

Getting Into The Promised Land Without Falling Asleep In Leviticus

3. In the Wilderness – Part 2 Leviticus - Deuteronomy

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**A Teaching Commentary
of the Old Testament**

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Table of Contents

1	LEVITICUS.....	6
1.1	THE OFFERINGS	7
1.2	THE ORDINATION OF AARON AND HIS SONS	9
1.3	LAWS OF CLEANLINESS.....	10
1.4	THE DAY OF ATONEMENT.....	12
1.5	MISCELLANEOUS LAWS AND REGULATIONS.....	13
1.6	THE FEASTS OF ISRAEL	14
1.7	THE OIL AND THE BREAD OF THE TABERNACLE	18
1.8	A BLASPHEMER STONED.....	18
1.9	THE SABBATH YEAR AND THE YEAR OF JUBILEE	18
1.10	CONSEQUENCES OF OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE	19
1.11	REDEEMING WHAT IS THE LORD'S.....	19
2	NUMBERS.....	20
2.1	THE CENSUS AND THE ORDERING OF THE CAMP.....	20
2.2	MISCELLANEOUS INSTRUCTIONS	21
2.3	THE NAZIRITE VOW	21
2.4	THE OFFERINGS FOR THE TABERNACLE, ETC	22
2.5	THE CLOUD BY DAY AND THE PILLAR OF FIRE BY NIGHT	22
2.6	THE WHINING CONTINUES, FIRE AND QUAIL	22
2.7	MIRIAM AND AARON CHALLENGE MOSES.....	24
2.8	THE EXPLORATION OF CANAAN	24
2.9	MISCELLANEOUS INSTRUCTIONS	26
2.10	MOSES' AND AARON'S AUTHORITY CHALLENGED	26
2.11	THE PRIESTS AND THE LEVITES	27
2.12	THE RED HEIFER AND THE WATER OF CLEANSING	27
2.13	THE DEATH OF MIRIAM	27
2.14	THE WATERS OF MERIBAH – MOSES' SIN.....	28
2.15	THE DEATH OF AARON	28
2.16	ISRAEL DEFEATS ARAD.....	28
2.17	THE BRONZE SERPENT.....	28
2.18	DEFEAT OF SIHON AND OG.....	29
2.19	BALAK AND BALAAM.....	29
2.20	SEXUAL SIN WITH THE MOABITES AND MIDIANITES	30
2.21	THE SECOND CENSUS	30
2.22	THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD	31
2.23	MOSES' SUCCESSOR APPOINTED.....	31
2.24	MISCELLANEOUS INSTRUCTIONS	31
2.25	ATTACKING THE MIDIANITES.....	32
2.26	THE TRANSJORDAN TRIBES.....	32
2.27	RECOUNTING OF THE JOURNEY	32
2.28	ALLOTMENTS OF LAND.....	33
3	DEUTERONOMY.....	34
3.1	MOSES' FIRST ADDRESS.....	34
3.2	MOSES' SECOND ADDRESS.....	35
3.2.1	<i>The Ten Commandments.....</i>	<i>35</i>
3.2.2	<i>"The Shema," Etc.....</i>	<i>35</i>

3.2.3	<i>Ridding the Land of Idolatry</i>	36
3.2.4	<i>God's Provision</i>	37
3.2.5	<i>Why They Were Chosen</i>	37
3.2.6	<i>Where and Whom to Worship</i>	38
3.2.7	<i>Miscellaneous Instructions</i>	38
3.2.8	<i>Marching Orders for War</i>	40
3.2.9	<i>Miscellaneous Instructions</i>	40
3.2.10	<i>Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim</i>	42
3.3	MOSES' THIRD ADDRESS.....	43
3.3.1	<i>Reminder of God's Grace</i>	43
3.3.2	<i>Second Chances</i>	43
3.3.3	<i>Choose Life</i>	43
3.3.4	<i>Moses' Final Remarks</i>	44
3.4	THE DEATH OF MOSES.....	44
4	INDEX OF SCRIPTURE REFERENCES	45
5	TOPICAL INDEX	47

1 Leviticus

The book of Leviticus is so named because it concerns itself primarily with the Levites – the duties of the priests. Out of the tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi was set aside to be priests for the rest of the nation. The responsibility was theirs to administer the Tabernacle and later the Temple.

In Exodus, God had given the people the Ten Commandments. What happened if people violated a commandment? Were they simply to be shut off from the nation or killed? Were they outcasts from God from that moment forward? The book of Leviticus addresses this question because it sets up the sacrificial system, which provided for the atonement for sin. The sacrificial system set out in Leviticus was a foreshadow of the sacrifice that God himself would make when Jesus died on the cross. Leviticus outlines several types of sacrifices that would be offered at various times and for various purposes (e.g. offering of thanksgiving, a desire to have fellowship with God, a covering for sin). They include:

- the burnt offering
- the grain offering
- the fellowship offering
- the sin offering
- the guilt offering

Leviticus sets forth regulations for purity and holiness. Leviticus chapter 23 is an important chapter, capturing in one location the regulations for observances of the Sabbath and the seven feasts of the nation of Israel: Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Pentecost, Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Tabernacles. Note that the feasts of Purim and Hanukkah were later added to the Jewish tradition and were not part of the original set of feasts that were to be observed by the nation.

Leviticus does very little towards advancing the telling of the history of Israel. It is not a history book. It was a "How To" book for the nation. It told them how to relate to God. Although we no longer live under the requirements of their sacrificial system, it is important for us to understand the "how to's" given to the nation of Israel because they reflect the nature of the one who gave them. Understanding the precepts of Leviticus gives us a better understanding of God. He has not changed since this book was written. Sin is still an issue with him. Purity and holiness are still issues with him. Sacrifice is still an issue with him, although it takes on a different meaning this side of the cross. How his people relate to him is still an issue.

Unfortunately, since Leviticus is not telling a story (it is not a history book), it has no narrative backdrop to the instructions being given. Thus it has a tendency to hold people's attention in the same manner as reading a dictionary would. Lots of people who have determined to "read the Bible through this year" have abandoned the goal mid-Leviticus because the reading therein is very dry and because some people find it difficult to relate to the subjects in Leviticus (what do the priestly garments have to do with me?). For this overview, we will take the same approach that we took with the laws given in Exodus. Sections that give important background to other events in the Bible we will examine. Concepts that are important to carry over into the New Testament we will consider. The rest we will skim at a very high level.

But do not sell the book of Leviticus short. The rest of the Bible does not make sense without it. What does the sacrifice of Christ mean without the context of the sacrificial system of Leviticus? What does Christ, the great high priest, mean, without the description of and the instructions to

the priests in Leviticus? Where would we all be if God had not taken care to give us a path for reconciliation and atonement? Thank God for Leviticus.

1.1 The Offerings

Leviticus 1-7

Leviticus 1-7 describes the offerings that are to be given. These chapters are broken into two sections. The first six chapters contain instructions to the people on the giving of offerings. Half way into the sixth chapter, the instruction turns to Aaron and the priests on how they are to administer the offerings.

The majority of the offerings involved a blood sacrifice (all but the grain offering). The scriptures are very specific about how the animal involved is to be slaughtered and how the priests are to deal with the animal parts, particularly the blood. The animals that were sacrificed had to be without defect. The one making the offering would lay his hands on the animal and then participate in the slaughter. It was messy, but God wanted it that way. God was teaching the people an object lesson. The shedding of blood of something without defect was required to cleanse from sin. Sin exacts a great price and cleansing from sin is a serious – deadly – business. The wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) It is not to be taken lightly.

For the majority of the offerings, parts are to be burned and other parts go to the priests and their families as food. The burnt offering is an exception. It was devoted wholly to God and was completely consumed by the fire. The fellowship offering also had a different twist. It consisted of a meal. Part of it was burned on the altar. The rest was a banquet to be enjoyed by the family making the offering and it could be shared with the priests. This was symbolic (or perhaps it was a true representation) of sitting down at a banquet table with God for a meal.

The guilt offering and the sin offering were very similar. The guilt offering was made for specific sins that involved restitution to another person. If a sin was committed which took property from another person, then the guilt offering would be given to atone for the sin; however the guilty person was also required to make restitution to the victim. The person must be repaid in full along with a 20% fine.

The offerings prescribed in Leviticus remained the offerings of the nation of Israel (and later, Judah) throughout its history. When the people had settled into the Promised Land and the temple had been built in Jerusalem, they would make periodic journeys to Jerusalem to make the sacrifices as these could only be made at the temple (that's where the brazen altar was, that's where the holy of holies was, etc). When people came, they would usually make more than one type of offering. They would typically start with a sin or guilt offering to make atonement for sin and to restore standing before God. They would then make a burnt offering next, symbolic of wholly consecrating themselves to God. That would often be followed by a fellowship offering – a time of joyous celebration of communion with God.

This is very important. People have never stopped breaking fellowship with God. They have never stopped rebelling. We have never stopped rebelling. When we find ourselves in broken relationship with God, how do we fix that relationship? First we must atone for sin. There is only one way we can do this. We must accept the blood sacrifice of the one male without blemish who was given for us. Jesus once and for all put an end to the need to make the annual trek to the temple to sacrifice bulls. He became our atoning sacrifice. Note also that if we are in need of a guilt offering (if we have wronged our fellow man) we must make restitution for that as well. We must next wholly consecrate ourselves to him. Having accepted Jesus as Savior, we must then accept him as Lord and submit to his authority in our lives. Then we are ready for communion. We are ready for fellowship. We will periodically give our grain offerings – our

voluntary offerings of praise and worship – and will live in fellowship with God, which is how he wanted things in the first place.

Offering	In Leviticus	How Offering is Made	Purpose of Offering	Comments
Burnt	1; 6:8-13, 8:18-21, 16:24	Bull or ram (young male pigeon or dove for poor), without defect	Free gift of worship, atonement for unintentional sin, devotion, giving of self to God	Offering is completely burned – priests do not eat parts of it
Grain	2; 6:14-23	Grain in various forms, could be baked into cakes or could be fine flour. Must not contain yeast. Must contain salt.	Free gift of worship, devotion, praise	Part was burned, part went to priests for food.
Fellowship	3; 7:11-34	Animal from herd or flock free of defect; variety of breads	Free gift of worship, thanksgiving and fellowship	The fellowship offering consisted of preparing a meal. Part of it was given as sacrifice and the other part consumed by the family making the offering. It was symbolic of sharing a meal with God – thus fellowship offering. The priest could be included in the meal.
Sin	4:1-5:13; 6:24-30; 8:14-17; 16:3-22	What was given depended on who was giving it. The offering for the high priest and the congregation was a young bull. For a leader of the community, a male goat was required. For a normal person, a female goat or lamb was required. For a poor person, a dove or pigeon could be given instead. A very poor person could offer a tenth of an ephah of fine flour.	Mandatory offering to atone for unintentional sins; a confession of sin; offering for cleansing from defilement	Part was burned, part went to priests for food.
Guilt	5:14-6:7; 7:1-6	Ram or Lamb	Mandatory offering to atone for unintentional sin requiring restitution; offering for cleansing from defilement	Part was burned, part went to the priest for food. The offerer must make restitution to the one who was wronged and pay a 20% fine

1.2 *The Ordination of Aaron and His Sons*

Leviticus 8-10

It was now time to actually ordain the priests for the nation. Aaron and his sons were to be set aside for this special role. A weeklong ceremony was held to do so. They had been consecrated for this at the end of Exodus, but now was the time for the ordination ceremony. It began by washing Aaron and his sons and then dressing them in the priestly garments. They were anointed with oil. A sin offering was given for them, followed by a burnt offering. This was followed by something referred to as an ordination offering, but it resembled a fellowship offering. It consisted of a ram that was offered along with some unleavened bread. Some of it was burned and the rest eaten by Aaron and his sons. The offerings follow the pattern mentioned above – the sin offering (atonement) followed by the burnt offering (consecration and devotion) followed by the fellowship offering.

On the eighth day (after the seven-day ordination) the newly ordained priests started their duties. They made a sin offering followed by a burnt offering for the priests. Then the people were told to make a sin offering followed by a burnt offering that was followed by a fellowship offering and a grain offering. This offering would be for the people. They were told to gather around and that they would see the glory of God when they made this offering. They did as they were instructed. The glory of God did appear and fire came out of heaven and consumed the offerings on the altar. The people shouted for joy and fell on their faces.

Chapter 10 has a bit of an unusual episode. We read in Leviticus 10:1-3,

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, contrary to his command. So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord. Moses then said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord spoke of when he said:

'Among those who approach me I will show myself holy;
in the sight of all the people I will be honored.'

Aaron remained silent.

We are not really sure what Nadab and Abihu did that was so wrong, but the key to what happened is found in the phrase "contrary to his command." Some have speculated that Nadab and Abihu may have gone into the holy place while drunk. This is supportable by the fact that right after this happened we see in Leviticus 10:8-9,

Then the Lord said to Aaron, "You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die."

It is also possible that the brothers wandered into the Holy of Holies when they were not supposed to be there. This could be deduced from Leviticus 16:1-2. They may have thrown God's instructions to the wind and decided to offer sacrifices and burn incense in their own way. Whatever the reason, we know that in some manner, Nadab and Abihu dishonored God. Somehow or other, they were not taking their role as priests seriously and they were not submitted to the authority of God. God puts up with a great deal from us but he would not allow this of his newly ordained priests, who were supposed to be showing this young nation how to submit to God. So he killed them. He would not be dishonored in front of his people.

God takes his authority seriously and people who are leaders, such as priests, are held to a higher standard than others. This same concept is reflected in the New Testament. James 3:1

says, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."

Aaron was probably in a great deal of grief over what happened but had enough sense to remain silent. Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, were told to keep their cool and not go into mourning or else they would be struck down as well. Their relatives and the rest of the nation were allowed to mourn for Nadab and Abihu.

The last part of chapter 10 has an exchange between Moses and Aaron and his sons. Moses is suggesting that they handled an offering improperly. A sin offering was involved. According to Leviticus 7:24-30, a sin offering was to be handled one of two ways:

- Either a portion of it was to be eaten by the priest in the sanctuary (the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting), or
- its blood was to be brought into the holy place to make atonement AND the body was to be burned completely.

It seems that a sin offering had been made where the blood was not brought to the holy place, but instead the sons of Aaron had completely burned the flesh and had not eaten any of it. The long and the short of it is that they made the offering contrary to the way God had prescribed. Moses challenged them on it. Although the response that Aaron gave is a bit cryptic, we gather from it that they acted in good faith – possibly they were fasting as an act of mourning. Anyway, whatever their reasons, their act seemed acceptable to Moses and also to God.

1.3 Laws of Cleanliness

Leviticus 11-15

The next several chapters of Leviticus define the laws of cleanliness. This is a concept that is somewhat unfamiliar to most modern-day Christians. To a Jew, however, being "ceremonially clean" was an important thing because a Jew could not otherwise participate in the religious activities of the nation (which were central to the social, legal, and religious functions of the society). Thus if an Israelite became ceremonially unclean, he or she would be cut off from the rest of the people until the period of uncleanness had passed, which would typically be the duration of that day in which the uncleanness occurred (i.e. until nightfall – the new day began at sunset). It was particularly important to be ceremonially clean at times like Passover, because a person who was unclean would not be able to participate in the celebrations. The people took these laws very seriously. Observant Jews still take these laws very seriously.

The first set of laws dealt with diet. Chapter 11 of Leviticus gives the rules about what could and could not be eaten. Certain birds and beasts and fish and insects were permissible for the people to eat. Others were not. Today when people think of Jewish dietary laws they think "no pork" – which is true and comes from the regulations given in Leviticus 11. However, there are a great number of other animals excluded from the diet than just pigs. The laws did not deal simply with the consumption of unclean animals. A person could be defiled by simply touching such an animal. It also limited people to eating animals that they themselves killed rather than animals that they found already dead.

Note that while the modern Jewish kosher dietary laws are based on the instructions given here in Leviticus (and a few other places in the Bible), much of what they do is based on traditions added after these Scriptures were written and are not actually Scriptural mandates. If one goes to a restaurant that has a kosher kitchen and he orders a steak and baked potato, then when they bring the potato, it will probably be completely dry. If you ask for some butter and sour cream,

they cannot serve it to you because it would not be kosher. One cannot eat beef and a dairy product in the same meal. Even if you are not on a kosher diet, they cannot serve it to you because their kitchen would no longer be kosher. There is no place in the Old Testament where it says you cannot have beef and dairy product in the same meal. The closest thing that is in Exodus 23:19 and a few other places not to cook an animal (specifically a young goat) in its mother's milk. This part of the kosher dietary laws was added later on.

One thing that would just about always cause uncleanness was blood. Being in contact with a flow of blood was something to be avoided. Unfortunately, women experience a form of this on a monthly basis. Women were considered ceremonially unclean during their monthly period. Childbirth also brings blood. Chapter 12 of Leviticus gives instructions on how a woman is to be purified after giving birth. She must wait a prescribed period of time and then go to the tabernacle or the temple and make a sin offering and a burnt offering. A lamb is to be used for the sin offering unless the person were poor, in which case an offering of pigeons or doves was acceptable. We see in Luke 2:21-24 where Mary followed these regulations after the birth of Jesus. Note that the Bar Joseph family fell into the "poor" category and made the offering of pigeons or doves.

Chapters 13 and 14 intertwine two topics that might not seem to have a great deal to do with one another: skin diseases and mildew. In Old Testament cleanliness discussions, however, these two are typically mentioned in the same breath. It could be that skin disease is to a person what mildew is to cloth or leather. Both cause deterioration and rot. Both can be contagious. And according to Leviticus, both cause uncleanness. If a person was suspected of having a skin disease, he would go to the priest to be examined. The priest would go through a prescribed procedure to determine whether or not the person did in fact have one of a number of certain types of skin conditions. If he did, the person would be forced to go live outside the camp. The person was unclean and would be excluded from the life of the community.

If a person had a skin disease and it cleared up, he would once again submit to an examination by the priest. If the priest determined that the person was clean once again, a prescribed offering would be given and the person would be clean once more and permitted to rejoin the community in the camp.

In the New Testament, there were several instances where Jesus healed people of leprosy, which is, of course, a skin disease. One example is in Matthew 8:1-4. When Jesus healed someone of this disease, he told the person to go and present himself to the priest so that he could be declared clean according to the law of Moses. Jesus was familiar with these regulations and he observed them as instructed by the law.

In the same way if a home was suspected of containing mildew or of housing items containing mildew, the priest would do a prescribed examination. If the home or article was contaminated, it would be isolated for a week. If the mildew cleared up during the week, then everything would be OK. Otherwise, the house or article would be destroyed.

Chapter 15 continues the theme of cleanliness and uncleanness by talking about uncleanness caused by bodily discharges. There are three types of bodily discharges that could cause uncleanness. The first seems to be caused by sickness, such as diarrhea. A person who had this was unclean and anything he touched was unclean. He would remain unclean for seven days after it cleared up. The second sort of bodily discharge that could cause uncleanness was that caused by sexual activity. People who engaged in sex would remain unclean for the rest of that day. The third is the discharge that a woman has during her monthly period. She would remain unclean for the duration of her period.

1.4 *The Day of Atonement*

Leviticus 16

The regulations for the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) are given in Leviticus 16. This is an event that is still central to the practice of Judaism.

God starts out by warning Moses that Aaron may not enter the Holy of Holies whenever he feels like it, and that if he does he will die. This leads to speculation that Nadab and Abihu may have been killed for violating the Holy of Holies. In fact, Aaron (and his descendants after him) were to enter this place on one solemn day of the year only. During the year people made sin offerings but there were never as many offerings as there were sins. The Day of Atonement was the day each year when the high priest would bring a blood offering into the Holy of Holies to atone for the sins of the people that had occurred during the last year.

The high priest would begin the process by putting on the priestly garments. Then he had to start by atoning for himself. He would make a sin offering for himself, sacrificing a bull. He would take the blood of the bull into the Holy of Holies and sprinkle some of it on the cover of the Ark of the Covenant.

Next two goats were brought into the picture. These two goats were brought to the high priest. Lots were cast and one was chosen as a sin offering for the people of Israel while the other was chosen to be a scapegoat. The one chosen for the sacrifice was slaughtered and its blood was taken into the Holy of Holies, just as had been done with the blood of the bull. Some of the blood was sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant. Through the blood of the bull and the blood of the goat, atonement was made in the Holy of Holies for the sin and rebellion and uncleanness of the high priest and the people. Next the blood of the bull and of the goat was sprinkled on the Tent of Meeting, making atonement in that place for the sin and rebellion and uncleanness. Last the blood of both animals was sprinkled on the brazen altar, making atonement there for the same.

Next, the goat that was still alive – the scapegoat – was brought forth. The high priest would lay his hands on the head of that goat and confess the sins of the nation. This was symbolic of laying all of that sin on the head of the goat. Then the goat was driven into the desert, out of the camp, symbolic of driving the sin out of the camp.

Next the high priest would remove the priestly garments, bathe, and come back and make burnt offerings for himself and for the nation. (Remember – the sin offering for atonement followed by the burnt offering for consecration.)

These instructions were given and this procedure was to be followed on the tenth day of the seventh month from that time forward. On that day the people were supposed to do no work and they were to "deny" themselves, which would imply sustaining from any fleshly distractions (which probably called for fasting).

Thus, as 16:34 says, "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites." And therein lies the problem with sin for the nation of Israel.

If this had to be repeated every year, then this means that it never really "took." They may have come out of the ritual completely "atoned-up," but by the same time next year they needed it all over again. Their fellowship with God was restored on the tenth day of the seventh month, but where did it stand on the tenth day of the eighth month? Or on the eleventh day of the seventh month? Or thirty minutes after the ritual ended on the tenth day of the seventh month? How

long did it take one of them to sin again? How did they ever really know how they stood before God?

And there was another problem. The atonement required a blood sacrifice. It required a death. God was giving us a vivid and terrible picture of what the book of Romans teaches us: The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Before fellowship with God could be restored, the blood sacrifice had to be made. That may not have been a big problem when the people had the tabernacle or when they had a temple. What did they do when they were in captivity in Babylon and the temple in Jerusalem had been destroyed? What have they been doing for around 1900+ years since AD 70, when the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans? If God requires a blood sacrifice for restoration of fellowship and if there has been no way to make that blood sacrifice for nearly the last 2000 years, then does that mean that God must have solved this problem once and for all sometime prior to AD 70? Could there have been a blood sacrifice around that time that "took," that offered a permanent solution to the sin problem? Was there a time when God came out from behind the veil of the temple and made himself available to the world, perhaps tearing the veil from top to bottom as he came so that there would be no question about the fact that he was the one doing the tearing?

It's just a thought.

1.5 Miscellaneous Laws and Regulations

Leviticus 17-22

Chapters 17-22 continue with some more rules and regulations given to the people of Israel.

Chapter 17 begins with the topic of where sacrifices may be offered. The people are warned that they are not to offer sacrifices anywhere but at the tabernacle (or later the temple). Apparently some people were making sacrifices outside the camp, in the fields. God wanted that practice to stop. One might wonder why. What difference did it make where the people made the offering as long as they were making it?

There seem to be two answers to that question. 17:7 seems to indicate that some people were going out into the fields and making sacrifices, but they were making them to idols rather than to God. God would not put up with that. The second answer to the question is quite straightforward. God told the people where to make the offerings, and it was not in the fields outside the camp. God told them how and where to do it and that should have been enough for them. Remember Nadab and Abihu? (In Acts chapter 5, remember Ananias and Sapphira?) When God says, "jump," the only question you need to ask is "How high?" When he gives clear-cut instructions, he does not expect us to dissect those instructions and analyze them and improve them. He expects us to follow them.

Next God dealt with the issue of eating blood. God forbade it. Leviticus 17:10-12 says:

Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood – I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood."

Blood represents life and life belongs to God. He gave us a use for the shed blood of animals, and that was to present it to him in sacrifice to make atonement for our sins. Either way, the blood was his. Eating blood was usurping something that belonged to God. It is a bit like Eve eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil so that she could be "like God." We do

not take things that God has declared to be his and his alone. Jewish kosher dietary restrictions are still very stringent about making sure that blood is properly drained from slaughtered animals before it is consumed and it is this passage that inspires that.

Chapter 18 sets boundaries around sexual relations. The family tree of Terah would have looked quite differently if these regulations had been given earlier and people had followed them. Many of the patriarchs who lived prior to the giving of these rules had marriages that violated these rules, but they had not been given when the people lived. The chapter forbids marriage (or sexual union) between a man and his sister (Abraham and Sarah), a man and his daughter-in-law (Judah and Tamar), a man and two sisters (Jacob and Leah and Rachel), and other close relations. The chapter also forbids homosexual relations and bestiality. It forbids sacrificing children to idols, which was a common practice among the pagan people of the time (and which was practiced by some of the Israelites after they were settled in the Promised Land).

Chapter 19 gives a potpourri of instructions concerning having proper reverence for God and proper treatment of fellow man. Among them are instructions on treating the poor and the alien. 19:9-10 says:

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time to pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.

People who had crops to harvest were instructed to leave portions of the harvest to be gathered by the poor. This practice is the backdrop of the story of Ruth. Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi were poor widows and she went out to glean in the fields of Boaz. The rest is history.

Chapter 19 forbids the people to practice divination or sorcery or to use mediums or spiritists. People were to look to God for guidance and not the advice of demons. It is a standing order.

19:27 says "Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard." This is a practice still followed by Orthodox Jews.

Chapter 19 teaches reverence for the aged. It also contains the passage that Jesus used as the background for the story of the Good Samaritan, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18).

Chapter 20 promises severe consequences for people that violate certain instructions that have already been given, including sacrificing children to idols, use of mediums and spiritists, dishonoring the elderly, and sexual improprieties.

Chapter 21 and 22 contain special instructions on priests. They are to keep themselves pure and ceremonially clean. They are to marry women who have not been prostitutes or divorced. A man who is to be high priest is to marry a virgin. A man with certain physical defects may not become a priest. There are warnings given concerning what might happen if they try to administer their duties while ceremonially unclean (remember Nadab and Abihu?). It reiterates the requirement for the sacrifices that are given to be pure and without defect. God is perfect and he must be approached in perfection, as close as we can come to that.

1.6 The Feasts of Israel

Leviticus 23

Leviticus Chapter 23 is an extremely important chapter. It starts by reminding the people to observe the Sabbath. It then lists the seven feasts of the nation of Israel. Here in one chapter we have instructions on the observance of these seven events that were central to the religious

life of the people. We also have a foreshadow of the events in the ministry of Christ. The feasts prescribed in this chapter are:

- Passover

When: The first month (Abib), the 14th day (today it falls somewhere in March or April)

How Observed: No work was to be done on that day. A lamb was slain and eaten along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread.

Purpose: Passover was to remember Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the fact that death had been avoided by the shedding of the blood of the lamb.

- Unleavened Bread

When: The first month (Abib), the 15th through the 21st (right after Passover, also falls somewhere in March or April) (Today many businesses in the nation of Israel shut down during the week of Passover and Unleavened Bread just like many do in the United States between Christmas and New Years.)

How Observed: Sacred assemblies are to be held on the first and last days of the feast. During the week, unleavened bread is eaten. Offerings are given during the week. If possible, the period of Unleavened Bread was to be observed in Jerusalem (after the people were settled in the Promised Land). In Scripture, leaven is symbolic of sin. The unleavened bread – symbolic of sinlessness – is broken.

Purpose: This is in remembrance of the fact that God brought them out of Egypt in haste.

- Firstfruits

When: The day after the Sabbath (i.e. Sunday) during the week of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (thus the Sunday after Passover)

How Observed: An offering of the first sheaves of the barley harvest were given. A burnt offering and a grain offering were given.

Purpose: Firstfruits was observed to celebrate the richness of the harvests that God gave the people once they were settled into the Promised Land.

- Weeks (Pentecost)

When: Seven weeks from the day after the Sabbath of the week of Unleavened Bread, i.e. 50 days after that Sabbath. The name "Pentecost" was later assigned to this festival. "Pentecost" means "50." This would put the feast of Pentecost in the 3rd month (Sivan), which is May or June in modern time keeping.

How Observed: No work was done that day. There were various offerings given, including sin offerings. It was a day of joyous celebration. If possible, the feast of Pentecost was to be observed in Jerusalem (after the people were settled in the Promised Land).

Purpose: Pentecost is the feast of the spring (or first) harvest. It included offerings of the first wheat harvest.

- Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah)

When: The first day of the seventh month (Tishri) (in modern days it is in the September-October time frame)

How Observed: No work was to be done on that day. There is a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. Offerings are made.

Purpose: The nation presented itself before the Lord for his favor. The Feast of Trumpets was later called Rosh Hashanah, which is literally "The Head of the Year" in Hebrew. We call it the Jewish New Year, which is a bit of a misnomer, since it occurs in the midpoint of the year rather than the beginning. Rosh Hashanah begins the ten-day period leading up to the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). It is a time of spiritual introspection and a time in which God deals with the spiritual condition of his people, preparing them for the Day of Atonement. This period is sometimes referred to as the "Days of Awe."

- Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)

When: The Tenth Day of the Seventh Month (Tishri) (or sometime in September-October in modern times)

How Observed: A day of rest and fasting. Offerings were made to atone for the priest and for the nation and to atone for the tabernacle (temple) and the brazen altar

Purpose: An annual atonement for the sins of the priests and the people and an annual cleansing and purifying of the chambers and artifacts of the tabernacle (temple).

- Tabernacles (Booths) (Ingathering)

When: The seventh month, the 15th through 21st days.

How Observed: Begins with a day without work and with a sacred assembly. For a week, the people live in temporary dwellings (booths) and offer sacrifices. On the eighth day, another sacred assembly is held and offerings made. If possible, the feast of Tabernacles was to be observed in Jerusalem (after the people were settled in the Promised Land).

Purpose: This was to remember the temporary shelters that the people had during the time in the wilderness and the provisions of God during the years of wandering.

Note that in later years, the Jews added to their list of festivals the feasts of Purim and Hanukkah. Purim is observed to celebrate the events of the book of Esther. It occurs sometime around mid-March. In modern times, the children dress up in costumes and walk about the streets at Purim, somewhat like American children do at Halloween (except that there are no controversial connotations to the Purim celebration). Hanukkah celebrates the rededication of the temple during the time of the Maccabees, which occurred during the period between the close of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New. Its observance falls around the time of year that we celebrate Christmas. Although Purim and Hanukkah were added later, they are legitimate festivals in Jewish life and they are religious observances that Jesus would have celebrated in his own life.

Some interesting corollaries may be drawn between the feasts of Leviticus 23 and the events of the ministry of Jesus. Some of what follows is speculation and interpretation, but it is interesting just the same. I believe that God gave us the feasts in Leviticus not only to be useful to the

religious life of the Israelites, but also to describe in no uncertain terms the order of events in the saving ministry of Christ.

- Passover

The lamb of God was sacrificed on Passover.

- Unleavened Bread

Jesus – the sinless bread of life, was broken and buried during the feast of Unleavened Bread.

- Firstfruits

Firstfruits is celebrated the first Sunday after Passover. We refer to that same day as Easter. 1 Corinthians 15:20 says,

But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

The year that he was crucified, Jesus celebrated this day by becoming the firstfruits of those who sleep.

- Pentecost

Pentecost celebrates the gathering of the spring (the first) harvest. As described in the book of Acts, chapter 2, in the year Jesus was crucified, Pentecost was the day that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles. Peter preached a sermon that brought thousands to Christ. The church was born that day. This was the celebration of the first harvest for the church.

- Trumpets

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 says

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will be changed – in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

The day will come when the ultimate celebration of the Feast of Trumpets will occur when the dead in Christ will rise and those living in Christ will be taken up to live with him.

- The Day of Atonement

Once it is all said and done, there will be a final battle. God is going to deal with the sins of the world once and for all and it is not going to be fun for those left around on earth.

- Tabernacles (Booths)

Those who were rescued from the destruction will “tabernacle,” or dwell with Christ for eternity.

Are we sure of the accuracy of these parallels? No. There is a fair measure of inference and speculation in the above. But the parallels are there and they are interesting.

1.7 The Oil and the Bread of the Tabernacle

Leviticus 24:1-9

The lamp stand in the tabernacle signifies the light of God shining on the nation of Israel. The twelve loaves of bread on the table of shewbread signify the presence of the twelve tribes before God. Leviticus 24:1-9 gives instructions to keep these lamps burning continually and to ensure that the loaves are ever present on the table. This shows that it is important to God that the people know that they always have his attention.

1.8 A Blasphemer Stoned

Leviticus 24:10-23

An Israelite half-breed (he was half-Egyptian) was caught blaspheming the name of God. He was detained and Moses sought God's will as to what should be done with him. The decision was that he should be stoned. The people did so. God said not to take his name in vain and he meant it.

Note that Jesus was accused of blasphemy several times and they attempted to stone him for it (but never were able to carry it out). The precedent of stoning blasphemers seemed to have lived on in the life of the nation for a long time.

1.9 The Sabbath Year and the Year of Jubilee

Leviticus 25

The concept of the Sabbath Year is reintroduced in Leviticus 25. It was already discussed in Exodus 23:10-11. One out of every seven years, the people were not to cultivate the land, but let it rest. They were not very faithful in doing it.

This chapter also talks about the Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee was a time of economic restoration of the nation. It was to occur once every fifty years. There would be a sabbath (seven) of sabbath years (i.e. seven times seven years) and then the fiftieth year would be the Year of Jubilee. In the year of Jubilee, any land that had been bought or sold since the last Year of Jubilee would be returned to its original owner. Hebrew slaves were set free. If one of the Israelites became poor and was forced to sell his property or himself to pay debts, the Year of Jubilee would put him and his family back on their original footing and they could start anew. With this in mind, when land or slaves were bought and sold, the price was to be fixed based on the number of years until the next Year of Jubilee.

Leviticus 25 also talks about redemption of land or slaves prior to the year of Jubilee. If a man had to sell his land or himself, Leviticus 25 says that his nearest of kin who is able has an obligation to redeem the land or the person by paying the person who bought it a fair price to get it back. The one who had bought it was obliged to sell it back. If somehow the individual who did the selling became able to pay for the redemption, he could buy the land or himself back as well. Again, the redemption price was to be based on the number of years until the next year of Jubilee. This concept of the kinsman redeemer is another Levitical backdrop for the book of Ruth.

The nation never observed the Sabbath Year or the Year of Jubilee. People were too greedy. Even though God had promised to provide for them during the Sabbath Year, they could not stand the thought of having a year without crops. As for the Year of Jubilee, it must have been a

comforting idea for the poor, but the rich (who tended to be in control) had no desire to give everything back every fifty years. So they did not.

1.10 Consequences of Obedience and Disobedience

Leviticus 26

In Leviticus 26, God is very much to the point. He says that if the people obey the things that he is commanding, he will give them prosperity, peace, and favor in the land. He will dwell among them and protect them. If they choose to disobey him, he promises them disease, crop failure, constant harassment by their enemies, death among their children and their flocks and herds, etc. It will not be good. Leviticus 26:33-35 says

I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.

And of course, this is exactly what ended up happening.

1.11 Redeeming What Is the Lord's

Leviticus 27

People from time to time might want to give special thanks to God by dedicating persons or things to the Lord. Hannah, Samuel's mother, dedicated him to God's service, and thus when he was very young she actually turned him over to Eli to live with the priest and work in the service of the tabernacle. It was more common, however, to dedicate someone or something to God but then redeem that person or thing so that it would not have to be given up. Chapter 27 of Leviticus gives prices that could be paid to redeem people or animals or houses or whatever that had been dedicated to the Lord.

A distinction is made between something that was dedicated to the Lord (that could be redeemed) and something that was devoted to the Lord. Devoting something to God went a step beyond dedicating it. Things that were devoted belong to God and could not be redeemed.

Leviticus 27 also mandates that a tithe of everything the people are able to produce belongs to God. The tithes could be redeemed as well by paying an appropriate price.

This concludes the commands that God gave to the people at Mount Sinai. Much of the background of the nation of Israel has now been put into place. The culture as it exists even today has been defined.

2 Numbers

The book of Numbers is so named because of the two census takings that occur in the book. It is probably not a great name for the book. In Hebrew, the book is called "In the Desert," and that is what the book is about. It describes the years that the children of Israel spent in the desert prior to entering the Promised Land.

At this point, the exodus may seem like it happened a very long time ago in the reading since it took place 1-1/2 books ago, but in fact it is still a very recent event when the book of Numbers opens (Numbers 1:1 indicates that the book begins 13 months after the exodus). The end of the book of Exodus and the bulk of the book of Leviticus contain teaching rather than history and thus the story has not advanced a great deal since the people left Egypt. It was God's desire to lead the people from this point to the Promised Land and then to lead them in the conquest of that land. Unfortunately, as the book of Numbers shows, that was not to be the case. The people rebelled. The people whined. And they discovered that this God who had miraculously led them from Egypt and who had begun to provide for them with water and manna was also a God of wrath. Their actions had consequences. God meant what he said about obedience.

The time in Egypt was an incubator for the nation of Israel. That is where they turned from a handful of men into a nation. The time in the desert, as recorded in the book of Numbers, was their preschool. This is where they had a forty-year tutorial in how to follow God and rely on him completely.

Numbers is a book of history and a book of teaching. It advances the history of the nation forty years. It also advances the teaching that God began in Exodus and Leviticus and further reveals the nature of God to his people. It begins at Mount Sinai right after Moses received the instructions given in Leviticus and ends with the people poised at long last to enter the Promised Land.

2.1 *The Census and the Ordering of the Camp*

Numbers 1-4

Numbers Chapter 1 begins with God telling Moses to take a census of the men in the camp who would be useful in forming an army. God is preparing to take the land. All of the men are to be counted by tribe except for the Levites. The Levites are set aside for service in the tabernacle and will not be used in the army.

In fact, Numbers 3:12 indicates that God is taking as his own the Levites as a substitute for the firstborn in Israel. After the Passover, God declared that all firstborn belonged to him. Now he is saying that the Levites are accepted as a substitute for that.

The census is taken and the totals by tribe are reported in the book, and the grand total of the men, excluding the Levites, is around 600,000. Many students of the Bible have trouble taking this number literally because it is quite large. If there were 600,000 men, then there would have been well over 2,000,000 people. It is a huge number of people for that day and time. In fact, the numbers may not literally mean 600,000. Hebrew words can take on meanings that their English counterparts do not. "A thousand people" in Hebrew can mean "an extended family." 600,000 could mean 600 extended families. There are other ways the numbers could be interpreted. There is also the real possibility that there were literally 600,000 men counted in the census. It does not matter too much.

The people were given instructions about where they were to live in the camp. The twelve tribes formed a square about the tabernacle, with 3 tribes on each side. The Levites lived in the middle, actually tending to the tabernacle. Now, if the Levites were excluded from the tribes living around the perimeter, how did they come up with twelve? Didn't Jacob have twelve sons? Twelve minus the Levites should only leave eleven tribes to camp around the perimeter. Remember that Jacob adopted Manasseh and Ephraim (Joseph's sons) as his own. Thus Joseph was replaced in the count by his two sons. The twelve tribes minus Joseph plus Ephraim and Manasseh totals thirteen. Take out Levi and you have the twelve tribes camped around the perimeter of the tabernacle. These are the actual twelve tribes that entered the Promised Land and became the nation of Israel. It was really thirteen tribes if you include Levi, but we do not include Levi because God took them as his own in place of the firstborn of Israel.

God told the tribes where they would pitch their tents whenever they stopped. He also gave instructions about the order in which they would march during the times that they were moving in the desert.

A separate census was taken of the Levites. Levi had three sons, Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The Gershonites, Kohathites, and Merarites were given specific duties to perform regarding the tabernacle. The Gershonites and Merarites were responsible for caring for and carrying the tabernacle itself (the tent, the tent poles, etc), whereas the Kohathites (which included Moses and Aaron and his sons) were responsible for the articles of the tabernacle, including the Ark of the Covenant. Each clan among the Levites had its specific assignment for what to do while they were camped and what to carry while they were traveling. They were also given a warning not to touch or handle things they were not supposed to touch or handle or else they would die.

2.2 *Miscellaneous Instructions*

Numbers 5

Numbers Chapter 5 contains a mixture of instructions regarding:

- keeping the camp pure by putting people who are ceremonially unclean outside of the camp.
- the necessity to make restitution to people you may have wronged.
- what a man is to do if he suspects that his wife has been unfaithful to him.

2.3 *The Nazirite Vow*

Numbers 6

Chapter 6 defines the Nazirite vow. What is a Nazirite? It is similar to a monk or a nun today. It is someone who consecrates himself for a time to be set apart to God. The instructions as they are given indicate that a person would typically become a Nazirite for a period of time – not for the duration of his life. The vow had three main components:

- The person would stay away from alcoholic beverages.
- The person would remain ceremonially clean, particularly by avoiding contact with dead bodies.
- The person would not cut his hair during the time the vow was in effect.

Perhaps the most famous Nazirite in the Old Testament is Samson. In his case, his parents made the vow for him and it was to be for life, but Samson broke all three of the conditions. Samson was a person of unusual strength but that does not necessarily go along with the Nazirite vow. That was something that God chose to give him but later took away from him because he finally broke all three conditions of the vow.

John the Baptist was probably a Nazirite as well.

2.4 *The Offerings for the Tabernacle, Etc*

Numbers 7:1-9:14

After the tabernacle was erected, there were twelve days of offerings. Each day, a representative from one of the twelve tribes would bring the offerings of that tribe. Each included a monetary offering, a grain offering, a burnt offering, a sin offering, and a fellowship offering.

In 7:89 we read

When Moses entered the Tent of Meeting to speak with the Lord, he heard the voice speaking to him from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony. And he spoke with him.

The presence of God "settled in" at the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant and there it remained for a long time.

A special ceremony was held to purify and dedicate the Levites.

The Passover was observed.

2.5 *The Cloud By Day and the Pillar of Fire By Night*

Numbers 9:15-10:36

Since the time they left Egypt, God had led the children of Israel with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This was the physical manifestation of his presence with them. When the tabernacle was erected, these phenomena settled over the tabernacle and that is where they stayed. As long as they hovered over the tabernacle, the people knew they were to remain in camp. When they lifted and began to move, the people knew it was time to march.

Everything that has taken place since the latter part of the book of Exodus took place at Mount Sinai. In Numbers 10, the cloud lifts and leads the people away from Mount Sinai and they begin a long period of wandering in the desert.

2.6 *The Whining Continues, Fire and Quail*

Numbers 11

So far in the book of Numbers, the people have been fairly well behaved. In Numbers 11, three days into their journey, they started whining about how difficult things were. When they grumbled, they were grumbling against God, whether they realized it or not. It made him mad. 11:1 says that "fire from the Lord" came down on the outskirts of the camp and burned. It

sounds like God may have sent lightening down around them and set things on fire on the edge of the camp, just to shake up the people a bit. He did not harm them, but he did let them know that he would not put up with their behavior. The people cried out to Moses and he prayed for them. The fire stopped.

But what a short memory the people had. Right after that they resumed whining about the food. They were tired of manna. They began fantasizing about how good they had it in Egypt and the abundance and variety of food that they had there. That was basically hogwash. They were slaves in Egypt. They may have seen other people having an abundance and variety of food there but they would have eaten rather meagerly. The issue was not what they had to eat in Egypt. It was that they were dissatisfied with what they had to eat in the desert. This was a problem. In Exodus 16:4, God indicated that he would test the people through their obedience (or lack thereof) in eating the manna. They were failing the test.

Verses 11:7-9 give us some interesting side information about the nature of manna.

The manna was like coriander seed and looked like resin. The people went around gathering it, and then ground it in a handmill or crushed it in a mortar. They cooked it in a pot or made it into cakes. And it tasted like something made with olive oil. When the dew settled on the camp at night, the manna also came down.

Back to the story. The people were moaning and groaning. Moses heard it and became totally frustrated with them. He made no real effort to hide his frustration from God. In 11:11-15 he says:

Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do you tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land you promised on oath to their forefathers? Where can I get meat for all these people? They keep wailing to me, "Give us meat to eat!" I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how you are going to treat me, put me to death right now – if I have found favor in your eyes – and do not let me face my own ruin.

Moses was not pleased.

God told Moses to choose 70 elders from among the people. God would send his spirit on those men and they would be equipped to share the spiritual burden of the community. They were gathered together and God sent his spirit on them and they prophesied. There were two other men who were not in the actual chosen assembly who prophesied as well. Some people tried to make them stop but Moses let them continue. He felt that if God wanted to send his spirit on more people, so much the better.

Then God sent quail for the people to eat. Although he sent them he was not pleased about it. Many of the people ate the quail and God's anger burned against them for it. He sent a plague and struck many of them dead.

This section poses two interesting questions. First of all, why was it okay for Moses to complain to God when it was not okay for everyone else to do so? At the beginning of this chapter, we see fire from heaven come down upon those grumbling against God, yet in verses 11-15 we see Moses very bluntly pour out his feelings to God. There seems to be one key difference. Moses was complaining to God. The people were complaining about God. The people were grumbling to each other and sowing seeds of discontent against the nature of God. Moses was pouring out his soul to God and seeking comfort and refuge. God wants us to be honest to him about our feelings. He can handle that. The other people were essentially taking the Lord's name in vain.

The other question posed by the section is why God sent quail to the people and then got mad at them for eating it. The key to this seems to be in verses 11:19-20:

You will not eat it for just one day, or two days, or five, ten or twenty days, but for a whole month —until it comes out of your nostrils and you loathe it.

Apparently some of the people went after the quail like pigs that had not been fed in a month. As they ate it they probably mumbled such things as "I'm so sick of that stinking manna." Their attitude and their demeanor was a rejection of God's provisions for them. It incited his wrath against them. If they had simply eaten the quail with a thankful heart, there would have been no judgment.

2.7 *Miriam and Aaron Challenge Moses*

Numbers 12

There came a day when Miriam and Aaron got jealous of Moses' special standing before God. They began to make fun of his foreign wife. They began to ask questions such as in 12:2: "Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? Hasn't he also spoken through us?"

Presumably, these were not private conversations they were having between themselves. They were probably saying these things publicly. However public or private they were, God heard what they were saying and God was not pleased. God had indeed chosen Moses as his special servant and he did not like Moses' authority being challenged. God summoned Miriam and Aaron and appeared to them in a pillar of cloud and rebuked them. When the cloud lifted, Miriam was leprous.

Why was Miriam struck and not Aaron? Perhaps since Aaron was the high priest, he spared him from becoming ceremonially unclean (being leprous made one unclean). More than likely, Miriam was doing more of the talking and complaining and Aaron was a lesser player in the situation. For whatever reason, God in his sovereignty struck Miriam and not Aaron. Moses pleaded with God to heal her. God put her out of the camp for seven days to publicly humiliate her and then allowed her to return.

God made it clear that Moses was his chosen leader.

2.8 *The Exploration of Canaan*

Numbers 13-14

God told Moses that it was time to go and explore the land of Canaan in preparation for taking the land. Moses chose twelve spies to send into the land, one from each of the twelve tribes. The names of the twelve spies are given, but the only ones that have any recurring significance in the Bible are Caleb, from the tribe of Judah, and Hosea, from the tribe of Ephraim. Verse 13:16 tells us that Moses changed the name of Hosea (which is Hebrew for "salvation") to Joshua (which means "the Lord saves"). This is the same Joshua that eventually led the people into the Promised Land.

The spies were sent into the land and given the charge to bring back a description of the land and its cities and to assess the nature and the strength of the inhabitants. They were also asked to bring back some fruit of the land.

They went. They explored. They were there forty days. When they returned, they brought back with them some large clusters of grapes from the land.

When they returned, the majority of the spies offered a good news / bad news report. The good news is that the land was truly rich, flowing with milk and honey. The bad news is that the people who lived there were big and strong, sons of giants, who dwarfed the spies and made them look like grasshoppers.

Needless to say, the Israelites, who had not built a good track record of acting in faith, were upset by this report. They cried, "Oh, woe are we!" They wanted to go back to the good old days in Egypt (how quickly they forgot that they were slaves making bricks without straw). All that they could figure is that they had been set up by God – led out into the desert to be handed over to these giants that lived in Canaan.

Moses and Aaron realized what was happening (i.e. who the people were really rejecting) and fell face down before the congregation. Joshua and Caleb (the two "good" spies) began to plead with the people. They offered a good news / good news report. They said that yes the land was rich and flowing with milk and honey. They also said that God would lead them and that they could certainly possess the land. They begged the people not to rebel against the Lord.

The people were too busy figuring out whether or not to stone them and did not listen to what they had to say. God had heard enough.

God came to Moses and said that he was ready to destroy the people and make Moses into a nation. Moses pleaded with God not to do so. He appealed to God's own reputation in order to spare the people. He asked how it would look to other nations if God led the people out into the wilderness simply to wipe them out. It would make God look rather harsh and unworthy of devotion. Moses reminded God of the event that took place in Exodus 34:5-7:

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

Moses appealed to the love and forgiveness side of God's character and begged him not to obliterate the nation.

God forgave the people, but came down on them with strict discipline and judgment. He said that none of them who had seen the miracles that God had performed in Egypt would enter the Promised Land. In fact, everyone over twenty years old with the exception of Caleb and Joshua would die before they entered the land. The people would have to wander in the desert for forty years – one year for each day the spies were in the land. Only at the end of that time would they enter the land. God sent a plague on the ten spies who had brought back the bad report and they died right away.

After hearing the judgment, the people came back and said that they were sorry and did not really mean what they said. They said they were ready to go and take the Promised Land now. Moses reminded them that God had left little room for doubt in what he said. They were not going to take the land now. Their children could take it in forty years. Being the slow learners that they were, they tried to take the land by force anyway. Of course, God was not with them and they were attacked and beaten by the Amalekites and Canaanites. Sometimes we have to learn the hard way.

This story begs an interesting question. When God told Moses that he was ready to wipe out the people and make a nation out of Moses, what if Moses had said, "Yes Lord. Go for it."? Did God really want to obliterate the people? Did God really not have a clear idea of what he wanted to do and instead looked to Moses for advice? Does God have fits of rage at times where he needs to "count to ten" before he does something he will later regret? What really happened here?

I believe that God's question to Moses was a way in which God tested Moses. God knew that it would be inconsistent with his character to wipe out the nation. I do not believe that he had any intention of doing so. He wanted to know whether or not Moses knew it. He offered Moses something that may appeal to someone who was motivated by ego – the opportunity to supplant Abraham as the patriarch of God's chosen nation. Moses passed the test. In spite of all their shortcomings, Moses acted in love for his people. He acted in love for his God. He showed insight and caring and wisdom. He passed the test. And if he had said, "Yes, Lord. Go for it."? Good question. Perhaps God would have replaced Moses as the leader since it would have been evidence that he no longer had the welfare of the people at heart. I do not think God had any intention of wiping out the nation.

2.9 *Miscellaneous Instructions*

Numbers 15

Chapter 15 reiterates some instructions on sacrifices and offerings. It contains a narrative about a man who was stoned for working on the Sabbath (God takes his word seriously).

2.10 *Moses' and Aaron's Authority Challenged*

Numbers 16-17

Some people never learn. A group of around 250 men, led by Korah (a Levite), Dathan, and Abiram (Reubenites) came and challenged the leadership of Moses and Aaron. They said that everyone was holy – why should Moses and Aaron pretend to be special? For Korah, it was not enough to be set apart as a Levite. He wanted the priesthood.

To make a long story short, God was very mad about this. Moses again pleaded with God not to kill everyone for the sins of a few. Moses said that God would show whom he had chosen to be leader. If God had indeed chosen Moses and Aaron, then these challengers would not die a natural death.

As soon as the words left Moses' mouth, the earth opened up and swallowed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their tents, families, and all their possessions. Fire came out of the opening and consumed the other 250 men.

You would think that the people would get the hint. But the next day, many people came forward and again challenged Moses' and Aaron's leadership and accused them of being responsible for the deaths of the people the previous day. God was ready to settle this leadership issue once and for all. He told Moses to have a leader from each tribe bring forth his staff and write his name on it. For the tribe of Levi, Aaron's staff was used and his name was written on it. All of the staffs were taken to the Tent of Meeting. God said that the staff of the one who was chosen to be leader would bud. The staffs were put in the Tent of Meeting and left overnight. Sure enough, the next day Aaron's staff had sprouted and budded and blossomed and was producing almonds. There should be no more questions about whom God had chosen to lead the people.

Aaron's staff was put into the Ark of the Covenant as a reminder to the people of God's chosen leadership.

2.11 The Priests and the Levites

Numbers 18

Chapter 18 of Numbers makes a distinction between the duties of the priests and the duties of the Levites. The Levites were to work at the tabernacle. They were to help with the duties of the tabernacle and theirs was a life of service. The priests (Aaron and his descendants) were the only ones who were supposed to touch the furnishings of the tabernacle and they were the only ones allowed behind the veil. Any Levite crossing the boundary would die.

The chapter also gives instructions about the portions of offerings that go to the priests and Levites and offerings that they are supposed to make.

2.12 The Red Heifer and the Water of Cleansing

Numbers 19

Chapter 19 of Numbers gives some special instruction about cleansing people who might have had contact with a dead body (having contact with a dead body made one ceremonially unclean – this procedure would make them ceremonially clean).

They were instructed to take a red heifer without blemish who had never been under a yoke. The animal was to be taken outside the camp and slaughtered in the presence of the priest. A bit of its blood would be sprinkled in the direction of the Tent of Meeting. The animal in its entirety (including the remaining blood) would be burned completely. The ashes would be collected and stored outside the camp. If a person then came into contact with a dead body, some of the ashes would be mixed with water and sprinkled on the person to make him ceremonially clean.

This whole procedure is a bit disjointed from anything else we have seen. This is not a sacrifice like the others. I do not really understand God's reason for this process. That's OK. I also do not understand how he made Aaron's staff bud or how he brought forth manna in the wilderness. He's God.

I do know that in modern Israel, they are again breeding red heifers in preparation for resuming this practice. They still have not caught onto what the writer of Hebrews said in Hebrews 9:13-14:

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

2.13 The Death of Miriam

Numbers 20:1

Miriam died and was buried at Kadesh.

2.14 The Waters of Meribah – Moses' Sin

Numbers 20:2-13

The people found themselves without water and started the old "why did you bring us out here to die – we want to go back to Egypt" whining. Moses and Aaron went to the Tent of Meeting to pray. God told Moses to go to a certain rock and speak to it and water would come forth for the people. Moses (with Aaron as his accomplice) lost his temper, called the people names, and struck the rock twice with his staff.

God was faithful to bring forth water like he said he would. Moses dishonored God in what he did. God told Moses to speak to the rock – that this would be enough. Instead Moses put on a little show and did things his way. Note that previously God had told Moses to strike a rock with his staff to bring forth water, so there was nothing inherently wrong with the action. The problem is that it was disobedient in the context of what God had just told him to do.

God informed Moses and Aaron that because of their disobedience in this, neither of them would enter the Promised Land. (Actually they should have known that already, because when God said who would enter the land in Numbers 14, their names were not on the guest list.)

Is this fair? Moses and Aaron had served God so faithfully and now slipped up this one time. So many of the people who would get to enter the land had messed up so much more. The fact is that God demands a higher accountability from his leaders. It is a principle that those in leadership would do well to remember. This is the same idea that is reflected in James 3:1, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly."

2.15 The Death of Aaron

Numbers 20:14-29

In Numbers 20:14-21, the Israelites had a brush with the Edomites (the descendants of Esau), who would not let them pass through their territory.

In 20:22-29, God told Moses and Aaron that it was Aaron's time to come home. Moses and Aaron and Eleazar (Aaron's son) went up on Mount Hor. Aaron's priestly garments were taken off of him and put on Eleazar. Then Aaron died. The community mourned for thirty days.

2.16 Israel Defeats Arad

Numbers 21:1-3

Arad was in the southern desert of what is modern Israel (the area called the Negev). The king of Arad heard that the Israelites were in the area. He attacked them. The Israelites pledged to God that if he would help them they would wipe out Arad. God did and they did.

2.17 The Bronze Serpent

Numbers 21:4-9

This section has a bit of Messianic symbolism. The people were progressing with their wandering. They began to whine again. This time they were complaining about having no bread and no water and being sick and tired of the lousy manna. God was really mad at them. God

sent venomous snakes into their midst and many of the people were bitten and began to die. Moses pleaded for them before God. God told Moses to make a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten could look at it and be saved.

The bronze snake on the pole was a representation of their sin and looking to it for salvation was an act of faith. It was a foreshadowing of Christ, who would be nailed to a cross as a representation of our sin and the salvation that we would receive by looking to that cross as an act of faith. Jesus himself drew the correlation in John 3:14-15:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

2.18 Defeat of Sihon and Og

Numbers 21:10-35

The people continued their wandering. They came to the territory of Sihon, king of the Amorites. They asked for permission to pass peaceably through his land. He refused and attacked them. God defended the Israelites and they defeated the Amorites and captured their cities. Og, king of Bashan (modern day Golan Heights) then attacked them. They defeated him as well and took his land. Note that they are still officially in their wandering stage, but God is beginning to lead them in the conquest and give them land. Through this process, he is also building their confidence to take the Promised Land under God's control.

2.19 Balak and Balaam

Numbers 22-24

Balak was the king of the Moabites. He heard what the Israelites had done to Arad and the Amorites and Bashan. He was nervous and felt like he needed some supernatural help to defend himself against them.

Balaam was a well-known sorcerer/diviner of the day. In fact, some of his oracles are preserved in extra-Biblical literature. Balak summoned Balaam because he wanted him to pronounce a curse on the Israelites.

Balaam was accustomed to dealing with gods. He was not accustomed, however, to dealing with God. God spoke to him and told him not to go to Balak and not to curse the Israelites. Balaam sent word back that he could not do as Balak wished. Balak sent messengers again and offered him great rewards if he would do the deed. God told Balaam that he could go but that he could say only what God told him to say.

The next day Balaam prepared to leave, but the text tells us that God was very mad at him for doing so. Why is this so if God just told him he could go? The fact is that God did not merely tell him he could go. He told him he could go but that he could say only what God told him to say. More than likely, Balaam intended to go and pronounce the curse and collect his reward.

Balaam was riding a donkey as he tried to leave. God sent an angel to block the way. The donkey saw the angel but Balaam did not. The donkey would not go forward (since its path was blocked by the angel). Balaam beat the donkey and beat it again and beat it a third time but it would not go. Finally God opened the mouth of the donkey and caused it to speak to Balaam. The donkey said, "What have I done to you to make you beat me these three times?" (22:28). Balaam responded in anger, saying that if he had a sword he would kill the donkey for making a

fool of him. The donkey reminded him that he had been a faithful creature and was not in the habit of doing this. At that time, the eyes of Balaam were opened and he could see the angel. He understood what was going on and he understood that he was not working with one of his usual gods. God told him to go on and reminded him that he was to say only what God told him to say.

Balaam went to Balak. Repeatedly Balak tried to get him to pronounce a curse on the Israelites, and each time Balaam pronounced a blessing on them and spoke of how they would prosper and defeat their enemies. This was not what Balak wanted. Balak was mad and said that he would not give Balaam the reward, but Balaam said that he had no choice in the matter.

Balaam went home. Balak was still worried.

2.20 Sexual Sin With the Moabites and Midianites

Numbers 25

The men of Israel began indulging in sexual immorality with the women of Moab and Midian. The women began inviting the men to "come to church with them" – that is, to join in the sacrifices to their pagan gods. Thus certain men of Israel began worshipping the Baals.

Once again, the people of Israel were ignoring and breaking the Ten Commandments. God's anger was stirred again. He sent a plague on the people and many began to die. God told Moses that the leaders of those who were worshipping the Baals must be put to death in front of the entire congregation and that would turn God's anger away from the nation.

About that time, a certain man with little discretion brought a Midianite woman right into the camp. The people were standing around weeping over what was going on and he brings his idol-worshipping sweetheart right into their midst. Phinehas, the son of Eleazar (and the grandson of Aaron) took a spear and plunged it through both of their bodies. Then the plague stopped. In all, around 24,000 people died over this incident.

God told Moses that he would honor the zeal of Phinehas and that he would have peace and a lasting priesthood. He told Moses that the Midianites should be treated as enemies and should be put to death. (Note that this section talks about the Moabites and the Midianites. They were allies at this time.)

2.21 The Second Census

Numbers 26

The book of Numbers opened in chapter 1 with a census being taken, that time to assess what sort of army could be mustered among the Israelites. In Numbers 26, some time had elapsed and a second census is taken, this time for assessing how the land is to be divided once they take the Promised Land. The land was to be apportioned to the various tribes, and tribes with more people would get more land so that the allotment per individual would be basically the same.

As stated earlier, the Levites would get no specific territory, but would be interspersed among the other tribes.

2.22 The Daughters of Zelophehad

Numbers 27:1-11

A man by the name of Zelophehad, from the tribe of Manasseh, had died leaving only daughters. His daughters came to Moses and asked that they might receive their father's portion of land as an inheritance when it came time to distribute land. Before this time, the issue of giving land to women had never been considered.

Moses took the issue to the Lord and received instructions that indeed they should get their father's portion. New inheritance rules were given. A man's property would normally go to his sons (remember that the eldest son got a double portion but also got the responsibility of providing for the widow and the unmarried sisters and young brothers.) If he had no sons, it would go to his daughters. If he also had no daughters, it went to his brothers – and if he had no brothers then to his father's brothers. If his father had no brothers, it would go to the nearest relative in the clan.

2.23 Moses' Successor Appointed

Numbers 27:12-23

The time is approaching to take the Promised Land. God had already told Moses that he would not enter the land. He told Moses to go to the top of a certain mountain where he will be able to see the land. Once he is there, God will gather him to his people, just as he had done with Aaron.

Moses prayed on behalf of the people and asked God to appoint a successor prior to taking him. God appointed Joshua, one of the two "good" spies that had been sent into the land. Joshua was brought before Eleazar and commissioned. The new leadership is in place – Moses and Aaron had been replaced by Joshua and Eleazar. (Joshua does not actually start acting as leader until the end of Deuteronomy.)

Moses is alive for the rest of the book of Numbers and he still had a few things left to say. In fact, the majority of the book of Deuteronomy contains speeches he made in the last few days of his life. It is at the end of Deuteronomy that he actually goes up the mountain and sees the land and is gathered to his people. It is not that he was putting God off. There simply was not a great deal of time that elapsed between Numbers Chapter 27 and the end of Deuteronomy.

2.24 Miscellaneous Instructions

Numbers 28-30

Chapters 28-30 give (and reiterate) instructions about offerings to be made daily, weekly, and monthly, about the observances of the feasts of Leviticus 23, and the taking of vows. Vows were considered to be binding unless made by a woman. If married, woman's vows could be overridden by her husband, or by her father if she were single. If they were not overridden then they were binding on her just as they would be on a man.

2.25 *Attacking the Midianites*

Numbers 31

It was now time to deal with the events that happened in chapter 25, when the men were seduced sexually and led into worshipping the Baals. God told Moses to have the nation attack the Midianites, as he had instructed in Numbers 25:16. So the people fought and defeated the Midianites. They wiped out all the men, but spared the women and children and took them as spoil.

Of special note is the fact that they killed Balaam, the sorcerer and diviner who had been unable to pronounce a curse on Israel. We learn in verse 31:16 that it was his idea to have the women seduce the Israelite men. If he was unable to defeat them by cursing them, then perhaps he could seduce them into defeat. He was killed for his involvement.

Moses was displeased that some of the Midianite women and children had been spared (so was God). The women were the ones who had participated in the seduction. Thus they killed the boys and all women who were not virgins.

The spoils that had been taken from the battle were divided among those who fought and those who stayed behind. Much of the plunder was also given in offerings.

2.26 *The Transjordan Tribes*

Numbers 32

The land that had just been conquered from the Midianites and from Sihon and Og was east of the Jordan River – on the opposite side of the river from the Promised Land. That is where the people were at this point – they entered the land from across the river. The people of the tribes of Reuben and Gad came to Moses. They had large herds and flocks and found the land on that side of the river (the east side) to be very suitable for raising their animals. They asked Moses if they could settle on that side of the river.

Moses reminded them that earlier (almost forty years earlier) some of their people had expressed an unwillingness to enter and conquer the Promised Land – an action that had severe consequences for the nation. He asked why they were doing the same thing now. The men indicated that they were fully ready to go into the Promised Land and fight alongside their brothers to conquer the land. They just wanted to come back to this area and settle once the fighting was done. Under those conditions, Moses agreed. Once the agreement was made, half of the people from the tribe of Manasseh decided that they wanted to settle on the east side of the river. Thus once everyone was finally settled, Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh (which means half of the people of Manasseh) settled in the Transjordan, or east of the Jordan River.

2.27 *Recounting of the Journey*

Numbers 33

Chapter 33 of Numbers is a recounting of the journey. At this point, the people had been wandering almost forty years. It is not like they were really going anywhere. During the majority of the forty years, they probably stayed confined in around a one hundred-mile radius.

The end of the chapter gives some solemn instructions from God to Moses. Numbers 33:50-56 says:

On the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho the Lord said to Moses, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them, 'When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. Distribute the land by lot, according to your clans. To a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one. Whatever falls to them by lot will be theirs. Distribute it according to your ancestral tribes.

"But if you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land, those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live. And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them."

The people of Israel were given instructions to obliterate the current inhabitants of the land. Why? Do these seem like the instructions of a loving God?

For the answer, refer to the commentary on Exodus 23:20-33. The recent events with the seduction by the Moabites and Midianites were still quite fresh. Those events had proven that the people of God had no business intermixing with idol-worshipping neighbors.

God wanted holy people. He wanted a holy land for the people. Not only did that mean driving out and destroying the idols, it meant ridding the land of the people who worshipped them.

2.28 Allotments of Land

Numbers 34-36

Numbers 34 gives the boundaries for the territories of the Promised Land. Numbers 35 gives instructions for the Levitical cities – the cities for the Levites that would be distributed among the land. This chapter also gives instructions for cities of refuge. Certain cities were designated as "cities of refuge." These were places where people who had accidentally killed someone could go for asylum. This chapter gives instructions about administering the death penalty for people who are tried and proven to have willfully killed someone else. People who had accidentally killed would go to a city of refuge to escape the possibility of revenge.

Numbers 36 gives more instructions concerning the daughters of Zelophehad, which become general instructions for dealing with the inheritance of men who die without sons. If his daughters receive his inheritance and marry men outside their tribe, they forfeit their inheritance. If they marry within their tribe, they keep their inheritance. The important thing is that the land stays in the tribe and cannot be passed to another tribe through marriage.

This concludes the book of Numbers. It almost concludes the wandering in the wilderness.

3 Deuteronomy

The people are in the Transjordan area, ready to go into the Promised Land. Moses is about to die and the leadership is about to transition to Joshua. The book of Deuteronomy is Moses' way of saying good-bye.

Deuteronomy consists of three speeches by Moses, followed by a narrative of the death of Moses. The speeches are sermon-style. There is a retelling of much of what has happened and much of what has already been said in the other wilderness books. There is great emphasis on renewing the covenant with God prior to entering the Promised Land. There is great emphasis on proper social behavior towards one another. If there is a single most predominant theme in Deuteronomy, it is the importance of abstaining from idol worship. This is the last chance Moses has to mold these people into a coherent and obedient nation before he dies.

If you have just read through Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers, then a great deal of Deuteronomy is repetition. For this overview, we will scan the repetitive sections at a very high level and focus on what is new.

Even though Deuteronomy contains a great deal of repetition from previous books, it is an important book of the Bible. Genesis, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Psalms are quoted in the New Testament more than any other books of the Old Testament. Deuteronomy is quoted more than 80 times in the New Testament. It is a book that was important to Jesus and his followers. We need to know what it says.

3.1 *Moses' First Address*

Deuteronomy 1:1-4:43

It was now forty years after the Israelites left Egypt (including thirty-eight years of wandering in the desert). It was time to move in and take the Promised Land. Moses reminded them of their history:

- Judges had been appointed among them to settle disputes.
- Spies had been sent into the Promised Land. The people had listened to and believed a bad report, showing a lack of faith. They had been punished for it by being forced to wander in the desert.
- They wandered for thirty-eight years. God continually provided for all of their needs during the time.
- God led them in the defeat of Sihon and Og and gave them the Transjordan lands previously occupied by the nations of these kings.
- The Gadites and the Reubenites and the half-tribe of Manasseh were given the Transjordan land but their men must fight alongside the rest of the nation to take the Promised Land.
- God promised to defeat all of the enemies of Israel just as he had done with Sihon and Og.

- Moses was forbidden to enter the Promised Land. He would take Moses to the top of Pisgah on Mount Nebo (in the Transjordan) and let him see the land before he died. Joshua would be commissioned as leader of the Israelites to take the place of Moses.
- Moses had given the people the laws that God had given to him. It was their responsibility to follow the laws and to teach them to their children and their children's children. Of particular importance was the prohibition against idolatry. They were to avoid it now. If the nation ever became idolatrous in the future, they would lose their land and be destroyed or scattered among other nations.
- They were to consider what God has done for them. Never in the history of the world has one nation been extracted from another, accompanied by signs and miracles. God did this to let them know that he is God and that he loves them and has chosen them to be his special people. They owe a response of gratitude and love and obedience.

In a transition paragraph, consisting of Deuteronomy 4:41-43, Moses set aside three cities of refuge in the Transjordan territory, one each in the territories of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh.

3.2 Moses' Second Address

Deuteronomy 4:44-28:68

Moses began to explain again much of the law and the commandments to the people. He began with the Ten Commandments. Why do these need to be restated? Probably because it had been nearly forty years since they were originally given and many of the people had been born since that time. Even if that were not the case, they were important enough to warrant a retelling.

3.2.1 The Ten Commandments

Deuteronomy 5

Deuteronomy Chapter 5 gives a retelling of the Ten Commandments. Note that it contains some minor wording differences from Exodus 20, specifically in the "Remember the Sabbath," "Honor your father and mother," and the "You shall not covet" commandments. None of the differences shift the meaning of the commandments. The extra wording in the "Remember the Sabbath" seems to be a commentary by Moses stressing the importance of giving servants a day off, reminding the people that they, too, were slaves in Egypt.

3.2.2 "The Shema," Etc.

Deuteronomy 6

Chapter 6 of Deuteronomy contains some very well known verses of Scripture, stressing the importance of loving God and teaching children to love him as well.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is a set of verses known as "The Shema." This is a Jewish confession of faith and is a very good confession for Christians as well:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.

The point of this is that our love of and relationship with God should be part of everything we do. We should model this love for our children. It should be part of our daily conversations with them. More than likely the part about putting them on one's hands and forehead and doorposts was intended symbolically, but many Jewish people take them very literally. Many Jewish people, particularly in Israel, take little black boxes containing selected verses of Scripture and strap them on their foreheads or wrists as they go about their normal daily routines. The boxes are called phylacteries. It is also common to see Jewish homes with little boxes containing verses of Scripture on small pieces of paper nailed to the doorpost of the home or at the gate. One of these boxes is called a mezuzah. In fact, most hotel rooms in Israel will have them on the door. They may be found on doors to offices, etc. Although the intent is that the home is to be guided by principles of Scripture, there is nothing wrong with the physical reminder.

The chapter continues with a warning of a trap that they could (and would) fall into once they entered the land. Deuteronomy 6:10-12 says:

When the Lord your God brings you into the land he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to give you – a land with large, flourishing cities you did not build, houses filled with all kinds of good things you did not provide, wells you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves you did not plant – then when you eat and are satisfied, be careful that you do not forget the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Have we changed that much? When we are in distress, somehow we find it much easier to remember our need of God than when we are in comfort. God was warning the people that when life got easy, they would be tempted to forget him. And guess what – they did.

In the rest of the chapter, God warned the people to remember him and to keep his commandments. His promise to give them the land and to give them prosperity was contingent on their obedience.

3.2.3 Ridding the Land of Idolatry

Deuteronomy 7

God promised to drive out the nations who were currently inhabiting the land and give them to the Israelites in battle. The Israelites, on the other hand, had the responsibility to destroy them completely. They were all to be killed, their idols destroyed, and their Asherah poles pulled down and burned (Asherah was a pagan fertility goddess). If they were faithful in this, God would give them prosperity and would protect them from disease, etc.

Verses 7:2-4 say,

And when the Lord your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.

They had just experienced this phenomenon with the Moabites and Midianites. They would continue to have problems with faithfulness in this once they entered the land. The problem continued until post-exilic times. Both Ezra and Nehemiah had to deal with the intermarriage problem after the Jews returned from Babylonian exile around nine hundred years later.

3.2.4 God's Provision

Deuteronomy 8

Chapter 8 reminds the people of God's wonderful provisions for them during the time in the wilderness. It tells us that during the entire forty years their clothes never wore out. It says that the time in the desert was a time of testing and teaching and disciplining. Verse 5 says "Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you." It reminds them again not to forget God once they arrive at a place of comfort, but to continue remembering that it is God who provides the comfort.

This chapter contains a verse, a part of which Jesus quoted to the devil when he was being tempted in the desert. Deuteronomy 8:3 says:

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

3.2.5 Why They Were Chosen

Deuteronomy 9-11

God reminded the people that they were chosen not because of their own righteousness but because of God's favor towards their forefathers. They were being given the land not because they were good, but because the current inhabitants were so evil.

He reminded them of events such as the golden calf and other incidents that occurred in the desert. The Israelites were not an exemplary people, free of major defects. Being chosen was an act of grace on the part of God and nothing that they deserved.

They are admonished again to abstain from idolatry. They are reminded again to teach their children about the miracles God performed in bringing them out of Egypt so that the nation would forever know what God had done for them.

Deuteronomy 11:26-29 sets forth some events that take place in the book of Joshua:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. When the Lord your God has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses.

Again and again in this book, God promises to bless the people if they are faithful and to curse them if they are not. In Joshua Chapter 8, after the people had entered the land and captured the first few cities, they went to Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. These are two mountains that are near one another. Half of the people stood in front of Mount Ebal and the other half in front of Mount Gerizim and they renewed the covenant and recited the blessings and the curses, reminding the people of the consequences of their choices. (See Deuteronomy 27 for more information.)

3.2.6 Where and Whom to Worship

Deuteronomy 12-13

When the people entered the Promised Land, they were to destroy any temples that were already there, which would have been pagan temples. They were to worship and sacrifice only at the place of God's choosing, which initially was the tabernacle and later was the temple. Note that when the kingdom split after the death of Solomon, one of the first things that Jeroboam (king of the Northern kingdom) did was to set up alternate temples in the north, contrary to these instructions.

The people were told that they could slaughter animals for food in places other than the temple (or tabernacle) and could eat these animals as long as the blood had been drained, but sacrifices were to be made only at the place of God's choosing.

Then again the people were warned against idol worship. They were to worship only God. This book stresses this point over and over. It is amazing that the people missed it. They were told not only to avoid worshipping idols, but also to kill anyone who suggested that they do so, whether it be friend or family or foe.

3.2.7 Miscellaneous Instructions

Deuteronomy 14-19

This sections gives miscellaneous instructions, many of which are repeated from previous books. It includes:

- 14:1-21 – Dietary regulations (Leviticus 11).
- 14:22-29 – Tithing. The people are told to set aside a tenth of their produce every year to be given as an offering. If they are unable to bring the actual produce (i.e. they are a distance away and it would rot before they could bring it), they are to exchange it for silver and give that as an offering.
- 15:1-11 – The Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25). Along with this are the instructions to care for the poor among them at all times.
- 15:12-17 – Freeing Hebrew servants after seven years (Exodus 21, Leviticus 25).
- 15:19-23 – Consecration of firstborn animals (Exodus 13).
- 16:1-8 – Passover Observance (Exodus 12, Leviticus 23, Numbers 28).
- 16:9-12 – Pentecost (Feast of Weeks) (Leviticus 23, Numbers 28).
- 16:13-17 – Feast of Tabernacles (Leviticus 23, Numbers 29).
- 16:18-20 – The people are given instructions to appoint judges from among themselves who will settle disputes justly. They are warned against partiality and bribes and any other perversion of justice.
- 16:21-17:7 – Do not worship idols (there it is again). Do not offer blemished sacrifices to God. If anyone is found worshipping idols, he is to be killed.

- 17:8-13 – If there are cases too difficult for the judges to decide, bring them to the priest. Accept whatever verdict he brings without question.
- 17:14-20 – God predicted the day when the people would want a king. He did not want it; he simply knew it would come. They are told to choose a king from among their own people. He should not have too many horses or too many wives, or else he would be led astray (exactly what happened to Solomon). He should be a man devoted to God and his word who does not consider himself to be greater than the other people.
- 18:1-8 – There are instructions for the offerings and provisions made for priests and Levites.
- 18:9-13 – The Israelites are warned that the people currently in the land include those who practice child sacrifice, divination, sorcery, interpretation of omens, witchcraft, casting of spells, consulting of the dead, spiritism, etc. It is because of these practices that God is driving them out of the land. The Israelites are not to adopt these practices.
- 18:14-22 – This section of Deuteronomy is a major Messianic prophecy. 18:15 says "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him." Moses set up an expectation among the people that the day would come when another like Moses would appear. That one was Jesus. In John 1:19-21, the leaders of the Jews sent a delegation to ask questions of John the Baptist to see if he was the Christ, the promised Messiah. The text reads:

Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ."

They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"

He said, "I am not."

"Are you the Prophet?"

He answered, "No."

This question, "Are you the Prophet?", is a reference to this promise in Deuteronomy 18. They were still looking for the one that Moses promised would come.

This section of Deuteronomy also gives instructions to kill those who come, claiming to be this prophet, but are found to be false prophets. How are they to know? If they say things that do not come true, they are false prophets.

- 19:1-14 – Cities of Refuge (Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 4).
- 19:15-21 – Witnesses. Nobody is to be convicted on the testimony of a single witness. It takes at least two or three agreeing on the details in order to bring about a conviction. If a person is found to be a false witness, then whatever penalty would have been inflicted on the defendant is instead inflicted on the false witness.

3.2.8 Marching Orders for War

Deuteronomy 20

Deuteronomy 20 gives instructions for warfare. The people are to remember that this is a holy war that they are about to undertake. God is the leader. The priest is responsible to help rally the troops. There are to be no soldiers among them who are not committed to the task; if there are any distracted by other events in life they are to be excused from a given battle.

If they come up against a city that borders the Promised Land, the residents are to be offered peace. They may choose to become slaves to the Israelites. If they accept, they live. If they refuse, the Israelites are to destroy them completely. When they come up against cities inside the Promised Land, none of the current residents are to be allowed to live. If they fail to destroy the people there, then those people will end up teaching the Israelites to worship their gods.

3.2.9 Miscellaneous Instructions

Deuteronomy 21-26

This section gives a number of miscellaneous instructions, including:

- 21:1-9 – How to make atonement for an unsolved murder (i.e. a dead body is found but nobody knows who did the killing).
- 21:10-14 – Instructions for marrying a captive woman. When a city bordering the Promised Land was captured and one of the Israelite men wanted to marry a captive woman, it was permissible to allow her to live. This gives the parameters for such a marriage.
- 21:15-17 – If a man had two wives and his firstborn is from his less favorite wife, it is not permissible to let the inheritance of the firstborn pass to the son of the favorite wife.
- 21:18-21 – Parents should deal with a rebellious son by having him stoned outside the city. Note that this would not happen the first time he disobeyed them. This would be a son who had a lifestyle of rebellion.
- Deuteronomy 21:22-23 says, "If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse." Jesus was hung on a tree. He took the curse of the world upon himself. His body was not left on the tree overnight.
- 22:1-4 – If you find someone else's lost property, you must return it to him. If you see someone else's animal in trouble (fallen into a ditch or whatever) you must try to help.
- 22:5 – Women are prohibited from wearing men's clothes and men from wearing women's clothes.
- 22:6-7 gives some somewhat strange instructions: If a person finds a bird's nest where the mother bird is caring for her young, he may take the young but should leave the mother alone. The only plausible explanation that I can find for this is that it is a recommendation to preserve the food source (the mother can bear other young).
- 22:8 – If you build a house, put protection around the roof so that someone walking up there will not be likely to fall off.

- 22:9-11 gives instructions about not mixing different kinds of seeds in the same field, not yoking an ox and a donkey together, and not mixing wool and linen in the same fabric. There may have been one of two explanations for this. This may have been an object lesson in purity. It is also possible that these were pagan practices to be avoided.
- 22:12 gives references to tassels on the garments, which was mentioned in Numbers 15:37-41.
- 22:13-30 – There are instructions about what a man should do if he suspects his wife of unfaithfulness. There are also other instructions about how to deal with people caught in extramarital sex.
- 23:1-14 – There are instructions about excluding unclean individuals or things from the camp.
- 23:17-18 – Don't be a shrine prostitute.
- 23:19-20 – Don't charge interest to your brothers (countrymen).
- 23:21-23 – If you make a vow to God, fulfill it quickly.
- 23:24-25 – You can eat from your neighbor's fields or vineyards, but you cannot gather from them (i.e. get a basketful of grapes and take them home).
- 24:1-4 – There are instructions about divorce and remarriage.
- 24:5 – Newlywed men are not required to be soldiers.
- 24:6 – Do not take a man's tools of his trade as pledge for a debt.
- 24:10-25:4 – There are prohibitions about taking advantage of the needy, the fatherless, the widow, the foreigner. When harvesting, some produce should be left for them to gather.
- 25:5-10 – There are instructions about the duties of the kinsman redeemer. The first time we encountered such a situation was with Judah and Tamar. In this time, it was customary that if a man died leaving a widow but no heir, the brother of the deceased man would marry the widow and impregnate her to produce an heir for his brother. Why is that?

It all goes back to the concept of the birthright. The firstborn son got a double share of the inheritance. He also got the responsibility of taking care of any young sons in the family, unmarried sisters, and the widow if she was still living. The other brothers got a share and went out and started their own family lines. Women did not get a share of the inheritance. So the custom was that the next surviving brother should marry and impregnate the widow. The child (hopefully a son) that would be born would be considered the heir of the dead brother. Thus this child would have legal rights to the dead brother's portion of the inheritance, the family line would be continued, and the widow would have someone to support her.

This arrangement could pose a problem to the surviving brother if he were greedy. If his deceased brother had no heir, then he would become the oldest brother and thus would have the birthright entitling him to the double share of the estate. By giving his sister-in-law a son, he would greatly decrease his own inheritance.

If the man refused, the sister-in-law would summon him to the city gate, take one of his sandals and spit in his face, publicly disgracing him. Note that this happened in the book of Ruth, except that she was fairly gentle in her rebuke.

- 25:13-16 – There are instructions about being honest in business practices.
- 26:1-15 – There are reminders about the giving of firstfruits and tithes.

3.2.10 Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim

Deuteronomy 27-28

Deuteronomy 11 alluded to the events that would take place at Mount Ebal. When the Israelites came into the land, they were to go to Mount Ebal to have a time of renewing the covenant. Chapters 27-28 of Deuteronomy give more information about what is to take place once they are there. These events actually take place in Joshua 8.

Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim are close to one another and both are close to the city of Shechem. The people are told to gather at these two mountains. Half of the people will stand by Mount Gerizim and pronounce blessings. The other half will stand in front of Mount Ebal and pronounce curses. There are curses for:

- idolatry
- dishonoring of parents
- cheating
- mistreatment of the blind, alien, orphan, widow
- improper sexual conduct
- murder
- accepting bribes
- not keeping the law.

There are blessings for those who keep the law. God promises prosperity and favor to those who keep his commandments. As long as they keep God's ordinances, they will have success and be his chosen people.

Then there is a very long section prescribing curses for disobedience. God made it very clear to the Israelites that if they are to continue receiving his blessings and are to continue in his favor, they must be obedient. He gives a long list of calamities that will come their way if they do not keep his law. It includes crop failure, flocks dying, harassment from enemies, falling prey to those enemies, drought, disease, captivity, etc. Life is going to be crummy if they are not faithful.

3.3 Moses' Third Address

Deuteronomy 29-33

Chapters 29-33 of Deuteronomy contain Moses' last speech to the nation. There is no more giving of law as there was in the previous speech. It is an admonishment to follow God but also a prediction that they will fail in this.

3.3.1 Reminder of God's Grace

Deuteronomy 29

Moses reminds the people of what God has done for them to bring them to this point. He reminds them of the miraculous way they were led out of Egypt and the miraculous provisions for them along the way. He encourages a response of obedience and admonishes them to abstain from idol worship. 29:18 says, "Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the Lord our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison." He reminds them again that failure to obey in this area will bring God's bitter wrath.

3.3.2 Second Chances

Deuteronomy 30:1-10

As God had already said, if the people fail and fall into idol worship, they will most likely be conquered and led into captivity. Once there, if the people become faithful again and turn their hearts towards God, he will gather his remnant and bring them back into their own land. Good news!

3.3.3 Choose Life

Deuteronomy 30:11-20

This is Moses' final plea to the people. Deuteronomy 30:15-20 says:

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees, and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

It speaks for itself.

3.3.4 Moses' Final Remarks

Deuteronomy 31-33

It is time for Joshua to take his place of leadership. Moses wrote down the law and gave instructions about having it read periodically to the nation.

God spoke to Moses and told him that in spite of all the warnings that have been given, once the people settled into the land, they would indeed have idol worship spring up among them. He gave them a song in chapter 32 that they were to learn and teach to their children that would describe that time in the future. Once the people found themselves in that state, they would remember this song and understand the wrath of God that would be poured out on them.

Moses pronounced a blessing over the nation and the twelve tribes individually. This is found in chapter 33.

3.4 The Death of Moses

Deuteronomy 34

As instructed, Moses went to the top of Pisgah on Mount Nebo. God showed him the entirety of the Promised Land. Then he died. God buried his body. He was 120 years old but was still strong and still had good vision. The nation mourned for him for thirty days.

Deuteronomy 34:9-12 says:

Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt – to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

It makes one wonder what the Israelites would do if they were given another man who spoke to God face to face and gave miraculous signs and wonders and did awesome deeds.

The new order is in place (Joshua and Eleazar). The people are poised in the Transjordan ready to cross. The stage is now set for the conquest of the land. That is what the book of Joshua is all about.

4 Index of Scripture References

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

1 Corinthians 15:20-----	17
1 Corinthians 15:51-52-----	17
Acts 5-----	13
Deuteronomy 1:1-4:43-----	34
Deuteronomy 11:26-29-----	37
Deuteronomy 12-13-----	38
Deuteronomy 14-19-----	38
Deuteronomy 20-----	40
Deuteronomy 21:22-23-----	40
Deuteronomy 21-26-----	40
Deuteronomy 27-28-----	42
Deuteronomy 29-----	43
Deuteronomy 29-33-----	42
Deuteronomy 30:1-10-----	43
Deuteronomy 30:11-20-----	43
Deuteronomy 31-33-----	43
Deuteronomy 34-----	44
Deuteronomy 4:41-43-----	35
Deuteronomy 4:44-28:68-----	35
Deuteronomy 5-----	35
Deuteronomy 6-----	35
Deuteronomy 6:4-9-----	35
Deuteronomy 7-----	36
Deuteronomy 8-----	37
Deuteronomy 9-11-----	37
Exodus 16:4-----	23
Exodus 20-----	35
Exodus 23:10-11-----	18
Exodus 23:19-----	10
Exodus 23:20-33-----	33
Exodus 34:5-7-----	25
Hebrews 9:13-14-----	27
James 3:1-----	9, 28
John 1:19-21-----	39
John 3:14-15-----	29
Leviticus 10:1-3-----	9
Leviticus 10:8-9-----	9
Leviticus 11-15-----	10
Leviticus 16-----	11
Leviticus 16:1-2-----	9
Leviticus 1-7-----	7
Leviticus 17-22-----	13
Leviticus 24:10-23-----	18
Leviticus 24:1-9-----	17
Leviticus 25-----	18
Leviticus 26-----	18

Leviticus 27	19
Leviticus 7:24-30	10
Leviticus 8-10	8
Luke 2:21-24	11
Matthew 8:1-4	11
Numbers 11	22
Numbers 12	24
Numbers 13-14	24
Numbers 1-4	20
Numbers 15	26
Numbers 16-17	26
Numbers 18	27
Numbers 19	27
Numbers 20:1	27
Numbers 20:14-29	28
Numbers 20:2-13	27
Numbers 21:10-35	29
Numbers 21:1-3	28
Numbers 21:4-9	28
Numbers 22-24	29
Numbers 25	30
Numbers 25:16	31
Numbers 26	30
Numbers 27:1-11	30
Numbers 27:12-23	31
Numbers 28-30	31
Numbers 31	31
Numbers 32	32
Numbers 33	32
Numbers 34-36	33
Numbers 5	21
Numbers 6	21
Numbers 7:1-9:14	22
Numbers 9:15-10:36	22
Romans 6:23	12

5 Topical Index

Aaron	
Death	28
Ordination	8
Priesthood	27
Staff that Budded.....	26
Abihu	9
Ark of the Covenant	12, 21, 22, 26
Balaam.....	29, 31
Balak.....	29
Blood Sacrifice.....	7
Bronze Serpent.....	28
Burnt Offering.....	7, 8
Caleb.....	24, 25
Canaan	
Exploration	24
Census	20, 30
Ceremonial Cleanliness.....	10
Cleanliness, Ceremonial.....	10
Day of Atonement	11, 16, 17
Dietary Laws	10
Donkey, Talking.....	29
Eleazar	28
Feasts of Israel	14
Fellowship Offering.....	7, 8
Firstfruits	15, 16
Gad.....	32
Grain Offering	8
Guilt Offering	7, 8
Hanukkah.....	16
John the Baptist.....	22
Joshua	24, 25
Moses' Successor	31
Kinsman Redeemer	18, 41
Manasseh.....	32
Meribah, Waters of.....	27
Midian	30, 31
Mildew.....	11
Moab.....	29, 30
Moses	
Death	44
Forbidden to Enter Promised Land	28
Mount Ebal	42
Mount Gerizim.....	42
Nadab.....	9
Nazirite.....	21
Offering	
Burnt.....	7, 8
Fellowship.....	7, 8

Grain.....	8
Guilt.....	7, 8
Sin	7, 8
Offerings.....	7
Og.....	29
Passover	14, 16
Pentecost.....	15, 17
Phinehas	30
Purim	16
Red Heifer.....	27
Redemption	19
Restitution.....	7
Reuben	32
Rosh Hashanah	15
Ruth	14
Sabbath Year.....	18
Sacrificial System.....	7
Samson	22
Scapegoat.....	12
Shema	35
Sihon	29
Sin Offering	7, 8
Skin Disease.....	11
Spies, Sent into Canaan.....	24
Tabernacles, Feast of.....	16, 17
Ten Commandments	35
Transjordan Tribes.....	32
Trumpets, Feast of.....	15, 17
Unleavened Bread	15, 16
Year of Jubilee	18
Yom Kippur	11, 16, 17
Zelophehad, Daughters of.....	30