

INTRODUCTION TO 4TH BIBLEBOOK

NUMBERS (1446 - 1407 B.C.)

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A. THE ORIGIN OF THE BOOK OF NUMBERS.

1. The name of the book.

In the Hebrew Bible, this book is called “in the desert” (Hebrew: ba-midbar), referring to Israel’s journey in the desert between Mount Sinai and the border of Canaan. In the oldest translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek, it is called ‘Numbers’, referring to the census of Israel in the first four chapters of the book.

2. The writer, the date and the place of writing.

From the book of Numbers itself we discover the following two facts: Numbers was written by Moses and Numbers had a few later additions by an editor.

Numbers was written by Moses. From many places in the book of Numbers it is clear that Israel was *living in tents in a camp in the desert*. For example in Numbers 1:52 we read that the Israelites had to set up their tents by divisions, each man in his own camp under his own standard. The many references to the *Tent of Meeting*, which was a tent which could be moved from place to place, show that Israel was still living in the desert.

In Numbers 33:3 we read, “The Israelites set out from Rameses on the fifteenth day of the first month, the day after the Passover. They marched out boldly, in full view of the Egyptians.” As we have seen in the book of Exodus, this was on the 15th of April¹ 1447 B.C. The book of Numbers begins with the words, “The Lord spoke to Moses in the Tent of Meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt.” This was the beginning of the month May 1446 B.C.

From Numbers 12:16, 13:26 and 20:1,22 we understand that Israel journeyed from Sinai to Kadesh, and again from Kadesh after wandering in the desert back to Kadesh, and then from Kadesh via Mount Hor to the border of Canaan opposite Jericho. Comparing Numbers 20:1,22 with Numbers 33:38 we read that Israel came to Mount Hor near the border of Edom during the fifth month of their fortieth year in the desert. Deuteronomy 2:14 says that Israel had wandered for 38 years in the desert after they had refused to enter Canaan from the South until they arrived at the border of Canaan in the East.

We therefore conclude that Moses recorded the book Numbers between the years 1446 B.C. and 1407 B.C. while Israel was wandering in the desert before they entered the land of Canaan. The book of Numbers gives a few more dates.

Numbers gives the date of the consecration of the Tent of Meeting (tabernacle), exactly one year after Israel’s departure from Egypt. Exodus 19:1-2 says that Israel arrived at Mount Sinai 3 months after they had departed from Egypt. Israel camped at the foot of Mount Sinai for a little more than ten and a half months. Numbers 7:1 speaks of the time when the Tent of Meeting was completed and consecrated. Exodus 40:17 says that this took place on the first day of the first month of the second year after the departure from Egypt – that is, in the beginning of April 1446 B.C. Numbers 9:15 says that on the day the Tent of Meeting was set up, the cloud of the Lord’s glory covered it.

Numbers gives the date of the celebration of the first Passover after Israel departed from Egypt. Numbers 9:1-5 says that after the Tent of Meeting was set up, the Lord commanded Israel to celebrate the Passover Festival in the desert of Sinai. This took place on the 14th day in the evening of the first month of the second year after the departure from Egypt - that is, in the middle of April 1446 B.C.

Numbers gives the date of the first census of Israel. Numbers 1:1 says that on the first day of the second month of the second year after the departure from Egypt, that was the beginning of May 1446 B.C., the Lord commanded Moses to take a census of Israel. Israel numbered more than 600.000 men over 20 years of age. This number did not include the women, children and the tribe of Levi.

Numbers also gives the date of Israel’s departure from Mount Sinai. Numbers 10:11 says that on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year after the departure from Egypt, that was twenty days after the census, the cloud of the Lord’s glory lifted from above the Tent of Meeting and Israel journeyed from the desert of Sinai to Kadesh in the desert of Paran.

Numbers had a few later additions by an editor.

¹ Hebrew: Abib, first month

Just like the book of Leviticus, the book of Numbers shows that several adjustments to regulations were made after Israel had settled in Canaan. Numbers 8:23-26 says that the term of service of the Levites was to be from the age of 25 to 50 years. But according to Numbers 4:3 their term of service was to be from the age of 30 to 50 years. This means that the account of the census in its present form was probably written later.

Certain passages, which speak of the difference between *the alien* and *the native-born*, are probably from the time Israel already lived in Canaan and *had absorbed many aliens into their community*. For example, Numbers 9:14 says, “An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the Lord’s Passover must do so in accordance with its rules and regulations. *You must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born* (15:15)”

No matter whom God used to write the book of Numbers, we Christians believe that the whole Bible has been inspired by the Holy Spirit. We base this on 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:20-21.

3. The character of the book.

Many times in the book of Numbers we read: “The Lord said to Moses”. Thus the book itself very clearly states that it is *a revelation* from the Lord. After the rebellion of the ten spies and Israel against going up into Canaan to conquer it from the South, the book of Numbers describes very little of the history of 38 years of wandering and living in the desert. During those 38 years, Numbers only relates the following events: the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, the budding staff of Aaron and the sin of Moses beating the rock. This fact proves that the Old Testament does not intend to give a history of Israel, but is rather a history of God’s revelation. The Old Testament is *a history of God’s words and wonderful acts!* Periods in which nothing of importance happens for God’s history of revelation are passed over with silence.

B. THE DIVISION OF THE BOOK OF NUMBERS.

The theme of Numbers: **“God calls Israel to serve in their journey through the desert to the Promised Land.”**

The book of Numbers may be divided into three main parts as follows:

1. Numbers 1:1 to 10:10. Ritual laws.

It has two sections. Following Exodus chapters 25 to 40 and Leviticus chapters 1 to 26, Numbers chapters 1-10 consists mainly of ceremonial (ritual) laws.

- Section one. Numbers 1-4 consists of numbers.

Numbers 1 gives the result of the census of Israel, showing how God had fulfilled his promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:2, where God promised, “I will make you into a great nation.” Numbers 2 describes the orderly way in which the tribes of Israel should camp and journey. The Tent of Meeting should be surrounded by the tribe of Levi and the tribe of Levi should be surrounded by the other 10 tribes and 2 half-tribes in order to show how holy and unapproachable the Lord is! Numbers 3 and 4 describe the assigned tasks of the three groups of Levites under the leadership of the priests.

- Section two. Numbers 5-10 consists of laws.

Numbers 5 and 6 consists of several ceremonial (ritual) laws concerning ceremonial cleanliness. Numbers 7 to 10 consists of the dedication of the Tent of Meeting, the consecration of the Levites, the first Passover Festival in the desert, the cloud of the Lord’s glory above the Tent of Meeting and the trumpets that should give signals to all the people.

2. Numbers 10:11 to 20:13. Israel’s journey from Mount Sinai to Kadesh.

There they stayed and from there they journeyed around in the desert.

It consists of 6 sections:

- Section one. Numbers 10 describes Israel’s departure from Mount Sinai and that a family member of the wife of Moses travelled along as a guide in the desert (10:29-32).
- Section two. Numbers 11-14 describes five events that happened during their journey to Kadesh: The Israelites complained about their hardships and the Lord punished them with fire from heaven (chapter 11). The Israelites complained about their food and the Lord punished them with a plague (chapter 11). The sister and brother of Moses opposed his leadership and the Lord punished Miriam with leprosy (chapter 12). The Israelites rebelled against Moses and Aaron after ten of the twelve spies or explorers to the land of Canaan spread a bad report among the people. The Lord punished them with exclusion from the Promised Land (chapter 13-14). The Israelites were disobedient to the Lord and made an attempt to enter Canaan from the South. The Lord punished them by allowing the Canaanite nations to defeat them (chapter 14).
- Section three. Numbers 15 consists of several ceremonial (ritual) laws concerning offerings, the Sabbath and the tassels on clothes.
- Section four. Numbers 16-17 describes the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and the budding staff of Aaron.
- Section five. Numbers 18-19 consists of laws that regulate the duties of the priests and Levites, their share of the offerings and the water that cleanses people who are regarded as *ceremonially unclean*.
- Section six. Numbers 20 describes the death of Miriam, the sin of Moses when he struck the rock and how God punished him with exclusion from the Promised Land.

3. Numbers 20:14 to 36:13. Israel's journey from Kadesh to the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho.

It consists of six sections:

- **Section one.** Numbers 20:14 - 21:9 describes the events during Israel's journey to the southern border of Edom. During this journey, Edom denies Israel passage through their country, Aaron dies on Mount Hor, a Canaanite king attacks Israel and Israel once more complains about their hardships. God punishes Israel with snake bites, but saves those who trust in him².
- **Section two.** Numbers 21:10 - 22:1 describes the events during Israel's journey to the plains of Moab. During this journey, Israel defeats the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og.
- **Section three.** Numbers 22 - 25 describes the attempts of the Moabites to conquer the Israelites by employing a false prophet, Balaam, to curse Israel. They fail to curse the Israelites, but succeed to seduce the Israelites to idolatry by sexual immorality. The Lord punishes Israel with a plague.
- **Section four.** Numbers 26 to 27 describes the results of the second census of Israel. During their 40 years in the desert, Israel did not increase. The census is important because the future partition of the land of Canaan should be based on it. Daughters could inherit land under certain circumstances. Joshua is commissioned to succeed Moses.
- **Section five.** Numbers 28 to 30 teaches regulations concerning offerings, the seasonal festivals and vows.
- **Section six.** Numbers 31 to 36 describes the events in the region East of the Jordan. The Midianites are totally destroyed and their spoils are divided. Two and a half of the tribes of Israel settle in this region. The stages of Israel's journey during these 40 years are listed. The Lord commands Israel to drive the idolatrous Canaanite nations out of Canaan. The boundaries of Canaan are delineated. The cities that should be given to the Levites, the cities of refuge and the inheritance of certain women is regulated.

C. THE BOOK OF NUMBERS IS A BOOK OF SERVICE AND A BOOK OF COMPLAINTS.

1. The book of Numbers is a book of service.

Throughout the book of Numbers we find the instructions God gives to all the people or to certain people with respect to specific tasks they have to do. *The New Testament shows that certain Old Testament principles continue to exist in the New Testament teachings and practices.* In the book of Numbers we find the following kinds of services.

- In *Numbers 1*, all the men who are twenty years and older should pay the tax for the upkeep of the offerings that are made in the Tent of Meeting. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians should contribute to the upkeep of the Lord's work in the Church, in missions and in the work of mercy in the world³.
- In *Numbers 2*, all the tribes, clans and families should maintain the orderly camp in which they live. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians should maintain order in their own families, in their church services and in the society in which they live⁴.
- In *Numbers 3-4*, the priests and the Levites are responsible for maintaining the service of the Lord in the Tent of Meeting. Likewise, in the New Testament, God has appointed certain people to be missionaries, preachers, evangelists, pastors and teachers to build up the Church everywhere in the world⁵.
- In *Numbers 5*, all the Israelites must exclude every form of defilement from their midst. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians must not only avoid every form of sexual immorality and idolatry, but must also exclude every form of sin from the Church⁶.
- In *Numbers 6*, the priests had to bless the people of Israel. The priestly blessing is, "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace." Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians must not only bless their brothers and sisters, but even their enemies⁷!
- In *Numbers 8*, the Levites must be dedicated to the service of the Lord between the ages of 25 and 50 years. After that, they must retire and hand over the work to the younger priests, although they may still assist in the work of the Lord. Likewise, in the New Testament, the older Christians must not despise the contribution of the younger Christians. In 1 Timothy 4:12-16 we read, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress."
- In *Numbers 9*, every Israelite must observe the Passover festival. The Passover Festival points backwards to the salvation of God from the slavery to sin and idols in Egypt and it points forward to the coming Lamb of God, who would die on the cross and shed his blood for the sins of his people.

² See John 3:14-15

³ 1 Corinthians 9:14; 2 Corinthians 9:6-7; 1 Timothy 5:17-18; James 2:15-17; 1 John 3:17-18

⁴ 1 Corinthians 14:33,40

⁵ Ephesians 4:11-12

⁶ 1 Corinthians 5:12-13; 6:9-11

⁷ Luke 6:27-28

Every single Israelite had to remember that the centre of his life should be the God of the Bible who saves his people through the blood of the Lamb⁸! Likewise, in the New Testament, every Christian should set his heart and mind on Jesus Christ and the things of Christ⁹.

- In *Numbers 10*, the Israelites had to respond to the various trumpet signals. Likewise, in the New Testament, Christians should not only obey God's Word, but should also "sound clear trumpet calls" when they preach and teach the truths of God's Word¹⁰.

2. The book of Numbers is a book of complaints.

Throughout Israel's wanderings in the desert, the children of Israel showed a *spirit of rebellion* against God. They were continually dissatisfied with God's sovereign decisions and ways in which he dealt with them. The clearest way you can see that somebody rebels against the sovereign decisions of God, is when they continually complain against God for bringing them into their present situations or for allowing them to suffer difficulties. *Grumbling and complaining is a manifestation of unbelief*. In *Numbers 14:11* God himself says, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?" The book of Numbers records the grumbings and complaints of the Israelites against God and against the leaders whom God appointed. It also records God's punishments for their unbelief and disobedience.

In the book of Numbers we read about the following complaints of Israel. In *Numbers 11:1-3* they complained about their hardships in the desert. In *Numbers 11:4-35* they complained about eating the same food every day. In *Numbers 12* the family members of Moses complained about the leadership of Moses. In *Numbers 13 and 14* the Israelites complained about conquering the Promised Land. In *Numbers 14:39-45* they complained against the righteous verdict God had pronounced on them. In *Numbers 16 and 17* some of the leaders and people complained against God's appointment of certain people to be the leaders of certain tasks. In *Numbers 20 and 21* they again complained about the hardships through which God was leading them in the desert.

D. THE MAIN MESSAGES OF THE BOOK OF NUMBERS.

The New Testament shows that certain Old Testament principles continue to exist in the New Testament teachings and practices.

1. The book of Numbers teaches that God's people are saved to serve.

Genesis teaches that man is ruined. *Exodus* teaches that man is redeemed. *Leviticus* teaches that man has the responsibility to maintain his relationship with God. *Numbers* teaches that man has the responsibility to serve God. God's people are saved in order to serve. They are only qualified to serve God after they have been saved from the slavery of their sin and their idols and maintain a relationship of love expressed in holiness towards God.

In *Numbers 3 and 4* it is God who assigns the specific tasks of the priests and of the Levites. In the New Testament Christians are also *saved to serve*¹¹ and God also assigns a specific place and task of each Christian in the Church. In *1 Corinthians 3:6* the Bible teaches: The Lord gives to each a spiritual gift¹². The Lord arranges to each a place in the Body¹³. "The Lord assigned to each his task¹⁴."

2. The book of Numbers teaches that God's people serve God in an orderly way.

In *Numbers 1* God commanded that a census of Israel should be taken. The census was the execution of the command in *Exodus 30:11-16* with respect to paying the tax for the upkeep of all the offerings to be made to the Lord. Another reason for the census was to show how God's promise to Abraham had been fulfilled. God had promised that he would become a great nation.

In *Numbers 2*, God commanded Israel to camp and to journey to the next place in an orderly manner. Notice that the Tent of Meeting was always in the centre of Israel. The lesson is that *only when God is in the centre of the Christian's life will his life be orderly*. In the New Testament in *1 Corinthians 14:33 and 40* the same truth is taught, "God is not a God of disorder but of peace." "Everything .. in the Church .. should be done in a fitting and orderly way."

3. The book of Numbers teaches that God guides his people one step at a time.

The Israelites did not know when and where they were going. In *Numbers 9:15-23* we read that the glory of God resided in a cloud above the Tent of Meeting. During the daytime it looked like a pillar of cloud and during the night-time it looked like a pillar of fire. This was the visible sign of God's reality and presence in the midst of his people. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent of Meeting, the Israelites broke camp and set out on their journey. And whenever the cloud settled over the Tent of Meeting again, the Israelites encamped.

⁸ John 1:29

⁹ Colossians 3:1-3

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:8; Colossians 4:4

¹¹ John 12:26

¹² 1 Corinthians 12:11

¹³ 1 Corinthians 12:18

¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 3:6

Sometimes the cloud only stayed for one or two nights at one place. At other times it would stay a month or a year in another place. As long as the cloud stayed over the Tent of Meeting, the people of God obeyed God's order and stayed. The important lesson is that the people of God should *only take the next step at the command of God!*

4. The book of Numbers teaches that God will supply every need of his people according to his riches.

During their journey through the desert, the number of the men of 20 years and older in Israel was more than 600,000. Thus the total number of all the Israelites must have exceeded 2 million! For 40 long years God was able to support this vast number of people and their animals in the desert with all their basic needs, like food, water and shelter, leaders and protection from enemies.

Several times we read how God gave Israel water and food in a miraculous way. Once he turned bitter water into drinkable water¹⁵. Six days every week he gave them manna from heaven, which functioned as bread¹⁶. Once he gave them meat in the form of birds that were blown inland from the sea (chapter 11). And once he gave them water from a rock (chapter 20).

God gave them good leaders every time they needed them. In Numbers 11:16-17 he equipped 70 elders with his Holy Spirit to help Moses carry the burden of caring for all the people of God. In Numbers 14:6-9 he gave them two courageous men who were not afraid of the difficulties to conquer the land of Canaan. These men had faith in God's promises, presence and protection. And in Numbers 27:15-23 he gave Joshua authority to succeed Moses as leader and to lead Israel into the Promised Land.

God gave the Israelites victory over the Egyptians through ten plagues, over the Amalekites through the prayer of Moses¹⁷, over the Canaanite king of Arad and the Amorite kings of Heshbon and Bashan through war (chapter 21), over the Moabites through fear and frustration (chapter 22-24), and finally over the Midianites through total destruction (chapter 31).

The lesson of the book of Numbers is the same as that of the New Testament in Philippians 4:19, "*My God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus!*"

5. The book of Numbers teaches that the Old Testament was written as an example and warning for Christians.

In Numbers 20 we read that Israel had hardened their hearts against God so that even their leader Moses went astray. Psalm 95:7-11 warns that God punishes unbelief. God says, "Today if you hear his voice, *do not harden your hearts* as you did at Meribah ... in the desert, where your fathers *tested and tried me*, though they had seen what I did. For forty years I was angry with that generation; I said, 'They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they have not known my ways. So I declared on oath in my anger, 'They shall never enter my rest'."

In the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 10:5-11 we read, "God was not pleased with most of them (the Israelites in the desert); their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now *these things occurred as examples* to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: "The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry." We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did. In one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did. They were killed by snakes. Do not grumble, as some of them did. They were killed by the destroying angel. *These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings* for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come."

6. The book of Numbers teaches that the people of God should beware of unbelief and rather trust God than fear man.

Again and again Israel failed because of their unbelief. In Numbers 14 we read that ten of the twelve explorers to the land of Canaan came back with a bad report. They said that the land cannot be conquered, because the cities were big and fortified, the people were strong and some were even giants. They said that the Canaanites would kill their men, capture their wives and children and plunder all their possessions. They advised that Israel choose a new leader and go back to be slaves in Egypt! However, two of the explorers, Joshua and Caleb, encouraged the people to go up and conquer the land.

God sets before Christians the land of possibilities and achievements. Then the giants appear. These may be giants of opposition from without or giants of fear from within. Then our faith begins to fail and we forget God. We compare our difficulties with our own strength rather than committing our difficulties to the strong arm of God. Then we turn back into the desert of half-trust and half-victory or total despair and total defeat. After Israel refused to trust God that God would enable them to conquer the land of Canaan, Israel wandered around in the desert for 38 years! Likewise, when we doubt the God of the Bible, we will feel defeated and discouraged. We will wander around aimlessly and never accomplish anything.

¹⁵ Exodus 15

¹⁶ Exodus 16

¹⁷ Exodus 17

The important lesson is that even in situations where the majority of people seem to make a reasonable choice not to face the giants and their strong castles it is still the best to do what God says! The Israelites looked at the situation with the eyes of the ten explorers and reacted with fear, unbelief and disobedience. But Joshua and Caleb *looked at the same situation from God's perspective and responded with faith and obedience!* Caleb said, "If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them." Just like the ten explorers, also we can put our difficulties between ourselves and God and then say, "We are not able!" But we can also put God between ourselves and our difficulties and then say, "We are able!" David pursued by an army of enemies, David said, "With your help (O Lord), I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall¹⁸."

7. The book of Numbers teaches that nothing can hinder God in accomplishing his original goal.

While Israel was at Mount Sinai, the Lord said to them that they had stayed long enough at that mountain and that they should go up and take possession of the land that the Lord had promised to give as an inheritance to Abraham¹⁹. It was necessary for the Israelites to pass through the desert, but it was not necessary for them to spend 40 years in the desert! It was God's plan that the Israelites should go straight up into the Promised Land, but the people chose not to do this. The consequences were that they had to wander aimlessly for 38 years in the desert.

Another consequence was that not one of the adults who had refused to go into Canaan, were allowed to enter the Promised Land. They all missed God's best plan for their lives.

But according to Numbers 14:18-19, although God punishes the guilty, he is abounding in love and forgives sin and rebellion. God set before the Israelites another plan. He decided to bring their children into the land which their parents had rejected. The lesson we learn is that *God does have a second plan* and that *nothing can hinder God in accomplishing his original goal!* God's second plan is only a different way in which he will accomplish his first plan. Whenever we repent from our sin and disobedience, then God forgives us and gives us a second plan. God can forgive us seventy times seven times. God can also give us a second plan and a third plan and many more plans! But just think of the many blessings we miss and how many burdens we bear by not accepting God's first and best plan? Think of the lost years! According to Deuteronomy 1:2 and 2:14, what could have been accomplished in eleven days, took 38 years to accomplish! God's second plan for Israel was very costly indeed! We Christians should be deeply convinced that God will accomplish what he has planned and that nothing can hinder him from accomplishing it²⁰!

E. THE MESSIAH, JESUS CHRIST, IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS.

1. Aaron's budding staff is a type or illustration of Jesus Christ as God's only choice to be the Saviour of the world.

Among the Levites, God had chosen only the descendants of Aaron to be priests. Only priests were allowed to sacrifice and burn incense. In Numbers 16 and 17 we read how Korah and about 250 other Levites rebelled against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. They said to Moses and Aaron that every Israelite is holy and can become a priest. Moses let them conduct a test to see whom the Lord had chosen to be the priests in Israel. He challenged them to burn incense in front of the Tent of Meeting together with the real priests. Then they will see for themselves whom the Lord had chosen to be his priests. After they had burned the incense, the Lord warned his people to stand away from the tents of the rebels, Korah, Dathan and Abiram. The Lord made the earth to split open and swallow up all the families of the rebels together with all their possessions. Then he sent fire from heaven to totally consume the 250 other rebels!

The Lord let the tribes conduct a second test. He commanded the leaders of Israel to each take a staff and write the name of his tribe on the staff. Moses placed all twelve staffs in the Tent of Meeting in front of the ark, that is, in God's presence. The Lord said that the staff of the man he chooses to be the high priest will sprout. In this way, God wanted to show all the people whom he *chooses* to be the high priest and thus to stop the constant grumbling against God's chosen man. The next day Moses brought out all the staffs for the people to see. The staff of Aaron had not only sprouted, but had budded, blossomed and even produced almonds! The staff of Aaron was put back in the Tent of Meeting as a sign to the rebellious people that it is *God who chooses* the high priest (17:10)!

Likewise, in the New Testament, in Hebrews 5:4-5 we read about the high priest, "No one takes this honour upon himself; he *must be called by God*, just as Aaron was. Jesus Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest." Hebrews 7:24-28 says that Jesus Christ proved in two ways why he is the only Saviour of the world.

- All other priests and religious leaders in the world have died and have never been resurrected. They are still in their graves. But Jesus Christ has been resurrected from the dead and lives today. It says, "There were many of those priests, since death prevented them from continuing in office; but because Jesus lives for ever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." Thus while all authors and prophets of the religions of the world have died only Jesus Christ was raised from the dead and exalted to be our High Priest and Saviour!

¹⁸ Psalm 18:29

¹⁹ Deuteronomy 1:6-8

²⁰ cf. Isaiah 14:24,27

- All other priests and religious leaders are imperfect and do not qualify to be saviours of other imperfect people in the world! Only Jesus Christ is sinless and 100% perfect. Only Jesus Christ qualifies to be the Saviour of the world! It says, “Unlike the other high priests, Jesus Christ does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, made perfect forever, exalted above the heavens!”

2. The smitten rock is a type or illustration of Christ dying once in history to bring spiritual benefits to all his people, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament.

In Numbers 20 we read how Israel quarrelled with Moses because there was again no water to drink in the desert. The Israelites tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?”²¹ So God commanded Moses to strike the rock *once* and water would come out of it²². In his anger against the Israelites Moses struck the rock *twice* and water gushed out of it (20:11). God punished Moses for his disobedience and said, “Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them” (20:12). This passage has a few lessons.

- 1 Corinthians 10:4 says, “The Israelites ... drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ.” Jesus Christ is figuratively called the spiritual rock and he never forsook the people of God, but accompanied them everywhere they went! Jesus was already working among his Old Testament people!
- 1 Corinthians 10:2-4 says: All the Israelites “were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink.” God’s Old Testament people received the same benefits as God’s New Testament people. They were baptised and they ate the spiritual food and drank the spiritual water from God. *God’s Old Testament benefits had a spiritual character, because they came from Christ.* In the New Testament ‘eating the spiritual bread’ symbolises coming to Jesus Christ and receiving him into your heart and life²³. And ‘drinking the living water’ symbolises receiving the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus Christ would give to everyone who believes in him²⁴.
- Hebrews 10:10 says, “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ *once for all.*” Jesus Christ, our spiritual rock, was to be smitten *once* for our sins. He need not be smitten *twice*! When Jesus died on the cross he said that all that is necessary for the salvation of man had been finished on the cross²⁵! Nobody can add anything more to the completed work of Christ!

3. The bronze snake lifted on a pole is a type or illustration of Jesus Christ lifted on the cross so that whoever believes in Christ will not die, but have everlasting life.

In Numbers 21:4-9 we read that the Israelites spoke against God and against Moses. They complained about their hardships, especially about the food they had to eat in the desert. The Lord heard their complaints and saw the attitude of their hearts and he punished them by sending poisonous snakes among the people. After Moses interceded for them, God commanded Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole where everybody could see it. God said that if people would look at the bronze snake when they were bitten, they would not die, but live. However, if they refused to believe God’s word and refuse to look at the bronze snake, then they would surely die.

In the New Testament, in John 3:14-16, Jesus says, “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

²¹ Exodus 17:7

²² Exodus 17:6

²³ John 6:31-37

²⁴ John 4:10-14; 7:37-39

²⁵ John 19:30