

Note: Course resources utilized included NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible notes, ESV Bible and ESV Study Bible notes, John Sailhamer's Pentateuch as a Narrative, Stephen Dempster's Dominion and Dynasty, Tom Schreiner's The King in His Beauty, Carson, Moo, and Naselli's Introducing the New Testament, T. Desmond's Alexander's From Paradise to the Promised Land, Carson, Moo, and Morris Introduction to the New Testament, The Gospel According to John by D.A. Carson from the Pillar New Testament Series, The Letters of John by Colin G. Kruse from the Pillar New Testament Series, Bethlehem College and Seminary Old and New Testament Survey and others (including TGC and TGC Online Commentaries).

As we resume our study of the Pentateuch this morning, I want to approach our lesson by sketching out some of the essential moves that take place within the first 5 books of our Bible

What I want you to appreciate is that the books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are not disjointed or unrelated, but are a unified work with a unified message. The way they are put together reflects careful thought composition.

As we consider the basic plotline of the Pentateuch, we will drill down on some important themes that emerge. Since we covered Genesis briefly last week, I will place particular emphasis on the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy.

But before we get started, let's open with prayer-

The basic plot of the Pentateuch may be outlined as follows:

In the very beginning God creates the heavens and the earth. His blessing on His creation abounds and is unmixed. All things created are good.

The first man and woman are created in God's unique image. They are representatives of God. They are priestly and royal figures. As priests they serve God, as king and queen they exercise authority on God's behalf, over all of creation.

The pair are blessed by God, and God commissions them to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Underlying this commission is the anticipation that the entire earth will be transformed into a place suitable for God's special presence.

However- our first parents defect in their commission and fail to exercise authority over this serpent figure. They submit to him and his temptation. They listened to the serpent's voice and did what is forbidden, eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They put themselves in the place of God and take unto themselves prerogatives belonging only to God. In a wretched and illegitimate way, they seek to become like God, pronouncing what is good and what is evil. And this sin lies at the heart of self-idolatry.

This rebellion brings estrangement and alienation from God. As a result, the man and the woman are kicked out of the garden sanctuary of Eden.

Through their actions, sin enters into the entire human race. There is this downward spiral that emanates from this first sin. By Genesis 6, things go from bad to worse. Violence and corruption become mankind's currency. Through it all, God is extraordinarily patient, but eventually sends a cataclysmic flood in response to widespread sin. The flood of judgment also ushers in a fresh start with righteous Noah and his family, but humanity is still rebellious. Genesis 11 shows us the extent of that remaining sin. Humans conspire together to build a tower that might give them access to heaven itself. It is a display of pride and shows us humanity's desire to replace God and rule not only the earth, but heaven itself. Men and women were originally commissioned to spread God's glory throughout the earth, but instead, humans have polluted the earth with sin, making it unfit for the divine habitation that God originally intended.

While the first 11 chapters of Genesis focus on the horrible consequences of sin, the rest of Genesis, from chapter 12 forward, presents to us the hope of being made right with God. It is here that Abraham and his family are front and center.

Central to God's plan to reconcile humanity to Himself, to get things back to good, are the divine promises made to Abraham. These promises set the agenda for all that follows in the rest of the Pentateuch. These promises to Abraham are reaffirmed to both Isaac and Jacob, and then spill over into the rest of the Bible as we know it. These promises are part of God's plan to restore humanity back to the goodness of the garden, bringing about His original intentions for this world we live in, His divine rescue plan as it were.

There are two major aspects concerning God's promises to Abraham.

First, there is the promise that through an offspring of Abraham "all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18).

Instead of the curse that Adam and Eve's sin brought upon all creation, there will be blessing. The consequences of what took place in the Garden of Eden will somehow be reversed, and there will be the blessing of God pronounced over creation and humanity once again.

As we read in Genesis, we see that this promise is bound up with a future royal line and a coming King descended from Abraham. Genesis 17.6 "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you."

In the first place, this royal line can be traced through Abraham's great-grandson Joseph. And there are hints of great blessing being mediated to the nations through Joseph, as he governs wisely in the land of Egypt. Amid terrible drought and famine, his actions result in the saving of many lives throughout the ancient Near-East.

However, in the book of Genesis there is this anticipation that the royal line associated with Joseph will be replaced by a coming king who will emerge from the tribe of Judah, through his son Perez.

A second aspect of the divine promises to Abraham consists of the establishment of a great nation and the promise of land for that great nation to dwell in. Essentially Abraham's descendants will become numerous, and then take possession of the land of Canaan. God guarantees Abraham these things in Genesis 15.

At this point in the process, the promise to bless the world through a royal descendant king takes a bit of a back seat in the narrative, and the promise of a great nation and land for that nation moves into the foreground. (And in an oversimplified way, this makes sense. In order to have this king, you must first have a nation, and in order to have a nation you have to have land for the nation). The promise of a coming king to bless all the nations is still alive and well, but is overshadowed in the remainder of the Pentateuch, becoming more conspicuous a little later in the history of Israel.

With the promises to Abraham in clear view, we can now move forward in time to the book of Exodus.

Now the first thing you must be aware of is that the book of Exodus is a continuation of the book of Genesis. Genesis concludes with the entirety of Abraham's family, by means of Jacob and his sons, residing in Egypt. Then, as the book of Exodus begins, approximately 400 years have elapsed, and Abraham's family is still the focus. But the family has blossomed into a much larger people group now known as Israel.

What you essentially see in the opening chapters of Exodus is something of the promises of God to Abraham materializing. Stage 1 of the fulfillment of those promises as it were.

In Genesis 15:5- God took Abraham outside to look at ancient Near Eastern night sky, no light pollution whatsoever, and said to Abraham- "Now look toward the heavens and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

And now we read in Exodus 1:7-

“But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.”

The divine fingerprint is all over this situation. The people are growing in number, becoming a great nation, despite circumstances that would have stifled any sort of flourishing.

Pharaoh of that day was king who had no regard for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph- and Pharaoh appointed taskmasters over Israel to oppress them with hard labor. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses.

However- Exodus 1.12 tells us “the more they oppressed them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they dreaded the sons of Israel.

In response to their growing strength and numbers, Pharaoh even institutes a policy of genocide and ethnic cleansing- an edict to murder every male child born to Hebrew women. It was a strategic move designed to break the spirits of God’s people and slow population growth. But God’s purposes cannot be thwarted- so we read in Exodus 1:20- “So God was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied, and became very mighty.”

All is going according to plan, God’s divine sovereignty is on display.

In Genesis 15 God issues to Abraham a list of divine prerequisites that must be met before he would establish this great nation- Genesis 15.13- Then God said to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. 14 But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

So everything is essentially in place in order for the ‘great nation’ promised by God to Abraham to emerge on to the world stage- as God shows himself powerful in keeping His word against all odds. According to Exodus 2.24, we are told that “God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.” God will honor his promises to Abraham.

Now, amid the oppression and bondage and genocide, we meet a woman who desperately wants to save her son from Pharaoh’s terror scheme. And in a moment of desperation, she places her baby boy in a small reed basket and floats him up the Nile River. In an unexpected twist, Pharaoh’s daughter finds the baby and takes him in as her own. We discover that the boy is Moses, who would grow up in Pharaoh’s

household and eventually emerge as the one who would be instrumental in Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

As a grown man, this Moses encounters God via a burning bush that is not consumed, and God speaks to Moses from that bush, and commissions Moses to be the one who would confront Pharaoh and then lead Israel to freedom. Moses does indeed confront Pharaoh, but Pharaoh's response goes something like this: "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go." Exodus 5.2

So now what happens?

In due time, and for the very purpose of displaying God's glory and power, God set his face to act with "outstretched arm and great acts of judgment" in order to rescue the people.

In an unprecedented display of signs and wonders, God unleashed 10 successive plagues upon the land of Egypt. With each affliction, Pharaoh was forced to watch helplessly, and acknowledge the reality and the power of Israel's God. Yet, in his hardness of heart, he would not let God's people go. However, with the final act of God's power- Pharaoh would relent. As the destroying angel passed over the land, the Egyptians, Pharaoh included, experienced the death of their firstborn sons. It was a judgment that was a response to Pharaoh's own evil disregard for the male children of the Israelites. And in this way God secures his people's freedom and release and demonstrates his absolute power over Pharaoh's wicked, hardened resolve.

As the angel of death "passed over" the land, the Israelites were spared the fate of the Egyptians. Not because they were inherently more righteous than those around them, not because they had earned God's favor, but because they responded in simple faith to God's instructions to them through his prophet Moses; the simple application of the blood of the Passover Lamb to the doorposts and lintel of each person's home.

As they streamed out of Egypt, released from their imprisonment, this became a defining moment for the nation. The Exodus was the greatest act of redemptive history recorded in the Old Testament, and now becomes a paradigm of salvation for the nation. The Exodus would be the grid, the framework through which they formed their identity. It becomes an event that is alluded to again and again in the Old Testament. Psalm 77 and 78, Jeremiah 7, Nehemiah 9. It is an Exodus or exit from Egypt and its slavery. And represents a type of Old Covenant salvation.

Now let's pause a moment and talk about the Passover, and its connection to Christ and the New Testament.

The Exodus was the central redemptive event in the Old Testament. The central redemptive event in the New Testament is Christ and His cross, the crucifixion. As we read our New Testaments, in various ways this event is closely tied to the Passover.

First, each of our four Gospels depict the death of Jesus as taking place in Jerusalem while the Jews were commemorating the Passover by keeping the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Second, Matthew, Mark, and Luke present the Last Supper as a Passover meal (Matt. 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7–8).

Third, the actual death of Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover sacrifice. The Passover sacrifice in Egypt points to Jesus in remarkable ways. John's Gospel in 19:33 mentions that Jesus's bones are not broken, and as such, Christ death resembles that of the Passover sacrifice -Exodus 12:46 It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the flesh outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones. This connection between Christ and the Passover is made in an undeniable way by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:7 where he explains that: "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed".

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The theme of knowing God is front and center in the book of Exodus. Exodus is about knowing God.

As Moses encounters God in Exodus 3, speaking with God at the burning bush, God reveals himself, who He is, including His divine name Yahweh, "The Lord", the "I am".

We have already seen in Exodus 5.2, Pharaoh pose the question, "Who is the Lord?" And God, through various signs and wonders would make Himself known to Pharaoh, while bringing the Egyptians to openly acknowledge His sovereign power as well.

In an ultimate display of his sovereign power and judgment on the Egyptians, he engulfs Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea, as they are in hot pursuit of the Israelites. We are told God's express purpose in this act-

Exodus 14.4- And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD."

In Exodus 15. 11-13 we are treated to a victory song that celebrates knowing God- "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them.

“You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed; you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.”

Moving forward, Exodus chapters 16–18 describe Israel’s journey to Mount Sinai. And even in these interim chapters, we see Moses’s pagan father-in-law, Jethro, openly confess- “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.” Exodus 18.11

Once the Israelites arrive at the foot of Sinai, the pace of the story slows down. But, God is not done making Himself known to His people. Chapters 19-40 continue with this theme of knowing God, and these chapters draw our attention to the development of a relationship between the Lord and the Israelites.

Two features dominate the landscape in chapters 19-40. The making of a covenant, known as the Sinai Covenant or Mosaic Covenant, and the construction of the Tabernacle.

A helpful way to think about this covenant that God makes with Israel at Sinai is the making of marriage vows, or the signing of a personal contract. The covenant sets out the conditions under which the Israelites must live in order to enjoy an ongoing relationship with God; the covenant stipulations are recorded in the Decalogue, better known as the Ten Commandments seen in Exodus 20:3–17 as well as the Book of the Covenant contained in Exodus 20:22–23:33.

If the people wish to experience the blessings of restored relationship with God and experience God's presence, these are the terms and conditions. As they obey these commands, they will reflect God's righteousness, and His compassionate nature, and represent God to the nations of the world. According to Exodus 19.6, they will be to God a kingdom of priests- a royal priesthood- and a holy nation- mediating God's presence to the world around him. And in that way they ought to become a blessing to the nations. If any people group was well suited to carry out this commission, it would have been the Israelites. They experienced, first hand, God's grace and power. They are the ones who know the Lord and can make Him known. So we see the people agree to the terms and conditions.

But there are a few major obstacles that they encounter along the way.

At the foot of Sinai, in Exodus chapter 19 and 20, God’s holy presence did not appear to be inviting to the newly rescued nation. “There were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.” They did not want to approach this kind of God. Drawing near to Him was not their natural response.

What's more, is that after the establishment of the initial covenant agreement in Exod. 19–24, we encounter the people giving themselves over to idolatry- forging a golden idol in the form of a calf- an event that almost brings the covenant relationship to grinding halt.

But Moses intercedes on behalf of the people praying- Exodus 32:12–14 (ESV): Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.' ” 14 And the Lord relented.

Since it was clear that the people did not really have the wherewithal- morally or constitutionally- to go up that holy mountain to be with God, God, in his kindness, made careful arrangements to come down to them and dwell in their midst. That is where the constructing of the tent, or tabernacle comes into play.

God himself supplies Moses with the blueprint. Several chapters of Exodus are taken up with its painstaking architectural design. Each detail is important, rich with symbolic value, its features and furniture remind us of the garden of Eden, that place of God's presence that we forfeited in the beginning.

The tabernacle will become God's dwelling place among his chosen people. Built according to divine instruction, it is the focal point of the Lord's presence among his ancient people; through its materials and structure, it reminds us of God's holiness.

Following the construction of the tabernacle, the Lord finally takes up residence in the camp- Exodus 40:34–35 (ESV): 34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.

And this brings the book of Exodus to this climactic conclusion- with a bit of a cliff hanger as well. One problem remains outstanding. Not even Moses is able to enter into God's presence at this point. The golden calf incident has revealed something deep seated, that was there all along, something that even the most glorious redemptive rescue from Egypt couldn't address. The people, Moses included, are still sinful. And this sinfulness wasn't going away anytime soon. Something more is needed if God was going to tabernacle among his people-

And that leads us to the book of Leviticus.

Exodus and Leviticus are part of the same story. Leviticus describes what takes place in the thirteenth month after the Israelites' divine deliverance from Egypt. The tabernacle is complete. The glory-presence of God resides among the Israelites- this an unmistakable privilege.

However, the presence of this Holy God presents certain challenges.

Although they were God's peculiar possession, they were a still "stiff-necked people". The people remain sinful. And no unholy person or thing can live this close to the presence of God and survive.

Leviticus 15:31 "Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, lest they die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst."

In order to live in such close proximity to the Holy One of Israel, God institutes a sacrificial system- in order to atone for sin. With God's glory presence in their midst, the people need some way to be forgiven and made holy. This explains why the first seven chapters of Leviticus are taken up with regulations concerning sacrifices.

Sacrifices meant that a priesthood was needed as well, and the duties of the priests are described in great detail in the book of Leviticus. As we read through Leviticus we see them offer a number of different sacrifices that deal with the different types of human sin and failure. There are even special regulations for the priests, as they offer sacrifices on behalf of themselves as well as the people that they represent.

In addition to all the regular sacrifices offered throughout the year, special attention is given to the Day of Atonement in Leviticus chapter 16, when the high priest enters the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sin of the entire nation and to purify the most holy places within the tabernacle.

Much of the content of Leviticus can appear tedious and far removed from our experience- but do not forget that the various provisions made for the people in Leviticus represent a gracious, unmerited kindness from God, and in their day, was absolutely necessary in order for them to experience God's presence with them. As God institutes the sacrifices and rituals, the Lord is providing a way of restoring and maintaining a right relationship with their God.

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Central to the book of Leviticus is the issue of holiness. A key text is Leviticus 19.2- "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.'"

There are four aspects concerning the importance of holiness that can be seen in the book of Leviticus.

1. God is inherently holy; he is the definition of holiness. Holiness is synonymous with God. God is holy. Therefore, to be holy is to be like God in some way.

2. God is the fountain of all holiness. Holiness emanates from Him. He alone makes other people, places or things holy. If something belongs to God, it is holy. It is his peculiar possession. Since God emanates or radiates holiness to that which is near to him, the ark of the covenant, the footstool of his throne as it were, is the most holy thing in the tabernacle. For the same reason, the Most Holy Place is the holiest part of the tabernacle. God's presence made it the holiest place on the earth.

3. Holiness describes God's moral perfections.

When God commands the Israelites, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy", he is speaking of moral behavior, their actions and attitudes. Implicit, is that God Himself is absolutely perfect in every respect, and God's character, His morality is no exception.

In order for the Israelites to enjoy a close and meaningful relationship with God, they must reflect his holiness through living upright and righteous lives. This is a prominent feature of chapter Leviticus chapters 18, 19, and 20-which provides commands governing personal behavior- describing a life characterized by righteousness, purity, and love.

4. Sanctification, the process by which someone or something becomes holy, is God's prerogative. It is God who sanctifies. This is reflected in the repeated refrain "I am the LORD, who makes you holy" In chapters 20, 21, and 22. Leviticus is absolutely clear about God's fundamental, essential role in sanctification. However, Leviticus draws attention to human responsibility. Those made holy by God are expected to maintain holiness by refraining from behavior that would compromise their holiness.

In Leviticus we see the perennial issue of uncleanness. In simple terms, uncleanness is the opposite of holiness. It represents all that is less than God-like. Uncleanness is associated with humans in two ways.

First, certain forms of uncleanness or impurity arise as a natural consequence of being human. This might include having some sort of skin disease or some sort of bodily discharges and the like. We often wonder why these are included- what is God's rationale for these regulations?

Perhaps the simplest and most straightforward rationale is that the various forms of uncleanness all appear to be associated, in one way or another, to death, a reality that is inescapable on this side of glory. By associating some bodily diseases and

conditions with death, Leviticus reminds us that death is very much a part of human existence. And only by becoming holy, can humanity somehow escape the domain of death and experience the life-giving power of God.

Second, there are other forms of uncleanness that occur when individuals, by their voluntary actions, transgress any boundary established by God. These are not the incidental or inevitable aspects of life in a fallen world. Rather, this type of uncleanness characterizes those who willfully ignore God's commands.. By their actions, they distance themselves from the domain of God and his life giving holiness, and align themselves with the domain characterized by separation from God and ultimately death.

Lastly, Leviticus teaches us, through its elaborate means of atonement and cleansing, that this pursuit of holiness will be a constant struggle in this life, as there will be both internal and external powers that oppose God.

Let's discuss connections between what we see in Leviticus and what we know of Christ in the New Testament

Jesus Christ as a Sacrifice

The New Testament presents the death of Jesus Christ as a sacrifice. Jesus is "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). There are many clear references to the "blood" of Christ (Acts 20:28; Rom. 5:9; Eph. 2:13; Col. 1:20; 1 Pet. 1:2; Rev. 7:14; 12:11).

Paul refers to Christ's death as a "sacrifice of atonement" (Rom. 3:25).

Hebrews 9:26 tells us that Christ "he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

For the author of Hebrews, Christ's death was the ultimate sacrifice that all the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to. The inadequacy of the sacrifices presented in the Old Testament is made clear by the fact that they had to be repeated, year after year after year-; they could never make perfect for all time those who offered them (Hebrews 10:1). Christ, however, the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice, rendering all other sacrifices unnecessary, obsolete, and inferior.

Nevertheless, the Old Testament regulations about sacrifices have continuing significance because they shed light on the nature of the atonement achieved through Christ's death. They teach us that somehow death is necessary in order to have atonement. As far as the idea of cleansing is concerned, the blood of animal sacrifices

would cleanse objects and people who were outwardly or ceremonially unclean, but the blood of Christ is far better, cleansing and purifying the conscience.

Hebrews. 9:14: "how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Jesus Christ as High Priest

Closely associated with the book of Leviticus is the New Testament description of Jesus Christ as our great high priest. But he is a different kind of high priest. He is not a Levite or a direct descendant of Aaron, who although they were priests, they were sinners. Christ alone is "holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26). The Aaronic priests served in the earthly tabernacle, "a copy and shadow of what is in heaven", but Christ has entered the true heavenly "sanctuary" (Hebrews 8:1–5), and he doesn't have to leave, he will not die, he does not grow tired. He is able continually to represent others before God (Hebrews 7:25). Because of Christ's sacrifice and high priestly work we are exhorted to have confidence that God accepts us. Finally, and thankfully, with the establishment of a new priesthood linked to the heavenly sanctuary, the regulations associated with the Levitical priesthood and the earthly sanctuary have become obsolete. The purifying power of Christ abides on us.

We come now to the book of Numbers.

And here we see the descendants of Abraham, a great multitude, a nation.

But this nation has been appointed a land to dwell in. Their final destination is not in the wilderness at the foot of Sinai. Their destination is the land of Canaan promised to Abraham in chapter 15 of Genesis.

In an over simplified way we could say that the opening chapters of the book of Numbers are focused on the people's preparations before departing from Sinai and heading to the promised land. Eventually, the Israelites do leave Mount Sinai and journey through the wilderness toward the land of Canaan. Unfortunately, the people's faith in God wilts before entering in.

The middle chapters of Numbers paint a rather negative picture of the Exodus generation. Despite all that they have witnessed in Egypt and at Mount Sinai, they display a remarkable lack of faith in the Lord's ability to

- (1) provide for their daily needs and*
- (2) ensure their safety once in the land*

They complain and murmur against the Lord, and this becomes a recurring theme. They express a desire to return to Egypt, romanticizing their time there. Meanwhile, they challenge those whom God has placed in authority over them.

Those sent to spy out the promised land bring back a discouraging report with the exception of Joshua and Caleb- The faithless spies explain that “The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.” Numbers 13.32-33

When fear of the nations living in Canaan causes the people’s trust in God to wilt and waver, they rebel against God.

Numbers 14.1-4 all the congregation raised a loud cry, and the people wept that night. And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

As a result, God punishes them, and they spend 40 years wandering in the wilderness.

Essentially, the faithless generation that went out from Egypt must first pass off the scene. With the exception of Joshua and Caleb, they are not permitted to enter the promised land.

Nevertheless, God’s promise to Abraham will not be thwarted by human disobedience and faithlessness. God will see to it that the next generation will enter in. And while exhibiting similar characteristics of unbelief and rebellion, the next generation, at the very least, is willing to acknowledge their own sin and dependence upon God.

Numbers 21.4-9:

And the people became impatient on the way. [5](#)And the people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we loathe this worthless food.” [6](#)Then the LORD sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many people of Israel died. [7](#)And the people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you. Pray to the LORD, that he take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. [8](#)And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it,

shall live.” [9](#)So Moses made a bronze^c serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.

Whereas much of Numbers concentrates on the failures of the Israelites, the final chapters of the book pick up the same theme seen in earlier chapters, as the people make preparations once again, for life in the promised land.

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Let's take a moment and focus on New Testament connections that are tied to the book of Numbers.

The account of the Israelites' time in the wilderness is picked up in a number of ways in the New Testament.

One of the most striking uses comes in the account of the temptation of Jesus (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). The temptation of Jesus in the wilderness serves as this stark contrast when compared to the Israelites who came out of Egypt. The Israelites were tested in the wilderness and conspicuously fail, Jesus is tempted in the wilderness and passes with flying colors.

In the first temptation, Jesus is hungry after fasting for forty days and Satan suggests that he turn stones into bread. Whereas the Israelites gave priority to their physical appetites in the wilderness, Jesus refrains, and is entirely content with God's provision for him.

Another temptation draws our attention to God's ability to save. Here Jesus is challenged to follow the example of the earlier Israelites, who would put God to the test.

Matthew 4—"The devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and "On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.""

And Jesus answers him point blank from the Scripture- "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.""

The third temptation focuses on God's capacity to give to Jesus the kingdoms that are under the control of another.

Matthew 4.8:Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

Whereas the Israelites doubted God's strength to give them the land of Canaan, Jesus expresses complete confidence in what the Father was doing-

Jesus's faith in God stands in sharp contrast with that of the Israelites who came out of Egypt.

We mentioned the bronze snake in passing last class- as Jesus speaks with Nicodemus in private at night, Jesus mentions the Numbers 21:4–9: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him" (John 3:14–15). Here Jesus draws an important parallel between himself and the bronze snake. While the ancient Israelites received life by trusting in the bronze snake, those who trust in Jesus will receive eternal life.

Later in John's Gospel, after the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus compares himself to the manna provided in the wilderness (6:25–59). Like the manna, he has been sent from heaven to give life to those who feed on him (6:33, 35–40, 50–51, 54–58). However, the life that Jesus offers is eternal life, not just physical sustenance (6:47–51, 58). Interestingly, John comments that many of the Jews respond to Jesus's words by grumbling (6:41, 43). Like their unbelieving ancestors, they fail to appreciate what God is doing among them.

Paul refers to the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness to warn the Corinthian Christians against pursuing various unrighteous practices:

Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." 8We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9We must not put Christ^c to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer (1 Cor. 10:6–10).

The author of Hebrews highlights the failure of the wilderness generation and uses this as a warning to his readers (3:7–19). Quoting Psalm 95:7–11, one of a number of psalms to recount the Israelites' experience in the wilderness, he observes that they did not enter the promised land "because of their unbelief" (Heb. 3:19; cf. 8:9).

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Let consider very briefly the book of Deuteronomy-

As Deuteronomy begins, the Israelites are camped to the east of the Jordan River near Jericho.

The nation stands ready to take possession of the land. Moses, nearing death, sets before a new generation of Israelites the obligations that they must fulfill in order to enjoy God's blessing in the land of Canaan.

At the heart of these obligations is the requirement to love the Lord wholeheartedly. Moreover, they are to be a holy nation, keeping the covenant obligations in order that other nations might know and marvel at the righteousness of God. Israel's future in the promised land is tied directly to their willingness and ability to fulfill these covenant obligations.

Moses ends his sermon on the border of the promised land with these words-

Deuteronomy 30. 19-20:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, [20](#)loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

Yet, despite special privileges bestowed on them, Deuteronomy points to a future in which the Israelites will rebel against the Lord and break the covenant. Moses warned the nation that if they turned away from the Lord, and preferred idols to the true and living God, that they would be uprooted from the good land that God gave them, scattered, and dispersed- that they would go into exile and bondage again, much like what they experienced in Egypt.. And true to form, they did bow down to their idols, and God did uproot them, on two occasions, once in 722 B.C. and again in 586 B.C. - they were exiled and forced to live among other nations, and instead of being a blessing to all nations, instead they come under God's curse.

Let's take a moment to draw out some connections to Christ and the New Testament.

Deuteronomy's influence is seen throughout the teaching of Jesus. When asked by "an expert in the law," "Which is the greatest commandment?" (Matt. 22:35–37), Jesus responds by quoting first Deuteronomy 6:5: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."¹¹

Elsewhere his commitment to the agenda set by Deuteronomy is clearly seen in the parallel accounts of his temptation (Matt. 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). On each occasion that he is tested by the devil, Jesus replies by quoting from Deuteronomy.

In doing so, he highlights one of the principal tenets of the book: "Worship the LORD your God, and serve him only" (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8, quoting Deut. 6:13).

Jesus's use of Deuteronomy recalls how the Israelite king was expected to meditate on the Book of the Law (tôrâ) (Deut. 17:18–20).

Even when the text of Deuteronomy is not quoted directly, its influence is still apparent. We see this in Jesus's insistence that his followers must be single-minded in their commitment to God: "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:24). The idea of wholehearted commitment to God also appears in the parables of Jesus, especially those that involve a master-servant relationship (Matt. 18:23–35; 24:45–51; 25:14–30; Luke 12:42–48; 19:12–27); these parables commonly emphasize the importance of loyalty and faithfulness.

Another aspect of Deuteronomy that is developed briefly in the New Testament is that of cursing. Paul picks this up in Galatians, where he declares, "All who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'" (3:10, quoting Deut. 27:26). Since, according to Paul, no one can keep the law perfectly, all are cursed. However, this for Paul is not the end of the matter. He then confidently affirms that Christ has "redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole'" (Gal. 3:13, quoting Deut. 21:23).

The book of Deuteronomy ends with the Israelites still outside the promised land- and Moses dies in the land of Moab. Although his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone, He is not able to enter into the promised land, and can only welcome it from afar.

Therefore, as the Pentateuch draws to a close- it is very much an unfinished story. We often think of it as a self-contained portion of the Bible, but it is very closely connected to all that comes after. So as we move forward in this class, hold on to some of the things we have covered here.

So we have seen blessing in the very beginning, we have seen blessing lost and forfeited by sin, we have seen the promise to Abraham that "in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed". We have seen promising beginnings materialize as Israel pours out of Egypt, but then we see failure, and sin and how God addresses those things in ways that are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. Finally, in the book of Deuteronomy we see the promise of more failure and faithlessness that would eventually lead to exile. And the promises made to Abraham remain unfulfilled.

Where does that leave us?

In the book Hosea, chapter 11:1-2, the Lord expresses his love toward Israel saying:

*11 When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.*

*2 The more they were called,
the more they went away;
they kept sacrificing to the Baals
and burning offerings to idols.*

These words are about Israel, and harken back to Exodus 4:22 where God says, “Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, ‘Let my son go,’” — “that he may serve me.”

Then in the fullness of time, this Israel-Exodus theme surfaces again. We see it early in Matthew, chapter 2: verses 13–15. Jesus is taken down to Egypt by his mother and Joseph, evading the wrath of Herod. And eventually the family returns.

And this return, we are told, fulfills the word, “out of Egypt I called my Son,” a reference to Hosea 11:1.

And what is established here is a Israel-Christ typology, teaching us that the ultimate Israel is Jesus himself.

In Christ, the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, we see an obedient Son, a faithful Son, a Son with whom God is well pleased. Christ is the true Israel through whom the nations are finally blessed. He is that Lion from the tribe of Judah, a king who mediates blessings to the nations. And as we identify with Him, and are joined to him, clothed in his perfections, we too become 1 Peter- a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, declaring the praises of him who called us, not out of Egypt, but out of darkness into his marvelous light.