

Numbers -by Gage Crowder (Chapters 8-36) & Tommy Lee (Chapters 1-7)

Chapter 1

We call this book "*Numbers*," emphasizing the fact that it begins and ends with a census, numbering the people. But some Jewish traditions call it "*In The Wilderness*," pulling those words from the very first verse of the book, reminding us that the 40 years of this history were entirely spent "*in the wilderness*." Other Jewish traditions call this book, "*And He Spoke*" (see, again, the first verse, and many more), emphasizing the fact that the whole book is about the Word of God, Israel's stubborn refusal to believe that Word, but God's faithfulness to his Word. So... if "*Numbers*" has regrettable connotations for you—as it sometimes does for me—pick one of the other titles, and let's begin! Three quick points today... **"The Lord knows those who are his"** (2 Timothy 2.19): In this chapter he counts them all up, and every one of them matters. God still knows the number of his people today, from *all* the nations! You matter!... **The Ransom is Paid:** Back in Exodus 30.12 God told Moses that everyone counted in this Numbers 1 census would have to "*give a ransom for his life to the Lord.*" We have always been a ransomed people. The final and forever ransom that bought us is the blood of Jesus Christ... **Soldiers of the Cross:** 14 times in this chapter we read that those numbered were "*able to go to war.*" As God's people, we are in a bona fide war (see Ephesians 6.10-20) against sin, against the flesh, against the world, against Satan himself. Are you in the fight

Chapter 2

Turn over to the New Testament for a moment and read 1 Corinthians 10.1-14. Take special note of when Paul says, "*Now these things took place as examples for us*" (v.4) and "*Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction*" (v.11). You know what book Paul is largely referring to when he says these things? The book of Numbers. So another possible title for Numbers—in addition to the two we mentioned yesterday—could be "*The Book of Examples.*" Let's keep this in mind as we move forward. 1 Corinthians also reminds us that our God is not a God of confusion, but a God of peace and order (1 Corinthians 14.33), and we see an *example* of that here in Numbers 2. Sketch out the order of the tribes and the arrangement of Israel's camp, according to the Word of Almighty God. Note how the tabernacle/"*tent of meeting*"—which is the assurance of God's presence with his people—is in the very center and heart of everything. "*God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved*" (Psalm 46.5). If he goes with us, all of his promises are secured. This is the constant theme of the Bible (see also Psalm 46.7,10-11) and its ultimate goal (see Revelation 21.3,22-23; 22.1-5). And it's also exactly what the ministry of Jesus was all about, according to John 1.14 and Matthew 28.20.

Chapter 3

As we saw Paul say yesterday—in 1 Corinthians 10—the book of Numbers is full of *"examples,"* for our instruction. Thirty-six chapters worth of examples, to be exact, from which God's people may still learn much-needed truths and wisdom today. Here the Bible records all that happened during Israel's 40 years of wilderness wandering, and it's recorded by a master storyteller. What is something we find in chapter 3? Well, in vs.5-10 the Levites are given to the High Priest Aaron, to assist him in all the services of the tabernacle. This is a very practical matter, as much of life tends to be. The tabernacle and its furniture had to be transported everywhere the camp went; many faithful hands were needed. Aaron and his sons would serve as "priests," while the rest of the tribe would assist them as "Levites." There were certain things that only the priests could do; anyone else who tried to do so would face death (v.10, see 16.1-33). Not in every specific (at all!), but the priest/Levite distinction is somewhat like the elder/deacon distinction we see develop in Acts 6. We can also see it as a picture of all pastors, elders, and deacons, who are charged to keep and care for the holy things of Jesus, our Great High Priest! Only Jesus can make the sacrifice for sins, but he calls certain men to *"be ready in season and out of season"* (2 Timothy 4.2) to faithfully care for those whom his sacrifice has purchased. Pray for these modern-day Levites, that they may be faithful to their charge.

Chapter 4

Reading this book thoughtfully, we are often going to see two things... 1: We will become more and more aware of what a healthy, godly community of believers looks like. And, 2: We will also become more and more aware of how often we (like this community of whom we are reading) fall miserably short. It's frequently going to be like looking in a mirror. Which one of these two things do we primarily see today? Well, in v.23 you see a summoning and enlistment of *"all who can come to do duty, to do service."* Are you ready to do duty and service for your king? Before answering, spend a moment or two reflecting on the king's words in Luke 14.25-33. Remember that serving the king of righteousness will bring you into a spiritual battle with an enemy who hates righteousness. From that conflict and war there is no escape. As chapter 13 of the Westminster Confession of Faith reminds us: *"This sanctification is throughout in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abideth still some remnants of corruption in every part: whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh."* Remember Ephesians 6.10-18.

Chapter 5

This book is (literally) a journey. And—like most journeys—there will be good days & bad days. But, as we've said repeatedly, there is much to learn from this book—both the "law" parts and the "story" parts. What do we learn in chapter 5? The ceremonially unclean people being put outside of the camp (vs.1-4) is a solemn and sober matter. It's meant to remind us of a truth we

meet often in the Bible. For example, Psalm 1.5: *"Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous."* Honest reflection on this should call us to examine ourselves anew. Have we been cleansed by the blood of Jesus? As the hymn says, *"Nothing but the blood of Jesus"* can wash away my sin and make me whole again. *"For my pardon this I see... for my cleansing this my plea... nothing can for sin atone... naught of good that I have done... this is all my hope and peace... this is all my righteousness... O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow; no other fount I know; nothing but the blood of Jesus."* The test for adultery (vs.11-31) seems odd to us, but it also reminds us of something very important: hidden sins will eventually be revealed, either in this life or in the next. See 1 Timothy 5.24 and 1 Corinthians 4.5. We cannot cover our sins. We can only confess and forsake them, looking to God in Christ for mercy.

Chapter 6

The Nazarite vow was a special vow, not to be taken lightly, in which an Israelite consecrated himself to some particular service to God, during which time he separated himself from some ordinary things of life, as a public sign of this extraordinary act (or season) of dedication. It was usually for a limited period of time. But not always! Samson was a Nazarite from birth (Judges 13; 16.17-20). So was Samuel (1 Samuel 1.11). John the Baptist seems to have been a Nazarite (Luke 1.15). The Apostle Paul took this vow for a season of time as well (Acts 18.18; 21.20-26). The Lord Christ was not a Nazarite in the strict sense of the term, and yet he is himself the fulfillment of all that it signified, so that he might accomplish salvation for his people. Worship him for that! At the end of this chapter (vs.22-27) God prescribes the blessing Aaron was to pronounce over Israel. We hear this blessing a lot, as a benediction, but it is far from just a religious cliché. It doesn't just roll off the tongue. It has six parts, and all six are bursting with meaning. Work out what those six parts are, and spend some time reflecting on each. And then read what Christ did—with his uplifted, nail-scarred hands—in Luke 24.50-51.

Chapter 7

We get tired reading this chapter. The same thing over and over again. Repetition, recurrence, repeating, reiteration, redundancy. We get tired. BUT!... God does not get tired of it! Why not? Because these are the gifts of his people, offered to him. And they are not offered to enrich him, for he is already the master and owner of everything. They are offered to praise him, and God never tires of the sincere offerings of his people. Even when they are much the same. Even when there are 12 tribes, and they're all the same. Do you sometimes get disheartened, thinking that you seem to have no special talents, that you have nothing extraordinary or distinctive to offer the Lord? The deal is he really has no need for our "stuff" or abilities. But he delights in a heart that truly loves him! *"For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do"* (Hebrews 6.10).

So, fear not that your gifts to the Lord and his work may sometimes seem small, meager, insufficient. Actually the Lord really doesn't even need the gifts that are substantial, rich, and significant! But he delights in all our gifts, all the same. In fact, he never tires of it!

Chapter 8

Lamps and Levites—in chapter eight, God commands a special place to be made for both in the tabernacle. These crafted lights will be used by these priests to see in order “to make atonement for the people of Israel” (v. 19). In the darkness of sin, God always gives the light of salvation. Though Israel was wondering in the wilderness because of their sin, God was still faithful to his people by ensuring that they could draw near to him (v. 19). These are ultimately two pictures of Christ, the true High Priest who took his blood into the true heavenly tabernacle to make the true atonement once and for all. Now, by the light of the Spirit, we can see this good news and draw nearer than Israel could with full assurance of faith (Heb.10:19-25). Not only is Christ the High Priest that makes this possible, but he is also the new Lamp, shining forever (Rev. 21:23, 22:5). For now, though, we are called to be lights in the world, lit by the Spirit’s fire, encouraging others to draw near through our royal, priestly ministry in Christ—until we end our own journey and shine with resurrected radiance as eternal lights around the table of the Father forever.

Chapter 9

In the first half of chapter nine, “certain men” come to Moses to inquire about their death-defiled uncleanness, which they assume will bar them from participating in the meal of covenant renewal and remembrance. In great grace, the Lord speaks to Moses and tells the men to keep the feast, regardless of their uncleanness. In fact, the Lord says that it is more dangerous for the people who are clean and choose not to keep the feast (v. 13). This reminds us that even when we have touched the death of sin from week to week, it is still safer for us to participate at the table of the Lord, which is for those who know their uncleanness and desire to be cleansed again! Indeed, as the catechism reminds us, our true Passover meal, the Lord’s supper, is given “for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians . . . that they may be further strengthened” (Westminster Larger Catechism, Questions 171-172). But what about the cloud and fire business in the second half of the chapter? This same cloud and fire combination that appears throughout the Old Testament in various forms is a picture of the Spirit, which means that Israel’s time in the wilderness was directed by the Spirit of the Lord. Do you feel as if you are being led through a wilderness, friend? Take heart; for “all who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God” (Rom. 8:14). Join the congregation of the redeemed in celebration of the true Passover this Sunday, and return to your God-wrought wondering with a heart full of Christ’s love.

Chapter 10

The trumpets of chapter ten were Israel's clarion call for any major event. The summoning of the congregation, the meetings of officials, the declaration of war, and the changing of seasons: each of these events were marked by trumpet blasts. Music, song, and dance preceded all that Israel did because their God is the Lord of glory, the One who brings joy. After the song of the trumpets, the Lord moves the people from the wilderness of Sinai for the first time (v.13). Following a detailed order of the tribes and their leaders, the Lord records an exchange that took place between Moses and Hobab in which Moses extends the promise of God to the Israelites to the Midianites in exchange for their aid. The offer is accepted after a bit of reluctance, and Israel journeys with the Midianites toward the promised land, under the protection and leadership of the arising and returning LORD himself (vv. 35-36). The message is not hard to see: God's people are always marked by their Spirit-filled musical celebration (Eph. 5:18-21; Col. 3:15-17). This joyful celebration is our sharpest form of evangelism and clearest apologetic to the curious and cautious Midianite world that we live in; and as we are traveling toward our promised land, we do so imploring this same risen Lord to return and to dwell with us forever. Whatever your day looks like, sing to our risen and returning Lord with thanks for his protection, guidance, and salvation!

Chapter 11

When we left Israel yesterday, they were walking in songs toward the promised land; today in chapter eleven, we find them stricken down in the graves of lust. Israel complains to Moses; Moses complains to God; God gives both what they want, and they are both ungrateful. The Lord ultimately strikes down the rabble in their dishonor and rebellion. And in the middle of it all, Moses makes an impassioned exclamation: "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (v. 29). Up to this point in Scripture, the Spirit was still reserved for specific offices. Yet Moses' desire for all people to have access to the power and the prophetic gift of the Spirit is echoed and promised throughout the Old Testament (Ezek. 36:27, 37:14; Jer. 32:39-40; Joel 2:28). For the Spirit grants the gift of prophecy, which is the ability to see reality the way the God sees it and call for the sanctification of personal and social life in accordance with God's word (Rom. 8:13; 1 Peter 1:2). At the Day of Pentecost forty days after the resurrection, Moses' plea and prophets promise was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit was given to the Church. If you are Christ's, the Spirit is yours! Moses has you and me in mind as the ideal Israelites, who would not have fallen to the lusts of the rabble. As Christ's prophets, may we keep in step with the Spirit today, bearing His fruit, imaging the Christ that He magnifies.

Chapter 12

Among other things, chapter twelve centers our attention on the uniqueness of Moses up to this point in redemptive history. Important and immanent prophets have come before; yet the Lord himself says that Moses has a power of supreme authority (v. 2), a privilege of access into God's immediate presence (vv. 6-8), a position of special mediation (v. 9-13), and a place of direct influence and efficacy on Mariam's punishment (vv. 13-16). Additionally, his is meek and faithful (vv. 3, 7). If so much honor was due to the man Moses for his uniqueness, then how much more honor are we to render to Christ, the One who "has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses" (Heb. 3:3)? Moses may have had supreme authority in Israel, but Christ has the supreme authority in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18); Moses may have had special access to God, but Christ could call God his own Father and claim equality with Him (John 5:18); Moses may have had a position of mediation between the Lord and Israel, but Christ is the only true mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5-6); Moses may have assuaged Mariam's punishment, but Christ assuaged the sins of the world (1 John 2:2). An infinitely worse curse than leprosy will fall on those who hold Christ in contempt (Heb. 6:6). May we remember the fear of the Lord today. Moreover, may we remember that, though Moses was meek, Christ is gentle and lowly in heart (Matt. 11:29), able to sympathize with our weaknesses, and grant true and full mercy and grace (Heb. 4:15).

Chapter 13

In the thirteenth chapter, we meet God's spies. What's ironic is that, in the typical spy movie, the spies entering an occupied territory to execute a mission do not usually have the promise of victory from the omniscient and omnipotent God of the universe *before* they go to spy (v. 2). This makes their report back to Moses all the more strange and sad. Yet we must ask ourselves the pointed question: How often do we gaze on the land from our televisions or grocery store visits and say, *There's no way that the gospel could conquer this?* If we are honest with ourselves, the answer is . . . all too often. We content ourselves with hiding the kingdom, fearful of the Nephilim-like giants of the culture. Christ, however, is the greater Caleb; He saw the joy set before Him and endured the onerous load of sin to the final dregs on the cross, triumphing over them and humiliating them in His resurrection (Col. 2:15). As you flip on the news today or drive past yet another rainbow flag or abortion clinic, remember: Christ did not forget to ask for the inheritance of nations for which He died and rose to possess (Ps. 2:8-9). The city of God planted among the cities of men by the Lord's spies is the depth charge that will eventually make disciples of all nations, baptizing them and teaching them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:18-20).

Chapter 14

Promise, rebellion, reaction, and death—it's the same story for Israel. Like their parents, the Wilderness Generation will now be unable to enter the promised land because of their rebellion against God's plan—only faithful Caleb and Joshua will enter (14:38). The rest will perish in a forty-year wilderness wondering for their faithlessness (14:33). However, when Israel hears this news, rather than repenting and accepting the consequences of their grumbling, they commit the sin of presumption and try to form their own means conquest and utterly fail because the LORD was not among them (14:42-44). This is the Babel syndrome: as sinners, we think that, while transgressing God's good Word, we can still accomplish our own plans apart from God, which is the very definition of foolishness (Psalm 33:10, 38:5; Prov. 26:11, 28:26). This chapter reminds us that there are only two kinds of people: those who desire to be the creator and those who are content as creatures. In our rebellion, we believe that we are able to counsel God on how he should run the world; and when He *graciously* refuses to listen, we think that we can take matters into our own hands. Yet, in the end, we are always and only left as faithless rebels in a wilderness of our own making. As creatures, therefore, we must recognize our dependence on God's promises and our need to mortify presumption. If anyone could presume to take matters into his own hands, it was Christ, God in the flesh Himself; yet He humbled Himself in obedience, trusting the plan of his Father even to death, which raised Him to glory (Phil. 2:1-11). May we trust His justifying resurrection and follow His example today.

Chapter 15

Chapter fifteen tells us at least one thing very clearly: there are sins that are intentional and sins that are unintentional (15:22-31). In Israel, unintentional sins were atoneable; intentional or "high handed" sins were cause for immediate cutting off from the covenant (15:31). To illustrate, Moses provides us with a story about a man who was stoned because he kept gathering sticks on the Sabbath, which was an intentional violation of Sabbath laws that was probably also preceded by warnings (Ex. 21:29). The point, however, remains intentional sins result in death. In order to keep this truth before the people, God commands Moses to have each Israelite attach a blue cord on the corner of their garments (15:37-41). In the new covenant, however, *every* sin and blasphemy is forgiven, except the blasphemy of the Spirit, which is the public rejection of Christ (Matt. 12:31; Heb. 10:26-31). Thanks be to God! Also, in the new covenant, we do not sport blue cords to remind us of our need for obedience; rather, we all sport a baptized conscience in Christ, which the Spirit effectually uses to remind us that we are to be a nation of sin-slaying priests of our Father (Heb. 10:19-25; Rom. 6:1-14; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Titus 3:4-6). Make no mistake: even under the new covenant, intentional rejection of Christ is met with the fearful judgement of God as it was in Numbers 15. But if we confess our

sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous; and we will be forgiven and cleansed of all unrighteous (1 John 1:9-2:2). Confess your unintentional and intentional sins today, and then turn to live as the royal priest that God has made you in Christ!

Chapter 16

More rebellion, more death—the gets even more grim in chapter sixteen. Korah rouses a rebellion, which ultimately leads to the death of 250 chiefs, several “well-known men,” and 14,700 other members of the congregation (16:2, 49). The question that we must avoid asking is, Why did God kill so many people? The proper question is, Why did God not kill *all* the people? For not only did Korah and his rabble rebel; no, “*all* the congregation of the people of Israel grumbled” (16:41). The absurdity is that they were grumbling because the Lord destroyed the rebellion that would have ultimately destroyed God’s good plan to bring Israel to the promised land! Sin truly makes us fools. Of course, where sin abounds, grace much more abounds (Rom. 5:20). As such, Moses, the prince of Israel (16:13) and the prophet of God (16:22-24), and Aaron the priest of Yahweh (16:46-48), stood between the wrath of God and the sin of man to make a saving atonement for the people. Friends, our grumbling and rebellion deserves no less punishment than Korah or the 14,700 received; however, in grace and mercy, Christ our greater prince, prophet, and priest stood between the dead and the living on the cross to make atonement for our sin. Through resurrection, the plague of death was ended. Thank God today for the salvation that we have in Christ, and live today as the prince, prophet, and priest that you are in Christ. So that, with him, as with Moses and Aaron, we too may someday come to stand at the entrance of the tent of meeting in the presence of God forever (16:50).

Chapter 17

With the plague ended, Numbers 17 recounts an interesting miracle—namely, Aaron’s budding rod. The Lord Himself refers to the rod as “a sign for rebels” (v. 10). In the tabernacle, the rod remained as a perpetual reminder that God punishes rebellion; and when they realize this, the Israelites have only one despairing question for Moses: “We are all undone . . . Are we all to perish?” (v. 12-13). Death is, indeed, the just retribution for rebellion. However, as we read this passage, we must constantly look to the cross of Christ, the new sign for rebels that promises forgiveness rather than destruction—not because God overlooks our sins, but because He refuses to overlook our sins. We will not perish for our rebellion as the Israelites feared, for our King Himself hung as a rebel in our place. The cross of Christ is the new budding rod, which brought forgiveness from judgement and life from death. Indeed, as Aaron’s rod flowered with life, so Christ’s cross bore the first fruits of resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-23). Today, remember the substitution that took place on the cross—unlike Aaron’s rod, Christ’s cross is a reminder of our

hope rather than our despair. We will not perish for our rebellion as the Israelites feared; the Son of God Himself died for our sins and rose for our justification.

Chapter 18

Yesterday, in Numbers 17, we heard the fearful question of rebellious Israel: “Are we all to perish?” (17:13). Today, we hear God’s gracious answer: no. Instead of death, the Lord establishes the mediating presence of the Levite-aided priesthood to both “bear iniquity” and “guard over [Aaron] and over the whole tent” (vv. 2-3). The priests guarded the sanctuary, and the Levites guarded the priests. And though this priesthood was rewarded with the tithes, offerings, and the Lord Himself (vv. 8-21), Aaron and the Levites stood day and night at the tent of meeting, guarding the direct access to the Lord under pain of death. They were like the cherubim at the gates of Eden, flaming swords drawn to keep fallen humanity from direct fellowship with God because of their sinfulness (Gen. 3:24). Christ’s priesthood differs significantly from the Levites: Christ may guard His Bride (the Church) and bear Her iniquity, but His guarding and bearing led to access to the presence of God rather than exclusion (Heb. 4:16). In Christ’s our High Priest, we stand in grace rather than condemnation (Rom. 5:2). As priests in Christ, we are to guard each other from sin (Heb. 3:13) and to bear with one another’s sins and burdens (Gal. 6:1-2). May we walk today in your priesthood under our Priest, guarding and bearing one another in love so that we may be presented blameless before our Father (Col. 1:21-23).

Chapter 19

Death spreads (Rom. 5:12)—Numbers 19 shows us as much. Eleazar the priest is unclean through the death-sacrifice of the red heifer (v. 7), the burnt heifer’s ash-gatherer is unclean (v. 8), whoever touches a dead body is unclean (v. 11), whoever is in proximity to death is unclean (v. 14), and even the person or the object who encounters the one unclean from death will be unclean (v. 22)! Because of sin, the effects of death spread far beyond us. The destruction and defiling of death touches everything and everyone through sin. This is as true for us today as it was for the Israelites. Though we do not follow the shadows of ritual uncleanness that they did, the reality of uncleanness is seen all around us and, unfortunately, within us. Yet the blood of Christ’s sacrifice purifies our unclean consciences and conduct (Heb. 4:19). Our baptism into Christ is our new washing, which signs and seals to us our true cleansing (Titus 3:5; 1 Peter 3:21), breaking the power of spreading death (Rom. 6:3-4). In the New Covenant, death does not spread like it used to; rather, life spreads through the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 5:17-21). No matter how bad things may seem now or how deep and wide death and destruction seem to be spreading all around, Christ has the final word. Spread the joy of life in Christ; and take heart, friend, resurrection triumphs over death—today, tomorrow, and eternally.

Chapter 20

Sadness saturates this chapter. The death of Aaron and Mariam bookend the chapter (v. 1; vv. 22-29), while the body of the chapter is taken up with the disbelief of Moses (vv. 2-13) and the denial of Israel's passage through the land of Edom (vv. 14-21). Disbelief, denial, and death—it sounds like an unfortunately familiar storyline for Israel and for us. Yet the passage still holds out hope. Paul tells us many years later that the rock following Israel through the wilderness was Christ (1 Cor. 10:4). Though we may not understand what Paul means by this or how this could be possible, the picture is clear: Moses strikes the rock with his wooden staff, and it brings out water for the life of Israel. Likewise, Christ was stricken on a wooden cross, and the Water of Life Himself gave up blood and water from his side for the life of the world (John 4:14; 19:34). Further, through his resurrection, Christ is no longer only the sacrificial rock, but the Cornerstone of the Church and a rock of offense for unbelievers (1 Peter 2:7-8). These are eternal truths, but they are also today's reminder; indeed, today, we must decide to cling to Christ, our rock of refuge (Ps. 18:2), or to crumble beneath His weight (Matt. 21:44). However, the choice should be easy, knowing that Christ, the Rock of Ages, promises all who repent of their sins and trust Him that they will be given a white stone (Rev. 2:17), which is an invitation to an eternal feast in the new Eden (Gen. 2:12). Though sadness of disbelief, denial, and death may mark this chapter of Numbers, it points us forward to our hope in the Rock of our salvation.

Chapter 21

As the journey continues, the Lord grants Israel victory over their enemies—the king of Arad at Hormah (vv. 1-3), the king of Amorites at Jahaz (vv. 21-30), and the king of Bashan at Edrei (vv. 31-25). But between these battles, two strange events occur: the fiery serpents and the well-song. Though these are historically significant stories for Israel, the Lord has given us a commentary on this passage in John's gospel, which takes us from shadow to reality. Jesus tells Nicodemus that "as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (John 3:14); in the chapter, around Jacob's well, Christ has a conversation about the living water with a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-30). Christ's sin-bearing crucifixion and life-giving resurrection are the true meanings of these stories here in Numbers 21. Today, we may be poisoned by the lies of that old serpent the devil (Rev. 12:9) and drink from the waterless springs of sin (Jer. 2:13), or we may look to Christ's sacrificial death and drink from the waters of new life from His resurrection. If we're honest, it will probably be a little of both. But let us continue the good fight on our journey to the promise land, looking to Christ in faith and trusting that He will one day bring us to the water of life that flows from His throne (Rev. 22:1).

Chapter 22

This must be one of the strangest stories in the Bible. A pagan prophet speaks directly with Yahweh, argues with his pitiful donkey, and promises the angel of the LORD to speak for Balak only what God puts in his mouth. What is going on here!? Though this single paragraph is not nearly enough space to explore all the eccentricities of this book-worthy passage, let's focus on the goal of Balak and Balaam—namely, cursing Israel (v. 6). Balak recognizes that only a divine counteraction is going to stop the people of God from taking his kingdom, and only a prophet can handle that job. Balak, however, does not know the God of Israel is the only God (Is. 43:10-11), and He works good from evil for His children. Later in redemptive history, God uses another unbelieving prophet. John says, "But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, 'You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish.' He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:49-52). God speaks through unlikely and ungodly men sometimes in order accomplish His purposes for us. May we be rejoicing today that Christ, our Prophet, lives forever to pronounce our eternal blessing and joy, having become a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).

Chapter 23

Ready for the show, Balak twice follows every word of Balaam, only to hear the word of blessing from the Lord over Israel from his prophet's mouth; and the chapter ends moving toward a third attempt. As Paul later says, "The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). The Lord has set his love on Israel (Deut. 7:7-11), and He is incapable of lying (v. 19). No false prophet can change the loving will of the Almighty God. In fact, not even our sin and unfaithfulness cannot change God's love for His people (Rom. 5:6-11). Christ came at the high point of Israel's hypocrisy so that, in their hard-hearted rejection, He could woo some of them back, as the good Bridegroom does for His wayward Bride (Hosea 2:14-20). This very day, Satan, that great Balaam, will hurl accusations and curses your way, but turn to God's true Word. Remember this: "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:37-39). Christ will not forsake His Bride, and He will ensure that we make it to the wedding feast (Rev. 16:6-9).

Chapter 24

Third times the charm, right? Balak thinks that a final attempt to get Balaam to curse Israel will work; however, Balaam delivers a Spirit-empowered blessing over Israel: "Blessed are those

who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you” (v. 9). This essentially buries Balak and his kingdom before Israel, the opposite of his intended purpose. But after Balak lambasts Balaam, Balaam delivers a final, ultimate word: “I see him, but not near . . . a star shall come out of Jacob . . . one from Jacob shall exercise dominion” (vv. 17-19). Balaam prophesize of Christ Himself. Not only will Balak bow to Israel, but all the enemies will bow before Christ. This is what Paul means when he says that, by his resurrection and ascension to the throne of heaven, Christ “disarmed the rules and authorities, humiliating them, by triumphing over them” (Col. 2:15). The glorious victories that Balaam sees Israel winning in his visions are only a faint glimmer of the victory of Christ, the Star of Jacob. Today, friends, remember that Christ has conquered sin and death and that, in Him, you also are a conqueror (Rom. 8:37). But don’t just remember it; embody it. Slay the sin that so easily besets you with the joy of the LORD. Shout for victory, sing Psalms of triumph, and mobilize your family for the good fight. Most of all, set your hope fully on the Conquering Christ. Like Balaam, we can see that the future victory is already His.

Chapter 25

Meanwhile, back at the camp, the Israelites obviously hadn’t heard the blessings of Balaam, son of Beor—or else they wouldn’t have been acting so obscenely, fornicating with Moabites (v. 1). The same LORD who blessed Israel through Balaam now demands the blood of the transgressors. When a certain Zimri of Simeonite descendance (v. 14) publicly flouts his high-handed transgression, the wrath of Phinehas waxes hot, killing Zimri and Cozbi the Moabite with a spear and assuaging the anger of the LORD. Phinehas’s godly zeal and jealous act of righteousness saves the Israelites and wins him an eternal priesthood (vv. 10-13). Jesus Christ is, of course, our greater Phinehas. In His zeal for His Father’s house, our Lord Christ sprang from the hosts of heaven, to stop our harlotry. However, rather than driving a spear through us, He had a spear driven into Him on the cross (John 19:34). Christ, the greater Phinehas, saved us from our wrathful sin by loving sacrifice. Christ, in resurrection victory, then ascended to His eternal priesthood, which is better than the priesthood of Phinehas (Heb. 7). Friends, today we must live as Phinehas ourselves. Kill your sin. Drive a spear through it, knowing that Christ died and rose to put an end to sin (1 John 3:4-10). We must join Christ, our great Phinehas, in this fight from victory unto victory, knowing that the battle has already been won (Heb. 9:25-26).

Chapter 26

We have come to the second census of Israel to find the will of the LORD fulfilled: “Among these there was not one of those listed by Moses and Aaron the priest, who had listed the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai” (v. 64). The exception, of course, was Joshua and Calab (Num. 14:30). The message is clear and simple: obedience leads to blessing, and disobedience leads to cursing. Of course, we aren’t talking about material blessing here. We are

speaking of the much greater inheritance of the promises of God, the inheritance of God Himself (Rom. 8:17; Rev. 21:22)! Christ secures our inheritance for us; He suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous, so that we could share in His blessing of resurrection by grace through faith. However, as Hebrews makes clear, we will find ourselves listed among those who did not inherit the promises if we rebel as they did at Kadesh (Heb. 4:1-13). In this passage, which comments directly on our story from Numbers, the author of Hebrews also gives us our good reminder: "Let us strive to enter that rest" (Heb. 4:11). Christ has purchased our ultimate Sabbath rest; however, without striving, persevering faith in Christ, we will not enter that rest. But Christ, our eternal high priest, calls us to the throne of grace so that we can find strength during our temptations (Heb. 4:14-16). Draw near to today, and fight the good fight of faith.

Chapter 27

A place in the land and a faithful leader for the people—these are the promises of chapter twenty-seven. The daughters of Zelophehad plead with Moses for their father's inheritance, and Moses pleads with the LORD for a new shepherd for Israel. However, as with the rest of Scripture, this chapter is much more than just a history of land divisions or leadership succession. Rather, the two promises of this chapter—namely, inherited land and faithful leadership—are also the basic needs of humanity as whole. In the beginning, Adam was to lead Eve in triumph over Satan in the inherited land of the Eden. Adam failed to do so at the tree, losing his credible authority and expelling him from the garden-land. In grace, however, the Lord immediately promises that one will be born to Adam and Eve who will triumph evil (Gen. 3:15) and lead us to a place where God dwells with His people (Gen. 3:18). We know just the man—Jesus Christ, our Lord. Jesus, our New Adam, triumphed over Satan on a tree, rising as a greater Shepherd than Moses or Joshua to lead His Bride to an inheritance in a greater promised. As you look to Christ in thankfulness and joy today, remember to also pray for His under-shepherds at DPC, leading our little flock. They are Christ's ambassadors, leading us to a greater promised land than the daughters of Zelophehad could have imagined (Rev. 20:7-21:8).

Chapter 28 & 29

We are combining chapters twenty-eight and twenty-nine since they deal with the same theme—namely, a reminder of the various feasts and offerings that are to be kept in the land. Though the specific regulations for these offerings and feasts days were given to Israel at length in Leviticus, this was before their wondering began. But wine (drink offering) is now added to each sacrifice. According to Leviticus 23:10, wine was not to be used in sacrifices *until* they entered the land. Coming to the land now, the LORD reminds Moses that every offering is accompanied by a moistened grain offering (bread) and a drink offering (wine). Though you may see where I am going with the bread and wine connection, read the story carefully and you realize this: only God gets to eat the bread and wine of his victory in the promised land. This is

the Lord's victory meal, and only the Lord gets the credit for bringing His often-unfaithful people into the promised land. But here is the good news for us: when Christ came, He gives us the bread and wine of His victory over sin and death, giving us a table. We partake freely of His victory! May we be faithful in coming to the table of victory for weekly strength and faithful in bringing others along with us. For if we do, we will one day find ourselves around the final table of victory, enjoying the bread and wine in the presence of our victorious Lord forever.

Chapter 30

Oaths and vows are not something that we think about much today. Unless we attend a wedding or participate in a legal proceeding, we don't see vows made very often. However, chapter thirty reminds us of at least one thing: God takes the vows that we do make very seriously. In fact, He even provides ways for those vows to be excused as "a thoughtless utterance" (v. 8) so that we do not have to bear the sin of breaking them in case we forgot what we said in haste. Nevertheless, we are a vow-making people because our God is a vow-making God. The Bible is actually one big story of the various covenants (vows) between God and His people. Ultimately, God has made an unbreakable vow to us oath to us in Christ (Heb. 6:13-20). He has promised to be our God forever. Our Father planed the wedding between His Son and His Bride, the Church, placing on us the ring of our baptism and nourishing us around His table. Our oaths to love and serve one another in the Church—as individuals in marriage (Eph. 5:22-23) and as members of Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:12-27)—are mirror images of God's oath to us in Christ. Restore and learn how to strengthen the bond of peace between your spouse, your Church, and your God this week, knowing that Christ has sworn Himself to you. He swore Himself to seek your good before you knew Him (Rom. 5:6), and He has vowed to bring you home safely (John 17:6-19).

Chapter 31

Here, we have come to Moses' last battle. After so many years of imperfect but faithful service to the Lord and His people, Moses will "be gathered to [his] people" in death (v. 2). And it is a fitting scene for the final fight: the Israelites gain a complete victory over their Midianite enemies and dedicate a portion of their spoils to the LORD, who gave them the victory. This scene, of course, reminds us of Christ's last battle. Though he fought the enemies of God—even Satan himself—many times, Christ's final battle came at the cross. Though it looked like a defeat, the Father raised the Son from the grave by the Spirit in order to show the world that He was victorious over all of God's enemies. And as a greater Moses, Christ takes His victory spoils (you and me!) and gives it to His Father through the same Spirit that raised Him from the grave. We are the spoils of Christ's victory, friends, and He is satisfied with His laborious death because He delights in us! Just read Isaiah 53:11 and try to bear the weight of love that you've been given. In all of your battles with sin, temptation, and death itself, remember that Christ

has already won all of those battles for you. Shout the Psalms of victory and partake of the table of victory each week as you go about triumphing in Christ. When you do this, you can rest assured that, when the time comes for your last battle, Christ will be there with you too.

Chapter 32

Rueben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh want their inheritance on the land opposite of Canaan, across the Jordan from the promised land (vv. 1-5). Moses gives this land to them as long as their men still go and fight with their brothers across the Jordan for the promised land, which they agree to (vv. 16-27). Though the promised land proper is across the Jordan, this story reveals a key to understanding the theology of the promised land: the promised land is a parable. Though it is a physical place promised by God, it is really a picture of the fact the Israel is to conquer not only the promised land but the whole world. Any part of the land was acceptable because it all belongs to the children of God; the only stipulation is that they must aid their brothers. In Christ, all of humanity is united, despite their deepest divides (Eph. 2:14-16; Gal.3:23-29). Though our brothers and sisters in other traditions may look or sound different than us across the Jordan in Gilead, we know that those who are not against Christ are for Christ (Luke 9:50). Christ body is universal, and our hope is that no matter how fractured the Church may seem, we will one day hold a visible unity in truth and love (John 17:22-23). Let's work closer to that goal together as Christ's universal body by prayers and acts of love and service. For it is the will of the Father to bring all things in subjection to the Son by the Spirit (Eph. 1:9)

Chapter 33

Chapter twenty-three is a map and a plan; it's where we've been and where we're going. The Lord has given Israel many gracious victories in the wilderness wandering, but one final task remains—namely, drive out the inhabitants of Canaan (vv. 50-56). In the middle of the story, Aaron the high priest dies on Mount Hor (vv. 38-39). This chapter is actually the story of redemption in miniature. First, it is a history of who they were and how they go there from their slavery in Egypt, which is the purpose of our Old Testament. Second, it is the death and resurrection of Israel, signified by the death of Aaron, the sinful wilderness generation's high priest. This is the good news of our Gospels: our High Priest, Jesus Christ, has died and risen to deliver us from the old world of sin. Third, the LORD reminds Moses of the mission to carry out—namely, drive out the inhabitation. Likewise, the rest of our Scripture is about our mission to drive out sin from the world through the example of Acts, the explanation of the Epistles, and the final expulsion of Revelation. Further, the passage serves as a warning for what happens if we refuse to drive out sin: what remains "shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides," which will ultimately lead to our destruction (v. 55-56). As John Owen says, "Be

killing sin or sin will be killing you.” There is neutral ground. We must drive out the sin in our hearts and in the world because the LORD has promised us the victory already (v. 53; Ps. 72:8).

Chapter 34

Chapter thirty-four is a lesson in sacred geography. The LORD instructs Moses how he is to divide the promised land among the tribes and the tribal chiefs. As we have seen many times already, the promised land is the world in miniature. What Israel does in the promised land is to eventually extend beyond the promised land in order to fulfill the both the covenant with Adam and the covenant Abraham, which both result in taking dominion over the world (Gen. 1:28; 12:1). However, because of their sinfulness, Israel must first learn faithfulness in the four corners of Canaan before she can inherit the four corners of the earth. When Christ came, He dealt with Israel’s faithlessness by being the Faithful One in her place, taking the punishment of her sin and rising to form the new Israel—the Church. Thus, in Christ, the Church’s mission is no longer to merely spread the gospel message of Christ’s Lordship to the four corners of a certain land, but to the four corners of the world (Matt. 28:18-20). In Christ, the Church presides over the world as a kingdom of priests, and we are to bring everything captive to Christ’s rule with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 1:8-10; 5:17). We, like Israel in this chapter, have a job set before us—namely, to baptize and disciple the nations. Though enemies will rise from the four corners to do battle, we have the promise of ultimate victory in Christ (Rev. 20:7-10).

Chapter 35

In chapter thirty-five, the Levites, the pastors of Israel, were given forty-eight cities in each of the tribes’ territories according to their size, which included six cities of refuge (vv. 6-8). As you read, the cities of refuge were to protect those guilty of accidental manslaughter—not intentional murderers. These cities are set up because shed blood pollutes the land (v. 33). The key to the passage, however, is the death of the high priest. When the high priest dies, the shed blood is atoned for, and the shedder-of-blood is free from his avenger. The story is the same for us. Because our sins pollute the land, we must run to Christ as a city of refuge from the penalty of sin—namely, death. However, Christ our greater High Priest has also died, which frees us from bearing the penalty of our sin. What’s more, Christ rose, which breaks the power of sin! Now, He lives a priest forever (Heb. 7) so that the old sins that would have caused our death can be put to death themselves. Friends, grow in this grace today. Christ is an eternal city of refuge; so put your sins to death by the Spirit. Run to Christ, your merciful High Priest for help in time of need. Doing so, we will ultimately find that, like Christ, when we die to sin, we will rise in victory—now and forever. Though remaining sin may bring us down to death, it will be a death that leads to eternal resurrection in Christ.

Chapter 36

Strange way to end the story, right? We would expect the story to end with one last mighty Mosaic triumph over an enemy or with a final, epic speech from Moses. Instead, we get Moses hearing a land-division case about the daughters of Zelophehad—again! Why would a grand story about wandering, sin, salvation, and inheritance end this way? The simplest explanation is this: though the wandering may be over, the story *itself* is not. There is more to be done. Israel is still wondering in her sinful immaturity. This chapter, thus, forces us to look ahead. It is, however, fitting to note that the story ends in marriage (vv. 10-12). For the LORD is married to Israel (Ezek. 16:8-14; Hos. 2:7; Isa. 54:5), and the Old Testament is really a record of the rocky marriage between God and Israel. On the cross, Christ, the New Adam, formed a new Bride from his side—namely, the Church. Though this new Bride includes some of old Israel, the Church is the new Israel, the Bride of the Lamb (Eph. 5:24; Rev. 19:7-9). She is white, pure, and clean because she has been washed by her husband; we are washed, sanctified, and justified in Christ (1 Cor. 6:11). Our goal, of course, is to maintain the peace and the purity of Christ's Bride, as our membership vows state. We are, like Israel, to improve upon our baptismal exodus from slavery to marriage (WLC 167). By doing so, our own wondering will end at a glorious wedding feast in the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the true promised land (Rev. 21:1-4).