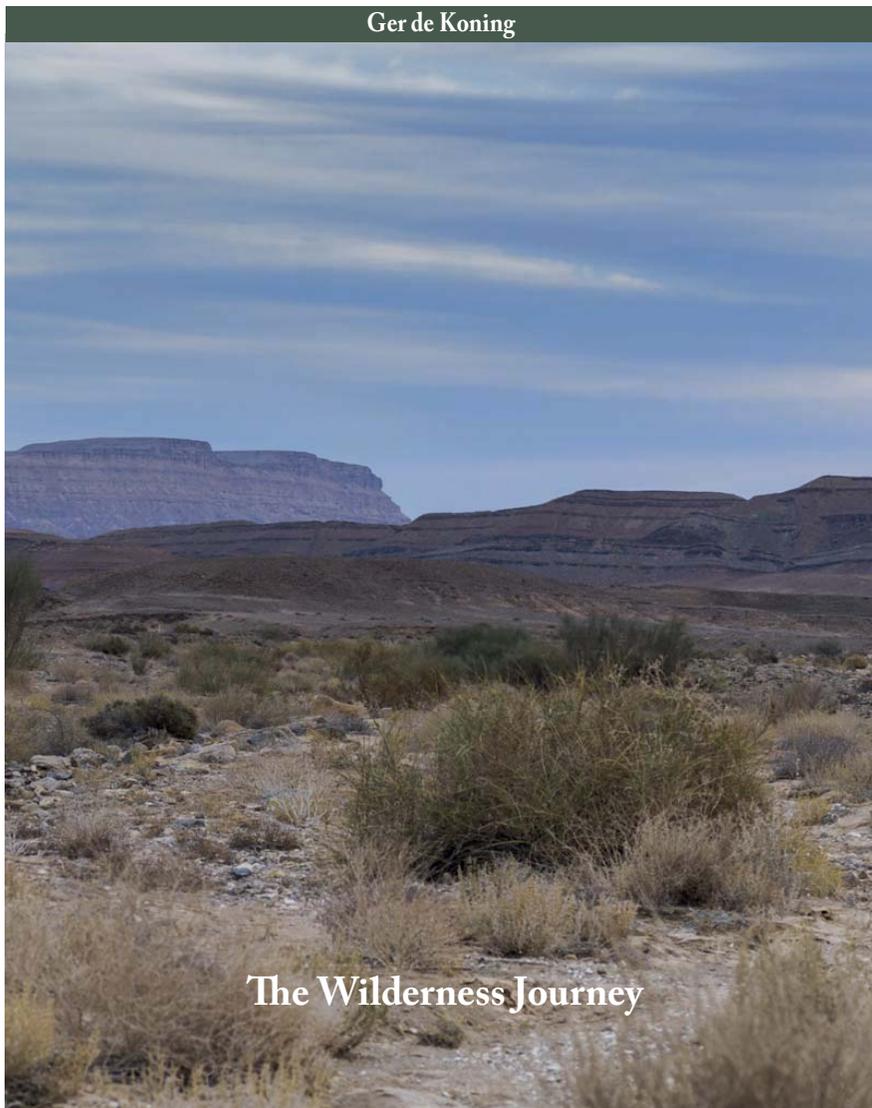


Numbers Explained & Applied 04

Ger de Koning



The Wilderness Journey

Numbers

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Ger de Koning

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Abbreviations of the Names of the Books of the Bible

Old Testament

Gen	Genesis
Exo	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Num	Numbers
Deu	Deuteronomy
2Ko	2 Korinthiërs
Jos	Joshua
Jdg	Judges
Rth	Ruth
1Sam	First Samuel
2Sam	Second Samuel
1Kgs	First Kings
2Kgs	Second Kings
1Chr	First Chronicles
2Chr	Second Chronicles
Ezra	Ezra
Neh	Nehemiah
Est	Esther
Job	Job
Psa	Psalms
Pro	Proverbs
Ecc	Ecclesiastes
Song	Song of Songs
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
Lam	Lamentations
Eze	Ezekiel
Dan	Daniël
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Amos	Amos
Oba	Obadiah
Jona	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Nah	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zep	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zec	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi

New Testament

Mt	Gospel of Matthew
Mk	Gospel of Mark
Lk	Gospel of Luke
Jn	Gospel of John
Acts	Acts of the Apostles
Rom	Letter to the Romans
1Cor	First Letter to the Corinthians
2Cor	Second Letter to the Corinthians
Gal	Letter to the Galatians
Eph	Letter to the Ephesians
Phil	Letter to the Philippians
Col	Letter to the Colossians
1Thes	First Letter to the Thessalonians
2Thes	Second Letter to the Thessalonians
1Tim	First Letter to Timothy
2Tim	Second Letter to Timothy
Tit	Letter to Titus
Phlm	Letter to Philemon
Heb	Letter of the Hebrews
Jam	Letter of James
1Pet	First Letter of Peter
2Pet	Second Letter of Peter
1Jn	First Letter of John
2Jn	Second Letter of John
3Jn	Third Letter of John
Jude	Letter of Jude
Rev	Revelation

Explanation of general format

PERSONAL PRONOUNS are capitalized when pertaining to Deity.

BRACKETS [] are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek but implied by it.

SHARP BRACKETS < > are used in this commentary in the Bible text to indicate words possibly not in the original writings.

When **ASTERISKS** * are used in New Testament quotations, it is to mark verbs that are historical presents in the Greek which have been translated with an English past tense in order to conform to modern usage. The translators recognized that in some contexts the present tense seems more unexpected and unjustified to the English reader than a past tense would have been. But Greek authors frequently used the present tense for the sake of heightened vividness, thereby transporting their readers in imagination to the actual scene at the time of occurrence. However, the translators felt that it would be wise to change these historical presents to English past tenses.

ALL CAPS in the New Testament quotations are used in the text to indicate Old Testament quotations or obvious references to Old Testament texts.

Numbers

In Leviticus we see a people of worshippers around a sanctuary in the presence of God. In Numbers we see a people in the wilderness in the presence of enemies. It is a people of warriors to defend the sanctuary. This is also our task, to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 1:3). “The faith” means the content of faith, that which is believed. Here we must think of the truths about the Lord Jesus and His work and its consequences.

There are different types of fight, both in terms of the area where the fight is fought and the nature of the fight:

1. We see Israel fighting in the wilderness, but also in the land.
2. We see Israel fighting an offensive battle, but also a defensive battle.
3. We see them fighting a fight to which they are called, but we also see them fighting a fight in which they have ended up through their own fault.

All these aspects of the struggle are reflected in our lives as believers. The struggle in the wilderness is that of daily life. In this we may have to deal with struggles that we have to avoid, but sometimes take on voluntarily and a kind of struggle that we cannot avoid.

For example, if we first join the world and then try to get rid of it, or read books and watch films that capture our thoughts and feelings, we have to struggle to get rid of it and be freed from it. We could have avoided that battle by keeping ourselves separated from the world. In order to avoid this battle, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray: “Do not lead us into temptation” (Mt 6:13).

There is also a kind of struggle that we cannot always avoid, for example when we do our work. Then we come into contact with things that can give rise to conflict, for example a question to participate in something that you, as a Christian, know that you cannot participate in. We often notice that

the enemy attacks us on our weak spot. We see that enemy represented in Amalek (Deu 25:17-18; Exo 17:8-13).

The Israelites must consciously seek out and engage in the struggle in the land. We read about this in the book Joshua. For us, this battle speaks of conquering the values of Scripture in connection with the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places, which we find above all in the letter to the Ephesians. We must also defend these blessings and not allow them to be robbed from us. For this God gives us His armor (Eph 6:10-18).

It is also important to know which battle we should *not* fight and that is the fight against sin within us. This battle is presented to us in Romans 7. It is the struggle of one born again to accomplish in his own strength, the power of the flesh, the law of God. This battle the born again always loses. He will only be freed from this battle when he sees the accomplished work of the Lord Jesus.

Numbers describes the walk and service of the people of God during their journey through the wilderness. In Exodus, we read about the beginning of the people who travel through the wilderness here. In Exodus 15-18 we also have a part of the wilderness journey. There is still everything under grace. After the law is giving at Mount Sinai the relationship between God and the people changes (Exodus 19-20). In Numbers we see how God immediately punishes when the people transgress and fail, because now the law is the foundation of God's dealings with them. In this book, the enemy is not so much the personal enemy, but rather the influences that causes murmuring and revolt, for example. Evil does not penetrate, but breaks out.

The journey through the wilderness is a history of failure. Instead of a rapid advance to Canaan in the "eleven days' [journey]" it takes (Deu 1:2), it takes them forty years. This book teaches us the lesson of the believer's trial, in which his failure becomes clear and in which it also becomes clear how much he depends on the grace of God. The grace of God does not fail.

God remains the God of grace. He shows this in the tabernacle, in which the way to Him is drawn out. In Leviticus the priests and their service are in the foreground (the name Leviticus does not do justice to the book).

Numbers is the book of numbers (hence the name). In Numbers, the Levite service is in the foreground.

The wilderness journey is not part of God's counsels, but is an example of His ways with us. It shows the spiritual journey of the believer through the world – the wilderness – where the flesh is being tested. Everything that happens to the people in the wilderness are lessons for us, for it has happened “as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved” (1Cor 10:6; 10:11). There the people get to know themselves and there they get to know God (Deu 8:2). We will thank God not only for the redemption from Egypt, but also for His tolerance of us in the wilderness, for all His love and care, His upbringing. We learn that in the wilderness of life.

Numbers is not a ‘quick bite’ reading. It is not for people who are unwilling to devote time and energy to the study of God's Word. However, those who are prepared to study this book will find much of the Lord Jesus in it and will discover rich lessons for his life of faith.

Finally an outline of the book:

1. The encampment of the people and the preparations for the journey (Numbers 1-10:10).
 - a. The order (Numbers 1-2).
 - b. The Levites isolated (Numbers 3-4).
 - c. what to do in case of infidelity (Numbers 5).
 - d. loyalty of the individual in case of general infidelity (Numbers 6).
 - e. the travel aids (Numbers 7-10:11).
2. The journey (Numbers 10:11-21:20).
3. The people in the plains of Moab (Numbers 21:21-34:13).

Numbers 1

Verses 1-3 | Assignment to Take a Census

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, 2 "Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, every male, head by head 3 from twenty years old and upward, whoever [is able to] go out to war in Israel, you and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

The book starts with counting and ordering. Counting is proof of ownership. The whole generation counted here perishes in the wilderness under the judgment of God – except Joshua and Caleb. This means that a new generation arrives in Canaan. Being counted for heaven, knowing that our names are recorded there, is something to be happy and grateful for. But we must not forget that God is interested in all our actions, the way we go, the trials and struggles we have. He counts that too.

Thirteen months have passed since the redemption from Egypt and one month has passed since the tabernacle was established (Exo 40:17). Applied to us, this means that there has been teaching about salvation, the church as the dwelling place of God and priestly service, as depicted in the tabernacle (Exodus) and the sacrificial service and priestly service (Leviticus). Now comes the order to Moses to count "all the church of the sons of Israel". The people are seen in their entirety. The picture speaks of spiritual growth and spiritual strength.

The census should be done "by their families, by their fathers' households, ... every male". Every member of the people must know his origin and where he belongs. Similarly, every believer must know his place in Christ; he must know that he is a child of God and what his spiritual family is, who his brothers and sisters are. "Every male" speaks of putting into practice what someone is in position.

It is about militant men, not children or the elderly. The age of twenty is in many countries the age of military service; the same was true in the Netherlands when military draft still existed. Once someone is in active service, he renounces personal interests and makes his time and strength available to the land. The effectiveness of the service depends on listening to the superiors. Whoever is in service is expected to follow orders without contradicting them (Lk 7:8).

“Head by head” they are counted. In this way each individual is placed before God. Counting shows that the people are not a great mass for God. The individual is not absorbed in the mass. God knows every single one of them. Every person is important to Him. God cannot miss one.

It is great to know that we are counted for heaven, that our names are recorded there (Lk 10:20b). But that is not all. The Lord also wants to record our names for the battle on earth. We are counted head by head, which means that we will be aware of the personal connection with the Lord Jesus. To know this is important for every Christian.

In order to explain this personal relationship with God, in order to belong to the numbered ones, the Israelite must be twenty years old. Spiritually applied this means that it takes a certain spiritual maturity to be able to serve as a warrior in the army of God. An end age is not mentioned. A baby in faith is not expected to be a warrior. It is expected of a young man in faith (1Jn 2:13-14; cf. 2Tim 2:3-4).

Moses and Aaron count together. Together they are a picture of the Lord Jesus, who is called *“the Apostle and High Priest of our confession”* (Heb 3:1). The Lord Jesus speaks on our behalf to God and represents us before God. We have to do with Him. We see in Him the King-Priest (Zec 6:13b). He knows His own. He knows who He can send out.

All who are counted here will never be able to begin the actual battle – that of the conquest of the land – because, except two, Joshua and Caleb, they will fall in the wilderness (Num 14:29). Those who are counted at the end of this book, in Numbers 26, form a new generation. But that is not what God is thinking about in this census. As has already been mentioned, the journey to the land should only take eleven days. The fact that it eventu-

ally became a journey of forty years has to do with the unfaithfulness of the people.

Yet God uses that time to show more of Himself than we would have known in case of a short journey. The robber on the cross who repents, has only a very small part of his wilderness journey to go. He has not come to know the faithfulness of God in all circumstances of life. He does not have so much to worship God for as someone who, throughout a lifetime, has come to know God's faithfulness and care in the face of the unfaithfulness that has so often been proven on his part.

Verses 4-16 | Who Has to Help with the Census

4 With you, moreover, there shall be a man of each tribe, each one head of his father's household. 5 These then are the names of the men who shall stand with you: of Reuben, Elizur the son of Shedeur; 6 of Simeon, Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai; 7 of Judah, Nahshon the son of Amminadab; 8 of Issachar, Nethanel the son of Zuar; 9 of Zebulun, Eliab the son of Helon; 10 of the sons of Joseph: of Ephraim, Elishama the son of Ammihud; of Manasseh, Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur; 11 of Benjamin, Abidan the son of Gideoni; 12 of Dan, Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai; 13 of Asher, Pagiel the son of Ochran; 14 of Gad, Eliasaph the son of Deuel; 15 of Naphtali, Ahira the son of Enan. 16 These are they who were called of the congregation, the leaders of their fathers' tribes; they were the heads of divisions of Israel."

Not only the Lord Jesus sees who can serve as a warrior in His army, but also the heads of the tribes are involved. This can be applied to the responsible or leading brothers in a local church. They see which young people are spiritually twenty years and older. They participate in counting by watching the spiritual development of young people. Timothy is one of those 'numbered' by older brothers. He has "he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium" (Acts 16:2).

Names have their meaning in the Bible. We see in Hebrews 7 that we can learn spiritual lessons from this (Heb 7:1-3). It is important, however, to remain vigilant that we do not fall into fantasy. Some names have multiple meanings. To be able to determine with a certain degree of certainty the meaning of a name, it is advisable to consult several biblical name books.

If several name books give the same meaning, it is likely that this is the correct meaning.

The names of the heads are also found in the Numbers 2, Numbers 7 and Numbers 10. In most of these names the Name of God resounds: 'El' means 'God'. This shows that the Israelites did not forget their God during their stay in Egypt. In the names they gave their children, they have kept the memory of God.

In order to give a meaning to the names that I think is plausible, I pass on the meaning that Grant gives of those names in his 'Numerical Bible'. It is up to the reader to think about this further.

1. Head of Reuben is Elizur, 'my God is a rock', the son of Shedeur, 'the Almighty is a flame'.
2. Head of the family of Simeon is Shelumiel, 'in peace with God', the son of Zurishaddai, 'my rock is the Almighty'.
3. Head of Judah is Nahshon, 'prophet', the son of Amminadab, 'people of the willing Giver'.
4. Head of Issachar is Nethanel, 'gift of God', the son of Zuar, 'small'.
5. Head of Zebulun is Eliab 'my God is Father', the son of Helon (too uncertain meaning).
6. Head of Ephraim is Elishama, 'my God has heard', the son of Ammi-hud, 'the people of Majesty'.
7. Head of Manasseh is Gamaliel, 'God is a rewarder', the son of Pedahzur, 'the rock that redeems'.
8. Head of Benjamin is Abidan, 'my Father is Judge', the son of Gideon, 'cutter down'.
9. Head of Dan is Ahiezer, 'brother of help', the son of Ammishaddai, 'the people of the Almighty'.
10. Head of Asher is Pagiel, 'God has met me', the son of Ocran, 'tormented'.
11. Head of Gad is Eliasaph, 'God has added', the son of Deuel, 'known by God'.
12. Head of Naphtali is Ahira, 'brother of evil', the son of Enan, 'seeing'.

Verses 17-46 | The Census

17 So Moses and Aaron took these men who had been designated by name, 18 and they assembled all the congregation together on the first of the second month. Then they registered by ancestry in their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, head by head, 19 just as the LORD had commanded Moses. So he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai. 20 Now the sons of Reuben, Israel's firstborn, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, head by head, every male from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 21 their numbered men of the tribe of Reuben [were] 46,500. 22 Of the sons of Simeon, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, their numbered men, according to the number of names, head by head, every male from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 23 their numbered men of the tribe of Simeon [were] 59,300. 24 Of the sons of Gad, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 25 their numbered men of the tribe of Gad [were] 45,650. 26 Of the sons of Judah, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 27 their numbered men of the tribe of Judah [were] 74,600. 28 Of the sons of Issachar, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 29 their numbered men of the tribe of Issachar [were] 54,400. 30 Of the sons of Zebulun, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 31 their numbered men of the tribe of Zebulun [were] 57,400. 32 Of the sons of Joseph, [namely], of the sons of Ephraim, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 33 their numbered men of the tribe of Ephraim [were] 40,500. 34 Of the sons of Manasseh, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and up

ward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 35 their numbered men of the tribe of Manasseh [were] 32,200. 36 Of the sons of Benjamin, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 37 their numbered men of the tribe of Benjamin [were] 35,400. 38 Of the sons of Dan, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 39 their numbered men of the tribe of Dan [were] 62,700. 40 Of the sons of Asher, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 41 their numbered men of the tribe of Asher [were] 41,500. 42 Of the sons of Naphtali, their genealogical registration by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war, 43 their numbered men of the tribe of Naphtali [were] 53,400. 44 These are the ones who were numbered, whom Moses and Aaron numbered, with the leaders of Israel, twelve men, each of whom was of his father's household. 45 So all the numbered men of the sons of Israel by their fathers' households, from twenty years old and upward, whoever [was able to] go out to war in Israel, 46 even all the numbered men were 603,550.

Whoever wants to belong to the numbered must declare his origin, as the Darby translation translates, "and they declared their pedigrees". Declaring goes beyond an inner conviction. Someone who is taken by the Lord into His army must testify for others of his faith and not be ashamed of it or uncertain about it (2Tim 1:8,12). Those who are in uncertainty about their salvation struggle with themselves and are not able to struggle with others. This is not a struggle or battle God is calling for. Believing God on His word puts an end to that struggle.

This declaration of their origin is necessary because of "a mixed multitude" (Exo 12:38; Num 11:4) who are among them. People who are not Israelites went with them from Egypt. This can be applied to people who have joined the company of Christians but do not have life from God. They are not able to declare before God that they belong to Him, nor can they fight for Him. They don't want that either.

If we make the numbers more readable, the table looks like this:

1	Rueben	46,500
2	Simeon	59,300
3	Gad	45,650
4	Judah	74,600
5	Issachar	54,400
6	Zebulun	57,400
7	Ephraim	40,500
8	Manasseh	32,200
9	Benjamin	35,400
10	Dan	62,700
11	Asher	41,500
12	Naphtali	53,400
	Total	603,550

This number corresponds to a previous count, about nine months earlier (Exo 38:25-26). In that count, each counted person had to pay half a shekel of silver as ransom. By the silver the Israelite was redeemed. Therefore, silver is a picture of the price of redemption.

Verses 47-53 | The Levites

47 The Levites, however, were not numbered among them by their fathers' tribe. 48 For the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying, 49 "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor shall you take their census among the sons of Israel. 50 But you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, and over all its furnishings and over all that belongs to it. They shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings, and they shall take care of it; they shall also camp around the tabernacle. 51 So when the tabernacle is to set out, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle encamps, the Levites shall set it up. But the layman who comes near shall be put to death. 52 The sons of Israel shall camp, each man by his own camp, and each man by his own standard, according to their armies. 53 But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the testimony, so that there will be no wrath on the congregation of the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the testimony."

The Levites are not among the warriors. They take care of the tabernacle and set up their camp right around it. The tabernacle is here called “the tabernacle of the testimony”. It is about the aspect of external testimony. This is also an aspect of the church, which is “the pillar and support of the truth” (1Tim 3:15). The church has to uphold the testimony of truth in the world. That creates resistance and requires struggle, defense.

The believers are priests; they are also Levites as well as warriors. Depending on his activity, the believer is a priest, a Levite or a warrior. He is busy as a priest when he is in the sanctuary to praise God. He is a Levite when he serves the church. He is a warrior when he stands up for the truth when it is attacked.

Verse 54 | The Assignment Is Being Executed

54 Thus the sons of Israel did; according to all which the LORD had commanded Moses, so they did.

The people do what the LORD has commanded Moses. They are characterized by obedience.

Numbers 2

Verses 1-2 | The Camp

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

Everything in battle revolves around the tabernacle that is the center of the army, here called “the tent of meeting” (cf. Num 1:50,53). The testimony of God in this world is given by the church, especially when the church meets. This is a particular target of the attacks of enemy. That is why it must be protected. To do this, each tribe must take its place around it. Every believer must know his place with regard to the coming together of God’s people.

To order the camp indicates the importance of the place that each tribe occupies. Every member of the tribe must know where that place is. It is important not only as a numbered person to belong to the army, but also to know what his place is in relation to the dwelling place of God. The counted protect the tabernacle.

God gives each tribe its own place. In this way He also gives us our own place around Himself (cf. 1Cor 12:18). We are called personally, Israel by tribe. Tribes cannot exchange tribes. Whoever belongs to a certain tribe cannot change tribe as he likes. The place that God gives us in His church, He gives us because He can best use us there.

Three tribes are linked together in a special way, under one standard. In this way, local churches are also connected in a special way by their location. It is also important to keep an eye on the people as a whole.

Standards hoisted in Christianity do not work unity, but divisiveness. There are those who raise a standard with the name of a human being or the name of a doctrine. All those who agree, gather under that standard. Every standard is a standard that distinguishes itself from others and that is not what God wants. There is only one center for God that He has set: the Lord Jesus, the true tabernacle, around whom He wants to gather His

scattered children into one. The Lord Jesus is “outstanding above ten thousand” (Song 5:10).

Believers are not called to go through the wilderness on their own. God has not redeemed just individuals who all go their own way. All who are redeemed belong together. In the New Testament they together form the church. They are brought together in ‘tribes’. We can apply this to local churches.

But also as a local church we are not separate from other local churches. Nor should we forget that as a local church we only represent a part of that local church when we meet. The local church consists of all the true believers in that place, although there are some who delimit themselves by church walls. Yet they are part of it. We should also think about this when we come together as a church.

It is important to maintain unity as a tribe and unity with other tribes in the immediate vicinity and unity with all tribes of the whole people. That unity may not be a unity according to one’s own thoughts. It should be the unity of the whole people and not a sectarian one, looking only at their own tribe or the tribes that belong under the same standard. Sectarianism makes the unity smaller than the unity that God wants to make visible.

Verses 3-9 | Those Who Camp on the East Side

3 Now those who camp on the east side toward the sunrise [shall be] of the standard of the camp of Judah, by their armies, and the leader of the sons of Judah: Nahshon the son of Amminadab, 4 and his army, even their numbered men, 74,600. 5 Those who camp next to him [shall be] the tribe of Issachar, and the leader of the sons of Issachar: Nethanel the son of Zuar, 6 and his army, even their numbered men, 54,400. 7 [Then comes] the tribe of Zebulun, and the leader of the sons of Zebulun: Eliab the son of Helon, 8 and his army, even his numbered men, 57,400. 9 The total of the numbered men of the camp of Judah: 186,400, by their armies. They shall set out first.

The tribes must camp in relation to the tabernacle according to the wind directions. The four standards lie in four directions from which the influences come from outside and which the people of God must face in the power of Him Who dwells in their midst.

The first side mentioned is the east side. On the east side is the entrance to the tabernacle and it is the side where the sun rises. These two aspects we can apply to (1) entering the sanctuary and (2) looking forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus.

These aspects may be expressed in the church, in the God's people. The tribe of Judah takes the lead. Judah means 'praise'. The spirit of praise is the spirit of power (2Chr 20:22). The main purpose of the meeting of the church is to praise and worship God, to offer Him sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. That should be the effect of every meeting.

On the east side Issachar and Zebulun have to camp as well. Together with Judah they are the fourth, fifth, and sixth son that Leah gave birth to Jacob. From the sins of Reuben, Simeon and Levi, the three older brothers (Gen 49:3-7), Judah becomes the first among his brothers (Gen 49:8). He becomes the royal line from whom the Messiah will be born (Gen 49:10; Rth 4:18-21). In the genealogy in Matthew 1 (Mt 1:1-16) we see that Nahshon, the leader of the tribe, is counted among the ancestors of the Lord Jesus (Mt 1:4).

Verses 10-16 | Tribes on the South Side

10 "On the south side [shall be] the standard of the camp of Reuben by their armies, and the leader of the sons of Reuben: Elizur the son of Shedeur, 11 and his army, even their numbered men, 46,500. 12 Those who camp next to him [shall be] the tribe of Simeon, and the leader of the sons of Simeon: Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, 13 and his army, even their numbered men, 59,300. 14 Then [comes] the tribe of Gad, and the leader of the sons of Gad: Eliasaph the son of Deuel, 15 and his army, even their numbered men, 45,650. 16 The total of the numbered men of the camp of Reuben: 151,450 by their armies. And they shall set out second.

The second side is the south side. South side is literally 'the right side'. The right side speaks in the Scriptures of dignity of position. The Lord Jesus "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). In a spiritual sense this means that the believer who camps on the south side knows the position of the Lord Jesus. That believer also knows

that this is his own position, because he is in Christ. God has “seated us with Him in the heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6).

Reuben is the leader on that side. Reuben means ‘see, a son’. When the church meets, believers come together who know that they are sons of God and that they owe it to the Lord Jesus, the Son, Who is their life.

Then Simeon and Gad have to camp on the south side. Reuben and Simeon are the oldest sons of Leah. Levi is not counted. In his place comes Gad, the first son of Zilpa, the maid of Leah.

Verse 17 | The Tribe of Levi

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

After two of the four standards are set out, the tent of meeting is set out. The tent of meeting is the center of the people. That is what the whole people should be aiming for, from there come their marching orders.

First we talk about “camp”, then “set out”, but both actions take place in agreement with each other. There must be set out to continue travelling in the same way as the people have camped. One is not separate from the other. Both in worship and approaching God – for which they camp – as well as in defense and protection –which must happen when they set out with the camp – it is about the relationship of God with His people. In these activities the Levites have their own specific task. They are seen as inseparable from both services.

Verses 18-24 | Tribes on the West Side

18 “On the west side [shall be] the standard of the camp of Ephraim by their armies, and the leader of the sons of Ephraim [shall be] Elishama the son of Ammihud, 19 and his army, even their numbered men, 40,500. 20 Next to him [shall be] the tribe of Manasseh, and the leader of the sons of Manasseh: Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, 21 and his army, even their numbered men, 32,200. 22 Then [comes] the tribe of Benjamin, and the leader of the sons of Benjamin: Abidan the son of Gideoni, 23 and his army, even their numbered men, 35,400.

24 *The total of the numbered men of the camp of Ephraim: 108,100, by their armies. And they shall set out third.*

The third side is the west side. The three tribes that have their camp there are closest to the ark of the testimony. West side is literally 'side of the sea'. This is the side that speaks of trials and difficulties in the life of the believer. In those trials they produce fruit for God (Gen 1:20-23). Life in connection with the tent of meeting also has its trials. Do we know them? Through these trials God wants to work fruit for Himself in the meetings.

Ephraim is the leader of this group of three. Ephraim means 'double fertility'. It is a fitting 'standard-bearer' for the west side. With him Manasseh and Benjamin also camp on the west side of the tent of meeting. These three are descendants of Rachel, where we see that Joseph is represented by his two sons.

These three tribes are also mentioned in Psalm 80 (Psa 80:2). The psalmist asks God to lead them in the last days of Israel's affliction and to reveal His power as in the days of Israel's wilderness journey (Num 10:35).

Verses 25-31 | Tribes on the North Side

25 *"On the north side [shall be] the standard of the camp of Dan by their armies, and the leader of the sons of Dan: Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, 26 and his army, even their numbered men, 62,700. 27 Those who camp next to him [shall be] the tribe of Asher, and the leader of the sons of Asher: Pagiel the son of Ochran, 28 and his army, even their numbered men, 41,500. 29 Then [comes] the tribe of Naphtali, and the leader of the sons of Naphtali: Ahira the son of Enan, 30 and his army, even their numbered men, 53,400. 31 The total of the numbered men of the camp of Dan [was] 157,600. They shall set out last by their standards."*

The north side is the darkest side, furthest from the sun. The north is literally 'hiding'. This represents the gloomy side of the testimony of God on earth. The light of God cannot penetrate there. So it may be that through hidden sins there is no power to come together to the glory of God. The meetings do take place, but without conviction, out of pure habit.

The leader on this side is Dan. Jacob calls him in his blessing "a serpent" (Gen 49:17), by which he links Dan to the devil. The descendants of Dan,

the Danites, have the doubtful honor of being the first to introduce idolatry early in the history of Israel (Jdg 18:30).

Together with Asher and Naphtali they set out last. They are all three sons of maids. Then Bilhah's first son is the maid of Rachel. Asher is the second son of Zilpa, the maid of Leah. Naphtali is Bilhah's second son.

Verses 32-34 | All Is Done According to the Command

32 These are the numbered men of the sons of Israel by their fathers' households; the total of the numbered men of the camps by their armies, 603,550. 33 The Levites, however, were not numbered among the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 34 Thus the sons of Israel did; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they camped by their standards, and so they set out, every one by his family according to his father's household.

The number of Numbers 1 fighters counted is repeated here. It corresponds to the tribes. Every warrior has taken his place in his own tribe. Each tribe has taken its own position in relation to the tent of meeting under the standard appointed by God. When Balaam sees this order, he comes to the outcry: "How fair are your tents, O Jacob, Your dwellings, O Israel!" (Num 24:5).

Numbers 3

Introduction

In this chapter we see that the Levites according to the thoughts of God are set apart for the service. They are a type of the church, or rather of the members of the church, in their service to God, just as the priests are a picture of the New Testament believers who approach to the throne of God for worship or in intercession for the benefit of others.

There are three principles that are important to us in the service to the Lord:

1. We are redeemed from Egypt, a picture of the world (Exo 12:1-40; Gal 1:4).
2. As a result, we belong to God (1Cor 6:20).
3. We were given to Christ for the service of the heavenly tabernacle (cf. Num 3:6).

The Levites are the only tribe chosen to carry the holy things of the tabernacle and serve therein. For the church this means that every member, every believer, is responsible for making his contribution to being a church. Of all that God has given us in the church, He has given us the responsibility to carry it all through the wilderness and to bring it to its end intact.

Every child of God is a Levite, but the question is who actually does this service. Every Levite has its own task. God has given us all a gift of grace, but are we using it? That is different from the priests. All the sons of Aaron are priests; there is no distinction therein. So we meet on the first day of the week. All brothers and sisters perform priestly service. In approaching to God all discernment disappears, for who and what are we in His presence? As Levites there is a difference. This distinction is made by God Himself (1Cor 12:5). Each has its own task, which is different from the task of the other.

Verses 1-4 | The Generations of Aaron and Moses

1 Now these are [the records of] the generations of Aaron and Moses at the time when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. 2 These then are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. 3 These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he ordained to serve as priests. 4 But Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD when they offered strange fire before the LORD in the wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children. So Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests in the lifetime of their father Aaron.

Moses and Aaron are mentioned together as the spiritual fathers of the generation of Levi, both priests and Levites. In Moses the aspect of the authority of the Word of God comes to the fore. In Aaron we see more sympathy for our weaknesses. Together they are a picture of the Lord Jesus in Whom both aspects are perfectly united (Heb 3:1; 4:12-16).

Nadab and Abihu have not taken into account the authority of the word God has spoken and have entered the sanctuary in the opinion of being able to approach God in their own way (Lev 10:1-3). That is their own invented priestly service. Such a priesthood dies out, it does not hold out to God because God does not hold it, there is nothing of Him in it. They have no sons or descendants to follow them. Their death, so soon after the establishment of the priesthood, must be a terrifying example and call for holiness in the priestly ministry.

Mentioning their names and their end makes it clear that the priesthood is not linked to the importance of the family, but to the sovereign choice of God. It also shows that getting a privilege does not automatically mean loyalty, but that man is able to corrupt his privilege.

The remaining sons serve as priests during Aaron's life. It is good if young people serve under the watchful eye of the elderly. It must also have been a joy for Aaron to see worthy successors in these two boys (cf. 3Jn 1:4).

Verses 5-10 | The Levites Are a Gift to the Priests

5 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 6 "Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. 7 They shall perform

the duties for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to do the service of the tabernacle. 8 They shall also keep all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to do the service of the tabernacle. 9 You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel. 10 So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons that they may keep their priesthood, but the layman who comes near shall be put to death."

The Levites are given as a tribe to Aaron and his sons. They are subject to Aaron and act on the priest's instructions. The Levite helps with priestly service. Every Levite's service in the church aims to make the members of the church better and better priests through this service. A better priest is more to the honor of God.

They are also given to the whole congregation of Israel. Every believer is as a Levite, as a servant, accountable only to the Lord (Rom 14:4). The performance of his task is a matter only between the Lord and Him. It is not the brothers and sisters who determine his service. If the matter is healthy, they will agree to it. Only in the case of discipline, when sin becomes manifest in the servant, the church must deal with it.

The gifts are given to the church and find their fulfillment in the midst of the church. That is why the servant has to do with the church. He does not act above or separate from the church. The church is entitled to this gift. He is a servant, so he is not in a higher place, but in the lowest place. He is subject to the Lord and works amidst the church.

Verse 6 and verse 9 find their counterpart for us in the words of the Lord Jesus to His Father: "They were Yours and You gave them to Me" (Jn 17:6), and to the Jews: "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (Jn 6:37).

The "layman" here is someone who does not belong to Aaron's family (cf. verse 38). In Numbers 1 it concerns someone who is not a Levite (Num 1:51). Nadab and Abihu were qualified, but still killed because they approached in their own way.

Verses 11-13 | The Levite Instead of the Firstborn

11 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 12 "Now, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the sons of Israel instead of every firstborn, the first issue of the womb among the sons of Israel. So the Levites shall be Mine. 13 For all the firstborn are Mine; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, from man to beast. They shall be Mine; I am the LORD."

The Levites replaced the firstborn. The firstborn belongs in a special way to the LORD. He reminds Moses that He has sanctified them for Himself on the basis of the blood of the Lamb (Exo 12:1-28; 13:1-13). In the firstborn the whole people of God are represented. The right to the firstborn is the right to the whole people.

The church is called the "church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Heb 12:23). Thus they are the property of God. This gives God the right to determine that they will serve the church. Members of the church are God's special property and God has the right to give each member of the church a task. God asserts His right from the very moment of birth. Every believer is predestined to a certain task from his being born again onwards (cf. Gal 1:15; Acts 9:15; 1Tim 1:18).

The Levite only starts to perform his service when he is thirty years old. The whole period up to 30 years is preparation for this task. This can be applied to a service in the church. Before a person performs a public service in the church, he will also get to know God's thoughts about his service better by reading and studying God's Word. That does not mean that nothing is done at that time of preparation. A believer can testify of the Lord as soon as he is converted (Acts 9:20). He can also thank the Lord in the church for his redemption.

God asserts His right over those He redeems, and only by being of Him can redemption become a reality. Through the exchange between firstborn and Levites we see the two fundamental pillars on which the service rests:

1. The new birth and purification through the blood of Christ.
2. The connection to and sanctification for the Lord.

The choice of God of this tribe shows us His grace. Their ancestor Levi is characterized by violence and cruelty (Gen 49:5; 34:25-31). But God glorifies Himself by making dedicated believers out of self-willed and cruel people.

Verses 14-20 | Command to Count the Levites

14 Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying, 15 "Number the sons of Levi by their fathers' households, by their families; every male from a month old and upward you shall number." 16 So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, just as he had been commanded. 17 These then are the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon and Kohath and Merari. 18 These are the names of the sons of Gershon by their families: Libni and Shimei; 19 and the sons of Kohath by their families: Amram and Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel; 20 and the sons of Merari by their families: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their fathers' households.

The Levites must also be counted. Like the firstborn (verse 40), the Levites are also counted from one month old. Each Levite individually is important to God and the service to be rendered. His task cannot be performed by anyone else. This is also the case in the church. It is of great practical importance that every child of God knows his task which the Lord has given him to do. It is also important that he stays with this and does not interfere in what the Lord gives another person to do. The Lord is sovereign in this.

The Levites all take a different place toward the tabernacle. The three sons each have a different task. This we can apply to the church to which the Lord Jesus gave "some [as] evangelists, and some [as] pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11). These gifts or tasks can be seen in the sons of Levi. There are believers who can speak about the Lord Jesus in a special way in what He is for God; others can present Him in what He is for the sinner in a special way. In this way, everyone has received his own gift to serve with.

A brother from Hong Kong told something that reminds us of this and illustrates it. He has known three leaders of home churches in China who have been of great significance for many home churches in China. All three have been nicknamed after the tabernacle. A brother was called "altar" because he burned for the gospel. The second brother was called 'laver'

because in his preaching he emphasized holiness and cleansing. The third brother was called 'sanctuary' because he knew the Scriptures so well.

Verses 21-26 | The Gershonites and Their Task

21 Of Gershon [was] the family of the Libnites and the family of the Shimeites; these [were] the families of the Gershonites. 22 Their numbered men, in the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, [even] their numbered men [were] 7,500. 23 The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward, 24 and the leader of the fathers' households of the Gershonites [was] Eliasaph the son of Lael. 25 Now the duties of the sons of Gershon in the tent of meeting [involved] the tabernacle and the tent, its covering, and the screen for the doorway of the tent of meeting, 26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway of the court which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and its cords, according to all the service concerning them.

The Gershonites have to take care of all the coverings and curtains. Coverings and curtains speak of our practical revelation in the world, what people see of us. Is the Lord Jesus visible in our lives?

The Gershonites must camp on the west side, the side of the tribulation. Our whole life as Gershonites may be a testimony of Who the Lord Jesus is. Who the Lord Jesus is for us is best seen when we find ourselves in difficulties. Being a witness is performing a service as an evangelist.

Verses 27-32 | The Kohathites and Their Task

27 Of Kohath [was] the family of the Amramites and the family of the Izharites and the family of the Hebronites and the family of the Uzzielites; these were the families of the Kohathites. 28 In the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, [there were] 8,600, performing the duties of the sanctuary. 29 The families of the sons of Kohath were to camp on the southward side of the tabernacle, 30 and the leader of the fathers' households of the Kohathite families was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. 31 Now their duties [involved] the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the utensils of the sanctuary with which they minister, and the screen, and all the service concerning them; 32 and Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest [was] the chief of the leaders of Levi, [and had] the oversight of those who perform the duties of the sanctuary.

The Kohathites receive the care for all the objects that are in the sanctuary, both in the holy and in the holy of holies. They are familiar with the presence of God. They know, so to speak, the position of God's people before God. In all the objects they care for, the glory of God is seen in Christ.

They have to camp on the south side, the right side. That is the side of dignity, of a known position. It is the task of the teacher to make all members of God's people aware of this.

Verses 33-37 | The Merarites and Their Task

33 Of Merari [was] the family of the Mahlites and the family of the Mushites; these [were] the families of Merari. 34 Their numbered men in the numbering of every male from a month old and upward, [were] 6,200. 35 The leader of the fathers' households of the families of Merari [was] Zuriel the son of Abihail. They [were] to camp on the northward side of the tabernacle. 36 Now the appointed duties of the sons of Merari [involved] the frames of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, all its equipment, and the service concerning them, 37 and the pillars around the court with their sockets and their pegs and their cords.

The Merarites are given the care for the boards and pillars, for everything needed to hold up and sustain the tabernacle. They must camp on the north side, the cold side, the side from where the attacks of the evil one come to destroy God's work.

We see their service in the work of the shepherds, who are committed to keeping the church standing so that it does not succumb under the pressure of the enemy. Shepherds make sure that the believers remain united, like the boards of the tabernacle.

Verse 38 | Camp of Moses and Aaron and his sons

38 Now those who were to camp before the tabernacle eastward, before the tent of meeting toward the sunrise, are Moses and Aaron and his sons, performing the duties of the sanctuary for the obligation of the sons of Israel; but the layman coming near was to be put to death.

Moses and Aaron were to camp on the east side, at the entrance of the tabernacle, the side of the sunrise. These most privileged persons and families

are closest to God's dwelling place and access to Him. That distinction of proximity does not exist in the church.

Every believer is equally close to God. But there is a difference in the enjoyment that the individual members of the church have of the position they all occupy without distinction because of the work of the Lord Jesus. He who is closest to Christ is the one who serves Him best. Without this closeness it is not possible to serve Him.

Verses 39-51 | Difference in Number

39 All the numbered men of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the command of the LORD by their families, every male from a month old and upward, [were] 22,000. 40 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Number every firstborn male of the sons of Israel from a month old and upward, and make a list of their names. 41 You shall take the Levites for Me, I am the LORD, instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the cattle of the sons of Israel." 42 So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, just as the LORD had commanded him; 43 and all the firstborn males by the number of names from a month old and upward, for their numbered men were 22,273. 44 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 45 "Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel and the cattle of the Levites. And the Levites shall be Mine; I am the LORD. 46 For the ransom of the 273 of the firstborn of the sons of Israel who are in excess beyond the Levites, 47 you shall take five shekels apiece, per head; you shall take [them] in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), 48 and give the money, the ransom of those who are in excess among them, to Aaron and to his sons." 49 So Moses took the ransom money from those who were in excess, beyond those ransomed by the Levites; 50 from the firstborn of the sons of Israel he took the money in terms of the shekel of the sanctuary, 1,365. 51 Then Moses gave the ransom money to Aaron and to his sons, at the command of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

For the third time, Moses is given the command to count. The purpose of this count is to see if every firstborn has a Levite as a counterpart. The question is whether anyone who is in position of a firstborn is in practice a Levite. Does every believer perform his task as Levite?

The count of both groups shows that there are unfortunately less Levites than firstborn. Applied to the church this means that in the practice of the church not every believer as a firstborn has a Levite as a counterpart. Yet God asserts His right to it. He wants such a person to serve as a Levite. Ransom is required to become a Levite as a firstborn. God determines the amount of the ransom. The ransom is ten times as much as the ransom to be paid by one who is numbered of the people (Exo 30:13).

The awareness that I was bought for a price by the blood of the Lord Jesus will lead me to accomplish my task as a Levite. It is my responsibility, of which the number five speaks.

The mention of cattle in verse 41 indicates that God asserts His authority and His rights not only upon ourselves, but upon everything we possess.

Numbers 4

Verses 1-4 | Service of the Kohathites

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 2 "Take a census of the descendants of Kohath from among the sons of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' households, 3 from thirty years and upward, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tent of meeting. 4 This is the work of the descendants of Kohath in the tent of meeting, [concerning] the most holy things.

The first of whom the task is specified are the descendants of Kohath. They have the most important task: the care for the objects in the holy and the holy of holies. In order to perform their task, they must be between 30 and 50 years old. For us these ages are not literally, but spiritually applicable. It is the period of power. Caring for the holy things requires spiritual strength. We must give the Lord the best years of our lives. We can also make the application here that there are tasks in the church that a newly converted cannot fulfil (1Tim 3:6).

There are also other ages in connection with the Levites' service:

1. They may already perform certain activities from the age of 25 (Num 8:24).
2. Later, in the time of David, they may begin already at the age of 20 (1Chr 23:24; Ezra 3:8).

To transport the objects of the tabernacle, they must be packed in 'travel clothing'. The objects are successively covered by the following different coverings:

Over the ark (verses 5-6):

1. the veil
2. covering of porpoise skin
3. cloth of pure blue.

Over the table (verses 7-8):

1. cloth of pure blue
2. cloth of scarlet [material]
3. covering of porpoise skin.

Over the lampstand (verses 9-10):

1. cloth of pure blue
2. covering of porpoise skin.

Over the golden altar (verses 11-12):

1. cloth of pure blue
2. covering of porpoise skin.

Over the bronze altar (verses 13-14):

1. purple cloth
2. covering of porpoise skin.

Verses 5-6 | Covering over the Ark

5 "When the camp sets out, Aaron and his sons shall go in and they shall take down the veil of the screen and cover the ark of the testimony with it; 6 and they shall lay a covering of porpoise skin on it, and shall spread over [it] a cloth of pure blue, and shall insert its poles.

Before the Kohathites can perform their task, the priests must first take action. First of all, the care for the ark is mentioned. The ark is for God the most important. The priests cover the ark with the veil, on top of which they lay a covering of porpoise skin and on top of it, finally, a cloth of pure blue. The latter is seen when the ark is being carried by its poles through the wilderness.

In all this we see a beautiful spiritual meaning for us. The ark represents the Lord Jesus as God (gold) and Man (wood), Who accomplished the work of reconciliation (mercy seat) by which He met all the holy demands of God (cherubs). Before we as Kohathites can carry the truth of the Lord Jesus through the wilderness, before we pass it on to others, we must first have been busy with it as priests. We must first bring a truth in worship

to God before we can show it to others and thus pass it on to others. Only then can we call a truth our spiritual property. It is not about taking a truth in our understanding, but in our heart.

The truths of the Lord Jesus and the church cannot be shown openly and naked to the world. If this happens, what the Lord Jesus warns about: "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine" (Mt 7:6a). Dogs and pigs are unclean animals. These truths must be carried through the world with appropriate covering.

The ark is first covered with the veil, which represents the Lord Jesus in His flesh, His body (Heb 10:20). People in the world have seen Him as Man. But they saw nothing attractive in Him: "For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no [stately] form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him" (Isa 53:2-3). This is represented in the covering of porpoise skin.

This covering is also a protection against all kinds of weather influences, so they will not get a grip on the ark. In the same way the Lord Jesus was in His life on earth not harmed by anything from outside (Jn 14:30).

The outer covering is a cloth of pure blue. Everything with the Lord Jesus on earth speaks of heaven. Nicodemus speaks for his unbelieving colleagues when he says: "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God" (Jn 3:2). His heavenly origins cannot be denied. Thus we give our testimony concerning Him in this world.

Verses 7-8 | Covering over the Table of the Bread of the Presence

7 Over the table of the bread of the Presence they shall also spread a cloth of blue and put on it the dishes and the pans and the sacrificial bowls and the jars for the drink offering, and the continual bread shall be on it. 8 They shall spread over them a cloth of scarlet [material], and cover the same with a covering of porpoise skin, and they shall insert its poles.

The priests then occupy themselves with the table of the breads. First a cloth of blue is put over it. On top of that the objects and the continual

bread are laid. A cloth of scarlet material is spread over it. The whole is covered with a covering of porpoise skin. Then the poles can be inserted to carry the table through the wilderness to the next place where the people will camp.

The table, made of wood and gold, also speaks of the Lord Jesus, but then connected with the church that is presented in the twelve breads of the Presence. Also with the table we see a cloth of blue that is first spread over the table, which in turn represents the heavenly origin of the Lord Jesus. The fact that the bread must be laid on it indicates the close connection of the church with the Lord Jesus. The church is also heavenly in origin.

Just as the table carries the breads through the wilderness, the Lord Jesus carries His church through the world. Through His gifts to the church – of which the various objects on the table are a picture – he ensures that the order of the church is preserved. The order of the church is perceived by the environment, also the world (Col 2:5).

To the origins of the church suffering is linked. This is represented in the cloth of scarlet material. The Lord Jesus suffered and gave His blood to make the church come into being (Acts 20:28b). Paul suffered to proclaim the truth of the church (Col 1:24). What the world sees of it is depicted in the covering that is spread over the whole, a covering of porpoise skin. In the carrying by the poles of the table with the breads through the world we can see a picture of the proclamation of the truth of Christ and the church. This truth has no attraction to the world.

Verses 9-10 | Covering over the Lampstand

9 Then they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand for the light, along with its lamps and its snuffers, and its trays and all its oil vessels, by which they serve it; 10 and they shall put it and all its utensils in a covering of porpoise skin, and shall put it on the carrying bars.

Two coverings must be spread over the lampstand. The lampstand gives light in the sanctuary. The sanctuary speaks of the heavenly places and the objects in the sanctuary speak of the heavenly things, they are “copies of the things in the heavens” (Heb 9:23). To know heavenly truths, we need the light of heaven, which is given to us by the Holy Spirit. We see

that represented in the lampstand that is first covered with a blue cloth. The covering of porpoise skin is visible to the world. This indicates that the light that we spread and that should be heavenly in character is not attractive to the world.

Verses 11-12 | Covering over the Golden Altar

11 Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth and cover it with a covering of porpoise skin, and shall insert its poles; 12 and they shall take all the utensils of service, with which they serve in the sanctuary, and put them in a blue cloth and cover them with a covering of porpoise skin, and put them on the carrying bars.

The golden altar of incense is first covered with a blue cloth. The prayers and adoration reminiscent of this altar (Psa 141:2; Rev 5:8b), are necessary for the church, that they may preserve their heavenly character during their journey through the wilderness. The tarpaulin of sea cowhides symbolically expresses the fact that these kinds of activities are unattractive to the world. The heavenly value of it has been hidden from the world.

So it is with all the service that happens in the sanctuary: it is heavenly in character, far-sighted for the world, and what she sees of it is unattractive to her.

Verses 13-14 | Covering over the Bronze Altar

13 Then they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it. 14 They shall also put on it all its utensils by which they serve in connection with it: the firepans, the forks and shovels and the basins, all the utensils of the altar; and they shall spread a cover of porpoise skin over it and insert its poles.

The bronze altar is also part of the service of the Kohathites, because, as with the golden vessels, it represents a revelation of God. This altar speaks of the work of Christ for the sinner, in which God invites the sinner to come to Him.

The bronze altar is not covered by a blue cloth, because it is not meant to express a heavenly character, but the work done on earth. The purple speaks of the royal dignity of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus will reign as

King on the basis of His work. He is now glorified after suffering (Heb 2:9). This glory will be visible to all in the kingdom of peace. Suffering and glory thereafter belong together (1Pet 1:11). This truth also has no attraction for the world. This is expressed in the outer garment, the covering of porpoise skin.

All that has been entrusted to the Kohathites must be carried with their hands, either with poles or on a carrier (verses 6,8,10,11,12,14). None of it should come into contact with the sand of the wilderness.

Verse 15 | What the Kohathites Should Carry

15 When Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy [objects] and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is to set out, after that the sons of Kohath shall come to carry [them], so that they will not touch the holy [objects] and die. These are the things in the tent of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.

Here we see once again that God establishes a sharp separation between the ministry of the priests and that of the Levites. The Levites are not allowed to touch anything of the holy objects under penalty of death. Only the priests are allowed to touch “the holy [objects]”. As an application, it can be said that no one should think that, by virtue of his gift, he can occupy himself with heavenly things, while others would not have that right. Whoever thinks so assumes something that does not come from God. This error gave rise to the reprehensible distinction between clergy and laity.

Being occupied with the holy things is the privilege of every child of God. Explaining the truths of God’s Word is another matter. Then God makes use of gifts He Himself has given through His Spirit.

Verse 16 | The Task of Eleazar

16 “The responsibility of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is the oil for the light and the fragrant incense and the continual grain offering and the anointing oil—the responsibility of all the tabernacle and of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.”

Eleazar is the third son of Aaron. He is connected with the land to which the people are travelling. There he will also be a high priest instead of

his father Aaron. But already now he has a special relationship with the Kohathites and the holy things (Num 3:32).

In order to perform our service as Kohathites well, we need a heavenly high priest. The Lord Jesus is that perfect heavenly High Priest. He knows perfectly how everything functions to the glory of God. He knows the value of the oil for light: the power of the Holy Spirit needed to learn to know heavenly things. He knows the value for God of the fragrant incense: He adds it to the prayers of the saints (Rev 8:3). He knows how the grain offering is a daily pleasure for God: the memory of the Lord Jesus in His life on earth. He knows the value of the anointing oil: the Holy Spirit, through whom only the whole service to God is pleasing to God.

Everything in the tabernacle is under the supervision of Eleazar. There is no other way. It is no different in the church. There everything is under the supervision of the Lord Jesus. It is His church. He knows how everything in it must function to the glory of God. If we, as true Kohathites, submit to Him, make ourselves available to Him, our service will be pleasing to God.

Verses 17-20 | The Kohathites Shall Continue to Exist

17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, 18 "Do not let the tribe of the families of the Kohathites be cut off from among the Levites. 19 But do this to them that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy [objects]: Aaron and his sons shall go in and assign each of them to his work and to his load; 20 but they shall not go in to see the holy [objects] even for a moment, or they will die."

The family of the Kohathites must always be preserved. They must "live and not die" to perform their service. Their lives depend on the way they deal with the holy things. It is therefore vital that they follow the instructions of Aaron and his sons closely.

It speaks of believers to submit to the Lord Jesus in their service and that they also keep an eye on their service as priests. Servants should always be aware that their service is meaningful to God only if it is done in obedience to the Lord Jesus and guided by priestly feelings. That will make clear to everyone what he has to do or to carry. He who does not perform his priestly service well will not perform his Levite service well either.

The danger to the Levites that they believe they have the right to enter the holy place solely on the grounds that they are servants is also pointed out. Such pride cannot be allowed by God and will be punished by Him with death.

Verses 21-28 | Service of the Gershonites

21 Then the LORD to Moses, saying, 22 "Take a census of the sons of Gershon also, by their fathers' households, by their families; 23 from thirty years and upward to fifty years old, you shall number them; all who enter to perform the service to do the work in the tent of meeting. 24 This is the service of the families of the Gershonites, in serving and in carrying: 25 they shall carry the curtains of the tabernacle and the tent of meeting [with] its covering and the covering of porpoise skin that is on top of it, and the screen for the doorway of the tent of meeting, 26 and the hangings of the court, and the screen for the doorway of the gate of the court which is around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords and all the equipment for their service; and all that is to be done, they shall perform. 27 All the service of the sons of the Gershonites, in all their loads and in all their work, shall be [performed] at the command of Aaron and his sons; and you shall assign to them as a duty all their loads. 28 This is the service of the families of the sons of the Gershonites in the tent of meeting, and their duties [shall be] under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.

The age limits for the Gershonites are the same as for the Kohathites. They have to carry all the curtains and coverings of the tent, with the accompanying cords and equipment. Their job is to ensure that the curtains and coverings are taken off, transported and hung or placed again in the right place and in the right way.

The coverings speak of our behavior, our habits, what people see of us. The Lord gives servants who take special care to ensure that believers behave in accordance with their position as members of the church of God. They will help the believers to live for the Lord's honor. Their service is aimed at ensuring that believers display the features of the Lord Jesus in their lives.

The coverings that are under the care of the Gershonites also speak of separation. They shield the tabernacle from the environment. However, it is

not only about separation *from*, but also about separation *to*, which means to God. The whole tabernacle is dedicated to God. The same applies to the church, which should be separate from the world and entirely dedicated to God.

Verses 29-33 | Service of the Merarites

29 “[As for] the sons of Merari, you shall number them by their families, by their fathers’ households; 30 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, you shall number them, everyone who enters the service to do the work of the tent of meeting. 31 Now this is the duty of their loads, for all their service in the tent of meeting: the boards of the tabernacle and its bars and its pillars and its sockets, 32 and the pillars around the court and their sockets and their pegs and their cords, with all their equipment and with all their service; and you shall assign [each man] by name the items he is to carry. 33 This is the service of the families of the sons of Merari, according to all their service in the tent of meeting, under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest.”

After the service of the Gershonites, who are among other things responsible for separation, follows the service of the Merarites, who are designed for unity. For the Merarites the same age limits apply as for the Kohathites and the Gershonites. They care for the boards and pillars, which give stability to the building.

Boards are a picture of the believers. Bars and pillars are a picture of servants who confirm the believers in the truth (cf. Gal 2:9). The purpose of their teaching is that they should “no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). They ensure that the believers are firm in their faith and “all agree ... made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1Cor 1:10b; Col 2:5). Then in their lives they will learn to see things as God sees them. It will also prevent them from drifting away (Heb 2:1).

Verses 34-48 | Numbered Men per Family and Total

34 So Moses and Aaron and the leaders of the congregation numbered the sons of the Kohathites by their families and by their fathers’ households, 35 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the ser

vice for work in the tent of meeting. 36 Their numbered men by their families were 2,750. 37 These are the numbered men of the Kohathite families, everyone who was serving in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD through Moses. 38 The numbered men of the sons of Gershon by their families and by their fathers' households, 39 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tent of meeting. 40 Their numbered men by their families, by their fathers' households, were 2,630. 41 These are the numbered men of the families of the sons of Gershon, everyone who was serving in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD. 42 The numbered men of the families of the sons of Merari by their families, by their fathers' households, 43 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who entered the service for work in the tent of meeting. 44 Their numbered men by their families were 3,200. 45 These are the numbered men of the families of the sons of Merari, whom Moses and Aaron numbered according to the commandment of the LORD through Moses. 46 All the numbered men of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron and the leaders of Israel numbered, by their families and by their fathers' households, 47 from thirty years and upward even to fifty years old, everyone who could enter to do the work of service and the work of carrying in the tent of meeting. 48 Their numbered men were 8,580.

After the division of tasks, the numbering per family and the total follow. The total number of 22,000 Levites from one month (Num 3:39) is large in proportion to the dimensions of the tabernacle. Those who actually serve, i.e. those who are between 30 and 50 years old, are 8,580. If every Levite faithfully does his job, he will be able to do his job well, for they are with many, whereas the work to be done is comparatively small.

Nor has the Lord Jesus laid upon His servants today any heavy and difficult burdens, for His "yoke is easy" and His "burden is light" (Mt 11:30; cf. Mt 23:4). According to the Lord's purpose, no servant need be overloaded. With so many servants you can relieve each other in time. Unfortunately, many of today's Levites do not perform their task (cf. Neh 3:5). The Lord Himself speaks of it when He says: "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few" (Mt 9:37). The result is that often too much has to be done by too few.

Verse 49 | Numbered for Service Purposes

49 According to the commandment of the LORD through Moses, they were numbered, everyone by his serving or carrying; thus [these were] his numbered men, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

Each one numbered has his own task. In this way, every member of the church has his own function in the body, which no other member can take over. “God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired” (1Cor 12:18). No one has the freedom to change function or think he doesn’t matter (1Cor 12:14-21).

Numbers 5

Introduction

Everything in the camp is organized and arranged. What must now happen is cleansing the camp of evil, that God, in Whom only their power is, may be with them. It is God's wisdom, the wisdom that is from above and that is first and foremost pure (Jam 3:17), to give His precepts for this. Defilement is to His dishonor and takes away the strength of the journey from the people. Eliphaz knows that, although he applies his statement in Job 22 to Job iniquitously (Job 22:23).

The importance of this chapter is that it shows that the presence of the LORD among His people can never be connected with evil. In Leviticus it is about the priests, they must be pure to be able to perform their service in the sanctuary in the presence of God. Here, in Numbers, it is about the people as the camp where the LORD dwells.

Anything connected with sin must be removed. Sometimes the person must be sent away for this (verses 1-4), sometimes the evil is done away with confession and compensation (verses 5-10), sometimes there is only suspicion and first the guilt or innocence must be determined, after which the LORD's prescription must be acted upon (verses 11-31).

Verses 1-4 | The Unclean Must Be Sent Away from the Camp

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Command the sons of Israel that they send away from the camp every leper and everyone having a discharge and everyone who is unclean because of a [dead] person. 3 You shall send away both male and female; you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell in their midst." 4 The sons of Israel did so and sent them outside the camp; just as the LORD had spoken to Moses, thus the sons of Israel did.

The command to send away anyone who is unclean applies to the whole of Israel. The whole people are responsible to act with what does not suit God's presence in their midst. For us, the different forms of defilement are not literal, but spiritual. It is about being influenced by the world, the flesh,

sin, things with which God cannot have fellowship. He has judged these things in the Lord Jesus on the cross. That is why we must also judge them.

Three forms of evil are mentioned:

1. leprosy; that is a picture of sin that breaks outwards and is not judged;
2. a discharge; this is a picture of the sin that comes from someone and flows to other people who are also defiled by it;
3. touching a dead person; here sin does not originate from anyone, but is the picture that someone is defiled by touching something that is not in connection with the living God.

The Israelites act with these cases as the LORD has spoken and as it has been made known to them by Moses. We must also act in the same way as God has made known to us in His Word about uncleanness.

The reason for all discipline is that God lives in the midst of the church. Therefore, all evil must be removed. This can happen in self-judgment, that is, when we have sinned, we confess it before the Lord and judge the evil within ourselves (1Cor 11:28-29). If there is no self-judgment, the church has to judge the evil. Then the church must remove the person from among her midst who refuses to judge evil in his life and remove it from his life: "Remove the wicked one from among yourselves" (1Cor 5:13b).

Verses 5-10 | Restitution of Guilt

5 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 6 "Speak to the sons of Israel, 'When a man or woman commits any of the sins of mankind, acting unfaithfully against the LORD, and that person is guilty, 7 then he shall confess his sins which he has committed, and he shall make restitution in full for his wrong and add to it one-fifth of it, and give [it] to him whom he has wronged. 8 But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution which is made for the wrong [must go] to the LORD for the priest, besides the ram of atonement, by which atonement is made for him. 9 Also every contribution pertaining to all the holy [gifts] of the sons of Israel, which they offer to the priest, shall be his. 10 So every man's holy [gifts] shall be his; whatever any man gives to the priest, it becomes his.'"

The uncleanness of the previous verses indicates more a state of uncleanness, which can be applied to *living* in sin. One also becomes unclean by committing a sin once, which can be applied to *falling* into sin. This is the case “if anyone is caught in any trespass” (Gal 6:1). In that case, cleansing must take place. But not only that. Restitution must also be given to the injured party. See the explanation of the guilt offering in Leviticus 5:14-6:7.

It is not enough for God to pay only the guilt. Something extra must be given to him who is affected. The Lord Jesus did that perfectly. God is dishonored. The Lord Jesus not only removed the guilt, but glorified God above and beyond. Here we find the positive side in dealing with sin. Something emerges that is to the glory of God.

Here something is added to what has already been said about the guilt offering in Leviticus 5-6. A guilt cannot remain outstanding. An outstanding guilt disturbs the fellowship and the peace in the church. In order to prevent this from happening, the guilt must be restituted at all times. If the guilt can no longer be restituted, for example because the injured party has died, the guilty one must go to the family members of the person injured by him. If there are none, he must go to the priest with his confession and his restitution.

The priest is a picture of a spiritually-minded believer to whom a debtor can relieve the burden of his heart, when the one he has aggrieved is no longer there. This is not an easy task for the ‘priest’. Such a believer will therefore receive a special appreciation for this from the Lord and his fellow believers.

Verses 11-14 | A Suspicion of Unfaithfulness

11 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 12 “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘If any man’s wife goes astray and is unfaithful to him, 13 and a man has intercourse with her and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband and she is undetected, although she has defiled herself, and there is no witness against her and she has not been caught in the act, 14 if a spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife when she has defiled herself, or if a spirit of jealousy comes over him and he is jealous of his wife when she has not defiled herself,

The direct meaning of the part of verses 11-31 puts the importance of the marriage in full light. The slightest suspicion of infidelity is a violation of marriage at its root. The violation of marriage affects society in its foundations. Therefore, there must be clarity about the relationship in marriage when questions arise about faithfulness. Uncertainty must be disposed of. God indicates here the way in which this should be done.

In the unfaithful woman the picture of Israel can be seen as a testimony for God on earth. The same goes for the church that is now God's testimony on earth. Israel has deviated from God by serving the idols. The church has deviated from God by connecting with the world. Both forms of unfaithfulness are spiritual fornication. Instead of fighting for and with God against the enemies, God's people have made a covenant with those enemies.

There is also a personal application to be made regarding how everyone's life is. The question must be asked whether our life is for the Lord or for something or someone else. This is about the assessment of our walk through the wilderness, while God walks with us through the wilderness.

It is based on the jealousy of the man. This should not be seen here as a negative characteristic. This jealousy or suspicion is a justified feeling that belongs to sincere love when the object of that love does not show any love in return. It is even possible that, instead of love in return, unfaithfulness is present, that the expected love goes to someone or something else. This case is presented here as an option.

Verse 15 | The Grain Offering of Jealousy

15 the man shall then bring his wife to the priest, and shall bring [as] an offering for her one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal; he shall not pour oil on it nor put frankincense on it, for it is a grain offering of jealousy, a grain offering of memorial, a reminder of iniquity.

There may be a suspicion that something is not right in the dedication of a believer or a local church. Those who care about the welfare of the believers will bring the matter to the priest. We can see the priest here as a type of the Lord Jesus. With all our suspicions we can go to Him.

The offering that is brought along also represents the Lord Jesus: a grain offering of barley meal. This offering is the humblest kind of grain offering. It shows the Lord Jesus in His deepest humiliation on earth, in which He was completely faithful to His God. This has become perfectly visible on the cross, where He is made sin. Because this offering is a reminder of iniquity, no oil nor frankincense may be added. God can't have any pleasure (frankincense) in injustice and the Holy Spirit (oil) is completely alien to it. The Lord is the sacrifice made for our unfaithfulness.

Verses 16-18 | Acts of the Priest

16 'Then the priest shall bring her near and have her stand before the LORD, 17 and the priest shall take holy water in an earthenware vessel; and he shall take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put [it] into the water. 18 The priest shall then have the woman stand before the LORD and let [the hair] of the woman's head go loose, and place the grain offering of memorial in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy, and in the hand of the priest is to be the water of bitterness that brings a curse.

The priest then presents the 'suspect' before the LORD. Any question of our dedication can only be decided in His presence and not by any ecclesiastical commission.

Then the priest takes holy water, a picture of the Word of God (Eph 5:26). He does that water in an earthenware vessel. The earthenware vessel is a picture of what man is by nature (2Cor 4:7). He also takes dust from the floor of the tabernacle. This represents the power of death in the presence of God. The Lord Jesus was laid by God "in the dust of death" (Psa 22:15b). The dust is what man is and what he becomes when he dies (Gen 3:19). Water and dust represent that God cleanses (water) through judgment.

Then the hair of the woman's head is let go loose. The woman's long hair is the symbol of dedication. God expects the woman to wear this symbol (1Cor 11:15). It is not a matter of time or culture. It is hereby released because her dedication is at stake (cf. Lev 13:45). She also receives the grain offering of jealousy on her hands, which here is called "grain offering of memorial". The believer of whom dedication is questioned must be

reminded, it must be remembered to him, Who the Lord Jesus is as the perfect Devotee to God, Who was faithful to death.

Finally, we see that the priest holds in his hand the water made bitter by the dust. The Word of God must be presented to that believer as a Word that judges (Heb 4:12). Then the priest will speak to the woman.

Verses 19-22 | The Priest Shall Have Her Take an Oath

19 The priest shall have her take an oath and shall say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you and if you have not gone astray into uncleanness, [being] under [the authority of] your husband, be immune to this water of bitterness that brings a curse; 20 if you, however, have gone astray, [being] under [the authority of] your husband, and if you have defiled yourself and a man other than your husband has had intercourse with you" 21 (then the priest shall have the woman swear with the oath of the curse, and the priest shall say to the woman), "the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people by the LORD's making your thigh waste away and your abdomen swell; 22 and this water that brings a curse shall go into your stomach, and make your abdomen swell and your thigh waste away." And the woman shall say, "Amen. Amen."

The priest has to make the woman swear under oath. The water, a picture of the Word of God, will bring to light the truth concerning her unfaithfulness or faithfulness. God will make her thigh waste away and her abdomen swell when she has drunk of that bitter water.

The Word of God will, in case of a secret unfaithfulness of a believer, reveal the features of that unfaithfulness through His Word. Such secretly unfaithful believers serve not Christ, but their own appetite or stomach, which is their god (Rom 16:18; Phil 3:19). Also, the application of the Word in judgment to their walk will make it clear that there is no spiritual power present, of which the wasting away of the thigh is a picture. Such unfaithful believers are spiritually limp, they are unbalanced in their religious life.

In expressing "amen, amen" by the woman we see her cooperation in the investigation (cf. Deu 27:26). She declares that she is aware that she has been placed in the light of God. Those who would like to live a dedicated life will be willing to undergo this investigation.

Verses 23-24 | The Woman Drinks the Bitter Water

23 'The priest shall then write these curses on a scroll, and he shall wash them off into the water of bitterness. 24 Then he shall make the woman drink the water of bitterness that brings a curse, so that the water which brings a curse will go into her and [cause] bitterness.

As a sign that the water of judgment cleanses, the priest writes the curses on a scroll and washes them off into the water of bitterness. Then he gives the woman the water of bitterness to drink. The Word is bitter when it has to examine us for possible deviations. This is not a work that gives joy. The Word gives joy when we are allowed to occupy ourselves with the Lord Jesus, not when we have to occupy ourselves with ourselves and with the judgment of our flesh (cf. Rev 10:9; Pro 5:4).

Verses 25-26 | The Memorial Offering of Jealousy

25 The priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, and he shall wave the grain offering before the LORD and bring it to the altar; 26 and the priest shall take a handful of the grain offering as its memorial offering and offer [it] up in smoke on the altar, and afterward he shall make the woman drink the water.

The application of the Word cannot happen separately from the Lord Jesus, presented here in the grain offering of jealousy. The Lord Jesus cannot be seen apart from His full dedication to God. God always wants to be reminded of this. We see this in the picture of the priest who offers a memorial offering as a special form of the grain offering up in smoke on the altar.

Verses 27-28 | When the Water Is Drunk

27 When he has made her drink the water, then it shall come about, if she has defiled herself and has been unfaithful to her husband, that the water which brings a curse will go into her and [cause] bitterness, and her abdomen will swell and her thigh will waste away, and the woman will become a curse among her people. 28 But if the woman has not defiled herself and is clean, she will then be free and conceive children.

After drinking the bitter water, the truth about faithfulness or unfaithfulness will become clear. The Word is like the rain that is drunk by the ground, after which what the ground produces will show what kind of soil we are dealing with. The Word always makes it clear whether there is fruit for God or whether it is reprehensible fruit: "For ground that drinks the rain which often falls on it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned" (Heb 6:7-8).

If the investigation shows that she is innocent, this has consequences for her fertility. Life will come forth from her. So it is with every child of God that lives dedicated. The fruit of life will become visible.

Verses 29-31 | This Is the Law of Jealousy

29 'This is the law of jealousy: when a wife, [being] under [the authority of] her husband, goes astray and defiles herself, 30 or when a spirit of jealousy comes over a man and he is jealous of his wife, he shall then make the woman stand before the LORD, and the priest shall apply all this law to her. 31 Moreover, the man will be free from guilt, but that woman shall bear her guilt.'"

Israel and the church have both become unfaithful. With regard to the church in Corinth, Paul writes that he is jealous of them with the jealousy of God (2Cor 11:2). He speaks to them about a deviation from Christ. They are no longer fully focused on Him; they are no longer fully dedicated to Him. The serpent, that is Satan, is always out to cool the feelings of love and dedication of the believers for Christ (2Cor 11:3). In cunning he spoils the thoughts, so that they no longer have Christ as an object, but other things or persons.

The church is connected to Christ as a pure virgin (2Cor 11:2). But the church as a whole has not remained faithful. It is presented as a great whore in Revelation 17 (Rev 17:1-5). As far as the final fulfilment is concerned, the time has not yet come, but the traces of the church's unfaithfulness are deep. But every true believer, as well as every local church, will gladly participate in the investigation to detect any deviation that may prevent them from serving Christ completely dedicated out of love. The sincere

praying of the prayer at the end of Psalm 139 is in this context important: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way" (Psa 139:23-24).

Numbers 6

Introduction

God has separated a special tribe for Himself, that of Levi. But God does not act at will. In this chapter, He gives directions that allow every Israelite who wants to do so to commit himself to Him.

After the unfaithfulness of the people, represented in the unfaithful wife of the previous chapter, here comes the other side. Here is someone who personally wants to devote himself completely and voluntarily to the LORD. When the condition of God's people has become like that of the unfaithful wife, in whom we may see a picture of the deviation of the whole people, God will speak about the individual in His people. This we also see in Revelation 2-3. After the deviation of each church, the word is addressed to the individual: "He who overcomes".

What is presented in the Nazirite is a picture of what the whole people should have been before God, but what they unfortunately were not. Israel has not set itself apart for God. It has been fulfilled by a God-fearing remnant in the midst of the people. In Acts 2 we see something of that. In the midst of the people that the Lord Jesus rejected, a company is formed by the Holy Spirit, which speaks "of the mighty deeds of God" (Acts 2:11).

Verses 1-2 | The Vow of a Nazirite

1 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man or woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to the LORD,

A Nazirite is someone separated. Separation is not negative, is not a goal in itself, but is a separation to the LORD. The Lord Jesus was the true Nazirite on earth, not literally, but in its true meaning. He did drink wine, we do not read that He had long hair, and He touched the dead. This shows that dedication is an inner matter. Its external characteristics must be visible signs. Where only are external characteristics, there is talk of hypocrisy, pharisaism.

Whoever makes the Nazirite vow (cf. 2Chr 17:16) does so for a certain time. There are also people who are Nazirite for their entire lives, such as Samson, Samuel and John the baptist. As such they are already labelled before birth (Jdg 13:5,14; 1Sam 1:11; Lk 1:15). They are it in the literal sense. In a way, the Rechabites are also Nazirites (Jer 35:1-19).

Whether there have been many who have dedicated themselves as Nazirites to the LORD is not clear. It is possible that in Numbers 30 there is a reference to the Nazirite vow (Num 30:3). They have been there (Amos 2:11-12), possibly even before the law of the Nazirite is given here. [See also Lamentations 4 where for ‘the consecrated ones’ also ‘Nazirites’ can be translated (Lam 4:7-8).] In any case, the case as such seems to have been known. Thus in Genesis 49 Joseph is called “the one distinguished [i.e. Nazirite] among his brothers” (Gen 49:26).

It seems that the conversation between James and Paul in Jerusalem also refers to the Nazirite vow (Acts 21:23-26; cf. Acts 18:18). Paul’s involvement in this is not in accord with his calling and service. The Christian is “not under law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14), and should therefore not place himself or himself be placed under law. Making vows does not belong to his position.

Verses 3-4 | Abstain from Eating and Drinking from the Vine

3 he shall abstain from wine and strong drink; he shall drink no vinegar, whether made from wine or strong drink, nor shall he drink any grape juice nor eat fresh or dried grapes. 4 All the days of his separation he shall not eat anything that is produced by the grape vine, from [the] seeds even to [the] skin.

If anyone wants to be completely dedicated, God gives His precepts, His standards. Whoever makes the Nazirite vow separates

1. from the vine – that speaks of joy,
2. from his rights as a man – which is expressed in his long hair and
3. from what has to do with death.

Here it is not just a separation from what defiles, but also from what is best in nature, from what God has given in it.

Wine is the picture of the joy of the earth. Wine rejoices in the hearts of God and men (Jdg 9:13; Psa 104:15). Thus we also read of a drink offering of wine, which speaks of the joy that God has found in the offering of His Son. Wine speaks of what God has given in nature. The Nazirite voluntarily renounces it. Nature is not condemned, that would be wrong for the Christian. Everything that God has created “is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer” (1Tim 4:4). But there is a way that is higher, and God gives to him who wants to go that way, both the conditions and the strength for it.

The Christian is not dead to nature. It is precisely in letters in which the Christian position is most emphasized (the letter to the Ephesians and the letter to the Colossians), that the obligations of earthly relations are most extensively discussed.

The Lord Jesus is now in heaven, separated from everything on earth, even from the natural relationship He had with His disciples on earth. In view of this, He has said that He will not drink any more of the fruit of the vine. He will drink of it again when He returns to establish the kingdom where His disciples will reign with Him (Mt 26:29). He will not always be Nazirite. He will say: “Eat, friends; Drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers” (Song 5:1b).

Verse 5 | Let the Locks of Hair Grow Long

5 'All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall pass over his head. He shall be holy until the days are fulfilled for which he separated himself to the LORD; he shall let the locks of hair on his head grow long.

“If a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her” (1Cor 11:14-15). This is the case at this time, the time of the church. The man represents the authority of God on earth. The sign of dependence and submission does not fit in with this. When God commands the Nazirite to let the locks of his hair grow long, it gives us the picture that the place of authority is given up to take a place of complete submission. In the eyes of men this is not a place of honor, but it is in the eyes of God.

Samson's strength lies in the hair as a Nazirite (Jdg 13:4-7). The place of dependency and submission is always the place of strength. When he no longer behaves dependent on God, but makes himself dependent on a woman, he loses his strength with his hair (Jdg 16:17-21).

Verses 6-7 | Not Go near to a Dead Person

6 All the days of his separation to the LORD he shall not go near to a dead person. 7 He shall not make himself unclean for his father or for his mother, for his brother or for his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head.

Touching death makes the Nazirite unclean. Death is the consequence and proof of sin (Gen 2:17). "The wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23). Death is everything that is not connected with the living God.

The Lord Jesus did not separate himself from the dead as the Pharisees (Pharisees means 'separated one'). He hath not despised the unbelievers; He hath eaten with tax collector and harlots. But never has He been defiled by them. He has remained internally perfectly separated from them.

Verses 8-12 | Void Days

8 All the days of his separation he is holy to the LORD. 9 'But if a man dies very suddenly beside him and he defiles his dedicated head [of hair], then he shall shave his head on the day when he becomes clean; he shall shave it on the seventh day. 10 Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest, to the doorway of the tent of meeting. 11 The priest shall offer one for a sin offering and [the] other for a burnt offering, and make atonement for him concerning his sin because of the [dead] person. And that same day he shall consecrate his head, 12 and shall dedicate to the LORD his days as a Nazirite, and shall bring a male lamb a year old for a guilt offering; but the former days will be void because his separation was defiled.

Even if a Nazirite accidentally comes into contact with death, he is still defiled. We would say that he can't do anything about it, but for God, even unforeseen circumstances are no excuse. Dedication to the Lord does not allow any interference from even the closest family ties (cf. Jn 2:4; Mt 10:37), which does not mean that we have no responsibilities to our parents

(Eph 6:1-3; cf. Jn 19:26-27). Those who are sanctified to God must always be vigilant and attentive. The standard for the Nazirites is the same as for the High Priest (Lev 21:11).

Defilement can just happen to us by our dealings with the disbelievers in the world. For the Nazirites – and for all who have dedicated themselves to the Lord – the consequences of unforeseen defilement are serious. The previous days of his separation will be void in such a case. His hair must be shaved off and a sacrifice must be made.

The shaving of his hair is the sign that the place of submission has been abandoned (cf. Jer 7:29). This shaving happens on the seventh day. Seven is the number of fullness. A full period has passed, in which he has realized what he has done. He is truly humbled. Shaving the hair is the ultimate proof of this. At the same time, this is also the start of the restoration. There is talk of an eighth day. After the hair has been shaved off, it also starts to grow again (Jdg 16:22).

In the offering of the two birds, the Lord Jesus is depicted as the Man Who descended from heaven to earth. The first bird is prepared as a sin offering, the second as a burnt offering. The defiled Nazirite is first reminded, as it were, that the Lord Jesus had to die for his defilement. Then, in the burnt offering, he also sees Him as the perfect Man dedicated to God, who has glorified God in all things. By being so busy with the Lord Jesus, atonement takes place.

The offering must be brought “to the doorway of the tent of meeting”. The life of the Nazirite is individually dedicated to God, but his behavior influences the coming together of God with His people. Just as there is a blessing for the whole people in case of faithfulness, so this blessing is diminished in case of unfaithfulness. What believers do in their daily lives always influences the meetings of believers, whether for good or evil.

After offering both birds he may start again. There are believers who have started well, but fail later in life. This failure happens when they start working in their own strength and forget the true dependence on the Lord. They must come to confession and see what the Lord Jesus has done for them. Then they will dedicate themselves again, but now in the power of

the offering, on the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus. The guilt offering must be made.

It is a humbling thought that, in the event of defilement, all the good of the preceding period will be void. There is nothing left of what is of value to God (cf. Eze 33:13).

Verses 13-15 | Offerings After the Days of Separation

13 'Now this is the law of the Nazirite when the days of his separation are fulfilled, he shall bring the offering to the doorway of the tent of meeting. 14 He shall present his offering to the LORD: one male lamb a year old without defect for a burnt offering and one ewe-lamb a year old without defect for a sin offering and one ram without defect for a peace offering, 15 and a basket of unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil and unleavened wafers spread with oil, along with their grain offering and their drink offering.

When the Nazirite has completed the time of his separation, he goes to the doorway of the tent of meeting to bring his offering there. The reason why he makes his offering there is that the whole people have to do with his dedication: the whole people benefit from it. We see this in the blessing at the end of this chapter.

Everything in the offering speaks of the Lord Jesus. With this he expresses the awareness that he has not been and remained committed in his own power. The Lord Jesus, the perfect Nazirite, gave him the strength to do so.

The offering he brings now is many times greater than in the previous part. There it is brought as a necessary offering because of its defilement. Here he brings an offering after his time as a Nazirite has ended. In his dedication he has seen more and more of the Lord Jesus. These offerings are the result of this. He brings

1. a burnt offering – that is the first thing here; with the birds the sin offering is the first thing;
2. a sin offering – he knows that he is a sinner in himself and
3. a peace offering – the offering that expresses the fellowship of God's people with God, with Christ and with one another.

He also brings several grain offerings and the accompanying drink offerings. They also speak of the Lord Jesus. The grain offering represents His life on earth, in which He is perfectly guided by the Spirit (of which the oil is a picture) and all the works of the Spirit have become visible in Him. The drink offering speaks of the joy that He has meant to God in His life on earth. God has found in Him a perfect pleasure.

Verses 16-17 | The Priest Brings the Offering

16 Then the priest shall present [them] before the LORD and shall offer his sin offering and his burnt offering. 17 He shall also offer the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, together with the basket of unleavened cakes; the priest shall likewise offer its grain offering and its drink offering.

The Nazirite offers this extensive offering. The priest prepares everything before the LORD. In the church, the Nazirite and the priests are the same person. Dedicated believers, Nazirites, see much of the Lord Jesus and these same believers will offer what they see of the Lord Jesus as priests to God. In bringing the offerings the sin offering takes first place. If we are allowed to continue with anything of our service, the realization that this may happen because of the work of the Lord Jesus as the sin offering will still take first place.

Of our dedication we will say that it is all accomplished by His grace. His offering has given us the strength. The offering we will bring speaks of it. When we come to Him, after our service on earth, we will see Him as the Lamb. We will honor Him because He has enabled us to do everything that has been to the glory of God. We will honor Him as the perfect burnt offering and grain offering and peace offering. We will also honor Him for what He was as the sin offering, he who bore our sins.

Verse 18 | The Hair Is Sacrificed

18 The Nazirite shall then shave his dedicated head [of hair] at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and take the dedicated hair of his head and put [it] on the fire which is under the sacrifice of peace offerings.

After the priest has prepared everything to offer what the Nazirite has brought as an offering, the Nazirite shaves his hair off and puts it on the

fire, under the sacrifice of peace offering. Because of this, together with the smell of the sacrifice of the peace offering, the smell of his hair rises to God. We see in this a beautiful picture that God is reminded forever of the dedication of every believer and that in direct connection with what His Son is as peace offering. Through the peace offering, fellowship has become possible between God and His people and between the members of God's people. A special aspect in that fellowship is the role that dedicated believers have in it.

The hair is placed on the fire under the sacrifice of peace sacrifice. Nowhere do we read that anything of a human being is connected with a sacrifice, except with this hair of the Nazirite. That proves the enormous value God attaches to what is done in dedication to Him. It is as it says in a song: "Everything done out of love for Jesus keeps its value and will continue to exist.

Verses 19-21 | The Offering Put on the Hands of the Nazirite

19 The priest shall take the ram's shoulder [when it has been] boiled, and one unleavened cake out of the basket and one unleavened wafer, and shall put [them] on the hands of the Nazirite after he has shaved his dedicated [hair]. 20 Then the priest shall wave them for a wave offering before the LORD. It is holy for the priest, together with the breast offered by waving and the thigh offered by lifting up; and afterward the Nazirite may drink wine.' 21 "This is the law of the Nazirite who vows his offering to the LORD according to his separation, in addition to what [else] he can afford; according to his vow which he takes, so he shall do according to the law of his separation."

After shaving his hair, parts of the offering are put on the hands of the Nazirite. This shows that it was only through the power of the Lord Jesus – depicted in the shoulder of the ram – and the perfect example of His dedication that the Nazirite was able to bring the time of his separation to a successful conclusion.

There is also a part for the priest: the breast of the wave offering and the thigh of the heave offering. The consciousness of love, of which the breast speaks, and the power, of which the thigh speaks, of the Lord Jesus in accomplishing a time of dedication is spiritual food for the priest. It also gives him the love and strength to perform his priestly service.

After making the sacrifices the Nazirite may drink wine again. When our service on earth is over, true joy will be enjoyed by us. The Lord Jesus says to His faithful servants: "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:21,23).

Verses 22-27 | The Israelites blessed

22 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and to his sons, saying, 'Thus you shall bless the sons of Israel. You shall say to them:

24 The LORD bless you, and keep you;

25 The LORD make His face shine on you,

And be gracious to you;

26 The LORD lift up His countenance on you,

And give you peace.'

27 So they shall invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I [then] will bless them."

In the preceding chapters and the preceding section of this chapter, we see how God has

1. placed the people around Himself;
2. counted the people name by name;
3. organized the service;
4. cleansed the camp;
5. determined the true position of the dedicated servant.

Everything is now ready to bless the people and put His Name on them. The blessing places the people under the protection, the grace and peace of the LORD.

There are three pairs of blessings and one final blessing, seven blessings in total. We can connect the three pairs with the three Divine persons (cf. 2Cor 13:14):

1. The blessing and protection of the Father.
2. The grace of the Lord Jesus.
3. The inner peace through the Spirit.

We receive everything that characterizes God. With a people so blessed, God wants to bind Himself together. For such a people He “is not ashamed to be called their God” (Heb 11:16).

1. “The LORD bless you,“: God’s blessing is wished for all spheres of our life; fertility and multiplication (Gen 1:22,28), above all in the spiritual life.
2. “And keep you,“: Protection against dangers and decline in order to receive the good.
3. “The LORD make His face shine on you,“: We need the light from his face (Psa 4:6; 44:3; 90:8).
4. “And be gracious to you,“: Showings of favor, mercy, goodness.
5. “The LORD lift up His countenance on you,“: By making us feel affection, that we are a pleasure for Him.
6. “And give you peace.“: Shalom: not only absence of war, but prosperity, justice and well-being.
7. “Invoke My name on the sons of Israel, and I [then] will bless them.“: God connects His Name with His people and blesses them as a whole.

The whole people are blessed on the basis of what the Nazirite has done. On the basis of what the Lord Jesus did as the true Nazirite, this blessing will also come to all creation. The church is also involved in the distribution of this blessing (Rom 8:19), which we can see in “Aaron and his sons” to whom the order to bless is given.

Numbers 7

Introduction

Numbers 6, at the dedication of the Nazirites, is about voluntariness, but also about rules on how such voluntariness should happen. In Numbers 7 we have no rules. Here everything happens voluntarily, out of the desire to give God something for the sanctuary and the dedication of the altar. Everything is out of love; it is the reaction of the heart of the people.

Verses 1-3 | The Offering of the Leaders

1 Now on the day that Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, he anointed it and consecrated it with all its furnishings and the altar and all its utensils; he anointed them and consecrated them also. 2 Then the leaders of Israel, the heads of their fathers' households, made an offering (they were the leaders of the tribes; they were the ones who were over the numbered men). 3 When they brought their offering before the LORD, six covered carts and twelve oxen, a cart for [every] two of the leaders and an ox for each one, then they presented them before the tabernacle.

Why do we go back in the first verse to the setting up of the tabernacle that already happened in Exodus 40, a month earlier? Because this fits with the arrangement by the Holy Spirit of these books. What is mentioned here, fits precisely in the book of Numbers.

The overview below shows the sequence of events until the start of the wilderness journey:

First month, Day 1	Setting up the tabernacle finished	Exo 40:2
	Laws for the offerings	Num 7:1
	Offerings for the altar	Num 7:3
	Ordination of the priesthood	Lev 8:1
First month, Day 8	Dedication of the priests finished	Lev 9:1
First month, Day 12	Offerings for the altar finished	Num 7:78
	Dedication of the Levites	Num 8:5
First month, Day 14	Second Passover	Num 9:2

Second month, Day 1	Start census	Num 1:1
Second month, Day 14	Passover for the unclean	Num 9:11
Second month, Day 20	The cloud is lifted, the journey starts	Num 10:11

The leaders see the setting up of the tabernacle. This works a reaction with them. They realize that God is coming to dwell in their midst – God’s dwelling has the emphasis in Exodus – and that then service to Him can begin, now that the people have arrived in the wilderness. They come with their offering on the right day to encourage the service to Him in the wilderness. God accepts these gifts and determines what gifts are given to whom. The service that is done for Him is controlled by Him.

These offerings have to do with the service in the tabernacle, the testimony to the outside world. The leaders have understood that the Levites can use help when carrying the tabernacle through the wilderness. In the tabernacle, not only priestly service is performed, it is also carried through the wilderness. So it is with the church. We come together to serve God as priests, but it is also God’s intention that we express in our testimony in the world all that we have received in blessings.

Leaders give covered carts. What we have to transport are not things we show off. The two of them bring one cart. This points to the search for fellowship in the service with the aim of encouraging God’s work in the church. The leaders speak of the leaders among the believers, those who are in charge.

Verses 4-9 | Distribution of the Carts and the Oxen

4 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 5 “Accept [these things] from them, that they may be used in the service of the tent of meeting, and you shall give them to the Levites, [to] each man according to his service.” 6 So Moses took the carts and the oxen and gave them to the Levites. 7 Two carts and four oxen he gave to the sons of Gershon, according to their service, 8 and four carts and eight oxen he gave to the sons of Merari, according to their service, under the direction of Ithamar the son of Aaron the priest. 9 But he did not give [any] to the sons of Kohath because theirs [was] the service of the holy [objects, which] they carried on the shoulder.

It seems that Moses is not fully aware of what to do with these gifts. It is not part of everything God has shown him about the tabernacle. But God indicates that Moses can accept them. They are the fruit of God-fearing souls, of men who have fellowship with God. What they bring is the result of spiritual considerations. God can accept that, because it was ultimately worked in them by Himself through His Spirit.

In the same way God wants to use in His service today means which He has not indicated as such in His Word, but which are the result of spiritual consultation with regards to the service in His house. The church is not a solidified business, but a dynamic one, always in motion. God accepts initiatives that respond to the concerns of the moment when they come from a spirit of dependence on the Spirit and are in accordance with the Word.

God decides to whom the carts are made available. God does not proceed in the way of people who would divide everything fairly. God regulates everything in such a way that faith and love are tested in order to accept that He acts according to His will and wisdom. When we agree with His different actions, we take the place of blessing. The heart so attuned to God's actions will rejoice in what he sees of Christ in another, while he himself does not possess it. We can rejoice in what He has given us, but also in what He has withheld from us and entrusted to others.

God entrusts each person with what is necessary for the service. He knows what each one has to bear and provides the necessary strength. We can apply this to means that facilitate the work of the Lord's servants (Tit 3:13; 3Jn 1:6b). In this way, if they come from another place, we can offer them accommodation, for example, to do their work in the church from our home. We can also support them financially.

The Gershonites get two carts and four oxen. They have the care for all the coverings. This speaks of the external testimony, the gospel.

The Merarites get four carts and eight oxen. They have the care for boards and pillars. That speaks of the care of the believers, the service of the shepherd. We can all help with the progress of the gospel and the care for the faithful.

The Kohathites care for what speaks of the Lord Jesus and His work. God takes care of the help in its progress. Human resources, such as theological

training, have no place here. The heavenly things should be carried on the shoulders. Without anything that might impress people, they carry their precious treasures through the wilderness.

Here David makes a fatal mistake. He forgets the precept of the LORD and places the ark on a cart. It appears not to be a safer means, but a more vulnerable means: the oxen are nearly upset. Uzzah has to pay for that with death (2Sam 6:6-7). The Philistines also put the ark on a cart, but they act out of ignorance (1Sam 6:7-11).

Verses 10-11 | The Dedication Offering for the Altar

10 The leaders offered the dedication [offering] for the altar when it was anointed, so the leaders offered their offering before the altar. 11 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Let them present their offering, one leader each day, for the dedication of the altar."

Moses dedicated the altar in Exodus 40. There are no human resources involved in this service. We have the altar in a spiritual sense (Heb 13:10), which is the table of the Lord. Here we see that the altar is also dedicated by the leaders of the people. They show their appreciation for the altar. God rejoices that there are also people on earth who show their appreciation for the Lord Jesus and His work.

Verses 12-83 | The Offering of Each Leader

12 Now the one who presented his offering on the first day was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah; 13 and his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 14 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 15 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 16 one male goat for a sin offering; 17 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Nahshon the son of Amminadab. 18 On the second day Nethanel the son of Zuar, leader of Issachar, presented [an offering]; 19 he presented as his offering one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of

the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 20 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 21 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 22 one male goat for a sin offering; 23 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Nethanel the son of Zuar. 24 On the third day [it was] Eliab the son of Helon, leader of the sons of Zebulun; 25 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 26 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 27 one young bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 28 one male goat for a sin offering; 29 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Eliab the son of Helon. 30 On the fourth day [it was] Elizur the son of Shedeur, leader of the sons of Reuben; 31 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 32 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 33 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 34 one male goat for a sin offering; 35 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Elizur the son of Shedeur. 36 On the fifth day [it was] Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai, leader of the children of Simeon; 37 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 38 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 39 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 40 one male goat for a sin offering; 41 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai. 42 On the sixth day [it was] Eliasaph the son of Deuel, leader of the sons of Gad; 43 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 44 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 45 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 46 one male goat for a sin offering; 47 and for the sacrifice of

peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Eliasaph the son of Deuel. 48 On the seventh day [it was] Elishama the son of Ammihud, leader of the sons of Ephraim; 49 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 50 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 51 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 52 one male goat for a sin offering; 53 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Elishama the son of Ammihud. 54 On the eighth day [it was] Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur, leader of the sons of Manasseh; 55 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 56 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 57 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 58 one male goat for a sin offering; 59 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur. 60 On the ninth day [it was] Abidan the son of Gideoni, leader of the sons of Benjamin; 61 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 62 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 63 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 64 one male goat for a sin offering; 65 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Abidan the son of Gideoni. 66 On the tenth day [it was] Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai, leader of the sons of Dan; 67 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 68 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 69 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 70 one male goat for a sin offering; 71 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai. 72 On the eleventh day

[it was] Pagiel the son of Ochrán, leader of the sons of Asher; 73 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 74 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 75 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 76 one male goat for a sin offering; 77 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Pagiel the son of Ochrán. 78 On the twelfth day [it was] Ahira the son of Enán, leader of the sons of Naphtali; 79 his offering [was] one silver dish whose weight [was] one hundred and thirty [shekels], one silver bowl of seventy shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, both of them full of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering; 80 one gold pan of ten [shekels], full of incense; 81 one bull, one ram, one male lamb one year old, for a burnt offering; 82 one male goat for a sin offering; 83 and for the sacrifice of peace offerings, two oxen, five rams, five male goats, five male lambs one year old. This [was] the offering of Ahira the son of Enán.

These offerings have to do with the service at the altar, the testimony before God in the tabernacle. God's great appreciation of the offerings of the leaders is shown by the enumeration of what each leader has given individually, although that seems to be a repetition of what another has given. Repetition is not a tiring activity for God. Thus, the repeated line in every verse of the 26 verses of Psalm 136 – "For His lovingkindness is everlasting" (Psa 136:1-26) – is an expression of God's lovingkindness as reaction on what is mentioned in the preceding line.

For God, what each person brings personally counts, and for Him it is not a pure repetition of what another person has brought. He doesn't say, and we shouldn't say, "That's what someone else has already done or said." God wants to hear it from each individual. Everyone is given the full opportunity to bring his offering and receives the full attention of God.

The fact that all bring the same shows a common understanding. Yet everyone brings it personally. For God, not only the total counts, but also what the individual brings. He sees the separate gift of each of His own, though many will bring the same as what another brings. In praise, we often use the same words, but God never says, "I have heard that before."

God sees in the praise of His people again and again the glorious work of His Son. And about that He gladly hears (Heb 13:15).

In the dedication offerings are offerings that are durable, such as the dishes and pans. There are also offerings that are no longer there after use, such as the different offerings. Furthermore, the daily offering is also important. Every day a gift is offered to God.

In the gift of the leaders, the sacrifice of the peace offering occupies a prominent place. But first they offer dishes and pans. Those silver dishes and gold pans speak of believers. They can, if they separate themselves from sin, serve at the altar (2Tim 2:20-21). Those who have a place of responsibility in the local church can bring such believers to the Lord. They can offer them in the prayers.

The silver dishes are filled to the brim ("full") with fine flour mixed with oil and the gold pans are filled to the brim ("full") with incense. In the lives of such believers, God sees abundantly Who the Lord Jesus has been in His life on earth. The fine flour speaks of the perfect life of the Lord Jesus. Mixed with oil speaks of the fact that He has let Himself be guided in everything by the Holy Spirit. The incense indicates that such a life is a pleasant scent for God.

As offerings are offered burnt offerings, a sin offering and peace offerings. This shows that the leaders have an insight into the distinction between the offerings. Leaders among the believers know the different aspects of the work of the Lord Jesus. That there are different kinds of burnt offerings indicates that there are different aspects in what the Lord Jesus did for God.

There is only one animal as a sin offering. The aspect of the forgiveness of sins does not occupy the greatest place. They are more filled with Him as a burnt offering and still more as a peace offering. The peace offering is the offering that expresses the fellowship between God and His people and between the members of the people with each other.

The order in which the leaders bring their offerings begins with Judah and ends with Naphtali. That is the same order as the one in which the tribes camp described in Numbers 2.

Verses 84-88 | Totals of the Dedication Offering

84 This [was] the dedication [offering] for the altar from the leaders of Israel when it was anointed: twelve silver dishes, twelve silver bowls, twelve gold pans, 85 each silver dish [weighing] one hundred and thirty [shekels] and each bowl seventy; all the silver of the utensils [was] 2,400 [shekels], according to the shekel of the sanctuary; 86 the twelve gold pans, full of incense, [weighing] ten [shekels] apiece, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, all the gold of the pans 120 [shekels]; 87 all the oxen for the burnt offering twelve bulls, [all] the rams twelve, the male lambs one year old with their grain offering twelve, and the male goats for a sin offering twelve; 88 and all the oxen for the sacrifice of peace offerings 24 bulls, [all] the rams 60, the male goats 60, the male lambs one year old 60. This [was] the dedication [offering] for the altar after it was anointed.

Everything is added up by God. But it is not a great heap for God: it is the sum of the individual parts. After twelve days God counts:

1. twelve silver dishes, each one hundred and thirty shekels (about one and a half kilos) filled with fine flour mixed with oil;
2. twelve silver bowls, each seventy shekels (about eight hundred grams) filled with fine flour mixed with oil;
3. twelve golden bowls, each ten shekels (about one hundred and ten grams) filled with incense;
4. twelve oxen for the burnt offering and the accompanying grain offering;
5. twelve rams for the burnt offering and the accompanying grain offering;
6. twelve male lambs one year old for the burnt offering and the accompanying grain offering;
7. Twelve male goats for a sin offering;
8. 24 bulls for a peace offering;
9. 60 rams for a peace offering;
10. 60 male goats for a peace offering;
11. 60 male lambs one year old for a peace offering.

What a joy it must be for Him if at the end of a meeting on the first day of the week, where we have honored Him with the dedication offerings – our sacrifices of praise (Heb 13:15) – that each of us has brought to Him, He can add this up.

Verse 89 | The LORD Speaks to Moses

89 Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim, so He spoke to him.

Moses enters the tent of meeting to speak with God. Moses is a picture of the Lord Jesus as the Teacher Who hears and reveals the thoughts of God. It is significant that this happens after the description of the voluntary offerings brought by the leaders. God then makes His thoughts known. He can only really share His thoughts when we have a willing heart that is full of admiration for the Lord Jesus.

Despite all the hustle and bustle of his leadership, or maybe that is why, Moses finds and takes the time to be with the LORD, to speak with Him and to listen to Him. The silence of the sanctuary is the appropriate place for this.

Numbers 8

Verses 1-4 | The Golden Lampstand

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to Aaron and say to him, 'When you mount the lamps, the seven lamps will give light in the front of the lampstand.'" 3 Aaron therefore did so; he mounted its lamps at the front of the lampstand, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 4 Now this was the workmanship of the lampstand, hammered work of gold; from its base to its flowers it was hammered work; according to the pattern which the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.

The description of the lampstand has not got lost and accidentally found its way to this place. The Author of the Bible, the Holy Spirit, has given this description here with a purpose. It connects directly to the last verse of the previous chapter. There we see Moses going into the tent of meeting to speak with the LORD. Moses speaks the Word of God to the people.

God's Word is important for walking in the wilderness. In doing so, the goal is that we see the glorified Lord in heaven. But we can only see Him in the light that the Holy Spirit gives. The model for our walk through the wilderness is Christ in glory (Jn 17:19). In directing our hearts on Him we can live on earth to His glory. In the sanctuary we see Aaron busy, as a picture of the Lord Jesus as the High Priest Who knows what we need on our journey through the wilderness. When our eye is on Him in the sanctuary, our feet know where to go in the world.

The lamps of the lampstand must be placed in such a way that their light falls on the lampstand itself. The light of the Holy Spirit always falls upon the Lord Jesus (Jn 16:14). Anyone who spreads light should radiate it from and upon the Lord, not upon himself (cf. Mt 5:16). The Lord Jesus is the lampstand who carries the seven lamps. The believers are the lamps through which the Holy Spirit shines. The believers should not present themselves when they stand before God in the sanctuary, but the Lord Jesus. They talk to each other about heavenly things, about what each one

has found in his examination of the Scriptures. The lampstand carries the lamps. The believers are supported by the Lord Jesus.

The priesthood of the Lord Jesus keeps the light burning. It is about the connection with Christ in the sanctuary in the presence of God on which everything depends. This can only be seen by the spiritual believer.

Verses 5-15 | The Dedication of the Levites

5 Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 6 "Take the Levites from among the sons of Israel and cleanse them. 7 Thus you shall do to them, for their cleansing: [sprinkle] purifying water on them, and let them use a razor over their whole body and wash their clothes, and they will be clean. 8 Then let them take a bull with its grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil; and a second bull you shall take for a sin offering. 9 So you shall present the Levites before the tent of meeting. You shall also assemble the whole congregation of the sons of Israel, 10 and present the Levites before the LORD; and the sons of Israel shall lay their hands on the Levites. 11 Aaron then shall present the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the sons of Israel, that they may qualify to perform the service of the LORD. 12 Now the Levites shall lay their hands on the heads of the bulls; then offer the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering to the LORD, to make atonement for the Levites. 13 You shall have the Levites stand before Aaron and before his sons so as to present them as a wave offering to the LORD. 14 "Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the sons of Israel, and the Levites shall be Mine. 15 Then after that the Levites may go in to serve the tent of meeting. But you shall cleanse them and present them as a wave offering;

Seeing Christ in the sanctuary as the model of our walk, as depicted in previous verses, also gives us ability to serve. The dedication of the Levites, of the servants, is done according to the purity of the sanctuary, for that is the field of their service. They are an offering of the people to the LORD, and the LORD gives them to the priests. They can only be pleasing to God in their service in the value of the offering Christ has brought to God and the Divine judgment of sin.

At the dedication of the Levites we see a special involvement of the people, more so than in the dedication of the priests. Priestly service is not primar-

ily aimed at fellow believers, but at God. Levite service is focused on each other. The service of the Levites is to the church.

By a separate ceremony the Levites are separated from the people. What happens to them is not a picture of the conversion of the sinner, but of making the believer fit to serve God in a way that is pleasing to Him. Here we see how first the persons are made fit, and then they come to a service that is pleasing to God. We must first give ourselves to the Lord, and only then give Him our service (2Cor 8:5).

The first action is to be sprinkled with the purifying water. The cleansing does not consist of washing, but of sprinkling. Sprinkling is the transfer of the value of that which is sprinkled on the object which is sprinkled. By sprinkling it comes under the power of it. We see that with the sprinkling of blood. Sprinkling with water is done here. The purifying water is not used here because the Levites have sinned. That is not the case here. But a special awareness is needed of the work of the Lord Jesus through which the sins have been disposed of. The flesh must have no place, nothing of that which has to do with sin.

The second action is the shaving of all the hair from their bodies (cf. Lev 14:8). Hair speaks of what comes from natural man. That must be shaved. The razor represents the judgment that is passed over the flesh. Pride, for example, is such a hair growth that needs to be shaved, judged.

Then they have to wash their clothes. Clothes show what is public from man, how he behaves, the habits he has. Washing the clothes indicates that the whole revelation of the servant comes under the power of the Word.

After their cleansing the offerings can be brought, in this case two young bulls. The first is intended as a burnt offering, together with the accompanying grain offering; the other is a sin offering. Both the burnt offering and the sin offering is a great offering. Both offerings represent the degree of insight into the work of the Lord Jesus, on the basis of which they can perform their service. The service is performed at the level of the servant's understanding of both the burnt offering – what the work of the Lord Jesus means to God, the honor He has given to God through it – and the sin offering – what the work of the Lord Jesus means in view of the problem of sin.

The laying on of hands by the Israelites shows their identification with the service of the Levites. All Israelites are involved, because the Levites are instead of the firstborn of the Israelites (verses 16-18). It is also important that the field of their service is the people of God. It is important that the church can identify herself with the service of servants. God involves the whole people.

The Levites are moved back and forth as a wave offering before God's face. God wishes His people to bring His servants before Him. God's people should not speak of the weaknesses every servant has, but of the way in which these servants remind them of the Lord Jesus, the true wave offering. After the people have moved the Levites back and forth as a wave offering, the priests also have to move the Levites back and forth. The service of each servant is in connection with both the daily life of God's people and the priestly service.

Verses 16-18 | Instead of the Firstborn

16 for they are wholly given to Me from among the sons of Israel. I have taken them for Myself instead of every first issue of the womb, the firstborn of all the sons of Israel. 17 For every firstborn among the sons of Israel is Mine, among the men and among the animals; on the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for Myself. 18 But I have taken the Levites instead of every firstborn among the sons of Israel.

After the identification of the Israelites with the Levites, expressed by the laying on of hands, the Levites are offered to the LORD. The Levites must do what the whole people should do. The Levites represent the whole people in their service and their service belongs to the whole people. In this way they became the property of the LORD instead of the firstborn. That fact is recalled again to emphasize that they are God's property because of the redemption He has established.

Verse 19 | Given to Aaron and His Sons

19 I have given the Levites as a gift to Aaron and to his sons from among the sons of Israel, to perform the service of the sons of Israel at the tent of meeting

and to make atonement on behalf of the sons of Israel, so that there will be no plague among the sons of Israel by their coming near to the sanctuary."

In verse 11 Aaron offered the Levites to the LORD. Now he gets them back from the LORD. God never remains someone's debtor. We can never give Him anything that He will not give back manifold. What is given is always of less value than the person to whom it is given. The Levites are not above the priests, but they are their servants, so they are their lesser ones (Lk 22:27).

Verses 20-22 | Dedication of the Levites

20 Thus did Moses and Aaron and all the congregation of the sons of Israel to the Levites; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so the sons of Israel did to them. 21 The Levites, too, purified themselves from sin and washed their clothes; and Aaron presented them as a wave offering before the LORD. Aaron also made atonement for them to cleanse them. 22 Then after that the Levites went in to perform their service in the tent of meeting before Aaron and before his sons; just as the LORD had commanded Moses concerning the Levites, so they did to them.

The Divine instructions are carried out in detail. Only when all that has been pre-described to them has been done, the Levites may begin serving. For our service it is also of the utmost importance that we do exactly what the Lord tells us. It is important to be cleansed and let Him show us what He wants us to do.

Verses 23-26 | Service Time of the Levites

23 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "This is what [applies] to the Levites: from twenty-five years old and upward they shall enter to perform service in the work of the tent of meeting. 25 But at the age of fifty years they shall retire from service in the work and not work any more. 26 They may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting, to keep an obligation, but they [themselves] shall do no work. Thus you shall deal with the Levites concerning their obligations."

There is a starting age and an end age. This must be applied spiritually. The Levites are only allowed to serve from the age of thirty (Num

4:3,23,30,35,39,43,47), but from the age of twenty-five they are allowed to cooperate. This refers to a preparatory period, which is necessary to be exercised (cf. Heb 5:14; 1Tim 3:13). Hastily rushing into a service for the Lord is not good.

We have a good example in the life of Paul. Immediately after his conversion "he [began] to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, "He is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20). After that he stays for some time in Arabia (Gal 1:17). Later Barnabas visits him and brings him to Antioch. In that church he does his service as a teacher (Acts 11:25-26). There, together with Barnabas, he is separated by the Holy Spirit for a special work. In the church is fasting and praying, the hands are laid upon them and they may go (Acts 13:2-3).

There will also come a time when the service in its full weight no longer needs to be done. Servants should not think that they are indispensable. The work is the work of the Lord. He maintains it. But even if active service ends, they are not discarded. There remains a supporting task. It is important to give young people advice in their early service, to provide them with the necessary 'tools' to perform their service (2Tim 2:2). They can pass on the torch of faith. In this way, brothers who are bound to their homes after many journeys due to old age can help others with advice. Others who can no longer attend the meetings may also be helpful in other ways. Their prayer and intercession are an invaluable help.

Numbers 9

Verses 1-5 | Observing the Second Passover

1 Thus the LORD spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month of the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, 2 "Now, let the sons of Israel observe the Passover at its appointed time. 3 On the fourteenth day of this month, at twilight, you shall observe it at its appointed time; you shall observe it according to all its statutes and according to all its ordinances." 4 So Moses told the sons of Israel to observe the Passover. 5 They observed the Passover in the first [month], on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did.

Here we have another time indication that heralds a historical part. On 1-1-02, the first day of the first month of the second year after the exodus, the tabernacle was erected. Next we find what is described in Numbers 7. That then runs until 13-1-02. The following day, the fourteenth day, the Passover is celebrated.

The first Passover was celebrated in Egypt. So here we read about the second Passover. Only in Joshua 5 do we read about the celebration of the Passover for the third time (Jos 5:10). Wouldn't it have been celebrated in the wilderness? God has prescribed its celebration as an eternal ordinance for the generations to come (Exo 12:14). Yet we read in the Bible only seven times in total about an actual celebration of the Passover (Exo 12:11; Num 9:5; Jos 5:10; 2Chr 30:15; 35:1; Ezra 6:19; Lk 22:15). It is reminiscent of the sparse times that the Lord's memorial is celebrated in Christianity.

There is a connection between the Passover in Exodus, Numbers and Joshua.

1. In Exodus, its celebration is unique. It refers to the moment a person comes to conversion, is redeemed and enters the wilderness, all on the basis of the blood. Israel could not leave Egypt without Pascha. For man there is no way out of the world without the death of Christ.

2. Also after that God wants us not to forget the Passover lamb. During our wilderness trip (Numbers) we celebrate it every first day of the week.
3. God also wants us to be aware that we owe all our heavenly blessings (Joshua) to that Lamb.

Thus we see the Passover Lamb at the beginning of the journey, during the journey and after the journey has ended.

The Passover is a reminder of their salvation and a symbol of their unity as a people. The Lord's Supper has the same thought. It reminds the members of the church of Him Who redeemed them – "Do this in remembrance of Me" (1Cor 11:24-25) – and expresses the fact that the members of the church are "one bread, one body" (1Cor 10:17). God gives these symbols – the Passover for Israel and the Supper for the church – to prevent the thought of unity and redemption from being lost.

The Passover is celebrated here for the first time as *a memorial*. Salvation is still fresh in the memory. They have experienced salvation. Every child of God has that experience of salvation, but as an experience of faith. By celebrating the Supper, the salvation experienced back then comes to us again and again with power, we are always reminded of it.

Verses 6-12 | Pascha Celebration in the Second Month

6 But there were [some] men who were unclean because of [the] dead person, so that they could not observe Passover on that day; so they came before Moses and Aaron on that day. 7 Those men said to him, "[Though] we are unclean because of [the] dead person, why are we restrained from presenting the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the sons of Israel?" 8 Moses therefore said to them, "Wait, and I will listen to what the LORD will command concerning you." 9 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If any one of you or of your generations becomes unclean because of a [dead] person, or is on a distant journey, he may, however, observe the Passover to the LORD. 11 In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight, they shall observe it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 12 They shall leave none of it until morning, nor break a bone of it; according to all the statute of the Passover they shall observe it.

Wilderness conditions sometimes cause hindrances to the celebration of the Passover. That may be in case of defilement. It is not about someone being unfit as a believer. By nature, every believer is unworthy, but he has been made fit by the Lord Jesus. However, our walk can make us unfit and that without wanting it ourselves. This is not about a conscious sin. This is about the touch of a corpse, perhaps accidentally, perhaps necessary because someone had to be buried there. It is not impurity that has come forth from himself.

That it is not a conscious sin, is also shown by the fact that these men are going to Moses. The men show sensitivity towards the Passover by indicating that their touch with death prevents them from celebrating it now. They are also not satisfied that they will only skip it once. They go to Moses with their problem. We see their good mind and desire in two directions: they are not indifferent to their defilement, nor are they indifferent to the Passover.

Moses does not pretend to know the answer to their question. It is true greatness to say that you don't know something and go to God with it in the confidence that He will answer. Moses approaches God on behalf of these men to ask Him and presents this case to Him. God answers. We always see that in Numbers. Ask Him and He tells you what to do. God provides for every circumstance where the people do not know what to do. God always maintains His holiness. Impurity makes unfit, but He does give a solution. He provides circumstances in which such a person can celebrate the Passover.

In His answer He gives a way out. He also adds another case that someone was unable to celebrate the Passover. That is in case someone is not able to celebrate because of a distant journey. By being on a distant journey someone has removed himself from the place where the LORD is. That is a choice of its own. Application: if we do not see someone in the meeting for a number of weeks, it may indicate that such a person is on a distant journey, i.e. spiritually far astray. We have to take care of that. We can't miss anyone. God also values the celebration of the Passover. It is not a matter of indifference to Him if anyone does not celebrate the Lord's Supper, the remembrance of the Lord.

Verse 13 | Guilty Negligence

13 But the man who is clean and is not on a journey, and yet neglects to observe the Passover, that person shall then be cut off from his people, for he did not present the offering of the LORD at its appointed time. That man will bear his sin.

The way out which the LORD gives is that the Passover may be celebrated in the second month. In this He provides in His grace. But if the person concerned does not make use of it again this time, he must be cut off. Then there is intention. One application could be to say to someone who repeatedly for no reason does not celebrate the Lord's Supper, that he cannot celebrate it until he realizes that he wrongs the Lord Jesus.

In a spiritual sense, we are all in the second month's circumstances. Some have come from church systems where death has taken its toll, others have come home from a 'distant journey'. In many local churches only a small part of the entire church meets in that place. Many are still in a place of Christianity where death reigns; many are also still on a distant journey.

God still gives this opportunity, as in the days of Hezekiah (2Chronicles 30-31). We read of those days: "For a multitude of the people, ... had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than prescribed. For Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the good LORD pardon everyone who prepares his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though not according to the purification [rules] of the sanctuary." So the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people" (2Chr 30:18-20).

This regulation does not mean that God lowers or loosens His standards. He never does. We must not become more flexible in our assessment of who can and cannot take part in the Lord's Supper. What applies to the first month also applies to the second month. Never should weakness in the testimony change the standards. But God does take the circumstances into account and we must do so too.

Verse 14 | The Passover for the Alien

14 If an alien sojourns among you and observes the Passover to the LORD, according to the statute of the Passover and according to its ordinance, so he

shall do; you shall have one statute, both for the alien and for the native of the land.”

The alien who sojourns with the Israelites is also obliged to keep the Passover for the LORD. It is an alien who, by being circumcised, has become part of the people of God: “But if a stranger sojourns with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. The same law shall apply to the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you” (Exo 12:48-49; cf. Ezra 6:19-21).

Verses 15-23 | The Cloud

15 Now on the day that the tabernacle was erected the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and in the evening it was like the appearance of fire over the tabernacle, until morning. 16 So it was continuously; the cloud would cover it [by day], and the appearance of fire by night. 17 Whenever the cloud was lifted from over the tent, afterward the sons of Israel would then set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the sons of Israel would camp. 18 At the command of the LORD the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. 19 Even when the cloud lingered over the tabernacle for many days, the sons of Israel would keep the LORD’s charge and not set out. 20 If sometimes the cloud remained a few days over the tabernacle, according to the command of the LORD they remained camped. Then according to the command of the LORD they set out. 21 If sometimes the cloud remained from evening until morning, when the cloud was lifted in the morning, they would move out; or [if it remained] in the daytime and at night, whenever the cloud was lifted, they would set out. 22 Whether it was two days or a month or a year that the cloud lingered over the tabernacle, staying above it, the sons of Israel remained camped and did not set out; but when it was lifted, they did set out. 23 At the command of the LORD they camped, and at the command of the LORD they set out; they kept the LORD’s charge, according to the command of the LORD through Moses.

The provisions God has given so far relate to the establishment and holiness of the camp. Now come the facilities for the trip itself. There are

two: the cloud (verses 15-23) and the silver trumpets (Num 10:1-10). Both means show that the people are completely dependent on God when they walk through the wilderness. The cloud is there “continuously” (verse 16). What a special concern of God! The special privilege of the guidance of God through the column of clouds is referred to several times in the history of Israel (Psa 105:39; Neh 9:19).

With the cloud we can think of the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life to give him directions for his going through the wilderness of this life. However, the personal aspect is not paramount. The cloud here is in fact the covering of the tabernacle, which is called here “the tent of testimony”. God has entrusted us with a testimony. He wants to give a testimony of Himself through us to the world. For this the Holy Spirit came to dwell in the church.

The first time the cloud shows the way, after the redemption from Egypt, is to lead them to the Red Sea (Exo 13:21). It is a picture of the guidance of the Holy Spirit Who, after redemption, will lead His people. The second time we see the cloud when it takes position at the entrance of the tent of meeting erected by Moses outside the camp (Exo 33:9).

The lifting and settling down of the cloud are described in detail here. The whole path of the people is connected to the lifting and settling down of the cloud. As the cloud indicates, the people must act. The people as a whole, not just the few, must aim for it. Even as local churches, we should not plan our own way, but surrender our way to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

God wants every local testimony of the church to pass through the wilderness. Every exercise in a church is related to watching the cloud. In questions about allowing someone to take part in the Lord’s Supper, or in the case of removing sin from the midst of the church or any other form of care, we must pay attention to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Also in the night the cloud is there to determine our walk. In the night the cloud looks like a fire. Everything is presented in a childishly simple way. It is the sure way of blessing for testimony. Everything must be done at or according to “the command of the LORD” (verse 18 [2x], verse 20 [2x], verse 23 [3x]), a command expressed in the movements of the cloud.

The people can go a certain way if they watch the cloud and act according to what it does. Because the people never know when the cloud will stop or move forward, it is necessary to constantly look at it. For each step we depend on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Taking action without His guidance only brings misery, as well as staying where we are, while the Spirit urges us to do a certain work or make a certain decision.

Paying attention to the guidance of the Holy Spirit is also important in discussions of brothers with a certain responsibility in the church. It is not a matter of business minded brothers, who can talk best, but of whether there is real dependence on the Holy Spirit in a spirit of prayer. Not only a case must be clear, but also the time of action. No time is lost when we wait for God's time. In order to act in the right way and at the right time, it is necessary to always look upwards. Our actions and the time when we should act, should not be dictated by what we see around us, for example, in business.

We must give the Lord the opportunity to lead us. He wants to lead us through His eye. He can also lead us through bit and bridle (Psa 32:8-9). In the latter case, He keeps us under control so that we do not take the wrong path. In the first case there is fellowship with Him in going the right way. Therefore, we should not ask if the Lord wants to stop us when we are in danger of going wrong, but rather entrust ourselves to Him and ask for His will. Then we will not act until we are certain that something is His will.

Numbers 10

Verses 1-10 | The Trumpets of Silver

1 The LORD spoke further to Moses, saying, 2 "Make yourself two trumpets of silver, of hammered work you shall make them; and you shall use them for summoning the congregation and for having the camps set out. 3 When both are blown, all the congregation shall gather themselves to you at the doorway of the tent of meeting. 4 Yet if [only] one is blown, then the leaders, the heads of the divisions of Israel, shall assemble before you. 5 But when you blow an alarm, the camps that are pitched on the east side shall set out. 6 When you blow an alarm the second time, the camps that are pitched on the south side shall set out; an alarm is to be blown for them to set out. 7 When convening the assembly, however, you shall blow without sounding an alarm. 8 The priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations. 9 When you go to war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies. 10 Also in the day of your gladness and in your appointed feasts, and on the first [days] of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a reminder of you before your God. I am the LORD your God."

There is, besides the cloud, another means by which God wants to lead His people: two trumpets of silver. Trumpets are not, like the cloud, to look at, but to listen to. The cloud is visible, the trumpets are audible. The trumpets are the voice of the LORD who speaks to them. They represent the Word of God, in which He emphatically reveals His will.

They are trumpets "of silver". It is, so to speak, a voice of silver. The voice of God, His Word, is not just any voice. The silver speaks of the price paid for the reconciliation. The voice of the Lord Jesus is the voice of our Savior. They are trumpets made of "hammered" silver, which means that this silver is beaten. This reminds us that He Who speaks is the good Shepherd who was beaten for us by the sword of God (Zec 13:7a).

The trumpets, the Word, are mainly used for two reasons:

1. For summoning the congregation (cf. Isa 27:13; Joel 2:15).
2. For having the camps set out.

They are blown by the priests, not by the Levites. Not the brothers who serve with the Word (Levites), but believers who are used to having fellowship with God in the sanctuary, who know His thoughts and know what is appropriate for Him, let His thoughts be heard. That is not only in the meetings, but in the life of every day. Such believers quickly understand what God wants. They are able to pass on His will, His Word, to others and thus determine the direction to which the testimony should move.

We come together because God's Word encourages us to do so (Heb 10:25). The LORD invites his people to come into his presence "at the doorway of the tent of meeting" (verse 3). The meeting should not be a matter of rut, but happens at the invitation of Him Who has bought us with the price of His blood. When we hear the Lord Jesus say: "Do this in remembrance of Me" (1Cor 11:24), then we come, don't we?

When we prepare for the meeting, when we have priestly exercises in advance, we come otherwise than only out of habit. So we also go to the meeting to listen to the Word and pray together. The Lord is there in the same way and as personal as during His Supper. When we come together as a church, He is there in the midst (Mt 18:20).

If only on one trumpet is blown (verse 4), it sounds half as loud as on two trumpets. But the experienced ears of the leaders perceive that blow. To brothers and sisters with a heart for all the people of God in connection with the interests of the Lord, half a word from the Lord is enough to obey what He says. They know what the Lord wants, where others do not, or see no problems at all.

If an alarm is blown, the camp shall set up (verse 5). So not only the lifting of the cloud is decisive. It is not enough to be guided by the Holy Spirit alone. The standard is the Word of God. Never will the Holy Spirit work anything that is contrary to the Word of God. Thus, a sister will never be able to say that the Holy Spirit has made it clear to her to give out a song or to pass on a word in the church. The Word commands women to remain

silent in the church (1Cor 14:34). But a sister who reveals a concern about a situation in the church may well be a priest who blows the trumpet.

Those who live on the east side hear the trumpet first. The east side speaks of looking forward to the coming of the Lord, the rising Sun. Those who expect the Lord, recognize His voice fastest. Then follow those who are on the south side, that is the right side. These are those who know their position in Christ. There is no trumpet blown for the west and north sides. They lie, so to speak, out of the reach of the Word, but they simply follow the example of the other tribes. There is not much spiritual exercise connected with this.

Verses 9-10 speak of the situation in the land, especially in case of battle (Joel 2:1; 2Chr 13:12) and feast (Lev 23:24; Psa 81:3; 2Chr 29:27). In both cases, in blowing the trumpet the people are remembered before God. When the Word is brought, not only the fellow believers listen, but also God. The brothers and sisters must be warned when danger is imminent or when there is something to celebrate. But God is also involved. He wants to be involved in everything that concerns His people.

Saul only lets the trumpet blow so that "the Hebrews hear" (1Sam 13:3), but he forgets that it is about God hearing it. Even though all believers hear it, but not God, what effect would it have? Victory begins with Jonathan, because he trusts in God (1Sam 14:6). We learn here that we should not complain to each other or seek support from each other, but that we should involve God. Then victory is certain.

We never have to fear the enemy's attacks. Instead of being afraid, we must give a faithful testimony of Who God is: "For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with [me] in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God" (2Tim 1:7-8). God gives the promise that He will stand by us with His power and fight for us. That is His answer to our testimony.

Even if there are celebrations to celebrate because of the blessing He has given, the trumpets must be blown to let Him hear their joy. We may share our joy with each other, but especially with Him.

Verses 11-28 | Israel Sets out from the Wilderness of Sinai

11 Now in the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud was lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony; 12 and the sons of Israel set out on their journeys from the wilderness of Sinai. Then the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran. 13 So they moved out for the first time according to the commandment of the LORD through Moses. 14 The standard of the camp of the sons of Judah, according to their armies, set out first, with Nahshon the son of Amminadab, over its army, 15 and Nethanel the son of Zuar, over the tribal army of the sons of Issachar; 16 and Eliab the son of Helon over the tribal army of the sons of Zebulun. 17 Then the tabernacle was taken down; and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari, who were carrying the tabernacle, set out. 18 Next the standard of the camp of Reuben, according to their armies, set out with Elizur the son of Shedeur, over its army, 19 and Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai over the tribal army of the sons of Simeon, 20 and Eliasaph the son of Deuel was over the tribal army of the sons of Gad. 21 Then the Kohathites set out, carrying the holy [objects]; and the tabernacle was set up before their arrival. 22 Next the standard of the camp of the sons of Ephraim, according to their armies, was set out, with Elishama the son of Ammihud over its army, 23 and Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur over the tribal army of the sons of Manasseh; 24 and Abidan the son of Gideon over the tribal army of the sons of Benjamin. 25 Then the standard of the camp of the sons of Dan, according to their armies, [which formed] the rear guard for all the camps, set out, with Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai over its army, 26 and Pagiel the son of Ochran over the tribal army of the sons of Asher; 27 and Ahira the son of Enan over the tribal army of the sons of Naphtali. 28 This was the order of march of the sons of Israel by their armies as they set out.

The actual wilderness journey begins in verse 11. God's people are going to write history. They are going to show what's in their hearts. It is *their* history. This part of the wilderness journey is different from the first part, just after their redemption, from Egypt to Mount Sinai. That part is described in Exodus 16-19. During that part God acts in grace. Then the people promise to do everything the LORD says, and receive the law (Exo 19:6; 20:1-18). That is in Numbers the basis of God's actions, although His grace is also visible every time.

In the history of the people of Israel we also see the history of Christianity. In both cases it is a history of failure and that while God has given so much blessing. The heart of man is fully revealed in the circumstances of life. The high – or better low – point of failure can be found in the “rebellion of Korah” in Numbers 16. Judas cites this history to illustrate the decline of Christianity (Jude 1:11).

After the people have been at Mount Sinai for almost a year (Exo 19:1; Num 10:11), God says it is time to set out on their journeys (Deu 1:6-7a). The people set out in the way God said in Numbers 2. They set out from the wilderness of Sinai to another wilderness, the wilderness of Paran, to camp there. As long as we are on earth, we move from wilderness to wilderness.

Still, there is a difference in the way they set out here with what is said about it in Numbers 2. It was said there that the tabernacle should set out in the middle. But here we see that already immediately after the setting out of the first three tribes the Gershonites and Merarites start setting out the tabernacle. The next three tribes follow. Then the Kohathites do their work. They carry the ark and the other objects of the sanctuary. The ark is the center of the parade, as God has said. Finally, the other tribes set out in the prescribed order.

The order is:

1. The first standard (Judah, Issachar, Zebulun);
2. A part of the Levites (the descendants of Gerson and Merari) with the tabernacle;
3. The second standard (Reuben, Simeon, Gad);
4. The rest of the Levites (the Kohathites) with the sanctuary;
5. The third standard (Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin);
6. The fourth standard (Dan, Asher, Naphtali).

Each tribe is led by the same leader who also helped in the census in Numbers 1:4-16 and came with his offering in Numbers 7. The third standard (Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin) immediately follows the ark, giving these tribes a direct view of it. It is possible that Psalm 80 refers to this section (Psa 80:2).

It is the wisdom of God who so governs this. When the people camp again, the Gershonites and Merarites can already do their work. And after the second standard has camped, they are ready so far that the Kohathites can place the holy object in the tabernacle.

Verses 29-34 | Moses Asks Hobab to Guide Them

29 Then Moses said to Hobab the son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses' father-in-law, "We are setting out to the place of which the LORD said, 'I will give it to you'; come with us and we will do you good, for the LORD has promised good concerning Israel." 30 But he said to him, "I will not come, but rather will go to my [own] land and relatives." 31 Then he said, "Please do not leave us, inasmuch as you know where we should camp in the wilderness, and you will be as eyes for us. 32 So it will be, if you go with us, that whatever good the LORD does for us, we will do for you." 33 Thus they set out from the mount of the LORD three days' journey, with the ark of the covenant of the LORD journeying in front of them for the three days, to seek out a resting place for them. 34 The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp.

Moses asks Hobab, a man who is not of the people of God, to go up with the people, because he knows where the people should camp in the wilderness. But Hobab is a man of the world and he doesn't like it. Moses should have left it at that. However, he urges Hobab to go along.

That is not a good thing. God has provided everything to guide the people. Appealing to Hobab is misplaced. Here Moses seems to rely more on a visible and tangible guide than the invisible God (cf. Jer 17:5-7). Have family relationships perhaps played a role? After all, Hobab is his brother-in-law. Such situations occur more often, like with Barnabas who wants to take his cousin (Acts 15:37; Col 4:10).

The LORD makes clear Who is in charge. The ark, which should be in the middle, takes the lead. Here the people don't protect the ark, but the ark now protects the people. The ark, God, leaves the place He has taken in the middle of His own in the camp to be taken care of, as it were, by them. But now He becomes their servant, Who goes out before them to seek for them a resting place in the endless wilderness. This action of the LORD is also

an encouragement for everyone who has to go a new, unknown way. The Lord knows the way well and goes ahead. He is the good Shepherd who goes ahead of His sheep (Jn 10:4).

The LORD cannot allow His people to be led by an unbelieving and disinterested man like Hobab. When we become unfaithful, God takes control. God will always uphold the honor of His Son, of whom the ark is a picture.

Verses 35-36 | The Ark Set out and Come to Rest

35 *Then it came about when the ark set out that Moses said,*

“Rise up, O LORD!

And let Your enemies be scattered,

And let those who hate You flee before You.”

36 *When it came to rest, he said,*

“Return, O LORD,

[To] the myriad thousands of Israel.”

Moses has learned the lesson. He agrees with God’s actions and calls upon Him to protect His people against their enemies, to stand up for His people against their enemies. He calls for a curse on the enemies and for a blessing on the people.

Moses speaks of “Your enemies”. The enemies of the people are in fact those of God. When we place our enemies in the light of God, the fear for them disappears. Our struggle then becomes the struggle of God. In faith Moses sees victory. He sees that the result of the battle means peace for the people. It leads him to the question: “Return, O LORD”, that the people may serve as a resting place for God Himself.

Numbers 11

Introduction

This chapter draws our attention to the behavior of the Israelites in the wilderness. Unfortunately, it is a history of constant infidelity and revolt. At the same time it is also a history of the long-suffering and grace of God. It is an utmost humbling picture that we get to see, but also very instructive.

Verses 1-3 | The People Complain and Are Punished

1 Now the people became like those who complain of adversity in the hearing of the LORD; and when the LORD heard [it], His anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed [some] of the outskirts of the camp. 2 The people therefore cried out to Moses, and Moses prayed to the LORD and the fire died out. 3 So the name of that place was called Taberah, because the fire of the LORD burned among them.

The first described events of the wilderness journey are not those of a people who are thankfully and joyfully on their way to the promised land. God has given them every reason to do so. In Numbers 1-10 He has given them His directions and means as preparations for the journey through the wilderness. God has provided all things, He guides them. The trip would not last long, only eleven days (Deu 1:2). Already in Numbers 13 they arrive at the border of the land.

But we hear nothing about their joy. Only three days left they are on the road or they are starting to complain. That is the first thing we read. The people are, as the footnote in the Darby translation reads, “like men complaining of evil”. That is, they behave like people who sigh and moan about an accident that has happened to them.

A general feeling of dissatisfaction has arisen. They complain about something they can't name by name, and that after so much goodness from God. They are simply not satisfied with what God has given them. It is inevitable that they will show their displeasure about the troubles and hardships that they feel result from the wilderness journey.

This is also the case in the Christian dispensation. We see that for example in the first letter to the Corinthians. In that letter we read about the laxity that prevails in the church. There it is not so much the result of dissatisfaction, but rather of their gloating, their pride in all their gifts. But the origin is the same. They don't think of the Giver, but of themselves. There the fire of the Lord, as it were, ignites, which we see from the many who are "weak and sick" among them, "and a number sleep" (1Cor 11:30).

The fire of God's judgment begins at the outskirts of the camp. Those who are furthest from the center of God fall first under God's punishing hand. Fortunately for the people there is an intercessor. By the intercession of Moses, the judgment, of which fire speaks, comes to an end. In the church people complain and whine about the conditions that may prevail, but where is the help to get rid of evil by intercession?

There would never have been a twenty-first century for Christianity if there had not been a true Moses praying to God. By the intercession of the Lord Jesus (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25) the fire of God's wrath is averted. Every blessing, every revival is the result of that intercession.

Verses 4-9 | The Food of Egypt and the Manna

4 The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, "Who will give us meat to eat? 5 We remember the fish which we used to eat free in Egypt, the cucumbers and the melons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic, 6 but now our appetite is gone. There is nothing at all to look at except this manna." 7 Now the manna was like coriander seed, and its appearance like that of bdellium. 8 The people would go about and gather [it] and grind [it] between two millstones or beat [it] in the mortar, and boil [it] in the pot and make cakes with it; and its taste was as the taste of cakes baked with oil. 9 When the dew fell on the camp at night, the manna would fall with it.

The recently executed wrath of the LORD has not caused any lasting fear for Him in the hearts of the people. If there is a general feeling of unease in verses 1-3, now a concrete evil is mentioned that arises with the "rabble". This "rabble" is made up of people who went with the people from Egypt, also called "a mixed multitude" (Exo 12:38a). They do not belong to those

who have a hope for themselves. They do not long for the promised land. They live only for the here and now and not for the future. The history of Christianity has many nominal Christians, people who only bear the name 'Christian', meaning that they have no life from God.

With their negative attitude they contaminate the whole people of God. So nominal Christians always get the carnal Christians on their side. People who have joined God's people just because of the pleasant feelings that this gives, have never been separated from the world. If Christian life does not give them what they expected, they will, in pictures, long back to Egypt. For the sake of convenience, they do not think of the heavy slavery, but of its pleasurable sides. The unpleasant things are pushed away.

In Exodus we only hear the people moaning about the heavy service. After a short stay in the wilderness they have forgotten that and their only thought is of the food of Egypt (verses 5-6). That food consists of six kinds. They are all without nutritional value. Some are spicy in taste, but cause a bad breath. It is a striking picture of what the world has to offer: magazines, films, music, that are attractive to the flesh, but do not satisfy the heart. Also a consequence of consuming this food is that there is a bad smell around us; our behavior is corrupted by it. On the other hand, there is the food of the land. This consists of seven nutritious and tasty kinds (Deu 8:8). The use of that food will give us a behavior and radiance in which the Lord Jesus is seen.

"Every spiritual blessing in the heavenly [places] in Christ" with which God has blessed us (Eph 1:3) fade away if we feel neglected in relation to the wealth in which the people of the world sometimes bathe. But the real reason is that we despise the food that God gives, the manna.

The manna is a picture of the Lord Jesus as "the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die" (Jn 6:50). He is our food. We feed on Him when we read about Him in the Gospels, when we think about the way He went His way on earth, the mind in which He did everything, the words He spoke, the deeds He did and His feelings accompanying all this. This food is the food of eternity. If He is not satisfactory now, how will it be in eternity? In heaven we have nothing and no one else but Him.

The only difference between now and later is that we won't have the flesh anymore. The Lord Jesus is and remains the same, but the flesh longs for the things of the world. We want the pleasure of the world, but not the judgment. If the world attracts us again, it is because we despise the Lord Jesus as it were, that we think that He does not offer us enough. The heart then no longer knows the power of the words the Savior has spoken: "He who comes to Me will not hunger" (Jn 6:35).

The description of the manna is done in terms of equation (verse 7; Exo 16:14,31). It is compared with coriander seed and with the bdellium, a precious stone. It gives the characteristics of the Lord Jesus' life. That is like the coriander seed: white, perfectly pure and perfectly balanced. He who sees Him and has an eye for Him sees in Him "a precious corner[stone]" (1Pet 2:6).

The people deal with the manna in a way that God has not commanded (verse 8). It is like flavoring the Bible. We recognize this in making Bible translations with the aim of making them marketable. The truths of Scripture are popularly translated or even filmed and then offered to the public. But it is all because people can no longer bear the unmixed truth of the Lord Jesus. They are looking for something that suits them well (2Tim 4:3).

There is still the taste of oil, a picture of the Holy Spirit. It is still brought as something that speaks of God. The Holy Spirit sometimes wants to use it to convince people that they are dealing with God. The fact that "its taste was like wafers with honey" (Exo 16:31) is not mentioned here. The sweetness of the relationship with the Lord Jesus that we enjoy when we read the Word of God (Eze 3:3) is not present in it.

The manna is connected with the dew (verse 9; Exo 16:14). Dew is a refreshment. Manna refreshes the soul. God provides the food while the people sleep. His care is there day and night. When they rise, they can take what God has laid out. The manna is the daily testimony of God's daily care.

Verses 10-15 | Moses Complains

10 Now Moses heard the people weeping throughout their families, each man at the doorway of his tent; and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly, and Moses was displeased. 11 So Moses said to the LORD, "Why have You been so

hard on Your servant? And why have I not found favor in Your sight, that You have laid the burden of all this people on me? 12 Was it I who conceived all this people? Was it I who brought them forth, that You should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom as a nurse carries a nursing infant, to the land which You swore to their fathers'? 13 Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me, saying, 'Give us meat that we may eat!' 14 I alone am not able to carry all this people, because it is too burdensome for me. 15 So if You are going to deal thus with me, please kill me at once, if I have found favor in Your sight, and do not let me see my wretchedness."

The weeping is general. Moses is displeased at the attitude of the people towards the gift of God in the manna. He complains about the people with the LORD. It's all going to be too much for him. In his words it sounds that he thinks *he* should take care of flesh and that *he* should carry the people. He has forgotten that it is not for him to take care of flesh or carry the people, but for God to do so (Exo 19:4; Deu 1:31). God does not expect these things from him either.

When the Lord entrusts us with the task of leading among the people, we may sometimes feel what we observe with Moses here. We too may think that we should carry the whole testimony of God on our shoulders. Then we become just like Moses. Then we take something on us that God has not imposed on us. We may entrust everything to Him. He Himself will safely bring His people to the end. It is good to feel the need of the people and at the same time to realize that God knows this need, even better than we do. This may make us pray.

Verses 16-17 | Seventy Elders and Officers

16 The LORD therefore said to Moses, "Gather for Me seventy men from the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and their officers and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. 17 Then I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit who is upon you, and will put [Him] upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you will not bear [it] all alone."

Moses must bring together seventy men. They are called "elders" and "officials". They are two names for the same people. The use of the word

“elders” emphasizes that it is about experienced, wise people; it is more about the person. When using the word “officials” or “overseers”, the task they perform is foremost. In the New Testament, elders and overseers are also two names for the same person (Acts 20:17,28; Tit 1:5,7).

Of the Spirit Who is upon Moses, the LORD shall separate a portion, and lay it upon the elders. Some people here see that part of the spirit of Moses – then there is no question of the Spirit of God, but the own spirit of Moses – is taken away and laid on others. The lesson then is that if we fail, God sometimes takes away from us a special privilege in a particular task, to share that task with others. As a result, we may lose part of our wages. The task which Moses received from the LORD does not exceed his strength, for the LORD imposes no unbearable burden. With the assignment he also gives the power.

When it comes to the Spirit of God Who is on Moses – as NASB suggests by writing “Spirit” with a capital letter – the meaning is different. Moses cannot lose anything “of the Spirit” Who is on him, while God can give of the same Spirit also to others. It’s like with a burning piece of wood. If that burning piece of wood lights another piece of wood, it doesn’t lose anything of its own fire, but on the contrary, it increases the fire. In the same way it works with the Spirit of God. If we kindle His work in others, this will never decrease the full measure of the Spirit we have received (Jn 3:34b).

Because of their age and experience, the seventy elders are suitable to take over from Moses’ task. Now they are being made competent by the Spirit to perform their task as well. It is remarkable that the Spirit of Moses is given to no less than seventy elders. That shows something of the extend of Moses’ task. His task is so extensive that it has to be divided among no less than seventy others.

The reason for this division of the Spirit lies in the preceding verses. There Moses complains to the LORD that he is not able to bear the burden of this whole people only by himself. It may be that this is a culpable complaining, resulting in the loss of a certain spiritual power that then goes to others. However, it is also possible that it shows how much Moses has a confidential relationship with the LORD. The consequence of this is that

there is not a decrease of the Spirit, but rather an increase. God could enable Moses to do it all by himself. But He does it differently and in a way that it becomes a manifestation of the Spirit in seventy others.

It will be the desire of all who let the Spirit work in their lives, that the same Spirit will also work in the lives of others. As all seventy elders receive of the Spirit, so too can all believers receive of God's Spirit. Every believer possesses the Spirit indwelling, but not in every believer God's Spirit gets the space to work. In a somewhat different context, but with the same thought, Paul encourages Timothy to "kindle afresh the gift of God" which is in him (2Tim 1:6). To kindle has to do with fire. The exhortation to be "fervent in spirit" (Rom 12:11) connects to this.

At the beginning of the church we see that tongues like fire divide and put themselves on each of the assembled believers (Acts 2:3). Here we see how the Spirit fills both the whole house and the individual believer. This division does not decrease the Spirit, but it makes it visible to others that the individual is filled with Him. This we also see with the seventy elders when they start to prophesy (Num 11:25). The lesson for us is that we have to start "flaming" as it were, through which others are kindled.

Verses 18-23 | Quail Promised

18 Say to the people, 'Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow, and you shall eat meat; for you have wept in the ears of the LORD, saying, "Oh that someone would give us meat to eat! For we were well-off in Egypt." Therefore the LORD will give you meat and you shall eat. 19 You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, 20 but a whole month, until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you; because you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before Him, saying, "Why did we ever leave Egypt?"' 21 But Moses said, "The people, among whom I am, are 600,000 on foot; yet You have said, 'I will give them meat, so that they may eat for a whole month.' 22 Should flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to be sufficient for them? Or should all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to be sufficient for them?" 23 The LORD said to Moses, "Is the LORD's power limited? Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not."

God is going to give meat. But He does this in a way that will allow the people to experience fully the horror of what they have asked for (Psa 78:29-31). When we insist that God gives us what He did not intend for us, He can finally give us what we demand of Him, but with disastrous consequences. The people must experience the folly of their lust. The quails are a blessing in Exodus 16 (Exo 16:2-13). There they serve as a preparation for the manna. Here the quails will come as a curse.

Moses still thinks he is the center of the people. He still believes that he should give meat to the people (verses 13,21-22). Sometimes we are hard learners, just like the disciples are (Mk 8:4,14-21). We should not hurl Moses too hard. He has to deal with a persistent people. The LORD asks him a question of faith and also promises him that He will live up to what he has promised.

Verses 24-30 | The Seventy Elders Prophecy

24 So Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD. Also, he gathered seventy men of the elders of the people, and stationed them around the tent. 25 Then the LORD came down in the cloud and spoke to him; and He took of the Spirit who was upon him and placed [Him] upon the seventy elders. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did not do [it] again. 26 But two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad and the name of the other Medad. And the Spirit rested upon them (now they were among those who had been registered, but had not gone out to the tent), and they prophesied in the camp. 27 So a young man ran and told Moses and said, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." 28 Then Joshua the son of Nun, the attendant of Moses from his youth, said, "Moses, my lord, restrain them." 29 But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" 30 Then Moses returned to the camp, [both] he and the elders of Israel.

Before the quails come, Moses first gathers the seventy elders. The LORD takes of the Spirit Who was upon him and places Him upon the elders. We read that the Spirit "rested upon them". This is a wonderful indication that the Spirit finds peace with them. It is like the Spirit Who descends upon the Lord Jesus like a dove and then abides upon Him (Jn 1:33b). When the Spirit finds rest with us, we can share the things of God with each

other. By the Spirit Who rests upon them, the elders prophesy. They do that temporarily. Prophecy is the application of the Word to the heart and conscience (1Cor 14:3).

Two of the seventy have stayed back in the camp. We can see a special guidance of God's providence that these two are absent, for thus it appears that it is indeed the Spirit of God, by Whom these elders are driven. Not Moses gave them that Spirit, but God Himself. Perhaps these two, it is supposed, have been too modest to respond to Moses' call. Yet God gives them His Spirit and urges them to prophesy. The fact that they are in God's favor may be deduced from the fact that God reveals their names to us, and of them alone. He knows perfectly well what is being done for Him, even if it happens in the camp and not at the tent of meeting.

Although they are not present where they should be, they still prophesy. A young man reports this to Moses. Joshua hears the message about this and thinks that the two men should stop prophesying. In his opinion they are not competent to do so because they are not in the right place, near the tent where the LORD is present in the cloud. But Moses has learned the lesson. He does not prevent it. The Lord Jesus also taught His disciples that lesson (Mk 9:38-41). Paul learned from the Lord Jesus and shows a mind similar to that of Moses (Phil 1:15-18).

Moses acknowledges that God uses them in that place and that they are a blessing to others. It is always good to recognize that God remains sovereign in the distribution of His Spirit. The names of the two are highlighted. Eldad means 'God has loved' and Medad means 'loved one'. In these names we find a development of love in a place where they should not actually be. It is a revelation of love that is often lacking among those who, possibly rightly, say that they are in the right place, namely the place where the Lord Jesus is in the midst (Mt 18:20). Such a revelation of love serves to embarrass all those who can say a lot about love, but in practice do not act upon it.

If we fail to hold the truth of God's Word about the meeting of the believers in love (Eph 4:15), God will use others who may lack understanding. The Lord says: "He who is not against us is for us" (Mk 9:40). That should

teach us about our judgment of what others do for the Lord. It forbids us to draw a line through activities just because they do not 'emanate from us'.

Moses' reaction to Joshua's proposal shows that he does not seek his own honor, but that of the LORD, and that he has the welfare of the people in mind. In the church there may also be the desire that "all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted" (1Cor 14:31). This excludes a one-man service. It is important to have this desire and to encourage others to allow themselves to be used for this service. Jealousy must be judged here. No one may present himself as being solely competent or qualified to perform this service. No one should also think that everything that comes to mind in him should necessarily be put forward, for "the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets" (1Cor 14:32).

Prophecy, as has been said, is speaking "to men for edification and exhortation and consolation" (1Cor 14:3). The question is to what extent the desire is present in us and to what extent the freedom is present in it. Is our relationship with the Lord Jesus to become jealous of, as with Moses? Prophecy is speaking what is necessary in view of the state of God's people or of a single soul at that time. If we are dependent on the Lord and we have the desire to serve His own, He will give the words that are needed.

The lamentation of Moses "would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!", will become a reality in the future. The prophet Joel speaks about this in his prophecy: "It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days" (Joel 2:28-29).

The wish of Moses has become with Joel a promise of the LORD: sons and daughters shall prophesy. This requires a life animated by the Spirit. Only then is one receptive to Divine revelations. This will be the case for all who enter the kingdom of peace. Prophecy is speaking out of the presence of God with knowledge of His will. God will make His will known to the old men through dreams and to young people through visions.

In the Old Testament we see that the Spirit does not generally use every member of the people. He does His work mainly through kings, priests

and prophets. It will be different in the future. Then all layers of the people, even the male and female servants, receive this gift. There will be no distinction between gender, age – for God there is no generation gap – or social status. The old men, with whom the power is diminishing or even gone, and the young men, who have little or no experience in the things of God, will receive revelations from God in dreams and visions.

Verses 31-35 | Quail and Judgement

31 Now there went forth a wind from the LORD and it brought quail from the sea, and let [them] fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, all around the camp and about two cubits [deep] on the surface of the ground. 32 The people spent all day and all night and all the next day, and gathered the quail (he who gathered least gathered ten homers) and they spread [them] out for themselves all around the camp. 33 While the meat was still between their teeth, before it was chewed, the anger of the LORD was kindled against the people, and the LORD struck the people with a very severe plague. 34 So the name of that place was called Kibroth-hattaavah, because there they buried the people who had been greedy. 35 From Kibroth-hattaavah the people set out for Hazeroth, and they remained at Hazeroth.

There is an overwhelming mass of meat (Psa 78:26-31). That should make them feel ashamed. They have doubted whether God can do it. Now they get it. But instead of it casting them upon God, they cast themselves upon the meat. It brings them not to God in humility, but to a revelation of their lusts, the proof that their god is the stomach (Phil 3:19).

Then God's patience with them is over. Also in a general sense there will be an end to God's tolerance. His wrath kindles. Many are being killed. The inscription on their tombstone reads: 'The greedy people'. How will be the inscription on our tombstone? How will people remember us?

In Exodus 16 the lesson is that believers must learn to feed on the manna, a picture of the Lord Jesus in His life on earth, from day to day. But the eating of the manna can only happen after one has fed oneself with the flesh of the Lord Jesus, or indeed His death. The consequence of this food is

getting part of the blessing of eternal life (Jn 6:53-54). The quail in Exodus 16 are a picture of this.

Here in Numbers 11, the quail are also a picture of the same death of the Lord Jesus. But the consequence here is judgment. The death of Christ is a blessing as we feed with Him to be freed from our sins. The death of Christ is a curse for those who are disgusted by Him. It is He by Whom God shall judge the earth (Acts 17:31; Jn 5:27; Rev 20:11).

After the event with the quail the people set out for Hazereth.

Numbers 12

Verses 1-2 | Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses

1 Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); 2 and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?" And the LORD heard it.

The discontent of the people because of the hardships of the wilderness journey is more against God than against Moses. But now Moses has got to pay for it as well. It is not so much the people who are revolting, but the leaders. The evil of discontent among the people also affects the leaders.

Miriam and Aaron are annoyed by the fact that Moses has a Cushite, or Ethiopian, woman, referring possibly to Zippora. That their brother hath taken a wife from the Gentiles is a thorn in their eye. They cannot bear the fact that grace is shown to the Gentiles.

In the parable of the vineyard that the Lord Jesus later tells, it appears that the same attitude of intolerance toward the proving of grace to the Gentiles dominates the Jews (Lk 20:16). Even later we see that nothing has changed among the people. When Paul speaks about grace going to the Gentiles, the Jews become fierce (Acts 22:21-22).

Aaron as a person again shows his weak character. He gave in to the will of the people and gave them a golden calf (Exo 32:1-2). Now his sister, who seems to be taking the initiative, whispers something about Moses to him, he submits again and follows her in her revolt against Moses.

The remark of Miriam and Aaron that God did not only speak through Moses is true. Miriam is called "the prophetess" (Exo 15:20) and Aaron is the high priest. They have both a place as a connection between God and the people. Together with Moses they occupy an important position, which is given to them by God. The prophet Micah later points this out to God's people: "Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt And ransomed you from the house of slavery, And I sent before you Moses,

Aaron and Miriam” (Mic 6:4). But that should not be a reason to rise to that position or to be jealous of what the Lord has given another. They indicate that they want to be equal to Moses. By having a heathen woman, he has lost his rights, they think, or at least they are on the same level as Moses, they think.

Perhaps Miriam did not say her remarks out loud, but only whispered in Aaron’s ear, but “the LORD heard it”. Our most confidential remarks have a Hearer in Heaven.

Verse 3 | Moses, the Humblest Man

3 (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth.)

This testimony that the Spirit of God gives about Moses makes the allegation of Miriam and Aaron all the worse. Someone claiming his rights may evoke jealousy. But the claiming of rights is completely absent from Moses. Moses does not take the law into his own hands. He does not stand up for himself. That does not fit his humbleness.

The higher a person’s position is among his fellow human beings, the more difficult it is for the natural heart to accept attacks on his person without reaction. Moses is wroth with anger when the glory of God is tarnished. But when it comes to himself, he hands over his case to God. In this he is a picture of the Lord Jesus and an example for us: “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting [Himself] to Him who judges righteously” (1Pet 2:21-23).

Verses 4-9 | The LORD Testifies of Moses

4 Suddenly the LORD said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, “You three come out to the tent of meeting.” So the three of them came out. 5 Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, 6 He said,

“Hear now My words:

If there is a prophet among you,

I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision.

I shall speak with him in a dream.

7 “Not so, with My servant Moses,

He is faithful in all My household;

8 With him I speak mouth to mouth,

Even openly, and not in dark sayings,

And he beholds the form of the LORD.

Why then were you not afraid

To speak against My servant, against Moses?”

9 So the anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed.

God stands up for Moses. It is striking that the LORD immediately comes into action. He commands the slanderers to go together with Moses to the tent of meeting. That is where the matter has to be looked at. Sin in the midst of the church must also be treated in the church.

The LORD comes down and tells what a special prophet Moses is. He is not just a prophet. God speaks of the faithfulness of Moses in His house. He is herein a picture of the Lord Jesus, with a difference. Moses is faithful *in* God’s house, and he is a servant in it: “Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant” (Heb 3:5). However, we read from the Lord Jesus that He is faithful as “as a Son over His house” (Heb 3:6). The Holy Spirit indicates here in picture how unique the place of the Lord Jesus is in what is now God’s house: the church.

God speaks directly to Moses (Exo 33:11a; Deu 34:10). Moses is connected to God that closely. God does not speak of the weaknesses that a man like Moses also has. God does not do this if He defends a man. We see this later also when He forces Balaam to bless the people, while he wants to curse the people (Numbers 22-24).

Verses 10-13 | Leprosy; Confession; Intercession

10 But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam [was] leprous, as [white as] snow. As Aaron turned toward Miriam, behold, she [was] leprous. 11 Then Aaron said to Moses, “Oh, my lord, I beg you, do

not account [this] sin to us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned. 12 Oh, do not let her be like one dead, whose flesh is half eaten away when he comes from his mother's womb!" 13 Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "O God, heal her, I pray!"

Miriam becomes leprous. Her name is first mentioned in verse 1. As said, it seems that she is the instigator. Leprosy follows as a prophet and priest rise up and reach out to the place which only belongs to Moses. God wants to be recognized in His sovereign grace that He allows those who are not entitled to it to share in the blessings of Christ.

The leprosy of Miriam is a striking picture of God's judgment on the rebellion of Israel against showing grace to the Gentiles, represented in the wife of Moses. Israel should recognize God's sovereignty. They did not do so and therefore they were struck with leprosy in their character of witnesses or prophets.

The application for the church is that where a man or a ministry assumes the place of Christ, the judgment comes from God. There, too, the principle of grace disappears. When a place that does not belong to him is assumed, leprosy breaks out. Maybe Miriam's jealousy has been there a long time before it erupts here. The will of the flesh becomes public. God makes clear in His time where leprosy is present.

In the pictures of the Bible, the woman is a picture of a particular state and the man is a picture of practice. The condition of Miriam is that of leprosy. Fortunately the practice of confession in Aaron is also there, and this immediately after the leprosy has broken out. Aaron immediately returns to his right place as mediator and speaks to Moses in all humility. His words show a radical confession.

The first words we hear in this history of Moses are those of an intercessor. He becomes a mediator. Herein we see his true greatness. Of any grudge appears nothing.

Verses 14-15 | What to Do with Miriam

14 But the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not bear her shame for seven days? Let her be shut up for seven days outside the camp, and afterward she may be received again." 15 So Miriam was

shut up outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on until Miriam was received again.

The intercession of Moses receives an answer. The LORD uses an example of everyday life to illustrate His statement. When a father spits his daughter in the face, he expresses his dissatisfaction with her actions. This humiliation by her father must convince her of the disgracefulness of her behavior. Seven days she will hide from her family out of shame.

There is no immediate healing after the confession. Miriam first has to stay outside the camp for seven days. A full recovery must take place and a full period, represented by the number seven, is needed for that. Evil can be so serious that the punishment must be imposed, even though forgiveness has already taken place. This will be the case when the public testimony of the Lord has been damaged.

The whole people are involved in the exercise of the punishment. They can't move on. There is no strength when a certain evil becomes public. The whole church must be exercised and come to purity: "For behold what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow, has produced in you: what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong! In everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter" (2Cor 7:11). A broken spirit is important in the exercise of discipline.

This history shows how heavy God takes it when we speak ill of a brother or sister, especially when it comes to someone who does a service for the Lord (cf. 1Tim 5:19). Even when it is about real facts, this kind of speaking is nothing more than a form of jealousy.

Verse 16 | From Hazeroth to the Wilderness of Paran

16 Afterward, however, the people moved out from Hazeroth and camped in the wilderness of Paran.

The people move out when the discipline over Miriam has had its full effect. The following place where they camp is in the wilderness of Paran. They are now close to the land.

Numbers 13

Introduction

In Numbers 11 we see a desire in the people of God to return to Egypt. Someone who yearns back to the world – of which Egypt is a picture – proves that he does not know the true character of the world. In Numbers 13 a new problem is emerging: how do the people think about the promised land? It will appear that, just as they do not know Egypt, they do not know the promised land either. They are as unbelieving in the glory that lies before them, that is of the land of Canaan, as they are in respect of Egypt that they have forsaken. The same goes for the wilderness they pass through.

The characteristic of Israel is that they fear more for the enemies than for the LORD. That is why they only think about the pleasant things of Egypt when they think about that land. Over against that, they have the unpleasantness of the wilderness. Therefore they long to go back to Egypt. Now that they stand before the promised land, it is the other way around. They are opposed to the difficulties of conquering the land and do not want to conquer it. So they despise the blessings of it that the LORD has presented to them. They do not see the blessings, they forget them, because they are blinded by the effort it will take to possess them.

Verses 1-16 | The Twelve Spies

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses saying, 2 "Send out for yourself men so that they may spy out the land of Canaan, which I am going to give to the sons of Israel; you shall send a man from each of their fathers' tribes, every one a leader among them." 3 So Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran at the command of the LORD, all of them men who were heads of the sons of Israel. 4 These then [were] their names: from the tribe of Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur; 5 from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son of Hori; 6 from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh; 7 from the tribe of Issachar, Igal the son of Joseph; 8 from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son of Nun; 9 from the tribe

of Benjamin, Palti the son of Raphu; 10 from the tribe of Zebulun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; 11 from the tribe of Joseph, from the tribe of Manasseh, Gaddi the son of Susi; 12 from the tribe of Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; 13 from the tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael; 14 from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son of Vophsi; 15 from the tribe of Gad, Geuel the son of Machi. 16 These are the names of the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land; but Moses called Hoshea the son of Nun, Joshua.

In Deuteronomy 1 it says that the people themselves are asking to send spies: “Then all of you approached me and said, ‘Let us send men before us, that they may search out the land for us, and bring back to us word of the way by which we should go up and the cities which we shall enter’” (Deu 1:22). Now God gives them what they want. He knows their desires. They want to spy it out to compare it with their own strengths. God commands them according to their desires, that they may experience the results. It is like appointing a king in Israel. The LORD commands Samuel to appoint a king, but that is because the people want a king (1Sam 8:22a).

The name change of Hosea by Moses is significant. Hosea means ‘salvation’, Joshua means ‘Yahweh is salvation’. With this Moses indicates what God will do and that the strength of the people can be found in Him. He will have spoken this change of name loud and clear as an encouragement to the people. This change of name also shows the special bond that exists between Moses and Joshua, between an old man of God and a young man of God.

Verses 17-20 | Commission to Explore the Land

17 When Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, he said to them, “Go up there into the Negev; then go up into the hill country. 18 See what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong [or] weak, whether they are few or many. 19 How is the land in which they live, is it good or bad? And how are the cities in which they live, are [they] like [open] camps or with fortifications? 20 How is the land, is it fat or lean? Are there trees in it or not? Make an effort then to get some of the fruit of the land.” Now the time was the time of the first ripe grapes.

God has already told them everything, both about the blessing and about the enemies who live there. But they don't remember that God also said: "I give you the land." Then there is no need to go and see what kind of land it is, whether it is good or bad, and how strong the enemy is, is it? Nevertheless, courage is needed to spy out the land. After all, it is hostile territory. For the first time in the Bible the exhortation sounds: "Make an effort", or: "Take courage."

The inheritance that we Christians will receive together with the Lord Jesus is "all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth" (Eph 1:10). That is why we have been saved. There is nothing we could do about this salvation. So it is with the inheritance. We do not need to spy out that heritage or to be strong enough. We have no strength, as we didn't have it for salvation. God has redeemed us and gives us the inheritance.

Verses 21-24 | The Land Spied Out

21 So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin as far as Rehob, at Lebo-hamath. 22 When they had gone up into the Negev, they came to Hebron where Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai, the descendants of Anak were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) 23 Then they came to the valley of Eshcol and from there cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes; and they carried it on a pole between two [men], with some of the pomegranates and the figs. 24 That place was called the valley of Eshcol, because of the cluster which the sons of Israel cut down from there.

The spies come to Hebron, which means 'fellowship', which indicates that the blessing is enjoyed in fellowship with others. In Hebron is also the enemy. He will try to prevent us from enjoying fellowship with others and above all with God and the Lord Jesus.

In the meaning of the names we see the nature of the enemies who want to rob us of the blessing of the land. "Anak" means "long of neck", which indicates pride, haughty. They think only of themselves. Such people know very well how to keep us from our blessings. They will point to the folly of our faith. It is not only others who are like this, we must also be aware that in each of us there is an 'Anakite'.

In the names of Anak's three children, the characteristics of pride come to life:

1. "Ahiman" means 'who is my brother'. We recognize individualism in this, in which thinking about oneself is expressed in a stronger way.
2. "Sheshai" means 'free'. This indicates that one does not submit to any authority, but feels free to do what oneself thinks is right.
3. "Talmi" means 'audacious' or 'unashamed'. This shows the aspect of posturing.

If we do not eliminate these 'children' of pride, but give them the opportunity to assert themselves in our lives, the blessings are lost to us.

The cluster of grapes speaks of joy. Joy is the result of fellowship (1Jn 1:3-4). Joy and fellowship belong together. Anyone who is involved with the heavenly blessings, together with others – two men are needed to carry the cluster – will be glad.

Hebron was built seven years earlier than Zoan. This is not just a chronological remark. There is an important spiritual meaning attached to it. Zoan was at that time the capital of Egypt. There are many sages living there. Zoan stands for everything Egypt represents, both in wisdom and in the enjoyment of sin. Egypt is, as we have seen before, a picture of the world. Do we long for that back? Then let's remember that Hebron is much older.

Christendom and the things we have received in it are much older than our stay in the world. The blessings of heaven date from before all times (Eph 1:4). Compared to that the world is nothing, which only has later and temporary pleasures. Is the choice still difficult when we have to choose between Zoan in Egypt or Hebron in the promised land?

Verses 25-33 | The Spies Bring Back Word

25 When they returned from spying out the land, at the end of forty days, 26 they proceeded to come to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; and they brought back word to them and to all the congregation and showed them the fruit of the land. 27 Thus they told him, and said, "We went in to the land where you

sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. 28 Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified [and] very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. 29 Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan." 30 Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we will surely overcome it." 31 But the men who had gone up with him said, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us." 32 So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, "The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of [great] size. 33 There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight."

When the twelve spies leave, there is no difference between them yet to be seen. The difference becomes only clear when they return "at the end of forty days". The number forty is the number of trial (Gen 7:17; Exo 24:18; 1Sam 17:16; 1Kgs 19:8; Jona 3:4; Mk 1:13; Acts 1:3). Testing of the faith reveals the state of the faith. The twelve spies show this to be the case. They have all seen the same, but only two have looked with the eyes of God. One of the two is Caleb. The name Kaleb means 'wholeheartedly'. He is worth that name. Caleb hath given himself with an undivided, completely dedicated heart to the LORD and His case. For him, the punishment that comes soon is not a setback from entering the land, but a postponement.

The ten other men who have spied out the land have received the same blessings as Caleb, but have never taken possession of the land. They are like the people of whom is written to have enjoyed the gifts of the heavenly land, but have been lost. "For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and [then] have fallen away" (Heb 6:4-6a). These are people who have never truly, with their hearts, been converted to God. Although the ten have an unbelieving heart, they cannot deny that the land flows "with milk and honey".

Milk is a healthy food we received from our mother as a baby. As believers, we are called to long for the Word, as a baby longs for its mother's milk (1Pet 2:2). Honey is a picture of the natural relationships between the members of God's people and speaks of the sweetness of brotherly love. We find in the milk and honey the blessing of the vertical and horizontal relationships.

The ten spies give a correct description. They have seen no other things than God has said from the beginning (Exo 3:8). But they let their report follow by a limiting "however" (verse 28) and shift the emphasis of blessing to the enemies. Yet God also told them of those enemies and not only of the blessing.

Already to Abraham He told him that his descendants would go to a land where there are enemies (Gen 15:18-21). And to Moses He promised – and Moses told the people – that He would drive out the enemies from the land (Exo 23:27-31). But if a man forgets what God has said, he will see things differently. Thus the ten feel like grasshoppers in their own eyes, because they have lost sight of God.

The impression that unbelief conveys causes turmoil among the people. Kaleb knows exactly what the others are talking about. He does not present things differently and does not belittle the dangers. He is not insensitive to the dangers, but he is a man of faith in what God has said. That makes the difference. With a calm confidence in the power of God, he bears witness to the certainty of victory and quiets the people.

Then "the men who had gone up with him" spread a bad report of the land. They paint in detail the impossibility of taking possession of the land, as if to undertake an effort for this purpose is equivalent to suicide.

This way of reasoning can be applied spiritually. We reason like that, for example, when we say to others that doing Bible study is actually nonsensical, that engaging in the blessing of God's land is a tiring activity that only causes problems. Then we present the heavenly land as an area where no life is possible. We may well wonder how we talk about living with the Lord and how we understand what He has given us as spiritual blessings.

Numbers 14

Verses 1-4 | Reaction of the People to the Report

1 Then all the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night. 2 All the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron; and the whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?" 4 So they said to one another, "Let us appoint a leader and return to Egypt."

All the people revolt against Moses and Aaron. They cry loudly. However, it is not a crying because they repent. It is a manifestation of rebellion and rejection of God. They weep "that night", indicating not only the darkness around them, but symbolically also the darkness of their unbelief. In their unbelief they accuse God of causing their wives and children to die by the sword. This is a wicked claim, which stems from a rebellious heart.

They speak out clearly that they want to return to Egypt. Later Nehemiah is still ashamed of this folly. This is what we hear in his prayer to God: "They refused to listen, And did not remember Your wondrous deeds which You had performed among them; So they became stubborn and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt" (Neh 9:17a). What they want here, the LORD will announce as a punishment for disobedience (Deu 28:68a). They even indicate that they would rather die in the wilderness than enter the land God has chosen for them. They want another leader and thus reject Moses, the God-given leader. Prophetically, this anticipates the rejection of the Lord Jesus and the choice of the people for the anti-Christ (Jn 5:43).

Verse 5 | Reaction of Moses and Aaron

5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel.

With this new revelation of rebellion and unbelief, Moses and Aaron fall to the ground in dejection. They do this before the people, not so much before the LORD. In this way they show that they are, as it were, broken by the mind of the people. The attitude of Moses and Aaron expresses their humility. It seems like a plea to the people to finally continue in faith. But their attitude does not impress the people.

Verses 6-9 | Testimony of Joshua and Caleb

6 Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of those who had spied out the land, tore their clothes; 7 and they spoke to all the congregation of the sons of Israel, saying, "The land which we passed through to spy out is an exceedingly good land. 8 If the LORD is pleased with us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us—a land which flows with milk and honey. 9 Only do not rebel against the LORD; and do not fear the people of the land, for they will be our prey. Their protection has been removed from them, and the LORD is with us; do not fear them."

Caleb and Joshua also show how sad they are about the reaction of the people. They tear their clothes, which is always a sign of mourning and dejection. Then they repeat what they said the day before. Their vision of the land and what God is capable of has not changed. They speak the language of faith and point out what God is capable of. In the midst of so much unbelief, the faith of the few radiates all the brighter.

By saying "they will be our prey" Joshua and Caleb suggest that the people will feed more on the enemies than they will have to fight with them. To subject the enemy will be easy and beneficial. So they don't have to worry about it. Their enemies are without protection because God removed it from them. Add to this the fact that the LORD is with His people. What is there still to fear?

Verse 10 | The People and the LORD React

10 But all the congregation said to stone them with stones. Then the glory of the LORD appeared in the tent of meeting to all the sons of Israel.

The rebellion of the people against the LORD is the only reason they will not enter the land. No one is excluded from Canaan except those who ex-

clude themselves from it, those who will not enter it. The language of the faith of Caleb and Joshua does not appeal. A people who do not want to believe is not convinced by the most powerful arguments.

The language of the faith of Caleb and Joshua puts the unbelief of the people in the true light. The people even talk about stoning the faithful witnesses. This has always been the reaction of the unbelieving people to the witnesses of God (Mt 23:37; Acts 7:51,59; Rev 11:7,10).

Then the glory of the LORD appears. This happens four times in this book (Num 14:10; 16:19,42; 20:6) and always in, humanly speaking, hopeless situations. In these cases, God confirms His absolute rights.

Verses 11-12 | The Proposal of the LORD

11 The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst? 12 I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they."

God does not intend to consume the people. He wants His people to pray to Him. To this end He challenges Moses, as it were. He knows the heart of Moses. For Him it is not necessary to reveal what is in it, but He wants us to learn from it. He proposes Moses to make him a new people. He already proposed this in Exodus 32 in response to the events surrounding the golden calf (Exo 32:10).

Verses 13-19 | The Plea of Moses

13 But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for by Your strength You brought up this people from their midst, 14 and they will tell [it] to the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that You, O LORD, are in the midst of this people, for You, O LORD, are seen eye to eye, while Your cloud stands over them; and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. 15 Now if You slay this people as one man, then the nations who have heard of Your fame will say, 16 'Because the LORD could not bring this people into the land which He promised them by oath, therefore He slaughtered them in the wilderness.' 17 But now, I pray, let the power of the Lord be great, just as You have declared, 18 'The LORD is slow to anger

and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear [the guilty], visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth [generations].’ 19 Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.”

Moses’ reaction to the LORD’s proposal shows that his heart is in tune with that of the LORD. He pleads for the people. Moses does not think of himself; he thinks only of God’s glory and the welfare of the people. What will the Egyptians say? And has not the LORD so often shown His goodness and forgiveness, from their redemption “from Egypt even until now”? Has He not connected promises to the people? God’s promises and deeds are the basis for his plea. Moses calls upon what the LORD has said of Himself (Exo 34:6-7).

That is also the ground for us to pray for God’s people. The longer we know God, the more reason we have to remind Him of His Being that He has shown after our conversion in His gracious and merciful dealings and involvement with us.

Verses 20-35 | The LORD Judges

20 So the LORD said, “I have pardoned [them] according to your word; 21 but indeed, as I live, all the earth will be filled with the glory of the LORD. 22 Surely all the men who have seen My glory and My signs which I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness, yet have put Me to the test these ten times and have not listened to My voice, 23 shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who spurned Me see it. 24 But My servant Caleb, because he has had a different spirit and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land which he entered, and his descendants shall take possession of it. 25 Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites live in the valleys; turn tomorrow and set out to the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea.” 26 The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 27 “How long [shall I bear] with this evil congregation who are grumbling against Me? I have heard the complaints of the sons of Israel, which they are making against Me. 28 Say to them, ‘As I live,’ says the LORD, ‘just as you have spoken in My hearing, so I will surely do to you; 29 your corpses will fall in this wilderness, even all your numbered men, according to your complete number from twenty years

old and upward, who have grumbled against Me. 30 Surely you shall not come into the land in which I swore to settle you, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun. 31 Your children, however, whom you said would become a prey—I will bring them in, and they will know the land which you have rejected. 32 But as for you, your corpses will fall in this wilderness. 33 Your sons shall be shepherds for forty years in the wilderness, and they will suffer [for] your unfaithfulness, until your corpses lie in the wilderness. 34 According to the number of days which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day you shall bear your guilt a year, [even] forty years, and you will know My opposition. 35 I, the LORD, have spoken, surely this I will do to all this evil congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die.”

God hears the prayer and forgives. This does not mean that He leaves evil unpunished, but that He postpones judgment. He saves the people and does not consume them immediately. He will punish evil in the continuation of the wilderness journey. Never will the disobedient enter the land (Psa 95:10-11). The bodies of all the rebellious will fall in the wilderness.

The next task to set out will not be to continue on the way to the promised land, but to go back in the direction of the Red Sea. They want to go back to Egypt (verse 3)? Then they can go that way. They want to die in the wilderness (verse 2)? They will die in the wilderness. Their bodies shall not be buried in the promised land, as Joseph's body shall (Gen 50:25; Exo 13:19; Jos 24:32), because they have despised that land.

Only Caleb and Joshua will enter the land. The LORD calls Caleb “my servant Caleb”. He is a picture of the faithful Servant, the Lord Jesus. This is also evident from the following character sketch: with him is “a different spirit” than with the unbelievers. Caleb does not let his mind be influenced by what he has seen, but by what the LORD has said. Through this “different spirit” in him it becomes visible to the outside that he “followed” the LORD “fully” (verse 24; Num 32:12; Deu 1:35-36; Jos 14:8-9,14).

In a few words, a portrait of a believer of old is given here, which we wish to take as an example. Obedience to the Lord and not let himself being influenced by the human spirit, which prevails in Christianity, are the conditions to fully follow the Lord.

Children under the age of 20 will also enter the land. They are a new generation. The old generation is full of Egypt. They are in the wilderness, but their hearts are still fully in Egypt. The children only know the wilderness, not Egypt. God takes these children for His account.

This is also a great encouragement for parents who care about their children because of the time they live in. There is more and more open revolt against God and His Word. There is hardly anything Christian any more present in the once Christian Netherlands. But God has a way for every generation to walk. That way can be found in His Word. If the children read in it and take it to heart, they will have their own experiences with an unchanging God who knows all circumstances and is above them.

God's people must roam in the wilderness for forty years. This is reflected in the two thousand years of Christianity. The good ones suffer in it with the evil ones. Caleb and Joshua, as well as the children, have to travel through the wilderness for forty years. They have to wait for 40 years before they can enter the land. Those forty years will be used by God to teach them who they are and who He is (Deu 8:2). They will have faith experiences and learn to distinguish between what is and what is not of God.

But across the board, Caleb and Joshua will have kept their eyes constantly on the impressions they have gained as spies of the land. What they have already tasted and enjoyed of the fruit of the land, will have given them strength to continue. They will thus have encouraged the children to persevere.

The people have become a people of vagrants. They have been pilgrims, travelers on a journey to the promised land. Now they are vagrants, without a fixed goal wandering around in the wilderness. This is their punishment, because they have "despised the pleasant land" that God has wanted to give them, for "they did not believe in His word" (Psa 106:24). To deny what God gives is in fact to deny God Himself.

We know little about the forty years in the wilderness. Only a few events are mentioned to us in Scripture, but they are characteristic of their entire stay in the wilderness. They have been written down so that we may learn from them: "But in most of them God had no pleasure, for they fell down in the wilderness. and these things happened as examples for us, that we

might not have desire in evil as they had desire in it. Do not become idolaters like some of them either, as it is written: "Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come" (1Cor 10:5-11).

The children must also learn that what is in the parents' hearts is also in their own hearts. They do come into the land, but not because they are better than their parents. If we can know and enjoy anything of the heavenly blessings it is not because we are any better than others who do not know these blessings.

Verses 36-38 | Unbelief Judged; Faith Spared

36 As for the men whom Moses sent to spy out the land and who returned and made all the congregation grumble against him by bringing out a bad report concerning the land, 37 even those men who brought out the very bad report of the land died by a plague before the LORD. 38 But Joshua the son of Nun and Caleb the son of Jephunneh remained alive out of those men who went to spy out the land.

The ten spies were not allowed to die a natural death. God endures many of the Christians, but for some He brings direct judgment (Acts 5:5,10). Where God's testimony is particularly defamed, the judgment of God comes directly, regardless of whether it concerns Israel or the church. They have sinned themselves and also made others sin. They have sinned themselves by spreading an evil rumor. Others have believed this evil rumor and therefore also sinned. The nature of sin is also very bad. They presented the service of God as a hopeless thing and made Him a liar.

Possibly the twelve spies are standing together, in the midst of the people. Then the LORD kills the ten unbelieving spies by a plague. Joshua and Caleb remain alive. That's got to say something to the Israelites. These two men remain standing where a whole people fall.

Verses 39-45 | The People Are Disobedient Again

39 When Moses spoke these words to all the sons of Israel, the people mourned greatly. 40 In the morning, however, they rose up early and went up to the ridge of the hill country, saying, "Here we are; we have indeed sinned, but we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised." 41 But Moses said, "Why then are you transgressing the commandment of the LORD, when it will not succeed? 42 Do not go up, or you will be struck down before your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. 43 For the Amalekites and the Canaanites will be there in front of you, and you will fall by the sword, inasmuch as you have turned back from following the LORD. And the LORD will not be with you." 44 But they went up heedlessly to the ridge of the hill country; neither the ark of the covenant of the LORD nor Moses left the camp. 45 Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in that hill country came down, and struck them and beat them down as far as Hormah.

In contradiction to what Moses says, they are now going as they first refused to go, in contradiction to what God said. They also act contrary to what the LORD has commanded in verse 25, where He said that the people must go back into the wilderness. Time and again they neglect God's words, whether they are spoken in blessing or in judgment.

Nor do they listen to Moses, who warns them not to go. They won't let themselves be told by anybody. They go up willfully: without God, without the ark of the covenant and without Moses. If there had been real repentance they would have bowed under God's judgment. But that is not the case. They only regret the consequences of their actions. Therefore they try to make up for their first sin, that of fear, by adding a second sin, that of audacious self-confidence. But God never commits His Name to disobedience.

Christians who want to appropriate the things of God in their own power become prey to the power of the enemy. That is what we see here in what

the Israelites do. As the enemies are in their eyes, when they look at them without involving God, so they experience the reality of the enemy's power because they move up without God. The people suffer a heavy defeat.

Numbers 15

Verses 1-12 | The Offerings by Fire

1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘When you enter the land where you are to live, which I am giving you, 3 then make an offering by fire to the LORD, a burnt offering or a sacrifice to fulfill a special vow, or as a freewill offering or in your appointed times, to make a soothing aroma to the LORD, from the herd or from the flock. 4 The one who presents his offering shall present to the LORD a grain offering of one-tenth [of an ephah] of fine flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of oil, 5 and you shall prepare wine for the drink offering, one-fourth of a hin, with the burnt offering or for the sacrifice, for each lamb. 6 Or for a ram you shall prepare as a grain offering two-tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour mixed with one-third of a hin of oil; 7 and for the drink offering you shall offer one-third of a hin of wine as a soothing aroma to the LORD. 8 When you prepare a bull as a burnt offering or a sacrifice, to fulfill a special vow, or for peace offerings to the LORD, 9 then you shall offer with the bull a grain offering of three-tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour mixed with one-half a hin of oil; 10 and you shall offer as the drink offering one-half a hin of wine as an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD. 11 ‘Thus it shall be done for each ox, or for each ram, or for each of the male lambs, or of the goats. 12 According to the number that you prepare, so you shall do for everyone according to their number.

Numbers 15 contrasts sharply with the two previous chapters and the next. In it we see events that are full of unbelief and revolt on the part of God’s people. But in this chapter, it seems as if God forgets all that for a moment. He starts with: “When you enter the land”, words that are completely independent of the current situation in which the people find themselves.

The LORD speaks of the entry of the people into the land as if nothing has happened. He doesn’t therefore speak to the unbelieving people, whose bodies will fall in the wilderness, but to a faithful remnant, like Caleb and Joshua. They present, together with the children under the age of twenty, “a remnant according to [God’s] gracious choice” (Rom 11:5). While God

will judge the whole people and only a remnant will reach the land, the encouraging words of this chapter are meant for this remnant.

This shows that man's sin can never overturn God's counsels. God will always fulfill His plans to a remnant. God is not embarrassed by man's sin. The large mass is killed in the wilderness, the remnant gets the blessing. He brings this remnant into the peace of His counsel, which was in His heart from eternity, undisturbed by everything that happens in Christianity.

Not least flustered by the unbelief and revolt of His people, God reveals what He intends to do. To know this acting of God is also a consolation for us in the midst of so much apostasy. The reference to entering the land at this time – now that the people have just refused to take possession of it – is a clear encouragement for faith and an assurance of the infallible grace of God.

God therefore has a firm foundation for this action. He has this in the work of the Lord Jesus. He wants to occupy His people, and the faithful in particular, with Him. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, described in picture in verses 1-16, is therefore central. The offerings described here are all offerings to a pleasant fragrance. God wants to occupy our hearts with the most glorious things His people will do in the land: Offering Him offerings. He wants us to penetrate His thoughts for this and for this He shows us these offerings and teaches us lessons.

Much has been said about the offerings themselves in Leviticus. The emphasis here in Numbers is on the accompanying offerings. The three different types of burnt offerings and peace offerings must always be accompanied by a grain offering, a drink offering and a quantity of oil. Depending on the size of the burnt offering and peace offering, the quantity for the grain offering, drink offering and oil is also determined.

The first offering that someone can bring is a lamb (verse 5), then someone can also bring a ram (verse 6) and finally someone can bring a bull as the greatest offering (verse 9). The offerings here go from small to large. In Leviticus it is the other way around. There God begins with the greatest. But in Numbers it is about our practice, how we increasingly penetrate the value of the offering and grow in the knowledge of it:

1. The lamb must be accompanied by a grain offering of one-tenth [of an ephah] of fine flour, one-fourth of a hin of oil and one-fourth of a hin of wine.
2. The ram must be accompanied by a grain offering of two tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour, one-third of a hin of oil and one-third of a hin of wine.
3. The bull must be accompanied by a grain offering of three-tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour, one-half a hin of oil and one-half a hin of wine.

God never wants His people to forget that to blood sacrifices these non-blood sacrifices belong. For us this means that we must never separate the work of the Lord Jesus on the cross from His life as Man on earth, of which the grain offering speaks. God wants us to learn this in Numbers. We must always remember that the work of His Son on the cross is the conclusion of a perfect life on earth. It makes all the difference to God that it is the perfect Man Who has directed His footsteps to the cross. He is that fine flour. As in fine flour everything is perfectly even, without any unevenness, so He has been in His life on earth.

The oil must be mixed with the flour. It speaks of how the Holy Spirit is completely mixed with the life of the Lord Jesus. He has done everything through the power of the Holy Spirit. He has only spoken and acted through Him. We have to learn that in our walk through the wilderness. The more we see of the Lord Jesus in His sacrifice, the greater our understanding of His work on the cross, the more the Holy Spirit will also be able to work in our lives.

The same can be said of the wine. Wine is a picture of joy. The drink offering makes us think of the joy with which the Lord Jesus surrendered Himself. God wants us to remember that too.

Paul has felt something of this. He says to the Philippians that he wants to be “a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service” of their faith (Phil 2:17). Through his death he wants to give God an extra reason to rejoice at the joy He already enjoys through the sacrifice of the Philippians. It is also a joy for Paul to remember that he gave his whole life to offer others, including the Philippians, as a sacrifice to God (cf. Rom 15:16).

The apostle sees all their faith and service as a sacrifice to God. They present their bodies “a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1). That is the main sacrifice for him. Their faith is active in sacrificing themselves and serving God and others. Paul thinks this is bigger than his life. His martyr’s death will be poured over it like a much smaller drink offering (2Tim 4:6).

The greater the sacrifice we bring, that is to say, the greater our understanding is of the work that the Lord Jesus did on the cross, the greater will be our drink offering. Then we will not walk around with sad faces, but with His joy and His mind in our hearts.

Are we alone impressed by the wickedness of the people? Or do we see the glory of the Lord Jesus? That is what God wants to teach us with Numbers 15. He wants us to rise to the level of His thoughts. Then we will not go down in the pain of decay, but will merge into the joy of the work of the Lord Jesus, of which the drink offering speaks.

Verses 13-16 | The Alien and the Offering by Fire

13 All who are native shall do these things in this manner, in presenting an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD. 14 If an alien sojourns with you, or one who may be among you throughout your generations, and he [wishes to] make an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD, just as you do so he shall do. 15 [As for] the assembly, there shall be one statute for you and for the alien who sojourns [with you], a perpetual statute throughout your generations; as you are, so shall the alien be before the LORD. 16 There is to be one law and one ordinance for you and for the alien who sojourns with you.”

When everything is so implicated on the Lord Jesus, the difference between Jew and Gentile disappears for God. That is why we read in these verses that the same applies to an alien as to the born Israelite. The alien also has the privilege of bringing such fire offerings. This means not only that he must do the same as the Israelite, but that he has the same position as the Israelite before the LORD.

The place given to the Gentile here next to the Israelite (verse 15b) is unique in the Old Testament. The distinction is always maintained. And if there is

blessing for the Gentiles, it is through Israel, so not on an equal footing. So how is it possible that this is written here? Because, as has been said, God here thinks of the offering of the Lord Jesus. Where He comes to the fore, there can be no difference in God's actions with man. Jews and Gentiles have both sinned "fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23b). Therefore they both depend on the same grace (Rom 10:11-12; 11:32). On the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus, God can deal with Jew and Gentile on the same basis.

Verses 17-21 | The Offering by Lifting Up

17 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 18 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land where I bring you, 19 then it shall be, that when you eat of the food of the land, you shall lift up an offering to the LORD. 20 Of the first of your dough you shall lift up a cake as an offering; as the offering of the threshing floor, so you shall lift it up. 21 From the first of your dough you shall give to the LORD an offering throughout your generations.

Again God speaks of the fact that they will come into the land. This is again a consolation for the 'Calebs' in the people. A new statute follows. If they enter the land, they may eat from what the land yields. But God also wants to have His share of it. They can give this to Him in the form of lifting up an offering. The offering is an offering that is moved up and down before the LORD. Here it is a cake, prepared from the fruit of the land.

In order to make the barley into flour and the flour into a cake, the Israelite must actively engage in it. This also applies spiritually. There must be a work in our heart, we must be busy with it in our heart if we are to be able to offer something from the Lord Jesus to God. God wants to receive His part first in every processing of it. God wants us to remember that it is He Who gives us the food we can enjoy. In the lifting up of the offering we let Him enjoy it as it were, and He as the first One.

The offering by lifting up of the land speaks of the Lord Jesus as He is now in heaven. God wants us to enter into what the Lord Jesus is now. From everything that we enjoy of the Lord Jesus in our spiritual growth in knowing Him as He is in heaven, God wants to receive an offering from

us. We lift it up, to Him, to let Him enjoy what we have enjoyed from the Lord Jesus. In Ezekiel 44 a special blessing is attached to the giving of first fruits (Eze 44:30).

This is not about special occasions, like the feasts of the LORD, but about the ordinary life of every day. God wishes to receive the first fruits of what we enjoy as spiritual food in our daily dealings with Him. He wants us to be the First to share with Him what we have enjoyed. Only then can we pass on what we have seen of the Lord Jesus to others. This can happen, for example, in a conversation, a Bible reading or lecture.

Verses 22-31 | Sinning Unintentionally and Defiantly

22 'But when you unwittingly fail and do not observe all these commandments, which the LORD has spoken to Moses, 23 [even] all that the LORD has commanded you through Moses, from the day when the LORD gave commandment and onward throughout your generations, 24 then it shall be, if it is done unintentionally, without the knowledge of the congregation, that all the congregation shall offer one bull for a burnt offering, as a soothing aroma to the LORD, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one male goat for a sin offering. 25 Then the priest shall make atonement for all the congregation of the sons of Israel, and they will be forgiven; for it was an error, and they have brought their offering, an offering by fire to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their error. 26 So all the congregation of the sons of Israel will be forgiven, with the alien who sojourns among them, for [it happened] to all the people through error. 27 'Also if one person sins unintentionally, then he shall offer a one year old female goat for a sin offering. 28 The priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who goes astray when he sins unintentionally, making atonement for him that he may be forgiven. 29 You shall have one law for him who does [anything] unintentionally, for him who is native among the sons of Israel and for the alien who sojourns among them. 30 But the person who does [anything] defiantly, whether he is native or an alien, that one is blaspheming the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Because he has despised the word of the LORD and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt [will be] on him.'"

There is another aspect in connection with the land the LORD confronts His people here with. This concerns the offences which the people will also be able to do in the land. The LORD not only proposes blessing, he also proposes failure. We see this in the letters that speak about the heavenly blessings. There is also spoken about failure in them. This happens if we do not walk with dignity, that is, not in accordance with our position.

It is about inattention, a sin without noticing it. God does not assume that we intentionally sin. A sinner often knows this, but he does not have the strength to resist sin. Yet while he is sinning, he will at the same time hate the sin that has regained power over him. How the believer stands against this unintentional sin hidden from him is beautifully illustrated by David: "Who can discern [his] errors? Acquit me of hidden [faults]" (Psa 19:13).

In Leviticus there is also talk of unintentional sinning by the whole church of Israel and the offering to be brought for it (Lev 4:13-21). There it is about *doing something* that according to the commandments of the LORD should *not* be done, while here it is about *not doing something* that according to the commandments of the LORD *should be* done. The starting point remains that it happens unintentionally.

Peter's denial of the Lord is an example of unintentional sin. Peter has come through his self-confidence to a place where he no longer has himself in control. Through fear of man he comes to statements concerning his relationship with the Lord Jesus in which he denies the Lord. But he has not become an adversary of the Lord. A little later he comes to deep repentance (Lk 22:56-62; cf. 1Tim 1:13).

Deliberately sinning, that is sinning "defiantly" (verses 30-31), means rebellion against God, consciously going against God, knowingly. There is no forgiveness for this: "For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Heb 10:26). A person who takes such a similar attitude to God is not too weak to resist sin, but consciously gives in to sin. He realizes what he is doing, knows the consequences, but there is nothing that can stop him.

In Leviticus 4, where unintentional sin is discussed in detail, only a sin offering is mentioned. But here, in Numbers 15, also is talk of a burnt offering, which also is greater than the sin offering. That is because this is about

a sin in the land. Being there gives a greater responsibility. If we sin there, we have also endangered the blessings. That is why this is a burnt offering, to remind us once again, as it were, that our blessings are the consequences of the work of the Lord Jesus for God.

Two cases of sinning are proposed in this section: by the church (verses 22-26) and by the individual (verses 27-29). We can connect this with the blessings, for there are also blessings in these two forms: there are collective blessings for the church as a whole (Eph 3:1-10) and there are personal blessings for each individual believer (Eph 1:3-8). When sin enters, the enjoyment of the blessing disappears, both for the whole and for the individual.

Verses 32-36 | The Sabbath Violator

32 Now while the sons of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering wood on the sabbath day. 33 Those who found him gathering wood brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation; 34 and they put him in custody because it had not been declared what should be done to him. 35 Then the LORD said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp." 36 So all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

In these verses we receive an example of a willful sin (verse 30) by someone who despises the word of the LORD (verse 31). To violate the Sabbath means to violate the peace of God. The sabbath is given by God to man as a blessing. By the sin of man it has become a commandment. Yet God's intention with the sabbath remains that on that day man may share in His rest, that he then does not have to work.

The sabbath belongs to the first creation. Later God included the sabbath in His law which He gives to His people. Believers of the church are "a new creation" (Gal 6:15) and "not under law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14). In a literal sense, the sabbath does not apply to them. What they can enjoy is the sabbath rest in a spiritual sense. They may enjoy the sabbatical rest of God that He found in the finished work of His Son. God rests in His

Son. That peace is trampled underfoot when we still produce works of the flesh.

Sunday is not the sabbath. By making Sunday a disguised sabbath, that day became a day of commandments and prohibitions in Christianity. It is precisely the people who keep the first day of the week as sabbath who are sabbath violators, for they believe that through works of the law, such as keeping the 'sabbath', they are pleasing to God. Then you are not on the basis of grace. Resting in the rest of God means standing in grace. Keeping Sunday as a sabbath is for many not a joy, but a burden, because nothing is allowed. Then the disguised sabbath becomes a yoke.

The sabbath violator collects dead branches. That is a picture of the performance of the works, i.e. works in which there is no life from God. *Dead* works are works that come forth from our *religious* flesh (Heb 9:14). *Evil* works come forth from our *corrupted* flesh (Col 1:21). Dead works do not have to be evil, but if they come from an unregenerate heart or are done in the context of a carnal religion, they are dead. In contrast to the dead works is the serving of the living God.

Dead works are works that are the product of a creature that in God's eye is "dead" in "trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). They do not originate from the source of all true life, that is God Himself. Such works are firewood, only good for the fire. We recognize this in all who place themselves on the basis of works of the law. They place themselves under the curse, "for as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them."" (Gal 3:10).

The man is not allowed to make fire on the sabbath (Exo 35:3). Fire gives light and warmth. God wants us to remember that this can only be found in Jesus Christ and not in something a person performs. The face of Moses, shining of the glory of God (Exo 34:35), is reminiscent of the light to be seen in Christ (2Cor 4:4-6). This is the only light that may be seen, and not the fire that is made by humans. The face of Jesus Christ shines, not what we accomplish.

The sabbath speaks of God's peace. In this He wants to let man share. This man is not bothered by this. He gathers wood, he works, to warm himself

by its fire. It is a picture of walking in the light of your own fire, your own experience, your own opinions, your own results. It points to collecting religious operations, but it is dead wood, it is dead works. He who willingly and knowingly surrenders to it dies without mercy.

The man is put in custody. Then God is consulted. That is important. The church may only exercise a punishment that is consistent with the offence. God determines the punishment. There are cases of discipline where the church does not know what to do. Then it may be necessary for someone to be “put in custody,” which we can apply by saying to someone that they will not participate in the Lord’s Supper for the time being, until the Lord makes clear what must happen. It is better in such cases to wait and take the place of an ignorant, while in that time of ignorance we trust that the Lord hears and takes care of us.

In this case, God’s judgment is: stone him with stones. The stones are thrown by all the congregation. The application for the church of God in this time is to remove the evil from the midst of the church (1Cor 5:13b). That is also a matter of all.

Verses 37-41 | The Memorial Tassels

37 The LORD also spoke to Moses, saying, 38 “Speak to the sons of Israel, and tell them that they shall make for themselves tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and that they shall put on the tassel of each corner a cord of blue. 39 It shall be a tassel for you to look at and remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them and not follow after your own heart and your own eyes, after which you played the harlot, 40 so that you may remember to do all My commandments and be holy to your God. 41 I am the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the LORD your God.”

It is possible that God commands the making and wearing of the tassels in response to the history with the sabbath violator. What is written here is a summary of the above. The people have been being occupied with the land. The thought of the land must now characterize every step they take in the wilderness. By seeing the tassel with the cord of blue they will remember all the commandments of the LORD, so as to do them.

In the tassels with the cord of blue we are reminded of heaven. We see in it the picture that heavenly principles have to determine the smallest details in our lives, even those closest to the earth. Then we shall avoid the evil by which we bring God's judgment upon us.

Memorial tassels or fringes are at the corners of the clothes, at the bottom (Deu 22:12). The dimensions are not given. The Pharisees make them big. They want to show everyone how they keep God's commandment. The Lord Jesus reproaches them, because they only show off their piety outwardly, but inwardly are far away from it (Mt 23:5).

The cord of blue is also seen on the plate of the high priest (Exo 28:35-37). That plate is attached to his forehead with a blue purple thread. The plate says "Holy to the LORD". With this he brings the people in remembrance to God. The head is in the direction of God. The hems with the cord of blue thread are near the earth. They remind us of the walk in the wilderness. One cannot be separated from the other.

The cord of blue reminds us of the task to seek "the things above" (Col 3:1). When they look at the tassels, they are reminded of the commandments. Then they will be saved from following their hearts, their feelings and affections, and their eyes, what they see. There is nothing that allows us to walk on earth better than the consciousness that we are of heaven.

The reason for all this is that the LORD has led them out of Egypt and that He is their God. He is "the LORD your God". Everything is connected with Him, He is the center of everything. For us, who are rescued from the world (Gal 1:4), all blessings are connected with and summarized in Him Who is in heaven.

Numbers 16

Verses 1-3 | Leaders Rise up Before Moses

1 Now Korah the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, with Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took [action], 2 and they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown. 3 They assembled together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"

This chapter is a low point in the history of Israel's wilderness journey. Can it be worse after what we have seen in the previous chapters: the longing for Egypt again, the contempt for the manna and the refusal to enter the promised land? Yes, we see that in this chapter.

Probably this uprising takes place towards the end of the wilderness journey. If we apply this to the end of the Christian dispensation, the time in which we live now, we can learn two lessons. The first is that after all the unfaithfulness and decay that have occurred in the Christian testimony, the worst is yet to come. The complete apostasy of what is called "Christian" will overshadow everything that has already become manifest in wickedness in Christianity. The low point is the denial of the Father and the Son (1Jn 2:22).

The second lesson is that if a people do enter the land, heaven, this is not based on the faithfulness of that people, but on the faithfulness of the high priest. The value of the high priesthood of the Lord Jesus is indicated at the end of this chapter and in the following chapters. The blossoming staff of Aaron that we see in the next chapter (Numbers 17) is a telling symbol of this.

The evidence that this history refers to the end time of Christianity can be found in letter of Jude. Dathan and Abiram we recognize in persons who reject the authority (in Moses) (Jude 1:8). In Jude three phases on the way

to apostasy can be distinguished (Jude 1:11). It starts with “the way of Cain”. This represents the principle of man who wants to build up his own righteousness before God, someone who wants to be accepted by God on the basis of his own works.

Then Judas speaks of “the error of Balaam”. In this we see the principle of a man who thinks he can serve God and at the same time serve the mammon. In the Christian church, that comes down to bringing in the teachings of people for money and power. This can be recognized in the ecumenical movement and the charismatic movement. The doctrines of demons have been introduced. It should not surprise us, for this is foretold by the Spirit: “But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1Tim 4:1-2).

The way of Cain and the error of Balaam are the preparers for what Judas mentions as third in his letter, “the rebellion of Korah” or the overt, direct rebellion against God. Where Dathan and Abiram reach out to the leadership of Moses, Korah reaches out to the priesthood of Aaron. Korah is a Kohathite. The Kohathites have the most wonderful task in connection with the tabernacle. They may carry the holy objects. But that is not enough for Korah. He wants the position of Aaron.

What Korah actually wants is a position that elevates him above the people, so that he becomes a mediator between the people and God. This sin, the sin of a separate priest class, has become common in Christianity. It is to take the place that only the Lord Jesus is entitled to. He who desires, falls into the rebellion of Korah and will perish. That is strongly seen in the pope. The papacy is the terrible premise of being the substitute of Christ on earth. A separate priest class is completely alien to biblical Christendom.

Korah, Dathan and Abiram are joined by two hundred and fifty men of renown. It is difficult to remain humble when you are someone “of renown”. Pride and ambition are lurking to let that name speak. Often “men of renown” are not content to be well-known, but want more. There is no place for God and His Word in the lives of such men. They have filled the

earth with their violence in ancient times and are the reason for the flood (Gen 6:4-7).

The rebels first flatter the people by saying that they are holy as a whole. To be holy, however, is not on the basis of a declaration by people, but on the basis of keeping the commandments of the LORD. Such a declaration is accepted by the people. Democracy is seen as a great gain. No one in the church wants to be deprived of that. Not a few men at the top, but everyone should be allowed to have their say. What people are blind to is that power lies with a few authoritarian figures among the people.

Korah wants to draw power to himself. If he can be a mediator, he has the whole people in his grip. The power of the spiritual class is enormous. Man likes to submit to leaders who caress their religious feelings (2Tim 4:3). Moses sees through what Korah wants (verse 10). We will be preserved from these deceivers and their flattering, seductive language when we listen to 'Moses' (cf. Lk 16:29), that is, when we listen to what God says to us in His Word.

Dathan and Abiram are Reubenites. Reuben is the eldest son of Jacob. As a member of his descendants, Dathan and Abiram claim the most important place among the people. Their behavior reveals their true nature. They refuse to obey Moses and accuse him of ruling over them. But Moses and Aaron do not assume their position among the people of God. God has given them that position (Heb 5:4). To acknowledge that is true wisdom. Whoever consciously opposes this by claiming gifts for himself without looking at what God has given, is nothing else but asking God to judge him. Dathan and Abiram want a place based on natural qualities.

This is how it happens in Christianity. We see that when people with a good mind and a quick talk claim or are given a prominent place.

Verses 4-7 | Moses Lets the LORD Decide

4 When Moses heard [this], he fell on his face; 5 and he spoke to Korah and all his company, saying, "Tomorrow morning the LORD will show who is His, and who is holy, and will bring [him] near to Himself; even the one whom He will choose, He will bring near to Himself. 6 Do this: take censers for yourselves, Korah and all your company, 7 and put fire in them, and lay incense

upon them in the presence of the LORD tomorrow; and the man whom the LORD chooses [shall be] the one who is holy. You have gone far enough, you sons of Levi!"

Moses falls on his face, he does not defend himself against criticism. He defers the case until tomorrow. This gives his opponents time to think. He himself has full confidence that the LORD will make everything clear. He puts the decision with Him, at ease about the outcome.

For the decision censers with fire and incense will be used. Maybe this means is used because the most sacred act of the priest, which brings the priest closest to God, is the bringing of incense. In connection with this the LORD has already shown once to the whole congregation of Israel how He by judgment has shown Himself to be the Holy One to those who have approached to Him with incense (Lev 10:1-3).

Verses 8-11 | The Indictment

8 Then Moses said to Korah, "Hear now, you sons of Levi, 9 is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has separated you from the [rest of] the congregation of Israel, to bring you near to Himself, to do the service of the tabernacle of the LORD, and to stand before the congregation to minister to them; 10 and that He has brought you near, [Korah], and all your brothers, sons of Levi, with you? And are you seeking for the priesthood also? 11 Therefore you and all your company are gathered together against the LORD; but as for Aaron, who is he that you grumble against him?"

Moses reminds Korah of his privileged position and task. Whoever becomes proud of what he has received from the Lord, exalts himself above others. The exercise of a ministry in the church should never be a reason for assuming a special function as mediator, which only the Lord Jesus has.

Verses 12-15 | Dathan and Abiram Refuse to Come Up

12 Then Moses sent a summons to Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab; but they said, "We will not come up. 13 Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, but you would also lord it over us? 14 Indeed, you have not brought us into

a land flowing with milk and honey, nor have you given us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Would you put out the eyes of these men? We will not come up!" 15 Then Moses became very angry and said to the LORD, "Do not regard their offering! I have not taken a single donkey from them, nor have I done harm to any of them."

Dathan and Abiram reject Moses as leader. They accuse him of being an incompetent leader. He has not brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey. On the contrary, they say that he has taken them out of a land flowing with milk and honey. They also accuse Moses of blinding the eyes of the people with beautiful promises, but nothing has come true. But it is exactly the other way around: people who have Egypt in their mind as a land that is flowing with milk and honey, are totally blind to God's plan and are also totally blind to their own failures. They blind the eyes of others with their false talk.

Here Moses loses his patience. However, he does not express himself against his opponents but against the LORD. He does not take the law into his own hands. He leaves justice to the LORD. He asks the LORD not to look at their offering. With this he aligns them with Cain who came with a selfish offering and whose offering was not accepted by the LORD either (Gen 4:3,5a).

He also pleads with God about the selflessness of his conduct. He has never enriched himself at their expense. And he never has done harm to them. He has never behaved like a ruler who demands of his subjects and oppresses them. Samuel and Nehemiah acted in the same way as Moses (1Sam 12:3-5; Neh 5:17-18).

Verses 16-18 | Firepan and Incense

16 Moses said to Korah, "You and all your company be present before the LORD tomorrow, both you and they along with Aaron. 17 Each of you take his firepan and put incense on it, and each of you bring his censer before the LORD, two hundred and fifty firepans; also you and Aaron [shall] each [bring] his firepan." 18 So they each took his [own] censer and put fire on it, and laid incense on it; and they stood at the doorway of the tent of meeting, with Moses and Aaron.

The LORD will make it clear who may approach Him by the hand of the incense. The place where this happens is at the doorway of the tent of meeting.

Verses 19-22 | The Glory of the LORD Appears

19 Thus Korah assembled all the congregation against them at the doorway of the tent of meeting. And the glory of the LORD appeared to all the congregation. 20 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 21 "Separate yourselves from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly." 22 But they fell on their faces and said, "O God, God of the spirits of all flesh, when one man sins, will You be angry with the entire congregation?"

The next day they all come to the doorway of the tent of meeting. Again God speaks of His desire to exterminate the whole people. But again the true shepherd reveals himself, to whom the people of God is dear. Moses does not take the opportunity to rid himself of his opponents. That is a great contrast with Korah, Dathan and Abiram. They have no heart for the people, for they drag it with them into destruction. By the intercession of Moses God saves the people (Psa 106:23).

God is called here the "God of the spirits of all flesh". This name is also found in Numbers 27 (Num 27:16). This name indicates that God is omniscient, that He comprehends man's heart, mind and will.

Verses 23-35 | Korah and His Followers Judged

23 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 24 "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'" 25 Then Moses arose and went to Dathan and Abiram, with the elders of Israel following him, 26 and he spoke to the congregation, saying, "Depart now from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing that belongs to them, or you will be swept away in all their sin." 27 So they got back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram; and Dathan and Abiram came out [and] stood at the doorway of their tents, along with their wives and their sons and their little ones. 28 Moses said, "By this you shall know that the LORD has sent me to do all these deeds; for this is not my doing. 29 If these men die the death of all men or if they suffer the fate of all men, [then] the

LORD has not sent me. 30 But if the LORD brings about an entirely new thing and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that is theirs, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have spurned the LORD.” 31 As he finished speaking all these words, the ground that was under them split open; 32 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with [their] possessions. 33 So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly. 34 All Israel who [were] around them fled at their outcry, for they said, “The earth may swallow us up!” 35 Fire also came forth from the LORD and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense.

The sin of these men is a sin to death. In the course of this chapter we see a picture of the developments in Christianity. There is talk of three days. The first day is the day of the uprising. We see this in the early days of Christianity, when a priesthood class is created. The second day is the day of intercession by Moses. On this basis God gives a way to escape judgment. That way is the way of separation from evil (Rev 18:4; 2Tim 2:19b).

After all these centuries of unfaithfulness of the church, God has not destroyed the church, but has given it a new principle. That is the principle of separation from the evil of all human institutions. In church history we see that this mainly happens in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the sabbath violator (Num 15:32-36) we see the picture that evil is being removed from the church. In this history we see that if evil is not removed from the church, the faithful themselves will have to depart.

Never before has it happened that people entered the realm of the dead, alive (Psa 55:15). It is the dishonor of the beast and the false prophet to be the first living beings to be cast into hell (Rev 19:20). What will happen to the beast and the false prophet is yet another clear indication that this history refers to the end time of the Christian testimony on earth.

Verses 36-40 | The Bronze Censers

36 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 37 “Say to Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, that he shall take up the censers out of the midst of the blaze,

for they are holy; and you scatter the burning coals abroad. 38 As for the censers of these men who have sinned at the cost of their lives, let them be made into hammered sheets for a plating of the altar, since they did present them before the LORD and they are holy; and they shall be for a sign to the sons of Israel.” 39 So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers which the men who were burned had offered, and they hammered them out as a plating for the altar, 40 as a reminder to the sons of Israel that no layman who is not of the descendants of Aaron should come near to burn incense before the LORD; so that he will not become like Korah and his company—just as the LORD had spoken to him through Moses.

Here begins a special part of the book of Numbers. In this part, the priesthood in its glory is shown as the foundation for the entry of the people into the land. That a new section begins here, can be seen in some Bible translations. Those translations begin here with Numbers 17:1.

Eleazar is the third son of Aaron. The number three speaks of the resurrection. He is the son of the new life, he will become the high priest after Aaron’s death. He is ordered to remove the bronze censers from the fire and use them as a plating for the altar.

The bronze is not consumed by the fire. We can therefore say that the bronze speaks of the righteousness that can withstand the power of judgment. Herein we see a picture of the Lord Jesus, Who is not consumed by God’s judgment. Whoever sees the bronze altar is reminded of the judgment of the bands and of what is resistant to the judgment. It is an enduring testimony, as is the sprouting staff, of the priesthood.

Verses 41-50 | Judgment and Reconciliation

41 But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You are the ones who have caused the death of the LORD’s people.” 42 It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the LORD appeared. 43 Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, 44 and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 45 “Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.” Then they fell on their faces. 46 Moses

said to Aaron, "Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense [on it]; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from the LORD, the plague has begun!" 47 Then Aaron took [it] as Moses had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put [on] the incense and made atonement for the people. 48 He took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked. 49 But those who died by the plague were 14,700, besides those who died on account of Korah. 50 Then Aaron returned to Moses at the doorway of the tent of meeting, for the plague had been checked.

On the third day the people assemble again against Moses and Aaron. Yesterday the leaders were judged. The people have not yet been judged. Yesterday the people fled, but what happened did not change their minds. Now the evil of the people is revealed. They speak of the rebels as "the LORD's people" and blame Moses and Aaron for their death! And this while Moses has prayed for the people that the LORD will spare them (verse 22). They have not allowed themselves to be warned by the judgment they have seen.

Because of this attitude, God judges immediately. Moses sees how the crowd starts to fall. And again we see Moses' love for his people and even more how much he knows what is in God's heart of the plans He has with his people. He orders Aaron to take his censer with which he enters the sanctuary on the Atonement Day. The incense in it speaks of the Lord Jesus. If God smells this, it is for Him the reason to stop the plague. When God is reminded of the Lord Jesus, He can prove mercy.

Atonement here is done by incense and not by blood. That is exceptional. Moses has insight into the heart of God. The Lord Jesus once on the cross brought about atonement by pouring His blood. If we as believers sin, we must confess our sins and there is the "Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1Jn 2:1-2). Incense represents prayer (Psa 141:2; Rev 5:8; 8:3-4). Because of the intercession of the Lord Jesus not all the people are killed. He can point out to God what He has done on the cross and to Whom He is in the perfection of His Person.

We have arrived in the history of Christianity on the third day. The hallmark of that day is that the whole people are carried away by new teachings, ecumenism and charismatic movement, following what the leaders proclaim. Around us, people in large numbers fall prey to all these doctrines and practices. In order to remain standing, we need the Advocacy, Whom we see in the midst of the church of God. Seeing Him and His loveliness to God is the only thing that preserves us from grumbling and rebellion.

Numbers 17

Verses 1-7 | Twelve Rods in Front of the Ark

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the sons of Israel, and get from them a rod for each father's household: twelve rods, from all their leaders according to their fathers' households. You shall write each name on his rod, 3 and write Aaron's name on the rod of Levi; for there is one rod for the head [of each] of their fathers' households. 4 You shall then deposit them in the tent of meeting in front of the testimony, where I meet with you. 5 It will come about that the rod of the man whom I choose will sprout. Thus I will lessen from upon Myself the grumblings of the sons of Israel, who are grumbling against you." 6 Moses therefore spoke to the sons of Israel, and all their leaders gave him a rod apiece, for each leader according to their fathers' households, twelve rods, with the rod of Aaron among their rods. 7 So Moses deposited the rods before the LORD in the tent of the testimony.

In the killing of the two hundred and fifty rebels, the LORD has shown in judgment who He has chosen for the priesthood. Aaron is the only one accepted with his censer with incense. Now follows another test, not by exercising judgment, but by generating life.

Moses should not take his own staff, but that of Aaron. A staff speaks of authority, of rule (cf. Gen 49:10). If Moses' staff had been there, we would have been reminded of discipline and judgment. Aaron's staff also speaks of authority, but in showing grace, compassion and weakness.

God wants the rods in His sanctuary, close to the source of all authority, and outside the presence of man. God will show whom He has chosen. That is determined in the sanctuary. He also shows what the character of the High Priest is, that He is a great Priest over the house of God and that it depends on His faithfulness.

Verses 8-9 | Aaron's Staff Sprouts

8 Now on the next day Moses went into the tent of the testimony; and behold, the rod of Aaron for the house of Levi had sprouted and put forth buds and

produced blossoms, and it bore ripe almonds. 9 Moses then brought out all the rods from the presence of the LORD to all the sons of Israel; and they looked, and each man took his rod.

Bringing life out of a dead staff is something only God can do. That Aaron's staff has sprouted indicates a priesthood in the power of an imperishable life (Heb 7:16). It is resurrection life, life that comes from the dead wood of the staff. It is therefore also a life of victory, for life has conquered death. The life that comes from Aaron's dead staff is not only an unmistakable sign of Aaron's choice as a priest, but also a significant sign of the true place of the priesthood, which here in type is based on death and resurrection.

Not only life has come, but also fruit. This indicates that fruit only appears in connection with the priesthood God has chosen. The fruit is for the sanctuary. Life is expressed in blossoms and almonds. The almond tree is the tree that blooms after the winter, which wakes up first from hibernation. The Hebrew name for almond means 'the watchful one' (cf. Jer 1:11-12). This tree is as if were the herald who announces the awakening of abundant upcoming life.

Thus Christ rose from the dead as "first fruits", followed by "those who are Christ's at His coming", these are all who possess Him as their lives (1Cor 15:23). Through His life they are able to produce fruit. All those who have brought their staff are given their staff back, but there is no life in it. Only in the Lord Jesus is life, "who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:4). We are dead of ourselves, but in Him is life. In connection with Him we live and will enter life.

Verses 10-13 | The Rod of Aaron Kept

10 But the LORD said to Moses, "Put back the rod of Aaron before the testimony to be kept as a sign against the rebels, that you may put an end to their grumblings against Me, so that they will not die." 11 Thus Moses did; just as the LORD had commanded him, so he did. 12 Then the sons of Israel spoke to Moses, saying, "Behold, we perish, we are dying, we are all dying! 13 Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, must die. Are we to perish completely?"

The rod must be placed in the ark, near the jar with manna (Heb 9:4). We need both the manna and the rod for our journey through the wilderness. The manna represents the life of the Lord Jesus. When we occupy ourselves with Him, feeding ourselves with Him, it gives us strength for our walk. The rod presents Him as the One Who was dead and now lives as the High Priest to pray for us. The rod reminds us on our journey through the wilderness that the source of life can only be found in Christ.

The people do not understand what happened to the rod. They are afraid. It characterizes man who does not understand the grace of God.

Numbers 18

Verse 1 | Bear the Guilt

1 So the LORD said to Aaron, "You and your sons and your father's household with you shall bear the guilt in connection with the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the guilt in connection with your priesthood."

The theme is still that we depend on the priesthood of the Lord Jesus. It is a priesthood in the power of resurrection. More than ever before, we depend on that priesthood in our time. On the basis of the intercession of the Lord Jesus, there are also believers in Christianity today who are saved from being dragged along in the general apostacy that is becoming increasingly apparent.

This chapter is the answer to the people's question about the priesthood at the end of the previous chapter (Num 17:12-13). For the first and only time the LORD addresses Himself directly to Aaron. He does this to show Aaron the privileges of the priesthood, not only of the high priest, but also of his sons. The point is that in the believers, as priests on earth, fruit for God comes forth, worked by the High Priest. That is what God desires. To this end He has formed us into a holy priesthood (1Pet 2:5; Rev 1:6).

But then He must also speak of iniquity. Being a priest gives not only privileges but also a great responsibility. They will notice every guilt of the people, to which the people are insensitive, and will bear it before God. They must act accordingly in accordance with the holiness of God and remove that guilt from His presence according to His instructions. Thus, believers who know the priesthood as a privilege and actually exercise it, will feel co-responsible for what happens in Christianity. They will acknowledge its guilt before God, while they also know that by virtue of the intercession of the Lord Jesus and their own intercession God still tolerates Christianity.

Verses 2-4 | The Levites Serve the Priests

2 But bring with you also your brothers, the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you, while you and your sons with you are before the tent of the testimony. 3 And they shall thus attend to your obligation and the obligation of all the tent, but they shall not come near to the furnishings of the sanctuary and the altar, or both they and you will die. 4 They shall be joined with you and attend to the obligations of the tent of meeting, for all the service of the tent; but an outsider may not come near you.

There is not only responsibility, there are also privileges. Performing the priestly service is such a privilege. The Levites have nothing to do with the sanctuary and the altar, that is, they have no direct task there. Their service is to help the priests in their priestly task. Thus the ministry of the Word is intended to promote the priestly service of the believers. If the Word of God is explained, it will arouse the desire of believers to praise God, that is, as priests they approach God with spiritual sacrifices.

The close connection between priesthood and Levite service is emphasized here. The Levite must join the priest, not the other way around – Levi means ‘added’ (Gen 29:34). Every Levite service must be aimed at enabling the priest to do his work better, the bringing of offerings. Levite service outside the sanctuary cannot be separated from the priesthood that enters God. God wants the connection between what happens outside and what happens inside the veil to remain.

Verses 5-7 | A gift for the Priests

5 So you shall attend to the obligations of the sanctuary and the obligations of the altar, so that there will no longer be wrath on the sons of Israel. 6 Behold, I Myself have taken your fellow Levites from among the sons of Israel; they are a gift to you, dedicated to the LORD, to perform the service for the tent of meeting. 7 But you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil, and you are to perform service. I am giving you the priesthood as a bestowed service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.”

Of the priesthood it turned out in the previous chapters that it was not appreciated by the Israelites. God now shows that His attitude toward

Israel depends precisely on the priesthood they despise. We can apply this to the situation in Christianity. There is little or no worship in spirit and truth in Christianity. Where it is found, God accepts it for the whole and can let the whole exist.

We read that the Levites are a gift and that the priesthood is a gift. Both gifts are given to the priest. That is, it is grace and not merit. As far as we are concerned, we must acknowledge that we are only unworthy slaves (Lk 17:10). Believers who are aware of this will serve the Lord with joy as Levites and with great gratitude as priests, which in turn will be to the benefit of the whole.

Verses 8-19 | The Income of the Priests

8 Then the LORD spoke to Aaron, "Now behold, I Myself have given you charge of My offerings, even all the holy gifts of the sons of Israel I have given them to you as a portion and to your sons as a perpetual allotment. 9 This shall be yours from the most holy [gifts reserved] from the fire; every offering of theirs, even every grain offering and every sin offering and every guilt offering, which they shall render to Me, shall be most holy for you and for your sons. 10 As the most holy [gifts] you shall eat it; every male shall eat it. It shall be holy to you. 11 This also is yours, the offering of their gift, even all the wave offerings of the sons of Israel; I have given them to you and to your sons and daughters with you as a perpetual allotment. Everyone of your household who is clean may eat it. 12 All the best of the fresh oil and all the best of the fresh wine and of the grain, the first fruits of those which they give to the LORD, I give them to you. 13 The first ripe fruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, shall be yours; everyone of your household who is clean may eat it. 14 Every devoted thing in Israel shall be yours. 15 Every first issue of the womb of all flesh, whether man or animal, which they offer to the LORD, shall be yours; nevertheless the firstborn of man you shall surely redeem, and the firstborn of unclean animals you shall redeem. 16 As to their redemption price, from a month old you shall redeem them, by your valuation, five shekels in silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. 17 But the firstborn of an ox or the firstborn of a sheep or the firstborn of a goat, you shall not redeem; they are holy. You shall sprinkle their blood on the altar and shall offer up their fat in smoke [as] an offering by fire, for a

soothing aroma to the LORD. 18 Their meat shall be yours; it shall be yours like the breast of a wave offering and like the right thigh. 19 All the offerings of the holy [gifts], which the sons of Israel offer to the LORD, I have given to you and your sons and your daughters with you, as a perpetual allotment. It is an everlasting covenant of salt before the LORD to you and your descendants with you."

The priests are distinguished in Aaron and his sons (verses 8-10) and Aaron and his whole family, sons and daughters (verses 11-19). There is food that is only for Aaron and his sons, those are the most holy things. There is also food that his whole family can eat, that is, all those who are clean from his sons and daughters. In the pictures of the Bible we see in the sons believers who live up to their priesthood. They are not satisfied that they know they are priests, but they actually exercise their priesthood. The daughters represent believers who are priests in principle, but in practice do nothing with it.

This difference is reflected in the food consumed. The grain offerings, guilt offerings and sin offerings are only for the sons. The peace offerings are for the sons as well as the daughters. All offerings speak of the Lord Jesus. But spiritual maturity is needed to feed on the Lord Jesus in what He has been in His life on earth, and to understand what He is as the One Who has taken the guilt upon Himself and bore the sin.

This insight is not necessary in the case of a peace offering. If someone has only recently come to conversion, he can immediately thank the Lord Jesus for his salvation. He can enjoy the breast of the wave offerings as a picture of the love of the Lord Jesus and of the right thigh as a picture of the power of the Lord Jesus. That is eating the peace offering.

In order to penetrate into what that redemption has cost Him, it is necessary to have been occupied with the meaning of the work of the Lord Jesus. Daughters represent believers – both men and women! – who are satisfied with the awareness that they are priests, but are not concerned with spiritual things. They know their position and are grateful for it, but it does not encourage them to enter the sanctuary with offerings. Sons represent believers – both men and women! – who are active in searching the Scriptures to know the meaning of the work of the Lord Jesus. It touches

their hearts and they long to praise God in the sanctuary for what they have seen of His Son.

The sin offering is slaughtered in case someone has sinned. The priest who brings it must eat it. Eating the sin offering represents the penetration into what it has cost the Lord Jesus to undergo judgment for that sin. If someone has sinned, a priestly believer can help such a person confess it. This is only possible by thinking about the Lord Jesus as a sin offering and showing that He suffered for that sin. By confession sin is forgiven. Helping someone to be restored in the fellowship with the Father and the fellow believers cannot be done by a 'daughter of Aaron'. This must be done by a 'son of Aaron'. A newly converted can't do that. It requires priestly maturity.

The income of the priests consists of (parts of) different sacrifices and the best of the land. The latter, of course, can only be got when the people live in the land. It is the responsibility of the people to give the best of their income to the LORD (Lev 27:30). Also every devoted thing and the firstborn is for the LORD and He designates it for the priests. What is for the LORD is also for the priests.

This regulation is given by the LORD to increase the solidarity of the people. So the people must also be busy with the blessing of the land. People, priests and Levites, all is connected. As believers we are the people, and we are also priests and Levites. Our daily lives contribute to our service as priests and Levites. Our lives also contribute to the priestly and Levite services of the others.

A 'covenant of salt' points to the sustainability of this statute as an indissoluble covenant. God always holds fast to what He has given in precepts as a blessing for His people.

Verses 20-24 | The Inheritance of the Levites

20 Then the LORD said to Aaron, "You shall have no inheritance in their land nor own any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the sons of Israel. 21 "To the sons of Levi, behold, I have given all the tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service which they perform, the service of the tent of meeting. 22 The sons of Israel shall not come near the

tent of meeting again, or they will bear sin and die. 23 Only the Levites shall perform the service of the tent of meeting, and they shall bear their iniquity; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, and among the sons of Israel they shall have no inheritance. 24 For the tithe of the sons of Israel, which they offer as an offering to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance; therefore I have said concerning them, 'They shall have no inheritance among the sons of Israel.'"

These verses also refer to the land to which the people are on their way to. The LORD has already made known in the wilderness what shall be the portion and inheritance of the priests and the Levites. They get no property, no piece of land. But that will not be a loss for them. They receive the LORD as their "portion" and their "inheritance" (verse 20; Deu 10:9; 18:1; Psa 16:5; 73:26; Lam 3:24). Everything belongs to Him. He who has Him as his inheritance has much more than a part of the land. He has everything. The Christian possesses everything in Christ Who is his portion, for all blessings are summarized in Him, in Him are "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3).

Verses 25-32 | The Tithe of the Levites

25 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 26 "Moreover, you shall speak to the Levites and say to them, 'When you take from the sons of Israel the tithe which I have given you from them for your inheritance, then you shall present an offering from it to the LORD, a tithe of the tithe. 27 Your offering shall be reckoned to you as the grain from the threshing floor or the full produce from the wine vat. 28 So you shall also present an offering to the LORD from your tithes, which you receive from the sons of Israel; and from it you shall give the LORD's offering to Aaron the priest. 29 Out of all your gifts you shall present every offering due to the LORD, from all the best of them, the sacred part from them.' 30 You shall say to them, 'When you have offered from it the best of it, then [the rest] shall be reckoned to the Levites as the product of the threshing floor, and as the product of the wine vat. 31 You may eat it anywhere, you and your households, for it is your compensation in return for your service in the tent of meeting. 32 You will bear no sin by reason of it when you have offered the best of it. But you shall not profane the sacred gifts of the sons of Israel, or you will die.'"

The tithes of the Levites come from the people of God. Our spiritual tithes that we give as members of the people of God prevent the Levites of sinning. An application is that we do give deconstructive but constructive criticism on a service. All those who are allowed to do a service must be supported by encouragement, by passing on something we have received from the Lord Jesus. Then we get a healthy Levite service. So we can also pray for each other.

Those for whom life consists of contributing to the work of the Lord are just as responsible to give of their income to the Lord. The Levites themselves must also pay the tithes, a statute that is also held after the exile (Neh 10:38-39). They pay their tithes of what they receive from the best of the people. They give the best of the best.

Failure to comply with this statute means that the servant loads sin on himself. Meeting this commitment never makes us poorer, but richer, not materially, but spiritually: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows" (Mal 3:10).

Numbers 19

Introduction

Numbers 19 is the heart of the book of Numbers, as Leviticus 16 is for the book of Leviticus. The sin offerings in Leviticus aim to restore a relationship. It's about things that come out from ourselves. In Numbers it's all about what we meet in our going through the wilderness. We are in danger of being defiled from the outside. We are called to "to keep oneself unstained by the world" (Jam 1:27) and to "cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit" (2Cor 7:1). Staining, contamination happens when we come into contact with death. How this happens is not directly relevant.

We cannot always prevent defilement, but we are responsible for having ourselves cleansed. For this God gives the purification water. The preparation of that water is described in this chapter to impress us with what it takes to become clean.

Verses 1-2 | The Unblemished Red Heifer in Which Is No Defect

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 2 "This is the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel that they bring you an unblemished red heifer in which is no defect [and] on which a yoke has never been placed.

The statute of the law is not only given to Moses, but to Moses and Aaron together. That shows how important this statute is. The Israelites must bring a heifer. They have to select that heifer. This means that they must deal with it. For them the heifer is also meant, in some cases they need it. The performance is given to Eleazar in verse 3. Everyone is involved.

It must be a "red heifer". It is a female animal, possibly because the female sex gives birth, or bears fruit. Other offerings never mention a color. A red heifer is rare. The red heifer, like the offerings in Leviticus, speaks of the Lord Jesus. As Man the Lord Jesus is Son "of Adam" (Lk 3:38). Adam means 'earth', or 'red earth'. So the red color points at His Mankind. Red is also the color of the blood. The Lord Jesus became Man. "Since the children

share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same" (Heb 2:14) in order to pour out His blood. Only through His bloodshed can there be forgiveness (Heb 9:22).

It must also be a perfect heifer, a heifer without defect. Everything about and in the Lord Jesus is perfect. From Him is written: "Who knew no sin" (2Cor 5:21), "Who committed no sin" (1Pet 2:22) and "in Him there is no sin" (1Jn 3:5). Not only has He not sinned, but everything in Him is perfectly directed toward God. By this He is a complete pleasure to God. His walk on earth is perfect. Only He can say: "Which one of you convicts Me of sin?" (Jn 8:46a). That is in contrast to our often imperfect walk.

Also, there must never have been a yoke on the heifer. This means that the Lord Jesus never let himself be led in his life by anything or anyone but the will of his Father. The principle of his life on earth is: "I have come to do Your will" (Heb 10:7,9). He has never been influenced by the flattery or threats of any man or the devil. The yoke called "My yoke" by the Lord Jesus (Mt 11:29) speaks of His complete, voluntary surrender to the Father's will.

Verses 3-5 | The Heifer Outside the Camp

3 You shall give it to Eleazar the priest, and it shall be brought outside the camp and be slaughtered in his presence. 4 Next Eleazar the priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and sprinkle some of its blood toward the front of the tent of meeting seven times. 5 Then the heifer shall be burned in his sight; its hide and its flesh and its blood, with its refuse, shall be burned.

The heifer is not sacrificed and does not come on the altar. She is slaughtered and burned. Eleazar does not slaughter the heifer himself. Nor is it a question of substitution, not of the reconciliation work done on the cross for the benefit of the sinner. The red heifer is not about removing sin, but about removing the defilement caused by the touch of death as a symbol of sin.

The slaughter and burning of the red heifer is done only once. It is not repeated and thus symbolizes the eternal power of the work of the Lord Jesus. That it is not repeated is a big difference with all other sacrifices. That is because this is about the purification water in the event of defilement.

It is not necessary to slaughter a new red heifer for every defilement. It is about maintaining the relationship with God and restoring when there has been contact with sin. The purification water is there for every Israelite and for every defilement that can be caught during the whole wilderness journey.

Like the sin offering, the red heifer must be brought outside the camp, away from God's presence. It emphasizes the horror God has of sin. Then the value of the blood is emphasized. We are determined by the value of the blood when we see how it is sprinkled seven times in the direction of the tent of meeting. The direction in which the blood is sprinkled indicates that defilement is not only a personal matter, but also affects the whole.

The complete consuming of the sacrifice, the burning to ashes, indicates God's total judgment of sin. When it comes to sin, there is nothing God can spare, nothing that has any attraction for Him. Ashes speaks of a completely frantic judgment.

Verse 6 | Cedar Wood, Hyssop and Scarlet

6 The priest shall take cedar wood and hyssop and scarlet [material] and cast it into the midst of the burning heifer.

While the sacrifice is consumed by the fire, some more objects are thrown into the fire. They too are consumed by fire, they perish in judgment. Cedar wood stands for man's natural greatness and hyssop for his natural smallness (1Kgs 4:33a). Both of them fell into the judgment of Christ. Scarlet speaks of earthly glory (2Sam 1:24). That glory cannot exist for God either. These three objects are also found with the cleansing of the leper (Lev 14:4).

If we have defiled ourselves, it is because we have come into contact with the spirit and behavior of the world. We have come under the influence of the great or the small that arouses admiration in the world. But everything for which the world has admiration is reprehensible to God. If we have been admiring or possibly even longing for it, we should be cleansed of it. We must become aware that these things have come to an end in the judgment that has passed over the Lord Jesus. This awareness happens when the purification water is applied.

Verses 7-8 | Cleansing

7 The priest shall then wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward come into the camp, but the priest shall be unclean until evening. 8 The one who burns it shall also wash his clothes in water and bathe his body in water, and shall be unclean until evening.

Being busy with the work of the Lord Jesus in view of the horror of sin before God requires cleansing. Everyone who is involved in it will feel his own uncleanness. There will be a desire to reconcile the behavior – of which clothing speaks – and its whole existence – his body – with God’s presence in the camp.

After his cleansing, the priest returned to the camp. But even then he is unclean until the evening. The awareness of who we are in ourselves, in the light of the complete judgment which the Lord Jesus had to undergo for this, is not a thing from one moment to the other. It is a sign of lightness when we think it works like this.

This is not about our position in Christ for God. In Christ we are a new creation and perfect, without any defect. Here it is about our practice. Then it is necessary to realize who we are in ourselves, so that we may live close to the Lord Jesus to be preserved from defilement and not dishonor Him.

The priest does not slaughter the heifer himself. It happens in his sight (verse 5), while another person does the actions. When that work is done, the man who has been busy with the heifer must also wash his clothes and himself and is also unclean until the evening. The same applies to him as to the priest.

Verses 9-10 | The Ashes of the Heifer

9 Now a man who is clean shall gather up the ashes of the heifer and deposit them outside the camp in a clean place, and the congregation of the sons of Israel shall keep it as water to remove impurity; it is purification from sin. 10 The one who gathers the ashes of the heifer shall wash his clothes and be unclean until evening; and it shall be a perpetual statute to the sons of Israel and to the alien who sojourns among them.

Yet another person is concerned with the ashes of the heifer. The ashes are deposited outside the camp, and are stored there in a clean place, to be used for the preparation of the purification water. Only death can remove the defilement caused by death. The ashes speaks of the perfect sacrifice of Christ by which conscience is cleansed: “For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:13-14).

The man who has been especially busy with the ashes must also wash his clothes and is also unclean until the evening. Whoever occupies himself with the work of the Lord Jesus for sin in whatever aspect of it, must cleanse himself. Dealing with sin means by definition that one is defiling oneself.

The possibility of removing impurity is there not only for the Israelite, but also for the alien. The sacrifice of the Lord Jesus in its value and application is not to be limited to one nation.

Verses 11-13 | Defilement and Removing Impurity

11 The one who touches the corpse of any person shall be unclean for seven days. 12 That one shall purify himself from uncleanness with the water on the third day and on the seventh day, [and then] he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third day and on the seventh day, he will not be clean. 13 Anyone who touches a corpse, the body of a man who has died, and does not purify himself, defiles the tabernacle of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from Israel. Because the water for impurity was not sprinkled on him, he shall be unclean; his uncleanness is still on him.

Touching a corpse causes at least seven days of impurity for the Israelite. A corpse stands for the death that came into the world through the sin of man. Touching death must remind a member of God’s people that he himself is the cause of death in the world. Death and sin belong together, they are inextricably linked (Rom 6:23a). Neither of them belong to God. God cannot tolerate them in His presence. Whoever has come into contact

with it must be cleansed to be with God and have fellowship with Him. This is provided by the purification water, the preparation of which we have just seen.

There are two phases in cleansing. It should be borne in mind that in Christendom it is not about literal days, but about a certain period that is necessary for the spiritual work in the soul. The cleansing water should be applied on the third day. Three full days are needed to realize the defilement. It often takes time before we realize that we have defiled ourselves. A quick confession is not proof of a profound work in the soul. Sometimes there is a direct insight into it, but it takes a while before we realize its depth and we realize that cleansing and forgiveness are necessary.

God wants us to reflect on what happened. Our hearts will become painfully aware that, despite redemption and atonement, they have again been defiled and stained by a sin, a sin for which Christ has suffered. Even if only for a moment, we have been pleased with something that has caused His suffering. These may be a little thing that may remind us in the distance of death, like a bone (verse 16), but for God is connected to death. We have forgotten this suffering for sin and have been light-hearted with sin. I have dishonored Him again as a believer and made the suffering of the Lord Jesus worse by this sin.

How important it is to look at death as God looks at it. This will make us vigilant not to come into contact with death. Unfortunately, we don't always escape it and sometimes we're inattentive. That doesn't make the matter for God any different. The impossibility for us to go through the world without being defiled does not make sin any less defiling. The world is for God one great cemetery (Eph 2:1; 1Jn 5:19).

Should that make us despondent? No! It makes God's grace all the greater when we see that He has given the means of cleansing for every defilement, no matter how great or small, in Christ's sacrifice (1Jn 2:1-2). What God wants us to learn is that we not only look at sin in the same way as He does, but also look at Christ's sacrifice in the same way He does.

The first feeling that a defiled soul tastes is the bitterness that he has sinned both against love and against the holiness of God. That will be the effect of the application of the purification water. With the realization of sin comes

also the realization of what has happened to the Lord Jesus for that sin from God's side. Then this bitter feeling – and this is probably the meaning of the second sprinkling on the seventh day (verse 19) – will turn into deep joy through the consciousness of the love and great grace of the Lord Jesus. On the seventh day, that is, after a complete period, – the number seven speaks of completeness – there is again “the joy of Your salvation” (Psa 51:12) and the restoration of the pleasure of fellowship.

A clear example of the third and seventh days of cleansing can be seen when Peter has denied the Lord Jesus. Peter experiences the third day as the bitterness of his denial got him (Lk 22:61-62). He also experiences the seventh day, the restoration of fellowship through and with the Lord by a charcoal fire at the sea of Tiberias (Jn 21:15-17).

Verses 14-22 | Various Forms of Defilement

14 'This is the law when a man dies in a tent: everyone who comes into the tent and everyone who is in the tent shall be unclean for seven days. 15 Every open vessel, which has no covering tied down on it, shall be unclean. 16 Also, anyone who in the open field touches one who has been slain with a sword or who has died [naturally], or a human bone or a grave, shall be unclean for seven days. 17 Then for the unclean [person] they shall take some of the ashes of the burnt purification from sin and flowing water shall be added to them in a vessel. 18 A clean person shall take hyssop and dip [it] in the water, and sprinkle [it] on the tent and on all the furnishings and on the persons who were there, and on the one who touched the bone or the one slain or the one dying [naturally] or the grave. 19 Then the clean [person] shall sprinkle on the unclean on the third day and on the seventh day; and on the seventh day he shall purify him from uncleanness, and he shall wash his clothes and bathe [himself] in water and shall be clean by evening. 20 'But the man who is unclean and does not purify himself from uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly, because he has defiled the sanctuary of the LORD; the water for impurity has not been sprinkled on him, he is unclean. 21 So it shall be a perpetual statute for them. And he who sprinkles the water for impurity shall wash his clothes, and he who touches the water for impurity shall be unclean until evening. 22 Furthermore, anything that the unclean

[person] touches shall be unclean; and the person who touches [it] shall be unclean until evening.”

In this section different forms of defilement are mentioned. The first is by a death in a tent. A tent represents the private sphere, what is happening in our house. Death can suddenly enter there. This can happen, for example, by a manifestation of the flesh in something that is said or done. We sometimes say or do things there that are heard and seen by our wife or our children and that negatively influence them. Or we bring things into the house like magazines, books, television, internet, where we can distinguish what defiles, but our children can't.

A tent can also be applied at a local church. Here too, death can enter suddenly through the manifestation of the flesh in something that is said or done. All are defiled by it.

An open vessel is open to defilement. If death has entered, in whatever form, open vessels will be affected. As examples in the application of open vessels we can think of children, young converts, weak believers, who are all receptive to the wrong.

The field looks at the public sphere, our activities in the world. Killed with the sword points to violence. This spirit of violence can also sometimes characterize us. Think of violent language. This language defiles us. If we react aggressively, we have touched a corpse or something like it.

The bones of a human being, a bone, represents something that reminds us of the distance of death. It is the picture of a generally accepted behavior, in which the thought of the sin has completely disappeared into the background. A lie for good must be possible, the figures must be filled in slightly differently to give a rosier picture than the reality is, we should not make a big deal of doing that.

Without being guilty ourselves of using dirty or violent language, we can also hear language that defiles us. We can also simply end up in a way of thinking that we no longer realize it is connected with death. In both cases we have to clean ourselves. We must engage with the Lord Jesus and His work by reading God's Word. Then we will see wherein we have defiled ourselves, confess our sin and receive the certainty of forgiveness. "If we

confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1Jn 1:9).

The touching of a grave also defiles. A grave can look beautiful, but inside it is dead and cold. The Lord Jesus thus describes the Pharisees (Mt 23:27). In each of us there is a Pharisee. We can easily pretend to be more beautiful than we are. We use flattering language when we speak to someone, but in our hearts we wish that person all but. If we recognize this, we must be cleansed.

Sometimes we come into contact with such people without knowing it. Then we will be defiled and we need to be cleansed. In practical terms, this is only possible if we become aware of it. It may be that we don't immediately realize it, but we still feel that something is not right in what we have heard or seen. Therefore it is good to say it with David and to pray: "Who can discern [his] errors? Acquit me of hidden [faults]" (Psa 19:12).

For cleansing, the ashes from the burned heifer has to be taken. The ashes must be put in a vessel. Then flowing water must be poured onto it. This suggests the following in the picture. The Spirit of God applies the suffering of Christ to the soul through the living Word of God. In this way the soul regains the certainty that sin and all that is of the old man and the world has been disposed of through the atoning death of Christ.

A clean man must apply the water. This is a picture of us as brothers and sisters helping each other to apply this water. To be able to help others, there must be no sin in our lives. We cannot always solve impurity in our lives ourselves. Sometimes it is desired, sometimes even commanded, to confess the sin to others (Jam 5:16). It is a privilege to benefit from the spiritual service of others.

Whoever refuses to let this water sprinkle on him, whoever does not ask for it, remains unclean and shall be cut off from the midst of the assembly (verse 20). Every sin, even the slightest sin, from which we do not let (or allow) to be cleansed, will lead us to destruction. On the way to destruction we will also drag others along. Hence, a person who does not repent of sin must be removed from among the church (1Cor 5:13b). It is not sin that becomes fatal to us, but the failure to apply the means of cleansing that God has given us.

The clean man is not better. He must use hyssop to apply the water (cf. Exo 12:22). This means that he must deal with the unclean in humility, “in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal 6:1). David asks for such a man (Psa 51:7). The flowing or living water, the Word of God, and the ashes, the proof that the sacrifice has been consumed, are the means of cleansing and not the knowledge or insight of the clean man. The clean man must know the Word of God to use the right text and he must know the work of the Lord Jesus to point out the right aspect.

The water must also be applied to the tent and all who are in it. If there has been defilement, everyone consciously or unconsciously involved must also be brought under the power of the purification water. Let us be glad when someone comes with the Word of God and presents to us the ashes of the red heifer, that is to say, the complete consuming of the Lord Jesus for sin, so that we may be cleansed from attached defilement.

The clean man should also cleanse himself. To help others to confess, to hear the sins of others, defiles. Any contact with sin and what is necessary to cleanse it makes one unclean. Therefore he must wash his clothes, that is, he must place his conduct in the light of God’s Word, so that nothing of the sin with which he had to occupy himself will attach to him.

Numbers 20

Verse 1 | The Death of Miriam

1 Then the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to the wilderness of Zin in the first month; and the people stayed at Kadesh. Now Miriam died there and was buried there.

The wilderness journey is nearing its end. The death of Aaron, at the end of this chapter, takes place in the fortieth year after the exodus from Egypt (Num 33:38). They arrive in Kadesh, at the border of Edom. Miriam dies in the first month of that, it is believed, the fortieth year. She also belongs to those who fall in the wilderness. This will also happen to Aaron and Moses. Through this excellent trio God has led His people out of Egypt (Mic 6:4), but none of them will enter the land with the people.

The death of Miriam, just before the end of the journey, gives the tone of the past forty years, about which hardly anything has been recorded. Scripture is silent about this. But it has been a death march. Every day men died, until the whole unbelieving generation is fallen in the wilderness. With the death of Miriam, the joy of redemption, a joy she expressed after the people had passed through the Red Sea (Exo 15:20-21), is silenced. That joy had to make way for the sadness of the ubiquitous death.

It seems that Miriam, together with her brother Aaron (Num 12:1-2), has completely disappeared from the scene after her attack on the authority of Moses. Perhaps she never got back the privileged position she had before her uprising. It may be a lesson that, even if someone is forgiven for a great sin, he or she will not regain the influence or position in the work of God that was there before that sin occurred.

Verses 2-6 | New Rebellion of the People

2 There was no water for the congregation, and they assembled themselves against Moses and Aaron. 3 The people thus contended with Moses and spoke,

saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished before the LORD! 4 Why then have you brought the LORD's assembly into this wilderness, for us and our beasts to die here? 5 Why have you made us come up from Egypt, to bring us in to this wretched place? It is not a place of grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, nor is there water to drink." 6 Then Moses and Aaron came in from the presence of the assembly to the doorway of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to them;

The people are rebelling again. Instead of feeling the loss of Miriam and being extra grateful for the leaders they still have, they turn against Moses and Aaron. The reason is the lack of water. The lack of water is a test by which God wants to test them. He wants to see if they have understood anything about being a high priest. In the previous chapters He has shown *His* appreciation of it. Now He wants to see *their* appreciation of it.

A people – or a person – who feels short, lacks gratitude and becomes unreasonable. The people wish again that they would have died, just like their brothers. They pretend that they died a natural death. They forget that their brothers were killed by the judgment over their sins. By their wrong view of what happened, they forget to be thankful that they themselves have been spared.

It is a people who live by the here and now and not by the promises of God. Their mind is expressed in the "why" questions by which they reveal their lack of trust in God (verses 4-5). They lack water, but not only that, they are also starting to complain about the lack of more food. Here and now a lot lacks. That is why they no longer want to continue to live. Their greatest shortcoming is faith in what God has promised them.

This people, who are now almost made up of people younger than twenty at the beginning of the journey or born in the wilderness, is no better than those who died in the wilderness. As so often, history repeats itself because the essence of man does not change.

The "why" questions are not answered because they stem from unbelief and rebellion. Moses and Aaron do not respond to the complaints of the people, but go to the only right place, to the dwelling place of the LORD. There they throw themselves down again, and there the glory of the LORD appears to them.

Verses 7-13 | Moses Strikes the Rock

7 and the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 8 "Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink." 9 So Moses took the rod from before the LORD, just as He had commanded him; 10 and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, "Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?" 11 Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. 12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them." 13 Those [were] the waters of Meribah, because the sons of Israel contended with the LORD, and He proved Himself holy among them.

The rod that Moses must take is that of Aaron, the rod that has flourished. Moses takes it, for he lies before the LORD, and there he takes it away (verse 9). The rock also has a meaning: "And the rock was Christ" (1Cor 10:4). Moses once struck a rock (Exo 17:6). Then water came out. That stream of water has been following the people throughout their journey through the wilderness. Probably the stream has dried up because of the unbelief of the people. That is why they are now without water. However, they are not without a high priest.

The LORD gives Moses instructions. The LORD does not appear to discipline His people with a plague, as he did before (Num 16:46). There is no judgment, no anger. From what He gives Moses will come a new proof of His grace and care for His ungrateful and contradictory people. Moses must now speak to the rock and not strike it.

The rock was once struck, by the rod of Moses, the rod that changed water into blood and cleft the Red Sea. It is a rod of judgement. Because Christ was struck by the striking hand of God, streams of water have emerged. That first strike happened at the beginning of the wilderness journey. Christ was struck once, He suffered once as "[the] just for [the] unjust, so

that He might bring us to God" (1Pet 3:18). Now He always lives to make intercession for us (Heb 7:25).

Any new appeal to be made to Him must not be made by striking the rock again, but by speaking to it. The source of blessing is at our disposal. We only need to speak to the High Priest, to approach Him in prayer, and He will give blessing and refreshment.

Weren't Moses and Aaron prepared for this demonstration of grace from God for the sake of a people yet again rebellious? In any case they do not act in accordance with the grace the LORD wants to show here. They are reproached by the LORD for acting in unbelief (verse 12) and resisting His command (Num 27:14). Instead of speaking to the rock, they speak to the people. The attitude of the people has excited Moses, he loses his patience and speaks rash words (Psa 106:32-33). But the LORD has not said that they should say anything to the people. Yet Moses says to them: "Shall we ...? He forgets that it concerns the LORD.

Moses strikes and God responds with ... water, much water. This blessing is not proof that Moses acted correctly. God can still give much blessing to believers who gather in a place that is not in His mind. He can even give blessing by an unbelieving pastor. Blessing says nothing about the place or about the person, it says something about the goodness and sovereignty of God.

Moses strikes the rock with *his* rod (verse 11), all against the LORD's command. He strikes with the rod of judgment, while God wants to show Himself as the God of grace to His people. Many people speak to God's people only about a judgmental God. He is, but not only that. God *has* judged. Therefore, He can be presented as a gracious God.

Moses and Aaron are given notice of the judgment. They have committed a "sin to death" (1Jn 5:16b) and will not enter the land. This punishment marks the seriousness of the sin, committed by the most responsible of the people. If we do not sanctify God, God sanctifies Himself.

The place where this happens is Meribah, which means 'a place of struggle'. It is the same name that was used forty years earlier on a same occasion (Exo 17:7). The events there speak, on the one hand, of the rebellion of the people (Psa 95:8) and, on the other, of the grace of God (Psa 114:8).

Verses 14-21 | Edom Refuses Israel to Pass Through

14 From Kadesh Moses then sent messengers to the king of Edom: "Thus your brother Israel has said, 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us; 15 that our fathers went down to Egypt, and we stayed in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians treated us and our fathers badly. 16 But when we cried out to the LORD, He heard our voice and sent an angel and brought us out from Egypt; now behold, we are at Kadesh, a town on the edge of your territory. 17 Please let us pass through your land. We will not pass through field or through vineyard; we will not even drink water from a well. We will go along the king's highway, not turning to the right or left, until we pass through your territory.'" 18 Edom, however, said to him, "You shall not pass through us, or I will come out with the sword against you." 19 Again, the sons of Israel said to him, "We will go up by the highway, and if I and my livestock do drink any of your water, then I will pay its price. Let me only pass through on my feet, nothing [else]." 20 But he said, "You shall not pass through." And Edom came out against him with a heavy force and with a strong hand. 21 Thus Edom refused to allow Israel to pass through his territory; so Israel turned away from him.

Edom is not just a people, but a brotherhood. This determines Israel's attitude in Edom's refusing to allow the people to pass through their territory. They must not fight against them. They can and must do that against hostile peoples. The request of Moses reveals the ingrained hatred of Edom against the people of God.

The name Edom is related to Adam. In Adam we see what we are in our old nature. Edom represents our 'brotherhood', our flesh. The flesh is hostile to God "because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God" (Rom 8:7a). We are not called to fight against it, but to be guided by the Spirit. Then we will be kept from fighting against the flesh (Gal 5:16-17). If we do fight against it, we will end up in the situation of Romans 7 and our lives will become a life of defeats. Consider ourselves to be dead to it (Rom 6:11) does not mean ignoring or fighting against it, but go around it. That means recognizing hostility, while taking the right attitude to it.

God uses Edom's refusal to deflect his people and bring them on the way to the Jordan. By taking the right attitude towards our flesh, that is to give

the flesh the place God's Word gives it, we come into the right position to take the blessings of the land.

This rejection of Edom is reminiscent of the rejection of "a village of the Samaritans" to receive the Lord Jesus. The Lord has also sent messengers there, as Moses does here to the king of Edom. By responding to the rejection as Israel does here, the people act in the spirit of the Lord Jesus (Lk 9:52-53,56).

Verses 22-29 | The Death of Aaron

22 Now when they set out from Kadesh, the sons of Israel, the whole congregation, came to Mount Hor. 23 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor by the border of the land of Edom, saying, 24 "Aaron will be gathered to his people; for he shall not enter the land which I have given to the sons of Israel, because you rebelled against My command at the waters of Meribah. 25 Take Aaron and his son Eleazar and bring them up to Mount Hor; 26 and strip Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar. So Aaron will be gathered [to his people], and will die there." 27 So Moses did just as the LORD had commanded, and they went up to Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. 28 After Moses had stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on his son Eleazar, Aaron died there on the mountain top. Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain. 29 When all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, all the house of Israel wept for Aaron thirty days.

The LORD commands Moses regarding the death of Aaron. He gives the reason for his death. He also takes care of a successor. Eleazar becomes high priest instead of his father Aaron. Eleazar brings the people into the land. Aaron is the high priest of a people travelling through the wilderness. This change indicates the different facets of the High Priesthood of the Lord Jesus.

Moses does as the LORD has commanded. His obedience to the LORD is unbroken, despite all the setbacks he has suffered in this chapter:

1. First the death of his sister Miriam,
2. then the uprising of the people,
3. then his own failure and the punishment for it,

4. the refusal and hostility of Edom which means a by-way and thus postponement of the goal to be achieved, and
5. finally the death of his brother Aaron, whom he sees dying with his own eyes.

Moses is a great example for us when we have to deal with setbacks. Let us also always remain open to the Lord's Will.

Eleazar is the third son of Aaron. He is a type of the Lord Jesus as High Priest, but in connection with the land. The number three speaks of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, Who rose from the dead on the third day (Mt 16:21; Lk 24:46; 1Cor 15:3-4; 1Pet 1:21). Eleazar presents the Lord Jesus as High Priest who has been dead and now lives. By His death He opened the heaven and all the blessings that are there, to all who are connected with Him. That is what the promised land speaks of.

Before Aaron dies, he saw Eleazar being clothed with his garments (cf. Isa 22:20-21). He might have been able to repeat what Simeon says in Luke 2 (Lk 2:29-30). Eleazar derives everything from Aaron. He continues Aaron's work in a new form. Aaron silently submits to what the LORD says. He dies, 123 years old, in dignity and peace, not as someone who is exterminated from the people. After that he is buried (Deu 10:6), we may accept by his brother and his son.

The people weep for him thirty days. They weep for the loss of him, against whom they have so often grumbled during his life. Similarly, there is often grief about the loss of blessings that we have not appreciated before. Godly people are often given more honor after death than during their lives.

Similarly, prophets have been persecuted and killed during their lives, but once they are killed, their graves are decorated as a kind of homage: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been [living] in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in [shedding] the blood of the prophets.' So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets" (Mt 23:29-31).

Numbers 21

Verses 1-3 | Fight Against the Canaanites

1 When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negev, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, then he fought against Israel and took some of them captive. 2 So Israel made a vow to the LORD and said, "If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities." 3 The LORD heard the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites; then they utterly destroyed them and their cities. Thus the name of the place was called Hormah.

Even before the people enter the land, enemies come forward to prevent that. The Canaanites attack and seem to surprise Israel. They take some of the Israelites captive. If we want to enter 'our land', that is to say if we want to occupy ourselves with the heavenly blessings, we will also experience that the enemy will try to prevent this with all possible means. We will have to be wary that the enemy does not inadvertently take something away from our strength.

The people make a vow to the LORD; it promises a counterpart, if He also does something for them, namely giving them the victory. The LORD doesn't blame them for this form of unbelief, but helps and gives a great victory. The place of victory is given the name "Hormah", which means "ban curse", "banned". This means that they dedicate all the spoils to the LORD and give Him the honor of the victory. But great victories are sometimes followed by great defeats, as the following history shows.

Verses 4-9 | The Bronze Serpent

4 Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey. 5 The people spoke against God and Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe

this miserable food.” 6 The LORD sent fiery serpents among the people and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. 7 So the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.” And Moses interceded for the people. 8 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery [serpent], and set it on a standard; and it shall come about, that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, he will live.” 9 And Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on the standard; and it came about, that if a serpent bit any man, when he looked to the bronze serpent, he lived.

First the people have to go in the direction of the Schelfzee again. At the end of the wilderness journey it is useful to look again and to make it well understood that this is the place where we are freed from the power of the enemy. The picture of the cross must come alive before us again. If we can't appreciate that, there will be grumbling. The people are getting impatient because of the detour they have to make. Again the reason for their grumble is that they have no water and bread. How can they say it! They have it, but they are fed up with it. It can no longer please them.

When the people despise the bread of life, the fiery serpents come and with them death. Throughout their journey through the wilderness they have been surrounded by fiery serpents (Deu 8:14-15), but the LORD has always kept them. But their aversion to the heavenly bread makes it necessary to teach them (and us!) a penetrating lesson.

The plague of the fiery serpents makes the people reflect. Through the fiery serpents, the people must discover that sin still dwells in them. It concerns the people of God who must learn what effect the bite of a fiery serpent has. Then, for the first time in Numbers, we hear the people say: “We have sinned.” This is the first time they confess guilt.

They appeal to the intercession of Moses. They also tell him what to pray. In doing so, they indicate what they think is best for their recovery. But God always has in mind the glory of the Lord Jesus when He hears a prayer. Therefore He does not take away the fiery serpents, as the people suggest. Compare Naäman who also proposes how he can be cleansed from his leprosy (2Kgs 5:11).

The LORD gives outcome, but in a way that the salvation is connected to the faith of the people. Moses has to make a bronze serpent and put it on a standard. A single look at the lifted up fiery serpent is enough to be healed. The 'looking' at the fiery serpent does have the meaning of intensely looking at. In his conversation with Nicodemus, the Lord Jesus explains the spiritual significance of this event: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life" (Jn 3:14-15; Rom 8:3; 2Cor 5:21; 1Pet 2:22; Col 2:14-15).

God heals the people not by taking away the serpents, but by adding something to it. Moses must take the means by which the people are plagued. Thus the Lord Jesus had to enter into our circumstances. He could not save us by speaking a word of power or by judging the devil. Then we would have remained in our sins. It is only because He was made sin for us on the cross that it became possible to free us from the power of sin (Jn 3:15).

The Son of Man *must* be exalted. This is not so much to forgive sins, although it is included, but He had to be exalted to give eternal life to all who believe in Him. The lifting up on the cross opens the richest, heavenly, eternal blessings for all who believe. The fiery serpent not only speaks of salvation of the serpent's bite and of not having to die, but on top of that of eternal life. At the end of the wilderness journey we are reminded of this by this history.

We know eternal life in the Father and the Son (Jn 17:3). Eternal life is knowing the Lord Jesus, for He is "the true God and eternal life" (1Jn 5:20). What eternal life means, we do not know at the beginning of our journey through the wilderness, when we have just been converted. We learn this as we give up more and more of ourselves through the lessons of the wilderness. Then we also see better and better that the eternal life means much more than forgiveness of sins and being freed from hell.

The fiery serpent is taken by the Israelites to Canaan. There it becomes an idolatrous object, that is destroyed by Hezekiah (2Kgs 18:4). Thus, the cross can be deprived of its true meaning and made into a kind of mascot. For example, a cross can be worn as a piece of jewelry and a protective effect can be attributed to it.

Verses 10-20 | To the Plains of Moab

10 Now the sons of Israel moved out and camped in Oboth. 11 They journeyed from Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim, in the wilderness which is opposite Moab, to the east. 12 From there they set out and camped in Wadi Zered. 13 From there they journeyed and camped on the other side of the Arnon, which is in the wilderness that comes out of the border of the Amorites, for the Arnon is the border of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites. 14 Therefore it is said in the Book of the Wars of the LORD,

*“Waheb in Suphah,
And the wadis of the Arnon,
15 And the slope of the wadis
That extends to the site of Ar,
And leans to the border of Moab.”*

16 From there [they continued] to Beer, that is the well where the LORD said to Moses, “Assemble the people, that I may give them water.” 17 Then Israel sang this song:

*“Spring up, O well! Sing to it!
18 “The well, which the leaders sank,
Which the nobles of the people dug,
With the scepter [and] with their staffs.”*

And from the wilderness [they continued] to Mattanah, 19 and from Mattanah to Nahaliel, and from Nahaliel to Bamoth, 20 and from Bamoth to the valley that is in the land of Moab, at the top of Pisgah which overlooks the wasteland.

The progress of the people along the different places to the plains of Moab is a picture of the spiritual progress that must characterize us as Christians. They first come to Oboth, which means ‘cavities’. Then they move on to Iye-abarim, which means ‘ruins of passages’. This place is connected to “ruins”, “the wilderness” and “Moab” on the one hand, and “to the east”, where the sun rises on the other. It gives a clear picture of our passing through the wilderness of the world, where on the one hand we see the ruins in all parts of society, caused by sin, death and the flesh, and on the other hand we may look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus as the “Sun of righteousness” rising in the east (Mal 4:2).

The next place is Wadi Zered. Zered which means 'willow'. Here we are reminded of the grief that we also encounter in our lives. From there we go to Arnon, which may well mean 'continuous flow'. It shows that in addition to the grief there is also comfort. The Arnon also forms the border between Moab and the Amorites. We live in an area where we are surrounded by enemies. How we defend ourselves there in the battle of faith – the people abide in the plains of Moab, and the Amorites must be defeated – is recorded in "the Book of the Wars of the LORD".

Everything God wants to give us, we will only be able to take possession of through battle. God looks at this and keeps a record of it in a book. The name of the book shows that He describes our struggle as His. He takes possession of the land through His people. It is His inheritance which He takes possession of in His saints (Eph 1:18c). He indicates the border of it.

After the Arnon the people come to Beer, which means 'well'. Not only does God water us to quench our thirst, He also wants to refresh us abundantly. Some things are said about the well. First of all, that by command of the LORD the people are assembled there. Enjoying the water from the spring, a picture of the Word of God spoken under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is especially something that takes place in the church. Meetings are opportunities for personal refreshment.

The second thing that is said is that it is water that He gives. Drinking of it will bring us to the enjoyment of eternal life (Jn 4:14). Through the Word we will discover more and more of the Spring Himself. The result, the third aspect, is that we come to worship and sing to the glory of Him from Whom everything comes forth (Rom 11:36).

Here they sing for the third time in the wilderness after the exodus from Egypt. During the wilderness journey, there was no singing, there was only complaining. There was singing after they crossed the Red Sea (Exo 15:1-21), then singing when they had made the golden calf. However, that was not a song for the glory of God, but for the glory of the golden calf (Exo 32:18). And now here, the third song, one of worship to the Spring Himself.

The fourth aspect has to do with the way in which the water appears. The water that has flowed out of the rock has come from God, by pure grace.

The water from the spring appears as a result of the efforts of the leaders of the people. This beautiful result shows the importance of the presence of ‘princes’ who dig wells. The ‘princes’ of God’s people are those who are aware of and live by the position given to them by God. They are concerned with the Word of God; they dig into it.

It is to be hoped that there will be more brothers who will occupy themselves with the Word of God, dig into it. It is also to be hoped that they will pass this on in the meetings of the church and that every proclamation of the Word will result in singing.

The “nobles of the people” sink the well “with the scepter [and] with their staffs”. It is not heavy work. In spiritual terms, nobles are believers who submit to God’s Word. The scepter speaks of this submission, a word that can also be translated as ‘legislator’. With the latter, we can remember that sinking is done on the instructions of Moses, a picture of Christ. Both expressions say something about authority, and that rests with God and His Word. If we acknowledge the authority of God’s Word and act only in accordance with what God says in it, we will be abundantly refreshed.

When they arrive in Beer, there are no more complaints about lack of water. There the jubilation breaks out (cf. Isa 12:3). God is made great because of His abundance of refreshment and blessing. There the leaders of the people are busy serving the people. There, the people acknowledge that they have a well at their disposal from which they can drink without restriction.

After Beer they travel to Mattanah (‘gift’) and then to Nahaliel (‘the inheritance of God’) and Bamoth (‘heights’) to finally arrive in the valley that is in the land of Moab, at the top of the Pisgah (‘survey’).

Verses 21-32 | Fight Against Sihon

21 Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, saying, 22 “Let me pass through your land. We will not turn off into field or vineyard; we will not drink water from wells. We will go by the king’s highway until we have passed through your border.” 23 But Sihon would not permit Israel to pass through his border. So Sihon gathered all his people and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. 24 Then Israel struck him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land

from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the sons of Ammon; for the border of the sons of Ammon [was] Jazer. 25 Israel took all these cities and Israel lived in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all her villages. 26 For Heshbon was the city of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken all his land out of his hand, as far as the Arnon. 27 Therefore those who use proverbs say,

“Come to Heshbon! Let it be built!

So let the city of Sihon be established.

28 “For a fire went forth from Heshbon,

A flame from the town of Sihon;

It devoured Ar of Moab,

The dominant heights of the Arnon.

29 “Woe to you, O Moab!

You are ruined, O people of Chemosh!

He has given his sons as fugitives,

And his daughters into captivity,

To an Amorite king, Sihon.

30 “But we have cast them down,

Heshbon is ruined as far as Dibon,

Then we have laid waste even to Nophah,

Which [reaches] to Medeba.”

31 Thus Israel lived in the land of the Amorites. 32 Moses sent to spy out Jazer, and they captured its villages and dispossessed the Amorites who [were] there.

The third part of the book of Numbers begins with the battle against Sihon. Part 1 is Numbers 1-10:10, in which the preparation of the journey is described. Part 2 is Numbers 10:11-21:20, in which the journey itself is described. The third part, which contains the rest of the book, takes place in the plains of Moab. The spiritual meaning of the journey is that as we go through the world, we are discovered to ourselves and that we learn about the faithfulness of God through the high priest, for us the Lord Jesus. He wants us to learn to walk in the power of the Holy Spirit and no longer according to the flesh.

‘The plains of Moab’ also has a spiritual meaning. The special thing about the plains of Moab is that the people are no longer in the wilderness, but they are not yet in the land either. The Jordan has still not been crossed.

Spiritually speaking, we are not yet seen as in the letter to the Ephesians, where we see how we are blessed with all the spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. That is the land for us. But we are not there yet. But we are also no longer in the wilderness. Spiritually, we have understood what the letter to the Romans teaches us: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." We no longer walk according to the flesh, "but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:1-4).

The area of the plains of Moab gives the picture of the Christian that we have in the letter to the Philippians. This Christian is still on earth, he has not yet gone through the Jordan, so to speak, but his whole heart goes out to heaven, to which he presses. We learn this in the rest of Numbers and the whole book Deuteronomy. The heart of the people will be completely focused on the land they will soon enter, so that they will love to enter.

The first thing we encounter in the plains of Moab, is battle. The first enemies are Sihon and Og. So this is not yet the battle in the land. There are different types of battle:

1. In the wilderness there is a defensive battle that cannot be escaped. It is a battle where the people have to fight, but which the LORD takes for his account (Exo 17:8,16b).
2. In the land there is an attacking battle to conquer the land.
3. In the plains of Moab, it's a battle they don't seek and try to avoid, but they can't escape either. Then they also take possession of the cities of the Amorites, something that has never been the case in their struggle in the wilderness.

The cities on the wilderness side of the Jordan are taken possession of. That is not yet the actual land, because that is on the other side of the Jordan. Later, two and a half tribes will ask for and receive their inheritance in this area. It turns out that they do not appreciate an inheritance in the land. Moses later blames them for this. Just as the land of Canaan speaks of the heavenly places and the spiritual blessings therein, so the territory on this side of the Jordan, the plains of Moab, speaks of the earthly blessings.

The blessing of the Christian consists of the spiritual blessings in the heavenly places and not the earthly blessings. To really enjoy the spiritual blessings, we first have to conquer the earthly ones. This means on the one

hand that we can accept the earthly blessings gratefully from God's hand. It also means, on the other hand, that we rule over it and not that we allow ourselves to be dominated by the earthly blessings. Only when we give the earthly blessings their true place, we can occupy ourselves with the heavenly.

Many Christians, and in fact Christianity as a whole, are like the two and a half tribes. They are so satisfied with the earthly blessings that they are not interested in the spiritual blessings and do not worry about them. They focus on the earthly as if the earth is their actual home. This also leads to political efforts to ensure a long and pleasant stay on earth.

That is not God's intention of earthly blessings. If that's all, we don't distinguish ourselves from the unbelievers who also (want to) have these blessings, without, by the way, thanking God for them or involving Him in them. God wants us, His children, to reach out to our real inheritance: the spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, which is the eternal life in Christ.

Sihon and Og are unbelievers. They represent people who possess blessings in the power of the flesh. With them there is no gratitude to God. The characteristic of Sihon is his honor, his fame. He did not conquer the land from the Ammonites for the glory of God, but for his own glory. This is expressed in the song by the poets of proverbs that Moses mentions here. Og uses the land for its own enjoyment. This is reflected in the only characteristic given of him: his giant bed (Deu 3:11).

In Sihon and Og we see the dangers that the earthly blessings have for us. If we do not keep the flesh in the place of death and walk through the Spirit, we will forget our actual spiritual blessings. The result is that we look for our own honor and pleasure that are connected to the earthly blessings.

After this digression about the spiritual meaning we return to the text. Israel has revived and rejuvenated at Beer. A people who are happy in the LORD is strong (Neh 8:10b). Through the joy of the well they can successfully fight against enemies. But first they send messengers to Sihon, as well as to Edom (Num 20:14). Sihon reacts just like Edom. Unlike with Edom, Israel is now ordered to fight against the enemy and to take its land. Already in Genesis 15 God foretold the judgment of the Amorites,

but it will only be carried out when their iniquity is full (Gen 15:16). That moment has now arrived.

In verses 27-30, those who use proverbs are quoted to prove that this area first belonged to the Ammonites and was conquered by the Amorites. Some say they are poets of proverbs of Israel, others think they belong to the Amorites. In any case, it is a victory song. In the first case the Ammonites, and in the second case the Amorites are challenged to rebuild their conquered and fire-destroyed capital. The song sings of a total over-winning.

About Moab the “woe to you” is proclaimed. Chemosh, the main god of the Ammonites (Jer 48:7) and of the Amorites (Jdg 11:24), is a worthless god who is unable to protect the people who have taken him to be their god. The Ammonites were overpowered by the Amorites and the Amorites were destroyed by the Israelites.

If the area where Sihon reigns had been of the Ammonites, Israel would not have been allowed to take it. Now they are allowed to do so and they can even live there. Jephthah appears to be well aware of this historical data. He can later use this to refute the claim of the king of the Ammonites (Jdg 11:13-23).

Verses 33-35 | Fight Against Og

33 Then they turned and went up by the way of Bashan, and Og the king of Bashan went out with all his people, for battle at Edrei. 34 But the LORD said to Moses, “Do not fear him, for I have given him into your hand, and all his people and his land; and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon, king of the Amorites, who lived at Heshbon.” 35 So they killed him and his sons and all his people, until there was no remnant left him; and they possessed his land.

No messengers are sent to Og, who rules the northern half of Gilead and Bashan. Og has not been warned by what happened to Sihon. He takes the initiative and attacks Israel. The LORD assures Israel of the victory. With this commitment, the people are fighting and Og is completely defeated. They also take possession of his land.

The victory over Sihon and Og is quoted several times later in the Bible (Neh 9:22; Psa 135:10-11; 136:18-20).

Numbers 22

Verse 1 | Israel in the Plains of Moab

1 Then the sons of Israel journeyed, and camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan [opposite] Jericho.

After the Israelites have conquered the whole area of the Amorites, they move to the plains of Moab to prepare for the conquest of Canaan. From here, after the death of Moses, they will, under the leadership of Joshua, cross the Jordan to enter the land of Canaan.

Verses 2-7 | Balak Sends Messengers to Balaam

2 Now Balak the son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. 3 So Moab was in great fear because of the people, for they were numerous; and Moab was in dread of the sons of Israel. 4 Moab said to the elders of Midian, "Now this horde will lick up all that is around us, as the ox licks up the grass of the field." And Balak the son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time. 5 So he sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor, at Pethor, which is near the River, [in] the land of the sons of his people, to call him, saying, "Behold, a people came out of Egypt; behold, they cover the surface of the land, and they are living opposite me. 6 Now, therefore, please come, curse this people for me since they are too mighty for me; perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land. For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed." 7 So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the [fees for] divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam and repeated Balak's words to him.

Before the people enter Canaan, God shows in the dialogue between Balak and Balaam something of which Israel is unaware at that moment. It is an attack on God's people in a form we have not seen before. We are made partakers of it, just like of God's conversation with Satan about Job (Job 1:6-12). And as in the case of Job, Satan's attack on God's people is used by God to bless His people.

If we allow the events of the next three chapters to be deeply engraved upon us, we will conclude with Paul shouting: “Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?” (Rom 8:33-34a).

Moab is also one of Israel’s inveterate enemies. The hallmark of Moab is his pride (Isa 16:6; Jer 48:29). The pride will always try to dominate God’s people. This nation is a great danger to the people of God. Conversely, Balak sees in God’s people an enormous danger to his own existence. He feels threatened in his honor. Yet there is no reason for that fear, because God has forbidden His people to drive Moab out of his territory (Deu 2:9). But wicked people always see dangers where they are not, because they have a bad conscience.

Warned by the defeat of Sihon and Og he doesn’t see any good in a military confrontation. He understands that such a confrontation means a certain defeat for him. He also knows that the people owe their victories to their God, as all the peoples around Israel know (Jos 2:10). He seeks salvation in a completely different direction. He seeks the weakness of the people and finds it in the unfaithfulness of the people against their God.

What he wants to try and do, is to drive a wedge between God and His people. He does so at an extremely tactical moment, at the end of the wilderness journey, when all the unfaithfulness of the people has become public. But then Balak shows that he does not understand anything of the God of Israel. He sees the God of Israel as a national idol, just as every nation has its god or gods. For example, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, sees the God of Israel like that (2Chr 32:10-19).

Balak sends messengers to Balaam, because he sees a prophet of the LORD in Balaam. But Balaam is not a prophet of the LORD. A true prophet of the LORD speaks to the people about their unfaithfulness. He also points to the blessings which are connected to conversion. Neither of these aspects we see with Balaam. Balak and Balaam together form a devilish span that we recognize in the devilish span of the future: the beast and the false prophet (Rev 13:1,11-12), who, under Satan’s guidance, turn against Christ and His people.

Scripture makes it perfectly clear that Balaam is a false prophet, a servant of Satan, who pretends to be a prophet of the God of Israel. That is why Balak wants to hire him. When Balaam pronounces blessing on God's people, it says nothing about Balaam and everything about God. God forces Balaam to bless his people.

His name appears in eight Bible books and always in a negative sense (Numbers 22-24 [many times]; Num 31:8,16; Deu 23:3-5; Jos 13:22; 24:9-10; Neh 13:1-2; Mic 6:5; 2Pet 2:15-16; Jude 1:11; Rev 2:14). At the end of Israel's history, the prophet Micah cites once more what Balak and Balaam want to do here, to use their example to remind Israel of the right of God (Mic 6:5a).

The three quotations of Balaam in the New Testament are significant. We read about "the way of Balaam" (2Pet 2:15), about "the error of Balaam" (Jude 1:11) and about "the teaching of Balaam" (Rev 2:14). From these quotations and their context, we see that his history teaches us as a church important lessons.

Will Satan, after his failures to kill the people in battle, this time succeed in his efforts to destroy the people? The attempts of the enemy make it clear that God maintains His relationship with His people against the enemy and does not allow His people to be cursed. Balak thinks only of God as a holy God. He knows nothing of the grace of God. As an enemy of God, God does not give him the right to set Him up against His people. The unfaithfulness of the people is always only a matter between God and His people.

Balak is not only looking for support from Balaam. He has also consulted with the elders of Midian. But his hope is mainly in Balaam.

Verses 8-14 | Conversation Between God and Balaam

8 He said to them, "Spend the night here, and I will bring word back to you as the LORD may speak to me." And the leaders of Moab stayed with Balaam.
9 Then God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?" 10 Balaam said to God, "Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab, has sent [word] to me, 11 'Behold, there is a people who came out of Egypt and they cover the surface of the land; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I may be able to

fight against them and drive them out.” 12 God said to Balaam, “Do not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.” 13 So Balaam arose in the morning and said to Balak’s leaders, “Go back to your land, for the LORD has refused to let me go with you.” 14 The leaders of Moab arose and went to Balak and said, “Balaam refused to come with us.”

God opens the conversation with Balaam. It does not seem to scare him, as he is used to dealing with the spirit world, where until now he has only had to deal with evil spirits. He doesn’t know better but this is a divining spirit. Thus God captures the sly prophet in his own net (1Cor 3:19).

God never asks questions that He Himself does not know the answer to, but to force man to think about what is in his heart. In this case, it must confront Balaam to the fact that they have come to ask him to curse God’s people. Balaam explains to God what it is all about. From what he says, it appears that he has no idea that it is the people of the God with Whom he speaks.

God ends the matter by ordering Balaam not to go along to curse the people because they are blessed. The fact that Balaam tries again later shows that he is led by greed and not by what God says. God has spoken to other ungodly people, such as Abimelech and Laban, with the command not to offend His elect (Gen 20:3; 31:24).

In his answer to the messengers of Balak, Balaam only speaks about the LORD’s refusal to let him go with them. It echoes the disappointment of a man who has no fellowship with God. He wants to go, but unfortunately he is not allowed. He does not say a word about them being a blessed people. Neither do the messengers give a true and fair account of what Balaam said. They refer only to the refusal by Balaam.

Verses 15-19 | Balak Sends Messengers Again to Balaam

15 Then Balak again sent leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the former. 16 They came to Balaam and said to him, “Thus says Balak the son of Zippor, ‘Let nothing, I beg you, hinder you from coming to me; 17 for I will indeed honor you richly, and I will do whatever you say to me. Please come then, curse this people for me.’” 18 Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, “Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could

not do anything, either small or great, contrary to the command of the LORD my God. 19 Now please, you also stay here tonight, and I will find out what else the LORD will speak to me."

Balak again sends messengers to Balaam. He now appeals not only to the greed of Balaam, but also to his ambition. A distinguished envoy with a lot of money is something else than an insignificant messenger with a lot of money. He also gives the promise that Balaam only has to ask what he wants, and Balak will comply. People of the world give everything to obtain the favor of a medium. They are empowered by the possession of the medium to assure themselves of the future, without realizing that this will bring them into the power of the medium.

Balaam speaks of "the LORD my God". Bad people can use very pious language. But God knows the heart of man. Balaam uses these words as a formula. There is no question of a relationship. The One Whom he calls "the LORD my God" is for him nothing more than a divine spirit, to whom he has submitted himself, and to whom he cannot escape.

The fact that he is not aware of God's authority and that he owes Him full obedience is once again evident from his further actions. God clearly has said that he should not go with them. So why should he try again? He believes he is dealing with a spirit that is easily willing to adapt.

Verses 20 | God Again Speaks to Balaam

20 God came to Balaam at night and said to him, "If the men have come to call you, rise up [and] go with them; but only the word which I speak to you shall you do."

God speaks again to Balaam. God knows his heart and instructs him to go with the men. God often gives assignments that fit the desires of people. Thus he gives Israel a king like Saul. He is going to use Balaam to give a great testimony about His people.

Verses 21-35 | Balaam Meets God as an Adversary

21 So Balaam arose in the morning, and saddled his donkey and went with the leaders of Moab. 22 But God was angry because he was going, and the angel of the LORD took his stand in the way as an adversary against him. Now he

was riding on his donkey and his two servants were with him. 23 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand, the donkey turned off from the way and went into the field; but Balaam struck the donkey to turn her back into the way. 24 Then the angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path of the vineyards, [with] a wall on this side and a wall on that side. 25 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she pressed herself to the wall and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall, so he struck her again. 26 The angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place where there was no way to turn to the right hand or the left. 27 When the donkey saw the angel of the LORD, she lay down under Balaam; so Balaam was angry and struck the donkey with his stick. 28 And the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey, and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" 29 Then Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a mockery of me! If there had been a sword in my hand, I would have killed you by now." 30 The donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey on which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?" And he said, "No." 31 Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed all the way to the ground. 32 The angel of the LORD said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? Behold, I have come out as an adversary, because your way was contrary to me. 33 But the donkey saw me and turned aside from me these three times. If she had not turned aside from me, I would surely have killed you just now, and let her live." 34 Balaam said to the angel of the LORD, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the way against me. Now then, if it is displeasing to you, I will turn back." 35 But the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but you shall speak only the word which I tell you." So Balaam went along with the leaders of Balak.

Balaam meets God as his adversary. Balaam goes because God has said it, and because he goes, God is angry. That seems to be a contradiction. Balaam knows it is against the will of God, but he goes, driven by love for money.

In the history with the donkey God shows that Balaam is even more stupid than a donkey. Blinded as he is by the greed of money, he does not know what danger he is in. The donkey has an eye for that. Animals often have

more eye for their Owner than humans (Isa 1:3). An animal sees more here than someone created in God's image. What foolishness to persevere on an evil way on which the sword of the LORD is stretched out against the evil one. The donkey saves him from that folly (2Pet 2:15-16).

Balaam doesn't seem to notice the unusualness of the donkey's speaking. He talks to her. It has been suggested that perhaps through his contacts with the demons he is used to talking to animals. Perhaps his anger also makes him so excited that the strangeness of it doesn't strike him.

That the LORD let the donkey speak shows how exceptional this event with Balaam is. What is at stake is much indeed. It is about blessing or cursing for the people of God and all related promises. God can use everything and give a voice to give a testimony of His omnipotence and thereby warn (Lk 19:40; Hab 2:11). He can also, if this fits into the execution of His plan, intervene in a law established by Himself (2Kgs 6:6; 20:11; Jos 10:13).

Unbelief speaks mockingly of three "saving animals": the speaking serpent (Gen 3:1), the speaking donkey (here) and the fish in which Jonah was (Jona 1:17; 2:1,10). Yet it is true that those who do not believe that this really happened cannot be saved, for such a person makes God a liar. The events in which animals are used by God for a special purpose above their nature have to do with the Fall (the serpent), the connection between God and His people with the associated promises (the donkey) and the Lord Jesus (the fish). All three are quoted in the New Testament (2Cor 11:3; 2Pet 2:16; Mt 12:40).

Instead of wondering why the donkey, who has never let him down, does so, he whips her off. He even wants to kill her, a folly that is prevented because he has no sword with him. What would he have gained from that? He would only have lost by it. So many people in their folly do things that do not profit them, but only make them lose.

Also by the cruel treatment of his faithful riding animal Balaam proves that he is an unrighteous person. The righteous person knows what his cattle need (Pro 12:10a). By the way, there is a sword in the neighborhood, that of the Angel of the LORD. But for that Balaam is blind. In addition, it is not directed against the donkey, but against him.

The reaction of the donkey is not only wonderful by her speaking, but also in what she says (verse 30). She speaks with more understanding than Balaam. In her words, in the form of questions, there are wise lessons for Balaam and every human being in their relationship to God. First, it recognizes Balaam's ownership of her when she says: "Am I not your donkey?". Secondly, she can say that she has always been there for him in faithful service: "On which you have ridden all your life to this day?" Thirdly, we see that this exceptional action is not the result of her unwillingness, "have I ever been accustomed to do so to you?", with which she indirectly says that the unwillingness is with him.

The questions of the donkey have no prophetic content. They are not questions that come from God and have a special meaning. She also says nothing about the Angel of the LORD. It is simply the questions that every animal that is abused would ask if it had the opportunity to do so. They do not go outside the realm of an animal's feelings, but remain within the realm of animal soul life. The only answer Balaam can and have to give to the questions asked is: "No!" But there is no question of any reaction in his conscience.

There is a practical application to be made. If we are on the road and there will be a delay that prevents us from continuing our journey, how do we react? The Lord wants such an obstacle to lead us to consider our motives for undertaking this journey, whether short or long. It doesn't have to be wrong, but He wants us to enter His thoughts and become aware that everything can only be His honor if He goes with us. This applies even more so to the life path we follow during our life journey, the choices we make, for example, which education, which profession, which man or woman we should choose. From which motive do we choose the way we go?

Just as the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey (verse 28), so He opens the eyes of Balaam (verse 31). That brings him on his knees. The LORD speaks to him in a questioning manner about his conduct against his donkey. Then He makes it clear to Balaam that He and Balaam are diametrically opposed to each other. Balaam is not in the way of the LORD, but in a way of which the LORD says: "Because your way was contrary to me." That means that this way was leading to destruction. The Angel emphasizes that Balaam mistreated his donkey three times to force her to

go the way he wants her to go, but that the donkey saved him three times for destruction, by turning away from the Angel.

After the LORD has declared to Balaam the lesson with the donkey, Balaam pronounces: "I have sinned". But it is in the same way as the Pharaoh, Saul, and Jude do (Exo 9:27; 10:16; 1Sam 15:24; 26:21; Mt 27:4). There is no real repentance. God does not relieve him of his duty, but obliges him to continue, saying that he will only speak what He says to him. It will be to God's greater honor if He not only prevents Balaam from cursing the people, but also makes Balaam an instrument by whom He blesses His people.

Verses 36-41 | Balak and Balaam to the High Places of Baal

36 When Balak heard that Balaam was coming, he went out to meet him at the city of Moab, which is on the Arnon border, at the extreme end of the border. 37 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not urgently send to you to call you? Why did you not come to me? Am I really unable to honor you?" 38 So Balaam said to Balak, "Behold, I have come now to you! Am I able to speak anything at all? The word that God puts in my mouth, that I shall speak." 39 And Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. 40 Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent [some] to Balaam and the leaders who were with him. 41 Then it came about in the morning that Balak took Balaam and brought him up to the high places of Baal, and he saw from there a portion of the people.

During the first contact Balak has with Balaam, he can only blame him for not having come sooner. His expectations are high. Balaam tempered these expectations by pointing out that he could only speak what God puts him in his mouth. He knows himself a prisoner of Him.

Balak takes Balaam to the high places of Baal. This is the first mention of Baal in the Bible. From this place the first attempt to curse will take place. It is a place entirely dedicated to the worship of Satan who hides here behind the name 'Baal'.

Baal (means: lord) main head god of the Canaanites, while Astarte is the main female head god. This form of idolatry is given a permanent place in Israel in the time of the judges (see the book of Judges). In the first days of Samuel's performance, this idol is removed from the land. But he comes back. During the reign of the wicked Ahab over the ten tribe realm, his

even more wicked wife Jezebel makes the Baal service the official religion in Israel.

From the place that Balak has chosen, Balaam cannot see the whole people, but only a portion of them. It must give Balaam the impression that he is dealing with only a small people, it must lead him to depreciation of the people. But listen to what statement God brings Balaam when he is impressed by what he sees: "Let me die the death of the upright, And let my end be like his!" (Num 23:10).

Each subsequent attempt always takes place from a different location, apparently closer and closer to the people. It is Balak's intention that Balaam sees what will give him a negative impression of that people, so that he gets 'material' in his hands, with which he can curse the people.

Numbers 23

Verses 1-6 | Preparations for the Curse

1 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me here." 2 Balak did just as Balaam had spoken, and Balak and Balaam offered up a bull and a ram on each altar. 3 Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stand beside your burnt offering, and I will go; perhaps the LORD will come to meet me, and whatever He shows me I will tell you." So he went to a bare hill. 4 Now God met Balaam, and he said to Him, "I have set up the seven altars, and I have offered up a bull and a ram on each altar." 5 Then the LORD put a word in Balaam's mouth and said, "Return to Balak, and you shall speak thus." 6 So he returned to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, he and all the leaders of Moab.

As a starting point for the curse, burnt offerings are made. Perhaps Balak heard of the sacrifices Israel makes to their God. He wants to imitate this and thereby appease God with regard to his wish to curse God's people. He is completely blind to what the burnt offering represents. It reminds God, as it were, that the people are not pleasant to Him in themselves, but that He accepts them on the basis of the value of the burnt offering.

The burnt offering speaks of the Lord Jesus in His complete surrender to the glory of God. For this reason God does not see the believers in their failure, but sees them in the Lord Jesus. They are "made pleasant in the Beloved" (Eph 1:6). Thus God thinks of His people at the end of the wilderness journey. This is also evident from the blessing He lets Balaam pronounce.

Before Balaam pronounces his words, he first wants to meet the LORD. That is, as usual, he wants to meet a demon to consult him. For him the LORD is no more than one of the demons with whom he usually communicates to consult them (Num 24:1). We do not read that he meets God, but that God meets him. The initiative comes from God again (Num 22:9,20). There is no discussion either. God does not respond to what Balaam says

about the sacrifices, but gives him a word in his mouth and sends him back to Balak.

Verses 7-10 | First Discourse

7 He took up his discourse and said,
*“From Aram Balak has brought me,
 Moab’s king from the mountains of the East,
 ‘Come curse Jacob for me,
 And come, denounce Israel!’*
 8 *“How shall I curse whom God has not cursed?
 And how can I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?*
 9 *“As I see him from the top of the rocks,
 And I look at him from the hills;
 Behold, a people [who] dwells apart,
 And will not be reckoned among the nations.*
 10 *“Who can count the dust of Jacob,
 Or number the fourth part of Israel?
 Let me die the death of the upright,
 And let my end be like his!”*

Balaam pronounces four, or better seven, blessing discourses, for the fourth blessing discourse contains four discourses. In each of the four both Jacob and Israel is mentioned. Each prophecy has a different content. Each time something more is brought forward of what God has in His heart as a blessing for His people. Each discourse also emphasizes a certain name of God:

1. God and the LORD (Num 23:8);
2. God and the LORD, his God (Num 23:21):
3. God, the Almighty (Num 24:4);
4. God, the Most High and the Almighty (Num 24:16).

The discourses that Balaam will pronounce are the first great prophetic utterances in the Bible. The prophecies are spoken by a false prophet, but he is forced to proclaim true prophecy. Balaam does not speak to the people. Moses did not hear it. Yet Moses writes down everything that Balaam said because he was inspired by the Spirit. God can have a man write things

down that are truth, without that man himself having been there. For example, the account of the creation in Genesis 1-2 is done in the same way.

The people know nothing of all the splendid things that Balaam mentions about them. Maybe it's grumbling in their tents at the same time. The practice of this people is in any case in stark contrast to what we successively see in the four prophecies that Israel is before God:

1. is a people who dwells apart (Num 23:9),
2. a justified people (Num 23:21),
3. a people full of beauty and freshness (Num 24:5-7) and
4. a people to whom the coming of Christ in His glory is promised (Num 24:17).

These discourses are primarily about God's earthly people, Israel. But they are also instructive for the church of God. Like Israel, Scripture presents the church of God in two ways. On the one hand we see the church in its 'wilderness life' and on the other hand as the object of God's counsels. In the church we see grumble and unbelief, deviation and failure. But when we see the church from above, from God's perspective, we see its value to Him. Therefore Balaam is always in a high place (Num 23:9,14,28).

The first discourse manifests what Balaam notices when he looks at that people from the top of the rocks. If he had walked between the tents, he would have seen and heard something totally different. He starts by stating where he comes from, who has let him come and what his mission is. He has been told that he must come to curse Jacob and to denounce Israel. And he has come.

Under the power of God, however, no curse comes out of his mouth, but blessing. First he justifies that he cannot curse whom God does not curse, and cannot denounce whom the LORD does not denounce. By this he connects the name "God" to *Jacob* and the name "LORD" to *Israel*. The almighty God is on the side of the weak, stumbling, willful Jacob. God calls Himself the God of Jacob. He will never disengage Himself from Jacob. LORD is the name that recalls the covenant between Him and His people. He will never give up the promises contained in the covenant, of which Israel, the people of God's counsel, is the center.

The first characteristic of the people is that they are a people who live apart among all nations. This also applies to Christians. They are in the world, but not of the world (Jn 17:16). God has taken a people from the nations for Himself, for His Name (Acts 15:14). Separation is not negative, it is not just about being separated from something, but separation is positive, separated for a purpose, namely to be there for God.

That God does not reckon His people – Israel formerly, the church now – among the nations, is His side. In practice, the church has not remained apart. Yet this does not detract from the truth that God does not reckon His people among the nations. Similarly, the believer can be unfaithful and connect with the world, something that is explicitly against the will of God (2Cor 6:14). But the new life of the believer has no part in the world.

While Balak did his best to bring the people of God to the attention of Balaam as meaningless as possible (Num 22:41), he speaks of a people who cannot be counted as the dust of the earth cannot be counted (verse 10; Gen 13:16; 28:14). Balaam only sees a part of it, “the fourth part”, which could be one of the four standards in which the people are divided (Numbers 2). Nevertheless, he speaks of the fact that this fourth part cannot be counted. How great must the whole people be then!

When he sees these people, he thinks about their future. He sees as it were the end, the ultimate goal. Then he thinks of his own end. He wants to die the death of a righteous one, but at the same time wants to live as a wicked one. He will die the death of the wicked one because he did not want to live as a righteous man and did not want to belong to a people who God has separated for Himself.

Verses 11-12 | Reaction of Balak; Reply of Balaam

11 Then Balak said to Balaam, “What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have actually blessed them!” 12 He replied, “Must I not be careful to speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?”

In his reaction, Balak does not say, ‘What have you done?’, but, “What have you doing to me?” He feels personally betrayed. Balaam has blessed his personal enemies instead of cursing them. Balak speaks of the people

of God as “my enemies”. Balaam answers that he is under the power of a higher Someone.

Verses 13-17 | Preparations for the Second Attempt

13 Then Balak said to him, “Please come with me to another place from where you may see them, although you will only see the extreme end of them and will not see all of them; and curse them for me from there.” 14 So he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah, and built seven altars and offered a bull and a ram on [each] altar. 15 And he said to Balak, “Stand here beside your burnt offering while I myself meet [the LORD] over there.” 16 Then the LORD met Balaam and put a word in his mouth and said, “Return to Balak, and thus you shall speak.” 17 He came to him, and behold, he was standing beside his burnt offering, and the leaders of Moab with him. And Balak said to him, “What has the LORD spoken?”

Balak wants to take Balaam to a place from where he will only see a part of the people again. Again it is about the extreme part of it (Num 22:41), but here it is obviously about people who live on the edge. Balak thinks that God will give permission to curse if His attention is drawn to those peripheral figures who live far from His residence, far away from the tabernacle in the center of the people.

Again seven altars are built and a bull and a ram are offered on each altar. Balak acts as Balaam commands him. He saves neither costs nor effort. If we desire the blessing of God as fervently as Balak desires the curse, we too will spare no effort to serve and honor God.

Balaam goes back first to meet a demon. It is significant that he does not mention a name in verse 15. ‘The LORD’ is put in brackets, which means the words are not in the original. The first verse of Numbers 24 shows that he wants to get his inspiration from evil spirits (Num 24:1). Again the LORD meets him. Again He puts in Balaam’s mouth the word that he must speak.

Balak’s question to Balaam “what has the LORD spoken?” must always be present with us. Balak of course hopes for a curse. His question has a false

starting point. Whoever really loves the Lord will ask the same question because he would like to know the will of the Lord (Jer 23:35).

Verses 18-24 | Second Discourse

18 *Then he took up his discourse and said,*
“Arise, O Balak, and hear;
Give ear to me, O son of Zippor!
 19 *“God is not a man, that He should lie,*
Nor a son of man, that He should repent;
Has He said, and will He not do it?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?
 20 *“Behold, I have received [a command] to bless;*
When He has blessed, then I cannot revoke it.
 21 *“He has not observed misfortune in Jacob;*
Nor has He seen trouble in Israel;
The LORD his God is with him,
And the shout of a king is among them.
 22 *“God brings them out of Egypt,*
He is for them like the horns of the wild ox.
 23 *“For there is no omen against Jacob,*
Nor is there any divination against Israel;
At the proper time it shall be said to Jacob
And to Israel, what God has done!
 24 *“Behold, a people rises like a lioness,*
And as a lion it lifts itself;
It will not lie down until it devours the prey,
And drinks the blood of the slain.”

Balak would like to know what the LORD has said. That is why Balaam now addresses the word especially to him. It is a message from God and that is why Balaam calls on Balak, even though he is a king, to stand up out of respect for God and to hear (cf. Jdg 3:20). He also calls on Balak to hear him, for he is the means through whom God will speak.

The second discourse is not a revocation of the first. It is not a repetition either. It is a confirmation of the first and an extension of it. The first words

of this second discourse justify God, Who cannot be compared with a man who is changeable and fickle. He does not break His word. He cannot be moved to other thoughts when it comes to His intention to bless (1Sam 15:29; Rom 11:29).

Balaam sees the people who live furthest from God. In those surroundings the fire of God's judgment burned because of the complaints of the people (Num 11:1). When we think of the weakest believers, we see reasons to sue them before God. The language of God from the mouth of Balaam is different. God has not observed misfortune in *Jacob*, that weak, failing believer (verse 21). Nor has He seen trouble in *Israel*, that has so often shown a way of doing things that is contrary to the name that speaks of their privileged place. In Numbers there has been revealed so much misfortune and trouble with the people as a result of the sin, but here God ignores it.

There is no question of sin or guilt in any prophecy of Balaam. How is that possible? God can do that because of the work the Lord Jesus accomplished. By that work everyone to whom that work is accounted has been declared righteous. What cannot exist before God has been removed by the work of Christ before God. What can only exist before God is the work of Christ. Whereby the guilt is proven, which is apparent from the necessity of the work of Christ, thereby the guilt is also removed. "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

Justification goes beyond forgiveness. A righteous man is one of whom God declares that he has never sinned. So great is the value of the work of the Lord Jesus. The truth of being declared righteous is explained in detail in the letter to the Romans. That is why it is so important to study that letter over and over again.

"The LORD his God" can be with this justified people. Without Him, this people have no possibility to exist. A zero is nothing, six zeros is nothing. But if you place a one at the head of six zeros, you suddenly have a million. So it is with the people of God. Without God there is no people, but with God there is a multitude of people. About that people the King according to God's heart can reign under the jubilation of His people. That is also his shielding.

God has guided His people by His power out of the bondage of Egypt (verse 22). That is where the beginning of righteousness lies. That justification resists any attack that may occur during the journey through the wilderness.

Against Jacob and Israel there is no evil power capable of bringing in any accusation (verse 23a). God has blessed His people. Who will be able to change that? We hear the language of the letter to the Romans: "Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?" (Rom 8:33-34a). Any attempt to separate God from those whom He has justified is futile. Nothing and no one is able to separate from God what is connected to Him through the work of Christ (Rom 8:38-39).

If we can say this, there is nothing of us involved therein. It is God's work in His people that can be spoken about "the proper time", which is at the end of the wilderness journey (verse 23b). Now we see what God has done, just as we are reminded of what God has done at the beginning of the journey: the redemption of His people from Egypt.

God has not only had *thoughts* of blessing about His people, He has also *given* that blessing to His people through the work of Christ. What God has committed Himself to, He also works out (Rom 8:29-30). His work we now see in saving souls, forming His own in the image of His Son and helping them go through the world. Also in the realm of peace, glorious results will be seen and He will be honored for what He has done (Psa 22:30-31). At the beginning of eternity it will be possible to say of all that God has resolved to do: "It is done" (Rev 21:6a). The result of this remains forever: "I know that everything God does will remain forever" (Ecc 3:14).

The people are not only a blessed people, but also a victorious people (verse 24). This people, justified by God, can go on in His power. The letter to the Romans not only indicates how someone can become a righteous person, but also how he can live as a righteous person. The righteous person cannot be overcome by just one enemy. In Christ "we overwhelmingly conquer" (Rom 8:37). This victorious life that becomes visible in the wilderness of this world will become fully visible when God has put all the enemies under the feet of the Lord Jesus (1Cor 15:25; Rom 16:20).

Verses 25-26 | Reaction of Balak; Reply of Balaam

25 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Do not curse them at all nor bless them at all!" 26 But Balaam replied to Balak, "Did I not tell you, 'Whatever the LORD speaks, that I must do'?"

Balak reacts to this second blessing by saying that, if there is no curse for the people, then at least Balaam will not pronounce a blessing on that people. But Balaam refers to what he said before. He can only bless.

Verses 27-30 | Preparations for the Third Attempt

27 Then Balak said to Balaam, "Please come, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will be agreeable with God that you curse them for me from there." 28 So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor which overlooks the wasteland. 29 Balaam said to Balak, "Build seven altars for me here and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me here." 30 Balak did just as Balaam had said, and offered up a bull and a ram on [each] altar.

Yet Balak makes a third attempt to curse. To do so, Balak takes Balaam to a place overlooking the wilderness. He wants Balaam to see those people in their wilderness conditions. We often look different in our daily circumstances than on Sundays. Then we often show more of our sins and weaknesses.

Numbers 24

Verses 1-2 | The Spirit of God Comes upon Balaam

1 When Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not go as at other times to seek omens but he set his face toward the wilderness. 2 And Balaam lifted up his eyes and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe; and the Spirit of God came upon him.

Balaam is getting ready for his third discourse. For the first time we read that the Spirit of God comes upon him. We see something similar happening with the unbelieving Saul (1Sam 19:23). In the wilderness, Balaam sees a people, not in disorder and rebellion, but camping according to his tribes. He sees the people in the order they have before God.

Verses 3-9 | Third blessing spell

*3 He took up his discourse and said,
“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
And the oracle of the man whose eye is opened;
4 The oracle of him who hears the words of God,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered,
5 How fair are your tents, O Jacob,
Your dwellings, O Israel!
6 “Like valleys that stretch out,
Like gardens beside the river,
Like aloes planted by the LORD,
Like cedars beside the waters.
7 “Water will flow from his buckets,
And his seed [will be] by many waters,
And his king shall be higher than Agag,
And his kingdom shall be exalted.
8 “God brings him out of Egypt,
He is for him like the horns of the wild ox.
He will devour the nations [who are] his adversaries,*

*And will crush their bones in pieces,
And shatter [them] with his arrows.
9 "He couches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares rouse him?
Blessed is everyone who blesses you,
And cursed is everyone who curses you."*

In his third discourse he speaks of himself in the same way as later David does (2Sam 23:1-3). He is "the man whose eye is opened". He sees much, much more than many a member of the people of God. But that says nothing about his personal faith. You can know a lot through everything you have heard in the meetings and you can tell a lot about it, but how tragic as it is in the way of Balaam, for whom it is not a matter of his heart.

In the previous discourse there is talk of what God does *not* see in Jacob and Israel (Num 23:21). In this third discourse Balaam speaks of what God *does* see in His people. Now that the justification of the people has been pronounced, the full testimony about Israel can be given and is no longer limited to God's plans and thoughts about them.

In verses 5-6 we read how God rejoices about their dwellings, not in the land, but in the wilderness. He sees them like valleys that stretch out. This refers to valleys through which streams flow that supply these valleys with water. But the metaphor goes even further. Their dwellings are even more lovely than the brook valleys with their abundant grass and their wealth of flowers: they are like gardens with fragrant aloe trees (Psa 45:8a; Jn 19:39-40), planted by the LORD Himself, and like the stately cedars (Song 5:15b) of which the wood has a long durability.

To see so much refreshment and beauty in God's people we must stand in a high place (Num 23:28), that is, next to God. We must lift up our hearts to Him. Then we will better understand God's thoughts and share His thoughts of grace that He sees the beauty of His people, His church, through everything. Through this vision of God on the church we are encouraged and unspeakably happy. We also see the whole people of God and not just the few members we know. For this the Lord must open our eyes.

Balaam does not speak about what is going on in those tents. In those tents there was a lot of grumbling, but he is not talking about that. These are dwelling places that reflect something of the dwelling place of God. God dwells in a tent among His people. The tents wherein his people dwell are a picture of it. That is how God sees our dwelling places and that is how we must show it to the world.

Tent and house are both a space where one stays to rest and seek protection against the heat. It is also the place where we have contact with family members. A tent emphasizes the temporary aspect of the stay. We travel through the world, on a journey to our eternal destination. In 'dwelling' the thought is more what one does in this stay, all that the resident can enjoy. They are the tents of "Jacob", tents with people full of weakness. They are the dwellings of "Israel", dwellings in which the people of God dwell.

God wants His people to be like valleys, like gardens, where He can find rest and pleasure. Are we such a valley and garden for Him? Aloe gives a wonderful fragrance, a cedar speaks of strength. If the Holy Spirit can work in us, all of this will be found in us by God because the fruit of the Spirit will then become visible: "Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22-23a).

We will then become a blessing to others, which is represented by water flowing out of us to others (verse 7; Jn 7:38). 'Buckets' presupposes labor, because effort is needed to fill the buckets. From what we have discovered ourselves in the Word, we can give others for their refreshment. This refreshment will not only be part of those who surround us, but also of our descendants.

Another consequence is that the Lord Jesus will have all authority in our lives, He will have dominion in our lives. Agag, the king of the Amalekites, picture of the flesh, will be kept subjected. The kingdom of God, now still hidden, will become visible in our families, in our tents.

We are reminded again of the origin of God's people, of the leading out of Egypt (verses 8-9). God is for His people, also thereafter, and against His enemies. He will give His people the strength to defeat all enemies. Then they will lay down like a lion and find peace. Nobody will dare to disturb them in that rest, so that they should get up again to fight.

Lions are said not to seek refuge to sleep. They can lie down anywhere to go to sleep because nobody dares to attack them. The people of Canaan live in Canaan during the reign of Salomon in that kind of safety, peace and security; they will live in the kingdom of peace in such security and peace.

Balaam concludes his third discourse with a statement that repeats the promise of God to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 12:3; 27:29).

Verses 10-14 | Reaction of Balak; Reply of Balaam

10 Then Balak's anger burned against Balaam, and he struck his hands together; and Balak said to Balaam, "I called you to curse my enemies, but behold, you have persisted in blessing them these three times! 11 Therefore, flee to your place now. I said I would honor you greatly, but behold, the LORD has held you back from honor." 12 Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not tell your messengers whom you had sent to me, saying, 13 'Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything contrary to the command of the LORD, either good or bad, of my own accord. What the LORD speaks, that I will speak'? 14 And now, behold, I am going to my people; come, [and] I will advise you what this people will do to your people in the days to come."

Balak is desperate. In words and gestures his anger burns against Balaam. The striking of the hands is a gesture of horror, of great anxiety (Job 27:23). He dismisses Balaam, who gets nothing from what he promised him because he has not kept the deal. Balak says it is the LORD's fault that Balaam gets no reward. That is also true, but Balak means this mockingly, to indicate where the obedience of Balaam to the LORD has led to.

Balaam is not impressed. He keeps the honor to himself. He can't do anything else either. He is against will an instrument in God's hand. He is so impressed by the power of God, that all the gold and silver of Balak could not persuade him to go against God. Under the power of God, he acts against his greedy nature. Unfortunately, all this is beyond his conscience. He loses the reward of Balak, but he doesn't choose for the LORD either.

If he continues to pronounce another prophecy, it is because of the same power that led him to pronounce the former prophecies. He invites Balak to come once again and listen to an announcement of future events.

Among other things, they are about what “this people”, that is Israel, will do to “your people”, that is Moab. This means that Balak’s fear of “this people” (Num 22:3) is justified. However, this fear will only become true in the future. Anyway, because it is also about his people, those events will have to interest Balak.

Verses 15-24 | Fourth discourse

15 *He took up his discourse and said,*

*“The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor,
And the oracle of the man whose eye is opened,
16 The oracle of him who hears the words of God,
And knows the knowledge of the Most High,
Who sees the vision of the Almighty,
Falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered.*

*17 “I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near;
A star shall come forth from Jacob,
A scepter shall rise from Israel,
And shall crush through the forehead of Moab,
And tear down all the sons of Sheth.*

*18 “Edom shall be a possession,
Seir, its enemies, also will be a possession,
While Israel performs valiantly.*

*19 “One from Jacob shall have dominion,
And will destroy the remnant from the city.”*

20 *And he looked at Amalek and took up his discourse and said,*

*“Amalek was the first of the nations,
But his end [shall be] destruction.”*

21 *And he looked at the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said,*

*“Your dwelling place is enduring,
And your nest is set in the cliff.
22 “Nevertheless Kain will be consumed;
How long will Asshur keep you captive?”*

23 *Then he took up his discourse and said,*

“Alas, who can live except God has ordained it?

24 *“But ships [shall come] from the coast of Kittim,*

And they shall afflict Asshur and will afflict Eber;

So they also [will come] to destruction.”

The fourth prophecy is exclusively about the future. Through the four times repeated word “discourse” (verses 15,20,21,23), this fourth prophecy is divided into four parts. The first discourse is about Moab and Edom (verses 17-19), the second about the arch-enemy Amalek (verse 20), the third about the Kenites (verses 21-22) and the fourth about the destruction of the great world powers (verses 23-24).

Balaam speaks of himself as the man who hears the words of God, who knows the knowledge of the Most High and who sees the vision of the Almighty. He has heard and seen much of God. This can also be seen in the different names with which he mentions God. Unfortunately, it did not bring him a step closer to that God, the God of Israel. The cause is that all his knowledge about God has had no effect on his conscience.

Here Balaam uses a new name of God: the Most High. This is the name of God in the millennial realm (cf. Gen 14:18-20). He then is revealed above all nations, all enemies are subdued, and His people have received all that He promised. In His omnipotence He carried His people through all the difficulties of the wilderness and brought them into the blessing of the kingdom of peace.

The coming of the Messiah is connected with the above (verse 17b). Balaam sees Him, “but not now”, that is to say, as not yet present; he beholds Him, “but not near”, that is, in the distance, not the near future. In Numbers 23 Balaam also said that he sees and beholds him (Num 23:9). There he means the people. Here he says it again, but now he means a Person.

The star mentioned here by Balaam will later lead the magi from the east to the Messiah (Mt 2:1-11). It says here that it is a star that comes from Jacob, not a star that comes to Jacob from heaven. It indicates that the Messiah comes forth from that people. Thus also the Redeemer comes *from* Zion, not *to* Zion (Rom 11:26). The scepter rises from Israel (Gen 49:10). For us,

the church, He is the “shining Morningstar” (Rev 22:16), Who arises in our hearts (2Pet 1:19; Rev 2:28).

What will soon be a reality for Israel – that the day will come with the coming of the Messiah (2Sam 23:3-4) – is already a reality for us. We are “sons of the day” (1Thes 5:5). We already have part in the blessings that will soon be part of all creation. Christ reigns already in our lives, soon He will reign over all creation.

The “forehead of Moab”, literally the “corners of Moab” means the boundaries of Moab. Moab and Edom (verse 18) will not be able to resist the power of Israel, which they derive from their Messiah (verse 19). The weak Jacob will become the mighty Israel. All enemies will be presented with the bill of their attitude towards Israel.

“Amalek” is the worst, the main enemy (verse 20). That enemy is a picture of the power of the flesh. But he will be destroyed. The Kenite (verse 21) were part of Amalek (1Sam 15:6). They thought they could escape destruction because they dwelt high in the cliff. But like “Cain” they should be consumed. Cain represents man who has his permanent residence in the world and builds cities to make life there as pleasant and safe as possible. “Asshur” is used to keep Cain captive.

Life is only possible in connection with God. To those who stand outside Him is the following: “Who can live?” With these words, Balaam begins his last discourse in verse 23, as if he had understood through the previous discourses that what God says is going to happen.

As certain as the blessing is for Israel, so too is the judgment for the enemies. No one is capable of turning the blessing, no one is capable of turning the judgment or escaping it. So Asshur will in turn be subject to the Kittimites (verse 24). Some interpreters assume that the Kittimites do not mean only the inhabitants of the island of Cyprus, but all powers on the western side of the Mediterranean, including Rome (Jer 2:10; Dan 11:30).

Verse 25 | Balaam and Balak Break Up

25 Then Balaam arose and departed and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way.

With the painting of the subjugation of all enemies of Israel and the blessing of Israel under the rule of the Messiah, the discourses of Balaam have come to an end. Balak has no perspective anymore. He has seen his end. There is nothing more to change or add. Balaam and Balak have nothing more to tell each other and part. Poor people! For a moment they were under the influence of God's Word. However, it has not touched their conscience. Both of them goes his way, a way that will end in complete darkness. Does what God says touch our conscience?

Numbers 25

Verses 1-5 | Israel Joins Themselves to Baal of Peor

1 While Israel remained at Shittim, the people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab. 2 For they invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. 3 So Israel joined themselves to Baal of Peor, and the LORD was angry against Israel. 4 The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of the people and execute them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." 5 So Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you slay his men who have joined themselves to Baal of Peor."

In Numbers 23-24 we see how God thinks about His people: as objects of His grace and care. Numbers 25 is therewith in great contrast. We often see this great contrast in our lives. On the one hand we may know that God looks at us in Christ. On the other hand, we often let the flesh work in our daily lives.

In the previous chapters Balaam did not succeed in letting God become unfaithful to His people. God has remained faithful to His view of the people. Now the enemy tries to do it on the side of the people. Balaam knows how to distract the people from God by a trick, to let them become unfaithful to God (Num 31:16). He succeeds in this with a people who have all the experience of the wilderness journey behind them. They got to know themselves and they got to know God's faithfulness. Here we learn that there will never be a time in our lives when we can say that the enemy can no longer get a grip on us.

The people "remained" in Shittim, while they had previously camped in the plains of Moab (Num 22:1). 'To camp' is done with a view to immediately moving on, while 'to remain' has a more permanent character. Could it mean that Israel is beginning to lose sight of the purpose of the journey and that they are moving towards a more permanent stay in Shittim? In any case, it is significant that the enemy manages to connect with them there. If we lose sight of the fact that we are pilgrims, on our journey to our

final destination, and start focusing on our stay on earth, we are open to wrong connections.

The people are invited to come and eat from the sacrifices that are brought to the idols. It seems like a friendly invitation. So people from the world can invite us to come and eat with them and that can be considered. It does not need to be rejected (1Cor 10:27). However, in such cases it may also be friendships of the world that are more to fear than its enmity.

In this case it does not stop with eating. The people also bow down before the idols of the Moabites. Although they have already had an idol in the golden calf (Exo 32:1-6), we find a new aspect here in the people's unfaithfulness against God. They have grumbled about food and drink and also about the leadership of Moses. They have always revolted against God and Moses and Aaron. Now they go one step further. In this idolatry they not only put the LORD aside, but replace Him by an idol. The persistence of this evil will be evident in the history of Israel. It will be one of God's main indictments against the people.

The application of this history for us is in Revelation 2 (Rev 2:14). There we read about the *teachings* of Balaam, not about his *deceit*. The deceit he uses here has become a doctrine. The mixing of the people of God with the world is not rejected, but encouraged. This turns the people's gaze from the Lord to the world. He is no longer in the first place, but the world is.

It says of the church in Pergamum that it "dwells where Satan's throne is" (Rev 2:13). Satan is the prince of the world. 'Dwell' means feeling at home there. The church lives in the heart of the world, where the government is exercised. The teaching is that Christians should not be separated from the world. The world council of churches is an example of this. Christians are called upon to connect with the world and to exert their influence in order to move towards a better world.

But the Lord says: "I have a few things against you" (Rev 2:14) Then He speaks of the teaching of Balaam and its effect on the people of God. The attitude that fits with this teaching is not a soft resistance. The Lord Jesus stands opposite this church with "the sharp, two-edged sword" (Rev 2:12). The use of the sword can be seen here in the next verses with Phinehas.

God was angry against Israel, because His people have joined themselves to Baal of Peor. The word 'joined' has the power of 'going together under one yoke with'. Israel moves under one yoke with a pagan people in the worship of the idols (2Cor 6:14-15). Baal of Peor, or lord of Peor, is the local god worshipped on Mount Peor (Num 23:28). There a plague and a judgment come. God punishes what bears His Name, that His people may not alienate themselves from Him. For that purpose, the fierce anger of God has also struck Christianity many times.

The most responsible persons have taken the lead in this infidelity. They should therefore be judged. The seriousness of sin requires a special punishment: "Execute them in broad daylight before the LORD." They must be hung in public before the LORD. The people must see it and fear, for the judgment is executed because of the LORD's charge. God's wrath of sin must deter man from committing sin. And the wrath of God over sin is the proof of His righteousness. Thus He wants evil to be punished.

The people are unfaithful in all the points God has mentioned in blessing on His people:

1. It is a people that dwells alone (Num 23:9), but here they mix with the nations.
2. It is a people in which God sees no iniquity (Num 23:21), but here they commit iniquity.
3. It is a people in which He sees beauty (Num 24:5), but here they commit fornication in their tents.
4. It is a people that will subdue their enemies (Num 24:19), but here they subdue themselves to their enemies.

Here we find no Moses who intercedes for the people. That says something about the seriousness of sin. There is no intercession here, but judgment. The memory of this sin is strongly kept alive throughout the history of Israel (Jos 22:17; Psa 106:28-31; Hos 9:10).

Verses 6-15 | Phinehas Is Jealous for the LORD

6 Then behold, one of the sons of Israel came and brought to his relatives a Midianite woman, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of

meeting. 7 When Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, 8 and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked. 9 Those who died by the plague were 24,000. 10 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 11 "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned away My wrath from the sons of Israel in that he was jealous with My jealousy among them, so that I did not destroy the sons of Israel in My jealousy. 12 Therefore say, 'Behold, I give him My covenant of peace; 13 and it shall be for him and his descendants after him, a covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.'" 14 Now the name of the slain man of Israel who was slain with the Midianite woman, was Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of a father's household among the Simeonites. 15 The name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi the daughter of Zur, who was head of the people of a father's household in Midian.

There is a man, an Israelite, who defies the judgment that has been carried out. He ignores God's judgment and, with incredible hubris, brings a Midianite woman to his brothers. This is not just any sin. It is a frontal attack on the true, high and pure service to God. With his deed he slaps God's face and he is not interested in anything that he does to his brothers with his deed. His brothers mourn about the situation and he indicates with his deed that they are behaving overly dramatic. So he defies God and despises the crying people.

The Israelites cry – is it just because of the plague or also because of the unfaithfulness to God that has been committed? – and watch as this great sin takes place. But not only do they have to cry, they also have to act here. Phinehas understands what is happening. For the superficial reader, his action seems merciless. But in his action he shows true love for God and for His people. True love "does not rejoice in unrighteousness" (1Cor 13:6a). Not acting is sin. Such shameless sin can be dealt with only in one way: without pardon he kills those who sin without shame and cause the plague.

When he has executed the judgment, the plague stops. With the execution of the judgment, Phinehas works reconciliation. 24,000 people have died

by the plague. This seems contrary to the 23,000 mentioned in 1 Corinthians 10 (1Cor 10:8). But there it says “in one day”. This could mean that on another day a 1,000 people died from the plague. It is also possible that the figure of 24,000 includes the death of the leaders of the people who have been executed. It would be about 1,000 leaders. In any case, it shows the extent of the unfaithfulness.

Phinehas is the son of Eleazar, the high priest, and the grandson of Aaron. All three are a picture of the Lord Jesus, the true High Priest. Aaron has died. He is a picture of the Lord Jesus Who made atonement and brought His blood in the sanctuary. Eleazar, as a high priest, is a picture of the Lord Jesus in what He is doing for us now, after He rose from the dead.

Phinehas is also a high priest and also a picture of the Lord Jesus, but then in judging power. Judgment is given to the Lord Jesus as the Son of man (Jn 5:27). Phinehas’ judgment of sin means that the whole people are spared. The Lord Jesus judges the church so that the relationship between Him and His people may be maintained. Hard measures are sometimes needed that we remain His people with whom He can have fellowship.

For his decisive action God rewards Phinehas and his descendants with the eternal priesthood (Jdg 20:28; 1Chr 6:4-15). When listing the gatekeepers, Phinehas is remembered with great respect (1Chr 9:19b-20). He has behaved like a true gatekeeper and made sure that evil is removed from God’s presence. The spirit of Phinehas must characterize us all. It is the spirit of priesthood, practiced in God’s presence. For us it is about the service in the sanctuary, especially when we come together as a church.

The man who dared to commit such a sin is the son of a leader of a father’s household. This teaches us that origin or position is no guarantee whatsoever not to fall into the most awful sin. For this we are only kept if we put our trust not in ourselves but in the Lord.

Verses 16-18 | Be Hostile to the Midianites

16 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 17 “Be hostile to the Midianites and strike them; 18 for they have been hostile to you with their tricks, with which they have deceived you in the affair of Peor and in the affair of Cozbi, the

daughter of the leader of Midian, their sister who was slain on the day of the plague because of Peor.”

Israel's attitude towards the Midianites is determined by Midian's attitude towards Israel. The Midianites have previously connected with Moab in an attempt to curse the people of God (Num 22:4). They have also had a hand in this history to seduce Israel to commit fornication with the daughters of Moab.

The judgment on Moab is carried out in Numbers 31 (Num 31:1-12). We have to be hostile to anything that can lead us to sin.

Numbers 26

Verses 1-4 | Assignment to Take a Census

1 Then it came about after the plague, that the LORD spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, saying, 2 "Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel from twenty years old and upward, by their fathers' households, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel." 3 So Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, saying, 4 "[Take a census of the people] from twenty years old and upward, as the LORD has commanded Moses." Now the sons of Israel who came out of the land of Egypt [were]:

Moses counts the people by command of the LORD. It is as it is in Numbers 1. It is a sin to count the people without explicit command of God. In this sin David is caught (1Chr 21:1-7). He wanted to know the power of his people, as if God is not his power.

The command to count is given "after the plague". The plague of the previous chapter is the last great plague that struck the people as 'wilderness people'. The wilderness journey is over. They are about to enter the land. The unfaithfulness of the previous chapter has shown that all wilderness experiences have not changed the heart of man. Nor has God's righteousness changed, as He has shown through the plague.

Yet He has not destroyed all of them, but in grace has kept them alive. They can be counted. But a new generation is counted. At the same time, however, the new generation is linked to the generation that "came out of the land of Egypt". Other persons make up the people, but they remain the same people.

The expression "after the plague" marks a turning point in the history of the book of Numbers. A new generation is counted. The great question that arises from this is: Will this new people serve God more faithfully than the people who died in the wilderness?

At the beginning of the journey the people are counted (Num 1:1-5). It is a great encouragement to know that, before we begin our 'wilderness

journey', God counted us head by head. God knows every member of His people by name. In the wilderness each member has his own exercises, but each member may know that God will take care during the whole journey. The census here is the census at the end of the journey. None of those counted in Numbers 1 is alive here, except Caleb and Joshua (verse 65). This means that a totally different people are counted than in Numbers 1.

They are numbered because the land will be given to them (verse 53). The big difference between the two censuses is that the census of Numbers 1 is done in view of the upcoming wilderness journey, while the census here is done in view of the upcoming entry into the promised land to take possession of the heritage. Because there will be a battle to take possession of the inheritance, again "whoever is able to go out to war in Israel" is counted.

In both cases, the census is a great encouragement. During the census, he or she personally stands before God. This gives each member the impression that God has personal attention for him. This awareness gives strength to the task ahead, both for the wilderness and for the land.

The census does not only take place for all those who are able to go out to war, but also "by their fathers' households", the latter being the most important one because this is mentioned first. In the wilderness, battle is necessary to survive. In the land, battle is needed to conquer the inheritance. Once that inheritance has been taken, God's intention is that every family should enjoy the inheritance. The blessings of the land are particularly enjoyed as a family of God, that is, together with our brothers and sisters, on occasions that are given for it. God's family consists of little children, young men and fathers (1Jn 2:12-18).

We can enjoy it when we do personal Bible study, we can also enjoy it as elderly or young people among each other. But according to God's intention, the most is enjoyed when the whole family comes together. The fact that the emphasis in the census is more on the families than on the militant men is also evident, for example, from verse 33, which also mentions women.

A comparison between the counts of Numbers 1 and Numbers 26 shows the following far-away difference:

Tribe	Num 1	Num 26	+/-
Reuben	46,500	43,730	- 2,270
Simeon	59,300	22,200	- 37,100
Gad	45,650	40,500	- 5,150
Judah	74,600	76,500	+ 1,900
Issachar	54,400	64,300	+ 9,900
Zebulun	57,400	60,500	+ 3,100
Ephraim	40,500	32,500	- 8,000
Manasseh	32,200	52,700	+ 20,500
Benjamin	35,400	45,600	+ 10,200
Dan	62,700	64,400	+ 1,700
Asher	41,500	53,400	+ 11,900
Naphtali	53,400	45,400	- 8,000
Total	603,550	601,730	- 1,820
Levi	22,100	23,000	+ 900

Verses 5-11 | Reuben counted

5 Reuben, Israel's firstborn, the sons of Reuben: [of] Hanoch, the family of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the family of the Palluites; 6 of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the family of the Carmites. 7 These are the families of the Reubenites, and those who were numbered of them were 43,730. 8 The son of Pallu: Eliab. 9 The sons of Eliab: Nemuel and Dathan and Abiram. These are the Dathan and Abiram who were called by the congregation, who contended against Moses and against Aaron in the company of Korah, when they contended against the LORD, 10 and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured 250 men, so that they became a warning. 11 The sons of Korah, however, did not die.

The census begins with Reuben, emphatically named “Israel’s firstborn”. The census comprises four generations (Gen 46:9). Among them Pallu is named in particular because from his family Dathan and Abiram originated. These names recall the terrible revolt of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Num 16:1-35). We are once again told what the sin of the rebels was and

the special judgment that struck them from God. It is stated that they “became a warning” (verse 10). They are a sign that warns against any form of pride and rebellion.

But here we also read that the “sons of Korah, however, did not die” (verse 11). The reason is not that they have shown a special faithfulness to the LORD. They belong to a doomy family. They were saved because God wanted to save them because they have not shown the spirit of their father. There is no other motive to discover than the grace of God. The sons of Korah have remained conscious of this grace also in next generations. We find its manifestations in several psalms (Psalms 42-49; 84; 85; 87; 88).

Verses 12-14 | Simeon Counted

12 The sons of Simeon according to their families: of Nemuel, the family of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the family of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the family of the Jachinites; 13 of Zerah, the family of the Zerahites; of Shaul, the family of the Shaulites. 14 These are the families of the Simeonites, 22,200.

Simeon is the tribe with the greatest loss. This large loss may also have been caused by the plague of the previous chapter, in which Simeon is also heavily to blame (Num 25:14). His count concerns five generations: “The sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman” (Gen 46:10).

Verses 15-18 | Gad Counted

15 The sons of Gad according to their families: of Zephon, the family of the Zephonites; of Haggi, the family of the Haggites; of Shuni, the family of the Shunites; 16 of Ozni, the family of the Oznites; of Eri, the family of the Erites; 17 of Arod, the family of the Arodites; of Areli, the family of the Arelites. 18 These are the families of the sons of Gad according to those who were numbered of them, 40,500.

The census of Gad concerns seven generations: “The sons of Gad: Ziphion and Haggi, Shuni and Ezbon, Eri and Arodi and Areli” (Gen 46:16).

Verses 19-22 | Judah Counted

19 The sons of Judah [were] Er and Onan, but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. 20 The sons of Judah according to their families were: of Shelah,

the family of the Shelanites; of Perez, the family of the Perezites; of Zerah, the family of the Zerahites. 21 The sons of Perez were: of Hezron, the family of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the family of the Hamulites. 22 These are the families of Judah according to those who were numbered of them, 76,500.

In Judah's census, as in Reuben's census, a dark event in the past is recalled: the death of Er and Onan (Gen 38:6-10). They died without descendants.

The census of Judah includes five generations: "The sons of Judah: Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan)" (Gen 46:12).

Verses 23-25 | Issachar Counted

23 The sons of Issachar according to their families: [of] Tola, the family of the Tolaites; of Puvah, the family of the Punites; 24 of Jashub, the family of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the family of the Shimronites. 25 These are the families of Issachar according to those who were numbered of them, 64,300.

The census of Issachar concerns four generations: "The sons of Issachar: Tola and Puvvah and Iob and Shimron" (Gen 46:13).

Verses 26-27 | Zebulun Counted

26 The sons of Zebulun according to their families: of Sered, the family of the Seredites; of Elon, the family of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the family of the Jahleelites. 27 These are the families of the Zebulunites according to those who were numbered of them, 60,500.

The census of Zebulun concerns three generations: "The sons of Zebulun: Sered and Elon and Jahleel" (Gen 46:14).

Verses 28-34 | Manasseh Counted

28 The sons of Joseph according to their families: Manasseh and Ephraim. 29 The sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the family of the Machirites; and Machir became the father of Gilead: of Gilead, the family of the Gileadites. 30 These are the sons of Gilead: [of] Iezer, the family of the Iezerites; of Helek, the family of the Helekites; 31 and [of] Asriel, the family of the Asrielites; and [of] Shechem, the family of the Shechemites; 32 and [of] Shemida, the family of the Shemidaites; and [of] Hephher, the family of the Hephherites. 33 Now Zelophehad the

son of Hopher had no sons, but only daughters; and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. 34 These are the families of Manasseh; and those who were numbered of them were 52,700.

The census of Joseph's tribe is done by the counting of his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. The census of Manasseh, Joseph's firstborn son (Gen 41:51), includes eight generations. Manasseh has increased in number. That has to do with the daughters of Zelophehad (Num 27:1-11). They have a special interest in the inheritance. They are not among the numbered in Numbers 1. But here, in view of the land, they show their interest in the land. God appreciates this and counts it. In Numbers 27 we see what inspires them.

Verses 35-37 | Ephraim Counted

35 These are the sons of Ephraim according to their families: of Shuthelah, the family of the Shuthelahites; of Becher, the family of the Becherites; of Tahan, the family of the Tahanites. 36 These are the sons of Shuthelah: of Eran, the family of the Eranites. 37 These are the families of the sons of Ephraim according to those who were numbered of them, 32,500. These are the sons of Joseph according to their families.

The census of Ephraim, Joseph's second son (Gen 41:52), includes four generations.

Verses 38-41 | Benjamin Counted

38 The sons of Benjamin according to their families: of Bela, the family of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the family of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the family of the Ahiramites; 39 of Shephupham, the family of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the family of the Huphamites. 40 The sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: [of Ard], the family of the Ardites; of Naaman, the family of the Naamites. 41 These are the sons of Benjamin according to their families; and those who were numbered of them were 45,600.

The census of Benjamin includes seven generations.

Verses 42-43 | Dan Counted

42 These are the sons of Dan according to their families: of Shuham, the family of the Shuhamites. These are the families of Dan according to their families. 43

All the families of the Shuhamites, according to those who were numbered of them, were 64,400.

The census of Dan concerns one generation.

Verses 44-47 | Asher Counted

44 The sons of Asher according to their families: of Imnah, the family of the Imnites; of Ishvi, the family of the Ishvoites; of Beriah, the family of the Beriites.

45 Of the sons of Beriah: of Heber, the family of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the family of the Malchielites.

46 The name of the daughter of Asher [was] Serah. 47 These are the families of the sons of Asher according to those who were numbered of them, 53,400.

The census of Asher includes five generations. A daughter is also mentioned.

Verses 48-50 | Naphtali Counted

48 The sons of Naphtali according to their families: of Jahzeel, the family of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the family of the Gunites; 49 of Jezer, the family of the Jezerites; of Shillem, the family of the Shillemites. 50 These are the families of Naphtali according to their families; and those who were numbered of them were 45,400.

The census of Naphtali includes four generations.

Verse 51 | All Counted Israelites

51 These are those who were numbered of the sons of Israel, 601,730.

In the wilderness more than 600,000 members of God's people have perished. But the people still have more than 600,000 members, although a little less over them – see the table at verses 1-4. It is a great miracle of God and a proof of His grace, that despite all the plagues the people are hardly decreased in number.

Verses 52-56 | The Size of the Inheritance

52 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 53 "Among these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. 54 To the larger [group] you shall increase their inheritance, and to the smaller [group] you

shall diminish their inheritance; each shall be given their inheritance according to those who were numbered of them. 55 But the land shall be divided by lot. They shall receive their inheritance according to the names of the tribes of their fathers. 56 According to the selection by lot, their inheritance shall be divided between the larger and the smaller [groups]."

The size of the inheritance depends on the size of the family. Where because of unfaithfulness, as with Simeon, the family has become smaller, that also means a smaller inheritance, so less pleasure.

The family of God's children is large. Yet the enjoyment of the inheritance is only experienced by those who are faithful in their lives with the Lord. The more there are, the more the inheritance is enjoyed.

Enjoying the inheritance is done in a tribal context. Each family stays within the borders that the LORD has determined for each tribe. One application may be that at the place where we meet as a local church, we enjoy the heavenly blessings together.

A practical application is that we should not go to another local church because we like it more there. Such behavior indicates that we are not content with our own "inheritance" which has been given to us, the place where the Lord has placed us. It may also have to do with running away from certain responsibilities.

Verses 57-62 | Levi Counted

57 These are those who were numbered of the Levites according to their families: of Gershon, the family of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the family of the Kohathites; of Merari, the family of the Merarites. 58 These are the families of Levi: the family of the Libnites, the family of the Hebronites, the family of the Mahlites, the family of the Mushites, the family of the Korahites. Kohath became the father of Amram. 59 The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram: Aaron and Moses and their sister Miriam. 60 To Aaron were born Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. 61 But Nadab and Abihu died when they offered strange fire before the LORD. 62 Those who were numbered of them were 23,000, every male from a month old and upward, for they were not numbered

among the sons of Israel since no inheritance was given to them among the sons of Israel.

The census of the privileged tribe of Levi also reminds us of the dark event in the beginning of their history as priests. The unfaithfulness of Nadab and Abihu is not concealed (verse 61; Lev 10:1-2).

Verses 63-65 | Reminder of the First Census

63 These are those who were numbered by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who numbered the sons of Israel in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho. 64 But among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest, who numbered the sons of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. 65 For the LORD had said of them, "They shall surely die in the wilderness." And not a man was left of them, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.

Here the census in the wilderness of Sinai is recalled. None of that first census could be included in this new census, except Joshua and Caleb. God has fulfilled His word of judgment, just as He fulfils His word of blessing. God always performs what He has said.

Numbers 27

Verses 1-4 | The Daughters of Zelophehad

1 Then the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hepher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh the son of Joseph, came near; and these are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah and Hoglah and Milcah and Tirzah. 2 They stood before Moses and before Eleazar the priest and before the leaders and all the congregation, at the doorway of the tent of meeting, saying, 3 "Our father died in the wilderness, yet he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against the LORD in the company of Korah; but he died in his own sin, and he had no sons. 4 Why should the name of our father be withdrawn from among his family because he had no son? Give us a possession among our father's brothers."

The daughters of Zelophehad are an illustration of what is written about the inheritance in the previous chapter. They belong to a family that is entitled to a portion of the land. Their father has died and they have no brother. This means that the inheritance of their family will be lost. But the inheritance is too precious for them. They go with this problem to Moses and present it to him and the others who are present at the doorway of the tent of meeting. The women walk right through the camp and appear in the center of the religion. With their question they openly testify of their desires in that place.

With a boldness inherent to faith, they ask for a solution. Thereby they count on the goodness of God. And not in vain. When they are in the land, they ask Eleazar for their inheritance with an appeal to what the LORD has said to Moses (Jos 17:3-4). The whole performance of the women and its result proves that women are not a disadvantaged group for God. He rewards the faith of women as much as of men.

The five women form a great contrast to the whole tenor of grumbling, complaining and revolt of the people during the wilderness journey. The people have always expressed a longing for what they have left behind in Egypt. These women are looking forward. They are the first to show a

longing for the promised land. They show a feeling with which the LORD fully agrees (verse 7). He greatly appreciates our desires for the rich blessings He has prepared for us in heaven.

In these women we see not only trust in the goodness of God, but also strength of faith with a view to taking possession of the inheritance. Getting something promised is one thing, actually making it your property is another. These women know what they want.

They also show respect for their deceased father. He died, but not as a rebel. At the same time, their affection for him does not make them blind to his failure. They agree with God's judgment on him. He died for his own sin. It was not a sin that God had to visit on his daughters (cf. Exo 20:5; 34:7). He has borne the consequences of his actions. But that doesn't make him despised in their eyes. He will have been a good father, with his shortcomings. They do not wish that his name will be erased, but that it will continue to exist. God appreciates this respect.

Verses 5-11 | Statutory Ordinance If Someone Has No Son

5 So Moses brought their case before the LORD. 6 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 7 "The daughters of Zelophehad are right in [their] statements. You shall surely give them a hereditary possession among their father's brothers, and you shall transfer the inheritance of their father to them. 8 Further, you shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If a man dies and has no son, then you shall transfer his inheritance to his daughter. 9 If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. 10 If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. 11 If his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his nearest relative in his own family, and he shall possess it; and it shall be a statutory ordinance to the sons of Israel, just as the LORD commanded Moses.'"

When the women have come to Moses with their question, he takes their question seriously. This is an unprecedented case. Moses has no ready-made answer. He is not ashamed of that. He knows where to go with his question. He goes with it to the LORD and receives an answer. Whoever approaches Him in confidence will always receive an answer.

If you count on the goodness of God, you always get more than you have asked. To the question of the five sisters comes an answer that means a blessing for the whole people. The LORD determines who gets the inheritance if someone has no son. If the manly element is missing, that is to say in the application that the spiritual energy has disappeared, that does not mean that there is nothing more to enjoy. Then the Lord gives other possibilities.

We never have to sit back when, spiritually speaking, the family is incomplete. Even if we only meet with a few in all weakness, we as members of the family of God may enjoy together all that has been given to us in Christ as blessings. We do not need to lose (the enjoyment of) our inheritance.

In the last chapter of this book, in Numbers 36, this ordinance is discussed further. There, in response to a new question, it is stipulated that daughters who are entitled to an inheritance may not marry outside their tribe.

Verses 12-14 | Moses Is Allowed to See the Land

12 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go up to this mountain of Abarim, and see the land which I have given to the sons of Israel. 13 When you have seen it, you too will be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother was; 14 for in the wilderness of Zin, during the strife of the congregation, you rebelled against My command to treat Me as holy before their eyes at the water." (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.)

Moses will not be allowed to enter the land because of his sin. He will soon have to die. The LORD reminds him of this. Before the LORD speaks to him about his death and the sin that caused it, he speaks to Moses about seeing the land that the Israelites will take possession of. In this way He soothes the pain of judgment and makes it easier for Moses to reconcile with God's policy. Moses gets the satisfaction of seeing the land. In Deuteronomy 34 it is told that he sees it and how he dies (Deu 34:1-6).

The LORD says to Moses that he, like his brother, will be gathered his people. Moses saw Aaron die. With what words will he have encouraged his brother? Now he is reminded. He and his ancestors will wait in the grave for the fulfillment of the whole plan of salvation of God.

Verses 15-17 | Moses Asks for a Successor

15 Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, 16 "May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, 17 who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

There is no bitterness or jealousy at all with Moses. He does not fall into self-pity. He is not concerned with his end. His heart continues to go out to God's people. In their favor, he asks for a successor. He adds a 'profile': it must be a shepherd who cares about the sheep. With this we see with Moses the same as with the Lord Jesus. When we see the need among God's people, we will pray that the Lord will provide for them by giving workers. The Lord Jesus urges us to do so (Mt 9:36-38).

Moses does not ask for someone who knows everything well, but for someone who leads the people visibly and trustworthily. He addresses his request to the "LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh", an expression which he has used before (Num 16:22). He Who is the God of the covenant with his people is also the One Who knows what goes on in the spirit of every man (cf. Acts 1:24a). With this expression Moses indicates the sovereignty of God. He wishes God to use His sovereignty to give His people the shepherd they need.

Verses 18-23 | Joshua Succeeds Moses

18 So the LORD said to Moses, "Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; 19 and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. 20 You shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey [him]. 21 Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go out and at his command they shall come in, [both] he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation." 22 Moses did just as the LORD commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. 23 Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

Moses receives an immediate response to his request. The answer shows that what he has asked is God's thoughts. Joshua will be the successor of Moses. Moses must lay his hand on him in the presence of Eleazar and all the people. Everyone must witness that Joshua will have the same position as Moses and, as a result, the same authority.

During the thirty-eight years of the wilderness journey we hear nothing of Joshua. But God knows him and has shaped him. He knows what spirit is present in him: in Joshua the Spirit of God is present. Moses has led the people through the wilderness. Joshua will bring the people into the land. Moses is a picture of the Lord Jesus as the One Who shows His people, the church, the way through the wilderness. Joshua is a picture of the Lord Jesus Who introduces His heavenly people in the Spirit into the heavenly blessings.

Moses and Joshua form a unity. That makes the laying on of hands clear. In them we see the Lord Jesus as "the author [Moses] and perfecter [Joshua] of faith" (Heb 12:2). Moses has redeemed God's people from Egypt. The Lord Jesus redeemed His people from the power of sin. By His death, resurrection, and ascension He made way for the Spirit (Jn 16:7).

Joshua brings the people into the land. The Lord Jesus does this now through His Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit He makes the church familiar with everything of Himself and the blessings of the heavenly places: "But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose [it] to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose [it] to you" (Jn 16:13-15).

Aaron is succeeded by Eleazar. They too are both a picture of the Lord Jesus. Aaron is the picture of the Lord Jesus as the One Who carries His people through the wilderness on His shoulders (a picture of strength) and on His chest (a picture of love). Eleazar presents the Lord Jesus as the High Priest who represents His people in heaven.

Moses and Aaron are connected to each other for the liberation from Egypt. Joshua and Eleazar are connected for the entry into the land. Joshua stands

before Eleazar, as if he is subordinate to him. It expresses that leadership is always subject to priesthood. A person can never be a good leader if he is not a good priest.

The fact that Joshua stands before Eleazar also expresses the fact that taking possession of the land under the guidance of Joshua depends on the high priest. We see in it the picture that everything we can enjoy of the heavenly blessings through the Spirit is based on the intercession of the Lord Jesus as High Priest. Joshua is dependent on the priesthood for his advancement. Thus the presence and working of the Holy Spirit depends on the presence of Christ in the holy place.

Through Eleazar the will of God can be known. The urim is with him, which means 'lights'. Divine light about the manner of taking possession of the land is obtained from the Lord Jesus as the High Priest. What He makes clear can then be done in the power of the Spirit.

Numbers 28

Introduction

Numbers 28-29 are only easy to understand when we see that we are dealing with a people who have come to the end of the wilderness journey. The feasts we find in these chapters and in connection with which the sacrifices are made are also found in Exodus 23, Leviticus 23 and Deuteronomy 16.

In each bible book they are viewed from a different angle:

1. In Exodus 23 the feasts are connected with the law, the rights of God.
2. In Leviticus 23 the emphasis is on the feasts themselves and the significance they have for the Israelites; they prophetically represent the history of God's people.
3. In Deuteronomy 16 it is about the time that the people are in the land and the feasts are in a special connection with "the place where the LORD chooses to establish His name" (Deu 16:2).
4. In Numbers 28-29 the accent is on the offerings brought during the feasts. These are offerings of which God says: "My offering, My food for My offerings by fire, of a soothing aroma to Me" (Num 28:2).

These two chapters are full of sacrifices. They all represent Christ in His Person and His work. Christ and His offering are all for God's heart. He wishes it to be the same with us. Therefore, He commands us to come up with these offerings, that is, to tell Him about the different aspects of His Son's offering that emerge in the various offerings.

In the wilderness the people are not ready for these offerings. Now that they are at the end of the wilderness journey and are just in front of the land, they are spiritually ripe for it. In view of the land, God is going to tell His people what He wants them to do there: He wants them to bring offerings to Him there. The old generation died in the wilderness. He addresses himself to a new people and speaks to them about the wishes of his heart towards the Lord Jesus, for all offerings speak of him.

Numbers is about the wilderness journey. The meaning of this is the life of God's people on earth as a place of trial. But the earth will not always

remain a place of trial. For there will come a time when the earth will be the resting-place for God's people. The offerings God speaks about with His people here refer to that time.

Verses 1-2 | Command to Bring Offerings to the LORD

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Command the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be careful to present My offering, My food for My offerings by fire, of a soothing aroma to Me, at their appointed time.'

After the change of leadership that has passed from Moses to Joshua, God makes it clear that the transfer of leadership does not change the bringing of offerings to Him. God makes clear to the people to what He is entitled. In Numbers 15, He also spoke of offerings. There it is about offerings of a voluntary nature and there they are in contrast with an apostate people. However, the apostasy of the people does not diminish the possibility for the few faithful to bring the LORD offerings when they will have arrived in the land. But even then, He connects His conditions to the way He wants to see the offerings brought.

Here God will speak of a multitude of offerings in connection with the various feasts that the people will celebrate in the land. These are regulations for the people as a whole. God will present the feasts in their full extent and glory. Everything is about Him. This can be seen in the recurring words "My" and "Me". The people must know what belongs to Him. Are we aware of that?

This is not about knowing the truth about the feasts. We find the truth about the feasts in Leviticus 23. There we find what the feasts mean. What still needs to be learned is what is due to God in each of those steps, with each of those feasts. And what is due to God? These chapters describe a large number of burnt offerings. No peace offerings, only a few sin offerings, but especially burnt offerings. This represents the work of the Lord Jesus in what God has enjoyed of it, what the Lord Jesus has given to God in it. What we have here is therefore the 'material' for eternal worship. We give Him in worship what He has given us in His Son.

The multitude of offerings put for our attention in these two chapters bear an overwhelming testimony to the work of the Lord Jesus. All the actions

of God are based on it. And He wants us to be ever more impressed and talk about it with Him. Hence His precept to take care to bring Him “My offering, My food for My offerings by fire, of a soothing aroma to Me” (Verse 2).

As said, God speaks to us about the all surpassing offering of His Son in His great richness as we come to the end of our wilderness experiences. The fact is, that the more experience we have gained in the wilderness about who we are and who He is, the more we will long to honor and worship Him.

Verses 3-8 | The Daily Burnt Offering

3 You shall say to them, ‘This is the offering by fire which you shall offer to the LORD: two male lambs one year old without defect [as] a continual burnt offering every day. 4 You shall offer the one lamb in the morning and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight; 5 also a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a grain offering, mixed with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil. 6 It is a continual burnt offering which was ordained in Mount Sinai as a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD. 7 Then the drink offering with it [shall be] a fourth of a hin for each lamb, in the holy place you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to the LORD. 8 The other lamb you shall offer at twilight; as the grain offering of the morning and as its drink offering, you shall offer it, an offering by fire, a soothing aroma to the LORD.

The first sacrifice God speaks of is the daily burnt offering. It consists of a sheep or a lamb. Every day a lamb is brought in the morning and a lamb in the evening, that is, “continually” (verses 4,10; Exo 29:38). It is the constant presentation of the value of Christ. God would like to be reminded of Christ daily, that is to say, without any break. Doing so also assures us that we will not forget Him. We may also see in it that God looks at us, His children, in His Son as the burnt offering.

The burnt offering must also be accompanied by a grain offering. That speaks of the life of the Lord Jesus. We may tell God that that Man accomplished that wonderful work. It is due to God. We may thank Him for all the good things in creation, but above all He wants to hear from us Who the Lord Jesus is for Him.

Verses 9-10 | The Burnt Offering on the Sabbath Day

9 *'Then on the sabbath day two male lambs one year old without defect, and two-tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and its drink offering: 10 [This is] the burnt offering of every sabbath in addition to the continual burnt offering and its drink offering.*

Additional offerings must be brought on the sabbath day. It is twice as much as is brought daily. The daily preciousness of Christ remains the same forever. The kingdom of peace and eternity confirm what has been seen by us of Christ every day in recent times and what has always stood before God's attention. One application may be that on certain occasions when we are particularly impressed by God's work in Christ, we will honor Him all the more powerfully.

When the true sabbath, that is to say, the rest which will be part of creation during the millennial kingdom of peace, has come, the soothing aroma of the burnt offering will rise in double measure. The appreciation of the sacrifice will be present much fuller and more widely spread, in all creation.

The sabbath in a spiritual sense speaks of the rest that God has found in the work of the Lord Jesus and that the believer has also found in that work. In a song we say it this way: 'He in Whom God Himself can rest, is the resting point for me too'.

Verses 11-15 | Offerings on the Feast of New Moon

11 *'Then at the beginning of each of your months you shall present a burnt offering to the LORD: two bulls and one ram, seven male lambs one year old without defect; 12 and three-tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, for each bull; and two-tenths of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, for the one ram; 13 and a tenth [of an ephah] of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering for each lamb, for a burnt offering of a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD. 14 Their drink offerings shall be half a hin of wine for a bull and a third of a hin for the ram and a fourth of a hin for a lamb; this is the burnt offering of each month throughout the months of the year. 15 And one male goat for a sin offering to the LORD; it shall be offered with its drink offering in addition to the continual burnt offering.*

Before looking at the offerings we find in these verses on the occasion of the Feast of New Moon, it is good, as an introduction to the offerings, to first summarize the rest of the chapter and the whole following chapter (Numbers 28:11-29:40). In that section it is about the monthly and annual feasts and the sacrifices that are made.

They are divided into two series of three feasts. The first series can be applied to the church. Those feasts have their fulfillment in the present time. The second series can be applied to Israel. They will find their fulfillment in the restoration of Israel as God's people on earth.

The first three feasts belong together. This can be seen from the fact that the same offerings are brought at these feasts. One feast is brought every first day of a new month. The next two feasts are held in the first half of the year, one in the first month and one in the third month. On

1. the Feast of New Moon (verses 11-15),
2. the Feast of Unleavened Bread, immediately following the Passover (verses 16-25) and
3. the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost (verses 26-31)

are brought as offerings:

1. two bulls for a burnt offering; for each bull the following is added
 - a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil and
 - a drink offering of half a hin of wine
2. one ram for a burnt offering; and
 - a grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil and
 - a drink offering of a third of a hin of wine
3. seven male lambs one year old for a burnt offering and per lamb
 - a grain offering of a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, and
 - a drink offering of a fourth of a hin of wine
4. a goat for a sin offering

Here we see larger burnt offerings than with the daily burnt offering and the burnt offering on the sabbath. On the occasion of the feasts, no lambs or sheep are brought as burnt offerings, as happens with the daily and weekly burnt offering, but bulls. They are also greater offerings than those brought in the second series. There it is one bull, while two bulls are brought here. At these three feasts a ram is also brought as a burnt offering. And every time there is talk of seven sheep or lambs.

All these sacrifices speak of the Lord Jesus.

1. The bull represents how He went his way to the cross in irresistible force and completely offered himself up to God there.
2. The ram suggests that He did so in perfect dedication to God.
3. The sheep or the lamb depicts that He completed the whole work without any complaint, without any restraint, completely willing. The number seven underlines that He has worked a complete salvation through His work on the cross. He is the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29).

God wants us to bring those offerings to Him as proof of our recognition and agreement with His appreciation of His Son's offering. For Israel there are daily, weekly, monthly, and annual special occasions to honor Him through a wide variety of offerings that all speak of the great work His Son has done and to tell Him about the special Person His Son is.

It calls upon us, children of God, to make every circumstance in which we find ourselves an opportunity to thank God (1Thes 5:18). If He is everything for us, it will not be difficult for us. We will then elaborate in telling the Father Who the Lord Jesus is for us. To do so, we will want to explore Scripture in order to learn more and more about the glory of the Son.

Now let's look at verses 11-15. The expression "at the beginning of each of your months" appears only here in the five books of Moses. This may have to do with the fact that it is about the experiences and changes to which a people in the wilderness is subject. Again and again God makes a new beginning possible.

The Feast of the New Moon speaks of the new light that God lets shine on earth on His testimony, while it is still night. This testimony is now given by the church on earth while in the world it is night.

This testimony can only be given on the basis of the work of the Lord Jesus as the burnt offering, which is His glorification of God. The ram speaks of the dedication of the Lord Jesus. He is our example of dedication. We testify on earth, where sin is still present. This is why there is also a sin offering, which indicates that the Lord Jesus destroyed the power of sin.

Verses 16-25 | Offers on the Passover

16 'Then on the fourteenth day of the first month shall be the LORD's Passover. 17 On the fifteenth day of this month [shall be] a feast, unleavened bread [shall be] eaten for seven days. 18 On the first day [shall be] a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. 19 You shall present an offering by fire, a burnt offering to the LORD: two bulls and one ram and seven male lambs one year old, having them without defect. 20 For their grain offering, you shall offer fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths [of an ephah] for a bull and two-tenths for the ram. 21 A tenth [of an ephah] you shall offer for each of the seven lambs; 22 and one male goat for a sin offering to make atonement for you. 23 You shall present these besides the burnt offering of the morning, which is for a continual burnt offering. 24 After this manner you shall present daily, for seven days, the food of the offering by fire, of a soothing aroma to the LORD; it shall be presented with its drink offering in addition to the continual burnt offering. 25 On the seventh day you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work.

The Passover is the memory of the redemption from Egypt. The Passover lamb recalls the death of the Lord Jesus as necessary for our redemption from the power and slavery of Satan, sin and the world, represented in the Pharaoh and Egypt. The Passover lamb is not mentioned here. The Passover flows, as it were, into the Feast of Unleavened Bread, indicating the close connection between the two.

In Luke 22 it is thus said: "Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover" (Lk 22:1). The emphasis is on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, but its exit point cannot be ignored. The Passover and the Feast of

Unleavened Bread form a unity and cannot be separated from each other, although they are distinguished from each other.

The connection between the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread has an important meaning for us. The Passover speaks to us of Christ (1Cor 5:7b). For us, for whom Christ “was sacrificed”, the Feast of Unleavened Bread means that there may be no place in our lives for sin, of which leaven is invariably a picture in Scripture. On the contrary, our life may be a feast in which sincerity and truth determine the brilliance of this feast (1Cor 5:8).

The offerings brought at this feast determine that we can only celebrate this feast because He has been what is represented in these offerings. If we bring these offerings – and God asks that from us! – we ourselves are also constantly reminded of what the Lord Jesus has been and has done for God and that it is only because of this that we can celebrate this feast.

Verses 26-31 | Offerings on the Feast of Weeks

26 'Also on the day of the first fruits, when you present a new grain offering to the LORD in your [Feast of] Weeks, you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. 27 You shall offer a burnt offering for a soothing aroma to the LORD: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs one year old; 28 and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths [of an ephah] for each bull, two-tenths for the one ram, 29 a tenth for each of the seven lambs; 30 [also] one male goat to make atonement for you. 31 Besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, you shall present [them] with their drink offerings. They shall be without defect.

The Feast of Weeks or Pentecost follows fifty days, or seven weeks, after the Passover, which means that is celebrated in the third month. At this feast the first fruits of the harvest are brought to the LORD as a new grain offering.

What is happening here must be distinguished from the sheaf of the first fruits that is brought after the Passover (Lev 23:9-14). The sheaf of the first fruits speaks of the resurrection of Christ as the First Fruits from the dead (1Cor 15:20). However, the Feast of the first fruits or Pentecost speaks of what happens in Acts 2. There, at the day of Pentecost, the believers are

baptized into one body and the church is formed (Acts 2:1-4). The church is as a body connected to Christ as the Head and is “a kind of first fruits among His creatures” (Jam 1:18).

Numbers 29

Introduction

The second series of three feasts falls in the second half of the year. The offerings on the occasion of those feasts are all brought in the seventh month. Just like the feasts of the first series belong together in a special way, the feasts of the second series also belong together in a special way. The first series is mainly of application to the church, the second series has particular significance with regard to Israel.

On the Feast of blowing of trumpets on the first day (verses 1-6) and on the great Day of Atonement on the tenth day (verses 7-11) are offered as offerings added to the other offerings to be made on that day:

1. one bull for a burnt offering and
a grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah,
2. one ram for a burnt offering; and
a grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: two-tenths of an ephah,
3. seven male lambs one year old without defect for a burnt offering
and per lamb
a grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: one-tenth of an ephah and
4. one male goat for a sin offering.

On the Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth to the twenty-second day (verses 12-38) are brought on the first day, together with the other sacrifices prescribed for that day:

1. thirteen bulls and per bull
a grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah
2. two rams and per ram
a grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: two-tenths of an ephah
3. fourteen male lambs one year old without defect and per lamb
a grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: one-tenths of an ephah
4. one goat as a sin offering

These offerings are also made on the second to the seventh day of the feast. However, there is one exception: every day one bull less is sacrificed.

Verses 1-6 | Offerings on the Feast of Blowing Trumpets

1 Now in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall also have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. It will be to you a day for blowing trumpets. 2 You shall offer a burnt offering as a soothing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, [and] seven male lambs one year old without defect; 3 also their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths [of an ephah] for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, 4 and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs. 5 [Offer] one male goat for a sin offering, to make atonement for you, 6 besides the burnt offering of the new moon and its grain offering, and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings, according to their ordinance, for a soothing aroma, an offering by fire to the LORD.

The feasts of this chapter speak to us of what God will do with Israel. It all starts with the Feast of blowing trumpets. We live in the end time, where God will start again with Israel. We can observe the signs. We live in a spiritual sense at the end of the wilderness journey of the Christian church. We could perhaps say that that period began with the sound of the call: “Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet [him]! (Mt 25:6b). We can see this as the forerunner of the Feast of blowing trumpets.

When the Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus, has come for the church and has taken her from the earth, He will again occupy Himself with Israel as His people on earth. He will be able to do that on the basis of His sacrifice. His sacrifice is multifaceted. This versatility is reflected in the various types of offerings brought here. When telling the Father about Who the Lord Jesus is for His heart, it is good to remember His intentions regarding Israel.

Verses 7-11 | Offerings on the Day of Atonement

7 Then on the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall humble yourselves; you shall not do any work. 8 You shall present a burnt offering to the LORD [as] a soothing aroma: one bull, one ram, seven male lambs one year old, having them without defect; 9 and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths [of an ephah] for the bull,

two-tenths for the one ram, 10 a tenth for each of the seven lambs; 11 one male goat for a sin offering, besides the sin offering of atonement and the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings.

The day of atonement expresses the first effect of God's renewed action with His earthly people. There will take place a great humiliation among the people, confession of the sins with which they have provoked God. It concerns the sins of idolatry and the rejection of the Lord Jesus. When they look on Him, they will come to a great general and also individual grief (Rev 1:7; Zec 12:10-14).

This will lead to an abundance of offerings being made. The depth of the awareness of sin works a deep and great admiration for the Lord Jesus. That is seen in the picture here. On the day of atonement, no less than thirteen burnt offerings are brought. In Leviticus 16 the sin offering is in the foreground, here it is especially the burnt offering.

Verses 12-38 | Offerings on the Feast of Booth

12 'Then on the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work, and you shall observe a feast to the LORD for seven days. 13 You shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire as a soothing aroma to the LORD: thirteen bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old, which are without defect; 14 and their grain offering, fine flour mixed with oil: three-tenths [of an ephah] for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, 15 and a tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; 16 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering. 17 'Then on the second day: twelve bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old without defect; 18 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams and for the lambs, by their number according to the ordinance; 19 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering, and their drink offerings. 20 'Then on the third day: eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old without defect; 21 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams and for the lambs, by their number according to the ordinance; 22 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering. 23 'Then on the fourth day: ten bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs

one year old without defect; 24 their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams and for the lambs, by their number according to the ordinance; 25 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering. 26 'Then on the fifth day: nine bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old without defect; 27 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams and for the lambs, by their number according to the ordinance; 28 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering. 29 'Then on the sixth day: eight bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old without defect; 30 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams and for the lambs, by their number according to the ordinance; 31 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offerings. 32 'Then on the seventh day: seven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs one year old without defect; 33 and their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams and for the lambs, by their number according to the ordinance; 34 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering, its grain offering and its drink offering. 35 'On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall do no laborious work. 36 But you shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire, as a soothing aroma to the LORD: one bull, one ram, seven male lambs one year old without defect; 37 their grain offering and their drink offerings for the bull, for the ram and for the lambs, by their number according to the ordinance; 38 and one male goat for a sin offering, besides the continual burnt offering and its grain offering and its drink offering.

The previous offerings already bear witness to abundance. On the occasion of this last feast, a tidal wave of offerings is added, as it were. It therefore represents the exuberant praise that will be brought to God during the kingdom of peace of which this feast speaks. We find this exuberance for example in the last psalms of the book of Psalms.

The Feast of Booth lasts seven days, which means a perfect period. Like the sabbath, this feast refers to the kingdom of peace. The feast starts with thirteen bulls. This is one less than the number of fourteen that speaks of double perfection, for the knowledge of Christ does not reach that perfection even in the realm of peace. Even at this feast we see in the picture of the diminishing number of offerings that the appreciation of Christ's sac-

rifice will diminish as the time of the kingdom of peace passes. But the diminishing goes no further than until seven bulls on the seventh day (verse 32). Although the appreciation diminishes, the perfect value – of which the number seven speaks – of the work itself remains in the attention.

We see this phenomenon of diminishing appreciation also in the history of the church which is prophetically presented to us in Revelation 2-3. It begins with leaving the first love in the message to the church in Ephesus (Rev 2:4) and ends with disgusting lukewarmness in the message to the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:16).

However, there is still an eighth day (verse 35). That speaks of a new beginning and also of a beginning without an end. The period of the empire of peace is followed by eternity. There everything is new and without end. On that day, too, the prescribed offerings must be brought. Everything that is of God, whether in time or for eternity, is exclusively based on the work of the Lord Jesus.

On the eighth day the same offerings are brought as on the day of atonement. The great atonement made by the Lord Jesus on the cross remains forever the certain basis of all that we enjoy there continually, without interruption and perfectly (Heb 9:12; 10:14).

With all the fullness that is present at all feasts and especially at the Feast of Booth, the sin offering does not fail. This shows that, no matter how blessed we are with all that Christ's work has worked for us, we will always remember what has been necessary for our sins. We will never forget that His work has also been necessary for the cleansing of our sins: "For he who lacks these [qualities] is blind [or] short-sighted, having forgotten [his] purification from his former sins" (2Pet 1:9).

Verses 39-40 | Ratification of the Foregoing

39 *'You shall present these to the LORD at your appointed times, besides your votive offerings and your freewill offerings, for your burnt offerings and for your grain offerings and for your drink offerings and for your peace offerings.'*
 40 *Moses spoke to the sons of Israel in accordance with all that the LORD had commanded Moses.*

God gives here the ratification of the foregoing. He also mentions that the regulations given do not affect the voluntariness of other offerings. He is entitled to our worship. That is right. He also seeks hearts that approach Him in voluntary worship, as the Lord Jesus says: "For such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers" (Jn 4:23).

We see such a mind among the people of Israel in the days of King Josiah: "Then the whole assembly decided to celebrate [the feast] another seven days, so they celebrated the seven days with joy" (2Chr 30:23). After the obligatory celebration of the Feast of Booth, another seven days of celebration is added with a voluntary heart.

Numbers 30

Introduction

It is still about a people that is about to enter the promised land. God prepares His people for this. With this in mind, in the previous chapters He spoke of the offerings He expects His people to bring, especially on the feasts. These are national compulsory offerings.

God expects another thing from His people: their dedication. This will be discussed in this chapter. We offer Him offerings and we offer Him ourselves. These are personal voluntary vows.

No one is obliged to make a vow. We must think carefully about whether we can keep the vow, otherwise we must not make the vow. In general, this rule applies: whoever vows to the Lord is bound to keep it (Ecc 5:3-4).

Verse 1 | Moses Speaks to the Heads of the Tribes

1 Then Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the word which the LORD has commanded.

The heads of the tribes are addressed because it is a family matter. They must ensure that, where appropriate, the LORD's commandment is complied where it concerns family or marriage questions.

Verse 2 | Vow of a Man

2 If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

There is a difference between a man and a woman who offer to do or leave something for the LORD. A man is always obliged to keep the vow he makes. The vow may be to give something of his property to the LORD or to sanctify it for Him or to fast or to refrain from anything.

The man is a picture of Christ. He has done "according to all that proceeded out of his mouth". The Lord Jesus said: "Behold, I have come to do Your will" (Heb 10:9; Psa 40:7-8). He has fully fulfilled the obligation which He

has assumed therein. For Him there has been no way back, nor has there been a release from His vow. When He asks the Father to take away the cup, His perfect dedication is evident from the addition “yet not what I will, but what You will” (Mk 14:36).

Verses 3-5 | Vow of a Woman in Her Youth

3 “Also if a woman makes a vow to the LORD, and binds herself by an obligation in her father’s house in her youth, 4 and her father hears her vow and her obligation by which she has bound herself, and her father says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand and every obligation by which she has bound herself shall stand. 5 But if her father should forbid her on the day he hears [of it], none of her vows or her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand; and the LORD will forgive her because her father had forbidden her.

These verses are about the vow of a young, unmarried woman who still lives with her father at home. If her father hears it and remains silent, he agrees by his silence and the vow is valid. However, if her father forbids her to comply with the vow, so refuses to agree, then the vow is not valid. She has promised something that she is unable to keep.

Then the grace of the LORD shines: The LORD will forgive her words spoken too quickly (verses 5,8,12). She has thought she would please God, but has not been aware of her incompetence and submissive position. She should have consulted her father first. If her vow contains anything disadvantageous for the family, her father will be able to release her from that promise. All that she can promise belongs to her father.

She shows her obedience to her father by refraining from keeping her vow. The obedience to her father is so highly appreciated by the LORD that He forgives her. She needs forgiveness because her good intentions were not according to the will of God. She thought she was doing a service to God, while she did not think about the bad consequences of her vow for the family.

In general, for a woman who makes a vow, its validity depends on what the man under whom she stands does with it. God gives each person a responsibility that is in accordance with their position. God expects the man who is the head of the woman (1Cor 11:3) to know his responsibility.

The relation of the woman to the man may be that of a daughter to her father (verses 3-5) and that of a wife to her husband (verses 6-8; 10-15). In the woman we see a picture of Israel. The LORD is in relation with Israel as a Father – “for I am to Israel a Father” (Jer 31:9) – and also as a Husband (Jer 31:32b).

Israel has also made vows to God. The people have said three times: “We will do everything the LORD has said” (Exo 19:8; 24:3,7). And God has kept silent. He has never overruled the promise, but on the contrary he has confirmed it by giving the people the law. Israel is still responsible for the vows with which it has committed itself to God. God has not overruled the vows in His government, that the people may learn what is in their hearts.

Verses 6-8 | Vow of a Betrothed Woman

6 “However, if she should marry while under her vows or the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself, 7 and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her on the day he hears [it], then her vows shall stand and her obligations by which she has bound herself shall stand. 8 But if on the day her husband hears [of it], he forbids her, then he shall annul her vow which she is under and the rash statement of her lips by which she has bound herself; and the LORD will forgive her.

Verses 6-8 are probably about a betrothed woman who has vowed when she is not yet connected to a man and who now takes that vow with her into the marriage. Her husband has now to decide about her vow in the same way as first happened by the father. If he does not directly decide that the vow is invalid, she must keep it. He may not return to it later.

This situation also speaks of Israel and the relationship between the people and the LORD. Israel made vows of faithfulness before God in her betrothals (Jer 2:2).

Verse 9 | Vow of a Widow or of a Divorced Woman

9 “But the vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, everything by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her.

Israel is also represented in the widow and in the divorced woman. They are pictures of women who are on their own account, stripped of the help

of their husbands. These aspects are also recognizable in the people of Israel. God will not leave them in that state. He will have mercy on his people, because his vows are irrevocable (Rom 11:29). The Lord Jesus became Slave forever and came to do the will of God. He has fulfilled the vows. He has accomplished what the people could not accomplish.

Verses 10-15 | The vow of a Married Woman

10 However, if she vowed in her husband's house, or bound herself by an obligation with an oath, 11 and her husband heard [it], but said nothing to her [and] did not forbid her, then all her vows shall stand and every obligation by which she bound herself shall stand. 12 But if her husband indeed annuls them on the day he hears [them], then whatever proceeds out of her lips concerning her vows or concerning the obligation of herself shall not stand; her husband has annulled them, and the LORD will forgive her. 13 "Every vow and every binding oath to humble herself, her husband may confirm it or her husband may annul it. 14 But if her husband indeed says nothing to her from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or all her obligations which are on her; he has confirmed them, because he said nothing to her on the day he heard them. 15 But if he indeed annuls them after he has heard them, then he shall bear her guilt."

The invalidation of the vow can only happen if its fulfillment is taken over by the man. That is what the Lord Jesus did. He bore the iniquity of His people, that is to say, the faithful remnant, to release His people from their vow: "Having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross" (Col 2:14).

We, New Testament believers, are now God's people who may take possession of the spiritual blessings of the heavenly land. But then God also expects us to dedicate ourselves to Him. There is no question of vows. We are children of God and as a church we are the bride of the Lord Jesus. We can convince ourselves of what the will of the Father is through God's Word and the Spirit Who dwells within us. We do not live by vows, but in knowing God's will.

The word of the Lord Jesus applies to us: “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’ But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ [or] ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil” (Mt 5:33-37).

Verse 16 | Summary

16 These are the statutes which the LORD commanded Moses, [as] between a man and his wife, [and as] between a father and his daughter, [while she is] in her youth in her father’s house.

This final verse is an endorsement of the previous section. The whole of what is said about vows in this section is opened (verse 1) and concluded with the emphatic announcement that it is “commanded” by the LORD.

Numbers 31

Verses 1-2 | Command to Take Vengeance on the Midianites

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Take full vengeance for the sons of Israel on the Midianites; afterward you will be gathered to your people."

Moses gets his last task here. Before the people can take possession of the blessings of the land, the people must take the LORD's vengeance on Midian. The evil connections with these enemies must be broken, otherwise the blessing cannot be enjoyed. These connections are wicked in God's eye and form an obstacle to His blessing. God does not allow His servant Moses to leave the world until he has seen the full revenge. We also see here that a servant is not taken away until after his task has been completed.

Midian is a brotherhood. He also descends from Abraham, but his mother is Ketura (Gen 25:1-2). They are neighbors of Moab and have connected themselves with them to destroy Israel (Num 22:4; 25:1-15). On that basis God has pronounced His judgment on them (Num 25:16-18) and now let it be executed by His people.

It is good to say again that the people of God have different kinds of struggles to fight. One of those kinds is the fight against Amalek. This is a defensive struggle that takes place in the wilderness. This struggle represents for us the daily struggle against which surrounds us in the world in which we live. Another kind of struggle is against the Canaanites. This is a struggle of attack, which takes place in the land to conquer it. This struggle represents the struggle we have to fight to master the spiritual blessings God has given us.

Here it is the struggle against Midian. This is a struggle of attack, which takes place in the wilderness. But there is a difference with the fight against Amalek. The fight against Amalek is inevitable. The one against Midian could have been prevented, but has become necessary because of the people's own unfaithfulness. The people had connected with that enemy as a result of the teachings of Balaam.

It does happen that we have become enemies of the world because we have maintained friendly relationships with her. That friendship has become a trap for us. Nevertheless, God gives us a complete victory as soon as we start to regard the world as hostile. However, everything that has seduced us must be completely destroyed, without compromise.

This is what we also find in Christianity, for example when a Christian does not reside in the world as a stranger, but mixes with it, often with nice but unbiblical motives. We can have fun with the people of the world. But where is the limit? When we become aware that we have gone too far, we notice how much effort it takes to get rid of it. If we have gone into something where we don't belong, it requires struggle to get out of it. That would not have been necessary if we had remained faithful.

Verses 3-6 | Who Should Go to the War

3 Moses spoke to the people, saying, "Arm men from among you for the war, that they may go against Midian to execute the LORD's vengeance on Midian. 4 A thousand from each tribe of all the tribes of Israel you shall send to the war." 5 So there were furnished from the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe, twelve thousand armed for war. 6 Moses sent them, a thousand from each tribe, to the war, and Phinehas the son of Eleazar the priest, to the war with them, and the holy vessels and the trumpets for the alarm in his hand.

The LORD speaks of the *vengeance for the sons of Israel* on the Midianites (verse 1). When Moses speaks of it, he speaks of the *LORD's vengeance* (verse 3). A small part of the people must fight the enemy so that it is clear that God has given them victory (cf. Jos 7:1). The whole people, every part of them, must have a share in that struggle. Each tribe furnishes the same number of men.

The leader is not Joshua but Phinehas, the priest. The circumstances of the failure of the people require that. A priest is the leader of this fight, because this fight must work the cleansing of the defilement that has come over Israel through the connection with Midian. Phinehas leads the battle because he has already distinguished himself before in the battle against Midian (Num 25:7-8). He has already used his sword once to judge Midian. If we let ourselves be carried away, away from God, and we want to go

back, then Phinehas must be in front, with the sword. He is the man who knows the holiness of God.

Phinehas knows that the victory must come from the LORD. Therefore he has the trumpets with him, that the LORD may hear them (Num 10:9). Priests can sound the alarm and seek God's help in this necessary battle. By "the holy vessels" are probably meant the trumpets. The fact that they are mentioned after that means that "the trumpets" are a more detailed description of these holy vessels. It seems unlikely that "the holy vessels" mean for example the Urim and the Thummim (Exo 28:30), because Phinehas was not yet the high priest.

Verses 7-12 | The Battle and Its Outcome

7 So they made war against Midian, just as the LORD had commanded Moses, and they killed every male. 8 They killed the kings of Midian along with the [rest of] their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword. 9 The sons of Israel captured the women of Midian and their little ones; and all their cattle and all their flocks and all their goods they plundered. 10 Then they burned all their cities where they lived and all their camps with fire. 11 They took all the spoil and all the prey, both of man and of beast. 12 They brought the captives and the prey and the spoil to Moses, and to Eleazar the priest and to the congregation of the sons of Israel, to the camp at the plains of Moab, which are by the Jordan [opposite] Jericho.

All men are killed. That not all the people have been killed we see later, when Midian is again a formidable enemy of the people (Jdg 6:1-3). The five kings are heads of Midian tribes. In Numbers 25 Zur is called "chief" (Num 25:15), and in Joshua 13 "princes" is mentioned (Jos 13:21).

Also Balaam cannot escape judgment. His name is associated with that of the five kings. It seems that he was their advisor. He falls with the enemies of God's people with whom he has joined. He has wished to die the death of the upright (Num 23:10), but he has continued to live in his wickedness. He did not want to join the people of the righteous. What he is separated from in his life, he is separated from in his death and will remain so forever.

In His grace God gives His people a great victory with much spoil. He fights for his people, because his honor is involved. If we are dragged along by false influences, it also involves God's honor.

Verses 13-20 | Further Commands from Moses

13 Moses and Eleazar the priest and all the leaders of the congregation went out to meet them outside the camp. 14 Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. 15 And Moses said to them, "Have you spared all the women? 16 Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD. 17 Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. 18 But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves. 19 And you, camp outside the camp seven days; whoever has killed any person and whoever has touched any slain, purify yourselves, you and your captives, on the third day and on the seventh day. 20 You shall purify for yourselves every garment and every article of leather and all the work of goats' [hair], and all articles of wood."

On the side of the people there is no loss (verse 49), which is a proof that this battle is from and for God. Now the people still have to learn that evil must be radically eradicated. We must learn that too. The men are killed, because they are a great danger by their strength. But also the women must be killed, because their danger is even greater because of their temptation. It is they who have caused so much harm to the people. The virgins of Midian do not need to be killed. They have not lent themselves to fornication. That teaches us that we must distinguish in the exercise of judgment. Furthermore, we learn that being engaged in evil, even though it is commissioned by the Lord, defiles. It is necessary to purify, to cleanse and use the cleansing water. Reading God's Word brings about that cleansing.

Verses 21-24 | Requirements for Cleansing

21 Then Eleazar the priest said to the men of war who had gone to battle, "This is the statute of the law which the LORD has commanded Moses: 22 only the

gold and the silver, the bronze, the iron, the tin and the lead, 23 everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean, but it shall be purified with water for impurity. But whatever cannot stand the fire you shall pass through the water. 24 And you shall wash your clothes on the seventh day and be clean, and afterward you may enter the camp.”

Everything that Israel has captured must be purified. The cleansing is done by putting it in the fire and then washing it with water. What cannot stand the fire should only be cleansed with water. The cleansing is carried out under the responsibility of Eleazar, who as a high priest must ensure that the cleansing is done strictly according to the prescription of Numbers 19 (Num 19:1-22).

Nothing can be used by Israel without first going through the fire. The spoils that come from our unfaithfulness must also be cleansed to make them suitable for our own use. Everything that has been in the hands of Midian and is therefore unclean must be cleansed.

We can apply this to unbiblical practices of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These unbiblical practices are a consequence of our unfaithfulness. When baptism and supper are brought back to the foundation of the Bible, when they are cleansed of what is contrary to it, they can again be accepted as a blessing from God’s hand and used for His glory.

Fire and water must thus be applied to every truth we confess and every practice we connect to it in order to use it for God. The fire speaks of judgment, the water speaks of the Word of God. Fire consumes what cannot exist for God, water removes dirt and cleanses. Everything that has been under God’s judgment and is in accordance with God’s Word can be used for His glorification. If we get to this point, it is the result of the high priestly work of the Lord Jesus that He, as the true Eleazar, does for us. He leads us to see and to do everything so that God can accept it.

Verses 25-31 | How to Distribute the Booty

25 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 26 “You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers’ [households] of the congregation take a count of the booty that was captured, both of man and of animal; 27 and divide the booty between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation.

28 Levy a tax for the LORD from the men of war who went out to battle, one in five hundred of the persons and of the cattle and of the donkeys and of the sheep; 29 take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priest, as an offering to the LORD. 30 From the sons of Israel's half, you shall take one drawn out of every fifty of the persons, of the cattle, of the donkeys and of the sheep, from all the animals, and give them to the Levites who keep charge of the tabernacle of the LORD." 31 Moses and Eleazar the priest did just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The booty must be divided into two parts. One half is for the warriors, the other half is for the people. The booty is not only for the warriors. David later acts in the same way (1Sam 30:21-25; cf. Jos 22:8). In proportion, the warriors get more. They have also experienced the difficulties, efforts and dangers of war.

The LORD makes sure that every Israelite can share in the joy of victory. He chooses who takes part in the war and honors them. He also wants to honor those who have stayed behind according to His sovereign will and who have faithfully fulfilled their task according to His will at their designated place.

Not everyone is equally capable of taking part in the battle. When believers achieve spiritual victories, the spoils must be shared with all. The spiritual riches one acquires must be shared with other believers.

Peter once made a fall. He has denied the Lord Jesus. The cause of this is the connection he has made with the world. He sat down in their midst (Lk 22:55). The Lord has even foretold this denial, but he said that Peter would convert from that evil way. He even connects to it a command for Peter: after that bitter experience Peter will become an instrument of blessing for others (Lk 22:31-34). His letters are proof that he has carried out that task.

The warriors must also give part to the LORD. This part is for the benefit of the Levites. Their service is also dedicated to the priestly service. Levites are encouraged in their task as they share in the spoils. Our spiritual victories should contribute to the promotion of the Levite service and through them also to the priestly service.

Everything is connected to the tabernacle (verses 30,47) where ultimately the spiritual gain of each victory ends up. There God is served and God's

people have fellowship with Him and with each other. The meetings of the believers are then places where believers come from richer than they came.

Verses 32-47 | Distribution of the Booty

32 Now the booty that remained from the spoil which the men of war had plundered was 675,000 sheep, 33 and 72,000 cattle, 34 and 61,000 donkeys, 35 and of human beings, of the women who had not known man intimately, all the persons were 32,000. 36 The half, the portion of those who went out to war, was [as follows]: the number of sheep was 337,500, 37 and the LORD's levy of the sheep was 675; 38 and the cattle were 36,000, from which the LORD's levy was 72; 39 and the donkeys were 30,500, from which the LORD's levy was 61; 40 and the human beings were 16,000, from whom the LORD's levy was 32 persons. 41 Moses gave the levy [which was] the LORD's offering to Eleazar the priest, just as the LORD had commanded Moses. 42 As for the sons of Israel's half, which Moses separated from the men who had gone to war — 43 now the congregation's half was 337,500 sheep, 44 and 36,000 cattle, 45 and 30,500 donkeys, 46 and the human beings were 16,000 — 47 and from the sons of Israel's half, Moses took one drawn out of every fifty, both of man and of animals, and gave them to the Levites, who kept charge of the tabernacle of the LORD, just as the LORD had commanded Moses.

The booty and its distribution are as follows:

Booty of sheep: 675,000

- for the soldiers: 337,500 of which 675 (=1/1000 of 675,000) for the LORD
- for the people: 337,500 of which 6,750 (=1/100 of 675,000) for the Levites

Booty of cattle: 72,000

- for the soldiers: 36,000 of which 72 for the LORD
- for the people: 36,000 of which 720 for the Levites

Booty of donkeys: 61,000

- for the soldiers: 30,500 of which 61 for the LORD
- for the people: 30,500 of which 610 for the Levites

Booty of people: 32,000

- for the soldiers: 16,000 of whom 32 for the LORD
- for the people: 16,000 of whom 320 for the Levites

Verses 48-54 | The Voluntary Gift of the Spoils

48 Then the officers who were over the thousands of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, approached Moses, 49 and they said to Moses, "Your servants have taken a census of men of war who are in our charge, and no man of us is missing. 50 So we have brought as an offering to the LORD what each man found, articles of gold, armlets and bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before the LORD." 51 Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from them, all kinds of wrought articles. 52 All the gold of the offering which they offered up to the LORD, from the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, was 16,750 shekels. 53 The men of war had taken booty, every man for himself. 54 So Moses and Eleazar the priest took the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it to the tent of meeting as a memorial for the sons of Israel before the LORD.

A spontaneous action of the superiors takes place out of gratitude. They are impressed by the fact that no one has died. They do not attribute this to their own competence. Many have perished in Numbers 25 because of their unfaithfulness. Now that no one has perished, they give God the honor for it.

The Lord Jesus will also make sure that no one who belongs to Him will be lost (Jn 17:12). No one will be missed in eternal glory from all those who have fought for the Lord on earth. All who abide by the Word of God attain salvation. We see this in the picture in Acts 27, which concludes with: "And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land" (Acts 27:44). The Lord Jesus will be praised for this for all eternity. This certainty will lead us now to worship Him in "the tent of meeting" (verse 54).

From spiritual leaders it may be expected to have more understanding of God's goodness. Here it is even mentioned that these things are given to make atonement. It is exceptional that atonement is attributed to materials. That is always reserved for the blood.

However, there are exceptions. Atonement is also done in Numbers 16 by incense, although there is connection with the altar where the fire comes from (Num 16:46-48). In Exodus 30, atonement takes place through silver (Exo 30:11-16). In order to exist for God, a price must be paid. Then someone becomes one of the numbered. Atonement means covering.

Normally that atonement has to do with sins, that they are covered. Here it is about God's glory covering His people after they have failed. This is about recognizing that it is only His glory that matters and that we want to hide in it, even if it is due to causes which we ourselves are to blame for.

The gold is brought by Moses and Eleazar into the tent of meeting (cf. 1Chr 18:11; 2Chr 15:18). All experiences should enrich our meetings. Every meeting should reflect all the experiences we have had over the past week that have impressed us with God's goodness and faithfulness and glory.

In the history of this chapter we see an illustration of Samson's riddle: here something to eat comes out of the eater and something sweet comes out of the strong (Jdg 14:14). What the enemy (the eater, the strong) wants to do to destroy the people, works out for the glory of God and blessing for His people (something to eat and something sweet).

Numbers 32

Introduction

To understand the lesson of this chapter we need to know what the land represents and what the wilderness side of the Jordan represents. The land of Canaan is the land in which the people may enjoy the blessing of God. For the Christian, Canaan is a picture of the heavenly places, in which God blessed him “with every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3).

To enter the land, you have to cross the Jordan. That river is a picture of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Only he who believes in Him is seated in Christ in the heavenly places. Heavenly blessings are the specific blessings of the believer. Only those who are aware of this will enjoy them.

The wilderness side of the Jordan is the land on the east side of the Jordan. The wilderness side of the Jordan speaks of the earthly blessings. With earthly blessings we can think of things like health, clothing, shelter, work and family. For these blessings you don’t have to cross the Jordan. Earthly blessings can also be enjoyed by non-Christians.

The difference in enjoying the earthly blessings between the believer and the unbeliever is that the believer will thank the Lord for those blessings (1Tim 4:3), while the unbeliever appropriates those blessings as a right acquired by himself. So earthly blessings are not specific to the Christian. The Christian who is satisfied with only the earthly blessings, ignores what God has given him there above to enjoy together with Him.

The wilderness side of the Jordan first belonged to the Ammonites and was then conquered by the Amorite kings Sihon and Og. Therefore, the Israelites have received permission to conquer it (Num 21:21-35). Sihon has ruled in the south (Gilead) and Og in the north (Basan). It is God’s intention that His people will inherit a part of the wilderness side of the Jordan. In the kingdom of peace, all tribes are assigned a part in the land and each tribe also receives a part in the wilderness side of the Jordan. However, it is not God’s intention that His people will settle there completely. He does not want His people to be content with it alone, without interest in the land of which He says: “The land belongs to me” (Lev 25:23). It is His land.

Verses 1-5 | The Wilderness Side of the Jordan as a Possession

1 Now the sons of Reuben and the sons of Gad had an exceedingly large number of livestock. So when they saw the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead, that it was indeed a place suitable for livestock, 2 the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben came and spoke to Moses and to Eleazar the priest and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, 3 "Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo and Beon, 4 the land which the LORD conquered before the congregation of Israel, is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock." 5 They said, "If we have found favor in your sight, let this land be given to your servants as a possession; do not take us across the Jordan."

Reuben and Gad are stationed under the same standard. They will have considered the situation together and have come to the conclusion that there is much to be gained if they can stay where they are now: the plains of Moab. They have an exceedingly large number of livestock. And the area in which they are currently located provides what their livestock need according to their perception. They are guided by their eyes: the land is pleasing to their eyes and good for their livestock (cf. Gen 13:10-11).

Therefore they ask Moses, Eleazar and the leaders to give them this land as their possession. In doing so, they ask to not have to go across the Jordan. They are asking, as it were, for a favor not to have to move into the land. That must have hurt Moses, who so desperately wanted to enter the land, but was not allowed to. And how this would have hurt the heart of the LORD. He has chosen this land for His people, and these tribes say they do not want to enter it.

The Gadites and Reubenites have experienced all the trials of the wilderness, they have been spared, and just before the Jordan they refuse to cross over. This is tragic. They use their large livestock as an excuse not to have to enter the land. Their property is their everything. If we use our earthly blessings for ourselves, they become an excuse not to occupy ourselves with the heavenly blessings.

There is also some impatience in the attitude of both tribes. Why wait for blessings of which you have to wait and see how they please you, if you can already enjoy them here and now? One bird in the hand is always better than ten in the air. This attitude can be found with us when we

live for what we possess on earth, what we can touch and taste with our natural senses.

Verses 6-15 | The Indignation of Moses

6 But Moses said to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben, "Shall your brothers go to war while you yourselves sit here? 7 Now why are you discouraging the sons of Israel from crossing over into the land which the LORD has given them? 8 This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. 9 For when they went up to the valley of Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the sons of Israel so that they did not go into the land which the LORD had given them. 10 So the LORD's anger burned in that day, and He swore, saying, 11 'None of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob; for they did not follow Me fully, 12 except Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua the son of Nun, for they have followed the LORD fully.' 13 So the LORD's anger burned against Israel, and He made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the LORD was destroyed. 14 Now behold, you have risen up in your fathers' place, a brood of sinful men, to add still more to the burning anger of the LORD against Israel. 15 For if you turn away from following Him, He will once more abandon them in the wilderness, and you will destroy all these people."

Moses points out the dangers of their wish. He points out the negative influence that their wish can have on the rest of the people. Moses sees again a reluctant people who do not want to enter the land. It reminds him of what happened forty years earlier, and that is how he represents the two tribes. Then the whole people did not want to enter because some spies misrepresented things (Num 13:27-33; 14:1-4). The two tribes also misrepresent the situation by indicating that they do not appreciate the promised land.

Moses is not flattering about their ancestry. He calls them "a brood of sinful men" (verse 14). Out of the fullness of his heart he expresses his indignation about the unwillingness of the people at the time to enter the land. Now the children from these 'sinful men' come and they also say that they

do not want to enter the land. He is afraid that the same unwillingness is present in these men, this new generation.

Verses 16-19 | Promise to Help in the Battle

16 Then they came near to him and said, "We will build here sheepfolds for our livestock and cities for our little ones; 17 but we ourselves will be armed ready [to go] before the sons of Israel, until we have brought them to their place, while our little ones live in the fortified cities because of the inhabitants of the land. 18 We will not return to our homes until every one of the sons of Israel has possessed his inheritance. 19 For we will not have an inheritance with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has fallen to us on this side of the Jordan toward the east."

The Reubenites and Gadites "came near to him". In order to avoid misunderstanding or to explain something, we need to go to each other to listen to each other and to understand each other. Then the differences may not be gone, but the conflict is.

Both tribes make it clear that it is not unwillingness. They want to enter the land, but prefer the area they are in now. They prove that they are not afraid to enter the land by promising to help conquer it first. They are believers, not rebellious. Instead of discouraging their brothers, they want to encourage them by promising to fight even in the front ranks.

Their wives and children they leave at home. They will never get to know and appreciate the land. On the contrary, they ensure that their children are provided with all the comforts of their own choice. They will build cities for them. In this way they use their powers to make life in that area so pleasant that their children do not even think that there are higher things. Parents are an obstacle for their children to seek the heavenly things if they give all their time and strength to the earthly things.

They refuse a permanent residence in the land, even after they have helped to conquer it. When they have gone through it in its full length and width and have seen everything the land has to offer, they still return to the other side of the Jordan. They are so attached to it, they have attached their hearts to it so much, that they sacrifice the land for it.

In this way we can tell others about the heavenly blessings, help them to enjoy them, while we ourselves do not live in them. That's because we're completely absorbed by earthly things. There are excuses for not accepting the invitation to enjoy what God wants to give. The excuses are not wrong things in themselves, but they make clear what our hearts really are about.

In Luke 14 the Lord Jesus mentions in a parable a number of lawful things that were used as an excuse not to accept the invitation for a meal (Lk 14:18-20). The fact that Christians often see earthly blessings as the highest delight, and occupying themselves with heavenly blessings as a tiring activity, is because they do not know what their true portion is. They appropriate what is from another and is only entrusted to them to be stewards of it, and they do not appropriate what is given to them as their possession (Lk 16:12).

The Gadites and Reubenites have chosen for delight here and now, not only for themselves, but also for their families. Later they are among the first to be carried away into exile by the Assyrians: "But they acted treacherously against the God of their fathers and played the harlot after the gods of the peoples of the land, whom God had destroyed before them. So the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul, king of Assyria, even the spirit of Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria, and he carried them away into exile, namely the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, and brought them to Halah, Habor, Hara and to the river of Gozan, to this day" (1Chr 5:25-26; 2Kgs 15:29).

Earthly blessings are not a protection for spiritual dangers. If they lose them, they have nothing left. Christians who connect their faith experience to earthly blessings, go up and down in that faith experience, like the fluctuations of stock market prices. And their children have no footing whatsoever. We often see them disappear into the world.

Verses 20-24 | Moses Agrees with the Pledge

20 So Moses said to them, "If you will do this, if you will arm yourselves before the LORD for the war, 21 and all of you armed men cross over the Jordan before the LORD until He has driven His enemies out from before Him, 22 and the land is subdued before the LORD, then afterward you shall return and be free of obligation toward the LORD and toward Israel, and this land shall be

yours for a possession before the LORD. 23 But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out. 24 Build yourselves cities for your little ones, and sheepfolds for your sheep, and do what you have promised."

Moses agrees to the guarantee that they will help first. He will no longer stop them and gives them the space to act according to their own desires. But he warns them not to sin against the LORD by not keeping their promise. He presents sin not only as something that will be discovered, but as an active person who will discover them, who will know how to find them. They will not be able to separate from their sin, nor will they be able to escape the punishment of sin.

Verses 25-27 | Confirmation of the Appointment

25 The sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben spoke to Moses, saying, "Your servants will do just as my lord commands. 26 Our little ones, our wives, our livestock and all our cattle shall remain there in the cities of Gilead; 27 while your servants, everyone who is armed for war, will cross over in the presence of the LORD to battle, just as my lord says."

The Gadites and Reubenites confirm the appointment. They will leave everyone and everything behind in Gilead and go to battle themselves.

Verses 28-30 | The Appointment Is Passed On

28 So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, and to Joshua the son of Nun, and to the heads of the fathers' [households] of the tribes of the sons of Israel. 29 Moses said to them, "If the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben, everyone who is armed for battle, will cross with you over the Jordan in the presence of the LORD, and the land is subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession; 30 but if they will not cross over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan."

Moses will not be able to be present at the fulfilment of the promise and exercise control over it. But he has a competent successor. He passes on the appointment made to Eleazar and Joshua to act accordingly. Joshua acts on it later (Jos 22:1-4).

Verses 31-32 | Repetition of the Promise

31 The sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben answered, saying, "As the LORD has said to your servants, so we will do. 32 We ourselves will cross over armed in the presence of the LORD into the land of Canaan, and the possession of our inheritance [shall remain] with us across the Jordan."

In a summary, the Gadites and Reubenites confirm once again what they will do and will get in return.

Verses 33-42 | Division of the Wilderness Side of the Jordan

33 So Moses gave to them, to the sons of Gad and to the sons of Reuben and to the half-tribe of Joseph's son Manasseh, the kingdom of Sihon, king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og, the king of Bashan, the land with its cities with [their] territories, the cities of the surrounding land. 34 The sons of Gad built Dibon and Ataroth and Aroer, 35 and Atroth-shophan and Jazer and Jogbehah, 36 and Beth-nimrah and Beth-haran as fortified cities, and sheepfolds for sheep. 37 The sons of Reuben built Heshbon and Elealeh and Kiriathaim, 38 and Nebo and Baal-meon—[their] names being changed—and Sibmah, and they gave [other] names to the cities which they built. 39 The sons of Machir the son of Manasseh went to Gilead and took it, and dispossessed the Amorites who were in it. 40 So Moses gave Gilead to Machir the son of Manasseh, and he lived in it. 41 Jair the son of Manasseh went and took its towns, and called them Havvoth-jair. 42 Nobah went and took Kenath and its villages, and called it Nobah after his own name.

Moses divides the wilderness side of the Jordan between the Gadites, the Reubenites and the half-tribe of Manasseh. This is not done by the lot, as will happen in the land (Jos 14:1-2). He gives them the land of their own choice. In the land every tribe gets the portion of God's choice.

It seems that, after the two tribes have received the coveted pledge, half of the Manasseh tribe joins them. They also prefer to have their inheritance in the wilderness side of the Jordan. Their choice may have been influenced by the arguments of the two tribes. This would then mean that the attitude of the two tribes has caused a division in another tribe. To make known our desires and our efforts to acquire them always influence others.

Numbers 33

Verses 1-2 | Each Journey Is Noted

1 These are the journeys of the sons of Israel, by which they came out from the land of Egypt by their armies, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. 2 Moses recorded their starting places according to their journeys by the command of the LORD, and these are their journeys according to their starting places.

It is time to look back at the journey. All places where the people have been are listed. This does not happen by the command of Moses, but “by the command of the LORD”. He looks back on His people’s journey through the wilderness.

When He looks back on our journey, it is often different from the way we look back. If we look back on it, we notice: our great unfaithfulness on the one hand and the great faithfulness of God on the other hand (Deu 8:2-3). We have already forgotten a lot. The wilderness wind has erased many traces of our journey. But God still sees every footstep of us in the wilderness sand.

When *God* looks back on the journey, it is to show how His people have walked before Him, how they have set out and how they have camped. In this enumeration he does not speak about revolt, but about progress. If we had only this list of places, we could conclude that Israel from Egypt to Moab faithfully moved from one place to another in good order.

The situation is that the new generation has replaced the old one. However, the report gives the impression that there has never been an earlier generation. The people who arrive in the plains of Moab are seen as the people who have left Egypt. With this report God indicates that His plans and intentions will be realized, despite the loss and disappearance of an entire generation.

Certain events are mentioned, but they are not events that refer to the sins of the people. At any place we can think of our way with Him and His way with us. He wants us to think about that as He does. Such memories can

only exist after we have left that event or place. Only then can we look back and God here proposes to do so with His eyes.

It is good to be reminded once again of God's vision of our journey in connection with the upcoming entry into the land of promise. We see His interest in all our activities, for every step we have taken in the wilderness, for every experience we have gained there.

Nor is there any guidance through the cloud. As we pass by the places, the thought arises of the spiritual energy that the people showed again and again by going from place to place. Of course it happened under the guidance of the cloud (Num 9:15-23), but from that point of view the journey is not described here. Here God, as it were, attributes all the good things of the people to themselves.

We can also apply this to the journey of Christianity through the ages. God also sees in this a core that has performed true Christianity for Him. He also looks back on that journey that way. For His attention are the believers who have gone the way in spiritual energy, with all the exercises that this has brought with it. They have always passed on the torch of the testimony.

The journey is described from journey to journey or from resting place to resting place. At the same time, the description indicates that each time it was only a temporary rest. Every place of rest has given an experience. After the experience they had to move on, to the next place, to a new experience. God knows at any time in what place or situation we are.

Verses 3-4 | The Start of the Journey

3 They journeyed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the next day after the Passover the sons of Israel started out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, 4 while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn whom the LORD had struck down among them. The LORD had also executed judgments on their gods.

From the beginning of the description of the journey until the end of it, it is the same people, although it actually consists of very different persons at the end of the journey. God does not see the people in those who have fallen, but in those who have remained standing. Literally the "they" of

verse 3 have perished in the wilderness. But the LORD sees in the people the true core.

Their trek begins with the exodus from Egypt. Every place they visit afterwards is followed by a new exodus. Nowhere in the wilderness is there a definitive place of rest, just as Egypt has not been (cf. Heb 11:13-14). That is how it has gone with Christianity. There is always the thread that runs through the testimony of God. He has always given times of rest and refreshment. There experiences were gained and lessons were learned, after which they had to set out.

This we also can apply to the local church. It may be necessary to set out to find a new resting place. If there are difficulties, we must ask ourselves how we can set out from them. Are there solutions in the Word that would allow us, as a local church, to set out from the difficulties?

When leaving Egypt, it is mentioned that it happens “the next day after the Passover”. That assumes the direct connection between what the Passover represents and the redemption from Egypt’s slavery. There is also talk of “boldly” which is literally “with a high hand”. This is the high hand of the LORD. It represents His exalted and mighty act in redemption. Only He is capable of something so wonderful.

What God does in redemption, He does not do in secret. It happens “in the sight of all Egyptians”, they are witnesses of it. And not only that. The “high hand” of the LORD by which He conducts His people is a hand that has struck Egypt in judgment. While God’s people are leaving, Egypt must concern itself with the results of God’s judgment. Every funeral is a tangible and fatal proof for them of God’s exaltedness above their gods.

Verses 5-49 | Places and Events During the Journey

5 Then the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses and camped in Succoth. 6 They journeyed from Succoth and camped in Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. 7 They journeyed from Etham and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which faces Baal-zephon, and they camped before Migdol. 8 They journeyed from before Hahiroth and passed through the midst of the sea into the wilderness; and they went three days’ journey in the wilderness of Etham and camped at Marah. 9 They journeyed from Marah and came to Elim; and in

Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there. 10 They journeyed from Elim and camped by the Red Sea. 11 They journeyed from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin. 12 They journeyed from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. 13 They journeyed from Dophkah and camped at Alush. 14 They journeyed from Alush and camped at Rephidim; now it was there that the people had no water to drink. 15 They journeyed from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai. 16 They journeyed from the wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth-hattaavah. 17 They journeyed from Kibroth-hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. 18 They journeyed from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. 19 They journeyed from Rithmah and camped at Rimmon-perez. 20 They journeyed from Rimmon-perez and camped at Libnah. 21 They journeyed from Libnah and camped at Rissah. 22 They journeyed from Rissah and camped in Kehelathah. 23 They journeyed from Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. 24 They journeyed from Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. 25 They journeyed from Haradah and camped at Makheloth. 26 They journeyed from Makheloth and camped at Tahath. 27 They journeyed from Tahath and camped at Terah. 28 They journeyed from Terah and camped at Mithkah. 29 They journeyed from Mithkah and camped at Hashmonah. 30 They journeyed from Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. 31 They journeyed from Moseroth and camped at Bene-jaakan. 32 They journeyed from Bene-jaakan and camped at Hor-haggidgad. 33 They journeyed from Hor-haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. 34 They journeyed from Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. 35 They journeyed from Abronah and camped at Ezion-geber. 36 They journeyed from Ezion-geber and camped in the wilderness of Zin, that is, Kadesh. 37 They journeyed from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, at the edge of the land of Edom. 38 Then Aaron the priest went up to Mount Hor at the command of the LORD, and died there in the fortieth year after the sons of Israel had come from the land of Egypt, on the first [day] in the fifth month. 39 Aaron was one hundred twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor. 40 Now the Canaanite, the king of Arad who lived in the Negev in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the sons of Israel. 41 Then they journeyed from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. 42 They journeyed from Zalmonah and camped at Punon. 43 They journeyed from Punon and camped at Oboth. 44 They journeyed from Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim, at the border of Moab. 45 They journeyed from Iyim and camped at Dibon-gad. 46 They journeyed from Dibon-gad and camped at

Almon-diblathaim. 47 They journeyed from Almon-diblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo. 48 They journeyed from the mountains of Abarim and camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan [opposite] Jericho. 49 They camped by the Jordan, from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab.

This list of the places and events that have occurred during the trip shows the forty years of the wilderness journey. Places are mentioned that we only encounter in this list. Other places call events to the mind that we find recorded in Exodus or Numbers.

So it is with our lives. Some events are clear to our minds, others we don't remember. But God has recorded the overview of our whole life (Job 31:4). No fragment of the film of our lives has been cut away. We will have it for us in its entirety when our lives will be revealed before the judgment seat of Christ (2Cor 5:10).

Here an outline with places where something happened and where they are mentioned:

Rameses	Judgment on Egypt and exodus from Egypt	Exo 12:37
Succoth		Exo 12:37
Etham	Located on the edge of the wilderness	Exo 13:20
Pi-hahiroth	Through the Red Sea and three-day trips through the wilderness of Etham	Exo 14:2
Marah		Exo 15:23
Elim	12 water sources and 70 palm trees	Exo 15:27
Wilderness of Sin		Exo 16:1
Rephidim	No water to drink for the people	Exo 17:1
Wilderness of Sinai		Exo 19:1
Kibroth-hattaavah		Num 11:34
Hazereth		Num 11:35
Wilderness of Zin		Num 20:1
Mount Hor	Aaron dies, 123 years, 40 years after the exodus; Canaanite hears of approaching Israelites	Num 20:22,24-29
Oboth		Num 21:10

Iye-abarim or ruins of Abarim		Num 21:11
Mountains of Abarim		Num 27:12
Plains of Moab	from Beth-jeshimoth to Abel-shittim	Num 22:1

Verses 50-56 | How the People Can Dwell in the Land

50 Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan [opposite] Jericho, saying, 51 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their figured stones, and destroy all their molten images and demolish all their high places; 53 and you shall take possession of the land and live in it, for I have given the land to you to possess it. 54 You shall inherit the land by lot according to your families; to the larger you shall give more inheritance, and to the smaller you shall give less inheritance. Wherever the lot falls to anyone, that shall be his. You shall inherit according to the tribes of your fathers. 55 But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then it shall come about that those whom you let remain of them [will become] as pricks in your eyes and as thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land in which you live. 56 And as I plan to do to them, so I will do to you.'"

After a look back we now get a look ahead. After the description of the wilderness journey behind them, the eyes of the people are turned to the land. The wilderness journey teaches us that we are on our way to our actual destination. It is significant that, while the people are not yet in the land, the thoughts of the people are already focused on staying in the land. This is also the case in Numbers 15. There it is about something that is going to happen in the land. Here it is different. Here it is about the land itself.

We read a lot in the Bible about our stay as Christians on earth, about the difficulties and exercises that this brings with it. We recognize this in practice. What is often less important to us as Christians is that we can already concern ourselves with the heavenly land. We can also read about this in God's Word.

An important distinction with Israel can be noted here. With Israel it is a succession of events: first the wilderness journey, then the land. For us both the one and the other is already true: we live both in the wilderness and in the land. Not that we experience both at the same time. When we are struggling due to illness or problems in the family or at work, we experience that we are in the wilderness. But at another time, when we read God's Word and think about our blessings in Christ, we experience that we are in the heavenly land. What literally happens to Israel is spiritually true for us.

Israel has arrived in the plains of Moab. The experiences of the wilderness are behind them. Now they can focus on the blessings of the land. In Deuteronomy this is discussed in detail; in Joshua they are conquered. Here in Numbers we find a piece of the book of Joshua, as it were. In this section the LORD speaks to the Israelites about the extermination of idols and the division of the land (cf. Num 26:53-56).

It is part of the preparation for the conquest of the land. We need to know what we are going to do; we need to calculate the costs. We must realize that there are enemies and idols.

In the land of promise we find idols. They represent forces of wickedness and rulers in the heavenly places. This is what we are dealing with in Christianity. It is precisely there that the imitation of the service to God is present. This imitation is nourished by demons who use nominal Christians. The reintroduction of the law is idolatry, a work of demons (Gal 4:8-10). Idolatry is the putting things that are not of the Lord in the place of the Lord.

The consequence of maintaining idolatry in any form is that the blessing of the land is not taken possession of. That is why idolatry must be radically eradicated. Then, as tribes, as separate local churches, we will be able to enjoy the inheritance given to us by the Lord. An example that every local church has received its own inheritance can be seen in the New Testament in the letters written to separate churches.

For Israel it is a dangerous human kindness to spare the enemies of God. It comes down to unbelief by saving themselves in battle with these enemies. It all too often leads to a connection with them. The result is that one shares

in the judgment that rests on these enemies of God. Joshua warns the people in his farewell speech with the same words (Jos 23:11-13).

Numbers 34

Introduction

In this chapter we see how God cares for His people in all respects. He establishes the borders of the land they will possess. He also regulates the way in which the division should take place. The hand that has led the people through the wilderness is also the hand that sets the borders of the land to which He leads His people.

Verses 1-2 | The Inheritance of Israel

1 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Command the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land of Canaan, this is the land that shall fall to you as an inheritance, [even the] land of Canaan according to its borders.

The LORD assigns Canaan as an inheritance to Israel. The boundaries that the LORD further indicates do not correspond to those which He has named to Abraham (Gen 15:18). The area He promised Abraham is much larger.

The border is already indicated here. The border separates what is of God from what is not of Him. It is necessary that we know what to conquer and what not to conquer. A border indicates an area, but at the same time it delimits to what is outside. If God indicates the borders of what we should conquer, we should not conquer the wrong pieces. Here we see that the wilderness side of the Jordan falls outside. We should not make things our property that God has not given us as inheritance.

For example, the borders of our spiritual land are indicated in the letter to the Colossians. There we see that we have died and been raised with Christ. We are called to seek "the things above" (Col 3:1). We have part "in the inheritance of the saints in Light" (Col 1:12-13). It is about Christ in us, He is our life.

The border of the land is what belongs to Christ. We are warned of what lies outside, so that we do not allow ourselves to be captured by it: "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception,

according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ" (Col 2:8). Here we speak of philosophy and the traditions of men. That is beyond the borders. We should not get involved in this. Philosophy and tradition impair the fullness of God in Christ in Whom we are brought to fullness.

Canaan itself is called "the Beautiful [Land]" (Dan 8:9). It borders on wildernesses and seas and is surrounded by unattractive landscapes. The inheritance given to the church in Christ is connected to the Father. This inheritance is in stark contrast to everything that the world contains and has to offer: "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world" (1Jn 2:16; cf. Acts 26:17-18).

We must not go beyond what God has revealed to us. The borders within which we can enjoy everything God has given us are set by God's Word. These borders are there, so that we may respect them, so that we may remain in the enjoyment of the blessing. Exceeding God's borders means losing the blessing.

Verses 3-5 | The Southern Border of the Land

3 Your southern sector shall extend from the wilderness of Zin along the side of Edom, and your southern border shall extend from the end of the Salt Sea eastward. 4 Then your border shall turn [direction] from the south to the ascent of Akrabbim and continue to Zin, and its termination shall be to the south of Kadesh-barnea; and it shall reach Hazaraddar and continue to Azmon. 5 The border shall turn [direction] from Azmon to the brook of Egypt, and its termination shall be at the sea.

The first border given is that on the south sector. South sector is literally 'the right sector'. The right side speaks in the Scriptures of dignity of position. The Lord Jesus "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" after He accomplished the work of purification of sins (Heb 1:3). In a spiritual sense this means that the believer who lives in the south sector knows the position of the Lord Jesus. That believer also knows that it is his own position, for he is in Christ. We are conquering within that border if

we involve ourselves with the place of honor that the Lord Jesus received at God's right hand.

The description of the border starts in the south at the Salt Sea. The description ends there also (verse 12). The Salt Sea, or Dead Sea, is the constant reminder of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Crossing the border at the Salt Sea means opening up to the sins that have caused the destruction of Sodom. The once so beautiful and fertile valley, in which these cities have been situated, is in its present state a warning to the people of God. Unfortunately, the iniquity of Sodom is later found in Israel (Eze 16:49).

Verse 6 | The Western Border of the Land

6 'As for the western border, you shall have the Great Sea, that is, [its] coastline; this shall be your west border.

The western border is formed by "the Great Sea", which is the Mediterranean Sea. The sea in the Bible is usually the picture of the sea of nations, the world outside of Israel, the world outside of God. As believers, we live in the midst of a world that is indifferent to God. This leads to difficulties and trials. We are conquering within that border if we overcome every trial or difficulty in the power of the Lord. Crossing that border exposes us to the danger of what the peoples of which the sea is a picture have to say.

Verses 7-9 | The North Border of the Land

7 'And this shall be your north border: you shall draw your [border] line from the Great Sea to Mount Hor. 8 You shall draw a line from Mount Hor to the Lebo-hamath, and the termination of the border shall be at Zedad; 9 and the border shall proceed to Ziphron, and its termination shall be at Hazar-enan. This shall be your north border.

When we think of the north, we think of cold and darkness. We can make the application that crossing that border exposes us to the danger of man's darkened thinking: "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart" (Eph 4:17-18).

Verses 10-12 | The Eastern Border of the Land

10 'For your eastern border you shall also draw a line from Hazar-enan to Shepham, 11 and the border shall go down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; and the border shall go down and reach to the slope on the east side of the Sea of Chinnereth. 12 And the border shall go down to the Jordan and its termination shall be at the Salt Sea. This shall be your land according to its borders all around.'"

The east side is the side where the sun rises. Living on the east side means living in the expectation of the coming of the Lord Jesus, Who is like the rising sun in her power. Crossing that border means exposure to demonic and impure influences. In Scripture evil powers also come from that side: "The sixth [angel] poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east. And I saw [coming] out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs; for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty" (Rev 16:12-14; cf. Jdg 6:3).

Verse 13 | Moses Confirms the Commandment

13 So Moses commanded the sons of Israel, saying, "This is the land that you are to apportion by lot among you as a possession, which the LORD has commanded to give to the nine and a half tribes.

In verse 1 the LORD tells Moses which borders of the land he should command to the Israelites. Then the LORD says how the border runs. Now Moses acts according to the commandment of the LORD and tells them that this is their inheritance. He expressly states that this applies to "the nine and a half tribes". That is for the LORD the whole people.

Verses 14-15 | The Inheritance of the Two and a Half Tribes

14 For the tribe of the sons of Reuben have received [theirs] according to their fathers' households, and the tribe of the sons of Gad according to their fathers' households, and the half-tribe of Manasseh have received their possession. 15

The two and a half tribes have received their possession across the Jordan opposite Jericho, eastward toward the sunrising."

The 'two and a half tribes shall not be taken into account in the division of the land within the borders laid down. They have already received an inheritance, namely the inheritance which they themselves have preferred, over the LORD's preference.

Their inheritance is connected to the city of Jericho and to the east, with the additional mention that it is the side where the sun rises. Perhaps this indicates the semi-hearted position of these tribes. On the one hand they are connected to the world, of which Jericho is a picture. They live at that level, at the level of the world. On the other hand, they also have a certain expectation for the future and look forward to the coming of Christ, but to judge and rule rather than to His coming for the church.

Verses 16-29 | The Men Who Apportion the Land

16 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 17 "These are the names of the men who shall apportion the land to you for inheritance: Eleazar the priest and Joshua the son of Nun. 18 You shall take one leader of every tribe to apportion the land for inheritance. 19 These are the names of the men: of the tribe of Judah, Caleb the son of Jephunneh. 20 Of the tribe of the sons of Simeon, Samuel the son of Ammihud. 21 Of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad the son of Chislon. 22 Of the tribe of the sons of Dan a leader, Bukki the son of Jogli. 23 Of the sons of Joseph: of the tribe of the sons of Manasseh a leader, Hanniel the son of Ephod. 24 Of the tribe of the sons of Ephraim a leader, Kemuel the son of Shiptan. 25 Of the tribe of the sons of Zebulun a leader, Elizaphan the son of Parnach. 26 Of the tribe of the sons of Issachar a leader, Paltiel the son of Azzan. 27 Of the tribe of the sons of Asher a leader, Ahihud the son of Shelomi. 28 Of the tribe of the sons of Naphtali a leader, Pedahel the son of Ammihud." 29 These are those whom the LORD commanded to apportion the inheritance to the sons of Israel in the land of Canaan.

The men who have to divide the land and will give each tribe an inheritance belong, except Joshua and Caleb, to the second generation. The leaders of the tribes, mentioned in Numbers 1, are no longer there. Here

we are dealing with new leaders. God always takes care of everything that is necessary for His people.

The leaders are a picture of the gifts the Lord Jesus gave to His church to introduce God's people to the blessings of the land. Each leader of a tribe gets an inheritance and he must divide that inheritance among the families that make up the tribe. As an application we can see a local fellowship of brothers and sisters in a tribe. In practice, in our lives we are not dealing with the whole church, the whole people of God, but with their local expression. It is to be hoped that there will be such leaders in every local church.

The land belongs to the whole people, but the enjoyment is different for each member of the people. They all listen to the Word, but each gets its own blessing through it. A leader is at the forefront of the battle. Leaders represent the character of the victor. They are used by the Lord to make the right decision in distributing the blessing and holding it. They are all in the church who ensure that the believers come and remain in possession of the blessings with which they are blessed in Christ in the heavenly places. The leaders themselves are again under the authority of Eleazar and Joshua. All service of leaders in the midst of the believers depends on the Lord Jesus as High Priest and Commander (Heb 3:1; 12:1b-2).

Numbers 35

Verses 1-3 | What the Levites Get from the Land

1 Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan [opposite] Jericho, saying, 2 “Command the sons of Israel that they give to the Levites from the inheritance of their possession cities to live in; and you shall give to the Levites pasture lands around the cities. 3 The cities shall be theirs to live in; and their pasture lands shall be for their cattle and for their herds and for all their beasts.

Not only are there leaders, as in the previous chapter, there are also Levites who play an important role in dividing the land. Levites have no inheritance of their own (Num 1:47-53). They will have their own cities with pasture lands around them. That’s for the cattle they have.

The cities of the Levites will be scattered all over the land. They won’t live in the land near the temple, as they had their camp in the wilderness near the tabernacle. Their dispersion across the land is a fulfillment of Jacob’s prophecy (Gen 49:7). God thus makes a matter that in itself means a judgment – Levi has committed violence and earned judgment – a matter that is a blessing. Through their dispersion through the land they are able to teach the people God’s statutes everywhere, for that is their task (Deu 17:9; 33:10; Lev 10:10-11; 2Chr 19:8-10; Mal 2:4-7).

Here we read for the first time about cities that the people will own in the land. A city also speaks of the church, but as a reflection of the city of God (Rev 21:10). Levite cities are all reflections of the city of God where He is served, day and night. Thus, local churches are reflections of the one church of God. In a Levite city, all Levites are working to promote priestly service. It is to be hoped that every believer in a local church will be busy for that.

Verses 4-5 | Size of the Pasture Lands

4 “The pasture lands of the cities which you shall give to the Levites [shall extend] from the wall of the city outward a thousand cubits around. 5 You shall

also measure outside the city on the east side two thousand cubits, and on the south side two thousand cubits, and on the west side two thousand cubits, and on the north side two thousand cubits, with the city in the center. This shall become theirs as pasture lands for the cities.

The pasture land is intended for the Levite cattle and not for cultivation. They do not need to sow and mow and have stock barns. God provides for their livelihood through the tenths of the proceeds of the work of others. By this they can concentrate on the study of the law and the teaching of it to the people of God.

The size of the pasture land also determines the size of their property. They will never become large landowners with a huge herd. God did not mean this for the Levites either. God gives His servants what they need to sacrifice and do their work.

Verse 6 | Six Cities of Refuge

6 The cities which you shall give to the Levites [shall be] the six cities of refuge, which you shall give for the manslayer to flee to; and in addition to them you shall give forty-two cities.

In Exodus 21, a free zone is spoken of for the first time (Exo 21:12-14). There it is not yet a city, but the altar. Once in the land the way to the altar in Jerusalem will in many cases be too far to stay out of the hands of the blood avenger (Deu 19:6). Therefore God has given cities of refuge.

Deuteronomy 4 and Deuteronomy 19 also refer to cities of refuge. In Joshua 20, all six are mentioned and designated as such. In Joshua 21 the division of the forty-eight Levite cities, including the cities of refuge, follows.

The time a manslayer would have to spend in such a city could last long. All this time he will be there as a stranger under the direct teaching of the Levites.

Verses 7-8 | Forty-eight Levite Cities

7 All the cities which you shall give to the Levites [shall be] forty-eight cities, together with their pasture lands. 8 As for the cities which you shall give from the possession of the sons of Israel, you shall take more from the larger and you

shall take less from the smaller; each shall give some of his cities to the Levites in proportion to his possession which he inherits."

The forty-eight cities that are for the Levites must be given to the Levites by the other tribes in proportion to their inheritance. The number forty-eight can be seen as the result of the multiplication of six and eight. The number six is the number of man created on the sixth day. The number eight represents a new beginning. We see this in Levi, who was judged for his sin, but whose judgment has been changed by God into something new.

Every tribe that gives a city as a Levite city will thus prove its gratitude to God for such a privilege. It is a privilege for the church to have faithful teachers everywhere who teach about and from God's Word. The appreciation of this privilege will be reflected in giving those teachers what is necessary so that they can give their time to studying the Word of God and passing it on (Gal 6:6).

Verses 9-15 | Cities of Refuge Are for the Manslayer

9 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 10 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, 11 then you shall select for yourselves cities to be your cities of refuge, that the manslayer who has killed any person unintentionally may flee there. 12 The cities shall be to you as a refuge from the avenger, so that the manslayer will not die until he stands before the congregation for trial. 13 The cities which you are to give shall be your six cities of refuge. 14 You shall give three cities across the Jordan and three cities in the land of Canaan; they are to be cities of refuge. 15 These six cities shall be for refuge for the sons of Israel, and for the alien and for the sojourner among them; that anyone who kills a person unintentionally may flee there.

The cities of refuge are for the manslayer. In the case of manslaughter we have the following to deal with:

1. The act, where it must distinguished between unintentionally and intentionally manslaughter.
2. The manslayer, who flees to the nearest city of refuge to stay out of the hands of the blood avenger – the blood avenger is the next of kin of the victim, who stands up for his interests.

3. The elders of the city of refuge investigate whether the manslaughter was accidental or deliberate.
4. If it turns out to be deliberate manslaughter, the manslayer is handed over to the blood avenger, who then kills the manslayer.
5. If the manslaughter is not intentional, the manslayer may remain in the city of refuge and is free from the vengeance of the blood avenger. However, he must remain in this city until the death of the high priest, for as soon as he leaves the city during the life of the high priest, the blood avenger is still entitled to kill him. Safety is only guaranteed in the city.

There are three free cities in the land and three in wilderness side of the Jordan. The three cities in the land are all situated in the heights, so that they can be seen from afar. "A city set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Mt 5:14b).

Assuming that there may be manslaughterers in the land, God points to abnormal conditions in the land. For the people, the land means living in abundance. But here God foresees the opposite.

In its application we can think of Israel, but also of Christianity. Israel killed the Messiah, but it did so ignorantly. Therefore there is hope for the people. The manslaughter of the Messiah is not attributed to the people as if it had been premeditated. We hear this in the words of the Lord Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Lk 23:34a). About fifty days later Peter says something similar: "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also" (Acts 3:17).

In Acts 2 Peter opens the gates of the city of refuge in his call to conversion. Three thousand people listen to it and are added to the church (Acts 2:41). What is written in Hebrews 6 applies to those and to all who further from the Jews accepted the Lord Jesus as the land of Heaven: "who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us" (Heb 6:18). This makes Christ the true city of refuge.

Not only the Jews are guilty of the death of the Lord Jesus. The Gentiles are too. They too did it in ignorance: "For if they had understood it they would

not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1Cor 2:6,8). For repentant Jews and Gentiles, the church functions as a city of refuge.

The city of refuge is also a type of city of refuge for Gentiles, because the alien and the sojourner can also make use of the privilege of these cities of refuge (verse 15). Thus in Christ Jesus no difference is made between Greek and Jew. Gentiles who by faith take refuge to Christ will be safe and saved in Him, because for both it is true: "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1).

But not only the Jews and the Gentiles are guilty. The principle of manslaughter also applies to the church as responsible witness on earth. In a spiritual sense, the church, in the sense of Christianity, has also become a manslayer. She robbed the Lord Jesus of His headship and took it in her own hands. The assumption of the entering into the rights of Christ is most clearly visible in the papacy. The same applies to all human statutes that deny or limit the working of God's Spirit in the church.

Those who become aware of this will feel the need for a city of refuge. He will seek a city of refuge where the rights and authority of the Lord Jesus are recognized by His Word and Spirit. In such a city of refuge the Spirit is not quenched (1Thes 5:19) by human rules and commandments. These rules may be laid down in confessional writings, but unwritten rules of tradition are also deadly for the experience of the work of God's Spirit who wants to glorify Christ.

The church also has to do with "the blood avenger", that is God Himself. He has not spared the branches of the olive tree, that is Israel. He has set aside His people for a time. Nor will he spare the church, seen as the professing Christianity, if it does not remain in the knowledge that it is entirely dependent on the mercy of God (Rom 11:21-22).

It is deeply about the people of God who live in the inheritance. There are the cities of Levi, some of which are also places of refuge for Christians who have become manslaughterers. Manslaughterers suffocate the true life of God. We recognize them in people who profess to be Christians, who claim the inheritance, while their true nature is that they proclaim false doctrine concerning the Lord Jesus. They deny for instance His virgin birth, His death

on the cross and His resurrection. By doing so they kill the faith of many. If such people repent, they can go to city of refuge.

A local church should be a visible place, a city on a mountain that cannot be hidden. Then the many who are fleeing will be able to find a refuge there. Are we well known as such?

Verses 16-21 | When the Manslayer Must Die

16 'But if he struck him down with an iron object, so that he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 17 If he struck him down with a stone in the hand, by which he will die, and [as a result] he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 18 Or if he struck him with a wooden object in the hand, by which he might die, and [as a result] he died, he is a murderer; the murderer shall surely be put to death. 19 The blood avenger himself shall put the murderer to death; he shall put him to death when he meets him. 20 If he pushed him of hatred, or threw something at him lying in wait and [as a result] he died, 21 or if he struck him down with his hand in enmity, and [as a result] he died, the one who struck him shall surely be put to death, he is a murderer; the blood avenger shall put the murderer to death when he meets him.

Before the manslayer can be granted asylum, it must be established whether he has accidentally killed someone or deliberately done so. If it has been intentionally done, the blood avenger will kill the murderer. Shed blood must be avenged. The guilt that has been placed on the land by the shedding of blood can only be erased by the blood of the guilty person.

Intention is assumed when the manslayer has beaten the other with something in his hand. He had to know that he could kill the other and should never have used that object against the other. There is also deliberate intent in the case of hatred and enmity. Then a push or a blow comes from a murderous mind.

The blood avenger is someone who stands up for family rights. The word for "blood-avenger" – in Hebrew *go'el* – is also used for "close kinsman" in the case of the redemption of a lost family property (Lev 25:25-26; Rth 3:9). He also acts in favor of family law.

Verses 22-25 | The City of Refuge as a Place of Residence

22 'But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw something at him without lying in wait, 23 or with any deadly object of stone, and without seeing it dropped on him so that he died, while he was not his enemy nor seeking his injury, 24 then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the blood avenger according to these ordinances. 25 The congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the blood avenger, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he fled; and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.

There are cases where the manslayer is allowed to live in the city of refuge. This is the case when the manslayer has accidentally pushed, hit or struck someone with a stone and killed the other person. This event then took place without the purpose of harming the other. Then there is death without intent. If that happens, the manslayer can stay in the city of refuge, he doesn't have to die, the blood avenger is not allowed to kill him.

Even though grace is given to him that he does not have to die, he is not allowed not return to his inheritance. Only after the death of the high priest who is there at the time of the manslaughter, the manslayer is free to return to his inheritance. This aspect is only covered in Numbers.

The death of the High Priest represents in picture the end of the High Priesthood of the Lord Jesus as He exercises it now. The priesthood of Christ now is a testimony that Israel is still rejected. It is a high priesthood in heaven in which He can "sympathize with our weaknesses" (Heb 4:15). We see this high priesthood in picture in Aaron.

When the Lord Jesus has taken us, the church, out of this world, we no longer need Him as such. Then He will appear for Israel as the High Priest to the order of Melchizedek to put His people back in possession of their inheritance.

Verses 26-29 | Only Safe in the City of Refuge

26 But if the manslayer at any time goes beyond the border of his city of refuge to which he may flee, 27 and the blood avenger finds him outside the border of his city of refuge, and the blood avenger kills the manslayer, he will not be guilty of blood 28 because he should have remained in his city of refuge until

the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession. 29 'These things shall be for a statutory ordinance to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings.

The manslayer is only safe in the city of refuge. When he leaves the city of refuge and falls into the hands of the blood avenger, he is still killed. The city of refuge is a place of separation, with the character of a Levite city. Believers who go outside the local church and no longer seek their protection and support there, will lose their lives. We can apply this to not attending the meetings to build up the faith. When there is no longer a need for spiritual food and education and when opportunities to visit God's Word are no longer sought, spiritual death generally follows.

Verse 30 | More Than One Witness

30 'If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death at the evidence of witnesses, but no person shall be put to death on the testimony of one witness.

In order to obtain sufficient testimony in a case of a manslayer, at least two witnesses must give evidence. One witness is not enough. It is so according to God's thoughts, and Paul acts accordingly: "Every fact is to be confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses" (2Cor 13:1b; Mt 18:16; 1Tim 5:19). Even the Lord Jesus says that His testimony is not true if only He bears witness of Himself (Jn 5:31), that is, it cannot be accepted as *legally* valid. Thus He Himself has let it be written down in the law (Deu 19:15). A testimony can only be accepted if there are witnesses who can confirm the case.

Verses 31-32 | No Ransom

31 Moreover, you shall not take ransom for the life of a murderer who is guilty of death, but he shall surely be put to death. 32 You shall not take ransom for him who has fled to his city of refuge, that he may return to live in the land before the death of the priest.

No amount, no matter how high, no effort, no matter how great, can cause a guilty manslayer evade punishment. For us it is only through faith in the power of the blood of the Lord Jesus that there is salvation (1Pet 1:18-19; Rom 3:19,23-26).

Only the death of the high priest gives the right to return to his own piece of land. The people who have now, in our days, returned to the land do so before the death of the High Priest. The Lord Jesus is still busy as High Priest in Heaven. The people who have returned do so in unbelief. They will revolt against God under the antichrist and perish under the wrath of the returning Messiah.

Verses 33-34 | The Land Shall Not Be Polluted

33 So you shall not pollute the land in which you are; for blood pollutes the land and no expiation can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it, except by the blood of him who shed it. 34 You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the LORD am dwelling in the midst of the sons of Israel.”

If God dwells in His land, it must not be defiled. The blood of someone who has been deliberately killed pollutes the land. This defilement can only be removed by shedding the blood of the manslayer. This means that the land can only be cleansed by killing all those who live there, because all the people are guilty of the death of the Lord Jesus. The miracle of God’s grace is now that the blood of the Innocent has cleansed the land. The whole creation will be cleansed on the basis of His shed blood.

The latter does not concern all men, but all things: “For it was the [Father’s] good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, [I say,] whether things on earth or things in heaven. And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, [engaged] in evil deeds, yet He has now reconciled you” (Col 1:19-22a). The last part of the quotation makes it clear that all who have accepted Christ and His work in faith are already “now” cleansed and reconciled.

Numbers 36

Introduction

The previous reference of the daughters of Zelophehad, in Numbers 27 (Num 27:1-11), is an homage to their faith. Here, in Numbers 36, it is about guarding the original inheritance part in the hands of the tribe to which it is given. The glory of God requires the avoidance of confusion about what He has given to His people.

Verses 1-4 | Question About the Loss of an Inheritance

1 And the heads of the fathers' [households] of the family of the sons of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of the sons of Joseph, came near and spoke before Moses and before the leaders, the heads of the fathers' [households] of the sons of Israel, 2 and they said, "The LORD commanded my lord to give the land by lot to the sons of Israel as an inheritance, and my lord was commanded by the LORD to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother to his daughters. 3 But if they marry one of the sons of the [other] tribes of the sons of Israel, their inheritance will be withdrawn from the inheritance of our fathers and will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they belong; thus it will be withdrawn from our allotted inheritance. 4 When the jubilee of the sons of Israel comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they belong; so their inheritance will be withdrawn from the inheritance of the tribe of our fathers."

A question has arisen in connection with the regulation of the hereditary possession of the daughters of Zelophehad. This question is about what happens to the inheritance when one of the daughters of Zelophehad marries someone from another tribe. Family heads do not ask the question to challenge what has been said in Numbers 27. They have thought about this and also come up with a question. They have no doubt whatsoever about the correctness of the former statement.

Here comes the side of responsibility, while Numbers 27 is about the position. Now it's about how to deal with what we got. All the children of

God may enjoy the blessings, daughters and sons. That is Numbers 27. But believers who enjoy should never forget the tribal bond.

What we have in common with all believers, we experience especially in the local church. For example, we should not see large conferences or private meetings as the only opportunity to enjoy the inheritance, but rather what happens in the local church. Our concern must be not only to take possession of our inheritance, but also to keep it.

The heads of families are worried that their tribe in case of a marriage with one of the daughters of “Zelophehad our brother”, will lose a part of the inheritance. We too must locally be busy to ensure that we do not lose anything of what is entrusted to us. We can easily slide down, for example to the wilderness side of the Jordan. We must all make sure that we keep what we have. We are all involved in this.

The inheritance is enjoyed by each person personally. It consists of the part of the knowledge of Christian truth that the Lord has shown us and that we have absorbed into our hearts. It is important that our personal blessings, that what we enjoy from them, run parallel to what we have received and enjoyed together.

We do not choose our brothers and sisters ourselves. A church with only spiritual believers is not the church of God. In the church of God there are spiritual and fleshly believers, strong and weak believers. Those in danger of losing their inheritance should be involved in thinking about what we have in spiritual blessings. These blessings must be presented to them vividly, so that they too may long to enjoy their inheritance.

Verses 5-9 | Only Marrying Within One’s Own Tribe

5 Then Moses commanded the sons of Israel according to the word of the LORD, saying, “The tribe of the sons of Joseph are right in [their] statements. 6 This is what the LORD has commanded concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, saying, ‘Let them marry whom they wish; only they must marry within the family of the tribe of their father.’ 7 Thus no inheritance of the sons of Israel shall be transferred from tribe to tribe, for the sons of Israel shall each hold to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers. 8 Every daughter who comes into possession of an inheritance of any tribe of the sons of Israel shall be wife to one

of the family of the tribe of her father, so that the sons of Israel each may possess the inheritance of his fathers. 9 Thus no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another tribe, for the tribes of the sons of Israel shall each hold to his own inheritance."

As in Numbers 27, the questioners get the desired answer. The answer is that the daughters of Zelophehad can only marry within their own tribe. As an extra incentive it is said that "the sons of Israel shall each hold to the inheritance of the tribe of his fathers" (verse 7). We also need this incentive, because we are quick to give in to the tendency to wander and change. This spirit of restlessness, no longer adhering to an assigned work or designated place, characterizes society.

The spirit of change did not stop at the church door. The desire and urge for change in the church is great and is breaking out everywhere. It seems difficult for everyone to "remain in that condition in which he was called" (1Cor 7:20). We must be sure that we are where God wants us to be. If we can say so, we should stay there in His power and honor until He gives us a clear indication from His Word that we should change, for "He chooses our inheritance for us" (Psa 47:4a). We must be in the inheritance He has chosen for us. His Word is the touchstone for this.

The call sounds not for nothing, especially in view of the last days of the church on earth: "Hold fast what you have" (Rev 3:11). And there it is especially about acknowledging that we have little power, about keeping the word of the Lord Jesus and about not denying His Name. This means that we do not think highly of ourselves and that we give Him His full authority over our church life through His Word. Then we will be able – personally and collectively – to continue to enjoy all the blessings He has given us.

Verses 10-12 | The daughters of Zelophehad

10 Just as the LORD had commanded Moses, so the daughters of Zelophehad did: 11 Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad married their uncles' sons. 12 They married [those] from the families of the sons of Manasseh the son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained with the tribe of the family of their father.

The daughters of Zelophehad show obedience to the LORD's statement. They marry within their own tribe. With that, this book, so full of revolt of the people, closes hopefully.

Verses 13 | Final Word

13 These are the commandments and the ordinances which the LORD commanded to the sons of Israel through Moses in the plains of Moab by the Jordan [opposite] Jericho.

The final word is a summary and underlining of what the LORD has said. In His goodness He emphasizes once again that not Moses, but He Himself has spoken. God knows where we are and what is the goal of our way. With this in mind He gives us His directions in the form of commandments and ordinances. He teaches us to make us fit for the road ahead.

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