Numbers

Notes on the Holy Book of Numbers

- Resources
- Introduction & Overview
- Numbers 1-4: First Census
- Numbers 5-10: Preparation for Leaving Sinai
- Numbers 11-12: The People Complain
- Numbers 13-14: Twelve Spies
- Numbers 15: Laws
- Numbers 16-17: Rebellion Against the Priests
- Numbers 18: Support for the Levites
- Numbers 19: Laws of Purification
- Numbers 20-21: Conquest of Israel
- Numbers 22-24: Balaam
- Numbers 25: Israel's Harlotry in Moab
- Numbers 27: Joshua the New Leader
- Numbers 28-30: Offerings and Vows
- Numbers 31-35: Conquest of Canaan
- Numbers 36: Marriage of Female Heirs

Resources

Patristic Resources

- Ancient Christian Texts
  - Origen: Homilies on Numbers
- Classics of Western Spirituality
  - Gregory of Nyssa: Life of Moses

Literary Sources

- Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty
  - Studies in the Holy Bible: The Book of Numbers
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Audio/Video Resources

- Fr. Daoud Lamei
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ig1T1y-nKy4
- Ancient Faith Radio
  - Search the Scriptures Podcast
- Christian History Podcast
- BibleProject
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tp5MIrMZFqo
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zebxH-5o-SQ
- OverviewBible
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvpCJ4qhsJA

Introduction & Overview

Overview

- Travel Log of the Israelites from Sinai to Canaan
  - This trip should take two weeks by foot... it takes forty years
    - It took 40 days to get Israel out of Egypt
    - It took 40 years to get Egypt out of Israel
  - So we covered about one year and 2 months since Israel left Egypt through the wilderness of Sinai (Numbers 1:1), through the receiving of the Law, the golden calf, the building of the tabernacle, consecration of the priests and all those laws. The end half of Exodus and all the way through Leviticus and the first half of Numbers covers about 1 year and 2 months. The second half of Numbers covers 40 years (Deuteronomy 1:3)
    - "on the first *day* of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt," (Numbers 1:1)
    - "In the fortieth year, in the eleventh month, on the first *day* of the month" (Deuteronomy 1:3)
- A good understanding of Numbers will help you to have a good understanding of the rest of the Bible
  - We see the generational impact of people who are given the choice to take God's word, or choose not to obey God.
  - We see that God always finds a way to spare those who are loyal to Him, and spare a whole new generation and allow them to make their own decisions

Structure

- Three locations, with travel sections between them; three groups of character focal points at each stage
  - Chapter 1-10: Mt Sinai
    - Taking the first census and arranging the tribes (1-4)
    - Laws about ritual purity (5-10)
    - **Characters**
      - **Israel**: Numbered and arranged
      - **Levites**: Not numbered; arranged at the tabernacle
      - **God**: Provides shelter when Israel moves, center of the camp when Israel stops - Protector and Guide
  - Chapter 10-12: Traveling
    - Complain about Manna (11)

    - Miriam and Moses complain (12)
    - **Characters**
      - **Israel**: Complaining
      - **Levites**: Complaining (Aaron and Miriam)
      - **God**: Punishes the complaints
  - Chapter 13-19: Wilderness of Paran
    - Twelve Spies (13-14)
    - Rebellion of Korah (16-17)
    - **Characters**
      - **Israel**: Rebel (kill Moses and go back to Egypt)
      - **Levites**: Rebel (Korah)
      - **God**: Bans first generation, Affirms Moses and Aaron
  - Chapter 20-21: Traveling
    - Complain about water and Moses (20)
    - Bronze Serpent (21)
    - **Characters**
      - **Israel**: Complains
      - **Levites**: Aaron and Miriam die; Moses will die too
      - **God**: Judges, heals, fights
  - Chapter 22-36: Plains of Moab
    - Balaam (22-25)
    - New Generation Census (26)
    - Tribes begin to settle (32-36)
    - **Characters**
      - **Israel**: Numbered again
      - **Levites**: Phineas is chosen
      - **God**: Blessing Israel through Balaam

Themes

- Israel's Rebellion vs God's Faithfulness
  - This book contains the majority of Israel's complaining:
    - Complain about Manna (11)
    - Complain about priesthood (Aaron, Miriam) (12)
    - Complain about the land (13-14)
    - Complain about Priesthood (Korah, Dathan) (16-17)
    - Complain about water (20)
  - God still provides and has mercy
    - Gives them Manna and water
    - Gives them the bronze serpent
    - Promise of the Messiah
  - OT References
    - Isaiah 63

        - Ezekiel 20
        - Jeremiah 7
        - Psalm 78
        - Psalm 95
        - Psalm 106
    - NT References
        - 1 Corinthians 10
        - Hebrews 4-5
- God brings judgment... AND shows mercy
    - "Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off." (Romans 11:22)
    - Judgment by prohibiting them from entering the Promised Land, and yet mercy by leaving it open for their children
    - Judgment by serpents, and yet mercy by the bronze serpent
    - Judgment on Korah and his followers, and yet the sons of Korah author some of the Psalms in our Scripture
    - Judgment on Miriam with leprosy, and yet mercy when it went away in seven days

Symbols

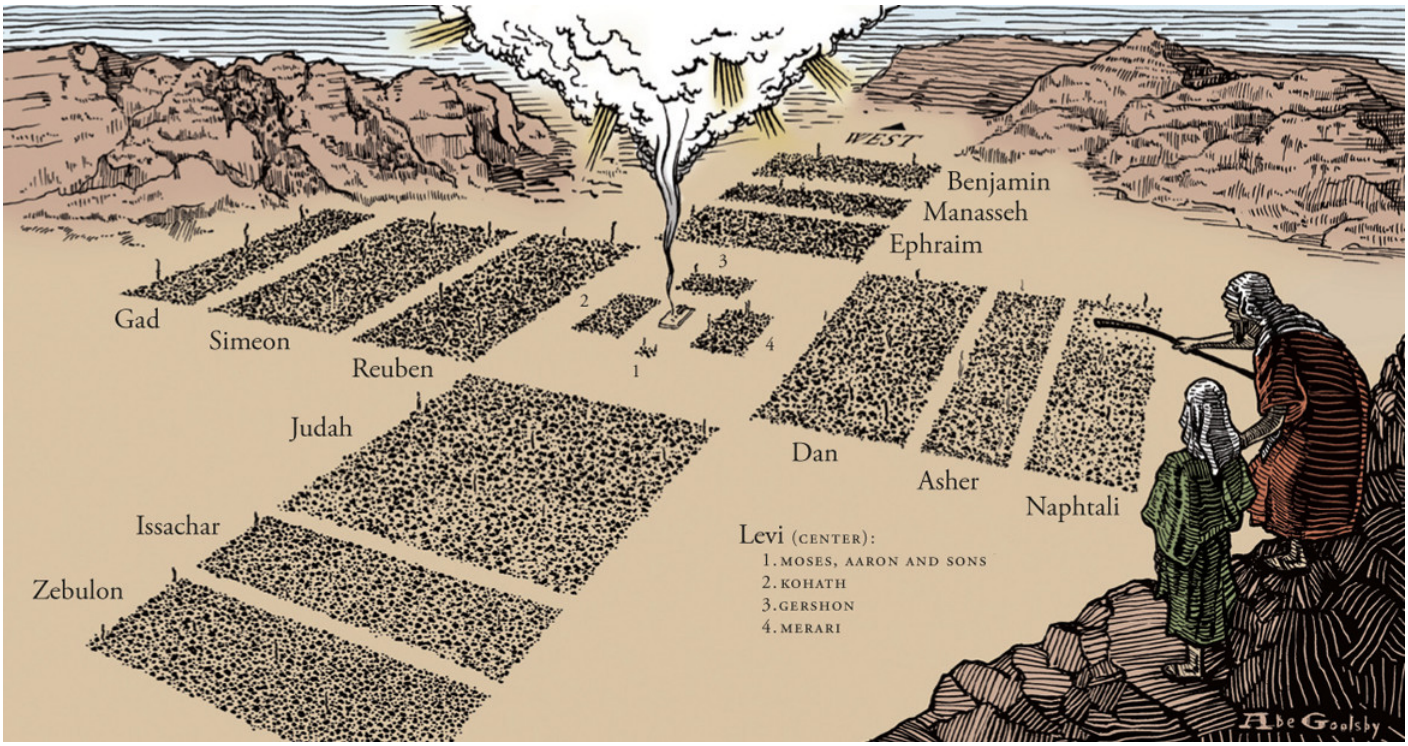
Patristic Guides

- St. Gregory of Nyssa - "The Life of Moses"
- Origen - "Homilies on Numbers"
- Theodoret of Cyrus - "Questions on Numbers"

Numbers 1-4: First Census

Numbers 1-2: The First Census

- Why count the people? [Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty 1]
  - To confirm God's promise to Abraham that his descendants will be multiplied
  - To assert the concern of God to everyone of His people that He is the Shepherd and He knows His sheep
  - To separate between the Israelite and the foreigner, that all may draw near to Him (Eph 2:14)
  - Because God is a God of Order not confusion
  - To ensure a documented genealogy of the people of Israel so that the identity of Christ can be confirmed and validated when He comes
- Why did God wait to count the people? [Origen 1.2.2, Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty 1]
  - After they were separated from Satan (Pharaoh)
  - After they have gone through the second birth through Baptism (Red Sea)
  - After they had struggled against the powers of darkness (Amalekites)
  - After they had consumed the Bread of Life and the Living Water (Manna and Water from Rock)
  - After they had heard the word of God in His commandment (The Law)
  - After they had attained a life of virtue through God's dwelling (Tabernacle)
  - After they had obtained a permanent union with God through sacrifice (Sacrifices)
  - Then they were counted
- How did they do the census?
  - Each tribe had a leader chosen by God
  - The names of the leaders correspond to that of the tribe (see Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty on Ch 2)
- Why didn't they count women, children, slaves? [Origen 1.1.1]
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Numbers 3-4: Levites

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Numbers 5-10: Preparation for Leaving Sinai

Numbers 5

Introduction

Consecration and purification came at three levels:

- The camp as a whole (1-4)
- The personal level (5-10)
- The family level (11-29)

Ceremonially Unclean Persons Isolated (1-4)

- God's concern is for the totality of the group
- Why does God command the ceremonially unclean to dwell outside the camp?
  - He was using issues of little importance to give instruction in the truly significant. If touching a dead body put you outside of a camp, how much worse would murder be? If an involuntary discharge made you unclean, how much worse is sexual immorality? If a leper is unclean, how much more is he who commits sins?

Confession and Restitution (5-10)

- God is also concerned about each individual - He teaches them here to confess their sins and to compensate (restitution) for their wrongdoings, and to offer a sacrifice for atonement

Unfaithful Wives (11-31)

- Every home is a small church
  - It has leaders (parents) and students (children)
  - It has prayer and Bible readings
  - The family must remain sacred in order for all the souls in the family to be saved
  - Adultery destroys the home and breaks the unity of the marriage

- 18: "After the priest has had the woman stand before the Lord, he shall loosen her hair and place in her hands the reminder-offering, the grain offering for jealousy, while he himself holds the bitter water that brings a curse."
  - It was a Jewish tradition for a married woman to cover her hair. And if a married woman committed adultery, then her veil would be removed to reveal her hair as a shaming. This is why in the story of Susanna when the two elders accuse her, and they want her face to be uncovered so they can gaze upon her beauty - her face is uncovered. But in our iconography, when we write an icon of Susanna, we always have her hair covered because she was innocent and found innocent by the wisdom of God through Daniel

Numbers 6

Laws of the Nazirite (1-21)

- Nazirite Vow was a vow of commitment and dedication and consecration to God
  - Original source of asceticism and monasticism
- Some were consecrated from birth, and some for a specific time
  - Samson was consecrated from birth and is called a Nazirite
  - St. John the Baptist is never called a Nazirite but we know that he did not drink wine or strong drink (based on what the Angel said to Zacharias) and that he consecrated his life
  - St. Paul probably took a Naziritic vow for a small time in his life "He had *his* hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow." (Acts 18:18)
- Nazirite spends his time:
  - Studying the laws
  - Worshipping
  - Serving others
- Nazirite renounces the pleasures of life:
  - strong drink
  - does not cut his hair, contrary to nature (1 Cor 11)
  - mourning the dead
- Specific purification for if he touches the dead
  - It is defilement
  - He must shave his head, wait 7 days, then offer a sacrifice
  - It's like he starts over with his vow - God's hatred of defilement even if it's on accident
- Completion of the vow
  - The burnt and peace offerings portray various aspects of the Cross
    - Our consecration will never be complete without the Cross
  - He also gives "whatever else his hand is able to provide"
    - We must not put limitations to our love to God or our giving
  - His hair is shaven and thrown into the fire

    - He drinks wine

Priestly Blessing (22-27)

- Three blessings (the gift of the Trinity)
    - Reminds us of every blessing that we receive in the Liturgy (in the name of the Trinity)
- All of them start with "The Lord" signifying that the blessing originates from God, not the priest
    - When I see that Abouna is blessing me, I am receiving a blessing from God

Numbers 7

Offerings of the Leaders

- Offerings are presented as a whole (1-9) and then on the level of each tribe (10-14)
- General Offering
    - Six covered carts with a pair of bulls pulling them
    - Six represents our struggle in working so that we can rest on the Sabbath
- Tribal Offerings
    - All the tribes present equal gifts
    - Silver plate: Word of God

Numbers 8

Numbers 9

Numbers 10

Two Silver Trumpets

See Theodoret Question XV on Numbers

Departure from Sinai

Order of the March

- Judah led the way followed by Issachar and Zebulun
- Sons of Gershon and Merari carrying the tabernacle went next
- Reuben, Simeon and Gad followed
- Moses and Aaron and the priests
  - Notice that Moses, the leader, is in the middle not at the front - because he is not the one leading them. God is.
- Kohathites carrying the holy things went next (so that by the time they arrived, the tabernacle would be ready for them to put the holy things)
  - The Ark of Covenant is in the midst of the congregation between six tribes and six tribes
- Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin followed
- Dan, Asher and Naphtali followed

Moses and his Brother in Law

- Hobab is Moses' brother in law
  - The names Reuel or Raguel (LXX) and Jethro are given for his father in law
  - Theodoret of Cyrus: He has two names like Simon Peter, Jacob Israel, etc.
- Paterius: Moses dealt wisely with a proud man
  - Hobab wanted to go back to his own people, the Gentiles. Moses would rather him stay with them. Why should he go back to the Gentiles instead of staying with the people of God?
  - Moses tells him "stay it will do you good"
  - Hobab says "No, I will go"
  - Moses, in humility, says: "But we need you to be our eyes" - he tells him that he needs him
  - This method works on Hobab and teaches us a lesson for how to deal with some personalities

Departure from Sinai

- "Rise up, O Lord! Let Your enemies be scattered, And let those who hate You flee before You."
  - Moses says this whenever the ark sets out
  - Abouna prays this in the Litany of the Assemblies
- "Return, O Lord, to the many thousands of Israel"
  - "But let your people be in blessing, thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand doing Your will"

Numbers 11-12: The People Complain

Numbers 11

The People Complain

- Despite their complaints, God supported them... God did not decide to stop them from entering the Promised Land until later. Even the punishment was that the Lord sent fire, but it just consumed the outskirts of the camp
- Moses always interceded for them despite everything
- "Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said..."
  - Mixed multitude refers to the Egyptians who were among them
  - The Egyptians incited them to lust for meat
  - The people remembered the fish and cucumbers but forgot about the whippings and beatings and humiliation and disgrace... they rejected the food of angels (Manna) in order to eat the food of the slaves

The Seventy Elders

- Moses was overwhelemed - even with his great love for them, he felt inadequate to bear the heavy responsibility. But God did not abandon him. He equipped seventy elders to support him.
- The two elders who didn't go to Moses also received the Gift of the Spirit - this is an indication from God that this "gift of the spirit" is from God not from Moses

The Lord Sends Quail

- God satisfies their craving for meat by sending the quails - not by telling them to eat from their cattle or giving them success in fishing or something, but by divine power

Numbers 12

Moses' Marriage to the Ethiopian

- Aaron and Miriam seemed to be upset that Moses did not consult them when he selected the 70 elders... they used his marriage to the Ethiopian as an opportunity to complain against him
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Aaron and Miriam's Dissent

Miriam's Leprosy

Numbers 13-14: Twelve Spies

Numbers 13-14

Spies Sent into Canaan

Israel Refuses to Enter Canaan

Moses Intercedes for the People

The Sentence of Wandering and Death

Futile Invasion Attempt

- Fruits of Disbelief in God:
  - Depression and melancholy (v. 1)
  - Rebellion against godly leadership (v. 2)
  - Fall in war (v. 3)
  - Irrational thinking (v. 3)
  - Irrational choices (v. 4)

Numbers 15: Laws

Numbers 15

Laws of Grain and Drink Offerings

Laws Concerning Unintentional Sin

Law Concerning Presumptuous Sin

Violating the Sabbath

Tassels on Garments

Numbers 16-17: Rebellion Against the Priests

Numbers 16

Rebellion Against Moses and Aaron

- Korah, Dathan, Abiram and 250
- Complaint against priesthood
- Desire for priesthood
    - They looked at priesthood as a means of authority and pride, not as a means for paternity and service
    - Service is a calling - not a choice - Matthew 12:18
        - God chooses the servant and God calls the servant... 12 apostles and 70 disciples
            - No one should come and say "I want to serve" but when God comes and calls you, you should not decline
        - God calls through the channels in the church
            - When God called St Paul and Barnabas - Acts 13:2 "As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, 'Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away."
        - God chooses the person that He is pleased with
            - Person should first please God and then when he is called to service, continue to please God
        - The ministry of God is done by His power... not by our abilities
            - "And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2:4)
            - The disciples could not leave Jerusalem to serve until they had received the Holy Spirit
        - Not just a servant in some places but in all places
    - Qualities of a servant - Matthew 12:19
        - Servant is a peacemaker "He will not quarrel nor cry out" - not making arguments and hard to deal with, hard to speak with, causing problems, etc.
            - Demon cannot cast out demon... demon of anger cannot cast out demon of falsehood. If you are defending the truth against falsehood, then you will be ineffective if you do it with anger

        - Correcting someone is with gentleness
    - Servant is gentle "Nor will anyone hear His voice in the streets"
        - Servant is humble
        - Listening to everyone to learn
        - Monk sitting with St Anthony: "It is enough for me to see your face, my father"
- How does he do his service - Matthew 12:20-21
    - "A bruised reed He will not break" - the servant will have compassion and mercy on the reed. He will try to support it so it can be healed
        - True servant will see his injured kid and see how he can help him, and he will pray for him
    - "And smoking flax He will not quench" - flax is part of wick of candle and it smokes when there's no oil. the servant will add oil so it lights up again
        - True servant will encourage and uplift
    - "Till he sends forth justice to victory" - justice here means truth
        - By serving in this way, the truth becomes victorious
        - Because the truth will set us free
- Goal of the service
    - "In his name Gentiles will trust" - for all to trust in God

- Their brazen censers were taken and were spread over the brazen altar to assure that the blemish
  does not lie in the censers themselves, but in whom so ever used them. For another point of view it was
  used as a sign to discourage anyone else from repeating this tragedy.

Complaints of the People

- The people started an uprising against Moses and Aaron and accused them of murder
- Moses and Aaron again intercede for them
- A plague starts and Aaron takes the censer and walks in the midst of the people
    - This reminds us of when Abouna takes the censer and walks in the midst of all the people during the liturgy many times

Numbers 17

Budding of Aaron's Rod

- God confirms his choice of Aaron as High Priest in a tangible way to set him apart from the false priesthood
- Symbolizes the Virgin Mary who presented us with Christ the Lord while remaining a virgin

Numbers 18: Support for the Levites

Numbers 18

Duties of the Priests and Levites

Offerings for Support of the Priests

Tithes for Support of the Levites

Tithe of the Levites

Numbers 19: Laws of Purification

Numbers 20-21: Conquest of Israel

Numbers 20

Moses' Error at Kadesh

- The people complained again

Israel and Edom

- Moses speaks to king of Edom in humility about how they are both descendants from the same blood
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Death of Aaron

- Priesthood is transferred to Aaron's son

Numbers 21

Canaanites Defeated

- King of Arad was not like Edom - he did not deny them passage through his land, but straight up just attacked them instead.
- They have to take the long way around Edom which means passing through Arad, the Amorites and Bashan
- God allowed them to be defeated by the king of Arad as if to show them that they are weak without Him. But once they depended on Him they conquered
    - When there is a sin I used to fall into, but I started to overcome it... and then after a long time, I fell into it again - I am sorrowful. But it becomes a lesson for me that I did not conquer the sin on my own or with my own strength, but with the help of the Lord. And I have to depend on Him. So I rush to repentance and confession.

The Bronze Serpent

- The Israelites complain again... probably because they have to go the long way around Edom so they say "have you brought us up out of Egypt to die?" and they even criticize the Manna. When they complained before, God didn't punish them but gave them everything they asked for... but this time, God sends serpents
- When Moses intercedes, God does not remove the serpents but commands him to make a bronze serpent. God did not take away the temptation right away, but opened a door for salvation out of it.
- He turned their evil into a blessing with the Bronze Serpent
  - The Lord Jesus Christ commented on the Bronze Serpent in John 3:14-15 (the verse before the famous John 3:16)
    - "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:14-16)
  - The Fathers comment on the Bronze Serpent
    - "Christ was slain, so that those bitten by the serpents would look up at Him, lifted up on the cross." (Augustine on Psalm 74)
    - "The lifted up serpent refers to the death of Christ on the cross; As death came through the serpent; its symbol became the portrait of a serpent. While the serpent's bite was deadly; the death of the Lord is a life-giver" (Augustine)
    - "He did not kill the serpents, but turned their bites not deadly... The bites of lusts actually work even in the believers; Yet he who looks up toward Him who is lifted up on the cross, would despise the passion; hence diluting the poison by the fear of the commandment" (St Gregory of Nyssa)
  - The Bronze Serpent is a type of the Cross
    - It looked like a Cross
    - "Lifted up" (John 12:32)
    - The Cross is death... and also salvation from death. As we say in the hymn of the Resurrection "By his death He abolished death"
    - The Bronze Serpent was a serpent that had no poison, just as Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh, but without sin (Romans 8:3)
    - In Genesis we read that God cursed the serpent (Genesis 3:14) - St Paul describes that Christ "became a curse for us" to redeem us from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13)
    - Bronze Serpent was seen by all people - Christ was crucified publicly
- What happened to the Bronze Serpent?
  - Hezekiah the king "broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan" (2 Kings 18:4)

Moving to the Plains of Moab

Sihon King of Amorites Defeated

- They asked Sihon if they can pass and he would not allow them... but instead, he came at them with his armies and fought them. Israel defeated them and took possession of their land.

Og King of Bashan Defeated

- Og was also delivered into their hands by the Lord

Numbers 22-24: Balaam

Introduction

- Satan sought a new way to fight against the people of God... not through armies and leaders, but by a curse

Balak Sends for Balaam

- Seeing all the danger around him, instead of preparing for war and for battle, Balak king of Moab sent for Balaam to come and curse the Israelites.
- Who is Balaam?
  - Does not belong to the people of God
  - He was a magician or diviner and God used him for His divine mission and purpose
    - St Gregory of Nyssa believes that Balaam was using satanic power, but God was showing the inability of Satan to harm His children; that if Satan intends to curse, he is committed to bless.
    - Origen believes Balaam was a magician using Satan's power, but God intervened because of His love for Israel
  - Revelation 2:14 "who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication"
- God speaks to Balaam and commands him
  - Balaam even replies "the Lord my God"

Balaam, the Donkey, and the Angel

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Balaam's First Prophecy

- Speaks of the incarnation

Balaam's Second Prophecy

- Speaks of the passions and Resurrection

Balaam's Third Prophecy

- Speaks of the Day of Pentecost

Balaam Foretells Israel's Happiness

Balaam's Fourth Prophecy

Numbers 25: Israel's Harlotry in Moab

Numbers 27: Joshua the New Leader

Numbers 27

Inheritance Laws

Joshua is the New Leader

Numbers 28-30: Offerings and Vows

Numbers 28-29

Daily Offerings

Sabbath Offerings

Monthly Offerings

Offerings at Passover

Offerings at the Feast of Weeks

Offerings at the Feast of Trumpets

Offerings on the Day of Atonement

Offerings at the Feast of Tabernacles

Numbers 30

Vows

Numbers 31-35: Conquest of Canaan

Numbers 36: Marriage of Female Heirs