

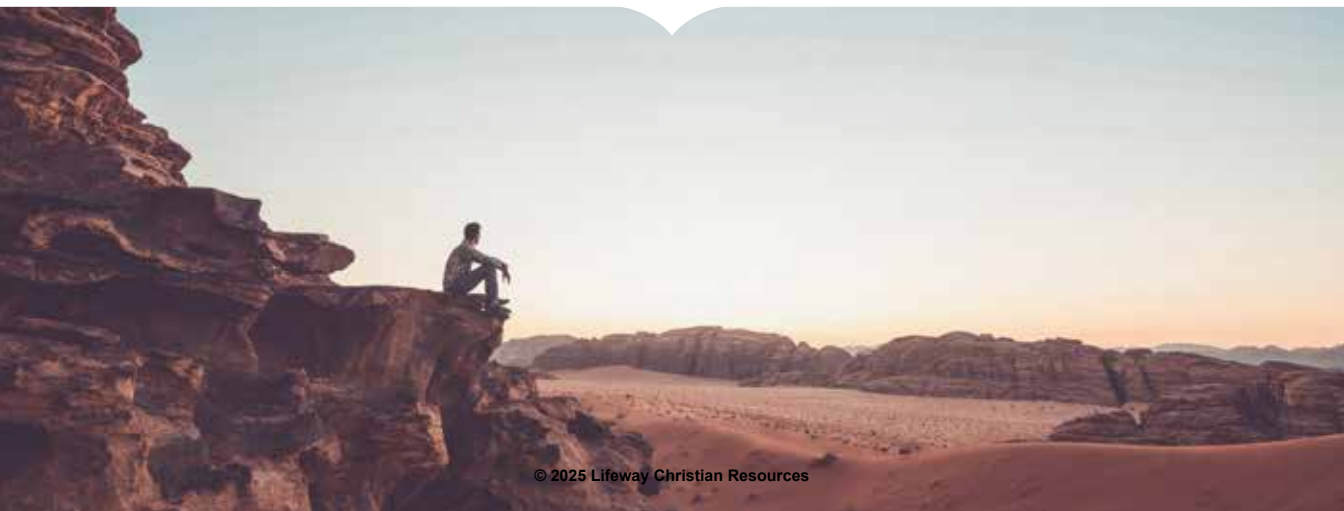


EXPLORE **THE BIBLE**
Adults

Numbers & Deuteronomy

Personal Study Guide (KJV)

Fall 2025



STEP BY STEP

In poetry and music, various metaphors have been applied to life. One song tells us “life is a highway,” a journey that never stops and takes us on any number of adventures if we will take the time to embrace the magic. Decades earlier, a poet suggested life is more like a choice between “two roads.” We’d love to try them both, but we have a choice to make—and the road we choose makes “all the difference.” For all the images used for our short time on this earth, roads and highways might resonate more than others. It’s the simple process of putting one foot in front of the other each day that keeps us going.

The ancient Israelites had started a journey on pretty solid footing. They escaped the slavery of Egypt, walked through the Red Sea, and received God’s game plan at Mount Sinai. Before long, they were on the edge of the promised land . . . until they weren’t.

Stubborn rebellion and disobedience moved them back to “Start.” Now, their journey entailed forty years of walking around in circles until an entire generation died out. But God was leading them—step by step—toward a second chance at Canaan. That’s the story of Numbers and Deuteronomy. It’s about God leading and protecting imperfect people through a wilderness as they learned to trust Him.

That’s not just the story of the Israelites. It’s our narrative as well. Rebels against our Creator, we are born into a wilderness of sin that we can’t escape on our own. But God demonstrated His love by sending His Son to die in our place, to pay the price for our sin. All we have to do is step toward Him. If you’re ready to take that step, here’s what you must do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God’s Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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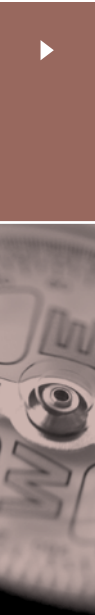
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*Evangelistic Emphasis

MEET THE WRITER



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Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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FROM THE TEAM LEADER



Steadfast faith. Time-tested devotion. We each desire a deep faith in God that enables us to persevere through the valleys and rejoice on the mountaintops of life. In the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, we get a front-row seat as the Israelites journeyed from Mount Sinai through the wilderness to the edge of the promised land. Like most expeditions, this journey was packed with unexpected events, a longer-than-expected timeline, and unforeseen challenges. The Israelites responded to these circumstances with grumbling, frustration, and disobedience to God’s commands. Upon reaching the Plains of Moab, Moses called the Israelites to commit to wholehearted devotion—following God, His commands, and His ways.

Through the twists and turns of events, God’s faithfulness to His people never faltered. He was with them. Time and again God demonstrated His loyalty to provide for and protect them as He led them to the promised land. His promise to be their God was neither forgotten nor dismissed. Despite their unfaithfulness, He remained fully faithful.

The lessons learned by the Israelites prove to be powerful truths we can cling to today. Our journeys will take unexpected turns, leaving us frustrated or unsure of what may lie ahead. Thankfully, we aren’t left on our own to navigate our experiences. Like the Israelites, we can choose to follow Him each day. We serve a God who is wholly trustworthy. He is with us!

In Him,

Amber Vaden

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Explore

Discover





Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Anak [AY nak]—patriarch of a clan of giants who were also known as Nephilim (Gen. 6:4; Num. 13:33)

Asherah [uh SHEE ruh]—Canaanite fertility goddess, considered the mother of Baal

Baalpeor [Baal-peor]—place where Israel kindled God’s judgment by embracing Baal worship (Num. 25:1-9). As a result, 24,000 people died.

Balaam [BAY luhm]—non-Israelite prophet from Mesopotamia. An ancient inscription suggests that he was well-known internationally as a “seer” who could speak for various gods. The Bible calls Balaam a “diviner” or “soothsayer” (Josh. 13:22).

Balak [BAY lak]—king of Moab who sent for Balaam to curse the Israelites (Num. 22:2-6)

Hamath [HAY math]—term used to describe the northern border of Israel (Num. 34:7-8; Josh. 13:5; 1 Kings 8:65; 2 Kings 14:25,28)

Hebron [HEE bruhn]—ancient city in the hill country of Judah where Abram sojourned (Gen. 13:18) and purchased a cave to bury Sarah. When Moses sent the twelve spies into Canaan, the tribe of Anak lived in Hebron (Num. 13:22).

Horeb [HOH reb]—a synonym for Mount Sinai. Some see “Horeb” referring to a region, while “Sinai” refers to the mountain.

Jeshurun [jih SHOO ruhn]—another name for Israel (Deut. 32:15; 33:5,26; Isa. 44:2)

Meribah [MEHR ih buh]—rocky desert between Kadeshbarnea and the Dead Sea in southern Canaan. It later became part of Judah (Num. 34:3-4; Josh. 15:1,3).

Moab [MOH ab]—region south of Jericho on the west side of the Jordan River. Israel camped in this area (Num. 22:1) until after the death of Moses (Deut. 34:1) when Joshua led Israel across the river.

Negev [NEH gehv]—the root word means “to be dry,” the basic meaning is “south”; region where the Amalekites lived (Num. 13:29)

Paran [PAY ruhn]—wilderness area north of Sinai where Israel camped after leaving Sinai; from there Moses sent out the twelve spies (Num. 13:3,26)

Wilderness of Zin—desert region stretching from Kadeshbarnea to the Dead Sea; formed part of the southern border of Canaan and later Judah (Num. 34:3-4)

BIBLE READING PLAN



SEPTEMBER

- ☐ 1. Numbers 1:1-54
- ☐ 2. Numbers 2:1-34
- ☐ 3. Numbers 3:1-13
- ☐ 4. Numbers 3:14-39
- ☐ 5. Numbers 3:40-51
- ☐ 6. Numbers 4:1-20
- ☐ 7. Numbers 4:21-33
- ☐ 8. Numbers 4:34-49
- ☐ 9. Numbers 5:1-31
- ☐ 10. Numbers 6:1-27
- ☐ 11. Numbers 7:1-23
- ☐ 12. Numbers 7:24-47
- ☐ 13. Numbers 7:48-71
- ☐ 14. Numbers 7:72-89
- ☐ 15. Numbers 8:1-26
- ☐ 16. Numbers 9:1-23
- ☐ 17. Numbers 10:1-36
- ☐ 18. Numbers 11:1-15
- ☐ 19. Numbers 11:16-35
- ☐ 20. Numbers 12:1-16
- ☐ 21. Numbers 13:1-33
- ☐ 22. Numbers 14:1-25
- ☐ 23. Numbers 14:26-45
- ☐ 24. Numbers 15:1-26
- ☐ 25. Numbers 15:27-41
- ☐ 26. Numbers 16:1-30
- ☐ 27. Numbers 16:31-50
- ☐ 28. Numbers 17:1-13
- ☐ 29. Numbers 18:1-32
- ☐ 30. Numbers 19:1-22

OCTOBER

- ☐ 1. Numbers 20:1-29
- ☐ 2. Numbers 21:1-35
- ☐ 3. Numbers 22:1-41
- ☐ 4. Numbers 23:1-30
- ☐ 5. Numbers 24:1-25
- ☐ 6. Numbers 25:1-18
- ☐ 7. Numbers 26:1-27
- ☐ 8. Numbers 26:28-65
- ☐ 9. Numbers 27:1-23
- ☐ 10. Numbers 28:1-31
- ☐ 11. Numbers 29:1-19
- ☐ 12. Numbers 29:20-40
- ☐ 13. Numbers 30:1-16
- ☐ 14. Numbers 31:1-30
- ☐ 15. Numbers 31:31-54
- ☐ 16. Numbers 32:1-19
- ☐ 17. Numbers 32:20-42
- ☐ 18. Numbers 33:1-56
- ☐ 19. Numbers 34:1-29
- ☐ 20. Numbers 35:1-34
- ☐ 21. Numbers 36:1-13
- ☐ 22. Deuteronomy 1:1-21
- ☐ 23. Deuteronomy 1:22-46
- ☐ 24. Deuteronomy 2:1-23
- ☐ 25. Deuteronomy 2:24-37
- ☐ 26. Deuteronomy 3:1-29
- ☐ 27. Deuteronomy 4:1-24
- ☐ 28. Deuteronomy 4:25-49
- ☐ 29. Deuteronomy 5:1-33
- ☐ 30. Deuteronomy 6:1-25
- ☐ 31. Deuteronomy 7:1-26

NOVEMBER

- ☐ 1. Deuteronomy 8:1-20
- ☐ 2. Deuteronomy 9:1-29
- ☐ 3. Deuteronomy 10:1-22
- ☐ 4. Deuteronomy 11:1-32
- ☐ 5. Deuteronomy 12:1-32
- ☐ 6. Deuteronomy 13:1-18
- ☐ 7. Deuteronomy 14:1-29
- ☐ 8. Deuteronomy 15:1-23
- ☐ 9. Deuteronomy 16:1-22
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- ☐ 12. Deuteronomy 19:1-21
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- ☐ 25. Deuteronomy 30:1-20
- ☐ 26. Deuteronomy 31:1-30
- ☐ 27. Deuteronomy 32:1-27
- ☐ 28. Deuteronomy 32:28-52
- ☐ 29. Deuteronomy 33:1-29
- ☐ 30. Deuteronomy 34:1-12

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND



WRITER

Moses is credited with writing the first five books of the Bible (Deut. 31:9; Josh. 1:7-8; Mark 12:26; John 5:46; 2 Cor. 3:15). These five books are known collectively as the Pentateuch, a word derived from the Greek terms *penta*, meaning “five,” and *teuchos*, meaning “container.” Less formally, many people refer to the five as “the books of Moses” or the Torah, a Hebrew word meaning “law” or “teachings.”

SETTING AND DATING

The books of Numbers and Deuteronomy were written after the Israelites left Egypt but before they entered Canaan. Numbers focuses on events that occurred before God’s people left Mount Sinai, as they traveled between Sinai and Canaan and while they were on the Plains of Moab, just east of the Jordan River and ancient Jericho. Thus, the events in Numbers began about a year after the Jews had left Egypt and continued for the next thirty-nine years (1445–1407 BC). All events in the book of Deuteronomy occurred while the Hebrews were on the Plains of Moab, prior to their entering Canaan. This would have been in 1406 BC.

THEMES

The book of Numbers is about organizing and preparing God’s people to enter the promised land. It records Moses conducting two censuses of the Israelites, one when they were at Sinai and the second thirty-nine years later, while the people were on the Plains of Moab waiting to enter Canaan. It also records Moses organizing the levitical priesthood, the tribal units for travel, and the process for worshiping and offering sacrifices to God in worship.

Deuteronomy contains primarily three long speeches or messages Moses delivered to God’s people. Moses called the people to live obediently to God’s instruction and warned of what would happen when the people erred. Deuteronomy contains some history; the focus, though, is on living as God’s people in the land of Canaan. This is reflected in a phrase that Deuteronomy uses regularly: “the LORD your God.” This appears 400 times in Scripture; 392 are in the Old Testament. Of those 392, 240 are in the book of Deuteronomy. In the book, God declared many times that no other so-called god was like Him. None were worthy of worship. He, Yahweh, deserved to be their God exclusively. God was remaining true to His covenant with His people; He wanted and expected the same from them.

OUTLINE



NUMBERS

- I. First Census and Consecration of Israel at Sinai (Num. 1:1–6:27)
- II. Preparation for Departure to the Promised Land (Num. 7:1–10:36)
- III. From Mount Sinai to Kadesh (Num. 11:1–15:41)
- IV. Rebellion Against Aaron’s Priesthood (Num. 16:1–19:22)
- V. From Kadesh to the Plains of Moab (Num. 20:1–25:18)
- VI. Second Census and Preparation of the New Generation (Num. 26:1–30:16)
- VII. Preparation for Entering the Promised Land (Num. 31:1–36:13)

DEUTERONOMY

- I. First Address of Moses (Deut. 1:1–4:49)
- II. Second Address of Moses (Deut. 5:1–26:19)
- II. Third Address of Moses (Deut. 27:1–30:20)
- III. Final Days of Moses (Deut. 31:1–34:12)



The Journey

GOD GIVES DAILY GUIDANCE TO HIS PEOPLE.

NUMBERS 9:15-23

Many of us rely on GPS navigation when going someplace new. Not only will it tell us to turn left in 1.2 miles, but it will also tell us what time we can expect to arrive. GPS systems weren't as reliable when they first came out. They were programmed at the factory and didn't automatically update with the most up-to-date information. They didn't know about new roads or routes. Thus, sometimes they gave wrong information, and people got lost.

 **Think of a time when bad directions led you somewhere unexpected. How can getting just one detail wrong disrupt our travels?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

NUMBERS 1:1-10:10

The book of Exodus divides into three parts, which are separated by geographic location. The first (chaps. 1-12) records events in Egypt. The second (chaps. 13-18) describes Israel’s trek from Egypt to Sinai. The third part (chaps. 19-40) details events at Sinai. Similarly, the book of Numbers presents three primary scenes, and geographic locations identify each. The first part (chaps. 1-10) occurred while the Israelites were still at Mount Sinai. The second describes their journey from Sinai toward Canaan (chaps. 11-25). The final section (chaps. 26-36) describes God’s people on the Plains of Moab—across the Jordan River from Jericho. This week’s study occurred while they were camped at Mount Sinai.

We often associate Mount Sinai with Moses receiving the Ten Commandments and the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. Another dramatic event, though, occurred there earlier. God spoke to Moses from a burning bush at Sinai (Ex. 3:1-5). The text refers to Sinai by another name, Horeb (3:1), which means “Desolation.” Certainly, it was (and is) desolate. As the book of Numbers opens, the Israelites had been gone from Egypt for a little over a year and had been in this desolate place for just over a month (40:2; Num. 1:1).

One major theme in the opening chapters of Numbers involves being “consecrated.” It means to be set aside as holy or sacred, emphasizing keeping something pure. The recurring emphasis on being consecrated underscores God’s setting aside His people to be unlike all others. He wanted them to be holy unto Him and devoted wholly unto Him. They were to serve, honor, and obey Him alone. The question of Numbers is how they would do in fulfilling that intent. In the opening chapters, they did well.

 **Read Numbers 9:15-23 in your Bible and underline the phrase “at the commandment of the LORD” each time it appears. In what ways did the people demonstrate their faith in God?**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GOD'S PRESENCE (NUM. 9:15-16)

¹⁵ And on the day that the tabernacle was reared up the cloud covered the tabernacle, namely, the tent of the testimony: and at even there was upon the tabernacle as it were the appearance of fire, until the morning. ¹⁶ So it was always: the cloud covered it by day, and the appearance of fire by night.

VERSES 15-16

Verse 15 serves as an introduction to the next part of the narrative—God's people would soon begin their travels from Sinai toward Canaan. The verse also echoes an event Scripture has mentioned twice before (Ex. 40:2; Num. 7:1). The people erected the *tabernacle*. This is a retelling of that same event.

The tabernacle was a movable, tent-like structure. It consisted of two primary parts. The outer courtyard measured 150 by 75 feet. Surrounding the courtyard were sixty wooden posts overlaid with bronze. Curtains hung between the posts. Inside the courtyard stood another tented structure. Whereas the courtyard was open to the sky, this smaller structure was completely covered with skins and cloth. This structure was the tabernacle itself; it measured 45 by 15 feet. Inside this covered structure were two rooms. The larger room, which one entered first, measured 15 by 30 feet and was known as the Holy Area. It contained the table of showbread, the lampstand (or “menorah”), and the altar of incense (Ex. 25:23-30,31-40; 30:1-10). The smaller room, measuring 15 by 15 feet, was the Most Holy Area (or “Holy of Holies” in some translations). It contained the ark of the covenant (25:10-22).

The Hebrew word translated *tabernacle* means “dwelling place.” Thus, the tabernacle was a visual reminder of God's presence with His people. In giving Moses instructions about the tabernacle's design and furnishings, God said, “And let them [the Israelites] make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (25:8).

The *tent of the testimony* points specifically to the small, enclosed tabernacle structure that housed the ark of the covenant. Inside the ark were the tablets on which God had written the Ten Commandments. Exodus refers to these as “two tables of testimony” (31:18; see 25:21-22). The “tables of testimony” likely led to the tabernacle being called the *tent of the testimony*.

The **cloud** by day and the **fire** by night covered the Holy Area and the Most Holy Area. The Hebrew verb tense for **covered** indicates a single act. In other words, the tabernacle was covered and remained covered. The word **always** in verse 16 means without interruption. The fire and cloud remained in place and never stopped being there.

This fire and cloud had guided God's people as they approached the Red Sea. At the sea, it stood between them and the Egyptian army (13:21-22; 14:19-20). There, it guarded them from danger. Here, the fire and cloud represented God's presence with His people. The fire and cloud would serve again as a guide as God's people began their journey toward Canaan.



God made His presence with His people visible. How do you think the visible evidence of His presence made the Israelites feel?



How can you be assured of God's presence in your life? What are some ways you benefit from His presence?

FAITHFUL DIRECTION (NUM. 9:17-21)

¹⁷ **And when the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, then after that the children of Israel journeyed: and in the place where the cloud abode, there the children of Israel pitched their tents. ¹⁸ At the commandment of the LORD the children of Israel journeyed, and at the commandment of the LORD they pitched: as long as the cloud abode upon the tabernacle they rested in their tents. ¹⁹ And when the cloud tarried long upon the tabernacle many days, then the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD, and journeyed not. ²⁰ And so it was, when the cloud was a few days upon the tabernacle; according to the commandment of the LORD they abode in their tents, and according to the commandment of the LORD they journeyed. ²¹ And so it was, when the cloud abode from even unto the**

morning, and that the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they journeyed: whether it was by day or by night that the cloud was taken up, they journeyed.

VERSES 17-18

Exodus records God's instituting Passover, delivering the Israelites from Egypt, and leading them to a new land. Numbers 9 somewhat echoes those events in three ways. First, the Israelites initially celebrated Passover at God's directive while they were still in the house of Pharaoh. When they celebrated it a second time, they again did it at the Lord's directive (Num. 9:1-5). Second, He made provisions for those who would have been deemed unacceptable. In Egypt, He had the non-Israelite men circumcised before they could receive Passover. In chapter 9, God made provision for some men who had handled a corpse and were thus ritualistically unclean (vv. 6-12). Afterward, they could receive Passover. Third, both stories tell of God's guiding and guarding His people with the cloud and fire.

The passage does not describe how ***the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle***. It does not explain how long it took for the cloud to reposition itself or how far it hovered above the tent. These details, thus, were not the emphasis or focus of what was happening. The dual focus was on God's leading and His people's following.

Beginning in verse 17 and continuing through the end of the chapter, the text has a poetic and rhythmic quality. Some biblical scholars believe verses 17-23 may have been a song the Israelites sang as they journeyed. If so, that explains the repetitive nature of this "Song of the Journey."

Two verbs in verse 18 describe what the Israelites did: they ***journeyed***, and they ***rested in their tents***. We sometimes forget that hundreds of thousands of people were involved in the exodus. Over six hundred thousand men left Egypt; the number swells exponentially when we add women and children (Ex. 12:37; Num. 1:45-46).

Earlier, the Lord laid out an arrangement for the tribal clans and their position around the tabernacle (Num. 2:1-33). Had He not, confusion and disorder would have ruled the day. Whether the people were camping or setting out for the next leg of the journey, they would have otherwise resembled a disorganized mob.

The first to set out were the Levites. They camped closest to the tabernacle and were responsible for its set-up and transport. Concerning the tabernacle, the ark of the covenant was always out front as the people relocated. Next was the tabernacle structure itself—with its curtains, posts, tent pegs, and ropes. Last in the

procession of the Levites were the furnishings for the tabernacle. This included the utensils they used for presenting the incense, grain, and animal sacrifices.

VERSES 19-21

The final chapter of Exodus described the setting up of the tabernacle and its furnishings for the first time. The priests were in place with their sacred garments. The instruments and people involved were anointed according to the Lord's command. The structure would have been impressive with its fabrics, woods, and metals. Nothing, though, could compare to what brought its ultimate glory. "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:34). The cloud was the visible manifestation of God's presence with His people.

Many times we wait without knowing why.

At times, the cloud stayed in place for *many days*. Other times, the wait lasted *a few days*. These verses are a reminder that the Lord sometimes compels us to wait. He may call us to sit still—which can be difficult to do. Many times we wait without knowing why.

Verse 21 provides a contrast to verses 19-20. Rather than the tabernacle remaining in place for multiple days, at times the sacred space was to be in place only overnight. When the cloud lifted the next morning, the people resumed their journey.

This description raises the question of how quickly the tabernacle could be set up. Exodus 40 provides the answer: "On the first day of the first month shalt thou set up the tabernacle" (Ex. 40:2). We get an echo of this detail in Numbers 9:15, "On the day that the tabernacle was reared up. . . ." This was possible because of the number of people involved. Over 8,500 Levites were responsible for the tabernacle, and each had a task for which he was responsible (Num. 4:46-49). This reminds us that God is a God of order, not chaos and confusion.



Have there been times when God made you wait for an answer or solution from Him? How did that experience affect your faith?

ACTIVE OBEDIENCE (NUM. 9:22-23)

²² Or whether it were two days, or a month, or a year, that the cloud tarried upon the tabernacle, remaining thereon, the children of Israel abode in their tents, and journeyed not: but when it was taken up, they journeyed. ²³ At the commandment of the LORD they rested in the tents, and at the commandment of the LORD they journeyed: they kept the charge of the LORD, at the commandment of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

VERSES 22-23

The previous verse spoke of the tabernacle being in place only overnight. Verse 22 describes the opposite side of the pendulum's swing. The phrase *two days, or a month, or a year* is all-inclusive. It covers any length of time the cloud remained in place.

The phrase, *when it was taken up, they journeyed*, conveys two ideas—first, an abrupt action. The people followed the Lord's directive promptly. Some commentators believe Moses assigned people to watch the cloud day and night. This would have ensured the Israelites did not miss the Lord's lead. Second, the phrase emphasizes that God's people followed His lead decisively and consistently. Nowhere do we get a hint that the phrase would ever be followed with, "except when. . . ." Because of the way the Lord led the Israelites, they knew each day where they were supposed to be.



KEY DOCTRINE: God

To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.
(See Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 1 John 5:3.)

With a crescendo, verse 23 reaches the finale of the "Song of the Journey." It uses repetition to strengthen the impact of the message. Three times this verse speaks about *the commandment of the LORD*. This makes a total of seven times God's command is mentioned in this "Song of the Journey" (see also vv. 18,20). The literal translation of the Hebrew phrase is, "at the mouth of the LORD." For a second time, the phrase *the charge of the LORD* appears—making yet another reference to God's command (also v. 19). Thus, the emphasis of this verse is on the Lord's directive. The question is how the people responded. Two verbs describe their response: they either *rested in the tents* or *journeyed*. Each of these verbs has been used multiple times in the preceding verses.

The dual emphasis of verse 23 is on the Lord’s directive and the people’s obedience. The overall message is clear. They would not move forward apart from God’s direction. They were dependent on Him for leadership and guidance. When He led, they obeyed.

***They would not move forward
apart from God’s direction.***

Finally, verse 23 echoes two statements that had been said of Moses earlier. Exodus 33:11 says, “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” Numbers 1:54 says, “And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they.” In this final verse of the “Song of the Journey,” the people carried out God’s directive He had given ***by the hand of Moses***. They knew that in obeying Moses’s words, they were obeying God’s commands.

 **Why does it matter that we follow the Lord’s lead?
Why do we sometimes delay doing what He wants us to do?**




BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about a biblical concept.*

Numbers 9:15-23 describes how God led His people through the wilderness. Read the article “Pillar of Fire and Cloud” in a Bible dictionary and record any new insights. Reflect on these questions: How does God primarily guide His people today? What is the relationship between Bible reading and prayer and God’s guidance? How can you be sure you are following God’s will for your life?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can be assured that God is with them and can provide trustworthy guidance.
- + Following God’s guidance will require believers to act on His instruction.
- + Following God in faith means that we act on His timeframe and not our own.

 **How might the Lord be leading your Bible study group or church into a new ministry? What can the group or church do to follow His lead?**

 **Examine your own life. How are you doing at following the Lord’s lead? How can you become more attentive to His guidance?**



Memorize Numbers 9:23.

Prayer Needs



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide
Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter’s Bible passages.



Provision

GOD HEARS HIS LEADERS AND SUSTAINS THEM
FOR HIS PURPOSES.

NUMBERS 11:4-17

Many of us know what it's like to have a job and find out we don't have the tools we need. We start to wash clothes and discover the washing machine isn't working. Maybe we are supposed to drive for the carpool, and the car won't start. We need to turn in an assignment in the morning and realize at midnight that the printer is out of ink. We discover that the bolt we're trying to remove requires a metric socket wrench that we don't have.



When has some difficulty kept you from doing what you needed to do? How did you feel when someone came through with a solution?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

NUMBERS 10:11-12:16


The Israelites had been camped at the base of Mount Sinai for ten months and nineteen days (Num. 10:11-13). This was not a time of idle inactivity. Moses received the Ten Commandments and the law, built and consecrated the tabernacle, established the priestly orders, organized the Israelites by tribes for travel and conquest, conducted a military census, and celebrated Passover for the second time. The Israelites remained at Mount Sinai for about a month after celebrating the Passover.

The first ten chapters of Numbers have been free of complaints and conflicts. This changes in chapter 11, which begins a cycle of rebellions. The first complaint or rebellion was due to the general hardship of the travel (11:1-3).

This first rebellion established a pattern. The cycle of behavior had four stages. First, the people rebelled or sinned against God. Second, God punished His people. Third, the people cried out to God. Fourth, God forgave and restored His people. We see this progression of behavior not only in the book of Numbers but also in the Israelites' ongoing relationship with God.

Before reaching Sinai, the Israelites complained because they needed food and water (Ex. 16; 17:1-7). God responded by providing what the people needed. The complaint in Numbers 11 is a lack of food. The Israelites would later rebel because they needed water (Num. 20:2-13). In both instances, God responded with judgment.

Why did God bring judgment rather than simply supply the need? Mount Sinai had changed everything. There, God had revealed Himself and His power to the Israelites. He had established a covenantal relationship with them. He wanted them to trust Him. God's people had some lessons to learn. In today's story, class was about to begin.

 **As you read through Numbers 11:4-17, underscore each time Moses used the pronouns “I” or “me.” When Moses made these statements, what was he revealing about his concern—and himself?**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DISSATISFIED FOLLOWERS (NUM. 11:4-9)

⁴ And the mixt multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? ⁵ We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick: ⁶ But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes. ⁷ And the manna was as coriander seed, and the colour thereof as the colour of bdellium. ⁸ And the people went about, and gathered it, and ground it in mills, or beat it in a mortar, and baked it in pans, and made cakes of it: and the taste of it was as the taste of fresh oil. ⁹ And when the dew fell upon the camp in the night, the manna fell upon it.

VERSES 4-6

Verse 4 refers to *the mixt multitude that was among them*. Seldom does such a colorful word appear only once in Scripture. Some translations render the noun as “rabble” and others as “riff-raff.” It refers to a mixed crowd. These were non-Jews who had left Egypt with Moses and the Israelites (Ex. 12:37-38; Josh. 8:35). They *fell a lusting*. The Hebrew underscores the intensity of their yearning; it reads, “they were craving a craving.”

The riffraff’s complaints stirred the Israelites. They *again* began to weep, or as some translations have it, began to wail or complain. The earlier complaining likely refers to Exodus 16:1-3. There, the Israelites grumbled to Moses and Aaron: “ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (v. 3). Now, they wanted *flesh*. This complaint ignores that they had brought flocks and herds with them (Ex. 12:32,38).

The Hebrews stayed in Egypt for over 400 years—until the exodus. There, crops were bountiful and *fish* were abundant. Saying they ate *freely*, though, indicates the people were minimizing or forgetting the strain of their slave labor back in Egypt.

The vegetables listed were common in the Egyptians’ daily diet, even among the poor. Growing them, though, required a lot of water. Arid conditions meant the Israelites were now doing without these dietary staples. The phrase *but now* showed they were

romanticizing their lives back in Egypt as if it had been blissful; *but now*, this was unbearable.



What blessings from God might we tend to overlook?

VERSES 7-9

The people complained that their only food was *manna*. God began providing manna for His people as they traveled between the Red Sea and Mount Sinai—about a month after they left Egypt. They already were coming to loathe this food, though it came without cost or labor. They were turning up their noses at what God was supplying.

Verses 8-9 state how the people gathered and prepared the manna. It came with the evening dew. “When the dew that lay was gone up, behold, upon the face of the wilderness there lay a small round thing, as small as the hoar frost on the ground” (Ex. 16:14). Unlike the fish in Egypt, which the people had to work to catch, this manna was free and abundant.

After picking up the flakes in the morning, people would grind them. They might use a pair of disk-shaped stones, each with a hole in the middle. The person would lay the bottom disk flat, cover it with seeds, and then put the other disk on top. A dowel in the center holes would keep the stones aligned as the person rotated the upper disk. Another option was to use a mortar and pestle, which was more common than stones. The manna softened as it boiled in water. While still moist, the cook would roll it into a ball, flatten it, and cook it in an oven.

Moses described the manna as “the bread which the LORD hath given you to eat” (16:15). Jesus compared Himself to manna. He is the living bread that came down from heaven, and whoever eats of His bread will never be hungry but will live forever (John 6:35,51).



What does God’s providing manna to His people reveal about Him?

FRUSTRATED LEADER (NUM. 11:10-15)

¹⁰ Then Moses heard the people weep throughout their families, every man in the door of his tent: and the anger of the LORD was kindled greatly; Moses also was displeased. ¹¹ And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? ¹² Have I conceived all this people? have I begotten them, that thou shouldest say unto me, Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing father beareth the sucking child, unto the land which thou swarest unto their fathers? ¹³ Whence should I have flesh to give unto all this people? for they weep unto me, saying, Give us flesh, that we may eat. ¹⁴ I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me. ¹⁵ And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

VERSE 10

The people were weeping in their tents. This verse gives the impression that complaints rang from everyone—***throughout their families***. Moses could not escape it.

The people's complaints made God angry. The Hebrew word describes someone burning or being ablaze with fury. The same word occurs in verse 1 of this chapter, describing the Lord's reaction to the people's complaints: "his anger was kindled." Our word "incensed" conveys the same idea.

The word ***also*** is significant; it connects Moses's reaction to God's. The Lord burned with righteous indignation. Moses, though, was exasperated and had reached his boiling point. As one commentary writer said, "Just as the people are sick and tired of manna, Moses is sick and tired of them!"¹



Why do you think God was angry at His people?

VERSES 11-13

Moses previously interceded for the Israelites and served as their advocate when God became angry (Num. 11:1-3). Not this time; Moses was angry with the people.

Moses asked **wherefore** (why). This wasn't a request for information but an accusation—**wherefore hast thou . . . wherefore have I not . . . ?** The questions reveal Moses's frustration and despair.

Moses reminded God that he had not brought this on himself. In the Hebrew of verse 12, the "I" comes first, which places it in the emphatic position. In English, we might say, "I, did I conceive all these people?" It was a sarcastic yet rhetorical question, and the implied answer was a resounding NO! God previously told Moses "Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Ex. 4:22, emphasis added).

In verse 13, Moses moved to the pragmatic question. Where would he get meat to feed the people? He later questioned whether slaughtering flocks and herds or catching all the fish in the sea would be enough food (Num. 11:22).

Even those with the strongest faith can still become frustrated and feel defeated.

VERSES 14-15

Moses declared in effect, "I can't do it; it's too much!" For a fourth time, he referred to the Israelites as **all this people**. The phrase drips with irritation and resentment. Moses's words reveal he was emotionally and physically worn out. The responsibility and burden were too great for him to bear by himself.

Moses had expressed feelings of inadequacy when he first encountered God at the burning bush (Ex. 3:11; 4:1,10). There, he pleaded, "O my LORD, send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send" (Ex. 4:13). Now, having reached his breaking point, Moses uttered a more desperate plea: **kill me**. His current frustration and feelings of helplessness eclipsed all the blessings God had previously supplied. His words reveal he blamed God for his plight.

Moses was not alone in bemoaning his life. Job cursed the day of his birth (Job 3:1-13). Likewise, the prophet Jeremiah said, "Cursed be the day wherein I was born" (Jer. 20:14). After a great victory over the prophets of Baal, Elijah fled the threats of Jezebel and prayed for God to take his life (1 Kings 19:1-4). Even those with the strongest faith can still become frustrated and feel defeated. God, though, was not finished with any of these men.



We often applaud Moses for his great faith and obedience. What does verse 15 reveal about Moses? How do you handle frustration and the feeling of defeat?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Holy Spirit*

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God, fully divine. (See Genesis 1:3; Exodus 31:2-3.)

GRACIOUS PROVISION (NUM. 11:16-17)

¹⁶ **And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee. ¹⁷ And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.**

VERSES 16-17

The Lord responded to Moses's anger with grace. He understood what was at the core of Moses's diatribe—Moses felt inadequate for the task. God declared He would meet Moses at his point of need.

Earlier, seventy elders had joined Moses plus Aaron and two of his sons for a covenant ratification ceremony at Mount Sinai (Ex. 24:1-11). These **seventy** were not necessarily the same men as those at Mount Sinai. In the New Testament era, the Sanhedrin was comprised of seventy men. The number was likely based on the seventy elders and officers Moses chose here.


The seventy were to approach **the tabernacle**. God would speak with Moses there and reveal His will to him. The seventy would hear God speak to Moses.

The Spirit on Moses was the Spirit of God. Moses later said, "Would God that all the LORD's people were prophets, and that the LORD would put *his* spirit upon them!" (Num. 11:29, emphasis added). Lighting a candle from the flame of an oil lamp's wick does not lessen the oil lamp's glow. In the same way, God's putting some

of the same Spirit that Moses had onto the seventy did not lessen Moses’s portion of the Spirit. This was the Holy Spirit, who would enable them to carry out their God-given tasks.

God’s response in this verse echoes Moses’s earlier complaints. In verse 11, Moses had asked why God “layest the *burden* of all this people upon me” (emphasis added). Here, God promised him that the seventy would help bear the *burden*. In verse 14, Moses complained, “I am not able to *bear* all this people alone” (emphasis added). Verse 17 uses the same Hebrew verb when God said, *thou bear it not thyself alone*. God never rebuked Moses for his tirade. Instead, He graciously provided what Moses needed.

 **What did God reveal about His character by supplying Moses’s specific and stated needs?**





BIBLE SKILL: *Look for the prayer prompts in a passage of Scripture.*


Numbers 11 describes how God sustained Moses by bringing alongside him seventy of Israel’s elders (vv. 16-30). He also provided quail for the people (vv. 31-34). What does this reveal about God? How should you respond to what it reveals? How does it prompt you to pray? Consider the following suggestions: Give thanks for the ways God has provided for you in the past. Express your willingness to allow Him to meet your needs in the way He chooses, rather than merely asking Him to work in the ways you desire.

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should be careful not to take God’s provisions for granted.
- + We can always take our concerns to God, telling Him what we need.
- + We can trust God to provide what we need to carry out the tasks He gives us.

 **What actions can your Bible study group take to help each other feel free to share their burdens and concerns openly—with God and with one another? What can you do to help foster honest dialogue?**

 **Even when we can see how God met our needs in the past, what causes us to panic when we face a new crisis? What can you do to help you remember God’s past blessings?**



Memorize Numbers 11:23.

Prayer Needs

1. Roy Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 581.




The Land

GOD REQUIRES OBEDIENT FAITH IN THE FACE OF FEAR.

NUMBERS 13:17-31

Have you ever noticed how a project grows? You decide to clean out the backyard shed, the garage, or the closet. You are going to put down new liner paper in the kitchen cabinets. You are going to paint the kids’ bedroom. You figure out how long it will take and can visualize what it will look like when you’re finished. You begin—excited. But about halfway through, you say, “What was I thinking? This is a lot more complicated than I thought it would be.”


 **What was the last project you had that was more complicated than you thought it would be? How did you handle it?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

NUMBERS 13:1-33

Moses led God’s people out of Egyptian bondage. They passed through the Red Sea and arrived at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula at Mount Sinai. They stayed there for about a year while Moses met with God on the mountain. Afterward, they traveled up the eastern side of the Sinai Peninsula. To their right was the body of water known today as the Gulf of Aqaba. It separates the peninsula from Saudi Arabia. They came to the northern end of the Gulf of Aqaba and continued northward through the Wilderness of Paran. In this context, “wilderness” means a vast desert land that is uninhabitable due to a lack of water and resources. The Israelites’ trek continued to Kadesh (also called “Kadeshbarnea”). This oasis was between the wilderness of Paran and the wilderness of Zin. Moses and the Israelites remained in Kadesh while the spies went into Canaan, the land God promised to Abraham.

The climate and resources of Canaan were dramatically different from what the people had experienced before. A huge issue was water. Egypt had a major river system that fed canals and irrigation fields, making food production possible. Not so with Canaan. The Canaanites depended on rainy periods to provide growing seasons for crops. The promised land had (and still has) essentially two seasons. Winter is cool and rainy. Summer, which lasts from mid-May to mid-October, is hot and receives no rain. The “early rains” break the annual drought and allow the farmers to work the fields and plant crops. The rain continues. About seventy percent of the annual rain falls from December to February. The “latter rains” come in March and April. In late summer the wheat and barley would have already been harvested. Workers would be harvesting grapes, figs, and almonds; olives would be visible on the trees but not yet ready for gathering.

 **As you read Numbers 13:17-31, notice the two contrasting reports of the spies when they returned. What do you think made the difference in the way they viewed the situation?**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE TASK OUTLINED (NUM. 13:17-20)

¹⁷ And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain: ¹⁸ And see the land, what it is, and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many; ¹⁹ And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds; ²⁰ And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes.

VERSES 17-20

Moses explained that the spies were to travel north from the wilderness of Paran. They would come to the southern edge of the •Negev Desert. The root word of **southward** means “to be dry,” but the basic meaning is “south.” They were to continue northward into Canaan. This was the land God promised Abraham (Gen. 17:8). The **mountain** was a central spine that ran north and south through modern-day Israel, Lebanon, and Syria.

Moses revealed his two primary concerns: the land and the people. What was the land like typographically? What challenges would the people face? He would ask more specific questions about the land in the following verses.

Concerning the people, Moses wanted to know how densely the land was populated and how the people looked militarily—were they **strong or weak**? He wanted to know if the inhabitants were capable of defending their cities and homes. Regarding the Canaanites’ defense capabilities, Moses wanted to know how many people the Israelites would face. Were they **few or many**?

Moses continued his questions, using the same pattern: inquiring about the land first and people second. He asked if the land was **good or bad**. This may seem like an odd detail to include. Certainly, Moses knew the land was good. God told him at the burning bush, “I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey” (Ex. 3:8). Did asking for this detail show a lack of faith on Moses’s part?

Was he asking if God could be trusted to keep His word? No, the exact opposite. This detail would prove that God had fulfilled His promise.

Next, Moses asked about cities. Were they fortified, meaning walled? The answer would make a difference in what the Israelite military would face.

Moses continued, asking first about the land—was it *fat or lean*? For months, the people had survived on the water and manna God provided. The Israelites had protested the monotony of their diet (Num. 11:4-6). If the land were fertile, it would supply enough food to support the Israelite military and their families. That would mean a variety of foods and no more manna! The trees Moses mentioned would have been fruit-bearing. Bringing back fruit would prove what the land was like, whether it was fertile or not.

The instruction to *be ye of good courage* can also mean “be determined.” This meant the spies had to be single-minded and tenacious about their task. Courage would be essential—especially if the Canaanites were strong and their cities were fortified.



What do you imagine the spies were thinking while Moses explained the information he wanted them to bring back? What would have caused them to be afraid?



How do you typically approach a God-given task? What concerns or apprehensions arise?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God is all powerful, all knowing, all loving, and all wise.
(See 2 Timothy 1:7; 2 Peter 1:3.)

THE LAND ASSESSED (NUM. 13:21-25)

²¹ So they went up, and searched the land from the wilderness of Zin unto Rehob, as men come to Hamath. ²² And they

ascended by the south, and came unto Hebron; where Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the children of Anak, were. (Now Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.)²³ And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.²⁴ The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence.²⁵ And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

VERSES 21-22

The word **so** links the instructions above with the actions described next. They **went up** and **searched the land**, exactly as Moses had told them to do (v. 17, also v. 2).

The **•wilderness of Zin** was on the northeastern part of the Sinai Peninsula and southeast of Beer-sheba. It was the southern boundary for Canaan. Receiving less than two inches of rain annually, the wilderness of Zin was uninhabitable and impossible to cultivate agriculturally.

The northernmost region the spies scouted out was at **•Hamath**. This was near the headwaters of the Orontes River, which flows northward into the Mediterranean. These headwaters begin northeast of today's Beirut, Lebanon. This valley region was known as **Rehob**, not to be confused with a Galilean city that had the same name; it will be discussed below.

The **south** (Negev) is the southern edge of Canaan. This desert region receives eight to twelve inches of rain annually, significantly more than the wilderness of Zin. The Negev's powdery soil does not absorb water well; instead, it runs off. This hinders any agricultural efforts in the region.

After Abram (later called "Abraham") separated from Lot, God promised him the land as far as he could see. Abram then moved to **•Hebron** and built an altar there to God (Gen. 13:14-18). This was the first time Scripture mentions this location.

Zoan was the capital city of some pharaohs in Egypt's fifteenth dynasty. Being older than the fortified city of Zoan helped bolster Hebron's reputation. David's first capital city was Hebron, and he was anointed there (2 Sam. 2:1-4,11).

VERSES 23-25

The Hebrew word **Eshcol** means “cluster.” The Hebrew word translated **brook** refers to a wadi, a stream bed or ravine that is dry except during rainy seasons. The spies named the site because of the grapes they cut there. Its exact location is unclear, yet it was evidently near Hebron. To this day, the region has excellent soil for growing grapes.

Many have wondered if the description of a cluster being carried on a pole was an exaggeration. Strabo, a Greek geographer and historian who lived about 63 BC to AD 24, described grape clusters harvested in Antioch that were two cubits, or about thirty-six inches long. The impressive fruit provided proof of the region’s abundant food resources. It was dramatically different from the foods the Israelites had in Egypt: “cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick” (Num. 11:5). The spies’ haul fulfilled Moses’s final instructions: “Bring of the fruit of the land” (13:20).

Verses 21 and 25 show that the spies followed the instructions God had given through Moses (see vv. 2,17a). How far had the spies traveled? From the wilderness of Zin northward to Rehob was about 250 miles one way. This would have required the spies to walk about twelve to thirteen miles daily.



How do we balance acting in faith and gathering information before acting?

THE DECISION AT HAND (NUM. 13:26-31)

²⁶ **And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and shewed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it. ²⁸ Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there. ²⁹ The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the**

mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan. ³⁰ And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. ³¹ But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.

VERSES 26-29

Initially, the spies' report focused on the land and how agriculturally productive it was. The spies brought some of the fruit; this was a representative sample, but not all that the land could produce. The phrase **milk and honey** highlights the rich resources of Canaan. God used this phrase at the burning bush to describe the abundance of the land (Ex. 3:17).

Numbers doesn't include the spies reporting that the land was "good." However, it was part of their report. Deuteronomy 1:25 says the spies "brought us word again, and said, It is a good land which the LORD our God doth give us" The Hebrew word for "good" is the same one God used to describe His creation in Genesis.

Having described the goodness of the land, the spies focused next on their concerns. The word **nevertheless** stands like a massive barrier in the flow of the story. The Hebrew text's word order emphasizes the spies' apprehension. It reads, "strong are the people who inhabit the land." The Hebrew word translated **strong** can also mean the people were harsh and fierce.

Excavations have shown that some Canaanite cities were **walled** and virtually impregnable, having fifteen-foot-thick walls that stood thirty to fifty feet high.

The **children of Anak** were known for their height. The spies reported that they (the spies) were "as grasshoppers" in their sight (Num. 13:33). A generation later, Joshua ran the Anakims out. They relocated to Philistine territory, including Gath, which, centuries later, was Goliath's hometown (Josh. 11:21-22; 1 Sam. 17:4).

Amalekites were nomads who lived in the northeast Sinai Peninsula; they had a reputation for using brutal battle tactics. They seemed to be in perpetual conflict with the Israelites. This eventually led to their destruction (Ex. 17:8-16; 1 Sam. 15:1-9).

The **Amorites** were a semi-nomadic people. Ancient Egyptian texts say they inhabited the region from the Negev northward to the hill regions of what is today Lebanon. The ancestral roots of the **Hittites** went back to Noah's great, great grandson (Gen. 10:15). In time, they came to be called the Hittites. The **Jebusites** were the

original inhabitants of Jebus, which came to be called “Jerusalem.” The **Canaanites** lived in the fertile lowlands.

VERSES 30-31


Caleb, one of the twelve spies, **stilled** the people. The Hebrew word here is typically an interjection and sounds much like the English word, “Hush!” The people were upset by the spies’ report.

Despite the troubling report, Caleb was ready to **go up at once, and possess it**. His words ring with confidence. He was not denying the challenge ahead. He had seen the same cities, fortifications, and people the other spies had seen. Rather than be intimidated by what he had seen, Caleb was ready to conquer the land and overcome its inhabitants.

Verse 31 highlights the contrast between faith and fear. The other spies (except Joshua) vehemently disagreed with Caleb (Num. 14:5-9). Their declaration was the opposite of his. Caleb said “we can.” They said **we be not able**.

When the time came for a decision, the ten spies could focus only on their fears, weaknesses, and inadequacies. They failed to see the challenge through God’s eyes and His strength. As we will see in next week’s study, fear won—at least for now.

 **What kind of obstacles might prevent or delay us from obeying God?**





BIBLE SKILL: Use multiple Scripture passages to better understand a Bible passage.

Review Numbers 13:27-31. Where does the unbelief show itself? Read Joshua 21:43-45 and 2 Corinthians 1:20. What do these verses reveal about God and His faithfulness to His promises? How should these verses guide us when we face challenging circumstances?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can depend on God to instruct them in the tasks He has for them.
- + Obedience to God includes doing what He is calling us to do.
- + Believers can face obstacles with faith, knowing God is with them.

 **What new ministry opportunity has the Lord put in front of your Bible study group? What actions (if any) have you taken to begin? What steps can you take to start implementing this ministry opportunity?**

 **What act of obedience have you been delaying because you thought it would become too difficult? What steps do you need to take to move you closer to beginning that undertaking? What will you do this week to move you forward?**

 **Memorize Numbers 13:30.**

Prayer Needs



▸ *Rebellion and Judgment* ◀

GOD BRINGS JUDGMENT WITH CONSEQUENCES
ON THE DISOBEDIENT.

NUMBERS 14:11-24

Most every parent has asked their child at some point: “If everybody jumps off the cliff (or bridge, roof, or into a fire), does that mean you should do it too?” The implied answer is, “No. I would never do that just because somebody else did.” Despite parents’ disapproval and internal warning bells going off, we’ve all made decisions that, years later, we regret. We look back and say, “If I only had the chance to do it all over again, I would have chosen differently.”



How much does the opinion of others affect your decision-making? How much should it affect it?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

NUMBERS 14:1-45

Recall that Moses sent twelve spies into the land to scout it out and bring back a report (Num. 13:1-20). The report they brought back was not encouraging. They suggested that the obstacles in the land would be too difficult to overcome (13:21-29). Only two scouts, Caleb and Joshua, encouraged the people to go up and conquer the land (13:30). The others insisted the inhabitants were too strong to overcome (13:31-33).


When the Israelite community heard the scouts' negative report, they wept (14:1). They complained to Moses and Aaron, suggesting they should have stayed in Egypt. Some suggested a return to Egypt (14:4).

Moses and Aaron fell facedown (14:5). Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes in lament and encouraged the people to go up and take the land (14:6-9). But the people refused to listen (14:10).

Suddenly, the glory of God appeared at the tent of meeting. He expressed His displeasure over the people's failure to trust Him. He stated that He would strike them down and make Moses into an even greater nation instead (14:11-12). Moses urged the Lord to forgive the people, lest the nations hear about it and the act result in God's name being tarnished (14:13-19).

The Lord told Moses He would pardon the people, yet they would face consequences. The generation that had seen God's miraculous works in Egypt and the wilderness would not enter the land. Caleb and Joshua would enter, the others would not (14:20-24).

When Moses reported God's words to the people, they grieved and determined to go up and take the land after all (14:39-40). Moses warned them not to try because they would suffer defeat since the Lord was not with them (14:41-43). When some of the people tried to enter the hill country, the Amalekites and Canaanites attacked them and drove them away (14:44-45).

 **Read Numbers 14:11-24 in your Bible. Locate the appeals to faithfulness. How and why did God expect Moses and the Israelites to be faithful? How did Moses highlight the need for God to remain faithful?**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GOD'S JUDGMENT (NUM. 14:11-16)

¹¹ And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have shewed among them? ¹² I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they. ¹³ And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them;) ¹⁴ And they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land: for they have heard that thou LORD art among this people, that thou LORD art seen face to face, and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. ¹⁵ Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying, ¹⁶ Because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land which he sware unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.

VERSES 11-12

The question, *how long*, which appears twice in this verse, is rhetorical. God was not asking Moses about minutes, hours, or days. He was using it the same way a parent might say to a child throwing a tantrum, “Are you about finished?” Like the parent, God was saying, “I have put up with all of this that I’m going to.”

God accused the people of two things: they had despised Him and not trusted in Him. The Hebrew verb translated *provoke* means to spurn or reject someone due to contempt. Despite the *signs* God had done, the people still did not trust Him. Signs always point beyond themselves. The *signs* included His parting the Red Sea, sending plagues that struck Egypt, and providing food and water in the desert. These signs demonstrated God’s love and care for His people. Despite this, they did not believe in Him.

Next, God made two promises. One involved the Israelites and the other, Moses. He would strike the Israelites with a *pestilence* that would kill both man and beast.

God would then enact His second promise—to make from Moses another, more powerful nation. This would reset God’s covenant with Abraham. God had made a similar statement when

the Israelites had been worshiping the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai (Ex. 32:10). With the golden calf, the Israelites had participated in blatant idolatry. Currently, they expressed a lack of faith. Fear, rather than trust, had shaped the report of the ten spies and the people's response. Saying He would destroy His people shows how offended God is when His people do not trust Him or His promises. The Lord's response is a reminder that "without faith it is impossible to please [God]" (Heb. 11:6).

The people were trusting themselves more than they trusted God. To not trust God is to doubt His truthfulness, and Scripture teaches that God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18).

The people were trusting themselves more than they trusted God.

VERSES 13-16

Moses's concern was not what the Egyptians thought about the Israelites. His concern was what they thought about God.

The Egyptians' telling how God had destroyed His people would discredit the Lord's name among ***the inhabitants of this land***, meaning the Canaanites. The Hebrew is unclear about who the second ***they*** are in verse 14—the Egyptians or the Canaanites. Some biblical scholars believe it was both. It was Moses's way of saying that everybody behind them and before them knew.

In Hebrew, the phrase ***face to face*** is literally "eye to eye." This idiom refers to being in the closest proximity to another. It meant that God revealed Himself in a close and personal way.

Moses would have known what had happened to the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. He had seen firsthand what God did to the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. Thus, Moses knew the Lord could wipe out all the Israelites. This detail underscores the fact that all the people had shown a lack of faith (Num. 14:1-2,10).

Moses mentioned God's ***fame***. He knew that the Lord's protecting His people and providing for them was a testimony of who He was to the Canaanites and Egyptians. In essence, Moses was saying, "Lord, your reputation is at stake."

Moses next hypothesized what people would say about God—that He ***was not able*** to finish what He had begun. He had gotten the Israelites out of Egypt but couldn't get them into the land of Canaan. This would call into question God's power and reliability.

A generation later, Joshua picked up on this same theme when the men of Ai defeated the Israelites. Joshua said, “For the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what wilt thou do unto thy great name?” (Josh. 7:9).



What do you think about how Moses responded to God’s threat to destroy His people? What adjectives would you use to describe Moses’s words and attitude?



What impact does our faithfulness to God have on our witness?

GOD’S GLORY (NUM. 14:17-19)

¹⁷ **And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my lord be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying,** ¹⁸ **The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation.** ¹⁹ **Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.**

VERSES 17-18

Moses prayed for the *power* of the Lord to *be great*. How could God’s power be made even more evident? Moses did not have in mind God doing something new. Rather, he wanted God’s power to be magnified by the Lord doing what He had already said.

Moses’s words echoed part of what God had said about Himself when He passed in front of him on Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:6-7). The message that God is slow to anger and abounding in faithful love resounds throughout the Old Testament (Neh. 9:17; Pss. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Nah. 1:3).

God’s *mercy* refers to His loyalty based on His covenant relationship with the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and

their descendants. It is a reciprocal relationship, meaning He has promised to be faithful to those whom He has called to be faithful to Him.

In Hebrew, the word translated *forgiving* means to lift or carry, meaning God would lift and carry away the sinner’s punishment. This was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus: “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree” (1 Pet. 2:24).

Because God is holy and just, He punishes the guilty. God, however, does not punish children or grandchildren for the sins of their parents (Deut. 24:16). Breaking ungodly traditions may take generations; thus, the consequences continue.



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Son*

In His substitutionary death on the cross Jesus made provision for the redemption of men from sin. (See Romans 5:6-10; Colossians 1:14.)

VERSE 19

This verse brings us to the conclusion of Moses’s intercession. Rather than praying for himself, Moses had been pleading with God to show mercy to the people. This is the picture of intercession—praying for someone else’s needs with the same intensity that we would pray for our own. It is seeking God on behalf of someone else.

Because God had forgiven His people in the past—from Egypt until now—Moses was asking Him to do it again. This is an encouragement for us. Because God has extended grace and forgiveness to others in the past, we should be confident we can ask on our behalf as well.



Why was it important for Moses to appeal to God’s character in his prayer for the people?



What are some appropriate ways of appealing to God’s character when praying?

FUTURE CONSEQUENCES (NUM. 14:20-24)

²⁰ And the LORD said, I have pardoned according to thy word:

²¹ But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD. ²² Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; ²³ Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: ²⁴ But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.

VERSES 20-23

The LORD responded to Moses by granting forgiveness. His covenant relationship with His people would continue.

The Lord spoke in past tense; He had already ***pardoned*** them. God was saying, “You asked Me to forgive them, I have done it.” For God to pardon them did not mean they would not bear the consequences for their sin. This becomes evident in verses 22-23.

God spoke of those whom He had led out of ***Egypt***. He said they tested Him ***these ten times*** yet did not obey. The phrase *these ten times* is probably best taken figuratively. Using the phrase this way can mean time and again (see Gen. 31:7; Job 19:3). Or, *ten* could signify completion, as in the Ten Commandments. If this was the case, then God was saying He had His fill of His people rebelling.

In verse 23, God introduced the punishment of His unfaithful children. They would not see the land He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Later in this chapter (vv. 28-35), He would describe the details: the Israelites would wander in the wilderness for forty years, one year for each day the spies had been in the land. Then, all aged twenty and older would die in the wilderness; their children would inherit the land.

Like the second bookend, God repeated the charge He introduced in verse 11—the people had ***provoked*** Him. Interestingly, none of the spies had returned from their trek and said they despised God. None of the people said it. To despise someone is an internal thing, an emotion. God knew their hearts—plus, their words and behavior revealed their hearts. He saw the peoples’ not believing Him as treating Him with contempt. He was not going to leave the guilty unpunished (v. 18).


VERSE 24

God’s turning His attention to Caleb in this way is reminiscent of how the Scriptures describe what happened with Noah. The text speaks of the great evil in the land and how God regretted creating mankind. Genesis 6:8, though, says, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.” Noah stood in stark contrast to the culture around him. The same occurred with Caleb. He remained loyal amid a disobedient people.

God’s calling Caleb *my servant* was an honor. Before this, the Lord had spoken only of Abraham and Moses this way. Centuries later, He would also refer to King David with the same title (Gen. 26:24; Num. 12:7-8; 2 Sam. 3:18).

This verse shows that God responds to the prayers of the faithful. Because he had brought back a favorable report and encouraged the people to proceed, Caleb was promised he would enter Canaan. Joshua, who had also brought a positive report, would be allowed to enter the promised land as well (Num. 14:6-9,30,38). Both men and their descendants would enter the land and receive what God had promised the patriarchs.

 Since God is willing to grant forgiveness for our sin, why do you think He does not remove the consequences as well?



BIBLE SKILL: *Compare an Old Testament and New Testament passage.*

Read Numbers 14:11-24. Note how God pardoned the people, yet their unbelief brought sad consequences. The writer of Hebrews 3–4 referenced this story, drawing parallels between the Israelites’ unbelief and his audience’s struggle to believe God’s promises. Read Hebrews 3:16–4:2,11. What consequences of unbelief and disobedience was the writer of Hebrews concerned about for his audience? What applications might we draw for Christian living today?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers honor God by trusting Him.
- + We can count on God to act according to His character.
- + We must understand that sin has consequences.



Moses was faithful in interceding for God’s people. How might your Bible study group strengthen its prayer ministry?



What can you do to prepare yourself to remain faithful to God when the crowd around you wants to do the opposite?



Memorize Numbers 14:18a.

Prayer Needs

[illegible]



Lack of Trust

GOD CALLS HIS PEOPLE TO TRUST HIM IN EVERY SITUATION.

NUMBERS 20:2-13

People generally fall into two categories—those who read and follow the instructions and those who think they can figure it out as they go along. Those who fall into this latter category may do so because of heightened self-confidence, impatience, or a history of past successes. Sometimes, though, at the end of the project, those in the second category may be left with extra, unused parts or an end product that doesn't quite look like it was supposed to.

 **Do you find yourself in category one or two? Why do you think that is your tendency? On what kinds of tasks is it most important to follow instructions all the way to the end?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

NUMBERS 15:1–22:1

Numbers 11:1 states that “the people complained.” This introduces a series of seven rebellions, which continue through chapter 21. In Hebrew writing, the climax of a series usually occurs in the middle. True to form, the fourth complaint was the most serious offense.

(1) Numbers 11:1-3 mentions a general complaint about hardships. Rather than being grateful for God’s provisions, the people focused on their discomfort. God responded with fire. Moses prayed, and the fire and complaints ceased.

(2) Numbers 11:4-34 records the people complaining about their daily manna. Moses told God that the pressure was too great to bear. God instructed him to appoint seventy elders to help.

(3) Numbers 11:35–12:16 says Miriam and Aaron complained about Moses’s wife. Their greater complaint was that God seemingly spoke only to and through Moses. God struck Miriam with a skin affliction. Moses prayed, and God healed her.

(4) Numbers 13:1–14:45 tells of twelve spies going into Canaan for forty days. Ten brought back a negative report, and the Israelites refused to enter. God caused the Israelites to wander in the wilderness for one year for each day the spies were in Canaan.

(5) Numbers 16:1-50 says Korah staged a rebellion against Moses. He enlisted ring leaders to help him, then others joined in. God was ready to destroy the Israelites. Moses interceded. The earth opened and swallowed Korah and his ring leaders. God then rained fire down on all the others. When the Israelites complained about what had happened, God sent a plague through the camp.

(6) Numbers 20:2-13 tells of the people again complaining about water. God provided water from a rock after Moses struck—rather than spoke to—the rock. This is the focus of today’s study.

(7) Numbers 21:4-9 says the people again complained about the food and water situation. God responded by sending serpents into the camp. They bit the people, who then died. The people repented, Moses prayed, and God told him to raise a bronze snake on a pole. All who looked upon it recovered.



Read Numbers 20:2-13. Note what Moses and Aaron did right and what they did wrong.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

THE PROBLEM (NUM. 20:2-5)

² **And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron.**

³ **And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the LORD!**

⁴ **And why have ye brought up the congregation of the LORD into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there?** ⁵ **And wherefore have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink.**

VERSES 2-3

The Israelites were in the wilderness of Zin, at Kadeshbarnea (v. 1). They had been there forty years earlier. From there, Moses had sent twelve spies into the land, and the people decided against entering Canaan (13:26). In the intervening years, they wandered in the wilderness. All aged twenty and above died during those four decades (14:26-35).

The need for water had been an ongoing problem. This was one of their earliest challenges after crossing the Red Sea (Ex. 15:23-26). Later, at Rephidim, likely just north of Mount Sinai, God supplied water by having Moses strike a rock (17:1-7). That was forty years earlier; most of this generation had not seen that miracle.

Verse 2 says the people ***gathered themselves*** against their leaders. Although not violent, they were intense and assertive. The Israelites ***chode*** intensely with Moses and Aaron.

When the people complained about a lack of water forty years earlier, they asked: “Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us . . . with thirst” (Ex. 17:3). Here they said they would have preferred to have ***died*** with their ***brethren*** who had died. They likely were referring to those who died following Korah in his rebellion against Moses.

VERSES 4-5

The Hebrews were not posing a question; rather, they were making an accusation. This is often the case with a question that begins with “why?”—especially if the *why* is followed by *would*, *have*, or *did you*.

The terminology the Israelites used, the **congregation of the LORD**, repeats the phrase Korah and his followers used when they staged their rebellion against Moses (Num. 16:3). These are the only two occurrences of the phrase in the book of Numbers. The phrase created a Moses-versus-them scenario and underscored the severity of both challenges to Moses's leadership.

The question clarifies the Israelites' concern. They thought they and their animals were about to die of thirst in **this wilderness**, meaning in this vast desert. Deuteronomy 1:19 describes it as the "great and terrible wilderness."

Verse 5 drips with irony. The **ye** is plural; the people blamed Moses and Aaron for leading them from Egypt. They evidently had forgotten about the Lord's deliverance "from under the burdens of the Egyptians" and their "bondage." They gave no thought of God redeeming them "with [His] stretched out arm and . . . great judgments" (Ex. 6:6).

Also, they called Kadeshbarnea **this evil place**. What an irony! God had led them to "an exceeding good land . . . which floweth with milk and honey" (Num. 14:7-8). This was Joshua's and Caleb's description of Canaan. The people could have been in "an exceeding good land"; instead, they were in an *evil place* because of their lack of faith.

Finally, the people longed for the food they had in Egypt. They spoke of **seed, figs, vines**, and **pomegranates**. These, though, were not foods from Egypt. While in captivity, they had "cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick" (11:5). Had they entered Canaan, they could have been enjoying grain, figs, grapes, and pomegranates—instead of manna.



Why do we tend to romanticize "the good old days," even though they weren't always so good?

THE PLAN (NUM. 20:6-8)

⁶ And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto them. ⁷ And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, ⁸ Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy

brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.

VERSE 6

Numbers 11-21 records the Israelites' seven rebellions or complaints. With each, Moses (and sometimes Aaron) interceded for God's people. Among the seven, this is the only one that specifies where Moses and Aaron made their inquiry before the Lord. Saying they *went from the presence of the assembly* underscores the Moses- and Aaron-versus-them situation.

Facedown was the common position when interceding for God's people. Moses and Aaron did this when the Israelites refused to enter Canaan. They also fell facedown when God threatened to destroy His people after Korah's rebellion (Num. 14:5; 16:22). Jesus assumed this same position when He pleaded, "let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39). Each instance was of a desperate prayer. The position communicates an anguished and humble attitude.

VERSES 7-8

The LORD spake unto Moses. How simple, yet profound, is this statement. It occurs thirty-two times in the book of Numbers, beginning with chapter 1, verse 1. This was the voice Moses first heard at the burning bush (Ex. 3:4). It was the voice that spoke creation into being. This voice declared at Jesus's baptism, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

One cannot help but wonder about God's voice at the tent of meeting. Did only Moses hear it? Was God addressing only Moses—but both men heard His voice? Or was God's voice audible at all? Scripture does not say.

Scripture does say what Moses and Aaron were to do. Did the **rod** belong to Moses or Aaron? If to Moses, he previously used it while tending his father-in-law's flocks. It became a snake in the courts of Pharaoh. The Nile turned to blood when Moses struck the water with it. More likely, the staff was Aaron's. In Numbers 17, God miraculously caused Aaron's rod to bud, blossom, and produce almonds—all in one night. Afterward, God told Moses to "Bring Aaron's rod again *before the testimony*, to be kept for a token against the rebels" (Num. 17:10, emphasis added).

With rod in hand, Moses and Aaron were to *speak . . . unto the rock*, and water would come forth. This was different from when God instructed Moses to hit the rock with his staff so water would pour forth and the people could drink (Ex. 17:6). Most people in the Numbers 20 community had not seen that happen.



What kinds of difficulties get you facedown—either literally or figuratively—before the Lord?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God is an intelligent, spiritual, and personal Being, the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe. (See Psalm 146:5-10; Isaiah 41:10.)

THE RESULT (NUM. 20:9-13)

⁹ And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him. ¹⁰ And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock? ¹¹ And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. ¹² And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them. ¹³ This is the water of Meribah; because the children of Israel strove with the LORD, and he was sanctified in them.

VERSES 9-11

Moses took the staff *from before the LORD*, meaning from the tabernacle. He did just as God had *commanded* him. This had been Moses's practice since first encountering God at the burning bush. How long, though, would that last?

Moses's and Aaron's patience was gone. They were exhausted and they overreacted. The verb ***gathered*** carries the idea of convening a group for a specific purpose. This would not be an informal assembly or meeting. God had given the directive, and Moses was responding obediently.

The multitude gathered in front of the ***rock***. This word referred to a bare-face cliff. Thus, Moses was bringing the crowd to the base of a cliff wall.

Emphatically, Moses demanded they listen to what he had to say. The Hebrew term for ***rebels*** typically refers to individuals who are defying God. The people had complained about a lack of water and food before. What was different this time? Moses had not responded like this before. Thus, Moses's anger—rather than the people's behavior—caused this outburst.

In asking, ***must we fetch you water . . . ?***, Moses was calling attention to Aaron and himself. *Must we* is radically different from *must God*. Any accolades and praises would go to him and Aaron. Even though Moses asked, *must we fetch*, he evidently struck the rock alone. Despite God's instructing Moses to speak to the rock, he instead struck it twice.

Did God withhold His blessing because of Moses's disobedience? No, water gushed out, enough to satisfy the thousands and thousands of people and their cattle. God did not punish the people because their leader had defied Him.

How much water did God provide? The psalmist said, "He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink as out of the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers" (Ps. 78:15-16).

VERSES 12-13

Instead of speaking to the rock (v. 8), Moses struck it. How did striking the rock indicate Moses and Aaron did not trust God to demonstrate His holiness? Scripture does not say, but a few connections could apply. First, God is holy. This fact echoes throughout the Bible. God calls His followers to be holy. To disobey was (and is) a sin and thus a violation of His holiness. Second, to flagrantly defy God's instructions meant the person thought he knew better than God. Moses and Aaron placed their plan in front of God's plan. God saw this as an act of rebellion (see v. 24). Third, hitting the rock to get water could appear to be a magician's or sorcerer's trick. Or the assembly might have thought this was a skill Moses had learned as a shepherd. But for water to come out because someone

spoke to the rock was beyond human explanation. Moses’s action moved the focus away from God—His power, uniqueness, and ability—and put it instead on Moses.

Because they had not followed God’s instructions to the end, neither Moses nor Aaron would enter Canaan. This was the final and ultimate Moses- and Aaron-versus-them scenario in this story.

The word **•Meribah** means “contention” or “strife.” The name reflected the people’s quarreling with God rather than trusting Him fully and obediently.

Events at Meribah demonstrated God’s holiness in two ways. First, God showed He was faithful. Second, by punishing Aaron and Moses, God showed that He expects obedience from all of His people. A person’s status does not influence or dictate God’s expectations. He expects all of us to trust Him.



What does it say about God’s character that He provided such an abundance of water?




BIBLE SKILL: *Use multiple Scripture passages to understand a key Bible teaching.*

Numbers 20:9-13 records the failure of Moses and Aaron to follow God’s instructions exactly. As a result, God did not permit them to enter the promised land. Read the passage, noting how the Israelites frustrated Moses and Aaron (v. 10), yet God held the leaders accountable for their disobedience. Do you think God holds leaders to a greater degree of accountability or the same? Explain your answer, using Hebrews 13:17 and James 3:1 for additional insight.

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can trust God even when current circumstances appear bleak.
- + We can turn to God with our needs and concerns.
- + Believers should recognize that ignoring God’s instructions leads to consequences.

 **Moses and Aaron fell facedown before the Lord (v. 6). Have you experienced “facedown” situations? What advice would you offer to members of your Bible study group about how to pray for those issues?**

 **In what areas has God given you specific instructions? How closely are you following those? What changes do you need to make to get back on track?**



Memorize Numbers 20:12.

Prayer Needs



God's Plans

GOD CAN USE ANY MEANS HE CHOOSES
TO ACCOMPLISH HIS WILL.

NUMBERS 22:22-35

God speaks to us through His Word. He speaks to our hearts or makes holy impressions when we seek Him and His will in prayer. Sometimes, when we hear someone preach, teach, or sing a particular song, we know “those words were for me. That was the answer I needed.” The same can occur in a conversation. We realize that God has delivered a personal message in that moment. We sense an internal confirmation that we have heard from Him.



When have you been skeptical about someone's claim to speak for God? Why?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

NUMBERS 22:2–25:18

Forty years earlier, Pharaoh released the Israelites from Egyptian captivity, and God led them “through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea” (Ex. 13:18). They crossed through the Red Sea, camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, and sent spies into Canaan. Afraid, they refused to enter the promised land although they stood at its threshold. As a result of their disobedience and lack of faith, God caused them to wander in the wilderness for forty years. The generation of adults died during those decades. Today’s study brings the Israelites back to the threshold of Canaan (Num. 22:1).

Not only were the Israelites a different people because the previous generation had passed away; they also had gained a reputation because of their numbers and strength. Previously, the Israelites had been too afraid of the people in Canaan to enter. Now, they struck fear in the inhabitants of the land. They had been victorious over the Amorites. This intimidated the Moabites and their king, Balak (Num. 14:1-9; 22:2-6).

The Moabites and Israelites had a shared ancestry. The Moabites descended from Lot, Abraham’s nephew. Lot’s two daughters got their father drunk on two consecutive nights. Shamefully, each slept with and became pregnant by Lot. The first daughter named her son “Moab.” The other named her son “Benammi.” The Moabites and Ammonites traced their roots to these sons (Gen. 19:30-38).

Balak was intimidated by the throng of Israelites approaching Moab on their way to Canaan. He decided to enlist the help of Balaam, a medium from Pethor, which was in upper Mesopotamia. Balak wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites so they would not defeat the Moabites. This desire contradicted what God originally told Abraham; He promised to bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him. Thus, God was the only One with this power. The question of this study is what would happen when a pagan, Mesopotamian diviner tried to curse the people God had promised to bless?



As you read Numbers 22:22-35, take note of how God chose to accomplish His will.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

OBSTACLES MET (NUM. 22:22-27)

²² And God's anger was kindled because he went: and the angel of the LORD stood in the way for an adversary against him. Now he was riding upon his ass, and his two servants were with him. ²³ And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and the ass turned aside out of the way, and went into the field: and Balaam smote the ass, to turn her into the way. ²⁴ But the angel of the LORD stood in a path of the vineyards, a wall being on this side, and a wall on that side. ²⁵ And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she thrust herself unto the wall, and crushed Balaam's foot against the wall: and he smote her again. ²⁶ And the angel of the LORD went further, and stood in a narrow place, where was no way to turn either to the right hand or to the left. ²⁷ And when the ass saw the angel of the LORD, she fell down under Balaam: and Balaam's anger was kindled, and he smote the ass with a staff.

VERSES 22-25

●Balak sent a second group of officials northward to secure Balaam's help. Following God's instructions, ●**Balaam** had refused to go to Moab with the first delegation. This time, God instructed Balaam to go with the men to Moab.

From Moab to Pethor was over 400 miles; each one-way trip would have taken three to four weeks. Thus, this story spans several months. How Balak knew Balaam is unclear. Evidently, Balaam was well-known throughout the region as one who practiced divination.

If God had told Balaam to go (v. 20), why was His **anger . . . kindled** because Balaam went? The Bible does not say. Many interpreters believe God was angry because Balaam had asked Him a second time if he should go when God already had told him not to go (v. 12). Others suggest perhaps Balaam uttered a non-authorized oracle along the way.

The term **angel of the LORD**, used primarily in the Old Testament, typically referred to God Himself when He conveyed a brief message to a particular person. In these occurrences, He sometimes took on a human appearance. Other times, the term refers to a powerful angel working in God's stead. The angel's action

and sword are reminders of the cherubim God used to block the entrance to the garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24).

Part of the comedic irony in the story is that this lowly donkey **saw the angel**. However, Balaam, the well-respected seer did not see the angel. Some have called him a “blind seer.” The donkey **turned aside out of the way**, likely out of fear. Balaam **smote** her because he was angry at the stubborn animal and wanted nothing to derail his progress.

When preparing a field, farmers first removed the rocks and stones. Otherwise, plowing and planting were impossible. Farmers stacked the stones and made walls around their fields. Parallel walls formed a narrow **path** between neighboring vineyards.

Trying to walk around the angel, the donkey squeezed Balaam’s foot against the wall. The diviner found himself between a rock and a hard-headed donkey.

VERSES 26-27

The angel appeared a third time. Again, it **stood in a narrow place**. This time, though, the text does not mention vineyards. The root for the Hebrew word can refer to a deep place. Some believe the donkey was in a deep and thus narrow furrow in a field. Unable to turn to the right or the left, the donkey did the only thing it could to avoid running into the angel. It **fell down**.

Balaam was angry the first two times his donkey “acted out.” This time, though, he was furious. The first two times he hit her, presumably with his hand. This time, he lost all control and beat her **with a staff**. The Hebrew word translated *staff* can refer to a riding stick. In this context, though, it likely refers to a stick Balaam used in his divination practices. It would have been one of the tools of his trade. The Old Testament mentions this type of stick elsewhere. God accused the unfaithful, saying, “My people ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them” (Hos. 4:12).

Another humorous irony in the story is that Balaam showed that he couldn’t dictate a single donkey’s actions. How did he think he could influence the actions of hundreds of thousands of people?



Why do you think God lets us set out on a path, knowing He is going to change it along the way?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God the Father*

God as Father reigns with providential care over His universe, His creatures, and the flow of the stream of human history according to the purposes of His grace. (See Psalm 103:19; Matthew 10:29-31.)

ATTENTION GAINED (NUM. 22:28-31)

²⁸ **And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times? ²⁹ And Balaam said unto the ass, Because thou hast mocked me: I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee. ³⁰ And the ass said unto Balaam, Am not I thine ass, upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day? was I ever wont to do so unto thee? and he said, Nay. ³¹ Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face.**

VERSES 28-30

The Creator who had opened the donkey's eyes to let it see (v. 23) now ***opened the mouth of the ass*** to let it speak. Only He could have done that. Our Creator is the One who put the “bark” in the dog, the “moo” in the cow, and the “bray” in the donkey to begin with. He can certainly control a voice.

The only other time the Old Testament mentions an animal speaking was the snake in the garden of Eden. The snake spoke deception. The donkey, though, spoke only truth.

Balaam said unto the ass . . . Instead of being shocked by a talking donkey, Balaam was so caught up in his rage that he didn't slow down to consider what was happening. He answered the donkey.

Balaam was furious because the donkey had ***mocked*** him. He was so mortified that he wished he had a sword so he could kill his donkey. This wish revealed more than Balaam meant for it to. Proverbs teaches, “A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast” (Prov. 12:10). His out-of-control anger and desire to slay his donkey gave evidence of Balaam's unrighteous heart.

Balaam was probably concerned about what Balak's dignitaries would say about him when they reached Moab. Would they report that Balaam could not control this stubborn and second-rate form

of transportation? That he lost his temper and self-control? That he carried on a conversation with a donkey?

This donkey, which Balaam had ridden all his life, understood what her owner wanted. Despite that, the donkey overtly disregarded Balaam's wishes this third time.

Still, Balaam showed no indication of being surprised by his conversation with his donkey. Balaam had responded to the donkey with fervent emotion (v. 29); the donkey replied with logic. In essence, she asked, "Didn't my unusual behavior alert you that something was up?" Balaam had to admit his donkey had a point.

This seems like the natural spot in the conversation for the donkey to tell Balaam about her supernatural encounters. Yet, she did not. She was going to allow the angel to reveal himself to Balaam. This verse contains the donkey's last words.

VERSE 31

After not one but two invitations from King Balak, after traveling many days and hundreds of miles, and after having to contend with an uncooperative talking donkey, ***then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam***. The word *then* reminds us that God is at work around us, though we don't always realize it. The Creator who opened the donkey's mouth now opened Balaam's eyes. Suddenly, he could see what had caused her behavior.

The word ***angel*** means "messenger." The divine being with a message from heaven stood before Balaam and his donkey. Again, the ***sword*** was present, the same type of weapon Balaam said he wished he had so he could have slain his obstinate donkey.

Balaam knelt and bowed face-down in worship. The text offers no indication that the angel had to identify himself. Despite that, Balaam knew this was a holy moment that called for worship.



When has an unusual experience led you to seek God more intentionally?

GOD'S PLAN (NUM. 22:32-35)

³² And the angel of the LORD said unto him, Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times? behold, I went out to withstand thee, because thy way is perverse before me:

³³ And the ass saw me, and turned from me these three times: unless she had turned from me, surely now also I had slain thee, and saved her alive. ³⁴ And Balaam said unto the angel of the LORD, I have sinned; for I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me: now therefore, if it displease thee, I will get me back again. ³⁵ And the angel of the LORD said unto Balaam, Go with the men: but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak. So Balaam went with the princes of Balak.

VERSES 32-33

The angel asked the same question the donkey had asked: Why had Balaam beaten the donkey these three times (see v. 28)? Then, clarifying that the donkey was not the one halting Balaam, the angel said, ***I went out to withstand thee***. The noun form of the Hebrew word translated *withstand* refers to an adversary or enemy, someone who stands against—or in opposition to—someone. The word conveys determination; the angel was going to make sure Balaam did not proceed with his journey.

The angel said he considered Balaam's actions to be ***perverse***. The word *perverse* can carry with it the meaning of reckless or evil. Balaam's heart was not right. Then the angel explained what had happened in the journey. His words, ***the ass saw me***, answered why the donkey behaved as she had and why she ***turned . . . these three times***.

The angel's next statement had to have shocked Balaam. The only reason he was still alive was because of what the donkey had done. He owed his life to this lowly animal he had wanted to slay. Had the situation not occurred like this, the animal would have lived and Balaam would not have. How close was Balaam to meeting an untimely end? Closer than he thought. The angel showed up—not only with a sword—but with a drawn sword (v. 31).

VERSES 34-35


When Balaam saw the angel, he “bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face” (v. 31). Having heard both his indictment of evil behavior and how close he came to losing his life (vv. 32-33), Balaam responded with a confession: ***I have sinned***. He did not clarify, though, what his sin was. Was his sin not comprehending the angel's presence earlier? Was it the way he took out his anger on his donkey? Was it because he was determined to take this journey despite God's prohibition?

Having been caught and confronted, Balaam hoped to avert the angel’s wrath; he offered to turn back to retrace his steps. His offer, though, may not have been sincere or selfless. Some scholars believe Balaam was making the offer, yet he still hoped he could continue his task and journey.

Balaam had been going to Moab with the second delegation that Balak had sent. Before Balaam left home, God had instructed him, “rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do” (Num. 22:20). Here, the angel gave Balaam almost identical instructions. The difference was Balaam was to say **only** what he had been told to say.

The angel’s instructing Balaam to **go with the men** showed that the seer had learned the lesson God had for him. Balaam could not dictate the donkey’s actions. He would not get the final say, God would. He could not fool God. The Lord could stop Balaam any time He chose. And He could use any means to convey His message, even speaking through a donkey if needed. After all that God had done to get His message to Balaam, the seer would obey exactly what God had instructed. Having heard the angel, Balaam was ready to continue his journey to Moab.

 **What benefits or outcomes can we anticipate when we seek to follow God’s plans?**





BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary to help understand a Bible passage.*

Read the article about Balaam in a Bible Dictionary. Note that he is mentioned both in the Old Testament (Num. 22–24; 31:8; Josh. 13:22) and New Testament (2 Pet. 2:15; Rev. 2:14). Read each passage that mentions Balaam. Why do you think Balaam did not remain faithful to God? What applications can we draw about our own walk with the Lord?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers must recognize that obstacles may arise as we are following God’s plans.
- + Believers must remain sensitive to God’s leading, being intentional to seek Him regularly.
- + We should be willing to surrender our plans so we can follow God’s plans.

 **What advice would you give to a new believer about how to know when God is directing his or her path? Be ready to share your thoughts with your Bible study group.**

 **In examining your own life, do you see a place where God has placed an obstacle and attempted to direct you with a new plan? What changes do you need to make to continue moving forward with God’s new direction?**



Memorize Numbers 22:38.

Prayer Needs



Instructions Given

GOD’S PLANS REQUIRE BELIEVERS TO ACT
ON THE INSTRUCTIONS HE GIVES.

NUMBERS 33:50-56; 34:13-15

We’ve all seen it. The “For Sale” sign is removed from the plot of land. Workers show up and conduct the survey. They put little orange marker flags in the ground. Trenches and holes are cut and dug. The ground is leveled. Concrete trucks show up. Construction crews arrive at the site day after day. In a few months, the house, subdivision, or apartment complex is complete. Every step occurred according to a plan that someone developed beforehand.

 **Why is it important to follow the plan when doing construction?
What happens when we don’t?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

NUMBERS 26:1–36:13

When God first called Abraham, He promised that he would have offspring as numerous as the stars in the sky and sand on the shore. God also promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 13:14-17). He made the same promise to Isaac and Jacob (26:3; 28:13). The Lord, speaking through an angel, changed Jacob’s name to “Israel” at Peniel (32:24-28).

From Jacob’s twelve sons would come the twelve tribes of Israel, with the exception of Levi and Joseph. From Levi would come the Levites, those who would serve as the priests of God’s people. Rather than inherit property in the promised land, they would be given a place in each tribal territory.

Concerning Joseph, recall he had been sold into slavery by his brothers. He became second in command in Egypt through God’s providence. God used him to save his brothers from starvation when famine hit their homeland. Joseph eventually brought his entire family, including his father, Jacob, to live in Egypt. Scripture refers to Joseph as the prince of his brothers (Deut. 33:16). Joseph’s inherited property was divided between his two sons who were born in Egypt—Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:3-6).

Each tribe was made up of several “clans.” A clan consisted of individual families that were related by blood or marriage. The head of each family was considered an elder; they helped guide and govern the family and thus the clan.

The social structure was therefore like a series of concentric circles. The smallest unit was the family, which was led by the elder. Families that were kin formed clans. The related clans formed the tribe. The twelve tribes made up the nation of Israel, both as a people and a land.



Read through Numbers 33:50-56 and 34:13-15, paying close attention to the text mentioning a family, clan, or tribe. What was the advantage of organizing the Israelites by these groups?

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

THE LAND (NUM. 33:50-53)

⁵⁰ And the LORD spake unto Moses in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho, saying, ⁵¹ Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; ⁵² Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: ⁵³ And ye shall dispossess the inhabitants of the land, and dwell therein: for I have given you the land to possess it.

VERSES 50-52

God's people had camped in *the plains of •Moab* (see also v. 48), from which they could look across the Jordan Valley to the land they would possess. They were a short distance from the Jordan River that separated them from Canaan. The **Jordan** River was the dividing line for the Israelites. On the east was their past; on the other side was their future, the land that God had promised His people since the days of Abraham.

Again, God told Moses what he was to say to His people. God had a message; Moses was to deliver it. This showed that God was not finished with Moses, despite how Moses disobeyed Him by striking the rock rather than speaking to it (20:11). This reminds us that God can still use us, even when we have failed Him. Our past does not always define our future.

The Lord did not say, "If you cross" or "In the event you cross." He spoke with absolute certainty: **when ye are passed over**. The time of God's judgment and the people's wandering was over.

What were they to do when they came **into the land of Canaan**? God's instructions were two-fold. First, they were to **drive out** the inhabitants. Right after God had given Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, He promised what He would do when His people reached the promised land. He said, "I drive out . . ." (Ex. 34:11). The command in this verse (Num. 33:52) does not contradict God's earlier promise. He would drive out the inhabitants of the land, but He would use His people to accomplish this.

Second, His people were to remove from the land any remnant of idolatry that had been embraced by the generations who lived

there before the Israelites’ arrival. The **pictures** were carvings on the face of a stone, like a three-dimensional picture. These typically depicted the people’s gods or pagan religious symbols. The **molten images** were typically made by pouring molten fine metal (sometimes gold) over a wooden form. Artisans would then carve the fine details with engraving tools. **High places** referred to the hills and mountains on which the Canaanites built pagan sanctuaries. For example, for hundreds of years before the Israelites arrived, the people in the region recognized Mount Carmel as a place for worship. This may explain why Elijah chose this location for his confrontation with the prophets of Baal (see 1 Kings 18:20-39). He knew they would be comfortable worshiping their so-called god there. God’s decisive victory would show His power over the local, man-made deities.



DID YOU KNOW?

Israel’s history revealed that they failed to follow the Lord’s commands in these verses. Their exile in Assyria and Babylonia was largely due to their persistence in pursuing the gods of the nations that surrounded them. (See Isa. 2:5-22; Jer. 9:12-16; Ezek. 5:5–6:14; Hos. 4:12-14; Zeph. 1:4-6.)

VERSE 53

After ridding the land of its current inhabitants and destroying all vestiges of their pagan worship practices, only then could the Israelites take possession of the land. This meant the land they would inhabit would not be the same as what was there now. It may have been the same regarding its geography and climate, but little else. Its culture, belief systems, religious practices, values, government, and social organization were to be transformed.

The only reason the Israelites could inhabit the land was because God had given it to them (see Deut. 9:5).



Why was it important to destroy the idols and high places devoted to false gods?



KEY DOCTRINE: God

To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.
(See Deuteronomy 6:14-15; James 1:22.)

THE TASK (NUM. 33:54-56)

⁵⁴ **And ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among your families: and to the more ye shall give the more inheritance, and to the fewer ye shall give the less inheritance: every man's inheritance shall be in the place where his lot falleth; according to the tribes of your fathers ye shall inherit.**
⁵⁵ **But if ye will not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you; then it shall come to pass, that those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes, and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.**
⁵⁶ **Moreover it shall come to pass, that I shall do unto you, as I thought to do unto them.**

VERSE 54

The land was an *inheritance*. God had told Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would live in this land. People of this generation, who had never met the patriarchs, were to be the recipients and the beneficiaries of the promise God made centuries earlier.

God could give them the land because it was His. “The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Ps. 24:1). Each of us is merely a steward, a caretaker, who dwells here for a limited number of days.

The apportionment of land would be decided by casting lots. The Israelites did not see this as leaving it to chance; they understood God could work through that process. “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prov. 16:33).

The book of Numbers carries its name because the numbers mattered. The book opens with the Israelites conducting a census (1:1-46). The book closes with a second census, taken on the Plains of Moab forty years later (26:1-63). The purpose of the censuses was two-fold. First, the numbers gave the leaders an idea of how many military-age men would be available to lead in the conquest of the land. Second, the larger clans would receive the larger territories, meaning more inhabitable space. Having all of the clans

or family units living together in the space apportioned according to their forefather's tribe gave greater importance to the tribe. No family or clan would be unimportant or excluded.

VERSES 55-56

The Lord warned what would happen if His people did not **drive out** the land's current **inhabitants**. The word translated **pricks** referred to small but sharp objects that could splinter someone's eyes. The result would be discomfort, infection, and maybe even blindness. The lesson was that even the smallest remnant could inflict unbelievable damage. The **thorns** in their sides could cause discomfort, pain, and even an infection. God's purpose was not just to run the people out but also to remove their idolatrous beliefs and pagan practices. God knew the damage these traditions would do.

Verse 56 carried a powerful warning. As mentioned earlier, God had said He would drive out the people of the land (Ex. 34:11). In this verse, He was saying that just as He promised to drive the people out of Canaan, He would do the same to His people if they did not obey Him. He would drive them out of the promised land.

How serious was God's command in this verse? The people's lack of compliance and how they embraced the pagan worship beliefs and practices led to the Assyrians and Babylonians overtaking the people and conquering the land centuries later.



What principles do you glean from these verses that can help you live a life of obedience to God?

THE PLAN (NUM. 34:13-15)

¹³ **And Moses commanded the children of Israel, saying, This is the land which ye shall inherit by lot, which the LORD commanded to give unto the nine tribes, and to the half tribe:**
¹⁴ **For the tribe of the children of Reuben according to the house of their fathers, and the tribe of the children of Gad according to the house of their fathers, have received their inheritance; and half the tribe of Manasseh have received their inheritance:**
¹⁵ **The two tribes and the half tribe have received their inheritance on this side Jordan near Jericho eastward, toward the sunrising.**

VERSE 13

The opening verses of this chapter delineate the geographical boundaries of the land the Israelites were to inhabit. Doubtless, the spies who scouted out the land gave information to Moses, information he used to describe the land to be inherited (Num. 13:1-33).

Verses 3-5 describe the southern border; verse 6, the western border; verses 7-9, the northern border; and verses 10-12, the eastern border. Verses 2 and 29 form a pair of bookends, using the phrase “the land of Canaan” to describe the land and the leaders who would direct the conquest.

The property divisions were not decided by human ingenuity or design. It was according to what ***the LORD commanded***. The land between the Jordan River Valley and the Mediterranean was to be home to ***nine tribes, and to the half tribe***.

***Followers of Christ are beneficiaries
of a spiritual inheritance.***

VERSES 14-15

The two and a half tribes were the descendants of ***Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh***. They earlier asked if they could live on the east side of the Jordan (Num. 32:1-24). This region is known as the Transjordan.

The ***two tribes and the half tribe*** promised that they would support the tribes on the west side of the Jordan as they fought for the land. They vowed to not “return unto [their] houses, until the children of Israel have inherited every man his inheritance” (32:18). Thus, these two and a half tribes would be separated physically from the other tribes but would be united in intent.

The tribes received these lands as an ***inheritance***. They understood that ultimately the land was a gift from God. After they entered Canaan, the Israelites continued to refer to the land as an ***inheritance*** (Josh. 13-15).

Verse 15 clarifies the location of the territory for the two and a half tribes. These lands were not “less than” those on the other side of the Jordan. Various rivers and tributaries ran through the Transjordan and flowed westward toward the Jordan River Valley. Much of the land was ideal for grazing.


God was fulfilling the promise He had made to His people. He promised Abraham that the land of Canaan would belong to

him and his descendants. He made the same promise to Isaac and Jacob.

When the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex. 2:24). He later promised Moses, “I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD” (6:8). God, ever faithful, was keeping that covenant promise. In front of the people was the Jordan River and just beyond to the west was Jericho. Here, God was proving that He was keeping His promise.

The New Testament explains that followers of Christ are beneficiaries of a spiritual inheritance (Col. 1:12; 3:24; Heb. 9:15). Because God always keeps His promises, we, centuries later, can also lift our voices and proclaim, “Great is thy faithfulness.”

 **How do God’s promises serve as a motivator to remain faithful to Him? Should they? Explain.**





BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible dictionary to understand a Bible passage.*

Read about Canaan in a Bible dictionary—the land, people, and gods. Ultimately, the Israelites did not drive out all the land’s inhabitants, and God’s warning of Numbers 33:55 came true. Joshua records how the Israelites conquered the Canaanites physically; the book of Judges records how the Canaanites conquered the Israelites spiritually. What factors do you think led the Israelites to fail to obey completely God’s command to take the land and drive out its inhabitants? Why do Christians today sometimes stop short of keeping God’s commands fully?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Following God often requires believers to remove potential distractions.
- + Believers can expect to encounter challenges while following God.
- + We can trust God to keep His promises.

 **What promises have you seen God fulfill in your life? How does reflecting on those promises increase your faith? Be willing to share your thoughts with your Bible study group.**

 **Examine your life for the things that might draw you away from remaining loyal to the Lord. What actions can you take to safeguard yourself from the influence of beliefs and practices that are contrary to what God has outlined in His Word?**

 **Memorize Numbers 33:53.**

Prayer Needs



Explore the Bible Prayer Guide
Scan here for a weekly prayer guide based on this quarter's Bible passages.



Remember

RECALLING GOD'S PAST FAITHFULNESS
LEADS US TO WORSHIP HIM.

DEUTERONOMY 4:1-9,15-20

Older folks will remember family get-togethers that included porch sitting. After the evening meal, family members headed outside. A few sat in rocking chairs. Some were on the porch swing. The adults would talk. Someone would ask, “What ever happened to so-and-so?” Then the reminiscing began. They talked about their happy memories and the hurdles. The kids didn’t do a lot of talking. Mostly, they listened, not realizing how much they would treasure these memories decades later.



What is your favorite family memory? How do your family’s stories get passed down from one generation to the next?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

DEUTERONOMY 1:1–4:43

The book of Numbers records events and lessons related to the children of Israel as they traveled from Mount Sinai to the Plains of Moab, which was across the Jordan River from the promised land. The book of Deuteronomy focuses and expands on the law God gave at Mount Sinai. Deuteronomy teaches God's people how to live in covenant in the promised land. Some terms appear in these opening chapters that deserve attention. Understanding their usage will aid in our study of Deuteronomy.

Great—This word appears thirty-nine times in Deuteronomy. Only in Psalms (66), Jeremiah (50), and Revelation (46) does the word appear more times. In Deuteronomy 4, the word is used to speak of God's great power (v. 37), of God bringing great terrors on Egypt (v. 34), and of His sending great fire on the earth (v. 36). Surprisingly, God referred to Israel as a "great nation" (vv. 6,8). Israel—a great nation! A generation earlier, the Israelites had been captive in Egypt and serving as slaves. Israel's greatness was not because of its accomplishments. They were great because of the power and presence of God among His people (see 3:24).

This day—The repetition of this phrase (4:4,8,26,38) highlights the sense of urgency for obeying God's law every day. Thus, moving forward, God's people would have to commit themselves to obedience for their every today.

Statutes and judgments—This phrase appears seventeen times in Deuteronomy; five are in chapter 4 (vv. 1,5,8,14,45). The root word for "statutes" alludes to engraving or etching; "judgments" has to do with judging. In Deuteronomy, the terms are almost indistinguishable; they refer to God's covenant requirements.

All this law and the Ten Commandments—These terms appear only once each in this fourth chapter (vv. 8,13). Their scarcity does not indicate an unimportance. The Ten Commandments are the core around which all the law is built. The first five books of the Bible are referred to as the Torah, which in Hebrew means the Law. The Torah contains a total of 613 commands.



As you read through today's text, underscore the imperative verbs. Pay close attention to the directives that appear once and those that are repeated.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

OBEDIENCE (DEUT. 4:1-4)

¹ Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers giveth you. ² Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. ³ Your eyes have seen what the LORD did because of Baalpeor: for all the men that followed Baalpeor, the Lord thy God hath destroyed them from among you. ⁴ But ye that did cleave unto the LORD your God are alive every one of you this day.

VERSES 1-2

Deuteronomy 1–3 contains Moses’s reiteration of what had happened from the time the Israelites left Mount Sinai until they arrived at the Plains of Moab. Chapter 4 verse 1 marks a transition. Rather than looking back, Moses, speaking for God, would be giving instructions about how to live as His people in Canaan.

Moses commonly used the imperative verb *hearken* as he was about to instruct God’s people (see 5:1; 6:4; 9:1; 20:3; 27:9). In Deuteronomy, the terms *statutes* and *judgments* referred to God’s covenant requirements. Thus, the people were to *do* them.

With the requirement of what the people were to do came a three-fold promise of what they would receive. The first promise, that they would *live*, was significant. These Israelites would not be like those who died during their wilderness wanderings. Second, they would *go in*. Fear would not keep them from advancing. Third, they would *possess the land*. They would receive what God promised. Canaan was the land God was giving them. It belonged to Him and was His to give. They would receive it, but not passively; they would *take* possession.

Verse 2 does two things. First, it emphasizes that the commands from Moses were *the commandments of the LORD*. Second, it affirms the sufficiency of God’s instructions. They would provide the guidance God’s people needed for living in Canaan. The command not to *add* or *diminish ought from* God’s instructions appears elsewhere in Scripture (Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19).

God’s Word is sufficient always and in all ways. As David declared, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul” (Ps. 19:7). His Word never returns void but accomplishes what God intends (Isa. 55:11).


God’s Word is sufficient always and in all ways.

VERSES 3-4

These verses speak of a recent event that would have been fresh in the people’s minds. The Israelites knew they were to worship God alone. At **•Baalpeor**, they had done the opposite. The Israelites began to “commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab . . . and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (Num. 25:1-3). Because of Israel’s unfaithfulness, God brought a plague; 24,000 of His people died.

Hearing Moses allude to that event, the Israelites could see families who were still grieving. The lesson could not have been plainer. Those who ***did cleave unto the LORD*** were ***alive every one . . . this day***; those who did not were gone.

 **Why do you think Moses kept emphasizing that the words he was speaking were from God?**



BIBLE SKILL: *Use a Bible atlas and Bible dictionary to locate and learn about places mentioned in Scripture.*

Find the location of Baal-peor in a Bible atlas. (Tip: Check the atlas index or search on the internet.) Then use a Bible dictionary to learn more about the place. What are some significant facts about this location and the incident that took place there (Deut. 4:3; Hos. 9:10)?

WISDOM (DEUT. 4:5-9)

⁵ Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. ⁶ Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. ⁷ For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? ⁸ And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? ⁹ Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;

VERSES 5-8

Behold signaled the urgency of the instructions that would follow (Gen. 28:15; Ex. 34:10; Deut. 2:31; 11:26-28; Josh. 6:2). Moses again underscored that he spoke only what the Lord had **commanded**.

The **them** in verse 6 were the statutes and judgments God had given (vv. 1,5). Following them would ensure the Israelites could live safe and productive lives in the promised land. Further, obeying God's statutes and ordinances would be a witness in the eyes of the other peoples. As others observed the Israelites living by God's principles, they would recognize the wisdom that governed their lives. Living by God's standards would set His people apart. They would be seen as a great nation. Ultimately, that differentiation would point people to God.

The expected response to the rhetorical question of verse 7 is "None." No other nation, no other peoples, would be like Israel and the Israelites.

The Canaanites worshiped more than twenty deities. These deities supposedly controlled war and weather, dusk and dawn, fertility and fire, and diseases and death. But no Canaanite god was near when people called out to them. Canaanite gods were merely sculptures and statues based on someone's imagination. The people had no idea how to please and appease these so-called gods. It was all speculation, trial, and error. People believed the gods were remote and angry. Not so with Yahweh. He had proven Himself to be always near. He had given His people ordinances and

statutes so they would know how to worship and live in harmony with Him. These statutes and ordinances were *righteous* because God was their source.

VERSE 9

To *take heed to thyself* meant being vigilant in spiritual matters. God's people could not allow themselves to become lax in observing what mattered to Him. The imperative phrase *keep thy soul diligently* carries the idea of building a hedge of protection. This is not something a person accomplishes passively or without effort; it requires determination.

Failing to guard and watch would result in the people forgetting what they had seen and experienced. Deuteronomy warns the people not to forget (1) God's covenant with them, (2) how He led them out of Egyptian slavery, (3) that He was their God, and (4) how God's people had rebelled against Him (4:23; 6:12; 8:11; 9:7).

Like bookends, verse 5 introduced a thought and verse 9 completes it. The connection involves teaching. Moses began by saying he taught the people what God had instructed. This verse challenged the Israelites to teach the next generation God's righteous statutes. In essence, Moses was passing the baton to those standing before him.

The responsibility to pass God's truth to subsequent generations is repeated throughout Scripture.

The responsibility to pass God's truth to subsequent generations is repeated throughout Scripture (Ex. 12:24-27; Josh. 4:1-9; Ps. 78:1-7). Christ's followers have the same responsibility today (Eph. 6:4).



How will obeying God's Word set believers apart in today's world?



KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*

The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. (See Isaiah 40:8; 2 Timothy 3:16-17.)

WORSHIP (DEUT. 4:15-20)

¹⁵ **Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire:** ¹⁶ **Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female,** ¹⁷ **The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air,** ¹⁸ **The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth:** ¹⁹ **And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.** ²⁰ **But the LORD hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as ye are this day.**

VERSES 15-18

Verses 10-14 recount events from forty years earlier at Mount Sinai. There, God called the people to assemble at the foot of the mountain and made His presence known with fire and smoke. The people could hear His voice but not see Him. Recalling those events had to bolster the Israelites' faith.

God instructed the Israelites: ***Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves.*** People tend to want something visible to focus on in worship. Canaanite religions had physical representations of their false gods. The Israelites could easily be lured into wanting God to be represented visually. If they did that, God would be personified as an idol. To portray Him in a visible form would violate the commandment, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Ex. 20:4).

Moses repeated the word ***any***. Don't make an idol in the shape of ***any*** figure. From there, though, Moses began to mention the forms that an idol might take. Egyptians and Canaanites had various gods that took the forms mentioned in verses 17-18.

A beast that is on the earth—The golden calf at Mount Sinai demonstrated the Israelites' comfort with worshiping an animal. This tragic incident may have mirrored the Egyptians' worship of Apis, their sacred bull.

A winged fowl—Horus was the Egyptian god of healing, kingship, sun, and sky. He took the form of a hawk or falcon. His right

eye was the morning star and represented power. His left eye, the evening star, was supposedly the source of healing.

Any thing that creepeth on the ground—Apophis took the form of a serpent. Egyptians believed he was the perpetual enemy of their solar god, Re. On cloudy days, they believed Apophis had been victorious over Re.

A fish that is in the waters—Dagon was portrayed as half-fish and half-human. Dagon is the Hebrew word for “fish.” Dagon worship began in third-millennium Mesopotamia; it migrated into Canaan before the Israelites’ arrival.

Thus, the forms mentioned in these verses were not idle conjecture. God knew His people would be tempted to worship a god in a visible form. Doing so, though, would be to act corruptly (v. 16).

VERSE 19

Finally, God warned His people not to worship the ***sun, moon, or stars***. Genesis states that God created the sun, moon, stars, and the heavens. The fish in the sea came afterward. Creatures that crawl and roam the earth and the birds of the air were created before Adam and Eve. The forms these gods could take (vv. 16-19) are offered in reverse order from what we see in creation.

The best that human ingenuity and imagination can offer is a counterfeit of God’s divinity. God alone is worthy of our worship, adoration, loyalty, love, faithfulness, and devotion.

VERSE 20

Verse 20 offers a climax to this teaching. Out of all the earth’s inhabitants, God had selected one group, Abraham’s descendants, to receive His grace. Hearing their cries in Egypt, God remembered His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He ***brought*** them ***out***.


This is always God’s work of redemption. He brings us out—from darkness to light, from death to life, from the yoke of slavery to freedom in Christ, and from condemnation to righteousness (Rom. 8:1-10; 1 Cor. 15:55-57; Gal. 5:1; Col. 1:13-15).





What kinds of idols do we need to refrain from worshiping today?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We are to obey God’s commands.
- + We are to value and seek the wisdom that comes from the Lord.
- + We can rejoice that God has called us to be His people.

 **What makes worship, worship? What makes worship meaningful to you? What hinders your worship? What can you do to help eliminate those hindrances? Be ready to discuss your thoughts with your Bible study group.**

 **If God’s Word gives us wisdom and understanding, why do we sometimes find reading it to be a challenge? How are you doing in spending time in God’s Word? What changes can you make this week to make Scripture reading a regular habit in your life?**



Memorize Deuteronomy 4:9.

Prayer Needs



Love

OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS DEFINED BY LOVE.

DEUTERONOMY 6:1-9,20-25

Decades ago, some parents began putting labels on items around their house. If you visited the home, you might see a label with the word “Curtain” pinned at the window. Or “Toybox” in the playroom. Or “Switch” beside the door. Labels were on many items in the house: “Chair,” “Table,” “Bathtub,” “Bed,” and “TV.” This is a type of passive information saturation. Studies showed that the system helps children incorporate reading into their lives without realizing they are learning.

 **What’s an effective way to help a child learn?
Why is this method effective?**

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

DEUTERONOMY 4:44–11:32

The name Deuteronomy comes from a Greek translation that means, “second law.” The source of the name comes from Deuteronomy 17:18, which instructed a king to “write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites.” The book of Deuteronomy is an amplification and further explanation of the law God gave Moses at Mount Sinai. The book serves as a celebration of the Israelites renewing their covenant with God.

Recall that those aged twenty and above at Sinai died during the four decades of wilderness wanderings (Num. 32:10-13). Thus, the words of Deuteronomy were for a new generation, those who had not heard God’s words at Sinai. In chapter 5, Moses recounted the Israelites’ experience at Mount Sinai. He told how God had appeared and spoken to them from a fire on the mountain. Then, Moses began to retell what God said.

As we read Deuteronomy 5, we recognize familiar words from Exodus 20, the Ten Commandments. God’s people were to have no other gods before Him, no idols. They were to honor His name and observe the Sabbath (Deut. 5:7-15). The commandments continue through verse 21. It was an amplification of what God had spoken to an earlier generation at Sinai.

Chapter 6 focuses on the greatest commandment (Matt. 22:34-38). The first and last verses of the chapter alert us to this focus. They mention “the commandments” (v. 1) and “these commandments” (v. 25). These two words help frame a unified thought.

Within the chapter, verses 1-3 mention that a command is coming up; verses 4-25 explain the command. Thus, some of the terms in verses 1-3 occur again in verses 4-25—for instance, “fear” (vv. 2,13,24); “follow” (vv. 1,3,24,25); “keep” (vv. 2,17,25). The most significant terms that are repeated are “commandments,” “statutes,” and “judgments” (vv. 1,2,17,20,24,25).



As you read through Deuteronomy 6:1-9,20-25, underscore the promises God made to those who kept His commands.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

FEAR OF THE LORD (DEUT. 6:1-3)

¹ Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD your God commanded to teach you, that ye might do them in the land whither ye go to possess it: ² That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. ³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and observe to do it; that it may be well with thee, and that ye may increase mightily, as the LORD God of thy fathers hath promised thee, in the land that floweth with milk and honey.

VERSES 1-3

Deuteronomy 5 contains the Ten Commandments. In chapter 6, Moses transitioned his focus to instructions about fulfilling the first commandment, which called God's people to have no other gods besides Him (5:7).

All the “you” and “your” pronouns in verse 1 are plural. In verse 2, they are singular. While we may have a spiritual family, we are each individually responsible for our relationship with God. We each decide to fear and honor Him and keep His instructions.

To **fear the LORD** means to revere Him. The external evidence of that reverence would be keeping God's **statutes** and **judgments**. Jesus taught this principle. He told His disciples, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

God had earlier said of the Israelites, “O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever” (Deut. 5:29). Verse 2 echoes this thought; God's law was to apply to the current generation and the ones that follow. Heart-motivated obedience would result in God's blessing, namely **prolonged** life. What a meaningful promise for those who had seen the previous generation die in the wilderness.

God promised that once His people were in the land, it would **be well** with them and they would **increase mightily**. This echoed God's promise to Abraham, “thy exceeding great reward.” He also said Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Gen. 15:1; 26:4).

A *land that floweth with milk and honey* referred to the rich resources of the land and to God's abundant blessings. The phrase is a reminder that God lavishes His blessings extravagantly. He abundantly pardons (Isa. 55:7). Further, He saves "to the uttermost" those who come to Him (Heb. 7:25).



**In what way(s) has God lavished His blessings in your life?
When have you been particularly aware of those blessings?**

DEVOTED (DEUT. 6:4-9)

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: ⁵ And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. ⁶ And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: ⁷ And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. ⁸ And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. ⁹ And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

VERSES 4-5

Verses 4-9 are known as the Shema. This is the Hebrew verb for "hear" or "listen," reflecting the first word of verse 4. Jews consider the Shema one of the most important Old Testament passages. When a Pharisee asked Jesus about the greatest commandment, He quoted the Shema and Leviticus 19:18 (Matt. 22:34-39).

The phrase, ***the LORD our God*** indicates that the Jews were called to be a family of faith. They were known as God's people, His children. The Lord initiated this when He told Moses to say to Pharaoh, "Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Ex. 4:22).

To refer to the Lord as ***one*** stood in contrast to Egyptian and Canaanite beliefs. They worshiped multiple gods.

The Lord being ***one*** does not negate the Trinity. Quite the contrary; understanding His unity and uniqueness paves the way for us to affirm that He is three in one. In His unity as three in one, the Lord's plan of redemption was fully revealed in His work as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God alone is worthy of our reverence, worship, and **love**. We obey Him because we love Him. We are to love God fully. The **heart** referred to one's will or intellect; the **soul** was the center of a person's being. One's **might** did not mean muscle power but what a person put his or her energies into. The three terms together point to the totality of a person's existence and effort. Stated as a confession: I am to love God with all I am, think, feel, and do.

VERSES 6-9

When we memorize something, such as a Bible verse, we might say, "I know that by heart." The statement means we recall the words with virtually no effort. The better we know the words, the more we can incorporate their meaning into our thinking, lives, and conversations. That is the intent of verse 6.

The **words** that Moses spoke were not his own. They came from God. Having these words in one's heart would affect how that person lived in covenant with God and in the promised land.

God's instructions were also to be on their lips. The verb **teach** is imperative. The Lord's command was to be the topic of conversation both at home and beyond, in the evening and in the morning. Those who were part of God's family were to pass God's instructions to the next generation.

Verse 7 calls us to recite God's commands verbally; verses 8 and 9 tell us to remember them visually. Having God's words before us will not happen passively. Having them in one's heart (v. 6) requires an intentional effort.

Through the years, Jews have debated whether the directions in verses 8-9 were literal or figurative. Some believe this was not a literal requirement. Instead, it meant people were to have God's commands always before them, even unseen. A literal interpretation, though, has become the norm. An orthodox Jewish man will use leather straps to attach a small leather box to his forehead and another to his arm. In the box is a small piece of parchment. On it are the words of Exodus 13:1-16; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; and 11:13-21. The boxes are called *tefillin* (also called phylacteries).

Jews often attach a small cylinder container to the doorposts of their homes or the city gates. The container is called a *mezuzah*, Hebrew for "doorpost." Inside the container is a small rolled-up scroll; on it are the full texts of the *tefillin* verses. Mezuzahs are always tilted with the top leaning toward the inside of the room, house, or gate. The first letter of "Shema" is always inscribed near the top of the cylinder; often the whole word is there.



What is a practical way we can keep God's Word and commandments at the forefront of our lives?



KEY DOCTRINE: *Family*

Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth. (See Ephesians 6:4; 2 Timothy 1:5.)

RIGHTEOUS (DEUT. 6:20-25)

²⁰ And when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you? ²¹ Then thou shalt say unto thy son, We were Pharaoh's bondmen in Egypt; and the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand: ²² And the LORD shewed signs and wonders, great and sore, upon Egypt, upon Pharaoh, and upon all his household, before our eyes: ²³ And he brought us out from thence, that he might bring us in, to give us the land which he sware unto our fathers. ²⁴ And the LORD commanded us to do all these statutes, to fear the LORD our God, for our good always, that he might preserve us alive, as it is at this day. ²⁵ And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the LORD our God, as he hath commanded us.

VERSES 20-23

God knew Israelite parents' lifestyles would raise questions in their children's minds. Thus, He did not say "if the questions come" but "when." Those questions would provide parents with teachable moments.

There are both singular and plural pronouns in verse 20.

Thy (singular) son (or daughter) will ask you personally. This will be a one-on-one conversation. He will ask, ***What mean the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgments, which the LORD our God hath commanded you*** (plural)?" This singular/plural arrangement sends a two-fold message to parents.

First, every parent should be ready to explain his or her faith. Second, parents should be living out and growing in their faith alongside other believers.

Parents were to explain God's covenant in the form of a story. The story was to begin with the Israelites being slaves in Egypt. The story might begin with Joseph's brothers selling him to a caravan of traders. Later details might include Joseph rising to prominence in Egypt, the famine, Joseph's brothers asking for grain, Joseph being reunited with his family, and the people being enslaved for 400 years. They would tell about Moses, the burning bush, and God delivering His people from Egyptian captivity. But the emphasis would not be on Joseph, Pharaoh, or the Israelites' enslavement. It would be on what God had done.

The parents would tell about the ***signs and wonders***, meaning the plagues God brought on Egypt. These acts bore witness to His mighty power. They showed the Lord was greater and mightier than even the most powerful nation and ruler on earth. God's actions proved that He alone is God.

Moses's description of what God had done was both concise and crystal clear. The Lord had brought them out in order to lead them in. He brought them out of a land they knew and led them into a land they had never seen. He brought them out of persecution and led them into His promise; out of bondage and into blessing. God fulfilled His promise to the Israelites' ***fathers***, meaning the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

VERSES 24-25


The parents' explanation would now focus on what God expected of His people in return. He expected them to obey His statutes and to ***fear***, meaning revere, Him. Again, following God's statutes is the external evidence of our internal reverence for Him. The New Testament echoes this same principle. (See 1 John 5:3.)


Fearing and following God's commands would result in prosperity and preservation in the promised land. Offering proof, Moses told the people to look at their current lives—***as it is at this day***.


Our obedience to God honors Him. Our behavior points to Him as the One who deserves our reverence. How we conduct ourselves says something about who we believe God is.

The reason behind all the decrees, statutes, and ordinances was so God’s children could live in righteousness—a right relationship with Him and He with them.

What about righteousness today? Our righteousness is made possible through what Jesus did on the cross. Paul wrote, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor. 5:21).

 **How does our behavior reflect what we believe about God?**

 **What does walking in righteousness look like in the life of a believer today?**



BIBLE SKILL: *Read and reflect on a Bible passage.*

Read the Shema (Deut. 6:4-9) slowly and reflectively. Note how it encourages God’s people to love Him with all they are, to pass the faith to the next generation, and to observe carefully His commands and decrees. Also read Mark 12:28-33, where Jesus declared the Shema the greatest commandment. What does it mean to you to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and strength? Consider Matthew 5:16 and 1 John 2:5-6. How does faithful obedience to God’s commands bless both us and others?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers demonstrate their love for God by obeying His commands.
- + We are to be intentional about putting God at the center of our lives, making everything else revolve around Him.
- + Remembering God’s past faithfulness helps us follow God’s commands today.



How ready are you to explain your faith to your children and/or grandchildren? What would you tell them if they asked? Share with your Bible study group ideas and tips for explaining your faith.



Think about your own life. In what way are you not demonstrating a wholehearted love for God? What changes can you make in order to deepen your love for Him?



Memorize Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Prayer Needs



▶ *Undivided Worship* ◀

BELIEVERS ARE TO AVOID IDOLS AND WORSHIP GOD ALONE.

DEUTERONOMY 12:1-11,29-32

We've all heard the statements. "I don't need to go to church to worship. I can worship just as well while walking on the beach, working in my garden, or hiking in the mountains." Well, those statements may contain a kernel of truth, but the experiences aren't the same, are they? To worship with God's people in a place set aside for that distinct purpose centers our focus. Corporate worship draws our hearts to Him like nothing else can.

 **Do you think God cares about where and how people worship Him? If so, why?**

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT


DEUTERONOMY 12:1–26:19

Deuteronomy contains a series of messages God delivered to His people through Moses. Moses’s first message (1:1–4:49) reviewed the history of the Israelites, beginning with their leaving Mount Sinai (also called Horeb). It concluded with a challenge for the Israelites to follow the Lord’s commands.

This week’s study comes from Moses’s second message (5:1–26:19). Some biblical scholars have called these chapters the “Code of Deuteronomy.” They compare it to Exodus 20:22–23:19. Although the two share similarities, the Deuteronomy passage contains details not in Exodus. Deuteronomy offers specific applications for God’s people as they entered and inhabited the land of Canaan. The Exodus passage was given to the Israelites at Mount Sinai; Moses delivered the Deuteronomy message to a later generation, as the previous had died out during their forty years of wilderness wandering.

The earlier part of Moses’s second message (5:1–11:32) reviewed the Ten Commandments and emphasized obeying the first of the ten (5:7). Last week’s study came from this earlier part of Moses’s second message. This week’s study comes from the latter part of Moses’s second message (12:1–26:19). This section explains how to apply the remaining nine commandments. These applications addressed specific matters the Israelites would face in the years ahead. Moses’s words would teach the Israelites how to live as God’s people in the land He was giving them.

Thoughts that connect the two parts of Moses’s second message include God’s giving the land to His people (6:1–3; 26:9–19) and His delivering them from Egyptian captivity (7:8, 17–19; 26:5–8). Both emphasize the importance of remaining faithful to God (6:4–19; 26:16–19). Both also warn God’s people not to become entangled in the religious practices of the Canaanites (7:16–19; 12:29–32).

 **As you read through Deuteronomy 12:1–26:19, highlight the imperatives. Why do you think God considered these specific actions so corruptible that they called for the death penalty for fellow Israelites?**

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REMOVE IDOLATRY (DEUT. 12:1-7)

¹ These are the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. ² Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and under every green tree: ³ And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place.

⁴ Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God. ⁵ But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come: ⁶ And thither ye shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: ⁷ And there ye shall eat before the LORD your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee.

VERSE 1

Four times Moses spoke of God's people obeying His *statutes and judgments* (Deut. 5:1; 11:32; 12:1; 26:16). These mark the beginning and ending of both parts of Moses's second message. Like parentheses, the terms indicate the framework for this message. *Statutes and judgments*, taken together, refer to the whole law. What will follow are details about following and applying that law.

Moses's words connected obeying God's law with living in the promised land. For the Israelites, the two were inextricably linked.

God had already given His people the land. Although they did not yet *possess* it, in the eyes of God, it was already theirs.

VERSES 2-3

Worship was the initial focus of these statutes and ordinances. The Lord was calling His people to worship Him in a radically different way. This was because God, the Creator of the universe, was radically different from the so-called gods other nations worshiped.

God called His people to **utterly destroy** all the pagan worship sites. These were easily identified. Canaanites put them atop **high mountains** and **hills**, believing this allowed the worshipers to be closer to their gods. The Old Testament commonly refers to these as “high places” (Num. 33:52; 1 Kings 3:3; Isa. 15:2).

Canaanites also set up places of worship under specific trees. The word **green** can also mean fertile. Their primary gods were supposedly concerned with producing fertile fields and wombs. Thus, •Asherah, the Canaanites’ main fertility goddess, was depicted as a tree.

The Israelites were to demolish any structures the Canaanites had erected on these sites. Further, they were to destroy all objects that represented the Canaanite gods or that the people used as a part of their worship. God did not want His people tempted to go to these sites and participate in their worship. Canaanite worship included “abominations” that the people did “unto their gods” (Deut. 20:18).

By destroying the locations and objects of worship, the Lord intended to erase the false gods’ names from the land and thus, the people’s minds. God had given similar instructions earlier because He was concerned about His people’s holiness (7:1-6). Here, He was focusing on His name being revered in the land.

VERSES 4-7

Verse 4 raises two significant questions. First, why was God determined to be worshiped differently? Simply put, He was unlike the false gods and deities the Canaanites worshiped. The Creator and Sustainer of the universe and all that exists, He alone is God. All other supposed gods and deities were the products of people’s imaginations and fanciful ideas.

Second, what did this prohibition include? It was a complete and all-encompassing ban. The Israelites could not involve themselves in the Canaanites’ pagan worship practices. They could not try to mix Canaanite and Hebrew worship practices. God allowed no compromise.

The word **but** in verse 5 denotes a profound contrast. Instead of *don’t*, what follows is what God expected His people to *do*. Verses 2 and 3 mentioned “all the places” and “that place.” The Canaanites worshiped their numerous deities in multiple places. Verse 5, though, talks about **the place**—singular. The Israelites were to worship at a singular place, the tabernacle. God had given Moses instructions about its construction and how the Israelites were to worship Him there (Ex. 25:1–31:17). After construction was complete, God’s glory

filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40). God’s *name*, His essence and glory, dwelt there. The Israelites were to *seek* it and *come*.

The people were to bring their offerings and gifts to the designated place. The *burnt offerings* were whole animals that worshipers offered to God. The burnt offering was a particular category or subset of the *sacrifices* worshipers gave (see Lev. 7).

God also spoke about the *tithes*. The Hebrews paid these out of gratitude for what their Sovereign Lord had done and would continue to do. The tithe was a tenth of the produce from the peoples’ fields and herds. The Hebrews typically gave these during the Feast or Festival of Weeks (Deut. 26:1-11). The *freewill offerings* were given spontaneously; *heave offerings* were planned.

Bringing offerings and contributions was a celebration. Families would eat together and express their thanks for God’s blessings. The different foods were to be shared by the worshipers and the worship leaders, except for the burnt offerings; they were completely burned atop the altar’s fire.



Why was it important for the Israelites to focus first on ridding the land of the pagan worship sites and related objects?



BIBLE SKILL: Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about a biblical concept.

Read the article “Sacrifice and Offering” in a Bible dictionary. Note the various kinds of offerings and their distinct purposes. How does bringing our offerings of time, talent, and treasure to our house of worship bring praise to God and bless others?

WORSHIP GOD (DEUT. 12:8-11)

⁸ Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. ⁹ For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD

your God giveth you. ¹⁰ But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety; ¹¹ Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there; thither shall ye bring all that I command you; your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes, and the heave offering of your hand, and all your choice vows which ye vow unto the LORD:

VERSES 8-11

We find a similar accusation in Judges 21:25. Judges described a time of sinful depravity when the Israelites failed to honor God as their King. The current description of *every man* doing *whatsoever is right in his own eyes*, though, is referring to worship. The Israelites were sacrificing whatever and however they wished. Rather than having multiple or even a portable worship hub, they needed a centralized site where they could celebrate, worship, and participate in their God-directed rituals and services. Having a set place would give the Hebrews a sense of permanence.

God stated the reason for the current state of Hebrew worship. The people had not yet *come to the rest*, meaning where they would settle on the other side of the Jordan. They had not yet received *the inheritance* God had promised. Thus, worship felt temporary and transitory, rather than firmly established in the land.

Life on the other side of the Jordan would differ from what the people had experienced while enslaved in Egypt and traveling in the wilderness. God described Canaan as *the rest* (v. 9). In doing so, He was not describing a life of leisure where the people would do no work or have no responsibilities. God promised to give His people *rest from all their enemies*.

Verse 11 echoes verses 5-6. The *then* comes as part of a sequence introduced in verse 10. When you cross, when you live in the land, when He gives you rest, and when you live in security—*then*—the Lord would reveal where His *name* was to dwell. God's *name* was more than a title. It indicated His essence, glory, and power.

The Lord would dictate the details about the *place* He would *choose*. God had chosen Israel to be His people (Deut. 7:6-7), had chosen to deliver them from Egypt (4:37), and had chosen the Levites to serve as the Hebrew priests (18:1-7). Where His name would dwell would also be the Lord's decision.



Why did God want to designate a certain place for His people to worship Him? Why was that important to Him—and to them?

STAND FIRM (DEUT. 12:29-32)

²⁹ When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; ³⁰ Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. ³¹ Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. ³² What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it.

VERSES 29-32

Verses 29-32 state the three-fold essential emphasis of Deuteronomy: God would lead His people successfully into the promised land, they were to worship Him alone, and they were to remain faithful to His full law.

The Hebrew word translated **cut off** carries the idea of something being destroyed. God earlier promised Moses, “For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off” (Ex. 23:23). These were the **nations** God would annihilate. However, the destruction would come at the hands of God’s people. Thus, God said the Hebrews would drive them out.

Having promised His people military victory, God knew the Israelites faced another threat—spiritual defeat. He did not want His people to go after foreign gods. A concern was that the Hebrews would attempt to incorporate some of the Canaanites’ religious practices and beliefs into Judaism. The word for this type of mixing is “syncretism.”

God was telling His people not to become curious about the Canaanite gods. He knew that if they began to **enquire**, they might

become enamored by those religions and become **snared** by their beliefs and practices. The root for the Hebrew word translated *snared* means to be entrapped, as with a noose.

As does verse 30, verse 31 twice mentions **their gods**. The Egyptians and Canaanites worshiped multiple gods. Temples and altars dotted the landscape. Verse 31, though, speaks twice of **the LORD**, singular. Worshiping one God differentiated the Israelites from all other people groups.

Moses declared that **the LORD . . . hateth** Canaanite worship. God said the Canaanites practice **every abomination . . . unto their gods**. The one practice God mentioned here is that **their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire**. They sacrificed their children as burnt offerings. This was not uncommon in that day. We find a description of other detestable practices a few chapters later (18:9-11; 23:17). Concerning the possibility of adopting any Canaanite beliefs and practices, God said emphatically, **thou shalt not do so**.

Verse 32 repeats two thoughts Moses stated earlier: follow God's commands and do not add to or take anything from them (Deut. 4:2,4). God's Word is altogether sufficient.

God made amazing promises to those who would obey His commands. He would affirm them as his own possession. (See 26:18-19.) Just a generation earlier, these same people were Pharaoh's slaves. God promised to bless them with a land and life they could have never imagined. What a promotion!



In what ways are we tempted to draw the world's practices and beliefs into our worship experiences today? How do we draw the line so we practice only what God finds acceptable in worship?




KEY DOCTRINE: *The Scriptures*


Scripture reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. (See Psalm 119:89; Matthew 24:35.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should be prepared to recognize and avoid false gods.
- + We are to worship the Lord by bringing our offerings to Him.
- + Believers should be strong spiritually, worshiping God alone.



How is giving our tithes and offerings an act of worship? What would help our giving feel more like a celebration rather than an obligation? Be ready to discuss your ideas with the Bible study group.



Examine your life for “gods” that might draw you away from remaining loyal to the Lord alone. What actions can you take to safeguard yourself from being drawn away?



Memorize Deuteronomy 12:10-11a.

Prayer Needs



▶ *Covenant Relationship* ◀

BELIEVERS FIND GOD'S BLESSINGS THROUGH OBEDIENCE.

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-6,15-19

We've all seen it. The parent is down on one knee, talking to her child as he is about to head out for the first day of a new school year. "Now, you have your backpack? Good. Remember to do what the teacher tells you. No acting up. Don't forget to bring home any papers I need to sign. Don't lose your lunch money. And have fun!" At this point, the parent isn't telling the child anything new. He or she is reinforcing and putting a new emphasis on what the child has heard countless times.



What wise "messages" did your parents repeat to you over and over again? What impact did hearing those words have on you?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

DEUTERONOMY 27:1–28:68

Deuteronomy contains Moses’s messages to the Israelites before they entered the promised land. The first (1:1–4:49) recalled their history as they traveled from Mount Sinai to their then-current location on the Plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River and across from Jericho. His second message (5:1–26:19) reviewed the Ten Commandments and how to apply them in the promised land.

The final verses of Moses’s second message (26:16-19) serve as a summary of chapters 12–26. They remind God’s people to obey God’s commands. Doing so affirmed that the Lord was their God. Additionally, God promised to elevate His people above all other peoples. These four verses firmly connect what came before (chaps. 1–26) with what came afterward (chaps. 27–28).

Twice, verses 16-19 use the words “this day,” undergirding the commitment God has for His people and His people have for Him. Ancient Near Eastern covenants and/or treaties included statements of mutual commitment. These covenants and treaties also included promised rewards for honoring the agreement and, in contrast, consequences of disobeying it. This is the emphasis of today’s text, Deuteronomy 27–28.

God instructed His people to have a ceremony once they entered Canaan. They were to celebrate their entrance into the land and seal the terms of the covenantal agreement. This ceremony was to take place on two mountains in Samaria. Mount Ebal, the northern of the two, rises to about 1,400 feet; Mount Gerizim rises to 2,850 feet. Half the tribes would gather on Mount Ebal and the others on Mount Gerizim. The people were to set up an altar on Mount Ebal and offer sacrifices to God there.

In the saddle between the two mountains is Shechem. This was the site of Jacob’s well, where, centuries later, Jesus met a Samaritan woman. Her forefathers had worshiped on “this mountain,” meaning Mount Gerizim (John 4:20).



As you read through Deuteronomy 27:1–28:68, underscore “this day.” How do these add a sense of importance for God’s people to make a decision or commitment?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

FAITHFULNESS (DEUT. 28:1-6)

¹ And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the LORD thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth:

² And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.

³ Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. ⁴ Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. ⁵ Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. ⁶ Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out.

VERSES 1-2

Most covenants and treaties in the ancient Near East began with a list of anticipated curses for those who violated the agreement. This chapter does the opposite; it begins on a positive note. It first states the promised rewards for honoring the covenantal agreement (vv. 1-14). The altered order certainly would have caught the attention of those listening.

Again, Moses challenged the Israelites to faithfully obey and carefully follow what God had said. This had been a recurring directive throughout Moses's speeches. With this command came a promise: God would elevate His people far above all other peoples on the earth. What a far cry from where Israel had begun.

God was reemphasizing His commands **this day**. His doing so compelled His people to make a decision and a commitment.

The word “bless” occurs seven times in verses 2-6. It appears in verse 2 in noun form as **blessings**; the remaining six are verbs. The emphasis of these verses is on God blessing His people.

The root behind the Hebrew verb translated **overtake** means to reach or take hold of something or someone. It was used in the story of the Egyptian army pursuing Moses and his people as they neared the Red Sea. Scripture says, “But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and *overtook them* encamping by the sea” (Ex. 14:9, emphasis added).

One does not passively *overtake* something or someone. Determination and effort are involved. The promise was that God's blessings would actively pursue His people. With the promise, though, came a contingency. God's blessings would pursue and take hold of His people because they made it their practice to ***hearken unto the voice of the LORD*** their ***God***.

The Lord stated one of His blessings in verse 1. God promised to place His people ***high above all nations of the earth***. Again, this was not something the people could achieve under their own power. They had neither the resources nor training to make such an achievement. Only the power and presence of God could make that happen.

VERSES 3-6

Verses 3-6 outline a six-fold covenant blessing God promised His people. The promises are listed in short, crisp sentences; some contain only three Hebrew words. This style of declarations would have made remembering them easier. Thus, the Hebrews could easily quote these words in worship—or put them to music—as a way to recall God's promised blessings.

The term translated ***blessed*** carries the idea of being prosperous. In modern culture, we tend to think of prosperity in terms of financial resources. The Hebrew word did not have this limitation. To be *blessed* meant to have one's life filled with benefits. God is the ultimate source of all blessings (Jas. 1:17). Further, the Hebrews understood that God gave His blessing so the recipient might be a blessing. In other words, the original recipient was a conduit through which God's blessings flowed to others. Being able to bless others was a sign of living a prosperous life.

This is a far cry from the false teaching about prosperity theology that many proclaim today. Many claim that God will give people material goods and riches if they will only—fill in the blank. What God was promising the Israelites was to honor those who honor Him with proper actions and motives. God will not be mocked and cannot be manipulated. He expects those who serve Him to do so out of love and gratitude, not out of selfish greed. What God desires is a broken spirit and a humble heart (Ps. 51:17).

Fertility among flocks, fields, and families was the most important contributor to the long-term survival of a household, people, or nation. The text uses the same Hebrew word three times in this one verse to refer to fertility. The literal translation is “fruit” or “fruitfulness.”

Context affected how the Hebrews heard this message. The Israelites were going into the land of Canaan. Baal and Astarte, the primary deities of the Canaanites, were known as fertility gods. Pagans worshiped them, prayed to them, and gave them offerings, believing that these so-called gods could bring an abundance of children, harvest, and cattle. Worshipers of these deities often participated in sexual activities, believing their actions would motivate the gods to bless their harvests and homes. This lure was part of the reason God repeatedly told His people to destroy every vestige and site of Canaanite worship.

What an affirmation of the Lord, the God of the Hebrews. He alone was the One who could cause families, cattle, and harvests to be fruitful. For His people, God's bounty and abundance were comprehensive. Every area of their lives would be blessed.

Preparing grain and baking bread was a wife's daily responsibility in the Jewish world. Wives would grind a bit of grain and then mix it with water, a bit of salt, and sometimes fermented dough or drink. The fermentation acted as yeast or leaven and caused the bread to rise. Women would knead the dough in a wide, shallow bowl, typically made of terracotta or wood. To make a daily supply of bread took about an hour. Although loaves could last up to four days, most wives baked them daily.

People typically used a basket to transport harvested grain and other foods from the field to the kitchen. Other times, though, people would use the basket to store and transport prepared foods, such as bread (Lev. 8:26,31; Deut. 26:2; Matt. 14:20). The promise that God would bless the **basket** and **store** meant He would meet the families' most basic needs, including daily bread.

Verse 6 complements the promised blessing of verse 3. It emphasized that people would be blessed wherever they were—whether in the city or the country. This verse emphasizes that God's people would be blessed wherever they went. The phrase **when thou comest in . . . when thou goest out** meant moving freely for both personal and business purposes.

Once in Canaan, most of God's people lived in small villages and were farmers. Their daily tasks included tending to their fields, orchards, and vineyards. This meant they had to pass through the city gate.

Merchants would sell their wares, goods, and food in the city gate. This still occurs at the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem. Fresh fruits, vegetables, baked goods, scarves, and items of clothing are sold there even today.

Additionally, in Canaan, the Jewish elders would sit at the city gate, often on benches carved of stone. From there, they would render decisions about important matters and settle issues and disputes between people and families (see Ruth 4:1-8). Remains of these stone benches are still visible at some biblical sites, including Beersheba and Gezer.



What do these verses say about the faithfulness of God toward His people? How would these promises encourage God's people to remain faithful to Him?



How do these promised blessings differ from the prosperity theology that is commonly taught and preached today?



KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (See John 1:16-17; Romans 5:20-21.)

DISOBEDIENCE (DEUT. 28:15-19)

¹⁵ But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee: ¹⁶ Cursed shalt thou be in the city, and cursed shalt thou be in the field. ¹⁷ Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store. ¹⁸ Cursed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy land, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. ¹⁹ Cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out.

VERSE 15

Verse 15 begins to outline the curses the Israelites would experience if they failed to obey God's commands and statutes. The list of prescribed disasters and miseries (vv. 15-68) is longer than the list of blessings for obedience (vv. 1-14). This was common in ancient agreements. Evidently, negative reinforcement was more effective in eliciting compliance than promised future rewards.

Mirroring the pattern in the first six verses, the word “curse” occurs seven times in verses 15-19. It appears in verse 15 in noun form as ***curses***; the remaining six, translated as “cursed,” are verbs. The emphasis of these verses, then, is on God removing His blessing; the result would be that the *curses* would reach and take hold of the disobedient. The application of these curses reflects point by point what we read in verses 1-6.

VERSES 16-19

To be cursed ***in the city*** and ***the field*** meant the person was cursed wherever he or she was. Being opposites, and yet used together, *city* and *country* meant everywhere. This grammatical device is similar to our saying that we've searched high and low for something. That means we've searched everywhere we can imagine.

This thought of being cursed everywhere had to be horrifying. It meant that all of life's activities were cursed. It was a life of hardship and humiliation, of difficulty and deprivation. These verses outline some of those challenges.

Leviticus spoke of God bringing judgment on those who rebelled against Him. For the disobedient, God said He would break “the staff of your bread”—meaning one's supply of bread (Lev. 26:26). This verse may have been the thought behind bread being called the “staff of life.” Like a staff, bread enables one to walk.

For one's ***basket*** and ***store*** to be cursed meant that obtaining the most basic necessity of daily life was going to be a hardship. In other words, God's curses were going to hit people right where they lived.

Whereas fertility among flocks, fields, and families was a picture of abundance, God's bringing a curse on those sources would result in poverty, scarcity, and deprivation.

The curses affecting the Israelites' offspring, produce, herds, and flocks would come as diseases and drought (Deut. 28:22-24,60-61). Many would die. God said, “And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God. And it shall come


to pass, that as the LORD rejoiced over you to do you good, and to multiply you; so the LORD will rejoice over you to destroy you” (vv. 62-63a).

As if that was not troubling enough, God said desperation would drive parents to do the unthinkable. As the people faced warfare and starvation, they would resort to eating their own children (vv. 53-57).

To be able to enter and exit freely meant life was good and normal and that enemies and illnesses were not impeding the people’s movement. If no one was coming or going, the city or village likely was facing a crisis, under siege, or abandoned and desolate (Zech. 7:14). That situation meant everyday life had come to a grinding halt.

The picture in the curses is of a life of misery. This, though, is not God’s desire. The purpose of the curses was to draw God’s people back to Himself. He calls His people to be holy and wholly devoted to Him (Lev. 20:26; Deut. 26:16; 1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:16). He is still calling His people to commit ourselves to Him today and all our “todays” going forward.

 **What do these curses say about God’s nature and character?**



BIBLE SKILL: *Read and reflect on a Bible passage.*

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-6. Try to imagine a life where every aspect of it experienced God’s blessing. What would that look like in your life? How and where would God’s blessing manifest itself? Now read verses 15-19 and try to imagine life totally apart from God’s blessing. How might the thought of such an awful alternative motivate people to live faithfully by God’s commands? God wanted to see His people demonstrate their faith in Him through obedience to His commands. How does James describe that concept (Jas. 2:18)?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers should enjoy the blessing that comes from following God’s commands.
- + Choosing to disregard God’s commands leads to humiliation.



God blesses us so that we can be a conduit of His blessings to others. In what way do you share His blessings? Be ready to discuss with your group specific ideas about sharing those blessings with someone. What action plan can you make to be a blessing to a certain individual?



This week, as you “do good deeds,” ask yourself, “Why am I doing this—to bring glory to God or myself?” What actions can you take to make sure your works come from a pure heart?



Memorize Deuteronomy 28:9.

Prayer Needs



► *Fully Committed* ◀

BELIEVERS ARE TO BE CHARACTERIZED BY A
WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT TO GOD.

DEUTERONOMY 30:11-20

Do you remember when people sat for a professional family photo? Afterward, somebody would have to decide which photo was best. It would be framed, hung, and proudly displayed. One of the best ways to pick the favorite is to not consider multiple options at once. Instead, look at only two. Of these two, which is better? Set aside the not chosen one. Place a new picture beside the chosen one and ask, which is better? By comparing only two, you eliminate choice fatigue. Eventually, you've chosen the best photo.



In what situation have you had so many options that it was overwhelming to pick only one? How did you eventually decide?

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

DEUTERONOMY 29:1–30:20

For forty years, Moses had been leading God’s people from Egypt across the Sinai Peninsula. He and the Israelites were now east of the Jordan River, across from the city of Jericho, on the Plains of Moab. At this point, he was an old man. He had spent his first forty years in Egypt, his second tending to his father-in-law’s flocks, and his final forty leading the exodus. God’s people were standing on the threshold of the promised land. Moses would only be able to view it from a distance; he would never be allowed to enter.

This week’s passage would be Moses’s last formal message to the Israelites. It was not for a select few. He “called unto all Israel” and began to speak (29:2). This message would apply to everyone.

In this message, Moses covered three main points. First, he spoke about God’s past faithfulness. He reminded them of the Lord’s mighty acts that led to the Hebrew slaves being freed from Egyptian captivity. Moses highlighted God’s faithful love, grace, and care for His people.

Second, Moses emphasized God’s covenant with His people. God had spoken His covenant with Moses at Mount Sinai. God’s message at Moab was a renewal of the covenant made at Sinai (29:1-2). God directed His people to obey this covenant because He wanted them to succeed in everything they did. Plus, this covenant would establish them as His people (vv. 9,13).

Third, God was giving His people a basis for hope in the future. Knowing God had shown His power and demonstrated His faithfulness in the past would reassure them of His continued care and protection. The people would certainly face challenges in Canaan. Recalling what God had done in the past would encourage them during challenging days ahead.



As you read Deuteronomy 30:11-20, identify the choices set before the people. Highlight the commands.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE COMMAND (DEUT. 30:11-14)

¹¹ For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. ¹² It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? ¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? ¹⁴ But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.

VERSES 11-14

In Deuteronomy, God repeatedly called His people to keep His commands. ***This commandment*** was not ***hidden*** or ***far off***. God had called His people to a doable task. Obedience was not attainable by only the superhuman or the super-spiritual. All could obey. The Lord was not setting His people up for failure but for spiritual success.

God's command was ***not in heaven*** or ***beyond the sea***. Moses was saying that if the Israelites wanted to know God's command, they would not have to send someone on an extreme and difficult journey to retrieve it. To be *in heaven* would mean God's covenant was lofty and unattainable to everyday Israelites. The good news was that although God's message to His people originated in heaven, it was not beyond their reach. One did not have to be an expert to understand, explain, or apply it.

What a contrast to the Egyptians' and Canaanites' beliefs about their so-called gods. Worshipers hoped to earn their gods' favor. Their efforts were essentially a hit-or-miss proposition, like playing darts blindfolded. "We did this before, and things got better—this must be what pleases the gods." The pagan gods and any theological beliefs related to them were complete fabrications of peoples' imaginations.

God was not that way with His people. He wanted His covenant purposes and will to be perfectly clear. He wanted His people to be able to follow. Thus, they did not need to send a messenger *beyond the sea* to retrieve it, bring it back to them, and then proclaim it to them.

Rather than being remote and unattainable, God's message was near. Significantly, the Hebrew word translated **word** in verse 14 is not plural. *Word* being singular underscores the unity of God's instruction. God has not left us an incoherent rambling of disconnected teachings. He has given a unified single message to His people. It proclaims God's redeeming, forgiving, restoring, and reestablishing His relationship with we who are fallen.

To have the message in one's **heart** meant God's command and covenant had been woven into the hearer's very being. It had become ingrained into the person's thinking and was part of the person's spiritual makeup; it affected his or her life.

Having the message in one's **mouth** meant the person could articulate the content and teaching of God's message. The Lord had a reason for wanting the Israelites to achieve this heart and mouth level of understanding; He wanted His people to obey His covenant. He was calling for life-changing obedience.



If people think God's truths are confusing and unattainable, how might that affect their openness to God's Word?



How can you respond to people who say it is too difficult to know God's will or to obey His commands?

THE COMMITMENT (DEUT. 30:15-18)

¹⁵ **See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;** ¹⁶ **In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.** ¹⁷ **But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;** ¹⁸ **I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it.**

VERSES 15-16

In Hebrew thought, prosperity was not limited to having abundant financial resources. Prosperity (*good*) could also refer to experiencing kindness and living joyfully. In contrast, *evil* referred to experiences that were unpleasant or hurtful.

Again, Moses reiterated the command that God's people were to love and obey Him (Deut. 6:5; 7:9; 10:12; 11:1; 19:9). These two actions were, by definition, interwoven. Jesus understood this. He told His disciples, "If a man love me, he will keep my words" (John 14:23). To love and obey was to *walk* in God's ways and *keep* His commands, statutes, and ordinances.

Verse 16 adds a layer to experiencing the life and prosperity mentioned in verse 15. God would allow His people to *multiply* in the land. Multiplication, whether in fields, families, or flocks indicated one was prosperous.

The sentence points to three benefits of walking in God's ways and obeying His commands. God's people would live in the land, multiply in the land, and be blessed in the land they would possess. This was the life and the prosperity mentioned in verse 15.

What a far cry from the preceding generation. They had been slaves in another land; someone else possessed them. Due to God's blessing, they would have a land and would possess it. What a great reminder that God can take our worst circumstance and turn it into a blessing.

God's people are not immune from difficulties and challenges. We are "born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). We don't have to face those troubles, though, by ourselves. God is still at work.

***God can take our worst circumstance
and turn it into a blessing.***

VERSES 17-18

Moses had just described the life and prosperity he introduced in verse 15. Next, he explained the death and adversity mentioned in that same verse. Numerous times, God had called His people to follow His statutes and ordinances (Deut. 4:5,6,14; 6:1; 11:22). Rather than follow, what if their *heart* turns from God, meaning they reject Him?

Verse 17 contains a progression of action. The first step begins in the heart, maybe unseen by others. Surrounded by the pagan Canaanites, a person could begin to think, “I really am tired of these restrictive customs and laws.”

Second, the person no longer listens to what God has said. They ignore His Word, instructions, and commands. This leads to step three; the person is ***drawn away***. Often, this can be an incremental movement rather than a massive leap.

Growing more comfortable in the presence of the ungodly can lead to steps four and five. The person will begin to bow in worship and ultimately serve the other gods. The enemy always makes sure that there are plenty of ***other gods*** to lure people. Those false gods will get the person’s time, attention, energy, and resources. This is what it means to ***serve them***.

During the looking, luring, and leading astray stages, the target does not know or maybe does not want to hear about the hook in the lure. But God is fair and just. He warned His people and told them the consequences of having a heart that turns from Him.

The consequences were two-fold, loss of life and loss of longevity. ***Ye shall surely perish*** echoes God’s warning to Adam and Eve about eating the forbidden fruit from the tree in the garden, “for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Gen. 2:17).

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race. (See Genesis 3:6-7; James 1:14-15.)

Adam and Eve did not physically die that day; yet they were banished from the garden because of their sin and eventually died. God’s people were eventually banished from the land where He was about to place them. They had gone after foreign gods. In 722 BC, the Assyrians conquered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and took survivors as captives. Similarly, the Southern Kingdom of Judah fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC. Their days were not prolonged in the land across the Jordan. Sin had consequences—and still does today.



Based on these verses, what does loving God look like?



How are people today fooled into thinking there is no penalty for sin?

THE CHALLENGE (DEUT. 30:19-20)

¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

²⁰ That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.

VERSE 19

As if in a courtroom setting, the Lord called His two witnesses against His people, *heaven and earth*. The phrase referred to all of creation. No being, either human or heavenly, could ever deny that God gave His people ample opportunity to make the right choice. The words *this day* added a sense of urgency. Moses's time with the Israelites was coming to an end. The time to decide was now.

The decision was between *life* and *blessing* or *death* and *cursing*—the very options Moses had been describing. Several times in Deuteronomy Moses had urged God's people to choose life (4:1; 5:33; 6:2; 8:1; 16:20). Here, he clearly laid out the only two options the Israelites had.

The decision they made this day would affect them and subsequent generations. The decision was not merely a mental or academic one. No one could say, "I am going to choose that one, but it's not going to change my life." No, the choice would have major life implications.

VERSE 20

Since verse 15, the two key words have been "life" and "live." They have appeared six times in these verses. This is the option God preferred for His people—and still prefers for us today.


Like mixing water and dye, which cannot be separated, loving, obeying, and remaining faithful to God affects every area of life.

Why the connection? Because God *is thy life*. He had created His people. He had chosen them. He had led them. Apart from Him, the Israelites would not have existed as a people or individuals. He was the only one who could fulfill the promise He had sworn to the Israelites’ ancestors. They would live in the land for a prolonged period of time. This was the essence of the old covenant.

It is also the core of the new covenant, which God revealed in sending Jesus to live among us and die for us. Death will not win over Him because “in him was life” (John 1:4). He said of Himself, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6). At one point in His ministry, many in the crowd quit following Jesus. He challenged His disciples, asking if they too were going to walk away. “Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (6:68). Peter knew that in Jesus alone was life. The same is true still today.

The disciples had a decision to make. The Israelites had a decision to make. We have a decision to make. It’s the decision every person must make for themselves. The choice is between life and blessing—or death and curse. Today, which do you choose?

 **What does it mean for you to say God “is your life”? In this context, what does it mean for you to “choose life”?**





BIBLE SKILL: *Read multiple Bible passages to understand a biblical concept.*


Read Deuteronomy 30:19-20; 32:46-47; John 17:3; and Colossians 3:1-4. Reflect on what it means that God is our life. Practically speaking, what does that look like? How does the truth these verses communicate challenge you to adjust your priorities?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + We can trust God to give us the ability to obey His commands.
- + People must choose whether they will follow God or not.
- + Our desire to follow God influences our descendants' choices to follow Him.

 **Discuss the following: What can you do to help yourself understand God’s Word better? How can your Bible study group help people with little Bible knowledge to better understand God’s Word?**

 **The enemy lures people away from God incrementally rather than in one huge leap. How might this apply to you? Do you sense you are not as close to God as you once were? What changes will you make this week to renew your commitment to God?**



Memorize Deuteronomy 30:16.

Prayer Needs



▶ *God’s Power* ◀

BELIEVERS CAN LIVE WITHOUT FEAR KNOWING
THAT THEY SERVE THE ONE TRUE GOD.

DEUTERONOMY 33:1-5,26-29

In this scene, we may have been the parent or the child. The child is standing on the side of the pool. The parent is in the water, arms outstretched and saying, “You can do it. I’ll catch you. I promise you’ll be fine.” The child is hesitating. “Ready? On the count of three.” Still hesitant, but finally the child lunges and is grabbed safely just as he reaches the water.

 **What is the connection between fear and insecurity?
Between trust and security?**

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UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

DEUTERONOMY 31:1–34:12

Deuteronomy records what occurred while the Israelites stood at the threshold of the promised land. They had left Egypt forty years before.

The story involving Egypt actually began when Joseph's jealous brothers sold him into slavery. He ended up in Egypt. While there, Joseph experienced a complete reversal of status. He went from being a nobody to a somebody, becoming the second in command in all of Egypt. Joseph, and eventually his entire family, came to know the luxuries of the house of Pharaoh. For 400 years, Joseph's descendants, the Hebrews, remained in Egypt.

During that time they also experienced a complete reversal of status. They came to know the misery of back-breaking, forced labor. They knew what it was to have no home, no land to call their own.

God, though, would raise up a man who would lead them from Egypt to the land He promised to Abraham and his descendants. Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers record events that occurred during their journey.

Once again, the Israelites' situation was about to completely change. They had been sojourners; they were about to be inhabitants of Canaan. The people had known only Moses as their leader. But Moses's successor, Joshua, would lead them into Canaan.

Deuteronomy 31:1–34:12 contains the last recorded words of Moses. It tells of his commissioning Joshua to be his successor. Chapter 32 contains a hymn that extols God's goodness and calls His people to live faithfully by the covenant. Chapter 34 tells of Moses's death.

This week's study focuses on God's blessings for His covenant people—His protection, presence, and provision. The text will include words and concepts we encounter in the New Testament: blessed, loved, happy, everlasting, and saved. It affirms the great message of Scripture—none other is like our Lord; He alone is God and worthy of our worship.



As you read through Deuteronomy 31:1–34:12, highlight the words that would have offered courage and comfort to the Israelites as they were about to enter Canaan.

EXPLORE **THE TEXT**

KING (DEUT. 33:1-5)

¹ And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. ² And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them. ³ Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words. ⁴ Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. ⁵ And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.

VERSES 1-2

Jacob, on his deathbed, gathered his sons and spoke his blessings on them (Gen. 49:1-27). He spoke prophetically about the challenges and victories they would experience. As Moses approached his life's end, he spoke a blessing—not to his sons but to the descendants of the sons of Jacob, the Israelites. Although Moses had led the Israelites for a generation, he had no authority to proclaim a blessing; the authority behind his words came from God.

This is the first time the phrase *the man of God* appears in Scripture. Moses used this title for himself in a prayer he wrote (Ps. 90). Nehemiah referred to David as the man of God (Neh. 12:24,36). Scripture also refers to Samuel and Elijah in the same way (1 Sam. 9:6; 1 Kings 17:18). The apostle Paul used the term to describe a minister of the gospel. Additionally, he used it to refer to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:11; 2 Tim. 3:17).


Looking at those who carried this title, what did it mean? It referred to someone with a vibrant and close relationship with God, who lived righteously and proclaimed the Lord's message.

Verse 2 depicts God as a Divine Warrior. The imagery would encourage the Israelites as they faced military opposition on the other side of the Jordan. They would not be going alone or under their own power; God would be going before them (Deut. 31:3,8).

God marched, leading His people from Mount *Sinai*. This is the only time the mountain goes by this name in Deuteronomy; otherwise, it is called Horeb. The *them* is the Israelites mentioned in

verse 1. **Seir** is the southern wilderness of Edom, which at the time began at the southern tip of the Dead Sea and stretched southward toward the Gulf of Aqaba (Red Sea). Today, we associate this region with ancient Petra. **Mount •Paran** is the wilderness region west of Moab. The emphasis in this verse, though, is not on the geography or route; the focus is on the Lord as He led His people.

That God **shined** on His people refers to His gleaming brilliance (see Ps. 104:2; Hab. 3:4). Some scholars believe the **ten thousands of saints** were angelic beings. The New Testament teaches that angels were involved in transmitting the Law to God’s people (Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2). Others believe the holy ones were God’s people, the Israelites. God had called them to be holy as He is holy (Lev. 11:44; 20:26). The second option is the more likely one; the lightning in God’s **right hand** was **for them**.



BIBLE SKILL: Dig deeper into the background and usage of key words and concepts.

In Deuteronomy 33 Moses blessed the tribes of Israel. Focus on the word “blessing” in verse 1. Look up the word in an English dictionary to discover its basic meaning. Read the article on “bless, blessing” in a Bible dictionary to discover the biblical usage of “bless.” Write any insights you learn in the space below. Read examples of blessing others in Genesis 27:27-29; Numbers 6:22-27; 2 Corinthians 13:14; and Hebrews 13:20-21. Finally, on a separate sheet of paper, write a blessing for each member of your family.

VERSES 3-5

Verse 3 further supports the “holy ones” being God’s people. The verse starts by referring to **the people**. This echoes what we read earlier: “thou art an *holy people* unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto him-

self, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deut. 14:2, emphasis added).

The text also declares that God loves His people. Giving evidence of that love, the Lord’s having His people in His hand meant they belonged to Him; He protected and provided for them.

In response, God’s people assembled at His **feet**. This was where the student sat—at the feet of the teacher. Sitting there was an indication of humility and loyalty to the teacher. At God’s feet, His people would receive His words.

In verse 3, the pronouns change person from third person **he** to second person **thy**. The shift indicates a heightened sense of intimacy. No longer were the words about God, they were to Him. God’s action and theirs—His holding and their listening—had caused the relationship to go deeper. God’s words came through Moses. He was the conduit through which God conveyed His message.

God gave His words to the Israelites, here called **the congregation of Jacob**. The term pointed back to Jacob calling his sons while on his deathbed. This unique word of instruction was for the Israelites. Earlier, God asked through Moses, “And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (Deut. 4:8). Both in content and intent, God’s instruction to the Israelites was unlike any other religious teaching. It remains so today. God’s Word is a light that illuminates our lives (Ps. 119:105). It is our source of spiritual nourishment (1 Pet. 2:2). It is a sword that penetrates to the core of our being (Heb. 4:12-13). It is a mirror that reveals to us our true selves (Jas. 1:23).

These verses began by identifying God as the Victorious Warrior. In verse 5 He was also proclaimed to be the **king in •Jeshurun**, which is a poetic name for Israel. It means “upright one.” The title **king** underscores God’s ultimate authority. That God is King is a theme throughout Scripture. His dominion was first celebrated after His victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Ex. 15:18). The Bible declares that God is the King of heaven, the King over all the earth, and the King of glory (Dan. 4:37; Ps. 46:6-7; 24:8-10). He is an eternal King (Ps. 29:10).

The King had the authority to gather the leaders and the tribes unto Himself. He did this to speak His blessings over them (Deut. 33:7-25). Because God alone is King, He could fulfill those blessings.

The declaration that God is King is significant. Reading through the story of Moses, one of the things we notice is that the Pharaoh of the exodus is not named. He is called either Pharaoh or the

king of Egypt (Ex. 5:1,4). Biblical scholars have long speculated about his identity. Egyptians believed their pharaohs were divine; they worshiped them as gods. Omitting the pharaoh's name was intentional; the only King and God who mattered was Yahweh. God alone was (and is) worthy of worship.

God's being King should give us security and comfort. We have put our trust in the only One with the authority, power, and resources to fulfill all His promises.



Why do you think the Bible portrays God in so many ways, such as a Warrior, King, and Shepherd? Which biblical portrait or title comes to mind first when you think of Him and why?



KEY DOCTRINE: *God*

There is one and only one living and true God. (See Isaiah 46:9; 1 Timothy 2:5.)

DWELLING PLACE (DEUT. 33:26-29)

²⁶ There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky. ²⁷ The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. ²⁸ Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew. ²⁹ Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.

VERSES 26-27

Verses 6-25 record Moses's blessing the descendants of Jacob and their tribes. Verses 26-28 focus not on the descendants of Jacob but on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The declaration begins triumphantly, proclaiming that no other god is like Him.

Although the gods of Egypt were worshiped ceremonially in lavish temples, the partial ruins of which still stand today, none could compare to Yahweh. He was the Creator; they were created, fashioned by human hands (see Ps. 115:4,7; Acts 17:24-29).

God riding *upon the heaven* and *on the sky* meant He was the triumphant King riding his stallion either to war or in victory. Being the triumphant King, He alone could give Israel (here called Jeshurun), aid. He alone was clothed in majesty. The same could never be said of the pagan gods, idols, and deities from the land behind or before them, Egypt and Canaan.

Not only would God provide aid, He would also be a refuge for His people. Again, this was declared in contrast to the so-called gods of the Egyptians and Canaanites. Only the Lord could provide the security His people would need. Only He would have *everlasting arms*.

Some commentators link *refuge* with the heavens and clouds mentioned in verse 26. Thus, this verse highlights that God is above His people and His *everlasting arms* are beneath. Nothing could better picture God's dependable protection and security for His people. Like a strong and loving Father, He safeguards His own in His caring embrace.

At the same time, He drove out the enemy before them. Thus, God was above them, His arms were beneath them, and He was at work in front of them. It is the picture of complete security. The New Testament takes this a step further. God is not only above, below, and before His people. The beloved disciple wrote, "greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Which *enemy*? Significantly, it is not named. Thus, the correct answer would always be "the next one." They will be destroyed.

***God was above them, His arms were beneath them,
and He was at work in front of them.***

VERSES 28-29

The Hebrew verb translated *dwell* carries the idea of settling down and abiding. Since God would drive the enemy out and destroy it, Israel could settle down and live securely and untroubled in the land. This, of course, was speaking in the most idealized of terms; God's people would experience battles and struggles. Israel's real security would come only in God.

The land would provide both peace and plenty. Moses here spoke of the abundance of the land. God would provide both food and drink. The harvests and the heavens would supply the people's needs. This echoes what God had promised earlier (Deut. 7:13-14).

To people who had eaten manna for forty years, the thought of grain and drink had to be incomprehensible. Something besides manna would fall from the sky! It's hard to imagine what the people thought.

Whereas verses 6-25 contained God's blessing on the individual and named tribes, verse 29 announces God's blessing for the named nation and people, **Israel**. How blessed they would be because they were God's people!

Verse 26 declares that there was no god like the God of Israel. Verse 29 declares there was no people like the people of Israel, whom the Lord had saved.

Some ancient texts translate this as "the people saved by the Lord," rather than a **people**. The difference, albeit small, would highlight God's exclusive relationship with Abraham's descendants. They were the only ones who would live in the promised land. They were the only ones whom the Lord had **saved** by delivering them from Egyptian slavery.

God was their **shield** and their **sword**. The shield was for protection; the sword was for fighting. He was both defender and warrior, battling on behalf of His people. The image harkens back to the description of God as the Divine Warrior. The Jews could be assured that they would have victory, regardless of what they might face in the land of Canaan.

That their **enemies** would **be found liars** before them indicates the enemies' previous boasting would be silenced in defeat. To **tread upon** the **high places** of the conquered opponent was the ultimate symbol of victory. The victorious Israelites did tread on the backs of their defeated. Joshua instructed his soldiers to each place a foot on the necks of five defeated kings. "And they came near, and put their feet upon the necks of them" (Josh. 10:24).

The Israelites had been victims in Egypt. By God's hand and power, they would enter Canaan and be victorious!



What does it teach us about God that He is our "dwelling place"?

APPLY THE TEXT

- + Believers can trust in God's love for them.
- + Believers should find their security in God alone.



How have you seen God to be sufficient in times of need?

Discuss with your Bible study group why people tend to look for security in something they can see and touch.



Reflect on your own spiritual journey. Have you ever doubted that God loved you? What were you going through that made you feel alienated from Him? Who do you know that might be going through something similar? What can you say or do to offer hope and reassurance?



Memorize Deuteronomy 33:29.

Prayer Needs

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal blue lines. On the left side, there is a vertical red margin line, creating a narrow column. The rest of the page is filled with evenly spaced horizontal blue lines for writing.

Jesus's Use of Deuteronomy

Speaking to Israel at the end of his life, Moses said, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” (Deut. 18:15). Peter identified Jesus as the One who fulfilled this prophecy (Acts 3:22). Readers of the Gospels should not be surprised, therefore, to see that Jesus quoted frequently from Deuteronomy.

THE WILDERNESS OF TEMPTATION

Deuteronomy consists of a series of three messages Moses delivered to the second generation of Israelites after the exodus. The first generation failed to enter the land (Num. 14:22-23) and died in the wilderness after forty years of wandering. Deuteronomy was a warning to Israel not to make the sinful choices of the first generation and not to forget the Lord when they entered the promised land.

Jesus, like Israel, faced temptations in the wilderness in preparation for His public ministry (Matt. 4:1). His responses in the

wilderness, however, were quite different from those of unfaithful Israel. Jesus faced three temptations from the devil, and after each one He responded with a quotation from Deuteronomy. In each instance Jesus demonstrated obedience to the Father in contrast to the Israelites' failure in their wilderness experiences.

In the first temptation to turn stones to bread (Matt. 4:2-3), Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 8:3, which referred to God's provision of manna for Israel in the wilderness. The Israelites grumbled and complained when they lacked food or water (Ex. 16:2). Jesus trusted the father to take care of His needs and refused to yield to the devil's suggestion.

In the second temptation (for Jesus to jump from the pinnacle of the temple) Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:16. This verse warned young Israelites not to test God as their fathers had done at Massah. Israel had grumbled against the Lord when they lacked water at Rephidim (later named “Massah,” Ex. 17:1-2). God provided water

but only after a rebuke for their lack of faith and testing of Him (v. 7). Jesus demonstrated His trust in God's promises and refused to test Him by jumping from a great height.

In the third temptation, the devil offered Jesus the kingdoms of the world if He would bow down to him. Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20, which command worship of God alone. Israel turned to idolatry at Sinai (Ex. 32:1-6) and later at Moab (Num. 25:1-3). Jesus maintained His obedience to the Father and did not deviate from absolute submission to His will.

Jesus succeeded where Israel failed by steadfastly trusting the Lord in the wilderness and keeping His commands. He was the "true Israel" who obeyed. He demonstrated His agreement with the commands of Deuteronomy as He wielded "the sword of the Spirit" to defeat Satan (Eph. 6:17).

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

During His public ministry, the scribes and Pharisees interpreted Jesus's rejection of their human

traditions as a violation of the Mosaic law (Matt. 15:1-2). Jesus responded by dismissing their rules as human inventions and charged them with specific violations of the Mosaic law (vv. 3-9). He said He had not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (5:17-18). Unlike anyone before or after Him, Jesus obeyed the law of God in its entirety. He was supremely qualified to answer every question about the meaning and proper application of the law.

In Matthew 22:36, an expert in the law asked Jesus, "which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jewish scribes traditionally taught that the law contained 613 individual commandments. They differentiated between 365 negative commands and 248 positive commands. Jesus did not hesitate; He quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest of the commandments.

Deuteronomy 6:4 begins with the Hebrew verb "listen" (*shema*). Verses 4-9 became the most famous Old Testament passage in Judaism (often referred to as "the Shema"). Verses 4-5 taught two essential truths. Verse 4

"Love and obedience are inseparable."

described the uniqueness of the one true God who revealed Himself to Israel. Verse 5 commanded believers to love God supremely. If we love God with the greatest love, we will seek to obey all of His commands. Love and obedience are inseparable, as Jesus taught His disciples (John 14:15). This is the greatest command because it is the basis for obedience to every command.

In Deuteronomy, Moses challenged Israel to love the Lord and obey His commands. They were to impress their children with God's Law for their safety and well-being. Deuteronomy was written in the form of the suzerainty treaties of the Ancient Near East. The king would establish laws, and the people accepted the responsibility of obeying them. Obedience would bring blessings and disobedience curses. God framed His covenant with Israel as their King. Israel failed repeatedly until God removed them from the land and sent them into exile.

Moses was a type of Christ. He led Israel out of the bondage of Egyptian slavery, baptized them in the Red Sea, and led them to the promised land (1 Cor. 10:1-2). Hebrews states that Jesus is superior to Moses because Jesus built the house (people of God), whereas Moses was only a servant in the house (Heb. 3:4-6). Moses revealed the law of God as the mediator of the Old Covenant, but only Jesus fully obeyed the

law of God. Moses gave the law, but grace and truth were realized through Jesus (John 1:17).

Jesus did not quote Deuteronomy 6:5 to offer a way of salvation through obedience to the law. Everyone has broken the perfect law of God (Rom. 3:23). Jesus revealed the law to demonstrate sinners' need for grace and to make obvious the necessity of His substitutionary atonement. The elaborate institution of an Old Testament sacrificial system and priesthood pointed to the universal violation of the law. Deuteronomy 6:5 uniquely described the eternal relationship of God the Son with God the Father (John 14:31). Perfect love resulted in perfect obedience—making Jesus uniquely the only acceptable sacrifice for sin.

We should not be surprised at the prominent place Jesus gave Deuteronomy in His private life and public ministry. He echoed Moses's words and amplified them through obedience to every divine command. He revealed that love—not fear—was the motivation of every genuine believer. He summons us to resist temptation and love God more than sin so that we (the Church) may be His holy people who love and obey His commandments as well (Deut. 7:6-13; John 14:21-24).

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COMING **NEXT QUARTER**



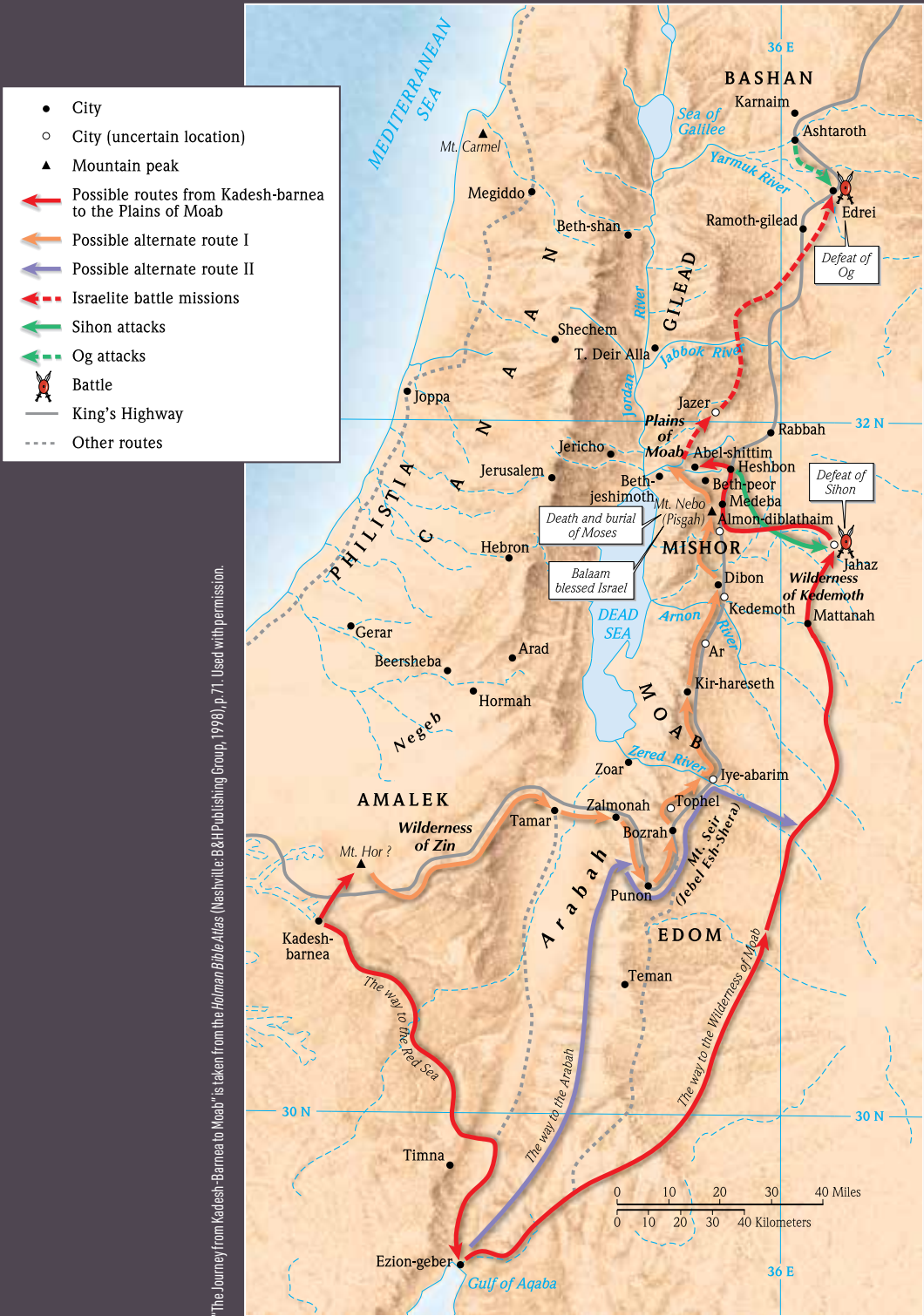
MATTHEW 1-13

Session 1:	Affirmation (Matthew 3:13-4:11)
Session 2:	Invitation (Matthew 4:12-25)
Session 3:	Worship the King (Matthew 2:1-12)
Session 4:	True Righteousness (Matthew 5:13-20,43-48)
Session 5:	Treasure (Matthew 6:19-34)
Session 6:	Authority Acknowledged (Matthew 7:15-29)
Session 7:	Every Life Valued (Matthew 8:1-4,14-17; 9:1-8)
Session 8:	Mercy Extended (Matthew 9:10-19,23-26)
Session 9:	Loyalty Tested (Matthew 10:16-20,26-34)
Session 10:	Confronting Doubts (Matthew 11:1-6,16-24)
Session 11:	Rejecting Legalism (Matthew 12:1-14)
Session 12:	Judgment Coming (Matthew 13:24-30,36-43)

Explore

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:13

The Journey From Kadesh-Barnea to Moab



"The Journey from Kadesh-Barnea to Moab" is taken from the Holman Bible Atlas (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1998), p. 71. Used with permission.

NUMBERS AND DEUTERONOMY

As road trips wind down, travelers start thinking about the work waiting for them back home. The ancient Israelites were no exception. The books of Numbers and Deuteronomy recount how the nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness for four decades and how God taught them to be His people as they approached the promised land. He wanted to remind them how much still needed to be done once they got “home.” As you study these final two books of the Pentateuch, ask God to show you what He longs to accomplish in you and through you. Learn how to avoid a life of spiritual wandering and embrace the best He has to offer.

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