

# EXPLANATION OF 4<sup>TH</sup> BIBLEBOOK

## NUMBERS (1446 - 1407 B.C.)

### **A. PART I. AT MOUNT SINAI (1:1 – 10:10)**

### **B. PART II. FROM SINAI TO KADES (10:11 – 20:13)**

### **C. PART III. FROM KADES TO MOAB (20:14 – 36:13)**

### **A. PART I. AT MOUNT SINAI (1:1 – 10:10)**

#### **NUMBERS 1:20-46. THE WORD ‘THOUSAND’ (HEBREW: ELEF) USED IN COUNTING**

“All the Israelites twenty years old or more who were able to serve in Israel’s army were counted according to their families. The total number was 603.550”<sup>1</sup> (1:46). In Deuteronomy 7:7 Israel is called “the fewest of all peoples”. The desert and even the oases of Kades Barnea was not able to feed a nation of one million with all their flocks in the desert! Also the number of 22.000 and 18.000 killed in battle in Judges 20:21,25 (about 12 men per km<sup>2</sup>) is very unlikely!

The number 603,550 uses the word ‘elef’ and was translated with the word ‘thousand’. But this dates from the Hellenistic period when people used the Hebrew alphabet to indicate numbers. The word ‘elef’ must therefore not be translated with the word ‘thousand’, but rather with the (Scottish) word ‘clan’ or ‘family group’! See for example, “the heads of the clans” of Israel (1:1; 10:4)<sup>2</sup>. “My clan is the weakest in Manasseh and I am the least in my family”<sup>3</sup>. “Present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and *clans* (instead of ‘thousands’)<sup>4</sup>. Thus Israel had 603 family groups and 550 individuals. The actual number in an ‘elef’ can no longer be determined. “The Levites, however, were not counted along with the other Israelites” (2:33)!

#### **NUMBERS 2:1-34 THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE TRIBAL CAMPS AND THE ORDER OF MARCHING**

The reason for Israel’s existence was to serve the LORD in an orderly way<sup>5</sup>. The tabernacle was the absolute centre of the nation. The 12 tribes with their flocks were arranged around it in order to frustrate the attacks by Bedouin tribes. The three tribes of Judah, Issachar en Zebulun were located on the East of the tabernacle to protect the opening of the sanctuary. Each tribe possessed a ‘banner’ consisting of a pole with an emblem on top. Among heathen tribes it was an emblem of their god (see Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian archaeology).

#### **NUMBERS 3:1-4 THE WORD ‘FAMILY ACCOUNT’ (HEBREW: TOLDOT)**

The Hebrew word ‘toldot’ (3:1) not only means “descendants” (‘family tree’), but especially ‘family history, genealogy’<sup>6</sup>.

The LORD is the Lord (‘adon) and Master (ba’al) of the land and everything on it. Only after man presented the best of the land to the LORD, may one enjoy the rest. The idea that ‘the male’, the parcel of land, the orchard, the flock, and even man belongs to the deity, is found in all the ancient Semitic world. There are certain rules for ‘setting apart’<sup>7</sup>, ‘dedicating’<sup>8</sup> and ‘bringing’ (18:15) the first fruits. The Levites took the place of all Israel’s male firstborn in a family (3:12).

Originally all priests were anointed when ordained (3:3), but after the fall of the royal house of David (the period of the kings), only the high priest was anointed, because he took the place of the king.

#### **NUMBERS 4:2-20 THE TASK OF THE LEVITES**

In the time of the Judges it was a known Semitic custom that the head of a family represented his family in the sacrifices. Only in the tabernacle service the Levites acquired this task. A Levite had to be between 30 and 50 years old (4:3). He had to be in the full strength of his life<sup>9</sup>. Most holy were the altar of burnt offering<sup>10</sup> and the altar of incense<sup>11</sup>. The tabernacle also contained the ark, the table of the Presence and the lampstand. The ark symbolises that the LORD dwells in the midst of Israel (4:5). The shewbread symbolised the LORD’s continued presence (4:7).

#### **NUMBERS 5:1-4 SENDING CULTIC IMPURE PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE CAMP**

Israel shared the conviction of all the eastern world that sickness and death are the result of demonic powers. Whoever touched a dead man came under the influence of demons and may therefore not participate in cultic ceremonies, because by these cultic ceremonies the community sought life power and fellowship with the deity. These people were a source of impurity and danger and had to be banned out of the community. The impurity functioned like a virus that jumps from one person to another. An impure person had to be excluded from all cultic practices.

<sup>1</sup> Hebrew: shes me’ot *elef* we-sheloshet *elafim* wa-chamesh-me’ot we- chamshim

<sup>2</sup> Joshua 22:21

<sup>3</sup> Judges 6:15

<sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel 10:19

<sup>5</sup> cf. 1 Corinthians 14:33,40

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 2:4; 5:1; 10:1; 11:10; 25:12; 36:1

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 13:2

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 13:12

<sup>9</sup> cf. 1 Chronicles 23:24,27

<sup>10</sup> Exodus 29:37

<sup>11</sup> Exodus 30:10

Evil spirits in the eastern world were driven away by magic formulas<sup>12</sup>. However, in Israel magic formulas had no place<sup>13</sup>. Impurities like skin diseases, menstruation of women and touching corpses caused *spiritual* impurity. Such people were driven out of the camp.

#### **NUMBERS 5:11-31      GOD'S JUDGEMENT OF A WIFE ACCUSED OF UNFAITHFULNESS**

This kind of judgment is also known in the ancient Eastern world, the Germanic tribes, India, African tribes and the Malaysian archipelago. Even the suspicion of the husband that his wife was unfaithful forced the woman to accept the verdict. The suspicious or jealous husband had to bring his wife with 'a grain offering for jealousy' (5:15) to the presiding priest, because no one should appear emptyhanded before God. The priest untied her hair as a sign of her 'mourning' and to make her unrecognisable to the powers of death. Then the grain offer of jealousy (a sacrifice to bring something into remembrance) was placed on her hands (5:18), curses (curse formulas) were written on a piece of paper and then washed off in 'the water that brings a curse' (5:23). This practice is also known in Babylonia and still within Islam and Buddhism in Tibet. But in Israel no magical power is ascribed to the bitter water or the words that bring a curse. It is symbolic for the will of God who will deal according to his moral righteous norm. The woman must then drink the water. If nothing happens, she is publicly declared to be innocent and for her husband it is the proof of her innocence!

Leprosy too was regarded as cultic impure. "The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, leave his hair unkempt, 1) cover the lower part of his face and cry out: 'Unclean! Unclean!' As long as he has the infection he remains 'unclean'. He 2) must isolate himself and live alone outside the camp". Whenever the priest approaches the LORD he must 3) wash his hands and feet with water in the basin for washing<sup>14</sup>.

#### **NUMBERS 6:1-21      THE LAW FOR THE NAZIRITE**

'Nazir' is the passive participle of the verb 'nazar' and means 'separation or segregation'. In the ancient eastern world making a promise was regarded seriously. The nazirite had three duties:

- He was forbidden to drink wine (alcohol) and 'sjekar'. It was an intoxicating drink, prepared from wheat, honey, dates and by adding spices to make it stronger<sup>15</sup>. All mystery religions that purpose to become one with the divine being, also used orgies and drunkenness. Wine and strong drink were used to bring people into a trance (that is, to step outside themselves and make contact with the 'sphere of the divinity').
- He was forbidden to shave the hair on his head (6:5) or cut the hair at the sides of his head or clip the edges of his beard. He was forbidden to cut his body for the dead or put tattoo marks on his skin. These practices are associated with turning to mediums or seeking out spiritists and prostitution<sup>16</sup>. Muslims on their pilgrims journey to Mecca also grow their hair as a sign of serving their god.
- He was forbidden to touch a corpse. In the ancient eastern world and in Israel sickness and death were regarded as the result of demonic influence. It caused spiritual impurity and jeopardised serving the LORD.

The law for the nazirite was terminated by bringing a 'sin offering' (as a sign of atonement), 'a burnt offering' (as a sign of complete dedication) and 'thank offering' (as a sign of reconciliation and a harmonious relationship between the believer and God). Being a nazirite was a temporary act<sup>17</sup>, but sometimes life long as with Samson<sup>18</sup>, Samuel<sup>19</sup> and probably John the Baptist<sup>20</sup>.

#### **NUMBERS 6:22-27      THE PRIESTLY BLESSING (cf. 'curse' in Numbers 22:6)**

Numbers 6:22-27, 9:1-14 and 19:1-22 would fit better in Leviticus. 'To bless' is to wish prosperity, help and support to someone. In the ancient eastern world a blessing was not mere words, but words loaded with power originating in the heart<sup>21</sup>. The word 'berek' (to bless) carries sacramental power into another's life centre, by which his development is strengthened, and likewise a curse can hinder development. 'Baraka' is the power from which life blossoms and richness of good deeds flow. Actually only the LORD has the ability to bless (berek), because he is the Living One and the Source of inexhaustible blessings in life and in deeds<sup>22</sup>. The LORD gave his servants the ability to bless. But these servants do not possess a magic power over these blessings of life and deeds! They are limited to living and acting inside the limits set by God.

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<sup>12</sup> cf. 2 Chronicles 16:12

<sup>13</sup> Exodus 22:17; Deuteronomy 18:11

<sup>14</sup> See Leviticus 13:45-46 and Exodus 30:19 for rules for Covid 19 infection!

<sup>15</sup> Isaiah 5:22

<sup>16</sup> Leviticus 19:6-29; 21:5

<sup>17</sup> Amos 2:11

<sup>18</sup> Judges 13:5

<sup>19</sup> 1 Samuel 1:11

<sup>20</sup> Luke 1:15

<sup>21</sup> Proverbs 4:23

<sup>22</sup> Ephesians 1:3

‘The priestly blessing’ (6:24-26) consists of three sayings. The number ‘three’ is the number for divine completeness and the basic form for the harmonious unfolding of following numbers and inner completeness<sup>23</sup>. In the Hebrew texts the three sayings consists of 2+1, 3+2 en 4+3, together 3+5+7 words and 3x5, 4x5 and 5x5 letters, a symbol for *the steady increase in the stream of blessings* which are poured out over the people. Here it is not an individual, but all the people of God that are blessed. In Babylon people preferred long sayings of blessings (cf. mantras), because the working of the blessing depended on the length of the blessing<sup>24</sup>.

In the first blessing God gives powerful protection. In the second blessing God is well pleased to give grace or compassion. In the third blessing God gives his love, peace (shalom) and joy of life<sup>25</sup>.

When the priest with raised hands<sup>26</sup> lays the Name of the LORD thrice on the congregation, Israel may be sure that they would experience this blessing. In Israel the right to pronounce the blessing<sup>27</sup> or curse<sup>28</sup> is given only to the priest.

#### **NUMBERS 7:89                      HEARING AND SEEING GOD**

“The LORD spoke face to face with Moses, clearly and not in riddles. Moses saw the form of the LORD, but the other prophets heard the voice of the LORD and saw him in their inner being.

#### **NUMBERS 8:5-26                      CONSECRATION OF PRIESTS AND LEVITES**

The acts done to priests made them ‘holy’ (kadosh) and to Levites made them ‘pure’ (tahōr). Thus the priests receive a positive quality, while a negative quality is removed from the Levites. Therefore only priests were anointed. Priests were washed, but Levites were sprinkled. Priests had to clothe themselves with new clothes, but Levites had to wash their clothes. Blood is applied to the ear, thumb and big toe of priests, but blood is only waved at the Levites. The priest is a servant of the LORD and the Levites are the helpers of the priest. A sin offering atones sin, the water of cleansing delivers one from the impurity of sins that cling to the body. Sin is regarded as something material that clings to the body, to hair on the body<sup>29</sup> and to clothes. Therefore hair is shaved off every second day. Whoever wants to be ‘pure’, must wash himself<sup>30</sup>.

The ‘laying on of hands’ (semika) creates a bond between the person bringing an offering and the offering whereby the offer takes the place of the person bringing the offering. The offering is ‘waved’, first in the direction of the tabernacle (symbolising dedication to the LORD) and then in the direction of the person bringing the offering (symbolising putting it at his disposal). In Israel the Levites had taken the place of the firstborn.

#### **NUMBERS 9:9-13                      THE SECOND PASSOVER**

The Passover took place on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month. The day began in the evening at sunset and the feast was celebrated at full moon (chodesh). The Passover in Exodus 12 was a family festival, but the second Passover received a more ceremonial character, especially when it was celebrated at the sanctuary<sup>31</sup>. Applying blood to the sides and top of the door frames was not practised while the Israelites dwelt in tents during their journey through the desert. A person that neglected to celebrate the Passover had to be cut off from his people (9:13). An alien/foreigner (ger) (a member of another nation) was allowed to celebrate the Passover when he held to the Passover regulations. “You must have the same regulations for the alien and the native-born” (9:14).

#### **NUMBERS 9:15-23                      THE CLOUD (OF FIRE) ABOVE THE TABERNACLE**

The cloud over the tabernacle by day and the cloud with fire by night are forms of revelation of the LORD and symbolise his presence<sup>32</sup>.

#### **NUMBERS 10:1-10                      BLOWING THE SILVER TRUMPETS**

The trumpet was about one cubit long and tapered outward at one end. The signal (terua’) on the trumpet was given when the camp had to break up, pack up and move on. Only priests (instead of the heads of the tribes) were allowed to blow the trumpets. The priests emphasized the religious instead of the national nature of the people. In ancient times trumpets were blown when sacrifices were brought in order to scare away demonic powers. In Israel the trumpets were blown during Passover, Pentecost, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles and bringing burnt offerings and thank offerings, but not when bringing sin offerings.

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<sup>23</sup> cf. 1 Samuel 3:8; Isaiah 6:3

<sup>24</sup> cf. Matthew 6:7

<sup>25</sup> Isaiah 55:12

<sup>26</sup> Leviticus 9:22

<sup>27</sup> Leviticus 9:22; Deuteronomy 10:8

<sup>28</sup> Deuteronomy 27:14-15

<sup>29</sup> also to the hair of Egyptian priests

<sup>30</sup> Exodus 19:10

<sup>31</sup> Deuteronomy 16:6

<sup>32</sup> Ex 40:36-38

## **B. PART II. FROM SINAI TO KADESH IN THE DESERT OF PARAN (10:11 – 20:13)**

### **NUMBERS 10:11-28 DEPARTURE FROM SINAI**

Exodus 19:1 says that Israel took 3 months from Egypt to Mount Sinai. According to Numbers 10:11 the journey was continued after about one year. During their one year stay at Sinai, Moses organised the life of the assembly of Israel thoroughly. He made all kinds of instructions and regulations for their social and religious life. They travelled directly to the north, the shortest route through the desert of Paran. In its northern section is the desert of Zin with a steppe (level grassy plain devoid of trees) containing some mountain ridges where there are meadows during the rainy season.

### **NUMBERS 10:29-36 FATHER-IN-LAW AND BROTHER-IN-LAW**

According to Exodus 3 and 18 the father-in-law of Moses, Jethro, the priest of Midian (a Kenite, part of the Midianites) visited Israel for a short while. But according to Numbers 10:29, his father-in-law is called Hobab and stayed for almost a year. Moses twice invited Hobab to travel with them as ‘their eyes’ (guide) in the desert. As a person living in the east, he only consented after repeated invitation. Only in Numbers 10:33 Mount Sinai is called ‘the mountain of the LORD’. Later Sinai is called ‘Horeb, the mountain of God’<sup>33</sup>. In the Psalm 24:3 Sinai is again called ‘the mountain of the LORD’.

### **NUMBERS 11:1 - 14:45 INCIDENTS ON THE WAY TO KADESH**

#### **NUMBERS 11:1-9 ISRAEL COMPLAINED AGAINST THE LACK OF BREAD AND MEAT**

The Israelites complained about their adversity. When the LORD heard them, his anger was aroused and fire from the LORD burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp (11:1). The people cried out, Moses interceded and the fire died down. The complaining started with “the many other people that went with them”<sup>34</sup>. They complained about the lack of meat (they only slaughtered animals from their flocks when the animals had no more function). They had forgotten their former slavery and remembered only the good in Egypt. In Exodus 16 Israel was glad with receiving ‘manna’, but here in Numbers 11 they abhorred it. *This is therefore not a parallel account.*

The word ‘manna’ is a Greek translation of the Hebrew word: ‘what’ is this?<sup>35</sup>. The manna resembled coriander seed and balsamic resin. In the northern half of the Sinai peninsula it is still a delicacy (known as ‘munn’). It is dried in the sun, grinded in a mortar and baked as cakes. It tastes sweet.

#### **NUMBERS 11:10-15 WAILING OF THE NATION, COMPLAINT OF MOSES, MERCY OF GOD**

The temper of Moses that led to manslaughter<sup>36</sup> now brought Moses to the brink of blasphemy. He reproached God for being unreasonable with regard to the responsibilities laid on him.

#### **NUMBERS 11:16-35 ELECTING SEVENTY ELDERS**

The LORD commanded Moses to select 70 men to help him carry his load of responsibilities. The people had to consecrate themselves (11:18), that is, wash themselves and their clothes and have no intercourse with women<sup>37</sup>. God would give them meat every day for a month long “until it comes out of their nostrils and they loathe it” (11:20). Moses doubted that he would be able to feed this great amount of people (600 elef = 600 ‘clans’, not ‘600 ‘thousand’). Nevertheless, God’s hand was not too short and he made it come true (11:23).

Moses appointed 70 men out of the elders of the people to stand around the tabernacle and God put some of the Spirit that was on Moses on them so that they could share his burden of leadership (11:24-25). These men prophesied once, but did not do so again (11:25). This was ‘an ecstatic experience’ as with Saul<sup>38</sup> and not the usual prophesying as with Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah. In this way the people of God could see that the Spirit of the LORD was working in them and they need to obey these leaders. Two of them, Eldad and Medad, prophesied in the camp and Joshua wanted to stop them. But Moses answered: “I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them” (11:29)! The Spirit of the LORD is given to each believer just as he determines and he equips them for each task (office)<sup>39</sup>. Moses is not indispensable for Israel, but the Spirit of the LORD is indispensable<sup>40</sup>! How these 70 men assisted Moses is not related.

In the spring swarms of birds come from the middle of Africa and fly northward. They are fat and can be caught easily (killed with sticks). Nevertheless, many people died due to their gluttony “while the meat was still between their teeth” (11:33).

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<sup>33</sup> Exodus 3:1

<sup>34</sup> Exodus 12:38

<sup>35</sup> Exodus 16:15

<sup>36</sup> Exodus 2:11-15

<sup>37</sup> Exodus 19:14-15

<sup>38</sup> 1 Samuel 10:1; 19:20-24; 1 Kings 22:10; Jeremiah 29:26

<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:11

<sup>40</sup> Jeremiah 31:34; Ezekiel 11:19; 36:27; Joel 2:28

## **NUMBERS 12:1-16      MIRIAM AND AARON OPPOSE MOSES**

Miriam and Aaron (the older sister and brother of Moses) talked against Moses for marrying a Cushite woman (thus not Sippora from Midian). She was from Sudan (a Nubian tribe with African culture). Moses however, was very humble (meek) (12:3) and did not respond. The LORD responded and punished Miriam with 7 days of leprosy (a complex skin disease). God revealed himself to the prophets by means of visions and dreams, but to Moses by speaking face to face with him, audibly, clearly and not in riddles (12:6-8).

Prophets receive a vision or dream<sup>41</sup> in which they are withdrawn from time and place and see events that must still happen in the future<sup>42</sup>. Visions and dreams to the prophets were the usual means of communicating God's will to people. Isaiah (6:1), Amos (chapter 7-9) 5x, Jeremiah (32:26), Ezekiel received messages about Jerusalem, Daniel (7:1; 10:5), Zechariah received visions at night. But most often prophets received revelations while wide awake and rejected people who made an appeal to dreams<sup>43</sup>. God spoke face to face with Moses<sup>44</sup>. Moses saw the glory of the LORD on Sinai, but not his form<sup>45</sup>, Job saw a form in a dream at night<sup>46</sup>. When the covenant was confirmed, Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and 70 elders saw the God of Israel but were not killed<sup>47</sup>.

## **NUMBERS 13:1-33      THE TWELVE SPIES EXPLORING CANAAN**

Israel had approached the border of the Promised Land. Moses sent 12 spies to report about the land. They reported that the land was flowing with milk and honey and brought some of the fruits of the land. It was during the first grape harvest (June-August). However, ten of the spies brought a negative report. Kadesh lay in the desert of Zin (or Paran)(13:26; 20:1; 27:14; 33:26). Hebron was founded 7 years before Zoan in Egypt (13:22). De Enakites ('the long people'/'long-necks' were viewed as 'Nefelim'<sup>48</sup>. They were unusual tall and strong. The rulers of Hebron (Kirjat Arba)(city of four) were Hittites, the vanguard of an Indo-Germanic tribal group who had founded a kingdom in Asia Minor and Syria. According to the Amarna letters, the Jebusites of Jerusalem also belonged to them. Also living in the Promised Land were: Amalekites (in the negev in the south)(nomads) and Hittites, Jebusites and Amorites (since 2700 B.C. in Canaan in the hill country (13:29).

## **NUMBERS 14:1-10      GOD PUNISHES THE REBELLIOUS NATION**

The people of Israel continued to complain loudly. They had chosen Moses to be the leader and now wanted another leader to lead them back to Egypt (14:4)! They wanted to stone Moses, Aaron and Joshua and Caleb who had given a positive report (14:10). But the glory (kabod) of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle before all Israelites. His glory is the weight of his authority, which was first seen at Sinai as 'a consuming fire'<sup>49</sup> and which made the face of Moses radiant<sup>50</sup>.

## **NUMBERS 14:11-45      INTERCESSION OF MOSES AND PUNISHMENT OF GOD**

In the ancient eastern mind the weakness of a nation is reflected in the weakness of their god (14:16). The LORD said about Israel, the LORD's firstborn son<sup>51</sup>, "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me?" (14:11-12)? Moses pleaded with the LORD to again show his power: "The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punished the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (14:18).

Israel had to turn around and retreat through the desert in the direction of the Red Sea "until this wicked community consisting of people of 20 years and older have died (14:29). They keep walking after other gods (the sin of zenut) and grumble against me" (14:27). They would wander through the desert for 40 years (14:33) and experience the opposition of the LORD. Israel remained 38 years at Kadesh Barnea<sup>52</sup>! Joshua, Caleb and Eleazar (priest since the 2<sup>nd</sup> year after the Exodus)<sup>53</sup> were exceptions. The lot of women was not mentioned, because at that time women had an inferior social position. The 10 other spies died in a plague (14:37). A late invasion into Canaan was repelled (14:39-45).

During the very long stay at Kadesh Barnea, only the rebellion of Korah, Datan en Abiram is related, because the Bible does not simply relate the history of Israel. The Bible relates salvation history, the revelation of the LORD's words and deeds! All other events in Israel's history were not recorded in the Bible!

<sup>41</sup> Genesis 15:1; 20:3; 28:11; 31:24; Ezekiel 1:1; 8:3; 40:2

<sup>42</sup> 2 Kings 8:13; Jeremiah 4:20; 38:22

<sup>43</sup> Jeremiah 23:25; 27:9; Zechariah 10:2

<sup>44</sup> Exodus 33:11; Numbers 7:89; Deuteronomy 34:10

<sup>45</sup> Exodus 33:11-16; Deuteronomy 4:12,15

<sup>46</sup> Job 4:16

<sup>47</sup> Exodus 24:9-11

<sup>48</sup> in Genesis 6:4 translated as 'giants' in Greek translation

<sup>49</sup> Exodus 24:17

<sup>50</sup> Exodus 34:29-35

<sup>51</sup> cf. Exodus 4:22. 'Firstborn' does not imply 'the only'. Believers during the New Testament period are also 'firstborn', the inheritors of the covenant promise (Hebrews 12:23)

<sup>52</sup> Deuteronomy 2:14

<sup>53</sup> Exodus 28:1

## **NUMBERS 15:1-41      RITUAL REGULATIONS**

“The community must have the same rules for the Israelites and the aliens living among them. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come (15:15-16).

“When the Israelites sinned by not keeping the commandments, the priest must make atonement for their sins and their sins will be forgiven (15:22,25). “But any Israelite or alien who sins defiantly must be cut off from God’s people” (15:30-31). Thus, not every Jew or every non-Jew is saved! They are cut off from God’s people!

A person breaking the Sabbath had to be stoned by the assembly outside the camp (15:32-36).

In the ancient eastern world people kept fighting against demonic powers. They protected themselves by means of tassels on their upper garments that would ward off these spirits. Amulets too were believed to ward off evil spirits. In Israel clothing of the priests had to be sacred (separated from evil and dedicated to good) in order to give them dignity and honour<sup>54</sup>. The tassels were affixed to the garments not to ward off evil spirits, *but to remember all the commands of the LORD that they may obey them* (15:39-41). Purple-red (NIV blue) colour served to ward off demonic powers (15:38; cf. 4:6). Blood is the colour of ‘life’ and also capable to ward off demonic powers

## **NUMBERS 16:1-35      REVOLT OF KORAH, DATHAN AND ABIRAM**

Korah was a Levite who wanted to put an end to the differentiation between Levites and priests (16:8-10). He rebelled against Aaron the priest and Moses the leader.

Datan and Abiram were Reubenites and laid claim to the right of the firstborn to raise themselves above Levi. Their rebellion was against Aaron and Moses (16:12-14). They claimed that the whole assembly of Israel was holy (16:3), not in an ethical sense, but in a cultic sense; that they too may approach the altar and make sacrifices on it. Only priests were allowed to burn incense before the LORD without fear of being struck dead. The smoke of the incense concealed the atonement cover above the ark (testimony) and thus symbolised protecting the priest from being killed by the deadly radiation of God’s presence<sup>55</sup>. The Levites were called to serve and not to lead in the priestly office.

Exodus 22:28 says, “You may not curse the ruler of your people.” Moses therefore made an appeal on the LORD’s judgement (16:4-7). The rebels had a circle of supporters (eda)(16:5). The glory of the LORD appeared and the whole assembly (the lawful representatives of the tribes)(eda) assembled at the tabernacle (Tent of Meeting) to witness the outcome of the confrontation (16:19). Korah *and his circle stood at the entrance of the sanctuary, while Datan and Abiram remained standing at the entrance of their own tents* (16:27). Moses and Aaron were commanded to separate themselves from that assembly (16:20-21). Then the ground under the perpetrators split apart and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them together with their households. “They went down alive into the grave” (16:30).

The words “all Korah’s men and all their possessions” is probably a later addition, because God’s judgement of Korah and his circle of followers had a different character than that of Datan and Abiram. Numbers 26:11 clearly says that the line of Korah did not die out.” The words: “God of the spirits of all mankind” (16:22) acknowledges that God has the right to take (to kill) a life which he gave (16:32-33)! “Fire came out from the LORD and consumed (Korah and) the 250 men who were offering incense”, but Aaron was spared (16:2,35). Thus God confirmed the priesthood of Aaron. Moses was not a priest, but his leadership was undoubtedly confirmed. The ancient eastern world believed in the solidarity of guilt and punishment<sup>56</sup>.

## **NUMBERS 16:36-50      NEW OPPOSITION FLARED UP AGAINST MOSES AND AARON**

The censers of the rebels were taken out of the smouldering remains and hammered into sheets, to overlay the altar of burnt offerings as a constant reminder to the Israelites of the sin of the Levites and to avoid using them again (16:36-40).

However, the assembly (eda) gathered again in opposition to Moses and Aaron (16:42). A plague had already broken out. The LORD appeared again to Moses and commanded to burn incense to hide the assembly (qahal) from God’s wrath (18:5). *Wrath is a form of expressing God’s holiness.* Compare this to the burning of incense when the high priest entered the Most Holy Place on the Day of Atonement<sup>57</sup>. The word ‘kipper’ here does not mean ‘atonement’ (of sin), but rather ‘covering’ (against the wrath of God)!

## **NUMBERS 17:1-13      AARON’S BUDDING STAFF**

The Levites continued to push for equality with the priests<sup>58</sup>. God commanded the Israelites to write the name of each of the 12 tribes (1:2-15) on 12 staves. Levi was not counted as one of the tribes (1:4-16,47). Aaron’s name represented especially the priests. The staves were placed in the Holy Place close to the curtain (17:7). In one night the staff of Levi sprouted, budded, blossomed and produced almonds (17:8)! Everyone could see that Aaron and the priesthood was the LORD’s choice to serve him in the tabernacle. This was not rhabdomancy (fortune-telling by means of a staff or shoots)<sup>59</sup>.

<sup>54</sup> Exodus 28:2

<sup>55</sup> Leviticus 16:13

<sup>56</sup> Exodus 34:7; Numbers 14:18; 2 Samuel 3:28; 21:6; Genesis 20:9; 26:10

<sup>57</sup> Leviticus 16:12

<sup>58</sup> 2 Chronicles 30:17f; 35:3-6

<sup>59</sup> Hosea 4:12

## **NUMBERS 18:1-32      DUTIES AND INCOME OF PRIESTS AND LEVITES**

In the light of Exodus 13:13-14 where the firstborn of Egypt were killed but the firstborn of Israel were kept alive, all firstborn belong to the LORD (18:15)<sup>60</sup>. *The Levites replaced the firstborn in Israel and had the task to serve the LORD.* The sanctuary and altar were the prerogative of the priests. The Levites had to join (lawa)(verse 2) them and serve only as assistants (18:1-7).

A covenant ratified by salt (chaq-olam, berit melach olam)(18:19)<sup>61</sup> points to an unassailable (inviolable) regulation of which the LORD himself is the Witness! The Levites had to pay a tenth of the tithes to the priests (18:24). *According to Leviticus 25:23 man is not the owner of the land and of what it produces, but only a tenant for life!* “Tithes” (ma’ eser) are thus a tax paid to the Owner for the produce of flocks and fields<sup>62</sup>. They are also a tax to support the poor and needy<sup>63</sup>. De LORD himself is ‘the share and inheritance of the Levites among the Israelites’ (18:20)!

## **NUMBERS 19:1-22      WATER OF CLEANSING FOR PURIFICATION**

People were buried in shallow graves. That is why graves were later marked with white limestone<sup>64</sup>. Sickness and death are in the mind of Israelites demonic powers that attach themselves to body and clothes. ‘The water of cleansing’ (me nidda), or ‘purifying water’, was prepared and used as a kind of filter or prevention (mishmeret) of evil (19:9). The cow had to be red, the colour of blood and thus of life. All life has the ability to destroy impurity as a power of death. This is also believed in the ancient world. Compare ‘the water that brings a curse’ (5:16-22) and the water sprinkled to cleanse an infectious disease<sup>65</sup>. ‘Holy’ and ‘unclean’ are both dangerous powers (taboos among the heathen and also among the Israelites). The cleansing took place by dipping a hyssop branch (that has hairy leaves forming a kind of brush) into the cleansing water and sprinkle (hizza)(19:13,18) it on the person. Thereafter he must wash himself and his clothes (31:24). Everyone touching an unclean person becomes ‘unclean’ (19:22)! That is why the Pharisees observed traditional washing ceremonies after they had visited the market<sup>66</sup>.

## **NUMBERS 20:1-13      DEATH OF MIRIAM AND SIN OF MOSES AT MERIBA**

Miriam died in Kadesh and was buried (20:1). The people grumbled again against Moses for bringing them to this terrible place where there was no grain, or figs, grapevines or water to drink (20:5). At Horeb<sup>67</sup> Moses was ordered to strike a rock – it had to do with *the power of striking*, but he spoke where he had to remain silent. He spoke in his own name and struck in his own power. At Meriba (20:2-23) Moses was ordered to command the rock – the difference had to do with *the power of the word*. But Moses said, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?” He struck the rock twice with his staff. He was disobedient, acted according to his own insight and dishonoured the LORD in the sight of all the people of Israel. God punished him by not allowing him to enter the Promised Land.

The LORD is incomparable to other ‘gods’. He needs no magic formula’s, his words need no support by any other means. His word is the deed. He does what he says<sup>68</sup>. Jews and Paul conclude that like the cloud, also the rock ‘accompanied them’<sup>69</sup>.

## **C. PART III. FROM KADESH TO MOAB (20:14 – 36:13)**

### **NUMBERS 20:14-29      JOURNEY TO TRANS-JORDAN AND DEATH OF AARON**

Moses asked permission from Edom to pass through the land of Edom, even by paying for drinking water, but Edom denied them and came against them with a large and powerful army. So Israel travelled south to the Gulf of Akaba, then east along the southern border of Edom and Moab and finally north in the direction of the River Arnon in order to approach the River Jordan (the border of the Promised Land) from the east.

Aaron died at Mount Hor on the border of Edom (20:23). “The words “he was gathered to his people” (20:20)<sup>70</sup> do not mean ‘being buried’, but rather testify to the belief in life after death (the realm of death). Aaron became 123 years old (20:24).

Moses removed his garments and put them on his son, Eleazar. This was probably his high priest robe<sup>71</sup> or his normal clothes with the notion that his clothes were imbued with his personality and power that thereby would pass on to Eleazar (compare the cloak of Elijah passing on to Elisha)<sup>72</sup>.

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<sup>60</sup> Exodus 22:29

<sup>61</sup> Leviticus 2:13; 2 Chronicles 13:5

<sup>62</sup> Nehemiah 10:38f

<sup>63</sup> Deuteronomy 14:28f

<sup>64</sup> Matthew 23:27

<sup>65</sup> Leviticus 14:1-9,49-52

<sup>66</sup> Mark 7:3-4

<sup>67</sup> Exodus 17:1-7

<sup>68</sup> Isaiah 55:11

<sup>69</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:4

<sup>70</sup> cf. Genesis 15:15

<sup>71</sup> Exodus 28:2

<sup>72</sup> 1 Kings 19:19

### **NUMBERS 21:1-3      CANAANITE ATTACK REPELLED**

A treacherous attack of some Canaanites from the north was parried with much bloodshed. These Canaanites and their dwellings were completely destroyed.

### **NUMBERS 21:4-9      THE BRONZE SNAKE**

Once again the Israelites grumbled and complained against God and against Moses. So the LORD sent venomous (literally ‘burning’) snakes among them and the people that were bitten, died. Moses had to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole as a sign of God’s victory. Anyone bitten could look at the snake and live.

‘The flying/darting snake’<sup>73</sup> are tree snakes in Arabia and Egypt that drop from trees and are a ‘kind of dragon’ in the imagination of people. The snake gods in Babylonia were regarded as animals that bring disaster, a feared monster from the underworld who guard the gates of the underworld (Hades) and kill people<sup>74</sup>. But at the same time they were also regarded as able to make people alive and protect them. That is why the snake also served as a symbol of the coming Messiah<sup>75</sup>. In the time of king Hezekiah<sup>76</sup> Israel made this bronze snake into an idol (efod), a bearer of power<sup>77</sup>.

### **NUMBERS 21:10-20      JOURNEY ALONG EASTERN BORDER OF MOAB**

Israel travelled northwards, crossed the upper reaches of the Arnon (“about in the middle of the Dead Sea, with waterfalls that rush down the mountain”) and made camp at the other side of the Arnon. The upper reaches of the Arnon is a deep ravine in the highland and forms a natural boundary between the Moabites and Amorites and later between the Moabites and Israelites.

‘The Book of the Wars of the LORD’ (21:14) is an old collection of histories and poems with regard to Israel’s wars to get possession of Canaan. The Book mentions ‘a well (beēr) that the princes dug’ (21:18). It was constructed with flat stones (piled onto one another) and covered with flat stones in which fountain water collected. It was often covered with soil to prevent strangers and animals to make use of the well. The poem quoted is about the joy of finding and digging up such a well.

### **NUMBERS 21:21-31      FIRST VICTORY: OVER SIHON, KING OF THE AMORITES**

The area between the Arnon and Jabbok was one of the last outstretched areas which the Amorites used to control. The Amorites were gradually deprived of their land: on the one hand by the Hittites (a complex people that moved from the north southward) and on the other hand by Egypt (the rebirth of the Egyptian Pharaohs under the 18<sup>th</sup> dynasty) that displaced the power of the Amorites. East of the Jordan was under the control of the Amorites under Sihon. The Amorites conquered the Ammonites (south of the Jabbok) and succeeded to drive the Moabites (between the Jabbok and Arnon) southward (21:26) across the Arnon.

In antiquity God had said to Abraham (2167 – 1992 B.C.), “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country (Egypt) not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years (in Egypt) ... In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here (1407 B.C.), for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure”<sup>78</sup>.

Numbers 21:27-30 is a song of triumph by the Amorites when they defeated the Moabites. The purpose of this quotation was to enhance the greatness of the victory of the Israelites over Sihon (21:24). The demise of the people (the Moabites) caused the demise of their god (Chemosh) – he had no worshippers left. Later (chapter 32) the tribes of Reuben and Gad took possession of the land between the Arnon and the Jabbok. The inhabitants were annihilated<sup>79</sup>, that is, men, women, children were killed and their flocks were captured. “We (the Israelites) have overthrown (destroyed, demolished) them (the Moabites) (21:30)”. “So Israel settled in the land of the Amorites” (21:31). The Moabites were called “the people of Chemosh” (21:29)<sup>80</sup>. This was the first victory of Israel as an organised state.

### **NUMBERS 21:32-35      SECOND VICTORY: OVER OG, KING OF BASHAN AND CAMPING IN THE VALLEY OF MOAB**

After this Israel conquered king Og of Bashan (also part of the Amorites) who ruled between the Jabbok and Mount Hermon and more specifically between the Yarmuk and Mount Hermon. His power was much greater than that of Sihon. Deuteronomy 3:11 illustrates this victory by the remark that Og was a Rephaite (not ‘a giant’) whom the Ammonites called a Zamzummite<sup>81</sup> and he ruled over all of the area east of the Jordan. He, his sons and his whole army were struck down, leaving them no survivors. And Israel took possession of his land.”

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<sup>73</sup> Isaiah 14:29; 30:6

<sup>74</sup> Jeremiah 8:17; 1 Corinthians 10:9

<sup>75</sup> John 3:14-16

<sup>76</sup> 2 Kings 18:4

<sup>77</sup> cf. Judges 8:27

<sup>78</sup> Genesis 15:13,16

<sup>79</sup> Deuteronomy 2:31-35

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 14:1; 32:5; Isaiah 1:2; 30:1,9; Jeremiah 3:14; Hosea 11:1; Psalm 80:16

<sup>81</sup> Deuteronomy 2:20

Numbers 21:33-35 is a quotation from Deuteronomy 2:34 and 3:1-3. The Old Testament knows only one joined invasion of Israel into Canaan under the leadership of Joshua.

### **NUMBERS 22:1 – 24:25 THE FALSE PROPHET CALLED TO CURSE ISRAEL**

**Note the difference between 'gods' and the One and Only God.** Note the difference between the Hebrew word 'elohim' (with small letters)(gods or godhead) and ELOHIM (with capital letters)(the only true God). In the ancient Oriental world, people understood the word 'elohim' to point to all kinds of good and evil powers (evil spirits, demons, gods) in the invisible world, the world of gods and spirits of different religions (22:8-20). Just as Chemosh was the god (elohim) of Moab and Milkom the god (elohim) of Ammon. Balaam believed that JaHWeH (the Hebrew for the LORD) (22:8,13,18-19; 23:3,12; 24:13 2x) was the name of 'the god (elohim) of Israel' (22:12). Balaam is a false prophet who pretended that he could speak to 'the LORD', the god (elohim) of Israel at any time. However, he did not know the LORD (JaHWeH), the real GOD (ELOHIM) of Israel! Balaam wanted to keep up the pretence that he knew the elohim of Israel because he wanted to get paid by Balak.

But the writer of the Book of Numbers clearly speaks about 'an elohim' ('god') (22:9,10, 12, 18, 20), thus exposing Balaam as a false prophet inspired by 'an elohim' and not by ELOHIM. He gives us a clear description of seers (baru's) and how they exercised their occupation as long as they were being paid for it! The 'god/godhead' (elohim) that speaks to Balaam, is not the LORD, the Living God (EL or ELOHIM) of Israel, but an 'elohim', a 'god' from the world of gods, and evil/lying spirit! Evil spirits are fallen angels<sup>82</sup> and can have certain knowledge of the spiritual world, for example, that God prohibited eating from a tree in paradise<sup>83</sup>, that the Israelites were blessed (22:12) and that Jesus is the Son of God<sup>84</sup>. The writer of the book Numbers speaks rightly of the Living God of Israel as 'God' (Hebrew: ELOHIM)(22:22), as 'the Angel of the LORD' (22:22,23,24, 25,26,27) or as 'the LORD' (22:28).

The LORD revealed himself in the Bible as follows: "God (ELOHIM) presides in the great assembly with the gods (ba-edat el) among the gods (be-qereb elohim)"<sup>85</sup>. "Who in heaven, in the assembly of the holy ones (bi-qehal qedoshim), among the sons of God (angels)(bi-bene ELOHIM) shows himself so wonderfully as the LORD (JaHWeH)"<sup>86</sup>? He revealed himself to the patriarchs as "the God (ELOHIM) of Abraham, Isaac and Jakob"<sup>87</sup> and later to Moses at the burning bush as "the LORD (JaHWeH), the God (ELOHIM) of the Hebrews"<sup>88</sup>. He said, "I am the LORD (JaHWeH) and appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God Almighty (EL Shaddai)"<sup>89</sup>. He commanded, "You shall have no other gods (elohim) before me"<sup>90</sup>! From then on "the LORD is the one and only/unique God"<sup>91</sup>! The LORD said, "Before me no god (elohim) was formed, nor will there be one after me"<sup>92</sup>. Thus so-called 'gods' (elohim) only exist in the mind/imagination and idolatry of religious people or as evil/lying spirits.

God's acts of salvation, bringing his people out of Egypt to Canaan and later his people out of exile from Babylon<sup>93</sup> shows that "the LORD (JaHWeH) is God (ELOHIM): besides him there is no other"<sup>94</sup>! "Apart from the LORD (JaHWeH) there is no God (ELOHIM)"<sup>95</sup>!

**Balaam is summoned (22:1-5).** The Israelites travelled to the plains of Moab and camped along the Jordan across from Jericho. King Balak of the Moabites feared the advancing Israelites that had already conquered the area between the Arnon and the Jabbok.

In this historical passage in the Old Testament the events happen outside Israel and Israel does not act! The purpose of the meeting between Balak and Balaam is *to reverse the initial victory of Israel and turn it into a defeat*. The curse of Balaam was intended to break the stream of blessings of the LORD in their midst. In the Old Eastern way of thinking an enemy is conquered in one of two ways: by an armed conflict or by incantation of a curse pronounced by a seer. The belief was that the power of the god/godhead of the enemy could be cancelled by means of magic spells. The god's power could be neutralized and the god could even become a victim of the enemy. Moab had already lost a war against Sihon and Sihon had already lost a war against Israel. Therefore Balak chose for the second option: to curse Israel!

Balak sought and found a seer, called 'a baru', somewhere in the Valley of the Euphrates and Tigris. He came from priests who possessed the ability 'to see'. A baru could inspect signs from the entrails of an animal slaughtered ritually, from the formation of drops of oil on water, from the position of the stars in the sky or from the form of clouds and make a prediction about what was going to happen. 'Baru's' were revered for their ability to influence the will of the gods (elohim) and force them to do something or refrain from doing something.

<sup>82</sup> Revelation 12:3-4

<sup>83</sup> Genesis 3:1-4

<sup>84</sup> Luke 8:29

<sup>85</sup> Psalm 82:1

<sup>86</sup> Psalm 89:6-7

<sup>87</sup> Exodus 3:6,13,15

<sup>88</sup> Exodus 3:18

<sup>89</sup> Exodus 6:6

<sup>90</sup> Exodus 20:3

<sup>91</sup> Deuteronomy 6:3. JaHWeH ELoHéNu JaHWeH ECHaD

<sup>92</sup> Isaiah 43:10-11

<sup>93</sup> Isaiah 45

<sup>94</sup> Deuteronomy 4:35

<sup>95</sup> Isaiah 45:5

These ‘men of oracles’ (qosem) or ‘knowers’ (jidoni) would be able to cut off the stream of blessings in Israel through their stream of curses. Balak sought a man who was inspired by these higher powers, who spoke the language of the gods, and who turned his incantations into an occupation that earned him money.

‘Balaam’ means ‘destroyer of the nation’. He lived in Pethor near ‘the River’ (the Euphrates), south of Carchemish on the main road between Mesopotamia and Syria, about 600 kilometres from Moab. But Balaam did not know “this nation that had come from Egypt and covered the face of the land” (22:5). He also did not know the LORD, the true God (ELOHIM) of Israel!

**Curses and blessings (22:6).** ‘To bless’ (berek) means to increase soul-substance, to enlarge life-power and to renew life-development. ‘To curse’ (arar en qabab) means the opposite: to release powers that break the above mentioned powers and make someone a victim of demons. These demons would stalk one, pounce on one, torment one, rob one from protection and finally kill one<sup>96</sup>.

**The first delegation (22:7-14).** In this passage the writer of the book of Numbers related how Balaam communicated with an elohim whom Balaam called ‘the LORD’, ‘the god/godhead (elohim) of Israel. If Balaam would say to the messengers (from Moab and Midian) that he did not know the god of Israel, that is, that he did not know his name or his being, and therefore would not be able to force Israel to let go of their intended attack, he would lose the wages (honour) of a fortune-teller (22:37; 24:11). Then the messengers would have turned to another seer (baru).

The only true God (ELOHIM) spoke through dreams<sup>97</sup>. Other nations believed that their ‘gods’ (elohim) dwell in darkness and also speak in the night through dreams. A god or evil spirit (an elohim, thus not the LORD, the ELOHIM of Israel) said to Balaam that he should not go with the elders of Moab to curse Israel, because Israel was ‘blessed’ (by whom is not said)(22:12). This means that Israel had received ‘the power of a blessing’ that could not be countered by the opposite ‘power of a curse’.

**The second delegation (22:15-21).** Balaam said that he was not able to go with the delegation or go beyond the command of “the LORD, my god” (JaHWeH, elohim) – he means , “beyond the command of the elohim of Israel” (2:18). Once more Balaam misled Balak to believe that he knew ‘the elohim of Israel’ and was able to make contact with him during the night. He pretended that the elohim of Israel spoke ‘to him’<sup>98</sup> (22:8) or ‘with him’<sup>99</sup> (22:19) and that he was able to negotiate with the elohim of Israel! And once more an elohim and not the LORD came to him! *This elohim gave him permission to go along with the delegation* to Balak provided that he would only say what that elohim of Israel would say to him (22:20)!

**The action of the Angel of the LORD (22:22-35).** The Hebrew text says, “The anger of god (elohim) was kindled, as if the god with whom Balaam communicated was angry. *After the elohim had given Balaam permission to go with the delegation (22:20), the anger of the elohim (22:22) would be out of place!* The Samaritan text and several Greek texts correctly say, “The anger of the LORD (JaHWeH) was kindled” (22:22) – they rightly say that the anger of the God (ELOHIM) of Israel, the only God that really exists, was kindled, because ELOHIM does not allow himself to be equated with the elohim (gods) of other nations. He resists those who oppose his plan of salvation with Israel.

The Angel of the LORD (22:22) is mentioned in Genesis 16:7; 22:11,15. In Exodus 3:2,4, Judges 2:1; 6:11,14,16 and Zechariah 3:1-2 he took the place of ‘the LORD’ himself!<sup>100</sup> He is the Protector of his people, Israel!<sup>101</sup>. Therefore he is also ‘the Angel of the covenant’<sup>102</sup>. That is why He opposed Balaam’s effort to curse Israel! The Angel of the LORD stood in the road with a drawn sword to oppose Balaam on his donkey. The donkey veered off the road into the field and Balaam beat her to get her back on the road. Then the Angel of the LORD stood in a narrow path with walls on both sides and donkey pressed close to the wall crushing Balaam’s foot. So he beat her again. Finally the LORD stood in a narrow place where there was no room to turn and the donkey laid down under Balaam. So he beat her with his staff. Only then the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey and she reprimanded Balaam. He also opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw the Angel of the LORD standing in the road with drawn sword.

‘The seer’ Balaam who claimed to know the LORD and claimed to be able to negotiate with the LORD whenever he desired, was in the beginning not able to see the Angel of the LORD! First, the donkey saw him, because the invisible LORD allowed himself to be seen by whom he wanted! Second, the LORD opened the mouth of the donkey to be able to speak “with the voice of man”<sup>103</sup>. Third, he removed the covering from Balaam’s eyes so that he could see the Angel of the LORD. It was only then that the LORD (that is, the Angel of the LORD) gave Balaam permission to go along with the delegation, provided that Balaam would only say what He, the LORD, the ELOHIM of Israel, and not the elohim, would say (22:35)! By stepping in, the Angel of the LORD made Balaam’s visit to Balak serve the LORD’s purpose.

<sup>96</sup> Proverbs 3:33; 1 Samuel 17:43; 2 Samuel 16:5

<sup>97</sup> cf. Genesis 20:3; 28:12

<sup>98</sup> dabar el

<sup>99</sup> dabar im

<sup>100</sup> The Angel of the LORD is in the Old Testament revelation the second Person of the Trinity.

<sup>101</sup> Exodus 14:19; 2 Kings 19:35

<sup>102</sup> Malachi 3:1

<sup>103</sup> 2 Peter 2:16

**Balak's attempt to induce Balaam to curse Israel by payment of a reward (22:36-41).** Balak berated Balaam for not coming sooner. Although Balaam had met, seen and heard the Angel of the LORD, the real ELOHIM, Balaam as a baru still wanted to earn money with his sorcery and fortune-telling: building altars and sacrificing animals to the gods (elohim) (cf. 24:2). Therefore we choose to translate the word 'elohim' in 22:38 and 23:3-4 as elohim and not as ELOHIM. Also Balak still understood that Balaam was speaking about the LORD, the elohim of the nation of Israel. Balak led Balaam to 'the heights of Baal' from where Balaam could see a part of the people of Israel in order to put a curse on them (22:41). If Balaam were a true prophet of the LORD, he would not have contradicted himself (22:12,20), he would not have consented to curse Israel and he would have known the true God (ELOHIM) of Israel.

**Balaam's first oracle (23:1-10). Sacrifices and conjurations failed.** In the mind of people living in the East, curses and blessings are not merely a series of words/sounds, but words loaded with power that can be cast through the air and attach themselves to the receiving person and have an evil or good effect on him. 'To curse' is not the function of a king, but of a seer (baru) who stood in close relationship to gods (elohim) and knew how to approach the gods (elohim). In the minds of Balaam and Balak the power stream of blessings coming from the elohim of Israel first had to be neutralized by appeasing that elohim with sacrifices in order to persuade him to let go of his intention to bless Israel. Only then it would be possible to pronounce a curse on Israel! That is why Balaam treated Balak as his inferior and gave him strict orders to carry out. Balak had to build seven altars and offer a bull and a ram on each altar (23:1-2). 'Seven' is the perfect number symbolising completeness of magical power. Also male sacrifices were regarded as more powerful than female sacrifices. By inspecting the liver of the animals, the seer could make certain predictions.

Balaam hoped that the LORD, the elohim of Israel, would come to meet him (23:3), even though Balaam did not know the LORD and could not distinguish between an elohim or ELOHIM! Naturally, Balaam had to use the name 'LORD' (JaHWeH) in his cursing (23:3), but Balaam was still a false prophet of the gods (of the nations, spirits, demons)(elohim) and not a true prophet of the LORD (JaHWeH), the God (ELOHIM) of Israel.

By changing one Hebrew letter in the sentence "he went off to a barren height", the sentence should be translated to "he went off to his exorcisms/conjurations (divinations, sorcery, witchcraft)" (NIV 24:1)<sup>104</sup>. The word is a summary of all kinds of practices used to exercise influence on the will of the godhead (elohim) of a nation. First the god (elohim) met Balaam (23:4) and Balaam told the elohim that he had prepared seven altars and had sacrificed a bull and a ram on each.

But before the elohim could tell Balaam how to act towards Israel, the LORD (JaHWeH), the real God (ELOHIM) of Israel, intervened and put the message consisting Numbers 23:9-10a in Balaam's mouth (23:5; cf. 22:35)! Balaam believed that the words were from the elohim of Israel (22:38), but in reality they were the words of the LORD, the real God (ELOHIM) of Israel (22:35)!

A 'saying/proverb' (mashal) is usually in the form of a poem containing a deeper meaning or a hidden allusion/insinuation. It stimulates one to think. The oracles of the Prophets and Psalms in the Bible are not called a 'mashal'. Despite the words in Numbers 24:2, "the Spirit of God came upon him", Balaam must not be put on one line together with the prophets of the Bible! The prophecy of Balaam must rather be compared to the prophecy of the high priest Caiaphas<sup>105</sup>.

The curse had to be directed against Israel. Balaam did not say that he did not want to curse Israel, (he still wanted to earn money), but rather that *he could not curse Israel*, because in order to pronounce a curse the god (elohim) first had to reveal that curse (22:38). "How can I curse those whom god (elohim) has not cursed (first)? How can I denounce those whom the LORD (JaHWeH), the godhead of Israel, has not denounced (first)" (23:8)?

Balaam began to realise that he was forced to say a blessing, something different than the curse he wanted to say! The words in Numbers 23:9-10a were inspired by God the, ELOHIM of Israel. Balaam thought he received the words from the elohim of Israel, but in reality he received the words from the ELOHIM of Israel. So, instead of pronouncing a curse from the elohim on Israel, Balaam pronounced a blessing from ELOHIM on Israel. The actual blessing consists of verse 9-10a. Israel would be a blessed nation, live apart (safe, unhindered) and would not consider itself to be one of the (heathen) nations (23:9). The Israelites would be as numerous as the dust of the earth (23:10a)<sup>106</sup>, as the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore<sup>107</sup>, uncountable!

Balaam tried to keep the honour of a baru high by saying to Balak that he had pronounced exactly what the elohim (the godhead of Israel) had put into his mouth to say (23:11-12).

**Balaam's second oracle (23:11-26). God's word overruled the oracles of gods.** Balak asked Balaam "to come with him to another place." He took Balaam to a second vantage point in the hope that Balaam would curse Israel from there. Again Balak had to build seven altars and sacrifice a bull and ram on each. Balaam ordered Balak to remain standing at the altars, while he would meet the elohim of Israel further away (23:15). A second time the LORD (JaHWeH), the God (ELOHIM) of Israel (the reality), stepped in and put a new message consisting of Numbers 23:19-24 into Balaam's mouth (23:16). Balak asked what the LORD, the elohim of Israel (the notion of Balak), had said (23:17).

<sup>104</sup> cf. 2 Kings 9:22; Isaiah 47:9,12

<sup>105</sup> John 11:49-53; 18:14

<sup>106</sup> Genesis 13:16; 28:14

<sup>107</sup> Genesis 22:17

The words in Numbers 23:19-24 were also inspired by God, the ELOHIM of Israel. By saying, “Arise and listen” Balaam prepared Balak that he as a baru was going to speak the word of the elohim. When an elohim spoke, the people had to stand up. Balak was a polytheist who believed that the gods (elohim) developed from the dust (elements of the ground) and were only gradually different than people. Balaam said, “God (elohim) is not a man and does not change his mind”, whereas people are liars and fickle (changeable)” (23:19). As a baru Balaam said this about the elohim of Israel. *Balak should not doubt his oracle!* Nevertheless, because these words were inspired by the real God (ELOHIM) of Israel, these words are true in a biblical sense. God (ELOHIM) is not a man (23:19)<sup>108</sup>. God (ELOHIM) never lies<sup>109</sup>!

Balaam said, “I received a command to bless what the godhead (the elohim) of Israel blessed and I cannot change it” (23:20)! The actual blessing consists of verse 21-24. The elohim and fortune is with Israel (23:21). He brought Israel out of Egypt and Israel had the strength of a wild ox (23:22). Regardless what Balaam would have Balak believe, “there is no sorcery/curse or divination against Israel” (23:23)! There are no secret ways by which the future can be disclosed, or secret methods by which one could influence the will of the gods (elohim) to harm or do good to others<sup>110</sup>! Israel is like a lion that breaks all opposition (23:24). *Balak should choose not to oppose Israel!* Then Balak pleaded with Balaam, “If you do not want to curse Israel, also do not bless it” (23:25).

**Balaam's third oracle (23:27 - 24:13).** Balak persisted and took Balaam to a third vantage point. Once again Balak had to build seven altars and sacrifice animals (23:27-30). But this time Balaam did not resort to sorcery (the conjurations, divinations) of a baru (cf. 24:2). He had said before that he could only say what *the godhead (elohim)* put in his mouth (22:38). Now he said that he must do whatever the LORD (the elohim of Israel) says (23:26). Balaam probably began to realise that his source of inspiration is another than the elohim he expected. But with this answer Balaam still tried to keep his honour as a baru high (23:12). He stopped trying to exercise influence through his sorcery, but submitted to the will of *the LORD, the elohim of Israel*, whom he (Balaam) nevertheless did not know as ELOHIM. He saw that it pleased the LORD, the elohim of Israel, to bless and not to curse Israel.

Then the Spirit of the LORD, the ELOHIM of Israel intervened and came upon Balaam (24:2) just as later on Samson<sup>111</sup> and on Saul<sup>112</sup>, but in differentiation to the prophets of Israel, Balaam fell prostrate into a trance with his eyes open when he received this revelation. Balaam now believed that he received this revelation from a higher power. He uttered an ‘oracle’ (Hebrew: ne’um)(meaning: what was whispered or revealed<sup>113</sup>)(24:3) from the godhead (elohim) and saw a vision from the almighty or uppergod (shaddai) (24:4). Already before 1200 B.C. polytheism was surpassed by the belief in the existence of a higher power, called ‘the lord of the gods’ or ‘the almighty’ (eljon). In Babylonia, Syria and even among the Amorites this higher power was called ‘the uppergod’ (shaddoe or shaddoe raboe) (the high mountain). Balaam certainly did not have an Israelite (biblical) view of God (ELOHIM)! In typical eastern fashion he believed that a strong nation must have a strong god (elohim) and regarded the elohim of Israel as very powerful, an almighty.

What Balaam said in 24:5-9 was inspired by the Spirit of God (ELOHIM). He pictured Israel as a nation that expressed its blessing (the life power of the godhead) in material possessions, in political and military power. “Israel would live in tents and spread out like gardens beside a river (24:5-7) ... The elohim of Israel brought the Israelites out of Egypt. The Israelites devour *hostile nations*, break bones in pieces and pierce them with their arrows” (24:6-8). He concluded his oracle/revelation with the wish (directed at Israel), “May those who bless you (Israel), be blessed and those that curse you (Israel) be cursed” (24:9)!

Balak was very angry that Balaam did not curse Israel, but blessed Israel three times (24:10)! Therefore Balak dismissed Balaam without reward for his oracles and said that “the LORD (the elohim of Israel) has kept Balaam from being rewarded (24:11). Balaam replied, “Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything of my own accord, good or bad, to go beyond the command of the LORD, the elohim of Israel – I must say only what the LORD, the elohim of Israel, says” (24:13).

**Balaam's fourth oracle (24:14-19).** When Balak sent Balaam away empty-handed, Balaam as a baru uttered a final oracle about what Israel was going to do (to Balak’s people, Moab) in the days to come (24:14). He spoke like a baru (seer, fortune-teller) and said that he heard the words of elohim, possessed knowledge from the most high god (eljon), saw a vision from the almighty (shaddai) and fell into a trance with eyes wide open (24:16).

What Balaam said in 24:17-19 was inspired by God (ELOHIM). He spoke about Israel, not as they were then encamped at the Jordan (“not now and not near”), but as they would be in the future. Balaam saw in a trance or visionary state ‘a star’, a royal person coming from Israel, that would conquer and crush Moab and Edom while Israel would grow strong! This is a reference to king David<sup>114</sup>, but later became a messianic prophecy, a reference to Jesus Christ when Balaam’s prophecy was seen in the light of later revelations from God<sup>115</sup>.

<sup>108</sup> Isaiah 31:3; Hosea 11:9

<sup>109</sup> Hosea 11:9; 1 Samuel 15:29; Malachi 3:6; Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18

<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, God (ELOHIM) abhors the detestable practices of the nations (Deuteronomy 18:9-13)

<sup>111</sup> Judges 14:6,19

<sup>112</sup> 1 Samuel 10:6

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Isaiah 8:19

<sup>114</sup> 2 Samuel 8:2,11-14

<sup>115</sup> cf. Genesis 49:10

These four oracles are in rhythmic form, the form in which someone falling in a trance was expected to speak and which would impress ancient people most.

- The first oracle (23:7-10). It would be impossible to curse Israel ( a blessed people).
- The second oracle (23:18b-24). It would be in vain to curse Israel with sorcery.
- The third oracle (24:3b-9). Israel would spread out, but the heathen nations would be vanquished.
- The fourth oracle (24:15-19). The coming king David (and finally the Messiah) would come from Israel.

Balak was not interested in predictions, but wanted Israel to be cursed. The curse would separate the god of Israel from Israel, weaken Israel and give Balak the opportunity to attack Israel. But when the Angel of the LORD intervened, Balak heard exactly the opposite he wished.

Balaam missed his reward for his oracles. He also missed the peace God gives to someone serving the LORD (ELOHIM) wholeheartedly. Balaam was a heathen prophet or fortune-teller. He was double-minded, because he knew that the LORD (the higher power, the almighty of Israel, whom he did not know) had taken him into his service, but yet he wanted to gain material profit from the event.

In the end, “the Israelites put Balaam son of Beor, the magician/sorcerer” (qoses), to the sword<sup>116</sup>!

**Three later additions of oracles about Israel's encounter with the nations (24:20-25).** These oracles have nothing to do with Moab or Israel. They found a place here in the Book of Numbers because they are about nations that later had something to do with Israel. Its possibly about the migration of Indo-Germanic tribes from the north that stirred up the Middle East, overran Greece conquered Crete and Libya, brought the kingdom of the Hittites in Asia Minor to an end and overran Syria. Thus the cry, “Ah, who can live when god (el) does this?” or “A people will gather from the north”(24:23)(the footnote).

### **NUMBERS 25:1-18 ISRAEL'S SEXUAL AND SPIRITUAL IMMORALITY WITH MOAB**

“The men of Israel began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their elohim (Baal of Peor, meaning: ‘to open wide’) and his consort: Baalat (Astarte/Asjera). Both deities had male and female prostitutes who sold their bodies to people on the ‘heights’<sup>117</sup>.

The Midianites lived in northern part of the peninsula of Sinai and the southern part of East Jordan. An Israelite man brought a Midianite women into his tent. A round number of 24000 (24 elef)(cf. chapter 1) died in a plague that followed. When the priest Phinehas made atonement by driving a spear through them, the plague stopped. The tribal leaders who represented the guilty also received the death sentence and were impaled. According to Assyrian inscriptions, they were placed belly down on pointed poles in public until their pierced bodies slid down along the pole.

### **NUMBERS 26:1-51 THE SECOND CENSUS**

A second census was taken of men of twenty years and older who were able to serve in the army (26:2). The census was necessary for determining the size of land in Canaan that would be allotted to each tribe. The final figure of the first and second census was about the same: 603,550 (chapter 1) and 601,730 (chapter 26)<sup>118</sup>. The difference was 1820: an increase of 59,200 and decrease of 61,020<sup>119</sup>. There was no increase in the number of Israelites during the 40 year journey through the desert! However the numbers of the separate tribes showed greater differences: Manasseh increased 63%, Benjamin 29%, Issachar 18%, Zebulun 5%, Dan 3%, Judah 2½ %. Simeon decreased 63%, Ephraim 20%, Naphtali 15%, Gad 12%, Reuben 6%. The census took place before the splitting of Manasseh was completed. In east Manasseh Aramaic influence increased and the sons of Gilead were counted together with Manasseh.

### **NUMBERS 26:52-56 THE FUTURE DISTRIBUTION OF THE LAND BY LOT**

“The land was distributed by lot” (26:55).

- The lot determined which tribes received land in the north, south, east and west.
- The lot determined which part in for example the south a tribe received for example in the south.
- The number of people determined the size of the land assigned.
- The lot determined the piece of land to each clan.

In ancient days, the decision of God was definite. No-one could oppose it and no-one could appeal it in a higher court. “The lot is cast into the lap, but the disposing thereof is from the LORD<sup>120</sup>”.

### **NUMBERS 26:57-65 THE LEVITES ARE COUNTED SEPARATELY**

The reason for the census, however, changed. In chapter 1 the Levites were counted separately because they were already serving in the tabernacle. Now in chapter 26 the Levites were counted separately because they were not included in receiving a part of the land. Only Joshua and Caleb were present at both censuses (see 14:28-32).

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<sup>116</sup> Joshua 13:22

<sup>117</sup> Hosea 4:13; 9:10

<sup>118</sup> 603 clans/families and 550 individuals and 601 clans/families and 730 individuals

<sup>119</sup> 59 clans/families and 200 individuals and 61 clans/families and 20 individuals

<sup>120</sup> Proverbs 16:33

## **NUMBERS 27:1-11      WHEN DAUGHTERS MAY INHERIT LAND**

The position of women, especially unmarried daughters in Israel, was different in the eastern world. In the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. a woman was the complete equal of a man in Babylonia. Her right to inherit was fixed<sup>121</sup>. At that time she was not regarded to be inferior and she had legal rights (chapter 30).

But now in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. the women had lost their right to inherit<sup>122</sup>. The body of judges in Israel consisted of Moses, the high priest, the royals and the gathering of the community at the temple. The view was that justice descended from God via the body of judges pronouncing justice. The decision was thus an oracle of God!

‘One’s name’ was part of one’s existence. The name of someone without a son passed away. His remembrance goes lost<sup>123</sup>, because he stopped being an owner of land.

The father, Zelophehad, died due to his own sin, but his descendants should not be punished for that (14:29-30)<sup>124</sup>. There was no specific reason to remove his name. Land should not be taken from a clan (family) that was the original owner. Therefore the daughters of Zelophehad claimed their property. Removing the right to inherit from women would lead to a few large landowners. But giving women the right to inherit land would oppose the current practice. God’s decision went in favour of the daughters. During the partition of the land, daughters may participate and become landowners. When one of these daughters marry, the husband must join her clan instead of the current practice (chapter 36). When someone died without children, the land must remain the property of the clan (family)<sup>125</sup>.

## **NUMBERS 27:12-17      THE DEATH OF MOSES IS AT HAND**

Moses is ordered twice to climb a mountain in the Abarim range in order to die there (27:12-14)<sup>126</sup>, probably because the account in Numbers was derived from another document than Deuteronomy. The locality is on the high plain close to the NE point of the Dead Sea in Moab. Pisgah (21:20) and Nebo<sup>127</sup>, the mountain where Moses died, are on that range. From one of these mountaintops (1200 m) one could see the whole of Canaan from Hebron to Galilee with mount Hermon in the far distance (27:12). There Moses “was gathered to his people”, those that had died before him<sup>128</sup>.

## **NUMBERS 27:18-23      JOSHUA TO SUCCEED MOSES**

Joshua was “a man in whom the Spirit of the LORD was”, that is, he possessed skills and wisdom given by God to attain God’s purposes<sup>129</sup>. He was commissioned as leader by the laying on of hands (27:23). Joshua received only a share of Moses’ authority (27:20). While Moses received instructions verbally from the LORD (9:8)<sup>130</sup>, Joshua received instructions via the high priest who used the Urim en Tummim<sup>131</sup> in order to determine the will of the LORD. Nevertheless the LORD also spoke to him<sup>132</sup>.

## **NUMBERS 28:1 – 30:16      NEW REGULATIONS ABOUT LIVING IN CANAAN**

**Sacrifices** had to be offered “at the appointed times”. They were regarded as “food and drink”, not for a hungry and thirsty god, but as part of the covenant in the ceremonial law. They were “an aroma pleasing to the LORD” or better, “an aroma that satisfied/stilled his wrath”. The words used were remnants of ancient language of priests who worshipped other gods and were convinced that “gods really ate and drank”<sup>133</sup> “in the time when the fathers of Abraham and Nahor lived beyond the River (Euphrates)”<sup>134</sup>. There were daily sacrifices (in the morning and in the evening) (28:1-8), sacrifices on the sabbath (28:9-10) and on the New Moon (28:11-15).

**The Passover** (28:16-25) must be celebrated on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month (March/April) and **the Feast of Unleavened Bread** from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month.

**The Day of First fruits** (28:26-31) was called **the Feast of the Harvest**<sup>135</sup>, **the Feast of Weeks**<sup>136</sup> and **Pentecost**<sup>137</sup> and is the official end of the harvest (half April to half June), a thanksgiving for the harvest.

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<sup>121</sup> Job 42:15

<sup>122</sup> Deuteronomy 21:15f; 25:5

<sup>123</sup> Jeremiah 11:19

<sup>124</sup> Deuteronomy 24:16

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Ruth 4:5

<sup>126</sup> Deuteronomy 32:48-52

<sup>127</sup> Deuteronomy 32:49; 34:1

<sup>128</sup> Genesis 25:8; 35:29; 49:33; Deuteronomy 32:50

<sup>129</sup> Deuteronomy 34:9

<sup>130</sup> Exodus 25:22

<sup>131</sup> Exodus 28:30

<sup>132</sup> Joshua 1:1; 3:7, etc.

<sup>133</sup> Judges 9:13

<sup>134</sup> Joshua 24:2

<sup>135</sup> Exodus 23:16

<sup>136</sup> Exodus 34:22

<sup>137</sup> Acts 2:1

The number '7' (29:1-6) is an old eastern number of perfection and acquired great significance in Israel:

- Every 7<sup>th</sup> day was **Sabbath**.
- The 7<sup>th</sup> month celebrated the three great festivals: 1) **the Feast of Trumpets**<sup>138</sup>, **New Year's Day** (rosh ha-shana), when the ramshorn (sjofar) was blown<sup>139</sup>; 2) **the Day of Atonement**<sup>140</sup> when people abstained from unrighteousness and food; 3) **the Feast of Tabernacles** when the ingathering of the harvest on the threshing floor and winepress was celebrated<sup>141</sup>.
- The 7<sup>th</sup> year was **the Sabbath Year**<sup>142</sup> when the land is to have a rest (no ploughing, no sowing, no harvesting, no pruning, etc.).
- The 50<sup>th</sup> year after seven sabbaths of years was **the Year of Jubilee**<sup>143</sup> when liberty was proclaimed throughout the land to all its inhabitants and everyone should return to his family property and clan.

**New laws with regard to vows** (30:1-16). In a vow a person takes a particular responsibility on himself in order to influence God's action. This was often misused and even neglected in Israel. Men must keep their vows. Men may prohibit the thoughtless vow of a woman!

#### **NUMBERS 31:1-54 ISRAEL'S VENGEANCE ON MIDIANITES**

In ancient eastern thinking and also in Israel the struggle between two nations was in reality a struggle between their gods. That is why 'war' was regarded as a cultic even religious act and were called 'the wars of the LORD'. "The Urim and Thummim" were taken along in the battle to counsel the LORD<sup>144</sup>. Cf. taking along the ark in battle<sup>145</sup>. The 'ban' was thus a religious act: they killed the kings and all men, captured (enslaved) all the women and children, plundered all their herds, flocks and goods, and burned all their towns as well as their camps (31:7-10). The war was "to carry out the LORD's vengeance on the Midianites" (31:2) for the trap they had set at the advice of Balaam to turn the Israelites away from the LORD (31:16)!

After a campaign, the returning army had to be purified/cleansed (31:13-24) and the spoils had to be divided according to rules (31:25-47). The numbers in 'thousands' (elef) were probably not literally '1000's! Later the five kings of the Midianites together with the cities of the Amorites were conquered and the false prophet Balaam was killed<sup>146</sup>. All weapons and tools had to be purified by fire and washed in the water of purification, because 'sin' was regarded as something concrete (like dust cleaving onto things) that had to be burned off and washed off (19:9)!

The spoils (31:25-54) were divided as follows: the first half went to the soldiers, who had to pay tax to the priests. The second half went to the community, who had to pay a larger tax to the Levites (because they were greater in number). A number of women became temple servants<sup>147</sup> and had to perform restoration and other slave duties at the sanctuary (31:41).

#### **NUMBERS 32:1-15 DIVISION OF EAST JORDAN LAND**

After king Sihon refused Israel to pass through his land (chapter 21), the Israelites were forced to fight their way towards the Jordan. They also had to fight against king Og of Basan. Two tribes, Gad and Reuben requested Moses that they might stay in the land east of the Jordan, but the LORD had only promised the land west of the Jordan to Israel (Canaan). A 20 kilometre rift valley with steep sides of 1000-1400 metres separated these two lands. It is notable that Moses did not consult the LORD, but negotiated directly with these two (Transjordan) tribes (32:6-15)! Moses gave the whole land of Sihon of the Amorites and Og of Bashan (north of the Jabbok, the best part) together with its cities to Gad and the other part (south of the Jabbok) to Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh (32:33). Reuben finally dissolved into Gad just as Simeon into Judah (32:34-38). This reflected later historical situations, but the story of Reuben and Gad (32:39-42) were added in the Book of Numbers to conclude the settlement in the East Jordan.

Geographical notions in the Bible are very elastic. 'Gilead' consisted of the whole East Jordan area up to Dan<sup>148</sup>; or exclusively the part occupied by Israel<sup>149</sup>; or the area next to Bashan<sup>150</sup>; or the limited area divided by the Jabbok in a northern part of Gilead<sup>151</sup> and a southern part of Gilead<sup>152</sup>.

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<sup>138</sup> Leviticus 23:23-25

<sup>139</sup> From the time of the Seleucids the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month became New Year's Day.

<sup>140</sup> Leviticus 23:26-32

<sup>141</sup> Leviticus 23:33-44

<sup>142</sup> Leviticus 25:1-3

<sup>143</sup> Leviticus 5:8-13

<sup>144</sup> 1 Samuel 23:2

<sup>145</sup> 1 Samuel 14:18

<sup>146</sup> Joshua 13:21-22

<sup>147</sup> 1 Kings 9:2; Ezra 2:43; Nehemiah 3:26

<sup>148</sup> Deuteronomy 34:1; 1 Kings 4:19

<sup>149</sup> Joshua 22:1; Judges 10:8

<sup>150</sup> Deuteronomy 3:10

<sup>151</sup> Deuteronomy 3:3; Joshua 12:5

<sup>152</sup> Deuteronomy 31:27

## **NUMBERS 33:1-44      STAGES IN ISRAEL'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE DESERT**

If we exclude the beginning point (Rameses in Egypt) and the end point (the plains of Moab) we arrive at 40 names, which probably have something to do with the 40 years wandering through the desert (32:13). They may be divided into three groups:

- from Rameses to the desert of Sinai – 11 stages (vs 5-15)
- from Sinai to Kadesh - 21 stages (vs 16-36)
- from Kadesh to the plains of Moab - 9 stages (vs 37-49)

The first 11 stages must be divided across the first year. The final 9 stages must be divided across the final year. The remaining 21 stages took place over 39 years. All stages are named in the list. Between Sinai and Ezion Geber (about 140 km) there were 21 stages. But between Ezion Geber and Kadesh (about 120 km) no names of stages are mentioned. We conclude that somehow verses 36b-41a got displaced and really belong between verse 30a and 30b.

Numbers 33:4 “The LORD had brought judgement on their gods” is a quotation from Exodus 12:12b and echoed eastern thought that the war between nations was a war between their gods. The recorder of Numbers added a couple of historical facts, including the remark about Aaron’s death on Mount Hor (33:38). The end parts of verses 6,8,9 and 14 are probably even later additions.

## **NUMBERS 33:50-56      CANAAN'S INHABITANTS MUST BE DRIVEN OUT**

A new chapter in the history of Canaan is the invasion of Canaan by Israel (1407 B.C.). Each tribe of Israel received its assigned portion of the land by lottery.

- **The LORD’s command:** “When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you, Destroy all their (immoral) carved images and their cast idols and demolish all their high places (religious places). Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. Distribute the land by lot. According to your clans ... and ancestral tribes” (33:51-54)!
- **The LORD’s warning:** “But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live” (33:55).
- **The LORD’s damning judgement:** “And then I will do to you (Israel) what I plan to do to them (the heathen nations)”, namely, send them out of the land into exile”(33:56).

Note the warning of Joshua: “If you (Israelites) turn away and ally yourselves with the survivors of these (godless, unholy and wicked) nations that remain among you and if you intermarry with them, and associate with them. Then you may be sure that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you. Instead, they will become snares and traps for you, whips on your backs and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land, which the LORD your God has given you”<sup>153</sup>

## **NUMBERS 34:1-12      THE BOUNDARIES OF CANAAN**

God intended the land of Israel (Canaan) to be limited to the area west of the River Jordan. As in Ezekiel 47:15-20 a rectangular area was assigned for occupation by Israel.

- **The southern border**<sup>154</sup> stretched from the southern end of the Dead Sea across the Scorpion Pass in SW direction to Kadesh Barnea and then NW direction to the River of Egypt.
- **The northern border** stretched from just north of Tyre eastward to southern flank of Mount Hermon.
- **The eastern border** stretched from the source of the River Jordan southward along eastern border of the Sea of Kinnereth (Galilee) and along the Jordan River to the Dead Sea.
- **The western border.** The beach of the Mediterranean Sea was never a part of Israel! Only in 144 B.C. Simon the Maccabee conquered Joppa. In the days of Israel, the Philistines and Phoenicians were in possession of the coastal plains. After the return from exile in Babylon, the returnees had to be satisfied with only the southern part of Canaan.

## **NUMBERS 34:13-29      THE DIVISION OF THE LAND**

The order of the names of the tribes are arranged from the south to the north, which proves that these verses were only recorded after the complete occupation of Canaan. The LORD ordered that the land of Israel be given to the 9½ tribes of Israel (34:13), because Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had already ‘received (in the sense of ‘wrongfully seized by force’)(laqach)’ (34:14) certain portions east of the Jordan. Later they were conquered by the Moabites, Ammonites and Arameans.

## **NUMBERS 35:1-8      THE CITIES OF THE LEVITES**

The tribes had to give up 48 towns together with their pasturelands to the Levites. This was badly executed, because the bigger tribes gave less than the smaller tribes. During the reign of king David the Levites lived in certain cities<sup>155</sup>, but during the reign of Jeroboam many Levites left the northern kingdom of Ephraim and moved to the southern kingdom of Judah.

<sup>153</sup> Joshua 23:12-13!

<sup>154</sup> Joshua 15:1-4; Ezekiel 47:19

<sup>155</sup> 1 Chronicles 13:2

‘The avenger of blood’ (go’el ha-dam) is not a remnant of barbarism. He was ‘a close relative of the deceased person and had a definite responsibility’. For example:

- He was the closest relative who had the responsibility to marry a childless widow in order to produce an heir (the kinsman-redeemer)<sup>156</sup>.
- He was the closest relative to whom restitution for some wrong to the deceased person had to be made (5:8). He was the close relative who received property from a deceased person that had been stolen, robbed, not returned or lost. If there was no ‘go’el’, it had to be given to the priest<sup>157</sup>.
- He was the closest relative that in the Year of Jubilee had to buy back family land that had been sold by a poor relative during his life<sup>158</sup> or after his death<sup>159</sup>.
- He was the closest relative that in the Year of Jubilee had to buy back a relative that had been sold into slavery<sup>160</sup>.
- He was the restorer of families. When someone was murdered, that family suffered ‘a loss of blood’, that is, a reduction of life and the balance had to be restored again. His responsibility was not to be an avenger of a crime, but rather a restorer of the balance of life in his family”!

‘The law of retaliation’<sup>161</sup> was not the same as the classical ‘blood avenger’ (in the Middle East), who blindly executed revenge: “who killed a man for wounding/injuring him”<sup>162</sup>. Such an avenger believed in ‘a law of blind revenge’. The law written in Exodus 21:23-25; Leviticus 24:19; Deuteronomy 19:12; 24:16: “a life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise” means something different! It is to administer a punishment in complete accordance with the transgression and to restore the balance in relationships in the right way.

When nations still lived in tribes, the avenger of blood had to restore the balance in the family and bring peace. He must normalize the relationships between the tribes. Later, when nations lived according to the law of a state, e.g. according to the lawbook of Hammurabi (1780 B.C. in Babylon) it does not prove that the laws in Babylon were higher and more moral than those in Israel, but rather that Babylon became a constitutional state before Israel (during the monarchy). In a constitutional state the government is responsible to punish the guilty<sup>163</sup>! In the oldest book of laws in Israel<sup>164</sup> ‘murder’ is differentiated from ‘manslaughter (homicide)’. In the case of manslaughter, the law of retaliation (the avenging of blood) may not be followed! The unintentional killer may find protection at a place later designated<sup>165</sup>. However, a deliberate murderer must receive the death sentence.

The six cities of refuge (asylum) to which the manslayer may flee<sup>166</sup> were for Israelites and also for aliens (ger) and strangers (tosheb)(35:15). ‘The alien’ was a person who took part in the tribal life of Israel via marriage. ‘The stranger’ is a temporary resident in Israel. The question about guilt or innocence is dependent on the intention of the killer. The instrument used to kill shows whether the death was intentional or not. ‘The go’el’ had to be the closest relative of the dead person.

The murderer (the guilty person) must be put to death, because “the blood (of the innocent murdered person) calls out to the LORD from the ground” (35:33)<sup>167</sup>. The curse brought about by the killer must be removed from Israel”. The killer must stand trial before the assembly (eda)(35:12) (preferably at the place of the crime, because there the voice of the blood in the ground is heard); and only on the testimony of at least two people (35:30). If the killer was guilty, the assembly must hand him over to the avenger to be killed<sup>168</sup>. But if the killer is innocent (because he did not kill the person deliberately), the assembly should send him to a city of refuge (asylum city), where he must remain until the death of the high priest, because the avenger may still take action. If the killer leaves the city of refuge, the avenger may kill him without incurring guilt! The avenger is not guilty and the blood of the murdered person will not call for revenge from the ground.

The trial may not be based on only one witness (35:30). A bribe may not be given or accepted to buy the freedom of the killer. In Israel atonement for murder can only be done by giving the death sentence to the murderer (35:33). “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed”<sup>169</sup>. But after the establishing of the constitutional state of Israel the law of avenging blood was abrogated<sup>170</sup>. The death sentence may only be executed by the state<sup>171</sup>!

<sup>156</sup> Ruth 3:13

<sup>157</sup> Leviticus 6:1-7

<sup>158</sup> Leviticus 25:25

<sup>159</sup> Jeremiah 32:7f

<sup>160</sup> Leviticus 25:48

<sup>161</sup> Exodus 21:12-37; Deuteronomy 19:1-13

<sup>162</sup> Genesis 4:23

<sup>163</sup> Romans 13:4

<sup>164</sup> Exodus 20:1-23:33

<sup>165</sup> Exodus 21:13

<sup>166</sup> Joshua 21:15,21,32,36

<sup>167</sup> Genesis 4:10

<sup>168</sup> Deuteronomy 19:12-13

<sup>169</sup> Genesis 9:6

<sup>170</sup> Exodus 20:13

<sup>171</sup> Romans 13:4

**NUMBERS 36:1-13****MARRIAGE PROHIBITION OUTSIDE THE TRIBE**

When a father died without leaving behind sons, the daughters became heirs. Because the land had to remain inside the clan, men from others tribes/clans had to join the clan of the wife. Every clan/tribe had to remain a geographic unity.