

NUMBERS / DEUTERONOMY

FOR BEGINNERS

 FAITHFULNESS IN THE FACE OF CHALLENGE

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THE "FOR BEGINNERS" SERIES

The "For Beginners" series of video classes and books provide a non-technical and easy to understand presentation of Bible books and topics that are rich in information and application for the beginner as well as the mature Bible student.

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1.

Introduction

This will not be a line-by-line study, but rather a summary of the content and lessons that we can learn from these two Old Testament books. As we have done in the past, I will assign you chapters to read from Numbers and Deuteronomy in advance so we can review the meaning and context of this material from chapter to chapter in the study guide. In this way we will be able to complete our study of both books in the twelve sections contained in this edition of Numbers and Deuteronomy for Beginners.

Background, Authorship, Historical Context of Numbers

A. Background

The Book of Numbers, the fourth book of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament, chronicles the Israelites' wanderings in the wilderness on their journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land of Canaan. Its name originates from the two censuses of the Israelites recorded in the text, but its Hebrew title, "In the Wilderness," more accurately captures its content. The book details the laws, rituals, and experiences of the Israelites, including their trials and rebellions, as well as God's provision and guidance.

B. Authorship

Both Jewish and Christian scholars attribute the authorship of Numbers to Moses. This is based on passages within the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) that suggest Moses wrote down the laws and events described (Exodus 17:14, 24:4; Numbers 33:2).

C. Historical Context

Numbers is seen as a historical document that provides a detailed account of the Israelites' experiences in the wilderness, including their travels, battles, rebellions, and the miraculous provisions of God. It also includes censuses, laws, and instructions for worship and community life, reflecting God's covenantal relationship with Israel and His requirements for them as His chosen people.

The events in the Book of Numbers are believed to have occurred in the late Bronze Age, roughly around the 13th century BC. This period is seen as the time when the Israelites, having been freed from slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses, wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before entering the Promised Land of Canaan.

Background, Authorship, Historical Context of Deuteronomy

A. Background

Deuteronomy, the fifth and final book of the Pentateuch, serves as a series of farewell speeches delivered by Moses to the

Israelites on the plains of Moab, just before they entered the Promised Land.

It revisits the laws given to the Israelites, emphasizing fidelity to God and the covenant, and includes Moses' blessings to the tribes, warnings about disobedience, and predictions of Israel's future. The book is characterized by its exhortatory style, urging the Israelites to choose life and blessings by adhering to God's commandments.

B. Authorship

Traditionally, Moses is credited with the authorship of Deuteronomy. This view is supported by numerous passages within the text where Moses is said to speak to the people.

The name "Deuteronomy" comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, known as the Septuagint.

The term itself derives from the Greek words "deuteros," meaning "second," and "nomos," meaning "law." Thus, Deuteronomy can be understood to mean "Second Law" or "Repetition of the Law." This title reflects the book's content, which includes a restatement and explication of the laws given to the Israelites in earlier books of the Pentateuch, particularly as the Israelites are preparing to enter the Promised Land.

The Hebrew title for the fifth book of the Pentateuch is "Devarim," which translates to "Words" or "Things" in English. This title is derived from the opening phrase of the book in Hebrew, "Eleh ha-devarim" (אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים), meaning "These are the words." It refers to the speeches or words that Moses spoke to the Israelites in the plains of Moab before they entered the Promised Land.

C. Historical Setting

The setting for the speeches in Deuteronomy is the end of the Israelites' 40-year journey through the wilderness, as they stand ready to cross the Jordan river into the land of Canaan.

Similarities and Differences Between Numbers and Deuteronomy

A. Similarities

1. Law and Covenant

Both books place a strong emphasis on the laws given by God and the covenant between God and the Israelites. Numbers continues the legal exposition from Exodus and Leviticus, including instructions on ritual purity, the priesthood, and community regulations, while Deuteronomy reiterates and expands upon these laws, emphasizing their observance as the basis for Israel's relationship with God.

In both books, adherence to the law is portrayed as essential for blessings and success in the land that God is giving to Israel.

2. The Wilderness Experience

Numbers and Deuteronomy share a narrative setting centered around Israel's experiences in the wilderness. Numbers details the journey and challenges faced by the Israelites as they travel from Mount Sinai towards the Promised Land, including their complaints, rebellions, and God's punishments and provisions.

Deuteronomy, while primarily a series of speeches by Moses, reflects on these wilderness experiences, using them as a backdrop for urging obedience to God's laws. Both books underscore the formative nature of the wilderness period for shaping Israel's identity and faith.

B. Differences

1. Narrative Focus and Structure

Numbers presents a mix of narrative history, law, and census lists, chronicling the Israelites' journey through the wilderness in a relatively chronological manner. It includes various accounts of rebellion, divine punishment, and the logistics of travel and camp arrangements.

Deuteronomy, on the other hand, is structured around Moses' speeches and focuses more on legal exhortation and theological discourse. While it revisits historical events narrated in Numbers and other Pentateuchal books, its primary aim is to exhort and prepare the new generation of Israelites for life in the Promised Land.

2. Perspective on Authority and Historical Context

Numbers is written from a perspective that combines immediate narrative with retrospective law-giving, often switching between third-person accounts of historical events and direct legal instruction. Its composition reflects various layers of tradition and editing. Deuteronomy is presented from Moses' point of view, giving it a more unified voice, and it addresses an audience standing on the brink of entering Canaan.

In the end, both books are written by Moses and addressed to the Jews while they are in the wilderness. The main difference is that Numbers continues to list the Laws and commands of God, the list of people who made the journey and the list of things the Jews did on their journey, both good and bad. Deuteronomy, on the other hand refers to these topics but as speeches by Moses as he prepares the people to enter the Promised Land.

Overview of the Wilderness Journey

The journey of the Israelites through the wilderness, as detailed in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, represents a pivotal era in the history of the Jewish nation. This period encompasses the transition from the miraculous exodus from Egypt to the brink of entering the Promised Land of Canaan. Over approximately 40 years, this journey shaped the identity and faith of the Israelite nation through trials, divine interventions, and the giving and reinforcing of the Law. The following is a brief overview combining elements from both books:

A. Departure from Sinai

After receiving the Law, including the Ten Commandments, at Mount Sinai, the Israelites prepared to journey towards Canaan. Numbers begins with a census of the people and details regarding the organization of the tribes around the Tabernacle, their central place of worship. The cloud of the Lord guided their movements, signaling when to set out and where to encamp.

B. Rebellion and Punishment

The journey was marked by repeated instances of rebellion and lack of faith among the Israelites, including complaints about hardships, longing for Egypt, challenges to Moses' leadership,

and the refusal to enter Canaan after the negative report of the spies. These acts of disobedience led to divine punishments, including the decree that the adult generation who left Egypt would not enter the Promised Land, destined instead to wander until they died while still in the wilderness.

C. Journeying and Encounters

Throughout their wanderings, the Israelites encountered various peoples and territories. Some of these encounters included conflicts, such as with the king of Arad, and the Moabite king Balak's attempt to curse the Israelites through Balaam. Despite these adversities, they also experienced divine provisions, such as water from the rock and the miraculous defeat of their enemies.

D. Laws and Covenant Renewal

In addition to the narrative of travel and conflict, Numbers and Deuteronomy contain significant legal material concerning God's covenant with them. Numbers deals with laws concerning purity, Levitical duties, and offerings, among others.

Deuteronomy, largely composed of Moses' farewell speeches, reiterates and expands upon the Law. It emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's commandments as the condition for blessings in the land of Canaan.

E. Preparation to Enter the Land

Deuteronomy focuses on the preparation of the new generation of Israelites to enter the Promised Land. Moses, not permitted to enter himself, reaffirms the covenant, reviews the laws, and encourages the people to remain faithful to God. He appoints Joshua as his successor and delivers blessings to the tribes.

F. The Covenant Renewed

Moses' speeches in Deuteronomy emphasize the renewal of the covenant between God and Israel. He recalls the journey from Egypt, the giving of the Law, and the lessons learned during the wanderings. The people are urged to choose life and blessings by loving the Lord, obeying His commandments, and teaching them to their children.

Conclusion of the Wilderness Journey

The wilderness period ends with the Israelites camped on the plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho. Moses' death is recorded in the final chapter of Deuteronomy, marking the end of an era. The Israelites stand ready to enter the Promised Land, carrying the laws and covenantal promises given to them in the wilderness.

This journey, with its trials, revelations, and teachings, was foundational for the Israelite identity, emphasizing faith in God, obedience to His commandments, and the centrality of the covenant in their relationship with Him.

Key Themes in the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy

The books of Numbers and Deuteronomy are rich with themes that are central not only to these texts but to the entire narrative arc of the Bible. Four key themes that emerge prominently within both books are obedience, faith, leadership, and covenant. Here's a brief summary of each:

1. Obedience

Obedience is a central theme in both Numbers and Deuteronomy, often portrayed as a fundamental requirement for the Israelites to maintain their relationship with God and to ensure their survival and success.

In Numbers, the consequences of disobedience are vividly illustrated through various rebellions against God and Moses, resulting in severe punishments, including the wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Deuteronomy reiterates the importance of obedience, with Moses urging the Israelites to adhere faithfully to God's commandments as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. Obedience is linked to blessings, while disobedience leads to curses and adversity.

2. Faith

Faith, or the lack thereof, is a recurring theme that underpins the Israelites' experiences in the wilderness. In Numbers, the lack of faith is starkly demonstrated in the incident of the spies, where the Israelites' fear and refusal to trust in God's promise led to their prolonged wandering.

Conversely, instances of faith, such as Caleb and Joshua's trust in God's protection, are highlighted as commendable. Deuteronomy often reflects on these experiences to reinforce the necessity of faith in God, emphasizing trust and reliance on Him as key to overcoming obstacles and inheriting the Promised Land.

3. Leadership

Leadership is explored through the figures of Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and others, providing insights into the challenges and responsibilities of leading a nation under God's guidance.

Numbers presents Moses and Aaron's leadership amidst rebellion, intercession for the people, and personal failures.

The transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua in Deuteronomy underscores the importance of godly leadership and the continuity of God's promises and plans for Israel. Both books highlight the role of leaders in guiding, teaching, and interceding for God's people according to His will.

4. Covenant

The covenant between God and the Israelites is a foundational theme that binds the narrative and laws together in both books. Numbers demonstrates the covenant in action, detailing how adherence to covenant laws affects the Israelites' journey and relationship with God.

Deuteronomy, often referred to as the book of the covenant, places significant emphasis on renewing, remembering, and adhering to the covenant. Moses' speeches remind the Israelites of their covenant obligations and the blessings of faithfulness, setting the stage for their life in the Promised Land under the covenant's terms.

Together, these themes of obedience, faith, leadership, and covenant weave a complex narrative that reflects the Israelites' relationship with God, their struggles and successes, and the foundational principles that would guide them into the future.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

The key themes of obedience, faith, leadership, and covenant in the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy provide timeless lessons that remain relevant for today's believers. Here are three lessons that can be drawn from these themes:

1. The Importance of Trust and Obedience in our Relationship with God

The narratives and laws in Numbers and Deuteronomy underscore the crucial role of obedience to God's commands as an expression of trust and faith in Him. For today's believers, this emphasizes the importance of living in accordance with God's will as revealed in Scripture.

It's a reminder that obedience is not merely about following rules but is rooted in a trusting relationship with God, recognizing His wisdom, sovereignty, and love. This obedience, born out of faith, is fundamental to experiencing God's guidance and blessings in one's life.

2. The Value of Godly Leadership and Fellowship

The stories of Moses, Joshua, Caleb, and others highlight the significance of godly leadership and the impact it has on the body's direction and faithfulness. For believers today, this underscores the need to both be and support leaders who are committed to following God's guidance, who intercede for the members of their congregation, and who encourage others in their faith journey.

Additionally, it speaks to the importance of being part of a congregation that nurtures growth, accountability, and mutual

support in walking with God. We need good leadership in the church. As I've said before, a church cannot grow beyond the maturity of its leaders.

3. The Centrality of a Covenant Relationship with God

The covenant theme running through Numbers and Deuteronomy reminds us of the deep, binding relationship between God and His people, marked by promises, obligations, and mutual fidelity. For believers today, this reinforces the idea that faith is not just about individual belief but involves a covenant relationship with both God and His church/body.

It calls believers to remember God's faithfulness and promises, to live out the covenant in daily life through love, service, and obedience, and to pass on these covenantal truths to future generations. We pass on our relationship with God through the proclamation of the gospel, and we are obligated to teach the future generation how to maintain their covenant with God through knowledge of His word and obedience.

These lessons from Numbers and Deuteronomy invite us to reflect on our relationship with God, the importance of the church and church leadership in our spiritual journey.

Each generation will have their own "wilderness journey" to undertake and we have to prepare them for that by teaching and modeling faithfulness, holiness and love of God. In addition to this it is also important to not only teach but to model sincere obedience to His word and how to love one another in the church since this is how all men will know that we are truly the disciples of Jesus Christ - (John 13:35).



READING ASSIGNMENT

READ: NUMBERS 1-4

2.

Preparing to Depart

NUMBERS 1-4

In our previous chapter we began our study of the Old Testament books of Numbers and Deuteronomy by examining the background, authorship and historical context of both these books written by Moses and set during the time that the Israelites spent in the wilderness after their liberation from Egyptian Captivity.

We also looked at the similarities (both books deal with aspects of the Law and covenant between God and His people, the Israelites) and differences (Numbers is a narrative describing the Israelites journey and actions, Deuteronomy is a compilation of teachings by Moses). Also, Numbers provides instructions, laws and information about the peoples' conduct in the desert while Deuteronomy is more of a monologue by Moses providing instruction to prepare the people for entry into the Promised Land.

Finally, we reviewed the various periods and major events that took place during the Jewish people's 40-year journey in the wilderness beginning with their departure from Mt. Sinai after

receiving the 10 Commandments to their arrival at the plains of Moab across the Jordan river opposite from the city of Jericho.

We ended with the key themes found in both these inspired texts:

1. **Obedience** – Blessings are linked to obedience.
2. **Faith** – The key element necessary to overcome obstacles.
3. **Leadership** – The necessity of having godly leaders to guide God's people.
4. **Covenant** – God deals with His people (even today) through a set covenant.

CHAPTER 1

In this second lesson we begin a closer study of the book of Numbers beginning with the first four chapters which you have finished reading.

Census # 1 – Numbers 1:1-46

There were two censuses described in the book of Numbers. The first of these is described in chapter 1.

¹ Then the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying, ² "Take a census of all the congregation of the sons of Israel, by their families, by their fathers' households, according to the number of names, every male, head by head ³ from twenty years

old and upward, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel, you and Aaron shall number them by their armies. ⁴ With you, moreover, there shall be a man of each tribe, each one head of his father's household.

- Numbers 1:1-4

The first census of the Israelites, as recorded in the Book of Numbers chapter 1, was conducted in a specific manner and for several important reasons:

1. Organization of the Tribes

The census was conducted to organize the twelve tribes of Israel according to their numbers. Each tribe had its own identity and responsibilities within the community. Knowing the population of each tribe was crucial for assigning them their roles and territories as they journeyed through the wilderness and eventually settled in the Promised Land.

2. Military Preparedness

Another significant reason for the census was to assess the military strength of the Israelites. By counting the number of eligible men who could serve in the army, the leaders of Israel could determine their military capabilities. This information would be vital for defense against potential threats during their journey and conquest of the Promised Land.

3. Inheritance and Distribution of Resources

The census also played a role in the distribution of land and resources among the tribes. The allotment of land in the Promised Land was to be done proportionately according to the size of each tribe. By knowing the population of each tribe, the

leaders could ensure a fair distribution of resources, enabling each tribe to sustain itself economically and agriculturally.

The manner in which the census was conducted involved counting only the men who were twenty years old and above, who were eligible for military service and considered adults in Israelite society. Each tribe was counted separately, with a designated leader representing each tribe assisting in the counting process. This meticulous counting ensured accuracy and provided crucial demographic information for the organization and governance of the Israelite community later on.

Someone might ask,



Why count only the men, would this not provide an incomplete number of actual people that comprised the Jewish nation?

This is a natural question when we consider a census taken today where one primary goal is to determine just how many people there are in a city or country.

The Jewish census, however, was not taken in order to count the total number of people. There were other reasons for the census taken in this particular manner:

In the census taken by Moses in the Book of Numbers, only the men were counted for several reasons beyond just assessing military potential:

1. Cultural and Legal Context

In ancient Israelite society, men held positions of leadership and authority within the family and community structure. The

counting of men reflected the patriarchal nature of the society, where men were seen as the heads of households and were responsible for various duties and obligations, including military service, religious rituals, and legal matters.

2. Lineage and Inheritance

The counting of men was also closely tied to the concept of lineage and inheritance. Inheritance laws and property rights were typically passed down through the male line in Jewish culture. Therefore, knowing the number of men in each tribe was essential for determining the distribution of land and resources among the tribes, as well as for preserving family lineage and inheritance rights.

3. Representation in Governance

The census of men helped establish a system of representation and governance within the community. In many ancient societies, including Israel, decision-making and leadership roles were primarily held by men. By counting men, the leadership could accurately assess the demographic makeup of each tribe and allocate responsibilities and representation accordingly.

4. Focus on Household Heads

The census likely focused on men because they were the primary providers for their families. Counting men provided a practical way to gauge the overall population and assess the community's ability to support itself economically and socially.

Overall, the decision to count only men in the census was first and foremost done as a response to God's instructions. Aside from this, the male count also served cultural norms, legal

considerations, and practical concerns related to governance and resource distribution within the community and not an effort to simply determine the total number of people.

Levites – Numbers 1:47-54

The Levites, however, were not numbered among them by their fathers' tribe.
- **Numbers 1:47**

The Levites were exempted from the military census conducted among the other tribes of Israel. Instead of being counted for military service, they were dedicated to serving at the tabernacle and assisting the priests in their religious duties.

They were responsible for dismantling, carrying, and setting up the tabernacle whenever the Israelites moved during their journey through the wilderness. The Levites were appointed to guard the tabernacle and its furnishings, and prevent unauthorized access. They were also entrusted with the care of the sanctuary.

Their duties were essential for maintaining the spiritual and ceremonial aspects of Israelite worship and ensuring the proper functioning of the tabernacle as the central place of worship for the nation. While in the wilderness, the tribe of Levi would camp directly around the Tabernacle and serve as a last line of protection in the event of an attack or rebellion.

Later on, we find out that they were not to receive a portion of land when the nation arrived in Canaan but rather, as servants of the Tabernacle, the Lord Himself would be their portion or inheritance. This, then, meant that it would not be necessary to

count them in the census for military, inheritance or governance purposes.

¹ "The Levitical priests, the whole tribe of Levi, shall have no portion or inheritance with Israel; they shall eat the Lord's offerings by fire and His portion. ² They shall have no inheritance among their countrymen; the Lord is their inheritance, as He promised them.

- **Deuteronomy 18:1-2**

CHAPTER 2 CAMP ARRANGEMENT

¹ Now the Lord spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying,

² "The sons of Israel shall camp, each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' households; they shall camp around the tent of meeting at a distance.

- **Numbers 2:1-2**

In chapter two we read an interesting account of how the Israelites were organized. They may have left Egypt as a single large group hurriedly escaping their Egyptian slave masters but once safely camped at Mt. Sinai, God not only instructs Moses to group and count the adult males in each tribe but also organizes their positions when camped out for periods of time.

Each tribe was to occupy a certain position around the tabernacle and to remain in that position when camped and while traveling as well.


BENJAMIN


MANASSEH


EPHRAIM



DAN


GERSHONITES


KOHATHITES

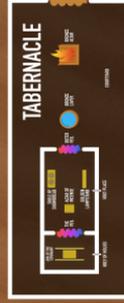


GAD



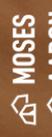
ASHER


MERARITES





NAPHTALI


MOSES
AARON
PRIESTS



REUBEN


JUDAH


ISSACHAR


ZEBULUN


ISRAEL'S WILDERNESS CAMP

Their encampments were to take the shape of a square, with three tribes residing on each side. All the encampments were to surround the Tabernacle in the middle.

The tents of Moses and Aaron, also located in the center of the encampment with the tabernacle, were placed in front of the eastern entrance. Camping with them were the sons of Aaron who were priests.

The diagram on the previous page shows the placement of the Tabernacle, Levites, Moses and Aaron as well as the 12 tribes camped around the Tabernacle. Let's review some of the reasons for each group's particular position which they maintained throughout the time that they were in the wilderness whether camped in one place or on the move.

The three sons of Levi who migrated to Egypt along with Jacob and the rest of his family were Gershon, Kohath and Merari (Genesis 46:11). Years later, after God dedicated the tribe of Levi to serve him as priests, he assigned responsibilities to each of these major families in regard to maintaining His Tabernacle. This is why the Kohathites, Gershonites and Merarites were the nearest groups to set up their tents around the Tabernacle (on the south, west and north sides). Note that the priests, Moses and Aaron camped facing east where the camp of Judah was located.

The Eastern Grouping

The first grouping of tribes in the wilderness encampment would face East toward the rising sun (which was the general direction they were traveling in - Numbers 2:3). They would be the first to leave the camp.

Next in line to leave would be the tribes on the South side, then the Levites who serviced the tabernacle, then those on the West and finally those facing north.

The wilderness tents from the tribes of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun were placed together on the eastern side of the tabernacle and were collectively under Judah's banner. Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun were the three youngest sons of Jacob's (Israel's) wife Leah.

Judah was chosen to lead this first set of Israelites out of their wilderness camp not only because it was the most numerous tribe of Jacob, but also because it was prophesied that the scepter of rule would never leave them (Genesis 49:10). Christ, in the New Testament, is called "*the Lion of the tribe of Judah*" (Revelation 5:5). The number of fighting men on this side of the camp totaled 186,400.

The Southern Grouping

The tribal camps of Reuben, Simeon and Gad were placed together on the southern side of the tabernacle and were collectively under Reuben's banner. Reuben, born through Leah, was the oldest son of all Jacob's children, with Simeon being the second oldest. Gad was born from Jacob and Leah's handmaid Zilpah. All together, they totaled 151,450 fighting men.

The Western Grouping

The Western side of the wilderness encampment contained the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin. They were collectively under the banner of Ephraim. Benjamin was born of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel. Ephraim and Manasseh were the product of Rachel' son Joseph. They were "adopted" by Jacob as

full tribes (see Genesis 48). This group of Israelites contained 108,100 fighting men.

The Northern Grouping

The tribal camps of Dan, Asher and Naphtali, collectively under Dan's banner, were placed together on the northern side of the tabernacle. Dan is the oldest son of Jacob and Bilhah (one of Rachel's slaves). They totaled 157,600 men who could fight and were the last group in the wilderness to leave.

According to the Bible, the total strength of Israel's wilderness camp army was 603,550 men.

What About the Levites?

The tribe of Levi pitched their tents close to the wilderness tabernacle which they served. They left the camp after the southern grouping of the tribes but before the western grouping. They ended up marching in the middle of all the tribes with two divisions in front and two in back as they carried the Tent of Meeting or tabernacle.

Because God dedicated the Levites to serve as priests, He did not have them numbered among Israel's wilderness camp army (Numbers 2:33). That said, some 38 years later a second census was carried out by Moses where the Levites were counted and we'll cover that when we get to chapter 26.

CHAPTERS 3-4

ROLES OF THE LEVITES AND PRIESTS

In Numbers chapters 3 and 4, the roles of the Levites and priests are described in detail.

In verse 39 of chapter 3, Moses writes that the total number of males a month old and over among the three tribes descended from Levi was 22,000. From this number came the priests and Levites who served at the tabernacle, each according to God's instructions.

Because of time constraints I'd like to briefly summarize the work and responsibilities of these servants of God at the Tabernacle.

1. Priests

- **Performing sacrifices:** The priests, descendants of Aaron, were primarily responsible for offering sacrifices and conducting rituals prescribed by God.
- **Intermediaries between God and people:** They acted as intermediaries between the people of Israel and God, offering prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the community.
- **Teaching:** Priests were responsible for teaching the people the laws and commandments of God.
- **Maintaining ritual purity:** They ensured that the rituals were performed with strict adherence to ritual purity laws, maintaining the sanctity of the tabernacle.

2. Levites

- **Assistants to the priests:** The Levites were appointed to assist the priests in their duties within the tabernacle.
- **Guardians of the tabernacle:** They were responsible for guarding the tabernacle and its furnishings, ensuring its sanctity.
- **Transportation and assembly:** Levites were tasked with transporting the various components of the tabernacle during the Israelites' journey and assembling them at each location.
- **Maintenance:** They were responsible for the general maintenance and care of the tabernacle and its equipment.
- The various duties within each of these categories were assigned according to each tribe (Kohathites, Gershonites and Merarites)
- For example, only the Kohathites could carry the objects from the inside of the Holy of Holies; only the Merarites could organize and carry the poles and sockets upon which the drapes surrounding the Tabernacle hung etc.

3. Priestly Lineage

In the Old Testament, priests in Israel were primarily descended from the tribe of Levi, which was divided into three main families: Kohath, Gershon, and Merari. However, within the tribe of Levi, only descendants of Aaron were designated as priests. Aaron was a descendant of Kohath, so priests in Israel were essentially a subset of the Kohathites. Therefore, priests did not

come directly from the Gershonites or Merarites but rather from the Kohathite lineage through Aaron.

These chapters provide a detailed enumeration of the specific duties assigned to both the Levites and the priests within the religious structure of ancient Israel, emphasizing their roles in the service of God and the maintenance of the Tabernacle.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

The material we covered in this chapter does not lend itself naturally to life lessons since it contains mainly information about the way God organized His people for camping and for travel. However, there is always something to learn from studying God's word. Here are a few lessons for us that we can glean from this section of the book of Numbers.

1. Importance of Organization and Orderliness

The meticulous organization of the Israelite camp and the allocation of specific duties to each tribe and family teach us the value of orderliness in our lives. Just as the Israelites were organized for their journey through the wilderness, we should strive to organize our lives, setting priorities, and allocating time and resources effectively. An organized life helps us to deal with the challenges and chaos that this sinful world often throws at us without warning.

2. An Unbelieving World Requires that Believers Serve and Cooperate With Each Other

The roles assigned to the Levites and priests highlight the importance of service and cooperation within the community of believers. Each individual had a specific role to play in the

functioning of the Tabernacle, and their collective efforts assured the smooth operation of worship and rituals.

Similarly, as modern believers, we are called to serve one another and work together for the advancement of God's kingdom. This teaches us the significance of humility, teamwork, and mutual support in our Christian walk. Churches that default to gossip and criticism when times are difficult don't honor God and don't grow either.

3. Faithfulness in Small Tasks Leads to Greater Responsibilities

The Levites were entrusted with various tasks related to the tabernacle, from transporting its components to maintaining its sanctity. This illustrates the principle that faithfulness in small or seemingly insignificant tasks can lead to greater responsibilities and blessings from God. As believers, we should be faithful in whatever God has entrusted to us (whether it's mowing, cleaning, fixing or teaching, preaching or comforting those who are hurting), because He will reward faithfulness and diligence in every task.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: NUMBERS 1-4

READ: NUMBERS 5-12

3.

From Sinai to Kadesh

NUMBERS 5-12

In chapter two we reviewed the first census, reasons why it was taken, why only the men over 20 years of age were counted, and the background and duties of the Levites.

We also examined the camping arrangements that God gave the people with the Tabernacle situated at the center of the camp, Aaron, Moses and the priests nearest the Tabernacle and the twelve tribes each with a specific place to camp surrounding the Tabernacle. We also saw the specific order in which the Israelites broke camp and travelled with six tribes before and six tribes following the priests and Levites who carried the parts of the Tabernacle complex.

We also studied the details of the roles played by both the priests and Levites with respect to duties in the functioning of the Tabernacle along with who was responsible for dismantling and carrying its separate parts.

In this chapter we will, among other things, review the purity laws given by Moses, including the Nazarite vow, and look at the

crucial event that changed the direction of the people's lives in the desert from a few weeks to 40 long years traveling and living in the wilderness.

Content – Numbers 5-12

Since we have limited space to complete both these books, we will begin with a summary of the contents of each chapter and comment further on several of the activities that might require further information not provided by other biblical references. For example, we have detailed information about the procedure to offer sacrifice and ritual rules to maintain ceremonial purity in the book of Leviticus but no information about the test for marital infidelity mentioned here in chapter 5 so we will provide more information for this topic when we get to vs. 11-31 of chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

1. Purity in the Camp (Numbers 5:1-4)

This chapter addresses the removal of anyone with an infectious disease, discharge, or who is ceremonially unclean due to contact with a dead body from the camp. This was significant as it stressed the holiness of the community and the need to maintain ritual purity while they lived in close quarters.

2. Restitution for Wrongs (Numbers 5:5-10)

Instructions are given for making restitution for wrongs committed against one another, emphasizing the importance of social harmony and responsibility. These instructions underline the importance of justice and accountability, reinforcing social and divine order. There was no police force or jail, so it was

important that there be a mechanism to deal with crime or injustice within the camp.

3. Test for an Unfaithful Wife (Numbers 5:11-31)

This is a ritual to determine the guilt or innocence of a wife accused of adultery. This reflects the concerns for familial integrity and the social order within the camp. This ritual aimed to address suspicions of infidelity and restore family and communal harmony, reflecting the values placed on marriage and trust.

The test for infidelity described in Numbers 5:11-31, often referred to as the "trial by ordeal" of the suspected unfaithful wife, or the Sotah ritual, was a unique process in ancient Israelite society that was used when a husband suspected his wife of adultery but had no witnesses to prove her guilt. This ritual involved several symbolic actions, including the woman drinking a concoction of holy water mixed with dust from the Tabernacle floor and the ink from a curse written by a priest.

The nature of the ritual, whether it actually determined guilt or not, was a method to seek closure and has been interpreted in various ways:

A. Symbolic Resolution

Some scholars suggest that the ritual was more about resolving suspicions within the marriage and restoring harmony between the husband and wife. If no physical evidence emerged after the woman drank the "bitter water," it could be seen as divine judgment that she was innocent, thereby resolving suspicions and restoring the couple's relationship.

B. Psychological Deterrent

Others view it as a psychological deterrent, relying on the belief that the fear of divine punishment would lead a guilty party to confess before undergoing the ordeal. The psychological pressure alone might resolve the situation, with the guilty party admitting fault to avoid the perceived consequences of divine retribution.

C. Divine Intervention

From a religious perspective, the ordeal was seen as a direct means of soliciting divine intervention to reveal the truth. The belief was that God would supernaturally indicate the woman's guilt or innocence through the physical effects of the water she drank.

D. Social Control

Additionally, the ritual served as a method of social control, maintaining the social order and the sanctity of marriage. It underscored the seriousness of marital fidelity and the consequences of violating societal norms.

The nature of the ritual, whether it actually determined guilt or not was also a method to seek closure in a matter that if left unresolved could lead to greater emotional suffering and/or violence.

CHAPTER 6

THE NAZIRITE VOW

The Nazirite vow, described in Numbers 6:1-21, is an ancient practice from the Hebrew Bible where individuals voluntarily committed themselves to a period of special consecration to God. Here's a summary of its history, purpose, practice, and results:

History

The concept of the Nazirite vow dates back to the time of the Israelites in the wilderness. Notable figures like Samson, Samuel, and possibly John the Baptist are thought to have been Nazirites, either for life or for specific periods. The practice was rooted in the Israelite community's desire for individuals to demonstrate extraordinary religious dedication.

Purpose

The primary purpose of the Nazirite vow was to allow an individual to dedicate themselves to God in a special way, temporarily adopting stricter rules than those followed by the general population. This vow was a form of spiritual purification, a physical manifestation of spiritual commitment, and a means to seek closer communion with God.

Practice

The Nazirite vow involved three main prohibitions:

1. **Abstinence from Alcohol and Grapes:** Nazirites were forbidden from consuming any form of alcohol and grape products, symbolizing a lifestyle free from

pleasures and indulgences that could distract from spiritual focus.

2. **Avoiding Contact with the Dead:** Nazirites could not come into contact with corpses, including those of family members. This maintained their ritual purity, a state necessary for someone with a heightened role in spiritual affairs.
3. **No Hair Cutting:** Nazirites were not allowed to cut their hair during the period of the vow. The growing of hair was a public symbol of their consecration and dedication to God.

Result

At the end of the Nazirite period, specific rituals were performed, including offerings and the shaving of the head at the Tabernacle or Temple. The shorn hair was burnt as part of a peace offering, symbolizing the completion of the vow and the return to normal life. The offerings included a burnt offering, a sin offering, and a peace offering, signifying purification, atonement, and fellowship with God.

The completion of the vow was seen as a spiritually enriching experience, potentially bringing the Nazirite closer to God and possibly conferring divine blessings and favor. The vow not only affected the Nazirite but also served as a powerful example of piety and sacrifice to the broader community, highlighting the importance of dedication and spiritual purity.

Overall, the Nazirite vow was a profound expression of faith, personal sacrifice, and spiritual discipline, reflecting an individual's desire to live a life set apart for divine service.

CHAPTER 7

OFFERINGS BY THE LEADERS

Following the construction of the Tabernacle, the leaders of each tribe bring offerings for the dedication of the altar. This act symbolizes the unity and commitment of all tribes in supporting the worship and service of God. This was a high point of obedience, unity and devotion to God for the Israelite people.

CHAPTER 8

Consecration of the Levites (Numbers 8:5-26)

The Levites were set apart to serve in the Tabernacle, taking the place of the firstborn. Their dedication highlights the structured religious hierarchy and the central role of divine service in daily life. This passage not only explains the ceremonial process of consecrating the Levites but also provides the theological and communal significance of this act.

Background and Purpose

Historically, the firstborn was considered special and belonged to God, especially as a memorial to the deliverance from Egypt, where the firstborn of the Egyptians perished while the Israelite firstborn were spared. However, after the sin of the golden calf, the Levites were chosen because of their steadfastness in remaining loyal to God. They were to be dedicated to the service of the Tabernacle, taking the place of all the firstborn sons of Israel who originally had this role **Exodus 13:1-2, 11-15**.

Practice of Consecration

The Levites underwent a specific ritual of purification and dedication:

1. Cleansing Rituals

The Levites were sprinkled with purifying water, instructed to shave their bodies, and wash their clothes to symbolize their complete cleansing from impurity.

2. Presentation Before the Community

They were presented before the congregation and then before the Tabernacle, symbolizing their formal introduction and integration into their roles as servants of the community and God.

3. Laying on of Hands

The Israelites laid their hands on the Levites, signifying the transfer of responsibility from the firstborn to the Levites. This act established a symbolic connection between the community and the Levites, endorsing them as their representatives.

4. Offerings and Sacrifices

Offerings were made on behalf of the Levites, which included both sin offerings and burnt offerings, essential for atonement and consecration to God's service.

Significance and Results – The taking of the Levites in place of the firstborn had several significant implications:

- **Divine Service:** It institutionalized a system where a specific tribe was wholly dedicated to the religious and ceremonial duties of the community, centralizing and professionalizing worship and ritual activities.
- **Redemption of the Firstborn:** This act also symbolically continued the protection over the firstborn, redeeming them from their original consecration to divine service by substituting the Levites.
- **Community Structure:** The Levites' role reinforced the structure within the Israelite community, clearly defining roles and duties that maintained the sanctity and order necessary for their survival and spiritual health.

CHAPTER 9

1.The Second Passover (Numbers 9:1-14)

The people have now been in the wilderness for a second year as the day for the Passover approaches and they will celebrate this important feast for only the second time since their liberation from Egyptian slavery.

However, a provision is made for those who were unclean or on a journey during the original Passover to allow them to celebrate it a month later thereby allowing them to comply with purification and preparations that they were not able to complete on the day of the official Passover feast. This indulgence emphasized God's inclusiveness and the importance that each individual participate in this communal worship.

2. The Cloud and Fire (Numbers 9:15-23)

The divine guidance provided by the cloud and fire ensured the Israelites traveled and camped under direct divine instruction, crucial for their survival and success. Here are some details about how these functioned.

Appearance and Description

- **The Cloud:** During the day, a cloud covered the Tabernacle, specifically the Tent of the Testimony.
- **The Fire:** At night, the cloud appeared as fire, making it visible in darkness.

Functions

1. **Guidance:** The primary function of the cloud and fire was to guide the Israelites on their journey. When the cloud lifted from above the tent, the Israelites were to break camp and follow it; when the cloud settled, the Israelites were to encamp.
2. **Signal for Movement and Rest:** The movement of the cloud dictated when the Israelites moved and when they stayed. This divine signaling ensured that the Israelites traveled and rested according to God's timing, which could vary from a few days to a longer period at a single location.
3. **Representation of God's Presence:** The cloud and fire were physical representations of God's presence among His people. It reassured them of His direct involvement and protection in their lives.

Significance

The cloud and fire served multiple purposes:

- **Spiritual Assurance:** They were constant, visible signs of God's guidance and protection, crucial for maintaining the morale of a people journeying through a harsh wilderness.
- **Practical Guidance:** The manifestations provided a practical mechanism for travel logistics, helping to organize and move a large community efficiently.
- **Symbol of Holiness and Purity:** The presence of God through the cloud and fire emphasized the holiness of the Tabernacle and the need for the Israelites to maintain purity and obedience.

Explanatory Note

Their journey and life rhythm were directly tied to God's will, as demonstrated by the movement of the cloud and fire. This dynamic underscored a profound level of Divine-human interaction where God's immediate presence and direction were tangible day and night. Wherever and whenever, the people could visibly confirm that God was with them.

CHAPTER 10

1. The Silver Trumpets (Numbers 10:1-10)

Purpose of the Silver Trumpets

- A. **Calling the Community:** The trumpets were to be used for summoning the whole community or the leaders when they were blown in a certain manner.
- B. **Signaling Movements:** They were used to signal the start of the camp's movements during their journey through the wilderness.
- C. **Use in War:** The trumpets were sounded to call the Israelites to arms and to signal the need for God's help in battle, ensuring His remembrance and assistance.
- D. **Festival Use:** The trumpets were also to be blown over offerings during festivals and on the first day of the month, integrating them into the religious celebrations and sacrificial ceremonies.

Manner of Use

- **Different Blasts for Different Purposes:** A long blast was used for assembling the leaders, while a series of short blasts indicated it was time for the camps to set out.
- **Specific Instructions for Assembly and Journey:** The blasts directed specific tribes when to gather and in what order to commence their march.

Significance

The silver trumpets served as tools for communication and coordination, vital in maintaining order among a large group of people. They also held religious significance, incorporating the aspect of divine guidance in both daily activities and special occasions. The sound of the trumpets was a reminder of God's presence and a call to worship, fostering a sense of community and shared spiritual practice.

This use of the trumpets underscores their role in organizing a nomadic community, guiding their movements, and enhancing their religious observances, thus reinforcing social bonding and their connection to the Divine.

2. Departure from Sinai (Numbers 10:11-36):

The people have been given their camping and marching orders. They have made the trumpets to provide signals and instructions, and the cloud above the Tabernacle enables them to know without a doubt if they are to remain camped or to break camp and begin to travel following that very same cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. The Israelites' departure from Sinai marked the beginning of their journey towards the Promised Land, led by the Ark and directed by Moses with God's guidance.

CHAPTER 11

COMPLAINTS ABOUT HARDSHIPS

The people complain about their hardships and the manna, leading Moses to feel the burden of leadership. God miraculously provides quail for meat and appoints seventy elders to assist Moses, showing His responsiveness to both the physical and governance needs of the people. There is a brief mention of God

punishing the people (a plague) for their greedy consumption of the quail He provided.

This, we will see, is a sign of the trouble ahead as the people, after more than a year in the wilderness begin to grow impatient to arrive at their destination and at one point consider a return to their former life in Egypt.

The journey from Egypt to the land of Canaan, under direct and uninterrupted travel conditions, would not have taken very long geographically. The distance between Egypt and Canaan is roughly 200 to 250 miles, depending on the specific starting and ending points. If the Israelites had traveled directly from Egypt to Canaan, without the significant delays and long stops described in the Bible, the trip could have been completed relatively quickly.

Here are a few considerations:

1. Walking Speed and Daily Distance

Assuming an average walking speed and a manageable daily distance for a large group including children, elderly, and livestock, the Israelites might have covered about 10-15 miles per day.

2. Overall Duration

At this rate, the journey from Egypt to Canaan could have taken about two to three weeks under direct and ideal circumstances.

However, Exodus through Deuteronomy describe a much longer period of wandering in the wilderness, which lasted 40 years. This extended time was due to a combination of divine judgment (for lack of faith and disobedience) and the need for the

formation and preparation of the Israelites as a covenant community before entering the Promised Land.

The actual journey, as described in the Bible, involved much more than simply moving from one geographical location to another; it was a significant spiritual and communal development process for the Israelites.

CHAPTER 12

MIRIAM AND AARON OPPOSE MOSES

Summary of the Event

1. **Criticism of Moses:** Aaron and Miriam speak against Moses because of his marriage to a Cushite woman. Their criticism, however, extended beyond his choice of spouse; they questioned Moses' unique role as God's prophet.
2. **Questioning Leadership:** They said, "Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" This reflects a challenge to the exclusive authority that Moses seemed to hold.
3. **Divine Intervention:** The Lord heard their complaint and summoned Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to the tent of meeting. God then appeared in a pillar of cloud at the entrance to the tent.
4. **God's Reprimand and Punishment:** God explicitly affirmed Moses' special status as the most faithful servant, who had a unique relationship with Him, different from any other prophet. Miriam was struck with leprosy as punishment for her insubordination, and Aaron pleaded for her healing.

5. **Miriam's Isolation and Healing:** Miriam was shut out of the camp for seven days, after which she was healed and allowed to return.

Possible Reasons for Their Reaction

Ethnic or Cultural Prejudices

Their initial focus on Moses' Cushite wife suggests possible ethnic or cultural bias. The Cushite (likely referring to a person from Cush, a region south of Egypt) might have been seen as an outsider, and this could have fueled discontent, especially if there were underlying concerns about leadership and authority.

Jealousy or Envy

Aaron and Miriam might have felt overshadowed by Moses' central role as leader and mediator between God and the Israelites. As his siblings, they were also leaders among the people but did not have the same level of direct communication with God.

Power Dynamics

As prominent figures themselves (Aaron being the high priest and Miriam recognized as a prophetess), they could have perceived that the balance of power was disproportionately in favor of Moses. Their questioning of whether God had spoken only through him demonstrates this desire for prominence.

Divine Testing

From a theological perspective, this event could be viewed as a test of Moses' humility and leadership, as well as a lesson for the

community regarding the importance of respecting divinely appointed leaders.

This incident highlights the complexities of leadership and the challenges that can arise even among close relatives when significant power and spiritual authority are at stake. It also underscores the biblical theme that leadership appointed by God comes with divine expectations and protection.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

Even though we have seen a wide variety of events and personal interactions in these eight chapters of Numbers, here are a few lessons we can draw from these and apply to our lives as followers of Jesus today:

1. Holiness and Purity are important in Church Life

These chapters repeatedly stress the need for holiness and purity among the Israelites. From the removal of the unclean from the camp in Chapter 5, the Nazirite vow in Chapter 6, to the purification and dedication of the Levites in Chapter 8.

The text underlines that spiritual purity is crucial not just for individual holiness but also for the health and integrity of the entire church. Your purity and devotion spark this kind of attitude in me. We must set the bar at a high point for it to have an impact on everyone. No one, in or out of the church, is impressed by believers who easily tolerate worldliness in their speech, dress or actions. We're supposed to be different!

2. We are a people who seek to follow Divine Guidance

These chapters elaborate on the theme of divine guidance, particularly through the depiction of the cloud and fire over the Tabernacle in Chapter 9. The Israelites were to move and encamp based on these divine signals.

This narrative emphasizes the importance of seeking and following divine direction in all endeavors, teaching that true success comes from aligning one's actions with divine will and timing.

The entire idea of the Restoration movement is that we are guided solely by the directions given to us in the New Testament.

It is our Pillar of smoke and Fire.

3. Leadership and Accountability are Necessary for Success

These chapters also focus on leadership, particularly in the roles of Moses, Aaron, and the Levites, and how leaders are held to high standards of accountability.

For instance, the criticism and punishment of Miriam and Aaron in Chapter 12 for speaking against Moses highlight the necessity of respecting divinely chosen leaders and the consequences of undermining authority. This underscores the lesson that leadership is a responsibility that requires humility, respect for authority, and accountability.

The quickest way to destroy a congregation of the Lord's church is to sow discord among the leaders or encourage members to

criticize or undermine the elders' leadership by lack of enthusiastic response or support for their leadership roles.

Together, these lessons from Numbers teach us about living a life that is directed by spiritual principles, governed by divine authority, and conducted within a framework of congregational unity and purity. These principles are crucial for maintaining order and fostering spiritual growth for ourselves as well as the congregation we are a part of.

We risk the same kind of wilderness wandering and lack of growth when we disregard the Spirit's lead, allow something other than holiness and purity to become our first priority, and undermine the leadership we have instead of supporting those who have been appointed to watch over our souls.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: NUMBERS 5-12

READ: NUMBERS 13-20

4. Rebellion and Leadership

NUMBERS 13-20

The material that we looked at in chapters 5-12 was all about preparation. The people had built the Tabernacle complex and in the seven chapters we covered, Moses provided the details concerning the preparations made for their journey.

These included:

1. Rules to maintain ceremonial purity.
2. A system to deal with crime.
3. A manner to deal with the suspicion of marital fidelity.
4. Regulations for those making a Nazarite vow.
5. Consecration of the Levites into service.
6. The manner of divine guidance with the cloud and pillar of fire.
7. The proper use of the Silver Trumpets to signal the people.

After these preparations are made for their departure, two negative events occur:

- A. The people complain about the lack of meat in their diet and God miraculously provides more than enough quail to feed the entire group. However, in gorging themselves on the meat, the people sin and God sends a plague to punish them.

- B. Once order is restored, Miriam and Aaron (Moses' sister and brother) challenge Moses' authority and God affirms Moses' leadership and strikes Miriam with leprosy for her insubordination. She is banished from the camp and after she is healed and returns, the people are set to leave for their journey to the Promised land.

Now, I mentioned that the journey from where they were in Sinai to the land of Canaan would take approximately a month to complete. However, we soon find out that there will be a crucial test of faith that the people fail which will turn their month-long sprint into a forty-year marathon of wandering in the wilderness.

Content – Numbers 13-20

Chapters 13 to 20 of the Book of Numbers cover a significant period in the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness. These chapters detail pivotal events, their consequences, and their significance to the development of Israel as a nation under God's guidance.

CHAPTER 13

SPIES SENT TO CANAAN



Significance

The report of the spies shapes the Israelites' response to God's promise. Ten spies give a discouraging report focusing on the insurmountable challenges, leading to fear and rebellion among the people, which signified a lack of faith in God's provision and protection.

Two of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, encourage the people to trust in God to give them the victory despite the challenges mentioned by the other 10. Note that they didn't dispute that there would be difficulties and the enemy was formidable, but their point was that God would give them the victory if they would trust Him. This conflict sparked a rebellion which is described in chapter 14.

CHAPTER 14

ISRAEL'S REBELLION AND GOD'S JUDGMENT

The people rebel, refusing to enter Canaan. We see both Moses and Aaron as well as Joshua and Caleb cry out to God for help and plead with the people not to rebel against God. It is at this point that God offers to destroy all the people and start over again with Moses and his descendants. Moses argues that other nations will dishonor God for not bringing the people to the Promised Land and this would be interpreted as a sign of His weakness.

The point here is not that God was talked out of something but that Moses was being tested to see if he had the people's welfare at heart and the proper humility to lead a people who would prove to be hard of heart and rebellious by nature. At this point God declares that none of this generation, except Caleb and Joshua (who brought back a positive report), will enter the Promised Land. All those that had been counted in the census would die in the desert. They are condemned to wander for 40 years (one year for every day that the spies spent spying out the land – Numbers 14:34).

This represents a pivotal moment of judgment and consequence for disobedience and lack of faith, emphasizing the serious repercussions of rebelling against God and not walking by faith.

CHAPTER 15

LAWS CONCERNING OFFERINGS

In chapter 15 we go from the scene of rebellion and punishment to a listing of laws on offerings and sacrifices. These include rules for unintentional sins and there is even a description of a specific incident involving a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath, who is then put to death.

This abrupt shift in topic from Chapter 14 to Chapter 15 can initially seem jarring, but it serves specific literary and theological purposes within the structure of the text. Here's an explanation of this transition:

Context of the Transition

- **Chapter 14** – This chapter deals with the Israelites' rebellion following the negative report by the ten spies. The people refuse to enter the Promised Land due to fear of the inhabitants, leading to God's decree that they will wander in the wilderness for 40 years, and that none of the current adult generation, except Caleb and Joshua, will enter the Promised Land.
- **Chapter 15** – This chapter shifts to detailing various laws and offerings related to when the Israelites will eventually settle in the Promised Land. These laws include offerings for unintentional sins, as well as regular burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings.

Reasons for the Shift

1. **Theological Reaffirmation:** After the despair and punishment described in Chapter 14, Chapter 15 serves as a reaffirmation of the covenant between God and the Israelites. Despite the current generation's failure, God continues to prepare the future generation for life in the Promised Land. It underscores God's unchanging promise to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
2. **Hope and Continuity:** By introducing laws relevant to life in Canaan, the text provides a message of hope and

continuity. It reassures the Israelites that although they are currently wandering as a consequence of their disobedience, there is still a divine plan in place for them, and they need to prepare for it by understanding the required observances and rituals.

3. **Instructional Purpose:** The new laws in Chapter 15 remind the Israelites—and the reader—of the importance of obedience to God's commandments. After witnessing the devastating consequences of disobedience in Chapter 14, these instructions serve to guide the Israelites on how to live righteously and in alignment with God's will once they enter the land.
4. **Literary Structure:** From a literary perspective, the shift may also serve to transition the narrative from a historical account of events to the legal and ritual instructions necessary for forming a functional society once they enter Canaan, an idea that they had recently thought would be impossible. This structure mirrors other parts of the Pentateuch where narrative and law interweave to teach through both story (narrative) and statute (Laws and ordinances).

Conclusion

Thus, the abrupt change from Chapter 14 to Chapter 15 in the Book of Numbers effectively bridges the narrative of punishment with a forward-looking focus on preparation for eventual entry into the Promised Land. It reinforces the ongoing relationship between God and the Israelites, centered around covenant, obedience, and future hope, even in the face of current failures and challenges. The people might want to give up, but God does not give up or change His promises.

As for the man executed for breaking the Sabbath by collecting sticks. This event had a significant effect on the people especially after their rebellion over the spies' report.

This incident emphasized the importance of observing the Sabbath, a commandment that held a central place in the Mosaic Law. The Sabbath was not only a day of rest but a sign of the covenant between God and Israel, symbolizing trust in God's provision and a break from daily labors to dedicate time to spiritual reflection and renewal. By including a narrative about breaking the Sabbath, the text underscores the seriousness of this command:

1. That this was a divine command that required compliance.
2. That disobedience threatened the cohesiveness of the community since this ordinance was also a vehicle to create unity and a particular identity among the Jewish people.
3. It also established, once again, Moses' role not only in articulating the laws and ordinances of God but also as one who could enforce these laws. In the end, he was the one that gave the people the instruction to execute the offender according to Law.

CHAPTER 16

KORAH'S REBELLION

In Numbers 16, Korah, along with Dathan, Abiram, and 250 community leaders, brings several charges against Moses and Aaron. These charges primarily focus on accusations of excessive authority and mismanagement of leadership roles.

Here's a list of the specific charges brought against Moses and Aaron by Korah and his followers:

1. **Usurpation of Authority:** Korah accuses Moses and Aaron of taking too much upon themselves. He argues that the entire congregation is holy and that the Lord is among them all, questioning why Moses and Aaron exalt themselves above the assembly of the Lord (Numbers 16:3).
2. **Elitism in Leadership:** Implicit in Korah's accusation is the charge that Moses and Aaron have established a hierarchy that excludes others who are equally qualified, particularly from the perspective of Korah and the Levites who also had roles in the religious activities of the community.
3. **Failure in Leadership:** Although not directly stated, there's an underlying implication that Moses has failed to bring the people into the Promised Land, thus questioning his effectiveness and the legitimacy of his leadership. This reflects the broader context of dissatisfaction among the people regarding their situation and prospects (referenced in other rebellions and complaints throughout Numbers).

These charges express a broader challenge to the established divine order through Moses and Aaron. Korah's rebellion is significant as it not only questions human leadership but also represents a direct challenge to the structure and authority ordained by God, as Moses' leadership was divinely appointed.

Of course, Moses and God respond decisively to address the accusations and restore order. Here's a summary of their responses:

Moses' Response

1. **Immediate Challenge:** Moses challenges Korah and his followers to a test to prove who is truly chosen by God. He tells them to take censers, put fire and incense in them before the Lord the next day, so that the Lord may show who is holy (Numbers 16:5-7).
2. **Accusation of Overreaching:** Moses accuses Korah and his followers, particularly the Levites, of not being content with their designated roles and seeking the priesthood, which was beyond what God had assigned to them (Numbers 16:8-11).
3. **Summons Dathan and Abiram:** Moses attempts to speak with Dathan and Abiram (two others who were in league with Korah in his accusations) who refuse to come, accusing Moses of leading them away from a land flowing with milk and honey (Egypt) to die in the wilderness, further questioning his leadership (Numbers 16:12-14).
4. **Intercessory Prayer:** After God tells Moses He will destroy the whole congregation, Moses and Aaron intercede for the people, arguing that only those who have sinned—the leaders of the rebellion—should be punished, not the entire community (Numbers 16:20-22).

God's Response

1. **Divine Separation:** God instructs the congregation to separate themselves from the households of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram (Numbers 16:23-24, Numbers 16:26-27).
2. **Miraculous Judgment:** God causes the earth to open and swallow Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their households,

along with all their possessions (and close up again), signifying a direct divine intervention to affirm Moses' leadership and punish the rebels (Numbers 16:31-33).

3. **Destruction of the 250 Rebels:** Fire comes forth from the Lord and consumes the 250 men offering incense, which serves as a warning and a sign of divine authority and wrath against those who challenge God's appointed leadership (Numbers 16:35).
4. **Prevention of Further Rebellion:** After the initial punishment, when the congregation murmurs against Moses and Aaron blaming them for killing God's people, God sends a plague. Moses and Aaron quickly make atonement for the people, with Aaron standing between the living and dead to stop the plague, thus preventing further loss of life (Numbers 16:41-50).

Moses' and God's responses to Korah's rebellion are both immediate and severe, emphasizing the seriousness of the challenge to divinely ordained leadership and the sanctity of God's commands regarding religious and communal roles. This incident highlights the consequences of usurping divine authority and serves as a pivotal lesson on the importance of adhering to God's chosen leadership and structure within the Israelite community.

CHAPTER 17

AARON'S STAFF BUDDING

To end disputes over the priesthood, staffs from each tribe's leaders are placed in the Tabernacle. Aaron's staff miraculously buds, blossoms, and produces almonds.

Therefore, the blossoming of Aaron's staff serves as a divine response to resolve the dispute over the priesthood that had been escalated by Korah's rebellion. This miraculous event was meant to clearly demonstrate God's choice and support for Aaron and his descendants as the rightful priests. Here are three specific purposes for why God chose Aaron's staff to bloom:

1. **Affirmation of Divine Selection:** The blossoming of Aaron's staff among the staffs of all tribal leaders served to confirm and reaffirm Aaron's and his family's divine selection for the priesthood. This event clearly illustrated God's choice, thereby settling any disputes or questions regarding the legitimacy of Aaron's priestly authority (Numbers 17:5).
2. **Restoration of Order and Peace:** By providing a clear and unmistakable sign, God aimed to restore order and peace among the Israelites. Following the severe punishments meted out in response to Korah's rebellion, the blossoming staff helped to calm tensions and reassure the people that the leadership structure established by God was to be maintained, thus preventing future rebellions and restoring stability within the community (Numbers 17:10-11).
3. **Visual Reminder of God's Presence and Power:** The event served as a powerful visual reminder of God's

active presence and power in the lives of the Israelites. Despite all the disruptions, God was still in charge and tending to His people.

CHAPTER 18

DUTIES AND RIGHTS OF PRIESTS AND LEVITES

Clarifications are given on the responsibilities and privileges of the priests and Levites, including details on offerings and tithes. They have received instructions about their roles and duties in the past but here in Chapter 18, God adds and emphasizes the following:

1. Clarification of Responsibilities and Rights

Comprehensive Priestly Duties: While earlier chapters introduced various duties of the priests, Numbers 18 specifically explains a comprehensive set of responsibilities. It outlines their duties related to the offerings—both the most holy offerings and the lesser holy offerings—and their role in managing the sanctuary and the altar (Numbers 18:1-7).

2. Specific Rights to Offerings

Right to Certain Offerings: This chapter specifies that priests are entitled to certain offerings not previously detailed with such clarity. These include all the "most holy" parts of the offerings made by the Israelites, such as the meat from the sin and guilt offerings, and all dedicated gifts brought by the Israelites (Numbers 18:9-11).

Portion of the Tithes: A significant new detail is that the Levites receive a tenth of the Israelites' produce as a tithe, and in turn, they are to give a tithe of that tithe to the priests (Numbers 18:21-32). This specific "tithe of the tithe" is a detailed regulation of how the Levitical and priestly support structure is to be funded, which hadn't been as explicitly laid out before.

3. No Land Inheritance

Provision Instead of Land: A notably new element in this chapter is the explicit statement that the Levites and priests would have no inheritance of land in Israel. Instead, their "inheritance" would be the offerings of the Israelites made by fire to the Lord and the tithes (Numbers 18:20; 23-24). This reinforces their dependence on the community and their unique role within it.

4. Redemption of the Firstborn

Renewed Emphasis on Redemption: While the concept of the firstborn belonging to God was introduced earlier, Numbers 18 details the process by which firstborn sons and unclean animals are to be redeemed (Numbers 18:15-18). The priests play a central role in this process, which underscores their duties in upholding the sanctity of the firstborn dedication to God.

These regulations in Numbers 18 serve to strengthen the structure and sanctity of the priesthood, clearly defining their role, support, and the manner in which they are integrated into the religious and communal life of Israel. The chapter ensures that the ministers' spiritual responsibilities are matched by provisions that sustain them materially, creating a balanced system of religious service and community support.

CHAPTER 19

THE RED HEIFER

Laws concerning the sacrifice of a red heifer and the use of its ashes to purify those who have come into contact with death. The red heifer was unique as an animal for sacrifice.

1. Unique Requirements for the Animal

Color: The red heifer had to be completely red without two hairs of any other color. This complete redness was unique among sacrificial animals, which typically did not have color requirements.

Blemish-Free and Unyoked: The heifer had to be without defect and never have been yoked or worked. This purity and lack of labor ensured that the animal was wholly dedicated to the ritual without ever having been used for another purpose.

2. Purpose of the Sacrifice

Red Heifer: The primary purpose of the red heifer sacrifice was for ritual purification, specifically to produce the ashes used in the water of cleansing. This was necessary for purifying people who had come into contact with a corpse, which rendered them ceremonially unclean. The ashes were mixed with water and used in a purification rite (Numbers 19:9-13).

Other Sacrifices: In contrast, other cattle sacrifices commonly described in earlier chapters (such as in Leviticus) were made for a variety of reasons, including sin offerings, burnt offerings, peace offerings, and guilt offerings. These were generally aimed at atonement for sins, expressions of gratitude, or fulfillment of vows, and they facilitated communion with God.

3. Method of Sacrifice

Red Heifer: The red heifer was sacrificed outside the camp, which was unusual because most sacrifices were made at the Tabernacle altar. The entire heifer, including its blood, hide, flesh, and dung, was burned to ashes in a ceremonial fashion (Numbers 19:3-5).

Other Sacrifices: Typically, sacrifices involving other cattle were conducted at the altar located within the Tabernacle or Temple precincts. Parts of the animal were burnt on the altar, but certain parts like the hide and some of the flesh could be used by the priests or the one offering the sacrifice.

4. Specific Requirements

Red Heifer: The red heifer had very specific requirements: it needed to be completely red, without any blemish, and it must never have borne a yoke (Numbers 19:2). The rarity of such an animal added to the uniqueness and sanctity of this sacrifice.

Other Sacrifices: While offerings like bulls and lambs also had requirements regarding being free of defects, there was no stipulation regarding their color or previous yoke-bearing as with the red heifer.

5. Usage of the Sacrifice

Red Heifer: The ashes of the red heifer were used for purification purposes, marking this sacrifice as part of a continuing rite that could be used over time by mixing the ashes with water whenever needed.

Other Sacrifices: The effects of other sacrifices were generally immediate, with the physical parts of the sacrifices consumed by

fire at the time of offering and thus not used beyond the ritual of sacrifice itself.

These distinctions highlight the red heifer's unique role in the Israelite purification rituals, separate from the communal and covenantal functions of other sacrifices. The red heifer provided a means for handling ritual impurity due to death, reflecting a profound understanding of purity, death, and the holiness required for the community living in close proximity to the divine presence (Tabernacle).

THE IMPORTANCE OF CEREMONIAL CLEANLINESS

Ceremonial cleanliness was a crucial aspect of religious life in ancient Israel, as outlined extensively throughout the Old Testament, particularly in the laws given in the books of Leviticus and Numbers. The importance of maintaining ritual purity was multifaceted, reflecting theological, practical, and symbolic dimensions. Here are the key reasons why ceremonial cleanliness was so important:

1. Theological Significance

Holiness of God: The concept of ceremonial cleanliness was fundamentally linked to the holiness of God. The Israelites were called to be holy because God is holy (Leviticus 11:44-45). Purity laws were a means of preparing the people to approach God, emphasizing the vast difference between God's pure nature and human impurity.

Divine Presence: The Tabernacle (and later the Temple) was considered the dwelling place of God's presence among His people. Maintaining purity was essential for protecting the

sanctity of this space and ensuring that God's presence remained with the community.

2. Community Cohesion

Social Order and Structure: Ceremonial cleanliness helped establish and maintain a well-ordered society. By adhering to these laws, the Israelites reinforced their identity as a community set apart for God. This practice fostered a sense of shared commitment and collective responsibility toward living according to divine laws.

Moral Discipline: The rigorous observance of cleanliness laws cultivated a culture of discipline and obedience among the Israelites, which extended to moral and ethical areas of life. This discipline was essential for maintaining a covenant of faithfulness to God.

3. Health and Well-being

Hygienic Benefits: While the primary purpose of purity laws was not medical, many of the practices had secondary health benefits. For example, the laws concerning food, skin diseases, and bodily discharges helped prevent the spread of diseases and promoted public health within the camp at a time when medical knowledge about these matters was not available.

Psychological Assurance: Ritual purity provided a sense of spiritual and physical well-being. Cleanliness rituals could alleviate concerns about contamination and illness, which were significant in a time when understanding of disease was limited.

4. Symbolic Representation

Sin and Redemption: Ceremonial cleanliness rituals often symbolized the removal of sin and the restoration of a right relationship with God. The processes for purification and atonement illustrated the spiritual realities of sin's defilement and the need for divine cleansing.

Preparation for Worship: The act of cleansing oneself before participating in worship or entering the sacred space of the Tabernacle/Temple served as a physical expression of spiritual preparation. It was a tangible way of expressing reverence and readiness to engage with the divine for prayer or worship.

5. Education and Remembrance

Continual Reminder: The daily and weekly practices associated with maintaining ritual purity served as constant reminders of the Israelites' special relationship with God, their history, and their responsibilities under the covenant. This ongoing aspect of education helped ingrain religious principles into every aspect of daily life.

Ceremonial cleanliness was thus not only about maintaining external purity but was deeply intertwined with spiritual, ethical, and communal life, reflecting and reinforcing the core values and beliefs of the Israelite community.

CHAPTER 20

THE WATERS OF MERIBAH: A CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Chapter 20 of the Book of Numbers serves as a significant breakpoint in the narrative of the Israelites' wilderness wanderings for several reasons. This chapter marks crucial transitions and events that fundamentally affect the leadership and future direction of the Israelites as they continue toward the Promised Land. Here's how it serves as a breakpoint:

1. Deaths of Miriam and Aaron

Death of Miriam: The chapter begins with the death of Miriam at Kadesh (Numbers 20:1). Her death marks the loss of a key leader; as Moses' sister and a prophetess, her presence was significant for the Israelite community.

Death of Aaron: Later in the same chapter, Aaron dies on Mount Hor (Numbers 20:28). Aaron's death is particularly impactful because he was the High Priest and had played a central role in religious and civil leadership. The passing of Aaron signifies a major transition in the priesthood, with his son Eleazar taking over his duties.

2. The Incident at Meribah

Moses Strikes the Rock: One of the most critical events in this chapter is Moses striking the rock at Meribah to bring forth water, instead of speaking to it as God had commanded (Numbers 20:7-12).

Divine Judgment on Moses: Because of this act of disobedience, God tells Moses that he will not lead the people into the Promised Land. This decree marks a dramatic shift in the

leadership narrative, setting the stage for Joshua to eventually take over as the leader of Israel.

3. Shift in Generation

End of the Older Generation: The events of Chapter 20 occur in the fortieth year of the Israelites' wanderings (Numbers 33:38), indicating that the wandering period decreed by God is nearing its end. The deaths of Miriam and Aaron, along with the impending death of Moses, symbolize the passing away of the older generation that had left Egypt.

4. Rejection at Edom

Request to Pass Through Edom Denied: Moses sends messengers to the king of Edom requesting passage through his territory, promising to stay on the main road and pay for any water consumed (Numbers 20:14-21). The king of Edom refuses and even threatens force if the Israelites try to pass. This rejection forces the Israelites to take a longer route, around Edom, delaying their journey to Canaan.

5. Strategic Realignments and Challenges

Preparation for Entry: The chapter concludes with the Israelites at Mount Hor, on the border of Edom, preparing for the final stages of their journey. The focus begins to shift toward conquering the land and dealing with external enemies, such as the Canaanites, whom they fight in Chapter 21.

Conclusion

Thus, Chapter 20 acts as a turning point in the wilderness narrative, marking the transition from the old leadership to new,

signaling the end of an era of wandering, and setting the stage for the conquest of Canaan. It highlights themes of judgment, transition, and the inevitability of change, critical for the continuation of Israel's covenant journey.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. The Importance of Faithful Leadership and Accountability

Chapters 12 and 20 feature pivotal moments concerning the leadership of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. In chapter 12, Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses' unique role as God's chosen leader, which results in Miriam's temporary punishment with leprosy and a reinforcement of Moses' God-given authority. In chapter 20, Moses disobeys God's command at Meribah by striking the rock to produce water instead of speaking to it, leading to God's judgment that he will not enter the Promised Land.

Lesson for Today's Believer: These narratives underscore the critical importance of humility, obedience, and accountability in leadership roles within the church. Leaders are held to high standards because their actions and attitudes significantly influence others. Moreover, these passages remind believers that all authority comes from God, and challenging this authority without just cause or disobeying God's direct commands can have severe consequences. This teaches believers to seek God's guidance in their actions and to maintain a humble and obedient heart, especially those in leadership positions.

2. Unity in the church is vital

Throughout Numbers 16 and 17, the community faces division and rebellion, notably with Korah's challenge to Moses and Aaron's leadership. This dissent leads to severe repercussions, not only for the rebels but for the entire community, which suffers from a plague as a consequence of the associated turmoil.

Lesson for Today's Believer: These chapters highlight the importance of unity and the dangers of discord within the church. For believers today, this underscores the need for maintaining peace and harmony within the church and among Christians. Disputes and divisions can weaken the church's mission and effectiveness and can lead to spiritual decay. The resolution of conflicts and the fostering of a spirit of cooperation and unity are essential in reflecting Christ's love to a lost world that is already skeptical about "organized religion".



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: NUMBERS 13-20

READ: NUMBERS 21-27

5.

Journey to the Plains of Moab

NUMBERS 21-27

In the previous section of the book of Numbers (Ch.13 – Ch. 20) we studied the main arch of both Moses and Aaron's leadership time over the Jewish people. According to the Bible, the Israelites left Mount Sinai on the 20th day of the second month of the second year after their departure from Egypt (Numbers 10:11-12).

During this time God gave Moses the Law and the instructions for building the Tabernacle. In addition to this, they built the Tabernacle complex and its furnishings in preparation for setting it up in the Promised Land, a journey that would have taken only a few months.

However, after sending out the spies to assess the land and upon their return the negative report of 10 of these men caused the people to rebel and threaten to return to Egypt. In response to this, God punished the people by causing them to remain in the

wilderness 40 years (one year for every day that the spies searched out the land).

Near the end of this time, that generation, except the faithful spies Joshua and Caleb, died in the desert along with both Miriam and Aaron. Only Moses was left of that era's leadership. In Numbers 20:12 he is told that he, also, will not enter the Promised Land with the people because he failed to follow God's instructions to speak to a rock to bring forth water for the Israelites at Meribah. Instead, Moses struck the rock twice with his staff. As a result of this act of disobedience, God tells Moses and Aaron: "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."

In Deuteronomy 32:48-52, God reminds Moses of this consequence and allows him to view the land from afar before his death. In the meantime, there is still one last leg of the journey to complete to the plains of Moab which will serve as a staging area for the people's entry into the Promised Land. This is where we pick up the story in Numbers 21.

Content – Numbers 21-25

Chapters 21 to 25 of the Book of Numbers narrate a series of crucial events as the Israelites journey through the wilderness, approaching the Promised Land. These chapters include conflicts, divine interventions, prophecies, and moral failures, each reflecting significant themes and lessons for the Israelites.

CHAPTER 21

JOURNEY TO THE TRANSJORDAN

The term "Transjordan" refers to the area east of the Jordan River, which is now roughly encompassed by the modern state of Jordan. In the context of the Bible, particularly in the Book of Numbers, the Transjordan is significant as the region where the Israelites encamped before crossing into the Promised Land, and where several tribes eventually settled.

The Arad Victory (Numbers 21:1-3)

After the Canaanite king of Arad attacks Israel, the Israelites vow to destroy their cities if God delivers them into their hands. This victory signifies God's ongoing support for Israel's conquests.

The Journey from Mount Hor (Numbers 21:4-9)

A familiar pattern repeats itself here. Right on the heels of their great victory in battle largely powered by their trust in God to overcome their enemies, the Israelites complain against God and Moses about the lack of food and water. In response, God sends venomous snakes among the people, and many are bitten and die.

The Bronze Snake

As a remedy, God instructs Moses to make a snake out of bronze and set it on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. Moses obeys, and those who look upon the bronze snake after being bitten are healed (Numbers 21:4-9).

Type and Antitype

Before going on about the significance of the snake and its role in healing, I want to explain a theological principle known as Type and Antitype. In biblical theology, the concepts of "type" and "antitype" are used to describe how events, persons, or things in the Old Testament prefigure and foreshadow greater truths revealed in the New Testament.

Type

A "type" is a real, historical event, person, or object in the Old Testament that serves as a prophetic symbol or example, pointing forward to a future event or person. Types are often seen as patterns or models that have both a direct significance at the time of their occurrence and an additional, deeper significance when linked to later Christian teachings.

Antitype

The "antitype" is the fulfillment or realization of the "type" in the New Testament. It is often revealed through the person, work, or teachings of Jesus Christ. The antitype not only fulfills the type but usually exceeds it in meaning and significance, providing the ultimate interpretation of what the type was pointing towards.

EXAMPLES

1. Adam as a Type

Adam is described as a "type" of Christ in Romans 5:14, where Paul calls him a "pattern" of the one to come. Adam's actions affect all humanity through sin, and he serves as a figure of Christ, who, unlike Adam, brings righteousness and life to all humanity through His obedience.

2. Jonah as a Type

Jesus refers to Jonah's experience in the belly of the fish for three days and three nights as a sign that points to His own death, burial, and resurrection after three days (Matthew 12:40).

Theological Significance: The bronze snake, therefore, serves as a means of salvation for the Israelites, symbolizing God's provision and grace in the face of judgment. It also reflects the consequences of sin and the immediacy of God's mercy when His people turn to Him in faith. The snake is a "type" representing this theological idea introduced here in the Old Testament.

John 3:14-15 - The Antitype in the New Testament

Jesus refers to the bronze snake in His conversation with Nicodemus. He says,

¹⁴ "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, ¹⁵ that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

- John 3:14-15 NIV

Theological Significance: Jesus draws a parallel between the bronze snake being lifted on a pole (the type) and His own upcoming crucifixion (the antitype). The analogy underscores that just as the bronze snake was a source of physical healing and salvation from immediate death, Christ on the cross is the source of spiritual healing and eternal salvation.

Key Theological Themes produced by the snake Type/Antitype

1. **Salvation through Faith:** Both narratives emphasize faith as the mechanism for salvation. Just as the Israelites had to look at the bronze snake to be healed (this was the expression of faith required by God), in the New Testament individuals must repent and be baptized – Acts 2:38 (this is the expression of faith required by God today) in order to be saved.
2. **Divine Grace in Response to Judgment:** The bronze snake was provided as a means of grace and mercy in response to God's judgment for sin. Similarly, the crucifixion of Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's grace in making restitution for our sins and thus offering forgiveness and life in response to the judgment our sins deserve.
3. **Symbol of Sin and Curse:** In the Bible, snakes are often symbols of sin and evil (e.g., Genesis 3), and being lifted on a pole or tree was a sign of being cursed (Deuteronomy 21:23). Christ's crucifixion, where He is metaphorically "lifted up" as sin itself and as bearing a curse, fulfills this symbolism, taking upon Himself the curse of sin to provide healing and salvation to all who believe.

Typology enriches biblical interpretation by linking the Old Testament with the New Testament, demonstrating the unified plan of God across the Scriptures. It helps believers understand how historical events and laws from the Old Testament find their ultimate meaning in Christ revealed in the New Testament.

The Song of the Well and Conquests Over Amorites (Numbers 21:10-20, 21-35)

Israel sings a song celebrating the well provided by God, and they conquer territories from the Amorite kings Sihon and Og. These victories highlight God's direct involvement in granting them success, preparing them for the impending conquest of Canaan. The Israelites now controlled the land east of the Jordan river from which they could prepare to conquer and settle the land on the western side of the Jordan river known as Canaan.



CHAPTER 22-24

BALAAM'S INVOLVEMENT

Balak's Invitation to Balaam (Numbers 22:1-21)

Balak, king of Moab, summons Balaam to curse Israel because of his fear that this large number of people will overrun his land. Balaam's journey is marked by an angelic intervention that his donkey perceives, teaching about God's control over all nations and the protection of His people. This is where Balaam's donkey answers the prophet when being questioned by him.

Balaam's Prophecies (Numbers 22:22-24:25)

Despite his initial intentions and encouragement by the king to curse the Israelites, Balaam blesses Israel multiple times instead, proclaiming their prosperity and dominance. These blessings reinforce the divine favor upon Israel and God's plan for their future. While specific details about Balak's death or further actions are not detailed directly after the events of Numbers 22-24, his name reappears as part of Israel's history in retrospective references, warning against similar enmity towards Israel (Micah 6:5, where Balak's interactions with Balaam are recalled as a reminder of God's protection over Israel).

CHAPTER 25

PEOR AND ITS AFTERMATH

Counsel against Israel

Despite his prophetic proclamations in favor of Israel during his oracles, Balaam later played a role in leading Israel into sin. He is mentioned as having advised the Midianites on how to corrupt

Israel by leading them into idolatry and immorality with Moabite women (Numbers 31:16).

This began with Israelite men being seduced by Moabite women into fornication as well as participation in Baal worship, specifically of the local god, Baal of Peor (Numbers 25:1).

The climax of this sinful behavior occurred when a Jewish man actually brought a Midianite woman, this time, into the camp and into his tent thus defiling not only himself but the camp. This act led to a rebellion with many leaders falling into idolatry and caused a severe plague to fall on the camp.

Phinehas's Zealous Act (Numbers 25:6-18)

Phinehas, Aaron's grandson, ends the plague by killing the couple (Jewish man and Midianite woman) involved in the apostasy, earning him a covenant of peace and a perpetual priesthood from God. This act symbolized the importance of zeal for God's law and the impact of righteous actions on communal well-being.

Death

Balaam's end comes when he is killed by the Israelites during a military campaign against the Midianites later on, as instructed by God. His death is mentioned explicitly in Numbers.

They killed the kings of Midian along with the rest of their slain: Evi and Rekem and Zur and Hur and Reba, the five kings of Midian; they also killed Balaam the son of Beor with the sword.

- Numbers 31:8

Significance of These Events

1. **Preparation for Conquest:** The military victories and divine interventions in these chapters serve to prepare and reassure the Israelites of their ability to conquer the land promised to them, with God's direct support and guidance.
2. **Spiritual and Moral Lessons:** The events involving the bronze snake and Balaam's blessings highlight the themes of salvation, divine protection, and the fulfillment of God's promises. These narratives strengthen the Israelites' trust in God's plans and their spiritual identity.
3. **Consequences of Disobedience:** The incident at Peor illustrates the severe consequences of straying from God's commandments, emphasizing the importance of maintaining purity and devotion amidst external influences.

Note: The following chapters 26 and 27 of the Book of Numbers document significant transitional events as the Israelites prepare for their entry into the Promised Land. These chapters focus on a new census, inheritance laws, and the transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua. Here's an orderly explanation of each event along with passage references and their significance:

CHAPTER 26

THE SECOND CENSUS

Conducting the Census (Numbers 26:1-4)

God commands Moses and Eleazar to take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans—all men 20 years old or older who can serve in the army. This occurs after the plague associated with the Baal Peor incident.

Results of the Census (Numbers 26:5-51)

The census lists each tribe's male population. This new count reflects those who will enter the Promised Land, excluding the generation that came out of Egypt, as they were decreed to die in the wilderness due to their disobedience (except for Caleb and Joshua).

Significance: This census serves to organize and prepare the new generation for conquest and settlement. It underscores a shift from the old generation that experienced the Exodus to the new one that will experience the conquest of Canaan.

LEVITE CENSUS AND INHERITANCE INSTRUCTIONS

Census of the Levites (Numbers 26:57-62)

The Levites are counted from a month old and above, highlighting their distinct role and duties separate from military functions.

No Inheritance in the Land (Numbers 26:52-56)

While the land is to be distributed to the tribes according to the census numbers, the Levites are not to receive a territorial inheritance; their inheritance is the Lord and the offerings given to Him.

Significance: The arrangement reinforces the Levites' special status and duties in the religious life of Israel, focusing on spiritual service over territorial governance.

CHAPTER 27

INHERITANCE LAWS AND LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

Daughters' Rights to Inheritance (Numbers 27:1-11)

The daughters of Zelophehad petition to inherit their father's land, as he had no sons. God instructs Moses to grant them their inheritance, setting a precedent for inheritance rights for daughters in the absence of sons.

Significance: This adjustment in the law promotes justice and equity in Israelite society, ensuring family legacy and property continuity even in the absence of male heirs.

Succession of Leadership (Numbers 27:12-23)

God tells Moses that he will not enter the Promised Land and instructs him to appoint Joshua as his successor. Moses lays hands on Joshua before Eleazar the priest and the whole community, conferring authority on him.

Significance: This transition of leadership is critical for maintaining continuity and stability. Joshua's appointment underlines the importance of godly leadership and the need for public endorsement and divine appointment in leadership transitions.

OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE TO THE JOURNEY

These chapters are pivotal as they deal with reorganization and preparation of the Israelite community for life in Canaan:

1. **Military Victories:** The military successes in Chapter 21 demonstrate God's support for Israel and signify their growing readiness as a conquering nation, a key aspect of their identity.
2. **Divine Protection and Guidance:** The narratives about the bronze snake and Balaam underscore God's protective guidance and His plans for Israel's blessing, reinforcing their special status as His chosen people.
3. **Moral and Spiritual Tests:** The incident at Peor represents a critical test of Israel's loyalty to Yahweh, illustrating the constant threat of apostasy and the need for vigilance in maintaining covenant faithfulness.
4. **Preparatory Actions:** The census prepares the nation for military and civic action in the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land.
5. **Legal and Social Foundations:** Establishing inheritance laws, including those for women, helps in laying down a more equitable societal structure.

6. **Leadership Continuity:** Ensuring a smooth leadership transition from Moses to Joshua helps in maintaining morale and direction as the Israelites stand on the brink of fulfilling the promise of entering the Promised Land.

Each event in these chapters teaches lessons about God's protection, the consequences of disobedience, and the importance of remaining faithful to divine commands. They collectively mold the character and destiny of the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land.

In addition to this, they collectively emphasize readiness—militarily, legally, and leadership-wise—for the significant changes awaiting the Israelites as they transition from wanderers to settlers.

LESSONS FROM THE JOURNEY

1. Depend on God's Provision and Protection First

In Numbers 21, when the Israelites face venomous snakes as a result of their complaints and lack of faith, God provides a means of healing through the bronze snake lifted by Moses. This event emphasizes reliance on God's provision even in punishment or correction.

Lesson for Christians: This teaches Christians the importance of looking to God for sustenance, healing, and protection first, especially in times of distress or dissatisfaction with life's circumstances. It's not faith if our attitude is, "Well, we might as well pray...it can't hurt." My point here is that going to God for help **first** should be our natural "go to" move when things get tough.

2. God is Sovereign Over the plans of Human Beings

In Numbers 22-24, Balaam's intent to curse Israel is overridden by God, who turns the intended curses into blessings. Despite Balak's persistent attempts to harm Israel through curses, God's protective hand over His people changes curses into blessings.

Lesson for Christians: This narrative underscores the sovereignty of God over all human plans and intentions. It encourages Christians to trust in God's overarching plans for their lives, even when we don't quite understand, especially when we don't understand! With God, all things are possible, however, not everything comes with an explanation. That's why and how we walk by faith.

3. The Dangers of Compromise and the Need for Moral Integrity

In Numbers 25, the Israelites engage in idolatry and immorality with the Moabite women, leading to God's severe judgment. Phinehas's zealous act of killing the sinning Israelite and Midianite woman stops the plague sent as punishment, showcasing a drastic but necessary action to preserve the holiness of the community.

Lesson for Christians: This stark event highlights the dangers of compromising one's faith by conforming to the secular and pagan practices surrounding us. For Christians, it's a call to uphold moral integrity and remain faithful to God's commandments, even in a culture that might encourage contrary behavior.

Zeal for God's holiness in an unbelieving, even pagan environment is what creates the light in the darkness. We can't show people the "way" by compromising our behavior, so we'll be accepted by unbelievers. That's what the world likes, low intensity Christians who contribute to the darkness instead of lighting up the darkness.

Each of these lessons from Numbers 21 to 27 encourages Christians to navigate their spiritual journeys with faith, trust in God's sovereignty, and uncompromised moral integrity. Remember what Paul said in I Corinthians 10:11 concerning what was written in the Old Testament:

Now these things happened to them as an example,
and they were written for our instruction, upon whom
the ends of the ages have come.

- I Corinthians 10:11



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: NUMBERS 21-27

READ: NUMBERS 28-36

6.

Preparing to Enter the Promised Land

NUMBERS 28-36

In this final lesson covering chapters 28-36 of Numbers, we go full circle in the journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land. After their departure from Egypt, they made their way to Mt. Sinai where they spent nearly two years in preparation for their journey to the land of Canaan. We witnessed their departure and eventual plan to spy out the land in preparation to enter, remove the inhabitants and settle the land as their own.

In the previous chapter we read about the failure of the spies to bring a good report which caused a rebellion among the people and God's judgement upon them in the form of a curse that they would remain in the wilderness until every single person of that generation (except Caleb and Joshua) that refused to enter in would remain and die in the wilderness. The irony of their punishment was that it would be their children, who they had used as an excuse not to enter in, these would come into the Promised Land and not their parents.

So far we have seen the passing of the older generation of leaders as Aaron and Miriam have died and Moses will not advance with the people into Canaan and has asked God to transfer his authority over to Joshua who will be the one who will not only lead the people into the land but also lead them in the conquering, apportioning and settling of the 12 tribes in the land given to them by God.

The people are once again amassed across the river ready to cross in but unlike last time, there is no general scouting and reporting, only the real-time preparation of the people to go in and take, with God's help, the land promised to them so long ago.

Content – Numbers 28-36

Chapters 28 to 36 of the Book of Numbers contain a mix of regulations for offerings, preparations for entering Canaan, and guidelines for the distribution and governance of the Promised Land itself. These chapters effectively transition the narrative from the wilderness wanderings to the threshold of Canaan and setting the stage for their conquest and eventual settlement.

CHAPTER 28-29

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DAILY OFFERINGS AND FESTIVALS

Daily and Regular Offerings

Daily Offerings:

- **Morning and Evening:** Two lambs, one-year-old, without blemish as a burnt offering each day (Numbers 28:3-4).

Sabbath Offerings (Weekly):

Every Sabbath: In addition to the daily offerings, two additional lambs of the same specification for the burnt offering, with accompanying grain and drink offerings (Numbers 28:9-10).

Monthly Offerings (Beginning of each month, New Moon):

Monthly Burnt Offering: Two young bulls, one ram, seven male lambs (one year old, without defect) with associated grain and drink offerings. Plus one male goat for a sin offering (Numbers 28:11-15).

Annual Festivals

1. Passover (1st month, 14th day):

Special sacrifices associated with Passover.

2. Days of Unleavened Bread (1st month 15th to 21st day):

Two bulls, one ram, seven lambs (year-old and without defect) each day of the festival as a burnt offering with appropriate grain and drink offerings, and one goat for a sin offering daily (Numbers 28:16-25).

3. Feast of Weeks

(Pentecost – Date varies, 50 days post-Passover):

Single Day Festival: Two young bulls, one ram, seven One-year-old lambs (without defect) for burnt offerings, with accompanying grain and drink offerings. One goat for a sin offering (Numbers 28:26-31).

4. Feast of Trumpets (7th month, 1st day):

One young bull, one ram, seven one year-old lambs (without defect) for burnt offerings, associated grain and drink offerings. One goat for a sin offering (Numbers 29:1-6).

5. Day of Atonement (7th month, 10th day):

Atonement Offerings: One bull, one ram, seven one year-old lambs (without defect) for burnt offerings, grain and drink offerings accompanying these. One goat for a sin offering (Numbers 29:7-11).

6. Feast of Tabernacles (7th month, 15th to 21st day):

Daily Offerings (for 7 days): Numbers of bulls decrease each day from 13 to 7, while one ram and seven lambs are constant daily; all with corresponding grain and drink offerings. One goat for a sin offering daily.

By the time of Jesus, three other feasts were added to the yearly calendar:

7. The Eighth Day of Assembly (Shemini Atzeret)

Date: Tishri 23 (the day after Sukkot ends) – A separate festival immediately following Sukkot, marked by a time of assembly and prayer. It serves as a closing to the intense series of holy days.

8. The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah)

Date: Kislev 25-Tevet 3 (Winter, November-December) – Although of later origin and not one of the pilgrim festivals, Hanukkah commemorates the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and is marked by lighting candles each night for eight nights.

9. The Feast of Lots (Purim)

Date: Adar 14 (Winter, February-March) – This feast marks the deliverance of the Jewish people from imminent doom at the hands of a Persian official as recorded in the book of Esther. It is a festive celebration that involves the reading of the Book of Esther, giving gifts, and charity.

The Maccabean Revolt: The Miracle of the Oil

After a successful guerilla war against the Seleucid Empire's forces in 167 BC, the Jewish family of the Maccabees, who led the uprising, recaptured Jerusalem and set about rededicating the Temple. Upon recapturing the Temple, the Maccabees sought to relight the menorah (a sacred candelabrum), an important ritual that symbolized the presence of God in the sanctuary. However, they found only a single cruse of pure olive oil that had not been defiled by the Greeks, bearing the seal of the high priest. This small amount of oil was sufficient for only one day.

According to tradition, the oil miraculously burned for eight days, which was the time needed to prepare and consecrate fresh oil under conditions of ritual purity.

These detailed instructions for daily worship and yearly festivals reinforced the importance of regular and seasonal worship as the Israelites prepared to settle in Canaan, ensuring that the community remained in constant communion with God.

JEWISH FESTIVALS CALENDAR AD 30 MATCHED TO GREGORIAN CALENDAR

HEBREW MONTH	FESTIVAL	DESCRIPTION AND OCCURRENCES
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Nisan 1 – March / April	Passover	14th: Commemorates the Exodus with a special meal and sacrifices.
Nisan	Unleavened Bread	15th-21st: A seven-day festival immediately following Passover, where no leavened bread is eaten. Daily offerings made.
Sivan 3 – May / June	Pentecost (Feast of Weeks)	50 days after Passover, celebrating the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai with offerings of new grain.
Tishri 7 – September / October	Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)	1st: The Jewish New Year marked by blowing the shofar, a day of awakening and repentance.
Tishri 7	Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)	10th: The holiest day, dedicated to atonement and repentance. Fasting and special offerings are made.
Tishri 7	Tabernacles (Sukkot)	15th-21st: Commemorates the wilderness wanderings; Jews dwell in temporary shelters. Daily offerings.
Tishri 7	Eighth Day Assembly (Shemini Atzeret)	22nd: A separate festival immediately following Sukkot, marked by assembly and a cessation of labor.
Kislev-Tevet 9-10 –Nov / Dec / Jan	Dedication (Hanukkah)	25th Kislev to 3rd Tevet: Celebrates the rededication of the Temple and the miracle of the oil. Candles are lit each night.
Adar 12 – February / March	Purim	14th: Marks Esther's deliverance of the Jewish people from Haman, celebrated with feasting, costumes, and the reading of the Book of Esther. Adar II (March/April) - Additional month in Leap years: Added about seven times in a 19-year cycle to keep the lunar calendar in sync with the solar year, ensuring that the festivals, particularly Passover, remain in their appropriate seasons.

CHAPTER 30

VOWS

Regulations on Vows (Numbers 30:1-16)

Laws concerning the making and fulfillment of vows, particularly focusing on the vows made by women and how they are to be handled by their fathers or husbands. In the end, the men who were charged with the leadership of their families would be bound to uphold and support the completion of the vow. For this reason, they had a say in the making of a vow by the women in the family. The system also tested the involvement of the men in the affairs of the family since there were instances when their authority could be nullified. For example:

1. **Failure to Object Promptly:** If a father hears his daughter's vow and he does not express disapproval on the day he learns of it, the vow stood and the daughter was obligated to fulfill it. Similarly, if a husband hears of his wife's vow and does not make an objection on the day he hears it, the vow remains in effect (Numbers 30:4-7).
2. **Inconsistency in Response:** If a husband initially approves (or fails to disapprove) his wife's vow but later decides to annul it, the vow cannot be nullified after the initial period of acceptance. The husband is held accountable for any resulting iniquity due to his inconsistency or failure to annul the vow promptly (Numbers 30:8, 12, 15).
3. **Widowhood or Divorce:** If a woman who made a vow subsequently becomes a widow or gets divorced, her vows or self-imposed obligations stand, regardless of whether her husband had previously objected. This is because his

authority to nullify her vows ends with the dissolution of the marriage (Numbers 30:9).

These rules served to regulate the making and fulfillment of vows, emphasizing the importance of accountability and the integrity of one's word within the community.

CHAPTER 31

WAR AGAINST THE MIDIANITES

The destruction of the Midianites, as recounted in Numbers Chapter 31, has several reasons rooted in the narrative of the previous chapters of the Book of Numbers, particularly the incidents involving the seduction of Israelite men by Midianite women and the subsequent idolatrous worship of Baal-Peor. Here are some of the reasons behind this action:

A. Retribution for the Incident at Peor

Incitement to Idolatry: The primary reason for the conflict with Midian was their role in leading the Israelites into idolatry at Baal-Peor. In Numbers 25, Midianite women, under the counsel of Balaam, seduced Israelite men and invited them to participate in the worship of their god, Baal-Peor. This led to a severe plague from God that killed 24,000 Israelites as divine punishment for idolatry.

Divine Command for Vengeance: In Numbers 31:1-2, God specifically commands Moses to take vengeance against the Midianites for their role in the Peor incident. This divine directive is portrayed as a punitive action against the Midianites for their successful plot to curse Israel through indirect means after Balaam could not curse them directly.

B. Preventing Future Idolatry

Elimination of a Spiritual Threat: The drastic measures taken against the Midianites can also be seen as an attempt to remove a persistent source of idolatrous influence near Israel. This was crucial as Israel prepared to settle in Canaan, where they would continuously face temptations to adopt pagan practices.

Cleansing Before Entering the Promised Land: The action against Midian was part of preparing Israel to enter the Promised Land by purging them from the sinful influences that had led them astray. This cleansing was not only physical but also spiritual, emphasizing the need for holiness and fidelity to God.

C. Demonstration of Divine Justice

Upholding God's Justice: The severity of the response to Midian reflects the biblical theme of divine justice. Those who lead God's people into sin face harsh consequences, which serves as a warning to both Israel and surrounding nations.

Reaffirming God's Covenant with Israel: By carrying out God's command against Midian, Moses reaffirms Israel's special covenant relationship with God, which demanded exclusive loyalty and obedience to Him.

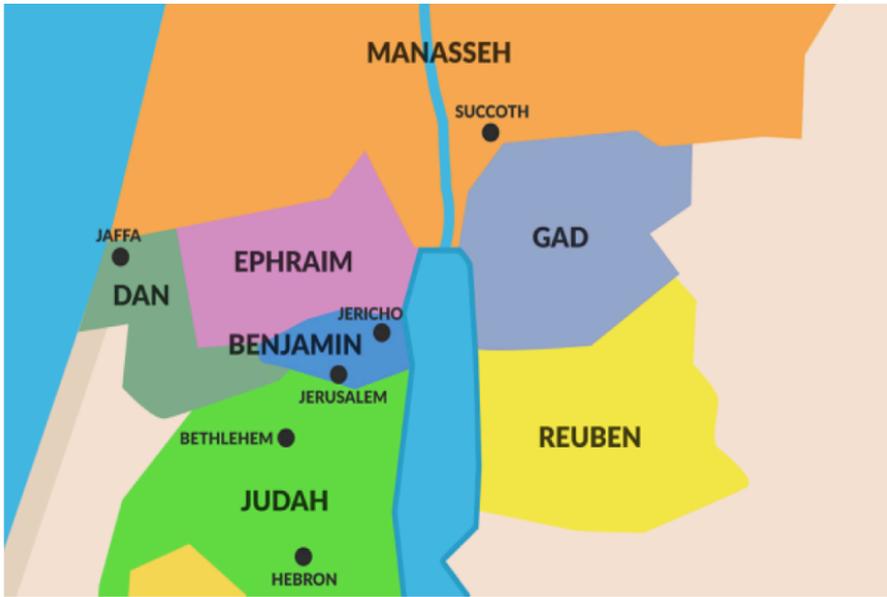
D. Political and Social Implications

Strategic Considerations: From a socio-political perspective, defeating Midian might have also served to enhance Israel's position among the local powers, demonstrating their might and God's backing. This would be significant in establishing Israel's place in the geopolitics of Canaan. They would be taken seriously by other nations.

CHAPTER 32

SETTLEMENT OF THE TRANSJORDAN TRIBES

Request by Reuben and Gad (Numbers 32:1-42): The tribes of Reuben and Gad request to settle in the fertile lands of Gilead and Bashan, east of the Jordan River, because of their large livestock herds.



This arrangement, which includes their commitment to help conquer the land west of Jordan, illustrates themes of negotiation, responsibility, and the importance of unity in achieving common goals (different locations, one goal = tribal unity).



CHAPTER 33 REVIEW OF THE JOURNEY

In Numbers Chapter 33, Moses reviews the stages of the Israelites' journey from their departure from Egypt to their arrival at the plains of Moab by the Jordan River near Jericho. This retrospective is significant and serves two primary objectives:

1. It documents and legitimizes the Israelite Journey

Record Keeping: The detailed account serves as an official record of the Israelites' movements through the wilderness. This documentation is crucial not only for historical purposes but also

for future generations to have a concrete account of the fulfillment of God's promises and guidance.

By listing each location where they camped, Moses provided a clear and structured itinerary that highlights the progress and the challenges faced along the way.

Affirmation of Divine Guidance: The review underscores the reality that each stage of the journey was under divine direction. The text often notes that their encampments and travels were commanded by God, reinforcing the idea that the journey, despite its difficulties and length, was part of a divine plan. This affirmation served to legitimize the leadership and the path taken, reinforcing the faith of the people in God's ongoing provision and protection. In other words, the journey was not their idea.

2. Preparation for Entering the Promised Land

Reflection and Learning: Reviewing the journey allowed the Israelites to reflect on their past experiences, the lessons learned, and the miracles witnessed. This reflection was essential for preparing them spiritually and mentally to enter the Promised Land. Understanding their history was crucial for ensuring that past mistakes were not repeated, especially those that led to God's displeasure and punishment.

Renewing Commitment: As the Israelites stood on the brink of achieving the goal set forth by their ancestors and promised by God, reviewing their journey served to renew their commitment to the covenant with God. It reminded them of their unique relationship with God and their obligations under the covenant, which would be critical as they transitioned from a nomadic existence to settling in Canaan.

Conclusion

The recounting of the journey in Numbers 33 thus serves as both a historical recapitulation and a spiritual preparation. It consolidates the narrative of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings while setting the stage for the conquest and settlement of Canaan, ensuring that the Israelites remember and draw strength from their journey under God's guidance. This chapter not only contextualizes their experiences but also reinforces their identity as God's chosen people, tasked with fulfilling a divine mandate in the land promised to their forefathers.

CHAPTER 34

BOUNDARIES OF CANAAN

A. Geographical boundaries

Land Boundaries (Numbers 34:1-29): Precise geographical boundaries for the allocation of Canaan among the tribes. This established clear guidelines for the division of the land, underscoring the importance of orderly distribution and management of God-given resources.

B. Division of the land Among the Tribes

Allocation by Lot: The land is to be divided by lot among the nine and a half tribes (as Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh have already received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan River). This method ensures that the division is seen as directed by God's providence (Numbers 34:13).



Leaders for the Allocation: Specific leaders from each tribe are appointed to oversee the distribution of the land. These leaders, one chief from each tribe, are responsible for managing the allocation process and ensuring that the boundaries for each tribe are respected (Numbers 34:17-29).

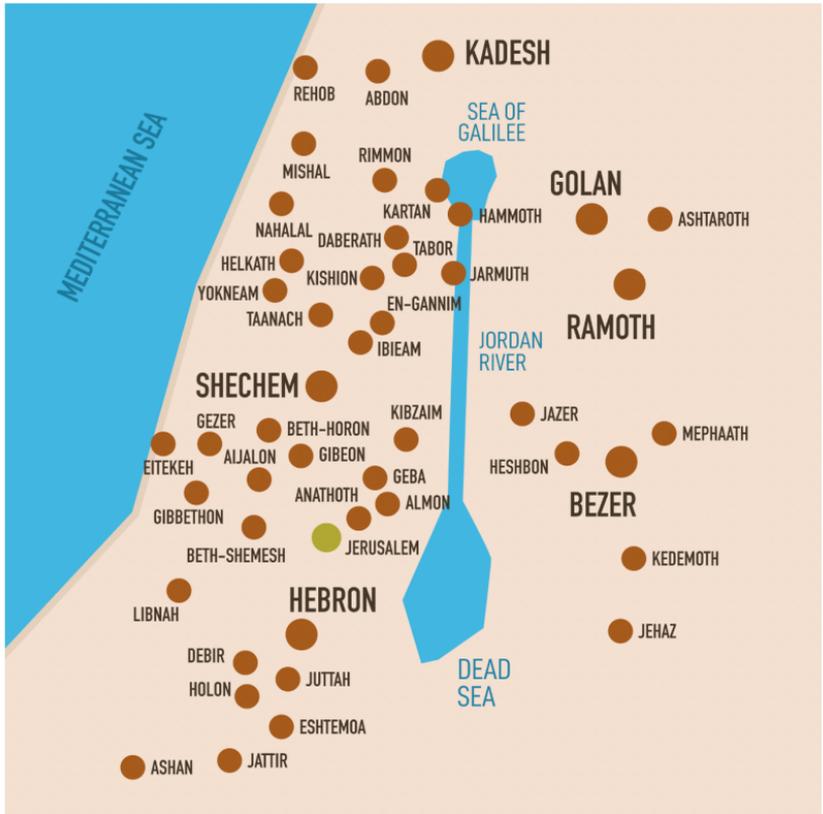
Significance

Fair and Ordered Distribution: The detailed boundaries and the use of lots for division signify a methodical and divinely guided process, aiming to ensure each tribe received a fair portion of the land.

Establishment of Tribal Territories: The clear demarcation of boundaries helped prevent disputes over land and established a structured setup for the newly formed Israelite nation in their promised homeland.

These guidelines not only facilitated the practical aspects of settling a nomadic people into a permanent homeland but also reinforced the importance of divine guidance and fairness in the distribution process, underscoring the covenant relationship between God and the Israelites.

CHAPTER 35 LEVITICAL CITIES AND CITIES OF REFUGE



Numbers Chapter 35 provides specific guidelines for distributing the Promised Land among the tribes of Israel, focusing particularly on the allocation of cities and surrounding lands to the Levites, as well as the establishment of cities of refuge. Here is a brief summary of these guidelines:

A. Allocation of Cities to the Levites

Designation of Levitical Cities: Since the Levites were not given a distinct tribal territory like the other tribes, they were to receive 48 cities spread throughout the different tribal territories (Numbers 35:7). This distribution ensured the Levites were present across the land, fulfilling their duties in religious instruction and temple service.

Surrounding Pasturelands: Each Levitical city was to be surrounded by pasturelands, extending outward 1,000 cubits (about 500 meters) from the city walls. The pasturelands were intended for their livestock, crops, and other needs (Numbers 35:4-5).

B. Establishment of Cities of Refuge

Purpose: Six of the 48 Levitical cities were designated as cities of refuge. These cities provided asylum for individuals who had committed manslaughter unintentionally, protecting them from the avenger of blood until a fair trial could be conducted (Numbers 35:11-12).

Accessibility and Fairness: The cities of refuge were strategically chosen to be accessible to all Israelites. This placement ensured that anyone who needed to flee to a city of refuge could reach one without undue hardship.

Legal Asylum: Once inside a city of refuge, the accused had to remain there until the death of the current high priest. After the high priest's death, they could return to their original home without fear of retribution (Numbers 35:28).

C. Additional Regulations for the Manslayer

Trial and Judgment: The manslayer was required to stand trial before the community to determine the intent behind the killing. This trial ensured that the protection of the city of refuge was granted only in cases of unintentional killing (Numbers 35:24-25).

Prohibition Against Leaving the City: If the manslayer left the city of refuge before the death of the high priest, the avenger of blood could lawfully kill the offender without consequence (Numbers 35:26-27).

Conclusion

These guidelines in Numbers 35 not only facilitated the fair distribution of land and responsibilities among the Israelites but also reflected a complex understanding of justice, sanctuary, and community life. They underscored the importance of the Levites in religious and social governance, while the cities of refuge represented a sophisticated legal principle (for that time) of asylum and protection for individuals awaiting trial, ensuring the maintenance of justice and mercy in a community with no formal public security or criminal legal system.

CHAPTER 36

INHERITANCE OF ZELOPHEHAD'S DAUGHTERS

Marriage within the Tribe (Numbers 36:1-13)

Regulations ensuring that the inheritance of land remains within the original tribe, responding to concerns raised by the inheritance rights granted to Zelophehad's daughters. This addresses issues of property rights and inheritance, ensuring

stable land ownership and the preservation of tribal identities within Israel.

These chapters end the story of the Jews' entrance into the Holy Land on a rather low-key event, however, these rules collectively set the groundwork for Israel's life in Canaan, transitioning from the nomadic existence in the wilderness (which the people would not return to) to a settled and structured community in the Promised Land, which was the happy ending that all had hoped for. These laws reflect a maturation of Israel's national identity and underscore the importance of adhering to God's laws as the foundation for national wellbeing and continued divine blessings.

LESSONS FOR TODAY

1. Structured Worship and Obedience are Basic

Chapters 28 and 29 meticulously detail the daily, weekly, monthly, and annual offerings that the Israelites are to present to God. These instructions emphasize the importance of regular worship and strict adherence to God's commands as a way of sustaining a relationship with Him. This is not just an "Old Testament Thing". We need to be carefully following the instructions given to us about biblical worship today just as they followed these types of instructions back then. God still requires that we both worship and obey Him in order to maintain a relationship with Him.

2. Social Justice and Community Responsibility are Marks of the Faithful

Numbers 35 discusses the establishment of cities of refuge where individuals accused of manslaughter could seek asylum

until they received a fair trial. This provision ensures that justice is balanced with mercy, protecting individuals from revenge/punishment until due process is observed. This highlights the importance of building fair systems within societies that protect the rights of all individuals, emphasizing that justice should be tempered with mercy.

3. Disobedience has consequences and Faithfulness has Rewards – Always!

Throughout the Book of Numbers, the Israelites faced numerous challenges and punishments, often as a direct consequence of their disobedience and complaints against God and Moses (e.g., the rebellion of Korah where the ground opened up and swallowed the rebels alive, not to mention the spies' negative report leading to 40 years in the wilderness). However, whenever the Israelites obeyed God (e.g., the offerings, the bronze snake), they experienced His protection and provision.

Modern Application: This overarching theme teaches us that actions have consequences, and faithfulness can lead to blessings. It encourages personal accountability and faithfulness in adhering to moral principles and ethical standards. In a broader sense, it speaks to the need for persistence in righteous behavior despite challenges or delays in seeing positive outcomes.

In the end, God always keeps His promises, for punishment or for rewards, so let's do our best to obey His word and remain faithful until the end because we too will enter the place that He has promised us:



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: NUMBERS 28-36

READ: DEUTERONOMY 1-4

7.

Introduction to Deuteronomy

REITERATION AND REMINDER DEUTERONOMY 1-4

The term itself derives from the Greek words "deuteros," meaning "second," and "nomos," meaning "law." Thus, Deuteronomy can be understood to mean "Second Law" or "Repetition of the Law." Deuteronomy is essentially a series of speeches delivered by Moses to the new generation of Israelites, a generation that had not experienced the events recounted in Numbers firsthand. As such, Moses takes this opportunity to recount their history, reiterate the laws and commandments given by God, and renew the covenant between God and the people.

In many ways, Deuteronomy serves as a recapitulation and reinterpretation of the laws and events recorded in Numbers, emphasizing the importance of obedience to God's commands and the blessings that come with it, while also warning against the consequences of disobedience.

The book of Deuteronomy is structured as a farewell address by Moses, as he prepares to pass the mantle of leadership to Joshua and the Israelites prepare to enter the Promised Land. It serves as a crucial bridge between the wilderness experiences recorded in Numbers and the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land depicted in the subsequent books of Joshua and beyond.

Differences and Similarities Between Numbers and Deuteronomy

Here are five similarities and differences between these two books that will help you retain the main content of each book.

Similarities:

1. **Historical Continuity:** Both books are part of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Hebrew Bible, and they continue the narrative of the Israelites' journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.
2. **Divine Guidance:** In both books, God provides guidance and instructions to the Israelites through Moses.
3. **Emphasis on Covenant:** Both Numbers and Deuteronomy emphasize the covenant between God and the Israelites. The covenant terms, including blessings for obedience and consequences for disobedience, are reiterated in both books.
4. **Leadership Transition:** Both books deal with a transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua. In Numbers, Joshua is appointed as Moses' successor, and in Deuteronomy, Moses commissions Joshua as the new leader.

5. **Inclusion of Laws and Regulations:** Both books contain laws and regulations given by God to the Israelites, covering various aspects of their lives, including religious practices, social conduct, and justice.

Differences:

1. **Narrative Focus:** Numbers focuses more on the events that occur during the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness, including census data, tribal arrangements, and incidents of rebellion. Deuteronomy, on the other hand, primarily consists of Moses' speeches to the new generation of Israelites, summarizing their history and reiterating laws and commands.
2. **Geographical Setting:** Numbers predominantly takes place in the wilderness as the Israelites journey from Sinai to the borders of the Promised Land, while Deuteronomy is set only the plains of Moab, just before the Israelites are about to enter the Promised and.
3. **Literary Genre:** Numbers is more historical and narrative in nature, recounting events and occurrences, whereas Deuteronomy has a more sermonic and exhortative style, with Moses delivering speeches and reminders to the Israelites.
4. **Content Emphasis:** Numbers focuses more on the organization and structure of the Israelite camp, the responsibilities of the priests and Levites, and incidents of rebellion and punishment. Deuteronomy emphasizes the importance of obedience to God's laws, the consequences of disobedience, and the covenant renewal.

5. **Timeframe Covered:** Numbers covers a span of about 40 years during the Israelites' wilderness wanderings, while Deuteronomy spans only a few months, primarily Moses' final speeches to the Israelites before his death.

Deuteronomy 1-4 – Summary

Chapters 1 to 4 of the Book of Deuteronomy involve Moses addressing the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. These chapters are a blend of historical review, motivational discourse, and instruction, meant to prepare the people for their impending conquest and settlement. Here's an orderly explanation of the key events and instructions contained within these chapters, along with their significance:

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL REVIEW AND EXHORTATION

Retelling of the Appointment of Leaders (Deuteronomy 1:9-18)

Moses recalls how he appointed leaders and judges to help manage and govern the people, emphasizing the need for wise and discerning leadership.

Significance: As they stand on the brink of entering Canaan, Moses reminds the people of the importance of just leadership to maintain order and justice in the new land.

The Spies and the People's Rebellion (Deuteronomy 1:19-46)

Moses recounts the episode of the spies sent to scout the land of Canaan and the subsequent rebellion against God's command due to fear, which led to 40 years of wandering.

Significance: This review serves as a warning against disobedience and lack of faith in God's promises, stressing the consequences of such actions.

CHAPTER 2

JOURNEY AND COMMAND TO AVOID CONFLICT

Travel Through Wilderness (Deuteronomy 2:1-23)

Moses details their travels through the wilderness and instructions to avoid conflict with the Edomites, Moabites, and Ammonites, as these lands were not given to the Israelites by God.

Significance: Highlights the sovereignty of God in determining the inheritance of nations and the importance of respecting God's allocations to others.

Conquest of Transjordan (Deuteronomy 2:24-37)

Moses discusses the battles against Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan, emphasizing God's role in their victories.

He also prepares the Israelites for future conquests in Canaan by demonstrating God's power and faithfulness in giving them victory over their enemies.

CHAPTER 3

FURTHER REVIEW OF THE TRANSJORDAN CONQUESTS

Defeat of Og (Deuteronomy 3:1-11)

Detailed account of the conquest of Og, the king of Bashan, and his territories.

Significance: Acts as a reassurance of God's support and the divine gift of land, bolstering the morale of the Israelites.

Distribution of Transjordan (Deuteronomy 3:12-22)

Moses recounts the allocation of land to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

Significance: Emphasizes the need for unity and mutual support among the tribes, as those settled must help others in conquering the rest of Canaan.

Moses Forbidden to Enter Canaan (Deuteronomy 3:23-29)

Moses shares his personal disappointment at not being allowed to enter the Promised Land.

Significance: Serves as a powerful reminder of the seriousness of obeying God's commands and the personal consequences of failing to do so.

CHAPTER 4

EXHORTATION TO OBEDIENCE AND LAW

Call to Obedience (Deuteronomy 4:1-40)

Moses urges the Israelites to adhere strictly to the laws given by God, warning against idolatry and encouraging them to teach these laws to their descendants.

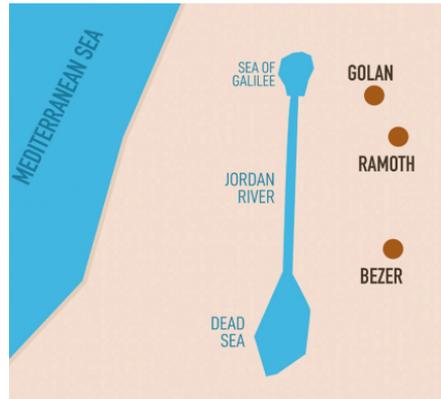
Significance: Establishes the legal and religious framework that will govern their lives in Canaan, ensuring their success and survival as a nation devoted to God.

Cities of Refuge (Deuteronomy 4:41-43)

Establishment of cities of refuge east of the Jordan.

Significance: Illustrates the provision of justice and mercy within the legal system of Israel, providing sanctuaries for those accused of manslaughter until a fair trial.

These chapters in Deuteronomy serve not only as a recap of the Israelites' journey but also as a critical set of instructions and warnings designed to ensure their success and fidelity to God as they prepare to finally enter the land promised to their ancestors.



LESSONS LEARNED FROM FAILURE AND SUCCESS

In Deuteronomy chapters 1 to 4, Moses addresses the Israelites as they prepare to enter the Promised Land, recounting their past experiences of failures and successes. Through these recollections, he imparts several vital lessons essential for their future prosperity and fidelity. Here are four basic lessons that Moses teaches about their past failures and successes:

1. Consequences of Disobedience and Lack of Faith

Context: Moses reminds the Israelites of their failure to trust in God's promise when they refused to enter the Promised Land after the negative report from the spies (Deuteronomy 1:26-32).

Lesson: Moses stresses that disobedience to God's commands and lack of faith in His promises lead to dire consequences, such as the 40 years of wandering and the denial of entry into the land for an entire generation. This teaches the importance of obedience and trust in God's guidance.

2. The Necessity of Strong Leadership and Wise Judgment

Context: Reflecting on the past, Moses recounts how he appointed leaders and judges to help manage the people and make wise decisions (Deuteronomy 1:9-18).

Lesson: The importance of having capable and fair leadership is underscored. Moses teaches that leaders must be just, unbiased, and fear God, ensuring that they handle disputes wisely and maintain order within the community.

3. God's Faithfulness and Power in Providing and Protecting

Context: Moses revisits the victories over Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, as clear demonstrations of God's power and commitment to His people (Deuteronomy 2:24-36, 3:1-11).

Lesson: Even in the face of formidable enemies, God's intervention on behalf of His people ensures their success. This teaches the Israelites to remember and rely on God's proven faithfulness and power as they face new challenges in Canaan.

4. Learning from Mistakes and the Importance of Future Vigilance

Context: Moses shares his personal disappointment at being forbidden by God to enter the Promised Land due to his transgression at the waters of Meribah (Deuteronomy 3:23-28).

Lesson: Moses uses his own failure as a powerful reminder of the need for constant vigilance in obedience to God. It teaches that even leaders are not exempt from the consequences of disobedience, and thus, continual self-examination and adherence to God's law are crucial.

Overall Message

Through these lessons, Moses aims to prepare the new generation of Israelites not only to remember the lessons from their past but also to apply these teachings as they forge ahead into a new phase of their nation's history. This preparation is crucial for ensuring that they do not repeat the mistakes of the past and are ready to live successfully and righteously in the Promised Land.

LESSONS FOR MODERN DAY READERS

The first four chapters of Deuteronomy are rich with historical recaps, exhortations, and foundational lessons that provide invaluable insights for modern Christian readers. Here are three simple yet profound lessons derived from these chapters:

1. Learn from Past Mistakes

Biblical Context: In Deuteronomy 1, Moses recounts the story of the spies who were sent to explore Canaan and how the Israelites' fear and lack of faith resulted in a 40-year punishment of wandering in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 1:26-36).

Modern Application: This lesson emphasizes the importance of learning from past errors and not allowing fear to prevent faithful action. Christians are encouraged to trust in God's guidance and not repeat the mistakes of disbelief or disobedience that can lead to spiritual stagnation or loss.

2. The Importance of Obedience to God's Word

Biblical Context: Throughout the early chapters, Moses reiterates the importance of obeying God's commands as a key to success and prosperity (Deuteronomy 4:1-2). He warns against adding to or subtracting from God's commands.

Modern Application: This underscores for Christians the importance of adhering strictly to the teachings of Scripture. It serves as a reminder to respect the integrity of God's Word and apply it fully in life without compromise, recognizing its authority and completeness.

3. God's Faithfulness and Provision

Biblical Context: Moses recalls God's faithfulness in guiding and providing for the Israelites through their wilderness journey, particularly in their victories over King Sihon and King Og (Deuteronomy 2:31-37, 3:1-3).

Modern Application: This narrative reminds Christians of God's continued faithfulness and His ability to provide in times of need. It encourages believers to remember and rely on God's past faithfulness as a foundation for trusting Him in current challenges, reinforcing the belief in God's active presence and help in our lives.

Conclusion

These chapters of Deuteronomy serve not only as a historical recount for the Israelites but also as spiritual and practical lessons for contemporary Christians. They highlight themes of learning from history, adhering faithfully to God's teachings, and trusting in His enduring faithfulness—principles that guide effective and faithful Christian living today.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: DEUTERONOMY 1-4

READ: DEUTERONOMY 5-11

8.

The Essence of the Law

DEUTERONOMY 5-11

Chapters 5 to 11 of the Book of Deuteronomy focus heavily on reinforcing the Law, the covenant between God and Israel, and the preparation of the Israelites to live faithfully in the Promised Land. These chapters highlight Moses's instructions and reminders about the importance of obedience, love, and loyalty to God.

Before we review the material in chapters 5 to 11, I want us to examine the nations that were already living in the land of Canaan which the Jews were sent to displace and destroy. Their end was not based simply on the fact that they were not part of the Jewish nation but because of their immoral behavior largely due to their pagan religious practices which were an abomination to the true and living God.



The condemnation and command to drive out these nations are primarily found in texts like Deuteronomy 7 and Joshua 9. For example, Deuteronomy 7:1-2 states:

"When the Lord your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drives out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you— and when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy."

When the Israelites entered the land of Canaan, it was inhabited by various groups known collectively as the Canaanites. Each of these groups had distinct tribal identities and religious practices, often involving polytheism centered around a pantheon of gods

associated with nature and fertility. Here is a list of the major nations and a brief description of their religious practices:

1. Canaanites

Description: The term "Canaanites" is sometimes used broadly to refer to all inhabitants of Canaan but specifically refers to the people living in the lowlands and the coastal areas.

Religious Practices: Their religion was polytheistic, centered around fertility gods and goddesses. The chief god was El, with Baal (god of fertility and weather) and Asherah (goddess of the sea and consort of El) being prominent deities. Ritual practices likely included sacred prostitution and child sacrifice, particularly in worship of Molech.

2. Amorites

Description: Originally nomadic, the Amorites settled in various parts of Canaan and became a dominant group in some regions. They built several prominent city-states, including Babylon in Mesopotamia.

Religious Practices: Their religion was similar to that of the broader Mesopotamian context, with a pantheon that included both Sumerian and Akkadian gods. Key figures included the storm god Hadad and the sky god Anu.

3. Hittites

Description: Though primarily associated with their empire in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey), small groups of Hittites lived in northern Canaan.

Religious Practices: Hittite religion included a large number of gods, often assimilating deities from conquered peoples. They practiced rituals that included offerings, prayers, and elaborate ceremonies intended to appease these gods.

4. Perizzites

Description: The Perizzites are mentioned in the Bible as one of the peoples living in Canaan, though little is known about them specifically.

Religious Practices: As with other Canaanite groups, their practices likely included the worship of local fertility gods and nature deities, similar to those worshipped by the broader Canaanite culture.

5. Hivites

Description: The Hivites were another group residing in Canaan, mentioned specifically in the context of the Gibeonites, who tricked Joshua into making a peace treaty with them.

Religious Practices: Their practices likely mirrored typical Canaanite religious customs, with a focus on local manifestations of deities like Baal and Asherah.

6. Jebusites

Description: The Jebusites controlled Jerusalem until it was conquered by King David. Their stronghold, Jebus, became the site of Jerusalem.

Religious Practices: Their religious practices would have been similar to those of other Canaanite groups, with a probable

emphasis on worshipping local gods associated with their city and its surroundings.

7. Girgashites

Description: Listed among the nations of Canaan in the Bible, but historical and archaeological details about the Girgashites are scant.

Religious Practices: While specific practices are not detailed, they likely followed typical Canaanite religious traditions.

These groups shared a common cultural background that included a pantheon of gods and religious practices deeply connected to agriculture and the cycles of nature. The religious practices often involved rituals that were seen as abhorrent by the Israelites, such as human sacrifice, which played a significant role in the conflicts and commands in the biblical texts regarding the conquest of Canaan.

The theological justification for the complete destruction of the pagan nations in Canaan as commanded to the Israelites in the Bible centers around several key points. These are derived from God's instructions as recorded primarily in the books of Deuteronomy and Joshua. Here's an overview of the main theological rationales for complete annihilation provided by God in the Scriptures:

1. Prevention of Idolatry and Moral Corruption (Deuteronomy 7:1-5, 12:29-31)

Justification: God commands the destruction of the Canaanite nations to prevent the Israelites from being influenced by pagan practices, specifically idol worship, which was prevalent among

these nations. The concern was that exposure to these religious practices would lead Israel away from worshiping the one true God and down a path of moral and spiritual corruption. The Canaanite religions often involved practices that were abhorrent to the faith of the Jews including ritual prostitution and child sacrifice.

2. Fulfillment of Divine Promise and Judgment (Genesis 15:16)

⁴ "Do not say in your heart when the Lord your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the Lord has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord is dispossessing them before you.

⁵ It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

- **Deuteronomy 9:4-5**

Justification: The conquest of Canaan was also seen as a fulfillment of the promises made by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would inherit the land. Furthermore, the destruction of these nations is portrayed not just as a conquest but also as an act of divine judgment. The "sin of the Amorites" is cited as having reached its full measure, implying that the Canaanite nations were being divinely judged for their iniquities, which had become intolerable.

3. Preservation of a Holy People (Exodus 19:5-6)

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

- Deuteronomy 14:2

Justification: Israel was chosen to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:6), set apart to worship God and live according to His laws. The complete destruction of the Canaanite cultures was seen as necessary to preserve the purity and distinctiveness of Israel's religious and social life, which was integral to their identity and mission.

4. Direct Divine Command

¹⁶ Only in the cities of these peoples that the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. ¹⁷ But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the Lord your God has commanded you, ¹⁸ so that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the Lord your God.

- Deuteronomy 20:16-18

Justification: The commands for destruction come directly from God. In the biblical context, God's commands are considered just and righteous by virtue of His sovereign and moral nature. Therefore, the command to destroy the Canaanites is presented

as a righteous act, sanctioned by God Himself, and not open to moral scrutiny by human standards.

Moses Reviews the Essence of the Law - Deuteronomy 5-11

Chapters 5 to 11 of the Book of Deuteronomy focus heavily on reinforcing the Law, the covenant between God and Israel, and the preparation of the Israelites to live faithfully in the Promised Land. These chapters highlight Moses's instructions and reminders about the importance of obedience, love, and loyalty to God. Here is an orderly explanation of the key events and instructions in these chapters, along with their significance:

CHAPTER 5

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS REITERATED

Events/Instructions: Moses restates the Ten Commandments to the new generation of Israelites (Deuteronomy 5:6-21).

Significance: The reiteration emphasizes the timeless importance of these foundational laws as the Israelites prepare to establish a society in the Promised Land. It serves to remind them of their core ethical and religious duties under the covenant. Their lives in the Promised Land will be based and guided by these commandments. They will change their style of living (from nomadic to settled) but the moral and spiritual quality of their every day lives will remain the same.

CHAPTER 6

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

Events/Instructions: Moses instructs the people to love God with all their heart, soul, and strength and to teach these commands diligently to their children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

⁴ "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!
⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.
- **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

Significance: This passage highlights the importance of loyalty to God and the transmission of faith through generations. It underscores the need for the Law to permeate every aspect of daily life, ensuring that the covenant relationship with God remains strong. As believers, we are always just one generation from apostasy. This is why it is important to teach our children the faith.

CHAPTER 7

INSTRUCTIONS FOR CONQUERING THE NATIONS

Events/Instructions: Moses commands the Israelites to completely destroy the Canaanite nations and not to intermarry with them, to avoid being led astray to serve other gods. This we reviewed at the beginning of our lesson (Deuteronomy 7:1-6).

Significance: This instruction is significant for maintaining religious purity and obedience. It stresses the dangers of idolatry and the importance of setting themselves apart as a holy people dedicated to God. We soon see its importance as the Jewish people quickly fall into the trap of copying the religious practices of these nations. They didn't stop worshipping God through the sacrificial system set up with the Tabernacle and priests etc., however, they began to add local gods and practices common to their pagan neighbors to their on-going worship to Jehovah. This type of mixing is called "syncretism" and was forbidden.

CHAPTER 8

REMINDER OF GOD'S PROVISION AND WARNING AGAINST PRIDE

Events/Instructions: Moses reminds the Israelites of God's past provisions in the wilderness and warns them not to forget God when they become prosperous in the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 8:1-20).

Significance: This chapter teaches the importance of humility and gratitude. It warns against the temptation to attribute their success to their own efforts rather than God's grace, thus fostering a spirit of continual dependence on God.

CHAPTER 9

NOT BECAUSE OF ISRAEL'S RIGHTEOUSNESS

Events/Instructions: Moses reminds the Israelites that they are not receiving the Promised Land because of their righteousness but because of the wickedness of other nations and to fulfill God's promise (Deuteronomy 9:4-6).

Significance: This serves to humble the Israelites, reminding them of their failures and God's mercy. It discourages pride and promotes a reliance on God's grace. It also served as a warning to the Jews that if God was able to use them to punish these nations for their actions, He could (and eventually would) use other pagan nations to punish the Jews this time for their own unfaithfulness.

CHAPTER 10

CALL TO CIRCUMCISION OF HEART

Events/Instructions: Moses recounts the remaking of the Tablets of Stone and calls for the Israelites to circumcise their hearts and be no longer stiff-necked as they had been for 40 years while they wandered in the desert.

¹² "Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?

¹⁴ Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it.¹⁵ Yet on your fathers did the Lord set His affection to love them,

and He chose their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day. ¹⁶ So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.

- **Deuteronomy 10:12-16**

Significance: This metaphorical circumcision signifies inner spiritual renewal and sincere devotion to God. It calls for a deep, heartfelt commitment rather than mere outward compliance with the law. They were to demonstrate their faith and love with actions that confirm on the inside (which only God can see) what is taking place on the outside (which anyone can see). This is the same exhortation given to Christian Jews by James in his epistle.

¹⁷ Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. ¹⁸ But someone may well say, "You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

- **James 2:17-18**

CHAPTER 11

BLESSINGS OF OBEDIENCE

Events/Instructions: Moses sets before the Israelites the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience, emphasizing the choice between life and death (Deuteronomy 11:8-32).

Significance: This chapter underlines the concrete consequences of their choices and actions. It reinforces the covenantal terms that obedience will lead to prosperity and life in the land, while disobedience will result in hardship and

expulsion. This continues to be a basic principle for all believers even in our time and day.

⁷ Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. ⁹ Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

- Galatians 6:7-9

Overarching Significance of Repetition

The repetition of certain commands and principles throughout these chapters serves several key purposes:

- **Reinforcement of Key Concepts:** Repetition ensures that the new generation of Israelites, who may not have experienced the first giving of the law or the earlier miracles, understand and internalize these laws.
- **Preparation for New Challenges:** As the Israelites stand on the threshold of the Promised Land, repeating these laws underscores their critical importance in the new challenges and temptations they will face.
- **Establishment of a Stable Society:** The reiterated laws provide a foundation for building a just, prosperous, and godly society in Canaan.

They have a spiritual blueprint to guide them not only in personal conduct pleasing to God but also for the building up of a society that will be at peace within itself and be prosperous

without exploiting another's weakness since the blessings come from God and not the people.

Their number one job was to carefully follow God's instructions, He would take care of the rest. This concept remains true and active into the New Testament lives of Christians where Jesus virtually repeats Moses.

³¹ Do not worry then, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear for clothing?' ³² For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. ³³ But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

- **Matthew 6:31-33**

Therefore, these chapters collectively prepare the Israelites not just in terms of military or strategic readiness for entering Canaan, but more crucially, in spiritual and communal readiness to live as God's covenant people in their new home.

MODERN DAY LESSONS

Chapters 5 to 11 of Deuteronomy contain Moses' poignant address to the Israelites, reminding them of God's laws, their covenantal relationship with God, and the importance of faithfulness as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. These chapters offer rich lessons that modern-day Christians can apply in their lives. Here are three practical lessons:

1. The Importance of Remembrance and Teaching

Biblical Context: Moses repeatedly calls for the Israelites to remember the acts of God and to diligently teach these statutes to their children (Deuteronomy 6:6-9).

Practical Lesson: Christians are encouraged to continually reflect on God's works and words in their lives. This involves not only personal meditation but also the active transmission of faith through family and community interactions. Modern applications include parents discussing faith at home, sharing testimonies with others, and participating in community worship and Bible studies. This process helps to ground one's faith in both personal experience and communal tradition.

2. The Danger of Prosperity Leading to Forgetfulness

Biblical Context: Moses warns the Israelites that prosperity in the Promised Land could lead them to forget the Lord and His commandments (Deuteronomy 6:10-12; 8:10-14).

Practical Lesson: This serves as a caution for Christians today against allowing material blessings and comfort to lead them away from reliance on God. The lesson is to maintain a posture of gratitude and humility, recognizing that all blessings come from God and should not lead to pride or self-sufficiency. Christians are encouraged to practice regular thanksgiving, acknowledge God's provision in their prayers, and engage in acts of service that reinforce dependence on and gratitude to God.

3. Vigilance Against Complacency

Biblical Context: Moses warns against forgetting God when experiencing prosperity in the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 8:10-14). He cautions that wealth can lead to pride and a false sense of self-sufficiency.

Modern Parallel: This lesson is particularly relevant in today's materialistically driven society, where prosperity can sometimes lead to a decreased reliance on God. Christians are reminded to attribute their successes to God's blessings and maintain humility and gratitude, regardless of their economic or social status. This might involve practices such as giving thanks in all circumstances, engaging in regular service and charity, and recognizing the source of all blessings.

Conclusion

Moses' address in Deuteronomy serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of covenant, the risks of prosperity, and the benefits of faithful obedience. For modern Christians, these chapters offer guidance on living a life that not only adheres to spiritual principles but also actively passes on these values to the next generation, ensuring a legacy of faith and obedience grounded in the historical faithfulness of God.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: DEUTERONOMY 5-11

READ: DEUTERONOMY 12-26

9.

Detailed Laws for Living

DEUTERONOMY 12-26

In our previous chapter Moses, in preparation for the people to enter the Promised Land, reminded them of two basic things, the 10 commandments and the "Shema" which was the instruction to love God above all else.

⁴ "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!
⁵ You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ These
words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on
your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your
sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house
and when you walk by the way and when you lie down
and when you rise up. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign
on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your
forehead. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of
your house and on your gates.

- **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**

This is the central affirmation of Judaism. It is the expression of the belief in the singularity of God and His incomparability. It is traditionally recited twice a day as part of the morning and evening services.

As he moves into the next section of this book, Moses now enumerates various ordinances which will serve as guides for worship, the exercise of justice and regular community life in the new land. He will also elaborate on the blessings of obedience and the curses attached to disobedience.

In chapters 12 to 25 Moses will address 16 different topics. We don't have time to give detailed explanations of each of these but will give a brief description of each and select several for a more detailed study. I will also include the passages in other books of the Bible where each of these ordinances were first given and explained more thoroughly.

We need to realize that Moses is not giving new instructions here but is reviewing and emphasizing laws and instructions that have already been given previously.

Detailed Laws for Living - Deuteronomy 12-25

WORSHIP AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

1. Central Sanctuary (Deuteronomy 12)

Worship and sacrifices must only be performed at the location God chooses.

Purpose: Centralized worship to maintain religious unity and prevent idolatry. The purpose of centralizing worship in a specific, God-chosen location, as dictated in Deuteronomy 12, had profound religious, social, and political implications for the Israelites:

A. Religious Unity

By centralizing worship, Moses aimed to create a unified religious practice among the Israelites. This would help maintain a cohesive belief system and shared rituals, which are vital for preserving the cultural identity and spiritual focus of a community.

In a time when pagan worship often involved multiple shrines and gods, the emphasis on a single worship site reinforced the monotheistic foundation of Israelite religion, emphasizing worship of the one true God, Yahweh.

B. Prevention of Idolatry

Idolatry was a significant threat to the spiritual fidelity of the Israelites, especially as they were about to enter a land populated by polytheistic cultures. By centralizing worship, the law minimizes the risk of local influences and the proliferation of local shrines, which could easily incorporate idolatrous practices and beliefs.

A central sanctuary would also allow for better regulation and oversight of religious practices, ensuring that they remain pure and in accordance with God's commands.

C. Political and Social Stability

A central place of worship also served as a focal point for national gatherings, festivals, and judicial matters, thereby fostering a sense of community and national identity.

This centralization helped to solidify authority of the central government and the priesthood, stabilizing the society politically and socially. It provided a venue where the entire nation could gather three times a year (during the major festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot), promoting unity and reaffirming their collective covenant with God.

D. Educational and Cultural Significance

The central sanctuary was not only a place for offering sacrifices but also a venue for teaching and passing on the laws and traditions of Israel to succeeding generations. This setting allowed for a consistent interpretation of the law, shared cultural practices, and the reinforcement of the historical narrative of the people of Israel.

In sum, the centralization of worship was a multifaceted strategy to ensure that the Israelites remained faithful to their covenant with God, fostering a strong, unified national identity that could withstand the influences and challenges of neighboring cultures. It was essential for maintaining the religious purity, social coherence, and political stability of the emerging Israelite society.

References: Exodus 20:24; I Kings 8:29
(Solomon's Temple as the central place of worship)

2. Prohibition Against Idolatry (Deuteronomy 12-13)

Forbids the worship of other gods and the use of idols.

Purpose: Ensures loyalty and purity in worship to Yahweh.

References: Exodus 20:3-5; Leviticus 19:4

3. Clean and Unclean Foods (Deuteronomy 14)

Specifies which animals are permissible to eat.

Purpose: The dietary laws in Deuteronomy 14, which define clean and unclean animals and detail what the Israelites may and may not eat, serve several key purposes, both in setting the Israelites apart from other nations and potentially offering health benefits.

Distinction from Other Nations

The dietary laws were a critical component of the Israelites' identity as God's chosen people. By adhering to a unique set of food rules, the Israelites visibly differentiated themselves from neighboring cultures, many of which had no such restrictions.

This distinction was not just physical but deeply symbolic, reinforcing their special covenant relationship with God. Eating, an everyday activity, became a regular reaffirmation of their spiritual and cultural identity.

Health Benefits

While the primary purpose of the dietary laws was to maintain ritual purity and obedience to God's commandments, modern

interpretations often suggest that these laws might have had health benefits as well. For example:

Avoiding pork and shellfish

These animals can carry parasites and diseases that are harmful to humans, particularly in hot climates and in times when proper cooking techniques and preservation methods were not well-developed. Avoiding these foods would have reduced the risk of foodborne illnesses.

Avoiding dead animals and blood

Prohibitions against eating animals that were found dead and consuming blood likely reduced the risk of spreading diseases, as these can be reservoirs for pathogens.

Butchering and food handling practices

The rituals associated with the slaughtering and handling of food likely ensured that meat was handled in a more hygienic way than might otherwise have been the case.

Social and Communal Harmony

The dietary laws also fostered a sense of community among the Israelites. Eating the same foods, prepared in the same way, avoided divisions that might arise from differing practices. These laws made it difficult for Israelites to eat meals with non-Israelites, thus preserving their religious and social integrity against outside influences.

Moral and Theological Implications

These laws also carried deeper symbolic meanings relating to holiness and purity. Many of the animals deemed unclean were predators or scavengers, which could symbolically represent death or uncleanness. The separation of meat and dairy, for example, can be seen as a symbolic act of separating life (milk, the sustenance of the young) from death (meat).

In conclusion, the dietary laws set forth in Deuteronomy served multifaceted purposes: they reinforced the Israelites' distinct identity, potentially protected their health, and strengthened their community while upholding the theological and moral principles central to their religion. These laws symbolized their separation from the impurities and moral ambiguities of the surrounding nations, underscoring their dedication to a life of purity as commanded by God.

Reference: Leviticus 11:1-47

4. Tithes (Deuteronomy 14)

A tenth of all produce and livestock is to be given as a tithe.

Purpose: Supports the Levites and the temple, assists the poor.

References: Numbers 18:21-24; Leviticus 27:30-32

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY REGULATIONS

5. Sabbatical Year (Deuteronomy 15)

Debts are forgiven and Hebrew slaves freed every seventh year.

Purpose: Promotes economic equality and freedom.

References: Exodus 21:2; Leviticus 25:2-7

6. Firstborn Animals (Deuteronomy 15)

Firstborn of livestock must be dedicated to God.

Purpose: Acknowledges God's provision and sovereignty.

References: Exodus 13:2, 12-13

7. Pilgrimage Festivals (Deuteronomy 16)

Outlines requirements for celebrating Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot.

Purpose: Strengthens national identity and communal worship.

National identity is a sense of a nation as a cohesive whole, represented by distinctive traditions, culture, and language. In the context of religious or communal practices, these can play a significant role in strengthening national identity by:

- A. **Shared Practices and Rituals:** Engaging in common rituals and customs can reinforce a collective memory and shared history, making each individual feel part of a larger story.

- B. **Cultural Symbols:** Religious and communal symbols can serve as powerful markers of national identity. For instance, in the context of Israelite culture, items like the menorah or the Ark of the Covenant were not just religious artifacts but symbols of national pride and identity.
- C. **Common Values and Beliefs:** A shared religious or moral framework can unify a diverse population, providing a common ground on which societal norms and laws are built.

ENHANCING COMMUNAL WORSHIP

Communal worship involves community members coming together to share in religious practices, which reinforces social bonds and provides a sense of belonging. Here's how communal worship can be strengthened:

- A. **Inclusive Practices:** Encouraging participation from all segments of society can help to integrate the community more fully. This can be through inclusive rituals that everyone can participate in, regardless of social status or age.
- B. **Regular Community Gatherings:** Frequent and regular communal worship events keep the community tightly knit and reinforce regular engagement with the community's beliefs and values.
- C. **Celebratory Events:** National festivals and holidays that include communal worship components (such as Passover or Sukkot in Jewish tradition) serve not only religious functions but also celebrate shared heritage and foster community spirit.

These elements not only support the spiritual life of the community but also its social structure, enhancing both individual and collective well-being.

References: Exodus 23:14-17; Leviticus 23

8. Justice System (Deuteronomy 16-17)

Establishes judges and courts; mandates just rulings.

Purpose: Ensures justice and order within the community.

Reference: Exodus 18:21-22

9. King's Conduct (Deuteronomy 17)

Sets limits on the wealth and power of a future king.

Purpose: Prevents corruption and promotes a focus on God's law rather than the amassing of wealth and power.

Reference: I Samuel 8:11-18

10. Rights of Levites (Deuteronomy 18)

Provides physical and financial support for the Levites who do not have a territorial inheritance.

Purpose: Ensures their welfare so they can serve the community spiritually.

Reference: Numbers 18:20-24

11. Prophets (Deuteronomy 18)

Distinguishes between true and false prophets executed.

Purpose: Guides the community in following God's true messages.

Reference: I Kings 18 (Elijah's confrontation)

LEGAL AND ETHICAL STANDARDS

12. Cities of Refuge (Deuteronomy 19)

Establishes cities where those who commit manslaughter can flee.

Purpose: Provides a fair trial; prevents blood vengeance.

Reference: Numbers 35:6-34

13. Laws of Warfare (Deuteronomy 20)

Set ethical guidelines for engaging in warfare.

Purpose: The Laws of Warfare as outlined in Deuteronomy 20 set forth several ethical guidelines for engaging in warfare that were notably progressive for their time. These guidelines reflect a deep concern for moral conduct in situations of conflict, emphasizing humane treatment of enemies and the preservation of resources. Here's an elaboration on these principles:

HUMANE TREATMENT OF ENEMIES

A. Offer of Peace Before Assault

Deuteronomy 20:10 stipulates that before attacking a city, an offer of peace must be made. If the city accepts the offer and opens its gates, its people are to be subjected to forced labor but must not be killed. This provision promotes the preservation of life and provides a non-violent option to resolve conflict.

B. Protection of Non-Combatants

The laws provide that women, children, and civilians generally should not be harmed during warfare. This distinction between combatants and non-combatants underlines an early form of what we now consider the rules of engagement under international law, which seek to minimize civilian casualties.

C. Exemption from Battle

Deuteronomy 20:5-7 exempts from battle those who have recently built a new house, planted a vineyard, married, or are fearful, thereby reducing trauma and ensuring that soldiers are mentally prepared and committed to the battle. This consideration for the personal and emotional states of individuals acknowledges the human aspect of warfare and aims to maintain societal stability.

Reference: I Samuel 15

14. Various Laws (Deuteronomy 21-25)

Includes laws on family, property, and social behavior.

Purpose: Regulates personal and social conduct to maintain community harmony.

Reference: Leviticus 19

15. Marriage and Family (Deuteronomy 22-24)

Regulates aspects of marital relations and family responsibilities.

Purpose: Preserves family integrity and ensures the protection of rights within the family.

Reference: Leviticus 18

16. Human Dignity and Rights (Deuteronomy 24-25)

Protects the rights and dignity of individuals, including the poor and the marginalized.

Purpose: Promotes fairness and compassion within the community.

Reference: Exodus 22:21-27

17. Loans and Fair Treatment (Deuteronomy 24)

The ordinances in Deuteronomy 24 regarding loans and the fair treatment of the poor are a crucial component of the social justice system established in Mosaic Law. These laws emphasize ethical treatment in financial dealings and special considerations

for the economically vulnerable members of society. Here's a detailed explanation:

Purpose:

- A. **Prohibition of Interest on Loans to Fellow Israelites:** Deuteronomy 24:10-13 instructs that if you lend anything to your fellow Israelite, you should not act as a creditor by demanding interest. This law discourages exploitation of the financial hardships of others within the community, fostering a spirit of support and brotherhood.

- B. **Collateral and Rights of Debtors:** The same chapter details how creditors should respect the dignity and basic needs of debtors. For example, a creditor must not enter a debtor's home to take a pledge (collateral) but must wait outside, and the garment taken as pledge must be returned by sunset so that the debtor can sleep in his cloak. This preserves the dignity and well-being of the debtor.

- C. **Remittance of Debts in the Sabbatical Year:** Although specifically elaborated in Deuteronomy 15:1-2, it aligns with the principles seen in Deuteronomy 24 by mandating that every creditor shall cancel the debts owed to him every seventh year. This prevents the accumulation of debt that can lead to poverty traps and enslavement.

Reference: Leviticus 25:35-37

18. Weights and Measures (Deuteronomy 25)

Requires honest weights and measures in trade.

Purpose: Promotes fairness and trust in economic transactions.

Reference: Leviticus 19:35-36

These categories and explanations reveal how the ordinances in Deuteronomy are designed to ensure a just, ethical, and devout community, reflective of God's covenant with Israel and their unique identity among the nations.

CHAPTER 26

OFFERING OF THE FIRST FRUITS

Chapter 26 of Deuteronomy outlines a series of rituals and practices for the Israelites to follow upon entering the Promised Land, emphasizing gratitude, obedience, and the recognition of God's providence. Here's a brief outline and explanation of the material in this chapter:

1. The Offering of First Fruits (Deut. 26:1-11)

Instructions: Upon entering the land and harvesting their first crops, the Israelites are to take the first of all the fruit of the ground, which they harvest from the land that God gives them and put it in a basket. They then go to the place chosen by God for His name to dwell and present it to the priest in charge at that time.

Ritual: The worshipper recites a brief history of Jacob's descent into Egypt, the affliction of the Israelites, their deliverance by God, and their arrival in a land flowing with milk and honey. This

recitation is a form of acknowledgment of God's help and blessings.

Purpose: This offering symbolizes the Israelites' gratitude for the land and their recognition of God's sovereignty and generosity. It serves as a reminder of their history and God's intervention in their lives.

2. The Tithe and Declaration (Deut. 26:12-15)

Instructions: Every third year, which is the year of tithing, after storing all the tithes of produce, the Israelites are to declare that they have removed the sacred portion from their house and given it to the Levites, foreigners, orphans, and widows according to the commandment given.

Ritual: The worshipper is to recite a declaration in front of God, acknowledging that they have obeyed the commandments concerning the tithes, have not forgotten them, and have not consumed any in mourning, impurity, or given any of it for the dead.

Purpose: This ensures the support of the Levites and the needy, fostering a spirit of community and shared responsibility. The declaration acts as an affirmation of compliance with God's laws and a prayer for God to look down and bless His people.

3. Affirmation of the Covenant (Deut. 26:16-19)

Instructions: Moses instructs the Israelites to observe the statutes and judgments with all their heart and soul.

Ritual: The chapter concludes with the Israelites affirming that they have avowed the Lord to be their God and will walk in His ways and observe His laws.

Purpose: This reaffirms the covenant between God and the Israelites, emphasizing their commitment to follow God's commandments in return for His promise to set them high above all nations, as a people holy to Himself.

Summary

Chapter 26 functions as a capstone to the legal instructions in Deuteronomy, emphasizing the importance of gratitude, obedience, and the remembrance of God's deliverance and blessings. It serves as a spiritual preparation for life in the Promised Land, reinforcing the community's relationship with God through rituals that remind them of their collective history and divine mission.

LESSONS FOR CHRISTIANS TODAY

1. Centralize God in Your Life.

In Deuteronomy, the Israelites are instructed to worship at a central sanctuary and to eradicate all forms of idolatry, emphasizing the need to focus their spiritual and communal life around the one true God. This principle can be translated into a contemporary setting as a call for Christians to prioritize their relationship with God above all else.

This means avoiding modern "idols" such as materialism, power, or self, which can detract from a God-centered life. It encourages believers to establish God as the central figure in all aspects of life, including decisions, relationships, and personal pursuits.

2. Everyone Actively Supports and Cares for Those in Need.

The numerous laws about fair treatment of the poor, widows, orphans, foreigners, and even the creation in Deuteronomy underscore our own responsibility towards those who are in need, starting with those in the church and extending to society at large.

They, as a nation, were meant to be a light unto to the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6) and we, as individual disciples of Jesus Christ, are meant to be the light of the world we live in today (Matthew 5:14). Different times, different people, same mission.



READING ASSIGNMENT

RE-READ: DEUTERONOMY 12-26

READ: DEUTERONOMY 27-34

10.

Renewal of the Covenant and Moses' Final Days

DEUTERONOMY 27-34

Welcome to our final chapter on the book of Deuteronomy. Over the past sessions, we have embarked on a demanding journey through the first twenty-six chapters of this pivotal book, where Moses addresses the Israelites on the plains of Moab, just before they enter the Promised Land. As we prepare to conclude our study, let us briefly review the key themes and instructions Moses relayed to God's people, ensuring they carried these lessons with them as they crossed into their new home.

- **Chapters 1-3: Historical Review** Moses begins by recounting the journey from Horeb (Sinai) through the wilderness, highlighting pivotal moments such as the appointment of leaders and judges to assist him, the refusal to enter the land due to fear after the spies' negative report, and the subsequent wanderings as a consequence of their disbelief.

- **Chapter 4: Exhortation to Obedience** Moses urges the Israelites to remain faithful to God's statutes and judgments. He highlights the importance of their unique covenant with God and warns against idolatry, emphasizing that their success in the Promised Land hinges on their adherence to the laws given at Horeb.
- **Chapters 5-11: The Covenant and the Law** Moses reiterates the Ten Commandments and expounds further on the covenant between God and Israel. He reminds them of their special status as God's chosen people and the blessings that come from obedience, alongside the terrible consequences of turning away from God.
- **Chapter 12-26: Specific Laws and Regulations** These chapters lay out detailed laws that govern various aspects of Israelite life, including worship practices, dietary rules, annual festivals, social justice, and legal procedures. These laws are designed to set Israel apart from other nations and to ensure that they live in harmony and righteousness. Moses stresses the importance of central worship, the necessity of justice and fairness, and the need for compassion and generosity towards the less fortunate.

Throughout these chapters, Moses emphasizes that the law is not merely a set of rules but a way to cultivate a relationship with God and ensure the well-being of the community in a land "flowing with milk and honey." The recurring theme is clear: obedience to God's commandments leads to blessings, while disobedience leads to destruction and despair.

As we transition to the final chapters of Deuteronomy, we will see Moses preparing the Israelites not only with final instructions but with a sense of hope and responsibility. This foundation we have explored is critical as they stand on the brink of a new beginning, ready to fulfill the promise given to their forefathers.

This introduction sets the stage for the concluding lessons connecting the early teachings in Deuteronomy to the responsibilities and challenges that await the Israelites as they prepare to inherit the Promised Land.

Summary of Deuteronomy 27-34

Chapters 27 to 34 of the book of Deuteronomy present a sequence of events and instructions critical to the Israelites as they prepare to enter and possess the Promised Land. Here is a brief summary of these chapters with references and their significance which will enhance your reading assignments of this material.

CHAPTER 27:

THE ALTAR ON MOUNT EBAL

Instructions: The Israelites are instructed to set up an altar of uncut stones on Mount Ebal upon entering the Promised Land, where they are to offer sacrifices and write the laws on these stones (Deuteronomy 27:1-8).

Significance: This serves as a reaffirmation of the covenant with God, emphasizing the permanence of the law in their new life and territory.

CHAPTER 28

BLESSINGS AND CURSES

Instructions: Moses details the blessings that will come from obedience to God's commands and the curses that will result from disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:1-68).

Significance: This chapter underscores the conditional aspect of Israel's relationship with God, directly tying their prosperity and success in the land to their fidelity to His commands. Obedience = blessings – Disobedience = severe punishment.

CHAPTER 29

THE COVENANT RENEWED IN MOAB

Instructions: Moses formally renews the covenant with the Israelites in Moab, warning them about the dangers of idolatry and the consequences of turning away from God (Deuteronomy 29:1-29).

Significance: This renewal is pivotal as it serves to remind the Israelites of their unique relationship with God and the history of their deliverance, reinforcing their commitment as they stand on the brink of the Promised Land.

CHAPTER 30

THE OFFER OF LIFE OR DEATH

Instructions: Moses presents a choice between life and death, urging the Israelites to choose life by loving and obeying God (Deuteronomy 30:1-20).

Significance: This chapter highlights the free will (no basis for Calvin's doctrine of depravity here) of the Israelites in their covenant relationship with God, emphasizing that their success in the new land hinges on their moral and spiritual choices.

CHAPTER 31

JOSHUA BECOMES MOSES' SUCCESSOR

Instructions: Moses announces his impending death and appoints Joshua as his successor. Moses also commands that the Law be read every seven years to all Israel (Deuteronomy 31:1-13).

Significance: The transition of leadership to Joshua is crucial for maintaining continuity and stability. The public reading of the Law ensures that future generations remain knowledgeable and committed to the covenant. This was necessary at a time where written materials were scarce.

CHAPTER 32

THE SONG OF MOSES

Instructions: Moses recites a song that recounts the history of the Israelites and predicts their future infidelity and God's mercy (Deuteronomy 32:1-43).

Significance: The song serves as a prophetic reminder of God's justice and mercy, intended to keep the Israelites committed to God's ways as they face future challenges.

CHAPTER 33

MOSES BLESSES THE TRIBES

Instructions: Before his death, Moses blesses the twelve tribes of Israel, speaking prophetically over their future in the land (Deuteronomy 33:1-29).

Significance: These blessings outline the roles and fates of the tribes, providing encouragement and divine assurances as they prepare to settle in the Promised Land.

CHAPTER 34

THE DEATH OF MOSES

Events: Moses views the Promised Land from Mount Nebo and dies there. God buries him in Moab, and Joshua takes over as leader (Deuteronomy 34:1-12).

Significance: Moses' death marks the end of an era and the fulfillment of God's promise that he would see but not enter the land. Joshua's leadership symbolizes a new beginning and the continuation of the covenant.

These chapters collectively emphasize the importance of covenant fidelity, leadership transition, and moral choices as the basic elements for the Israelites' success in their new homeland. It won't be about wealth or strong armies, it will be about faithfulness to God and holy living that will guarantee their blessed lifestyle and abundance.

Main Differences Between Deuteronomy 1–26 and Deuteronomy 27–34

The book of Deuteronomy is structured as a series of speeches by Moses to the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land. While the first 26 chapters focus on reviewing history, reiterating the Law, and emphasizing the importance of covenantal obedience, chapters 27 to 34 shift towards preparing for immediate future actions, leadership transition, and the practical steps necessary for entering and living in the land. Here are the four main differences between these sections:

1. Content and Focus

Chapters 1-26

- **Review of the Past:** Moses recounts the journey from Egypt, the giving of the Law at Sinai, and their wanderings in the desert.
- **Detailed Laws:** Extensive coverage of civil, criminal, and ceremonial laws, including specifics on worship, justice, and societal norms.
- **General Exhortations:** Moses emphasizes general principles of obedience, faithfulness, and the consequences of Israel's choices between blessings and curses.

Chapters 27-34

- **Immediate Instructions:** Commands about building an altar on Mount Ebal, the procedure for blessings and curses, and the specific actions to take upon entering the land.
- **Leadership Succession:** Designation of Joshua as Moses' successor and instructions for the transfer of leadership.
- **Future Predictions and Warnings:** The Song of Moses serves as a prophetic outline of Israel's future disobedience and God's faithfulness.
- **Blessings of the Tribes:** Moses gives specific blessings to each tribe, which include prophecies about their roles and futures in the land.

2. Tone and Emphasis

Chapters 1-26

- **Instructional and Directive:** Moses teaches the laws as a foundational element for living as a community under God's rule.
- **Exhortative:** Encouraging adherence to the law through reminders of God's past deeds and the promise of future blessings for obedience.

Chapters 27-34

- **Ceremonial and Prophetic:** There is a strong ceremonial aspect as Moses directs the people to perform specific rituals that symbolize their covenant renewal.
- **Reflective and Prophetic:** Moses reflects on the nation's future challenges and God's ongoing relationship with Israel, focusing on the broader spiritual and historical implications of their covenant with God.

3. Audience Engagement

Chapters 1-26

- **National Identity and Memory:** Reinforcement of Israel's identity as God's chosen people, called to remember their history and the laws given to them.

Chapters 27-34

- **Preparation for Immediate Future:** Preparation for immediate and concrete actions they must undertake upon entering the land, emphasizing the practical outworking of their covenant relationship in the land.

4. Ultimate Goals

Chapters 1-26

- **Holistic Understanding of the Law:** Providing a comprehensive framework for living under God's rule, covering all aspects of personal and communal life.

Chapters 27-34

- **Ensuring Covenant Continuity and Blessing:** Ensuring that the transition into the Promised Land is marked by covenant renewal, leadership continuity, and divine blessing, setting the stage for future prosperity and faithfulness.

In essence, while the first 26 chapters lay a broad foundation of history and law, chapters 27 to 34 focus on immediate actions, future predictions, and final preparations for life in the Promised Land, all aimed at reinforcing the Israelites' commitment to their covenant with God as they face a significant transition.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE USE OF POETRY

Moses' use of poetry in chapters 27-34 of the book of Deuteronomy, particularly in the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), is significant for several reasons:

1. Emotional and Artistic Expression

Poetry, with its rhythmic and metaphorical qualities, is well-suited for expressing deep emotions and complex theological ideas in a powerful and memorable way. Moses uses poetry to evoke a strong emotional response from the Israelites, helping

them to feel the gravity of their covenant with God and the serious consequences of obedience or disobedience.

2. Memorability

The poetic form simplifies the memorizing of Moses' message. Poetry, by its very nature, is easier to recall than prose, which is particularly important in an oral culture where laws and histories are handed down from one generation to another using oral tradition. The Israelites could more easily remember and pass down the teachings and warnings contained in Moses' song.

3. Prophetic and Didactic (teaching/educational) Nature of the Content

The Song of Moses serves both prophetic and instructional purposes. It outlines the history and future of Israel, warning about the dangers of apostasy and the assurance of God's justice and mercy. Poetry enhances these themes, making the prophetic message more striking and the instruction more profound.

4. Covenant Renewal and Solemnity

The use of poetry in this context underscores the solemnity and sacredness of the covenant renewal process. As the Israelites prepare to enter the Promised Land, the poetic form serves as a solemn reminder of their responsibilities and the seriousness of their commitment to God.

5. Cultural and Historical Continuity

In many ancient Near Eastern cultures, important historical and legal texts were often composed in poetry. Moses' use of poetry connects these traditions with the Israelite experience, providing a sense of continuity and legitimacy. It aligns the Israelites'

covenant experience with broader cultural practices of that time, emphasizing its importance and sacredness.

6. Theological Depth

Poetry allows for a depth of theological expression that prose may not as easily convey. Through vivid imagery and dramatic presentation, Moses communicates complex ideas about God's character, His justice, mercy, and faithfulness, and the ideal behavior expected from His people.

7. Enhancing Community Identity

Finally, the poetic sections of Deuteronomy serve to strengthen community identity. As the Israelites recite and remember these poems collectively, they reinforce shared values and communal commitments under their covenant with God.

In summary, Moses' use of poetry in these critical chapters of Deuteronomy is a strategic and effective way to communicate, commemorate, and deepen the covenantal experience as the Israelites stand on the threshold of a new phase in their relationship with God. It's a powerful literary choice that enhances the spiritual impact of his final messages.

FINAL LESSONS

The book of Deuteronomy is rich in teachings and lessons that span theological, practical, and unique aspects, each deriving from the varied layers of content it presents. Here are three takeaway lessons from three different perspectives:

1. Theological Perspective: The Centrality of the idea of Covenant

Lesson: The book of Deuteronomy emphasizes the centrality of the covenant between God and Israel. It reiterates the laws given at Sinai and details the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience, underlining the covenant as not merely a legal agreement but as a deep, relational bond between God and His people.

This highlights a fundamental theological principle: the relationship with God is governed by faithfulness to His commands and is rooted in His unchanging character and promises.

Application: This theological insight invites believers to reflect on the nature of their relationship with God. It encourages a commitment that goes beyond mere rule-following to embrace a relationship based on love, trust, and obedience to God's will.

2. Practical Perspective: The Importance of Memory in Sustaining Faith

Lesson: Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses continually calls on Israel to remember their past—both the miraculous deliverance from Egypt and their failures of faith. This act of remembrance serves a practical purpose: it grounds the people's faith in concrete historical realities, ensuring that future generations understand their identity and moral obligations.

Application: Practically, this teaches the importance of memory and history in sustaining faith and moral conduct. By remembering God's past actions, we are inspired to trust and obey Him in the present.

This principle can be applied in our lives today by keeping spiritual journals, regular attendance for worship, Bible study and fellowship events, and teaching the Bible as well as our own church's history to younger generations.

3. Unique Lesson to Deuteronomy: God's People Love Other People

Lesson: Deuteronomy is unique in its detailed requirements for loving others as a sign of credibility, which includes the care for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner. The book provides specific laws that ensure these vulnerable groups are protected and supported.

This emphasis is a distinctive aspect of Deuteronomy, highlighting a society where justice and compassion go hand in hand with faithfulness to the covenant with God.

Application: This unique focus on loving one's neighbor challenges both individual believers and congregations of the church alike to consider how their actions affect the most vulnerable and to actively engage in practices that fulfill Jesus' mandate in Matthew 25 to care for the poor, sick, imprisoned, hungry and others who suffer in our society today.

This was not a new thing that Jesus introduced, but rather something that went as far back as Moses and his instructions to the people who were entering the Promised land.

These lessons from Deuteronomy teach us something vital about living a life that is pleasing to God on one hand while being beneficial to the community in which we live and worship on the other.

This was combining a holistic approach to spirituality and ethics which was unknown outside the nation of Israel and constituted the light in the darkness that God was bringing to mankind through His chosen people then, and through His church today.

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