

MAY 2017

# TODAY IN THE WORD™



*The cloud of the LORD was over them by day when they set out from the camp.*

Numbers 10:34

## NUMBERS: Faith and Faithlessness in the Desert

A devotional from



MOODY  
GLOBAL MINISTRIES™

# TODAY WITH DR. PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Global Ministries

## Never Deserted



Ann Rodgers, age 72, was lost in the Arizona desert for nine days. She survived by drinking pond water, eating plants, and spelling

the word *help* on the ground using sticks and rocks. When Ann started out to visit her grandchildren, she never intended to end up in the desert. But when her hybrid vehicle ran out of power and her food and water dwindled, she began scavenging for desert plants. “When I saw the rescue crew, I sat down and bawled,” Ann said. “I just said, ‘Thank you.’”

This month we will read in the book of Numbers about the nation of Israel, who also spent time filled with anxiety and fear as they wandered in the desert. What began as a victorious journey to the Promised Land quickly became confusing and desperate. For 40 years, due to their doubting and disobedience, the Israelites wandered from Mount Sinai through Kadesh, the plains of Moab, and the Sinai desert. And, like Ann, they desperately wanted out. Again and again we read their cries and complaints.

The book of Numbers is not your typical “lost in the desert” story, because

while the Israelites’ journey may have seemed to have gotten off track, they were safely within God’s care. As promised, He never abandoned His people. He was beside them, guiding them to their destination and supplying their every need.

I have often heard people describe the life of faith as a journey. We set out toward our heavenly destination, but the road before us is not always easy. And in times of sadness, weakness, and discouragement we sometimes compare it to being “in the desert.” You may feel lost in the desert of life, but remember that God has promised to be with you. No matter the circumstance you may be facing, you are never deserted by Him. “The Lord your God is the one who goes with you, He will not fail you or forsake you” (Deut. 31:6).

All of us experience times in our faith journey where we feel lonely, burned out, perhaps even abandoned by God. But it is also in those difficult places where our attention turns to our Savior. Away from the pressing needs of daily life, we can experience the richness of God’s presence. May you hear His voice and experience His presence today. We may walk through the desert, but we are never deserted. ■

# THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

## Why the Old Testament Still Matters

**T**he *Religion News Service* reported in January that a German toy company produced a Martin Luther figurine to celebrate the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Reformation. The small plastic figure holds a quill in one hand and an open Bible in the other. The left page of the Bible says, “Books of the Old Testament. END.” On the right page it says, “The New Testament, translated by Doctor Martin Luther.”

The common designation of the first 39 books of the Bible as the *Old Testament* could lead us to draw the wrong conclusion. We might think that these books have less value or that they are less inspired than the New Testament. We should remember that the Old Testament was the Bible Jesus knew. He said that Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35). He also said that He had not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17).

The Old Testament was the Bible from which the Apostles first preached the gospel. Paul makes it clear that the Old Testament has ongoing value for the church, citing several incidents from the book of Numbers: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come” (1 Cor. 10:11).

God has revealed Himself and His redemptive plan progressively across both Testaments. As a result, the two Testaments do have some important distinctions. They are equally the inspired Word of God, but they do not both serve the same purpose. The Old Testament sets the stage for the person and work of Jesus Christ, looking forward to a redemption that is needed and is yet to come. The New Testament looks back on a redemption that has been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Because of this difference in perspective, not all of the Old Testament commands still apply to us today. Those who are in Christ are no longer bound by the regulations of the Law of Moses (Rom. 6:14–15; Gal. 3:24–25).

Through the laws and teachings in the Old Testament, we see our sin and need for the grace that comes through Jesus Christ. Through its predictions it confirms that Jesus is Israel’s promised Messiah. Through its examples of obedience and disobedience it shows us a life of faith. ■

### FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *From God to Us: How We Got Our Bible* by Norman Geisler and William E. Nix (Moody).

# FROM THE EDITORS

by Bruce Everhart

## Emma Dryer, a Woman You Should Know

I'd like to introduce you to Emma Dryer, a woman whose life of faith, perseverance, and commitment to Bible study still speaks to us today. Emeline Dryer was born in Massachusetts in 1835. She was brought up in the church with a solid knowledge of the Scriptures. An accomplished student, school teacher, and school superintendent, her life was forever changed in the summer of 1870 when she stayed with friends in Chicago.

With the exploding population came more opportunities for Christian work, and Emma Dryer felt God urging her to extend her hand to those in need of His love and redemption. She was also becoming more serious about Bible study and Christian service. "The Bible became a new book. God's plans were not experiments," wrote Emma. "His Word never failed." She believed the Bible was the solution to society's problems. Her dream was to get a Bible into the hands of every woman in the city and train them to lead Bible studies of their own.

She met evangelist D. L. Moody, who challenged her not to return to teaching school. "That is good work for its kind; but there are teachers enough," said Moody. "But there ain't enough to do THIS work, and this is the best work."

Emma Dryer dedicated her life to Bible outreach efforts in Chicago, even canvassing the entire city to visit homes, distribute Bibles, and encourage the study of God's Word. The evangelist and the school teacher would begin a Bible training school for young men and women who wanted to enter Christian service. By 1878, the beginning of a formal school was emerging.

In 1889, after years of prayer, fund-raising, and tireless organizational work by Emma, the school became a reality. While many have heard about Mr. Moody and the school that bears his name, few may realize that, without the dedication of Emma Dryer, we would not have the Moody Bible Institute we know today.

D. L. Moody called Emma Dryer "the best teacher of the Word of God in the United States." She believed each of us is better when we spend time studying Scripture. What a wonderful example for us to follow! *Today in the Word* continues Emma Dryer's mission of providing Christians with Bible study tools. Join me in thanking God for her life of service! ■



**VOLUME 30 • ISSUE 5**

**EXECUTIVE EDITOR**

Bruce Everhart

**MANAGING EDITOR**

Heather Moffitt

**SENIOR EDITOR**

Elena Mafer

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**

Jamie Janosz

John Koessler

**WRITER**

Brad Baurain

**ART DIRECTOR**

Lynn Gabalec

**GRAPHIC DESIGNERS**

Larry Bohlin, Dana Chen

**BUSINESS MANAGER**

Paul B. Currie

**MARKETING MANAGER**

Claire Kniowski

**MOODY GLOBAL MINISTRIES**

**PRESIDENT**

J. Paul Nyquist

**PROVOST**

Junias Venugopal

**EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**

Steven Mogck

**SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT**

Greg R. Thornton

**CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

Ken Heullitt

**VICE PRESIDENTS**

Tim Arens

Larry Davidhizar

Jim Elliott

Bruce Everhart

John A. Jelinek

Collin G. Lambert

Frank W. Leber Jr.

Bryan O'Neal

Paul Santhouse

James Spencer

Janet Stiven

Anthony Turner

Debbie Zelinski

**TRUSTEES**

Christopher Denison

Orbelina Eguizabal

T. Randall Fairfax (Chairman)

Thomas S. Fortson

Manuel Gutierrez

Jerry B. Jenkins

Paul Johnson (Emeritus)

James Meeks

J. Paul Nyquist

David Schipper

Julianna Slattery

Paul Von Tobel

Mark Wagner

Richard E. Warren

Richard Yook

# TODAY IN THE WORD™

## Book of Numbers: Faith and Faithlessness in the Desert

In July 1969, when astronaut Edwin “Buzz” Aldrin set foot on the Moon, the second person to walk on its desolate surface, he did something unusual—he took communion. After he partook of the elements from the communion kit the pastor of his church in Texas gave him, he read Jesus’ words from the Gospel of John: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whosoever abides in me will bring forth much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing” (15:5).

This month in *Today in the Word* we’ll read about a journey in another desolate place, this one lasting forty years—“in the Desert of Sinai . . . after the Israelites came out of Egypt” (Num. 1:1). The book of Numbers tells us about Israel’s cycles between obedience and disobedience, trust in God and unbelief, worship and idolatry. We’ll see how God urged His people to find their identity in Him, and gave them instructions for their worship and obedience. And we’ll note how Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness remind us of the seriousness of sin.

As we read about their faithlessness in the desert, we’ll see God’s faithfulness to His people. We’ll remember Christ’s sacrifice who fulfilled the perfect Law of God. He, the Vine, gave us the ability to follow Him, to be faithful, and to reach the Promised Land. Truly, apart from Him we can do nothing! ■

Moody Global Ministries is the sole publisher of *Today in the Word*, copyright © 2017 by Moody Global Ministries. All rights reserved. Please direct all *Today in the Word* inquiries to Donor Resource Management, 820 N. LaSalle Blvd., Chicago, IL 60610. Scripture taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®, NIV®, copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. Scripture taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. Printed in the U.S.A. *Today in the Word* is published monthly. Printed on 30% recycled paper.

MONDAY  
MAY

1

*These things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.*

1 Corinthians 10:6

## Background to the Book and the First Census

In English, we know the fourth book in the Old Testament by the name *Numbers*, taken from the two national censuses recounted in chapters 1 and 26. The Hebrew title for this book means “In the Wilderness” or “In the Desert,” an apt description of the account of Israel’s wanderings in the wilderness after God delivered them from bondage in Egypt.

This book is the narrative of a journey that ended where it started: the border of Canaan, the Promised Land. In addition to the conflicts and tests of faith that make up much of the story, the book of Numbers is also in part a religious instruction manual, reviewing key regulations from the Law given at Mount Sinai. The narrative and religious instruction sections are intertwined in a back-and-forth pattern that highlight Israel’s obedience or disobedience alongside God’s unchanging faithfulness. Other themes include

worship, leadership, holiness, justice, and God’s promises and sovereignty.

Some Bible skeptics think the census in chapter 1 is a problem. The figure of 603,550 men ages 20 to 60, who could be soldiers (not including Levites) indicates a total population of about two million people (v. 46). How could such a large migrant population be sustained in the desert? But these numbers are in line with both earlier and later censuses (see Ex. 38:26; Num. 26:51). Scripture remains consistent even in these details, and as we study this book we see how God continued to miraculously care for and provide for His people even when they were disobedient.

For Israel, taking a national census was an important step for these former slaves to renew their sense of identity and chosenness. It was also a demonstration of obedience to God’s command (v. 2).

### APPLY THE WORD

*The Literary Study Bible* suggests 1 Corinthians 10:1–13 as an interpretive framework for reading the book of Numbers. Paul taught that these things “were written down as warnings for us” (v. 11), that is, as “examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did” (v. 6). Ask the Lord to shape your desires for obedience to Him.

### PRAY WITH US

We invite you to pray for Moody’s trustees, whose names you can find on page 5 of this issue. As they develop strategy for our ministries, we ask that God grants them wisdom and insight to make wise decisions for the future, while upholding Moody’s legacy.

*The Israelites did everything the  
LORD commanded Moses.*

Numbers 2:34

TUESDAY  
MAY

2

## Israel's Camping and Marching Plans

The first motorcycle ride across America was completed by champion racer, George Wyman, who rode his motorcycle—basically a bicycle with a 1.25-horsepower motor—eastward from San Francisco to New York City in 1903. When roads weren't available, he rode on railroad tracks. The trip took him about 50 days. His bike broke down often, and he had to pedal the last 150 miles, but he made it!

The Exodus and wilderness wanderings of Israel were also an amazing journey. As Numbers 2 makes clear, a group of two million people had to be well organized for both camping and marching. Many study Bibles include a diagram of both formations, including the fact that the Levites formed a buffer between the tabernacle and the other tribes. When they marched, each tribe followed its own flag. According to tradition, the flags' colors matched

those of the twelve stones in the high priest's breastpiece (see Ex. 28:15–21).

Judah, the tribe from which the Messiah would come, led the marching order. (Genesis 49:3–12 explains why he took precedence over his older brothers.) The tabernacle was always carried in the middle of the marching order (v. 17), reminding the people of God's holy and loving presence in their midst. East was the primary or honored direction, where the tribe of Judah, Moses, and Aaron camped (2:3; 3:38).

Moody Theological Seminary professor James Coakley observed in the *The Moody Bible Commentary* (v. 34): "The posture of the people presented at this point is one of order and obedience. Here there was universal harmony and submission to both the Lord and Moses. This early obedience contrasts, however, with the people's later rebellions."

### APPLY THE WORD

Scholars think the tribal flags likely featured emblems—for example, a lion for the tribe of Judah and an eagle for the tribe of Dan—that symbolized the character of the group. If your family or small group were to design its own flag or banner following the same idea, what would it show? What Bible verse might be your motto?

### PRAY WITH US

Today, please uphold in prayer Anthony Turner, VP and dean of Student Enrollment Services, as well as his administrative assistant Samuel Roller. We are grateful for their service to Moody's students on our Chicago campus.

WEDNESDAY  
MAY

3

*The Levites are mine, for all the firstborn are mine.*

Numbers 3:12–13

## The Plan for the Levites

Calendars and schedules help organize our time. Maps are necessary for trips, syllabi for university courses, flow charts for business processes, and blueprints for new buildings. These days, many people would be lost without all the plans stored on their smartphones.

Practical planning was necessary for Israel. After all, when two million people broke camp and moved out, it was a major undertaking! The Levites played a key role. By staying between the tabernacle and the rest of Israel, they helped prevent disobedient intrusions (whether intentional or unintentional), protecting the people from God’s wrath. In addition to thus serving as “security officers,” they were also responsible for maintaining and transporting the tabernacle’s furnishings (3:5–10). Their special status was not to lead to pride, however, as had been the case in the tragic episode of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu (3:4; see Leviticus 10).

The Levites also substituted for all of Israel’s firstborn sons (3:11–13, 40–41, 44–51). Because of what had happened at the original Passover, all the firstborn were now to be set apart or consecrated to the Lord. Symbolically, the entire tribe of Levi took their places by being set apart for God’s service: “The Levites are mine, for all the firstborn are mine.”

In other Ancient Near Eastern cultures, firstborn sons were held responsible to lead the family in ancestor worship. God’s instructions here contradicted those idolatrous practices in order to help keep Israel’s eyes focused on Him. Another divine distinctive was that the Levite clans are listed here not in birth order, which would have been culturally expected, but rather in order of the sacredness of the tabernacle objects for which they were assigned to care.

### APPLY THE WORD

We rely on our calendars and schedules to help us get things done. As Christians, a godly attitude toward our plans is to submit them to the Lord (Prov. 16:3). We should not state a plan as if it were a certainty, but rather say, “If it is the Lord’s will” (James 4:15). We can make our preparations—but know that ultimately God is in control.

### PRAY WITH US

Moody’s Academic Records team works tirelessly to ensure our students’ educational process at Moody is recorded accurately and efficiently. Join us in praying for Auctavia Cegers, Bethanne Tremper, David Thompson, Elise Champanhet, and George Mosher.

*Surely God is good to Israel, to those  
who are pure in heart.*

Psalms 73:1

THURSDAY  
MAY

4

## The Holiness and Purity of God's People

In the classic chorus, “Sanctuary,” by John Thompson and Randy Scruggs, the lyrics are a prayer: “Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true; / With thanksgiving, I’ll be a living sanctuary for you.”

For the people of Israel, purity and holiness had both internal and external dimensions. The topics in today’s reading are thus connected by an emphasis on physical, moral, and spiritual purity. The first topic was skin disease and contact with corpses (vv. 1–4). Both made people unclean, meaning that they were disqualified from being with the community where God was dwelling with them so as not to bring death into God’s presence.

The second topic was restitution (vv. 5–10). Wronging one’s neighbor was a grave sin that also defiled the community’s worship. To make restitution, the sinner not only had to make up for the

loss but also add a 20 percent penalty along with a confession of their sin.

The third, longest, and most difficult topic was marital purity or sexual unfaithfulness (vv. 11–31). This procedure applied only in the case of a husband’s jealousy without evidence, since when adultery was proved both the man and woman were to be put to death (see Deut. 22:22). But a husband could not act on mere suspicions. Instead, the priest would perform a ceremony to test the wife through a kind of trial-by-ordeal. She would either be cleared or found guilty, but in any case the matter would be settled, so in a sense this process gave the wife some protection against her husband’s jealousy. If she failed the test, her punishment was barrenness, a serious disgrace in that day.

God cared about the purity of His people, and He could not tolerate sin in their midst or death in His presence.

### APPLY THE WORD

If you’d like to dig deeper into the book of Numbers, consider useful tools such as a study Bible or commentary. One volume with a wealth of helpful cultural and historical background information is *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis–Deuteronomy*, by John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews.

### PRAY WITH US

Today, we pray again for the Academic Records department. Pray that God gives Julianne Van Peurse, Julie Bialas, Troy Dueck, and Tyrome Turner attention to all the details and organization of students’ records and bless their hard work and dedication.

FRIDAY  
MAY

5

*Throughout the period of their dedication, they are consecrated to the LORD.*

Numbers 6:8

## Nazirite Vows of Special Dedication

One of the most famous Nazirites in the Bible is the prophet and judge Samuel. Before he was even conceived, his mother Hannah vowed to God that if He granted her prayer for a son, she would “give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head” (1 Sam. 1:11). Her prayer was answered, and she kept her promise, dedicating young Samuel to God’s service at the tabernacle.

As is explained in today’s reading, the Nazirite—the word means “separated one”—vow was one of special dedication or consecration (vv. 1–8). The vow could be for a limited period of time, or for one’s whole life, as in the cases of Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist. The vow could be taken by either a man or a woman. Its external markers included abstaining from wine, alcoholic beverages, and even grape-derived products (cf. Hosea 3:1), as well as not cutting one’s hair. A priest could

step away from ministry for a death in the family, but not a Nazirite—God took priority.

To bring the vow to a fitting conclusion, a Nazirite had to make extensive offerings, further indicating that this vow was not something to be entered into lightly (vv. 13–21). They were also required to cut off and burn their long hair. If they accidentally defiled themselves, they were required to purify themselves, offer sacrifices, and start over (vv. 9–12).

This passage concludes with the strategically placed priestly blessing, calling on God to bless and watch over Israel (vv. 22–27). For God’s face to “shine” indicates His gladness or favor. Peace is “shalom,” an all-encompassing wellbeing. This standard blessing affirmed and reminded Israel that they were indeed God’s people!

### APPLY THE WORD

Throughout Christian history, people have chosen fasting, or temporarily abstaining from food, to mark a period of dedication or consecration (see Matt. 6:16–17). Fasting or other spiritual disciplines are intended to be a season of removing other distractions in order to focus on fellowship with God more fully.

### PRAY WITH US

Your prayers today will encourage Janet Stiven, VP and general counsel, and her administrative assistant Amber Adames. Pray that God would bless the service of our Legal department as they assist Moody in complying with all legal regulations.

*The LORD make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.*

Numbers 6:25

SATURDAY  
MAY

6

## The Dedication of the Tabernacle

A groundbreaking ceremony for a new building project is often attended by the leaders of the organization and local community or government officials. Selected dignitaries use special shovels to dig out a piece of ground to mark the formal beginning of the project. And then when a building is finished, the leaders and officials gather again for the ribbon cutting. Large decorative scissors replace the shovels at the ceremony to mark the opening of a new place.

Our reading today describes the dedication of the tabernacle. Chronologically, this event took place one month before those of chapters 1 through 6, but it is placed here in Numbers to make its significance clear.

The dedication of the tabernacle was a milestone in multiple ways. It was a national milestone, marking the end of a transition from slavery to nationhood. It was a religious milestone, ushering in

a new era in which worship and daily life were governed by the Law God had given at Sinai. It was an identity milestone, as the Lord once again stamped His name on His people (6:27). And it was a faithfulness milestone—mainly of God’s faithfulness in keeping His promises, but also of Israel’s obedience in getting this far and obeying God’s specific instructions for building the tabernacle.

The dedication festival was huge and lasted twelve days! The leaders of each tribe presented elaborate and expensive gifts, marking the importance of the event (vv. 84–88). Each tribe gave the same, no matter their size or status, indicating their equal standing before the Lord. The repetitive structure of the chapter reflects the serious, formal, ceremonial nature of the occasion. As in Exodus 40, the climax was the descent of the cloud—the visible manifestation of the Lord’s presence and glory—and God speaking directly to Moses.

### APPLY THE WORD

Throughout Scripture, giving generously to the work of the Lord is an act of worship and obedience. If regular financial giving is not part of your stewardship, review 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 in light of our text today. Ask the Lord to show how you can give joyfully and freely to support His work through Christian ministries.

### PRAY WITH US

Moody Distant Learning’s Independent Studies allows students of all ages worldwide to study Scripture in depth and train for ministry. Pray that these students will grow in grace and knowledge of the Word of God and bless their communities.

SUNDAY  
MAY

7

*Aaron is to present the Levites before the LORD as a wave offering from the Israelites.*

Numbers 8:11

## The Consecration of the Levites

Expositing Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, New Testament scholar D. A. Carson wrote: “In much contemporary evangelism, there is little concern for whether or not God will accept us, and much concern for whether or not we will accept him. Little attention is paid to whether or not we please him, and much to whether or not he pleases us. . . . As a result, there is far too little stress on God’s character and the requirements of the kingdom, and far too much stress on our needs.”

Today’s passage presents an instructive contrast. In order to serve in the tabernacle, the Levites were required to meet God’s standards for purity and holiness. Following the dedication of the tabernacle, the next step was the consecration of the Levites.

The Levites’ one-day ceremony was rich with spiritual symbolism. Water—sprinkled and used for bathing

and washing clothes—represented cleansing. There was even a special recipe and ritual for preparing holy water (see Lev. 19:9). Shaving their entire bodies signified completeness. Bulls were offered as a sin offering and burnt offering to make atonement. The laying on of hands indicated substitution—they represented the nation (vv. 10, 16–18). And their public presentation by Aaron, the high priest, showed that they were now prepared and qualified for service.

Males served between the ages of 25 and 50. It appears that there was a five-year period of training, with full service beginning at age 30 (4:3). Perhaps because the job was physically strenuous, retirees could assist or perhaps stand guard, but no more than that. What an honor it must have been to be a Levite, but also a serious responsibility with God-given standards. The same is true for ministry today.

### APPLY THE WORD

Specifically pray for the leaders of your church by name. Ask the Lord to keep them strong in faith as they lead the congregation. Pray for their purity of heart and obedience to God. Pray that they may have the physical health and strength for ministry. And ask the Lord how you can encourage and support them and their families.

### PRAY WITH US

The assistant deans of Moody Distant Learning provide a Moody education to all interested learners. Lift up Andrew Beaty, Ashish Varma, Janet Randerson, and Kerwin Rodriguez in your prayers as they encourage and guide students around the globe.

*Have the Israelites celebrate the Passover at the appointed time.*

Numbers 9:2

MONDAY  
MAY

8

## The Celebration of the Passover

The Passover story is a gripping drama (see Exodus 11–13). Four centuries of Israelite slavery in Egypt were about to end. The confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh had reached a climax. God sent one final plague, the death of all the firstborn in Egypt who were not protected by the blood of a lamb on the doorpost. That lamb was eaten in the first “Passover” meal, so called because the angel of death “passed over” the protected homes.

The celebration of Passover was to become an essential part of Israel’s religious life. The one narrated here was only the second—the first had been the dramatic original in Egypt. The Israelites would not celebrate Passover again until they entered Canaan, the Promised Land (see Joshua 5:10).

Passover was a serious occasion. All regulations had to be followed exactly. Anyone who failed to celebrate

this festival was to be cut off or excommunicated from Israel, which was the same as a death sentence (v. 13).

At the same time, the Lord extended grace. Provision for later observance was made for those who were ceremonially unclean and unable to participate at the time (v. 11). Participation was not limited to Israelites, but the “foreigner residing among you” could also join in (v. 14).

The Passover meal reminded the people of God’s life-saving presence, protection, and guidance throughout the Exodus (vv. 15–23). The main dish, lamb, reminded them of the blood on the doorposts that had saved the lives of their firstborn. The unleavened bread reminded them of their hasty exit when Pharaoh had finally yielded. And the bitter herbs reminded them of their four centuries of slavery and suffering in Egypt, now ended by the powerful hand of the Lord.

### APPLY THE WORD

At this point, the Israelites “obeyed the LORD’s order, in accordance with his command through Moses” (v. 23). We’re to live our lives in this same spirit of utter obedience! When He says go, we go. When He says stay, we stay. As the classic hymn says, we can “trust and obey,” knowing we’re perfectly safe in His loving hands.

### PRAY WITH US

As students on Moody’s Chicago campus prepare for their final exams today, we ask for prayer for Tim Arens, VP and dean of Student Life, and his administrative assistant, Kathryn Santhouse. May they have joy during this busy season.

TUESDAY  
MAY

9

*You will be remembered by the LORD your God and rescued from your enemies.*

Numbers 10:9

## Setting Out from Sinai

Silver spoons have represented status and safety for centuries. In the Korean Joseon Dynasty, silver spoons were used to detect poisons, since silver tarnishes on contact with arsenic sulfides. In the Middle Ages, having a silver spoon could distinguish a landholding farmer from a serf or peasant. Even today, families prize their heirloom collections of silver spoons and place settings.

With everything organized and dedicated, the nation established and the Law given, and the primacy and presence of the Lord made clear in this theocracy, today's chapter begins to narrate Israel's actual journey from Sinai to Canaan. When they set out, they thought they were just a few months away from entering the land.

The silver trumpets embody the repeating community events (vv. 1–10). Even more valuable than silver spoons, these trumpets were a sign of Israel's

lasting ordinance with the Lord (v. 8). They were to be blown by the priests to call meetings or as a signal to begin marching. Later, they were to be blown for going into battle, so that the Lord would remember and rescue them. They were also to be blown at festival and sacrifice times, as a memorial before God (vv. 9–10). Centuries later, silver trumpets were still part of the nation's worship (1 Chron. 16:6).

Moses asked Hobab—presumably his brother-in-law, since he was a son of Reuel, or Jethro—to accompany them as a guide (vv. 29–32). The implication is he said yes, an inference supported by the fact that his descendants, the Kenites, appear in the book of Judges (1:16; 4:11). His Midianite clan accepted Moses' offer and threw in their lot with the people of God, a choice forever altering their destiny, since the rest of the Midianites later chose to be Israel's enemy and fell under God's judgment (Num. 25, 31).

### APPLY THE WORD

Starting and stopping their journey became sacred rituals for the Israelites (vv. 35–36). The repeated prayers or watchwords on these occasions signaled their dependence on the Lord. We can also begin and end our own trips with prayer. Even better, begin and end every day with prayer, in the same spirit of faith and trust.

### PRAY WITH US

Keep Moody undergrad students in your prayers today as they take their final exams. Your prayers for strength, perseverance, and energy will be an encouragement to them as they navigate through the last week of their semester before summer break.

*Is the LORD's arm too short?*

Numbers 11:23

WEDNESDAY  
MAY

10

**Grumbling, Provision, and Judgment in the Desert**

People who fly frequently complain about the blandness of airline food. Now we know why! Recent research found that the type of white noise heard by airplane passengers affects their sense of taste. Specifically, loud background sounds such as the engine noise heard in aircraft cabins reduce people's ability to taste salt and sugar.

What excuse did the Israelites have in today's reading for their complaints about the food provided by God? To this point, the people have been reported to be obedient, but from here on we see more of their complaining and faithlessness. That trend will climax in things going tragically wrong at the border of Canaan and resulted in a lost generation.

The grumbling wasn't new; the Israelites were reverting to their old ways (see Exodus 15–17). Here, they first complained about the hardships of the journey. God judged them with fire,

mercifully stopping it at the outskirts of the camp in response to Moses' intercessory prayer.

Having learned nothing, the people then complained about the food God was miraculously providing. They were bored with manna. The phrase "craved other food" (v. 34) indicates that the people were behaving as slaves to their appetites and self-indulgence. Moses, understandably fatigued and frustrated with his stubborn people, complained to God about them.

The Lord mercifully provided seventy elders to share the burdens of leadership, then provided quail for food. But this provision was also a judgment, for God intentionally sent so much meat that the Israelites grew sick of it, both literally and figuratively (vv. 19–20, 33–34). They were struck with a "severe plague," a deserved punishment for their ingratitude and faithlessness.

**APPLY THE WORD**

We also struggle with being discontent with God's provision. Grumbling, however, is serious business, as God's judgment demonstrated. Consider how well you are growing in godly contentment and gratitude. If you find that you complain more than you praise, confess that attitude and ask the Lord to give you a spirit of contentment (Phil. 2:12–16).

**PRAY WITH US**

Please join us in prayer for our undergraduate professors, specifically those in the Bible department: Andrew Schmutzer, Benjamin Wilson, Eric Redmond, and Ernest Gray. We pray their ministry to students yields much spiritual fruit, to God's glory.

THURSDAY  
MAY

11

*With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD.*

Numbers 12:8

## Miriam and Aaron's Attempted Coup

CEO Joel Manby was once asked about the corporate culture of the company he led, Herschend Family Entertainment (HFE). As recounted in his book, *Love Works*, he replied: We “use love to define our leadership culture at HFE. Not *love* the emotion, but *love* the verb. We train our leaders to love each other, knowing that if they create enthusiasm with their employees, the employees will in turn create an enthusiastic guest experience.”

Moses led God’s people with love, even though they often acted in unlovable ways. He interceded for them when they incurred God’s wrath. He was not a control freak; he had taken his father-in-law’s advice about delegating more responsibilities (see Exodus 18), and he was glad when the Spirit came on the 70 new elders. He was a humble man, demonstrating how humility and leadership can be intertwined. He was clearly God’s chosen leader!

The attempted coup in Numbers 12 came from the same rebellious, complaining spirit on display in Numbers 11. It must have hurt Moses especially that it was led by his sister and brother. The pretext was their displeasure with his Cushite wife (v. 1). Scholars are unsure if this was Zipporah (Ex. 2:21–22) or someone else, but in any case the real reason was that his siblings were jealous of Moses’ special relationship with the Lord and his status as leader and prophet of Israel. Miriam and Aaron may also have been afraid that their authority had been weakened by the commissioning of the 70 new elders.

God Himself condemned their mutiny and explicitly affirmed Moses’ close relationship with Him (vv. 4–8; Deut. 34:10). Aaron confessed and repented for both himself and Miriam. She, apparently more at fault, was judged with leprosy, which was healed in response to Moses’ forgiving, intercessory prayer (vv. 9–15).

### APPLY THE WORD

Humility is essential for leaders and for all followers of Christ. As He said: “Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35). Paul taught that “in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others” (Phil. 2:3–4).

### PRAY WITH US

Please remember the Bible undergraduate professors in your prayers again. We pray that Gerald Peterman, John Goodrich, Michael Vanlaningham, and Michael Wechsler will guide their students with the truth of the Scripture for the life of ministry.

*The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does.*

Psalm 145:13

## Spying Out the Land of Canaan

According to Guinness World Records, the largest bunch of grapes ever recorded was grown in 1984 in Chile. It weighed 20 pounds, 11.5 ounces! The largest grapevine in the world is found at Hampton Court Palace in England. It measures more than 12 feet in circumference and its branches are typically about 108 feet long. Nearly 250 years old, this one vine produces about 600 pounds of grapes per year!

One wonders how these world records might compare with the grapes the spies brought back from Canaan (v. 23). Arriving at the border of Canaan, Israel sent twelve spies to scout out the military situation—population, fighting strength, fortified cities, and enemy morale—as well as the land itself. They surveyed the entirety of it, a round trip of about 500 miles. This spy mission was prudent and obedient (v. 2). Joshua would do the same thing the next time they arrived at the border (Joshua 2).

The problem was that the spies' report was accurate in content but weak in faith. They reported that the land was rich and prosperous. "Flowing with milk and honey" has become an English idiom indicating abundance (v. 27). They also reported that the people and cities were strong, more than a match for the "grasshopper" Israelites. To attack such foes was suicidal.

Only Joshua and Caleb disagreed, filing a minority report that with God on Israel's side, victory was certain (v. 30). They didn't dispute the content of the report, but instead focused on the Lord's promise to give Israel the land. They might also have reminded the people that He had defeated the armies of Egypt to liberate them from slavery—surely the Canaanites presented less of a challenge. The nation, however, listened to the majority and disobediently decided not to enter the land.

### APPLY THE WORD

To trust in God's promises means to believe and act on them, no matter what things look like from a human perspective. The enemy may indeed be strong. We may indeed be like grasshoppers. But God's perspective is what matters. "The Lord is trustworthy in all he promises and faithful in all he does" (Ps. 145:13). What's holding you back today?

### PRAY WITH US

At the end of the week of final exams, please continue to keep in prayer the Bible undergraduate professors, Ronald Sauer, Steven Sanchez, and William Marty. May God give them perseverance, and wisdom in their teaching and spiritual growth in their own lives.

SATURDAY  
MAY

13

*This whole wicked community . . . will meet their end in this wilderness.*

Numbers 14:35

## Israel's Faithlessness and Disobedience at the Border

Born in 1809, Kit Carson was one of the most famous scouts and frontiersmen in American history. He helped guide the westward journeys of explorers, fought on the Union side during the Civil War, and advocated for the creation of reservations, arguing they would save Native Americans from extinction. But he also fought against them, including brutally removing the Navajo people from their traditional lands.

Among the twelve scouts or spies sent into Canaan, Joshua and Caleb were the only ones who delivered their report in faith. The Israelites' complaining and rebellious spirit had warped their perspective to the point where they seriously thought death in Egypt would have been preferable to entering Canaan and trusting God to keep His promises (v. 2). They even talked about picking a new leader and returning to the country that had enslaved them for four centuries (v. 4).

This was pathetic and sad and funny, but mainly tragic. Their words and actions insulted the Lord. Confounded by this incredible sin, Moses and Aaron fell facedown before God, once again interceding for the people. Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes in grief and tried again to persuade Israel to obey. In response, the nation doubled down on its sinful foolishness and suggested stoning the two of them (vv. 6–11).

In response, God righteously and angrily proposed wiping out Israel and starting fresh with Moses. But Moses passionately interceded, not on the basis of what the people deserved but on the basis of God's character, "slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion" (v. 18). In the end, God spared the nation, punished the ten spies immediately, and decreed that the guilty generation would wander and die in the wilderness (vv. 32–38).

### APPLY THE WORD

Moses and Daniel give us excellent biblical examples of interceding for one's nation (Daniel 9). Many values, practices, and lifestyles are widely accepted in America today that Scripture calls wrong. Knowing how displeased God must be, are we daily interceding and repenting for the past and present sins of our nation?

### PRAY WITH US

The Moody Commencement ceremony in Chicago is being held today. Please include Moody's president, Dr. Paul Nyquist, in your prayers as he presents students with their diplomas and prays for God's blessing and guidance for their future ministry.

*Walk in obedience to all that the LORD your God has commanded you.*

Deuteronomy 5:33

SUNDAY  
MAY

14

## Offerings and Obedience

One of Fanny Crosby's lesser-known hymns was intended to be sung by children in Sunday school: "We must not break God's holy law, by wicked words profane, / For He will punish every one that takes His name in vain. / Remember, remember, it is the Lord's command; / Remember, remember, it is the Lord's command."

When it is "the Lord's command," obedience can never be casual. Our reading is an encouraging reminder that—despite Israel's disobedience—God's promises remained true and He provided forgiveness for sin. They had blown it, but God remained faithful. A day *would* come when the people would enter the land.

This chapter is divided into three words of the Lord to Moses. First, God reminded the people that sacrifices were an "aroma pleasing to the LORD" because they signified genuine worship (vv. 1–16).

He also noted that both Israelites and believing foreigners had the same rights and responsibilities in His eyes.

Second, God reminded the people to offer the firstfruits, not the leftovers, of their harvests (vv. 17–31). Offering the firstfruits was proper gratitude and an expression of faith in God's continued provision. He also reminded them that unintentional sins were still sins and needed atoning sacrifices, including some cases in which the entire community was to be held responsible. Defiant sins, on the other hand, merited immediate punishment (vv. 32–36).

Finally, God reminded the people to wear tassels on their garments as a sign of being set apart to the Lord (vv. 37–41; see Deut. 22:12). This was both costly obedience, for blue dye was expensive, and a tangible reminder of their special identity as the people of God and the imperative of obedience to Him.

### APPLY THE WORD

Confession of our sins is an important part of our relationship with the Lord. As we cultivate a love for holiness and a godly hatred of sin, we can confess our sins, both known and unintentional, with confidence in God's forgiveness (see 1 John 1:9). And when we can't find the words, we can rely on the Holy Spirit to intercede for us (Rom. 8:26).

### PRAY WITH US

Today, join us in praying for the Alumni Association staff on our Chicago campus: Nancy Hastings and Diane Janchenko. We are grateful for the excellent relationships and connections they maintain with thousands of Moody alumni worldwide.

# QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Eric C. Redmond, Assistant Professor of Bible

**Q** **If I understand and embrace the doctrine of election, does it stop me from praying for unsaved people?**

**A** Even for those who acknowledge election as a biblical doctrine, the concept might conjure pictures of a capricious or biased God. But rightly understood, election refers to an act of God in eternity, according to the good pleasure of His sovereign freedom, and on account of no foreseen merit in sinful people, whereby He chooses, in mercy, to save some individuals on the basis of the person and work of Jesus Christ alone. The doctrine of election does underscore that some people are saved and some people will not be saved, and it has been a troubling and confusing teaching for some people.

The narrative of God bringing redemption to the world through Christ is a story about God's choices to bring certain people into the line of promise. He selected Abraham from a family of idol worshipers; He chose Isaac rather than Ishmael; He loved Jacob and not Esau (see Gen. 21:12–13; Joshua 24:2; Mal. 1:2–3). Abraham experienced salvation because of God's choice, while many in Abraham's family did not experience salvation. Ishmael received blessing in this life in keeping with God's promise to his mother, Hagar,

to preserve his life, but he did not experience the salvation and gift of inheritance promised to Isaac. God's love for Jacob placed Jacob in the line of promise, but Esau was not included in the promise of salvation.

From Jacob, God called out the twelve tribes of Israel, of whom He says: "The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:7–8). The Lord's choice to redeem Israel for salvation out of all other nations is an intentional choice of God's great love alone.

The apostle Paul draws on the Old Testament story of Israel in order to acquit God of accusations of injustice for choosing to save some in Israel rather than all in Israel (see Rom. 9:6–18). First, Paul indicates that God's distinction of the children of promise from children of the flesh shows that His word has not failed toward Israel. God's purpose in election is demonstrated because the "older" Esau serves the "younger" Jacob. Jacob will continue the line of promise of the covenant blessings given to Abraham and Isaac.

*Without God's mercy, not one person would experience salvation.*

Second, Paul reveals that God's freedom to give mercy as He wills, as in the case of Pharaoh, acquits Him of injustice in election. God owes no one mercy, for all people are sinners before Him; all are deserving of the wrath Pharaoh experienced. The gift of mercy is God's free choice to withhold judgment from some rather than others. Without such mercy, not one person would experience salvation. Mercy is not a matter of justice or injustice.

God's choice to save people in mercy invites rather than limits our prayers for unsaved people. Paul exhorted the church to pray for governing authorities: "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3–4). We pray for the hope of salvation of lost persons through Christ the Redeemer.

**Q** **If Christ died for all of our sins, past, present, and future, and we have accepted His death on the cross, what does 1 John 1:9 mean about confessing sins so that we will be forgiven?**

**A** Christ's redemption of believers secures God's forgiveness of our sins (Eph. 1:7). When Christ died on the cross in our place, as the propitiation for our sins—which means He satisfied the just

need for payment as the penalty for sin demanded by a holy God—He took the judgment we deserved because of our sin against God (Rom. 3:23–25). The moment anyone believes the word of truth about Christ's death and resurrection, the believer secures this forgiveness as part of one's salvation (Rom. 10:9–10; Eph. 1:13). Forgiveness means that the debt we owe to God for our sins has been canceled, even as the king canceled the debt the servant owed to him in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt. 18:25–35). We are saved from the wrath of God that our sins have earned us (Rom. 5:9; 6:23).

Forgiveness removes the penalty due our sins. But forgiveness does not stop anyone from sinning. All sin strains the relationship between believers and our Father, and so we seek forgiveness in order to put right our relationship with God. That is, we are confessing that we have wronged Him with our disobedience, and we affirm that we desire to do what is pleasing to Him. Salvation is not lost by sin. But sin is something God hates. By confessing sin and seeking forgiveness, we say to God that we hate what He hates and love what He loves—and that we love Him.

MONDAY  
MAY

15

*Moses was faithful in all God's house.*

Hebrews 3:2

## Korah's Attempted Coup

One of the most famous Bible translation mistakes in history put horns on Moses' head. When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, his face was shining or "radiant," translated from the word *karan* in Hebrew. But when the church father Jerome translated Hebrew, which is written without vowels, into Latin, he wrote the word as *keren*, meaning "horned." Centuries of paintings and sculptures showed Moses with horns!

Korah and his followers were also badly wrong about Moses. They thought he was just a normal human leader. After the incidents recorded in recent chapters, it seems incredible that anyone would challenge his leadership. Yet Korah, a leader of a prominent Levite clan, recruited allies among the Reubenites and launched another coup attempt.

The Kohathites and Reubenites offered a democratic rationale for their rebellion. They said that, since

all Israelites were "holy," Moses had no right to claim special status and set himself above the people (v. 3). They were wrong. God had already affirmed Moses' leadership. Moses was not prideful; it was they who were "insolent" and motivated by ambition (vv. 1, 10). They claimed that leaving Egypt meant leaving a life of prosperity—when in reality, it was enslavement. They blamed Moses for their failure to enter Canaan, showing the extent of their self-deception (vv. 13–14).

The matter was decided via a public test, one in which the rebels refused to participate, showing the depths of their disrespect for Moses and contempt for the Lord. The results were predictable. They were executed by God, and Moses was once again confirmed as His choice to lead the nation. Moses and Aaron again interceded to save Israel from God's wrath (v. 22). And once again, the people failed to learn from their experience (see vv. 41–50).

### APPLY THE WORD

Like Korah, we are capable of tremendous self-deception. In order to see God's hand at work, we must pray for His wisdom and discernment. Thankfully, God promises to answer this prayer! We can make this request for ourselves (see James 1:5) or as part of our intercessory prayer for others (Col. 1:9; see Eph. 1:17).

### PRAY WITH US

Please uphold Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, in your prayers today as he oversees Moody's finances. We pray the Lord will continue to guide him and his teams as they efficiently manage the budget and ensure an effective use of funds.

*Aaron's staff . . . had not only sprouted but had budded, blossomed and produced almonds.*

Numbers 17:8

TUESDAY  
MAY

16

## God's Affirmation of Aaron's Leadership

All human leaders are inevitably imperfect, including Christians who are doing their best to follow the Lord. Their endeavors in ministry don't always go as well as they hope. Even Charles Spurgeon, known as the Prince of Preachers, felt the sting of depression in ministry: "The strong are not always vigorous, the wise not always ready, the brave not always courageous, and the joyful not always happy."

Scripture never portrays people as perfect, and Aaron's flaws have been visible since he was introduced in the biblical narrative in the book of Exodus. But God showed him much grace and used him mightily to lead Israel alongside his brother Moses. In today's reading, God took the initiative to affirm the leadership of Moses and Aaron, but especially Aaron, one more time: "I will rid myself of this constant grumbling against you by the Israelites" (v. 5). God vindicated Moses and Aaron as a

warning to anyone who continued to harbor rebellious thoughts.

The means of doing so was once again a public test. Twelve wooden staffs were carefully labeled and put before the Ark, in God's presence. God's choice would be indicated by which one sprouted. The answer, which came one day later, was extravagant. Aaron's rod not only budded but also blossomed and produced almonds! God left no room to misinterpret His choice and the meaning of this sign. The rod was then placed by the Ark, along with the tablets of the Law and the jar of manna, as an enduring symbol and reminder (v. 10).

God accomplished His objective: we read no more about attempted coups. Although it's unclear whether the people's response indicated repentance or only fear (vv. 12–13), they did not again try to overthrow God's appointed leaders.

### APPLY THE WORD

It's worth reflecting on our attitudes toward our local church leaders. Are we critical or supportive? Do we complain or judge? Are we unresponsive to their leadership? How often do we remember them in prayer? Hebrews 13:17 reminds us to have confidence in them and submit to them—"Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden."

### PRAY WITH US

As VP of Publications, Paul Santhouse oversees the production of thousands of books at Moody Publishers, bringing quality Christian literature across the globe, cultures, and generations. Would you commit him and his assistant, Karen Waddles, to prayer?

WEDNESDAY  
MAY

17

*I am giving you the service of the  
priesthood as a gift.*

Numbers 18:7

## The Responsibilities of the Priests and Levites

In today's reading, God called the ministries of the priests and Levites a "gift" (vv. 6–7). Culturally, we think of gifts as something received, as on birthdays and holidays. But in Scripture, a gift is given by God in order to enable the recipients better to serve Him and His people and thereby to live lives of more complete worship (see 1 Cor. 14:12; 1 Peter 4:10).

The word *gift* here also suggests that it was an honor for the priests and Levites to represent the people before God, and it was a special privilege for them to spend extra time in God's presence and to lead the nation in worship. With Aaron's priestly leadership reaffirmed in chapter 17, this chapter summarizes the duties and responsibilities of serving before the Lord (v. 1). Only the Levites were allowed to help, and then only by caring for the tabernacle itself, not by offering sacrifices at the altar. This strict division of labor was divinely

ordained, with death the penalty for disobedience.

God's instructions extended to practical matters as well. Specific parts of each offering were to be set apart as food for the priests. It was still to be regarded as holy, so they would need to be ceremonially clean to partake. Since their ministry replaced an inheritance of land (v. 20), they had no other way to make a living or provide for themselves. Similarly, provision for the Levites happened by receiving the nation's tithes, and they also were required to tithe the best of what they received. Their failure to tithe would defile the nation's giving (v. 32).

The phrase "covenant of salt" is a memorable one (v. 19; 2 Chron. 13:5). It reflects salt's preservative function and thus the permanence or "everlasting" nature of the covenant.

### APPLY THE WORD

The New Testament teaches that every believer has a spiritual gift that is a "manifestation of the Spirit [that] is given for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). Are you using your gifts to serve the church appropriately? If you are unsure, this is an excellent matter for prayer, especially with your church leaders or small group.

### PRAY WITH US

Keep the Moody Publishers Creative and Production team in your prayers today. We pray the Lord blesses the dedication and creativity of Andrew Flores, Ann Hackler, Carolyn McDaniel, Eddie Cuevas, and Erik Peterson as they serve our readers.

*Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

Psalms 51:7

THURSDAY  
MAY

18

## Ritual Cleansing

In their book *Every Tribe and Tongue*, Michael Pasquale and Nathan L.K. Bierma point out that the verb *wash* in Psalm 51 refers specifically to washing clothes. “The word actually means ‘to tread, to trample underfoot,’ since that’s how clothes were washed in ancient Israel. You’d put a dirty garment underwater and trample it to try to get it clean. The psalmist doesn’t just ask for a cleansing or a rinsing, but is saying to God, ‘trample my sins out, just like I try to tread on my clothes to get the stains out, pounding and grinding them with my feet.’”

The cleansing procedures described in Numbers 19 carry these spiritual themes as well. There is an overwhelming desire to stand pure and holy in God’s sight. To make the special “water of cleansing” required burning a red heifer outside the camp, along with some cedar wood, hyssop, and scarlet wool, all (red, like blood) symbols of

purification (vv. 6–9). The ashes were then kept outside the camp and used to make holy water as needed.

A specific ritual with this holy water is described for cleansing after touching a corpse. It included bathing and washing one’s clothes in a prescribed manner. The ritual was not just a rote action but part of worship because it honored God’s holiness. Other ceremonies, such as the one for cleansing from skin diseases, were similar (see Lev. 14:1–11).

The writer of Hebrews later compared this holy water to the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:13–14). The first could only cleanse externally, whereas Christ’s saving blood can actually “cleanse our consciences” and make us spotless of sin. We desire to stand pure and holy in God’s sight, but we cannot do it on our own. We need His help to be made truly clean!

### APPLY THE WORD

Through the blood of Christ, we gain full cleansing from the stain of our sin: “As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” (Ps. 103:12). If you have never trusted in Jesus for your salvation, call on Him today in repentance. He is the only way to be purified from sin!

### PRAY WITH US

Once more, we pray for the Moody Publishers Creative and Production team. As they work to produce godly literature, pray the Lord continues to give unity to the team: John Matsuoka, Josh Reigel, Judy Tollberg, Matthew Boffey, and Ryan Lloyd.

FRIDAY  
MAY

19

*You did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy  
in the sight of the Israelites.*

Numbers 20:12

## The Sin of Moses and the Death of Aaron

When Nehemiah led the Jews in national repentance after the exile in Babylon, their prayer acknowledged their history back to the days of the book of Numbers. As they confessed their sins, admitting that their ancestors had been “arrogant and stiff-necked, and they did not obey your commands.” Thankfully, the Lord is “a forgiving God, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Neh. 9:16–17).

Moses had had more than enough of the “arrogant and stiff-necked” Israelites, and for a moment he took his eyes off his loving and faithful God. He may have been grieving the death of his sister, Miriam (v. 1). But there is no excuse for disobeying God’s command!

What started as just another cycle of the Israelites’ complaint—whining by the people, intercessory prayer by Moses, provision by God—unfortunately turned into a watershed moment for

Moses. Instead of simply following the Lord’s instructions to supply water, Moses decided to do things his own way. Perhaps he was grandstanding or prideful, perhaps he felt angry, perhaps both. Worse, he took some of the credit or glory for himself (vv. 10–11).

Because of this sin, Moses never entered Canaan. What Moses did—with the staff of Aaron that had budded, no less (v. 9)—publicly dishonored the Lord and showed a lack of trust in Him. Leaders are held to a higher standard! Aaron was also part of this sin (v. 24), and because of it he, too, was condemned to die in the wilderness rather than enter the Promised Land.

God’s holiness is absolute. No one, not even Moses, who was close enough to God to speak with Him as a friend (see Ex. 33:11), had the right to disobey God’s command and take the credit for the Lord’s provision.

### APPLY THE WORD

One of Moses’ sins at Meribah was his use of “rash words” (Ps. 106:32–33). Our tongues are always getting us in trouble! James compared them to small sparks that start forest fires (James 3:1–12). If Moses needed help with his tongue, how much more do we need to rely on God’s help to ensure that our words are pleasing in His sight (Ps. 19:14).

### PRAY WITH US

The Moody Publishers Finance team welcomes your prayers as they supervise a wide network of funds. Pray the Lord gives wise judgment to Edgar Santiago, Harrison Gunter, Jeffrey Reynolds, Jonathan Swanson, Richard Peterson, and Susan Malnati.

*Anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.*

Numbers 21:8

SATURDAY  
MAY

20

## The Bronze Snake and Israel's Early Victories

At more than 70 years old, Smokey Bear is “the face of the longest-running public service campaign in U.S. history,” according to the *Los Angeles Times*. Conceived in 1944 as part of World War II resource conservation efforts, he has his own ZIP code (20252) to handle all his fan mail. His familiar tagline is, “Only you can prevent wildfires.”

Smokey Bear is a symbol of caring for creation, and the bronze snake in today's passage was given to the Israelites as a symbol of healing and life (vv. 4–9). The Israelites had grown impatient at taking a longer route, which Moses had chosen to do in obedience to God's instructions not to fight against the Edomites (descendants of Esau). They were also complaining (again) about leadership and food. Rejecting God's provision of manna led to an immediate judgment of death by poisonous snakes. The people repented, Moses interceded, and God

gave the sign of the bronze snake to stop the plague. Thus, healing didn't happen automatically. It required faith: A person had to choose to look at the bronze snake in order to be saved.

This episode is sandwiched between a pair of early military victories by Israel. The first victory was over Arad, a Canaanite king in the Negev desert (vv. 1–3). The second was over Sihon and Og (Amorites), following an aggressive response to Israel's request to pass peacefully through their territory (vv. 21–35). Sihon had previously been strong enough to take land from Moab, so this was a significant victory.

The case of the bronze snake also shows, unfortunately, our human ability to turn good into evil. Centuries later in Israel's history, during the days of Hezekiah, the bronze snake became an object of idolatry and had to be destroyed (2 Kings 18:4).

### APPLY THE WORD

Jesus compared His death on the Cross to the lifting up of the bronze snake in the wilderness (John 3:14–15). Just as looking at the bronze snake in faith led to life and salvation for any Israelite who had been snake bitten, so also does looking to the Cross in faith bring about life and salvation for all who believe on the name of Jesus.

### PRAY WITH US

Today, please focus your prayers on Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media. We appreciate his hard work, dedication, and the impact of his Moody ministry across the globe. Pray the Lord grants him joy and strength in his day-to-day tasks.

SUNDAY  
MAY

21

*Must I not speak what the LORD  
puts in my mouth?*

Numbers 23:12

## Balaam and His Donkey

You might remember Francis the Talking Mule, star of seven popular movies during the 1950s. Francis was a U.S. Army mule who befriended a young soldier named Peter. Francis would talk to Peter—but only to Peter, which of course led to many humorous and difficult situations.

The only donkey that has actually talked in real life belonged to Balaam. Balaam was a pagan diviner or soothsayer, a person who claimed to be able to foretell the future and to have some influence with the gods and divinities.

The Moabites and Midianites were petrified. They had heard of Israel's recent victories and feared they would be next to be overrun by the "horde" (22:4). They felt they needed supernatural help, and they decided to pay for Balaam to use his skill to pronounce a curse on their enemies.

Though Balaam was not a follower of God, apparently he knew His voice when he heard it. The Lord told him not to dare to curse people whom He had blessed (22:9–12). Despite his greed (see 2 Peter 2:15–16), Balaam at first obeyed, perhaps out of fear or concern for his reputation—a curse that didn't work would be bad for business. But when offered a higher price, he couldn't resist moving in the desired direction.

The famous episode with his talking donkey took place on the way to deliver his curses (22:21–35). God mercifully sent this miraculous warning to impress upon Balaam the seriousness of His previous command not to curse Israel (23:19). His "path [was] a reckless one" (22:32), flirting with disobedience. In a bit of divine comedy, Balaam ended up not cursing but blessing the Israelites multiple times!

### APPLY THE WORD

As Balak and Balaam discovered, God is the King of kings, whether or not people or nations acknowledge His rule or even believe in His existence. Praise the Lord today for His sovereignty. Rejoice that you can have a personal relationship with God. And thank Him for His guidance and protection in your life.

### PRAY WITH US

As Steve Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer, prepares for the Pastors' Conference on Moody's Chicago campus tomorrow, we pray for energy and efficiency for him and his teams during this time of ministry to the pastors.

*How beautiful are your tents, Jacob,  
your dwelling places, Israel!*

Numbers 24:5

MONDAY  
MAY

22

## Balaam Blesses the Israelites

In *Morning and Evening Prayers*, Johann Habermann recorded this prayer for blessing: “Abide with all Thy brightness, Thou brightest Light of all; / And lest we stray from rightness, make Thou Thy truth our wall. . . . Abide with Thy protection, Great Captain, clothed with might; / O’ercome our world affection and vanquish Satan’s spite. Abide with care untiring, Our God and Lord indeed; / All steadfastness inspiring, help, Lord, our every need.”

To Balak’s frustration, Balaam blessed the nation he had been hired to curse. By his third oracle he realized God wasn’t going to change His mind, so he stopped bothering with pagan rituals (24:1). No matter what he wanted to say to earn his fee, the Spirit of God came on him and compelled him to speak God’s truth (24:2).

Balaam spoke seven oracles in all. The first two attested to Israel’s blessedness

(23:7–10; 18–24). The third pictured the nation’s strength and favor in God’s eyes, ending with a verse reminiscent of the Abrahamic covenant (24:3–9; see Gen. 12:3). The fourth was mainly a messianic prophecy about the “ruler [who] will come out of Jacob”—a phrase encompassing both David and Jesus the Son of David (24:15–19). The fifth (24:20) and sixth (24:21–22) indicated that Israel would defeat the Amalekites—proven enemies of Israel (see Ex. 17:8–16)—and the Midianites.

The seventh oracle (24:23–24) suggested that while nations will always rise and fall, these prophecies about Israel were rooted in a divine reality that transcended global politics. This is seen in both the messianic prophecy and the third oracle. According to Moody professor Michael Rydelnik, the phrase “greater than Agag” (24:7) could also be translated “greater than Gog” (see Ezekiel 38–39).

### APPLY THE WORD

Balaam’s prophecy is also connected to our Savior, Jesus. The “Magi from the east” (Matt. 2:1) saw that the “star will come out of Jacob” (24:17), and followed it to worship the Messiah. God used a pagan seer to proclaim the gospel. He wants us to share the good news about Jesus, too. Whom can you invite to worship?

### PRAY WITH US

Pastors’ Conference on Moody’s Chicago campus starts today! Pray for our Event and Guest Services team—Amanda Privett, Anna Gonzalez, Hannah Fowler, Kevin Utecht, and Lauren Cuevas—as they ensure the conference is a blessing to all the attendees.

TUESDAY  
MAY

23

*He was zealous for the honor of his God and made atonement for the Israelites.*

Numbers 25:13

## Balaam and Israel's Apostasy

In the Old West, towns whose sheriff or deputies killed a criminal would display the corpse in public as a warning to other desperadoes to keep away and tangible proof that the law was in control. Outlaws should seek victims elsewhere.

Similarly, in the Ancient Near East, the heads of defeated foes would be impaled on sticks and used to warn and demoralize one's enemies. A custom such as this seems to be what is meant in today's reading, in which God commanded that idolaters be executed and their bodies exhibited as part of Israel's repentance (vv. 4–5).

How had the nation been led into idolatry? Balaam was to blame (see Num. 31:16). Perhaps threatened with no pay for blessing Israel rather than cursing them, Balaam offered Balak advice about how to undermine Israel spiritually. If they could be tempted away from the Lord and into sexual

immorality and idolatry—and the fertility rites of Baal would have led to both sins (vv. 1–3)—perhaps the Moabites and Midianites wouldn't be devoured like grass in the fields after all.

While Moses was giving the instructions for repentance mentioned above, an Israelite leader and his Midianite lover brazenly entered the camp, right in front of everyone (vv. 6, 14)! They may even have been going into the tent for sex, since one spear thrust killed them both.

They showed complete contempt for the Lord and roused the righteous anger of Phinehas, son of the new high priest, Eleazar. Thanks to Phinehas's prompt action, God stopped His plague judgment against Israel (vv. 7–11). He also renewed His "covenant of peace" with the line of Aaron, affirming a "lasting priesthood" through Phinehas "because he was zealous for the honor of his God" (vv. 12–13).

### APPLY THE WORD

Like the Israelites, we are also continually tempted to place our trust in something other than God. Invitations to idolatry abound. We must be on guard against the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13, and make this verse your prayer for God's power to resist the siren call of sin.

### PRAY WITH US

We commit the rest of the Event and Guest Services department to the Lord in prayer today: Mary Chapman, Nathaniel Jacobs, Sonya Valeff, Stacey Craelius, and Valencia Holloway. We are grateful for their hard work in making sure events run smoothly.

*Take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit of leadership.*

Numbers 27:18

## The Second Census and Joshua's Anointing

Mission leader Hans Finzel identified a failure to prepare for succession in his book *The Top Ten Mistakes Leaders Make*. “Pride tightens the grip on leadership; humility relaxes and lets go.” He cited Moses and Joshua as a positive counterexample: “The plan worked, the transition was smooth, and the followers immediately transferred their allegiance to Joshua, because his predecessor had in humility placed his hands on Joshua and prayed for God’s blessing on his leadership. That is leadership maturity in the final hour, when it probably counts the most.”

Joshua’s anointing took place after the second census of Israel. The first census had been of the first generation of Israelites that failed to enter Canaan and died in the wilderness by God’s decree (Numbers 1–25). This second census counted the second generation, which was preparing to enter the land in faith (Numbers 26–36). One purpose

for the census was to count potential soldiers; another was for future land allocation (26:52–56). This census also served as a reminder that God had been faithful through the years of wilderness wandering, for the total population had remained basically the same (26:51, 63–65).

Since Moses knew he could not enter the land due to his sin at Meribah, this was also the appropriate time for a transition in national leadership. God would graciously allow him to see the land and gave him time to prepare for his death (27:12–14). Commendably, after hearing this news Moses’ first concern was for the people. He didn’t want them to be “sheep without a shepherd” (27:15–17). At God’s command, the mantle of leadership was therefore passed to Joshua (27:18–23). The nation’s ultimate leader remained the Lord Himself (27:21).

### APPLY THE WORD

God always keeps His promises! His faithfulness includes not only care and provision but also justice. He promised that only Caleb and Joshua would enter the Promised Land, and that’s exactly what happened. A good way to reflect on this truth is to read and meditate on Psalm 89, which celebrates both sides of His faithfulness.

### PRAY WITH US

We ask that the Holy Spirit provides encouragement to Dr. James Spencer, VP and dean of Moody Bible Institute. We thank God for his leadership and the influence he has had on the lives, education, and spiritual journeys of our students.

THURSDAY  
MAY

25

*Make sure that you present to me at the appointed time my food offerings.*

Numbers 28:2

## Offerings and Feast Days

Most churches have special worship services during Christmas and Easter to sing, preach, and dramatize the gospel story. The community and religious life of Israel revolved around prescribed offerings and an annual calendar of festivals or feasts. These events brought people together in obedience, thankfulness, and worship for who God is and what He had been doing in their lives. Like the census and the leadership succession, reviewing the worship schedule and calendar (see Leviticus for more details) represented a vital step in spiritual preparation prior to entering the Promised Land.

Seven items are covered in today's reading. First, the daily offerings—including the custom of morning and evening prayers that remain a part of some Jewish and Christian traditions to this day—gave off an “aroma” of worship that was “pleasing to the Lord” (28:1–8). Second, the weekly offerings

helped set apart the Sabbath as a holy day of rest (28:9–10; Ex. 20:8–11). Third, there were also prescribed monthly offerings (28:11–15).

Fourth, the Passover festival and its symbolic foods commemorated the Exodus from Egypt (28:16–25). Fifth, the Festival of Weeks (or Firstfruits)—called Pentecost in the New Testament—gave thanks for the main harvest (28:26–31). Sixth, the nation celebrated the Festival of Trumpets, which would later become Rosh Hashanah, the new year (29:1–6).

Seventh and finally, that festival led into Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement, a time of self-examination, confession, and repentance. Both individuals and the community should have an attitude of humility and self-denial (29:7–11). After making things right with God, they could together celebrate His atonement and forgiveness!

### APPLY THE WORD

*Putting God Back in the Holidays*, by Bill and Penny Thrasher, offers practical ideas for making holidays purposeful. Sixteen occasions are included, from Christmas to birthdays to Labor Day to Arbor Day. Dr. Gary Chapman wrote in the foreword, this book can help us “take every opportunity to receive and reflect the love of Christ to family and friends.”

### PRAY WITH US

Jim Elliot, VP of Stewardship, and his administrative assistant, Audrey Gross, appreciate your prayers today. We give thanks for the wonderful connections Jim and his teams maintain with our donors, establishing relationships all over the country.

*When a man makes a vow to the LORD . . . he must not break his word.*

Numbers 30:2

FRIDAY  
MAY

26

## Feast Days and Oathkeeping

In the story “The Pied Piper of Hamelin,” the townspeople hired the piper to get rid of an infestation of rats. With his magic music, he led the rats out of town and drowned them in the river. But when he returned for payment, the mayor and town council tried to get rid of him. So once more the piper played his tune. This time every child in Hamelin followed him out of the town gates, never to be seen again.

This folk tale warns of the consequences of not keeping promises. Festivals were a common time for people to keep vows they had made, which is why this material is located here in Numbers. Today’s reading describes one more holiday, the Festival of Tabernacles (or Booths) (29:12–38). The Festival of Trumpets led into the Day of Atonement, which led into this one.

The principle of promise keeping is based on understanding who God is. To take a vow before the Lord, who perfectly keeps all His promises, is an absolute commitment to doing what we say. Furthermore, it should be done not slowly or grudgingly, but willingly and eagerly (Deut. 23:21–23). The option of taking an oath was open to both men and women.

Such a commitment was not to be made lightly. Making a vow was a free choice, but it had serious obligations (see Eccl. 5:1–7). Not to keep a promise was a sin, but it was not a sin not to make one in the first place. Speaking many words and not meaning them is the mark of a fool; the wise don’t let their mouths lead them into sin. “Let your words be few,” Ecclesiastes thus advises, pointing out that listening and attentiveness are the path to fearing the Lord.

### APPLY THE WORD

Jesus taught the best practice regarding oaths: “All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’” (Matt. 5:33–37). One should always strive to speak with truth and integrity, not only when making special promises or keeping special vows. This kind of simplicity and honesty is beautiful to God, because His standards for words are always the same.

### PRAY WITH US

Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education, appreciates your prayers today during the Moody Aviation commissioning celebration. We give thanks for this ministry that trains aviators to bring help and Christ’s love to remote areas of the world.

SATURDAY  
MAY

27

*You give us victory over our enemies, you put our adversaries to shame.*

Psalm 44:7

## Victory over the Midianites

Rulers have often used the promise of dividing up the booty or spoils to motivate soldiers to fight in wars. They would allow the victorious army to plunder and ransack the goods, animals, women, and children of the losers.

A “winner-take-all” victory is described in today’s passage—but with some important differences. One was that God received a share, which went to the priest and Levites. This acknowledged that He was the reason for the victory, which had been won without casualties (vv. 48–50). Another difference was that, whereas the custom was for soldiers to get ten times more, the Lord mandated the spoils to be divided equally between the soldiers and the civilian community (v. 27). This acknowledged that the main motives for fighting were spiritual and not material.

Dealing out God’s justice on the Midianites was Moses’ last official act

as leader (v. 1). This was a warm-up for the conquest of Canaan, as he sent not the full army but one thousand men from each tribe to “carry out the LORD’s vengeance” (v. 3). This battle had been coming ever since the Moabite-Midianite alliance had first tried to get Balaam to curse Israel and then corrupted God’s people with idolatry and sexual immorality. Balaam had joined the wrong side, and now he paid for it with his life (v. 8).

After the battle, two problems needed to be solved. One was that the army had allowed the women to live—but since these were the same women who had led the Israelites into sin, God decreed that only the virgins would be spared. The second problem was that the army had not purified themselves after their victory. Cleansing rituals were thus performed for the soldiers, their captives, everyone’s clothing, and the plunder from the battle.

### APPLY THE WORD

If we take seriously God’s call to holiness, we must join His battle against sin. We must put on the armor of God “so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph. 6:10–17). Some people review these verses every morning, “putting on the armor of God” as part of daily preparations, along with brushing teeth or combing hair.

### PRAY WITH US

Moody Bible Institute Spokane professors come to the top of our prayer list today. May God give Beverly Tronsen, Brian Jaworski, Christopher Rappazini, Wendy Liddell, Craig Ferderer, and Daniel Ward renewed energy after the end of the semester.

*We will not return to our homes until each of the Israelites has received their inheritance.*

Numbers 32:18

SUNDAY  
MAY

28

## Settling the Land East of the Jordan River

At noon on May 22, 1889, more than 50,000 people poured into the Oklahoma Territory, rushing to stake their claims to cheap land offered by the federal government. It was the beginning of the Oklahoma Land Rush. Those who illegally slipped into the territory early were called “Sooners,” which became the state’s nickname.

The Reubenites and Gadites came to Moses to stake their claims to land on the east side of the Jordan River. This land had been conquered as part of Israel’s early military victories. The problem, from Moses’ perspective, was that allowing them to do so might discourage the rest of the nation from obeying God and entering Canaan, thus repeating the previous generation’s disobedience (vv. 6–15).

How could he approve their request and yet avoid this danger? The Reubenites and Gadites responded

with a wise solution: They promised to cross the Jordan River with the rest of the nation, going to war along with their brothers even though their inheritance was already won. This answered the obedience question, showing their genuine commitment to God’s plan and promise. It also answered the political question, showing their genuine commitment to the other tribes and acknowledging that the entire nation had won the land to which they now wished to stake a claim (v. 18).

On the basis of their vow (see Numbers 30), Moses granted their petition. They and the half-tribe of Manasseh (v. 33) would receive their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan while the other tribes would receive theirs on the west side. The two-and-a-half tribes promised to make preparations for leaving their families and livestock behind, then to join the rest of the Israelite army for the conquest of Canaan.

### APPLY THE WORD

Moses warned Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh: “If you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD and you may be sure that your sin will find you out” (v. 23). If we need another reason not to sin, here it is! Consequences might become obvious. God might directly expose our sins. Better to live at all times as if we were on display!

### PRAY WITH US

We keep Spokane professors in our prayers, praying for David Beine, Dominick Hernandez, Floyd Schneider, George Orr, Gerald Vreeland, and Jennifer Mills. Pray for encouragement from the Lord for their ministries in the classroom and outside the campus.

MONDAY  
MAY

29

*These forty years the LORD your God has been with you, and you have not lacked anything.*

Deuteronomy 2:7

## Reviewing Israel's Desert Journey

In 2011, a company called Liquid Robotics launched four Wave Glider robots from San Francisco. Their purpose was to gather scientific data while traveling under and across the world's oceans. A year later, the first of these robots arrived in Australia, having completed a world-record 9,000-mile journey without fuel or outside propulsion.

Numbers 33 describes another epic journey: Israel's wanderings in the wilderness. These were essentially desert campsites; the people never built fortified towns or put down permanent roots. These wanderings demonstrated God's faithful care and provision for His people along the way (Deut. 2:7). The journey had begun with their miraculous liberation from slavery. "They marched out defiantly in full view of all the Egyptians, who were burying their firstborn, whom the LORD had struck down among them; for the LORD had brought judgment on their gods"

(vv. 3–4). This history made their later grumbling all the more ridiculous.

Now the nation stood for the second time at the border of Canaan. The Lord charged them to drive out the Canaanites, destroy their idols, and settle in the land, dividing it fairly as they had been instructed (vv. 51–54). They should take heart, for the same God who had humbled the Egyptian gods could do the same to the Canaanite gods. And when they had conquered the land, they were not to take the credit but to remember the One who had given them victory.

God also cautioned them to obey His commands. If they spared any pagans and their idols, those would become "barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides" and "give you trouble" (v. 55). Then the Israelites would also come under divine judgment (v. 56), a warning that came true later in the Exile.

### APPLY THE WORD

This is a good day to review your own faith journey. What have been the key spiritual milestones? In what ways has God shown His love and provided for your needs? You could draw a timeline, read over journal entries, or discuss memories with a loved one. To "remember the deeds of the LORD" in this way can lead to a time of praise (Ps. 77:10–12)!

### PRAY WITH US

Once more, our focus for prayer is our Spokane professors. Commit John McMath, Jonathan Armstrong, Joshua Malone, Keith Krell, Marc Canner, and Michael Kibbe to the Lord today, praying they will be blessed in their service.

*Six of the towns . . . will be cities of refuge, to which a person who has killed someone may flee.*

Numbers 35:6

TUESDAY  
MAY

30

## Future Boundaries and Cities of Refuge

Revenge is an empty dish. As Gandhi said, “An eye for an eye will only make the whole world blind.” Francis Bacon advised, “Revenge is a kind of wild justice, which the more man’s nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out.” And Paul instructed, “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the LORD” (Rom. 12:19). Only God’s justice is perfect.

The establishment of cities of refuge (done in Joshua 20) was intended to break the cycle of eye-for-eye and tooth-for-tooth revenge (35:6–34). There would be six such cities, taken from the 48 to be allotted to the Levites. Anyone guilty of accidental manslaughter could go there and escape “blood for blood” cultural traditions. God still demands justice, however: real murderers still had to pay with their lives. They couldn’t buy their

way out of punishment, as was the case in other local cultures (35:31).

Four other matters are dealt with in today’s reading. After reviewing Israel’s wilderness wanderings in Numbers 33, Numbers 34 and 35 look ahead to the conquest of Canaan. First, God delineated the complete boundaries of the land. Second, He reminded them to divide up fairly the tribal land allotments. Since the inheritance was from Him, they would be wise to listen to His commands!

Third, God provided a mechanism for this to happen. A committee of tribal leaders, headed by Caleb, would make sure God’s instructions were obeyed. Fourth and finally, towns were set aside for the Levites to live in (done in Joshua 21). Their inheritance was to be serving the Lord, not land, but they still needed places to live. Their towns were spread throughout the land allotted to the other tribes.

### APPLY THE WORD

Invite someone to join a church committee, and their eyes might glaze over. But often the work is necessary and meaningful, such as that of the “land allotment committee” chaired by Caleb. Ask God if you should serve behind the scenes and volunteer for a committee at your church, knowing that work is part of your service for Him.

### PRAY WITH US

We pray God will grant Dr. John Jelinek, VP and dean of Moody Theological Seminary, joy and a sense of accomplishment as he leads Moody’s graduate education. Also include in your prayers his administrative assistant, Angela Edwards.

WEDNESDAY  
MAY

31

*These are the commands and regulations the LORD gave through Moses to the Israelites.*

Numbers 36:13

## Zelophehad's Daughters and Conclusion of the Book

In 1979, archaeologists in Jerusalem discovered two small silver scrolls, probably worn as amulets and dating back to the late seventh or early sixth centuries B.C. Once these scrolls were unrolled and deciphered, a delicate process that took more than three years, they were found to be inscribed with part of the Aaronic blessing found in Numbers 6:24–26. These, according to Michael A. Grisanti in one scholarly introduction, “are the earliest known artifacts from the ancient world that document passages from the Hebrew Bible.” These verses from Numbers are the oldest physically confirmed words of Scripture!

The book of Numbers ends with a matter of case law involving the daughters of Zelophehad. They had been listed in the second census (26:33). Their original inquiry had led to God providing for daughters inheriting and allowing family lines to

continue (27:1–11). Now the decision needed tweaking, to make sure that whatever happened the land would stay within the tribe (v. 9). Why was this so important? John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews provide an answer in their *Bible Background Commentary*: “That is because the land was the gift of the covenant, so each family’s allotment was its share in the covenant.”

This episode with Zelophehad’s daughters wasn’t just a matter of case law. These women were faithful and obedient. The nation, unlike a generation ago, stood poised to trust God’s promises and enter the land. In both Hebrew and English, the last word of the book is “Jericho”—they’re ready to go! To conclude the book in this way, especially compared with the various episodes of complaining and rebellion scattered throughout previous chapters, constitutes a happy ending, one filled with faith, hope, and obedience (v. 10).

### APPLY THE WORD

What has God taught you through this month’s book study? Themes have included obedience, faith, holiness, God’s faithfulness and provision, purity, atonement, leadership, and worship. What resonated most strongly with you? Ask the Lord what would be appropriate and fruitful ways to respond and apply these lessons from His Word.

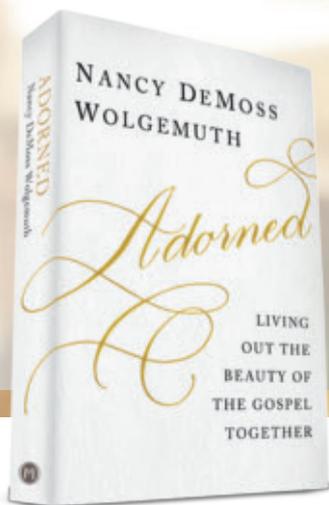
### PRAY WITH US

As we look back at everything we learned during this month, let us thank God that He is with us today as He was with the nation of Israel. No matter what deserts we may encounter in life, He will never desert us.

*New*  
FROM  
NANCY DEMOSS  
WOLGEMUTH

*Adorned* is sure to be one of Nancy's legacy works. Celebrating God's design for women in spiritual community, she explores the teaching of Titus 2 for life today.

If you want to grow and help others grow, pass on a legacy of godliness to generations, and enjoy deep spiritual friendship with other women, then *Adorned* is for you. It will equip and inspire you for the community you were made for: one adorned by the gospel.



Adorned  
ISBN: 978-0- 8024-1259- 1

Find it at your local or online bookstore or  
buy directly from Moody Publishers by calling  
(800) 678-8812 or at [moodypublishers.com](http://moodypublishers.com).



MOODY  
Publishers®

*From the Word to Life®*

I consider that our present sufferings  
are not worth comparing with the glory  
that will be revealed.

*Romans 8:18*

## TODAY IN THE WORD™

You can share *Today in the Word's* verse of the day  
by visiting us on Facebook or Twitter.

Visit us online to request resources and view past issues.

[TodayInTheWord.com](http://TodayInTheWord.com)



Today in the Word



@TodayintheWord



TodayInTheWordDevotional



**MOODY**  
GLOBAL MINISTRIES®

Moody helps equip you with the truth of God's Word as you impact your community and the world for Christ. We believe that understanding and sharing God's Word is a lifelong journey. Let us help you take the next step in your relationship with Christ.

Learn more at [MOODYGLOBAL.ORG](http://MOODYGLOBAL.ORG) or call (800) DL MOODY today.

MOODY  
Bible Institute™

[moody.edu](http://moody.edu)

MOODY  
Theological  
Seminary™

MOODY  
Bible Institute™  
DISTANCE LEARNING

MOODY  
Publishers®

[moodypublishers.com](http://moodypublishers.com)

MOODY  
Radio®

[moodyradio.org](http://moodyradio.org)