



Summary of Numbers

Chapter One

The first census, counting the men clan by clan, has two purposes:

1. To demonstrate the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore (Genesis 22:17).
2. To count the number of men over 20 years old who could fight. Both considerations should give the people confidence in their battle for the land.

The Levites, the priestly tribe, were not included in the census because they had a more important job than fighting. They were responsible for the tabernacle, God's dwelling place, the most vital part of the whole camp. Israel was the people of God, but without his presence with them in the tabernacle, there would have been no point to their existence. The Levites' task was to ensure God's continuing presence with Israel. They dismantled, carried, and reassembled the tabernacle (vv.50-51). They also guarded it from intruders. Entry to the tabernacle by laypeople could lead to divine wrath breaking out and the death of many Israelites, so the Levites were told to execute any outsider breaking in (vv.51-53). A similar threat had been made against anyone trying to approach God on Mount Sinai; refer to Exodus 19:11-13 and Hebrews 12:18-29).

Chapter Two

This chapter prescribes how the camp was to be arranged and the order in which the tribes were to march. At the centre of the camp was the tabernacle. Rameses II, in his campaigns in Syria (1275-1270 BC), employed a similar strategic layout. The pharaoh, who claimed to be divine, had his large tent pitched in the centre of his military encampment.

Surrounding the tabernacle are the Levites: their arrangement is more closely described in Chapter 3. They guarded the sanctuary from intrusions by unauthorised laypeople. Beyond the Levites the lay tribes are encamped. The twelve tribes are divided into four groups of three. In premier position, east of the tabernacle camp, were Judah with Issachar and Zebulun (vv.2-9). Next in rank came the tribes camping to the south of the tabernacle, Reuben with Gad and Simeon (vv.10-16). After them on the west came Ephraim with Benjamin and Manasseh (vv.18-24). Finally, on the northern side of the tabernacle camp were Dan with Asher and Naphtali (vv.25-34). The same sequence was to be maintained on the march. The Judah group headed the march, followed by the Reuben group; and then followed the Levites carrying the tabernacle. After them came the Ephraim group of tribes, and the Dan group brought up the rear (v.31).

Chapter Three

This chapter commences the census of the tribe of Levi. It starts by naming Aaron and his sons, including the two who had died, for they were the anointed priests. God then instructs Moses to call the other Levites before Aaron to anoint them for their service in the tabernacle.

The Levites, descendants of Levi's sons Gershon, Kohath, and Merari, are then counted according to their clans. Unlike the other Israelites, who were numbered from 20 years upwards, the Levites are counted from one month old. Each of the clans is then given their respective tasks.

God then instructed that all first born males aged one month and above should be counted. All firstborn males are to be consecrated to the Lord, who now states they are to be redeemed by Levites, with the excess firstborn being redeemed at a cost of 5 shekels per firstborn.

Chapter Four

All Levites between 30 and 50 years old were responsible for moving the tabernacle from campsite to campsite. This chapter specifies what each Levitical clan must do (vv.3-33), and then records their number (vv.34-49). The instructions presuppose that the reader can visualise the tabernacle and its furniture. For a full description of the tabernacle, refer to Exodus Chapters 25-31 and the various comments made on the website.

Chapter Five

In preparation for the march to the Holy Land, the camp of Israel must be purged of all uncleanness. The first priority is to cleanse the camp by removing all people who are themselves unclean and who could therefore make others they come into contact with also unclean in the sight of God.

Anyone guilty of wrongdoing against a neighbour must make restitution for the harm they have done, making a full confession of their guilt. If payment cannot be made to the individual or their close relatives, then it is made to the priests.

If a married woman commits adultery which cannot be proven, or if her husband suspects her of committing such an act then he shall bring her before the priest and make an offering. The priest will then make a bitter potion that the woman must drink. If it makes her ill then she is deemed guilty of the act of adultery; if she remained well then she is cleared of guilt.

Chapter Six

This chapter deals with how people can consecrate themselves for special service to God. Such people were called Nazirites and made a special vow before God to keep themselves holy in order to serve God in some particular way. It required them to absolve themselves from doing some of the things that people in general did, such as drinking alcohol, cutting their hair or coming into contact with the dead, even a close relative.

The chapter concludes with the priestly benediction for all of Israel.

Chapter Seven

The opening statement: **<<On the day when Moses had finished setting up the tabernacle, and had anointed and consecrated it with all its furnishings>>** places these events a month before those described in Chapters 1-6, for example: **<<On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting>>** (Exodus 40:2), and: **<<The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying>>** (Numbers 1:1). If the opening chapters of Numbers had not been placed first, it would have been more difficult to grasp the significance of what is described in this chapter. Numbers Chapters 3-4 describes the duties of the priests and Levites; Chapter 7 shows how the other tribes supported them. First, they supplied wagons and oxen to help the Levites carry the tabernacle. The Gershonites, carriers of the tabernacle curtains and hangings (4:25-26), were given two wagons and four oxen (v.7). The Merarites, carriers of the poles, frames, and bases (4:31-32), were given four wagons and eight oxen (v.8). The Kohathites, who carried the tabernacle furniture on shoulder poles, received none (v.9).

On twelve successive days the leaders of the twelve tribes, one leader per day, brought gifts to show their tribes' support for the official worship. Each tribe gave exactly the same thing: one silver plate and one silver basin, each filled with flour mixed with oil. They also offered one golden dish full of incense. The lower weight of 4 ounces or 113g of the dish makes commentators think it may have been more like a ladle or spoon. Then there were a variety of animals to keep the regular

sacrifices going. The summary of all the donations in vv.84-88 shows that the animals were not sacrificed immediately after they were offered but were kept for the appropriate occasion. The exact repetition of the donations of each tribe underlines that all the tribes were equally committed to supporting the tabernacle. It is also noteworthy that, as in Chapters 1-4, the tribe of Judah takes the lead.

Chapter Eight

The chapter commences with an instruction to Aaron to set up the golden lampstand inside the tent of meeting. The consecration of the Levites is then described in detail. This involves both the washing of each person and a series of sacrificial offerings in order to separate the Levites from the people for their service to God. The ages of the men range from 25-50 years old.

Chapter Nine

The Lord commands that Moses institute the Passover Festival on the first anniversary of his leading the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. This raised an issue for some of the people were ceremonially unclean as they had been handling corpses. So Moses asked the Lord for a ruling and he graciously allowed anyone unclean at the time of the Passover, or who was away on a journey, to celebrate the Passover one month later on the fourteenth day of the second month of the year.

When the Israelites were encamped the cloud representing God's presence was over the tabernacle, giving the appearance of fire by night. All the time the cloud was over the tabernacle the Israelites would remain in their camp. As soon as the cloud lifted this was a sign that they were to march and they did so until the cloud descended again.

Chapter Ten

God instructs Moses to have two silver trumpets made and sets out the regulations for their use. One trumpet signifies the calling together of the leaders whereas both trumpets signify an alarm. Initially, the alarm was sounded to signify the breaking of camp according to the order of march. The trumpets would later be sounded to draw the fighting men to battle and to celebrate national festivals.

It was almost a year since the Israelites had arrived at Sinai. They had witnessed the power of God on the mountain, received the statutes of God, built the tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, and all the other utensils that were required for service, had witnessed the priests and Levites being consecrated for service, but now at last it was time to set out towards the Promised Land.

Chapter Eleven

The chapter starts with a general complaint with the intervention of Moses preventing the wrath of God from falling on the people. The second popular protest concerns the manna that had been Israel's food ever since it was provided on the way to Mount Sinai in Exodus Chapter 16. On the surface, the protest is merely about the monotony of the diet; underlying the complaint, however, is a yearning for the pleasures of Egypt and a rejection of God's plans. God subsequently provided quail in vast quantities, making the people sick and bringing God's wrath upon them.

Chapter Twelve

After the protests of the people comes an even more painful challenge to Moses' authority. His brother Aaron, the high priest, and his sister Miriam, a prophetess (Exodus 15:20), contest his unique position. Once again their initial remarks, concerning Moses' Cushite wife, are only cover for their real complaint: "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?"

Chapter Thirteen

Israel now stood on the borders of the Promised Land and God instructed Moses to choose twelve leaders, one from each tribe, to travel into the land to determine what it was like and how strong the local people were. So the men journeyed for nearly six weeks into the land and brought back with them samples of the wonderful food that was on offer.

After forty days the twelve spies returned to report to Moses, Aaron and the congregation of Israel. The report of the land was favourable: it was indeed flowing with milk and honey as God had promised. However, they were negative with regard to the strength of the people who lived there, providing a report indicating they were too powerful for Israel to take on. Only Caleb voiced the opinion that it was right to go in and take the land.

Chapter Fourteen

The people rebel against God and believe they would be better off choosing a new leader to take them back to the security of slavery in Egypt rather than into a land of strong people. While Moses and Aaron turned to the Lord in prayer, Joshua and Caleb pleaded with the people to not rebel against God but to go forward into the land. The presence of God came down in anger against the people, warning of their annihilation by his wrath and the establishment of a new people through the faithful Moses.

Moses intercedes for the people, asking God to forgive the continued transgression against him, not on the basis that they deserve his favour, but for the sake of the Lord's name among the other nations. God then forgives the people but also

decrees that none of those who were adults when they left Egypt will enter the Promised Land other than Caleb and Joshua. For this to happen, the entire people were destined to wander in the wilderness for a total of forty years, where the adults would perish.

At this the people realised they had sinned. Still not realising they were opposing God's will they decided to go into the Promised Land anyway. Ignoring Moses' warnings that they would fail without God, they went anyway and were defeated in battle, for they were transgressing against the will of God.

Chapter Fifteen

At each place where Israel encamped for a long time, laws were given: at Sinai (Exodus Chapter 20 to Numbers Chapter 9), Kadesh, and the plains of Moab (Numbers Chapters 28-36). The Kadesh laws are the briefest and are mainly clarifications of the Sinai laws. As well as dealing with the laws relating to offerings, they cover the penalties for violating the Sabbath and the need to wear tassels on garments to remind them of the laws of God.

Chapter Sixteen

This story heads a section concerned with demonstrating the privileges and mediatorial role of the priesthood. It begins with Korah overemphasising one truth to the exclusion of others, which is what heretics and founders of cults commonly do. He claims that since all in the congregation are holy all have equal access to God. As a result, he and his followers demand that they should have all the privileges of priests, to enter God's presence in the tabernacle itself. However, God judged them swiftly, and the final episode ends with all the people crying out in fear. They have learned that only the priests may approach the tabernacle, and this protects the rest of the nation from death.

Chapter Seventeen

This experiment is a symbolic re-enactment of the Korah episode, which showed who had the right to approach God (16:5). The chief of each tribe puts his staff in front of the ark for a night to see what will happen to it. Nothing happened to the staffs, except for Aaron's, which miraculously produced blossom and bore ripe almonds overnight. It may well be that flowering almonds are significant. Their white blossoms symbolise purity, holiness, and God himself, which are all associated with the priesthood.

Chapter Eighteen

The preceding events have demonstrated the necessity of properly appointed mediators between God and Israel, if the nation's sins are not to lead to their destruction. This chapter sums up the duties of the priests, as confirmed by Leviticus 10:8-11, and Levites, and lays down the rewards that they are to receive

for their service. Aaron's special status is underlined by God speaking directly to him in v1 and v.8. Usually in Numbers God speaks to Moses, who then passes on his instruction to the appropriate people.

Chapter Nineteen

Life and death are the two poles of existence inside and outside the Bible. Holiness, God, and life are associated in Scripture, whereas uncleanness, sin, and death also belong together. Human corpses caused the gravest kind of pollution under the Mosaic system, affecting all who approached them. Thus those who have contact with the dead must keep away from the sanctuary and undergo cleansing. This rite is designed to provide ritual cleansing for all who have been near or touched corpses. This is especially relevant here in view of the numerous deaths reported in the preceding chapters and those that follow.

Chapter Twenty

Following a brief statement that Miriam has died, the account turns to the familiar theme of the Israelites complaining to Moses and Aaron, this time over the lack of water. Moses and Aaron prayed to God, who instructed them to command the rock and water would pour forth. Moses was angry with the people and so he struck the rock, producing the required water. However, Moses had not obeyed the Lord's command, which would cost both men their place in the Promised Land.

The Israelites needed to pass through the land of Edom, the people descended from Jacob's twin brother Edom. Even though Israel clearly stated they would remain on the main highway and would pay for any food or water consumed, Edom sent out a large military force and told the Israelites they could not pass through the land, and so the Israelites turned away.

The Israelites arrived at Mount Hor on the border with Edom. God instructed Moses to take Aaron and his son Eleazar up the mountain for it was time for Aaron to die. On the mountain, Moses stripped the high priest's garments from Aaron and dressed Eleazar in them; thus the office of high priest passed from father to son. Aaron died and the people mourned his passing.

Chapter Twenty One

The Chapter commences with Israel being attacked by the Canaanite king of Arad, but the Lord heard the pledge from his people and gave them victory.

The people again complained against Moses and God, so the Lord sent in poisonous serpents to punish the people. They realised they had sinned and pleaded with Moses to intercede for them. He did so and the Lord instructed to Moses to construct a bronze serpent so that, whenever a person was bitten, they could look towards the bronze serpent and they would not die.

The people then continue their journey through the wilderness, with the Lord providing their needs, and finally they arrived in the land of the Moabites. Here, just as they had on their approach to Edom, Israel sent word to King Sihon of the Amorites asking if they could pass through his territory. He not only rejected their request but sent out his army to fight Israel. God gave victory to Israel and they settled in the land of the Amorites for a while. The same then happened with King Og of Bashan, with no Bashanite survivors. So Israel took the land of Bashan as well.

Chapter Twenty Two

This chapter commences the story of Balaam, a prophet and sage who is hired by king Balak of Moab to curse the Israelites so they will fail in battle against Moab. Balak sends representatives to Balaam to accompany them back to Balak. Balaam first enquires of God, who tells him not to go so the representatives are sent back to their king.

A second group of even more eminent men offering an even greater financial incentive are then sent to Balaam who refuses their offer because God had told him before not to go, but this time God tells him he can go with them.

Balaam sets out and on the way his donkey sees the angel of the Lord standing in their path with his sword drawn and the donkey tries to take avoiding action. Three times the donkey tries to do this and three times Balaam beats his donkey, threatening it with death. God then enables the donkey to speak to Balaam, who then realises it is the Lord.

Balaam arrives in Moab, where Balak chastises him for not coming sooner, then makes an offering to his god Baal, sending some of the offering to Balaam. The next day he takes Balaam to a place where he can see the Israelite nation.

Chapter Twenty Three

Balak is instructed to build seven altars and offer a bull and a ram on each as a sacrifice, while Balaam goes off to seek the will of God. God meets with Balaam and gives him an oracle to deliver back to Balak, which he does. Balak is not pleased with what he hears and believes that, if he takes Balaam to a different viewing point from which to observe the Israelites, he will then curse them.

The whole process is repeated with the same offerings. God again gives a word to Balaam which he delivers to Balak, whose response is the same as before and so the two of them move to yet another high place, with Balak still hopeful of his desired outcome.

Chapter Twenty Four

Balaam delivered his third oracle directly under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, an unmistakable blessing on the people of God. This angered Balak further; he had hired Balaam to curse Israel, not bless them. Balaam was adamant that he could do no other than to obey God.

Before Balaam departed for home he uttered a fourth oracle, warning Moab of a future Israelite king, the Messiah, who would rise up to rule over every nation. He concluded with three shorter oracles against Moab's neighbours.

Chapter Twenty Five

Balaam had delivered his final oracles at Peor. Now, at the foot of the mountain where Balaam had been prophesying, the Israelites start having sexual relationships with the women of Moab and sacrificing to their gods. The juxtaposition could not be starker between the most exuberant visions of Israel's future and their present blatant infidelity to the law and the covenant.

However, this sort of inconsistency was not new. The same thing had happened at Sinai. While Moses was being given instructions on building the tabernacle, the people were making and worshiping the golden calf. And at Kadesh the wonderful prospect of entry to the land was dashed by national unbelief. These earlier episodes are alluded to here, and various details in this apostasy parallel earlier ones, e.g. the plagues, and the consecration of the Levites and priest. What is missing here is the threat to destroy the whole nation or delay the entry to Canaan. God's plan is going to be implemented despite Israel's unfaithfulness. As Deuteronomy 9:5 puts it: **<<It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land; but because of the wickedness of those nations that the Lord your God is dispossessing them before you, in order to fulfil the promise that the Lord made on oath to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob>>**.

Chapter Twenty Six

The later chapters of Numbers are all concerned with Israel's future life in Canaan. Balaam has predicted a secure and prosperous future there. This census deals with establishing the relative size of the tribes so that they may each be given an appropriately sized allocation.

The first census in Chapter 1 was primarily concerned with establishing the number of fighting men, but this issue is mentioned only once in this second census. The issue of territory probably also explains why the second census is so interested in the clans that make up each tribe, which are hardly mentioned in Chapter 1.

The total number of Israelites has changed very little between the censuses: 603,550 in the first and 601,730 in the second. Even though the total may be

similar, vv.64-65 stress that the people being counted are quite different: only Joshua and Caleb figure in both totals. The tribal totals vary somewhat more than the overall total, but the most striking change is the fall in Simeon's total from 59,300 to 22,200 and the increase in Manasseh's from 32,200 to 52,700. The fall in Simeon's numbers could be partly due to the plague caused by Zimri, the Simeonite, but there is no obvious explanation for the increase in Manasseh.

Chapter Twenty Seven

One of those who died in the wilderness left behind five daughters but no son. Under the current legislation he would have no one to leave an inheritance to. Moses took the issue before the Lord who made an ordinance to deal with this and similar situations.

The second part of the chapter deals with preparations for the succession of leadership from Moses to Joshua, as it would soon be time for Moses to die.

Chapter Twenty Eight

God instructs Moses to command the people in the way they are to conduct and what they are to offer for the following sacrificial ceremonies: their daily offerings, their Sabbath offerings, their monthly offerings, and their offerings for Passover and the Festival of Weeks.

Chapter Twenty Nine

The story continues from Chapter Twenty Eight with three more ordinances given to the people, this time relating to the Festivals of Trumpets and Booths, and for the Day of Atonement.

Chapter Thirty

In a crisis people often make a vow: "If God delivers me from X, I promise to do Y." There are many examples in the Bible, for example: <<***Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you'***>> (Genesis 28:20-22), and: <<***She made this vow: 'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head'***>> (1 Samuel 1:11). The danger is that, when the crisis is over, the vow may not be fulfilled. Stern warnings about failing to fulfil a vow are found in Deuteronomy 23:21-23 and Ecclesiastes 5:4-6.

These laws are concerned with defining those few circumstances in which a person may be excused from fulfilling a vow. Basically, a man is always obliged to fulfil his vow, but a woman may be excused if her father or husband, i.e. the head of the family who is assumed to have the authority to nullify such a vow, objects to her vow as soon as he hears about it. However, if the man, as the head of the family, hears of his daughter's or his wife's vow and does not object to it, then it stands and the woman is obliged to fulfil it.

The placement of this law here may seem surprising, but there are several reasons why it should come here. Vows are mentioned in Numbers 29:39, and they are often involved in the offering of a sacrifice. Also, war often prompts vows, and Israel is about to start its military campaign in Canaan. In addition, the conquest of Canaan depends on God keeping his promised word to Israel, and Israel must be equally strict in carrying out her promises to God.

Chapter Thirty One

The Midianites were a group of nomadic tribes who inhabited the deserts on the fringes of Canaan. They were associated with the Ishmaelites, Amalekites, and Moabites. It is the Moabite Midianites who are the target here. Instigated by Balaam, they had seduced the Israelites into worshipping Baal at Peor, so a brief but fierce military campaign is launched against them, for persuading Israelites to worship other gods is a capital offence according to Deuteronomy Chapter 13. As the last campaign led by Moses, this one sets precedents for the coming invasion of the land of Canaan.

Chapter Thirty Two

The conquest of Sihon and Og, the kings of Transjordan, was described in Chapter 21. The high hills of Transjordan, which rise to 2,500 feet or 762m, made for excellent cattle grazing, so it must have seemed a good idea for some of the Israelites to settle there. The tribes of Reuben and Gad put their bid in first. However, since Transjordan south of the Sea of Galilee is outside the Promised Land, Moses is shocked by the request. He accuses the tribes of making the same mistake as the spies by rejecting God's promises. The tribes of Reuben and Gad insist that they fully support the conquest of Canaan: their fighting men will head the invasion force and not return to Transjordan until Canaan is won. Moses accepts this compromise and instructs the high priest and leaders of Israel to honour this agreement. The subsequent settlement of Reuben and Gad is summarised. Half of the tribe of Manasseh would also settle in northern Transjordan.

Chapter Thirty Three

This list of camping places is unexpected at this point in Numbers. What is its function and why is it here? It comes straight after the threat posed by the

settlement in Transjordan, when it seemed that some tribes might not have wanted to enter the Promised Land. Further, this is the only part of the book that is explicitly said to be written by Moses: most of the book is said to have been given to Moses by God, but only this is said to have been recorded by him (v.2). It therefore serves as Moses' testimony of what God has done for Israel during his lifetime.

By mentioning Aaron's death, Moses indirectly reminds the people that he too will die soon because of his disobedience. However, this is not to suggest that God has failed his people; rather, this list of places where Israel triumphed over her enemies, was fed and watered, received the law, and was preserved for 40 years in the wilderness is proof that the Lord can bring Israel into Canaan, provided that they do not imitate the unbelief of their forefathers.

The list therefore concludes with an urgent plea to make sure that all pagan worship is eliminated from Canaan when they enter it. Seventeen of the names in this list occur only here, and nothing more is known than that Israel camped at those places. Even places that are named elsewhere cannot necessarily be firmly located. Although tradition places Sinai at Jebel Musa in the southern Sinai Peninsula, clues within the narrative may point to a more northerly location. However, these geographical uncertainties do not affect the historical and theological point of the passage, namely, God's sovereign and merciful guidance of Israel from Egypt to Canaan.

This chapter is a uniform and complete description that reflects the form of a military itinerary. Such military itineraries are widely attested in the countries bordering on the eastern Mediterranean Sea. In ancient Egypt, for example, those of Thutmose III (circa 1479-1425 BC), Amenophis II (circa 1427-1401 BC), and Sethos I (circa 1306-1290 BC) provide prime examples of this literary genre.

Chapter Thirty Four

The Lord gives instructions to Moses to pass on to the Israelites. It is time for them to take the Promised Land of Canaan. The Lord provides details of the extent of the lands four boundaries that the nine and a half tribes may possess to the west of the River Jordan. The other two and a half tribes may possess Transjordan as already agreed.

The land is to be apportioned by lot with the largest tribes receiving a proportion of the land to represent their needs. The high priest Eleazar and the designated leader of the people Joshua will be the two men who will draw the lots. A leader of each of the nine and a half tribes will also be present to ensure the land is allocated fairly.

Chapter Thirty Five

The Levites did not receive any land as an inheritance because the Lord was their inheritance: <<***Therefore Levi has no allotment or inheritance with his kindred; the Lord is his inheritance, as the Lord your God promised him***>> (Deuteronomy 10:9); their sole purpose was to serve him and his people. Therefore, they received a total of forty eight cities in which to live, along with sufficient land to graze their animals. These cities were scattered throughout the land inherited by the main tribes.

The theological reason for the rule regarding the cities of refuge is given at the end of the section: <<***You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the Israelites***>> (v.34). Canaan is the holy land, not because Israel lives there but because God dwells there. He is the pre-eminently holy one, and sin and death are in absolute opposition to him. If the land is made unclean by violent death, drastic measures have to be taken to make atonement; otherwise the Lord will forsake the land and Israel will be exiled.

The cities of refuge and the laws associated with them show how cases of homicide are to be handled in order to prevent the nation's being forsaken. The Israelite system of justice involved the injured party seeking relief in court from the aggressor. In the case of homicide, the male relative closest to the murder victim was expected to exact retribution. This is the situation envisaged in vv.11-15. In hot anger, the avenger may hunt down the killer and execute him. However, the perpetrator can run to the nearest city of refuge to stand trial before the representatives of the people. The judges will then decide whether the killer deserves to be executed for his crime.

Chapter Thirty Six

In Numbers 27:1-11 Zelophehad's daughters had requested a change in the inheritance laws, where a man had daughters but no sons. In this situation they had asked that daughters be allowed to inherit. This was granted. Now the heads of Zelophehad's clan foresee a problem. If these daughters marry husbands from another tribe, their land will become the property of that tribe. Then the tribe of Manasseh, to which Zelophehad belonged, will lose that land, because it will not revert to the original tribe in the Year of Jubilee. The Jubilee Year occurred every fifty years, and in it, land which had been sold returned to its original owner (Leviticus 25:10-28). However, this did not apply to land that was transferred through marriage. Normally when men married, there was no transfer of land; it stayed within the man's own tribe. But if a land-owning daughter married, the land would be transferred to her husband's family and tribe. To prevent tribal land being lost through intermarriage, Moses rules that Zelophehad's daughters must marry men from their own tribe. In this way tribal lands will be preserved: every

one of the people of Israel shall hold on to the inheritance of the tribe of their ancestors.

The insistence that every one shall hold on to his own inheritance is more than a legal obligation, it is a promise that the tribes will always live in their God-given land. In the words of Genesis 17:8 <<***And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God***>>. This makes a fitting conclusion to a book whose principal interest is to show how Israel was brought to the verge of the Promised Land.

However, in another way the book leaves the reader in suspense. The last time the situation of the daughters of Zelophehad was discussed, there immediately followed the command to Moses to go up the mountain to die (Numbers 27:12). This command has still not been fulfilled, so Numbers requires a sequel. And that is provided by the Book of Deuteronomy.