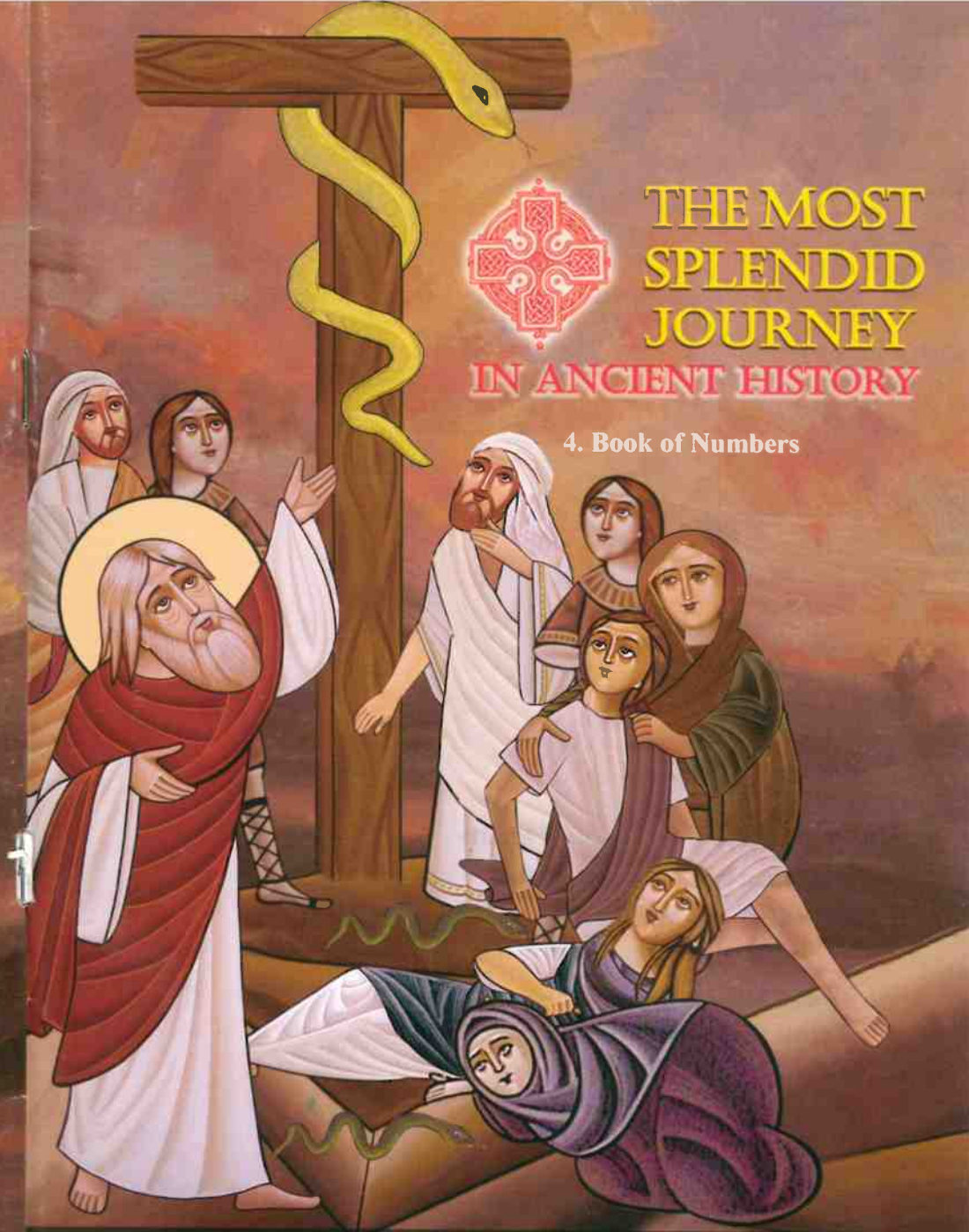




THE MOST SPLENDID JOURNEY IN ANCIENT HISTORY

4. Book of Numbers



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PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

The grandchildren gathered around Grandma Monica on the first day of the family's summer vacation. Young Mina said: "Grandma, we are so happy that you have decided to spend this vacation with us. We want to hear a bedtime story each evening throughout this week of your vacation!"

Grandma Monica answered: "I would be glad to get together with you each evening and tell you the story of the most splendid journey in ancient history; it happened more than forty centuries ago. Can you guess which story I am talking about?"

John said: "Oh! Oh! I know, you are probably referring to the journey that the children of Israel made from Egypt to the land of Canaan under the leadership of the great prophet Moses."

Grandma smiled and said: "You are such a bright child John, but the real leader was God, although He was invisible. He is the One who sent Moses the prophet to lead the people from Egypt to mount Moab, and then his disciple took over the leadership."

This was a journey that God had planned for them and which He led Himself. It was a symbol of the journey that the Lord Jesus Christ takes us along, as we travel through this world and until we enter into heaven through His Cross. That is what results in our salvation.

In my gathering with you last week, I told you about the story of Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Moses and Aaron. This time, I will be telling you about this extraordinary journey in the wilderness. I will be talking to you about Moses from the time of his birth to the time when he left Egypt with Aaron and all the people of Israel and went into the wilderness.

GOD LEADS THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

Numbers: Chapter 1

Do you remember what happened immediately after Pharaoh allowed Moses and Aaron to leave the land of Egypt with their people?

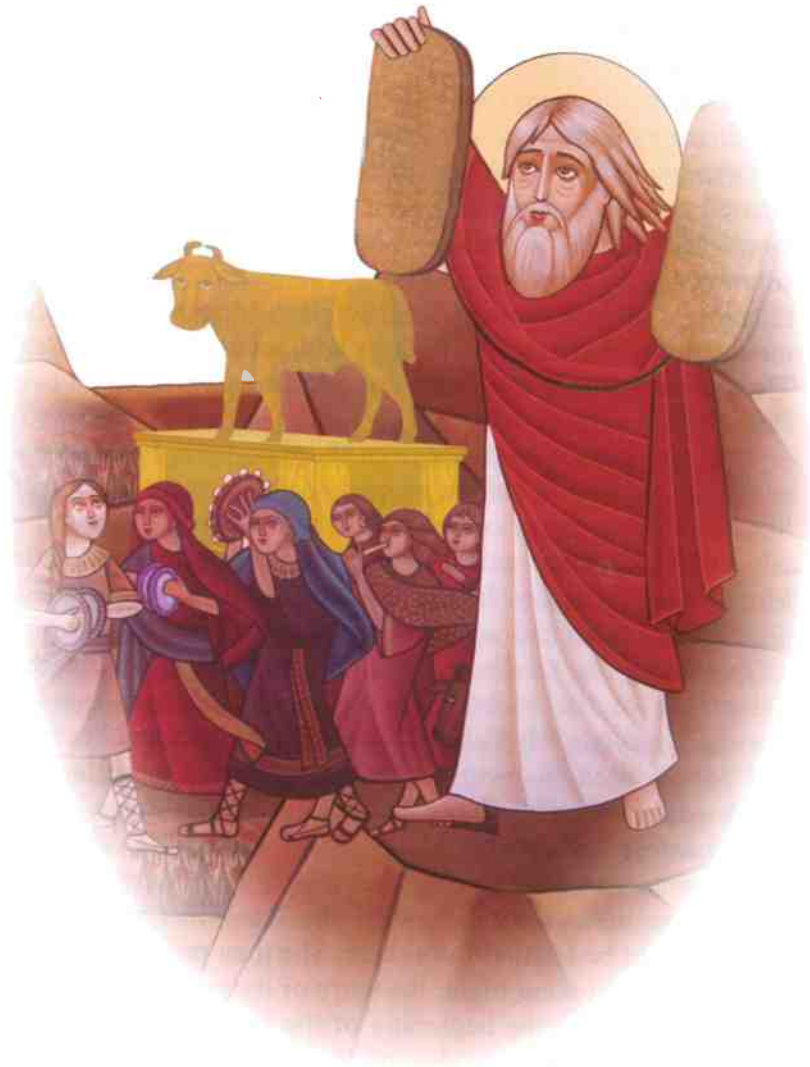
Matthew answered: "First, Pharaoh changed his mind and insisted on killing them all, with his great army and chariots, yet the unarmed people were able to cross the Red Sea and the whole army disappeared into the water."

Grandma Monica replied to Matthew that she was very pleased that he remembered some of the story but there was more! Moses led the men, and Miriam – his sister - led the women, and they praised the Lord who had saved them from Pharaoh and his horsemen. Shortly after, Moses went up the mountain. He fasted for **forty days** without any food or water. Then, God gave him the **Ten Commandments** written on two stone tablets.

When Moses came down from the mountain, he got very angry, because he found the people worshipping a golden calf like the Egyptians. In complete frustration, Moses threw the tablets on the ground and they broke down into pieces. While Moses was still angry, he prayed that God would forgive his people for sinning and worshipping idols.

According to God's commandments, Moses built the Tabernacle of the Meeting on the model he had seen in heaven. Everyone felt that the Tabernacle represented heaven; and Moses used to meet with God in the Tabernacle and speak with him as he would speak to a friend. Moses never moved unless God ordered him.

Grandma was very pleased that the children were intently listening to these stories, because she knew that many life-lessons could be learned from them. She then promised to tell them in the following night, the story of the meeting between God and Moses at the beginning of the second month in the second year after the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt.



TWO AMAZING REQUESTS FROM GOD TO MOSES

Numbers Chapter 1

Grandma Monica said:

“When Moses entered the Tabernacle of Meeting in the second month of the second year, he lifted up his eyes and prayed. Then God spoke to him and requested of him and his brother Aaron to do two things:

The first request was to take a census of the men of the age twenty and over – those would be counted as men of war.

I do not know what feelings Moses had about such a request, nevertheless he obeyed God, remembering what had happened in Egypt more than forty years earlier. Around that time, Moses had beaten to death an Egyptian who was treating a Hebrew man with excessive violence. As the incident became known, he was afraid and fled Pharaoh’s palace and went into the wilderness. He remained there for forty years, during which he did nothing but prayed that God may rescue His people from the cruelty of Pharaoh.

Moses was wondering why God requested a census for the men. Were they going to a war, even though they had no weapons, chariots or experience? He recalled that God had saved His people from Pharaoh and his army without any of the people having to get engaged in any battle!

Furthermore, Moses realized that he was going into war, and he believed that God was the One who would lead the fight and who would grant victory to His people.

Now apply this to your own life: this is what happens to every believer: he engages in war against his own sin and against Satan, and God grants him victory, so long as he has faith and believes.

The second request was that God wanted the appointment of a leader for each tribe, as He is the One who searches the hearts and knows who would be fit to lead each tribe.

In our lives, God is the real Leader and He is the God of order and organization. He is not a God of commotion. He desires His Church, as well as every believer, to live and act in an orderly manner.

Now you may be wondering why God requests organization? It is rather simple; without organization one could be staying idle or lazy, and that matter can lead to sin because it keeps the mind open for the devil's entry. When your life is in order and you have a regimen it is much easier to stay consistent in your spiritual life, and stay as close to God as possible on your journey to salvation.



A CAMP IN THE FORM OF A CROSS

Numbers: Chapter 2

The numbers of the warriors were 603,550; and this brought the number of the people - men, women, and children - to over two million. The congregation of Israel who had come to Egypt was about seventy persons and as they left Egypt now they were over two million.

The Lord delivered to Moses the plan of the camp to be built around the Tabernacle of Meeting. It was in the shape of a big cross, formed by three tribes in each direction (North, South, East, and West). In the center of the field there was a small cross with the Tabernacle of Meeting in the front with Moses and Aaron, and the three clans of the tribe of Levi, each clan facing a certain direction.

If we were to fly in a helicopter and look at the camp, we would see a small cross in the center with a big cross around it.

This is the journey of the Church of the New Testament: each true member participates with the Crucified Lord Jesus Christ as the Church travels like a Bride heading towards her eternal marriage with her Heavenly Groom.

This journey or this procession is the path of our lives as we rejoice in the company of our Crucified Lord who shelters us.

LAUNCHING THE HOLY PROCESSION

Numbers Chapters 3-10

The young child Ruth asked her Grandmother: "Is it possible for every person to join the procession in the company of our Lord Jesus Christ?"

Grandma responded: "The Lord Jesus Christ came to save the whole world. He came to be crucified on behalf of all of us. He opens His arms to everyone. But He needs to know who really wants to join the procession. This is a holy procession, a procession of the holy and glorious Lord.

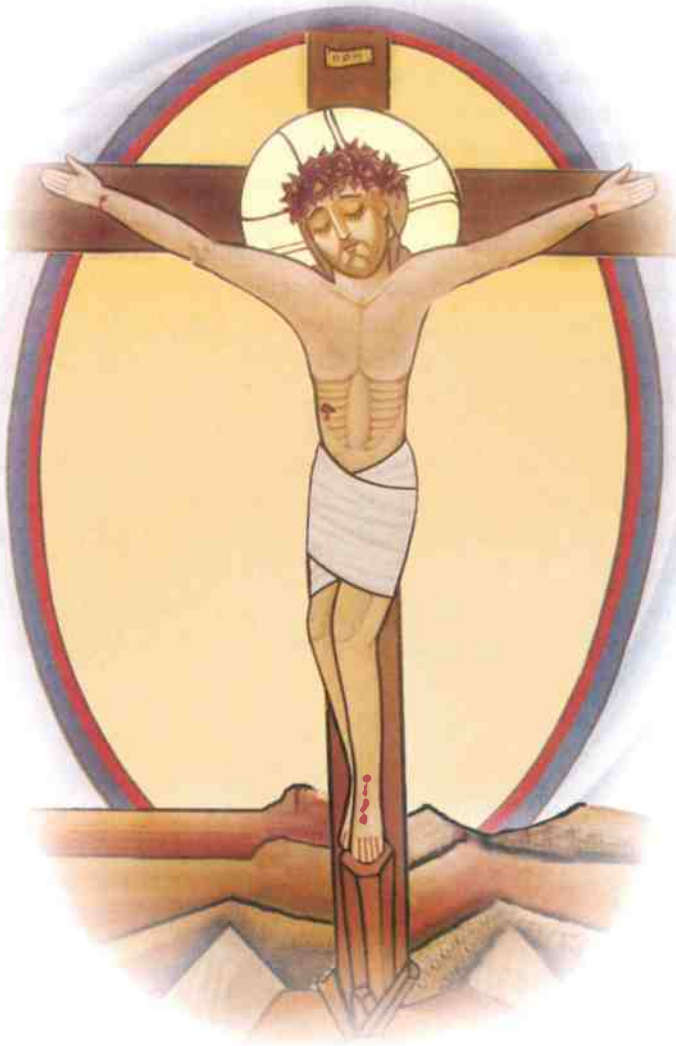
In ancient times, God asked the people and Moses the prophet, and his brother Aaron not to count the men of the tribe of Levi for they were not supposed to take part in wars since they served the House of the Lord which was the Tabernacle of Meeting. They also served the people and taught them to worship [3-4]. They devoted their lives to service in place of the firstborn of every tribe.

Ruth asked: "Would the Levites be prevented from serving in the Tabernacle, if they joined their brothers in battle?"

Grandma answered: "It is good for everyone, even the children, to worship and serve the people. However, God sets up people who are devoted to such work so that the service of the Lord is not to be considered secondary or an unimportant matter. The choice of a whole tribe devoted to work in the Lord's House underlines the importance of serving and worshipping Him.

We can say that the procession that was moving included the Levites who were devoted to serving the Lord, as well as the people moving with them. This is the procession of the Church of the holy God. Therefore, it was necessary that the people get purified, for every sin is a betrayal to the holy Lord.

This procession also included those promised to the Lord's service for they dedicated their whole life or a specific period of it and they had to fulfill the law of consecration."



Ruth asked: "Why was the Tabernacle of Meeting, the altar and its accessories anointed before they started to travel?"

Grandma replied: "To make sure that they were only to be used to serve the Lord."

Ruth asked: "Did God require any other things before they began to move?"

Grandma replied: "Yes, God requested the following:

- 1- The heads of the tribes had to bring their gifts so as to be a model for their people in offerings presented to God [Ch.7].
- 2- To turn on the lights and to have the Levites get purified, as they are the lamps that were to bring light to the world [8].
- 3- God asked Moses to celebrate the first Passover, and to fashion two silver horns. These would be used to call on the people when they had to travel, to go to war, or to celebrate feasts. These horns represent the Two Testaments - the Old and the New - which guide all believers in their decisions and dealings."

Ruth asked Grandma: "And what do we learn from all this?"

Grandma Monica answered: "All these matters are relevant even to children. They have to observe them spiritually in order to share in the procession of our Crucified Lord Jesus Christ:

- 1- May our hearts, thoughts and feelings be like the tribe of the Levites who make no demands from God, but are happy to serve and worship Him.
- 2- We all sin each day, so let us repent and confess our sins with trust in our Lord Who forgives us our sins.
- 3- Every child should consider that he is consecrated to the Lord because he has become the child of God through Baptism.

4- Our body is a tent anointed with the Holy Spirit, our heart is the mountain of Golgotha - the altar of the Lord, and we will not allow any evil to creep into our life.

5- Every day we need to give offerings to the needy, for they are the Lord's children.

6- We pray that the Holy Spirit enlightens our hearts so that we may become the light of the world as the Lord tells us.

7- We celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Passover each morning.

8- We need to read constantly the Old and the New Testaments, like the two silver horns, which when our hearts hear them, they move powerfully on the journey of the Cross.

In this manner we are able to go on the journey of the Cross joyfully and cheerfully as the Ark of the Testimony advances before us and the cloud of the Lord covers us [Ch 10:23-24]. And as the tent moves, we sing the hymn of the Lord's resurrection and say: 'Arise O Lord and may your enemies be scattered...' When the Tent stops we run into the Lord's embrace and say: 'Return, O Lord, to the many thousands of Israel' [10:25-26]."

Ruth asked Grandma: "Why has God not preserved the Ark of the Testimony until today so that it would lead us, and His cloud would cover us?"

Grandma Monica replied: "Instead of the Ark, He Himself has come to dwell in our hearts and set up His Kingdom inside us (Lk. 17:21). Instead of the cloud, the Holy Spirit has descended on His Church and lives in each one of us through the mystery of anointment (Myron). He does lead, cover, and guide us until we reach Heaven."

THE DIFFICULT PATH OF THE CROSS!

Numbers 11-16

Young Caroline asked her Grandmother: "How can we accept the path of the Cross joyfully?"

Grandma Monica replied: "The path of the Cross is hard, yet the Crucified Lord is sweet. When we look at the Lord, He will carry the Cross with us and so the road would become a bit easier to bear.

The Book of Numbers demonstrates to us those people who have travelled cheerfully on that road, while others complained and perished. Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb travelled cheerfully, while very many others sadly complained and died.

- 1- Those who complained did not thank God for the manna that He sent to them fresh from heaven. They longed for the smell of the meat they had eaten in the land of bondage [11]. They did not look to the heavenly God to thank Him. Rather, they cared for the lust of their stomachs and grumbled.
- 2- Also, Moses was hoping to see the Lord Jesus Christ coming and opening the door of the Church to the Gentiles, therefore, he himself got married to an Ethiopian woman who was not from among the Israelites.

The strange gentile woman became united to Moses the prophet [12] but his sister Miriam, who objected to that union, was expelled from the camp for a while. That is why we should not belittle any person. We need to pray for those who are persecuted and those who oppose the truth, so that they may have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- 3- Moses sent twelve spies to discover the Promised Land. Among them, Joshua and Caleb who came back rejoiced because the land was rich and prosperous, and they were certain that the Lord would give it to them. Whereas, the ten other spies were afraid to fight for the Promised Land.

When the people heard the report of the spies, they rejected Joshua and Caleb account, and they demanded new leaders other than Moses and Aaron, in order that they could go back to Egypt and live as slaves under Pharaoh [13-14].

So, the Lord punished them because they grumbled against Moses and Aaron. They had rejected the path of the Cross.

God also gave them the Commandments so that they would lead holy lives for the Lord.

- 4- During the journey of the Cross, Korah and Abiram and two hundred leaders of the people unlawfully seized the priesthood. Therefore the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up [16].

These are examples, my dear ones, of people whom the Lord called to walk on the path of the Cross. He offered them all the love and care, but they neither sought Him nor thanked Him for looking after them. They were therefore no longer protected under the eyes of Christ.

God willing, tomorrow I will tell you about the people who have tasted and enjoyed the sweetness of the path of the Cross."



A ROD OR A FRUITFUL CROSS!

Numbers 17-19

Grandma told the children:

“My dear children, I would like to tell you about the pleasantness and sweetness of the Cross to those who fix their eyes on the Crucified One. But I will leave this for a later time, as it requires many long stories about this path.

It is a path which fills me and all of you and every believer with joy as we come to the Cross. For now, remember how we had mentioned that there were grumblers? I will tell you a joyful and amazing story:

It seems that some people thought that God had favorites. He had chosen Aaron from the tribe of Levi as a high priest, and He did not choose anyone of the heads of the other tribes.

According to a command from God, Moses gathered all the people of Israel and he took the wooden cane from each tribe leader, which he held in his hand [17]. In the desert, there were no factories to produce beautiful canes like those we have now. But every tribe leader looked for a dry tree branch and tried to clean it from all the small branches and dry leaves.

The elderly fathers used to lean on these canes just like some elderly monks do today, especially those who live in caves. This helps to support them as they walk in the desert.

The people stood in amazement at what Moses did with these dry canes. In front of them, he wrote on each cane the name of the tribe leader who owned it.

He then carried the canes into the Tabernacle and placed them before the Ark of the Testimony.

On the following day, Moses gathered the canes and presented to each tribe leader his cane. The people and the tribe leaders were astonished at what Moses was doing. But he brought the dry cane of Aaron on which his name was



written, and behold it had produced new branches, green leaves, beautiful flowers, and even almonds!!

Everyone stood amazed. The cane had no roots, and it had not been put in water. So how did it produce blossoms and fruit! It bore life and had a beautiful smell as well as fruit that feed the soul.

They all realized that by grumbling as they traveled on the path of the Cross, they had not enjoyed the heavenly blessings. But Aaron had travelled with his eyes focused on the Lord, and therefore his dry cane had become a symbol of the blossoming Cross of life with its good scent.

Having underlined His work in Aaron's life, the Lord assured him that all of the tribe of Levi would not inherit the land, for God Himself is their inheritance [18:20].

The Lord gave Moses and Aaron the instructions about the red heifer [19] as an offering for sin. It had to be killed outside the camp, and its blood had to be sprinkled seven times in reference to the Lord Jesus Christ who offers His Blood as reconciliation for our sins (Is. 63:1-3).



REPEATED BLESSINGS DURING THE JOURNEY OF THE CROSS

Numbers 20-22

Grandma Monica said: "Although the people complained from time to time, God did not stop caring for them. He wanted them to taste the sweetness of the journey of the Cross."

Some of its blessings were:

- 1- The people got thirsty in the desert. They felt they were going to die due to their great thirst and dehydration. God commanded Moses to hit a rock with his rod [20]. The rock symbolizes the Lord Jesus Christ who was beaten through His crucifixion; and so the springs of the Holy Baptism flowed (1 Cor. 4:10). The people, who were thirsty, were able to drink and were content.
- 2- God granted His people victory over many nations [21]. That symbolizes God's granting us our victory over Satan and over sin. Through the Cross we live uprightly and corruption does not creep into our lives.

'Edom' means 'bloody' and refers to Satan the blood thirsty.

'Amorites' means 'bitterness' and refers to sin which is bitter though it provides a temporary sweetness.

- 3- When the people complained against God and against Moses, many were attacked by deadly serpents and many died. God ordered Moses to make a bronze serpent and raise it on a hill so that anyone who looked at it was healed of the serpents' bite (John 3:14-15). The bronze serpent points to the crucified Lord Jesus Christ Who carried our sins.



THE CROSS AND THE INVITATION OF FAITH TO THE GENTILES

Numbers 23-24

One of the features of the journey is that God revealed His love for the Gentiles towards its end. He transformed a gentile magician into a witness who prophesied about the crucified Messiah:

- 1- He spoke about the **Divine Incarnation** saying: “For from the top of the rocks I see Him... Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my end be like His!” (23:9-10)
- 2- About the **Lord’s suffering and resurrection**, he said: “Look, a people rises like a lioness, And lifts itself up like a lion; It shall not lie down until it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain” (23:24).
- 3- About the **Pentecost**, he said: “He bows down, he lies down as a lion; And as a lion, which shall rouse him? Blessed is he who blesses you, and cursed is he who curses you.” (9:24).
- 4- Concerning **preaching**, he said: “A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel, batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult. And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession,” (24:17-18).

THE FINAL PREPARATIONS

Numbers 26-36

The journey of the Cross was concluded with granting all its blessings to those who thankfully accepted the Cross with the Lord Jesus Christ. They entered the Promised Land which is a symbol of the heavenly Canaan.

- 1- When Balaam could not curse the people of Israel, the king of Moab put plan that would make them sin and act wickedly so that the Lord would abandon them. They would then be conquered. But there were others who were faithful, like Phinehas the priest who rejected the corruption that spread among his people, and who pleased the holy Lord [Ch. 20].
- 2- The Lord ordered a second census [Ch. 26] so that every believer learns that the Lord keeps count of those who will inherit the Kingdom,
- 3- Zelophehad had no sons, so a law was made for his daughters [Ch. 27] which gave women the right to the eternal inheritance.
- 4- Moses was intent on appointing Joshua as a leader,
- 5- Announcing the feasts, offerings, and sacrifices as moments of celebrations of our heavenly joyful and holy lives. They are times of rest which do not imply any laziness or slackness
- 6- Commitment of people to fulfill their vows to God.
- 7- The tribe of Reuben and Gad, as well as half the tribe of Manasseh asked to inherit the land that lay east of the Jordan River. Their request was answered but with their commitment to help their brothers in wars that would take place on the western side [Ch. 32].
- 8- Choosing the cities of refuge [Ch. 35]: three cities east of the Jordan; and three on the west of it. Anyone who wrongfully or unintentionally killed a person could take refuge in these cities.