

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

NUMBERS 1-5

The Greek name for the fourth book of the Bible is “*Arithmoi*” - from which we get our word, “*Arithmetic*”. Its title in Latin is the word, “*Numeroi*”, or “*Numbers*”.

Now, if you’re squirming in your seat – worried that this is going to be a Math lesson, and you don’t do too well with Math – then take heart – don’t sweat it – there is much more to the book of Numbers than just numbers.

In the Hebrew Bible the book is more aptly entitled, “*In the Wilderness*”, and that’s what the book describes – the nation Israel’s wilderness wanderings.

In fact, there’s another title for the book. I like to call it, “*How to Turn a Fifteen Day Walk into Forty Years of Wandering.*” Numbers reveals the reasons why the Hebrews failed to enter the land God promised them and died in the desert.

And this is why the book abounds with lessons for us. Spiritually speaking, we’ve been delivered from the Egypt of sin, and promised a place of rest and blessing – but to enter – we, like the Hebrews - need to have faith. If we yield to doubt and fear, we too, can end up dying in a wilderness of frustration.

Verse 1 begins, “**Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt...**” It’s been 13 months since Israel’s exodus from Egypt. They spent a-month-and-a-half

getting to Mount Sinai.

The next 10½ months were at the foot of the holy mountain where God gave to Moses the Law and the blueprints for the Tabernacle. Then final month-and-a-half was spent erecting the Tabernacle and its furniture. But now its time to march!

But to march effectively and in unison you have to be organized.

So the Lord spoke **“saying: "Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above - all who are able to go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies.”** Notice God calls a horde of people who had spent their whole life as slaves – *an army!* Israel was God’s army and He was sent the nation to war.

Canaan was the land God promised to His people, but it was no hand-out.

Israel had to go to battle to take ownership. And the same is true with God’s promises today. We battle doubt, fear, and guilt - to take possession by faith.

“And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father's house.” A representative from each tribe helped with the census.

Several years ago billboards started popping up in major American cities. They consisted of quotations attributed to God. Here are a few examples...

“Let's meet at my house Sunday before the game.”

“What part of "Thou Shalt Not..." didn't you understand?”

“We need to talk.”

“Loved the wedding, invite me to the marriage.”

“That "Love Thy Neighbor" thing... I meant it.”

“Big bang theory, you've got to be kidding.”

“My way is the highway.”

“Need directions?”

“You think it's hot here?”

“Have you read my #1 best seller? There will be a test.”

“Do you have any idea where you're going?”

“Don't make me come down there...”

And all the quotations are signed “God”.

But there's one quotation I think fits the book of Numbers. It says, “I love you and you and you and you and... - God.” While in bondage the Hebrews were a nameless, innumerable band of slaves. In Egypt the individual was expendable.

But now the Hebrews belong to God. They're His people - and each person matters to God. Thus, He orders a census to hammer home the point.

It was Augustine who said, “God loves each one of us as if there's only one of us to love.” Nobody gets lost in the crowd with God. He accounts for all His kids.

It's been said, “When God counts people it means people count to God.”

But let me add a caution. When God numbers people it's a good thing, but when man numbers people it can lead to sin. Numbering implies ownership.

You number only what belongs to you. You don't number someone else's stuff.

That's why in 2 Samuel 24 King David is judged for taking a census. He wants to know the extent of *His dominion*. He forgot *his kingdom* was not *his kingdom*. It belonged to God. The people were not *David's subjects*, but *God's subjects*.

And this also applies to the church.

Counting sheep may get you to sleep at night, but it's also a good way for us to fall asleep spiritually. I've known churches and individuals who got off-track when they became preoccupied with numbers. In the beginning the goal of their church was to *reach more people* – over time it deteriorated into *produce more numbers*.

For churches and individuals numerical success can become a point of pride.

Big crowds - big bank accounts - lots of anything - can cause us to boast in our prowess. We forget our prosperity is a result of God's grace - not our ingenuity.

Here's the lesson for us... It's okay for a church to take a census, or a shop owner to take an inventory - as long as we're doing it for the right reasons.

If you're throwing a party you want to count of the crowd so you can supply enough food, etc. You number to be a good *host*, not in order to *boast*.

By maintaining a church directory it enables us to better communicate and minister - but we should always check our motive – is it to *guide or gloat*?

Beginning in verse 5 Moses and the 12 tribal leaders take a census.

Read the rest of chapter 1 and you'll discover the tribe of Reuben numbered 46,500... Simeon, 59,300... Gad, 45,650... Judah 74,600... Isaachar, 54,400... Zebulun, 57,400... Ephraim, 40,500... Manasseh, 32,200... Benjamin, 35,400... Dan, 62,700... Asher, 41,500... and the tribe of Naphtali, 53,400.

Judah was the largest tribe. Manasseh was the smallest tribe.

Verse 45 tells us, "So all who were numbered of the children of Israel, by their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war in Israel - all who were numbered were 603,550. And that was just the men at least 20 years. Add women and kids... and 2-3 million marched with Moses.

"But the Levites were not numbered among them by their fathers' tribe; for the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle." One tribe was not numbered among the fighting men. The Levites had *holy hands* not *bloody hands*.

The other tribes fought the battles. The tribe of Levi ministered to God.

Notice, if you review the census there were 12 tribes

counted. Add Levi and it makes 13. In fact, 14 different tribes are listed on at least one biblical list. At times Levi appears, or Joseph appears, or Manasseh and Ephraim take Joseph's place.

But God is consistent, there are always 12 - it's just a different 12.

“And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death.” Guys, I've discovered a key to life is to find out what God wants you to do - then just do it. Don't try to do what's not your job.

As in this case, many people have died trying to do somebody else's job.

Verse 52, “The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.” Thus the children of Israel did; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so they did.” The army is ready to march!

Chapter 2, “And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: “Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father's house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting.

Each tribe was assigned a specific spot around the tabernacle to pitch their tents. They camped under a banner that pictured that tribe's coat of arms...

Let me summarize a little here...

Three tribes camped on each of the four sides of the Tabernacle.

On the **east**, Judah was closest to the Tabernacle, then Isaachar and Zebulun.

On the **south**, there was Rueben, then Simeon, then Gad. The **west** side story - was Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin. And to the **north** – those Yankees – were Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.

From a practical standpoint the arrangement of the camp was strategic.

It maximized space, and made for a ring of protection around the Tabernacle. When they broke camp and marched, it made for smoother and easier mobility.

It also put God had the heart of the nation. At the center of the camp was the Tabernacle. Israel's national life was center around God and worship.

There were practical reasons behind the arrangement of the camp – *but it's from a spiritual perspective that you see the real strategy behind God's plan.*

The Tabernacle was the hub, and out from it came four spokes of three tribes each. Imagine though, what the camp of Israel looked like from heaven's viewpoint.

From an aerial view the tribes of Israel camped in the shape

of a cross.

Whenever God looked on His people He was reminded of the means by which they'd be saved – the event of which all their sacrifices spoke – the cross of Jesus.

It's also interesting that verse 2 tells us that each of the 12 tribes camped under the banner of the four lead tribes on each side of the Tabernacle. The banner was the coat-of-arms for each tribe. And we know what these insignias were...

Judah was a lion - Rueben a man - Ephraim an ox - Dan was an eagle.

And this is fascinating, for when we peer into God's heavenly throne room – in passages like Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4 - we always find four living creatures, or angels, who each have four faces – the face of *a lion, a man, an ox, and an eagle*.

It seems the camp of Israel was also a type of God's throne room in heaven.

When they began to march the eastern tribes broke camp first, followed by the southern three tribes. Then comes verse 17, **“Then the tabernacle of meeting shall move out with the camp of the Levites in the middle of the camps; as they camp, so they shall move out, everyone in his place, by their standards.”**

The tabernacle was placed in the middle – at the heart of the procession.

After the tabernacle the western tribes broke camp, followed by the caboose... Dan, Asher, Naphtali brought up the rear.

They acted as the rear guard.

Verse 32 “These are the ones who were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers' houses. All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces were 603,550. But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel, just as the LORD commanded Moses.” Remember, there are some things we need to count, and some things God just doesn't want us to count.

“Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards and so they broke camp, each one by his family, according to their fathers' houses.” Imagine 3 million people on the move. It was an imposing sight, and struck fear in the hearts of their enemies.

Chapter 3, “Now these are the records of Aaron and Moses when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. And these are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests.

Nadab and Abihu had died before the LORD when they offered profane fire before the LORD in the Wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children.”

Nadab and Abihu were the first pastors to every suffer serious burn out.

“So Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests under the oversight of Aaron their father.” Remember all priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. Only Aaron, his

sons, and their descendents could serve as priests in Israel.

Verse 5, “**And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle."** Levi would be the priestly tribe.

They were to come alongside Aaron and his sons to help them in the ministry, just as the elders and deacons need to come alongside the pastors to help serve the church. Our elders and deacons are the New Testament Levites.

Every ministry is too big for one man. Your pastor needs your help.

Notice the Levites are given to the High Priest for two reasons... Verse 7, “**They shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation**”.

Here’s another analogy. In a sense we are all Levites, and who is our High Priest? Hebrews 7 tells us it’s Jesus. *But what does it mean to serve the Lord?*

First, it means to “**attend to his needs**”. This is why Jesus wants a personal relationship with us, so we can know His heart. He wants us to be tender and sensitive to what’s important to Him personally. We make Jesus happy when we worship Him, and are attentive to the whispered instructions of His Spirit.

But also, Jesus wants us to “**attend to... the needs of the whole congregation**”. We serve Jesus by serving each other. If I love Jesus I’ll learn to love you.

Verse 8, “Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle.

And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel. So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.” Only the Levites were suppose to do the job of the Levites.

Later we’ll read of King Uzziah. Though he was a king from the tribe of Judah, he wanted to be a priest. But when he went into the Holy Place God struck him with leprosy. In light of Leviticus God let him off light. The outsider was to die.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast.

They shall be Mine: I am the LORD."

Here God works a deal with Israel. He makes a trade.

The Hebrews were suppose to dedicate the firstborn of every family to God – *it was a thank-you for saving their firstborn from Egypt*. But here God barter with Israel. He’ll accept the 22,000 Levites as a substitute for Israel’s firstborn.

Verse 14, “Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the

Wilderness of Sinai, saying: "Number the children of Levi by their fathers' houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above." So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded.

These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari."

The next few verses list the sons of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

And each of the families are numbered... There were 7,500 Gershonites. Another 8,600 Kohathites. And 6,200 Merarites. The total number of Levites was 22,000. Add women and kids and the tribe was probably 80,000 people.

Verse 23 tells us, "The families of the Gershonites were to camp behind the tabernacle westward. And the leader of the father's house of the Gershonites was Eliasaph the son of Lael The duties of the children of Gershon in the tabernacle of meeting included the tabernacle, the tent with its covering, the screen for the door of the tabernacle of meeting, the screen for the door of the court, the hangings of the court which are around the tabernacle and the altar, and their cords, according to all the work relating to them." The Gershonites handled the tabernacle **fabrics**.

Verse 29, "The families of the children of Kohath were to camp on the south side of the tabernacle. And the leader of the fathers' house of the families of the Kohathites was Elizaphan the son of Uzziel. Their duty included the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, the utensils of the sanctuary

with which they ministered, the screen, and all the work relating to them.” Kohath oversaw the **furniture**.

Notice, verse 32, God places one of Aaron’s two sons over the Levites.

“And Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest was to be chief over the leaders of the Levites, with oversight of those who kept charge of the sanctuary.” Hey, there was a hierarchy and a chain of command. God is into oversight and organization.

Verse 35 “The leader of the fathers' house of the families of Merari was Zuriel the son of Abihail. These were to camp on the north side of the tabernacle. And the appointed duty of the children of Merari included the boards of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, its utensils, all the work relating to them, and the pillars of the court all around, with their sockets, their pegs, and their cords.”

In other words the family of Merari were in charge of transporting the **frame**.

There will be a test on this next week... Gershon handled the tabernacle *fabrics*. Kohath oversaw its *furniture*. Merari was in charge of its *frame*.

Verse 38 tells us, “Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death.” Remember the east side of the Tabernacle was right by the entrance. Moses and Aaron had best access.

“All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, by their families, all the males from a month old and above, were 22,000.” Imagine, 22,000 men... and everyone with Levi genes.

“Then the LORD said to Moses: "Number all the firstborn males of the children of Israel from a month old and above, and take the number of their names. And you shall take the Levites for Me - I am the LORD - instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the livestock of the children of Israel."

So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the children of Israel, as the LORD commanded him. And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names from a month old and above, of those who were numbered of them, were 22,273.

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. The Levites shall be Mine: I am the LORD." But it wasn't really an even swap. God was getting shorted 273 people. And God never gets cheated.

Verse 46, “And for the redemption of the 273 of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites, you shall take five shekels for each one individually; you shall take them in the currency of the shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of 20 gerahs. And you shall give the

money, with which the excess number of them is redeemed, to Aaron and his sons."

So Moses took the redemption money from those who were over and above those who were redeemed by the Levites. From the firstborn of the children of Israel he took the money, 1,365 shekels, according to the shekel of the sanctuary.

And Moses gave their redemption money to Aaron and his sons, according to the word of the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses."

There are a couple of problems here... First with 603,550 men why only 22,273 firstborn? If 90% of the men married that's just one firstborn child per 24 marriages.

Here's the answer... this number of firstborn was probably just those born after they had left Egypt. If it had been retroactive it would be a much larger number.

And there's another apparent problem... If you add the total of each of the three families of Levites you get 22,300 – not 22,000. And there are several possibilities for the difference... First, Moses simply rounded off. Given the detail he's taking I doubt if that was the case, but it's a possibility.

And second – what I think this is most likely – there were 300 firstborn among the Levites, and since God already possessed the firstborn they didn't count in the total. Either way, you need to trust your Bible. If you study and look objectively there's a good reason for every *alleged and so-called* discrepancy.

Chapter 4 "Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron,

saying: "Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting."

Notice the mandatory retirement age for a priest – 50 years old. They served just 20 years – then stepped aside to give younger guys an opportunity. Today, someone would want to slap God with an age discrimination lawsuit.

The priests started their ministry at age 30 and retired at age 50.

Remember Jesus didn't start His ministry until around the age of 30.

The next verses explain how the tabernacle furniture was packed for transport.

"This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things: When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles."

Remember what happened when King David got flippant and too casual with God's holiness. He wanted to bring the Ark to Jerusalem on a cart. And when the Ark started to slide, a man named Uzzah reached out to grab it... And instantly, God struck him dead. He had touched what was holy, and David was to blame.

He tried to serve God his way – a mistake many people make. And it always brings death in some form or fashion.

God's work needs to be done God's way.

“On the table of showbread they shall spread a blue cloth, and put on it the dishes, the pans, the bowls, and the pitchers for pouring; and the showbread shall be on it. They shall spread over them a scarlet cloth, and cover the same with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles.

And they shall take a blue cloth and cover the lampstand of the light, with its lamps, its wick-trimmers, its trays, and all its oil vessels, with which they service it. Then they shall put it with all its utensils in a covering of badger skins, and put it on a carrying beam.

Over the golden altar they shall spread a blue cloth, and cover it with a covering of badger skins; and they shall insert its poles.

Then they shall take all the utensils of service with which they minister in the sanctuary, put them in a blue cloth, cover them with a covering of badger skins, and put them on a carrying beam.

Also they shall take away the ashes from the altar, and spread a purple cloth over it. They shall put on it all its implements with which they minister there - the firepans, the forks, the shovels, the basins, and all the utensils of the altar - and they shall spread on it a covering of badger skins, and insert its poles.

And when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the furnishings of the sanctuary, when the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die.

These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry.” The Kohathites were furniture movers – the Holy Mover Company. *Hey, do you think the blue cloths on the U-Haul truck originated from Hebrew priests?*

“The appointed duty of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest is the oil for the light, the sweet incense, the daily grain offering, the anointing oil, the oversight of all the tabernacle, of all that is in it, with the sanctuary and its furnishings.”

Verse 17, “Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: “Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites; but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task. But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die.” Only the priests could lay eyes on the holy furniture. The Kohathites were supposed to use their *backs*, not their eyes. They were to *walk* not *gawk*.

In Christ, we’re allowed to not only serve God, but to behold His glory! And the blessing we often take for granted was a privilege the Levities only dreamt about.

In verses 21-28 the Gershonites are given the same age parameters, and put in charge of the fabrics of the tabernacle... the curtains, coverings, screens, and hangings... Aaron’s son Ithamar was placed in charge of the Gershonites.

In verses 29-33 we're told Ithamar was also in charge of the Merarites. They too were eligible to serve from 30-50 years old. And they were in charge of the tabernacle's frame – the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, pegs, and cords.

Remember the Levitical responsibilities – Kohath moved the **furniture**, Gershon moved the **fabrics**, Merari moved the **frame**. *You'll be tested next week...*

In the remaining verses Moses and Aaron and the leaders number the Levites eligible to serve – between the ages of 30 and 50... There are 2,750 Kohathites, 2,630 Gershonites, and 3,200 Merarites. A grand total of 8,580 eligible Levites.

And your reaction is... *Why in the world am I missing television to find out the total number of eligible Levites? How could this possibly be relevant to me?*

Hey, here's the big lesson I hope we learn from tonight's study...

God places a tremendous value on organization. The Israelites had the Law – and the Tabernacle – I'm sure they were tempted to just move out. But God knew they also had to be organized to be effective. This new nation needed to number its ranks, develop procedures for operation, and clearly lay out responsibilities.

Guys, throughout the Bible, God puts a premium on effective utilization of time and resources. When Jesus fed the 5000 He first arranged the people in groups of 50 and 100. As He broke the bread Jesus gave it to the disciples to serve the people. He didn't do it Himself. Jesus knew how to organize and delegate.

I run into Christians who call themselves “*opponents of organized religion*”.

They assume the more organized you are the less spiritual you are – and I admit, it’s possible to organize out the work of the Holy Spirit. I’ve seen it done. Church leaders can become so dependent on their management of the ministry they don’t allow room for God to work. They trust in the flesh, not the Spirit.

But you really can’t read through the book of Numbers without concluding that the worship of God was intended to be “*organized*”. In 1 Corinthians 14:40, the Lord commands the Church, “**Let all things be done decently and in order.**”

Don’t think it’s more spiritual to meet together without a plan and purpose. Numbers 1:3 calls Israel the army of the Lord - just as you and I are soldiers of Christ - and no army goes into battle without a plan, a strategy, an organization.

Too many churches today are weakened by a lack of organization. No one knows their roles and duties. There’s wasted time, and a duplication of effort. Ministry is done sloppily rather than with the excellence the Lord deserves.

It’s been said, “**Don’t agonize. Organize.**” That’s a message for the Church.

Remember in Romans 12:8 one of the gifts of the Spirit is that of *leading, or spiritual management*. We need people with this vital spiritual endowment.

Guys, all life has structure. Take away the skeleton from which your organs hang, and over which your skin is wrapped

- and you'll become nothing but a mound of goo... Spiritual life also needs some structure, and organization.

Now the camp is organized, but it also needs to be purified...

Chapter 5, "And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell. And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the LORD spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did."

Leprosy was contagious so his isolation was a matter of good health policy.

I think this is still good wisdom for the Church. A baby with a green, snotty nose should be put outside the camp (*or nursery*) lest they contaminate someone else.

I hope you remember the concept of *ceremonial uncleanness*.

A person with a discharge, or defiled by a corpse was considered unclean for ceremonial or symbolic reasons. But either way God required purity in the camp.

Obviously, these ceremonial issues no longer apply to believers under the New Covenant, but the principle remains. God desires purity in the camp. A church that condones sin, or turns its head to immortality, is no longer the church God desires.

Verse 5, “Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel: ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged.’” In other words, real repentance involves an attempt at restitution. If you sin against another person don’t just shed a few crocodile tears and offer lame excuses... Instead, pay for the damages and add an additional 20%. A glib apology is no substitute for an attempt at restitution.

This is also true for New Testament believers. When Jesus forgave Zaccheus, his first reaction was to repay four-fold the people he had cheated. It’s interesting, the Law required pay back plus 20%. The love of Jesus caused Zaccheus to add 400%. And which is the most powerful motivator? The *Law*, or the *love* of Jesus?

“But if the man has no relative to whom restitution may be made for the wrong, the restitution for the wrong must go to the LORD for the priest, in addition to the ram of the atonement with which atonement is made for him. Every offering of all the holy things of the children of Israel, which they bring to the priest, shall be his.

And every man's holy things shall be his; whatever any man gives the priest shall be his." A sacrifice was offered to God, but most were eaten by the priest.

The rest of the chapter contains an interesting ritual for a wife accused of adultery by her husband. Verse 11, “And the

LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'If any man's wife goes astray and behaves unfaithfully toward him, and a man lies with her carnally, and it is hidden from the eyes of her husband, and it is concealed that she has defiled herself, and there was no witness against her, nor was she caught...' In other words, there's no evidence. This is just the husband's suspicion...

Rather than hire a private investigator the husband resorted to a ritual...

"If the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, who has defiled herself; or if the spirit of jealousy comes upon him and he becomes jealous of his wife, although she has not defiled herself - then the man shall bring his wife to the priest. He shall bring the offering required for her, one-tenth of an ephah of barley meal (1/10 of a bushel); he shall pour no oil on it and put no frankincense on it, because it is a grain offering of jealousy, an offering for remembering, for bringing iniquity to remembrance." No oil – no incense... this means there was no joy in the procedure. This issue hurts... and it still does...

I've counseled many people whose spouse was unfaithful... And it absolutely brutalizes the victim. Adultery shatters the victim's self-worth. It tortures them with guilt. It makes them think they did something to cause their spouse's sin. Victims of adultery live for years wondering if they'll ever be able to trust someone again.

There's no oil and frankincense in adultery – there's nothing soothing or sweet.

Verse 16, “And the priest shall bring her near, and set her before the LORD. The priest shall take holy water... This is the only place in the Bible where the term “holy water” is used. The priest puts the holy water “in an earthen vessel, and take some of the dust that is on the floor of the tabernacle and put it into the water.

Then the priest shall stand the woman before the LORD, uncover the woman's head...” This was a symbol of shame. Prostitutes wore their hair down. “And put the offering for remembering in her hands, which is the grain offering of jealousy.

And the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that brings a curse.”

“And the priest shall put her under oath, and say to the woman, "If no man has lain with you, and if you have not gone astray to uncleanness while under your husband's authority, be free from this bitter water that brings a curse.

But if you have gone astray while under your husband's authority, and if you have defiled yourself and some man other than your husband has lain with you" - then the priest shall put the woman under the oath of the curse, and he shall say to the woman - "the LORD make you a curse and an oath among your people, when the LORD makes your thigh rot and your belly swell; and may this water that causes the curse go into your stomach, and make your belly swell and your thigh rot." Then the woman shall say, "Amen, so be it."

Even if you were innocent this was still a humiliating procedure. One lesson from this story is certain... *Don't marry*

a man who's jealous and suspicious...

Verse 23, "Then the priest shall write these curses in a book, and he shall scrape them off into the bitter water. And he shall make the woman drink the bitter water that brings a curse, and the water that brings the curse shall enter her to become bitter. Then the priest shall take the grain offering of jealousy from the woman's hand, shall wave the offering before the LORD, and bring it to the altar; and the priest shall take a handful of the offering, as its memorial portion, burn it on the altar, and afterward make the woman drink the water.

When he has made her drink the water, then it shall be, if she has defiled herself and behaved unfaithfully toward her husband, that the water that brings a curse will enter her and become bitter, and her belly will swell, her thigh will rot, and the woman will become a curse among her people. But if the woman has not defiled herself, and is clean, then she shall be free and may conceive children.

This is the law of jealousy, when a wife, while under her husband's authority, goes astray and defiles herself, or when the spirit of jealousy comes upon a man, and he becomes jealous of his wife; then he shall stand the woman before the LORD, and the priest shall execute all this law upon her. Then the man shall be free from iniquity, but that woman shall bear her guilt.' "

This was a bizarre ritual, but it has important spiritual lessons for you and me.

1 Corinthians 10:11 tells us, "All these things happened to (Israel) as examples, and they were written for our

admonition...” Hey, swelling bellies and rotting thighs convey vital spiritual lessons – *I just have no idea what they are!* I’m sure it was a deterrent to flirting, but after that... your guess is as good as mine!

The one observation I can offer is that here Tabernacle dirt is used to condemn an adulterous woman. In the New Testament Jesus used Temple dirt to forgive an adulterous woman. Remember in John 8:6 when He wrote in the dirt - and the Pharisees dropped the rocks they were going to use to stone the woman...