


RIGHTLY DIVIDING THE WORD OF TRUTH



**Survey Studies
In The Old Testament**

EXODUS-DEUTERONOMY

**A CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE
WILDERNESS WANDERINGS**

by Steven Harper

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Preface

One of the most well-known events of the entire Bible^o is what is commonly called The Exodus — the story of the Israelites' escape from slavery in Egypt by the power of God and their eventual entrance into the Promised Land of Canaan. While the basic story is simple, the accomplishment of the task was certainly anything **but** simple; what normally would have been a journey of a few weeks turned into a 40-year trek through the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula and the regions just outside the Promised Land because, at the edge of the Promised Land, they lost faith in God and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.

There has been much discussion, especially in the last half century, regarding the dating of the Exodus, with many placing it around 1441 B.C., some placing it 150 years later [1291 B.C.], and now one man is arguing for a date *1000 years* prior to the 'early date' [ca. 2440 B.C.]. The dating of 1441 comes when one accepts a literal interpretation of **1st Kings 6:1**, which dates the building of Solomon's temple 480 years after the Israelites came out of Egypt. Since his kingdom and, therefore, the construction of the temple have been reliably dated, the 1441 B.C. date is reasonable. The 'late date' [1291 B.C.] has no Bible basis, but argues from archæological evidences. But since both dates have archæological evidence, the 'late' date' is often seen as less reliable. I will not get into a lengthy study about why, but for the course of this study we will consider the 'early date' of 1441 B.C. the time of the Exodus.

This study will differ from others in this series in that it will cover more than one book at a time, but with reason. The books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy all cover some portion of the wilderness wanderings, and a consecutive study would be sometimes redundant and often confusing because of the lack of a chronological time line in which the events could be considered. To reduce the repetition, we will be studying these four books somewhat simultaneously as we try to follow the Israelites in their travels from Egypt to the edge of Canaan — in chronological order. [Remember, the **writings** are inspired but not the order in which they appear in the Bible!] I have used *The Reese Chronological Bible* to arrange these events as best as could be determined, but realize that the timing of some events [such as the times when God gave various laws] cannot be known. I have tried to arrange those portions of text in a logical place, according to what is known in the surrounding texts [by either locations or people mentioned in the text].

That said, it must follow that the texts we will be reading and studying from week to week will not be in 'Biblical' order; that is, it won't be Exodus, then Leviticus, then Numbers, and ending with Deuteronomy. We will jump from book to book, depending on the information's location of the Israelites' movements and actions, with no limitations of sticking to one book at a time. Many times, we will be considering texts in more than one book at a time because something is mentioned in one place, but not another, of the same event. Many times, it may be just a few verses from one book combined with a couple of chapters of another. Sometimes it will be only *one verse* from one book that is considered with several chapters from another. I have tried to be particularly careful in arranging the texts to be considered, but if you find any inconsistencies, I would welcome your criticisms about the story's placement in the time line of events.

As with the Genesis study, the text will not be included so as to not make the workbook's length unwieldy. Though the text will not be provided within this workbook, I still recommend you make notes and observations on the Bible text **somewhere** [notebooks exclusive to each book is highly recommended]. Use your pencil! If you do not mind marking in your Bible, use colored pencils, markers, pens, and whatever else you want to make the words jump out to you and help you to see the message of the writer. Remember: *"He who gets wisdom loves his own soul"* (**Prov. 19:8**).

Steven C. Harper
May 2008; Revised February 2020

A CHRONOLOGY OF THE WILDERNESS WANDERINGS

THE BOOKS	LOCATION	TIME PERIOD	MAJOR EVENTS RECORDED			
	IN EGYPT	80-200 YEARS [?]				
	EGYPT TO SINAI	3 MONTHS				
	AT SINAI	11 MONTHS 20 DAYS				
	SINAI TO KADESH-BARNEA	11+ DAYS [?]				
	DEPARTURE FROM & RETURN TO KADESH-BARNEA	37 YEARS, 8 MONTHS				
	KADESH-BARNEA TO MOAB	11 MONTHS				
	AT MOAB	5 MONTHS				

Lesson One

OVERVIEW

Overview. Using the chart on the facing page, properly place each of the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy within the time period it covers [under 'The Books']. Write in the main events recorded in each portion of time covered, from Egypt up to the edge of the Promised Land [under 'Major Events Recorded']. Below, write a brief summary of what may be seen as the main point[s] in each book, noting the 'theme verse(s)' and key words and/or phrases — those which are significant in the overall message of each book.

Exodus:

Main Point -

Key Verse[s] -

Key Words/Phrases -

Leviticus:

Main Point -

Key Verse[s] -

Key Words/Phrases -

Numbers:

Main Point -

Key Verse[s] -

Key Words/Phrases -

Deuteronomy:

Main Point -

Key Verse[s] -

Key Words/Phrases -

Background. As we are covering four books in this series of studies, it becomes necessary to consider each book's background individually, and then we may see how they fit together in this portion of God's written word.

Exodus: As with the previous book of Genesis, there is simply no way to know for sure when this book was written, but we can only reason that it was sometime after the conclusion of the events recorded within the book. Like the previous book, too, Moses has been considered the author of this book since almost the beginning. No credible evidence has been shown otherwise, and even internal evidence would attribute at least a portion of it to the hand of Moses (**34:28**). Later books indicate to us that he would add more to these words (**Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9**), as would Joshua (**Josh. 8:32**). For the portions of the book that would have happened before his time, or without his personal knowledge, let us again remember the part of God's inspiration in the revelation of these things.

This book is entitled "Exodus" but it is much more than just the record of the exodus from Egypt, which is considered in the first half of the book. The second half of the book tells of the Israelites' experience travelling to Sinai and the giving of the law by God to Moses on Sinai, some of the laws that were given, and the preparation of the items for service in the tabernacle and the tabernacle itself. The time covered in the early chapters of the book cover anywhere from 80 years [the age of Moses] to 200 years [the time from Joseph's death until the exodus], but the time covered from the exodus to their time at Sinai is only about 15 months.

Leviticus: The name of this book, *Leviticus*, is somewhat fitting in that it literally means "the law of the Levites"; it might be more correctly described as "the law of the priests" [who were of the tribe of Levi]. The contents of this book may be rightly described as the laws regarding the priests, for the first seven chapters deal with the various sacrifices the people would make in the presence of the priests, and the next four chapters deal with the consecration of the priesthood and their prescribed conduct. The rest of the book deals with the laws entrusted to them and which they were commanded to teach the people, and the precepts regarding the feasts they would conduct.

Leviticus picks up where Exodus left off, with the tabernacle just having been erected and all its furnishings arranged. The book begins with God speaking to Moses from that "*tabernacle of meeting*," though we cannot determine how long after the tabernacle's initial construction these words were spoken. [The book of Numbers (**1:1**) begins with a similar statement, but the date indicates it actually took place after the second Passover (cf. **Num. 9:1-5**). Just remember that the words recorded in Leviticus and Numbers are not necessarily in chronological order.] What we *can* know, though, is that the words and events recorded likely took place within a span of not much more than the eight days in which the priests were consecrated and began their service (**Lev. 8-9**); they would have had to have these laws in place *before* they began their service. Any other comments or statements about the length of time transpiring within this book are mere conjecture and are unworthy of our consideration.

Numbers: This book begins with a statement that the Lord spoke to Moses "*in the tabernacle of meeting, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt*" (**1:1**), but this must have occurred after the Passover they celebrated at Sinai [the second], according to **9:1-5**. This apparent lack of chronological order prevents any identifiable time period where the book begins, but we know better when it ends, due to the record of **Deuteronomy 1:3**. It would be best to simply estimate the total time covered within the book at about 38 years [from Sinai (**Exod. 19:1**) to Moab (**Deut. 1:3**), minus some period of time at Sinai]. The saddest part of this is the fact that the journey from Mount Horeb [Sinai] to Kadesh Barnea would normally be 11 days.

Once again, it has been widely accepted that the author is Moses, and this would seem likely as most of what is recorded within the book is either addressed to Moses [from God] or a record of events in which Moses was himself a participant. In fact, we are told plainly that Moses wrote at least a part

of this record (33:2). And, again, the time of writing cannot be pinpointed, but must have been written and/or compiled at some point after the conclusion of the events recorded here.

The book of Numbers is so named because of the numbering of the people of Israel at the beginning (1:2, 3) and near the end (26:2) of the book, but the majority of the book is concerned with the period of the wilderness wanderings and such should be our focus as we do a survey. [The Hebrew Bible title this book "In the Wilderness."] This book is not like many others in that it is a compilation of a number of seemingly unrelated bits of information and stories listed one right after the other. For this reason, it is difficult to group many of the texts together because they simply stand alone in their purpose and the type of information given. The first half cannot be confirmed one way or the other that it is chronological [due to the content], but the last half [particularly from chapter 20 to the end of the book] seems to be more chronologically ordered in its arrangement.

Deuteronomy: This book is the final one in the group of five often called *The Pentateuch* [literally, *the five books*], all composed by Moses. Of all the books, this one has the least cause to doubt Moses' authorship, and for no other reason than he is cited as the source of quotes from this book several times in the New Testament (Mark 10:3, 4; 12:19; Acts 3:22; 7:37). We must admit, though, that another author/scribe must have written at least a portion of this book, particularly the latter portions that describe the death, burial, and mourning of Moses. We also must recognize, of course, that these words did not come from the mind of any man, but were inspired by God [as were all prophetic words, 2nd Pet. 1:20, 21]. Like the other four books, there is not any credible means of establishing the *time* of writing other than when it is explicitly stated that Moses wrote something (cf. 31:9, 22), and it would not be beneficial or prudent to speculate at this point.

Deuteronomy is unique compared to the other three books in our study in that it is, for the most part, *not unique*. A good deal of what is recorded here is a reiteration of what was given earlier, or a simple recounting of events that had already transpired. The name itself [*Deuteronomy*] would seem to imply as much in that it literally means "the second [giving of the] law" or "repetition of the law." Indeed, the occasion of this book's writing is when Moses speaks to the congregation of Israel shortly before his death and recounts all they had seen and done in the wilderness up to that day. The text of Deuteronomy covers the words spoken by Moses and the events that happened in the last month of the 40 years of wandering. There are some things that were not previously recorded [such as the laws in chapters 20-22], but this is mostly a summary of the events of the last 38 years.

As this book is about laws, pay attention to the laws stated here that have not already been revealed in the earlier books. Note also the prophetic words that are spoken concerning their kings (17:14-20), prophets (18:15-22), the blessings and cursings (27:16-28:14), and the promised punishment to the disobedient (28:15-68) and exhortations to obey that follow (29:1-30:20). Note also the words that describe their future unfaithfulness and compare this to the reality of its fulfillment in their later history. Always keep in mind the time frame of these words, remembering that these are the last words of Moses to the people before he died. No doubt, the people paid close attention to him as they were hearing him for the last time, but it will become painfully evident that they did not pass on these words to the succeeding generations, for his words were fulfilled in their disobedience.

After reading through the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy [reading each book in its entirety, one at a time], please answer the following questions relating to their content and purpose.

1. Who wrote these books?

⇒ Who was the writer? What do we know about him and how he acquired the knowledge of the events written here?

⇒ What other book[s] did he write, and how does it/do they relate to this one?

2. To whom were these books written?

⇒ Though this is a record of the Israelites deliverance from Egyptian bondage, their move to Canaan, and the giving of the Law, was this book originally written for any particular group? Explain.

⇒ How important would these books be for Jews during the period of the Old Testament? For the Jews of the first century? For Gentiles of either time period?

3. Why were these books written?

⇒ How could these books be categorized? Why?

⇒ During what time period do the events in these books take place and what is the span of years in which these events take place?

⇒ With the ability to look back and consider their place in history, what might we know now about why the stories of major characters in these books were included?

⇒ How do these books fit in the overall message of the entire Bible?

4. List some of the major characters [either individuals or groups] in these books and for what action(s) they are known best.

From Egypt To Moab. We know the basic story of the exodus, but within that period are found some important events that took place during that exodus and the wilderness wanderings. Below is a list of some major events in the experience of the Israelites [with Scripture references], beginning with those that facilitated their deliverance and ending at the edge of the Promised Land; consider each event and how it affected the general spiritual condition of the Israelites. [Consider their condition before and after the event.]

The Ten Plagues (Exod. 7:8-12:30)

Impact on Israel ⇨

Exodus/ Red Sea Crossing (Exod. 12:31-14:31)

Impact on Israel ⇨

Ten Commandments Given (Exod. 20:1-17)

Impact on Israel ⇨

The Golden Calf (Exod. 32)

Impact on Israel ⇨

Tabernacle Built (Exod. 36:8-40:33)

Impact on Israel ⇨

Aaron & Sons Consecrated (Lev. 8, 9)

Impact on Israel ⇨

Error of Nadab & Abihu (Lev. 10:1-7)

Impact on Israel ⇨

First Census (Num. 1)

Impact on Israel ⇨

Levites Set Apart (Num. 3, 4)

Impact on Israel ⇔

Spies Sent Into Canaan (Num. 13, 14)

Impact on Israel ⇔

Korah's Rebellion (Num. 16)

Impact on Israel ⇔

Error of Moses & Aaron (Num. 20:1-13)

Impact on Israel ⇔

The Bronze Serpent (Num. 21:4-9)

Impact on Israel ⇔

Balaam (Num. 22-24)

Impact on Israel ⇔

Idolatry in Moab (Num. 25)

Impact on Israel ⇔

Second Census (Num. 26)

Impact on Israel ⇔

Joshua Chosen to Lead (Num. 31:1-8)

Impact on Israel ⇔

Moses Forbidden Entrance; Dies in Moab (Deut. 3:23-29; 32:48-53; 34:1-12)

Impact on Israel ⇔

Questions and Application.

1. What was the common motivating factor behind all that God did for the Israelites, according to these few examples? How is this still true today, even under the New Covenant?
2. What was the common error of those who were displeasing to God? How does God look on this under the New Covenant? Cite Scripture for your answer.
3. In what ways did God punish the people for their disobedience, and which ways did He *want* to punish them, but was persuaded to change? What has God promised to the disobedient today, under the New Covenant?
4. Ultimately, what was the reason for any of the Israelites — including Moses and Aaron — not being able to enter into Canaan? [Cf. **Heb. 3:16-19.**] What warning should we heed from this example (cf. **Heb. 4:1-11**)?

Lesson Two

THE OPPRESSION

(Exodus 1)

When we last read of Jacob [Israel] and his descendants [the sons whose descendants would comprise the 12 tribes of Israel], they were in Egypt and enjoying the blessings of the land; they had traveled to Egypt and made that their home due to the severe drought in the region and because Egypt was the only place where there was food enough to survive. Let us also remember that Jacob died there but had his bones taken up to Canaan and buried. Before Joseph died, he made the Israelites take a vow to return his bones to Canaan also, but that vow would not be fulfilled for many years. After Joseph died, and all his brothers, a king rose up who did not know Joseph and all the great things he had done for Egypt, and he began to fear the growing number of these outsiders who dwelled in the land — **his** land.

Thus begins the terrible oppression of God's people, the Israelites, which would last for many years to come and which would eventually lead to God's intervention on their behalf as He remembered the promise He had made to their forefathers to give them the land of Canaan as their own possession. The time in Egypt is stated as 400 years (**Gen. 15:13**) or — to be more exact — 430 years (**Exod. 12:40, 41; Gal. 3:17**). By this reckoning, this would include all time since the promise made to Abraham and the time of Jacob and his children in Egypt would be about 215 years — a reasonable calculation when we consider the number of generations that lived from Jacob to the Exodus. Those last few years were definitely the most unpleasant for the Israelites.

If we look back to the time when the famine brought the family of Jacob to Egypt, we find that those who were said to have gone down to Egypt numbered 70 people, which included the sons of Jacob, the families of all his sons, including their children (**Gen. 46:5-27**). Not included in that number were the wives of Jacob's sons, so a number somewhat larger than 70 went to Egypt. Those 70 people would eventually become the nation of Israel and number in the millions, but even while in Egypt, their numbers were growing and they filled the land, a point that led to their bondage in Egypt and lingering there for as long as they did.

This seemingly unchecked population growth amongst these foreigners caused a great deal of consternation among the Egyptians because the Pharaoh [who did not know of Joseph] saw it as a threat to him and his people. Now, fearing their numbers and [in his mind] the possibility of them joining future invaders against them, he decides it would be best to suppress their freedoms and oppress them through literal slavery. He set taskmasters over the Israelites in the hopes it would control them somewhat and diminish their strength. It didn't work! The fact was, "*the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.*" Then, seeing that his affliction of the Israelites was not bringing about the desired results, Pharaoh then decided he should strike right at the heart of his 'problem' and commanded that the midwives to the Hebrews should kill the newborns if they were male. Fortunately, the midwives feared God more than the Pharaoh (cf. **Acts 5:29**) and they did not obey his ungodly command. For their decision, God "*dealt well with the midwives*" and the numbers of the Israelites continued to grow.

Finally, when his plot to kill the newborns failed, Pharaoh then made it a nationwide command that all sons born to the Hebrews should be cast into the river, sparing the females. That ungodly command serves as the setup for the next lesson.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Exodus 1, answer the following questions:

1. What descriptive term is used in 1:1 that will identify God's people from this point forward in the Old Testament? In what way does this help us understand to whom the Law was exclusively given? _____

2. Why is the numerical growth and strength of the Israelites so often mentioned at this point in the record (cf. 1:7, 9, 12, 20)? _____

3. What was the new Pharaoh's perception of their numerical growth and what he believed it would mean to his own nation? _____

4. What kind of labor were the Israelites forced to do (cf. 1:11, 14)? How was this made worse later, when Moses demanded their freedom (cf. 5:6-19)? _____

5. To what lengths was Pharaoh willing to go to reduce the growth and the perceived threat of the Israelite people? What does this say of his character and morals? _____

6. What did the midwives do to thwart the command of Pharaoh and how did God deal with them for their efforts? _____

► **Application.**

1. Name at least three things in this chapter that demonstrate the providence of God. _____

2. How does what the midwives did show us how fearing God more than men can lead us to do great things? What things can we do today that result from fearing God above men? _____

Lesson Three

BIRTH OF MOSES; FLIGHT TO MIDIAN

(Exodus 2:1-22)

Having considered the environment into which Moses would be born, we now turn to that very event and consider once again the providential working of God to accomplish His will and to fulfill His promises made long ago to Abraham. Here, we are told of the circumstances surrounding the birth of Moses — arguably one of the greatest men in the Old Testament record — and it is here we begin a new era in God's dealings with mankind. We are introduced to Moses as a babe, but we will eventually see him raised as a member of the royal family, a defender of his people [some might say a murderer], a fugitive, a shepherd, a deliverer, a prophet, a judge, a spokesman, a mediator, and — yes — even as a disobedient servant. But Moses must surely be seen as a great representative of the Old Law, demonstrated by his appearance with Elijah and Jesus on the mountain where the Lord was transfigured.

But as we continue the story, we find that, as the midwives had done, the parents of Moses did not obey the commandment of Pharaoh and were not about to allow anyone else to carry it out on their own child. Aaron had already escaped the condemnation, but now their newest son was threatened. They acted as any loving parent would and rightly determined the command to be worthy of disobedience and obstruction. Because of the ungodly command, the parents of Moses hid him in the reeds along the river. Whether they knew of the habits of Pharaoh's daughter or not, we are not told, but she came to the river and found Moses and took him and raised him as her own son. Also, because of Miriam's watchful eye and intervention, Moses' own mother was the one who nursed him, a blessing for him and for her. Did these events happen by mere chance, or is this another example of God's Providence?

There is quite a jump after this story, time-wise, for the next we read of Moses, though the text does not mention his age here, he “*was grown*”; Stephen said he “*was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds*” (**Acts 7:22**) and puts his age at “*forty years old*” (**v. 23**). He apparently knew that the Hebrews were his people, purposefully deciding to go out and visit them. The result of that visit led to his own flight to Midian to escape certain death (**Exod. 2:15**). When he fled Egypt, he came to the region of Midian and met his future wife while at a well. Zipporah, the daughter of a Midianite priest [later named as Jethro, **3:1**] becomes his wife and bears him two sons (**18:3, 4**). He lives in Midian for about 40 years (**Acts 7:30**) before God comes to him in the burning bush. Though he was far from the rest of God's people [who cried out to Him from Egypt], God knew where Moses was.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of chapter 2:1-22, answer the following questions:

1. For what reasons did the parents of Moses hide him? _____

2. List the coincidental/providential events that led to Moses being raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. _____

3. Why did Moses go out to see his brethren (v. 11; see also Acts 7:23)? _____

4. Why did Moses fear, and was it justified? _____

► **Application.**

1. What do the parents of Moses teach us about civil disobedience? _____

2. What may we learn about God's providential care from this chapter? _____

Lesson Four

MOSES CALLED TO GO TO EGYPT

(Exodus 2:23-7:7)

When we last left Moses, he had fled Egypt and was living in Midian, where he had started a new family. Meanwhile, time passed and another king arose in Egypt and the oppression of the Israelites only increased. God heard their cries and it was fast approaching the time when He would send for a deliverer to bring them out. Thus begins one of the most well-known stories in the Bible, where Moses is called by God in the burning bush to go to His people and bring them out. But he was not excited at the prospect of such a daunting task!

This Moses — whom we will later find to dare stand between the Israelites and their certain destruction by God — starts out by making excuses for why he *cannot* be the one to deliver them! Yes, even the best of people sometimes make excuses instead of trying; Moses was no different than anyone else in that characteristic! Pay attention to the words of Moses and God's answers to him; note some important lessons about how we should view our duties toward God and His work.

While Moses is away from Egypt, the Pharaoh who was pursuing him died and a new one took his place. The change in leadership did not, however, mean a change in the way the Israelites were treated. Their burdened cry reached up to heaven and God heard and acknowledged them, setting in motion a series of events that would lead to their eventual freedom from slavery. The story begins at Mount Horeb, where God called to Moses, identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and further reveals that He has chosen Moses to be the one by whom His people will be brought out of Egypt. Note that God *could have* accomplished this deliverance without the help of man, but chose instead to use man to further His will and to be the spokesman through whom His word would also be given.

Moses, upon hearing of God's choice, first tried the humble approach, saying he was unworthy of being the one. Then, he tried the 'they will never listen' approach that argues for inadequacy or inability to persuade. Next, he tried the old 'I don't know what to say and I don't say it well' argument. Finally, he basically pleaded with God to appoint someone else ['let someone else do it']. In each case, God had an answer! Eventually, God tells Moses that He will also send Aaron, his brother, to be the one who would do the speaking. But Moses argued further about not wanting to go, saying that the Israelites would question his authority for coming; God replied with a now-familiar answer to give to them: *"I AM WHO I AM."* God tells Moses, too, that Pharaoh will not want to allow the release of the Israelites, but He already has planned the 'motivation' for letting them leave. We will soon see the terrible things brought upon Egypt for Pharaoh's hardened heart, demonstrated in the ten plagues.

As an answer to the possible doubt that God had sent Moses, God gave two signs to Moses as convincing evidence: the rod turning into a serpent and the hand becoming leprous. He used both of these signs to convince the people (**4:28-31**), and the rod turning into a serpent before Pharaoh. He would also use the third sign [water turning to blood] since Pharaoh refused to heed (cf. **7:8-21**). When Aaron and Moses went to the people to tell them of their divine mission, they spoke to them and showed them the signs and they were convinced. Their reaction was to worship God, who had heard their cries and now promised deliverance. They would not get such a response from Pharaoh, however.

When Pharaoh heard the demand of God through Moses, he questioned who this unknown God was and he was not convinced. Instead, he told the people to get back to their work, increased their labors, and then made it more difficult to even accomplish their given tasks. Their daily quotas of brick are increased and then they have to find their own straw with which to make them! After this increased

oppression, the appointed leaders spoke to Moses and Aaron and argued that the only difference was they were now hated in the sight of Egypt [as if they were not already]. Though they were previously convinced by Moses' and Aaron's words and signs, now doubt began to creep into their minds.

Eventually, Moses is told to go again to Pharaoh, and he again complains of inability, but God reminded him Aaron would be speaking, and He also promised great wonders would be done in the land of Egypt whereby all would know that He was the Lord. Moses and Aaron do the will of the Lord and go to demand the Israelites' release, and it is noted that Moses is now 80 years old, and Aaron is 83

► **Interpretation.** From the text of chapters 2:23 through 7:7, answer the following questions:

1. What does **2:23-25** tell us about the character of God? Be as specific and as thorough as possible, based on what is revealed here. _____

2. What made the ground “*holy ground*” where Moses stood? What about the claims of regions today to be “*holy land*”; how are they so called? _____

3. How did God identify Himself to Moses (**3:6**)? How would He identify Himself to the Israelites (**v. 14**)? Why the difference? _____

4. What did God reveal prophetically to Moses about the mountain where he now stood (**3:12**)? When was this fulfilled? _____

5. What was meant by the phrase, “*a land flowing with milk and honey*”? _____

6. What did God promise would happen even as they were departing Egypt (**3:21, 22**)? _____

7. What evidence did God grant to Moses to convince the people and Pharaoh he was sent by God? Were they successful? Why, or why not? _____

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8. What did Moses forget about God when he complained he lacked eloquence and was slow of speech (4:11)? _____

 9. What certain punishment did God promise would be brought upon Pharaoh if he refused to heed the demand for release (4:22, 23)? _____

 10. What action[s] turned away God's anger from Moses when He was prepared to kill him (4:24-26)? _____

 11. How differently were the miracles of Moses and Aaron perceived by the Israelites and Pharaoh? Why? _____

 12. What was Pharaoh's response to the demand to let the people go? Be thorough. _____

 13. When the people lamented their increased burden (5:21) and Moses brought the complaint before the Lord (vv. 22, 23), God sought to reassure Moses and the people that deliverance would come. How did the people respond, and why (6:9)? _____

 14. Why did God say the wonders would be done in Egypt (7:5)? _____

► **Application.**

1. What may we know about God's care for His people when they are in distress today? Cite Scripture that supports your answer. _____

2. When we are given the task of bringing God's word [the gospel] to the world, in whom or in what should be our trust — **self** or in the message we bring? _____

3. What lessons should we learn from the excuses of Moses and the answers God gave to each one? _____

4. What possible consequence will there be should we go to the world and demand they not be so hard on those who are believers? _____

5. What evidence do we have today to convince people the message we preach and teach is sent by God? _____

6. Looking back at the life of Moses up to this point, what possible lessons may we gain from seeing how God used him to accomplish His will? _____

Lesson Five

THE SIGNS AND PLAGUES

(Exodus 7:8-12:36)

We now come to another of the more well-known stories in the Bible — the plagues in Egypt. What we may not realize, though, is the point that was made in each one of the plagues. Before they began, God said He would “*multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt*” (Exod. 7:3) and “*the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD*” (v. 5). For Egypt — an idolatrous, polytheistic people — each plague would be a demonstration by the true and living God that He had power over each and every one of their supposed, but false, gods — and over the Pharaoh himself. The fact of the humiliation and victory over the false gods seems to be implied when, after the deliverance, it is said, “*on their gods the LORD had executed judgments*” (Num. 33:4).

What should be noted by any and all who know the secular history of these times is that this nation and empire that began as the most powerful in the civilized world was brought down by the power of God and never again regained its status. While Egypt may have continued to exist, it was never again the world power that it was before the plagues; the land was devastated and the people were demoralized. It is not coincidental that this mighty fall happened in conjunction with the rise of the Israelites — God's people. Both were by the hand of God!

When Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, they simply cast down Aaron's rod before Pharaoh, and the rod became a snake; but the magicians of Pharaoh did likewise, which seemed to defeat any possibility of convincing Pharaoh that God was with them. But, in the end, Aaron's rod swallowed up all the others. Let's not overlook the significance of this, which symbolized the power in Egypt being 'swallowed up' by the power of God. [An image of a cobra was worn on the outfits of those in the royal family.] But then the first of the ten plagues began: turning the water into blood. When this was done, Moses and Aaron stood by the [Nile] river bank, lifted up the rod and struck the water and turned it to blood. For the Egyptians, this was tantamount to blasphemy, for the Nile River was seen as 'the giver of life to all men' — the transformed life-blood of Osiris — and that ability was now taken away. As a secondary result, the Egyptian goddess of the fish, Hatmety, was overruled by God's power when the fish all died.

Most of the rest of the plagues also struck at the numerous false gods of the Egyptians: the second plague [frogs] was a pointed degradation of the Egyptian god of creation and the center of a large fertility cult, the frog-headed Hekt; the third plague [lice] is the one plague that, as far as can be determined, does not point to any particular Egyptian god; the fourth plague [the swarms] possibly struck at either the Egyptian god of the flies, Kheper, or Amon-Ra, who was always seen with a head of a beetle the fifth plague [a disease afflicting the cattle and other livestock], struck at several of the Egyptian gods who were represented as cattle, or with the head of a bull, including Amon-Ra and the goddess Hathor; the sixth plague [boils] debased the goddess of healing, Sekhmet; the seventh plague [fire and hail on the land] disgraced the sky goddess, Nut [the mother-goddess of the sun god Ra], as well as the wind god, Shu, and another sky god, Horus; the eighth plague [locusts] would point once again to the gods Isis and Seth, as well as Nepri, goddess of the grains; the ninth plague [darkness] would strike against the sun god Amon-Ra, the one most revered in the land because of all the power and life he was said to have given and sustained.

After all the destruction and devastation of his land, Pharaoh's heart is still hardened against the Israelites and against God and he refuses to set them free. Now, Moses comes to him with the news that the next disaster that would be brought on them would be the death of the firstborn — man and

animal, from the lowliest servant to the highest in the land. At least for this one, God allowed the Pharaoh several days before bringing such a plague on the land, giving him time to think about it and the possible consequences. He cannot say he didn't have time to decide! After this announcement, it is said that Moses left the presence of Pharaoh *“in great anger.”* How troublesome is the hardened heart to those who love truth, mercy, and righteousness!

After Moses left Pharaoh, God came to him and commanded the commemorative feast of the Passover, which would later be codified within the Law of Moses. On the last day the people would be in Egypt and in remembrance of the Lord passing over their homes [not striking any dead], the people would begin a tradition which would be passed down for generations, and which would point back to the significant event of their exodus from Egypt and freedom from the bondage which had held them there. For this initial event, the people had to take an unblemished lamb on the tenth day of the month (12:3), kill it at twilight of the 14th day of the month (12:6), and spread its blood on the doorposts and lintel of the house where they will eat the meat of the lamb (12:7). Beginning on that 14th day, there was to be no leaven in the house (12:15) and they were to eat unleavened bread until the 21st day of the month (12:18). When the Passover would be 'officially' codified as law at Sinai (Exod. 23:15), the commands regarding the blood were absent (Deut. 16:1-8).

Despite the dire warnings, Pharaoh did not heed Moses and, as a result, the final plague comes upon Egypt — and Pharaoh's own house is affected. One can only imagine the cry that was heard throughout the land that night as households woke to find one in their house was no longer living. Because of this last plague, the command to go did finally come from Pharaoh, but after so much needless destruction and sorrow. Ironically, he asks Moses to bless him before he leaves. At least he recognized who was better! (cf. Heb. 7:7) The rest of the Egyptians were no less concerned than was Pharaoh, urging the Israelites to leave quickly before they were *all* dead. Truly, the fear of the Lord had come upon a people who had not known Him before those dreadful days. As God had said they would (cf. Exod. 3:21, 22), the people asked of the Egyptians what they wanted and it was given to them; they did not leave empty-handed.

➡ **Interpretation.** From the text of chapters 7:8-12:36, answer the following questions:

1. What seems to be implied in what God said Pharaoh would demand of Moses (7:9)? _____

2. Were the signs convincing evidence to Pharaoh? What does this say about his heart? _____

3. What powers did Pharaoh's magicians have, and to what degree? How did this influence Pharaoh's view of Moses and Aaron? _____

4. What was the conclusion of the magicians about the plague of insects (8:19)? _____

5. To what extent do we see the *mercy* of God in the midst of the plagues (9:15, 16)? _____

6. What statement of ignorance and arrogance did Pharaoh make after the fiery hail had devastated the land (9:27) What did he say that was *right*? _____

7. The NASB translates 10:2 as follows: “*tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians*”; in what way[s] did God make a mockery of the Egyptians?

8. When Moses declared the coming plague of locusts, what did the servants of Pharaoh recognize about their land and the plagues (10:7)? _____

9. When Pharaoh asks about who is going to go worship the Lord, what does he imply about their intent (10:10; NASB, ESV)? _____

10. What threat did Pharaoh make against Moses (10:28)? Was it fulfilled? _____

11. Describe the standing of Moses before the people of Egypt (cf. 11:3). What brought about this change in the people? _____

12. What were the requirements placed on the Israelites if they wanted to escape the last plague's reach? How many obeyed? _____

13. What memorial was established here, and how long was it remembered among the Israelites, as far as the Biblical record shows? _____

14. To what extent did the last plague affect the Egyptians (12:30)? _____

► **Application.**

1. What do these events show about God's power over the rulers of this world? _____

2. What has God given *us* that demonstrates He is Lord? _____

3. How are hardened hearts demonstrated or revealed today when we speak God's will to the world? _____

4. In what ways can *we* show that God is over all the false gods that exist today? _____

5. What may we learn from the command to the Israelites regarding the last plague and the necessity of obedience? _____

6. What parallels, if any, may be drawn between this great story of deliverance and the story of our spiritual deliverance? If none, please be ready to explain why not. _____

Lesson Six

THE EXODUS

(Exodus 12:37-15:21; Num. 33:1-8)

After the demand of God [through Moses] was refused and after the plagues were sent to demonstrate God's power over all the false gods of the Egyptians, Pharaoh finally relents and lets the people go; now it is time to go. And they go! But, again, Pharaoh's heart is hardened and he pursues the Israelites to the Red Sea, where they are camped. Though things looked bleak, Moses trusted in the power of God to deliver them from the army of Pharaoh and the Israelites once again got to be eyewitnesses of the awesome power of God in their deliverance and in the destruction of the Egyptian army. The Israelites have been reminding their children of this great deliverance ever since.

As **we** study this, let us remember *“whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope”* (Rom. 15:4). The story here has some spiritual lessons and applications for us that should not be overlooked, and many events foreshadow the reality of spiritual deliverance that would come through the Christ.

A few facts regarding the beginning of the Israelites' exodus from Egyptian bondage: (1) It is noted that there are about 600,000 men on foot, with women and children not numbered, and a *“mixed multitude”* who came with them (12:37, 38); with all included, it was likely the number would probably be 2-3 million. (2) So rushed were the Israelites in departing the land, they did not have time to wait for their bread to rise, so it was unleavened bread they ate as they left. (3) Abraham had been told by God that his descendants would *“be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years”* (Gen. 15:13), and we are now told that their exodus happened 430 years **to the day** the promise was made (Exod. 12:40, 41). (4) Finally, the Israelites took the bones of Joseph with them, just as he had demanded they do. Long after that promise was made and in a way none could have imagined, that promise was fulfilled.

As the Israelites leave Egypt, God reminds the Israelites that the firstborn of both man and animal are His, and says later that He had set them apart *“On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt”* (Num. 3:13; 8:17). In that same context (Num. 3:12), God changes the commandment and now takes the Levites for His own instead. God also reminded them of the requirements and details of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread that followed it. The Israelites were to tell their children, when asked about the Feast, *“This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt”* (Exod. 13:8). God wanted this great deliverance to be remembered, and said it was to be *“as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes”* (vv. 9); in other words, this was to be something always on their mind, or not far from it.

When the Israelites departed God did not lead them by the most direct route; He took them a different way because they were not prepared to face battle and might become discouraged and want to return to Egypt, and to receive the law at Sinai. He took them *“by the way of the wilderness of the Red Sea,”* but it would not be long before the Israelites faced the Amalekites in battle (Exod. 17:8-16). This route likely played a part in the decision of Pharaoh to pursue the Israelites, with him thinking that they were headed towards a dead-end, where he would be able to easily defeat them and/or recapture them. [He was wrong!]

Despite the great devastation already suffered by his country, Pharaoh's heart is softened only for a short time. After the departure of the Israelites, Pharaoh decides he will pursue them and destroy them in the desert. Right away, we see a demonstration of God's care and protection of the Israelites as they departed Egypt. The pillar [cloud by day, fire by night] would guide them wherever they went, but would also serve as a defense against the pursuing army of Pharaoh. To the Israelites, the cloud would be a light by night, but to the Egyptians it was darkness that prevented them from coming near the Israelites. Later, we find that the Israelites moved or remained in place, according to what the cloud did (**Exod. 40:36-38**).

Sadly, the people did not fully trust that God would deliver them, because even before they are out of the land, the people come to a point where it looks like they are trapped and face certain destruction [or at least a return to captivity] and they begin complaining that Moses had only brought them out into the desert to die there, instead of back in Egypt. Though the people complained, Moses trusted in God enough to not worry about the apparent predicament. He told the people they would soon see the power of God demonstrated in their deliverance and in the destruction of the Egyptian army. Though Moses did not know *how* God would “*gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army*” (v. 4), Moses knew that God would be glorified and Pharaoh humiliated.

God's power would be demonstrated mightily when Moses stretched out the rod over the waters and God parted them as a wall on either side, and the people passed through “*on the dry ground.*” It was not muddy, as might be expected from ground that had been recently underwater, and which would bog down the travelers and their carts; it was dry land! Though some have tried to explain this away scientifically, such only shows a lack of trust in God. But Pharaoh made the mistake of thinking he could pursue the Israelites into the path made by God for the Israelites. His punishment was soon realized when God bound the chariot wheels so they could not drive them easily. Only after this did they realize the mistake they had made and then tried to flee, but it was too late. Moses stretched out his hand over the waters and the waters returned to full depth and the Egyptians were overthrown in the sea with no one surviving. By God's hand, the Israelites were delivered from Egypt, and when the Israelites saw the great work of God, they feared and believed.

Following the overthrow of Pharaoh and his army, Moses leads the people in praising God through song [Moses would seem to be the author]. The song is a plain retelling of the events they just experienced and witnessed, and an event worthy of taking the time to praise God. And as Moses and the people sang this song, note that they made it a personal exultation. They would each be singing the praise of God as one's own God — not just as 'the God of Israel' as He is often called — and the cause for each one's salvation. The song uses descriptive language to describe what God had done to the Egyptians, with Pharaoh and his army sinking “*to the bottom like a stone*” and “*like lead in the mighty waters.*” Within the song, too, Moses tells of how the people of Canaan and the surrounding regions will hear of what God had done that day and would “*hear and be afraid.*” Some would “*be dismayed*” and of others, “*fear and dread will fall on them.*” When the Israelites finally crossed over into Canaan and the spies went into Jericho, Rahab told them, “*I know that the LORD has given you the land, that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land are fainthearted because of you*” (**Josh. 2:9**). The song's words rang true!

► **Interpretation.** From the text of chapter 12:27 through 15:21, answer the following questions:

1. How many men left Egypt (**Exod. 12:37**; cf. **Num. 1:46**)? How did this number differ from that when numbered just before they entered into Canaan (**Num. 26:51**)? What accounts for the difference? _____

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2. What was the purpose of the Passover (**Exod. 12:42**)? How long [in their history] was it to be observed? _____

 3. Under what conditions could a stranger [non Jew] keep the Passover (**Exod. 12:48**)? _____

 4. What was the Lord's intent regarding **Exod. 13:9, 16**? What was this command made to be by tradition? _____

 5. What were the Israelites to tell their sons when asked about the sacrifice of every firstborn animal (**Exod. 13:14, 15**)? _____

 6. Why did God not lead the Israelites in the shortest/fastest route out of Egypt (**Exod. 13:17**)? _____

 7. What did the Israelites do that was a particular fulfillment of what God had told Joseph long ago (cf. **Exod. 13:19**)? _____

 8. What did God give to the Israelites to guide and protect them during their exodus (**Exod. 13:21, 22**)? In what way[s] did it guide? Protect? _____

 9. What change of heart did Pharaoh and his servants have when they heard that Israel had fled (**Exod. 14:5-9**)? What did they obviously forget? _____

 10. What was the response of the Israelites when they saw the approaching Egyptian army (**Exod. 14:10**)? What was the reaction of Moses (**vv. 13, 14**)? _____

11. How did God bring the Israelites through the Red Sea? _____

12. How did God achieve honor above Pharaoh and his army? _____

13. What was the response of the Israelites after witnessing God's destruction of the Egyptian army (**Exod. 14:31**)? _____

14. What did Moses and the people do after seeing this (**Exod. 15:1-18**)? _____

► **Application.**

1. Who is the Christian's Passover (**1st Cor. 5:7**)? How so? _____

2. Draw some parallels of the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian captivity, and the deliverance of man from sin by Christ. _____

3. What should we learn about God's ability to deliver, especially when things look bleak? _____

Lesson Seven

FROM THE RED SEA TO SINAI

(Exodus 15:22-17:16; 19:1, 2; Num. 33:8-15)

As the move toward Canaan progresses, we recall that the Israelites have just been delivered from the Egyptians, the Egyptian army has been annihilated, and the Promised Land awaits! Here begins the journey from Rameses to the Jordan River crossing for which the Israelites are so famous, but there is much to do, much to see, and much to hear before the day they cross into the Promised Land. This short leg from the Red Sea to Sinai lasts only about three months [see **Num. 33:3** and **Exod. 19:1**], and some important events will take place that will set the tone for much of what follows: more complaints precede food being provided for them in the form of *manna*, a bread-like substance that appears each morning; more complaints; and a battle with the Amalekites, who will be a source of contention for them for years to come.

This short leg of the journey is that part which will bring them to Mount Sinai — surely one of the most famous peaks in the world, but not because it is the highest. It is there where God came to man and delivered the law that would guide the Israelites for another 1500 years. If only the people could have foreseen the great and terrible presence of the Lord as they journeyed, maybe some of them would have been less likely to complain. Maybe if we could foresee the same thing [this time, in Judgment], maybe *we* would do a lot less complaining, too. Maybe.

Having successfully escaped the Egyptian captivity by the great power of God, one might expect that it would all be a trouble-free, joyous journey the rest of the way into Canaan. Sadly, whatever joy they had would last just *three days*. It was at Marah that the people began their long history of complaining against God and Moses, or whoever happened to be leading them at the time; many more complaints will come, with the complaint at Kadesh-Barnea being the 'final straw' that moved God to decide that the adults would not enter, and that they would wander in the wilderness one year for every day the spies were in Canaan. This may seem like an odd time to point out the unpleasantness of complaining, but it was what kept out many from the rest God had promised to His people. Moses would later (**Exod. 16:8**) pointedly chastise them for their complaints, reminding them that it was not against *them* [Moses and Aaron] that they made such complaints, but against God. The same would be true for us today when we complain about the things God demands of us; let us not think that complaining won't keep *us* from entering *our* rest!

And after their complaints so soon after the deliverance, God promises that He will not put on them any of the diseases He brought on Egypt *if* they would only "*diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes.*" As we look back on the history of Israel and their persistent unfaithfulness, and the fact the nation as a whole would turn away from Him, we can only shake our heads and wonder "what could have been." and, again, just one month out from the exodus, the Israelites again find reason to complain; this time, it is for lack of food (**Exod. 16:1-3**)! at least they *thought* they lacked food. They inexplicably get reminiscent and start remembering Egypt far better than it actually was! Later, they will complain for the lack of water (**Exod. 17:1-7**). Though God had already proved His power and ability to provide their every need, it seems that they doubted that God was even amongst them! As we look at their persistent complaining, let us take a look at ourselves to make sure we have not forgotten God's promises and provisions and complain, too.

Throughout it all, God delivers according to their needs and even specifies that they were to take no more than what was *needed* each day. Meat was provided in the evening and bread in the morning,

enough to fill their hunger (**Exod. 16:8**). Quails came up at evening and provided the meat, and God provided the substance called *manna* every morning. Though God specified they should only take what they *needed* for each day and a double portion the day before the Sabbath, someone had to test it, of course, with unpleasant results (**vv. 20, 27**). What they should have learned from this provision was that it was the Lord who had brought them out (**v. 6**) and that they should glorify Him for that provision (**v. 7**). Let us learn to trust God's commands — that they are for our good, that they will turn out as specified, and that we will lack nothing if we keep His commands faithfully; let us also learn to give credit to God for our daily provisions and let us give Him the glory for who we are and for what He has given us.

It is worthwhile to note, too, *how* God provided for His people. When God said He would provide food for them, it was a provision that was necessary for the place and the situation. Once they entered into the Promised Land and ate of the land, it came no more (cf. **Exod. 16:35; Josh. 5:12**). Let us learn from this that God did not provide what they *could* obtain, but only that which they could not. While in the wilderness, they had no means of providing food or water for themselves, so God gave them what they needed — but not an overabundance [except to make a point]. Once they entered into the Promised Land, where the land could sustain them, God no longer sent the manna. Let us see that God will not provide for us what we can obtain, but He has provided for us what we could not obtain. He expects us to do what we can, and He will "fill in the gaps" for our physical and spiritual needs.

A small point to note here: Just a few days out of Egypt (**Exod. 16:23-30**), Moses gives the command to the Israelites that they should observe the Sabbath [*sabbath* = rest; intermission], a day of rest that would be codified at Sinai when the Ten Commandments were given to them (**20:8-11**), but one that would demand the death penalty for those who transgressed it (cf. **Num. 15:32-36**); at this time, there was no death penalty.

Earlier, as they were departing Egypt, God sent them by a roundabout way, instead of a direct route, stating that the sight of war would discourage them (**Exod. 12:17, 18**). But, less than a month out of Egypt, the war comes to them! As we will see on numerous occasions later, also, God gives them victory — and some unconventional means are used to guarantee the victory. But the first adversaries the Israelites face after leaving Egypt are the Amalekites (**Exod. 17:8-16**), a people who would be a thorn in the side of the Israelites for many years to come. Here, God promises to wipe them from existence, and will reiterate it later and with a stern warning for the Israelites to not forget it (**Deut. 25:17-19**). God would later give command to King Saul to utterly destroy them — a task which he personally fails to accomplish (**1st Sam. 15**).

As the Israelites come to Sinai (**Exod. 19:1, 2**), they probably do not realize that the next year in their life will be one of the most important periods in the history of mankind — the time when God gave His law to the Israelites, a law that would guide and rule them for about 1500 years. The things contained in that law still influence nations today.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of 15:22-17:16 and 19:1-2, answer the following questions:

1. What was the reason for the first complaint of the Israelites? Was it a 'legitimate' complaint; that is, was it a genuine need? _____

2. What was the promise of God at Marah and what were the contingencies? _____

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3. What was the next complaint of the Israelites, and was **it** a legitimate need? _____

 4. How did the Israelites exaggerate the conditions back in Egypt, and why (**Exod. 16:3**)? _____

 5. Against whom did Moses say that the complaints were directed (**Exod. 16:8**)? _____

 6. What food provisions did God promise the people, and when and how would it come? _____

 7. What were the restrictions on food-gathering? Be thorough in your answer. _____

 8. For what reason did God command Moses to set aside a pot of manna? _____

 9. How long did the Israelites eat of God's food provisions, and when did His provision of the manna and quail end? Cite Scripture for your answer. _____

 10. What was the next reason for the Israelites' complaints (**Exod. 17:1-3**)? _____

 11. Though **Exod. 17:13** says Israel “*defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword,*” what was the foundational reason? _____

► **Application.**

1. When we consider the complaints of the Israelites, what should we learn about trusting the Lord, even for legitimate needs? _____

2. In **John 6:30-35**, those following Jesus asked that He provide a sign that they might believe and referred to the text of this lesson (**Exod. 16:4**), but Jesus told them about the “*true bread from heaven*”; to what [or *whom*] was He referring, and what did He mean? How did this parallel what God had done for the Israelites in the wilderness? _____

3. Considering the period between the Red Sea and Sinai, what should we learn from the Israelites about the necessity of keeping God's commands **exactly**? _____

4. What parallels may we draw from this period in the Israelites' history that applies to the spiritual life of disciples today? _____

5. What is the danger today in complaining about the way the church is organized and the things we may do and/or how we do them? _____

6. How does spiritual life within the Lord's church today compare or contrast with the Israelites at this point in time? _____

Lesson Eight

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

(Exodus 19:3-20:20; Num. 33:15)

In the religious world, the Ten Commandments hold a high place in the minds of many. To the Jew, it is the basis for all their laws, though not as revered [in distinction to any other in the Law of Moses] as it is in the 'Christian' denominational circles. To many who profess Christ, they are still bound by these laws and even recent history shows us the veneration they have for them as they fight to have them displayed in public places for what they believe is a sort of reminder of what was once the basis for the [moral] laws of this country. Some denominational groups go beyond veneration, stating within their creed books that all disciples of Christ are still bound by God to obey these laws — all of them. [Creative explanations and doctrines have been written for commandment #4.]

But when we read the context of the Law's giving, we find that God gave these commandments to the Jews *in particular* and no one else. Moses would say as much later (**Deut. 4:13; 5:2, 3**). Paul would later write that the Old Law [which includes these Ten Commandments] was only meant to be temporary (**Gal. 3:24, 25**) and anyone who went back to the Old Law had separated themselves from Christ, the only means of salvation (**Gal. 5:3, 4**). While every one of the commandments was repeated within the New Testament [except #4], we are not bound by these commandments because they were not given to us. Keep these words in context, and let us be admonished (cf. **1st Cor. 10:11**).

But as this part of the story of the exodus begins, we find the Israelites at Mount Sinai, where God had met with Moses and where He had told Moses he would be back one day return to serve God (**Exod. 3:12**); he has returned, and with the Israelites as God intended. It is here that God makes an explicit statement about their potential future blessings as His people being a *conditional* promise: “if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant” (**Exod. 19:5**), they would then be a “special treasure” to Him. If these words sound somewhat familiar, it may just be because they are foreshadowing the day when God would call those in Christ “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people” (**1st Pet. 2:9**). The wording [and the meaning] is slightly different in that the Israelites were a nation of priests [meaning they were guided by the priests] while Christians today *are* priests. When this was then told to the people by Moses, they agreed to the terms. God did not force them into the agreement, but they did so willingly.

Because of the supreme righteousness of God, the people could not come before God as with any ordinary being. God commanded that Moses consecrate [lit. *clean*] them before coming into His presence, further stipulating that they must wash their clothes on the next day, not to come near the mountain to touch it lest they die, and that husbands should not have relations with their wives. God tells Moses He will come down to the people in a cloud that He may speak to them and that they would know that all Moses would teach them later would come from the mouth of God. On the third day, and at the sound of the trumpets, God would come to them and they were to approach the mountain. When God comes down, the sight and sound of His coming and of His voice was too much for the people and they pleaded with Moses to do all the speaking to them in the future because they were simply too afraid. From this point forward, Moses will be the mediator between God and man, and the prophet through whom God will deliver the commandments to the people.

But for now, God spoke directly to the people what came to be called the Ten Commandments (cf. **Exod. 34:28**). The first four addressed man's relationship with God, while the last six dealt with man's relationship with his fellow man. Let us not forget, though, that these were certainly not the *only* laws God expected His people to keep; they are merely the basis for all other laws — all of which God expected His people to hear and obey. It should be noted that God re-emphasizes the command to the people to not make any images or gods of gold or silver for themselves. As we might remember, though, it was not long before they disobeyed this command (**Exod. 32**).

► **Interpretation.** From the text of chapters 19:3-20:26, answer the following questions:

1. What was meant by them becoming His “*special treasure*” above all people, and what were the conditions that had to be met for this to happen? _____

2. What was meant by them becoming a “*kingdom of priests*” and how does this differ from Peter's words in **1st Peter 2:9** which described Christians? _____

3. Why was it necessary that the people be consecrated before God came down? _____

4. Describe the scene as God comes down to the mountain to speak to the people, and the reaction of the people to what they saw and heard. _____

► **Application.**

1. How does God's deliverance of the people to Him parallel what was done for us in Christ? _____

2. Knowing the coming history of the Israelites, what should we learn from their words in **Exod. 19:8** and our own promises to faithfully serve the Lord today? _____

Lesson Nine

THE TABERNACLE AND PRIESTS

(Exodus 24:1, 2; 24:9-31:18)

One of the most prominent individuals in the wilderness wanderings was, of course, Moses, but only a little less prominent was the priest, for it was through him every man had to come and bring an offering for his or her sins, for peace offerings, and for dedications. And just as prominent in the wilderness wanderings was the place where the people came to the priests to make those offerings: the Tabernacle. It was the Tabernacle where the sacrifices were made, and where God's presence descended in a cloud when it was time for the people to camp, and ascended when it was time for the people to move (**Exod. 40:34-38**); the glory of God also descended in a cloud when the High Priest entered the Holy Place on the Day of Atonement (**Lev. 16**). Even geographically speaking, the Tabernacle was the center of attention, with the people camped on every side (cf. **Num. 2**).

Priests are mentioned almost 300 times just in these four books [Exodus-Deuteronomy] and the Tabernacle about 250 times, as well as numerous mentions of the articles of the Tabernacle. These things all together constituted the religious/spiritual service of the Israelites and were the medium through which God's word would be taught after Moses was gone and the people settled in the Promised Land, with the nation either strengthened or weakened according to whether or not the priests were fulfilling their duties as God prescribed.

After the affirmation of the covenant, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 elders of Israel came up on the mountain by God's order to worship. The sight of God was not an actual sighting, for God said in other places He did not want man to see His image lest they try to make a copy and call it their god (cf. **Deut. 4:15, 16**). But they did see a glorious scene, with a surface described as “*a paved work of sapphire stone, and it was like the very heavens in its clarity.*” After these men worshiped and ate and drank together, God then called Moses to come up to the mountain, and he took Joshua with him and commanded the others to remain until they returned. When he came to the mountain, it was covered with a cloud and remained that way for six days until the glory of the Lord rested on the mountain in the form of “*a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.*” It was here Moses remained for 40 days and nights.

When we consider the materials for the construction of the Tabernacles and its items, it is significant to note that these things were to be given willingly by the people. And when God named the materials from which the Tabernacles and its items would be made, one could easily see that there was purpose in everything He named. Gold, silver, and bronze would be used to construct the items within the sanctuary and which would exemplify the best materials for His service, as well as durability and protection or resistance to the elements. The dyed linens further showed a regal atmosphere in which the spiritual service would be done, with light provided by oil, and spices which would make up a specific and exclusive mixture of incense that was not to be duplicated (cf. **Exod. 30:35-38**) to show these were for God alone. Additionally, precious stones were specified for the manufacture of the ephod and breastplate which was to be worn by the High Priests (cf. **Exod. 28:1-35**). Let us note some details about the tabernacle and the items within:

- **The Ark of the Covenant.** It was made out of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, and measured 2½ cubits long, 1½ cubits wide, and 1½ cubits high [Approximately 3'-9"L x 2'-3"W x 2'-3"H], with two gold rings on each side by which it would be carried. Its top had two cherubim facing each other, with their wings covering the “*mercy seat,*” and the Ark was carried by two poles of acacia wood that were likewise covered with gold.

- **The Table of Showbread.** This was also made out of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, on which bread was to be continually present. [The word literally translated is *presence bread*, meaning it was to always be before the face of God.] This was for the priests to eat and was to be changed out every Sabbath day.
- **The Gold Lampstand.** Some have illustrated the lampstand from the top view as six branches going in various directions and connecting the ends of the branches to form the familiar "Star of David," but note the instructions indicate there are three branches on one side and three on the other, which would like the modern-day *menorah* [Heb. *candlestick*]. By command, the lampstand was to continually burn olive oil brought from the people, tended even throughout the night by Aaron and his sons, and its purpose was simple: the lamps were arranged on the lampstand “so that they give light in front of it” (Exod. 25:37).
- **The Altar of Incense.** This was one cubit long and one cubit wide, and two cubits its height. It was made out of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, with moldings all around, horns at the upper corners, and two rings of gold for carrying the altar — one each on opposite sides of the altar. The poles to carry the altar were also made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold.
- **The Bronze Laver.** A basin of bronze was built and placed in between the altar in the court and the tabernacle so the priests could wash themselves before entering into service.
- **The Tabernacle.** The overall dimensions of the Tabernacle were about 12 cubits wide by about 30 cubits long [cubit ≈ 18 inches; approximately 18' x 45'], 10 cubits high [approx. 15'], and it was divided by a veil into the Holy Place and Most Holy Place. It was walled on three sides [north, south, and west sides] with a veil hanging over the east side for entry. All of the elements of the Tabernacle were placed in the Holy Place except the Ark of the Covenant, while it resided in the Most Holy Place. Many references state that the dimensions were 10 x 30 cubits, but note that it is clearly stated that there were 8 boards on the ends and 20 on the sides (cf. Exod. 36:20-34); if each board was 1½ cubits, then each end of the Tabernacle was equal to 1½ x 8 cubits, or 12 cubits.
- **The Court.** As a border and a visible boundary for the Tabernacle, a linen wall [5 cubits high; approx. 7½ feet] was erected that surrounded the Tabernacle, and formed a sort of courtyard that measured 50 x 100 cubits with a gate/entry on the east side of 20 cubits. The people of Israel [not of the tribe of Levi] could enter into this area for their sacrifices, but they were forbidden from entering into the Tabernacle itself.

With the materials for the Tabernacle and its items explained, God names Aaron and his sons as those who will serve Him in the priestly service — an order that will continue through the time of Christ and for several years after His death, burial, resurrection and ascension. The details of their consecration will be described later (Exod. 29:1-37) as is the actual event (Lev. 8). As High Priest, Aaron would wear the ephod [fine woven linen with threads of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet; two shoulder straps with a stone on each strap with the names of six of the sons of Israel on each one; settings of gold with braided gold chains attached] and the breastplate [a square of finely-woven linen with threads like the ephod, about a hands width; 12 stones set within, with each one bearing a name of one of the sons of Israel; gold rings on each end, with braided gold chains attaching it to the settings of gold on the ephod; two other gold rings attached to the shoulder straps and tied to the gold rings by blue cord]. As such, Aaron would wear the breastplate with the Urim and Thummim over his heart when he went before the Lord. The robe of the ephod was to be blue with a single opening at the top for his head, with weavings of pomegranates in blue, purple, and scarlet, with gold bells between them all around the opening. The bells were so he would be heard when he goes in and out of the holy place. A plate of pure gold was to be engraved with the words "Holiness to the Lord" and attached to his turban by a blue cord. He also wore a tunic and a sash. The rest of the priests would wear special clothing, too, just not as the High Priest's. Aaron's sons would wear linen tunics with sashes and linen trousers to prevent any exposure

while going up to the altar. They would also have turbans to wear in service. After all this was detailed, God then gave them the procedures for consecrating Aaron and his sons for service.

The daily offerings are here explained, and specified as first-year lambs — one in the morning and one in the evening — along with the grain and drink offerings each time. This was to be done *every day*. Likewise, there would be a daily offering of incense by Aaron on its special altar, offered by Aaron when he entered the sanctuary every morning and again each night when the lights were lit at twilight. It would also be on this altar that, once a year, the offering of atonement would be made.

One of the lesser-known details of the Israelites' responsibilities is this: the monetary atonement offering. When the people were numbered (cf. **Num. 1:2ff**), each one 20 years old and above was to make an offering of half a shekel [rich and poor alike]. This same amount was demanded as the "temple tax" in the time of Christ (cf. **Matt. 17:24-27**), but there is no Scriptural basis to tie the two together as one and the same.

It should be noted that for the anointing oil and the incense to be offered daily for Him, God specified the ingredients of these things to be used in His service *only*, making it clear that they were holy and set aside for Him only. Reproductions or uses in other places was strictly forbidden and any who did so would be cut off from the people.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of chapters 24-31, answer the following questions:

Paragraph Divisions: at 24:1, 9, and 12; then 25:1, 10, 23, and 31; then 26:1, 7, 15, 31, and 36; then 27:1, 9, and 20; then 28:1, 6, 15, 31, 36, and 40; then 29:1, 10, 15, 19, 26, 29, 31, 35, and 38; then 30:1, 11, 17, 22, and 34; then 31:1, 12, and 18.

Note the paragraph divisions and give a short title for each main thought. [Note: Some paragraphs may be grouped together.] Be prepared to discuss the details of the items used in the Israelites' religious service to God, and any possible parallels and/or comparisons to our religious service to God under the New Testament.

1. How were the materials for the sanctuary to be acquired or accumulated (**25:1**)? What does the *quality* of materials say about that which is for God's service? _____

2. Where was the "mercy seat" and what was its purpose (**25:21, 22**)? _____

3. How many layers of curtains were to be made for the Tabernacle (**26:1-14**), and why? Of what was each made? _____

4. What was the purpose of engraving the names of the sons of Israel on the stones on the ephod (**28:9-12**) and the stones on the breastplate (**28:21, 29-30**)? _____

5. How do the words of the writer of Hebrews (**Heb. 9:21, 22**) apply to what was done when consecrating Aaron and his sons for the priestly service? _____

6. How was the interior of the Tabernacle divided, and what was in each "room"? _____

7. How often were the sacrifices of lambs to be made (**29:38-46**)? Counting only the days in the wilderness, how many sacrifices were made [not even counting other sacrifices made by individuals]? _____

8. How did God help those who were involved in the making of all these things for the people's religious service to Him? _____

➡ **Application.**

1. List any parallels between the Tabernacle, its divisions, its articles, the court and its articles, and anything we have in the New Testament. _____

2. How much greater is the sacrifice of Jesus than the animal sacrifices made under the Old Law, seeing as how He made only *one* sacrifice (cf. **Heb. 10:11, 12**)? _____

3. How much greater was Jesus as our Priests than those who served under the Old Law, and why? [See **Hebrews 7:20-8:6**.] _____

4. What does God's requirement for exclusivity imply about the things we offer up to Him in our spiritual service today? _____

Lesson Ten

THE GOLDEN CALF

(Exodus 32:1-35; 33:7-34:28)

It was no coincidence that the first laws given to God's people commanded that they have no other gods before Him and that they make no carved images (**Exod. 20:3, 4**). It is also no coincidence that so soon after these laws were given, the people disobeyed. It is truly astounding that so soon after the people were eyewitnesses to the fearful power and glory of the true God on Sinai that they would then create an idol and call it the same "god" who brought them out of Egypt, but this is merely a preview of things to come as idolatry was a persistent problem with God's people. Over and over, the Israelites lost their faith in the true God and either made their own idols, or took those of the nations surrounding them and provoked the true God to anger (cf. **Jdgs. 2:12**).

At this point, early in their escape from captivity, God is ready to destroy the disobedient and make the great nation promised to Abraham through Moses. It was through the mediation of Moses, though, that they were spared. In this is a shadow of the mediation of our Savior, whose sacrifice of Himself served as the propitiation for our sins and took away God's wrath from us, though we were certainly deserving of destruction.

The story begins when the people, while Moses was still on the mountain [just about to leave and come down to them], grew impatient and called on Aaron to make them idols to go before them — as if any pitiful inanimate objects could move of themselves, much less protect them or do anything for them. Aaron called on the people to give them their gold for the making of this idol — a directly blasphemous act against God, who had specified the use of gold in the making of the items used to worship Him; in doing this, they equated this false god with the true. It is often said in today's religious climate, "As long as your heart is sincere," God will accept whatever you offer up and in any way you choose to do that. This occasion shows that concept to be false, for these people made this idol and called it their god whom they claimed had brought them out of Egypt [not a *different* god] and Aaron even proclaimed a feast day to the Lord when the people brought burnt offerings and peace offerings. Some today would argue that they were "sincere" in their efforts and that it should have been acceptable to God. God thought differently and was ready to destroy them!

The true God, of course, saw what they were doing and revealed it to Moses, and was then prepared to destroy them and make a great nation from Moses, but Moses mediated and urged God's mercy by not wiping out *all* of the people, as He had first stated He wanted to do. Moses appealed to the previous promises made by God to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel [Jacob] as reason to not utterly destroy them, and God listened. But after Moses convinced God to temper His anger and not utterly destroy the Israelites, when he saw what they had done with his own eyes, *he* was exceedingly angry and he threw down [and broke] the tablets on which the commandments were written, burned the idol, ground it into powder, scattered it on the water, and made the people drink. While this may seem a dramatic response, imagine what would have happened had it been **God** who had not withheld His anger!

And when Moses then addressed Aaron's part in this, Aaron shifted the blame entirely on the people and their evil intent, and claimed that when he told them to bring him their gold, he took it and cast it into the fire and out came this idol! The fact was, when Aaron was left behind while Moses went up on the mountain to receive from God the laws, he did not uphold his duties and allowed the people to make an idol and he did not control the people. Translations differ on the condition of the people, but the original Hebrew can be translated as either *naked, uncovered, or to be loosened of restraint*, so it is

difficult to tell exactly which is meant. None of it was good, however, and Aaron bore the responsibility for not doing what he ought to have done.

Because the Tabernacle and any of the items for religious service had not yet been constructed, Moses took his tent and pitched it far from the camp as a sort of 'temporary Tabernacle' where he would meet with God. Note the reverence shown by the people whenever he went toward the tent, and their worship offered up when the cloud descended on it. Note also that this was Joshua's *de facto* residence.

When Moses met with God, it is said that the Lord “*spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*” and this closeness apparently allowed Moses to feel he could make a personal appeal to God to show Himself as an assurance He would be with them throughout their journeys. He would not allow Moses to see His face, but did state that He would allow him to see his back as He passed by and while Moses was in the cleft of a rock. And when Moses returned to the mountain to meet with God, and because Moses has broken the first tablets in his anger, God commanded that he cut a new pair of stone tablets on which the laws would be rewritten. God would write on the tablets the original laws, but Moses would also write the additional laws given to him on the mountain.

Finally, while Moses was up on the mountain with Him once again, God took the time to restate some of the laws that had already been given, such as the prohibition of covenants with the people of the land and against idolatry, instructions regarding the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the law of the firstborn, the law of the Sabbath, the three required feasts, and the requirement to bring the firstfruits to Him.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of 32:1-35 and 33:7-34:28, answer the following questions:

1. What was the reason the people gave for coming to Aaron and their demand to make them idols to set before them? _____

2. What did God want to do to the Israelites after seeing what they had done? How did Moses intervene? _____

3. What punishment did Moses command for those who had participated in the idolatry, and what further punishment did God exact? _____

4. What were the prohibitions regarding the people of Canaan, and why? _____

► **Application.**

1. What does this particular instance of their unfaithfulness tell us about how God feels when we sin against Him? _____

2. What lessons should we learn today regarding the world around us when we consider God's warning to the Israelites regarding the Canaanites? _____

Lesson Eleven

THE BEGINNING OF PRIESTLY SERVICE (Exod. 40:17-35; Num. 8:1-4; 7:1-89)

As the Israelites began their second year out of captivity, the tabernacle was erected and their religious service to God changed forever [or at least up until the time of Christ]. With the tabernacle, they had a place to bring their offerings for sacrifice, and God had a specified place symbolic of His meeting together with man. The very location of the tabernacle each time they encamped represented the point that God was trying to make with Israel: His holiness, and God Himself, was at the center of their existence as His people. It was at the tabernacle that the people made sacrifices for sins, for thank offerings, and peace offerings, and the place where the priests would serve the Lord daily by offering burnt offerings and incense twice daily throughout their time in the wilderness and up until the temple was built. God set apart the Levites for His service and to serve Aaron and his sons, and any "outsider" [not of their lineage] who approached would be struck dead. God considered this a *serious* matter, to say the least!

Before that is established, though, God decrees that the tribe of Levi is to be dedicated to His service and attend to the needs of Aaron and his sons as they also serve the Lord. They would receive no land when the Israelites moved into Canaan, they would depend on the contributions of others, and they were given specific laws and prohibitions no others in Israel were given. Their life would literally be a life of sacrifice — personal sacrifice as well as the duty of assisting the people in their sacrifices and offering up the daily sacrifices required by God. Think about these things as you read of the beginning of their service, and how the lives of disciples parallel their lives, and the sacrifices God requires of us.

But as this portion of their story begins, it is significant to note that on the first day of the month of the beginning of the second year out of Egypt, the setting up of the tabernacle was done. And as it is set up, seven times in these 14 verses, we are told that the tabernacle and its elements were set up “*as the LORD had commanded Moses.*” Repeated words and phrases should cause us to sit up and take note! For those who say following God's word and appealing to the numerous examples as "patterns" for what we teach and do is useless and of human origin, we see here that the Scriptures teach otherwise. Try to imagine the success of those who might have tried to do anything other than in the way God established! But Moses followed the pattern, and God's word emphasizes it in a way that we would have to willfully ignore it to say obedience to God's word is a trivial matter.

And as the tabernacle is being erected, it begins with the outer frame and tent coverings, and then begins from the Most Holy Place and works his ways outwards, ending with the erecting of the court screens. This will make more sense when we understand the Ark of the Covenant and the most holy place itself could not be viewed by just anyone. At the consecration of the tabernacle, the people brought six covered carts and twelve oxen for the priests' use in the Lord's service. Though the people had already given willingly and liberally for the construction of the tabernacle, its elements, and the priestly garments, their generosity was not at an end just yet. Though the offerings from the tribes was genuine and with good intentions, Moses did not hastily receive the items without God first indicating His approval, which He quickly gave. Once the tabernacle and its elements were erected and in place, the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle, and not even Moses could enter due to His glory.

An explanation of this just may be that the tabernacle had not yet been dedicated and no sacrifices had been made. Only after the 12 days of dedication offerings [one day of offerings for each of the 12 tribes] In this is a powerful lesson in that for all men: God allows us into His presence on **His** terms and on **His** time.

As dedication offerings, each tribe brings particular offerings, each on a designated day. The total for the burnt offerings: 12 each of male oxen, rams, male lambs, and goats; the total for the peace offerings: 24 bulls, 60 rams, and 60 lambs. Also, each tribe offered a silver platter of 130 shekels, a silver bowl of 70 shekels, and a gold pan of 10 shekels. Total weight of the silver: 2400 shekels; total weight of the gold: 120 shekels. [Value of the silver was about \$17,000; value of the gold was about \$58,000.] Once again, we see the liberality of the people and, again, should note the worthiness of God to receive our best offerings. Only **after** the tabernacle is erected, everything is put in place, and it is dedicated, does Moses went into the tabernacle, and it was there that God spoke to him, with Moses hearing the voice of God speaking to him from above the mercy seat on the Ark of the Covenant. Apparently, God would speak to Moses here at other times, also (**Lev. 1:1; Num. 1:1**) — as He said He would (cf. **Exod. 25:22**). There would be at least two occasions where others were brought into the tabernacle so God could speak (**Num. 12; Deut. 31:14**).

➤ **Interpretation.** From the text of Exodus 40:17-35, Numbers 7, and Numbers 8:1-4, answer the following questions

1. Explain the reasoning [if any] behind the order of the setting up of the tabernacle, the placing of the elements, and the court screens.? _____

2. What must we conclude about the presence of the Lord from the fact Moses could not enter into the tabernacle when His glory filled it? _____

3. Who initiated the offerings brought to Moses in **Num. 7:2**? For what reason were these things given? Which family among the priests did not receive any of the gifts, and why?

4. What must we conclude is the only difference between the inability of Moses to enter into the tabernacle (**Num. 7:1**) and the time when he **did** enter (**v. 89**)? _____

➤ **Application.**

1. How significant is it that the phrase “*as the Lord had commanded Moses*” is repeated so many times in this passage? What should we learn from this? _____

2. Moses was unable to enter into the tabernacle because of the glory of the Lord; in the book of Revelation, John speaks about those in the presence of the Lord at His throne in heaven (**Rev. 4:10**). What should we consider each time we come together to worship Him? _____

Lesson Twelve

THE PRIESTLY DUTIES

(Num. 3:1-3; Lev. 7:35, 36; 8:1-9:24; 21:1-22:33)

Under the Old Testament, the Levites were the special servants of God, dedicated to Him instead of the firstborn of the Israelites. As we have seen already, God set them aside for His service and commanded them to serve Aaron and his sons, to serve the people in their religious service, and to take care of all the elements and articles that were in and around the tabernacle [and the tabernacle itself]. They were, in a sense, assistants to the Israelites when they brought offerings to God [though the offerings were through the priests], assistants to Aaron and his sons [essentially, the family of the High Priest], and a people set apart of service like no other tribe.

In the duties noted in this lesson, we will see further commands given to this tribe [the Levites] but, in an even more restrictive sense, regulations regarding the service and life of Aaron's sons, the priests. These regulations clearly set them apart from the rest of the Israelites, though they were all God's people. In these regulations, let us see that God had higher expectations of those who would bring the people's offerings to Him, who guided His people in His word, and who were daily living in His service. Hopefully, we will consider all these regulations, but not just the "what"; let us also consider the "why" of these regulations.

The text clearly states that only the sons of Aaron will be consecrated to minister as priests, and not just anyone in the tribe of Levi. In Leviticus, when the commandments for the offerings are outlined (Lev. 1-7), it again names the sons of Aaron as the priests [note particularly 1:5, 8, 11; 2:2; 3:2, 8; 21:1]. I believe we should note this because [1] it distinguishes the priests as only those of the lineage of Aaron [often called the 'Aaronic priesthood'] and [2] restricts the application of the tighter regulations for the priests to only them, and does not apply to all Levites.

And when God set aside Aaron and his sons as priests, He did not leave them without a means of provision, stating that a portion of every peace offering [the breast and thigh, Lev. 7:30-34] was to be given to them. Further regulations for this consecrated portion are also given. And let us note that the manner in which the tabernacle and all its elements were dedicated (Exod. 40:9) will also be the manner in which Aaron and his sons are consecrated for service. Many years later, in drawing a parallel and a contrast between Christ and the Old Testament priests, the writer of Hebrews points back to this consecration and reminds us that there would be no purification without blood (Heb. 9:16-22). With that said, we should not be surprised to find that Moses instructs Aaron to make offerings, first for himself and then for the people. Remember that these sacrifices are made *after* the burnt offerings already made for Aaron and his sons in the dedicatory offerings (Lev. 8:14-29). It would be good for us to consider *why* this was done.

After Aaron had made the sacrifices for himself, his sons, and for the people, he and Moses went into the tabernacle and it was then "*the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces*" (Lev. 9:23, 24). As with the scene at Sinai when the glory of the Lord appeared, the people are rightly fearful of Him and cannot stand in His presence. Such is the glory of the Lord, so great and good that fallible, sinful man cannot bear His presence well, and a cause for great awe and fear at His appearing.

As noted in this lesson's opening remarks, as priests, the sons of Aaron were particularly special to God and he demanded them to be holy people because He was holy (Lev. 21:8). Remaining undefiled meant they could not touch a dead body [for movement or burial] unless it was a near relative. They

were also not to shave any portion of their heads nor were they to trim the edges of their beards. They were also forbidden from taking a wife who has been a prostitute or one who had been divorced for any reason. No man could approach the altar to offer bread if he had any physical defect or deformity, but he could eat of the bread that belonged to the priests.

Furthermore, the one who was designated to be High Priest could not uncover his head, could not touch *any* dead person, and was not to go out of the sanctuary; furthermore, he could only take a virgin as a wife [no prostitute, widow, or divorced woman]. More regulations are given regarding the priests, their conduct, and their service (**Lev. 22:1-16**), and an emphasis is made on ensuring the offerings remain undefiled and that no unclean [whether by touching an unclean thing or himself being defiled] approach to make an offering. It is also specified that no outsider should eat of the holy offering [reserved for the priests], with a couple of exceptions. Any accidental eating of the offering is to be restored with a 20% penalty added.

Finally, any sacrifice, whether from an Israelite or a stranger [one who is not a Jew], was to be without blemish and no defects. There was an exception for freewill offerings, but not for vow offerings (**Lev. 22:23**). Emphasis is again made on not profaning His name or offering imperfect sacrifices.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Num. 3:1-3; Lev. 7:35, 36; 8:1-9:24; and 21:1-22:33, answer the following questions:

1. Why was it necessary that blood be shed for this consecration? Cite Scripture to defend your answer. _____

2. Why was it necessary that Aaron first make an offering for himself before making one for the people? _____

3. What reason did God give for commanding a stricter regulation of the ones who would serve as His priests? _____

► **Application.**

1. In what ways does our "priesthood" parallel that described within these passages? How are we different? _____

2. How were *we* consecrated for service to God as His priests today? Who is our High Priest? Cite Scripture for your answers. _____

3. What does it mean to be truly holy as God is holy? _____

Lesson Thirteen

THE LAW OF SACRIFICES

(Lev. 10:1-20; Num. 3:4; Lev. 1:1-7:34; 16:1-17:16)

For the Jews who lived under the Old Law, sacrifices were — without a doubt — an important part of their religious service to God. According to the Law, the one who sinned and who then brought the prescribed offering to make sacrifice would find forgiveness. [Nine times is this stated between **Lev. 4:1-6:7**; we understand the forgiveness was made effective through Christ's sacrifice, **Heb. 9:15**.] Just as a child of God today must pray and seek forgiveness through His blood (cf. **1st John 1:9**), the Israelite, as one of God's children *then*, had to offer the sacrifices, which essentially appealed to the as-yet-to-be-shed blood of the Christ. Without that offering, they had no forgiveness! But there were other sacrifices than the sin offerings.

God specified the terms of all burnt offerings (**Lev. 1**), grain offerings (**Lev. 2**), peace offerings (**Lev. 3**), sin offerings (**Lev. 4**), trespass offerings (**Lev. 5:1-13**), and offerings with restitution (**Lev. 5:13-6:7**). Additionally, God specified for the priests their actions and their portions [if any] of the sacrifices that were brought to them (**Lev. 6:8-7:34**). While we often focus on the necessity of an unblemished offering, let us not forget that there were many other specifications which must be obeyed, too, in carrying out these sacrifices. Disobedience to any of these specifications would render the offering unfit and the sacrifice useless. As an example, consider what happened to Nadab and Abihu because they used the wrong *fire* for the altar.

For example: Some today will argue, "It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you're sincere." The basic premise is, you can worship God however you want, by whatever means and with whatever songs, prayers, or words you feel like because God is just so loving, He doesn't care how you do it as long as you do it. It should be clear from the example of Nadab and Abihu (**Lev. 10:1, 2**) that God does, in fact, care how you worship Him. He specified what they were to do, how they were to do it, and with what to do it, but they disobeyed, taking "*profane fire*" to offer up the sacrifices, which God had not commanded. This example clearly refutes the argument that proposes we may act where God has not commanded. It would be wise to learn from the error of these men lest we have to answer before Christ on Judgment Day for going beyond His specific commands for **our** worship.

After instructing the relatives of Nadab and Abihu to come retrieve the bodies [the priest was forbidden from approaching a dead body], Moses then instructed Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, to not take part in the usual grieving process wherein the mourners would uncover their heads and tear their clothing; he further reminded them to not go out of the tabernacle lest they die because they were still consecrated for service to God. [This was a command specifically given, which was covered in the last lesson; see **Lev. 21:10-12**.]

Moses had just reminded Aaron and his sons that they were to eat a portion of the grain offerings in a holy place because it was their due, and he had earlier commanded that they also eat a portion of the sin offering in a holy place [specifically, in the court of the tabernacle; **Lev. 6:25, 26**]. When he came and found the meat burned up, he rightly questioned why it had not been eaten and the blood not brought into the holy place. Aaron's answer was that the sin offerings had been made, but that he did not feel it appropriate to eat of that offering because of what had happened. This seems to be Aaron's judgment about the acceptability of their part in the ritual sacrifices, but the answer was sufficient for Moses, thus acceptable.

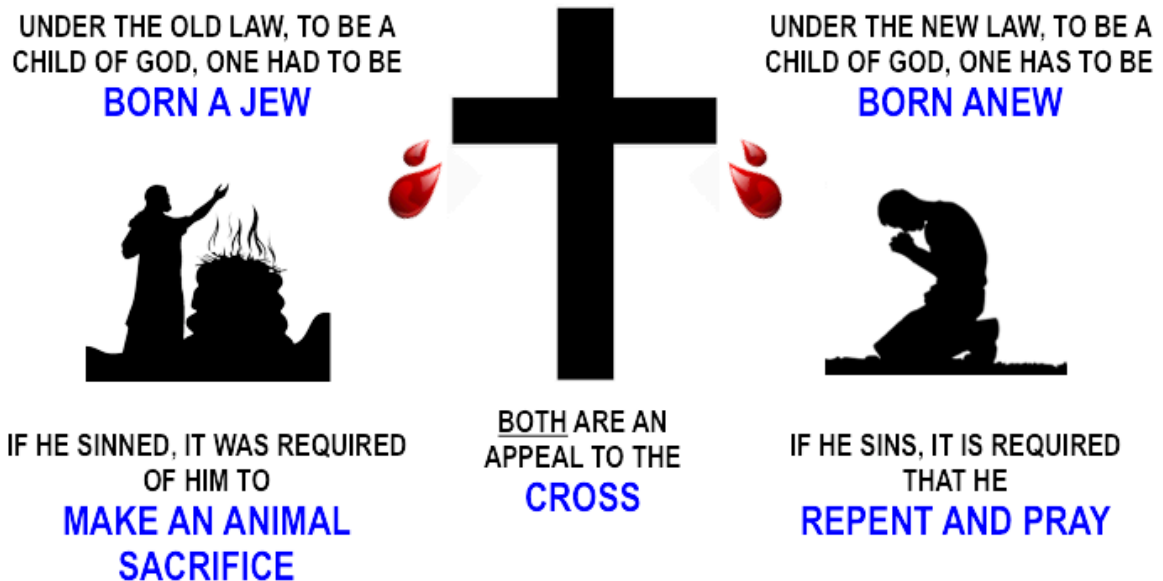
Regarding the various sacrifices that were to be made by the people, let us note a few of the regulations for each, and the purpose of each:

- **The Burnt Offering.** Sin existed since the beginning with the error of Adam and Eve in the garden, but it is here that God prescribes the means by which His people could be atoned. Note that in **verse 3**, the one bringing the sacrifice is to bring the offering “*of his own free will*” [NKJV]. The ASV, NASB, and ESV translate it more correctly, saying, “*that he may be accepted before the Lord.*” The whole point of the sacrifice was that he be once again right in the sight of the Lord. [More on that later.]
- **The Grain Offering.** The KJV translates this as “*a meat offering*” which might cause one to believe the offering itself was meat. The original Hebrew word is מִנְחָה (*minchah, min-khaw'*), which simply means 'offering.' The context goes on to describe that offering: “*fine flour*” with “*oil*” and “*frankincense*” on it. Moses went on to detail how it was to be “*baked in the oven, it shall be unleavened cakes of fine flour mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers anointed with oil.*” As with the burnt offering, the priests were to take a part of the offering for Aaron and his sons; in the case of the grain offering, only a small portion was burned on the altar.
- **The Peace Offering.** The peace offering, which could be a bull, lamb, or goat, was an offering freely given by one who desired to offer up something in thanks to God. [Some footnotes call this a 'thank-offering.'] The Hebrew word is related to the word often translated as 'peace', but this word has meaning of *repaying* or *reciprocation*. It was done willingly and it seems to be a way of offering thanks to God for His blessings; in a small manner, giving back something for what He has given them. This offering allowed female animals as sacrificial offerings, as did the sin offering for the common people (**Lev. 4:28**) and the trespass offering (**5:6**).
- **The Sin Offering.** Moses gives four different situations where a sin offering must be made — all for unintentional sins (**Lev. 4:2, 13, 22, 27**); there was a sin offering for the anointed priest, for the congregation of Israel as a whole, for a ruler, and for the common people. The only thing offered of the animal is the fat around the entrails and kidneys, while the flesh, hide, entrails, head, and legs were to be taken outside the camp to a “*clean place, where the ashes are poured out*” (**vv. 11, 12**) and burned. Certain portions of the meat of the sin offerings, trespass offerings, and peace offerings could be eaten, as specified later (**6:24-7:34**). The fat and blood were specifically prohibited from being eaten (**7:22-27**); the one who did would be cut off.
- **The Trespass Offering.** God also provided offerings for what we might call 'lesser offenses' such as touching unclean animals or people, or in hearing or speaking false or rash oaths; sacrifices were to be made as a means of atonement (**Lev. 5:1-13**). The primary offering was to be a female lamb or kid, with an alternate offering of two turtledoves or two pigeons or, barring that, one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour. It should also be noted that this is the only type of offering wherein the guilty one was commanded to confess the sin (**v. 5**).
- **Offerings With Restitution.** For some wrongs, God demanded not only an offering, but a restoration and a penalty (**Lev. 5:14-6:7**). A sin against any of the “*holy things of the Lord*” demanded an offering and restitution for the harm done, plus 20%. For a man who lied to his neighbor about something given in his charge, a pledge, or a robbery involving the neighbor's goods, he was to make restitution, plus 20%, in addition to a trespass offering.

When it comes to the animal sacrifices, we may get the mistaken idea that one who made an offering simply brought it to the priests and let them do all the work, but that was not the case. According to the commandment, the one bringing the offering was to kill the animal (**Lev. 1:5, 11**), skin it and cut into pieces (**vv. 6, 12**), and wash it (**vv. 9, 13**). [The priest would take on all tasks for the bird offerings, **vv. 14-17**.] Most likely, these things were required so the one bringing the offering would see the ugliness of sin. If you have had the experience of a 'hog-killing' on a farm, you know there is nothing pleasant about the task of killing, skinning, and cutting up an animal.

We must not overlook an important point revealed within the regulations for the offerings, specifically regarding the outcome of sin offerings. Contrary to what many believe, there **was** forgiveness of sin under the Old Law; that was the whole purpose of the sin offering and the trespass offering. It should be noted that God's promise to those who made the sin offering or the trespass offering was that "it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7). [And, it should be noted, the word translated as "forgiven" means exactly that; there is nothing different in the meaning than the word used in the New Testament for forgiveness.]

How do we reconcile this with the words of the writer of Hebrews, who said, "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4)? Keep in mind [1] God is not bound by time as we are and [2] their sacrifices were equivalent to the prayers of Christians when they ask for forgiveness; we are commanded to pray for forgiveness (Acts 8:22) and are told that, when we do so, we will be forgiven (1st John 1:9). Is it the prayer that brings forgiveness? Yes, but only by the fact we are appealing to God for the power in the blood of Jesus Christ's sacrifice on the cross to forgive. In the same way, when the Israelites sinned and brought the necessary sacrifice, they, too, were appealing to the sacrifice that paid the actual price and did the actual work of taking away their sins (cf. Heb. 9:15). The sacrifices brought forgiveness for them in the same way our prayers bring forgiveness today: through an appeal to the blood of Jesus Christ.



Finally, let us note that God specifies the continuous burning of the fire on the altar of daily sacrifices (Lev. 6:9), the clothing that was to be worn by the priest (v. 10), what part[s] of the grain, sin, trespass, and peace offerings was for the priests and when and where it was to be eaten, as well as the daily grain offerings.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Leviticus 1-7 and 10, and Numbers 3:4 answer the following questions:

1. What was the error of Nadab and Abihu [cite the specific violation of law, if any], and what other factors may have contributed to such a harsh punishment by God? _____

2. According to the words of Moses (**Lev. 10:3**), what was apparently lacking in their actions? _____

3. What was Aaron's answer to Moses as to why the meat from the sin offering had not been eaten? What did he mean and why did Moses accept his answer? _____

4. Briefly list the types of sacrifices, the content of each, and its purpose. _____

5. What was promised to the one who brought the sin offerings and trespass offerings? How was this ultimately made possible? _____

7. What part of the animals were actually offered as burnt offerings to the Lord, and what was done with the remaining portions? _____

► **Application.**

1. What lessons should we learn from the error of Nadab and Abihu? _____

2. If we consider the sacrifices as parallel to our prayers today as God's people, what should we offer up to God in our words? _____

3. What should we learn about God's mercy *and* His wisdom in commanding these sacrifices? _____

Lesson Fourteen

THE DEPARTURE FROM SINAI & FIRST ENCAMPMENT

(Numbers 10:33-11:34; 33:16)

IN EGYPT
EGYPT TO SINAI
AT SINAI
TO KADESH-BARNEA (11 DAYS?)

All in all, the Israelites have spent just about a year at Mount Sinai [about 10 days short of a year], and it is there that God delivered to them [through Moses] the laws that would govern His people for about 1500 years. While this time in their history was an important event, it is now time to move on because God had promised them “*a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites*” (**Exod. 3:8**) and they have not yet arrived. While it may have been comfortable, convenient, and easier to stay in one place, God had other plans for them.

As they set out for Canaan, we find that the first leg of their journey from Sinai gives us an indication of what was to come: dissatisfaction, complaints, and punishment. Though God has already powerfully demonstrated His ability to deliver them and provide for them, they begin complaining from the outset and actually have the nerve to talk about how 'good' they had it back in Egypt! Three days into the 11-day journey (cf. **Deut. 1:2**), they are showing their ungratefulness and selective memory to God and how unworthy they are of His abundant blessings.

Sadly, this is but one of numerous failings of the Israelites on this short journey, and merely signals the beginning of the end of their life in the desert. What started out as a powerful demonstration of God's might and a great hope of moving to a land of abundant blessings is quickly turning into a demonstration of man's fickle heart and his ungrateful attitude towards God that will be shown time and time again throughout their history.

Each time the ark set out, Moses would cry out to the Lord to scatter His enemies, and each time the ark rested, he pleaded for the Lord's protective presence (**Num. 10:35, 36**). If only the people were as trusting in the Lord as was Moses! Less than three days out from Sinai, (cf. **10:33**), the complaining begins once again (**11:1, 2**). Apparently, they had forgotten all that God had ever done for them just about as soon as they left Sinai. Should we be surprised with God's response to their complaining? And as he has already done and will do again, Moses stands between God and the people and averts their certain destruction.

We may have overlooked the fact that others departed Egypt with the Israelites (**Exod. 12:38**); those people, whoever they were, began to also complain to the point they influenced the Israelites to join them as they greatly desired some provision of meat. Up to this point, they had only manna (**Num. 11:6**) and, to them, was not enough. Part of the people's complaint was the specious argument that, back in Egypt, they had previously enjoyed “*the fish...the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.*” Somehow, I doubt that their memory of "the olden days" was an accurate description, when compared to the reality of their life in Egypt (cf. **Exod. 1:13, 14**); it was only wishful thinking on their part. When Moses heard the weeping of the people in their tents, for the perceived "lack" [of meat], he went to the Lord and pleaded his case, basically excusing himself from their guilt and asking God to just kill him, rather than have to put up with their incessant whining and complaining. He asks God for help in bearing with the people.

Apparently because of Moses' complaint about the people, God commands him to choose 70 men from among the elders of the people, who will be given the same Spirit as

Moses to alleviate the burden of Moses. When he gathers them all around the tabernacle, the Spirit comes upon them and they prophesied, but not any time other than that occasion. In addition to these 70 men, we find later that two men, Eldad and Medad, had not yet come to the tabernacle, but were found to be prophesying in the camp anyway (**Num. 11:26-29**). Joshua came to Moses with sincere interest, and asked Moses to forbid them [probably because they had not come to the tabernacle]. But Moses did not forbid them, instead asking that there be *more* men like them who would be blessed by the Lord to do so.

God heard the complaint of Moses [about the complaining of the people], and when He tells Moses to prepare the children of Israel for the eating of meat, Moses apparently has a short-term memory loss and questions where enough meat to feed all the people for even one day — much less a *month* — is going to be found. This is reminiscent of the time much later when the Israelites have returned from captivity and were not giving their tithes and offerings for the upkeep of the temple; it was then that God said, “*Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this, ’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it’*” (**Mal. 3:10**). It was almost as if God was asking, "Do you think you can out-give ME?" Moses apparently forgot what God had done for them, especially the fact He had provided food for them for over a year already; now, one month's worth was *nothing*!

And just as the Lord had promised, He caused a wind to bring quail from the sea and settle near the camp of the Israelites. The number was such that they covered the ground for about a day's journey outward from the camp and about two cubits deep [about three feet]. The mixed multitude and the Israelites had asked for meat and God gave it in abundance. They greedily gathered what had been given [the least any individual gathered was about 100-110 bushels worth], but God punished them with a plague for their complaints and in their greed, demonstrating once again His displeasure with their unjust thoughts and actions. [The name given to the place where they were buried means "graves of the greedy".]

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Num. 10:33-11:34, and 33:16, answer the following questions:

1. What was the reason for the complaints of the people this time? Was it legitimate? Why, or why not? _____

2. What was Moses' response to the people's complaints? What was his main plea to God? _____

3. What was Moses' question to God after He said He would give them meat? What was wrong with his question to God regarding provisions? _____

► **Application.**

1. What lesson[s] may we learn about the complaints of the people regarding the food God had given them? How might we take also for granted the blessings God has given us? _____

Lesson Fifteen

AARON AND MIRIAM COMPLAIN

(Numbers 10:35; 33:17; 12:1-15)

When God heard the cry of the Israelites and decided to bring them out, He specifically chose Moses to be the one who would lead them out by His power (**Exod. 3:10**) and told Moses He would be with him and give him the words to speak (**4:12**), and adding Aaron as one who would be the spokesman to the people and to Pharaoh when Moses continued to complain he was not able (**vv. 14-16**). Later, at Sinai — where they heard the voice of the Lord and were too terrified to hear Him again — the people particularly asked that Moses alone speak with them when God had something to say (**20:19**). From that time on, Moses was the one who would approach the Lord and receive His words (**24:2**), which were then delivered to the people. Clearly, Moses enjoyed a special relationship and position with God (**33:11**) that no one else had.

Aaron, too, had been chosen by God for a particular task (cf. **Exod. 4:14-16**) and Miriam was called a prophetess (**15:20**). One might think they would be content with such roles but this was, apparently, not good enough; they wanted a more prominent role. God did not approve.

When Aaron and Miriam sought something against Moses [as potential motive for raising their complaint], it is sad to read that they “*spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman.*” Some Jewish rabbis comment on this text that it was a racially motivated complaint [naturally, unjust], but not the *real* reason for them speaking against Moses. The Ethiopians were known for their dark skin and the argument is that Miriam and Aaron complain about Moses having married someone who was not only not a Jew, but whose skin was dark. Racism has long been a problem and it is clear from this example that some will use it as a pretense for other issues.

And when Miriam asked Aaron, “*Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?*” she neglected to ask the *right* question: What has God chosen for us to do? She presumed that because God had spoken through them, too [she was a prophetess and Aaron was God's spokesman to the people], that they could assume the same position and prominence of Moses. Miriam and Aaron might have been speaking to each other privately so no one else could hear, but the Lord heard. Let us not forget that God always hears what we say, though it may be said in private, for this is the God who “*knows the secrets of the heart*” (**Psa. 44:21**). It is noteworthy to see that in all this, Moses does not answer their presumption; he allows God to do the talking. The inclusion of the statement about Moses here shows that it was due to his humility, or meekness that he did not speak.

God answered the question of Miriam, though I am sure she really didn't want to hear His answer; I'm sure she didn't even want Him to know what she had said! But God's answer is one that applies to any question we have about what He wants or approves: If He wants us to do something, He will say it plainly. For Miriam and Aaron, in particular, He also made it clear that while they all were ministers of His word in some way or another, it was to Moses alone that He spoke “*face to face.*” The punishment for the presumption of Miriam was that she “*became leprous, as white as snow.*” Considering the results of others who would later rebel against God's prophet (Ex., Korah, **Num. 16**), I am sure Miriam was thankful.

The usual response to a leper is that they be put out of the camp for seven days and examined by a priest at the end of the seven days to see if the leprosy has been healed. Miriam suffers the same fate, being shut out of the camp for seven days. The children of Israel waited for her to be healed and moved only after she had returned.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Num. 11:35, 33:17, and 12:1-15 answer the following questions:

1. What was the ostensible complaint Miriam and Aaron had against Moses? What was their real intent? _____

2. What was God's answer to Miriam and Aaron about Moses? _____

3. What was the punishment inflicted on Miriam and why was nothing done to Aaron? _____

► **Application.**

1. What should we learn from this about our 'right' to question God's commands and God's ways? _____

2. When we speak against men in positions appointed by God, who are we actually speaking against? _____

Lesson Sixteen

TO KADESH-BARNEA

(Num. 12:16; 13:1-14:45; 33:18-36; Deut. 1:19-46)

We now come to the turning point in the Israelites' wilderness wandering: the rebellion at Kadesh-Barnea. It is here that the spies are sent into the land [a land God had already promised was theirs, **Exod. 3:17; 6:4; Lev. 14:34; 25:38**] and the report is brought back that would literally change the course of their lives. Though God had said the land was theirs, and that He would be with them, 10 of the 12 spies brought back a bad report and doubted their ability to defeat the people whom they described as “*stronger than we*” and “*men of great stature*” in whose eyes the Israelites were like grasshoppers.

In spite of the majority opinion, though, Joshua and Caleb [along with Moses] stood firm in their belief that God would deliver the land into their hands as He had said, and that He would be with them and give them no reason to doubt or fear the Canaanites. We learn from this sad scene that doubting God's word is not wise, and that trusting Him brings great blessings. That is still true today.

As it is written here, it appears that the Lord was the one who sent the spies into the land without any input from the people, but the record of **Deut. 1:22** indicates it was initiated by the people and then brought before the Lord, who approved it and then sent them out. The Deuteronomy record shows this desire to send out spies was of the people and we may imply that in that desire was a measure of doubt that they could take the land as God had already promised. As you read through this list of names, most of them are obscure names never mentioned before this day — and mostly names we will never hear again because the majority will come back doubting the ability to take the land God had promised.

But the men are chosen and Moses sent them out with specific instructions to evaluate the condition of the land and its people. His instructions were not because *he* doubted, but so that they could see it was as God had described it. If they could see that the land truly flowed with milk and honey as God described it, they might then see that He would deliver it into their hand, as He had said. When they returned, they brought back a cluster of grapes on a pole, carried between two men, indicating the land's abundance, but ten of the twelve spies also noted that the inhabitants were too big and too powerful for them to overcome. Their conclusion was, “*We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we.*” But Caleb [and Joshua] spoke for the minority when he said, “*Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it.*” Why the difference in conclusions when they all saw the same things? The difference was not in *what* they saw but in the level of trust they had in God's promises.

The result of the bad report of the ten spies was that the people cried out, complained to Moses and Aaron, and were ready to select new leaders to take them back to Egypt. And though the people were set in their minds to go back to Egypt, Joshua and Caleb — the only two spies who trusted in God's promise in spite of the strength of the people of Canaan — continued to exhort the people to push into the land of promise, to trust the Lord's word and in His power to deliver, and to not rebel, but the people were then ready to stone them to death. It was at this the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle, and His feelings about the situation would soon be known.

Normally, when God's glory appeared in the tabernacle of meeting, it was a sign of some important message that was about to be delivered; this is no different, but the message is not going to be received well. Upon hearing their rebellious and unbelieving cries, God is ready to wipe them out and fulfill the promise through the descendants of Moses! God rightly points to His great works demonstrated among them as evidence enough to believe His promise of bringing them into the land; apparently, it was not enough for some and they now doubted because of the word of *men*. He was ready to destroy

them but, once again, Moses now steps up to intercede for the people, though he has experienced their rebellious attitudes long enough to know they will probably not change. Moses appeals to the character and reputation of the Lord as reason to not destroy the Israelites, citing the likelihood that the surrounding nations will mock the idea of a God who brings His people out into the desert only to destroy them, or claim that He was unable to deliver on His promise to bring them into the land of Canaan.

God **did** listen to Moses and did not wipe the people out immediately, but He also promised that those who complained would not enter into the land. At first, this sounds like God is not going to keep His promise, but He later clarifies this by telling us that those 20 years old and above would die in the wilderness, while the children they believed would be in danger **would** enter the land. As God delivers the message to Moses and Aaron to give to the people, He enumerates their errors as justification for the punishment that would come.

As a result of their faithlessness, not only would they have to wander in the wilderness for 40 years, so would their children who would eventually enter into the land. We might also add that the faithful ones [Joshua, Caleb, Moses and Aaron and their families] had to wander with them for those long years. Often, the sinful actions of individuals affect not just themselves, but also the innocent and the faithful. While the people were generally spared immediate punishment, the same could not be said of the ten spies who had brought back a bad report. They died by the plague of the Lord after Moses delivered God's condemnation. The only exceptions from among the spies were the ones who trusted God's promise: Joshua and Caleb. It should be noted that God chose 40 years as the length for their wandering, but He explains that it is one year for every day they spent spying out the land (cf. **Num. 13:25**). Since we have covered over 1½ years so far, that leaves about 38½ years to go.

But Israel's stubbornness continues! After hearing of their condemnation, it's as if the people suddenly realized how foolish and rebellious they had been and decided to declare their willingness to obey **now** (**Num. 14:40**). Though Moses said their efforts would not be successful and that the Lord would not be with them, they went anyway, and they were driven back by the Amalekites. It was too little, too late. Not only did the Israelites prove themselves rebellious and stubborn, but also **presumptuous**, acting as if God would bless them when He had plainly told them He would not. The time to obey was when God said to go, and not only after hearing you will be punished.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Num. 13 and 14, 33:18-36, and Deut. 1:19-46 answer the following questions:

1. What part of the 10 spies' report was true, and which was not? _____

2. What was God wanting to do after their latest complaints and rebellion? What did Moses do, and how did this affect what God eventually handed down as punishment? _____

► **Application.**

1. What lessons must we learn about rebellion against God's will, and about acting presumptuously [without God's approval]? _____

Lesson Seventeen

KORAH'S REBELLION & AARON'S ROD

(Numbers 16, 17)

Before the disastrous foray into Canaan that led to their condemnation and which began their forty years of wilderness wandering, two people — Aaron and Miriam — rose up against Moses and declared that they were just as worthy as Moses to speak God's word [**Lesson Fifteen**]. Miriam, if we recall, was struck with leprosy because of that. Either some did not know of this incident or they had a very short memory, for it is here that we find others rose up against Moses and Aaron, attempting to denigrate their position and accusing them of exalting themselves “*above the assembly of the LORD.*” They suffered a worse fate than leprosy this time.

And you would think that witnessing the earth opening up and swallowing the rebellious ones would be something one wouldn't quickly forget, but *the very next day* some were complaining that Moses and Aaron had killed the people of the Lord! How quickly they forgot the great works of God and how poorly they learned from the mistakes and errors of others! Let us take the time to learn what they did not, sparing ourselves a bitter disappointment in the final Judgment. We do not *have* to make the same mistakes!

No time or date is mentioned to pinpoint when this incident happened, but the wording seems to point to some time near to the return of the spies from Canaan. Some, unsatisfied with the leadership of Moses and Aaron (cf. **Num. 14:4**), determined that others were just as worthy as Moses and Aaron to speak to God and to serve Him as did the Levites and Aaron's sons. These four men are named, but others obviously took a part in the rebellion, and these were representatives of the congregation of the people of Israel! Korah must have been particularly vocal in this, for his name is prominently mentioned. All these men and their households would suffer God's wrath, in the end.

Let us not overlook the fact that, though it is said that these men rose up against Moses and Aaron, the reality was that they rejecting the Lord (cf. **16:30**). Rebellion has never been a light matter with the Lord (cf. **1st Sam. 15:23**) and the assembly of the children of Israel would witness just how seriously God would respond. And to make certain all would know what the Lord thought about the complaint of Korah and company, Moses was willing to put their charge to a very public test. Just as Elijah would later test the false gods against the true God, so would Moses be willing to put himself against Korah and the rest of the attempted usurpers. Truth fears no testing! The very public test served two purposes: [1] It verified that Moses was doing the will of God and was not acting of his own desires or will and [2] revealed Korah and company as those who had rejected God. Both were necessary to not only silence any further questions about Moses' position of leadership, but to expose the wrongdoers for what they were. What Korah and company had done was no little matter and in punishing them as He did, God demonstrated that He was clearly not pleased.

Let us note, too, that among those who rebelled against Moses were some who were bold to challenge authority when amongst great numbers, but less bold when called upon to defend their actions one-on-one. Dathan and Abiram rebelled with Korah, but would not come when Moses called for them, inciting his anger against them and causing Moses to plead with God to specifically not accept their offerings.

Once again, God wants to utterly consume the whole assembly of the Israelites, this time because of the rebellion of a few. But, once again, because of Moses' intervention, God spared the great majority of the people and redirected His anger at the rebels. And before God exacted His punishment on the disobedient rebels, He had Moses warn the people to get away from the tents of the rebels lest they be consumed with them. As much as He had wanted to destroy them all earlier, He now gives the rest of the people an opportunity to save themselves by literally staying away from the ones who presumed to lead them. Separation was a wise choice, for God would show the people what Moses called “*a new thing*,” likely pointing to the fact such a punishment had never before happened: the earth opening up and swallowing the rebels. The punishment was done in such a way that the people would clearly know it was of God and not coincidence or bad luck. The Israelites had already witnessed various demonstrations of God's power and this was but another that should have caused them to put away all doubts and humbly submit. Initially, the people were afraid they, too, would be swallowed up.

God not only punished Korah and company because of their presumption, but further destroyed 250 men who presumptuously offered incense to the Lord. Just because they were not the leaders did not mean they would escape punishment for their rebellion. and after the 250 perished in the fire God sent, He commanded Moses to order Eleazar to pick up their bronze censers and fashion them into a covering for the altar as a memorial, reminding them that no outsider should approach God to offer incense, lest they suffer the same fate as Korah and his companions. It must have been effective, for we read of few others who would dare do this.

After this frightening demonstration of God's power, one might think the Israelites had forever learned their lesson to not doubt God's ways, but *the very next day*, the people came to Moses and Aaron, complaining that they had killed the Lord's people. Once again, God is angered by their presumption and arrogance and is ready to annihilate them. Only by Moses' and Aaron's intervention is this not carried out, but 14,700 perished that day because of God's plague on them.

Almost as hard to believe is the fact the incident with Korah did not stop the complaining, but that a rod that budded **did!** When the people saw the rod of Aaron [among rods from the heads of each tribe] had budded, they cried out in fear that they would perish. Apparently, the earth opening up and swallowing the rebels had little to no effect, while a rod budding stops the complaining. Who would have believed it?

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Num. 16 and 17, answer the following questions:

1. What was significant about the 250 men who sided with Korah in the rebellion? What did this imply about possible support from among the people? _____

2. What was the accusation leveled against Moses and Aaron, and what was the claim of the rebels as to their standing before God? _____

3. In earlier studies, we noted that the entire assembly of the children of Israel was to be holy (cf. Lev. 11:44, 45) and then specified that the priests also be holy (Lev. 21:8); what was the distinction and why was Korah's statement presumptive, in light of the response of Moses (Num. 16:5)? _____

4. What was Korah and the other Levites presuming to do, according to Moses (16:10)? _____

5. Against whom were these men actually rebelling, according to Moses (16:11)? _____

6. If this was immediately following the condemnation to wander for forty years, what was so galling about the complaint of Dathan and Abiram made against Moses (16:12-14)? _____

7. What was the character of these men and what was the charge laid against them, as stated by Moses (16:26)? _____

8. What was to be done with the censers used by the rebellious 250? _____

9. What was the charge made against Moses and Aaron after the destruction of the rebels (16:41)? Was it a fair charge? Why, or why not? _____

10. What were the punishments handed down by God for the rebels and the complainers? _____

11. What was the two-fold purpose of the test of the rods to see whose would bud? _____

12. What was the reaction of the people to the punishment of the rebels and the budding of Aaron's rod? How would these affect their view of God and of Moses and Aaron? _____

► **Application.**

1. In what ways do men presume to act within the system of faith God has established under the New Covenant? What will be the result of such presumptive acts? _____

2. What should the different positions of "holiness" tell us about the right of God to specify and/or limit any individual disciple's role within the church? _____

3. What should we learn about rebellion, presumption, and complaining, from what we see of God's response to these things in today's text? _____

4. How is the action of Aaron a physical likeness of what Jesus has done for us, spiritually?

Lesson Eighteen

THE ERROR OF MOSES & AARON

(Numbers 20:1-21)

Have you ever said something or did something and, as soon as it was begun, you wished you could take it all back? Many times, we open our mouths and speak and afterwards regret the words we said, but we can never take them back. As the philosopher Menander once said, "It is as easy to recall a stone thrown violently from the hand as a word which has left your tongue." We may certainly apologize for what we have said or done, but it can never be truly taken back. This is one such occasion, I would imagine, where Moses and Aaron wished they could have taken back their foolish words, spoken in the heat of frustration with the Israelites and the insistent complaining. They were words which cost them entrance into the Promised Land!

Later, God would remind Moses that he had "*rebelled against My command to hallow Me at the waters before their eyes*" (**Num. 27:14**), was told plainly by God, "*Even you shall not go in there*" (**Deut. 1:37**), and when Moses pleaded for mercy, God again said, "*Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan*" (**Deut. 3:23-27**); and right before he went upon the mountain to look over the land, he was again told he would not enter "*because you trespassed against Me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah Kadesh, in the Wilderness of Zin, because you did not hallow Me in the midst of the children of Israel*" (**Deut. 32:50, 51**). This sad story reminds us we cannot allow others to affect us to the point we speak or act in ways that do not bring glory to God; sometimes, it will cost us dearly.

When God told Moses at Kadesh-Barnea that, because of the stubborn unbelief of the people, all the ones over 20 years old would not enter into the land, it is likely we were not thinking of Moses or Aaron as ones included in that statement, yet we will see that this was indeed the case, but for their own matter of rebellion. Miriam, too, would not enter into the Promised Land, and though we do not know the age of Miriam, we know she was older than Moses (cf. **Exod. 2:4, 7**). Her death is at least mentioned, giving her some measure of respect for her part in the exodus from Egypt.

It seems there is a large jump from the first year of the wilderness wanderings to the last year or so. When it mentions here that these events took place "*in the first month,*" we might think that it is in the first month after they came to Kadesh, but later events [specifically, the death of Aaron as mentioned in **Num. 20:22-29**, and **Num. 33:38**, where it says he died in the fifth month of the 40th year] seem to point to a time late in the wandering. This would likely mean the first month of the 40th year.

And as they began, so they end their wilderness wanderings: with complaints about being brought out in the desert to die for lack of water (**vv. 2, 3**). Once again, the Israelites lost their faith and trust in God and began to complain about their daily needs, though He had provided for them for almost 40 years by now. While God demonstrated patience and longsuffering in this example, Moses and Aaron demonstrated a *lack* of both, and were angry at the complaining of the people. In their anger, they disobeyed God's command and then took the honor upon themselves, saying, "*Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?*" (**v. 10**) The important word in the response of Moses was "we" — as if he and Aaron were personally responsible for its provision! God's immediate response was to tell Moses and Aaron of their error and its consequences. Their failure to hallow God would be the error that would keep them out of the Promised Land.

Before the Israelites leave Kadesh, a party is sent to the King of Edom, requesting passage through his land as they traveled to Canaan. The King refused, even after further pleas and promises to not harm

any of the land or even to drink any of the water. This refusal would cost the descendants of Edom several generations later when their land becomes a part of David's kingdom (cf. **2nd Sam. 8:14**).

➡ **Interpretation.** From the text of Num. 20:1-21, answer the following questions:

1. What was the complaint of the Israelites, and was it valid, considering the apparent need? Was it valid, considering God's history of provision? _____

2. What was God's response and how did this differ from earlier responses? _____

3. What was the response of Moses and Aaron, and how did this differ from earlier situations? _____

4. What was the punishment for Moses and Aaron, and for what sin were they punished? _____

5. What was the initial plea of the Israelites to Edom and what promises were made? _____

6. What was the response of the Edomite king to their pleas, and what might have motivated him to react as he did? _____

➡ **Application.**

1. What may we learn about the patience and longsuffering of God as demonstrated here and in other places? _____

2. Is there any parallel of the sin of Moses and Aaron, and the possibility of just one sin keeping us from heaven? Defend your answer from Scripture. _____

Lesson Nineteen

DEPARTURE, COMPLAINING & CONQUEST

(Numbers 20:22-21:35; 33:37-47; Deut. 10:6-7; 2:1-3:12)

The record of the wilderness wanderings leaves large gaps in the time they actually spent wandering [after the spies were sent into Canaan], but it appears they spent a great deal of time around Kadesh-Barnea. As their time in the desert nears an end, they finally move from Kadesh-Barnea and towards Canaan. It is here that Aaron's life comes to an end [failing to see the land, as God had promised, **Num. 20:12**], but it is not the end of their complaining. Once again, God's people find reason to complain and, once again, they suffer the consequences.

But once they move towards Canaan, they are met with opposition, as they might have expected, and their enemies are delivered into their hands, as they might have expected. The king of the Amorites and the king of Bashan were both defeated by the Israelites as they moved towards the Promised Land, setting up the confrontation with Balak of Moab.

As was stated earlier at Kadesh (**Num. 20:12**), Aaron would not bring the people into the Promised Land. Though he knew this, he did *not* know when he would die, and that day has finally come. Since Moses was 120 when he died (**Deut. 31:2**) and Aaron was older (**Exod. 6:16-20**), the age given at his death of 123 is logical (**Num. 33:39**). And because Aaron was about to die, the position of High Priest would be passed on to one of his sons (**Num. 20:25ff**) and, by default, that would be Eleazar. Nadab was actually the firstborn (**Num. 3:2**), but he had been struck down by God for disobedience (**Lev. 10:1, 2**). And as noted here (**Num. 20:29**), the Israelites mourned 30 days for Aaron upon his death. According to some commentators, seven days was the usual length of mourning, but 30 days was common for government officials and men of great wealth or influence. It is noteworthy that the length of mourning and Moses were the same, indicating an honor to Aaron we might not normally think him worthy.

We don't normally speak of the Israelites facing a defeat, but the Canaanite king Arad attacked the Israelites and took some prisoners. The Israelites then prayed to God for deliverance and a promise that they would utterly destroy their cities, if so. God delivered (**Num. 21:1-3**)! Sadly, the next thing recorded is yet another instance of the Israelites complaining (**vv. 4-9**), and their deliverance from God's wrath by their repentance and by the intervention of Moses — again. On this occasion, their complaints brought “*fiery serpents*” among them, biting them and causing the death of many. When Moses intervened and prayed on their behalf, God commanded him to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole and lift it up in the midst of the people, and whoever was bitten and looked on the serpent would be healed.

After their passage through Edom was refused (**Num. 20:14-21**), the Israelites circumvent the land and work their way northward up into Moab, where they will camp until their entry into the land of Canaan — the Promised Land. It is here that the border of Moab and Ammon is revealed to be the River Arnon and we follow the movements of the Israelites through Moab as they stop at Pisgah. And as they had done with Edom, the Israelites requested passage through the land, this time the Amorite king, Sihon. Like Edom, Sihon refused and came out against Israel with his army but, unlike with Edom, the Israelites did not concede. Israel “*defeated him with the edge of the sword and took possession of*

his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok.” After this victory, they turned northward again and, when the king Og of Bashan came out against them with his army, they again defeated the opposing army and took possession of his land. King Og distinguished himself by his size, a remnant of the giants who had once dwelt in the land. His iron bedstead was nine cubits long by four cubits wide [Approximately 13 feet long and 6 feet wide.]

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Num. 20:22-21:35, answer the following questions:

1. Where did Aaron die and why was he not allowed passage into Canaan? Cite Scripture for your answer. _____

2. Who took Aaron's place as High Priest and what factor[s] led to his selection? _____

3. What did the Israelites complain about this time, and what was God's response? _____

4. What did God command as a means of healing those bitten by the fiery serpents? _____

► **Application.**

1. What does the death of Aaron and his failure to enter into the Promised Land teach us about the necessity of giving God the glory in all things we do [if it teaches us anything]? _____

2. Note the story of the fiery serpents and all its elements. How do these things parallel our salvation through Jesus Christ today? [Be as specific as possible on each part of the story without stretching the point and parallel.] _____

3. How and when — and why — did Jesus refer to this story of the bronze serpent? _____

Lesson Twenty

BALAK & BALAAM

(Numbers 22-24)

The Old Testament record has numerous accounts of the enemies of God and His people attempting to resist them or defeat them and failing, none more well-known than that of Balak as he tried to get Balaam to curse them. In this story, though, Balak almost takes a backseat to Balaam and his indecisiveness and the events that follow as Balaam goes back and forth between the answer of God and the request of Balak. Surely, there is a lesson for us about accepting the command of God and not second-guessing or making appeals, hoping to change God's mind. Balaam may have ultimately done what God commanded, but he was not pleasing to the Lord. And just because he ended up doing God's will doesn't mean he always did the right thing. Sometimes, men choose to do the right thing out of compulsion or fear of retribution.

As we read through this somewhat familiar story, let us note the stubbornness and failures of Balaam, but let us also note the stubbornness of Balak and the end result for each. [You will have to look beyond this text to learn of Balaam's fate.] Note also the methods of Balak to persuade Balaam to fulfill his request and Balaam's apparent willingness to go, though God had said "no."

As we have followed the Israelites from Rameses in Egypt to now the plains of Moab across from Jericho, they have wandered now for almost 40 years and are nearing the completion of their journey. It may have been here that the last of those who were over 20 years old at Kadesh-Barnea would die, for none would be able to enter the Promised Land, and this is their last encampment outside Canaan. And though they didn't have our modern forms of communication, the news of the Israelite victories got to the lands in and around Canaan before the Israelites did! Balak, king of Moab, recognized that the Israelites were a threat. He saw that they would consume everything around them (**Num. 22:4**), that they were large in number (**v. 5**), and that they were too mighty for him and his army (**v. 6**). What could he do?

Balak could only think of one thing that might work: divination and cursing. Balaam was asked by Balak and his men to curse the Israelites, but he at least had the right answer when he said he would say and do only what the Lord said. The problem was, Balaam wasn't truly convicted of that and was influenced by material gain — even after he had heard God's answer. After Balaam tells the men of Balak he would await God's word, God comes to him [probably in either a dream or vision] and asks, "*Who are these men with you?*" It wasn't that God didn't know, but was the beginning of questioning that should have awakened Balaam to the obvious wrong he was about to be asked to do. God knows the hearts of men (cf. **Psa. 44:21**), so it wasn't that He did not know what they were plotting. The questioning was for the sake of Balaam, to give him an opportunity to answer their request by his own wisdom. He obviously was lacking in the wisdom needed to come to that conclusion, however.

God's initial answer to Balaam was, "*You shall not go with them; you shall not curse the people, for they are blessed.*" When Balaam answered the princes of Balak, though, he only said, "*...the LORD has refused to give me permission to go with you,*" not telling them **why** He refused him permission. Then, when the princes reported to Balak, they said, "*Balaam refuses to come with us,*" leaving out the part about **God** refusing him permission and, of course, nothing about the fact the Israelites were blessed. Some important parts of the message got lost along the way!

TIMELINE	IN EGYPT	EGYPT TO SINAI	AT SINAI	TO KADESH-BARNEA	DEP. & RET. TO KADESH-BARNEA	KADESH-BARNEA TO MOAB	AT MOAB
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(5 MONTHS)

But upon hearing that Balaam refused to come and curse the people, Balak then sent “*princes, more numerous and more honorable than they*” who passed on Balak's message: “*I will certainly honor you greatly, and I will do whatever you say to me*” — an apparent effort based on the old adage “every man has a price”; that is, every man will surrender his principles if the right “price” is offered. Too often, as we see here, that adage is true! In this case, after hearing the offer of Balak from the more honorable princes, Balaam told them to stay the night and he would hear more of what the Lord would say. The error here is assuming God is going to change his mind. Later (**23:19**), Balaam would plainly state what he apparently forgot about at this moment: “*God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*” God had **already** made it clear there would be no cursing of the Israelites, but Balaam felt compelled [\$\$\$] to try again and see if God, perhaps, had a change of heart. Jude reveals [if we didn't already conclude this] that Balaam's motive was greed (**Jude 1:11**).

When Balaam heard from God again, God said, specifically, “*If the men come to call you, rise and go with them.*” God was specific in the prerequisites for Balaam going, but His original answer **should** have been sufficient. From the record, we see that Balaam did not wait for them to come to him to call him again, but he took it upon himself to go, disobeying the Lord's specific command. Again, from the words of Jude, we can conclude that his greed had a lot to do with that.

As Balaam went, the Lord prevented him from seeing the angel at first, and only after three failed attempts to pass by him did the Lord allow him to see what the donkey saw. The great prophet Balaam is outwitted by a donkey? Could God be making a point about Balaam? Who was really the stubborn one in this story? Throughout the Bible, when an important point is to be made, it will often be repeated three times for effect, since the written languages did not have bold lettering or underlining for emphasis. [For example, Peter and the vision in Joppa, **Acts 10:9-16**.] What important message is God trying to get through to Balaam?

When Balaam finally gets to Balak, three times Balak takes Balaam up on high places to offer sacrifices and hear curses placed on Israel, with seven altars built and seven bulls and rams offered each time. The offerings were apparently given in hopes it would influence the outcome, but it obviously did not. Each time, Balaam spoke only what God gave to him to speak and each time it was a blessing, rather than a curse. Needless to say, Balak was not pleased. Again, we hear some words from God, through Balaam, that should be the attitude of preachers of God's word everywhere: “*How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? And how shall I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?*” It is worthwhile to note, too, that one of the things spoken in Balaam's prophecy was a statement about the righteousness of Israel, and the statement/request that he “*die the death of the righteous*” and that Balaam's end would be like that of the righteous man.

In answering Balak's complaint that Balaam had blessed, instead of cursed, the Israelites — following God's word — God spoke through Balaam again and made the clear distinction that God is not like man, and cannot be influenced to change for evil's sake, like men. So, in spite of Balak's desire that Israel be cursed and fail, Balaam speaks forth the true future of the invading people, and it does not bode well for those in Canaan and the surrounding lands, including Moab. Israel would not be a nation of peace until they had destroyed, defeated, or subjugated the other nations. In battle, they would be victorious, though seemingly outnumbered, and they would consume the surrounding nations and break them by the power of God.

Apparently, the first two times Balaam went upon the mountain to speak God's word, he intended to use sorcery to deliver some message. This time, however, Balaam saw the blessing Israel pleased the Lord and he “*did not go as at other times, to seek to use sorcery*” (**24:1**); this time, he was relying entirely on God's word revealed to him, and the Spirit of God came upon him (**v. 2**).

When Balaam finished his work, Balak complained about Balaam's work of blessing, instead of cursing, the Israelites, and argues that God has kept Balaam from receiving the honor that Balak promised him because he did not fulfill Balak's request. Balak was grossly mistaken. The reality is, Balaam was withheld honor by **Balak** — not by God.

Finally, though Balak has been disappointed these three times and wants to hear no more, Balaam takes up the oracle the fourth time and gives him some "free advice" about their future (**24:15-24**). Contained within this prophecy is the foretelling of the certain fall of Moab, Edom, and the Amalekites by one who would arise from Israel [most likely King David].

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Num. 22-24, answer the following questions:

1. What was the stated motivation for Balak sending messengers to Balaam to curse the Israelites? _____

2. What was Balak's request of Balaam, and why? _____

3. What was Balaam's initial answer to Balak's men, and what was the 'final' answer given by God? _____

4. What did Balak do further to persuade Balaam to do his bidding? Were his efforts successful in any measure? _____

5. When Balaam heard from God the second time, what was God's specific command, and did Balaam obey or disobey? _____

6. How did God react to Balaam going with the princes of Balak? _____

7. Briefly describe the events as Balaam tried to go with the princes of Balak and was hindered. _____

9. What was the donkey's questions to Balaam? What was Balaam's response to each question? _____

10. What were the things Balaam said [within the prophecies] about the possibility of Israel being cursed?

12. How did Balaam's attitude change throughout the course of these attempts to curse Israel? _____

14. What were the prophetic expectations for the nations of Canaan and the surrounding areas? _____

➡ **Application.**

1. What does Balaam's persistence in going back to see what else the Lord would say teach us about simply accepting the will of God? _____

2. What does Balaam's words about speaking only what the Lord gives to him set an example for us about what we should be teaching even today? _____

3. As with the example of Balaam, how can the evidences of God's power change attitudes of even those who are not initially willing to believe? _____

4. How easy can even righteous men today be motivated by greed to do the bidding of worldly men? Give some 'real world' examples of how this might be demonstrated. _____

Lesson Twenty-One

IDOLATRY IN MOAB; THE SECOND CENSUS

(Numbers 25-26; 33:48, 49)

After almost 40 years wandering in the wilderness because of their unbelief, the Israelites have come once again to the edge of the Promised Land and, once again, they allow the people of the land to distract them from their goal. At Kadesh-Barnea, they looked at the people of the land and declared they were not able to conquer them; here, they were persuaded by the people to join with them in adultery and idolatry. For this, some who had been shown mercy by the Lord would now see His wrath for their sins.

As we read through this particular story of the Israelites' unfaithfulness, let us think about how men today can also come so close to receiving the blessings of God, only to allow the things and people of this world to distract us and keep us from obtaining the promised blessings in Christ. The same things that kept the Israelites out of the Promised Land are the same things that will keep us from salvation today: rebellion (**Heb. 3:16**), sin (**Heb. 3:17**), disobedience (**Heb. 3:18**), and unbelief (**Heb. 3:19**).

If the residents of Moab had drawn up an army and came against Israel, the Israelites would have no doubt stood firm against them and defeated them handily without hesitation or any desire to fraternize with them; but when the Israelites looked on the women of Moab with a fleshly mindset, they were drawn into sin with them [adultery] and to engage in further sin (**25:1**). Don't forget that these are the people whose leader wanted them cursed! It should have come as no surprise that God's anger would be aroused against the Israelites for these acts of unfaithfulness; it was specifically forbidden to have anything to do with the people of the land or their false gods (**Exod. 34:13-15**) and having other gods before the true God was the first of the Ten Commandments (**Exod. 20:3**). In this case, God commanded that the leaders of Israel take the offenders out and hang them in the sun (**Num. 25:4**) that His anger be turned away from the congregation, as a whole. He also brought a plague on the people (**Num. 25:8, 9**), and only by the righteous action of Phinehas was God's anger prevented from reaching more.

After God had dealt with His people first [there's a lesson in that], He turned to the ones who had caused them to sin: the Midianites (**25:16-18**). His command was to "*Harass the Midianites, and attack them*" because they had "*harassed [them] with their schemes by which they seduced*" them to engage in sexual immorality and idolatry.

Just about a year out of Egypt, God commanded Moses to take a census of the people; the number then was 603,550 men who were 20 years old and above who was able to go to war (**Num. 1:20, 46**). Now, with less than a year until they enter into Canaan, He commands a census again. In between the two numberings, those 20 years old and above have all died and it is now those who have grown up in the wilderness who will be numbered, and all because of the unbelief of their parents; this time, the number is 601,730 (**Num. 26:51**) — approximately the same number as those who were numbered before. God kept His promise to bring the Israelites into the Promised Land; they just weren't all of the Israelites who had left Egypt! To make this point absolutely clear, it is said that in this census, "*among these there was not a man of those who were numbered by Moses and Aaron the priest when they numbered the children of Israel in the Wilderness of Sinai*" (**Num. 26:64**). A sobering statement, indeed, of the consequences of unbelief. Were they still 'God's children'? Yes. But did they receive the inheritance? No. We should be forewarned!

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Num. 25, answer the following questions:

1. What were the sins of the Israelites at Peor? Be specific. _____

2. What was God's command to Moses regarding those who had sinned, and what did He do? _____

3. Describe the actions and motivation of Phinehas. _____

► **Application.**

1. How can the world around us 'seduce' us as were the Israelites at Peor? _____

2. Is the type of zeal Phinehas had a *good* thing even today? Why, or why not? _____

3. What lessons should we learn from the events at Peor that are applicable to our spiritual life in Christ today? _____

Lesson Twenty-Two

JOSHUA GIVEN CHARGE

(Num. 27:12-23; Deut. 31:1-8)

Moses would not live forever, so it was inevitable that God would appoint another to take his place; Joshua was that man, chosen by God to lead the Israelites into Canaan after the death of Moses. We know little about Joshua at this point other than he was the one who led the army of Israel against the Amalekites in the wilderness (**Exod. 17:8-16**); we also know that he went with Moses to at least the base of Sinai when he returned to hear more from the Lord (**Exod. 24:13**) and that he was with Moses when he came down from Sinai after having received the Ten Commandments, reporting the noise in the camp (**Exod. 32:17**); we know that when Moses made his tent the tabernacle of meeting at the edge of camp, he would remain there even after Moses went back into the camp (**Exod. 33:11**); we know him [and Caleb] most famously for his stand with God after the spies returned to give their report about Canaan (**Num. 13, 14**); we know from our text today that he was a man “*in whom [was] the Spirit*” and was well-pleasing to God.

Much more will be learned about Joshua as we read of his leadership of Israel and how he worked with both them and with God as they entered the land and conquered it over time. Suffice it to say at this point, though, that God's choice was [of course] a wise one.

There are three accounts of Moses being told he was to go up on a mountain and see the land [but not enter] and then be taken in death (here, **Deut. 3:23-28**, and **Deut. 32:48-52**). What a disappointing end to his earthly life that must have been, to have done so much and gone so far in serving the Lord, only to be prohibited entry into the Promised Land, of which Moses had spent a good portion of his life leading the Israelites to enter and receive. The reason for the prohibition was well-known: the rebellion of Moses at the waters of Meribah.

Those who are leaders of God's people are held to a high level of accountability, both for the fulfillment of the task given to them and the example they set before God's people and before the world. Moses did nothing that many other Israelites had done, yet he was the leader and would be a greater influence on the nation than the common man, and for that he would suffer the consequences of his actions. God demands honor from all His people, but especially so for those who are leaders of His people.

Moses did not at this time plead his case, but merely accepted God's judgment and then expressed his concern for the people and for the one who would take his place as their leader. Moses had a righteous heart and asked only that the Lord would appoint a man who would lead them in all they did and wherever they went, that they not be like sheep without a shepherd. In these words, Moses demonstrated the heart of a true leader in that he did not see himself as indispensable to God, but knew that other men would be capable of filling his shoes. [That doesn't mean Joshua was his equal, just that he was capable of leading God's people.] And God's choice of Joshua was not arbitrary; He told Moses that Joshua was “*a man in whom is the Spirit*”; surely, this is a beneficial — and necessary — requirement of the one who would lead God's people! And though Joshua was a worthy successor to Moses, he wasn't Moses. Moses was the one to whom God spoke “*face to face*,” but Joshua would seek the counsel of the Lord through Eleazar, the high priest, whose word would come from God as to when they would go and when they would return.

And as any good leader would do, Moses turns to the people who had followed him these last 40 years and admonishes and exhorts them to continue moving towards the Promised Land, and to do all that the Lord would command them to do. It is here Moses reminds them **he** would not be going in, but that it would be Joshua who led them into the Promised Land. The charge Moses gives to Joshua is the same God would give to him later: “*Be strong and of good courage*,” and that the Lord would

“not , , , leave you nor forsake you.” After having seen Moses lead the people these last 40 years — witnessing the troubles, complaints, and sin of the people — Joshua would rightly have doubts about his ability to keep them focused on their goal. But, as good leaders must, he had to conquer his doubts and fears; that was made all the more easy with the reminder that God would always be with him [and them] and would never forsake them. Later, when he is about to lead them into the Promised Land, God will reiterate the need for obedience to the Law, with the promise of blessings to follow.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of Numbers 27:12-23 and Deuteronomy 31:1-8, answer the following questions:

1. What was the basic request of Moses after God reminded him he would not lead the people into Canaan? _____

2. What was the major difference between Moses and Joshua in how commands were given from God to the people? _____

3. What did Moses mean when he said he could no longer “go out and come in”? [Keep in mind what is said about him in Deut. 34:7!] _____

► **Application.**

1. What must leaders of God's people also remember about God's presence today that should encourage them in their efforts? _____

Lesson Twenty-Three

MOSES' FINAL BLESSINGS

(Deuteronomy 33)

As Jacob neared the end of his life, he called together his sons and prophesied to them what they could expect in the coming years — but not necessarily in their lifetime. Now, a few generations later and at a time when the tribes of those sons are now numerous, Moses speaks to them as to the nation of Israel — the descendants of Jacob — and speaks only words of blessings to them as he is also about to depart from them and as they stand at the edge of the Promised Land. In between these two scenes, the children of Jacob [Israel] have become numerous [as God promised] and have become a great nation [also as God promised] and are about to receive the land of Canaan, where their ancestors once lived — also as God promised. Jacob would no doubt wonder what would transpire in the intervening years, just as Moses would likely be thinking about what was to come for God's people as they entered into that Promised Land.

As we are nearing the end of the life of Moses, he is here called “*the man of God*” as a descriptive term when he is “introduced” to the Israelites to pronounce the blessings on them. The term is used in the Old Testament of those who have been given the word of God, to be delivered to God's people [with a notable exception such as Nineveh]. What Moses is about to speak is from God, then, and His people should hear with all seriousness and faith that it will come to pass as He says. But more than just the meaning as a prophet of God, let us recognize Moses as truly “*a man of God*” — that is, one who walked with God, whose life revolved around God's desires, and who spoke with God and for God. Everything about the life of Moses was about God and accomplishing His will.

And when he begins, he reminds them of God's presence with them at various times, using an interesting description of God's first appearance to the Israelites, coming from Sinai, Seir, and Mount Paran [basically, Sinai being the place where the Law was given and the other two places were notable locations along the border of the Promised Land]. Yet for all the terror He must have caused in the hearts of the people at His presence (cf. **Exod. 20:18-21**), it is noted here that He loves the people. Indeed, who could argue against that, for He heard their cries in Egypt and sent Moses to deliver them, demonstrating His supreme power over all through the plagues that devastated the land, bringing them through the Red Sea as if on dry land, and then completely obliterating the Egyptian army when they tried to pursue them. If they had forgotten this, these words would serve as a good reminder of how they got where they now were.

Let us consider the various declarations of Moses for each of the tribes:

- **Reuben.** (v. 6) The blessing on Reuben was simple: Let them survive. Reuben [and, thus, his descendants] were cursed by Jacob, so this blessing was a semi-reversal of the future that had been pronounced (**Gen. 49:3, 4**), though it sounds more like a plea than a blessing.
- **Judah.** (v. 7) The tribe from which our Savior descended did not receive much more of a blessing than did Reuben: A plea to God to be with them and deliver them from their enemies. [See **Gen. 49:8-12.**]
- **Levi.** (vv. 8-11) This being the tribe from which Aaron comes, they are reminded of his transgression at Meribah and the simple plea for them is that the Urim and Thummim would always be with them in their priestly service. The life of service is further explained as their heritage, teaching the people God's word and offering incense and burnt offerings to God. A plea is also made to God that He would strike the one who rose against them. [See **Gen. 49:5-7.**]

- **Benjamin.** (v. 12) The promise is of God's nearness [protection]; being one of Jacob's favored sons [second only to Joseph], the favor continues with God now. [See **Gen. 49:27.**]
- **Joseph.** (vv. 13-17) Being the favored son of Jacob [Israel], Joseph now receives the lengthiest blessing of all the tribes; the blessings would, of course, fall on the descendants of his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. The blessings included an abundant produce from the land and on his descendants, who would be an unbeatable army that would push out the people of the surrounding nations. [See **Gen. 49:22-26.**]
- **Zebulun and Issachar.** (vv. 18, 19) As we will see when the tribes receive their allotted land portions after conquering Canaan, these tribes will be known as mountain people, but they find success in whatever they did. [See **Gen. 49:13-15.**]
- **Gad.** (vv. 20, 21) Gad's blessing seems to point to them being a powerful tribe that was known for its terrifying and destructive force against all enemies and/or attackers. But they would also be the ones who would exact justice of the Lord; that could come on the battlefield [and it often did], but it could also come at the tent of wise judges. [See **Gen. 49:19.**]
- **Dan.** (v. 22) Since they were on the northern end of the Promised Land, the tribe of Dan would be at the forefront of all skirmishes and battles with the enemies who attempted to invade or overthrow the nation of Israel. Dan was said to be “*a lion's whelp*” [its young] who would “*leap from Bashan,*” or be the one who defended the nation first. [See **Gen. 49:16-18.**]
- **Naphtali.** (v. 23) This tribe is promised the “*blessing of the Lord*” and told they would possess the west and the south. [See **Gen. 49:21.**]
- **Asher.** (vv. 24, 25) Called here “*most blessed of sons*” and Moses calls upon God to bless them with children, favor from his brethren, and an abundance of crops and successful mining of metals [iron and bronze]. [See **Gen. 49:20.**]

If you counted the tribes who were named here and notice you came up one short, you would be correct. Moses did not address all of the 12 tribes because he omitted Simeon. [See **Gen. 49:5-7** to learn why this might be the reason why they were excluded from these blessings.] But, lastly, the nation of Israel is blessed by Moses, particularly noting the protection of God from the surrounding nations' armies and their submission of their enemies to them; note that he also named the blessing of an abundance of crops.

► **Interpretation.** From the text of 33:1-29, answer the following questions:

1. What was the reason Moses described God and how he had come to the Israelites, right before he pronounced the blessings on the Israelites (vv. 2-5)? _____

2. From the description of God in vv. 26-29, what could the Israelites expect to enjoy as long as He was their God? _____

► **Application.**

1. In what ways are the words describing God as the God of Israel applicable to Him today as the God of the faithful in Christ? _____

Lesson Twenty-Four

THE DEATH OF MOSES

(Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:1-12)

The Scriptures teach us that many things and a few people from the Old Testament era were shadows of the true in the New Testament, with Moses being an obvious parallel to Jesus. Both were sent by God to deliver people from slavery (**Exod. 3:7-10; Gal. 4:3-7**); both were born at a time when the ruler commanded all male children to be killed (**Exod. 1:14-22; Matt. 2:16**); both left their home country for fear of being killed (**Exod. 2:11-15; Matt. 2:13**); both were prophets (**Deut. 34:10; John 6:14**); and both acted as mediators/intercessors for God's people (**Num. 14:11-20; Heb. 7:25**). There are more parallels, but these should be sufficient to show the similarities are more than coincidental; God **meant** for it to be so.

That said, the end of their lives on this earth had some notable differences. First, Moses died and was not able to enter into the earthly reward of the Promised Land because of his own sin; Jesus never sinned, but He died for the sins of others and that death was the final step that granted Him the right to ascend into the heavenly 'Promised Land' and prepare the way for others who would follow in His steps. Second, Moses died and God ensured he was buried in a place where no man ever knew; Jesus was buried in a well-known location, but He rose from the dead and we know that His body will never be found because He has ascended into heaven. Finally, the death of Moses was mourned for 30 days, and then it ended; the death of Jesus is still remembered to this day, each Lord's Day by faithful disciples.

Now, as the time draws near for his departure, Moses already knows he will not be entering into the Promised Land, but he now hears from God that his disappointment will be moderated somewhat by the fact God will allow him to go to a high mountain and view the land. It may not have been what he wanted, but it was better than nothing, and it must have been the smallest bit of comfort to be able to look out over the land for which he had spent much of his life leading the Israelites to enter. God again (**Num. 20:12**) explains that Moses will not be able to enter into the Promised Land because he and Aaron had not sanctified Him at Meribah. By assuming the role as provider, Moses took the glory that was rightfully God's, and for that Moses would not enter into the Promised Land.

The mountain was one whose location — just northeast of the edge of the Dead Sea — allowed Moses to ascend and look out over the Promised Land, seeing everything from Dan in the north, to the edge of the sea on the west, to as far south as Zoar. Mount Nebo is only about 800 meters [2,625 ft.] elevation, but the surrounding terrain would permit viewing of a wide angle and it is there that Moses went and God showed him the land that he would not enter. And as He does, he speaks of that very promise that was made to Abraham long before that day, when He told him, *“I will give it to your descendants.”* Though Moses would not live to see that day completely fulfilled, the day was coming when the descendants of Abraham — the Israelites — would receive the land, just as God had promised. This will be a common point to be noted throughout the rest of the written word of God.

The life of Moses was notable: he left Egypt at about age 40 (**Acts 7:22, 23**), was called to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage around age 80 (**Acts 7:30; Exod. 7:7**), and died at 120. What a life he had lived! The first third of his life he was raised as an Egyptian royal; the next third was spent in exile; and the last third of his life was spent leading God's people through the wilderness. In the end, *“His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished.”* He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab where no one knows, and he was mourned for 30 days. The usual mourning period is said to have been seven days (cf. **Gen. 50:10**), but there were exceptions and it was expected that the longer the mourning, the greater standing he or she had among the mourners [shorter, for King Saul - **2nd Sam. 1:12**; longer, with the Egyptians, for Joseph - **Gen. 50:3**].

Joshua, upon taking over the leadership of the Israelites from Moses, had some pretty big shoes to fill. Consider that the inspired writings describe Joshua as being full of the spirit of wisdom, but he wasn't a prophet like Moses, and no one performed signs and wonders or demonstrated such great power from God as did Moses. For all that, he did not enter into the Promised Land, but we should not feel like his life was a complete waste (cf. **Matt. 17:1-3**).

► **Interpretation.** From the text of 32:48-52 and 34:1-12, answer the following questions:

1. For what reason was Moses prohibited from entering the land? _____

2. What did God allow Moses, though he still could not enter into the land, and how was this accomplished? _____

3. What indication do we see of the Israelites' perception of Moses, though he had certainly been strict with them? What was God's estimation of him? _____

4. Though Joshua was chosen by God and more than capable to lead the Israelites into the land, how did he compare with Moses? _____

► **Application.**

1. What may we learn from the death of Moses regarding consequences for sin [not able to enter into the Promised Land] and forgiveness [standing with Jesus in the first century]? _____

2. What can we know [again] about the surety of God's promises, from what is said to Moses just before he died? _____

Lesson Twenty-Five

REVIEW

► Interpretation.

1. What initiated the Pharaoh's persecution and oppression of the Jews while they were still in Egypt? _____

2. Describe the circumstances in which Moses is introduced. _____

3. What event[s] led to Moses fleeing Egypt, where did he then go, and how long was he there? _____

4. Briefly describe God's call to Moses to go back to Egypt and deliver the Israelites. _____

5. What did God bring upon Egypt as a means of convincing Pharaoh to let the people go? What eventually was the point at which he did? _____

6. How did God demonstrate His power over Pharaoh and, essentially, all of Egypt's false gods? Note all that God did to demonstrate His power. _____

7. What was the first major stopping point of the Israelites after leaving Egypt, and what happened there? How significant is this period in the history of the Israelites and, in fact, much of the Bible history? _____

8. What did the people see and hear at Sinai and how did this affect the way they received God's word from that point forward? _____

9. Briefly describe the religious service of the Israelites while in the wilderness, including where specifically they went and what they did as a means of interaction with God. _____

10. What tribe was designated as the ones who would exclusively serve God, and what were their particular duties? _____

11. What was constructed while they were in the wilderness that would be carried with them throughout their wanderings, something in which the law of God was carried, and where God came down to meet with Moses? _____

12. Why was the Sabbath established and how important was the Israelites' obedience to it? [What was the penalty for disobedience?] _____

13. Which of the Ten Commandments did the Israelites especially seem to be willing to break, and which grieved and angered God more than any other? Why was this so troublesome to God? _____

14. What was the point of the Passover observance? _____

15. Briefly describe the Day of Atonement and its meaning. _____

16. What was the cause for the majority of the spies who were sent into Canaan coming back with a negative report? Why did Joshua and Caleb disagree? _____

17. What was God ready to do after the people made the golden calf and after they refused to enter into Canaan? What [or *who*] persuaded God to change His intentions? _____

18. What was the penalty given because of the Israelites' refusal to enter into Canaan? Note all the penalties. _____

19. What was the reason for the tithing under the Old Law? _____

20. What act of Moses and Aaron was the cause for them not being able to enter into the Promised Land? _____

21. According to the writer of the book of Hebrews (**Heb. 3:16-19**), what four ways did God describe what caused the Israelites to not be able to enter into the Promised Land? _____

► **Application.**

1. Generally speaking, what should we learn from the example of the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness? [Note **1st Cor. 10:1-13** and **Heb. 3:7-4:13** before answering.] _____

2. What might we learn from Moses' example during this same period? _____

3. What should we learn about the Israelites when considering the example of the relationship between them and God during this period? What good examples did they leave and what poor examples did they leave? _____

4. What should we learn about God when considering the example of the relationship between Him and the Israelites during this period? _____

5. What should we learn from the Israelites and their particular problem of complaining? Idolatry? _____

6. What should we learn from the Israelites and their seeming inability to trust in God? _____

7. What lesson should we learn from God's prohibition against interacting with the surrounding nations when they settled Canaan? _____

8. God commanded the people that they be holy (**Lev. 19:2**) and repeats that command to disciples in the New Testament (**1st Pet. 1:15, 16**); what does it mean to be holy, what does it require of us, and why has God always required this of His people? _____

9. List some spiritual parallels to the whole series of events involved in the exodus of Israel and our conversion from sinners to disciples of Christ. _____

10. Give a brief summary of the example the following people left for us: Moses; Joshua; Korah; Aaron; Phinehas; Balaam. _____

11. What, specifically, have you learned from this study that will help you in your spiritual walk? _____

12. Though it is tempting to shake our heads at the persistent failures of the Israelites during this time and during their time while in Canaan, what must we learn about **ourselves** after considering this period in the history of the Israelites? _____
