

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## NUMBERS 1-5

To break the ice on the book of “*Numbers*,” I want to start with *an exercise in numbers*... In your mind pick a number 1-10... multiply that number by 9... You’ll have a two digit number, so add the two digits together...

Now subtract 5... Take the letter in the alphabet that corresponds with your number. Like 1 is A, 2 is B, etc...

Now think of a country that begins with your letter... Take the last letter of that country and think of an animal that begins with that letter... Take the last letter of that animal and think of a fruit that begins with that letter... **Raise a hand if you’re thinking of a kangaroo in Denmark eating an orange!** Numbers can be a lot of fun! And we’ll find quite a few *numbers* in ***Numbers***.

The Greek name for the fourth book of the Bible is “**Arithmoi**” - from which we get our word, “**Arithmetic**.” Its title in Latin is “**Numeroi**,” or “**Numbers**.” Yet don’t worry, this is not a math book - *something you’ve never been good at*. Actual *numbers* only come into play in taking a census. “*Moses has to come to his census.*”

In the Hebrew Bible this book is more aptly titled, “**In the Wilderness**,” which is what it describes, the nation Israel’s roaming through the Sinai deserts. Rather than “*Numbers*” I prefer to call this book, “**How to Turn a Fifteen Day Walk into Forty Years of Wandering**.” This book reveals why the generation of Hebrews that escaped Egyptian bondage failed to enter the land God had promised them, and died in the wilderness.

And this is why the book is so instructive for us. Spiritually speaking, we too have been delivered from the bondage of sin, and promised a life of rest and blessing - but to enter *our* promised land we, like the Hebrews, **need faith**. If we yield to doubt and fear, we’ll also die in a wasteland (*wilderness*) of frustration.

Verse 1 begins, “**Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt...**”

It’s been thirteen months since Israel’s exodus from Egypt. They spent a-month-and-a-half getting to Mount Sinai. The next 10½ months were at the foot of the holy mountain where God gave to Moses the Law and the blueprints for the Tabernacle... Then the final month-and-a-half was spent erecting the Tabernacle and its furniture...

*Now its time to march!* Yet to move effectively and in unison you have to be organized...

So the Lord spoke **saying: "Take a census..."** The word means **"head"** or **"count heads."** Or literally, **"take a head count."** **"Of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male individually, from twenty years old and above - all who were able to go to war in Israel..."** You weren't counted in the census, or sent to war, or required to sacrifice, or paid the half-shekel tax... until you reached the age of **twenty**. You could make a case that **twenty years old was the age of accountability in ancient Israel**. At twenty you became a full member of the community.

No offense to teenagers, but something happens to most people when they reach twenty! They get more serious about life. *I fully surrendered to Jesus after I turned twenty.* After raising three sons my wife says boys don't get *their man brain* until after they turn 20.

God tells Moses to count everyone age twenty and up. **"You and Aaron shall number them by their armies."**

*Notice that!* God calls a people who had spent their whole life as slaves, **"an army!"** Israel was God's army and He was sending them to fight. Canaan was the land God promised their forefathers, but it was no hand-out. They'll have to do battle to conquer enemies.

And this is true of God's promises today. We battle doubt, fear, and guilt. It's by faith we take possession!

**"And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father's house."** A representative from each tribe will help with the count.

Several years ago billboards started popping up in major American cities. They were quotations attributed to God. Here're a few examples... **"Let's meet at my house Sunday before the game..."** **"What part of 'Thou Shalt Not' didn't you understand?..."** **"We need to talk..."** **"Loved the wedding, invite me to the marriage..."** **"That 'Love Thy Neighbor' thing, I meant it..."** **"Big bang theory, you've got to be kidding..."** **"You think it's hot here?..."** **"Have you read my #1 best seller? There'll be a test..."** **"Don't make me come down there..."** All these quotations were signed, **"God."**

But one quotation fits the book of Numbers perfectly, **"I love you and you and you and... signed 'God'."** While in bondage the Hebrews were a nameless, innumerable band of slaves. In Egypt, the individual was expendable. But now the people belong to

God. They're His people - and each person matters to Him. God's ordering of a census hammers home that point.

Augustine once said, "God loves each one of us as if there was only one of us to love." Nobody gets lost in the crowd with God. He accounts for all His children.

It's been said, "When God counts people it means people count to God..." But let me add a caution. *When God numbers people it's a good thing, but when man numbers people it can lead to sin.* For **numbering implies ownership**. You only number what belongs to you. Seldom do you number somebody else's stuff.

That's why in 2 Samuel 24 King David is judged by God for taking a similar census. David is desiring to know the extent of *His dominion*. He's forgotten that *his kingdom* was not *his kingdom*. It belonged to God. The people were not *David's subjects*, but *God's subjects*.

This also applies to churches. Counting sheep may put you to sleep at night, but it can also put a pastor to sleep spiritually. Pastors preoccupied with numbers get off-track. In the beginning the goal is to *reach people*, but over time numerical success can become a point of pride. Big crowds - big bank accounts - lots of anything can cause a person to boast in their own prowess. We forget our prosperity is always a result of God's grace.

Here's the lesson for us... It's okay for a church to take a census, or have a directory, as long as it's done for the right reasons. Throw a party and it's appropriate to count the crowd so you can provide the people's needs. **Count to be a good host, never count to boast.** Numbers should be taken **to guide**, but not **to gloat**.

Beginning in verse 5 Moses and twelve tribal leaders take *a head count*, a census. The tribe of Reuben 46,500. Simeon 59,300. Gad 45,650. Judah 74,600. Issachar 54,400. Zebulun numbers 57,400. Ephraim 40,500. Manasseh just 32,200. Benjamin 35,400. Dan 62,700. Asher, 41,500. And Naphtali numbers 53,400. Judah was largest. Manasseh was the smallest tribe.

Verse 45 tells us, "So all who were numbered of the children of Israel, by their fathers' houses, from twenty years old and above, all who were able to go to war in Israel - all who were numbered were 603,550." And that was just men 20 years old and older. Add women and kids, and 2-3 million people marched with Moses. That's a city about the size of metropolitan Orlando.

Verse 47, "But the Levites were not numbered among them by their fathers' tribe; for the LORD had spoken to Moses, saying: "Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number,

nor take a census of them among the children of Israel; but you shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the Testimony, over all its furnishings, and over all things that belong to it; they shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings; they shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle.” Remember, the Tabernacle was a tent - a mobile house of worship. It was made to move. And the Levites were the movers!

Levi was the one tribe not numbered among the fighting men. Levites had *holy hands* not *bloody hands*. Other tribes fought battles. Levi ministered to God.

And notice, in this census twelve tribes get counted, yet the tribe of Levi gets left out. Also, instead of “*the tribe of Joseph*,” his two sons “*Ephraim and Manasseh*” inherit his spot... It’s interesting, whenever the Bible lists the tribes of Israel fourteen tribes can appear, yet the list always contains twelve - *it’s just a different twelve tribes depending on the author’s purpose*.

Verse 51, “*And when the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down; and when the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up.*” The Levites were in charge of the Tabernacle *set up* and *take down*... They were like the father of pre-schoolers at the beach. **(Clip)** *Dad is the one who hauls the rafts, umbrella, cooler, boogie boards, tents, towels... and you leave dad alone.* Try not to laugh, he’ll get it done. Just stay out of his way. As it says here, “*The outsider who comes near shall be put to death.*” Let the ole boy do his job! *A dad’s purpose is transporting beach stuff!*

And this really is the key to life, discover what God wants you to do; *then do it!* The Levites transported the Tabernacle stuff, and everyone stayed out of their way. *Try to do somebody else’s job, and it will kill you too.*

So verse 52 states, “*The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, everyone by his own camp, everyone by his own standard, according to their armies; but the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle of the Testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel; and the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the Testimony.*”

Thus the children of Israel did; according to all that the LORD commanded Moses...” Concentric circles formed around the Tabernacle. God was at the center of everything - surrounded by the Levites - then the tribes. The army of God now has their camping plan!

Chapter 2, “*And the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: "Everyone of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard, beside the emblems of his father's house; they shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting."* Apparently,

each tribe camped under a banner that depicted the tribe's coat of arms. Each of the tribes was assigned a specific campsite.

Now, let me summarize a little: Three tribes camped on each of the four sides of the Tabernacle. **East** of the tent was **Judah; then Issachar; then Zebulun...** To the **south**, **Rueben, Simeon, Gad...** Going **west** young man, **Ephraim, Manasseh, Benjamin.** And **north**, *those Yankees*, were the tribes of **Dan, Asher, and Naphtali.**

From a practical standpoint the arrangement of the camp was strategic. It maximized space, and made for a ring of protection around the Tabernacle. When the people broke camp, it made for smoother and easier mobility... It also put God had the heart of the nation. At the center of the camp was the Tabernacle. Israel's national life was centered around the worship of God.

There were lots of practical reasons for the camp's arrangement - *but the real strategy was spiritual!*

The Tabernacle was the hub, and from it came four spokes of three tribes. The most people camped to the east. The fewest people camped west. Think of what the camp looked like from heaven's vantage point. From an aerial view the camp resembled a cross. Thus, whenever God looked on His people He saw the means by which He would save them - the event of which all the sacrifices spoke, the cross of Jesus!

It's also interesting that 2:2 tells us the twelve tribes camped under the banner of the four lead tribes on each side of the Tabernacle. And we know what their insignias were... **Judah was personified as a lion, Rueben a man, Ephraim an ox, and Dan an eagle.**

And this is fascinating, for whenever we peer into God's heavenly throne room - like in Ezekiel 1 or Revelation 4 - we always find four living creatures, or angels, who have four faces - **the face of a lion, a man, an ox, and an eagle.** Apparently, the camp of Israel was a reflection of God's throne room in heaven.

When Israel begins to march the eastern tribes break camp first, followed by the southern three tribes. Then comes verse 17, **"Then the tabernacle of meeting shall move out with the camp of the Levites in the middle of the camps; as they camp, so they shall move out, everyone in his place, by their standards."** The tabernacle was positioned in the middle of the procession; afterwards the western tribes broke camp; then the northern tribes were the caboose. Evidently, Dan, Asher, and Naphtali acted as the rear guard.

Verse 32 **"These are the ones who were numbered of the children of Israel by their fathers' houses. All who were numbered according to their armies of the forces were**

603,550.” *Same as the earlier count.* “But the Levites were not numbered among the children of Israel, just as the LORD commanded Moses.” God wants some things counted - and some things not.

“Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses; so they camped by their standards and so they broke camp, each one by his family, according to their fathers' houses.” Imagine, three million people on the move. It was an imposing sight, and struck fear in the hearts of Israel's enemies.

Chapter 3, “Now these are the records of Aaron and Moses when the LORD spoke with Moses on Mount Sinai. And these are the names of the sons of Aaron: Nadab, the firstborn, and Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. These are the names of the sons of Aaron, the anointed priests, whom he consecrated to minister as priests. Nadab and Abihu had died before the LORD when they offered profane fire before the LORD in the Wilderness of Sinai; and they had no children.” *Nadab and Abihu were the first pastors to suffer from burn out.* They approached God's altar with profane fire. They came before Him improperly - frivolously or irreverently or even drunk - and were torched by fire from the Lord.

“So Eleazar and Ithamar ministered as priests under the oversight of Aaron their father.” All priests were Levites, but not all Levites were priests. Only Aaron and sons, and their descendants, served as priests.

The tribe of Levi came alongside the priests to help them in the Tabernacle ministry. *I think you'll find every ministry for God is too big for one man.* As elders and deacons assist a pastor in the church, the Levites helped Aaron in the Tabernacle. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle.”

Notice verse 7, the Levites were to serve the High Priest in two ways... “They shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation.” According to Hebrews 7 our High Priest is none other than Jesus. So in a sense we're Levites recruited to serve Jesus. *But practically speaking, how do we serve the Lord?*

Well first, we're to “attend to his needs.” We certainly want God to be attentive to our needs, but do we spend much time considering what Jesus needs? He has desires and needs and plans. Are we sensitive and attentive to the whispered instructions of His Spirit?

And we also serve Jesus when we “attend to... the needs of the whole

**congregation**". We serve Jesus by serving each other. If I love Jesus, I'll learn to love you.

Verse 8, "Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel. So you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall attend to their priesthood; but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death." Only Levites were to do the job of Levites. *And this was important...*

Later we read of Uzziah, king of Judah, who wants to be priest. He goes into the Holy Place and God strikes him with leprosy. *According to Numbers, God let him off light... For the outsider was to die.* Kings weren't allowed **priestly power** nor priests **political power**.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, because all the firstborn are Mine. On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the LORD." Earlier, Israel dedicated the firstborn of their families to God, as a *thank-you for saving their firstborn at Passover*. Yet God makes a trade. He'll take 22,000 Levites in place of the firstborn.

"Then the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, saying: "Number the children of Levi by their fathers' houses, by their families; you shall number every male from a month old and above." So Moses numbered them according to the word of the LORD, as he was commanded. These were the sons of Levi by their names: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari." He counts Levi's grandsons. Three families: 7,500 Gershonites, 8,600 Kohathites, 6,200 Merarites. A total of 22,300.

In Chapter 3 as the Levites are counted, God lays out their duties. The Gershonites camped on the Tabernacle's west side, and handled the **fabrics** - that is, *the coverings and the screens - the tents and tarps*.

The Kohathites camped on the south side of the Tabernacle and managed the **furniture** - *the Ark, the lampstand, the table of showbread, both altars*.

And the Merarites camped north, and transported the **frame** - *the boards, bars, pillars, sockets, and pegs*.

Here're **the Tabernacle movers**: Gershon moved the **fabrics**, Kohath the **furniture**.

## Merari the framework.

Verse 38, “Moreover those who were to camp before the tabernacle on the east, before the tabernacle of meeting, were Moses, Aaron, and his sons, keeping charge of the sanctuary, to meet the needs of the children of Israel; but the outsider who came near was to be put to death.” East of the Tabernacle was right by its entrance. Moses and Aaron had the nearest access.

“All who were numbered of the Levites, whom Moses and Aaron numbered at the commandment of the LORD, by their families, all the males from a month old and above, were 22,000.” *All 22,000 had Levi genes.*

Verse 42, “So Moses numbered all the firstborn among the children of Israel, as the LORD commanded him. And all the firstborn males, according to the number of names from a month old and above, of those who were numbered of them, were 22,273. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites instead of their livestock. The Levites shall be Mine: I am the LORD.”

But notice, it’s not an even swap. God is getting shorted 273 firstborns. *And hey, you don’t cheat God.*

That’s why verse 46 tells us, “For the redemption of the 273 of the firstborn of the children of Israel, who are more than the number of the Levites, you shall take five shekels for each one individually; you shall take them in the currency of the shekel of the sanctuary, the shekel of 20 gerahs (a “gerah” was a tiny coin, it had the smallest value among Hebrew currency). And you shall give the money, with which the excess number of them is redeemed, to Aaron and his sons.” So 1,365 shekels are collected from Israel’s families to reimburse Aaron for getting less Levites than firstborns.

Now there’re a couple of problems here... First with 603,550 men, *why are there only 22,273 firstborn?* If 90% of men marry and sire children; then 22,273 firstborns is just 1 birth per 24 marriages. Surely, there would’ve been more... *Unless* this number of firstborn were just the children born since they had left Egypt. If we’re talking babies born in the last year that would fit.

There’s another *apparent* problem... Adding males from the three Levitical families equals 22,300. *Why then does verse 39 read 22,000?* It could be Moses simply rounds off, but given the detail in all this, that’s not likely... What I think is happening is among the Levites they had quite a few firstborn, maybe as many as 300 - since God already possessed the firstborn theirs weren’t included in the count being reconciled.

Let me just say, *trust your Bible!* I've studied it for 50 years and I've never run across an *alleged discrepancy* that couldn't be cleared up by digging a little deeper.

Chapter 4, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: "Take a census of the sons of Kohath from among the children of Levi, by their families, by their fathers' house, from thirty years old and above, even to fifty years old, all who enter the service to do the work in the tabernacle of meeting." Notice, a priest served twenty years. His ministry began at age 30, and mandatory retirement was at age 50. It's interesting, Jesus didn't start His ministry until around 30 years old.

The Tabernacle was a mobile structure. Thus Chapter 4 explains how it was packed for transport.

"This is the service of the sons of Kohath in the tabernacle of meeting, relating to the most holy things: When the camp prepares to journey, Aaron and his sons shall come, and they shall take down the covering veil and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they shall put on it a covering of badger skins, and spread over that a cloth entirely of blue; and they shall insert its poles." Later in 2 Samuel 6 King David gets too casual with God's holy furniture. Rather than follow these covering instructions and carrying the Ark on poles, he brings the sacred Ark to Jerusalem on a cart.

*But the Ark begins to slide, and Uzzah, a man with good intentions, reaches out to grab it and steady it.* Yet instantly, God strikes Uzzah dead. A sinful man has touched what was holy, *and King David was to blame.* David tried to serve God **his way** - a mistake many people make today. *And it always brings death in some fashion.* **God's work needs to be done God's way.**

From verses 7-14 instructions are given for the table of showbread, menorah, and altar of incense - they too are covered with "*a blue cloth*" and carried on poles.

We're told in verse 15, "When the camp is set to go, then the sons of Kohath shall come to carry them; but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die." David and Uzzah should've read Chapter 4 more carefully.

"These are the things in the tabernacle of meeting which the sons of Kohath are to carry." Again, the Kohathites were **the furniture movers**... and they put a blue cloth over everything. *Where do you think the blue cloths that come with a U-Haul truck originated?*

Verse 17 is important, "Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: "Do not cut off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites; but do this in regard to them, that they may live and not die when they approach the most holy

things: Aaron and his sons shall go in and appoint each of them to his service and his task. But they shall not go in to watch while the holy things are being covered, lest they die." Notice, only the priests could lay eyes on the holy furniture. The Levites used their *backs*, not their eyes.

Yet in Christ, we not only serve God... **we can behold His glory!** *A blessing we often take for granted was a privilege the Levites could only dream about.*

In the remainder of Chapter 4 the duties of the three Levitical families are again emphasized. Gershon moved the **fabrics**, Kohath the **furniture**, Merari the **frame**. Aaron's son, Eleazar, supervised the furniture; while his other son, Ithamar, managed the fabrics and frame. In Chapter 3 the overall number of Levites get counted. In Chapter 4 those eligible to serve is the focus. There were 2750 Kohathites, 2630 Gershonites, 3200 Merarites. A grand total of 8,580 eligible Levites.

And your reaction to this is... *I'm missing a round of golf, or some good fishing, to find out the total number of eligible Levites? How is this possibly relevant to me?*

Well, here's what should be the take away from today's chapters... **God greatly values organization!**

The Israelites now have the Law and the Tabernacle. They could've just moved out. But God knew they also had to be organized to be effective. This new nation needed to number its ranks, and develop procedures for operation, and clearly lay out responsibilities.

And all throughout the Bible, God puts a premium on the effective utilization of time and resources. When Jesus fed the 5000, He first arranged the people into groups of 50 and 100. As He broke the bread He gave it to the disciples to serve the people. He didn't do it all Himself. Jesus knew how to organize and delegate.

Often, I run into Christians who call themselves, "**opponents of organized religion.**" They assume the more organized you are the less spiritual you'll be, and I admit, you can organize out the work of God's Spirit. I've seen it happen. Church leaders can lean so hard into their management skills they don't allow room for God to work. They trust in *their efforts*, not *His Spirit*.

But you can't read through the book of Numbers without concluding that the worship of God is intended to be "**organized.**" 1 Corinthians 14:40 tells the church, "**Let all things be done decently and in order.**" Believe me, God definitely doesn't favor *disorganized religion!*

Don't ever think it's more spiritual to forego a plan. Wasting people's time, duplicating tasks, haphazard effort is not Spirit-filled ministry. God deserves better.

Numbers 1:3 calls Israel *“the army of the Lord”* - and if you and I are soldiers of Christ - then no army goes into battle without a plan, a strategy, an organization.

I’ve heard it said, *“Don’t agonize. Organize.”* That’s a message for the Church. Remember Romans 12:8, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is that of *leading*, or *spiritual management*. We need people with this vital gift. All life has structure. Take away the skeleton from which your organs hang, and over which your skin is wrapped - and you’ll be nothing but a mound of goo... Spiritual life also needs structure and organization.

Now the camp is *organized*, but it also needs to be *purified*. Chapter 5, *“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Command the children of Israel that they put out of the camp every leper, everyone who has a discharge, and whoever becomes defiled by a corpse. You shall put out both male and female; you shall put them outside the camp, that they may not defile their camps in the midst of which I dwell. And the children of Israel did so, and put them outside the camp; as the LORD spoke to Moses, so the children of Israel did.”*

The leprosy of the day was a contagious disease, so quarantine and isolation was a matter of good health policy. And at times this is still good wisdom. A child with a green, snotty nasal discharge should be put outside the camp (*or nursery*) lest the infection spread.

Of course, this doesn’t account for why a person defiled by a corpse should be quarantined. Recall though the concept of *ceremonial uncleanness*. Often symbolic statements are as vital to God as morals or hygiene. God speaks through symbols. God is ordering a better world, and He conveys His ideal through ceremony. Thus, since God is the author of eternal life, it’s appropriate a person contaminated by death should remain outside the camp for a brief time.

God wants His camp to be pure on all levels. Even today, a church that condones sin or excuses compromise is no longer the church God desires.

Verse 5, *“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the children of Israel: ‘When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit in unfaithfulness against the LORD, and that person is guilty, then he shall confess the sin which he has committed. He shall make restitution for his trespass in full, plus one-fifth of it, and give it to the one he has wronged.’”* Hey, real repentance involves an attempt at restitution. If you sin against someone don’t just shed a few crocodile tears and offer lame excuses, try to make right the wrong you’ve done. Pay the damages you’ve caused; then add 20% for the person’s inconvenience. A glib apology is no substitute for sincere restitution.

And this was true in the NT. When Jesus forgave Zaccheus it prompted him to repay those he defrauded four-fold. The Law required pay back plus 20%. **But love is always a far more powerful motivator than law.**

Now the remainder of Chapter 5 presents maybe the most bizarre law in the Bible. This year we've studied from Genesis 1 to Numbers 5 and have run into some really peculiar stories, *but nothing this strange*. This sounds like a spell conjured up by some witchdoctor.

It's called "**The Sotah**" or Hebrew for "**strayer**." And not only is this law strange, it's probably offensive to many of you. The story strikes people with modern sensibilities as chauvinistic, and cruel, and capricious.

Let me summarize these verses for you... If a husband suspected his wife of adultery - *and this was with or without evidence, it could be sheer jealousy on his part* - nevertheless, here's what happened... The accused was brought to the priest, who took dirt from the floor of the Tabernacle and mixed it with "**holy water**." Verse 17 is the only place in the Bible where the expression "**holy water**" is used... The priest puts the woman under an oath; then writes down the curses that will come upon her if she's guilty; then he scrapes the ink off the parchment and mixes it in with the water.

The woman then drinks the potion... and if her belly swells and thigh rots, she's guilty. No adverse reaction and she's innocent... I suppose this law discouraged flirting, it could remove a cloud of suspicion from over a marriage, and it could even reveal a secret affair. *But wow, what a humiliating ordeal for a woman to endure. A woman married to an insecure, paranoid doofus, with no cause, could be subjected to this embarrassment.*

Yet remember 1 Corinthians 10:11, "**All these things happened to (Israel) as examples, and they were written for our admonition...**" That means all this about *swelling bellies* and *rotting thighs* are for our benefit. *And how can that be? Well, there's one more reason why I believe God included Numbers 5 in your Bible...*

In John 8 Jesus is in the Temple when an adulterous woman is thrown at His feet. Any other day a priest might've started this ritual, swept dirt off the Temple floor, and mix it with holy water, *but not today!* Jesus is on duty and rather than scooping dirt, He writes in the dirt with His finger. He then challenges the woman's accusers, "**He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first...**" Jesus stoops again and writes in the dirt a second time. That's when John says, "**Those who heard it, being convicted by their conscience, went out one by one...**" They dropped their stones and self-righteousness, and chose mercy.

Whatever it was that Jesus wrote in the dirt that day helped shoo off the woman's accusers. Some think it was a list of the Pharisees' sins, or names of the men who had purchased the woman's services - *but what if Jesus had written "**Numbers 5**" in the Temple dirt?*

When Jesus put His hand in the Temple dust that day, it harkened back to Numbers 5, and how cold and cruel the Law could be... *but Jesus forgives and shows mercy!* Jesus used the Temple dirt to contrast *the harshness of the Law* with *His amazing grace*. For that reason alone, I'm glad the Bible includes Numbers 5!