

Numbers

This book gives more details about the Israelites' journey through the desert, with special attention to census and legal details.

Chapters 1 – 5

A census was taken of all the men aged twenty years and above.

The twelve tribes were told to pitch their tents all around the Sacred Tent site.

Each time they moved to a new place and pitched their tents, they would do so in the place allocated to each tribe.

Dear God, may our homes never be too far from a church

Chapter 6

God said to Moses and Aaron:

"This is how you are to bless the people. Say to them:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

May the Lord let his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

May the Lord uncover his face to you and bring you peace."

Dear God, please bless everyone in the world

Chapters 7, 8

When Moses went into the Tent of Meeting
to speak with God,
Moses heard God's voice.

Specially dedicated to God were the Levites.
They were responsible for the worship ministry in the Tent.

They served this ministry from when they were
twenty five years old until they were fifty years old.

Dear God, please bless all pastors and ministers

Chapter 9

Whenever the Israelites pitched camp
the Cloud of God's presence covered the Sacred Tent.

From nightfall until morning,
the Cloud took the appearance of fire.

Whenever the Cloud lifted above the Tent,
the Israelites broke camp.

Wherever the Cloud stopped,
there the Israelites pitched camp.

Sometimes the Cloud stayed in one place
for one day, sometimes for a month, sometimes a year.

However long the Cloud stayed above the Tent the Israelites remained in camp.

In this way they pitched camp and broke camp at the Lord's command.

The Cloud in Christian tradition is understood to be God the Holy Spirit, so we can pray:
Dear Holy Spirit, please lead me and guide me just as you guided the Israelites through the desert

Chapter 10

The Israelites made two silver trumpets.

When both trumpets sounded, the whole community would go to where Moses was.

When only one trumpet sounded, only the leaders would assemble.

The trumpets were also used on special feast days, to remind the people to praise God.

Dear God, when we hear trumpets being used in an orchestra or band, may their sound remind us of you

Chapter 11

Some of the Israelites started complaining about not having meat to eat, only manna.

So God arranged for quails to land near the camp and be easily caught for food.

About this time Moses selected seventy men to help him care for the people.

God blessed the seventy men and they began to prophesy.

Moses said "I wish the whole people of God could be prophets, and God would give his Spirit to them all."

Dear God, please pour out your Holy Spirit
on the whole human family

Chapter 12

Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron, started complaining against Moses.

So God called Moses, Aaron and Miriam to the Sacred Tent.

God said: "Moses is at home in my house and I speak with him face to face.

You were wrong to speak against my servant Moses."

When God finished speaking Miriam had become a leper.

Moses pleaded with God for Miriam.

Miriam was exiled from the camp for seven days and then the leprosy left her.

Dear God, please help me
not to complain so much about other people

Chapters 13, 14

Moses sent some men to reconnoitre the land of Canaan.

After some weeks the men returned
and reported that the land was fertile and rich.

But most of the men also said that the towns of Canaan
were too well fortified for the Israelites to capture.
They said that the Canaanites were too strong for the Israelites.

Only Caleb and Joshua had the trust in God and courage
to do battle with the Canaanites.

Just as the rest of the people were thinking of stoning Joshua
and Caleb, the glory of God appeared at the Sacred Tent.

God then said that all the men aged twenty and over
who had refused to go to Canaan
would indeed never see Canaan :
they would keep on traveling in the desert until they died.

Canaan would not be entered by the Israelites
until all the men aged twenty and over had died,
excepting Caleb and Joshua.

The reconnoitre men who inspired the rebellion
were all struck dead that day.

Dear God, please give me more courage
to face the trials of life,
and don't let me ever discourage other people

Chapter 16

Another rebellion broke out when Korah and his group of 250 men rebelled against Moses and Aaron.

This group said “You take too much on yourselves. The whole community is consecrated. How can you say you are more important than the community?”

The next morning this group and other rebels were punished by God: the ground where the Korah group were standing split open and they disappeared into the hole.

The other rebels died when a fire came down from heaven and consumed them.

Dear God, please help people not to rebel against you

Chapter 17

Once again the people complained against Moses and Aaron.

This time through Moses God told the leaders of the 11 tribes to bring 11 branches and plant them with Aaron’s branch.

The next day Aaron’s branch had blossomed and produced fruit.

Aaron’s branch then became a sign to the people that they should stop complaining.

Dear God, please help me not to complain so much

Chapter 18

God's words to Aaron:

"You and your sons will be priests.

You will lead the liturgy

and carry out the duties of your priesthood.

You will have no portion of the land as your own.

I myself will be your portion.

When your sons receive the people's tithes,

they must give you for a special offering a tithe of the tithes."

Dear God, please help priests to be good and not greedy

Chapter 19

God's words to Moses:

"Burn a red heifer and mix its ashes with water

to make holy water

for special blessings in cases of uncleanness."

Dear God, thank you for holy water.

May it protect and cleanse us

Chapter 20

The Israelites arrived at Kadesh in the desert of Zin.

They had no water,

and complained bitterly to Moses and Aaron.

Moses and Aaron pleaded with God for help.

God told Moses to hit a rock with a branch

and in this way order the rock to give water.

Water did in fact flow when Moses hit the rock,

but through lack of faith Moses hit it twice.

So God said to Moses and Aaron:
"Because you did not fully trust me,
therefore you will not lead the people
to the promised land."

When the Israelites moved on from Kadesh,
they asked the Edomites for permission
to go through their land.

But the Edomites refused this request.

Later, on Mount Hor, Aaron died
and was succeeded as High Priest by his son Eleazar.

Dear God, please increase our trust in you

Chapter 21

In order to avoid the land of Edom,
the Israelites headed towards the coastline.

But the people again criticized God and Moses.

So God sent snakes among the people
and many people died.

The people then said to Moses

"We have sinned; please pray for us to save us."

Moses prayed for them, and God heard his prayer.

God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole.

Anyone bitten by a snake

could then look at the bronze snake and live.

Jesus' words (John 3.13):

"The Son of Man must be lifted up
as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert,
so that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him"

Chapters 21 – 22

As the Israelites continued their journey, a number of kings did battle with them.

One of these was Og, king of Bashan.

God said to Moses: "Do not be afraid of him, for I have given him into your power."
Israel then easily defeated Og and occupied his land.

The king of Moab also wanted to attack the Israelites, but before attacking, he consulted Balaam son of Beor who was a type of prophet and could see the future.

Several times the king asked Balaam to curse the Israelites, but each time he blessed them, because this is what God told him to do:

"You are not to curse this people, for they are blessed."

The king then summoned Balaam to his presence.

Balaam began his journey to the king, travelling on a donkey.

God sent an angel with a sword to block Balaam's way. The donkey could see the angel, so she left the road to make a detour.

Balaam hit her and made her return to the road. On the road the donkey again saw the angel and just lay down on the road.

Balaam was very angry and hit her with a stick.

Then God made the donkey speak:
"Why did you hit me?
Haven't I always been faithful to you?"

God now opened Balaam's eyes
and he saw the angel with a sword.

Balaam realized that the donkey had saved his life.

The angel then told Balaam to continue his journey
but to say to the king only what God said to say.

Dear God, please stop people from being cruel to animals

Chapters 23, 24

When Balaam came to the king of Moab,
the king again tried to get Balaam to curse the Israelites.

But Balaam followed God's words and said:
"How can I curse people that God does not curse?"

These people are specially blessed by God.
How beautiful are your tents, O Jacob.
How lovely are your dwellings, O Israel.

From you will come a mighty one
who will reign over countless peoples.
A star from Jacob will be leader."

Dear God, please bless the Jewish people
with peace and love

Chapter 25

For a while the Israelites settled in the area of Shittim.

In that place the Israelite men gave themselves over to debauchery with the women of Midian.

The Israelites joined these women in sacrifices to local idols.

God therefore sent a plague to punish the Israelites and thousands of people died.

God commanded Moses to execute Israelites who had taken part in sacrifices to local idols.

Phinehas the priest, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron showed his loyalty and zeal by personally executing one of the main offenders, at a time when most people didn't care what was happening.

Dear God, please help us to care about
what goes on around us
and what is happening in the world

Chapters 26, 27

Moses made a census of all the men in the community. The total number was 624,730.

Moses also gave a ruling concerning inheritance:
"If a man dies without sons,
his inheritance is to pass to his daughters.

If he has no daughter, the inheritance is to go to his brothers.
If he has no brother, it is to go to his father's brothers.
If his father has no brothers,
it is to go to the member of his clan
who is his closest relative."

As Moses neared the end of his life,
he asked God for someone to succeed him as leader.

God answered:

"Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom the spirit dwells.
Lay your hands on him,
then bring him before Eleazar the priest
and the whole community so that everyone will obey him."

Dear God, please bless all my relatives...
and people in authority

Chapters 28, 29

Times for the Israelites to offer sacrifices to God:

- daily
- the Sabbath
- the feast of the New Moon of each month
- the feast of Unleavened Bread (14th day of 1st month)
- the feast of Weeks
- the feast of Acclamations (1st day of 7th month)
- the day of Atonement (10th day of 7th month)
- the feast of Tabernacles (15th day of 7th month).

Dear God, thank you for special days
and seasons to honor you

Chapters 30 – 33

The Israelites waged war against the Midianites and claimed their land and the land of Canaan.

To the sons of Gad, Reuben and Manasseh were given the land of Sihon, king of the Amorites and the kingdom of Og, king of Bashan.

The land of Canaan was divided by lot among the Israelite clans.

Dear God, please give peace to the people
of the Middle East

Chapters 34, 35

God gave the land of Canaan to the Israelites and Moses allocated a section of the land to the eleven tribes.

The tribe of Levi received some towns and pasture land from each of the eleven tribes.

Cities of refuge were established, where people could find safety if they had accidentally caused someone's death and the dead person's relatives wanted to take revenge.

In cases of homicide, more than one witness was required to convict someone of murder.

A final law: the inheritance of each tribe was not to be transferred to another tribe.

Dear God, please bless my family
with a sense of history and togetherness