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Running Commentary on the Echoes Bible, Volume IV: Numbers & 1 Corinthians

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Introduction

The following work considers the texts from two Canonical Books, Namely Numbers and the First Letter to the Corinthians; it is therefore apposite to familiarise readers with the character and context of the books, their writers, their audience and their reception to provide a palpable background.

Numbers

The Book of Numbers, known in Hebrew as Bamidbar ("In the Wilderness"), is the fourth book of the Torah that chronicles the Israelites' 38-year journey from Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab. The English name comes from the Greek and Latin translations (*Arithmoi/Numeri*), based on the two major population censuses of the Israelites found in chapters 1–4 and 26.

The texts blend narratives, historical travel logs, census lists, legal instructions, purification rites, sacrifices, Nazirite vows and other sundry matters. The challenges facing the people following the Exodus account of escape from Egypt now deal with the preparation to enter the land and the people's behaviour.

Numbers importantly addresses questions of spiritual authority through Moses' leadership challenges, Aaron's priestly role, and various rebellions. It establishes principles for godly leadership while showing the costs of challenging divinely appointed authority.

The late Chief Rabbi of the UK, Jonathan Sacks, remarked that it is among the most searching, self-critical books in all of literature about what Nelson Mandela called "the long walk to freedom." Its message is that there is no shortcut to liberty. Numbers is not an easy book to read, nor is it an optimistic one. It is a sober warning set in the midst of a text – the Hebrew Bible – that still remains the West's master narrative of hope.

Numbers serves as both a historical account and a theological meditation on faithfulness, revealing how God's character remains constant even when his people falter.

It is important to remember the eschatological view found in the accepted (undisputed) Pauline epistles: Paul consistently anticipated an imminent parousia (the sudden, visible arrival or second coming of Christ).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 and 1 Corinthians 15:51–52, Paul expected the parousia to come quickly, and that it would take place before his death.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17, Paul twice employs the first-person plural "we": "We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord," which may be taken to mean "we Christians who are alive survive until the parousia."

In 1 Corinthians 15:51f, the same idea appears where the "we" emphasized in verse 52b ("we shall be changed") indicates that Paul placed himself among the survivors at the parousia.

In Romans 13:11–12, Paul urges moral alertness by declaring that "the night is nearly over; the day is almost here" and salvation is nearer than when they first believed. In 1 Corinthians 7:29, he states that "the time is short" from now on, pressing an urgency into earthly decisions. [1]

Although Paul viewed the parousia as perpetually imminent, he refrained from proposing a precise calendrical date, warning instead that the day would come unexpectedly like a “thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

The First Corinthian Correspondence

The Epistle known as First Corinthians, one of the accepted Paulines, was composed by Paul in Ephesus around 55 CE. Paul had spent around eighteen months establishing a church there before proceeding on further missionary activities. Corinth was a major port city in the ancient world with several temples, making it a huge economic-religious center in the Roman world. Scholars estimate the church numbered between 40 and 150 members at the time of writing. Churches generally met in believers' homes, such as those of Gaius or Stephanus, which accommodated between 30 and 50 people.

The Epistle is broken up into five main parts and a final greeting. The five sections correspond to the five problems Paul addresses, and the letter reads like a collection of short essays.

- Internal rivalries.
- Tolerating incestuous relationships and pride.
- Members taking each other to a public court in front of non-believers.
- Eating food sacrificed to idols.
- Misuse of spiritual gifts, behaving selfishly during the Lord's Supper, and causing chaos in their gatherings.

Quite a list considering the small number of people involved.

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Paul employing Numbers as foundational to his teaching becomes very obvious almost immediately once realizing that both the Corinthians, and the children of Israel having just come out of Egypt had huge problems, both coming from a highly idolatrous environment and both peoples on the whole had an extremely low level of spiritual purity.

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In texts like Numbers 1:51 and 3:10, a stranger, *Ger*, is anyone who is not of the tribe of Levi or the family of Aaron. The core idea was that unauthorized contact by an outsider would defile or desecrate the sacred space and bring lethal spiritual danger. The Corinthians behaviours are also defiling; they are behaving as strangers.

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In recent decades, exploratory work has occurred at a number of candidate sites for Mount Sinai, including the traditional site in the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. One candidate that shows considerable promise is Jabal Al-Lawz in Northwest Saudi Arabia. Signs of water flowing east, an interesting altar, a potential “cave of Elijah,” grave sites to the north, and a feature that many consider to be the site of the golden calf are just a few of the features that add to the interest.

The now-dry streambed flows into the intersection of two large wadis, one running north-south, and one running east-west, that intersection being at the center of the satellite image below. The wadis are wide, but surrounded by hills. If the tabernacle was erected at that intersection, the twelve tribes would necessarily be spread out in all four directions into the shape of a cross. Moreover, this giant feature of two intersecting wadis, each spreading exactly in all four

compass directions, is unmatched in all that area of Saudi Arabia. Said another way, no location would be a more perfect fulfilment of the original placement of the tribes as God commanded in Numbers, than at the base of Jabal Al-Lawz.



Google Maps

In Numbers chapter 4, the Kohathite Levites are given strict instructions to wrap the holy furniture—such as the Ark of the Covenant, the table of showbread, and the lampstand—using precise layers of blue cloth, scarlet cloth, and fine leather (sealskin or goatskin) before moving the camp.

Note the continuity with strangers above. These physical coverings shielded ordinary human eyes from looking directly upon lethal holy objects and thus defiling them. In addition, the coverings also protected the items from desert dust and storms, averting divine wrath or death upon the bearers.

The underlying concept of covering in the Torah is tied to the Hebrew verb kaphar, which literally means “to cover” and is translated as “to make atonement”.

Just as the physical hides and cloths veiled the sanctuary's items, blood sacrifices and rituals acted as a spiritual “covering” that mercifully hid human sin and guilt from the pure judgment of God.

p.22

There was no cure or healing for leprosy at that time; the “cured leprosy” of the biblical text was almost certainly some other skin condition that was not recognized as being distinctive. It was a defilement, not the disease itself—hence the reader must be careful with what is translated as “leprosy.” In other cases it should properly be interpreted as a form of defilement. Nevertheless, defilement required the appropriate remedial measures.

p. 25

While the Bible explicitly states that both men and women could take the Nazirite vow (Numbers 6:2), no specific women are named in the biblical text as having personally completed or taken a formal Nazirite vow. Hannah: In 1 Samuel 1:10–11, Hannah prayed for a son (Samuel) and vowed to dedicate him to the Lord as a Nazirite for his lifetime, but the vow was made for her son, not for herself. Manoah’s Wife (the mother of Samson): In Judges 13, an angel instructed her to abstain from wine and unclean food while pregnant because her son Samson would be a Nazirite from birth, but her personal name is never recorded in a list of Nazirites

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it is considered that Nazirites were given temporary quasi-priestly status. Note that James, the brother of Jesus, prayed in the priestly parts of the Temple. A Nazirite’s restrictions were actually more intense than a standard priest's. For example, an ordinary priest was permitted to mourn and touch the dead bodies of close immediate family members, whereas a Nazirite could not touch a corpse under any circumstance

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Concerning Numbers 7:13, “According to the Shekel of the Sanctuary”

The shekel of the sanctuary is mentioned in the Book of Numbers (and other biblical books like Exodus and Leviticus). The word shekel literally means “weight”. Marketplace or merchant weights often varied, but the “sanctuary shekel” was the official royal or sacred standard kept by the priests. The unit of weight was equal to 20 gerahs (roughly 11.4 to 11.5 grams or about 0.4 ounces). It served as the fixed sacred benchmark for religious taxes, vows, and redemptions, ensuring that weights used for the tabernacle were precise and untampered with. The reason for the money changers in the Temple was that they were there for precisely this matter.

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In Hebrew thought, sitting between 10 (Law/Completeness) and 12 (Governmental perfection/Tribes), 11 marks a waiting period before a shift.

An 11-day journey from Mount Sinai (Horeb) to the Promised Land took the Israelites 40 years due to rebellion, linking 11 to missed breakthrough or delayed destiny.

Joseph was the 11th son of Jacob, whose life of dreams and trials served as a major prophetic bridge for his family. After Judas' departure, the original apostolic circle functioned temporarily as 11 disciples before being restored to 12.

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It would also make sense if Hobab was neither Jethro nor his son (Moses’ brother-in-law) but just an unrighteous man.

Numbers 10:29: Identifies Hobab as the “son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses’ father-in-law,” making Hobab likely the brother of Moses’ wife, Zipporah (and thus Moses’ brother-in-law).

Judges 4:11: Some traditional translations and interpretations refer to him directly as the “father-in-law” of Moses. The ancient Hebrew word hoten (ḥōṯēn) is broad, meaning a relative by marriage, which may alternatively imply a broader familial term.

The idea that Reuel/Jethro was also known by or interchanged with Hobab in local tradition is not in itself definitive. Jethro was known by seven descriptive names, sometimes better understood as titles thus Hobab—cherished or beloved—not the same person.

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Though voiced against Moses and Aaron, God viewed the complaints as a direct rejection of His divine authority and presence.

By wishing to return to Egypt, the people trivialized their brutal enslavement and openly despised the Promised Land that God swore to give them.

Murmuring replaces faith and gratitude with active unbelief, making it impossible for the community to move forward or rely on divine provision. It is highly destructive.

Because the grumbling manifested as a fundamental rejection of God's covenant, it resulted in severe judgments, including plagues, fires at Taberah, and the sentence of wandering for 40 years.

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The Real Issue

While the marriage is the stated reason, the verses immediately reveal a deeper underlying issue of **Jealousy and spiritual authority**. They asked,

“Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us?”

Many historical and midrashic interpreters argue that the text refers to Zipporah, the Midianite whom Moses married in Exodus 2:21. In this view, “Cushite” (often associated with ancient Ethiopia or parts of Arabia) may have been used as a broad term for a foreigner.

Other scholars suggest Zipporah had either died or passed away by this time. They believe Moses subsequently married a second woman who was a native of the region of Cush (modern-day Sudan/Ethiopia).

In reality, Moses was sanctified by his wife’s actions.

Miriam and Aaron were both married and living with their spouses, which underlay the conflict and highlighted the distinction between their situations and that of Moses. Both were judged, Miriam being made a leper

Therefore when God spoke to “Moses, Aaron and Miriam,” it corresponds to “as God has called each, so let him walk.” Indeed, their situations were different from one another. To summarize, Paul does not appear to blame Moses for the separation from Zipporah, as his was pragmatic due to circumstances, not a typical divorce or separation.

The celibacy following her return was part of the rituals of pre-war sanctifications, and Numbers 12:3 reminds us of Moses's humility, consistent with Traditional Jewish Commentaries (TJCs) — but Paul strengthens that claim by adding that Moses's willingness to remain in the marriage, even though Zipporah separated from him, sanctifies both her and their children.

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More on Parousia…

Paul starts by saying **"you have not sinned."** There is a local underlying element here: the city of Corinth was filled with extreme views. Some factions in the church (often called ascetics) were arguing that sex and marriage were unspiritual and that true holiness required complete celibacy. Paul firmly corrects this error by validating marriage as entirely holy, but he offers singleness as a highly strategic, practical preference for ministry rather than a moral requirement largely due to his position that the parousia (The Second Coming) was imminent.

p. 45 bottom

In the literal text of the Hebrew Bible, Miriam is never explicitly stated to have married Caleb, and the biblical text does not mention her having a husband or children.

However, according to classical Rabbinic tradition and the Talmud (such as in Tractate Sotah 12a), sages identified Miriam with certain figures and alternative names mentioned in 1 Chronicles (like Azubah or Ephrath). Through this exegetical interpretation, tradition teaches that Miriam did marry Caleb the son of Jephunneh (or Hezron) and that they bore Hur.

Josephus offers a slightly different perspective, recording instead that Miriam was married to Hur rather than Caleb.

p. 53

Paul defends the accusation that he is not a real apostle because he was not one of the twelve by employing horao/*heōraka*, treating his encounter with the risen Lord just as objective and real as the physical appearances Jesus made to Peter, James, and the other early disciples.

p. 54

Possibly referring to the fact that during the wanderings, "others" attached themselves to Israel en route, some of whom were part of the initial departure from Egypt.

p. 55

Does Paul despite his assumed modesty view himself in the manner of a priest and apostle? Note carefully that while he does not use the formal title of an institutional "priest" for himself, he explicitly describes his apostolic work in sacrificial, priestly terms!

p. 63

The text of Numbers is not translated well here and is capable of being misunderstood.

et-avon ha-mikdash. Et avon is 'bear responsibility.' Iniquity in modern English would make this read as though they are bearing sins that belong to the tabernacle, which makes no sense at all.

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Kadesh

“Kadesh” mentioned here is sometimes understood as “Kadesh Barnea.” This entry assumes the two are one in the same.

Kadesh Barnea: a major desert oasis and camp where the Israelites stayed during their wilderness wanderings. It appears primarily in Numbers 13, 14, 20, 27, and 33, meaning a place of holy wanderings. However t was a place of constant tension due rebellion and negativity

The problem then is, if the two places are the same, then our proposed echo has Paul encouraging people to hold firm to rebellion and negativity, in which case the echo would need to be withdrawn.

p. 82

In the Corinthian text love is a poor translation in the instances of the passage; in the text it is *ἀγάπην*. There are three words for love in Greek: eros, physical love; phile, brotherly love; and agape, the love of God. Paul therefore is speaking in the agape sense, which is far more dynamic in concert with rest of the passage.

p. 83

Balak, the King of Moab, served the traditional gods of Moab, most notably Chemosh, who was the national deity of the Moabites, and Baal-peor, the local manifestation of Baal worship at Mount Peor.

p. 84

Here is an aspect of henotheism. Balaam is running around looking for the right geographical location [mountain] where he thought the resident deity might hold authority and allow him success for Balak.

p. 90

I find the first echo to not have a substantive connection. A deeper view is needed.

p. 91

W When Tamar’s pregnancy advanced to the point where she could no longer conceal it, the Midrash says, “she would tap upon her stomach and boast, ‘I am big with kings and redeemers!’” (Genesis Rabbah 85).

The sages sometimes call the Messiah “Son of Perez.” The twins in Tamar’s womb have been seen as portending two messiahs: Messiah son of Joseph and Messiah son of David. Zerah (Zerach, זֶרַח), whose name means “dawning,” represents Messiah son of David. The prophet Isaiah described the great redemption of the Messianic Era as a dawning:

Arise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen (zarach) upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth and deep darkness the peoples; but the LORD will rise upon you and His glory will appear upon you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising (zarach). (Isaiah 60:1-3)

The origin of this number typically stems from a few other distinct areas of New Testament analysis:

- **General Evangelism Verbs:** According to linguistic analyses of New Testament Greek, there are roughly 142 verbs and 19 nouns used across the entire New Testament to describe the act of proclaiming the Gospel.
- **1 Corinthians 15 Structural Verbs:** In 1 Corinthians 15—where Paul directly defines the Good News of the resurrection—he uses a highly structured format of 12 antithetically paired verbs (six pairs) to contrast death and the resurrection.
- **Verse Numbers:** The chapter most famous for Paul defining the Gospel is 1 Corinthians 15, and a highly cited breakdown of the physical body versus the resurrected body happens specifically in verses 42–44. [1,2]

When Paul directly defines the core mechanics of the Good News, he actually relies on just **four primary verbs** found in the correspondence:

1. Christ **died** (*apethanen*) for our sins.
2. He **was buried** (*etaphe*).
3. He **was raised** (*egegertai*) on the third day.
4. He **appeared** (*ophthe*) to Peter and the apostles. [1,2]