

**PART THREE**

**FROM KADESH TO**  
**EAST OF THE JORDAN**  
**NUMBERS 20:22 - 36:13**

### Introduction to Numbers 20:22 – 22:1

Intense archeological research in recent years has put us in a better position to understand the account of the wilderness journey from Kadesh to the northern border of Moab (the Arnon River), as well as the heroic military victories in Transjordan that are narrated here in Numbers 20:22 – 22:1. In the Introduction to the second volume of his commentary (Numbers 21-36, Anchor Bible, 200, page 36), Baruch A. Levine writes:

The priestly writers of Numbers sought to trace all that subsequently became important in Israelite religion and society to the Wilderness Period.

We have seen evidence for this in the first twenty chapters, especially in their including later cultic developments in the revelation given by YHWH to Moses. This same retrojection is true here in this narrative section. Whatever stories may have been handed down in the oral tradition, the written sources used by the priestly writers in this section belong to a period centuries after the period of the Exodus (most likely in the middle of the ninth century), with the result that places are described in terms familiar to the readers at the time of writing and as the authors imagined them to be ‘back then’. As stated in the Introduction, our task is not to expect accurate history or geography. Rather, we are to look for what it is that the authors are saying about YHWH and about YHWH’s will for Israel, and how his people are to listen and respond if they want to experience YHWH’s blessing.

We have already been told of the death of Miriam at Kadesh (20:1). Now as they leave Kadesh, the death of Aaron is reported (20:22-29). This is followed by a victory over the Canaanite king of Arad at Hormah (21:1-3). Here archeology comes to our aid. The record in Numbers is not historically accurate, for there is no evidence of urban settlement at or around Arad in the late thirteenth or early twelfth centuries BC. The source used by the priests may reflect memories of a victory in this area from the period after the settlement of Canaan, such as are recorded in the Book of Judges:

The descendants of Hobab the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad. Then they went and settled with the Amalekites. Judah went with his brother Simeon, and they defeated the Canaanites who inhabited Zephath, and devoted it to destruction. So the city was called Hormah.

– Judges 1:16-17

The victory at Hormah is followed by an account of the journey that took the Israelites around Edom and up through the wilderness area to the Zered Gorge and then east of Moab till they reached the Arnon on the border between Moab and the area held by the Amorite king, Sihon (21:4-20; see the map on page 381). The Exodus generation died out during this long journey.

The rest of chapter twenty one narrates the victories of the second generation in the area east of the Jordan and north of Moab, over Sihon and then Og, king of Bashan, till they camp on the plains of Moab (21:21 – 22:1; see the map on page 384).

Here, too, the authors have drawn on material from a later period to set the scene for the settlement of some of the Israelite tribes in the Transjordan. This settlement itself may go back to the early period of the monarchy (eleventh-tenth centuries). Our understanding of the account found here in Numbers has been advanced significantly by the discovery of the Mesha stele (middle ninth century) in which Mesha, the king of Moab, speaks of the presence of Gad in Moab 'longer than anyone can remember', of the expanding of Israelite settlements in Moab during the reign of Omri, king of Israel (892-871), and of his own successes in regaining some territory.

**<sup>22</sup>They set out from Kadesh, and the Israelites, the whole congregation, came to Mount Hor.**

**<sup>23</sup>Then YHWH said to Moses and Aaron at Mount Hor, on the border of the land of Edom, <sup>24</sup>“Let Aaron be gathered to his people. For he shall not enter the land that I have given to the Israelites, because you rebelled against my command at the waters of Meribah. <sup>25</sup>Take Aaron and his son Eleazar, and bring them up Mount Hor; <sup>26</sup>strip Aaron of his vestments, and put them on his son Eleazar. But Aaron shall be gathered to his people, and shall die there.”**

**<sup>27</sup>Moses did as YHWH had commanded; they went up Mount Hor in the sight of the whole congregation. <sup>28</sup>Moses stripped Aaron of his vestments, and put them on his son Eleazar; and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain. Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain.**

**<sup>29</sup>When all the congregation saw that Aaron had died, all the house of Israel mourned for Aaron thirty days.**

It is possible that ‘Hor’ may simply mean ‘summit’, in which case the translation would be ‘to the summit of the mountain’(unnamed).

Aaron, too, died before entering Canaan. His death is attributed here by the priestly authors to his involvement with Moses at Meribah (see 20:2-13). Like his sister, he is part of the generation that YHWH had said would perish in the wilderness (see 14:32).

When the sacred vestments are handed to his son, Eleazar, the high priesthood moves to the next generation, the generation that is to take possession of the Promised Land (see Joshua 14:1). Eleazar was introduced in Numbers 3:2-4. After the deaths of Nadab and Abihu he is the eldest of Aaron’s sons. In 3:32 he is mentioned as being in charge of the Kohathite Levites, and details of his specific duties are given in 4:16. He is named as the priest responsible for carrying out the priestly parts of the purification ritual for the censers that had been contaminated by Korah in the rebellion (16:36-40), and for those who had contacted a corpse (19:3-7).

At the time of the Exodus Aaron was eighty-three years old (Exodus 7:7). He dies aged one hundred and twenty three (see 33:39).

Back in 14:44-45 we read of an attempt by the Israelites while at Kadesh (see 13:36) to enter Canaan from the south. This was against YHWH's explicit orders and ended in defeat for Israel. They 'were pursued as far as Hormah' (14:45). This defeat set the scene for the journey down to the Red Sea, which was commanded in 14:25 and which will be recounted in the rest of chapter twenty-one.

As noted on page 348, in the traditional story this journey from Kadesh to the Red Sea was the beginning of the long years of desert wandering. The priest writers organise the story differently. They linked the skirmish of chapter fourteen with the wilderness of Paran (and so with the Sinai, see 13:26). It is still towards the beginning of the wilderness period which they place in the Sinai. They quickly cover the forty years, speaking only of some further revelations concerning the cult, and the rebellion of Korah, the Levite. They have the Israelites arriving at Kadesh (now correctly located in the wilderness of Zin) at the beginning of the fortieth year (see 20:1; 33:36-39). The dying out of the Exodus generation, threatened by YHWH in 14:22, is demonstrated by the death of Miriam. They leave Kadesh (20:22), heading northeast in the direction of Arad along the 'way of Atharim', and reach Mount Hor where Aaron dies. The priestly writers conclude this insert with the present scene.

The simplest way to read it is to see it as an alternative version of the scene already given in chapter 14. The difference is that this story here in chapter 21 begins badly, but ends in victory as a result of a vow made by the people. It shows Deuteronomic influence by introducing the notion of a *herem*: a vow not to gain any advantage from the spoils of war but to dedicate them to YHWH by 'utterly destroying the people and their towns' (21:3). This is given as the explanation for the name 'Hormah' (21:3). This dreadful notion is common in Deuteronomy (see 2:34, 3:6, 7:2, 13:16, 20:17) and recurs frequently in Joshua. The positive aspect of this vow is that it discourages wars for personal or communal gain (all spoils have to be given up to YHWH). The negative aspect is in the picture it gives of YHWH, and what YHWH wills or allows in order to give the land to his chosen people.

Those who are determined to read Numbers as an accurate historical record, rather than as a vehicle for conveying important truths through story, have, or should have, problems with this scene. It is possible that the title 'king' stands for the leader of a Bedouin group, but archeology has found not one settlement in the eastern Negeb that was inhabited at the time of the Exodus.

**<sup>1</sup>When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel and took some of them captive. <sup>2</sup>Then Israel made a vow to YHWH and said, "If you will indeed give this people into our hands, then we will utterly destroy their towns." <sup>3</sup>YHWH listened to the voice of Israel, and handed over the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their towns; so the place was called Hormah.**

**<sup>4</sup>From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way.**

**<sup>5</sup>The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food."**

**<sup>6</sup>Then YHWH sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. <sup>7</sup>The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against YHWH and against you; pray to YHWH to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.**

**<sup>8</sup>And YHWH said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live."**

**<sup>9</sup>So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.**

**<sup>10</sup>The Israelites set out, and camped in Oboth. <sup>11</sup>They set out from Oboth, and camped at Iyve-abarim, in the wilderness bordering Moab toward the sunrise.**

**<sup>12</sup>From there they set out, and camped in the Wadi Zered.**

The direction of their journey is explained by YHWH's command (14:25) and the refusal of Edom to allow the Israelites to pass through their land (20:21). We have another story of complaint, similar to that of 11:4-6 and 14:2-4. As in Numbers 11, it is about the manna. On that occasion YHWH answered their 'need' by sending quails, which ended up poisoning them. Here he sends poisonous serpents. The word translated 'poisonous' is *šārāp* ('burning'), so described, perhaps, because their bite caused a fiery inflammation, though Isaiah uses the same word for the heavenly serpent-like 'seraphim' attendant on God's throne (Isaiah 6:2; see also 14:29, 30:6).

As in other complaint stories, the people acknowledge their sin (21:7; compare 12:11, 14:40), and beg Moses to intercede (compare 11:2, 12:11-13).

The story of the bronze serpent fits with other Near Eastern texts that speak of sympathetic magic exercised in a context of invoking the gods. In this case, the notion is that harm caused by serpents is counteracted by a serpent that is the divine vehicle for healing. By gazing upon it, those bitten by the serpents open themselves to the divine healing.

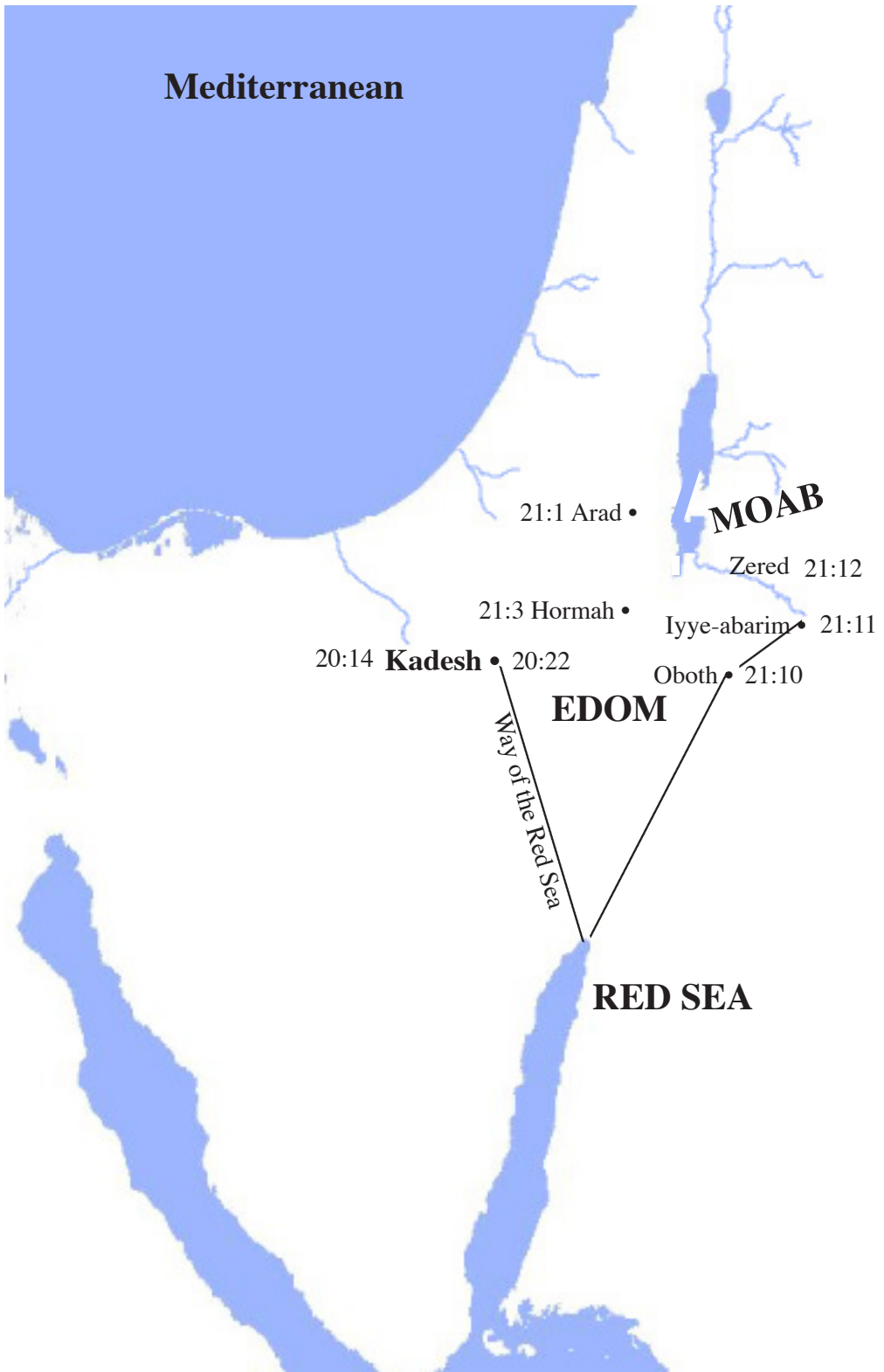
A bronze serpent found its way into the courtyard of the Jerusalem temple, for Hezekiah, as part of his reform, had it removed (see 2Kings 18:4). He judged it to be a distraction from worship of YHWH, in much the same way as centuries later Christian iconoclasts saw icons as a distraction from true worship of God.

The Israelites proceed northwards to Oboth and Iyve-abarim, through the deserts east of Moab, and then to Wadi Zered (in fact a very deep gorge). This marks the end of the Exodus generation:

The length of time we had travelled from Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the Wadi Zered was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation of warriors had perished from the camp, as YHWH had sworn concerning them.

– Deuteronomy 2:14

In the itinerary as narrated on their journey from Kadesh to the Zered the Israelites skirt the territories of Edom and Moab (see the map opposite).



To the Arnon River

**<sup>13</sup>From there they set out, and camped on the other side of the Arnon, in the wilderness that extends from the boundary of the Amorites; for the Arnon is the boundary of Moab, between Moab and the Amorites.**

**<sup>14</sup>Wherefore it is said in the *Chronicle of the Wars of YHWH*, “Waheb in Suphah and the wadis. The Arnon <sup>15</sup>and the cataract of the wadis. *Where it bends to the settlement of Ar, and heads toward the border of Moab.*”**

**<sup>16</sup>From there they continued to Beer; that is the well of which YHWH said to Moses, “Gather the people together, and I will give them water.”**

**<sup>17</sup>Then Israel sang this song: “Spring up, O well!—*They sang to it!*”**

**<sup>18</sup>Oh well that the leaders sank, that the nobles of the people dug, together with the magistrates bearing their sceptres.”**

**From the wilderness to Mattanah, <sup>19</sup>from Mattanah to Nahaliel, from Nahaliel to Bamoth, <sup>20</sup>and from Bamoth to the valley lying in the region of Moab by the top of the *summit* that overlooks the wasteland.**

Moab proper is bordered on the south by the Zered Gorge, on the north by the Arnon River, on the east by the Arabian desert and on the west by the Dead Sea. It is a plateau with an elevation of about one thousand metres. This story is about the area north of the Arnon, an area disputed between Israel and Moab for centuries.

Israel’s claim is that at the time of its occupation of the area north of the river Arnon, it was not part of Moab, having been occupied by the Amorites. To support their claim they quote from an epic collection known as ‘The Chronicle of the Wars of YHWH’ (21:14-15) in which the Arnon is named as the boundary of Moab. The expression ‘wars of YHWH’ is found also in 1 Samuel 18:12; 25:28. The mythical background is that of YHWH subduing the forces of chaos, including other gods. There is also the notion that it was YHWH who commanded Israel to wage war to conquer the Promised Land, and that YHWH was leading them into battle. As noted in the Introduction (page 32), there was an underlying and unquestioned assumption that the enemies of Israel were necessarily the enemies of Israel’s God. One of many examples is in the Song of Deborah where we hear the cry: ‘YHWH, perish all *your* enemies’ (Judges 5:31).

Ar (21:15) is mentioned again in 21:28 (see also Deuteronomy 2:9, 18, 29).

Beer (21:16) means ‘well’ and the authors recall the story of the leaders of the Israelites digging the well (21:18, a claim to ownership), and a song that was composed to celebrate it (21:17).

The places mentioned in verses eighteen to twenty lie along the northern border of Moab, near the Arnon.



This appears to be an imaginative retrojection into the Wilderness Period of tenth century Israelite military victories in Transjordan. Amos (mid eighth century) is familiar with the story:

I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of cedars, and who was as strong as oaks; I destroyed his fruit above, and his roots beneath. Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness, to possess the land of the Amorite.

– Amos 2:9-10

It is quite possible that there were Amorites north of the Arnon in the twelfth century, as a result of the collapse of the Amurru Empire in northern Syria, but archeology has established that Heshbon was not a fortified town at this time, and there is no evidence of Ammon's border being fortified before the eighth century.

An heroic note is struck. This is the second generation, the children of the Exodus generation that has died out.

'Jahaz' (21:23) is mentioned in the Mesha stele (see Isaiah 15:4; Jeremiah 48:21, 34).

Verse twenty-six is written to justify Israel's incursions into territory traditionally claimed by Moab. The claim is that the Israelites took it from the Amorites, not from Moab. They cite an ancient ballad, originally composed to celebrate Israelite victory, but altered to refer to an earlier Amorite victory (I have used Levine's translation).

Medeba (21:30) was the main town in the area claimed by Moab north of the Arnon.

**21**Then Israel sent messengers to King Sihon of the Amorites, saying, **22**"Let me pass through your land; we will not turn aside into field or vineyard; we will not drink the water of any well; we will go by the King's Highway until we have passed through your territory." **23**But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. Sihon gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel to the wilderness; he came to Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

**24**Israel put him to the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as to the Ammonites; for the boundary of the Ammonites was strong. **25**Israel took all these towns, and Israel settled in all the towns of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all its villages. **26**For Heshbon was the city of King Sihon of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and captured all his land as far as the Arnon.

**27**Therefore the ballad singers say, "Come to Heshbon, how it is fortified! How firmly founded is Sihon's town!

**28**For fire blazed from Heshbon, flame from Sihon's capital; it consumed Ar of Moab, Barmoth-Baal-on-Arnon. **29**Woe unto you, Moab! You have vanished, people of Kemosh! His sons were delivered as fugitives, his daughters into captivity. To the Amorite king, Sihon. **30**Their posterity has vanished, from Heshbon all the way to Dibon. They are devastated down to Nophar, located near Medeba."

**31**Thus Israel settled in the land of the Amorites. **32**Moses sent to spy out Jazer; and they captured its villages, and dispossessed the Amorites who were there.

## Victory over Bashan

<sup>33</sup>Then they turned and went up the road to Bashan; and King Og of Bashan came out against them, he and all his people, to battle at Edrei. <sup>34</sup>But YHWH said to Moses, "Do not be afraid of him; for I have given him into your hand, with all his people, and all his land. You shall do to him as you did to King Sihon of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon." <sup>35</sup>So they killed him, his sons, and all his people, until there was no survivor left; and they took possession of his land.

<sup>22:1</sup>The Israelites set out, and camped in the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho.

The Psalmist celebrates these great victories:

Praise YHWH! Praise the name of YHWH; give praise, O servants of YHWH ... He struck down many nations and killed mighty kings – Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan.

– Psalm 135:1, 10-11



## Introduction to the Balaam Insert (22-24)

In 1967 a text inscribed in plaster was discovered at Deir 'Alla, in the Valley of Sukkoth in biblical Gilead, just north of the Yabbok River and about eight kilometres east of the Jordan. Like the text we are about to read, it refers to 'Balaam, son of Beor'. It has been dated c.800BC, and so comes from a time before the Assyrian invasions of 734 and 721BC, a time when the population of the area was largely Israelite. Levine holds that it is likely that it was composed by an Israelite, and states: 'Rarely has the recent discovery of an extra-biblical source had so direct a bearing on the interpretation of biblical texts' (Volume 2, page 41).

The story of Balaam in Numbers 22-24 consists in poetic extracts, which could well come from the same place and period as the Deir 'Alla text, with later prose interpretations. It would appear from the poetry that the Israelites in Gilead at the time were at home with a pantheon of gods, including El, the high god of the whole region (and the god featured in the Deir 'Alla text), as well as their national God, Yahweh. The prose setting and commentary reveal a different religious mentality. They interpret the poems in the light of exclusive Yahwism, which is certainly the position of the priestly writers who include the material here. .

The main character, Balaam, gets rather a bad press in other parts of the Bible. Later in Numbers we are told that Balaam was slain along with the Midianite kings (31:8; see Joshua 13:22), and he is blamed for the Israelite apostasy at Baal Peor (31:16; see also Revelation 2:14). In Deuteronomy 24:9 we are told that he tried to curse Israel, but YHWH turned his curse into a blessing (see also Joshua 24:9-10). This idea persists in the tradition (see Nehemiah 13:2), even into the New Testament (see 2Peter 2:15). It is important to note that, apart from the fable of the talking donkey (22:22-35), which makes fun of non-Israelite 'seers' (and which, in any case, does not belong with the rest of the narrative), the image of Balaam presented in these chapters of Numbers is entirely positive. Balaam is asked by Balak, king of Moab, to curse Israel, but all he can do is utter words of blessing.

It is important also to clarify what is meant by 'curse'. It is the antonym of 'bless'. When Balaam is asked to curse Israel, he is being asked to use his special powers to communicate with the gods, to win their favour, and to entreat them to deprive Israel of their blessing, so that Moab will be able to be victorious over them. This is the aim of the prayer of Moses when the Israelites set off from Sinai:

Whenever the ark set out, Moses would say, "Arise, YHWH, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you."

– Numbers 10:35 (see Psalm 68:1)

YHWH assures Israel:

You shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword.

– Leviticus 26:7

Israel's enemies are not the only ones who can be deprived of YHWH's blessing:

I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down by your enemies; your foes shall rule over you, and you shall flee though no one pursues you.

– Leviticus 26:17

## Introduction to the Balaam story

Jerusalem saw itself as being cursed (deprived of YHWH's blessing) over the long years from its destruction to the rebuilding of the temple (see Zechariah 1:12).

The king of Moab sought out Balaam because of his international reputation as an expert in cursing. However, as we will see, for this kind of expertise to work there must be divine powers who are willing to get involved. In the story included here in Numbers, no such god can be found. All Balaam can do is bless.

This material is included here because it comes from Transjordan and because it promises well for the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. It is significant that Moses is not mentioned.

Verse two loosely attaches this narrative to the context. The reference to Moab's 'great dread' of the Israelites is more likely to belong to the period of Israelite expansion in Transjordan during the reign of Omri, king of Israel (892-871), the period just prior to the Mesha stele referred to in relation to Numbers chapter twenty-one (see page 377). The ninth century experience has been read back into the Wilderness period.

There seem to be two traditions concerning Balaam's place of origin, and both leave their mark in the text. According to one tradition he came from 'Pethor' (22:5), from the river country extending from the Orontes in northern Syria eastwards across the Euphrates. Another tradition has him coming from Transjordan: hence the link to the 'Ammonites' (22:5), and 'Midian' (22:4; see 31:8). He may even be the king of Edom referred to in Genesis 36:31.

Balaam is called to curse ('*arar*) Israel (see page 385). In accordance with the understanding of the ancient East, his magic will work only if the gods so will it. He therefore tells the messengers to wait till he hears from God, whom he calls YHWH (22:8). God ('*lohim*) comes to him, and Balaam tells God that he has been asked to 'curse' (*qābab*) the 'people who have come out of Egypt' (22:11).

<sup>2</sup>Now Balak son of Zippor saw all that Israel had done to the Amorites. <sup>3</sup>Moab was in great dread of the people, because they were so numerous; Moab was overcome with fear of the people of Israel. <sup>4</sup>And Moab said to the elders of Midian, "This horde will now *chew* up all that is around us, as an ox *chews* up the grass of the field." Now Balak son of Zippor was king of Moab at that time.

<sup>5</sup>He sent messengers to Balaam son of Beor at Pethor, which is on the Euphrates, in the land of *Ammonites*, to *invite* him, saying, "A people has come out of Egypt; they have spread over the face of the earth, and they have settled next to me. <sup>6</sup>Come now, curse this people for me, since they are stronger than I; perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land; for I know that whomever you bless is blessed, and whomever you curse is cursed."

<sup>7</sup>So the elders of Moab and the elders of Midian departed with the fees for divination in their hand; and they came to Balaam, and gave him Balak's message. <sup>8</sup>He said to them, "Stay here tonight, and I will bring back word to you, just as YHWH speaks to me"; so the officials of Moab stayed with Balaam.

<sup>9</sup>God came to Balaam and said, "Who are these men with you?"

<sup>10</sup>Balaam said to God, "King Balak son of Zippor of Moab, has sent me this message: <sup>11</sup>'A people has come out of Egypt and has spread over the face of the earth; now come, curse them for me; perhaps I shall be able to fight against them and drive them out.'"

Balak sends for Balaam

**<sup>12</sup>God said to Balaam, "You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed."**

**<sup>13</sup>So Balaam rose in the morning, and said to the officials of Balak, "Go to your own land, for YHWH has refused to let me go with you."**

**<sup>14</sup>So the officials of Moab rose and went to Balak, and said, "Balaam refuses to come with us."**

**<sup>15</sup>Once again Balak sent officials, more numerous and more distinguished than these. <sup>16</sup>They came to Balaam and said to him, "Thus says Balak son of Zippor: 'Do not let anything hinder you from coming to me; <sup>17</sup>for I will surely do you great honour, and whatever you say to me I will do; come, curse this people for me.'" <sup>18</sup>But Balaam replied to the servants of Balak, "Although Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of YHWH my God, to do less or more. <sup>19</sup>You remain here, as the others did, so that I may learn what more YHWH may say to me."**

**<sup>20</sup>That night God came to Balaam and said to him, "If the men have come to summon you, get up and go with them; but do only what I tell you to do."**

**<sup>21</sup>So Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey, and went with the officials of Moab.**

God ('elohîm) commands Balaam not to go with the emissaries from Balak. He is not to curse the people for they are blessed (bērēk) by God. Balaam is renowned for his ability to curse, but since God does not allow it there is nothing he can do. He tells the officials to go back to Balak, for YHWH has refused him permission to go with them. Clearly the authors of the story see YHWH as being in sole control.

Balak sends a second lot of emissaries, of higher rank and with more attractive promises. Balaam explains that there is nothing he can do without the will of the one whom he calls here 'YHWH, my God'(22:19). He is being portrayed as a faithful and obedient believer in the God of Israel. Once again he tells them to wait till he hears what God wants of him.

This time God tells him to go, but 'do only what I tell you to do'(22:20). He saddles his donkey and sets off for Moab.

This fable has been included from a separate source. It is as though 22:13-20 did not exist. God's angry reaction here implies that Balaam 'saddled his donkey and went with the officials of Moab' (22:21) in defiance of God's command not to do so (see 22:12).

The author of the fable is mocking Balaam. He is supposed to be a seer, When YHWH makes his presence apparent (the significance of the expression 'the angel of YHWH'), the donkey can see, but Balaam can't!

Finally, when there is no way out of the situation, and only after the donkey has had words with Balaam and YHWH has opened his eyes, 'Balaam saw the angel of YHWH, and he bowed down' (22:31). It is only after he has acknowledged his sin, repents, and is willing to obey and 'return home' (22:34), that we are back again at 22:20, with YHWH giving him permission to go, but 'do only what I tell you to do'.

<sup>22</sup>God's anger was kindled because he was going, and the angel of YHWH took his stand in the road as his adversary. Now he was riding on the donkey, and his two servants were with him. <sup>23</sup>The donkey saw the angel of YHWH standing in the road, with a drawn sword in his hand; so the donkey turned off the road, and went into the field; and Balaam struck the donkey, to turn it back onto the road. <sup>24</sup>Then the angel of YHWH stood in a narrow path between the vineyards, with a wall on either side. <sup>25</sup>When the donkey saw the angel of YHWH, it scraped against the wall, and scraped Balaam's foot against the wall; so he struck it again. <sup>26</sup>Then the angel of YHWH went ahead, and stood in a narrow place, where there was no way to turn either to the right or to the left. <sup>27</sup>When the donkey saw the angel of YHWH, it lay down under Balaam; and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he struck the donkey with his staff. <sup>28</sup>Then YHWH opened the mouth of the donkey, and it said to Balaam, "What have I done to you, that you have struck me these three times?" <sup>29</sup>Balaam said to the donkey, "Because you have made a fool of me! I wish I had a sword in my hand! I would kill you right now!" <sup>30</sup>But the donkey said to Balaam, "Am I not your donkey, which you have ridden all your life to this day? Have I been in the habit of treating you this way?" And he said, "No." <sup>31</sup>Then YHWH opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of YHWH standing in the road, with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed down, falling on his face. <sup>32</sup>The angel of YHWH said to him, "Why have you struck your donkey these three times? I have come out as an adversary, because your way is perverse before me. <sup>33</sup>The donkey saw me, and turned away from me these three times. If it had not turned away from me, surely just now I would have killed you and let it live." <sup>34</sup>Then Balaam said to the angel of YHWH, "I have sinned, for I did not know that you were standing in the road to oppose me. Now therefore, if it is displeasing to you, I will return home." <sup>35</sup>The angel of YHWH said to Balaam, "Go with the men; but speak only what I tell you to speak." So Balaam went on with the officials of Balak.

Balak goes to meet Balaam

<sup>36</sup>When Balak heard that Balaam had come, he went out to meet him at Ir-moab, on the boundary formed by the Arnon, at the farthest point of the boundary. <sup>37</sup>Balak said to Balaam, "Did I not send an urgent message inviting you? Why did you not come to me? Am I not able to honour you?" <sup>38</sup>Balaam said to Balak, "I have come to you now, but do I have power to say just anything? The word God puts in my mouth, that is what I must say." <sup>39</sup>Then Balaam went with Balak, and they came to Kiriath-huzoth.

<sup>40</sup>Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent them to Balaam and to the officials who were with him.

<sup>41</sup>On the next day Balak took Balaam and brought him up to Bamoth-baal; and from there he could see part of the people of Israel.

<sup>23:1</sup>Then Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me." <sup>2</sup>Balak did as Balaam had said; and Balak and Balaam offered a bull and a ram on each altar. <sup>3</sup>Then Balaam said to Balak, "Stay here beside your burnt offerings while I *move about*. Perhaps YHWH will come to meet me. Whatever he shows me I will tell you." And he went to a bare height.

<sup>4</sup>Then God met Balaam; and Balaam said to him, "I have arranged the seven altars, and have offered a bull and a ram on each altar." <sup>5</sup>YHWH put a word in Balaam's mouth, and said, "Return to Balak, and this is what you must say." <sup>6</sup>So he returned to Balak, who was standing beside his burnt offerings with all the officials of Moab.

'Ir-Moab' is probably the same as Ar, mentioned already in 21:15 and 28. It is on the upper reaches of the Arnon, at the northeast border of Moab and so the nearest point of entrance for a seer coming from Ammon.

Balaam explains that it is up to God to decide what he will say, not up to Balak or himself. They arrive at Kiriath-huzoth ('town of the markets'), where Balak slaughters oxen and sheep to offer proper hospitality to his guest. He then takes Balaam to a vantage point where he can see the encamped Israelites.

Balaam gets Balak to build altars and make a burnt offering ('ōlâ). The number seven is clearly significant. The offering is made with the hope that the sweet-smelling smoke will attract a god. Balaam then walks around the place looking for omens and awaiting divine communication

God, identified as YHWH (23:5), meets Balaam and gives him a message to deliver to Balak. In this way the author of the prose narrative introduces the first of the poetic oracles.



Balaam states that he has been brought from Aram to curse Jacob-Israel (a combination that recurs in each of the four oracles). He cannot, for El (23:8), the high god of the western Semites, and YHWH (23:8), the national god of Israel, will not allow it. Balaam is impressed with the size of the Israelite camp (the amount of dust that they raise). Clearly they do not need to depend on alliances to achieve their aims. They can go it alone. He praise them for their valour that merits victory.

The most interesting aspect of this oracle is that it appears to be composed prior to the synthesis whereby YHWH came to be identified with El (see Deuteronomy 33:25-29). In this story, the chief God for Balaam is El. Since El does not curse Jacob, Balaam cannot. In this El is supporting Israel's national god, YHWH, who has not 'denounced' (23:8, zā'am, 'abandoned in anger') his people, Israel.

Thinking Balaam may have been over-impressed by the size of the Israelite camp, Balak takes him to another spot where he can 'see only part of them' (23:13). He is hoping this might obtain a better outcome.

The same procedure is repeated: the burnt offerings to attract the gods, and Balaam on the look out for omens, hoping that one or other god might appear and communicate with him.

Once again, according to the version of the prose-writers, it is YHWH who appears, and once again YHWH has a message for Balak.

**7Then Balaam uttered his oracle, saying: "Balak has brought me from Aram, the king of Moab from the eastern mountains: 'Come, curse Jacob for me; Come, denounce Israel!' 8How can I curse whom El has not cursed? How can I denounce those whom YHWH has not denounced? 9For from the top of the crags I see him, from the hills I behold him; Here is a people camped apart, unallied with other nations!**

**10Who can count the dust of Jacob, or number the dust-cloud of Israel? Let me die the death of the valiant, and let my end be like his!"**

**11Then Balak said to Balaam, "What have you done to me? I brought you to curse my enemies, but now you have done nothing but bless them."**

**12He answered, "Must I not take care to say what YHWH puts into my mouth?"**

**13So Balak said to him, "Come with me to another place from which you may see them; you shall see only part of them, and shall not see them all; then curse them for me from there." 14So he took him to the plateau of Zophim, to the top of Pisgah. He built seven altars, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.**

**15Balaam said to Balak, "Stand here beside your burnt offerings, while I seek an encounter hereabouts.**

**16YHWH met Balaam, put a word into his mouth, and said, "Return to Balak, and this is what you shall say." 17When he came to him, he was standing beside his burnt offerings with the officials of Moab. Balak said to him, "What has YHWH said?"**

<sup>18</sup>Then Balaam uttered his oracle, saying: "Rise, Balak, and hear; listen to me, O son of Zippor: <sup>19</sup>El is not a human being, that he should *fail*, or a mortal, that he should change his mind. Has he promised, and will he not do it? Has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it? <sup>20</sup>See, I received a command to bless; he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it. <sup>21</sup>He *does not countenance harm to Jacob; he brooks no wrong against Israel*. YHWH their God is with them, acclaimed as a king among them. <sup>22</sup>El, who brings them out of Egypt, is like the horns of a wild ox for them. <sup>23</sup>Surely there is no *augury in Jacob, no divination in Israel; Jacob is promptly informed; Israel - what El plans to do'* <sup>24</sup>Look, a people rising up like a lioness, and rousing itself like a lion! It does not lie down until it has prey *to devour* and drinks the blood of the slain."

<sup>25</sup>Then Balak said to Balaam, "Do not curse them, *but do not bless them.*" <sup>26</sup>But Balaam answered Balak, "Did I not tell you, 'Whatever YHWH says, that is what I must do'?"

<sup>27</sup>So Balak said to Balaam, "Come now, I will take you to another place; perhaps it will please God that you may curse them for me from there." <sup>28</sup>So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, which overlooks the wasteland. <sup>29</sup>Balaam said to Balak, "Build me seven altars here, and prepare seven bulls and seven rams for me." <sup>30</sup>So Balak did as Balaam had said, and offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

<sup>24:1</sup>Now Balaam saw that it pleased YHWH to bless Israel, so he did not go, as at other times, to look for omens, but set his face toward the wilderness. <sup>2</sup>Balaam looked up and saw Israel camping tribe by tribe.

As in the first oracle, the god who communicates with Balaam is the high god, El. El has already refused to curse (23:8). He is not going to change his mind. In fact, he goes further, commanding Balaam to bless (23:20). Furthermore YHWH, the god of Israel, is with his people (23:21).

For the authors of this poem, no less a god than El was responsible for bringing Jacob-Israel out of Egypt (23:22). El is their support ('like the horns of a wild ox for them', 23:22).

Balaam, the expert in augury (naḥaš) and divination (qesem), sees that there is no need for this art in Israel (23:23), for El declares his will to them openly. With El's power, Jacob-Israel is like a lion. No one will be able to stop them devouring their prey.

Balak is clearly rattled. If Balaam is not going to curse the Israelites, at least let him refrain from blessing them (23:25).

Balak has a third attempt. Balaam asks for the same preparations, but this time he does not wander around looking for omens.

In this third oracle the spirit of God comes down on Balaam, so that he speaks as a prophet. To this point he has been seeing what is. Now he sees what is to be. He speaks on behalf of a whole pantheon of gods: El – the chief god of the region; Shadday – the mountain god; Elyon – the high god (see 24:16); and YHWH – the god of Jacob-Israel.

The prophets were constantly calling upon the people of Israel to stop worshipping other gods, and to restrict their worship to YHWH. A gradual process of assimilation seems to have gone on in which each of the gods just mentioned came to be identified with YHWH. As regards El we see this in Deuteronomy 33:25-29. As regards El-Shadday we see it in Exodus 6:2-8. As regards El-Elyon, we see it in Deuteronomy 32:7-8. These poems seem to indicate that this had not yet happened in ninth century Transjordan.

Balaam gives a beautiful poetic description of the blessings that YHWH, Israelites national god, has poured out on Israel. Then he ‘sees’ (hāzâ, 24:4) a ‘vision’ (24:4, mah<sup>a</sup>zeh) of Israel prevailing over the Amalekites (see 1 Samuel 15), reversing the defeat at Hormah (Numbers 14:45).

Once again El is described as having brought Israel out of Egypt (24:8; see 23:22). In the second oracle, Israel was poised like a lion ready to strike. Here the strike has already happened and the lion won’t be prevented from devouring its prey.

**<sup>2</sup>Then the spirit of God came upon him, <sup>3</sup>and he uttered his oracle, saying:**

**“The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, <sup>4</sup>the oracle of one who hears the words of El, <who is privy to Elyon’s knowledge>, who sees the vision of Shadday, sleeping or with eyes uncovered: <sup>5</sup>how fair are your tents, O Jacob, your encampments, O Israel! <sup>6</sup>Like palm-groves that stretch far away, like gardens beside a river, like aloes that YHWH has planted, like cedar trees beside the waters. <sup>7</sup>Water drips from his boughs, and his seed grows near abundant water, his king shall prevail over Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted. <sup>8</sup>El who brings him out of Egypt, is like the horns of a wild ox for him; he devours the nations that are his foes and breaks their bones. He shatters their loins. <sup>9</sup>He crouches like a lion, and like a lioness; who can rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.”**

<sup>10</sup>Then Balak's anger was kindled against Balaam, and he struck his hands together. Balak said to Balaam, "I summoned you to curse my enemies, but instead you have blessed them these three times.

<sup>11</sup>Now be off with you! Go home! I said, 'I will reward you richly,' but YHWH has denied you any reward."

<sup>12</sup>And Balaam said to Balak, "Did I not tell your messengers whom you sent to me, <sup>13</sup>If Balak should give me his house full of silver and gold, I would not be able to go beyond the word of YHWH, to do either good or bad of my own will; what YHWH says, that is what I will say'? <sup>14</sup>So now, I am going to my people; let me advise you what this people will do to your people in days to come."

<sup>15</sup>So he uttered his oracle, saying:

"The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of the man whose eye is opened, <sup>16</sup>the oracle of one who hears the words of El, <sup>17</sup>and who is privy to Elyon's knowledge, who sees the vision of Shadday, sleeping or with his eyes uncovered: <sup>17</sup>I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near— a star marches forth Jacob, a meteor rises from Israel; he strikes the brow of Moab, the skull of all the Shethites. <sup>18</sup>Edom will become a land depopulated, Seir depopulated by its enemies, while Israel emerges triumphant. <sup>19</sup>Jacob shall subdue them, and deport the survivors from Ar."

The prose commentary speaks only of YHWH. Balak is angry. Balaam makes a dire prediction in the name of El, Elyon and Shadday - all gods familiar to Balak.

Verse fifteen to sixteen repeat the opening words of the previous prophetic oracle (24:3-4), and then Balaam 'sees' in the heavens what the gods have decreed will one day be revealed on earth. A star appears, and it is Jacob. A meteor flashes through the heavens and it is Israel. Moab is stricken a deadly blow. The reference would seem to be to David who was to subjugate much of Transjordan. The language is echoed in Jeremiah, who is speaking of the fate of Moab at the hands of the Amorites (compare Numbers 21:28):

In the shadow of Heshbon fugitives stop exhausted; for a fire has gone out from Heshbon, a flame from the house of Sihon; it has destroyed the forehead of Moab, the scalp of the people of tumult.

— Jeremiah 48:45

The reference to 'Shethites' (benê šēt) in verse seventeen is obscure, and our understanding is not helped by the words 'people of tumult' (b'ênê šā'ôn) in the equivalent verse in Jeremiah. One can only assume a tradition that the Moabites were considered descendants of Seth, Adam's son (Genesis 4:25-26; 5:3-4).

Once a country was defeated in war, it was customary to drive the local inhabitants from the land. As refugees they had to fend for themselves as best they could. Balaam's dire threat is that this will be the fate of Edom (Seir) and Moab at the hands of the Israelites.

The Balaam segment finishes with three short oracles that portray Balaam as an international seer.

The first oracle (24:20) concerns the Amalekites (already implied in 24:7).

The second oracle (24:21-22) relates to the Kenites (see Genesis 15:19). The description would appear to be describing the impregnable city of Petra. However the descendants of Cain will be taken captive by the Assyrians. The reference is to the Assyrian invasions of 734 and 721BC.

The third oracle (24:23-24) speaks of the subjugation of Assyria and the land west of the Euphrates ('eber, Joshua 24:2-3), from the north by invaders from Cyprus. However, the invaders in their turn will perish. This may be a reference to an Egyptian-led attack against Assyria in which Sidon took part, recalling its huge ocean going ships from Kittim (see Isaiah 23:1). For this rebellion, Sidon was destroyed by the Assyrian Essarhadon in 677BC.

**<sup>20</sup>Then he looked on Amalek, and uttered his oracle, saying: <sup>21</sup>"First among the nations was Amalek, but its end is to perish forever."**

**<sup>21</sup>Then he looked on the Kenite, and uttered his oracle, saying: "*Your settlement is secure; your nest – ensconced in the rock;***

**<sup>22</sup>yet Cain is trampled land at the time Asshur take you away captive?"**

**<sup>23</sup>Again he uttered his oracle, saying: "*Alas, who shall from the North-land <sup>24</sup>when ships shall come from Kittim? They subjugate Asshur and Eber; and he also shall perish forever."***

**<sup>25</sup>Then Balaam got up and went back to his place, and Balak also went his way.**

**<sup>1</sup>While Israel was staying at Shittim, the people began to have sexual relations with the women of Moab.**

**<sup>2</sup>These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods.**

**<sup>3</sup>Thus Israel yoked itself to the Baal of Peor, and YHWH'S anger was kindled against Israel.**

**<sup>4</sup>YHWH said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people, and impale them in the sun before YHWH, in order that the fierce anger of YHWH may turn away from Israel." <sup>5</sup>And Moses said to the judges of Israel, "Each of you shall kill any of your people who have yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor."**

This story picks up from 22:1 where we were told that 'the Israelites camped in the plains of Moab across the Jordan from Jericho.' The problem here is not that they were having sexual relations (zānâ), but that this led to breaking their covenant fidelity to YHWH by getting involved in worship of the local god, Baal of Peor. YHWH is angry. (On the anger of YHWH see pages 337-339). To reinforce the lesson that there can be no worship of other gods in Israel, the chiefs (ro'sh) are to be impaled for all to see, and the ones appointed to judge (šāpat) are to see that anyone guilty of idolatry is killed.

This scene is of special significance, for the Exodus generation has already died because of their stubborn refusal to believe, and now the second generation, whom YHWH has blessed with victory, have fallen into sin. It emphasises the importance of crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land. The authors are reading back into the Wilderness Period the ninth-eighth century antipathy between Israel and the Transjordan Israelites. The story was known to Hosea (middle 8th century):

Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel.  
Like the first fruit on the fig tree, in its first season,  
I saw your ancestors. But they came to Baal-peor,  
and consecrated themselves to a thing of shame.

– Hosea 9:10

Infidelity to the covenant was not something found only among the Transjordan Israelites. Hosea saw the same kind of behaviour among his contemporaries:

When Ephraim spoke, there was trembling;  
he was exalted in Israel;  
but he incurred guilt through Baal and died.  
And now they keep on sinning  
and make a cast image for themselves,  
idols of silver made according to their understanding, all of  
them the work of artisans.  
"Sacrifice to these," they say. People are kissing calves!  
Therefore they shall be like the morning mist  
or like the dew that goes away early,  
like chaff that swirls from the threshing floor  
or like smoke from a window.  
Yet I have been YHWH your God  
ever since the land of Egypt; you know no God but me,  
and besides me there is no saviour.  
It was I who fed you in the wilderness,  
in the land of drought.  
When I fed them, they were satisfied; they were satisfied,  
and their heart was proud; therefore they forgot me.

– Hosea 13:1-6

The priest writers of Numbers use the traditional story to support the claim of the Eleazar (as distinct from the Ithamar) line from Aaron to exclusive exercise of the ministry of 'perpetual priesthood' (25:14). They have already described the handing on of the high priesthood from Aaron to Eleazar (see Numbers 20:22-29). Now they highlight the zeal of Eleazar's son, Phinehas (see the genealogy, Exodus 6:25).

Verse eight can be read in two ways, depending on whether we read *qubbâ* (tent) or *qëbâ* (belly). The first is more likely as 'belly' points to sexual intercourse as the problem, whereas the focus throughout is on idolatry.

The names add interest to the story. They also support the introduction into the story of the Midianites (25:6, 15), and supply a divine warrant for the military aggression of Israel against Midian (25:16; see also 31:1-12). The Book of Judges tells the story of constant struggle between the Israelites and Arabs of northwest Arabia.

**6Just then one of the Israelites came and brought a Midianite woman into his family, in the sight of Moses and in the sight of the whole congregation of the Israelites, while they were weeping at the entrance of the tent of meeting. 7When Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he got up and left the congregation. Taking a spear in his hand, 8he went after the Israelite man to the tent, and pierced the two of them, the Israelite and the woman, through the belly [or 'at her tent']. So the plague was stopped among the people of Israel. 9Nevertheless those that died by the plague were twenty-four thousand.**

**10YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: 11"Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the Israelites by manifesting such zeal among them on my behalf that in my jealousy I did not consume the Israelites. 12Therefore say, 'I hereby grant him my covenant of peace. 13It shall be for him and for his descendants after him a covenant of perpetual priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the Israelites.'"**

**14The name of the slain Israelite man, who was killed with the Midianite woman, was Zimri son of Salu, head of an ancestral house belonging to the Simeonites. 15The name of the Midianite woman who was killed was Cozbi daughter of Zur, who was the head of a clan, an ancestral house in Midian.**

**16YHWH said to Moses, 17"Harass the Midianites, and defeat them; 18for they have harassed you by the trickery with which they deceived you in the affair of Peor, and in the affair of Cozbi, the daughter of a leader of Midian, their sister; she was killed on the day of the plague that resulted from Peor."**

## Census of the Israelites

As with the genealogies and the other accounts of the taking of a census that we find in the Pentateuch, this census is a creation of the priestly school. A census was taken of those who returned to Judah from exile in Babylon. It is likely that this census here is an assurance to the returned exiles that their ancestors had a similar experience when they first entered the Promised Land. The primary source for the census here in Numbers 26 is Genesis 46:8-37 which lists ‘the Israelites who came to Egypt’ (Genesis 46:8).

The purpose of the census here in Numbers 26 is threefold. It substantiates the fact that, as YHWH had said, the Exodus generation, apart from Caleb and Joshua, has died out (see 26:64-65). It musters the clans with a view to the conquest and settlement of Canaan (26:2). It also provides the basis for the allotment of land.

## Introduction (26:1-4)

**<sup>1</sup>After the plague YHWH said to Moses and to Eleazar son of Aaron the priest, <sup>2</sup>“Take a census of the whole congregation of the Israelites, from twenty years old and upward, by their ancestral houses, everyone in Israel able to go to war.” <sup>3</sup>Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho, saying, <sup>4</sup>“Take a census of the people, from twenty years old and upward,” as YHWH commanded Moses.**

As explained in relation to the census in Numbers chapter one, a tribe (*maṭṭeh*) is the largest unit, consisting of all those who trace themselves back to one of the twelve sons of Jacob. Each tribe is divided into a number of ancestral houses (26:2, *bêt ’ab*), consisting of all those who trace themselves back to a grandson of Jacob. Each ancestral house is divided into a number of clans (*mišpāḥah*), consisting of all those who trace themselves back to a great-grandson of Jacob. The reference to YHWH’s command also takes us back to Numbers 1:2-3. There Moses was aided by Aaron. Here Aaron’s place is taken by his son, Eleazar.

## 1. Clans of the tribe of Reuben (26:5-11)

**<sup>5</sup>Reuben, the firstborn of Israel. The descendants of Reuben: of Hanoch, the clan of the Hanochites; of Pallu, the clan of the Palluites; <sup>6</sup>of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Carmi, the clan of the Carmites. <sup>7</sup>These are the clans of the Reubenites; the number of those *mustered* was forty-three thousand seven hundred thirty. <sup>8</sup>And the descendants of Pallu: Eliab. <sup>9</sup>The descendants of Eliab: Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram.**

The four Reuben clans are listed in Genesis 46:9 (repeated in Exodus 6:14). Eliab, Dathan and Abiram are first mentioned in Numbers 16:1. The following verses are an insert referring back to the rebellion recorded in Numbers 16.

**(These are the same Dathan and Abiram, chosen from the congregation, who rebelled against Moses and Aaron in the company of Korah, when they rebelled against YHWH, <sup>10</sup>and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up along with Korah, when that company died, when the fire devoured two hundred fifty men; and they became a warning. <sup>11</sup>Notwithstanding, the sons of Korah did not die.)**



## 2. Clans of the tribe of Simeon (26:12-14)

**<sup>12</sup>The descendants of Simeon by their clans: of Nemuel, the clan of the Nemuelites; of Jamin, the clan of the Jaminites; of Jachin, the clan of the Jachinites; <sup>13</sup>of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites; of Shaul, the clan of the Shaulites. <sup>14</sup>These are the clans of the Simeonites, twenty-two thousand two hundred.**

With slight differences in the spelling of some of the names, the five Simeon clans are listed in Genesis 46:10 (repeated in Exodus 6:15).

## 3. Clans of the tribe of Gad (26:15-18)

**<sup>15</sup>The children of Gad by their clans: of Zephon, the clan of the Zephonites; of Haggi, the clan of the Haggites; of Shuni, the clan of the Shunites; <sup>16</sup>of Ozni, the clan of the Oznites; of Eri, the clan of the Erites; <sup>17</sup>of Arod, the clan of the Arodites; of Areli, the clan of the Arelites. <sup>18</sup>These are the clans of the Gadites: the number of those *mustered* was forty thousand five hundred.**

The seven Gad clans are listed in Genesis 46:16 (where Numbers has Ozni, Genesis reads Ezbon). There is no listing for Gad or any of the following tribes in Exodus 6, which goes only as far as Simeon and then focuses on Levi.

## 4. Clans of the tribe of Judah (26:19-22)

**<sup>19</sup>The sons of Judah: Er and Onan; Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. <sup>20</sup>The descendants of Judah by their clans were: of Shelah, the clan of the Shelanites; of Perez, the clan of the Perezites; of Zerah, the clan of the Zerahites. <sup>21</sup>The descendants of Perez were: of Hezron, the clan of the Hezronites; of Hamul, the clan of the Hamulites. <sup>22</sup>These are the clans of Judah: the number of those *mustered* was seventy-six thousand five hundred**

This list closely follows Genesis 46:12, including the reference to the deaths of Er and Onan (see Genesis 38), and the listing of the two sons of Perez.

## 5. Clans of the tribe of Issachar (26:23-25)

**<sup>23</sup>The descendants of Issachar by their clans: of Tola, the clan of the Tolaites; of Puvah, the clan of the Punites; <sup>24</sup>of Jashub, the clan of the Jashubites; of Shimron, the clan of the Shimronites. <sup>25</sup>These are the clans of Issachar: sixty-four thousand three hundred enrolled.**

The four Issachar clans are listed in Genesis 46:13.

## 6. Clans of the tribe of Zebulun (26:26-27)

**<sup>26</sup>The descendants of Zebulun by their clans: of Sered, the clan of the Seredites; of Elon, the clan of the Elonites; of Jahleel, the clan of the Jahleelites. <sup>27</sup>These are the clans of the Zebulunites; the number of those *mustered* was sixty thousand five hundred.**

The three Zebulun clans are listed in Genesis 46:14.

## The tribe of Joseph

**<sup>28</sup>The sons of Joseph by their clans: Manasseh and Ephraim.**

Genesis 46:20 reads: ‘To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim’. Since the list in Genesis 46 is of those who came down to Egypt when Joseph was governing Egypt, it does not include any of the descendants of Manasseh or Ephraim.

## 7. Clans of the tribe of Manasseh (26:28-34)

**<sup>29</sup>The descendants of Manasseh: of Machir, the clan of the Machirites; and Machir was the father of Gilead; of Gilead, the clan of the Gileadites.**

**<sup>30</sup>These are the descendants of Gilead: of Iezer, the clan of the Iezerites; of Helek, the clan of the Helekites; <sup>31</sup>and of Asriel, the clan of the Asrielites; and of Shechem, the clan of the Shechemites; <sup>32</sup>and of Shemida, the clan of the Shemidaites; and of Hephher, the clan of the Hephherites. (<sup>33</sup>Now Zelophehad son of Hephher had no sons, but daughters: and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.)**

**<sup>34</sup>These are the clans of Manasseh; the number of those *mustered* was fifty-two thousand seven hundred.**

Machir was mentioned in Genesis 50:23. The rest of the list appears here for the first time. ‘Gilead’(26:30) is a geographical region on the east of the Jordan, north of Moab and south of Bashan. ‘Shechem’(26:31) is an important centre in the hill country of Samaria, associated with Abraham (Genesis 12:6), Jacob (Genesis 33:18), and Joseph (Genesis 37:14). Manasseh was the only tribe to have territory on both sides of the Jordan.

## 8. Clans of the tribe of Ephraim (26:35-37)

**<sup>35</sup>These are the descendants of Ephraim according to their clans: of Shuthelah, the clan of the Shuthelahites; of Becher, the clan of the Becherites; of Tahan, the clan of the Tahanites. <sup>36</sup>And these are the descendants of Shuthelah: of Eran, the clan of the Eranites. <sup>37</sup>These are the clans of the Ephraimites: the number of those *mustered* was thirty-two thousand five hundred. These are the descendants of Joseph by their clans.**

As with Manasseh, so here with Ephraim, the list appears for the first time in this text.

## 9. Clans of the tribe of Benjamin (26:38-41)

**<sup>38</sup>The descendants of Benjamin by their clans: of Bela, the clan of the Belaites; of Ashbel, the clan of the Ashbelites; of Ahiram, the clan of the Ahiramites; <sup>39</sup>of Shephupham, the clan of the Shuphamites; of Hupham, the clan of the Huphamites. <sup>40</sup>And the sons of Bela were Ard and Naaman: of Ard, the clan of the Ardites; of Naaman, the clan of the Naamites. <sup>41</sup>These are the descendants of Benjamin by their clans; the number of those *mustered* was forty-five thousand six hundred.**

‘Bela’ and ‘Ashbel’(26:35) are in the list in Genesis 46:21. ‘Hupham’(26:39) appears there as ‘Huppim’. The other two Benjamin clans appear here for the first time.

## 10. Clans of the tribe of Dan (26:42-43)

<sup>42</sup>These are the descendants of Dan by their clans: of Shuham, the clan of the Shuhamites. These are the clans of Dan by their clans. <sup>43</sup>All the clans of the Shuhamites: sixty-four thousand four hundred *mustered*.

Where Numbers has Shuhan, Genesis 46:23 has Hashum.

## 11. Clans of the tribe of Asher (26:44-47)

<sup>44</sup>The descendants of Asher by their families: of Imnah, the clan of the Imnites; of Ishvi, the clan of the Ishvites; of Beriah, the clan of the Beriites. <sup>45</sup>Of the descendants of Beriah: of Heber, the clan of the Heberites; of Malchiel, the clan of the Malchielites. <sup>46</sup>And the name of the daughter of Asher was Serah. <sup>47</sup>These are the clans of the Asherites: the number of those *mustered* was fifty-three thousand four hundred.

The Asher clans are listed in Genesis 46:17, including mention of Serah.

## 12. Clans of the tribe of Naphtali (26:48-50)

<sup>48</sup>The descendants of Naphtali by their clans: of Jahzeel, the clan of the Jahzeelites; of Guni, the clan of the Gunites; <sup>49</sup>of Jezer, the clan of the Jezrites; of Shillem, the clan of the Shillemites. <sup>50</sup>These are the Naphtalites by their clans: the number of those *mustered* was forty-five thousand four hundred.

The Naphtali clans are listed in Genesis 46:24.

## Total of Census (26:51)

<sup>51</sup>This was the number of the Israelites *mustered*: six hundred and one thousand seven hundred thirty.

## Allotment of Territory (26:52-56)

<sup>52</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>53</sup>To these the land shall be *allotted as territories* according to the number of names. <sup>54</sup>To a large tribe you shall give a large *territory*, and to a small tribe you shall give a small *territory*; every tribe shall be given its *territory* according to its *muster*. <sup>55</sup>But the land shall be apportioned by lot; according to the names of their ancestral tribes they shall *receive territories*. <sup>56</sup>Their *territory* shall be apportioned according to lot between the larger and the smaller.

Lots (gôrāl) were small pieces of stone, wood or bone that were thrown, like dice, or picked out randomly, as a way of by-passing human decision, in the trust that God would intervene and ensure that the result was according to his will.

Census of the Levite clans (26:57-62)

**<sup>57</sup>This is the muster of the Levites by their clans: of Gershon, the clan of the Gershonites; of Kohath, the clan of the Kohathites; of Merari, the clan of the Merarites.**

Gershon, Kohath and Merari are listed as Levi's sons in Genesis 46:11 (repeated in Exodus 6:16).

**<sup>58</sup>These are the clans of Levi: the clan of the Libnites, the clan of the Hebronites, the clan of the Mahlites, the clan of the Mushites, the clan of the Korahites. Now Kohath was the father of Amram. <sup>59</sup>The name of Amram's wife was Jochebed daughter of Levi, who was born to Levi in Egypt; and she bore to Amram: Aaron, Moses, and their sister Miriam. <sup>60</sup>To Aaron were born Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. <sup>61</sup>But Nadab and Abihu died when they offered illicit fire before YHWH. <sup>62</sup>The number of those *mustered* was twenty-three thousand, every male one month old and up; for they were not *mustered* among the Israelites because there was no allotment given to them among the Israelites.**

Exodus 6 lists Libni as Gershon's son (6:17), Mahli and Mushi as Merari's sons (6:19), and Hebron and Amram as Kohath's son (6:18). It also lists Jochebed as Amram's wife and Aaron and Moses as his sons (6:20), as well as Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar as Aaron's son (6:23).

The list here in chapter 26 is an abbreviation of the list already given in Numbers chapter 3. The Levites are to be mustered separately. The reason given here is that no territory is to be allotted to them. As in 3:15, they are to be counted, not from twenty years old and upward like the others (26:2), but 'from one month old and up' (26:62).

Summary (26:63-65)

**<sup>63</sup>These were those *mustered* by Moses and Eleazar the priest, who *mustered* the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan opposite Jericho. <sup>64</sup>Among these there was not one of those *mustered* by Moses and Aaron the priest, who had *mustered* the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. <sup>65</sup>For YHWH had said of them, "They shall die in the wilderness." Not one of them was left, except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.**

Reference is made to the earlier muster taken at the beginning of the journey from Mount Sinai (see Numbers 1-3). The only ones still alive from that earlier muster are Caleb and Joshua, according to YHWH's words (see Numbers 14:30, 35).

There is more to verse one than is immediately apparent. Zelophehad and his five daughters were listed in the census (26:33). Hoglah and Noah are named in the Samaria Ostraca (records on pottery) as localities in Samaria. It is likely that the same is true of the other three names. This story functions as legitimating the claim of some clans of Manasseh to the legal possession (27:4, 'ahuzzâ) of lands in Canaan over and above their territory in Transjordan.

The prevailing system was that only the sons inherited land. If a daughter were to inherit the land would go to the family of her husband and so be lost to her kin. This passage introduces a change in law, allowing daughters to inherit. The priests, as always, link this change back through Moses to YHWH (compare 9:6-14 and 15:32-36). The unusual word for 'pass' in regard to inheritance (he'ebîr, 27:8, instead of the usual nātan) highlights that this is envisaged as an unusual situation.

Chapter 36 adds the rider that the daughter is obliged to marry within her kinship group to ensure that the property is not lost to another tribe. It will go to her children, or, if she has none, the older custom will come into play and it will revert to the closest male member of her kin.

The overall effect of this change is to keep the land in the kinship group, but give first preference to the woman's children as distinct from other male relatives.

Note the role of the high priest and of the 'leaders' (nāšî') in governing the community (27:2). Note, too, the insistence that Zelophehad did not take part in the rebellion, but 'died for his own sin' (27:4). Had he died because of rebellion, his property would have been confiscated according to the law of ḥērem, and his family would have lost all rights to inherit it.

**1**Then the daughters of Zelophehad came forward. Zelophehad was son of Hephher son of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh son of Joseph, a member of the Manassite clans. The names of his daughters were: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.

**2**They stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders, and all the congregation, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and they said, **3**"Our father died in the wilderness; he was not among the company of those who gathered themselves together against YHWH in the company of Korah, but died for his own sin; and he had no sons. **4**Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan because he had no son? Give to us a possession among our father's brothers."

**5**Moses brought their case before YHWH. **6**And YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: **7**The daughters of Zelophehad are right in what they are saying; you shall indeed let them possess an inheritance among their father's brothers and pass the inheritance of their father on to them.

**8**You shall also say to the Israelites, "If a man dies, and has no son, then you shall pass his inheritance on to his daughter. **9**If he has no daughter, then you shall give his inheritance to his brothers. **10**If he has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to his father's brothers. **11**And if his father has no brothers, then you shall give his inheritance to the nearest kinsman of his clan, and he shall possess it. It shall be for the Israelites a statute and edict, as YHWH commanded Moses."

**<sup>12</sup>YHWH said to Moses, “Go up this mountain of the Abarim range, and see the land that I have given to the Israelites. <sup>13</sup>When you have seen it, you also shall be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron was, <sup>14</sup>because you rebelled against my word in the wilderness of Zin when the congregation quarreled with me. You did not show my holiness before their eyes at the waters.” (These are the waters of Meribah of Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin.)**

**<sup>15</sup>Moses spoke to YHWH, saying, <sup>16</sup>“Let YHWH, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint someone over the congregation <sup>17</sup>who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of YHWH may not be like sheep without a shepherd.”**

**<sup>18</sup>So YHWH said to Moses, “Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand upon him; <sup>19</sup>have him stand before Eleazar the priest and all the congregation, and commission him in their sight. <sup>20</sup>You shall give him some of your authority, so that all the congregation of the Israelites may obey. <sup>21</sup>But he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the decision of the Urim before YHWH; at his word they shall go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he and all the Israelites with him, the whole congregation.”**

**<sup>22</sup>So Moses did as YHWH commanded him. He took Joshua and had him stand before Eleazar the priest and the whole congregation; <sup>23</sup>he laid his hands on him and commissioned him—as YHWH had directed through Moses.**

The ‘Abarim range’ includes Mount Nebo (see 33:47), where tradition has it that Moses died (see Deuteronomy 34:1-5). Verses thirteen to fourteen refer back to 20:12-13. They understood Moses’ death as a punishment and had to find the fault that accounted for it. A just God cannot act arbitrarily.

As noted in the commentary on Numbers 16:22, the expression ‘the God of the spirits of all flesh’ (27:16) appears in the Bible only in these two texts. It is common in post biblical literature (see 2Maccabees 3:24; 14:46; and Jubilees 10:3). It occurs over a hundred times in the Book of Henoch. This may be an indication of the lateness of this strand of priestly writing.

Joshua first appeared in the story when he led the force that defeated the Amalekites near Mount Sinai (see Exodus 17:8-13). He is associated with Moses on Sinai (Exodus 24:13, 17) and in the tent (Exodus 33:11). Along with Caleb he was spared from the punishment suffered by the whole of the Exodus generation, because of his fidelity (Numbers 14:30, 26:65).

God’s spirit is on Joshua, and Moses is told to commission him as his succession by ‘laying your hand upon him’ (27:19, see Deuteronomy 34:9). He does not, however, share Moses’ unique, direct communication with God. To discover God’s will he must go to the high priest who will throw (see 1Samuel 14:43) the Urim and Thummim (see Exodus 28:30) to find God’s No (Urim) or Yes (Thummim). This, of course, consolidates the position of the high priest.

## Calendar of the Public Cult

In chapter twenty-eight and twenty-nine, the priest authors of Numbers bring together (and at times update) various pieces of cult regulation found in Deuteronomy, Exodus and Leviticus. The most significant factor in the adapting of the cult was the reform of Josiah (640-609) whereby public cult was limited to the Jerusalem temple. The legislation here in Numbers reveals practice in the post-exilic second temple.

**<sup>1</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>Command the Israelites, and say to them: My offering, the food for my offerings by fire, my pleasing odour, you shall take care to offer to me at its appointed time.**

When stating cult regulations, the priest writers, believing in the providential presence and guidance of YHWH, always refer back to the revelation given to Moses, for they see the cult regulation has consistent with, implicit in, and flowing from the revelation given to Moses on Sinai. Hence the customary ‘YHWH said to Moses’(28:1).

## 1. Regular Morning and Evening Offering (28:3-8)

This legislation is found also in Exodus 29:38-42 (see the reference to Mount Sinai in verse six). The Exodus text also speaks of ‘offering’(28:3, that is, ‘burnt offering’, ‘ōlâ, Exodus 29:42), ‘cereal offering’(28:6, minhâ; Exodus 29:41) and ‘drink offering’(28:7, nesek; Exodus 29:41). The quantities are identical in both texts.

**<sup>3</sup>And you shall say to them, This is the offering by fire that you shall offer to YHWH: two male lambs a year old without blemish, daily, as a regular offering. <sup>4</sup>One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight, <sup>5</sup>also one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour for a cereal offering, mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil. <sup>6</sup>It is a regular burnt offering, ordained at Mount Sinai for a pleasing odour, an offering by fire to YHWH. <sup>7</sup>Its drink offering shall be one-fourth of a hin for each lamb; in the sanctuary you shall pour out a drink offering of strong drink to YHWH. <sup>8</sup>The other lamb you shall offer at twilight with a cereal offering and a drink offering like the one in the morning; you shall offer it as an offering by fire, a pleasing odour to YHWH.**

The expression ‘pleasing odour to YHWH’ has its origins in mythical thinking that the gods were pleased with the sweet smell of the smoke rising to heaven from the altar (see Genesis 8:20-21)..

## 2. Public Sacrifice on the Sabbath (28:9-10)

**<sup>9</sup>On the sabbath day: two male lambs a year old without blemish, and two-tenths of an ephah of choice flour for a cereal offering, mixed with oil, and its drink offering – <sup>10</sup>this is the burnt offering for every sabbath, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.**

The Sabbath was first conceived as a family celebration. Though there is evidence of public cult on the Sabbath in pre-exilic times (Hosea 2:13, Isaiah 1:12-13, 2Kings 4:23), at the time of the Babylonian Exile the Sabbath became an important identifying symbol. This is the only Torah text that legislates for the public Sabbath cult, and it stresses that it is in addition to the regular daily offerings already mentioned.

### 3. Sacrifices at each New Moon (28:11-15)

Though there is evidence that public cult took place at the appearance of the New Moon (Hosea 2:11, Amos 8:5, Isaiah 1:13) this is new Torah legislation, giving us further information about the public cult in the post-exilic second temple.

**<sup>11</sup>At the beginnings of your months you shall offer a burnt offering to YHWH: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish; <sup>12</sup>also three-tenths of an ephah of choice flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, for each bull; and two-tenths of choice flour for a grain offering, mixed with oil, for the one ram; <sup>13</sup>and one-tenth of choice flour mixed with oil as a grain offering for every lamb – a burnt offering of pleasing odor, an offering by fire to YHWH. <sup>14</sup>Their drink offerings shall be half a hin of wine for a bull, one-third of a hin for a ram, and one-fourth of a hin for a lamb. This is the burnt offering of every month throughout the months of the year.**

**<sup>15</sup>And there shall be one male goat for a *purification* offering to YHWH; it shall be offered in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering.**

Legislation governing purification offerings (28:15, ḥattā't) is found in Leviticus 4-5. The main public purification sacrifice took place yearly on the feast of Yom Kippur (see Leviticus 16). This monthly offering appears to be a way of continuing the efficacy of Yom Kippur throughout the year, by providing a regular monthly reminder to the people of their need to be purified of sin. Once again (see 28:10) it is stressed that this is in addition to the regular morning and evening offerings (28:15).

### 4. The Paschal Offering (28:16)

**<sup>16</sup>On the fourteenth day of the first month there shall be a paschal offering to YHWH.**

This verse begins the list of public spring festivals. The use of ordinal numbers ('first' etc) entered the Hebrew world as a result of contact with Assyria, probably in the seventh century BC. We find it in Jeremiah (see, for example, 1:3). There are indications in the Bible (see also the Gezer calendar from the tenth century BC) that the ancient Israelites celebrated 'the first month' in the autumn (perhaps in line with the resurrection of the storm god, Baal, in Canaan). However, by the seventh century BC the 'first month' was in the spring (see Jeremiah 36:22, 2Kings 25:8, Ezekiel 40:1). The fourteenth day is the day of the full moon. For the origins of the pasch see the commentary on Numbers 9:2. The word itself comes from a verb meaning 'to spare'. When the firstborn of the Egyptians were killed, Israel was spared. Regulations for celebrating the pasch can be found in Exodus 12. The text here in Numbers follows the equally brief statement in Leviticus 23:5. Both reflect the changes brought about by Josiah and legislated in Deuteronomy:

You are not permitted to offer the passover sacrifice within any of your towns that YHWH your God is giving you. But at the place that YHWH your God will choose ... You shall cook it and eat it at the place that YHWH your God will choose; the next morning you may go back to your tents. For six days you shall continue to eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a solemn assembly for YHWH your God.

– Deuteronomy 16:5-8



## 5. The Pilgrimage Festival of Unleavened Bread (28:17-25)

For this festival the people were ‘summoned to the sanctuary’ (28:17). Legislation regarding the pilgrimage festival (*ḥag*, from *ḥāgag*, ‘to dance for joy’) of Unleavened Bread (*maṣṣôt*) can be found in Exodus 12:15-20 (see also Exodus 13:6-10; 23:15; 34:18). The text here in Numbers follows Leviticus 23:6-8, giving more details as to the offerings that are to be made. The origins of the pilgrimage festival of Unleavened Bread seem to go back to an ancient agricultural spring festival celebrating the beginning of the barley harvest. It is not surprising that in time this would have coalesced with the spring pasch so that pasch was celebrated in the evening before the first day of the seven day harvest celebration (see Deuteronomy 16:1-7; Ezekiel 45:21). The festival of Unleavened Bread was thus used to reinforce the truths about God expressed in the Exodus story (see Exodus 23:14-15; 34:18-20). At this holy time they had to refrain from work that required hard labour.

There are indications that the pilgrimage originally took place on the seventh day of the festival (see Exodus 23:8), but when the cult was centralised it became impossible to make a pilgrimage to the sanctuary for the paschal offering and then come back again a week later, so the pilgrimage was moved to the first day (as in 23:7). It is perhaps during the exile, when a pilgrimage was not possible, that the word *ḥag* began to lose its necessary association with ‘pilgrimage’ and be used generally for a ‘festival’.

**<sup>17</sup>And on the fifteenth day of this month is a *pilgrimage* festival; seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. <sup>18</sup>On the first day there shall be a *summoning to the sanctuary*. You shall do no *laborious work*. <sup>9</sup>You shall offer an offering by fire, a burnt offering to YHWH: two young bulls, one ram, and seven male lambs a year old; see that they are without blemish. <sup>20</sup>Their grain offering shall be of choice flour mixed with oil: three-tenths of an ephah shall you offer for a bull, and two-tenths for a ram; <sup>21</sup>one-tenth shall you offer for each of the seven lambs; <sup>22</sup>also one male goat for a *purification offering*, to make atonement for you. <sup>23</sup>You shall offer these in addition to the burnt offering of the morning, which belongs to the regular burnt offering. <sup>24</sup>In the same way you shall offer daily, for seven days, the food of an offering by fire, a pleasing odour to YHWH; it shall be offered in addition to the regular burnt offering and its drink offering. <sup>25</sup>And on the seventh day you shall have a *summoning to the sanctuary*. You shall do no *laborious work*.**

6. Offering of First Fruits (28:26-31)

The regulations covering the offering of first fruits are found in Leviticus 23:9-21. The first fruits are due to YHWH because it is YHWH's land (Leviticus 23:10; Psalm 24:1). There are indications in the Leviticus text of a complex development, from the time when farmers in different areas made offerings at the local sanctuary according to the time of harvest, to an attempt to organise a time for the offerings, and then, once the cult was centralised, to make their offering seven weeks later at the end of the harvest (Deuteronomy 16:9-12). Note that the pilgrimage mentioned in Exodus 23:16 is not mentioned in Leviticus, nor here in Numbers. It is interesting to note the change in the details of the sacrifices from Leviticus to Numbers. The sacrifices detailed here in Numbers are the same as those required for the New Moon feast (Numbers 28:11-15) and the pilgrimage festival of Unleavened Bread (Numbers 28:19-23).

**<sup>26</sup>On the day of the first fruits, when you offer a cereal offering of new cereal to YHWH at your festival of weeks, you shall have a *summoning to the sanctuary*; you shall do no *laborious work*. <sup>27</sup>You shall offer a burnt offering, a pleasing odour to YHWH: two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs a year old. <sup>28</sup>Their cereal offering shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, three-tenths of an ephah for each bull, two-tenths for one ram, <sup>29</sup>one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; <sup>30</sup>with one male goat, to make atonement for you. <sup>31</sup>In addition to the regular burnt offering with its cereal offering, you shall offer them and their drink offering. They shall be without blemish.**

7. New Moon of the Seventh Month (29:1-6)

This is the first of the autumn festivals. It is listed in Leviticus 23:23-25. Every new moon was accompanied by the blast of the trumpet (see Numbers 10:10), but the seventh month is to the other months as the seventh day is to the other days. It is set apart for YHWH. Scholars are divided as to whether it was a New Year celebration. The 'rest' (šabbātôn) is a less stringent one than that required on the sabbath. The trumpet blasts are short and urgent, like those that alert people to prepare to defend themselves against attack. They are an urgent call on YHWH for the needed autumn rains. Leviticus speaks of 'burnt offerings'. The text here in Numbers gives the details.

**<sup>1</sup>On the first day of the seventh month you shall have a *summoning to the sanctuary*; you shall do no *laborious work*. It is a day for you to blow the trumpets, <sup>2</sup>and you shall offer a burnt offering, a pleasing odour to YHWH: one young bull, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish. <sup>3</sup>Their cereal offering shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, three-tenths of one ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the ram, <sup>4</sup>and one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; <sup>5</sup>with one male goat for a *purification* offering, to make atonement for you. <sup>6</sup>These are in addition to the burnt offering of the new moon and its cereal offering, and the regular burnt offering and its cereal offering, and their drink offerings, according to the *edict* for them, a pleasing odour, an offering by fire to YHWH.**

'According to the edict' presumes that legislation is already in place and is known.

## 8. Offerings on the Day of Atonement (29:7-11)

The timing (tenth day), the mention of ‘denying yourself (primarily fasting), and of ‘the purification offering of atonement’, all identify this as the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippûr), the regulations for which are in Leviticus 16 and Leviticus 23:26-32. What we have here in Numbers is an updating of the regulations to fit with the practice in the second temple.

**<sup>7</sup>On the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a *summoning to the sanctuary* and deny yourselves; you shall do no *laborious work*. <sup>8</sup>You shall offer a burnt offering to YHWH, a pleasing odour: one young bull, one ram, seven male lambs a year old. They shall be without blemish. <sup>9</sup>Their cereal offering shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, three-tenths of an ephah for the bull, two-tenths for the one ram, <sup>10</sup>one-tenth for each of the seven lambs; <sup>11</sup>with one male goat for a *purification* offering, in addition to the *purification* offering of atonement, and the regular burnt offering and its cereal offering, and their drink offerings.**

## 9. Offerings of the Autumn Pilgrimage Festival (29:12-40)

This is the autumn festival of booths (sukkôt, Deuteronomy 16:13). The harvesting is complete. The people are awaiting the rains and the time for sowing. This creates the perfect circumstances for a seven-day pilgrimage to the sanctuary. The name ‘Booths’ (sukkôt) in all likelihood comes from the fact that the huge influx of pilgrims to Jerusalem required the setting up temporary dwellings to accommodate them for a stay of seven days. This festival is listed in Leviticus 23:33-36. Numbers details the offerings to be made on each of the seven days.

**<sup>12</sup>On the fifteenth day of the seventh month you shall have a *summoning to the sanctuary*; you shall do no *laborious work*. You shall celebrate a festival to YHWH seven days. <sup>13</sup>You shall offer a burnt offering, an offering by fire, a pleasing odour to YHWH: thirteen young bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old. They shall be without blemish. <sup>14</sup>Their cereal offering shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, three-tenths of an ephah for each of the thirteen bulls, two-tenths for each of the two rams, <sup>15</sup>and one-tenth for each of the fourteen lambs; <sup>16</sup>also one male goat for a *purification* offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering, its cereal offering and its drink offering.**

**<sup>17</sup>On the second day: twelve young bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>18</sup>with the cereal offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; <sup>19</sup>also one male goat for a sin offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its cereal offering, and their drink offerings.**

**<sup>20</sup>On the third day: eleven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>21</sup>with the cereal offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; <sup>22</sup>also one male goat for a *purification* offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its cereal offering and its drink offering.**

9. Offerings of the Autumn Pilgrimage Festival (29:12-34) continued

<sup>23</sup>**On the fourth day: ten bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>24</sup>with the cereal offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; <sup>25</sup>also one male goat for a *purification* offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering, its cereal offering and its drink offering.**

<sup>26</sup>**On the fifth day: nine bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>27</sup>with the cereal offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; <sup>28</sup>also one male goat for a sin offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its cereal offering and its drink offering.**

<sup>29</sup>**On the sixth day: eight bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>30</sup>with the cereal offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; <sup>31</sup>also one male goat for a *purification* offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering, its cereal offering, and its drink offerings.**

<sup>32</sup>**On the seventh day: seven bulls, two rams, fourteen male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>33</sup>with the cereal offering and the drink offerings for the bulls, for the rams, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; <sup>34</sup>also one male goat for a *purification* offering, besides the regular burnt offering, its cereal offering, and its drink offering.**

10. Offerings of the eighth day of the Autumn Pilgrimage Festival (29:35-38)

The 'eighth day' is a celebration in its own right, timed to come at the end of the seven day pilgrimage festival (see Leviticus 23:36). The sacrifices are common to all the autumn festivals. Psalm 118 is a liturgical psalm composed for this very day.

<sup>35</sup>**On the eighth day you shall have a solemn assembly; you shall do *no laborious work*. <sup>36</sup>You shall offer a burnt offering, an offering by fire, a pleasing odour to YHWH: one bull, one ram, seven male lambs a year old without blemish, <sup>37</sup>and the cereal offering and the drink offerings for the bull, for the ram, and for the lambs, as prescribed in accordance with their number; <sup>38</sup>also one male goat for a *purification* offering, in addition to the regular burnt offering and its cereal offering and its drink offering.**

See the statement from the Mishna on page 268.

Conclusion (29:39-40)

<sup>39</sup>**These you shall offer to YHWH at your appointed festivals, in addition to your votive offerings and your freewill offerings, as your burnt offerings, your cereal offerings, your drink offerings, and your *communion sacrifices*.**

<sup>40</sup>**So Moses told the Israelites everything just as YHWH had commanded Moses.**

This legislation covering vows, oaths and pledges (binding contracts) is appended here because of the custom of making such pronouncements on the occasion of a pilgrimage to a sanctuary.

A 'vow' (neder) is a promise made to God that is conditional on God granting a request. When and if the request is granted, the person making to vow is obliged to do what he/she has promised.

An 'oath' (šebū'â) calls on God to guarantee the truth of what a person states he or she will do or not do. It is not conditional, and is binding from the moment it is uttered.

The particular kind of oath with which this text is concerned is the oath a person takes to enter into a binding contract ('issār or 'esār). The contract is envisaged as being in writing and one is obliged by its content once it is signed.

To fail to keep a vow, or to fail to sign the pledged contract is to 'break one's word'. Since both the vow and the oath include God, it is also to sin against God.

Verses one and two establish the general legal principles. Verses three to five set down the laws covering the special situation of vows or oaths made by unmarried women. Being still under the guardianship of their father, they were often not in a position to carry out what they have undertaken, especially if it involved material cost. It would be their father who would ultimately have to do so. This legislation is to establish the right of unmarried women to take vows and to make oaths, while at the same time maintaining the father's authority.

If a woman is bound by a vow taken prior to marriage, her husband now has the same rights and obligations that her father previously had (30:6-8). If he does not express his disapproval when he first hears about her vow, his silence is taken as assent, and he bound to make good on her word.

**<sup>1</sup>Then Moses said to the heads of the tribes of the Israelites: This is what YHWH has commanded. <sup>2</sup>When a man makes a vow to YHWH, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.**

**<sup>3</sup>When a woman makes a vow to YHWH, or binds herself by a pledge, while within her father's house, in her youth, <sup>4</sup>and her father hears of her vow or her pledge by which she has bound herself, and says nothing to her; then all her vows shall stand, and any pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand.**

**<sup>5</sup>But if her father expresses disapproval to her at the time that he hears of it, no vow of hers, and no pledge by which she has bound herself, shall stand; and YHWH will forgive her, because her father had expressed to her his disapproval.**

**<sup>6</sup>If she marries, while obligated by her vows or any thoughtless utterance of her lips by which she has bound herself, <sup>7</sup>and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her at the time that he hears, then her vows shall stand, and her pledges by which she has bound herself shall stand. <sup>8</sup>But if, at the time that her husband hears of it, he expresses disapproval to her, then he shall nullify the vow by which she was obligated, or the thoughtless utterance of her lips, by which she bound herself; and YHWH will forgive her.**

**<sup>9</sup>But every vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall be binding upon her.**

**<sup>10</sup>And if she made a vow in her husband's house, or bound herself by a pledge with an oath, <sup>11</sup>and her husband heard it and said nothing to her, and did not express disapproval to her, then all her vows shall stand, and any pledge by which she bound herself shall stand. <sup>12</sup>But if her husband nullifies them at the time that he hears them, then whatever proceeds out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning her pledge of herself, shall not stand. Her husband has nullified them, and YHWH will forgive her.**

**<sup>13</sup>Any vow or any binding oath to deny herself, her husband may allow to stand, or her husband may nullify. <sup>14</sup>But if her husband says nothing to her from day to day, then he validates all her vows, or all her pledges, by which she is obligated; he has validated them, because he said nothing to her at the time that he heard of them. <sup>15</sup>But if he nullifies them some time after he has heard of them, then he shall bear her guilt.**

**<sup>16</sup>These are the statutes that YHWH commanded Moses concerning a husband and his wife, and a father and his daughter while she is still young and in her father's house.**

Verse nine legislates for vows made or oaths taken by women who are not under the authority of a man, either because they are widowed or because they are divorced. Since no man is legally responsible for making good on the obligations she has bound herself to, she, and she alone, is responsible before God.

Verses ten to twelve clarify that verse nine refers to undertakings made after the death of her husband or after divorce. Pledges made while she was still married come under the legislation stated in verses six to eight.

Verses thirteen to fifteen refer to vows and oaths that do not involve property but concern self-denial (30:13). This usually related to fasting, but could include other forms of penance. The husband's authority is insisted upon here as well. Seemingly the legislators were trying to protect women against unwise pledges. It is obvious that the legislators were male, and saw themselves as the more intelligent sex!

Verse sixteen speaks of 'statutes' (hoq) because the legislation is in writing.

There are two problems here that have to be faced. The first concerns history. As with much of the narrative material in the Torah, this seems to be a reading back into the Wilderness Period of military conflict between Israel and the Arab tribes of North Arabia and the Transjordan from a later period (see Judges 6-8) – conflict which became part of the epic tradition, as is witnessed in the words of Isaiah in reference to the struggle in his day against Assyria:

For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.

– Isaiah 9:3

YHWH of hosts will wield a whip against them, as when he struck Midian at the rock of Oreb; his staff will be over the sea, and he will lift it as he did in Egypt.

– Isaiah 10:26

Do to them [our enemies] as you did to Midian.

– Psalm 83:9

Referring to the rivalry as one that had been present from the beginning helped to justify later Israelite aggression.

This brings us to a more serious problem, for the authors not only link the Israel-Arab rivalry with Moses, they give it divine authorisation as well. It is YHWH who commands Moses to ‘execute YHWH’S vengeance on Midian’(31:3), for the role they played in what happened at Peor (25:16-18). The fact that every nation in the ancient world had similar notions in regard to their national gods does not make it any more acceptable. Christians are not the only religious group that rejects such a notion of God, or perhaps I should say would reject such a notion if they were to listen to Jesus (The image of God gets worse as the story unfolds!)

This forces us to examine, once again, the meaning of ‘YHWH said’ as we find it throughout these texts. If we reject the idea of a God who commands war, we have to say that what the expression communicates is the conviction of the writers that the events so commanded were in accordance with God’S will. We have to go back to the ideas canvassed in the Introduction concerning the human limitations of all inspired authors. The fact that stories such as this one are still used to justify violence in God’S name should be a warning to us.

The importance of the presence of Eleazar and the sacred vessels, and the fact of each tribe contributing equally reveal the interests of the priestly writers (compare Numbers 3).

**<sup>1</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>“Avenge the Israelites on the Midianites; afterward you shall be gathered to your people.”**

**<sup>3</sup>So Moses said to the people, “Arm some of your number for the war, so that they may go against Midian, to execute YHWH’S vengeance on Midian. <sup>4</sup>You shall send a thousand from each of the tribes of Israel to the war.” <sup>5</sup>So out of the thousands of Israel, a thousand from each tribe were conscripted, twelve thousand armed for battle. <sup>6</sup>Moses sent them to the war, a thousand from each tribe, along with Phinehas son of Eleazar the priest, with the vessels of the sanctuary and the trumpets for sounding the alarm in his hand. <sup>7</sup>They did battle against Midian, as YHWH had commanded Moses, and killed every male.**

**<sup>8</sup>They killed the kings of Midian: Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, the five kings of Midian, in addition to others who were slain by them; and they also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword.**

**<sup>9</sup>The Israelites took the women of Midian and their little ones captive; and they took all their cattle, their flocks, and all their goods as booty. <sup>10</sup>All their towns where they had settled, and all their encampments, they burned, <sup>11</sup>but they took all the spoil and all the booty, both people and animals. <sup>12</sup>Then they brought the captives and the booty and the spoil to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the congregation of the Israelites, at the camp on the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.**

**<sup>13</sup>Moses, Eleazar the priest, and all the leaders of the congregation went to meet them outside the camp. <sup>14</sup>Moses became angry with the officers of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. <sup>15</sup>Moses said to them, "Have you allowed all the women to live? <sup>16</sup>These women here, on Balaam's advice, made the Israelites act treacherously against YHWH in the affair of Peor, so that the plague came among the congregation of YHWH. <sup>17</sup>Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by sleeping with him. <sup>18</sup>But all the young girls who have not known a man by sleeping with him, keep alive for yourselves.**

The source of the names in this list is Joshua 13:21-22. Zur is the father of the Midianite woman who was named as seducing the Israelites into idolatry at Peor (25:15). The names appear to be places along the Nabataean trade route in northern Arabia. In regard to Balaam's inclusion, see the commentary on page 385.

The treatment meted out by the victors, Israel, is typical of the times. Referring to the town of Nebo in Moab, the Moabite king, Mesha (mid-ninth century) writes:

The Kemosh [the god of Moab] said to me: 'Go occupy Nebo, which belongs to Israel.' So I proceeded at night and did battle against it from the crack of dawn until noon, and I seized and killed everyone, seven thousand men and male children, and woman and female children and virgins. For I proscribed the town to Ashtar-Kemosh. I took away from there the vessels of YHWH, and hauled them before Kemosh.

– Mesha Stele lines 14-18

If it is good enough for the Moabite god it is good enough for YHWH! The justification for this kind of behaviour finds its first expression in Deuteronomy 7, 20 and 21. For enemies outside the Promised Land, peace terms were to be offered. If the terms were accepted the conquered people effectively became slaves. If the terms were rejected the treatment was to be as we see it here in Numbers. For enemies inside Canaan, even the children had to be killed (Deuteronomy 20:15-16). Since when Deuteronomy was written such enemies no longer existed, we should read this as a severe warning against the danger of religious compromise.

Verses 16-18 are dreadful. Notice how the women are blamed for what happened at Peor, and remember that Moses' anger is seen as appropriate. He is insisting on obedience to YHWH! The text draws on Judges 21:11-12.



The principle of the need for purification (ḥāṭā') after contact with a corpse has already been stated in Numbers 19:11-20. Verses nineteen to twenty-four spell out some details.

The practice of devoting some of the spoils of victory to the god who was understood to have brought about the victory is universal in the ancient world. It helped support the temple and its ministers. Saul gave this as his pretext for sparing the flocks of the Amalekites (1Samuel 15:20-21), though it did nothing to soften God's judgment in his regard. We are told that the sword of Goliath was deposited in the sanctuary at Nob (1Samuel 21:10). Gideon dedicated jewelry at Ophrah (Judges 8:24-27), and David consecrated to YHWH the spoils of the victory against Aram (2Samuel 8:9-12).

The directions given here in Numbers reflect the ideas found in 1Chronicles 26:26-28 and 29:1-9. Both Chronicles and Numbers were composed at a time when victory in war was nothing but a distant memory, as Judah was now a small part of the Persian Empire and in no position to wage war.

The fact that the Levites have a larger share than the priests (compare 31:28-29 with 31:30) reflects the bigger numbers of Levites in the service of the second temple.

**<sup>19</sup>Camp outside the camp seven days; whoever of you has killed any person or touched a corpse, purify yourselves and your captives on the third and on the seventh day. <sup>20</sup>You shall purify every garment, every article of skin, everything made of goats' hair, and every article of wood."**

**<sup>21</sup>Eleazar the priest said to the troops who had gone to battle: "This is the statute of the law that YHWH has commanded Moses: <sup>22</sup>gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, and lead – <sup>23</sup>everything that can withstand fire, shall be passed through fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless it shall also be purified with the water for purification; and whatever cannot withstand fire, shall be passed through the water. <sup>24</sup>You must wash your clothes on the seventh day, and you shall be clean; afterward you may come into the camp."**

**<sup>25</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>26</sup>"You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the ancestral houses of the congregation make an inventory of the booty captured, both human and animal. <sup>27</sup>Divide the booty into two parts, between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation. <sup>28</sup>From the share of the warriors who went out to battle, set aside as tribute for YHWH, one item out of every five hundred, whether persons, oxen, donkeys, sheep, or goats. <sup>29</sup>Take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priest as an offering to YHWH. <sup>30</sup>But from the Israelites' half you shall take one out of every fifty, whether persons, oxen, donkeys, sheep, or goats – all the animals – and give them to the Levites who have charge of the tabernacle of YHWH."**

**<sup>31</sup>Then Moses and Eleazar the priest did as YHWH had commanded Moses:**

<sup>32</sup>The booty remaining from the spoil that the troops had taken totaled six hundred seventy-five thousand sheep, <sup>33</sup>seventy-two thousand oxen, <sup>34</sup>sixty-one thousand donkeys, <sup>35</sup>and thirty-two thousand persons in all, women who had not known a man by sleeping with him. <sup>36</sup>The half-share, the portion of those who had gone out to war, was in number three hundred thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep and goats, <sup>37</sup>and YHWH'S tribute of sheep and goats was six hundred seventy-five. <sup>38</sup>The oxen were thirty-six thousand, of which YHWH'S tribute was seventy-two. <sup>39</sup>The donkeys were thirty thousand five hundred, of which YHWH'S tribute was sixty-one. <sup>40</sup>The persons were sixteen thousand, of which YHWH'S tribute was thirty-two persons.

<sup>41</sup>Moses gave the tribute, the offering for YHWH, to Eleazar the priest, as YHWH had commanded Moses.

<sup>42</sup>As for the Israelites' half, which Moses separated from that of the troops, <sup>43</sup>the congregation's half was three hundred thirty-seven thousand five hundred sheep and goats, <sup>44</sup>thirty-six thousand oxen, <sup>45</sup>thirty thousand five hundred donkeys, <sup>46</sup>and sixteen thousand persons.

<sup>47</sup>From the Israelites' half Moses took one of every fifty, both of persons and of animals, and gave them to the Levites who had charge of the tabernacle of YHWH; as YHWH had commanded Moses.

<sup>48</sup>Then the officers who were over the thousands of the army, the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, approached Moses, <sup>49</sup>and said to Moses, "Your servants have counted the warriors who are under our command, and not one of us is missing. <sup>50</sup>And we have brought YHWH'S offering, what each of us found, articles of gold, armlets and bracelets, signet rings, earrings, and pendants, to make atonement for ourselves before YHWH."

The need to 'make atonement' (kōper, 31:50) seems to be that since not one of the Israelite army was killed (31:49), they all owed their lives to YHWH who was responsible for their victory and their lives. The tribute dedicated to YHWH (and so to the priests and Levites) was by way of ransom, the dedicated gold being accepted by YHWH as a substitute for the men (compare Exodus 30:11-16).

<sup>51</sup>Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from them, all in the form of crafted articles. <sup>52</sup>And all the gold of the offering that they offered to YHWH, from the commanders of thousands and the commanders of hundreds, was sixteen thousand seven hundred fifty shekels. <sup>53</sup>(The troops had all taken plunder for themselves.) <sup>54</sup>So Moses and Eleazar the priest received the gold from the commanders of thousands and of hundreds, and brought it into the tent of meeting as a memorial for the Israelites before YHWH.

This chapter is part of a long history of concern about the legitimacy of Israelites living in the Transjordan. It seems to have been a particular concern of the priestly writers, possibly because of the disjunction between the Israelites in the area and the temple in post-exilic Judah. The bulk of chapter thirty-two refers to the tribes of Reuben and Gad in the area conquered from the Amorites (Numbers 21:21-35; see map page 384). This chapter continues on from chapter twenty-one.

Moses' reaction to the request to settle in Transjordan is harsh. He likens their unwillingness to 'cross the Jordan' (32:5) to the disbelief shown by the people when the spies frightened them with their report about Canaan (Numbers 14:1-4). He reminds them of YHWH's anger at that time and of the punishment that came to the Exodus generation because of their failure to put their trust in YHWH (14:22-35). Moses is afraid the same will happen again.

In Numbers 13:6, Caleb was listed as representing Judah. Here he is here described as a Kennizite (32:12), one of the peoples of pre-Israelite Canaan (Genesis 15:19-21). Like the Kenites, another group in the Negeb, they seem to have joined forces with Judah and so were absorbed into the Judah tribe (see Joshua 14-15; Judges 1 and 3).

**<sup>1</sup>Now the Reubenites and the Gadites owned a very great number of cattle. When they saw that the land of Jazer and the land of Gilead was a good place for cattle, <sup>2</sup>the Gadites and the Reubenites came and spoke to Moses, to Eleazar the priest, and to the leaders of the congregation, saying, <sup>3</sup>"Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon – <sup>4</sup>the land that YHWH subdued before the congregation of Israel – is a land for cattle; and your servants have cattle." <sup>5</sup>They continued, "If we have found favour in your sight, let this land be given to your servants for a possession; do not make us cross the Jordan."**

**<sup>6</sup>But Moses said to the Gadites and to the Reubenites, "Shall your brothers go to war while you sit here? <sup>7</sup>Why will you discourage the hearts of the Israelites from going over into the land that YHWH has given them? <sup>8</sup>Your fathers did this, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. <sup>9</sup>When they went up to the Wadi Eshcol and saw the land, they discouraged the hearts of the Israelites from going into the land that YHWH had given them. <sup>10</sup>YHWH'S anger was kindled on that day and he swore, saying, <sup>11</sup>"Surely none of the people who came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, because they have not unreservedly followed me – <sup>12</sup>none except Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite and Joshua son of Nun, for they have unreservedly followed YHWH.'**

**<sup>13</sup>And YHWH'S anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness for forty years, until all the generation that had done evil in the sight of YHWH had disappeared. <sup>14</sup>And now you, a brood of sinners, have risen in place of your fathers, to increase YHWH'S fierce anger against Israel! <sup>15</sup>If you turn away from following him, he will again abandon them in the wilderness; and you will destroy all this people."**

**<sup>16</sup>Then they came up to him and said, “We will build sheepfolds here for our flocks, and towns for our little ones, <sup>17</sup>but we will take up arms as a vanguard before the Israelites, until we have brought them to their place. Meanwhile our little ones will stay in the fortified towns because of the inhabitants of the land. <sup>18</sup>We will not return to our homes until all the Israelites have obtained their inheritance. <sup>19</sup>We will not inherit with them on the other side of the Jordan and beyond, because our inheritance has come to us on this side of the Jordan to the east.”**

**<sup>20</sup>So Moses said to them, “If you do this—if you take up arms to go before YHWH for the war, <sup>21</sup>and all those of you who bear arms cross the Jordan before YHWH, until he has driven out his enemies from before him <sup>22</sup>and the land is subdued before YHWH – then after that you may return and be free of obligation to YHWH and to Israel, and this land shall be your possession before YHWH. <sup>23</sup>But if you do not do this, you have sinned against YHWH; and be sure your sin will find you out. <sup>24</sup>Build towns for your little ones, and folds for your flocks; but do what you have promised.”**

**<sup>25</sup>Then the Gadites and the Reubenites said to Moses, “Your servants will do as my lord commands. <sup>26</sup>Our little ones, our wives, our flocks, and all our livestock shall remain there in the towns of Gilead; <sup>27</sup>but your servants will cross over, everyone armed for war, to do battle for YHWH, just as my lord orders.”**

The Reuben and Gad tribes offer to settle their families in Transjordan as a sign that they will make no claim to land on the west of the Jordan. They also offer to cross the Jordan with the others, even leading the attack. Moses agrees so long as they keep their word. Notice how frequently Moses' words refer to YHWH's presence with the army. The authors of the story have no doubt that their enemies are YHWH's enemies. The only danger is that YHWH may abandon them. If he stays with them they are certain of victory. This theme is a key one especially in Deuteronomy:

Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is YHWH your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.” Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: “Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that YHWH has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. It is YHWH who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

– Deuteronomy 31:6-8

Note the following psalms:

With God we shall do valiantly;  
it is he who will tread down our foes.

– Psalm 60:12

Grant us help against the foe,  
for human help is worthless.

– Psalm 108:12

If YHWH does not fight with them, there is no hope for them:

You have rejected us and abased us,  
and have not gone out with our armies.  
You made us turn back from the foe,  
and our enemies have gotten spoil.

– Psalm 44:9-10

Agreement is reached, and grants of land in Transjordan are assigned to Gad and Reuben.

Unexpectedly 'the half-tribe of Manasseh' (32:33) is included (32:33,39-42). This is mainly the clan of Machir (see Numbers 26:28-34).

Archeologists are confident in the location of some of the towns mentioned in this text. For these and for the areas of Israelite settlement in Transjordan see the map on page 420.

<sup>28</sup>So Moses gave command concerning them to Eleazar the priest, to Joshua son of Nun, and to the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelite tribes.

<sup>29</sup>And Moses said to them, "If the Gadites and the Reubenites, everyone armed for battle before YHWH, will cross over the Jordan with you and the land shall be subdued before you, then you shall give them the land of Gilead for a possession; <sup>30</sup>but if they will not cross over with you armed, they shall have possessions among you in the land of Canaan." <sup>31</sup>The Gadites and the Reubenites answered, "As YHWH has spoken to your servants, so we will do. <sup>32</sup>We will cross over armed before YHWH into the land of Canaan, but the possession of our inheritance shall remain with us on this side of the Jordan."

<sup>33</sup>Moses gave to them – to the Gadites and to the Reubenites and to the half-tribe of Manasseh son of Joseph – the kingdom of King Sihon of the Amorites and the kingdom of King Og of Bashan, the land and its towns, with the territories of the surrounding towns.

<sup>34</sup>And the Gadites rebuilt Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer,

<sup>35</sup>Atroth-shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, <sup>36</sup>Beth-nimrah, and Beth-haran, fortified cities, and folds for sheep.

<sup>37</sup>And the Reubenites rebuilt Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, <sup>38</sup>Nebo, and Baal-meon (some names being changed), and Sibmah; and they gave names to the towns that they rebuilt.

<sup>39</sup>The descendants of Machir son of Manasseh went to Gilead, captured it, and dispossessed the Amorites who were there; <sup>40</sup>so Moses gave Gilead to Machir son of Manasseh, and he settled there.

<sup>41</sup>Jair son of Manasseh went and captured the villages of *Ham*, and renamed them *villages of Jair*.

<sup>42</sup>And Nobah went and captured Kenath and its villages, and renamed it Nobah after himself.

Transjordan Tribes



## From Egypt to Transjordan (33:1-49)

The itinerary given here differs in interesting ways from that given earlier in Numbers (see maps page 374 and 381). Faithful to the traditions which they inherited, the authors of Numbers include it here as they approach the end of the Wilderness Journey.

**<sup>1</sup>These are the stages by which the Israelites went out of the land of Egypt in military formation under the leadership of Moses and Aaron. <sup>2</sup>Moses wrote down their starting points, stage by stage, by command of YHWH; and these are their stages according to their starting places.**

This is the third time that writing has been mentioned in Numbers. The other two:

The priest shall put these curses in writing, and wash them off into the water of bitterness.

– Numbers 5:23

Speak to the Israelites, and get twelve staffs from them, one for each ancestral house, from all the leaders of their ancestral houses. Write each man's name on his staff, and write Aaron's name on the staff of Levi. For there shall be one staff for the head of each ancestral house.

– Numbers 17:2-3

## From Egypt to Sinai (33:3-15)

For the journey to Sinai see Exodus 12:37 to 19:2

**<sup>3</sup>They set out from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the day after the passover the Israelites went out boldly in the sight of all the Egyptians, <sup>4</sup>while the Egyptians were burying all their firstborn, whom YHWH had struck down among them. YHWH executed judgments even against their gods.**

**<sup>5</sup>So the Israelites set out from Rameses, and camped at Succoth. <sup>6</sup>They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, which is on the edge of the wilderness. <sup>7</sup>They set out from Etham, and turned back to Pi-hahiroth, which faces Baal-zephon; and they camped before Migdol. <sup>8</sup>They set out from Pi-hahiroth, passed through the sea into the wilderness, went a three days' journey in the wilderness of Etham, and camped at Marah. <sup>9</sup>They set out from Marah and came to Elim; at Elim there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees, and they camped there. <sup>10</sup>They set out from Elim and camped by the Red Sea. <sup>11</sup>They set out from the Red Sea and camped in the wilderness of Sin. <sup>12</sup>They set out from the wilderness of Sin and camped at Dophkah. <sup>13</sup>They set out from Dophkah and camped at Alush. <sup>14</sup>They set out from Alush and camped at Rephidim, where there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>15</sup>They set out from Rephidim and camped in the wilderness of Sinai.**

## From Sinai to Kadesh (33:16-36)

The journey from Sinai to Kadesh has already been told in Numbers 10:33 to 21:1 (see the map page 374). We have already noted differences in the traditional account and that of the priestly writers in relation to the arrival at Kadesh (see page 381). The itinerary here in Numbers 33 has them pass via Ezion-Geber on the Gulf of Aqabah on the journey north that took them to Kadesh (see 33:35). Kibroth-hattaavah and Hazeroth are mentioned in Numbers 11:34-35. The other names are on the road from Sinai to the Gulf.

<sup>16</sup>They set out from the wilderness of Sinai and camped at Kibroth-hattaavah. <sup>17</sup>They set out from Kibroth-hattaavah and camped at Hazeroth. <sup>18</sup>They set out from Hazeroth and camped at Rithmah. <sup>19</sup>They set out from Rithmah and camped at Rimmon-perez. <sup>20</sup>They set out from Rimmon-perez and camped at Libnah. <sup>21</sup>They set out from Libnah and camped at Rissah. <sup>22</sup>They set out from Rissah and camped at Kehelathah. <sup>23</sup>They set out from Kehelathah and camped at Mount Shepher. <sup>24</sup>They set out from Mount Shepher and camped at Haradah. <sup>25</sup>They set out from Haradah and camped at Makheloth. <sup>26</sup>They set out from Makheloth and camped at Tahath. <sup>27</sup>They set out from Tahath and camped at Terah. <sup>28</sup>They set out from Terah and camped at Mithkah. <sup>29</sup>They set out from Mithkah and camped at Hashmonah. <sup>30</sup>They set out from Hashmonah and camped at Moseroth. <sup>31</sup>They set out from Moseroth and camped at Bene-jaakan. <sup>32</sup>They set out from Bene-jaakan and camped at Hor-haggidgad. <sup>33</sup>They set out from Hor-haggidgad and camped at Jotbathah. <sup>34</sup>They set out from Jotbathah and camped at Abronah. <sup>35</sup>They set out from Abronah and camped at Ezion-geber. <sup>36</sup>They set out from Ezion-geber and camped in the wilderness of Zin (that is, Kadesh).

## From Kadesh to the Plains of Moab (33:37-49)

Here the itinerary differs most significantly from that given in Numbers 21. There the Israelites headed southeast from Kadesh and skirted around both Edom and Moab. Here they pass through the centre of Edom (Punon, 33:42) to reach Oboth and Iyye-abarim (21:10).

<sup>37</sup>They set out from Kadesh and camped at Mount Hor, on the edge of the land of Edom. <sup>38</sup>Aaron the priest went up Mount Hor at the command of YHWH and died there in the fortieth year after the Israelites had come out of the land of Egypt, on the first day of the fifth month. <sup>39</sup>Aaron was one hundred twenty-three years old when he died on Mount Hor. <sup>40</sup>The Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the Israelites. <sup>41</sup>They set out from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah. <sup>42</sup>They set out from Zalmonah and camped at Punon. <sup>43</sup>They set out from Punon and camped at Oboth. <sup>44</sup>They set out from Oboth and camped at Iyye-abarim, in the territory of Moab. <sup>45</sup>They set out from Iyim and camped at Dibon-gad. <sup>46</sup>They set out from Dibon-gad and camped at Almon-diblathaim. <sup>47</sup>They set out from Almon-diblathaim and camped in the mountains of Abarim, before Nebo. <sup>48</sup>They set out from the mountains of Abarim and camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho; <sup>49</sup>they camped by the Jordan from Beth-jeshimoth as far as Abel-shittim in the plains of Moab.



In a world which thought of God as controlling whatever happens in this earth, and which was committed to thinking of God as being a just God, some reason had to be found for God's decision to drive the inhabitants of Canaan out of their land. The reason was not hard to find (compare Leviticus 18:24): it was their idolatrous worship of 'figured stones' (maskiyyôt), 'cast images' (šalmê maššêkôt) in their 'high places' (bāmôt) – temples built around what were open-air raised cult platforms.

YHWH instructs Moses to instruct the people that they must drive the local inhabitants out of the land, for:

You shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan.

– Leviticus 18:3

If they do not drive them out they will be corrupted by them into idolatry, as they were at Peor (Numbers 25:3). If that were to happen, YHWH would be bound to 'do to you as I thought to do to them' (33:56). In fact, for the post-exilic theologians, this is what happened when YHWH abandoned Judah to the Babylonians and drove them out of the land into exile. Deuteronomy puts it even more starkly:

You shall devour all the peoples that YHWH your God is giving over to you, showing them no pity; you shall not serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you.

– Deuteronomy 7:16

Instructions are also given about apportioning the land by lot (33:53-54).

<sup>50</sup>In the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>51</sup>Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When you cross over the Jordan into the land of Canaan, <sup>52</sup>you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their figured stones, destroy all their cast images, and demolish all their high places.

<sup>53</sup>You shall take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. <sup>54</sup>You shall apportion the land by lot according to your clans; to a large one you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small one you shall give a small inheritance; the inheritance shall belong to the person on whom the lot falls; according to your ancestral tribes you shall inherit.

<sup>55</sup>But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides; they shall trouble you in the land where you are settling.

<sup>56</sup>And I will do to you as I thought to do to them.

Boundaries of the Promised Land (34:1-12)

The boundaries here are identical with those given in Ezekiel 47:15-20. They are not as extensive as Genesis 15:18 where YHWH promises Abraham: 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates' (repeated in Deuteronomy 1:7, Joshua 1:4). In his commentary (II, 529) Levine writes:

It has been suggested that the borders projected in Numbers 34:2b-12 correlate with the zone of Egyptian hegemony in Canaan during the latter part of the thirteenth century B.C.E., after the battle of Kedesh on the Orontes and enactment of the Egyptian-Hittite treaty between Rameses II and Hattushili III had effectively redefined respective Egyptian and Hittite spheres of influence in the Levant.

Israel is laying claim to the Canaanite territory commanded by Egypt. The fact that the south is listed first shows Judahite interest (as in the lists in Numbers 2, 7 and 10). The southern boundaries are identical with those in Joshua 15:1-4.

**<sup>1</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>Command the Israelites, and say to them: When you enter the land of Canaan (this is the land that shall fall to you for an inheritance, the land of Canaan, defined by its boundaries),**

**<sup>3</sup>your south sector shall extend from the wilderness of Zin along the side of Edom. Your southern boundary shall begin from the end of the Dead Sea on the east; <sup>4</sup>your boundary shall turn south of the ascent of Akrabbim, and cross to Zin, and its outer limit shall be south of Kadesh-barnea; then it shall go on to Hazar-addar, and cross to Azmon; <sup>5</sup>the boundary shall turn from Azmon to the Wadi of Egypt, and its termination shall be at the Sea.**

**<sup>6</sup>For the western boundary, you shall have the Great Sea and its coast; this shall be your western boundary.**

**<sup>7</sup>This shall be your northern boundary: from the Great Sea you shall mark out your line to Mount Hor; <sup>8</sup>from Mount Hor you shall mark it out to Lebohamath, and the outer limit of the boundary shall be at Zedad; <sup>9</sup>then the boundary shall extend to Ziphron, and its end shall be at Hazar-enan; this shall be your northern boundary.**

**<sup>10</sup>You shall mark out your eastern boundary from Hazar-enan to Shepham;**

**<sup>11</sup>and the boundary shall continue down from Shepham to Riblah on the east side of Ain; and the boundary shall go down, and reach the eastern slope of the sea of Chinnereth; <sup>12</sup>and the boundary shall go down to the Jordan, and its end shall be at the Dead Sea. This shall be your land with its boundaries all around.**

Postscript about Transjordan

**<sup>13</sup>Moses commanded the Israelites, saying: This is the land that you shall inherit by lot, which YHWH has commanded to give to the nine tribes and to the half-tribe; <sup>14</sup>for the tribe of the Reubenites by their ancestral houses and the tribe of the Gadites by their ancestral houses have taken their inheritance, and also the half-tribe of Manasseh; <sup>15</sup>the two tribes and the half-tribe have taken their inheritance beyond the Jordan at Jericho eastward, toward the sunrise.**

Those who are to apportion the land by lot

<sup>16</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>17</sup>These are the names of the men who shall apportion the land to you for inheritance: the priest Eleazar and Joshua son of Nun. <sup>18</sup>You shall take one leader of every tribe to apportion the land for inheritance. <sup>19</sup>These are the names of the men:

Of the tribe of Judah, Caleb son of Jephunneh. <sup>20</sup>Of the tribe of the Simeonites, Shemuel son of Ammihud. <sup>21</sup>Of the tribe of Benjamin, Elidad son of Chislon. <sup>22</sup>Of the tribe of the Danites a leader, Bukki son of Jogli. <sup>23</sup>Of the Josephites: of the tribe of the Manassites a leader, Hanniel son of Ephod, <sup>24</sup>and of the tribe of the Ephraimites a leader, Kemuel son of Shiphtan. <sup>25</sup>Of the tribe of the Zebulunites a leader, Eli-zaphan son of Parnach. <sup>26</sup>Of the tribe of the Issacharites a leader, Paltiel son of Azzan. <sup>27</sup>And of the tribe of the Asherites a leader, Ahihud son of Shelomi. <sup>28</sup>Of the tribe of the Naphtalites a leader, Pedahel son of Ammihud.

<sup>29</sup>These were the ones whom YHWH commanded to apportion the inheritance for the Israelites in the land of Canaan.

<sup>1</sup>In the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho, YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>Command the Israelites to give, from the *allotted territory that they have acquired*, towns for the Levites to live in; you shall also give to the Levites pasture lands surrounding the towns. <sup>3</sup>The towns shall be theirs to live in, and their pasture lands shall be for their cattle, for their livestock, and for all their animals. <sup>4</sup>The pasture lands of the towns, which you shall give to the Levites, shall reach from the wall of the town outward a thousand cubits all around. <sup>5</sup>You shall measure, outside the town, for the east side two thousand cubits, for the south side two thousand cubits, for the west side two thousand cubits, and for the north side two thousand cubits, with the town in the middle; this shall belong to them as pasture land for their towns.

<sup>6</sup>The towns that you give to the Levites shall include the six *towns of asylum*, where you shall permit a slayer to flee, and in addition to them you shall give forty-two towns.

<sup>7</sup>The towns that you give to the Levites shall total forty-eight, with their pasture lands.

<sup>8</sup>And as for the towns that you shall give from the *territory acquired by the Israelites*, from the larger tribes you shall take many, and from the smaller tribes you shall take few; each, in proportion to the *estate* that it obtains, shall give of its towns to the Levites.

<sup>9</sup>YHWH spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>10</sup>Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When you cross the Jordan into the land of Canaan, <sup>11</sup>then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you, so that a slayer who kills a person without intent may flee there.

The allotment of land to the tribes according to their size was first mentioned in 26:52-56. In chapter 32 the task of organising the allotment was given to the high priest, Eleazar, and Joshua (as Moses' substitute). They were to be assisted by a leader from each of the tribes.

We have already been told that the priests and Levites 'shall have no allotment' (18:20, 24). Here we discover that in place of having their own territory, the Levites are to be given specified towns along with the surrounding pasture lands (*migrāšîm*).

Verse six introduces the idea of 'towns of asylum' to which a person who has killed another person may flee. Verse eleven clarifies that this asylum is for those who have killed 'without intent'.

Before the development of organised cities, when a person was killed by another person, it was a matter of family honour for the closest relative of the killed person to avenge his death by tracking down and killing the person responsible. This relative is called 'the avenger' (or 'redeemer', *gō'ēl*). When the killing was accidental, the killer could seek asylum in a sanctuary to gain time to be able to argue his innocence. Later, systems were set in place where witnesses could be called and a court could rule. It seems that when Josiah centralised the cult it became impossible for those responsible for accidental homicide to seek refuge because of the problem of distance. Cities of refuge had to be set up.

Blood was of the highest significance in the symbolic world of ancient Israel. This applied to animals as well as humans. Shedding the blood of animals for food was considered not to be in God's original plan (see Genesis 1:28-29), but to have been a concession made by God because of the tendency to violence that had proven to be beyond human beings' ability to completely control. At the same time, it was surrounded by careful cult practices, especially the dashing of blood against the altar by the priest, to ensure that the life of the sacrificed animal was symbolically given back to God before the flesh was consumed. Furthermore, the sacred life-blood had to be drained from the animal before it could be consumed: 'You shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood' (Genesis 9:4). A 'human being' ('*ādām*) must not eat 'blood' ('*dām*).

Even greater care had to be taken when the life of a 'brother' (a fellow Israelite) was concerned. Recall YHWH's words to Cain:

Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!

– Genesis 4:10

The seriousness of shedding blood is underlined by the following principle enunciated in Genesis:

Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.

– Genesis 9:6

In the case of manslaughter, something had to be done, lest the shed blood pollute the land and the sanctuary, and lead to YHWH abandoning his presence among them. The idea of cities of refuge seems to have come from the Deuteronomists (see Deuteronomy 19:1-10 (see also Exodus 21:12-13). This version here in Numbers is secondary.

**<sup>12</sup>The towns shall be for you an *asylum* from the avenger, so that the slayer may not die until there is a trial before the congregation.**

<sup>13</sup>The towns that you designate shall be six towns of *asylum* for you: <sup>14</sup>you shall designate three towns beyond the Jordan, and three towns in the land of Canaan, to be towns of *asylum*. <sup>15</sup>These six towns shall serve as *asylum* for the Israelites, for the resident or transient alien among them, so that anyone who kills a person without intent may flee there.

<sup>16</sup>But anyone who strikes another with an iron object, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. <sup>17</sup>Or anyone who strikes another with a stone in hand that could cause death, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. <sup>18</sup>Or anyone who strikes another with a weapon of wood in hand that could cause death, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death.

<sup>19</sup>The avenger of blood is the one who shall put the murderer to death; when they meet, the avenger of blood shall execute the sentence.

<sup>20</sup>Likewise, if someone pushes another from hatred, or hurls something at another, lying in wait, and death ensues, <sup>21</sup>or in enmity strikes another with the hand, and death ensues, then the one who struck the blow shall be put to death; that person is a murderer;

the avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death, when they meet.

<sup>22</sup>But if someone pushes another suddenly without enmity, or hurls any object without lying in wait, <sup>23</sup>or, while handling any stone that could cause death, unintentionally drops it on another and death ensues, though they were not enemies, and no harm was intended, <sup>24</sup>then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the avenger of blood, in accordance with these *edicts*; <sup>25</sup>and the congregation shall rescue the slayer from the avenger of blood. Then the congregation shall send the slayer back to the original town of *asylum*. The slayer shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil.

<sup>26</sup>But if the slayer shall at any time go outside the bounds of the original town of *asylum*, <sup>27</sup>and is found by the avenger of blood outside the bounds of the town of *asylum*, and is killed by the avenger, no bloodguilt shall be incurred. <sup>28</sup>For the slayer must remain in the town of *asylum* until the death of the high priest; but after the death of the high priest the slayer may return home.

The killer who is judged to have done so ‘without intent’ must stay in the town of *asylum* till the death of the high priest, when he is given an amnesty and allowed to return home. This is new legislation.

<sup>29</sup>These things shall be a statute and *edict* for you throughout your generations wherever you live.

Deuteronomy 17:6 also requires evidence to come from more than one witness,

The biblical legal system does not allow for a murderer to buy his way out of the death sentence – a practice allowed in other ancient Near East codes.

Herein lies the rationale for the need for a process to set things right in some way when blood is shed. Otherwise the land is defiled, and this threatens the presence of YHWH in the land. If YHWH abandons the land, all is lost.

**<sup>30</sup>If anyone kills another, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses; but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of a single witness.**

**<sup>31</sup>Moreover you shall accept no ransom for the life of a murderer who is subject to the death penalty; a murderer must be put to death.**

**<sup>32</sup>Nor shall you accept ransom for one who has fled to a city of refuge, enabling the fugitive to return to live in the land before the death of the high priest.**

**<sup>33</sup>You shall not pollute the land in which you live; for blood pollutes the land, and no expiation can be made for the land, for the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of the one who shed it.**

**<sup>34</sup>You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I YHWH dwell among the Israelites.**

Women who inherit must marry within their kinship group

This is added here to cover a problem arising from the regulation given in 27:1-11 concerning the right of daughters to inherit land. The land would be expected to go to her sons, with the result that if she were to marry outside her kinship group, the land would be lost to another tribe. The solution was to require that she marry within the tribe.

<sup>1</sup>The heads of the ancestral houses of the clans of the descendants of Gilead son of Machir son of Manasseh, of the Josephite clans, came forward and spoke in the presence of Moses and the leaders, the heads of the ancestral houses of the Israelites; <sup>2</sup>they said, "YHWH commanded my lord to give the land for inheritance by lot to the Israelites; and my lord was commanded by YHWH to give the inheritance of our brother Zelophehad to his daughters. <sup>3</sup>But if they are married into another Israelite tribe, then their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestors and added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they marry; so it will be taken away from the allotted portion of our inheritance. <sup>4</sup>And when the jubilee of the Israelites comes, then their inheritance will be added to the inheritance of the tribe into which they have married; and their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our ancestral tribe."

<sup>5</sup>Then Moses commanded the Israelites according to the word of YHWH, saying, "The descendants of the tribe of Joseph are right in what they are saying. <sup>6</sup>This is what YHWH commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, 'Let them marry whom they think best; only it must be into a clan of their father's tribe that they are married, <sup>7</sup>so that no inheritance of the Israelites shall be transferred from one tribe to another; for all Israelites shall retain the inheritance of their ancestral tribes. <sup>8</sup>Every daughter who possesses an inheritance in any tribe of the Israelites shall marry one from the clan of her father's tribe, so that all Israelites may continue to possess their ancestral inheritance. <sup>9</sup>No inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another; for each of the tribes of the Israelites shall retain its own inheritance.'"

<sup>10</sup>The daughters of Zelophehad did as YHWH had commanded Moses.

<sup>11</sup>Mahlah, Tirzah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah, the daughters of Zelophehad, married sons of their father's brothers. <sup>12</sup>They were married into the clans of the descendants of Manasseh son of Joseph, and their inheritance remained in the tribe of their father's clan.

<sup>13</sup>These are the commandments and the *edicts* that YHWH commanded through Moses to the Israelites in the plains of Moab by the Jordan at Jericho.

And so ends the priestly legislation in the Torah. The abrupt ending of Numbers is perhaps another indication of its supplementary nature.