

Understanding The Old Testament Week 12: Numbers Part 2

Numbers 16 - Further Rebellion

- Numbers 13-15 record Israel's rejection of Yahweh and the promised land due to their lack of faith. Numbers 16-17 will record the rejection of Yahweh and the leadership He has set up.
- Leadership is something the Lord is very serious about; He places people into leadership and takes them out if they fail. Usurping leadership is never the Biblical pattern. Suppose we find leadership in the community of believers corrupt. In that case, we have two biblical options, lovingly approach them and trust the Lord to change their hearts and bring them to repentance or remove ourselves from under the authority of that person until the Lord removes them.
- Korah and the other rebels unjustly criticize Moses and Aaron, who are not perfect but genuinely try to follow the Lord and do what is best for the people, and attempt to usurp authority to lead Israel themselves.
- Korah is Moses' cousin.
- This chapter has separate but connected rebellions: Korah and those who follow him. Korah is Specifically against Moses and Aaron. Dathan and Abiram are against Moses. The 250 leaders are against Moses and Aaron.
- Numbers 16:3: The rebels assemble and criticize Moses and Aaron for "exalting themselves above the assembly of Yahweh."
- Numbers 16:4-11: Korah and his rebels are commanded to get censers for burning incense and let the Lord choose who is His and who is not.
- Numbers 16:10: It's not that Yahweh kept people out; He brought Korah and his family near to Himself. Korah and the rebels are upset about Moses and Aaron's positions of authority.
- Numbers 16:12-14: While this is happening, Dathan and Abiram think Moses is lording himself over them and is unwilling to speak to Moses about the matter.
- Numbers 16:15: Moses leaves it to the Lord as his vindication. The Lord knows who does what and even sees the motivations of everyone's heart.
- Numbers 16:17-19: Everyone shows up with their censers, and the Glory of Yahweh is revealed to all of Israel.
- Numbers 16:20-27: The Lord tells Moses and Aaron to separate from the congregation before He announces His judgment. Moses and Aaron intercede for the people of Israel and command Israelites to choose if they will follow Moses and Aaron or the rebels.
- Numbers 16:27: Not everyone from Korah's family chooses to follow Korah and the other rebels. Psalms 42-49, 84, 85, 87, and 88 are all attributed to the "Sons of Korah ." (Psalm 43 is not directly attributed but is likely part of Psalm 42, the wording and the flow look like a 3rd stanza to Psalm 42.) Some of these psalms are more well-known of the Psalms as well.
- Numbers 16:28-34: Moses tells the people if the Lord does something supernatural to judge these men, then believe Moses. If not, believe Korah. The Lord responds by opening the earth up and swallowing Korah's followers and all of their possessions.
- Numbers 16:27, 35: Pride is at the heart of all sin. A self-center view of our lives leads to death. We find true life only when we lay aside our pride and set our eyes on Jesus.

- Numbers 16:36-40: The censors used by the rebels were made into the bronze covering for the altar of sacrifice in the Tabernacle as a reminder of what had happened.
- Numbers 16:41-50: After seeing what the Lord did to the rebellion, the people continue to rebel, provoking the Lord to anger. Moses and Aaron make atonement for them, and the Lord relents his wrath against the people.
- Yahweh's justice and wrath are very real; Jesus shields us from the punishment we deserve. Jesus is our "propitiation" (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2, 4:10), or appeasement of demands by the justice of the Lord. In this case, Aaron is a type of Christ, standing among the people to shield them from the plague they brought upon themselves. See Numbers 16:48.

Numbers 17 - The Test of The Staffs

- The Lord conducts a test to show further that Aaron and his sons are the chosen high priests. A staff is presented from each tribe. The staffs are put before the ark of the Covenant, where Aaron's staff buds.
 - Aaron's staff is "brought back to life." The long-dead wood brings forth blossoms and ripe almonds; as such, Aaron's staff is a type for the cross. Jesus was hung on a dead tree, and that dead tree brought forth resurrection life.
- The staff would remind Israel of the importance of treating the Lord's sacred space as holy and that no one should proceed too far into the tent unless authorized. This highlights the seriousness of the Lord's presence amid Israel and how Holy or "other" Yahweh really was. It also demonstrates our New Covenant is much better than the Old Covenant.

Numbers 18 - Statues Regarding the Priesthood

- Because of the priesthood rebellion by Korah and his followers, and the subsequent wrath poured out on all the people because of the rebellion, God made a change in the priesthood. The priesthood will bear its iniquities.
 - The priesthood stands before Yahweh as their representatives; this poses a problem when the priesthood sins rather than the people. This change makes it so the priesthood still represented collective Israel but would bear their sin upon themselves.
- The rest of the chapter describes which contributions to the Lord they got to use, how to use them, etc.

Numbers 19 - Purification from Touching the Dead

- Previous sections have talked about becoming unclean from touching corpses. It is not until this chapter that the ritual for purification is made clear. This chapter is a natural sequel to the death of Korah and the other rebels who have contaminated much of Israel, including the Tabernacle itself.
- Numbers 19:9 - The red heifer is a sin offering for the atonement of uncleanness (such as touching a dead body) and unintentional sin. (See notes on Leviticus 4)

Numbers 20 - The Waters of Meribah, The Death of Miriam and Aaron, and the Edomites

Numbers 20:1: Records the location and death of Miriam, as well as the place of her burial.

Numbers 20:22-29: Records the death of Aaron and the anointing of Eleazar as the new high priest of Israel.

Numbers 20:2-13: There are two possibilities; let's look at both:

- Possibility 1. The Lord, through Moses, brought water from the rock **twice** at **two different times**. In Exodus 17, the people complain to Moses about their lack of water; the Lord commands Moses to go to a stone and strike it. Out of this stone sprang water to satisfy the people. In Numbers 20, the circumstances repeat. Israel has a lack of water, and the people complain to Moses. This time the Lord changes the method of bringing water from the rock. Instead of striking the rock, Moses is to speak to the rock. However, Moses disobeys the Lord and strikes the rock instead. Water does proceed from the rock to satisfy the Israelites' thirst, but because of Moses' (and Aaron, who had a role in this, likely as spokesperson. See Exodus 4:16) failure to "uphold Yahweh as holy in the eyes of the people" Moses and Aaron are denied entrance into the promised land (see Deuteronomy 32:48-52 and notes).
- Possibility 2. This is one event recorded two times. This possibility suggests that the first narrative highlights Israel's rebellion in a condensed format, whereas the description in Numbers gives us further detail. This possibility is brought by the similarities between the two passages in both passages. The region is the same; Moses calls both places the same (Meribah).
 - While option 2 is possible, this is more likely a separate event. This is further supported by similar but differing complaints by the Israelites (Exodus 17:3 vs. Numbers 20:4-5). Moses will strike the rock twice in Numbers instead of once in Exodus. The most significant difference is Moses appears to be commanded to strike the rock in Exodus 17, whereas Moses was commanded to speak to the rock in Numbers 20. Some point out that the Lord commanded Moses to take the staff with him in Numbers 20:8. They state why the Lord would command Moses to bring the staff if He didn't plan on having Moses use the staff. This also has flawed reasoning as the very act of Moses bringing the staff was, in itself, using the staff. This was the staff that the Lord had Moses use in Egypt; it represented the power of God to the people. Considering the evidence, the 2nd possibility is less likely.
 - What is clear is **this rock is a type for Christ** (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-10 - specifically Verse 4). The rock that was struck to bring forth water (essential for life) prototypes Jesus, who was struck to give us life. The second time Moses is commanded to bring water from a rock, he is commanded to speak to the rock. Christ will not be struck again. He has already paid the price (compare to Hebrews 6:4-6). Life for the believer comes through speaking with Him, our rock and provider of life.
- Numbers 20:14-21: Israel tries to obtain passage through the land of Edom (Esau, the brother of Jacob/Israel's decedents). Edom refuses passage and comes out to fight Israel if they proceed further. Because of this action against Israel, Edom would lose its favor and receive judgment.

Numbers 21 - Israel's pre-conquest battles and the Bronze Serpent.

- Numbers 21:1-3: Is the battle against Arad, which shows a renewed faith in the Lord to give them victory. This is likely in the narrative to compare against all the evil the Israelites did surrounding it. While Israel did rebel a lot they also followed the Lord and were His chosen people.
- Numbers 21:4-9: In stark contrast to verses 1-3, Israel rebels against her God again. This time the Lord would send fiery serpents among the people. The people repent of their sin, and the Lord commands Moses to make a pole with a fiery serpent. Whoever is bitten by one of the serpents must look at the pole to be saved.
 - This pole is a type for the cross (see John 3:14-15). The key to spiritual life is keeping our eyes on Jesus and Jesus alone. Looking at our problems will never save us, and looking at our sin and mistakes will never save us. We must keep our eyes on the one who was lifted up for us.

Seraphim, Cherubim, Snakes, and the Devil

In Numbers 21, we have the fiery serpent event where the Lord sends fiery serpents as a judgment against the Israelites. To remedy this, Moses makes a pole with a serpent on it; the Israelites must look at the serpent on the pole, and their lives will be saved. The Hebrew gives us more details to ponder. The Hebrew word for “fiery serpent” is “seraphim nachashim”; likely, you are familiar with the word “seraphim.” We see it in Isaiah 6:1-3: “In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!’” These Seraphim are the throne guardians in Isaiah’s vision. How does that differ from Cherubim, seen as the throne guardians in other passages in the OT? An interesting observation is when Yahweh tells Moses in Numbers 21:8 to “make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole” He more literally says, “make a seraph and set it on a pole” The word nachash isn’t even spoken. (Hebrew masculine plural is the ending ‘-im.’ So “seraphim” means multiple “seraph.”. What is going on here?

To understand, we have to further look into the worldview of the ancient reader of the book of Numbers, Isaiah, and the rest of the OT books. The heavenly realm cannot be put into proper words; we get this with the descriptions the authors attempt to use, but they fail in comparison to the beauty and glory they see. This is true, especially of Yahweh but also the other spirit beings. They try to describe a non-physical world and non-physical beings to people who live in a physical world. The words used to describe the throne guardians that the prophets (Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1) and apostles (Revelation 4) see are words they believe will help their readers best understand what they are seeing.

In Exodus, we saw that Israel made a golden calf and named the golden calf Yahweh. The idea was calves (bulls) represented power and strength to defeat their enemies. Because Moses was gone for so long and the Israelites grew impatient, they made Yahweh into the form they wanted, a military power to help them defeat their enemies and lead them into the promised land.

It works the same with descriptions of these throne guardians. Isaiah uses the term Seraphim because Israel was in close contact with Egypt during his days. Egypt’s throne guardians were serpents, specifically cobras, with exaggerated fins or wings coming from its head. Do an image search for

“Egyptian winged snake guardian.” You will see what I am talking about. It may be a familiar hieroglyph you have seen before but didn’t realize what it was. Because Israel would have been knowledgeable with serpent throne guardians, this is the term Isaiah uses: “Seraphim.” Not because they were necessarily serpentine but as their job description as throne guardians.

We see similar depictions in Ezekiel, where the cherubim are described with the face of a man, a bull, a lion, and an eagle. This doesn’t have to be taken quite so literally. Ezekiel is attempting to describe the indescribable. He is using imagery to speak to their function as throne guardians. We have already talked about the bull representing power and strength. The lion represents kingship (the throne guardians are likely the highest rank of angelic beings, being the closest to Yahweh’s throne), the lion also gives images of courage and protection. The face of a man is likely symbolizing some similarities to humans; we see angels often take the form of men in different Bible passages. The eagle represents wisdom and their role as overseers/guardians of sacred space. In Revelation, John describes the throne guardians as having eyes all over. When the living creatures see the holiness of the One on the throne, they cry out, “Holy, Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty.” When they do this, all of heaven bows down and worships. John is telling us they are well-equipped to handle this task. They see everything, and they see it all very well, much more clearly than we do with our two eyes.

Ezekiel and other parts of the Bible use cherubim, not seraphim, to describe the throne guardians. It is not that there are two different kinds of throne guardians (or three different types if you count John calling them “living creatures”). Each author used terms their audience would be most familiar with. Ezekiel is in Babylon with the exiled Jews at the time. Like Egypt’s throne guardians were seraphim, Babylonian throne guardians were called Cherubim. Ezekiel used this term to better help his audience living in Babylon understand the ununderstandable.

This becomes interesting when we consider Ezekiel 28, where the king of Tyre is compared to a divine rebel. A rebel who fell because of his pride (Ezekiel 28:5), a rebel who was in the garden of Eden (Ezekiel 28:13), a rebel who was a cherub, a throne guardian (Ezekiel 28:14). As mentioned above, cherubim and seraphim are two names for the same beings: throne guardians. It is no mistake that a serpent (nachash) deceived Eve and Adam, an ancient reader would have understood this was not simply an animal; this was a throne guardian, a supernatural rebel who, in his pride, deceived humanity into rebelling against their creator and thus casting our world into darkness.

The Bible never says the words “the devil (or Satan) was the serpent in the Garden.” So how do we know it was him? Jesus will say things like “Satan was a murderer from the beginning,” speaking to how he brought death into the world by deceiving Adam and Eve (Genesis and “he is the father (or originator) of lies” (both references are John 8:44). This still doesn’t say Satan was the serpent. When we combine serpent and throne guardian language into the mix, we can see with relative clarity Jesus is testifying to what the Old Testament says. This was far more than an animal. This was a divine being.

What’s the lesson in Numbers 21? The seraphim nachash (fiery serpents) sent to the Israelites because of their rebellion were almost certainly some cobra animals. Still, the messaging to the Israelite people was evident. This is Yahweh’s divine judgment against us for treating Him improperly, for failing to honor Him and treat Him as Holy.

- Numbers 21:10-20: Israel rejoices and praises Yahweh for the water He provided them.
- Numbers 21:21-25: See notes on Deuteronomy 2 and 3 for the battles against Sihon and Og, two Nephilim kings on the east side of the Jordan River.

Numbers 22: Balaam

- Balaam is a crucial character in the Torah. He is a prophet for hire. Balaam will be hired to curse the Israelites by the King of Moab (the decedents of Lot). Balaam will be unable to curse Israel but instead will teach the Moabites how to curse Israel, get them to marry Midianite women, and worship their gods.
 - Balak, king of Moab, is in this scheme with the Midianites, whom Israel will battle against in Numbers 31.
- Numbers 22:1-8: Balak, the king of Moab, calls for Balaam to curse the Israelites because of their fear of them and what the Lord did to the Egyptians. Balaam says he will speak with Yahweh on the matter.
 - It is fascinating that Balaam knows who Yahweh is and apparently has heard from Him before. This is reminiscent of Jesus speaking of those who would do mighty works in the name of Jesus but would not know Him, Matthew 7:21-23.
- Numbers 22:9-19: Balaam converses with Yahweh, and Yahweh tells Balaam, “You shall not go with them. You shall not curse the people, for they are blessed” - Verse 12. Balaam tells Balak’s men this, and they offer Balaam riches. Balaam says, “he cannot go against the word of Yahweh,” but to wait, and Balaam will “know what more Yahweh will say to him.” Of course, Yahweh already told Balaam what to do, but he is so enticed by the money that Yahweh will let Balaam do what he truly wants to do, but it won’t end well for Balaam.
- Numbers 22:20-21: The Lord tells Balaam he can go if the men come to call him but only do what He tells Balaam to do. It is of note that the text never says Balak’s men called to him. It just says Balaam went. The author could be further documenting that this is what Balaam wants; he is not being coerced. The following passage further evidences this.
- Numbers 22:22-35: The Lord’s anger is kindled against Balaam, and the angel of the Lord stands in Balaam’s way. Balaam is unaware of this, but his donkey sees the angel and turns aside; because of this, Balaam strikes his donkey. Again the angel of the Lord stands before Balaam, and he fails to see the Lord, but the donkey does and turns aside and pushes Balaam’s foot against the wall; the donkey is stuck again. This happens a third time when Yahweh opens the donkey’s mouth to talk. The donkey speaks to Balaam, asking why he has struck the donkey three times. Balaam’s eyes are open, and he sees the angel of the Lord standing in his way with his sword drawn (see Joshua 5:13-15; Revelation 1:16). Balaam admits his sin and is commanded only to speak the words the angel of the Lord tells Him.
- Numbers 22:32, 35: The angel of the Lord says Balaam’s way is perverse before “me.” This being is Yahweh himself in the form of a man. The 2nd member of the trinity, Jesus pre-incarnate. The angel of the Lord also tells Balaam He will tell Balaam what to say.
- Numbers 22:33: It is interesting that so many times we miss the Lord, yet both of the famous donkeys of the Bible, Balaam’s donkey and the donkey Jesus rode into Jerusalem, recognized Jesus and who He was. These animals are known for being stubborn, submit to their creator.

Numbers 23-24 - Balaam's Oracles

- Balak asks Balaam to curse Israel four times. Each time Balaam begins speaking, instead of speaking curse to Israel speaks blessing. This is the divine protection of Yahweh for His people. It is a beautiful reminder that even amid all the rebellion that Israel has committed, He is still protecting them from the curse of Israel's enemies.
- The most exciting oracle is the one prophesying the Messiah: Numbers 24:15-17.
- Numbers 23:19: God is not man, that he should lie.
- Numbers 23:22; 24:8: God is for Israel "like the horns of the wild ox." We have spoken previously about how the bull represents strength; here, we see this imagery again.
- Numbers 24:9: Balaam prophesies what was spoken to Abraham by Yahweh in Genesis 12:3: "Blessed are those who bless you and cursed are those who curse you." This protection is still in full effect hundreds of years after the promise to Abraham.
- Numbers 24:25: The plan to curse Israel didn't work, but Balaam will advise Balak before they part ways (see Numbers 31, Revelation 2:14).

Numbers 25 - Israel worships Baal.

- Chapter 25 marks the beginning of Baal worship among Israelites. The Midianites bring in the worship of this foreign and false deity. According to Numbers 31 and Revelation 2:14, Balak and the Midianites did this intentionally at the instruction of Balaam before they departed. Baal worship will continue to be a thorn in the side of Israel for a long time. Much of the Bible has polemic jabs against Baal worship.
- Numbers 25:1-3: Intermarriage wasn't forbidden with non-Israelites, but the foreigner was required to be a Yahweh worshipper.
- Intermarriage that led to the worship of foreign deities was strictly forbidden and is the height of rebellion in the narratives of Numbers.
- Numbers 25:6: The height of apostasy is seen here when an Israelite man takes a Midianite woman into the tent of meeting to have sexual relations with her.
- Numbers 25:7-8: In Chapter 3, we are told the Levites are the "throne guardians" of the physical Tabernacle on earth. It is their job to protect sacred space. Phinehas, on the death of his grandfather Aaron became the chief of the temple guards (Numbers 3:32; 1 Chronicles 9:20). It is fitting that he is the one to stop this treachery. Phinehas takes a spear and pierces both the man and the woman.
- Numbers 25:8: Phinehas' act stops a plague on the people that had broken out because of their rebellion.
- Numbers 25:10-13: Phinehas is credited with being jealous of Yahweh as He is jealous of His people. Our desire as the NT priesthood should be to have the same jealousy for Him that He has for us.

Numbers 26 - The Census of the Next Generation

- The final eleven chapters are focused on the new generation that will go into the promised land to possess it.
- The purpose of the census is to prepare for the battles to come, knowing what army you have and from what tribes, and knowing the clan sizes, which will be important when determining allotment for the land.

Numbers 27 - Rights of Women Who Lead Their Household and Joshua To Take Moses' Place

- Several women from the tribe of Manasseh come to Moses with a problem. Their father has died, and their clan remains without a male heir. This would cause their family to lose their inheritance. Details about how the women can keep their inheritance are given to Moses and the people (see Numbers 27:7-11).
- Numbers 27:12-23: Because of Moses' disobedience, he cannot enter the promised land. A leader to replace Moses is chosen, Moses' right-hand man Joshua. Joshua has a zeal for the Lord, was on the mountain with Moses for the 40 days, remained at the Tent of Meeting when Moses left, and was one of the two spies who went into the promised land and brought back a good report to the people.

Numbers 28 - Specific Offering Required For The Tabernacle

Numbers 29 - Continued Commands Regarding Offering For The Tabernacle

Numbers 30 - Vows taken before the Lord.

- Numbers 30:1-2: Men are required to carry out any vow he makes before the Lord
- Numbers 30:3-16: Women must carry out any vow she makes before the Lord. However, more conditions are designed to protect her from making a vow. If a father hears the vow and determines it is wrong, he can break it. The same with a woman's husband. This is not to lower the woman in the sight of anyone but to protect the woman whom some would try to exploit. This allows a protector of the woman to determine whether the vow was unnecessary, misunderstood, or lacking in any way to break the vow, and the Lord would not hold it against her. Women were less educated in those days; while it was not the Lord's ideal, it was a fact of the culture at the time. This allows further protection from those who have bad intentions.

Numbers 31 - Israel Wars with Midian

- After the events with Balak, Balaam, and the Midianite women and gods, Israel battles against the Midianites.
- Numbers 31:8: Balaam is among those slain in the battle; Israel was the weapon of the Lord against him for the evil Balaam had done.
- Numbers 31:16: Balaam was the one who instigated the Midianites to seduce the Israelites.

Numbers 32 - Reuben, Gad, and Half of Manasseh are given their allotment on the east side of the promised land.

- With the success of the pre-conquest on the east side of the Jordan River (Transjordan). Two tribes and half of the tribe of Manasseh decided they would like to receive theirs here instead of in Canaan. They agreed to send their soldiers with the rest of Israel to take the promised land then they would return to their families in the Transjordan.

Numbers 33 - The Recap of the Wilderness Journey of Israel and The Command to Drive Out The Inhabitants of Canaan.

- Numbers 33:1-49: This record informs of the journey for posterity and shows that Israel didn't settle in some oasis or near cultivated land; they had to travel and travel often. This highlights the miracles the Lord had to do for His people as they traversed land that did not regularly provide food or water.
- Numbers 33:50-56: There are two commands in the conquest. The first and most well-known is when the Lord tells Israel to "devote to destruction" or make holy war. When this command was in place, all city occupants were killed. As previously stated, when this verbiage is used, the Giant Nephilim clans are, in view, a supernatural-natural threat. When the Nephilim are not in view, they are only to drive out the inhabitants. They are not allowed to kill everyone in every city they battle within Canaan. In all cases, they were to destroy all objects of pagan worship.

Numbers 34 - The Boundaries of the Land and The Tribal Chiefs.

- The ideal boundaries the Lord has for His people. Israel is never recorded as having control of all land within the borders listed in Numbers 34.
 - ***I need more time to research this; I can't find my sources:*** Israel would never control the border set by the Lord in Numbers 34. However, the missionary expeditions in Acts show the Gospel received in the areas that Israel never held as a spiritual fulfillment of the promised land.

Numbers 35 - The Levitical Towns

- The Levites would be allotted cities to live in as they had no land. This gave them a safe place to carry out their duties and localized areas to receive offerings to the Lord that they would live off of.
- These cities also served as cities of Refuge. If a person had been accused of murder, they could come to one of these cities where a trial of sorts would be carried out. If they were guilty of murder, they would bear their punishment. However, if the death were accidental, they would be allowed to live in the city until it was safe to return home.

Numbers 36 - Follow Up to Women Inheriting When They Have No Heirs

- This is a follow-up to Numbers 27. As to why it is here, not in Numbers 27, it was likely added (under inspiration) by an editor as an appendix to Numbers at a later date. The idea that Moses himself penned the entire Torah is greatly exaggerated and impossible. It make the Bible as an inspired word impossible to defend.
- The argument was if these women married from outside of their tribe, the tribe would lose their inheritance, and it would mess up the boundaries of inheritance when the jubilee year came.
- A tribe could use this to target another and claim their land as their own. To prevent this, the Lord says that should the situation in Numbers 27 arise, they must marry inside their tribe.