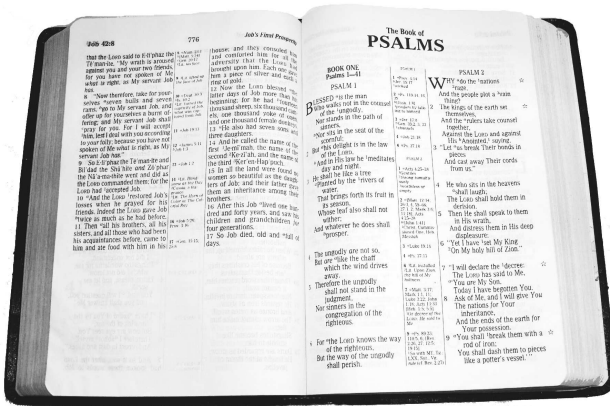


# PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



May 2022

Bible readings from Numbers chapters 1 to 18

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# NUMBERS

The title ‘Numbers’ was taken from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). This title is apt for chapters 1 to 3 (a record of the census taken at Sinai) and chapter 26 (the record of the census taken some 38 years later in the plains of Moab). The Hebrew title of the book is ‘In the Wilderness’ (cp. 1:1). This is a more accurate description of the book as a whole, for it details the slow journey of the Israelites from Mount Sinai to the borders of Canaan (the promised land). The New Testament tells us that the events ‘in the wilderness’ were recorded as an example to us for our admonition (1 Corinthians 10:1–11). The people were very slow to learn and a sad saga of complaining and failure continued throughout their journey (12:1–2; 14:1–4; 16:1–3, 41–42; 20:1–5; 21:4–5). The Lord judged them for their unbelief and constant complaining — not one of them who was over twenty years of age went into the promised land, except for Joshua and Caleb (14:26–30). The people wandered around in the wilderness because they went *astray in their hearts* (Psalm 95:8–11). The book of Numbers is divided into four sections:

1. Preparation for the march through the wilderness 1:1 to 10:10
2. Journey from Sinai to the plains of Moab – 10:11 to 22:1
3. Balaam the false prophet – 22:2 to 25:18
4. Preparation for entrance into Canaan – 26:1 to 36:13

**Note** — The early chapters of the Book of Numbers can be hard going with some long lists of names. Some sections have been omitted from our readings. Persevere with the readings that have been chosen from the beginning of the book. There are spiritual lessons within them which are important for us to learn.

## **Recommended commentaries on the Book of Numbers**

John Currid, Commentary on Numbers,  
Gordon J. Keddie, According to Promise

Both books are published by Evangelical Press

*You shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony*

The Lord told Moses to take a census of Israel in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the second year after their exodus from Egypt just one month after the tabernacle was erected (1; Exodus 40:17). Every male aged twenty years and over, able to serve as a soldier, was to be included in the census (2–3). This census numbered 603,550; another census taken 38 years later in the plains of Moab showed 601,730 (26:51).

You may wonder why God wanted Moses to take a census of Israel. Surely the sovereign God knew exactly the number of people eligible to be included in the census. That is true, and he knew all their names even as he knew the name of each leader of each tribe (5–16). Moses would also have known the leaders but he also needed to know just how many men could be called upon to fight in the battles that lay ahead. They had to fight for the promised land even though the Lord was their helper. The result of the census is recorded in verses 20–46.

Judah was the largest and strongest single tribe with 74,600 men who were able to go to war (26–27). Joseph's descendants, the most numerous, were divided into the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (32–35). They made up the number to twelve tribes because the Levites were not included in this census but were numbered separately (47–53; cp. 3:14–39).

Moses was a Levite and the Lord told him, '*You shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony*' (50). The Levites did not provide soldiers but priests and those who would care for the tabernacle. They were set apart for spiritual service. They were the smallest of the tribes, even though that number includes all males from the age of one month (3:39). God did not choose them on account of their numerical strength. **A small fellowship that is wholehearted in its love and service for God is stronger than a much larger church which has grown lukewarm and lethargic.**

*Everyone in his place*

This chapter describes the way in which the tribes of Israel should camp and the order in which they should march. The tribes were divided into four groups ('camps' – 17), each consisting of three tribes. Each camp was named after the first tribe in the group. The number of fighting men in each tribe is mentioned, together with the name of their leader:–

1. The camp of Judah on the east side (3–9) — Judah, Issachar, Zebulun.
2. The camp of Reuben on the south side (10–16) — Reuben, Simeon, Gad.
3. The camp of Ephraim on the west side (18–25) — Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin.
4. The camp of Dan on the north side (26–31) — Dan, Asher, Naphtali.

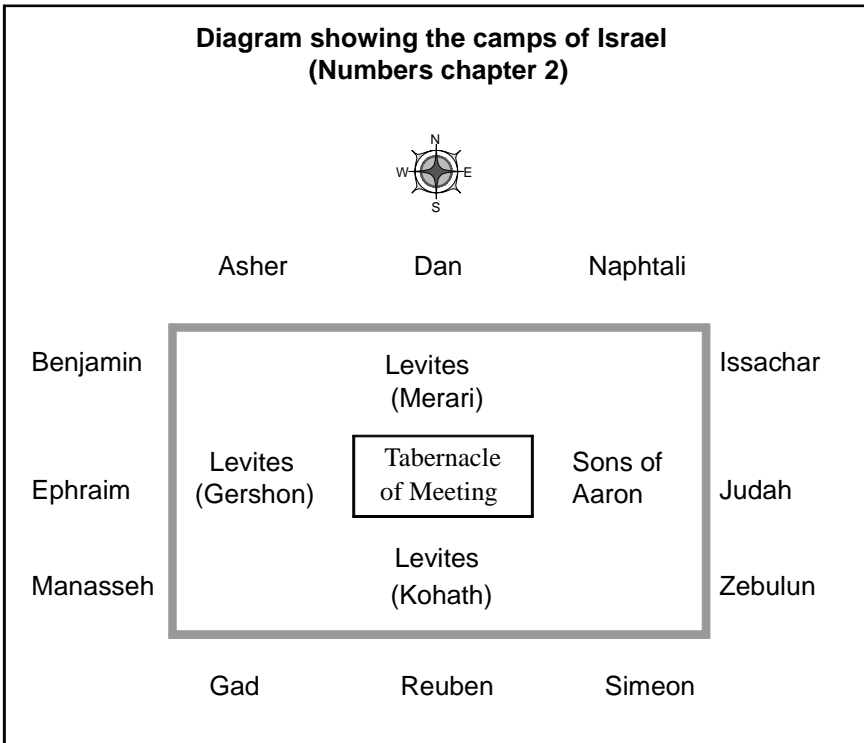
The Levites (17) camped in the centre, around the tabernacle (1:53; see also 3:14–39).

**(See diagram on page 6)**

*The tabernacle of meeting* (17) symbolised the presence of the living God among his people. It was there that the high priest approached God to offer sacrifices for sin and to intercede for the people. Without the presence of God we cannot know his blessing.

There was order in the camps – *everyone in his place* (17). Each person had his position. There is a lesson for us here. In the church *we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function* (Romans 12:4). We have different gifts and we all have a work to do so that our local church will grow and be edified in love (Ephesians 4:16). *Everyone in his place. Are you in your place, serving God in your church and seeking to glorify him in your life?*

**Diagram showing the camps of Israel  
(Numbers chapter 2)**



**Marching Order (Numbers 10:11–28)**



Camp of Dan	Camp of Ephraim	Levites with Tabernacle of Meeting	Camp of Reuben	Camp of Judah
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*They offered profane fire before the LORD*

The duties of the Levites and details of the census taken among them are given in Numbers chapter 3. The priests were taken from the family of Aaron (2–4,10); the remainder of the tribe of Levi was to attend to the needs of the priesthood and the work of the tabernacle (6–7).

Aaron's two eldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, were punished by death *when they offered profane fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai* (4; cp. Leviticus 10:1–6). Though a priest was allowed to burn incense (cp. Luke 1:9), they acted presumptuously in adding something to the day's ritual which the Lord had not commanded. They may have been under the influence of alcohol because the Lord commanded Aaron, the same day, that the priests should not enter the tabernacle after drinking any intoxicating drink (Leviticus 10:8–9). There was also a warning of death to anyone from another tribe who would dare to do the work reserved for the Levites (10; 1:51).

What are we to learn from this solemn incident? God is still the same and we must seek to glorify him in our worship which is a serious and holy exercise. We are not permitted to experiment with worship. The 'chummy' attitude to addressing God, flippant behaviour and clowning around have no place in Christian worship. *Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:28–29).

**We must take our worship seriously, remembering that we should come before God with awe, reverence, adoration and worship. Let us beware of 'profane fire'!**

*Lo, God is here! Let us adore,  
And own how holy is this place!  
Let all within us feel his power,  
And silent bow before his face;  
Who know his power, his grace who prove,  
Serve him with awe, with reverence love.*

(Gerhard Tersteegen, translated by John Wesley)

*Redemption money*

The census of the Levites included every male from the age of one month (15). Levi's three sons and the families descending from them are listed in verses 17 to 20. The descendants of Gershon were in charge of the externals of the tabernacle (25–26), and those of Kohath the sacred vessels (29–31). Moses and Aaron were descended from Kohath (1 Chronicles 6:1–3). The descendants of Merari were to care for the boards, pillars, sockets, etc. of the tabernacle (36–37). Moses and Aaron and his sons were appointed by God to teach the nation (Leviticus 10:11; Deuteronomy 24:8). They and they alone were placed in charge of the sanctuary *to meet the needs of the children of Israel*. Any outsider who approached the sanctuary was to be put to death (38).

Another census revealed that there were 22,273 firstborn males in Israel (not including Levites). The firstborn of Israel were *sanctified* (set apart) to the Lord, to belong to him (13; cp. Exodus 13:2). There were 22,000 male Levites and they were dedicated to God in place of the firstborn of Israel. *Therefore the Levites shall be mine, because all the firstborn are mine* (12–13). God loved them and wanted them for himself, to love him and to serve him. There were 273 firstborn from the tribes of Israel who were not covered by a dedicated Levite (40–46). Five shekels were given to the priests for each of the 273 as *redemption money* (47–51).

Every Christian belongs to the *church of the firstborn* (Hebrews 12:23). *We were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold... but with the precious blood of Christ* (1 Peter 1:18–19). We have been bought at a price (the precious blood of Christ) and we are not our own. We must therefore glorify God in our lives (see 1 Corinthians 6:19–20). **We have been saved to be holy and to glorify God and to serve him! Does your life bring honour to the name of Christ?**



*Each of them to his service and his task*

A further census was taken of Levite tribal groups of Gershon, Kohath and Merari (22–23,29–30,34–36). Males between thirty and fifty years of age were to serve in the tabernacle. Those eligible to serve God were required to be mature adults. The Lord Jesus began his public ministry at the age of thirty (Luke 3:23).

The New Testament does not lay down a required minimum age for Christian service but there is a principle that an elder must not be a recent convert (1 Timothy 3:6). There are rare examples of younger men who are spiritually mature and able to serve God. Timothy himself was such an example. The great Baptist pastor and preacher of the nineteenth century, C.H. Spurgeon, was pastoring a village church at the age of seventeen. It is most important that we understand that Spurgeon was an outstanding young man and his case must be regarded as the exception and not the rule.

Details of the duties of the three Levitical tribal groups are given in verses 4 to 33. There is much detail in this chapter which does not make for easy reading, but the order in the service of the tabernacle should impress us. The liberty given by the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17) is not an excuse for us to do our own thing in the worship or service of God. We must always remember the words of Scripture, *Let all things be done decently and in order* (1 Corinthians 14:40).

The Levites had their individual responsibilities – *each of them to his service and his task* (19,49). We must beware of envying those who may have an office in our church which we desire to have. If we are prayerful and patient, and show ourselves to be dependable, God will bless us in what we do and we will find recognition in due time. To have God's approval is more important than that of men. We have already seen the importance of recognising our place in the local church and of using the gifts that God has given to us. **Are you a worker or a passenger in your church?**

*He shall make restitution*

The Lord gave Moses laws for the spiritual and physical health of the camp. Those with a skin disease such as leprosy, those with a bodily discharge and those who had touched a dead body, were ceremonially unclean and were put outside the camp (1–4; cp. Leviticus chapters 13 to 15). Leprosy was a dreaded disease in biblical times; it was incurable and it was also contagious. The stringent laws emphasised that God's people must be holy. If we are to know God's blessing we must be concerned to keep ourselves clean and undefiled by sin (cp. 2 Corinthians 6:17 to 7:1).

When we wrong our fellow-men, such a sin is committed *in unfaithfulness against the LORD* (6; Leviticus 6:1–5). The guilt of sin had to be confessed and restitution had to be made to the victim who was to be given the full value of the goods stolen plus one fifth. *He shall confess the sin which he has done. He shall make restitution for his trespass.* A ram was also to be offered as an atonement for sin (7–8; cp. Leviticus 6:6–7). Crime did not pay; it was the criminal who paid. **We have a free salvation, but it does not free us from confession, repentance and restitution, which are costly.**

There is no place in the Bible for the practice of the confessional, where a priest stands in the place of God to forgive sins. We must confess our sins, however (1 John 1:9). Confession is not easy; it humbles us. If we sin against God, we must confess that sin to him. If we sin against another person, that sin must be privately confessed to them. If we sin against our church, that sin must be confessed to the church (James 5:16). Restitution goes with confession. We must make good any loss suffered through our sin whenever possible. Such action is an evidence of true repentance (cp. Luke 19:8). Confession, repentance and restitution are necessary elements in conversion but they do not cancel out sin. A substitutionary sacrifice had to be made to atone for sin (8). The Lord Jesus paid the price and died to make atonement for us. He is worthy of our devotion and service.

*The law of jealousy*

*The law of jealousy* (29) reminds us that God does not tolerate unfaithfulness in marriage. A husband or wife is right to be jealous if they suspect their partner of unfaithfulness. The law is given in these verses for the Israelite man who suspected his wife of adultery. He may have no proof when his wife is guilty of such a sin (12–14a) or he may be jealous without a cause (14b).

In the elaborate ritual given to the Israelites at this time the jealous husband had to bring his wife to the priest, bringing a grain-offering. The priest took some dust from the floor of the tabernacle and put it into *holy water* (15–18) ‘*Holy water*’ just means that the water was set apart for a particular use in the work of God; it had no magical qualities. The woman may swear on an oath to protest her innocence, but if she were lying, she would bring the most terrible curse upon herself (19–29). The ritual and the oath were made *before the LORD* (16,18,25,30). The Lord was witness to the proceedings and the husband had to leave the consequences with him.

The ritual of *the law of jealousy* is not valid for us today; it was for the camp of Israel. What does remain, however, are God’s holy standards for family life and the principle that biblical church discipline must be exercised in the case of such offences (1 Corinthians chapter 5). The Bible upholds the sanctity of marriage and we lament the increasing instances of the sin of adultery among professing Christians. *Fornicators and adulterers God will judge* (Hebrews 13:4). There is a day coming *when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ* (Romans 2:16). Let us be sure that we have no dark secrets, unconfessed to God and unforgiven. *There is nothing covered that will not be revealed* (Luke 12:2). **Oh, let us be determined with God’s help to keep ourselves pure. How we need to daily depend on him for grace to lead holy lives.**

*He shall consecrate to the LORD the days of his separation*

The word *Nazirite* means ‘separated’ (from the Hebrew verb ‘to separate’, ‘nezer’). *The law of the Nazirite* (21) concerned the man or woman who desired to set themselves apart to God for a specific period, though Samson and possibly Samuel were Nazirites for life (Judges 13:5; 1 Samuel 1:11,28). They took a vow to separate themselves to the Lord and to separate themselves from intoxicating drink (3,4), to abstain from cutting the hair (5) and from having contact with corpses (6–8). Offerings were brought to the Lord when the period of separation ended (13–20).

The Nazirite was to *consecrate* (Hebrew = ‘separate’) *to the LORD the days of his separation* (12). Biblical separation means that we must keep ourselves separate from sin while separating our days (lives) to God. Separation is a very positive thing. We are to present our *bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God* (Romans 12:1). Our days of consecration are not temporary, but for life. Such consecration does not deprive us of the everyday joys of living, but brings a contentment which this world cannot give (Philippians 4:11). The Nazirite’s consecration could be seen by those around him and so should that of every believer (Matthew 5:14–16). **Let us be determined to consecrate ourselves each day to the Lord, and to live for his glory (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:31).**

*Take my life and let it be  
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;  
Take my moments and my days,  
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

*Take my love, my Lord, I pour  
At thy feet its treasure store;  
Take myself, and I will be  
Ever, only, all for thee.*

(Frances Ridley Havergal)

*The LORD bless you and keep you*

Today's short reading contains some of the most beautiful and best-known verses in the Book of Numbers. These verses (24–26) consist of the blessing that the priests were to pronounce upon the people of Israel. What does it mean to be blessed by God?

- It means that God will *keep* (protect) us.
- It means that the LORD will *make his face shine upon us, and that he will lift up his countenance* (or face) upon us. Oh, the blessing of knowing God's smile upon our lives!

*But saints are lovely in his sight;  
He views his children with delight;  
He sees their hope, he knows their fear,  
And looks, and loves his image there.* (Isaac Watts)

- It means that the LORD will be *gracious* to us. What a joy, what a privilege to know his favour! If he favours us and *is for us, who can be against us?* (Romans 8:31).
- It means that we enjoy the peace of God. *The peace of God which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:7).

The blessing of the priests was more than just words. God said that he would put his name on the children of Israel and that he would bless them. 'God's name upon them was their honour, their comfort, their safety, their plea' (Matthew Henry).

William Hendriksen comments, '**This act of blessing is more than mere well-wishing. It is an effective impartation of welfare, peace, and power**' (COMMENTARY ON LUKE, page 1076). Think about this when you pray for God's blessing on someone.

*The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.*

*They brought their offering before the LORD*

Following the dedication of the tabernacle at Sinai the leaders of Israel brought their gifts for the work of God (1–2). The leaders, one for each tribe, are also mentioned in chapter 2 (verses 3 to 29). They brought *six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for every two of the leaders, and for each one an ox* (3). The covered carts and the oxen to pull them were given to the Gershonites and the Merarites for use in moving the parts of the tabernacle as the camp moved on in the journey to Canaan.

In addition the leaders each presented an identical offering on successive days (12–83). This offering consisted of a silver platter and a silver bowl, both filled with fine flour mixed with oil (for a grain offering), a gold pan full of incense, a bullock, a ram and a lamb (for a burnt offering), a kid (for a sin offering), and two oxen, five rams, five male goats and five male lambs (for a peace offering). The details in verses 12 to 17 are identical to those in verses 18 to 83 except for the names of the tribes and their leaders. The total amount offered is then recorded (84–88).

The leaders *brought their offering before the LORD* (3). They were filled with deep gratitude to God who had not only delivered them from oppression in Egypt, but had caused the Egyptians to load them with possessions when they left the country (Exodus 12:35–36). The Lord Jesus became poor and gave himself to die on the cross to save us. If we love the Lord and are grateful for our great salvation, we will give cheerfully and generously to his work (2 Corinthians 9:7).

When the sacrifices were offered up to God, Moses heard the Lord's voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat (88–89). **If heaven appears to be silent to our prayers, could one of the reasons be that we are robbing God of our tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8–10)?**

*After that the Levites went in to do their work in the tabernacle*

This chapter details the arrangements of the lamps in front of the lampstand (1–4) and of the consecration of the Levites to the work of God (5–26). We have already seen that the Levites were *wholly given* to the Lord *instead of all the first-born of the children of Israel* (16–18; see notes on Numbers 3:12–13). The Levites were ritually cleansed (6) and the Israelites were to lay hands on them (a symbol of identification with them) and the Levites were to lay hands on the sacrifices (10,12).

*The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes.* Aaron then made atonement for them to cleanse them. *After that the Levites went in to do their work in the tabernacle* (21–22). To be consecrated to the Lord requires cleansing from sin, and only *after that* should we do our work for God. The Lord requires *clean hands and a pure heart* from those who would serve him (Psalm 24:4).

In chapter 4, verse 3 the age for service in the work of the tabernacle was thirty years and above; here it is twenty-five years and above (24). It may well have been that from twenty-five to thirty years of age the Levites spent their time in training for service. They retired at the age of fifty, but they were able to assist in the less demanding tasks during their retirement (25–26).

Though we have a higher retirement age than fifty, we must never consider that we should rest from the Lord's work at sixty, sixty-five, or whenever we retire. The work of prayer continues and there are many other opportunities to serve God as long as we have reasonable health and strength. The Lord will not forget our work and labour of love (Hebrews 6:10). We will have to give an account of our lives to the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:9–11). **Will we be ashamed because we have frittered so much time away and spent so much energy indulging ourselves in pleasure rather than grasping the challenge of serving the Lord?**

*Moses told the children of Israel that they should keep the Passover*

The Israelites kept the first Passover in Egypt on the fourteenth day of the first month and it was to be celebrated every year, even when they settled in the promised land (Exodus 12:25). The Lord reminded Moses, one year after they had left Egypt, that the Passover must be kept at *its appointed time... So Moses told the children of Israel that they should keep the Passover* (1–5). Certain men had been defiled by contact with a dead body and were thus ceremonially unclean and unable to observe the Passover (6–7). The Lord provided for such people. Anyone unable to keep the Passover at the appointed time was allowed to keep it a month later (8–12). The man who was able to keep the feast and refused to do so was to *be cut off from among his people* (13).

Christians are not under any obligation to keep religious feasts, but the Lord Jesus is described as *our Passover* (1 Corinthians 5:7). He instructed us to remember his death in the ordinance of Communion. (1 Corinthians 11:23–32). It is clear from the verses in Corinthians that Communion is to be *often* and that the Lord will chasten us if we are sinful or careless in coming to his Table. If we are indifferent about our attendance at the Lord's Table, is there something wrong in our relationship with God? **Surely, if we love the Lord, we will gladly obey his commandments and consider it to be a great privilege to share in the Lord's Table?** Do you come to the table expecting to enjoy communion with God and thus to be blessed (cp. 1 Corinthians 10:16)?

*According to thy gracious word,  
In meek humility,  
This will I do, my dying Lord;  
I will remember thee.*

*Thy body, broken for my sake,  
My bread from heaven shall be;  
Thy cup of blessing I will take,  
And thus remember thee.*

(James Montgomery)



*The cloud*

The Lord led his people out of Egypt, going before them *in a pillar of cloud* (Exodus 13:21; 14:19–20,24). When the tabernacle was raised up, it was covered by the cloud, which at night became a pillar of fire (15–16; cp. Exodus 40:34–38). The cloud reminded Israel that the Lord was with them and that he was leading them (notice the number of times that *‘the cloud’* is mentioned in these verses). *Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle*, the Israelites continued their journey; when the cloud rested, they would stop and pitch their tents (17). The cloud also determined the length of stay in a particular place, *whether it was two days, a month, or a year* (22).

We have no cloud today, but God graciously leads us by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14). The Lord goes ahead of us; we have no need to fear. It is a tremendous source of comfort to know that we are never alone. God is with us and he leads us (Hebrews 13:5–6). There are times when we may be perplexed by the way in which the Lord is leading us, but he never makes mistakes. The psalmist says of Israel’s journey through the wilderness, that God led them forth by the right way (Psalm 107:7). **The right way is not always the easiest way, nor the way that we expect, but the Lord wisely and lovingly leads us. He is with us and he knows best.**

The great hymn writer Frances Van Alstyne once had no money, and desperately needed five dollars. She prayed, and while still on her knees a complete stranger arrived at the door and handed her five dollars. She praised God for his wonderful leading. She then wrote:

*All the way my Saviour leads me:  
 What have I to ask beside?  
 Can I doubt his tender mercy,  
 Who through life has been my guide?  
 Heavenly peace, divinest comfort,  
 Here by faith in him to dwell!  
 For I know whate’er befall me,  
 Jesus doeth all things well.*

*You shall sound an alarm with the trumpets*

The Lord directed Moses to make two silver trumpets to be blown by the sons of Aaron (1–2,8). These trumpets were to be used in various ways:

- Both trumpets were to be blown to call the whole of Israel to the tabernacle (3).
- The leaders were summoned when just one trumpet was blown (4).
- An advance was sounded for the people to begin their journeys (5–8).
- When Israel reached the promised land and went to war, they were to *sound an alarm with the trumpets*. They would then *be remembered before the LORD* who would save them from their enemies (9).
- They were also to blow the trumpets at the appointed feasts (10).

There were distinctive sounds for the different trumpet calls; any lack of clarity would have led to confusion. In warfare the alarm had to be sounded. In the church at Corinth there was much confusion concerning spiritual gifts, just as there is today in many churches (1 Corinthians 12:1). Paul asked, *‘If the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle?’* We need to be clear in our doctrine, using words *easy to understand* (1 Corinthians 14:8–9). **We must sound an alarm to our needy generation. May God be pleased to help us.** Pray for your pastor and for other Christian pastors known to you, that they will be faithful in sounding forth the Word of God.

*Sound ye the trumpet call;  
Heralds proclaim  
Jesus as Lord of all,  
Sound forth his fame:  
Tell of his great renown,  
Lift high the kingly crown,  
Let every knee bow down  
At his blest name.*

(J.H. Stuart)

*Come with us, and we will treat you well*

Today's reading begins the second section of Numbers, which runs to chapter 22, verse 1; this section spans a period of almost forty years. It covers the journey from Sinai to the arrival of the Israelites in the plains of Moab, the final stop before the conquest of Canaan (see map on the next page). The marching order of the tribes is found in verses 14 to 27. The Israelites departed from Sinai just as God had directed them, when he took up the cloud from above the tabernacle (11–13).

Moses was visited by his father-in-law Jethro (or Reuel) who brought his wife and sons to him soon after Israel left Egypt (Exodus 2:18; 18:1–4;). It is likely that Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, was with Jethro on that visit. Moses invited Hobab to remain with the people of God, saying, '*Come with us, and we will treat you well; the LORD has promised good things to Israel*' (29). Hobab at first declined to accept the invitation but Moses was not daunted. He pleaded with Hobab to join them because he had a good knowledge of the wilderness (30–31). Moses promised Hobab that he would share in the blessings of God's people if he would join them (32).

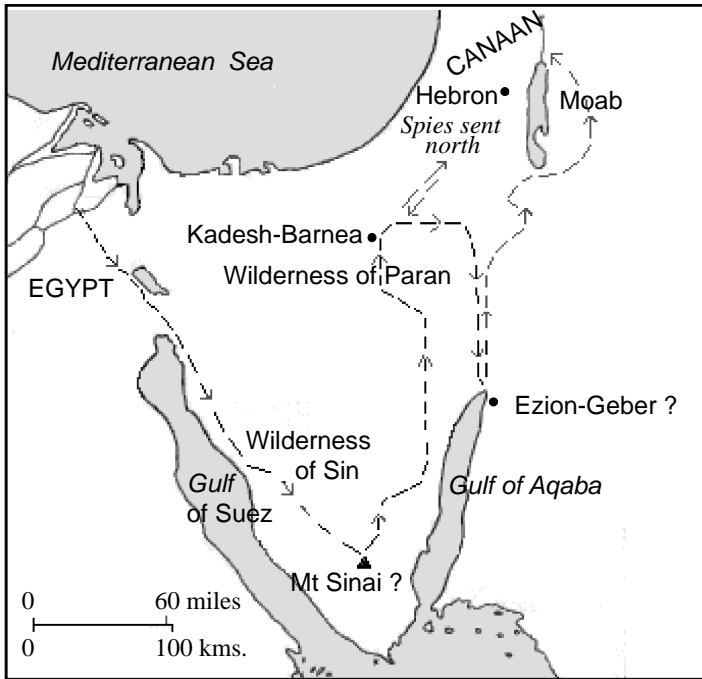
It would appear that Moses' persuasion won the day and that Hobab did stay with Israel. His descendants, the Kenites, were found in the promised land (Judges 1:16; 4:11; the Hebrew translated 'father-in-law' can have a wider meaning). Moses did not take 'No' for an answer. **Let us persevere in our evangelism and pray that the Lord will turn to himself those who presently reject the gospel.** Christians are on a pilgrimage to heaven through this life. We want others to join us and we must treat them well and encourage them. This is the meaning of true fellowship.

**Marching Order (Numbers 10:11–28)**

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Camp of Dan	Camp of Ephraim	Levites with Tabernacle of Meeting	Camp of Reuben	Camp of Judah
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## Israel's forty-year journey from Egypt to Canaan



Numbers chapter 33 gives an account of Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan, listing all the stopping-places.

- Year 1, month 1, day 15 – Israel leaves Rameses in Egypt (Numbers 33:3)
- Year 1, month 2, day 15 – People murmur against Moses and Aaron in Wilderness of Sin. God sends manna to feed them (Exodus 16:1–4)
- Year 1, third month – Israel arrives at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:1)
- Year 2, month 1, day 1 – Tabernacle set up (Exodus 40:17)
- Year 2, month 2, day 20 – Departure from Sinai (Numbers 10:11)
- Year 40, month 5, day 1 – Death of Aaron (Numbers 33:38–39)
- Year 40, month 11, day 1 – Moses addresses Israel in Moab (Deut. 1:3–5)
- Year 40, month 12? – Death of Moses in Moab (Deuteronomy 34:5)

*Now when the people complained, it displeased the LORD*

The Israelites had been richly blessed by God. They had experienced a miraculous deliverance from bondage and had left Egypt loaded with possessions. The Lord had given them proof of his visible presence with them in the pillars of cloud and of fire. Despite all this *the people complained, it displeased the LORD; for the LORD heard it, and his anger was aroused* (1). God burned up some of the murmurers with fire, which was extinguished only after Moses prayed to the Lord (2). He named the place ‘*Taberah*’ which means ‘It burns’ (3)

More complaints followed! *The mixed multitude* among the people craved for meat (4). These people had left Egypt with the Israelites (Exodus 12:38) but their heart was not with God and his servants. Their dissatisfaction soon spread to the Israelites who remembered the good things of Egypt, but forgot the dreadful oppression (4–5). They despised the manna which God had so graciously provided for them (6–9; cp. Exodus 16). *The anger of the LORD was greatly aroused* (10).

Moses poured out his heart to God. He had become so depressed by the burden of leading an ungrateful people, that he wanted to die (10–15). We must not be murmurers, forever complaining (1 Corinthians 10:9–11). If we are moaners, we behave no differently from the people of the world. **The Lord hears us and he is displeased when we complain for such behaviour despises his wise providence.** Murmuring breeds discontent and robs a church of its peace, vitality and blessing. Let us cultivate a contented and thankful heart (Philippians 4:6–7,11; 1 Timothy 6:6–8; Hebrews 13:5).

*Have you no words? ah! think again;  
Words flow apace when you complain,  
And fill your fellow-creature's ear  
With the sad tale of all your care.*

*Were half the breath thus vainly spent  
To heaven in supplication sent,  
Your cheerful song would oftener be,  
Hear what the Lord has done for me!*

(William Cowper)

*Oh, that all the LORD'S people were prophets*

The Lord answered Moses' prayer by providing help for him and promising that the people's craving for meat would be met (13–23). He directed Moses to choose seventy men from the elders of Israel to share the burden of leadership with him. The Lord said that he would put his Spirit upon them to equip them (16–17). The people complained that they were not having meat to eat and God promised that they would have meat in abundance, Moses could hardly believe that the Lord would be able to provide such an abundance of meat for the people (18–22). God asked Moses, '*Has the LORD'S arm been shortened?*' (in other words, 'Has God lost any of his power?') and he added that his word would be fulfilled (23).

Moses placed the seventy men around the tabernacle where God spoke to him from the cloud. As the Holy Spirit came upon them, they prophesied. The Spirit also came upon two of their number, Eldad and Medad, who were not around the tabernacle but in the camp. On hearing of this, Joshua urged Moses to forbid them to prophesy (24–28). Moses told him that his zeal was misplaced and said, '*Oh, that all the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit upon them!*' (29). We should not take verse 29 as a sanction for all and sundry to prophesy today. Beware of those who claim to be prophets today. They have caused havoc in the lives of many. Every Christian has the Holy Spirit who leads us and guides us as we humbly depend upon the Lord (Romans 8:9,14; Galatians 4:6–7). We may not prophesy, but we have the Bible which is *the prophetic word made more sure* (2 Peter 1:19–20).

The Lord sent quails in great abundance and as the people began to feast, he destroyed many of them with *a very great plague*. The place became known as *Kibroth Hattaavah* – 'Graves of Craving' (31–35). Psalm 106, verse 15 reminds us that God *gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul*. **We must not behave like spoiled children. If we do, the Lord may chastise us by giving us what we want, and what we want is not always what is best for us.**

*Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant?*

Moses now faced a greater threat to his leadership, all the more dangerous and hurtful because it came from his own brother and sister. Both of them were in positions of influence, Aaron being the high priest (Exodus 28), and Miriam a prophetess (Exodus 15:20–21). They spoke against Moses because of his wife (1). Commentators are not certain whether or not this refers to Zipporah, who had recently returned to be with Moses (Exodus 18:1–2). If Zipporah had died, Moses may have remarried, but speculation is fruitless as Scripture is silent.

It is obvious that Miriam and Aaron were using Moses' wife as an pretext for their rebellion; they wanted to share in the leadership over the Israelites *and the LORD heard it* (2). Notice that God's Word again points out that the Lord hears our words. How careful we should be with our speech! Moses was the most humble man on earth and God vindicated him (3):

- By showing that Moses was more than a prophet. God speaks to a prophet by vision or dream, but he spoke to Moses *face to face*. Miriam and Aaron should have been afraid to speak against his servant. The Lord asked them, *'Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?'* (6–8).
- By striking Miriam with leprosy (10; God visited Gehazi and King Uzziah with a similar judgment; 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Chronicles 26:16–23). Miriam alone was punished because she may have been the ringleader in the rebellion.

A terrified Aaron confessed their sin and pleaded with Moses to pray for Miriam. The Lord heard Moses' prayer, but commanded that Miriam be shut out of the camp for seven days (11–15). **There is a solemn warning and a challenge in this chapter. Woe betide the man or woman who dares to speak against a faithful servant of God.** The Lord hears and will punish those who oppose his servants. If we are slandered, let us like Moses be ready to pray for those who spitefully use us (Matthew 5:44). 'The more silent we are in our own cause, the more is God engaged to plead it' (Matthew Henry).

*We are well able to overcome*

The Lord directed Moses to send spies into the promised land, a leader being taken from each of the twelve tribes (1–16). They were to do a thorough job and bring back a report on the people, their cities, the fortifications, and the condition of the soil. They were also to bring back some of the fruit of the land (17–20). Why did God want Moses to send the spies into Canaan when he knew exactly what lay ahead of them? We are not told, but a good report from the spies would have encouraged the people to persevere in the face of difficulties.

Ten of the spies were faint-hearted; they were very impressed by the richness of the countryside, but felt intimidated by the large fortified cities and by the descendants of Anak (27–28; the Anakims were giants who were about nine feet or almost three metres in height). Joshua and Caleb, the other two spies, took a positive stance in the face of this defeatism. They were persuaded that what God had promised, he was able to perform. God had promised them that he would give them the land (2; cp. Romans 4:20–21). Caleb said, *‘Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it’* (30).

Though there are difficulties in the Christian life, we must not have a defeatist attitude. Such thinking comes from unbelief and it will sap our strength, rob us of Christian joy and contentment, and keep us from praising God as we ought. *We are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Romans 8:37). Christian, are you being overcome by besetting sin, or by Satan’s wiles and attacks? **Have you lost hope of conquest, or do you look to God to give you victory in your life and witness? Do you really believe the promises of God as you read them in the Bible? *We are well able to overcome.***

*We go in faith, our own great weakness feeling,  
And needing more each day thy grace to know:  
Yet from our hearts a song of triumph pealing;  
We rest on thee, and in thy name we go.*

(Edith G. Cherry)



*The LORD is with us. Do not fear them*

The people were more ready to believe the ten faithless spies than Joshua and Caleb. They cried and wept all night as they wallowed in self-pity. They murmured against Moses and Aaron, but even worse, they reproached the Lord for bringing them out of Egypt, complaining, ‘*Why has the LORD brought us to this land to fall by the sword, that our wives and children should become victims? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?*’ (2–3). They decided to appoint a leader to take them back to Egypt and to bondage (4; Nehemiah 9:17).

What was the problem with the Israelites? They had seen God work many miracles on their behalf in order to lead them out of Egypt. He had also given them wonderful promises to encourage them to go to the promised land. They had what is described in the New Testament as *an evil heart of unbelief* (Hebrews 3:12). When we are faced with problems and difficulties, let us be sure not to blame the Lord, but to see them as a challenge to our faith so that we can prove God and overcome in his strength.

Moses and Aaron were greatly distressed and they fell on their faces before the assembly (to call upon God; 5). Moses sought to reassure the people (Deuteronomy 1:29–31), followed by encouraging words from Joshua and Caleb (6–9). Such was the revolt of the people that they would have stoned Joshua and Caleb, but for the intervention of God (10). Look at the words of Joshua and Caleb to the people: ‘*The LORD is with us. Do not fear them*’ (9). **We should always remember that as we seek to honour God in our lives, we will know his presence with us.** God is with us, at work, at home, at school. We have no need to fear men (Hebrews 13:5–6).

*Fear him, ye saints, and you will then  
Have nothing else to fear;  
Make but his service your delight;  
Your wants shall be his care.*

(Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady)

*He has a different spirit in him and has followed me fully*

The Lord asked Moses how long the people would reject (despise) him and refuse to believe his word even though he had performed great signs among them (11). Seeing signs and wonders does not necessarily strengthen faith. Indeed, the Lord Jesus warns us against seeking signs (Luke 11:29; John 4:48). God told Moses that he would destroy the unbelieving people with pestilence and disinherit them. He would raise up a great and mighty nation from Moses (12).

Moses again prayed for them with persuasion and compassion (11–19; cp. Exodus 32:9–13). What patience and love for his people are found in this great leader! See how he pleaded with God:

- God's honour and glory would be compromised if he destroyed the people. He reminded God that the Egyptians and other nations knew of God's mighty acts and of his presence among the people. Surely they would reproach the Lord if he now destroyed Israel.
- He pleaded with God to forgive the people according to the greatness of his mercy (17–19). Moses remembered that the Lord had proclaimed his name to him at Mount Sinai – a name which showed God to be *merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth*, etc. (Exodus 34:5–7).

The Lord told Moses that he had heard his prayer and had pardoned the people, but those who had rebelled would not see the promised land (20–23). Joshua and Caleb were so different from the unbelieving spies. God said of Caleb, '*He has a different spirit in him and has followed me fully*' (24). He was not a fair-weather believer, but trusted God in the most difficult circumstances and was prepared to be different from the crowd. **Let us be like Caleb, following God in faith and with whole-hearted obedience to his Word.**

*Faith, mighty faith the promise sees,  
And looks to God alone.  
Laughs at impossibilities  
And cries, it shall be done.*

*But they presumed to go up to the mountaintop*

The Lord told Moses and Aaron to tell the people of the punishment that he would visit upon them for their murmuring (26–35). There is a solemn irony in the words of the Lord: ‘*Just as you have spoken in my hearing, so I will do to you.*’ (28). The people had said, ‘*If only we had died in this wilderness*’ (2) and God heard their words and gave them their request. They did die in the wilderness during the forty years of Israel’s wandering (a year for each day that the spies were away on their mission, 32–35). Everyone from twenty years and above who had been numbered in the census would fall in the wilderness (29). God said that he would bring their children, who they claimed would be victims, into the promised land (31). The ten unbelieving spies, whose evil report concerning the land led to the rebellion, died by plague before the Lord (36–37).

The people mourned and confessed their sin, but their repentance was not genuine (39–40). They decided to leave immediately for the promised land, but God had not so directed them. He had already decreed that they would not enter Canaan and the cloud did not lead them. Moses warned them that God was not with them but they ignored his pleas and *they presumed to go up to the mountaintop* (41–44). They were still rebels at heart and had not truly repented! Presumption comes from a low view of God who is sovereign and holy.

There are men who have dishonoured the name of God by serious moral lapses while in positions of trust and leadership in the church. Now we know that God is gracious and does forgive the repentant sinner, but some absolve themselves from their wicked behaviour and continue to hold prominent positions in the church. One would have thought that they would want to crawl away and hide rather than to parade themselves. **Presumption takes God for granted and we must never do that – it is to despise his Word** (cp. 15:30–31).

*Just as you do, so shall he do*

Our reading gives rules for various offerings made to God. Offerings made from grateful and worshipping people are ‘*a sweet aroma to the LORD*’ (3,7,10,13,14). What a difference from murmuring which brings the displeasure of God! The Lord would abundantly provide for them and their offerings were to continue throughout their generations (18–21). We are no longer required to bring animal sacrifices, grain or drink offerings to God, but there are offerings which we are expected to bring to him. We must be generous givers to the work of the Lord who is pleased with our sacrifices of praise and of our possessions for his work (2 Corinthians 9:7; Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 13:15–16). Is your life a sweet smelling aroma to God?

The foreigner who lived among the Israelites was permitted to bring an offering to God but the same conditions applied to him as to the Israelite: ‘*Just as you do, so shall he do*’ (14–16). **We must always make the outsider welcome into our services and church fellowship, but we must never lower our standards and allow worldly practices into the church in order to be ‘user-friendly’.** *Just as you do, so shall he do.* We must regulate our church life by God’s Word if we are to enjoy his blessing upon us.

We have seen that those above twenty years of age at the time of the rebellion would not be allowed into Canaan (14:29). There is now a message for the younger generation; they would come into the land that God was giving to them (2) to which he would bring them (18). These words would have been a great encouragement to them. They would surely come into the land, though their unbelieving rebellious parents would be kept out. God would certainly keep his promises to Israel.

*Let us with a gladsome mind  
Praise the Lord for he is kind;  
For his mercies shall endure,  
Ever faithful, ever sure*

(John Milton)

*If you sin unintentionally*

Our reading today deals with unintentional sin (sins of ‘ignorance’, AV). These verses are a summary of those found in Leviticus chapter 4. The Lord gave Israel instructions to deal with situations when they failed to observe his commandments ‘*if you sin unintentionally*’ (22). God does not overlook our sin though we may be unaware of what we have done. We are sinful by nature and because of this, we sin. We may not intend to sin, but in our ignorance of God’s law and in our human frailty we do sin. This does not mean that God excuses us. **Ignorance is not the same thing as innocence. We are still guilty before God whatever our sin (Romans 3:19).**

Sin requires atonement even when it is committed in ignorance. The Israelites still had to bring a sin offering to make atonement for sin (28). Where the whole congregation sinned unintentionally, other offerings were to be brought in addition to the sin offering (24–25). The same rule applied also to the foreigner who lived among the Israelites (29).

We are often unaware of our own sin and when the law of God reveals our sin (Romans 3:20; 7:7–8) and the Holy Spirit convicts us of it, we should be most thankful to God for clearing away our ignorance in the matter. We can then confess our sin and seek God’s forgiveness. We should frequently use the words of Psalm 139:23–24 when we pray:– ‘*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*’

The *god of this age* (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers (2 Corinthians 4:4). Their understanding is darkened and they are ignorant of spiritual things (Ephesians 4:18). Saul of Tarsus (Paul) persecuted the church because of his ignorance (1 Timothy 1:13–15) but God had mercy on him and wonderfully saved him. The Lord is able and willing to forgive the vilest sinner. **Let us pray that God who delights in mercy (Micah 7:18) will save man who oppose the gospel because they do not realise what they are doing.**

*Because he has despised the word of the LORD*

The Hebrew word translated *presumptuously* (30) is quite different from the word translated *presumed* in chapter 14, verse 44. Here in verse 30 it means to be ‘high-handedly’ or ‘wilfully’. High-handed sin is a calculated act of defiance against God. We cannot plead ignorance when God’s word is understood. The man who sins presumptuously does so *because he has despised the word of the LORD* and should be cut off from the people of God (31)

The man who violated the Sabbath (32–36) sinned in a high-handed manner. He chose to rebel against God even though his laws concerning the Sabbath had been repeatedly emphasised at Sinai. The death penalty for Sabbath-breaking may appear to be harsh, but rebellion had to be punished for it was already threatening the survival of Israel (eg. 14:3,11–12). Such punishment does not hold for today, but to despise the Lord’s Day is to show contempt for God and his Word.

The person who persists in repeated rebellion against God and in rejecting the claims of Christ is in very serious danger of blaspheming the Holy Spirit (cp. Mark 3:29). In such a case the Holy Spirit no longer strives with the person concerned (cp. Genesis 6:3). God gives up that person to his own sin and his heart becomes hardened so that he will never repent (Romans 1:24,26,28; Exodus 8:19; 10:27–29). There can be no forgiveness without repentance. The person who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit is not usually troubled about his sin.

The Israelites were commanded to put special tassels on the corners of their garments to remind them of God’s commandments and to warn them not to follow the sinful inclinations of their hearts and eyes (37–41).

*Ah! give me Lord, the tender heart  
That trembles at the approach of sin  
A godly fear of sin impart,  
Implant and root it deep within  
That I may dread thy gracious power  
And never dare to offend thee more.* (Charles Wesley)

*You take too much upon yourselves*

The most serious rebellion against the leadership of Moses and Aaron is recorded in this chapter. Two groups of people were involved, the first being Levites led by Korah, and the other being Reubenites led by Dathan and Abiram. Another Reubenite, On, is mentioned in verse 1, but he may have repented for he is not mentioned again. It may be significant that Korah (of the Kohathites) was camped in close proximity to the Reubenites to the south of the tabernacle (see diagram on page 6). Two hundred and fifty leaders of Israel joined the rebels (2).

Korah's father was the brother of Amram, the father of Moses (Exodus 6:16–21). The Kohathites (including Korah) had been appointed to care for the ark of the covenant and other holy things when the camp moved (4:1–20). Moses and Aaron were also Kohathites (1 Chronicles 6:1–3) and it would appear that Korah was jealous of the prominence of Moses as leader and of Aaron and his sons as priests. They were not content to serve God in the work appointed for them (8–11). The rebels reproached Moses and Aaron, saying, '*You take too much upon yourselves*' and claimed that too were *holy* (separated'; 3) .

Moses fell on his face (before the Lord) when he heard the rebels and Moses told Korah to hear him and pointed out that it was Korah and his company who had taken too much upon themselves (7). They counted their high privilege of service within the tabernacle as a small thing and they wanted to be priests (9–10). Moses set a test. (8). Korah and his company, and Aaron were to burn incense the next day and the Lord would show who was *holy* (separated' for the priestly work).

What lessons are there here for us? Many churches have been wrecked by ambitious people wanting pre-eminence (cp. 3 John 9). A desire to serve the Lord is good and proper, but we must watch our motives. The godly man is not self-seeking. The responsibilities of eldership or any Christian leadership are awesome and are not to be taken lightly. **Let us beware of a jealous and rebellious spirit lest we find ourselves fighting against God** (11).

*Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins*

Dathan and Abiram defied the summons of Moses calling them to go up to the tabernacle. Standing their ground, they insulted Moses and accused him of leading them out of the abundance of Egypt (conveniently forgetting the bondage and oppression suffered there), to kill them in the wilderness (12–14). They failed to recognise that it was the Lord who had decreed that they would die in the wilderness because of an earlier rebellion (14:32–35).

Moses had told Korah and the rebels to take censers and appear at the door of the tabernacle the next day to burn incense before the Lord (5–7). Korah and his followers accepted the challenge of Moses, such was their presumption (16–19). When the rebels assembled at the door of the tabernacle, *the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation* (19). The Lord would have destroyed the people but for the intercession of Moses and Aaron (20–22). How patient and compassionate they were with an ungrateful and rebellious people!

The Lord instructed Moses to tell the congregation to move right away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Moses warned the people, *‘Touch nothing of theirs, lest you be consumed in all their sins’* (26). Moses told the people that if the rebels died natural deaths, it would prove that the Lord had not sent him. If God did a new thing, however, and the earth swallowed them up, they would know that these men had rejected the Lord (28–30).

Korah, Dathan and Abiram were defiant to the end and met a terrible death as the earth opened up to swallow them. The other rebels were destroyed by fire from God as they offered their incense. Their censers were to be hammered into plates to cover the altar as a sign to the children of Israel (31–40). Let us beware of being tainted by discontent and rebellion. **The New Testament refers to the rebellion of Korah (Jude 11) and warns us against rejecting authority and of speaking evil against those whom God has appointed to lead us.** God will vindicate his servants just as he vindicated Moses and Aaron.



*The glory of the LORD appeared*

The people were so hardened in rebellion that they were not silenced by God’s awesome judgment on the rebels, but grumbled against Moses and Aaron, accusing them of killing *the people of the LORD*. They declared the guilty to be innocent and the innocent guilty. Moreover, it was the Lord (Yahweh) who had killed the rebels. Hardness of heart is a terrible condition. God responded to this further rebellion in an awesome manner. *Now it happened, when the congregation had gathered against Moses and Aaron, that ... the glory of the LORD appeared* (42).

The Lord told Moses that he and Aaron must get away from among the congregation of Israel whom he would then destroy. They both fell on their faces before the Lord as a sign of submission to God and to plead for mercy. Moses told his brother to take a censer and put fire in it from the altar and to put incense in it and to hurry to the congregation to make atonement for them because the plague God sent on the people had already begun (45–46). Aaron stood between the dead and the living and the plague was stopped, but not before 14,700 people had perished. If Aaron had not made atonement for the people, the judgment would have been more severe (47–50).

John Currid observes, ‘Grumbling against God and against those whom he has put in authority over us is a devastating sin. It is cancerous and, thus caught easily by others. We see here in our text that the entire congregation was grumbling against Moses and Aaron, and, ultimately, against God. And we ought to understand that grumbling is often done by those who have the least reasons to murmur’ (COMMENTARY ON NUMBERS, page 247).

***Do all things without murmuring and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world*** (Philippians 2:14–15).

*A sign against the rebels*

God now gave further proof to the people that he had chosen Aaron and his sons to the priesthood and not others such as Korah and his followers. Each tribe was to provide a rod with the name of their leader inscribed upon it. Aaron's name was placed on the rod for the tribe of Levi. Each of the rods was to be brought to the tabernacle and placed before the ark of the covenant (described here as 'the Testimony'). God said that he would cause the rod of the man he chose to blossom. *Thus I will rid myself of the murmurings of the children of Israel* (1–5).

The rods were placed before the Lord in the tabernacle and the next day Moses found that *the rod of Aaron ... had sprouted and put forth buds, had produced blossoms and yielded ripe almonds* (7–8). Moses brought out the rods from the tabernacle to show the people and to return them to their owners (9). Each tribal leader took his own rod and could see that it was no different. Aaron's rod was to be kept in the tabernacle as *a sign against the rebels*, as a warning against murmuring (10). It was later kept in the ark of the covenant (cp. Hebrews 9:4) and was lost with the ark when the Babylonian army destroyed Jerusalem in 586 BC.

The Israelites were seized with fear, expecting to perish and to die for their sin of siding with the rebels. They recognised that only the Levites should serve in the tabernacle (12–13). The apostle Paul warns us from the experience of the Israelites on their journey to Canaan: *Nor let us ... murmur, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed by the destroyer* (1 Corinthians 10:9–10). We must guard ourselves against nurturing a complaining and rebellious spirit. **When we grumble, we do not worship God, praise is stifled and the Lord's work is greatly hindered.** If you are a grumbler, please ponder carefully the warnings in this chapter and chapter 16. If you feel that your gifts are not being recognised in your church, commit your way to the Lord. If you are unhappy with certain individuals in your church, do not go around grumbling about them, but pray for them. This is the way to blessing.

*You shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary*

God gave directions to Aaron (1,8,20) and to Moses (25) concerning the responsibilities (1–7) and the support (8–32) of the priests and Levites. The priests were to *bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary* and that of the priesthood (1). They had a duty to guard the purity of the worship of God's people and to keep unauthorised people from entering the priesthood or serving in the tabernacle. They bore the guilt of any neglect of these duties. Aaron had *stood between the dead and the living; so that the plague was stopped* (16:48). Aaron and his descendants undertook their priestly duties and sacrifices *that there be no more wrath on the children of Israel* (5).

Scripture does not warrant a priesthood to mediate to God and to offer animal sacrifices for the people under the new covenant. The Lord Jesus Christ is our great high priest whose work at Calvary has superseded the work of the Old Testament priests (Hebrews 4:14; 7:20 to 8:6; 9:28). Jesus is the only *Mediator between God and men* (1 Timothy 2:5).

Korah had coveted the priesthood for its privileges, but there were also awesome responsibilities with the office. It is possible to covet a position in the church in order to obtain prestige and to gratify personal ambition, but fail to see that there are heavy burdens to bear and an account to give to God (cp. Hebrews 13:17). Gospel ministry is hard work and it must not be entered into lightly. The qualifications for elders are given in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and they must be applied to all those men who would be elders in the church.

The Levites were given to Aaron as a gift from the Lord to serve in the tabernacle. Their work was essential for the functioning of the tabernacle. The priesthood was also *a gift for service* (6–7). Pastors are not priests, but they are God's gift to the church (Ephesians 4:11). **Do we see that any task given to us is a gift from God? Let us then pray for pastors and church leaders and be zealous in whatever work the Lord has given to us.**