



“Reading the Bible Together”

Issue 4.

Books of Leviticus and Numbers:

The journey into being a nation continues.

May 2009.

How's it going?

Had enough with all the rules, regulations, measurements and numbers yet? Well, unfortunately there is more to come, for a while at least. Many readers of the Scriptures compare the Books of Leviticus and Numbers to the twenty mile mark and what is known as “The Wall,” in running a marathon. Get through these few books and then on the far side the horizon begins to open up once again as the Promised Land and the finish line of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible which the Jewish people call The Torah – The Law) comes into sight.

What about if I've fallen behind?

Some people have said to me they have fallen behind and I wonder if there are some who perhaps have given up simply because they feel they are so far behind. Can I encourage you to keep going, one foot at a time!! Don't worry too much which day you're on. What is key is just that rhythm of spending a few minutes each day with the Scriptures and with our Lord. It doesn't matter whether you're in Genesis, Exodus or Leviticus – try to press on, smile to yourself, dig deep – set aside 5 minutes today, and its surprising how the desire and hunger for the next instalment of God's Word will return to you. To draw on the analogy with marathon running once again, when everything in you feels like giving up because you can't run anymore or any faster, rather than stopping completely, take a break, walk for a bit, and quite often the hunger to start jogging again soon comes.

Background to the month and the Book of Numbers:

If the later part of the Book of Exodus gave us the directions of how to build the Tabernacle, then Leviticus has given us the rules and laws as to how worship should be conducted within it. This, together with instructions on such matters as the liturgical year, ceremonial washing, moral laws, and the Sabbath all form part of the instruction manual of the later priestly cast who managed and organised social and religious life of the people of Israel through the Temple.

Thus the key theme of holiness is established; that because of the holiness of God, His people likewise needed to be holy. How to become holy? Well, in the Jewish faith, which is very practical, the answer is, “observe and keep the Law – the Torah.” In other words, “do what it says on the tin: if the good Book says, “do this, or wash that,” you do it – faithfulness makes you holy.

But what next?

The Book of Numbers: All this took place at Mount Sinai – it is believed Moses and the people camped there for about a year whilst they established themselves more cohesively as a nation.

In the Book of Numbers the history continues with preparations for moving on, from Sinai to Canaan. The Book begins with the Census, from which the Book takes its name (the Book of the Numbers of men). But over the course of the Book we follow the people through their forty odd year journey from Sinai all the way to the edge of the River Jordan.

What can we hope to learn from the Book?

The key thing we can learn is that God is true, God is faithful. Even when the Israelites let God down (as they are perceived as doing in Num 14) God by His character remains faithful to His redeeming purpose. But this redeeming purpose now carries a second edge to its sword.

Up till now the people have seen themselves as God's covenant people fulfilling their vocation as the servant people of God, charged with establishing God's kingdom on earth. In other words they see themselves as a 'special' people, a people of privilege, as they still do today. In Numbers 14 Israel is seen as breaching that covenant. The people God called out of slavery, who He entered into covenant with at Mount Sinai, to whom He had revealed His holiness, also now had to discover that God could be a God of wrath, that which they enjoyed could and would be taken from them. Even Moses is not spared (Numbers 20).

This is all very sobering. God does indeed call people to follow Him, He gives them great privilege and great blessing. But the Israelites, and we, need to recognise with such privilege and blessing also comes responsibility and commission – to be His people and to be a blessing to the world. God will be God, with us or without us, He will be about His purpose in liberating and saving the world. That is what He is doing, and He is doing so because He is that sort of God. When we abuse or rebel against God or our calling we find that we are not immune from the other side of God's ongoing redeeming and refining fire and that is to experience His wrath. Indeed, even more so than those who can claim not to have known Him, or His purpose, and in the case of Moses and the Israelites they are told they will not enter the Holy Land, they will live out their lives in the desert.

This was a great shock to the Israelites, it may well come as a great shock to us. But if we perhaps ponder it for a while we see that God, although gracious, and generous in compassion and forgiveness, still has to be God – in other words perfecting the world in holiness and in love: to be one with Him we have to be transformed into His image not He be conformed to ours, albeit He would do even this so that we might not die but live.

A hard, but an important lesson. Enjoy though reading the Book of Numbers.

Scheme of Reading for May:

<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>	<u>Date:</u>	<u>Reference:</u>
Fri 1 st May	Lev 16:1 – 16:34	Tues 19 th May	Num 5:1 – 5:31
Sat 2 nd May	Lev 17:1 - 18:30	Wed 20th May	Num 6:1 – 6:27
Sun 3 rd May	-----	(Next Bible Together Meeting – 8.00pm in Church)	
Mon 4 th May	Lev 19:1 – 19:37	Thurs 21 st May	Num 7:1 – 7:89
Tues 5 th May	Lev 20:1 – 20:27	Fri 22 nd May	Num 8:1 – 8:26
Wed 6 th May	Lev 21:1 – 22:16	Sat 23 rd May	Num9:1 – 9:23
Thurs 7 th May	Lev 22:17 – 22:33	Sun 24 th May	-----
Fri 8 th May	Lev 23:1 – 23:25	Mon 25 th May	Num 10:1 – 10:36
Sat 9 th May	Lev 23:26 – 23:44	Tues 26 th May	Num 11:1 – 12:16
Sun 10 th May	-----	Wed 27 th May	Num 13:1 – 13:33
Mon 11 th May	Lev 24:1 – 24:23	Thurs 28 th May	Num 14:1 – 14:45
Tues 12 th May	Lev 25;1 – 25:55	Fri 29 th May	Num 15:1 – 15:41
Wed 13 th May	Lev 26:1 – 26:46	Sat 30 th May	Num 16:1 – 17:13
Thurs 14 th May	Lev 27:1 – 27:34	Sun 31 st May	-----
Fri 15 th May	Num 1:1 – 1:54	Mon 1 st June	Num 18:1 - 18:32
Sat 16 th May	Num 2:1 – 3:51	Sun 2 nd June	Num 19:1 – 19:22
Sun 17 th May	-----	Mon 3 rd June	Num 20:1 – 20:29
Mon 18 th May	Num 4:1 – 4:49	Tues 4 th June	Num 21:1 – 21:35