

## February 15 : Scriptures Numbers 34-36

### SUMMARY

Borders and leaders. That's chapter 34. Why does the Torah define Israel's borders so clearly, at least in terms of the cities and landmarks they knew at that time? Because many of the Torah's laws apply only to the Promised Land, which we'll see in more detail in Deuteronomy. To get an idea of just what the borders are as laid down in this chapter, I would highly suggest you search online for "Numbers 34 Israel boundaries map." Trust me, you'll get a lot of images. Some will agree and some won't. But that's okay. You'll get a general idea. However, on many of the maps, it won't include the land given to Reuben and Gad on the east side of the Jordan river, but that's included later.

If you do any study of Israel's ancient borders, historic borders, and prophesied borders, you'll also see a lot of variations. Why? Nations rise and fall in influence and their influence is often exercised through warfare which often changes boundaries. Israel's borders start quite small when Joshua begins Canaan's conquest but grow to their largest extent under King Solomon's reign. And then, *BAM*, Israel's borders shrink again then they are exiled to Babylon, and on and on.

In the future, the Bible says the Euphrates River will eventually be Israel's boundary. Look at a current map. This means Israel's ultimate boundary will be from the southern edge of modern-day Turkey to include Syria, half of Iraq, all of Jordan, and the north part of Saudi Arabia, i.e. a significant part of the Fertile Crescent! Next, leaders are selected who will receive one of the 12 primary land parcels and divide them up among their tribe's clans. It's all pretty straightforward.

In chapter 35 we move on to cities for the Levitical priests. The cities total 48 and are to be scattered throughout the land. Of those 48 cities, 6 of them are designated as Cities of Refuge which we'll look at next. I want to point out that even though the Levites get no land as their family inheritance, they do need a place to live. In a modern sense, these cities are like the parsonage (house and/or financial allowance) given to many local pastors so they can live close to the congregation or help with living expenses. This is needed since many pastors in the U.S. serve for lower salaries compared to those in the secular world with comparable education and training. The general principle is for God's people to be supported by those they serve (Leviticus 7:35, Numbers 18:21, 1 Corinthians 9:1-12, 1 Timothy 5:17-18). Therefore, each tribe is to give a portion of their land to the local Levites for their homes and family food production.

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The Cities of Refuge in this chapter are very important. Their purpose is to “serve as cities of refuge for you, so that a person who kills someone unintentionally may flee there” (35:11). This is for cases of “manslaughter” only, not murder. They are to ensure that a perpetrator lives long enough to get a fair trial (35:12) because of the victim’s family’s desire for vengeance. The cities were to be 6 Levitical cities, 3 on each side of the Jordan, arranged north to south with well-marked roads. This is so a person who had killed another person could easily reach sanctuary before the victim’s family avenger catches up with them and exacts retribution, death for death.

Verses 16-24 give several examples explaining what the Lord regards as the difference between manslaughter and murder. Murder is often determined by the use of an object, but not always. 1) An object could accidentally fly out of a worker’s hand and kill someone, or 2) according to verses 20-21, a killer does not even need a weapon and is still liable for the murder. The circumstances must be fully evaluated to determine whether it was a premeditated act or whether it was simply an accident. The intent is the key.

However, when such a tragedy happens, revenge can overrule reason. This is the purpose of the Cities of Refuge, to let cooler heads and justice prevail. Should the person be found guilty of murder, the avenger of blood (a family member of the slain person) has the sole right and duty to execute justice. There is no third party involved. Until the ruling comes down from the elders of the City of Refuge, the perpetrator is to be protected from the avenger of blood’s desire for vengeance. If the perp is found not guilty of murder, they must remain within the protection of the city until the current High Priest’s death. Why? The rabbis explain the High Priest must bear some responsibility for the death because such deaths would not have occurred unless he had been praying against them from happening. Also, since intentionality is tough to judge human beings, then the length of the perp’s sentence is left up to God, the time when the High Priest dies.

Yes, murder happens. Even in the case of murder, the Lord puts a few strong boundaries to ensure proper judgment is made. There *must* be at least two witnesses. If a person is guilty of murder, the sentence is death. There is no parole via a monetary payment to ransom the perp’s life. And that applies to the person stuck in a City of Refuge as well.

All of this comes down to the value of life (35:33-34). Justice for a spilled life *must* be observed. All unjust taking of life *must* be dealt with for *unjust shedding of blood defiles the land*. This means unjust shedding of blood will affect the land that Israel is soon to conquer. Will Israel be guilty of shedding innocent blood when they attack the Canaanites? No. Under God’s just decree against the Canaanites’ sin, Israel can wage war against them and it is not regarded as murder.

Finally, in chapter 36 Moses clarifies the Lord's ruling for Zelophehad's daughters. Yes, they may inherit a portion of the land. But since their land portion transfers to their husband and their land is to stay within their family line (Joseph), then they can only marry within their tribe (36:6). This applies to any other woman in all the tribes of Israel as well (36:7-9).

Congratulations! You've now cruised through the book of Numbers. We leave this book with Israel on the plains of Moab, ready to start their assault on Canaan. There are only a few things left to do. First, Moses will repeat the covenant terms on the 40<sup>th</sup> year after the Israelites first received them at Mount Sinai. Deuteronomy means "second law." While they *are* a repeat of the original terms of the Torah, God's covenant laws, and Israel's Constitution, there are some additions and clarifications that will be made. Second, Moses will walk up Moab's Mount Nebo, get a supernatural view of Israel's Promised Land, and then go home to be with His God and friend, Yehovah.

### INSIGHT

According to Scriptures, three things defile the land – *innocent bloodshed, idolatry, and immorality* – the three "I"s. Verse 33 states that the (innocent) bloodshed defilement cannot be removed except by the blood of the one that defiled it. Our nation legalized and therefore condoned the taking of innocent life through the Supreme Court's 1973 Roe v. Wade abortion decision. As of January 2021, *62 million babies have been killed in the womb*. How defiled and unclean our land has become because of this great sin? It is unbearable to think about, even unfathomable. What justice is building against us by the Judge of All Life? If we add to that our nation's obvious rejection of God and our rampant and unrestrained sexual immorality, how does God even allow us to exist? Only the blood of Jesus could pay for such great personal and national sin. Will we reach out to God in repentance or be stamped out as a nation in rebellion?

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## February 16 : Scriptures Deuteronomy 1-3

### SUMMARY

Deuteronomy's Hebrew name is *Devarim*, meaning *Words*. (*Davar*, word). Deuteronomy is unique because 1) These laws are focused on Israel's new life in Eretz Yisrael, and 2) Rather than God speaking directly and Moses recording the words, Moses was inspired by God and wrote in his own words. In Deuteronomy, Moses is the speaker, not God directly. This is shown by the fact that in Deuteronomy, Moses says, "the Lord spoke to me," whereas the constant refrain in the rest of the Torah is "the Lord spoke to Moses." So in a sense, Moses was inspired, yet he was allowed to choose the words that became the Torah. This position is not far from the theologically stuffy "verbal, plenary (all the original words) inspiration of Scripture" position of most Evangelicals.

Moses now begins to recount the last 40 years of Israel's history with God and in the next Torah portion, he'll begin to launch into the body of the Covenant itself. According to (1:3) Moses begins his talk on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month in the 40<sup>th</sup> year after leaving Egypt. That would be somewhere around February-March, about 1 ½ months before the Israelites enter the land under Joshua's leadership.

Moses starts with a refresher course of Israel's recent 40-year history with the Lord. This is a very common part of the way covenants are constructed. They usually start with a history of the relationship between the two parties, say a conquering king and a freed people. After retelling the parties' history, there come the terms of the covenant along with the command for obedience, blessings for obedience, disciplinary measures for breaking the covenant, ways to cover offenses (reinstating the covenant), and the recognition of the "witnesses" needed to affirm both parties agreed to the covenant. We'll see all of these parts in Deuteronomy.

This may seem like a boring rehash of Israel's wilderness wandering, but there are very interesting things to notice. I'll hit some highlights to help you read through Deuteronomy 1-3. Note that chapter 1 reviews the Israelites' history with God from the departure from Mount Sinai to the failed 1<sup>st</sup> attempt at Canaan.

We get a little perspective here in verse 1:2. Question: How long could it have taken Israel to actually enter the Promised Land after they left Mount Sinai (Mt. Horeb)? This verse says that the journey from Sinai to Eretz Yisrael at Kadesh-Barnea (in the southern desert, Negev) *should have taken only 11 days*. Disobedience stretched that out to an additional 39 years. So, how long are our "lessons" stretched out because we refuse to "hear and obey?"

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Why do verses 4-5 say that kings Sihon and Og were defeated? The rabbis point out this is noted to prove Moses could bring them into the land counter to what the people said 39 years earlier (Numbers 16:14). Verse 5 gives us the reason for Moses' talk. He will begin to expound on the Torah. Expound means "to make plain, distinct, clear, declare." Deuteronomy is a retelling of the Torah under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to prepare the people for their future in their new homeland.

But first, a little reminder. Law = Torah. Yes, Torah means *law*. But that's a very narrow description. Torah also means *direction, instruction*. Torah is more than the strict judicial laws embedded in it. There are many directions and instructions to God's people about *how* they are to live with their Covenant King in His Kingdom on earth.

And speaking of God's kingdom on earth, the land designated in 1:6-8 is the land that was promised to Abraham even though the Israelites would begin to conquer only some of it. Note that Abraham is mentioned in vs. 8.

Okay, first the land is mentioned, now judges (9-18). Why did the Lord have Moses select judges for Israel? Judges would be needed not only when they were a single camp in the Wilderness, but also when they were spread out all over the land. These judges are to be well-known wise and discerning men. What's the difference between wise and discerning? God's word says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge of the Holy One is insight" (Proverbs 9:10). *Wisdom* is knowledge applied. *Discerning* is knowing the situation and *how* to apply wisdom. Why must Israel's judges be *well-known* men of the tribes? Because the tribes knew the character of these men and knew them better than Moses did. Plus, the new leaders could not be successful unless they had the respect and acceptance of the tribe they were to judge.

In 1:19 the story is resumed. It's the account of the spies and the Israelites' failure to trust their God. The rabbis have an interesting observation about verse 22. In Numbers 13:1-3 it says the Lord commanded Moses to send out the 12 men to scout out Canaan. However, here in 1:22, Moses says that it was at the people's request that scouts were sent out. To square the accounts, the rabbis suggest that the people approached Moses (per Deuteronomy) and in response, the Lord commanded Moses to send out the spies on behalf of the low-faith nation (Numbers). Although one could make the argument that the people sent the spies to find a way into the land, it's clear *now* that the people did not trust God and the spying mission was about whether they should obey God or not.

I like Moses' depiction of the Lord during the first attempt on Canaan (1:31). "The Lord carried you this far (implying "through Egyptian attack, parting the Red Sea, making

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poisoned water fresh, providing meat and manna, fending off other enemies, appearing to you at Mount Sinai), what makes you think He can't steamroll the Canaanites and give you what He promised? *But no! You didn't trust Yehovah!*" (1:32). Except for Caleb (1:36). Caleb is granted the ground that his feet walked upon. Since he was granted Hebron, that must have been where he went. Israel's city of Hebron is Abraham's burial place and the family burial plot. It's where Joshua killed the king of Hebron (Joshua 10:3-27) and Caleb drove out the Anakim and claimed his inheritance (Joshua 14:12-15). Hebron was also one of the designated Cities of Refuge. Much later, King David ruled for seven years from Hebron, before moving his capital to Jerusalem. Do you see why the city of Hebron is still extremely important to the Jews today?

Besides Caleb, Joshua will also inherit the land (1:38). Why? Because he's the designated leader and has the training and courage to lead the attack. Courage is not ignoring the threat as you charge forward. It is fully acknowledging the threat as you charge forward anyway! He is God's example of a man after His heart.

Verse 1:39 reveals the most wicked of Israel's accusations against the Lord. It was that He didn't care about their little children. Therefore after the failed attempt, the Lord declared to them those very ones will feel the fullness of His care and mercy, but the adult rebels will feel the absence of it by not being allowed to see His promise.

Yes, the Israelites messed up big time (1:41-43)! The Israelites thought they could change their minds and God would change His. Nope. Yehovah said, "Go!" and they said, "No!" Israel changed to "GO!" but the Lord said, "NO!" Failure to line up with the Lord's word (written and "now" word) exposes the Israelites to attack and ultimate defeat. This is a good lesson for all of us to learn.

Chapter 2 covers the 39-year Wilderness wandering in one verse (2:1), then picks up with His command to position themselves for the assault in the 40<sup>th</sup> year (2:2-3). Yehovah's commands are clear – *don't provoke the descendants of Esau, the Edomites. Their land is theirs, not yours. Treat the Moabites the same way.* As a side note, Moses recounts that there were giants in the land – the Emim (aka Rephidim) as tall as the notorious giants (Anakim). The Horites (another tribe of giants) were also there at one time until Abraham's descendants, the Edomites, drove them out just like Israel is going to do with the Canaanites and the giants that live there (2:10-12).

Finally, it was time to prepare to enter Canaan (2:16) because the last of the Israelite fighting men of the faithless generation had died. Again, Israel was told not to provoke the Ammonites because they too were descendants of Abraham's nephew, Lot, just as

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Moab was, and their land belonged to them as well. Like Moab, the Ammonites dispatched the giants living in their land (2:20-23).

As part of their school of faith and warfare training, the Lord directed them to move toward the Amorites and their king, Sihon. As you may recall, the Lord picked a fight with them to use the Amorites as a foil against Israel. This proved to the growing-in-faith Israelites that they could indeed defeat Canaanites (2:33-36).

Chapter 3 concludes the history lesson. After King Sihon and the Amorites, the Lord leads the Israelites against the giant-king Og of Bashan (the Golan Heights of today). Yes, he must have been an *OGre*. (I couldn't resist.) As with the previous battle against Sihon, it's the same results, but now Israel realizes they can topple giants as well. You know, *the bigger they are, the harder they fall!* Moses goes on to recall the Reubenite and Gadite request for Sihon and Og's land for their livestock and the agreement they struck. The "eastern" tribes' warriors will leave their families and flocks behind and help the "western" tribes defeat their enemies and secure their own lands (3:18-20). Only then may the warriors of Reuben and Gad return home. The last part of chapter 3 is about the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua and how Moses asked the Lord to let him cross into the land. Denied! Joshua is the leader-elect and will accomplish the task. And thus ends the history lesson part of the renewal of Israel's covenant.

As a final note, Deuteronomy is looked at as a 2<sup>nd</sup> covenant. The first was the Sinai covenant that was broken by Israel during the Golden Calf debacle. The second is the Moses covenant reiterated and sealed here in Moab on the eastern side of the Jordan across from Canaan. Both the Sinai and Moses covenants are in essence one because they share many of the same terms – Yehovah's and Israel's responsibilities to each other in their mutual commitment. So the Sinai Covenant is the first and the Moses Covenant is the reinstatement with additions.

As we move ahead, we'll see many things that are familiar and some new things added in. There is so much to teach in the book of Deuteronomy, but so you can be Crusin' Through The Bible and not get stuck in place, I'll only share points of interest along the way. I desire that you find this fascinating and encouraging enough to help you read through the whole Bible, understand it more fully, appreciate God's word better, and walk with our Lord in a more pleasing way, a more trustful way!

## INSIGHT

As I mentioned at the top, Deuteronomy is set up like a classic ancient Middle-East Treaty (Covenant). Covenants have specific forms they follow. Here is how Deuteronomy is laid

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out per Nelson's NKJV Study Bible, page 291. This would be very handy to print and keep in your Bible.

- a. Preamble/Introduction (1:1-5).
- b. A review of the past relationship between the parties (1:6-4:49).
- c. Basic stipulations that ensured faithfulness to the treaty (5:1-26:19).
- d. Enforcement in the form of blessings and curses (27:1-30:20).
- e. Witnesses to the treaty (32:1).
- f. A provision for the storage and re-reading of the treaty (31:1-34:12).

Moses used this treaty pattern to reinforce to the people that they are not their own, they were bought with a price, i.e. the death of the firstborn (of Egypt), and they owed their complete faith and obedience to their Sovereign Covenant Lord. Sound familiar? (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, Romans 5:10, 1:5 and 16:26)



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## February 17 : Scriptures Deuteronomy 4-6

### SUMMARY

Oh boy, this is a huge section! So, let's take it in big chunks, shall we?

Moses' introductory words (4:1-14). Moses tells the people to listen to his words as they stand on the brink of taking possession of the land. He tells them not to add or subtract anything from them, but to obey them all (4:2). He reminds them that they know very well what happened to those who turned from the Lord's words at Baal-Peor. *They died.* It's the *faithful* ones who survived (get the hint, Israelites?) Therefore, they should heed his words. If they do, it will impress the nations around them at the wisdom and understanding they'll show backed up by the presence of God in their midst (4:6-7). Moses cautions them to remember that his words came to them from God Himself when they met Him at Mount Sinai (4:10). Even though they didn't see Yehovah's physical form, they did hear His voice and they also have the tablets that He wrote with His finger (4:12-13).

Idolatry is forbidden (4:15-24)! Idols are right out, so they'd better be careful to stick close to the Lord's words or they'll likely fall into idolatry. When people are close to God, they need no idols. They *must* remember it was the Lord alone that brought them out of Egypt and not any other god. Moses won't be able to enter the Promised Land because of the Lord's jealous anger, so they'd better learn from his example.

Don't take the land for granted, Israelites (4:25-26). Even after they've been in the land for generations, idolatry will get them kicked out. Then when they're devastated in numbers and are scattered among the nations, which is one of the covenant punishments God revealed in Leviticus 26:33, they'll wallow in idolatry until they come to their senses and turn back to God. I especially like the following hopeful verses, "*But from there, you will search for the Lord your God, and you will find him when you seek him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have happened to you, in the future you will return to the Lord your God and obey him. He will not leave you, destroy you, or forget the covenant with your ancestors that he swore to them by oath, because the Lord your God is a compassionate God*" (4:29-31). Do you see how seriously God keeps His covenant promises? Even if Abraham's descendants commit the worst kind of spiritual adultery, the Lord will still honor His oath that He gave to Abraham hundreds of years earlier!

The Israelites should remember how remarkably special they are and what that means (4:32-40). Moses tells the Israelites how special and unique they are among all the peoples

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of the earth. Can they point to any other god that has done for its people what Yehovah has done for them? The One and Only True God kept His side of the covenant, rescued His people from Egypt, and now they're poised to take their new land with His help. Therefore, they're to keep their side of the covenant, "the statutes and commands, which I am giving you today, so that you and your children after you may prosper and so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you for all time" (4:40). Did you catch that? *The Lord your God is giving you for all time.* That means no matter who the Lord allows to live on Israel's land, it's still and forever their land!

Three Cities of Refuge on the east side of the Jordan (4:41-43). Here we learn the names of the three Cities of Refuge that will be in the eastern tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh – Bezer, Ramoth, Golan. Next comes a quick introduction of the Torah/the Law/the Covenant terms (4:44-49).

Chapter 5 opens up with the core of the Torah, the 10 Commandments. The 10 Commandments begin Moses' teaching of the covenant laws, which are the main subject of Deuteronomy. Why start with them? Because 40 years earlier, that's where the Lord started when He handed down His commands and this is a "restatement" of the Sinai covenant terms. Many of the Israelites who are standing there never experienced the awesome Revelation at Sinai. They never knew slavery unlike those of the community 40+ years old. In a sense, this reminder of the Ten Commandments is to bring the younger generation up to speed with the older generation about what's required of them to remain faithful and to be able to live in their new homeland.

Moses isn't just bringing up the Ten Commandments, but he's reminding the nation of the commitment they and their parents made to God at Sinai to which they are irreversibly bound (5:22-30). "Do it all, don't waver, so that 'you may live, prosper, and have a long life in the land you will possess'" (5:33). But what if they don't live up to their covenant commitment? We can assume the opposite will happen; they will not live, prosper, or stay for long in the land God is giving them.

Chapter 6 opens with Moses telling the people the commands they are about to hear are to be obeyed when they're in Canaan, soon to be the land of Israel (*Eretz Yisrael*). By doing so, they will show their reverence for the Lord ("fear the Lord your God," 6:2). God wants His people to prosper, multiply, and enjoy a long life in the land He's giving them! But it will require faithfulness to the terms of the covenant Moses is about to share and explain.

Deuteronomy 6:4 is called the Shema (Shem-mah'). Shema in Hebrew means, "Hear." It's much more than physical hearing. It means "Hear and obey what you're hearing." And

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what's the first command of the Shema? *There is only one God, Yehovah.* And because He is your God, how are they to respond? They are to "love" the Lord (absolute covenant faithfulness demonstrated by obedience) with everything they are and have (6:5)! Therefore, they are to learn these commands by heart (6:6) and help their children do the same (6:7). They do it by continually talking about the commands from the moment they wake to bedtime and wherever they are, home or away (6:7). They are to keep God's commands close at hand and in their mind continually (6:8). The commands are to infuse their home life and their city (6:9). Do you get God's point through Moses? The Israelites are to be so saturated with God's commands and guidelines that once they enter their land, live their lives in total obedience to the Lord from sunrise to sunset!

But there's a danger and we, dear readers, know it all too well. It's easy to keep the Lord at the front and center of our minds when we're lacking what we need. Our physical, emotional, or mental needs *drive* us to keep after Him. But it's when things are going well, that we tend to forget God or even think we're doing fine all by ourselves, "Thank you very much, Lord. I've got this." Moses cautions the people to not forget the One who delivered them from Egypt once their lives get easier (6:11-12), for it's when life gets easy that people begin to look to other things (gods) to credit for their provision. The Israelites are to keep their eyes on Yehovah and not look to the gods of the Canaanite locals (6:14). If they look to other gods, they'll be doing it at the risk of angering their covenant partner who is more than able to strip them from the land grant He's about to give them (6:15). Therefore, don't test Him, Israelites. Obey Him and you'll receive all He's promised to give you (6:16-19).

Consider this. The Israelites that Moses is talking to have spent almost their whole lives living with the Lord in the desert. They've seen repeated miracles, eaten divinely created food, and sipped water from rocks. But there will come a generation that will have known nothing but living in the plenteous land of Israel and will begin to question why they live the way do (6:20). Therefore, it's the parents' duty to answer that question starting with the Israelite nation's history, to explain Yehovah's "Law of the land," to teach their children how to respect and revere the Lord, and why their prosperity is linked to obedience (6:21-24). As long as they follow God's commands, they'll stand right with Him (6:25). One generation experiences God and his ways and it's crucial for the next generation to experience God their way and be faithfully taught. Without this happening, succeeding generations may lose their connection to the historical events and the faith that shaped the previous generation. Remember, as God's people, we're only one generation away from forgetting God entirely.

## INSIGHT

“Teach them to your children.” When I was a young lad, my dad bought me a pocketknife. One of the first things he taught me (besides not carelessly cutting myself) was how to sharpen the blade. He retrieved a small, flat, smooth rectangular stone from his workbench. He called it a whetstone. He showed me how to lay it on a table, put a dab of oil on the surface, hold the edge of the blade at a certain angle, and then slowly move the blade in a circle. He also showed me how to draw the blade across the stone toward myself in a sweeping motion. It looked like nothing was happening. After a few minutes, he wiped off the blade and gently ran the edge along the top of his arm for a few inches. It was amazing! The previously dull blade that couldn't seem to cut bread effortlessly separated hairs from his skin. He told me that his father liked to use a whetstone to sharpen his straight razor and a leather razor strop to fine-tune the edge. The razor became so sharp his father would balance a single hair on the blade's edge and by just the barely perceptible air currents, the hair was sliced in two.

The Hebrew used for “teach” in this verse means “to sharpen, whet.” You get the picture, I hope. God commands the Israelite parents to continually apply God's commands (words) to the child to sharpen them up for life. By the 24/7 action of teaching God's commands, parents can raise super sharp children who know the Lord and can cut through the deception of the world that is trying to convince them to forsake the Lord and look to other things to prosper them. As it works with children, so it works for us as well. That's why it's so important for us to read, process, and put into practice God's word every day.

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## February 18 : Scriptures Deuteronomy 7-9

### SUMMARY

The Canaanite Protocol (7:1-11). Protocol: A code of correct conduct. "When the Lord brings you into the land and He drives out...and when He delivers them over to you and you defeat them...". When, not if. Destroy them, don't let them live and think a treaty will accomplish the same effect as eliminating them. No tribal treaties or marriage treaties! *Any* relationship with them *will* lead you to worship their gods. The Lord knows how enticing idolatry is because it's connected to human desires. Idols are dangerous because humanity looks to fake gods to meet their needs (but can't) rather than THE God to meet their needs (which He can). So here's the Canaanite Protocol, the correct code of conduct – completely purge the Canaanites and any hint of their religion from the land. Period. You are God's possession, the only people on earth chosen by Him (at this time), and are to be completely devoted to Him alone (7:6).

Israel is a holy people (7-11). Why has the Lord "set His heart on you"? Not by any merit the Israelites have, in this case numbers because they weren't numerous compared to other nations. It's because He loves them, and by that I refer back to the meaning of covenant faithfulness and loyalty, not feelings. Now here comes some very strong covenant language: Yehovah is graciously devoted to those who are faithful and obedient, but He will "pay back directly" those who "hate Him," i.e. break His covenant. You can't say the Israelites weren't warned!

The next verse (7:12) has an implied "therefore." "(Therefore, since Yehovah will treat you as you treat Him) If you listen to and are careful to keep these ordinances, the Lord your God will keep his covenant loyalty with you, as he swore to your ancestors." What follows is a list of great things the Lord will do for them if they remain faithful and obedient (7:13-15), but the Israelites *must* follow the Canaanite Protocol (7:16).

Now for a quick quiz. What caused the Israelites to balk the first time they tried to invade Canaan? If you answered, "Fear," you're right! After telling the Israelites how to deal with the Canaanites and their religion, and after His warning to remain faithful and the benefits thereof, Moses encourages the Israelites to not be afraid (7:17-18). What's the solution to their fear? Remembering how they faced similar fearful things and the wonderful things the Lord did for them! Yup, just as Yehovah whomped on up the Egyptians, He'll do the same to the Canaanites. Don't fear for the Lord is with you and working ahead of you! Remembering is the key to their success. Forgetting will be their downfall. Remember = Reward, Forget = Punishment and Discipline.

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Side note: Yehovah won't let them conquer the land all at once because with the smaller Israelite population relative to land size, that would leave too much unoccupied land and the wild animals will multiply and become a secondary threat. Israel is part of the African Rift Valley and African animals that migrated up from Africa roamed there (Samson v. the lion, Judges 14:5). This is why the Canaanite Protocol is so important to follow. The Lord knows the Israelites may get weary or discouraged continually battling the Canaanites and just choose to make a treaty with them. Nope, that's forbidden! Fight your fear with God's promise, "No one will be able to stand against you; you will annihilate them." Then follow the Protocol – destroy every bit of their idolatry. Don't even think of sparing any idol because it's made of gold or silver. Burn what can be burned, destroy the images regardless how "precious" they may be. The Lord has already put a ban on idols, decided on its destruction, so don't think you can take it for yourself. It belongs to God for annihilation, not you.

In chapter 8 Moses turns from the Canaanite Protocol back to Israel's responsibility to follow Yehovah's covenant commands. The only way the Israelites are going to take the land and grow as a nation is by carefully following God's commands. And now we come to two main reasons for Israel's wilderness wandering – for their testing and training. Keep in mind that Israel was essentially a nation of slaves who had lived their whole lives in servitude to a king, Pharaoh. He was the one who provided for them, but he also abused and killed them. After the Lord freed them from slavery to Egypt, He had to re-train them to be subjects (not slaves) to their new King. It was the older generation that was unable to make the transition. When they tried to conquer Canaan, the unskilled-in-battle former slaves failed miserably because they didn't follow their King's commands. Those were the ones Yehovah had to "weed out" over forty years in the Wilderness. At the same time, however, Yehovah was training the younger generation to look to Him as their King and provider, and how to live according to His commands.

Do you see it? Yehovah was killing the slave mentality and building a loyal subject mindset and it took those two things to gauge their readiness, testing and training. The Lord tested them to see how ready they were *and to show them how ready they were*. Just compare Israel's first attempt on Canaan and their recent battles against Canaanites and a giant. Big difference! They've come a long way! Another part of their training was to teach them to rely on Yehovah for absolutely everything they needed, especially the deep needs of life that often drive people to provide for themselves in their own strength or in ungodly ways. The wilderness wandering was Yehovah teaching them to rely on Him and Him alone. This will become extremely important when the Israelites enter the land with all its challenges, distractions, and enticements. Therefore, Moses' words, "Remember that the Lord your God led you... He humbled you... so that you might learn

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that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (8:2-3). The Lord was building discipline in you (8:5) so walk in that discipline. Why? The Lord is bringing you into a remarkably rich land. It's so rich and productive that you may forget that everything it produces isn't automatic, nor does it come from other gods, nor by your own hand. It all comes from your covenant King! So be careful.

Slavery caused the Israelites to call out to Yehovah out of their need for His help. Prosperity is dangerous because it reduces or eliminates those needs making it easier to take everything for granted. "When you prosper, 1) Be careful that your heart doesn't become proud and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery" (8:14) and 2) "You may say to yourself, 'My power and my own ability have gained this wealth for me,' but remember that the Lord your God gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm his covenant he swore to your ancestors, as it is today" (8:17). Bad move. Why? God can take away prosperity as easily as He can give it. If you forget, you'll relearn quickly who is really in control when you suffer the consequences of abandoning Yehovah (8:19-20). As tough as this is, this is something every Christian needs to keep in mind as well!

In chapter 9 Moses warns the people they're going to come up against big nations, fortified cities, and much bigger entities (9:1-2). The deciding factor is the Lord "will cross over ahead of you as a consuming fire; he will devastate and subdue them before you." That's the *only* reason why the Israelites are going to prevail. They may be tempted to say that they won because they're good or super-right with God or by their amazing integrity. "Nope," says Moses. "Instead, the Lord your God will drive out these nations before you because of their wickedness, in order to fulfill the promise he swore to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand that the Lord your God is not giving you this good land to possess because of your righteousness, for you are a stiff-necked people" (9:5-6). That's right. It's all on God. The Israelites are simply a stubborn people He's using to accomplish His will as He fulfills His promise to their ancestors.

And in case the Israelites object to that characterization, Moses reviews their past history at Mount Sinai and the Golden Calf fiasco to prove his point (9:7-24). It was only Moses' intercession that saved their skins (9:25-29). Yeah, that pops the pride-bubble, doesn't it?

## INSIGHT

Why does the Lord save us, but allow us to go through so many troubles in life – testing and training? That's our wilderness discipline process. Facing deprivation forces us to act – will we turn to our own strength or method to meet our need or turn to Jesus to provide for us as we follow His lead? As we practice this throughout life, it firms our character,

strengthens our convictions, and helps us experience God's presence, power, and provision. Tough times break our pride when we think we can do it all. Difficulties test us to show *us, not God*, where our hearts are and what our inner nature is. God already knows! It demonstrates to us our faithfulness or lack thereof. So it's common for the Lord to intentionally lead us into lack to see if our commitment to Him overrides our drive to satisfy our own desires, our way.



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## February 19 : Scriptures Deuteronomy 10-13

### SUMMARY

Chapter 10 opens with Moses finishing his reminder of Israel's stubbornness with the covenant renewal account, Aaron's death and Eliezer's elevation to High Priest, the selection of the Levites, God's agreement not to annihilate the stubborn Israelites, and command to get moving toward the conquest (10:1-11). Paraphrasing Moses, "After all of your stubbornness, Israel, and Yehovah's forgiveness, what does the Lord your God ask of you except to fear the Lord your God by walking in all his ways, to love him, and to worship the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul?" How should Israel fear, love, and worship their God? By walking in His ways and keeping His commands and statutes. Why? Because even though everything belongs to God, He has set His heart on Israel's fathers and descendants (10:14-15). So stop being stubborn and unresponsive to the Lord (10:16). God is good and fair. Revere Him, be faithful to Him, and worship Him. Look at all He's done for your people and you (10:17-22).

Chapter 11 is a significant section! It starts with Moses reminding the Israelites of what they've seen. It's not theoretical. *They saw God act.* And now they must continue following the Lord as they have in the Wilderness even though life will change. The land is not like Egypt, where they had to irrigate it to get crops to grow. It's a unique land that God Himself watches over. God irrigates it with rain and cares for it all year long (11:11). Here is Moses' (God's) point. "You won't have to water the land. God will. That's His responsibility. Your responsibility is to remain faithfully obedient. If you don't, God can easily 'turn off the spigot,' and you'll see how well you'll fare." This covenant thing works both ways for the Israelites and Yehovah. If they remain faithful, the rain comes. If they turn away, the rain stops. Therefore, Moses encourages the people to remind themselves always to keep God's Word front and center. "Imprint these words of mine on your hearts and minds, bind them as a sign on your hands, and let them be a symbol[g] on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your city gates, so that as long as the heavens are above the earth, your days and those of your children may be many in the land the Lord swore to give your ancestors" (11:13-21)

In the synagogue service of today, the congregation recites the Shema, and it's drawn from two sections of Deuteronomy. The first part is Deuteronomy 6:4-6, and the second part of the Shema is right here in 11:13-21. Together, they are a call to remember all the Lord's commands, a blessing if they do, and a warning if they don't.

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Moses continues with God's promise to go ahead of His people to help them clear out the land. The land is not just Canaan, but eventually the land "from the wilderness to Lebanon and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea" (11:24). Israel has yet to realize this full promise by God. Perhaps this will happen when Jesus returns and establishes the kingdom of Israel right in the heart of the Middle East.

Chapter 11 ends with a typical covenant element detailed later – the covenant blessing and curse. God will bless their obedience and curse their disobedience. When both sides uphold their part of the bargain in business contract terms, they both prosper. But if one side defaults, then the "curse" falls, i.e., lawsuits to make the other party live up to their commitment. And here's something to remember. Just because a covenant is broken, it doesn't mean that covenant ends. Covenants have a reinstatement clause that will continue the covenant if the offending party turns back and fulfills their pledge and responsibilities.

This blessing and curse part of Moses' covenant is so important, God tells Israel via Moses they are to hold a covenant ceremony in the land where the nation will proclaim the blessing from the top of Mount Gerizim and the curses from the top of Mount Ebal (11:29). Why? So the blessings and curses are formalized in everyone's hearing. Everyone hears, so everyone is responsible.

In chapter 12, Yehovah again tells the Israelites to wipe out all pagan worship sites (12:1-4). But then, where will the Israelites worship? Moses relays to the people that Yehovah will show them one place to become their center of worship (12:5-7). But that won't happen for hundreds of years when David becomes king and selects a hill in Jerusalem to be that single house of worship. In the meantime, the Tabernacle will serve as the rallying point for all worship activity wherever they set it up. The Canaanite pagans worshiped their gods everywhere, wherever there were high places (hill and mountaintops, closer to their storm god, Baal) or trees (the groves associated with the goddess Asherah), etc. Unsupervised, self-directed worship is not allowed for the Israelites (12:8). They are to worship God the way He's taught them (see Leviticus and Numbers) through the sacrificial service. The people must bring their animal sacrifices to the Lord at His designated place.

But that doesn't mean the Israelites can't kill animals for food. They can so long as they pour out the blood that still belongs to the Lord, whether it's spilled at the Bronze Altar in the Tabernacle or the local butcher for food. On the other hand, all firstfruits *must* be taken to the Tabernacle or given to the Levites in their villages to support God's "staff." Kosher animal food laws are to be observed in their villages (12:20-24).

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Moses then pivots to another matter regarding the world of pagan idolatry to which Israel is about to be exposed. Yes, they will encounter the spiritual practices of the Canaanites and even curious religious items. Moses tells the people not to ask how the Canaanites worshiped their gods because their worship was horrendous, and they burned their children alive as sacrifices to their gods. The best thing for the Israelites to do is stay focused on Yehovah and remain ignorant of pagan practices. It will only lead to evil. God's people must *never* ask about idolatrous practices.

Moses shifts from Canaanite idolatry to idolatry rising from within the Israelite community. Even if a person has a spiritual experience, but they entice others to turn from Yehovah, that person is to be ignored (and more). Moses tells them that Yehovah will allow this type of thing to test the Israelites' faithfulness to Him. Regardless of how genuine or spectacular a person's spiritual experience is, the Israelites should not be swayed away from Yehovah by that person. Idolatry is idolatry and any call to turn from Yehovah to idols is wrong. The person doing the enticing is to be killed, the same punishment designated against the pagan Canaanites (13:5).

But what if the person who's doing the enticing is a family member (12:6)? That doesn't matter. They must treat that person the same way, ignore them and kill them. And the fact that Yehovah commands the close family member to cast the first stone shows that not even family affection is to override God's command against idolatry.

Okay, but what if the enticement comes from a whole city? No matter. The number of people involved doesn't cancel the prohibition against idolatry. The entire town, all its people, animals, and material goods are to be destroyed.

What's Yehovah's point with these examples? Idolatry is such a severe thing Israel is to follow a no-tolerance policy regardless of spiritual experience, family affection, or numbers. Yehovah is not kidding. The severity of the punishment reflects the seriousness of the crime. Israel is to have no other god. Period. Chapters 12 and 13's theme is idolatry, if you haven't guessed by now. Moses' focus on all these things is to prevent the contagion of idolatry from taking hold and leading Israel away from their Savior and Lord.

## INSIGHT

I find something exciting in this reading. The text says, "Keep the Lord's commands and statutes I am giving you today, *for your own good*" (10:13). First, most Christians shy away from the Law (Torah) because, on the one hand, they've learned it no longer applies after Jesus' death on the cross. Second, they've also been taught the only use for the Law

(Torah) is to point out how far short we fall of God's standard to show us how much we need God's saving grace. But here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses says following the Law (Torah) is for their good. Why is it for their good? For the same reason as point two above. *It shows us how we should walk with God.* It sets the standard of moral right and wrong. Just because we can't live up to it ideally doesn't mean it's bad. It's still the standard for living a righteous life with God, and that's good. It's something to learn and the standard for which to strive. God has a built-in system to deal with sins from falling short, the sacrificial service. It'll do until the final and most perfect sacrifice for sin, Jesus, accomplishes his task on earth about 1,470 years later

When Christians say the Law (Torah) is bad, they include "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (6:5) and "love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). Can we really say the Law is bad when its core tells us to love God and love other people? Can we say the Law is bad if Jesus says the greatest commandment is welding Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 together into one and that all of God's Word hangs on this core command of the Law (Matthew 22:36-40)? Absolutely not! Notice that loving God means keeping his requirements, decrees, laws, and commands. Jesus says loving God and loving people *sum up* the Torah and the prophets; it doesn't *replace* them. God's Law reflects who He is and wants us to be. His Torah reveals His will and what we're to do. Therefore, learning and following God's commands really are for our good. We just have to understand what they are and how He wants us to apply them in life. And that's the Holy Spirit's job!

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## February 20 : Scriptures Deuteronomy 14-17

### SUMMARY

"You are *sons of the Lord your God*... you are a holy people belonging to the Lord your God" (14:1-2). With that opening statement in chapter 14, the text implies a big, Therefore. Because you are His holy children, you must be like your Father, distinct from the pagan world, and stay away from unholy things and practices.

Pagan religious funeral and grieving practices are out (4:1). They must observe kosher v. non-kosher laws regarding animals, fish, and birds. They are not even to touch the non-kosher meat or carcasses. "You are not to eat any carcass; you may give it to a resident alien within your city gates, and he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner" (14:21). This is kind of funny to me. "You're not to eat it, Israelites. But you can give it to those Gentiles; they aren't my holy people.

As we read on, we see a repeat of the tithe laws. Tithes include produce (grain, wine, oil, livestock). In essence, it's a tenth of what one produces. For us today, it's our paychecks. Please note a couple of things here. Bringing the tithe to the central worship site may be troublesome because of long distances or the amount one must carry. The Lord allows the Israelites to sell whatever it is and then travel to the Tabernacle (later the Temple), buy an equivalent, whatever they desire, and offer it to the Lord. Tithes are for the Lord and support the priests, whether on duty in the Tabernacle or residing in their hometown (14:27). The producer can enjoy other tithes as an act of worship and celebration (14:26). Every third year, tithes are kept locally to help the resident Levites, resident non-Israelites, and the vulnerable needy (widows and orphans) who have no means of support. There are days when I think of this and imagine what it would be like if cities and towns in the U.S. followed the tithe pattern in the Torah. How wonderful would it be for the community to care for their local needy persons rather than send it to a national bureaucracy?

Chapter 15 continues the previous chapter's theme of helping people by repeating the debt cancellation laws every Sabbath (7th) year. This is mind-boggling in our moneylending age with confiscatory interest and economic servitude. Imagine what it would be like if all debts were canceled every seven years (15:1). First, it would correct economic imbalances. No one person could use money as a tool to enslave other people. It would also motivate people to lend wisely and encourage financial responsibility. Besides the built-in economic resets, the Lord promises to bless the Israelites for their obedience there so will be no poor people because of abundance!

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Furthermore, if a brother or sister Israelite gets into financial trouble, the Lord commands his people to lend freely to the poor person (15:7-8). Yes, a person can just give something to the poor without expecting anything in return. That's the gold standard. But the idea here is to provide a loan with the intent of helping the needy person get back on their feet. And I love how the Lord calls out human nature. "Be careful that there isn't this wicked thought in your heart, 'The seventh year, the year of canceling debts, is near,' and you are stingy toward your poor brother and give him nothing. He will cry out to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty. Give to him, and don't have a stingy heart when you give" (15:9-10). In a sense, the Lord tells the Israelites to make a loan even if it turns out to be a gift because of the Sabbath year. What a contrast from how the world deals with money and poor people! This is one of those sections that affirm to me that the Law/Torah is excellent and would be beneficial if we followed it. And we can! Here's a wonderful place to start. How many needy people are there among your family and friends? Is there anyone you can help get on their feet or help with job training or education to improve their earning ability? Try it and see how the Lord blesses you as He promises in His Word!

This next part is a repeat of Exodus 21 regarding hiring a needy person. Again, it's a great way to help someone out financially until they can pay off their contract or reaches its end in the Sabbath year. When it comes time to send the person off, the employer is to load them up with good things for a fresh start (15:13-14)! But if they opt for a lifetime employment contract by becoming a bondservant (a bound servant), they certainly can do so. However, many past rabbis have counseled against doing so since a person's God-given natural state is freedom. Again, God promises that if the Israelites are merciful and generous as He commands them, he will bless them well (15:18).

Chapter 16 covers the three Pilgrim Feasts – Pesach (Passover, spring), Shavuot (Weeks, early summer), and Sukkot (Tabernacles, fall). These feasts are known as "The Season of our Joy" because God commands the people to rejoice (16:11, 14). Imagine that. The Lord *commands them to party three times a year!* For what? Passover celebrates freedom and Weeks/Tabernacles celebrates God's early and later provision throughout the year. As part of the celebration, the Lord wants the Israelites to acknowledge from whom their freedom and abundance comes. Therefore, "No one is to appear before the Lord empty-handed. Everyone must appear with a gift suited to his means, according to the blessing the Lord your God has given you (16:16-17). They are to give back to Yehovah out of the abundance of what He's given them as an act of gratitude.

Moses turns to the theme of justice in the latter part of chapter 16. They must appoint excellent qualified judges (16:18-20). This point in the text is a great place to ignore the

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chapter number and heading because it flows from appointing judges to making judgments regarding idolatry or improper worship (16:21-17:1).

If a person is discovered committing idolatry, the situation *must* be investigated thoroughly. Because taking a life via capital punishment is a severe judgment, there must be witnesses. And I find it interesting that those who are the witnesses to the wrongdoing are the first to execute justice. There is no justice-by-proxy, no sterile accusation with no involvement. And all of this is done under the watchful eye and sound mind of an approved judiciary.

Moses now moves from judges to kings (17:14). This is interesting because Israel's king is God, not a man. When we get to 1 Samuel 8, we'll find that Yehovah intended to be Israel's king forever and not to give them a human king. A human king was the Lord's allowance for a stiff-necked people who wanted to be just like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:20). This law anticipates that request. The king is to be the Lord's choice, an Israelite and not a foreigner. He is not to acquire horses or go back to Egypt to acquire them, nor is he to have many wives or much silver and gold. What does all this mean? Oh, we know this all too well. Israel's king is to have absolute allegiance to his people because they're of the same family. The other commands put a damper on pride about military prowess (horses) or preventing unapproved alliances (wives) or succumbing to greed.

Furthermore, to keep the king on the right track, the king is to copy the Torah by hand and read it daily (17:18-19). The purpose is "so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to observe all the words of this instruction, and to do these statutes. Then his heart will not be exalted above his countrymen, he will not turn from this command to the right or the left" (17:19-20). To sum up, the king is to avoid temptation and keep focused on the Lord. That's a good direction for all of us.

### INSIGHT

Imagine if Deuteronomy 17:18-19 were written for the President of the United States: "When inaugurated, he is to write a copy of God's Word for himself to be double-checked by his pastor. It's to remain with him, and he's to read from it daily, as long as he holds office, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to observe all the words of this instruction, and to do these statutes." I can only imagine how the Lord would bless such a leader of our nation with that kind of obedience and devotion to the Lord! Now imagine if the President and his staff and cabinet also had a daily Bible reading and prayer time to start the day!

## February 21 : Scriptures Deuteronomy 18-21

### SUMMARY

In yesterday's reading, we read about Israel's judges and king. Now we turn to priests and prophets. Chapter 18 repeats the commands to support the local Levites (18:1-8). There's a good reason why the Lord commanded that the Levite tribe be scattered throughout *Eretz Yisrael* and not just wherever they erect the Tabernacle. The Levites are the keepers of the Torah, the arbitrators of the Law. They have to be where people can access them for personal and domestic inspections (diseases), supervising animal slaughter for food, etc. Another huge reason is the priests help all the people of Israel stay focused on Yehovah and not seek out idols.

Why would people seek out idols? For spiritual help and information. Therefore, Moses gives prohibitions against pagan occult practices (18:9-14) and declares Yehovah and His prophets' as the only source of spiritual assistance and insight they need (18:15-22). Here is the key verse, "When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, *do not imitate the detestable customs of those nations*" (18:9). The detestable acts of the pagans are occult practices to get help and occult (hidden) information. Note the methods involve practicing fortune-telling, divination, omen reading, and inquiring of the dead. These practices are strictly forbidden, and participating in them carries a very stiff punishment, death. So Yehovah tells them not to seek occult information because He will raise a prophet like Moses to help them.

What is a prophet? Someone who hears God's word and relays it to God's people. Moses says this is precisely what the people wanted at Mount Sinai. They were terrified at God's presence and pushed Moses forward, saying, "Let us not continue to hear the voice of the Lord our God or see this great fire any longer, so that we will not die!" (18:16). Now while Moses desired that all Yehovah's people were prophets (Numbers 11:29), the Lord made an accommodation to the people by promising them ever-present prophets to give them spiritual information. Therefore, they will not need to consult occult sources.

The Lord's promise to raise up a prophet like Moses can mean a couple of things to which the Bible testifies, 1) God will continually bring forth prophets for the nation (general), and 2) a prophet will arise that will act like Moses (specific). On the general side, God did keep bringing forth a string of significant prophets to guide, rebuke, and comfort His people. From Moses' day onward, the Lord anointed people to hear His word and speak to the people: Moses (Torah), Joshua (book of Joshua), Deborah (book of Judges), Samuel, Nathan, Gad (books of 1&2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles), Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel,



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Daniel, the Minor prophets (with their books). God honored His pledge to raise up prophets from among the people of Israel to serve as their moral compass and sources of spiritual revelation. But for four hundred years before Jesus, there is no biblical record of any prophet serving Israel. Silence. Did Yehovah stop sending prophets? No. John the Baptist was the last of the Old Covenant/pre-New Covenant prophets. Jesus was the prophet of all time because He was God in the flesh. You can't get any more exact words from the mouth of God than Jesus (John 7:16). What about after Jesus ascended? There were New Testament prophets such as Agabus (Acts 11:27–28), Silas, and Judas (not Judas Iscariot, 15:32). There was even a false prophet, Bar-Jesus (Acts 13:6).

Our Heavenly Father's desire is for everyone to know His Word and hear His voice. We have the written Word, the Bible, and the indwelling Holy Spirit who not only speaks to us within, but He confirms the words He speaks through others. Whether there is prophetic activity in the church today is a resounding, "Yes!" Are there prophets today? Some say yes, some say no. But I'll offer this. In Ephesians 4:11-13, Paul writes, "And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness." First, Jesus gave all 5 (some say four with pastor-teacher connected) functions for a purpose. That is to help the entire Body of Christ grow to unity with full maturity matching Jesus's standard. Can you honestly look at the Body of Christ today and say it's reached that level of maturity? Second, the church readily accepts pastors, teachers, and evangelists, but they wrestle over apostles and prophets. Why? Apostles and prophets are a bit spooky, and frankly, most Christian leaders don't know how those two functions operated in Early Church times. But that's another teaching. What I do want to point out is *if Jesus said He would provide ALL 5 of the functions, why would He suddenly withdraw 2 of them? Suppose our Heavenly Father promised to raise up prophets like Moses and kept His promise. Why would His Son make a similar promise then withdraw them without telling us why despite the fact the Body of Christ isn't unified or mature, matching the standard of faith and character Jesus set? I'm just askin'.* Okay, enough of that rant. Let's look at how the Israelites are to react to these future prophets.

Because the people wanted Moses to listen to the Lord for them, they *were required* to listen to Moses. The exact requirement will hold for every other genuine prophet Yehovah calls forth (18:15,19). Remember, the Hebraic idiom "listen" means hear, receive, and obey. The Lord will hold anyone accountable who refuses to listen to His designated "prophet like Moses" (18:19). On the other hand, they are not to listen to a prophet who does not speak for God, proven by his words not being fulfilled (18:22). That prophet they are to execute because he or she is leading the people astray with false words (18:20).

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Chapter 19 covers judicial matters regarding Cities of Refuge (the remaining three in the land west of the Jordan), boundary markers (because they're about to go into the land and will need laws to clarify family land plots), court witness requirements (19:15), and false accusations (19:16-19). Regarding false accusations, can you imagine if the Lord's punishment for such things were a requirement for today, "you must do to him as he intended to do to his brother" (19:19)? It would cut down on a lot of frivolous lawsuits, right?

The rules for war in chapter 20 are practical and address the "fear factor," fighting wars outside the borders of Canaan (20:15, because the Canaanite Protocol demands total destruction), and preserving agriculture to be used to support the army during a siege (20:19-20). God tells the Israelites they need not fear when they go to war because He is fighting on their side. However, the Lord recognizes human nature, so He makes conditions that graciously allow soldiers to back out of a battle without fear of reprisal. Note the four conditions: 1) A house that hasn't been dedicated, and 2) a vineyard that hasn't been established for the family estate. If a soldier dies before these two things are established, they could be claimed by another within a related family line. 3) An engagement. If the soldier dies before he can marry his wife, she remains in her father's house and has no claim on her fiancé's estate to support her. Therefore, an engaged man may be excused from battle until he has not only married her but they're enjoyed married life for a year. 4) Just plain old fear because fear spreads.

Finally, in chapter 21, we get sundry laws dealing with unsolved murders, merciful and fair treatment of Gentile women captured in battle, firstborn son rights, dealing with a rebellious son, and the compassionate care of executed criminals. Murder is the unsanctioned taking of human life. God knows who did it, but the locals and the investigators don't. The "shedding of innocent blood" is profound because it defiles the land. Therefore, the defilement must be remedied. Concerning the case of a murder where the perp has been clearly identified and justly convicted, their execution is what "clears the slate." In the case of the unsolved murder, the slate must still be cleared. Therefore, the priest-investigators call the elders of the closest town to bear witness that they have no idea who the perp is. Why? They would know what's been going on in their village, likely knowing the victim. They stand in to represent the town, and the cow represents the murderer. The cow's death stands in for the murderer's death. This doesn't mean the actual murderer goes free. God will deal with them later. At least the town and its people are cleared of guilt, and their land is spiritually cleansed (21:8).

The Gentile woman captured in warfare is a fascinating case showing God's mercy. His law calls her not to look her best, tempering her potential husband's infatuation. It also

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allows the woman to grieve for family deaths during the war (21:12-13). If he still wants her after being in the same house with her for a month, he can marry her. If not, he is not to treat her like a slave and sell her. She must go free, most likely home to any remaining family.

Here's another cultural allowance. Suppose a man has a wife and she bears a son. That son is officially the father's firstborn with all the rights and responsibilities therein. Now, let's say a man sees a more beautiful woman and gets married and has a son. (Yeah, I know. It was allowed at the time, but God's whole Word shows it's not His design. It's an allowance for the time being. Just go with it.) Just because the man favors the 2<sup>nd</sup> wife, he's not allowed to bypass the 1<sup>st</sup> wife's son for the birthright and the blessing. God backs up what is right and just and doesn't bow to personal preferences.

And speaking of sons, what happens when parents have a rebellious son who refuses to obey or even listen to them? That's a serious case as this breaks one of the Ten Commands, "Honor your father and mother" (5:16 and Exodus 20:12). The rabbis take this to mean this is a son who isn't just cranky; he's refusing to follow God's Torah with all its commands and statutes. Verse 20 shows he is a total miscreant. In the words of Winston Churchill, "This is the sort of thing up with which I will not put!" This cannot stand in Israel as it will encourage other children to lawlessness (Torah-lessness). He must be executed, and the men of the town do it as they take the responsibility to lead the community.

The chapter closes on a related note, how to take care of a criminal after being executed. It is another example of the Lord's mercy. In ancient Israel, most executions were by stoning, as you just read about re: the rebellious son. After stoning, sometimes the body was hung on a tree as an example to others who would attempt the same crime. While intended as a deterrent, it is not to entice ridicule or degrade the dead person. They've already suffered for their crime. There is no need to defile their "defenseless" dead body by leaving it hanging overnight subject to the elements or being fed upon by animals or birds. There will be no humiliation of the person's remains by keeping them on display for voyeuristic interest. That would be an unholy thing to do that defiles God's land. The perp has already borne God's curse. Therefore, the executed person is taken down and promptly buried. Even to a dead criminal, God shows mercy.

## INSIGHT

Yehovah promised to raise up a prophet like Moses from among the people (18:15). The people are to pay attention to this prophet because they are accountable if they don't (18:15,19). According to the Bible, by Jesus' day, there had been about 400 years since

Israel had such a prophet. However, in John's Gospel, we get a fascinating insight. John the Baptist was a mighty prophet that captured the Jewish nation's attention. They asked him if he was the Messiah. John said no. They asked him if he was Elijah because John was dressed like Elijah (a camel hair suit and a leather belt) and acted like Elijah by calling the people to repentance (Elijah – 1 Kings 18:21, John – Matthew 3:1). But then they asked him, "Are you the Prophet?" (John 1:21). What were they asking him? They asked John, "Are you *the Prophet* Moses said God would send?" because they most certainly needed to hear and obey John if he was. Yes, John was *a* prophet, but not *the* Prophet.

A remarkable person appeared shortly after who spoke just like the prophet John the Baptist (Matthew 4:17) and acted like a prophet (Cleansing the Temple, John 2:13-17 and providing bread for the people, John 6:1-15). Sound familiar? It did to the people who ate the miraculous bread that Jesus provided, "When the people saw the sign he had done, they said, "This truly is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (John 6:14). The people even pursued Jesus for more free lunch (John 6:26). They were right. Jesus was the Prophet like Moses. Jesus was the epitome of Israel's prophetic servants! He was indeed the Prophet God would send that they must listen to or be held accountable. But He was (and is) so much more. Jesus is Israel's highest High Priest, as I pointed out earlier. Jesus is Israel's ultimate Prophet. And as we'll see later, Jesus is and will be Israel's penultimate King!