

## **By the Numbers**

I'll never forget how my former pastor described Leviticus to me some 15 years ago. He and I sat down for a discussion about my struggles to be faithful to my daily Bible reading. Handing me the One Year Chronological Bible, he encouraged me to try reading the Bible this way. He encouraged me to persist through the entire Bible while conceding that there would be some dry parts. "Like Leviticus," he said, pretending to gag himself with his right hand.

I would wager that's how most people feel when they start reading Leviticus. Genesis and Exodus are exciting and full of miracles, events, and thrills. Exodus closes with the glory of the Lord coming to live with Israel. However, Leviticus brings the story to a screeching halt by focusing heavily on the details of the fledging nation's relationship with God and its God-given laws and regulations of worship and government.

As one enters the book of Numbers, the story picks up again and it's understandable that the reader would become excited and hurriedly leave Leviticus behind. Doing that, however, would be a mistake. The essential theme of Leviticus -- holiness, both Israel's and God's -- carries through to Numbers and explains a lot, especially the grave consequences that the Israelites suffered because of their disobedience to God.

As Numbers opens, Israel starts to undertake preparations

to leave Mount Sinai, where they've been camping for the past year and, more importantly, where they entered into a contractual agreement known as a covenant with God to be His people. One of the things that God instructs Moses to do before they leave their Sinai camp is to take a census of the whole Israelite community. (By the way, this census in chapter 1 and the second census mentioned in chapter 26 is where the book of Numbers gets its name.)

I want to focus on one number in particular from the census: 603,550. This number, listed in Numbers 1:46, represents the total of all the Israelite men aged 20 years and older who were able to serve in the army. Except for Joshua and Caleb, all of these men died in the desert (Numbers 14:29-30). Think about that sobering statistic for a second. More than 600,000 men marched out from Mount Sinai, and only two men survived and made it to the Promised Land 40 years later.

Why? Because the people had already forgotten God's covenantal promises of rewards for obedience and punishments for disobedience as recorded in Leviticus 26. They rebelled in fear when told to enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14). They forgot that to be holy -- to be set apart from everyone else -- they had to obey God unequivocally.

People who seriously pursue holiness will also pursue Godly obedience -- even if the external circumstances look scary -- because they understand that being holy is serious business. Indeed, it is what our holy God has been working on from the very beginning, when tainted Adam left the Garden of Eden. God wants us to be holy again so that we can behold each other once more, the Creator and His creation.

*~ Matt Aggen*

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**February 25th Readings**

LEVITICUS 25:24-26:46

**February 26th Readings**

LEVITICUS 27:1-34

NUMBERS 1:1-54

**February 27th Readings**

NUMBERS 2:1-3:51

**February 28th Readings**

NUMBERS 4:1-5:31

**March 1st Readings**

NUMBERS 6:1-27

NUMBERS 10:1-36

**March 2nd Readings**

NUMBERS 11:1-13:33

**March 3rd Readings**

NUMBERS 14:1-15:41