



This book is called “Numbers” because it begins and ends with a census of the Israelites.

Many readers will find this book frustrating because it seems to ignore what is historically plausible. Likewise, many pages devoted to the laws and customs of Israel will appear as dry and dated as the chapters of Leviticus that precede this book.

Therefore, it helps to understand, from the beginning, that this book superimposes two histories. On one hand, we are dealing with ancient traditions found especially in Chapters 11-14 and 20-25. At times, certain events of Exodus are related again in a different form. The book assumes that on Sinai, immediately after the great revelation to Moses and the story of the golden calf, God gave all the laws that are mentioned in Leviticus. Following that, the book situates all the events that it relates: all that we are going to read was supposed to have taken place in the course of the following year, during the crossing of the desert of Paran or upon arriving at the oasis of Kadesh.

The chapters we have just mentioned do contain ancient traditions. However, like Leviticus, most of the book was written in the priestly circles of Jerusalem, after the Israelites returned from the Exile, namely, around seven hundred years after Moses. The purpose of these priests was to justify the religious and social structure that they intended to establish in Israel in order to make of Israel the people consecrated to the worship of the one God.

All the initiatives attributed to Moses are meant for the Jews, back from the Exile. Thus, the authors depicted the setting in which they lived on the basis of the people before them: the hundred or so families of the Exodus became a people of six hundred thousand men, plus their wives, children and their cattle. The small wooden ark, that was carried on a donkey, became the center of a portable Sanctuary, almost as impressive as the Jerusalem temple and the priests with their rubrics always occupy center stage. When the account was written, Israel was just a quiet province within the Persian Empire: all the more reason to flatter their imagination and to build up Moses’ companions into a formidable, aggressive and conquering army at the service of the one God.

As with Leviticus, we have to say the following: those who accept this way of rewriting history will find the word of the Holy God at every instant; the call to

holiness is not just a personal matter but it conditions the entire life of the people of God. For God, Christians are holy people who have broken away from the ideal that liberal societies have about free humans who only seek the fulfillment of their desires or whims in this world. Before the God who called them to follow the path of Christ, human beings are totally at the service of a mission, so are couples who become families and the Christian community totally turned toward evangelization.

The census of Israel

2S 24

1 • ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses, in the desert of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after their departure from the land of Egypt. He said:

²“Take a census of the whole community of Israel, by clans and families, taking a count of the names of all the males, head by head. ³You and Aaron will enlist all men of Israel, twenty years of age and over, able to give military service. ⁴From each tribe you shall take a man, the head of his family, to help you in this.

⁵These are the names of those who are to be your helpers: For Reuben, Elizur son of Shedeur. ⁶For Simeon, Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. ⁷For Judah, Nahshon son of Amminadab. ⁸For Issachar, Nethanel son of Zuar. ⁹For Zebulun, Eliab son of Helon. ¹⁰Of the sons of Joseph: for Ephraim, Elishama son of Ammihud; for Manasseh, Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. ¹¹For Benjamin, Abidan son of Gideoni. ¹²For Dan, Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. ¹³For Asher, Pagiel son of Ochran. ¹⁴For Gad, Eliasaph son of Reuel. ¹⁵For Naphtali, Ahira son of Enan.”

¹⁶These men were elected by public acclamation; they were leaders of their ancestral clans, chiefs of Israel’s hosts.

¹⁷Moses and Aaron took these men who had been named, ¹⁸and on the first day of the second month they called together the whole community. The sons of Israel listed their names according to their clans and families, and one by one the names of all men of twenty years and over were recorded and counted. ¹⁹As Yahweh had commanded, Moses took a census of them in the desert of Sinai.

Rev 7:4

²⁰When the tribe of Reuben, Israel’s first-born, had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ²¹The total of these for the tribe of Reuben was 46,500.

²²When the tribe of Simeon had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one

by one. ²³The total of these for the tribe of Simeon was 59,300.

²⁴When the tribe of Gad had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service were recorded one by one. ²⁵The total of these for the tribe of Gad was 45,650.

²⁶When the tribe of Judah had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ²⁷The total of these for the tribe of Judah was 74,600.

²⁸When the tribe of Issachar had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service were recorded one by one. ²⁹The total of these for the tribe of Issachar was 54,400.

³⁰When the tribe of Zebulun had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ³¹The total of these for the tribe of Zebulun was 57,400.

³²The descendants of Joseph: when the tribe of Ephraim had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ³³The total of these for the tribe of Ephraim was 40,500. ³⁴When the tribe of Manasseh had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ³⁵The total of these for the tribe of Manasseh was 32,200.

³⁶When the tribe of Benjamin had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ³⁷The total of these for the tribe of Benjamin was 35,400.

³⁸When the tribe of Dan had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service were recorded one by one. ³⁹The total of these for the tribe of Dan was 62,700.

• **1.1** What is the meaning of this census, with its many repetitions and orderly arrangement of the camps of the twelve tribes? It seems like scenes from a play: Israel appears as an orderly people, Yahweh’s armies on their way

to conquer the Promised Land. First come those of the tribe of Levi, or the Levites, responsible for worship: thus we know that this is a “holy” people, consecrated to God.

⁴⁰When the tribe of Asher had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ⁴¹The total of these for the tribe of Asher was 41,500.

⁴²When the tribe of Naphtali had been listed by clans and families, the names of all the males of twenty years and over, able to give military service, were recorded one by one. ⁴³The total of these for the tribe of Naphtali was 53,400.

⁴⁴Such were the men registered by Moses, Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, each representing his tribe. ⁴⁵Every man of Israel of twenty years and over, able to give military service, was counted according to his tribe. ⁴⁶Altogether the full total was 603,550.

⁴⁷But the Levites and their tribe were not included in the count.

⁴⁸Yahweh spoke to Moses and said:

⁴⁹"Do not take any census of the Levites, or register them among the sons of Israel.

²⁵⁻²⁸ ⁵⁰You yourself must enlist the Levites to serve the Holy Tent of the Testimony and to look after its furnishings and its belongings. They are to carry the Holy Tent, and all its furnishings; they are to take care of it and set up their camp around it. ⁵¹Whenever the Holy Tent is to be moved, the Levites shall take it down; whenever the Holy Tent is to be set up again, they shall do this. Any layman coming near it must be put to death.

⁵²The sons of Israel are to set up their tents in formation, each man with his own group and under his own banner. ⁵³But the Levites are to set up their tents around the Holy Tent of the Testimony, lest God's anger fall on the whole community of Israel. The Levites will take care of the Holy Tent of the Testimony."

⁵⁴The sons of Israel did exactly as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

Israel's armies

2 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said: ²"The Israelites are to camp, every man by his own banner, under the flag of his tribe. They are to camp all around the Holy Tent of the Testimony, but at some distance from it.

³Those who are to camp on the east side, towards the sunrise: the camp of Judah around his banner, in battle arrange-

ment. Leader of the sons of Judah: Nahshon son of Amminadab. ⁴His command: 74,600 men.

⁵Encamped next to him:

The tribe of Issachar. Leader of the sons of Issachar: Nethanel son of Zuar. ⁶His command: 54,400 men.

⁷The tribe of Zebulun. Leader of the sons of Zebulun: Eliab son of Helon. ⁸His command: 57,400.

⁹The assembled strength of the camp of Judah numbers in all 186,400. These are to be first in marching.

¹⁰On the south side, the banner of the camp of Reuben, in battle formation. Leader of the sons of Reuben: Elizur son of Shedeur. ¹¹His command: 46,500 men.

¹²Beside him shall camp: the tribe of Simeon. Leader of the sons of Simeon: Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai. ¹³His command: 59,300 men.

¹⁴The tribe of Gad. Leader of the sons of Gad: Eliasaph son of Reuel. ¹⁵His command: 45,650 men.

¹⁶The assembled strength of the camp of Reuben numbers in all 151,450. They are to be second in order of marching.

¹⁷Next the tent of meeting will move, since the camp of the Levites is located in the middle of the other camps. The order of marching is to be the same order as in camping, every man under his own banner.

¹⁸On the west side, the banner of the camp of Ephraim, in battle formation. Leader of the sons of Ephraim: Elishama son of Ammihud. ¹⁹His command: 40,500 men.

²⁰Next to him: the tribe of Manasseh. Leader of the tribe of Manasseh: Gamaliel son of Pedahzur. ²¹His command: 32,200 men.

²²The tribe of Benjamin. Leader of the sons of Benjamin: Abidan son of Gideon. ²³His command: 35,400 men.

²⁴The assembled strength of the camp of Ephraim numbers in all 108,100. They are to be third in order of marching.

²⁵On the north side, the banner of the camp of Dan, in battle formation. Leader of the sons of Dan: Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai. ²⁶His command: 62,700 men.

²⁷Beside him shall camp ²⁸the tribe of Asher. Leader of the sons of Asher: Pagiel son of Ochran. His command: 41,500 men.

²⁹The tribe of Naphtali. Leader of the sons of Naphtali: Ahira son of Enan. ³⁰His command: 53,400 men.

³¹The assembled strength of the camp of Dan numbers in all 157,600. They are to be last in order of marching.”

³²Such was the total count of the sons of Israel when the census was made according to tribes. The full count of the entire camp, grouped under the various commands, was 603,550. ³³The Levites, as Yahweh had commanded Moses, were not included in this census of the sons of Israel.

³⁴The sons of Israel did exactly as Yahweh had commanded Moses. This was how they camped, grouped by banners. This was how they broke camp, each in his own clan, every man with his own family.

The Tribe of Levi

3 ¹These are the descendants of Aaron and Moses, at the time when Yahweh spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai.

²These are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab the eldest, then Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.

³These are the names of Aaron’s sons, priests anointed and invested with the powers of the priesthood. ⁴Nadab and Abihu died in the presence of Yahweh, in the desert of Sinai, when they offered fire that was unlawful. They left no children and so it fell to Eleazar and Ithamar to exercise the priesthood under their father Aaron.

⁵Yahweh spoke to Moses and said:

⁶“Call for the tribe of Levi and appoint them as servants to Aaron the priest. ⁷They are to perform the duties that are laid on him and on the entire community before the tent of meeting, in their service

of the Holy Tent. ⁸They shall take care of the furnishings for the tent of meeting, and serve me in the Holy Tent as representatives of the sons of Israel. ⁹You are to give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given to him from the sons of Israel.

¹⁰You are to enroll also Aaron and his sons, and they are to carry out the priestly duty. But any layman who comes near is to be put to death.”

¹¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said:

¹²“I myself have chosen the Levites ^{8:16} from among the sons of Israel, in place of the firstborn, those who open the mother’s womb among the sons of Israel; the Levites therefore belong to me, ¹³for every firstborn belongs to me. On the day I struck all the firstborn of the Egyptians, I consecrated for my own all the firstborn of Israel, of both man and beast. They are mine; I am Yahweh.” ^{13:1; 22:29}

¹⁴Yahweh spoke to Moses in the desert of Sinai. He said: ¹⁵“You are to take a census of the sons of Levi by families and clans; all the males of the age of one month and over must be counted.” ¹⁶Moses took this census, as Yahweh had ordered. ¹⁷These are the names of the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari.

¹⁸These are the names of Gershon’s sons by their clans: Libni and Shimei; ¹⁹Kohath’s sons by their clans: Amran, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel; ²⁰Merari’s sons by their clans: Mahli and Mushi. These are the clans of Levi, grouped according to their ancestral families.

²¹From Gershon are descended the Libnite and the Shimeite clans; these are the

• **3.1** Chapters 3, 4 and 8 refer to the priests or Levites.

At the time of Abraham, each family head was “priest” for his own group; he himself was responsible for the sacrifices (Gen 15:10) and sacred rituals (Gen 28:18); he also gave blessings on behalf of God (Gen 27:27).

Possibly, Moses appointed men in charge of teaching Yahweh’s laws to Israel. The group called the tribe of Levi, perhaps a tribe of warriors at first, became responsible for this mission. In the episode of the Golden Calf they supported Moses in restoring order.

Still, heads of families as well as priests kept on celebrating without laws or control (Jdg 17).

David and Solomon established the Jewish clergy: from then on, only men from the tribe of Levi could be priests. It was perhaps with Josiah’s reform that a distinction was made

among the Levites. Those of a higher rank were called priests and those of a lower rank were *Levites* (see 2 K 22:8). Those who returned to Jerusalem at Josiah’s command and were forbidden to officiate in the temple may have been the first “Levites” of a lower rank, while the Jerusalem clergy saw their privileges confirmed. They, the “priests” of the temple, began to form a superior class and, to differentiate themselves within the tribe of Levi, they claimed to be descendants of Aaron, Moses’ brother.

The Book of Numbers attributes to Moses himself, in a fictitious way, all this organization.

The Levites represent the firstborn of Israel, the ones whom Yahweh saved in the first Passover when the firstborn of Egypt died. Since they were saved by Yahweh, from that time on they belonged to God.

Gershonite clans. ²²Their number, counting the males of one month and over, came to 7,500.

²³The Gershonite clans camped behind the Holy Tent, on the west side. ²⁴The leader of the clan of Gershon was Eliasaph son of Lael. ²⁵In the tent of meeting the sons of Gershon had charge of the Holy Tent, its inner and outer covers, ²⁶the screen for the entrance and curtains for the court which is around the Holy Tent and the altar, and the ropes needed for all this work.

²⁷From Kohath are descended the Amramite, the Izharite, the Hebronite and the Uzzielite clans; these are the Kohathite clans. ²⁸Their full number, counting the males of one month and over, came to 8,300. They were in charge of the Sanctuary. ²⁹The Kohathite clans camped on the south side of the Holy Tent. ³⁰The leader of the Kohathite clans was Elizaphan son of Uzziel. ³¹They were in charge of the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the sacred vessels used in the liturgy, and the screen.

³²The chief of the Levite leaders was Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest. He was the head of all those who were in charge of the Sanctuary.

³³From Merari are descended the Mahlite and the Mushite clans; these are the Merarite clans. ³⁴Their full number, counting the males of one month and over, came to 6,200. ³⁵The leader of the Merarite clans was Zuriel, son of Abihail. They camped on the north side of the Holy Tent. ³⁶The sons of Merari were in charge of the framework of the Holy Tent, with its cross-bars, posts and bases, all its fittings, ³⁷and also the posts around the court, with their bases, pegs and ropes.

³⁸Finally, on the east side, facing the Holy Tent and the tent of meeting, toward the sunrise, was the camp of Moses and Aaron and his sons, who had charge of the Sanctuary for the people of Israel. Anyone else coming near was to be put to death.

³⁹Altogether, the total count of Levites of the age of one month and over, whom

Moses numbered by clans as Yahweh had ordered, came to 22,000.

⁴⁰Yahweh said to Moses:

“Take a census of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, all the males from the age of one month and over; take a census of them by name. ⁴¹Then you will take the Levites for me, Yahweh, instead of the firstborn of Israel; in the same way you will give me their cattle instead of the firstborn cattle of the sons of Israel.”

⁴²As Yahweh commanded, Moses took a census of all the firstborn of the sons of Israel. ⁴³The total count, by name, of the firstborn from the age of one month and over came to 22,273.

⁴⁴Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and said,

⁴⁵“Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn of Israel’s sons, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; the Levites shall be my own. ⁴⁶But you have to buy back the 273 of the firstborn of the sons of Israel who outnumber the Levites. ⁴⁷So for each one you are to pay five pieces of silver, according to the official standard, ⁴⁸and you shall give this money to Aaron and his sons.”

⁴⁹Moses received the 1,365 pieces of silver as ransom from those who were left when the rest had been redeemed by the Levites. ⁵⁰From the firstborn of the Israelites he received one thousand three hundred and sixty-five pieces of silver according to the Sanctuary standard. ⁵¹And he gave them to Aaron and his sons as Yahweh had ordered.

The Levite families: the Kohathites

4 • ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron. ²⁵ He said: ²“Take a census of those Levites who are sons of Kohath, by sub-clans and families ³count all the men between thirty and fifty years of age, those able to give military service who will be given tasks in the tent of meeting.

⁴These are the duties of the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting; they are to have charge of the most holy things.

• **4.1** In Israel, every male born into the tribe of Levi was automatically a priest. Besides, each family of that tribe was destined for some form of service. This is the lesson taught in the description of the census taking of the tribe of Levi. The Levites, consecrated to God’s service for their whole lives (and that of their sons) were, by their very presence, reminding Israel

that they were a people destined for the service of God.

This Israelite clergy still had its place in the temple at the time of Christ. From the very beginning the Church was free of this type of priesthood. For her there was no longer a “House of God” among the houses of the people (Jn 2:19; Rev 21:22): Jesus was the New Temple

⁵When it is time to move from the camp, Aaron and his sons are to come and take down the veil of the screen. With it they shall cover up the Ark of the Covenant.

⁶On top of this they shall put a covering of fine leather, and spread over the whole a cloth all of violet. Then they are to fix the poles to the ark.

⁷Over the offertory table they are to spread a violet cloth and put on it the dishes, cups, bowls and jars for the wine offering; the bread offered to the Lord shall be perpetually on it. ⁸Over these they shall spread a cloth of scarlet and cover the whole with a covering of fine leather. Then they are to fix the poles to the table.

⁹They are then to take a cloth of violet and cover the light-bearing lampstand together with the lamps, tongs, trays and all the oil jars that belong to it. ¹⁰They are to put it, with all its utensils, on a covering of fine leather and place it on the carrying frame.

¹¹Over the golden altar they must spread a violet cloth, and cover that with a covering of fine leather. Then they are to fix the poles to it.

¹²They are also to take all the other objects used in the service of the Sanctuary. They must put them all on a violet cloth, cover them with a covering of fine leather and place them together on the carrying frame.

¹³When they have removed the ashes from the altar, they must spread a scarlet cloth over it, ¹⁴and place on this all the objects used in the service at the altar: the fire pans, hooks, shovels, sprinkling basins

and all the altar vessels. Over the whole they must spread a covering of fine leather. Then they are to fix the poles to it.

¹⁵When Aaron and his sons have finished covering all the sacred objects and all the equipment in preparation for moving from camp, the sons of Kohath are to come to carry the sacred things, but without touching any of them; otherwise they would die. This is the duty given to the sons of Kohath in the tent of meeting.

¹⁶Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, is to watch over the oil for the light, the sweet-smelling incense, the grain offerings and the anointing oil; he must watch over the whole Holy Tent and everything in it: the sacred objects and their equipment."

¹⁷Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said: ¹⁸"Do not let the families of Kohath be cut off from the number of the Levites. ¹⁹This is what you shall do for them, lest they die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons must go in and assign to each of them his task. ²⁰In this way they can go in and yet not look, even for a moment, on any of the holy things; if they do, they will die."

The Gershonite families

²¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said to him:

²²"Take a census also of the sons of Gershon, by families and sub-clans: ²³count the men between thirty and fifty years of age, those able to give military service, who will be given tasks in the tent of meeting.

²⁴These are the duties of the Gershonites: ²⁵They are to carry the curtains of the Holy Tent, the tent of meeting with its

"for in Him dwells the fullness of God in bodily form" (Col 2:9). From then on the Church no longer needs a "clergy" assuring the service of the temple, it no longer needs "Levites." What the Church needs now are "ministers" who by their different services assure the growth of the entire Body (Eph 4:11-12).

But through the centuries the Church developed; entire nations following their king or prince joined the new religion and were baptized. The great majority of humans feel the need of a religion, without having heard the call to faith. So a majority was Christian simply because Christianity had dethroned ancient beliefs. In Christendom centuries, the Church became what the ancient Israel had been: a religious people animated by an invisible network of believers. Already the extension of Christian communities, those who worship in churches

replacing meetings in private houses, had prepared the ground for more demanding ministries: the new situation originated a return to the perspectives of the Old Testament. From then on "priests" and "clergy" were needed to serve the "faithful," those who "were only baptized."

It was not until the twentieth century that baptism was reevaluated. Then it became clearer that ministries were needed but not all the ministries had to be entrusted to a celibate clergy, recruited in their youth and formed in seminaries, rather than being chosen within the Christian community for the gifts they proved to have.

Put out of the camp... (5:2). Let us not forget that all of this was written in figurative language. The camp stood for the Holy Place, for the temple. It was a way of saying which people were not allowed to enter the temple.

2S 6:7;
Lev 17:1

covering and the other covering of fine leather that goes over it, ²⁶the screen for the entrance to the tent of meeting, the curtains for the court, the screen for the entrance to the court that is around the Holy Tent and the altar, the ropes and all the necessary equipment.

²⁷They are to be responsible for these things. These are the duties of the sons of Gershon. Their functions and their tasks are to be carried out under the direction of Aaron and his sons: you must see that they fulfill their duties. ²⁸Such shall be the duties of the Gershonites in the tent of meeting. Their work will be supervised by Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest.

The Merarite families

²⁹You are to count the sons of Merari, by sub-clans and families. ³⁰Count all the men between thirty and fifty years of age, those able to give military service, who will be given tasks in the tent of meeting.

³¹The burden they are to carry and the duties that are to fall to them in the tent of meeting shall be as follows: the framework of the Holy Tent, its crossbars, its posts and bases, ³²the posts around the court with their bases, pegs, ropes and all the fittings used in setting them up. You are to draw up a list of their names with the duty that each man must fulfill.

³³These are the duties of the Merarite clans. All their duties in the tent of meeting will be supervised by Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest."

Census of the Levites

³⁴Moses, Aaron and the leaders of the community took a census of the sons of Kohath, by sub-clans and families, ³⁵of every man between thirty and fifty years of age, able to give military service and to be given tasks in the tent of meeting, ³⁶the total of their clans was 2,750 men. ³⁷This was the number of the Kohathites, of all those who were given tasks in the tent of meeting whom Moses and Aaron counted at the Lord's command given through Moses.

³⁸A census was taken of the sons of Gershon, ³⁹by sub-clans and families, of every man between thirty and fifty years of age able to give military service and to be given tasks in the tent of meeting. ⁴⁰The total was 2,630 men. ⁴¹This was the number of the Gershonites, of all those who

were given tasks in the tent of meeting, whom Moses and Aaron counted at the Lord's command.

⁴²A census was taken of the sons of Merari, by sub-clans and families, ⁴³of every man between thirty and fifty years of age, able to give military service and to be given tasks in the tent of meeting. ⁴⁴The total was 3,200 men. ⁴⁵This was the number of the Merarites whom Moses and Aaron counted at the Lord's command through Moses.

⁴⁶The total number of Levites, counted according to clans and families—⁴⁷all the men between thirty and fifty years of age, able to give military service and to be given tasks of carrying burdens in the tent of meeting ⁴⁸amounted to 8,580. ⁴⁹At Yahweh's command given through Moses, the census was taken to assign to every man his duty and his task; they were numbered as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

Various laws

5 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ²"Order the Israelites to put out of the camp all lepers, and all who suffer from a contagious infection, or who have become unclean by touching a corpse. ³Man or woman, you must put them out and forbid them to return to the camp. The Israelites must not allow the camp where I dwell among them to become unclean in this way."

⁴The Israelites did so: they put them out of the camp. The Israelites did as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

⁵Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ⁶"Tell the people of Israel:

If anyone commits a fault against another person, and thus is unfaithful to Yahweh, ⁷that person must confess the sin committed and give back in full the amount which was taken plus 20 % more. Payment is to be made to the person who was wronged.

⁸If, however, that person has died and there is no near relative to whom the ill-gotten goods can be returned, this payment owed to Yahweh shall be given to the priest, in addition to the ram of atonement with which the priest makes atonement for the guilty person. ⁹For of everything consecrated by Israelites and brought to the priest he has a right to the share set aside. ¹⁰Whatever a person consecrates is his own; whatever is given to the priest belongs to the priest."

Lev
13:45;
Dt23:11;
1Cor5:7;
2Cor
6:16;
Rev
21:27

Lev
5:15

Lev
22:12

¹¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹²“Say this to the people of Israel:

If anyone has a wife who goes astray and is unfaithful to him, ¹³sleeping with some other man without the husband’s knowledge, and she disgraces herself in secret in this way, without any witness against her, and without anyone catching her in the act; ¹⁴then, perhaps the spirit of jealousy will come over the husband and make him jealous for the wife who has disgraced herself. But perhaps the spirit of jealousy comes upon the husband, and makes him jealous of his wife even though she is innocent. ¹⁵In these cases the man must bring his wife before the priest, and on her behalf make an offering of two pounds of barley flour. He is not to pour oil on it or put incense on it, because this is an ‘offering for jealousy,’ a memorial offering to record a fault.

¹⁶The priest is then to bring the woman forward and stand her before Yahweh. ¹⁷Then he shall take living water in an earthen jar, and on the water throw dust that he has taken from the floor of the Holy Tent. ¹⁸After he has placed the woman before Yahweh, he shall loosen her hair and put in her hands the commemorative offering (that is, the offering for jealousy). In his own hands the priest will hold the bowl containing bitter water that brings a curse.

¹⁹He is then to make the woman agree to an oath. He shall say to her: If it is not true that a man has slept with you, that you have gone astray and disgraced yourself while under your husband’s authority, then may this water of bitterness and cursing do you no harm. ²⁰But if it is true that you have gone astray, and have disgraced yourself by sharing your bed with a man other than your husband, ²¹may Yahweh make of you an example and a curse among your people, making your breast shrink and your stomach swell! ²²May this water of cursing enter your body to swell your stomach and to shrink your breast! The woman must answer: Amen! Amen!

²³Then the priest shall write these curses down and wash them off in the bowl of bitter water. ²⁴He must make the woman drink this water of bitterness and of cursing, and this water of cursing shall go into her and be bitter inside her.

²⁵The priest shall then take the offering for jealousy from the woman’s hands, and hold it up before Yahweh with a gesture of offering, and so carry it up to the altar. ²⁶He shall take a handful of the flour as a memorial, and burn it on the altar.

He shall then make the woman drink the water. ²⁷After he has made her drink it, if it is true that she has disgraced herself, deceiving her husband, then the water of cursing that goes into her shall indeed be bitter: her belly will swell and her breast shrink, and she will be a curse among her people. ²⁸But if she has not disgraced herself and is clean, then she will go unharmed and will bear children.

²⁹This is the law in cases of jealousy, when a woman has gone astray and disgraced herself while under her husband’s authority, ³⁰or when a spirit of jealousy has come over a man and made him jealous for his wife. When a husband brings such a woman before Yahweh, the priest must apply this law to her in full. ³¹The husband shall be guiltless, but the woman must bear the punishment for her sin.”

The Nazirites

6 • ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses, “Speak to the people of Israel ²and say to them: When either a man or a woman makes a special vow, the vow of a Nazirite, to dedicate himself to Yahweh, ³he shall abstain from wine and strong drink. He shall not drink vinegar made from wine or strong drink; nor shall he drink the juice of the grape or eat fresh or dried grapes. ⁴All the time he lives as a Nazirite he shall eat nothing produced by the grapevine, from the pips to the skin.

⁵All the days of his vow of separation no razor shall touch his head. Until the time of his dedication to Yahweh is over, he will

Jdg 13:5;
1S 1:11;
Am 2:11;
Lk 1:15

• **6.1** The *Nazirites* were men who consecrated themselves to God for a while or for life. Samson was a Nazirite (Jdg 13:5) and John the Baptist may have also been one (see Lk 1:15). There were also Nazirites among the first Christians of Jewish descent (Acts 21:23). See also Paul’s vow (Acts 18:18).

We do not know of any religious congregations in Israel as we now have in the church. Therefore the law concerning the Nazirites enabled any believer to dedicate himself to God in a personal way.

be a consecrated person and he shall let his hair grow freely. ⁶For all the time of his separation in honor of Yahweh he shall not go near a dead person, ⁷not even for his father, mother, brother or sister, lest he be defiled, for he bears on his head the sign of his consecration to God. ⁸All the time he lives as a Nazirite he is consecrated to Yahweh.

⁹If someone suddenly dies near him, his dedicated head is defiled. He then shall be purified on the seventh day and shave his head on that day. ¹⁰Then on the eighth day he shall bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ¹¹The priest shall offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering; so he shall make atonement for his sin because of the dead person. ¹²And that same day the Nazirite shall again consecrate his head and bring a yearling lamb as a guilt offering. The time of his consecration begins again from that day. The former days are not valid for his separation has been defiled.

¹³This is the ritual regarding the Nazirite on the day when his period of consecration is completed. He is to be led to the entrance of the tent of meeting, ¹⁴and must make his offering to Yahweh: a one-year-old male lamb without any defect for burnt offering, a one-year-old lamb without any defect for sacrifice for sin; a ram without any defect for peace offering; ¹⁵and a basket of unleavened loaves made of fine flour mixed with oil, and of unleavened wafers spread with oil, with the required offerings of grain and wine. ¹⁶When he has brought all this before Yahweh, the priest must offer the sacrifice for sin and the burnt offering for the Nazirite. ¹⁷Then he shall offer the peace offering with the ram and the unleavened bread in the basket, and finally the priest shall offer the accompanying offerings of grain and wine. ¹⁸Then the Nazirite shall shave off his consecrated hair at the entrance to the tent of meeting, and put it in the fire of peace offering. ¹⁹The priest is to take the shoulder of the ram, as soon as it is cooked, with an unleavened cake from the basket, and an unleavened wafer. He is to put them into the hands of the Nazirite who has just shaved off his hair. ²⁰With

them he must make the gesture of offering before Yahweh; as it is a holy thing, it belongs by law to the priest, in addition to the breast that has been presented and the leg of the ram that has been set aside. After this the Nazirite may once more drink wine.

²¹Such is the ritual for the Nazirite, if, besides the hair, he has also vowed a personal offering to Yahweh, he must fulfill the vow he has made, in addition to what the ritual prescribes for his hair."

The blessing

• ²²Then Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, ²³"Speak to Aaron and his sons and say to them: This is how you shall bless the people of Israel; you shall say:

²⁴May Yahweh bless you and keep you!

²⁵May Yahweh let his face shine on you, and be gracious to you!

²⁶May Yahweh look kindly on you, and give you his peace!

²⁷In that way shall they put my name on the people of Israel and I will bless them."

Offering of wagons

7 ¹On the day Moses finished setting up the Holy Tent, he anointed and consecrated it with all its furniture, as well as the altar and all its equipment. When he had anointed and consecrated it all, ²the leaders of Israel made an offering; these were the heads of the clans, who were leaders of tribes and had supervised the census. ³They brought their offering before Yahweh: six covered wagons and twelve oxen, one wagon for every two leaders and one ox each. They brought them before the Holy Tent. ⁴Yahweh then spoke to Moses and said, ⁵"Accept these from them, and let them be set apart for the service of the tent of meeting. You are to give them to the Levites, to each as his duties require."

⁶Moses took the wagons and the oxen, and gave them to the Levites. ⁷To the sons of Gershon he gave two wagons and four

Acts
21:23

Ps 121:7;
Jn 17:11

Ps 122:6;
Jn 14:27

40:17-
33

Lev 7:34

- 22. Blessing of Moses which St. Francis of Assisi always used.

oxen for the duties they had to perform.⁸ To the sons of Merari he gave four wagons and eight oxen, for the duties they had to perform under the direction of Ithamar, son of Aaron the priest.⁹ But to the sons of Kohath he gave none at all, because the sacred duty given to them had to be carried on their shoulders.

Ezk
43:18

¹⁰The leaders then made an offering for the dedication of the altar, on the day it was anointed. They brought their offering before the altar,¹¹ and Yahweh said to Moses, "Let the leaders each bring an offering each day for a period of twelve days for the dedication of the altar."

¹²On the first day an offering was brought by Nahshon son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah.¹³ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil,¹⁴ one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense,¹⁵ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering;¹⁶ one goat for the sacrifice for sin;¹⁷ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Nahshon son of Amminadab.

¹⁸On the second day an offering was brought by Nethanel son of Zuar, leader of Issachar.¹⁹ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil,²⁰ one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense,²¹ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering,²² one goat for the sacrifice for sin,²³ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Nethanel son of Zuar.

²⁴On the third day an offering was brought by Eliab son of Helon, leader of the sons of Zebulun.²⁵ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil,²⁶ one golden bowl weighing 50 ounces, filled with incense,²⁷ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering;²⁸ one goat for

the sacrifice for sin,²⁹ and for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Eliab son of Helon.

³⁰On the fourth day an offering was brought by Elizur son of Shedeur, leader of the sons of Reuben.³¹ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil,³² one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense,³³ one young bull, one ram, and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering,³⁴ one goat for the sacrifice for sin,³⁵ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Elizur son of Shedeur.

³⁶On the fifth day an offering was brought by Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai, leader of the sons of Simeon.³⁷ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil,³⁸ one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense,³⁹ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering,⁴⁰ one goat for the sacrifice for sin;⁴¹ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai.

⁴²On the sixth day an offering was brought by Eliasaph son of Reuel, leader of the sons of Gad.⁴³ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil,⁴⁴ one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense,⁴⁵ one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering,⁴⁶ one goat for sacrifice for sin,⁴⁷ and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Eliasaph son of Reuel.

⁴⁸On the seventh day an offering was brought by Elishama son of Ammihud, leader of the sons of Ephraim.⁴⁹ His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine

flour mixed with oil, ⁵⁰one golden bowl weighing four ounces filled with incense, ⁵¹one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁵²one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ⁵³and, for the peace offering, two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Elishama, son of Ammihud.

⁵⁴On the eighth day an offering was brought by Gamaliel son of Pedahzur, leader of the sons of Manasseh. ⁵⁵His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil, ⁵⁶one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense, ⁵⁷one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁵⁸one goat for the sacrifice for sin; ⁵⁹and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Gamaliel son of Pedahzur.

⁶⁰On the ninth day an offering was brought by Abidan son of Gideoni, leader of the sons of Benjamin. ⁶¹His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil, ⁶²one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense, ⁶³one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁶⁴one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ⁶⁵and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Abidan son of Gideoni.

⁶⁶On the tenth day an offering was brought by Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai, leader of the sons of Dan. ⁶⁷His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled, for the grain offering, with fine flour mixed with oil, ⁶⁸one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense, ⁶⁹one young bull, one ram, and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering, ⁷⁰one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ⁷¹and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai.

⁷²On the eleventh day an offering was brought by Pagiel son of Ochran, leader of the sons of Asher. ⁷³His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil, ⁷⁴one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense, ⁷⁵one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁷⁶one goat for the sacrifice for sin; ⁷⁷and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Pagiel son of Ochran.

⁷⁸On the twelfth day an offering was brought by Ahira son of Enan, leader of the sons of Naphtali. ⁷⁹His offering was: one silver bowl weighing 50 ounces, one silver sprinkling bowl weighing 30 ounces by the official standard, both of them filled for the grain offering with fine flour mixed with oil, ⁸⁰one golden bowl weighing four ounces, filled with incense, ⁸¹one young bull, one ram and one male one-year-old lamb for the burnt offering; ⁸²one goat for the sacrifice for sin, ⁸³and, for the peace offering: two oxen, five rams, five goats, and five male one-year-old lambs. This was the offering of Ahira son of Enan.

⁸⁴These were the offerings made by the leaders of Israel for the dedication of the altar on the day it was anointed: twelve silver bowls, twelve silver sprinkling bowls, and twelve golden bowls. ⁸⁵Each silver bowl weighed 50 ounces, and each sprinkling bowl 30 ounces, the silver of these objects weighing in all 60 pounds. ⁸⁶The twelve golden bowls filled with incense weighed four ounces each, the gold of these bowls weighing in all 48 ounces.

⁸⁷The sum total of animals for the burnt offering: twelve bulls, twelve rams, twelve male one-year-old lambs, together with their accompanying grain offering. For the sacrifice for sin, twelve goats. ⁸⁸The sum total of animals for the peace offering: twenty-four bulls, sixty rams, sixty goats, and sixty male one-year-old lambs.

These were the offerings for the dedication of the altar, after it had been anointed.

⁸⁹When Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with Him, he heard the voice speaking to him from above the mercy seat which was on the Ark of the Covenant, from between the two cherubim.

25:31-39

8¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ²“Say this to Aaron: Set up the lamps, so that the seven lamps throw their light toward the front of the lampstand.”

³Aaron set up the lamps to the front of the lampstand, as the Lord had commanded Moses. ⁴This lampstand was made of hammered gold; from its stem to its petals, it was of hammered gold. This lampstand had been made according to the pattern Yahweh had shown to Moses.

The Levites are offered to Yahweh

Lev 14:8; Ezk 36:25

⁵Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ⁶“Separate the Levites from the other Israelites and purify them. ⁷You shall sprinkle them with the water of purification, and they shall shave their bodies all over and wash their clothing. They will then be clean. ⁸They shall next take a young bull, with the accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil, and you shall take a second young bull for a sacrifice for sin. ⁹Then bring the Levites before the tent of meeting, and call together the whole community of Israel. ¹⁰When you have brought the Levites before Yahweh, the sons of Israel must lay their hands on them. ¹¹Aaron shall then offer the Levites, and make the gesture of offering waving them before Yahweh on behalf of the Israelites. From that time, they will be dedicated to the service of Yahweh.

¹²The Levites must then lay their hands on the heads of the bulls, one of which you are to offer as a sacrifice for sin, and the other as a burnt offering to Yahweh; this is the rite of atonement for the Levites. ¹³Having brought the Levites before Aaron and his sons, you will present them to Yahweh and wave them before him. ¹⁴So you shall set the Levites apart from the rest of the sons of Israel, so that they may be mine. ¹⁵The Levites may begin their ministry in the tent of meeting when you have purified them and offered them with the gesture of offering. ¹⁶They are given me from among all the sons of Israel. They are to replace all the firstborn of all the sons of Israel. I have taken them for my own. ¹⁷For all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, man and beast, belong to me: the day I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I consecrated them to myself, ¹⁸and now, in place of all the firstborn among the sons of Israel, I have taken the Levites. ¹⁹But

3:13; 13:2

now I give them to Aaron and his sons from among the sons of Israel and they will minister in the tent of meeting on behalf of the sons of Israel, and perform the rite of atonement over them, so that none of the sons of Israel may be struck down for approaching the Sanctuary.”

²⁰Moses, Aaron and the whole community of the sons of Israel dealt with the Levites exactly as Yahweh had ordered Moses; this is what the sons of Israel did with them. ²¹The Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes, and Aaron presented them and waved them before Yahweh. Then he performed the rite of atonement over them. ²²The Levites were then allowed to perform their ministry in the tent of meeting in the presence of Aaron and his sons. As Yahweh had ordered Moses concerning the Levites, so it was done to them.

²³Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ²⁴“This concerns the Levites. The Levite shall exercise his ministry and do his duties in the tent of meeting from the age of twenty-four onward. ²⁵After the age of fifty, he is no longer bound to the ministry; he shall have no further duties; ²⁶but he can still help his brothers to perform the services in the tent of meeting, though he himself will no longer have any ministry. See that this is the rule for the ministry of the Levites.”

Date of the Passover

9¹Yahweh spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the second year after the exodus from Egypt, in the first month. He said:

²“Let the sons of Israel keep the Passover at its appointed time. ³The fourteenth day of this month, between the two evenings, is the appointed time for you to keep it. Then you must celebrate the Passover according to all the laws and customs proper to it.”

⁴So Moses gave orders for the sons of Israel to celebrate the Passover. ⁵They celebrated it in the wilderness of Sinai, in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, between the two evenings. The people of Israel did exactly as Yahweh had ordered Moses.

⁶It happened that some men had become unclean by touching a dead body and they could not celebrate the Passover

12:1

Lev 23:5

that day. They came the same day to Moses and Aaron, ⁷and said to them, “We have become unclean by touching a dead body. Why should we be forbidden to celebrate the sacrifice to Yahweh at the proper time with the rest of the Israelites?” ⁸Moses answered them, “Wait there till I hear what Yahweh tells me about you.”

⁹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁰“Say this to the Israelites: If anyone, among you or your descendants, becomes unclean by touching a dead body or is far away on a journey, he can still celebrate the Passover for Yahweh. ¹¹He shall do it one month later instead, on the fourteenth day, between the two evenings. Then you shall celebrate it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs; ¹²nothing of the victim must be left over until morning, nor must they break any of its bones: You shall keep all the regulations of the Passover. ¹³But anyone who is clean and not away on a journey, and who fails to celebrate the Passover, shall be cut off from his people because he did not bring the offering to Yahweh at its appointed time. So he must suffer the punishment for his sin.

¹⁴If a stranger is living among you and wants to celebrate the Passover for Yahweh, he must celebrate it in accordance with the laws and customs of the Passover. There is to be only one law among you, for settler and native alike.”

By means of the cloud, God leads his people

¹⁵On the day the Holy Tent, that is the tent of meeting, was set up, the cloud covered it. At nightfall the cloud took the appearance of fire over the Holy Tent and remained so until the morning. ¹⁶The cloud covered it continually in daytime and at night it looked like fire.

¹⁷Whenever the cloud lifted above the Tent, the Israelites took down their tents and continued their journey; whenever the cloud stopped, there the Israelites camped. ¹⁸The Israelites left at the command of Yahweh, and at his command they camped.

The people remained in camp as long as the cloud rested on the Holy Tent. ¹⁹As long as the cloud stayed above the Holy Tent the Israelites obeyed Yahweh and did not move on.

²⁰Whether the cloud happened to stay for many days above the Holy Tent or only

one day, they camped at Yahweh’s command and moved on at Yahweh’s command. ²¹If the cloud happened to remain only from evening to morning, they moved on when it lifted the next morning. Or, if it stayed for a whole day and night, they moved on only when it lifted. ²²Sometimes it stayed there for two days, a month, or a year; however long the cloud stayed above the Holy Tent, the Israelites remained in camp in the same place, and when it lifted they moved on. ²³At Yahweh’s command they camped, and at Yahweh’s command they moved on. They obeyed Yahweh’s command given through Moses.

10 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ²“Make two trumpets of hammered silver that you shall use for calling the people together, and for sounding the order to move on. ³Whenever both trumpets are sounded, the whole community is to gather around you, at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁴But if only one trumpet is sounded, then only the leaders, the chiefs of clans are to gather around you.

⁵When the trumpet sounds shrilly, the camps to the east shall move on. ⁶At the second shrill blast, the camps pitched to the south shall move on. The trumpet blast shall be shrill when they are to leave; ⁷but to gather the people, the trumpet shall be sounded plainly. ⁸The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to sound the trumpets; this is a law for you and your descendants for all time to come.

⁹When you are in your own land and are to go to war against an enemy who oppresses you, you shall sound the trumpet shrilly so Yahweh your God will remember you, and you will be delivered from your enemies.

¹⁰On joyful occasions, on your festival and new-moon feast, you will sound the trumpet at the time of your burnt offering and your communion sacrifices, and they will call you to the remembrance of your God. I am Yahweh your God.”

Israel’s armies in ordered array

¹¹On the twentieth day of the second month in the second year after the people left Egypt, the cloud lifted over the Holy Tent of the Covenant ¹²and the Israelites moved on, in marching order, from the desert of Sinai. The cloud came to rest in the desert of Paran.

Jn 19:36

Jl 2:1;
2:1513:22;
40:34Hos 5:8;
1Thes
4:16;
1Cor
15:52;
Rev 8:6Sir
50:16

¹³This was the first stage of the Israelites' journey at the command of Yahweh given through Moses: ¹⁴in the front was the banner of the camp of the tribe of Judah, in battle formation. In command of Judah's force was Nahshon son of Amminadab; ¹⁵in command of the tribe of Issachar, in battle formation, was Nethanel son of Zuar; ¹⁶in command of the tribe of Zebulun, in battle formation, was Eliab son of Helon.

¹⁷Then, the Holy Tent was taken down and the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari started out, carrying the Holy Tent.

¹⁸Then came the banner of the camp of the tribe of Reuben, in battle formation. In command of Reuben's force was Elizur son of Shedeur; ¹⁹in command of the tribe of Simeon, in battle formation, was Shelumiel son of Zurishaddai; ²⁰in command of the tribe of Gad, in battle formation, was Eliasaph, son of Reuel.

²¹Then came the sons of Kohath, who carried the Sanctuary (the Holy Tent was set up before their arrival.)

²²Then came the banner of the camp of the sons of Ephraim, in battle formation. In command of Ephraim's force was Elishama son of Ammihud; ²³in command of the tribe of Manasseh, in battle formation, was Gamaliel son of Pedahzur; ²⁴in command of the tribe of Benjamin was Abidan son of Gideoni.

²⁵Last of all, serving as rearguard of all the camps, came the sons of Dan, in battle formation. In command of the force of Dan was Ahiezer son of Ammishaddai; ²⁶in command of the tribe of the sons of Asher, in battle formation, was Pagiel son of Ochran; ²⁷in command of the sons of Naphtali, in battle formation, was Ahira son of Enan.

²⁸Such was the order of march for the Israelites, in battle formation. So they set out.

MEMORIES OF THE DESERT (1st Part)

2:15

• ²⁹Moses said to Hobab, son of Moses' father-in-law, Reuel the Midianite, "We are setting out for the land which Yahweh has promised to give us. Come with us, and we will treat you well, for Yahweh has promised happiness to Israel." He answered, ³⁰"I will not come with you. I would rather go to my own land and my own family." Moses replied, ³¹"Do not leave us, for you know where we can camp in the desert, and so you will be our eyes. ³²If you come with us, you will share in the blessing with which Yahweh blesses us."

³³They moved on from the Mountain of Yahweh, a three days' journey, and for three days the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh went before them, ³⁴seeking out a resting place for them.

40:34

Yahweh's cloud was over them by day when they left the camp. ³⁵Whenever the Ark left, Moses would say,

Ps 68:2

"Arise, Yahweh, and let your enemies be scattered and let those who hate you flee before you." ³⁶And when it came to rest, he would say, "Come back, Yahweh, to the multitude—the armies of Israel."

11 • ¹Now the people were seeking a quarrel with Yahweh. Yahweh heard and his anger was aroused. A fire from Yahweh flared out against them and burned the outer part of the camp. ²Then the people cried out to Moses and he interceded for them to Yahweh and the fire died out. ³They called the place Taberah, because the fire of Yahweh was inflamed against them.

⁴Now the rabble that was among them had greedy desires and even

• **10.29** *This is the beginning of a series of ancient traditions which form the best of Chapters 11–14. In this section we use the normal print for these ancient stories and italics for the parts coming from the priest-editors of the Book of Numbers.*

• **11.1** In this chapter two traditions are merged:

- one referring to the quails and the manna, similar to Exodus 16;
- the other, about the gift of the "spirit of Yahweh" to the elders, that is, to the leaders of Israel.

the Israelites wept and said, “Who will give us meat to eat? ⁵We remember the fish we ate without cost in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and garlic. ⁶Now our appetite is gone; there’s nothing to look at, nothing but manna.”

⁷Now the manna was like coriander seed and had the appearance of bedellium. ⁸The people went about gathering it up and then ground it between millstones or pounded it in a mortar. They boiled it in a pot and made cakes with it which tasted like cakes made with oil. ⁹As soon as dew fell at night in the camp, the manna came with it.

¹⁰Moses heard the people crying, family by family at the entrance to their tent and Yahweh became very angry.

32:11

This displeased Moses. ¹¹Then Moses said to Yahweh, “Why have you treated your servant so badly? Is it because you do not love me that you burdened me with this people? ¹²Did I conceive all these people and did I give them birth? And now you want me to carry them in my bosom as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their fathers? ¹³Where would I get meat for all these people, when they cry to me saying: ‘Give us meat that we may eat?’ ¹⁴I cannot, myself alone, carry all these people; the burden is too heavy for me. ¹⁵Kill me rather than treat me like this, I beg of you, if you look kindly on me, and let me not see your anger.”

18:21

¹⁶Yahweh said to Moses, “Assemble seventy men from the elders of Israel whom you recognize as elders

and men of authority over them and bring them to the tent of meeting and let them take their stand there with you. ¹⁷I shall come down to speak with you and I shall take some of the spirit that is in you and put it in them. From now on they will share with you the burden of the people so that no longer will you bear it alone.

¹⁸You shall say to the people of Israel: Consecrate yourselves for tomorrow and you shall eat meat, for you have wept in the hearing of Yahweh, saying: Who will give us meat to eat? For it was well with us in Egypt! Yahweh will give you meat and ¹⁹you shall eat, not only one day, or two, or five or ten or twenty days ²⁰but a whole month until it comes out of your nostrils and becomes loathsome to you. For you have rejected Yahweh who is in your midst and have wept before him saying: Why did we ever leave Egypt?”

²¹And Moses said, “The people I am with are six hundred thousand on foot and yet you say, ‘I will give them meat and they shall eat it for a whole month!’ ²²Will sheep and cattle be slaughtered in sufficient number for them? All the fish of the sea would not be enough for them.”

Jn 6:7;
6:9

²³And Yahweh said to Moses, “Is Yahweh’s arm shortened? Now you shall see whether or not my word is true.”

Is 50:2;
Jer
32:17;
Ezk
12:25

The spirit given to the elders

• ²⁴Moses then went out and told the people what Yahweh had said. He assembled seventy men from among

• 24. The first awareness that the Israelites had of the *Spirit of God* came to them through the prophets’ deeds. The prophets were those persons who knew something of God’s secrets, and with whom God had shared some of his wisdom, and who on certain occasions possessed an irresistible power. By the way the prophets

acted, the Israelites came to understand that God communicated his spirit like a violent and sudden wind (in Hebrew the same word *ruah* means *spirit* and *wind*).

In order to better understand this story, it would help to compare it with 1 Samuel 10:1-13 and 19:18-24.

the elders and placed them round about the Tent. ²⁵Yahweh came down in the cloud and spoke to him. He took some of the spirit that was upon him and put it on the seventy elders. Now when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But this they did not do again.

²⁶Two men had remained in the camp; the name of one was Eldad, the name of the other Medad. However, the spirit came on them for they were among those who were registered though they had not gone out to the Tent. As they prophesied inside the camp, ²⁷a young man ran and told Moses, "Eldad and Medad are prophesying in the camp." ²⁸Joshua, the son of Nun, who ministered to Moses from his youth said, "My lord Moses, stop them!"

²⁹But Moses said to him, "Are you jealous on my behalf? Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets and that Yahweh would send his spirit upon them!" ³⁰Then Moses and all the elders of the people returned to the camp.

³¹A wind arose, sent by Yahweh, that drove in quails from the sea and let them down beside the camp covering the distance of a day's walk on one side and almost a day's walk on the other side around the camp; they

were about three feet deep on the ground.

³²The people spent that day, the whole night and all the next day gathering the quail. He who gathered the least had ten homers; and they spread them out for themselves around the camp. ³³The meat was still between their teeth when already the anger of Yahweh was kindled against the people and he struck them with a very severe plague.

³⁴That place was named Kibroth-hattaavah because there they buried these greedy people. ³⁵From Kibroth-hattaavah the people moved on towards Hazereth where they remained.

Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses

12 • ¹Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married ²and they said, "Has Yahweh only spoken through Moses? Has he not also spoken through us?" And Yahweh heard.

³Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than any man on the face of the earth. ⁴Yet suddenly Yahweh said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out, all three of you, to the tent of meeting." The three of them came out.

⁵Yahweh came down in the pillar of cloud and, standing at the door of the Tent, called Aaron and Miriam. They both went out and ⁶he said, "Listen carefully to what I say,

This story teaches us that the Spirit acts in various ways (see 1 Cor 12 and 14). It is one thing to say and do strange things, to speak in tongues, etc; quite another and more important to have received the responsibility to guide and teach God's people. It is the spirit of Moses, God's representative (who did not speak in tongues nor prophesy in ecstasies) who will produce in the seventy elders strange prophetic manifestations.

The episode of Eldad and Medad also shows that God does not always give his Spirit through official channels. Eldad and Medad were on the list, but not near Moses. Thus the authorities of the people of God should not be surprised when the Spirit is given where they are not: such will

be the case with Cornelius (Acts 10) and Paul (Acts 9).

Would that all Yahweh's people were prophets (v. 29; see Jl 3:1 and Acts 2:17).

• **12.1** In the Gospel, Jesus would declare that no prophet is accepted by his own family (see Mk 6:4). Miriam and Aaron, the "relatives" of Moses, criticized what he was doing and may have been right. However, it was an attempt to make themselves equal to Moses and God intervened to defend his prophet. God's answer clarifies two things:

– Moses has a special place in revelation: he is to establish the foundations of faith in a Liberating, Just, Holy and Merciful God and

1S 10:9;
19:20;
2K 2:9

Mk 9:38

Jl 3:1;
Acts 2

16:12-
13

Di:9;
22

20:1;
15:20

4:15

If there is a prophet among you,
I reveal myself to him in a vision
and I speak to him in a dream.

Dt 34:10;
Heb
3:2-5

⁷It is not so for my servant, Moses,
my trusted steward in all my house-
hold.

1Cor
13:12

⁸To him I speak face to face,
openly, and not in riddles,
and he sees the presence of Yahweh.
Why then did you not fear to speak
against my servant, against Moses?"

⁹Yahweh became angry with them
and he departed.

Dt 24:9

¹⁰The cloud moved away from
above the Tent and Miriam was there
white as snow with leprosy. Aaron
turned towards Miriam and he saw
that she was leprosy. ¹¹And he said
to Moses, "My lord, I beg you, do not
charge us with this sin that we have
foolishly committed. ¹²Let her not be
like the stillborn whose flesh is half-
eaten when it comes from its moth-
er's womb."

32:11

Lev
13:4

¹³Then Moses cried to Yahweh,
"Heal her, O God, I beg of you." ¹⁴But
Yahweh said to Moses, "If her father
spat in her face, would she not hide in
shame for seven days? Let her then be
confined outside the camp for seven
days; only then shall she be admitted
again."

¹⁵And so Miriam was confined for
seven days outside the camp and the
people did not move on until she had
been readmitted.

¹⁶After that the people set out from
Hazeroth and camped in the wilderness of
Paran.

Moses sends scouts to explore the Promised Land

13 ¹Yahweh then spoke to Moses, say-
ing, ²"Send men to explore the land
of Canaan that I am giving to the Israelites;
send one man from each of the ancestral
tribes, all of them leaders."

Dt 1:20-
29

³So Moses sent these men from the wil-
derness of Paran as Yahweh commanded.
All were leaders among the Israelites ⁴and
these were their names: from the tribe of
Reuben, Shammua the son of Zaccur;
⁵from the tribe of Simeon, Shaphat the son
of Hori; ⁶from the tribe of Judah, Caleb the
son of Jephunneh; ⁷from the tribe of Issa-
char, Igal; ⁸from the sons of Joseph and
from the tribe of Ephraim, Hoshea the son
of Nun; ⁹from the tribe of Benjamin, Palti
the son of Raphu; ¹⁰from the tribe of Zebu-
lun, Gaddiel the son of Sodi; ¹¹from the sons
of Joseph and from the tribe of Manasseh,
Gaddi the son of Susi; ¹²from the tribe of
Dan, Ammiel the son of Gemalli; ¹³from the
tribe of Asher, Sethur the son of Michael;
¹⁴from the tribe of Naphtali, Nahbi the son
of Vophsi; ¹⁵from the tribe of Gad, Geuel
the son of Mahci.

• ¹⁶These are the names of the men
sent by Moses to explore the country.
But Hoshea, the son of Nun, Moses
called Joshua.

¹⁷So Moses sent them to explore
the land of Canaan and said to them,
"Go up by the south and then into the
hill country ¹⁸and see what the land
is like, whether the people there are
strong or weak, many or few. ¹⁹See
also whether the land they live in is
good or barren. See what their cit-
ies are like, if they are open camps
or fortresses. ²⁰See if the soil is fertile
or poor, if the land is wooded or not.

no prophet will be able to change that. What
is more, prophets who actually are Moses' suc-
cessors will have to be accepted by the religious
leaders of God's people.

- *To him I speak face to face* (v. 8). Visions
and dreams can be one of God's ways of reveal-
ing himself to prophets, though these ways are
of an inferior nature, since all kind of spirits may
be involved and may even be illusions from the
devil.

Moses was a very humble man (v. 3), a clear
sign that he had encountered God.

• **13.16** In those days, the land promised
to the Hebrews was called Canaan. Later, it
would be called Israel since the Israelites became
its owners. Its name would also be Palestine.
In their dreams they looked upon this land as
a paradise. *They cut down a branch with a
cluster of grapes. Two of them carried this by*

Be courageous and take some of the fruit of the land.” It was the season for early grapes.

²¹They went up and surveyed the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob near the entrance of Hamath. ²²They went up by the south and reached Hebron, an old city which had been built seven years before Zoan in Egypt; the Anakites, Ahiman, Sheshai and Talmai were living there.

²³And they came to the valley of Eshcol where they cut down a branch with a cluster of grapes. Two of them carried this by means of a pole. They also brought pomegranates and figs. ²⁴Because of the cluster that the Israelites had cut, they called that place the Valley of Eshcol.

²⁵After forty days of exploration, they returned. ²⁶They went and met Moses, Aaron and the whole community of Israelites in the wilderness of Paran at Kadesh. They gave an account to them and the whole community and showed them the fruit of this land. ²⁷And they said,

“We entered the land where you sent us, truly a land flowing with milk and honey and here is the fruit. ²⁸But how strong are the people who inhabit the land! The cities are fortified with walls and bars, and we even saw there descendants of the Anakites. ²⁹Am-

lekites live in the region of the Negeb; Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites live in the hill country; the Canaanites are by the sea and along the banks of the Jordan.”

³⁰Caleb then quieted the people who rose up against Moses and said, “We should go up and take over the land, for we shall surely overcome it.”

³¹But the men who had gone up with him said, “We cannot advance against these people for they are stronger than we are.”

³²And they spread an unfavorable report about the land that they had explored, saying to the Israelites, “The land we went through to explore is a land that devours its inhabitants and all the people we saw there are men of great size. ³³We even saw giants (these giants were the Anakites). We felt like grasshoppers before them, and to them we must have seemed the same.”

Gen 6:4

Rebellion at Kadesh

14 ¹Then all the community broke out in loud cries and wept during the night. ²All the people grumbled against Aaron and Moses; and the whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in Egypt or died in the wilderness. ³Why is Yahweh bringing us to this country

Dt 1:26-

32

14:11;

16:3

means of a pole (v. 23). This fabulous detail shows a beautiful land “of milk and honey.” This image is used by today’s Israelites as the symbol of their country.

Here, Scripture describes one of the great sins of Israel, as in Exodus 32. It would not have been difficult for Israel to believe in Yahweh if he had not required that they conquer the land, a challenge which frightened them. In the same way today, many Christians filled with spiritual fervor get scared when the church asks them to commit themselves to the task of justice and reconciliation in every area of the world.

• **14.1** We can recall experiences very similar to this rebellion.

Fear is a bad adviser; it turns cowards into violent people.

Mediocre people kill the prophets either to preserve their peace, or to return “to the slavery of Egypt.”

Yet, God comes to the rescue of the person who confronts the crowds for the sake of God.

How long will this people spurn me? (v. 11). The fear of acting is an insult to God. These words are also addressed to all those who today, faced with the wounds of our society, say: nothing can be done.

Pardon then, I pray you, the sin of this people (v. 19). Once again Moses appears in his role as intercessor. Moses has learned from God himself that God is rich in kindness and mercy.

where we shall fall under the sword, and our women and little children become part of the plunder? Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?"⁴ And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and return to Egypt."

⁵Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the Israelite community. ⁶Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh from those who had explored the country, tore their clothes ⁷and then spoke to the whole community of Israel, saying, "The land we went through to explore is, indeed, a very good land. ⁸If Yahweh is pleased with us, he will lead us to this land and give it to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁹Only do not rebel against Yahweh, and don't be afraid of the people of the land for they will be bread for us: their protection is withdrawn and Yahweh is with us. Have no fear of them!"

¹⁰All the community spoke of stoning them when the glory of Yahweh appeared before all the people of Israel in the tent of meeting.

¹¹Yahweh said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn me? How long will they refuse to believe me, in spite of the signs I performed among them? ¹²I will strike them with a plague and destroy them, and then I will make of you a greater and more powerful nation than they are."

¹³And Moses said to Yahweh, "The Egyptians know that you have brought out this people from their midst by your power, ¹⁴and they told it to the inhabitants of the land. They know that you, Yahweh, are in the midst of

your people, and that they have seen you face to face. They know that your cloud stands with your people and that you go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵And now you would destroy this people at one stroke!

Then the nations that have heard of you will say: ¹⁶Yahweh was not able to bring this people to the land he had promised them in oath, so he slaughtered them in the desert. ¹⁷Now let your power be seen, my Lord. For, according to your words, ¹⁸you are slow to anger and rich in steadfast love: you forgive sin and rebellion, yet you do not declare innocent those who are guilty, but you punish children to the third and fourth generation for the wickedness of their fathers. ¹⁹Pardon then, I pray you, the sin of this people according to the greatness of your mercy just as you have pardoned them from Egypt even until now."

²⁰Then Yahweh said, "I pardon them as you have pleaded, ²¹but as truly as I live and the glory of Yahweh fills the earth, ²²I swear that they will not see the land I promised to their fathers. For all these have seen my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the desert, and yet have put me to the test ten times and have not heeded my voice. ²³Only my servant Caleb will enter it, ²⁴because he has a different spirit and because he has followed me faithfully. I will bring him to the land where he has already been and his descendants shall possess it, ²⁵while the Amalekites and the Canaanites will remain in the valley.

1Cor
10:520:6;
34:6-7;
Dt 5:9;
Jon 4:2Dt 1:
34-40
Is 6:3Jos
14:12;
Jdg 1:20

Dt 1:40

32:10;
Gen
12:29:15;
13:21

God forgives, but this does not exempt people from having to pay the price of their errors. The rebellion of Kadesh and the following defeat are given as the reason for the long time spent by the Hebrews in the desert. They did,

in fact, spend a fairly long time, forty years, not far from Kadesh as if prevented from entering the land of Canaan. The word is harsh: all who have refused to take part in the conquest will die at the gate of the Promised Land.

So you shall turn tomorrow and leave for the desert by way of the Red Sea.”

²⁶Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron saying, ²⁷“How long will this wicked community grumble against me?” I have heard the grumbings of the people of Israel against me. ²⁸Say to them: As truly as I live, it is Yahweh who speaks, I will do to you what you have said in my hearing. ²⁹All of you of twenty years or more, numbered in the census, who grumbled against me, your corpses will fall in the desert. ³⁰You will not enter the land where I swore to settle you, except Caleb, son of Jephunneh and Joshua, son of Nun. ³¹But your children, whom you said would be part of the plunder, them I will bring and they will know the land that you have rejected. ³²Your corpses will fall in the desert ³³and your sons will wander with their flocks for forty years in the desert, bearing the guilt of your faithlessness till the last of you lies dead in the desert.

³⁴According to the number of days spent in exploring the land—forty days, for every day a year—for forty years you shall bear the guilt of your sins and you shall know what it is to oppose me. ³⁵I, Yahweh, have spoken. Surely this is what I will do to this wicked community that has con-

spired against me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed and this is where they shall die.”

³⁶The men sent by Moses to explore the land and who on their return had made the community grumble against him, ³⁷those men who wickedly spread a bad report on the land, died of a plague before Yahweh. ³⁸Only Joshua, son of Nun, and Caleb, son of Jephunneh, survived out of those who went to explore the land.

³⁹When Moses related this to the Israelites, the people mourned bitterly. ⁴⁰They rose early in the morning and went up to the mountain saying, “Here we are! We have sinned but now we are ready to go to the place that Yahweh spoke of.” ⁴¹But Moses said, “Why are you going to disobey Yahweh’s command? You will not succeed. ⁴²Do not go up lest you be struck down by your enemies for Yahweh is not with you. ⁴³The Amalekites and the Canaanites are there ahead of you and you will fall by the sword, for you turned away from following Yahweh and he will not be with you.”

⁴⁴They insisted on going up to the top of the mountain but neither the Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh nor Moses moved from inside the camp. ⁴⁵Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who lived in the hill country came down and defeated them, beating them back as far as Hormah.

MORE LAWS

15 • ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²“Tell this to the people of Israel: This is a rule for you when you have entered the land I give to you. ³When you make a fragrant offering to Yahweh, either as a burnt offering or in payment of a vow, or as a voluntary gift, or on the occasion of one of your solemn feasts, whoever takes from his herds and flocks for a fra-

grant offering to Yahweh ⁴shall bring also, as a gift to Yahweh, a grain offering of two pounds of fine flour mixed with two pints of oil. ⁵He shall also make a wine offering, two pints for each lamb, in addition to the burnt offering or sacrifice. ⁶For a man, he shall make a grain offering of four pounds of fine flour mixed with three pints of oil, ⁷and a wine offering of three pints of

Heb
3:17;
1Cor
10:5
Ps
95:10

Dt 1:42

29:40;
Lev 2:1

• **15.1** In Chapters 15–19 we again have laws and customs of Israel.

– Verse 17. Instructions about offering the first batch of bread—the first loaves from flour of the harvest. The people of God will be a well-trained and courteous people: they will not eat without giving thanks nor serve themselves first, but will offer the first part to the Levite or the poor, which means offering it to God.

– Verse 37. *The violet cord* can be compared to the badges which many people wear today: an external sign which is good insofar as it corresponds to an interior disposition. Jesus accepted this prescription (Mt 9:20) but he criticized those who wore these tassels only for show (Mt 23:5).

wine, offering it as a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh. ⁸If he offers a bull as a burnt offering or sacrifice, in payment of a vow or as a peace offering to Yahweh, ⁹he shall offer also a grain offering of six pounds of fine flour mixed with four pints of oil, ¹⁰and a wine offering of four pints of wine, as a burnt offering, sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh. ¹¹This must be done for every bull, every ram, every lamb or goat. ¹²Whatever the number of victims you have for sacrifice, you must do the same for each of them.

¹³This must be done by every man of your people who makes a burnt offering, as a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh. ¹⁴If any stranger living among you, or among your descendants, will also make a burnt offering, as a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh: just as you act, so must the stranger do. ¹⁵There shall be only one law for you and for the foreigner among you. This is a law that shall bind your descendants forever before Yahweh: you and the stranger are alike. ¹⁶There is to be the same law, and the same regulation for you and for the stranger who lives among you.”

¹⁷Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁸“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you have entered the land to which I am bringing you, ¹⁹and you eat the bread of this country, you shall set aside a share for Yahweh. ²⁰You must set aside one loaf as the first fruits of your grain, and set this offering aside like the one set aside from your threshing. ²¹You are to set aside for Yahweh a share of the best of your flour, and your descendants are to do the same, from generation to generation.

²²If without meaning to do so, you fail in any of these commands that Yahweh has given to Moses ²³and that Yahweh has commanded you through Moses, this is what you have to do, you and your descendants. ²⁴If it is an unintentional fault of the community, the community as a whole must make a burnt offering of a young bull, a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh, with the required offering of flour and wine, and a he-goat must be offered as a sacrifice for sin. ²⁵The priest must perform the ceremony of atonement over the entire community of Israel, and pardon will be given, since it was an unintentional fault and they have brought their offering as a burnt offering to Yahweh, not counting

their sacrifice for sin for their unintentional fault. ²⁶The entire community of Israel will be forgiven, as also the stranger who lives among them, since the entire people have sinned without meaning to do so.

²⁷If it is an individual who has sinned unintentionally, he must offer a one-year-old goat in sacrifice for sin. ²⁸The priest shall perform the ceremony of atonement before Yahweh over the person who has gone astray by this sin of inadvertence; when the ceremony of atonement has been performed over him, he will be forgiven, ²⁹whether he is an Israelite, or a stranger living among them. There shall be only one law among you for the one who sins by an unintentional fault.

³⁰But the one who sins deliberately, whether native or stranger, angers Yahweh himself. Such a person must be cut off from the community; ³¹he has rejected the word of Yahweh and broken his command. This person must be entirely cut off because of sin.”

Breaking the Sabbath

³²While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, a man was caught gathering wood on the Sabbath day. ³³Those who caught him gathering wood brought him before Moses, Aaron and the whole community. ³⁴He was kept under guard because the penalty he should undergo had not yet been decided. ³⁵Yahweh said to Moses, “This man must be put to death: the whole community shall stone him outside the camp.” ³⁶The whole community took him outside the camp and stoned him till he was dead, as Yahweh had commanded Moses.

³⁷Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ³⁸“Speak to the people of Israel and tell them to put a fringe on the hems of their garments and a violet cord on this fringe. ³⁹You must then have a fringe, and the sight of it will remind you of all the commands of Yahweh. You are then to put them into practice, and no longer follow the desires of your heart and your eyes, which would lead you to go astray. ⁴⁰So you will remember all my commandments to put them into practice, and you will be consecrated to your God. ⁴¹It is I, Yahweh your God, who have brought you out of the land of Egypt so that I may be your God, I, Yahweh, your God.”

Lev 4:27

Dt
22:12;
Mt 23:5;
Lk 8:4420:2;
Lev
22:33

Pretensions of Korah; rebellion of Dathan and Abiram

Ps 106:
16-20;
Sir
45:18;
Jdt 11

16 • ¹Korah, son of Izhar, son of Kohath, from the tribe of Levi—and also Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On, son of Peleth, from the tribe of Reuben—rebelled against Moses. ²Two hundred fifty Israelites followed him; all were well known leaders in the community and members of the council.

^{19:6} ³They came together and addressed Moses and Aaron saying, “It is enough! The whole community is consecrated to Yahweh and he lives among them. Why then, do you set yourselves over the community of Yahweh?”

⁴When Moses, heard this, he threw himself face downward on the ground.

^{16:7} ⁵Then he said to Korah and all his followers, “Tomorrow morning Yahweh will make known who belongs to him, and who is consecrated to him and may approach him. He himself will let the one he has chosen approach.”

⁶You Korah with all your followers, take your censers tomorrow. ⁷Then you will fill them with burning coals and put incense in them before Yahweh, and Yahweh will indicate the one who is holy. Sons of Levi, you have gone too far!”

⁸Moses said to Korah, “Listen to me now, you sons of Levi. ⁹Is it not enough for you that the God of Israel has set you apart from the rest of the community of Israel, and called you close to himself for service in the Holy Tent of Yahweh, to stand before this community and perform the sacred service on their behalf? ¹⁰He has called you to be near him, you and all your

brother Levites with you, and now you want the office of priesthood as well! ¹¹What is the misdeed of Aaron that you complain against him? It is against Yahweh himself that you and your followers have rebelled.”

¹²Moses sent messengers to summon Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, but they said, “We will not come up. ¹³Is it not enough that you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey to die in the wilderness? Do you also want to lord it over us? ¹⁴You did not bring us into a land flowing with milk and honey, nor give us an inheritance of fields and vineyards. Do you suppose that all these people are blind? We will not come.”

¹⁵Moses then became angry and said to Yahweh, “Do not look favorably on their offering. I have not taken a single donkey, nor have I harmed any of them.” 1S:12:3

¹⁶Moses said to Korah, “You and all your company be present before Yahweh tomorrow, you and they, together with Aaron. ¹⁷Each of you take his censer, put incense in it and present it before Yahweh—250 censers!—and Aaron will do the same.” ¹⁸So every man took his censer and put incense in it and they stood at the entrance to the tent of meeting with Moses and Aaron. ¹⁹Korah assembled all the community against them at the entrance to the tent of meeting and the glory of Yahweh appeared to all the community.

²⁰Then Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron, ²¹“Stand aside from this community so that I may immediately

• **16.1** *The whole community is consecrated to Yahweh and he lives among them* (v. 3). That is true but there is a hierarchy which comes from God. This is the lesson in this chapter and Paul will recall it later: “One cannot claim the

honor of being a priest: he must be called by God as Aaron was” (Heb 5:4).

Several stories are combined in this text:

– in the first, the Levite Korah claimed for himself the privileges of the priests, sons of Aaron;

Job
12:10;
Gen
18:16

destroy them.”²² They fell on their faces and said, “God, God of the spirits of all mortals, for one man’s sin will you become angry with the whole congregation?”

²³ Yahweh answered Moses,²⁴ “Speak to the community and say this: Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.”

²⁵ Moses got up and went towards Dathan and Abiram, and the elders of Israel followed him. ²⁶ He spoke to the community saying, “Move away from the tents of these wicked men and touch nothing that belongs to them lest you perish because of all their sins.” ²⁷ They withdrew from the area near the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram; they came out and were standing with their wives, their sons and little ones.

3:12;
Jn 2:11

• ²⁸ Then Moses said, “By this you shall know that Yahweh sent me to do all these deeds and that it is not my doing. ²⁹ If these men die a natural death, merely suffering the fate of all men, then Yahweh has not sent me. ³⁰ But if Yahweh works a miracle and the earth, opening its mouth, swallows them, together with all they possess, and they descend alive to Sheol, you will know that these men have rejected Yahweh.”

³¹ As Moses finished saying all this, the earth under them split in two,³² opened its mouth and engulfed them with their household and all the men who belonged to Korah with their possessions. ³³ They descended

alive to Sheol with all that belonged to them; the earth covered them and they perished from the midst of the assembly. ³⁴ On hearing their cries, all the Israelites who were around them fled, for they said, “Let not the earth swallow us as well!”

³⁵ A fire then came forth from Yahweh and consumed the 250 men who were offering incense.

17 • ¹ Yahweh spoke to Moses saying, ² “Tell Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, to take the censers from the blaze and scatter the fire some distance away, for the censers are now holy ³ because these men sinned at the cost of their lives. Let the censers be made into plates to cover the altar, because they have been offered before Yahweh and are sacred. Let them be a sign to the Israelites.”

⁴ So Eleazar the priest took the bronze censers of those men who were burned during the offering and had them hammered out to make a covering for the altar ⁵ and to serve as a reminder to the Israelites that no one who is not a priest, a descendant of Aaron, should draw near to burn incense before Yahweh, lest he become like Korah and his followers, just as Yahweh had said to Eleazar through Moses.

Aaron pleads for the people

⁶ On the following day, the entire community of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, “You have brought death to the people of Yahweh.” ⁷ As the community was rising together against Moses and Aaron, they turned toward the tent of meeting; and there was the cloud covering it, and the glory of Yahweh appeared. ⁸ And Moses and Aaron went to the door of the tent of meeting.

⁹ Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁰ “Stand away from this community; I am going to destroy them here and now.” The

and fire from heaven devoured him along with his two hundred partisans;

in the second, Dathan and Abiram, from the tribe of Reuben, rebelled against Moses and the earth swallowed them up.

• 28. Compare verse 28 with John 5:19 and 5:36.

• **17.1** Various miracles show Aaron’s authority, and the effectiveness of his prayer because he is a priest chosen by God. Aaron’s staff (v. 23) reflects the fruitfulness that God grants to every action done in response to his command and to every person who dedicates himself to him (Jer 17:8; Ps 92:15).

two of them threw themselves face downward on the ground. ¹¹Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take the firepan, fill it with burning coals from the altar, put incense in it and hurry to the community to ask the mercy of Yahweh for them. The anger has come down from Yahweh and the terrible disease has begun." ¹²Aaron did as Moses said and ran among the community, but the terrible disease was already at work among them. He put in the incense and asked for the mercy of Yahweh on the people. ¹³Then he stood between the living and the dead, and the terrible disease stopped. ¹⁴There were 14,700 victims of the terrible disease, not counting those who died because of Korah. ¹⁵Then Aaron came back to Moses at the tent of meeting; the terrible disease had been stopped.

Aaron's branch

¹⁶Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ¹⁷"Tell the people of Israel to give you walking sticks, one for each tribe; that is twelve sticks for the leaders of the twelve tribes, and write the name of each on his stick; ¹⁸and on the stick of Levi write the name of Aaron because he is the first among the families of Levi. ¹⁹Then put them in the tent of meeting before the ark, at the place where I meet you. ²⁰The man whose stick sprouts will be the one I have chosen; this is how I shall stop the complaints that the Israelites make against you."

²¹Moses spoke to the Israelites, and each of their leaders gave him a stick, twelve sticks in all for their tribes; and Aaron's stick was among them. ²²Moses placed them before Yahweh in the tent of the meeting. ²³On the following day, Moses came to the Tent of the Testimony and there, already sprouting, was Aaron's stick, standing for the tribe of Levi. Buds had opened, flowers had blossomed, and almonds had already ripened. ²⁴Moses took all the sticks away from before Yahweh and brought them back to all the people of Israel; they examined them and each one took back his own stick.

²⁵Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Put back Aaron's stick before the Ark and keep it as a sign to these rebels, so that I will no longer hear their complaints and they may not die."
²⁶Moses did as Yahweh had commanded.

Atonement: the duty of the priesthood

²⁷The people of Israel said to Moses, "We are lost! We are all to die! ²⁸Anyone who

draws near the Holy Tent of Yahweh dies! Are we doomed to die to the last one?"

18 ¹Then Yahweh said to Aaron: "You and your sons, and your whole family shall be responsible for the Sanctuary. You and your sons with you shall suffer the guilt for any faults committed while serving as priests in the Holy Tent. ²Let your brothers of the tribe of Levi, your father's tribe, come with you too. They are to join you and serve you, yourselves and your sons, before the Tent of the Covenant. ³They are to be at your service and the service of the whole Tent. But let them not come near the sacred vessels or the altar, lest they die and you as well. ⁴They are to help you, they are to take charge of the tent of meeting for the entire ministry of the Tent, and no layman shall come near you.

⁵You yourselves must take charge of the Sanctuary and the altar, and my anger will never again fall on the Israelites. ⁶I myself have chosen your relatives, the Levites, from among the Israelites as a gift to you. They will belong to Yahweh, to serve at the tent of meeting. ⁷But you and your sons will undertake the priestly duties in all that concerns the altar and all the sacred things that lie behind the veil. You will perform the worship services, the duties of which I entrust to your priesthood. But the layman who comes near shall die."

The priests' share

⁸Yahweh said to Aaron: "I myself have given you all that is set aside for me, from every offering of the people of Israel. I give it to you and to your sons as your share forever. ⁹This is what shall be yours of the most holy things, of the consecrated food: every offering that the Israelites give back to me, whether it be a grain offering or a sacrifice for sin or a sacrifice of repayment is a thing most holy; it shall belong to you and your sons. ¹⁰You may eat these most holy things. Every male may eat them. You are to consider them sacred.

¹¹To you also shall belong all the first fruits that are set aside and offered by the Israelites; this I give to you, as well as to your sons and daughters, forever. Every person in your house who is clean may eat it. ¹²All the best of the oil, all the best of the wine and wheat, the first fruits given by them to Yahweh, these I give to you.

Heb
7:25-28

Ezk
44:29

Heb 9:4

13:12 ¹³All the first harvest of their land which they bring to Yahweh shall be yours. Every person in your house who is clean may eat them. ¹⁴Everything in Israel which has been dedicated to me shall be yours. ¹⁵Every firstborn brought to Yahweh shall be yours, the firstborn of all living creatures, whether child or animal. Nevertheless, you must make the people buy back the firstborn child and the firstborn of an unclean animal. ¹⁶They must buy back the child in the month in which it is born at the price of five pieces of silver according to the official standard. ¹⁷The firstborn of cow, sheep and goat—these alone you shall not buy back. They are holy: you must sprinkle their blood on the altar and burn the fat as a burnt offering, a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh; ¹⁸the meat shall be yours, together with the breast that has been presented with the gesture of offering, and the right hind leg. ¹⁹All that the Israelites set aside for Yahweh from the holy things, this I give to you, and to your sons and daughters, forever. This is a Covenant of salt, an everlasting Covenant before Yahweh, for you and your descendants after you.”

The Levites’ share

Dt 10:9; Jos 13:14 ²⁰Yahweh said to Aaron: “You shall have no property in the land of Israel, no share of it shall be yours. It is I who will be your share and your inheritance among the people of Israel.

²¹See, to the Levites I give as their inheritance all the tithes collected in Israel, in return for their services, for the ministry they render in the tent of meeting. ²²In this way the Israelites will no longer go near the tent of meeting; this sin would carry the death to them.

²³The Levites will take care of the tent of meeting, and have the full responsibility for it. This is a law forever for all your descendants: because of this the Levites are to have no inheritance among the Israelites. ²⁴The tithe that the people of Israel

set aside for Yahweh, I give to the Levites for their inheritance. For this reason I have told them that they are to have no inheritance among the people of Israel.”

²⁵Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ^{Dt 14:22} ²⁶“You are to say to the Levites: When you receive the tithe that the people of Israel must pay and which I am giving you as your inheritance, you are to set aside a part of this as a special contribution for Yahweh. ²⁷This will take the place of the offerings of new grain and new wine that all the people have to give me. ²⁸Thus you too will set aside a share for Yahweh, of all the tithes you receive from the Israelites, and you will give to Aaron the priest this part you have set aside for Yahweh. ²⁹Out of all the gifts you receive you will set aside the best as a share for Yahweh.

³⁰This best part that the Levites set aside shall be credited to you as an offering of the threshing floor and the wine press. ³¹You may eat them anywhere, you and your families: this is your payment for serving in the tent of meeting. ³²You will not be guilty of any sin because of this, as long as you have presented the best part to Yahweh. You will not eat any of the gifts before the best part is offered. In this way you will not defile the sacred gifts of the Israelites and you will not die.”

The ashes of the red cow

19 • ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and Aaron. He said: ²“This is a regulation and a law that Yahweh gives to you. Say to the people of Israel that they are to bring you a red cow which has no defects and has never been made to work. ³You will give it to Eleazar the priest so that it may be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in his presence. ⁴Then Eleazar the priest is to take some of the cow’s blood on his finger, and sprinkle this blood seven times toward the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁵The cow shall then be burned in his presence; including hide, flesh, blood, and the

• **19.1** The letter to the Hebrews refers specifically to this chapter when it speaks of the sacrifices of the Old Testament which could not really give interior purity to anyone and only prefigured the perfect sacrifice of Christ (see Heb 9:13 and 13:11).

Verses 17-21 deal with water for purification. Many people used water in their religious rituals. Here we see how the Jews used it.

After washing us through baptism, the Church also uses holy water. The Church does not attribute magical power to it but is aware that visible signs help bring about proper dispositions in us: making the sign of the cross with holy water, attentively and with faith, helps us to set aside our daily preoccupations at the entrance to the church.

intestines too. ⁶Then the priest is to take cedar wood, a twig of hyssop leaves and a red cord, and throw them on the fire where the cow is burning. ⁷Finally he shall wash his clothing and bathe his body in water, after which he may go back to the camp, but he will remain unclean until evening. ⁸The man who has burned the cow shall also wash his clothing and bathe his body in water and will remain unclean until evening. ⁹A clean man shall gather up the ashes of the cow and put them outside the camp, in a clean place. They must be kept for the community of Israel to prepare the water of purification.

¹⁰The man who has gathered up the ashes of the cow shall wash his clothing and will remain unclean until evening. This will be a law forever, for the people of Israel as well as for the stranger living among them.

A case of uncleanness

¹¹Anyone who touches a corpse of any person whatsoever, will be unclean for seven days. ¹²He shall purify himself with these waters on the third and the seventh day, and he will be clean; but if he does not purify himself on the third and the seventh day he will not be clean. ¹³Anyone who touches a dead person, the body of a man that has died, and has not purified himself, defiles the Holy Tent of Yahweh; such a person must be cut off from Israel because the waters for purification have not flowed over him; he is unclean, and his uncleanness remains in him.

¹⁴This is the law when a person dies in a house. Anyone who goes into the house,

or anyone who is already there, becomes unclean for seven days. ¹⁵Equally unclean shall be every open jar and pot in the house that has not been closed with a lid or fastening.

¹⁶Anyone in the open country who touches a person who has been killed, or a person who had died, or human bones or a tomb, becomes unclean for seven days.

¹⁷For the unclean, you shall take some of the ashes of the cow that was offered for the sin and you shall throw it into water in a vessel. ¹⁸A clean man shall dip a twig of hyssop in the water and sprinkle it on the house and everything in it, and on the persons as well who were there. And he shall sprinkle it on the one who touched the bone or the dead body or the one slain, or the grave.

¹⁹The clean man shall sprinkle water on the unclean on the third and the seventh days. So, on the seventh day the unclean is cleansed; he shall wash his clothes and bathe himself on this day and in the evening he will become clean. ²⁰But if the unclean man does not cleanse himself, he shall be cut off from the assembly, lest he defile the Sanctuary of Yahweh. As long as the water of purification has not been thrown upon him, he is unclean.

²¹This shall be a lasting ordinance for you. The man who sprinkles the water of purification shall wash his clothes and those who touch this water are unclean until the evening. ²²Whatever the unclean person touches shall be unclean and whoever touches it shall be unclean until evening."

MEMORIES OF THE DESERT (2nd Part)

You did not trust me

20 ¹*The whole congregation of Israel came to the wilderness of*

Zin in the first month and the people stayed in Kadesh. Miriam died and was buried there.

• **20.1** This account is part of texts drawn up by the priests after their return from captivity. It takes up the episode related in Exodus 17:1-7 but with the addition of a "sin of Moses!" Why? Rereading the history of their forbears these priests faced a question: how was it possible that Moses, this prophet with whom "God spoke face to face" (Ex 33:11), had been excluded from the Promised Land? Moses had

mysteriously died on Mt. Nebo. A certitude, however, remained: God is just! If Moses had not entered the Promised Land, it was because he had sinned. They then rewrote the account but charging Moses with sin: he had doubted God!

We have a similar case in comparing the two accounts of the death of Josiah, the just king (2 K 22:2 and 23:29 compared with 2 Chr 35:19-25).

Heb
9:13;
13:11...

Lev
21:2;
Hg 2:13

Dr 21:1

17:1 ²Now there was no water for the community, and the people gathered together against Moses and Aaron.
 14:11 ³They disputed with Moses saying, "Would that we had perished with our kinsmen in the presence of Yahweh!"

⁴Why have you led Yahweh's community to this desert to die here with our cattle? ⁵And why did you bring us out of Egypt to this wretched place? It's no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates and there's not even water for drinking."

⁶Moses and Aaron fled from the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. Then the glory of Yahweh appeared ⁷and Yahweh spoke to Moses, ⁸"Take your rod and assemble the community, you and Aaron, your brother. In their presence command the rock to give forth water and you will make water gush from the rock for the community and their livestock to drink."

⁹So Moses took the rod from before Yahweh as he had been ordered.

¹⁰Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly in front of the rock and said to them, "Listen, you rebels. Shall we bring water for you from this rock?" ¹¹Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod. And then water in abundance gushed out for the community and their livestock to drink.

¹²But Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, "You did not trust me nor treat me as the Holy One in the sight of the Israelites; because of that you shall not lead this community into the land that I am giving you."

¹³It was at the waters of Meribah that the sons of Israel quarreled with Yahweh and where he showed his holiness to them.

Edom refuses right of way

¹⁴Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, and they said to him, ^{11:17}"This is the petition of your brother Israel: you know the trials we had to suffer. ¹⁵Our fathers went down to Egypt and we lived there for a long time. But the Egyptians treated us badly as they did our fathers. ¹⁶Then we cried to Yahweh and he listened to us. He sent an angel to bring us out of Egypt and now we are in Kadesh, the town which is on the borders of your territory. ¹⁷We want you to let us pass through your land. We will not cross any fields or vineyards, or drink any water from the wells, but we will keep to the king's road without turning to right or left until we are out of your land."

¹⁸Edom answered, "You shall not pass through my land. If you do, I will come out to attack you." ¹⁹The Israelites then said, "We will keep to the road and we will even pay for the water we and our cattle drink. We ask only for your permission to pass through with our sheep."

²⁰Edom answered, "You shall not pass through." And the Edomites marched out to meet Israel with many armed men and a strong army. ²¹Thus, Edom refused to let Israel pass through his land, and Israel had to turn away.

Death of Aaron

²²The Israelites set out from Kadesh and the whole community came to Mount Hor. ²³There, on the border of the land of Edom, Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, ²⁴"Aaron must now be gathered to his people. You shall not enter the land that I am giving to Israel since you rebelled against me at the waters of Meribah. ²⁵Take Aaron and Eleazar, his son, and bring them up Mount Hor. ²⁶There, strip Aaron of his gar-

1Cor
10:4;
Jn 7:38

Dt 1:37;
Ps
106:32

Only the fulfillment of Scripture in Jesus could fully enlighten us on the mission of Moses. His mission was to guide the people of God to the entrance of the Promised Land. Once there, he could step aside and say with John the Baptist, the last prophet of the Old Testament: "He must increase, I must decrease" (Jn 3:30). Joshua's

ministry was now beginning: to open the gates of the Promised Land to the people of God and let them take possession of it. The double vocation of Moses and Joshua prefigures and throws light on the mission of the Old Testament and that of Jesus (in Hebrew, the names Joshua and Jesus are the same).

ments and put them on Eleazar his son, before Aaron is gathered to his people. For he is to die there.”

²⁷Moses did as Yahweh ordered. In the sight of the whole community they went up Mount Hor. ²⁸There Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and put them on Eleazar his son, and Aaron died there on top of the mountain. ²⁹When the Israelites saw that Aaron had died, the whole community wept for him for thirty days.

33:38;
29:29

33:40;
Jdg
1:16

21 ¹When the Canaanite king of Arad, in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he attacked Israel and took some prisoners. ²Then Israel made this vow to Yahweh, “If you put these people into my hand, I will consecrate their towns by anathema.” ³Yahweh heard the voice of Israel and delivered the Canaanites into their hands. They were wiped out and their towns were destroyed according to the anathema. Because of this that place was named Hormah.

The bronze serpent

• ⁴From Mount Hor they set out by the Red Sea road to go around the land of Edom. The people were discouraged by the journey ⁵and began to complain against God and Moses, “Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is neither bread nor water here and we are disgusted with this tasteless manna.”

14:11

⁶Yahweh then sent fiery serpents against them. They bit the people and

1Cor
10:9

many of the Israelites died. ⁷Then the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, speaking against Yahweh and against you. Plead with Yahweh to take the serpents away.”

Moses pleaded for the people ⁸and Yahweh said to him, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a standard; whoever has been bitten and then looks at it shall live.”

2K 18:4;
Jn 3:14

⁹So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a standard. Whenever a man was bitten, he looked towards the bronze serpent and he lived.

Towards Transjordania

¹⁰The Israelites set out and camped at Oboth, ¹¹Then they left Oboth and camped at Iye-abarim, in the wilderness that borders Moab, toward the sunrise. ¹²They set out from there and camped in the Valley of Zered. ¹³They set out from there and camped beyond the Arnon. This valley in the desert begins in the land of the Amorites and is on the border of Moab, between the Moabites and the Amorites. ¹⁴Because of this, it is written in the Book of the Wars of Yahweh: Waheb, by Suphah, and the Valley of Arnon ¹⁵and the slope of the ravine that runs down to Ar along the border of Moab.

Dr 2:8

¹⁶From there they went on to Beer. This is the well of which Yahweh said to Moses, “Call the people together and I will give them water.” ¹⁷Then it was that Israel sang this song, “Let the water spring! Sing out

• **21.4** With regard to this bronze serpent, two quite different questions may be asked. The first: what is the historical origin of this account? An easy answer: near the Sinai mines a healing god was honored and little bronze serpents were offered in thanksgiving. The stories of travelers must have inspired the narrative. But the important question is the second: what does this page of the holy book intend to say?

The people complained (v. 5). The Israelites complain again: this is the inner rebellion of those who do not accept sacrifices and will not exert themselves in order to become better and who would rather blame others.

Make a fiery serpent (v. 8). A strange command to the Israelites, but the bronze serpent will be a prophetic sign: God intends to cure the sin with the very instrument of the sin.

Whoever looks at it shall live (v. 8): another prophetic statement. Sinners will not have to follow strict prescriptions: let them merely look with faith at the sign God sends for their healing. Jesus will say: “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up (on the cross) so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (Jn 3:14).

The story of the serpent is one of those biblical images with a hidden meaning, and people had to wait for the day when Christ would give them meaning. The same is true of the story of Melchizedek (Gen 14) and the story of Joseph.

The same is true in our own lives; in our past there have been some incidents which we did not understand at that time. Why did this happen to me? Some day, the light of Christ will reveal the meaning.

for the well; ¹⁸the well sunk by princes, the well dug by the leaders of the people with their sticks, with their staves.”

From the desert they went to Mattanah; ¹⁹from Mattanah to Nahalielel; from Nahalielel to Bamoth; ²⁰from Bamoth to the valley that gives on to the country of Moab, toward the heights of Pisgah which looks down on the desert.

Conquest of Transjordan

• ²¹Israel sent this message to Sihon, king of the Amorites, ²²“We want to pass through your land. We will not cross any fields or vineyards or drink any water from the wells. We will keep to the king’s road until we are out of your land.”

²³But Sihon refused to let Israel pass through his land. He gathered all his people, marched into the desert to meet Israel and reached Jahaz. There he gave battle to Israel. ²⁴But Israel struck him down and conquered his country from the Arnon to the Jabbok, which is the frontier of the Ammorites because this frontier was well-defended. ²⁵Israel occupied all the cities and the towns of the Amorites, including Heshbon and the towns depending on it.

²⁶Heshbon was the capital of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and captured from him all this territory as far as the Arnon. ²⁷Because of this the poets continue singing this song, “Courage, Heshbon, city of Sihon, well built and well founded! ²⁸A fire came out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon. It devoured Ar of Moab and the Baals of the high places of Moab. ²⁹Woe to you, Moab! You are lost, people of Chemosh! Your sons have fled; your daughters were taken captive. ³⁰For Sihon,

king of the Amorites, has destroyed Heshbon. The little children and the women were brought as far as Dibon and Nophah, the men were taken as far as Medeba.”

³¹When the Israelites settled in the country of the Amorites, ³²Moses sent spies to explore Jazer. Israel took this city with all the towns depending on it, and the Amorites who lived there were evicted.

³³After that the Israelites turned and went up to Bashan. Og, king of Bashan, set out with all his people to meet them and gave them battle in Edrei. ³⁴Then Yahweh said to Moses, “Do not be afraid of him, for I have given him into your hands with all his people and his land. You shall deal with him as you did with Sihon, king of the Amorites, who lived in Heshbon.” ³⁵The Israelites killed him, his sons and all his people to the last. And they took possession of his land.

22 ¹Then the Israelites journeyed on and camped in the plains of Moab along the Jordan opposite Jericho.

The story of Balaam

• ²Now Balak, the son of Zippor, saw all that the Israelites had done to the Amorites. ³And the Moabites were afraid of Israel, because they were a very numerous people. In fact, they were terrified. ⁴So the Moabites said to the elders of Midian, “Look, this horde is destroying everything around us as easily as the ox eats the grass of the field.”

So Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab at the time, ⁵sent messengers

• 21. After their years of confinement in Kadesh were over, the Israelites together with Moses started their march toward the land of Canaan.

They surrounded the country to the south and the east and temporarily settled in the territories east of the Jordan. Two victories occurred there and, once again, the Israelites saw that God saves his people. In Psalm 136, after praising God “who made them cross the Red Sea because his love is everlasting” they recall that “he struck great kings to death, Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan.”

• **22.2** Here begins the very meaningful story of Balaam, developed in the form of a

legend (about Balaam, see commentary on Gen 32:22). When they set out on the way to freedom, the people of God faced several enemies, as well as their own cowardice about the sacrifices asked of them. But an even greater danger threatens them now without their knowing it: Balaam has been called and paid to bring curses upon them. Everyone knows, though we may use more modern words to express this curse—that our own demons can lead us to disaster: radicalization of conflicts, refusal of risk and sins against life.

Later, God will remind the Israelites of the way he protected them in the Balaam incident: not only did God shield them from their visible human enemies, but also from invisible ones

Dt 2:
26-36

Jer 48:
45-46

Dt 3:1-17

31:8, 16;
Dt 23:5-6;
Jos 2:3;
Ne 13:2;
Mic 6:5;
2P 2:15;
Jd 1:11;
Rev 2:14

to summon Balaam, son of Beor, at Pethor near the river in the land of the Amonites. Balak said, "A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the earth and are settling opposite me. ⁶Come and put a curse on these people because they are too powerful for me. Then perhaps I may be able to defeat them and drive them out of the land, for I well know that those you bless are indeed blessed and those you curse are cursed."

^{1S 9:7} ⁷The elders of Moab and Midian set out, taking with them the fee for divination. They went to Balaam and gave him Balak's message. ⁸Balaam said to them, "Stay here tonight and I will give you whatever answer Yahweh will have given me." So the Moabite elders stayed in Balaam's house.

⁹God came to Balaam and asked him, "Who are these men with you?" ¹⁰Balaam said to God, "Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab, sent them to me with this message: ¹¹A people has come out of Egypt and covers the face of the earth. Now come and put a curse on them for me. Perhaps I shall then be able to fight and drive them away." ¹²But God said to Balaam, "Do not go with them; you must not put a curse on them because they are blessed."

¹³Next morning Balaam got up and said to the elders of Balak, "Return to your country for Yahweh has refused to let me go with you." ¹⁴So the Moabite elders returned to Balak and said, "Balaam refused to come with us."

¹⁵Balak sent other leaders, more numerous and more distinguished than the first. ¹⁶They went to Balaam and said, "This is what Balak, son of Zippor says: Do not refuse to come to

me; ¹⁷I will greatly honor you; whatever you ask of me I will do for you. Please come and lay a curse on this people for me."

¹⁸Balaam answered the servants of Balak, "Even if Balak gave me his house full of silver and gold I could not do anything great or small beyond the command of Yahweh, my God. ¹⁹Now you, too, stay here tonight as the others did, till I wait for what else Yahweh may tell me."

²⁰God came to Balaam at night and said, "If these men have come to summon you, go with them, but you may only do what I tell you." ²¹Balaam got up next morning, saddled his donkey and went with the Moabite leaders.

Balaam's donkey

²²But the anger of God was aroused because of his going and Yahweh's angel posted himself on the road, a drawn sword in his hand. Balaam was riding on the donkey and his two boys were with him. ²³When the donkey saw the angel, she turned off the road and went into the field. Then Balaam hit the donkey to get her back on to the road. ²⁴But the angel of Yahweh stood on a narrow lane between vineyards with a stone wall in either side. ²⁵When the donkey saw the angel of Yahweh, she shrank against the wall crushing Balaam's foot against it so he beat her again.

²⁶Then Yahweh's angel went ahead and stopped at a narrow place where there was no room to go either to the right or left. ²⁷When the donkey saw Yahweh's angel there, she lay down under Balaam; he was angry and beat her with a stick.

which neither ordinary people nor rulers could foresee or detain (see Jos 24:9 and Mic 6:5).

I did not want to sin, I did not know you were posted against me on the road (v. 34). What a

likable sorcerer Balaam is. He is obstinate in his wicked project until he discovers that God himself blocks the way!

Dt 10:9;
Jos
13:14

^{2P 2:16} ²⁸But now Yahweh opened the mouth of the donkey and she said to Balaam, "What have I done to you to make you beat me three times?"

²⁹Balaam answered, "You have made a fool of me. If I had a sword just now I would kill you." ³⁰And the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your own donkey that you have ridden to this day? Have I ever dared to do this to you?" He said, "No!"

³¹Then Yahweh opened Balaam's eyes and he saw Yahweh's angel standing on the road with a drawn sword. He bowed and fell downward, his face to the ground. ³²Yahweh's angel said to him, "Why did you strike your donkey three times? I have come here to oppose you because you are going a wrong way. ³³The donkey saw me and turned away three times. Otherwise I would have killed you, but not her."

³⁴And Balaam said to Yahweh's angel, "I did not want to sin. I did not know you were posted against me on the road. But if this journey displeases you I will go back."

³⁵Yahweh's angel said to Balaam, "Go with these men, but you may say only what I tell you." So Balaam went on with Balak's men.

Balaam and Balak

³⁶When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went to meet him at the boundary city of Moab on the Arnon border. ³⁷Then Balak said to Balaam, "I sent an urgent summons to you; why didn't you come? Did you think I would not pay you well enough?"

^{Jer 1:9} ³⁸Balaam then said to Balak, "Now I have come to you; but what can I say? Only what Yahweh puts on my lips."

³⁹So Balaam went with Balak and they came to Kiriath-huzoth. ⁴⁰There Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep and gave some to Balaam and the leaders who were with him. ⁴¹Next morning Balak took Balaam up to the high places of Baal and from there he saw some of the people of Israel.

23 ¹Balaam said, "Build me seven altars here and prepare seven bullocks and seven rams for me," ²Balak did just as Balaam had ordered and Balak and Balaam offered up a bullock and a ram on each altar. ³Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here beside your offering while I go aside. Perhaps Yahweh will meet me and whatever he lets me see I will tell you." So he went to a barren hill.

⁴God met Balaam who said, "I have prepared the seven altars and on each altar I have offered a bullock and a ram." ⁵Yahweh then put a message on Balaam's lips and said, "Go back to Balak and give him this message." ⁶Balaam returned and found Balak standing beside his offering, together with the leaders of Moab. ⁷Then Balaam pronounced his oracle:

"From Aram, Balak has brought me, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains. 'Come, curse Jacob for me!

Come, denounce Israel! ⁸How can I curse him whom God has not cursed? How can I denounce him whom God has not denounced?

⁹From the peak of the crags I see him, ^{33:16} from the heights I behold him. I see a people that lives apart, a people different from all the nations.

¹⁰Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the fourth part of Israel? Let me die the death of the upright and may my end be like theirs!"

¹¹Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I took you to curse my enemies and you have actually blessed them."

¹²And Balaam answered, "Must I not take care to say what Yahweh puts on my lips?"

¹³Balak said to him, "Come with me to another place where you will see them. You will not see all of them, only the tail end, and there you shall curse them for me."

¹⁴So he took him to the field of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah and built seven altars and offered a bullock and a ram on each altar. ¹⁵Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your burnt offering while I go and meet Yahweh over there."

¹⁶Yahweh met Balaam and put words on his lips and said, "Go back to Balak and give him this message." ¹⁷He returned and found Balak posted beside his burnt offering with the leaders of Moab. Balak asked, "What did Yahweh say?" ¹⁸Balaam then pronounced his oracle,

1S15:29; Mal 3:6; Job 9:32; Heb 6:18
 “Be ready to hear, Balak; listen to me, son of Zippor. ¹⁹God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should repent. Has he said he will do something and will not do it? Has he promised something and not fulfilled it?”

²⁰See, I have received a command to bless; when he has blessed I cannot change it. ²¹He has not seen misfortune in Jacob or observed misery in Israel. Yahweh, their God is with them, and the shout of a king among them.

24:8-9; Mt 2:15
²²God has brought them out of Egypt; he is for them like the horns of a wild ox. ²³There are no diviners or magicians in Israel. But it shall be made known to them what God will do with them.

Gen 49:9; Dt 33:20
²⁴Behold a people that rises like a lioness, that rouses itself like a lion. It shall not lie down before it devours its prey and drinks the blood of its victims.”

²⁵Balak said to Balaam, “Even though you cannot curse them, do not bless them.” ²⁶But Balaam answered, “Did I not tell you that whatever Yahweh says, I will do?” ²⁷And Balak said to Balaam, “Come, I will take you to another place. Perhaps it is God’s will that you curse them for me there.”

²⁸Then Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor which overlooks the wasteland, ²⁹and Balaam said to Balak, “Build seven altars for me here and prepare seven bullocks and seven rams.” ³⁰Balak did just as Balaam ordered and offered a bullock and a ram on each altar.

Balaam’s blessing

24 ¹But Balaam saw that Yahweh willingly blessed Israel. He did not seek out signs as he had done before, but turned towards the desert. ²He looked up and saw Israel camping, tribe by tribe; and the spirit of God came upon him ³and he uttered his song:

“Word of Balaam, son of Beor, the seer, the one who hears the words of God,

⁴and beholds the vision of the Almighty, in ecstasy, with eyes unveiled.

Is 54:2
⁵How goodly are your tents, Jacob, your encampments, Israel!

⁶Like valleys stretching far, like gardens beside a stream, like aloes planted by Yahweh, like cedars beside the waters.

⁷His buckets are overflowing and his seeds are always watered. His king becomes stronger than Agag, and his kingdom grows.

⁸His God brought him out of Egypt and fights for him like the horns of a wild ox. 23:22-24

He devours the carcasses of his enemies and crushes their bones in pieces.

⁹He lies like a lion, or like a lioness; who dares rouse him? Gen 12:3

Blessed is he who blesses you!
 And cursed is he who curses you!”

¹⁰Balak’s anger burned against Balaam; he beat his hands together and said, “I called you to curse my enemy and you have blessed him three times! ¹¹So flee to your place now. I said I would greatly reward you but Yahweh has taken away your reward.”

¹²Balaam said to Balak, “Did I not tell your messengers: ¹³though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not do anything, good or bad, of my own accord beyond Yahweh’s command? What Yahweh speaks, I speak. ¹⁴Now, before I return to my people, come that I may warn you what this people will do to your people in the days to come.”

• ¹⁵Then Balaam pronounced his oracle:

“Word of Balaam, son of Beor, the seer,

¹⁶the one who hears the words of God, who has knowledge from the Most High,

and sees the vision of the Almighty, in ecstasy, with eyes unveiled.

¹⁷I see a figure, but not really.

I behold him but not near.

A star shall come forth from Jacob, he rises with a staff in his hand; he shatters the forehead of Moab Rev 2:28; Gen 49:10; Jer 48:45

• **24.15** It would seem that God wants to proclaim the marvelous destiny of his people to the whole world, even through Balaam’s mouth. We single out the most famous of the poems, or prophecies of Balaam (vv. 15-19) announc-

ing the *star of Jacob*. This star referred to king David, chosen by God to begin the Rule of God in Israel. Through him we recognize another one, Christ, the truly chosen one of God.

and tears down all the sons of Sheth.

¹⁸He conquers the land of Edom, and takes the cities of his enemies. Israel grows strong;

¹⁹Jacob dominates.”

²⁰Then Balaam looked to Amalek’s country; he said, “Amalek, the first of the nations, will finally meet with destruction.”

²¹Then he looked to the Kainite’s land and continued his oracle: Your dwelling place is enduring, your nest is set in the rock, ²²but you shall be destroyed; and finally Asshur shall take you captive.”

²³Balaam continued his oracle and said: “Alas! Who will live when God does this?”

²⁴Ships shall come from Kittim and shall conquer Asshur, but also Eber; they too shall be destroyed.”

²⁵Then Balaam rose and set out on his journey home while Balak also went on his way.

Israel’s licentiousness in Baal Peor

25 • ¹Israel settled at Shittim and the men began to enjoy themselves with the Moabite women and to have sex with them. ²These women invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods. There the people ate and bowed down before their gods.

1Cor
10:8;
Rev 2:14

³The Israelites prostituted themselves to the god of Peor, so Yahweh’s anger flared against them. ⁴He said to Moses, “Take all the leaders of these people and hang them in broad daylight before Yahweh, so that his fierce anger may turn away from Israel.” ⁵So

Dt 4:3

Moses told the Israelite judges, “Each of you shall slay any of your men who have joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor.”

⁶Then a man, an Israelite, came back bringing a Midianite woman to his family in view of Moses and the Israelite community while they were weeping at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ⁷When Phinehas, a son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand ⁸and followed the Israelite into the tent. There he drove the spear through both the man and the woman. So the plague against the Israelites was checked ⁹but those who had already died numbered twenty-four thousand.

¹⁰Yahweh spoke to Moses, ¹¹“Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned away the blows of my anger from the sons of Israel, zealous as he was for me; he has defended my honor among you. Because of this, I did not feel zealous for my honor so that I should destroy the people of Israel.

¹²Therefore tell him that I am making with him a Covenant of friendship. ¹³I grant to him and his descendants that they be my priests forever, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the sons of Israel.”

32:25;
Dt 33:8;
Ezk
44:15

• **25.1** Sexual licentiousness is not without effect on people’s welfare. It is not merely a question of private morality, but it also seriously impedes social development insofar as it is related to the level of responsibility and capacity for self-sacrifice. In the Scriptures, the struggle against sexual immorality always goes hand in hand with faithfulness to God.

When the Israelites took over the land of Canaan, the pagan cults of that country were a constant temptation for them. One of the most common practices of these cults consisted in having relations with prostitutes consecrated to the god Baal. The pagan practice of sacred prostitution, severely condemned by the Scrip-

tures, was still widely developed at the time of Paul, particularly in Corinth (1 Cor 6:16). As a lesson, we are told here that the people had already fallen into that sin at the time of Moses, and what the punishment was. To unite with a prostitute was to be united with the god Baal, and God does not tolerate such treason: a double prostitution, the physical one and the infidelity of a person betraying his Savior.

He was zealous for his God (v. 13): he was not afraid of being called a puritan, a person with outdated ideas, and an intolerant mind. He did not resign himself to merely laughing it off and taking pictures.

• ¹⁴ *The Israelite slain with the Midianite woman was Zimri, son of Salu, a leader of a Simeonite family.* ¹⁵ *And the name of the Midianite woman who was slain was Cozbi, daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family.*

¹⁶ *Yahweh said to Moses,* ¹⁷ *“Attack the Midianites and crush them,* ¹⁸ *for*

they have been your enemies, deceiving you with regard to Peor and with regard to Cozbi, their kinswoman, daughter of a Midianite leader, who was slain on the day of the plague because of Peor.”

After the plague, it happened that...

LAWS AND FEASTS

The second census

26 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and to Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest. He said: ²“Take a census of all the community of Israel, by families: all those of twenty years and over, able to give military service.” ³So Moses and Eleazar the priest enlisted the people in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan opposite Jericho as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ⁴They counted the men twenty years and over among the Israelites who had come out of the land of Egypt.

⁵Reuben, the firstborn of Israel. The tribe of Reuben: for Hanoch, the Hanochite clan; for Pallu, the Palluite clan; ⁶for Hezron, the Hezronite clan; for Carmi, the Carmite clan. ⁷These were the Reubenite clans. They numbered 43,730 men.

⁸The descendants of Pallu: Eliab. ⁹The sons of Eliab: Nemuel, Dathan and Abiram. These two, Dathan and Abiram, councillors of the community, were the ones who rebelled against Moses and Aaron; they belonged to the followers of Korah who rebelled against Yahweh. ¹⁰The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them (Korah died with his followers), when fire destroyed the 250 men as a warning to the people. ¹¹The sons of Korah were not killed.

¹²The tribe of Simeon by clans: for Nemuel, the Nemuelite clan; for Jamin, the Jaminite clan; for Jachin, the Jachinite clan; ¹³for Zerach, the Zerachite clan; for Shaul,

the Shaulite clan. ¹⁴These were the Simeonite clans. They numbered 22,200 men.

¹⁵The tribe of Gad by clans: for Zephon, the Zephonite clan; for Haggi, the Haggite clan; for Shuni, the Shunite clan; ¹⁶for Ozni, the Oznite clan; for Eri, the Erite clan; ¹⁷for Arod, the Arodite clan; for Areli, the Arelite clan. ¹⁸These were the clans of the tribe of Gad. They numbered 40,500 men.

¹⁹The tribe of Judah: Er and Onan. Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan.

²⁰The other sons of Judah became clans: for Shelah, the Shelanite clan; for Perez, the Perezite clan; for Zerach, the Zerachite clan. ²¹The sons of Perez were: for Hezron, the Hezronite clan; for Hamul, the Hamulite clan. ²²These were the clans of Judah. They numbered 76,500 men.

²³The tribe of Issachar, by clans: for Tola, the Tolaite clan; for Puvah, the Puvite clan; ²⁴for Jashub, the Jashubite clan; for Shimron, the Shimronite clan. ²⁵These were the clans of Issachar. They numbered 64,300 men.

²⁶The tribe of Zebulun by clans: for Sered, the Seredite clan; for Elon, the Elnite clan; for Jahleel, the Jahleelite clan. ²⁷These were the clans of Zebulun. They numbered 60,500 men.

²⁸The tribe of Joseph, by clans: Manasseh and Ephraim.

²⁹The tribe of Manasseh: for Machir, the Machirite clan; Machir was the father of Gilead: for Gilead, the Gileadite clan.

³⁰These were the clans of Gilead; for Iezer,

• 14. Here conclude the ancient traditions referring to the time of Moses. Yet, in Deuteronomy 34, we find the remembrance of Moses' death.

The numbers of this census on leaving the

desert are no truer to history than those of the first chapter. But neither are they pure caprice. These numbers, taken separately, or as a whole, had a symbolic value and served as a pretext for religious teaching.

the lezerite clan; for Helek, the Helekite clan; ³¹Asriel, the Asrielite clan; Shechem, the Shechemite clan; ³²Shemida, the Shemidaite clan; Hephher, the Hephherite clan. ³³Zelophehad son of Hephher had no sons but only daughters; these are the names of Zelophehad's daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. ³⁴These were the clans of Manasseh. They numbered 52,700 men.

³⁵The tribe of Ephraim by clans: for Shuthelah, the Shuthelahite clan; for Becher, the Becherite clan; for Tahan, the Tahanite clan. ³⁶These are the sons of Shuthelah: for Eran, the Eranite clan. ³⁷These were the clans of Ephraim. They numbered 32,500 men.

These were the descendants of Joseph, by clans.

³⁸The tribe of Benjamin, by clans: for Bela, the Belaite clan; for Ashbel, the Ashbelite clan; for Ahiram, the Ahiramite clan; ³⁹for Shephupham, the Shephuphamite clan; for Hupham, the Huphamite clan. ⁴⁰Bela had Ard and Naaman for sons: the Ardite clan; for Naaman, the Naamite clan. ⁴¹The tribe of Benjamin by clans numbered 45,600 men.

⁴²The tribe of Dan, by clans: for Shuham, the Shuhamite clan. ⁴³All the Shuhamite clans numbered 64,400 men.

⁴⁴The tribe of Asher, by clans: for Imnah, the Imnite clan; for Ishvi, the Ishvite clan; for Beriah, the Beriite clan. ⁴⁵The clans of Heber and Malchiel were descendants of Beriah. ⁴⁶The daughter of Asher was called Serah. ⁴⁷These were the clans of Asher. They numbered 53,400 men.

⁴⁸The tribe of Naphtali, by clans: for Jahzeel, the Jahzeelite clan; for Guni, the Gunite clan; ⁴⁹for Jezer, the Jezerite clan; for Shillem, the Shillemite clan. ⁵⁰The clans of Naphtali numbered 45,400 men.

⁵¹The sons of Israel numbered in all 601,730 men.

⁵²Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ⁵³"The land is to be divided among the tribes as a heritage, according to the number of those registered. ⁵⁴To a tribe large in number you are to give a large area of land; to a small one in number, a small area; to each the heritage will be in proportion to the number registered. ⁵⁵The dividing of the land is, however, to be done by lot. ⁵⁶Each tribe is to receive its inheritance according to the number of men registered."

⁵⁷These are, by clans, the Levites that were registered: for Gershon, the Ger-

shonite clan; for Kohath, the Kohathite clan; for Merari, the Merarite clan.

⁵⁸These are the Levite subclans: the Libnites, the Hebronites, the Mahlites, the Mushites, the Kohathites. Kohath was the father of Amram, ⁵⁹who married Jochebed, descendant of Levi, born in Egypt. She bore Aaron, Moses and Miriam their sister. ⁶⁰Aaron was the father of Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ⁶¹Nadab and Abihu died when they offered unlawful fire before Yahweh.

⁶²Altogether there were registered 23,000 males of one month and over. They were listed separately from the rest of the Israelites, because they would receive no property in Israel.

⁶³These were the men registered by Moses and Eleazar the priest who took this census of the Israelites in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan River, opposite Jericho. ⁶⁴Not one of them was among those whom Moses and Aaron had listed in the desert of Sinai; ⁶⁵for Yahweh had told them that these were to die in the desert and none would remain, except Caleb, son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, son of Nun. ^{14:20-38}

27 ¹Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward. Zelophehad was the son of Hephher, son of Gilead, son of Machir, son of Manasseh, son of Joseph. These are the names of his daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. ²They appeared before Moses, before Eleazar the priest, and before the leaders and the whole community, at the entrance to the tent of meeting, and said, ³"Our father died in the desert. He was not one of those who rebelled against Yahweh, nor among the followers of Korah; but he died for his own sin as all the people and he did not leave any sons. ⁴Why must our father's name disappear from among his clan? Since he had no son, give us some property among our father's relatives."

⁵Moses took their case before Yahweh, ⁶and Yahweh spoke to Moses. He said, ⁷"The daughters of Zelophehad have a just case. Give them property for their inheritance among their father's relatives; pass on to them their father's inheritance. ⁸Then say this to the people of Israel, If a man dies without sons, his inheritance is to be given to his daughter. ⁹If he has no daughters, the inheritance is to go to his brothers. ¹⁰If he has no brothers, it is to go

to his father's brothers. ¹¹If his father has no brothers, it is to go to the member of his clan who is most nearly related: he is to hold it as his own property. This shall be a law for the people of Israel, as Yahweh has commanded Moses."

Joshua succeeds Moses

¹²Yahweh said to Moses, "Climb this mountain of the Abarim range, and look on the land I give to the Israelites. ¹³After you have seen it, you will die, as Aaron your brother did. ¹⁴For you both rebelled against my command in the desert of Zin when the community complained against me, when I commanded you to proclaim my holy power before their eyes in the matter of the water." (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh, in the desert of Zin).

¹⁵Moses said to Yahweh, ¹⁶"May Yahweh, God of the spirits that give life to all living creatures, appoint a leader for this community, ¹⁷who shall go out and come in at their head, who shall lead them out and bring them in; so that the community of Yahweh may not be like sheep without a shepherd." ¹⁸Yahweh answered Moses, "Take Joshua, son of Nun, a man in whom the Spirit dwells, and lay your hands on him. ¹⁹Then bring him before Eleazar, the priest, and the whole community, to instruct him in their presence ²⁰and to give him a share of your authority, so that the whole community of the Israelites may obey him. ²¹Eleazar the priest shall consult me for him and tell him my decisions by means of the Urim and Thummim. Then Joshua will direct all the Israelites, the whole community, in all their affairs."

²²Moses did as Yahweh had commanded. He took Joshua and brought him before Eleazar the priest and the whole community, ²³laid his hands on him and instructed him, as Yahweh had directed through Moses.

28 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²"Give the Israelites this command: Take care to bring the food offerings, my sweet-smelling offerings at the times I have appointed.

³Say to them: These are the burnt offerings you must offer to Yahweh:

Daily sacrifices

Every day, two one-year-old lambs without any defect. ⁴The first lamb you

must offer in the morning, ⁵together with a grain offering of two pounds of fine flour mixed with two pints of purest oil. ⁶This is the everlasting burnt offering which was first offered at Mount Sinai as a sweet-smelling offering for Yahweh. ⁷The accompanying wine offering to be poured out at the altar is two pints of wine for each lamb. ⁸The second lamb you must offer in the evening; do this in the same way as the morning offering, together with the wine offering.

The Sabbath sacrifice

⁹On the Sabbath day, you must offer two one-year-old lambs without any defect, and four pounds of fine flour as a grain offering, mixed with oil, as well as the accompanying wine offering. ¹⁰This burnt offering is to be offered every Sabbath in addition to the daily offering with its accompanying wine offering.

The new-moon sacrifice

¹¹At the beginning of each of your months you must offer a burnt offering to Yahweh: two young bulls, one ram and seven one-year-old lambs without any defect; ¹²for each bull a grain offering of six pounds of fine flour mixed with oil; ¹³for each lamb, four pounds of fine flour mixed with oil. These burnt offerings are sweet-smelling offerings to Yahweh. ¹⁴The accompanying wine offering is four pints of wine for a bull, three pints for a ram, two pints for a lamb. This must be the monthly burnt offering, month after month, every month of the year. ¹⁵In addition to the daily burnt offering, a he-goat must be offered to Yahweh, as a sacrifice for sin, with its accompanying wine offering.

The Feast of the Unleavened Bread

¹⁶The fourteenth day of the first month is the Passover of Yahweh, ¹⁷and the fifteenth day of this month is a feast day. For seven days unleavened bread must be eaten. ¹⁸On the first day you shall gather for worship and not do work of a worker. ¹⁹You shall offer to Yahweh a burnt offering: two young bulls, a ram, seven one-year-old sheep without any defect. ²⁰The accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for the bull, four pounds for the ram, ²¹and two pounds for each of the seven lambs. ²²There must also be a he-goat for the sacrifice for sin,

Dt 31:1-8;
31:23

Dt 3:27

20:12

1K 22:17;
Ezk 34:5;
Jn 10;
Mt 9:36

28:30;
1S 28:6

Mt 12:5

Am 8:5;
Is 1:13

12;
Lev 23:5

29:18

for the atonement over you. ²³This must be done in addition to the daily morning offering. ²⁴You must do this every day for seven days. It is food, a burnt offering, a fragrant offering to Yahweh; it is to be offered in addition to the daily offering and its accompanying wine offering. ²⁵On the seventh day you shall gather for worship and not do work of a worker.

The Feast of Weeks

²⁶On the first day of the harvest, when you make your offering of new fruits to Yahweh at your Feast of Weeks, you are to gather for worship; you must do no work of workers. ²⁷You must offer as a burnt offering: two young bulls, one ram, seven one-year-old lambs. ²⁸The accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for each bull, ²⁹four pounds for the ram, and two pounds for each of the seven lambs. ³⁰There must also be a he-goat for the sacrifice for sin, for the atonement over you. ³¹This must be done in addition to the daily offering and its accompanying wine offering.

The New Year Festival

29 ¹In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall gather for worship and do no work of a worker. It shall be a day on which you sound the trumpets. ²You must offer as a burnt offering: one young bull, one ram, seven one-year-old lambs without any defect. ³The accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for the bull, four pounds for the ram, ⁴and two pounds for each of the seven lambs. ⁵There must also be a he-goat for the sacrifice for sin, for the atonement over you. ⁶All this must be done in addition to the monthly burnt offering with its grain offering, the daily offering with its grain offering, and the accompanying wine offering according to the law, as a burnt offering and sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh.

The Day of Atonement

⁷On the tenth day of this seventh month, you shall gather for worship. You must fast and do no work of a worker. ⁸You must offer a burnt offering and a sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh: one young bull, one ram, and seven one-year-old lambs of your choice without any defect. ⁹The accom-

panying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for the bull, four pounds for the ram, ¹⁰and two pounds for each of the seven lambs. ¹¹A he-goat must be offered for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the sacrifice for the feast of Atonement, and to the daily burnt offering with its accompanying grain offering and wine offerings.

The Feast of the Tent

¹²On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you are to gather for worship and do no work of a worker, and for the space of seven days you are to celebrate a feast for Yahweh. ¹³You must offer as a burnt offering and sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh: thirteen young bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect. ¹⁴The accompanying grain offering of fine flour mixed with oil is to be six pounds for each of the thirteen bulls, four pounds for each of the two rams, ¹⁵two pounds for each of the fourteen lambs; ¹⁶also one he-goat as a sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering and its grain offering and wine offering.

¹⁷On the second day: twelve young bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect; ¹⁸the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ¹⁹also one he-goat for sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

²⁰On the third day: eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect, ²¹the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ²²also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

²³On the fourth day: ten bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect: ²⁴the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ²⁵also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

²⁶On the fifth day: nine bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any

Lev
23:24

23:14;
Lev
23:33

Lev
16:29;
Ezk
45:18

defect: ²⁷the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ²⁸also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

²⁹On the sixth day: eight bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect; ³⁰the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ³¹also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

³²On the seventh day: seven bulls, two rams, fourteen one-year-old lambs without any defect; ³³the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams and lambs; ³⁴also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

³⁵On the eighth day you shall all gather for worship and do no work of a worker. ³⁶You shall offer as a burnt offering and sweet-smelling offering to Yahweh: one bull, one ram, seven one-year-old lambs without any defect; ³⁷the accompanying grain offering and wine offering, as required, in proportion to the number of bulls, rams ³⁸and lambs; also one he-goat for the sacrifice for sin. This is in addition to the daily burnt offering with its grain offering and wine offering.

³⁹This is what you are to do for Yahweh at your solemn feasts, besides whatever burnt offerings, grain offerings and wine offerings you present as your free-will offerings.”

Rules about vows

30 ¹Moses told the people of Israel exactly what Yahweh had commanded him.

²Moses spoke to the leaders of the tribes of Israel. He said, “This is what Yahweh has commanded:

³If a man makes a vow to give something to Yahweh or a solemn promise to abstain from something, he must not break his promise: whatever he promises by word of mouth he must do.

⁴If a woman makes a vow to give something to the Lord or a solemn promise to abstain from something while she is still young and lives in her father’s house, ⁵and if he hears about this vow or promise made by her and says nothing to her about it, she must do whatever she has promised. ⁶But if the father on the day he learns of it expresses his disapproval of it, then she is not required to keep her promise. Yahweh will not hold her to her promise, since her father has expressed his disapproval.

⁷⁻⁸If a woman makes a vow before being married or makes a solemn promise to abstain from something, either deliberately or without giving it much thought, she must do everything she vowed even after she marries if her husband learns of it and says nothing about it. ⁹But if on the day he learns of it he expresses his disapproval to her, she is not required to keep her promise. Yahweh will not hold her to it. ¹⁰Any vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, or any pledge to which she binds herself is valid.

¹¹If she has made a vow or a solemn promise to abstain from something while in her husband’s house, ¹²and if when the husband learns of it he says nothing to her and does not express disapproval to her, then she must do whatever she has vowed or solemnly promised to abstain from. ¹³But if the husband forbids it on the day he learns of it, she is not required to do whatever she has vowed or solemnly promised. Yahweh will not hold her to it.

¹⁴Any vow or solemn promise to abstain from something that the wife makes, must be allowed or forbidden by the husband. ¹⁵If by the following day the husband has said nothing to her, it means that he approves or allows her vow, whatever it may be, or her solemn promise, whatever it may be. He confirms the vows of his wife by saying nothing on the day he learns of them. ¹⁶But if he forbids them a long time after he learned of them, then he must suffer what results from the wife’s failure to fulfill the vow or solemn promise.”

¹⁷These are the laws given by Yahweh to Moses, concerning the relationship between man and wife, and between a father and his daughter while still young and living in her father’s home.

The holy war against MidianDt 20:1;
1S 15:
1-33

31 • ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²“Fully avenge the Israelites for what they have suffered from the Midianites. After that you will be joined to your people.”

25:17-18

³Moses said to the people, “Let some of you go off to the war and attack the Midianites, for you have to carry out Yahweh’s vengeance. ⁴Put a thousand men in the field from each of the tribes of Israel.”

⁵In this way the Israelites provided twelve thousand men equipped for war, one thousand from each tribe. ⁶Moses put them in the field, one thousand from each tribe, with Phinehas, son of Eleazar the priest, to go with them carrying the sacred vessels and the trumpets for sounding the alarm.

⁷They attacked the Midianites, as Yahweh had commanded Moses, and they put every male to death. ⁸And further, they killed the kings of Midian, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur and Reba, the five Midianite kings; they also put Balaam son of Beor to the sword. ⁹The sons of Israel took the Midianite women captive with their young children, and took for themselves all their cattle, all their flocks and all their goods. ¹⁰They set fire to the towns where they lived and all their camps. ¹¹Then, taking all the spoils, all that they had captured, man and beast, ¹²they brought the captives and the spoils to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the community of the Israelites, at the camp in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan River opposite Jericho.

Laws regarding war

25

¹³Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the community went out of the camp to meet them. ¹⁴Moses was angry with the commanders of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come back from this battle. ¹⁵He said, “Why have you spared the lives of all the women? ¹⁶These were the very ones who, on Balaam’s advice, tempted the people of Israel and made them unfaithful to Yahweh at Peor: hence

the epidemic which struck the community of Israel. ¹⁷So kill all the male children. Kill also all the women who have slept with a man. ¹⁸Spare the lives only of the young girls who have not slept with a man, and take them for yourselves. ¹⁹As for you, you must camp for seven days outside the camp, all of you who have killed a man or touched a corpse. Purify yourselves, you and your prisoners, on the third and seventh days; ²⁰purify also all clothing, everything made of skin, everything woven of goats’ hair and everything made of wood.”

²¹Eleazar, the priest, said to the soldiers who had come back from this battle, “These are the regulations given by Yahweh to Moses. ²²The gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin and lead, everything that is not melted by fire, must be passed through the fire to become clean, and also be purified by the water for purification. ²³But whatever would be melted by fire you must pass through water.

²⁴On the seventh day you will wash your clothes and then be clean. You may then come back to the camp.”

²⁵Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ²⁶“With Eleazar, the priest, and the heads of families in the community, count the prizes of battle and the captives, man and beast. ²⁷Then share out the spoils, half and half, between those who fought the battle and the rest of the community. ²⁸As Yahweh’s share you will set aside, from the share of the soldiers who took part in the battle, one out of every 500 persons, oxen, donkeys and sheep. ²⁹These are to be taken from the half share which is their due, and given to Eleazar, the priest, as an offering to Yahweh. ³⁰From the half which is due to the community of Israel, you will take one out of every fifty persons, oxen, donkeys, sheep, and all other animals, and give them to the Levites who have charge of the Holy Tent of Yahweh.”

³¹Moses and Eleazar, the priest, did as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ³²The prizes of battle, the remainder of the spoil captured by the soldiers, came to 675,000

• **31.1** The present chapter refers to the “holy war.” It is important to remember that all of this was written when Israel no longer had the means of attacking any other people. See the commentary on Joshua 6 to that effect. The

killing of women is not described in this fictitious episode... The author of the story only wanted to insist on how dangerous it was for the Israelites to marry or go near women of pagan nations.

head of sheep and goats, ³³72,000 head of cattle, ³⁴61,000 donkeys, ³⁵and, in persons, women who had never slept with a man, 32,000 in all. ³⁶The half assigned to those who had taken part in the war amounted to 337,500 head of sheep and goats, ³⁷of which Yahweh's share was 675; ³⁸36,000 head of cattle, of which Yahweh's share was 72; ³⁹30,500 donkeys, of which Yahweh's share was 61, ⁴⁰and 16,000 persons, of which Yahweh's share was 32. ⁴¹Moses gave Eleazar, the priest, the share set aside for Yahweh, in accordance with Yahweh's instructions to Moses.

⁴²As for the half due to the Israelite community, which Moses had separated from that of the soldiers, ⁴³this half, the community's share, came to 337,500 head of sheep and goats, ⁴⁴36,000 head of cattle, ⁴⁵30,500 donkeys ⁴⁶and 16,000 persons. ⁴⁷From this half, the share of the community of Israel, Moses took one out of every fifty, man and beast, and gave them to the Levites who had charge of the Holy Tent of Yahweh, according to what Yahweh said to Moses.

⁴⁸Then the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, came to Moses ⁴⁹and said, "Your servants have numbered the soldiers under their command; not one is missing. ⁵⁰And further, we bring as an offering for Yahweh the gold ornaments we have found, armlets and bracelets, signet rings, earrings and necklaces, to make atonement for ourselves before Yahweh." ⁵¹Moses and Eleazar, the priest, accepted this gold from them, all this jewelry. ⁵²This offering of gold given by them to Yahweh weighed over 400 pounds, all given by the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds.

⁵³Each of the soldiers took his own loot. ⁵⁴But Moses and Eleazar, the priest, received the gold from the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and carried it to the tent of meeting as a reminder to Yahweh of the people of Israel.

The Israelites settle in Transjordan

32 • ¹The tribes of Reuben and Gad owned great herds of fine cattle. Now they saw that the land of Jazer and Gilead was good for raising livestock. ²Because of this they went to Moses, Eleazar the priest, and the leaders of the community, and said to them, ³"The land around Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo and Beon, ⁴which Yahweh has conquered in the sight of the community of Israel, is good land for raising cattle, and we have livestock. ⁵If we have deserved your friendship, give us this land for our own; do not make us cross the Jordan River."

⁶Moses replied, "Shall you stay here while your brothers are off to the war? ⁷Why do you discourage the people of Israel from entering the land that Yahweh has given them? ⁸This is what your fathers did when I sent them from Kadesh-Barnea to inspect the land. ⁹They went up as far as the Valley of Eshcol and inspected the land; but they kept the people of Israel from entering the land Yahweh had given them. ¹⁰Because of this Yahweh was angry that day and swore this oath, ¹¹"These men of twenty years and over, who came out from Egypt, will never see the land that I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For they have not followed me faithfully, ¹²except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite, and Joshua son of Nun: these indeed have followed Yahweh faithfully." ¹³The anger of Yahweh blazed out against Israel and he made them wander in the desert for forty years, until the generation that offended Yahweh had all disappeared. ¹⁴And now, will you do as your fathers did? You, new generation of sinful people, will you add still more to the burning anger of Yahweh against Israel! ¹⁵If you turn away from him, he will make your roaming in the desert still longer, and all this people will perish because of you."

¹⁶But they explained their purpose to Moses, "We would like to build sheepfolds

Dt 3:
12-20;
Num
21:24;
Jos 1:12

• **32.1** Not all the Israelites left Kadesh, the oasis in the desert where they stayed "forty years," as one people. The traditional image of the Israelites leaving as a united group to conquer the land of Canaan is more poetic than historical. These people were independent and each group wandered freely with their flocks except in the most difficult times when they gathered,

as happened in the time of Moses. Some left Kadesh before or after Moses: the most important group was the one who went to Gilead, on the other side of the Jordan. There, they settled peacefully in the midst of other nations.

Verses 20-22 emphasizes solidarity among the Israelites.

here for our flocks and towns for our young children. ¹⁷Then we ourselves will take up arms to lead the people of Israel until we have brought them to the place appointed for them: only our young children will stay in the fortified towns, safe from the inhabitants of the country. ¹⁸As for us we will not return to our homes until every one of the Israelites has taken possession of his inheritance. ¹⁹For we shall have no inheritance with them on the other bank of the Jordan River or beyond, since our inheritance has fallen to us here, east of the Jordan."

²⁰Moses said to them, "If you mean what you have said, if you are prepared to go to battle in the presence of Yahweh, ²¹and if all your fighting men cross the Jordan River under the command of Yahweh, until he has defeated all his enemies, ²²then, once Yahweh has taken possession of the land, you may go back; you shall be free of your obligation toward Yahweh and Israel, and this country shall be your inheritance before Yahweh. ²³But if you do not, you will sin against Yahweh, and you can be sure that your sin will follow you. ²⁴Build towns, then, for your young children and fenced places for your sheep; but do what you have promised."

²⁵The sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben said to Moses, "Your servants will do as you order, sir. ²⁶Our children, our wives, our sheep and all our livestock will stay in the towns of Gilead, ²⁷but we, every man armed for war, will cross over the Jordan before Yahweh to fight as you have ordered."

²⁸Then Moses gave instructions about them to Eleazar, the priest, to Joshua, son of Nun, and to the other leaders of Israel. ²⁹Moses said to them, "If the sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben, all who are armed for battle, cross the Jordan before Yahweh to fight with you, then once you have conquered the land, you will give them the country of Gilead for their possession. ³⁰But if they do not cross over and go into battle with you, then they must have their possessions among you in the land of Canaan."

³¹The sons of Gad and the sons of Reuben replied, "What Yahweh has said to us, we will do. ³²We will cross into the land of Canaan and go into battle under Yahweh's command; but our inheritance shall be beyond the Jordan." ³³Moses gave to the

tribes of Gad and Reuben and to half the tribe of Manasseh, the territory of Sihon, king of the Amorites, as well as that of Og, king of Bashan, and all the land and towns surrounding them.

³⁴The sons of Gad built Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, ³⁵Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, ³⁶Beth-nimrah, Beth-haran, fortified towns, and fenced places for the sheep.

³⁷The sons of Reuben built Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, ³⁸Nebo, Baal-meon (their names were changed), and Sibmah. They gave names to the towns they had built.

³⁹The sons of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead. They conquered it and drove out the Amorites who were there. ⁴⁰Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there. ⁴¹Jair son of Manasseh attacked and captured some villages and called them villages of Jair. ⁴²Nobah attacked and captured Kenath with its outlying villages, and called it Nobah after himself.

The stages of the Exodus

33 ¹Here are the stages of the journey of the people of Israel when they left the land of Egypt by divisions, under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. ²Moses followed Yahweh's instructions and wrote down the starting place for each stage of the journey. Here are the stages or, better, the starting places.

³They left Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month of the year. On the day following the Passover, the people of Israel set out triumphantly in the sight of all the Egyptians, ⁴when they were burying their dead. For Yahweh had killed all their first-born; he had also passed judgment on the gods of Egypt.

⁵The people of Israel left Rameses and camped at Succoth. ⁶Then they left Succoth and camped at Etham which is on the edge of the wilderness. ⁷They left Etham, turned back to Pi-hahiroth which faces Baal-zephon, and camped before Migdol. ⁸They left Pi-hahiroth, crossed over the sea into the wilderness, and after marching for three days in the desert of Etham, they camped at Marah. ⁹They left Marah and reached Elim. At Elim, there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; they camped there.

¹⁰They left Elim and camped by the Sea of Reeds. ¹¹They left the Sea of Reeds and

camped in the wilderness of Sin. ¹²They left the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. ¹³They left Dophkah and camped at Alush. ¹⁴They left Alush and camped at Rephidim; the people found no drinking water there. ¹⁵They left Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai. ¹⁶They left the wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth-hattaavah. ¹⁷They left Kibroth-hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. ¹⁸They left Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. ¹⁹They left Rithmah and camped at Rimmon-perez. ²⁰They left Rimmon-perez and camped at Libnah. ²¹They left Libnah and camped at Rissah. ²²They left Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. ²³They left Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. ²⁴They left Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. ²⁵They left Haradah and camped at Makheloth.

²⁶They left Makheloth and camped at Tahath. ²⁷They left Tahath and camped at Terah. ²⁸They left Terah and camped at Mithkah. ²⁹They left Mithkah and camped at Hashmonah. ³⁰They left Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. ³¹They left Moseroth and camped at Bene-jaakan. ³²They left Bene-jaakan and camped at Hor-haggidgad. ³³They left Hor-haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. ³⁴They left Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. ³⁵They left Abronah and camped at Ezion-geber.

³⁶They left Ezion-geber and camped in the wilderness of Zin; that is Kadesh. ³⁷They left Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the borders of the land of Edom. ³⁸There Aaron, the priest, went up Mount Hor at Yahweh's command and there he died, in the fortieth year of the journey of the Israelites from the land of Egypt, in the fifth month, on the first day of the month. ³⁹Aaron was 123 years old when he died at Mount Hor.

⁴⁰The king of Arad, a Canaanite who lived in the Negeb in the land of Canaan, was informed when the people of Israel arrived. ⁴¹So they left Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. ⁴²They left Zalmonah and camped at Punon. ⁴³They left Punon and camped at Oboth. ⁴⁴They left Oboth and camped in Moabite territory at Iye-abarim. ⁴⁵They left Iye-abarim and camped at Dibon-gad. ⁴⁶They left Dibon-gad and camped at Almon-diblathaim. ⁴⁷They left Almon-diblathaim and camped in the Abarim mountains facing Nebo.

⁴⁸They left the Abarim mountains and camped in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan opposite Jericho. ⁴⁹There they camped near the Jordan between Bethhazeshimoth and Abel-hashshittim, in the plains of Moab.

⁵⁰Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan River opposite Jericho. He said: ⁵¹"Say this to the people of Israel: When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, ⁵²you must drive out all the inhabitants of the country. You must destroy their stones, and their idols and all their places of worship. ⁵³You will take possession of this land and settle in it for I have given it to you for your own. ⁵⁴You are to divide it by drawing lots ^{26:54-56} among your clans. To a large clan you will give a larger piece of property, to a small clan a smaller one. Where the lot falls for each, that will be his. Make this division according to tribes.

⁵⁵But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the country, then those you have allowed to remain will be as splinters in your eyes and thorns in your side; they will harass you in the land where you are to live ⁵⁶ and I will treat you as I meant to treat them."

The boundaries of Canaan

34 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said, ²"Give the people of Israel this order: When you go into the land of Canaan, this territory will be your inheritance. This is the land of Canaan with its boundaries:

³The southern part of your country will stretch from the wilderness of Zin along the borders of Edom. It will start on the east at the southern end of the Salt Sea. ⁴It will then turn south toward the Ascent of the Scorpions and go through Zin as far as Kadesh-Barnea. Then it will go northwest toward Hazar-addar and pass through Azmon. ⁵From Azmon the boundary will turn toward the valley at the border of Egypt and end at the Big Sea (the Mediterranean Sea).

⁶The Big Sea will be your western boundary. ⁷For your northern boundary you will draw a line from the Big Sea to Mount Hor, ⁸then from Mount Hor you will draw a line to the Pass of Hamath, and the boundary will end at Zedad. ⁹From there it will go on to Ziphron and end at Hazar-enan. This will be your northern boundary.

¹⁰You will then draw your eastern boundary from Hazar-enan to Shepham. ¹¹The boundary will go south from Shepham toward Riblah on the east side of Ain and on to the hills on the eastern shore of Lake Galilee. ¹²The boundary will then follow the Jordan and end at the Dead Sea. This will be your land with the boundaries surrounding it.”

¹³Moses then gave this instruction to the people of Israel: “This is the land you are to divide by lot, which Yahweh has commanded to be given to the remaining nine and a half tribes. ¹⁴The tribe of Reuben and the tribe of Gad with its clans and also the half tribe of Manasseh have already been given their land ¹⁵beyond the Jordan opposite Jericho, to the east, toward the sunrise.”

¹⁶Yahweh spoke to Moses and said: ¹⁷“These are the names of those who will share out the land: Eleazar the priest and Joshua son of Nun, ¹⁸with one leader from each tribe. ¹⁹Here are the names of these men:

For the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh; ²⁰for the tribe of Simeon, Shemuel son of Ammihud; ²¹for the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad son of Chislon; ²²for the tribe of Dan, the leader, Bukki son of Jogli; ²³for the tribe of Manasseh, the leader Hanniel son of Ephod; ²⁴and for the tribe of Ephraim, the leader Kemuel son of Shiphtan; ²⁵for the tribe of Zebulun, the leader Elizaphan son of Parnach; ²⁶for the tribe of Issachar, the leader Paltiel, son of Azzan; ²⁷for the tribe of Asher, the leader Ahihud son of Shelomi; ²⁸for the tribe of Naphtali, the leader Pedahel son of Ammihud.” ²⁹These are the men whom Yahweh commanded to divide the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel as their inheritance.

The share of the Levites

35 ¹Yahweh spoke to Moses in the plains of Moab, near the Jordan opposite Jericho. He said:

²“Tell the people of Israel to give to the Levites, out of the property they possess, towns in which to live and pastureland around the towns. ³They will live in the towns and the surrounding pastureland is

to be for their cattle and all their animals. ⁴The pastureland surrounding the towns that you give to the Levites shall extend from the walls of the towns 500 yards in each direction, ⁵so that there is a square area measuring 1,000 yards on each side, with the town in the middle. ⁶The towns you give to the Levites will be the six towns of refuge to which a person can escape who causes another’s death; and you are to give them forty-two more towns. ⁷Altogether you will give forty-eight towns to the Levites, towns together with their pasturelands. ⁸You will take these towns from the property of the sons of Israel, taking more towns from the tribes who own more, and less from tribes who own less. Every tribe will give towns to the Levites in proportion to the land they themselves have received.”

Cities of refuge

• ⁹Yahweh spoke to Moses and said:

¹⁰“Say this to the people of Israel: When you cross the Jordan River and reach the land of Canaan, ¹¹you are to select towns which you will make into towns of refuge to which a person who has killed someone accidentally may escape. ¹²In these towns they will be safe from the dead person’s relative who wants revenge, so that the killer may not die without being brought to trial before the community. ¹³The towns you give will serve you as six cities of refuge: ¹⁴the three that you give beyond the Jordan and the three that you give in the land of Canaan are to be cities of refuge. ¹⁵These six towns will be a refuge for the people of Israel as well as for the stranger and the foreigner among you, where anyone who has killed accidentally may find safety.

¹⁶⁻¹⁸But if the killer has struck someone with an iron object, or with a stone or wooden instrument and has killed that person, he is a murderer and must be put to death. ¹⁹The dead person’s nearest relative must put the murderer to death. When he finds him he must kill him.

²⁰If a person hates someone and causes his death by pushing him down or by throwing something at him ²¹or by hitting him with his fist, he is a murderer and is to

• 35.9 These laws concerning the cities of refuge are similar to those in Deuteronomy 19:1.

be put to death. The dead person's nearest relative must put him to death when he finds him. ²²If, however, a person has accidentally killed someone whom he does not hate, either by pushing him down or throwing him down or throwing something at him ²³or, without looking, has thrown a stone that kills someone, ²⁴then the community shall judge in favor of the one who caused death rather than in favor of the dead person's relative who seeks revenge. ²⁵They will send the person who killed someone accidentally back to the city of refuge where he went for safety, and there he must stay until the death of the high priest. ²⁶If the killer should leave the city of refuge to which he had gone for safety ²⁷and the dead person's nearest relative meets him outside the city of refuge, the relative may kill him without fear of punishment ²⁸since the killer should stay in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. Only after the death of the high priest is he free to go back to his own home. ²⁹These regulations are for you and your descendants wherever you may be.

³⁰In case of murder, the accused may be found guilty and put to death only on the evidence of two or more witnesses; the evidence of only one witness is not enough to uphold an accusation of murder. ³¹You shall not accept payment to save the life of a murderer condemned to death; he must die. ³²Nor are you to accept payment from anyone who wishes to leave his city of refuge to return and live in his own home before the death of the high priest. ³³You must not defile the land you live in. Murder defiles the land and there is no other atonement for the land where blood has been shed than through the blood of the murderer. ³⁴You must not defile the land you live in, the land in which I live; for I, Yahweh, live among the people of Israel."

A wife's inheritance

36 ¹Then the heads of families in the clan of Gilead, son of Machir, grandson of Manasseh, one of the clans of

Joseph, came forward. They spoke before Moses and the heads of the families of Israel ²and said:

"Yahweh has commanded you to give the land to the people of Israel, sharing it out by drawing lots; and Yahweh has commanded you to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. ³Now, if they marry someone from another tribe in Israel, their property will be taken away from the inheritance of our fathers. The property of the tribe to which they will belong will be increased, while the property given to us will be decreased. ⁴And when the jubilee year comes, the property of these women will be added to the inheritance of the tribe to which they then belong, and lost to the inheritance of our own tribe."

⁵Moses, at Yahweh's command, gave the following ruling to the people of Israel. He said:

"The tribe of Joseph is right. ⁶This is Yahweh's decision for the daughters of Zelophehad: They may marry whom they please, but they must marry into a clan of their father's tribe. ⁷The property of the people of Israel is not to be transferred from tribe to tribe; the property of every Israelite is to remain attached to his own tribe. ⁸Every woman who has inherited property in one of the tribes of Israel must marry into a clan of her own tribe, so that each Israelite may inherit the property of his ancestors. ⁹No property may be transferred from one tribe to another: every tribe of Israel will always keep its own property."

¹⁰The daughters of Zelophehad did as Yahweh had commanded Moses. ¹¹Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah and Noah, daughters of Zelophehad, married the sons of their father's brothers. ¹²Since they married into the clans of Manasseh, son of Joseph, their property remained with the tribe of their father's clan.

¹³These are the commandments and laws that Yahweh gave to the people of Israel through Moses in the plains of Moab near the Jordan opposite Jericho.

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