



DECEMBER • JANUARY • FEBRUARY
DAILY DEVOTIONS

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We are so glad that you decided to pick up a copy of the Winter 2019-2020 Personal Study Guide. This quarter we will be studying Numbers and Deuteronomy.

It is no secret that Numbers and Deuteronomy are some of the most intimidating books of the Bible to study. There is certainly no lack of long chapters and obscure references in them. Most people start to lose steam in these very books when they follow a yearly Bible reading plan.

So, it is a good reminder here, at the beginning of our study in these books, that when we come to Numbers and Deuteronomy, we come to the living oracles of God (Acts 7:38). One of the major emphases in these books is the life-giving power of God's words. Jesus repeats this emphasis when He quotes from Deuteronomy 8:3—"Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). As you read and study Numbers and Deuteronomy this quarter, we want to encourage you to come to the words of these books as you come to your daily meals—in dependence upon them to give you what you need to live.

We pray that your time in Numbers and Deuteronomy will be fruitful. May God bless you as you diligently commit yourself to His Word.

LIST OF LESSONS

Sunday	Lesson Title	Scripture
December 1	God Leads	Numbers 9:15-23
December 8	God Judges	Numbers 13:31-14:10
December 15	God Requires	Numbers 20:1-13
December 22	God Saves	Matthew 1:18-25; Numbers 21:6-9
December 29	God Calls	Numbers 22:22-35
January 5	God Commissions	Numbers 27:12-23
January 12	God Expects	Numbers 32:20-32
January 19	Valued	Deuteronomy 5:17; 19:4-13
January 26	Honored	Deuteronomy 4:1-9
February 2	Loved	Deuteronomy 6:1-13
February 9	Revealed	Deuteronomy 18:15-22
February 16	Chosen	Deuteronomy 30:1-10, 19-20
February 23	Promised	Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:4-7

WEEK OF
NOVEMBER 25, 2019

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

At the command of the Lord they camped, and at the command of the Lord they set out; they kept the Lord's charge, according to the command of the Lord through Moses.
Numbers 9:23

MONDAY
NOV.
25

Numbers 1–2

MAIN IDEA

God is faithful to keep His covenant promises and to provide His covenantal presence.

Numbers 1 and 2 detail for us a census of all the tribes of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai and the arrangement of the camp of Israel as they set out from Sinai toward the Promised Land. More than mere bookkeeping, these numbers and details communicate glorious truths about God's relationship with His people. Moses concludes that all fighting men over the age of 20 from all the tribes listed in the census add up to 603,550 (Numbers 1:46). Compare this figure with the promise that God made Abraham in Genesis 15:5: "Look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them... So shall your descendants be." What started with an aged couple past the age of bearing children had become a nation of 603,550 fighting men over 20 years old (plus everyone else!). Moreover, what are all these people doing? They are setting out from Sinai to enter into and overtake the land of Canaan, just as God promised Abraham (Genesis 15:7). And they are doing it all with God in their midst—with the Tent of Meeting at the very center of their camp (Numbers 2:2). What are all these details communicating? That God is delivering on His covenant promises to Abraham! Brothers and sisters, God is a faithful God. Just as God delivered on His covenant promises to Abraham, so also He will deliver on His covenant promises to us. For all those who have entered into the New Covenant through repentance and faith in Christ, know that just as God abundantly fulfilled His promises to Abraham, so also He will abundantly fulfill His promises to you.

In what ways do these chapters show us God's faithfulness?

What ways have you seen God's faithfulness in your life? When are you most tempted to forget God's faithfulness? How can you use this passage as a reminder of His faithfulness?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you remember His faithfulness and that you would rejoice and rest in the ultimate manifestation of His faithfulness—redemption through Christ and the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

MAIN IDEA

God desires for us to place our covenant relationship with Him at the very center of our lives.

Numbers 3 and 4 contain two more censuses: the census of the male Levites and the census of the mature Levites. The first census counts all the male Levites in Israel (Numbers 3) and the second counts the male Levites ages 30 to 50 (Numbers 4). The purpose of the more specific, second census is to count the Levites of requisite physical strength and maturity to bear the great responsibility of carrying the tabernacle. The big question these chapters raise is: Why have two separate censuses for the Levites at all? The answer comes in the job that the Levites fulfilled: they were the keepers, protectors, servants, and priests of the Tent of Meeting, which was another name for the tabernacle. This job of attending to the Tent of Meeting—where the presence of God dwelled in their midst—was so important that they were separated out from the other tribes and given their own censuses. This is how important Israel’s covenant relationship with God was. It was literally at the very center of the entire nation in the tabernacle. It was at the core of their identity. And the Levites were specifically set apart to bear the main responsibility of maintaining that covenant relationship. Amazingly, when we turn to the pages of the New Testament we find that all believers are called to be a “royal priesthood” and to “proclaim the excellencies of Him who called [us] out of darkness and into His marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9). Through what Christ has done for us on the cross, all of us are now “priests to our God” (Revelation 5:10) and enjoy all the glorious benefits of a covenant relationship with Him! May your relationship with Christ inhabit the very center of your life, just as God’s covenantal presence inhabited that place in Israel!

What is the purpose of the two separate censuses for the Levites?

What are some ways that you can place your covenant relationship with God at the center of your life? What are some ways that you are already doing this? What are some new ways you can do this?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you draw near to Him in every area of your life. Thank Him that because of what Christ has done for you there is nothing that separates you from Him; and, therefore, you can know that when you draw near to Him, He will draw near to you!

MAIN IDEA

God demands purity in us and provides purity for us.

Numbers 5 and 6 address the cleanness of the camp of Israel as they prepare to set out from Sinai toward the Promised Land. God instructs Moses to purge the camp of physical uncleanness (Numbers 5:1-4) and spiritual uncleanness, such as interpersonal conflict (Numbers 5:5-10) and adultery (Numbers 5:11-31). The implication of these chapters is that Israel will only enter the land that God promised if they rid themselves of all uncleanness. Notice, for instance, that the priestly blessing of Aaron comes directly after God's instructions for cleansing (Numbers 6:22-27). When your child wakes up on Sunday morning with a fever and a runny nose, you know that he won't be allowed in the nursery because of the danger that he will infect other children with his illness. In the same way, Israel's camp must be purged so that God's people won't be infected with uncleanness as they are entering the Promised Land. Since God is holy, the people of Israel must also be holy. This is a concept that carries over to the New Testament as well. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). Paul expounds on this and says, "For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God" (Ephesians 5:5). Those who are unclean are not allowed to enter into the kingdom of God because the kingdom of God is the place where God's holiness abides! But the question is: Who among us is actually clean? Who among us has not been tainted by sin? The answer, of course, is that none of us is clean! None of us, except Jesus. And that is the good news. Though we are unclean, Jesus is perfectly clean. He is holy. He is God. He came to this earth to perfectly fulfill the righteous requirement in His life, satisfy the wrath of God for our uncleanness in His death, and proclaim victory over our sin in His resurrection. John tells us that because of what Christ has done, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Why was cleanness such an important aspect of Israel's camp?

What are your successes and failures in terms of purity? Read 1 John 1:9 again and specifically apply it to sins you are currently struggling with.

PRAY

Pray that God would help you to walk blameless in His sight. Thank Him that even though you are unclean in a million ways before Him, He is faithful and just to forgive you your sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness because of what Christ has done.

MAIN IDEA

God desires that we respond to His grace in our lives with extravagant worship and extravagant measures of obedience.

Numbers 7 and 8 describe the offerings that the tribes of Israel brought to the Levites to be offered to God and the lengths to which the Levites had to go to purify themselves for service in the Tent of Meeting. When we take a closer look at both of these actions described in Numbers 7 and 8, we find extravagant offerings and extravagant measures. Numbers 7 goes on for 89 verses describing in detail the offerings that each tribe brought to the tabernacle for their consecration. In Numbers 8 God gives instructions for how the Levites must purify themselves that are so specific that not one hair on their body is left unaddressed, literally! (See Numbers 8:7.) Why do we find these extravagant offerings and extravagant measures in these chapters? The reason is because of the extravagant God that dwells in the Tent of Meeting. Numbers 7 and 8 teach us that God is worthy of all our worship and all our obedience, that He is so holy that not even an unclean hair on our head can survive in His presence! These chapters teach us that God desires to live in a covenant relationship with His people, in which He is their God and they are His people. Ultimately, God made the way for that desire to be fulfilled. While we could never offer enough sacrifices to God to please Him on our own, or go through enough ritual cleansing to be clean before His fiery gaze, He sent His Son Jesus Christ to offer His own life in our place as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (Ephesians 5:1-2), so that our hearts might be cleansed of iniquity and made ready to worship Him forever. Let us respond today to God's gracious gift of salvation by offering to Him extravagant worship and extravagant measures of obedience!

Why do these passages describe in such detail the tabernacle offerings of the Israelites and the purification procedures for the Levites?

How do you see God's grace at work in your life today? How will you respond to His grace in extravagant worship and obedience today?

PRAY

Praise God for redeeming you from your slavery to sin. Ask that He would give you a receptive heart to glory in His grace in your life and to respond in worship and obedience.

MAIN IDEA

Like Israel, we ought to respond to God’s grace and presence with obedience and worship.

Today we read the account of Israel’s first Passover celebration since the event of Passover and their exodus from Egypt. Whereas the first Passover looked forward to what God would do, this second Passover (and all subsequent ones) looked back on the powerful grace of God in redeeming Israel from Egypt and parting the Red Sea so that they could pass through to safety. In this way, the Passover was a remembrance of the greatest saving event in Old Testament history, all the way up until the person and work of Christ. Notice also what happens after the Israelites celebrate the Passover—the presence of God descends upon the tabernacle in a cloud by day and a fire by night. The same presence of God that was with the Israelites when He saved them from Egypt is still with them now, and they respond to this presence in obedience: “Whenever the cloud was lifted from over the tent, afterward the sons of Israel would then set out; and in the place where the cloud settled down, there the sons of Israel would camp” (Numbers 9:17). Brothers and sisters, we can learn much from this snapshot of Israel’s relationship with God. Just as God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt, so also He has redeemed us from slavery to sin through the person and work of Christ. Just as His presence was continually with the Israelites in the tabernacle, so also His presence is continually with us through the indwelling Holy Spirit. Just as Israel responded to this reminder of God’s saving grace and His presence with them in joyful obedience, so also we ought to respond to God’s grace and presence in our lives today by gladly offering up to Him everything that we have and everything that we are.

How does Moses describe Israel’s relationship with God in this passage?

When do you struggle most to follow Jesus and the commands He has given you? When is it easiest to do this? How does this passage help you to understand what it looks like to live in a right relationship with God?

PRAY

Pray that just as Israel followed God’s leadership as He descended upon the tabernacle and ascended from it, that you would follow His leadership through the commands that Christ has given you in His Word.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **“God Leads”** from Numbers 9:15-23. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP NOTES _____

List 2-3 ways you plan to respond to the truths you have learned this week:

WEEK OF
DECEMBER 2, 2019

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations.

Numbers 14:18

MONDAY
DEC.
2

Numbers 10:11-36

MAIN IDEA

God's faithfulness is on display as Israel sets out for the Promised Land.

Are you a sports fan? No matter what sport you like most, it is always interesting how much work a team does simply to prepare for "game time." Whenever a team walks onto a field or court, you can assume that they have spent hours and hours watching game footage, going over specific plays, strategizing, practicing, and warming up, all leading up to the actual moment of "game time." Something similar has been occurring in Numbers so far. We have been reading about censuses counting the people of Israel at large and the Levites in particular, principles of purity for the camp of Israel, and the establishment of the tabernacle and the indwelling of the tabernacle by God's presence; and all of it has been leading up to and in preparation for this moment: When the people of Israel finally set out on their journey to the Promised Land. As we watch Israel spring into action in these verses, we watch the "game plan" unfold. Israel arranges themselves as a moving camp in the way that God commanded, and they follow God's leadership as His presence descends and ascends from the tabernacle in the cloud. On an even larger scale, we see God's "game plan" being carried out. As Moses reminds his father-in-law, God had promised Abraham over four-hundred years ago that He would give to his descendants the land that they are now setting out to enter (Numbers 10:29). Moses knew that God would be faithful to keep His covenant promises, which is why he had confidence that God would defeat their enemies when the ark set out and come back to the tens of thousands of Israel when it rested (Numbers 10:35-36). One of the amazing things about studying the book of Numbers is that we get to see, over and over again, how God is faithful to keep His covenant promises, even amid the repeated failures of Israel. This is a truth that stands just as firmly in your life today as it did in the life of Israel then.

Why was it such a momentous occasion as Israel set out for the Land of Promise?

How is God's "game plan" unfolding in your life? How has your obedience to His commands led to joy in your life? What are some evidences of His faithfulness that you've seen lately? Are there any areas of your life in which you are struggling to see His faithfulness?

PRAY

Pray that God would help you respond to His faithfulness in your life with thanksgiving and obedience. Pray that He would make His faithfulness clear in your life and that He would show you the gracious benefits of His commands in your life as you respond to them in obedience.

MAIN IDEA

Israel shows its faithlessness by complaining, but God shows His faithfulness through Moses.

While Numbers teaches us much about the faithfulness of God, it also shows us much about the faithlessness of Israel. These two themes are not, however, mutually exclusive. When we realize just how rebellious Israel was toward the Lord, it highlights just how radical God's faithfulness is to them. Today we are introduced to the obstinate Israel: "And the people complained" (Numbers 11:1). Isn't this an amazing thing? They had just reminded themselves at the Passover of God's saving grace in redeeming them from Egypt, and they had just seen the cloud of His presence descend upon the tabernacle and lead them toward the Promised Land. Yet, their response is to complain about their misfortunes. Before we judge Israel for being obstinate, though, how many of us relate to God in similar ways in our own lives? We have experienced an even greater salvation than Israel, and yet do we complain when traffic makes us late, or our children are difficult, or the waiter gets our order wrong? If you are a complainer like Israel (and each one of us is), there is terrifying and good news for you. The terrifying piece is this: Just as God's anger burned against Israel, both metaphorically and literally, because of their complaining, so also His anger burns against us for our sin. But the good news is this: Just as Moses stepped in and fulfilled the role of mediator between the people of Israel and God, thus abating God's anger, so also we have a Mediator. First Timothy 2:5-6 tells us about Him: "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all..." Jesus Christ stood in our place and took the wrath that we deserved for our obstinate complaining, so that we would never have to experience it. And even at this very moment, He is always and ever will be interceding for us before the Father, which means that He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him (Hebrews 7:25). So, brothers and sisters, draw near to God through Christ today!

Why does Israel complain in this passage? How does this show their faithlessness?

What have you complained about lately? Can you identify how your complaining was an act of forgetting God's grace to you in Christ? What are some ways that you can replace complaining with thanksgiving in your life?

PRAY

Pray that God would overwhelm you with the grace and kindness He has shown you in Christ. Ask that He would help you to practice thanksgiving instead of complaining.

MAIN IDEA

Israel craves the fleeting pleasures of Egypt, while God offers fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore in Himself.

If you are a parent, the following scene is probably a familiar one to you:

Child: "I'm hungry!"

Parent: "Here's your meal."

Child: "No! I don't want this. I want crackers instead!"

While it is easy to see the absurdity of this child's response from the perspective of a parent, our text today shows us that we all have a similar tendency in our hearts. Israel had experienced the greatest salvation in all Old Testament history—they had been delivered from the house of slavery in Egypt and they were on their way to the land God had promised their father Abraham. God was taking care of them in every way imaginable: Organizing their camps, leading them with His own presence, protecting them with His strength, and feeding them with manna. Yet, in the face of His great fatherly care, the Israelites complain: "We're tired of manna. We want the food we used to eat in Egypt!" They yearned for the comforts of Egypt even while God was giving them something so much better: His abiding presence and the fulfillment of His covenantal promises. It is no wonder, then, that Israel's rebellion is met with God's burning anger and stern discipline. The meat they thought would bring them pleasure actually, in God's discipline of them, led to their demise. Brothers and sisters, do you believe that God is better than the "pleasures of Egypt" in your life? God has redeemed you from slavery to sin through the cross of Christ. Do you yearn, like the Israelites, to go back to the house of slavery? Remember today that this story was written down for your instruction. Turn away from the fleeting pleasures of sin that will only lead you to destruction and embrace the life-giving fullness of joy and pleasure eternal that comes only from the presence of the Lord our God.

Why did Israel complain about the manna?

What are some of the things that you crave more than God in your life? Can you identify how those things actually fall short of the joy and satisfaction that can be found in Christ? What actions do you need to take to turn away from those fleeting pleasures and to embrace the greater pleasure you have in Christ?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you see the folly of returning to the fleeting pleasures of Egypt in your life. Ask that He would help you find the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore that abide in God's presence.

MAIN IDEA

Moses' authority in Israel pictures the ultimate authority that Jesus holds to tell us what to do and how to live.

What do you think about authority? In many cultural circles, the word "authority" has become tantamount to a curse word. To say that one person has authority over another person, and that one person has the right to tell another person what to do and how to live, is considered a declaration of war. In fact, many in our culture do war against authority by questioning and opposing it on all levels. In today's passage, we find out that this tendency to buck authority and to fight for personal autonomy is nothing new. This is precisely what Aaron and Miriam are attempting to do as they oppose Moses and question his unique role as the mediator between God and the people of Israel. We would be wise to notice at least three truths that unfold from this text. 1) God affirms Moses' role as mediator between God and Israel. 2) God's anger is kindled against those who question the authority of His chosen mediator. 3) Moses acts as mediator on behalf of the people of Israel, even Aaron and Miriam, asking that God would heal Miriam of the leprosy God punished her with. While Moses' position as mediator between God and men was only a temporary one, there is an eternal mediator between God and men—the man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5). As the revelation of God for us, He has all authority in heaven and on earth to tell us how we ought to live. May we not harden our hearts against Him like Aaron and Miriam did against Moses, but rather respond to His gracious commands in repentance and faith, and gladly follow Him all of our days. For John tells us, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him" (John 3:36).

What is the main reason Aaron and Miriam oppose Moses?

When do you struggle most to submit to authority in your life? When is it easiest? What steps can you take today to grow in your submission to the Lordship of Christ in your life?

PRAY

Ask God to forgive you for any ways that you have failed to submit to Jesus' authority over your life. Ask that He would help you to have a soft and submissive heart to Him and His will for your life.

MAIN IDEA

Even when we sin big, God’s grace through Christ is infinitely bigger; however, we must remember when we sin, God graciously and lovingly disciplines us for our good.

What is your biggest sin? In today’s passage we read about one of the biggest sins that Israel committed in their wilderness years: Their refusal to enter into the land that God had promised them because of the pessimistic report of the spies. On the precipice of bliss, about to enter into the Land of Promise, Israel’s faithlessness overtakes them as they question God’s faithfulness and power to help them enter into the land and defeat its inhabitants. Perhaps you can think of times in your life when you have failed in similarly big ways to trust God’s faithfulness and power. What happens when Israel sins big? First, they face God’s judgment because of their sin (Numbers 14:11-12). Since God is holy and just, He must meet rebellion with wrath. However, God in His grace and mercy had given Israel a mediator in Moses. So, second, Moses intercedes on Israel’s behalf and secures God’s forgiveness for Israel’s sin (Numbers 14:13-20). Yet, even though God forgives Israel’s sin, they still face consequences: God promises that none of that generation would enter the land, except Caleb and Joshua (Numbers 14:21-38); and He gives them over in battle to the Amalekites and the Canaanites (Numbers 14:39-45). There is much here for us to learn about the big sins in our own lives. Each of us faces the prospect of God’s judgment for our sin. But just as Israel had Moses as mediator, so also, we have Christ. Whereas Moses secured a temporary pardon for Israel’s sin, Christ secured for us eternal forgiveness through the cross—He saved to the uttermost those who are in Him. Yet, even though we are eternally forgiven even for the big sins in our lives, we will still face consequences for those sins. So as we head into the weekend and prepare our hearts for Sunday morning, take time to bask in the glorious grace of God that has been bestowed on you in the person and work of Christ—in Him you have forgiveness of sins and eternal security! That applies even to the biggest sins in your life! But at the same time, may the reality that sin results in the fatherly discipline of the Lord compel you to flee far from it and pursue the righteousness that the Lord loves. God disciplines those whom He loves because He knows that His discipline will lead us away from our sin and toward His plan for our lives. So, respond to Him today in repentance and faith!

What was Israel’s sin in this passage? How did God respond to it?

What are the ways in your life that you have most failed to trust God’s faithfulness and power? What are your biggest sins? What does this passage teach you about how you should respond when you sin big? What does this passage teach you about the purpose for God’s discipline?

PRAY

Praise God today that even though you sin big, His grace is infinitely bigger! Ask that He would help you to respond receptively to His discipline in your life when you sin and that by His grace He would train your heart to love Him supremely and to hate sin greatly.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is “**God Judges**” from Numbers 13:31–14:10. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP NOTES _____

Lined area for taking Sunday School group notes, consisting of 20 horizontal lines.

List 2-3 ways you plan to respond to the truths you have learned this week:

Lined area for listing 2-3 ways to respond to truths learned, consisting of 7 horizontal lines.

WEEK OF DECEMBER 9, 2019

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

For He is our God, And we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand. Today, if you would hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, As in the day of Massah in the wilderness, "When your fathers tested Me, They tried Me, though they had seen My work."

Psalm 95:7-9

MONDAY
DEC.
9

Numbers 15

MAIN IDEA

Worship is at the very heart of what it means to have a relationship with God.

Last week we focused primarily on faithless Israel. Even though God's faithfulness was being displayed in the multitudinous population of Israel and their impending entrance into the Land of Promise, Israel complained against God and even refused to enter the land God had given to them. As a result, Israel faced God's judgment, which would have been poured out on them immediately if it were not for the mediatorial work of Moses, which is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. It is perhaps surprising, then, that after such a heavy section focusing on the faithlessness of Israel, that the narrative would suddenly turn to focus on laws about the sacrificial system Israel will maintain once they enter the land. Such a hard shift should get our attention. And when we look closer, we find that this passage is dripping with the grace and mercy of God. Even amid Israel's faithlessness, God will still faithfully deliver on His promises. He will bring Israel into the land that He promised them (Numbers 15:1-2). Certainly, His discipline of them still stands: only Joshua and Caleb, from the present generation, will enter the land. But Israel's faithlessness does not negate God's faithfulness. God will bring them into the land; and in the land, they will worship Him (Numbers 15:3-21). Even when they sin, they will respond in repentance and worship Him (Numbers 15:22-31). Even as they are going about their daily lives, they will look to the tassels on their garments and be reminded to worship Him (Numbers 15:37-41). This chapter stresses to us the vital importance and absolute centrality of worship in Israel's relationship with God. In fact, it shows us that worshipping God is so important for Israel that anyone who does it wrong (in this case, by breaking the Sabbath) will face death (Numbers 15:32-36). While many of the specific laws about sacrifices, unintentional sins, tassels on garments, and Sabbath principles that we find in this chapter have their ultimate end in Christ—our ultimate atoning sacrifice—and in Sabbath rest, the principle this chapter communicates still stands: There is nothing more important in our lives and in our church community than the worship of God (Romans 12:1). Jesus went to the cross for this very purpose! So, let us respond to God's rich grace in our lives today by presenting ourselves to Him in true and wholehearted worship.

What does this passage teach us about the importance of worship in Israel?

Apart from corporate worship services, what are some ways that you are offering your life to God as a sacrifice, which is your spiritual worship (Romans 12:1)?

PRAY

Pray that God would orient your heart toward the worship of Him. Ask Him to give you the desire to worship Him not only on Sundays and Wednesdays, but with every moment and every area of your life.

MAIN IDEA

The rebellion of Korah shows us our desperate need for a mediator.

Numbers 16 focuses on the complaints of Korah and others with him, which can be boiled down to one concept: a suspicion of and resistance against authority. They ask, "Are not Aaron and Moses exalting themselves unduly by entering into God's presence in the tabernacle alone? If we are all the holy ones of God, why can't we all do it? Were you not fools for leading us out of Egypt and into this wilderness? Where is all this milk and honey you promised us? Weren't we better off in Egypt?" Is there a ring of familiarity in these questions? Each of us asks similar questions. "Who made him boss?" "Why didn't I get that promotion?" "Why in the world did she make that decision?" "Don't I deserve that pay raise more than he does?" Oftentimes jealousy is at the heart of our resistance against and suspicion of authority. We want the power and privilege that we perceive comes along with it. This even extends to our relationship with God. This is how it's been since the beginning: "God told me not to eat the fruit of that tree. But the serpent told me I would become like God, knowing good and evil, possessing the authority He possesses! I will take things into my own hands, thank you very much." Every act of rebellion against God that we commit in our lives is a reenactment of that first act of rebellion, and that picture is painted for us again here in Numbers 16. Upon such rebellion, brothers and sisters, the wrath of God justly comes. In righteousness God caused the ground to swallow them up and deposit them in Sheol; in justice, fire from Yahweh consumed the 250 (Numbers 16:31-35). What this passage shows us more than anything else is our desperate need for a mediator. Moses spoke on behalf of these rebels, but his efforts ultimately failed. But we have a better mediator. We have a better Moses. Jesus spoke on our behalf when He suffered and died for our sins on the cross. The fate of Korah and the 250 is a picture of the fate Jesus experienced for us. But unlike Moses' failed attempt as mediator, Jesus rose from the grave in triumphant victory over sin, death, and hell. In Him, in His atoning work on the cross, we are free from our sin and the righteous judgment that we deserve from it. So repent and believe in Him today!

What was at the root of the rebellion of Korah?

What are some ways that the rebellion of Korah is reenacted in your life? What does it look like for you to repent of that rebellion and to live in the obedience of faith toward Jesus?

PRAY

Pray that God would root out the rebellion of Korah from your heart. Ask that He would help you have a soft and obedient heart toward Him. Praise Him that Christ is your Mediator and that He died on the cross for your rebellion.

MAIN IDEA

Aaron and the Levites point us to our need for a high priest who will bear our iniquities.

The Korah episode taught us that we are in desperate need of a mediator between ourselves and God. Our sin condemns us before God and subjects us to His righteous wrath. We know that our ultimate and perfect Mediator is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. However, until the time was right for Christ to come, God made provision for Israel. He showed forbearance by appointing the Levitical priesthood, led by Aaron and his descendants, to mediate Israel's relationship with God and make continual atonement for their sin. God's appointment and approval of Aaron and the Levites in their role as the priesthood of Israel is confirmed by the episode of Aaron's Levitical staff, alone of the twelve tribes, budding and producing blossoms (Numbers 17:1-13). This positive affirmation from God of the role of Aaron and the Levites, along with His previous condemnation of those who grumbled against that role, was effective in stopping the grumbling of the Israelites in its tracks. Now that God has convincingly displayed His design for Aaron and the Levites, the stage is set for an explanation of their role. While Numbers 18 explains the role of Aaron and the Levites in guarding the Tent of Meeting and the Tabernacle (Numbers 18:2-7) and the provision they receive from the offerings that Israel brings (Numbers 18:8-32), perhaps the most surprising detail appears in the first verse: God has appointed Aaron and his descendants to "bear iniquity" associated with the sanctuary and the priesthood (Numbers 18:1). In other words, if the people of Israel disobey God's commands concerning the tabernacle and the priesthood, the priests of Aaron will serve as "spiritual lightning conductors" that absorb God's wrath and anger on behalf of the people. This, brothers and sisters, is a clear picture of what Christ has done for us. In a thousand ways we have defiled the sanctuary of the Lord—we have lived in this world in utter rebellion against Him. We deserve His eternal wrath and anger. Yet, in His great mercy, He appointed a High Priest, Jesus Christ, to serve as a spiritual lightning rod to absorb the wrath of God that should have fallen upon us. What a precious promise it is that God, because of what Christ has done, is faithful and just to forgive all those who repent and believe in Christ (1 John 1:9)!

What was the primary role of Aaron and his descendants?

How does Jesus, in His role as High Priest, give us access to God in a way that Aaron and his descendants never could?

PRAY

Praise God that Jesus is your Great High Priest. Thank God for the access that you have into His throne room through the blood of Christ. Boldly go there in prayer today and receive mercy from your Father.

MAIN IDEA

Each of us has a desperate need to be cleansed from death.

Have you ever noticed how hard it is to keep things clean? You just finished loading the dishwasher, and ten minutes later there are four dirty plates in the sink! You just finished folding all those clothes, and the dirty hamper is already half full! You just dusted those shelves yesterday, but dust is accumulating already! All around us there are subtle (and not so subtle) reminders of our great need to be clean. This need was especially present in the congregation of Israel. One great requirement of the people of God, to live in the presence of God, was cleanness. And at the very opposite end of the cleanness spectrum was death. Death is the epitome of uncleanness because death is the ultimate result of sin (Romans 6:23). Numbers 19 is all about Israel's need to be cleansed of death in order to live with God's presence at the center of their camp. The most striking thing about Numbers 19 is the thoroughness and specificity of the procedure that the Israelites had to go through in order to cleanse themselves of death. And even more, this whole process had to take place not just once, but every single time an Israelite came into contact with death! The procedure was provisional, not perpetual. The uncleanness of death cannot be overcome by the ashes of a heifer. Something much more powerful had to be slain. This is precisely what Hebrews 9:13-14 tells us: "For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" The purification that leads from death to life, from dead works to the living God, comes only through the blood of Jesus Christ. Praise Him today for shedding His blood for you!

Why was death such an unclean thing in the congregation of Israel?

What are some specific ways that you have seen the Lord bring you from spiritual death to spiritual life? In what ways has He purified your conscience?

PRAY

Praise God that through Christ you have been brought from dead works to serving the living God. Ask Him that He would help you to serve Him with a pure and undefiled heart for all your days.

MAIN IDEA

The insanity of Israel at Meribah warns us about the danger of our own rebellious hearts.

One definition of insanity is “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.” The account of the waters of Meribah shows us not only the insanity of Israel, but also our own insanity. How many times, in the book of Numbers alone, have the Israelites grumbled against God to their own peril? How many times have they cast doubt, suspicion, and bitterness upon Moses and upon God for delivering them out of Egypt and leading them through the wilderness? How many times have they blamed Moses and God for their own sin which prolonged their stay in the wilderness by 40 years? In the Meribah episode we find one more iteration of this insanity. Over and over, Israel’s rebellion has been met with God’s mercy and grace. Yet they rebel again. Lest we sit in a high, ivory tower and cast judgment upon Israel, we need to take a look at our own lives. Isn’t this insanity at work in our lives as well? We get the slightest inkling of a trial in our lives—stuck in a traffic jam, a hard conversation at work, a tight month on the family budget, etc.—and the insanity of Meribah begins in our hearts. Even Moses was not immune! Even he showed he did not believe in God by striking the rock (perhaps in anger) instead of speaking to it, like God commanded. The account of Meribah shows us the core insanity that exists in our hearts: We rebel against God over and over again even when we know our rebellion will result in brokenness, while our repentance and faith will result in restoration, joy, and peace. It is through this persistent rebellion that this generation of the Israelites missed out on entering God’s rest for them in the Land of Promise. And it is through this persistent rebellion that the author of Hebrews warns us that we might miss out on God’s eternal rest that He has for us in Christ (Hebrews 3:12-19). So do not harden your hearts, brothers and sisters, as the Israelites did at Meribah. Do not let the deceitfulness of sin lead you to the insanity of rebellion. Instead turn away from it, turn to Christ, and enter into the eternal rest that God has promised for all who find their refuge in Him.

What is the insanity of Meribah?

What are some forms of rebellion against God that persist in your life? How might Hebrews 3:12-19 impact the way you think about the sins you struggle with most?

PRAY

Ask God to protect you from the deceitfulness of sin that leads you to fall away from the living God. Ask that He would help you to understand and feel and desire the glory of the eternal rest that is yours in Christ. Ask that you would keep your eyes and heart focused on Christ so that you may enter that rest.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is “**God Requires**” from Numbers 20:1-13. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP NOTES _____

List 2-3 ways you plan to respond to the truths you have learned this week:

WEEK OF DECEMBER 16, 2019

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up; so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life.

John 3:14-15

MONDAY
DEC.
16

Numbers 20:14-21

MAIN IDEA

The Israelites learn that there are no shortcuts to the blessings of God.

Last week we ended by looking at Israel's rebellion at Meribah. This week we begin by reading about another difficult situation that Israel faced: Edom's refusal to let them pass through their land. There are several striking elements at play here. First, God had just finished telling Moses and Aaron that they would enter the land He promised. Their rebellion against Him had the consequence of their not entering the resting place of the land. Yet, here we see Israel, led by Moses and Aaron, attempting to take a shortcut to the blessing of the land. God promised them discipline for their rebellion, but they attempted to skirt that discipline by appealing to their kinsmen the Edomites to help them enter the land. Another striking element, in relation to this, is the lack of acknowledgment of the Lord in this passage. The only time the name of the Lord is mentioned is in passing as a historical reference to what God did in Egypt. Moses and Aaron are not depending on the Lord to lead them; rather, they are attempting to use their own diplomatic powers to get what God has withheld from them. Ultimately, their efforts fail: Edom refuses to grant Israel passage and even comes out against Israel with their army. Israel is powerless to access the Land of Promise on their own. God must deliver it to them in His own timing. Have you ever tried to take a shortcut to blessing? Has the Lord, for His own good and sovereign purposes, ever withheld something from you that you wanted so bad you were willing to ignore Him to get it? Certainly, it is sometimes hard to understand why God does this. But it is helpful to see the important lesson that God was teaching Israel here. They had to learn that it is God who is their salvation and their strength, their stronghold and their redeemer. Moses and Aaron would not bring them into the land. They would face the consequences of their sins, but God would remain faithful to His promises. As we continue in Numbers, may we likewise learn that lesson. May we look to Jesus Christ today and embrace Him as our faithful Redeemer, our sovereign Lord, our only hope in life and death.

In what way do Moses and Aaron attempt to take a shortcut in this passage?

What are some ways that you have attempted to take shortcuts to blessings in your life? What are some difficult things that the Lord has given you or hasn't given you? How might this passage teach you to trust Him in those things?

PRAY

Ask God to help you place your faith and trust in Him, and not the blessings He provides. Thank Him that in Christ He has given Himself to you, so that even if you had nothing else, you would have Him, and that would be everything you ever needed.

MAIN IDEA

Aaron's death teaches us that there is only one man in whom we can place our trust: Jesus Christ.

Scripture tells us that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a). We see this reality played out literally and physically in our passage today. Aaron, due to his disobedience in the rebellion at Meribah, dies before Israel enters the Land of Promise. This, again, would have been a striking lesson to Israel that they must not put their trust in any man to lead them, but rather in the Lord. Aaron (and Moses) was insufficient and inadequate to lead Israel into the rest that God promised them. His life—like the life of all men—was like the grass that sprouts in the morning only to fade and wither in the evening (Psalm 90:6). While a glimmer of grace appears with the installment of Eleazer as Aaron's successor, the questions are left hanging: What evidence is there that Eleazer won't likewise fail to believe in God and fail to lead Israel in righteousness? What evidence is there that Eleazer's fate won't be that of Aaron's? Ultimately, the answer is that there is a guarantee: Eleazer will fail just as Aaron did. All men will fail because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). All, except one, and His name is Jesus Christ. The story of Aaron's death, due to his failure at Meribah, points us to the perfect life of our Lord Jesus Christ. All men fail, but Jesus never failed. All men disbelieve and rebel against the Lord, but Jesus never did. He was God Himself! And He went to the cross and died and rose again on the third day, so that believing in Him we might receive eternal life. It is true that in princes there is no salvation (Psalm 146:3), but in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is eternal salvation! So, trust in Him today, brothers and sisters.

In the flow of the narrative, why did Aaron die?

Who are the people in your life that you are tempted to trust in? What would it look like for you to place your trust in God alone?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you to place your dependence on Him and Him alone. Thank Him for providing for you perfectly through the person and work of Christ.

MAIN IDEA

Israel's victory at Hormah teaches us that God's steadfast love and faithfulness are unfailing.

One way to describe Numbers 20 is as a series of discouraging events. Meribah, Edom, and the death of Aaron would surely have left Israel in a gloomy state. Was God done with them? Had they sinned so much that His covenant promises were nullified? Did they go past the point of no return with God? Perhaps you have asked these questions about your own relationship with God. Numbers 21 begins with a welcome ray of God's grace. Israel's sin could never be big enough to overcome the power of God's grace. God's grace is triumphant, even over Israel's rebellious hearts. Finally, after a series of events that were clearly in the loss category, God gives Israel a win. They call upon His name, they commit themselves to Him, they trust in His power and His deliverance, and they overtake the Canaanites at Hormah. Have you ever wondered whether God's grace has departed from your life? Have you ever been so discouraged by your sin that it was hard for you to believe in God's love for you? Have you experienced a series of discouraging events precipitated by your own sin? Let this short episode be an encouragement for you. God's covenant love of the Israelites was steadfast and faithful. He could not be moved by any action that the Israelites decided to take, and the same is true for us. When Christ died on the cross, God the Father took His righteousness and applied it to our account, and He took our sin and placed it upon Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). For all who repent and believe in Jesus, there is nothing in creation that can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:37-39). Jesus ratified an eternal covenant on your behalf with His blood; and since God is steadfast and faithful and unchanging, this is a covenant that will never be removed. Rest today in the unfailing promises of God. Live today with gratitude and joy in your heart and worship the God of your salvation.

How does the episode at Hormah compare and contrast with the rest of Numbers 20?

What is one specific way this passage provides encouragement to you or someone you know who is in a period of doubt or discouragement?

PRAY

Praise God for His steadfast love and faithfulness. Thank Him that there is nothing that can separate you from His love in Christ. Ask that He would help you to rest in Him and respond to Him with thanksgiving and worship.

MAIN IDEA

The Bronze Serpent episode teaches us that God will save His people from judgment.

After an encouraging victory against the Canaanites at Hormah, Israel returns to its habit of complaining against God. Perhaps as they made their way to the Red Sea, they were overcome with the reality that they had spent 40 years in the wilderness and ended up right back where they started. This Red Sea episode is very different from the first, though. In the first, the Israelites' lips were filled with a song of praise to the Lord (Exodus 15). In this episode, the people complain against God about their lack of progress, food, and water. Their complaint is ironic on all accounts. Their lack of progress is due to their own rebellion; God provided them manna and quail from heaven; He literally brought water out of a rock for them. This stubborn, hard-hearted bitterness from the Israelites results in God's judgment: He sends fiery serpents that bite and kill the people. His judgment, however, is tempered with mercy. He instructs Moses to make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, so that anyone who looks at it shall live and not perish from the fiery serpents that God sent in His wrath. God, amid His righteous judgment of the Israelites for their sin, provides salvation through a mediator. Again, we see the patient, unchanging faithfulness of God. He will preserve His people and bring them into the Land of Promise even in spite of themselves. May God use this passage in your heart today to turn bitterness into gratitude as you meditate on the steadfast love and faithfulness of God who, though we rightly deserve His eternal judgment, provides us His eternal salvation.

What does this passage show about God's character?

Do you ever struggle with complaining or bitterness? How might this passage address this heart issue?

PRAY

Praise God that He provides salvation even to complainers who deserve His wrath. Ask that He would cultivate a discipline of thanksgiving and an experience of joy in Him in your heart.

MAIN IDEA

The Bronze Serpent is ultimately a picture of Jesus Christ and what He did for us on the cross.

Yesterday we read the account of Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness. Interestingly, this account shows up in the Bible in a way that we wouldn't immediately expect. The first verses of Isaac Watts' hymn "As When the Hebrew Prophet Raised" explain the biblical connections of this passage:

As when the Hebrew prophet raised The brazen serpent high,
The wounded looked, and straight were cured, The people ceased to die:
So from the Saviour on the cross A healing virtue flows;
Who looks to Him with lively faith Is saved from endless woes.²

In John 3, Jesus teaches us that the story of the serpent being lifted up in the wilderness is actually a picture of who He is and what He has done for us on the cross. What an interesting image! Who would ever have thought that Jesus would say, "You remember that snake in the wilderness? Yes, that snake was a picture of Me." Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness and everyone who looked upon it was saved from God's wrath and from death, so also everyone who repents of his or her sins and looks upon Jesus in faith and dependence will be saved from God's eternal wrath and the eternal death that we deserve because of our sin. Are your eyes fixed upon the Savior Jesus Christ today? As we move into the weekend, take this opportunity to fix your gaze on Him and abound in thanksgiving for the glorious truth that He has delivered you from the wrath of God.

How does the bronze serpent from Numbers 21 relate to who Jesus is and what Jesus has done?

In this passage, Jesus exhorts you to look to Him—to repent of your sins and to come to Him in faith and dependence. Are you looking to Jesus in this way today? Are you relying on Him as your only hope in life and death, the way the Israelites relied on that bronze serpent in the wilderness? If you aren't, what is holding you back from looking to Jesus today?

PRAY

Praise God for who Jesus is and what He has done. Thank Him for going to the cross to be lifted up for you, so that by looking to Him you might be delivered from God's wrath and receive eternal salvation. Ask that you would go into this weekend and into church this Sunday worshipping Him wholeheartedly.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is “**God Saves**” from Matthew 1:18-25 and Numbers 21:6-9. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
DECEMBER 23, 2019

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

God is not man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent.
Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and
He will not make it good?
Numbers 23:19

MONDAY
DEC.
23

Matthew 1:18-25

MAIN IDEA

The promise of a savior is ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Christ.

If the book of Numbers has taught us anything so far, it is that we desperately need a savior. Numbers is like a loud megaphone announcing to all who turn its pages, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)! Each of us deserves the just and righteous wrath of God! None of us can do anything to save ourselves! We are in need of a savior!" This need for a savior is a reality that continues to be acknowledged throughout the whole Old Testament, but remains unfulfilled. Leaders like Moses and Aaron arise, but they need a savior just as much as any of us. Yet, as we have already seen in Numbers, the promise and expectation of a savior is a recurring theme in the Old Testament, from Genesis 3:15 on. This promise and expectation finally meets its fulfillment in the first chapter of the first book of the New Testament: Matthew 1. As we lead up to Christmas, we will take the next several days to study Matthew's account of the coming of the Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ. In today's passage, we see the promise fulfilled. We read the account of the virgin Mary being found with child "from the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 1:18) and of an angel visiting Joseph and instructing him to call the child's name Jesus, "for He will save His people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). This announcement from the angel is what the entire Old Testament has been promising and anticipating (Matthew 1:22-23; cf. Isaiah 7:14). Jesus, God in the flesh, would come to this world to do the thing that no leader of Israel, no prophet, no king could do: Save God's people from their sins.

In what ways does the book of Numbers show us our need for a savior?

In what ways does your own life show you your need for a savior?

PRAY

Confess to God today the sins that exist in your life and from which you need to be saved. Thank Him for sending His Son, Jesus, to save you from your sins. Ask that you would continually repent and believe in Him.

MAIN IDEA

Jesus, as Lord of all, is worthy of our worship.

While the focus of yesterday’s passage was Jesus’ identity as the savior of His people, today’s passage focuses on the lordship of Jesus. Wise men arrive in Jerusalem and announce to Herod the birth of one who is “king of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2). After their announcement, we see two opposing responses to the lordship of Jesus. Herod views Jesus’ lordship as a threat and uses all of his own power to attempt to stamp out that threat (Matthew 2:3-8, 16-18). The wise men, on the other hand, humbly submit to the lordship of Jesus by rejoicing over Him, worshiping Him, and bringing Him gifts (Matthew 2:10-11). How are you responding to the lordship of Jesus this Christmas? It is easy, especially during a season when our culture would have us focus on our own satisfaction and comfort, to buck against the idea of a sovereign Lord who calls us to lay down our lives to follow Him. But the call of Christian discipleship that Jesus has placed on our lives is to follow the example of these wise men: Rejoicing in His kingship, falling on our faces to worship Him, giving over our lives to Him as a sacrificial offering, and following Him for the rest of our days. During this Christmas season, let us submit ourselves to the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Describe the opposing responses of Herod and the wise men to Jesus.

In what ways does Jesus’ kingship threaten the idols of your own heart and life? What would it look like for you to follow the wise men’s example in worship and submission to Jesus and His will for your life?

PRAY

Ask that God would break your love for idols this Christmas season. Ask that He would lead you to love Jesus supremely and to submit to His lordship. Ask that He would help you worship Him wholeheartedly this Christmas.

MAIN IDEA

Jesus is the true and greater Israel.

In Numbers, we have been reading the story of God delivering His son Israel out of slavery in Egypt and giving him the Land of Promise. God remained true to His promise even though Israel rebelled against Him again and again. Israel, the faithless son, was covered by the grace of his faithful God and given the promises that he truly didn't deserve. What is amazing about the passage before us today is that Matthew connects the identity of Israel with the identity of Jesus. Matthew tells the story of Joseph, at the direction of an angel, taking his family from Bethlehem to Egypt to flee Herod. After Herod dies, Joseph then takes his family back into the land of Israel, and eventually to Nazareth of Galilee. Matthew interprets this whole series of events as follows: "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (Matthew 2:15; cf. Hosea 11:1). Just as God called His son Israel out of Egypt to fulfill His promises, so now He calls His Son Jesus Christ out of Egypt to fulfill His promises. There is, however, a key difference between God's son Israel and God's Son Jesus Christ. Where Israel was faithless, Christ was perfectly faithful. Jesus is, in fact, the greater Israel and God's true Son. Where Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness, we find later in Matthew that Jesus perfectly obeyed God and never gave in to temptation (Matthew 4:1-17). Where God delivered Israel from Egypt and covered their rebellion with His grace over and over again, Jesus came to deliver and save His people and to bring God's grace to them in His perfect life, death, burial, and resurrection, for the forgiveness of sins. So, on this Christmas day, may our hearts sing the praise of God's true Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

How does Matthew draw comparisons between Jesus and Israel in this passage?

Why is it important that Jesus is the true and greater Israel? What does this show you about who He is and what He did for you?

PRAY

Praise God today for Jesus—the true and greater Israel. Ask that God would transform your own rebellious heart to look more like that of Christ.

MAIN IDEA

God fulfills His covenant promises, down to the smallest detail.

So far, in Numbers, we have paid attention to how God is fulfilling His grand covenantal promises of a great people and a great land as He delivers the nation of Israel from Egypt to the land of promise. However, isn't it true that many of the most beautiful and important things in life are quite small? Minuscule details, like the pattern one finds on a single leaf or the intricacies of a raw diamond, can lead us to awe and to the worship of a God who is so grand even in the small details. Today's passage presents to us an opportunity to glory in one of the smallest details of God's covenant promise to His people. In Genesis 15, God promises that the people of Israel will not enter the land until the fourth generation, "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Numbers 21:16). In today's passage, over four hundred years after God mentioned that small detail and included it in His covenant promises, we find God leading Israel to defeat Sihon, king of the Amorites, route out the inhabitants of the land of the Amorites, and inhabit it themselves. Moreover, this was the first Transjordanian region that the Israelites inhabited. God has once again delivered on His promise. The iniquity of the Amorites was complete and God brought His people into their land, just as He had promised. This shows us, once again, that God is faithful to His covenant promises—down to the very smallest detail. Know today, brothers and sisters, that God will fulfill the promises He has revealed to us in His Word—not even a jot or tittle from them will pass away until all is accomplished (Matthew 5:18). So, place your trust in Him today.

What covenantal promise does God fulfill in this passage?

How have you seen God's faithfulness in your life this week, even in small ways?

PRAY

Praise God that not one jot or tittle from all the law and prophets will ever pass away until all is accomplished and that in Christ it is all fulfilled. Ask that He would help you to recognize His faithfulness in your life more and more.

MAIN IDEA

God is committed to blessing His people.

The story of Balaam that is recounted in these chapters is perhaps one of the most interesting in Scripture. It is interesting that God chose an outsider to pronounce blessings on the people of Israel. The political maneuvering and antics that occur between Balak and Balaam are deeply entertaining. But, of course, the most fascinating and famous aspect of this account is Balaam’s talking donkey. Even though there is so much going on in these chapters, there is really only one central point to the whole account: God is absolutely and undeniably bent on blessing Israel. Not even a money-hungry, unbelieving false prophet can stay his lips if God wants to use him to bless Israel. And that is precisely what God does in this passage. God uses Balaam to pronounce four specific blessings on Israel that should lead us to worship Him:

- 1) Balaam recognizes God’s faithfulness to Israel in setting it apart and multiplying it greatly (Numbers 23:7-10).
- 2) Balaam recognizes God’s presence among Israel as a King who sustains His people and leads them to victory (Numbers 23:18-24).
- 3) Balaam prophesies Israel’s prosperity and victory in the land of Canaan (Numbers 24:3-9).
- 4) Balaam prophesies that Israel will one day have a King who will destroy all of its enemies (Numbers 24:15-24).

While all of these blessings in some way come to pass in Israel’s history, most of them also have further fulfillments in Christ. For it is in Christ that God’s people have fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore; it is in Christ that we find our true resting place; it is in Christ that we have a true King who has defeated all our enemies, especially sin, Satan, and death. So let us rise up today and worship the God who blesses His people even from the mouth of their enemies.

What is the significance of God using Balaam to bless Israel?

In what ways do you see the blessings of God in your life? Think especially about the blessings that Balaam mentions here. Where do you see God giving you victory over sin? When has the kingship of Jesus and His presence in your life been especially sweet to you?

PRAY

Praise God for His absolute and undeniable commitment to bless His people. Thank Him that He blesses you even in spite of yourself—that while you were yet a sinner Christ died for you. Ask that as you experience His blessings in your life that you would become a blessing to others as well (Genesis 12:1-3).

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **“God Calls”** from Numbers 22:22-35. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP NOTES _____

List 2-3 ways you plan to respond to the truths you have learned this week:

WEEK OF DECEMBER 30, 2019

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

May the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord will not be like sheep which have no shepherd.
Numbers 27:16-17

MONDAY
DEC.
30

Numbers 25

MAIN IDEA

Israel's infidelity meets God's jealousy.

Numbers 25 presents us with a sobering picture of our own sin and a glorious picture of God's character. Israel's sin in worshiping Baal of Peor is described in glaring terms: "The people began to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab... They joined themselves to Baal of Peor" (Numbers 25:1, 3). The language here is that of infidelity. Israel had entered into a covenant relationship with God, and they were breaking that covenant by worshiping a god other than the true God. Have you ever thought of your sin in this way? You probably aren't tempted to worship a Canaanite fertility god like Baal. But, you probably are tempted to worship the gods of our culture: your cell phone, your television time, your romantic relationships, or even yourself. Sin is any time we worship and serve created things rather than the Creator. Thus, we should think about it in the same way that Moses describes: Our sin is infidelity. It is breaking our covenant with the God who created us to worship Him. The way that God responds to Israel's sin shows us a glorious aspect of His character: "The Lord was angry against Israel" (Numbers 25:3). God responds to infidelity with wrath (Numbers 25:10) because He is a jealous God (Numbers 25:11). For unfaithful sinners (which is all of us), this aspect of God's character can be terrifying. It means that each of us is living with a death sentence, just like Phinehas meted out on Zimri and Cozbi. But this terrifying attribute of God—His jealousy—should also comfort us because it shows us how much God desires for His people to worship Him. In fact, God desires for us to worship Him so much that He was willing to sacrifice His Son Jesus Christ on the cross. God established a covenant of peace with Phinehas for being His agent of jealousy and delivering the sentence of death on unfaithful sinners. But, how much greater is the work that Christ did on the cross, where He became the object of God's jealousy and received the death penalty that we unfaithful sinners deserved, so that we might gain eternal life through repentance and faith in Him.

What does this chapter teach us about our sin? What does it teach us about the character of God?

In what ways can the jealousy of God be a comforting truth to you?

PRAY

Pray that God would sanctify you and help you to be faithful to Him and His Word. Thank Him for His jealousy—that He is jealous for your worship. Praise Him for pouring out His jealous wrath on Christ so that you could worship Him forever.

MAIN IDEA

The second census shows God's grace to the next generation of Israel.

Have you ever heard of the sandwich method for giving criticism? Basically, here's how it goes: You begin the conversation (or email) with a compliment, then you provide criticism, and you conclude with another compliment. You sandwich the negative meat of your communication in between two positives. There is a kind of wonderful sandwich method that is going on in the census of Numbers 26. This census is the same type of census that we saw in Numbers 1. It counts all the males in Israel of age twenty and older; in other words, all the men who are "able to go out to war in Israel" (Numbers 26:2). The difference is that this census counts the congregation of Israel after their forty years of wilderness wandering. The amazing news of this census, though, is that Israel's population has stayed almost the same throughout these forty years. The first census totaled 603,550, while this one totals 601,730. This news is made even more amazing by the bits of negative information that are sandwiched into this census. The narrator pauses to remind us of Dathan and Abiram and their participation in the rebellion of Korah, when God devoured 250 men by fire (Numbers 26:9-10). He also reminds us of Nadab and Abihu, who "died when they offered strange fire before the Lord" (Numbers 26:61). Finally, he reminds us of the rebellion of Israel in the wilderness wanderings as a whole, which led to everyone in the previous generation, except Joshua and Caleb, dying in the wilderness. These negative details drive home the truth that we have been learning all through Numbers: God is faithful to His promises. He will keep His promise to make Israel into a great nation. He will deliver them into the Land of Promise. He will do this even though Israel has proved itself faithless, over and over again. Don't forget that this census comes right after the account of Israel playing the harlot with Baal of Peor. Israel is being wooed into infidelity by a false god, yet God continues to be faithful to His covenant people. What an incredible truth for us to rehearse and be reminded of again and again!

What are the differences and similarities between this census and the one we saw in Numbers 1?

What impact do the narrator's reminders of Israel's sinful track record in the wilderness have on the way that you read and understand this census?

PRAY

Praise God once again for His faithfulness. Ask that you would never tire of giving Him thanks for His steadfast love and faithfulness. Ask that He would give you a deep understanding of the gravity of your sin, so that you would be even more awestruck by the wonders of His grace.

MAIN IDEA

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad tells us a familiar testimony of God's grace.

Everyone's testimony is, at the same time, wonderfully unique and gloriously similar. Some have a testimony of growing up in a Christian home and coming to Christ at a young age. Others grew up in an unbelieving household and came to Christ at a later age, after living a life of unbelief. Countless unique stories fit somewhere in between these two poles. No matter the unique circumstances of your testimony, we all have this in common: We were sinners who deserved God's wrath, but in His great mercy and grace, God saved us when we repented and believed in the person and work of Christ. The story of the daughters of Zelophehad tells us a wonderfully unique story of this same grace of God. Even though their father was an Israelite, they grew up in an unbelieving household, in a sense, since Zelophehad had died in the wilderness as a result of his own personal sin. The question is, why didn't the daughters of Zelophehad succumb to the same fate as their father? God would have been just to visit the iniquity of this father upon his children for generations to come (Numbers 14:18). We find the answer in the grace of God. God is "slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression" (Number 14:18). Furthermore, God in His grace had promised that the children of the rebellious generation would enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14:31). Yesterday we saw how the second census shows us God's faithfulness to His promises in preserving the next generation of Israelites and delivering them into the land. Today we see that same promise being fulfilled in a specific instance, a personal testimony. The testimony of the daughters of Zelophehad is gloriously similar to ours. They deserved to perish in the wilderness along with their father with no land to inherit. But, God is gracious, and He is faithful to keep His covenant promises even when we are faithless. And so instead of visiting their father's iniquity upon their heads, God gave to the daughters of Zelophehad the inheritance of their father.

What is the testimony that the story of the daughters of Zelophehad tells us?

What is your testimony? How has God worked in your life in unique and familiar ways? Spend time writing out how God's grace has impacted your life.

PRAY

Praise God for the way He has uniquely worked in your life. Praise Him for the specific life circumstances that led to your salvation. Rejoice in the experience of forgiveness of sins and undeserved favor from the Lord that you share with your brothers and sisters in Christ.

MAIN IDEA

God provides Joshua as a shepherd to lead and protect Israel.

Do you know what happens when sheep don't have a shepherd? Sheep are incredibly vulnerable animals. Left to their own devices they wander off cliffs, drown in shallow streams, and generally get themselves into regular mortal danger. They are also at the very bottom of the food chain (unless you count the grass they graze). They are prey for wolves, lions, bears, and many other predators. At the same time, sheep were a precious commodity in the ancient world. They provided food to eat, milk to drink, wool and hides for clothing, and leather for tents. For this reason, the job of a shepherd was a very important job in the ancient world. The shepherd led the sheep and kept them safe from themselves and predators. Without the shepherd, the sheep wouldn't have much chance for long-term survival. In our passage today, Moses prays that God would not leave Israel as sheep without a shepherd. Like a flock of sheep, Israel needed a shepherd to lead them and keep them safe. Everything we have learned so far in Numbers about Israel's hard-heartedness confirms this need. God immediately grants Moses' request by raising up Joshua—a man in whom God's Spirit exists (Numbers 27:18)—to take Moses' place. God's provision of Joshua is just another piece of evidence of God's grace in the book of Numbers. He could have justly left Israel as sheep without a shepherd, hopelessly wandering in the wilderness until they perished. But, God Himself is the shepherd of Israel, and therefore He made provision for them and established a leader who would care for them and lead them. Don't let this day pass without acknowledging God's provision in your own life. Spend time meditating on the words of Psalm 23:1-3. In Christ, God leads us and cares perfectly for us. He leads us to peace, prosperity, and righteousness. He is our shepherd. What a comforting truth!

When Moses uses the imagery of "sheep without a shepherd" in this passage, what is he communicating?

In what ways have you experienced God's shepherdly provision in your own life?

PRAY

Spend time praying the words of Psalm 23 back to God.

MAIN IDEA

Even though all of Israel’s shepherds ultimately failed, God finally provided His only Son as the good shepherd who perfectly leads and protects His people.

Yesterday we saw how God, in anticipation of Moses’ death, graciously provided Joshua as a shepherd to lead and care for Israel. But we have to ask these questions. Are Moses and Joshua the shepherds that Israel really needs? Can these men lead Israel to the eternal rest that God promised? The Bible’s answer to these questions is a resounding “no.” Moses dies and Joshua after him. A long line of judges and kings in Israel follows, all of whom shepherd Israel to some extent, but also decisively fail. This line of failed shepherds leads all the way to the point in history when Jesus peered out over the crowds of Israel and His heart was filled with compassion, “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36). Do you hear the echo of Moses’ prayer in this passage from Matthew (Numbers 27:17)? Here is an indictment on all the previous leaders and judges and kings of Israel. In the end, they left Israel harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. A greater shepherd than Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, Solomon, or Hezekiah is needed. A good shepherd is needed. A shepherd who would lay down his life for his sheep and have the power to take it up again (John 10:15, 18). There is only one shepherd who meets this job description: Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He is our Good Shepherd, and we are His sheep. May we listen to His voice today and follow Him as He leads us to still waters, green pastures, and paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:1-3).

Why does every shepherd of Israel ultimately fail to shepherd Israel? How is Jesus, as the Good Shepherd of Israel, different?

Read John 10:1-18. What does this passage teach us about Jesus’ identity as the Good Shepherd?

PRAY

Pray through Psalm 23 again. This time, as you are praying, think about how Jesus ultimately fulfills the description of a shepherd in this passage.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is “**God Commissions**” from Numbers 27:12-23. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP NOTES _____

List 2-3 ways you plan to respond to the truths you have learned this week:

WEEK OF
JANUARY 6, 2020

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.
Hebrews 10:4

MONDAY
JAN.
6

Numbers 28–29

MAIN IDEA

The sacrificial system points us to our need for fellowship with God, the cost of sin, and the ultimate sacrifice of Christ.

Numbers 28–29 constitute a calendar of public sacrifices. Moses gives Israel details for how and when public sacrifices should take place, all the way from a normal daily sacrifice to the most important sacrificial day of the year: The Day of Atonement. This calendar teaches us the importance of the sacrificial system in Israel. It was the way that Israel maintained fellowship with God. Because of the continual presence of sin in Israel, there had to be a continual system in place to make atonement for sin. That's what the sacrificial system did. Fellowship with God was costly—each day it cost Israelites precious sacrifices, and sometimes, like during the Feast of Booths, it was extremely costly (Numbers 29:12-38). But the cost the Israelites paid paled in comparison to the cost the sacrificial animals paid—which was their very lives. The sacrificial system teaches us that sin has a cost, and the final cost is death. While the animal sacrifices of the sacrificial system made temporary provision for the sins of Israel so that they could have fellowship with God, ultimately something more was needed. A sufficient sacrifice was needed that would cover the cost of sin once and for all. The good news of the gospel is that Christ came as our Passover lamb to die for sin once and for all, so that whoever repents and believes in Him can be forever forgiven through the atoning blood of Christ and have eternal fellowship with God that will never be broken (Hebrews 10:11-14).

What was the purpose of the sacrificial system in Old Testament Israel?

What is different about Jesus and the sacrifice He made for sin? How does the sacrificial system point you to your ultimate need for Him?

PRAY

Praise God today for sending His Son as the all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. Pray that you would enjoy the communion and fellowship that you have with God because of what Christ has done.

MAIN IDEA

The laws on vows teach us to be faithful people but also point us to the perfect faithfulness of God through Christ.

Have you ever made a rash vow? Children often do this: “I promise I will eat my broccoli if you let me watch a movie tonight!” But adults do it too: “I promise I will pay this expensive car payment if you let me drive this luxury car off the lot!” The basic teaching of Numbers 30 is this: When you make a vow, you must fulfill it. You must let your yes be yes and your no be no. You must be people of your word—faithful and trustworthy people. The reason for this teaching is equally as basic: Israel, as the covenant people of God, represented God’s character to the world. God is perfectly faithful and trustworthy. He always keeps His promises and is faithful to do exactly what He says He will do. Therefore, Israel must be faithful and trustworthy to properly represent God. This applies to Christians as well. God calls us to Christlikeness in the way we relate to the truth. He calls us to be honest people because Jesus Himself is the truth! But the truth is, we aren’t always honest people. Oftentimes, we fail to live up to the standard of God’s law when it comes to honesty. As the bride of Christ, we are often like the wife of Numbers 30 who makes vows with “thoughtless utterance” (Numbers 30:6 ESV). We pledge ourselves to all kinds of idols and forget our pledge to God. But that’s why the words of 2 Timothy 2:13 are so sweet to Christians: “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.” God has pledged Himself to us—we are His covenant people. God’s commitment to us stands even when we are faithless to Him. The reason why Jesus had to go to the cross is because you and I failed to faithfully keep covenant with God. A punishment for that faithlessness had to be exacted, but God laid it on Christ instead of on us. Christ died for our faithlessness and in so doing proved beyond doubt God’s perfect faithfulness.

Why is it so important for Christians to be people of their word?

Think about the last time you failed to be honest. What led you to dishonesty? In what way is the gospel good news when you are dishonest or unfaithful?

PRAY

Ask that God would create in you a heart of truth and honesty. Ask that He would grow you in Christlikeness. Ask Him to forgive you for the times that you have been unfaithful or dishonest, and praise Him for His constant and steadfast faithfulness.

MAIN IDEA

When God judges, He also saves.

An important theme in the Bible is God's salvation through judgment. God uses His just judgment of some people to bring about His gracious salvation of others. One clear example of this is the worldwide flood: God rightly judges the world for its evil by flooding it, but graciously saves Noah and his family. This theme is very present in Numbers 31–32. You may remember from Numbers 25 that the Midianites seduced the Israelites into worshiping Baal at Peor. They were a people who not only deserved God's righteous judgment, but who also would have continued to seduce the Israelites. So what God does in Numbers 31 is provide salvation to the Israelites through the judgment of the Midianites. He uses Israel as an instrument of His righteous wrath to wipe out the Midianites and by so doing graciously saves the Israelites from further seduction from them once they enter the Promised Land. There's one problem with this picture, though. The problem is Numbers 32. Even though God graciously saves Israel from the Midianites by judging the Midianites, Moses' response to the Reubenites and Gadites in Numbers 32 shows us evidence that he is still wary that the seductive spirit of the Midianites still exists within Israel. Because of his past experience with unfaithful Israel, Moses was afraid that Reubenites and Gadites were seduced by greed and fear when they saw the abundantly suitable livestock conditions of the land of Gilead. Their initial request comes across to Moses as "Why cross into the land God promised when there is so much potential for prosperity right here?" Moses might have been thinking "You can take Midian out of the Promised Land, but you can't take Midian out of Israel's hearts." Reuben and Gad's reply reassures us of their righteous desire to fight with Israel and participate in conquering the rest of the Promised Land with their brothers before claiming Gilead. Though Reuben and Gad had pure motives in their desire for the land, Moses' initial outrage points to the fact that a greater salvation is needed to truly transform the seductive hearts of man. And that greater salvation through judgment has come upon us in Christ. For on the cross God made war on our sin not by judging us for it, but by judging Jesus for it and thereby securing our right standing before Him. On the cross Jesus got the wrath for our sin and in exchange we were covered with His perfect righteousness. This, brothers and sisters, is the greatest act of salvation through judgment in all of history!

How does the biblical theme of God's salvation through judgment appear in this passage?

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus was judged for your sin? How does this truth impact your affections for God?

PRAY

Praise God today for saving you by judging Jesus for your sin. Praise Him for giving you the perfect righteousness of Christ in exchange. Ask God to cultivate in you a heart of gratitude for Him and all that He's done for you in Christ.

MAIN IDEA

Moses testifies before Israel to God's enduring faithfulness.

One of the most encouraging things to do is to talk to a brother or sister in Christ who has been walking with the Lord for a long time. Oftentimes, these brothers and sisters have countless stories about how the Lord has shown His grace and faithfulness to them over and over again throughout their lives, through the best times, the worst times, and everything in between. In Numbers 33, Moses does something similar. He gives the people of Israel his own personal testimony of God's constant faithfulness to Israel from the time they left Egypt to the time they arrived at the Promised Land, finally ready to enter in as an entirely new generation. He shows them how faithful God was to give them victory over their enemies, to feed and water them, to give them His perfect law, and to overall preserve them during forty years of wilderness wanderings. How have you seen the Lord's faithful hand at work in your life? Perhaps you have been a Christian for fifty years, or perhaps only five days. Either way, you can look back on your Christian life and see how God, in His grace, has preserved you.

What are some of the evidences of God's faithfulness that Moses lists?

Think about your own life and the evidences of God's faithfulness in it. List out some of the ways that God has been faithful to you in your Christian life.

PRAY

Thank God for the testimony of His faithfulness that you can tell. Ask Him to continue showing you His faithfulness as you continue to walk in obedience to Him.

MAIN IDEA

The book of Numbers ends with a beginning: Israel's entrance into the land.

In a real sense the book of Numbers ends with a beginning. The people of Israel are on the cusp of entering the Land of Promise. Moses just completed an entire summary of how God has led them over the past forty years to arrive at this climactic moment. Now, it is time to look forward to what life will be like once they enter the Land. So, Numbers closes with three solid chapters detailing laws that will govern life in the Land. Numbers ends with a beginning—the beginning of Israel's life in the place where God's covenant promises are fulfilled. This ending of Numbers has a lot to teach us about our own lives. For our lives bear striking similarity to the lives of the Israelites. We are not home. Like the Israelites, we are pilgrims progressing toward the place that is our home. The Israelites were looking forward to the Land of Promise, but we look forward to something so much greater: An eternal relationship with God in the New Heavens and New Earth. Just as the Israelites had to trust that God's promise of the land would come to pass, so also we must trust. God has shown Himself faithful. He has already given His Son to ensure His promises would stand. It is up to us to do exactly what Numbers 33–36 calls the Israelites to do: Look forward with expectant hope to the glorious future God has in store for His covenant people. Take time today to set your mind on the sure hope that is yours in Christ.

In what way does the book of Numbers end with a beginning?

What does the ending of the book of Numbers teach you about how you should relate to your life in this world?

PRAY

Praise God today for the firm hope of eternity that is yours in Christ. Ask Him to help you set your mind on your citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:19-21).

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **“God Expects”** from Numbers 32:20-32. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP NOTES _____

List 2-3 ways you plan to respond to the truths you have learned this week:

WEEK OF
JANUARY 13, 2020

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

So you shall keep His statutes and His commandments which I am giving you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long on the land which the Lord your God is giving you for all time.

Deuteronomy 4:40

MONDAY
JAN.
13

Deuteronomy 1:1-18

MAIN IDEA

Deuteronomy opens with the story of Israel's false start.

If you are a football fan, you know that a false start is one of the most frustrating penalties in the game. The play is about to begin. Everyone is ready to spring into action. The ball is going to move down the field. And then a player moves too soon, delays the whole thing with a penalty, and moves the team back five yards. When we open the pages of Deuteronomy, we find Moses narrating a similarly frustrating scene (Deuteronomy 1:6-4:43). Deuteronomy places us in Moab with Moses speaking to Israel as they are about to enter the land after forty years of wilderness wandering. Moses recounts how Israel was at Horeb forty years ago, enjoying God's covenant promises of numerous offspring and a covenant relationship with God. They were on the precipice of entering the land God had promised them. It looked like the play was about to begin. God was showing them the land and commanding them to enter it and take possession of it (Deuteronomy 1:8). Moses was setting out regulations for how Israel's leadership would be organized upon entering the land (Deuteronomy 1:9-18). Yet, what this first speech of Moses shows us is that Israel's departure from Horeb ended up being a false start—one for which they received the penalty of their forty years in the wilderness. Over the next week we will see how Israel committed this infraction, what it cost them, and how God was faithful through it all.

What promise was God about to fulfill when Israel had a false start in Moab?

Why does Moses begin Deuteronomy by recounting Israel's past failures in their relationship with the Lord? What would Israel have learned from this narrative?

PRAY

As we begin our study in Deuteronomy, pray that God would help you to grow in your knowledge of Him and in your relationship with Him. Pray that the story of Israel's relationship with the Lord would be instructive for your own relationship with Him.

MAIN IDEA

Israel's rebellion against the Lord results in the Lord's discipline and highlights His triumphant grace.

If you're a parent, you've probably been there, or you can at least imagine the following situation: You've worked really hard to provide something good for your children—you slaved away in the kitchen to give them a home-cooked meal or you worked overtime to buy them a birthday present. But, then, when you offer that good gift to them, they don't respond with gratitude. Instead, they throw a tantrum and scream about how it's not exactly what they wanted. What we see in today's passage is that Israel, as God's son, behaves exactly like an ungrateful child. God presents them with the gift of all gifts—the Land of Promise. But instead of entering it with gratitude, the people rebel against the command of God, murmur against Him, and doubt the goodness of the gift He has given to them (Deuteronomy 1:26-33). Just as you would imagine a child should be disciplined for behaving the way described above, so God disciplined Israel. He left them in the wilderness for an entire generation (Deuteronomy 1:34-40) and refused to fight for them when they tried to take the land in their own timeline (Deuteronomy 1:41-45). Before we look down our noses at Israel for their blatant and childish rebellion against God, we must examine our own hearts. This passage shows us that outward rebellion comes from an inward heart of rebellion. What strongholds of rebellion against the Lord still exist in your heart? How does Israel's sin highlight sin in your life? Fearlessly and with boldness you can ask yourself these questions because what the book of Deuteronomy teaches us over and over again is that God's grace triumphs even over our own rebellion. That was true for Israel, and it is even truer for those of us who have experienced the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, deal ruthlessly with your heart of rebellion today, and rest peacefully in knowing that the grace of Christ secures your forgiveness forever.

What is the nature of Israel's rebellion against God at Kadesh-barnea? What is the consequence they face for it?

When was the last time you sinned against the Lord and experienced His discipline? How does God's grace shine through triumphantly even when you are facing His discipline?

PRAY

Ask God that He would root out a rebellious heart from your life. Ask that when you do experience His discipline, as all of His children do, that you would recognize His love, grace, and kindness even amid the pain.

MAIN IDEA

God's triumphant grace shines through the wilderness years.

Yesterday we ended on a note of hope. Israel rebelled against God and as a result they faced the penalty of forty years in the wilderness. But there is hope amid God's discipline of Israel. The theme of the whole book of Deuteronomy is that God's grace is triumphant, even over Israel's rebellion. This is exactly what Moses' description of Israel's wilderness years shows us. Throughout those forty long years, God was present with Israel. He cared for His treasured nation and preserved it. The discipline was real: All the previous generation (except Joshua and Caleb) died in the wilderness. But the grace was real too: God shepherded His people. The discipline had an end. After forty years He delivered on His promise and led them into the land. He helped them pass safely through the lands of Edom, Moab, and Ammon (Deuteronomy 2:1-25). He gave them victory over Sihon and Og (Deuteronomy 2:26–3:11). He fought for His people. He distributed the land of their enemies to Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh (Deuteronomy 3:12-17). He showed them that they had nothing to fear from the people of the land because He was on their side. Surely their sin was grievous, but even more surely His grace was stunning. Perhaps you have sinned grievously in some way and are experiencing the discipline of the Lord. Let Israel's experience encourage you. Receive the Lord's discipline as evidence of His fatherly love. Know that His grace, through the atoning work of Christ, has secured for you His eternal favor. In fact, it is because of His favor toward you, in Christ, that you are experiencing the discipline in the first place.

How did God show Himself gracious in the wilderness?

Can you think of a time in your life when you were very aware of God shepherding you or fighting a battle for you? What does this passage help you to see about the character of God?

PRAY

Pray that God would give you more awareness of His shepherding hand in your life. Pray that He would help you see the battles—spiritual or otherwise—that He is fighting for you, even now. Praise Him for already fighting the greatest battle for you in Christ—through whom He defeated sin, death, and Satan.

MAIN IDEA

God's triumphant grace shines even when He says no.

In the passage before us today, God says “no.” This is a fairly obvious observation from the text, but it is a very important one. Moses, the leader of Israel and the only one who had seen God’s glory on the mountain, makes a request of God. And God says no. Moreover, God says no when Moses asks for something good—entrance into the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 3:25). It is a seemingly well-intentioned request from Moses to be allowed to see more of God’s greatness and His mighty hand (Deuteronomy 3:24) and yet God still says no. Of course, God was justified in His no. God would not allow Moses to enter the land as a consequence of Moses’ own sin (Deuteronomy 1:37). But still, you may be a little shocked, along with Moses, that God answers his genuine request with a resounding “no.” Is God still gracious to us when He says no? Notice just a few ways from this text that God’s grace shines through the “shut door” on Moses’ request. First, notice that God answers Moses. God did not owe Moses a response. Moses did not deserve an audience before God. Yet Moses’ relationship with God is defined by covenant—God has committed Himself to Moses and nothing, not even Moses’ sin and its consequences, can break that commitment. Second, notice that God does allow Moses to see the land that Israel will enter. He instructs Moses to climb up on Pisgah “and look at it with your eyes” (Deuteronomy 3:27 ESV). Though it is something less than entering the land, it is still the undeserved mercy of God. Third, notice that God is faithful to provide a leader for Israel to replace Moses. At the end of Numbers, we found Moses praying that God would not leave Israel as sheep without a shepherd (Numbers 27:17). We see here that God answers “yes” to that prayer by providing Joshua as a leader for Israel. In the “shut door” of God’s no, His grace still shines brightly. What “no” have you received from God lately? How have you seen His grace working even amid His refusal to grant your request?

Why does God say “no” to Moses? How does His grace triumph even in His denial of Moses’ request?

Has God ever answered your prayers in a way you didn’t expect? Has He ever said “no” when you asked Him for something very specific? How did you respond? How did He show you triumphant grace even when He said no?

PRAY

Bring your requests to God today as a son brings requests to his father. Rest before Him in the truth that He is good and His grace is triumphant. Praise Him that He hears your prayers and responds to them, and that He always completes His perfect work through and in your broken life.

MAIN IDEA

Moses exhorts Israel to be exclusive in their covenant relationship with the Lord.

Moses' first speech before the assembly of Israel ends with an exhortation that can be summed up as follows: Be exclusive in your relationship with the Lord. Any good relationship requires some level of exclusivity. For instance, one of the cornerstones of a good marriage is exclusive commitment to your spouse. Similarly, Israel had to be exclusive in their covenant relationship with the Lord in order to experience its true benefits. They had to be careful to keep His commandments, not forget them, and teach them to their children and grandchildren. They had to be very careful not to worship the imaginary gods of the nations, but rather to worship the Lord God alone. The basis for Moses' exhortation is this: "The Lord is God; there is no other besides Him" (Deuteronomy 4:35 ESV). It is the Lord alone who is worthy of such exclusivity. So, when Israel remains exclusive in their covenant relationship with the Lord, what is the result? The result is not redemption. Israel had already experienced redemption when God delivered them from Egypt. It was their redemption from Egypt that propelled them into this covenant relationship with the Lord. Rather, the result of their being exclusive in this relationship was their flourishing. If Israel kept the Lord's commandments, were careful not to forget them, taught them to their children, and worshiped Him alone, then they would flourish in their relationship with Him. It would go well for them and their children after them, and they would prolong their days in the good land God had given to them (Deuteronomy 4:40). This is the exhortation that Moses gave to Israel. And it is also an exhortation for us. The Lord has redeemed us, not out of slavery in Egypt, but rather out of slavery to sin. In Christ, we have experienced redemption from sin, and in Christ we have entered into a covenant relationship with the Lord. When we are careful to stay exclusive in that relationship and not to give our hearts to idols, we will flourish in every aspect of our lives and our relationship with the Lord.

Notice how many times the word "keep" appears in this passage. Why do you think that word continues showing up?

What are some specific idols that your heart tends to cling to? How does this passage teach you to deal with those idols? What reason does it give? What promise does it extend to those who keep their relationship with God exclusive?

PRAY

Praise God today for redeeming you through Christ and giving you access to Himself in a covenant relationship. Ask that He would give you the power to destroy idols in your heart and to cling to Him alone.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **“Valued”** from Deuteronomy 5:17; 19:4-13. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

SUNDAY SCHOOL GROUP NOTES _____

List 2-3 ways you plan to respond to the truths you have learned this week:

WEEK OF
JANUARY 20, 2020

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

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

MONDAY
JAN.
20

Deuteronomy 4:44–5:33

MAIN IDEA

The Ten Commandments reveal God's holy character.

Last week we looked at Moses' first speech before the Israelite assembly in Moab, before they entered the Promised Land. This week we begin to look at Moses' second speech. While Moses' first speech was mainly a historical narrative recounting Israel's past failure and their resulting time in the wilderness, Moses' second speech lays out the law that God gave to Israel on Mount Sinai. The most prominent theme throughout this passage is God's revelation of Himself. With Moses as mediator, God spoke with Israel "face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire" (Deuteronomy 5:4 ESV). The Ten Commandments themselves show us God's holy character, His love for righteousness, His steadfast love, and His faithfulness. They are commands based in His character for us to worship Him supremely and exclusively (Deuteronomy 5:7-15) and to love our neighbors both in our outward actions and inward desires (Deuteronomy 5:16-21). Israel responded fittingly to this revelation from God: "If we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, we shall die" (Deuteronomy 5:25 ESV). They realized that what God's holy character meant for them, as unholy people, was death. They could not remain in the presence of a holy God and live. God agreed with this assessment: "They are right in all that they have spoken" (Deuteronomy 5:28 ESV), and therefore Moses stood between them and God as a mediator. However, it is important for us to remember that Moses himself was not worthy to stand between Israel and God. In fact as Moses delivered this speech, he was facing his own death, due to his sin. This stark reality points us to our need for a greater mediator. And, the good news of the gospel is that we have a greater mediator in Jesus Christ: "For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

What is the purpose of the Ten Commandments?

How should you relate to the Ten Commandments today? How should they impact the way you live your life? How do they connect to your relationship with Jesus?

PRAY

Praise God for revealing Himself and His holiness to you through the law. Ask that God would help you delight in His revealed character, and also see your need for Christ as your mediator before a holy God.

MAIN IDEA

God commands those who love Him to keep His commandments close and teach them to others.

When you really love something, you keep it close and you tell others about it. Cell phones have become a great example of this. We tend to keep our phones close to us: in our pockets, on our nightstands, in our purses, etc. If we lose our phones, the world might as well have ended. We also teach others about our phones. Children as young as the age of two know how to operate a touch screen and use it to play games. How do you think they learned that? All of this is true because we love our phones. When we come to Deuteronomy 6, the famous “Shema” passage, we find God teaching us something similar about our relationship with Him and His commandments. We learned yesterday that God is worthy of our supreme and exclusive worship (Deuteronomy 6:4). What this means is that we should love God with everything that we have (Deuteronomy 6:5). There are two ways this command to love God supremely works itself out in our lives. First, we keep the commandments of God close to us (Deuteronomy 6:6, 8, 10-19). Second, we teach the commandments of God to others and, more specifically, our children (Deuteronomy 6:7, 20-25). When we love God, His commandments exist on our hearts, and we delight in sharing them and teaching them to others. The reason for this, as we learned yesterday, is because God’s commandments reflect His holy character. We love them because we love the God they picture. Like a grandmother who carries a picture of her beloved grandchild with her everywhere she goes and shows it to everyone she meets, we who love God delight in His gracious commandments and take every opportunity to teach them to our children, our friends, and anyone else who crosses our paths. Jesus Himself told us that this kind of relationship with the commandments of God is a fruit of our love for Him: “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

How does God instruct those who love Him to relate to His commandments?

How can you keep God’s commandments close to your heart today? How can you teach others about them today?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you to live out your love for Christ by keeping His commandments (John 14:15).

MAIN IDEA

Israel's conquest of the Promised Land teaches us to make war on sin.

Historically, there have been two wrong approaches to passages like today's reading. On the one hand, many people consider this passage an affront to modern sensibilities and a compromise of basic ethics. On the other hand, this passage and others like it have been used in centuries past as a means to justify brutal and unethical war time practices, like some of the crusades even up to all out genocide. As we read and study a passage like this, we need to avoid both of those wrong historical approaches and responsibly understand and apply this passage to our lives, as the inspired and holy Word of God. It is important to acknowledge that in this passage God does instruct Israel to completely wipe out the pagan population of the Promised Land. However, it is equally important to acknowledge that this was a specific, one time, never to be repeated command, not a general command for how God's people should regularly conduct their lives. God was using Israel as an agent of His wrath in the destruction of these rebellious nations, while at the same time accomplishing the one-time mission of giving Israel the land He promised them. Israel could not co-exist in the land with those nations because Israel would have been ensnared by their sins and idolatry. Therefore God, in an act of His righteous and just wrath upon completely deserving sinful nations, commanded Israel to commit these nations to destruction. So, how do we apply such a passage? While Christians do not war against nations in the same way this passage commands Israel to go to war, we are actively engaged in spiritual battles against sin on a daily basis. For those spiritual battles, this passage is very instructive. First, it is instructive that God exhorts the Israelites to remember their place as His special, chosen people (Deuteronomy 7:6-11). In our battles against sin, we must remember that we have been redeemed through the blood of Christ and that we are God's chosen possession in Him. This means that our lives are not our own but belong wholly to God. We must, therefore, strive to live our lives for His glory and to treat the temptations of sin as a grave threat. Second, it is instructive that God promises to work His power for the Israelites (Deuteronomy 7:17-26). The same is true in our spiritual battles against sin. God promises to give us power over sin; and He has, in fact, already done this by uniting us with Christ in His death and resurrection. Finally, it is instructive that God commands Israel to make a clean cut with these sinful nations. Israel must be completely separated from them. They must not flirt with them in the slightest. The same is true of us in relation to sin. We must take radical, ruthless, offensive action against sin in our lives to keep our hearts from it. We must be living lives of radical repentance of sin and faith in Christ, continually killing the sin that so easily creeps up, lest it overtake us and lead us to destruction.

Why did God command Israel to wipe out the nations in the Promised Land (cf. Genesis 15:13-16)?

What are some specific ways you can make war on sin in your life today?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you to fight the spiritual battles you are engaged in on a daily basis. Ask that He would keep you from temptation. Ask Him that He would help you harness the power you have over sin, in Christ. Ask Him to help you live a life of radical repentance.

MAIN IDEA

God instructs us through His discipline of Israel in the wilderness.

If you are a parent, you have probably learned that disobedience is an opportunity. When your children disobey, you have a golden opportunity to teach them about sin, consequences, grace, and forgiveness. Christian parents pray that their children would grow to understand that they are sinners and that they are wholly dependent upon the grace of God, in Christ, for forgiveness and salvation. The moment of your child's disobedience is the "teachable moment" that gives you the opportunity to further your child's understanding of these truths. This is exactly what God was doing with Israel in the wilderness: "As a man disciplines his son, the Lord your God disciplines you" (Deuteronomy 8:5 ESV). Through the wilderness, God taught Israel that the way to flourishing is the way of humble dependence upon and obedience to Him. He taught Israel that His favor had nothing to do with their own righteousness, but rather His abounding grace, steadfast love, and unchanging faithfulness. He taught them that their hearts were hard and prone to wander and that they desperately needed Him to shepherd them away from their own destruction and toward the abundant life He established for them in Himself. God taught Israel all of these lessons in the wilderness. His purpose was that they would apply these things when they entered the land. But Romans 15:4 tells us that these things did not happen solely for Israel's instruction, but also for ours. God wants to use the lessons that Israel learned in the wilderness to instruct us too—"so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Romans 15:4). As you continue to consider the lessons that Israel learned through God's discipline of them in the wilderness, strive to apply these same lessons to your own heart and life.

What does God teach Israel by disciplining them in the wilderness?

What lessons can you learn from God's discipline of Israel in the wilderness?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you to continue receiving instruction from His Word in the Old Testament. Ask that He would help you learn from Israel's failures and the discipline they received. Ask that your study of this passage would propel you to greater dependence on Him, love for Him, and obedience to Him.

MAIN IDEA

God calls us to respond to His grace by circumcising our hearts.

One of the most important questions that you ask in life is: “What is required of me?” We ask this question in all kinds of different contexts. At home we ask, “What does my spouse require of me?” or “What do my children require of me?” At work we ask, “What does my boss require of me?” At church we ask, “What does my pastor require of me?” As citizens we ask, “What does my government require of me?” The list could go on. But while all of these questions are important, there is one question that is infinitely more important than all the rest combined: “What does the Lord require of me?” Our passage today is one of the passages in Scripture that most clearly answers that question. Here is the answer: “To fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 10:12-13 ESV). This can all be summed up in a word picture: Circumcise your heart (Deuteronomy 10:16). The purpose of circumcision in God’s covenant with Abraham was to symbolize the commitment of Abraham and his offspring to the covenant God made with them. The command to circumcise your heart is a command to fully commit yourself to a covenant relationship with God, which is marked by all the actions that Deuteronomy 10:12-13 describes. Moreover, the command to circumcise your heart is rooted in two important truths about God and us. First, God is worthy of our wholehearted commitment to Him and His covenant because He is the perfectly righteous and holy God of gods and Lord of lords (Deuteronomy 10:17-18). Second, His command for us to commit ourselves to Him is rooted in His preceding commitment to us. Look at the context that the command comes in: “Yet the Lord set His heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them...Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart” (Deuteronomy 10:15-16). God calls us to commitment to Him in the context of His commitment to us. He has already shown His commitment by sending Christ to die for us while we were yet sinners. He set His great love on us while we still hated him. And because of this glorious grace that He has shown us, He calls us to respond by fully committing ourselves to Him.

What does it mean for Israel to circumcise their hearts?

How can you obey this command to circumcise your heart today?

PRAY

Praise God for your salvation—that He has removed your heart of stone and replaced it with a heart of flesh. Ask that He would help you commit your heart to Him and to fully commit yourself to the covenant relationship that you have with Him, through Christ.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is **“Honored”** from Deuteronomy 4:1-9. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
JANUARY 27, 2020

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

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

Deuteronomy 14:2

Deuteronomy 12–13

MONDAY
JAN.
27

MAIN IDEA

God wants us to worship Him with everything we've got in every area of life.

One of the key principles from the Ten Commandments—which we considered last week—is that God is worthy of our supreme and exclusive worship. In today's passage, this principle is specifically applied to when Israel enters the Promised Land. Moses is basically saying, "When you enter the land, here is the specific way in which you will obey God's commandments to worship Him supremely and explicitly." God instructs Israel to destroy all the former places of worship from the other nations that inhabited the land (Deuteronomy 12:1-4) and to worship Him by offering joyful and orderly sacrifices in the place that He Himself chooses (Deuteronomy 12:5-14). God additionally adds a new provision that allows Israelites to freely "slaughter and eat meat within any of [their] towns, as much as [they] desire" (Deuteronomy 12:15-28 ESV). The flip side of God's command to worship Him supremely and exclusively is His command not to worship any other gods. Therefore, God gives the Israelites three specific examples of things that might happen in the land that would draw them to idolatry. They must not fall into the trap of false prophets (Deuteronomy 13:1-5), fallen friends and family (Deuteronomy 13:6-11), or bad influencers in their cities (Deuteronomy 13:12-18). These applications of the Ten Commandments to the details of Israel's life in the Promised Land teach us that God's commandment for us to worship Him is meant for our lives. It is not just a principle that we talk about on Sunday morning. It is meant to be massaged into every nook and cranny of our lives. God wants us to worship Him with everything we've got. So, respond to this passage today by worshiping Him at home, at school, at work, and everywhere else!

What commandment is this passage expanding upon? How does it specifically apply that commandment?

How can you further massage the worship of God into the nooks and crannies of your life? What are the specific dangers for idolatry in your life?

PRAY

Ask that God would keep you from idols and that He would help you worship Him with all you've got in every area of life.

MAIN IDEA

God desires His people to be distinct from the world.

Have you ever tried to keep a regimented diet and have a social life at the same time? Especially in a cultural context in which social interaction is often accompanied by food, having strict limitations on your diet without being socially awkward is a hard thing to do. You end up “making a scene”—a proper social taboo. For instance, try going on the Keto diet (which restricts most carb intake) and going out to Panera Bread with your friends at the same time. You’ll quickly find that your restrictive diet distinguishes you from your friends and eliminates the common denominator of bread that brought you together at Panera. An awkward scene is sure to ensue! This social phenomenon gets really close to the purpose of Deuteronomy 14:1-21. Israel had very specific regulations on their diet in order to make them distinct from the nations surrounding them. In a sense, the purpose was for them to “make a scene,” to excel in social awkwardness, so that everyone around them would know that God’s election of them as a treasured possession made them undeniably distinct (Deuteronomy 14:2). And just as your friends might not invite you back to Panera Bread for the next get together due to your restrictive diet, so also the purpose of the food regulations in Old Testament Israel was to help Israel be excluded from the idolatrous practices of the surrounding nations (Deuteronomy 14:1). Even though these food regulations do not apply to us as Christians (Acts 10:9-16), the principle of distinctiveness certainly does. In a world of unbelievers, Christians should be the awkward friend who is obviously different, probably a little weird, and oftentimes left out. Not because we want to be awkward, but because through Jesus Christ and His gospel we are fundamentally different people. We are people with hearts of flesh instead of hearts of stone. We are people who are in the world, but not of the world. We are lights that shine in the darkness. We are “sons of the Lord [our] God” (Deuteronomy 14:1).

How did food regulations help distinguish the Israelites from the nations surrounding them?

What are some ways that we, as Christians, are distinct from the world? In what areas of your life do you see yourself caving to the influences of the world? What would it look like for you to pursue holiness in those areas?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you to be in the world, but not of the world. Ask that He would help you to be a light shining in the darkness, and that you would have the opportunity to let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. 69

MAIN IDEA

Giving is a joyful act of worship that grows our dependence upon God and supports the ministry of the church.

Tithing is a very familiar concept among most Christians, even though we probably don't spend too much time thinking about passages like the one we are looking at today. Most Christians would say that it is right to tithe and even that it is God's will that we tithe, but they wouldn't be able to put their finger on a specific text in the Bible that commands it. Tithing is the topic of Deuteronomy 14:22-29. Notice several things about the tithe from this passage. First, notice that tithing was an act of worship in Old Testament Israel. One of the most repeated phrases in the passage is "the place that [God] will choose" (Deuteronomy 14:22, 24, 25). The Israelites were to take their annual tithe to "the place that [God] will choose" (Deuteronomy 14:23), which we saw in Deuteronomy 12 is the place where God chooses for Israel to worship Him. Tithing is an element of Israel's worship of God. Notice also the two-fold purpose of tithing: 1) Tithing did something in the heart of the Israelites, "that [they] may learn to fear the Lord [their] God always" (Deuteronomy 14:23); 2) The requirement to set aside ten percent of their yield for the Lord drove them to further dependence on and further holy reverence for God. Tithing also had a very practical purpose. It supported the work of the ministering Levites (Deuteronomy 14:27-29). Notice that tithing was a joyful occasion, accompanied with eating and drinking and the gathering of family (Deuteronomy 14:26). It was not to be done in drudgery, but rather with delight and festivity. Finally, notice the result of tithing—"that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hand which you do" (Deuteronomy 14:29). When God's people take what God has given to them and in obedience give it back to Him, the result is the blessing of the Lord. We don't always know exactly what that blessing will be, but we can rest assured that the blessing is the result of our obedience to giving. While the New Testament does not explicitly command Christians to tithe in the same way Israel's laws functioned, the principles of giving are there. And all of the instructions that we read in this passage are true of us as we give according to the New Testament: It is an act of worship, it will grow our dependence upon God, and it supports the ministry of the church. It is to be done joyfully, and it results in the blessing of God. Let's walk in obedience to the principles of this passage to faithfully and obediently give this week!

What were the requirements of the tithe in the Old Testament?

What requirements can you take from this passage and apply to the way that you practice giving?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you give according to the requirements laid out in this passage. Ask that He would help you to give in response to the glorious gift that He has given to you in His Son Jesus Christ.

MAIN IDEA

The Sabbatical Year was an occasion of special generosity.

The main focus of this passage is the Sabbatical Year, and the main general action that this passage commands Israelites to do in the Sabbatical Year is to release what is bound. The concept behind the Sabbatical Year is God's Sabbath Rest—God worked in creation for six days and then on the seventh day He rested. This concept worked its way into many spheres of Israel's life, including the Sabbatical Year. Whether it was a poor person in your own family to whom you lent money or someone who was sold to you in slavery, the rule of the Sabbatical Year was that you would treat those people with an open hand—forgiving their debt or releasing their burden of slavery and setting them free from the obligation (Deuteronomy 15:3, 8, 11). One of the greatest motivations for the Israelites to take this open-handed approach to the person's debtors or slaves was God's open-handed approach to them—"as the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you" (Deuteronomy 15:14-15 ESV). In short, the Sabbatical Year was a year of special generosity grounded in the special generosity that the Lord showed Israel. While we might not celebrate a Sabbatical Year, the principles in this passage are applicable to us as Christians! God has been far more generous to us than we can possibly imagine by not sparing His own Son for us (Romans 8:32)! Christ has exemplified generosity in His grace toward us: "Though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). The generosity of God in Christ is at the heart of the good news of the gospel. Let us make it our pleasure, then, to live out the principles of generosity that Deuteronomy teaches us in this passage!

What was the purpose of the Sabbatical Year?

What are some ways that you can show Christlike generosity this week?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you to grow in Christlikeness, especially by abounding in generosity, just as He abounded in generosity toward you.

MAIN IDEA

The feasts that occurred during Israel's calendar year were about joyfully worshipping God and remembering His redemption.

What do you use to keep your calendar? Are you an old school pen-and-paper type, with a calendar in your kitchen or in your notebook that you write everything into? Or, do you take advantage of modern technology with Google Calendar or the like? If you open up your calendar and scroll through the year, what kinds of events do you have marked? What are the big events that pop out to you as you look at your calendar year? If you were an Israelite in Old Testament Israel, there would be at least three big events on your calendar each year: Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths. Deuteronomy 16:1-17 gives us details about these three big events in Israel's calendar year. What the descriptions about these events tell us is that God's purpose for Israel was vibrant worship in the context of a covenant relationship with Him and with one another. These events were times when Israel would gather together in the place of worship to worship by remembering God's gracious redemption of them from Egypt, offering sacrifices, giving to Him and to one another, supporting the needy, and more. They were to do all of this with genuine and abundant joy. While the three events described in this passage are not regular events on the Christian calendar, since they ultimately found their fulfillment in Christ, the principles of worship, celebration, covenantal care, giving, joy, and remembrance are certainly present at almost every level of the Christian calendar. Each time we gather together on Sunday morning these elements are present in one way or another. We remember and celebrate how God has redeemed us in Christ and how Christ is our Passover Lamb. We worship Him in spirit and truth. We weep with one another, rejoice with one another, and bear one another's burdens. We give out of the abundance of joy that we have in Christ. One of the clearest ways that you can apply the principles in this passage is to participate with joy on Sunday morning!

What was the purpose of the feasts in Old Testament Israel?

How can you apply the principles from this passage even this Sunday when you attend church?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you to worship Him this Sunday with abounding joy. Ask that He would help you to remember the great redemption He has accomplished for you in Christ. Ask that He would help you to give with joy for the sake of His glory and the sake of others.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is “**Loved**” from Deuteronomy 6:1-13. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
FEBRUARY 3, 2020

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.

Deuteronomy 18:18

MONDAY
FEB.
3

Deuteronomy 16:18–18:22

MAIN IDEA

Moses' teaching on what makes a good leader ultimately points us to the best leader of our souls: Jesus Christ.

What makes a good leader? Throughout history, as well as in our modern-day political landscape, this is a question that has been answered in many different ways. In today's passage, Moses gives instruction concerning the most significant leaders in Israel: judges, priests, kings, and prophets. We see from this passage that leaders are established by God. Israel was to set a king over them "whom the Lord [their] God" chose (Deuteronomy 17:15). God chose the tribe of Levi "to stand and minister in the name of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 18:5, ESV). It is God who would raise up a prophet like Moses in Israel (Deuteronomy 18:15). We also see that leaders and their subjects are ultimately accountable to God. Judges were required to lead the people in "righteous judgment," in keeping with the righteous judgments of God (Deuteronomy 16:18). The legal decisions administered by the priests and judges on behalf of the Israelites were before the Lord "in the place" that the Lord chose (Deuteronomy 17:8). The king that God would appoint over Israel would be accountable to the statutes and commands of God's Word, just as the people of Israel were (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). The prophet was required to speak the words of the Lord and the people were required to listen to him (Deuteronomy 18:18-19). If he spoke anything which the Lord had not spoken, he would be subject to death (Deuteronomy 18:20). Moreover, it was the responsibility of the Israelites to discern a prophet's legitimacy based on the standards that God had provided in His Word (Deuteronomy 18:21-22). While God established leaders in Israel who were called to lead their people according to His Word, we must recognize that all earthly leaders ultimately fail. Not even Moses was a sufficient leader as the prophet of the Lord for the people of Israel. That's why God promised that He would raise up a new prophet like Moses, who would speak the word of the Lord in the name of the Lord. The New Testament teaches us that the prophet to whom this passage points is Jesus Christ—the Word of God incarnate. Jesus is the ultimate God-appointed leader that our souls desperately need. Peter pleads with the crowd at Solomon's Portico to "listen to Him in whatever He tells you" (Acts 3:22 ESV). May we heed this exhortation today, brothers and sisters!

How does Moses describe a good leader?

What does this passage teach you about leadership in your life? What principles can you draw from it? How does it help you understand your need for Christ?

PRAY

Thank God today for the leaders He has placed in your life—bosses, governmental leaders, pastors, etc. Praise Him for the leadership of your Lord Jesus Christ. Ask that you would follow His leadership all your days.

MAIN IDEA

God commands us to value human life because humans are created in His image.

Our culture’s approach to the “value of human life” is very conflicted, if not contradictory. In many ways, we are the principle’s greatest champions. Our medical community strives, day in and day out, to learn new and improved methods for saving and extending life. We uphold and celebrate the inherent value of all people regardless of race, religion, or sex. We rage against murder and the taking of innocent life. But in other ways, we treat life flippantly. Many believe that to murder a child in a mother’s womb through abortion is a perfectly moral act. Television shows and movies glorify the gruesome taking of life. In some places it is even legal for doctors to assist people in taking their own lives. In light of these things, our passage today is strikingly refreshing in its approach to human life. Sure, this passage details some strange ancient practices, like slaughtering a heifer to atone for the sin of an unknown murderer. However, the driving principle of all the laws and practices prescribed in this passage is that human life is precious and immeasurably valuable. It is thus an expansion on the sixth commandment: “You shall not murder” (Deuteronomy 5:17). The theological foundation that this whole passage rests on is found in Genesis 1:27: “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” Because God has created humans in His own image, human life must be preserved, prolonged, and protected at every level. In ancient Israel this included cities of refuge for manslayers, capital punishment for murderers, protections against malicious witnesses, rules for equitable warfare, and atonement offerings for the guilt of innocent blood in unsolved murders. While these laws, based in God’s value of human life, should lead us to embrace life and fight for it, they should also lead us to realize something about our own hearts. As Jesus teaches us, murder exists in every single one of our hearts (Matthew 5:21-26). That means that each of us deserves the broken neck of the heifer (Deuteronomy 21:4). But the good news of the gospel is that those who repent and believe in Jesus are recipients of His atoning work on the cross. Jesus subjected Himself to murder by men and the fierce wrath of God so that people with murderous hearts could be forgiven and gain eternal life. Let this glorious truth lead you to thanksgiving today. Let it drive you to uphold God’s design for human life all the more!

What is the basis that the Bible gives for valuing human life?

What are some ways that you have failed to value human life as the Bible commands? What are some real steps you can take to begin valuing human life the way that God does?

PRAY

Praise God for the gift of His image that He has placed in every single human being. Ask that He would help you to treat others as humans made in God’s image. Praise Him for sending His Son to be subjected to death so that you might have eternal life through Him.

MAIN IDEA

God desires for us to walk in purity, and He has given us the power to do that through Christ.

Have you ever had jambalaya? It is a classic Cajun/Creole recipe that combines a host of different ingredients (shrimp, chicken, sausage, rice, onion, bell pepper, celery, garlic, herbs, and spices, just to name some of the essentials) with a truly delicious result. What really brings together the whole dish is the Cajun seasoning, which settles in to all the different ingredients. The passage before us today is a kind of Deuteronomic jambalaya. There are a lot of ingredients, a lot of different laws being applied to a lot of different situations. There is, however, one phrase that somewhat brings all these verses together like Cajun seasoning: “So you shall purge the evil” from your midst (Deuteronomy 21:21; 22:21-24 ESV). The repetition of this phrase indicates that the main purpose of this passage is Israel’s purity. The Lord is concerned that Israel should remain pure even in the messy specifics of life—how firstborn sons of fathers with two wives receive their inheritance, how parents raise unruly children, how the death penalty is carried out, how to deal with husbands who falsely accuse their wives of misconduct, how to deal with a man’s “nocturnal emission” (Deuteronomy 23:10), and how to deal with “excrement” (Deuteronomy 23:13). While most of the laws that we find in this passage are specific to the nation of Israel and the regulations by which purity was maintained in their camp, these laws should also propel us toward purity in all areas of life. Indeed, just as the Lord God walked in the midst of Israel’s camp (Deuteronomy 23:14), so also He dwells in us through His Holy Spirit. Therefore, we should strive to glorify Him with our bodies and with every aspect of our lives (1 Corinthians 6:20)! Christ subjected Himself to the defilement of hanging on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:22-23; cf. Galatians 3:13) so that we could be cleansed of our impurity and walk in the purity that God intends for us!

What does this passage teach us about purity?

What are some ways that you’ve failed to walk in purity? What truths can you draw from this text that will help you walk in purity?

PRAY

Thank God for caring so much for His people that He commands us to not ruin our lives with impurity. Thank Him that He has given you the power to walk in purity by cleansing you from your sin in Christ.

MAIN IDEA

God desires for us to treat others with open-handed generosity and He has empowered us to do that through the generosity of Christ toward us.

The Deuteronomic jambalaya continues in this passage. Here we find various laws concerning the everyday life of the average Israelite, all drawn from the principles of the Ten Commandments. While the instructions of this passage may feel a bit random, they do show us how applicable and relevant God’s law is to real life. While the Ten Commandments only communicate ten general principles, there are thousands and thousands of applications to them. We see just a few of those applications today. There are some instructions concerning sexual purity (Deuteronomy 23:17; 24:1-5) and general purity in this passage (Deuteronomy 24:8). However, the main focus is the eighth commandment: “You shall not steal” (Deuteronomy 5:19). The Israelites were to mirror the upright character of God by being people of integrity. This meant refraining from exploiting fellow Israelites with interest on loans (Deuteronomy 23:19-20), being careful to deliver on commitments (Deuteronomy 23:21-23), not taking a fellow Israelite’s produce and using it for profit (Deuteronomy 23:24-25), refraining from thievery (24:7), and operating with integrity and generosity with neighbors, employees, and sojourners (Deuteronomy 24:10-15, 17-22). The general injunction that binds many of these instructions together is that the Israelites were called to have a disposition of open-handed generosity that led to giving, not closed-handed greed that led to stealing. This is a standard that none of us perfectly reaches. Yet, we know that Christ did exactly this. He became poor by subjecting Himself to the human condition and to a shameful death on the cross, so that we might experience the riches of heaven through repentance of sin and faith in Him. Through the power of this gospel in our lives, we can be transformed from the kind of people who have a propensity to steal to the kind of people who delight in giving to others, just as Christ gave Himself for us (Ephesians 5:2).

How does this passage expand on the eighth commandment?

In what areas of your life are you operating out of closed-handed greed? How might God be calling you to open your hands in generosity?

PRAY

Praise God for dealing with you in open-handed generosity by sending Christ for you. Ask that He would help you have such gratitude at His own generosity toward you that you would respond in generosity toward others.

MAIN IDEA

God's call on Israel to the fair exercise of justice highlights both God's justice and His mercy.

Our final serving of Deuteronomic jambalaya comes in this passage. The ingredient that binds all these instructions together is perhaps the subtlest of the three passages that we've looked at so far. This section contains instructions about muzzling an ox while it is treading out the grain, on the one hand (Deuteronomy 25:4), and what happens when a woman, who is saving her husband from a fight with another man, grabs the other man's private parts (Deuteronomy 25:12). What do all these different, painstakingly specific instructions have in common? The general theme of this passage seems to be the fair exercise of justice. Israel, as God's chosen son, was called to reflect God's perfect justice in the way they administrated their nation and related to one another. A man guilty of an offense should receive a punishment in keeping with that offense (Deuteronomy 25:1-3). An ox should be allowed to eat some of the grain that it is tirelessly laboring to tread (Deuteronomy 25:4). Even though the woman's intent was to help her husband, she went about it in an indecent and immoral manner, and therefore was deserving of the punishment (Deuteronomy 25:11-12). A judge ought to use the same scales of justice for every situation and every person accused (Deuteronomy 25:13-16). In all of these examples from today's passage, the point is that justice should be exercised fairly and equally. Nowhere do we see justice exercised with equity so clearly as we do at the cross of Jesus Christ. For at the cross Jesus bore our sin, for which we deserved to be eternally punished, and received the full force of God's wrath on our behalf. In this God showed His perfect righteousness—He did not wink an eye at our sin or let it go unpunished. But He showed His abounding grace by laying the punishment on Christ instead of on us—thus securing our redemption. May we thank God for His perfect righteousness today. May we strive to rightly exercise justice in our own lives. But may we also praise God for dealing with us not only in justice, but also in abounding, infinite mercy!

How did God's justice influence the way the Israelites were to operate as a nation and as a community?

What are some ways that you can personally exercise justice fairly in your own relationships, job, etc.?

PRAY

Praise God for His unwavering justice and righteousness. But also praise Him for His abounding mercy and grace. Worship Him today for the way that He brought His justice and mercy together when He poured out the punishment for our sin on Christ, so that we might be redeemed and forgiven.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is “**Revealed**” from Deuteronomy 18:15-22. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
FEBRUARY 10, 2020

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.”
Galatians 3:13

MONDAY
FEB.
10

Deuteronomy 26

MAIN IDEA

God’s gift of the land to Israel came with expectation that Israel would give themselves to God.

Are you a gift giver? The way gift-giving worked in the Ancient Near East is different from the way it works today. Gift-giving played a very significant role in the social customs of the Ancient Near East. A wealthier, more influential person would give a gift to a less wealthy, less influential person. This gift would come with an expectation that the less wealthy, less influential person would give something back—a service, a commitment, loyalty, etc. Your friends would probably look down on you if that was your approach to gift-giving! But this approach was normal in the Ancient Near East, and we see it at work in this passage. God gave Israel an incredible gift! He had graciously redeemed them out of slavery in Egypt, preserved the nation in the wilderness, and given them the Land of Promise. But this gracious gift came with an expectation of a gift in return. God called Israel to give themselves, their first fruits, and their worship to Him in response to His gracious gift of redemption and the land. This is exactly how God calls us to respond to His gift of redemption through Christ. Spend time meditating on this call from Romans 12:1: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (ESV).

What are the differences between the idea of gift-giving in our culture and in the Ancient Near Eastern Culture?

What are some specific ways you can present your body as a living sacrifice to God?

PRAY

Praise God today for the wonderful gift of salvation. Ask that you would respond to this gift by giving every aspect of your life over to Him.

MAIN IDEA

The altar on Mount Ebal was a symbol of God’s ultimate faithfulness, even amid Israel’s unfaithfulness.

The altar on Mount Ebal was a symbol of blessing and curse. Literally, *Ebal* means “cursing” in Hebrew. However, the altar that God instructed Israel to raise was a testimony to His grace. God had revealed Himself to Israel through the “words of this law” that He instructed them to write on the stones (Deuteronomy 27:8). This law—through which God revealed Himself—was not just a list of rules for Israel to follow. It represented the covenant relationship that God initiated with Israel—a relationship He began with Abraham and consummated in the sweeping act of redeeming Israel from Egypt, leading them through the wilderness, and giving them the land. Mount Ebal, though the mountain of cursing, also stood as a testimony to the abounding grace of God upon His people Israel. It is important, however, that God instructed Israel to write “all the words of this law very plainly” (Deuteronomy 27:8). The expectation of the covenant relationship was that Israel would “keep the whole commandment” (Deuteronomy 27:1). This, we know, Israel failed to do. We also know that breaking just one of the commandments written on the stone was tantamount to breaking them all (James 2:10). For that reason, Mount Ebal also stood as a witness against Israel for their unfaithfulness to the covenant. The ceremony of peace offerings, food, and rejoicing, however, points us to the faithfulness of God even amid Israel’s unfaithfulness. Israel will fail to keep the whole commandment, but God will not fail to keep His covenant. He will remain faithful to His promises. He will make atonement for Israel’s transgressions. Therefore, Israel can still rejoice in their covenant relationship with God. This ultimately points us to Jesus, whose atoning work on the cross provides the basis for Israel’s ability to rejoice, even when they deserve the curses of the law, not its blessings.

In what ways was Mount Ebal a testimony of God’s grace? In what ways did it stand as a witness against Israel?

What are some specific areas of your life where you know you have been unfaithful to the Lord? How does the truth of God’s faithfulness change the way you think about and approach those areas of your life?

PRAY

Praise God today for the glorious truth that even when you are faithless, He remains faithful. Ask that He would help you respond to His faithfulness with your own faithfulness toward Him.

MAIN IDEA

The curses of the law function as a warning—leading Israel (and us) to the safety of keeping God’s covenant.

A warning is one of the most effective ways to lead a person to safety. Here in Florida, hurricanes are a perennial threat. We are accustomed to reading weather radars in the tropics and hearing news reports about storms with landfall potential. An imminent storm threat is usually accompanied by a press conference from a government official that goes something like this: “This hurricane is no joke. You need to evacuate. If you don’t evacuate, your life will be in danger.” The severe warning is meant to lead people to safety. When we come to this ceremony of curses on Mount Ebal, something very similar is at work. All the men of Israel would say “Amen” to the curse—“Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them” (Deuteronomy 27:26). The purpose of this ceremony is for all Israel to acknowledge the grave danger of disobeying the law—to lead them to heed this grave warning and to the safety of covenant faithfulness. While in some sense this warning was effective in governing Israel’s disobedience, they ultimately did not heed the warning. Israel, like us, was subject to the curses of the law, not its blessings. That’s why the gospel is such good news. The gospel teaches us that Jesus took on the curses of the law for us, so that we—through repentance and faith in Christ—could receive its blessings. What a glorious reality! We will dive deeper into it the rest of this week.

What was the function of the curses of the law?

How do the warnings of Scripture apply to you? How should you respond to them?

PRAY

Ask God to help you to heed the warnings of Scripture today. Ask that they would lead you to the obedience of faith in Christ.

MAIN IDEA

The blessings and curses of the law help us to see that our hearts are prone to disobey God.

When things are lopsided, they lack symmetry and balance. One great example of this is the trade of Kobe Bryant to the Los Angeles Lakers in 1996. The Charlotte Hornets traded Bryant (who went on to be one of the greatest players in NBA history) to the Lakers for the average, unimpressive Vlade Divac. The next two decades of Laker/Bryant domination in the NBA would be a constant reminder to the Hornets' administration and fans: "That could have been us!" When we come to Deuteronomy 28 we come to the epitome of biblical lopsidedness. The chapter begins with fourteen verses describing blessings for obedience to the law and ends with fifty-four verses describing the curses of the law. That's a strikingly lopsided blessing and curse ledger! What is God teaching to us here? For one, it shows us the bent of Israel's heart. If you are a parent, you know that you spend most of your time talking with your children about the things they struggle with—working with them to do better in those areas. The same is true here. God knows that Israel's overwhelming bent is toward disobedience, not obedience. Their years in the wilderness proved this. They need a four-times-over reinforcement of the grave danger their souls will be in if they don't listen to the voice of the Lord. We desperately need this warning too because our hearts are also prone to stray from the commandments of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This passage also illustrates for us just how great a sacrifice it was for Jesus to die for us on the cross and receive the curses of the law that we deserved. We will spend tomorrow focusing on the gruesome curse that Christ bore for us and the glorious blessing that He secured for us.

Why is Deuteronomy 28 so lopsided when it comes to blessings and curses?

What does Deuteronomy 28 show you about your heart?

PRAY

Ask that God would help you identify specific areas in your life where you are prone to disobey Him. Ask that He would help you heed the warning of these curses, but also find hope in the truth that Jesus has taken all these curses from you.

MAIN IDEA

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus took the curse of the law for us and in exchange gave us the blessing.

When we read Deuteronomy 28, our tendency is to think: “This is bad news, indeed!” There are a lot of curses here, and just a few blessings. But good news always enters into bad space. The atmosphere in which light shines brightest is darkness. Deuteronomy 28 is indeed bad news. None of us can keep the statutes of the law, which means that none of us deserves the fourteen verses of blessings listed here. Instead, we deserve the fifty-four verses of curses! Paul acknowledges this truth in Galatians 3:10: “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them’” (ESV). We are all deserving of the curses of the law! Each of us—apart from Christ—lives under the weight of that condemnation. But here is where the good news of the gospel shines like a blinding light into the darkest situation ever. Look at Galatians 3:13—“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (ESV). This is good news, indeed! Paul is teaching us that Christ, when He died on the cross, took the full weight of the curse of the law upon Himself. He absorbed all of God’s wrath for our sin. In exchange for the curses that we should receive, Jesus gives to us blessings of the law! Look at Galatians 3:14: “So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (ESV). Christ, who is the only one who perfectly obeyed the law is the only one who truly deserves its blessings. He took the curse of the law for us and gave us the blessings in exchange. That, brothers and sisters, is the good news of the gospel. Respond to it today by repenting of your sin and placing your faith in Christ. Respond to it today by offering your life as an offering of worship to your great God of mercy.

How does Deuteronomy 28 relate to Galatians 3:10-14?

How do you need to respond to the good news of the gospel today? What truths of the gospel are most difficult for you to believe? Believe them afresh and anew today!

PRAY

Praise God for the gracious, sacrificial work of Christ on the cross. Let your gratitude for Him overflow into your worship of Him this Sunday.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is “**Chosen**” from Deuteronomy 30:1-10, 19-20. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

WEEK OF
FEBRUARY 17, 2020

WEEKLY MEMORY VERSE

Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.

Deuteronomy 30:6

MONDAY
FEB.
17

Deuteronomy 29–30

MAIN IDEA

Moses gets to the heart of the matter—the matter of the heart.

The passage before us today is Moses' final exhortation to the people of Israel. In this exhortation he gets to the heart of the matter—the matter of the heart. Israel's relationship with God is a matter of the heart. If their hearts turn away from God, they will perish (Deuteronomy 30:18). And up to the point of Moses' speech, God had not given them a heart to understand, which leads to the obedience of faith (Deuteronomy 29:4). Therefore, their hearts were inclined away from God and prone to wander from His commandments. Yet, this is where the glorious promise of the new covenant comes in: "And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deuteronomy 30:6 ESV). Moses, in effect, says, "You cannot obey God because He has not given you a heart to obey Him. Your heart is inclined away from Him, and therefore you deserve to perish. But let me tell you about the grace of God. In His grace, God will circumcise your heart and make it new, and He will give your heart the ability to love Him and keep His commandments and, as a result, to prosper in your relationship with Him." What an amazing promise! And it is a promise that is ultimately fulfilled in the church. Since our hearts have been circumcised by God through the atoning work of Christ and the regenerating work of the Spirit (Romans 2:28-29; Philippians 3:3; Colossians 2:11-12), may we abound in our love for God and respond to Him with the obedience of faith.

In what ways does Moses address the matter of the heart in this passage?

How is the promise of a circumcised heart fulfilled in Christ? How does the fulfillment of this promise in your life impact the way you relate to God?

PRAY

Praise God for circumcising your heart. Praise Him for accomplishing your redemption in Christ and applying your redemption through the regenerating work of the Spirit. Ask that He would help you to continually put off the old self and put on the new self, created in Christ Jesus in righteousness, holiness, and truth.

MAIN IDEA

God leads Joshua to godly confidence as he prepares to enter the Land of Promise.

When you think about the world's greatest ego, the name Mohammad Ali probably makes your top three list. There is one story about Ali on an airplane that highlights his characteristic ego. Apparently, he was notorious for refusing to wear his seatbelt on airplanes. During one such ride, a flight attendant confronted him and demanded that he put on his seatbelt. Ali answered, "Superman don't need no seat belt." She replied, "Superman don't need no airplane." Pride can oftentimes blind us. It is when we think more highly of ourselves than we ought. In today's passage we see a great example of what godly confidence, rather than ungodly pride, looks like. As Joshua is commissioned to lead Israel into the Promised Land, he is instructed twice (once by Moses and once by God) to enter the land with an extra measure of confidence: "Be strong and courageous" (Deuteronomy 31:7, 23). But what is important about this confidence to which Joshua is commanded is its basis. Both times, the ground of Joshua's strength and courage is this: "It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8 ESV; cf. Deuteronomy 31:23). Joshua should have confidence in the presence of the Lord, not in his own innate abilities or strengths. As Christians, God has also commissioned us to our own kind of confidence. We are to boldly proclaim the good news of the gospel and make disciples of all nations. The ground of our confidence is exactly the same. Jesus says, "All authority in heaven and on earth have been given to Me...And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20 ESV). As you go and make disciples in whatever context God has placed you, go boldly knowing that the Lord is present with you today.

What is the difference between pride and godly confidence?

What are some ways that pride rears its ugly head in your life? What are some ways that you can fight pride in your life today? How does the truth, that we can experience boldness in the knowledge of God's presence, impact the way you think about pride and humility?

PRAY

Praise God for His faithful presence in your life. Ask that He would give you boldness in His presence as you seek to fulfill the commission that He has given you: to make disciples.

MAIN IDEA

Israel's national anthem is a frame into which we should place the gospel.

For the bulk of Deuteronomy, Moses has used the form of law to communicate with Israel. Here, at the close of Deuteronomy, the close of Israel's time in the wilderness, and the close of his life, he uses a new medium: song. Deuteronomy 32 is in essence the national anthem of Israel as they enter into the Promised Land. It is an anthem of five stanzas. In the first stanza (Deuteronomy 32:1-4), Moses praises God for His utter perfection; in the second stanza (Deuteronomy 32:5-18), Moses calls Israel to acknowledge their own imperfections in light of God's utter perfection; in the third stanza, Moses calls Israel to recognize the reality of God's justice in dealing with both their own sin and the sin of their enemies; in the fourth stanza, Moses calls Israel to treasure God's covenant love, according to which He will deal with them compassionately and defeat their enemies; finally, in the fifth stanza, Moses calls Israel to celebrate God's ultimate redemption and deliverance of them from their enemies. While this song deals with the specifics of Israel's historical setting and situation, we also see in this song a fitting frame for the gospel. The gospel starts with God—His perfection as Lord and Creator of all. The gospel then turns to man—though we were created in God's perfect image, we turned from God and sinned against Him, and thus were corrupted by sin. Because of our sin we deserve God's wrath—God's just punishment for our sin. Yet, because of God's covenant love for His people, He dealt with us compassionately by sending His only Son Jesus to die for our sins and purchase our forgiveness. We are called to respond to this good news in the same way that Moses called Israel to respond: Repentance, faith, and rejoicing for the great redemption that God has accomplished for us.

How does the song of Moses take on the frame of the gospel?

Which aspect of the gospel, as highlighted in the song of Moses, stuck out to you as you read this passage?

PRAY

Praise God today for the truths of the gospel. Ask that He would help you grow in your understanding of them all the more.

MAIN IDEA

The blessing of Moses shows us God's gracious provision for His people.

Moses uses one final mode to communicate with Israel: the patriarchal blessing. Amazingly, Moses steps into the role of the patriarch of all Israel by speaking a word of final blessing upon all twelve tribes. While it may not be immediately clear how these blessings upon the twelve tribes of Israel relate to us as Christians, there is one theme that binds them all together. In each blessing we are reminded that it is God who blesses His people. It is God who makes them dwell in safety and provides for them abundantly and fights for them. Moses puts a capstone on this theme in the final words of his blessing: "So Israel lived in safety, Jacob lived alone, in a land of grain and wine, whose heavens drop down dew. Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph! Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs" (Deuteronomy 33:28-29 ESV). God cares for and provides for His people. This is a theme we see not only in relation to Old Testament Israel, but also in relation to the church. God has made provision for us in the way we need it most. He has atoned for our sins through Christ's work on the cross, and has made a way of salvation through repentance and faith in Him. Happy are you, O Christian! Who is like you, a person saved by the Lord!

What is the common theme that ties all of Moses' blessings together in this passage?

What are some ways that you have seen the provision of the Lord in your life? Think both about your spiritual life and your physical life.

PRAY

Praise God for being a God who blesses, provides for, and protects His people. Thank Him for how He has ultimately done that in your salvation.

MAIN IDEA

The death of Moses points us to God's ultimate fulfillment of His promises in Christ.

The death of Moses shuts the curtain not only on the book of Deuteronomy, but also on the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Old Testament) as a whole. When we turn the page to Joshua, we enter into a new era in Israel's history—the full entrance into the Promised Land. While the rolling out of God's promises is still ahead of us, Moses' death should strike us as weighty and with a sense of finality. From the perspective of Israel, Moses was *the* prophet (Deuteronomy 34:10-12). He was the one who met God face-to-face and mediated the Word of God to the people of God. Though they were now looking to Joshua as their leader, this passage is very clear that Joshua was not the same kind of leader that Moses was. Deuteronomy recognizes that another, greater prophet like Moses is needed to truly lead God's people in their covenant with Him (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). And while that prophet had not yet come at the time that this final chapter of Deuteronomy was written, we know that He has come and that His name is Jesus Christ. Deuteronomy ends with a fairly significant question. Will Joshua lead God's people into their final rest in the Promised Land? Will Joshua lead Israel to the fulfillment of all God's wonderful promises? Joshua does lead Israel into the Promised Land, but he does not lead them into their final rest—their final salvation. Brothers and sisters, we have the overwhelming privilege today of saying that we do know the One who leads God's people into their final salvation, and His name is Jesus Christ! May we cling to Him today! May God use the time we have spent in Numbers and Deuteronomy to drive us into deeper dependence upon His Son Jesus Christ!

Why is the death of Moses such a significant event?

In what ways does Jesus ultimately fulfill the expectation for a prophet, like Moses, but greater than Moses?

PRAY

Praise God for Jesus—a prophet like Moses but ultimately greater than Moses. Ask that God would help you worship your Lord Jesus Christ in spirit and truth as you prepare your heart for Sunday morning. Ask that God would continue to produce fruit in your life as a result of your study of Numbers and Deuteronomy.

As you reflect on your personal study throughout the week, choose one verse or passage that particularly stood out to you.

- Why was this verse or passage so meaningful to you?

- In what areas of your life do these truths apply?

- In what ways do you plan to put the truths you've observed this week into practice?

Family Focus: Now take the verse or passage that stood out to you and think about how you can share it with your family. How does it apply to your husband, wife, son, or daughter? For singles or students, think about how it applies to your friends or parents. Commit to share this passage with a family member or friend today.

Tomorrow our lesson is “**Promised**” from Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:4-7. Review these verses to prepare your heart and pray for your teacher.

CITATIONS

1. Page 21 - Wednesday, December 11
Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers*, 160.
2. Page 30 - Friday, December 20
Isaac Watts, "As When the Hebrew Prophet Raised" (1709).

