Greetings, dear reader, in the Everlastingly Effectual Name of JESUS!

NUMBERS, three-six chapters, is named for the numb'ring
Of the Israelites by tribe and fathers therein.
About to enter the promised land, their faith altered:
Hearing their spies speak of giants, they faltered.
Wilderness-trapped 40 years, having turned aside,
Save faithful Joshua and Caleb, doubters died.
We see Jesus foreshadowed oft in subterfuge:
In Aaron's High Priesthood, the cities of refuge,
The brass serpent placed on pole, that looked on gave life
When the people murmured 'gainst God: all these show Christ.
When Balak, Moab's King, the prophet Balaam pressed
To curse Israel, he foresaw Christ, and thrice blessed!

JESUS IN THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

Numbers is so named because of the 2 numberings of the wandering Israelites
(Ch 1,26). One day we will be part of a great multitude which no man can
number (Rev 7:9)!

Some preliminary thoughts...the Israelites wandered in more ways than one.
When we are tempted to complain & question God's dealings in our lives, and
"murmur", the book of Numbers is good reading...eg. Ch 11. (Note that the
prayer of Moses in Num 11:29 has been fulfilled in us!). Numbers is also
salutory reading when one is tempted to rebel against those in spiritual
authority over us...eg Ch 12.

Chapters 13 & 14 are also very challenging & sobering...the Israelites were
about to enter the promised land of Canaan, but (Num 13:31-33) their spies
fearfully declared there were giants in Canaan that made the Israelites look like
grasshoppers. The faith of the Israelites (excluding Joshua and Caleb - Num
14:9) faltered, despite their having seen many mighty miracles from God. We
find it easy to condemn them, but suffer oftentimes from the same lack of
faith. How often, instead of claiming God's promises and moving forward by
faith into the land promised to us, we grow fearful of "giants" & murmur like
the Israelites (Num 14:2)! Read I Cor 10:1-13.

Due to their unbelief, the Israelites were punished by God - wandering an
unnecessary 40 years in the wilderness until all those that had murmured died,
leaving the men of faith - Joshua & Caleb. How often an attitude of complaining (instead of thanksgiving & praise) robs us of God's blessings! Amusingly, Joshua 2:9-11 informs us that the people of the promised land were themselves afraid of the Israelites because they had heard of the mighty works that the Lord had been doing! It is the devil who is afraid of us! In the Lord, we are not grasshoppers, but giant-killers!

Now to the book of Numbers. We will skip the numbering details in the first 4 chapters.

Ch 5:5-10: Sin is against the Lord ultimately (v6), and there must be atonement (v8), in Christ.

Ch 6: Here we see Jesus as the perfect Nazarite...the word means "one separated".

Ch 9: Underlines the importance of the Passover, fulfilled in Christ.

Ch 16 & 17: Aaron's rod that budded is a picture of Christ in resurrection. To show that Aaron was indeed God's chosen High Priest (and not the princes who were murmuring against him - Num 16:1-3) the head of each tribe brought a "dead" rod, and along with Aaron's rod, these were placed in the tabernacle. ONLY the rod of Aaron budded. Buddha, Mohammed, Confucius, etc. are dead, but Jesus was resurrected. God did not suffer His Holy One to see corruption (Ps 16:10). In raising Him from the dead, God the Father was confirming His favour upon the Son, that His sacrifice had been acceptable, that He was indeed the Chosen One.

Ch 19: We see Jesus as our red heifer...we may turn to Him for continual purification from sin.

Ch 21: A tremendous chapter! The Israelites murmur yet again (v5). The blessings of the Lord were spurned...regarding the manna from heaven, they said "our soul loatheth this light bread"! As a consequence, serpents sent from the Lord bit the people and many died (v6). The people repented...then God made an amazing proclamation in verse 8...which throws new light on Calvary: "The Lord said to Moses, make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole, and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, WHEN HE LOOKETH UPON IT, SHALL LIVE". This came to pass (v9).
Jn 3:16 is the most quoted verse in the Bible - "For God so loved the world, that he gave His only beloved Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life".

But look at the preceding two verses:

"And, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life". (Jn 3:14-15).

There are 2 crucial lessons to be learnt from Numbers 21:

First, the serpent is the ugliest, deadliest, symbol of sin...but that is exactly what Jesus became as He hung on the cross...SIN, for us.

Secondly, when we "look" to Jesus on the cross, life is imparted to us. Let us pause at this juncture, and look anew at JESUS, our serpent of bronze, lifted up. We will look at 7 of His attributes on the cross:

1. His **PERFECT SUFFERING**. Read Mark 15:15-23. "Pilate delivered Jesus, when he had scourged Him, to be crucified". This was a Roman flogging, with a long leathern whip called a flagella. It was studded at intervals with pellets of lead and sharpened pieces of bone. it would tear the flesh from a man's back, literally. The Romans sometimes would flog a man to death. It is probable that Jesus received 39 lashes. Yet "with His stripes we are healed" (Is 53:5).

Consider the background to the cross...Jesus was on trial many times that fateful night/morning, without rest. First, there had been a preliminary hearing before Annas (Jn 18:12-14). Then, an informal trial before Caiaphas the Jewish High Priest and the Sanhedrin somewhere in the night (Matt 26:57-68, Mark 14:53-65, Luke 22:54,63-65; Jn 18:24). At this point the Jews had started to beat Jesus - they had spit in His face, fulfilling the prophecy of Isa 50:6.

In all this, note, Jesus held His peace. They spit in His face. They buffeted Him. They covered His face, hit Him and taunted Him saying "Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, who smote thee?" But Jesus said nothing.

There followed the formal Jewish trial by the Sanhedrin (Matt 27:1, Mark 15:1, Luke 22:66-71) in the morning. Then Jesus was questioned by Pilate for
the first time (Matt 27:2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5, Luke 23:1-5, Jn 18:28-38). Pilate sent Jesus to Herod (trial #5) - Luke 23:6-12. In all this Jesus opened not his mouth. Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate for trial #6. Pilate did not want to convict Jesus, and his wife was urging him not to (Matt 27:19), so he staged trial #7 by the common people: release Jesus or Barabbas? Incited by the chief priests and elders, the people voted that Jesus should die.

In total Jesus had 3 Jewish trials, 3 Roman trials, and was finally condemned by the multitude. God was making sure that the rejection of His Son was total and complete, by Jew, Gentile, upper & lower classes alike.

That's the background to Mark 15:15-23. The Roman soldiers, having whipped Jesus, placed a crown of thorns on His head, put a purple robe on Him, and mocked Him. They hit Him on the head, spit on Him, and pretended to worship Him, mocking Him. Then He was led to be crucified. Jesus was beaten so badly before being crucified that "His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men..." (Isa 52:14). Despite His enormous natural strength, He was now so weak physically that He staggered under the weight of the cross.

We arrive, finally, at Calvary. Crucifixion was the most brutal form of death ever devised by man...deliberately slow torture of the worst kind. Jesus had nails driven through both His hands and feet to nail Him to the cross as it lay on the ground. Then the cross was set upright and put into its hole with a jarring bump. Imagine the effect!

A crucified man usually took several hours to die. And with the passing of time the pain and suffering and agony would grow worse. To breathe one had to haul oneself up on the nails, making the wounds worse. One's body would start to cry out for water. The lubricating liquid would go from the eyes, and just blinking would be torture, because the eyes would feel gritty. And remember - Jesus (sleepless) had already been beaten by Jew and Roman alike.

Some of the suffering is described in Psalm 22, written long before crucifixion had been instigated as a means of death. David in the Spirit foresaw the cross..."they pierced my hands and my feet" Ps 22:16. In crucifixion the bones of the body start to be pulled out of joint..."all my bones are out of joint" (Ps 22:14) with accompanying agony. There is profuse perspiration causing the body to lose its fluids. Strength is exhausted..."my strength is dried up" (Ps
There is extreme thirst "my tongue cleaveth to my jaws" (Ps 22:15). Ps 22:17 hints at the nudity of Jesus "I may count all my bones, they look and stare upon me". Verse 18 confirms that the Psalm refers to Jesus: "they part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture". (Cf Matt 27:35).

Despite all this, when given "wine to drink mingled with myrrh..." a stupefying drink to deaden the pain a little...Jesus "received it not"! (Mark 15:23). He refused to lessen His suffering & cheapen in any way His sacrifice!

2. His PERFECT SOLITUDE. We all feel lonely sometimes. But look at Jesus. At the last supper, there were 12 disciples. Judas left & betrayed Jesus, fulfilling the prophecy of Ps 41:9. Eleven disciples were left. Jesus went to the Garden of Gethsemane & took His 3 closest disciples (Peter, James, & John) with Him to pray...and they fell asleep! When Jesus was arrested, His disciples forsook Him and fled! (Matt 26:52). Peter, His most vocal follower (cf Matt 26:33, Mark 14:29), then secretly followed Him, but proceeded to deny Him 3 times within sight of Jesus!

We can counter that the Father was with Jesus (Jn 16:32), but then we hear Jesus crying out with a LOUD voice: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:40). Creation must have shivered at that moment, for when Jesus became literally SIN for us, His Holy Father also turned away. Jesus was left ALONE. Mocked on all sides, by Jew & Roman; Jesus was silent (when any other man would have vehemently protested his innocence), but when the presence of the Father left Him, Jesus could bear it no longer...He cried out in a loud voice, quoting Ps 22:1. He literally had NO comforters (Ps 69:20).

3. His PERFECT SUBMISSION. Jesus was totally obedient and perfectly submissive to the Father unto death. The battle was won in the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus said "...Not my will, but thine, be done." Earlier in His ministry Jesus had stated: "I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father Who hath sent me" (Jn 5:30). (Cf John 6:38, Ps 40:8 & Heb 10:1-5). How willing are we to die to self, and let His will rule in our lives?

4. His PERFECT SUBSTITUTION. Jesus took our place. We fully deserve death, the penalty for sin, but "He hath made Him, Who knew no sin, to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him". II Cor 5:21. Check also I Peter 2:21-24 and I Pet 3:18.
5. His **PERFECT SACRIFICE**. We are redeemed with the blood of "a lamb without blemish and without spot". (I Pet 1:19). Only the sacrifice of a perfect man could have redeemed us, reversed the effect of the rebellion of Adam & Eve, and removed the curse of sin & death. Contrast the lack of obedience of Adam & Eve with the perfect submission of Jesus; contrast their pride, trying to be like God (Gen 3:5) with the perfect humility of Jesus, forsaking all His glory for us (Phil 2:5-8); contrast their passing-of-the-blame for sin (Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the devil) with Jesus, Who, though innocent, opened not His mouth!

A sacrifice had to be physically "without blemish" (cf Lev 1:3, Lev 3:3, Lev 4:3 etc.), and Jesus was a PRIME physical specimen. One can see this from reading the gospels. He had laboured manually for many years as a carpenter. He could fast for 40 days. He habitually climbed mountains to pray, and spent whole nights in prayer. He walked hilly terrains in His 3 1/2 year ministry, sleeping rough many times. He may have been the healthiest man who has ever lived. It may have been no coincidence either that at Calvary He was about 33 years old, when a man is typically mentally at his peak. (Statistics compiled by Professor Arpad Elo have shown that a chess grandmaster's ability peaks between the ages of 30 to 35, and tapers off after that).

After Adam & Eve sinned they were chased from God's presence, but the veil of the temple, the entrance to the Holy of Holies, was rent in two at the precise moment when Jesus, our perfect sacrifice, died...signifying that we may now come boldly before the Father (Heb 10:19-20).

6. His **PERFECT SUFFICIENCY**: The work accomplished by Jesus on the cross is all-embracing, all-sufficient, for any & every need that we have. Full provision for every contingency is there. We walk down the hot, dusty road of life in the hot sun, and along comes Jesus, driving an air conditioned Rolls-Royce, and offers a lift. Yet pride and a lack of faith hinders us from getting into His car, and we try to get to your destination by self effort. The Lord often has to wait until we are totally exhausted by the wayside before He picks us up. We don't need to add to the work of the cross.

7. His **PERFECT SALVATION**. It is eternal (Heb 5:9), and He is able to save "to the uttermost" all that come to God by Him (Heb 7:25). He saves from the penalty of sin, from the guilt of sin (cf Rms 8:1), and from the habit
and dominion of sin. We can walk free from sin if we walk in the Spirit, perfectly submissive, reckoning ourselves dead to sin (cf Rms chapters 6 - 8), and claiming sanctification by faith in the same way that we believe for salvation, the Spirit, & the gifts of the Spirit.

All of the 7 attributes of Jesus on the cross (His perfect SUFFERING, SOLITUDE, SUBMISSION, SUBSTITUTION, SACRIFICE, SUFFICIENCY, and SALVATION) are echoed in the 7 recorded utterances of Jesus from the cross:

The first cry (Luke 23:34) was "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Our first reaction is "Jesus, they certainly did know - they wanted to kill you!" But had the mystery of the cross been revealed, as Paul said "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (I Cor 2:8). But check the love of Jesus. How hard it is, when someone hurts us, to forgive! To forgive people who have beaten you, spit in your face, called you all kinds of names, mocked you, lied about you, hated you without a cause (Ps 69:4)...takes, literally, the love of GOD. Only JESUS possesses such agape love, and those to whom He gives it as a gift of grace.

The second cry was to the repentant thief on the cross. "Verily I say unto thee, today thou shalt be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43). The thief confessed his sin and turned to Jesus for salvation (Luke 23:42). "Him that cometh unto Me", Jesus said, "I will in no wise cast out." (Jn 6:37).

The third utterance was "Woman behold thy son!...Behold thy Mother!" (Jn 19:20-27). Jesus saw that His mother was in need of someone to comfort her. Though suffering for the sins of the whole world, He took time out to attend to the individual.

The fourth utterance : "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" The original words (in Aramaic) spoken by Jesus made such an impression that they are recorded in both Matthew (27:46) and Mark (13:34). Both writers record that Jesus spoke these words "with a LOUD voice". Jesus had become sin, and the Father turned His head away.

The fifth cry: "I thirst." Perhaps Jesus did not say this merely to fulfill Scripture (Ps 69:21 in this case), but really was thirsty: God, but not "above" the circumstances. He was truly suffering. Praise God that when we drink of Jesus, our thirst is satisfied.
The sixth cry: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30). The Greek word here is "TETELESTAI". In the time of Jesus, if a servant had carried out a job, he would report back to his Master saying "Tetelestai!" If a painter had finished a picture, he would say "Tetelestai!". Jesus had finished His great work which His Father had given him to do.

The seventh cry: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit". (Luke 23:46). This was said with a LOUD voice (Matt 27:50). The original Greek for "commend" (& used also in Jn 19:30) means "give over" or "deliver up". Then there was a great earthquake! Nature could contain itself no longer. For 3 hours, the last 3 hours before Jesus died, there had been a supernatural darkness over the land. Now the earth trembled as the Lord of Creation died. "Now when the centurion, and they that were with him watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God." (Matt 27:34).

Summary: Bitten by the serpent (satan), man may look at Jesus lifted up on the cross and live. He is our serpent of bronze - He became sin for us, and bronze speaks of divine judgement, which Jesus bore in our place.

**Num 21:16-18:** The Holy Spirit is like a well of water inside us, and there are times, when like the Israelites, we must sing "spring up, O well!!" (We must not sing "spring up!" and then in unbelief sigh "O well...!"). Note (Num 21:18) that "the princes dug the well". The water was there all right, but dirt had to be removed from between the thirsty people and the water. Sin must be put away - removed - before we can drink of the Spirit. The man who builds his house on the rock of Jesus must dig deep (Luke 6:48) and remove the intervening earth of sin. If we build our house on earth (sin) it will fall (Luke 6:49).

In the rest of Numbers 21 we see Israel winning great military victories. They came from grumbling, complaining and backsliding to repentance, forgiveness (through the uplifted serpent of bronze, symbol of Christ on the cross) to refreshing water (symbol of the Holy Spirit) and victory.

**CH 22-25:** The prophecies of Balaam. Balak (King of Moab) wants Israel cursed. Sends for the prophet Balaam. God says "don't go!". Balak sends again - more prestigious guys than at first, with promises to honour Balaam if he gives in. Balaam, although he knows the will of God already, prays again.
God, knowing his heart of greed etc., lets the prophet go. The seriousness of disobeying God's first word is brought home to Balaam as his ass saves him from death. By the time Balaam reaches Balak, he has been humbled (Num 22). He is taken to a high place to see and curse Israel. His first prophecy - he blesses Israel! (Num 23:7-10). Balak then brings Balaam to another viewpoint to view Israel (Num 23:13), thinking that maybe by changing the view Balaam would change his view too (!) and curse Israel. The second prophecy of Balaam - he blesses Israel even more than the first time!! (Num 23:18-24). Balak said in effect "Look, if you're not going to curse them, then don't bless them". Then Balak brought Balaam to yet another vantage point...! The third prophecy of Balaam - he blesses Israel again! (Num 24:2-9). Balak tells him to leave! (Num 24:11). Before Balaam leaves, however, he gives one final wonderful prophecy which caps them all...he sees Jesus (!!), saying: "I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not near: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel..." (Num 24:17).

There is a sobering epilogue. The heart of Balaam was not right with God, and he counselled Balak to corrupt the people whom he could not curse. (Study Num 25, Num 31:16, Jude 11 & Rev 2:14 - note that the doctrine of Balaam is conformity with the world).

CH 27: Joshua, a type of Christ, is appointed to succeed Moses. Note that the prayer of Moses (Num 27:16-17) also applies to Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of that prayer.

CH 28-29: The offerings, as in Leviticus, all speak of the ultimate offering up of Jesus.

CH 35: Jesus is our city of refuge (Num 35:6 & Heb 6:18).