

Day 34 Leviticus 8.1 – 10.20

Following the rough chronology of the story, rather than the arbitrary divisions of chapters and verses, the scene moves to Leviticus 8, the inauguration of the priesthood, and the early days of the sacrificial rites.

Leviticus is so called in the western Bible because it concerns the code for the Levitical priesthood, the descendants of Israel's son Levi, through the brother of Moses, Aaron. In the Hebrew Bible, this is the third book of the *Torah*, the Law, and is known by its Hebrew name, *Vayyikra* (Heb וַיִּקְרָא = And he called) which is the first word of the book.

8.1ff Moses assembles the people at the Tent door, with all the garments and the elements for sacrifice. During the ceremony, Aaron and his sons are correctly clothed, and then everything is anointed with oil (Heb root is מָשַׁח *mashach*, from which comes the word *meshiach*, anointed one, or Messiah.) The concept of anointing therefore is well-known by Israel from early times.

8.14ff For anyone who pictures the Tent of meeting, the Tabernacle as a quiet, contemplative place, they need to remember the amount of sacrificing of animals that was going on any day in the courts of the tabernacle. Here, a bull and rams are slaughtered and butchered in various ways, and burned on the altar.

The inner tent certainly would have been a very different atmosphere, muffled by all the covers over the tent itself, and here the sense of calm would come. But outside the noise (and smell) of sacrificial worship filled the air.

8.30 Aaron and his sons have oil and blood sprinkled on their garments as signs of covenant consecration. Given that we read in the New Testament of the shadow-nature of these events, it points us to consider God's anointed one, the Messiah Himself, spattered with His own blood in sacrifice, by which He becomes our High Priest (see Hebrews 10.19-22)

8.31 It's of note that the priests were to eat portions of the sacrifices brought for their provision as well. They are to remain a week in the tabernacle area.

9.1ff At the end of a week, the Lord intends to appear to them all, and so they bring more sacrifices and offerings.

Various offerings are designated for the people here

- A sin offering v2 (Heb חַטָּאת *chatt'ah* from word for sin.)
- A burnt offering v2 (Heb עֹלָה *'olah* from *alah* meaning to go up.)
- A peace/wholeness offering v4 (Heb שְׁלָמִים *shelem* from *shalam*, to be whole, complete)
- Grain offering (although KJV had meat offering!) v4 (Heb מִנְחָה *minchah* from word meaning portion or tribute.)
- Atonement v.7 (Heb כַּפֵּר *kapp-er* from word to cover.)

- Offering (for the people) v7 (Heb קֹרְבָן *qorban* from the word for to bring near)
This offering is referred to by Jesus in the New Testament, as indicating something designated only for the Lord and for no other purpose. (Mark 7.10)
- A wave offering v21 (Heb תְּנוּפָה *tenuphah* from word *nuph* to shake or quiver.)
This is one of the most unusual offerings for us – the priest would walk around brandishing the piece of bull or grain.

9.23,24 When all the offerings have been made, and the people have been blessed, fire comes and consumes the offering on the altar. God has shown Himself to His people.

10.1ff Now follows a troubling and strange event. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, no doubt in enthusiastic heart, take it upon themselves to offer incense to the Lord. One thing we can note from the foregoing offerings which have been brought is there is a refrain throughout of their being offerings which the Lord or the Lord through Moses, has commanded (9v11, 9v21)

But this is fire which the Lord has not authorized, and for their presumption, the fire of the Lord burns them up. Aaron is dumbstruck.

One of the strangest things about this occurrence is that Aaron as the father of these two men is not allowed to mourn. The men's cousins carry their bodies away, while Aaron is not allowed to follow the normal mourning practices for the dead (leaving hair uncared for, tearing clothes.) This is the burden, then, of the priesthood, that they are the Lord's, and Aaron particularly as High Priest has the heaviest weight upon him.

10.8 No alcohol is allowed in the tent of meeting (it is fermented.) Alcohol is seen as common, not holy.

10.12 Aaron now gives careful instructions to his remaining sons about what and where to eat their portion of the sacrifice.

10.16 Even then, there is a discrepancy in one of the offerings. A goat has been burned instead of being eaten by the priests as a sin offering. Aaron now stands in their defence, and says that he himself has made a mistake or has experienced an anomaly in the keeping of the sacrificial rites, and Moses is satisfied.

The law is indeed a hard taskmaster, and does not bring righteousness to anyone.

**Day 35 Num 3.1-13, Num 8.5-15 & 19, Num. 8.23 – 26 then 20-22
Then Num 7.1 – 8.4**

Since the book of Numbers carries part of the story of the journeyings in the desert, it is brought in at this point in chronological order.

The book of Numbers is so called, because it contains the census of all of Israel and the tribes. However, in Hebrew, it is known by the first word of the book, *B'Midbar* (Heb בְּמִדְבָּר) *In the Desert.*

3.1ff We find here the continuing story of the generations of God's people which we saw in Genesis, beginning with the words 'This is the offspring of Aaron and Moses – Aaron is mentioned first as being the elder brother of the two. Moses and Aaron are another example of God turning around the right of primogeniture. In that sense, Aaron being the high priest is appropriate since the Levite priesthood serves God in place of the eldest son of every Jewish family.

Of course, Nadab and Abihu are dead, and the line is continued through Eleazar and Ithamar, his remaining sons.

3.5 There is too much for just Aaron and his sons to do and thus the whole male contingent of the tribe of Levi is called into service at the tabernacle.

3.11 As mentioned, the Levites, the smallest numerically of Israel's tribes, but also renowned for their zeal for God after the incident of the golden calf, are to stand in place of the firstborn male of each Israelite woman. (It's worth noting the mention given here to the role of the woman in Israel in bringing the sons to birth.)

8.5ff As with Aaron and his sons, so the Levites are to be ceremonially clean before the Lord.

8.9 The Levites stand before the whole assembly of Israel, who lay their hands on them and present them as a *tenuphah* (Heb תְּנֻפָּה), a wave-offering to the Lord. It is a wonderful picture of the people of Israel presenting this 'brandishing' of the whole tribe's men before the Lord.

8.23ff The age limits on priesthood are set here as between 25 and 50 years old. At 50, a priest could assist, but didn't take any further official role in the duties of the Tent. Later, the Levites were divided up into orders, who served in turn in the Temple. (so in Luke 1.5, Zacharias, John the Baptist's father is a priest in the roster of Abijah.)

8.20 Having been presented and 'waved' and cleansed, the Levites get to work.

7.1ff In this chapter we are introduced to the tribal chieftains of each of the tribes of Israel as they bring wagonloads of gifts to the priests for their work – in six cartloads with twelve oxen, one ox for each tribe. We note that Levi is not included in this list, as that tribe now belongs the Lord, entirely, but Ephraim and Manasseh, the two half-tribes descended from Joseph, make the number back up to twelve.

7.6 Note here how equality is not always God's way of doing things. The Gershonites, the descendants of Levi's son Gershon are given two carts and four oxen, the Merarites, descendants of Merar, get four carts and eight oxen, but the Kohathites receive nothing, because their responsibility is portering the tabernacle when it moves. This might seem unfair, but God gives according to need and requirement, not with favoritism.

7.12 For the rest of the chapter, up to verse 83, there is an inventory of the offerings brought by the twelve tribes over a period of twelve days. They are, frankly, the same for each tribe – that is, in the summary given in v84 – 88, twelve silver plates, twelve silver bowls, twelve gold dishes, (with gold ladles for incense, though this only becomes

apparent in the summary!) and for the burnt offering, twelve bulls, twelve rams and twelve lambs, along with twelve male goats for a sin offering. For the rest of the sacrifices, the total they bring is twenty four oxen, sixty rams, sixty goats and sixty lambs.

These are brought by the leaders of the tribes who are;

Nahshon of Judah	Elishama of Ephraim
Nethanel of Issachar	Gamaliel of Manasseh
Eliab of Zebulun	Abidan of Benjamin
Elizur of Reuben	Ahiezer of Dan
Shelumiel of Simeon	Pagiel of Asher
Eliasaph of Gad	Ahira of Naphtali

7.89 Moses goes into the tent and actually hears the Lord speaking to him from His seat between the cherubim on the ark.

8.1ff The lamps are lit on the seven-branched *menorah* and the tabernacle work is complete.

Day 36 Num 9.1-12, then Num 1.1- 2.34

9.1ff (circa BC1445) Having set up the Tent and all its furnishings, and having put in place the Levitical priesthood, the time comes, in the first month, Nisan, of the second year of Israel's journey to Canaan to celebrate the Passover in commemoration of the great deliverance from Pharaoh.

At twilight on the fourteenth of Nisan, the lamb selected on the tenth, and kept, is slaughtered and the celebrations begin, on the night of the full moon.

9.6 A problem arises, however, for those who are ritually unclean because of contact with the dead. They do not want to miss out on this vital celebration. It's worth noting that Moses doesn't give them a considered response, but he goes and enquires what the Lord wants. The Lord tells him to have those who are ritually unclean celebrate it a month later, on the 14th of Iyyar, the second month, in the same way they would if they were celebrating it normally.

1.1ff Returning now to the beginning of the book of Numbers, but chronologically following the first Passover in the desert, God speaks to Moses on the first day of Iyyar, the second month, and require a census, particularly to tally the number of men eligible for military service.

1.4ff There are to be twelve assistants, one from each of the tribes, to officiate for the count, the chieftains of each of the tribes who have already been involved in presenting the gifts for the tabernacle. (See above, Num 7.)

1.17 Each man is to come and be recorded, with a note of their ancestry and their clan. The numbers tallied are

Reuben 46,500	Issachar 54,400	Benjamin 35,400
Simeon 59,300	Zebulun 57,400	Dan 62,700
Gad 45,650	Ephraim 40,500	Asher 41,500
Judah 74,600	Manasseh 32,200	Naphtali 53,400

The Levites are not included in the count, for they are the Lord's servants to be engaged with the Tent and will not be given to military service.

1.52ff God now gives instruction to Moses about the encampment of Israel around the Tent, which is to be in the centre. Each tribe camps around their banner, which will indicate their place of setting up. Nearest to the Tent of meeting is to be the camp of the Levites, around the perimeter of the court. (see also 2.17)

2.1ff The tribes will camp, three on each point of the compass from the tent of meeting;

Eastward going south will camp Judah, Issachar then Zebulun.
 Southward going west will camp Reuben, Simeon then Gad
 Westward going north will camp Ephraim, Manasseh then Benjamin
 Northward going east will camp Dan, Asher and Naphtali

In forming up in this way, God has ordered the people so that when they move on, there is not confusion but peace and safety. The tribes are to set out on the journey one after another, and when they arrive at the next place, they will be ready to set up in line with the Tent of meeting in the centre.

No wonder at a later time, Balaam the prophet will say of this order, 'How good are your tents and your tabernacles, O Israel!' (Num 24.5)

Paul describes God as a God of order, not chaos. It is clear here that organization is needed if the vast numbers of people are to adhere as a nation. There is a picture here of the community of God, knowing its relationship, its role and its order as they journey.

2.32 The total number of men of military age is given as 603,550.

Day 37 Num 3.14 -39, 4.1- 49 then 3.40 – 51

The Priests and their Duties

Although the Levites have not been included in the census of fighting men, their numbers are now taken, although this time it includes all males over a month old. As mentioned before, the Levites are divided into three sub-clans, the Gershonites, the Kohathites and the Merarites, after the three sons of Levi when they came down into Egypt.

It is according to these three clans that God will now divide up the duties of the priesthood for the Tent of meeting, the Tabernacle.

3.14ff The **Gershonites** were to camp to the immediate west of, and behind the Tabernacle. Numbering 7,500, they were given care of the curtains and coverings of the Tabernacle with their ropes.

3.27ff The **Kohathites** were to camp to the immediate south of the Tabernacle. Numbering 8,600, their task was to care for all the furnishings of the Holy Place, the Tent itself.

3.33ff The **Merarites** were to camp to the north of the Tabernacle. They numbered 6,200 and looked after the timberwork of the Tabernacle, all the bars and cross-beams needed in the setting up, as well as the ropes and pegs.

3.38,39 In the middle of camp, to the east and in front of the door of the Tabernacle camped **Moses, Aaron and his sons**.

In total, there were 22,000, making Levi the smallest numerically of all the Tribes of Israel.

4.1 There is a clear strategy now given by the Lord for the tear-down of the Tent and its courts. It is a precision operation, made more risky by the need for utter holiness before the presence of the God who is a consuming fire.

4.5 In any move, first Aaron and his sons are to take down the veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies, and then they must cover the ark with it, putting then over that hides of dugongs, seal-like creatures. (These would have been quite waterproof.) Then a cloth of blue would be put over that, and then the poles put in place to carry it.

4.7 The table is covered with blue cloth and then the plates, dishes, bowls and even the bread itself is then covered with red cloth and sea-cow hides before the poles are put in to carry it.

4.9 The *menorah* lampstand is covered with blue, then wrapped with all its tools in seal-skins and put on poles.

4.11 The incense altar is made ready with blue cloth, hides and poles,

4.12 and then all the tools and vessels used in the holy place are put on a frame for carrying and covered in blue cloth and hides, then poles attached.

4.13 The bronze altar of offering is cleaned of ash, and covered with a purple cloth. The tools for the altar are then put on it, under a cover of sea-cow hides.

4.15 There is a warning to the Kohathites that although they are carrying the holy things, they are not allowed to touch them, other than by the carrying poles. This is to emphasise the unique and separated nature of all the items which have been set apart for an awesome God who has no rivals.

4.16 Aaron's son Eleazar takes charge of the oil and incense and grain offerings.

4.17 Moses and Aaron are to take special care not to let the Kohathites come in until everything is covered up, for their safety.

4.21ff The Gershonites then move in, and take down all the hangings and curtains from the Tent and the surrounding courtyard.

4.29ff The Merarites then dismantle all the framework of the Tabernacle and the outer courts, and carry them, including the ropes and pegs.

4.34 A separate count is now made of the men of each sub-clan who is able to actually minister in the Tabernacle, all those between 30 and 50, the ages of service for the Levites. The Kohathite men number 2,750, the Gershonites 2,630 and the Merarites 3,200. The total is therefore 8,580.

3.40 A further count is made of all Israelite firstborn males a month old or more. It happens that the number comes out at 22,273, which is almost the same number as the Levites numbered in the census (see 3.39.) The reason this is important is because God is putting a claim on the Levites in place of the firstborn He rescued from the last plague in Egypt. It's going to be simpler for Israel to have a tribe set apart than to have every firstborn son having to go and be a priest.

However, there are 273 not accounted for if the Israelites firstborn, so they will be redeemed by a payment of five shekels (about two ounces/55 grams) of silver, which is given to Aaron and goes into the Lord's treasury.

There is a tremendous attention to detail, but this teaches the Israelites to have God right in the centre of their life and behaviour. The holy was at the focus of their national life.

Day 38 Num 10.1 – 34, then 9.15-23, then Num.10.35 – 11.35

The people are about to set out on their journey to Canaan as a nation covenanted to God; there are possibly as many as two million of them, including women and children, plus their livestock. This is an awesome migration, following the cloud. It's essential then that everyone moves together and in order.

10.1ff The Lord commands the making of two beaten-silver trumpets (Heb חֲצֹצְרוֹת כְּסֵף-מִקְשָׁה *chatsotsorot keseph-miqshah*). These are not the shophar, which is a rams horn blown on holidays. These trumpets are particularly to call Israel to gather in assembly, or to break camp and move on, following the Lord. They are blown by Aaron's sons.

10.3,4 When both are blown, it is calling for a general assembly of Israel (the *edah* Heb הָעֵדָה literally, *the witness*) but when just one is blown, it is calling for the tribal leaders to come.

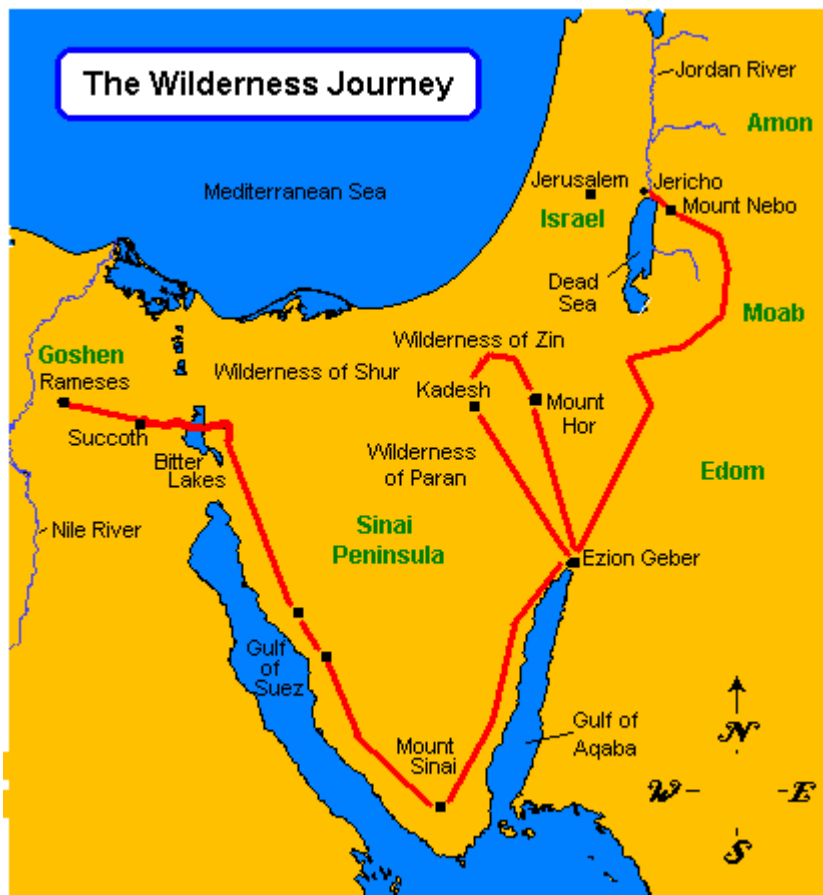
10.5 There is another signal which is used to indicate the camp is moving on. The word used in Hebrew for this is *teru'ah* (Heb תְּרוּעָה) which is a war-cry or an alarm. It was distinct from the *taqa'* (Heb תִּקְעָה) which called the tribes together in assembly.

As this alarm is sounded, the tribes on the east side move out, and when a second alarm comes, the tribes on the south move; the Levites would then follow with the holy things, followed by the other six tribes from west and north, although there do not seem to be trumpets indicated for that move.

10.9 The trumpets are also to be the battle horns of Israel in time of war.

10.10 The silver trumpets were also to be used to celebrate feasts and holidays throughout the year, particularly new moons. However, on the most important new moon feast, Rosh HaShanah (Heb ראש־השָׁנָה *Head of the year*, or new year), on the first day of the seventh month (Tishri) the *shofar* is used in precedence over the silver trumpets, following later Rabbinical teaching. This day is also called *yom-teru'ah* (Heb יוֹם־תְּרוּעָה *Day of the alarm*). This feast is often connected in Christian faith with Paul's reference to the 'last trumpet' in 1 Cor 15, heralding the new age. (See Lev.23.24)

10.11ff So, on the twentieth of Nisan, after the first Passover in the desert, God's glory-cloud lifts from the tabernacle, and they move to Paran. A map may help at this point.



This is a move north toward Canaan, up along the coast of the Gulf of Aqaba.

All happens in accordance with God's plan as given to Moses.

10.29 Although Reuel (also called Jethro), Moses' wise father-in-law and priest of Midian has gone home, Moses' brother-in-law Hobab has stayed around until this point. He now intimates that he will return to his family. But Moses urges him to stay with them, and act as a guide through the desert (although it seems unnecessary, as God is leading them.) Perhaps Moses wants a reason not to let go of a close friend? It seems Hobab agrees, and they set out on the three-day trek north to their camp in Paran.

9.15-23 Mirroring the passage in Exodus 40.36-38, we have an account of the dwelling of God in the middle of his people's camp, visible in fire by night and cloud by day. Whenever God moved, they moved. This is a God of mobile, portable purposes. It perhaps reminds us of the later Scripture in the New Testament, 'Here we have no permanent residence, but we look for one that is coming.' Heb 13.14

10.35 At the point where the Kohathites lifted the poles of the Ark on their shoulders, a shout would go up;

קוּמָה יְהוָה וַיִּפְצוּ אֹיְבֵיךָ

(above is read from right to left)

Koomah Adonai veyatsufoo 'oyevekha

Arise Lord may they be broken your enemies

And when the ark reached its new resting place, the cry went up

שׁוּבָה יְהוָה רַבְבוֹת אֱלֹפֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

(above is read from right to left)

Shoovah Adonai riv-evot alphei Yisra-el

Return Lord to myriad thousands of Israel

11.1ff The people start to do what masses of people often do best – complain. As a result, the anger of God burns up some of them, until Moses' intercession prevails for them. This results in them naming the place Taberah (Heb תַּבְעָרָה *tav'erah*) = burning. Their ungratefulness is an insult to God's rescue.

11.4 They even begin to be nostalgic for Egypt, and the 'good life' they had there as slaves, and bemoan the constant divine provision of manna each day.

11.7ff A description of the manna, this miracle provision of God. It shows how much we can come to take God's blessing for granted as wayward people.

11.10 ff Because of this state of affairs, God is angered and Moses is annoyed too. Moses tells God that this was all his idea – God called this people into being, not Moses! Moses actually takes God to task in a very one-on-one confrontation, and ask God to kill him now if this is how it's going to be.

11.16 An awesome thing now happens. Rather than break out in his anger even more fiercely, the Lord hears Moses' burdened heart. How much more creative it is to take our complaint directly to God than to attack and criticize him to others. God is big enough to cope with our disappointments with Him, if we will bring them to Him.

God calls for Moses to gather seventy of the Israelite leaders, so that God can place on them the same spirit that is in Moses, to carry the burden of the people with him. Then he also promises meat for everyone – so much, that they will be sick of eating it!

11.21 In a moment of doubt, Moses questions God's ability to do this with so many. It is a sad fact that, even when we see amazing miracles of God and experience His power, our tendency is to disbelieve His provision. Moses is even sarcastic with the Lord – 'even if you gave us all the fish in the sea, it wouldn't cover the need!'

11.23 But the Lord reproves Moses – 'you'll see, Moses, what I can do.'

11.24 The seventy are gathered, and God comes in the cloud, and takes of the spirit upon Moses, and puts it on the elders, and they *prophesy*. (Heb וַיִּתְּנָבֵא *va-yitnabe'oo* – *they were made to prophesy*, from the Hebrew root נָבֵא *nava'* to prophesy.)

The word used here for prophesy is the usual one in Hebrew, but something unusual, out of the ordinary is going on, something which can be distinguished as beginning and ending at a defined point, for it seems to suggest that they did it once, and then not again. (The Hebrew here is rather ambiguous, since it says 'they did not add'. This could mean they did it continuously thereafter, or they didn't do it again!)

The word in the Hebrew comes from a root meaning to bubble up (See Gesenius on this word at

<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H5012&t=KJV#>)

He says that 'passive forms... are used in this verb, from the divine prophets having been supposed to be moved rather by another's powers than their own (which is the simple truth, 'Holy men spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.) '

This is the first occurrence of such ecstatic outbreak of charismatic expression in Scripture , and is in 11.26 followed up immediately by the recounting of an outpouring on Eldad and Medad, who had been called to the gathering, but had not gone, who are nonetheless found 'being caused to prophesy' in the camp where they are.

Because of the concern about God's possible anger, a message is got to Moses, that there is apparently prophesying going on elsewhere, and they should be stopped. But Moses, perhaps remembering God's desire in Exodus 20 to speak to all the people, to be heard by

them all, replies, looking forward to a day in Jerusalem when the Spirit would again break out upon all flesh, ‘I wish all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them!’.

11.31 The wind blows and drives swarms of quail in from the Gulf of Aqaba. They end up a metre deep in quail! They gather and start to eat, but God’s judgement is in the eating. They get ill, presumably from the eating, and end up burying the victims, calling the place Kibroth Hattaavah (Heb קִבְרוֹת הַתְּאֵוָה *Kivrot ha-ta'avah*), meaning ‘Graves of craving.’ They then move on, leaving behind two scenes of sadness in their relationship with God.

It is confusing to us, perhaps, to try and understand why God would first pour out His Spirit so powerfully on the elders of Israel, only to next day cause such illness among the people. Is God capricious? Is He vindictive? What He has declared is that He is a God who cannot overlook or ‘innocentise’ sin, allowing its consequences to run their course. What Israel witnesses of God’s judgement is only the outcome of their yielding to the darkness pulling them away from trust in the power of God to provide and rescue them.

Perhaps we need to remind ourselves constantly that it is only because of the complete provision in the cross of Jesus Christ that we are not subject to the same outcomes of our own darkness. God is no less holy, but Jesus carries our guilt and our shame on Himself.

Day 39 Num 12.1 – 14.45

12.1ff Jealousy rears up its head from Miriam and Aaron against Moses at this point. They are older than Moses, Miriam by some years. But the point at issue seems to be Moses’ wife, Zipporah. She is described here as Cushite, which normally would have referred to an Ethiopian, but numbers of scholars see Cushan as an alternative name for Midian (see Hab.3.7) and therefore is in harmony with the story.

We already saw how attached Moses became to Reuel-Jethro, his father-in-law and to Hobab, his brother-in-law. It is possible that the jealousy has arisen because of the favour Moses shows his wife and her family and the spiritual guidance he derives from them. For example, we see Zipporah back in Exodus 4.24 preventing Moses from a serious error in not circumcising their son, and being the daughter of a priest, she obviously had an eye for spiritual matters.

Thus Miriam and Aaron take exception to this influence, and begin to stake their own claim for recognition as spiritual leaders in the nation. After all, Aaron has served Moses as his voice through the battles with Pharaoh, and Miriam led the women in praise after the Red Sea victory – should they not have status also?

12.3 The editor here comments on the character of Moses as being the most humble man on earth. The Hebrew word is *anav* (Heb אָנָוּ) meaning needy or lowly. King James had meek. The picture we have of Moses after his exile from Egypt is of a man totally dependent on God, not willing to take the limelight. We have seen this to be true in Moses’ life.

12.4 The Lord now speaks to the three siblings together, and meets them in the cloud.

12.6 The Lord differentiates between all other prophets, to whom He speaks in visions and dreams, and Moses, with whom He communicates *peh-el-peh* (Heb פֶּה-אֶל-פֶּה), literally mouth-to-mouth. Moses, of all the earth, is permitted to see the *temunat Adonai*, (Heb תְּמוּנַת יְהוָה) the shape or outline of God.

12.9 As a result of this encounter, Miriam is made white with skin disease. She asks pardon for the sin they have committed, and Moses prays for her healing. God commands that she spend seven days in isolation, and then she will be healed.

After this, they move on to Paran.

This is a great lesson in how we treat servants of the Lord, particularly where there is a temptation to jealousy. God uses whom He will, in the measure He will, and it behoves the rest of God's people to abstain from critical attacks on them.

13.1 Twelve men are called from the people to explore (Heb יָתְרוּ *yaturu* from verb root תָּוַר *tur* meaning to meander, or wander) the land. The word *spies* is not used in the Hebrew, although we tend to know them as the twelve spies.

Note, they are not sent to assess or to decide the next step. They are merely to go and report back their findings.

Among the twelve are Joshua (here called Hoshea, *rescuer*, later called Joshua, *he will rescue*.) He is from the tribe of Ephraim. There is also Caleb of the tribe of Judah. These will be the only two men of Israel who actually enter the land of Canaan.

13.17 They are commissioned by Moses to bring back a report of conditions in Canaan.

13.21 In the course of their incursion, they cut a bunch of grapes which two of them have to carry back on a pole, it is so heavy. This has become a symbol of the Israeli Ministry of Tourism today



13.25 Nearly six weeks later, they return and report to Israel at Kadesh. Ten of them say that although the land is good, there are giants there, and they can't do it. They feel like grasshoppers before the taller inhabitants of the land.

13.30 Caleb speaks up, that they can do it, but he is shouted down by the others.

14.1 The Israelites go back to complaining mode and think about Egypt again.

14.4 Moses and Aaron fall on their faces, fearful of the consequences after the last time Israel complained about the food. Joshua and Caleb are beside themselves and tear their clothes – ‘the Lord will lead us into the land’ they say. For their trouble, the people consider stoning them.

14.10 God’s glory-cloud comes before all the people. God is about to destroy them, but Moses again intercedes, - ‘Think of what the Egyptians will say.’

There is something so poignant here about God’s frustration with Israel –this is all ‘in spite of the miraculous signs I have performed.’ (v11). The depth of darkness is so deep that they seem unable to keep on course, even when God has made Himself known so intimately to them. Has God underestimated the depth to which darkness in the heart of man takes him?

14.18 Moses reminds God of the nature of His character – gracious, compassionate, covenanted to them in obligation, forgiving sin...

14.20 The Lord has forgiven them. But He will not allow them to pass into Canaan ever, apart from Caleb and Joshua. They will all die in the desert. This is a terrible conclusion to this generation which has seen God move and do mighty things.

14.36 The ten who misled the people into rebellion are struck down with plague and die.

14.39 In their foolishness, the people decide to attempt an attack on the land. But it is too late. The Amalekites and Canaanites overwhelm them, and beat them back to Hormah.

This is a terrible outcome for a people whom God has led and cared for with supernatural grace. It leads a later writer, to the Hebrews, to comment ‘the message spoken by angels was proved to be true and all who disobeyed or rejected it were punished as they deserved. So if we refuse this great way of being saved, how can we hope to escape? The Lord himself was the first to tell about it, and people who heard the message proved to us that it was true.’ Heb. 2.2-3 (CEV)

Day 40 Num 16.1 – 18.32

With the Promised Land now beyond their reach, Moses has to lead a discouraged people on their wilderness wanderings. It is a time of challenge to his leadership, of disgruntlement, but still God journeys with them and is faithful to them, providing miraculously for them and dwelling in their midst in the Tent of meeting.

16.1 A coup against Moses and Aaron is attempted by a Kohathite priest, Korah, with Reubenites Dathan and Abiram. They recruit two hundred and fifty Israelite community leaders, and come to make their accusation against the two senior leaders of the nation, claiming that all the people are holy, accusing Moses and Aaron of lording it over the people.

16.4 Moses' immediate reaction is to hit the deck. This is Moses' default position, seeking God's face when he is challenged, as in Numbers 14.5. After this, he announces a divine decision to be announced the next day, about who is holy, and adds that they are taking a big risk here.

16.8 Moses also rebukes Korah for his arrogant ambition; not content with having the honour of being a priest of the priestly nation, they want to run the priesthood themselves.

16.12 Dathan and Abiram refuse to appear before Moses, accusing Moses of blocking their access to the promised land so that he can hold sway over them in their desert wandering.

16.15 Moses, angry and frustrated, appeals now to the Lord, pleading his cause, and asks God not to accept their offering. It's clear from this interchange that Moses doesn't know what the outcome of this judgment will be. He is not being self-assured or strident with the rebels, and is putting his case to God.

The plan is that all the rebels, with Moses and Aaron are to come with incense-carriers to the Lord, however, the Lord lets Moses know that He has in His mind to destroy the whole assembly of the elders of Israel, which leads Moses and Aaron again to plead on their faces for mercy for those not implicated.

16.26 Again, Moses and Aaron's prayer has affected God's heart, and He advises Moses to get the rest of the assembly away from the tents of Korah, Abiram and Dathan.

16.30 It is hard for us to equate the terrible thing that happened to these families with our loving God; yet we also do not see the power of darkness and its threat to God's plan of salvation. We are very tolerant of sin, and intolerant of judgment, generally, because we have a Saviour who has given us all. Yet here was an effort to thwart that plan; if Korah and company had succeeded, it is certain that Israel would not have reached Canaan, and none of the history had happened. It is a desperate measure.

Not only are the three men and their families swallowed into the desert, but fire consumes the two hundred and fifty accomplices.

16.36 Because the incense-holders they carried are holy items, their remains must be retrieved and beaten into a cover for the altar of offering, as a sign of God's holiness and the toxic nature of sin against Him. Only Aaron and his descendants are ever allowed to carry incense before the Lord.

16.41 Next day the people grumble that Moses and Aaron have killed God's people. Instead of being angry with them, Moses tells Aaron to go and intercede for them, knowing that God will not allow such wicked accusations to go unpunished. Before Aaron manages to get the offering under way, over fourteen thousand have already died of plague. But Aaron 'stands between the living and the dead', a powerful picture of intercession, by a man whose priesthood is being attacked.

17.1ff God makes a conclusive sign for the people; all the tribes are to be represented by a wooden staff each, including Aaron. Aaron's stick produces almond blossoms, and then almonds. God now commands the people to stop attacking Aaron and to leave well alone.

There is a powerful allusion here to the waywardness of the human mass movement when it is against God's word. Even as followers of Christ, we have been schooled in the dogma of the inherent righteousness of democracy. Yet the evidence from Scripture is that *vox populi vox Dei non est* – the people's voice is not God's voice. We also see Moses and Aaron's heart for the people as they stand in prayer for a people so misled by their own sense of rights.

17.12 The chapter ends with a terrible cry of fear from the people – 'This God is going to kill us if we get near Him.' How different it all could have been.

The awesome truth is that God is now shackled to this people by covenant; He cannot disown them or annihilate them. The way ahead will be one of bitter struggle and disappointment for the Lord, as well as for the Godly, yet God Himself will become the antidote to the venom of darkness lodged in men's hearts.

18.1ff The Lord reiterates the calling of the priesthood and in v.8 they are to share in the offerings to God for food. There are exceptions, however, in the firstborn of humans and unclean animals, which have to be replaced with monetary value, and the blood and fat of the firstborn of oxen, sheep and goats brought for offering.

18.19 This food is covenanted to the Israelites a *covenant of salt* (Heb בְּרִית הַמֶּלַח *berit ha-melach*) an ancient way of indicating at a meal the covenant between the guest and the host. Many cultures even now greet guests with salt as a sign of honour and protection.

18.20 The Levites will not have a share of the land in its division among the tribes later on entry to Canaan, but as well as the offerings as food, the priesthood will receive the tithes (tenths) of Israel as their income instead of land.

18.25 The Levites are to present a tenth of their tithe to Aaron and his descendants the high priests, to honour the Lord.

A tenth (Heb מַעֲשֵׂר *ma'aser*) as an offering was a recognised amount to honour God in giving long before the Levites or the *Torah*. Abraham and Jacob knew the concept in Genesis, and it seems therefore to have an ancient root in the lives of eastern culture. For those who argue it as purely Old Covenant, it is worth seeing that the tenth predates the Mosaic era, and is handed down to them in the example of the patriarchs.