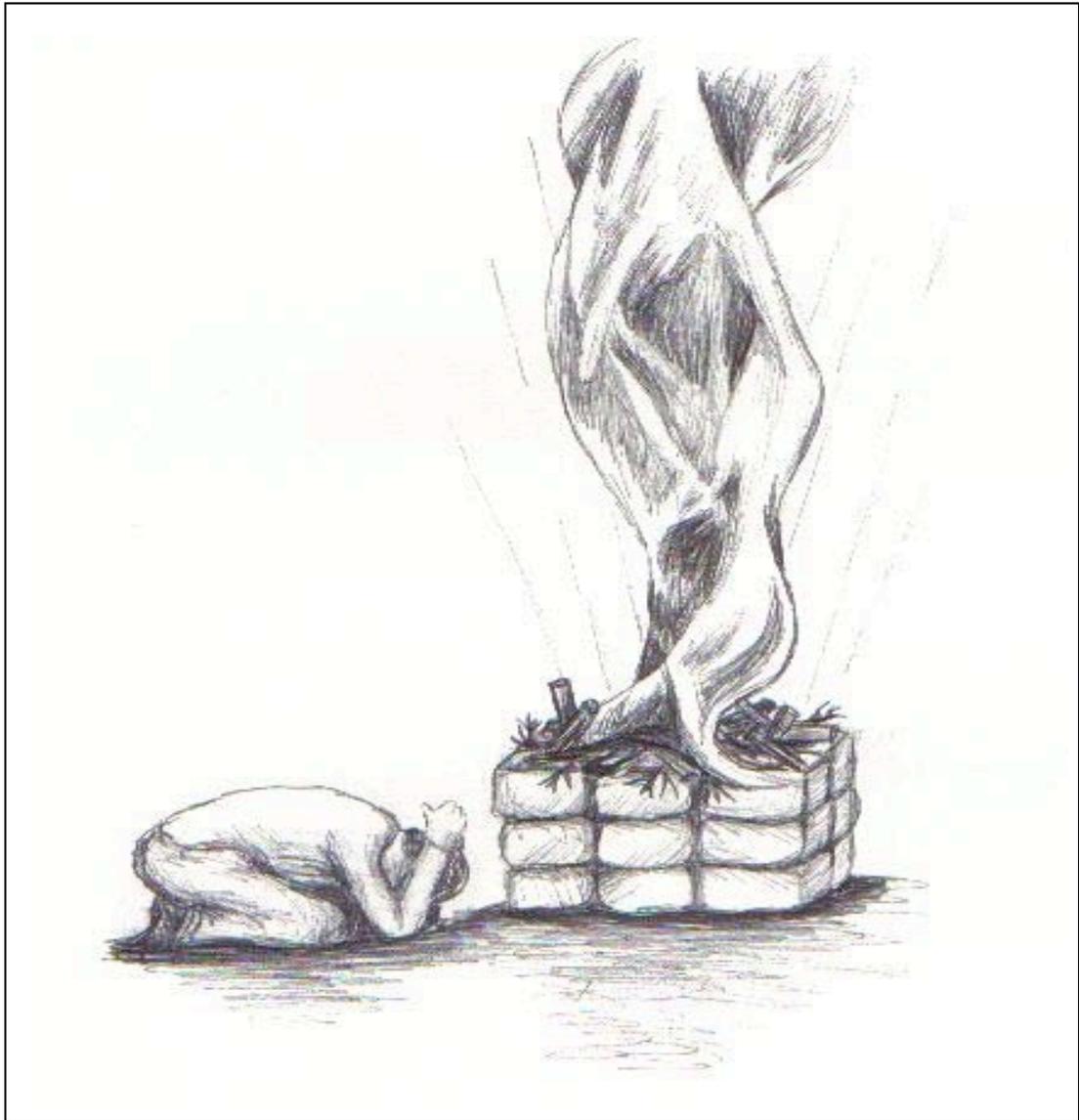


*FINDING GOD IN
THE BOOK OF MOSES
PART 2*



SANTA BARBARA COMMUNITY CHURCH

Summer Calendar 2007

Teaching Date	Study	Text	Title
6/3	13	Leviticus 9:1—10:11	Unforgettable Fire: God's Glory
6/10	14	Leviticus 16	The Day of Atonement: Grace Foreshadowed
6/17	15	Leviticus 18	A Third Culture: God and Purity
6/24	16	Leviticus 19	Leaving the Edges: God and Society
7/1	17	Numbers 11	Grumbling and Grace
7/8	18	Numbers 13-14	Surveillance and Rebellion: God and Faithfulness
7/15	19	Numbers 20:1—21:9	The Water and the Snake: God, Discipline and Grace
7/22	20	Numbers 22-25	Balaam's Funky Prophecy: A Promise of Messiah
7/29	21	Deuteronomy 4:1-40	Obedience to a Jealous God
8/5	22	Deuteronomy 4:44—6:25	Hearing God
8/12	23	Deuteronomy 10:12—11:32	Circumcised Hearts: God's Salvation
8/19	24	Deuteronomy 12—13	The Problem of Idolatry
8/26	25	Deuteronomy 29-30	The Choice is Yours

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SOURCES/ABBREVIATIONS

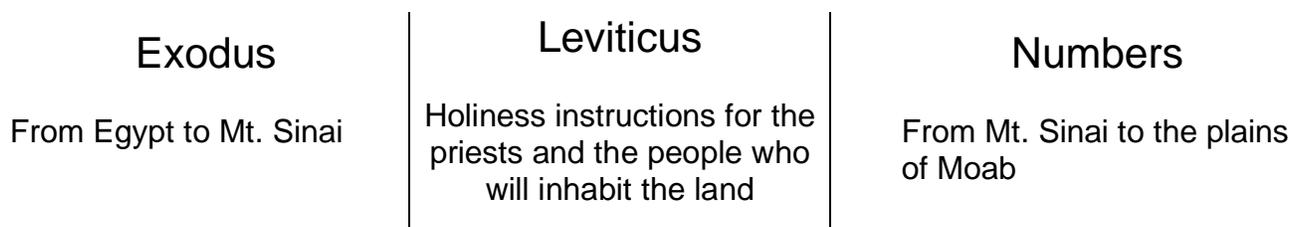
Brown	Raymond Brown. <i>The Message of Numbers</i> , IVP, 2002
Childs	Brevard Childs. <i>The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary</i> , Westminster, 1967
Cole	R. A. Cole. <i>Exodus: And Introduction and Commentary</i> . Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, IVP, 1973
Craigie	P.C. Craigie. <i>Deuteronomy. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament</i> , Eerdmans, 1976
Kalland	Earl S. Kalland. <i>Deuteronomy</i> . Expositor's Bible Commentary. Zondervan, 1992
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
PAN	Sailhamer, John. <i>The Pentateuch As Narrative</i> , Zondervan, 1992
Ross	Allen Ross. <i>Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus</i> , Baker Academic, 2002
Thompson	J. A. Thompson. <i>Deuteronomy</i> . Tyndale Old Testament Commentary, Inter-Varsity Press, 1974
Tidball	Derek Tidball. <i>The Message of Leviticus</i> , IVP, 2005

Introduction to Leviticus

From the way people talk, one might think that the word *Leviticus* is actually Hebrew for the English word *boring*. Preachers make jokes about the book, few Christians read the book and fewer still have any idea of its contents. And, if we open Leviticus and thumb through its pages we are likely to have our preconceived notions of the book confirmed. We will notice subheadings announcing descriptions of the people’s offerings (1:1—6:7), lists of clean and unclean animals (chapter 11), bodily discharges that make a person unclean (15:1-33), sexual practices which are forbidden (18:1-23), and seemingly countless lists of sacrifices that are to be offered in the tabernacle. But Leviticus is one of the more important books in the whole Bible. In these pages we find Israel’s religion spelled out in detail, and we also find the theological backdrop for the cross of Christ. As Derek Tidball writes,

Leviticus is good news. It is good news for sinners who seek pardon, for priests who need empowering, for women who are vulnerable, for the unclean who covet cleansing, for the poor who yearn for freedom, for the marginalized who seek dignity, for animals that demand protection, for families that require strengthening, for communities that want fortifying and for creation that stands in need of care. All these issue, and more, are addressed in a positive way in Leviticus. (Tidball, p. 17)

What is this book, and how does it fit into the larger *Book of Moses*? The title *Leviticus* in our English Bible comes from the Latin title of the book and means *pertaining to the Levitical priests*. Much of this book consists of instructions to the priests of the tribe of Levi. Leviticus forms a bridge from Exodus to Numbers. Exodus concludes with the completion of the building of the tabernacle. Leviticus gives instructions on how to worship in the tabernacle.¹ Numbers will continue the story of the people’s pilgrimage through the desert toward the Promised Land. A diagram of these three books would look like this:



¹ The timing is precise. Exodus 40:17 states that the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month of the second year after the exodus from Egypt. Numbers 1:1 begins on the first day of the second month of the second year after the exodus. Leviticus centers on the intervening month. See PAN, p. 323.

The most prominent theme of Leviticus is that of holiness. The people of God are to be different. They are to be holy, that is, set apart, for their Lord, Yahweh.

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

Leviticus 18:1-5

God's people are to be *holy* when they dwell in the land. But holiness is not something they will have to achieve by rigor and self-discipline alone. God is holy and he himself will make his people holy.

Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.
20:8, NIV¹

¹ See also 21:8; 22:9, 16, 32.

Study Thirteen

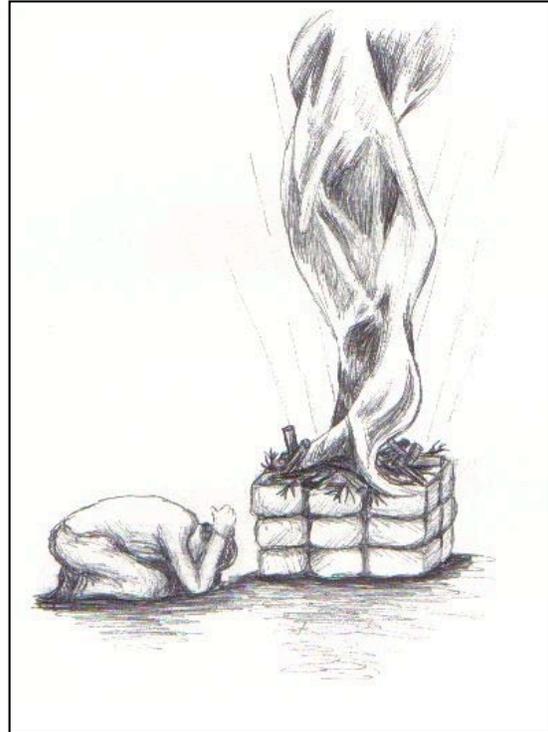
Unforgettable Fire: God's Glory

Leviticus 9:1—10:11

Remember the theme of this study, reflected in the title. We are *finding God in the Book of Moses*. What do we find out about God in the book of Leviticus?

One might say that in Leviticus we learn the God of the Bible is fond of giving instructions. Or we learn that God requires a lot of offerings. We certainly catch a glimpse of God's holiness and his expectation of the same for his priests and his people. All of this would be true, but about a third of the way into this book we catch a glimpse of God's red-hot glory, God's unforgettable fire.

Read Leviticus 9—10:11. The setting for these chapters is in a section of the book describing the beginnings of tabernacle worship.¹ In chapter 8, Aaron and his sons are consecrated to serve in the tabernacle. This consecration takes seven days. During this one-week period priestly garments are donned, oil is used to anoint the tabernacle, and sacrifices are offered.



Leviticus 9 continues the narrative, *On the eighth day. . .*

We will fill in some of the details below, but for now read the text and jot down your initial thoughts, questions and reactions to these two chapters. Brace yourself. There is a shocking incident in chapter 10.

Keep the following outline in mind as you read these 35 verses.

9:1-24 God's fire because of acceptable worship

10:1-11 God's fire because of unacceptable worship

¹ Remember from our introduction, in Exodus we learned of the construction of the tabernacle which concluded in Exodus 40:17. Here in these chapters we read of the very first worship service in the tabernacle. For a description of the tabernacle and a discussion of its significance see study 12.

Thoughts

Questions

Reactions

Both Leviticus 9 and 10 speak of the *fire of the Lord*. In chapter 9 the LORD'S fire produces *joyful shouting and prostrate worship* (9:24). In chapter 10 the LORD'S fire consumes Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu (10:3). What is happening here?

9:1-4 What promise does Moses make to the people? He promises that the Lord will *appear* before the people. In verse 6 he promises that *the glory of the LORD* will appear.

Recall the setting of Leviticus. The nation is still encamped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. What would the people be feeling upon hearing such a promise from Moses? Refresh your memory by reading Exodus 20:18-21. In that passage, what was the people's reaction to seeing something of God's glory?

How does this compare to the times when you have sensed God's holiness or been aware of his glory?

What does it mean when Moses promises that *the glory of the Lord* will appear before the people?

The Hebrew word for *glory* means, literally, *heavy* or *weight*. The word was used to describe a king's clothing which were, literally, weighty. The king was weighed down with glorious clothing.

9:7 It is because of the coming appearance of God's glory that the people must offer blood sacrifice. God is glorious and they are not, therefore they must be prepared.

Think of this in the context of the Book of Moses. What happened when the tabernacle was first constructed? Read Exodus 40:35. Why is Moses not able to enter the tabernacle?

But what happens in Leviticus 9? The priests, along with Aaron, have been consecrated, sacrifices have been offered and Moses and Aaron are now able to go into the tabernacle and worship God.

Notice the sequence of events.

9:7 *Then* Moses said to Aaron. . .

9:8 *So* Aaron drew near to the altar and killed the calf of the sin offering. .

9:12 *Then* he killed the burnt offering. . .

9:15 *Then* he presented the people's offering. . .

9:18 *Then* he killed the ox and the ram. . .

9:22 *Then* Aaron lifted up his hands. . .

9:22-24 Finally, the Lord's fire consumes the burnt offering and the people fall on their faces and express their joy.

The fire from before the Lord that consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar (v. 24) was a sign to all the people that God had accepted their offerings. (PAN, p. 329)

In the whole chapter we cannot miss the orderliness of Israel's worship. Aaron offers sacrifice for his own sins, and then many sacrifices for the sins of the people. Finally they are ready for the glory of the Lord.

The objective of Israel's worship was not that they should engage in religious theatre but that they should encounter God himself. But there could be no other way for sinful people to meet with a holy God except through the presentation of offerings of atonement and worship. (Tidball, p. 126)

What sacrifice do you offer before you come to worship God? (Hint: There is a *right answer* to this question and every believer will have the same answer.)

How is the worship of the church, and your own worship of God, similar and different from the worship described in this chapter?

Similar

Different

If nothing else, Leviticus 9 highlights the seriousness of coming before a holy God. Consider and respond to the following quotation.

[Significant] is the fact that until this point Moses alone had had access to God's intimate presence. Their joint appearance before him marks the completion of the ordination ceremonies and the handing over from Moses to Aaron of the full responsibility for intercession on behalf of Israel. From now on, Aaron too would enjoy access to God.

It is hard to believe that the privileged right of immediate access to the presence of God that all believers now enjoy through Christ was once confined solely to Moses and Aaron. It is a mark of the glory of the new covenant, in contrast to the old, that all who have faith may approach God's throne of grace with confidence and there receive mercy and find grace to help in times of need. (Tidball, p. 127)

Consider the above quotation as you read the following verses:

- Romans 5:1
- Hebrews 10:19-22

10:1 Nadab and Abihu are Aaron's oldest sons. This verse is far from clear, but they offer *unauthorized fire before the LORD*, or, as the NRSV reads, *unholy fire*.

What was Nadab and Abihu's exact sin? Perhaps they were drunk when they served in the tabernacle (see 10:9), perhaps they went too far into the tabernacle, all the way into the Holy of Holies (see Leviticus 16:1ff), perhaps they used an unauthorized censer, or perhaps the source of their fire was from an alien source. The reader is not given the answer to our question.

But what is clear is that *Nadab and Abihu were acting in flagrant disobedience to God. Their transgression was neither accidental nor inadvertent.* (Tidball, p. 132)

10:2 What is God's response to Nadab and Abihu's sinful worship?

Taken together these chapters startle us a bit. On the one hand God's glory produces joyful shouts (9:24), and on the other it consumes two priests who underestimate the power of Yahweh.

The glory of God is both beautiful and attractive, yet also consuming.

What is there for the twenty-first century church to learn from these chapters? Think about your practices of worship. Have you become so casual in your approach to God that these chapters make little sense? Respond to the following quotation. How do you find the *weightlessness of God* to be a reality in your own life?

It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is now weightless. I do not mean by this that he is ethereal but rather that he has become unimportant. He rests upon the world so inconsequentially as not to be noticeable. . . . Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence may nonetheless consider him less interesting than television, his commands less authoritative than their appetites for affluence and influence, his judgments no more awe-inspiring than the evening news, and his truth less compelling than the advertisers' sweet fog of flattery and lies. That is weightlessness.¹

10:3 Why is God's judgment so swift and so harsh? As Derek Tidball notes, *God had made himself known as jealous about his honour and was only acting in a way that was consistent with his holiness.* (Tidball, p. 134)

The brief promise Moses recites to Aaron is pregnant with meaning.

*Among those who approach me
I will show myself holy;
in the sight of all the people
I will be honored.* (10:3, NIV)

On this day in Israel's history, Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the people of Israel learned once again that Yahweh is a consuming fire, a jealous God. (Deuteronomy 4:24)

¹ David Well, *God in the Wasteland*, 1994, p. 88.

As Tidball puts it,

Scripture speaks with a united voice: the closer one is to God, the more careful one must be about his holiness and honour; the greater the privileges one has received, the more careful one must be to fulfill one's responsibilities. (Tidball, pp. 134-135)

What are your responsibilities in approaching God? What care do you take in fulfilling those responsibilities?

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Fourteen

The Day of Atonement: Grace Foreshadowed Leviticus 16



Sin is the fundamental problem in the universe. Wars, family feuds, earthquakes and daytime television all have their source in sin. Most importantly, sin places distance between a person and God. God is holy and therefore unapproachable by sinful men and women. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury in the

eleventh century, grappled with the problem of sin and the necessity of forgiveness in his work *Cur Deus Homo (Why God Became Man)*. If anyone imagines God can simply forgive us the way we forgive one another, that person has *not yet considered the seriousness of sin, or what a heavy weight sin is*. Or, as John Stott puts it,

The problem of forgiveness is constituted by the inevitable collision between the divine perfection and human rebellion, between God as he is and us as we are. The obstacle to forgiveness is neither our sin alone, nor our guilt alone, but also the divine reaction in love and wrath towards guilty sinners. For, although indeed 'God is love', yet we have to remember that his love is 'holy love'.¹

Leviticus 16 grapples with the sins of the nation Israel and stands alone in the Book of Moses. The chapter describes in great detail the most important day on Israel's calendar, the holiest day of the year, called the Day of Atonement. *Atonement*, a word that is used with some regularity in Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, but is rarely found elsewhere in the Bible, means *to cover*. On this day, the high priest was to *make atonement* for his own sins and for the sins of Israel.

¹ From John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 1986, p. 88.

Before going on in this study read Leviticus 16. Keep the following outline in mind as you read. Jot down the observations and questions that come to mind.

1. 16:1-2 Warning concerning the Holy Place
2. 16:3-14 Preparation for the priest
3. 16:15-22 Making atonement
 - 16:15-19 A goat sacrificed
 - 16:20-22 A goat sent out
4. 16:23-28 Returning to normal priestly duties
5. 16:29-34 Instructions for future observance

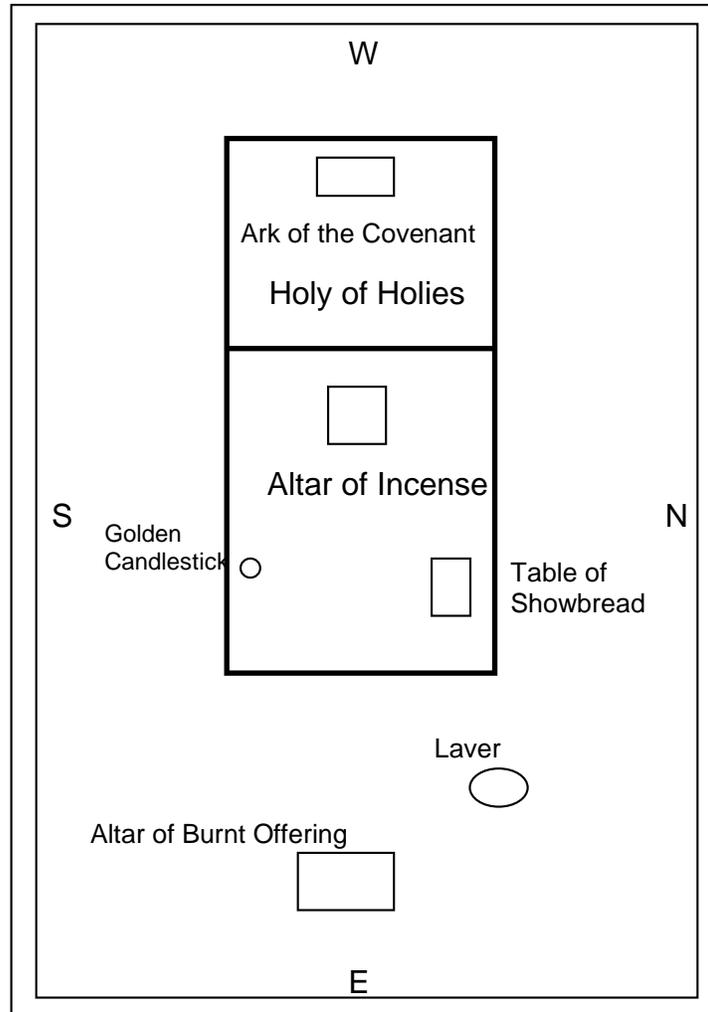
Observations

Questions

Theologically, the Day of Atonement, or *Yom Kippur*, is the most important day of the year. Again, it was on this day that the high priest was to make atonement for the sins of the people and was to cleanse, ritually, the tabernacle. It has been compared to *spring cleaning* where the accumulated dirt of the previous twelve months are swept away. (Tidball, p. 187)

Chronologically, this chapter follows the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10). Notice how the chapter begins. Aaron is forbidden *to come at any time into the Holy Place inside the veil, before the mercy seat that is on the ark, so that he may not die.* (16:2)

What is going on here? Review the shape and location of the tabernacle.



The *atonement* described in Leviticus 16 was to take place once a year, on the holiest day of the holiest month of the year. On this day alone the high priest was permitted to enter the *Holy of Holies*. Once there, he was to sprinkle blood on the lid of the ark of the covenant. The ark was a box that contained a golden jar of manna, Aaron's rod and the Ten Commandments. The ark was covered by a *mercy seat*, a solid gold slab measuring 44" by 26". On top of this golden slab were angelic figurines perched on each end with their wings touching in the middle. Moses describes the scene in Exodus 25.

You shall make a mercy seat of pure gold. Two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its breadth. And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. Make one cherub on the one end, and one cherub on the other end. Of one piece with the mercy seat shall you make the cherubim on its two ends. The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat with their wings, their faces one to

another; toward the mercy seat shall the faces of the cherubim be. And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you. There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Exodus 25:17-22)

Notice the above Bible verses. What is so special about the *mercy seat*?

Now look over Leviticus 16 again. Answer the following questions.

- 16:3-4 How is the high priest to be prepared for entering the Holy of Holies?
- 16:5-10 What sacrifices are to be prepared for the Day of Atonement? List these in detail.

16:8 reads in the ESV,

And Aaron shall cast lots over the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.

In the NIV *Azazel* becomes *scapegoat*. *Scapegoat* is basically a guess by the translators of the NIV as to what the Hebrew word *Azazel* refers to. No one really knows what *Azazel* means. Tidball explains,

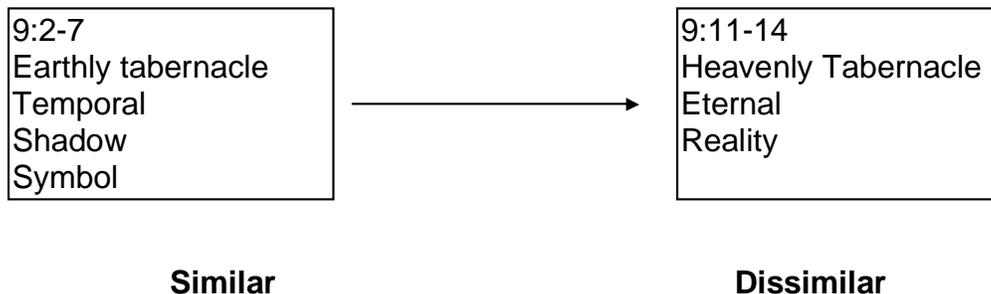
It might refer to an inaccessible place in the desert, as envisaged in verse 22. Or it might simply be a way of saying that this is the 'goat that goes away', as the NIV margin suggests. The Hebrew term is more than likely to be a compound of *éz* ('goat') and *'azal* ('to go' or 'be led away'). Or it might refer to the demonic ruler of the wilderness, a desert demon, or perhaps the leader of fallen angels. (Tidball, p. 190)

- 16:15-19 What happens to the two goats in the tabernacle?

- 16:23-28 describe the manner in which the high priest leaves the presence of God. What happens after atonement has been made in the Holy of Holies?

Before going on in this study, make a list of all the things we learn about God from this passage.

When we turn to the New Testament, we learn that the annual rite in the tabernacle was only a foreshadow of God's true provision. The writer of the book of Hebrews makes much of a comparison of the Day of Atonement with the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Read Hebrews 9:1-15 and compare these two sacrifices. How was the work of Jesus similar and dissimilar to the work of the high priest in the tabernacle? Use the following chart to make the comparison.



List the ways in which Jesus' sacrifice is superior to the sacrifice offered by the high priest in the tabernacle.

Read Mark 15:37-39. Hebrews 9 is something of a commentary on these three verses.

Think of how you would explain the gospel using Leviticus 16 and Hebrews 9 to someone who knows virtually nothing about the God of the Bible. Share a brief version of this explanation with your homegroup.

Hebrews 9:6-7 Notice the qualitative difference in our relationship with God before and after the cross! In the old covenant,

Only the high priest had access to the *Most Holy Place*.

His access was *only* once a year.

His access needed to be accompanied by a blood sacrifice.

Indeed, the people of the first covenant had very limited access to God. The climax of God's provision of atonement in the new covenant is found in Hebrews 9:12.

[Jesus] entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, having obtained eternal redemption. (NIV)

The priest's sacrifices, offered for more than a thousand years,¹ had to be repeated day after day, year after year. These sacrifices were ineffectual in removing sin. They pointed to a future reality.

¹ Some estimate that over a million animals had been sacrificed in the temple by the time of Jesus.

But Jesus entered the heavenly tabernacle *once for all!*

How does Jesus' atoning sacrifice change the way in which we approach God?

Celebrate the wonder of the Day of Atonement as a homegroup. Give God praise for his provision of the ultimate sacrifice. The ceremony in the tabernacle *was* effective insofar as it produced ceremonial cleanliness. But the blood of Christ truly *purifies our conscience* forever (Hebrews 9:13-14)! Praise!

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Fifteen

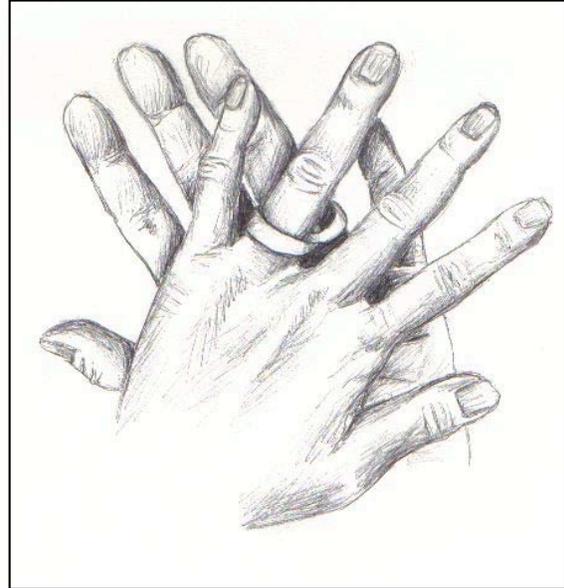
A Third Culture: God and Purity

Leviticus 18

Weird. Yuck. Gross. Such are the words we are likely to mutter upon reading Leviticus 18. Certainly many who read this chapter will say, *I can't believe this is in the Bible!* But it is, and for good reason. In Leviticus we learn that God expects his people to live holy lives.

Leviticus 18 could be called *An Agenda For God's People*. Here, just two chapters after describing the Day of Atonement, Leviticus recounts God's holy intentions for his people as they prepare to enter the land. Note that at the outset, Israel is to be different, a third culture (18:3). They are to be unlike the Egyptians and unlike the Canaanites; they are to be a people who walk in holiness.

Before going on in this study, read the 30 verses that comprise Leviticus 18. Jot down questions that come to mind as you read. Look for the following:



- What promises does God make for those who obey his instructions?
- What is the threat that is given for disobedience to the Lord's commands?
- What do you think the main point of this chapter is?

Outline

Questions

Obviously much of this chapter limits the sexual practices of Israel as the nation enters the Land of Promise. Israel is to remain faithful to the call to have sexual relations in the covenant of marriage. While Egypt lurks in the background, Canaan stands in the future. God's concern is that the detestable sexual practices of the Canaanite nations don't rub off on his people. The key words are to *uncover the nakedness*. The words occur 22 times in the chapter and are interpreted as *sexual relations* in the NIV. Basically these words are a euphemism for sexual intercourse, but more is in mind here. One scholar points out,

While the idiom certainly means sexual relations, the use of the verb suggests a more forceful or passionate activity. . . and implies that the perpetrator is forcefully taking advantage of someone who is vulnerable, someone living with him who may be a dependent. (Ross, p. 344)

Think of how this term has evolved in the Book of Moses. In Genesis 2, before sin entered the world, *nakedness* was a good thing, *a symbol of integrity and sinlessness (Genesis 2:25)*. (Ross, p. 345) But now, in a fallen world, *nakedness* is a synonym for sin and a sign of *exploitation, captivity, abuse, and shame*.¹

18:1-5 A call to loyalty

List the commandments in these verses.

Notice how this chapter begins: *I am the Lord your God*.² This is how the Ten Commandments begin (see Exodus 20:2). At the outset Yahweh is asserting that these commandments are coming from the God who has loved them and who has brought them thus far. God is not saying, *I'm the boss. . . do what I say*. On the contrary, God employs his personal name to show that the following commandments flow out of a personal relationship with his people.

It communicates not so much his authority and right to command, as his 'incomprehensible grace'. He is the God who is faithful to his promises. (Tidball, p. 217).

When you think of God's commands in your life, what difference would it make to insert these words before his command?

¹ See Genesis 3:7, 11.

² The phrase and its shorter version, *I am the Lord*, occurs five times in the chapter (see vss. 4, 5, 6, 21 and 30).

- *I am the Lord your God. . . don't gossip.*
- *I am the Lord your God. . . give a portion of your money to me.*
- *I am the Lord your God. . . be honest in all your business practices.*

18:3 contains the central concern of this chapter. God's people are to be different. In the Egypt that Moses left, some 80 different gods were worshipped. Many gods enshrined sexual lusts and made the satisfaction of those lusts a part of one's religious practice. The nations of Canaan were well known for their sexual depravity.

Canaan was famed for its encouragement of homosexuality and bestiality, and practices condemned in this chapter were enshrined in the fertility rites in which temple prostitutes (both male and female) incited their deities to grant fertility to the land by performing sexual acts in their presence. (Tidball, p. 218)

18:5 What is the promise given for those who keep the *rules* that are to follow in this chapter? How would this be true in your life?

18:6-23 Forbidden sexual practices

Consider how this section unfolds.

- **18:6-19 Forbidden sexual practices across family boundaries**

In these verses sex is forbidden with one's

Mother (18:7)
Stepmother (18:8)
Sister / half-sister (18:9, 11)
Granddaughter (18:10)
Aunt (12-14)
Daughter-in-law (18:15)
Sister-in-law (18:16)
Step-daughter or step-granddaughter (18:17)

Notice the difference between the NIV and the ESV. Several times the NIV interprets the word *nakedness*.¹ Compare two of several examples in this chapter.

¹ Tidball calls the NIVs rendering *prudish*. (Tidball, p. 221)

NIV	ESV
18:7 Do not <u>dishonor</u> your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her.	You shall not <u>uncover the nakedness</u> of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness.
18:10 Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter; that would <u>dishonor</u> you.	You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, <u>for their nakedness is your own nakedness</u> .

What is in mind here? How do these sorts of sexual relations bring dishonor to both parties involved?

Discuss the following quotation as you answer these questions.

The dishonour involved was more than a mere lack of respect. To commit any of these forbidden acts was to uncover a woman's nakedness, and since these women were already bound in a 'one flesh' relationship of some sort with someone else, to uncover her nakedness was tantamount to uncovering his nakedness. It was to violate the sanctity of a 'one flesh' relationship that had already been formed. (Tidball, p. 221)

- **18:20-23 Forbidden sexual practices outside the family**

What four practices are forbidden in these verses?

18:20 Adultery

Why would adultery be singled out in this verse? What harm might this sin have caused the nation of Israel as she entered the Land of Promise?

In the New Testament Jesus assumes the validity the law against adultery and then intensifies it.

Read Matthew 5:27-30.

Is lust really as bad as actually committing adultery? Why? Why not? One writer defines lust as *unbridled sexual desire that denies the humanity of its quarry and treats its object as a thing*.

What can you do to protect yourself from lust in our society?

18:21 Molech

Virtually all of the Canaanite nations practiced some form of child sacrifice to the Ammonite god Molech. This practice even is even adopted by Israel later in her history.¹

Why does God stand against child sacrifice? What does this offering do to God?

How does this command inform the abortion debate in our time and place?

18:22 Same-sex relations

Notice that the focus of this verse is on behavior. Men are not to have sexual relations with other men. The focus is not on identity (*I'm gay. I'm straight*), but on behavior. The Bible speaks with one voice on homosexual behavior. It is forbidden and is seen as an abomination.²

18:23 Bestiality

Yuck! Such is the unregenerate heart. It craves things that ought to be repugnant. We are shocked to find such practices needed to be outlawed in the Scriptures. And we should be repulsed to find that such practices occur in our own time.

18:24-30 Conclusion

What is the severe warning to Israel in this section?

¹ See. 1 Kings 11:5, 7, 33; 2 Kings 23:10, 13; Isaiah 57:9; Jeremiah 32:35; 49:1, 3; Zephaniah 1:5.

² Several key texts in the Bible that deal with homosexual behavior are, Genesis 19:1-29; Judges 19:1-30; Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:18-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11; and 1 Timothy 1:9-10.

What does this passage teach us about how God relates to a society that indulges in sexual immorality?

Israel was to be an island of purity surrounded by nations which practiced impurity. In the New Testament it is the church which is to be pure. Reflect upon the following as a homegroup. How can we encourage one another to be pure in our sexually saturated society?

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. (1 Thessalonians 4:3-7)

Study Sixteen

Leaving the Edges: God and Society

Leviticus 19

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God. (Leviticus 19:9-10)



Just when you thought it was safe to go on reading your Bible. . . Leviticus 19. What are we to make of a chapter of Scripture that tells the reader not to get tattoos, how to cut his hair, what kind of fruit trees not to plant, how to pay honor to gray-haired old men, and to refrain from selling one's daughter as a prostitute? Indeed, as we read the Book of Moses we are like time-travelers entering a foreign land.

Before going on any further, read the 37 verses of Leviticus 19.¹ Notice how the author mixes *major issues with minor ones, ritual issues with ethical ones, and theological issues with behavioral ones*. (Tidball, p. 232) Notice at the outset that the chapter flows from the call to holiness given in 19:2. To be holy means to be separate, or set apart. And thus we have this set of seemingly disparate instructions.

- What initial reactions do you have to this chapter?
- What is the most famous verse in this chapter?
- What is the refrain, repeated fifteen times in the chapter, that gives weight to the commands which are recorded?

¹ Be sure to read this entire chapter aloud as a homegroup.

- What questions does your first reading provoke?

- What do you think the author's intentions are in this chapter?

19:2 A Call to Holy Living

It would be appropriate to outline this chapter in the following way.

- 1. A Call to Holy Living 19:1-2**
- 2. How to be Holy in the Land 19:3-37**

As Tidball puts it,

The previous chapter dealt with ethical issues to do with the family, the fundamental building block of society. This chapter broadens the scope and is concerned about how people should live to create a healthy society, one in which it would be a pleasure to live and in which its citizens are at ease with one another. The factors that go to make for social harmony are numerous. But the perspective from which this chapter comes is that all individuals have responsibility for the society to which they belong, and by their actions and attitudes they either contribute to its health or destroy it. (Tidball, p. 233)

To whom are the words of this chapter addressed? Moses is to speak to *all the congregation*. And it is all Israel who is to be *holy* upon entrance into the land.

What is the basis for the call to holiness? How should God's holiness inform our call to be holy?

Read 1 Peter 1:13-17. Here Peter quotes Leviticus 19:2. But there is a difference. In Leviticus the people are called to be holy as the inhabitants of the land. In 1 Peter the call is to be *holy* as *exiles*. Is there a difference in how the New Testament church would appropriate holiness from the way Old Testament Israel was to appropriate holiness? Look over the rest of the chapter to inform your answer.

What are you doing in your life at this time to pursue holiness?

2. How to be Holy in the Land 19:3-37

We often think of *holiness* primarily as things we avoid (adultery, pornography, drunkenness, *Cosmopolitan Magazine*, etc.). Notice how this chapter expands our view of holiness. Look over verses 3-37 once again. Which commands are positive and which are negative? How does this second glance at the chapter enlarge your view of holiness?

Positive Commands

Negative Commands

The purpose of *rules*, or *laws* such as these was not so much judicial as social. As one commentator explains, Leviticus 19 is not statutory law for the courts, it is a set of rules intended to promote healthy values.

. . . its purpose is to educate the people of God in the will of God for the whole of their life as his people, to create and develop the conscience of the community.¹

¹ R. Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically*, 1989, p. 25

With this in mind, look over the chapter again. What is the most *important* verse in the second section of the chapter? What verse guides all the rest (hint: this is the same verse that is the *most famous* in the chapter)?

19:9-18 describes what it means to love ones *neighbor as yourself*. What principles in these verses can we apply to our own society as a church? How many principles can you find in this section?

19:9-10 speaks of how Israel was to treat the poor.

The provision of food for the poor by this means achieved more than establishing in Israel an elementary welfare system. To leave some food unharvested was a sign of thanksgiving for God's abundance, a mark of trust in his provision, a way of restraining greed and a reminder of Israel's own story, as they too had once experienced times of great hardship. (Tidball, p. 237)

Compare Deuteronomy 24:19. Notice especially the last part of the verse. Most of us don't own vineyards, but how could we apply this principle to our own Christian lives?

19:17-18 form what has been called the *epicenter* of Leviticus.¹ This is, according to Jesus, the second greatest commandment.²

¹ Samuel Balentine, *Leviticus*, 1987, p. 166.

² See Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31 and Luke 10:27. In James 2:8 we read of *the royal law according to Scripture*. James is referring to Leviticus 19:18.

Write down three statements that describe what it means for you to love your neighbor as yourself. Share these with your group.

19:19-37 contain an array of concerns for the people of God as they enter the land. In this section they are told how to prune their trees and how to care for their cattle. The emphasis, overall, appears to be on healthy community relations. The people are to show respect. They are to show respect for boundaries (19:19), respect for people (19:20-22, 29, 32-36), respect for the environment (19:23-25), and respect for God (19:26-28, 30-31, 37).

Summarize for your group what you have learned about God and what you have learned about living a life of holiness from your study of this chapter.

Derek Tidball makes a comment that forms a fitting conclusion to this study.

[The words of Leviticus 19 are] addressed to the people of God and primarily have relevance to the way they relate to one another within the Christian community and within the wider society. They teach us that holiness has to do with social relationships as well as with spiritual devotion. The way we treat God cannot be divorced from the way we treat one another. But though they are addressed to God's covenant people, these words contain wisdom that would be beneficial for any society, at any time. (Tidball, p. 248)

Sermon Notes. . .

Introduction to Numbers

Many of us say, *I'm not good with numbers*, meaning we can't get too far away from our calculator when balancing our checkbook. The same could be said with a different meaning with regard to this next chapter in the Book of Moses. Most of us aren't too good with *Numbers*. We ask, *What does a book laced with census data, lists of names, tribal archives and ceremonial law have to do with me?*

Look a bit closer and you will find a world of relevant material. Numbers was cited often by Jesus, referred to by Paul and it has been nutritious food for the church for centuries.¹

So what was, and is, the purpose of *Numbers*? On the one hand, this book does provide the reader of the Book of Moses with a record of the size and scope of the fledgling nation of Israel. We learn in chapter one that Israel has a military comprised of 603,550 men (Numbers 1:46). Sailhamer argues that the primary purpose of the inclusion of this kind of data is to

. . . give the reader a full and accurate picture of the scale of operations and necessary preparations for Israel's return to the land. In some respects this material can be seen as an attempt to justify the scope of the laws given in the Pentateuch. It is clear, at least, that the picture given here of the size and state of the nation helps show why so many detailed regulations were necessary. (PAN, p. 370)

But what else does *Numbers* offer the reader?

- **Geographically**, the book shows how Israel got from Sinai to the edge of the Promised Land in Moab.
- **Theologically**, the book boldly demonstrates to the reader the love and grace of Yahweh toward a stubborn and rebellious people. God's love in Numbers is seen and felt rather than being stated as a doctrinal idea. God's love is relentless in these pages. Israel rebels, grumbles and sins in the wilderness. God judges his people, but loves them tenderly as their heavenly father.
- **Practically**, the book shows the consequences of unbelief. The decisive turning point in the book is in chapter 13-14. Yahweh's desire is for the people to go and take the land. But because of unbelief and fear, they spend another 38 years wandering in the wilderness. In many ways, Numbers is a chronicle of wasted time.

¹ The title *Numbers* comes from the Latin Vulgate. Jerome gave this book the name *Numeri*. The Jews had various names for the book, usually pulled from the opening words of 1:1. It was called *In the Wilderness* and *And He Spoke*.

Outline¹

Part 1 Getting Ready 1:1—10:10

In these chapters God prepares the nation to leave Sinai, cross the wilderness and enter the Promised Land

Part 2 Setting Out 10:11—12:16

These chapters chronicle the move from Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea. During this time the people grumble and Moses endures opposition from his brother Aaron and his sister Miriam.

Part 3 Chickening Out 13:1—14:45

These chapters recount the decisive event in Numbers. Israel rebels against God with their lack of faith (see study 18).

Part 4 Wasting Time 15:1—25:18

These chapters chronicle both the life of Israel and the instruction of God in the wilderness. Essentially the nation is waiting for the older, responsible generation to die off before she can enter the Promised Land (14:20-23).

Part 5 The New Generation 26:1—36:13

With a second census recorded, a new generation prepares to enter the Promised Land.

¹ This outline is adapted from Brown, pp. 5-6.

Study Seventeen

Grumbling and Grace

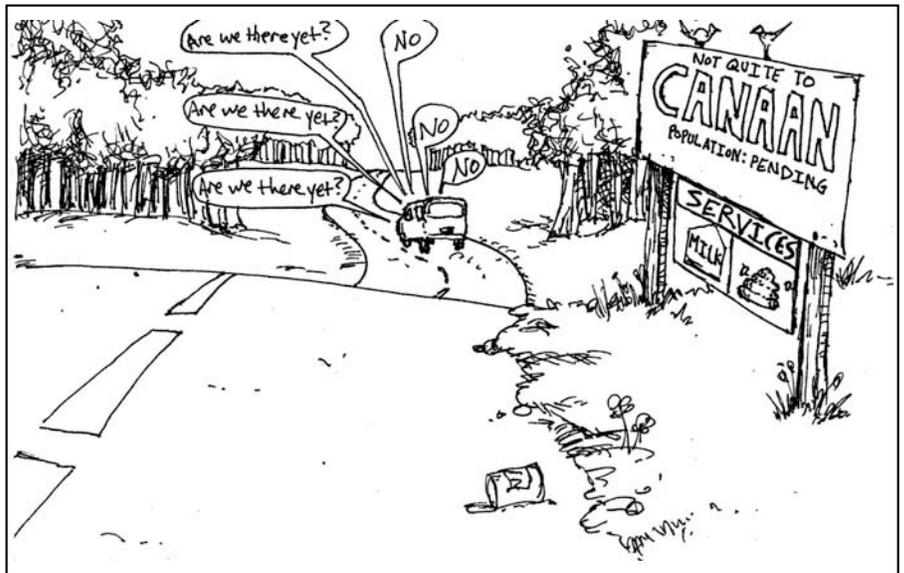
Numbers 11

Karl Barth, one of the most famous theologians of the 20th century, said,

The only answer to grace is thanksgiving. . . Grace and gratitude belong together like heaven and earth. Grace evokes gratitude like the voice of an echo. Gratitude follows grace like thunder lightning.¹

When we read the Book of Moses, we read of a God who is relentless in offering grace. But his chosen people have a penchant for grumbling. Disaster is the result.

Much of the book of Numbers surrounds the events which take place during 38 unnecessary years spent wandering in the wilderness. The immediate cause behind these fruitless years was the rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea (see study 18). But we could also say, curiously, that the time spent in the wilderness is bracketed by two rebellions over food. The



second of these comes at the end of the 38-year period (Numbers 21). The first comes in Numbers 11. Food, which is always a sign of God's grace in Scripture, becomes something the people complain about. Not because they don't have enough food, but because their menu doesn't have enough variety. The people complain and the consequences are disastrous.

At the close of Numbers 10, Israel has set out from Sinai at last (10:11). After camping at the foot of Mt. Sinai for a year, the nation is on the move. The last verses of chapter 10 indicate that the journey is going well. Yahweh was leading them (10:33-34) and protecting them from potential enemies (10:35). The trek through the desert was off to a splendid beginning. For three days at least. . .

In 11:1 we learn that the God who leads and protects also hears. His ears are attentive to the people's grumbling. Three days into the wilderness Israel grumbles and Yahweh is angry.

¹ From Ben Patterson, *He Has Made Me Glad*, 2005, p. 17.

Before reading on in this study, read Numbers 11. Be prepared for a *choppy* chapter of Scripture. Look for the flow of the passage. In these verses we see the tremendous significance grumbling and ingratitude have in the mind of God. We also catch a glimpse of the need for leadership to guide God's people. Make a few notes of questions that come to mind and lessons you learn on your first reading of this chapter.

11:1-9 Grumbling about manna

11:1 The ESV and the NIV probably under-translate this verse. Commentators point out that the Hebrew could be read, *Now the people became truly murmurous, an offense to Yahweh's ears.* (Allen, p. 786)

What is the basic complaint of the people?

Notice how the complaining spreads. It begins with *the rabble* (vs. 4). This is the only time this word occurs in the Hebrew Bible and probably refers to the non-Jewish exiles who joined Israel in leaving Egypt (see Exodus 12:38). It appears that the dissent of *the rabble* spread to the Jews. By verse 10 there is weeping at the entrance of every tent!

Give an example where you've experienced a season of grumbling in some sort of community (church, work or club). Can you trace this contagion of grumbling? Did the complaining start with a few and then spread? What could have stopped the grumbling?

11:5-6 Analyze these verses. Are the people remembering accurately their diet in Egypt? How does a divisive spirit shape our memory of the past?

Whining, especially when one has the basic necessities of life, aggravates God. In many ways the story of Israel during the move from Egypt to the Land of Promise is a story of grumbling. The first call to go back to Egypt came three days after crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 15:22-24).

Centuries later Paul speaks of the value of *contentment*. Read and discuss the following passage as a homegroup. Think of ways in which you can cultivate contentment in your life.

Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Timothy 6:6-8)

What threats do we face in our time and place with regard to contentment?

What do you find yourself complaining about? Where do you find yourself discontent? How does this affect your relationship with God?

11:10-15 Grumbling about the people

After the people complain, their leader complains. Read these verses. Make a list of Moses' specific complaints.

11:11 What false inference does Moses make in this verse?

What kind of leadership do you exercise in your life (again, think of the church, your work, your family and other groups of people you associate with)? With this in mind, respond to the following:

Part of the secret of effective leadership is to recognize the limitation of human responsibility. There are certain things we must do and the Lord expects us to get on with them. There are other things that only he can do, and all our strenuous exertion will never achieve them. (Brown, p. 94)

11:14-15 Moses appears to be truly depressed. He says to God, *If this is the way it's going to be. . . kill me, I can't stand this!* Probe those in your homegroup who are strong leaders. Ask them if and when they feel like this. Ask them what helps pull them out of the pit of depression.

11:16-30 The provision of leadership

This section shows the development of Israel's body of elders. From now on, the load of leadership will be shared among the elders.¹

¹ **11:26-30** may seem like a quirky parenthesis in the chapter. Here two elders, Eldad and Medad, stay in the camp and prophesy. Moses is told about this activity so that he can put a stop to it. But instead of interfering, Moses says he wishes everyone had the *Spirit on them* (11:29). The story serves to show what a secure leader Moses was. It also calls readers who have the

11:18-20 contains the message the elders are to convey to the people. The message is as humorous as it is gross. *You want meat? You'll get meat, quail meat, and you'll eat till it comes out of your nose!*

Notice the crux of the matter.

. . . you have rejected the LORD who is among you and have wept before him, saying, "Why did we come out of Egypt?" (Numbers 11:20)

Allen explains,

The issue was not just failure to demonstrate proper gratitude to the Lord who was in their midst and who was their constant source of good; it was turning from him entirely and grudgingly rejecting his many acts of mercy on their behalf. I suspect the only comparable thing for the modern reader would be for one who has made a Christian commitment to say to the Savior, "I wish you had not died for me! Leave me alone!" Only when we put things in these terms may we sense the enormity of the language of this verse. (Allen, p. 793)

11:31-35 Stuffed on quail

This last section of the chapter describes God's wrath on a complaining people. Notice the comedy mixed in with the tragedy.

- How deep is the dead quail?
- How many quail do the people gather?

Respond to the following:

The passionate quest for material things is like thirsting for a drink that far from quenching the thirst, only intensifies the desire for more. At Kibroth Hattaavah, the place of inordinate craving became a scene of intense grieving. What began as a luxurious banquet ended up as a distressing funeral. (Brown, p. 105)

whole Bible to think of passages such as Joel 2:28-32 and Ezekiel 36:22-27 which look forward to the time when the Spirit of God will be poured out on *all flesh*.

Surely this story is played out in many times and in many ways. What safeguards can you keep in place to see that this doesn't happen to you?

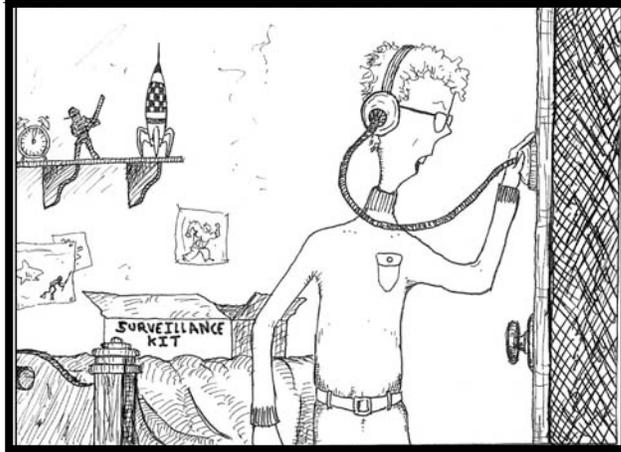
Go back to the quotation by Karl Barth at the beginning of this study. Spend time praying together as a homegroup. Remind of how he has shown his grace to you. Spend time expressing your gratitude.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Eighteen

Surveillance and Rebellion: God and Faithfulness

Numbers 13-14



Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a 20th century theologian, biologist and paleontologist, once said, *Pessimism has done infinitely more harm than atheism.* Numbers 13-14 show this to be true. The fear, doubts and pessimism sway a nation and lead to disaster in the wilderness.

Numbers 13-14 record one of the most decisive and far-reaching events in the exodus story. Israel

has made its way from Mt. Sinai to the southern edge of the Land of Promise. The journey took a mere eleven days. Yahweh's original intention for Israel was that the nation would begin the conquest immediately.¹ But because of Israel's lack of faith and their rebellion in the desert, an eleven-day journey ended up taking 38 years!

Read these two chapters. Try to put yourself in the setting of a Jew living in the wilderness. What thoughts come to your mind? How would you have reacted had you been living in a tent, waiting for the report of the spies?

13:1-24 Spying Out the Land

13:17-20 What was the purpose of the surveillance of the spies?

¹ Thirty-eight years after this event Moses tells the story of these chapters in a sermon recorded in Deuteronomy 1. His version of the events at Kadesh-barnea is slightly different from, but complimentary to, what we read in Numbers 13-14. There, Moses recalls, God's original command was for the Jews to begin the conquest immediately (Deuteronomy 1:21-23). But in Numbers Yahweh commissions the spies to survey the land before the conquest.

13:22 The twelve spies come to Hebron, about 250 miles from Kadesh-barnea where their expedition began. This verse is interesting for what it leaves out. The reader is alerted to the time in which the city was built (. . . *seven years before Zoan in Egypt*), but not reminded of the significance of this location (perhaps Moses assumes all Hebrew readers would already know). Hebron is the burial place of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Leah, and all of Jacob's sons except Joseph. In other words, this place was a tangible reminder of Yahweh's faithfulness to fulfill his promises. Here the spies, as representatives of the twelve tribes, are playing the role Abraham did centuries earlier.

Genesis 13:14-18

The LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, "Lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring as the dust of the earth, so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring also can be counted. Arise, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you." So Abram moved his tent and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD.

Numbers 13

Reenacted and fulfilled in the mission of the spies

Is there a *Hebron* in your life? Is there a place where you can go to be reminded of the faithfulness of God? Share this with your group. What happens when you go there?

13:23-24 Eshcol means *cluster*. The spies come to Cluster Valley and swipe a bunch of grapes that takes two people to carry. After a fruitless season at Mt. Sinai, the people will see grapes unlike any others. As Ronald Allen puts it, . . . *why the people should have thought they had discovered Eden!*

13:25-33 Grapes and Giants

Whether the glass is half empty or half full depends on one's perspective. When the spies return from their journey, they bring with them both grapes and doubt.

13:27-29 Re-read these verses. What is the most important word in the spies' report? Hint: the destiny of an entire generation hinges on this single word.

The real issue here is whether or not the nation will walk by faith. As always there are reasons to proceed and reasons to cower in fear (good grapes, big people). Reflect upon this in your own life. Use the following quotation to stimulate your thoughts. Discuss this as a homegroup.

Christians recognize that God alone knows the future and holds their destiny in his strong and reliable hands. Life is more than a series of disconnected accidents and believers are not to fret about the unknown. Their part is to live each day to his glory, discern his will in times of decision and trust him for the guidance he as promised to provide.
(Brown, p. 114)

What fears do you have about your future? Who, or what, are the Anakites in your life? How do these fears reduce you to feeling like a *grasshopper* (13:32)?

Ponder Proverbs 3:5-6. In what ways do these verses encourage you for your future?

14:1-4 Going Back to Egypt

The doubts of ten men spread to an entire nation. Everything from their past seems to be forgotten: the plagues in Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea, the glory of God on Sinai, the manna from heaven. . . Yahweh's glory is eclipsed by fear. *Let's find a new leader and get back to Egypt!* Pessimism does more harm than atheism.

Of course the story is deeply ironic. The people lament, *Would that we had died in this wilderness*—and that's exactly what will happen because of their lack of faith. The people's fear becomes a self-fulfilled prophecy.

Think of an example from your own life in which your fear and lack of faith produced the very thing you were afraid of. If that is too difficult, think of when you've seen this in another's life (appropriate sharing only).

When you experience fear, doubt or pessimism, what can help you strengthen your faith? What can you do? What can others do to help? Is there an area in your life where you can apply these things?

14:5-10 The Reaction of Caleb

How does Caleb respond to the people's rebellion?

14:8 What is the condition of success for the people to receive the land? Explain how this *condition* should comfort you?

14:10 What keeps the people from killing Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua?

14:11-35 A Dialogue Between Moses and Yahweh

14:11-12 What is Yahweh's primary complaint with his people? What is he going to do about it?

14:13-19 contains Moses' response to Yahweh's intent to destroy his people. What specific appeals does Moses make to God?

What does this paragraph teach us about prayer? How can you pray the way Moses prays in this paragraph?

14:20-30 speak of God's judgment. None of the grumblers will enter the Promised Land. Verse 22 speaks of seeing God's glory ten times!¹ The point is that the people had ample reason to trust God. They are not being called to an irrational leap in the dark, but to proceed on the basis of what they know to be true.

What are the *signs* of God's glory in your life that should compel you to move forward by faith?

¹ We are not exactly sure what Yahweh is referring to. Allen takes a guess.

1. At the Red Sea where it seemed that Pharaoh's army would destroy them (Exod 14:10-12)
2. At Marah where they found bitter water (Exod 15:22-24)
3. In the Desert of Sin as they hungered (Exod 16:1-3)
4. In the Desert of Sin as they paid no attention to Moses concerning the storing of the manna until morning (Exod 16:19-20)
5. In the Desert of Sin as they disregarded Moses concerning the gathering of the manna on the seventh day (Exod 16:27-30)
6. At Rephidim as they complained for water (Exod 17:1-4)
7. At Mount Sinai as Aaron led the people in making the golden calf (Exod 32:1-35)
8. At Teberah where the people raged against the Lord (Num 11:1-3)
9. At Kibroth Hattaavah in the grumbling provoked by the rabble for quail (Num 11:4-34)
10. At Kadesh in the Desert of Paran when the people refused to receive the good report of Joshua and Caleb but rather wished themselves dead (Num 14:1-3) (Allen, p. 822)

Notice the recurrence of the word *grumbling* in this section. The people grumble and their *dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness* (14:29). In other words, their rebellious grumbling kept them from God's gift of the Promised Land.

We would be amiss if we didn't think there was application to our lives. God forgives grumblers (14:20), but this passage serves as a warning nevertheless. It is quite possible in the Christian life to forfeit the blessing of God by living in fear and doubt.

Think of a time when this has happened to you. Can you share this with your homegroup?

14:36-38 shows the spies who were vectors of despair receiving the wrath of God. These ten men receive the wrath of God in the form of a plague and die suddenly. If nothing else, this paragraph shows the seriousness with which God took their dissent. Grumblers, be warned.

14:39-45 brings this episode to a conclusion. The foolish rebels launch the conquest on their own without the help of Yahweh. These presumptuous soldiers meet disaster.¹

Think back over these two chapters. What have you learned about God in this portion of the Book of Moses?

¹ When Moses recounts this story in Deuteronomy he concludes by saying, *So you remained at Kadesh many days, the days that you remained there* (Deuteronomy 1:46). In Numbers 20:1 Israel is in Kadesh. Some commentators speculate that the nation spent the 38-years camped right where these chapters take place, Kadesh-barnea in the Desert of Paran.

Study Nineteen

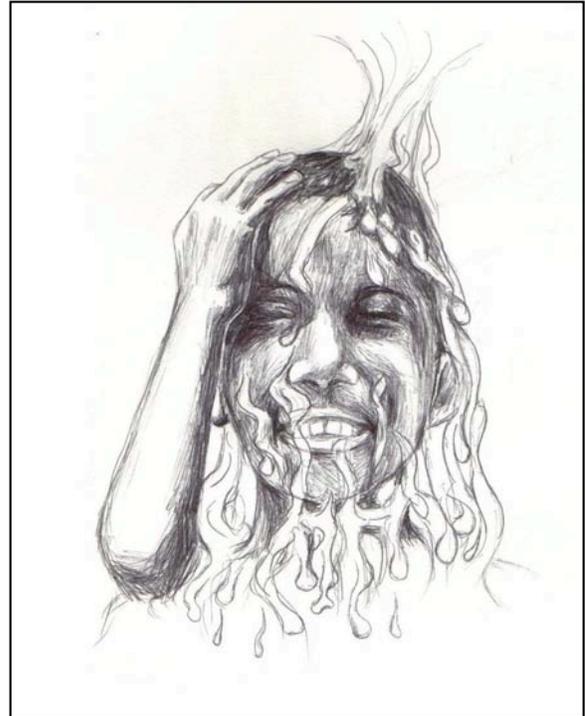
The Water and the Snake: God, Discipline and Grace Numbers 20:1—21:9

Oftentimes Christians will say that when God *justifies* a sinner that means God treats that person *just-as-if-he-had-never-sinned*. Of course that is true, but is that the whole truth? Are there consequences for disobedience in a believer's life? Does the biblical doctrine of justification mean that we bear no penalty in this life for our foibles? Does the forgiveness of God mean that we have no liability for our sinful disobedience? Or are there genuine blessings we forfeit and punishments we bear because of hardness or our own hearts?

In Numbers 20-21 we have two stories that help answer the questions above. On the one hand we will learn that sin in a believer's life pays very real dividends. On the other hand we will see that God's grace has the final word.

Numbers 20 is a chapter of conclusions. It records the death of Miriam and Aaron, four months apart, and shows why Moses himself was not able to enter the Promised Land. In each of the lives of these three leaders we find that a genuine price is paid for a failure to trust and believe in God.

In 20:1 we have come to the first month of the last year of Israel's time in the wilderness. They are camped at Kadesh, and as we have seen, they may have been encamped there thirty-eight years.¹ It is almost time to move on.



¹ In Deuteronomy Moses retells this story of Numbers 13-14 and concludes, *So you remained at Kadesh many days, the days that you remained there* (Deut. 1:46). It is possible that the *many days* refers to 38 years. Allen speculates, *Perhaps the best reconstruction of events is to presume that the people may have sent out parties on a cycle of robbing travels, following the slight water sources and the sparse vegetation, supported primarily by manna, the bread from heaven. But their circuits would bring them back to Kadesh, the scene of their great rebellion (Num 13-14). They have now come full circle; the Land of Promise lay before them again.* (Allen, p. 866)

Consider the following outline as you read these chapters. Read these verses before going on in this study.

- **20:1** **The setting and the death of Miriam**
- **20:2-9** **More complaining about water**
- **20:10-13** **Moses' mistake**
- **20:14-21** **Edom says "No"**
- **20:22-29** **Aaron's death**
- **21:1-3** **Victory at Hormah**
- **21:4-9** **Grace after grumbling**

20:2-9 More Complaining about Water

If this paragraph sounds familiar, that is because it *is* familiar. Forty years earlier, at the beginning of Israel's sojourn in the desert, the nation experienced a water shortage. And, in a similar fashion, they whined in the wilderness, saying,

Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst? Exodus 12:3

In that incident Moses was instructed to strike a rock at Mt. Horeb (Sinai), and water gushed out.

Now, thirsty once again, the people wish they had died under one of God's judgments!¹

These verses give the reader what might be called an anatomy of grumbling. What, specifically, do the people grumble about?²

First, they challenge the leaders God has appointed for them (20:3).

Second, they make light of God's wrath by claiming it would have been better than living at Kadesh (20:3).

Respond to Brown's comment on this point.

¹ See Numbers 16:31-35.

² See Brown, pp. 176-177.

We live at a time when there is scant regard for God's holiness. His name is openly misused on radio and television. Our blasphemy laws¹ are challenged and disregarded. Stage plays, films and stand-up comedians treat sacred things with scorn. The incarnation becomes a hilarious Christmas joke; the crucifixion of God's Son a scurrilous logo on T-shirts. The holiest things are publicly derided. A sick world invites the judgment of a holy God. In such an alien environment, believers take pains to ensure that they do or say nothing that belittles the holiness of God, the beauty of Christ and the purity of the Spirit. (Brown, pp. 176-177)

Third, they misread the plan of God. In 20:4 they blame Moses and Aaron for bringing them to Kadesh. But it was God who achieved the exodus (Exodus 3:9, 6:6, etc.). It was God who brought the people to Kadesh and it was the people's sin that kept them in the wilderness for 38 years.

Fourth, they are ungrateful for God's generosity (20:5). Brown, again, lends insight.

They frequently recalled the luxurious meals of Egypt (11:5; 16:13) or visualized the attractive diet of Canaan (16:14), and saw both in stark contrast to their barren wilderness experience. Longing for what we want, we ignore what we have received. (Brown, p. 177)

Consider the four points above and compare them to the times when you find yourself complaining to God. What does this *anatomy* of the people's grumbling teach you about your own grumbling? Respond specifically to the four points above.

- How is it with your response to the leaders God has placed in your life?

- How does the biblical doctrine of God's wrath motivate your Christian life (read Colossians 3:5-7)?

¹ Brown is from Great Britain.

- Can you share a time when you misread God's plan for your life due to your own sin?

- What habits of gratitude do you have in your discipleship habits? When and how do you express your gratitude for God's generosity in your life?

20:10-13 Moses' Mistake

What was God's specific instruction to Moses in 20:8?

Allen writes of these verses,

Then, at long last, Moses exploded! Was he disappointed that the Lord had not burst out against his people, as had happened time after time? Moses burst out against them—and against the rock—to his lasting regret (vv. 10b-11). Suddenly the accumulated anger and frustration of forty years bore down on Moses, servant of Yahweh. (Allen, p. 867)

But what was Moses' specific sin? Examine these verses. What do you find? Notice especially 20:12. Sailhamer writes,

It should be noted that just at the point in the narrative where the writer could have described the actual misdeed of Moses and Aaron, the narrative is interrupted by a word from the Lord. When he spoke to Moses and Aaron, the Lord did not say that what they had done was wrong but rather, and simply, that they had acted in unbelief. . . . The Lord's words in this narrative allow us to see that the underlying problem was the failure of Moses and Aaron to believe in the Lord and thus to treat him as holy before the people. (PAN, p. 397)

If this is what is in the writer's mind, a profound point is being made. It is a lack of faith or belief that keeps Moses from entering the Land of Promise. His unfaith causes him to forfeit God's blessing.

Respond to the above. What blessings might you have forfeited because of your lack of faith?

20:14-21 Edom Says “No”

The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, Jacob’s twin. Here the people of Israel meet their cousins. The feud of Jacob and Esau continues and the Edomites threaten war if Israel tries to pass. The discouragement to Moses, Aaron, and the people must have been formidable and the detour long (see Numbers 21:4).

20:22-29 Aaron’s Death

Here the mantle of priestly leadership is passed. Three men ascent Mt. Hor and only two return. What takes place on Mt. Hor? Why would this be included in the Book of Moses? What lessons can we draw from this paragraph?

21:1-3 Victory at Hormah

21:4-9 Grace after Grumbling

These two paragraphs contrast sharply with one another. First the people experience a needed military victory and then they fall on their proverbial faces. Is the author trying to show us something? Don’t we often make miserable mistakes on the heels of great victories?

Consider especially 21:4-9. Perhaps we can be sympathetic with the people’s complaint. They are moving southeast rather than northwest. After 38 years of whiling away their time, they are moving in the wrong direction!

So, the people once again grumble. Respond to Motyer’s comment below.

[T]hey did not trust [God’s] word. The desert community were more adept at itemizing their grievances than at counting their blessings. The Lord had promised to meet their needs, and it was iniquitous to forget his faithfulness, despise his care and deny his providence. They were greatly loved children . . . and he would not allow anything to befall them that was outside his sovereign will. (Motyer, p. 188).

Are you better at *itemizing* your *grievances*, or *counting* your *blessings*? Make a list of ten or more blessings with which God had blessed you. Share this list with your homegroup.

21:5-9 Notice the progression in these verses. Sin—Judgment—Confession—Forgiveness. We find a great picture of the gospel in these verses, a picture that Jesus employs in his conversation with Nicodemus. After explaining to Nicodemus that he needed to be *born again*, Jesus explains,

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (John 3:14-15)

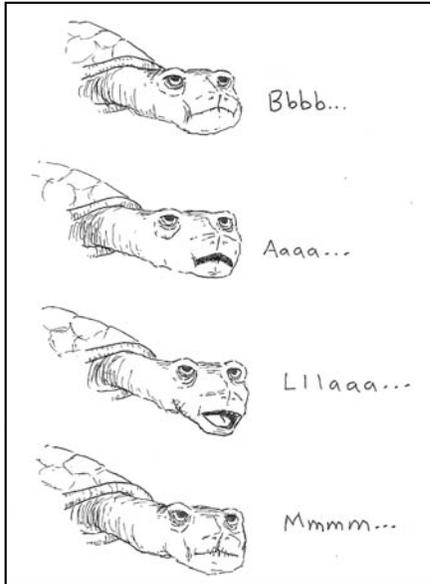
See also John 12:31-33. Spend time as a homegroup looking to the Son of Man who was lifted up for our sins.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twenty

Balaam's Funky Prophecy: A Promise of Messiah

Numbers 22-25



Tighten your seat belt. These chapters of Numbers are both literary and loony, beautiful and downright strange. About one thing there should be no controversy: these chapters make for great reading! Commentator Ron Allen calls this section *one of the most remarkable stories in the Bible: the dramatic encounter of Balaam the pagan mantic with the God of Israel* (Allen, p. 885). To be sure, the content of these pages will stretch us a bit.

At the beginning of these chapters we learn that Israel's wandering in the desert is complete. The nation is encamped on the *plains of Moab* adjacent to Jericho where the conquest of the Promised Land will begin. As the events of these

chapters unfold, the people can literally see the Promised Land!

The characters of these chapters are important.

Balak is the king of the Moabites. He has heard a report of Israel's military might and their defeat of the Amorites (21:21ff.). With the nation encamped on his property, Balak assumes that Israel's intent is to take over his kingdom. He seeks help in an unusual way.

Balaam is the key player in this story. In fact, Balaam had quite a reputation in the ancient Near East.¹ Balak's military strategy is intriguing. He summons Balaam from Mesopotamia, pays him well and expects him to put a supernatural curse on Israel. The strange part of the story is that while Balaam practices witchcraft, even necromancy, Yahweh still speaks to Balaam (through the most unusual means) and through Balaam (in an unexpected way)!

Enough introduction. Read these chapters. Enjoy this story. Be careful to read Balaam's oracles with care.

¹ Some of Balaam's oracles have been found by archeologists studying this period. Allen writes, *Balaam was an internationally known prophet, a diviner expert in examining the entrails of animals and observing natural phenomena to determine the will of the gods.* (Allen, p. 887)

What questions arise as you read these chapters? Why do you think Moses included this in his account of the exodus? What are the main points of the story?

Main points

Questions arising from the story

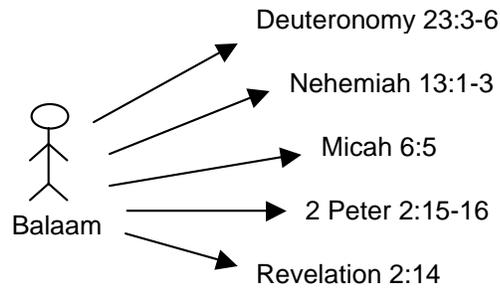
One of the dominant themes of the Book of Moses is that the sovereign God who called Abraham will deliver his people, against all odds, to the Land of Promise. Along the way the nation has encountered thousands of obstacles that might have hindered God's plan (the Red Sea, a dry desert, rebellion, poisonous snakes, etc.). Two formidable challenges to God's plan come in the form of world-rulers. At the beginning of the exodus, Pharaoh is the obstacle; at the end of the exodus, Balak is the obstacle. The parallels are intriguing.

- Both kings are leaders of powerful, prosperous nations.
- Both kings are fearful of Israel's growing population (Exodus 1, Numbers 22:3, 5).
- Both kings try three times to thwart Israel from entering the Promised Land (Exodus 1, Numbers 23:1-12, 13-26; 23:27-24:9).

While both kings do God's will in the end, the Balaam/Balak story is a bit more subtle. Here in the book of Numbers, Balak is the obstacle and Balaam is the chief threat to Israel's success in entering the Land. Consider 22:18.

But Balaam answered and said to the servants of Balak, "Though Balak were to give me his house full of silver and gold, I could not go beyond the command of the LORD my God to do less or more."

The above verse makes it sound as though Balaam is quite loyal to Yahweh. Biblical scholars have pondered whether this man was a false prophet who is trying to go right, or a true prophet who goes bad. In any event, Balaam is soundly condemned in later scriptures. Notice how later scriptures both condemn and illumine Balaam's sin. With these scriptures in mind, define the sin of Balaam.



Where do we find the sin of Balaam in the church today?

Allen points out that Balaam was a diviner (Joshuah13:22) who is thoroughly pagan.

Balaam is not a good prophet who went bad or a bad prophet trying to be good. He is altogether outside Israel's prophetic tradition. He is a pagan, foreign national whose mantic acts center on animal divination, including the dissection of animal livers, the movement of animals and the flight of birds. He believed that he had a way with the gods, a hold on them. To him Yahweh was not the Lord of the heaven but just another deity whom he might manipulate. He was in for the surprise of his life. (Allen, p. 888)

22:21-41 The Donkey Story

The setting for this story is confusing. In 22:12 God tells Balaam not to go with the elders of Moab. In 22:20 God tells Balaam to go, and then in 22:22 God is angry with Balaam for going.

The irony of this story compels us to laugh. Here we find an ass, universally a symbol of dense stupidity, which, three times, can see what a famous seer can not. The donkey saves Balaam's life, yet Balaam wishes he could execute the beast of burden.

22:32 What is Yahweh's real lesson for Balaam?

What does this story teach about who, or what, God will speak through?

Has God ever spoken to you in an unexpected way?

John Ortberg works two lessons from this story. Respond to each.

Hearing God speak to us is no indication that we are unusually spiritual or mature or important. God is able to communicate with whomever he chooses. . . . Now imagine that the donkey had responded to that event as many of us might be tempted to. Suppose the donkey had returned to its stable all puffed up because of its superior spiritual insight: "I was able to discern the angelic presence when even the prophet himself was ignorant!" What if the donkey had put on airs and considered itself in an exalted spiritual class above the other quadrupeds?¹

Balaam's Three Oracles

23:1-6 What happens when Balaam arrives at his destination?

22:4-5 is both troubling and engaging. Balaam has just offered pagan sacrifices and now we find Yahweh both *meets* Balaam and speaks through him.

This is utterly remarkable. We often say that God will never use an unclean vessel. This is not quite accurate. God may use whatever vessel he wishes; the issue concerns what happens to an unclean vessel when God has finished using it for his purposes. It appears that such vessels are tossed aside, dashed on the road. (Allen, p. 896)

23:7-10 Briefly summarize Balaam's first oracle. How does this oracle fit into the larger Book of Moses? (Hint: compare Genesis 12:1-3 with 23:8)

23:11 How does Balak respond?

23:18-24 contain Balaam's second oracle. Examine 23:19-20. What do these verses teach you about God and his blessing?

¹ *The Life You've Always Wanted*, 1997, 141-142.

What application can you make to your own life from these verses?

24:3-9 contain Balaam's third oracle.

Compare 23:24 with 24:7-8. Do we have a promise of messiah in these verses? On the one hand, 23:24 speaks of Israel as a *lioness*. This verse promises that the people Balaam was hired to curse will, in the end, rise up as a lioness and devour her enemies.

On the other hand, in 24:7-8 the *lioness* has become the *lion*. The shift is from the people of Israel to the coming king of Israel. Sailhamer explains,

It is clear from Numbers 23:24 that Balaam is speaking about the people of Israel and the exodus from Egypt. In 24:8, however, Balaam repeats the same line and applies it, using singular forms, to the king he has introduced in 24:7; "God brought him [singular] out of Egypt; he has the strength of a wild ox."

The writer's purpose appears to be to view the reign of the future king in terms taken from God's great acts of salvation in the past. The future is going to be like the past. What God did for Israel in the past is seen as a type of what he will do for them in the future when he sends his promised king. (PAN, p. 408)

With the above in mind, notice Balaam's parting shot to Balak. Here he prophesies that *a star shall come out of Jacob. . . who will exercise dominion* (24:17, 19). Surely the coming messiah is foretold in these verses.

24:10-14 What happens after Balaam utters his third oracle?

Numbers 25 is an important coda on the Balaam/Balak story. In this chapter we find that the seductions of Moabite women did what Balaam could not do. The people, as we have seen, are living in Shittim, across the Jordan from the Land of Promise, poised to go into the land. At the outset of the chapter we learn that *the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab*. Yahweh's ire is raised and his swift judgment follows. According to Numbers 31:16 this seduction was Balaam's idea! As Brown puts it, *When the devil fails at one enterprise, he quickly makes use of another*. (Brown, p. 227)

25:1-5 Read these verses carefully.

- What are the sins of some of the people of Israel?
- What is God's judgment upon the perpetrators of these sins?
- What do we learn about the seriousness of idolatry from this paragraph?

25:6-9 show the depths of Israel's depravity. As the people are weeping over the judgment of God, one Israelite man brings a Midianite woman to the tent of meeting, the place where God had met with Moses and Aaron for almost 40 years. There, in the sight of whoever chose to watch, they begin to have sexual intercourse, probably enacting some sort of Baal worship at the very place where God's voice was often heard. Their brazen act of paganism compels Phinehas, a young priest and the grandson of Aaron, to take matters into his own hands. Phinehas *kebabs* the couple together, pinning them to the ground. With this bold act the plague sent by Yahweh is stopped. Twenty-four thousand Israelites have lost their lives because of this dreadful incident.¹

It would be easy to read this chapter and dismiss the Jews in the desert as half-hearted believers who were fickle through and through. But the New Testament writers use this story as a warning to us.

Paul refers to this incident as he warns the Corinthian church, which was prone to both sexual immorality and idolatry (1 Corinthians 10:8). And Jesus himself, when addressing the church of Pergamum, says,

But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. (Revelation 3:2:14)

We marvel over how casual the Israelites seem to have been concerning idolatry. But are we not the same? Respond to the following.

Luther said that everyone 'who falls away from the knowledge of Christ necessarily rushes into idolatry.' In contemporary society, people idolize homes, jobs, possessions, sexuality, relationships, food, drink, entertainment. All these things, harmless or appropriate in their proper

¹ This is the highest body count recorded in the Book of Moses with regard to Yahweh's judgment on his people. The rebellion at Kadesh cost 14,700 their lives (Numbers 16:46-49). Certainly we learn from this how Yahweh viewed and views idolatry among his people.

setting, become controlling powers that displace God in human thinking. Christians today need to heed the closing warning in John's first letter: 'Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.' (Brown, p. 229)

What *controlling powers* threaten to displace God from your *human thinking*? Make a list of these powers; submit them to your homegroup. Pray for one another in these areas.

What steps have you taken or can you take to *keep yourself from idols*?

Think back over these four chapters and this study. What have you learned about God from Balaam's Funky Prophecy?

Sermon Notes. . .

Introduction to Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy should be on the *Top Ten* list of every Old Testament Bible reader. It is, as most readers discover, a great book. The book gives the reader a vision of a bright future even as it discusses a checkered past.¹

In Deuteronomy the reader has the privilege of listening in on the reminiscences and last minute instructions of an old man about to be separated from his people. Moses has led the nation for forty years through the deserts of Sinai. He has worshipped, wept and celebrated with the same group of people since they left Egypt. During these years of nomadic wilderness wandering, Moses has listened to the whining complaints of an impatient and terribly imperfect people. This man, the first of Israel's prophets, has prayed for, interceded for, and at times been disgusted with the nation. Throughout, Moses has served the nation and modeled an unwavering commitment to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

By the time we get to Deuteronomy in the Book of Moses, Israel is camped on the plains of Moab (southeast of Palestine), ready to begin her conquest of the Land of Promise. Moses, forbidden to enter Palestine due to his own failure in the desert (Numbers 20), preaches three sermons which are recorded in Deuteronomy.² These sermons constitute his last will and testament for the nation. They encourage the nation to renew again her covenant with Yahweh. The covenant, which was ratified in Sinai after the victory of Yahweh over the Egyptians, is to be renewed on the plains of Moab before Yahweh's victory over the inhabitants of Palestine. Two of the sermons are very brief while one is quite lengthy. Each is an encouragement to the nation to *remember* what Yahweh has done and to behave accordingly in the Promised Land. Each is a call to serve a loving God with heart, soul and mind. Yahweh loves Israel. Israel is called to reciprocate this love with heartfelt obedience and service.

The word *remember* aptly summarizes the dominant message of Deuteronomy. Moses uses the word (*zakar* in Hebrew) at least 16 times, but the concept comes up repeatedly. He urges the nation to remember what they have witnessed with regard to the power of God. Accordingly there are numerous references to *not forgetting*. A few examples:

4:9 *Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your*

¹ Historians have noted that Deuteronomy was the most quoted book of the Bible during the time of the American Revolution by this country's founding fathers.

² Deuteronomy can be outlined simply:

1. Introduction: 1:1-5
2. First Sermon: 1:6-4:43
3. Second Sermon: 4:44-28:68
4. Third Sermon: 29:1-30:20
5. Conclusion: 31:1-34:12

heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children. . .

5:15 *You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.*

6:12 *. . . then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

8:19 *And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.*

16: 3 *You shall eat no leavened bread with it. Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of affliction--for you came out of the land of Egypt in haste—that all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.*

John Maxwell captures the value of remembering in Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy, he writes, *brings the power of the past to bear on the present, with an eye to the future.*¹

What is it Moses wants Israel to remember? Even a glance at the above verses will show that Israel was called to remember God himself. The people were to recall who Yahweh was and what he had done in their immediate past. Moses constantly appeals to the love of God for the nation which, when rightly remembered, compels love for God on the part of the people. God's acts in history engender gratitude toward God.

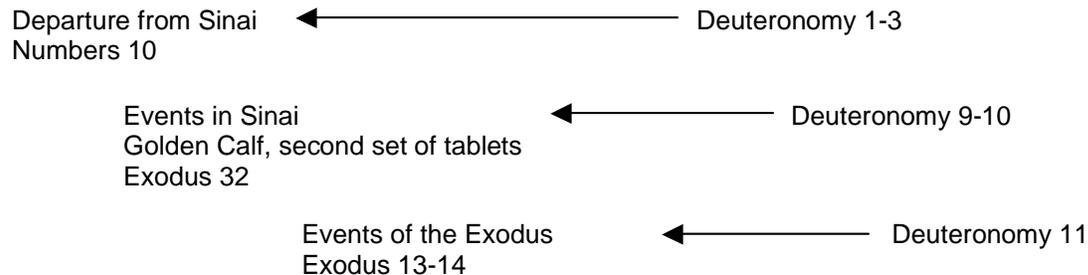
The book of Deuteronomy was originally called, in the Hebrew Bible, *These are the words*. . . In the ancient world books were named after the first few words of the manuscript. The title *Deuteronomy* literally means *second law* and comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, made during the second century before the time of Jesus. The translators misunderstood Deut. 17:18 (a copy or a repetition of the law) to mean a *second law*. Moses, in his three sermons, reiterates the law already given on Mt. Sinai, but the book hardly constitutes a second or new law with regard to content.

Think of Deuteronomy from the perspective of Numbers 14 which we studied earlier. This chapter tells the story of the people's rebellion following the report of the spies who were sent into the land. Yahweh is so upset with the nation's lack of faith that he decides to destroy the nation. Moses pleads with God not to do

¹ John Maxwell, *Deuteronomy*, 1987, p. 24.

this. *What will the other nations say about you???* Moses asks (Num. 14:13-14). Instead of destroying the nation Yahweh forbids those over 20 years of age to enter the land of promise. By the time we get to Deuteronomy, thirty-eight years have passed. The older generation has died. Nineteen-year-olds during the events of Numbers 14 would now be fifty-seven years old. Had they grown unacquainted with the law? Was the revelation of God's will given on Mt. Sinai long forgotten? Here Moses leaves the younger generation with the same law which was given to their mothers and fathers. Moses reiterates the law lest the second generation forget as they enter the Land of Promise.

Deuteronomy is great material for those who enjoy nostalgic reminiscence. Moses points back to numerous events in the wilderness period of Israel's history to bolster the nation's confidence in the future. As Yahweh was present in the past, so he will be present in the future.



Why does the Book of Moses conclude with these three sermons? John Sailhamer's explanation is helpful.

The great promises of God which were on the verge of fulfillment at Sinai were now being threatened by the failure and faithlessness of the people. Moses would have to warn the people of their failure and encourage them in their faith and trust in God.

Thus the people for whom Moses wrote the Pentateuch needed to know more fully what was about to happen to them. They needed to know who they were and the great purposes God had for them in his covenant. Thus, as part of the overall task of forming this people into a nation obedient to God, Moses wrote a history of the "children of Israel." In this history he explained to Israel who they were and why they had come to Egypt. Moreover, he showed them that they were not an ordinary people. They were descendants of a promised seed—heirs to the great covenant promises that God had made to their forefathers. Moses wanted Israel to know that what was happening to them was not simply a liberation from a particularly bad period of enslavement. Rather, God was beginning to work in their lives and they were now becoming a major part of his program to redeem the world to himself. They were being called into fellowship with a God who wanted nothing short of their perfect obedience and trust. (PAN, p. 5, emphasis added)

As we study this wonderful book let us enter into these tremendous sermons delivered on the plains of Moab. Let us review the past, what God has done, and how he has worked. Let us reaffirm our own covenant with God. We have been saved by faith due to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. Let us renew that faith in light of our biblical heritage. As we study Deuteronomy we will become aware, again, of the consequences of sin and obedience. The good life is found when we trust God and obey his instructions. The milk and honey of life in the twenty-first century come not from finding our own way, but rather from walking in his way.

You shall be careful therefore to do as the LORD your God has commanded you. You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. 33You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess. (Deuteronomy 5:32-33)

Study Twenty-One

Obedience to a Jealous God

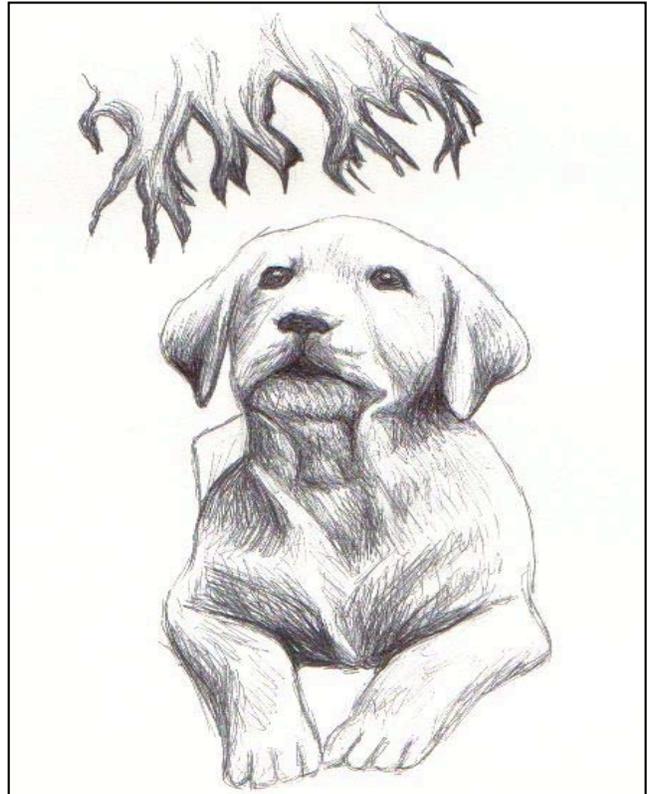
Deuteronomy 4:1-40

This section of Deuteronomy concludes the first of Moses' three sermons. We can outline this first sermon as follows:

1. Reflections on the long route to the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 1-3).
2. A plea for obedience (Deuteronomy 4:1-40).

Read Deuteronomy 4:1-40. Here we find Moses appealing to the nation to *keep* the covenant made at Horeb (Sinai) in Exodus 23-24. In fact, the chapter is a mini-sermon on the covenant given at Sinai. Moses appeals to the present generation to *remember* and to teach those who follow. Moses' appeal is warm, passionate, emotive. He wants the best for his people.

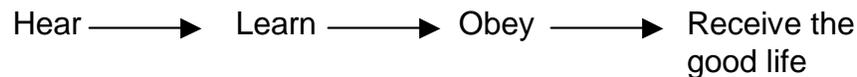
Keep the following outline in mind as you read and make a note of any questions you have of the chapter:



1. The covenant as the foundation of the nation Israel (vss. 1-8).
2. The covenant as a reflection of Yahweh's character (vss. 9-24).
3. Disobedience to the covenant law resulting in judgment (vss. 25-31).
4. The covenant as a means to knowing God (vss. 32-40).

What is the key verse in this chapter? What is the climax of Moses' sermon?

4:1 contains what some scholars call the *Deuteronomic Principle*. Moses tells the people to



Note that Deuteronomy is not simply the law given by God to Moses. Moses is teaching the law to the people and persuading them of its value. Teaching is to produce learning, which should lead to obedience.

How do you see this process in your own life? Are you teachable? Do you place a value on being taught? Does teaching have an effect on your actions?

What are the means and methods whereby God's word has been taught to you? How are you learning God's word at this point in your life? What are your learning practices and disciplines?

How has *obedience* produced blessing in your life?

4:3 looks back to the incident we saw in our last study (Numbers 25:1-5). Recall, it was at Baal-peor (or Baal of Peor) when *the people began to whore with the daughter's of Moab*. Craig explains that more than sexual immorality was involved:

Baal, a principal Canaanite god, was responsible for fertility. In the cult of Baal, the performance of the sexual act seems to have been done as a type of imitative magic; just as the woman became pregnant through the sexual relationship, so too, it was hoped, the land would be made fertile by

Baal in the coming agricultural season. The god mentioned here may have been a local manifestation of the Canaanite high-god Baal, or some other local deity, known as the lord of (ba'al) Peor. (Craigie, p. 130)

In any event, as we saw in our last study, the results of this behavior were swift and harsh.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Take all the chiefs of the people and hang them in the sun before the LORD, that the fierce anger of the LORD may turn away from Israel." (Numbers 25:4)

Consider vss. 4:1-8 as a unit. What distinguished Israel from the surrounding nations? What was unique about this group of people?

Does the church bear this same uniqueness as a people? How should the difference between the church and secular society be as pronounced as the difference between Israel and her neighbors?

4:9 is translated in various ways. The NIV reads, *Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely*. The ESV reads, *Only take care, and keep your soul diligently*.

The word translated *soul*, or, *yourselves* is *nepesh* in Hebrew. Craigie points out that when used in a reflexive sense it takes on the meaning of desire. His translation bears consideration:

Only guard yourself carefully and guard very carefully your desire, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen. . . (Craigie, p. 131, emphasis added).

Our desires can cause us to forget what our eyes have seen or our hearts have understood. Have you ever considered the notion of guarding your desire(s)? What would this look like in the Christian life?

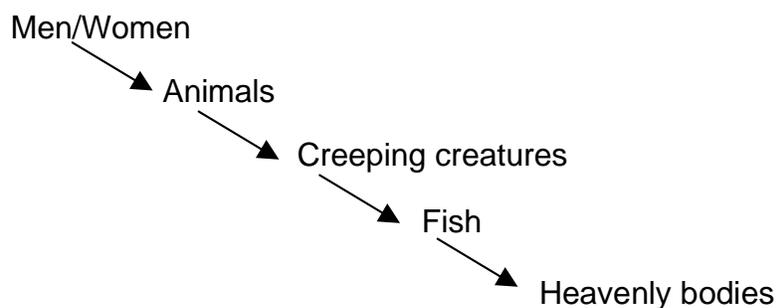
What did Israel see (vs. 9)? Not dead idols, but the work of the living God! Nevertheless, the people are commanded to guard their previous vision. How were they to do this? How can we do this?

Make a short list of a few things you have *seen* God do in your life. Share this list with your homegroup. How can you protect this vision?

4:10-14 looks back to Exodus 19:1-19 (Study 10). Review that chapter:

- What took place that day?
- What was the response of the people?
- What was the response of Moses (cf. Hebrews 12:21)?
- Why was the response of Moses so different from the response of the people?
- How does this review show the importance of Deuteronomy 4:9?

Note the various areas of idol worship which could possibly seduce the nation as she enters the Promised Land (vss. 15-19).



What do you make of this? Notice the similarity of this list with Paul's discussion of the fall in Romans 1:18-22.

Note the concern about the worship of the sun, moon and stars. Here we move from idol making to a more subtle temptation, that is, worshipping the creation rather than the Creator. Is it possible Christians in our time could do this? Can we become so concerned about clear-cutting of the forests, the thickness of the ozone layer, etc. that the creation becomes an object of worship? How can we have an appropriate concern for the environment without lapsing into eco-worship?

Commenting on 4:25-31, Craige writes,

The whole Canaanite society, even that which would nowadays be called secular, was permeated by the belief structure and world view of the Canaanites. Simply to live among the Canaanites would involve concessions on the part of individual Israelites. The covenant promise anticipated a state, a theocracy, but the fulfillment of that vision depended on the unity of the people, by which alone such a state could be brought into being. (Craige, p. 140)

What is the *belief structure* of American society? How is this belief structure a challenge to a Christian's faith? Where does the worldview of a Christian collide with twenty-first century thinking?

Very Advanced Question (get ready, this could hurt): The United States is anything but a theocracy (rule by God). Our government combines democratic and republican ideas (remember your civics class?). There are, however, some Christian thinkers (called *reconstructionists* or *theonomists*) who would like to institute a theocracy in the United States. They want to employ Old Testament law as the law of our land. Others see the increasing secularization of American life as an inevitable consequence of the modern world. The Christian, these thinkers argue, should not attempt to impose his/her theological convictions on

society at large. Believers are called to a *quiet faith*. We should mind our own business, worship God and see what happens.

Where do you stand between these widely divergent views of faith and culture? How much should the *Christian view of things* be a part of our public discourse?

4:21-23 contain a bitter contrast. Moses will die in this land, while the people will cross the Jordan and enter the good land. God is consistent. As Moses bears the consequence of his own sin he pleads with the people not to follow his example.

4:32-39 lists several ways God had shown himself to his people that they might know that Yahweh is God and that the other gods are no gods at all (4:35). Share with your homegroup something that God has done in your life that assures you that he is God.

4:40 contains the words *that it may go well with you*. . . The phrase occurs eight times in Deuteronomy (4:40; 5:16; 6:3-18; 12:25, 28; 19:13; 22:7) and emphasizes Israel's motive for obedience. God has his people's best interest in mind!

Phillips Brooks said,

Sad is that day when we are satisfied with the thoughts we are thinking, the lives we are living, the dreams we are dreaming until there ceases to be forever knocking at the door of our souls a desire to do something greater for God. (from Maxwell, p. 94)

Moses is passionate in Deuteronomy in his warning against smugness in the land. He yearns for the people to maintain their yearning for Yahweh.

Think about your own life. Are you spiritually satisfied, smug, content, or do you yearn to know more of God and more of his will for your life by the time you finish this study of Deuteronomy?

Look at 4:32-40 as a unit. Moses warns Israel about future complacency in the land of promise. What does this say to you as a believer?

4:39 reads,

Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth below. There is no other. (NIV)

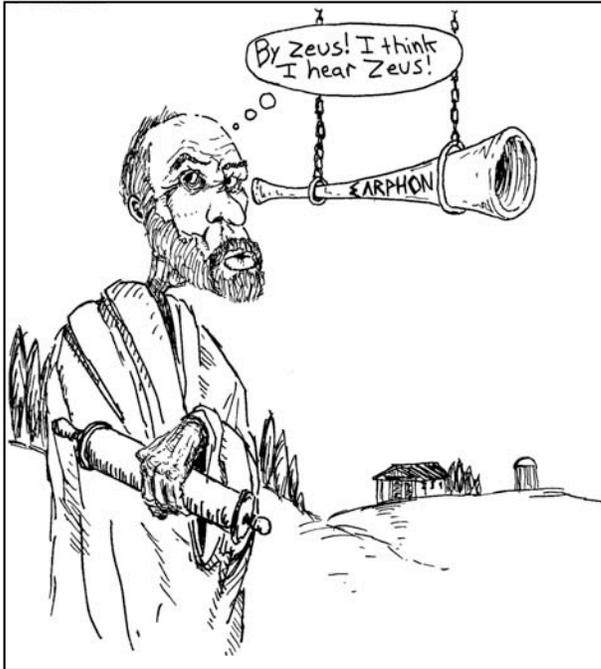
Spend time as a homegroup practicing this verse. Acknowledge and take to heart this day (evening?) that the Lord is God. Give him praise. Share with one another what God means to you. What God has done for you? What you can do for him?

Sermon Notes. . .

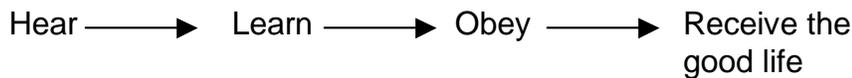
Study Twenty-Two

Hearing God

Deuteronomy 4:44—6:25



Do you remember what we called the *Deuteronomistic Principle* in our last study? This principle is crucial to Moses' sermons. The people are going into Baal territory. This generation knows that Yahweh is powerful and active in the desert, but what about the land of Canaan? Will Yahweh stand up to the competition? Would it be advisable to combine the worship of Yahweh with the worship of the local deities? Moses has a strong agenda for the people he has led through these years. It is imperative that they listen to and follow Yahweh in a land of foreign gods. The *Deuteronomistic Principle* can be diagrammed accordingly:



The principle is stated over and over.

You shall walk in all the way that the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live, and that it may go well with you, and that you may live long in the land that you shall possess. (5:33)

Israel is to obey Yahweh so that

... *you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son's son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long. Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. (6:2-3)*

In this section of Deuteronomy Moses enforces this principle. Our text could be outlined as follows:

- 4:44-49 An introduction to the law
- 5:1-21 A summary of the law (The Ten Commandments)
- 5:22—6:25 A plea to love God in keeping the law

With the above in mind, read our passage of Scripture. What initial thoughts does the reading of this passage provoke? What questions come to mind?

Deuteronomy 5:29 is critical. Here Yahweh longs for the heart of his people to long to fear him.

Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever! (5:29 NIV)

In chapter six, the *fear* of Yahweh is explained. Read the following quotation carefully. It contains a marvelous definition of what it means to *fear* the Lord.

Fear (i.e., a deeply felt respect for the Lord) is to be taught to all generations as the basis for godly living and obedience. The result of obedience is blessing - living long and well in the land. . . .

Ironically, the fear of God which produces obedience is here called “love”—“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Dt 6:5). It is thus clear that the “fear of the Lord” which Moses has in mind is not that which flees from his presence but that which longs to do his will. It is a fear which produces not obeisance but obedience, not worry but worship (6:13). The central concern of Moses in this section is clearly the propensity of the people to fall into idolatry. Hence, what he stresses beyond the need for love and reverence is the absolute “oneness” of God. There are no “other gods” beside him. (PAN, p. 439)

With the above in mind, think about your own *fear* of the Lord. Think of your own attempts to obey God. How do these efforts flow from your love for God? Do you ever catch yourself obeying in order to earn God’s love? Share your thoughts with your homegroup.

Deuteronomy 6 is an important chapter in the Bible and many commentators consider it the most important chapter of this book. It contains the great *shema* (Hebrew for *hear*) which is used to this day to open every Jewish service of worship:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (6:4-5)

These verses are recited as a daily prayer by devout Jews along with Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41.

Jesus calls Deuteronomy 6:5 the *greatest* of the commandments (Mt. 22:36-38).

One scholar sees these verses as the key to all of Deuteronomy:

It is in a very real sense true to say that the entire book is a commentary on the command which stands at the beginning; 'You shall love the Lord your God. . .'¹

Does it surprise you that the Israelites were commanded to *love* Yahweh? How can we *love* on command?

List some of the ways in which you love God. How do you love God on a daily basis? What habits could you change that would enhance your love for God?

6:4 speaks of the oneness of God. The phrase *The Lord our God, the Lord is one* is loaded with significance.

Sailhamer writes of this verse,

The intent of the phrase is to give a clear statement of the principle of monotheism, that is, that there is one God and only one God who exists. It thus has also been translated, "The Lord is our God, the Lord alone." It is important to note, however, that the stress on the uniqueness of God over against the worship of false idols is not stated in such a way as to exclude the equally important notion of the divine Trinity. The word used

¹ E. W. Nicholson, *Deuteronomy and Tradition*, 1967, p. 46.

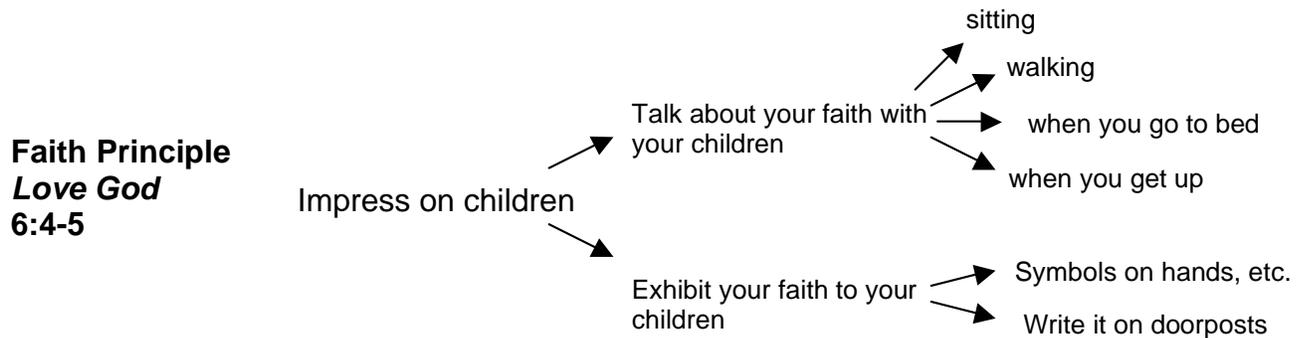
for “one” in this passage does not mean “singleness” but “unity.” The same word is used in Genesis 2:24, where the husband and wife in marriage are said to be “one flesh.” Thus while this verse is intended as a clear and concise statement of monotheism, it does not address or exclude the concept of the Trinity. (PAN, p. 439)

Thompson adds,

Yahweh was to be the sole object of Israel’s worship, allegiance and affection. . . . Anything less than whole-hearted devotion and allegiance would lead to a shared allegiance, which would have been impossible. The command to love cannot be interpreted as an evidence that love is anything other than spontaneous, but rather evidence that only a love that is undivided can be called love in its truest sense. (Thompson, pp. 121, 123)

In the fourth century St. Augustine said, *Love God and do as you please.* . . Does this capture the spirit of Deuteronomy 6:4-5? Why? Why not?

6:7-9 Explains how the faith of Israel was to be handed down through the generations. The faith was to be communicated, parents to sons and daughters, by word and deed. The children were to see and understand faith in Yahweh through the lives of their parents. Everything the parents did, rising, sleeping, coming, going etc., was to testify to the presence and sovereignty of Yahweh.



This principle is evident in the New Testament as well:

“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. (Ephesians 6:2-4)

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:20-21)

Think about your own training in this regard. Were your parents believers? Did they demonstrate their faith *when they got up* and when they went through their various activities?

If your parents were believers, think of a few ways you would want to copy their religious home schooling.

How would you like your home to be different if and when you have children?

If you have children, how is your home similar/dissimilar in these areas from the one in which you were raised?

Christians are increasingly concerned about the values (or lack of values) being taught in public schools. How does this Hebrew style home schooling affect your view of the power of public schools over children from Christian homes? Moses indicates that what is learned in the home will shape our children. Can an atheist homeroom teacher undo the years of home training that have already taken place?

6:10-12 contain a poetic warning against complacency in the land of promise. Israel is going to be the recipient of many good things. Moses understands the inherent spiritual danger of the good life. It breeds laziness.

flourishing cities	you did not build
filled houses	you did not provide
wells	you did not dig
vineyards & olive groves	you did not plant

Be careful, Moses commands, that you don't get too fat on the *fruit of the land* and forget the Lord.

Think of your life. As a North American, you are one of the richest peoples of the world.

- One study estimates that the average North American is seventeen times wealthier than the average citizen of Kenya and fourteen times wealthier than the average Indian.
- Between 1950 and 1975 disposable income (purchasing power) rose 69% in the U.S.
- 95% of U.S. homes have refrigerators.
- North Americans consume, on average, 1,850 lbs. of grain each year per capita, while Africans make do on about 380 lbs.

Clearly we are among the most cared-for peoples of the world.

What is the danger here for us spiritually? What is the danger for you spiritually? Do your various savings accounts (and your VISA cards) tempt you to *forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery*? Is there a way to enjoy the good things available to us and still remember the Lord? What role does or should the church play in all of this?

A Russian proverb says, *You need strong legs to hold up under good days.* . . What does this mean? Do you agree?

Re-read 6:13-25. Moses seems to be offering a solution to the potential sin of forgetfulness and complacency. Read these verses aloud as a group. Have one person make a list of the imperatives (commands, suggestions) Moses offers Israel. How can the nation avoid the sin of forgetting God? How can your homegroup apply these commands to your own lives?

6:16 looks back to Exodus 17:1-7. Here the people grumbled against the Lord: *What the #%^&* are we doing out here in the desert without water? Let's go back to Egypt. . .*

To *test* God is to impose conditions on Him and to make His response to the people's demand in the hour of crisis the condition of their continuing to follow Him. (Thompson, p. 125)

Moses' point is that Yahweh is to be worshipped regardless of our life circumstance. He is Lord and does not need to answer the whims of his people.

What would it mean to *test* God in our life situation? Have you ever done this? What was the result?

Spend time praying for one another. Pray that you might *hear* God as you live in the land of Santa Barbara.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twenty-Three

Circumcised Hearts: God's Salvation

Deuteronomy 10:12—11:32

Legalism is the notion that our good works will help God save us from our sins. Legalism says, *If I just try hard enough, if I am good enough, God will be impressed with my sincerity and my good deeds and he will be obligated to accept me into his fellowship.*

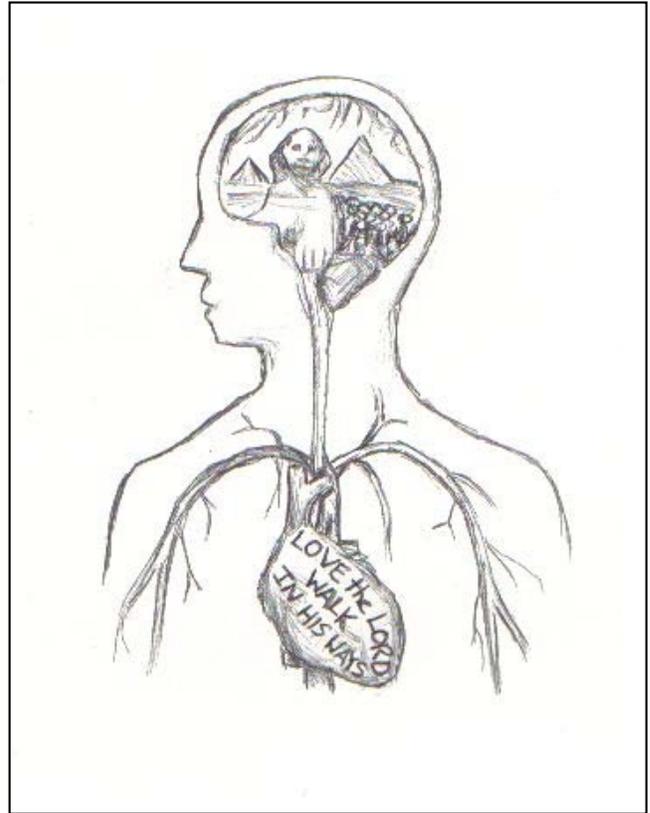
Surprisingly, legalism creeps into the minds of even the most devout people who have been saved by grace. And it steals the thunder of grace. After legalism grows to maturity, grace is swallowed up completely and is no longer grace. The man who thinks salvation is achieved by self-effort develops a comfortable religion. His good deeds outweigh his bad deeds and therefore he rests in a false sense of security. *God must love me*, he reasons; *I try hard and I am certainly better than my neighbor who is cranky to the mail carrier . . .*

This was the apostle Paul's understanding of salvation before he met the risen Christ on the road to Damascus. He was *faultless* with regard to legalistic righteousness (Philippians 3:6). After all, Paul was a Pharisee, he was circumcised at the appropriate time, and he kept the law. Paul even missed sporting events on Sunday in order to harass the church. He was *okay* in the eyes of God. But when Paul was confronted by the blinding grace of God he came to realize the importance of a different kind of circumcision. In his letter to the Roman church Paul could proclaim:

A man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man's praise is not from men, but from God. (Romans 2:29, NIV)

Was this idea new or revolutionary? Hardly. Jeremiah spoke repeatedly of the need to have God's covenant on one's heart.

Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, circumcise your hearts, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire



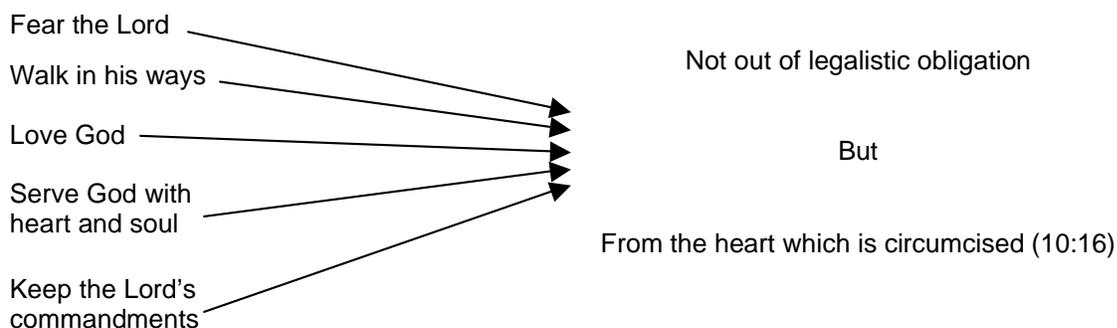
because of the evil you have done—burn with no one to quench it.
(Jeremiah 4:4)

*“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,”
declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their
hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.”* (Jeremiah 31:33)

But Jeremiah didn't think up this idea either. The idea of a circumcised heart goes all the way back to Moses' sermon in Deuteronomy. It turns out God has always been a God of grace. Salvation has always been for people of faith. Legalism has never had a place in God's economy. He desires the hearts of his people!

Read these verses before looking any further in this study. How would you have reacted to this part of Moses' sermon if you were one of the original listeners? How do you react today? Does Moses' emphasis on the heart characterize your relationship with God?

10:12-13 set the stage for what follows:



Craige explains:

In broad terms, the common theme is *allegiance* to the God of the covenant; the particular requirements indicate the dimensions of the common theme of allegiance are reminiscent of the language of the Near

Eastern political treaties. . . . The requirements stated in 10:12-13 indicated the positive nature of the total commitment to the One God. Still another way of looking at this portion of the address is to see it as a sermon on the "Great Commandment" (6:5) to love God. Of the five requirements listed in the present context, love for God is the central one. (Craig, p. 204)

10:16-17 Verse 16 literally reads, *circumcise the foreskin of your hearts*. This graphic metaphor symbolizes the covenant relationship Israel had with Yahweh in a spiritual manner.

God's requirement was that his people *love him* (10:12), but to do this, they required a particular attitude of heart or mind, which—unlike circumcision—involved decision and action symbolizing allegiance. Thus to circumcise the heart is to take an attitude to God which is the opposite of being *stubborn* (or stiff-necked). (Craig, p. 205)

Evaluate *the state of your soul* during this season of life. How is it with your heart? Is your heart soft? Pliable? Are you yearning for God? Is your heart a bit hard? Does it need circumcision?

What can be done to maintain your love for God? To keep your heart soft? What can your homegroup do for you in this area? How can your homegroup pray for you in this area?

If your heart is hard what can be done to enter the world of Deuteronomy 10-11? How can you change the direction of your heart?

10:17-18 shows both Yahweh's lordship/sovereignty and his impartiality. In the NIV the reads *who shows no partiality*, while the ESV reads, *who is not partial*. The words in the original are from a Hebrew idiom which could be translated literally, *who does not lift up faces*. The point seems to be God shows no favors based on race, social or economic standing. Moses goes on to point out God cannot be bribed. Our obedience counts for nothing with regard to a right standing with Yahweh. Loving faith is what matters.

How do should we read 10:19 in our current setting? One of the big issues in the United States is that of immigration, illegal aliens, etc. Here Moses tells Israel to *love* the alien. How should this impact a Christian's view of this issue?

10:21 What does Moses mean when he says Yahweh is our *praise*? How can you practice this verse?

Notice the threefold repetition in chapter 11:

Love God and keep his commands: 11:1	—————▶	Illustrations from History: 11:2-7
Love God and keep his commands: 11:8	—————▶	Because the Promised Land is good: 11:9-12
Love God and keep his commands: 11:13	—————▶	Because the Promised Land is fertile: 11:14-17

11:6 The story of Dathan and Abiram looks back to Numbers 16. Here insurrection led to punishment. This brought on the people's grumbling, which would have caused Yahweh to destroy the entire nation had it not been for the intercession of Moses and Aaron. Read Numbers 16 to understand more fully Moses' point in his sermon.

Deuteronomy 11 indicates that the blessing of God or the curse of God in the Promised Land will be contingent on the moral behavior of the people in the land. This is a familiar theme in Moses' teaching. Do you think of the Lord's presence in your life in these terms? What is the correlation between your behavior and God's blessing in your life? How do grace and forgiveness enter into this mix?

Read the following two quotations from the New Testament. How do they inform your answer to the above question?

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming. (Col. 3:5-6)

And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

*“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reprovved by him.*

*For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.”*

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:5-11)

Are the wrath of God and the discipline of God the same thing? How have you sensed the wrath or the discipline of God in your life? What was the outcome of this wrath, discipline, or chastisement?

How has God blessed you? Do you see this as a consequence of your faithful obedience?

11:29 Israel entered into a covenant with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19). In Deuteronomy the covenant is being renewed on the plains of Moab (see Deuteronomy 29:1ff.). But here we learn the covenant should be renewed after entrance into the Promised Land. This renewal was carried out and recorded in Joshua 8:30-35.

What does this repeated renewal of the covenant tell us about the place of the reaffirmation of our faith? Sometimes we think of our *salvation* as a once and for all event in life: *I walked the aisle, prayed the prayer and was born again.* . . . While many come to know God in this way, we still need to recommit ourselves (our hearts) to God regularly. The most obvious ceremony of recommitment in the church is the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Here the communicant

reestablishes his or her relationship to Christ. Sins are confessed, thanksgiving is offered and God is worshipped.

When did you first come to know Christ? Have there been significant times of reaffirming your faith in Him?

Earlier in this study we considered the question of keeping our hearts soft. How could the Lord's Supper, rightly understood, be a weekly help in this regard? How do you prepare to receive the Lord's Supper each week? How do you pray before coming forward to the Lord's Table?

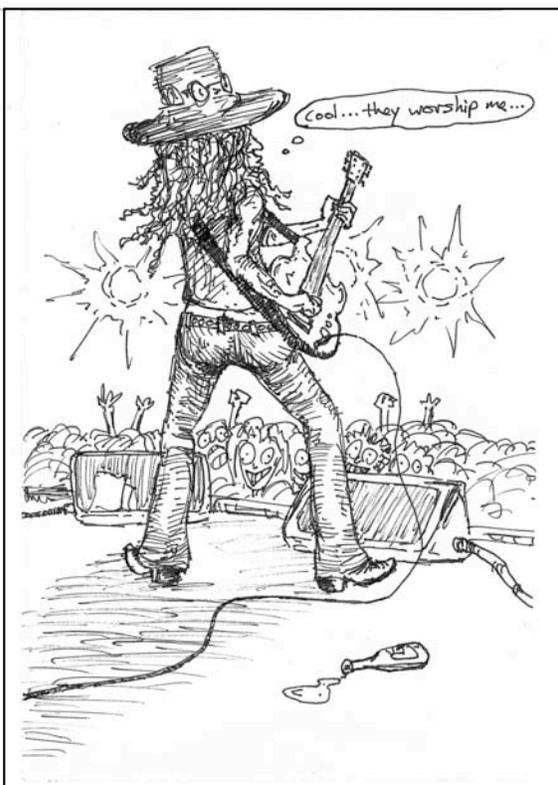
What have you learned about God from these chapters? Spend time as a group celebrating these findings.

Study Twenty-Four

The Problem of Idolatry

Deuteronomy 12—13

You shall surely destroy all the places where the nations whom you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved images of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way. (12:2-4)



Worship. Every society, every nation, every man and woman who has ever existed worships someone or something. Indeed, there is a worship-reflex in each of us that will be satisfied. If we don't worship God we might find ourselves worshipping sex. Or reptiles, or the environment, or automobiles destined for the junkyard. But everyone will, somehow, satisfy his or her innate craving for worship.

The nations of Canaan worshipped in a very practical way. They subscribed to Baalism which involved fertility rites that were guaranteed, more or less, to produce plentiful crops. On the tops of various hills, shrines would be set up and the worshippers would engage in open-air sexual orgies to provoke the Baal gods to send rain and make the land fertile.

But now Israel is going to take the land. And Moses wants the people to know that Yahweh will not tolerate such false worship. As Brown puts it, *[Israel's] worship will not only honor God's word; it will reflect God's nature* (Brown, p. 144). Accordingly, Deuteronomy 12-26 contain a series of laws for Israel to follow. Broadly speaking, these chapters contain instructions for worship.¹

¹ This legal section of the book clarifies and emphasizes laws which have already been stated in the Book of Moses while introducing some new material. We should remind ourselves again that the function of the law was not to produce holiness in the nation of Israel. The law was never intended to be a means of righteousness. On the contrary, the law was a series of instructions for people who had already been made holy. *The observance of law is a by-product of holiness, not a means of attaining holiness.* (Maxwell, p. 183) 12:1 reminds us of this at the outset. The

As we have seen, Yahweh is a jealous God. Anyone who looks at the Book of Moses, or any of the Old Testament for that matter, will notice immediately Yahweh's refusal to share the spotlight with the gods of the Canaan. *Yahweh and Baal* will not do. *Yahweh and Molech* is an abomination.

As the people prepared to enter the land of promise they would be faced with a new challenge. After 40 years in the desert, where Yahweh was the only God around, they were entering a region which was full of pagan deities. Again, hilltops were places of worship. Fertility gods were seen as a necessary component of good farming practice. Child sacrifice was understood to be good business practice.

Moses pleads, repeatedly, for an allegiance to Yahweh alone. God has provided in the wilderness; he will provide in the Land of Promise. There is no God but Yahweh. He is the only God who is really there. He is worthy of complete trust. He competes with no one.

Deuteronomy 12 and 13 address the problem of idolatry. Chapter 12 concentrates on places of worship that might seduce Israel into pagan worship. Chapter 13 looks at different groups of people who might lead the Israelites astray.

Chapter 12, which is difficult to read due to its repetitive nature, emphasizes that Israel must not utilize the *places* of Canaanite worship. Instead,

*[Y]ou shall seek the place that the LORD your God will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and make his habitation there.*¹ (12:4)

As Thompson points out,

One emphasis that cannot be avoided is that this chapter stresses that Israel must not use the numerous cult (worship) centers scattered throughout the land for the worship of Yahweh. Rather she must destroy all these and bring her burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes and firstlings to 'the place' (12:6, 11). It is not entirely clear, however, whether a single sanctuary is intended or whether a multiplicity of Yahweh sanctuaries is allowed. (Thompson, p. 163)

Read Deuteronomy 12-13. Notice as you read the extreme nature of the warnings regarding idolatry.

- Why are these commands given to Israel (see 12:28, familiar territory by

land is a gift from God, not a reward. Obedience and fidelity to the gift-giving God should flow freely from a people who have received his grace.

¹ Many see here an early prophecy of Jerusalem and the temple.

this point in Deuteronomy)?

- What is the most shocking verse in these two chapters?
- What is the most important verse in these two chapters? Why?
- What questions do these chapters provoke?

12:6 mentions seven different offerings that were to be a part of Israel's worship:

Burnt offerings

Offerings which were completely burnt on the altar (Leviticus 1:1-17; 6:8-13).

Sacrifices

Offerings of thanksgiving and fellowship (Leviticus 3; 7:11-21).

Tithes

A tenth of the produce from the soil which was to be brought to the sanctuary (Leviticus 27:30-32).

Special gifts (sometimes called *heave offerings*, or *the contribution that you present*, ESV)¹

Contributions made at any time for the work of Yahweh in the sanctuary (Lev. 22:21; 27:2).

Vow offerings

Contributions which represent a promise made to God (perhaps during a time of crisis).

Freewill offerings

Voluntary contributions.

Firstborn of herds and flocks

The dedication of the firstborn male offspring produced during the bearing-life of an animal (this offering is further explained in Deuteronomy 15:19-23 and looks back to Exodus 13:11-15; 22:29-30, etc.).

¹ The 'lifting up of the hand,' as the Hebrew has it, seems to be a more general expression for contributions ('special gifts') than the traditional translation 'heave offering' suggests. (Kalland, p. 93)

What does this list of offerings teach you about Israel's prescribed attitude toward giving?

What does this list tell you about God's expectations with regard to giving in general?

How does this list inform your understanding of giving? Are you sharing a portion of your income with God? Do you do this regularly?

Why do some of us struggle with generous giving? We are among the wealthiest people ever to live. Why is it so hard for some to offer their monies to God as an act of worship?

Israel's giving, at least as it is listed here, seems to be giving of tangible things (cows, birds, crops). We tend to write checks when we give or place cash in a box or a passing plate. What difference does this make in our act of giving? How would our giving feel if we collectively stacked groceries in the front of our church services or if we brought the things we produce at work to the church parking lot for distribution?

12:15-25 contains two sets of instructions regarding the eating of meat. First, Moses points out that such eating is not prohibited by the law: *Eat as much as you want*. . . Second, the availability of meat is understood as a gift of Yahweh. . . *according to the blessing the LORD your God that he has given you.* (12:15) Third, he sets up some guidelines to separate normal meat-eating from anything ceremonial. Thompson explains,

The passage simply declares that the slaughter of animals for food is permitted, only the blood must be *poured out upon the earth like water*. It

is equally important for ritual offerings and for slaughterings for food, to avoid the eating of blood. This prohibition provides a concrete recognition of the fact that God was the sole master of life, and since life belonged to Him, it was to be given back to Him. (Thompson, p. 171)

12:31 is a reference to the detestable practice of child sacrifice in the land of Canaan. Historians are uncertain of the extent of the practice. The phrase *They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods* is graphic. The verse shows the depth of the depravity of the Canaanites. Yahweh is giving his people the Promised Land, but he is also judging a people worthy of judgment. This verse explains the severity of treatment the inhabitants of the land were to receive. Yahweh was bringing his wrath on a repugnant people.

G. K. Chesterton writes about another people group who practiced child sacrifice. His words are certainly relevant to the practice in Canaan and they bring the abomination of such practices into bold relief:

. . . [T]he worshippers of Moloch were not gross or primitive. They were members of a mature and polished civilization, abounding in refinements and luxuries. . . . And Moloch was not a myth; or at any rate his meal was not a myth. These highly civilized people really met together to invoke the blessing of heaven on their empire by throwing hundreds of their infants into a large furnace. We can only realise the combination by imagining a number of Manchester merchants with chimney-pot hats and mutton-chop whiskers, going to church every Sunday at eleven o'clock to see a baby roasted alive. (*The Everlasting Man*, 1925, p. 149)

13:1-18 deals with people who might entice the hearts of the Israelites to turn away from the one true God. Three groups of people are singled out:

1. Religious leaders (prophets, dreamers) 13:1-5.
2. Family members 13:6-11.
3. Community leaders 13:13-18.

What does this list say about the responsibility of spiritual leaders? You are probably *leading* someone in the spiritual arena. You are, more than likely, the best Christian someone knows. Do you take seriously your role in guiding that person toward the Lord? Do you *watch your life and doctrine closely* as Paul instructed Timothy (1 Tim. 4:16, NIV)?

What do you do to nurture your spiritual life? What spiritual disciplines are you developing and practicing in your life to grow up spiritually?

Twenty-first century readers of Deuteronomy will recoil a bit when they read the harsh penalty, death, for soliciting worship of Canaanite gods. But Yahweh is a jealous God. He cannot tolerate idolatry on the part of his people:

The legal penalties noted in this chapter may seem at first sight to be excessively harsh, but the reason for the severity lies in the nature of the crime. The continued existence of the covenant community depended literally upon allegiance to the Lord of the covenant. Thus the crime is considered not simply in light of the actions of the perpetrator, but in light of the effect of the crime on the welfare of the whole people of Israel. Of all the potential crimes in ancient Israel, the one described in this chapter was the most dangerous in terms of its broader ramifications: to attempt deliberately to undermine allegiance to God was the worst form of subversive activity, in that it eroded the constitutional basis of the potential nation, Israel. (Craigie, p. 222)

It is interesting to note that as we read through Israel's history in the following books of the Bible, the punishment of false prophets, etc., was extremely rare. Paganism crept into the nation's worship and terrible consequences followed.¹

It would be easy to look at this section of Deuteronomy without any reference to our own time and place as worshippers of Yahweh. In the New Testament church there are certainly no injunctions regarding capital punishment for heretics. But consider the New Testament parallel to Deuteronomy 13. Church discipline (banishing the unrepentant from fellowship) is a part of the New Testament's teaching. Church discipline, we should note, is always remedial. It puts one out of fellowship with the intention of restoring that same person to fellowship.

Read the following verses on church discipline. How are they similar/dissimilar to Deuteronomy 13?

- Matthew 18:15-17

- Galatians 6:1-2

¹ Manasseh, king of Judah, went so far as to practice child sacrifice (2 Kings 21:6, 16). When Josiah became king he reformed the nation and destroyed *Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech* (2 Kings 23:10).

- 1 Corinthians 5:1-12 (see also 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. Is this the same person referred to in 2 Corinthians 5?)

How have you seen church discipline work in SBCC? Have you applied the Matthew 18 model in your interaction with others? Have you experienced Matthew 18 in your life? Has someone ever confronted you and helped you through a sin? If so, you have experienced church discipline at its most subtle level.

Look around America and you will not find too many idols or pagan temples. But this should not be taken to mean we are a people free from idolatry. G. K. Chesterton said, *When people cease to worship God, they do not worship nothing, they worship anything.*

Respond to the following quotation by Richard Keyes on idolatry in the evangelical church of America:

An idol is something within creation that is inflated to function as a substitute for God. All sorts of things are potential idols, depending only on our attitudes and actions toward them. If this is so, how do we determine when something is becoming or has become an idol?

Idolatry may not involve explicit denials of God's existence or character. It may well come in the form of an overattachment to something that is, in itself, perfectly good. The crucial warning is this: As soon as our loyalty to anything leads us to disobey God, we are in danger of making it an idol. . . . [I]dols will inevitably involve self-centeredness, self-inflation, and self-deception. Idolatry begins with the counterfeiting of God, because only with a counterfeit of God can people remain the center of their lives and loyalties, autonomous architects of their futures. Something within creation will then be idolatrously inflated to fill the God-shaped hole in the individual's world. But a counterfeit is a lie, not the real thing. It must present itself through self-deception, often with images suggesting that the idol will fulfill promises for the good life.¹

Think about this statement with regard to your own life. Are you drawn into idolatry? In what areas? How can your group pray for you?

¹ *No God But God*, ed. by Os Guinness and John Seel, Mood Press, pp. 32-33.

Sermon Notes. . .

Study Twenty-Five

The Choice is Yours

Deuteronomy 29-30

Read Deuteronomy 29—30.

God's word treats God's children like grown-ups. The scriptures don't *talk down* to their readers. A life of obedience to Yahweh is meaningful, purposeful, full of wonder. Sin is detestable, full of consequences. Moses' sermons in Deuteronomy have given repeated testimony to this truth. By the time we get to Deuteronomy 30 Moses seems to sigh and say, *Okay, you have heard your options. The choice is yours. Either choose obedience and the good life God has for you, or choose disobedience which will lead you back to Egypt!*



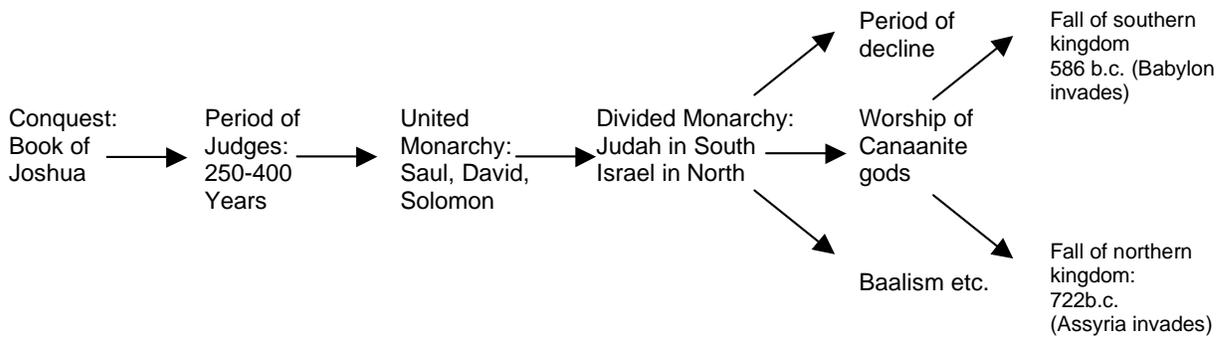
Sadly, the call for decision in these latter chapters of Deuteronomy is surrounded with prophecies of failure. After twenty-seven and a half chapters of encouragement and warnings, the second half of Deuteronomy 28 predicts dismal failure for the nation upon entering the land of promise.

And the LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer. (28:68)

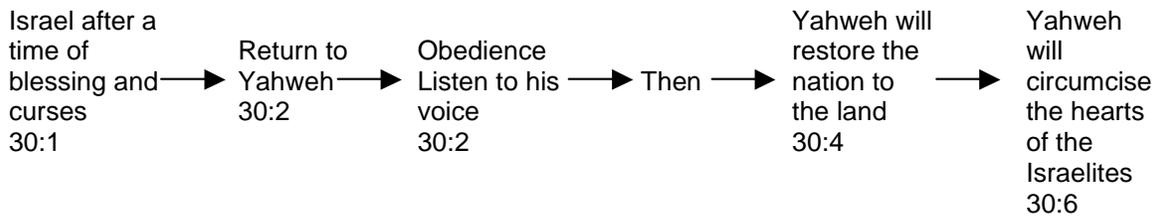
Deuteronomy 31 again predicts failure:

And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them." (31:16)

In the midst of this, Deuteronomy 30 looks at the future and present of Israel. Israel's failure to keep her half of the covenant will lead to captivity and dispersion. Consider the following timeline of Israel's history:



The chapter also predicts that Israel will be restored and the nation will return to the land. The covenant will be written on the *heart* instead of on tablets of stone. Note the wonderful progression in vss. 1-6:



Sailhamer writes of these verses:

Moses apparently has in view the promise of the “new covenant” spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Ezekiel 36:22-28. For these later prophets the hope still remained that in spite of their repeated failure, God’s promises to the fathers would ultimately be fulfilled, and sometime in the future Israel would be restored both to the land and to the covenant. (PAN, p. 473)

What does this part of Moses’ address say about his faithfulness as a leader? Think about it. Here is a man who led a grumbling people for forty years. Now, in his third farewell sermon to the people, he predicts abysmal failure. What drove Moses as a leader? What kept him going?

All leadership has its price. What keeps you going as a leader? What motivates the leadership you show in your life?

Consider the words of Yahweh to Moses in 31:14-22. How discouraging this must have been! Does the failure of Israel motivate you or discourage you with regard to taking an active role in the lives of others who need your leadership?

What does God's refusal to give up on his people do to your willingness to become involved in leading others?

30:4 contains a hypothetical particle in Hebrew translated by the word *if* (as *if* in the NIV).

Kalland explains that this particle

. . . is often used to make a very strong assertion, as in Numbers 22:18: 'Even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold, I could not do anything great or small to go beyond the command of the Lord my God.' So here from the most extreme distance, as the ancient Israelites conceived distances, out on the perimeter of the known nations, even from there the Lord would re-gather his people. (Kalland, p. 187)

30:11-14 indicate the *keep-ability* of the law. It is not too difficult (the law itself provided for failure). It is not too obscure, too far away or too heavenly minded. The phrase *Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it* is probably a reference to Moses on Mt. Sinai. The law of the new covenant (Ezekiel 36, Jeremiah 31, see above) will be written on the heart. The reference to crossing the sea to get the law may be a reference to the nation crossing the Red Sea to get to Sinai.

Do you find God's law *keep-able*? What enables you to keep God's law? What disables you from keeping God's law?

Deuteronomy is the last part of a single work, the Pentateuch. Here we come to the final chapters of the end of the Pentateuch. Think where the reader has come since Genesis 1.

Moses closes this section with several allusions to the first instance of the revelation of the will of God in the Scriptures, Adam in the Garden of Eden. His purpose is to draw a comparison between the first work of God in providing a "good land" for his people and the situation of Israel as they

prepare to enter again into God's good land. Just as God had put "the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil" before the first man and woman in the Garden (Gen 2:9b) and had commanded them not to eat from it on pain of death (2:17), that is, being separated from the "Tree of life" (Gen 3:22-24), so now Moses again presents to the people the choice of "good and evil" and "life and death" (Dt 30:16). Just as Adam and Eve were to depend on God's knowledge of "the good and the evil," so also in this covenant the people were to look to God's Torah as the pathway to the "good" and the means of regaining the "life" that was lost in the Fall (Gen 3:22-24). . . . Carefully choosing his words to reflect back on these earlier themes in the Pentateuch, Moses skillfully draws his book to a conclusion by returning to its central themes. He thus ends on the same note as he began - compare: "You will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess" (Dt 30:16) with: "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the land" (Gen 1:28). (PAN, p. 474)

Again, Moses tells the original readers of Deuteronomy that *today* is the time for decision (30:11). Think about the *today* of your faith. Are you trusting God for your daily needs? Do you see the good things in your life as a gift from him? Are you living in obedience to his will? Are you choosing *life and prosperity* or *death and destruction*?

Think about your life and your habits. What can you begin to do, or cease to do, in order to more fully *choose life*? What *life-choosing* changes can you adopt?

Harry Blamires sounds like a modern day Moses when he writes the following:

We must not exploit our Faith by advertising it as a technique for achieving earthly satisfactions. The Faith is not a recipe and not a programme. It is a Way. Recipes and programmes are made to help you to carry out earthly jobs successfully. But a Way is something you walk in. (Blamires, *The Secularist Heresy*, p. 50, Blamires', emphasis)

Let us be people who walk in the Way!

Think back over these past twenty-five weeks of our study of the Book of Moses. We have moved from creation to the plains of Moab. Along the way we have sought to find God in this panoramic book. How has God grown in your understanding? What have you learned about God that has increased your appetite for him? How will your relationship with God be affected by this glimpse?