1:2 *One by one*- Here we see the value and meaning attached to the human person by God.

1:18 The implication is that every single Israelite was part of a family. In such a large community there inevitably would have been some who had no family. In the context of commenting upon the Exodus, Ps. 68:6 observes that God set the lonely in families. This may have happened at this point. Those who had no family were arranged into one, so that God’s people moved through the wilderness in family units. In this we see how God is a family God; the family is His desired way of human organization, and we should seek to preserve it.

1:20 *The number of the names*- Implies there was a written list. Moses had been educated in Egypt and therefore would’ve been able to write (Acts 7:22). We should use what worldly wisdom we have in the service of God’s people.

1:46 Over a period of 430 years (Gen. 15:13; Ex. 12:40), the Israelites grew from 70 people (Gen. 46:27; Dt. 10:22) to 603,550 men. This was a primary fulfilment of the promise to Abraham, that his descendants would greatly multiply (Gen. 22:17; Heb. 11:12). We who are in the same covenant relationship with God will experience some element of blessing and fulfilment of the covenant promises in this life too. The large numbers may also have been due to the Egyptians joining the people of Israel.

1:50 We are a new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5). The spirit of the Levites should be ours. As they encamped around the tabernacle, having it as the centre of their lives, so the things of God’s ecclesia, His church, should be central to our lives and have far more importance to us than our careers and associations in this world.

1:53 *That there may be no wrath on the congregation*- The wellbeing of others is dependent upon our efforts. If we don’t do our part for them, we cannot assume that God will raise up someone else. There really can be Divine wrath on others because of our lack of attention to them.

2:1 Encamping around standards and by their tribes was different to how they had filed out of Egypt as one long stream of humanity (Ex. 13:18). After our exodus from the world through our Red Sea baptism, we find our place within the larger family of God. Their sense of which tribe they belonged to had probably been eroded in the 430 years they spent in Egypt; now even the isolated and lonely were given family groups to belong to (Ps. 68:6; see on 1:18).

2:2 The standards of the tribes were a pole with a symbol upon it. Israel marched through the wilderness towards the promised land, as we walk through the wilderness of life towards the Kingdom, carrying and walking behind poles- foreshadowing the cross or stake of Christ, which we are asked to daily pick up and walk behind. Is. 11:10-12 speaks of the cross of Christ as a standard lifted up, to which the believing Gentiles come and camp around- as if they take their place in the Israel of God.

2:3 Three tribes camped on each of the four sides, around the tabernacle. This place of meeting with God was to be central to the community. It is the things of Christ and our relationship with God which should be at the core of the Christian community; we’re not held together by geography, personal friendship or shared denominational history. We are to be Christ centred. The language of the numbering of Israel according to how many fighting men there were in each tribe, and the ideas of encamping and breaking up, all suggest that Israel were God’s army on earth. According to Jewish tradition, Judah carried a lion emblem on their standard, Reuben a man, Joseph an ox, and Dan an eagle. In this case, the cherubim vision of Ezekiel 1 would allude to Israel, as if to say that above them there hovered an Angelic army organized the same way, and the armies of God’s people on earth were a reflection of them. The tent of meeting in the midst of the troops of Israel would’ve been understood in military terms as the tent or pavilion of a general in the centre of an army. But there was nobody within that pavilion- just the presence of God over the sprinkled blood. We aren’t just sitting around waiting for Christ’s return; we are God’s army in this world, with a very present although invisible Heavenly commander in our midst. But His invisibility led Israel many times to ask ‘Is the Lord among us?’, and we face the same doubt in our weak moments. But this is the essence of faith.

2:17 *As they encamp, so shall they march out*- Our attitude and position at rest or leisure is to be our attitude when on the move for Christ.

2:32 The size of Israel’s encampment would’ve been huge- maybe twenty square kilometres, like a moveable city, with streets and lanes. The continual commands to move on, to follow the leading of the Angel in the pillar of fire and cloud, would’ve likely been received without enthusiasm because the breaking of camp would’ve been a long and tedious process. Yet as with us, God works things so that His people are always on the move. God looked down upon their orderly encampment and thought His people were beautiful (24:5,6). Perhaps Paul alludes to their order when he says that the body of Christ should likewise be characterized by orderliness when they are beheld by others (Col. 2:5).

3:4 *They had no children*- That is, no children who ministered as priests. Ultimately, from the perspective of the Kingdom, if our children don’t serve God it will be as if we have no children. Hence the need in this life to train them up to be God’s servants.

3:9 This meant that Moses’ sons were Levites and not priests, and were given to serve Aaron’s sons. Yet Moses time and again is revealed as the undoubted leader of the people, and more spiritually mature and committed than Aaron. Verse 38 could imply that Moses even camped separately to his children. There were no special privileges for the children of the leader, and Moses’ humility would have been exercised by seeing his sons serve Aaron’s sons. If all we want to see is God’s work go forward, we will likewise not become resentful of such things as they work out in church life today.

3:10 *Keep their ministry*- The phrase from the Septuagint version is quoted by Paul about our service of the ecclesia / church today (Rom. 12:7). Whatever day job or career we have in this world, our real work is our ministry to God’s people.

3:13 Those who had been spared from death by the blood of the lamb on Passover night weren’t just free to do as they wished with their saved lives, but were to be devoted to God. We are those who have likewise been spared from eternal death by Christ’s blood, and we are therefore not to see ourselves as having merely escaped eternal death but must go further to perceive ourselves as thereby dedicated to God’s service. Hence the Christian community is called “the church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:23)- we are all as it were the firstborn who were saved by grace on Passover night, because we are in Christ, the firstborn (Col. 1:18).

3:28 Some original manuscripts read 8,300. This could solve the apparent discrepancies in the numbers later on. The difference between the Hebrew letters for 8,300 and 8,600 is miniscule. Although the word of God itself is inspired and infallible, this isn’t to say that there aren’t minor errors of copyists as the manuscripts were passed on over the generations.

3:38- see on :9.

3:43 Levi was by far the smallest tribe- the numbers of the males over 20 in the other tribes (as recorded in Num. 1) is far larger than the number of males of the tribe of Levi. God uses as His special workers those who are weakest in human terms. It could be argued that Levi grew less in number than the other tribes because of some spiritual weakness- for at this time, Divine blessing was reckoned in terms of number of offspring. So perhaps spiritually as well as numerically they were the weakest, yet were chosen by God for His special work. God seems to love to work in this way.

4:1 Kohath wasn’t the firstborn nor the senior born amongst the three sons listed here, but the Kohathites are numbered first and had the greatest responsibility. Again we see how God prefers to work not with the humanly best, strongest or most senior.

4:3 *Enter into the service*- The original words have a military connotation. Whatever our occupation in this world, we are to see ourselves as soldiers fighting for the only truly good and worthy cause of earth. There should therefore be in our lives an element of discipline, regimentation and focus on specific objectives. The New Testament is full of military metaphors (e.g. 2 Tim. 2:4).

4:5 The taking down of the tabernacle is turned by Paul and Peter into a metaphor for our death (2 Cor. 5:1; 2 Pet. 1:14). The implication is that all the valuable things within the tabernacle through which God was manifest can on one level be interpreted as our lives. In this metaphor alone we see the immense value and meaning of human life if it is lived in God’s service.

4:8 *Sealskin*- Taken by the Israelites from the shores of the Red Sea? Whatever we pick up along the wilderness journey of life we are to give to God’s service.

4:15 In 2 Sam. 6:8, God slew Uzzah because he touched the ark when David brought it back to Jerusalem on a cart. Yet the Law clearly stated that the ark was to be carried only by the Levites, and was to be carried on poles rather than on a cart. Throughout Ps. 119, David declares how he loves God’s law and studies and recites it by day and night. That surely included this passage in Numbers 4. But we have a tendency to read God’s word, to know it well, speaking of it to others- and yet somehow assume that it doesn’t apply to us personally, and we can take shortcuts as convenient to us. If righteous David did this, how much more should we be aware of our temptation to fail in the same way.

4:18 *Don’t cut off the clan*- By Moses’ inattention, a whole group of people could have died because of their inattention. Our sensitivity, or lack of it, to others’ likely failings can lead to their losing their part amongst the family of the redeemed. We can’t reason that human failure is simply their fault; we also bear some responsibility if we don’t do what we can to mitigate against it.

4:19 Not touching holy things connects with the command not to touch the forbidden fruit of Eden (Gen. 3:3). Time and again, Adam’s sin is presented (by way of such allusions) as the sin of everyman; elements of it are to be found in all human sin, and therefore we can never blame Adam as the source of our present discomfort under the curse; for we would have done the same. In this sense, all humanity sinned as it were in Adam (Rom. 5:12 Gk.). It’s no bad exercise to analyze our own sins in the light of Adam’s failure and see wherein are the similarities in essence.

4:20 This law was applied even to Gentiles who looked into the ark (1 Sam. 6:19). God still feels sin as a committed offence against Him personally, even when it’s performed by those not responsible to His law. It must be hard being God, seeing and feeling so much offence against Him every moment. In this we see not only His sensitivity to sin, but His grace in allowing the whole of human society to exist in its disobedient, sinful state, minute by minute. And thereby we can appreciate more fully the way that He delays judging this world and ending sin, all because He is so earnest that we and others might come to repentance and salvation (2 Pet. 3:9).

4:44 The Merarites had 3200 workers out of a total of 6200. Although they were the smallest of the three families, they had the most number of workers (Gershon had 2630 out of 7500; Kohath 2750 out of 8600). This may have been for various reasons, but it’s also a fact that the smaller the group, the higher percentage are willing to work. God doesn’t need great numbers to do His work.

4:49 Each man having his own burden to bear is an idea picked up in the New Testament (Gal. 6:5). We are each asked to carry the cross of Christ, and yet that cross is articulated in unique ways for each of us.

5:4 *The children of Israel did so*- Israel’s obedience was mainly when it came to disciplining others, giving materially and making things. But the Pentateuch emphasizes their disobedience when it came to personal morality, internal spirituality and worshipping God alone rather than any idols. We must analyze our own obediences and see if they follow a similar pattern. To be externally religious isn’t difficult, indeed we can rather enjoy being like that.

5;6-8 *When a man or woman commits any sin... he shall confess... the man*- Proof that the Bible often uses the masculine singular to mean ‘any person’, of either gender.

5:7 Both confession and restitution were required. These two elements are still required if we are to truly resolve broken relationships.

5:12 There were various possibilities for how a man should respond in this situation. He could have his wife stoned; divorce her; put her through this ‘trial of jealousy’; or simply forgive her. We too have a range of options open to us when wrong is done to us or when we suspect it has been. The very existence of these options encourages us to think through our responses, and surely inspires us to choose the way of grace over the way of personal revenge or justification.

5:14 This provision for the trial of jealousy appears to have been a concession to human weakness, in this case, male weakness. For the New Testament outlaws envy (the Hebrew word translated “jealousy” here has this sense): Rom. 1:29; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4; Tit. 3:3. It could be that James 4:5 alludes to the spirit of male jealousy which this legislation sought to make a concession to (:14). The simple lesson for us can be that God does indeed make concessions to our human weakness; but we are to use them sparingly, and realize that their very existence is actually intended to inspire us *not* to make use of them but to serve God on the highest level we can.

5:24 **The Corinthians were told that they would “provoke the Lord to jealousy" by breaking bread and yet also worshipping idols (1 Cor. 10:22). This is surely an allusion to the “trial of jealousy". A curse was recited and then the believer drunk a cup; if they were unfaithful, they drunk to their condemnation. Paul’s allusion suggests that each day we break bread and drink the cup, we as the bride of Christ are going through the trial of jealousy. Brutal honesty and self-examination, and not merely of our lives in the last few days, is therefore crucial before drinking the cup.**

6:3 Any Israelite could vow him or herself to special service to God; we too shouldn’t see our service to God in terms of doing the minimum. Realizing the wonder of His grace and the certainty of our eternal life in His Kingdom, we should be moved to special devotions. In this vow, the ordinary Israelite willingly submitted to some of the regulations specific to the priests on duty. The growing of long hair could be seen as an imitation of the High Priest’s mitre. They were not to see the priesthood as something reserved just for specialists, those born into it; nor were they to see the High Priest as so distant from themselves that he could never be imitated, in spirit at least. We likewise can take to ourselves some aspects of the personal work of the Lord Jesus; for all that is true of Him becomes true of we who are baptized into Him. As He was the light of the world, so are we to be.

6:6 The Nazirite was not only to not touch a corpse, but not go near one; likewise they were not only to not drink wine, but not drink grape juice nor eat seeds or skins of grapes, from which wine is made. This is the classic ‘hedge around the law’- forbidding something not because it unlawful of itself but because the associations may lead to breaking an actual law. We in Christ are freed from all legalism and casuistry; and yet in our daily struggle against temptation, it is no bad idea to remove far from us those things, associations, images etc. which may stimulate temptation and the power of sin.

6:11 It hardly sounds sinful for a person who has made a special dedication to God to be made unclean by a person unexpectedly falling dead next to him or her. But in this legislation God is seeking to teach us how sensitive He is to uncleanness. This principle can carry over into our lives today; if we love to view, read and talk about unclean things, even if we don’t do them, then we are not respecting the distance which God seeks to set between the clean and unclean, right and wrong, good and evil.

6:14 The need for a sin offering at the end of his period of dedication was maybe to remind him that his extra special devotion didn’t take away his sin and need for grace; for relationship with God depends upon this rather than upon our works and special efforts. Again, we can take that principle to ourselves in our age.

7:2 Continuing the voluntary spirit of the Nazirite vow explained in chapter 6, we read that the heads of the tribes now offered a voluntary offering. They weren’t commanded to bring these things; they chose to bring them. The constant repetition of chapter 7 can seem boring, but the point is that God remembered their freewill offerings, in every detail; and recorded and preserved them for millennia. He likewise remembers all our sacrifices for His sake (Ps. 20:3).

7:9 Significantly, David carried the ark on a wagon rather than have it carried on shoulders as commanded. One wonders whether his slip in this matter was because the Kohathites had resented seeing how their brothers got to transport their parts of the tabernacle in wagons, whereas they had to carry their parts on their shoulders; and therefore they began to use wagons, because their brother did. We can also too easily do what our brothers do, and for us it can become sin, because we each have an individual calling. What may be permissible for them may not be for us. The fact they do it doesn’t mean we can, because our context and calling is different from theirs.

7:89 The blood of atonement, pointing forward to the blood of Christ, was permanently on the mercy seat, i.e. the cover of the ark of the covenant, with the Angel-like cherubim peering down onto it. There in that most Holy of places, God spoke. The fact that the voice of God was associated with the blood which represented the blood of His Son is alluded to in Heb. 12:24-26, which likens the blood of Christ to a voice more powerful than the sound which accompanied the shaking of Sinai. God’s word becomes powerful to us over the blood of Christ in that beholding Him there, we cannot walk away passively. We are spurred to action. Yet as we behold His blood in our mind’s eye, in our reconstruction of how it all maybe happened on Golgotha, we face an insistent question: What can I do, what must I do, in response to this? That question is answered in God’s word, and it is in this sense that His word becomes of especial power to us in Christ. In this sense He is that word made flesh, supremely in His time of dying.

8:7 Washing and becoming like new born children, with no body hair, looks forward to baptism. We’re not baptized just for the sake of it; we do this so that we may be made holy or separated unto the service of God. We are God’s, just as they were (:14).

8:12 The sin offering always preceded the burnt offering. Dedication to God, represented by the burnt offering, is on the basis of our recognizing first of all our sinfulness and need for His grace. This is why the sin offering always precedes the burnt offering in the Mosaic rituals. We too have been cleansed by the blood of Christ in order to serve Him and His Father (Heb. 9:14; 1 Thess. 1:9).

8:14 *Separate*- The Levites were separated unto God’s service; it wasn’t so much that they were separate *from* others in a negative sense; rather they were positively separated *unto* God’s service. We shouldn’t see holiness as negative- that we can no longer do certain things; but instead focus on what positively we have been separated *unto*.

8:19 *That there be no plague among the children of Israel*- The spiritual and physical wellbeing of others can depend upon third parties, in this case the faithfulness of the Levites. Others can suffer because of our lack of diligence; it’s not that if we don’t do our part for them, then God will raise up others to do what we ought to have done. He *may* do this, as He was prepared to at the time of Esther, but He wishes us to see the eternal consequence of our actions upon others.

8:24 *That which belongs to*- A reference to the fact the Levites had no possessions of land within Israel. What belonged to them was the honour of serving God; whether or not we own property in this present age, our eternal possession is the honour of being God’s servants. To be a servant, in a world where perceived ‘freedom’ is so cherished, is to be our greatest possession.

9:6 These men are similar to us. We wish to keep the Passover, which for us is the breaking of bread service (1 Cor. 5:8), but we feel the burden of our uncleanness. But this is no barrier to God; He found a way for them to keep it, so eager was He for fellowship with His people. In our times, God has likewise found a way- and that way is through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus which cleanses us and enables us to legitimately have fellowship with God. This desire of God to ‘find a way’ for His weak people to approach Him is found throughout the Law of Moses, e.g. in the possibility for a very poor person to offer a flour sacrifice rather than a blood one requiring an animal. This is a comfort to us, and should also be a pattern for us in how we deal with the weakness of others.

9:14 The Passover was open to Gentiles who wished to identify themselves with Israel, and to see in the Red Sea deliverance something of their own deliverance from this world. We should not be exclusive but rather inclusive when it comes to the breaking of bread service which was typified by the Passover.

9:22,23 There was no prior warning how long they were to remain in any one place; sometimes they stayed a year in one place, at other times they had to travel even by night. This was all at the commandment or word of the Lord. If the Red Sea deliverance represents our baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2), the wilderness journey is like our journey through life towards the promised land of God’s Kingdom. We are led by an Angel, and the path we take is determined by God. Sometimes we are suddenly and unexpectedly asked to move forward; sometimes quickly, travelling by night, as it were; other periods of our lives can appear static and leading nowhere. But in all these situations we are still being led- if we remain obedient to the word of God. A community of three million people would’ve been very hard to organize; setting up and breaking camp demanded a huge amount of time and effort. When they only remained a short time, even a day, in one place, the tendency would’ve been to complain ‘Must we really break camp and move on so quickly?’. We too are tempted to resent the unstable nature of our lives; for those whose lives are led by the Spirit, as the Angel was in a sense the Spirit of God (Ps. 104:4), life will never be static and boring; even if we geographically remain in one place all our lives, we are being actively led forward by God’s direction.

10:9 *When you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you*- If Israel were obedient, they were promised that they would live *in their land* in peace with no oppressors; they would only be oppressed if they were disobedient. So here we have another reflection of God’s sensitivity to the weakness of His people; they very structure of His law foresaw their likely weakness, and offered a way out. In this case, it was through the blowing of the trumpets. The perceptive Israelite would have seen that the same blowing of trumpets was what had been done to command Israel to move forward during their wilderness journey (:5). Even in the settled existence in Canaan, they were to still see themselves as on a wilderness journey- just as we should in our settled lives. And when we fail, we are to rally ourselves and move onwards, rather like a ‘Play on!’ command in some sports, when a player has tumbled and fallen. We have to move on, as quickly as possible.

10:10 Also in the day of your gladness- The trumpet call was an appeal to God. It wasn’t only to be made in times of crisis (:9), but in good times too. We shouldn’t treat God as someone we rush to only in times of crisis, but should share with Him our good times as well as the bad times.

10:11 *The tabernacle of the testimony*- The tent of meeting is sometimes called the tent of the “testimony”, a reference to God’s word on the tables of stone which were within the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place. Out of all the tabernacle furniture, the symbol of God’s word was seen as central. God’s word- the Bible, in our times- is to be utterly central to our lives and collective sense of community.

10:30 There’s something very sad about this; Hobab could’ve identified himself with Israel and shared a place in the promised land with them, if he had travelled with them through the wilderness. But he preferred his own family rather than God’s family, and so he turned back. We too invite people to share our future hope, but they turn back, even if they journey with us for a while as Hobab did with Israel.

10:31 *You can be to us instead of eyes*- This may have been a moment of weakness in Moses, for the Angel went before Israel to find them camping places (:33), and the Angels are God’s eyes (2 Chron. 16:9; Rev. 4:6-8). Like Moses, we tend to seek for human guidance in our wilderness journey, rather than trusting in God’s Angelic Spirit guidance of us.

11:1 *In the ears of Yahweh*- They doubtless grumbled amongst themselves. But what we say secretly, as we think, to ourselves and to each other is spoke right into the ears of God Himself.

*Those in the outskirts of the camp*- The implication could be that it was those who camped furthest away from the tabernacle who complained. An encampment of three million people (:21) would’ve been large, and for them to walk to the tabernacle would’ve been quite a journey. If we are wholeheartedly devoted to God, we won’t want to be on the edge of God’s people, just peripherally associated with the things of God.

11:5 They forgot their misery in the slave camps of Egypt, and imagined life had been much better there than it was. In our weakness, there are times on our wilderness journey towards the Kingdom when we look back to this world and think it was all far better than it was.

11:6 In the same way as Israel became ungrateful for the manna and became bored with it, so we can become bored with God’s word in Christ which it represents (Jn. 6:63 and context). It all can become the same old scene- unless we remember the daily miracle God is performing in giving us His word and guiding us as Israel were daily guided by the fire and cloud, with His presence clearly amongst them. These things were soon taken for granted by them. We at times long for a more visible declaration of God’s presence in our lives; but Israel had this daily, and yet it didn’t result in their faith remaining. For faith isn’t related to what we can see with our eyes (Heb. 11:1,2).

11:11 Moses earlier had had the same doubt, as to whether he had really found grace in God’s sight; and God had magnificently assured Moses that indeed he had (Ex. 33:13-17). Yet Moses still struggled to accept this; the complex difficulties of his life coupled with what appears to have been some form of depression led him to again doubt it. We too struggle with accepting our salvation by pure grace; one moment we may grasp it, but life’s difficulties trigger again the old doubt. Only perhaps at the day of judgment, as he see ourselves as it were from outside of ourselves, standing in the promised land of God’s Kingdom, shall we finally realize that all is ultimately OK, His grace to me is for real.

11:13 The disciples had the same question- from where to find food to feed a great multitude in the desert (Mk. 8:4). If their minds had been more spiritually attune, they would have perceived that they were in essence in the same situation as Moses- and God would likewise provide. The more we are familiar with Scripture, the more we will realize that our life situations and the crises we face have in fact been faced and overcome, in essence, in previous Biblical situations.

11:15 Here we surely have Moses in depression; but God doesn’t seem to rebuke him (although He does rebuke him for other failures at other times). He recognizes our humanity with incredible sensitivity; and depression isn’t sin.

11:29 This incident has similarities with the disciples asking Jesus to forbid the disciples of John the Baptist from using the Spirit (Mk. 9:40). Because other believers aren’t with us or in our group, we aren’t to forbid them. This isn’t to say that unity amongst God’s people isn’t important; but where there is fracture amongst them, this doesn’t mean that God only works with one of the groups.

11:33 Ps. 78:31 adds the detail that those who were killed were the “fattest”- those who weren’t really hungry, but simply wanted a better life in the wilderness with the delicacies of Egypt, rather than the basic provision of daily food which God had faithfully promised His people. This attitude can easily happen amongst us- discontent because we seek both eternity in the future, and the life of Egypt right now too. Jesus clearly teaches that we must carry the cross in this life before we can enter the eternal joys of His future Kingdom.

12:2 Yahweh heard it- It is a theme of the record of the wilderness journeys that God heard the thoughts and secret complaints of His people. His total knowledge and sensitive awareness of every word and thought of our wilderness journey should have an abiding impression on how we think and talk.

12:3 *Moses was very humble*- The Hebrew could imply ‘*made* very humble’. Moses appears to have been very angry at times, but this may be understandable in terms of his depression, and this great commendation, that he was the humblest person, must be allowed its full weight in our interpretation of his character. True greatness is in humility, as the New Testament often teaches. Moses was the leader because he was the most humble.

13:28 *The people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified*- Rahab informed the later spies that the cities were fortified from fear of Israel, and the Canaanites were weak and fearful before Israel at this time (Josh. 2:10,11). Those obstacles to our inheritance of the Kingdom which seem to us huge and too strong for us may actually be very weak and far easier to overcome than we imagine.

13:30 *Let us go up at once*- The Bible often records the immediacy of response in faithful people. Procrastination and endlessly weighing up the difficulties often leads to failure to act as we should.

13:32 *A land that eats up its inhabitants*- This was effectively calling God’s descriptions of the promised land untrue. If we don’t believe we can inherit the Kingdom prepared for us (Mt. 25:34), then we are effectively calling God a liar. Ps. 106:24 says that they didn’t believe God’s word of promise that they would possess the land (Gen. 15:18; 17:8; Ex. 23:30). These promises were clear and unambiguous; but the immediate and the visible seemed more true to them than the promises of God’s word. Perhaps they had forgotten those promises, not recited them to themselves, not bothered to attend Moses’ sessions of instruction, of which the Pentateuch is likely a transcript. Unless God’s words of promise are regularly in our consciousness, we will likewise fail to believe it when we come up against the human obstacles in our paths.

14:3 There should be no question amongst us, not in our deepest heart, about returning to the world / Egypt, the life we knew before our baptism (cp. the Red Sea crossing, 1 Cor. 10:1,2). If we do allow this question, then it will lead to actually doing this in practice (:4).

14:4 *A captain*- Human beings so want human leadership. God through Moses was their captain, but they wanted a leader who would them where *they* wanted. The large number of human religions and religious leaders is proof enough of this desire for human leadership.

14:11 *How long will they not believe in Me*- It’s not that the people were atheists. They speak about the existence of Yahweh quite freely (:3). But to not believe that He will give us the Kingdom, the promised land, is to effectively be in denial of Him. We too can be effective atheists when we doubt our salvation by grace.

14:13 To have done this would’ve resulted in God changing His stated purpose with Israel. He is prepared to alter His intentions, according to human behaviour. And He shows Himself here open to dialogue, to persuasion, from His faithful children like Moses who reason according to a desire to see *God’s* glory rather than their own glory. It may be that it becomes clear that God intends to do something- perhaps to end a life, to relocate us geographically, to close one road and open another. Our prayers shouldn’t be simply asking Him to do or not do something. Rather should we reason with Him, giving our reasons as to why we wish Him to act in the way we are asking. This is for our benefit and reveals our motives to ourselves; and also deepens our faith that we are really asking according to God’s will as revealed in His word.

14:14 *They have heard that You, Yahweh, are... seen face to face-* It was only Moses who saw Yahweh face to face. But his personal relationship with God had been shared not only with Israel, but somehow the Gentile world of Canaan had got to hear about it. If we have a close relationship with God, we will not need to boast of this to others, it will become apparent, and the knowledge of it will somehow spread widely.

14:20 *I have pardoned according to your word*- Others can be forgiven because of our intercession (see too Mk. 2:5,6). This has huge implications; for in this case we should be praying constantly for others, if the prayers of a third party can have such power in another’s life.

14:24 *Followed Me faithfully*- ‘Caleb’ means ‘dog’ in Hebrew, and God alludes to this in describing Caleb as His faithful follower. The intimacy between a man and his dog can be see between God and His man.

14:33 *Your prostitution*- To disbelieve we will enter the promised land of God’s Kingdom is effectively prostitution against God. The Bible often describes unfaithfulness in terms which are startling to us, but this is to show how serious is unbelief.

14:34 *The altering of My purpose*- That God can change His mind is an indication of the extreme sensitivity He has to human behaviour. The only thing in which He is unchanging is His patience with sinners (Mal. 3:6).

14:44 Those rejected by God at His judgment still desperately want to enter His Kingdom (Mt. 25:11). In that day of final judgment, all present will desperately want only one thing- to enter the Kingdom. Nothing else will matter. We should have that spirit with us now.

15:4 This section seems to be reminding Israel of the need not to forget to offer a grain offering at the same time as a major sacrifice; as if to underline that God is magnified in the little things of life, and these shouldn’t be left outside the sphere of His influence just because we consider we have made a major sacrifice to Him.

15:17 *When you come into the land to which I bring you-* The Law of Moses, like the whole of God’s word, is studded with such incidental reminders that truly we shall enter the promised land.

15:24 Sins of ignorance still required atonement. The passage of time doesn’t work a quasi-atonement for our sins; confession of sin and earnest searching of our lives, both past and present, is one of the disciplines which characterize the spiritually healthy believer. It’s likely we will come to the day of judgment with sins of ignorance still counted to us, and yet we believe God will forgive them- hence we ask to be forgiven for such sins which aren’t perceived by us (Ps. 19:12). This means we will be forgiven without repentance. If we look forward to such forgiveness, we should show it to our brethren today, forgiving without demanding their repentance, hoping that they will later on in their journey perceive things more maturely.

15:31 *Despised the word*- These words are used about David’s sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:9,10). But God’s grace is such that even in this case, when David deserved to die for knowingly doing wrong, still a way was found for David to live. We are all in essence in the same situation, for our sins are often knowingly done.

15:35 *Outside the camp*- Heb. 13:12 stresses that the Lord Jesus died in the same place, outside the camp of God’s people. Although Jesus never sinned, in His time of dying He so closely identified with condemned sinners that even in our moments of sin He can still identify with us (Gal. 3:13).

15:38 People touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, the fringes mentioned here, in search of healing (Mt. 9:20; 14:36). By doing so, they were recognizing that their healing was possible because of His righteous obedience to the Father’s commandments. His power to heal has a basis- not merely that He is powerful of Himself, but because of His moral obedience.

16:9 They didn’t consider servanthood within the family of God to be a very great honour; they wanted leadership and personal honour from those they would be over. This is the great paradox, the acme of humility, that serving is actually an honour. But there are so few who really grasp this. Leadership, like respect, is something which can never be demanded nor sought after if we are truly God’s people. Notice that to serve others in God’s family is to come “near to [God] Himself”.

16:16 *Moses was very angry*- Yet he was the humblest man on planet earth at the time (12:3). Anger isn’t advisable for us, as it can easily lead us into sin; but of itself, anger isn’t necessarily incompatible with humility.

16:22 *Shall one man sin*- It’s clear from the record in this chapter that the architect of the rebellion was Korah, the “one man” whom Moses referred to (see too :40,49; Jude 11). But he influenced others to sin, and they were still guilty for their sin. Although God doesn’t count people as guilty merely by association, He expects us not to identify ourselves with sinful behaviour- hence verses 23-25 are God’s response to Moses’ concern that God might be indiscriminately applying the unfair principle of ‘guilt by association’.

16:32 *All the men who appertained to Korah*- Korah’s sons didn’t die (26:11); they separated themselves from their father and his supporters in time. There are times when our loyalty to the Lord will result in us having to experience some kind of separation from family members who choose not to go the Lord’s way; Jesus foretold this would happen frequently (Mt. 10:34-37).

16:34 These people who “were around them” were saved by grace, considering the warning of :24-26, that whoever stood near those men would also perish. All the time in the Old Testament we are seeing examples of people breaking God’s law and yet being saved by grace.

16:38 The example of sinners from previous generations ought to be a warning to us. Asaph in Psalm 73 explains how he struggled with the fact that sinners appear to have a blessed life and the righteous suffer; but when he entered the sanctuary, “then understood I their end” (Ps. 73:17), probably a reference to him beholding the plates on the altar made from the censers of these sinners.

16:46 Again we see Moses acting on his own initiative to persuade God to change His intended plan. Moses and Aaron could only have brought about this change of mind in God by intense, fervent prayer and desire- and it was for people who had just tacitly supported a revolution against them. No matter how much we are slandered and manipulated against by our brethren, they are still God’s people and we should respect them and intercede for them as that.

17:5 Their murmuring against Moses was a murmuring against God; our attitude to our brethren is our attitude to God.

17:8 The language of budding, blossoming and bearing fruit is used in Is. 27:6 about *all* Israel. The initial hearers of Isaiah’s words would have thought back to how Aaron’s rod budded, blossomed and bore fruit as a sign that God had chosen that family and not all Israel. However, Is. 27:6 makes it clear that God’s ideal intention was that all Israel would be a nation of priests (Ex. 19:6). This came to fulfilment in essence with the end of the Levitical priesthood and the establishment of all those in Christ as a new priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5).

18:6 The Levites were given to God, through having been given to the priests. What we give to God’s people we give to God (see too on 17:5). Constantly we are being taught to see God as manifest in His people, and to treat them appropriately.

18:7 Again, serving God is presented as an honour, a gift from God (see on 16:9). Although the Levites had no physical land inheritance amongst the people of Israel, this was compensated for by being given the gift of serving God. Of course, this would only have been perceived as a gift by the more spiritually minded. We are to see service to God even in repetitive things as a gift we have been given to do.

18:11 The theme of giving gifts continues; what was given as a gift to God, He gave as a gift to the priests. See on :6.

18:20 *I am your portion and your inheritance*- The Levites had no land nor great material wealth to leave to their children; but they had this unique relationship with God to pass on. Jeremiah in depression, having lost all he had, concludes that God is his portion (Lam. 3:24), clearly alluding to this verse. Even if materially we lose all we have- our relationship with God is our true portion and inheritance, which we will eternally receive in the Kingdom. The writers of the Psalms, some of whom like David weren’t Levites, could use the same Hebrew word to describe how God was their “portion” and inheritance (Ps. 16:5; 73:26; 119:57; 142:5). This should be our self-perception, whether or not we leave any material inheritance to anyone or not. Not for us the obsession with building up ownership of property, under the excuse we want to leave something to our children. Our service of God and His people is our inheritance, which we shall eternally receive back at the resurrection and the time of the Kingdom of God on earth. The priests and Levites were provided with enough to eat, but no great wealth. So it should be for all full time servants in God’s house. By contrast, the priests of the surrounding tribes were generally more wealthy than the other people, and owned land, which was seen as especially holy (see Gen. 47:22).

18:26 The Levites numbered 22,000 males over one month old (3:34); they were to receive the tithe of 600,000 grown men from the other tribes (1:46). This may appear to mean that the Levites were to be extremely well provided for. However it’s more likely that this is an example of where God foresaw the likely failure of His people to obey His Law fully, and built into that very Law some provision for this. In this we see His sensitivity to our human failure.

18:30 The tithes were to be paid to the Levites, not the priests. The priests survived by eating the sacrifices made by Israel. It’s therefore incorrect for modern church leaders to demand a tithe be paid to them because they are equivalent of the priests. In any case, we are to be a community of priests (1 Pet. 2:5). The tithes were produce from the land, not money; although seeing money existed in some form, God could have commanded money to be given them. But the tithe was of agricultural produce, simply so that the Levites would have something to eat as they concentrated on God’s service- not in order to make them wealthy.

19:2 This sacrifice was to provide purification from death through its ashes, which were to be mixed with water (:9), perhaps the running water from the rock, which water followed them through the wilderness- for what other source of “running [Heb. ‘springing’] water” (:17) could they have had in the wilderness? It speaks very clearly of Christ’s death; for He was without blemish and never came under the yoke of sin; He too was killed outside the camp of Israel (:3 cp. Heb. 13:12). Heb. 9:13 specifically alludes to how the ashes of this heifer were typical of Christ’s sacrifice.

19:6 *Wood, and hyssop, and scarlet*- All associated with the crucifixion of Christ.

19:13 The sacrifice of the red heifer, like that of Christ, became meaningful and effective for the individual when mixed with water, which could suggest our need to appropriate the sacrifice of Christ to ourselves through baptism.

19:21 *Perpetual statute*- The implication is that this process of cleansing from the results of death was to be permanent; but the whole style of the command for Eleazar to kill the red heifer in :2,3 sounds as if only one red heifer was killed for all time. There is no command as to continuing to kill a red heifer, nor by whom or how often it should be done. The record may be framed to present the result of the red heifer’s sacrifice as if it were eternal, clearly typifying Christ’s sacrifice. Another option is that this entire ritual is to be understood in the context of the death of so many Israelites in the rebellion described in chapter 16. Chapters 17 and 18 provide the answer to the peoples’ concerns arising out of that incident, and chapter 19 may also be in that context- describing how to avoid defilement by all the dead bodies which died in the plague.

20:6 When faced with unreasonable criticism and aggression, even from those amongst the people of God, our response should be not to argue back immediately, but take the situation to God.

20:11 Moses had previously struck the rock and water came out (Ex. 17:6), but this time he was asked to speak to it- yet instead, he struck it. He became over familiar with God, assuming he could do as he wished without careful respect for God’s word. He failed to believe in the power of the spoken word (:12), effectively he rebelled against the commandment (27:14); he assumed that detailed obedience wasn’t necessary to God’s commandment; and he gave the impression that he rather than God was giving the water (“shall *we* bring you water...?”, v. 10). One angry sentence can reveal so much about our attitudes. Moses had earlier asked that he be excluded from entering the land so that Israel might enter (Ex. 32:32- see note there). In a strange way, that prayer was heard. Although Moses sinned, repeatedly we read that he didn’t himself enter the land for Israel’s sake (Dt. 1:37; 3:26; 4:21). They are blamed for provoking him to speak poorly (Ps. 106:33). God works through our sins in a strange way; and what we ask for in prayer, we have a way of receiving, in essence.

20:12 Although Moses didn’t believe in God as he should have done, God still did the miracle. He is prepared to accept even imperfect faith.

20:21 Soon after this incident, Israel were commanded not to despise an Edomite (Dt. 23:7)- although this is just what Edom had done to them. We aren’t to treat others as they treat us, but leave their judgment with God. These incidents took place in the 40th year of their wanderings (33:38), and the commands of Deuteronomy were given at the same time.

21:2 *Then I will utterly destroy their cities*- But it was in any case a command to “utterly destroy” the Canaanites (Dt. 7:2; 12:2; 20:17). We shouldn’t consider that which is our duty to do some kind of special dedication to God which deserves His reward. But so eager is God for relationship with His people that He all the same agreed (:3).

21:4 *By the way to the Red Sea*- Their route took them back on themselves at this point, heading back towards Egypt. This may have been the psychological trigger for their desire to be back in Egypt (:5). We must try to avoid things and situations which may stimulate a desire to leave the way to the Kingdom and return to the world.

21:7 *Moses prayed for the people*- Previously in such situations, God had just accepted Moses’ prayer. But now He asked the people to additionally make some personal effort to demonstrate their faith. Quickly dashing off a request for Christ’s mediation in the case of sin may sometimes be met by God seeking to convict us more deeply of our sin and asking us to make some more concrete effort.

21:8 This is interpreted in Jn. 3:14-16 as a symbol of Christ lifted up on the pole at His death; looking toward the snake is seen as faith in Him; and healing from the snake bite as eternal life. This is another reason for thinking that the ‘cross’ of Christ wasn’t as traditionally understood; the Greek word *stauros* translated “cross” means a tree trunk or pole. The snake was a symbol of sin- but it was as it were dead in Christ. As He hung there, He was so deeply identified with our sins (despite never sinning personally) that a snake can legitimately be used as a symbol for Him there. We are in the position of the Israelites feeling the poisonous venom rising within them, knowing they had limited time left in this life, recognizing they had indeed sinned and deserved death and yet didn’t wish to die. In an encampment of over three million people living in single storey dwellings, i.e. tents, it would have taken some several kilometres walk to get to the bronze snake. To walk when you have been bitten by a snake is dangerous; you shouldn’t let your heart work any more than necessary so that the venom isn’t spread. So they were commanded to do that which is counter-instinctive, what is totally against worldly wisdom and sense. Our faith in Christ is similar. But it could be that the people were told about the existence of the bronze snake, and had to look toward it in faith from where they were, believing it was there, although not seeing it. This would be similar to our faith in Christ’s death. We didn’t see it, there is no physical representation of it within our sight, but we look to it from far away in time, space and understanding, and believe it was there- and believe that really, 2000 years ago, on a day in April, on a Friday afternoon, on a hill outside Jerusalem, it really did happen. We can imagine the relief of the people as they felt the temperature subside, the fever go; and their gratitude afterwards, their eager vowing to give their saved lives to God and not rebel again. These should be our emotions as we reflect on our salvation in Christ.

22:3 The fear of the tribes surrounding Israel is stressed in the record, yet Israel were so fearful of *them*. The obstacles to our inheriting the Kingdom aren’t as insurmountable as they appear.

22:7 The simple lesson is that God’s blessing is one of those things which money can’t buy.

22:8 *Lodge here this night*- He should surely have immediately sent them away. He knew that whoever cursed Abraham’s seed would be cursed, and had had experience of this (:6; Gen. 12:3). The longer we keep the possibility of sinning before us, the more likely it is that we shall fall into it.

22:9 *Who are these men with you?*- God knew. It was a rhetorical question, designed to make Balaam reflect that here in his home he had the enemies of God’s people. God likewise at times makes us stop and think, sometimes making us put into words out loud the situation we are really in.

22:13 *Yahweh refuses to permit me to go with you*- There’s a hint of resentment against God here; and Balaam should’ve told them direct that he was not going to curse God’s people. It’s rather like us excusing ourselves from doing something sinful by telling people that our “stupid religion” doesn’t allow it- rather than personally identifying ourselves with the reason why we will not do it.

22:19 *Please wait also here this night*- Clearly Balaam wanted to go with them, because he loved the idea of getting the promised wealth (2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11). If he had sent them away immediately, the spiritual crisis would’ve passed. But instead, God confirmed Balaam in the sinful way he wished to go- for He now permitted Balaam to go with them, but to only speak His word (:20). By going with them- and it was a very long journey- Balaam was going deeper into temptation. This is an example of how whilst the process of temptation is internal (James 1:13-15), God can lead sinful people further into situations of temptation if this is what they wish in their hearts. Hence we should pray that God will not lead *us* into temptation (Mt. 6:13). Hence God was angry with Balaam because he went (:22), even though God told him to go (:20)- God led him further into temptation, but was angered that Balaam went that way.

22:22 *For an adversary*- The Hebrew word for adversary is “satan”. Good people, Angels, even God Himself, can be ‘satans’ or adversaries. The word carries no bad connotation of itself as a word; the word has been loaded with this meaning by the wrong idea that there is a personal ‘satan’ out in the cosmos who is in radical opposition to God. This isn’t a Biblical idea.

22:24 The two times Balaam faces the Angel, albeit unknowingly, refer to the two times that Balak’s messengers had come to him. Balaam didn’t see God in it all; and he was angry with the donkey for perceiving God in a situation where he himself couldn’t perceive God.

22:26 The New Testament describes Balaam as rushing headlong on this journey, running greedily for the money (Jude 11), in “madness” (2 Pet. 2:15). This is the effect which the hope of wealth can have upon people.

22:29 *I wish there were a sword in my hand, for now I would have killed you*- Moments later, Balaam sees the Angel with a sword in his hand, thinking of killing him, but refraining by grace. God was trying to teach Balaam that He is indeed gracious.

22:34 *If it displeases you, I will go back again*- Still Balaam doesn’t get it. Surely he knew his journey was displeasing to God. Sometimes people are pulled up by God in their path- and still they refuse to understand. They are blinded by the immediate rather than seeing God’s perspective.

22:35 Again God leads him further into temptation, seeing he didn’t himself decide to return home. God was pushing him onwards down the destructive road he so eagerly chose to go.

23:12 Clearly Balaam didn’t want to say the words he did. The process of Divine inspiration means that men spoke God’s word even against their will; they were moved, carried along, by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:15,16). The Bible is therefore not the words of men but those of God, and the fact some of those who gave the original words did so *against their own will* – and Balaam would be a classic example- is proof that it is indeed the word of God and not of men.

23:19 *Change His mind*- God does change His mind about some things due to His great sensitivity to His people; but He will not change His basic love for His people (Mal. 3:6). He will not arbitrarily decide now to curse His beloved people.

*Has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*- God had promised to give His people the promised land, as He has promised to give us the Kingdom, and there is no way He will renege on that promise.

23:21 *He has not seen iniquity in Jacob*- There was indeed much iniquity in Jacob- notice how Jacob’s old name is used rather the new name, Israel. They took with them the gods of Egypt, and the tabernacle of another god as well as that of Yahweh (Acts 7:43). But God did not ‘see’ that sin; this is an Old Testament presentiment of the ‘imputed righteousness’ of which Paul speaks in the New Testament. God doesn’t count sin, doesn’t ‘see’ it, in His people; for this really is what love is about, seeing someone in a positive light and not imputing their weakness to them.

23:26 *Didn’t I tell you*- Again there is a resentment in Balaam, repeating God’s word to others but not personally identifying with it, bemoaning the limitations of it.

24:5 *How beautiful are your tents, Jacob*- God is described in the prophets as being in love with Israel at this time (Ez. 16:8)- just as He is with us on our wilderness journey towards His Kingdom. He didn’t ‘see’ their sin (see on 23:21).

24:10 *These three times*- Balaam ought to have perceived that each time he tried to curse Israel and ended up blessing them, it was like him trying those three times to ride his donkey down the lane with God standing in the way to block him. The same phrase “these three times” occurs three times in that record (22:28,32,33).

24:17 This star and sceptre would seem to refer to Israel’s Messiah, the Lord Jesus. It seems He will yet win a resounding victory against Israel’s Arab enemies, represented here by Moab, and be higher than Agag (:7), or Gog. Ez. 38:1-7 speaks of Christ’s latter day conflict with Gog. It seems there will be a final conflict around the time of Christ’s return, in which He will finally save Israel from all their surrounding enemies.

24:25 We learn from 31:16 and Rev. 2:14 that at this time, Balaam advised Balak to entice Israel with Moabite prostitutes, so that the people would be cursed by their God for immorality. The events of chapter 25 were therefore on Balaam’s advice. This desperate strategy reflects how headlong was Balaam’s desire to receive the wealth promised him, and how he sacrificed the welfare of God’s people upon that altar. In essence we can do the same today.

25:3- see on 24:25.

*Baal Peor* refers to the Baal who was worshipped at the town of Peor, near where they were now encamping (Dt. 3:29; 4:46). Each town and geographical area had its own gods, rather like today there is a geography to religion, different parts of the world or even areas within a country tend to have their local religions. The true God and His Truth is the same worldwide, which allows a unique international bond between those who know Him and are in His Son.

25:5 This command didn’t need to be carried out, because Phinehas took the initiative in killing the chief offenders (:7,8) and this act so impressed God that the plague was ended (:11). Here we have an example of how God sets up one plan or purpose, but is prepared to amend or change it according to human initiative suggesting another one, as Moses did several times. We see here therefore how open God is to dialogue, to living relationship with His people.

25:8 The spear connecting Jew and Gentile in death could be seen as pointing forward to the cross of Christ.

25:11 *Jealous with My jealousy*- God’s feelings are to be ours. His colossal love for His people means that He is also therefore jealous over their devotions to any other god.

26:2 This numbering of the people just before they entered the promised land perhaps looks forward to the way that God will be aware of the exact number of those who will enter His Kingdom at the day of judgment when Christ returns. Ps. 87:6 appears to speak of a ‘writing up of the people’ in the last day.

26:9 *Strove against Moses... strove against Yahweh*- Moses manifested Yahweh and in this sense whatever was done to him was done to Yahweh. This doesn’t mean that Moses was Yahweh Himself in person. Likewise Jesus carried the Name of God (Jn. 5:43) but wasn’t God in person. We who are baptized into the Name are in the same situation- whatever is done to us is done to God, and our attitudes to those in His Name are our attitudes to Him (Mt. 25:40,43).

26:11 The inspired titles of the Psalms sometimes mention that the Psalm was written by the sons of Korah. They therefore dedicated themselves to God’s service, not following the bad example of their father. We in Christ are a new creation, and not inevitable victims of our upbringing or bad parental example.

26:14 All these figures may seem irrelevant, but analyzing them provides confirmation that the Bible we read is indeed God’s inspired word, because there is so much incidental confirmation of the truth of the record provided. The sum total of Israel at the end of their wilderness wanderings was 1,820 less than it had been at the beginning, nearly 40 years previously. But the tribe of Simeon had decreased by 37,100 (cp. 1:23). The plague of chapter 25 had killed 24,000 people for committing fornication with the Moabites (25:9); but the ringleader of that had been Zimri, a Simeonite prince (25:14). It’s likely therefore that he led his tribe into the orgy with the Moabites, which resulted in so many of them being killed.

26:43 Dan had only one son and yet by this time had become the second largest tribe in Israel. Benjamin had ten sons (Gen. 46:21) but was one of the smallest tribes. Again we see how God doesn’t work through human strength or advantage; the passage of time reveals over the generations that human blessing soon fades away.

27:2 Considering the low status of women at that time, we see here a commendable spirit of initiative and spiritual ambition for these women to dare ask a male dominated society to change their rules to allow them to have an inheritance. We see too how God and Moses weren’t at all anti-women, and responded positively. Note how the women were allowed to come directly to the decision makers, without needing to appoint a male representative for their case, as was common in surrounding cultures. The value of the human person is consistently seen throughout the Pentateuch. They asked about this matter *before* the land had been possessed, reflecting their strength of faith that God would fulfil His promise of giving His people the Kingdom; they imagined what it would be like there, and acted accordingly even before they got there, as if the land was already theirs in possession- just as we should.

27:11 One wonders why this statute had not been included within the Law of Moses. Perhaps God had reserved it in potential, waiting the initiative of these women?

27:13 Moses seeing the promised land but being unable to enter it himself points to how the Law of Moses gave a view of salvation, but couldn’t bring people into it.

27:16 We see here Moses’ selflessness, his concern was always for the wellbeing of God’s people rather than his own status. He didn’t ask for one of his own family members to take over the leadership; for he realized that spiritual leadership must be based upon spiritual qualification, not family connection.

27:17 *Be not as sheep which have no shepherd*- Quoted by Jesus about the crowds of Israelites in the first century (Mt. 9:36). He clearly saw those confused and misguided people, with all their wrong beliefs and attitudes, as still the congregation of God. We also learn from what Moses says and the Lord’s approval of it that God’s people need shepherds. There is an undoubted teaching regarding the need for leadership / shepherding throughout the Bible. When God’s people are leaderless, they go astray.

27:18 Because Joshua had the Spirit, Moses was told to lay his hand on him. Yet Dt. 34:9 says that Moses laid his hand on him so that Joshua might receive the Spirit. Here we see the upward spiral of spirituality at work- those who are of the Spirit are made more spiritual.

28:3 The commands about the continual burnt offering are repeated more frequently and in more detail in the Law of Moses than those about anything else or any other offering. It’s as if God perceived the likely tendency of His people to forget the regular sacrifices and focus instead on the occasional ones; and to disregard the commands about the grain offering, which was so small and yet so valuable to God. It is likewise continually stressed in the legislation that these continual sacrifices were “a pleasant aroma to Me” (:2). Spirituality is about daily discipline, not occasional acts of devotion; hourly prayer, daily Bible reading, constant spiritual mindedness, rather than occasional attendance at a church meeting. When God later asked Israel “Did you offer unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?” (Am. 5:25; Acts 7:42), the answer that is implied is that no, they did not. Hence this repetition here at the end of the wilderness journey. The whole purpose of their being given Canaan was so that they would have an environment in which to keep God’s laws (Ps. 105:45). Likewise with us- if we’re not interested in keeping God’s principles in this life, there will be little point in our being given the Kingdom, which is likewise an arena in which we can live perfectly according to His principles.

28:9 Here for the only time in the Law it is pointed out that the Sabbath sacrifices must include a grain offering, although this principle had been given in 15:3. The theme of this chapter is that the small offerings mustn’t be forgotten nor minimized in importance.

28:24 *Besides the continual burnt offering*- It is so often stressed, both in this chapter and elsewhere, that these continual offerings mustn’t be forgotten about at the time of the greater festivals. See on :3.

28:31 *To you without blemish*- Every animal is blemished in some way, but they were to offer that which in their eyes (“to *you*”) was without blemish. Whilst we are to offer our best, it’s only the best in our eyes, and is only accepted by grace.

29:11 *One male goat for a sin offering*- This additional sin offering on the day of Atonement isn’t mentioned in the previous legislation about the day of Atonement in Lev. 16. Because Israel had failed to keep the sacrifices during the wilderness journey as they should have done (so Am. 5:25 implies), God now at the end of the wilderness journey added more sacrifices to be kept. Perhaps the Israelite was to see in this male goat a symbol of himself, worthy only of rejection- the goat being a symbol of the rejected in Mt. 25:33; and the “sin offering of atonement” as representative of the whole community’s unforgiven sins. This is the great paradox- that those who consider themselves rejected will be accepted, and those who think of themselves as accepted in their own strength will be rejected. The Lord's right hand is our left hand, and vice versa, if we imagine ourselves standing before Him. Those who put themselves to *their* right hand , i.e. justify themselves, are putting themselves at His left hand; and vice versa (Mt. 25:34).

29:13 In total, the feast of Tabernacles required 70 oxen to be sacrificed. Far more animals were sacrificed in this feast than for any other. Yet this was the feast of joy- teaching that true happiness is related to sacrifice to God, rather than keeping for ourselves.

29:19 Each day of their rejoicing in God’s grace toward them, Israel were to offer a sin offering as a reminder of the fact they were sinners, and all God’s blessings toward them were given to a sinful people. We must never let slip our recognition of our sinfulness before God, and unworthiness in ourselves of His blessings.

29:39 *Besides your vows, and your freewill offerings*- God envisaged that at the time the whole community were engaged in extra special devotion to Him, the individual might still wish to make a private sacrifice. We can’t ride into God’s Kingdom on the back of others, e.g. our family members, our church. Our collective devotions shouldn’t lead us to think that God doesn’t seek our private freewill dedication to Him.

30:3 Girls married young in Semitic cultures of the time, usually in their teens. God here foresaw the possibility of a young girl wanting to do something extra special for Him. In contemporary religions, active participation in religion was typically something for older males. But such is God’s value of the human person that He eagerly anticipated young people, even children, making a special act of devotion to Him on their own initiative. Mary’s teenage ambition to become the mother of Messiah is the supreme example to today’s youngsters, growing up as they do in a world where selfish ambition is the order of the day as never before.

30:7 The simple principle established here is that there are times when silence means consent. The Proverbs wisely advise us not to meddle in others’ business and to hold our tongue in some cases. But there are other times when not to speak up can have damaging consequences upon others, especially those less mature than ourselves.

30:9 A divorced woman was counted as genuinely single; the sin of marriage breakup is in the factors leading to the breakup of the marriage, but afterwards the person is seen by God as single. Divorce under the Law of Moses was possible only for adultery, and adultery was punishable by death. Yet God foresaw that there would be women who had done this and yet remained alive by grace, or who had been falsely accused; and correctly imagined that such women would love to make a freewill dedication of themselves to Him.

31:2 *Avenge the children of Israel*- But in :3 we read of avenging Yahweh. The insults against God’s people are against Him. Many of His children struggle today with a sense of justice not having been done to them, and a desire to see some level of justice or vengeance against their abusers. This day will come, if indeed the injustice has been done to us because of our devotion to God; because whatever is done to God’s people is done to Him.

31:5 12,000 was a small army compared to what could have been raised- for there were over 600,000 fighting men numbered amongst Israel at this time. But throughout His military history, God has taken special pleasure in using small numbers to defeat far larger ones, and that principle continues in how He works today.

31:6 God chose Phinehas the priest to be the army commander, whereas Joshua was the more obvious human choice for that job at this time. But God wished to demonstrate that it is spiritual principle which must lead His people rather than human strength and appropriacy. It was of course Phinehas who had so well perceived the spiritual danger of the Moabites earlier (25:7).

31:15 Moses was distressed that the Israelite army had failed to perceive the spiritual reason for the battle- it was to stop the Midianites posing a temptation to Israel with their women as they had in chapter 25. Sometimes God’s people can fight His battles and even be given victory, whilst failing to perceive the spiritual intent behind the war.

31:27 *And all the congregation*- This kind of policy of sharing the spoils of war with the congregation was repeated in Israelite history (1 Sam. 30:24,25; Ps. 68:12). It ensured that the minority called upon to do highly visible and humanly heroic work didn’t do it for themselves nor to settle their own scores, but always, always, with an eye to benefitting the community of God’s people.

31:49 *Your servants*- It’s usual for military men to consider themselves as an elite in their own right. But these leading military leaders considered themselves as nothing but servants to their spiritual leader. Humility in leadership is vital amongst God’s people.

31:50 *To make atonement for our souls*- Even in times of spiritual victory, we are to never lose sight of our basic sinfulness and need for atonement with God.

32:3 These place names occur in the later Old Testament, but always with reference to the fact that Gentiles lived there. So Reuben and Gad’s short term desire for inheritance didn’t last for long; subsequent generations lost those lands. Although they changed the names of these cities (:38), their original names evidently stayed with them because the Gentiles re-took them from Reuben and Gad.

32:5 *Don’t bring us over the Jordan*- They said this to Moses, who so dearly wished to enter the land but wasn’t able to. The paradox is obvious and intentional; Moses could easily have answered their request with reference to it, but he omits all personal reference, in his selfless way; and focuses instead on the impact their choice would have on God’s people as a whole. For their salvation and not his own was uppermost in his mind.

32:7 Our attitudes to possessing the Kingdom affect others; if we don’t want to go over ourselves, we will discourage others. The power of example is far greater than we realize. Jesus may have referred to this incident when He condemned the Pharisees for not entering the Kingdom of God themselves and not sending forth others on their way there either (Mt. 23:13 Gk.).

32:15 At first sight this may appear unreasonable- that the whole community would be punished for the sake of the sin and short-termist thinking of two tribes. But the eternal wellbeing of others is in our hands in that our example can discourage others from entering the Kingdom, and God may not compensate for our causing them to stumble.

32:17 *Until we have brought them to their place*- They thought that their human strength would give Israel their inheritance, whereas God had promised that *He* and not they (“*we*”) would give the inheritance. Moses therefore corrects them by saying that *God* will drive out “His enemies from before Him” (:21). It was exactly because they failed to believe that *God* would do this that they preferred to stay the other side of Jordan and not enter Canaan; and they wished to share that attitude with others.

32:38 *Their names being changed*- Nebo and Baal were the names of Canaanite gods, and Yahweh forbad His people to even mention their names (Ex. 23:13; Hos. 2:17). The principle for us is that we shouldn’t surround ourselves with things which even suggest or stimulate the idea of being anything other than totally dedicated to the one true God, or which may trigger the idea of idolatry.

33:2 Moses kept this record of their journeys in the spirit of how God commanded His people to each one remember the way by which God had brought them out from Egypt to Canaan (Dt. 8:2). We need to keep at least a mental diary of how God has led us in our lives, to look back with feelings of gratitude and grace as we see how He has led us, how life for us is no mere succession of chance events, but has a definite direction and end point in entering the Kingdom.

*Their goings out*- The Hebrew word is used about the entire ‘going out’ of Israel from Egypt to the promised land. Our total journey from the world through the Red Sea of baptism to the Kingdom of God involves much wandering, backwards and forwards (32:13). But it’s all under God’s control and part of our total exodus from Egypt to the Kingdom. Although humanly the journey was a zig-zag and circular route, it is described in Ps. 107:7 as a “right” or ‘straight’ way- from God’s perspective.

33:4 on their gods also Yahweh executed judgments- Each of the plagues targeted a specific Egyptian god, and it seems that on Passover night something dramatic happened to all the gods- maybe the idols to them fell over or were destroyed. Yet Israel still took the gods of Egypt with them through the Red Sea and worshipped them on the wilderness journey (Ez. 20:7; Acts 7:43). The pull of idolatry is against all reason, and yet there is such a strong tendency within us not to devote ourselves to only one God.

33:8 Their dramatic passage through the Red Sea is described in the same way as any other stage on their journey; our baptism into Christ is our Red Sea crossing (1 Cor. 10:1,2), but the other stages of our journey are no less led by God and part of our final deliverance into His Kingdom.

33:55 What can appear mere harmless associations with the world can in the end destroy us. Whilst we are to be in this world in the same sense as the Lord Jesus was, mixing and identifying with them to bring them too to God, the basic principle of separation from unbelievers must never be forgotten.

33:56 *As I thought to do to them, so will I do to you*- That is, drive them out of the land. And this is what happened to Israel. There is a theme in the Bible that the judgments of this world will come upon the unfaithful amongst the children of God; there’s a need to be radically different from this world or else we will share this world’s condemnation (1 Cor. 11:32; Rev. 18:4).

34:2 The land promised to Abraham was from the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea, but here God redefines it as much smaller. He perhaps perceived that they simply didn’t have the spiritual vision to possess that vast area. There is so much made possible for us in prospect; maybe we will ultimately receive less than we could have had because of our limited vision in this life. Yet He encouraged the people to go exploring beyond the bounds which He here gave them, right up to the Euphrates, promising to give them whatever land they walked upon (Dt. 11:24). It seems none rose up to that challenge. God invites His people to assume that they would receive this land and make preparations as if they had- for at this time they had not yet crossed Jordan into it. We are likewise asked to believe that we have been moved into the sphere of the Kingdom of God’s Son, and have received an inheritance by reason of our being in Him (Col. 1:13; Eph. 1:11).

34:14,15 The triple emphasis here that those who chose immediate inheritance east of Jordan had already received their inheritance may be behind Christ’s triple emphasis that some “have their reward” in this life rather than waiting for the future, eternal reward (Mt. 6:2,5,16).

35:2 This meant that the Levites were divided amongst the 12 tribes of Israel, enabling them to teach God’s ways to the whole nation (Lev. 10:11; Dt. 33:9,10). In this way, the curse upon Levi that his children would be scattered in Israel (Gen. 49:7) turned into a blessing for all- and God so loves to work in this way, using the consequences of sin to bring about His work, purpose and glory.

35:15 We are all in the position of the person who unintentionally killed another person and is therefore liable to death. We have all sinned, and yet as it were in the spirit of how Paul describes our sin in Romans 7- committed against our better intentions. Heb. 6:18 speaks of us fleeing for refuge into Christ- suggesting we are the one who flees after committing manslaughter, and becoming “in Christ” by baptism is our entry into Him as our city of refuge. But we must abide in Him- for if we leave Him then we are liable to death (:26). And our final salvation from the effects of sin is guaranteed by the death of the High Priest, the Lord Jesus (:25).

35:19 The idea of blood vendettas, whereby a family member of the murdered has a legal right to hunt and kill the murderer, is widespread in primitive societies. Yet the Law of Moses seems to make provision for it. Seeing that God is presented as the ultimate avenger (see on 31:2), this may seem strange. Instead of grace and forgiveness being inculcated, revenge seems allowed. Yet the desire to repay murder with murder is so great within primitive society that it seems God made a concession to this weakness, and allowed it, whilst seeking to control it being applied in any wrongful or doubtful context. The fact God makes concessions to human weakness doesn’t mean we should eagerly make use of them; the spirit of all God’s revelation to us in His word is that we should forgive and leave judgment to Him.

35:25 The death of the High Priest enabled the ‘guilty’ person to be totally freed because the principle that death was required to atone for death had been thus fulfilled (:33)- as if in his death, the High Priest was taking upon himself the guilt of the sin of murder, as a total representative of the sinner. In this we see foreshadowed the representative nature of Christ’s death for us.

36:6 *Let them be married to whom they will*- This verse is alluded to by Paul in 1 Cor. 7:39, where we read that a Christian widow can marry whom she will but only to someone “in the Lord”- in the same way as the women here could marry whom they wished, but only in the tribe of their fathers, unless they would lose their inheritance permanently. It could be that Paul is teaching that marriage within the faith, to those also “in the Lord” by baptism into Him, is so important that doing otherwise may cause us to lose the promised inheritance of the Kingdom. Marriage within the faith is indeed an important principle and ignoring it often has terrible spiritual consequences. But note that she was free to marry whom *she* wanted- in a culture where arranged marriage was the norm, God valued the dignity and free choice of the woman.