

**UNIT 1 - INTRODUCING THE OLD TESTAMENT****LESSON 5****THE WILDERNESS JOURNEYINGS**

In this lesson, we consider the books of Leviticus and Numbers.

LEVITICUS

Leviticus is an extensive guidebook as to how Israel was to work out in daily living, the promises and responsibilities of the covenant. That is, how to be priests and worshippers of God.

We will not study this book in detail. It consists of laws for the religious and civil life of Israel, including detailed instructions for sacrifice in chapters 1-7. Important ideas here are:

1. People's need to bring offerings to God on account of sin.
3. The perfect nature of the offering.

Here is a table of the main sacrifices:

	Subject	Main Features	Purpose
Burnt Offering Lev.1; 6:8-13	Perfect male animal ranging from bull for the high priest to doves for the poor.	Killed by worshipper, blood sprinkled on the altar by the priest. Whole offering burnt.	Atonement for sin.
Cereal Offering Lev. 6:14-23, Num.15:1-12	Flour, baked cakes or roasted grain.	Presented by the worshipper. Token part burnt on the altar, remainder eaten by priests.	Thanksgiving. Sin offering for the very poor.
Peace Offering Lev. 3; 7:11-18	Animal, male or female.	Killed by the worshipper, blood sprinkled on the altar by the priest. Specified portions burnt, rest eaten by priest and worshipper.	Expresses the desire for a right relationship with God.
Sin Offering Lev. 4:1-5:13; 5:24-30	Perfect animals ranging from bull for high priest to doves specified for the very poor.	Presented and killed by the worshipper. Blood sprinkled portions burnt. Remainder eaten by the priest.	Cleansing for unintentional sin.
Guilt Offering Lev.5:14-19; 7:1-10	Perfect ram of appropriate value.	As for sin offering.	As sin offering but restitution made to injured party.

The Day of Atonement (16:1-34) is also important, with its theme of substitutionary sacrifice. This annual event, marked by careful ritual and prepared for by fasting on the part of the people, was an overwhelmingly solemn occasion, unlike other feasts with their bursts of praise (23:40).



The plain garments Aaron wore, emphasised the austerity of the occasion. These facts showed:

- a) the awe-full holiness of God who is not to be trifled with, and
- b) the separation caused by sin and the need for humans to approach God with a penitent and contrite heart.

The imagery of the scapegoat (20-28) is vivid and meaningful. The goat sent out into the wilderness symbolised the bearing away of sin, which was effected by the sacrifice.

There are two major views as to how Leviticus came to be written.

1. Moses wrote it while at Sinai, through his encounter with God at the tent of meeting.
2. Moses, as a result of meeting God, gave Israel a set of rules which were handed on orally - modified and brought into a system (codified). Later, the people settled down and stopped their wanderings. The rules were finally written down when the system was threatened at the time of the exile.

NUMBERS

In the Hebrew Bible, this book is called “In the Wilderness”. The name “Numbers” comes from the later Greek version.

Like Exodus, this book contains both law and history, the latter covering a period of 38 years. It falls into three major divisions, and we will examine each in turn.

1. Preparation for leaving Sinai (1:1-10:10)

The time of this section is during the second month of the second year after the Exodus, and occupies the first nineteen days of that month. The census begins the book, and reveals that Israel has 603,550 fighting men, and the total population has been estimated at 2 million. Further laws follow, such as camp laws and regulations (e.g. which people are excluded from camp, such as lepers); laws of restitution in case of stealing and unfaithfulness and the interesting Nazarite vows (6:1-21).

The Passover at Sinai (9:1-14) and the information concerning the clouds and the trumpets, precede the resumption of their journey. The pillar of cloud is to direct their movements and the trumpets are to call them to assemble for meetings, battles and religious events.

2. From Sinai to the Plains of Moab (10:11-21:35)

Again in this section, we find a mixture of history and law. The complaint of the people about their food is answered by the provision of the quails (chapter 11). Miriam’s complaint brings a judgment upon her (chapter 12).



Evidently, Moses' intentions were to lead Israel into the Promised Land. Spies were sent out to see what lay ahead. Their discouraging report condemned the Israelites to another 38 years of wanderings (chapters 13 and 14).

Chapter 13, and the preceding chapters, show us the people's state of mind. They were disgruntled, complaining and dissatisfied. What the 12 men actually saw is described in 13:21-27. These are the objective facts. How Caleb and Joshua saw it is shown in 13:30. They had faith and saw with the eyes of God. They had spiritual perception and knew they could overcome the inhabitants of the land.

The 10 saw it (v31-33) as unconquerable. They looked through the eyes of humans. It took God one night to get Israel out of Egypt, but forty years to get Egypt out of Israel.

Further important events in this section are the rebellion against Moses (chapters 16 and 17), the deaths of Miriam and Aaron (chapter 20) and Edom's refusal to let Israel pass through her territory (chapter 20). Through various places, and in the face of opposition, the Israelites moved to the plains of Moab (chapter 21).

3. Events in the Plains of Moab (22:1-36:13)

Chapters 22-24. Balaam and his prophecies. Archaeological discoveries in Mesopotamia have revealed that priests of this type were quite common. Ugaritic literature has examples of oracles similar to Balaam's. God's control of men, even outside Israel, is shown by Balaam's encounter with the angel, for Balaam had intended to curse Israel in defiance of God.

Chapters 25-31. Various incidents including Israel's idolatry and the zeal of Phinehas (chapter 25), another census (chapter 26), various laws (chapters 28-30) and the war of vengeance on Midian (chapter 31).

Chapter 32. The inheritance of Reuben. God and Manasseh on the east side of Jordan.

Chapter 33:1-49. This list of Israel's encampments indicates the route which they had taken. Unfortunately, most of the places mentioned cannot now be identified.

Chapters 33:50-36:13. Here we have the allotment of Israel's territory west of Jordan, and further provisions for life within the land. The cities of refuge are an interesting example of divine mercy, overshadowing the old code of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth".

R. K. Harrison says of this book:

"Numbers must never be regarded as merely comprising, a catalogue of the outstanding incidents which marked the Israelite sojourn in the Wilderness. Not only did the book record such events, but it interpreted them so as to demonstrate covenant love of God for His people in every emergency of distress and danger, as well as the stern and severe judgments of God against apostasy and rebellion ... The theme of divine holiness, so apparent in Leviticus, is also central to the theology of Numbers. While God dwells in the midst of His people, His innate sanctity demands that any who approach Him, do so through the carefully prescribed rules."



QUESTIONS

Question 1:

What do you think is the purpose of the book of Leviticus?

Question 2:

Briefly describe what happened on the Day of Atonement (16:1-34).

Question 3:

What is the symbolism in the Day of Atonement?

Question 4:

Briefly summarize (in note form) what is involved in a Nazarite vow (Numbers 6:1-21).

Question 5:

Read Numbers 13:17-33. What did the spies actually see (21-24)?

What was the reaction of the 10 spies (v31)? What was Caleb and Joshua's reaction (v30)?

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY

"As Christians we often fail to appropriate all that God has for us. Our grumbling and complaining rob us of the joy of full communion with Him and our fears can rob us of the liberty which should be ours in Christ". How does this tie in with the people's reaction to the spies' report in Numbers 13 and 14? How does it apply to you personally?