

### NUMBERS

#### Lesson 5 - Chapters 4 and 5

The core story in Numbers 4 is what is typically called the second Levite census. The information is pretty straightforward, so we won't dwell here too long. And this census differs from the earlier Levite census that God Himself performed, primarily that in this new census the age range to be counted was from 30 years old to 50 years old .....a narrow 20-year age range (the first Levite census counted males from 1 month old and up). The reason (though not specifically stated) for specifying this particular age range is because of the heavy nature of this work that involves carrying Sanctuary objects and pieces, and doing guard duty. The thought is that these men must be very responsible and emotionally mature so as to perform their jobs with absolute dedication, and they must be physically able to lift heavy objects and defend the Sanctuary in hand to hand combat if necessary.

#### READ NUMBERS 4 all

Tribalism is the culture of the Bible; until we can ingest that and deal with it we're going to miss a lot of what is happening in the many narratives that shape the Scriptures. In our Western civilization the ways of tribalism are usually either not known to us at all or they're terribly misunderstood. It's important to grasp that tribalism is morally neutral; it is neither good nor bad of itself. Tribalism was a very natural societal structure for an ancient world. Tribalism was the dominant societal structure worldwide until the medieval times in Europe, because it was based on familial ties and the bond of blood has always been instinctive, intuitive, and powerful to mankind.

By Medieval times European societal structure became transformed by a combination of religious and national identity, thus tribalism began to take a backseat in that part of the world. In the late 17th and early 18th centuries another transformation took hold in Europe and the New World as guided by the leaders and philosophers of the period history now calls the Enlightenment, when religious identity was brought into question and replaced by atheistic viewpoints and the desire for purely secular governments and societal structures based on economics rather than common beliefs or blood.

The rub is that the Enlightenment also tended to dissolve family ties (family ties are the heart of tribalism) and thus today Western societies have become collections and loose networks of small family units that anthropologists call **nuclear families**. That is that the concept of family has become redefined as generally consisting of a mother, father, and their immediate children. The term nuclear family is not referring to the invention of the atom bomb. However it does provide us with a good illustration: just as an atom in its natural state has a center called

a nucleus with electrons and protons orbiting around it, the new modern Western family unit is akin to an atom that has been stripped of its electrons and protons and all that remains is that nucleus. Within this new definition of family in the West, legal family rights are usually limited to a two-generation relationship. Grandparents are considered outsiders; aunts, uncles, and cousins are now legally (and in most instances practically) "distant" relatives who have only the most minor tie to your personal nuclear family.

And of course we are all aware that an even further evolution of family relationship is well underway in the West that negates the need for long term commitment or bonds among individuals, or even for the presence of a mother and a father as head of a family, or for the desirability of blood ties. Essentially the newest modern era social unit that is being advocated and legislated in an ever-widening circle in the developed world is much more akin to a pack mentality whereby mostly unrelated and uncommitted individuals choose to band together for a brief time to satisfy some immediate or intermediate needs of companionship, or group protection, or perhaps a perceived economic advantage.

In other words we today are so far removed from tribalism that it is near to impossible for our minds to comprehend it, and thus we immediately see it as a negative or backward institution. But it might surprise you to know that despite the best efforts of the UN and the world's more powerful governments most of the world today is still tribal. Thus one of the many sources of clashes that we see between Islam and Judeo-Christianity concerns a tribal mentality based purely on family and faith, versus a Western society that revolves around individualism and moral relativism.

Where I'm leading you is that to understand the Bible we need to understand tribal structure and mentality. And the most influential societal unit within a tribal culture is the clan; a clan being a large extended family that often is its own economy and government if it has grown large enough over time. A clan's identity invariably goes back to a founder that the clan was named after; loyalties of its members to the clan are inviolable and can stretch back for centuries. Further it is usual that a few clans will become dominant within a tribe, while others become inferior, subservient, or even die out or become absorbed by the dominant ones. Thus when we hear of the term "tribal warfare" today (and in ancient times) more often than not what is occurring is NOT battling between two tribes, but rather fighting among the clans that make up a single tribe. In tribalism there is a never-ending battle for clan superiority; within tribalism the status of each clan is everything. And underlying the texts of our Bible is this tribal struggle for dominance. Keep this in mind especially as we study Torah and the books of the older testament. And it shows up front and center here in Numbers.

In Numbers 4 the first clan of the Levites to be counted in this new census is the Kohathites. This is different from the 1st census because in the prior census the clan of Gershon was counted first because Gershon was the firstborn. The probable reason that the Kohathites are given priority status in this census is because this clan transported the most sacred, and therefore most dangerous, object. Further Aaron and Moses (as the leaders not only of Levi but of all Israel) belonged to the clan of Kohath so this lent significant tribal status to the Kohathites.

Now as regards tribal status among the various Levite clans, we won't get into it right now but I want you to know that over time the order of preeminence among the Levite clans would change. Even some duties would shift from laymen to Levites, then from Levites to Priests. This greatly bothers some Bible scholars for they fear that information we discover in later books of the OT that sometimes paints a different picture of the priesthood are errors or serious revisions for a political purpose or discrepancies, as regards these changes in how the priests and Levites operated. Personally I find that it makes the Scriptures all the more believable, because even though Israel was slowly developing a different culture from the rest of the world, they didn't start living on a different planet. Over the centuries everything from changing weather patterns to technology advances to fluctuating societal demographics to more simple tangible things like the decommissioning of the Wilderness Tabernacle and replacing it with a permanent Temple, even what nation might have been ruling over Israel at any given time (Assyria, Babylon, the Romans, etc.), make it such that the precise way rituals and ceremonies were (or even **could**) be performed.....and who did them.... HAD to change. If we were to read that these things NEVER changed over a period of 14 or 15 centuries from the moment they were first introduced it simply wouldn't pass the smell test because that's not real life.

For instance, people today can argue all they want over what is proper Kosher food regulations; but in reality NOBODY can follow the Kosher food laws exactly as laid out in the Torah because there is no Temple to dedicate meat portions and no priesthood to preside over the slaughter. So we do the best we can under the circumstances. There are no fields and croplands that I'm aware of in America that are regulated by means of the Shabbat and Jubilee laws. Therefore, what grows on land that is not regulated that way is not Scripturally Kosher. In fact very little food grown in Israel follows the Law in such a way as to be Biblically Kosher. We can argue over exactly how to celebrate the various required Biblical Festivals. But at least for 3 of them that require pilgrimages to the Holy Land in order to be efficacious, we can't do them exactly as stated no matter what because the main point of going to Jerusalem was to worship and sacrifice at the Temple, not to simply visit the city of Jerusalem. Some rituals like the water libation ceremony, which could be done to a degree, are required to be done atop the Great Altar.....which no longer exists. These are just a few examples that today's Jews face (and we face as Believers) in attempting to cope with Biblical regulations that, due to circumstances mostly beyond our control, cannot be accomplished as laid down.....and so did the Israelites face this as the years rolled on after Mt. Sinai.

So don't let some of these changes we'll find.....even as we move from Numbers to Deuteronomy.....throw you. These changes in circumstance weren't a surprise to Yehoveh and the whole point to the exact nature of the required holy rituals revolved around teaching and obedience.....not some magical or mystical nature of hand movements, or the use of golden bowls over copper bowls, or the power of incense burning, or whether one kind of food is necessarily healthier than another kind, and so on.

As we move into verse 5 we find that the sacred objects and furnishings of the Tabernacle were too holy to be directly handled by the Levites. So they had to be wrapped and packed up BY THE PRIESTS.....and then transferred to the care of the Kohathites for transport.....so that the hands of those who were not of a high enough holy status would not accidentally touch a

holy object.

For example: we see that the inner veil of the Sanctuary had to be taken down by the priests, and then it was used to wrap the Ark of the Covenant. Then over that a waterproof layer of (probably) Porpoise skins was added. The final layer of the package was a special pure blue cloth, and then poles were inserted to carry the precious cargo. The Priests accomplished all this preparation before giving it over to the Kohathites, who were allowed ONLY to handle the sacred object by means of touching the carrying poles. In fact later in the Bible we'll read of a couple of different incidents when the Ark was being transported and it appeared about to fall over; so an unauthorized person reached out to steady it.... and they were instantly struck dead.

Next the Table of Shewbread was also to have a blue cloth laid over it upon which the various utensils that were used in ritual services were to be laid upon the table, PLUS a fresh group of the 12 loaves of bread that it was designed to hold. Then a covering of crimson (red) cloth wrapped up the whole thing, and then over that went a waterproof layer of Porpoise skins. The Table had rings built onto it, as did the Ark of the Covenant, so poles were then inserted through the rings for carrying; now it was ready to transfer to the care of the Kohathites.

The next most important item was the Menorah and the various implements used to tend it; those were wrapped up in a blue cloth, and over that some Porpoise skins were placed to keep it dry, and then it was laid on a special wooden frame for transport.

In verse 11 the Golden Altar of Incense that stood in front of the Parokhet (the inner veil between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies) had a blue cloth spread over it, and then it was covered yet again in a more waterproof covering. Next the remaining service vessels that were used INSIDE the Tabernacle were wrapped in blue cloth and dolphin skins for maximum protection.

Now that the Priests packed up all the items used INSIDE of the Tent of Meeting, the texts turn their attention to things outside of the Tent that resided in the courtyard; and it begins with the Altar of Burnt Offering.

After the ashes are removed from the Altar a purple cloth is place over it. Upon that all the items used to service and care for the Altar like fire tongs and blood basins, and so forth are placed. Over the top of that more dolphin skins were laid.

All the sacred items having been covered and prepared by the Priests are now turned over to the clan of Kohath for transport. NONE of these items.....not even their coverings.....will be touched by the Kohathites; the penalty for that infraction is instant death. Rather most of the larger objects had iron rings through which poles were inserted, and the smaller objects were carried atop some kind of wooden frame.

Verse 16 tells us that the priest, Eleazar, is the supervisor OVER the Levites as regards the transporting of all the sacred objects. Further the Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, telling them that the supervision over the Kohathites must be total because their job is so dangerous that

nothing can be left to chance. One glance at an uncovered piece of holy furniture could prove fatal to an unauthorized onlooker. We begin to see, now, why God insisted that only men from age 30 to 50 could do this task; younger men might be too cavalier in their duties and find themselves dead, and God's holiness assaulted.

Now the clans of Gershon are to be recounted and the count included only those males between 30 and 50 years of age. It's this particular age group that is to deal with the items that have been called out once already: primarily, the various coverings of the sacred tent. These men are to be under the direct supervision of another son of Aaron, Ithamar.

Similar orders are given in verse 29 for the clans of Merari and they also are under the supervision of Ithamar.

Starting in verse 34 we get the result of this latest count and we find that the Kohathites had 2750 men in the 30 - 50 age range, the Gershonites had 2630, and those of the Merari clans numbered 3200.....the total being 8580.

It is interesting how we watch a foundational principle of God.....dividing, electing, and separating..... occur in so many parallel ways. God divided and separated the entire population of the world into two groups: Hebrews and gentiles. These Hebrews....now the nation of Israel.....were also divided into two groups: the 12 tribes and the tribe of Levi. And we have recently seen the tribe of Levi divided into two groups, the Priests and the non-priests, the Levites. In this process of dividing, electing and separating, absolutely NO merit is stated for why one certain line of people was to be of a higher holy status than another. There was nothing inherently special about Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob. There was nothing inherently special about the Tribe of Levi, and there was nothing particularly special about Aaron's descendants (who were the priests of Israel) than any of the other sons of Levi. God simply, for His own good reasons, elected them.

About the best that can be said for the person or group that was divided away from the others and assigned a special level of holiness above all the others is that that person or group accepted the offer. That, dear friends, is the pattern for those of us today who are set apart as saved Believers. We are no better than anyone else. We haven't done something to earn or merit such favor. We haven't lived a better life. By God's grace we were offered this salvation that came upon the back of Messiah Yeshua and when presented the offer we simply accepted it. By accepting it we were assigned a special level of righteousness and holiness above all others on our planet. Our salvation in Yeshua is as much a mystery as to "why me?" as it is was to why Abraham and not somebody else.....why Isaac and not Ishmael.....why Jacob and not Esau.....why the tribe of Levi and not one of the other tribes.....why the line of Aaron instead of one of his brothers?

Yet it is so because it is God's will. Israel is a completely set-apart nation for God, and the rest of the world is not. As such Israelites (today we would say "Jews") are BORN into a special, higher status than you or I (as gentiles) were born into. The tribe of Levi was given a holy status a notch above the rest of Israel. The priestly line of Aaron was given a yet higher holy status than the other families and clans that made-up the Levites, and the clan of Eleazar (a

son of Aaron) was given the highest holy status as being the line of High Priests.

We saw last week that the Levite clan of K'hat was also given a slightly higher status above the other clans of the regular non-priest Levites. Therefore they were assigned the honor of transporting the holiest items of the Tabernacle.

There are a couple more principles woven into Numbers that we'll find Paul expound upon in the NT, particularly in 1Corinthians 12 and 13. One is that Yehoveh demands order and not chaos, and thus He creates hierarchies of authority. Why? Because it is His pattern; we learn in the Bible that even Heaven itself is built on hierarchies so naturally the physical world follows suit to the level that the physical is able. All human life has worth; but God gives higher and lower worth to various humans for His purposes, just as He gives lower and higher status to His spiritual servants, the Angels and the Cherubim. There is a variety of service to the Lord available to be done (plenty to go around) but it is ALL for the purpose of serving the same God. Listen to Paul, briefly, in NAS **1 Corinthians 12:4 *Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. 5 And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. 6 And there are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. 7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.***

And just as Israel is a congregation with God-ordained structure, so is the Believing body of disciples of Yeshua to be a divinely ordered structure. Listen to Paul again in NAS **1 Corinthians 12:28 *And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues. 29 All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? 30 All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they?*** This second principle that sort of interlaces with the first is that it takes different skills and different jobs, working together to perform different functions to form an entire and complete community. Naturally we find this principle addressed by Paul in the NT because it is but Torah carried forward in light of the advent of Messiah Jesus.

God spoke to Moses, who took those instructions to Aaron, who took them to the priests, who took them to the people. As there were a variety of tasks to be done there were also a variety of offices established to see to them. The priests were created to be the keepers and teachers of the law; the Levites were the police and the servants to the priests. Even among the priests and Levites jobs were carefully broken down into finite units: some tended to certain parts of the sacred furniture, others carried plants and tent pegs, others performed guard duty, and so on. Yes and some held higher status than others; but each had a critical role to play and no role was menial except in the minds of men.

Such is all this with the body of Christ today. No one is set aside and no one is given a pass; every one has his duty. Not one Believer ever got passed over for a Spiritual gift. That one chooses to ignore his assignment and sit on the sidelines doesn't mean he doesn't have a purpose awaiting him. We can complain all we want that the Church is perhaps broken and malfunctioning and point to what others do wrong. But at least they DO; at least they stand at the plate and take their swings. The system that God set up for His people to follow is not

about 10% doing and the 90% observing. Worship and walking with God is a contact sport; it's dangerous and you can get hurt. If you're not battered and bruised to some degree then you've probably been sitting it out too long.

This kind of passivity was not tolerated in Moses' day, or in King David's day, or in Yeshua's day. We should not think that Yehoveh would allow us to get away with it now, expecting no repercussions.

Let's turn to Numbers chapter 5.

### NUMBERS CHAPTER 5

Numbers chapter 5 is another of those ventures into Scripture that, at first glance, seems as though repetition is at work and therefore there is nothing additional to gain. Let me say before we even read this Torah portion that this is far less repetition than it is progressive revelation. And there is so much to gain from even the first couple of paragraphs that we could be a month in this chapter and barely scratch its surface. We, assuredly, will not spend *that* much time in Chapter 5 but I want you to be aware of its significance.

If we were to give a name to this chapter, "Cleansing the camp of the unclean" might be appropriate. Now that the Tabernacle is part of the Israelite's daily life and therefore God's presence among them is assured, it is necessary that the sacredness of the entire Tabernacle area.....the tent and its courtyard.....be kept free from impurity or defilement.

We've discussed the subject of clean and unclean, and of holy and common in past lessons. But since it's been a while we will review those terms in due time. Just be aware that clean and unclean, holy and common, are NOT two different ways of the saying the same thing; they each denote something a bit different.

It's always best to read the entire chapter as a whole so that the context is clearly established. Let's do that and then we might re-read some portions as we go through our lesson.

### READ NUMBERS CHAPTER 5 all

Yehoveh says that the following people are not welcome to reside among His people, and then gives divides them into 3 categories. In Hebrew those categories are persons who

1) are *tzara*, those who are suffering from *tzara'at*.....a skin disease; 2) a person with *zav*..... a discharge from the genital organs; and 3) anyone who is *tamei nefesh*..... unclean due to having touched a human corpse.

Basically these are 3 very serious kinds of ritual impurity, and each demands a period of 7 days of ritual cleansing AFTER it is determined that the condition that is the cause of the impurity is no longer present. And whether male or female these ritually unclean people MUST be removed from the congregation of Israel and set outside the camp. Understand what this means: excommunication. Once the ritual impurity is cleansed.....if it ever is.....that person may resume his or her life among the community. But until then, that person is separated from

everyone else. Usually the excommunicated lived in caves or tents just outside of the village or city.

Verse 3 states the reason for this severe method of dealing with these unfortunate folks: a) so that their unclean state doesn't defile others in the camp of Israel, and b) because in the midst of the camp of Israel is where God dwells; thus no impure thing can be near to Him. And verse 4 says Israel obeyed Yehoveh in this instruction.

Probably of all the subjects we've discussed in Torah Class, clean and unclean.....which also includes the category of Kosher and non-Kosher.....is the most difficult to grasp for the 21st century Western gentile mind; and particularly for a person schooled in a Traditional church setting where Pastors and Teachers have done a poor job in explaining what it all means, and what it might have to do with modern Believers. Typically, as most of you are aware, the entire concept is dismissed as utterly irrelevant to modern Christians and therefore a waste of breath to even address it.

Ritual uncleanness (which is the same thing as ritual impurity) was and remains a VERY serious issue for those who worship the God of Israel, but it is discussed in detail in the OT as opposed to the NT. Why is this? Let me answer that question with a question: why would Yeshua or the Apostles repeat everything that was already long established as the foundation for proper worship and obedience to Yehoveh? Yeshua WAS the Word; He didn't have to re-validate His own Word. He didn't come to defend what was already settled.

What makes ritual impurity so serious is that it is contagious; SPIRITUALLY contagious. When someone was put outside the camp with tzara'at (skin disease that is usually mistranslated as Leprosy, and Leprosy didn't even exist among the Israelites until after Babylon) it was not so that someone else didn't contract that disease per se. Rather they did it because a person with tzara'at threatened to defile others in a spiritual way, thus denying them access to God.

So to the Israelites a skin disease, or a genital discharge, or coming into contact with a dead body (among other things) all amounted to approximately the same thing; separation from God and from the community of God for anywhere from a few days to forever. And frankly that is EXACTLY what it was meant to demonstrate.

The problem was that a ritually unclean person presented a danger to himself or herself because if they came too near to God in that condition that person would be destroyed. And they were a danger to the entire community because uncleanness was transmissible. A clean person touching an unclean person might become unclean themselves; NOT ill but unclean.

An unclean person could transmit their uncleanness to objects like dishes and pots, or even a chair that they sat on or a bed they laid in. And then once that object became unclean IT could transmit uncleanness to a clean person who, unawares, came along and sat on that chair, lay in that bed, or used that pot to cook in.

Now I know that many of you feel like such talk becoming unclean from touching someone or something ought to be about some deep-jungle backwards tribe in New Guinea or Australia



and not the people of Yehoveh. On the surface this sounds like magic and sorcery and superstition at its worst. But this is a good time to remind you that while every one of these laws were real and absolute, and God fully intended that they be scrupulously obeyed, that they were ALSO simultaneously a physical demonstration and learning tool designed to progressively reveal the deepest and most critical spiritual truths.

I had a wonderful discussion with Dr. Robert McGee, the author of Search for Significance, about the nature of spiritual truths and how to express them in words. And we agreed that at the absolute best, words or word pictures, or even drawings and illustrations, fell far short of communicating to humans the infinite depths or heavenly heights of God's principles and laws. And the reason this is so is simple, yet profound: Yehoveh is spirit while we are flesh. The Spirit world may have boundaries, but whatever those boundaries might be they are so enormous compared to our severe physical limitations, that it's probably best to oversimplify and say that the Spiritual world has no limits. Regardless of whether we are saved or unsaved, as humans we live in a 4 dimensional universe of length, width, height, and time. A human word.....whether it be a thought, or spoken, or written.....is confined to aptly describe ONLY things which operate in the same 4 dimensions that we live in. Spirit is a 5th or "other" dimension, if you would. It's a thing outside of our ability to grasp or define. Spirit is NOT the first 4 dimensions plus another one. Spirit is an entirely other dimension THAN the 4 we are aware of. Nothing made of 4 dimensional material....you, me, the chair you sit on, the building we're in, the Bibles we read and the words on those pages....the physical.... can fully describe or even reasonably contemplate that which is of the 5th dimension.....spirit.

So we do the best we can. We have some understanding of God, but very little really. He doesn't answer our every question because we have no capacity to ask the proper question or to grasp the full answer. Therefore when it comes to the Tabernacle and the various rituals and procedures performed there; and the priesthood, and the Biblical Feasts that are all only extremely limited facsimiles of spiritual principles, we must not think that the physical model is all there is or that it is fully adequate. Yet neither must we think that the physical model is incorrect or not worth observing; it is just incomplete as compared to the original spiritual object or principle it is demonstrating or foreshadowing.

Now as concerned the principle of ritual uncleanness and the camp of the Israelites, the ultimate danger and concern was that the constant uncleanness of the people would defile the camp, and the camp would become so defiled that God would no longer live there among His people. There was a very definite quid pro quo present: God would remain among His people only so long as His people were scrupulous in keeping the camp ritually clean. Let that sink in a minute: the Israelite people, God's people, had definite obligations if they wanted God to dwell in their midst. And I will tell you unequivocally that that pattern of obligation to Yehoveh remains, as do all His heavenly patterns; we have obligations to God if we want Him to dwell with us. Those obligations may not be so much about ritual as they are about faith, especially since the advent of Yeshua. Yet as James said, a faith without works is a dead faith. Allow me to paraphrase that in modern terms: a so-called faith that does not produce tangible service to God by whatever means He directs, is a faith that doesn't actually exist.

Since nearness to God is an inherently dangerous proposition, many preventative measures

were taken beginning with a scrupulously purified priesthood who were the only ones allowed to get anywhere near Yehoveh. Levite guards were deployed to keep the unauthorized people away and execute those who insisted on trying to come near; and a system of dealing with ritual impurity was established that involved removing the unclean people from the area and then, in most cases, making the unclean clean again so they could enjoy God's presence in their lives.

This is another principle that of course has never become obsolete. Believers have always been required to take preventative measures so as not bring immorality, which is unclean behavior, into nearness to God. And since Yehoveh dwells with us (His modern day Tabernacles) we **MUST** not allow impurity to enter us because that brings it near to Him. We must not join ourselves to prostitutes or engage in any kind of immoral sex. We must not defile ourselves with wanton drunkenness. We must not worship false gods or idols or worthless symbols. We are to have the attitude of the Levites as we stay alert and chase away every danger to the holiness of the God who has graced us with His presence.

Yet humans cannot avoid impurity, and this reality traces back to the fall of Adam and Eve. Perhaps the **primary** reason for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, was so that the High Priest could remove all the uncleanness from the Sanctuary (God's earthly dwelling place) that built-up during the previous year. The mere fact that humans, regular Israelites and the priests, were constantly present in and around the Sanctuary meant that imperfection and therefore sin and uncleanness were present....and it defiled the place. Even the High Priest was not seen as perfect: he was merely declared to be the holder of the Highest Priestly office, and authorized to perform certain vital functions to the service of the Lord.

We'll continue with this subject next week.