

Ch. 4 – Numbers

(“In the desert” – not only for mathematicians): Mobilization and March Toward the Promised Land

Numbers deals with the 40 years that the Israelites (slaves liberated from Egyptian oppression) spent “in the desert” (13th century B.C.) before entering the promised land (under → **Joshua**). Although Numbers claims to include documents written by Moses (33:2), the book speaks of him in third person and was not written by him. (See 12:3, “Now the man Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth.”). Using Yahwist and Elohist traditions (from the 9th-7th centuries B.C.), priestly writers exiled in Babylonia (6th century B.C.) created a re-reading of the old traditions to make a reinterpretation pertinent to their situation –as Israelites, exiled from the land, who also hoped to return and enter it.

Undoubtedly today Numbers is one of the least read books of the Bible, but it was not always so. The first generation of Christians, very much aware of living between the redemption achieved by Jesus in his first coming and the full liberation hoped for with the second, profoundly identified with the Israelite generation of the desert. Thus, St. Paul made a systematic rereading of the events of the desert march, proposing a typological rereading of the events described in the book of Exodus, but, above all, in **Numbers** (1 Cor. 10:1-13):¹

- 1 Cor. 10:1-2 baptized in the sea; → Ex. 13:21, 14:22
- 10:3 manna; → Ex. 16:4-35 +
- 10:4 water from the rock; → Ex. 17:7; **Num.** 20:2-13 (the rock was Christ)
- 10:5 bodies spread out in the desert; → **Num.** 14:16 (LXX)
- 10:6 they coveted evil; → **Num.** 11:4-34, the quails
- 10:7 drinking... play; → Ex. 32:6
- 10:8 sexual immorality; → **Num.** 25:1-9, Moabite women (Rev. 2:14)
- 10:9 victims of the serpents; → **Num.** 21:4-7
- 11:10 rebellion; → **Num.** 14:1-38; 16:41; 17:6-15

Paul’s typological rereading makes no claim to be a modern scientific exegesis of the original meaning of the texts. Rather, by appealing to the typology, an author seeks to find parallelisms between the previous events and the subsequent situation (→ 1 Cor. 9:9-10; 10:11). On saying that the rock “accompanied” the Israelites in the desert (a Jewish tradition) and that the “rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10:4), obviously Paul goes beyond the original meaning of the texts in Exodus and Numbers to make a theological statement pertinent to the situation of his readers (NJB note 10:6d). Nor does Paul strive to represent the original story with accuracy in every detail (cf. the 23,000 deaths in 1 Cor. 10:8 with the 24,000 deaths in Num. 25:9). Other New Testament references to Numbers further underscore the importance of the book for the first-generation Christians (see also the popularity of the book among the English pilgrims in “the desert” of North America):

- Num. 21:4-9, the bronze serpent; → **John** 3:14-15, Jesus elevated on the cross.
- Num. 9:12, Ex. 12:46; → **John** 19:36, “nota broken bone” of Jesus broken on the cross.
- Num. 16:5; → 2 Tim. 2:19, “The Lord knows those who are his” (citation from LXX).
- Num. 30:2, keep your vows (but better yet, avoid making any; → Mat. 5:33).
- The promised land: → Heb. 3:1-4:13, esp. 3:6, 12-19, 4:11-13; heavenly Jerusalem, 12:18-24.

Outline

(**Boldface “P”**, the final writing, by *P*riests, from 6th century B.C.)

I. Preparation for the March	1:1–10:10 (P)
1 First census (→ 26:1-65, Second census)	1:1-47 (P)
2 Arrangement of the tribes around the tabernacle	1:48–2:34 (P)
3 The tribe of Levi	3:1–4:49 (P)
4 Laws to protect the sanctity of the camp	5:1–6:27 (P)
5 Leaders’ offerings and the consecration of the Levites	7:1–8:26 (P)
6 Passover and departure	9:1–10:10 (P)
II. First Stage: from Sinai to Kadesh	10:11–20:21
1 Order of the march	10:11-28 (P)
2 Moses’ invitation to Hobab and departure	10:29-36 (J)
3 Demands for meat, miracle of the quails	11:1-23...31-35
4 Moses approves seventy elders-prophets	11:24-30 (E)
5 Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses, Miriam healed	12:1-16 (J + E)
6 Mission of the 12 spies, Israel punished for their incredulity	13:1–14:45 (P, JE)
7 Priestly laws: sacrifices and fringes on garments	15:1-31, 37-41 (P)
8 Sabbath violation	15:32-36 (P)
9 Rebellion against Moses, punishment of Korah, Dathan, Abiram	16:1-35 (P, J+E)
10 Aaron’s rod sprouts	17:1-28 (P)
11 Priests: atoning function and privileges	17:12–18:19 (P)
12 Levites: privileges and tithes	18:20-32 (P)
13 Ashes of the red heifer, corpses, purifying waters	19:1-22 (P)
III. Second Stage: from Kadesh to Moab	20:22–25:18
1 Miriam’s death, waters of Meribah, Edom confronted	20:1-21 (P, J+E)
2 Aaron’s death	20:22-29 (P)
3 Hormah captured	21:1-3 (J)
4 The bronze serpent (→ <i>John 3:14-15</i>)	21:4-9 (E)
5 Stages toward Transjordan and its conquest	21:10-35 (E, J)
6 Balak, Balaam and his talking mule	22:1–24:25 (EJ, P)
7 Israel’s apostasy and prostitution in Peor; → 1 Cor. 10:8	25:1-5, 6-18 (P)
IV. The New Generation Prepares for Entry	26:1–36:1-13
1 Second census of men for military service	26:1-65 (P); → 1:1-47, first census
2 Zelophehad’s five daughters inherit land	27:1-11 (P); → 36:1-13
3 Joshua, leader of the new generation	27:12-23 (P)
4 Obligations concerning offerings	28:1–29:40 (P)
5 Women’s vows	30:1-17 (P)
6 War against Midian: Yahweh’s war rules	31:1-53 (P)
7 Division of land in Transjordan	32:1-42 (J+E)
V. Conclusion of the preparations (priestly)	33:1–36:13
1 List of the stages of the exodus	33:1-49 (P)
2 Division of Canaan and its borders	33:50–34:29 (P)
3 Cities for the Levites and the cities of refuge	35:1-34 (P)
4 Inheritances of married women	36:1-13 (P); → 27:1-11

1. Poor and Oppressed. Numbers does not represent the typical vision of the pre-exilic prophets of a poor class oppressed by the national elite class, in collaboration with an oppressive empire. The entire population is “in the desert” and suffer privations *because* they have been liberated for oppression and slavery in Egypt. The time in the desert lasts 40 years because of the people’s own sin, but their sin consists of not trusting in God’s promises and the lack of solidarity with the historic project of taking them, despite all obstacles, to the promised land (Numbers 13–14; see **3. Sexual Minorities** below). The privations (poverty) of Israel in the desert, then, are not due to an oppressor, but rather represent the divine disciplines that a people suffer who are liberated and on their way to the fullness of life in the promised land. In Numbers Israel’s poverty is especially revealed in relationship to Yahweh’s miraculous provisions:

1.1 Israel’s hunger: manna (11:4-9), quails (11:31-35)

1.2 Israel’s thirst: water from the struck rock (20:1-13 // Exodus 17)

1.3 Israel’s hunger and thirst, serpent plague: the bronze serpent (21:4-9)

1.4 Even more than Joshua, Numbers emphasizes that the division of the land is done *justly*, in an egalitarian sense, a practice of justice only made possible by the census:

Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying: To these the land shall be apportioned for inheritance *according to the number of names*. To a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance; each tribe shall be given its inheritance *according to its enrollment*. But the land shall be apportioned by lot; according to the names of their ancestral tribes they shall inherit. Their inheritance shall be apportioned according to lot between the larger and the smaller.” (Num. 26:52-56; → Joshua 13–21)

1.5 In addition to narrating a just division of land, Numbers refers to the Jubilee Year (36:4), established in Leviticus, a type of radical “agrarian reform,” that guaranteed the just redistribution of the land every 50 years (→ **Leviticus 25**; → **Luke 4:18-19**).

1.6 Besides the description of their privations, a consequence of the liberation of the oppressed, Numbers also contains vocabulary of oppression that facilitates our understanding:

The donkey *oppresses* (*lakhats*) Balaam (22:25) in a *narrow place* (*tsar* I; 22:26); cf. 24:8, 17);

The fast of the Day of Atonement: one should oppress (*‘anah*) one’s soul, 29:7; cf. 30:13;

The inhabitants of Canaan will oppress (*tsar/ar* II) Israel (33:55; see 10:1-10).

1.7 In Numbers, as in many books of the Hebrew Bible, a preoccupation with the Levites, clerics who are deprived of their employment by the reforms of King Josiah and the centralization of worship in Jerusalem, is evident. As Jacob Milgrom points out, although priests dominate in the book of Leviticus, *in Numbers the Levites dominate*, where they

- are excluded from the census (1:47-53; 2:33);
- register separately (3:1–4:49);
- transport the tabernacle in wagons (7:6-9);
- are purified before they serve (8:5-22);
- shave their entire bodies (8:7);
- continue as assistants after their retirement (8:23-28);
- carry the tabernacle in the center of the march (10:17, 21);
- are allies of Korah in the rebellion (16:7-10);
- later are represented by Aaron (17:18, 23);
- are paid with the tithe (18:1-6, 21-24);
- in the second census are separated (26:57-62);
- receive the spoils of war 1/50;
- *are in charge of the tabernacle* (31:30, 47);
- are given 48 cities, of which six are cities of refuge (35:6, 9-15; → **Joshua 20–21**).²

2. Women

2.1 The ordeal of women suspected of adultery (5:11-31). This is one of the longest and most detailed legal cases in the Hebrew Bible. Although common in other cultures, this is the only example of judgment by ordeal in the Bible. Feminist theology has pointed out that for modern readers, who accept the equality of women and the teaching of modern science, this is a very difficult (patriarchal and prescientific) text, since:

- it teaches a double standard that submits a woman, but never a man, to such a test, even though more often it is the men who seek sexual experiences outside the marriage;
- when the wife is innocent, the husband, who is guilty of slander against the woman, suffers no punishment;
- the text reflects magical beliefs, given that drinking the prescribed mixture of dust, ink and water normally would not have the indicated consequences and, according to modern scientific norms, there would be no correlation between adultery and the negative consequences indicated in the text.

However, as Jacob Milgrom indicates, we should not judge the text by our social norms (the imposition of such an ordeal would be an outrage), but from the perspective of antiquity, where the husband's common recourse would have been violence. As a means of sublimating the violent masculine instincts and submitting to priestly control in the sanctuary, the text offers a type of protection for the accused woman.³ Moreover, since drinking the potion would almost never produce the indicated negative effects, some suggest that the intention of the text is rather to pacify the jealous paranoid male with a little ironic theater.⁴

2.2 Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses because of his marriage with the Cushite woman (Ethiopian, black, not an Israelite; 12:1-16); Miriam's death (20:1). Although a woman, Miriam opposed Moses for having married a black foreign woman. The narrative points out the danger of following certain leaders simply because they represent an oppressed group which has our sympathy and solidarity (whether they be women, people of color or sexual minorities). It also makes it clear that the prohibition of certain texts against mixed marriages (→ **Ezra** 9:2) does not reflect an "ethical absolute," since there is a variety of historical contexts and teachings in the Bible concerning the issue (→ **1 Cor.** 7:12-14).

2.3 Idolatrous Moabite women and Cozbi (Midianite; 25:1-18; → 1 Cor. 10:8). At the end of the 40 years in the desert, the Israelite "people" (= men) began to have sexual relations with Moabite women and made sacrifices to their gods (Num. 25:1-3). An Israelite family head, Zimri, even took Cozbi, a Midianite woman, to his tent where both were assassinated by Phinehas, the Aaronic priest. In the ensuing plague 24,000 died (Num. 25:9; cf. 23,000 according to Paul, 1 Cor. 10:8). The final form of this complex text evidently seeks to legitimize the Aaronic priestly line (Num. 25:13-14; see Ps. 106:31; cf. the preference for the Levites in → **Ex.** 32:25-29). Baruch Levine concludes that in Num. 25:1-5 (J + E) the prostitution is not literal but is a metaphor for idolatry and by no means refers to sacred prostitution.⁵ Faced with the sexual abuses in the church in Corinth, and in a cultural context where sexual relations mixed with idolatrous practices, St. Paul does a rereading which takes literally the reference to prostitution (1 Cor. 10:8; Num. 25:1-2).

2.4 Zelophehad's five daughters change the law and obtain an inheritance (27:1-11). Backlash: the men manage to limit the change (36:1-12; see Joshua 17:3-6). This narrative concerning the five daughters (Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah) of Zelophehad, who died without begetting sons, provides an outstanding example of political initiative and feminine power in a patriarchal context (Num. 27:1-11). On seeing that their deceased father's property was going to pass to another patriarchal family of the clan, the five daughters, all single, approached the people's maximum political-religious center (the tent of meeting, Moses and the priest Eleazar), complained of the imminent injustice, and requested a change in God's laws on inheritances. Moses humbly presented the case to Yahweh, who then recognized the injustice in the laws and approved the amendment proposed by the women, affirming that they had spoken *ken* ("honestly, correctly, truthfully"; Num. 27:7).

However, at the end of Numbers, like modern women, accustomed to suffering a backlash with each advance, Zelophehad's daughters had to accept an amendment to their amendment, which limited their right to marry

outside their tribe and in this way avoid the original tribe's potential loss of the property – and Yahweh also approved the backlash amendment (36:1-12; but see the reference to the jubilee year in 36:4; → **Leviticus 25**). Finally the five single militant sisters submitted to the twice-amended law and married their cousins (Num. 36:11-12; Leviticus 18 and 20 notwithstanding). In the literature which reflects, sometimes painfully, the patriarchal context, this account tells of a notable subversive feminine effort – perhaps even more important for signifying the flexibility of the law and the sensitivity of God and Moses in the face of the new challenges, suggesting that the future might well bring even more favorable developments for women and others who suffer oppression.

2.5 A woman's vows (30:2-17, P) conditioned by her father and husband. In the patriarchal Israelite society, women, were they single, married, widowed or divorced, usually were subject to the authority of their father (30:3-5) or of their husband (30:10-15). A common concern of such vows would have been fertility (1 Sam. 1:9-11; Prov. 31:2), since the “liberation” that a woman sought was not a liberation from the home to enter a profession, but a liberation from infertility in order to produce many children (Psalms 127-128; see the competition between Jacob's wives in → **Genesis 29–30**).

2.6 Holy war against Midian: massacre of Midianite women (31:9, 15-18, 35). See 14:3; Ex. 34:16; cf. the protection of prisoners of war in → **Deut. 21:10-14**; → **Joshua**.

2.7 Israelite women of Transjordan remain at home during the war (32:16-27). The essence of being masculine was being a warrior (→ **Revelation**). Consequently, the women were left with the children and the animals (cf. Deborah in → **Judges**).

3. Sexual Minorities.

3.1 Miriam, Num. 12:1-16, 20; 26:59. (→ Ex. 2:1-10; 15:1-21; Deut. 24:8-9; 1 Cron. 6:3; Micah 6:4.) The daughter of Amram and Jochebed and sister of Aaron and Moses (26:59), she was the first prophetess in the Bible (Ex. 15:20). Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses (Num. 12:1-16); Miriam dies (20:1). As Phyllis Trible points out: “Unlike most women in the Bible, Miriam is never called wife or mother. She has neither husband nor children.”⁶ Majority propaganda, however, does not tolerate actions that subvert its privileges: Josephus names Hur as Miriam's wife (*Antiquities*, 3.54), while rabbinic sources affirm that Hur was Miriam's son and substitute Caleb as husband (cf. 1 Chron. 2:19; → Deborah in **Judges**).

3.2 Moses, Num. 12:1-16 (→ Ex. 2:21; 18:2; widowed, divorced, polygamist?). Married a Cushite (Ethiopian, black).

3.3 The nazirites (Num. 6:1-21). The *nazir*, “consecrated” to God, is determined by three vows of abstinence (NJB note Num. 6a):

- not to cut their hair (equals consecration to God, whose vital and liberating strength works through the Nazirite);
- not to drink fermented beverages (repudiation of the pleasant life; → **Jer. 35:5-8**, the Rechabites; Mt. 11:18-19);
- not to approach a corpse (separated for the living God).

The transition of nazirites from being a permanent state (from birth in the cases of Samson and Samuel) to a temporal state in Numbers 6, is notable. (Cf. the priestly vow of perpetual celibacy in the Catholic Church.) Like the levirate law in the Hebrew Bible (→ **Deut. 25:5-10**) and baptism (of adults, for the dead, and also infants?, 1 Cor. 7:14; 15:29), the nazirite institution appears to have gone through various stages and the texts reflect a certain diversity of expression:

- Samson, Judges 13:5-7, 14; 16:17 (and his mother, 13:2-5);
- Samuel, 1 Sam. 1:11-12: “nazirite until the day of his death”
(textual problem, LXX confirmed by 4Qumrán Sam a; see NRSV and note 1:11a);
- John the Baptist, Luke 1:15 (lacking the uncut hair).

In the nazirite principles, abstention from sexual relations (the maximum consecration to God in the Hebrew Bible) is not contemplated (cf. → **1 Cor.** 7:1-7; **Matthew** 19:12). Reproductive sex was a principal blessing in the Hebrew Bible and sexual love a basic dimension of God’s peace (shalom, overall welfare; → **Song of Solomon** 8:10). Women, as well as men, could take the nazirite vow to consecrate themselves to God (Num. 6:2; see Numbers 30 concerning women’s vows; Samson’s mother, → **Judges** 13:2-5), although it was their task to prepare the corpses for burial (→ **Mark** 16:1). When the time of their vows ended, the nazirites were to shave their heads (Num. 6:18-20; cf. the Levites who shaved their entire bodies for their consecration, 8:7; cf. Paul in Jerusalem, Acts 21:24, 1 Cor. 11:4-7). The nazirites were “different/queer,” but there was a great variety of “lifestyles” and “differences” (Mt. 11:18-19).

Thus, although there are not many explicit examples of sexual minorities in Numbers, nor of pertinent positive or problematic texts, the book overall is one of the most pertinent, since:

- Like the Israelite generation of the “desert,” sexual minorities all over the world are born in arid and hostile environments (homophobic societies) and spend their lives “on the road” without experiencing the full liberation and justice that the majority (married heterosexuals) take for granted. Thus, similarly, the first Christian generation, being very aware of living in disagreement with the “world” (Rom. 12:1-2) and under persecution, living between the redemption achieved by Jesus in his first coming and the full liberation, while they awaited with the second coming, they strongly identified with the Israelite desert generation (see above, 1 Cor. 10:1-13).

- The 40 years of the Israelites in the desert reminds us that “it’s a long, long road to freedom” that requires “militant perseverance” (→ **James**). Generations of leaders and faithful followers have died without entering the promised land (above all, in the last few years, from AIDS). The same has occurred in the other struggles against oppression: against slavery; to obtain freedom and justice for women; and in Martin Luther King’s and Nelson Mandela’s struggles for justice for people of color. Moreover, like the Israelites liberated from Egypt but who suffered privations in the desert as a result of their liberation, sexual minorities who leave the closet and reveal their sexual orientation publicly generally suffer privations (job loss, rejection by families, churches, etc.).

- Moses’ *subversive authority* confronting the oppressor Pharaoh (like the subversive authority of Jesus confronting Jerusalem’s local oligarchy and Paul’s confrontations with the Roman Empire), reveals the importance of discerning who are our authentic leaders, those sealed by God’s Spirit. Loyalty to such leaders is essential, but not to oppressors (who falsely claim legitimate authority), nor to a demagogic populist “leadership” ever seeking to take advantage of crises with slogans that only reflect ignorance and common prejudices (2 Tim. 4:3).

- Homophobic oppressors continually denounce *sin* – but always the sin of oppressed sexual minorities; they invent slander, like the accusation that the abuse of children is basically a sin committed by homosexual males, when in reality such abuses are almost always committed by heterosexual men and most frequently within their own families. The account of the twelve spies is of particular value, since it reminds us that the great sin of the majority is their *lack of solidarity* with God and the faithful minorities in the grand divine historical project (Numbers 13–14; see the lack of solidarity with the weak in Jesus’ teaching concerning the final judgment, → **Mat.** 25:31-46). A comparison between Numbers 13–14 and history makes it clear that we can be very pious and obey all the 10 Commandments in our personal relations, but if we oppose God’s will for society (abundant life for all) and continue supporting slavery, the oppression of women, the slander and violence against sexual minorities, then we are guilty of homicide – of killing countless people (just as when we support an unjust war that kills thousands).

Appendix: Elwell, Sue Levi (2006). “Numbers”. *The Queer Bible Commentary*. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, Thomas Bohache, eds. London: SCM, 105-21. A queer reading of Numbers confronts us with the question, who counts whom? And why bother to count? And (noting the *silences* of the text, as Foucault teaches us), who is left out? (Sue Levi Elwell 2006:107-08). Numbers makes clear that for the census of potential soldiers, women and children do not count, despite the examples of Debora and Jael in → Judges. Nor are women counted among the priests and levites, despite the example of the profetess Miriam in → Exodus and the women nazirites (Num 6). Particularly after the silence of the woman accused of adultery (Num 5:11-31), the protest of Zelophehad’s five daughters abruptly erupts as they seek to change Yahweh’s law and receive their inheritance (27:1-11; cf the backlash of the males who later managed to limit the amendment, 36:1-12; see Joshua 17:3-6). As Elwell indicates, especially after the beginnings of gay liberation with Stonewall in 1968 (108), many queers can identify with the situation of Israel “in the desert,” freed from slavery, but without power to enter a Promised Land characterized by justice for all. Like Israel in the desert, the effort is to survive, with power struggles between leaders and ideological conflicts between factions (gay marriage versus the deconstruction of marriage; military service for gays versus pacifism, etc.). Elwell emphasizes that the blessing of 6:22-27 includes not only the falsely accused wife but also the guilty spouse and her jealous husband; it embraces, moreover, the nazirites of both sexes as well as those who take no such vows (2006:112). In the story of the spies (Num 13-14), in addition to the courage and wisdom reflected in the “minority report”, Elwell (112) points out the tendency of minorities to exaggerate their weakness and small size (“like grasshoppers,” 13:33), instead of trusting in God and strengthening themselves through solidarity. The fable of Balaam and his donkey that speaks (22:21-35) may remind us how the study of homosexuality in animals corrects all those myths that insist that homosexuality is “against nature” (see also Elwell 116-17 → 2 Peter).

Hymns

Guide me, oh thou Great Jehovah, by William Williams, 1745 (a magnificent Welch hymn, but it individualizes and spiritualizes the community experience of Israel in the desert and perpetuates the Medieval error of referring to Yahweh as “Jehovah”; → Exodus 3).

Guide me, O thou great Jehovah,
 Pilgrim thru this barren land;
 I am weak, but thou art mighty;
 Hold me with thy powerful hand;
 Bread of Heaven, Bread of Heaven,
 Feed me till I want no more,
 Feed me till I want no more.

Open now the crystal fountain,
 Whence the healing stream doth flow;
 Let the fire and cloudy pillar
 Lead me all my journey thru;
 Strong Deliverer, Strong Deliverer,
 Be thou still my strength and shield,
 Be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
 Bid my anxious fears subside;
 Death of deaths, and hell’s Destruction,
 Land me safe on Canaan’s side;
 Songs of praises, songs of praises,
 I will ever give to thee,
 I will ever give to thee.

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Magic, Magicians, Witchcraft and Fortunetelling in the Bible; → Ex. 22:17/18; Deut. 18:10-11; Num. 5:5-31; Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:1-6, 27. (Also see “miracles” and “superstition”.)

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Hymns in Spanish, cf.:

173 Celebremos Juntos (Costa Rica): “Hambre de Dios”—“No podemos caminar...”

103 Celebremos Juntos: “Shalom, javerim” (Num. 6:24-26).

399 Himnario Presbiteriano: “Los designios de nuestro Dios” (Num. 14:21)

211 Himnario Presbiteriano: “Dios de gracia, Dios de gloria” (Fosdick, “God of Grace and God of Glory”).

¹ Oliver Artus, 1999:439-440. “Typological exegesis is the search for linkages between events, persons or things within the historical framework of revelation,” G. Lampe and K. Woolcombe, 1957:40, cited in T. B. Dozeman, DBI, 1999:15.

² Jacob Milgrom (1992:1152-53); cf Pleins 2001:71-74.

³ Milgrom 1992:1151.

⁴ “Thus while lending a tongue-in the cheek dignity to male paranoia, the law ultimately provides an almost transparent charade to pacify the distraught husband”; Rhonda Brúñete. Bletsch 2000:217; Richard Davidson points out that Numbers 5:11-31 is the only biblical law where the outcome depends on a miracle, and unlike Mesopotamian law presumes innocence until guilt be proved; *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2007:349-54; see also Milgrom 1993:192-212, where he concludes that such texts imply limits in terms of “right to life” and permit a type of abortion in certain cases.

⁵ Baruch Levine, 2000:283, 294-297; see Karen van der Toorn 1989.

⁶ Phyllis Trible, 2000:128.