ADDITIONAL NOTES ON NUMBERS

JAY SKLAR

Jay Sklar's commentary on Numbers for *The Story of God* series is guided by the question, "What is most necessary to know to teach or preach well on this passage?" Any of its technical or in-depth discussions, or interactions with the secondary literature, remain focused on those aspects of the passage most central to its meaning.

This book is guided by the question, "What else might the reader want to know when interacting with the secondary literature, or when wanting even further detail on various aspects of the passage?" It thus complements the commentary so that readers wanting to go even further in their study of Numbers are equipped to do so. Keeping the preacher and teacher in mind, it also has appendices that provide tips on narrative preaching and a full range of possible sermon series.

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Jay Sklar

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a complement to the commentary I wrote on Numbers in Zondervan's *The Story of God Bible Commentary* series: Jay Sklar, *Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023). A colleague of mine tells his preaching classes that it is important to distinguish between what *can be said* about a passage and what *must be said* about it. In the commentary, I have tried to focus on what must be said about a passage; in these notes, I include further comments on what can be said.

Most of the notes begin by identifying the verse or verses being commented on, for example:

> 1:18. *The people*. That is, "the men twenty years old or more," in accordance with the earlier commands (1:2–3). This is not two different groups ("the people" and "the men twenty years old or more") but one.

At other times, the notes will begin by referring to a specific section of the commentary, for example:

> **Chapter 3, Listen to the Story.** For further possible parallels between the Hittite "Instructions to Priests and Temple Officials" and Numbers, see Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology,* Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 36 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 50–53, although the parallels might not all be as tight as he suggests.

The notes below begin with additional comments relating to the commentary's Introduction and then proceed to additional notes relating to the commentary's chapter by chapter comments.

For further resources on Numbers, including commentary recommendations, chapter by chapter themes, and mini sermon outlines, see my site, preachandteachthebible.com.

ABBREVIATIONS

AB   Anchor Bible

BETL   Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovaniensium

ConC   Concordia Commentary

DCH   *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.* Edited by D. J. A. Clines. Sheffield, 1993–2008

DOOTP   *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003*

EvQ   *Evangelical Quarterly*

ESV   English Standard Version

GKC   *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar.* Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2d. ed. Oxford, 1910

HALOT   Koehler, L. W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994–1999

HS   *Hebrew Studies*

IBC   Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching

ISBE   *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.* Edited by G. W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979 – 1988

NAC   New American Commentary

NASB   New American Standard Bible

NICOT   New International Commentary on the Old Testament

NIDOTTE   *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.* Edited by W. A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997

NIV	New International Version
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
SBLABS	Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
ZECOT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament

Additional Notes on Numbers

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE INTRODUCTION TO NUMBERS

Preaching from Numbers

Census Lists

We may begin by noting that the census lists take up much less space than the other genres in Numbers! Nonetheless, it is these lists that people often think of when they think of the book. This is unfortunate for the simple reason that many moderns view these lists as boring at best and completely irrelevant at worst. This can quickly lead to a similar view of the book as a whole.

But this perspective not only overemphasizes the amount of census material in the book, it also misses the ways in which such material functioned in its original context. There are in fact several different functions of the census material in Numbers, at least three of which we can identify here. In some instances, a census list met a very practical need. Since the Israelites were preparing to march into the Promised Land for battle, they needed to know the number of their troops (1:1–46) and what their war camp should look like when at rest or on the march (2:1–34).

At the same time, a census list could also emphasize the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant promises. It becomes clear from Numbers 1 that the Lord had indeed made Abraham's descendants into "a great nation" as he had promised (Gen 12:2; 15:5; 22:17), and this in turn should have fueled the Israelites' confidence and courage as they marched toward the land. If the Lord has been faithful to his promise to their forefather Abraham to make him into a great nation, surely he would be faithful to his promise to the Israelites, Abraham's descendants, to give them the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18).

When set in the larger context of redemptive history, this same truth encourages the Christian today, who not only sees the Lord's faithfulness to his covenant promises in the Old Testament, but who also sees this same faithfulness in the New Testament, especially the Lord's promise to Abraham to bless all nations through him (Gen 12:3), a promise that finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus

(Gal 3:8). This is a God who is trustworthy and who can therefore be followed with courageous obedience.

Finally, a census list could function to remind individual Israelites that they had a place within the collective people of God. This had at least two effects. On the one hand, to hear your tribe being called out among the covenant people of God was to hear a declaration that you also were a member of that same covenant people and therefore an heir of the promises of God. On the other hand, to hear your tribe called out among the other tribes was to remind you that these also were your covenant brothers and sisters to whom you owed faithfulness and love. The Israelites were thus to rejoice in the covenant promises that were theirs and to reaffirm their commitment to the covenant King as well as to their covenant brothers and sisters.

The New Testament picks up on these last two themes in numerous ways, whether through its constant reminders of the wonderful promises that belong to us in Jesus (John 1:12; 3:16; Rom 3:21–24; etc.) or its continual exhortations to be faithful to the covenant King (Matt 28:18–20; Rom 6:13; 12:1; etc.) and to our covenant brothers and sisters (John 17:20–23; 1 Cor 1:10; 12:12–27; Phil 1:27; etc.). Indeed, all of these themes come together in the Lord's Supper, a time in which Christians both celebrate the redemption in Jesus that makes it possible to belong to the people of God and reconfirm their commitment to the Lord of that covenant and to their covenant brothers and sisters (1 Cor 11:17–34).

When teaching and preaching on the census lists, staying with the larger themes identified above will help to make clear the significance of these lists, not only to meet the immediate and practical needs of ancient Israel but also to underscore deep and significant theological themes that stretch far beyond ancient Israel to the people of God today.

Approaches to Preaching Narrative
See Appendix 1.

ADDITIONAL NOTES ON NUMBERS 1–36

1:18. *The people*. That is, "the men twenty years old or more," in accordance with the earlier commands (1:2–3). This is not two different groups ("the people" and "the men twenty years old or more") but one.

1:20–46. A fourth observation may be added to the three listed in the commentary. Gad—a son of Leah's handmaid—has now moved up to the third position in the list, after two of Leah's sons (Reuben, Simeon), perhaps in preparation for the fact that he will be with them in a grouping of three in the next chapter (2:10–16) (Iain M. Duguid, *Numbers: God's Presence in the Wilderness*]Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006], 41).

Chapter 2, Listen to the Story. A further sign that the tent is the Lord's royal palace may be noted: "The curtain before the Most Holy Place was woven with cherubim (Exod 26:31–33), who not only symbolically guarded the entrance into this throne room (cf. Gen 3:24) but were heavenly beings, thus making clear it was the throne room of the heavenly King" (Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: A Discourse Analysis of the Hebrew Bible*, ZECOT [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023], 11).

With regard to the doctrine of accommodation and Calvin's explanation of it, the relevant section of the *Institutes* is as follows:

> "For who even of slight intelligence does not understand that, as nurses commonly do with infants, God is wont in measure to 'lisp' in speaking to us? Thus such forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity. To do this he must descend far beneath his loftiness" (Calvin, *Institutes*, Book 1, Chapter 13, Section 1).

Chapter 3, Listen to the Story. For further possible parallels between the Hittite "Instructions to Priests and Temple Officials" and Numbers, see Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Levitical Terminology,* Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity 36 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1983), 50–53, although the parallels might not all be as tight as he suggests.

3:1. *This is the account of the family of Aaron and Moses*. The phrase "this is the account of the family of *person X*" is used throughout Genesis to introduce a story, usually involving a genealogy, about that person and their descendants (Gen 6:9ff.; 10:1ff.; etc.). In keeping with this, Aaron's immediate family is named (Num 3:2–4). (For possible reasons why Moses is named here but his family is not, see commentary.)

3:11–13. (The following comments are a fuller supplement to those found at 3:11–13 and 9:1–14 of the commentary.) When the Lord rescued the Israelites from Egypt, the final plague involved the death of all firstborn people and animals in the land (Exod 12:29–30). But the Lord provided a way for the Israelite firstborn to be protected by means of a special Passover meal (12:1–13). Central to the meal was a lamb whose blood was put on the home's doorposts; when the Lord saw the blood, he "passed over" that home and any firstborn were safe (12:7, 13). Since the Egyptians did not do this, their firstborn died and Pharaoh finally let the Israelites go free (12:29–33). "He commanded them to do two things from then on as regular reminders of his rescue: celebrate the Passover meal (Exod 13:3–10) and set aside to him every firstborn human or animal (13:1–2, 11–16). In each case, parents performed an action to teach their children the redemption story (13:6–8, 12–15)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 75).

Setting animals apart to the Lord meant that the firstborn of ritually clean animals would be sacrificed to him (13:12), while firstborn unclean animals (which could not be sacrificed) would be redeemed or destroyed (13:13). "For firstborn children, being set apart to the Lord could mean serving in his tabernacle (cf. 1 Sam

1:11, 22–28), but instead of disrupting families like this, the Lord normally allowed a five-shekel redemption price to be paid (Num 18:16)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 75).

3:15. *a month old or more*. Why one month? The text does not say. It may simply be that the infant mortality rate was high, especially in the first few weeks, and thus waiting a month was meant to give an accurate count. Alternatively, since the mother was ritually impure for forty days after the child's birth (Lev 12:2–4), and since the child would have shared in that impurity through contact with her (he would be nursed by her), it may be that he was not counted until the impurity had ended and he could fully integrate into the community with his mother after day 40, at which point he would be described in a general way as a month old. It is sometimes assumed that the child did not count as a person before this time, but the assumption is unnecessary (and, as my colleague Jack Collins has noted to me in a private conversation, hard to square with the fact the covenant sign is applied on day 8 [Lev 12:3], something presumably not done for those that did not count as people).

3:32. *The chief leader of the Levites was Eleazar son of Aaron*. In calling Eleazar the "chief leader" of the Levites, it implies he was not only responsible for the Kohathites but also in ultimate authority over each of the Levitical leaders, and thus over Ithamar, the priest in charge of the Gershonites and Merarites (4:28, 33).

4:1–49. It may be noted that chapter 3 described the Levites' placement in the camp in their birth order: Gershon, Kohath, Merari (cf. Exod 6:16). Chapter 4 now mentions the Kohathites first, perhaps because their duties (removing the most holy furniture) were carried out first when the tent was disassembled and perhaps also because their duties required the most care and therefore the most careful instruction.

4:6. *durable leather*. The NIV understands the Hebrew term to be related to an Egyptian word (*ṯḥs*) relating to leather, which seems possible in terms of the roots of both words and in light of the fact that other Egyptian loanwords are used for other tabernacle items (such as "acacia wood" [Exod 25:5] and "fine linen"

[Exod 35:23]). See Benjamin J. Noonan, "Hide or hue? Defining Hebrew *taḥaš*," *Biblica* 93 (4), 2012: 580–89, esp. 586–89.

4:25. *that is, the tent of meeting*. Rather "and the tent of meeting." The tabernacle and tent are not one item (so NIV) but two (cf. 3:25). The tabernacle curtains are richly decorated linen and formed the first covering over the sanctuary's inner frame (Exod 26:1–6); this was followed by the "tent," a covering of goat's hair that was slightly larger and would conceal the first layer of curtains from the outside (Exod 27:7–13). Num 3:25 (an abbreviated description) simply calls it the "tent"; Num 4:25 (a fuller description) calls it the "tent of meeting." Two coverings then went over this tent, the first ("its covering") made of rams' skins, the second ("its outer covering") made of durable leather (Exod 27:14).

its covering…its outer covering. Their size is not stated but they were presumably at least as large as the tent they covered.

curtains for the entrance to the tent. Rather, "*curtain* for the entrance to the tent"; the same phrase is properly translated in 3:25 with a singular. In terms of dimensions, its exact size is not known, but the front (east) of the tent was 15 feet wide and high, so the entrance curtain would presumably not have been larger than this.

Chapter 4, Live the Story: What is the proper posture to have before a holy king? With reference to the mention of Nadab and Abihu, it is especially significant to note a possible play on words. Translated very woodenly, Num 3:4 states that "Nadab and Abihu *died*…when they *caused to draw near strange* fire before the Lord"; the same language is used in 3:10 and 3:38 to warn non-priests not to try and approach the tabernacle to do priestly duties: "But the *stranger who draws near will be put to death*." In short: Repeat their mistake and you will end up as dead as they are!

5:6–7. In the commentary it is noted these verses summarize the fuller law of Lev 6:1–7. "There, a person has committed two wrongs. First, they have defrauded or stolen from someone else (Lev 6:2–3 gives several scenarios). Second,

they have lied about it by swearing falsely in the Lord's name (Lev 6:3, 5)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 97). In support of this understanding of that passage, consider the following: "While some versions translate [Lev] 5:21–22[6:2–3] as though they describe several different sins that call for a reparation offering (NIV, ESV, NJB), it seems better to read these verses as describing one sin (swearing a false oath) and four examples of it (deceiving a neighbor, lying about lost property, etc.; so NRSV). This neatly explains why the act of treachery is said to be 'against the LORD': the person misuses his name in each case" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 177; so also Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation and Commentary*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 337–38; John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus,* ConC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 128; Thomas Hieke, *Levitikus 1–15* [Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2014], 285–86).

5:6. *in any way*. Cf. the list of ways in Lev 6:2–3.

is guilty. "The end of Numbers 5:6 is better translated 'and suffers for their guilt,' that is, the Lord brings his justice to bear against them in some way" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 97). In support for the translation "suffers for their guilt," consider the following:

"First, the verb built on the same root (אָשֵׁם/אָשַׁם) refers elsewhere to suffering guilt's consequences: 'Their heart is smooth; now they will *suffer for their guilt* (יֶאְשָׁמוּ): he himself *will break down their altars, destroying their pillars*' (Hos 10:2; see also Isa 24:6; Jer 2:3; Hos 14:1 [13:16]). Second, the same verb occurs throughout Lev 4–5 but often causes problems if translated as 'to be guilty.' All of these problems disappear with a consequential translation: 'to suffer guilt's consequences' [see further Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 142 n. 22]. Finally, Lev 10:6 makes clear that the priests' sin can endanger the people, which again supports a consequential understanding: 'if it is the anointed priest who sins *so that the people suffer guilt's consequence*'" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 142).

5:8. *But if that person has no close relative to whom restitution can be made for the wrong, the restitution belongs to the LORD.* This might be because the word for "close relative" (*gōʾēl*) elsewhere refers to a "kinsman-redeemer," that is, someone who shows special care to their relative by redeeming them from difficulty (cf. Lev 25:48–49). Biblically speaking, the Lord is the ultimate kinsman-redeemer (Exod 6:6; 15:13), and so the payment naturally goes to him. Alternatively, the idea might be that when you sin against someone in the King's image, and cannot make restitution directly to them, you make it to the King himself.

5:11–31, Listen to the Story. After citing the trial by ordeal in the Code of Hammurabi §132, it is noted in the commentary that the women's guilt or innocence is determined by whether or not she makes it out of the river (Sklar, *Numbers*, 101-102). In support, see law 2 of the same code, which begins: "If a [man] brought a charge of sorcery against a(nother) [man], but has not proved it, the one against whom the charge of sorcery was brought, upon going to the river, shall throw himself into the river, and if the river has then overpowered him, his accuser shall take over his estate; if the river has shown that [man] to be innocent and he has accordingly come forth safe, the one who brought the charge of sorcery against him shall be put to death, while the one who threw himself into the river shall take over the estate of his accuser" (*ANET*, 166).

Explain the Story. In the commentary it is noted that by this rite, "justice is taken from [the husband's] angry hands—and from the hands of any angry mob that might seek [the woman's] harm—and put into the just hands of the Lord, who would clear an innocent wife's name before her husband and community" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 102). Over the years I have asked my students, "Has anyone here experienced public slander who would gladly go through this rite to clear their name?" Each time I ask, several raise their hand (as do I with them). I suspect many of those who do not have not experienced the deep and cutting pain that public slander can cause.

5:12. *is unfaithful to him*. The word for marital unfaithfulness here is also used in contexts where someone is unfaithful to the Lord, as when it describes "Israel's treacherous acts of worshipping different gods (1 Chr. 5:25), 'abandoning' the Lord's law (2 Chr. 12:1–2), or 'turning away' from him (Josh. 22:16, 31) and 'rebelling' against him (Josh. 22:18–19, 22)" (Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 3 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014], 120).

5:18. *bitter water that brings a curse*. In the Hebrew, there is a play on words, with the word for "bitter" (*hammārîm*) sounding very much like the word for "brings a curse" (*hamʾārrăîm*). One might translate "the bitter waters which bring a bitter curse" (cf. 5:24, 27).

5:19. *become impure*. That is, morally impure. As noted in the commentary, the same language is used for ritual impurity and moral impurity, an unsurprising fact in light of how moral wrongdoing can leave us feeling defiled. "From the world of literature, see Lady Macbeth, who feels her hands are permanently stained with the blood of the one she had conspired to have murdered and thus keeps washing them, even though no physical spot can be seen (Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 5.1.26–41)" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 151 n. 58).

5:21. *womb miscarry*. The word translated "womb" (*yārēk*) refers to the "thigh/genital region" and is associated elsewhere with descendants in particular (Gen 46:26; Exod 1:5). The word translated "miscarry" (*nāpal*) is the standard word for "to fall," which can refer to "failing" (Josh 23:14) or to "being ruined" (Amos 5:2). Putting these together, the sense may be general ("unable to have children") as opposed to specific (to "miscarry").

5:29–30. "The chapter finishes by briefly summarizing the preceding law (5:29–30)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 107). The summary is perhaps of 5:12–14 in particular, with 5:29 corresponding to 5:12–14a, and 5:30a to 5:14b (which also begins with "or") (Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1990], 347). Alternatively, the word "or" that begins 5:30 could also be translated "or rather"

(see BDB 14.1 for this range of meaning; cf. Gen 24:55). The sense would be that this is the law for a situation when a wife commits adultery (5:29), or rather, when her husband thinks she has (5:30).

6:1–21, Listen to the Story. Different possibilities explain why this law is placed here. On the one hand, preceding laws have made a clear distinction between lay Israelites and members of Levi's tribe (chpts. 1–4), making it logical to now describe the one way in which lay Israelites arrive at an elevated ritual state comparable to a priest: the Nazirite vow. Alternatively, just as Numbers 5–6 begins with a law about ritual states (5:1–4), it now returns to that focus with a series of laws related to someone who had become ritually holy by means of a Nazirite vow (6:1–21). This could also suggest these two chapters have been arranged as a chiasm ending in a benediction:

> A: a law concerning ritual states (5:1–4)
> B: a law about "unfaithfulness" (5:5–10)
> B': a law about "unfaithfulness" (5:11–31)
> A': laws concerning ritual states (6:1–21);
> Conclusion: benediction (6:22–27).

6:1–8. "The vow was typically for a certain period of time (cf. Num 6:13–21), rather than lifelong (Samson and Samuel represents exceptions)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 114). See Judg 13:5; 1 Sam 1:11. Perhaps also John the Baptist (Luke 1:15), although no mention is made of his hair not being cut. See discussion in Roy E. Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 536–37.

6:3. *they must abstain*. The word for "abstain" is built on the same root as the word Nazirite, the sense being that Nazirites (*nāzîr*) must set themselves apart (*yāzzîr*) from these products (compare how some people today set themselves apart from certain foods or activities during Lent) (Ronald B. Allen, "Numbers," in

Allen, Ronald B., *Numbers to Ruth*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 2:749).

6:13–20. With regard to the three offerings, it may be noted that priests made these offerings as they entered into the realm of ritual holiness; Nazirites did so as they left it. In both cases, "the offerings are ordered beginning with one that focuses on cleansing away sin (the purification offering) before turning to those for general worship or atonement (the burnt offering) and covenant fellowship (the fellowship offering). In the Bible, dealing properly with sin is a necessary first step to enjoy fellowship with the LORD" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, p. 274).

6:13–17. The first two offerings (purification, burnt) are described in summary form (Num 6:16) and, for the burnt offering, would have included the grain and drink offering already mentioned (6:15; see at 15:3–5 for further description). The fellowship offering receives more focus (6:17–20), perhaps because there were variations in how it could be presented (cf. Lev 7:11–15 with 7:16–17) and also because this particular ritual has some unique elements. In this case, along with its regular grain and drink offering (see at Num 15:6–7), additional breads are presented when the fellowship offering is made (6:17). This happens with at least some other types of fellowship offerings (Lev 7:11–14) and most notably at the priests' ordination ceremony (Lev 8:2, 26), again making a link between holy Nazirites and holy priests and suggesting that this ceremony, like theirs, was an especially important occasion. Requiring a ram underscores this point, since it was an especially valuable flock animal (cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Ps 66:15).

6:18. *They are to take the hair and put it under the sacrifice of the fellowship offering*. Most assume this refers to the altar fire, where the fellowship offering fat would be burned (cf. Lev 3:3–5). Alternatively, the next verse mentions the "boiled shoulder of the ram" (Num 6:19), implying a fire was made somewhere in the courtyard for boiling fellowship offering meat in a pot (cf. 1 Sam 2:13–14), which would be natural to describe as the "fire...under…the fellowship offering" (Num 6:18).

6:19–20. The breast of fellowship offerings typically went to the priests in general and their families, and the right thigh to the officiating priest and his family (Lev 7:31–33; 10:14). In this case, one of each of the breads is also presented as a wave offering, along with the right shoulder, and then given to the priest (Num 6:19–20a). Why the shoulder is included here is not clear; since this was an especially costly vow, it may have seemed appropriate that even more of the animal was given to the Lord's tabernacle than normal.

6:22–27, Listen to the Story. These verses describe the blessing priests were to speak on Israel's behalf. Since this can be a concluding action (cf. Lev 9:22–23), describing it here is fitting: not only do these verses conclude the section that began in 5:1, they are also, chronologically speaking, some of the last words given before the Israelites break camp in Num 10:10 to set out for the Promised Land. (Much of the material in 7:1–10:10 is a flashback; see Sklar, *Numbers*, 134.)

Chapter 7, Explain the Story. In the commentary, it is noted that Numbers 7 flashes back to events occurring before Numbers 1–6. It may be further noted that though the events of Numbers 7 occur before those of Num 1–6, it has been edited in light of those chapters, e.g., the notice in 7:7–9 assumes the information already given in 4:15, 24–26, 31–32. Cf. Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 154 n. 2.

7:10–88. "The sacrificial animals were meant for three types of offerings: burnt offerings…purification offerings…and fellowship offerings" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 136). Guilt offerings are not made here or in other public offering ceremonies on the tribes' behalf (e.g., Lev 23:15–21; Num 28:11–15, 17–25, 26–31; 29:1–38). No reason is given, though it may be noted that guilt offerings were for a very specific type of sin (defilement of holy property [Lev 5:14–16]), whereas the burnt and purification offerings appear to atone for a wider range of sins and thus perhaps together sufficiently represented making atonement.

7:15–17. The order of the offerings here is that found elsewhere when offerings are listed (Lev 12:6; 23:18–19); when offerings were actually made,

however, the normal order was purification offering, burnt offering, and fellowship offering (see Sklar, *Numbers*, 117, for the rationale).

7:84–86. Be aware that we cannot simply look up the price of silver or gold today and use that to determine these gifts' value since the buying power of silver or gold in ancient Israel may have differed relative to its buying power today. For a relative comparison within ancient Israel, however, it may be noted that "each silver dish equaled the price of two adult male servants and one adult female servant (Lev 27:1-8); this suggests they were of great value (Sprinkle, *Leviticus-Numbers*, 224)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 135 n. 9).

7:88. *oxen*. The English word "ox" can refer to a male or female bovine (a cow or bull) or to a castrated bull. The former is meant here; castrated animals were forbidden on the altar (Lev 22:24) (cf. Milgrom, *Numbers*, 55).

7:89. "The concluding verse (7:89) echoes Exodus 25:17–22, where the Lord promises to speak to Moses from above 'the ark of the covenant law,' which rested in the most holy place. Given the extreme measures Aaron, the high priest, had to take to enter the most holy place (Lev 16:2–4), Moses presumably does not enter to hear the Lord but stands instead in the holy place on the other side of the veil" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 137). It may further be noted that when the Lord says to Moses in Exod 25:22, "There, above the cover…I will meet with you," this does not have to mean that Moses is in the same room as the Lord; cf. Exod 29:43, where the Lord states he will "meet with" the Israelites at the tent of meeting, even though they never entered the tent. As noted in the commentary, given the extreme measures necessary for Aaron the high priest to take when entering the most holy place (Lev 16:2–4), it seems unlikely Moses regularly entered there.

Chapter 7, Live the Story: Which tribe matters most? As Ashley summarizes, "By repetition the author showed that each tribe hand an equal stake in the support of the sacrificial ministry of the tabernacle. No tribe had a monopoly on the responsibility for support and no tribe was unnecessary" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 164).

8:2. *lampstand*. Including its utensils, it weighed roughly seventy-five pounds (34 kgs) (Exod 25:39).

8:5–22. "Numbers 3 noted that the Levites were taken in place of all the firstborn Israelites to serve at the tabernacle (it may be helpful to review the comments at 3:5–10, 11–13). This passage focuses on the process and the results" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 146). The chronological displacement of much of 7:1–10:10 is described in the commentary (Sklar, *Numbers*, 134). Presumably, this ceremony also took place during the first month (7:1; 9:1); by describing the event here, the text prepares the reader for the Israelites breaking camp in 10:11–34 since the Levites would have to dismantle and transport the tabernacle (10:17, 21).

8:7. *water of cleansing*. The commentary suggests one possible source of this water was the courtyard laver, which may also have been the source of the "holy water" mentioned at 5:17. If the same water is in view in both places, then the name may differ because the focus in 8:7 is not its state (holiness) but its effect (purification). The commentary notes a second possible source of the water could be spring water, which features in other cleansing rites. In Hebrew, spring water is called "living water" because it flows, and this association with life may have meant it was considered to be extra cleansing in its effect.

Chapter 8, Live the Story: Why have age requirements for the Levites? "To this day, mandatory retirement ages are set for certain physically taxing jobs, such as firefighting, and age fifty was realistic for Levites, given the shorter lifespans of the ancient world" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 149). As Goldingary notes, "if seventy is now the new sixty, in a society with poor health resources and diet, fifty is the old sixty" (John Goldingay, *Numbers & Deuteronomy for Everyone* [Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010], 23).

9:1. *first month*. "Also known as Abib (Exod 13:4) and later on as Nisan (Esther 3:7). It occurred sometime in March or April" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 627 n. 10).

9:8. Moses commands them to wait so he may go to the tent of meeting and "find out what the LORD commands concerning you" (9:8). Moses and Israel do not create law but seek the Lord's direction in cases that are unclear, underscoring their desire to follow his will above all (see also Lev 24:10 – 12; Num 15:32 – 36; 27:1 – 11; 36:1–9).

9:10. *away on a long journey*. This anticipates a situation that could arise once the Israelites are in Canaan and someone is unable to celebrate because they are traveling.

9:11–12. "In his grace, the Lord provides a way his servants may come and worship him. But grace was not license; they still had to follow all other Passover regulations, a few of which are mentioned by way of example (9:11b–12; cf. Exod 12:8, 10, 46)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 155). The regulation of putting blood on the doorposts is not mentioned, presumably because the Israelites are now in the wilderness (and not in houses). Whether the blood was put on the tent entrance or simply poured out and covered with earth (cf. Lev 17:13) is unclear.

9:17–23. "The highly repetitive verses explain the same point from different angles to emphasize: by day or night, after a short time frame or long, the Israelites obediently followed the Lord's guidance by cloud" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 160). In the Hebrew, the phrase "at the Lord's command" occurs seven times (9:18 [2x], 20 [2x], 23 [3x]) (Allen, *Numbers*, 778)—a number that emphasizes thoroughness (cf. Lev 26:18)—and each time the Israelites' obedience to the command is noted.

10:2. "While the cloud guided the Israelites generally, trumpet signals provided more specific direction about gathering and dispersing" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 160). A traditional approach understands the gathering signals to be long and the departing signals to be short but there is no way to verify this from the text itself.

10:8. *This is to be a lasting ordinance*. This is better translated, "These [i.e. the trumpets] shall be a lasting ordinance" (cf. ESV), though the endpoint is the same.

10:10. *Also at your times of rejoicing—your appointed festivals and New Moon feasts—you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am the LORD your God.* NIV understands one general category ("times of rejoicing") and two examples of it ("appointed festivals, New Moon feasts"). Alternatively, there are three categories, from general to specific: "times of rejoicing" (for whatever reason), "appointed festivals" (such as Passover and Unleavened Bread, Weeks, Day of Atonement, etc.) (cf. Lev 23; Numbers 28 – 29), and the beginning of each month ("New Moon") (cf. Num 28:11 – 14).

10:29. *Hobab, son of Reuel.* "For a survey of approaches to the relationship between Reuel (Exod 2:18; Num 10:29), Jethro (Exod 3:1; 4:18; 18:1; etc.), and Hobab (Num 10:29; Judg 4:11), see Ashley, *Numbers*, 194–97, who suggests (with many commentators) that the simplest understanding is that Reuel and Jethro are two names for the same person, and Hobab is his son" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 168). As for Judg 4:11, the word often translated as "father-in-law" (*ḥōtēn*) can, with different vowels (*ḥātān*), refer to a male relative by marriage, e.g. a "brother-in-law" (see *ḥātān* in *HALOT*, *DCH*]). The same is true in our verse. If we translate the key term as "father-in-law" (so NIV), it refers to Reuel; if we translate as "brother-in-law" (so NLT), it refers to Hobab.

Chapter 10, Live the Story: Who is this rest for? "In the context of our passage, a certain tension arises since Israel is on their way to engage in warfare in the promised land and fight against the nations" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 171). But such an approach to the nations was the exception, not the rule. In the case of Canaan, the sin of the inhabitants had reached a breaking point, and the Lord, instead of sending a flood as he did in Genesis in a similar situation (Gen 6:11 – 14), is sending the Israelites to be his instrument of justice (see Gen 15:16; Lev 18:24 – 30). (See further discussion in commentary at Numbers 21, "Live the Story: Why such severe destruction?", 288 – 90).

Chapter 11, Listen to the Story. "Chapters 11–12 [contain] three stories in which rebellious complaint is met with the Lord's discipline or judgment, a warning for Israel not to repeat such rebellious behavior (and sadly, a warning that goes unheeded)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 174). The first two stories occur in chapter 11. In the first (11:1–3), the Lord's judgment comes as a burning "fire" that "consumes" some of the camp's outskirts (11:1); the same language is used to describe the fire that consumed rebellious Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:2) and the fire that consumed those rebelling with Korah (Num 16:35). Such fiery outbreaks are miraculous demonstrations of the Lord's power bringing justice to bear and—like strong discipline from a parent—clearly warning of the dangers of rebellion. In the second story (11:4–35), the judgment strikes not simply at the camp's outskirts, but within the camp itself; increased judgment has come because of increased rebellion. Indeed, the Psalms return to this story as a paradigm of faithless behavior (Pss 78:17–31; 106:13–15). It is especially tragic because the Lord had previously provided meat for the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod 16); if they had cried out in faith instead of rising up in rebellious complaint, how differently might this story have ended?

11:3. *Taberah.* "Since Taberah is not included in the list of camp sites in chapter 33, it was probably a name given to an area near Kibroth-hattaavah (cf. verses 4–35)" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers, an Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 4 [Downers' Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981], 106).

11:6. *manna.* In size, it was like coriander seed (comparable to a small peppercorn). In appearance, it was white (Exod 16:31), like bdellium, which is usually understood to be a "resin" (so NIV), meaning either that it was called white because it glistened (as resin does) or because the resin itself was whitish (perhaps in its dried state). In taste, it was like something made with olive oil, as opposed to water, and thus sweeter, explaining its comparison elsewhere to honey (Exod 16:31).

11:11–15. As many have noted, the prayer is arranged as a chiasm, with the following terms repeated (in the Hebrew) in parallel sections: A/A´—trouble, find favor in your sight (11:11,15); B/B´—all this people, carry (11:12, 14). Highlighted in the center is 11:13: the people's complaints.

11:31. *drove quail in from the sea*. Each spring, quails migrate from North Africa and Egypt to Europe and western Asia, thus bringing their path across the Sinai Peninsula; they follow the same route back in the fall (see John Wilkinson, "The Quail Epidemic of Numbers 11:31–34," *EQ* 71:3 [1999], 196–97).

11:31–34. By delaying the judgment until after the gathering of quail, the Lord makes clear his power to provide whatever he wants for his people—even up to thirty-three bushels of quail each! But by bringing the judgment nonetheless, he makes clear that rejecting him and spurning his salvation is tremendously serious. If treason against an earthly king is met with severe penalty, how much more when done against the King of heaven.

Chapter 11, Listen to the Story. As noted in the commentary (Sklar, *Numbers*, 174), the book takes a depressing turn at this point, with story after story of the Israelites' grumbling and complaining. Such a steady drip of negativity is meant to impact us. "We grow sick and tired of their bitterness. And hopefully, complaints in our own mouths begin to taste like ash" (Matthew Richard Schlimm, *This Strange and Sacred Scripture: Wrestling with the Old Testament and Its Oddities* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015], 56).

12:1. *Cushite wife*. On the basis of Hab 3:7, which associates Midian and Cushan, some have argued that Num 12:1 might refer to Zipporah. Hab 3:7, however, is much later and debate exists whether "Cushan" and "Cush" are the same place; moreover, if Zipporah were meant, it may be questioned why her name was not used and why she was not called a "Midianite" (for the latter, cf. Num 10:29 [noted by J. Daniel Hayes, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible," *Bibliotheca sacra*, 153 no 612 (Oct-Dec 1996), 398 n. 8]).

12:3. *humble*. "While the relevant Hebrew word (ʿ*anaw*) can refer to those who are 'afflicted' through oppression or difficulty (Pss 9:12, 18; 10:12), it can also refer to those who are 'humble' and reliant on the Lord in contrast to those who are proud and evil (Prov 3:34)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 185). The related word "humility" (ʿ*ănāwâ*) is similar, indicating an attitude that is not self-seeking, but that recognizes the Lord's greatness and seeks to follow him humbly (Prov 15:33; 18:12; 22:4).

12:8. *face to face*. The Hebrew is actually "mouth to mouth," though NIV's translation represents the idea well.

12:10. *Miriam's skin was leprous…she had a defiling skin disease.* In the Hebrew, these phrases are almost identical, the repetition underscoring the point: "Behold! Miriam is afflicted with a ritually defiling skin disease!"

defiling skin disease. Several have suggested the malady functions as a punishment that fits the crime: Miriam refused to welcome Moses's foreign wife into Israel's midst (12:1) and is thus (temporarily) cast out of Israel's midst. Indeed, if the Cushite's skin color played a role in Miriam's antagonism, to suffer a skin disease was especially appropriate.

12:13. *cried out.* The word translated "cried out" (ṣāʿ*aq*) is often used in situations of deep distress (Exod 14:10; Num 11:2; 20:16); Moses is making an urgent plea for help.

12:14. *If her father had spit in her face.* "In ancient Israel, as in many cultures today, one reason to spit on someone was to say their behavior was utterly shameful" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 187). For example, when a brother-in-law refuses to carry out an expected social role in Israel for his dead brother's widow, then she "shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, 'This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line'" (Deut 25:9).

Chapter 12, Live the Story: What do bad leaders look like? "If you were to ask ancient Israelites to identify some of their key leaders in addition to Moses,

the names Miriam and Aaron would have been at the top of the list" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 188). As Sprinkle notes, "Micah 6:4 lists Aaron and Miriam as the leaders who along with Moses lead Israel from Egypt…Miriam is the most important female spiritual leader among all the Israelites of her day…Apart from Moses, Aaron [as high priest] is the most prominent spiritual leader of Israel" (Joe M. Sprinkle, *Leviticus and Numbers*, Teach the Text Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015], 262).

Live the Story: What do good servants look like? In 24:8, in a matter concerning ritual impurity, the Israelites are told, "Be very careful to do exactly as the Levitical priests instruct you. *You must follow carefully what I have commanded them.*" These priests would be passing on to the Israelites the words of God, and the Israelites were to follow those words exactly.

Chapter 13, Listen to the Story. As Rasmussen notes, "The concept of the 'land of Canaan' is found throughout Scripture (over 88 times, from Gen 12:5 through Ezek 47:15–20). The term 'Canaan' is attested as far back as the Ebla tablets (ca. 2400 BC), where reference is made to 'Dagan [a deity] of Canaan.' Later, one Mari tablet (ca. 1800 BC) actually refers to the 'men of Ki-na-ah-um' (which is one of the earliest usages of 'Canaan' as a geographical term), and one of the cuneiform tablets found at el-Amarna in Egypt (ca. 1400 BC) indicates that Hannathon was in the 'land of Canaan.' Thus at the time of the exodus and conquest, the 'land of Canaan' was a definite geopolitical entity, known both to the Egyptians and to the Israelites, with specific boundaries" (Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, revised edition [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 106).

13:2. *leaders*. There were twelve specific tribal leaders (cf. Num 1:16) but the word "leader" was also used more broadly, e.g., Num 16:2 speaks of 250 "leaders" of the congregation.

13:25. *forty days.* The distance from Kadesh to Rehob was "about 250 miles each way, so the forty days…would be a realistic estimate of the time for them to

cover the distances involved" (Wenham, *Numbers*, 118). "According to the annals of the campaigns of Thutmose II and Ramesses II, a day's journey was approximately twelve to fifteen miles" (R. Dennis Cole, "Numbers," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds* Commentary, Vol 1; ed. John H. Walton [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009], 359).

14:2. *raised their voices and wept aloud.* The Hebrew uses the phrase "they lifted up and gave their voice"; the phrase "gave their voice" is used elsewhere to describe weeping so loud it is heard by people not even in the same room (Gen 45:2).

14:6. *Joshua…and Caleb…tore their clothes*. Joshua is not mentioned together with Caleb in 13:30. This is often explained by source-critical scholars as the result of two different sources, but it may also be explained as being due to the simple fact that Caleb was the primary one taking the lead in chapter 13 and thus the one on whom the narrator focuses. This may be complemented by the observations of Wenham (*Numbers*, 121): "This is the first time that Joshua has publicly associated himself with Caleb's minority report. His silence hitherto makes good psychological and literary sense. Had he spoken out earlier in defence of the plan of conquest, his testimony could have been too easily dismissed as biased; he was Moses's personal assistant and therefore entirely associated with the Mosaic programme of exodus and conquest. But in the context of this programme his intervention is most appropriate here. The people have just stated that their children will be taken captive if they enter Canaan and that they should, therefore, select a new leader to bring them back to Egypt. Though Joshua's appointment as Moses's successor is not discussed for many chapters, the stepping forward of Joshua at this moment adumbrates the future. He will be their new leader, who will bring their little ones into possession of the land."

14:7. *exceedingly good.* In the Hebrew, this is expressed as "very, very good." The phrase "very good" occurs nine times in the Bible, most famously in

Gen 1:31a ("God saw all that he had made, and it was very good"), but this is the only time "very, very good" occurs, thus indicating incredibly strong emphasis.

14:11. *these people*. With his opening description of the Israelites—"these people" instead of "my people"—the Lord points to the way their rebellion has distanced them from him (14:11).

14:12. *I will strike them down with a plague and destroy them.* "The last time God 'struck with [a plague]' was against Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the ten plagues of the exodus (e.g., Exod 9:15). Like Pharaoh, the rebellious Israelites refuse to believe in the power of God to do what God says. Thus, Israel will suffer the same fate as Pharaoh. Corresponding to their plan to return to Egypt (Num 14:4), God's punishment will reverse the exodus. Although God had taken Israel out of Egypt as God's 'inheritance' (Exod 34:9), now God will 'disinherit them' (Num 14:12)" (Dennis T. Olson, *Numbers*, IBC [Louisville: John Knox Press, 1996], 80).

destroy them. NIV reads "destroy" but the Hebrew term may also be translated "disinherit, dispossess" (cf. ESV, NASB).

I will strike them down…but I will make you into a nation greater and stronger than they. This was indeed a great honor; it would make Moses like a second Abraham, a new forefather of the Lord's covenant people.

14:18–19. "Moses makes his appeal on two bases: the Lord's honor and the Lord's character" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 200). Nowhere in the prayer does he appeal to any aspect of the people's character; there is nothing there to which he can appeal! Indeed, they have needed pardoning more than once since leaving Egypt (14:19; cf. Exod 32:7–14; Num 11:1–3).

In these verses, Moses is clearly alluding back to the Lord's self-revelation in Exod 34:6–7, a passage that makes clear that mercy and forgiveness are central to the Lord's character. Stuart, in comments on the parallel passage in Exod 20:5–6, picks up on the centrality of mercy and forgiveness in the Lord's character and shows it is made clear even by the numbers mentioned in these verses: "By the

greatest numerical contrast in the Bible (three/four to thousands), God identified eloquently his real desire: to have his people remain loyal forever so that he might in turn show them the rich blessings of his resulting loyalty to them" (Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC 2 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006], 454).

14:21–23. "The latter was the final straw of rebellion that broke the back of the Lord's patience, and he thus swears an oath that the discipline he has described will indeed come to pass, an oath that might be paraphrased: 'As certainly as I exist, and as certainly as my glory—my great strength and miraculous care—have been evident in the earth, those who have seen clear signs of it and yet still rebelled against me will not make it into the promised land' (14:21–23)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 202). Alternatively, one could translate: "As surely as I live, the earth will be filled with my glory," that is, "People will see my great strength and power, and they will see this in the judgment that I bring: none of these rebels will make it into the promised land." In either case, the Lord is affirming a certainty: those who have rebelled will be disciplined by being refused entry to the Promised Land. "The primary audience for this book is the second generation, the sons and daughters of these people who behaved so egregiously. The second generation was to learn a lesson that their parents did not learn: God can be provoked only so far. Finally, his wrath is kindled" (Allen, "Numbers," 817).

15:3. *burnt offering.* In which all the animal's meat was burned up on the altar (Lev 1).

fellowship offering sacrifices. In which the animal's fat was burned up on the altar and its meat was divided between priests and offerors (Lev 3).

special vows. These were especially substantial due to their financial or personal cost, "such as the dedication of a person (Lev 27:2), or a Nazirite vow, which involved strict lifestyle obligations (Num 6:2)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 212 n. 5). "This type of vow was likely used in especially serious situations, not only to underscore the gravity of the request but to ensure an appropriate expression of

thanksgiving and praise was offered when the prayer was answered" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 608).

freewill offerings. "Unlike praise or vow offerings, which offerors brought in response to specific acts of deliverance or answers to prayer, voluntary offerings might have been brought as more general acts of praise" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 230).

pleasing aroma. "This phrase should not be taken in an overly literal way, as though the LORD were sniffing the smoke as it rises to heaven. Psalm 50:13 rejects such a literalistic reading of sacrifice as God's actual food: 'Shall I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of male goats?' The implied answer is, 'No!' Instead, the phrase simply describes the LORD's actions in human terms so that we can understand his actions. In [this context,] it conveys the LORD is pleased with the offeror and favorably accepts the smoke as representing a legitimate sacrifice presented with heartfelt worship (cf. Gen 8:21; Ezek 20:41)" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 94; for the observation about Ps 50:13, the quote above cites Roland K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 3 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980], 47).

15:20. *threshing floor.* During the harvest, threshing would separate the grain from the husk. This was done by placing the grain on a threshing floor (a flat, smooth surface) and going over it with a sledge of some sort. It would then be winnowed by lifting it into the air and letting the wind blow away the husks. See picture in ISBE, vol 2, 554.

15:22. *Now if you as a community unintentionally fail to keep any of these commands the LORD gave Moses.* "No examples are named, but such sin might take place if the community got the calendar wrong and celebrated a feast on the incorrect day" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 214). Another possible example is the deception by the Gibeonites, in which the Israelites took an oath they should not have (Joshua 9) (noted by Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT 3[Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979], 99).

unintentionally fail to keep. Some believe this verse focuses on sins of "omission" rather than sins of "commission." "But it is probably unwise to make too great a distinction between the two, since the difference is often due to the commandment's form, not to the sin itself. For example, [breaking the Sabbath] could be described as a sin of commission, since one committed a forbidden act (cf. Deut 5:14…), or it could be described as a sin of omission, since one failed to do a required action (cf. Exod 23:12…). The sin is the same in either case" (Sklar, *Leviticus [TOTC]*,109–110, n. 8). See also Sklar, *Numbers*, 214 n. 14.

15:27. *a year-old female goat for a sin offering.* Lev 4:27–35 allows for either a goat or a sheep; it may be that Num 15:27–29 assumes a sheep was also allowed (note how the opposite happened earlier in this chapter: 15:5 mentions only a sheep but 15:11 makes clear a goat was also allowed). Our passage also specifies a yearling animal while Leviticus does not; it may simply be that yearling animals were the most commonly sacrificed (cf. Exod 29:38; Lev 23:12, 18, 19; Num 7:15, 17, etc.), and our passage simply names that reality.

15:30–31. In the Hebrew, the word order is irregular and emphasizes that this rebellion is against the Lord. Translated woodenly, the text reads: "But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether a native Israelite or a resident alien, *the Lord* they are blaspheming, so that person must be cut off from their people. For *the word of the Lord* they have despised *and his commandment* they have broken; that person must certainly be cut off; their sin remains on them."

15:31. *their guilt remains on them.* And thus the penalty their guilt calls for; terms for sin or guilt often refer to the punishment that such sin calls for. See Jay Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement: The Priestly Conceptions*, Hebrew Bible Monographs, 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2005), 20–23, esp. p. 22 n. 41.

15:38. *Throughout the generations to come you are to make tassels on the corners of your garments, with a blue cord on each tassel.* This reads as though the cord of blue is put on top of the tassel; a comparison with Exod 39:30–31, however, suggests the sense is, "and they will put on the tassels of the extremity a cord of

blue *by which they will fasten the tassel to the wing/extremity of the garment*." Thus compare the two texts (the underlined words are the same in Hebrew or consist of similar roots):

"They <u>made</u> the <u>plate</u> (*ṣîṣ*) of the holy crown of pure gold, and inscribed it like the engravings of a signet, 'Holy to the LORD.' They <u>put on</u> it <u>a cord of blue</u>, in order to put it on the turban above, just as the LORD had commanded Moses" (Exod 39:30–31)	"And they will <u>make</u> for themselves <u>tassels</u> (*ṣiṣit*) on the wings/extremities of their garments, throughout their generations, and they will <u>put on</u> the tassels of the extremity <u>a cord of blue</u> [*in order to put it on the wing/extremity of the garment*]" (Num 15:38)

tassels…with a blue cord. "Observant Jews still follow the law concerning tassels, the *tsitsit*. These are intertwined with a blue thread and attached to the four corners of the prayer shawl…Traditionally, they also have 613 knots to symbolize the 613 commandments in the Pentateuch by rabbinic reckoning. These thus continue to serve as reminders of God's commandments for many Jews" (Sprinkle, *Leviticus and Numbers*, 276–77).

blue cord. Blue "was a color of royalty because only royalty could afford this kind of dye, which 'was extracted from the gland of the *Murex trunculus* snail found in shallow waters off the coast of northern Israel and Lebanon…12000 snails yield only 1.4 grams of dye'" (Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 623, citing Milgrom, *Numbers*, 127).

16:1. *Korah…became insolent.* The Hebrew reads as though this phrase involves the common verb "to take" (*lāqaḥ*), leading some versions to supply "men": "Korah…took men" (so ESV, NET). The NIV appears to be following the suggestion of some commentators that the verb is from a rare Hebrew root *yāqaḥ*, meaning "to be bold, insolent," similar to the Arabic verb *waqaḥa* (and perhaps

also occurring in Job 15:12). This suggestion seems plausible, since it would not be unusual for an uncommon verb to be mistaken for a very common one, and since it avoids the difficulty found in having the verb "to take" without a direct object. See further discussion in Ashley, *Numbers*, 298 n. 2.
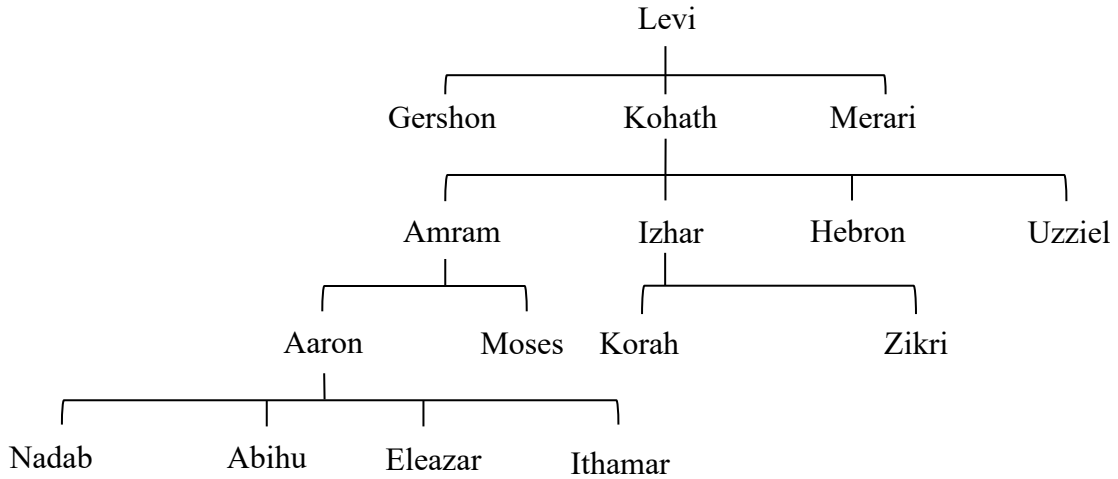
and On the son of Peleth. "Since On the son of Peleth is not mentioned elsewhere in this story or in texts which refer to this story, some scholars have posited that the name On (ʾ*ōn*) should be eliminated as a corruption of the last letters of the preceding name Eliab (ʾ*yb*). The name Peleth should be read as Pallu (*pallûʾ*; so LXX here) in line with the census of 26:5. The text would then read: "Dathan and Abiram the sons of Eliab, the sons of Pallu, the sons of Reuben" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 298 n. 1). It may be noted that in the paleo-Hebrew script, "Peleth" and "Pallu" look more similar than in the square script, thus explaining how they could be confused.

16:5. *In the morning the LORD will show*. The Hebrew reads: "Morning and the Lord will make known." At first glance this seems awkward, so it is no surprise the LXX reads differently: "The Lord has visited and known," which apparently takes the first word as a verb (*biqqēr*, translated with the Greek word "to visit, have a care for" [cf. Lev 13:36]) instead of a noun (*bôqer*, "morning"). But the Hebrew, though not common, can stand as it is, as demonstrated by Exod 16:6,7, where a similar construction is found (see especially v. 6: "evening and you will know," that is, "in the evening, you will know").

who is holy, and he will have that person come near him. Note that the phrase "to come near" (*hiqrîb*) is built on the same root as the description of the priests as "those who approach (*qārôb*) the Lord" (Lev 10:3). Moses is describing those the Lord will designate as priests.

16:8–11. Along with the comments in the commentary, it may further be noted that Korah, like Moses and Aaron, was descended from Kohath though from a different family line (see chart below and Exod 6:16–25). It would be natural to

suspect that this also fueled Korah's jealous rebellion; envy is sometimes most deeply felt when those connected to us are honored in ways we are not.

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                              Levi
                               |
          ┌────────────────────┼────────────────────┐
      Gershon               Kohath               Merari
                               |
          ┌────────────────────┼──────────────┬──────────────┐
       Amram                 Izhar          Hebron          Uzziel
          |                    |
   ┌──────┴──────┐      ┌───────┴────────┐
 Aaron        Moses   Korah             Zikri
   |
┌──────┬─────────┬──────────┐
Nadab  Abihu   Eleazar   Ithamar
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It may also be noted that the genealogy in Exodus 6 lists Moses and Aaron as only the fourth generation in Levi's genealogy, even though the period covers four hundred years (Gen 15:13). Hebrew genealogies, however, can be "telescoped," skipping generations (see Roland K. Harrison, "Genealogy," *ISBE* 2:424–28, esp. 424–25, 427), which is the simplest explanation of what has happened here. As Allen ("Numbers," 834) notes on 16:1:

> "The phrase 'A son of B son of C' in this instance extends over four hundred years. Levi, son of Jacob, was one of the twelve patriarchs who entered the land of Egypt over four hundred years before the time of the events of this text. Numerous intervening generations are demanded…We might paraphrase today, "Korah was a Levite whose line may be traced through Kohath and Izhar.""

16:9. *do the work.* That is, everything involved in taking it down, transporting it, and setting it up.

16:12–14. Dathan and Abiram were Reubenites (16:1). Since Reuben was the firstborn, Dathan's and Abiram's bitterness at not leading may have also been fueled by a sense that it should have been them, not Moses, who led the people (but cf. Gen 49:4). Their joining with Korah (a Kohathite) in rebellion may also have been facilitated by the fact that they camped near one another on the south side of the camp (see diagram in Sklar, *Numbers*, 62). See Ashley, *Numbers*, 303.

16:12. *will not come.* In the Hebrew, "will not come up," language used elsewhere "to indicate going to a higher authority or even a judge" (Gen 46:37; Deut 25:7; Judg 4:5) (Ashley, *Numbers*, 310).

16:14. *treat these men like slaves.* In the Hebrew, the words "treat these men like slaves" are "blind the eyes of these men," a metaphor which could mean "treat them as captives or slaves" (so NIV; cf. Exod 21:26; Judg 16:21) or perhaps "to hoodwink" (so NET note, based on such verses as Deut 16:19; cf. NIV mg.). Most commentators lean toward the latter, the sense being that Dathan and Abiram are saying, "Are you trying to blind these men to the truth? We will have no part of it!" If this is the sense, then Deut 16:19 is not strong support since it is not about "fooling someone in a legal decision" (thus "hoodwinking") as much as it is "causing someone to pervert a legal decision." One would therefore need to argue that it is simply the context that supports this understanding: they have just cited Moses's failed leadership and are refusing to be involved in watching him try and make it seem otherwise. But the NIV's suggestion fits just as well contextually and does have textual support from other verses, thus giving it a slight advantage: Moses is indeed lording himself over the others and treating them like captive slaves (so also Baruch Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, AB 4 [New York: Doubleday, 1993], 414). In either case, however, it is an accusation that Moses is a bad leader and they will no longer be subject to it.

16:21. *Separate yourselves from the assembly.* The words "separate yourselves" of course mean "get away from," but this is also the language used elsewhere for making a separation (or distinction) between the pure and the impure (Lev 20:24–26), and it is very natural to think of those overtones here: get away from this sinful, impure people.

16:22. *O God, the God who gives breath to all living things.* More woodenly, "O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh." At a minimum, the phrase implies the Lord's sovereignty over every life. The NIV interprets the phrase a bit more specifically: the Lord is the one who gives life to all. This would be in keeping with several texts that indicate the Lord is the one who gives us our spirit, so that we might live, and that he also can take it away again (Job 12:10; Ps 104:29; Ecc 12:7; Zec 12:1). The idea thus seems to be since he gives life to all, he cares for all, as a father does for his children, and Moses and Aaron appeal to his merciful love as the basis for him not ending life quickly. So also C.F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Numbers*, Vol 3: The Pentateuch, Trans. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 109, citing Calvin. (The same phrase is again used in 27:16; see comments there.)

16:24. *tents.* The word translated "tents" (*miškan*) refers to a dwelling and is used once in the Pentateuch in parallel to the typical word for "tent" (*ʾōhel*; Num 24:5). Everywhere else in the Pentateuch it is used to describe the Lord's tabernacle and is perhaps used here in a sarcastic way: "As for these people, who think they can be priests in the Lord's tabernacle, get away from their 'tabernacle' since it's about to be destroyed!" (similarly Allen, "Numbers," 840).

It may also be noted the word is singular in the Hebrew. Since this is not usually used in a collective sense, it may simply be understood that it is in construct with all three names: "the dwelling place of Korah, and that of Dathan, and that of Abiram." See JM §129b.

16:25. *elders of Israel.* This could be the 70 mentioned in 11:16, though this could be simply a general group of elders from Israel (as 11:16 makes clear, there

were more than 70 elders in Israel). It is also not clear if they are on Moses's side or simply going as witnesses. What is clear is that the word for "elder" is different than the words used to describe the leaders composing the 250 (16:2); this is a different group of leaders now going with Moses.

16:30. *brings about something totally new.* This is a traditional rendering, understanding the verb here to be *bārāʾ*, "to create." With different vowels, the same verbal root can refer to "cutting, cleaving" (Josh 17:15, 18; Ezek 23:47), leading some to suggest that the phrase should be translated "makes a great chasm" (Milgrom, *Numbers*, 137; cf. Wenham, *Numbers*, 137 n. 1). As Milgrom notes (*Numbers*, 137), this would provide a good parallelism with the fulfillment passage in verses 31 – 33:

Verse 30	Verses 31b–3a
But if the Lord makes a great chasm so that the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they go down alive into Sheol…	The ground under them burse asunder and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up with their households… They went down alive into Sheol…

In further support, it would be easy to see why a scribe would mispoint the letters since this root is predominantly used with the sense "to create" and only seldomly with the sense "to cut, cleave."

contempt. Note that the word "contempt" is the very one used in Num 14:11, 23 to describe the apostate rebellion of the Israelites in refusing to go to the Promised Land; this describes a serious rejection of the Lord and his ways.

16:37. *Eleazar.* His involvement here makes sense given that he was responsible for "the entire tabernacle and everything in it, including its holy furnishings and articles" (4:16); this would have included the altar, for which these censers would be used (4:16) (Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 417). (It is sometimes

suggested that Aaron could not be involved since he was high priest and thus had to be extra careful to avoid the dead. Against this explanation, however, it has been noted that in 16:48 Aaron runs into the crowd and takes his stand between the living and the dead.)

charred remains. The phrase "charred remains" (16:37) translates the same word used to describe the "burning" the Lord brought about in judgment with Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:6; NIV translates there "destroyed by fire").

16:38. *to overlay the altar.* Ashley (*Numbers*, 326), suggests this is the incense altar. This fails for the simple reason that the plating was to serve as a reminder to the lay Israelites (16:38, 40), who never saw the incense altar, which stood in the holy place (where lay Israelites were not allowed to go).

a sign to the Israelites. A "sign" is something that functions as a reminder by pointing beyond itself to another reality, be that a covenant (Gen 9:12; 17:11), the reality of the Lord's presence (Exod 3:12; 4:1–9) and power (Exod 7:3; 10:1–2; Num 14:11, 22), the people's relationship with the Lord (Exod 31:13, 17), or here, the Lord's choice of Aaron's family to serve as priests (and the need never to repeat those who rebelled against this authority structure; so also 17:10).

16:43. *Then Moses and Aaron went to the front of the tent of meeting.* To the front, but not inside, because the cloud had descended and filled it (cf. Exod 40:34–35).

16:45. *Get away from this assembly…they fell facedown.* The contrast between the Lord's command and Moses's and Aaron's actions is especially strong in the Hebrew, which may be woodenly translated: "And the Lord said to Moses, '*Rise up and away* from this congregation, so that I might consume them in an instant!' Then *they fell* on their faces" (Keil, *Numbers*, 111). The point is not that they are disobeying but they are taking this announcement of judgment as one more opportunity to plead on the people's behalf (see comments in Sklar, *Numbers*, 198, at 14:5–10a).

16:49. *because of Korah.* That is, because of joining him in rebellion (not because it was simply his fault).

Chapter 16, Live the Story: What is the problem? "Biblically speaking, when God calls us to positions of authority, it is for the sake of service, not privilege [cf. Ashley, *Numbers*, 309]. But Korah was interested in privilege, not service. He refused to accept that God gives each one different gifts and different roles of service" (Sklar, *Numbers,* 232). Stubbs notes how this contrasts with Aaron: "Aaron's action with the censer in making 'atonement for the people' and standing 'between the dead and the living' (16:48–49) contrasts sharply with the actions of Korah and company. Aaron's use of the censer shows that the priesthood is not primarily about exaltation and privilege, but rather service and prayerful mediation for the benefit of others. Priestly actions formed with these intentions are part of what makes a priest holy" (David L. Stubbs, *Numbers*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible [Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009], 144–45).

Live the Story: How does the Lord respond? "We have already seen an example of the latter: 'Your children will be shepherds [in the wilderness] for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness' (Num 14:33)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 234). This verse is also a good illustration of the meaning of Exod 34:7b ("he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation"): because the family is a unit (often consisting of three to four generations), all generations within that unit can suffer when the family head is punished. "Yahweh is committed to disciplining those who rebel against him, and this sort of discipline extends through the family unit, which was typically comprised of four generations, until the death of the offender" (Mark J. Boda, *A Severe Mercy: Sin and Its Remedy in the Old Testament*, Siphrut 1 [Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2009)], 45).

17:2. *ancestral tribes.* The Hebrew phrase used here "ordinarily refers to the family household or clan (as in 1:2), but in this passage it designates the entire tribe. This special usage is mandated because the technical term for tribe, *matteh*,

is preempted for 'staff.' To avoid the confusion arising from using *matteh* for both staff and tribe in the same passage, a near synonym for tribe…is employed" (Milgrom, *Numbers*, 143).

17:3. *On the staff of Levi write Aaron's name, for there must be one staff for the head of each ancestral tribe.* There were times when the tribe of Levi was not counted among the other tribes (as in the military census, Num 1) or did not participate in the activity of the other tribes (such as the bringing of tribute in Num 7). In this instance, however, they must partake; this verse makes their participation clear and the second part of the verse appears to underscore that every single tribe must participate this day (including that of Levi).

17:4. *Place them in the tent of meeting in front of the ark of the covenant law, where I meet with you.* This "likely refers not to the most holy place but in front of it, in the holy place (just as the incense altar was 'in front of the ark of the covenant law' in the holy place; Exod 40:5)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 240). The only person who is explicitly said to enter the most holy place is the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:2), and when he does so, he has to follow a very strict series of ritual instructions, including the offering of an incense offering. No such instructions or offerings are ever required of Moses when he enters the tent to speak with the Lord, suggesting he stays in the holy place, where the same ritual instructions do not need to be followed.

17:8. *almonds.* "Many different guesses have been made as to possible symbolic significance of the almonds…These all remain guesses, however, and preachers and teachers do well to resist presenting any of them as settled facts" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 240 n. 3). In terms of the guesses made, a partial list includes: 1) there is no symbolism; Aaron's rod just happened to be made of almond wood; 2) the lampstand in the holy place was tree-like and its design made to look like an almond tree in particular (Exod 25:33–34), thus making it the perfect symbol for the priestly rod; 3) the white buds of the almond tree symbolized priestly purity; 4) the word for "almond" is related to the word for "watch" (cf. Jer 1:11–12)

symbolizing the priestly role of watching over Israel or their duty to guard the Lord's tent from improper entry (see 18:1). While some of these may be more closely tied to the text than the others (see options 2 and 4), it is difficult to know how to choose between them with any certainty, and even more difficult to know if there is still another option of which we might simply be unaware.

17:12. *We will die! We are lost, we are all lost!* Significantly, both verbs the people use are in a form that refers to "an action which in fact belongs to the (usually near) future, but which is represented as being performed at the very moment of utterance" (JM §112g). In other words, "We're all on the cusp of suffering fatal judgment! Help!"

lost. This same verb is translated by the NIV as "perish" in 16:33, and the latter is probably a better translation here as well, thus keeping the parallelism with the verb "to die." Cf. NASB; NET. This verb may be translated "to be lost," but that might leave the reader with the impression the Israelites are simply without direction (as a lost animal; cf. Deut 22:3); the concern here is much more severe: they are dying!

17:13. *Are we all going to die?* The translation of this phrase is debated, however, a good case can be made that the sense might not be, "Are we all going to die?", as much as, "Have we finished dying yet?" In support, there are a series of verses similar to ours in using the verb *tāmam* ("to be complete, to finish") in combination with an infinitive (Deut 2:16; Josh 3:17; 4:1, 11; 5:8; 2 Sam 15:24). In each case the sense is "to finish x" (with "x" representing the infinitive), which in this case would be "to finish dying." The verse may thus be translated, "Anyone who draws near to the Lord's tabernacle will die! So is it [the case that] we have finished dying?" They want to know, "Is this over yet? When will this end?" And that is exactly what the Lord answers in the verses to follow: yes, as long as you and the priests and Levites behave faithfully and properly at the tabernacle.

18:1–7. Numbers has already identified that only people from the tribe of Levi can work at the tabernacle and has also made a clear distinction between what

non-priestly Levites can do there in comparison with priestly Levites: non-priestly Levites help to dismantle, transport and setup the tabernacle as well as guard it from improper approach by Israelites; priestly Levites alone can do priestly duties (such as present offerings) and alone can have direct contact with the sanctuary's holiest items (see at 3:5–10; 4:1–20). This section underscores these themes. In doing so, it accomplishes three goals: 1) it affirms that non-priestly Levites have an ongoing role at the tabernacle (despite the recent rebellion of Korah, a key leader from among the non-priestly Levites); 2) it reaffirms the role distinctions between priestly Levites and non-priestly Levites (thus making clear Aaron's family is indeed in charge); and 3) it reassures the Israelites that the Lord's sanctuary can be in their midst without them dying (as long as the roles the Lord has assigned to each person are duly respected).

18:2. *Bring.* I understand "your family" in v. 1a to refer to the entire tribe of Levi (see Sklar, *Numbers*, 241 and n. 7) and "you and your sons" to refer to Aaron's family in particular. The Hebrew of v. 2 begins with "and also," which can have the sense "and yet, but, though" (BDB 168.5). The sense would thus be: "Aaron, your tribe will bear the punishment for any offenses against sanctuary offenses (v. 1a), and your family will bear the punishment for any offenses against the priesthood (v. 1b), and yet your brothers, the tribe of Levi of the tribe of your father, bring with you to join you…" In other words, verse 2 returns to the entire tribe as mentioned in v. 1a.

18:7. There is a textual difficulty here, with the text in the MT reading: "…and within the veil, and you will serve, service of, a gift I give your priesthood…" Perhaps the easiest solution is to understand the word "service of" as a dittography of the previous word, leading to: "…and within the veil, and you will serve: a gift I give your priesthood..."

18:8. *offerings*. More specifically, "contribution offerings." The contribution offering may be explained as follows:

The breads given to the priest are called a "contribution offering" (תְּרוּמָה). The verb built on the same root refers to "lifting [an object] up *and away*" from a group of other objects and occurs in several contexts where that item is given to the Lord, such as the memorial portion of the grain offering (2:9), the fat of the purification offering (4:8 – 10, 19), the censers of Korah and company (Num 16:37 – 39), and various spoils of war (Num 31:28 – 29). The same understanding applies to the term "contribution offering" (תְּרוּמָה), since it refers to various items Israelites remove from their possessions or sacrifices to give to the Lord, such as building materials for the tabernacle (Exod 25:2 – 3; 35:5, 21, 24; 36:3, 6), specific portions of a sacrifice (Exod 29:27 – 28; Lev 7:32, 34; 10:14 – 15; Num 6:20), or different "holy gifts" (most often items of food; Lev 22:12; Num 5:9; 18:18 – 19, 21 – 24, 26 – 29). The Lord then designated these for the needs of the tabernacle in general or priests and Levites in particular.

In short, a "contribution offering" is an item given to the Lord, which he in turn gave to support the tabernacle and its workers (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 229).

18:9. *most holy offerings.* In terms of their ritual status, offerings could be either "holy" or "most holy." "A 'holy' offering could be eaten in a 'clean place' by the priests' family (Lev 10:14 [cf. 7:30–34]) and by the worshipper (7:15–18; 19:5–6), but the 'most holy' offerings could only be eaten in a ritually 'holy place' and only by the ritually holy priests, not their families (Lev 6:16–18; 24:9)" (Sklar, *Leviticus* [ZECOT], 109).

18:11. *wave offerings.* This is built on the same root as the verb "to wave."

This verb refers primarily to "waving" an item or "shaking/moving" it back and forth, such as "shaking" nations in a sieve (Isa 30:28), "waving" a hand back and forth (Isa 13:2), or "wielding" a tool, especially tools that cut this

way and that, such as a sickle (Deut 23:25) or a saw (Isa 10:15). This suggests a "wave offering" (תְּנוּפָה) is presented to the LORD by means of "waving" it back and forth. By this ritual action, the item was marked as belonging to him.

> …

> The relationship between the "wave offering" and "contribution offering" is debated. The two are clearly similar. With both, an item is given to the LORD, who then usually designates it for the tabernacle in general or the priests and Levites in particular. But only the "wave offering" was given by means of a specific ritual action. This suggests the "wave offering" is a type of "contribution offering," namely, one that is waved. The text nowhere explains why the action was required for some items but not others, and no consensus exists among commentators who have tried to discern the reason. What is clear is the waving designated the item as a gift to the LORD from the offeror (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 243 – 44).

18:12–13. *firstfruits…firstfruits.* These verses uses two different Hebrew words for "firstfruits." Whether they refer to different types of firstfruits is debated. It is possible that the term used in 18:12 "refers to first-*processed* items, such as flour made into breads containing leaven or honey," while the term used in 18:13 "refers to first-*ripened* items, such as grain not yet made into flour" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 113, on the same interchange in Lev 2:12, 14; for details see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 190–91.

18:16. *five shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel.* In a day and time when standardized measurements were harder to come by, the "sanctuary shekel" (18:16) would have been able to function as such a standard. It was equivalent to twenty gerahs (18:16) or two bekahs (Exod 38:26). "Archaeological evidence suggests a shekel in general would have been about 0.4 oz (11–12 g)"

(Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, at 5:15b, citing E. M. Cook, "Weights and Measures," *ISBE* 4:1054).

18:20. *no inheritance in their land.* That is, no large tracts of land like the other tribes. They did receive cities in which to dwell, with enough surrounding land for herds and flocks (35:1–8), but no large tracts of lands for growing crops.

18:25. *The LORD said to Moses.* Why switch from Aaron (18:1, 8, 20) to Moses? Ashley's suggestion seems reasonable: "The reason for this change is that Aaron and the priesthood are to be the beneficiaries of the current legislation. In modern terms, the address to Moses avoids a conflict of interest" (*Numbers*, 358).

18:28. *the LORD'S portion.* Rather, "the Lord's offering," and in particular, "the Lord's contribution offering." Just as the Israelites gave the tithe as a contribution offering to the Lord for the Levites, the Levites gave a tithe as a contribution offering to the Lord for the priests.

19:2. *red.* This "probably refers to a reddish-brown, as in…Zech 1:8 (a horse)" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 364). The same word is used elsewhere to describe stew (Gen 25:30), blood (2 Kgs 3:22), or clothing that is stained from working in a winepress (Isa 63:2).

heifer. More properly, "cow," since "heifer" indicates an animal that has not given birth and the Hebrew word here (*pārāh*) is not limited to such animals (1 Sam 6:7).

As also noted in the commentary: "Female animals had to be used for the purification offering of individual lay Israelites (Lev 4:28, 32). This fits well here since this is a type of purification offering (Num 19:17) and its ashes used to make purificatory waters for everyday Israelites" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 260). In this case it is a cow instead of a (smaller) goat or sheep, perhaps in order to have a substantial amount of ashes or because only larger cattle could have coats red enough for the rite.

without defect or blemish. Translated woodenly, the Hebrew reads, "a red heifer complete/without defect which there is not in it a defect." In only one other

passage do both descriptions occur together (Lev 22:21). This could suggest that the animal's blamelessness is being emphasized. Alternatively, the word for "complete/without defect" (*tāmîm*) is sometimes used to mean "whole" as in a "whole year" (Lev 25:30) or "whole day" (Josh 10:13) and thus could perhaps be read here mistakenly as "a wholly red heifer." The addition of "there is not in it a defect" would thus be to make clear that the word *tāmîm* should be read in keeping with its more common use: "without defect."

19:3. *outside the camp.* Why not at the altar? No reason is given, but since the result of interacting with the carcass and the ashes is to become ritually impure (19:7–8, 10), it makes sense that this does not take place in the sanctuary (which must remain holy) but outside the camp (thus helping to keep the camp pure as well).

19:4. *blood.* This was one of the most powerful cleansing agents in ancient Israel. "While many impurities could be cleansed with water (11:25, 28; 14:47; 15:18), more serious impurities required blood (14:14; cf. Lev 16:19)" (Sklar, *Leviticus* [ZECOT], 143 n. 25).

19:6. *hyssop.* This "was the plant of choice for smearing or sprinkling liquid (Exod 12:22; Num 19:18), though whether this was due to any symbolic value or to its abundance and utility is unclear. The plant's identity is also debated, though many believe it to be *Origanum syriacum*, 'a small, bushy plant, usually about 2–2 1/2 feet in height [0.6–0.76m] and most often found in dry, rocky areas'" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 382, citing Richard A. Taylor, "אֵזוֹב," *NIDOTTE* 1:334).

19:12. *third…seventh.* Since the impurity lasts seven days, sprinkling on the seventh day is no surprise. Why also on the third? No reason is given. At the least, the number three is clearly important in ancient Israel (Exod 23:14; Lev 19:23), so its occurrence here may have seemed very natural.

19:17. *fresh water.* Such water was "used only in the context of major impurities (Lev 14:50–52; 15:13; Num 19:17), suggesting it too was considered to be especially purifying" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 383). The Hebrew for "fresh

water" is "living water," a reference to "water from a flowing source (and which thus appears to be moving/living) (Gen 26:19; Jer 2:13). Perhaps this association with the word 'living' led to it being viewed as especially purifying" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 383 n. 101).

19:18. *furnishings*. Or "containers"; the Hebrew is the same as in 19:15, the sense being that containers with lids on them would be sprinkled and the contents considered clean.

19:19. *And on the seventh day he is to purify them.* Perhaps better: "Thus on the seventh day he is to purify them" (so ESV). This is not a separate action from the sprinkling but the result of it.

19:22. *and anyone who touches it becomes unclean till evening.* The Hebrew simply reads, "and anyone who touches becomes unclean till evening." The NIV supplies "it," which would refer back to the object that was touched by the unclean person. The idea would be that the person made that object ritually unclean and whoever touches that object becomes ritually unclean. An alternative understanding is to translate, "and anyone who touches him becomes unclean till evening," that is, whoever touches the unclean person becomes unclean themselves. This seems somewhat redundant, however, since the first half of the verse already makes this consequence clear (unless the last half of the verse is providing new information by specifying how long the impurity lasts for a *person* who comes into contact with the unclean person). This apparent redundancy might tip the scales in favor of the first understanding above since it avoids the redundancy by supplying new information (namely, the person's impurity can spread from objects to other people; cf. Lev 15:9–10, 20–23).

20:5. *It has no grain or figs, grapevines or pomegranates.* While it is true these foods were not readily available in the wilderness where Israel was, some of these very same fruits were brought back by the twelve scouts from the Promised Land—to which Israel had refused to go (13:23)! Their lack of these goods was not Moses's and Aaron's fault but their own.

20:8. *the staff.* As noted in the commentary, this most likely refers to the staff that budded in Numbers 17. This would imply it is not Moses's staff that he used to strike the rock earlier in Exodus 17. Sprinkle (*Leviticus and Numbers*, 308), while agreeing that the staff of Numbers 17 is being referred to, has recently surveyed the texts in Exodus that speak of the staffs of Moses and Aaron and notes the possibility that these staffs were one and the same, meaning the staff mentioned in Num 20:8 would indeed be the one that Moses used in Exodus 17. This explanation also assumes, however, that the staff mentioned in Numbers 17 was the same staff mentioned in Exodus, and that is harder to prove. If anything, Num 17:3 suggests the staff that was used in that chapter came from the tribe of Levi (and not from Aaron directly).

Speak to that rock before their eyes. The phrase "before their eyes" could be translated "'in their presence' or 'in their full view,' but does it modify the verb 'to speak' or the noun 'the rock'?" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 383). In answer to his own question, Ashley (ibid.) writes: "Keil cites the opinion of Machmanides that it should modify the latter and be read *the rock-before-their*-eyes, i.e., 'to the rock in front of them, and standing in their sight.' The alternative, that the speaking is to be done 'in the presence of the people' (lit., 'before their eyes') makes better sense, however, because, in God's sentence on the leaders in v. 12, they are accused of not relying on God by holding him as holy 'before the eyes of…the children of Israel.'"

20:14. *king of Edom*. Ashley (*Numbers*, 389 n. 13) notes that the Hebrew word for king (*melek*) "is flexible and may refer to great kings, such as those in Egypt (Gen 39:20), Assyria (2 Kgs 15:19), Babylon (2 Kgs 24:1), or Persia (Ezra 1:1); to lesser national kings such as those in Israel and Judah (2 Sam 2:4; etc.); and to petty rulers of such local places as Sodom (Gen 14:2), Gerar (Gen 20:2), Jericho (Josh 6:2), or Ai (Josh 8:2)." As a result, "the current text does not demand that Edom be a centralized monarchy…only that there be some kind of Edomite ruler to which the request was made" (389). He makes this note in light of the fact that

there is no external evidence to support the idea of a centralized monarchy in Edom during this period. The "king" in this instance may be a much more local ruler; cf. the "chiefs" mentioned in Gen 36:14–19.

20:16. *Kadesh*. "Kadesh, also called Kadesh Barnea (Num 32:8), is about fifty miles from traditional Edom, making its description as being on the edge of Edom's territory appear hyperbolic. If at that time some Edomites had come to live west of the Arabah rift valley as they did later in Edomite history, Kadesh could be literally on the edge of Edom's territory" (Sprinkle, *Leviticus and Numbers*, 314).

20:21. *Since Edom refused to let them go through their territory, Israel turned away from them.* Deuteronomy 2 fills out the picture, noting that the Edomites were not simply hostile but feared the Israelites coming into their land (2:4). It also explains that the Lord had warned Israel not to engage them in battle since he had given the Edomites at least parts of this territory (Deut 2:4–5). "Israel's avoidance of a clash (20:21) is worth noting; their battles were fought, in the ensuing campaigns, only by divine permission or command" (Derek Kidner, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971], 48).

20:22. *set out from Kadesh*. It was from Kadesh that Moses sent the messengers (20:16), whose going back and forth to Edom (twice) would have taken several days, if not longer. It is possible that in the meantime, the people departed for Mt. Hor (20:22), which was on the edge of Edom's territory (20:23), and received the final message back from Edom while there, at which point they departed and took the longer route around Edom (21:4). In other words, 20:22 is going back in time to describe what the Israelites did while the back-and-forth of 20:14–20 was going on.

Mount Hor. Traditionally, Mount Hor has been identified with a mountain in the area of Petra, though most scholars today prefer to place it "to the north-east of Kadesh-barnea" (Wenham, *Numbers*, 153). See further discussion in Ashley, *Numbers*, 394–95. Deuteronomy 10:6 identifies the place of his death as Moserah, suggesting Mount Hor was in this area (so Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of*

Deuteronomy, NICOT 5 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], 200; cf. Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC 4 [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], 199). Whether or not Moserah and Moseroth (Num 33:31) are the same place is unclear.

20:24. *Aaron will be gathered to his people*. "This is the standard poetic expression for death. The bones would be buried, often with the bones of relatives in the same tomb, giving rise to the expression" (NET note on 20:24; cf. Gen 25:8, 17; 35:29). This understanding finds possible support in Gen 25:8–10: "Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; *and he was gathered to his people*. His sons Isaac and Ishmael *buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre*, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham *was buried with his wife Sarah*." The same is true of Gen 49:29, 31: "Then he gave them these instructions: 'I am *about to be gathered to my people*. *Bury me with my fathers* in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite…*There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah*.'" This is not to say someone's bones had to be placed with their ancestor's bones each time, only that such a practice is what led to the use of this phrase as a poetic way of saying that someone died. Whether Israelites at this point in history also connected this phrase to joining their relatives in the afterlife is less clear (despite the affirmation of commentators, often without supporting evidence).

20:28. *and Aaron died there*. The death of Miriam, which began this chapter (20:1), is now balanced by the death of her brother. In the span of twenty-nine verses, the Israelites have lost two of their most important leaders.

21:1. *the Canaanite king of Arad*. "The Hebrew for 'the Canaanite' is normally translated 'the Canaanites'; using it for an individual is very uncommon (only four other examples exist: Gen 46:10; Exod 6:15; Num 33:40; 1 Chr 2:3). Several thus suggest 'king of Arad' is a mistaken scribal insertion based on Josh 12:14 or Judg 1:16–17, which mention Arad and Hormah (but which take place later in Israel's history)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 277 n. 4). In further support of this being

a later scribal addition, it may be noted that kings are commonly described as "king of the Philistines/Amorites/etc.", and not, as here, "the Canaanite, king of Arad" (cf. Gen 26:1, 8; Num 21:21; etc.).

Arad. As noted in the commentary, if the phrase "king of Arad" is original, then it is unlikely "Arad" refers to the city of the traditional site, which is seventeen miles south of Hebron in the eastern Negev and far from one of the sites often identified as Mt. Hor (at least fifty miles as the crow flies; see Map 2 in Sklar, *Numbers*, 40). As also noted in the commentary, "Arad" could refer to a broad region or to a different city. With regard to the latter, Allen notes that Shishak (or Sheshonk I), Pharaoh from c. 945–924 B.C., conquered several towns in Judah, among which he mentions "two Arads: 'Arad of the House of Yrhm' and 'the Great Arad'" (Allen, "Numbers," 874 n. 1). Though coming from a later time, this well illustrates the use of the same place name in the same region for different cities.

road to Atharim. Several ancient versions (Targum, Peshitta, Vulgate, Aquila, Symmachus) understood this to mean "road of the scouts," which is how it could easily be read if the initial letter were missing. It is not clear in that case, however, why a scribe would add the initial letter to make the phrase less clear. This suggests that "Atharim" is the original reading and refers to a place name. This is how the Septuagint understood it and it remains the most common translation in modern versions.

captured some of them. There were different reasons for taking captives in the ancient Near East. Some could be sold to other people as slaves (cf. Gen 37:28), others could be forced to become slaves of the conquering party (cf. 2 Kgs 5:2), and women could be taken as wives and children enfolded into homes (cf. Num 31:9; Deut 21:10–11).

21:3. *Hormah.* "Since the name 'Hormah' was used in the first (and unsuccessful) battle against the Canaanites and Amalekites of the region (14:45), it is possible that the naming of the region came as a result of this present battle and that the earlier passage uses the name (of what became a well-known place)

proleptically. In any event, the association of the victorious battle with Israel's earlier defeat is made certain by the use of this place name" (Allen, "Numbers," 874). For the significance of the association, see Sklar, *Numbers*, 277–78.

21:5. *this miserable food*. Since they have just said "there is no food" and "there is no water," the sense must be, "There is no naturally occurring food or water; all we have is *this* miserable food, that is, the miserable manna you have provided."

21:6. *venomous snakes*. Other verses describe the venom of snakes by calling it the "heat of the snake" (Deut 32:33; Ps 140:3), likely because it causes a painful burning sensation. Something similar happens here, with these being called "fiery snakes," that is, snakes whose venomous bites cause painful burning (with lethal results).

21:8–9. *look*. Verses 8 and 9 use different words for the verb "to look." While these verbs overlap greatly in meaning, there can be a slight difference in their use. The more common is found in v. 8 (*rāʾāh*), where the Lord is giving a general description of what must be done: look at the snake. The more uncommon is found in v. 9 (*nābaṭ*); it describes what the people actually did and can be used to refer to someone who looks at something intently or for a period of time (Gen 15:5; Exod 33:8). This more specific use fits this context well. The people did not simply cast a glance towards the snake but looked at it intently, desperate for salvation and healing.

21:9. *bronze*. As Ashley notes, the Hebrew word (*nĕḥōšet*) "can mean copper (Deut 8:9; Job 28:2) or bronze (e.g., Lev 6:21 [Eng. 28]; Num 17:4 [Eng. 16:39]; 1 Sam 17:5, 6; 1 Kgs 14:27)" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 405). In favor of "copper" he cites Wenham's observation that a copper snake was found in this region at Timnah, dating to the 12th c. B.C. (see Wenham, *Numbers*, 156; Milgrom [*Numbers*, 175], dates it between 1200 and 900 B.C.). Neither Ashley nor Wenham are arguing that the snake from Timnah is the one mentioned here, simply that such

metal snakes were known in a region and time period fairly close to that of our passage.

21:10–11. "Comparing the campsites in the current passage with Num 33:41–49, one finds that ch. 33 lists more sites before Israel comes into Amorite country (five, counting Mt. Hor) than Num 21 does (two); but ch. 21 names more sites in Amorite country (seven) than ch. 33 does (three). This difference may be due to the different purposes of the lists. The current list shows an interest in arriving at the eastern edge of Moab as quickly as possible and zeroing in on the Amorite land. It should, then, be linked with 21:21–35 as the story of the Amorite campaign" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 409). In other words, since the near focus of chapter 21 is on battles with the Amorites, this list focuses more on geographical names in that region. Ashley goes on to note that "this itinerary (and that of ch. 33) probably list only a selection of campsites" anyway (Ashley, *Numbers*, 409), so one need not assume that differences in the lists are contradictory.

21:12. *Zered Valley*. Typically identified a *Wadi el-Hesa*, whose river flows in a west-north-west direction and connects with the Dead Sea's southeastern corner (see Map 1 in Sklar, *Numbers*, 39). Deuteronomy informs us that by this point, the entire first generation had passed away. "And the Lord said, 'Now get up and cross the Zered Valley.' So we crossed the valley. Thirty-eight years passed from the time we left Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the Zered Valley. By then, that entire generation of fighting men had perished from the camp, as the Lord had sworn to them" (Deut 2:13–14).

21:13. *Arnon*. Identified as *Wadi el-Mujib*, flowing west into the midpoint of the Dead Sea. It forms a natural boundary between Moab in the south and the land of the Amorites in the north (see Map 1 in Sklar, *Numbers*, 39).

21:20. *wasteland*. This might be too specific; other versions translate as "desert" (ESV) or "wilderness" (NET). The common word for "wilderness" is *midbār*. The word used here (*yešîmôn*) occurs several times in poetry parallel to *midbār* (Ps 78:40; 106:14; 107:4; Isa 43:19, 20) though it is not certain whether it

is a perfect synonym, refers to a certain type of wilderness, or refers to a specific wilderness region (in which case it should be rendered as a proper noun: "the Jeshimon"). If the latter, it would differ from the Jeshimon mentioned in other contexts associated with David (1 Sam 23:19, 24; etc.), which is in a different geographical region on the western side of the Dead Sea.

21:22. The message in this verse is shorter than that reported in Deut 2:27–29 and has a few differences: this verse says they will not turn aside into fields or make use of wells while Deut 2:28 says they will buy food and water, and this verse makes no mention of Edom or Moab while Deut 2:29 does. None of the differences are contradictory and may simply reflect that each passage is summarizing the fuller message that was sent by means of the messengers. (Given that the messengers undoubtedly had lengthy conversations with Sihon, it should not surprise us that two different summaries pick up on different aspects of those conversation.)

21:24. *Israel, however, put him to the sword*. Deuteronomy 2:30–36 fills out the picture: "But Sihon king of Heshbon refused to let us pass through. For the LORD your God had made his spirit stubborn and his heart obstinate in order to give him into your hands, as he has now done. The LORD said to me, 'See, I have begun to deliver Sihon and his country over to you. Now begin to conquer and possess his land.' When Sihon and all his army came out to meet us in battle at Jahaz, the LORD our God delivered him over to us and we struck him down, together with his sons and his whole army. At that time we took all his towns and completely destroyed them—men, women and children. We left no survivors. But the livestock and the plunder from the towns we had captured we carried off for ourselves. From Aroer on the rim of the Arnon Gorge, and from the town in the gorge, even as far as Gilead, not one town was too strong for us. The LORD our God gave us all of them." Deuteronomy thus makes clear that while the Lord had not given Edom or Moab into Israel's hands—and therefore commands them not to engage in battle with the inhabitants of those lands (2:3–9)—he had given this territory into Israel's hands and would later give it to the tribes of Reuben and Gad in particular (Deut 3:16).

their border was fortified. The Hebrew reads, "for strong (*ky ʿz*) was the border of the Ammonites." The LXX translates "for Jazer (*ky yʿzr*) is the borders of the Ammonites." Deciding which reading is original is challenging. In favor of the LXX, it could be argued: 1) that Jazer is an uncommon place name, while the root for "strong/fortified" is fairly common, making it easy for a scribe to misread here in favor of the more common word; 2) Jazer is mentioned only a few verses later (21:32) and appears to be towards the western edge of the Amorites' territory, in keeping with the LXX reading; and 3) in some of the older Hebrew scripts, the beginning letter of the following word ("border"), which begins with a *g* in Hebrew, is very similar to the last letter of Jazer, which is an *r* in Hebrew, making it all the easier for a scribe to misread the phrase "for Jazer is the b[orders]" (*ky yʿzr g*) as the phrase "for strong was the b[order]" (*ky ʿz g*). In favor of the Masoretic Text, it could be argued that the LXX scribe changed from "strong/fortified" to "Jazer" in order to avoid the impression that it was Ammon's strength, instead of the Lord's command (cf. Deut 2:19), that kept Israel from going there. As this latter argument is more speculative than those in favor of the LXX, I lean towards the LXX reading. If the Hebrew reading is maintained, the explanation "their border was fortified" would thus be here to explain why this marked the border of the Amorites' territory (and not as a way to say that Israel could not take the land due to its fortifications) (Keil, *Numbers*, 151).

21:28. *Ar of Moab*. Unknown location but in the vicinity of the Arnon and thus associated with the border of Moab (21:15; Deut 2:28).

the citizens of Arnon's heights. This could also be translated "the Baals of Arnon's heights." In place of "Baals/citizens" (*baʿal*) the Septuagint reads "swallowed" (*bālaʿ*), which brings better parallelism to the verse: "It *consumed* Ar of Moab, it *swallowed* Arnon's heights." The reason a scribe may have misread "Baals/citizens" in place of "swallowed" is either that the word for "citizen" (*baʿal*) is much more common than that for "swallow" (164 vs. 41 occurences) or that the following word—"high places"—would have naturally led a scribe to read "the

Baals of the high places" since the worship of Baal was associated with high places (cf. the place name "Bamoth-Baal" ["high places of Baal"] in Num 22:41 and the phrase the "high places of the Baal" in Jer 19:5; 32:35).

21:29. *Chemosh*. The main god of the Amorites (1 Kgs 11:7, 33; see also the text of the Mesha Stele), who is described here as being utterly defeated so that the men have fled and the women have been taken captive by the Amorites. Little more is known about this god.

21:30. *Heshbon…Dibon…Medeba*. Dibon is at the southern border of the territory, Heshbon to the north and Medeba in between (cf. Josh 13:9 for the latter). Nophah is of unknown location; the text is in fact difficult here and the Septuagint does not read this as a place name.

Chapter 21, Live the Story: How can we avoid such judgment? In John 3:14–15, Jesus compares his death on the cross with the lifting up of the snake in the wilderness. Gane's comments here are very helpful:

> It is deeply disturbing that Jesus identified himself with Moses's snake, which symbolized sin and death. We would much prefer to think of him as the innocent "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The "snake" idea is even more repulsive when we remember the Genesis story of how a satanic serpent introduced sin and death into the world by instigating the disobedience of Eve and Adam (Gen 3; cf. Rev 12:9). However, rather than gently backing off the identification of Christ with sin, Paul jarringly rams it home: "God made him who had no sin to *be sin* for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21; emphasis Gane's) (Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 682).

Gane proceeds to quote one of his earlier works:

Imagine that! In a sense, Christ *became* sin! He bore every evil passion and selfish degradation of the billions of people who have ever inhabited our planet. With that overwhelming deluge of misery collected upon Him and identified with Him as if He were the personification of all evil, He gave Himself up for destruction in order to wipe out all sin and all of its consequences (Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 682, citing Roy Gane, *Altar Call* [Berrien Springs, MI: Diadem, 1999], 77).

22:2. *Balak son of Zippor*. The opening scene introduces us to Balak, who will be a major figure in the coming chapters and who is now aware of Israel's recent victories. We assume he is from Moab since Moab's response is told next: they are absolutely terrified of Israel's vast army (22:3). He will be reintroduced in 22:4, where we will learn he is in fact Moab's king.

22:3. *was terrified…filled with dread*. The use of two different words in the Hebrew underscores how negatively the Moabites were looking at this situation. The second word (*qûṣ*) often has the sense "to loathe" and could perhaps be translated here "sick with dread" (so NET; cf. BDB).

22:5. *Pethor*. In place of Hebrew *petōr*, the Syriac and Vulgate read *happôtēr*, which means "the interpreter (of dreams)" (cf. Gen 40:8; 41:8), but in Deut 23:4 (Heb 23:5) Pethor is clearly a place name. It is "almost universally agreed to be ancient Pitru (modern Tell el-Aḥmar), a site on the Sajur, a tributary of the Euphrates, and about 12 mi. [20 km.] south of Carchemish…The distance between Pethor (Pitru) and the plains of Moab would be over 370 miles. The journey would take an estimated 20–25 days, hence the four journeys in the story about 90 days" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 445).

in his native land. An alternative reading ("in Amaw") makes just as much sense of the text (see Sklar, *Numbers*, 289 n. 5). If the reading "in his native land" is maintained, then "his" most likely refers to Balak since it would be less clear

why one would have to identify that the place Balaam was staying was in Balaam's native land.

cover the face of the land. The same expression is used elsewhere to describe locusts (Exod 10:5, 15).

22:7. *fee for divination*. The Hebrew is simply "divinations." Many versions understand this to be a metonymy in which "divinations" is used to refer to the fee for performing divination, just as the word for "work" can refer to the wages paid for that work (Lev 19:13). Alternatively, this could be a metonymy in which "divinations" refers to the items with which the divination would be performed (the plural being a plural of composition; cf. JM §136b). Cf. Deut 18:10 and 2 Kgs 17:17, where the plural in the phrase "to divine divinations" can be understood similarly, i.e. "to divine by the various means of divination." Related but slightly different is the understanding of Cole ("Numbers," 379), following Hurowitz, who argues that the term could refer to clay models of objects that Moabite diviners had already performed divination with (such as animal entrails): "Hurowitz, developing the lead of J. M. Durand, delineates several parallel contexts from Mari in which objects used in the process of divination were presented, dispatched, and used in the negotiation with the recipient of the divination. These included such items as clay models of intestinal entrails, livers, or other parts used in the practice of extispicy, the art of ritual dissection. Hurowitz concludes: 'If Balaam was, among his various magico-religious talents, a *bārū*, and if extispicy was practiced in Moab as it was at Canaanite Hazor and Megiddo and Ugarit, then the [divinations] referred to may well have been baked clay models of the entrails predicting Moab's downfall and Israel's ascendancy'" (see V. Hurowitz, "The Expression *ûqsāmîm bᵉyādān* (Numbers 22:7) in Light of Divinatory Practices from Mari," *HS* 33 (1992): 5–15, esp. 12–13.

22:17. *reward you handsomely*. The Hebrew could be translated, "I will indeed honor you greatly." There were many different ways to show honor to someone, one of which included financial reward, which Balaam himself focuses

on here (22:18) and which supports the NIV's decision to go with "reward" in this context.

22:18. *all the silver and gold in his palace*. This is possible, and would still be a very strong statement, but it is possible the statement is even stronger than the NIV implies. The Hebrew reads, "the fullness of his house, silver and gold," which is perhaps better translated, "enough silver and gold to fill his house." Cf. "and he will take the fullness of the firepan, coals of fire" (Lev 16:12), i.e., "and he will take a firepan full of coals of fire." Bearing in mind that a king's house (i.e. palace) was the biggest one in the nation, this is like a modern person saying, "enough silver and gold to fill a stadium."

22:20. *do only what I tell you*. That is, in terms of pronouncing blessing or curse, you must follow my commands exactly (cf. 22:35).

22:22. *when he went*. The word translated as "when" is *kî*. Most versions translate with "because" or "that," which is its most regular translation, though the NIV's rendering is also possible (BDB 471.2). The word translated as "went" is *hōlēk*, which is a participle and would usually be translated as "going" (so NASB). (It is unclear why many versions translate this as a past tense. Perhaps they are following the Septuagint and Syriac, which treat the verb as a perfect [which is normally translated as a past tense]. But this reading is unlikely since the Hebrew has an extra pronoun ["he"], which is typical with the participle but not with the perfect.) The most likely translation is thus either "because he was going" or "when he was going." If the latter, we might translate as follows: "Now the Lord's anger was kindled when he was going, so the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him" (cf. Ashley, *Numbers*, 451, 454–55, who offers a similar translation as a "modest" possibility). In other words, the focus is not on the Lord being angry simply because he went; rather, it is letting us know that the Lord was angry with him as he was going, inviting us to ask, "What is the reason for the anger?" As noted in the commentary, the answer becomes clear at the end of the episode: Balaam was going to ignore the Lord's warning in 22:20 and sell himself out to

Balak (22:35). But even if we translate, "But God was very angry because he was going," we still arrive at the question, "Why is God angry that he is going?", for which the same answer as above may be given.

angel of the Lord. "The 'angel of the Lord' could also be translated 'messenger of the Lord'; he occurs frequently as someone who acts and speaks on God's behalf (Gen 16:9–10; 22:11–12; etc.)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 291 n. 15). Due to this representative role, and especially the way he takes on God's own voice (cf. Gen 22:11 with 22:12), some have concluded that this messenger must be the second person of the trinity. This is not necessary for the simple reason that messengers in general take on the voice of the king they represent (1 Sam 16:19; 2 Sam 3:12; 2 Kgs 18:28–36).

22:37–38. *Did I not send you an urgent summons?...I can't say whatever I please.* In the Hebrew, both of these phrases contain emphasis. (They do this by making use of an infinitive absolute.) Balak emphasizes that he sent a very urgent summons, the implication being he needs the curse he desires to happen as soon as possible. Balaam understands this and replies by underscoring he simply cannot say whatever he wants. Indeed, he changes normal word order in the following phrase to put the emphasis on needing to speak only God's word (see next note).

22:38. *I must speak only what God puts in my mouth.* In the Hebrew, this reads, "The word which God puts in my mouth, it I will speak." Placing the verb "I will speak" at the end of the sentence is unusual and draws attention to what comes ahead of it: "The word which God puts in my mouth." The emphasis thus lies on the word God will give him.

22:40. *Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and gave some to Balaam and the officials who were with him.* The Hebrew reads, "And Balak sacrificed cattle and sheep, and sent to/for Balaam and the officials who were with him." Most versions translate as NIV and assume that the verb "to send" refers to portions of the sacrifice just mentioned and thus supply a missing word such as "some" (NIV, NASB). For similar places where the verb "to send" assumes (but does not state) a direct object,

see Gen 43:5; Exod 9:2; Lev 16:21. In a few instances, the relevant Hebrew phrase here is translated "sent for," leading to the ESV's translation: "And Balak sacrificed oxen and sheep, and sent for Balaam and for the princes who were with him" (cf. Ezra 8:16; Ezek 23:40). In either case, Balak is making sacrifices to provide meat for Balaam and the officials.

23:1. *prepare*. This could also be translated "provide" (cf. 1 Chron 29:2; see also BDB 465.2b). In either case, seven bulls and rams would be ready for him to offer (23:2).

bulls…rams. Bulls and rams were costly. Bulls were the largest herd animals. As for rams, "Adult male sheep ("rams") appear to have been particularly valuable. Samuel mentions their fat as an example of a costly sacrifice (1 Sam 15:22), and the psalmist lists rams when describing sacrifices of great thanksgiving (Ps 66:15)" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 174). This was a lavish set of sacrifices.

23:3. *stay here beside your offering*. Later Babylonian texts note that an offerer stayed near the sacrifice to pray while the diviner went to seek an answer from the gods (Samuel Daiches, "Balaam—a Babylonian *bārū*: The Episode of Num 22:2–24:24 and Some Babylonian Parallels," in Samuel Daiches, *Bible Studies* (London: Edward Goldston and Son, 1950), 110.

to meet with me. The verb for "meet" (*qārāh*) may have the sense of a meeting that occurs unexpectedly (cf. Exod 3:18; 2 Sam 1:6) (S.R. Driver, *The Book of Exodus: in the Revised Version with Introduction and Notes* [Cambridge: The University Press, 1911], 25; cited in NET's marginal notes). In this context, the uncertainty is because Balaam is unsure ("perhaps"!) whether the Lord will come or not. Alternatively, the sense could be "allow oneself to be met, make oneself available" (cf. HALOT; see JM§51c for the sense "to allow something to happen to oneself" in the Nifal). This would lead to the translation, "Perhaps the Lord will make himself available to meet with me." The endpoint is the same.

Whatever he reveals to me I will tell you. The Heb. reads, "And a word of anything he might show me, then I will declare [it] to you," and is more likely to

be translated as a conditional sentence (cf. the "perhaps" in the preceding clause): "Perhaps the Lord will come to meet with me, and if he reveals anything to me, then I will tell it to you" (cf. also JM§161b).

Then he went off to a barren height. The Hebrew word translated here as "barren height" (*šĕpî*) is often understood to be the singular form of a word that elsewhere appears eight times in the plural to refer the top of a mountain range (Isa 41:18) or to a place overlooking the wilderness (Jer 12:12). This would fit the context well. Due to the infrequency of the term, however, debate as to its meaning remains. (It has also been noted we might expect the verb "went *up*" if the meaning "barren height" were meant [Milgrom, *Numbers*, 195], but this is mitigated by the fact they were already high up when the event took place.) One suggestion is "he went off alone" (NJPS; Targums), though there was a much more common Hebrew expression for "alone" (*lĕbad*). Another is "he went off silently," "reflecting a relatively rare verb *š-p-h*, 'to be calm, silent, smooth,' also known in Aramaic" (Baruch Levine, *Numbers 21–36*, AB 4A [New York: Doubleday, 2000], 167). More recently, Geveryahu has suggested "he went on foot" (as opposed to with his donkey), citing Akkadian *šēpu* ("foot") (Gilad J. Gevaryahu, "The meaning of *and he went shefi* [Num 23:3]," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 41 [no 4], Oct-Dec 2013, 262–65). At this point, the translation "barren height" still fits the context well though the rareness of the term prevents a great deal of certainty.

23:5. *The Lord put a word in Balaam's mouth*. While this could refer to prophetic inspiration, that more clearly happens with the last two messages (cf. 24:2). The phrase "to put a word in someone's mouth" can mean no more than "communicate to them what they need to say" (Exod 4:15; 2 Sam 14:19), which the Lord could do by means of visions or dreams or even lots. Stated differently, the point is that the Lord let him know what to say, not how he let him know it.

In the commentary, it was suggested that the Lord condescended to Balaam's use of divination. It was also noted that "it was common for diviners to pose questions to the deity with two options and to receive their answers by means

of lots (e.g., Ezek 21:21; for an example from Anatolia, see *COS* 1.78)" (311 n. 7). In a private correspondence, which I cite immediately below, Benjamin Wiggershaus has provided several quotes to establish the binary nature of divination in Egypt and her neighbors:

> Ancient Israel:
> "In one of the most widely attested forms of divination in ancient Israel, lots were cast, or sacred objects such as the Urim and Thummim and the ephod were employed, to give answers to questions that could be answered by either 'Yes' or 'No'" (Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006], 298).

> Ancient Anatolia:
> "The Hittites practiced several kinds of oracles, in each of which the diviner asked a question, and the deity was expected to answer in the particular divinatory language chosen…The questions asked were not open-ended; they required only positive or negative responses, so the practitioner had to continue asking questions until he had arrived at the correct one" (Billie Jean Collins, *The Hittites and Their World*, ABS 7 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007], 166).

> Ancient Egypt:
> "Brief questions are also preserved on scraps of papyrus and flakes of limestone or pottery, and one letter refers to papyrus roll being placed before the oracle. The god then gave a decision, yes or no, which was transmitted to the priests who carried the deity. They then translated the god's directive through movement. In cases where two alternative petitions were placed before the god, the oracle 'took' one, presumably, stopping before or

approaching the one that it favored" (Emily Teeter, *Religion and Ritual in Ancient Egypt* [Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 108).

23:7. *Then Balaam spoke his message*. The Hebrew reads, "Then Balaam took up his discourse/taunt song." The word translated by NIV as "message" (*māšāl*) can refer to memorable discourse, be it a proverb (1 Sam 10:12; Job 13:12), or a longer poetic discourse one "takes up" (Job 27:1; 29:1), including "taught songs" that one "takes up" against another (Isa 14:4; Mic 2:4; Hab 2:6). There is thus perhaps a double entendre here: this is not simply his discourse but his taunt song (to Balak!) that makes clear Israel will indeed be blessed.

Aram. Aram was "northeast of Israel including [the] area around Damascus, Syria, and the upper Tigris-Euphrates Valleys" (Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, 275), the latter of which fits with Pethor (see at 22:5).

Jacob…Israel. The two names are often used in parallelism together (Gen 49:7; Deut 33:10; etc.; cf. Gen 32:28). Both names refer here to the nation of Israel.

23:10. *Who can count the dust of Jacob?* This is a clear allusion to the Lord's promise to make Abraham's descendants like the dust of the land (Gen 13:16). Since "dust" is a common enough metaphor for numerous quantities of something (cf. Job 27:16; Ps 78:27; Zech 9:3), there is no need to conclude Balaam was aware of the significance of these words. For Israelites familiar with their story, however, these words underscored the Lord's faithfulness to his promises.

a fourth of Israel. Ashley (*Numbers*, 468) follows Albright in emending the text and translating this phrase as "dust cloud of Israel," deriving this possibility from an Akkadian word (*turbuʾu*) which is similar to the Hebrew here (*ʾt rbʿ*) (cf. *HALOT* for a similar approach). This is not supported by the versions but would bring better parallelism to the first half of the verse, which makes it especially attractive here given the strong parallelism shown throughout the other lines. With or without this emendation, the point remains that Israel's numbers are incalculable.

23:11. *I brought you to curse my enemies*. In the Hebrew this reads, "To curse my enemies I brought you!" The word order is unusual, putting the emphasis on the goal of cursing.

23:12. *Must I not speak what the LORD puts in my mouth?* In the Hebrew this reads, "Is it not true that that which the Lord puts in my mouth, it I must be careful to speak?" Again, the word order is unusual, the focus here being on "that which the Lord puts in my mouth."

23:14. *Zophim*. The Hebrew for "Zophim" can refer to a "lookout" (1 Sam 14:16) and is thus an appropriate name for a field with an overlooking view.

while I meet him over there. Or, "and I will make myself available to be met with over there" (cf. *to meet with me* at 23:3 above), that is, he is not sure whether it will happen but he will put himself in the position for the Lord to come and meet with him.

23:19. *that he should lie*. The Hebrew for "lie" (*kizzēb*) (23:19) can refer to an outright lie (Prov 14:5) or to "failing" in what one says (Hab 2:3).

change his mind. The context must be kept clearly in mind here. The focus is on the Lord's determination to bless Israel (23:20); in that regard, he certainly will not change his mind. Israel will be blessed! This is a promise he will indeed keep! And this stands in strong contrast to humanity, who can set off on one path but quickly change their mind due to things like fear, as in Exod 13:17: "When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, 'If they face war, *they might change their minds* and return to Egypt.'"

Having said the above, many verses make clear the Lord can "relent" or "change his mind," not from fear or fickleness, but from mercy and love: "Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry. For their sake he remembered his covenant, and *relented* according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (Ps 106:45; cf. Exod 32:12–14; 2 Sam 24:16; Joel 2:13).

23:21. *misfortune…misery*. The same terms are used elsewhere in parallel to describe harm and misery brought upon one person by another (Job 15:35; Ps 10:7; Isa 59:4). NIV margin: "He has not looked on Jacob's offenses or on the wrongs found" (cf. NJB). Context favors the translation NIV keeps in the main body (so also NASB, ESV, etc.). Even though many (like Balak) seek Israel's harm, the Lord will not allow it.

23:22. *brought them out of Egypt*. Cf. 22:5, where Balak simply says the Israelites came out of Egypt. Here, Balaam makes clear the Lord did this (Milgrom, *Numbers*, 200).

brought them. This is a participle, which would normally be translated "was bringing" but can also be translated as a simple past in some contexts (cf. Ps 136:5, 10, 13; JM §121i).

they have the strength of a wild ox. Or, "[God] is for them like the strength of the wild ox" (cf. NASB, ESV). In either case, a fierce strength surrounds them.

23:23. In the Hebrew, this verse begins with a particle (*kî*), untranslated in the NIV, that can be used to indicate emphasis: indeed, surely, certainly (BDB 471.e).

There is no divination against Jacob In the commentary, I understand the sense of the first half of v. 23 to be, "Even the results of divination and seeking evil omens on my part are unanimous: God is for Israel and this will become exceedingly clear as his deeds on Israel's behalf are observed" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 306). An alternative understanding is, "Israel has no need of using divination or seeking omens in their midst; at the right time, they will be told what God will do for them" (cf. Keil, *Numbers*, 184). Context, however, favors the above, since Balaam has been hired to use divination against Israel (so also Wenham, *Numbers*, 175–76; Ashley, *Numbers*, 481).

24:3. *of one whose eye sees clearly*. The Hebrew reads "opened of eye," though there is debate among the ancient versions and the sense of "open" for the Hebrew word comes from later Hebrew and Aramaic texts (though such a meaning

would bring good parallelism to "uncovered eyes" later in 24:4). Vulgate reads "closed of eye," involving a small difference in the word's opening letter (*setum* instead of *šetum*), the sense perhaps being he has closed his eyes and gone into a trance (cf. Keil, *Numbers*, 187). It is also possible to redivide the two words and repoint them to read "whose eye is perfect" (*šetāmâ ʿayin*), which may be behind the LXX's "who sees truly" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 483 n. 5, mentions this possibility but does not endorse it).

24:4. *who sees a vision from the Almighty*. Alternatively, "I have had a vision of the Almighty!" But since the vision's focus is not on describing God, the NIV's sense is preferred.

vision. This word (*maḥăzeh*) describes a vision in only three chapters (Gen 15:1; Num 24:4, 16; Ezek 13:7). More common is the word *ḥāzôn*, which appears to be interchangeable with *maḥăzeh* in Ezekiel 13 (cf. 13:7 with 13:16). A survey of occurrences of *ḥāzôn* shows that a "vision" can be perceived as an audible voice (1 Sam 3:1–5), can be described in parallel to a "dream" (Isa 29:7; cf. 1 Chr 17:15 with 17:3), and can be like a dream that takes place during the day, full of symbolism that must be interpreted (Daniel 8). Which of these Balaam experienced is not clear, though something akin to Daniel 8 would fit the context well, with Balaam giving both the vision and its interpretation.

24:5. *How beautiful are your tents*. In light of v. 6, the word "beautiful" in v. 5 has the sense of "a pleasing sight" due to their abundance (not because the tents themselves were necessarily beautiful). Cf. the use of the same verb for "more pleasing" in Song 4:10.

24:6. *valley*. Isa 66:12 also uses the words "valley/stream" and "stretch out" together.

aloes. The Hebrew word has the same consonant as that for "tents" and the verb "to plant" sounds like the Hebrew word for "to pitch (a tent)," thus leading to a beautiful play on words that compares Israel's pitched tents (24:5) to planted aloes (24:6).

In terms of the species of tree, "aloe is perhaps *Aquilaria agallocha* or eaglewood, which secretes aromatic resins used in ancient perfumes (Ps 45:8; Prov 7:17). Israel's 'tents' are like these aromatic, sweet-smelling trees" (Sprinkle, *Leviticus and Numbers*, 347; for the species identification, he cites United Bible Societies, *Fauna and Flora of the Bible*, 2nd ed., Helps for Translators [New York: United Bible Societies, 1980], 90–91).

24:7. *Water will flow form their buckets*. The Hebrew reads, "Water will flow from his buckets." The most common approach is to understand this as a reference to Israel having abundant supplies of water so that her "watering buckets" (cf. our watering cans) are always full to overflowing. A different approach is to understand "from his buckets" (*mdlyw*) as a scribal error for "from his branches" (*mdlywtyw*), the scribe's eye skipping from the first *yw* to the second *yw* (a common scribal error known as *homoioteleuton* or "like ending"). The sense would then be that Israel is such a well-watered tree that its branches drip with water (an otherwise unknown metaphor, which also may have contributed to a scribe reading this as "buckets" since it is much more natural to think of water flowing out of a bucket than off of tree branches). In further support, and perhaps tipping things in favor of this approach, is the fact that this keeps a tight parallelism in 24:7a in that there is now in each phrase a mention of water and a part of a tree (branch, seed).

their seed will have abundant water. There is some question in terms of how to translate the preposition in this clause. The Hebrew reads, "And his seed in/by/equal to abundant waters." ESV goes with the first ("his seed [shall be] *in* many waters"), NASB with the second ("his seed [will be] *by* many waters"), and NET with the third ("their descendants [will be] *like* abundant waters"). The sense of the ESV is not entirely clear, while the end result of the NASB and NET is more or less the same, namely, prospering seed/descendants. In support of the NASB (which NIV also seems to adopt, though not as woodenly) is Ezek 17:5, which also speaks of seed being beside many waters (and thus being fruitful). (The preposition for "beside" [*ʿal*] is different than our verse [*be*] but is interchangeable with it when

speaking of being near water; cf. Ezek 10:15 [*be*] with 1:3 [*ʿal*].) Taken with the above, this leads to one of two translations: 1) "Water will flow from his buckets, and as for his seed, it will be by many waters"; 2) "Water will flow from his branches, and his seed will be by many waters." As the above discussion implies, I lean towards the second of these translations.

24:8. *with their arrows they pierce them*. The NIV reflects the Hebrew, which reads, "and [with] his arrows (*wḥṣw*) he pierces/smashes [them]." The Syriac reads, "and his loins (*wḥlṣw*) he smashes," which Levine notes "recall[s] the idiom…'smash the loins' in Deuteronomy 33:11" (*Numbers 21–36*, 197–98; the word for "loins" is different in Deuteronomy but the word for "smashes" is the same, as is the concept itself). This would seem to bring a better parallelism to "crushing bones"; the reason a scribe might mistake these words is explained not only on the basis of their similarity but also because the word for "loins" is relatively rare while the word for "arrow" is very common, especially in a context describing defeat of enemies.

24:17. *A star*. Though using a different word than "star," Isa 14:12 uses the imagery of a shining celestial body to describe a king.

come out. This verb (*dārak*) often means "to march, step, tread" (Deut 1:36; 11:25; Judg 5:21; etc.). It is used in the phrase "to tread a path" (Job 22:15), leading HALOT to suggest that here it means "to come forth," i.e., "to tread [a path] from Jacob."

the skulls of all the people of Sheth. The meaning of the word translated "skulls" and "Seth" are both debated. The Hebrew word for "skulls" is *qdqd*, but the current text reads the word *qrqr* (the letters *d* and *r* are almost identical in Hebrew). If we maintain the word *qrqr*, this could be a very rare form of a very rare verb built on the root *qrr*, the sense being something like, "He will tear down/batter down," as one does to a wall (cf. Isa 22:5, the only other occurrence of the verb). Many assume that a mistake has been made and that *qdqd* ("skulls") should be read instead. This would maintain parallelism with "forehead" in the preceding phrase

and finds further possible support in Jer 48:45, which has *qdqd* in a phrase parallel to that found here. However, this is an easier reading insofar as one could understand why a scribe would go from a word that is very rare in the Hebrew Bible (*qrqr*, "tear down") to one that is much more common (*qdqd*, skull), but much more difficult to understand a scribe going from a common word to a very rare one. This suggests the reading "tear down" is to be preferred, in further support of which it may be noted that it maintains parallelism with the verb "to crush" in the preceding phrase.

As for the word translated "Sheth" (*šēt*), since the following verse uses two different names for the same region and its people (Edom/Seir), the same is likely true here. This could mean one of three things: 1) "Sheth" is a proper name associated with Moab that is otherwise unattested; 2) "Sheth" refers to a people group associated with the Moabites (such as the Šutu, "a nomadic Palestinian tribe" [Ashley, *Numbers*, 501, citing the proposal of Albright]); or 3) it is a nickname of Moab, as suggested by Keil (*Numbers*, 193), who argues that the word "Sheth" (*šēt*) is a contraction of a word for "devastation/destruction" (*šēʾt*) (Lam 3:47). This last suggestion, taken together with the above comments on *qrqr*, would lead to the following translation of 24:17b:

> He will crush the foreheads of Moab,
> He will tear down all the people of destruction.

The idea of the second phrase would thus be that the Moabites, who had been bringing destruction to others, will themselves be torn down. Until more evidence links the Šutu tribe with Moab, the first or third proposals seem most likely.

24:18–19. Wenham (*Numbers*, 180) follows several who change the placement of one word in the text, and also divide two words differently, to arrive at the following:

> [18] Edom shall be dispossessed,
>
> and Seir shall be dispossessed,
>
> when Israel does valiantly.
>
> [19] Jacob shall rule his enemies,
>
> and destroy the survivors from Ir."

The word for "his enemies" is the one that is moved since its current location in 24:18 makes that Hebrew phrase longer than the rest and leaves the Hebrew phrase that begins 24:19 shorter than the rest. The word division change is to take the letter *m* (meaning "from") off of the word "Jacob" in 24:19 and include it as a suffix on the end of the preceding word ("he shall rule," which comes just before "Jacob" in the Hebrew). These changes are explicable according to the rules of text criticism and help to solve difficulties with the present text, thus rendering them quite plausible to the present writer. The reading they lead to is similar to the traditional reading in that both readings stress the defeat of Israel's enemies. The two readings differ in that the traditional reading makes the king the more explicit victor in 24:19 whereas the above reading speaks of the nation more corporately as the victor. Even so, context makes clear that Israel is victorious because of the "star" and "scepter" leading them, so that the end point is not so different after all.

It may finally be noted that Wenham takes the word normally translated as "city" (*'îr*) at the end of 24:19 as a reference to a specific Moabite town. "Balak had met Balaam at Ir-Moab or City of Moab (22:36), and Ir in this verse could be an abbreviation of this longer term" (*Numbers*, 180). (NIV's "Moabite town" in 22:36 is more literally "the city of Moab".) Alternatively, this could be read as "survivors from Ar," the town mentioned in 21:28 (though the Septuagint reads "unto" [*'ad*] in place of "Ar" [*'ad*] in that text.) Either reading is plausible and would make the destruction even more specific since it is not just any city whose survivors are

destroyed but a key city of Moab. In either case, however, any survivors will be destroyed, underscoring the strength of Israel's victory.

24:18. *but Israel will grow strong*. Rather, "Israel will do valiantly." See also NASB, ESV, NRSV. The relevant Hebrew words occur together elsewhere to describe those doing valiantly in war (1 Sam 14:48; Ps 60:12; 108:14).

24:20. *first*. Whether "first" refers to their antiquity or their quality is not clear (Wenham, *Numbers*, 181).

24:22. *when Ashur takes you captive*. Perhaps better, "How long will Ashur take you captive?" (so NET), that is to say, "There's no telling how long that exile will last!"

24:23–24. *Alas! Who can live when God does this? Ships will come from the shores of Cyprus*. Wenham (*Numbers*, 182), again provides a helpful discussion. He notes that these phrases could also be translated, "The isles shall assemble in the North, ships from the farthest sea." "Though the meaning is radically different, the textual changes involved are quite small, and have won wide acceptance" (Wenham, *Numbers*, 182). In a note to this comment, he writes:

> All that needs to be done is to rewrite the text in archaic spelling (i.e. omit vowel letters), reinterpret *ḥyh* as 'assemble' instead of 'live', and change *d* into *r* in one word. Consonantally the new interpretations is:

> ʾym yḥy mṣm ʾl wṣym myrkt ym,

> and the old:

> ʾy m yḥy mṣm ʾl wṣym myd ktym.

> Vowel signs, as opposed to vowel letters, were not inserted in the Hebrew Bible till *c.* AD 900.

Wenham does not note that the words are divided differently, but this also counts as only a small textual change. In support of *ḥyh* as assemble, cf. 2 Sam 23:13 where the word *ḥyh* refers to a "community," that is, a gathered group of people.

25:1. *The men began to indulge in sexual immorality*. With different vowels for the first word, this could read, "The men began to pollute themselves by indulging in sexual immorality" (so Septuagint). In either case, sexual immorality has been committed.

to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women. The verb for "indulge in sexual immorality" (*zānāh*) could also be translated "to play the harlot" or "to engage in prostitution" and can be used in a metaphorical sense to describe the faithlessness of idolatry. This is the case in Ezek 16:26 and 28, where the same Hebrew phrase that is found in our verse is used to describe the Israelites engaging in illicit worship practices with other nations (and not sexual immorality per se). In our context, however, it seems that actual sexual immorality is meant, as illustrated by the story to come in 25:6–8 (cf. also 1 Cor 10:8).

In terms of the connection between sexual immorality and idolatry, it is often suggested that ritual sexual acts were central to Canaanite religion (e.g., Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, 722). In carefully reading such suggestions, however, it will be noted that no texts from the ancient Near East describing such acts are brought forward as proof—for the simple reason that we have not yet found any. While prostitutes may have been active in and around shrines and temples in the ancient world, their involvement in ritual acts at these places is far from certain. See Milgrom, *Numbers*, 479, and also Karel van der Toorn, "Prostitution (Cultic)," *ABD* 5:510–13, who "argues that while evidence suggests prostitution could be a revenue source for temples, no strong evidence indicates the widespread use of temple prostitution as part of any 'fertility cult,' in either the Bible or the ancient Near East" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 587 n. 25). Until evidence of ritual

prostitution or ritual sexual acts among Israel's neighbors actually surfaces, it seems best to avoid giving the impression that it did.

Moabite women. "The woman slain by Phinehas was a Midianite (25:6, 15, 17–18). Midianites and Moabites are closely associated in the Balaam story (22:4, 7), so it is unnecessary to suppose for this reason that verses 1–5 are from a different source from verses 6–18. The Midianites were a mobile group (cf. Judges 6) who evidently at this time were worshipping at the same shrine as the Moabites" (Wenham, *Numbers*, 185).

25:3. *the Baal of Peor.* "'Baal' means 'Lord' and was used to describe a significant major deity (1 Kgs 16:31–32) as well as local deities (or perhaps local manifestations of the major deity). Cf. mention of 'the Baals' in Judg 2:11" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 317 n. 7). Thus when the Bible speaks of the Israelites going to serve "the Baals" (plural), it is speaking of the worship of many local deities (or local manifestations of the major deity) with the name "Baal" in the title (Judg 2:11; 3:7; see esp. 8:33).

25:4–5. It is not uncommon to read that while the Lord commanded the public execution of all the leaders in 25:4, Moses changed this command to the execution of only the guilty in 25:5 (Ashley, *Numbers*, 517, 519; Milgrom, *Numbers*, 477; Duguid, *Numbers*, 293). If so, it is striking that there is no rebuke for him doing so, especially in light of the strong warnings in the preceding chapter that one may only speak the word given by the Lord (22:20, 35, 38; 23:12, 26). The alternative approach is to understand that the leaders are the ones who took the lead in this sin (for support of which cf. 25:14) and that it is all of the leaders who did this that the Lord has in view, a point which Moses simply makes explicit in passing on his words to the Israelites.

25:6. *Then.* The Hebrew of 25:6 actually begins: "Now behold!" This clearly interrupts the flow of thought in order to arrest the reader's attention.

into the camp. Rather, "to his brothers," which could refer to the Israelites as a whole (cf. Lev 10:6) or to the man's more immediate relatives (his kin) (cf.

Gen 31:25). If the former, then the mention of Moses and all the congregation of the Israelites is an explication of "brothers"; if the latter, then Moses and the Israelites are distinct from these "brothers." The latter seems less redundant. In either case, the NIV is correct that this certainly would have taken place in the camp (cf. 25:6b).

a Midianite woman. The Hebrew has "the Midianite woman" even though we are meeting her for the first time, which some take as at least partial evidence that the author has abridged a longer narrative (A. Noordtzij, *Numbers*, Bible Student's Commentary, trans. Ed van der Maas [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983], 237) or that this part of the story comes from a different source than 26:1–5 (Levine, *Numbers*, 286). It may be noted, however, that it is not unusual for Hebrew to make use of the definite article "the" to describe something the reader has not yet encountered. "Peculiar to Hebrew is the employment of the article to denote a single person or thing (primarily one which is as yet unknown, and therefore not capable of being defined) as being present to the mind under given circumstances. In such cases in English the indefinite article is mostly used" in translation, as here (GKC §126q; this verse is one of the examples listed in §126r). This observation will also hold for the phrase "the plague" in 25:9.

25:8. *the tent*. This is the only time this word for "tent" (*qubbāh*) occurs. There are different reasons why it may have been used here: 1) perhaps to make clear that this action did not take place in the "tent" of meeting that had just been mentioned (cf. 25:6, which uses the much more common word *ʾōhel* for "tent"); 2) the author wanted to have a play on words between the word for "tent" *qubbāh* where the sin was committed, and the word for "stomach" (*qēbāh*), where the penalty for sin was experienced; 3) it refers to a specific part of the tent (such as an inner chamber) where sexual relations would have been had. Possibly more than one of these is true.

25:9. *24,000*. In 1 Cor 10:8, Paul cites this story and states, "in one day twenty-three thousand of them died." The discrepancy in numbers has not yet been

satisfactorily explained. A promising suggestion is that of Koet (B. J. Koet, "The Old Testament Background to 1 Cor. 10:7–8," in *The Corinthian Correspondence*, ed. R. Bieringer, BETL 125 [Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996], pp. 607–15), summarized in Ciampa and Rosner (Roy E. Ciampa, Brian S. Rosner, "1 Corinthians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 726). The suggestion is that "Paul has fused together elements of the punishments mentioned in Num 25:9 [24,000 dead] and Exod 32:28 [3,000 dead]" (Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians," 726), in partial support of which it is noted that Exod 32:28, "unlike the Numbers text, says that the people died 'that day' and that they 'fell,' using the exact same word, *epesan* as in 1 Cor 10:8. Koet thinks Paul may have fused the two texts together so that the reference to Num 25:9 would still be recognizable but that the echo of Exodus might also be heard. In his view, this explains why there is no mention of a punishment in [1 Cor] 10:7 [even though it mentions the sin of Exod 32:6]: the punishment for the sin of Exod 32:6 is incorporated into the reference to the punishment for the sin of Num 25 in the subsequent verse" (Ciampa and Rosner, "1 Corinthians," 726). While this solution is promising, it must also be noted that there is currently no other example from Jewish or Christian literature in which two numbers from different texts are fused together in this way (cf. ibid.), making it difficult to move Koet's suggestion from the realm of possible to plausible. Our historical distance from biblical texts makes it difficult to fully resolve certain difficulties at this point in our knowledge, and this passage remains in that category.

25:11. *Since he was as zealous for my honor among them as I am, I did not put an end to them in my zeal*. The Hebrew might be more woodenly translated, "Since he was zealous/jealous with my zeal/jealousy among them so that I did not put an end to them in my zeal/jealousy." The key root (*qnʾ*) can refer to the improper jealousy that one person has towards another (Gen 26:14; 37:11) or to a human jealousy that can be proper if it is based on fact, e.g., it is proper for someone to

feel jealous if their spouse has been unfaithful to them since marital love is to be exclusive and any betrayal of such exclusive love should indeed incite jealousy and anger (cf. Num 5:14). This in turn explains how the same root can be used to refer to the Lord's jealousy when his people have betrayed him to worship other gods (Exod 20:5; Deut 4:24; 5:9) and why it can be used in parallel to his anger (Deut 32:16). Not surprisingly, the same root can also be used to refer to a zeal motivated by one's protective/jealous love for a people (2 Sam 21:2) or faithful/jealous love for one's God (1 Kgs 19:10, 14), and the difference between "jealousy" and "zeal" in some contexts is so slight that versions will at times differ in which they choose (cf. NASB, NIV and ESV on Ezek 39:25 and Joel 2:18 and on this verse itself). In short, the overall context is one in which Israel has been like an unfaithful spouse, causing the Lord's jealous anger to boil over because of their betrayal. Phinehas felt the same way and in that jealous zeal carried out an execution on those committing the very betrayal in question, which the Lord accepted, like a sacrifice, on behalf of the rest of the guilty. (In light of the above, it is also preferable to follow ESV or NASB in this verse rather than NIV, since the context of betrayal is what elsewhere incites the Lord's jealous anger as opposed to simply his zeal.)

25:13. *lasting*. Sometimes translated "perpetual." Elsewhere I have noted: "The word 'perpetual' [Heb. *ʿōlām*] does not necessarily mean 'always, as long as time endures'; it can mean 'always, as long as certain conditions endure.' See 1 Sam 2:30, where the LORD'S promise that Eli's house would serve as his priests 'perpetually/forever [Heb. *ʿad ʿōlām*]' assumed this would be the case as long as they were faithful to follow him (and thus explains why their faithlessness meant the covenant with those priests was annulled)" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 127 n. 25).

26:4–51. As noted in the commentary, "the overall results to the first census are very similar, though there are significant differences among certain tribes, especially Simeon, Manasseh, Benjamin and Asher. The reasons for such dramatic changes are nowhere given and any explanations suggested must remain in the

realm of speculation" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 328). These suggestions include: Reuben's small decline might be related to the judgment experienced on members of Reuben's tribe during Korah's rebellion (cf. 26:9–11 with 16:1–35) (Allen, "Numbers," 928); the tribe of Simeon may have been especially involved in the sin at Baal-Peor (cf. 25:14) and therefore decimated by its plague; "Manasseh and Ephraim have virtually exchanged totals (but perhaps their names should have come in their usual order)" (Kidner, *Leviticus-Deuteronomy*, 53; though "usual order" might be too strong, cf. Num 1:10, 32–35).

It may also be noted that differences exist between the genealogies here and those in Gen 46:8–24, on which this genealogy appears to be based. Two fairly thorough explanations of these differences may be found in Keil (*Genesis*, 371–73; *Numbers*, 209–10) and Ashley (*Numbers*, 525–29, 532–38), who notes that many of them are explicable as either variants on the same name (or scribal errors involving one of the names) or that they are due to using the term "son" in some instances "to indicate [political] importance at the time of a particular list" (as opposed to simply indicating immediate genealogical descent). In other words, they are using genealogical language to describe political relationships among related tribes (see Ashley, *Numbers*, 536 for further details).

26:22. There is no significant change to Judah's population but it may be noted that its population is the largest, which is in keeping with the earlier blessing-prophecy of Judah's future success (Gen 49:8-12). King David comes from this tribe (Matt 1:2-6), as does the far greater Davidic King, Jesus (Matt 1:2-16).

26:58–59. *forefather…descendant*. The Hebrew words could also be translated as "father" and "daughter," but the NIV seems to be taking into account that in a genealogy, the language of "father" can refer to a forefather and "daughter" to a female descendant. See discussion above at 16:8–11.

27:1–11. Milgrom (*Numbers*, 482) writes:

Israelite practice contrasts sharply with that of its neighbors regarding a daughter's inheritance rights. It is clear that some other law codes expressly allow a daughter to inherit: Ancient Sumerian law ordains that an unmarried daughter may inherit when there are no sons, and so also do decrees of Gudea (ca. 2150 B.C.E.), ruler of Lagash. Thus, the concession made by the Bible to Zelophehad's daughters was anticipated in Mesopotamia by a millennium.

It may freely be granted that among Israel's neighbors there are instances of daughter's inheriting property long before Israel. But the opening line suggests that Israel's neighbors were of a unified whole in their approach to this question, with Israel being the sole outlier. This is simply not the case. Zafira Ben-Barak gives an overview of the ancient Near Eastern literature with regard to the question of a daughter's inheritance rights (*Inheritance by Daughters in Israel and the Ancient Near East: A Social, Legal and Ideological Revolution*, tr. Betty Sigler Rozen [Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publications, 2006], 111–197). A survey of this evidence shows that there was a very wide range of practices among Israel's neighbors. If we look specifically to instances most similar to Num 27:1–11—that is, a household with only daughters and no sons—then we can see that at various points in their history, at least four of Israel's "neighbors"—Sumer, Babylon Nuzi and Emar—either did not allow the daughters to inherit or started with a different approach to the problem (such as adopting a son, though it is not always clear if this was the only approach allowed or just the first approach) (Ben-Barak, *Inheritance by Daughters*, 113–79). In short, Israel was not an outlier in her practice; she was right at home in her cultural context.

27:1–4. In the last chapter (26:33), Zelophehad and his daughters were specifically named. It now becomes evident that was done to prepare us for the following story (27:1–11).

27:12. *this mountain in the Abarim range*. The word translated "mountain" (*har*) can also refer to "hill country" (cf. Gen 10:30; 31:21; Num 14:45), which would lead to the translation, "this hill country of the Abarim range." It may also be noted that the word "this" is often used with place names where English would not, e.g., the mention of "this Jordan" (Gen 32:11; Deut 3:27), where English would typically say "the Jordan," or "this Lebanon" (Josh 1:4), where English would typically say "the Lebanon" or just "Lebanon." In this instance, the sense would be, "Go up into the hill country of the Abarim Range," with Deuteronomy then specifying that Mt. Nebo was the particular mountain Moses went up (34:1).

27:13. *gathered to your people*. See the comments at 20:24.

27:16. *the God who gives breath to all living things*. The Hebrew reads, "the God of the spirits of all flesh," which is the same phrase used in 16:22 where it appears to refer especially to the fact that God grants life to all flesh. And since he gives life to all, he cares for them, as a father does for his children, so Moses and Aaron appeal to his merciful love to preserve the people (see note at 16:22 for more detail). The same understanding works equally well here: "God, as the giver of all life, must be specially concerned with the continued existence of his chosen people, Israel" (Wenham, *Numbers*, 194), and it is on this basis that Moses prays for a leader.

The context suggests another possible understanding, or rather, two complementary ways to understand the phrase. Most generally, the idea could be that because God is the one who gives people life, he knows them intimately and is thus best able to choose the right leader. More specifically, the idea could be that God not only grants life to all but also those things we associate with someone's "spirit" or inner life, including their talents and gifts, and thus would be able to find the person with the right gifting (see also note on 27:18). In either case, the Lord's knowledge of a person's internal makeup enables him to make the right choice.

Choosing between the approaches in the above two paragraphs is difficult, but the first paragraph enjoys a small advantage in that its understanding holds in a

similar context in chapter 16, showing that this was an actual usage of the phrase, whereas the explanations of the second paragraph do not have the same type of secondary support.

27:18. *a man in whom is the spirit of leadership*. The Hebrew reads, "a man in whom is (a) spirit." The word "spirit" could be understood in three ways. 1) Some versions understand this as a reference to God's Spirit and translate "the Spirit" (NASB, ESV). If that were the case, however, we might expect a definite article ("the Spirit"; cf. 11:25–26 with 11:29). 2) This could refer to a gift given by God's Spirit. In Exod 28:3 we read, "You shall speak to all the skillful, whom I have filled with a spirit of skill, that they make Aaron's garments to consecrate him for my priesthood" (Exod 28:3, ESV). The reference appears to be to people who are hard-wired with gifts associated with craftsmanship, that is, they are simply a natural part of who they are. God is the one who gives such gifts, which is why elsewhere the Lord can say of such a person, "I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills" (Exod 31:3). This apparently does not refer to spiritual gifts given to a person due to their belief in God (cf. 1 Cor 12), but gifts people are born with that God has granted them. In this case, it would mean that Joshua has the type of gift needed to lead the people well. This is how the NIV understands the word (see also NET), translating, "the spirit of leadership." 3) The word "spirit" could refer to "courage," which is the meaning of the word in Josh 2:11 and 5:11 (the NIV's "courage" is the Hebrew word "spirit"). In favor of this last understanding is the fact that those references also occur in a military context and involve similar grammatical constructions in the Hebrew. The main similarity between the second and third understanding is that in each case the person's inner makeup qualifies them for leadership. The main difference is that in the second understanding the reference is to a personal gift while in the third understanding the reference is to a character quality.

27:21. *the Urim*. "Short for Urim and Thummim, so abbreviated also in 1 Samuel 28:6" (Milgrom, *Numbers*, 236).

28:1–31. "Listen to the Story." In the commentary (354 n. 1), I observe that Wenham and Duguid have different totals for the sheep (the difference is seven). The reason for the difference is not clear to me, though calculating the number of sheep is somewhat challenging for the simple reason that it could change year over year. This is because a lunar year is about eleven days shorter than a solar year, meaning that "leap months" were presumably added every few years to keep the calendars aligned (cf. the way we add an extra day every four years during a leap year). This would in turn increase the number of days in such years and therefore the number of sheep required (since they were offered every single day). In either case, it would be true to say that over 1,000 sheep would be offered each year.

28:2. *my food offerings, as an aroma pleasing to me*. The Hebrew may be more woodenly translated, "my offering, my food, with regard to my offerings by fire, an aroma pleasing to me." (The word I translate as "offering by fire" is translated as "food offering" by NIV; for details, see Sklar, *Numbers*, 212 n. 4.) The first two nouns ("offering, food") are general descriptions of offerings; these are followed by more specific descriptions: the portion of the sacrifice burned up on the altar ("offering by fire") and the impact of burning it there (making a "aroma pleasing" to the Lord).

The word "food" is used elsewhere to describe offerings to the Lord (Lev 3:11; 21:6), "not because the LORD was literally hungry (cf. Ps 50:12–13) but because offerings were like a meal" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 586). Consider the fellowship offering. It may be noted that "a meal in ancient Israel could be used to express covenant relationship and fellowship [see Gen 26:28–30; 31:44, 46, 53–54]. In addition, it was an opportunity to show honor by giving someone the very best part of the meal (Gen 43:34; 1 Sam 1:5), which in [the case of the fellowship offering] was the "fat"…The fellowship offering was thus a way for Israelites to

celebrate their covenant relationship with the LORD and honor him by giving him the meal's choicest part" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 126). With burnt offerings, which are entirely burned on the altar, a major function is to honor the Lord by giving him the entire meal.

28:4. *at twilight*. "Heb. 'between the two evenings.' Most agree this refers to twilight, since Aaron lights the lamps at this time (Exod 30:8)" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 627 n. 11).

28:5, 7. *grain offering…drink offering*. "One metaphor for sacrifice was that of a meal. In ancient Israel, a special meal would consist of meat and bread and wine (1 Sam 16:20), and the offerings described here make the sacrificial meal complete, complementing the meat (sacrificial animal) with bread (grain offering) and wine (drink offering)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 212).

28:5. *oil from pressed olives*. "This fine olive oil is described elsewhere as being given as a gift from one king to another (1 Kgs 5:11); thus it is not surprising to find it being used here in the earthly palace of the heavenly King" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 644; the observation based on 1 Kgs 5:11 is from Cornelis Van Dam, "כתת," *NIDOTTE* 2:747).

28:11. *two young bulls*. Heb. "two bulls, sons of a herd." In notes on Lev 4:3 (where a similar phrase is used), I note: "The term 'son' could imply a '*young bull of the herd*' is in view (so RSV, NIV…). But since there was a different way to refer to a young bull (9:2), it may be preferable to understand the word 'son' as simply referring to a member of a group (cf. BDB, 121 7.a and 7.b). The sense here would be 'a bull, a member of a herd' (or 'a bull, a herd-member'), frequently rendered more simply as 'a bull of/from the herd' (so NASB, ESV, NRSV)" (Jay Sklar, *Additional Notes on* Leviticus *in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament* [St. Louis: Gleanings Press, 2023], at 4:3).

28:16. In the chart (Sklar, *Numbers*, 347), I assume a male lamb but would note here that a goat could also be used (Exod 12:5).

28:26–31. "Lev 23:9–14 describes the firstfruits of the barley harvest and vv. 15–21 the firstfruits of the wheat harvest; the latter is the focus here (cf. Num 28:26 with Lev 23:16)" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 350 n. 20). Why is the first harvest not mentioned? No reason is given but it may be related to the fact that the focus in Numbers 28–29 is on events involving public offerings made on behalf of the community while Lev 23:9–14 describes what may be a private offering made on behalf of the individual and/or his family.

It may also be noted that Lev 23:19 mentions fellowship offerings, while Num 28:26–31 does not. This may again be due to the fact that the Numbers text is focusing on the offerings made on the community's behalf (burnt and purification) not those that may have been brought by individuals or their households (fellowship offering). Cf. Sklar, *Leviticus (ZECOT)*, at 23:15–22, esp. p. 631.

Finally, it may be noted that Lev 23:18 calls for one bull and two rams while Num 28:27 calls for two bulls and one ram. "The reason for the change is not clear, though there is at least one other instance where Num requires more extensive offerings than Lev [cf. Num 15:22–24 with Lev 4:14 and discussion in Sklar, *Additional Notes on* Leviticus, at 4:14]. It is also interesting to note that the change in Num 28 now brings these offerings into line with the burnt offering of the previous two sections (see Num 28:11, 19). It is thus not impossible that there was simply a scribal error in Num 28:27, the scribe being influenced by 28:11 and 28:19" (Sklar, *Additional Notes on* Leviticus, at 23:18).

29:1–6. In the commentary, I note the connection made in Num 10:9–10 between trumpet blasts and being remembered before the Lord (Sklar, *Numbers*, 351). This connection is also evident in Lev 23:24, which may be translated, "In the seventh month, on the first of the month, you must have a [day of] resting, a [day of] being remembered [before the Lord] by trumpet blasts, a holy gathering" (my translation). In comments on that passage, I ask:

But a reminder for whom? And how do trumpet blasts relate to this? The word "reminder" [Heb. *zikkārôn*] can refer to something serving as a "reminder" of the Israelites before the LORD (Exod 28:12, 29; 30:16). In these contexts, the word does not imply the LORD has forgotten them. Rather, the language of remembrance describes the LORD showing his people they are in the forefront of his thoughts. He does this by granting them favor (Gen 8:1; 19:29; 30:22; Num 10:9) and, in particular, by demonstrating faithfulness to his covenant promises (Gen 9:15, 16; Exod 2:24; 6:5; 32:13; Lev 26:42, 45). The "reminder" is thus a request from the Israelites, "O LORD, show us your favor and be faithful to your covenant promises to us." That this is in view here is confirmed by the phrase "trumpet blasts," which serve as "reminders" before the LORD elsewhere (Num 10:10). The sense here is thus: "you must have a [day of] resting, a [day of] being remembered [before the LORD] by trumpet blasts." These blasts would be an offering of musical prayer, and, when blown in conjunction with the presentation of offerings (23:25), a way of saying, "We present these to you, O LORD, as an acknowledgment that you are our covenant God. Receive these offerings and the prayers that go with them, and show us your favor and faithfulness." Importantly, because the LORD commands this, his provision of this day assures his people he will indeed hear their prayers. When the LORD's children seek his help, he delights to give it (cf. Matt 7:7–11) (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 632).

29:6. *These are in addition to the monthly and daily burnt offerings*. The daily burnt offerings have been mentioned before (28:10, 15, 24, 31); the monthly offerings are mentioned as well because this day takes place at the beginning of the month and the text wants to make clear that the offerings accompanying the trumpet blasts do not replace the regular monthly offerings.

29:35. *closing special assembly*. This translates the Hebrew term *ʿăṣeret* which is perhaps better translated as "holy closing gathering." "Outside of the Pentateuch, this…term can be used for a religious gathering in general, whether for a pagan god (2 Kgs 10:20) or for the God of Israel (Isa 1:13; Joel 1:14; 2:15; Amos 5:21). In the Pentateuch, however, it is only used for the last day of a festival, whether the eighth and final day of the Festival of Booths (Num 29:35; cf. 2 Chr 7:9; Neh 8:18) or the seventh and final day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread (Deut 16:8). The related verb…is used to describe something being stopped (Num 17:13, 15; 25:8), which leads to the tentative suggestion that *ʿăṣeret* refers to a 'closing gathering' (cf. NIV: 'closing special assembly'), to which I add the word 'holy' since no laborious work could be done (making it similar to the other 'holy gatherings'; Lev 23:7, 8, 21, 24 – 25, 27 – 28, 35)" (Sklar, *Additional Notes on Leviticus*, at 23:36).

29:39. *In addition to what you vow and your freewill offerings, offer these to the LORD at your appointed festivals: your burnt offerings, grain offerings, drink offerings and fellowship offerings*. This translation is not impossible but is somewhat problematic in that the last part of the verse could be read as listing offerings required at the festivals even though fellowship offerings have not been mentioned in chapters 28–29. A possible explanation would be that since the Israelites would presumably bring their own fellowship offerings to at least some of these festivals, their mention here is not surprising (cf. Deut 12:5–7, 11–12 with 16:11, 14; see also 2 Chr 30:21–22). An equally possible translation, however, avoids this difficulty and is thus preferred: "All these you shall offer to the LORD at the stated times, in addition to your votive and freewill offerings, be they burnt offerings, meal offerings, libations, or offerings of well-being" (NJPS; cf. BDB 510.5.e.(c) for support of the relevant translation of the preposition *lĕ*). "The sense is that votive and free-will offerings can be either burnt offerings or offerings of well-being together with their meal and libation supplements (15:1–12)" (Milgrom, *Numbers*, 250).

30:6. *If she marries*. Heb. "if she will indeed be to a man," a phrase used elsewhere to refer to marriage (Lev 21:3; 22:12; Deut 24:2; Ruth 1:13).

30:7. *killed every man*. "This statement probably means only that they killed all the men in the group that they attacked, not that they killed every single Midianite male" (Anastasia Boniface-Malle, "Numbers," in *Africa Bible Commentary*, ed. Tokunboh Adeyemo [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006], 204; cf. also Milgrom, *Numbers*, 257, and see Judges 6–8).

30:10. *If a woman living with her husband*. Heb. "And if the house of her husband she makes a vow," that is, "And if *in* the house of her husband she makes a vow." The word translated "house of" can mean "in the house of" when followed by a modifying word (see BDB 109.1; cf. Gen 24:23).

30:14. *from day to day*. Some versions understand the phrase "from day to day" to mean "from that day to the next" (so NJPS; cf. NJB: "by the following day"). This would make sense of the phrase in 1 Chr 16:23 and of the similar phrase in Ps 96:2.

31:6. *Phinehas*. "The reason why Phinehas rather than Eleazar was involved is unknown, but was probably analogous to the reason why Eleazar rather than Aaron was set the task of dealing with the unclean censers (17:1–5 [Eng. 16:36–40]), viz., the risk of cultic contamination of the high priest. A further reason may be that Phinehas's zeal in killing the daughter of Zur the Midianite clan chief had earned him a reputation and the right to act in this manner" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 591).

31:20. *Purify*. "Milgrom (*Numbers*, p. 328 n. 40) notes that this could be rendered 'cleanse for yourselves,' a usage of the hithpael found (with different verbs) in 33:54 and 34:10 (Milgrom cites GKC on the latter of these; see GKC 54f[c])" (Sklar, *Sin, Impurity, Sacrifice, Atonement*, 111 n. 20).

31:23. *and anything else that can withstand fire*. The Hebrew does not begin this verse with the conjunction "and" (cf. ESV, NASB, NET). The NIV's translation could capture the sense, that is, the beginning of verse 23 could be listing

items that were additional to those of verse 22, but that would more naturally be expressed with the use of a conjunction, leading me to follow the ESV for this verse.

must be put through that water. The Hebrew reads "must be put through the water," which the NIV apparently takes to refer to the water just mentioned (the special waters of cleansing). However, the special waters are elsewhere sprinkled on objects (19:18); objects are not placed in the special waters. It thus seems more likely to understand the use of "the" on front of the word "waters" as a generic use of the definite article in front of a noun of material, the same use we have in English when we say someone "fell into the water" (see GKC §126n and note the use of "the fire" in 31:23; Ashley [*Numbers*, 596] is the one who notes this argument even though he is not persuaded by it).

31:28. *set apart as tribute*. This verb can refer "to 'lifting [an object] up *and away*' from a group of other objects and occurs in several contexts where that item is given to the LORD, such as the memorial portion of the grain offering (2:9), the fat of the purification offering (4:8–10, 19), the censers of Korah and company (Num 17:2–4 [16:37–39]), and various spoils of war (Num 31:28–29). The same understanding applies to the term 'contribution offering' [which is built on the same root]…since it refers to various items Israelites remove from their possessions or sacrifices to give to the LORD, such as building materials for the Tabernacle (Exod 25:2–3; 35:5, 21, 24; 36:3, 6), specific portions of a sacrifice (Exod 29:27–28; Lev 7:32, 34; 10:14–15; Num 6:20), or different 'holy gifts' (most often items of food) (Lev 22:12; Num 5:9; 18:18–19, 21–24, 26–29). The LORD then designated these for the needs of the Tabernacle in general or priests and Levites in particular" (Sklar, *Leviticus* [ZECOT], 229).

31:29. *the LORD'S part*. Or "as the contribution offering to the Lord." For the sense of "contribution offering," see above note.

31:32. *The plunder remaining*. That is, remaining after the command of 31:17 was fulfilled or remaining "after the march back from the battle site to the plains of Moab" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 598) or both.

31:40. *16,000 people, of whom the tribute for the L*ORD *was 32*. Presumably they would have become household servants (cf. Lev 22:11) or perhaps tabernacle servants (Exod 38:8; 1 Sam 2:22). If the former, nothing would have prevented the priests from arranging a marriage for them, as would typically happen with daughters. (Deuteronomy makes clear that foreign women could be enfolded into Israel through marriage; 21:10–14; cf. Ruth 4:11–12.) Whether this marriage could be to someone from within the tribe of Levi is less clear. It may be noted that only the high priest is required to marry "from his own people" (21:14), a likely reference to the tribe of Levi at the least and to a closer family member within that tribe at the most (see discussion in Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 590 – 91). Such stipulations do not exist for regular priests (see Lev 21:7–8). What is not clear is whether the lack of stipulation on where the woman comes from is because the text was simply assuming the regular case for most Israelites (marriage to a woman from one of the Israelite tribes) or because regular priests could marry even non-Israelites.

32:1. *Jazer*. Captured by the Israelites in 21:32 as they came up the eastern side of the Jordan. Site unknown but some suggest it was located ten miles north of Heshbon (*Khirbet as-Sar*). See Map 4 in Sklar, *Numbers*, 42.

Gilead. Ashley (*Numbers*, 607) notes the difficulty in identifying exactly what is meant by this term.

> As is well known, the meaning of the term *Gilead* varies in the Old Testament. Sometimes the reference seems to be to the whole of the conquered area east of the Jordan, as opposed to Canaan on the west (e.g., Josh 22:9, 13). This territory is sometimes called the two halves of Gilead (Deut 3:12–13; Josh 12:2, 5; 13:31). Other times Gilead indicates only the southern half of the territory between the Arnon and the Yarmuk (e.g., all the towns in Num 32:3, 34–37 are south of the Jabbok; also v. 28; Josh 13:25). Other times only the

> northern half of the territory is intended (e.g., Num 32:39; Josh 17:1, 5–6). Geographical designations are not always as exact in the ancient world as moderns might like…A modern example of a similar phenomenon might be New York, which may either be a city (or part of a city) or a state, depending on the context.

Ashley himself suggests that if the description of Jazer refers "to the territory around that city," then this could "mean that the term *Gilead* is also to be taken in the very specific sense of the mountain or town of Gilead (Khirbet Jelʿad) a few miles north of Jazer" (*Numbers*, 607).

32:3. *Sebam…Beon*. The Septuagint and Samaritan read Sibmah in place of Sebam (cf. 32:38; Josh 13:19; these are one letter different in the Hebrew). Beon is understood by some as an abbreviation of "Baal-meon (v. 38; Ezek 25:9; 1 Chron 5:8), Beth-baal-meon (Josh 13:17), or Beth-meon (Jer 48:23). These variants probably refer to the same place" (Milgrom, *Numbers*, 268).

32:5. *possession*. The Hebrew word (ʾăḥuzzāh) "can refer to land over which one has rights (Gen 23:4; Lev 25:10; Num 27:3–7). Often translated as 'possession' or 'property,' the term seems best translated here as 'holding,' which helps convey that while the Israelites have rights over the land, it belongs ultimately to the Lord (25:23)" (Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 387).

32:6. *fellow Israelites*. This gets at the sense but is perhaps not strong enough. The Hebrew is "brothers," perhaps to underscore the kinship connection and thus how treacherous it would be for the Gadites and Reubenites to abandon the other tribes.

32:12. *Kennizite*. See the same in Josh 14:6, 14; Judg 1:13. Elsewhere he is identified as coming from Judah (Num 13:6; 34:19). Ashley (*Numbers*, 233) explains:

The Kenizzites were an Edomite clan descended from Kenaz, the youngest son of Eliphaz, the oldest son of Esau (Gen 36:10–11). Gen 15:19 states that this group lived in Canaan. Since the book of Numbers makes it clear that Caleb was chosen as a leader of Judah (13:6; 26:65; 34:19), at some point the Kenizzites must have become related to or absorbed by the tribe of Judah…Indeed, Josh 14:6 mentions both groups together.

32:15. *leave*. Other versions translate "abandon" (NASB, ESV), which is perhaps too strong (and for which the verb *ʿāzab* might be expected). See BDB 628.2: "let remain, leave (in present condition), obj. nations Ju 2:23, 3:1, Je 27:11, people in wilderness Nu 32:15."

32:16. *women and children*. The Hebrew simply uses one word (*ṭap*) that often refers simply to young children (as it does in 32:26, where the Hebrew uses it for "children" and a separate word for "wives"). BDB 1124 notes, however, that in several places "the word includes (or implies) *women* as well as children," citing this verse along with Gen 47:12; Exod 10:10, 24; 12:37. "In modern terms, the dependents" (Ashley, *Numbers*, 611).

32:17. *go ahead of the Israelites*. The word translated "go ahead of" (*lipnê*) is regularly translated as "before," which can have a temporal reference (Gen 29:26; 30:30) but which is also "the most general word for *in the presence of*" (BDB 815.4) and thus need mean nothing more here than "in the presence of/together with the Israelites." See 32:29, which uses the preposition "with": "If the Gadites and the Reubenites…cross over the Jordan *with you*" (32:29; so also 32:30).

32:34–38. It may be helpful to read the following comments by first going to Map 4 in Sklar, *Numbers*, 42, which represents the final distribution of the land. "According to the final distribution of the land (Josh 13:15ff.) the tribe of Reuben occupied the land immediately east of the Dead Sea, whereas the tribe of Gad settled east of the Jordan between the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee. But under the temporary arrangements described here some Gadites rebuilt Dibon and Aroer

[and Ataroth], which lay in the later tribal territory of Reuben (Num 13:34; cf. Josh 13:16–17), whereas Heshbon, here occupied by Reuben, later belonged to Gad (Num 13:37; cf. Josh 21:39)" (Wenham, *Numbers*, 215–16). At an even later point in history, it appears that Gad took over at least one of these cities again (Ataroth; see the Mesha Stele inscription cited in Sklar, *Numbers*, 381).

33:2. *At the Lord's command*. A more wooden translation of the phrase would be: "Moses recorded their starting places with regard to their journeys according to the command of the Lord" (NASB). The question is whether "according to the command of the Lord" refers to their journeys (see the use of the phrase in Exod 17:1; Num 9:18, 20, 23; 10:13), or to Moses's recording of their journeys (see the use of the phrase in Num 3:16, 39, 51; 4:37, 41, 45; 13:3; 36:5). Most translations favor the latter understanding (ESV, NIV, JPS, NLT, RSV, NRSV), though some are a bit ambiguous (NASB, TNK); NJB favors the former understanding. The final resolution would not add to our understanding of the Lord's activities in Numbers since the verses cited above already make clear that the Lord regularly commanded the Israelites where to camp and also for Moses to record historical activities.

33:36. *Kadesh*. In earlier chapters, Numbers recounts two different times the Israelites encamped here, the first soon after leaving Sinai (cf. 12:16 with 13:26; see also 32:8; Deut 1:19, 46), the second shortly before leaving for the plains of Moab (20:1, 14, 16, 22). The latter is in view here. Why the first is not mentioned is unclear though it is noted in the commentary (Sklar, *Numbers*, 392 n. 10) that the itinerary is not complete and seems to have been arranged either to have forty stopping places in between the starting and stopping points, parallel to the forty years of wandering in the wilderness, or to have forty-two total names falling into six groups of seven (the latter being an important number to Israelites).

33:40. *The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Negev of Canaan, heard that the Israelites were coming*. The phrase "king of Arad" might be a later insertion, so that the passage should read, "The Canaanites, who lived in the Negev

of Canaan, heard that the Israelites were coming" (see at 21:1 above, *the Canaanite king of Arad*). Whether this is the case or not, it may be noted that Num 21:1 simply says the king "lived in the Negev," while 33:40 specifies he "lived in the Negev in the land of Canaan" (NASB), seemingly to underscore that the attack narrated in 21:1 took place in Canaan. During the attack, some of the people were taken captive, leading the Israelites to cry out for the Lord's help and vow to devote the king and the participating cities to destruction. The Lord answered their cry and the Israelites were faithful to their vow. This story was a picture in miniature of what was supposed to happen on a large scale once they reentered Canaan for good: as they looked to the Lord in faith, he would give their Canaanite enemies into their hands, and the Israelites would completely dispossess them. Recalling that story here is both an encouragement to the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land and an exhortation to them to look with faith to the Lord and obey his commands.

33:51. *When you cross the Jordan*. The Hebrew uses a participle here, indicating action that is on the verge of happening (cf. JM §121e). This crossing is imminent.

34:21. *Elidad*. Several ancient versions read "Eldad" in place of "Elidad" in 34:21. If correct, this could be a reference to one of the seventy elders who received a special portion of the Spirit (11:16–17, 24–26), though it could equally be a different person with the same name. Against the variant, however, is the fact that it is easier to see why a scribe would change an unknown name (Elidad) to a known one (Eldad) than vice versa.

35:12. Deuteronomy specifies that the cities of refuge must be spread out equally in the land so that the guilty party has every chance of making it to one before the avenger can catch them (Deut 19:1–3, 6–7) and wrongly spill innocent blood (19:10).

35:14. *Give three on this side of the Jordan and three in Canaan as cities of refuge*. The Hebrew actually reads as though one is already standing in Canaan:

"You shall give three cities across the Jordan [that is, on the eastern side] and three cities in the land of Canaan [here on the western side]; they are to be cities of refuge" (NASB; see also ESV). This could be an anachronism, and thus a sign of this text coming from a time when Israel was already in the land, or it could simply be the author is speaking from the perspective already named in 35:10.

35:20. *If anyone with malice aforethought shoves another*. The Hebrew may be more woodenly translated, "And if he pushed him out of hatred." Since the very next phrase reads, "or hurled something at him, lying in wait," the implication is that the "hatred" described in the first phrase is premeditated, that is, he approaches the person with hatred and pushes them to their death (e.g., off of a roof). This finds further confirmation in 35:22, which describes a case where someone unintentionally kills another by pushing them "suddenly," that is, with no pre-planning. The NIV's use of the phrase "with malice aforethought" in 35:20 therefore captures the idea well. Compare also Deut 19:11a: "But if out of hate someone lies in wait, assaults and kills a neighbor…"

35:22–23. In the commentary, it was argued that a crime of passion would not count as unintentional killing as described in these verses (Sklar, *Numbers*, 412 n. 12). What of the situation in 2 Sam 14:6–11? It may be that David determined the lack of a weapon and the lack of any preexisting enmity allowed this case to be considered unintentional manslaughter (cf. Exod 21:12–14), or it may be that he simply decided that the surrounding circumstances (the widow losing both her sons and her husband's name being extinguished in Israel) were enough to allow for this ruling (though whether such circumstances should have been considered legally relevant is another question).

35:24. *accused*. The word translated as "accused" by NIV is actually "killer" in the Hebrew (so also in 35:25–28). The question is not whether this person is guilty of killing (as the word "accused" might imply); their guilt is clear. The question is whether it was murder or manslaughter. I use the phrase "unintentional killer" in place of "accused" in the commentary to make clear on the one hand that

the person is not simply accused but actually guilty of causing the death, while on the other hand making clear that the death they caused was accidental.

35:31–32. No ransom is allowable for the murderer or for the person who has committed manslaughter. In cases of death due to gross negligence, however, ransom was possible, as witnessed in one of the cases of the goring ox (Exod 21:29–30). In particular, if it was known the ox was in the habit of goring, and its owner did not guard it properly so that it ended up goring someone to death, the ox would be stoned, its lifeblood presumably addressing the land's pollution (21:29). The ox's owner, however, is still liable for death and also to be executed (21:29). But they may pay a ransom if it "is placed upon them," that is, by the offended party (the family of the slain), who may show mercy in light of the secondary nature by which the death occurred.

35:33. *Bloodshed pollutes the land*. Like laws regarding ritual impurity, the idea of blood polluting the land may function as another act of accommodation. Just as the Lord made use of the Israelites' existing ideas about purity and impurity to communicate his values (see Sklar, *Leviticus [ZECOT]*, 33 – 35), so too here, making use of the idea of the polluting power of blood in order to underscore how valuable life was.

36:1. *before Moses and the leaders*. The Hebrew reads "before Moses and before the leaders." The Septuagint and the Syriac read "before Moses and before Eleazar the priest and before the leaders." It may be that the latter text is original, the phrase "and before Eleazar the priest" dropping out of the Hebrew because the scribe's eye skipped from the "*and before* Eleazar" to "*and before* the leaders" (a common scribal error known as *homoioarchton* or "like beginning"). Either way, Israel's leaders are gathered to hear the complaint.

36:3. "It is generally assumed the custom was to marry within the tribe" (Sklar, *Numbers*, 419; cf. Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001], 55). Support for this is

found in the simple fact that tribes stuck together, meaning those you interacted with most frequently were from your tribe.

from our ancestral inheritance. This could also be translated "from the inheritance of our forefathers." Bailey (*Leviticus-Numbers*) represents the view of various scholars who suggest this phrase is an anachronism: "Since, in the literary context, the apportionment ("inheritance") had only been made to the generation of the leaders who are speaking, this expression betrays that it comes from a later period." This conclusion is possible but by no means necessary for the simple reason that because the land was divided among tribal lines, the inheritance was thought of as belonging to the tribe. As a result, this was not simply the inheritance of these men; it was the inheritance of *Joseph's* tribe, making it very natural to speak of it as "the inheritance of our forefathers."

Chapter 36, Live the Story: Is this fair? The following comments from Matthews (Victor H. Matthews, "Family Relationships," *DOOTP* 294) are worth citing at length:

> The various factors in a marriage to be weighed in the negotiations involved social parity, economic advantage and expansion of the kinship network…Marriages served not only to produce children and a new generation to inherit property, but they also established social ties, economic connections and a network of association that was designed to benefit both parties. Other considerations included kinship obligations (Gen 24:3–4), political advancement (see David's marriages to Michael in 1 Sam 18:17–28 and to Ahinoam in 1 Sam 25:43) and, occasionally personal desire (Exod 22:16; Judg 14:3; 2 Sam 11:27).

Also worthy of long citation are the remarks of Stubbs (*Numbers*, 249) regarding our modern approach to individualism and personal freedom:

In our modern culture, any curtailment of personal freedom is difficult to swallow, especially when it is the rights of women and other people who have all too often been wrongfully oppressed. Yet this passage need not be read exclusively in this light. It might instead be recognized for the remarkable visibility of women in it and for the way it helps preserve a system of land distribution that was remarkably egalitarian, in stark contrast to the monarchical systems of Israel's neighbors, including that of Egypt from which it was rescued. The daughters of Zelophehad…mix boldness to confront systems that do not serve their proper ends with the obedience that is willing to curtail certain freedoms for the good of the community. They are an icon of character we desperately need to contemplate.

APPENDIX 1—FOUR WAYS OF PREACHING STORIES

One of the most common genres in the Bible is that of narrative. As a result, sermons are very often expounding a narrative of one form or another. There are many different ways that this can be done, though it is possible to identify four main approaches. In what follows immediately below, I describe each of the four approaches with reference to the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17. Following these descriptions are further comments on a few of the practicalities of preparing a narrative sermon as well as sermon outlines that illustrate each of the four approaches.

1. *Deductive #1: story serves as starting place to discuss theological truths*. In this approach, the preacher identifies certain truths illustrated by the story and uses these truths as the starting place for the sermon's various points. Once the point is identified, however, the sermon swings away from the story itself to focus on what the rest of the Bible teaches us about this point. This is often because the story is not being read as a whole; rather, it is being treated as a mine from which isolated nuggets of truth may be extracted.

    As an example, the sermon will have as its first point that fear causes us not to trust in the Lord (1 Sam 17:11). The sermon will then go on to discuss how those who know the Lord do not need to be afraid, with references being made to other places in the Scriptures that speak of people who are not afraid in the face of challenging circumstances or to verses which affirm the Lord can be trusted. In this approach, however, these verses are typically from outside of the immediate story and are typically not related back to the story. Instead, once these other verses have been expounded, the sermon goes on to the next point, e.g. "The second thing we see is that those who have a deep heart for God's glory are incensed when his name is defamed (1 Sam 17:26)."

This approach may do well to identify various truths that the story is trying to get across. Its greatest weakness, however, is that it can decontextualize these truths. As a further result, it can also miss how the story functions as a whole to present various truths for the people of God. And finally, it does not model for those listening how to read a story contextually.

2. *Deductive #2: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths*. In this approach, the preacher also identifies certain truths illustrated by the story and uses these truths as his sermon's main points. Unlike the first approach, however, he endeavors to show how the story itself demonstrates these truths and relates them to one another. That is to say, in this approach the preacher focuses on the truths in the context of the story and uses the story itself as the illustration of how these truths play out. In this way, the story is not simply a mine containing nuggets of truth, but a tapestry in which the various pictures of truth can only be understood in relation to the tapestry as a whole.

    As an example, the sermon will have as its first point that fear causes us not to trust in the Lord (1 Sam 17:11). It will then show, however, why Saul had every reason to trust in the Lord (including the Lord's deliverance in immediately preceding chapters). In other words, it takes time to set the truth in the context of the story. It certainly may go on from there to discuss verses outside of the story but only once the point has been firmly grounded in the context of the story. Moreover, it tries to relate this point to the next point that is being made. For example, in going on to describe that those who have a deep heart for God's glory are incensed when his name is defamed, the sermon carefully explains how David is serving as a contrast to Saul and that this contrast is a way of reminding Israel of the type of king they really need.

    This approach not only identifies various truths, it does well to set them in the context of the story and thus also to see how the truths relate to one another. It also models well for the congregation how to read the Bible well. This

approach is perhaps the easiest one to take while remaining faithful to the original context.

   Note: if this is the form you are most comfortable with, you can easily turn it into an inductive approach by turning each of your main points into questions. For example, instead of point 1 being, "Fear defeats us by causing us to forget who the Lord is and lose our trust in him (1 Sam 17: 11)," point 1 would be, "Why does fear defeat us?" and the sermon would proceed by describing what takes place up to v. 11 and then using v. 11 as the way to supply the answer. This is not a big switch to make, but it will serve to keep the listener more engaged as they follow the story to get the answer.

3. *Inductive #1: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.* The main difference between this approach and the preceding one is that the truths of the story are gotten at inductively rather than deductively. That is to say, instead of starting with a point and then illustrating it, the preacher begins by telling the story and then gets to the point that is being illustrated. Typically, the preacher best prepares for this approach by breaking the story up scene by scene, identifying the truths being communicated, and then putting it all together by telling the story scene by scene and incorporating the truths along the way.

   As an example, the preacher would begin by describing the place that the battle was occurring (1 Sam 17:1–3), the size of Goliath (1 Sam 17:4–7), and the way in which his defiant cry was really blasphemy against the Lord (1 Sam 17: 8–10). Before getting to the first point— namely, that Saul was not prepared to meet this challenge because his fear caused him not to trust in the Lord (1 Sam 17:11)—the preacher might take time to note from the surrounding context that the Lord's previous deliverance should have enabled Saul to meet this challenge. This then sets Saul's failure in sharper relief and also provides a good

comparison when applying it to us: we too have seen the Lord do mighty things, and yet we too sometimes fail to trust him because of fear.

This approach has all the advantages of the former as well as any added benefits that come from presenting truths inductively versus deductively. Some will find this a bit more difficult to prepare than the former approach and that it therefore requires more time. For an example of this being done with a parable (Luke 18:9–14) see otpentateuch.com (Narrative Preaching tab). See there also for an example with an Old Testament story (Ruth) (note: the Ruth sermon is somewhat in between Inductive #1 and Inductive #2).

4. *Inductive #2: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.* The main difference between this approach and the previous is that in this approach the preacher becomes a straight narrator, adopting either a third-person or first-person voice and maintaining that voice for the majority of the sermon. Thus while there may be a lot of third-person narration in the previous approach, the preacher will often use this in shorter bursts with other types of explanation or exhortation in between. In the fourth approach, however, the third- or first-person voice is used much more consistently, giving the entire feel of the sermon a much more narrative feel.

As the attached example shows, the way to do application in this approach is by having a transition sentence out of the narrative to the point of application and then a transition sentence back in from the point of application to the narrative. Be careful of two things. First, do not do too much "preaching" when you go into the point of application, otherwise the narrative feel of the sermon is lost. Second, beware of putting all the application at the end of the sermon (when the story is over and the tension has been lost).

For an example with a third-person voice, see the David and Goliath sermon on otpentateuch.com (Narrative Preaching tab). If this were done with a first-

person voice, I might choose one of the Israelite soldiers as the person who was telling the story. An example of a first-person sermon on Gen 22 may also be found on otpentateuch.com (Narrative Preaching tab); the same is true for a sermon on Lev 16 (the Day of Atonement).

Once again, this approach has all the advantages of the previous two. Many preachers, however, will either feel uncomfortable with trying to do this approach themselves or will find that it takes way too much preparation time (it can take almost twice as long to prepare this kind of sermon).

A few further suggestions on the practicalities of preparing a narrative sermon—especially inductive #1 or #2—will be helpful. The following comments will at times refer to the full sermon manuscript of 1 Sam 17 that is included below as an illustration of the inductive #2 approach.

1. *Always* start with the exegesis of the text. Remember: your goal is not to tell a good story and entertain; you goal is to feed people the Word of the Lord!
2. Bear in mind the particular issues that you need to be aware for reading and interpreting stories. That is to say, stories are a specific genre; to read them well, you need to be aware of literary issues like foreshadowing, plot and character development, etc. For a full discussion, see Richard L. Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 1993).
3. Doing the exegesis well will allow you to answer the questions concerning points of application most clearly. Here are those questions and my answers in this case:
    a. (where applicable): What did the original characters in this passage learn—or what should they have learned—about the Lord, about themselves, and about the Lord's ways with man?

i.   The Philistines in this passage learned that Israel's God is
     the true God.

ii. The Israelites in this passage (including Saul) learned (or
     should have learned) several things:

1. David is a demonstration of the type of leader who
    pleases the Lord (note that there is a contrast between
    David and Saul in this passage; note as well that this
    contrast is a part of the larger theme of 1 Sam 9–18:5,
    in which Saul is shown to be a king like the nations
    [1 Sam 9–15] and David is shown to be the type of
    king that the Lord delights in [1 Sam 16–18:5]).

2. In particular, this type of leader is someone who has
    a deep trust in the Lord (1 Sam 17:37, 45–47) and a
    deep desire for God's glory to be made known in
    Israel and in all the nations (1 Sam 17:26, 46–47).

3. The Israelites here should also recognize that these
    traits are not simply to be true of the leader of Israel,
    but that the leader is a personal example of how each
    Israelite is to live life, namely, with a deep trust in
    the Lord and a desire for the Lord to be glorified.

iii. David would have had his trust in the Lord confirmed.

b. What would have been most applicable to the original audience to
    whom this passage was written?

i.   The reference to the "kings of Judah" in 1 Sam 27:6 suggests
     that this book was written after the division of the kingdom
     in 930 BC. This verse also suggests that the book is written
     before the final exile of 586 BC since the kings of Judah are
     said to possess the city of Ziklag "to this day." As a result,
     the original audience would have been living sometime

between 930 and 586 when the kingdom was divided. On the one hand, then, it would have served to underscore the legitimacy of the Davidic line. On the other hand, it would have served as a reminder to both the people and the king that the type of king that the Lord wants for Israel is one who is marked by this deep trust in the Lord and zeal for the Lord's glory.

c. In light of the above, how does this passage apply to us today? (In what ways does it not apply to us today?) In particular, are there appropriate places to discuss how the truths of the passage relate to the life and ministry of Jesus, e.g., ways in which Jesus fulfills or demonstrates or accomplishes the things spoken of in this passage?

i. This text is a testimony to the fact that the Lord of the Old Testament is the true God. In this regard this text has an evangelistic and missional application.

ii. This text also teaches believers what to look for in those who are leading the people of God (e.g., church officers). The focus here is upon character, and in particular, the leader's trust in the Lord and focus upon his glory being known by all.

iii. Related to this, the believer is reminded that Jesus is the one who has come as the ultimate leader of God's people and the ultimate victor over the enemy of the people of God. He is the ultimate Davidic King and the one to whom we are to look as our leader. He is the one who gives us confidence that the enemy can be defeated. See final application in attached sermon.

        iv.   Finally, the individual believer is still challenged by this text to consider whether they have a deep trust in the Lord and whether his glory is what matters most to them.

    d. Note: you do not need to focus upon every possible area of application. Who is your audience? Know them well and choose the appropriate application in light of that. For this sermon I am assuming a largely Christian audience in a Sunday morning service. I have chosen to focus in particular upon the last two points of application mentioned above.

4. Once you have done the exegesis and determined the main truths of the story and how they might apply, you can begin to prepare the story, following along the scenes as given in the biblical text. Remember that all stories consist of three basic parts.

    a. *An introduction*. The purpose of the introduction is to grab hold of the attention of your hearers. Naturally, there are many ways to do this. One way that is more unique to stories than to sermons is illustrated in the following, namely, beginning with an interesting scene from later on in the story and then "flashing back" to the start of the story.

    b. *The main body of the story*. This is where you will follow the scenes of the story as laid out in the biblical text. You will also want to choose two or three places here to incorporate the spiritual truths and applications. In order to incorporate these truths you will want to use "bridging sentences." These are sentences that help to "bridge" from the flow of the narrative to a point of application and then "bridge" back to the flow of the narrative (examples may be seen in the following story). Bridge sentences help you to avoid bumpy transitions from "story-telling" to "preaching" and then back to "story-telling" again. Instead, they help keep the story seamless.

c. *The conclusion*. This is where the "problem" of the story is resolved. Consequently the tension that has kept your listeners interested also tends to disappear! For this reason, do not make the mistake of incorporating all of your spiritual truths and points of application after the conclusion. What is said after the conclusion of the story should be concise and directly related to what your listener has just heard. And while you do not want to incorporate all of your truths or applications after this point, it may be appropriate to follow the conclusion with very concise yet direct questions or statements of application for your listeners.

5. Points to be aware of when telling and/or preaching biblical stories:

a. Do not invent details! You *must* stick with the biblical text. In the following story, for example, the third sentence had originally read as follows: "His body armor alone weighed 125 pounds, and his spear – *which he could hurl just as easily as you or I could hurl a dart* – had a tip on it that was as heavy as a fifteen-pound bowling ball." The section that is in italics has been removed from the story—even though it makes the story sound better!—because we simply do not know how easily Goliath could throw his spear.

b. In connection with the above you will note that there are times in the following story that I wonder aloud what people were thinking or feeling (e.g., the third paragraph on the third page of the story: "It is hard to imagine what emotions were going on in the hearts of those who watched one young man…"). This is not wrong in and of itself since these stories are not told in a vacuum but in an actual historical context. *But these sections are clearly identified as things that we might wonder, not as things that we actually know! Moreover, no conclusions or points of application are built directly upon this part of the story*.

c. Make sure that your audience is aware that the story you are telling is a biblical one! In today's culture there are some (many?) who might not even know that the story of David and Goliath is from the Bible. You can let them know this by having the person introducing you make note of this or even by having them read the story ahead of time. You can also combine this with reading directly from the Bible at various parts, e.g., dialogue or certain descriptions (some of the dialogue in the following story I end up reading directly from 1 Samuel 17).

d. Who is the hero of the story? Remember, David's ability to be trusting is due to the fact that *the Lord* is trustworthy! Indeed, David's own statement is that "the battle is the Lord's" (1 Sam 17:47) and that "the Lord will deliver him" (1 Sam 17:37). For this reason you will note that throughout the story I have sought to emphasize that while David sets a model of faith for us on the one hand, the ultimate reason that we can be as brave and faithful as David is because the Lord is the One in whom we trust! Stated differently, if you are telling a biblical story that highlights a model for us to follow, make sure that your audience is aware that the person who is modeling faith for us can do so only because the One in whom they believe is trustworthy and faithful! It is the Lord, not David, who is the ultimate hero of 1 Samuel 17!

e. Finally, as much as possible, I always look for a place where I can naturally show how the truths of this story are exemplified or fulfilled in Jesus. The last paragraph of this story in particular is meant to encourage people that they can have trust in the Lord because of what Jesus has done as the ultimate second David.

6. **Finally, while the above hints for telling a story are meant to aid you in communicating God's Word, they are by no means a formula for**

success in preaching or teaching. True success comes when the Lord's Holy Spirit comes down in power and opens the eyes of our hearts and minds to the holy truths of God's Word. For this reason, never trust in your power as a storyteller but always cry out to the Lord that he would be pleased to bless the preaching of his holy Word with the power of his Holy Spirit! Remember: "the battle is the Lord's!"

USING 1 SAMUEL 17 (DAVID AND GOLIATH) TO ILLUSTRATE THE FOUR APPROACHES TO PREACHING STORIES

Deductive #1: story serves as starting place to discuss theological truths (this approach is to be avoided!).

SO WHO DO YOU TRUST IN AND WHAT DO YOU CARE MOST ABOUT?

Intro: story about a time in life when it was difficult to trust; today's message is about learning to trust in those difficult times.

1. Fear defeats us by causing us to forget who the Lord is and lose our trust in him (1 Sam 17:11).
    a. The reason Saul and Israel did not trust was because their fear caused them to forget who the Lord is.
    b. When we forget who the Lord is, we become fearful and fail to trust.
        i.   This is exactly what happened with Israel in Numbers 14 when they were afraid to march into the Promised Land.
        ii. It is exactly what happened with the disciples in the storm on the lake (Mark 4:35–41).
        iii. Application: when we fear and fail to trust, it is probably a sign that we have forgotten who the Lord is.
        iv. Transition: so how is fear defeated?
2. Fear is defeated when we focus on the Lord's glory (1 Sam 17:26, 45–47).
    a. The first reason David did not fear is because he had a heart keen for God's glory.

    b. When we are focused on God's glory, we will not fear.

        i. The psalmist shows us this focus: "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, because of your lovingkindness, because of your truth" (Ps 115:1).

        ii. Jesus teaches us to pray for God's glory: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:9–10).

        iii. Application: when we are focused on God's glory we will not fear but move forward in confidence in him.

        iv. Transition: but there is a second way that fear is defeated.

3. Fear is defeated when we remember who the Lord is (vv. 37, 45–47).

    a. The second reason David did not have fear is that he remembered who the Lord is.

    b. If we remember who God is, we have no reason to fear.

        i. Jesus makes this clear: after rebuking the wind and the waves, he says to his disciples, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

        ii. Application: when we fear—especially in the midst of the storms of life—we need to remember who the Lord is.

Conclusion: return to story of how I was fearful but overcame it by remembering who the Lord was and focusing on his glory.

(Note: everything said in the above sermon is true. The problem is that it does not show the listener how these truths are rooted in the story's context and thus does not model how to read the Bible well. In preaching, we should want to model for the listener how to read the Bible well.)

Deductive #2: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.

SO WHO DO YOU TRUST IN AND WHAT DO YOU CARE MOST ABOUT?

Intro: story about a time in life when it was difficult to trust; today's message is about learning to trust in those difficult times.

1. Fear defeats us by causing us to forget who the Lord is and lose our trust in him (1 Sam 17:11).
   a. It is important to remember what has happened just before this story. In the chapters just before this story, the Lord has helped Saul and the Israelites to defeat the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, kings from Zobah, and the Philistines (1 Sam 14:47; see also 1 Sam 15:1–8)!
   b. But somehow Saul and the Israelites forgot this. To be sure, Goliath was a huge man: the text in fact goes out of its way to describe how big he is (1 Sam 17:4–7). But what is a man before the Lord? Less than dust on the scales. The Israelites had every reason to trust that the Lord could defeat him. Their failure to do so means one thing: they had forgotten— or stopped believing—in who the Lord was.
   c. Application: when we fear and fail to trust, it is probably a sign that we have forgotten who the Lord is.
   d. Transition: so how is fear defeated?
2. Fear is defeated when we focus on the Lord's glory (1 Sam 17:26, 45–47)
   a. As we go through the story, we see one man who does not fear, and one reason he does not fear is he is focused on the Lord's glory.
   b. The man's name is David. He is not at the battle at first; he's left shepherding his father's sheep. But eventually his father sends him to find out how David's brothers are faring in the battle (1 Sam 17:14–19).

    c.   When David arrives, he witnesses the scene that has been going on for the past forty days (1 Sam 17:20–25). While the scene fills the other Israelites with fear, it fills David with anger (1 Sam 17:26). David recognizes that Goliath is not simply defying and belittling Israel but defying and belittling Israel's God. And because David has such a deep love for God and God's glory, he does not shrink back in fear; he moves forward in faith (1 Sam 17:32).

    d.   Application: when we are focused on God's glory, we will not fear but move forward in confidence in him.

    e.   Transition: but there is a second way that fear is defeated.

3. Fear is defeated when we remember who the Lord is (1 Sam 17:37, 45–47).

    a.   David was not going into battle in blind confidence; he was going into battle knowing that his God had already proven himself to be powerful and strong (1 Sam 17:37). Indeed, he knew that God would defend the honor of his holy name and would be faithful to his promises to his people: to fight for them, to care for them, to watch over them and protect them (1 Sam 17:45–47). And in this confidence of who the Lord is, David went forward in faith, not backwards in fear.

    b.   Application: when we fear, we need to remember who the Lord is. Indeed, we have seen with even more clarity in the person of Jesus that God is faithful to his promises! We have seen the lengths that he will go in order to rescue and save and deliver his people. Brothers and sisters, we have no reason to fear. King Jesus is with us and will deliver us. Let us follow him in faith!

Inductive #1: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.

SO WHO DO YOU TRUST IN AND WHAT DO YOU CARE MOST ABOUT?

Intro: begin by describing the scene in 1 Sam 17:40–42, then flashback to the beginning of the story.

1. First scene described
    a. Our story begins with the Israelite and Philistine armies gathering for war (1 Sam 17:1–3). But this would be no ordinary war: in this war, there was one champion from the Philistines—Goliath, this mountain of a man—who was to fight one champion from the Israelites.
    b. While it is true that Goliath was a frightening figure to fight, we know by this point in the story that Saul and Israel had nothing to fear. In the chapters just before this one, the Lord has helped the Saul and the Israelites to defeat the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, kings from Zobah, and the Philistines (1 Sam 14:47; see also 1 Sam 15:1–8)! And if he could do this with entire nations, what was one man?
    c. But somehow Saul and the Israelites forgot this. They had every reason to trust that the Lord could defeat Goliath. Their failure to do so means one thing: they had forgotten—or stopped believing—in who the Lord was.
    d. It's no different with us: **Fear defeats us by causing us to forget who the Lord is and lose our trust in him (1 Sam 17:11).**
    e. Application: when we fear and fail to trust, it is probably a sign that we have forgotten who the Lord is.
    f. Transition: so how is fear defeated?
2. Second scene described (1 Sam 17:26, 45–47)

    a. It's not long after Saul and Israel run from Goliath that a new character enters the story. His name is David. He's the youngest of eight sons and has not even been sent into battle; he's left shepherding his father's sheep. Eventually, though, his father becomes worried about David's brothers who are fighting and so sends David to the front lines to get news about them (1 Sam 17:14–19).

    b. When David arrives, he witnesses the scene that has been going on for the past forty days (1 Sam 17:20–25). While the scene fills the other Israelites with fear, it fills David with anger (1 Sam 17:26). David recognizes that Goliath is not simply defying and belittling Israel but defying and belittling Israel's God. And because David has such a deep love for God and God's glory, he does not shrink back in fear; he moves forward in faith (1 Sam 17:32). **That's what happens when you have a deep love for God: you are so concerned that his name is honored that you move forward in faith instead of shrinking back in fear. It is your love for God that propels you.**

    c. Application: when we are focused on God's glory, we will not fear but move forward in confidence in him.

    d. Transition: but there is a second way that fear is defeated.

3. Third scene described

    a. David was not going into battle in blind confidence; he was going into battle knowing that his God had already proven himself to be powerful and strong (1 Sam 17:37). Indeed, he knew that God would defend the honor of his holy name and would be faithful to his promises to his people, to fight for them, to care for them, to watch over them and protect them (1 Sam 17:45–47). And in this confidence of who the Lord is, David went forward in faith, not backwards in fear. **And that's just how it is for us: when you remember who the Lord is and what he has done, you realize you have no reason to fear.**

b. Application: when we fear, we need to remember who the Lord is. Indeed, we have seen with even more clarity in the person of Jesus that God is faithful to his promises! We have seen the lengths that he will go to in order to rescue and save and deliver his people. Brothers and sisters, we have no reason to fear. King Jesus is with us and will deliver us. Let us follow him in faith!

Inductive #2: story serves as illustration of its own theological truths.

See attached sermon manuscript for a third-person telling of this story.

So Who Do You Trust In

and What Do You Care Most About?

(1 Sam 17)

[To hear this sermon being preached, visit otpentateuch.com and choose the "Narrative Preaching" tab.]

Read 1 Sam 17:44–46.

In the history of war there had seldom been a more mismatched pair of combatants. On the one side stood a mountain of a man, his warrior's helmet scraping the clouds. His body armor alone weighed 125 pounds, and his spear had a tip that was as heavy as a fifteen-pound bowling ball. On top of his massive bearing and great strength, this man was a seasoned warrior, having fought from his youth.

On the other side stood a youth. He did not own warrior's armor; his breastplate was simply his shirt. He had neither sword, nor spear, nor shield, but a staff and a simple sling. His experience fighting—what little there was—did not even begin to compare with that of his opponent. And to make matters worse, the fate of an entire nation rested on the unarmored shoulders of this young man.

[here we flashback to the beginning of the story] It had all begun forty days earlier. The armies of the Philistines, Israel's arch enemies, had infiltrated into the very center of Israel. Saul—who was the king of Israel at that time—had gone up with the army of Israel to try and halt their advance. They met near the valley of Elah, which ran east to west and was bordered by hills on each side. The Philistine army was gathered on the hills to the south, the Israelite army on the hills to the north, and the valley—a broad plain bordered on the north by a creek—stretched out in between.

Every day this mountain of a man—Goliath was his name—would come out from the ranks of the Philistines, stand before the armies of Israel, and shout his challenge: "Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us. I DEFY THE RANKS OF ISRAEL THIS DAY. GIVE ME A MAN THAT WE MAY FIGHT TOGETHER!" (1 Sam 17:8b–10). Every morning and every evening, day after day after day, this enemy of Israel would come forward and shout the same defiant cry. And every time he did so, Goliath defied not just the armies of Israel but their God as well. In those days, when you defied someone's army, you were saying that they *and their god* were too weak to defeat you. When Goliath defied Israel he was saying that he *and his gods* were stronger than Israel and its God.

Saul—the king of Israel—knew this wasn't true. Just a short time before this the Spirit of God had come upon Saul and he had won a mighty victory over another people known as the Ammonites. Just a short time before this God had delivered the Philistines themselves into Saul's hands in battle. And so when Goliath raised his defiant cry, Saul knew better. He knew that the God of Israel's army was mighty to save. The Israelites knew better. They knew that the God of their army was mighty to save. And yet Saul, and all Israel with him, trembled and fled before the Philistine every time he uttered his defiant cry.

[Bridge sentence into first main point] Of course it would be easy to criticize Saul and the Israelites; it would be easy to shake our heads and say, "They knew better; they should have had more faith." And yet it seems to me that we are often more like Saul and the Israelites than we might realize. Like them, we know about God as well. We know that he is strong; we know he is true; we know that his promises never fail. And yet, time and again, I find myself in different situations where I act as though the promises of God—and the God who promises—cannot be trusted. I see it most of all in the things that worry me. Things that I know God is big enough to handle. Things that I know that God might not fix, but that he will

be with me through. Things that I have a hard time taking from my hands and leaving in the hands of God. I know: I know that God is big enough. I know: I know that God is strong enough. I know: I know that God is good enough. And yet still— I fear. I know the truth about God and yet so often I fail to act upon it. *[Bridge sentence back into flow of story]* In so many ways, I am no different than Saul and the rest of Israel, who day after day turned and fled when Goliath uttered his defiant cry. And yet, not everyone in Israel was cut of the same cloth.

Not far from the battle, in the town of Bethlehem, was an Israelite by the name of Jesse. Jesse had eight sons, three of whom were fighting—if you could call it that!—with Saul and the Israelite army. Like any father, Jesse was concerned for the welfare of his children, and so he called his youngest son David, who was shepherding the sheep, and sent him to the frontlines. Before David left, Jesse gave him some food for his brothers, some supplies for their commander, and told David to look into the welfare of his brothers and to bring back news of them.

David arose early the next morning and traveled to the place of battle. When he arrived at the front lines, the army of Israel was preparing to go into battle, raising their war cry and drawing up into battle array. Losing no time, David left the supplies with the baggage keeper and ran to the front lines to greet his brothers. While he was talking with them, the champion from the Philistines—Goliath— came forward and hurled out his challenge: "I DEFY THE RANKS OF ISRAEL THIS DAY. GIVE ME A MAN THAT WE MAY FIGHT TOGETHER!" This was the fortieth day that Goliath had uttered that challenge, and as they did every other time, Israel turned and fled from the giant, fear coursing through their veins.

Now whether David was afraid, we do not know; but we do know that very soon what coursed through his veins was not fear, but anger. Turning to those around him, David asked, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine, and takes away the reproach from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should taunt the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam 17:26) You see David knew full well that Goliath was defying not only Israel, but Israel's God as well,

and this provoked David to anger. David knew that the God of Israel was a living God and his love for God ran so deep that he was provoked, he was angered, when his God was defamed.

When David's brave words were reported to Saul, Saul sent for him. Saul was perhaps hoping to see a seasoned warrior brought before him, or a man as big and strong as Goliath. Instead, it was David, a youth, fresh from shepherding his father's sheep! But David's courage had not flagged: "Let no man's heart fail on account of him," David said; "your servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (1 Sam 17:32). I wonder if Saul didn't know whether to laugh or cry! Saul thought it was impossible. "You can't do it," he said; "you are only a youth, and this Philistine has been fighting since he was a youth" (paraphrase of 1 Sam 17:33). But David would not give up; his God had been defamed and he refused to let that go unanswered. David told Saul of times when he had been shepherding and a lion or bear had come to take away one of the sheep, and how he had risen up and killed them. "Look, the Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, he will deliver me from the paw of this Philistine!" (1 Sam 17:37a). David's determination finally won out, and Saul gave him his blessing to go.

David, of course, had not come to the front lines carrying sword or spear. He was just there to deliver some food to his brothers. And while Saul tried to provide him with some armor, David chose at the end of the day to go out only with his staff and his sling.

It is hard to imagine what emotions were going on in the hearts of those who watched one young man—one young man carrying nothing but staff and sling—separate himself from the front lines of Israel, stop briefly at the creek to collect some stones, and then walk towards this Philistine warrior. What did the Israelites feel as they watched this young man—this young man whose success or failure would decide their fate—as he stepped closer and closer to what must have seemed like certain annihilation? Perhaps in the heart of some there was hope, hope against hope. Perhaps in the heart of others, or even in the hearts of most, there was fear,

even terror, at what seemed their certain demise. And what did the Philistines feel as they saw this young man walk forward? Was there glee at what would have seemed a certain victory? Was their disappointment that a greater foe could not be found? We don't have to guess what Goliath was feeling. When he saw David—and saw that he was just a youth with a staff and sling—he was incensed. "Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?" he cried (1 Sam 17:43), and then Goliath began to curse David, calling on the gods of the Philistines to help him destroy his young foe.

And David? His words betray a heart full of faith, a heart zealous for God's glory: "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the Lord does not deliver by sword or by spear; for the battle is the Lord's and he will give you into our hands!!" (1 Sam 17:45–47).

You see it wasn't just that David had full faith in the promises of God. It wasn't just that he knew God could be trusted or that he acted upon that trust. It was that David's love for God ran so deep that it was unbearable to him that no one among God's people would stand up for what he knew to be true about God. His love for God ran so deep that it was unbearable to him to hear his God mocked and the people of God shrink back in fear. His love for God ran so deep that it was unbearable to him to hear his God mocked and to know that the nations around would believe what Goliath was saying if someone didn't act. His love for God ran so deep he was willing to risk it all so that the world might know that his God was not just a God, but *the* God, creator of all and worthy of the worship of all. ***That's what love for God does: it makes you want to spend your life in whatever way you***

can that the world might know that God and God alone is worthy of our worship and praise.

As Goliath came forward, David did not turn and flee—he *ran* to meet Goliath, loaded a stone in his sling, and hurled it right towards the giant. When the stone hit, Goliath toppled forward, crashing to the ground like a tree that had been struck by lightning. Whatever glee the Philistines might have been feeling evaporated. Now it was their turn to flee. And whatever fear the army of Israel had been feeling, they were now as bold as a lion, chasing after the Philistines and cutting them down on the road, following in the footsteps of their champion, their true king, David.

Brothers and sisters, if that is what the Israelites did in following a king who defeated an earthly enemy, how much more confidence and faith should we have in following Jesus, the ultimate King, who has defeated sin and death and hell itself? If they followed boldly and without fear in the wake of their king, how much more should we follow boldly in the wake of ours? If they came to a place of thinking, "There is nothing we need to fear as long as our king goes before us!", then how much more can we follow King Jesus without fear? He is the King of kings and Lord of lords, to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given, and who in all of his splendor and glory and power and authority and might looks you and me in the eye, calls us by name, and says, "Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age!" Consider how much more can we follow him without fear! Indeed, how very much more!

Appendix 2—Preaching/Teaching Series
on the Book of Numbers
Dr. Jay Sklar, Covenant Theological Seminary

Unless you preach or teach through the entire book of Numbers, you will need to be selective in terms of which chapters to cover. What follows immediately below are nine possible sermon/teaching series on Numbers. They range anywhere from twenty weeks in length to 4 weeks. Naturally, you might want to adjust any of the series' length or focus to meet the needs of your local context. (For further Numbers resources, including commentary recommendations, chapter by chapter themes, and mini sermon outlines, see my site, preachandteachthebible.com.)

The nine series are as follows:

1. The Lord's Faithfulness in the Wilderness: An Overview of Numbers (20 weeks)
2. The Book of Numbers: Stories of Warning and Hope (14 weeks)
3. Who is the Lord? Lessons from the Book of Numbers (15 weeks)
4. Mission: Lessons from the Book of Numbers (7 weeks)
5. The Gospel: Lessons from the Book of Numbers (11 weeks)
6. Stewardship: Lessons from the Book of Numbers (6 weeks)
7. Leadership: Lessons from the Book of Numbers (9 weeks)
8. The Life of Discipleship: Lessons from the Book of Numbers (18 weeks)
9. Worship: Lessons from the Book of Numbers (4 weeks)

The Lord's Faithfulness in the Wilderness: An Overview of Numbers

1. The Lord of Faithfulness, Holiness and Mission (Num 1). See "Why Does It Matter?" (p. 54), "How Should We Respond?" (p. 57), and "What Does the Almighty King Do?" (p. 55).
2. Living with the Lord and His Mission at the Center (Num 2). See Live The Story, pp. 64-66.
3. The Nature of Biblical Authority and the Good News of Substitution (Num 3-4). See Live the Story, pp. 84-90.
4. Sexual Faithfulness (Num 5:11-30). See Live the Story, pp. 107-11.
5. The Lord of Blessing (Num 6:22-27). See p. 124 ("What is Blessing?), p. 125 ("How Do We Find True Blessing [Part 1]?"), and p. 126 ("How Do We Hope?").
6. Leadership Requirements and Transitions (Num 8:5-26). See Live the Story, pp. 148-52.
7. Lamenting Versus Complaining (Num 11). See p. 179 ("What Leads To?"), p. 180 ("How Does God View?"), p. 181 ("What's the Difference?")
8. The Importance of Obedience and Our Hope after Disobedience (Num 13-14). See Live the Story, pp. 204-208.
9. The Lord Who Pours Forth Grace (Num 15). See Live the Story, pp. 216-19.
10. Leadership: Rebuking and Interceding (Num 16). See p. 232 ("What is the Problem?"), p. 235 ("How Does Moses Respond?"), p. 235 ("How Do the People Respond?"), p. 236 ("How Does the Story End?").
11. Giving Back to the One Who Meets Our Deepest Needs (Num 18:8-32). See Live the Story, pp. 253-56.
12. The Lord Who Disciplines Leaders (Or: The Lord's Discipline of Leaders) (Num 20). See Live the Story, pp. 271-73.
13. The Lord Who Fights our Battles and Delivers Us From Evil (Or: Judgment and Deliverance) (Num 21:1-22:1). See Live the Story, pp. 281-84.
14. The Lord Who Blesses and His King of Blessing (Num 22:41-24:25). See Live the Story, pp. 311-314.
15. Sin: A Betrayal Against the Lord and His World (Or: How Sin Disrupts Our Calling) (Num 25). See Live the Story, pp. 319-21.
16. The Lord Who Is Faithful to Judge and to Bless (Num 26). See Live the Story, pp. 331-33.
17. Celebrating the Lord's Character and Deeds (Num 28-29). See Live the Story, pp. 353-58.
18. United in Mission (Num 32). See Live the Story, pp. 385-87.

19. The Lord's Word Versus Cultural Values (Num 27:1-11). See p. 339 ("What Do We Learn from Zelophehad's Daughters?"). (Also possible to do this together with Num 36 below.)
20. Costly Obedience and Rich Inheritance (Num 36). See Live the Story, pp. 420-23. (Also possible to do Num 27:1-11 and Num 36 together.)

The Book of Numbers: Stories of Warning and Hope
1. The Lord Who Leads His People to a Land of Rest (Num 10:11-36). See Live the Story, pp. 169-71.
2. Lamenting Versus Complaining (Num 11). See p. 179 ("What Leads To?"), p. 180 ("How Does God View?"), p. 181 ("What's the Difference?")
3. Bad Leaders, Good Leaders, Good Servants (Num 12). See Live the Story, pp. 188-89.
4. The Importance of Obedience and Our Hope after Disobedience (Num 13-14). See Live the Story, pp. 204-208.
5. The Lord Who Pours Forth Grace (Num 15). See Live the Story, pp. 216-19.
6. Leadership: Rebuking and Interceding (Num 16). See p. 232 ("What is the Problem?"), p. 235 ("How Does Moses Respond?"), p. 235 ("How Do the People Respond?"), p. 236 ("How Does the Story End?").
7. The Weighty Role of Spiritual Leadership (Num 17:1-18:7). See Live the Story, pp. 243-46.
8. The Lord Who Disciplines Leaders (Or: The Lord's Discipline of Leaders) (Num 20). See Live the Story, pp. 271-73.
9. The Lord Who Fights our Battles and Delivers Us From Evil (Or: Judgment and Deliverance) (Num 21:1-22:1). See Live the Story, pp. 281-84.
10. The Lord Who Blesses and His King of Blessing (Num 22:41-24:25). See Live the Story, pp. 311-314.
11. Sin: A Betrayal Against the Lord and His World (Or: How Sin Disrupts Our Calling) (Num 25). See Live the Story, pp. 319-21.
12. The Lord Who Is Faithful to Judge and to Bless (Num 26). See Live the Story, pp. 331-33.
13. United in Mission (Num 32). See Live the Story, pp. 385-87.
14. Costly Obedience and Rich Inheritance (Num 36). See Live the Story, pp. 420-23. (Also possible to do Num 27:1-11 and Num 36 together.)

Who is the Lord? Lessons from the Book of Numbers
1. The Lord of Faithfulness, Holiness and Mission (Num 1). See "Why Does It Matter?" (p. 54), "How Should We Respond?" (p. 57), and "What Does the Almighty King Do?" (p. 55).
2. The Lord of Blessing (Num 6:22-27). See p. 124 ("What is Blessing?"), p. 125 ("How Do We Find True Blessing [Part 1]?"), and p. 126 ("How Do We Hope?").
3. The Lord Who Shines His Favor on Us (Num 8:1-4). See p. 143 ("Are We Trying?")
4. The Lord Whose Presence Empowers Obedience (Num 9:15-10:10). See p. 161 ("What is the Proper Response?"), p. 163 ("What Does a Trumpet Sound Do [Part 2]?").
5. The Lord Who Leads His People to a Land of Rest (Num 10:11-36). See p. 169 ("What Keeps Us?") and p. 170 ("Where Does the Lord Lead?").
6. The Lord Who Forgives and Disciplines (Num 13-14). See p. 207 ("What Hope?").
7. The Lord Who Pours Forth Grace (Num 15). See Live the Story, pp. 216-19.
8. The Lord Who Judges and Vindicates (Num 16). See p. 232 ("What is the Problem?") and p. 233 ("How Does the Lord Respond?").
9. The Lord Who Disciplines Leaders (Num 20). See Live the Story, pp. 271-73.
10. The Lord Who Fights our Battles and Delivers Us From Evil (Num 21:1-22:1). See Live the Story, pp. 281-84.
11. The Lord Who Blesses is the Sovereign Lord (Num 22:2-40). See p. 293 ("What is God's Posture?") and p. 295 ("Who Has the Final Say?").
12. The Lord Who Blesses and His King of Blessing (Num 22:41-24:25). See Live the Story, pp. 311-314.
13. The Lord Who Is Faithful to Judge and to Bless (Num 26).* See Live the Story, pp. 331-33.
14. The Lord Who Judges and Forgives (Num 33:1-49). See Live the Story, pp. 393-95.
15. The Lord Who Values Life and Redeems Lives (Num 35:9-34). See p. 414 ("What Do the Laws?") and p. 415 ("How Does the Death?").

Mission: Lessons from the Book of Numbers

1. Living with the Lord and His Mission at the Center (Num 2). See Live The Story, pp. 64-66.
2. Complete Dedication to the Lord (Num 6:1-21). See Live the Story, pp. 118-20.
3. When the Nations Join in Worship (Num 9:1-14). See Live the Story, pp. 156-57.
4. When the Nations Enter the Lord's Land of Rest (Num 10:11-36). See p. 170 ("Who Is This Rest For?").
5. The Lord's People: Priests to the Nations (Num 15:37-41). See p. 219 ("What Has the Lord?")
6. How Sin Disrupts Our Calling (Num 25). See Live the Story, pp. 319-21.
7. United in Mission (Num 32). See Live the Story, pp. 385-87.

The Gospel: Lessons from the Book of Numbers

1. The Good News of Substitution (Num 3-4). See p. 87 ("What is the Proper Posture") and p. 88 ("What Does a Substitute Do?").
2. Complete Dedication to the Lord (Num 6:1-21). See Live the Story, pp. 118-20.
3. The Source of Blessing (Num 6:22-27). See p. 124 ("What is Blessing?), p. 125 ("How Do We Find True Blessing [Part 1]?"), and p. 126 ("How Do We Hope?").
4. Our Need of Favor (Num 8:1-4). See p. 143 ("Are We Trying?")
5. Biblical Faith Versus Religion (Num 14:39-45). See p. 208 ("How Does the Story End?").
6. The Gospel: An Open Invitation (Num 17:1-18:7). See p. 243 ("Does God Want Us to Know Him?")
7. Being Cleansed (Num 19). See Live the Story, pp. 263-64.
8. Judgment and Deliverance (Num 21:1-22:1). See Live the Story, pp. 281-84.
9. Blessing and Submission (Num 22:2-40). See p. 293 ("What is God's Posture?") and p. 295 ("Who Has the Final Say?").
10. Sin: A Betrayal Against the Lord and His World (Num 25). See Live the Story, pp. 319-21.
11. Being Ready for Judgment (Num 31:1-24). See p. 375 ("How Is This Story a Warning?") and p. 376 ("What Does Ritual Impurity?").

Stewardship: Lessons from the Book of Numbers
1. Supporting the Lord's Work (Num 5:8-10). See p. 99 ("What Do the Israelites?")
2. Who's Going to Pay the Electricity Bill? (Num 7). See p. 138 ("Who's Going to Pay?").
3. Giving Back to the One Who Meets Our Deepest Needs (Num 18:8-32). See Live the Story, pp. 253-56.
4. The Love of Money and Its Dangers (Num 22:2-40; 22:41-24:25). See p. 294 ("What Is at the Root?") and p. 311 ("How Is This Story a Warning?").
5. How and Why to Give (Num 31:25-54). See p. 378 ("How Does the Division?")
6. Providing for the Levites (Num 35:1-8). See p. 413 ("What Might It Look Like?")

Leadership: Lessons from the Book of Numbers
1. The Nature of Biblical Authority (Num 3-4). See p. 85 ("What is the Goal?" and "What is the Proper Response?").
2. A Leader's Call to Pray (Num 6:22-27). See p. 125 ("How Do We Find True Blessing [Part 2]?").
3. Leadership Requirements and Transitions (Num 8:5-26). See Live the Story, pp. 148-52.
4. Complaining: A Burden to Leadership (Num 11). See Live the Story, pp. 179-82.
5. Bad Leaders, Good Leaders, Good Servants (Num 12). See Live the Story, pp. 188-89.
6. Leadership: Rebuking and Interceding (Num 16). See p. 232 ("What is the Problem?"), p. 235 ("How Does Moses Respond?"), p. 235 ("How Do the People Respond?"), p. 236 ("How Does the Story End?").
7. The Weighty Role of Spiritual Leadership (Num 17:1-18:7). See Live the Story, pp. 243-46.
8. The Lord's Discipline of Leaders (Num 20). See Live the Story, pp. 271-73.
9. The Leader as Shepherd (Num 27:12-23). See p. 340 ("What Do We Learn From Moses?"), p. 341 ("What is the Key?").

The Life of Discipleship: Lessons from the Book of Numbers

1. Seeking Holiness, Receiving Cleansing (Num 5:1-4). See Live the Story, pp. 93-95.
2. Proper Repentance (Num 5:5-7). See p. 98 ("What Does True Repentance?")
3. Supporting the Lord's Work (Num 5:8-10). See p. 99 ("What Do the Israelites?")
4. Sexual Faithfulness (Num 5:11-30). See Live the Story, pp. 107-11.
5. Complete Dedication to the Lord (Num 6:1-21). See Live the Story, pp. 118-20.
6. The Importance of Unity (Num 7). See p. 139 ("Which Tribe Matters Most?")
7. Lamenting Versus Complaining (Num 11). See p. 179 ("What Leads To?"), p. 180 ("How Does God View?"), p. 181 ("What's the Difference?")
8. The Importance of Obedience and Our Hope after Disobedience (Num 13-14). See Live the Story, pp. 204-208.
9. The Gift of Grace and the Dangers of Sin (Num 15). See Live the Story, pp. 216-19.
10. Giving Back to the One Who Meets Our Deepest Needs (Num 18:8-32). See Live the Story, pp. 253-56.
11. Sin: A Betrayal Against the Lord and His World (Num 25). See Live the Story, pp. 319-21.
12. The Lord's Word Versus Cultural Values (Num 27:1-11). See p. 339 ("What Do We Learn from Zelophehad's Daughters?").
13. Celebrating the Lord's Character and Deeds (Num 28-29). See Live the Story, pp. 353-58.
14. Costly Obedience (Num 30). See Live the Story, pp. 363-66.
15. How and Why to Give (Num 31:25-54). See p. 378 ("How Does the Division?")
16. Costly Love for One Another (Num 32). See Live the Story, pp. 385-87.
17. Turning from Idols to Enjoy Life with God (Num 33:50-34:29). See Live the Story, pp. 401-405.
18. Costly Obedience and Rich Inheritance (Num 36). See Live the Story, pp. 420-23.

Worship: Lessons from the Book of Numbers
1. The Importance of Worship and Supporting It (Num 7). See p. 137 ("Why Focus So Much?") and p. 138 ("Who's Going to Pay?")
2. Celebrating Redemption (Num 9:1-14). See Live the Story, pp. 156-57.
3. The Need for Skilled Musicians (Num 10:1-10). See p. 162 ("What Does a Trumpet Sound Do [Part 1]?").
4. Celebrating the Lord's Character and Deeds (Num 28-29). See Live the Story, pp. 353-58.

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