



# wilderness wanderings

Santa Barbara Community Church • Winter 2024





## Calendar

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# Homegroups Serving in Children's Ministries



## What Is Involved?

- Each homegroup is scheduled to provide childcare helpers 2-3 Sundays between September and June.
- This is strictly a helper role where you are assisting children's ministries leaders as they care for and lead the children.
- Be ready to be flexible and serve at a service time you don't normally attend!
- Helpers are placed in the following groups: Nursery, Toddlers, Preschool, and Elementary.
- You will be able to choose your service time and age group when you sign up.

## Why Do We Do This?

Our philosophy is that everyone who regularly attends is part of our church family and the larger family of God. We believe it is our privilege and responsibility to care for one another, including the very youngest members. As you minister to SBCC's children, we hope that in the process you would:

- Meet people you might not otherwise meet.
- See God in unexpected ways and places.
- Find a role you may enjoy and in which you might like to serve more regularly.
- Enjoy yourself!

## Substitutes:

- If you can't serve one of the Sundays your group is scheduled, you are responsible to find a sub for yourself. Use the emailed link you'll receive to choose another Sunday, make a switch, or sign up a friend in your place.
- Carolee Peterson is a great resource if you need help. ([carolee@sbcommunity.org](mailto:carolee@sbcommunity.org)).
- All subs need to be someone who attends SBCC regularly and should be in high school or older.

- We really do need all scheduled slots filled every week!

## The Day You Serve:

- MOST IMPORTANT! Please check in at the Info Table 20 minutes before the service starts.
- Report to assigned children's area right away. (Don't stop and talk.) Kids are arriving!
- Sick at the last minute? Call or text Rhonda DuPar at (805) 895-4274 or Carolee at (805) 895-4064.

## Exemptions:

- Those who currently work as a regular Youth Leader or Children's Ministry Leader are exempt.
- Exemptions are not given for the important ministries of Worship, Sound/Projection, Info Table, Greeters, etc., since those roles do not require missing all of the adult service.
- We do give exemptions for health reasons or if there are other situations where it wouldn't be appropriate for someone to care for our children (psychiatric, felony, etc.). We ask that if you fall into this category, please let your homegroup leader know so we can exempt you.

## CAROLEE PETERSON

Children's Ministries Pastoral Assistant  
(805) 895-4064  
[carolee@sbcommunity.org](mailto:carolee@sbcommunity.org)



## Welcome to Homegroups at SB Community Church

### Homegroups have three essential elements:

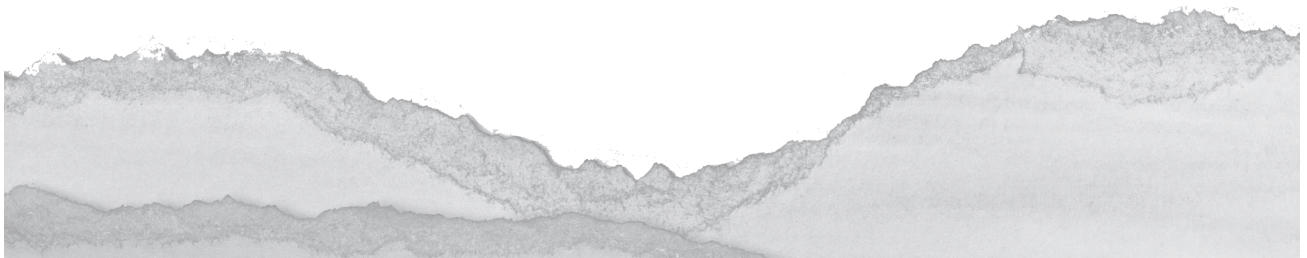
- Bible study
- Prayer
- Community building

### How to thrive in a homegroup:

To build community and trust, we all make every effort to **be prepared, be present, and be real.**

- Expect to spend 45 minutes to an hour preparing for your homegroup gathering. You can split this time up into shorter daily segments. Spend time reading and pondering the passage. Consider the questions and mark any that you particularly want to discuss during homegroup. Come ready to contribute and also to listen to others.
- Try to come each week—this honors the rest of your group and contributes to building the trust and connections that will help us all to grow. Arrive on time if possible. Set your phone aside. Notify your leaders if you won't be able to attend.
- We all long for authentic relationships, and homegroups can be a place where we are truly known and loved. Keep information shared by others confidential.
- If you're comfortable speaking out in a group, or talk a lot, regulate yourself. Leave space for others to talk. Ask questions to draw out others.
- Respect others' views, do not argue, do not interrupt. As trust grows, be willing to build relationships and to encourage each other.

The prayer of our pastoral staff is that each homegroup will grow spiritually, personally, and in community life as we study the Bible together. May you engage in and enjoy the riches of God's word each week!







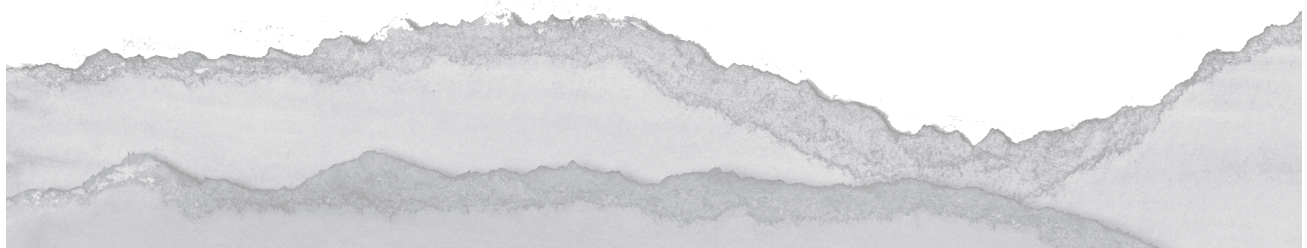
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## Acknowledgements

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**Sheep and camel graphics courtesy of FreePik** ([https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/hand-drawn-sheep-silhouette\\_49275578.htm](https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/hand-drawn-sheep-silhouette_49275578.htm) and [https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/caravan-desert-background-arab-people-camels-silhouettes-sands-caravan-with-camel-camelcade-silhouette-travel-sand-desert-illustration\\_13031987.htm#query=camel%2silhouette&position=31&from\\_view=keyword&track=ais&uuid=d8c50667-0f7d-4279-ad18-7612e03324ce](https://www.freepik.com/free-vector/caravan-desert-background-arab-people-camels-silhouettes-sands-caravan-with-camel-camelcade-silhouette-travel-sand-desert-illustration_13031987.htm#query=camel%2silhouette&position=31&from_view=keyword&track=ais&uuid=d8c50667-0f7d-4279-ad18-7612e03324ce))



# wilderness

## Introduction

For obvious reasons, we associate the Jewish people with the land of Israel. After all, much of the story of the Old Testament takes place in the “promised land.” But the time that precedes the nation of Israel’s arrival in the land– the time of the wilderness wanderings which we are going to study for the next several months– is quite instructive for us as Christians. Here we see glimpses of the God who saves, the nature of our deliverance, of our dependence on God through trials and challenges, and of our ultimate hope.

The stories that we’ll consider are scattered through the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Some of these stories may be very familiar regardless of your knowledge of the Bible (“Prince of Egypt,” anyone?). Other stories you may find very strange whether you’re familiar with the Bible or not (like the one about Balaam’s talking donkey!).

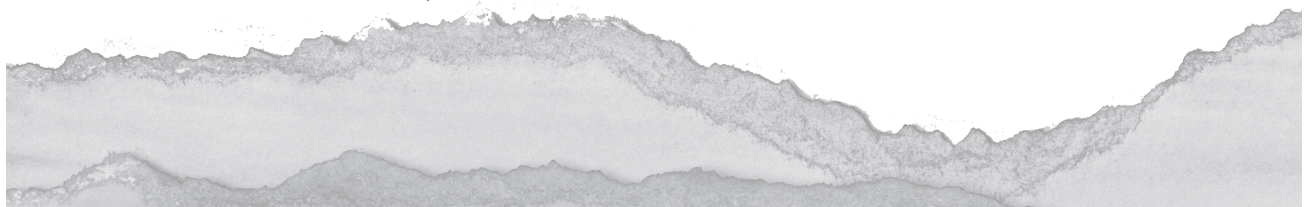
In any case, remember: we are not doing these studies in the hopes of knowing an answer to a trivia question about ancient history. The story of Israel’s preparation for entering the Promised Land is part of the larger story that God is writing throughout history. And so, it should not be surprising that these accounts contain sometimes subtle and sometimes dramatic pointers to the climax of it all– the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And neither should it surprise us that Israel’s story so often parallels our own experiences and longings.

The time in the wilderness was an in-between time. The people of Israel were dramatically saved out of slavery (as we’ll look at in the first study), and yet for the next 40 years they continue to need God’s merciful protection, provision and pardon, even as they are still waiting for their hope of a homeland to be fulfilled. This should sound very familiar, for we are also a people who live in the now (we have been saved) as well as the “not yet” (we wait in hope for all that God has promised us).

As we prayerfully study God’s word together, may we grow in our awareness of our deep need for God and his powerful ability to save. May we hunger more for communion with the living Christ and our heavenly home. Indeed, may the hymn writer’s prayer become our own:

*Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,  
Pilgrim through this barren land;  
I am weak, but Thou art mighty,  
Hold me with Thy pow’rful hand.  
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven,  
Feed me till I want no more;  
Feed me till I want no more.<sup>1</sup>*

1 “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” by William Williams. Public domain.







## Study 1

# Into the Wilderness

## Exodus 12–15

Defining moments...we all have them. It may be the start of something new: the first time you tried something that became your passion, or the day you became a parent. It could also be something difficult: the death of a loved one or the end of a dream. Regardless of the kind of emotions connected to them, defining moments fundamentally change us and can shape the way we see ourselves and the future.

1. What are a few defining moments in your life? Be ready to share them with your homegroup.

It is not a stretch to say that the Exodus was the defining moment in the history of Israel. It was the event that gave the Jews their identity. It gave meaning to their past and to their future. The story is a great one! If you have time this week, put on some headphones and go for a walk and listen to the first eleven chapters of Exodus from the beginning. But in case you aren't able to, here's the context in brief before we jump in mid-stream...

The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob went down into the land of Egypt during a famine. They were welcomed there because one of their own, Joseph, had ascended to power in the house of Pharaoh. But over the course of four centuries, while their numbers soared, their plight grew worse and worse. The people of Israel were enslaved in Egypt and were ruthlessly oppressed. But God took notice.

Chapters 1–6 of the book of Exodus tell how God heard their cry and sent a chosen man, Moses, to bring them out of bondage. Chapters 7–12 tell of the famous ten plagues that God sent on Egypt because of Pharaoh's refusal to let the people go.



2. Now pick up the story in Exodus 12:33 and read through chapter 15. Relish the story and then jot down some reflections: What questions does this story bring to mind? Anything strike you as interesting, confusing or amazing?

The end of chapter 12 gives the history of the institution of the Passover feast. We will spend more time in a later study on the festivals and celebrations God instructed Israel to observe (study 6), but for now, notice the directions about who may eat it. 12:38 makes clear there were non-Israelites who left Egypt with the Jews. 12:45-49 make allowances for those from other nations to participate in the feast while at the same time restricting it from those who have not identified themselves with God's people and (more importantly) the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

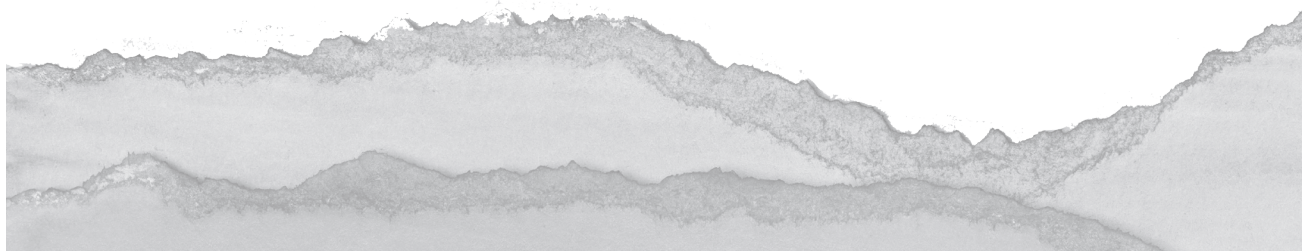
3. In what ways would you similarly describe the gospel of Jesus as inclusive and as exclusive?  
?
4. In chapter 13 Moses prescribes some ways of remembering what God has done in delivering them from Egypt. What are two of the ways they are to remember how God liberated them?
5. What are some ways we regularly remember, as a community and as individuals, what God has done for us? Share some of your habits or ideas with your homegroup.

In 13:17 we see that there was a much shorter route from Egypt to their new homeland that they could've taken. But God often does not lead us in a way that is straight and easy.

6. Why did God lead the Israelites through a longer route, and what could this teach us about divine guidance?

Fear is a recurrent part of this story (see especially 14:10-14) and of our own stories too, if we're honest. Our stories, like Israel's, are filled with situations that seem daunting and challenges that seem formidable.

7. In which areas of your life right now are you finding it the most challenging to trust God? Have you found anything particularly helpful in trusting God in these areas?
8. Look back at 14:15-18 and note God's desire for glory. Is this divine narcissism, or self-centeredness? What do you make of this?



Such New Testament words as redeem/redemption, deliver, salvation, ransom, purchase, slavery, and freedom entered the religious vocabulary of Israel through the Exodus event. Clearly, there are parallels between what the Exodus was for Israel and what the cross of Christ is for us. Read the following verses and then respond to the questions below.

Mark 10:45

1 Corinthians 5:7

Galatians 3:13

Colossians 1:13-14

Hebrews 2:14-15

1 Peter 1:17-19

9. Reflecting on these verses, respond to the following questions:

Who is responsible for our deliverance?

From whom/what have we been delivered?

How were we redeemed?

What is our new status, having been delivered?

Consider this perspective from Peter Enns:

The significance of the Exodus for us is not found in what we do with it, but in what God has done for us already. We have missed the theological point of the story if we reduce its grand theological message to a number of moral lessons, such as “Be faithful in a tight fix,” or “Don’t fear tough times, just be ‘still’ and let God take care of you.” Of course, these are good things to remember (and difficult to do!) but the question here is whether the point of the Exodus story is to teach us these things. I think not. The Exodus story is not a pep talk for when we go through trying circumstances, to teach us that God will win *our* battles for us. Rather, if anything, it is a pep talk to remind us that God *has* won *the* battle. All our daily battles, which are real and matter to God, should be seen in this overarching context.<sup>1</sup>

In Exodus 15 we find the song of Moses— a jubilant celebration of God’s triumph over Israel’s enemies and the glorious freedom they’ve come into.

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1 Enns, 289-90.



10. Do you have any favorite songs or hymns that express the joy of the victory Christ has won for us? Perhaps share the lyrics or even a recording with your homegroup.

After such a triumphant episode of being delivered through the Red Sea, how surprising must it have been to Israel to find themselves in the wilderness! The remainder of our study of the Wilderness Wanderings will explore the lessons learned by a people who had experienced God's powerful salvation and yet continued to struggle to trust in the sovereign grace of their Savior.

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Celebrate the fact that God is our redeemer! Praise him for the even greater deliverance we have received in Christ. Worship the Lord for his mighty power, his unparalleled wisdom, his extravagant kindness.

**Repent.** Confess the ways you continue to struggle to trust God in spite of the goodness he has shown time and again. Be honest with God about ways you continue to act like a slave to sin rather than as a liberated and beloved child.

**Request.** Ask God to help you see your life and daily battles in the grand context of all that he has won for us in Jesus. Pray that we would be effective in telling the story of our deliverance to the next generation in a way that will leave them in awe and eager to spend their lives for the glory of our Savior. Pray for one another in your homegroup, and for our broader church family, to be receptive to God's leading even when the way doesn't make sense to us.





## Study 2

# The Desert of Sin

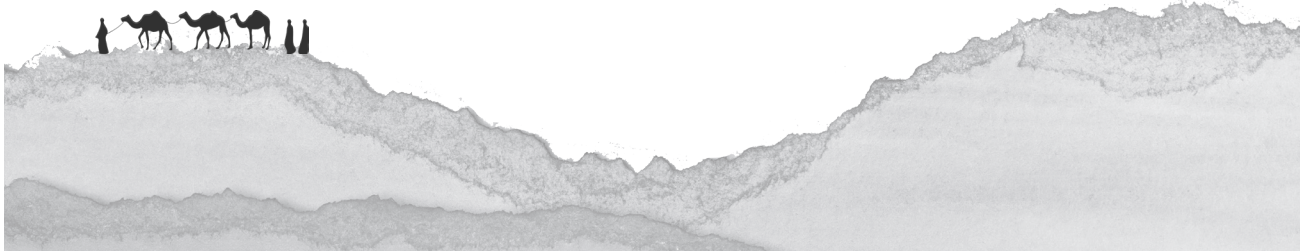
## Exodus 16

This week, we get a window into the minds and hearts of a group of people who have been powerfully, miraculously rescued out of bondage and are on their way to a new life. We got a sense of some of their excitement and joy last week in chapter 15. But there is great anxiety, too, and the adventure is just beginning...

1. Describe a time when you found yourself in completely new territory—a new job, new school, a new city, or a new phase of life. What were some of your concerns, fears and anxieties?
  
2. Read carefully through Exodus 16. Take notes here of any interesting details or anything you have questions about.

Now, before going on in chapter 16, go back and read 15:22-27.

3. Describe the pattern of events in these verses from the previous chapter. What did the people of Israel need, how did they respond, and what did God do?



The events of chapter 16 are especially stunning in light of what has just taken place. Israel needed water and God provided an oasis! But a few weeks later, all that is forgotten. Consider the complaints of 16:2-3. This is a human tendency we should all be able to relate to—viewing the past through rose-colored lenses! Even the complaint is confusing...do they wish they had died in Egypt, or do they wish they were back in slavery? Note the absurdity as they accuse Moses of having brought them into the desert in order to starve them to death. And yet God's response to their ridiculous charge is merciful and gracious.

The main purpose of sending manna and quail is certainly not just to test the Israelites or simply to fill their stomachs. It is rather to teach them something about God, or as verse 6 puts it, so that the Israelites will 'know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt' (see also v.12). That the Israelites will 'know' is another echo of the departure narrative. God is not yet finished teaching his people who he is. In fact, he has hardly begun.<sup>1</sup>

4. What can we learn about God from this story alone?

Look back at verses 25-30. It's interesting to note that this is the first mention of the Lord giving his people a weekly Sabbath. The Ten Commandments will come later on Mount Sinai (Ex. 20, which we'll cover in Study 5) and the command to keep the Sabbath holy is one of these. But here in chapter 16 is the first time this group of formerly enslaved people is given the space to rest for a full day once a week.

5. Why do you think God gave this instruction about rest?
6. Read Psalm 77. The Psalmist finds himself in deep distress, but there is a turning point when he remembers the Exodus story. How do you think the story he tells himself about the past informs his perspective on the present moment?

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<sup>1</sup> Enns, 325.



The New Testament continues to echo the themes we see in the Exodus story of the manna. Read Matthew 14:15-21.

7. If you had been an Israelite present for this miraculous provision of bread, how might you have made sense of what happened that day in light of what you knew about the Exodus 16 story?
8. When we voice complaints about our circumstances, our leaders, etc., how do we know if we're engaging in healthy and appropriate critique, or if we're sinfully and mistrustfully grumbling against the Lord himself? This isn't a simple question, so tease it out a bit with your group.

One of the things we will see again and again in our study of the Wilderness Wanderings is that Israel's reaction to their circumstances is often inconsistent with what they know to be true about God. Take note of this in the weeks ahead and watch for examples! Peter Enns adds some insight for all of us:

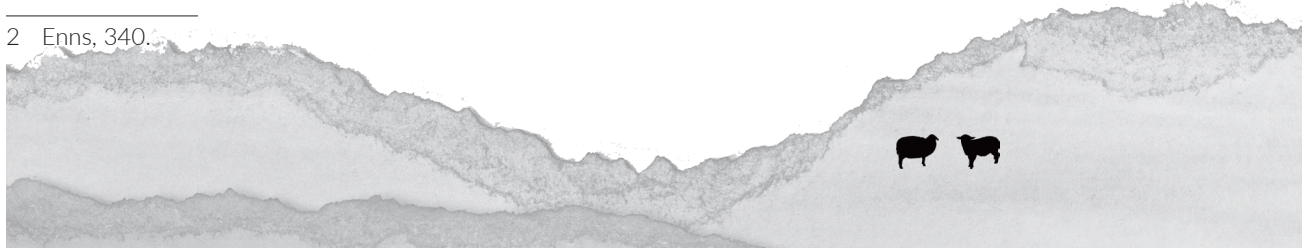
Throughout Exodus we have seen Israel's inclination for defining their situation in terms of their own perceptions. Whether it is lack of straw for making bricks or the advancing Egyptian army at the shores of the Red Sea, the Israelites did not respond in a way that we would expect people who have witnessed God's mighty acts to respond.

All around us is the ever-present temptation to see ourselves as the center of the universe... nothing is more important than meeting our perceived needs.

The way of the cross is different. We are being trained in righteousness to be able to rid our minds of perceived needs and their immediate gratification and to turn our glance outward (or upward) toward Canaan and the God who is determined to get us there. It is an arduous training process...He is teaching us to look at the big picture rather than our own narrow, doomed version of that picture."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Enns, 340.





## Study 3

# Leadership and Power

## Exodus 17:8–18:27

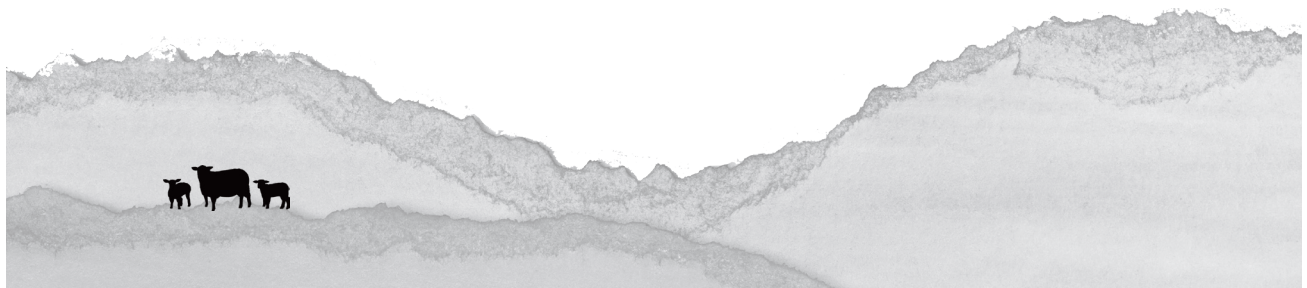
Chapters 17 and 18 in Exodus are dense, mysterious, and profound. There is much to discover and learn from these chapters. In today's study, we will focus on three scenes in chapters 17 and 18 that, among other things, speak to the themes of leadership and power. There is a notable cast of characters mentioned throughout these chapters. One might be tempted to focus on the competencies and leadership skills of each of the characters in these passages—Moses, Joshua, Aaron, Hur, Jethro, etc.—but let us not forget that the main character in these passages is God. It is God's power and design for leadership that are ultimately on display here!

1. Whether it's on your school campus, raising children in your home, or in your swivel chair at work, leadership is required of each of us in different arenas. In your opinion, what is one advantage of being a leader, and one challenge of being a leader?

Since Exodus 17 and 18 are lengthy, let us thematically outline the three scenes we will see unfold in our text today:

- I. Power in persistence (Exodus 17:8-15)
- II. Power in testimony (Exodus 18:1-12)
- III. Power in sharing power (Exodus 18:13-27)

Read Exodus 17:8–18:27.



2. What initial observations stand out to you in 17:8–18:27? Are there questions or clarifications that arise for you? Do you see any connections between chapter 17 and chapter 18? Note your thoughts here.

Let's dive into the first section of our text.

## I. Power in Persistence (Exodus 17:8-15)

Many questions come to mind when reading this passage, but for now, let's address two that particularly stand out:

### Who were the Amalekites?

The Amalekites are a mysterious group of desert dwellers who wage a seemingly unprovoked attack on the Israelites in Exodus 17. This is not the first nor the last time we encounter the Amalekites in the Old Testament (we meet them repeatedly in Numbers, Judges, and 1 Samuel). In addition to other nations, the Amalekites will continually discourage and prevent the Israelites from entering the land of Canaan, prolonging their time as wanderers in the wilderness.

### What is happening on that hill?

In the face of the sudden attack of the Amalekites, Moses chooses reliance on the Lord and a persistent posture of appeal before him. Instead of relying on human weapons or sheer might, Moses recognizes that the battle is in God's hands. The mystery and power of the Israelites' fight against the Amalekites is most profoundly seen not on the battlefield, but on the hill where Moses, Aaron, and Hur contend for God's people.

Bible scholars differ on what exactly is happening when Moses raises his hands on the hill. Is it a "psychological effect to inspire the troops every time they glance up the hill?" Is it a callback to the plagues in Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea? Perhaps it is some combination of multiple theories. One of the more compelling interpretations of this passage comes from Walter Kaiser who states that, "the prophetic-symbolic action of the constantly upraised hands did signal the fervent prayers (either internal or external) of the heart of Moses as he witnessed the battle."<sup>1</sup>

3. In times of crisis, how do you cope? Do you jump into problem-solving, fear, despair, distractions, avoidance, prayer?

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<sup>1</sup> Kaiser, 408



4. God could have chosen to employ only Moses for the deliverance of the Israelites in their battle against the Amalekites. Why do you think God chose to work through the joint effort of Moses, Aaron, and Hur?

Before we make our way into chapter 18, let us take note of a thematic thread that we see in both chapter 17 and 18. Peter Enns suggests:

In the very next chapter (18), we read of the delegation of certain of Moses' responsibilities, at Jethro's suggestion, to some of the elders of the community. They are to help Moses when his tasks become too heavy for him...It is plausible to understand Hur's and Aaron's helping of Moses as another foreshadowing of things to come: the division of labor in chapter 18.<sup>2</sup>

Something to consider! With that, let's transition to chapter 18.

## II. Power in Testimony (Exodus 18:1-12)

5. Consider Jethro's interaction with his son-in-law in verses 1-12. What stands out to you about this conversation with Moses?

Enns makes an important observation:

Notice how quickly Jethro delights in the testimony that Moses shares about God's power and deliverance of the Israelites. Because of Moses' testimony, Jethro responds in praise. He acknowledges the greatness of the LORD above all other gods, and offers a burnt offering and other sacrifices to God. Unlike Pharaoh or the Amalekites, it is Jethro and the nation of Midian that give the proper response to God's deliverance of his people: praise.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Enns, 349.

<sup>3</sup> Enns, 369.

6. Like Moses, what testimonies of God's power and deliverance in your own life do you have the opportunity to share with others?

Shortly after Jethro's conversation with Moses, he gets to see Moses' leadership on display. Let us transition to the last section of our passage today.

### III. Power in Shared Power (Exodus 18:13-27)

In 18:13-27, we see that

Moses is said to "judge" (v.13), which in context means arbitrating legal issues between parties based on the standard of "God's decrees and laws" (v.16)...This adjudication between parties proves too much for Moses. He is dead tired after keeping up the pace all day. Jethro sees what is happening to his son-in-law and offers sound advice: Get some help.<sup>4</sup>

7. Like Moses, have you ever experienced a season of exhaustion and being "spread too thin"? Perhaps you're in such a season right now! What do you notice about your spiritual health when you find yourself weighed down with seemingly endless responsibilities, commitments, and demands for your time?

Jethro is direct and firm with his son-in-law. His assessment of Moses' leadership style is that it is "no good" and that it will only "wear out" both him and the Israelites. What sobering yet sound advice to receive from your father-in-law! Instead of belaboring Moses' leadership missteps, Jethro proposes a purposeful way forward for him. Jethro's commands seem to be intertwined with the will of God in this matter.

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<sup>4</sup> Kaiser, 371

Instead of resenting his father-in-law's advice or hoarding his power, Exodus 18:24 tells us that Moses *listened* and *did everything* that Jethro had said. What humility and wisdom! We see in the following verses that this model of leadership goes well for Moses and the Israelites. Let's skip ahead to a later date and see if this model of leadership holds up for them:

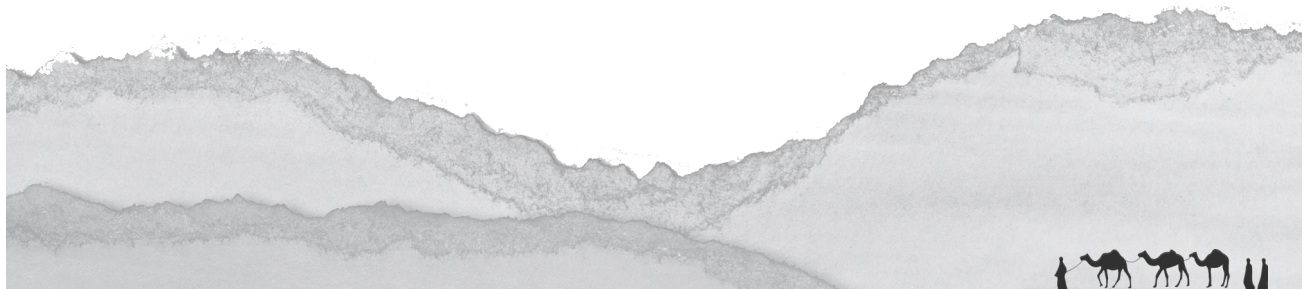
8. Read Numbers 11:24-30, paying particular attention to Moses' response to Aaron. What has Moses learned about the Lord's design for leadership?

Exodus 17:8–18:27 paints a picture of the power that comes from persistence and reliance on God, the power that comes from testimony of God's faithfulness, and the power that comes from sharing power with others. Each of these postures is a mark of a mature leader. Consider what Andy Crouch has to say about God's original design for power in his book, *Playing God*. He states, "True power multiplies when it is shared...The true power that is available to us, the power that multiplies power, lies on the other side of the choice to empty ourselves of power."<sup>5</sup>

9. Look back at your answer to the first question of this study. Whether it's at school, at home, or at work, what leadership lessons might God be calling you to right now? Share with your group and take some time to encourage and pray for one another in your calling as a faithful leader wherever you are.

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5 Crouch, Andy. *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013, 41-42.



## Prayer Guide

We can learn to be mature leaders who share power by looking at the perfect model of our Lord, who shares power with us! Reflect on these compelling words from Tyler Staton's book on prayer, *Living Like Monks, Praying Like Fools*:

Prayer is the pathway God has made to get us back to his original plan. Prayer is the way we can rule, manage, intercede for this world. Prayer is the repair of the communication breach that paralyzes us. Philip Yancey says, 'Of all the means God could have used, prayer seems the weakest, slipperiest, and easiest to ignore. So it is, unless Jesus was right in that most baffling claim. He went away for our sakes, as a form of power sharing, to invite us into direct communion with God and to give us a crucial role in the struggle against the forces of evil.' God has shared his power with you. He calls you a co-manager of heaven, walking around on earth. Prayer is how this moves from a biblical rumor to your actual, everyday experience.<sup>6</sup>

**Rejoice.** Thank God that he has seen fit to call us "co-managers" and "co-heirs" with him by his Son and through his Spirit.

**Repent.** Reflect on ways that you have relied too much on your own strength in difficult situations or seasons. Repent of the ways that you have perhaps "hoarded control" instead of leaning on the presence of the living God.

**Request.** Ask God to grant you wisdom in your spaces of leadership; being persistent in prayer, quick to give testimony of God's faithfulness, and sharing power readily with others.

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<sup>6</sup> Tyler Staton, *Praying Like Monks, Living Like Fools: An Invitation to the Wonder and Mystery of Prayer*, Zondervan Books, 2022, 104-105.

## Study 4

# The Covenant-Making God

## Exodus 19

1. Describe a promise someone made to you. Did they follow through or not? Share with your group what that was like for you.

The Old Testament follows the story of humanity God created to be in relationship with him. Genesis 3 tells of our rebellion and alienation. Much of the rest of the story is about a way back to the family of God. That's where the need for covenant comes into play.

2. Look up and write the definition of the word covenant:

Dr. Sandra Richter explains the way covenants played a key part in structuring the ancient world:

On the individual, tribal and, eventually, national level, if you needed someone to act like a family member, and you were willing to give that person the privileges of family in return, you would invite that individual (tribe or nation) into a covenant agreement...<sup>1</sup>

In the Old Testament, God makes five covenants with his people through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David. This week we'll look at the covenant God made with his people through Moses.

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<sup>1</sup> Richter, 72





3. Read Exodus 19. Summarize what you read in a few sentences. What questions or observations do you have?

After God brought more than two million of Abraham's descendants out of exile in Egypt, through the Red Sea, and into the wilderness, he made them a promise.

4. Look back at Exodus 3:12. What was the promise God made?

God's covenant with Abraham involved a promise to do three things: to give him land and descendants, and to bless all the nations through them (see Genesis 12:1-3). This covenant with Moses doesn't negate any of that. Quite the opposite! In fact,

The promise of people, place and presence finds its first fulfillment here. Like the great hinge of redemptive history, the Mosaic covenant fulfills the Abrahamic covenant typologically and it foreshadows the new covenant typologically.<sup>2</sup>

5. Let's see what it includes. What are the responsibilities and privileges to which each party is agreeing?

- Israel is agreeing to (v.5) \_\_\_\_\_.  
(We'll see more specific detail about what this entails next week in Chapter 20.)
- God is agreeing to make Israel a (v.5) \_\_\_\_\_. The whole earth (inclusive of all nations) is his, but they will be a kingdom of (v.6) \_\_\_\_\_ and a \_\_\_\_\_.

6. How did the people respond? (Exodus 19:8)

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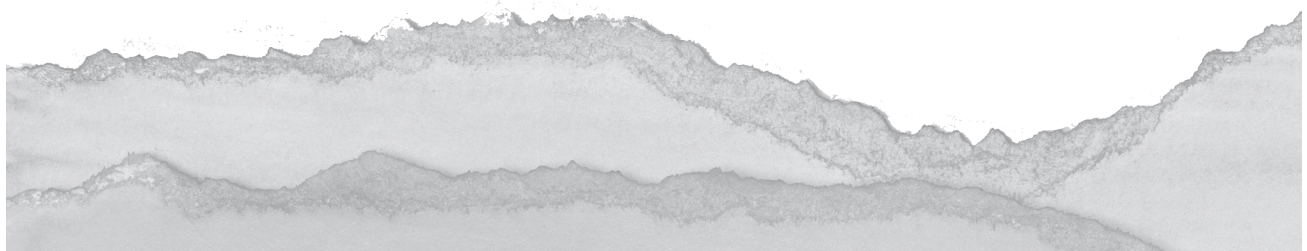
<sup>2</sup> Richter, 177



7. Why do you think they were given such detailed instructions about how to come near to God? ( vv.10-13)
  
8. Why do you think God presented himself the way he did instead of taking a more gentle approach? ( vv.16-25)
  
9. How does God's holiness factor into the way you approach God?

During this liminal space between rebellion and restoration, when sin had not yet been finally dealt with, an intermediary was needed to protect sinful people from being destroyed by God's holiness.

10. Look back at Exodus 19:5-6. Now Read 1 Peter 2:9-10. What similarities do you see in how believers in Jesus from any nation are described?



11. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. Because Jesus has dealt with our sin, we can now approach our holy God. Summarize three ways we can respond:

Verse 22: Let us...

Verse 23: Let us...

Verses 24-25: Let us...

12. Pick one of those from the above verses you find meaningful and share why with your homegroup.

13. In their spiritual wilderness, God gave Israel a way to get back into relationship with him. Who are you in a broken relationship with? What one action toward restoration could you take toward that person?

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God for ways he's shown up in the wildernesses of human history.

**Repent.** Name specific ways you've experienced God's love or mercy and thank him.

**Request.** Pray for reconciliation for and with people you wrote about. Pray the Holy Spirit will walk you through it.

## Study 5

# The Big Ten

## Exodus 20

1. Before you begin in this passage, for some big-picture context, watch the Bible Project video called *The Purpose of the Old Testament Law of Moses in the Bible*. You can scan the QRC or go to <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/law>. (Don't worry—we'll get to our passage in a little bit). Take notes below.



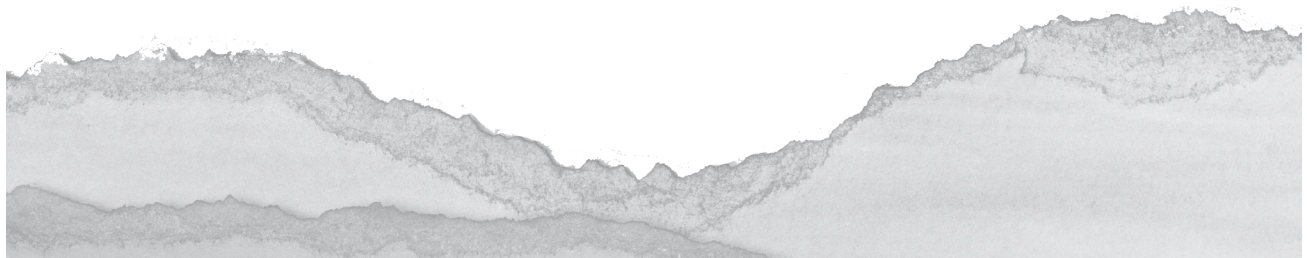
This week, we get to take a closer look at the law that God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai. Exodus 20 contains the famous “Ten Commandments”, or the Decalogue—the Ten Words. They are a concise spelling out of the terms of the covenant toward God and toward others. More than that,

They reflect the manner in which his people are to be ‘holy’ (cf ch. 19). It is, therefore, safe to say that these laws are more than simply good rules to live by. They show us something of the nature of God, and for this they deserve our close attention. We see in them not simply ‘what we must do’ but what God is like.<sup>1</sup>

2. Read through the entire chapter carefully. Use the chart on the following page to take notes and write down your own paraphrase of each of the sections. Compare and contrast with your homegroup.

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<sup>1</sup> Enns, 411.



Exodus 20:1-2	
Exodus 20:2-3	
Exodus 20:4-6	
Exodus 20:7	
Exodus 20:8-11	
Exodus 20:12	
Exodus 20:13	
Exodus 20:14	
Exodus 20:15	
Exodus 20:16	
Exodus 20:17	
Exodus 20:18-20	



3. Think for a bit about what it means to “misuse the Lord’s name.” What do you think is being prohibited here—the flippant use of God’s name (“OMG”), the use of his name for cursing others, or something else entirely? Why would it matter how people who love and belong to God use or invoke his name?
4. Conversely, consider the positive implications of keeping the third commandment. Read and reflect on 2 Chronicles 16:7-11.

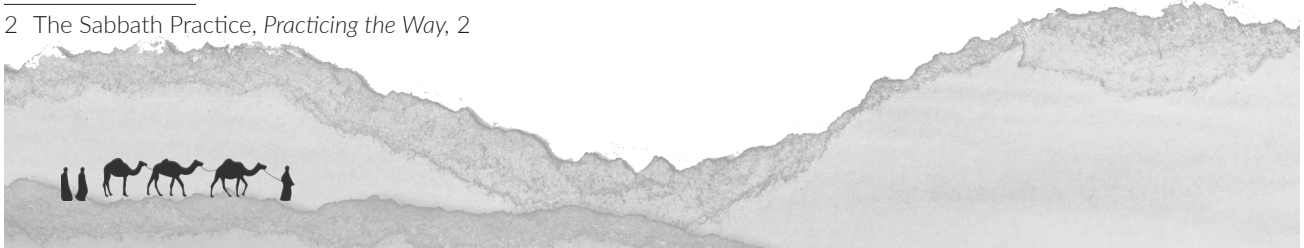
Now reflect for a bit on the fourth commandment. The word “Remember” indicates that God had given them this command previously! Flip back to Study 2 on Exodus 16 to refresh your memory. God is reminding them of a pattern he had already built into their lives, which dates back to the creation of the world (see Genesis 2:1-3).

As you may remember, the word *sabbath* means to cease. God’s people were invited to cease from their normal work week and enter into rest and worship. And as John Mark Comer notes, “Jesus sabbathed. In fact, many Jesus stories in the gospels take place on the Sabbath, especially the stories of healing and deliverance. One likely reason is that *the Sabbath is a day for healing and freedom*. It’s a day where the kingdom to come *has* come, and we get to enter into a whole new dimension of time and space.”<sup>2</sup>

5. If you set aside one day in the week to “cease,” describe for your homegroup what this looks like for you and what boundaries make this possible. If you don’t observe a Sabbath in your week, what do you think the result would be if you began to honor God’s pattern by practicing/enjoying a weekly day of rest and worship? What would need to change in order to make this possible? Discuss this as a homegroup.

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2 The Sabbath Practice, *Practicing the Way*, 2



While the first four commandments expressly have to do with the love of God, the last six deal with principles concerning the love of neighbor. Because Yahweh is God, because he has created humanity and chosen Israel as his beloved people, they are to reflect his character in the way they treat one another.

The ninth commandment is another principle based on love. If I am to honor God by valuing others, it matters how I speak of them. The 17th-century pastor and commentator Matthew Henry puts it so well:

The ninth commandment concerns our own and our neighbor's good name. This forbids speaking falsely on any matter, lying, equivocating, and any way devising or designing to deceive our neighbor. Speaking unjustly against our neighbor, to hurt his reputation. Bearing false witness against him, or in common conversation slandering, backbiting, and tale-bearing; making what is done amiss, worse than it is, and in any way endeavoring to raise our reputation upon the ruin of our neighbor's. How much this command is every day broken among persons of all ranks!<sup>3</sup>

6. If Matthew Henry is right and we are often in the habit of breaking this command, what can we do about it? What practical habits or disciplines could help us become the kind of people who honor others sincerely with our speech?

Although it's important for Christians to consider God's commands carefully and soberly, the commentator John Goldingay also reminds us of the liberating and life-giving nature of what God commanded. God's law is intended to be a delight to his people! Israel, he reminds us, "delights in God's statutes, longs for God's precepts, loves God's commands, and takes comfort in God's ordinances."<sup>4</sup>

7. Read and pray through Psalm 19:7-11. Most of us are well aware that living in obedience to God's commands can feel strenuous and costly at times. How could this Psalm be an encouragement to those who are struggling to obey? How else might you encourage someone who views God's commands as harsh and difficult?

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3 Matthew Henry's *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible*

4 Goldingay, John. *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 380.

Looking forward to the New Testament, we see that the Law of Moses was a topic that Jesus engaged with often in his conversations and teaching. Read Matthew 5:17-20 and 22:34-40.

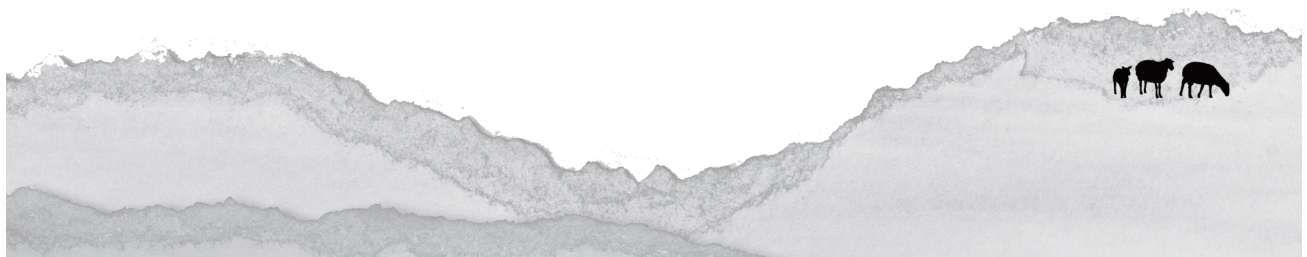
8. How do you make sense of the tension between Jesus' comment in 5:20 and the fact that, individually and collectively, we have not kept the law perfectly (again, our video from question 1 might be helpful here)?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Read Romans 8:1-4. Reflect on your own and with your homegroup about the place of the Ten Commandments in your life as a follower of Jesus. If there are areas of your life in which you sense God is calling you to greater delight in—and obedience to—his ways, ask for wisdom and power through the Holy Spirit to help you.

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God for his delightful commands. Even though we may sometimes find his ways hard to understand, we can rest in his infinite wisdom and goodness. Praise God that his is the heart of a Father whose boundaries are life-giving for his children.

**Repent.** Ask God to show you any areas of your life where he is calling you to repent and to grow in Christlikeness. Confess these things to him in prayer.

**Request.** Pray for tender hearts toward God and for a church family that is eager to walk in faithfulness to him. Pray for your homegroup, that each one of you would love God more from week to week as you meet together.





## Study 6

# Festivals and Celebrations

## Exodus 23:10-19, Leviticus 23

The nation of Israel was wandering and waiting in the wilderness for a long time, looking ahead to the time when God would finally establish them in a land of their own as he had promised. During these years, God was continually working with them, speaking to them, and teaching them to notice and remember his rescue, provision and care. One way he did this was to establish a rhythm of feasts and celebrations. This week we'll explore some of these and what they have to teach us about God, his character, and the way he calls us to respond to him in our daily lives.

1. Think of one holiday tied to the Christian faith. Describe a way you routinely celebrate it that holds special meaning for you.

Now, let's look at the feasts and celebrations in our passages. Start by reading Exodus 23:10-19.

This passage begins by expanding on the observance of Sabbath, one of the Ten Commandments that we explored last week. God set aside one day in seven for people to rest from work and celebrate their Creator. Here we see God's vision for his people to order their lives around a cycle of work and a cycle of rest.

2. Who and what does this cycle benefit (Exodus 23:10-12)?





Peter Enns writes, “Note, therefore, that the means by which the Israelites are to ‘keep it holy’ is not by offering the produce of the seventh year to God...but by leaving it for the poor.”<sup>1</sup>

3. What does Exodus 23:10-12 tell you about God’s values?

4. Name some ways you aspire to live out those same values.

The Sabbath and feasts are more than just national holidays. Each teaches the next generation about walking with their God through the wilderness while they look forward to their ultimate redemption and restoration.

Tim Mackie explains how feasts are tied to the concept of Sabbath found in Genesis 2:1-3.

The Sabbath represented a burst of Eden rest into ordinary time. These seven feasts all participate and develop aspects of the meaning of the original Sabbath.

- **Passover and Unleavened Bread:** redemption from death (new creation) and commitment to simplicity and trust in God’s power to provide food in the wilderness.
- **First fruits and Weeks:** celebrating the gift of produce from the land.
- **Trumpets:** announcing the sabbatical (seventh) month.
- **Day of Atonement:** God’s renewing the holiness of his Eden presence among his compromised people.
- **Tabernacles:** provision for God’s people on their way to the Promised Land. They are to act like they are living in God’s tent for a Sabbath cycle.<sup>2</sup>

5. Leviticus 23 lists all seven feasts in calendar order. For each feast below, write one instruction you find intriguing. Discuss why with your homegroup.

Passover: Leviticus 23:4-5, Exodus 12:1-14

Unleavened Bread: Leviticus 23:6-8, Exodus 12:14-20, Exodus 23:15

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1 Enns, 460

2 Mackie, Tim. <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/seven-festivals/>

First Fruits: - Leviticus 23:9-14

Weeks (also called Harvest, Shavuot or Pentecost): Leviticus 23:15-22, Exodus 23:16a

Trumpets (also called Rosh Hashanah): Leviticus 23:23-25

Day of Atonement (or Yom Kippur): Leviticus 23:26-32

Tabernacles (also called Ingathering, Booths, or Sukkot): Leviticus 23:33-35, Leviticus 23:40-42, Exodus 23:16b

All these celebrations were tangible ways for the people to remember how God has provided for them in the past and give them hope that he will continue to do so.

6. Describe one example of how God has shown up and provided for your physical needs.

7. Describe one example of how God has shown up and provided for your spiritual needs.



Jesus celebrated these feasts. In many ways, they foreshadow his person and ministry.

8. Look up the following verses and describe links you see between a feast and God's redemptive plan.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8

Acts 2:1-4

Hebrews 10:1-10

1 Corinthians 15:20

For the Israelites, these celebrations are an act of obedience to God's law, as well as an act of worship. Peter Enns emphasizes "We must remember the refrain of the Exodus narrative itself: "Let my people go, so that they may worship me."<sup>3</sup>

9. Take inventory of some of your daily, weekly, or yearly spiritual practices that are designed to realign your heart with God's. Which are most helpful and meaningful to you?

10. Are there any new ones you'd like to explore? Discuss with your homegroup.

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Remember what God has done. Praise him for how he has provided in the past. Thank him for what he promises for the future in the scriptures.

**Repent.** Confess to God the ways you didn't remember and rely on him this week.

**Request.** Ask God to give you what you need in the present.

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<sup>3</sup> Enns, 458.

## Study 7

# Sacred Space

## Exodus 25:1-22

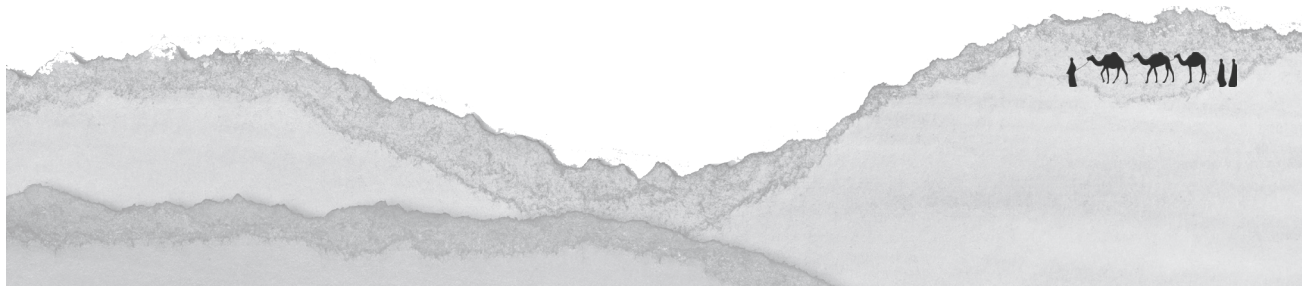
1. What's the most complicated thing you ever built? How did it turn out?

Moses got more than the law when he met God on Mt. Sinai—he also climbed down with instructions for a portable temple to go wherever the Israelites went (Exodus 26:30). Once constructed, the tabernacle took up residence in the center of Israel's twelve tribes. Its blueprints roll out over sixteen chapters, mainly in Exodus 25–31 and 35–40. We're going to focus on just a handful of them, Exodus 25:1-22.

As we consider the tabernacle and the concept of sacred space throughout Scripture, we'll also look at the tabernacle's primary architectural detail, foreshadowing the person and ministry of Jesus.

2. Read Exodus 25:1-9. What can you discern here about God's motivation in giving these instructions?

Before we go onto one of the key architectural details of the tabernacle, let's look back at another sacred space. Tremper Longman & Raymond Dillard help us understand the tabernacle's significance as a pointer back to the Garden of Eden:



When Adam and Eve were first created, there was no need to meet with God in a special location. They met with God anywhere in the garden of Eden. The fall, however, resulted in a fundamental alienation between God and human creatures, so that they could no longer easily enter into his presence.<sup>1</sup>

Every element in the tabernacle draws us back to Eden and forward to the New Heaven and New Earth. Let's consider the most important of them.

3. Read Exodus 25:10-22. What element is being described? Try to draw it. Share your drawings with your homegroup.

4. The ark has two pieces. Focus on the mercy seat (also called the "atonement cover"). What is its purpose? ( vv.21-22)

5. Other passages in Scripture speak of the ark. What do you learn about the "mercy seat" or "atonement cover" from these verses?

Numbers 7:89

Psalm 99:1

Hebrews 4:16

Romans 3:23-25 (read it in the CSB version)

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<sup>1</sup> Dillard and Longman, 76-77.

In the wilderness, separated from God by their sin, people needed a way to come into his presence. The tabernacle designed by God was later replaced by the temple King Solomon built. Longman & Dillard point us further.

All of the Old Testament symbols for God's dwelling on earth, however, were provisional and temporary. They all pointed forward and anticipated the coming of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, who 'became flesh and tabernacled for a while among us' (John 1:14, author's translation). Ultimately, the tabernacle and temple, which represented heaven on earth, looked forward to the merging of heaven and earth in the New Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

6. Read Revelation 21:1-5. What elements do you see here that were present in the tabernacle?

7. Look up the following verses. What is the common theme among them?

Matthew 18:20

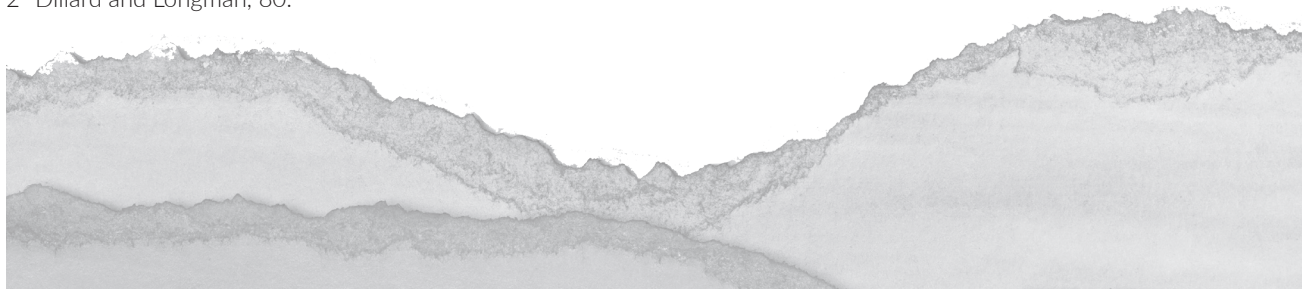
John 14:23

John 14:16-17

8. Before we wrap up, read 1 Corinthians 6:19. Name another sacred space and describe some of your habits to keep it holy.

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<sup>2</sup> Dillard and Longman, 80.







9. Read Ephesians 2:19-22. What other sacred space are you part of?

10. What is one thing you learned (or were reminded of) about God from this week's study?  
Consider how you can encourage one another as a homegroup about God's very real presence with each of us and among us as the body of Christ.

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God. Name the ways we know he is here with us from Scripture and from lived experience.

**Repent.** Pray for your homegroup members and the places that each one needs to know God is with them.

**Request.** Pray for Santa Barbara Community Church, that we collectively experience God's presence through his Holy Spirit and will reflect his presence out into our community.

## Study 8

# Rebellion

## Exodus 32

Read through Exodus 32.

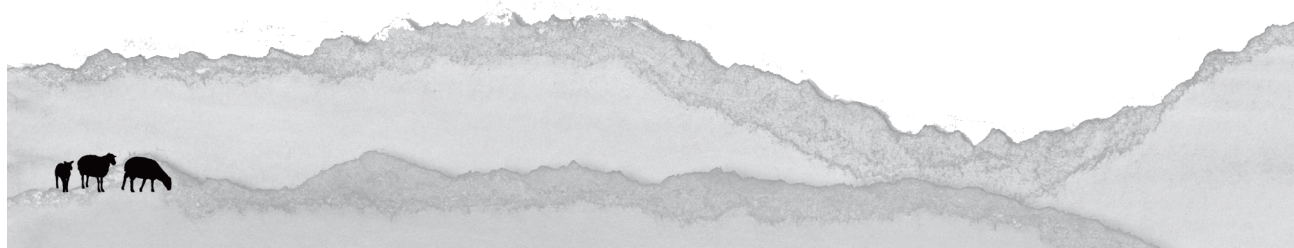
1. Write down any initial observations or questions that arise as you go through the chapter.

In the previous chapters, Moses had a glorious and intimate conversation with God at the top of the mountain. This contrasts with our passage here in Exodus 32 which describes the rebellion of God's people at the foot of the mountain. Our passage begins with the people's observation that Moses was delayed in his return. As they wait, their patience wanes—and their determination to take the situation into their own hands will turn out to be disastrous.

2. Can you think of a time or season of your life when you felt that God was silent or absent while you waited? Describe that situation and what you may have learned from that experience.

Anthony Evans (son of Dr. Tony Evans, pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, Texas) has a song entitled *Silence* and the lyrics are:

*Questions left unanswered  
Feels like my prayers are hitting these walls  
So I'm left here wondering  
If You can still hear me, hear me at all*



*I've been here so long my faith is getting weak  
So I just have to believe*

*Maybe You're speaking through the silence  
Maybe it's all I need to hear  
Give the patience in this quiet  
I need to rest here and wait for You<sup>1</sup>*

3. The Scriptures say much about this challenging but so important action of waiting. Read the following passages and write down the wisdom of purposeful waiting.

Genesis 8:5-17

Psalms 25:1-5

Acts 1:4-8

To appease the masses, Aaron fashions a golden calf to be worshiped. Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton note,

All evidence seems to indicate that the Hebrews borrowed the bull-god symbol from the Egyptians, probably the Apis-bull cult of Memphis. Apis was the sacred bull later known as the incarnation of the son of Osiris. This sacred bull was a fertility deity who gave life, health, and strength to the king and agricultural and reproductive fertility to the kingdom.<sup>2</sup>

4. Take a look at verse 4. In what way are the people creating a revisionist history—and for what purpose?

Pastor and author Jon Tyson writes about idolatry:

We live in a society without a reference point for idolatry. We have neither the cultural framework nor the worldview to support it. And this makes us all the more susceptible to it.... It's amazing how clearly we can see false worship in others. Yet in our own lives, idolatry comes to feel normal, like an enjoyable hobby, a rational approach, the way things simply are. Yet these idols have the power to enslave us.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Evans, Anthony.. *"Silence." Home*, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Hill, Andrew E. and Walton, John H., *A Survey of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991, 2000, 2009, 298.

<sup>3</sup> Tyson, Jon, *Beautiful Resistance*. Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2020, 24.



5. Finish this sentence: "I would be safer, happier and more truly fulfilled if I only had \_\_\_\_." We've all filled in this blank in a variety of ways, so be honest!"

The pastor and author Tim Keller defines an idol as "anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give."<sup>4</sup> Keller expounds and states that all of us struggle with the deep idols of *power*, *approval*, *comfort*, and *control*.

6. Which of these four are you seeking the most in your life right now? How are these idols manifesting in your life – in your work, your habits, your relationships, your thoughts?

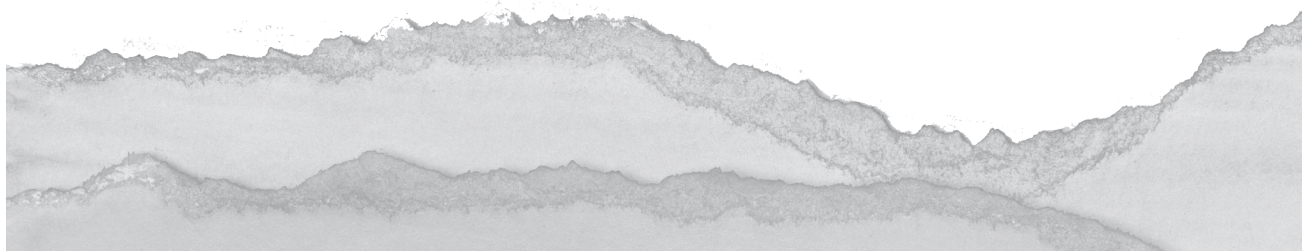
In response to the people's wicked idolatry and their choice to reject him, God becomes angry and shares with Moses his plan to disown the people (especially seen in v.7 when God refers to the Israelites not as "my people" but as "your people").

7. How is it a good thing that God reacts to sin and disobedience in this way? What does it reveal about his character?

God may appear harsh or unmerciful in this section, but we must remember that our God is perfect and his ways are perfect and good.

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4 Keller, xvii.



As the passage continues, we witness God relenting from his anger through Moses' mediation. It is amazing that we know and serve an omnipotent, eternal God who nonetheless listens and responds to the prayers of imperfect, finite, and ordinary people. Did God always intend to relent, or did he genuinely change his mind? We may have a hard time understanding how this plays out, but this is truly a situation of our God being a mystery and his thoughts and ways being infinitely higher than our own.

The scholar Peter Enns writes on this paradox:

I suggest that we should look at this in the broadest context possible. The Bible gives us a varied portrait of the nature of God. At times we seem to be peering into heaven itself. At other times, the Bible presents God in human pictures. The dialogue of verses 11-14 is more in keeping with the latter category than the former. The reason for this here seems to be that the writer is focusing his attention on Moses' role as intercessor, not on the inner workings of God's psyche.<sup>5</sup>

The role of intercessor is one that we witness throughout the Scriptures: Abraham (Genesis 18); Moses (here in Exodus 32); Paul (Romans 9:1-5); Jesus himself throughout his earthly ministry; even the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26-27). As we close, let us consider how we can serve as intercessors for the Church, and the people placed around us.

8. Who is currently on your heart that you are interceding for in prayer? What do you pray for them?

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God for who he is, perfect in his character and ways with his people. We worship a God who will never fail to offer us his very best, which is why he will only offer us Himself. Because God is like this, we have full assurance that he will indeed work for our good in all circumstances of life (Romans 8:28). Thank God for this!

**Repent.** Take some time to consider the ways that you have been worshiping idols instead of living for God. Also, consider the ways that you have been forming God into your own image as opposed to honoring him for who he is. Write down anything that comes to mind in this.

**Request.** Take some time to fulfill the role of intercessor. Consider people you can pray for, especially those who are facing their own struggles and difficulties. Write down the names of the people that God brings to mind, and spend some time praying for them. Write down anything that the Lord reveals and speaks to you as you pray for them.

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<sup>5</sup> Enns, 573.

## Study 9

# God, Grace, and Guilt

## Leviticus 16

1. Tell about a childhood mistake you made. How did you respond or make it right?

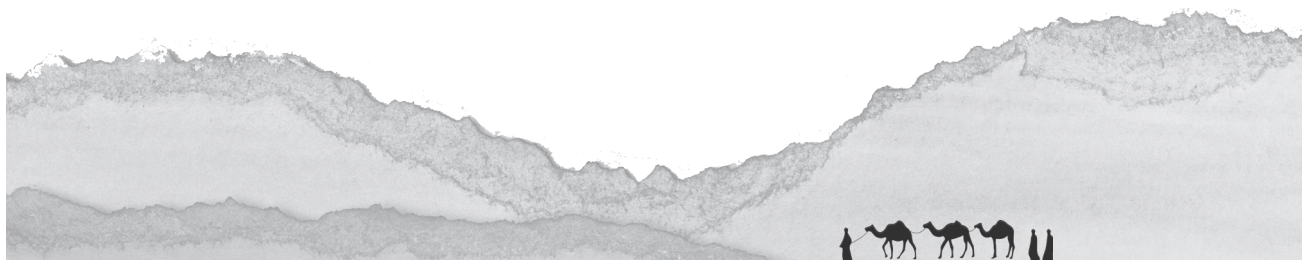
“Nobody’s perfect.” For most of us, this saying is, sadly, all too easy to prove. Whether in the realm of our actions or our inner life, we each know the truth that we often fall short not only of God’s calling, but our own ethical standards, too.

At the heart of most religious observance lies the question of how to deal with the world’s, and personal, brokenness. Each of the world’s religious belief systems offers some way to deal with sin, even if that isn’t the preferred language to describe such shortfalls. In this week’s passage, we will see God’s gracious offer of a way for his people to respond to their sin.

2. Read Leviticus 16 and make a note of anything that jumps off the page to you, confuses you, or comforts you.

Our chapter begins with a sober reminder that also serves as a warning. For more context on the demise of Aaron’s sons, read Leviticus 10:1-5.

3. Why did Aaron’s sons die? How do God’s own words in 10:3 fill in the reason for their punishment?





4. Why do you think Leviticus 16 begins by referencing the events of Leviticus 10?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What picture of God emerges from Leviticus 16:1-2?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. In what ways does the rest of the chapter fill in or round out or further contribute to that initial impression of God?

The ceremony and sacrifice outlined in Leviticus 16 is known as the Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur. This elaborate ceremony fulfilled a number of purposes for the people of Israel and included both individual and national aspects.

7. Look again through the passage and make a list of the purposes or outcomes of the various rituals given in this chapter. (For example, verse 6 shows that one purpose of Yom Kippur was to make atonement for individual sins.)

This passage highlights both the individual and the corporate aspects of sin. In addition, we see that there is guilt associated with being part of a sinful people, even if the specific sins are not committed by each individual. Through Yom Kippur, God graciously provides the possibility of atonement for each of these things.

8. Are you more accustomed to focusing on the individual nature of sin or the corporate, systemic aspects of sin? What do we stand to lose if we don't give appropriate consideration to both the individual and the corporate?

After outlining the process for cleansing the Tabernacle, God goes on to provide instructions about the scapegoat.

9. If the sacrifice described in the earlier part of the chapter made atonement for the sins of the people, what is the meaning behind the scapegoat?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Psalm 103 is a song of praise in which David offers up various reasons to thank and praise God, including his forgiveness and grace for sinners. How do the beautiful words of Psalm 103:8-12 resonate with what we've seen in Leviticus 16?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
11. Imagine you find yourself in a conversation with a friend who insists that while she knows she's been forgiven for past sins, she finds herself still wracked with guilt over her transgressions. How might this psalm and the imagery of Leviticus 16 inform how you would answer your friend?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Read Hebrews 9:11-14. How does Christ's work completely fulfill all the purpose and symbolism of the Day of Atonement?

Praise God that, because of Christ, we can have full assurance of forgiveness and live in the freedom of canceled debt!



## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God that he has always been compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love for his people. Praise him for the provision of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! Thank God that Christ's once-for-all sacrifice is sufficient and need not be repeated year after year by virtue of elaborate processes.

**Repent.** Name ways in which, like Aaron's sons, you have not shown reverence for God's holiness. Confess any tendencies you may have to overlook individual sin to focus on corporate sin, or the other way around.

**Request.** Ask God's Spirit to increase your hunger for holiness and your resolve to seek forgiveness when you fall short. Pray that those in your life who are seeking atonement and absolution in ways that can't deliver would discover the beauty and sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice.

## Study 10

# Looking to the Lord

## Numbers 9

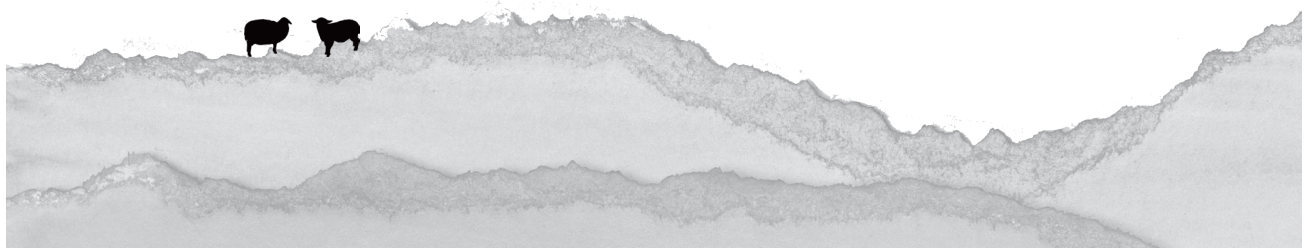
Many of us have found ourselves, at some point in life, in a situation where we had someone who functioned as a mentor in some area of life. Whether vocational, spiritual, relational, or otherwise, many of us can relate to the experience of having someone to look to for wisdom, guidance, and even example.

1. If you have had someone mentor you in some aspect of life, who was it and what were you being mentored in? What words would you use to characterize the relationship?

Much of the experience of mentoring is built on a differential in wisdom or life experience as the apprentice looks to the mentor to help guide through uncharted territory. In this week's passage, the Israelites will find themselves in uncharted territory and in need of wisdom for the next steps in their journey of faithfulness.

2. Read Numbers 9 and make a note of anything that stands out to you, confuses you, encourages you, or that you want to be sure to discuss with your homegroup.

The celebration of the Passover was instituted to commemorate the Lord leading his people out of slavery in Egypt (see Exodus 12 for a refresher). By the time we reach Numbers 9, verse 1 tells us that the people have been on their wilderness journey for two years.





3. What significance might we draw out of the fact that God's instructions to Moses in verses 2 and 3 repeat the term "appointed" and refer to a previously given set of "regulations" or "ordinances"?

It would be difficult to overstate the significance of the Passover celebration in the life of the Israelites. It marked both a remembrance of the Lord's deliverance and an opportunity to consecrate themselves anew to live as those who enjoyed a unique relationship to Yahweh.

4. Can you think of similar worship rituals in our contemporary Christian setting? What traditions have you experienced around such celebrations? Compare notes and experiences with your homegroup.

5. What tone of voice do you imagine when you read the words of verse 7?

By this time, Moses is an experienced—if not always trusted or valued—leader among the people. It would be understandable for the people to anticipate that he would have answers to their pressing questions.

6. What might Moses' response in verse 8 reveal about his character and his understanding of his leadership role among the people?
7. Look carefully at God's instructions in verses 9-14. How does what we see here align with what we've seen to be true of God throughout the wilderness wanderings?

8. Why do you think that God makes the specific distinction he does in verse 13? What does this tell us about God's concern for holiness and proper worship?

The second half of the passage relates some travel details for the Israelites' journey in the wilderness.

9. Read Exodus 33:7-11 for background on the Tabernacle and the cloud. What did the cloud indicate?

10. While Exodus 33 provides some details on how Moses related to the cloud, how would you describe the relationship of the whole of the Israelites to the cloud over the Tabernacle?

Numbers 9 provides two different stories of dependence on the Lord's guidance: one in which Moses seeks specific counsel, and one in which the entire nation is shown to be eager for and responsive to the Lord's movements.





11. Take some time to do an honest self-inventory of your own life. Do you see a similar sense of dependence on the Lord's leading and guidance? What would need to change in your life to more consistently live your life with Moses-like dependence on the Lord's leading?
12. Unlike the people of Israel, churches do not have the luxury of looking at a literal cloud for such direct, divine leading. In what ways can a church live out a similar posture of collective dependence on God's wisdom and leading?

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Rejoice in the Lord's promise to guide his people and to direct paths of those who seek his will. Praise God for his provision of the Holy Spirit to indwell both individual believers and churches.

**Repent.** James 1 says that anyone who lacks wisdom need only ask God, but that's not how we often live. Confess the ways in which you are tempted to trust in your own strength, experiences, wisdom, or talents rather than seek God's face for counsel. Name ways in which you have not taken seriously the gift of God's very presence dwelling within you.

**Request.** Ask God to direct SBCC in paths that glorify him. Pray, specifically, for the Elders and staff of SBCC that they would individually and collectively demonstrate the kind of posture of dependence on display in Numbers 9. And pray for the church at large to embody the heart of the psalmist in his request, "Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths." (Psalm 25:4)

## Study 11

# A Failure of Courage

## Numbers 13-14

Numbers 13-14 narrate an event that is pivotal to the book, and indeed to Israel's history as a whole. Each character or group of characters in the story can be categorized by their relationship to the glory of God and how they speak and act in response to it. It's a story that has a great deal to teach us about God's character, human fear and mistrust, godly leadership, obedience and disobedience, intercessory prayer, and the nature of God's forgiveness and punishment. Numbers 13-14 can be understood as a crystallization of a pattern that is repeated several times throughout the book of Numbers, which "functions as a paradigm for every succeeding generation of God's people."<sup>1</sup>

Let's dive in!

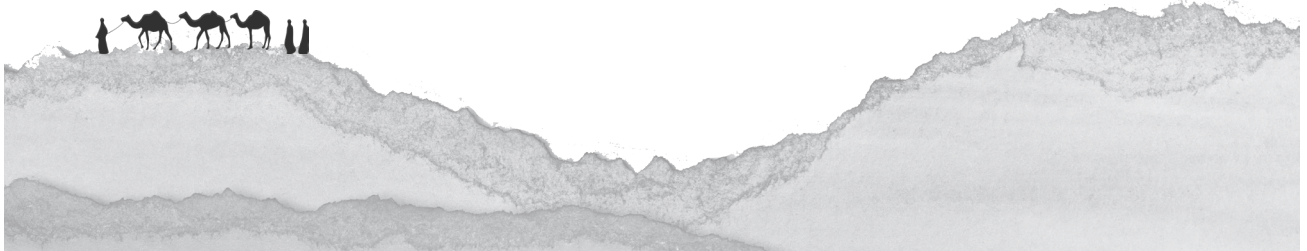
1. Read through both chapters carefully. Take notes here; be especially attentive to words and details that demonstrate attitudes of the heart.

Take a closer look back at 13:26-29, as the scouts report their findings.

2. Look up Exodus 3:8, 3:17, and 13:5. What information has God previously given the Israelites about the land of Canaan?

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<sup>1</sup> Dillard and Longman, 89.



It should have been no surprise to them either that the land was fruitful, nor that it was inhabited by other peoples! Gordon Wenham points out, as well, that the mention of Hebron in chapter 13 should have been a strong signal of God's previous promises since it was near Hebron that God had promised Abraham that he would inherit the land.<sup>2</sup>

So the Israelites' story is unfolding according to God's plans. But now that they're standing on the brink of the promise, fear and anxiety have crept in, and it causes the people to put a different spin on what is playing out. Although in the past Canaan has been referred to as a land which God had promised to give them, here the scouts address Moses with a description of Canaan as "the land to which *you* sent us" (13:27, emphasis added), as though they are recasting this whole adventure as some harebrained scheme that Moses came up with.

3. Can you think of a time when fear or anxiety caused you to have second thoughts about doing what you knew to be right? Describe your thought process.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Look back at 13:31-33. In what ways is the narrative of the scouts shifting from their earlier account? Why do you think this is?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Reflect for a while on 14:1-4. In what ways do the Israelites' statements and arguments contrast with God's plans and directions for them?

The Israelites' completely misguided charges against God result in the very things they feared coming to pass, as though God has taken them at their word: some do indeed die in the wilderness, and some do fall by the sword in Canaan (14:45). Meanwhile, the children whom they feared would be captured are the ones who inherit the land in their parents' place. And the wish to return to Egypt is reflected with irony in 14:25, when God directs the survivors to turn back and proceed along the route back towards the Red Sea, toward Egypt.

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2 Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers. An Introduction And Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981, 118.

6. How do Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb respond to the situation?

Moses' conversation with God in 14:13-19 is an echo of his intercession after the golden calf incident at Sinai in Exodus 32. Here, Moses pleads with God to remember his reputation for power and strength to carry out his purposes, and his nature as a compassionate and forgiving God. As before, "Moses' insistence that God change was clearly based on his conviction as to what is unchangeable in God, namely his unwavering intention to save."<sup>3</sup>

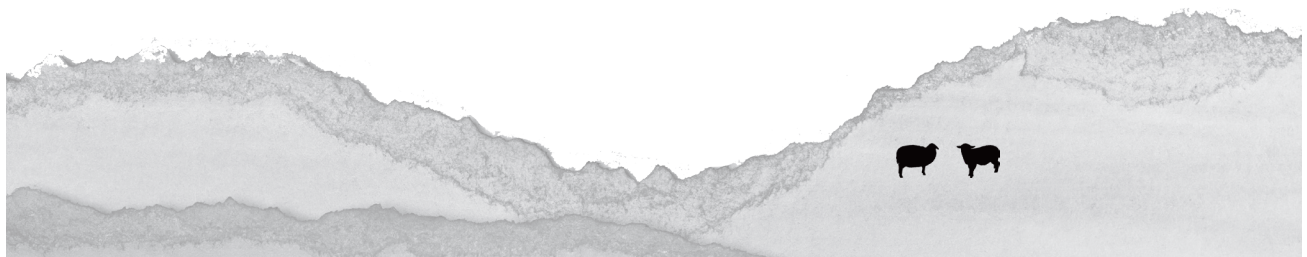
7. What are you praying for these days that requires the greatest amount of faith and persistence? How could Moses' prayers encourage you in yours?

God responds to Moses' intercession in 14:20-35, forgiving the rebellion and preserving the covenant with Israel. However, they will nevertheless suffer severe punishment for their rebellion. God is both merciful to his people and demanding of an appropriate response to his glory. In Genesis 22:16-18, because Abraham has obeyed God and has not withheld his only son from him, God promises that Abraham's descendents would be multiplied and would "take possession of the cities of their enemies." Gane remarks on the ironic reversal of this promise as it is played out in Numbers 13-14: now, because Abraham's descendents have disobeyed God and have failed to "entrust the welfare of their children to him," God reverses the statement in 14:28—"they will be decimated rather than multiplied and will not take possession of the promised cities and land of their enemies."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> D. Gowan, qtd. in Gane, 612.

<sup>4</sup> Gane, 610. Gane, 610 Gane, 610.



8. We all know that forgiveness for wrongdoing doesn't eliminate consequences and even discipline for the original offense. How have you seen this reality play out in your life or the life of someone you know?

The tragic story has a particularly tragic ending in 14:39-45. The people, having rebelled and received God's judgment, still do not seem to grasp the situation accurately. Gane sums up the situation: "Here is confession without repentance... Before they were unwilling to go where he led. Now they want to go where he is no longer leading."<sup>5</sup>

9. Think about your own heart toward God. What does it mean to you to respond to the Lord with reverence, humility and obedience? How do you know when you are not?

The themes of Numbers 13-14 show up in various places in the New Testament as well: God's people are rebellious, but God is just and faithful with preemptive love to redeem and heal, and we are called to respond with wholehearted trust.

10. Read Hebrews 3:7-11 and 3:16-19 (You may need to read more of the context as well). What message is being given here to Christians?
11. Read Matthew 19:16-22. Where in this story can you find similar themes to the ones we have explored this week in Numbers 13-14?

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5 Gane, 611

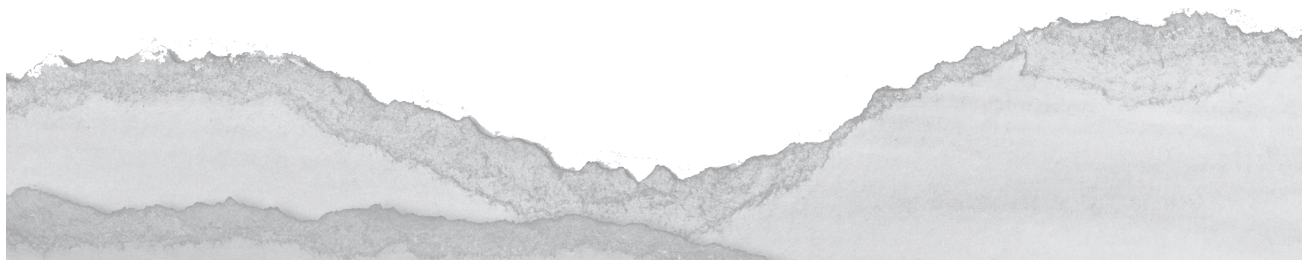
12. Wrap up your thoughts with your homegroup this week. Are there ways God is calling you to respond to him with a more wholehearted trust? Pray for one another in these areas.

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God for his mercy and patience with us as he teaches us to trust in him. Thank him for specific ways he has guided you and worked with you even in your mistakes.

**Repent.** We have all been like Israel in this story—unwilling to trust in God’s promises, afraid to risk our comfort, reluctant to accept God’s plans for us. Think about where you can identify yourself in the story, and ask God where he would have you repent.

**Request.** Pray for greater faith! Ask that God would fill his people with radical trust and great courage to live in obedience to him. Pray for those who are overcome by great anxiety and fear.







## Study 12

# Grace for Grumblers

## Numbers 20-21

If we're honest, complaining is far too easy for many of us. With the right combination of circumstances, most of us can readily become a Debbie Downer, Gloomy Gus, or Negative Nancy.

1. Can you think of a time when you found yourself repeatedly complaining about the same situation? How did that situation get resolved, if it even has? Tell your homegroup about it.

While any of us can be prone to more mundane and run-of-the-mill complaining, most of us have been around people who seem to have elevated grouching into an art form. But, no matter what we've encountered, what Moses repeatedly faced during Israel's journey through the wilderness is fairly exceptional. At nearly every turn, the people of God voiced their displeasure and their discomfort. In this week's study, we will take a look at two such instances and see the dramatic consequences of their ungrateful hearts.

2. Read Numbers 20:1-13 and, as you do, use the space below to write down anything that stands out, whether notable, confusing, or comforting.



3. The term in verse 3 is far more serious than mere complaining. What word does your Bible use to describe the way that the people interacted with Moses? What images come to mind for you when you think of “quarreling” or “contending”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. In one sense, the facts of the people’s description of the wilderness were correct: there was limited produce and water. What problems can you find, though, with the people’s description and perception of their situation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. What can we deduce about the state of Moses’ leadership in this passage?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. What do you think that God means in verse 12 when he accuses Moses of failing to honor his holiness?

The consequences for Moses’ disobedience are steep! In the next section we will consider this week, the complaining continues and similarly steep consequences are felt throughout the community.

7. Read Numbers 21:4-9 and, again, use the space below to write down anything that stands out, whether notable, confusing, or comforting.



12. After sending the snakes to punish the people, why do you think God offered the bronze snake as a means of rescue? What does this tell us about how judgment and grace co-exist together in God's character? You may want to explore Hebrews 12:4-13 as you consider your response.

You may already know that Jesus references the story of the bronze snake and applies it to himself. Read John 3:1-15.

13. What is Jesus claiming about himself in John 3:14-15?

14. In the desert, the people literally looked to the bronze serpent for their salvation. What does it mean for someone to "look to" Jesus for salvation?

15. This study is titled "Grace for Grumblers." Where do you see God's grace on display in the two stories we've considered this week?

16. Where do you see evidence of God's grace in your life, or in the lives of your fellow homegroup members? It may even be in surprising places! Take some time to point out to one another where you've seen him at work.

Spend time as a homegroup rehearsing the grace of God for one another. Tell of his enduring grace and mercy for people prone to stumble, complain, and wander.

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God for his always-gracious character and for his patience with his frail and sometimes faithless image bearers. Praise God that, through Jesus, he has provided a means of rescue from a condition much more serious than a snake bite!

**Repent.** Confess any ways in which your heart has grown cold toward the Lord's gracious provision. Name any patterns of persistent complaining or ingratitude that you find in yourself. Confess any ways in which, like Moses, your partial obedience has not shown reverence for God's holiness.

**Request.** Ask God to create in you a hunger for greater faithfulness. Ask the Spirit for eyes to see the many reasons you have to give God praise with a grateful heart. Ask for open doors to point those you know and love to the saving work of Jesus Christ, "lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14-15).







## Study 13

# Prophet for Hire

## Numbers 22–25

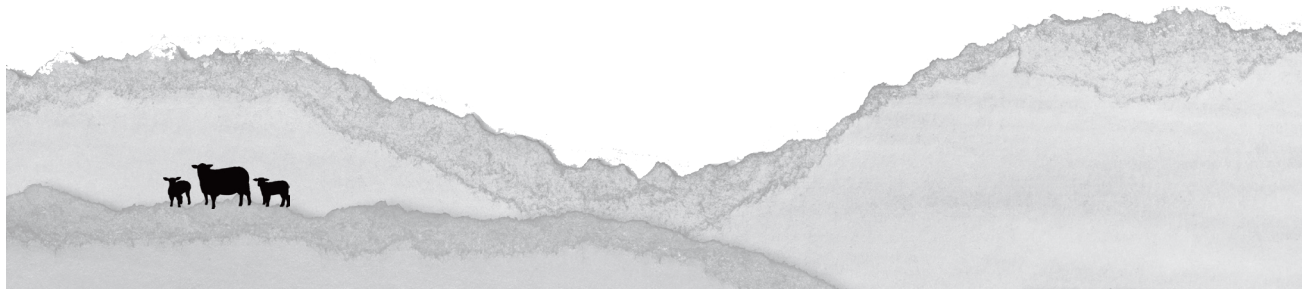
Have you ever shown up somewhere expecting a certain kind of event only to realize your expectations were wrong? Perhaps you thought it was a costume party– only to be the only person in costume. Or perhaps you thought you were being asked out on a date, but the asker had a group event in mind? When there is a difference between our expectations of a situation and reality, the result can be hilarious or tragic.

1. Tell your homegroup about a time when you had expectations of one thing and the reality was quite different.

The passage we're going to look at this week is undoubtedly full of some of the oddest stuff in the Bible. The story is filled with irony and unexpected twists and ends with a tale of sex and violence. As you read this story, undoubtedly you'll have lots of questions. But enter into the story and try not to miss the forest for the trees.

The action begins as the people of Israel are nearing the end of their time in the wilderness. They are close to where they will enter the Promised Land, across the Jordan River from Jericho. Numbers 21 closes with an account of two memorable victories over the Amorite kings Og and Sihon. This leaves some of the other neighboring peoples very afraid!

2. Read Numbers 22–25. In the space below, record some of the things you notice. What is surprising, funny, interesting, confusing, tragic?



3. The first character we're introduced to in Numbers 22 is Balak. Read verses 1-6 and answer the following questions about Balak:

Who is he?

What is he worried about?

What's his plan?

The other main character in these chapters is Balaam. He is an obscure figure but it is clear he is a pagan prophet who has an international reputation for pronouncing effective blessings and curses. Furthermore, it seems he is available for hire.

4. There is a fundamental conflict in how these two men understand what Balaam is there to do. What does Balaam repeatedly say he can/will do? What does Balak want Balaam to do?

5. The theme of blessing and cursing is one of the earliest themes in the biblical story. Look up the following verses:

Genesis 1:28

Genesis 3:14-19

Genesis 12:1-3

Genesis 22:17-18

Genesis 27:26-29

Genesis 35:9-12

Genesis 48:15-16

6. With all this in mind, how does Balak's course of action conflict with God's character and God's plan?

As Balaam makes his way to see Balak, a crazy thing happens that captures our attention and memory: a donkey talks! But there's more to this story than just one of the more unusual miracles. The beast of burden sees what his master, the seer (Balaam is famous for being a "see-er" of spiritual things!) cannot. Commentator Roy Gane points out the deep irony:

In a stunning reversal, the donkey is like a human and the human is asinine! ... This should have been a humbling experience for Balaam. He thought he was special because God spoke through him, but now God spoke through his donkey, to whom he considered himself so superior. God can use whomever or whatever he chooses.<sup>1</sup>

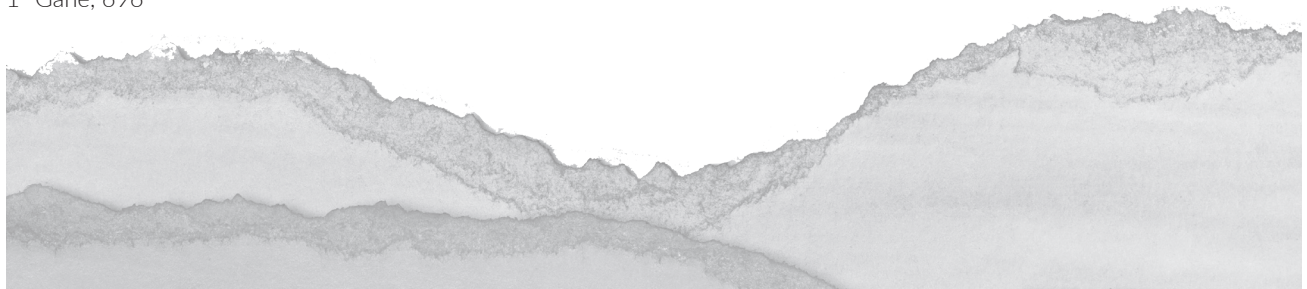
7. Do you find this encouraging or humbling (or both)? In what areas of your life can God's ability to use whomever or whatever he chooses give you confidence?

The series of Balaam's oracles—'failures' from Balak's point of view— gets more and more comical. As if just changing the vantage point will change anything! But the message doesn't change and truth just gets louder and louder: God is intent on blessing Israel and no enemy can stand in the way.

But the last of the oracles (24:15ff) contains something new. Look at 24:17 again. This verse contains a shadowy prophecy of things to come. Both 'star' and 'scepter' point to a royal personage who will exercise dominion (24:19) and triumph over Israel's enemies. To an extent, this prophecy was fulfilled by King David who defeated the surrounding nations including the Moabites, Edomites, and Amalekites. But many have seen a more distant fulfillment in Jesus, the far greater King who called

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1 Gane, 696



himself “the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16) and who triumphed over the powers of darkness and definitively dealt with the curse that stood against us.

8. Read Ephesians 1:3-14 which details some of the many blessings that are irrevocably ours through Jesus. List some of these blessings that cannot be altered by any power of hell or scheme of man.

By the time we get to the end of Numbers 24, the Israelite cause feels assured. But then, in chapter 25, another plot twist...what Balak could not bring about through a curse from Balaam becomes a reality through Israel's own sin. Numbers 25:1-3 is tragic! As often happens, sexual immorality and idolatry go hand in hand, and many in Israel bring destruction on themselves.

Several chapters later, we learn that a trap had been laid. In spite of his apparent obedience to God in blessing Israel, if Balaam struck you as a person who couldn't be trusted, you were right! Read Numbers 31:8 and 16.

9. What was Balaam's plan to get Balak's reward after all?

It is no wonder Balaam is later treated in Scripture as an anti-hero, a model of which to be aware.

10. Read 2 Peter 2:14-16 and Revelation 2:14. How might we heed this instruction and become people who encourage others toward righteous living rather than enticing toward sin? What could this look like practically for you?

In the middle of the Israelite crisis steps a hero named Phinehas. Although we might cringe at the violence of this story, it is important to understand what Phinehas is responding to. Like a destructive cyber-attack, the plot of the Midianite rulers to use their women to lead Israel into idolatry and sexual immorality has led to what they had hoped for—a catastrophe in the Israelite camp. It all comes to a head when one of the leaders in the Simeonite clan takes the daughter of one of the leading men in Midian and blatantly and publicly flaunts the commands of God.

Phinehas responds by shish-kebabing them “in the act” and thereby averts the wrath of God. Because of his jealousy for God’s glory, God commends Phinehas and gives to him “a covenant of peace.”

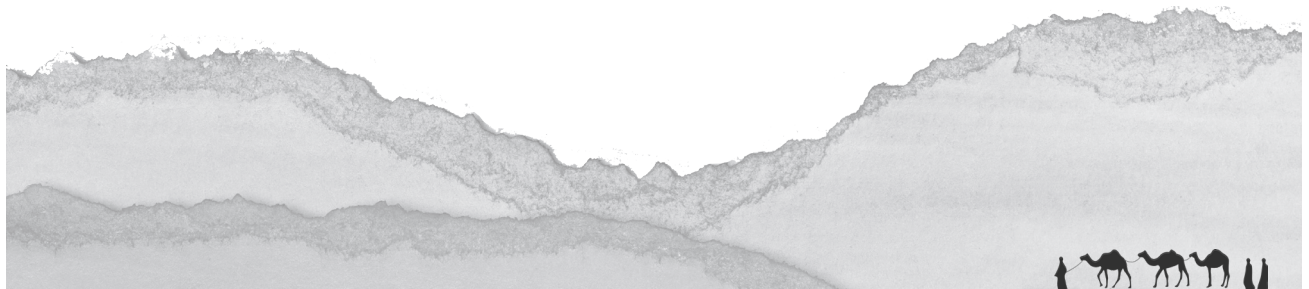
Jesus teaches his followers to be ruthless with sin. Read the following verses:

- Mark 9:42-48
- Romans 8:12-14
- Colossians 3:5-6

11. How can you be ruthlessly committed to guarding your heart and mind and body from temptations to sin? Do you have any practical examples of what this has looked like for you?

Finish this study by reflecting on Jesus who, like Phinehas, was consumed by zeal for God’s honor. Like Phinehas, he averted God’s wrath from falling on his people. But Jesus did this not by inflicting violence on others, but by submitting to the awful consequences himself to make atonement for us.

12. What’s one lesson you want to remember from this study? Share with your homegroup one takeaway from this bizarre, yet powerful, story.





## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Thank God for the assurance that we have through Jesus of God's blessing. Use the passage we looked at earlier, Ephesians 1:3-14 as a stimulant to give thanks for all that we have been blessed with in Christ.

**Repent.** Confess the ways you have pampered your sin tendencies. Name the ways that you have given in to acts or patterns of life that are unbecoming for God's children. Seek his forgiveness and strength to put to death whatever is ungodly in you.

**Request.** Pray for yourself and our church broadly that we would be a people who are zealous for God, grieved by things that cause his name to be dishonored, and eager to see God's holiness respected. Pray that the people of God would not be spiritually anxious, but would know the peace of knowing that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

## Study 14

# Covenant Living

## Deuteronomy 6

As we navigate the wilderness of life in a fallen world, what does covenant living look like? First, a quick reminder about the Mosaic covenant to set things up.

1. Flip back to study 4, question #2 and copy your definition of the word “covenant.”

Covenant Definition:

2. Also from study 4, question #8, what were the responsibilities and privileges each party agreed to from Exodus Chapter 19?
  - Israel agreed to (v.5).....  
(Specifically, the Ten Commandments, the law)
  - God agreed to make Israel a (v.5)..... The whole earth (inclusive of all nations) is his. But they will be a kingdom of (v.6)..... and a.....

Now let's look at our passage for today. Read Deuteronomy Chapter 6.

3. What stood out to you? What questions did you have?





7. What are the three ways we love God described in verse 5? Discuss the distinctions between these three.
  
8. Read Matthew 22:34-40. Jesus is quoting the Shema combined with Leviticus 19:18. Why do you think he said this is more important than any other commandment? Why not quote the Ten Commandments instead?

It's easy to forget our life-purpose is loving God, and instead wander through our days making ourselves the center of things.

9. There is a warning in Deuteronomy 6:10-12. Summarize it in your own words.
  
10. How would you apply that warning today?
  
11. Verses 13-18 mention some of the things God wants from us. List one that stands out to you and why.



In verses 20-25, the Israelites are challenged to remind their children just as Moses reminded them. The next generation will also need a reminder of their purpose in life and the covenant God made. While God's purposes for his people have not changed, Jesus, having fulfilled the demands of the old covenant, has made a new covenant with us.

12. Look up the following verses and write what each says about this new covenant.

Hebrews 8:6

Ephesians 2:8-9

Romans 8:9-11

Hebrews 9:15

13. How would you explain this new covenant to a 10-year-old?

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God for the promises he's fulfilled in the past. Remember them in prayer. Thank Jesus Christ for bringing us this new covenant and all its benefits.

**Repent.** Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you ways in which your heart is resisting God this week. Ask for the power to turn back to him and to love him with your whole heart, soul, and strength.

**Request.** Pray for the next generation to love and obey Jesus.

## Study 15

# Blessings and Curses

## Deuteronomy 28

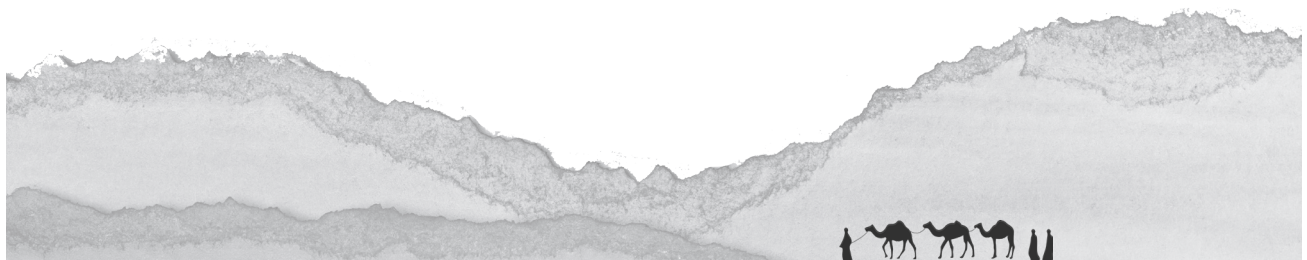
Whether it was receiving our first cell phone or a driver's license, signing a child up for club sports or taking a new job, most of us have had to sign contracts at some point in our lives.

1. What's one time that you've entered into a contract-like agreement in your life? What were the benefits that came from that arrangement? What were the obligations?

This week's passage brings us nearly to the end of Deuteronomy and this study of Israel's wilderness wanderings. The book of Deuteronomy is built around three speeches or sermons that Moses delivered to the people of Israel as they stood on the brink of entering the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 1:1-8). The passage we will consider this week is in the final of these three sermons.

2. This week's reading is quite lengthy and fairly wordy. Make time to carefully read Deuteronomy 28-29:1. As you do, make a note of anything that stands out to you, confuses you, or challenges you.

As we've learned in earlier studies, the shape of God's relationship with his people is described in covenantal language. Here in chapter 28, we see a clear outline of the blessings that come from covenant obedience and the curses that result from covenant unfaithfulness.







8. Passages like Psalm 103:13-18, John 3:16-17, and 1 John 4:9-10 highlight the enduring and unmerited love of God. How does such an obviously conditional covenant in Deuteronomy align with the Bible's clear declaration elsewhere about God's unconditional love for his people?

Since Eden, it has been all too easy for humans to imagine faithfulness to God in terms of drudgery and lifeless duty. Our original parents believed the serpent's lie that God was a miser holding out on them and that the good life could be found in living by their own will. Yet, shortly after this list of blessings and curses, Moses paints covenant fidelity in the most compelling light. Read Deuteronomy 30:11-20.

9. What emotions do you feel prompted in your heart as you read Moses' charge to the people of Israel?

Moses' candid descriptions of the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience are meant to prompt a response in his original listeners and in much later readers, like us. Daniel Block helps explain the intent:

Just as John wrote his gospel after several decades of reflection on the death and resurrection of Jesus, so Moses preached the sermons in Deuteronomy after almost four decades of reflection on the significance of the Exodus and God's covenant with Israel. Thus, like the gospel of John, the book of Deuteronomy functions as a theological manifesto, calling on Israel to respond to God's grace with unreserved loyalty and love.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Block, 25.



Jesus's message would have resonated deeply with Moses and the people of Israel when he told his disciples,

Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them...Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me (John 14:21, 23-24).

10. How has love for Jesus grown your obedience to Jesus? How has obedience to Jesus grown your love for Jesus?

An honest inventory of our lives could leave us despondent about the ways in which we have not kept covenant with our Sovereign Lord. But, the gracious God who extended this covenant to the imperfect people of Israel continues to make covenants of blessing with undeserving people like us.

11. Read the following passages and write down how God extends blessings through Jesus.

Romans 5:6-10

2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Galatians 3:10-14

1 Peter 2:22-25

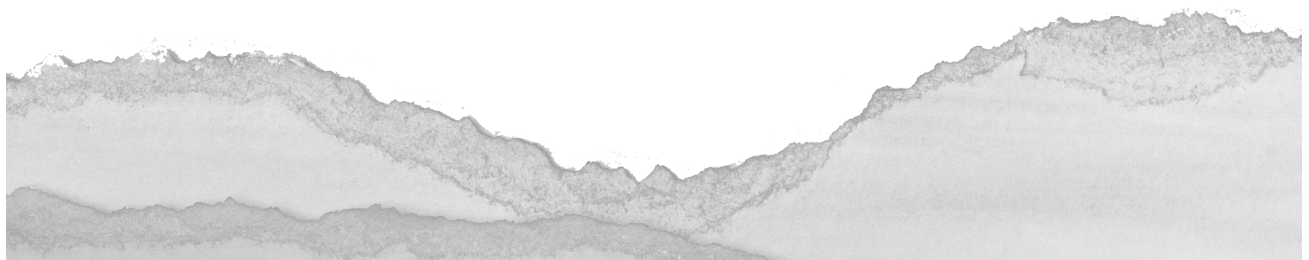
Spend time comparing answers with your homegroup and allow what you discover in these passages to inform your time of corporate prayer, giving thanks, confessing sin, and asking God to continue to transform your heart and life more and more into the image of Jesus Christ.

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God that, because of Christ's perfect faithfulness, rebels like us can experience the blessings of God! Praise God that, because Christ bore the penalty of our disobedience, "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1)!

**Repent.** Name ways in which your other allegiances draw you away from obedience to God's law. Confess any places in your life in which you are tempted toward obedience merely for the reward rather than out of love for the Father.

**Request.** Ask God to increasingly turn your heart toward the joy of obedience as an expression of love and gratitude for his saving grace. Ask that SBCC's corporate pursuit of joyful faithfulness would be compelling and inviting to a watching world.





## Study 16

# Moses on Mt. Nebo

## Deuteronomy 32 and 34

1. What is your all-time favorite song (if you don't have an all-time favorite, you can just think about a song that you like a lot)? What is the message of the song? What do you think is the purpose of the song?

In Deuteronomy 31, God instructs Moses to write down a song and teach it to the people as a witness. God knew that his people would turn away from him and pursue false idols so he wanted Moses to recite every word of this song to everyone (Deuteronomy 31:30). In Deuteronomy 32, we "hear" the song that was shared on that day.

Read Deuteronomy 32.

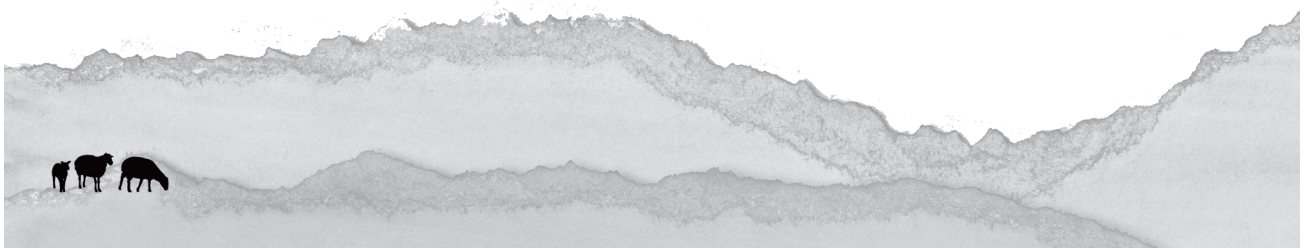
2. What does this song teach us about God? How is God portrayed in these verses?
3. What does it mean that God is the Rock (v.4)? The song describes the Rock's works and ways to be perfect and declared to be the faithful God. Look at these following passages to gain a fuller understanding of this important term and name of God.

Psalms 18:1-3

Psalms 95:1-3

Matthew 7:24-27

Note: This is why Moses' disobedience in striking the rock twice in Numbers 20 would disallow him from entering the Promised Land (see Study 12).









The scholar Daniel Block writes:

For thirty-three chapters readers have been listening in on a sacred event, as Israel's pastor has been preparing his congregation for life in the Promised Land. The gospel according to Moses has been rich in grace: the gift of salvation, free and undeserved; the gift of covenant, personal and intimate; the gift of revelation, profound and unparalleled; the gift of providence, patient and loving; and the gift of a home, over the Jordan about to be delivered into their hands.... By this point in the drama, Moses has done all he could do to set his house in order. He has commissioned a successor, provided a written transcript of his farewell pastoral sermons and arranged for the regular reading of this Torah in the future, taught the people a national anthem, and pronounced his benediction on the tribes. All that remains is the report of his death and the people's response to his passing. This is the function of chapter 34.<sup>1</sup>

In this final chapter of the Pentateuch, Moses is allowed to see the Promised Land after a 40-year journey of deliverance, signs and wonders, wanderings, and intimacy with God. However, this must have been an emotional moment because Moses is only allowed to see the land but not cross into it.

7. How do you think Moses must have felt at this moment? What questions or thoughts do you think were swirling in his mind at this time?

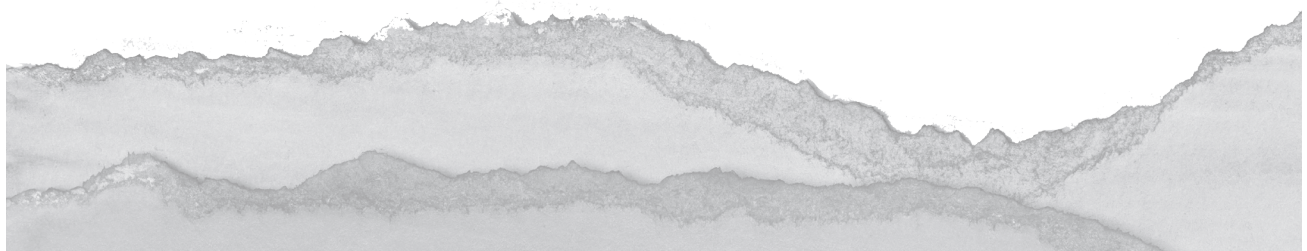
Rita Springer sings these lyrics in the song "Worth It All"<sup>2</sup>:

*I don't understand Your ways  
Oh but I will give You my song  
Give You all of my praise  
You hold on to all my pain  
With it You are pulling me closer  
And pulling me into Your ways*

*It's gonna be worth it  
It's gonna be worth it all  
I believe this*

<sup>1</sup> Block, 805-806.

<sup>2</sup> Springer, Rita. "Worth It All." *A Fragrant Offering*, 2005.



8. Have you experienced a time or season when you wrestled to have faith and questioned if it was going to be “worth it all”? What was going on and what came out of that wrestling?

In Hebrews 11 (oftentimes nicknamed ‘The Hall of Fame of Faith’), we are taught that faith in its very nature involves not seeing and not having things fully realized here on earth.

9. Read Hebrews 11:39–12:2. For what purpose is God building up your faith? According to these verses, what can help you as you continue running this race of faith? Be prepared to share with your homegroup so that they might run well alongside you!

## Prayer Guide

**Rejoice.** Praise God for his perfect plan for you and how he is forever faithful. Thank him for all the circumstances and situations of your life as God is using them all to build up your faith and trust in him.

**Repent.** As we have studied the many ways that God’s people chose to forget about God and turn away from him, take some time to consider the ways you have done the same. Write down anything that comes to mind. Ask for God’s forgiveness trusting that it is his kindness that leads us to repentance.

**Request.** Pray with confidence that God will help you to keep your eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Pray for endurance that you will be able to keep running this marathon of faith with a deep belief that it is going to be worth it all in the end. Pray that you will be faithful to the very end like Moses. Write down anything that God may speak to you during this time.