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Biblica Study Notes

Numbers 1:1–5:4

The people of Israel camped at Mount Sinai for two years. God's instructions to them while they were there are recorded in Exodus and Leviticus.

God's instructions that are recorded in Numbers were about preparing to leave Mount Sinai. Moses, Aaron and the leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel counted the people.

First they counted the men 20 years old or older. These were men who could fight in battles. Moses counted the Levite males who were 30 to 50 years old. Moses also counted the males one month old or older in Levi's tribe.

Then he counted the eldest sons in the other tribes. All Israelite males who were born first in their family belonged to God. The reason for this was explained in Exodus 11:1 – 13:16. This didn't mean that God wanted the Israelites to sacrifice children. Instead, the Levite males took the place of the eldest sons from other tribes. They did this by being set apart to serve God.

Levite males from Aaron's family line were set apart to serve God as priests. Others were responsible for taking care of the different parts of the holy tent.

The holy tent was in the centre of the Israelite camp. The tribes were arranged in order around it. First were the Levites who camped closest to the holy tent. Then came the tribe of Judah. They were the lead tribe and had the most soldiers. After that were the other Israelite tribes.

People who were considered unclean couldn't be near the tent. They couldn't even stay in the camp. This reminded the Israelites that God is holy and was present with them.

Numbers 5:5–6:27

The Israelites were to be held responsible for their actions and their words. It was a serious matter when someone did something wrong to someone else. They had to pay the person they sinned against back and pay extra.

God explained that sinning against others hurt the relationship between the person who sinned and

God. It showed that the person wasn't being faithful to God. Their relationship with God was healed when they repented and turned away from their sin. They sacrificed a ram to show that they had repented. The death of the ram atoned for their sin. This means that it paid for the person's sin.

Another serious matter was when husbands and wives weren't faithful to one another. It was as important for men to be faithful as it was for women to be faithful. There were times when it was hard to know if someone had been unfaithful. Women were often falsely accused of being unfaithful. So God provided a way for women to show that they weren't guilty. This practice wasn't magic. It showed that God would bring judgement against those who weren't faithful in marriage.

It was also a serious matter when people made a promise to God. This was clear in the instructions about being a Nazirite. The words of the priests to the people were another serious matter. God commanded them to speak words of blessing. The priests' words would help the Israelites trust that God was with them. God wanted them to trust that he cared for them and provided peace for them.

Numbers 7:1–8:26

Exodus chapters 35 to 39 described how the Israelites built the holy tent. They obeyed God's instructions about the tent completely.

But before the tent could be used to worship God, many supplies were needed. Numbers recorded how the Israelites obeyed God completely in gathering these supplies.

Leaders from all the tribes except Levi brought the same amount of supplies. This showed that all the tribes were important no matter how big or small they were.

The Levites didn't bring supplies. The Levites themselves were an offering to God. Levite males had work to do in the holy tent. They did this work from the age of 25 until 50.

Once the holy tent was set up, God started speaking to Moses there. Moses heard God's voice from above the ark of the covenant. The cloud that covered the tent showed that God was present there.

Numbers 9:1–10:36

Priests were to blow the silver trumpets to give messages to the Israelites.

God said that the sound would remind him of the Israelites. This didn't mean that God sometimes forgot about them. This was a way of describing how much attention God pays to his people (God's people). He always takes care of them. He even listens to the noises they make.

Before leaving the desert around Mount Sinai, the Israelites celebrated the Passover Feast again.

Outsiders like Hobab could participate in the feast (feasts) if they wanted to.

Then the tribes marched away from Sinai. They obeyed God completely by leaving the camp in the order God had told them to. The sign to do this was when the cloud over the holy tent moved.

Numbers 11:1–14:45

Many of the Israelites spoke against God and didn't obey him. They complained about how hard life was and about their food. They complained about Moses as their leader. Even Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses.

The complaining showed that God's people didn't want God to be their God. They wished that God hadn't saved them from being slaves in Egypt. They didn't accept the ways that God had saved them and provided for them.

God brought judgement against them for refusing to accept him. He sent a fire, plague and disease among the Israelites. Yet God didn't destroy all of them. He was patient with his people and forgave them.

God shared the power of the Holy Spirit with 70 leaders. He did this so that they could help Moses. But God made something clear about Moses. Moses was close to him like no other human being was.

Moses sent 12 spies to look at the land of Canaan. Of the 12, only Joshua and Caleb urged the people to obey God. But the Israelites refused to enter Canaan. That happened at Kadesh Barnea.

This meant that they were saying no to who God is. They were saying no to God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

As a result the Israelites would wander for 40 years in the desert. They would wander until those who had refused to enter Canaan died. After that, their

children would receive the covenant blessing of the land.

Numbers 15:1–19:22

God had made it very clear that the Levites were set apart to serve him. They were to take care of everything that had to do with the holy tent.

He had also made it very clear that males from Aaron's family line were to be priests. They were responsible for everything that had to do with sacrifices and the altar. This included the special water that made people and things clean.

The Levites and priests wouldn't receive land or get paid with money. Instead, God provided for them from the offerings given by the other Israelites.

Yet Korah and other Levites who weren't from Aaron's family line didn't like God's rules. They wanted to be priests. When they spoke against Aaron, they opposed the way that God led his people. God put them to death for this.

Other Israelites blamed Moses and Aaron for the deaths. Yet Moses and Aaron remained faithful to serving the Israelites. Again and again, they prayed for God to have mercy on the Israelites. As a result over and over again God decided not to destroy his people.

God made Aaron's walking stick produce buds and flowers. This was a sign that the Israelites must respect Aaron and his sons as priests.

Numbers 20:1–24:25

The people of Israel continued to complain and argue as they wandered in the desert. They said it would have been better to remain slaves or to be dead. That is how unhappy they were.

The people needed water. At Meribah Moses and Aaron didn't completely trust God to provide water. They made water come out of the rock by using force. Because of this, Moses and Aaron wouldn't be allowed to enter Canaan.

Another time when the people needed water, they once again complained instead of trusting God. So God allowed some of the covenant curses to come upon them. This included sickness that wouldn't heal like Deuteronomy 28:59–60 talked about. The sickness was from poisonous snakes. As a result of this many people died. Yet those who looked at the bronze snake on the pole were saved. God used that snake to provide healing for his people. It was a picture of salvation.

Hundreds of years later, Jesus compared himself to the snake that had been lifted up (John 3:14). Even though the Israelites spoke against God, God continued to bless them. He gave them victory over the Canaanites who attacked them. He gave them victory over the kings Sihon and Og. He protected them from Balak the king of Moab. God didn't allow Balaam to put a curse on the Israelites. Instead, Balaam spoke words of blessing.

Balaam's prophecy was also about someone called a star, a king and a ruler. Many years later people understood that this was a prophecy about Jesus.

Numbers 25:1–31:54

Balak had worked together with the Midianites to try to stop the people of Israel. Their plan of having Balaam put a curse on the Israelites didn't work. So Balaam gave them advice about how to trick the Israelites.

Israelite men committed sexual sins with women from Moab and Midian. Then they started worshipping a false god named Baal with these women. These things were wrong and God brought judgement against his people for doing them. God sent a plague against them at the place called Baal Peor.

Phinehas showed how committed he was to making sure that the Israelites honoured God. Later God brought judgement against the Midianites for tricking God's people. The Israelite army attacked them and destroyed their towns. Balaam was killed.

The plague at Baal Peor marked an important time. It was when all the Israelites who had refused to enter Canaan had died. After this the people were counted for a second time. They also received more instructions from God about making offerings and special promises. Joshua was set apart and recognised as the leader after Moses. He and Eleazar would lead the people like Moses and Aaron had.

Numbers 32:1–36:13

Moses recorded a list of all the places where the Israelites had travelled. Then God described the borders of the land he was giving them. It was to be divided among the tribes by casting lots.

Each family group would receive land based on how many people were in the family. Land would be given to daughters if there were no sons in the family. This was the case with Zelophehad's

daughters. Daughters who received land would marry men in their own tribe. That way the land wouldn't be lost to the tribe.

The borders God described didn't include the lands the Israelites had taken from Sihon and Og. Yet some Israelites were allowed to stay east of the River Jordan. This included the tribes of Reuben and Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh.

The men of these tribes would go into Canaan with the other tribes. They would help them drive out the people already living there. Then they would return to their homes east of the River Jordan.

Canaan would be divided among all the other tribes except the tribe of Levi. The Levites would receive towns and fields throughout the other tribes' territories. Six of their towns would be safe cities.

The Israelites' land was to be considered pure and clean. This was because the holy God wanted to live among them. But the land would be polluted and impure if people committed murder. It would also be impure if the Israelites worshipped false gods and didn't worship only God. That would happen if they didn't drive out the Canaanites who lived there already.