



CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION

BIBLE SURVEY

THE UN-DEVOTIONAL

NUMBERS

Week 3

You've Gone Too Far

Numbers 16:1-50

OPENING
up to the Word

Has anyone ever told you—or have you told someone else, “You’ve gone too far!”? What line had been crossed?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. How would you characterize the complaints that Korah and his crew brought against Moses (16:1-3), and that Dathan and Abiram brought (16:12-14)? (a) religion and politics don’t mix, (b) you can’t please all the people all the time, (c) a bunch of whiners, (d) unwarranted (e) a trial by numbers.

2. How did Moses and God respond to these disloyal critics (16:4-11, 16-20)?

3. Did God intend that innocent people suffer because of the sins of others? To what extent was this averted (16:21-27, 41-50)?

4. What was the outcome of Korah’s rebellion (16:22-35)? What was the effect on the onlookers?

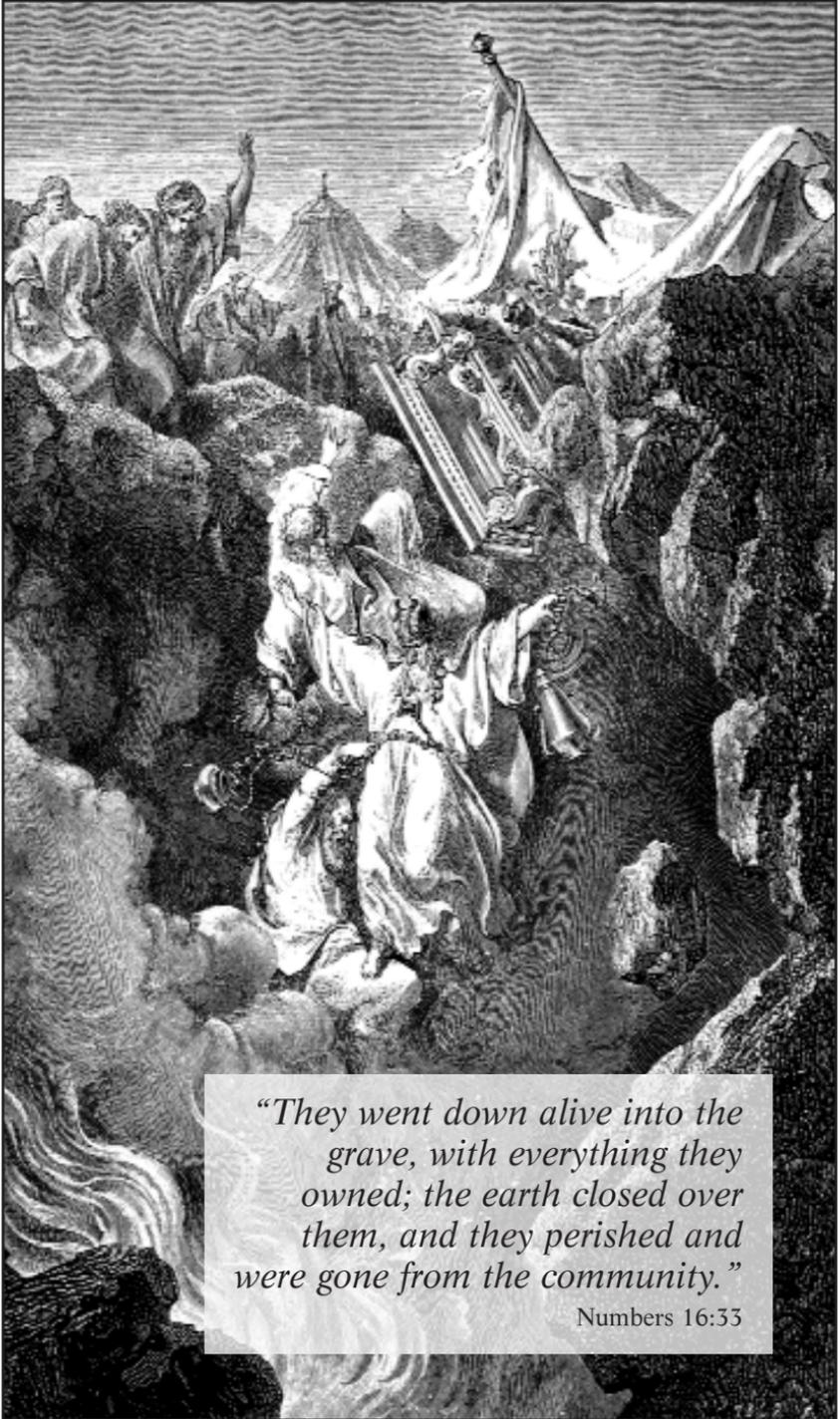
LIVING
out the Word

1. How do you usually respond to criticism from someone who has a problem with you? What would Jesus do?

2. Consider: Korah’s claim that “the whole community is holy” would have been true under the new covenant given by and through the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, where all believers are priests (1 Peter 2:9). It was not true, however, under the old covenant. Aaron’s priestly role as intercessor for the people was confirmed in Nu 16:47-48 when his mediation averted a plague from God that had already begun.

WINDOW
on the Word

Korah (16:1) was in the priestly tribe, descended from Levi through Kohath. As a Kohathite he had high duties in the Tabernacle (see 4:1-20). Earlier, Miriam and Aaron had rebelled against Moses’ leadership. But here, Korah was joined by 250 other leaders of Israel to demand a share of the power.



*“They went down alive into the
grave, with everything they
owned; the earth closed over
them, and they perished and
were gone from the community.”*

Numbers 16:33

It's a Blooming Miracle!

Numbers 17:1-13

OPENING
up to the Word

What symbolizes authority in your line of work, in your church, in your family? (a) paycheck, (b) badge, (c) gavel, (d) certificate or license, (e) stone tablets, (f) results.

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Is a contest being set up here (17:1-7)?
2. Why place a staff from each tribe before the Lord instead of just putting Aaron's staff out to let it bud?
3. Why go to such lengths to prove Aaron is the leader of God's choosing? (a) to end the complaining, (b) to build Aaron's confidence, (c) to create a visible symbol of God-chosen authority.
4. Why the big fear of dying? (a) they remembered what happened to Korah (see Nu 16), (b) they knew God was serious, (c) their hearts were still rebellious, (d) God carried a big stick.

LIVING
out the Word

1. How does old covenant leadership differ from the servant leadership embodied by Jesus (Mt 20:25-28)?
2. Do you believe God has placed certain leaders in your life? Are there others you may be better off without? How might you change those situations?

WINDOW
on the Word

*In this test, only the staff belonging to the man God chose would sprout or blossom (17:5). The next morning, **Aaron's staff** had not only sprouted, but also budded, blossomed and produced almonds (17:8). God far exceeded the demands of the test, to eliminate all doubt about the outcome. The significance of almonds may be in their association with "watching" (Jer 1:11-12), which is the role Aaron's tribe had in relation to the rest of Israel.*

The Best of the Best

DAY 17

Numbers 18:1-32

If you could be “the best of the best” in something, what would you want it to be?

1. What extra responsibilities and consequences did the priests carry (18:1-7, 22-23; 26-29, 32; see notes)?

2. In this ancient society, how were the “ministers” compensated (18:6-8, 11-14, 18-20, 21, 24)?

1. If you were a Levite, would you want to be paid with money or the best of the best that the Israelites offered? Why or why not?

2. How does the Levites’ compensation for service compare with how ministers of the new covenant are paid (see 1Co 9:3-10)?

3. If you made a list of the “best of the best” things God has given you, what things would be on it?

4. What would you give to God if he asked for the “best of your best”?

*The Levites received all the Israelites’ **set-aside portions** (18:8-9), **firstfruits** (18:12-13), **firstborn** (18:15) and **tithes** (18:21, 24). The best one-tenth of everything the Israelites had was given to the Levites to be used as wages and inheritance. And even the Levites gave back to God one-tenth of the tithe they had received. No one was exempt from returning to God the best portion. Something or someone **devoted to the Lord** (18:14) was set aside as totally committed to God. The **covenant of salt** (18:19) is an ambiguous phrase. It may refer to the ingredients that accompany various offerings (see Ex 30:35; Lev 2:13; Eze 43:24), the sacrificial meal associated with covenant-making (see Ge 31:54; Ex 24:5-11) or it may be a figure of speech for permanence.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

Blood Cleanses, Water Works

Numbers 19:1–20:13

OPENING
up to the Word

When baths are inconvenient, how do you wash?
What cleansing agent does your family use?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. How was an Israelite “cut off” from the community for being unclean?
2. Cleansing with ashes, hyssop, blood and water was inconvenient. So why bother? (a) to avoid contagious disease, (b) conditions were hot and unhealthy, (c) to symbolize spiritual cleansing, (d) uncleanness of death was pervasive.
3. With so many uses for water, why do you think God cut off their water supply (20:2)?
4. What were the consequences for Moses for striking the rock instead of speaking to it (20:8-12)? What crime was involved?

LIVING
out the Word

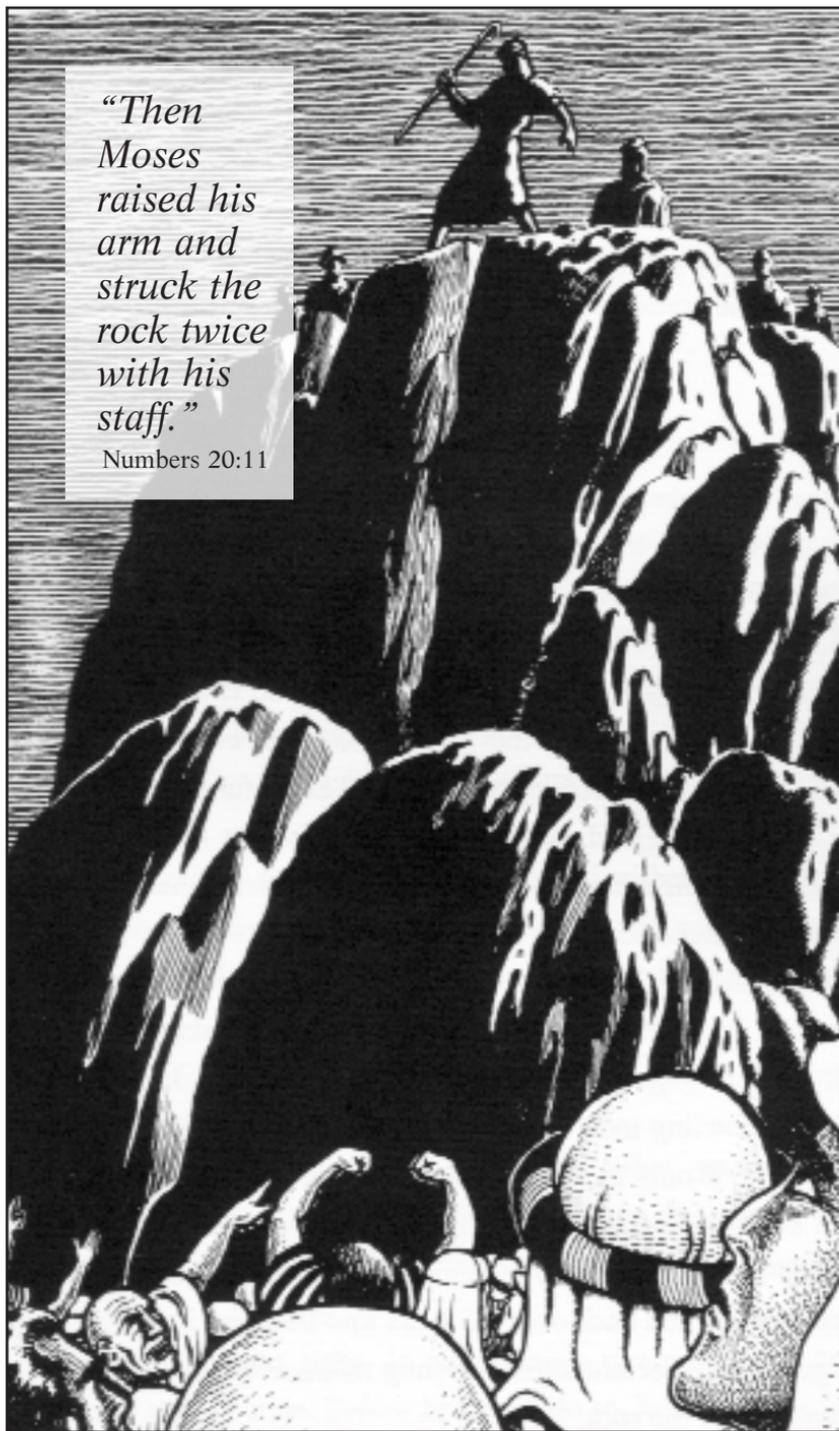
1. Do you think the punishment of Moses fit the crime? Why or why not?
2. Would you want the job of sprinkling unclean people? Why or why not?
3. How do you keep yourself “clean?” Where does today’s “water of cleansing” come from? (See Jn 7:37-39).

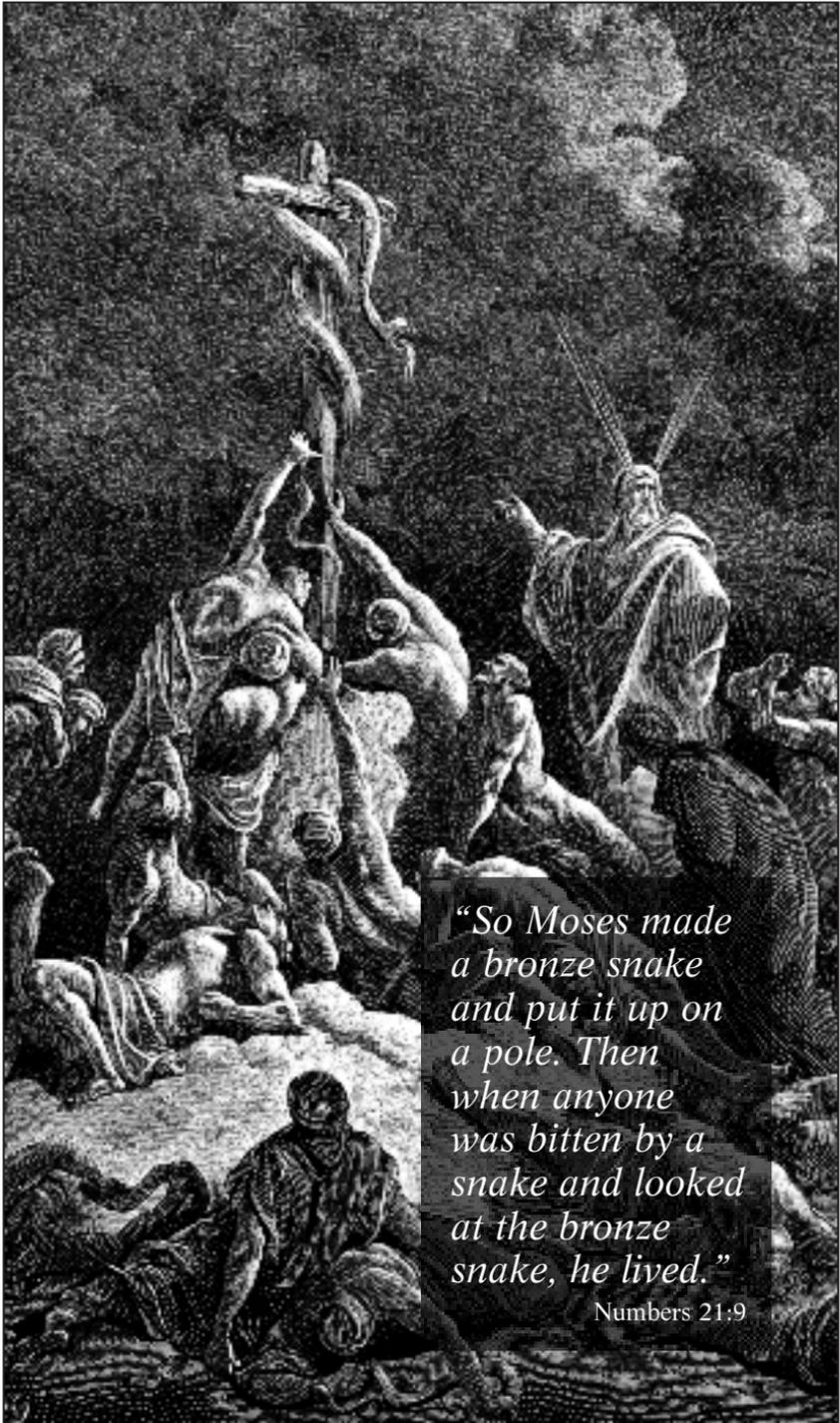
WINDOW
on the Word

*The **cleansing agents and rituals** used by Israel as a lasting ordinance (19:21) had some practicality. The **red heifer** (19:2) was a cow to be slaughtered and burned for its ashes, not an ox or bull sacrificed for atonement. Its ashes were mixed with blood—the most potent “cleansing” agent mentioned in the Bible (see Heb 9:22). The ashes were mixed with other ingredients having cleansing properties—cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool (19:6), as well as fresh water of purification (19:12-14, 17-18). Hyssop takes on spiritual significance when David says, “Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean” (Ps 51:2, 7). For a second time, Moses performed the **water-from-the-rock** miracle after Israel acted rebelliously (20:1-13; compare Ex 17:1-7). Can you blame Moses for being angry at these rebels and at having to repeat the miracle?*

*“Then
Moses
raised his
arm and
struck the
rock twice
with his
staff.”*

Numbers 20:11





*“So Moses made
a bronze snake
and put it up on
a pole. Then
when anyone
was bitten by a
snake and looked
at the bronze
snake, he lived.”*

Numbers 21:9

Do Not Pass Go

DAY 19

Numbers 20:14–21:35

How do you pass the time when you're in a traffic jam? What frustrates you more—a long wait in traffic or a “road closed” sign?

1. Were Moses' peaceful negotiations with the King of Edom a sign of strength or weakness (20:14-21)?

2. Why did the Israelites turn away from the Edomites when passage was denied (20:21), yet put to the sword the armies of Sihon and Og (21:21-35)? (a) the conflict wasn't worth the consequences, (b) the Edomites were marauding thugs, (c) he who runs away lives to fight another day.

3. What was significant about Aaron's death (20:22-29)?

4. Why did God give the bronze snake on a pole to those who had repeatedly scorned his grace (21:7-9)? How does this compare with Christ being lifted up on a cross (Jn 3:14-15)?

5. How did the defeat of Arad (21:2-3) and Og (21:35) contrast with the taunt song for Heshbon's defeat (21:27-30)?

1. How do you react when someone blocks your plans?

2. What message from God would give you courage to win your battles?

Your brother Israel (20:14; see Dt 23:7). *Jacob and Esau were brothers who became the ancestors of two nations, Israel and Edom. When the King of Edom denied the Israelites passage through his land, he was actually refusing his own relatives. This rebuff would be remembered by the eye-for-an-eye orientation of old covenant Israel for centuries and later avenged (see 1Ki 11:15-16; 2Ki 14:7; Ps 137:7; Ob 1-21). Contrast the teachings of Jesus in the new covenant (Mt 5:38-42).*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word

DAY 20

Touched by an Angel

Numbers 22:1-41

OPENING
up to the Word

Has anything in your experience convinced you that guardian angels exist?

DIGGING
into the Word

1. Why was Balak, the king of Moab, so afraid of the Israelites (22:2-6)?
2. What did King Balak commission Balaam the sorcerer to do (22:6-8)?
3. Why was Balaam reluctant to take Balak's payment (22:4-18)? (a) holding out for more, (b) also intimidated by Israel, (c) obedient to the Lord, (d) Balaam can't be bribed.
4. What did the donkey and angel teach Balaam? (a) patience, (b) kindness, (c) obedience, (d) fear of God, (e) they gave him a second chance.

LIVING
out the Word

1. If you had been Balaam, would you take someone's money for speaking for God? If you thought you didn't understand God's will, would you then make up something, or remain silent?
2. What dramatic, donkey-like or angel-like measures has the Lord used to arrest your attention?
3. In speaking through the example of others, such as he did with Balaam and Balak, what might the Lord be telling you right now?

WINDOW
on the Word

Balaam was a prophet for hire, willing to take a fee for divination and to do the bidding of any god (22:7-8). For his devious religious abuses, he is widely remembered and condemned (see 31:7-8, 15-16; Dt 23:3-6; Jos 13:22; 24:9-10; Ne 13:1-3; Mic 6:5; 2Pe 2:15-16; Jude 11; Rev 2:14). An angel of the Lord prevented Balaam from a foolish mistake in his intention to harm Israel (22:21-27). God's angels often prevent harm to God's people; they stand against sin, avert evil, deliver good news and bad, protect cities and oppose the enemies of God (Heb 1:14; Da 10:13; 12:1; Mt 1:20-21; 2:13). "Do not go with them" (22:12) and "go with them" (22:20) seem like contradictory commands, but the first was a ban on going to curse Israel, the second came with the explanation, "do only what I tell you." God was upset (22:22), not because Balaam finally got going, but because God could read Balaam's evil intent.



*“When the donkey saw
the angel of the Lord,
she lay down under Balaam,
and he was angry and
beat her with his staff.”*

Numbers 22:27



*“Then Balak’s
anger burned
against Balaam”*

Numbers 24:10

Third Time's a Charm

DAY 21

Numbers 23:1–24:25

Have you ever had trouble doing something right the first time? Have you repeated mistakes at least three times?

1. Where did Balaam get the courage to stand before the king of Moab and all its princes and proclaim exactly the opposite of what they wanted to hear (23:5)?
2. Why did Balaam decide not to use sorcery during his first or second oracle (23:1-26)?
3. What is similar and what is different about the third oracle (23:27–24:14)?
4. Balaam blesses the Israelites in progressive fashion. Each time, what is increasingly more blessed about God's people?

1. Do you obey God the first, the second, the third time—or not at all?
2. For the right price, can your services be influenced or purchased? Why or why not?

*How unusual that a sorcerer like Balaam would prophesy and do the work of the Lord! **God can use anyone or anything** to achieve his purpose and fulfill his plan. God was certainly not condoning sorcery, as it is condemned (see Ex 22:18, 2Ch 33:6). Rather, God's ultimate sovereignty over good and evil is confirmed by these events. This word translated **oracle** (23:7; Hebrew, mashal) is the word for "proverb." A different word was used for divine utterance ("thus-saith-the-Lord") spoken by the Hebrew prophets.*

OPENING

up to the Word

DIGGING

into the Word

LIVING

out the Word

WINDOW

on the Word