

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

1. **Introduction:** Numbers is a tough book for any disciple to trudge through, but God purposefully included it in Scripture. One is then compelled to wonder what benefit did God intend for His people to derive from this book? Origen was a third century church father who wrote a long series of sermons on the book of Numbers. Origen found in Numbers wisdom, insight and encouragement for the disciple's wilderness journey. The wilderness experience is one that every Biblical character experienced in both the old and new Testaments. It stands to reason that it is something all of God's people will experience at some point in their walk with God.
 - a. **The Apostle Paul wrote of three perspectives regarding the importance of Numbers to avoid spiritual errors of the past:**
 - i. **Theological content: 1 Cor 10:1-5** For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; and all ate the same spiritual food; and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.
 - ii. **God's abiding relevance – 1 Cor 10:6-10** Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer.
 - iii. **The ongoing principle of spiritual life application – 1 Cor 10:11-13** *Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.* Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.
 - b. **The title "Numbers" is an unfortunate choice that the early church fathers employed from the Greek [*Arithmo*] and the Vulgate [Latin *Numeri*] translations of the Hebrew text. They chose this due to the double census found in chapters 1-4 and 26. The traditional Pentateuch Hebrew title is "In the Wilderness" which better describes both the setting and context of the book.**
 - c. **Numbers is a recital of God's faithfulness and humanity's faithlessness where God's holiness and grace is displayed. It is a complex story of the people's unfaithfulness, rebellion, apostasy, and frustration... set against the background of God's faithfulness, presence, provision, and forbearance. Because of the spiritual distance and dissonance between God's Perfection and humanity's imperfection, there results the necessity of:**
 - i. **Separation of God and His people – impure people cannot remain in the Presence of a Pure and Holy God. Not that He can't take it, but rather it would totally destroy us.**

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

- ii. Separation of the clean and unclean – among the people and creation there are elements that are clean and unclean... to be in the proximity of God in ritual purity requires ritual cleansing. This reinforces the distance between a Clean and Holy God, and humanity in its fallen condition.
 - iii. Separation of the faithful and the faithless – where all are invited and some are specifically called; only those who endure in faith may approach God.
2. **Structure and outline:** Hermeneutics – the art of interpreting Scripture has much to say about the intrinsic structure provided in the text and the author’s intended meaning. Please refer to the Hermeneutic part of Biblical Literacy for a more complete review. In the text of Numbers, there are two structural approaches that speak to what was important to the author. The most important principle in the arrangement of the book is its use of large cycles in which 3 important areas of revelation are disclosed on Israel’s geographical journey in the desert wilderness – Sinai, Kadesh, and Moab. A secondary arrangement has to do with a Chiastic (concentric) structure of the Wilderness Journey.
- a. **Geographic Structure:**
 - i. Preparation for the journey through the desert – 1:1-10:1
 - 1. Men of war numbered – 1:
 - 2. Positions assigned for the camp and the march – 2:
 - 3. Levites are numbered and duties described – 3-4:
 - 4. Removal of uncleanness and defilement from the camp – 5:
 - 5. A special type of separation... the Nazirite vowⁱ – 6:1-21
 - 6. Proper life of faith in the camp of the faithful – 6:22-9:14
 - 7. God’s provision for direction and guidance – 9:15-10:10
 - ii. Journey from Sinai to Kadesh – 10:11-12:16
 - 1. 1st part of the journey – 10:11-36
 - 2. Israel’s complaint and God’s response of fire – 11:1-3
 - 3. Israel’s complaint of God’s food provision and Moses identified as the fountainhead of prophecy – 11:4-35
 - 4. Moses exalted position over Aaron and Miriam – 12:
 - iii. At Kadesh in the Paran Wilderness – 13:1-20:13
 - 1. The mission of spies and their report – 13:
 - 2. The people’s decision and God’s judgment – 14:
 - 3. Laws for the land after the crisis [focus on future blessing] – 15:
 - 4. Rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram – 16:
 - 5. The budding of Aaron’s staff – 17:
 - 6. Duties and privileges of priests and Levites – 18:
 - 7. Arrangements for cleansing from defilement from death – 19:
 - 8. Moses’ sin at Meribah – 20:1-13

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

- iv. Journey from Kadesh to the Moab Plain – 20:14-22:1
 - 1. Edom’s opposition – 20:14-21
 - 2. Death of Aaron; victory over opponents – 20:22-22:1
- v. On the Plains of Moab – 22:2-36:13
 - 1. Balaam incident and prophecies – 22:2-24:25
 - 2. Apostasy at Peor and plague – 25:
 - 3. New census – 26:
 - 4. Laws about land, offerings and vows – 27-30:
 - a. Zelophehad’s daughters and women’s rights – 27:1-11
 - b. Joshua appointed to succeed Moses – 27:12-23
 - c. Laws about offerings and special feasts – 28:1-29:40
 - d. Law about vows – 30:
 - 5. Vengeance against the Midianites – 31:
 - 6. Apportionment of Trans-Jordan – 32:
 - 7. Summary of journeys from Egypt to Moab – 33:1-49
 - 8. Levitical towns and cities of refuge – 35:
 - 9. Zelophehad’s daughters and women’s rights – 36:
- b. Chiasitic (concentric) Structure of the Wilderness Journey – Numbers 10:11-21:20 by David Dorsey. Chiasitic structures have an inward movement that focuses on the central idea at the center of the structure then has a reflective outward movement that parallels the inward movement. The budding of Aaron’s rod or staff indicates God’s ability to bring life out of death... a message of hopeful expectation that finds fulfillment in Jesus’ resurrection in the New Testament. The theme of life from the dead is also foretold in Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones – Ez 37:1-6.
 - A. Journey begins – departure from Sinai – 10:11-36
 - B. Complaint about hardship, manna, and food – 11:
 - C. Miriam punished for her sin (with Aaron)... leprosy – 12:
 - D. Rebellion at Kadesh – 13:1-14:45
 - E. Ritual regulations – 15:1-36
 - F. Holiness of Aaron above Levites challenged – 15:37-17:15
 - X CENTER: Budding of Aaron’s rod – 17:16-28**
 - F’ Holiness of Aaron over Levites explained – 18:
 - E’ Ritual regulations – 19:
 - D’ Rebellions at Kadesh – 20:1-21
 - D’ Aaron punished for his sin... death – 20:1-21
 - B’ Complaints about hardship, manna and food – 21:4-9
 - A’ Journey ends – arrivals at Moab Plains – 21:10-20

- 3. The Theme of Wilderness – courses through Scripture, but has a central importance as indicated in the Hebrew title of the text – “In the Wilderness”:**
- a. The Wilderness is a Place of Testing:**
 - i. From the place of bondage [Egypt] to the place of blessing [The Land or Canaan] is a long journey through a vast wilderness.**
 - ii. This journey was as much Spiritual as it was geographical where the wilderness came to represent a “place” and a “spiritual-psychological condition.”**
 - iii. The wilderness is by definition a place that is wild and untamed by man... it is formless and lifeless. Thus, it is a hostile environment.**
 - iv. Jeremiah called it a “land not sown” (Jer 2:2). Because it is a land beyond cultivation where nothing can grow, it is thus a place without promise or hope. Without growth, there is no “seed” and thus no future.**
 - v. Jeremiah also called it a “place of judgment” (Jer 2:2-13) where God called Israel into accountability.**
 - vi. The “wilderness journey” therefore became a companion metaphor for Saint John of the Cross’ “dark night of the soul” where God’s testing, conviction, and revelation led God’s faithful into increasing dependence and intimacy. (Deut 8:2 & 15)**
 - b. The Wilderness is a Place of Revelation:**
 - i. Once a person has been humbled and convicted by God, when they have been stripped of their own independence and control; then they are prepared to see a revelation of God they would otherwise have been blind to.**
 - ii. In this environment, God turns reality upside down:**
 - 1. Manna (bread of Life) comes down from the sky... but only enough for each day’s needs.**
 - 2. Water (spring of Life) comes up out of a rock... but only when commanded and released by God’s chosen servant.**
 - 3. Jesus is the ultimate example of both.**
 - iii. In this condition people are induced to make a choice – will they continue to depend upon themselves and perish in their futility, or turn to God and be healed.**
 - iv. Deut 8:3; Ps 77:19-20**
 - v. It is in despair in the wilderness that Elijah is illumined by God’s Presence 1 Kings 19:9-12.**
 - c. The Wilderness is a Place of Preparation:**
 - i. God employs the hostile environment to break the hold of the world on His people/leaders.**
 - ii. In desolation we depend on God and develop the strength, fortitude and faith that would sustain His faithful followers through adversity and danger.**

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

- iii. The people who began their wilderness trek from Egypt as disparate individuals are forged into a nation with a new identity and a specific purpose and calling... but not all of them are called and not all who are called respond.
- d. The Wilderness is a Place of Worship:
 - i. The journey is a Holy Pilgrimage – a place where their personal and corporate identity converges in the Presence of God.
 - ii. The Tabernacle becomes the locus of the faith identity of the people in preparation for the Temple in Jerusalem and ultimately the Temple of the Human Heart where the Spirit dwells in perpetuity.
- e. Other Wilderness Thematic Developments – where human limitations force dependence upon God:
 - i. David in the Wilderness:
 - 1. Pursued by Saul – 1 Sam 19-2Sam 1.
 - 2. Pursued by Absalom – 2 Sam 15-20; Ps 3; Ps 61-63
 - ii. Elijah in the Wilderness – 1 Kings 17:1-7; 19:1-18
 - iii. Israel in a second wilderness (in captivity in Babylon) – Isaiah 40:3; 41:18
 - iv. Jesus in the wilderness – Mat 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-12; Mark 1:12-13; 6:30-44; 8:1-9, John 6.
 - v. Paul in the wilderness – Acts 9:25; 2 Cor 12:1-10; Gal 1:16-24.
 - vi. St John of the Cross – The Dark Night of the Soul.
- 4. Other Themes in Numbers:
 - a. Organization – God has a preference for order, and His organizational strategy prepares His people to contend with the chaos prevalent in the world order – Num 1-10:
 - i. Israel is organized into an invincible army of 603,550 fighting men.
 - 1. Numbers alone are not optimum if the people are not tactically and strategically arrayed, thus organization and structure was foundational.
 - 2. It is estimated based on cross checking records of other peoples that the army would have been approximately 20-25% of the total population... thus there would have been some 2.5 million people on this journey. Obviously a group this large would need organizational structure for cohesiveness, as well as miraculous food and water provisions for the journey.
 - 3. It is interesting that the nation had an identity as a clan or tribe in following a chieftain, but their overarching identity was as a nation. The Christian church could learn much in refocusing our identity as disciples of Jesus, not as disparate denominations or affiliated groups.
 - ii. The entire camp was strategically organized around the Tabernacle [God's dwelling place].

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

1. The camps of Dan [Dan, Asher and Naphtali] to the North; The camp of Judah [Judah, Issachar and Zebulun] to the East; the camp of Reuben [Reuben, Simeon and Gad] to the South; and the camp of Ephraim [Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin] to the West.
 2. This served as a constant reminder of Who was the focus of the People... God Himself!
 3. God’s primary leadership and representatives circled in an inner circle around the Tabernacle with the clans next. The location reinforced the necessary importance of the leaders as intermediaries and caretakers for the people.
 4. Prominence was given to Moses as the “Prophet Leader” and to Aaron as the “Priest Leader”... these roles would continue into the New Testament era. The Prophet role was the spokesman for God, the Priestly role was the intermediary for God. Later the Monarch would be added in leading the people with the prophet and priest keeping the King in check. All three roles ultimately came into harmony in Jesus... God’s Messiah.
- b. Loyalty and Submission Crisis – Mutiny and the doom of the first generation – Num 11-20
- i. As God takes His rightful place in the center of camp with the people arrayed around Him in chapters 1-10, there is some dissonance between the dominant voice of optimistic order, obedience, and faithfulness; and the foreboding voice of warning over the divine power radiating out from God’s Presence (introduced in 1.c. above). It must always be so... as Isaiah decried in his vision of God in His Temple (Is 6:5). In the Presence of Perfection we can’t help but see our failures and shortcomings, and it is profoundly unpleasant... but then Grace enters and we are cleaned.
 - ii. The contrast of the mighty forces described in chapters 1-10 and the sniveling & recalcitrant rabble we meet in chapters 11-20 is stark. Where the Blessing of being in God’s proximity starts at the center and moves outward, the rebellion starts on the fringes and works its way inward to the center of Israel’s leadership.
 1. When looking inward we see God and are transformed, when we look outward we see threats, longings for personal pleasures and self interest.
 2. On the fringes – the people complain about some adversity and God responds with fire to cleanse the camp – 11:1-3.
 3. The people complain about their provisions – where they were once totally delighted with God’s Manna, now they demand meat and the succulent foods they left behind in Egypt. Moses speaks to the heart of the problem – “you have rejected the Lord Who is among you” and now you bitterly complain “why did we ever leave Egypt?” Leaving what is known for that

which is unknown always requires faith and risk. This is a fundamental reality. You can't take hold of something better, while clinging to what's been left behind – 11:4-35. Lands in the New Testament in Jesus' parable of new wine in old wine skins

4. Aaron and Miriam contest Moses' leadership – the issue concerns Moses' superior mode of revelation over Aaron and Miriam. The dispute has a double edge... do they merely want the position of power over the people, or do they envy Moses' close relationship with God? God demonstrates that He alone has chosen who will lead, the question remains – will you follow?
 - a. Moses has his limits and the action of his own brother and sister puts him over the edge. They should know better, even if the people do not. The bickering of people is one thing, the complaints of friends is another, but the betrayal of family is the worst possible offense. The closer you move to the center of the relational sphere of encounter, the more the blessing and the greater the damaging.
 - b. As Moses distances himself from Israel and complains to God of the burden of leadership, God responds with multiplying the leadership to 70. 70 became the number in the Sanhedrin and Jesus also appointed 70 evangelists and disciples to go out.
 - c. Moses welcomed shared leadership – and this is the model for church leadership today. (Acts 13:1-3; 1 Tm 3; Titus 1)
 - d. God also added the distinction between His servant Moses, and the role of prophet – 12:6-8. God and Moses will speak face to face, prophets will be inspired through dreams and visions.
 - e. From a hermeneutical standpoint, this is a significant distinction – there is no intermediary with Moses who is the direct and unmediated mouth to mouth conduit of the message. Thus prophetic revelations should never overrule the Law, but rather make is clear and applicable. Further, clear teaching should always take precedence over unclear teaching. The Apostle John makes this point in stating that Jesus being the only One who knows Truth because He is God and has made it known – John 1:18. Therefore no testimony can override Jesus'.
5. Rebellion at Kadesh Barnea – 13-14
 - a. At the threshold into the Promised Land and ready to fulfill God's promise to Abraham. Instead of grasping the promise and moving forward in confidence in God, they cower and retreat in fear.

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

- b. The people's rebellion is a rejection of God and Moses His chosen leader. Yet it is Moses who intercedes for the people to prevent their total destruction.
- c. When informed of their fate they confess, but instead of repentance and acceptance of God's decree they arrogantly set out on a campaign to conquer without Moses, the Ark, or God. The result is disaster.
- d. This generation witnessed firsthand what God had done in Egypt and through the desert journey. Yet they decide to reject God and Moses, chose a new leader and return to Egypt. This is sin of a great magnitude. They have seen for themselves everything God has done, and refused to believe in Him – 14:11.
- e. Theological Reflections on the "Spy Story":
 - i. The nature of sin is not mere disobedience, it is despising or spurning God's Free Gift. In the Old Testament the free gift is the Promised Land... a land that is the best. In the New Testament the cross is a sign of the world's despising of God's free gift of Grace... salvation in Christ.
 - ii. The people of God at Kadesh Barnea witnessed all the miracles that God had done, and still they refused. The people of God in Israel witnessed all that Jesus had done, and still they refused.
 - iii. *Hessed* ["God's Loyal Love"] is what Moses appealed to in his intercession at Kadesh Barnea, it is also what Jesus appealed to from the Cross. Where Moses' intercession ended at his death, Jesus' intercession is continual as He is eternal. Thus Paul writes : "nothing can separate us from the love of God" [Hessed] – Rom 8:39; and Jesus "intercedes for us" at the right hand of the Father [position of power and authority] – Rom 8:34.
 - iv. There is always tension both in the Old and New Testament between God's Judgment and Forgiveness through the paradigm of the death of the old and birth of the new. This tension keeps us on the horns of a dilemma as it can only be appropriated by faith and obedience... not merely blind faith, but faith in a real and proven God. Both the OT and the NT saints had "Reason to know and believe" – their sin is refusal.

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

- v. At Kadesh Barnea when God judged them, those who feared the inhabitants of the land more than God died. The “Little ones” that they thought would die, ultimately conquered the land. In the NT, Jesus has much to say about the faith of “little ones.”
6. Life in the Land – 15
- a. The judgment condemning the Egyptian refugees who refused God’s leadership is followed by the promise of blessing for the generation who will wander the desert for 40 years as the previous generation dies out.
 - b. It is interesting that this promise is accepted by those who were either children or not yet born when they fled Egypt. The hope God provides and the witness of those who failed to grasp it galvanizes the next generation. You can imagine the older generation warning the younger, “Don’t make the same mistake we made.”
 - c. “The offering by fire to the Lord” (11:2-3) is a reversal of the Lord having sent fire to consume the faithless rebels. This reciprocal response is not necessarily transactional (i.e. Quid-pro-quo) but rather the focus is relational. The context suggests an enduring relational interaction of blessing appropriated by faithful dependence.
7. Holiness and death, key terms – 16-20
- a. “To draw near” – 16:5, 9, 10, 40; 17:13; 18:3, 4, 7, 22
 - b. “Holy” – 16:3, 5, 7, 37, 38; 18:9, 19, 32; 20:12, 13
 - c. “Choose” – 16:5, 7; 17:5
 - d. “Die/death” – 16:13, 29, 41, 48; 17:10, 13; 18:3, 7, 22, 32; 19:11, 13, 14, 16, 18; 20:1, 3, 4
8. Moses and Aaron’s relationship to God and the priesthood – 16-18
- a. Korah’s rebellion creates a crisis where God acts to demonstrate who His “chosen one” is. Moses shows his worth by interceding for the people even though they had wronged him.
 - b. The resulting destruction by fire of the 250 rabble-rousers and the budding, blossoming and fruiting of Aaron’s staff demonstrated without any credible doubt who God had chosen to lead His people. Moses correctly assigns the blame to the people for rejecting God’s order.
 - c. There remained in the aftermath, 2 enduring symbols of death and life – the bronze covering of the altar of the 250 censurers and Aaron’s

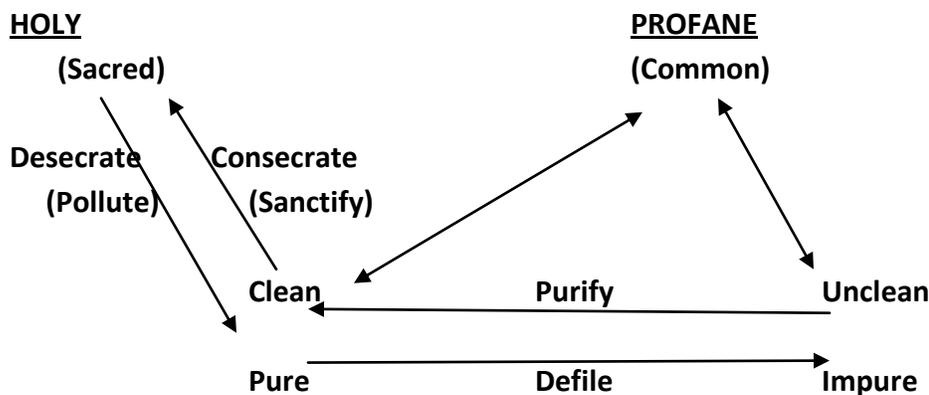
Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

staff. The staff or “tree of life” would find its fulfillment in the Cross of Jesus. The staff that budded is a foretelling of resurrection that would later be revealed in Messiah Jesus. These two Tree of Life foreshadowing’s transition between the Garden event – where the tree is denied to prevent humanity from living forever in their fallen state, and in Heaven – where the Tree of Life is the inheritance of all children of God.

- d. There remained in the aftermath 2 enduring offices to help prevent corruption and abuse of power – the prophets who spoke for God were to restrain the priests and later the monarch as they strayed from God’s purpose, and the high priest who would accept responsibility for his brothers in leading the priestly ministry. The monarch, prophet and priest all came into perfect harmony in the Messiah Jesus.

9. Defilement & Purification – 19

The following diagram shows the progression of the purification and defilement process in Old Testament theology. This is the pattern that the disciples/apostles of Jesus operated under until Messiah pronounced everything God made as clean.



- a. Exposure of anything that was pure/clean to anything that was impure/unclean caused its defilement. This held sway until Jesus. Jesus being God in the flesh was the only earthly thing that could not be defiled, and which rendered the unclean clean. He so rendered by divine prerogative.
- b. Aaron’s atonement stopped the advance of the plague, but could not undo its effects. Only Jesus could undo its effects... which is why Paul preaches Jesus as superior to Aaron as priest, and also superior to David as king, and superior to Moses as prophet – Jesus thus

became the Priest/Prophet/King... all three offices perfectly expressed in Messiah.

- c. The magnitude of the corruption following the deaths of so many priests required a special Old Testament remedy as Jesus was not yet revealed. The ritual required at that time involved the ashes of the “red-heifer” [red cow]. No other ritual has such strict requirements involving burning the whole animal, not just parts which was the norm. The red heifer would be burned completely along with cedar wood, hyssop, and crimson pigment. These ashes were collected and mixed with water for cleansing. This powerful purifying agent applied by faith led a person from the realm of the dead to the realm of life. [see also Heb 9:13-14]
- d. This special process also demonstrates that God holds some more guilty than others... especially for leaders such as priests who should know better having been given a more clear understanding of God and His requirements and a closer relationship with God.

10. Moses’ Mistake at Meribah – 20

- a. Moses was told to “speak to the rock” and then the water would gush forth. Instead, he chose to opportunity to castigate the people as rebels [not untrue] and struck the rock. As a result of his failure in obedience, Moses is denied entry into the land. Miriam and Aaron would also be denied due to their earlier disobedience.
- b. My human response to this decree by God is to wonder at its fairness... but then I’m immediately reminded that my ways are not God’s ways. We see in part, God sees the whole matter. Some thoughts regarding Moses’ judgment:
 - i. Speaking to the rock recalls how God brought about creation... God said, and it happened. It also resounds well with Jesus’ healings... Jesus spoke to the wind and the waves and calmed creation; He exorcised the demon possessed by speaking to the demon thereby demonstrating His control of the Spirit realm; he spoke to heal and pronounce clean the unclean... etc.
 - ii. Thus it may well be that God was requiring Moses to act in an archetypical fashion, which he failed to do.
 - iii. God’s grace is later displayed as Moses is invited by Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration along with Elijah... neither of which ever saw the land of promise until then.

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

- c. It is significant that Scripture does not whitewash the errors of the leaders of God’s people. They are portrayed “warts and all” demonstrating our common human frailty – spiritual and physical.
 - d. Numbers chapter 20 reveals Moses’ as one who was offended by Korah and the people. He is shown to be unforgiving and typically human... being fallible and conflicted within himself, with the people, and with God.
 - e. My mind might question God’s decision, but my heart trusts God that it is mercy that prevents Moses from entering the land. The fact that Moses meets the Messiah at the Transfiguration argues that it is indeed mercy that motivates God’s action – Mat 17:1-3.
 - iii. Israel’s passage through the land of Edom [Esau’s descendents] is refused – 20:14-21
 - 1. Though there ultimately was peace during their lifetimes [Gen 32-33], the descendents of Jacob and Esau are clearly at odds. Israel seeks passage, and Edom refuses.
 - 2. Identity as a person flows from our identity as a people. Esau’s descendents do not want Israel around. They would later be political adversaries.
 - 3. This also sets the stage for the rift between Abraham’s sons – Isaac and Ishmael as the fathers of Israel [Jews] and Arabs [Muslims] respectively, which continues to this day. This begs the question – “Can the broken family of Abraham be healed?” All things are possible with God.
 - c. The End of the First Generation... Climax of the Rebels and Hope for a Future – 21-25
 - i. The Story of Bronze Serpent – 21:4-9
 - 1. In the ancient world the snake was a potent sign for life and death. This story comes at a pivotal place with the wilderness generation dying out and the next generation about to enter the land.
 - 2. As Moses leads the people around Edom and back into the wilderness, the people become impatient and again complain about Moses leadership, no adequate food and water. God send snakes into their midst and many die a painful death from the venom.
 - 3. However, in 21:7 the people confess their sin against God and Moses, and ask Moses to pray for the snakes to leave them.
 - 4. Moses does pray and God answers by having them fabricate a bronze serpent mounted on a pole, with instructions that any who look to the sign they made would be healed.

5. When the people realized they were bitten and dying, they looked to the sign and were saved... a foretelling of Jesus raised on the Cross. When we realize our need that we are dead without grace, we turn to God and He saves – John 3:14-15; 8:28; 12:32.

ii. The Story of Balaam – 22-24

1. As Israel succeeds in conquering the adversaries in entering the land, one king [Balak] king of Moab decides to engage a Mesopotamian soothsayer/prophet to curse Israel and thus to thwart God's plan.
2. There are several theological and literary issues at play:
 - a. God cannot be thwarted by Pagan gods and their leaders.
 - b. The text indicates that Balaam knew who God is, though he didn't necessarily serve Him.
 - c. The peoples of Canaan were marked for destruction because of their "detestable practices" – these people were under judgment not unlike Sodom & Gomorrah. They likely knew about God from Noah's sons who settled in the area, but they failed to follow God.
 - d. The story is told to advance God's redemptive purpose through Israel, but it should also be obvious that God had previous contacts with these people... thus they would know about Him.
 - e. It is an interesting twist that shows that Balaam serves Yahweh against Balak, just as the donkey serves Yahweh against Balaam.
 - f. Balaam gave a series of oracles – all of them blessing Israel. It is interesting that in the third oracle, he does not resort to sorcery:

Nu 24:1-3 Now when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he did not resort to sorcery as at other times, but turned his face toward the desert. When Balaam looked out and saw Israel encamped tribe by tribe, the Spirit of God came upon him and he uttered his oracle:

- i. Notice he faced toward the desert or wilderness... he was meeting with God on His terms.
 - ii. The oracles are prophetic about God and His people, the lands inhabitants are doomed.
 - iii. This clearly speaks to an older more prevalent experience of God and humanity, of which the turning point of Moses and Israel takes redemptive history in another direction... with the other paths being dead ends.
3. Theological Message of the Balaam story in Literary Parallels:
 - a. The donkey sees what Balaam cannot – Balaam sees what Balak cannot.
 - b. The donkey sees the angel 3 times – Balaam sees a vision 3 times.

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

- c. **The donkey becomes progressively more painful to Balaam – Balaam becomes progressively more painful to Balak.**
 - d. **Balaam becomes progressively more furious with the donkey – Balak becomes progressively more furious with Balaam.**
 - e. **God puts words in the donkey’s mouth – God puts words in Balaam’s mouth.**
 - f. **Heretofore the donkey served Balaam well – heretofore Balaam had served Balak well.**
 - g. **Balaam is blind to the miracle – Balak is unmoved by the miracle.**
- iii. **Sin Renewed at Shittim and Peor – 25**
1. **When confronted with the Pagan faiths of the Moabites, Israel proves false with God. What a surprise! Cultural immersion leads to sexual desire, which leads to compromising your morality, and then sexual license leads to loss of identity and death.**
 2. **At the entrance to the Promised Land, we see Israel making the same mistake as on the foot of Mount Sinai with the golden calf and Baal worship.**
 3. **If there ever was evidence that humanity could not of their own strength be obedient to the Law, it is in the Pentateuch. Things look hopeful and then fall short. Thank God for Grace in Jesus!**
 4. **Though humanity is weak and faithless, God is strong and faithful.**
 5. **This sin is the old generation’s final rebellion... it is also their worst. In the midst of the dismal end of the wilderness generation, a new generation of hope is about to emerge. They have seen the errors of the past, and they have seen the power and mercy of God.**
- iv. **A Second Census and a New Generation of Hope – 26-36**
1. **There is affirmation that all of the old generation has died except the 2 spies who faithful held they could take the land... in keeping with God’s decree.**
 2. ^{Nu 26:63-65} **These are the ones counted by Moses and Eleazar the priest when they counted the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho. Not one of them was among those counted by Moses and Aaron the priest when they counted the Israelites in the Desert of Sinai. For the LORD had told those Israelites they would surely die in the desert, and not one of them was left except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.**
 3. **In preparation for entering the land at the fulfillment of the promise, the nation engages in being instructed on God’s expectations, and in reciting the blessings and curses that would ensue depending on their faithfulness and obedience.**

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

4. Leadership is conveyed to Joshua [AKA Jeshua or Jesus] – not a coincidence that Jeshua would lead God’s people into the Promised Land.

5. Biblical Theology Summation:

a. Three aspects of Meaning in Interpreting the Text:

i. “In the Wilderness” spoke to the Jews in terms of their Past History:

1. Moses, Aaron, Miriam, and the Jews redeemed from Egypt failed to receive God’s promises in inheriting the promised land.
2. The promise was initiated in Egypt, and commissioned with the Mount Sinai Covenant.
3. No sooner had the covenant been accepted, the people fail to honor it. This is an indictment on the Fallen condition of humanity – our inability to do what is right even when we know what that is and have committed ourselves to doing so. Being prone to wander like the “Lost Sheep” – Ps 119:176; Jer 50:6; Mat 10:6.
4. Even in this pathetic state, God demonstrates being patient, keeping His Presence to guide their way.

ii. “In the Wilderness” spoke to the Jews of their Present History:

1. Bondage, exodus freedom and return to blessing is a recurring theme – from Egyptian, Babylonian, Roman, Palestinian – the history of the Jews is in the context of a subdued culture within a dominant culture.
2. While a remnant always maintained their identity and hope in God, the majority wandered away.
3. Amid the context of a faithful minority and a faithless majority, God remains committed to His people.

iii. “In the Wilderness” spoke to the Jews of their Future History:

1. The compelling message is one of God calling out to His people throughout time and history encouraging their return to relational intimacy with Him.
2. Since God has been faithful in the past and through the present, He can be trusted to be faithful in the future – He doesn’t forget His promises or His people.
3. The call rings out to remain loyal, to look for signs of His presence, and follow in trust and obedience.

b. Three aspects of interpreting God’s provision for His people:

- i. Stories of guidance, protection, and material supply – 10:11-14:45; chaps 16-17; 20-25; 27-12-23; 31:1-33:49.
- ii. Instructions of God’s Law and requirements of life in the Presence of God – 1:1-10:10; chaps 15; 18-19; 26:1-27:11; chaps 28-30; 33:50-36:13.
- iii. Leadership guidance and responsibilities – 11:1-14:45; 16:1-35; 27:12-23.

Bible Survey – 4.1 Numbers

- c. **Three aspects of the problem of and consequences for sin and rebellion:**
 - i. **Between individuals and God**
 - ii. **Between leadership and the people**
 - iii. **Between the people and the surrounding nations**

ⁱ **The Nazirite Vow – From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia:**

- a. Nazir refers to one who took a vow described in Numbers 6:1-21. The term "nazirite" comes from the Hebrew word nazir meaning "consecrated" or "separated" ... or "set apart." This vow required the man or woman to:
 - i. Abstain from wine, wine vinegar, grapes, raisins, intoxicating liquors and vinegar distilled from such.
 - ii. Refrain from cutting the hair on one's head
 - iii. Avoid corpses and graves, even those of family members, and any structure which contains such
- b. After following these requirements for a designated period of time (which would be specified in the individual's vow), the person would end their vow:
 - i. Immerse in a *Mikvah* ... this involved immersion in a naturally occurring body of water [living water], or a ceremonial bath.
 - ii. Make three offerings: a lamb as a burnt offering (*olah*), a ewe as a sin-offering (*hatat*), and a ram as a peace offering (*shelamim*), in addition to a basket of unleavened bread, grain offerings and drink offerings, which accompanied the peace offering.
 - iii. They would also shave their head in the outer courtyard of the Temple and then place the hair on the same fire as the peace offering. (Numbers 6:18)
- c. The nazirite is described as being "holy unto the LORD" (Numbers 6:8), yet at the same time must bring a sin offering.
- d. Two examples of Nazirites in the Old Testament are Samson (Judges 13:5), and Samuel (1 Samuel 1:11).
 - i. In the case of Sampson, God sent an angel to make the vow known to the mother for her not yet conceived son of what he wanted the child to be like in his life(ref. Judges 13:3-5).
 - ii. In the case of Samuel, the mother (Hannah) made the vow before he was even conceived because she was barren (ref. 1Samuel 1:11).
 - iii. The vow required them to live a devout life, yet in return they received spiritual gifts:
 - 1. Samson possessed strength and ability in physical battle, while Samuel was a prophet.
 - 2. Samson appears to break his vows, by touching a dead body (Judges 14:8-9 , "drinking party", in Judges 14:10). Goswell suggests that "we cannot understand the career and failings of Samson without attention to his Nazirite status."
- e. In the New Testament:
 - i. John the Baptist in the book of Luke 1:13-15 it is foretold that "he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb", in other words, a nazirite from birth, the implication being that John had taken a lifelong nazirite vow – Luke 1:13-15
 - ii. The practice of a nazirite vow is part of the ambiguity of the Greek term "Nazarene" that appears in the New Testament; the sacrifice of a lamb and the offering of bread does suggest a relationship with Christian symbolism (then again, these are the two most frequent offerings prescribed in Leviticus, so no definitive conclusions can be drawn).