

1. My unusual title for this lesson is "Where's the sex?" This was taken from a British journalist who was commenting on an American political scandal a good number of years back. At that time, an American president was accused of doing something wrong. The British comment was in effect, "Who cares? Where is the sexual scandal? Without that, I can't sell this scandal to my readers."
 - a) I use that title for two reasons. In Chapter 25, we have a true sexual scandal. It has to do with some Israelites turning from God to go worship a local false deity of that area. They did it by having sexual affairs with some of the local women of that area.
 - b) To explain this, let us remember where we last left off: We just finished a three-chapter section about two non-Israelite men. One was a local king named Balaam, who ruled over the Moabites. Then we had the prophet Balaam, who gave four separate predictions that God would bless the Israelites. Now the story switches in Chapter 25 to a sexual scandal involving lots of Israelites. We don't learn of the connection until Chapter 31. Then, we learn that Balaam is the one who told the king to organize this scandal in the first place.
 - i) Balaam could not curse the Israelites, but he wanted to earn a fee for cursing them. So behind the scenes he told the king in effect, "Send out your prettiest girls to go entice Israelite men. Get those men to worship the local god by getting them to have sex with those girls." That in effect is the sexual scandal of this chapter.
 - c) That leads me to Chapter 26. This is one of the longest chapters in the book and I'll also admit, is one of the most boring chapters. This chapter will remind us why this book is called "The Book of Numbers" in English. This chapter goes to great detail to let us know the exact number of Israelite fighting men after this scandal was over. The conclusion of this chapter is that the exact number of Israelite men is essentially the same (with less than a 0.1% difference) than the last count forty years earlier.
 - i) The main point here is that the Israelites failed to grow as a nation during the forty year period that they wandered in the wilderness. The good news is that despite the scandal of the previous chapter and the death that occurred due to that scandal not to mention the death caused by other scandals earlier in the book, there was no decrease in population. The bad news is the number of Israelites failed to increase during this time. The population is about the same as it was forty years earlier.
 - ii) Thus, my title, "Where's the sex" as the Israelites failed to increase in numbers.
2. OK John, so the Israelites collectively committed a sexual scandal in Chapter 25 and they failed to increase in size in Chapter 26. Why should I care about any of this ancient history? As you like to say, what does any of this have to do with the fact that my kids are sick or my bills are due?
 - a) The answer has to do with perspective. One thing the bible emphasizes through out the book is to teach us how to have proper perspective about whatever it is we have to deal with in our lives. God never promises to make our problems instantly go away. He does promise to guide us through whatever we are dealing with at the moment. The secret of course is to keep our focus upon Him and He then will help us with our lives.
 - b) That leads me back to these Israelites. The scandal of Chapter 25 is based on the fact they got their focus off of God and onto the excitement of a sexual relationship. That scandal will cause the death of over twenty thousand people in this chapter. My job is to explain why that many people died and how the "where's the sex" issue was the problem.
 - c) This also leads me to Chapter 26. To state the obvious, God is not anti-sex. We can't produce the new people without sexual activity. The Israelites failed to increase in size over the last forty years due to a lack of increase in children. That is why the concept of "where's the sex" is an issue in this chapter as well. With that intriguing but confusing introduction done, let me start the text and I'll explain this concept in more detail.

3. Chapter 25, Verse 1: While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, ² who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. ³ So Israel joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor. And the LORD's anger burned against them.
- a) These three verses require a number of behind the scenes explanations:
 - i) The Israelites are now camped just east, outside of Israel in a large valley. They will effectively be here until the end of the book. This same group will not enter Israel until after Moses dies which is the end of the next book, Deuteronomy. Then the next leader, Joshua will actually lead them in the Promised Land.
 - ii) Meanwhile, the Israelites are in effect, just sitting there. Meanwhile number two, the King of the Moabites still wanted to defeat the Israelites as all two million of them (I'll explain that number in this lesson) are still in Moabite territory.
 - iii) Next, I need to talk a little about this false religion. The local god of that area was named Baal. As strange as this seems, Baal was a god of fertility. The idea was if one would make the effort to please Baal, one would increase in riches. In order to entice Baal, one is to have sexual activity. Therefore, it was the duty of female prostitutes to have sexual activity in order to entice Baal. They would invite men to these encounters. That is why I have my title "where's the sex".
 - iv) Then came the consequences of this sexual activity. To state the obvious, babies would happen due to this activity. Those babies were then sacrificed to Baal to show one's trust in Baal to provide for one's future. This is sort of like an ancient abortion ritual, only with loud drums to silence the babies screaming.
 - v) The point is all of this sexual activity is enticing based on the appeal of the girls who "worked" for Baal, but there were consequences for these sins. The Israelites struggled with this false religion for centuries as they failed to end this practice.
 - a) This is why God wanted to bring this false religion to an end and perform a "mercy killing" on the people involved in this practice. The problem was that they were sacrificing their own children due to this sinful practice.
 - b) It was much more than just turning from the true God. It was the practice of actually sacrificing living children to appease this false god.
 - b) With all of that background in mind, these three verses should make more sense. Some of the Israelite men were enticed by these women and had sexual relations with them. Then these women invited the Israelite men to the sacrifice of their gods. Yes it is as bad as it seems. The men were probably invited to watch the rituals with children being sacrificed to Baal in order to get Baal to bless them with more children and more stuff.
 - i) For a man, this does have appeal: Have lots of illicit sex and then watch a ritual where the outcome of that sex is sacrificed to this deity. Of course, they don't see the consequences of their actions: Not only are they turning away from God, but then they are sacrificing their own children due to their sins.
 - ii) One of the reasons God wanted the Israelites to wipe out the current inhabitants of the nation of Israel was due to Baal worship. Any religion that encourages child sacrifice is not one that any society should tolerate. That is why back in Genesis 15:16, God told the common ancestor of all the Israelites, Abraham in effect, "I will give this group 400 years to stop this practice. Then, if they don't wipe them out."
 - iii) My related point is that Verse 3 says, "The LORD's anger burned against them".
 - a) Does God literally get angry? I argue no, as I believe that God knows all things and He cannot learn. The anger is our perception of His reaction to our actions. The point is if we have dedicated our lives to serving Him, it means just that, He is in charge of our lives. If our behavior is not pleasing to Him, that could be perceived by us as His anger.
 - c) So how did the Israelites know God was angry anyway? The answer is in Verse 4 where God tells Moses, their leader to punish those who are responsible for this sin.

4. Verse 4: The LORD said to Moses, "Take all the leaders of these people, kill them and expose them in broad daylight before the LORD, so that the LORD's fierce anger may turn away from Israel." ⁵ So Moses said to Israel's judges, "Each of you must put to death those of your men who have joined in worshipping the Baal of Peor."
- a) Let's start with the phrase "leaders of these people". Does that mean God wanted to kill all of the tribal leaders? I believe it only refers to those who lead the rest of the Israelites to go after the Moabite women. Some commentators believe it was all the leaders.
 - b) Stop and think about the fact that the last two chapters talked about how the Israelites were blessed. The foreign prophet Balaam could not curse what God has blessed. The only thing that can hold back from God blessing us is when we willfully turn from Him.
 - i) "The mightiest attack of Satan against us can never do as much damage as our own sin and rebellion against the Lord." David Guzik.
 - c) Meanwhile Moses ordered that the judges of Israel (think of the judges as those people appointed by the Israelites to be in charge of their particular group) to find out who among their group was guilty of this action and put them to death.
 - d) OK, why a death sentence? All of us admit that having an affair is wrong, but why does God call for a death sentence here? The first of the 10 commandments is to have no other god except the true God. By worshipping false gods, one is turning away from Him.
 - i) Still, how does that warrant a death sentence? Think of it as having a body part that has incurable cancer. One has to remove what cannot be fixed in order that the rest of one's body can live on. Now think of all of Israel as a "single body". God wants to eliminate what is causing "cancer" to the rest of the Israelites.
 - ii) I don't know if the people who died here are saved or not. That is God's business. Our business is to judge behavior as it affects our lives and the lives of believers. For example, if there is someone in our church congregation who is openly sinning by having an affair, and that affair is common knowledge, there should not be any tolerance of that sin in that church. That person should be told to leave the church (using Matthew 18:15-19 as a model of how to judge them) until they repent.
 - iii) This leads me back to the "death sentence". To state the obvious, we don't put people to death today for having an affair. However, again, they should not be part of our church body until they repent. In that sense, we do commit a "death sentence" by not allowing them to be a part of our community until they repent.
 - e) So why does God have no tolerance of this false religion? Does God literally get jealous of other gods? The answer is, if God cares about us, then He would care about our behavior. He wants the best for us. He wants us to live a life full of joy no matter the circumstances. God makes an example of those who turn from Him (until they repent) in order to teach the rest of us that the best thing we can do for our lives is to keep our focus upon Him.
 - i) Look at it this way: These men were guilty of killing innocent children due to the illicit sexual activity. God is punishing them as they are punishing innocent kids.
 - ii) Does that mean God wants us to kill those who commit abortions? No. It means that God will judge people appropriately for their actions. Their actions here were to kill the byproduct of the worship of these false gods.
 - f) One final thing I want to bring up about these verses. Not only did God tell Moses to kill those who committed this act, but also that they are to publicly display their dead bodies. I don't believe they were killed publicly. After they were killed, instead of just burying the bodies, the bodies were left out in the open as a public witness to the other Israelites.
 - i) The point is this crime was so bad, that God wanted everyone to know what were the consequences of this crime. This leads me back to the scandal of "where's the sex"? Let's be honest, it is enticing to consider having a sexual affair. What we fail to consider is the consequences of our actions. Today, we have millions of babies killed out of inconvenience to the lifestyle of the parents of those children.

5. Verse 6: Then an Israelite man brought to his family a Midianite woman right before the eyes of Moses and the whole assembly of Israel while they were weeping at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.⁷ When Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, saw this, he left the assembly, took a spear in his hand⁸ and followed the Israelite into the tent. He drove the spear through both of them--through the Israelite and into the woman's body. Then the plague against the Israelites was stopped;⁹ but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000.
- a) Let me set the scene: Picture the leaders of Israel at the central location, God's tabernacle. Moses gave the order to kill everyone who was involved in this scandal. They knew God gave the order to kill fellow Israelites that they may have known all of their lives.
 - i) Then, all of a sudden, a man shows up with one of these foreign women right in front of Moses and the other leaders. Essentially this couple has sex either right in the main tabernacle or very close to that central location.
 - ii) The grandson of the original high priest Aaron, saw this action, and he killed both the man and the woman literally in the act of having sex. The original text implies that the sword pierced them essentially as they were doing it.
 - iii) That act of killing this couple ended the plague.
 - iv) The total number of Israelites who died in this plague were about 24,000 people.
 - b) This leads to a lot of questions: How did the 24,000 die anyway? Were they all tried as individuals and sentenced to death for their crimes? Was there some sort of plague that broke out? Was it some sort of sexual disease that just caused the guilty ones to die? I don't know the "how", I just know the results and again, 24,000 died.
 - i) Somehow the leaders of the Israelites figured out that when this one couple was killed, the plague was over.
 - c) Let's think about this from the perspective of the man who did the killing, the grandson of the High Priest Aaron. Obviously he was in line to be a high priest, so he understood that part of his duty as a priest is to protect what belongs to God. Some speculate that what drove him to do this was this priest was protecting God's "Most Holy place" and the fact that this couple had no regards for God to have sex in the place where they had it. I sort of picture this priest thinking, "I am sick of all of these people dying due to the fact that some of them are worshipping foreign gods. Let me put an end to this right here and put two of the guilty people to death."
 - i) We will read later that both the Israelite man who was guilty as well as the woman was guilty were both from leading families of their tribes.
 - d) Speaking of the guilty couple let me talk about them for the moment. The guy having the sex was probably thinking, "Hey this foreign god says we can be blessed by having sex so let me do it right in front of our god so He can be blessed by our actions." This is the false idea of thinking that somehow God needs our help in order for Him to bless us.
 - i) I admit I am reminded of a famous joke by Richard Pryor many years ago when he said, "How would you prefer to die, having sex or cancer?" Richard then said, "I will be in that long line for sex as opposed to the very short line for cancer."
 - ii) Unfortunately, the consequence of this sinful action was instant death. Again, it does not mean we kill people guilty of this crime. It does mean we separate them from the rest of the church until they repent of turning from God with their lives.
 - e) One more thing about this couple: The text says she was a Midianite. Wasn't Balak the king of the Moabites? Who are the Midianites? They were a nomadic tribe (that is a tribe without a homeland) that lived in the area. Apparently the Midianites also practiced Baal worship. Some of the women of this tribe were used as prostitutes for Baal and they were the ones who enticed the Israelites.
 - i) Think of this in terms of King Balak from the last chapter. Let's not get our own people hurt by having them mix with the Israelites. Instead, let's get some of the Midianite prostitutes to mix with the Israelites in order for them to turn from God.

6. Verse 10: The LORD said to Moses, ¹¹ "Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. ¹² Therefore tell him I am making my covenant of peace with him. ¹³ He and his descendants will have a covenant of a lasting priesthood, because he was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites."
- a) The good news is that this chapter is not all bad news. The priest who put the spear to the couple having illicit sex was rewarded for his actions. In effect, the promise made in these verses, is not a new promise by God, but the continuation of an existing promise: That is, the descendants of Aaron would remain priests for a long time.
 - b) In fact, that priesthood existed until the Romans destroyed the temple in 70AD. Why did it end then? Because the family records were destroyed by the destruction of that temple. Also the Israelites were then scattered to run for their lives. Since from that day onward, no one could prove their heritage and without the temple, that concept died out.
 - i) My point here is that a rough date here in Numbers 25 is about 1,400 BC. That means that God kept this family line going for the next 1,400 to 1,500 years. That promise by God literally came true for well over a thousand years.
 - ii) So was this priest rewarded for killing this couple? Not exactly. The point is that this priest cared about serving God and cares about his duty of being in charge of His people. So should our own pastors and priests put to death those who sin? If that were the case, none of us would live very long.
 - iii) I would argue that it is job of the church leadership to encourage a church as sin free as possible. That means that unconfessed sin is to be confessed and turned from. I think one of the biggest mistakes churches make today is the failure to have times of confession before God when we come together as a church body.
 - c) Coming back to the ancient Israelites notice the plague did not end with God saying, "OK enough death". It ended when someone in their midst took action to bring it to an end.
 - i) The point for you and me is that when we make the effort to seek Him and help to bring our own sins to an end, we don't realize the benefits to our local society when we help to bring the public turning from God to an end.
 - ii) I am not saying we have to be the "sin police". I am saying we should regularly examine our own lives and look for areas of our lives that are not pleasing to Him. Such actions can help us to not collectively turn from Him with our lives.
 - d) Let me approach this one more way before I move on. Let's say, we are not guilty of any sexual sin at this time. The issue is not just "where's the sex", but any and all actions that we take with our lives that are displeasing to Him. It is a matter of asking God every now and then, "What area of my life for just me, is displeasing to You?" I'm also not implying that every moment has to be in prayer or in some action for God. I'm saying that it is His desire that He be the central focus of our lives in all that we do.
 - i) As I like to remind my children, the most valuable thing we own is our time. At any moment, we can use that time for our self or to make a difference for others. I can't force my children to do anything, as any parent will tell you. What I can do is lead by example, which is something each of us should strive for.
 - ii) Meanwhile, it is time to get back to the "where's the sex" scandal of this chapter.
7. Verse 14: The name of the Israelite who was killed with the Midianite woman was Zimri son of Salu, the leader of a Simeonite family. ¹⁵ And the name of the Midianite woman who was put to death was Cozbi daughter of Zur, a tribal chief of a Midianite family.
- a) Something simple to consider is that if God didn't care about the man and woman who were guilty of this scandal, why are their names and family background listed here?
 - b) What we discover is that both the man and woman were prominent members of each of their respective tribes. What we will also discover is that this lack of leadership is going to cause damage to the rest of those two tribes by their bad decisions.

- c) Let me expand on that for a moment. In the next chapter, we get a detailed head count of the "fighting men" among the Israelites at that time. This is not a repeat of Chapter 1. The last time Numbers did this head count was in Chapter 1, 40 years earlier. That was a head count of the last generation. This head count is of the second generation.
 - i) My point here is that when we read of the head count of the tribe of Simeon, we will discover in the next chapter a large decrease in their number. I am convinced that large drop in number is due to the sin of their leader here.
 - ii) The point is simply that what are leaders do affect those under us. In Chapter 25, one of the prominent leaders of the tribe of Simeon has sexual intercourse with a Midianite woman. Many members of that tribe probably died due to this plague.
 - iii) As for the woman, we will read in the next set of verses, God orders the Israelites to attack and kill the Midianites. Again, it is an example of the role of the leaders affecting those that are under them.
 - iv) Speaking of the next set of verses.
- 8. Verse 16: The LORD said to Moses, ¹⁷ "Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them, ¹⁸ because they treated you as enemies when they deceived you in the affair of Peor and their sister Cozbi, the daughter of a Midianite leader, the woman who was killed when the plague came as a result of Peor."
 - a) If you recall from the opening of this lesson, I said that the prophet Balaam was the one who suggested that the Midianites do this. We will read of Balaam's punishment and death in Chapter 31. Here in Chapter 25, God says in effect, "Kill the Midianites as they are the one's who actually led you astray." So who is to blame for this sin?
 - i) The point is that God judges all of them, and they get punished by the Israelites for their sins. Think of it this way: Verse 9 says 24,000 Israelites died due to this sin. We will read of the death of Balaam and King Balak in Chapter 31. Here at the end of Chapter 25, we are reading of the death of the Midianites who caused the Israelite men to have the illicit sexual relationships in the first place.
 - ii) My point is when people turn from God a lot of people suffer. As the bible says, when sin is left alone to grow, it will eventually lead to death. (See 1st John 5:16.)
 - b) Remember that the woman who was killed by the Israelite priest was one of the leading women of this group. God is saying in effect, "There is nothing I can do to revive these people. It is more merciful to kill them then to let them keep on living like they are. I am using the Israelites to revenge the death of the babies that came from this sinful practice."
 - c) OK, you may say. Too bad for them. This happened thousands of years ago. Other than the danger of illicit sexual affairs, what I am to learn from this? It is the concept that God takes sin seriously. There are consequences then and now for bad activities. I recall one pastor saying, "The way God punishes some adulterers is to have them live with the one who they had the affair with." The point is to live with someone willing to have sexual activity with a married person is the kind of person who will be trouble to live with.
 - i) What if we say, "OK, I haven't had any affairs and I don't plan on it. Why should I care about this stuff?" If nothing else, it is the reminder that if we say we belong to God and care about pleasing Him, we should realize the dangers of turning from Him in our lives. As Christians we are saved despite of the sins we commit. Still, as most of us have learned the hard way, God in His own way, finds way to keep us close to Him despite the sins that we do commit.
 - d) Speaking of moving on, it is time to talk about the next chapter and why this is here. The previous few chapters talk about how the Israelites were blessed by God just because they were. In this chapter 24,000 of them die. The effective point of this chapter is that even if God wants to bless us, we can stop that blessing by turning from Him. When we mess up it is time to start over and take a head count of where we are in life. That is why the next chapter is in effect a big "head count" of the Israelite people.

9. Chapter 26, Verse 1: After the plague the LORD said to Moses and Eleazar son of Aaron, the priest, ² "Take a census of the whole Israelite community by families--all those twenty years old or more who are able to serve in the army of Israel." ³ So on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho, Moses and Eleazar the priest spoke with them and said, ⁴ "Take a census of the men twenty years old or more, as the LORD commanded Moses."
- a) Way back in Chapter 1, God told Moses to take a census of all the men over 20 years old who were able to fight in a war. What is implied is that if one is under 20 or if one is too old to fight or if one was unable to fight for some reason, that person was not counted.
 - i) Chapter 26 in effect does the same thing as Chapter 1. The difference is that it is now 40 years later. The first generation failed to be obedient to God and go into the Promised Land to attack the residents there. Now God is starting again with the second generation of Israelites.
 - ii) This leads me back to what I said at the end of Chapter 25. When we sin and mess up, there is a price to pay, however, we still have to move forward in life. The idea is that God still forgave the Israelites as He still forgives us and God still wants us to go forward in life and do His will.
 - b) I have been stating throughout the book that there are about two million Israelites that are camping in the Israelites. For the sake of those who have not been reading all of these lessons, let me explain it briefly. We will discover there are about 600,000 fighting men by the end of this chapter. If you figure one woman for every man, that is 1.2 million. Now one has to add for children, the men and women who couldn't go to war and for the tribe of priests that were not counted in this census. That is why I estimate 2,000,000 Israelites.
 - c) You may also remember from a number of chapters ago, that Moses' brother Aaron, who was the first high priest, had died (Numbers 20:28). I mention that because now Moses is working with the son of Aaron named Eleazar to count the people. So how do two people count 600,000 men? The answer is they work with all the leaders of the tribe. The leaders then say, "This family is part of my group and here is my count within that family."
 - d) I also need a quick "where" comment here: The Israelites are still right across the Jordan River from the land of Israel. They have been in the same spot during the whole Balaam and Balak incident and the same spot as the sexual scandal of the last chapter. This is God saying in effect, "I am not going to kill all of you for this sin. Enough have suffered. It is time for everyone to move on. In order to move on, we need a head count of who is here and who will actually do the work of conquering this Promised Land."
 - e) OK, so why should I care about all of this stuff? I get the idea that the Israelites failed to increase in number and God wanted a head count before they started to attack the people who lived in the land of Israel. This is all ancient history. How does this affect my life?
 - i) The first thing we learn is that despite the sins of the last chapter, God still cares about them, and us and still wants them to do what He wants them to do, which is go conquer and live in the Promised Land. The point for us is when we mess up God does not say "I am through with you." To state the obvious, there is always a price to pay when we sin. Then God wants us to move on and get back to the idea of serving Him as we live to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) How do we do that? The answer is different for every person. Often I find it just means to do what one enjoys doing or has a talent to do. Of course we have to balance that with life's requirements. I also find that if one prays about the idea of how we can be more pleasing to God, He does guide us to show us ways how we can make that difference for Him. Sometimes it is a matter of just being with other believers or people and just figuring out how one can make a difference.
 - f) So, while you are contemplating how one can use one's time to make a difference for God, for Moses and the top priest, they have their answer for this moment. They are to count all the Israelite men who could go to war. That is their mission for the rest of this chapter.

10. Verse 4 (cont.): These were the Israelites who came out of Egypt: ⁵ The descendants of Reuben, the firstborn son of Israel, were: through Hanoch, the Hanochite clan; through Pallu, the Palluite clan; ⁶ through Hezron, the Hezronite clan; through Carmi, the Carmite clan. ⁷ These were the clans of Reuben; those numbered were 43,730.
- a) I believe I warned everyone on the opening page of this lesson that I consider Chapter 26 to be one of the most boring in the book. It is mostly a list of names of Israelite leaders of the individual tribes and families within those tribes. The point is this chapter will give us essentially the exact number of Israelite fighting men per tribe in this chapter.
 - b) OK, why should I care about all of these people? The idea is that if God cares enough to list the names of each of these families, it is a reminder to us that He also is concerned with each of our lives and the lives of each of our families.
 - i) Sometimes I wonder how do we know God knows all of these things? How do we know that God knows the names of all the billions of people who have ever lived? That is when I remind myself of the concept that if I believe the first sentence of the bible, I can handle the rest. If I believe in a God that can create the universe, then I can easily believe in a God that knows the names of all people and cares about the lives of all people.
 - c) Odds are pretty good that a few minutes from now, one is not going to remember how many Israelites are part of each group. That is why I am not going to get to obsessed with the literal number count of each tribe. The only facts I want us to keep in mind as we go through these verses is that the Israelites failed to increase in size. That is one reason why I picked the lesson title, "where's the sex" as the Israelites failed to grow as a nation during the forty years that they were stuck in the wilderness. The lesson is that these years were truly wasted years as the Israelites refused to do what God called them to do at that time.
 - d) The good news is that this chapter does give us some interesting little side stories in order to keep it interesting as we work our way through this chapter. One of those little side stories is the next set of verses.
11. Verse 8: The son of Pallu was Eliab, ⁹ and the sons of Eliab were Nemuel, Dathan and Abiram. The same Dathan and Abiram were the community officials who rebelled against Moses and Aaron and were among Korah's followers when they rebelled against the LORD. ¹⁰ The earth opened its mouth and swallowed them along with Korah, whose followers died when the fire devoured the 250 men. And they served as a warning sign. ¹¹ The line of Korah, however, did not die out.
- a) Back in Chapter 16, we had a story about a rebellion lead by an Israelite named Korah. To make a long story short, this man led a rebellion against Moses, and he lost badly. Much of his family died due to the sin of that rebellion.
 - b) With that said, the simple point here is that not everyone in his family died out. And I should care about this because? This bit of trivia becomes a key point in the next chapter. To jump ahead and give a key point in the next lesson, one of the reasons Jesus could literally be considered the Promised Messiah has to do with the facts of Chapter 27. Still, we still have a long way to go in Chapter 26, and I'll save "27" for the next lesson. Meanwhile we still have a lot more names and tribes to get through in this chapter.
12. Verse 12: The descendants of Simeon by their clans were: through Nemuel, the Nemuelite clan; through Jamin, the Jaminite clan; through Jakin, the Jakinite clan; ¹³ through Zerah, the Zerahite clan; through Shaul, the Shaulite clan. ¹⁴ These were the clans of Simeon; there were 22,200 men.
- a) Remember I said this chapter has a lot of little facts to keep us reading? One of those facts is that the tribe of Simeon decreased significantly since the last head count. We can't be positive for the reason why, but we are suspicious of one fact: The sexual scandal of the last chapter involved a leader of the tribe of Simeon. Scholars suspect that a lot of those who died in that rebellion in Chapter 25 were from this tribe. Thus the big size decrease.
 - b) To keep it simple, this tribe lost about 20,000 men since the last count 40 years earlier.

13. Verse 15: The descendants of Gad by their clans were: through Zephon, the Zephonite clan; through Haggi, the Haggite clan; through Shuni, the Shunite clan; ¹⁶ through Ozni, the Oznite clan; through Eri, the Erite clan; ¹⁷ through Arodi, the Arodite clan; through Areli, the Arelite clan. ¹⁸ These were the clans of Gad; those numbered were 40,500.
- a) Here we have another tribe listed. The only point here is that this tribe's size was about the same as it was 40 years ago, as opposed to the tribe of Simeon that greatly decreased. It just shows that the rebellion of the last chapter may have been mainly one tribe.
14. Verse 19: Er and Onan were sons of Judah, but they died in Canaan. ²⁰ The descendants of Judah by their clans were: through Shelah, the Shelanite clan; through Perez, the Perezite clan; through Zerah, the Zerahite clan. ²¹ The descendants of Perez were: through Hezron, the Hezronite clan; through Hamul, the Hamulite clan. ²² These were the clans of Judah; those numbered were 76,500.
- a) To understand these verses we have to go back to Genesis Chapter 38. Remember that the leaders of the 12 tribes were born over 400 years earlier in the Land of Israel even before they ever moved to Egypt. When God lists the descendants of the 12 tribes, He is starting with the names of the tribal leaders and listing the families that expanded from that time.
- i) In Genesis Chapter 38, two of Judah's sons died without producing any children. Judah committed a sin by having a sexual affair with one of his daughter in laws. That sin did continue the family line. Did Judah suffer for that? Yes he did, but at the same time, God continued His plan to have the Promised Messiah come from the tribe of Judah through that family. It is a simple reminder that God will use "what He will use" to accomplish His will, including our sins. It doesn't excuse the sin, but God still used it for His glory. From this sexual scandal, Judah did have a new son (that is part of Jesus' family heritage), named Perez. See Verse 21 above.
- ii) When I said the title of this chapter is based on the scandal "where is the sex", one can see that theme runs through both of these chapters.
- b) All of that background leads us back to these verses in Numbers. The simple point here is that despite that mistake and the fact that two of his sons died, the tribe continued to exist and even prosper with a large number that existed at this point. Despite the fact that two of Judah's sons died, his descendants four hundred years later is about twice as many as most of the tribes and a lot more than the loss due to Simeon's rebellion from Chapter 25.
- c) I should probably pause for the moment to disclose the fact that the vast majority of the Jewish people today don't know what tribe they are from. When the Romans burnt down the official Jewish temple in 70 AD, the tribal records of family history were destroyed in that fire. The only exception is a few particular last names, which scholars are pretty sure is part of the priestly tribe. I'll bring up the specifics of those names another day.
- i) In the New Testament book of Revelation, it mentions 12,000 men from each tribe being witnesses for Jesus in the "end times". A great future mystery is if this fact is literally true, how will we know who is from what tribe? I don't know the answer. Just like the existence of Israel as a nation after 2,000 years of them not being in that land, I believe the answer is wait and see what will happen in the future.
- ii) Meanwhile we have to get back to counting the Israelites in Numbers Chapter 26.
15. Verse 23: The descendants of Issachar by their clans were: through Tola, the Tolaite clan; through Puah, the Puite clan; ²⁴ through Jashub, the Jashubite clan; through Shimron, the Shimronite clan. ²⁵ These were the clans of Issachar; those numbered were 64,300. ²⁶ The descendants of Zebulun by their clans were: through Sered, the Seredite clan; through Elon, the Elonite clan; through Jahleel, the Jahleelite clan. ²⁷ These were the clans of Zebulun; those numbered were 60,500.
- a) OK, here are more names and numbers that most of us will forget two minutes from now.
- b) The important thing to remember is that Moses did what God commanded him to do, which was to go count everyone. Whatever God calls us to, He also makes it physically possible and gives us the resources to accomplish what He wants us to accomplish.

16. Verse 28: The descendants of Joseph by their clans through Manasseh and Ephraim were: ²⁹ The descendants of Manasseh: through Makir, the Makirite clan (Makir was the father of Gilead); through Gilead, the Gileadite clan. ³⁰ These were the descendants of Gilead: through Iezer, the Iezerite clan; through Helek, the Helekite clan; ³¹ through Asriel, the Asrielite clan; through Shechem, the Shechemite clan; ³² through Shemida, the Shemidaite clan; through Hephher, the Hephherite clan. ³³ (Zelophehad son of Hephher had no sons; he had only daughters, whose names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah.) ³⁴ These were the clans of Manasseh; those numbered were 52,700. ³⁵ These were the descendants of Ephraim by their clans: through Shuthelah, the Shuthelahite clan; through Beker, the Bekerite clan; through Tahan, the Tahanite clan. ³⁶ These were the descendants of Shuthelah: through Eran, the Eranite clan. ³⁷ These were the clans of Ephraim; those numbered were 32,500. These were the descendants of Joseph by their clans.
- a) Here are even more names and numbers that we will forget in two minutes. ☺ I warned you that this was a tough chapter, and I'm doing my best to get us through these names.
 - i) The application is simply to remember that if God cares about all of these families it is also evidence that He cares about your lives and our lives. In Jewish thought, to kill someone also means one is also killing all of their potential descendants. That is one reason why murder calls for the death penalty in the bible. The idea here is to think of people as not just being individuals, but parts of a larger family. By listing all of these verses together, it helps us to see that picture.
 - b) OK, now onto the specific's of these verses. Going back to Genesis, one of the 12 sons was named Joseph. He is the one that became the second most powerful man in Egypt after his brothers sold him into slavery. When he was in Egypt, he had two sons whose names were Manasseh and Ephraim. When Joseph in effect rescued his brothers and his father, his father gave him a "double blessing". The point of that story is that Joseph's two sons then became equal with Joseph's brothers and each son was considered a separate tribe along with their uncles, who were Joseph's brothers.
 - i) As I like to say every now and then, "Joseph got a two for one stock split" in that each of his two sons were leaders of a tribe the same way Joseph's brothers were.
 - ii) Therefore, technically there are not 12 tribes of Israel, but actually 13. Sometimes God wanted to exclude the priestly tribe. In order to have 12 tribes and exclude the priests, Joseph's tribe had this split as mentioned here.
 - c) All of this trivia does lead me back to these verses. The point here is that both sons were prosperous in terms of producing a large number of descendants. Of the two sons, the one that was born first was Manasseh, so he was listed first here. When they actually go into Israel, the second son, Ephraim will grow and become larger in size later. Joseph's father Jacob even predicted that Ephraim would dominate one day and they did in size.
 - i) My only point here is that while the total number of Israelites was roughly the same as it was 40 years earlier, remember that the tribe of Simeon lost a lot of members probably due to the sexual sins of the last chapter. The way the total number of Israelites stayed the same was largely due to the growth of these two tribes during that same time period. OK, everyone yawn, and we can move on.
 - d) OK, one more bit of trivia here, and I promise I will move on. Notice that Verse 33 is put in parenthesis. In the original Hebrew, it is not listed that way. That is only done in some English translations. That is because that verse is a key point of the next chapter of this book. But I thought you said Korah was from another tribe earlier. Not exactly. Back in Verse 8 of this chapter, it was talking about the fact that not everyone who died in that rebellion was part of that particular family. It never said Korah was himself part of that family. Korah's family was actually part of the tribes listed in these verses. The point of having no sons will again, be a key issue of the next chapter. It affects you and me in that it teaches how Jesus could "legally" be a son of David. More on that in the next lesson.

17. Verse 38: The descendants of Benjamin by their clans were: through Bela, the Belaite clan; through Ashbel, the Ashbelite clan; through Ahiram, the Ahiramite clan; ³⁹ through Shupham, the Shuphamite clan; through Hupham, the Huphamite clan. ⁴⁰ The descendants of Bela through Ard and Naaman were: through Ard, the Ardite clan; through Naaman, the Naamite clan. ⁴¹ These were the clans of Benjamin; those numbered were 45,600. ⁴² These were the descendants of Dan by their clans: through Shuham, the Shuhamite clan. These were the clans of Dan: ⁴³ All of them were Shuhamite clans; and those numbered were 64,400. ⁴⁴ The descendants of Asher by their clans were: through Imnah, the Imnite clan; through Ishvi, the Ishvite clan; through Beriah, the Beriite clan; ⁴⁵ and through the descendants of Beriah: through Heber, the Heberite clan; through Malkiel, the Malkielite clan. ⁴⁶ (Asher had a daughter named Serah.) ⁴⁷ These were the clans of Asher; those numbered were 53,400. ⁴⁸ The descendants of Naphtali by their clans were: through Jahzeel, the Jahzeelite clan; through Guni, the Gunitite clan; ⁴⁹ through Jezer, the Jezerite clan; through Shillem, the Shillemite clan. ⁵⁰ These were the clans of Naphtali; those numbered were 45,400.
- a) I suspect that if I woke everybody up who is reading this lesson tomorrow morning and asked how many Benjaminites or how many Danites existed at that time? I doubt many of us would know that answer including myself.
 - b) So if no one cares about these names or numbers today, why are they here? They teach us that God cares about people as both individuals and as part of our families. It is to show that the Israelites continued to exist for these forty years even though collectively they failed to prosper as a nation.
 - i) Think of it this way, the bible could have just said after 40 years there were "x" number of people from this tribe and "y" number from that tribe. By listing all of these names, it shows that they were real people that God cared about. It allowed the Israelites for the next 1,400 years to know what tribe they were from.
 - ii) The bible still has unfulfilled promises that the Israelites will one day inherit the land of Israel by tribe. This is stated in the last few chapters of Ezekiel. In order for that to happen. Israel will have to know again one day, what tribe everyone will come from. How that will happen, I don't know. I just know that if the nation of Israel can exist again after not being there for 2,000 years, if that can happen, so can God make it possible for them to know their tribal backgrounds one day.
 - c) Let me explain all of this one more way. There are Muslims today that deny Israel ever historically existed as a nation, but only as a religion. Yet they believed that Jesus was a prophet of God. However, Jesus could prove His Jewish heritage through the bible.
 - i) My point is that all of these details of Israelite family history does document the history of that nation as factual history.
 - d) Meanwhile, we have almost made it through this chapter.
18. Verse 51: The total number of the men of Israel was 601,730.
- a) Back in Numbers Chapter 1, Verse 46, there were 603,550 men. That was 40 years ago. The difference 40 years later, is less than 0.1%. Again, it shows the Israelites failure to grow and prosper during the 40 years wandering in the wilderness. It shows in effect what a true waste of time all of those years were. God promised to bless them and help them grow as a nation. Their failure to grow, is documented in this chapter. Yes, God was still with them and still guiding them. At the same time, their was a failure to grow as a nation due to the sins they have committed in this book
 - i) The lesson for you and me is that God wants to bless and prosper our lives. We can at any moment, fail to gain that blessing when we are disobedient to Him.
 - ii) The great lesson of "where's the sex" as a description of a scandal, is that when we fail to be obedient to God, we lose out on blessings due to our disobedience. Does God still love us and want to guide us? Of course. We only hurt ourselves when we choose to be disobedient to Him. That is the underlying lesson here.

19. Verse 52: The LORD said to Moses, ⁵³ "The land is to be allotted to them as an inheritance based on the number of names. ⁵⁴ To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one; each is to receive its inheritance according to the number of those listed. ⁵⁵ Be sure that the land is distributed by lot. What each group inherits will be according to the names for its ancestral tribe. ⁵⁶ Each inheritance is to be distributed by lot among the larger and smaller groups."
- a) The good news is we have finished counting the "soldiers" in this chapter. However, we still have fourteen more verses in this chapter, if my count is right.
 - b) Let me give one my loose translations for these verses. Believe it or not, I have not given one of those for this lesson. Here we go: "When Israel actually conquers this land, there shall be a random drawing to decide which tribe gets what part of the land of Israel. Then a larger amount of area is given to larger tribes and a smaller amount to smaller tribes."
 - i) That is why the tribal sizes are listed at this point in the book of Numbers.
 - ii) If these verses were not listed, Joshua, the next leader of the Israelites would not know how much land to give to each tribe and how to distribute the land.
 - iii) It also shows that the Israelites will win this war before it even starts. It shows how God is guiding our lives even when we don't know what will happen next.
 - c) Meanwhile, we only have one more bit of business to do in this chapter. The only tribe not listed so far in this chapter is the "priestly" tribe, which were the Levites. The priests don't go to war, but still get some land. God commanded that the priests are not to get a single section of land, but they are to be scattered throughout the area. The idea for us is that if we are going to be a witness for God, He wants us "scattered" where the people are.
 - i) Therefore, let take care of this final piece of business in this chapter.
20. Verse 57: These were the Levites who were counted by their clans: through Gershon, the Gershonite clan; through Kohath, the Kohathite clan; through Merari, the Merarite clan. ⁵⁸ These also were Levite clans: the Libnite clan, the Hebronite clan, the Mahlite clan, the Mushite clan, the Korahite clan. (Kohath was the forefather of Amram; ⁵⁹ the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, a descendant of Levi, who was born to the Levites in Egypt. To Amram she bore Aaron, Moses and their sister Miriam. ⁶⁰ Aaron was the father of Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar. ⁶¹ But Nadab and Abihu died when they made an offering before the LORD with unauthorized fire.) ⁶² All the male Levites a month old or more numbered 23,000. They were not counted along with the other Israelites because they received no inheritance among them.
- a) Remember that Moses and his brother Aaron were from this tribe. The list starts with the common ancestor "Levi" and works its way down to list Moses and Aaron in Verse 59. In Verse 60, it recalls that Aaron had four sons. Two of those sons died many years earlier as recorded in Leviticus Chapter 10 when they failed to do their duties exactly as God had instructed them to do. I suspect that is listed here to remind the other Levites never to take their duty lightly as priests, as they could pay a major price for failing to obey God.
 - b) You may recall from earlier in this lesson that it was a Levi priest that threw the spear through the couple having sex in front of the main tabernacle. My point is simply that one should take their duty seriously of guiding God's people to do His will.
21. Verse 63: These are the ones counted by Moses and Eleazar the priest when they counted the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho. ⁶⁴ Not one of them was among those counted by Moses and Aaron the priest when they counted the Israelites in the Desert of Sinai. ⁶⁵ For the LORD had told those Israelites they would surely die in the desert, and not one of them was left except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.
- a) These final verses emphasize a couple of key facts about this chapter:
 - i) The first is that Moses and his nephew Eleazar did as commanded and did count all of the Israelites at this point in time.
 - ii) The second is that only two people of the first generation, the two spies who gave the good report, could enter the Promised Land with the second generation.

22. OK, John, it is time for your wrap up comments, and make it quick as your now running long. The reason this lesson is called "where's the sex" is that illicit sexual activity has consequences that last far longer than the joys one can have from that activity. I also called it "where's the sex" as the Israelites failed to grow as a nation during the 40 years they wandered in the desert as recorded in detail in Chapter 26 of this lesson.
- a) What I want us to get to remember is the idea that a failure to obey God has consequences that affect our lives as believers. Christians cannot lose our salvation by sinning enough, but at the same time, God wants us to avoid sin as much as possible as it is harmful to our lives as believers. Our motivation to be obedient to Him should be out of love for Him, not fear of His judgment. Either way, the idea is for us to stick close to Him by trusting Him to guide our lives. Let me explain how we do that in my closing prayer:
23. Let us pray: Father, help us to remember that You desire to guide our lives. We know that we are not perfect people. To live a life pleasing to You means that we have to stick close to You. We do that by regular time in prayer, in Your word and even time with other believers. Help us to use the most valuable thing we own, our time, to make a difference for You in this world. Guide us and direct us, even if it is painful at times so that our lives can make that difference. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.