

# A NEW BEGINNING IN CHRIST JESUS

**W**elcome to 2020! So many beginnings—a new year, a new decade, and the chance to begin another two-year devotional reading of the Bible.

In January, we study Genesis. This gives us a chance to revisit God's wondrous creation, the tragic fall of our first parents into sin, and the promise of the Savior.

In February, we read in Exodus how God forges His chosen people into a mighty nation.

In March, we study Leviticus and Numbers to learn about the worship God established for His Old Testament people and see how He gave them their daily bread and provided for all their needs as they sojourned in the wilderness.

At the beginning of this decade and this study, we pray that God creates a renewed sense of direction and purpose in us, even as He continually forgives our sins and restores us as His own children in Christ.

In Jesus Christ,

*Wayne Palmer*



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Edited by Wayne Palmer

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# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1. Make an “appointment with Jesus.” Ink it into your daily calendar. You will need about twenty minutes.
2. Forestall interruptions. Turn off the phone. Close your office door. Do whatever you need to do to get alone with your Lord.
3. Make the time pleasant for yourself. I read first thing in the morning over coffee. Choose a time and place you will be comfortable, relaxed, and focused on the Word of God.
4. Start with prayer. Ask God to meet with you, to teach you, and to give you an open heart to the work of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to personalize His Word to your circumstances today. Then talk with Him while you read.
5. Pray as you close. Ask God to bring His Word back to your mind as you need His help today. See the daily prayer list found at the end of this issue.

## GET THE BIG PICTURE

Gives you a helpful overview of the day's text before you read the passage.

## SHARPEN THE FOCUS

Helps you clearly understand the passage and see its meaning for your life.

## ZOOM IN

Highlights interesting parts of the text you may not notice at first glance and gives practical suggestions for living according to God's Word daily.



### Get the Big Picture

Genesis records many firsts—the first people, the first family, the first sin, the first city, the first musician, and more firsts besides. Today's reading zeroes in on the first week of our world's existence and on the first home God gave His human creatures. As you read, note the care God took as He made this home for us—the first paradise.



### Sharpen the Focus

The Bible never attempts to prove that God exists. It simply asserts: “In the beginning, God . . .” (1:1). Reading these four simple words, we take the first steps on the road to adventure, the road of discovery. God gave us His Word—from Genesis through Revelation—to reveal to us what He is like. As we read, mark, learn, and think about His Word, our Lord will make Himself real to us. The Holy Spirit has promised to do this in particular. He has promised to reveal to us God's love and forgiveness for us in Christ.

As we read the account of the creation, for example, we see God's

- power,
- creativity,
- wisdom, and
- tender concern for His human creatures—His children.

Take time to notice and to marvel at the creation around you today—the colors of the sky, the light of the sun or stars, the mosaic of leaves on the tree outside your window, or the snowflakes that drift down onto the front lawn. Praise the Creator who “richly provides us with everything to enjoy” (1 Timothy 6:17). You might want to use the words of Psalm 8 as you do so.



### Zoom In

Already in Genesis 1:2 and 1:26, we begin to see evidence of one of the most compelling mysteries of God's nature—the mystery we know as the Trinity. (Note the plural pronouns.) Other Old Testament texts hint at the trine nature of God. See, for instance, Isaiah 63: 8.

January

1  
Wednesday

Read Genesis 1–2.

If time is short,  
focus on 2:4–25.

Psalm 8

Proverbs 1:1–6

Genesis 1  
A Perfect Home

Genesis 2  
A Perfect Family

**P.S.** What if you miss a day? You could just keep going, reading at your own pace, not necessarily on the day designated for a particular devotion. However, each week's readings usually combine Saturday and Sunday. That gives you one free “makeup day” each week to do the extra reading. Or simply skip what you've missed. Plan to read it next time around—two years from now. Don't let yourself feel discouraged. Remember, your goal is to sit at the Lord's feet to get to know Him better, to receive strength from Him, and to receive life and salvation through His Word. Reading through the Bible by a specific date is secondary.

## Suggestions

- ◆ *Cut out this book-mark; fold it on the center line.*
- ◆ *Keep it in your Bible.*
- ◆ *Check off each day's reading as you complete it.*
- ◆ *Mark your Bible to find passages more easily when you want to refer to them again.*
- ◆ *Personalize the text further by underlining, circling, and making notes in the margin.*
- ◆ *Don't feel you must use all the colors here if you don't want to. Choose one or two topics to mark with one or two colors. Next time through, choose other topics/colors.*

## Marking Guide

Praise . . . . .yellow

Forgiveness . . . . .red

God's promises. . .blue

Ways to love

God & others. .orange

Giving . . . . .pink

Jesus' return . . .purple

The Church. . . .green

Sin & Satan . . . .gray

Old Testament  
promises of the  
Savior to come



What God says  
about my heart



## March 2020

- |                          |       |                 |
|--------------------------|-------|-----------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 1     | Leviticus 1     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 2     | Leviticus 2-3   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 3     | Leviticus 4-6   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 4     | Leviticus 7-9   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 5     | Leviticus 10-11 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 6     | Leviticus 12-15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 7/8   | Leviticus 16-17 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 9     | Leviticus 18-19 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 10    | Leviticus 20-22 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 11    | Leviticus 23-25 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 12    | Leviticus 26-27 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 13    | Numbers 1-3     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 14/15 | Numbers 4-6     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 16    | Numbers 7-8     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 17    | Numbers 9-10    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 18    | Numbers 11-12   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 19    | Numbers 13-15   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 20    | Numbers 16-18   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 21/22 | Numbers 19-20   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 23    | Numbers 21      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 24    | Numbers 22-25   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 25    | Numbers 26-27   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 26    | Numbers 28-30   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 27    | Numbers 31      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 28/29 | Numbers 32-34   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 30    | Numbers 35      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | 31    | Numbers 36      |

# Today's Light<sup>®</sup>

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MARCH 2020

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Wayne Palmer, Editor



## HOLINESS IN LEVITICUS

As we begin to read Leviticus, it may help our understanding if we review the meaning of *holiness*. This theme ties the entire book together.

On a simplistic, surface level, *holy* means “sinless and hating sin.” But as we study Scripture, we see that its meaning goes much deeper than this. Holiness is a characteristic of God Himself! “Holy” people and “holy” things were set aside as God’s own possessions, dedicated for His glory. So, for instance, the innermost room of the tabernacle was the “Most Holy Place.”

Outward from there, like a series of ever-larger rings of decreasing holiness, lay the following:

- The Holy Place
- The tabernacle court
- The camp of the Levites
- The camp of Israel’s other tribes
- The nations outside Israel

This arrangement spoke Law to the hearts of sinners. All humanity fell far short of the holiness of heart and life the Lord required. But the arrangement also protected sinners, for when the sinful and the holy came into contact, all sin was destroyed (cf. Leviticus 10:1–2; 2 Samuel 6:1–7)—and the sinner along with it. Thus, the “circles of holiness” served as a set of “quarantine zones” designed by God in grace to protect those whom He had come to save.

The God of Leviticus is not “the guy upstairs” or “my pal in the sky.” Our God is an awesome God, the holy God, and the merciful God in Jesus Christ.



## Get the Big Picture

As you read Leviticus 1 and the chapters that follow, keep in mind the purpose behind all the rituals the Lord gave His people. He used these “visual aids” to make His people aware of the destructive nature of sin and to point them toward the coming Savior, who would die in their place. As you read today, ask yourself, “What picture of Christ does the burnt offering of Leviticus 1 paint?” Hint: Circle the word *all* in 1:9 and 1:13.



## Sharpen the Focus

Frances Havergal penned this well-loved hymn:

*Take my life and let it be*

*Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;*

*Take my moments and my days,*

*Let them flow in ceaseless praise.*

In the burnt offering, God’s Old Testament people “sang” Havergal’s words of worship. By this sacrifice, the worshiper said: “All that I am, all that I have, belongs to You, Lord. As I place my hand on the head of this animal, I identify myself with it. As the flames completely burn it up, I ask that I might be consumed with love and zeal for You.”

A beautiful thought. A lovely song. Both we and our Old Testament brothers and sisters have sung the refrain again and again. And yet, unfortunately, that kind of zeal often evaporates in the heat of trouble or the sunshine of pleasure. Sometimes, even before the final chords of the melody have died away, we find ourselves less than thrilled with doing what our Lord asks of us.

That’s why it’s helpful, even necessary, to see in the burnt offering a picture of our Savior. Jesus dedicated Himself totally to the heavenly Father, obeying the Father’s will fully in our place. And then He lay down on the altar of the cross, consumed with zeal and love for God—and for you!



## Zoom In

Reread the words of “Take My Life” (above) and then pray them boldly. Look for ways to live today to honor the One who lived and died for you.

# March

# 1 Sunday

Read Leviticus 1.

If time is short,  
focus on verses  
1–9.

Psalm 38

Proverbs 10:20–21

## Leviticus

### 1:1–9

#### The Burnt Offering— Bulls

## Leviticus

### 1:10–13

#### The Burnt Offering— Lambs

## Leviticus

### 1:14–17

#### The Burnt Offering— Birds

March

2

Monday

Read *Leviticus*  
2–3.

If time is short,  
focus on  
chapter 3.

*Psalm* 19

*Proverbs*  
10:22–23

**Leviticus 2**  
The Grain  
Offering

**Leviticus 3**  
The Peace  
Offering



## Get the Big Picture

Today, you will read about the grain offering. The Hebrew word that identifies this offering can also refer to tribute money paid to a conquering king as a show of loyalty. This word, then, perhaps hints at what the sacrifice meant. You will also read about the peace offering. It was optional and could be brought in thanksgiving (7:12), to fulfill a vow (7:16), or, possibly, as a confession of sin. As you read, note the roles played by the worshiper and by the priest in each offering.



## Sharpen the Focus

In 1989, the Berlin Wall—a border separating East and West Germany that served as a powerful icon of the Cold War—came down. The snapshots of freedom have been burned into history: men and women with heavy sledge hammers slamming away at this symbol and source of their captivity; East German soldiers, machine guns slung over their shoulders, watching it all, numbness masking their faces. For decades, the Berlin Wall separated loved ones. Then, finally, the wall fell.

Sin separates, alienates, as certainly as any physical barrier. It's no wonder, then, that the Scriptures often picture Jesus' work in words like these:

*For [Christ] Himself is our peace, who has . . .  
broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility.*  
(Ephesians 2:14)

In Christ Jesus, through His blood shed on the cross, the wall that stood between us and the holy God has fallen. In Christ, we have the courage to work toward peace with one another in our families, neighborhoods, and churches.

Where are the walls in your relationships? Ask the Lord for courage and for the wisdom you need to bring peace into those situations today.



## Zoom In

Peace, “shalom” to Old Testament believers, meant more than a lack of conflict. When God gave peace, it included physical health, prosperity, and wholesome relationships with the Lord and with other people.



## Get the Big Picture

Detail by detail, Moses spells out the rituals that Israel had to perform when sin polluted their hearts and lives. Depending on the community standing of the one who broke the law, the sin offering involved one of several different animals. The trespass offering included provisions for making restitution to one's neighbor in addition to the sacrifice offered to God. Most of Leviticus 6, then, reviews the regulations concerning the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the sin offering.



## Sharpen the Focus

Think of the mess. The cost. The physical work. The inconvenience. The Old Testament sacrificial system must have been a burden in every way. Nothing about it was quick or easy or pleasant.

"Why?" we may well ask. "What point was the Lord trying to drive home to His people?" For one thing, the system taught them the seriousness of sin. The holy God had taken up residence among this group of sinners. As we shall see in future readings, when holiness touched sinfulness, death snapped its jaws shut on the guilty. If the Lord was to continue His presence among them, the pollution of sin had to be cleansed, eliminated.

The worshiper could make the sacrifice, but only God could grant the pardon. And so, again and again, Moses repeats the refrain of hope: "and he shall be forgiven" (4:20, 26, 31, 35). Not because the blood of bulls or goats had any cleansing power but because the blood of Christ would be shed for human sin.



## Zoom In

*Not all the blood of beasts  
On Jewish altars slain  
Could give the guilty conscience peace  
Or wash away the stain.*

*But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb,  
Takes all our sins away;  
A sacrifice of nobler name  
And richer blood than they.* Isaac Watts

# March

# 3 Tuesday

Read Leviticus 4–6.

If time is short,  
focus on 4:27–35.

Psalm 5

Proverbs 10:24–25

### Leviticus

### 4:1–5:13

### The Sin Offering

### Leviticus

### 5:14–6:7

### The Trespass Offering

### Leviticus

### 6:8–30

### Reviewing the Offerings

March

4

Wednesday

Read Leviticus  
7–9.

If time is short,  
focus on  
chapter 8.

Psalm 133

Proverbs 10:26

Leviticus 7  
Reviewing  
the Offerings

Leviticus 8  
Consecrating  
the Priests

Leviticus 9  
Offerings  
for Priests  
and People



## Get the Big Picture

Leviticus 7 continues the review that began in chapter 6. Both chapters add some instructions not previously given. Chapter 7 concentrates on the trespass offering and the peace offering. Chapters 8 and 9 then report the rite in which Aaron and his sons were consecrated (set apart) for their special work as priests in Israel.



## Sharpen the Focus

It's only natural to think of Jesus' work as we read the "worship handbook" of Old Testament Israel. In Leviticus, we see Jesus as the one perfect sacrifice for our sins and as our faithful and eternal High Priest.

But the work of the Holy Spirit comes through loud and clear in Leviticus too. In today's reading, for instance, we see again the role oil played in Old Testament worship life. Anointing oil, symbolic of the Spirit's presence and work, was poured over Aaron's head. Psalm 133 pictures this anointing process and connects it with unity among God's people.

The New Testament talks about "the unity of the Spirit" too, and it ties this unique kind of unity to the work of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers in Christ's Church (Ephesians 4:3, 11–13) as they teach the Word of God.

Whenever God's Word is proclaimed, the Holy Spirit works to produce faith. True faith leads to love for God and for others around us. This love shows itself in words and actions of concern and kindness—especially toward other believers.



## Zoom In

How is it with you and your congregation?

- For what evidence of "the unity of the Spirit" can you thank God?
- In what areas of your own heart does the Spirit need to keep working more of His divine love?
- What specifically can you ask God's Spirit to work in your local congregation today?



## Get the Big Picture

Leviticus 10 illustrates the scriptural truth that those “who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1). Leviticus 11, then, outlines the dietary laws Israel was to observe. By following these, Israel would demonstrate to the nations around her the unique relationship she enjoyed with her Savior-God. This outreach (evangelistic) purpose lay behind many of the regulations that you will read about today.



## Sharpen the Focus

What attitude should we, as God’s people, have toward ourselves? On the one hand, we enjoy the honor of being a holy, royal priesthood (1 Peter 2:9–10), and that’s as it should be, for our Lord has truly honored us. On the other hand, the Scriptures everywhere warn against the dangers of pride and presumption—self-reliance.

Nadab and Abihu learned the hard way that “among those who are near [Him, the Lord] will be sanctified, and before all the people [He] will be glorified” (Leviticus 10:3). We dare not swagger into our Lord’s presence, cocky in our own innate acceptability. We have none of our own. Instead, we honor and glorify our Lord for the righteous standing He has provided for us in Jesus Christ.

The writer to the Hebrews encourages us to fix our eyes—continually—on Jesus, instead of on ourselves. Jesus began and will complete the work of saving us (Hebrews 12:1–2). When we keep Him and His cross always in mind, we can, by His grace, avoid spiritual arrogance. We can also avoid the spiritual fatigue and despair that struggling on alone produces (Hebrews 12:2–3).



## Zoom In

Nadab and Abihu had enjoyed incredible privileges as God’s priests. (See Exodus 24:9–11!) Jesus summarized the principle behind their untimely death this way: “From him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more” (Luke 12:48). Praise God we can ask Him for everything we need—including the godly humility He treasures in His servants.

# March

# 5 Thursday

Read Leviticus  
10–11.

If time is short,  
focus on chapter 10.

Psalm 9

Proverbs 10:27–28

### Leviticus 10

#### The Dangers of Presumption

### Leviticus 11

#### The Details of Diet

March

6

Friday

Read *Leviticus*  
12–15.

If time is short,  
focus on  
13:38–46.

*Psalm* 6

*Proverbs*  
10:29–30

**Leviticus 12**  
Uncleanness  
from  
Childbirth

**Leviticus**  
13–14  
Uncleanness  
from Skin  
Diseases

**Leviticus 15**  
Uncleanness  
from Bodily  
Discharges



## Get the Big Picture

You may well want to skim today's reading, but as you do, note the meticulous attention to detail the Lord asked of His people as they dealt with the ceremonial uncleanness in their lives. Also note the social and spiritual consequences of outward uncleanness in any individual's life (13:45–46).



## Sharpen the Focus

"Every time we turn around, we're unclean again. Another ritual. Another bath. Another sacrifice. Another load of laundry. Where will it all end?" If ancient Israelites felt this way, who could blame them? The burden of staying ceremonially clean had to have weighed heavy on their hearts. And if outward uncleanness caused so much trouble, then how much heavier the burden of unclean hearts and lips and lives—for us as well as for Old Testament Israel!

Maybe our Lord's expectation that you live a life of holiness, a life set apart for Him, weighs you down at times too. Maybe you catch yourself thinking, "Every time I turn around, I've missed the mark, stepped over the line, spoiled God's purpose for this part of my life again. Where will it all end?"

If you feel like that, like a failure, remember this: it ended at the baptismal font. There you died with Christ. There you were raised with Christ. Now you live in Christ. In Christ, you are made holy (sanctified).

Someone has said, "Holiness is not the way to Christ; Christ is the way to holiness." Look to Him to supply the strength—all the strength—you need to keep walking toward a more holy lifestyle. He is your holiness. And He is your way to a holier life.



## Zoom In

Jot these words on a note card and display them on your desk or refrigerator. They are God's words of promise to you!

*By [God's] will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

(Hebrews 10:10)



## Get the Big Picture

Once each year, the high priest entered the Most Holy Place. He took with him blood to “atone for” his own sins and the sins of the people. The great Day of Atonement was Israel’s most solemn observance, corresponding roughly to our Good Friday. As you read, look for parallels and differences between Aaron and Jesus.



## Sharpen the Focus

*I lay my sins on Jesus,  
The spotless Lamb of God;  
He bears them all and frees us  
From the accursed load.* Horatius Bonar

As Aaron and the high priests who followed him laid their hands on the scapegoat (16:21), they confessed the sins of God’s people. Thus, they transferred those sins to the goat, which was then taken into the wilderness and released.

Later on, the Old Testament picks up this idea of God sending His people’s sins far away from them and from His own sight. Remember these comforting words?

*As far as the east is from the west, so far does He  
remove our transgressions from us.* (Psalm 103:12)

The most common New Testament word for forgiveness means “to send away.” Soldiers used this word to dismiss those of a lower rank.

Still today, we can trust our Lord to remove our burden of sin and to send it far away from us and from His remembrance. What the Day of Atonement pictured, Good Friday fulfilled. Spend some time today praising your Savior for His mighty deliverance.



## Zoom In

The next time you confess your sins to your Lord, you may want to try using a picture taken from Leviticus 16. In your mind, place your hands on Jesus’ head as you confess. Realize that God transferred your guilt—all of it—to your Savior and has given you, in exchange, Jesus’ very own righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21)!

# March

# 7/8 Saturday/ Sunday

Read Leviticus  
16–17.

If time is short,  
focus on  
chapter 16.

Psalms 103

Proverbs 10:31–32

## Leviticus 16 The Day of Atonement

## Leviticus 17:1–9 Where to Sacrifice

## Leviticus 17:10–16 Life in the Blood

March

9

Monday

Read *Leviticus*  
18–19.

If time is short,  
focus on  
chapter 19.

*Psalm* 16

*Proverbs* 11:1–3

**Leviticus 18**  
Sexual Sins

**Leviticus 19**  
Social Order



## Get the Big Picture

In *Leviticus* 18, the Lord warns His people against sexual sins, particularly incest. These sins pollute the land (18:24–25) and destroy lives and families. Chapter 19, then, goes on to repeat the Ten Commandments in expanded form. How many of them can you identify?



## Sharpen the Focus

Even if “just getting by” is your goal as you think about keeping the Ten Commandments, you can’t help but throw up your hands in despair at *Leviticus* 19. The examples God gives here illustrate 19:18: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This principle of love requires that we

- renounce greed; care for the poor (19:9–10);
- practice complete honesty in all our relationships (19:11–12);
- give up gossip and the desire for revenge (19:16, 18);
- refuse to harbor ill will against anyone (19:17);
- practice total purity in our sexual behavior (19:20, 29) and total honesty in our work relationships (19:11, 13, 35–36);
- never consult a horoscope or dabble in the occult, no matter how socially acceptable the behavior may be (19:26–29, 31).

No wonder Paul concluded in despair, “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God’s] sight” (*Romans* 3:20). Does this mean we’re off the hook? God knows we can’t keep His Law. Can’t we just ignore it?

Far from it! Rather, we cling by faith to Christ Jesus, who kept the Law of love in our place and who, in love, hung on our hook—the hook of the cross—to take the punishment we deserve for our lovelessness. Looking to Him, we receive forgiveness and are declared righteous. And we receive power to walk in love—step by step.



## Zoom In

The law given in 19:5–8 was far from arbitrary. God intended the peace offering to picture Jesus, who would rise from the dead on the third day and would thus not “see corruption” (*Psalm* 16:10).



## Get the Big Picture

As you read Leviticus 20, note the priority God places on relationships—those between Himself and His people and those between individuals among His people. This contrasts sharply with the laws of most pagan cultures of that day (and oftentimes our own), which placed first priority on property and possessions. As chapters 21 and 22 unfold, they reveal the Lord’s concern that His priests accurately represent the Savior—our perfect Priest and the perfect sacrifice for our sin—the Savior who was to come.



## Sharpen the Focus

Heinous crimes often take neighbors and even family members by surprise. No one sees the warning signs for months or even years. Then, suddenly, the police show up.

Sometimes there’s a fine line between not knowing and not wanting to know. For instance, when we see our brothers and sisters in the faith continually breaking God’s Law, we’re often tempted to pretend that it’s not happening. How easily we convince ourselves to turn away. How readily we decide not to get involved in “other people’s business.” That’s the tendency the Lord addresses in Leviticus 20:1–5.

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” a belligerent Cain asked God (Genesis 4:9).

Much of Scripture answers that question with a resounding yes! Christ’s love in us leads us to bear patiently with one another’s sins of weakness. But Christ’s love also leads us to share our honest concern when we see another believer drifting in the wrong direction or sliding down sin’s slippery slope toward disaster.

As Christ empowers us, we don’t turn our heads; instead, we bow them in prayer for ourselves and for our wandering brother or sister. And then we speak the truth, in love and concern.



## Zoom In

Note the Lord’s encouragement and promise in James 5:19–20. How might He want to use you to show His concern for and share His pardon with someone today?

# March

# 10 Tuesday

Read Leviticus  
20–22.

If time is short,  
focus on chapter 20.

Psalm 1

Proverbs 11:4

**Leviticus 20**  
Penalties for  
Disobedience

**Leviticus 21–22**  
Regulations  
for the Priests

# March

# 11

## Wednesday

Read *Leviticus*  
23–25.

If time is short,  
focus on 25:1–43.

*Psalms* 92

*Proverbs* 11:5–6

### Leviticus 23 Holy Days

### Leviticus 24 God's Holy Name

### Leviticus 25 Holy Years



## Get the Big Picture

Leviticus 23 summarizes the holy days the Lord commanded His people to observe. In chapter 25, Israel's Father-God gives His people Sabbath years and, twice in every century, the Year of Jubilee. As you read, try to imagine the joy of that year.



## Sharpen the Focus

Imagine the anticipation as the Day of Atonement drew to a close and the Year of Jubilee began. As the evening sacrifice concluded, the unmistakable blast of the ram's horn would sound. Imagine the people of God walking home, arm in arm, to break their fast and to revel in the Lord's fantastic generosity toward them:

- They had not a day or a week but a year to rest and enjoy their relationships (25:11–22)!
- All their debts were canceled (25:25–28).
- All who had sold land once again held title to their family's property (25:23–28).
- All who had been slaves went free (25:40–41).

Freedom. Joy. Relief. Rest. The Year of Jubilee represented all of these and more; it symbolized what the Savior would accomplish one day for all of God's people. He would

- give us rest from the burden of trying to save ourselves (Hebrews 4:1–3, 8–9);
- cancel the debt we, by our sins, had incurred (Matthew 18:21–27);
- free us from slavery to sin and to the Law (John 8:34–36);
- make it possible for us to return home to our Father and to stay there forever (Luke 15:11–24; John 14:1–3).

Jesus is our jubilee! Celebrate Him today!



## Zoom In

The Feast of Tabernacles celebrated God's faithfulness to Israel in the wilderness. In what specific ways has God shown Himself faithful to you?



## Get the Big Picture

Leviticus concludes with promises from God and some possible responses by His people. The Lord pledges Himself to bless the obedient (26:1–13), to punish the disobedient (26:14–39), and to restore the repentant (26:40–46). Chapter 27 brings Leviticus to a close by explaining ways God’s people can respond to His goodness.



## Sharpen the Focus

If/then. Much of life revolves around “if/then” transactions. If you clean your room, then we’ll go get ice cream. If you do a good job on this project, then you’ll get a bonus. If you cook dinner, then I’ll do the dishes.

The covenant God set up with Israel on Mount Sinai (the old covenant) includes many “if/then” features. Today, you read one of them.

“If/then” promises appeal to us. We coax ourselves into thinking, “I can do that.” But the old covenant could not accomplish salvation for the human race. Not because it was defective, but because Israel was. And so are we.

Paul explains one of God’s purposes in giving the threats and conditional promises of the old covenant:

*The law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.*

(Galatians 3:24–25)

The Law showed people their sin and need for a Savior. In Christ, God has replaced “if/then” with “but now”:

*But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law . . . the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.*

(Romans 3:21–22)



## Zoom In

Hebrews 8:6 assures us that God’s new covenant is a better covenant, based on even better promises than the old one! Find and read one of your favorite promises from God today—then look for a chance to use it to encourage someone else who needs God’s Good News. (See Psalm 65; John 10; Romans 8; or 1 John 3 for some promises.)

# March

# 12

## Thursday

Read Leviticus  
26–27.

If time is short,  
focus on 26:1–13.

Psalm 65

Proverbs 11:7–8

Leviticus 26  
Obedience  
and  
Disobedience

Leviticus 27  
Consecration  
and  
Conclusion

March

13

Friday

Read Numbers  
1–3.

If time is short,  
focus on  
chapter 2.

Psalm 14

Proverbs 11:9–11

Numbers 1  
Census for  
War

Numbers 2  
Camped  
in Peace

Numbers 3  
Census  
for Ministry



## Get the Big Picture

As Numbers opens, Israel is still camped at Mount Sinai. The Lord will soon give the order to move out—toward the Promised Land. Before He does so, He orders a census taken of all the men over the age of twenty in Israel who are “able to go to war” (1:3). The Levites are not counted here; instead, they are to be set aside to help Aaron and the other priests in the service of the tabernacle (chapter 3).



## Sharpen the Focus

Imagine Israel camped in the early morning, the banners of each of the twelve tribes snapping like flags in the sunshine above the camp. The tabernacle lay at the very center, and the people of God pitched their tents around it on all four sides. It must have made quite an impressive sight, not unlike the picture of the Holy Christian Church C. S. Lewis painted in *The Screwtape Letters*: “spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners.”

Many times, the people of God seem, to all outward appearances, to be weak and irrelevant. Nevertheless, we are our Lord’s divisions, or “hosts,” His troops (Exodus 12:51). He marches with us into the world as, heart by heart, we touch lives with the precious Gospel of our Lord Jesus. The victory is already ours because He has won it for us.

Our Deliverer has sounded the trumpet; He has called us to share His life and peace, wholeness and joy, with a world that is dead in sin and at war with the One who is their only hope. He has hung His banner over us—His love (Song of Solomon 2:4). Lift that banner high over your life today.



## Zoom In

If you could design a standard, a flag, a banner to remind you of your position as Christ’s redeemed child, what would it look like?



## Get the Big Picture

Each of the chapters in today's reading deals with a separation of one kind or another, for one purpose or another. How many kinds of separation or "set-apartness" can you find? What purpose may lie behind each?



## Sharpen the Focus

Week after week, ever since the time of Moses, God's representatives have spoken the Lord's blessings over His people (Numbers 6:22–27). In all those centuries, the words have been translated into hundreds of languages but have not changed in meaning at all:

- "The LORD bless you and keep you"—preserve your body and your soul with every good and perfect gift that you need for your total well-being.
- "The LORD make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you"—smile in love and forgiveness toward you and show you His compassion for all your distresses and hurts.
- "The LORD lift up His countenance upon you [look upon you with favor] and give you peace"—give you His peace (*shalom*), the sum total of all the good things He establishes for His people, especially in Christ, our Savior.

All these benefits can be summed up in the name of the Lord—the Savior-God, Yahweh (Jehovah). In His name, in His Word, and by His promises in Christ Jesus, each and every one of these blessings comes to us and remains on us. We are blessed!



## Zoom In

While most Nazirites dedicated themselves to God for a specific period of time, several biblical characters lived as Nazirites their whole lives. Samson may well have been the most famous (Judges 13:1–7, 14, 24). John the Baptist lived as a Nazirite (Luke 1:11–17). Samuel also likely lived this set-apart lifestyle (1 Samuel 1:11). While not priests, Nazirites dedicated themselves to God's service and to a lifestyle of purity.

# March

# 14/15

## Saturday/ Sunday

*Read Numbers 4–6.*

*If time is short,  
focus on chapter 6.*

*Psalms 4*

*Proverbs 11:12–13*

### Numbers 4 Separated for Service

### Numbers 5 Separated for Suspected Sin

### Numbers 6 Separated as a Sign

March

16  
Monday

Read Numbers  
7–8.

If time is short,  
focus on 8:1–20.

Psalm 107

Proverbs  
11:14–15

Numbers 7  
Gifts to God

Numbers 8  
Gifts  
from God



## Get the Big Picture

Each tribe gave the same exact offerings for the use of the Levites as they served in the tabernacle and in transporting it (Numbers 7). Nevertheless, the Lord in grace noted and recorded each gift separately! Each came as an offering from the hearts of His precious children. The Levites, in turn, were His gifts back to Aaron and the priests, who could not do all the work of worship themselves (8:18), and to the nation as a whole.



## Sharpen the Focus

“He thinks he’s God’s gift to humanity.” Most often, we say words like these in disgust, when offended by an arrogant or otherwise obnoxious attitude in someone we dislike. That can’t change the fact, however, that the Lord does give some of His gifts to us in the form of people:

*And [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11–12)*

For which particular people-gifts in the Church do you feel most thankful? Why not jot a note or pick up the phone to thank those people-gifts today? Don’t stop with a general “thank you” statement; instead give one or two examples of ways you’ve been equipped and strengthened through the ministry you’ve received.



## Zoom In

Compare Numbers 8:1–4 with Revelation 1:12–13. Moses made the furnishings for the tabernacle “according to the pattern that the LORD had shown” him on Mount Sinai (Numbers 8:4). The earthly furnishings corresponded to heavenly realities. In this case, the lampstand pictured the Church—God’s family throughout all time. Filled with the oil of the Holy Spirit, she shines the love of Christ out into a sin-darkened world. (See also Exodus 25:37–40.) The lampstand was pure gold—symbolic of our value and righteousness in our Lord’s sight.



## Get the Big Picture

Israel has been camped at the base of Mount Sinai for about a year. As the people prepare to break camp, they celebrate the Passover. Then the pillar of cloud lifts, and the nation marches out toward the Promised Land. The tribe of Judah leads the way—its standard (banner) shining in the sun (10:14).



## Sharpen the Focus

As you begin new tasks, face new challenges, and take up new opportunities, do you begin with praise to the Lord, the one who has chosen, delivered, and forgiven you? The one who has, in His cross, given you a new life and a reason to live? The name *Judah* means “praise.” In a very literal sense, praise led the way as Israel marched through the desert to Canaan. Focused on the cloud of God’s glory that sheltered them from the desert sun, the people had every reason to praise their Savior-God. He had, after all, “promised good to Israel” (10:29). And, what He promised, He was able to perform (cf. Romans 4:21).

What new project lies ahead of you right now? Maybe your new beginning involves something as simple as a new day. Or maybe you’re beginning a new career, a new family, or life in a new city. Regardless, you can begin in confidence and praise because your Lord is faithful.



## Zoom In

Psalm 68:1 quotes Numbers 10:35:

*Arise, O LORD, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You.*

These were the words of praise Moses shouted each time Israel broke camp, taking the ark of the covenant with them. Most of the psalm describes Israel’s wilderness experience and God’s faithfulness. It includes several verses that speak of the work of the coming Savior. Read some or all of it today, using its words of praise as your own. You may find the promise of Psalm 68:19–20 especially meaningful.

# March

# 17

## Tuesday

Read Numbers  
9–10.

If time is short,  
focus on 10:11–36.

Psalm 68

Proverbs 11:16–17

### Numbers

### 9:1–14

### Israel

### Celebrates the Passover

### Numbers

### 9:15–10:36

### Israel Breaks Camp

# March

# 18

## Wednesday

Read Numbers  
11–12.

If time is short,  
focus on  
chapter 11.

Psalm 78:1–39

Proverbs  
11:18–19

Numbers 11  
Doubt and  
Complaints

Numbers 12  
Disrespect  
and  
Competition



## Get the Big Picture

The people tire of God's provision and grumble because He has not—in their opinion—done a good job in caring for them. Moses takes these complaints personally and goes to the Lord in near despair. In love, the Lord helps Moses and feeds His people in a miraculous way. As the reading closes, He also reaffirms His choice of Moses to lead Israel despite the jealousies of Miriam and Aaron.



## Sharpen the Focus

Will God's Word come true for me or not? When we find ourselves in humanly impossible situations, that's the question that can flit through our minds—or come home to roost there.

As Moses faced the anger and disappointment of the people, he found himself overwhelmed. He threw up his arms in dismay and said, in effect, to God, "This is out of my hands. It's too much for me. Kill me now if You don't intend to help us" (11:10–15).

Maybe you've been there. Maybe you've felt as helpless or desperate as Moses did. If so, the Lord's response to Moses can encourage you. Moses heard not one word of rebuke from heaven. Instead, the Lord granted some immediate, practical help (11:16–17). He gave Moses His solemn promise to provide an answer to calm the crisis (11:18–20). And when Moses could not quite believe that promise, God repeated it and personalized it: "Now you shall see whether My word will come true for you or not" (11:23).

What doubts or fears flood your heart today? Take them to your Lord in prayer and hear His word of grace. His promises will come true for you. In Jesus, He forgives. In Jesus, He will help. Rest in His love until you see His deliverance.



## Zoom In

Note how personally the Lord took Miriam and Aaron's disrespect (12:4–9). When God delegates responsibility to human beings—in the family, church, or state—He also gives His representatives His authority. Exodus 22:28 expresses this principle in these words: "You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people."



## Get the Big Picture

At the Lord's command, Moses sends out twelve spies, one from each of the twelve tribes, to scout out the land of Canaan. Ten of the spies report news that provokes terror in Israel. But Joshua and Caleb try to reassure the people and encourage them to trust in the Lord. Faithless and rebellious, the people pay the price of their unbelief.



## Sharpen the Focus

Someone once asked General Patton, a famous US Army general during World War II, "Have you ever been afraid in battle?"

"Of course I experience fear," the general replied, "but I never take counsel from my fears."

How often in your own life have you taken counsel from your fears and thus missed out on blessings your Lord wanted you to have? Does fear keep you from taking on some task in your congregation or community the Lord might want you to do for His glory? Does fear keep you from speaking about Christ to that friend, neighbor, or brother who needs Him so much? Does fear padlock your wallet and keep you from supporting God's mission in Panama or Russia or China or Mexico?

There's one remedy for that kind of paralyzing fear. The apostle John wrote, "Perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Not our effort in drumming up perfect love for God in our own hearts, but rather God's already perfect—complete—love for us in Christ! God showed us that love by sending Jesus to die for us although we were still living in rebellion, still acting in hatred toward Him.

If you struggle with fear, set aside some time today to meditate on your Savior's love for you—His perfect love for you. Let His Spirit counsel your heart through His powerful Word. Let His grace strengthen you as you face the "giants" of your life today.



## Zoom In

God is not impressed with disobedience disguised as bravado. When some in Israel tried to fool God with an outward show of repentance, they met with humiliating defeat (Numbers 14:39–45).

# March

# 19

## Thursday

*Read Numbers*  
13–15.

*If time is short,*  
*focus on 14:1–35.*

*Psalm 78:40–72*

*Proverbs 11:20–21*

### Numbers 13

Giants in  
the Land

### Numbers 14

Fear in  
the People

### Numbers 15

Offerings  
from the Heart

March

20  
Friday

Read Numbers  
16–18.

If time is short,  
focus on 16:1–40.

Psalm 112

Proverbs 11:22

Numbers 16  
Aaron  
Challenged

Numbers 17  
Aaron  
Confirmed

Numbers 18  
The Priests  
Set Aside



## Get the Big Picture

As you read today, note the difference of opinion between some in Israel and the Lord concerning the authority of Aaron and the Levites, who served God and the people in the tabernacle.



## Sharpen the Focus

How easily we can come to blame others for our own sins:

- If she hadn't gotten angry first . . .
- If they would have done what they promised . . .
- If he had been more helpful . . .

Today's reading from Numbers quickly convinces us that blame-shifting is not a new trend in the human race. Note 16:12–14, 41. Dathan and his followers blamed Moses for consequences they had brought on themselves. They, not Moses, had swallowed the fear-provoking report of the ten spies. They, not Moses, had refused to believe Joshua and Caleb's report based on God's faithfulness. Moses and Aaron hadn't made the earth open up! The Lord had! And He did so in anger against just this sort of disrespect.

How do you deal with the sin in your own heart? Do you acknowledge it for what it is and open yourself to the Holy Spirit's examination, forgiveness, and cleansing? Or do you hide behind excuses, blaming circumstances or other people for your own godless attitudes, words, and actions?

Read 1 John 1:5–9 prayerfully, perhaps several times. Let God's love chase away your fears as you talk with Him about your failure and His forgiveness in Jesus Christ.



## Zoom In

The Levites received no land in Canaan. Instead, the Lord set aside for the Levites 10 percent of the income of the other tribes (Numbers 18:24). God does not want those who serve Him to live in want or in worry about their material needs. Also note the special promise He made to Aaron in 18:20b. Here was the greatest honor and antidote to worry of all!



## Get the Big Picture

Because death comes to mankind as a consequence of sin, death defiled those Old Testament believers who came into contact with it. By His own death, Christ has purified us from this pollution. The sacrifice of the red heifer pointed forward to this (Numbers 19). Chapter 20 records the deaths of Miriam (20:1) and Aaron (20:22–29).



## Sharpen the Focus

Exasperation. Who could blame Moses and Aaron for feeling it? Think of all the rebellion, the hardship, the many leadership crises they had faced for nearly forty years. Both were over one hundred years old, well past the time most people want to face the harshness of a desert climate, the irritation of sand in one's sandals, and the kind of continual grumbling to which many in Israel seem to have been addicted. No wonder Moses fell prey to the temptation to lay down the law (as seen in 20:10).

And yet it seems that the Lord intended to induce repentance and trust through an act of kindness (20:8; cf. Romans 2:4). Much as He had provided water for their parents in a similar situation (Exodus 17:1–7), He now would display His grace to this generation. And to keep them from turning Aaron's staff into an object of worship, this time Moses was simply to speak to the rock.

Instead, in an unholy fit, Moses scolds the people and beats the rock—actions that paint for Israel a portrait of the Lord just the opposite of what He Himself had intended.

Distinguishing Law from Gospel is sometimes easy. Speaking each at the right time seldom is. In your prayers today, ask the Lord for grace to know Him better and better through His Word. Ask that you more appropriately discern and apply His Law and His grace to your own heart and to those lives your life touches.



## Zoom In

To better grasp the meaning of Numbers 19, compare it with the description of Christ's sacrifice and its results in Hebrews 9:11–14.

# March

# 21/22

## Saturday/ Sunday

*Read Numbers  
19–20.*

*If time is short,  
focus on 20:1–13.*

*Psalm 111*

*Proverbs 11:23*

### Numbers 19 Purification from Death

### Numbers 20 Moses and Aaron Sin

March  
23  
Monday

Read Numbers 21.

If time is short,  
focus on verses  
1–9.

Psalm 106

Proverbs 11:24–26

Numbers  
21:1–9  
Grace for  
Guilt

Numbers  
21:10–20  
Grace  
for Need

Numbers  
21:21–35  
Grace  
for Victory



## Get the Big Picture

As Israel moves toward the outskirts of Canaan, she faces several enemies—not the least of which is the nation’s own tendency toward discouragement and complaining. In grace, God makes victory possible, providing all that the people need.



## Sharpen the Focus

The New Testament word for *confess* means literally “to say the same thing” or “to speak together.” When we confess our sins, we say what God knows:

- I did it.
- It was wrong.
- I have no excuse.
- I deserve punishment.

Compare 21:5 with 21:7 and notice how Israel handles the sins of disrespect and rebellion this time. They do not make excuses. They do not try to shift blame. “We did it,” they confess simply. “We were wrong. We have sinned.”

The Lord has been at work in their hearts. He has made a difference there. By His grace, the nation is growing up spiritually. Of course, ideally, the people of Israel (and we ourselves) would avoid wrongdoing in the first place. Nevertheless, the willingness to make an honest confession and to admit our need for forgiveness is one signpost along the road of spiritual growth.

Where do you see this sign of the Lord’s work in your own life? In what situations do you still tend to make excuses instead of making confession? Why not talk to the Lord about that right now?



## Zoom In

Jesus commented on the bronze serpent incident in His midnight chat with Nicodemus. The Lord’s words are well worth our meditation:

*As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. (John 3:14–15)*



## Get the Big Picture

Taken together, these four chapters detail the encounter of Israel with Balaam. Terrified that no human army can stop the Lord's divisions from conquering Canaan, the king of Moab (Balak) chooses a superhuman weapon: he asks the pagan magician Balaam to conjure up a curse against Israel. But what God has blessed, Balaam cannot curse. And so, in the end, Israel's enemies get God's people to bring God's wrath down upon themselves—by committing spiritual adultery (25:1–3).



## Sharpen the Focus

Someone has said, “God made man in His own image, and man has since returned the favor.” How tempted we often are to characterize God in human terms, to assume He thinks and will act just as we sinful human beings do. The Lord Himself once rebuked this notion: “You thought that I was one like yourself” (Psalm 50:21). Balaam prophesied against this idea too:

*God is not man, that He should lie,  
or a son of man, that He should change His mind.  
Has He said, and will He not do it?  
Or has He spoken, and will He not fulfill it?*

(Numbers 23:19)

Unlike human beings, God always keeps His word. He acts with perfect integrity. He is always true to Himself and to His people. Through the cross of Christ, He has sworn to bless His repentant people. And He will never change His mind. How can this truth comfort you today?



## Zoom In

Blinded by greed, Balaam forgot God's changelessness and almost lost his life on the spot (22:21–35). Blinded by lust, Israel forgot God's unchanging Law and brought its curse upon themselves (25:3–9). What temptations are most likely to blind you to God's unchanging Law or to His unchanging love for you in Jesus? Ask for His grace to see Him more clearly and obey Him more fully as you continue to grow up in Him.

# March

# 24 Tuesday

Read Numbers  
22–25.

If time is short,  
focus on  
chapter 22.

Psalm 50

Proverbs 11:27

## Numbers 22 Balaam's Folly

## Numbers 23–24 God's Blessing

## Numbers 25 Israel's Fall

March  
25  
Wednesday

Read Numbers  
26–27.

If time is short,  
focus on  
27:15–23.

Psalm 1

Proverbs 11:28

Numbers 26  
Israel's  
Second  
Census

Numbers 27  
Israel's  
Second  
Leader



## Get the Big Picture

As he did before the people broke camp at Sinai (Numbers 1–4), Moses takes a census now, forty years later. Nearly all the people from the previous generation have died, and Israel is preparing to enter and conquer Canaan itself. Moses knows he will not go with them, so he prayerfully appoints Joshua to lead the people in their conquest.



## Sharpen the Focus

Clearly, Moses mentored Joshua:

- At the battle with Amalek (Exodus 17:8–13)
- On Sinai (Exodus 24:13)
- At Kadesh Barnea (Numbers 13:1–2; 14:6–10)

Moses made Joshua his assistant (Exodus 24:13). No doubt, all of his experiences in this position prepared Joshua for later leadership. Yet the Lord led His servant Joshua in a deeper kind of preparation too—a personal, spiritual preparation:

*Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.*

(Exodus 33:11)

What did Joshua do there? Undoubtedly, he meditated on the Lord's Word, on the Lord's goodness, on the Lord's promise. Undoubtedly, he prayed for himself and for his people. Undoubtedly, he praised and thanked the Lord.

The Lord drew Joshua to Himself—just as He wants to draw you to Himself. We can enjoy all the experiences, all the mentoring, all the previous service for Christ in the world, but these things cannot replace the time we spend with our Lord in His Word. We do not (and need not) know what plans He has in mind for our future service to Him. For now, we need only let Him bring us closer to Himself through the cross of His Son.



## Zoom In

Joshua's name means "the Lord [Yahweh] saves." It's the Hebrew version of a Greek name familiar to you—*Jesus*.



## Get the Big Picture

For a new generation, Moses once again repeats and summarizes Israel's regular sacrifices and yearly observances. Numbers 30 then gives explicit case-by-case instructions about the oaths the Lord's people take. God stresses His intention that their word be as certain as His.



## Sharpen the Focus

An elderly lady waited all afternoon for a plumber to arrive. Late in the day, she gave up and headed for the grocery store. Sure enough, the plumber drove up ten minutes later. He rapped on the door. "Who is it?" croaked the lady's parrot from inside the house.

"It's the plumber."

"Who is it?" insisted the voice from inside the house.

"It's the plumber!" hollered the repairman.

"Who is it?" insisted the voice again.

The veins stuck out on his neck as he bellowed at the top of his lungs, "It's the plumber!!!" Whereupon he suffered a heart attack and died on the spot. The lady of the house returned shortly thereafter. "Who is it?" she wondered aloud, seeing the fallen repairman on her front steps.

"It's the plumber," croaked the parrot from the living room.

As any teacher can tell us, parrots aren't the only creatures that learn through repetition. In today's reading from Numbers, the Lord may seem to repeat Himself once too often. After all, haven't we heard most of these worship regulations detail by detail many times by now?

Yes. But our Lord knows how easily we humans forget. And so He tells us again and again about our sin and the work of our Savior, Jesus.



## Zoom In

- What encouragement or warning have you heard from God's Word several times in recent days?
- How will you use the power your Savior provides to respond to that Word now?

# March

# 26 Thursday

Read Numbers  
28–30.

If time is short,  
focus on  
chapter 28.

Psalm 119:1–16

Proverbs 11:29–31

## Numbers

### 28:1–15

### A Review of Sacrifices

## Numbers

### 28:16–29:40

### A Review of Observances

## Numbers 30

### The Regulation of Vows

March

27

Friday

Read Numbers 31.

If time is short,  
focus on verses  
1–8.

Psalm 37

Proverbs 12:1

Numbers  
31:1–24  
Moses’  
Final Battle

Numbers  
31:25–54  
The Warriors’  
Thank  
Offering



## Get the Big Picture

If Canaan is to serve as a kind of “spiritual incubator” for the infant nation Israel, the dangerous virus of idolatry must be neutralized. The people of Midian, allied with Moab, have already tempted Israel into this sin. At that time, twenty-four thousand Israelites died (Numbers 25:1–9). Thus, the Lord declares the “holy war” you will read about today. (See the article “Holy War” for more on the “holy wars” of the Old Testament.)



## Sharpen the Focus

Because we read Balaam’s story three days ago, it would be easy to miss the tie-in with today’s account. Numbers 31:8b and 31:16 serve as flares, flagging us down so we don’t miss the point.

Unable to curse Israel, the soothsayer Balaam signed on with Israel’s enemies as an unholy consultant. He apparently knew the Lord’s attitude toward idolatry. And he knew enough about sinful human nature to guess what might result if Israel met a strong enough temptation. His motive? Greed, pure and simple.

Well, perhaps simple, but not so pure. Within weeks or, at most, a few months, Balaam’s sin caught up with him. His love of money destroyed him.

The love of money—and the comforts and trinkets money can buy—creeps into even Christian hearts. Greed can insert itself so quietly that it leaves not so much as a ripple on the surface of our lives to betray its presence. We need not have money to love it. And if we do love it, no amount, however large, will leave us feeling content and secure. Only in Jesus—the wisdom of God and the power of God—can we find forgiveness for our greed and the strength to look to the Lord for true security.



## Zoom In

*Blessed is the one who finds wisdom,  
and the one who gains understanding,  
for the gain from her is better than gain from silver  
and her profit better than gold.*

(Proverbs 3:13–14)



## Get the Big Picture

The leaders of the tribes of Gad and Reuben come to Moses with a request that makes him throw up his hands and say, in essence, “Here we go again!” But once they explain their reasoning and volunteer their help to the other tribes, Moses relents. Chapter 33 reviews the nation’s physical journey from Egypt to Canaan, and in chapter 34, the Lord lays out the boundaries of the land He intends His people to have.



## Sharpen the Focus

From a human point of view, it doesn’t quite make sense. But the Bible clearly teaches that sin against other people is, first and foremost, sin against God. Note Moses’ words to Reuben and Gad:

*But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.* (Numbers 32:23)

When we think nasty thoughts about our employees or our supervisor, when we snap at others in our family, when we drive carelessly, when we fail to help those who hurt, when we use racial slurs even in jest—these sins all offend God and add to the wall that divides us from Him.

Why so? Because His plans for us include relationships with other people. His will for us includes the joy of harmony and self-forgetful love in our relationships. When we sin against others, we delay His plan, we subvert His purpose for our lives. And when we do these things, we can be sure that our sins will find us out.

That fact would drive us to despair if it weren’t for one other fact—the Lord Jesus lived and died and rose again for each of us. Cling by faith to Him today as you pray the prayer of Ephesians 3:14–21 for yourself and your family.



## Zoom In

Numbers 33:3–4 sheds an interesting light on the exodus events. The Lord judged not just the Egyptians but their “gods” as well. Thinking about the events, we say with the psalmist, “What god is great like our God?” (77:13).

# March

# 28/29

## Saturday/ Sunday

Read Numbers  
32–34.

If time is short,  
focus on 32:1–27.

Psalm 77

Proverbs 12:2–3

## Numbers 32

### Reuben’s Request

## Numbers 33

### Wilderness Wanderings

## Numbers 34

### Broad Borders

# March 30 Monday

Read Numbers 35.

If time is short,  
focus on verses  
9–34.

Psalm 57

Proverbs 12:4–7

## Numbers 35 Unique Cities



### Get the Big Picture

Think of it. A nation of former slaves that has lived as a nation of wandering shepherds for forty years is now about to inherit land, cities, farms, villages, houses. As Israel settles down beside the vineyards and olive trees of Canaan, the Lord will prosper His people as He has promised. And prosperity will bring with it new problems and temptations: spiritual forgetfulness, a rising crime rate, the desire for the power that can come along with wealth. As you read today, note the safeguards the Lord gave Israel to protect them against these dangers.



### Sharpen the Focus

What pictures come to your mind when you hear the word *refuge*? A cave in a cliff where a person can hide in a hail storm? A family whose members provide emotional comfort for one another? A home where neighborhood teens can spend time after school and on weekends and relax, safe from the crime in the streets and maybe even the alcohol or drug abuse in their own homes?

The Bible often calls the Lord our “refuge.” In Jesus, we can hide in safety when Satan’s accusations roar in our ears and when the hurricane of death threatens to carry us away. Jesus is our hiding place from sin and Satan, hell and death. He is our “city of refuge.” He died for our offenses in our place.

Think about that as you read one or more of these psalms that describe the Lord as our refuge: Psalm 14; 46; 57; 62; 91.

From what do you seek refuge today? Find it—in Him!



### Zoom In

Upon the death of the high priest, those guilty of manslaughter could leave the city of refuge to which they had fled. They could go home. Their guilt was pardoned. Glory be to Jesus, our High Priest, whose death has earned our pardon, whose death has set us free and sent us home to our Father!



## Get the Big Picture

To understand Numbers 36, you need to sit in the context of 27:1–11. Here, the Lord gave daughters the right to inherit family land under certain specific circumstances. But if those daughters married outside their tribe, their land could transfer to that tribe in the Year of Jubilee. The Lord's plan to prevent senseless poverty and extravagant wealth at the expense of the poor in Israel would be thwarted. Read to find the solution Moses decreed.



## Sharpen the Focus

In some places in the world today, arranged marriages predominate. In our culture, people marry for love, for money, or for companionship, but seldom to placate an insistent patriarch.

We may find it hard to imagine that the problem raised in Numbers 36 mattered. But that's due to the cultural blinders we wear. In an agricultural setting, land ownership is everything. That's why the Lord carefully prescribed the inheritance laws He did—well before Israel entered the Promised Land. He wanted to protect His people from the grinding poverty that could ensue in a society in which the rich got richer and the poor got the scraps the rich deigned to give.

Throughout Scripture, we read about our Savior-God's concern for the poor. We must admit, must we not, that His concern outstrips our own by miles? Our hard and selfish hearts cling to our trinkets and yearn to possess the latest gadgets, all only a click away.

Faced with that truth, how comforting we find the Gospel of our Savior, who laid aside His riches in glory to take on our spiritual poverty before God. Because He assumed our debt of guilt on His cross and paid it in full there, we now have been made overwhelmingly rich (2 Corinthians 8:9)! Penitent sinners receive not only pardon but also power to grow more like Christ—especially in our attitudes toward those in need.



## Zoom In

*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you by His poverty might become rich.*  
(2 Corinthians 8:9)

March

31  
Tuesday

Read Numbers 36.

If time is short,  
focus on verses  
5–12.

Psalm 9

Proverbs 12:8–9

Numbers 36  
Obedience  
from the Heart

# HOLY WAR

Several times in Exodus and Numbers, we have seen God's people go into battle against His enemies. These instances fit in with the Old Testament concept of "holy war." This concept may strike our ears today as odd or even reprehensible. To understand it, we need to grasp several important concepts:

- The old and new covenants differ. Under the old covenant, God dealt with a specific racial group in a specific geographical location—the nation of Israel. Under the new covenant, God deals with His Church—all believers of every tribe, nation, tongue, kindred, and (we might add) location on earth.
- The church and state were united under the old covenant, unlike today's new covenant arrangement. The church has twisted God's will when she has tried to use political means to deal with the enemies of God's kingdom (e.g., the Crusades, the Inquisition).
- God cannot deal with evil by ignoring it or by glossing it over; He must destroy it. When Israel ignored His commands, the Lord's words from Numbers 33:55 came true: "If you do not drive out the inhabitants of the land from before you, then those of them whom you let remain shall be as barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they shall trouble you in the land where you dwell."

God's desire that evil be destroyed in Canaan was never completely fulfilled by His old covenant people. However, evil will be completely obliterated on the Last Day. Our Savior-God will cast everything that is unholy into the eternal fire of His judgment. For now, though, the hope of that coming day can encourage us. We will not live forever with fear, with pain, with poverty, with sin, with temptation, with injustice, or with Satan and death. God will swallow those things up. Then we will shout in victory with Paul:

*"O death, where is your victory?"*

*O death, where is your sting?"*

*The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:55–57)*

# PICTURES OF JESUS

## FROM LEVITICUS AND NUMBERS

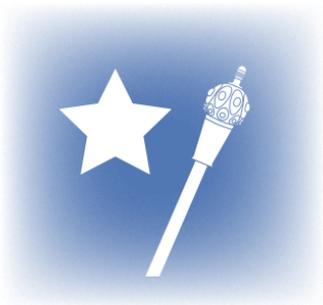
How many can you match?

- |                                   |  |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <p>___ 1. The burnt offering</p>  | <p>a. The One in whom I am set free from slavery, have all my debt for sin canceled, and can go home to my Father (Leviticus 25:11-42)</p> |
| <p>___ 2. The peace offering</p>  | <p>b. The Bread of Life who came down from heaven (Numbers 11:7-9)</p>   |
| <p>___ 3. The red heifer</p>      | <p>c. The One who purifies me from the pollution of death (Numbers 19)</p>   |
| <p>___ 4. The high priest</p>     | <p>d. Lifted up in the desert as Christ was lifted up on the cross; I look to Him in faith and live (Numbers 21:4-9)</p>                   |
| <p>___ 5. The Passover lamb</p>   | <p>e. The One from whom I receive living water, the water of life (Numbers 20:8)</p>   |
| <p>___ 6. The Jubilee</p>         | <p>f. The One who gave Himself completely to do the will of God in my place (Leviticus 6:8-13)</p>   |
| <p>___ 7. The rock</p>            | <p>g. The One whose blood protects me from the power of death (Numbers 28:16; Exodus 12:23)</p>  |
| <p>___ 8. Manna</p>               | <p>h. The One to whom I can flee for safety from my guilt and Satan's accusations (Numbers 35:9-25)</p>                                    |
| <p>___ 9. The bronze serpent</p>  | <p>i. The One whose death on the cross brought me peace with God (Leviticus 3:1-17)</p>  |
| <p>___ 10. The city of refuge</p> | <p>j. The One who offered Himself on the altar of the cross as the sacrifice for my sin, whose death set me free (Numbers 35:25)</p>       |

Answers: (1) f (2) i (3) c (4) j (5) g (6) a (7) e (8) b (9) d (10) h

# LEVITICUS/NUMBERS QUIZ

- Which of the following was not commanded of God's people with respect to the grain offering (Leviticus 2:1–16)?
  - It must contain oil.
  - It must be made with yeast.
  - It must be seasoned with salt.
  - It must be offered with incense.
- The kinds of animals God identified as clean animals, suitable for the people to eat, included all of the following except (Leviticus 11:1–47)
  - animals that have a split hoof completely divided and that chew their cud.
  - water creatures that have fins and scales.
  - winged creatures that walk on all fours that have jointed legs for hopping on the ground.
  - creatures that move around on the ground on their bellies.
- What was the scapegoat to carry on itself when the people released it into the desert (Leviticus 16:20–22)?
  - the sins of the people
  - ashes from the altar
  - a priestly sash trimmed with bells
  - the diseases of the people
- Which of the following statements about the Nazirite vow is NOT correct (Numbers 6:1–21)?
  - Those taking the Nazirite vow must abstain from wine and other fermented drink.
  - Only men can take a Nazirite vow.
  - Nazirites must not eat grapes or raisins.
  - The hair of someone who has taken a Nazirite vow must not be cut.
- Which of the following men sent to explore the land of Canaan was later named Joshua by Moses (Numbers 13:16)?
  - Sethur
  - Hoshea
  - Palti
  - Ammiel
- Who died and was buried in the Desert of Zin near where Moses disobeyed God by striking a rock twice instead of speaking to the rock and honoring God for the water that came from it (Numbers 20:1–13)?
  - Miriam
  - Moses
  - Aaron
  - Korah
- Which of the following symbols were included in Balaam's prophecy about the coming king of Israel (Numbers 24:15–19; ultimately fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah)?
  - star and scepter
  - rod and staff
  - crown and throne
  - orb and diadem



1. b—No offering made to the Lord by fire was to contain any yeast (or honey) (Leviticus 2:1).
2. d—Every creature “that swarms on the ground is detestable; it shall not be eaten” (Leviticus 11:41).
3. a—The scapegoat carried away the sins of the people when it was released into the desert (Leviticus 16:22). The scapegoat reminds us of Jesus, who came to remove all sins.
4. b—According to Numbers 6:2, both men and women could take a Nazirite vow.
5. b—Moses gave Hoshua, whose name means “salvation,” the name Joshua, meaning “the Lord saves.”
6. a—Miriam died and was buried before God provided water from the rock at Meribah (Numbers 20:1).
7. a—Balaam prophesied, “A star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel” (Numbers 24:17). Originally applied to the kingship of David, this prophecy also refers to Jesus, our Savior and King.

## ANSWERS

# AN HOUR OF PRAYER



**Y**ou may want to devote a full sixty minutes to the following prayer outline. On the other hand, perhaps you may have a smaller amount of time available. In any case, many believers down through the centuries have received the Lord's blessing upon meditation of His Word. In addition, since God's Word re-

veals His will, contemplation of His Word can guide our prayers in powerful, God-pleasing ways.

## ENTER HIS GATES

Begin by praising God for His love and care. Use the following verses from Psalm 84.

How lovely is Your dwelling place,  
O LORD of hosts!

My soul longs, yes, faints  
for the courts of the LORD;  
my heart and flesh sing for joy  
to the living God.

Even the sparrow finds a home,  
and the swallow a nest for herself,  
where she may lay her young,  
at Your altars, O LORD of hosts,  
my King and my God.

Blessed are those who dwell in Your house,  
ever singing Your praise!

Blessed are those whose strength is in You.

(Psalm 84:1-5)

## OUR NEEDS AND CONCERNS

- Daily, we struggle with our own sinfulness and that of the world around us. What sins do you need to confess before God's throne of mercy? Of what mercy, guidance, and help are you in need today?
- How can remembering God's love for you in Christ Jesus and the new life into which you have been baptized comfort and assure you?

Continue with the words of Psalm 57:1–3. Ask God’s Spirit for the faith to trust in Him with the confidence of these words as you face the challenges, struggles, and disappointments in your life.

Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me,  
for in You my soul takes refuge;  
in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge,  
till the storms of destruction pass by.  
I cry out to God Most High,  
to God who fulfills His purpose for me.  
He will send from heaven and save me;  
He will put to shame him who tramples on me.  
God will send out His steadfast love and His faithfulness!

- Reflect on your life and on how your Savior-God has answered your prayers and acted on your behalf. What thoughts come to mind as you reflect on the words of this psalm?
- What special requests are on your heart and mind as you approach God’s throne of grace?

We come before our holy and righteous God mindful of His love and care for us. In His Son, Jesus, He has forgiven our sins and promises to us a new and eternal life in His name. Still, we remain a people in need. Bring the needs and concerns of your heart to your heavenly Father in prayer, right now. Let the Holy Spirit shine the light of His love into every dark corner of your life, as you pray with the psalmist (Psalm 84:8–12):

O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer;  
give ear, O God of Jacob!  
Behold our shield, O God;  
look on the face of Your anointed!

For a day in Your courts is better  
than a thousand elsewhere.  
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God  
than dwell in the tents of wickedness.  
For the LORD God is a sun and shield;  
the LORD bestows favor and honor.  
No good thing does He withhold  
from those who walk uprightly.  
O LORD of hosts,  
blessed is the one who trusts in You!

## THE LORD HELPS HIS PEOPLE

Consider the worries and burdens you carry. Think about the confusion or pain in the lives of those you love. Remember the mission of the Holy Christian Church and of your congregation. Ask the Lord to lead you as you intercede for all these needs. The following suggestions may assist in establishing a rhythm of daily and weekly prayer.

**Sunday:** For the joy of the resurrection among us; for God's grace as we anticipate the week before us; for an outpouring of God's grace throughout the world.

**Monday:** For faith to live in the promises of Holy Baptism; for one's vocation; for those without work or who find it difficult to serve in their present positions; for the salvation and well-being of our neighbors; for good weather; and for our nation and its leaders.

**Tuesday:** For deliverance against temptation; for the addicted and despairing, the tortured and oppressed; for those struggling with sin, that they may know God's mercy and grace.

**Wednesday:** For family and loved ones near and far, that all may live together under the grace of Christ according to the Word of God; for support for adults who must rear their children alone; for godly schools, church schools, and seminaries.

**Thursday:** For the Church and her pastors; for missionaries; for fruitful and salutary use of the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood; for children and those new to the faith.

**Friday:** For the preaching of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and for its spread throughout the whole world, especially in our community; for the persecuted; for the sick and dying.

**Saturday:** For faithfulness to the end; for the renewal of those who are withering in the faith or have fallen away; for hearts and minds receptive to God's Word on the Lord's Day; for pastors and people as they prepare to receive Christ's gifts.

Conclude with the Collect appropriate for the season of the Church Year, such as the following:

### *Christmas*

Grant, Almighty God, that the birth of Your only-begotten Son in the flesh may set us free, who are held in the old bondage under the yoke of sin, through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

### *Epiphany*

O God, who by the leading of a star manifested Your only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, mercifully grant that we, who know You now by faith, may live each day as Your dear children and after this life enjoy eternity in the light of Your glory; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

### *Lent*

Almighty and everlasting God, create and make in us new and contrite hearts that we, worthily lamenting our sins and acknowledging our unworthiness, may obtain of You, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

