the twelve tribes to serve the Lord by caring for all the practical circumstances of the tabernacle. It was among the Levites only that all of the priests that were allowed to come near the Lord and

enter His house for service were called. Both Moses and Aaron were descended from the tribe of Levi, and Aaron was appointed as the first high priest. Aaron's four sons were given the roles of Aaron's assistants in the service of the tabernacle. As we saw in the book of Leviticus, shortly after being set apart for the priesthood, Aaron's two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, who should have been most respectful of the Lord and responsible toward the special boundaries of the tabernacle, instead foolishly violated those boundaries.

They offered incense on the altar of incense inside the tabernacle that was only to be offered by the high priest and only in the way that the Lord had commanded. Their violation was not a light transgression that resulted in a slap on the hand. Even as they were in the midst of their transgression against the Lord's holiness, the Lord cause fire to come out from His presence in the Holy of Holies and Nadab and Abihu were instantly killed by the fire. Their deaths, which were from their own perspective a tragic waste of all of their future service to the Lord, nevertheless were made to serve a greater purpose by the Lord. Their execution by the Lord Himself became a startling lesson on the level of seriousness attached to the holiness of the Lord as represented in the tabernacle. Their deaths became an ongoing object lesson of the cost of disregarding the Lord's boundaries and trampling on His holiness. Their names and their deaths are again mentioned here in this passage to establish an atmosphere of reverent fear of the Lord as an introduction to this chapter which identifies the special calling of the entire tribe of Levites.

The lesson applies to us in the New Covenant also. All true believers in Christ are identified as priests in the New Covenant temple of God. We are not Levites, but are called members of a royal priesthood. The physical circumstances of our priesthood service are very different from the Old Testament priesthood service, but the principles still apply. God is still holy, He does not want His holiness violated by disregarding His commands and boundaries as we serve Him now any more than He did in that day. It never ceases to amaze me how many of those who serve the Lord in ministry today ignore or disregard the clear boundaries of the Lord as revealed in His Word.

3:5-9 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. They shall perform the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle. They shall also keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel."

The Levites were set apart from the other tribes for the Lord. Originally, the Lord had named all the firstborn sons of Israel for His special servants, going back to the night of the first Passover (Exodus 12) when the Lord judged all of Egypt in

the death of their firstborn sons. With the failure of the golden calf incident, the Lord named the Levites as a tribe of servants for Himself because they were the one tribe that stood by the side of Moses and the Lord and were willing to do the hard work of executing His judgment upon the rest of the tribes. Now, the Levites are identified in this passage as the servants of Aaron as well as the servants of the Lord. They are named Aaron's servants because of his role as high priest. Aaron represents the Lord Jesus as a symbol of His role as our great High Priest in the New Covenant. We serve Him, and all of our duties in life are given to us through Him. Just as the Levites were "wholly given" to the service of Aaron, we as New Covenant priests are wholly given to the service of Christ Jesus. It is very important that we notice not just that they were given to the high priest's service, but who gave them. It was not the Levites themselves that wholly gave their own service to Aaron! It was the Lord Who wholly gave their service to Aaron. The difference is significant. If the priests gave themselves, then it would mean that they still belonged to themselves and that their service was measured by their own level of commitment. Instead, the Levites belonged to the Lord. They were His. He gave them to serve Aaron, and the measure of their service was that they were obligated to give their all to their service for Aaron. In the same way, we belong to the Lord, not ourselves, and we are obligated to give our all in the service of our high priest.

3:23-26 - "The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward, and the leader of the fathers' households of the Gershonites was Eliasaph the son of Lael. Now the duties of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting involved the tabernacle and the tent, its covering, and the screen for the doorway of the tent of meeting, and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway of the court which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and its cords, according to all the service concerning them."

The Levites were divided into three main groups for purposes of camping, marching, and the work that was assigned to them in relationship to the tabernacle. One group camped to the South of the tabernacle, one camped to the North, and one to the West. The camp of honor nearest the East entrance was reserved for Moses and Aaron. Each group of several thousand Levites was also given specific duties for the tabernacle. The first group, the Gershonites were assigned the actual coverings of the tabernacle, the screens, hangings, and the altar of sacrifice. Each time the Lord led Israel to a new location the Gershonites were to carefully take down all the coverings and hangings and prepare them for transport to the next camp. Their job was to take those items to the next camp and then set everything back in place in the exact order it was in when they broke camp. They were to faithfully do this same job for their entire life! This was no "career path" in which aspiring Levites attempted to climb the ladder of success and move from this job eventually to other "more important" jobs. This job was not a stepping stone to others. They did not choose the job,

they were chosen for it. Once chosen, they continued their entire working life in this exact same area of responsibility.

The principle here is reflected in the New Testament pattern of the Lord's special purpose for different segments of the body of Christ. "But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills." (I Corinthians 12:11). The Lord does not give the same assignment and spiritual gift to each member of the body. He assigns each a part to play according to His purpose and each is to do the part assigned to him by the Lord. Those spiritual assignments and gifts given to us by the Lord are not things we try for a while to see if we like them, or fulfill until we get bored of them and want to do something else. The assignment is suited for the priest and the priest is suited for the assignment by the Lord's wisdom and design.

Numbers 4

4:1-3 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Take a census of the descendants of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' households, from thirty years and upward, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tent of meeting."

Chapter four is the record of another census of the tribe of Levi. In chapter three all the Levites were numbered for the purpose of identifying them as God's chosen replacement for the firstborn sons of all Israel. That census was taken of all the Levites above the age of one month old. This second census is not an unnecessary duplication, but is made for a completely different purpose. This census was to identify all the Levites between the ages of 30 and 50. These ages defined the beginning and end of full time ministry in serving the Lord in the tabernacle. In a later chapter we will see that Levites could begin to serve in a partial capacity as age 25 in what we would call an apprentice or learning and helping position. The earliest age allowed for full service though was age 30. This age was not arbitrary, but chosen for its significance. The age 30 throughout the Bible is the age of prime personal maturity. It is the age that represents when a man has reached his full capacity, not only physically, but in experience and maturity. We have many examples of the age 30 being a key age. Besides it being the age for Levitical service, Joseph became Pharaoh's regent at 30, Saul became king at 30, David became king at 30, John the Baptist began his ministry at 30, and of course Jesus began His ministry at 30 also.

4:4-6 - "This is the work of the descendants of Kohath in the tent of meeting, concerning the most holy things. When the camp sets out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and they shall take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it; and they shall lay a covering of porpoise skin on it, and shall spread over it a cloth of pure blue, and shall insert its poles."

The Kohathites were given a special responsibility to carry the ark of God whenever the Lord led Israel to a new location in their wilderness journey. They were to carry the ark to each new location, but they were not allowed to prepare the ark for transport. That job was only to be done by Aaron and his sons. When it was time to dismantle the tabernacle and move, the first task to accomplish before anything else was that Aaron and his sons were to enter the Holy Place. There they were to take the veil which separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies and walking forward holding the veil they were to cover the ark of the covenant with the veil. Then, on top of the veil they also covered the ark with a leather covering. Our translation calls this leather covering "porpoise skin" but there is debate among Bible scholars regarding the translation of the Hebrew word translated porpoise. There are in the nearby Red Sea a type of porpoise, also known as Sea Cows, and it is possible that the Lord intended Israel to use the skins of this animal, but I agree with some Bible scholars that have concluded this was not porpoise skin. Their reasoning is that porpoise was identified among the animals that the Lord categorized as unclean because of their lack of scales. It is doubtful that the Lord would choose to cover the most holy ark with the skin of an unclean animal. It is more likely the leather of one of the clean animals that was used for the covering.

4:15-20 - "When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy objects and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them, so that they will not touch the holy objects and die. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry. The responsibility of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is the oil for the light and the fragrant incense and the continual grain offering and the anointing oil--the responsibility of all the tabernacle and of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings." Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "Do not let the tribe of the families of the Kohathites be cut off from among the Levites. But do this to them that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy objects: Aaron and his sons shall go in and assign each of them to his work and to his load; but they shall not go in to see the holy objects even for a moment, or they will die."

Though the Kohathites were to carry the ark it was critical that they never did either of two things which the Lord considered a violation of His holiness. These two violations were considered so serious by the Lord that transgressions were met with an instant death penalty from the Lord. The Lord's boundaries for their

service were to never touch any of the holy objects of the Lord's house as they transported them, and to never see those objects uncovered. This required Aaron and his sons to take great care to properly cover everything within the house of God before the appropriate Levites were allowed to lift them and carry them. In order to carry items that could not be directly touched, the Lord had ordained a ring and pole system for each of the furnishings of the tabernacle. The Kohathites were allowed to lift the poles bearing the furniture, but never actually touch the furniture. Even entering the tabernacle too soon, before the furniture was properly covered and seeing the furniture directly would result in their deaths. This practical boundary was the way the Lord chose to emphasize in symbol the New Covenant principle that the way into heaven was not yet open (Hebrews 9:8-15).

The tabernacle was an earthly representation of heaven. For even a Levite to see or touch the furniture of the tabernacle was effectively saying that they had the right based upon their own righteousness to enter heaven. The reason for the death penalty for any violation of this principle was to declare that those who try to enter heaven apart from Christ deserve only death. This was not an idle threat by the Lord. During a later time in the history of Israel, the ark of the Lord was transported in a way that violated the Lord's commands. During the transport a man reached out and touched the ark with the intent to steady it from falling and for daring to touch the ark he was instantly killed by the Lord (II Samuel 6:1-7).

4:19 - "But do this to them that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy objects: Aaron and his sons shall go in and assign each of them to his work and to his load;"

A now familiar theme is once again emphasized here. Every Levitical priest served the Lord according to the work responsibilities that were assigned to him. The assignment was not his choosing. Today, in order to maintain high enlistment numbers for military service it is a common practice for military recruiters to allow the potential recruit to choose their own assignment. This caters to the natural preference we all have to have things our own way, even in our work and calling. God's kingdom follows a different principle. The core principle of Kingdom callings and work is that God is wiser than we are. He sees and knows where we best fit. If we were left to choose for ourselves what our spiritual life assignments would be, most of us would have chosen something that made us comfortable, not what would make us most fruitful. For myself, I had no desire and no plan as a new believer to one day be engaged in church leadership or to become a Bible teacher. Had you suggested those assignments to me I would have laughed at you and then run the other way. The Lord's purpose and assignment for me was His wisdom, not mine. Ask Jonah whether we would always choose what the Lord would choose in handing out Kingdom assignments.

Questions from Numbers 3:

Question: Numbers 3:1-3 - Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire to God and died. What makes a fire strange? How they will know they are offering it right before the Lord?

Answer: The fire Nadab and Abihu offered was strange not because it was some unusually kind of fire, but because it was fire the Lord had not commanded or instructed them to offer. The Lord wanted only the fire He ordained offered within His own house. They violated God's house by offering fire against His command on the Altar of Incense. They disregarded the Lord's instructions regarding who, when and why the incense was to be offered. The lesson for us is that obedience is better than sacrifice. It is not acceptable to serve the Lord according to our own rules and ideas if we are disobeying the Lord in that service.

Question: Could you give an example how people ministering today violate Gods clear boundaries? And why don't we see God striking them down, like he did with Nadab, and Abihu?

Answer: It is a violation of God's boundaries for those serving God in ministry to be involved in adultery, unbiblical divorce, drug abuse, mixing New Age elements in with Biblical teaching, misuse of ministry funds, homosexuality, drunkenness, and many other things that could be mentioned, yet there are church and even large ministry leaders that commit such violations and continue in "ministry." I cannot explain why God does not strike down more than He does, other than by reference to His great mercy, and long suffering.

Question: Numbers 3:4 - "But Nadab and Abihu died before the Lord when they offered strange fire before the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children." In reading this example (again) and a few chapters back the man who was stoned for using the Lord's name in vane, are we as the royal priesthood suppose to support and encourage movies, plays, books, etc. that use the Lord's name in vain by going to them and/or buying/renting them? My thinking is that virtually everything produced in Hollywood can be assumed to be perverse and offensive to God and we the Royal Priesthood should boycott it all. Am I too extreme in my "boycotting" attitude?

Answer: I would not fault you for boycotting most of what originates in Hollywood today. Not every movie and TV show takes the name of the Lord in vain, but too many do and we should certainly not be entertained by what insults the holy Name. Each believer and believing family must discern their own standards for how much of the surrounding culture to embrace when it comes to entertainment choices. I personally do not practice a complete boycott and instead attempt to discern and decide on a case by case basis, but any believer who chooses a full boycott has my respect as well as long as they maintain the ability to effectively

interact with the culture around them in order to represent the kingdom of God effectively.

Numbers 5

5:5-8 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, 'When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give it to him whom he has wronged. But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution which is made for the wrong must go to the LORD for the priest, besides the ram of atonement, by which atonement is made for him.'"

The great concern of this chapter is the spiritual integrity of the camp of Israel because it is the camp of God's holy nation and the Lord Himself dwells in the midst of the camp. The issue of course is that the Lord in His perfect holiness dwells in the midst of a people who are far from perfectly holy. The tabernacle and the many sacrifices the Lord ordained were the Lord's provision for the issue of sin so that as sins were committed by any man or woman of Israel there was a solution close at hand. However, the tabernacle sacrifices were not designed by the Lord to remove from the one who had sinned all responsibility for their sin. The sacrifices properly offered did remove whatever judgment from God they would have received had they not made that sacrifice. The sacrifice did not resolve however the sinner's community responsibility.

The Biblical understanding of sin is that it creates consequences in two directions; both vertical and horizontal. The effect of sin was to corrupt both the sinner's relationship with God (vertical) and their relationship with the community (horizontal). Once the appropriate sacrifice was offered for a sin, the vertical relationship with God was restored, but the horizontal relationship with the community still needed to be addressed. In this passage, any of a number of different kinds of sins is addressed but they would all involve sins against other people. Even though the sin committed was against another person, the first concern is that the person had acted "unfaithfully against the Lord." If I murder, commit adultery, steal from you, bear false witness against you, or covet something that belongs to you, I have sinned not only against you, but against the Lord. My first and greatest accountability is always to Him, because ultimately it is His Law and holiness that has been violated.

The other element given here to resolve the horizontal responsibility is that the guilty person must confess their sin. The target of their confession is not specified here, but the most likely conclusion is that they should confess first to

the Lord in the presence of the priest handling the sacrifice for their sin, and then subsequently to the person against whom they sinned. There is an implication of a subsequent confession to the person that was sinned against because following the confession there is an additional responsibility to make restitution to that person. Without a confession of sin an attempt at restitution would be unclear or even confusing. The restitution requirement was to add 20% of the value of the wrong and pay the person that was hurt in some way by the sin. The value of the transgression was not up to the one that sinned to determine, but was according to the standards established by the Lord in the Law. In any case in which the value was uncertain from the Law the Levitical priest would assign an appropriate value.

This requirement of a fully expressed horizontal repentance as carried out in a confession of sin and a monetary restitution insured both the continuing unity of the nation in community relations and served as a highly effective deterrent against future temptations. The confession requirement struck a powerful spiritual blow against the root of pride in the heart of the offender and the restitution at an increased 20% value was costly enough to discourage continued transgressions in the future. As was mentioned in an earlier study, the restitution principle also eliminated the need for a prison system in a constantly traveling community. Any crime that was exceeded the resolution of restitution was dealt with by a quickly carried out death penalty. Anything less than a death penalty offence was addressed in a way that did not create career criminals and a criminal welfare system (prison).

5:11-16 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'If any man's wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him, and a man has intercourse with her and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband and she is undetected, although she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act, if a spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife when she has defiled herself, or if a spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife when she has not defiled herself, the man shall then bring his wife to the priest, and shall bring as an offering for her one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall not pour oil on it nor put frankincense on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of memorial, a reminder of iniquity. Then the priest shall bring her near and have her stand before the LORD,"

This law is among the most mysterious laws of the Old Testament. It addressed a problem that might arise in a marriage that is not uncommon in our own generation, or any other. The circumstance covered two possible cases that arose from a rising suspicion in one of the husbands of Israel that their wife had not been faithful to them. The suspicion of adultery without any evidence or tangible reason for that suspicion was addressed by this law. Because marriage was originally designed by the Lord as a sacred covenant between one man and

one woman, and established by the one flesh bond formed in their physical union (Genesis 2:21-24), any concern that arose about the faithfulness of one's marriage partner was a very serious matter. However, the penalty under the Law for violating the marriage covenant by adultery was deadly serious. Confirmed adultery was a death penalty sin. The punishment under the Law was death by stoning. Suspicion alone was not sufficient grounds to enact such a severe law.

At the same time, the Lord did not completely dismiss the suspicions of unfaithfulness that might arise in one's heart regarding their mate. The Lord identified this growing suspicion by a more spiritual description. He referred to it as a "spirit of jealousy" coming over the husband in this case. The implication of calling it a spirit of jealousy is that the Spirit of God may be the source of this jealousy. If a wife had been unfaithful, the Lord may alert the husband of the wife's wayward actions by stirring within him a sense of her wandering. Of course, there was also the possibility that the husband could be jealous for no good reason even if his wife was perfectly faithful to him. Either way, this jealous spirit would need to be resolved. Unresolved suspicion in a marriage is deadly to the foundation of trust upon which the marriage is based.

The Lord made for Israel a special ceremonial ritual to once for all resolve such jealous suspicions. The jealous husband was to bring his wife to the tabernacle and offer a grain offering on her behalf. Then, once the offering was made, she was caused to "stand before the Lord." This occurred in the courtyard of the tabernacle. Neither the woman nor her husband would be allowed to enter the actual tent of the tabernacle, but having made the required offering she would stand between the altar of sacrifice and the door of the tabernacle facing the presence of the Lord in His house. The entire scene was intentionally very intimidating. It evoked the holy fear of the Lord and that both accused and accuser were accountable to Him. It was intended to create in everyone involved an immediate awareness of the direct oversight of the Lord.

5:17-24 - "and the priest shall take holy water in an earthenware vessel; and he shall take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water. The priest shall then have the woman stand before the LORD and let the hair of the woman's head go loose, and place the grain offering of memorial in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy, and in the hand of the priest is to be the water of bitterness that brings a curse. The priest shall have her take an oath and shall say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray into uncleanness, being under the authority of your husband, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings a curse; if you, however, have gone astray, being under the authority of your husband, and if you have defiled yourself and a man other than your husband has had intercourse with you" (then the priest shall have the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman), "the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people by the LORD'S making your thigh waste away and your abdomen swell; and this water that brings a curse shall go into your stomach, and make your abdomen swell and your thigh waste away." And the woman shall say, "Amen. Amen." 'The priest shall then write these curses on a scroll, and he shall wash them off into the water of bitterness. Then he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings a curse, so that the water which brings a curse will go into her and cause bitterness.'"

It is this portion of the law of jealousy that is most mysterious. Once the sacrifice was offered and the wife suspected by her husband of unfaithfulness was standing before the Lord, the priest officiating was to carry out a strange ritual. The priest was to take an earthen vessel, which was a symbolic reminder of the spiritual weakness of fallen human beings (II Corinthians 4:7). Then he was to take some of the water from the laver before the entrance of the tabernacle, and some of the dust from the floor of the tabernacle (holy ground). He was to mix the dust of the tabernacle into the water from the laver. Then the priest was to loosen the hair of the woman (a cultural symbol of physical intimacy), and have her take an oath in the presence of the Lord. The oath was a pronouncement by the priest of the blessing of protection in case she was innocent of unfaithfulness, and the curse of the Lord's judgment if she was secretly guilty of being unfaithful to her husband. Then the priest was to write the oath on a scroll. Once he wrote the oath, he was then to wash the words from the scroll into the same water in the earthen vessel. Then, finally, the woman was to drink the water from the earthen vessel that had been either blessed or cursed depending upon her hidden behavior.

Some have confused this strange ritual with a magical rite. This was not magical at all. There was no special property in the earthen vessel, the water, or the words washed into the water. It did not actually change into a physically poisonous substance at all. The power of the ritual was not in its physical elements, but in its symbolism, and in the Lord Who was there using this entire

process to impact the hearts of those involved about the seriousness of covenant relationship with Him, and covenant marriage with one another. If the woman was innocent of unfaithfulness she would be unaffected by drinking the mixture in the earthen vessel, and her continuing good health was the Lord's confirming testimony for the sake of her suspicious husband and the observing community that she was a virtuous and faithful woman. If, on the other hand, she had been secretly unfaithful in adultery, the mixture she drank would have a profound and immediate impact on her health. She would experience severe physical consequences in the specific areas of her body that were sinfully misused in her adultery.

We, of course, have no such recourse in a practical sense today when struggling with rising jealousy in marriage. There is no physical tabernacle or temple for us to go get our concerns resolved. There is no special water mixed with dust to drink. That does not mean that the Lord is not just as concerned for the integrity of marriage today as He was then. Our resolution for events and circumstances that we cannot see or know is with the Lord just like it was for them. I would recommend to any couple struggling with such suspicions to seek out a godly pastor and pray with him for the Lord to bring to the light anything hidden that would threaten the health of the marriage. We can be confident in such cases that the Lord will cause to be revealed in one way or another the truth of the matter.

Numbers 6

6:1-5 - "Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD, he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes. All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from the seeds even to the skin. All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long.'"

The first twenty one verses of chapter six are the law of the Nazirite. These laws ordained and regulated the special vows that could be made unto the Lord that resulted in the dedication of the person making the vow. Under the Law, there were other kinds of vows that could be made unto the Lord, but the Nazirite vow was for the setting apart of a person in complete holy dedication to the Lord for the duration of the vow. A Nazirite vow could either be lifelong or it could be for a specified period of time with an end period determined at the time of the vow. In order to gain Nazirite status, the one making the vow was required to offer special sacrifices and to maintain certain personal sacrifices for the duration of

the vow. If it was a lifelong Nazirite vow, then those personal sacrifices had to be maintained throughout the life of the Nazirite.

The personal sacrifices had both a practical element and a spiritual symbolism attached to them. The Nazirite was to abstain from drinking wine, strong drink, sour wine, or even fresh grape juice or any product of the grape vine. The requirement to abstain from anything produced by the grape vine is often mistaken by some Bible teachers as a comment from the Lord against the "evils" of drinking wine or any other alcohol product. This is a misunderstanding of the purpose of this law. It is true that the Nazirite was forbidden to consume alcohol, but only during the time of his vow. Once the vow was completed, they were free to drink wine and once again use the products of the grapevine. If the point was that the drinking of wine was evil due to alcohol content, the ending of the vow would not change the need to avoid the evil. That interpretation also would not address why even the eating of fresh grapes and grape juice was forbidden for the Nazirite since neither is in any way evil. The point was that the grape vine and all of its products symbolically represented Israel itself. The Lord identifies Israel as His grapevine planted in His vineyard (Isaiah 5:1-7). The abstaining from enjoyment of any of the products of the grape vine was designed to display in the life of the Nazirite a vivid reminder that Israel belonged completely to the Lord. This sacrifice was special unto the Lord because the few that chose to undertake the sacrifice of the vow served as the Lord's message to all of Israel to recognize that they belonged to Yahweh and not to themselves.

The second required element for the Nazirite was that they were to never cut any hair upon their head for the duration of the vow. This again pointed symbolically to the Lord as a reminder for all of Israel that observed the Nazirite, that the Lord was the head over Israel. The most famous Old Testament Nazirite by far was Samson. His uncut hair was the source of his superhuman strength, not because it had magical properties, but because the Lord honored his vow and blessed him for special purpose with great strength. His true strength was from the Lord, not from his hair. His hair was only the visible symbol of the blessing of the Lord because of the vow.

The ultimate meaning of this special category of those who voluntarily sacrificed and set themselves apart for holiness unto the Lord is found in Christ. He is the fulfillment toward which the Nazirite vow pointed in symbol. This is hinted at by the connection between the Hebrew word for Nazirite and the same word used elsewhere in the Law to identify the crown worn by the high priest as he served in the tabernacle. This connection shows that Christ, Who is our high priest, is also the only One to live a perfectly dedicated life unto the Father's will. Christ was the only person in all of history that ever lived their entire life completely dedicated not to their own will, but to the will of God. Jesus only ever did those things which were pleasing to His Father. He never once sinned. He maintained perfect set apart holiness and righteousness throughout His life. In this perfect dedication to the will of God, we cannot perfectly follow Him, but we are called by Him to follow

and learn from Him. His dedication and sacrifice of His life in full commitment to the Father's will is the model and example we are called to follow as His disciples.

6:22-27 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them: The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.' "So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I then will bless them."

This is one of a few special blessings of the Old Covenant. It was a blessing given by the Lord to Moses to give to Aaron and his sons. The blessing was not for their personal enjoyment, but for them to pronounce upon all of the nation. It was a priesthood blessing in which the high priest, or his sons, representing the Lord to Israel was to declare these words over Israel. The declaration of the blessing was far more than just repeating them as an empty form or ritual. These words carried the grace and power of God and when appropriately pronounced over the people caused the things described in the blessing to occur in their lives. Again, this was not because the words were like some magical incantation, but because they represented the Lord's mind and heart for His people. As the priest representing the Lord declared this blessing over the people, the Lord would honor His own blessing and move in His power in the lives of the people to bring about what was declared for them.

The blessing was a five fold promise of the Lord toward Israel. He promised to keep them which meant that He would watch over them and protect them physically and spiritually. Keeping Israel included protection from such external dangers as invasion from foreign enemies, and such internal dangers as the tendencies of their own hearts to wander from the Lord. The blessing of the Lord would cause His face to shine upon Israel. This is a figure of speech which meant that He would smile favorably upon them as He looked upon them. This did not mean that no matter how they lived or what they did, that the Lord would always smile at them. It meant that the fullness of the Lord's blessing would transform them as a nation so that they would live lives pleasing to the Lord and that He could in turn smile with satisfaction upon. In order for this transformation to take place in Israel to turn them from their stubborn and rebellious tendencies to obedient and submissive to the Lord, it would be absolutely necessary for Him to "be gracious" to them. For them, just like for us, it is only by the grace of God that we can be changed from the people we are by nature to the people we must become in His eternal purpose.

The declaration of the Lord lifting His countenance upon Israel is another figure of speech describing the Lord looking directly at Israel with favorable intent. It refers to Israel becoming the object of the Lord's full attention among the nations of the world. Certainly the Lord pays attention to all the nations and all people,

but this indicates the special covenant attention given to the favorite of the Lord's heart. The phrase, the apple of the eye, with which we are more familiar communicates the same general idea. The final blessing is that the Lord would give Israel peace. This is the Hebrew word, shalom. It is a special kind of peace in which all is well in one's life. It starts with true peace being established between the Lord and the one so blessed. It implies no controversies and no issues to resolve between the Lord and the person blessed. This is truly the crown of the five fold blessing. This great blessing of shalom between God and His people was to overflow their lives (Psalm 23:5).

Some churches have historically made this blessing a part of their church services in which the pastor will pronounce this blessing over the congregation at the end of the service. This is an appropriate New Covenant application of the blessing, but there is an even greater expression of it than how it is used by some churches. This was the blessing that Aaron as high priest was to pronounce over Israel, the chosen people of God. In the New Covenant, our high priest is Christ and through Him God has blessed us with all of these blessings and even greater. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. (Ephesians 1:3-4).