

## **MARCH 5**

### **Numbers 4-5**

#### Numbers 4

What I find interesting in all of this is the amount of organization the Lord put into founding the nation. Especially because of His holiness, and also because He was making a symbolic point regarding approaching Him, God took great care in putting the worship and logistics of marching and moving and packing up, etc., into a form that the people could follow.

Often they say in leadership to give people responsibility but not to prescribe how they have to get the job done. More often than not, people need direction at the beginning of anything, and slowly they become competent and independent. God is creating a nation here, so He is giving very specific detail in very important things.

Take note of what each of the four groups were to do. This will become more interesting when the Lord gives them their order of marching. If you made a chart with the tabernacle in the middle and the tribes around it, it will make sense later.

Vs. 1-20 The sons of Kohath had a great honor and great danger. What is interesting is that Aaron and his sons went in first and prepared everything in the Holy Place and packed it and covered it, until it was just goatskins and poles. Then, when everything was properly concealed, they called the sons of Kohath. If they touched or even saw any of the furniture of the holy places, they died. Aaron and his sons had the responsibility to protect them.

Isn't it cool that the Levites could "retire" at 50? Actually, it didn't mean that those younger or older couldn't help in other ways, but those people who were 30-50 carried the tabernacle and its parts.

As a very real object lesson, God underscores His holiness by forbidding the people to even look upon the items in the Holy Place and Holy of Holies that represent His presence and His provision to them. In 1 and 2 Samuel 6 (what a coincidence that in both books it's in chapter 6), we'll see what happens when well-intentioned people disregard God's holiness and commands regarding the ark of the covenant. All of these restrictions would also look forward to the time when the veil would be torn, and we, as disciples of our Lord, could stand before His throne and know His grace.

Vs. 21-28 The sons of Gershon took down all of the hanging skins and coverings. These were not wool blankets. The panels that made up the tabernacle and the outer court were all animal skins and probably had some weight to them.

Vs. 29-33 The sons of Merari transported the framework for everything.

Vs. 34-49 Notice that v. 47 specifies that this age grouping was for bearing burdens. As I read this I'm impressed with the detail and planning God put into this. We like spontaneity in worship, but God also likes things to be done decently and in order. Discipline in following Christ has fallen on hard times too; but I think you could make a symbolic point from how God ordered the life and worship of Israel, that to follow Christ in the harvest, we do it better if we have discipline and structure.

#### Numbers 5

Vs. 1-4 Now we are easing back into laws for governing the nation of Israel. Since, for the first time, the "camp" has now been defined, they were to enact the regulations for lepers and those who were unclean. There was to be some area of housing, "outside the camp," where those who were defiled could stay. Notice, particularly with the lepers, they didn't send them away. They had to remain outside the "city limits," but were still a part of Israel. Remember, this emphasis

on uncleanness was symbolic in the community of Israel for their need to remain ready for the worship and service of God.

Vs. 5-10 This is a slant on a law we saw earlier in Leviticus, when a person realized they had done something wrong and restitution had to be made restoring money or livestock. This has a very important connection to worship and keeping the worship of God pure. This is similar in spirit to what Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 5:23-24, *So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* God is not excited about worship from those who have hurt others without making up and making restitution.

In the case of needing to make restitution but the person was dead and had no family, they still had to make restitution. It would be given to God, specifically to the priest. No statute of limitations here. This would be used for the financial provision for the priests.

Vs. 11-31 Well, this is a strange one. The general idea is that if a man were overcome by *the spirit of jealousy*, he was to go to the priest and there would be a supernatural way of figuring out if his wife had been unfaithful. The entire thing was spiritually instigated. It seems that God is singling out the adulterous woman and not the man; but if a woman was caught, the man she committed adultery with would also be caught. There was a law for dealing with adulterers. This provision deals with the detection of marital defilement; and it works off the idea that the man, being the head of the family, would be roused by this supernatural impulse.

Whatever it was that would happen to the woman was awful and also visual. It wasn't a "scarlet letter," but instead a life-long disability that would not look very appealing. It would be a visual warning to the entire people not to be unfaithful, either to each other, or to God. God identifies Himself as jealous for Israel. Just as a note, later in Numbers, the people will be enticed to worship Baal sexually. At the end of Joshua (22:17), Phinehas mentions that there was still evidence of that sin among the people. That suggests to me, that God allowed some physical disability to be associated with that sin to keep it as a warning before the people.

Don't ask me why I think v. 28 is funny. So what if you're an innocent 50-year-old woman. As a result of your husband's jealousy and this ritual, you're going to be rewarded! And get pregnant!

I'm not sure what your impressions and observations will be, but I'll make a couple of general ones.

First, note the large amount of text and attention given to this. It must have been important.

Second, to take it to the priest, once they were in the land, meant a "road trip." So this was a serious thing and this was the only valid way to work through this sort of a problem. The man had to do the right thing and take her to the tabernacle to the priest.

Along with this issue, the people were to take all severe matters to the priest, because he carried the Urim and Thummim as a way of finding the will of God.

Third, inherent in this entire law, was the symbol of God being the husband and Israel being His wife. What is clear in this law is that any unfaithfulness will be found out and punishment will follow. When God says that He is a jealous God, it brings the symbol of marriage to mind.

As disciples it is easy to slip and pursue all sorts of things besides our Lord and His will in the harvest. God understands; but staying close to Christ, in His Word, in the company of other disciples, helps us to stay focused and faithful to the One who loves us and commissions us to share His love.

**Mark 12:18-37**

Vs. 18-27 We know this story. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection and were trying to get Jesus to give some answer they could ridicule. Oddly enough, most of the priests were Sadducees. Apparently this question had worked well with the scribes and Pharisees, making them look foolish in the eyes of the public. This was a question like, "how many angels can stand on the head of a pin?" To even answer this question made you look silly.

V. 25 So Jesus gave them new information that showed their lack of understanding of the Scripture and of the spiritual life after death. All of this made perfect sense, and in the sight of the people the Sadducees were reeling from this unexpected insight and answer.

Vs. 26-27 Here was the knock-out. Not only didn't they know the power of God; but again, in a very simple and obvious text, they showed that they didn't know the Scriptures. The interesting thing with this illustration is that the Sadducees argued about the interpretation of the law. The story Jesus used was about Moses, but it was about him before the law was given and it taught theology. The Sadducees weren't expecting this passage of Scripture or what it taught.

What stands out to me is that they *knew neither the Scriptures nor the power of God*. How many Christians is this true of? When Jesus said they didn't know the Scriptures, He wasn't saying they didn't know any of it, but they didn't have the relationship with God that made sense of it all and that makes the Word alive and unified. So many Christians don't know enough of the Bible to get beneath the surface and find the living pulse of God, much less be led by the Spirit through the day. Many others know the verses, but there is no love of Christ that makes the Word a light for their lives and to a lost world.

So where do we need to see the power of God? If it is not in the harvest, seeing the lost saved and becoming fully devoted followers of Christ, I'm afraid all we're looking for is a carnival show or a "feel good" experience, like the people mentioned in Matthew 7:21-29.

Vs. 28-34 Although Luke (Luke 20:39) alludes to this scribe, Mark gives us "the rest of the story." It shows that there were some men of spiritual understanding who had open hearts. This scribe was moved by the wisdom and understanding of Jesus' answer. Although the scribes were mostly Pharisees, this man's interest went beyond the political, and he was truly spiritually motivated.

Vs. 29-31 Jesus is putting Deuteronomy 6:4-5 together with Leviticus 19:18. The two commandments are really a summary of the Ten Commandments. The first four have to do with God and the last six with our neighbor. Paul uses this teaching in Romans, saying that *love your neighbor* fulfills the law.

V. 34 The sincerity and truth of this encounter stopped the conflict. The opponents of Jesus were humiliated, and when they saw that Jesus actually complimented the scribe, they had nothing more to say.

Vs. 35-37 Generally, the common people understood that the title, *the son of David*, referred to the Messiah. The leaders seem to have reduced this understanding to the Messiah being "only" the son of David. They apparently felt that David was superior to the Messiah.

Notice again how Jesus shows in a very clear insightful passage of Scripture that the Messiah was God and superior to all, and that the leaders didn't understand the Scripture at all. Notice too that the people rejoiced in this clear teaching.

As we follow the Lord in the harvest, teaching His Word, we need to follow His example. We need to know the Scriptures so well that we can simply and clearly show people the power of God and the truth of His Word.

## **Psalm 48**

(Another of the psalms of the sons of Korah)

None of us likes hard times. I really, really don't like them. But think of this. If it is true that they wrote in and around the dangerous and stressful times of the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem under Hezekiah, look at the praise that came out of that dark time. Even the psalms of David reflect the joy and wonder of being delivered by God from threat, danger and death.

You can understand that this kind of great deliverance not only was an amazing thing to Jerusalem, but if the Assyrian army just lost 185,000 men, especially during a time they were making a play to become the world empire of the day, all other nations would not only notice, but they would be afraid to approach Jerusalem, even for a visit. Israel was in the news all over that world. When the ambassadors from Babylon visited Hezekiah after his illness in 2 Kings 20, I'm sure they approached Jerusalem with awe. You can sense some of this awe of the nations in this psalm.

Imagine what God will produce in us if we are in the harvest with Christ, battling for the souls of the lost, ourselves in danger, following in faith, relying on God, living to bring Him glory by bearing much fruit and so proving to be disciples of our Lord.

Vs. 1-3 Since the ridicule of the Assyrians was brought to the gates of Jerusalem, Zion is being exalted as the throne of God and the city of God.

Vs. 4-8 *In the city of the Lord of Hosts*, all remained calm; but the kings who came against Israel were all humbled.

Vs. 9-11 God's *steadfast love* was promised to Abraham, that through Israel all the nations of the world would look toward Israel to be blessed.

### **Proverbs 10:26**

*And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.* (1 Tim. 3:10) The words in 1 Timothy make a good application to this proverb.