

# Desert Wanderings: The Nurture and Discipline of God

**Read:** *The Book of Numbers*, particularly Chapters 1-2, 10-17, 20, and 22-24.

**Corresponds to:** *The Bible Timeline: The Story of Salvation Workbook* pp 57-63.

With the spray of the Red Sea still upon them and in awe of the mighty deliverance by God on their behalf, the newly-emancipated Jewish slaves form a six-mile long caravan through the desert, headed for the Promised Land at last. The *Book of Numbers* picks up the exciting saga and ends with them poised on the eastern edge of the Jordan River, ready to invade and take possession of Canaan.

But from the first chapter of *Numbers* to the last is found much heartache, disobedience, forty years and the passage of an entire generation—and all marked by the discipline and nurture of God towards a stubborn, complaining people who repeatedly and brazenly trespass His commands. Law and grace are always inextricably woven together. God gives His Law for a purpose: to transform an unholy people into a holy one, whose hearts were designed to beat in sync with the heartbeat of love and mercy of God the Father. Will God be able to create new hearts? How will He do it? Will His people cooperate—or not? The story is far from over!

Let's unpack this arduous desert journey for life application and for revelation of the character of God and His plans for us, His children--- because their journey in so many ways mimics our own.

*From Numbers we shall discover:*

\*God is a mystery.

\*Nothing is to take the place of God. Idols come in many forms, but God wants to be at the center of our affection and thought.

\*Disobedience to God's clear commands has consequences. God is nevertheless a good Father, who desires the best for His children and will discipline them to the degree needed.

\*When we become overwhelmed by fear or fall into negative ingratitude in spite of God's provision and undeserved grace, we will not experience God's full blessing.

\*God will keep His promises, even to unfaithful children. His love remains steadfast throughout the generations, for God's name is Mercy and Love. Nevertheless, His Justice is to be taken into consideration for a balanced perspective, for He is holy, and we are not. He is God, and no matter how much we may act like we are, we are not! The "fear of the Lord" and respect, awe, wonder, and even trembling are appropriate responses to any encounter with the Almighty God, the Father of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob--and you.

\*God wants to have an intimate relationship with us, but the choice is ours. Let's not be apathetic or reject His love.

## **Numbers 1-2**

*The Book of Numbers* derives its name from the two censuses taken (in Chapter 1 and 26) of all men age twenty plus, fit for military action (1:46). The number of qualified men remained remarkably consistent from the first to second generations, in spite of the hardships

of desert migration. These refugees would need to be disciplined to become an efficient, invading force to be reckoned with by the pagan residents of Canaan.

After the disastrous Golden Calf incident, God keeps the Jews at Sinai for a year for intense instruction about the priesthood, liturgy, tabernacle, and community organization. The *Book of Leviticus* is full of these laws, for at this time, there was no “remedy for sin. Israel’s sin cut her off from her all-holy Lord. With Christ’s atoning sacrifice not yet in sight, many of Leviticus’ laws provide stopgap measures so that Israel can still dwell in God’s presence. These instructions are given to Moses on Mt Sinai, after the Golden Calf incident (Ex 32) but before the departure into the wilderness (Num 10:11-12) in order to teach Israel the principle of holiness. Before the coming of Christ, who alone can conquer sin, the toxic nature of sin required drastic action to contain it.”<sup>1</sup>

God is a God of order. How is this evident in Numbers 1:53 and 2:2-34? \_\_\_\_\_

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In total, how many eligible men fit for military service were counted? (1:46) \_\_\_\_\_

What is the role of the Levites in Numbers 1:50? Why are their males not counted in the census? \_\_\_\_\_

It is not simply symbolic that the Levites tend the Tabernacle in the center of camp, protected on all sides by the tribes, and that the tribe of Judah will always lead the march when they break camp to move onward to the next destination. Worship is always to be at the center of community life, and Judah will be a tribe with a special future destiny.

### **Numbers 3:2-4**

List the four sons of Aaron (3:2): \_\_\_\_\_

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What happened to the two eldest? (3:4) \_\_\_\_\_

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*The lesson learned:* A holy God demands obedient, holy priests!

### **Numbers 3:9-12**

What status does the tribe of Levi gain that is new, unique, and awe-inspiring? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Numbers 3:17**

The three original sons of Levi were: (1) \_\_\_\_\_; (2) \_\_\_\_\_; and (3) \_\_\_\_\_. Each was given specific duties, namely: Gershonites in 4:22-26; Kahathites in 4:4-5; and the Merarites in 4:29-32. This nomadic people can now mobilize quickly. Stream-lined, everyone knew their task and were learning to execute it efficiently.

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<sup>1</sup> Gray, Tim and Jeff Cavins. *Walking with God: A Journey Through the Bible*. © 2010 by Ascension Press, West Chester, PA, pp 91-93.

It is important to note that it was the Lord who made the assignments “for service and for transport”—of the Tabernacle, etc. (Num 4:48). “The duties of the three clans of the Levites were specific. No shift-sharing and no departmental staff transfers were allowed. The wrappers were to wrap; the carriers were to carry; the carters were to cart. Each man clearly understood not only what he *should* do but also what he *should not* do. Note that this demarcation of duty was not based on innate ability but on God’s prescription. A broad-shouldered man from another tribe couldn’t just show up and say, ‘I’m strong; I’ll carry!’ How often do we give innate ability too much consideration when we assign duties? Clearly, we want people to use their gifts and talents for God’s glory! But do we also take into account God’s prescriptions?”<sup>2</sup>

What are your Holy Spirit-given gifts? Are you using them for “the greater glory of God”? What is God calling you to do that might surprise others (and possibly yourself)? Will you be willing to step out and do it, in obedience to God? In spite of weakness, St Paul had learned that “God’s grace is sufficient” (2 Corinthians 12:9). Have you? \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Numbers 4

*New Testament Connection:*

A Levite was eligible for service between 30-50 years of age, with 30 the minimum age of priestly service for centuries thereafter (Num 4:3). What age was Jesus when He began His public ministry (Luke 3:23)? Who is our High Priest (Hebrews 9:11-26)? \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Numbers 5

This chapter begins to define what to do in cases of defilement, adultery, and stealing neighbor’s goods. These are concrete examples of God beginning to establish order, based on justice in the community. Sin against one’s fellow man was regarded as sin against God. The basic principles are laid out in Numbers 5:7:

- (1) Confess your sin;
- (2) pay back in full what was stolen;
- (3) generous restitution is endorsed. (Zaccheus later exemplified this in Luke 19).

Who were expelled from the camp and why? (5:2-4) \_\_\_\_\_

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#### Numbers 6

Any man or woman could make a specific, temporary consecration to the Lord, called a Nazarite vow, for ALL were called to holiness. The laws concerning this vow included:

- \* (6:3): abstain from strong \_\_\_\_\_;
  - \* 6:4): abstain from produce from the \_\_\_\_\_;
  - \* (6:5) no \_\_\_\_\_ will touch the head;
  - \* (6:6) no contact with the \_\_\_\_\_ .
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<sup>2</sup> Swindoll, Charles. *Insight’s Bible Application Guide: Genesis-Deuteronomy*. © 2012 by Insight for Living Publishing House, Plano, TX, pp 92.

It is thought that many Biblical figures took the Nazarite vow, such as Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11), Samson (Judges 13:3-5), John the Baptist, and Paul (Acts 21:23-24). This “extra-ordinary” devotion to God is not carried out incognito but was a public witness.

How often/ how do you offer yourself as a “living sacrifice”? Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Psalm 51:17 \_\_\_\_\_

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What famous priestly blessing is found in Numbers 6:24-26? \_\_\_\_\_

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*Note:* This is the oldest known Israelite prayer (pre-dating 600 BC). As a priestly prayer, it could only be prayed by Aaron and his sons.

What does God encourage the Israelites to do, in 6:27? What will be the result? \_\_\_\_\_

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*New Testament Connection:*

How does praying “in the name of Jesus” empower your prayer and embolden your spirit? \_\_\_\_\_

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“Luke 10:17 states: ‘The seventy-two returned with joy and said, ‘Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.’ As Christians we are called to spiritual warfare, but we cast spirits out not by our own authority, but by the power of the name of Jesus Christ. The ‘name’ really means the ‘Person’ of Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

“In Hebrew thought, the name of a person stood for the entire person: so to pray in the name of Jesus meant to pray as Jesus Himself would pray. To pray in the name of Jesus means that we must put on ‘that mind which was in Christ Jesus,’ that we see people and situations as Jesus does, and then speak with the power and authority of Jesus. To see people and situations in this way is a gift.”<sup>4</sup>

Pondering the need of others or yourself for healing, deliverance from evil, etc., write a prayer that begins with the powerful words “In the name of Jesus,” remembering that these are not magical words, but represent your dependence on the power of Jesus to move in the circumstances of your life, and that your authority to call upon His name is derived from your obedient relationship to Him.

(Your Prayer): *In the name of Jesus,* \_\_\_\_\_

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## Numbers 7

This chapter references back a month earlier, when the tabernacle was completed and dedicated. Each tribal leader offered what was necessary to outfit the new tabernacle and

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<sup>3</sup> MacNutt, Francis. *Deliverance from Evil Spirits: A Practical Manual*. © 2009 by Chosen Books, Grand Rapids, MI, pp 175.

<sup>4</sup> MacNutt, Francis. *Healing*. © 1999 by Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, pp. 99.

transport it in the desert. Six wagons and twelve oxen were given to transport various furnishings, but why were no wagons/oxen distributed to the Kohathites, according to 7:9?

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Do you expect to be given every convenience when given a task by God? \_\_\_\_\_

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Are you willing to do things God's way, even though you may wonder why He does not provide certain amenities to make the task easier to carry out? \_\_\_\_\_

### Numbers 8

The Levites were set apart (consecrated) for active ministry to God and as such they became a living sacrifice. Rather than God blessing an individual or Patriarch, He now moves to bless His people through liturgy and worship. Because of their serious sin, they need to first rededicate themselves to God through the Passover celebration. "Once the Passover is celebrated, the glory of the Lord descends on the tabernacle; worship lets loose God's power and presence; Israel finally is ready to leave Sinai. Led by God's Spirit, Israel breaks camp and is homeward bound at last."<sup>5</sup>

### Numbers 9

What did the cloud by day and fire by night over the Dwelling represent (Num 9:15-23)?

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How did the cloud direct the Israelites to break camp and move or settle in a spot? Did the cloud move on a regular schedule? How was this training the people to follow the Lord's direction? \_\_\_\_\_

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### Numbers 10

"Imagine the thrill in the camp! The cloud over the newly built tabernacle lifted. Silver trumpets signaled the muster. Banners raised. The tribes marched out. The people had camped at Sinai almost a year, but God was on the move again, and His people were following Him! The Law had been given, the tabernacle crafted, and the people organized and numbered. Now, the great journey to Canaan had begun. How far? Which direction? Where would they camp? All was in God's hands...supposedly. Moses had taken care to persuade his brother-in-law Hobab to accompany them, anxious for his help as a scout. Hobab was a Midianite; he knew the region and the locals. Were Moses' actions a hint that he was unsure of God's care for His people? How easily we give our concerns to God for His care only to snatch them back and try to work things out for ourselves!"<sup>6</sup>

When have you acted like Moses, one moment confidently surrendering all into God's hands, and the next moment trying to solve the insurmountable task at hand by your own means? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>5</sup> Gray, Tim. *Walking with God*. pp 95.

<sup>6</sup> Swindoll, Charles. *Insight's Bible Application Guide: Genesis-Deuteronomy*. © 2012 by Insight for Living Publishing House, Plano, TX, pp 96-97.

Jesus encourages each of us: "Surrender to Me does not mean to fret, to be upset, or to lose hope, nor does it mean offering to me a worried prayer asking me to follow you and change your worry into prayer. It is against this surrender, deeply against it, to worry, to be nervous, and to desire to think about the consequences of anything. It is like the confusion that children feel when they ask their mother to see to their needs, and then try to take care of those needs for themselves so that their childlike efforts get in their mother's way. Surrender means to placidly close the eyes of the soul, to turn away from thoughts of tribulation, and to put yourself in my care.... O Jesus, I surrender myself to you; take care of everything."<sup>7</sup>

How did the silver trumpets (Num 1-2, 9-10) serve as the communication means to signal movement, war, and days of religious celebration? \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Numbers 11**

The journey has barely begun, and the complaints begin in Numbers 11:1-6. In fact, it gets so bad that Moses starts complaining to God about the people complaining!

How seriously did God take their complaints? How did He respond? (11:1-3) Why did God take such drastic action? Look ahead to Numbers 11:20. \_\_\_\_\_

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This gives a hint that teaching these people to trust God, in spite of all that He had provided and done for them, was not going to be easy!

Who influenced the Israelites to complain about the lack of meat, according to 11:4? When have others made you discontent? \_\_\_\_\_

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*Life Application:* It is interesting that the word "greedy" is used in 11:4. If we begin to think that what God has provided is not enough, then nothing will be enough!

Was the manna so distasteful to deserve such complaints, according to its description in 11:7-9? \_\_\_\_\_

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The people's complaints drove Moses to despair. What honest admission does he make to God? Are you honest when you cry out to God about your limitations? \_\_\_\_\_

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God will move to reinforce Moses with helpmates in Numbers 11:24-30. Note that He answers Moses quickly, even before He sends the quail as meat for the people. The Lord is attentive to the cries of His faithful servants.

### **Numbers 11:17-29**

What power enabled Moses to lead the people? How was this power shared with the seventy elders? \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>7</sup> Day 2 of the *Novena of Surrender to the Will of God* by Father Don Dolindo Ruotolo (1882-1970).

“Whenever the divine favor chooses someone to receive a special grace, or to accept a lofty vocation, God adorns the person chosen with all the gifts of the Spirit needed to fulfill the task at hand” - St Bernardine of Siena.

What work of God can you carry out *only* if you are filled by the Holy Spirit? How often do you ask for a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit? Do you become jealous of others who have been called by God to tasks that may overlap with yours? How did Moses correct Joshua (Nums 11:25-29)? \_\_\_\_\_

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In what ways does this mirror Jesus’ instruction of His disgruntled disciples in Mark 9:38-41? \_\_\_\_\_

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How much of a problem is jealousy in your daily interactions with others? \_\_\_\_\_

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*Historical Note:* The establishment of the 70 Elders is the basis for the Senate of 70 known as the Sanhedrin, who eventually tried and condemned Jesus. If only all religious leaders were filled and directed by the Holy Spirit, as Moses declared!

### **Numbers 11:31-34**

God answered their desire for meat in what way? Did Moses have confidence that God could provide meat to such a large number of people? \_\_\_\_\_

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How did the Lord answer Moses, whom He was training as well in the School of Trust? (11:23)

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For what need or want are you wavering in confidence that God can meet? Note it here: \_\_\_\_\_

Now write out again God’s answer to Moses, but this time direct it to your own petition: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Natural phenomena:* To this day, quail migration patterns occur from the interior of Africa, northeasterly. In the Biblical account, though, this pattern was altered so that the wind evidently blew from the southeast (very unusual), which would have driven them northwest across the Sinai.

Each gathered 10 homers (about 60 bushels) of quail and then started to gorge themselves on it. What happened next (Num 11:33-34)? Why would the place be called “Graves of craving,” the literal meaning of Kibroth Hattaavah? \_\_\_\_\_

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Note that their sin (unbridled appetite and a rejection of God’s provision) will later be referenced by Paul in Philippians 3:9.

### **Numbers 12**

Sibling rivalry. It surfaces in the early pages of Genesis and results in the murder of Abel. Now Miriam and Aaron question the authority of their younger brother. What two complaints do they raise in Numbers 12:1-2? \_\_\_\_\_

Miriam's name is listed first, implying that she was the primary instigator of this rebellion with respect to Aaron. When have you coveted another's position, privilege, or rank? How has envy caused you to act irrationally? \_\_\_\_\_

It is not coincidental that this challenge occurred after (Moses' wife) Zipporah's father advised Moses to select 70 elders to help him. Did Miriam perhaps feel threatened, as she and Aaron no longer would enjoy exclusive leadership roles in this new administrative set-up?

God takes what swift action to make it clear to all that Moses' is His choice (12:9-15)? \_\_\_\_\_

Why, one might ask, does God take such dramatic action? Rebellion against God's covenant leader is tantamount to rebellion against God. Also, the entire incident is indicative that rebellion has now contaminated not just the people, but also infiltrated the highest ranks of leadership. This is indeed a national crisis.

*Life Application from Miriam's Experience:* "Trust God in where He has placed you and in where He has not placed you. If we nurse grievances and do not deal with them, they will end up being expressed in some other way (Matthew 12:34). Wrong attitudes can make you overly critical of another person. We must trust God with our position in life.... God knows who you are. Trust Him to use you when He chooses, where He chooses, and in the way He chooses."<sup>8</sup>

### **Numbers 12:8**

Moses enjoyed a unique relationship with God, whereby God spoke to him directly to relay the Ten Commandments and innumerable other times. At times this even transfigured Moses' countenance, causing his face to shine so brilliantly that he had to be covered (Ex 34:35)! Henri Nouwen wrote: "My deepest vocation is to be a witness to the glimpses of God I have been allowed to catch."<sup>9</sup>

What "glimpses of God" form the core of your testimony of His glory? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Numbers 13**

Now poised to enter the Promised Land in the desert of Paran, Moses sends twelve Scouts to assess the land and people. How did Caleb and Joshua's report differ from the other ten? How did their confidence in God differ from their peers? \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>8</sup> Barber, Wayne. *Following God: Learning Life Principles from the Women of the Bible: Book One*. ©2004 by AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, pp 23-34, 118.

<sup>9</sup> Bookmark produced by National Pastoral Life Center of NY, NY. [www.nplc.org](http://www.nplc.org).



When you view obstacles, do you call yourself a “grasshopper” in the face of giants? (13:33). How does confidence in God make you fearless—or lack of confidence in God make you fearful? \_\_\_\_\_

*Interesting note:* Fear distorts reality. The ten negative spies report that the inhabitants of Hebron are veritable giants. However, decades later, Caleb (the representative scout from the tribe of Judah) will conquer the city of Hebron without any reference to giants.

## Numbers 14

Discouraged by the majority report, the people threaten to revolt against Moses and to stone Caleb and Joshua when the two pleaded: “Do not rebel against the Lord!... The Lord is with us. Therefore, do not be afraid of them!” (14:9).

What ‘Plan B’ does God propose in Numbers 14:11-12? \_\_\_\_\_

Moses shows his increasing maturity by interceding again on behalf of the people. God then gives what sentence on this disgruntled generation? Who alone will see the Promised Land? (14:23-24; 30; 34-35) \_\_\_\_\_

Compared to others, do you “have a different spirit and follow (the Lord) unreservedly”? How might this make your life presently more challenging? What might be your future reward for loyalty and faithfulness? \_\_\_\_\_

What happened to the ten scouts that undermined the people’s morale (14:36-45)? \_\_\_\_\_

Why is this debate on whether to invade the Promised Land such a monumental moment in Israel’s history? Note the stark contrast between the despairing, weeping people and calm, confident Joshua and Caleb, the only two showing any measure of faith that God will enable them to do what He has called them to do. “To return to Egypt is to repudiate the covenant at Sinai and all God had done for them. This rejection of the land is a rejection of God, and it is as grievous a sin as the apostasy of the golden calf. .... The weeping that marks the people’s despair illustrates the **vice of acedia, or sloth**, which is *the condition of heart that shrinks back from difficulties and arduous efforts and is content to wallow in sorrow rather than suffer while trying to succeed*. God calls Israel to great things, but slavery in Egypt appears easier to them than the work of obtaining the good that God has in store. This condition of the heart is one that brings a progressive sense of depression and is marked by a constant sense of sadness. Acedia, in other words, is the heart disease that often sets in when we give up faith and the pursuit of greatness to which God calls us.”<sup>10</sup> St Thomas Aquinas defined sloth as “a sadness arising from the fact that the good is difficult.”

When have you experienced acedia or sloth? \_\_\_\_\_

“The important word in the struggle against sloth is ‘FINISHED.’ The world judges us by results; Our Lord judges by the way we fulfill and finish our appointed tasks.... Whenever

<sup>10</sup> Gray. *Walking with God*. pp 100-101.

man attempts to do what He knows to be the Master's will, a power will be given him equal to the duty"- Archbishop Fulton Sheen.

The opposite of sloth is magnanimity, which means 'great souled.' This virtue gives us the confidence we can do all things in Him who strengthen us (Philippians 4:13), or, as Caleb and Joshua said so simply: "The Lord is with us. Why be afraid?"

What action do the chastised people then take in 14:39-44? Note that they do this without Moses or the Ark, tantamount to God's presence. \_\_\_\_\_

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Where do you "go" where God has not led, expecting His hand of blessing? Was their disobedience met by a successful invasion of the hill country of the Amalekites and Canaanites?

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How many times have the people rebelled against Him, according to God, in 14:22? \_\_\_\_\_

### Summary:

#### **"The Ten Times Israel 'Tests' the Lord in Exodus and Numbers**

1. Exodus 5:15-6:9 The people of Israel reject Moses and his message when his initial efforts backfire.
2. Exodus 14:10-12 Israel complains, loses faith, and wants to give up on the shores of the Red Sea.
3. Exodus 15:22-25 Israel 'murmurs' against Moses because the water is bitter at Marah.
4. Exodus 16:1-36 Israel 'murmurs' because of hunger; God provides manna, but the people ignore Moses' word about keeping it overnight (16:20) or gathering on the Sabbath (16:27).
5. Exodus 17:1-19 Israel 'murmurs' and 'tests' the Lord at Massah; God provides water from the rock.
6. Exodus 32:1-35 The Golden Calf incident.
7. Numbers 11:1-3 Complaints against God and fire--plague at Taberah.
8. Numbers 11:4-35 The demand for meat, the provision of quail, and an ensuing plague.
9. Numbers 12:1-16 Miriam and Aaron try to rally the people against Moses, claiming equal prophetic gifts.
10. Numbers 14:1-38 General revolt and mutiny after the bad report of the spies: 'none of the men who have ...put me to the proof these ten times..... shall see the land' (Numbers 14:22-23).

The significance of God's response to these ten rebellions should not go unnoted. First and foremost, it demonstrates that, far from being malevolent or vicious, the Lord is extremely patient with his people, forgiving them time and time again after major acts of transgression and even apostasy. Second, and equally important, God's punishment of the Israelites in the *Book of Numbers* is a mysterious combination of irony, justice, and mercy. The irony can be found in the Biblical principle that God punishes His people by giving them what they want, when what they desire is not Him and His will. Numbers 14:26-34 may be one of the most consequential turning points in the entire Hebrew Bible, both historically and theologically. For it is the Israelites themselves who prayed, 'Would that we had died in this wilderness!' (Num 14:2), and so now will their own words come to pass, when they are condemned to die without

entering the Promised Land (Num 14:32). Nevertheless, God is merciful as well as just and responds to their faithless prediction concerning their children that ‘our little ones will become a prey (Num 14:3) by declaring that while the children will suffer for their faithlessness-- 40 years of suffering to be exact—they will not die in the desert but will be brought into the land (Num 14:31).’<sup>11</sup>

### **Numbers 15**

Scattered throughout Numbers is found the insertion of various laws, particularly following disobedience or revolt. It is as though God must add ‘amendments’ to the original covenant to further train His people in His ways. For example:

*Numbers 15-* God increases the requirements for sacrificial offerings, adding cereal offerings of flour mixed with oil, as well as libations of wine—all much costlier. By having to utilize the fruit of the land in these libations, the people are reminded when they hesitated to invade the first time, when the scouts held grapes so heavy it required two men to hold them on a pole. Laws are added that distinguish between inadvertent grave sins and deliberate grave sins (punishable by death).

*Numbers 18-19-* Laws for priests, Levites, and corpse impurity.

### **Numbers 16-17: Korah’s Rebellion**

Unrest brews again. Moses becomes the target yet once again—(A lesson for leaders who are operating in the confines of their God-given assignments: Expect opposition). This time, a Levite named Korah recruits Dathan and Abiram of the tribe of Reuben, in concert with 250 others, to challenge the religious and political leadership of Moses. Their allegation was that Moses was unjustified in being the leader of the people, because Israel at large was the Lord’s covenant community- making all of them equally capable and qualified (holy) to lead. The important consideration that they ignored was that God Himself had appointed Moses (and Aaron) to their offices.

Why was Moses particularly distressed at the actions of the Levite Korah (Num 16:8-10)? \_\_\_\_\_

*Note:* It was the vocation of the Levite priests to offer sacrifice on behalf of the people and act as intercessors. Only Aaron and his sons could enter the Tabernacle area. The other Levites had very specific tasks in dismantling and setting up the Ark during their nomadic wanderings in the desert. It would be tantamount to a deacon today protesting that he cannot carry out priestly duties.

What contest is set up for the next day? What happens? (Num 16:16-27) \_\_\_\_\_

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<sup>11</sup> Bergsma, John and Brant Pitre. *The Old Testament: A Catholic Introduction to the Bible*. © 2018 by Ignatius Press, San Francisco, CA, pp 238-239.

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How does this once again confirm Moses' and Aaron's authority? \_\_\_\_\_

How many total people died in the aftermath of Korah's revolt (Num 16:35 plus Num 17:14)? \_\_\_\_\_

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"- Hebrews 10:31.

As a consequence of their continued rebellion and disobedience, the people are distanced from holy God (Num 17:27-18:1-5). What is God's solution? \_\_\_\_\_

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Mediation is now needed between God and His people. The Levitical priesthood was now to fulfill that role; only a descendant of Aaron could stand before the Lord in the holy office of priest. Looking ahead down the corridors of time from this period, Jesus will become the ultimate High Priest and Mediator who reconciles all to God (Ephesians 2:13-18; Hebrews 7:23-25).

### **Numbers 18**

God tells the chosen Levites in 18:7: "I give you the priesthood as a \_\_\_\_\_ ." Specifically, only Aaron and his sons can be priests; other Levites can help with the maintenance of the Ark and later Temple. This was a distinction that was an important factor in Korah's rebellion.

Given that the rod or staff was a symbol of authority, what significance is found in Aaron's rod being the only one of twelve that blossomed and brought forth buds and almonds (Num 17:10)? How did this confirm his authority as High Priest, a responsibility bestowed on him by God and not man? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Numbers 20:2-13--- Moses and the Rock**

How does this incident parallel what occurred in Exodus 17:1-7? How does it differ? \_\_\_\_\_

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This time, was Moses told by God to speak to the rock or strike it (20:8)? What did Moses do? \_\_\_\_\_

To whom did Moses give credit for the flowing water, with the pronoun "we"? (20:10) \_\_\_\_\_

God says to Aaron and Moses: "Because you did not \_\_\_\_\_" you shall not enter the Promised Land (Num 20:12). Does this seem a harsh punishment to you? What was the dynamic at play? \_\_\_\_\_

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"What was Moses' sin? Although he was technically disobedient, his action does not seem grave enough to merit the punishment God imposes on him: never to enter the Promised Land.... We should note that this is not the first time in Moses' career when he expresses doubt about God's will or even opposes it. We will find out in the *Book of Joshua* that Moses was

negligent about certain matters, such as ensuring that the Israelite children were circumcised according to the covenant (Josh 5:5).

A superficial reading of the Biblical text will miss the fact that Moses' relationship with God had not only high points but also tensions and complications all along. At Meribah in Numbers 20:11, these issues come to the surface. God's judgment on Moses is based less on the gravity of his exterior actions than on the state of his heart, which is seen only by God (see 1 Samuel 16:7). The sacred author does not give us a full explanation but intentionally leaves ambiguity about the exact reason for the gravity of Moses' punishment."<sup>12</sup>

The Early Church Fathers and Christians allegorically interpreted the rock as Christ. See 1 Corinthians 10:4-5. How might they reach this conclusion, given that Christ is the "Living Water" (John 7:37-39)? \_\_\_\_\_

How did Christ (God) "follow" His people in the desert, providing for their needs repeatedly? \_\_\_\_\_

Also, Ezekiel's vision (Ez 47) was reenacted during the Feast of Tabernacles (which commemorated the Desert Wanderings) at the Temple each year. This water is unleashed at Christ's crucifixion by the soldier's lance (John 19:34) and is interpreted as the waters of baptism that cleanse us.

### **Numbers 20:22-29**

What happens to Aaron on Mount Hor? Who takes his place as High Priest? \_\_\_\_\_

### **Numbers 21:4-9 --- The Fiery Serpents**

"Time and again, the Israelites had complained; time and again, God had preserved them and provided for them. The fiery snakes in the desert were an expression of His frustration. And the antidote for these snakes' particularly deadly bites was a curious one, involving looking up at a bronze serpent on a pole. The people's natural focus was on the problem--- they frantically looked down, tending to bites and trying to avoid being bitten again. It would not have made sense to think about looking up. But when they did, they shifted their focus from the problem to the cure God had provided, and they found relief. Speaking with Nicodemus, Jesus compared Himself to that bronze serpent in the wilderness, telling the old teacher that belief in Him was key (John 3:14-15). What was true for Nicodemus is true for us. It doesn't make sense to look up to the dying Man on the cross to find a cure for death. But that's where the cure lies."<sup>13</sup>

### **Numbers 22: Balaam Blesses Israel**

As the Jews move north to Moab, they experience several key military victories, defeating Sihon and Og, the kings of Heshbon and Bashan. This unnerves King Balaak of Moab, who attempts to defeat the invading forces not by military might but through spiritual means

<sup>12</sup> Bergsma. *The Old Testament: A Catholic Interpretation to the Bible*. pp 242.

<sup>13</sup> Swindoll, Charles. *Insight's Bible Application Guide: Genesis-Deuteronomy*. © 2012 by Insight for Living Publishing House, Plano, TX, pp 104.

(sorcery and divination). He drafts the services of Balaam to curse Israel, but Balaam is able to only speak the words of God and ends up blessing the Jews, not once but four times! Within his recorded blessings are several future prophecies that hint that a king will one day come forth from this people, for the benefit of all people.

What was King Balak's intention, after he paid Balaam to curse Israel, according to Numbers 22:6? \_\_\_\_\_

*Note:* Divination is " 'the practice of attempting to foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge by occult or supernatural means.' God hates divination because it leads people to seek satanic intelligence for guidance in their lives instead of God and His Word. We cannot mix the guidance of the Holy Spirit with that of Satan without getting into problems."<sup>14</sup>

How does the talking donkey in Numbers 22:22-32 reveal that Balaam is no real threat to God's people? What does the angel of the Lord bluntly tell Balaam in 22:32? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there "any sorcery against Jacob" that will be effective? (23:23) \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Numbers 24**

How does Balaam's prophecy (in 24:7-8 and 24:19) regarding a star and scepter dovetail with that of Jacob in Genesis 49:10? \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Putting it all together:*

Balaam includes the new detail that this ruler will "crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth (Edom)." King Herod the Great of New Testament infamy was an Edomite, and hence his fear when he hears the Magi have followed a star to find the newborn king prophesied from of old. Herod's slaughter of all newborn boys in Bethlehem that followed was due to the widespread knowledge among the ancients of Balaam's prophecy. (Note: Balaam was from Mesopotamia, from whence the Magi are believed to have come).

#### **Numbers 25: The Worship of Baal of Peor**

The Jews prove to be their own worst enemy. King Balak could not conquer the tribes by military might nor Balaam through sorcery, but the Jews met defeat because of their own disobedience and choice to practice pagan idolatry.

What plan of King Balak meets with great success in 25:1-5? \_\_\_\_\_

A plague ensues and is only limited by quick action by Aaron's grandson, Phineas. How many perish because of this serious physical immorality and spiritual adultery (worshipping a pagan god rather than God) (25:9)? \_\_\_\_\_

Like Phineas, how radically dedicated are you to God and His ways? \_\_\_\_\_

God takes your choice very seriously.

<sup>14</sup> Robeson, Jerry and Carol. *Strongman's His Name; What's His Game?* © 1996 by Shiloh Publishing House, Woodburn, OR, pp 13-15.

### What happens next?

God continues to add more laws to correct the people's persistent disobedience, as a means to mold an unruly people into a holy one. Before they can be ready to take possession of the Promised Land (as this is not so much a military campaign as a spiritual one), they need to be taught the Torah, which "in Hebrew literally means 'instruction,' and is often translated as 'law.' *Torah* comes from the Hebrew verb *yarah*, which means 'to aim at' or 'to hit the mark,' and usually refers to the aiming of an arrow or the throwing of a javelin. Learning and following Torah instruction is the way to aim towards what is true and good, and thereby avoid sin, which is the missing of the good that one is to aim for in life.

Deuteronomy serves as Israel's catechism. The most important and popular Jewish prayer, the Shema, is found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5- "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."<sup>15</sup>

The word "Shema" means "to hear or listen" or, more exactly, "to obey." How does this prayer call the Jews to keep the law given in covenant through the practice of obedience? Do you give the highest priority to obedience to God's Word today? \_\_\_\_\_

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To whom are you to diligently teach God's word? Deut 6:6-7 \_\_\_\_\_

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What choice awaits the chosen people, according to Deut 30:19-20? \_\_\_\_\_

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Everything hinges upon the issue of obedience!

### Summary of Apostasy of Israel at Beth-Peor and Why It's So Significant:

"The parallels between the Golden Calf (Exodus 32) and the idolatry of Baal of Peor (Num 25) are many: what the Calf was to the Exodus generation, the Baal of Peor incident was to the Wilderness generation. Both events involve idolatry combined with sexual misconduct (Ex 32:6; Num 25:1, 8). In both cases, one or more Levites rise up to execute judgment and stop the plague on God's people and win for themselves a clerical role (Ex 32:29; Num 25:10). After the Golden Calf, the Levites become the 'clerical' tribe. After the worship of Baal at Peor, Phinehas wins the high priesthood for himself and his descendants.

Beth-peor, the geographical location of this promiscuous idolatry on the plains of Moab, will be the site of Israel's encampment for the entire remainder of the Pentateuch, including the whole duration of Moses' lengthy and often severe discourses in the *Book of Deuteronomy*. This is significant: the location is associated with the spiritual failing of the people of Israel, including members of the second generation. This shadow partly explains the severity of some of Moses' laws and exhortation in the 'farewell discourse' that is *Deuteronomy*."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gray, Tim. *Walking with God*. pp 107-109.

<sup>16</sup> Bergsma. *The Old Testament: A Catholic Introduction to the Bible*. pp 245-255.

How does Paul use the Wilderness experience as a warning against ingratitude, immorality, and rebellion against authority in 1 Corinthians 10: 1, 5-6, 8-11 and Hebrews 3:19-4:13? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Summary: The Major Events of *Numbers* and The Story of Salvation**

1. The Israelites wander in the desert for 40 years after questioning God’s provision, flagrantly disobeying His commandments, and rebelling against His authority.
2. The Levites become the only tribe permitted to direct the worship as priests. The rest of the tribes become essentially laicized.
3. God gives explicit directions on how to worship Him with sacrificial offerings, that will not only serve to remind them to keep God central but be a precursor or typology of the worship enacted by the New Covenant of Jesus Christ.
4. Miriam, Aaron, and Moses will die before entering the Promised Land. Only the faithful scouts Caleb and Joshua will be permitted to cross the Jordan and begin the phase of taking possession of the land.
5. Before dying, Moses gives Joshua and the people very specific mandates on how to proceed once they enter the Promised Land. Will the second generation of the Israelites delivered from Egypt remember God in the land flowing with milk and honey? Stay tuned!

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