

cq

Collegiate Quarterly


2009
October–December



people on the move: the book of numbers

A Devotional Bible-Study Guide for Young Adults

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People on the Move: The Book of Numbers

October--December 2009

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JUST CLICK AND SERVE!

This Quarter's *Illustrator*



Armon Perez Tolentino did not receive any formal training in art. He just admires people who are blessed with this talent and draws inspiration from them in expressing his mental pictures of how sublime God is. A graduate of Adventist University of the Philippines' Bachelor of Science biology program, his dream of becoming a medical doctor was not realized. At present, he works for the Central Luzon Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as the executive assistant to the president and the assistant director for news. He also writes and edits for *Central Light*, the official publication of the conference. Armon dreams of going to law school and prays that he soon finds the means, as schools that do not have Saturday classes in his country are expensive.

Getting the Most Out of CQ

FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

CQ is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the *Adult Bible Study Guide* find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

About four hundred Adventist young adults contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety and occasional repetition of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 72,500.

POINTERS FOR STUDY

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

2. The Bible passages on which each week's lesson are based appear in bold type in the "Logos" portion of the lesson. Read these entire passages.

3. The Bible passages for the week are usually divided into sections on the "Logos" pages. When studying these sections, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the headings.

4. Read the other sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passages.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the Bible study guide:

"Introduction" is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

"Logos" is a guide for direct study of the Bible passages for the week.

"Testimony" presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

"Evidence" approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.

"How-To" discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

"Opinion" is a personal viewpoint on the lesson meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

"Exploration" provides the reader with a variety of open-ended, creative ways to explore the topic of the week's lesson.

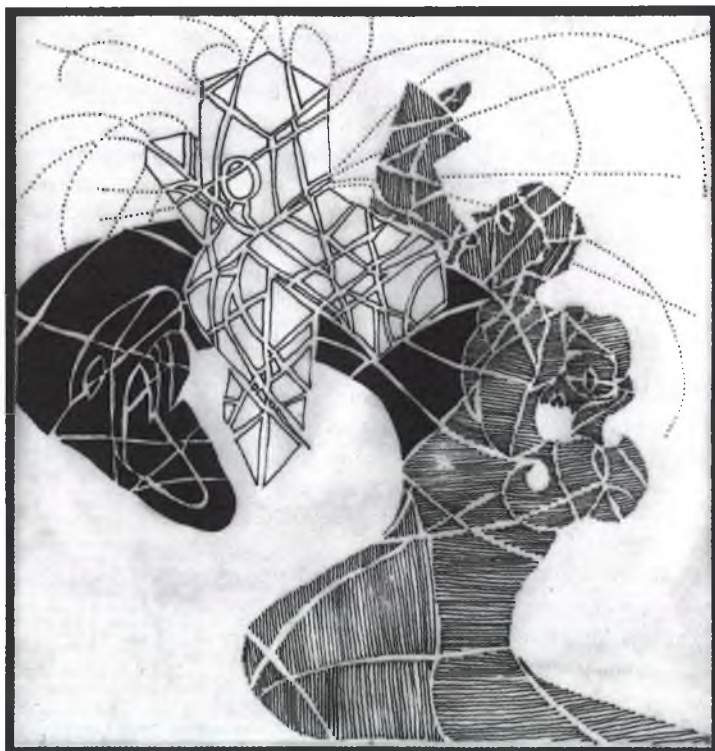
CQ AND THE CHURCH

CQ is the General Conference-approved Bible study guide for the young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.

lesson one
SEPTEMBER 26–OCTOBER 3

A New
Order

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV).



Ps. 37:23, 24

Introduction
Order Out of Chaos

It is often said that creative people need to work in chaos. I am one such person. Neat piles on a desk stifle my creative juices as my thoughts clumsily bump into the sterile organization of imposed order. As a writer, I need my mind to be free of such constraints.

To me, it was an absolute nightmare.

I remember the time when my husband decided to tidy my desk. I literally went spare (blank)! I simply couldn't find anything at all. I couldn't figure out what to do. Where were my things? To me, it was an absolute nightmare. Nothing was where it should be, and I had deadlines to meet.

My husband frequently asks me, "How can you work in such a mess?" Mess? Believe me, I know where to find anything I want on my desk. To me, everything is in order. But to my beloved, it's chaos.

God gave Moses a difficult task—leading a large group of people out of slavery. He really would have to be organized. No wonder Moses was a little scared. I would have been extremely terrified.

God, however, took a humble shepherd who was slow of speech and made him an organized leader (Exod. 4:10–12). The God that can do something like that is a wonderful and challenging God. A God who chooses the most unlikely person to be a leader lets us know that His order is not quite like our order. And the God who put a man like Moses in charge didn't just leave him on his own. From the very beginning of the journey, He gave Moses detailed instructions. (Review such chapters as Exodus 12; 13; and 16.)

This week we'll begin to learn from the book of Numbers how God organized His people for their sacred calling. As you study each daily lesson, consider how He guides you in your sacred calling. We can trust a God who makes order out of chaos. The God who led the Israelites through the wilderness can certainly order our steps today.

Logos
*In the Presence of the
King*

Gen. 15:14–16;
Lev. 10:1–11;
Numbers 1–4;
Jer. 23:23, 24;
John 14:15–18, 24

Promises: Living in Hope and Faith (Gen. 15:14–16)

The Jews lived in hope for over four hundred years. Parents told their children stories about the promises God had made, promises that were passed down from father to son. These words were spoken by God to Abraham, promises about great possessions, of freedom from slavery, and of a country of their own. It took a great deal of work for the parents to flesh out these promises in their stories in order to capture the vivid imagination of their children. How can you convey the truth about God's reliability when you talk about promises made to an ancestor (Abraham) who is long dead? How can you describe richness when you live in poverty, or freedom when all you know is slavery? How can you imagine an entire country of your own, when all you've ever known

You are guaranteed the presence of God in your life.

is the one in which you and your parents live? This became increasingly more difficult as time passed by and their oppression became tougher and tougher. As these children became adults, they had two options regarding their view of these promises: (1) that they were lovely subjects of their childhood stories, or (2) that they were an ever-growing certainty in their lives, a surety that one day they would become reality (Heb. 11:13).

Misconceptions About God: Taking Him for Granted (Lev. 10:1–11)

More than four centuries of slavery and pagan influence meant that the Israelites had lost their sense of who God is. In fact, so heavy was the impact of their surroundings that when they entered into the very presence of God, they thought it was all right to do so under the influence of alcohol. What they failed to understand is that the God they worshiped was a real God, unlike those worshiped by the Egyptians. The differences were real: *YHWH* was the Creator God (thus separating Himself from the status of His worshipers, who were His creation). He was the Deliverer God (thus differentiating Himself from those who were slaves to human masters). Finally, He was the God who gave them a hope and a future, which they didn't have (Jer. 29:11).

The Reality About God: In the Presence of the King (Numbers 1–4; Jer. 23:23, 24)

God desired to be with His people, and He wanted to help them understand

who He was. So He instructed Moses and Aaron in how to build the sanctuary. He instructed them to set apart an entire clan for full-time service in the sanctuary. He gave them a detailed layout of their campsite and detailed how entire families were to be dedicated to performing the particular services of the sanctuary (the care of furniture, livestock, worship, etc.). These instructions would help them realize who they were and who He really was.

Contrary to What the World Thinks, God Takes Things Seriously (John 14:15–18, 24)

“The world cannot accept him [the Holy Spirit], because it neither sees him nor knows him” (John 14:17, NIV). God, in the form of His Spirit “lives with you and will be in you” (John 14:17, NIV). Therein lies the challenge: We know in our hearts what God has promised to us and what He expects of us. However, these views are not shared by all those around us. The promise is there, too, that “whoever does not love me [Jesus] does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me” (John 14:24, NRSV). You are guaranteed the presence of God in your life. Isn't it marvelous to have the Creator of the universe live with you!

REACT

1. In what ways are we living in hope and faith regarding the promises made many centuries ago to our spiritual ancestors (promises about the Second Coming; the mansions Jesus is preparing for us; the City of God that will come down from heaven; etc.)?

2. What are some of the influences (positive and negative) in your life that affect the way you think about God? What are some of the possible misconceptions you may have about God? Is God serious about such things as keeping the Ten Commandments, or are they up for negotiation in light of the examples of Nadab and Abihu (especially those commandments which relate to worshiping Him)?

3. How do you view such expectations in church as punctuality, thorough preparation for special musical items/drama/Pathfinder activities (homework), etc.? Are they mere challenges given to you by your leaders, or do they serve a greater purpose in your appreciation of who God is? Why is it that we can observe the laws laid down by our schools, society, and place of work, but many times try to negotiate those laws relating to worshiping God?

4. How do you deal with the contrast between what you know (and feel in your life) about God and what those around you think? Is there a place for making a decision based on the evidence you have in your own life and just going with it, and then asking others to respect your choice just as much as they would have you respect theirs?

Testimony
A Call to Order

Genesis 1; 2;
Numbers 1-4

From the very beginning, we witness an orderly God at work. And again in Numbers 1-4, one is struck by the orderliness of His instructions to Israel.

“God is a God of order. Everything connected with heaven is in perfect order; subjection and thorough discipline mark the movements of the angelic host. Success can only attend order and harmonious action. God requires order and system in His work now no less than in the days of Israel. All who are working for Him are to labor intelligently, not in a careless, haphazard manner. He would have His work done with faith and exactness, that He may place the seal of His approval upon it.”¹

“Order and perfection are seen in all His work.”

We again witness orderliness when Christ arose from the grave. “The graveclothes were not thrown heedlessly aside, but carefully folded, each in a place by itself. . . .

“It was Christ Himself who had placed those graveclothes with such care. When the mighty angel came down to the tomb, he was joined by another, who with his company had been keeping guard over the Lord’s body. As the angel from heaven rolled away the stone, the other entered the tomb, and unbound the wrappings from the body of Jesus. But it was the Saviour’s hand that folded each, and laid it in its place. In His sight who guides alike the star and the atom, there is nothing unimportant. Order and perfection are seen in all His work.”²

To us, as well as to the Israelites and to Jesus, comes a call to order: “Disorder and untidiness in daily duties will lead to forgetfulness of God and to keeping the form of godliness in a profession of faith, having lost the reality. We are to watch and pray, else we shall grasp the shadow and lose the substance.

“A living faith like threads of gold should run through the daily experience in the performance of little duties. Then students will be led to understand the pure principles which God designs shall prompt every act of their lives. Then all the daily work will be of such a character as to promote Christian growth. Then the vital principles of faith, trust, and love for Jesus will penetrate into the most minute details of daily life.”³

REACT

What needs organizing in your life?

-
1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 376.
 2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 789.
 3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 170, 171.

Eunice Simmons, Detroit, Michigan, U.S.A.

Amos 9:7

Evidence

Even God Has a Plan B

Based on all the trouble the Israelites caused that we read about in Numbers, Israel shouldn't be in existence today. Other nations, more erudite and established, did not survive the same test of time. The Sumerians, who developed the cuneiform system of writing, along with the Aztecs, Mayans, and Phoenicians, have all come and gone. Twentieth-century historian Arnold J. Toynbee concluded that societies decline not so much because of environmental and economic issues but because of a moral and religious collapse.¹ While many historians do not adhere to Toynbee's conclusion, the Bible does deal with God's part in the movements of nations and civilizations. Amos 9:7 in particular mentions God's leading with Israel and with the Ethiopians, Philistines, and Syrians.

Israel's survival was nothing short of miraculous.

Israel's survival was nothing short of miraculous. Clearly, the genius behind their new order was the God who was a "cloud by day" and a "pillar by night." Clearly, He also desires to be personally involved in our lives (Rev. 3:20). This is seen in stark contrast with a deist's hands-off wind-it-up-and-let-it-run-on-its-own view of God. That being said, however, Numbers gives the distinct impression that because of their perennial stubbornness, God constantly had to rework His original plans for "sheepish" Israel. They were meant to subsist on the heaven-sent manna, but they craved earthly meat (Numbers 11). They were meant to arrive at Canaan sooner, but because of their rebellion, they wandered for 40 years while the old guard died (Num. 14:33). "We have far more to fear from within than from without. The hindrances to strength and success are far greater from the church itself than from the world."²

Nevertheless, we see God's sovereignty and grace. We see His mercy despite our self-inflicted misery as He works around our mess-ups in order to move us from plan A to plan B—all so that we can still be conquerors in Christ (Rom. 8:37–39; Romans 8). We are encouraged to increase our faith and trust in God, so that the order He wills for our lives will bring protection, peace, and an abundant life.

REACT

What evidence is there in your life that you can trust God's plan for you?

1. Philosophy Professor Arnold J. Toynbee, <http://www.philosophyprofessor.com/philosophers/arnold-toynbee.php>, retrieved December 1, 2008.

2. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 122.

How-to Making Sense of Life

Num. 3:5–7, 38;
4:1–4

At the center of the order God brought to Israel's camp was His desire to be with His people, to protect them, and to guide them like a loving parent. The symbol of this desire was the sanctuary, or the tent of meeting. In time, Jesus, God's Son, came to live among them, as the true temple of God, bringing love and order into the lives of those He touched. And now, through the Holy Spirit, we have the same opportunity to make a place in the center of our lives in which Jesus can dwell. In that place, He promises to love us, to take care of us, and to bring meaning, purpose, and order into our lives (John 14:23; Rev. 3:20). How do we make a place for Jesus to live in us? Here are a few pointers:

God will never give up on you!

You are His temple. When we believe in Jesus and decide to follow Him, our very bodies become a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 6:19).

Let the Word of God be real to you. During Creation, God spoke, and the world came into existence (Gen. 1:3). Jesus spoke, and people were healed (Luke 7:1–10). God's Word never fails. And just as the Israelites put the tabernacle in the center of their camp, we also should make God's Word central to our lives. Here are some ways we can do so:

- a. *Come to grips with the big picture.* Always remind yourself of the Bible's core message. God loves you so much that He was willing to send His Son to die for you so that you could live with Him forever. God is love, and His plans for you are all good ones! (Jer. 29:11; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8).
- b. *Don't let your feelings or circumstances dictate how you see yourself or what you do in life.* Feelings are not always reliable. However, God's Word is. Circumstances change all the time, but His Word never does. Discipline your mind and will by making yourself familiar with all of His promises (Isa. 40:8; 55:8–11; Matt. 24:35).

Remember that God will never give up on you! It's just not His nature to do that. His desire is to come to the center of your being and from there love you, care for you, bring order into your life, and transform you to reflect His character.

REACT

1. How does it make you feel to think that God wants you to be a temple in which He can dwell?
2. What about your life would you like to "put in order"?

Num. 2:1–33

Opinion

The Center of Attention

In life, we have a multitude of choices to make. Sometimes we may look back at a choice we've made and think that if we had the chance to make that decision again, we would choose differently. Some choices we make are less important; some are more important. Exodus 25:8 tells us that God told Moses to build the tabernacle so He could dwell among the people. Numbers 2:2 says that the Israelites were to dwell around that tabernacle. God gave direct orders about where the Israelites were to camp in relationship to the tabernacle—the tent where He “lived.” The rest of Numbers 2 describes how He planned His tent to be at the very center of the Israelite encampment. This illustrates that it was His desire not only to live with them, but to be at the very center of their lives.

God has made His choice quite clear.

The book of Hebrews describes Jesus as a fulfillment of the tabernacle and its services (Hebrews 8–10). God has made His choice quite clear: He wants Jesus Christ to be at the very center of our lives. To me, it is amazing that a holy God, the Creator of the universe, wants to be at the center of my life. This is where we encounter the most important choice we will ever have to make: How do we respond to God's desire to be the center of our lives? Do we accept Him? Or do we turn our backs on Him?

Does it matter what we believe in regard to this subject? Yes, it does, and the place where it matters most is in our daily lives. How we live each day makes it clear whether or not Christ really is the center of our world.

Peter wrote that our “enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8, NIV). Satan has numerous ways of trying to take our attention away from Jesus.

Admittedly, it is not natural for humans to keep focused on Christ. Thankfully, however, Christ says the same words to us as He said to the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV).

REACT

1. What distractions does the devil use to break your focus on Christ?
2. What does having Christ at the center of your life actually mean?

Exploration
God's Special Class

1 Cor. 10:11–38

CONCLUDE

God's plan was a daunting one—to take a people, degraded by many years of slavery, and make them His ambassadors to the world. These unformed, undisciplined people were to learn lessons of order and organization, faith and obedience, through one of the most amazing of all object lessons—a live-in experience with God, as He demonstrated His plan for salvation through the sanctuary service. That God is holy, that He is particular, that He is just, and that He bore on Himself the consequences of our sins because He loves us are all lessons we still need to learn today.

CONSIDER

- Designing a model sanctuary and encampment to scale. Add to your model throughout the rest of the quarter's lessons to make your study more visual. Then plan on sharing it with the rest of your class.
- Organizing members of your class into a team to act out a daily temple service at the conclusion of the quarter as a means of outreach. Some members may want to build temple furniture, others may sew priestly robes, and still others may opt to work on a script or set design.
- Examining your life or home for areas of chaos. You may want to search your church family for a mentor to aid you in reordering these parts of your life.
- Finding a special area in nature or in your home that can become your sanctuary. Make comfortable seating arrangements and visit your sanctuary regularly for prayer and devotions.
- Brainstorming creative ideas for keeping Christ at the center of your life. Imagine how your devotional life might be revitalized through pictures, music, memorizing Bible verses, and nature walks. Then choose one or two ideas to put into action.
- Choosing a motto from one of the inspired passages you have encountered in this week's lesson. Print it in a special font, or write it out in calligraphy, display it, and share it.

CONNECT

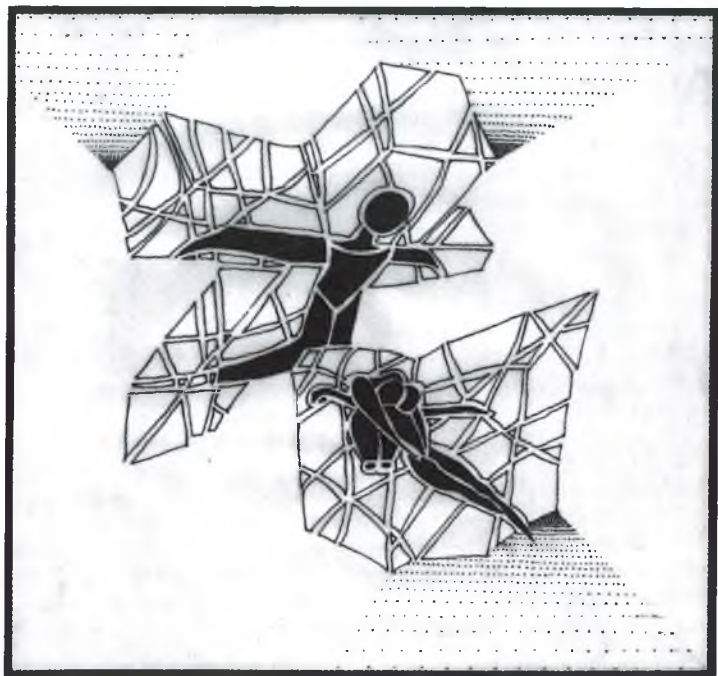
Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 27.

Nancy Van Pelt, *Get Organized* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1998).

Preparing a
People

*“Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in
health, just as your soul prospers”*

(3 John 2, NKJV).



Introduction
*Preparing for the
Ultimate Trip*

Numbers 5; 6

How often have your parents, professors, or church leaders urged you to prepare for a special event? We can all agree that for any major goal we have set, some level of preparation is required. We prepare to attend college, and we prepare for weddings and for various holiday celebrations. We work tirelessly when a major event is about to occur or even for regular day-to-day events. Shouldn't we also prepare to meet with God? We can enjoy the special moments of life when everything is in order. No more important are our special moments and events than having an audience with God and being a part of His kingdom.

Halt! Take that 180-degree turn toward God.

This week we will study some passages of Scripture that challenge us to prepare ourselves for the coming of God's kingdom. As people whose ultimate aim is to enter God's kingdom, we have been provided with a moral as well as a spiritual compass to guide us in our preparation. Numbers 5 and 6 contain some ethical and moral codes that we can learn from.

Major events demand preparation! Our first responsibility is to make sure we are spiritually right with God. Therefore, we must put away immorality, an unforgiving heart, infidelity, etc. As we prepare, we are called upon to halt! Take that 180-degree turn toward God. If we don't prepare our minds and body for action, we will not have the spiritual strength to control our bodies, to glorify God, and to weather the storms we may encounter on the journey.

This week, we must think about the physical and mental preparations that are required for entering God's kingdom. If we neglect the nourishment of our bodies and minds, we'll lose our battle with sin. Just like a soldier who doesn't prepare for the battlefield, we will lose the fight; we will miss the kingdom. It should be obvious that, as a people on the move, as a people seeking to reach the Promised Land, as a people called out by God, we could learn from the book of Numbers.

Just as many of the special moments we prepare for have special themes (parties, weddings, etc.) and attributes we want to include, so does preparing for God's kingdom. Read Galatians 5:22–24. Let's get ready for our special day with Jesus by filling our lives with these wonderful attributes.

Now that we are on the move toward the greatest preparation in life, ask this week what is in your life that is hindering your preparation for the kingdom. Ask God to show you more ways in which you can prepare.

Helyne Frederick, Lubbock, Texas, U.S.A.

Numbers 5; 6;
John 17:20–23

Evidence

Healthy Apples, Healthy Barrel

After He led the Israelites out of Egypt, God began to transform His free but fragmented people into a single-hearted nation of witnesses (Exodus 13–17). As recorded in Exodus through Deuteronomy, He taught the Israelites exactly how to order their new society. Each ceremonial and social law reminded the Israelites of their responsibilities to God and cemented their connections to each other. By applying His principles to all aspects of their lives, the people learned how to honor God, make their community healthy, and keep their living witness pure.

The rules supported the community's collective health.

The laws God gave Moses showed His deep concern for the Israelites, their physical health, social relationships, marriage fidelity, and personal vows to Him. In Numbers 5, God taught Moses to stop dangerous diseases from spreading by quarantining infected people. God then established an even stricter social rule for resolving conflicts.

The Israelites' quarantine rules stopped physical diseases from overrunning them, but their restitution rules were designed to kill off even deadlier parasites. Jealousy, anger, malice, and grudges would completely corrupt the people if left to fester. That is why every member of the community had to cooperate with the rules God set. The rules supported the community's collective health. If each apple in a barrel stays healthy, all the apples stay healthy.* But if the Israelites disregarded God's principles, the spoilage would spread from person to person, and the nation's testimony about God would suffer.

Unlike apple bruises, however, our spiritual and social bruises can be healed. Having joyfully received Jesus, Zacchaeus began attending to his neighbors, the poor, and those he had wronged (Luke 19:1–10). In the same way, when God heals us, we become inspired to heal our communities, confess our wrongs, make restitution for them, and help rebuild whatever is broken. The Israelites could not faithfully testify of God while they were not in loving communion with each other, and the same is true of us today. Jesus' prayer for us was that we would be one, and that our communion would testify that God had sent Him (John 17). If we really are His witnesses, then our spiritual and social communities will show it.

REACT

We can stop a bruised apple from spoiling other apples by discarding it. In dealing with each other, what alternatives to discarding do we have?

*A rotten apple emits a great deal of ethylene gas. This causes other apples to emit the gas so that soon all the apples become spoiled.

Logos
*Company, Halt: Are You
Ready?*

Numbers 5; 6;
Ezek. 33:15, 16;
Luke 19:8, 9;
Acts 17:28;
1 Cor. 6:19, 20

Clean Up Your Act (Numbers 5; 6)

The Israelites were moving to the land God promised them through their father Abraham. But before they could continue their journey, they needed to examine themselves and obey His commands. In Numbers 5, we read that the unclean were removed from the camp and that confession of sins was highly encouraged. Additionally, God reminded the people about the firstfruits and other oblations belonging to the priests, and that restitution must be made for trespasses. He commanded that if a person sinned against another, "The person shall make full restitution for the wrong, adding one fifth to it, and giving it to the one who was wronged" (Num. 5:7, NRSV). The book of Numbers lists guidelines under which Israel was to live. In fact, the Lord commanded that all ceremonially unclean persons must be removed from the vicinity of the camp.

We are on our way to the Promised Land.

Definite procedures were to be followed in dealing with marital infidelity. However, the children of Israel were not consistent with what the Lord wanted them to do, and they were thus tried by the laws given to them. They were not to do as they pleased. God is particular about His laws and commands.

The Nazirite Vow (Numbers 6; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20)

The word *Nazirite* means "separated." Some Nazirites, such as John the Baptist, were appointed by God even before their birth and were to serve for life. However, other men and women voluntarily became Nazirites and served for a specified period of time.¹

As we prepare for the kingdom, we also need to follow certain rules. For example, read 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20. The admonition given in this text complements the principles in Numbers 6. For example, the Nazirites "were to eat nothing that came of the vine, to teach us with the utmost care and caution to avoid sin and every thing that borders upon it and leads to it, or may be a temptation to us."² Just as the Nazirites did, we must deny our selfish desires and set ourselves apart as we prepare for the Second Coming.

Restoration (Luke 19:8, 9)

Zacchaeus had a bad reputation. As a tax collector, he gathered higher

amounts than he was supposed to and kept the profits for himself. In this way, he became wealthy at the expense of his countrymen, and people hated him for it.

Read Ezekiel 33:15, 16. Perhaps Zacchaeus was acquainted with these verses, for when he met Jesus, he said, “‘I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have overcharged people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!’” (Luke 19:8, NLT).

“Where restoration was voluntary, the Law of Moses required simply the addition to the principal of one fifth of the amount taken. . . . A fourfold restoration was one of the extreme penalties for deliberate robbery followed by loss of the goods (see Exodus 22:1 . . .). Ordinarily the amount restored was to double that taken, if the original property or money was also recovered (Exod. 22:4, 7). The amount Zacchaeus promised to restore was the best of evidence that he had experienced a change of heart.”³ When Christ is in the heart, His presence will manifest itself in the Christian’s behavior. The Bible says, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (2 Cor. 5:17, NRSV).

Complete Makeover (Numbers 5; 6; Acts 17:28; 1 Cor. 6:19, 20)

I love looking at the homes featured in the television show *Extreme Makeover*. Sometimes the houses look as if they are abandoned and dilapidated; but what a transformation there is at the end of the program! As we prepare to serve God, we must undergo a transformation. When Christ changes the heart, it must be visible in our behavior. All our activities—whether they are mental, physical, or spiritual—will reflect Christ living in us. The Bible tells us that as we prepare for mission and for God’s kingdom, we need to prepare our hearts and obey laws that govern our bodies. There should be a point in our experience where we separate ourselves to the Lord (Num. 6:1–8).

We are on our way to the Promised Land. The big question is, Am I being transformed, or am I still caught up in my own ways? Whom do I need to forgive? What habits do I need to break? Let us learn from Zacchaeus’s example.

REACT

1. How can you apply the principles in the “vow of a Nazirite” to your life?
2. If you were asked to take a vow to signify your preparation for God’s kingdom, what principles would you include?

1. *SDA Bible Dictionary*, p. 781.

2. *Matthew Henry’s Commentary* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), p. 586.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 853.

Testimony
*Youth Preparing for a
Mission*

Numbers 5; 6

“Christian life is more than many take it to be. It does not consist wholly in gentleness, patience, meekness, and kindness. These graces are essential; but there is need also of courage, force, energy, and perseverance. The path that Christ marks out is a narrow, self-denying path. To enter that path and press on through difficulties and discouragements, requires men who are more than weaklings.”¹

“Health is a blessing of which few appreciate the value; yet upon it the efficiency of our mental and physical powers largely depends. Our impulses and passions have their seat in the body, and it must be kept in the best condition physically and under

“Be not satisfied with reaching a low standard.”

the most spiritual influences in order that our talents may be put to the highest use. Anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind, and makes it less capable of discriminating between right and wrong.”²

We also are called upon to have firmness of character. “Some have no firmness of character. Their plans and purposes have no definite form and consistency. They are of but little practical use in the world. This weakness, indecision, and inefficiency should be overcome. There is in true Christian character an indomitableness that cannot be molded or subdued by adverse circumstances. We must have moral backbone, an integrity that cannot be flattered, bribed, or terrified.

“God desires us to make use of every opportunity for securing a preparation for His work. He expects us to put all our energies into its performance, and to keep our hearts alive to its sacredness and its fearful responsibilities.”³

“Be not satisfied with reaching a low standard. We are not what we might be, or what it is God’s will that we should be. God has given us reasoning powers, not to remain inactive, or to be perverted to earthly and sordid pursuits, but that they may be developed to the utmost, refined, sanctified, ennobled, and used in advancing the interests of His kingdom.”⁴

REACT

How can you redirect your preparation for God’s kingdom to ensure that you maximize your potential for service?

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 497.
2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 235.
3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 498.
4. *Ibid.*

Num. 6:22–27;
Ps. 107:1–3;
Isa. 25:4

How-to Weathering the Storm

“The weather today calls for clear blue skies and slight winds.” Ironically, that’s the day the heavens open up with rain; lightning and thunder crackle across the sky; and you are caught without an umbrella. If you’re anything like me, in your journey toward the kingdom, you’ve had your share of storms in your life. Some fell hard and fast and were totally unexpected, while others we’ve walked right into without any heed to the darkness ahead. God never promised a life free from storms. However, He has promised to be with us through the storms and to get us safely to the kingdom. How can we weather the storms when they arise and still stay on the move?

God created tears for two reasons.

Pray and study the Bible. Commit yourself to His care every day. Read 1 Peter 5:7. Because He cares, He has told us in the Bible how to prepare for His kingdom and how to work for Him.

Give thanks. Always be thankful (Eph. 5:20). Sometimes this is easier said than done; but I have found that you can always find a rainbow after every storm (1 Thess. 5:18). Thank God for helping you to overcome temptations and for restoring you to Him. Thank Him for pointing you back to the right path when you stray (Numbers 5). Thank Him for being your Guide and Compass as you prepare to meet Him.

Cry. Shout. “I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me” (Ps. 77:1, NIV). I believe that God created tears for two reasons: to relieve our frustrations and to cleanse our souls. When it seems as though preparation is slowing down or stalled, reach out to Him. Cry out to Him for help. When it seems as though you are on the right path, shout for joy. Don’t be afraid to get emotional on the journey.

Help others. Stretch out your hand to help someone else in need. I’ve found that while assisting others, we give God time to calm our raging winds and rains. We also can strengthen others on the journey if we encourage and lift each other up. We are social beings, and 1 Thessalonians 5:11 urges us to encourage one another and to build each other up!

REACT

1. How can you help others prepare to meet God?
2. What advice and encouragement would you give to someone who is trying to prepare for the kingdom but who is constantly discouraged by his or her personal storms?

180-Degree Turn for the Better

Ezek. 33:15;
Matt. 16:24;
Luke 19:8, 9;
John 10:10;
Gal. 3:29

God was interested in the spiritual and physical health of the children of Israel (Numbers 5; 6). He is just as interested in our well-being today. The commands He gave Israel through Moses provided the means of ensuring a healthy nation that would live a holy life. It all comes down to our love for God and our fellow humans. Just like the ancient Israelites, we must make that 180-degree turn from our ways to God's ways and there remain in His path forever. Our motto should be that of Philippians 4:8, "Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (NRSV).

Do we love just the lovable?

When we love God, we will not defile our bodies with unclean food and abusive substances; we will conform to biblical health laws. "Those who perceive the evidences of God's love, who understand something of the wisdom and beneficence of His laws and the results of obedience, will come to regard their duties and obligations from an altogether different point of view. Instead of looking upon an observance of the laws of health as [a] matter of sacrifice or self-denial, they will regard it, as it really is, as an inestimable blessing."* As we prepare for the Second Coming, and while we preach the gospel, we must remember that spiritual and physical strength are essential to face the end times.

When we put Jesus first, our reward is eternal life. Like Zacchaeus, we should mend our former ways (Luke 19:8, 9). Read Matthew 16:24. If we choose to follow Christ, we "are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29, NIV). Humility should be the order of the day. The end result is partaking in only godly activities. This does not involve a list of things we must do; rather, it is surrendering our selfishness to God.

He commands us to love Him and others (Matt. 22:34-40). He is willing to forgive us if we give up our unrighteous ways and make right our wrongs (Ezek. 33:15). If God forgives, why can't we do the same? Do we love just the lovable?

God wants us be in line with Him spiritually and physically. It's necessary for us to keep the flame of Jesus burning within us.

* *Counsels on Health*, p. 40.

John 14:2-4

Exploration
Our Final Trip

CONCLUDE

Preparing for a trip, even a spur-of-the-moment one, requires preparation. Clothes must be packed, mail needs to be held, and pets require a sitter. How much more effort might be necessary for us to leave our galaxy on the last and biggest trip we'll ever take? And yet, God takes care of everything. He will provide us with all that we need when we get to heaven. We can take nothing from this earth with us. Still, we have much preparation to do. We are to prepare our minds and bodies to be ready to live with Jesus.

CONSIDER

- Creating a collage or a painting of what you think heaven might look like. Hang it somewhere to help you when you struggle with spiritual challenges.
- Comparing and contrasting the physical challenges that the Israelites faced in exile with those we face today.
- Reading Numbers 6:1-21 and then writing a summary about how a Nazirite might live today.
- Creating or finding music to accompany the words found in Numbers 6:24-26. Sing the song once you've found it or created it.
- Exercising regularly to help physically prepare for heaven. Set goals for yourself that will enable you to be ready for Christ's second coming.
- Volunteering in a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. As Wednesday's lesson states, helping others is a good way to let God help us weather storms.
- Journaling about what concrete actions you could take to change your life, like Zacchaeus did after meeting Jesus.

CONNECT

Matthew 16:24.

The Desire of Ages, chapter 61.

lesson three
OCTOBER 10-OCTOBER 17

Worship and
Dedication

*“Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not
reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver”*

(2 Cor. 9:7, NRSV).



Jer. 10:23;
Col. 3:2

Introduction

Attention: All Shoppers!

Each Sabbath morning while I was a teenager, I had a decision to make. There are 72 Adventist churches within a 30-mile (48-kilometer) radius of my hometown. So the question wasn't whether or not to go to church, but rather, which church to attend.

Don't forget which church has the best potlucks!

With a plethora of churches in the vicinity, sometimes it's difficult not to feel like you're at the mall. Many people spend a lot of time and effort "shopping" for the right church. Which church has the most active youth group? Are the sermons relevant to my life? Does this church's style of music match my own? Does it cater to my needs?

Some break it down even further. They attend one church for Sabbath School, drive to another to listen to an amazing praise team, and yet another to hear a renowned pastor preach the Word of God. And don't forget which church has the best potlucks! At the end of the day, you've been blessed with great music, a powerful sermon, and physical nourishment. But what have you given of yourself?

While there is absolutely nothing wrong with exploring the options to find the right church, we need to remind ourselves what worship is all about. As humans, it's only natural for us to seek out that which meets our needs. But when we worship, the focus is neither on us nor what we can get out of church. Rather, worship is *all* about God.

It's about venerating the only One who is worthy of praise—the Almighty God who takes care of us. When we worship the Lord, we are simply giving back the time and talents He has blessed us with. It's our duty and privilege to use what God has given us to serve Him, honor Him, and praise Him. He has never forgotten us, so we must not forget Him in our worship.

As you study this week's lesson on worship and dedication in Numbers 7 and 8, remind yourself of *who* your focus is on.

Logos
Called to Worship

Exod. 25:22;
Numbers 7; 8:1-3,
5-19; Zech. 4:1-6,
11-14; Rev. 4:2-5;
11:4

With the construction of the tabernacle, God made clear His intent on being actively involved in the development and growth of the Israelites. Although He had conversed with Moses prior to the presence of the tabernacle, perhaps He wanted a meeting place so that He could always be “found” by everyone. He wanted a relationship, not only with Moses, but with all the people of Israel. And this relationship was to be special.

Allegiance and Dedication (Numbers 7)

At the dedication of the altar, each tribal leader brought an offering. Each of the 12 leaders brought the identical gift, which makes Numbers a bit boring to read. To God, however, each gift of worship is special and noted, even if it is nothing more than two mites. Read Mark 12:42-44. God does not require more worship from one

God does not require more worship from one person than He does from another.

person than He does from another. The value of our gifts to God are determined not by the value society places upon them, but upon the degree to which they represent self-sacrifice.

This litany of offerings in Numbers 7 also reminds us of the importance of giving and of signifying in tangible ways our allegiance and dedication to our Creator and Savior.

Sharing the Work (Num. 7:1-10)

After the anointing and consecration of the tabernacle, the leaders of the 12 tribes voluntarily brought oxen and carts to the tabernacle. The families of Gershon, Merari, and Kohath were responsible for transporting the tabernacle (Numbers 4). This was not an easy task, but the oxen and carts would assist in this work.

In the offerings that were brought to the new sanctuary, we learn that all the people participated in some way. This lets us know that it was truly their sanctuary.

Worship Together (Num. 8:5-13, 19)

In Numbers 8:5-13, we read about the dedication of the Levites. In verse 10, the children of Israel were to lay their hands on the heads of the Levites. “This was a representative act. Some commentators think it was perhaps carried out by the princes, transferring to the Levites the obligations of the congregation in connection

with the tabernacle services. The Levites were given to God instead of the first-born; and as the whole family was sanctified through the first-born, so the whole congregation benefited.”¹

The Levites were responsible for the sanctuary services. However, this did not mean that the rest of Israel did not need to worship anymore. Rather, it was so that the community of Israel could worship more. One of the principle duties of the Levites was to make atonement for the sins the Israelites committed, thus allowing the people to safely approach the sanctuary (verse 19) to worship God. By setting apart the Levites to work in the sanctuary, God was giving the community of Israel the freedom to worship God without fear or reservation.

The Lamps (Num. 8:1–3)

It seems common knowledge that the lamps would be used for light inside the tabernacle to help the priests do their work inside. Of the furniture in the tabernacle, the lamps are the only ones focused on in this section of Numbers. The instructions given here almost look out of place in the midst of all the offering, dedicating, and sacrificing going on. The importance of light, whether indoors or outdoors, cannot be argued. And God wants to make sure that the Levites will be able to conduct their duties well while in the Holy Place.

In visions shown to John, we see candlesticks around Jesus, and we are told that these candlesticks represent the church (Rev. 1:20). This isn't the first time that the church is compared to candlelight. Jesus also told us that we were to be a light for the world (Matt. 5:14–16). Our worship is to lead others to glorify God. If our lives do not lead others to God, we are like a candle under a bowl. “Christ came to dispel the darkness and to reveal the Father. This same work Christ committed to His disciples. Light shines, not so much that men may see the light, as that they may see other things because of the light. Our lights are to shine, not so that men may be attracted to us, but that they may be attracted to Christ, who is the light of life, and to things worth while (Matt. 6:31–34; John 6:27; cf. Isaiah 55:1, 2).”²

In Exodus 19:6, God told Moses that the people of Israel were called to be a nation of priests. And just as a priest's job is to lead others to worship God, the nation of Israel was to help the nations of the earth approach God in worship. Today, this is our duty also. We are called to worship, but we shouldn't stop there, for true worship is also helping the people around us develop their relationship with God.

REACT

1. How does a nation full of priests make more sense than a plane full of pilots?
2. What priestly duties has God given each of us to do?
3. The Israelites celebrated the sanctuary by bringing offerings. If you knew your thanksgiving offerings went toward celebrations, what occasions would you be thankful for?
4. How can you signify in tangible ways your allegiance and dedication to God?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 852.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 331.

Testimony
*To Love, Honor, and
Cherish*

Ps. 95:6

“The Lord designed that by a faithful observance of the Sabbath command, Israel should continually be reminded of their accountability to Him as their Creator and their Redeemer. While they should keep the Sabbath in the proper spirit, idolatry could not exist; but should the claims of this precept of the Decalogue be set aside as no longer binding, the Creator would be forgotten and men would worship other gods.”¹ True worship is followed by undivided and unconditional dedication to God. In creating the Sabbath, God had hoped to guarantee an unbreakable covenant. Ideally, we were created to be a people of deep spirituality and indomitable devotion.

Their actions were a prominent indication of where their hearts truly lay.

“The Israelites, in their adoration of the golden calf, professed to be worshipping God. Thus Aaron, when inaugurating the worship of the idol, proclaimed, ‘Tomorrow is a feast unto Jehovah.’ They proposed to worship God, as the Egyptians worshipped Osiris, under the semblance of the image. But God could not accept the service. Though offered in His name, the sun-god, and not Jehovah, was the real object of their adoration.”²

Worship without dedication can clearly deceive. The focal point of worship was lost even among the anointed people of God. The Israelites, with a sense of misguided adoration, spoke with their words and even louder with their actions. Their actions were a prominent indication of where their hearts truly lay.

“The Israelites well knew that their idols were powerless to save or to destroy. They knew that the heathen worship was contrary to reason and sound judgment. But they had gradually departed from God, and had indulged in sin until their moral perceptions were dulled, and they were led astray by Satan.”³

The true actions of loving, honoring, and cherishing time with God are unveiled by the quantity and quality of time spent on “worshipping” our “idols,” or the secular circumstances that consume our lives. Genuine worship directs us to Jesus and away from our own helpless souls. We have so much more to look forward to when our eyes are trained ahead!

1. *Lift Him Up*, p. 137.

2. Appendix to *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 760.

3. *The Signs of the Times*, August 18, 1881.

Exod. 25:22

Evidence

Come to the Mercy Seat

After delivering His people from slavery and leading them to the Promised Land, God introduced Himself more fully to them. Yes, His presence was with them daily in the pillar of cloud and fire (Exod. 13:22). However, now He was ready to instruct them in the ways of worship.

This He did by instructing Moses to tell the Israelites to “make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8, NKJV). The day would come when God’s chosen people—all those who believe in Him—could come into His presence at any time, at any place. For now, though, a sanctuary was to be built where He could dwell with them.

**Today the mercy seat also can be found
at the side of the bed [or] at the sink full of dishes.**

With explicit details, God instructed Moses on how this sanctuary should be built. Within the sanctuary, placed in the Most Holy Place, was the ark of the testimony. On this ark was placed the mercy seat. The mercy seat was made of pure gold with two gold cherubim placed on either end facing each other—their wings outstretched to cover the mercy seat. This mercy seat was placed on top of the ark of the testimony which contained the Ten Commandments (Exod. 25:17–22). First Samuel 4:4 states that God dwelt between these two cherubim. Furthermore, on the yearly Day of Atonement, the priest entered God’s presence and before the mercy seat made atonement for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:1–22).

Within the ark were the laws of the testimony (Exod. 25:16), a pot of manna (Exod. 16:32–34), and Aaron’s rod (Num. 17:10), all reminders of Israel’s rebellion at some stage in their journey. Today the mercy seat also can be found at the side of the bed, at the sink full of dishes, in a car stuck in traffic, in a church, in a park, anywhere the need is felt to worship God or to ask for forgiveness. God is always near. The blood of the Lamb—Jesus Christ—made that possible.

REACT

1. How can the contents of the mercy seat—reminders of Israel’s rebellion—encourage you regarding God’s willingness to forgive?
2. First Corinthians 3:16 reminds us that we are God’s temple and that His Spirit dwells in us. How can this help us to focus daily on Him?

Celene Williams, Yokosuka, Kanagawa, Japan

How-to When You Want to Give More

Num. 8:21, 22;
Jer. 29:11–13

Learning about the dedication of the tabernacle helps us to understand how much God desires our allegiance and dedication. It also helps us to understand what is required of us to have a relationship with Him and to grasp the significance and importance of committing ourselves to Him. At an earlier time, when the hearts of the Israelites were filled with thankfulness to God, their offerings even exceeded the required amount. They just wanted to keep on giving (Exod. 36:3–7)! The cross of Jesus Christ displays how much God wants to give us. How can we apply these concepts of giving to our lives?

The cross of Jesus Christ displays how much God wants to give us.

Take time to understand your purpose. This is not always an easy task, but as we ask God to guide us, prepare us, and use us, He will reveal His purpose for us (Jer. 29:11–13). Spend a few moments each day reaffirming your purpose and goals, not only for that day, but also for life.

Take time to consider your commitment. Is commitment to God a casual, one-time event? Or is it a continuing, dynamic, and growing closeness to Him? As we search for God with all our hearts (Jer. 29:13), our dedication to Him will deepen, our trust for Him will strengthen, and our desire to share His message of hope will grow.

Take time to know God's goodness. If you really love someone, you will want to give more and more. As you take time to consider and to experience what God offers us—abundant life (John 10:10) and eternal life (John 3:16)—your heart will release gifts of thankfulness to Him.

The bottom line is, we must take time for God. As we do, the joy, peace, and confidence we gain from such a close relationship with Him will be ours.

REACT

1. As we consider our level of commitment to God, what role should our emotions play?
2. In what ways can we align our own goals with the overall goals and mission of God's church (Matt. 28:19, 20)?
3. Close, healthy relationships are not formed instantly. How, then, can we ensure that we make adequate time for God?

Worship: A Way of Life

A friend of mine once worshiped the lead singer in a popular rock band. He dressed the same way as this singer, had the same hairstyle, and even went so far as to add the singer's last name to his own. Why does it seem so easy to be devoted to a human full of flaws, yet difficult to devote ourselves to the One who alone is worthy of such complete devotion?

God gave specific instructions about how He wanted the tabernacle and its worship services to be. These detailed instructions were to impress upon the Israelites, and us, the importance and specialness of worship.

Our worship today . . . must also be personal.

The book of Numbers tells the story of a group of people on a journey, not just to discover God, but to discover themselves as well. The tabernacle gave them a sense of family and of belonging. Through the symbolism of all that was the tabernacle, they could learn to be the type of family God wanted and needed them to be.

Our worship today is not just about coming together to sing praises. It must also be personal. It must acknowledge that every aspect of our lives belongs to God. We should live our lives as a constant response to God and everything He has given us. Our lives will then be a lifestyle of constant worship.

Unfortunately for many of us, we've learned to compartmentalize our lives so that worship falls into one of those compartments, separate from the others. But Colossians 1:16 says, "In him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him" (NRSV). God did not mean for part of life to be secular and another part to be religious. He created all of life to be for Him. We tend to forget that God is the very reason we exist and that He is concerned with every aspect of our lives. We should remember that everything in our lives comes from Him. That is where true worship begins.

REACT

1. Does living a life of constant worship mean that there is no room for "secular" activities? Explain.

2. Should there be a distinction between what is secular and what is religious? Explain.

3. How do we make sure that being in constant worship does not cut out the world around us?

Exploration
*Representatives of
the King*

Ps. 63:1–8;
Psalm 99

CONCLUDE

In the children's fictional story, *The Yellow Star: The Legend of King Christian X of Denmark*, King Christian resists the Nazi regime in their attempts to distinguish Jews from any other inhabitants of Denmark by wearing a star on their clothing, by wearing one himself and thus inspiring the people of his country to do likewise.

How will people know that we belong to Jesus? We have the opportunity to devote our time and talents every day to the King of kings, thus developing our characters to become more like His. As we serve, honor, thank, and obey Him, others may be inspired to learn of the One True God, the Light of the world, and may thus choose to worship Him for eternity. Our worship can be that kind of witness!

CONSIDER

- Viewing pictures of people and items of God's magnificent creation. Take time to thank Him for His many blessings.
- Comparing a healthy plant to a dying or dead plant. Imagine life in a perfect environment.
- Finding a pleasant place outside where you can memorize or recite Psalm 23.
- Composing a musical piece that sounds majestic. Play the music for someone else and see how it inspires him or her.
- Taking a walk or hike and praising God for everything you see and hear that proclaims His goodness.
- Celebrating a friend's birthday or baptism. Ask the individual to share his or her testimony from the past year.
- Documenting the changing of the seasons, noting especially the regeneration of the plant and animal world and the handiwork of God in every detail.

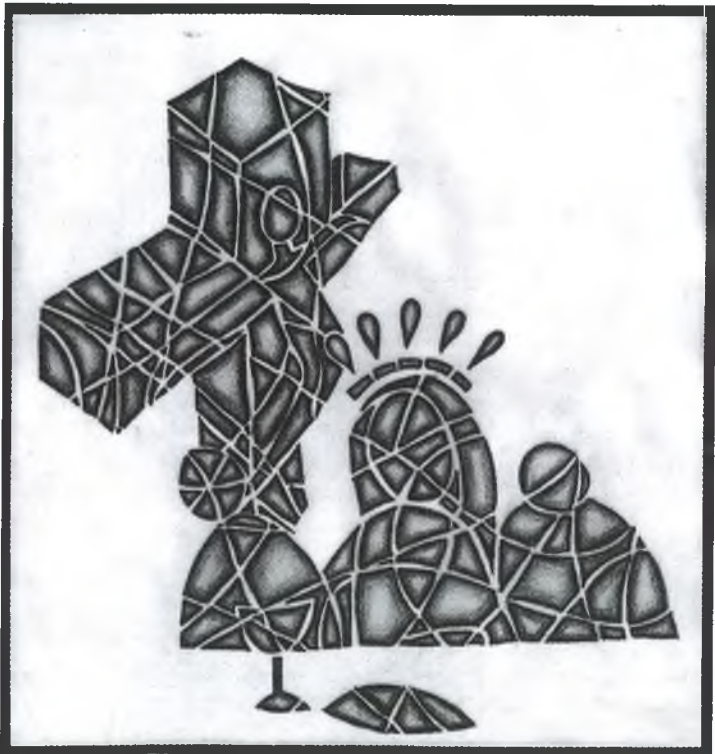
CONNECT

Romans 12:1, 2.

Chris Blake, *Searching for a God to Love*.

Trumpet, Blood, Cloud, and
Fire

*“Purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump,
since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover,
was sacrificed for us” (1 Cor. 5:7, NKJV).*



Lunar New Year is an important Chinese festival. According to legend, a monster came every Chinese New Year's Eve and killed a lot of people. This happened for a long time until an immortal one came and taught the people that the monster was afraid of the color red and loud noises. The next New Year, the people killed animals and sprinkled or wiped the blood on their doorframes. When the monster saw the red blood, he ran away. Today, the Chinese put red paper or cloth on their doorframes and burn firecrackers on the New Year. On New Year's Eve, the families gather to eat fish and chicken, which are served whole.

When the monster saw the red blood, he ran away.

God instructed the Israelites to kill a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their doorposts the day before He freed them from the Egyptians. It was the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover. They were to eat the lamb after roasting it over the fire (Exod. 12:9). They were to eat their Passover lamb with a readiness to flee Egypt (Exod. 12:11). The Lord's Passover signified the freedom of the Israelites from the persecution and slavery of the Egyptians.

Before leaving their encampment at Sinai, Israel celebrated their first Passover anniversary in freedom. God would not have them forget their miraculous redemption from Egyptian slavery. To remind them of His presence with them, He led them in the pillar of cloud and fire. The cloud led eastward and northward in the wilderness of Paran.

Jesus Christ, who is our Passover Lamb, has delivered us from the slavery of sin. The Lord's Supper is the Christian Passover. Like the Israelites, after eating the Passover lamb, we receive instruction to spread the gospel and to "watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" (Matt. 26:41, NKJV). Like the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, we are to follow His instructions without worrying about what will happen to us. The key is to trust Him, our all-wise Father.

This week, we will learn about the Lord's Supper, a reminder of His sacrifices and of what we must do in His name.

Num. 9:15, 16;
10:1-10

Evidence
*Heavenly Guidance for the
Journey*

“Numbers is the book of testing. Numbers (L. *numeri*, Gr. *Arithmoi*) is so named because the Israelites were twice numbered (chapter 1 and 26), the first time in the beginning of their journey, the second time at the close of 38 years of wandering in the desert. Numbers is a wilderness book covering the time span from the second month of the second year after the exodus from Egypt to the tenth month of the fortieth year.”¹

The church is our camp.

This week, we are studying Numbers 9 and 10. These chapters tell about the Israelites’ preparation for their journey to the Promised Land. In Numbers, God gave strict guidelines to the Israelites. “He wanted them to have a lifestyle distinct from the nations around them. He wanted them to be holy people. God was preparing the people, both spiritually and physically to receive the inheritance.”²

We, too, are preparing to enter the Promised Land of heaven. God also gives us strict guidelines to have a pure life in the church. The church is our camp. God is preparing us by purifying and sanctifying our lives so we can receive our heavenly inheritance.

Numbers 9:15, 16 portray how God protected the Israelites on their journey to the Promised Land. “A pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night guided and protected the Israelites as they traveled across the wilderness. The cloud and the fire were not merely natural phenomena; they were the vehicle of God’s presence and the visible evidence of His moving and directing His people.”³

God also gave the silver trumpets for guidance. The cloud and fiery pillar were visible, whereas the trumpets made known the mind of the Lord in an audible way.

Before entering heaven, we must follow God’s guidance to know His will in our lives. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit by day and by night, He will reveal His will in our lives as we move toward our Promised Land.

1. Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Bible Handbook: An Essential Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), p. 121.

2. *New Living Translation: Life Application Study Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996), pp. 196, 197.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

The Passover or the Lord's Supper?

Exod. 12:1–29;
Numbers 9;
Matt. 26:36–43;
Luke 22:14–20;
John 1:29

The Lord's Supper

Jesus is God's true Priest. We do not need anyone else serving the same purpose. The sacrificial lamb was but a prelude to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for our sins. This is why Jesus is called the Lamb of God: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29, NKJV).

**The unleavened bread represents His body, and the wine
represents His blood.**

Today, when many Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper, they are celebrating Christ's death on the cross. The Lord's Supper, as did the Passover, celebrates Jesus' sacrifice as the "Lamb of God." The unleavened bread represents His body, and the wine represents His blood.

"Although it may be understood and practiced in different ways by diverse Christians, the Lord's Supper is of central importance to all believers. The rite instituted at Christ's Last Supper is called by different and usually interchangeable names: Eucharist, a giving of thanks for God's good gifts; Communion, emphasizing the fellowship with Christ; and the Lord's Supper, denoting the origin of the service."¹

"On the fourteenth day of the month, . . . the Passover was celebrated, its solemn, impressive ceremonies commemorating the deliverance from bondage in Egypt, and pointing forward to the sacrifice that should deliver from the bondage of sin. When the Saviour yielded up His life on Calvary, the significance of the Passover ceased, and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper was instituted as a memorial of the same event of which the Passover had been a type."²

The Lord's Supper in the Old Testament (Exod. 12:1–29; Numbers 9)

The Lord instituted Passover just before He delivered the Israelites from Egypt. It was intended as a foreshadowing of the Lamb of God, who would deliver spiritual Israel from the bondage of sin.

Moses instructed the Israelites to kill a Passover lamb and to paint their doorposts with the lamb's blood. That night the angel of the Lord would kill all the firstborn males of the house which did not have the lamb's blood painted on their doorpost (Exod. 12:21–24).

"The passover pointed backward to the deliverance of the children of Israel, and was also typical, pointing forward to Christ, the Lamb of God, slain for the

redemption of fallen man. The blood sprinkled upon the door-posts prefigured the atoning blood of Christ, and also the continual dependence of sinful man upon the merits of that blood for safety from the power of Satan, and for final redemption. Christ ate the Passover supper with his disciples just before his crucifixion, and the same night, instituted the ordinance of the Lord's supper, to be observed in commemoration of his death. The passover had been observed to commemorate the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. It had been both commemorative and typical. The type had reached the antitype when Christ, the Lamb of God without blemish, died upon the cross. He left an ordinance to commemorate the events of his crucifixion."³

The Lord's Supper in the New Testament (Luke 22:14–20)

Christians celebrate Passover in their own special way. However, there is a different significance for this special observance. In the New Testament, Jesus is depicted as the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed to free us from the slavery of sin. For Christians, then, the Lord's Supper is a memorial and tribute to Jesus for what He has suffered on our behalf. Seventh-day Adventists follow the rituals of the Last Supper as stated by Jesus to His disciples.

About the importance of the Lord's Supper, we read that "the salvation of men depends upon a continual application to their hearts of the cleansing blood of Christ. Therefore, the Lord's supper was to be observed more frequently than the annual passover. This solemn ordinance commemorates a far greater event than the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. That deliverance was typical of the great atonement which Christ made by the sacrifice of his own life for the final redemption of his people."⁴

REACT

1. Describe the relationship between the Passover in the Old Testament and the Lord's Supper in the New Testament.
2. Do you stay home on the Sabbaths during which your church celebrates the Lord Supper? If so, why?
3. Consider how your church celebrates the Lord's Supper. How could it be celebrated in a more spiritual, thought-provoking manner?
4. Why do we need to be reminded of Christ's sacrifice for us?

1. *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12, p. 595.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 539.

3. *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 201.

4. *The Signs of the Times*, March 25, 1880.

“Behold the Lamb of God”

1 Cor. 5:7

“The Passover was to be commemorative and typical, not only pointing back to the deliverance from Egypt, but forward to the greater deliverance which Christ was to accomplish in freeing His people from the bondage of sin. The sacrificial lamb represents ‘the Lamb of God,’ in whom is our only hope of salvation. Says the apostle, ‘Christ our passover is sacrificed for us.’ 1 Corinthians 5:7. It was not enough that the paschal lamb be slain; its blood must be sprinkled upon the doorposts; so the merits of Christ’s blood must be applied to the soul. . . . We must appropriate to ourselves the virtue of the atoning sacrifice.”¹

“Christ’s example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord’s Supper.”

“The salvation of men depends upon a continual application to their hearts of the cleansing blood of Christ. Therefore, the Lord’s supper was not to be observed only occasionally or yearly, but more frequently than the annual passover. This solemn ordinance commemorates a far greater event than the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt. That deliverance was typical of the great atonement which Christ made by the sacrifice of his own life for the final deliverance of his people.”²

“Christ’s example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord’s Supper.”³ Why? Because (a) “Christ by the Holy Spirit is there to set the seal to His own ordinance. He is there to convict and soften the heart. . . . Every disciple is called upon to participate publicly, and thus bear witness that he accepts Christ as a personal Savior. . . . All who come with their faith fixed upon Him will be greatly blessed.”⁴ (b) “The Communion service points to Christ’s second coming. It was designed to keep this hope vivid in the minds of the disciples. . . . In their tribulation they found comfort in the hope of their Lord’s return. Unspeakably precious to them was the thought, ‘As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come.’ 1 Corinthians 11:26.”⁵ (c) “Our ‘soul will receive spiritual strength from every Communion. The service forms a living connection by which the believer is bound up with Christ, and thus bound up with the Father.”⁶

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 277.

2. *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 3, p. 228.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 656.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, p. 659.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 661.

Exod. 12:1–29;
Matt. 26:26–30

How-to A Reminder of His Salvation

The Passover was to remind the Israelites of God's ability to save them and of His promise to give them a new land. In the New Testament, Jesus gave His disciples another reminder of salvation. From the descriptions of these two events, we can learn how we can enrich our Communion experience to strengthen our spiritual lives:

Think of a loving Christian character as a sign of Christ's atonement for sin.

Remember how you came to accept God's salvation (Exod. 12:17). God instructed the Israelites to yearly celebrate the Passover because He led them out of Egypt. Jesus leads us out of sin. The Communion service, therefore, is a time to remember that He is our Savior and how He saves us.

Prepare a special sacrifice (Exod. 12:3–6). The Israelites sacrificed a lamb without blemish. What special sacrifice can we make? A thank offering? A sacrifice of time and effort to help someone in need or to help with a church activity? Use your sacrifice to reflect on how much greater is the sacrifice Jesus made.

Do something special on that day (Exod. 12:7, 26, 27). The Israelites were to put blood on their doorposts. This was a public testimony of their faith and a symbol of Christ's blood as atonement for sin. You may also put a sign on your door. This "sign" may trigger an opportunity to witness. Also think of a loving Christian character as a sign of Christ's atonement for sin.

Have a special meal (Exod. 12:8–11). Sharing a meal after the Lord's Supper is a perfect time for fellowship and for sharing your gratitude with other church members. Or share a "meal" by "eating" from the Word of God, either by studying alone or with friends.

Repeat God's promises (Exod. 12:25). God promised the Israelites that He would give them the Promised Land. He promises us that He will give us the heavenly Promised Land.

REACT

1. How can you personally apply these steps the next time your church celebrates the Lord's Supper?
2. What is the danger of letting the Communion service be just another religious routine?

Trust Him and Be Saved

John 3:16, 17;
Acts 4:12;
Heb. 5:9

My son Patrick, five years old, sat beside me during the Communion service. He asked, "Why aren't children allowed to eat the bread and drink the juice?" I explained to him that he would participate when he was baptized. Lately, I've come to realize that the answer I provided him was not the right one.

Three months later, at our church's next Communion service, the pastor's wife prepared special bread similar to the bread made for Communion. She also provided another type of fruit juice for the children. Then they attended a service in their classroom so that their teachers could teach them about Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for their sins. Patrick was glad to be involved and to learn important lessons from his first Communion service.

"Why aren't children allowed to eat the bread and drink the juice?"

"Children need to be trained early and to gain an understanding of this service," our pastor said. Two important lessons for me were that salvation is for everyone and that our children should be taught about Jesus from the very beginning of their lives.

Everyone can participate in the Communion service, regardless of what Christian denomination they belong to, because the promise of God's salvation is given to everyone (John 3:16, 17; Heb. 5:9).

If in the past, sin could be forgiven by bringing the lamb to be sacrificed before the Lord, and if now sin is forgiven by claiming Christ's sacrifice on the cross, then we can repent and be saved. "Christ is our only hope. 'There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' 'Neither is there salvation in any other.' Acts 4:12."*

As my son learned to understand how God is providing for us through His wonderful promises of forgiveness and salvation, so we can learn to trust that the same wonderful promises are given to us.

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 73.

Num. 9:1, 2

Exploration

Preparation for the Kingdom

CONCLUDE

When God delivered the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, He took them by a series of miracles to the foot of Mount Sinai. There they camped for about two years as He prepared them to live in the Promised Land. He personally gave them His moral law, and they were instructed in the civil laws and religious ceremonies they would be observing in the new land. They received plans for their house of worship and then built it. Finally, they celebrated their first Passover in freedom. God prepared to lead them with a cloud, a pillar of fire, and silver trumpets, and to settle them in a new land, where they would form a new kingdom with Him as their King.

CONSIDER

- Reflecting on your own life as a Christian, and journaling the ways God's leading has been like a cloud, fire, or trumpet.
- Charting a chronological overview of the events of Exodus 14 through Numbers 14.
- Listening to Michael Card's CD, *Known by the Scars*, and contemplating what Jesus went through to become your Passover Lamb.
- Reading Exodus 12 and listing all the details you can find about the Passover celebration and all the ways Jesus fulfilled these details.
- Celebrating Communion with your family or a few close friends in a unique location (for example, at the beach, washing your feet in the ocean; in someone's living room following a musical worship).
- Planning an agape feast for your church's next Communion service. This is usually an evening event and includes footwashing, a simple meal with contemplative music, Communion, and testimonies.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 374–386.

Stephen N. Haskell, *The Cross and Its Shadow*, pp. 93–102; Leslie Hardinge, *With Jesus in His Sanctuary*, pp. 429–442.

From Complaints to
Apostasy

“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world”

(Phil. 2:14, 15, NKJV).



Phil. 2:12–18;
4:4–7

Introduction

The “24-Hour” Bus Ride

To most of us, the mission trip had sounded exciting, adventurous, and even a bit glamorous—jetting across Europe to help build a hospital and run health clinics in Africa—a dream come true for this group of dedicated Christian warriors.

However, no one told us about the “24-hour” bus ride. Well, maybe it wasn’t truly 24 hours; but that’s what it felt like, sitting on top of luggage and each other, sweating in unbearable heat, feeling like sardines in a tropical oven as we covered mile after mile after mile. When would this trip end?

The complaints flowed like a rushing river.

The complaints flowed like a rushing river. “When do we get there?” “Why is it so hot?” “Why did I come on this trip?” Those were some of the words resonating around the bus that transported this westernized group of young people as we traveled on a mission trip from Accra, the capital of Ghana, in the south, to the northern city of Tamale.

However, it finally did end. It ended in an experience of a lifetime—one in which we learned to appreciate the pleasures of life we take for granted and in which we experienced the Holy Spirit working through our ministry. Most important, we learned there are people who, despite having so little, gave thanks to God for what they had.

There are many journeys we’ll all have to take in life, and not all of them will be pleasant. There will often be times when it’s easier to complain bitterly than praise joyously. God, however, urges us to a higher calling. As His followers, He wants us to “rejoice in the Lord always” (Phil. 4:4, NKJV), no matter what the circumstances.

We never know where a trip may take us; but if we believe God is in the driver’s seat, we can allow Him to be in total control. Only then will we be able to get through the bad conditions to the blessings waiting for us.

The Israelites who escaped Egypt spent their trip to the Promised Land complaining about the conditions, and for that reason, that generation never saw their inheritance. As you learn about their experiences this week, consider that you have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes, to stop complaining, and to enjoy the ride!

The Israelites had broken camp at Sinai and had started their 11-day journey to Kadesh, not far from the borders of Canaan. At Sinai they had entered into a covenant relationship with God by promising to obey the Ten Commandments (Exod. 19:8). However, Numbers 11-14 chronicles the people doing the exact opposite. These chapters record a people in rebellion against the Almighty God.

They chose to look through fearful, faithless eyes.

Dissatisfaction in the Camp (Numbers 11)

The people were only three days into their march when they began complaining. They were unhappy with the route that was taken and the physical discomfort along the way, despite knowing that they were being led by God, as represented by the cloud ahead of them. They had quickly forgotten that they had arrived thus far by His providence and mercy.

They also began murmuring about manna, the food God was providing. "The Lord became exceedingly angry" (Num. 11:10, NIV) as the people failed to accept the daily provision of food He arranged for them. "Had they been willing to deny appetite, in obedience to His wise restrictions, feebleness and disease would have been unknown to them. . . . But their unwillingness to submit to the restrictions and requirements of God, prevented them, to a great extent, from reaching the high standard which He desired them to attain, and from the blessings which He was ready to bestow upon them."¹

Sibling Rivalry? (Numbers 12)

In Numbers 11, God had allowed the appointment of 70 elders to share the burden of responsibility when Moses cried out in distress. Moses' elder siblings, Miriam and Aaron, were not part of this group. They had played integral roles in the formation of the nation and during the Exodus, and in Aaron's case, continued to do so in the priestly ministry. However, God had placed Moses in a position of authority over them, and he had a special relationship with God. Moses, unlike any other in the camp, was privileged to speak with God face-to-face and see His form (Num. 12:8).

Miriam and Aaron envied Moses and were presumptuous enough to compare themselves to him. In their envy they lashed out at his Cushite wife, speaking of her ancestry with contempt. However, this was more than mere sibling rivalry. Miriam and Aaron were rebelling against God in choosing to speak against His appointed leader. They gave in to a spirit of self-exaltation and considered themselves better than the one through whom God had chosen to work.

Our Strength, Our Power (Numbers 13)

The Israelites were finally on the borders of Canaan. What God had promised was within sight. Once again, however, they suffered from a previously observed malady—collective amnesia. They forgot the astounding miracles God had provided to deliver them from the clutches of Egypt. They forgot their Red Sea experience. They forgot how God had been providing and sustaining them through their wilderness experience; and they forgot that God was the One who would accomplish what He had promised.

It was the peoples' idea to send spies to survey the land, not God's idea.² This is a clear indication that they doubted His promises. The nation to whom God had especially revealed Himself and covenanted with did not understand what Balaam, a pagan prophet prophesied, " 'God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?' " (Num. 23:19, NIV).

The first part of the spies' report about the abundance of the land was true; but it was overshadowed by their fear of the powerful people they saw there. They chose to look through fearful, faithless eyes rather than eyes filled with hope and faith that was strengthened by how God had been leading them. Only Joshua and Caleb gave a report prompted by faith in God. Canaan was a gift from God, and by speaking poorly about it, the people were speaking against God and rejecting what He was graciously offering to them. If only they had remembered that the Lord's arm is never too short (Num. 11:23). When human strength and power fail is the perfect occasion for God to lovingly demonstrate His incomparable omnipotence.

God's Strength, God's Power (Numbers 14)

Caleb and Joshua pleaded with the people not to rebel against God (Num. 14:9); but their pleas fell on deaf ears. The people were prepared to stone them. Their attitude was one of contempt toward God. They continued to doubt Him and His power (Num. 14:11).

Their sustained rebellion against God resulted in the sentence of wandering for 40 more years in the wilderness, one year for every day the spies had spent reconnoitering the land. The people mourned this decree. Ellen White states that they mourned the judgment rather than their sins. The command to retreat was God testing their submission to His will.³ However, the Israelites were steadfast in their rebellion. When God asked them to take the land, they refused and when commanded to retreat they did the exact opposite. The army of Israel was defeated because they failed to realize that God would accomplish what He promised, not by their strength and power, but by strict obedience to His commands.

REACT

1. How might you presently be rebelling against God through your actions or inaction?
2. What changes do you need to make in your journey to the Promised Land?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 378.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 387.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 391.

Testimony
"Obedience to God's
Will"

Num. 11:4–6

"God brought the Israelites from Egypt, that He might establish them in the land of Canaan, a pure, holy, and happy people. In the accomplishment of this object He subjected them to a course of discipline, both for their own good and for the good of their posterity. Had they been willing to deny appetite, in obedience to His wise restrictions, feebleness and disease would have been unknown among them."¹

"They desired a flesh diet, and they reaped its results."

"And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a-lusting; and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?" (Num. 11:4).

"God might as easily have provided them with flesh as with manna, but a restriction was placed upon them for their good. It was His purpose to supply them with food better suited to their wants than the feverish diet to which many had become accustomed in Egypt. The perverted appetite was to be brought into a more healthy state, that they might enjoy the food originally provided for man—the fruits of the earth, which God gave Adam and Eve in Eden."²

"By departing from the plan divinely appointed for their diet, the Israelites suffered great loss. They desired a flesh diet, and they reaped its results. They did not reach God's ideal of character or fulfill His purpose. The Lord 'gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.' Psalm 106:15. They valued the earthly above the spiritual, and the sacred pre-eminence which was His purpose for them they did not attain."³

REACT

1. How does the story of Daniel in Daniel 1:8–20 relate to the lesson discussed today?

2. Have you been following God's dietary plan for your life? If not, ask Him to help you make that change.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 378.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 312.

Numbers 11;
Eph. 6:11;
Heb. 11:1

Evidence *Ancient People, Modern Lessons*

Is there archaeological evidence of a 40-year wilderness sojourn by the Israelites? There have been few discoveries in the Sinai Peninsula to support the biblical account of 600,000 men and their families spending all those years there. But even in modern times, Bedouin nomads leave little to no trace of their camps when they move to another location. So why should we expect to find “remains of large encampments after 3,000 years?”* This is one Bible story that for now we may have to accept on faith (Heb. 11:1).

“You want meat? I’ll give you meat!”

While we may not have the hard evidence we might like, there is a lot to learn from the biblical narrative. Reading Numbers 11–14 reminds us of parents dealing with recalcitrant children. The Israelites had repeatedly proclaimed that they would be obedient (Exod. 19:7, 8; 24:3, 7). When we turn forward a few pages, however, we see them complaining that they don’t have meat to eat (Num. 11:4). And this is after the miraculous daily provision of manna. I had to chuckle at God’s response. “You want meat? I’ll give you meat until it comes out of your nose!” (Num. 11:18–20, author’s paraphrase).

Time and again, God had to discipline His people. The ultimate punishment was that the complainers were barred from the Promised Land, and an 11-day journey turned into 40 years. At the end of their wandering, no one over the age of 60 was allowed to enter Canaan. The only exceptions were Caleb and Joshua, who had exhibited faith in the Lord when all others did not. What a sad commentary on a people who had seen God’s incredible power manifested so often.

It’s easy to look back on their experiences and castigate the choices the Israelites made. However, their experience should serve as a reminder that we are not immune to the forces of evil that tempt us to murmur and complain—even amid great evidence of God’s leading and provision. The only remedy is to hold fast to God and gird ourselves with His armor (Eph. 6:11).

*Rabbi Dovid Lichtman, “Archaeology and the Bible,” Part 2, http://www.aish.com/societyWork/sciencenature/Archaeology_and_the_Bible_-_Part_2.asp, retrieved October 13, 2008.

How-to Being Content

Numbers 11–14;
Phil. 4:10–12

This week, we have seen how constant complaining caused one generation of Israelites to lose their lives in the wilderness, thus forfeiting their opportunity to live in the Promised Land (Numbers 11–14).

Complaining is a result of being discontented with circumstances that are usually beyond our control. It always seems quite hard to avoid making upsetting remarks, as doing so is part of our sinful human nature. The sad part about complaining is that it rarely ever improves the situation, but often makes it worse.

People today have a great tendency to fuss about many things.

Just like the children of Israel, people today have a great tendency to fuss about many things. As human beings, we sometimes complain when we don't get our way, when the people around us seem to be much better off than we are, and a host of other reasons. Here are a few steps that can help us overcome our tendency to grumble:

Learn to be satisfied with your abilities and possessions (Phil. 4:10–12). Paul reminds us that we should be content no matter what our situation, whether we are in a tight situation or when things are going smoothly.

Always maintain a thankful attitude (Ps. 105:1). Giving thanks is one of the best ways to offset a spirit of discontent. Count your blessings and give God thanks for all of the things He has blessed you with, even those things that seem insignificant. Doing so will leave you with very few things to complain about.

Refrain from comparing your situation to the situations of other people. They have their own shortcomings. Instead, identify your own faults and rely on Jesus to help you remove them from your life.

REACT

Think of some of the ways a complaining attitude can hinder an individual's spiritual relationship.

The S Word Syndrome

Under enslavement for four hundred years (Gen. 15:13), murmuring and complaining had become a way of life for the Israelites. Gone were the days when it was a joy to mirror God's characteristics to nonbelievers in Egypt. The generational teachings of a coming Messiah had become remote in the minds of both young and old. Nevertheless, it was God's desire to revert their attention back to Him. Through His servant Moses, a type of Christ, and the sanctuary, which was a pattern of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 8:1–6), God wanted His people to know that there was only one way, and that was through the Messiah.

He who has never murplained let him point a finger.

The *S* word syndrome (selfishness) had caused the Israelites to become ambitiously and dangerously self-sufficient. They had become independent of God by turning their backs on His laws. Ironically, they thought that it was God who had forsaken them.

The archdeceiver murmured and complained about Jesus' rightful position in heaven; and, as a result, he instigated rebellion and apostasy among a third of the angels.* Murplaining (a cross between murmuring and complaining) exerts more effort than simply listening to God. It's like frowning when we could be smiling. God missed His people so much that all He wanted to do was to reconcile them to Himself through Jesus. Their murplaining was an indication that they would reject Jesus at His first coming.

He who has never murplained let him point a finger. . . . I thought not. We feel it is our duty to "beat" up on the Israelites, but are we any different? Think about it. We murplain if a person sings off-key or if the Sabbath School lesson wasn't explained to suit our intellectual fancy. Murplaining causes us to become slaves to the *S* word master, Satan.

Proverbs 6:16 says, "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him" (NIV). Five of those are a cause of murplaining (see verses 17–19). The enemy had ignited the Israelites to think that they had rights. Thus, they grew to believe that they could exist without God's laws, forgetting that murplaining against Him leads to chaos and anarchy. The *S* word syndrome is a one-way relationship. Satan says, "I will," God says, "Let us." It takes two when it's God's way—Jesus and me.

* *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 13–17.

Exploration

"So You Wanna Go Back to Egypt"

Exodus 14;
15; 17; 32**CONCLUDE**

Murmuring, complaining, and other manifestations of self-centeredness, even in plain view of God's miraculous intervention in their lives, eliminated the possibility that the original Israelites who came out of Egypt would enter the Promised Land. We are no different today. Our solution lies in maintaining a growing, trusting relationship with God on a daily (or even more frequent) basis.

CONSIDER

- Reading the lyrics of Keith Green's song "So You Wanna Go Back to Egypt" at www.lyricsfreak.com/k/keith+green/so+you+wanna+go+back+to+egypt_20077386.html. Look for tie-ins with the material in this week's lesson.
- Putting yourself in the Israelite camp with Moses and the rest of your relatives. Make a journal entry for the following days: Exodus 14:5–31; 15:22–25; 17:1–7; 32:1–35 (assuming you survived).
- Adapting the Song of Deliverance from Exodus 15 to God's work in your life.
- Sharing with a trusted friend a time when you recently rebelled against God and how He showed His love for you anyway.
- Weeding a garden or flowerbed that is overgrown, then nurturing the remaining flowers. Think about how this once lovely place could have become so unattractive and the effort it took to restore it.
- Facing a small source of heat (space heater, campfire, etc.). Enjoy the warmth you feel. Describe it out loud. Turn your back and walk some distance away. Speak out loud what you feel now and how it has changed. What part did your words play in the differences you noticed? What does this teach you about the relationship between complaining and your relationship with God?

CONNECT

View Matthew 23 in *The Visual Bible: Matthew*. Be especially sensitive to the tone of voice the actor portraying Jesus uses.

Read the following days in Oswald Chambers's *My Utmost for His Highest*: June 26 and 27, November 1 and 11. The readings can be accessed online at <http://www.rbc.org/utmost/index.php>.

Planning **Ahead**

“But I said to their children in the wilderness, ‘Do not walk in the statutes of your fathers, nor observe their judgments, nor defile yourselves with their idols. I am the Lord your God: Walk in My statutes, keep My judgments, and do them; hallow My Sabbaths, and they will be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am the Lord your God’” (Ezek. 20:18–20, NKJV).



Am I Sleepwalking?

Num. 15:37–41;
2 Cor. 2:15, 16

I had volunteered to do the least popular job in my workplace. It was downstairs, cold, dirty, and noisy. But I would be alone, and I knew that I needed time alone with God. I always ask God to go with me, but then I spend my days as though He is far away.

“Are You here, God?” I asked when I arrived downstairs. Everything in me was alert for confirmation of His presence.

“I now know God sent me down here to talk to you.”

Moments later, Kesavan, a work colleague who is Hare Krishna, stopped on his way by. He is gentle, humble, and kind, and we have enjoyed many conversations about God. On this occasion, he perceptively asked if I had volunteered for this job in order to read and pray! We started chatting about God. I wondered aloud whether we could enjoy a three-way conversation—Kesavan, myself, and God. We exalted in awe of these thoughts, and as he turned to leave, he said, “I now know God sent me down here to talk to you, because I have been blessed.”

Yesterday, I tore out of the house, running late for an evening program at church. The car stereo sang plaintively—“Please, remember me.”* *Oh, God, I’m so sorry, I prayed. Help me to remember You in each moment of my day. How short is my memory!*

The sanctuary must have been an incredible sight in the desert, representing God’s glory and telling the story of salvation through its services, sacrifices, and symbols. How it must have lifted the eyes of people heavenward as they traveled the dreary desert to the Promised Land. Yet even with all those reminders, God instructed the children of Israel to wear tassels on their garments to remind them to obey His commandments.

Today we live in a world full of distractions, yet God is all around. He speaks to us through sunsets and sunrises, rainbows, oceans, moonrises, and friendships. Still, something tells me that maybe I need to wear a tassel.

This week, we will learn what the book of Numbers has to teach us about the importance of remembering God and about how we can do so.

*LeAnn Rimes, “Please Remember Me.”

Numbers 15;
John 14:21;
Eph. 5:1, 2

Evidence *Togetherness Through a Tassel*

God's call to obedience came in the form of a physical reminder for the Israelites. They were to incorporate a single blue (literally "violet") thread in tassels, which they were to place on the corners of their garment. These tassels, with their blue thread, were to be a constant reminder to "remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them . . . and be holy for your God" (Numbers 15:39, 40, NKJV).

We are living during a time of spiritual exodus.

Obedience to God's commandments is a sign of our love for Him. The Sabbath was a test, or sign of obedience.¹ John 14:21 says, "They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them" (NRSV).

It was significant that the tassels were placed on the hem of their garment. In ancient times, the hem of a garment was regarded as an extension of that person.² In this way, obedience to God was an extension of the person.

We are living during a time of spiritual exodus. We are looking ahead to the promised land of heaven. And just as with the Israelites, God desires fellowship with us.

Fellowship with God lays the foundation for obedience and shapes our attitude toward giving.³ Not just giving halfheartedly, but (like the offerings mentioned in Numbers 15) giving the pure produce, which points toward Jesus, who offered Himself without spot to God (Heb. 9:13, 14).

When we follow the laws that God desires to instill in our minds and write on our hearts, He gives us an abundant life. He calls us to "walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:2, NKJV).

REACT

What are some practical ways to "walk in love"?

1. M. L. Andreasen, *The Sanctuary Service* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 2006), p. 272.

2. Iain M. Duguid, *Numbers: God's Presence in the Wilderness* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2006), p. 195.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

Logos
*Uplifting Legal
Interjection*

Numbers 15;
2 Cor. 2:15, 16;
Gal. 3:26–29;
Eph. 5:2;
Col. 3:1–11

Breaking the Silence (Num. 15:1, 2, 17, 18, 37, 38)

It was the biggest standoff the Israelites had had so far with their Divine Father and Spiritual Guide. Following a collective tantrum and then a mad scramble to reclaim the promised prize, Israel had made a mess of everything. As they reluctantly packed up their camping gear, the spiritual silence must have been deafening. Who was going to break it?

You needed to be rich and famous to wear blue-purple clothes.

To their amazement, it turned out to be God. However, the fact that He was the One to break the silence was not the only surprise. Instead of a withering blast of rebuke or soothing words of reassurance, God laid out a detailed message regarding sacrifices and tassels!

As the Israelites listened to God, it should have dawned on them that He was reaffirming His original promise to give them the land. With the real risk of their community plunging into deep spiritual depression regarding their destiny, God breaks the silence to reassure them of His promise, and of the reality that the land was something He was giving them, not something they had lost. Second, this reiteration of God's laws reminded the Israelites that He was still actively pointing them toward a better way of life.

Fragrant Offerings of Hope (Lev. 7:28–36; Num. 15:1–13; 2 Cor. 2:15, 16; Eph. 5:2)

They read like detailed recipes, these laws regarding burnt and freewill offerings. Mix together a tenth of an ephod of flour with a quarter of a hin of wine, and marinate thick slices of lamb to produce an offering that smells rather scrumptious.

These directions regarding sacrifices are fascinating and, surprisingly, encouraging. Both the flour and the wine imply that the people involved in making the sacrifices were already part of a settled, agricultural community, harvesting wheat and pressing grapes. Hence, these laws intrinsically reaffirm the promise that Israel will settle down in the fertile Promised Land. Not only that, these offerings portray the fact that God was inviting His people to share an appetizing peace meal with Him and the priests.¹ These sacrifices represented forgiveness and the restoration of their relationship.

Perhaps this identifies the real reason the sacrifices were a pleasing aroma to God. Rather than God particularly enjoying the smell of marinating meat, He relishes the

prospect of enjoying a restored relationship with us. This is why Jesus' life was so fragrant to God; and it is why we also are called to spread this same fragrance of Christ wherever we go.

The Real Status of Foreigners (Num. 15:14–16; Gal. 3:26–29; Col. 3:1–11)

It is also refreshing to note how inclusive God is in the laws He shares with the Israelites. In many places in chapter 15, He tells the Israelites that the same laws regarding freewill and peace offerings apply to foreigners in their company, just as much as it applies to them. Peace is extended to them, by God, as much as it is to the Israelites.

However, it is possible to see this inclusiveness through much more optimistic glasses than was truly the case. In fact, foreigners did not hold exactly the same status as Israelites. While they could enjoy the same civil status as ethnic Jews (Lev. 24:22; Num. 35:15), foreigners did not share exactly the same religious status.²

Only in Jesus Christ are racial, gender, and economic inequalities removed. While human laws may hint that social imbalances will be corrected, such imbalances are fully eliminated only through the bridging work of Christ.

Tiny Reminders of Identity (Num. 15:37–40; 1 Pet. 2:1–9; Rev. 1:4–6)

Finally, we get to the end of all these laws—and what are we left with? Laws regarding tassels! This surely must be a perfect example of insignificant laws regarding peripheral issues. But stop to consider what the tassels represent. God recognized how easy it would be for the Israelites to forget Him and His ways, so He gave them a tangible way of remembering.

God also specified that the tassels should have a blue thread through them. In Old Testament times, blue and purple dyes were produced from the Murex trunculus snails that lived in the ocean off the coast of Lebanon. People needed to collect 12,000 snails to make only 1.4 grams of blue-purple dye, so it was a very expensive color!³ You needed to be rich and famous to wear blue-purple clothes.⁴ Interestingly, we find that God asked His people to clothe the priests and decorate the sanctuary with blue-purple material (Exod. 26:1; 28:5–8; 39:1). So when God directed all of His people to wear tassels of blue, He was saying, “You are valuable and special! You are my royal priesthood!” Amid rebellion and potential spiritual depression, God uplifts His people with the color of prosperity.

1. *The New American Commentary*, vol. 3B: Numbers (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 2000), p. 245.

2. Jacob Milgrom, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Numbers* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Jewish Publication Society, 1990), Excursus 34, p. 399.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

4. Remember that Lydia was a seller of blue-purple clothes in Acts 16:14.

Human Nature—No Change!

Numbers 15;
Eph. 6:11–18

“The mixed multitude that came up with the Israelites from Egypt were a source of continual temptation and trouble. They professed to have renounced idolatry and to worship the true God; but their early education and training had molded their habits and character, and they were more or less corrupted with idolatry and with irreverence to God. They were oftenest the ones to stir up strife and were the first to complain, and they leavened the camp with their idolatrous practices and their murmurings against God.

So many times it happens—first abhor, then pity, then embrace.

“Soon after the return into the wilderness, an instance of Sabbath violation occurred, under circumstances that rendered it a case of peculiar guilt. The Lord’s announcement that He would disinherit Israel had roused a spirit of rebellion. One of the people, angry at being excluded from Canaan, and determined to show his defiance of God’s law, ventured upon the open transgression of the fourth commandment by going out to gather sticks upon the Sabbath. . . . The act of this man was a willful and deliberate violation of the fourth commandment—a sin, not of thoughtlessness or ignorance, but of presumption. . . . The sins of blasphemy and willful Sabbathbreaking received the same punishment, being equally an expression of contempt for the authority of God.”¹

So many times it happens—first abhor, then pity, then embrace. Enticements might be attractive, but they lead us away from God. Choosing to go our own way can soon become open revolt against God and His ways. No wonder we are advised to “guard well the avenues of the soul.”²

REACT

1. How hard is it to change our ways of thinking? If we have been brought up one way, how can we make a change?

2. Have you ever found yourself doing something you had previously thought you would never do? How can you protect yourself against doing so again?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 408, 409.

2. *The Adventist Home*, p. 403.

Num. 15:37–41;
Deut. 4:9; 11:16–21;
Jer. 2:32

How-to Remembering Not to Forget

The Israelites forgot to remember the most important things, such as the God who brought them out of Egypt, the commands He gave them, and the land He promised them. God knew they would forget so, like a piece of string around a finger, He gave them a memory tool—something to help them to remember not to forget.

What if every action, every deed of your hands, belonged to God?

This tool was simple strands of thread, tied together with a blue cord attached to the corners of every garment so that everywhere the Israelites turned they were reminded. *Don't forget the God who loves you.* A moving sea of blue against the endless yellow desert. *Don't forget the plans He has for you.* A tassel swinging from a corner. *Don't forget what "I AM" has promised.*

Here are four things we can do to remember not to forget what really matters:

Tie God's Word to your hands (Deut. 11:18). Most of us use our hands to make a living. Whether for typing on a computer or turning a wood lathe, your hands are instrumental in creating the life you live. What if every action, every deed of your hands, belonged to God?

Bind God's Word on your forehead (Deut. 11:18). Give God your thought-life. What goes on inside your head determines your focus and where you place your energy. Imagine how your future would be shaped if you disciplined yourself to constantly check in with Him during the day, if, like Paul, you took "captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5, NIV).

Prioritize your life (Jer. 2:32). Do you value earthly things above eternal things? Then you're bound to forget God. Choose today to put God's priorities at the top of your list.

Tell the next generation (Ps. 78:4). As any good teacher will tell you, if you want to know that you've really learned something, try teaching it to someone else. By passing on your knowledge, faith, and understanding, you will invariably strengthen your own Christian experience.

REACT

1. What significant distractions in your life prevent you from remembering the plans God has for you? Read Jeremiah 29:11, and renew your sense of purpose.
2. What "tassels" do you have in your own life to remind you of the awesome God you serve?

The Israelites had fallen into a rut. They had wandered around the wilderness for so long, that one might wonder if they could do anything else. But God encouraged them to look ahead to the plans He had for them. Instead of being miserable and feeling sorry for themselves, they were to look ahead to their bright future and get excited about it!

Israel represents the way people in God's church behave today. God was encouraging the Israelites to look forward to and to be prepared for their bright future. He wants us to do the same. But it's easy to look around and get depressed by all the bad things we see in the church. The next time you're tempted to do so, think about what God has in store for you. You may find that God will make it a reality when you are ready.

Israel represents the way people in God's church behave today.

If we choose to go our own way, take note of the Sabbath breaker who was put to death (Num. 15:32–36). God wants only what is best for us, and the Ten Commandments are life-rules that will lead to happiness and a long life. But the importance God places on these commands is emphasized here by the death penalty. Not only was this man's disobedience harmful to himself, it would have led others far astray. Such discontent could easily have spread through the whole camp, leading God's people down the path of rebellion and mistrust. Some may think God harsh for killing someone for desecrating the Sabbath, but at this point in their journey, it was essential that everyone understand the importance of keeping His commandments.

God knows how easily we forget, so He created many visual reminders of Himself and His ways. He told the Israelites to do certain things so they would not forget how He had led them in the past. In Numbers 15:37–41, He told them to put tassels on the corners of their clothes so that they would remember His commands and their consecration to Him.

Perhaps it would be helpful for us to put such reminders across our own paths. Are God's commands that important to you?

REACT

1. What do you do when you find yourself in a spiritual rut?
2. How can we stay fresh and focused in our relationship with God?

CONCLUDE

Have you ever known people who always seem to have a better idea or a better way of doing things? Seemingly oblivious to what your past experience has taught you or whatever suggestions or instructions you give them, they insist upon doing things their own way. All of us are like that at times when it comes to spiritual things. God says to do it *this* way, but we want to do it *that* way. Unfortunately, as many people throughout history have discovered, doing things our own way instead of God's way leads only to disaster. Knowing this, and motivated by love and concern for His children, God gave the Israelites a visual reminder so that they (and we) would remember that *His* way is best.

CONSIDER

- Using your favorite artistic medium, create a visual reminder for your home to remind you to keep God's law. For example, if you enjoy calligraphy, you could write out the Ten Commandments on parchment paper, frame it, and hang it on a wall.
- Getting together with a group from your church and handing out in your community copies of the book titled *The Ten Commandments Twice Removed*, by Danny Shelton and Shelley Quinn.
- Composing a tune in which you select verses from Psalm 119 that have to do with keeping God's law, statutes, or commandments.
- Reading through the entire book of Psalms. In a journal, jot down each passage that refers to God's law or the commandments. When done, total up the number of references you found.
- Memorizing Exodus 20:1-17, and then recite it to a friend or repeat it aloud as you work around the house.
- Inviting some friends over on a Saturday night to watch the classic film *The Ten Commandments*. Hold a group discussion afterward.

CONNECT

The Art of Making Sabbath Special (DVD) by Nancy Van Pelt.

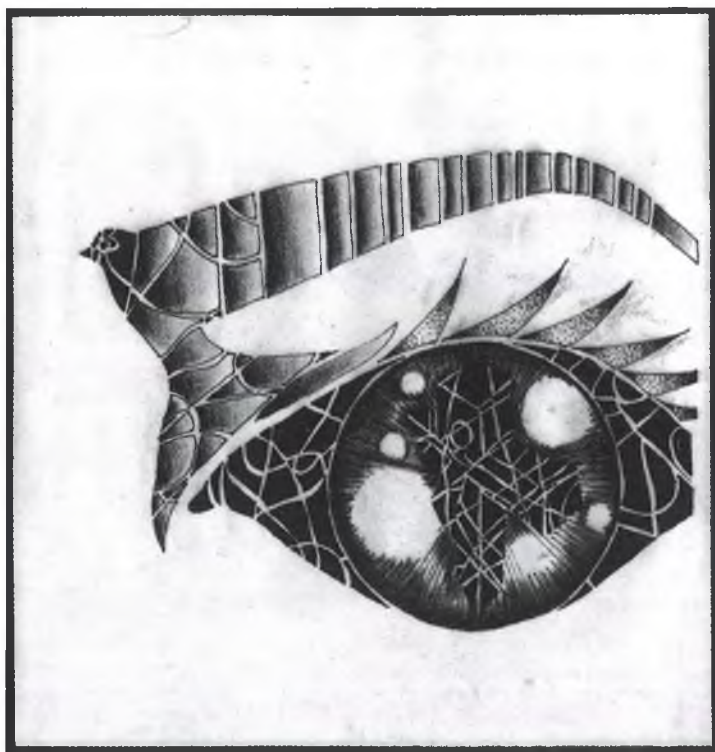
The Seventh Day DVD set by LLT Productions.

What the Bible Says About the Sabbath (special *Signs of the Times*® issue for sharing).

lesson seven
NOVEMBER 7-14

Power
Struggle

*“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit
before a fall” (Prov. 16:18, NKJV).*



Numbers 16;
Prov. 8:13;
James 3:16

Introduction

WHY? Why? Why!

The flowers were budding, the birds were chirping, and his bank account was bulging. Julian reflected on his life as he sped down the highway in his brand-new Porsche Carrera GT. He had it all: a luxurious car, a gorgeous home in Hillsborough, sports watches, European designer watches, and one could hardly miss his precious Rolex collection. His young wife represented the very definition of beauty.

“I did the work. Why should the boss get the glory?”

As a high-powered attorney, he had the most efficient administrative assistant and partners who thought he was the best. One would have thought he would be satisfied, but Julian was far from it. The one thing that really bothered him was that he was not the boss. He often fantasized of the strategic decisions he would make if only he were in charge. “Why can’t folks see that I am qualified? Didn’t I just last week successfully complete a million-dollar merger? I did the work. Why should the boss get the glory? Why can’t I be number one? Why, why, why?” Julian complained.

Galatians 5:26 says, “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another” (NKJV). Although Julian had much, he was still envious of his superior’s status. His greed and pride caused him to overlook the blessings of his life and to focus instead on what others had that he didn’t.

Julian’s situation is like the story of Korah in the book of Numbers. He was placed in an esteemed position among the Israelites. However, he could not fathom that God could appoint Moses and Aaron as leaders. He felt that he could do a better job. In the end, he and all he owned and associated with succumbed. The earth opened up, and they were swallowed (Num. 16:31, 32).

Just like Korah, Julian lost it all. You see, he was so focused on what he did not have, that he failed to reflect upon the blessings that were bestowed upon him.

How often have you looked on the actions of others to determine your own worth? God detests pride and abhors jealousy. It’s important to base our security and contentment on the blessings that He has bestowed upon us. Proverbs 3:6 says, “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (NKJV). God want us to reflect upon Him and His goodness, and when we do, He will show us the unique path that He has set for each one of us.

Conquering the Enemy

Gen. 17:10–17;
Numbers 16; 17;
Josh. 4:3–9;
Matt. 26:6–13;
Luke 22:19

The Promise (Gen. 17:10–17)

Genesis 17:10–17 gives a brief description of God's covenant to Abraham and his descendants. God tells Abraham that he and his children will inherit the Promised Land. The Lord also goes on to say that not only is the promise for people who are related to Abraham through birth, but also to those who keep the covenant of the Lord. God then says that those who are part of Abraham's

“Yesterday has a meaning for today.”

family but who refuse to do what God instructs will not be considered heirs to the promise. In the New Testament, the Lord tells of those who will be cut off and those who will be grafted into the Vine (Jesus Christ) because of their faith in the Word. We can be heirs to the promise when we remember God, His Son, and all They have done for us.

The Result of Rebelling (Numbers 16; 17)

In Numbers we read about the enemy that entered the Israelite camp through three men (Numbers 16; 17). Through the rebellion of Korah, thousands of people had to be killed. Through the events in these two chapters, we learn that God warns us to be positively influenced and that we, in turn, are to be a positive influence. He warns us to be careful of the company we keep. Here we plainly see how thousands of people were destroyed because they allowed the evil seed that was planted in their hearts through one man to grow. To save the remaining Israelites, God destroyed the tree at its very root. He had to stop the spread of the disease to save the faithful. Just a pinch of leaven can be leaven for the whole batch. Just a little sin can spread like a spark.

“Had the rebellion of Korah succeeded at that time the result would have been the worst kind of chaos, and God's plan for Israel would have been dealt a retardingly disastrous blow.”¹

Remembering the Lord's Deliverance (Josh. 4:3–9)

In Joshua 4:3–9, God taught the children of Israel to conquer the enemy by staying focused on He who gives life. In order to remember that it was the

Lord who brought them out of Egypt, He had them remove 12 stones from the middle of the river and build an altar to Him.

Today, the Lord still teaches us to keep our eyes on Him. The world talks about self-esteem and self-improvement. However, when our sole focus becomes ourselves, then we easily become selfish and self-centered. God wanted to prevent the Israelites from thinking that Joshua and they were able to do everything and anything. Instead, He wanted them to remember that He was their leader and the One who had brought them out of Egypt.

“God will not permit the past to be forgotten. Yesterday has a meaning for today. Nations have strength in so far as they recall the experiences of the past. . . . The Hebrew people were always thrown back upon ‘I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.’ ”²

Remembering Jesus as the Sacrifice (Matt. 26:6–13; Luke 22:19)

In an attempt to reprimand the woman who anointed Jesus, one of the disciples tried to belittle what she did. However, Jesus said that wherever the gospel would be preached, there would be her story.

“Mary’s gift would shed its fragrance, and hearts would be blessed through her unstudied act. Kingdoms would rise and fall; the names of monarchs and conquerors would be forgotten; but this woman’s deed would be immortalized upon the pages of sacred history. Until time should be no more, that broken alabaster box would tell the story of the abundant love of God for a fallen race.”³

During the Last Supper, Jesus wanted His disciples to again focus on Him through the symbolism of the Passover food—the bread, His body; the wine, His blood. When His disciples down through the ages participate in Communion, they are remembering His sacrifice in a very special way. Such remembering helps to conquer our enemy, Satan.

REACT

1. In what ways are you remembering the goodness of the Lord?
2. How can you better serve the Lord and show your gratitude for what He has done?

1. George Arthur Buttrick, ed., *The Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 2. (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1953), p. 222.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 568, 569.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 563.

Testimony
*Conflict in the
Wilderness*

Num. 16:30–33

“Men of power are those who have been opposed, baffled, and thwarted. By calling their energies into action, the obstacles they meet prove to them positive blessings. . . . Conflict and perplexity call for the exercise of trust in God, and for that firmness which develops power.”¹

Moses was such a man of power. He showed that he trusted God, although he might have been tempted several times to give up on the children of Israel.

“Conflict and perplexity call for the exercise of trust in God.”

Despite warnings from Moses that God would destroy the rebels, the rebellion continued after more than 14,000 people perished from a plague. By communing with God, Moses was able to ask the children of Israel to bring the rods of the representatives from the 12 tribes, with Aaron’s rod among them, to find out who was chosen to lead the children of Israel. Even when Aaron’s rod sprouted some buds to show he was God’s chosen leader, the rebellion continued.

“In the rebellion of Korah is seen the working out, upon a narrower stage, of the same spirit that led to the rebellion of Satan in heaven. It was pride and ambition that prompted Lucifer to complain of the government of God, and to seek the overthrow of the order which had been established in heaven. Since his fall it has been his object to infuse the same spirit of envy and discontent, the same ambition for position and honor, into the minds of men. He thus worked upon the minds of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, to arouse the desire for self-exaltation and excite envy, distrust, and rebellion. Satan caused them to reject God as their leader, by rejecting the men of God’s appointment. Yet while in their murmuring against Moses and Aaron they blasphemed God, they were so deluded as to think themselves righteous, and to regard those who had faithfully reproved their sins as actuated by Satan.

“Do not the same evils still exist that lay at the foundation of Korah’s ruin? . . . Like Korah and his companions, many, even of the professed followers of Christ, are thinking, planning, and working so eagerly for self-exaltation that in order to gain the sympathy and support of the people they are ready to pervert the truth, falsifying and misrepresenting the Lord’s servants, and even charging them with the base and selfish motives that inspire their own hearts.”²

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 194.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 403, 404.

Exod. 20:13;
Esther 6:1;
Matt. 26:59;
Rev. 3:14–22

Evidence
The Laodicean Church

This week's lesson is concerned with a power struggle pitting Korah, Dathan, and Abiram against Moses and Aaron. The struggle for power is apt to rear its head in all relationships. Why do we have people killing one group or another in the name of religion? Clearly it is stated, in Exodus 20:13, a Ten Commandment law, "You shall not murder" (NKJV). Where is there evidence that God wants us to kill in the name of religion?

Who will speak up for the unbelievers of this world?

Haman did not have any evidence against Mordecai. So why did he want to execute him? Haman was filled with jealousy. Haman planned to execute Mordecai because he did not bow to him. Providence, however, intervened that night. Read Esther 6.

Even the Sanhedrin sought to find evidence to discredit Jesus, the Son of God. Read Matthew 26:59.

Who will speak up for the unbelievers of this world? Will Christians today still be looking for evidence to follow the working of the Holy Spirit before they go out and tell people about Christ's return? Or will they be found wanting and lacking in faith and zeal? There is coming a time when the King of the universe will show all of His evidence concerning good and evil. Will there be a power struggle then?

The Bible speaks about the Laodicean church in Revelation 3:14–22. Ellen White wrote about this church: "Those who will not act when the Lord calls upon them, waiting for more certain evidence, and more favorable opportunities, will walk in darkness, for the light will be withdrawn. The evidence given one day, if rejected, may never be repeated."*

What a power struggle there will be when Jesus stands up against Satan, the enemy of our souls, as he tries to prove that we deserve condemnation.

REACT

1. What evidence is there in your life that there is a power struggle between good and evil?
2. What can you do to be free of that struggle?

* *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, September 16, 1873.

The Art of Letting Go

Prov. 3:5, 6

The art of letting go is often accomplished by the act of holding on—letting go of your thoughts, your will, and your way, and holding on with *both hands* to God's promises, His will, and His way.

A power struggle is a choice.

From the time we first pedaled our Big Wheel® or tricycle alone until that solo drive in the car, the sense of control and power hits us, and we relish that feeling. We are allowed to steer, but God is waiting and wanting to navigate. If power struggles develop over an issue and we feel we know the best route, but the signs indicate another direction, we may fight to hold on to our plans when letting go would end the battle. It's like purchasing a GPS system but stopping frequently to check the map or ask for directions. A struggle requires two opposing views. By letting go, we become free to hear and heed divine direction. One may let go by doing the following:

Determine God's will through prayerful Bible study (Rom. 10:17; 2 Tim. 2:15). When you let go, God's Word becomes your safety net. Make the Bible personal by following a reading plan. Begin with a favorite passage.

Decide to follow God's way by daily surrendering your life to Him (Ps. 37:5; 1 Cor. 15:31). A power struggle is a choice. Your daily, hourly, or moment-by-moment decision can be to allow God to navigate. "To place little confidence in one's own understanding does not mean that a man must lay aside intelligence and give up the power of choice. Intelligence is needed to determine from the Word of God and from God's guiding providences what is the divine will. A will strengthened and cleansed by God is needed if one is to follow a true course through to the end."¹

Delight in the joys of God, and find joy in the freedom that comes when we allow His GPS system to take control (Ps. 1:2; 119:143). "He who is following the divine guidance has found the only true source of saving grace and real happiness, and has gained the power of imparting happiness to all around him."²

Demonstrate your commitment. Act as if you are letting go until letting go actually occurs. Where do you need to begin your "letting go" journey?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 956.

2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 264.

Isa. 41:10

Opinion

Getting Through the Rough Waves

Ocean waves are fascinating to watch. They can be so powerful yet so calm. At first, they may appear to be somewhat quiet and nonthreatening. In actuality, however, there are many currents beneath that are waiting to spurt to the surface.

This same pattern parallels the Christian journey both individually and collectively. Just as one “reaches” the mountaintop of their Christian journey, struggles become an inherent part of the descent. Struggles do not discriminate against one’s origin, age, occupation, creed, or gender. God’s people have always gone through struggles, and, as a result, many of them have become stronger Christians.

The answers to life often lie within the rough waves.

Internal struggles within the church also can be very disheartening. King David experienced this firsthand. Read Psalm 55:12–14. Even today there are similar struggles. Samantha is a recent convert in the church. She is zealous for God and wants nothing more than to serve Him. Church leadership noted her enthusiasm, and within a short time and proper training, she now holds esteemed positions within her congregation. It was challenging, especially as a college student, but she trusted God and she excelled. Her peers, however, thought differently. They made snide comments and remarks. They even jeered her for trying to get to the kingdom through good works. Samantha became discouraged and started questioning God.

Ellen White counseled, “Whenever the message of truth comes home to souls with special power, Satan stirs up his agents to start a dispute. . . . Whenever a good work is begun, there are cavilers ready to enter into dispute over forms or technicalities, to draw minds away from the living realities. When it appears that God is about to work in a special manner for His people, let them not be enticed into a controversy that will work only ruin of souls.”*

We should not be surprised when the struggles start within. The answers to life often lie within the rough waves. When the sea of life turns calm once more, we realize that we have gained new perspectives.

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 396.

Let Go and Let God

Prov. 3:5, 6

CONCLUDE

Love for position and power seems to be a characteristic of human nature. Throughout the Bible, and all around us today, we can find numerous instances of people whose desire to be first led them away from God. He has a plan for each of our lives, and that plan doesn't necessarily include being at the top of the ladder or being recognized as a person of prestige. When we allow God to lead in our lives and learn to be content in giving Him our best service—no matter where or how He directs—we will find true happiness.

CONSIDER

- Keeping a journal of Bible texts, conversations, and experiences in which God seems to be leading you or providing an answer that you have been seeking.
- Interviewing respected members of your church who impress you as being humble, yet gifted. Have them tell you their secrets for staying humble.
- Praying the prayer, "Search me, O God . . ." found in Psalm 139:23, 24, and asking Him to show you if there are areas of rebellion or pride in your life that you need to surrender to Him.
- Observing in nature the order with which God's creatures and the natural world function. Also note what happens when events or circumstances disrupt that order.
- Discussing with a friend any applications you might make regarding God's desire for your place in the scheme of things relating to your education, church, work, or family.
- Looking through your music collection to find a song that deals with surrendering to God's will or allowing Him to lead in your life. Memorize the words and sing it often.
- Thinking about situations around you, either at church, at work, at home, or at school, in which you see a power struggle taking place or developing. Brainstorm ways in which you might be able to provide helpful Christian counsel. (In some situations, prayer might be your best approach.)

CONNECT

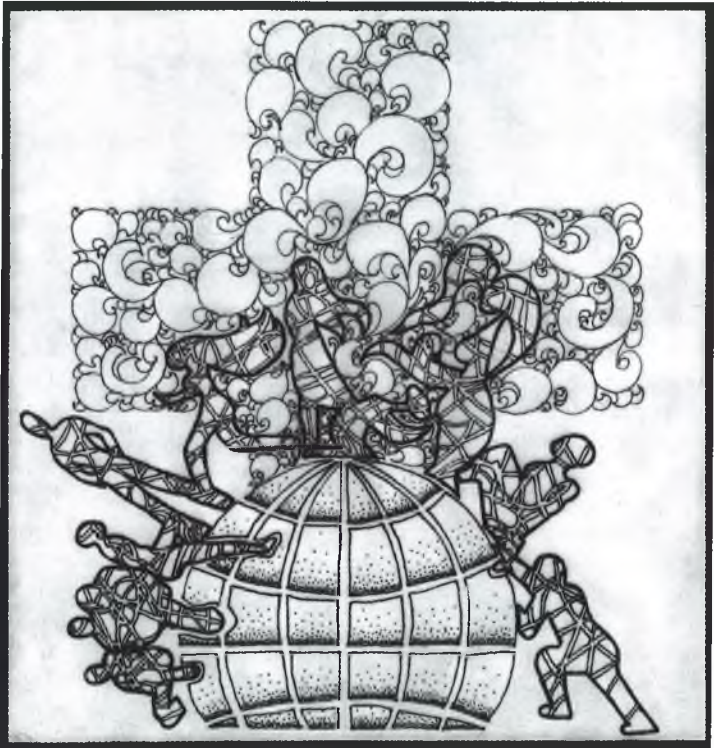
Ruby Ratzlaff, compiler, *Here I Am, Lord: Prayers From the Heart of Ellen White*; Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading From the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams*; Shelley Quinn, *Life Affirmations From Scripture*.

Pat Humphrey, Keene, Texas, U.S.A.

Priests and **Levites**

“Then the Lord said to Aaron: ‘You shall have no inheritance in their land, nor shall you have any portion among them; I am your portion and your inheritance among the children of Israel.’ ”

(Num. 18:20, NKJV).



Introduction
"Simon Says"

Num. 9:15–23

The game Simon Says was one of my favorite games when I was a child. Someone is "Simon" while the others must do what "Simon" tells them to do. If Simon says, "Simon says sit," the players who do not sit are out. However, if Simon says just "Sit," without first saying "Simon says," then the players who do sit are out. The person who remains last after a varied series of commands is declared the winner. For the most part, it's the spirit of the command, not the actions, that matter in this game. The point is the ability to distinguish between valid and invalid commands, rather than physical ability. A recent psychological study found that this game can be a healthy way to help children improve self-control and restrain impulsive behavior.*

Directions from God are not always just for your next big move.

This classic favorite reminds me of the time when the Israelites were in the wilderness, guided by God's cloud. The cloud gave them shade during the day, and it took the form of a pillar of fire to give them light during the night. And just like a round of "Simon Says" (with God playing "Simon" through the cloud), the Israelites would set camp wherever the cloud settled or follow the cloud whenever it lifted from the tabernacle.

Sometimes, the cloud stayed only overnight and lifted the next morning. But day or night, when the cloud lifted, the people were to break camp and move on. Whether the cloud stayed above the tabernacle for two days, a month, or a year, the people of Israel stayed in camp. However, as soon as it lifted, they broke camp and continued traveling (see Numbers 9:23).

The priests and the Levites, together with the rest of the Israelites, traveled, camped, and worshiped as God guided. When people follow God's guidance, they can be confident that they are where God wants them, whether they're moving or staying in one place. So instead of praying, "God, what do You want me to do next?" it's better to ask, "God, what do You want me to do while I'm right here?" Directions from God are not always just for your next big move. He has a purpose in placing you where you are right now. So as you study this week's lesson from Numbers, be mindful of the needs around you and how you can help to fulfill them.

* *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 2008.

1 Pet. 2:9

Evidence
Special People

The Levites were formally consecrated to the priesthood after many Israelites in the wilderness turned to idol worship while Moses was communing with God on Mount Sinai (Exodus 32). The Levites stood firm and did not take part in this idolatry. They even killed 3,000 of those who were running wild, as ordered by Moses (verses 25–29). Consequently, Moses told them: “Dedicate yourselves today to the Lord—for every man has been against his son and against his brother—in order that [God] may bestow a blessing upon you today” (verse 29, NASB).

We are to declare His glory.

“Levi had three sons—Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. From those branches of the family, the Levites were organized into three levels of service:

- The first level was composed of Aaron and his offspring, who were descended from Levi’s son Kohath. They formed the priesthood.
- The second level consisted of the descendants of Kohath, who were not descendants of Aaron. They were in charge of the most sacred parts of the Tabernacle (Num. 3:27–31; 4:4–15; 7:9).
- The third level consisted of all of the descendants of Gershon and Merari, who were given lesser duties (Num. 3:21–26, 33–37).”*

Like the Hebrews of old, God declared through Peter, “You [Christians] are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Pet. 2:9, NIV). This verse tells us that we are not to be content or self-righteous about our specialness before God. Instead, we are to declare His glory and share how He brought us out from darkness.

REACT

1. Knowing that God has chosen special people in our day, how do we, as Adventists, share the biblical doctrines that the majority of the Christian world neglects?
2. What are some biblical principles to help us live as God’s “chosen people, a royal priesthood”?

*Wayne Blank, “Priests and Levites” <http://www.keyway.ca/htm2002/20020205.htm>. Retrieved October 14, 2008.

Logos
*Distinguished From the
Rest*

Numbers 3; 18; 19;
1 Pet. 2:9

One Sabbath, I attended the pastoral ordination of a friend. The speaker stressed that while each child of God is called to His service, He has set apart the pastors in the ministry. His wife, one of my best friends, also was commissioned to that sacred calling, emphasizing the importance of her role as a minister's wife.

God's people are sui generis.

Dedicated to a High Calling (Numbers 3)

The Levites were set apart by God for the sacred service in the tabernacle. But why were they chosen for the priesthood? When Moses returned from Mount Sinai after receiving the Ten Commandments, he witnessed the encampment worshipping the calf. When Moses asked who was on the Lord's side, the Levites were the only tribe who rallied behind him and who had not participated in the idolatrous worship (Exod. 32:26). Thus, they won God's favor that day.

Review Numbers 3. Here we learn that the Hebrew camp was arranged with the tabernacle in the middle with the three families of Levi closest to it. The Gershonites were positioned on the west side behind the tabernacle. They were in charge of the tabernacle's curtains and hangings. The Kohathites were stationed on the south side of the tabernacle and were responsible for its furnishings. The Merarites were positioned to the north of the sanctuary. They were appointed to take care of the frame of the tabernacle and other equipment.

The tents of Moses, Aaron, and the anointed priests, who were sons of Aaron, camped on the eastern side the tabernacle. They were in overall charge of the sanctuary and cared for the needs of the people. The priesthood was exclusively confined to Aaron and his sons, as specifically instructed by God. The Levites were to take down the sanctuary once the pillar of cloud had lifted above it. Then Israel was to move forward on their journey to the Promised Land. Once the cloud stopped, the Levites were to set up the sanctuary again. In the evening, the cloud looked like fire, giving light to the encampment. It was through Moses that they obeyed these holy orders.

In the aftermath of Korah's rebellion, God emphasized the distinct roles and functions between the priests and the other Levites. Such clear instructions show us the importance and sacredness of these roles and functions. Likewise,

God has given us certain responsibilities for which He holds us accountable. He gives us our work, not because of anything in us, but because of His abounding grace.

Living on God's Sustenance and Grace (Numbers 18; 19)

God did not give any land to the Levites. Rather, they lived from the offerings given by the children of Israel. "God himself was their share and inheritance. For food, they relied largely on offerings from other tribes. Thus, the physical survival of 'fulltime ministers' depended on how faithful the other Israelites are."¹

The tithes of the Israelites were the Levite's inheritance in return for the services they rendered in the sanctuary. They were to regard those offerings as holy. God also instructed Moses that the Levites must give a tenth of the holy offerings they received.

Actually, God does not need our tithes and offerings. However, we need to recognize that what we have is given to us by God. Giving our tithes and offerings helps us to remember that we are dependent upon Him. When we remember that He provides for us, the giving of our tithes and offerings becomes an act of worship which says that we recognize He is the Owner of everything we have. Returning to God a part of what He has given to us is our way of expressing our gratitude and appreciation to Him for all of His blessings.

Numbers 19 lists the guidelines set by God for a special ritual cleansing of the Israelites. A red heifer without any blemish or defect was to be burned; and its ashes mixed with water were to be used for cleansing. This symbolized purification from sin. It also symbolized the grace of God that cleanses us from sin, and by which we are saved (Eph. 2:8).

The New Priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9)

Today the ceremonial and sacrificial services are no longer necessary. "The ceremonial priesthood of the Levites lost its significance when Christ died on the cross because all the ceremonies pointed ahead to Him. In the New Covenant, every believer is, in a sense, a priest of Christ (1 Pet. 2:5, 9)."²

God's people are *sui generis*. That is, they are a class of their own or of a peculiar kind. The three angels' messages are the unique banner that we, as Seventh-day Adventists, are to proclaim to the world in these last days. Just as important as these messages is that our thoughts, words, and actions show that we are indeed God's children.

1. *The Devotional Study Bible*, NIV, 1987, p. 132.

2. *Alpha and Omega*, vol. 8, p. 352.

Testimony
*Being Right in the
Presence of God*

Ps. 34:15

It is a great joy to know that the duty we are performing is sanctioned by God. However, there are many young people today who are not sure if their line of work is God's will for them. There are many things we can learn from the experience of Levi's descendants. God gave them their sacred duties because they remained faithful to God while the rest of Israel worshiped the golden calf.

**“By this signal honor He manifested His approval
of their fidelity.”**

“By divine direction the tribe of Levi was set apart for the service of the sanctuary. In the earliest times every man was the priest of his own household. In the days of Abraham the priesthood was regarded as the birthright of the eldest son. Now, instead of the first-born of all Israel, the Lord accepted the tribe of Levi for the work of the sanctuary. By this signal honor He manifested His approval of their fidelity, both in adhering to His service and in executing His judgments when Israel apostatized in the worship of the golden calf. The priesthood, however, was restricted to the family of Aaron. Aaron and his sons alone were permitted to minister before the Lord; the rest of the tribe were entrusted with the charge of the tabernacle and its furniture, and they were to attend upon the priests in their ministrations, but they were not to sacrifice, to burn incense, or to see the holy things till they were covered.

“In accordance with their office, a special dress was appointed for the priests. ‘Thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, for glory and for beauty.’ . . . The priests were not to enter the sanctuary with shoes upon their feet. Particles of dust cleaving to them would desecrate the holy place. . . . Thus was constantly taught the lesson that all defilement must be put away from those who would approach into the presence of God.”*

REACT

1. Search your heart to answer whether or not you are true to God or are worshipping the things of this world.
2. If you, like the families of Aaron, remain true to God and cease to worship the things of the world, what can you be sure of in terms of your calling?

**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 350.

Mark 12:41–44;
Luke 12:42–48;
16:10, 11

How-to *Being a Cheerful Giver*

God appointed the priests and Levites to distinct roles and responsibilities regarding the administration of the sanctuary. He desired the children of Israel to support these sanctuary workers with portions of their sacrifices. However, even the Levites were to give a tithe from what they received.

Honesty is . . . an attitude that embraces the whole life.

God is so good to us. He always blesses each of us according to our needs. Hence, we must be faithful in serving Him and in giving back what He owns. How can we do this? How can we be a cheerful giver?

Be honest. Honesty is not just a series of good deeds, but an attitude that embraces the whole life. The Bible says that whosoever is faithful in small matters will be faithful in large ones (Luke 16:10, 11). By giving our tithes faithfully, we are being honest with God.

Be faithful. Read Luke 12:42–48. These verses teach us that to whom much is given, much will be demanded, and to whom much is entrusted, much more will be asked. At any early age, many of us learned from our parents that we are to care for our things, that if we did not take care of our toys, no one would trust us to handle someone else's toys. Jesus' teaching goes one step further—as His servants, faithfulness in handling His property qualifies us to handle our own.

Be a giver, and do not expect anything in return. As Christians, we should practice this selfless attitude just as the widow did in Mark 12:41–44. She gave all that she had despite her lowly status in life, yet she did not expect anything in return. When we give to the Lord, it must be our desire to do so, not just because other people have told us to do it or because giving is expected of us.

Be cheerful. Jesus is a cheerful giver. His immense love leads us to give cheerfully. He has given us time and talent to proclaim His message. He even sacrificed Himself to save us.

How about you? Have you been a faithful steward? Are you using your abilities to hasten the coming of Jesus? Is your tithe up-to-date? Today is the right time to be a cheerful giver and to thank Jesus for letting us, the managers of His vast wealth, share His blessings with others.

Faithfully Obeying God's Commands

Numbers 8; 9; 18;
Mal. 3:8

In Numbers 9, God told Moses that the children of Israel were to celebrate the Passover, give sacrifices, organize the camp, and move from one place to another until they reached the Promised Land. God gave Aaron a delineated role between the priests and Levites. Aaron and his descendants were ordained to serve as priests. The rest of the Levites were given the responsibility to assist Aaron and his sons while they ministered before the tent of the meeting. They were to perform all the work in the sanctuary.

The Lord said to Aaron that the priests and Levites would be cared for through the offerings the children of Israel made to the sanctuary. The priests and Levites were to pay tithes on the offerings they received (Num. 18:25).

We must keep on going on.

We are to obey God, not because we want something in return, but because we love Him and want to serve Him. A tenth of our wages plus offerings belong to Him and must be faithfully returned to Him. In giving, we should not expect something in return. He will provide for us. He will never leave us wanting. All we need is to trust Him. One way to understand God's will for us is to endure suffering and sacrifice. We must keep on going on and trusting God because of His astounding and wondrous promise to us.

The Bible admonishes us to be obedient to God—a good servant and a follower of the Lord. We must learn to be responsible, disciplined, and patient in every task He gives us. We need to put God in the center of our lives, hold on to our faith, and trust in Him. There is no need to worry, because He is a great provider to all of us!

REACT

1. What is the biggest sacrifice you have had to make in your life?
2. Are you willing to give more than 10 percent of the fruit of your labor for God's ministry?

Exploration Set Apart

CONCLUDE

When the rest of Israel turned their backs on God in idolatry, the Levites chose to stay faithful. Because of this loyalty, God set them apart to serve Him as caretakers of His tabernacle. The Levites attended to God's holy things. They moved the tabernacle and performed other duties related to the temple services, while Aaron's descendants served as priests. Today, God has made us all priests in His holy service. We, too, have a work to do for the body of Christ.

CONSIDER

- Writing a dedication service for a baby who is brought to the Lord. Imagine yourself as this child being set apart for service, like Samuel was when he was brought to the temple.
- Studying a church manual about the duties of a deacon or deaconess. When it is time for your church to nominate people for these offices, volunteer your name, and ask a deacon or deaconess to mentor you in your new responsibilities.
- Examining your church for areas in which you might serve with your talents, such as creating a children's bulletin, decorating a bathroom, building furniture for a classroom, or doing a survey for the church board on a needed topic.
- Painting a mural in one of the children's Sabbath School classrooms. Get permission from the church board and confer with the various teachers for ideas they may have about a scene they'd like you to paint.
- Offering to have special music for a Sabbath School or church service. Don't forget the children's divisions. Think about composing a song and designing props that would appeal to the age group you will be serving.
- Scouting out church families with special needs and organizing ways of helping the church assist these families.
- Offering an intercessory prayer for someone on your prayer list every day this week.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapters 30, 31.

Leslie Hardinge, *With Jesus in His Sanctuary*, part V; Carroll Shewmake, *When We Pray for Others*, chapters 4, 8.

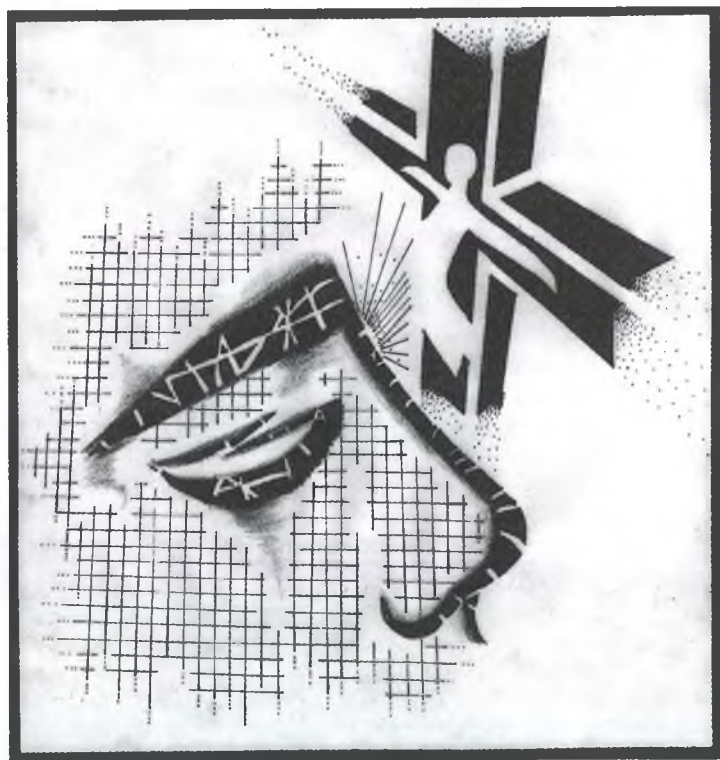
lesson nine

NOVEMBER 21-28

The Sin of Moses and **Aaron**

“Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan ”*

(Deut. 3:27, NKJV).



Num. 20:1-13

Introduction

I Did It My Way

Frank Sinatra's song "My Way" topped the charts in the 1960s and remains popular today. Its words ring true for Moses' sin as well: "I did it my way." Miriam, Moses' sister, had just died. The Israelites, once again, were rebelling against God and crying to go back to Egypt. Moses, fed up with their complaining, did things his way; instead of obeying God's orders to speak to the rock, Moses struck the rock with his staff. The interesting part of this story is that God still sent forth water from the rock in spite of Moses' disobedience. God's compassion and justice shone through. Instead of making a fool of Moses and giving the complainers one more item to add to their why-we-should-return-to-Egypt list, water poured from the rock, quenching the thirst of the good, the bad, and the four-legged creatures alike.

God's compassion and justice shone through.

Justice had to be served, however. Moses and Aaron were punished for striking the rock instead of talking to it. They were no longer permitted to lead the clans of Israel into Canaan. They had struggled through 40 years in the desert, guiding a quarreling, grumbling, complaining people, all the while looking forward to settling at last in the Promised Land. But with one thoughtless action, they forfeited their opportunity to lead their people into the homeland God had pledged to give them. That privilege was given to the charge of another.

That seems a high price to pay for disobedience. For those who have much light, however, much is required. Moses had had many walks and talks with God as a leader of God's people. What if he had spoken to the rock? The Israelites already knew that God could send water from a rock that had been hit—but talking to a rock? Who had ever heard of something like that? If Moses and Aaron had focused on God's glory instead of their own frustrations, God's purposes could have been held up before Israel. How much stronger could the people's faith have grown had the leaders not acted like the people they were leading.

As you study this week's lesson, consider the importance of obeying God's commandments—and His mercy when we do not.

REACT

1. Have you ever done something your way instead of God's way? What was the outcome? How would you do it differently now?
2. How can you be sure that you are following God's way?

The Plan of Salvation

Numbers 20; 21;
John 3:14, 15;
James 4:4–15

Sin Enters (Prov. 29:23)

Israel needed food and water. As they arrived at Kadesh, they saw neither. This wasn't the first time both necessities had been missing. See Exodus 15:22–25; 17:1–7; and Numbers 20:8.

In the Bible, bad news is always followed by good news.

When Moses was on his face before God, God gave him wisdom. When Moses disobeyed God's command, he was sentenced to die in the wilderness. Before he struck the rock, he took the credit for the miracle about to happen: "Must *we* bring water?" (Num. 20:10, NKJV; italics supplied). This disobedience, this rebellion meant that Moses would die without seeing the Promised Land.

Moses Finds a Way (Num. 21:4)

Moses had no reason to carry on; but he set his eyes on the Promised Land and desired to get his people there anyway. However, Edom was in the way, and Edom didn't trust Israel.

Israel was named after the patriarch, Jacob, who was named Israel by Jesus. Edom had a patriarch, too, and his name was Esau, the brother of Jacob. Jacob, and thus Israel, was known for his betrayal of Esau, and Edom had learned from these past experiences not to trust Israel. Moses promised Israel would not interfere with Edom as they passed through, but their access was denied anyway.

Israel did not need to fight their way past Edom. Moses took it upon himself to find a different route (Num. 21:4). Likewise, we do not need to work our way back into heaven's courts after sin. Christ found a different route. He found a way to fight the war for us, and by His stripes we are healed (Isa. 53:5).

The Power of Forgiveness (James 4:7–10)

It was now time for Aaron to say Goodbye to the rest of the travelers. However, as he was drawing close to death, certain rebellions came to mind, most notably, the golden calf (Exodus 32). Aaron must have been worried about his salvation, but God was not. "All their [Moses' and Aaron's] powers had been developed, exalted, and dignified by communion with the Infinite One. Their life had been spent in unselfish labor for God and their fellow men; their countenances gave evidence of . . . firmness and nobility of purpose."^{*}

Do you see the amazing things said about Aaron at the close of his life? Read James 4:7–10. If Aaron had had the New Testament, these words of James would have been inspiring to the old and tired high priest.

In the Bible, bad news is always followed by good news. Aaron was a sinner. God forgave him. Read the bad news of Romans 3:23, and then read the good news that follows in verse 24.

Christ Became a Serpent for Us? (John 3:14, 15; Rom. 6:10)

From Genesis to Revelation, the snake represents Satan. That's why this story in Numbers 21 can be confusing. As the people continued their sinful murmuring around Edom, fiery serpents began to bite them, and many people even died. They admitted their crime and went to their mediator, Moses, for help. Then the story takes a strange turn. A serpent is lifted up and eyes turn to it. Those who look are instantly healed.

The fiery serpents are the consequences of sin, while the bronze serpent is Christ. Christ lowered Himself, so that we could lift Him up as He took the consequences of our sins. No other religion has God becoming man, in order to help humankind. Never forget how special that is.

Victory in Jesus (Rom. 13:11, 12; 1 John 1:9)

Any parent knows how often they tell their children that they “complain too much.” Israel was that child. They also had their fair share of sins, rebellions, revolts, and faithless blunders. How is it then that God could continue to move them toward the Promised Land? Read about His forgiveness in Romans 3:24 and 1 John 1:9.

Israel had seen some tough times, but they also had seen God do many wonders. As Israel “wandered” farther from Egypt, they journeyed closer to God. Israel was the “church militant” (including the three major victories found in Numbers 20; 21) and was becoming the “church triumphant.” Soon after their victories over the southern Canaanites, the Amorites, and the residents of Bashan, they camped on the bank of the Jordan River, ready to claim what was theirs. Meditate on the words of Paul in Romans 13:11, 12. Are we as a church ready to wake up and become the “church triumphant”? We all have sinned, but Christ found a way to save us. He offered Himself as our ransom. He offers us forgiveness and grants us complete victory.

REACT

1. Why did the rock spew water for the people, even though Moses disobeyed God?
2. How is the church to be militant? How can the church become triumphant?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 425.

How Bad Is “The Sinfulness of Sin”?

James 4:7

“The history of Israel was to be placed on record for the instruction and warning of coming generations. Men of all future time must see the God of heaven as an impartial ruler, in no case justifying sin. But few realize the exceed-

“Press toward the mark for the prize.”

ing sinfulness of sin. Men flatter themselves that God is too good to punish the transgressor. But in the light of Bible history it is evident that God’s goodness and His love engage Him to deal with sin as an evil fatal to the peace and happiness of the universe.”¹

In this era of forgiveness and tolerance, it is sometimes difficult to grasp the concept of “the exceeding sinfulness of sin.” But in His goodness and mercy, God has also provided “the rest of the story,” as the late news-commentator Paul Harvey would say.

“We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us.”²

“God has made ample provision for His people; and if they rely upon His strength, they will never become the sport of circumstances. The strongest temptation cannot excuse sin. However great the pressure brought to bear upon the soul, transgression is our own act. It is not in the power of earth or hell to compel anyone to do evil. Satan attacks us at our weak points, but we need not be overcome. However severe or unexpected the assault, God has provided help for us, and in His strength we may conquer.”³

“Run the Christian race with patience, and rise superior to every temptation, however grievous it may be, that shall come to you. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw nigh to God; and if you are desirous of taking the first upward step, you will find His hand stretched out to help you.”⁴

REACT

If you know the “rest of the story” of the controversy between good and evil, how does that change the way you live today?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 420.
2. *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 31.
3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 421.
4. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 79.

Num. 20:8, 11

Evidence

Two Strikes and You're Out

In Numbers 20, we find the weary leader of an ungrateful group being put to yet another test. Moses had led them under the instruction of God for 40 years. He had patiently put up with all their complaining, often prostrating himself before God on their behalf.

This moment of weakness cost them dearly.

Now the people gather against him and Aaron again. They feel God has led them to an evil place and desires that they and their animals die of thirst. No wonder Moses and Aaron are angry. But instead of being angry because God has been insulted, they are incensed because of all they've had to bear. Instead of following God's instructions in the matter, they let their anger and impatience get the best of them. This moment of weakness cost them dearly.

Moses and Aaron "had been overcome by a sudden temptation, and their contrition was immediate and heartfelt. The Lord accepted their repentance, though because of the harm their sin might do among the people, He could not remit its punishment."*

Many of the faithful leaders in our church have been criticized and murmured against for sticking to the commands of God. We the members (just like Israel of old) are apt to quote popular maxims and to arrive at our own decisions apart from the counsel of God. We then expect the leaders to carry out our demands despite their convictions or promptings from the Holy Spirit.

Can you think of other examples of leadership who succumbed to pressure? Aaron did earlier in the desert trek, when the people begged him to make them an idol to worship while Moses was in the mountain. Pilate didn't want to crucify Jesus, but he was afraid to stand up to the crowd demanding Jesus' death. Won't it be interesting to find out, on Judgment Day, how many leaders have lost their way due to pressure from those they are leading?

Nevertheless, God expects those whom He has chosen to be leaders to stay true to principle, regardless of pressure. As for members of the flock, it is a positive calling to seek the knowledge of God and be in tune with His will, so that we can be supportive of the leaders instead of being a stumbling block.

REACT

What can we derive from Hebrews 13:17? How might the outcome at Meribah have been different if the children of Israel had followed this advice?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 419.

How-to Why God Gets Angry

Numbers 20

When reading the Bible, I often ponder the question, “Why?” Why would God do that? Why did He respond that way? So today, let’s contemplate the “Why?” so we can learn something about God and ourselves as well.

Read Numbers 20 in a translation other than the one you normally use. Sometimes this breaks us out of the “I’ve heard that story a million times” mode and gives us a fresh perspective.

Wouldn’t we be afraid?

As you read, put yourself in the place of the characters of the story. In Numbers 20:1, we learn that Miriam dies. Next we read that the people are complaining to Moses about water. We need to ask ourselves how it would feel to learn that Miriam died. How would it feel to be out in the desert with no water? Wouldn’t we be afraid? But God had taken care of many similar problems in the past. The children of Israel had ample opportunities to see His provision so that by this time they should have trusted Him. How did God feel about the people complaining all the time?

Examine the text for evidence of God’s justice and mercy, not only for the individuals concerned, but for the long-term well-being of the people of Israel, the instruction of the nations around them, and even the universe. Make a chart to help you reason this out. On one side of a sheet of paper, state why God’s actions seem unfair, and for whom. On the other side, state why God’s actions are fair, and who benefits from these actions. Consider these issues: (a) Why were the consequences so severe for this one sin? Did God treat the leaders differently from the people they were leading? Why? (Read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter 37.) (b) Did the people learn to trust God? In the next chapter, they once again complain. Read Numbers 21:5. Do we complain when what God provides isn’t exactly what we want? How did God try to help Israel develop trust? Why was it important for them to demonstrate trust to the nations around them?

Again and again God gives consequences, and again and again He forgives and heals. This example of wilderness rebellion teaches us about the seriousness of disobedience. It also offers a beautiful example of His love and of His provision for our greatest needs—pardon for our sins and reconciliation with Him.

Exod. 32:7–11;
Num. 20:9–12Opinion
No Excuse

The people of Israel are being unreasonable again. It's no wonder that poor old Moses and Aaron, as patient as they've been through all these years, have lost their cool. But not a word does God say about the people's rebellion, though He has said plenty about it in times past. Now all His reproach falls on His two leaders who, in a moment of passion, have spoken angrily to this belligerent people.

No one could ever say that God plays favorites.

While Aaron has had a rather spotty record of leadership, Moses has never failed the children of Israel until now. With every problem, he has turned to God as the real Owner of all the problems that had been involved in leading Israel to the Promised Land. When God angrily said to Moses, “*Your* people whom *you* brought out of the land of Egypt,” Moses reminded Him, “Lord, why does *Your* wrath burn hot against *Your* people whom *You* have brought out of the land of Egypt?” (Exod. 32:7, 11, NKJV; emphasis supplied).

God wants His people to recognize that He is their Leader, and Moses is His servant, following His direction. Moses has been faithful to acknowledge this before the people. Until now. “Must we bring water for you out of this rock?” Moses cries out to the crowd, and in so doing, publicly accepts personal responsibility for the leadership of the people (Num. 20:10, NKJV).

In this moment of weakness, Moses undid much of his witness to God's ownership and leadership. If God had not dealt swiftly with this failing, His people would have felt that great provocation is an excuse for sin. This was a critical issue that God had to make perfectly clear. There is never any excuse for sin. If there were, there would have been no need for Christ to die. Humbly, Moses acknowledged the justice of his punishment. No one could ever say that God plays favorites. Sin is so terrible, that even a small slip in patience has long-term consequences. While God abundantly forgave Moses and Aaron, He could not excuse their sin. What a blessing that He has promised that He will never forsake us, that He is ever ready to deliver us from the power of evil.

REACT

1. If Moses constantly needed God's grace in the face of temptation, how much more do we need to depend on Him to guide us?
2. What are your favorite texts that encourage you in regard to God's power to keep you from temptation?

Cheryl Des Jarlais, Ronan, Montana, U.S.A.

Exploration
*Gratitude and
Obedience*

Num. 20:15, 16

CONCLUDE

Is it human nature to remember only the bad things that have happened in our lives? The Israelites certainly demonstrated that kind of thinking. For all that God had done for them, taking them out of Egypt and caring for them all across the desert, they were quick to protest when something did not quite live up to their expectations. Like petulant children, they complained. Moses and Aaron tried to be good parents, turning to God for answers. However, they eventually lost their tempers with the children, at great personal cost. God deserves gratitude and obedience for His many gifts.

CONSIDER

- Mapping out the route delineated in Numbers 20 and 21. Calculate the extra distance walked because Edom denied passage to Israel.
- Comparing and contrasting the actions taken by Israel against Edom and against the Canaanites. Why such different measures?
- Writing or e-mailing someone in your life with whom you have been quarreling, remembering that while God did not remove the consequences of Aaron's and Moses' behavior, He did forgive them.
- Role-playing Moses' part of the conversation with God after striking the rock rather than speaking to it.
- Interviewing someone you consider to be a pillar in your church or life. Ask this person how he or she has dealt with temptation and obedience in his or her life.
- Reflecting on how fortunate you are to have food and water at your disposal and considering the fact that at times, you still have trouble obeying God.
- Studying the Sinai wilderness environment in an encyclopedia or biblical commentary. Try to figure out what a large group of people would require to survive in a situation like the one in which the Israelites existed, if God had not provided for their needs.

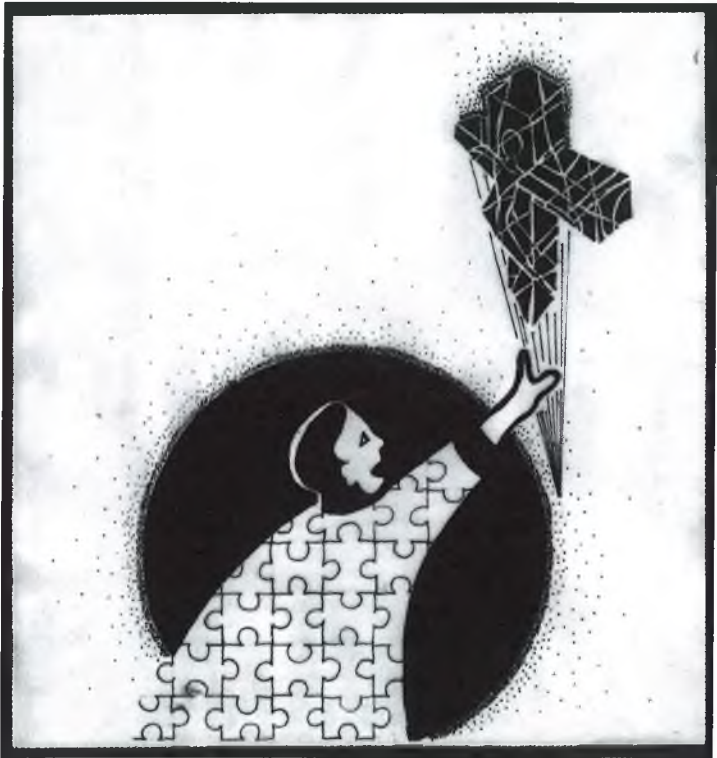
CONNECT

Psalm 78:17–55.

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapters 37, 38.

The “Madness” of the **Prophet**

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:10, NKJV).



You Want Me to Do What?

Num. 22:22–35;
1 Cor. 1:20, 21

Have you ever felt that God told you to do something illogical? Has He ever asked you to follow a plan that doesn't make sense, and you wondered how it would glorify Him? Often, we judge situations based on our own perspective; and we use our own experiences, background, and intuition to determine what we think is the right path.

“Excuse me, sir, I beg you some change,” he timidly asked me.

In many circumstances, I find myself with the opportunity to do something God asks of me, but it doesn't seem logical. Sometimes I think that maybe this is what God wanted 2,000 years ago. But now, things are different! So I ask myself what I should do, and often I rationalize what He says so that it makes sense to me. Here's a classic example:

I flew to Jamaica recently to visit this beautiful land. It was a long drive from the airport to where I was staying. It was a hot summer day as we wound along the narrow roads cut from the lush green landscape. Wary from driving, we stopped at a fruit stand to buy some food and stretch our legs. Stepping out of our hot, cramped van, I rubbed my eyes as I squinted in the bright sun. As my eyes adjusted, I saw a homeless man inching toward me. “Excuse me, sir, I beg you some change,” he timidly asked me. Now I'm quite aware that God tells me to give to the poor, but I thought, *Well, God had to mean that He only wanted me to help the poor who can't help themselves. I shouldn't just give money to any beggar who asks for it, because of course, he could waste it on liquor.* So I told the homeless man, “Sorry. I don't have any Jamaican money.”

Even though God may send us to do an illogical task, He knows what good can come out of it. Yes, it may seem strange; but God only calls us to follow His will. He will do the rest. First Corinthians 1:20, 21, reminds us that God's wisdom really surpasses all our ideas about what makes sense. As you read and study the story of Balaam this week, remember that although we may not understand God's plan, we may be a small puzzle piece to an incredibly big and detailed picture.

Gen. 3:1–7;
Num. 22:22–35;
Rev. 12:9

Evidence

Can Donkeys Really Talk?

Balaam is one of a handful of non-Jewish prophets to pronounce prophecy for the Israelites. Balaam was Balak's choice for speaking a curse upon the Jewish nation; but God allowed him to speak only blessings. On the road to see Balak, an angel allowed Balaam's donkey to speak in opposition to the cruel treatment it was receiving.

Only two times in the Bible do we read about talking animals.

Three times the donkey tried to back away from the angel blocking the road, and three times Balaam abused his donkey. When the donkey spoke to Balaam, it revealed Balaam's true heart. This was the same donkey he had always used on his journeys, yet Balaam cursed it. Balaam lost trust in his donkey just as he had lost trust in God. The same God who had told Balaam not to go to Balak the first time is the same God Balaam lost trust in, then did his own will.

Only two times in the Bible do we read about talking animals. The first animal is found in Genesis 3, where a talking serpent deceived Eve. Revelation 12:9 confirms that the serpent was Satan himself. In this account, Satan speaks through the animal in order to tempt Eve by twisting God's words. The second time we read of a talking animal is in Numbers 22, where we find the account of Balaam and his donkey.

There is great irony in these two instances, as both times there is great opposition to God and His specific directions. The serpent in Genesis is Satan deceiving Eve. In Numbers 22:22, the angel is sent to be an adversary against Balaam. The Hebrew word for adversary is *satan*. This word is used in Numbers 22:22 and Revelation 12:9.

In the case of Balaam, however, it was not Satan standing in the path. It was an angel of the Lord. God was not using the angel to block Balaam, because he was determined to follow his own will rather than God's. Balaam was the adversary to God's plan for blessing the Israelites.

Just a short time after this incident, Balaam spoke three blessings on the Israelite nation. History is not kind to Balaam as he is referenced in 2 Peter 2:14–16 and Revelation 2:12–14. He will always be remembered as one who would do anything for money.

REACT

What "talking donkeys" has God used in your life to help you turn around when you were headed down a wrong path?

The Conflicted Prophet

Numbers 22; 23; 24;
Deut. 1:30; 20:4;
Matt. 15:14;
1 Cor. 2:14;
2 Pet. 2:12–16;
Rev. 3:17, 18

A Prophet With a Divided Heart (Numbers 22; 2 Pet. 2:14–16)

Balaam is definitely a noteworthy character in God's book. Here is a prophet who communicates with the true God, yet is not an Israelite. He is a man who is conflicted—simultaneously wanting to please God on one hand, but wanting even more to gratify his own ego and greed on the other. Furthermore, he has a donkey that talks to him. Unique? Perhaps, but maybe more like us than it first appears.

Perhaps Balaam was like most of us.

Unfortunately for Balaam, his experiment with fence straddling comes to an end before we get too far into his story. One thing unique about God is that He cannot share His throne with others (Exod. 20:3). He doesn't live in a pantheon as just another one of the gods. That uniqueness made it difficult for Balaam, because he loved "the wages of unrighteousness" (2 Pet. 2:15, NKJV). Greed was vying for the throne of his heart, and Balaam would have to choose which god he would have, for as Jesus said, " 'No servant can serve two masters. . . . You cannot serve both God and Money' " (Luke 16:13, NIV).

Do we ever think, like Balaam, that we can do things our way and serve God at the same time?

Unresolved Sin Habits Will Take Over (Numbers 23; Titus 3:3–8)

The fact that God spoke to Balaam in dreams and visions implies that they had some kind of a significant relationship. What we know about God is that He takes us just as we are (Titus 3:3–5). He desires to do everything He can to help us grow out of our sinful habits that would otherwise eventually kill us. Balaam was no exception. So at the beginning of His relationship with Balaam, we can be sure God knew about his problem with greed. We can be sure that God pulled and tugged and wooed and pursued Balaam's heart. He wanted Balaam to experience the freedom of total commitment, the freedom of salvation by grace.

Balaam refused to deal with the deeply rooted habits of sin in his life. Instead of listening to the Holy Spirit, he rationalized, reasoned, and resisted Him until the problem of greed grew into a giant weed that filled the garden of his heart (Jude 11). By the time the delegation from Balak arrived, offering him riches, rewards, and honor, Balaam was ready to do what his heart had been telling him

to do for quite some time. The result of an unresolved sin led to a disastrous ending.

How can we resolve sin in our lives?

How Not to Love a Lie (2 Thess. 2:9–11; Rev. 2:14)

The interesting thing about Balaam is his professed preoccupation with seeking God's will. Why did he care so much about what God thought when he was going to do what he wanted to do anyway? Why did he keep pressing God for a different answer when he already knew what God's will was? Perhaps Balaam was like most of us. He liked to feel as if he was on good terms with God, but he still wanted to do his own thing. Aren't we the same way?

The apostle Paul tells us that people will be this way at the end of time. "They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie" (2 Thess. 2:10, 11, NIV). It's human nature to want to feel good about what we're doing, and Balaam was no exception. He knew too much about God to want to live apart from Him, so he decided to see if he could change God into what he wanted Him to be.

In a way, Balaam lived a rather legalistic life. He did exactly what God told him to do as far as fulfilling specific commands. However, he violated the principles upon which God's specific commands were based. He wouldn't curse Israel with words (Num. 24:12, 13), but later he would accomplish the same end by enticing the Israelites to sin (Rev. 2:14). The Pharisees had the same problem in Jesus' day. They would tithe their spices, but had no problem plotting to kill someone on the side. They were good at doing what they were told, but their hearts were not in it. Jesus rebuked them for overlooking the principle and just going through the motions (Matt. 23:23).

A spirituality of outward good works without a changed heart is not a spirituality that is from God. In the end, Balaam is an example of someone who "tweaked" his own idea of God's will enough so that he was able to feel comfortable doing pretty much whatever he wanted to do. He didn't love the truth, so God let him believe a lie. His story is a warning to people living in a generation when nothing is absolute, and truth is considered relative.

How do we know whether we love the truth or not? How can we be sure?

God's Will Is Accomplished (Numbers 24)

In spite of Balaam's selfish actions that directly went in the face of God's plan for Israel, God orchestrated circumstances in such a way that His will was still accomplished. He turned Balak's request for a curse into the reality of a blessing.

How has God turned something bad into good in your life?

Testimony
"One Man's Sin"

Ps. 81:11, 12

"The Lord appeared to Balaam and said, 'If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them. . . .' Thus far the Lord would permit Balaam to follow his own will, because he was determined upon it. He did not seek to do the will of God, but chose his own course. . . .

"It is a perilous thing to allow an unchristian trait to live in the heart."

"There are thousands at the present day who are pursuing a similar course. They would have no difficulty in understanding their duty if it were in harmony with their inclinations. It is plainly set before them in the Bible or is clearly indicated by circumstances and reason. But because these evidences are contrary to their desires and inclinations they frequently set them aside and presume to go to God to learn their duty. With great apparent conscientiousness they pray long and earnestly for light. But God will not be trifled with. He often permits such persons to follow their own desires and to suffer the result. 'My people would not hearken to My voice. . . . So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels.' Psalm 81:11, 12. When one clearly sees a duty, let him not presume to go to God with the prayer that he may be excused from performing it. He should rather, with a humble, submissive spirit, ask for divine strength and wisdom to meet its claims."¹

"Balaam . . . had received great light and enjoyed special privileges, but a single cherished sin poisoned the entire character and caused [his] destruction.

"It is a perilous thing to allow an unchristian trait to live in the heart. One cherished sin will, little by little, debase the character, bringing all its nobler powers into subjection to the evil desire. The removal of one safeguard from the conscience, the indulgence of one evil habit, one neglect of the high claims of duty, breaks down the defenses of the soul and opens the way for Satan to come in and lead us astray. The only safe course is to let our prayers go forth daily from a sincere heart, as did David, 'Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not.' Psalm 17:5."²

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 440, 441.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 452.

Numbers 22;
Acts 5:29

How-to Staying Strong for God

Balaam reminds us of some character traits that would be helpful when facing temptation and peer pressure. Let's put it into practice. You are just getting to know some new friends. They know you are a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, but they have no idea what it means to live like one. These friends know you are strapped for cash. They've discovered a great job opportunity and have invited you to join. The high school has a football game every Friday night, and they need a group to pick up trash in the bleachers afterward. The pay is great for only two hours of work. You know this job is scheduled on the special day God wants you to spend with Him. But part of your mind rationalizes why it's probably OK. What do you do?

In the end, he lost the money anyway.

Consult God. Discerning right from wrong is your first step. You may not need to spend long hours in prayer and study about this particular issue, because you know that Sabbath begins at sundown Friday, and that you should keep it holy by not working. So you might need to pray that God will give you the strength to do what you already know is right. Other situations may not be as clear as this one. In these cases, prayer and Bible study will make a remarkable impact.

Tell others. This is the step that makes Balaam's story stand out. When he decided what God wanted him to do, he boldly told the princes and eventually the king (Num. 22:12, 13, 18, 23, 38) that he had to speak the words of God. He knew the importance of following God and the folly of going against Him.

Tell yourself. This step comes out of necessity. Balaam consulted God and even told others what his beliefs were, but when he had to decide, he chose to go with the Moabites to see if he could curse Israel. He was worried about the money he would lose and his reputation as a paid diviner (Num. 22:7). In the end, he lost the money anyway.

If you know what's right, keep telling yourself. And just do it. You will save yourself a lot of trouble. True story.

REACT

How does having money or pleasing people compare to the success story of your Christian life? Whoever was praised by God for how much money they earned?

Do We Really Have Free Choice?

Num. 22:18;
1 Pet. 3:13, 15, 16

When Balak's entourage arrived to request Balaam's presence, Balaam said something rather curious. Read Numbers 22:18. He said, in other words, I can do nothing in regards to God's people except what He has said I should do.

We applaud the fact that God has given us freedom of choice. We can choose whether or not to accept Jesus as our Redeemer. We can choose whether to obey the commandments. We can choose what to eat and drink. We can choose our friends. Regardless of the consequences, we know God allows us to make choices. So why does Balaam make this statement? What could possibly keep him from uttering a curse on the children of Israel?

Was Satan right?

When Satan rebelled in the courts of heaven, one of his arguments was this issue of choice. *God doesn't let us choose whether to obey or not. He requires blind obedience because He knows there's something better for us.* Is that the reason Balaam couldn't curse the Israelites? Was Satan right?

God does not arbitrarily allow or disallow our decisions. Numbers 23:21 says that God had observed no "iniquity in Jacob, nor has He seen wickedness in Israel. The Lord his God is with him" (NKJV). It was because of Israel's righteousness at that point that God would not allow Balaam to curse His people.

This is a great example of what Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:13, 15, 16. The Bible tells us that we will face conflict, but if we are living according to the words of Scripture, no one can harm us for eternity. Does that mean we're invincible? No. Does that mean we're immortal because we're keeping the Sabbath? Absolutely not. Our obedience is not a prerequisite for receiving God's protection by God. Rather, it is a *result* of His protection.

Putting ourselves in Israel's place, we find that there is nothing anyone can do to harm us eternally if we live by God's Word. Balaam's story teaches us that while we can physically harm or be harmed, no one can change the status of a person's salvation.

We have the freedom of choice, but that freedom does not allow us to command God to save or not save other people.

REACT

What type of things must one consider when making choices? Does the Bible offer a blueprint for making choices?

2 Cor. 3:17, 18

Exploration
Reign in Our Hearts

CONCLUDE

God saves! This is His passion. Human passions seem to run completely contrary to this. Greed. Lust. Tyranny. Praise God that He is in the business of transforming sinful human ambitions if we will, with His guidance, *seek* and *follow* Him. Then greed becomes money to meet needs and to further His work. Lust is obliterated in favor of love for God and His creation; and tyranny ceases to reign. Oh, for strength, wisdom, and courage to avoid Balaam's path.

CONSIDER

- Analyzing how you might be able to make a difference for someone using just \$25 (or a larger amount, if you wish). If you can afford to, make that difference this week.
- Discussing with a friend or family member the difference between love and lust. Present specific scenarios which clearly show the results of one practice over the other.
- Playing charades to reveal common selfish tendencies and redeeming god-like qualities.
- Conducting interviews asking which law would be a top priority for the person you are interviewing if that person ruled the world. Based on your interviews, determine if people seem to be more in favor of freedom of choice or control.
- Praying that God will give you evidence of His leading in your life. Journal instances of that leading for at least one week.
- Observing instances in nature of God's perfection versus sin-infested results.

CONNECT

Matthew 6:9–14.

Chris Blake, *Swimming Against the Current*, pp. 53–57, 124–126, 157–160.

The lyrics for “Our God Reigns” at <http://gospelyrics.blogspot.com/2007/08/our-god-reigns.html>.

Immorality on the
Border

*“Nor let us commit sexual immorality, as some of them did,
and in one day twenty-three thousand fell”*

(1 Cor. 10:8, NKJV).



Numbers 25;
1 Kings 1–10;
11:1–13

Introduction

The Rise and Fall of King Solomon

When Solomon began his reign, he acknowledged God's power and great wisdom. When God came to Solomon and asked him what he wanted, he asked for one thing that no king before or after had asked of the Lord—wisdom. The Lord granted his request and blessed him further because he had asked God for the one thing that would bring glory and honor to Him. In this instance, we see Solomon humbling himself while acknowledging his desire to serve God and his inability to do so without God's help.

**He lost sight of the Living God who had given him
all that he had.**

For a while, Solomon did nothing without consulting God. People viewed him as generous and as an extraordinary ruler. The surrounding nations marveled at his success. They even came to him to learn why he was so successful; and at the beginning, he attributed it to the Lord of heaven. Thus, he was able to witness for God.

Solomon, however, became proud of his accomplishments and began to believe that he alone was responsible for all that he accomplished and was therefore worthy of much praise. This pride and belief in himself was his downfall. "In seeking to glorify himself before the world, he sold his honor and integrity. . . . The conscientious, considerate spirit that had marked his dealings with the people during the early part of his reign, was now changed. From the wisest and most merciful of rulers, he degenerated into a tyrant."^{*} He also married many women from other nations who did not worship Yahweh. As a result, he lost sight of the Living God who had given him all that he had. How much like his ancestors he had become!

As you study this week's lesson about the children of Israel's infidelity, ask yourself if you are traveling the same route today. Are you abusing the very gifts that are meant to draw you closer to God?

^{*} *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 55, 56.

Logos
*So Close but
yet So Far*

Numbers 25; 31;
Deut. 21:10–14;
1 Cor. 10:1–14;
Rev. 2:14

Charmed Into Disobedience by Strange Women (Numbers 25)

The army of Israel began to commit adultery with the daughters of Moab. The Midianitish women influenced the Hebrew men into worshiping Baal-peor. This kindled God's anger against Israel. After being instructed by God, Moses told the judges of Israel to kill all the men that were joined to Baal-peor and to hang their heads under the sun so that His anger would be turned away. Twenty-four thousand deaths occurred as a result.

“We must be careful to weigh both the words and the deeds of those who claim to offer spiritual help.”

While the children of Israel were weeping at the door of the tabernacle, Zimri brought a Midianitish harlot into the camp in the sight of Moses and the rest of the congregation. Phinehas rose up from among the congregation and thrust a javelin through Zimri as well as the Midianitish harlot. Because Phinehas was zealous for his God, he received the covenant of peace. God's wrath was thus turned away from the children of Israel.

The combination of sexual sin and idolatry that Numbers 25 opens with “was Balaam's idea (see 31:16; Revelation 2:14), the same Balaam who had just blessed Israel and who had appeared to be on their side. It is easy to see how the Israelites were misled, for Balaam seemed to say and do all the right things. . . . Not until Balaam had inflicted great damage on them did the Israelites realize that he was greedy, used sorcery, and was deeply involved in pagan religious practices. We must be careful to weigh both the words and the deeds of those who claim to offer spiritual help.”¹

Midianites Defeated by Children of Israel (Numbers 31)

A thousand men were chosen from each of the 12 tribes of Israel to fight against the Midianites. The children of Israel killed all the Midianite men as well as five kings of Midian. They took captive all the women and children, along with all their cattle and flocks. They also destroyed their cities. Moses became angry with them because they had saved the same women who caused the children of Israel to worship Baal-peor. So he commanded that every male among the children and all the women who were not virgins were to be killed.

He also instructed the Israelites that if they killed a person or touched a body, they were to stay outside the camp for seven days and purify themselves on the third and the seventh day. They also had to purify all their raiment and all that was made of skins and goat hair, as well as anything made of leather and wood. Only then would they be clean and allowed to reenter the camp.

Today, such measures seem harsh and even barbaric. However, “when we discover sin in our lives, we must deal with it completely. When the Israelites later entered the Promised Land, it was their indifferent attitude to sin that eventually ruined them. Moses dealt with the sin promptly and completely. When God points out sin, move quickly to remove it from your life.”²

Don't Let History Repeat Itself (1 Cor. 10:1–14)

The children of Israel were to take possession of the land that God promised Abraham centuries earlier. They were led by the mighty arm of God, and were therefore guaranteed success because God can never be defeated. Their part was to let God help them to be a holy people. However, their behavior and desires were self-defeating. Idolatry and adultery brought them down.

We are on the borders of the Promised Land of heaven. Therefore, let us learn from the mistakes that the children of Israel made so we won't fall into the same traps.

REACT

1. What attitudes and motives caused the Israelites to take part in idol worship and sexual wrongdoing? How are these attitudes and motives present today both in the church and in society? What can we do about this presence?

2. What steps can we take to make sure we don't make the same mistakes the Israelites made?

1. *New International Version: Life Application Study Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1997), p. 259.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 267.

“It was when the Israelites were in a condition of outward ease and security that they were led into sin. They failed to keep God ever before them, they neglected prayer and cherished a spirit of self-confidence. Ease and self-indulgence left the

“It takes time to degrade those formed in the image of God to the brutal or the satanic.”

citadel of the soul unguarded, and debasing thoughts found entrance. It was the traitors within the walls that overthrew the strongholds of principle and betrayed Israel into the power of Satan. It is thus that Satan still seeks to compass the ruin of the soul. A long preparatory process, unknown to the world, goes on in the heart before the Christian commits open sin. The mind does not come down at once from purity and holiness to depravity, corruption, and crime. It takes time to degrade those formed in the image of God to the brutal or the satanic. By beholding we become changed. By the indulgence of impure thoughts man can so educate his mind that sin which he once loathed will become pleasant to him.”¹

“Israel’s sin at Beth-peor brought the judgments of God upon the nation, and though the same sins may not now be punished as speedily, they will as surely meet retribution. ‘If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.’ 1 Corinthians 3:17. Nature has affixed terrible penalties to these crimes—penalties which, sooner or later, will be inflicted upon every transgressor. It is these sins more than any other that have caused the fearful degeneracy of our race, and the weight of disease and misery with which the world is cursed.”²

“We must be aided by the abiding influence of the Holy Spirit, which will attract the mind upward, and habituate it to dwell on pure and holy things. And we must give diligent study to the word of God.”³

REACT

Your classmate confronts you with the idea that everyone seems to be engaging in premarital sex, so why should she/he behave differently? What would your advice be?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 459.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 460.

1 Cor. 10:8

Evidence

By Beholding We Become Changed

The book of Numbers begins with the Lord's commandment to number the Israelites according to their tribes in preparation for the occupation of Canaan. Some of the highlights of this book include the inspection of the Promised Land by the 12 spies; the rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram; Israel's sexual immorality; and the fiery serpents. This week, we are focusing on Israel's harlotry with the Moabites.

We are not always aware of the danger Satan sets before us.

Although the story of the Israelites' sin at Shittim happened long ago, we can learn from their failures on the borders of the Promised Land, because we are on the borders of the heavenly Canaan. Satan unfortunately succeeded in hindering the Israelites from entering the Promised Land by enticing them to commit immoral sexual acts with the Moabites. Similarly, Adventists today face the danger of being lured into committing sins that might prevent them from entering heaven.

At the camp in Shittim, only the River Jordan lay between the Israelites and Canaan. The certainty of God's presence was with them in the form of a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night. So why did they not have the faith to cross over?

1. They were living a life of "outward ease and security."¹ They "neglected prayer and cherished a spirit of self-confidence."²

2. They formed close friendships with the surrounding people, which eventually weakened their morality and caused them to fall.

The people of God are facing similar dangers today. Many of the signs pointing to our Lord's soon return have been fulfilled and are being fulfilled. How much more do we need to study and to pray? We are not always aware of the danger Satan sets before us. Therefore, we can never trust ourselves (1 Cor. 10:12). Jesus, however, has promised safety to those who will watch and pray (Matt. 26:41). There will be a day when God will destroy sin and those who have clung to it. His love, however, will surround those who have accepted His gift of salvation. Let us pray, then, without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17).

REACT

What are ways the Bible gives us for resisting temptation? Phil. 4:8; Ps. 119:9, 11; James 4:7, 8.

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 459.

2. *Ibid.*

After a difficult journey across the desert, the children of Israel finally arrived at the border of the Promised Land. Very little was left to the imagination now. The view of the rolling plains and the captivating scent from a multitude of plant species should have inspired them to claim God's Promised Land. Unfortunately, they allowed themselves to be taken in by the ever-scheming and calculating devil.

We, too, are prone to risk it all.

Like the Israelites, Satan also will tempt us to grumble, complain, and doubt the goodness of God. When everything that He has prepared for us is within sight, while we are at the borders of the heavenly Canaan, we, too, are prone to risk it all.

To make sure that we are counted among those who arrive safely in the heavenly Canaan, each of us needs to prayerfully keep up our defenses against the devil by putting on the whole armor of faith. Because of the subtle nature through which the devil weaves his evil web, it is essential that we remain alert. The following three steps will help us do just that.

Avoid being idle. There are times when we leave godly things and our minds become idle. This could be a result of the various allurements that the world flashes at us. Our senses become numb toward heavenly things. In Philippians 4:8, Paul encourages us to keep our minds on that which is virtuous.

Avoid evil. Sin surrounds us every day. However, we cannot use this as an excuse to be overpowered by it. In John 17:15, Jesus prayed for us to be kept from evil while in this world.

Take action against sin. As much as we try to stay away from sin, it can and will manifest itself among us. Once it does, we must as individuals and as a church do something about it. In John 8, Christ gave examples of how to gently but firmly deal with sin.

Sin is not merely doing something wrong. The motives and desires that cause us to sin are also evil. Christ offers to cleanse us from these evil motives and desires. David offered a prayer found in Psalm 51, asking God for re-creation.

REACT

The destruction of the Midianites was extensive and protracted. What is the significance of this for us?

Sincengani Mabshena Ncube, Pretoria, South Africa

Jude 17–22

Opinion

Not Much Has Changed

The Israelites had problems staying free of sexual immorality en route to the Promised Land. With each place, and with its new men and women, new customs, and new vices, the people of Israel couldn't seem to help themselves. Though they lived thousands of years ago, are we all that different? Take a good look around you—religious leaders hauled off to jail for sexual abuse of minors; pastors confessing pornography addictions; church members secretly struggling with heinous sins. We are not immune.

We are not alone in our struggles to stay on the right track.

The book of Jude serves up interesting perspectives on fighting immorality with the grace of God. Back then, there were those who sought to pervert God's grace by luring believers into thinking that they had license to sin because God had saved them. But it is because we are saved that immorality has no place in our lives. Our steady defense against the snares laid out for us by Satan is to surround ourselves with the armor of God. For believers, that concept isn't anything new. However, do we take it seriously?

Jude 17–22 says, "But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. They said to you, 'In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires.' These are the men who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit. But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit. Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life. Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh" (NIV).

We are not alone in our struggles to stay on the right track. As the Israelites before us, we sin and fall short of Christ's plan for us. Thankfully, redemption and direction are readily available for the taking.

REACT

1. Have there been recent scandals in Christian circles you know of that have completely shocked you? How have you reacted to them?
2. Aside from girding ourselves up with the armor of Christ, what else can we do to stay on a path of purity and morality?

On the Border Once Again

1 Cor. 10:6-11

CONCLUDE

The children of Israel sat poised on the edge of the Promised Land. For 40 years, they had been preparing for this moment, hungering for the fulfillment of this promise. In desperation, Satan lunged one last time and almost ripped the prize from their hands. The story of their spiritual seduction into immorality and idolatry has been preserved to strengthen us who stand at the brink of eternity. With the heavenly Canaan in view, we can learn from the mistakes and weaknesses of the Hebrews and guard ourselves against the same temptations that are sure to come.

CONSIDER

- Checking out premaritalsex.info on the Internet and prayerfully considering some of the “benefits of abstinence” and “strategies and guidelines” listed on this site. Make your own list of reasons why you choose to save yourself physically for the one you will marry.
- Rewriting Numbers 25 in a modern-day setting. What might spiritual seduction and idolatry look like today?
- Having someone share with your class why they chose to stay pure until marriage and why they don’t regret that choice.
- Writing a poem about your desire to honor God with your body and your spirit.
- Making a chart of immoral people who crossed Jesus’ path and how He treated them.
- Discussing the following statement with your Sabbath School class or Bible study group: “Sin is the illegitimate fulfillment of legitimate desires.” How does this concept relate to sexual immorality? How can we have a healthy attitude toward God’s gift of sex and still abhor perversions of it?

CONNECT

Dannah Gresh, *And the Bride Wore White: The Seven Secrets to Sexual Purity*;
P. Roger Hillerstrom, *Intimate Deception: Escaping the Trap of Sexual Impurity*;
Elizabeth Elliott, *Passion and Purity*.

The Second Generation:
Admonitions

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might’ ” (Deut. 6:4, 5, NKJV).



It is said that we are condemned to repeat the mistakes of our parents. Sometimes we try to blame our failures on our genes. We can argue that the children of the Israelites who were redeemed from slavery had the same character faults as their parents. All this may be true. However, God does not desire for us to continue failing the same way our parents have. Rather, He desires for us to rise above our circumstances. "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction" (1 Cor. 10:11, NASB).

I felt the pain of not having taken the time to study.

Personally, I have a difficult time learning from other people's mistakes. I like to find things out on my own. This has led me to experience some pain that I could have avoided if only I had listened to the warnings I received. As a freshman at Andrews University, I received a lot of advice about going to bed at a decent time, eating right, and taking time to study. However, as many freshmen do, I completely ignored most of this advice. I stayed up late watching movies and playing video games. While it seemed fun in the beginning, when exams came around for Foundations of Biology and Western Heritage, I felt the pain of not having taken the time to study.

I had ignored the admonitions of my parents, RAs, deans, and teachers. The children of Israel had the same problem. God and Moses warned them verbally. However, they also chose to learn the hard way. God again gave verbal warnings to the second generation to follow His commands so all would go well in their lives. It is important for our well-being to heed such warnings. Ecclesiastes says it's better to be a poor youth who is willing to receive admonition, than a rich king who is not (Eccles. 4:13).

As you read the lesson for this week, I challenge you to examine your life and, with an open heart, take note of the areas God may be admonishing you to change.

REACT

1. Describe a time when you did not listen to the warnings of others. What did you learn from that experience?
2. Describe a time when you heeded the admonition of a friend and experienced the resulting blessing.

Numbers 26–32 deals with events prior to the Israelites' conquest of Canaan. The last of the former generation has died (Numbers 26), and the second generation is preparing to enter. They are aware of their history and the trouble caused by their parents. The daughters of Zelophehad are aware that their father had sinned (Num. 27:3), but they wanted to ensure that he was not further punished for the lack of sons.* God backs the women's request and commands that they be given their father's inheritance. Here is an instance of God's justice intermingled with mercy.

It is much better to obey God the first time!

Though the older generation was condemned to die in the wilderness, God spared their children and fulfilled His promises to the nation as a whole. To bless them, God must have their loyalty. He uses a number of offerings, laws, sacrifices, and vows (Numbers 26–30) to remind them of their ritual obligations to Him. These were to teach the Israelites the principle of substitutionary death for the forgiveness of sins. They were reminders that it is God who saves them from their sins.

Chapters 31 and 32 detail the final military acts of the Israelites, as well as the pledge that the Reubenites and half the tribe of Manasseh will join their kinsman in conquering the Promised Land. This second generation has proved more faithful than their parents, and the promise is about to be fulfilled. It is often easy to pass judgment on those who have gone before us, but we should avoid doing so. Yet, we need to learn from their mistakes.

What are you doing that is contrary to God's will? Do you still expect Him to bless you? If He forgives you, will there still be consequences for your actions, in spite of His grace? The biggest lesson we can learn from the Israelites' wilderness saga is that it is much better to obey God the first time! However, there is comfort in knowing that when we mess up, God can set things right, even though the road back may be longer and more painful.

REACT

What promises do you believe God has made to you, personally?

*Roy E. Gane, *Leviticus, Numbers: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), pp. 740, 741.

Logos
*Faithful Wounds of a
Friend*

Numbers 26–32,
Prov. 27:6;
Romans 5

Deceived? (Numbers 31; 32)

Israel's victory over the Midianites must have been quite impressive. Their commanding officers counted the soldiers and discovered that not one Israelite soldier had been killed (Num. 31:49). Moses had sent a thousand men from each tribe into battle (Num. 31:5), and all had returned victorious. Is it possible that the Reubenites and Gadites were deceived into thinking that the conquests west of the Jordan would be just as easy? That their absence from among the fighting men would not make any real difference?

Turn away from God's express will, and if you are fortunate, you will get to die a natural death in the desert.

Or perhaps it was just a simple matter of greed. God had already told Moses that the land was to be distributed by casting lots (Num. 26:54, 55). Had the sight of the fertile grasslands east of Jordan prompted an attempt at preemptive deal making?

The fact is, we are not told what their real motive was. We are left to surmise what lay behind their request by how Moses responded to them.

Mad Moses (Num. 32:6–14)

Moses was very near 120 years old (Deut. 34:7), yet his eyes and strength had not failed him—eyes that had seen Pharaoh's army drown in the Red Sea and strength that had lugged stone tablets written by the finger of God off the top of Mount Sinai. Now this! Even today his response to Reuben and Gad seems to smolder on the pages of the Bible with righteous rage. Moses accuses them of wanting to sit out upcoming battles of conquest, of doing just what their fathers had done by refusing to follow God wholeheartedly, and of being "a brood of sinners" (Num. 32:14, NIV).

Moses had just sent twelve thousand Israelites into battle and defeated five Midianite kings (Num. 31:8). Amongst the dead was Israel's old nemesis Balaam, son of Beor (Num. 31:8). Praise God! But you don't have to go to war to suffer defeat! Moses had seen it too many times before. Turn away from God's express will, and if you are fortunate, you will get to die a natural death in the desert. Moses loved these people. He knew for a fact that God loved even this "brood of sinners," and so he warns them of the dire consequences of their actions. "If you

turn away from following him, he will again leave all this people in the desert, and you will be the cause of their destruction” (Num. 32:15, NIV).

Yes. Moses is angry! But notice he does not say, “If you turn away from following me.” He has learned to be angry about the things God is angry about and yet not sin.

Faithful Wounds (Num. 32:16–42)

For the sake of argument, let’s assume that Reuben and Gad were guilty of everything Moses accused them of. Notice the effect of Moses’ words: “Then they came up to him and said . . .” (Num. 32:16, NIV). Whatever their motive might have been for making their request, the recounting of their father’s failures in the past had its desired effect, and they came even closer to Moses.

At best, Reuben and Gad had not taken offense at Moses’ tirade against them. At worst, they had quickly repented of their grievous mistake and had come up with a solution that honored God. However, they were still not in a hurry to assuage Moses’ fear of another full-blown apostasy. Instead, they restated their desire to build sheep pens and cities for their families east of Jordan (Num. 32:16). Then without a hint of hurt pride at Moses’ harsh accusations, they proposed to go ahead of all Israel and fight the battles of conquest on the west side of Jordan.

Moses favorably responded to their proposal, and the rest of Numbers 32 takes the format of a formal contract with all the conditions and promises being publicly restated, along with devastating consequence for any failure to follow through on the part of Reuben and Gad.

Proverbs 27:6 states that “faithful are the wounds of a friend” (NKJV). Reuben and Gad had allowed their eyes to be opened by the white-hot anger of Moses’ words, because they had come to trust him. Even if Moses were dead wrong in his hasty judgment of their proposal, they knew where his heart was, and they did not take offense. What a dramatic change in leader and those being led!

REACT

1. God had given specific directions on how the land was to be divided up. Is He always this flexible and willing to consider human counteroffers?
2. Do you have a “friend” like Moses whose words you will listen to even when they are wrong or extremely painful?
3. Is there an instance in your life right now where you need to be in the forefront of your fellow Christians’ battles for a place in the kingdom?

Write the Last Chapter

Deut. 6:4, 5;
1 Cor. 10:11, 12

“Satan well knows the material with which he has to deal in the human heart. He knows—for he has studied with fiendish intensity for thousands of years—the points most easily assailed in every character; and through successive generations he has wrought to overthrow the strongest men, princes in Israel, by the same

“Today the challenge to Israel might be repeated.”

temptations that were so successful at Baalpeor. All along through the ages there are strewn wrecks of character that have been stranded upon the rocks of sensual indulgence. As we approach the close of time, as the people of God stand upon the borders of the heavenly Canaan, Satan will, as of old, redouble his efforts to prevent them from entering the goodly land. He lays his snares for every soul. It is not the ignorant and uncultured merely that need to be guarded; he will prepare his temptations for those in the highest positions, in the most holy office; if he can lead them to pollute their souls, he can through them destroy many. And he employs the same agents now as he employed three thousand years ago.”¹

“They [Israel] had often felt impatient and rebellious because of their long wandering in the wilderness; but the Lord had not been chargeable with this delay in possessing Canaan; He was more grieved than they because He could not bring them into immediate possession of the Promised Land, and thus display before all nations His mighty power in the deliverance of His people. With their distrust of God, with their pride and unbelief, they had not been prepared to enter Canaan. They would in no way represent that people whose God is the Lord; for they did not bear His character of purity, goodness, and benevolence.”²

“Today the challenge to Israel might be repeated. The laws which God gave His ancient people were wiser, better, and more humane than those of the most civilized nations of the earth. The laws of the nations bear marks of the infirmities and passions of the unrenewed heart; but God’s law bears the stamp of the divine.”³

REACT

In what areas of your life are you ready to rely on God to lead you safely into the heavenly promised land?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 457, 458.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 464.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 465.

Num. 13:1–33;
14:1–43;
20:1–12

How-to
Hope Amid Mistakes

Two examples of what happens when we lose our faith in God and choose not to follow where He leads are (1) when Moses forgot that God was the One who brought water out of the rock and not he himself, and (2) when the people of Israel forgot that God Himself could win the battles with the Canaanites and that these victories would not involve the strength of their own armies. Both these stories end with the inability of God's people to realize the destiny God so much wanted them to have. These stories can bring us hope if we remember the following:

All of us make mistakes.

Believe in the call and direction of God. If God has called you to do something, trust in His leading. Sometimes it feels as though He has promised us something that seems impossible to accomplish. Then it's easy to second-guess Him or to feel that we must have misunderstood what He meant. This often causes us to set our own goals, which we feel we can accomplish ourselves. God, however, has given us many examples of the folly of looking to ourselves to accomplish something He has promised He will do.

Study the examples God has left for you. Not only through the Bible, but also through the life and testimony of those around you, God is calling you to learn from the mistakes of others and to choose to follow His paths. *All of us make mistakes.* But God asks us to learn from each other so that we can truly become like Him.

God loves you no matter how big or small your sins or mistakes may be. The story of God's response to Moses' striking the rock instead of just speaking to it, as God directed, gives us a clear view of how God feels about us when we sin. He could not allow Moses to lead His people into the Promised Land under these circumstances, but He never changed how He felt about Moses. Try to purposely see God in this way when you condemn yourself for a misstep or an outright sin. God wants us to repent. He does not always take away the consequences of our sins, but He doesn't change how much He loves us. Our sins may change circumstances on earth, but if we learn from them, they also will help us grow closer to the God who loves us unconditionally!

Ask yourself tough questions. What would have happened if God had allowed His people to doubt Him, believe in their own strength, and still receive the same rewards promised? How do you see a loving God in these examples?

The human being's sense of smell is the strongest of all the senses in triggering memories. For me, the sharp scent of cedar makes me long for my Texas home. Moses had wandered for 40 years in the desert with his nation grumbling behind him. After one attempt to cross into the land God had promised, after lies were told and consequences faced, Moses once again stands at the edge of this land. He can smell it. So Moses asks God for a favor. And God responds.

**If I were standing on the hills near my home . . . , I would be . . .
trying like a ninja to get there.**

Moses does not ask to go in, to just stick his toe over the border, or to go for a helicopter flight to see the territory. He doesn't ask for a vision of what will be or for a bank deposit slip proving the future success of his beloved people. He simply asks who will take over what he has been doing for 40 years.

I know that if I were standing on the hills near my home and was told "No," I would be wheedling and begging and trying like a ninja to get there. But Moses isn't thinking about himself. He's thinking about the people he loves, the people he has led and pleaded with for over the last four decades. Home is a quick jog away, but he only asks that God makes sure this baby nation is taken care of when he no longer has the job.

Sometimes, all I want is to be home, to sleep under the big bright Texas stars, and to breathe deeply the scent of cedar. And Moses? All he wanted was for Israel to succeed in following God. Moses wanted the babies born in the desert to grow up on the land meant for them. Moses had been free in Egypt. However, he had been traipsing through a desert for years, trapped by the failures of his people. Still, all he wanted was for them to make it home. And God? Well, God did just that. He led them home.

REACT

1. Who, in your life, has never given up on you? Why do you think they continue to hold out for your success?
2. When you reach the end of your days and reflect on your life, what do you want others to remember about you?
3. Have you been impressed to pray for or encourage someone who appears to be struggling? Did you follow through on those impressions? What were the results?

Jennifer Ogden, Austin, Texas, U.S.A.

Numbers 13; 14; 20

Exploration

Been There; Done That?

CONCLUDE

We can choose a different course for our lives based on what we learn from the lives of others. The stories of the Israelites wandering in the desert provide excellent material to study.

CONSIDER

- Comparing the report Moses requested in Numbers 13:17–20 with the one he received from the spies in verses 26–29. What motive(s) did the majority of the spies appeal to when they argued for their preferred course of action?
- Writing a list of the questions and complaints in Numbers 13:28–14:4 and 20:3–6. What theme(s) do you see repeated?
- Asking five or six physically fit people to stand side by side in a row. Instruct them to face forward as you walk behind them. Push one or two of the individuals out of line. Comment about how easy it was to do that. Next, have the members of the line link arms. Again, push one or two individuals out (if possible). Why was it more difficult this time? How does this relate to the ten fearful spies?
- Discussing with friends which is more powerful in your lives—faith or fear—and under what circumstances each one is more powerful.
- Listening to a copy of Michael Card’s album titled *The Beginning*. The songs “The Wilderness,” “Lift up the Suffering Symbol,” and “A Face That Shone” are particularly appropriate for this week’s study.
- Exploring in your journal the role fear plays in your life. Think about the information you receive that feeds your fear and about the times you have exercised faith. Ponder what the difference was between those negative and positive experiences. What can you do now to strengthen faith?

CONNECT

Hebrews 11:24–29.

Read April 19, May 11, and October 5 in Oswald Chambers’s *My Utmost for His Highest*. The readings can be accessed online at <http://www.rbc.org/utmost/index.php>.

lesson thirteen

DECEMBER 19-26

Cities of **Refuge**

“We . . . who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”

(Heb. 6:18-20, NKJV).



Numbers 35

Introduction

Guaranteed Lifetime Protection

Imagine what your life would be like if you were suddenly whisked off to a new city where you were given a new identity, a new job, and a new past. You could never speak of your real past again. You were even told you couldn't contact your family or friends back home. This has been a reality for over 17,000 Americans.

“Do not contact anyone back home or go back—ever!”

The United States Marshals Service offers lifetime protection to witnesses whose lives become jeopardized by their willingness to testify in court against indicted criminals. Once accepted into the witness-protection program, protected witnesses are moved in a random path and schedule to their new city of residence, where they are given a new identity, name, job, history, and documentation. It's as though their past never existed; they are now actors in their own new lives.

The most important rule in the program is “Do not contact anyone back home or go back—ever!” It's one thing to change your name, but to never see your friends or family again? What would Christmastime be like if you couldn't have any contact with your old friends or family or go home? The U.S. Marshals Service Web site states that “No program participant who follows security guidelines has ever been harmed while under the active protection of the Marshals Service.” Any loss they've had occurred because someone voluntarily left the safety of the Marshals Service protection.

This isn't so different from the “cities of refuge” we read about in Numbers 35. After accidentally killing someone, a person could seek refuge in one of these predetermined cities until their trial. Once found innocent, they would be safely returned to this city, where they were guaranteed safety from anyone avenging the blood of the one accidentally killed. They were to remain there until the death of the high priest, at which point they were free to return to their homes without fear of harm. However, if they ever wandered out before this time, the “avengers” of the victims could rightly take their lives. To stay in the city meant guaranteed safety; to leave was to walk out of that protection and put your life back in jeopardy.

Are you choosing to remain in the spiritual protection program God offers us? Are you choosing to follow the guidelines God has given us that protect us from one who waits for us outside our safe area? This week, we'll take a look at God's protection program for the Promised Land and its relevance for us today.

Set Aside, Just in Case

Numbers 33–36;
Josh. 20:1–7;
Ephesians 2

The children of Israel are on the verge of walking into the Promised Land. God is fulfilling His word. The command is given to set aside land as cities of refuge for people who take the life of a fellow human.

“This merciful provision was rendered necessary by the ancient custom of private vengeance, by which the punishment of the murderer devolved on the nearest relative or the next heir of the deceased. . . . The Lord did not see fit to abolish this custom at that time, but He made provision to ensure the safety of those who should take life unintentionally.”¹

You had to make it to the safe zone without being tagged.

These cities were to be no more than a half day’s walk, and they were placed on either side of the Jordan for easy access.² People sent to a city of refuge were guaranteed a trial. This was their only hope—six cities set aside, just close enough, just safe enough, just in case.

The Right for Blood (Num. 35:16–21)

Whether it was intended or unintended, it was still a relative’s right to seek capital punishment on behalf of the deceased. God allowed this, and some perhaps acted upon their right, but it was also the wisdom and mercy of God that set aside a place of refuge for those who killed someone unintentionally.

If You Make It, You’re In (Num. 35:22–28)

Cities of refuge were designed to take in everyone from the citizen to the alien who lived in the land who had no papers to prove who he or she was. The only requirement was making it safely to the gates of refuge to plead your case. You did not have to prove who you were or where you came from. All that mattered was intent, and if at trial the congregation found unintentionality, your life was spared, and when the high priest died you could return to your property.

What a relief to those who had made a mistake. How gracious of God to say that the cities of refuge were open to those who were aliens among them. This is to say that they were just as valuable and in need of refuge as a Hebrew. Retaliation was only a threat if you left the safe confines of the city and once again took your life into your hands. Make it in, and stay in—this was your only guarantee of life.

“The prisoner who at any time went outside the city of refuge was abandoned to the avenger of blood. Thus the people were taught to adhere to the methods which infinite wisdom appointed for their security.”³

From the City of Refuge to Christ Our Refuge (Ephesians 2)

The cities of refuge are a microcosm of Christ, who is our Refuge and Strength. Only in Him can we find security and safety both in this world and from this world. “The same merciful Saviour who appointed those temporal cities of refuge has by the shedding of His own blood provided for the transgressors of God’s law a sure retreat, into which they may flee for safety from the second death. No power can take out of His hands the souls that go to Him for pardon.”⁴

I remember playing tag out on the playground. The goal was to not get “caught” or tagged by the person who was “it.” There was always a “safe zone,” a place that if you made it there, the “it” person could not tag you. You had to be smart. You had to be fast. And you had to make it to the safe zone without being tagged. I was smart, and I was fast, but sometimes I made mistakes or was careless, and I found myself tagged as “it.” I hated not making it to the safe zone.

The “safe zones” set up for Israel weren’t part of a playground game. They were needed to protect people who unintentionally had committed a serious offense that required serious intervention. We need serious intervention today. “Remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (Eph. 2:12, 13, NRSV).

It is in Christ that we find our refuge. The reality is that someone had to pay, and it was Christ through the cross. He suffered. He died. And He shed His blood so that we might be safe in Him. Now we must stay within the arms (walls) of Christ, for we have an enemy who still lurks outside the gates. Take refuge in Him, who accepts all and protects all who have sought His forgiven.

REACT

1. In what ways can your church or Sabbath School class be a city of refuge?
2. How does the acceptance of aliens into the cities of refuge change how you see the world at large?
3. How has Christ been a refuge for you?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 515.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 517.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 516.

Testimony
Refuge in Christ

Ephesians 2

Because Christ is our city of refuge, we must learn of Him. “We must know what He is to those He has ransomed. We must realize that through belief in Him it is our privilege to be partakers of the divine nature, and so escape the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then we are cleansed from all sin, all defects of character. We need not retain one sinful propensity. . . .

“The mind rests with peace and assurance in Jesus.”

“As we partake of the divine nature, hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong are cut away from the character, and we are made a living power for good. Ever learning of the divine Teacher, daily partaking of His nature, we cooperate with God in overcoming Satan’s temptations. God works, and man works, that man may be one with Christ as Christ is one with God. Then we sit together with Christ in heavenly places. The mind rests with peace and assurance in Jesus.”¹

“We have access to God through the merits of the name of Christ, and God invites us to bring to Him our trials and temptations; for He understands them all. He would not have us pour out our woes to human ears. Through the blood of Christ we may come to the throne of grace, and find grace to help in time of need. We may come with assurance, saying, ‘My acceptance is in the Beloved.’ ‘For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.’ ‘In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.’ As an earthly parent encourages his child to come to him at all times, so the Lord encourages us to lay before Him our wants and perplexities, our gratitude and love. Every promise is sure. Jesus is . . . our only hope; for through His merits alone we have pardon and peace. When the efficiency of the blood of Christ becomes a reality to the soul through faith in Christ, the believer will let his light shine forth in good works, in bringing forth fruits unto righteousness.”²

REACT

What trial are you facing now? Are you currently being tempted to commit a particular sin? What needs and perplexities are you dealing with? Pray about these now, remembering that you have access to God through Christ, our great Refuge.

1. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 943.

2. *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 1116.

Where's the GPS?

Growing up, I heard Bible stories all the time. I had a set of records that told all the fascinating stories Christian children grow up with—David and Goliath, Esther, Joshua and the walls of Jericho, and the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt, crossing the desert, and finally going into the Promised Land. I always pictured God leading His people through this endless desert in a straight line

The desert was . . . a necessary tool in their journey.

from Egypt to Canaan. In my mind's eye, this desert was so vast it was logical that it took them years and years to cross it. This, however, is not the case. From where scholars believe the Israelites crossed the Red Sea to the borders of Canaan was approximately 150 miles. If the Israelites had taken a direct route, they could have reached their destination in less than a month.* This information is startling when you read the book of Numbers and see God's people wandering around in the desert for 40 years. Why would God allow such a thing?

When I look at my life, and then around me at the world, it seems that I can see this same phenomenon taking place. Why does God allow me to walk in circles and wander around seemingly aimlessly when He could simply direct me exactly where to go next?

The answer for the Israelites was that they were not ready for the Promised Land when they left Egypt. In fact, it took them 40 years to get to the place where they had the relationship with and trust in God to adequately take over and then live in the land. The desert was not an obstacle that stood in their way, but a necessary tool in their journey.

This is, I'm sure, what God is doing in my life and in the lives of others. God has a destiny—a destination, if you will—for each person. No matter how important it is that a person reaches that place, often the journey is the most vital part.

REACT

Where can you see God's hand in seemingly unnecessary lulls and dead ends in your life?

*Truth.net, "Biblical Archeology of the Exodus,"

<http://www.truthnet.org/biblicalarcheology/5/Exodusarcheology.htm>, retrieved November 6, 2008.

Cities of Refuge—Where Do I Go?

Ps. 46:1

After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the Israelites were finally on the brink of claiming the promise God had given them. They had struggled both physically and spiritually along the way, overcoming sin and self, mountains and murmurings, nations and nature. Many had died along the way, including their beloved leader Moses, who lost out on Canaan because of disobedience, but had gained, after sincere repentance, a place in the eternal Land of Promise.

Would they forget, as we often do, who had led them in the past?

“To each was given according to his faith. The unbelieving had seen their fears fulfilled. Notwithstanding God’s promise, they had declared that it was impossible to inherit Canaan, and they did not possess it. But those who trusted in God, looking not so much to the difficulties to be encountered as to the strength of their Almighty Helper, entered the goodly land.”*

The story of the Israelites is not unique, and the more we study their experiences, the more we see the similarity in our lives. The stage was set. They could see the land afar. However, the Israelites faced again the big challenge of faith. Would they forget, as we often do, who had led them in the past? But God would yet again pull them through. The battle would not be won instantaneously, but tribe by tribe, miraculous victory by miraculous victory, Canaan would eventually be theirs. Even then God still had to establish cities of refuge in and around Canaan, places of safety where sinners condemned by Jewish laws could be safe. Psalm 46:1 reminds us that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (NKJV). Here are some concepts we must remember as we claim this promise: (1) Battles will come, some of which we will fail. The devil will try valiantly, even to the end, to gain the victory. The struggle is a daily process with new challenges every day. (2) God establishes cities of refuge along the way so that we might remember His willingness to save us by His grace. (3) The battle is not ours, but the Lord’s. (4) The victory is assured. The Promised Land is there. It is for us to trust God’s promises and claim them!

REACT

How can you apply lessons from the Israelites’ journey to your walk with the Lord? In what modern “cities of refuge” do you take shelter?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 513.

Heb. 6:17-19

Opinion

With or Without You, He'll Come Through

We must hold on to God's hand. He is looking for faithful people to bear witness to His goodness, such as Job, who remained faithful despite great hardship. It is vital that we exemplify Christ's character, so we can be a light to others.

God's promises are true, and His Word will stand forever. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. As His people, we need to seek His face to understand His will. Some Christians do not see God working in their lives because they are not obedient to His will.

We need to know where we are going and how to get there.

Israel should have known better, because they had seen God work time and time again. They experienced firsthand His power to provide food, water, and victory over their enemies. Yet instead of trusting, they complained. It is so ironic how the people born after the Exodus complained that they wanted to go back to Egypt when they hadn't even experienced it. Rather, they heard about Egypt from their complaining parents.

We often tend to lose sight of God's promises. We need to remain faithful and patient because the testing of our faith works patience.

We talk about how people are on the move. But as people of God, we need to know where we are going and how to get there. More important, what do we do on our way there? The Bible has given us clear directives to these questions. As God's people, we need to be ready to move when He directs us to. Abram moved when God told him to leave the land of Ur. He did not question God. We need to follow Abraham's example and remember that God knows what He's doing. When He asks us to do something, He also gives us the power to do it. The book of Numbers serves as a reminder for us to trust God, to let Him lead us wherever He asks us to go.

This week, we studied about the cities of refuge. We are to find refuge, rest in Christ's arms, so that we don't make the same mistakes the Hebrews made while they traveled to Canaan. Focus on Him, as one of His redeemed children, so that you can enjoy life everlasting in the earth made new.

REACT

1. How can we remain faithful when our world is falling apart?
2. When we complain, what are we really telling people about our relationship with God?

Exploration

Safe at Home!

Num. 35:9–13

CONCLUDE

Every game has some kind of “free zone” or “goal line” in which a player can no longer be pursued. In Israelite society, God established fairly strict rules for those who harmed others intentionally: the famous “eye for eye” rule (Exod. 21:24; Lev. 24:20; Deut. 19:21). But God also allowed that someone might be harmed by accident. So He established “cities of refuge”—free zones where people who unintentionally hurt someone could go to escape family members or friends of the injured who were bent on revenge. Here in these cities they would be safe.

CONSIDER

- Identifying on a map in the back of your Bible, or in a Bible atlas, the cities of refuge (Josh. 20:7, 8). After identifying the sites, record how far apart they were from each other; the farthest someone would have to travel to be safe; and how long it would take on average for someone to reach one of the cities of refuge on foot.
- Setting up a role-playing situation in which a defendant has to appear before a judge and explain how some harm he or she caused was accidental, and why he or she should not be punished. Have someone else play the part of the plaintiff, who demands justice.
- Assuming the identity of someone who accidentally injured someone. Write three days’ worth of diary entries that include (1) what you did, and how it made you feel; (2) who you met as you traveled to one of the cities of refuge, and what you talked about; and (3) how you felt when you reached the city, and who welcomed you.
- Chairing the committee that welcomes those who have fled to your city of refuge. What do you have to provide them? What can they expect? Who provides those resources? How do you provide not only for their physical needs, but for their emotional and spiritual needs as well?
- Writing a psalm of praise for the places of refuge God has provided in your life. Be sure to admit your mistakes, recall the hardships you endure, and thank God for the people and places that make you feel safe and secure.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 515–517.

Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary, “City of Refuge.”

“Cities of Refuge,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cities_of_Refuge.

The Fruit of the Spirit

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 2010, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1 "By Their Fruit . . ."

Logos: Luke 13:7-9; John 11:4; 12:28; 15:1-10; 2 Tim. 3:5

Memory Text: " 'Therefore by their fruits you will know them' " (Matt. 7:20, NKJV).

Those who abide in Jesus always will bear the fruit of the Spirit. Do you sometimes wonder if that promise really could be for you? The answer is a resounding Yes. We can be confident of this very thing, that He who has begun this good work in us will finish it (Phil. 1:6). Remember His words: " 'You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you' " (John 15:16, NKJV).

And the best news yet is that the good work the Holy Spirit is doing in our lives is not just for now but for eternity.

Lesson 2 The Fruit of the Spirit Is Love

Logos: Deut. 6:5; Matt. 5:43-48; 7:12; 22:39; Luke 10:25-37; 1 Cor. 13:4-7

Memory Text: "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13, NKJV).

It is no accident that Paul's list of the character traits that identify the fruits of the Spirit begins with love. Love is the paramount virtue for Christians because it is the trait that most characterizes God. It was love that motivated God to create us, to sustain us, to make Himself known to us, and to give us His Son in order to redeem us.

John says it so plainly and simply—"God is love" (1 John 4:16). Because love is so central to His character, love must be central to ours as well. "He who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (verse 16, NKJV).

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Going Home



After delivering the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, God had to teach them how to live and journey with Him. Roy Gane fills in background details that help us understand their wilderness experience and emphasizes that we too must learn those same lessons before we enter the Promised Land. Paperback. \$11.99

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But that's changing. Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help provide new, permanent picture charts for children in the islands of the Pacific. I want to help these children grasp the story of salvation, to understand the love that Jesus offers them. For me it's personal.

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