



Torah Journey

Reading Plan

Follow our guided Torah journey to discover biblical patterns. Explore a set of links, or visual clues, for each primary pattern within a portion of Scripture we're calling a "movement." Reading the Bible in movements is helpful because it provides a structure that breaks up the books of the Bible in sections that are meant to be read together.

Note: This resource was originally an interactive reading experience on the BibleProject app. As we prepare to support new reading experiences we have moved this content from the app to a PDF. Some features and context from the original experience are not included. This PDF is intended for personal use only.

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Movements and Links

Learn how to recognize the structure of movements in each biblical scroll and trace patterns throughout the story of the Bible.

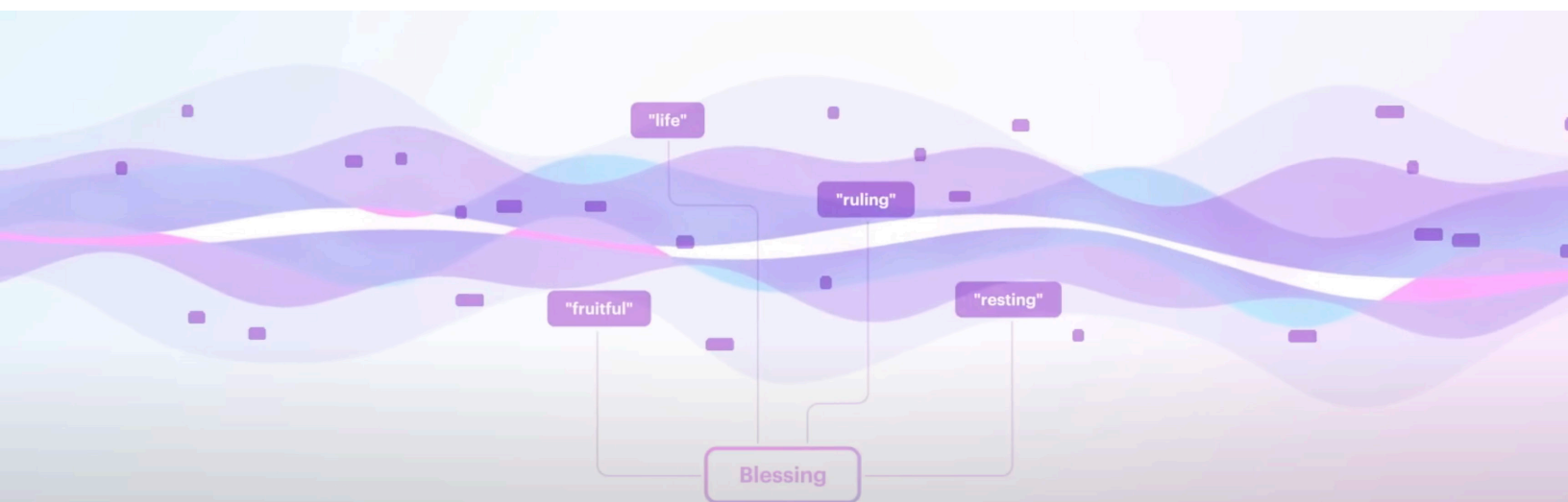
Watch

[Movements Video](#)

What is a movement? Modern Bibles are divided into chapters and verses, but the biblical scrolls were written to be read aloud, meditated on, and memorized as one continuous work.

[Links Video](#)

What is a link? The biblical story is connected by repeated words or ideas that we call links. In this video, we explain how links work and invite you to practice following them through biblical movements.





Genesis Scroll



GENESIS SCROLL

Movement 1: Adam to Noah

God creates a good world and commissions humans to rule it, but they choose rebellion again and again. Where does this rebellion lead, and what is God going to do about it?

Watch

[Genesis 1-11 video](#)

Read

Genesis 1:1-11:26

Primary Pattern

[Holy Spirit](#)

The Holy Spirit is God's personal presence, but what does that mean? How does God plan to change the entire world through his Spirit?

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Genesis 1:2

God's Spirit in Creation

The first time God's "Spirit" appears in the Bible is on page 1! The Hebrew word for Spirit is "*ruakh*" meaning breath, wind, and spirit. The first and most basic meaning in the Hebrew Bible for *ruakh* is breath—the invisible life-energy that a person breathes in and out, and it can also mean "wind"—an invisible power (e.g. the wind) that animates humans (breath) and all creation. In Genesis 1:2, God's *Ruakh* is the invisible, life-animating energy of God that is present in his creation and sustaining all life. God's *Ruakh* is present in creation, animating everything.

Genesis 2:7

The Breath of Life

Here we see God's *Ruakh* (Spirit) working as the invisible, life-energy that a person breathes in and out—as breath. We see this breath as God's gift to humanity. God forms Adam of dirt from the ground and breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, and man becomes an animated, living being.

Genesis 3:8

The Wind of the Day

In this verse, we see God's *Ruakh* (Spirit) translated as "wind of the day." Throughout the Hebrew Bible, God's *Ruakh* is associated with the wind, an invisible, powerful energy.

Genesis 6:3

Humanity's Borrowed Ruakh

The author presents the story in Genesis 6:1-2 as another fall narrative, using the same narrative design pattern in analogy with Genesis 3. In response to the rebellion of the "sons of Elohim," God sets a limit to human lifespan. Often translated as "Spirit" in verse 3, God is saying that his "breath" or *ruakh* will not abide in humans forever. Living creatures have borrowed *ruakh*—the invisible life-energy that sustains their existence, and when they die, their *ruakh* goes back to the Creator. The reference to 120 years is most likely a narrative countdown to the beginning of the flood (see Gen. 6:13).

Genesis 6:17

The Flood Destroys Living Creatures

All the earth corrupts God's good world so that God is deeply grieved that he ever made humans. All living creatures with the "breath of life" (*ruakh*) will be destroyed in the ensuing flood.



Genesis 7:15

A Remnant is Spared

God promises to destroy all living creatures who possess his breath (*ruakh*). But he saves a remnant—God’s Spirit, his breath of life, has not fully departed the earth. His breath remains in those saved from the flood, and through them he will begin humanity 2.0.

Genesis 7:22

The Flood Kills Those With the Breath

In this verse, we see a connection back to God’s resolution in 6:17—that all living things, every creature in “whose nostrils was the breath of life,” would be destroyed in the flood. This phrasing also circles back to Genesis 2:7, when God formed Adam from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

Genesis 8:1

The Spirit in Creation 2.0

In this verse, *ruakh* is translated as “wind”—an invisible, powerful energy. God sends this *ruakh* over the earth, and the waters of the flood subside. The flood, an undoing of creation, has resulted in a state of the earth much like that which is found in Genesis 1:2, where God’s Spirit (his *Ruakh*) is hovering over the chaotic waters, ready to take part in creation.

Related Resources

Video

[Holy Spirit](#)

Article

[How God’s Presence Came to Dwell With All His People](#)

Podcast

[God’s Spirit in Creation](#)

[God’s Spirit in the Flood Narrative](#)

[The Spirit of the OT vs. the Spirit of Christianity](#)

[God’s Ruakh](#)

[Holy Spirit in the New Testament \(podcast episode\)](#)





GENESIS SCROLL

Movement 2: Abraham

God chooses to restore blessing and life to the world through the family of a man named Abraham.

Watch

[Genesis 12-50 video](#)

Read

Genesis 11:27-25:18

Primary Pattern

[Tree of Life](#)

At key points in the biblical story, there are usually trees somewhere in the mix playing an active role. Why did the authors include all of this tree imagery? Explore the rich biblical theme of the tree of life from its introduction in the garden of Eden to Jesus' ultimate sacrifice.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Genesis 12:6

On a High Place With God Under a Tree

At the end of Genesis 3, humans are exiled from the Eden tree of life because they have become trees of testing to one another. Though they are exiled, there is an expectation that just as trees produce seed (Gen. 1:11-12), so too will the woman produce seed (Gen. 3:15-16) that will overcome the snake, while also being overcome by it. Genesis chapters 4-50 are all about God's work with the family who would fulfill that promise. The turning point in the book of Genesis occurs in chapter 12. Abram (later named Abraham) is called out of Mesopotamia to go to the land of Canaan. His first entry into the land portrays him and Sarah as a new Adam and Eve, and also as a new Noah. Abram journeys into Canaan and ascends to a high hill (Shechem). There is a high tree there called "vision," where Yahweh appears to him in a vision. Then Abram goes to a mountain near Bethel ("house of God") and builds another altar where he worships Yahweh. Abram is a **human meeting with God on a high place under a tree**. Sound familiar? This is Eden imagery!

Genesis 13:3

The Promised Land, a New Eden

Here, Abram goes back to the Eden place at the "house of God" (Bethel), and from that high place, God tells Abram to look out upon the promised land as a new Eden. He is instructed to "walk about" (התהלך). This is a unique verb that recalls Genesis 3:8, where God comes "walking about" (מתהלך) in Eden to look for the humans. Abram is depicted as a new Adam walking about the trees and mountains of a new Eden. A few verses later in Genesis 13:18, Abraham moves from the oak of Moreh (מורה) to the oaks of Mamre (ממרא), where, yet again, he meets God near trees on a mountain.

Genesis 14:13

The Nations Experience Covenantal Blessings Under a Tree

While a battle rages around Abraham, he sits in peace among the oak trees of Mamre (Gen. 14:13). Corrupt Canaanites are being struck down all around, but another group of Canaanites, who are in a covenant (ברית) with Abraham, sit with him in safety (Gen. 14:13). In this passage, we see the Canaanites portrayed in two ways.

Genesis 18:1

Man and Woman Meeting With God Under a Tree

Abraham is among the oaks of Mamre where he camped in Genesis 13:18. This evokes the oak of Vision/Moreh from Genesis 12:7. At these oak trees, Abraham had visions of God's covenant blessings. Notice the pairing of "under the tree" (Heb. *takhat ha'ets*) in 18:4, 8 and "the door of the tent" (Heb. *petakh ha'ohel*) (פתח האהל) in 18:1, 2, and 10. The tree and the door are both Eden images (Gen. 4:7-8) that are replayed in the ark as well



(Gen. 7:13). The scene of a man and woman meeting with God under a tree and at the door of a tent, talking about a fruitful womb—this is all Eden imagery!

Genesis 21:15

Eden Blessing for the Non-Chosen

Hagar and Ishmael are exiled from Abraham's family because Sarah saw Ishmael "playing" (Gen. 21:9). God tests Abraham by telling him to listen to the voice of his wife, which landed them in a heap of trouble last time (Gen. 16:2). Abraham, like Adam, doesn't resist his wife's voice, and he exiles the woman and her child, essentially sending them to their deaths. He gives them only a skin of water as he sends them into the wilderness, and it immediately drains, putting Hagar and Ishmael in mortal danger. But God provides for the immigrant and her son by leading them to a spring by a tree and giving them the Eden blessing of Abraham.

God provides life-giving water for Hagar and Ishmael in the waterless desert by means of a "Well of Seven," which leads to the provision of a wife for the son. This sequence maps onto both the first and last moments of the opening movement of the Eden narrative, which also begins with God's provision of water in the wilderness (Gen. 2:4-6) and concludes with the provision of a wife (Gen. 2:24). The point here is that God is providing an Eden blessing for the non-chosen son, who is separate from the chosen line set to inherit the promised land.

Genesis 21:33

Covenant Peace Between Rival Families

This is a story about two rival brothers, each of whom feels threatened by the other. The Philistines recognize God's blessing on Abraham ("Elohim is with you in all that you do"), and instead of initiating conflict, they invite Abraham into a covenant of peace. This recalls the promise of Genesis 12:1-3: "Those who bless you will be blessed ... all the families of the land will find blessing by means of you." Abraham, on the other hand, brings up a matter of dispute about a source of water in the wilderness. But here too, Abimelech shows himself favorable to Abraham as he confesses his ignorance about the well. We may expect a conflict over resources between two rival families to end in violence. But in this case, the families achieve peace through just dealings that lead to a covenant of peace. The fact that the story ends with Eden and tree imagery (Abraham meets with Yahweh under a tree that he planted) shows that matters have reached an ideal resolution.



Genesis 22:2

The Land of Moriah

What is the significance of this location? The land of Moriah (מוריה) means “the land of vision,” intentionally mirroring the “oak of vision” (מורה) in Genesis 12. Abraham has been meeting God by trees on mountains. And here, God calls Abraham to a mountain which has a name that sounds similar to the hill and tree in Genesis 12 where he also built an altar. This is all building anticipation—will Abraham worship God here on this mountain?

Also Mount Moriah has clear hyperlinks forward to the temple mount on which David will later establish the site for the temple. The name given to this place in Genesis 22:14, the “mountain of Yahweh” (הר יהוה), is only used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to refer to Mount Zion, the temple mount in Jerusalem (see Isa. 2:3; 30:29; Micah 4:2; Ps. 24:3). Mount Moriah appears only one more time in the Hebrew Bible, as the location where the events of David’s greatest test took place in 2 Samuel 24.

“And Solomon began to build the house of Yahweh in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where Yahweh had appeared to his father David, which he established at the place of David, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite” (2. Chron. 3:1).

So we’re left wondering what will happen on this mountain—will Abraham worship God on this mountain? Will he experience testing, or will it be both?

Genesis 22:3

Yahweh Provides a Substitute on Mount Moriah

The narrator draws the reader’s focus to the tree/wood in this story—the wood of the burnt offering, taken along, placed on Isaac, and arranged on the altar.

Additionally, the ram in the thicket on the mountain is an inverted image of the tree of life. In Hebrew, ram is spelled with the same letters as oak (איל). Isaac’s life is spared, and his substitute is offered from the “tree.”

The narrator’s comment in verse 14 draws a direct analogy between Yahweh’s provision of a substitute on Mount Moriah and a future sacrifice that will be offered on this same mountain, the temple in Jerusalem. Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac is offered here as an image of a future faithful descendent who will offer a sacrifice of great cost in Jerusalem and release the blessings of Eden’s tree of life to all of the nations.

Genesis 23:17

Sarah’s Burial

This story of Sarah’s burial is a full-scale replay of the core themes at work in the garden of Eden story. Through wordplays, hyperlinks, and narrative analogies, Abraham’s loss of Sarah is compared to both the loss of eternal life in Eden and the hope of God’s promise to restore life.



After Abraham's great act of faithfulness, we're told that his beloved wife dies near the sacred tree that Abraham had camped by all the way back in Genesis 14. The design of this story emphasizes the special importance of this location by repeating the mention of Hebron in the opening and closing of the chapter.

The narrative highlights that Abraham worshiped and met with God near trees when he was living near Hebron/Mamre. This is a clear Eden motif, as Abraham and Sarah are presented as a new Adam and Eve, living in the promised garden land and communing with God by the trees of Hebron. Sadly, the wife of the new Adam eventually dies by the sacred trees of Mamre. This is a vivid and potent image that recalls the woman eating from the tree that leads to death. But there is a shred of hope because Sarah is also buried near the sacred trees of Mamre/Hebron.

Related Resources

Video

[Tree of Life](#)

Article

[The Tree of Life: Lost but Not Forgotten](#)

Podcast

[Under the Trees With Yahweh](#)

[Trees of Testing and Blessing](#)

[Dismantling the Tree](#)

[Moses, Israel, and the S'neh Tree](#)

[David, Isaiah, and New Eden](#)





GENESIS SCROLL

Movement 3: Isaac and Jacob

The scroll of Genesis continues to trace the story of Abraham's family through four generations, revealing how in each generation, we see human failure paired with God's commitment to rescue and bless his people.

Watch

[Genesis 12-50 video](#)

Read

Genesis 25:19-37:1

Primary Pattern

[Blessing and Curse](#)

God's blessing is about flourishing and multiplication of life. While God shares his life-producing ability with all creation, human beings must choose to either receive or reject it, and denying the blessing leads to corruption and death—the curse.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Genesis 25:31

The Birthright

Before Esau and Jacob were born, we learned that God had already upset the cultural practice of elevating the firstborn son as head of the family. Instead God chose the younger son, Jacob, to be the one who would receive the Eden-blessing that was given to Abraham.

But in this story, we see Jacob's sly nature come to the surface. Instead of trusting God to give him the honor of the blessing, Jacob schemes a way to steal it for himself by tricking Esau out of his birthright. There is an important link between the blessing and the birthright. The Hebrew word for birthright is "*bekorah*" (בכרה), and the Hebrew word for blessing is "*berakah*" (ברכה) with the Hebrew letters rearranged. By swindling Esau out of his birthright, Jacob shows that he would rather try to seize honor and blessing by his own wisdom, instead of receiving these things as a gift from God. This becomes a pattern in Jacob's life, and, as we'll see, it only creates trouble for himself and others.

Genesis 26:3

God's Blessing to Abraham Continues With Isaac

Isaac receives the same blessing that God gave to his father Abraham, and with the same purpose: so that the Eden blessing can be restored to all nations. But Abraham and Sarah didn't always trust God for the blessing. On multiple occasions, they lied and abused other people in order to secure the blessing for themselves. And so right after Isaac receives the same blessing as his father, he goes on to repeat his father's sins.

Genesis 26:12

God Blesses Isaac

This blessing may come as a surprise. Even after acting deceitfully, God blesses Isaac in a time of famine and provides him with a huge harvest (100 fold!).

Genesis 26:24

Reaffirmed Blessing

God reaffirms his promise to Isaac. Isaac has been rejected by Abimelech earlier in the story, but God has not rejected him. God is with him and remains committed to his promise to bless him.

Genesis 26:29

Isaac as a Blessing to the Nations

In a reversal from Abimelech's earlier rejection of Isaac, Abimelech acknowledges God's presence with Isaac and seeks to enter into a covenant with him. This story shows Isaac as an image of what Abraham's family was intended to be, a blessing to all the families on Earth (Gen. 12:3).



Genesis 27:4

Rebekah and Jacob's Scheme

This chapter is filled with blessing and curse language. As you read, notice the consistent repetition. This story is about how Isaac, like Esau with his birthright, disregards the immense value of the blessing and instead treats it with contempt. In this culture, Isaac was supposed to give the blessing to his oldest son, Esau, but he gave it to Jacob instead, all for a bowl of food. Isaac is willing to go against the birth oracle's promise that the younger will rule over the older. And Isaac is willing to give away the blessing to the wrong person, simply in exchange for food. Through a network of hyperlinks, the narrative sets up a large-scale analogy between Isaac and Adam's failure in Genesis 3. Both men were willing to forfeit the blessing of God because they were deceived with lies that included food from their wives.

Rebekah chooses to deceive her husband, and she enlists her son Jacob to help her in her scheme. Instead of trusting that God would give the blessing in his own time and way, Rebekah and Jacob attempt to gain God's blessing without God. And they end up stealing, cheating, and hurting many in the process. Throughout the story of Jacob, we find a pattern. When Jacob sees that blessing and abundance are available, he assumes that it is in his power to scheme or bargain in order to get what he wants.

Genesis 28:1

Jacob Receives the Divine Blessing

Isaac passes on the divine blessing to Jacob and commands him to go and find a wife from their larger extended family. The implication is that Jacob will "be fruitful and multiply" (cf. Gen. 1:26-27) and become a great nation through which God will bless all of the people and families of Earth. God's covenantal promise of blessing to Abraham has been passed to Isaac and now to Jacob.

Genesis 27:36

Esau Trades His Blessing

Esau's statement about Jacob's deception shows the narrator's emphasis in these early stories about Jacob. "Isn't he rightly named Jacob (*ya'akov*) because he deceived me (*ya'kaveni*) these two times! He took my birthright (*bekorah*), and now he has taken my blessing (*berakah*)!"

While Isaac and Esau were themselves short-sighted and willing to give the blessing away in exchange for food, Jacob proves to be no better! He's a liar who is willing to abuse his own family and scheme his way into the blessing that God said already belonged to him. If no one in this family really receives God's blessing, what is God going to do?



Genesis 28:14

Jacob, the Carrier of the Promise

The original phrase used here, “will be blessed in you,” is precisely the phrase used for the blessing given to Abraham in Genesis 12:3! The story presents Jacob as a potential new Abraham, receiving the blessing that God gave to Abraham for all the nations. This blessing is meant to be “carried” on through Abraham’s descendants, eventually leading to a descendant through whom all the nations of the world will be blessed.

In verse 14, the promise focuses on Jacob as he goes into exile. Although we may have serious questions about his worthiness and character, this marks Jacob as the carrier of God’s promise to Abraham.

Genesis 30:27

Laban’s Flocks Multiply

In this story, Laban claims that his flocks have multiplied because of God’s blessing on Jacob. But is that true? Can God’s blessing on Abraham be siphoned off by a devious guy like Laban? It’s clear that Laban thinks so. But notice that Laban says he learned this by “divination.” Interestingly, the Hebrew word for “divination” is spelled with the same letters as the Hebrew word “snake” (*nakhash*). This wordplay is a subtle hint that Laban is up to his deceptive and persuasive tricks again, trying to get as much labor out of Jacob as he can. And ironically, it’s going to bring about the opposite of what he hopes!

Genesis 30:30

Laban Uses Jacob for Blessing

Jacob affirms Laban’s intuition that his abundance has come from Yahweh’s blessing. However, Laban’s abundance at his expense makes Jacob angry. He can see that Laban has been using him as a means to blessing and abundance, echoing how Jacob used his brother and father as a means to blessing and abundance.

Genesis 32:26

Jacob Wrestles With God

This story is symbolic of the entire Jacob narrative so far. Once Jacob sees that blessing and abundance are available to him, he assumes that it is in his power to scheme or bargain in order to get what he wants.

In this story, Jacob is presented as wrestling with God in order to get the very blessing that God has already promised to grant him—the original blessing God gave to Abraham so that all the nations would receive God’s blessing through him.



Genesis 32:29

Jacob Renamed

God eventually blesses Jacob, but only after wrestling him to the ground and wounding him. It is as if the only way God can get Jacob to receive his blessing is to take away his strength. The only option left for Jacob is to surrender. However, Jacob isn't totally helpless, and he won't let go of God or the blessing. And so Jacob receives his new name, "Israel," which means "struggles with God."

This story anticipates the entire history of Israel that will follow in the Torah and Prophets. God is committed to working through these descendants of Jacob, but what if they turn out to be just as crooked as their ancestors, trying to keep God's blessing for themselves instead of sharing it? Jacob's wounds in the wilderness become a powerful image of the long struggle ahead between God and the Israelites.

Genesis 33:11

Jacob Repays Esau

After about 20 years, Jacob tries to reconcile with his brother Esau. He attempts to repay him for the blessing he stole from him. Jacob gives to Esau from the abundance that God's blessing has given to him.

(Note: many Bible translations render the word "blessing" here as "present" or "gift," but it is the Hebrew word for "blessing.")

Genesis 35:11

Blessing for the Next Generation

Recall how God's blessing to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) was passed on to Isaac and then to Jacob, so the blessing for all nations is now going to somehow take place through Jacob's many children. Here, God restates the blessing given to all humanity, to rule over the land and its creatures (Gen. 1:26-28). But now the blessing is focused on Jacob's descendants, as he's told that kings will come from his lineage. This invites the reader to anticipate a story of Israelite kings who may (or may not) become the vehicle of God's rule and blessing for the nations. While that story will have to wait until the scrolls of 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings, the idea is rooted in God's blessing from the book of Genesis.

Genesis 35:9

Blessing on Jacob's Descendants

Jacob's name change is repeated and reemphasized. He is back in the land promised to Abraham, and the blessing that was originally promised to Abraham is now projected into the future generations of Jacob's descendants.



Related Resources

Video

[Blessing and Curse \(video\)](#)

Podcast

[Great Blessing and Great Responsibility](#)

[Wrestling God for a Blessing](#)

[Covenant Curses](#)

[Can Anyone Live a Blessed Life?](#)

[Moses' Final Words](#)





GENESIS SCROLL

Movement 4: Jacob's Sons

The biblical story continues to trace Abraham's descendants, and as the scroll of Genesis closes, we see the promise of a king from the line of Judah who will rule over the nations and restore blessing to the world.

Watch

[Genesis 12-50 video](#)

Read

Genesis 37:2-50:26

Primary Pattern

[Exile](#)

Exile is one of the core patterns woven throughout the entire biblical storyline. How does exile permeate the story, and how does God provide a way back from exile to our true home?

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Genesis 37:24

Joseph Exiled

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve are driven out, or “exiled,” from Eden. At this point, exile from the garden takes on the narrative role of death. We pick this theme back up in the story of Joseph, where Joseph is cast out and “exiled” from his family and land. His brothers literally “throw him” away from the family as they plot his death.

Genesis 37:28

Joseph Sold Into Exile

The narrative continues with Joseph being brought out of the pit and taken to Egypt as a slave. His brothers sell him into slavery, and he is exiled from both his family and his homeland.

Genesis 37:35

Images of Exile and Death

Joseph has gone down into exile in Egypt and, in Jacob’s mind, he has “gone down into the grave.” The author is connecting “going down” with “Egypt” and “exile.” And this pattern will continue. The word used for “pit” in this passage is the Hebrew word “*bor*.” It refers to a literal pit, but it is also used poetically to refer to the land of the dead, *Sheol*. The dead go down to *Sheol*, and they may also be described as “ones going down to the pit” (e.g. Ps. 28:1; 143:7; Isa. 38:18). The pit, Egypt, and the grave are all images of exile and death.

Genesis 39:1

Joseph Goes Down to Egypt

The theme of exile continues in the narrative. Take notice of the repeated use of “going down” by the author(s). Just as Joseph goes down into the pit, he is then brought down into Egypt and exiled from family and land.

Genesis 39:20

Joseph Goes Down into Prison

Take notice of the repeated use of “going down” by the author(s). This is exilic language. Joseph goes down into a pit, then goes down to Egypt, before finally going down into a prison. This language is symbolic of exile.

Genesis 41:14

Exile Reversed

In this passage, the “going down” language is reversed. Joseph’s exaltation to rule involves him being taken up out of the pit (i.e. a reversal of his exile).



Genesis 42:3

Joseph's Brothers Go Down to Egypt

Here we see the use of “going down” language again. But this time, it’s Joseph’s brothers who are going down to Egypt. Because of the famine, Joseph’s brothers go down—in exile from their land and family—to Egypt to look for food.

Genesis 42:38

Jacob Clings to Benjamin

Jacob won’t let his other favorite son, Benjamin, go down to Egypt in exile. Losing Benjamin in addition to Joseph would make Jacob “go down into the grave.” The grave is being used as an image of death.

Genesis 43:15

The Brothers Go Down to Egypt Again

Once again, Joseph’s brothers go down to Egypt in exile from their land and family to find food.

Genesis 45:9

Egypt As Eden

In this passage, we see that God transforms the “death” of Joseph’s exile in Egypt into an Eden-like land filled with provision and life. Joseph’s family can now go down to Egypt and experience life instead of death.

Genesis 45:25

Canaan as the Land of Death

The brothers go up out of Egypt in a return from exile. However, Egypt is now the garden land (i.e. Eden), and Canaan is the land of famine and death.

Genesis 46:3

Jacob's Family in Egyptian Exile

As the story moves toward its conclusion, God tells Jacob to take his family into Egyptian exile because it is now the place of blessing and life. His family is to remain in Egypt until the day when God “will bring [them] up again.”

Genesis 46:26

The Descendants in Exile

The following passage lists the descendants of Jacob who go down into Egyptian exile.



Genesis 50:5

Jacob Buried

As the story concludes, Jacob dies in Egyptian exile. However, Joseph wants to “go up” out of exile to the “garden cave” (Gen. 50:13) where Jacob is to be buried. This cave is near the sacred tree where Abraham camped in Genesis 14—where Abraham lived, worshiped, and met with God. It is also the cave where Abraham and Sarah are both buried. So Joseph and his family “go up” out of exile to bury their father, but they return to live in exile from their land in Egypt.

● **Recall Pattern**

● [Holy Spirit](#)

- The Holy Spirit is God’s personal presence, but what does that mean?
- How does God plan to change the entire world through his Spirit?

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).

Genesis 41:38

The First Person Empowered by the Spirit

God’s Spirit (*ruakh*) can “enter” human beings in order to influence and empower them by divinely enhancing their human abilities. The Spirit can enhance or use a person’s own thoughts, abilities, and purposes to accomplish God’s purposes. Joseph was the first Spirit-empowered person in the Bible. And Pharaoh elevates him to a position of authority because he is “one in whom is the Spirit of God.”

Genesis 40:8

Joseph Interprets the Baker and Cupbearer’s Dreams

God’s Spirit (*ruakh*) can “enter” human beings in order to influence and empower them by divinely enhancing their human abilities. Here, we see the Spirit’s influence on Joseph, enabling him to interpret dreams. We are explicitly told this in Genesis 41:38, where Joseph is described as “one in whom is the Spirit of God.”

Genesis 41:8

Pharaoh’s Troubled Spirit

We read that Pharaoh’s spirit (*ruakh*) is troubled because of his dreams. The use of spirit here concerns a frame of mind or conscious purpose. Pharaoh’s frame of mind—his *spirit*—is described as troubled.



Genesis 45:27

Jacob's Spirit Revived

The narrator writes that Jacob's spirit (*ruakh*) revived (*ḥayyâ*)—his spirit awakened at the discovery of Joseph being alive. Jacob's being and frame of mind, filled with the animating presence of God's Spirit, came to life upon hearing that his son was alive.

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Exodus Scroll



EXODUS SCROLL

Movement 1: The Exodus From Egypt

Abraham's family ends up enslaved in Egypt, but God has not forgotten his promises to his people. He raises up a deliverer to confront Pharaoh and rescue the Israelites.

Watch

[Exodus 1-18 video](#)

Read

Exodus 1:1-13:16

Primary Pattern

[YHWH/LORD](#)

Why does God have so many names in the Bible, and why is it important for us to know and understand them? Explore the significance of the many names that Jewish and Christian people have used to refer to the God of the Bible.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Exodus 3:2

The Angel of Yahweh

The messenger (referred to as “the angel of the LORD/Yahweh”) who appears to Moses is the only angel who bears the name of Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible. Interestingly, this angel is said to be in the midst of the bush, yet Yahweh is the one who spoke to Moses from the midst of the bush (Exod. 3:4). The narrator calls this figure the angel of Yahweh as though he is distinct from Yahweh, but then the figure is called Yahweh and also called God. This figure speaks as though he is Yahweh God, and that is who Moses understands him to be.

At this point in the story, we may be wondering: Is this being distinct from Yahweh, or is this being Yahweh himself?

An often overlooked detail in this narrative is that the blurring of identities between Yahweh and the angel of Yahweh is an intentional strategy aimed at making a profound theological claim about the identity of Yahweh. The one God of Israel is a complex unity who is both transcendent and above all, yet simultaneously present and accessible within creation through a mediating person who is both Yahweh and distinct from Yahweh.

Exodus 3:14

The Name

We first learn the meaning of God’s name in this narrative. Moses wonders what will happen if people want to know how to address the god who has sent him to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. And God responds, “Tell them *ehyeh* has sent me to you.” When God refers to his name here, he uses the first-person form of the Hebrew verb “*hayah*” (meaning “to be”), which parses to “*ehyeh*” (“I am”). In other words, God’s name means that he is “the one who is and who will be.” God’s existence does not depend on anyone or anything else. This god simply *is* (Exod. 3:13-14).

However, when humans mention God’s name, they do so in the third-person form of the verb “*hayah*,” which parses to Yahweh (“He will be”). And this is the personal name of the God of Israel. It appears over 6,500 times in the Hebrew Bible and refers to the one who was, who is, and who forever will be.

Exodus 3:15

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

God reveals that the name Yahweh is how the Israelites will know him from this point forward. This is the first time that the Hebrew Bible states the divine name along with the phrase “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” The name Yahweh speaks to God’s ultimate existence transcending all creation, and when connected to these patriarchs, it speaks to God’s intimate involvement with human beings throughout time, from generation to generation.



Exodus 4:5

God Gives Moses Signs

God reveals that the name Yahweh is how the Israelites will know him from this point forward. This is the first time that the Hebrew Bible states the divine name along with the phrase “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” The name Yahweh speaks to God’s ultimate existence transcending all creation, and when connected to these patriarchs, it speaks to God’s intimate involvement with human beings throughout time, from generation to generation.

Exodus 5:2

Pharaoh Questions Moses

Pharaoh asks, “Who is Yahweh that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?” The personal name of the God of the Hebrews was not known in the land of Egypt, so Pharaoh’s question seems genuine and reasonable. Pharaoh may also be expressing arrogance by downplaying the God of the Hebrews; however, it seems likely that Pharaoh was genuinely inquiring about who Yahweh was.

Exodus 6:3

God Almighty

This interesting passage tells us that God first revealed himself only partially as “God Almighty” (Hebrew, *El Shaddai*) when he engaged with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This does not mean they did not know his name; it only says God did not make himself known to them by his full name, Yahweh. Instead, he used God Almighty/*El Shaddai*. Overall, the name Yahweh appears 182 times in the Genesis scroll, but when God “appeared” to the patriarchs, it was *El Shaddai*.

Exodus 6:7

They Shall Know the LORD

This is the first occurrence of the phrase “you shall know that I am the LORD your God” in the Hebrew Bible. The Israelites will know Yahweh in a new way because he powerfully delivers them from oppression in Egypt. They will know him in a way that their ancestors did not.

Exodus 6:8

Promise Charged to the Name

Notice how God declares that he will fulfill all of his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and he does so on account of his personal name. When it comes to keeping his word, God charges it to his name, to who he was, is, and will always be.



Exodus 7:5

The Egyptians Will Know Yahweh

God emphasizes a big point here. When he rescues the covenant people from Egypt, his actions will cause the Egyptians to know the God of Israel. Knowledge of him will not be exclusive to Moses, Aaron, or the Israelites—it will be accessible to the Egyptians, too. The Israelites will know who he is through a great rescue and exodus from slavery, and the Egyptians will know who he is through a great judgment on their nation and their role as oppressors.

Exodus 7:17

Pharaoh Will Know Yahweh

God shifts focus from who will receive this knowledge of him to, specifically, the Egyptian people and then Pharaoh. Pharaoh had previously asked who Yahweh is in Exodus 5:2, and God now says he will answer this question through the upcoming plague and all to follow.

Exodus 8:10

Knowledge of Yahweh Through Plague

Here we read about Pharaoh's knowledge of Yahweh coming to him, again, through the consequences of a plague. Moses reveals the purpose of these plagues—so that Pharaoh may know how no other god in Egypt is like Yahweh. Sadly, this knowledge will come through God's judgment instead of Pharaoh's humility.

Exodus 8:22

A Declaration of War

This is the third time we see Pharaoh's knowledge of Yahweh connected to a plague. This time, however, Pharaoh will come to know specifically that Yahweh is present in the land of Egypt, the land that Pharaoh believes "belongs" to him and the Egyptian gods. By saying he will be present in the land of Egypt, Yahweh appears to be making a declaration of war. He is "intruding" on their land.

Exodus 8:28

The God of Israel

Here we see Pharaoh's progression of knowledge of Yahweh go from not knowing the name of Yahweh to acknowledging Yahweh as the God of Israel. Pharaoh does not see Yahweh as the "most high God," but he does credit Yahweh as the God of the Hebrews.



Exodus 9:14

No One Like Yahweh

Although God does not explicitly mention his name here, it is worth noting that he still expresses a desire to be known through his mighty acts against Egypt. God wants Pharaoh to know that he is unlike any other god. This is a reiteration of what Moses declares to Pharaoh in Exodus 8:10: there is no one like Yahweh.

Exodus 9:16

God Appointed Pharaoh Ruler

Although God does not explicitly mention his name here, it is worth noting that he still expresses a desire to be known through his mighty acts against Egypt. God wants Pharaoh to know that he is unlike any other god. This is a reiteration of what Moses declares to Pharaoh in Exodus 8:10: there is no one like Yahweh.

Exodus 9:29

Egypt Belongs to Yahweh

Moses replies to Pharaoh, saying that he will pray to Yahweh on behalf of the Egyptians so that when the plague of hail ceases, Pharaoh will know that the land of Egypt truly belongs to Yahweh. Yahweh is not merely declaring war against Egypt or intruding in their land (cf. Exod. 8:22); he has full ownership of the land and all that is in it.

Exodus 10:2

Pharaoh's Heart Is Hardened

God declares that Pharaoh's heart is hardened and that, consequently, judgment will continue to come upon the Egyptians. As a result of these judgments (plagues) against Egypt, Moses will one day tell his descendants about how Yahweh dealt with the Egyptians, and Pharaoh will know that Yahweh is God.

Exodus 10:7

Pharaoh's Servants Beg Him to Let the Israelites Go

Notice a minor yet important detail, here: Pharaoh's own servants begged him to let the Hebrews serve "*Yahweh their God*." The same servants beg Pharaoh to acknowledge the damage Egypt has endured as a result of his refusal to let the Hebrews go.

Exodus 10:16

Pharaoh Acknowledges His Sin

Although Pharaoh's heart will remain hardened (see 10:20), we see some change as he acknowledges his previous defeat against Yahweh. His pride has been carrying him throughout the narrative, but now he finds himself in a place of unexpected humility before Yahweh. Pharaoh finally sees that Yahweh truly does have power over him.



Exodus 11:7

Warning of a Final Plague

While speaking with the Israelites, Moses declares that the most devastating plague is approaching. As a result of this final plague, all will know that Yahweh clearly distinguishes between the Egyptians and his people.

Exodus 12:12

Judgment on the Gods of Egypt

In this pivotal moment in the Exodus story, God makes a judgment statement on the gods of Egypt, explicitly stating his direct opposition to them. Although implied throughout the narrative, Yahweh is now clearly stating his intentions to execute judgment against the gods of Egypt.

Related Resources

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EXODUS SCROLL

Movement 2: Israel at Mount Sinai

After the Israelites escape from Egypt, they begin their journey through the wilderness on their way to Mount Sinai.

Watch

[Exodus 1-18 video](#)

Read

Exodus 13:17-24:18

Primary Pattern

[The Test](#)

Why does God test people? Trace the pattern of testing in the Bible and see how God determines whether or not his covenant partners will trust him. Though these tests present serious challenges to God's people, they also lead to growth and transformation along the way.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Exodus 14:10

The Israelites Lodge a Complaint Against Moses

While the word “test” is not explicitly used in this narrative, it is the first time the Israelites lodge a complaint against Moses when they are faced with death at the hands of Pharaoh and his soldiers. This same type of complaint will be repeated in Exodus 16:3 and in 17:2-3. Both instances are identified as moments when God tests Israel (Exod. 16:4) or when Israel tests God (Exod. 17:2).

Take notice of how this particular moment in Exodus 14 represents a failure to trust God in the face of danger and death. But despite the people’s failure, God saves them anyway. This story is an implicit test of Israel’s trust. And by the end of the story, we read that Israel “trusts in Yahweh and in Moses” (Exod. 14:31). However, we also know from their complaint that it is a fragile trust. And the following test and failure narratives will confirm this.

Exodus 15:25

The Second Water Test

This short story is framed as a test of Israel’s faith when they are once again faced with death—except in this case, they faced death by thirst. In this text, notice the similar pattern of “grumbling,” the complaint, and the divine provision.

This “water test” follows directly after the other great water test of Israel’s faith, passing through the waters of the Red Sea, or “Sea of Reeds” (Exod. 14:31). At the previous water test, the Israelites saw God’s power over the waters and “believed.” So how will they respond to this test?

Unfortunately, their response is not great. Israel will not trust God to provide water for them. But God once again provides for them.

Additionally, the narrative leads the reader to expect future, similar tests, including the difficult tests to come in chapters 16 and 17. In Exodus 15:26, God gives a “commandment and instruction” for Israel to “do what is right in [God’s] eyes.” This language draws specifically from Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve faced a similar choice—will the humans trust God and live according to his wisdom?

Will Israel trust God, or will they do what is right in their own eyes?

Exodus 16:14

The Manna Test

This testing story builds on the previous two, and here the grumbling leads to a complaint similar to what we hear in Exodus 14:11-12. Once again the Israelites will not trust God to rescue them from death, which, in this case, is death by starvation.



Still, God lovingly provides meat and “bread from heaven” for the people, and he also establishes clear guidelines for gathering it. The people may gather this food for six days each week, but they must refrain from gathering on the seventh day. Similar to the way God rests from work in the Genesis creation narrative, here he invites his people to rest together with him as his partners and to trust him.

How the Israelites respond to God’s instructions will determine whether or not they pass this test of trust. The narrative draws attention to the people’s disobedience against the “commandment and instruction” God gave them, regarding how to collect the manna (Exod. 16:26-30). And sadly, the Israelites do not trust God to provide for them.

Exodus 17:7

Israel Tests God

The Israelites have come to a place called Massah. (This name turns the Hebrew verb “test,” *nasah*, into a noun, *massah*.)

This is the third testing story that links back to Exodus 15:21-27—another water test. Together, these three stories create a triad of testing stories about water (Exod. 15), food (Exod. 16), and water again (Exod. 17). With the first and last story focusing on water, readers are invited to compare and contrast the test in Exodus 15:21-27 with the test in Exodus 17:1.

If we compare the two stories, we can spot a key difference. In the first water story, God is testing Israel. But in the second water story, Israel is testing God. The stories are inverted. This test is about Israel failing by testing God’s patience. But God still provides for them, even though they test him. This is a portrait of divine mercy and generosity.

Exodus 18:19

Jethro’s Advice

In this story, Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, comes to visit the people of Israel after hearing about all that Yahweh had done for them. Jethro notices that Moses is exhausted from hearing and judging the disputes of all the people (and we know from Exodus 15-17 that they love to quarrel with Moses!). So Jethro proposes an alternative. Moses should play the role of a priestly prophet and represent the people’s concerns before Yahweh. He will also bring the words of Yahweh to the people.

Notice the mentions of Yahweh’s “commands and instructions” that appear in the earlier testing stories (i.e. Exod. 15:25, 16:4, 16:28). But also notice that, in this story, it is Moses who faces a choice. Will he lead the people according to his own wisdom? Or will he listen to the instruction of his wise, priestly father-in-law, who in this moment is bringing the word of God to him? Notice that Jethro equates his counsel with God’s command. That’s bold! This story takes up the theme of God testing Israel, and Israel testing God but with a twist.



Will Moses trust in God's wisdom delivered through Jethro and share leadership over the people?

Moses does listen to Jethro's wisdom (Exod. 18:24), but he receives it similar to the way Israel often receives wise instruction—they hear it and seem to agree with it, but it doesn't stick. Just as Israel will grumble and test God again in the future (see Num. 13-14), Moses too will revert back to his old ways and try to lead the people by his own strength. And unfortunately, it will not go well (see Num. 11). Even the great Moses will fail to listen to God's wise commands.

Exodus 19:5

Listen to the Voice of Yahweh

Yahweh brought Israel to the mountain to give them a choice. The people have to decide whether or not they will listen to Yahweh's voice. The phrase "if you will indeed listen to my voice" is a link to Exodus 15:26.

God is inviting Israel to listen to his voice, but the stakes are higher than they were in chapter 15. In that story, their survival was at stake (still pretty intense!). But in chapter 19, Yahweh invests his own name and reputation into his people by calling them to become his priestly representatives among the nations. The decision they must make—their test—is whether or not they will listen to Yahweh's voice and faithfully represent God to the nations.

Exodus 19:11

The Third Day Test

This is Israel's first test on Mount Sinai. Yahweh will descend the mountain, and the people will be able to approach the divine presence and listen to his voice. This connects to the third day test motif found throughout the Torah, where God's chosen one(s) endure a test of their trust in Yahweh's goodness.

Exodus 20:20

The Ultimate Test

This statement sums up the tests of chapters 15-17. In the previous tests, Israel faced death by thirst and starvation. And in the midst of their desperation, God offered the people a choice to trust in his power. Instead, they complained, straining their relationship with Yahweh almost to the breaking point.

In Exodus 20, God gives Israel the ultimate test—an invitation to come directly into the divine presence. Understandably, they're afraid that Yahweh is going to kill them. But it turns out, this choice is their real test. Will the Israelites enter into God's presence despite their fear?



Notice how their fear leads them to keep their distance, sending Moses to hear from God directly (Exod. 20:19). They would rather hear from Yahweh through a human representative than be in his presence. This represents a failure of trust, and, like Adam and Eve in the garden (Gen. 3:8-11), the Israelites try to hide from God when he shows up in a windy, fiery storm.

Exodus 20:23

No Physical Images of Yahweh

Moses becomes the mediator in the Israelites' covenant relationship with Yahweh. And the first command Moses gives is that the people are to never make physical images of Yahweh. This sets up Israel's next test, which (spoiler alert) they fail when they make the golden calf (Exod. 32).

Exodus 21:1

The Law as Israel's Test

After the Israelites receive the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20), we find a collection of 42 additional commandments (Exod. 21-23). Altogether, these chapters make up the first body of covenant laws for Israel.

The initial test (Exod. 15, 19-20) is now filled out with specific applications and ways to live by God's wisdom daily. The laws communicate profound details about Yahweh's nature, portraying him as a wise king and law-giver. When the people follow these laws, they will faithfully represent Yahweh to the nations. When they ignore these laws, they remain publicly connected to Yahweh while misrepresenting him. Mirroring Adam and Eve's test in the garden, the Israelites have a choice to make. Will they choose to define good and bad for themselves, or will they trust Yahweh to show them?

Exodus 23:32

Yahweh Alone

The final command of the covenant laws circles back to the theme of worship and loyalty to Yahweh. Now that Yahweh has made his covenant with the people, they are not to give their allegiance to any other deity.

Exodus 24:7

Israel Chooses to Trust

The peoples' response echoes back to Yahweh's instruction to listen to his voice (Exod. 19:5-6). They are publicly declaring their decision to trust and listen to Yahweh. In this moment, we see the heart of the Israelites' desire—they want to be with their God! But that desire will ebb as the story unfolds (e.g. Exod. 32).



Secondary Pattern

The Law

The Hebrew word “*torah*” can be translated as “instruction” or “law.” When we trace the law pattern, we can see that God’s *torah* is more than rules and regulations—it’s about people being formed into a community driven by real love for God and others.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).

Exodus 19:7

God Invites Israel to Keep His Laws

Here we see God inviting Israel to “keep [his] covenant” (Exod. 19:5). This “covenant” is referring to the body of laws that will be given in the subsequent chapters (Exod. 20-23). These covenant terms are later referred to as, “these **words** which the Lord commanded him” (Exod. 19:7). So the **covenant**, the **words**, and the commands all become synonymous with each other.

This portrayal of these laws alongside the story of Jethro’s wisdom (Exod. 18) gives us a rich picture of one purpose of the Torah. The laws create a vision of justice for Israel (as Jethro understood in Exod. 18) and also a vision of covenant loyalty to Yahweh (as in Exod. 19).

The laws given to Israel are the terms of its covenant, and its role as a priestly witness to the nations (Exod. 19:6) depends on them. The degree to which the Israelites are loyal to the covenant will be expressed by their adherence to the laws.

Exodus 20:1

The Ten Words

Recall that the commands of the covenant were called “these words” in Exodus 19:7. That reference repeats again here in the introduction to the Ten Commandments—the ten “words.” The words of God become synonymous with the commands of God.

This opening statement portrays the Ten Commandments as the introduction to the covenant laws. They summarize what the rest of the commands are all about and become the foundational rules that form the way Israelites relate to God and one another.

Exodus 24:3

The Israelites Offer Their Loyalty to Yahweh

Moses delivers the divine commands (called both “words” and “ordinances”) to the people, and the Israelites immediately offer their allegiance to Yahweh.



Exodus 25:16

God's Words and the Covenant Ceremony

As Moses enacts the covenant ceremony, he once again associates the covenant with the words of God's commands.

Exodus 24:12

A Physical Symbol of the Law

The stone tablets with laws carved into their surface now embody the covenant as a physical symbol of God's law.

Related Resources

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EXODUS SCROLL

Movement 3: The Tabernacle Constructed

As the Exodus Scroll concludes, we find detailed architectural blueprints of a sacred tent called the tabernacle, a micro-Eden where God and Israel can meet together in peace.

Watch

[Exodus 19-40 video](#)

Read

Exodus 25:1-40:38

Primary Pattern

[Temple](#)

Israel's temple is described as the place where God's space and humanity's space are one. In fact, the whole biblical drama can be seen as a story about God's temple. Explore the origins of the temple and see how this pattern develops throughout the whole Bible.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Exodus 25:8

The Tabernacle

At Sinai, God invites the entire nation of Israel into a new Eden opportunity where they will live and work as a kingdom of priests in his presence. He gives them “the pattern,” or instructions, for the tabernacle, a sacred symbolic model of Eden and a place where Heaven and Earth are united as one (see Exod. 24:9-11, 25:9).

The word “tabernacle” (Heb. *mishkan*) is formed from the same Hebrew root as “dwell” (Heb. *shakhan*). The tent is the “dwelling place” of God among his people.

We learn in Genesis 1 and 2 that Heaven and Earth are not meant to be separate realms—they are meant to completely overlap. And the tabernacle served as a sacred place where Heaven and Earth, divine and human, could become one—where God could dwell with his people.

Exodus 25:22

Cherubim Guarding the Holy of Holies

The specific hotspot of God’s presence is in the center-back of the tabernacle, commonly known as the holy of holies. This sacred space is guarded by the angelic cherubim that were intricately designed on the veil/screen separating the holy of holies from the holy place, as well as on the ark itself. This is all Eden imagery! To pass by the cherubim is to pass through the dimension of Eden itself, where God’s presence and power are the most intense.

Exodus 25:30

The Bread of the Presence

The golden table that stands in front of the veil is to have fresh bread on it at all times. This bread is called the bread of the presence. The word “presence” used here is the Hebrew word meaning “face” (*paneh*). This bread is to stand before God’s face, a metaphor for God’s presence on the other side of the screen.

Later in the Torah (Lev. 24:5-9), we learn that the bread was to be laid out in twelve loaves with two symbolic layers. The first layer represents Israel’s offering of food back to God, the one who gave it to them in the first place. And the second layer represents the twelve tribes of Israel, who perpetually sit near the face of God in the tabernacle and temple.

Exodus 25:40

The Pattern

Moses is on top of Mount Sinai, looking into the skies. The biblical authors speak of the skies (i.e. the heavens) as the place of God’s throne high above the cosmos, a place the tabernacle symbolically represents. When we link this back to Eden as the Heaven-on-Earth place, we see that the tabernacle is a symbolic mini-Eden, where Heaven and Earth are once again united.



Exodus 26:30

The Tabernacle Courtyard

The entire tabernacle courtyard is said to be a plan modeled after the reality that Moses saw on top of the mountain. His vision into God's heavenly temple was translated into a building plan for representing Eden on Earth.

Exodus 27:8

Shown on the Mountain

Take note of the repetition of the phrase "shown on the mountain." The repetition creates a heightened focus on the Heaven-on-Earth nature of the tabernacle as a symbolic representation of God's heavenly temple, which God showed Moses on the mountain.

Exodus 27:21

The Tent of Meeting

This is the first time the phrase "tent of meeting" is used to describe the tabernacle. The tabernacle is a place where God and humans can "meet" together. These words will be repeated hundreds of times in the Torah to describe the tabernacle as the location where Heaven and Earth come together so that God and human beings can meet.

Exodus 28:3

A Spirit-Created Eden

In Genesis 1, we read that God creates all things by his Spirit (Gen. 1:2) and animates humans with his breath (Heb. *ruakh*) (Gen. 2:4-9). Humans were then tasked to care for this sacred space. They were to "work and serve" (*'abad* [עבד] and *shamar* [שמר]) by participating with God in the ongoing task of upholding and sustaining the order God had established in the cosmos. And God tasked humans with their own creative power and imagination to spread the order and beauty of the garden-temple into the rest of creation.

In this passage, God's Spirit empowers a group of skilled workers to create the sacred garments for Aaron and his sons to wear as they fulfill their roles as priests. And they will serve as priests in the Heaven-on-Earth place that looks like a symbolic garden. The tabernacle is a Spirit-created Eden!

Exodus 29:45

Shining Priests

God speaks to Moses for 40 days and 40 nights, which we read about through seven distinct sections of this passage, each regarding instructions for the tabernacle. And at the center of these instructions is a long speech detailing priestly clothing (Exod. 28:1-43).



We read that the priests' garments are made of white material accented by gold and gemstones, many of which only appear in the Eden narrative (Gen. 2:12) and in John's description of the new Heaven and Earth in the New Testament scroll of Revelation. Priestly clothing is only to be worn when priests are fulfilling their "Adam and Eve" roles inside the micro-Eden of the tabernacle. The clothes recall the Eden narrative and humanity's ideal role. Priests were to represent the new '*adam* (humanity)—shimmering, royal, priestly humans who enter into the Eden space through prayer and sacrifices.

The phrases "I will dwell among" and "so I may dwell among" conclude the description of Israel's priests (Exod. 28-29) who become a symbolic humanity, re-entering Eden on behalf of God's people. The goal of the priesthood is similar to the purpose of the tabernacle: to unite divine and human space and bring Heaven and Earth together in one space and in one person.

Exodus 30:6

The Altar of Incense

This description of where the altar of incense is supposed to go implies that the ark of the covenant is the central spot for the human and divine to meet. Just as Moses had to pass through the cloud on his way up Sinai to get to heavenly heights, here in the tabernacle, the priest must also pass through clouds—clouds of incense—as he passes into the divine presence behind the veil.

Exodus 31:3

Building Empowered by the Spirit

Bezalel is filled with God's Spirit (*ruakh*) to lead a team of creatives to build the symbolic mini-Eden. This passage connects back to Exodus 28:3, and together they set up an analogy between the creation of Eden by God's Spirit and the creation of the tabernacle by God's Spirit (Gen. 1:2 and 2:7).

Exodus 33:3

The Loss of the Divine Presence

The statement "I will not go up in your midst" reveals the true crisis that Israel faces as a consequence of their failure. The divine presence, which is a major focus of Exodus 25-31, is now being taken away. God's purpose in rescuing Israel out of Egypt was to make them a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:6), and now their distrust in God and love for idols make it impossible for them to be who they are meant to be, a tension the subsequent story draws into sharp focus.



Exodus 33:7

Moses' Tent of Meeting

In this passage, we discover that Moses has his own private “tent of meeting” where he speaks with God face to face. What Israel has forfeited Moses has personal access to. And in the following story, Moses plays the role of high priest on Israel’s behalf, helping people find forgiveness and healing from God while also pleading to God on their behalf.

Exodus 33:15

Moses Refuses to Continue Without God’s Presence

Moses makes it very clear that it is only the presence of God (Heb. *paneḥ*, “face”) that marks Israel as distinct from the other nations. If God will not dwell in the middle of his people, then Moses refuses to take the people any further.

Exodus 34:9

A Needed Intercessor

Moses’ final request is for God to not abandon his people, even though they have and will continue to fail. And God honors this request! However, the overall thrust of this story forces the reader to see that this covenant relationship and God’s presence are not a guarantee. If Israel does not have an intercessor like Moses, it is likely that the entire project will collapse.

Exodus 35:31

Eden on Earth

This chapter starts showing us how the pattern for tabernacle building that Moses received on the mountain (Exod. 25-31) is now being created for real. Exodus 35-40 recounts the amazing and detailed measurements, materials, and procedures necessary for building this tent, and it repeats all the same details from earlier tabernacle descriptions in the scroll. You will find all the same items listed, often in exactly the same words.

While this repetition may strike modern readers as unnecessary, it is a literary strategy used to communicate just how important the tabernacle was to the story and to Israel’s identity. It is also a phonetic/memorization strategy, as these texts were meant to be orally spoken, sung, and memorized. And the repetition greatly helps with that! Allow this repetition function to remind you of how beautiful and sublime the tabernacle must have been, a virtual Eden on Earth!



Exodus 40:34

God's Presence Fills the Tabernacle

This is the culmination of the story so far. The divine presence that filled Eden was revealed on the top of Mount Sinai, where Moses saw the pattern of God's Eden temple that was to be made into the tabernacle. And now God's presence moves from the mountain to the tabernacle. What else could go wrong? Well, notice this small detail. Once the tent is finished and God's presence fills it, nobody can go inside—not even Moses! What is happening here? This crisis takes us forward to the next scroll, Leviticus.

● **Recall Pattern**

● [The Law](#)

● The Hebrew word “*torah*” can be translated as “instruction” or “law.” When we trace the law pattern, we can see that God's torah is more than rules and regulations—it's about people being formed into a community driven by real love for God and others.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).

Exodus 25:16

The Ark of the Testimony

This passage describes God's instructions for Moses to put the tablets of the “testimony” into the ark of the covenant (also referred to as the ark of the testimony). The “testimony” is referring to the covenant commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Placing the tablets in the ark is a symbolic way of showing how the laws of the covenant are expressions of something close to God's heart. And the physical icon of the covenant (the tablets) sits before God at all times. As such, the tablets “testify” on God's behalf, constantly reminding Israel that they agreed at Sinai to follow the terms of the covenant.

Exodus 31:18

God's Presence Linked to Covenant Loyalty

As the physical embodiment of God's Eden-presence on Earth, the tabernacle exists among the people God called into his covenant with clear terms (see Exod. 20-23). This is key. We see that God's presence among his people is closely linked to their loyalty to the terms of the covenant. To violate the covenant is to jeopardize their access to Eden. And this, it turns out, is what the following narrative is all about.



Exodus 32:8

The Golden Calf

This passage is Israel's foundational failure narrative (e.g. Gen. 3). Similar to how Adam and Eve ignored God's command in the garden, Israel ignores God's commands by making a golden calf to worship as a god. The making of the golden calf specifically violates the first two commands about honoring other gods and making images of them (Exod. 20).

Exodus 32:19

A Shattered Covenant

This powerful narrative image assumes the association of the laws of the covenant with the physical tablets. The shattered tablets become an image of the shattered covenant—a breaking of the commands written upon them. Israel broke the covenant, so Moses breaks the covenant tablets.

Exodus 34:1

A Needed Mediator

Because of Moses' intercession, God relents and decides to remain with the people despite their inability to trust him and stay true to their agreement with him. Moses now has new tablets with new commands, an image portraying the renewal of the covenant. Here, a unique difference from the first covenant emerges. In Exodus 19-20, God appeared to all the people, but now he appears only to Moses. Moses alone hears the words of God about the new covenant. In other words, the new covenant depends on the intercessory work of a mediator for Israel, a mediator who will go up in the skies (on the mountain) to intercede for the people.

Exodus 34:27

These Words

The phrase "these words" is once again associated with the laws of the covenant.

Exodus 40:20

The Tablets Bear Witness

Moses places the tablets of the covenant commands into the ark where they function as a "testimony" to Israel's agreement to hear and obey God. They sit perpetually in God's presence, bearing witness to both God's will for their lives and Israel's success or failure.



Related Resources

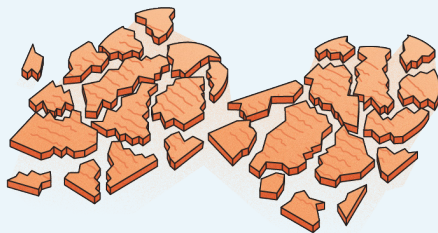
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[What Made the Tribe of Levi Special?](#)

[What's a Nazarite Vow?](#)

[There Isn't a Law For That](#)

[The Law ... Again](#)

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Leviticus Scroll



LEVITICUS SCROLL

Movement 1: Repairing the Relationship

With the law, Yahweh gives people instructions to bless and protect them and also repair their relationship with him.

Watch

[Leviticus video](#)

Read

Leviticus 1:1-7:38

Primary Pattern

[Sacrifice and Atonement](#)

The tragic split between Yahweh and humans looks irreparable, but by showing the people a way to sacrifice and atone for their sins, Yahweh offers forgiveness and a path to restoration.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Leviticus 1:3

Sacrificial Rituals Begin

When we burn something to ash, where does it go? *Up* in smoke!

The Hebrew word “*olah*” is translated “burnt offering” here because *olah* refers to things that rise up or go up. Of all the offerings, this one goes up in smoke, all the way up to God (metaphorically speaking). For this reason, it is also called an ascension offering. Unlike other sacrifices, where big portions get eaten by the worshipers and priests, this offering burns to ash. It is the most costly.

This text requires a burnt offering before the priest. But why require a costly sacrifice before allowing a priest to be in God’s presence?

Recall the garden of Eden, a uniquely uncommon space filled with life and pure good, or *tov* in Hebrew (Gen. 1:31). Eden was a no-evil, no-death zone. The human attempt to embrace evil inside God’s space ends with Adam and Eve being exiled from the garden and blocked from entering.

Through the tabernacle, Yahweh intends to create a miniature Eden space, so the same law applies: no death allowed, no corruption allowed, and no evil of any kind allowed. All *tov*, no *ra*! But people have become enmeshed with death. Is God saying their relationship is permanently severed? Not at all, but humans are going to have to start learning to listen more closely.

God will allow the whole life of an animal to be given through the burnt or ascension offering. God’s gift of this law, reciprocated by the people’s gift of the burnt offering, creates a social bond that works toward repairing the relationship. This burnt offering is the first of the five main sacrifices we will trace in this pattern.

Notice in Leviticus 1:3-5 how God wants the animal to be killed right at the doorway. Why the doorway? We’ll look at that question in our first pattern link, focusing on the “make atonement” language.

Let’s trace this pattern!

Leviticus 1:4

Atonement

This first mention of atonement in Leviticus comes from the Hebrew word “*kipper*.” *Kipper* has a few layers and can refer to the act of covering someone’s moral failure (think “compensating for,” not “hiding”) or to paying a debt owed.

Kipper can also mean “to purge” or “to wipe away consequences” that come from bad decision making. So when someone is making atonement in the Hebrew Bible, the action both covers over human failure *and* cleanses the person from related consequences, whether the wrongdoing was intended or accidental.



As the Israelites offer up the blood of an animal, they are owning the fact that their bad decisions brought corruption and death into God's good world.

When God drives Adam and Eve out of Eden, it is not meant as a temporary time-out. He sends them out for good, and he enforces their expulsion by placing a cherubim and flaming sword to guard the entrance (Gen. 3:24). The doorway back into God's space then seems permanently blocked for Adam and Eve.

Similarly, at the end of Moses' story in Exodus, he is blocked from entering the tent of meeting (Exod. 40:35), which is supposed to be God's space modeled after Eden. Like the garden, this is a no-death, no-evil zone. (The larger story about why Moses cannot enter requires more discussion about the Exodus scroll's structure. If interested, check out the Exodus scroll's movements in the Reading Journey.)

By teaching the people how to make atonement, God creates a way to re-enter through an otherwise blocked doorway. The atoning sacrifice, according to God, will cover over and cleanse the person from the corrupting effects of sin, and all of this makes re-entering God's Eden-like tabernacle space possible.

Leviticus 1:9

A Soothing Aroma

Here, the Hebrew phrase *reyakh nikhoakh* can be translated as "soothing aroma," which metaphorically imagines God in the skies, smelling something wonderful. It's a phrase that expresses God's delight in knowing his beloved human beings are experiencing the blessing of life by listening to and trusting him enough to follow his way.

The biblical author wants readers to recall the Genesis flood story, the scene where the waters recede and Noah builds an altar to give thanks. He offers burnt offerings, or ascension sacrifices, that "go up" to God in the smoke, and God says they present a "soothing aroma" to him (see Gen. 8:20-22). By repeating the precise term and idea, the author is telling us that this moment is a lot like that moment, and we're invited to meditate on the similarity and difference.

In Hebrew, *reyakh nikhoakh*, the phrase that we translate as "soothing aroma," rhymes with Noah's name (*Noakh*), which means "rest." Noah's sacrifice was not only soothing to God but also rest-inducing. The original pattern is activated. True rest and real peace begin with trusting and following the ways of God. That's what Noah is up to, and that's why God calls his sacrificial offerings soothing, or rest-inducing.

The phrase "an offering by fire as a soothing aroma to the LORD" appears seven times here in Leviticus 1-3, and then it keeps showing up after that. Try to find them all!



Leviticus 2:1

The Grain Offering

The Hebrew word “*minkhah*” can be translated as “grain offering,” and here the word is “*qorbban minkhah*,” which essentially doubles the offering idea: “a gift of a grain offering.” As such, it can also be called the gift offering.

Notice what’s happening as the pattern begins to unfold. First, we had the ascension offering, or burnt offering of some kind of meat, now the bread or wheat gift offering, and then will come the drink offering (Num. 15:1-5). Are we putting a whole meal together? It sure looks that way.

We can continue thinking about this as we go, remembering that all of the sacrifices fit within the larger idea of **atonement**. We noted at the beginning that we would trace five main sacrifices. So far, we’ve seen the burnt/ascension offering and now the grain/gift offering.

The Hebrew word “*selet*,” which is often translated as “fine flour,” specifically refers to the difference between barley and flour. Perhaps more than emphasizing the fineness of flour particles, the idea here is about excellent wheat products. The *minkhah* involved sacrificing either raw flour (imagine a pile of flour with a drizzle of olive oil and incense sprinkled on top) or fried, pan-cooked, and baked goods.

Leviticus 1:9

A Soothing Aroma (Again)

The pattern unfolds! This is the fourth mention of “soothing aroma,” and it will keep showing up to echo what came before and add new meaning. Remember how the burnt offering of a full animal also gave a soothing aroma to God? Here, the grain offering signals the same willful participation—people are listening and obeying because they *want* to—making it produce for God a “smell that restores rest,” which is another way to say soothing aroma.

What are we learning about God’s intent behind these regulations? What’s his goal?

Some in authority may give rules in order to dominate and control, often in an effort to gain or secure something. Others give rules to provide guidance, well-being, and benevolent, good life for others. Yahweh’s laws are all about the latter.

We’re seeing God work closely with human beings toward healing and restoring his world. By teaching them how to make atonement, he is helping to carve out a place of peace and blessing, filled with life that makes more life.

That kind of world is, as God says in Genesis 1:31, *tov me’od*—very good!



Leviticus 3:1

The Peace Offering

The Hebrew word “*shalem*” can be translated “peace offering,” and here it marks the third of five sacrifices we’re tracing in this pattern (the first two being burnt/ascension offering and grain/gift offering).

Shalem sounds a lot like *shalom*, and also like *shalam*, because the three ideas are tightly related. *Shalom* describes wholeness, peacefulness, and well-being. *Shalam*, a verb, means “to be at peace with.” We have said that the whole first movement of Leviticus (chapters 1-7) is about God teaching human beings how to repair their relationship with him, and each of the sacrifices and laws aim in that direction. But this *shalem*, or peace offering, happens specifically when a relationship has been harmed. We can also call this the fellowship offering, as its intent is to restore *shalom*-style fellowship.

Unlike the burnt/ascension offering, where fire reduces the whole animal to smoke and ash, the peace/fellowship offering only burns part of the animal. Think of it more like a special kind of butchering. The worshiper takes the animal to the priests. They slaughter it and use some of the blood for splashing or sprinkling (Lev. 3:2), plus the fat surrounding the entrails, the kidneys, and the liver (Lev. 3:3-5). Only those things get burned to ash. The rest gets cooked and eaten, partly by the priests and their families (this was one way God compensated priests) and partly by the family offering the sacrifice.

Once the peace/fellowship offering has been given, people celebrate the event with a big meal together. People join together in the presence of God, sharing the fellowship of life with God, and all of this is happening in order to restore relationships and strengthen peaceful togetherness—*shalom*.

As you proceed, *shalom* to you!

Leviticus 4:3

The Sin Purification Offering

The Hebrew word “*khata’at*” can be translated as “sin offering” or “purification offering.” It comes from the root word “*khata’*,” which is one of the Hebrew words for sin. *Khata’* means “to fail” or “to miss the goal.” So the sin offering must be related to some kind of specific failure, but *khata’at* speaks more specifically about an offering that purifies or cleanses the consequences of failure or sin. In this sense, calling it the purification offering may be more accurate.

Like the peace offering, only part of the animal is burned all the way, while the tastier parts are roasted and eaten in a celebration feast with others, all in God’s presence. So, like the peace offering, this works toward strengthening relationships, even as it also cleanses sin and its consequences.



Notice in the previous verse, Leviticus 4:2, the instruction specifically relates to “straying unintentionally” or “sins of straying.” This is about priests violating God’s commands unintentionally, and the rest of Leviticus 4, plus Leviticus 5:1-6, describes the unintentional sins of straying this purification offering attends to.

Leviticus 4:20

Atonement and Forgiveness

We first heard the word “atonement” in Leviticus 1:4. When one is making atonement, the attentive and willing adherence to God’s instruction ritually cleanses both the person and the space (in this case the tabernacle), while also removing the consequences of evil and death.

Here, tracing the **sacrifice and atonement** pattern and also seeing another sin offering or purification offering, we can see the author reminding us about what has come before while adding new meaning—forgiveness as a result of atonement.

The priest makes atonement for all the people so “they will be forgiven,” and he takes the bull outside the camp and burns it all the way to ash, sending the whole gift to God in holy smoke, which leads to real forgiveness.

Notice the next three mentions of “make atonement” in Leviticus 4:26, 4:31, and 4:35. What similarities and differences do you see? Notice especially the two main ways that atonement refers to both the covering of moral failure (think “covering a debt,” not “hiding”) and the removal of consequences caused by an individual’s or community’s mistakes.

Leviticus 5:6

The Guilt Offering

The fifth main category of sacrifice—the guilt or restitution offering—is given as a penalty for offenses or transgressions against Yahweh and others. This is once again about unintentional sin, which we first saw in this movement in Leviticus 4:2.

Leviticus 5:1-13 will detail sins that have not been previously mentioned, and, interestingly, it develops custom requirements for the poor—anyone lacking access to goat herds or blemish-free bulls. Verses 7-13 especially show this tender attunement from God, caring for each person without partiality related to social or economic status.

In the section between Leviticus 5:7 and 7:7, see how the authors continue activating the **sacrifice and atonement** pattern. The words “make atonement” show up three times in chapter 5 and three more times in chapters 6 and 7.

We can trace 13 total examples of “make atonement” in the first Leviticus movement (chapters 1-7), and then a focus shift happens during the second movement, where the aim switches to ritual cleanliness more than moral, sin-related forgiveness. Let’s wrap up the **sacrifice and atonement** pattern with a few more examples.



Leviticus 7:7

Atonement (Again)

This is the thirteenth mention of making atonement in the first Leviticus movement, and we can remember the doorway to the tabernacle where this all began. God is making a clean, Eden-like space free from evil and death because he wants to bless, heal, and continue giving life to human beings. These instructions he's giving point to that kind of attitude and character.

This means he needs to be with us, even as we have invited death and evil into our own lives. As dying, corrupted human beings, we are prohibited entry from death- and evil-free spaces like the space where God dwells. We can't see much hope. The prohibition seems permanent. But the story shows God creating a path by establishing a way to make atonement.

He gives good laws to beloved people, teaching them that hope is anything but lost.

Hope is bound to faith and to love, and his instructions are teaching the people to practice all three. As they make **sacrifices and atonement**, the priests and people acknowledge the death—its violence and bloodshed in God's otherwise good world—and trust God for new life.

So far, we have already seen that these laws are about God blessing people and repairing the relationship he has with them. This is very good, or in Hebrew, *tov me'od*!

Leviticus 7:30

The Wave Offering

The wave offering fits in the peace offering category (see verse 29), and it works like it sounds. The priest waves raw meat in the air. Why? By taking a portion of that animal and waving it, or lifting it up in the air, the priest and the worshipers are symbolically presenting the gift to God.

This starts to make more sense as we see it in the movement and pattern. We can see the words "peace offering" in verse 29 and recall that this is not the same as the burnt offering (where the whole animal is burned up). Peace offering sacrifices only burn up part of the animal, and in this case, certain parts receive the special waving treatment. It sounds weirder to us than it would have to them.

After the portion is waved before Yahweh, they distribute what's left among themselves for eating. Notice again how attuned God is to the needs of people. These laws do bring order to chaos and do give a system for society to function within, as laws ought to, but they do not oppress people. That teaches us something significant that is worth meditating on.



We see God giving these laws as a gift that provides human beings a way to be with him and to be cleansed from the effects of sin, even forgiven from the sins themselves. And with all that going on, he's also taking care of dinner for the priests and the whole community.

These laws can teach us so much if we pay attention to their literary structure and patterned layers of meaning. You've traced a few of the key places where this pattern shows up. Good work! Continue on your own, and you'll see many stories and scenes where the author repeats the pattern.

Remember, we only focused on this sacrifice and atonement pattern for chapters 1-7 as a way to practice, but it extends well beyond these chapters. You will keep seeing the same key words and phrases emerge as you read, including into the New Testament. As the next movement begins in chapter 8, notice the ordination offering which, like the wave offering, is a variation on the peace offering. And there's more!

Keep reading. Continue thinking and recognizing these movements and patterns of Scripture, and we will keep on learning together.

Related Resources

Video

[Sacrifice and Atonement](#)

Article

[Animal Sacrifice? Really?](#)

Podcast

[How God Reveals Himself in Leviticus](#)

[What is Atonement?](#)

[What Did the Burnt Offerings Really Mean?](#)





LEVITICUS SCROLL

Movement 2: Restoring the Holy Space

For God to meet with corrupted and dying human beings in an Eden-like space—the tabernacle—he restores the holy space by removing all corruption and death and by teaching Israel to do the same.

Watch

[Leviticus video](#)

Read

Leviticus 8:1-16:34

Primary Pattern

[Holiness](#)

With Israel's priests, Yahweh is showing people a fundamental difference between choosing what is clean or unclean, pure or impure—the fundamental, life-and-death difference between holy and common.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Leviticus 8:10

Making It Holy

Moses has heard from God, assembled all the people, and gathered all the supplies. Now he is symbolically transforming everything and everyone into a state of holiness—to consecrate something is to make it holy.

Yahweh is the source of all holiness and life, everything that is good and true and alive in the world, so this space he's helping the people create is going to be dedicated to him alone. It needs to be consecrated to *his* way of love and only *his* definition of good and bad, not to the ways of any other people or gods. This is *God's* space.

We'll keep seeing these consecrations in Leviticus and beyond, but this is the first story about the inauguration of Israel's priests and tabernacle. Notice how the entire space, all of the objects within it, and all of the human beings who enter into it need to be consecrated in order to restore this holy space whenever it becomes unclean.

Leviticus 9:23

A Glorious Appearing

Now that the tabernacle and priests have been consecrated in order to live and work alongside Yahweh in his space, the area is now fit for a king—for *the* king.

Now, at last, the people are faithfully preparing themselves and the space. When they hear God's instructions, rather than ignoring him or trying to rewrite the script, they follow him in trust. They're embracing what it means to be a living human being. The space is being restored to holiness, and it's time to bring the glory!

This word "glory," in the ancient world, describes the physical manifestation of a person's importance. Showing up for public honor, a king came with glory on display (usually material wealth and military power). Here, Yahweh's glory arrives when his priests express deep humility, after blessing everyone in the community. That says something. Unlike other gods or kings, Yahweh's glory becomes visible when people are loving him by caring for and loving one another.

Once they have listened and obeyed, consecrating things as he's asked, then the glory of the Lord shows up. Here, in verse 23, you see the beginning of a consistent pattern. After the space is consecrated, the people are blessed ("bless" is one of those words that recalls the Eden ideal). Over and over this will happen.

A piece of Eden has been restored! The blessing has returned, at least for now.



Leviticus 10:3

Living Holiness

God has been straightforward about how he wants the tabernacle to function, but these young priests, Nadab and Abihu, want to do things differently. They ignore God's instruction and burn incense their own way, on their terms. This is reminiscent of Adam and Eve, who chose to define good and bad on their own, apart from God.

As a result, their sacrifice does not present a soothing aroma to God but, instead, a "strange fire." Leviticus 10:1 tells us that Nadab and Abihu do what God "had not commanded them" to do. Then they drop dead!

Everyone witnessing this gasps, wide-eyed and shocked. What just happened?

Nadab and Abihu treat God as common, rather than holy, and doing so costs their lives. Remember, this is about priests in the tabernacle; normal life experience makes it obvious that people do not always immediately die when they ignore God.

This appears to happen because of the uniqueness of tabernacle space—God dedicates a small space (a moveable tent) and only a few out of hundreds of thousands of people to re-create a miniature Eden. Here, he is helping Israel, and then the whole world, learn about the nature of true life. In a deep way, being alive means also being attentive to what God says.

So these two priests lose life precisely when they ignore God, and the people observing this learn something huge. As the pattern unfolds, keep noticing the connection between holiness and choices that lead to life or death.

Leviticus 10:10

Clean And Unclean

We are seeing holiness pattern words like holy and profane, clean and unclean, show up in similar ways, but this addition in verses 10-11 engages all four words at one time and offers distinction.

Distinguishing between holy and common is about discerning whether or not a person or object has met the holiness requirements for entering the divine meeting space, the tabernacle (or temple). To defile that person or object, moving either from holy to common status, is to profane him, her, or it.

The concepts of clean and unclean or pure and impure are about a person or object's condition, whether or not he, she, or it has been profaned. A person in the holy state can be profaned by, for example, touching shellfish or pork, which are perpetually unclean according to these laws. Notice that the human person can be made clean or unclean based on whether they ignore or attend to God's instructions.



While reading further and watching the pattern unfold, pay close attention to the objects, fluids, and other things that get categorized as clean or unclean. The categories may feel weird or complex, but the more we meditate upon this kind of law, which is a form of prose discourse, the more we start to see.

Remember, God's space (Eden, tabernacle, temple, etc.) is where he dwells with people and where they experience his true life blessing. When God makes things conducive for life, he pushes out all the darkness and chaos, bringing light and goodness.

This unclean state of ritual impurity is about whether or not you can enter into the sacred God space of the tabernacle, here in Leviticus, and later the temple. To make it a death- and corruption-free space, symbolically speaking, God tells the people to pay close attention to physical contact with things that represent death. Almost every time we see this "clean and unclean," "holy and profane" language show up, the authors are adding to the holiness pattern in order to help us get it.

Sidenote: If holiness simply means "perfection," then God's later instruction to "be holy because I am holy" becomes unintelligible—too much Scripture speaks to the common imperfections of all people. It would be similar to hearing God say, "Be invisible because I am invisible." Unfortunately, by missing the patterned way the Scriptures explain holiness, we sometimes turn it into an impossible standard. But by tracing the pattern, we see something else that shows us holiness is neither impossible nor burdensome.

God is giving the people a liveable, reasonable, blessing-filled way to be consecrated and made holy.

Leviticus 11:44

Changing Into Participants

The Hebrew verb "*kadash*" can be translated as "to sanctify" or "to dedicate or consecrate"—more key words for tracing the holiness pattern. Consecrate or dedicate are repeated over and over, tightly tied to the holiness idea, specifically emphasizing the verbal idea of making something holy, or transforming something from common to holy. In that sense, consecrating is the exact opposite of profaning.

We've seen other consecrations where sprinkling blood or oil on objects or spaces would cleanse them, making them holy. Here, the focus shifts to living, breathing people: consecrate *yourselves*.

Chapter 11, overall, describes multiple ways a person could become unclean, zeroing in on animals. We get little to no explanation about why certain animals, like large lizards or mice or animals that "do not chew the cud" get tagged as unclean. But hear a prohibition against anything that "crawls on its belly" (Lev. 11:42) and wow! Remember the snake in the first garden, back in Genesis, the one that tried to bring deception and



corruption into God's space? "On your belly you will crawl!" God says (Gen. 3:14), before exiling the snake. Our author here is advancing that early pattern: no belly crawlers! We know what happened the last time one of those things got into the holy space.

Notice that God created the snakes and lizards, shrimp and pigs, along with all the other animals in creation. These are not evil creatures, somehow. These laws are part of God's multigenerational storytelling, filled with symbolic meaning, and they help us develop wisdom. They remind people about God's original Eden space, where created beings follow and trust the Creator's terms for living. And God's space, however we're going to continue defining that, will always exclude evil and corruption. And it always has.

As this **holiness pattern** keeps surfacing with the language of holy or profane, clean or unclean, notice how all of it orbits around one central theme—life.

God is making a way to rejoin him in pure, good, and true life.

Leviticus 12:2

Temporarily Unclean

If God has directly told human beings to make more babies—to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28)—why would he now tell new mothers to wait a week before touching anyone? Then wait a month or more before returning to the holy sanctuary (tabernacle)? And then we read that the reason is because childbirth makes her unclean. What is going on here? This feels borderline abusive and certainly alarming. Are we now punishing women for being fruitful and multiplying?

Most simply stated: *no*. Not at all. This is about the priests teaching Israel the most fundamental categories of life and death, holiness and commonness, etc. The exclusion is to teach, not to punish, and it comes with a powerful gift that shows God's tender strength. When she is following God's instruction, the new mom is also receiving a restful, quiet week to heal after her excruciating experience.

Seeing this within the larger pattern helps it make more sense. Notice the saturation of **holiness** language here, such as blood purity, purification, clean, unclean, etc. The pattern screams, "This is about holiness!" And we have already learned that this means life or death.

Yes, the good life of a newborn has begun—a miracle! But in our current common state (think holy versus common status), childbirth means blood, and blood can be associated with life or death. Many women died during childbirth. The whole experience may be the most visceral picture of our human situation—receiving real life from God, even as we are surely dying. This mystery is worth meditating upon.

Being in this common state isn't sinful. The woman is *not* being punished. And washing requirements are not aimed at females only, men have many ritual purity codes to follow as well. And they need to be purified after normal, even good parts of life, like burying



the dead, preparing food, or having sex. God is saying these are common, not inherently evil, but because of their closeness to death, something needs to be transformed before the human being can enter truly into God's meeting space.

The common, or impure, way may be necessary right now, but God is saying that it remains less than ideal. The bloodshed and pain of childbirth says humanity is surviving in an extremely vulnerable and tragic state right now. Commonness is neither sinful nor is it exclusively pure or holy. Humans are designed to be holy, like the one who created them is and will be.

Leviticus 13:45

Ancient Social Distancing

Chapter 13 starts off pretty gross. Swelling, oozing lumps? Scabs and discharges? Bright spots? Bright spots might be favorable in general, but in the skin disease context, bright spots can't be good. Then, as though that's not bad enough, once the problem is detected, God says the priest needs to pronounce you as unclean (Lev. 13:3).

Once the priestly pronouncement is given, you have to practice an early version of social distancing, yelling, "Unclean! Unclean!" to everyone in public so they could avoid touching you. (If they touched you, whether they contracted the disease or not, they would be defiled or profaned, made ritually unclean.)

Seeing the frequent repetition of words like clean and unclean activates the holiness pattern, so we allow what we've already learned to inform what's happening here. God is **restoring the holy space** by teaching people to keep corruption- and death-related symbols and people and things out.

Here, the Hebrew word "sar'at," which in English is translated as "skin disease" or "fungal infestation," is referring to the whole category, not a specific disease. In Leviticus 14:40, the same word describes moldy foundation stones. The point was that infestations like mold and skin problems presented a visible sign of mortality, as if death were accelerating the corruption process. To be infected, or to touch one who is infected, is to be in a state of impurity.

However, once the death and corruption of the disease passed, the person could be made clean, re-inspected, and pronounced clean or pure by the priests.

The New Testament Gospel accounts tell stories about Jesus healing skin diseases. When he does, he will tell them to "go to the priests" to present themselves for inspection (see Matt. 8:4; Mark 1:44; Luke 5:14, 17:14). He's following Torah. After cleaning, or cleansing the disease, they go to be pronounced clean.

We talk often about the Hebrew Bible telling a unified story that leads to Jesus. And this moment offers an especially clear example.



Leviticus 14:7

Removing Contamination

Get two birds and a clay pot filled with water. Kill one over the water, draining its blood into the water, and then dip stuff in the bloody water. And then there's something about cedar planks and red yarn? What is going on in these opening verses to Leviticus 14?

Also unique, this sacrifice appears to be about pronouncing something, not atoning or forgiving as we might expect at this point. This person is already cleansed and healed from the skin disease, and this is supposed to happen on the day of his or her purification (Lev. 14:2).

Once the person's skin disease has healed, the priest goes outside the camp to where the person is for an inspection. If the skin is healed and clear, then the priest follows the procedure described in Leviticus 14:4-7 (with the water, blood, yarn, cedar, etc.), and all of this to pronounce him clean.

But wait. Wasn't touching blood something that rendered a person unclean? Now we're intentionally sprinkling blood on the person in order to cleanse him or her?

That basic observation reminds us that this isn't about magic or some inherent power in the blood—this is figurative, symbolic, and representative. Blood can symbolize life when in its proper place, either inside the body and providing life or used as God instructs. But blood in the wrong place, either spilled outside of the body or used in ways that oppose God, becomes a symbol of death. Here, because the priests use the blood as God has directed, they are symbolizing the healing, truth-telling effects of God's life given to humans who are suffering from corruption.

Notice here that it's not only blood being sprinkled, but blood that has been mixed with water. The priest sprinkles it seven times, a biblical number pointing to the concept of completion. The period of cleansing has been completed, and the priest now publicizes that reality. His job is not only to see and confirm the person's clean status, but also to pronounce him or her as such so others will know.

This purification aspect of our holiness pattern continues through Leviticus 14. In verse 14, notice how the purifying blood from a guilt offering is applied to the person's ear lobe, the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot. Symbolically speaking, this signals a whole-body purification, all the way out to the extremities.

All of the blood smears, sprinklings, and sacrifices in verses 15-20 become part of making atonement, or cleansing the person from sin and the consequences of sin, so that he or she may re-enter God's space in the tabernacle.



Leviticus 14:40

Unclean Building Stones

Clean and unclean, pure and impure—these words talk about a person's ritual status and **holy** condition (or lack thereof), but it also expands beyond human beings to God's sacred space. Here, we're talking about moldy or fungus-infested building materials that have become unclean because they contain "infection," that same Hebrew word (*sara'at*) used for skin disease infecting people (see Lev. 13:45).

Just like humans, the stones used to build houses can also become infected. When the Israelites enter the land of Canaan to live there, if they move into already-built homes, they have to inspect them for infections. When discovered, just as if an infection had been discovered on the skin, the person needs to tell the priest right away.

Then the priest inspects the stones for *sara'at* on the basis of two criteria. First, does the infection go into the walls beneath the surface? Second, does it consist of yellowish green or reddish eruptions? (Lev. 14:37) Conceptually speaking, these infestations are symbolic evidence of unhealth and corruption—the opposite of good life.

Understanding the exact point(s) God is teaching through these laws may require more meditation and reading within the broader context of Scripture. Whatever we make of this, we can already see God saying that his divine space is meant to overlap with human living spaces, and these will once again be spaces free from *sara'at*, or any kind of corrupting power. God-and-human space is clean, and it supports life by removing all contamination and death, exiling it to the "unclean place outside the city."

Leviticus 15:13

Unusual Discharges

The holiness pattern activates once again through the instructions for men with "flowing discharges." If you were a male, and if you had any fluids oozing from your body, those fluids were unclean. They made you unclean. They made anyone who touched you unclean. And if you slept in a bed or sat on a chair or on a donkey, that object became unclean too! If you touch a clay pot, smash it. If you touch kitchen utensils, wash them with water. On it goes.

As we have seen already, a time of purification is required for this person. Once it ends, the man needs to count off seven days "for his cleansing," so that he can be declared **holy** or purified once more. Then, similar to the ritual at the end of skin disease purification, a series of sacrifices (the sin purification offering and burnt ascension offering) take place so that the priest can make atonement. All of this is happening to restore the **holiness** to the space and people who enter it.

Notice again how the period for completing this purification is seven days, the number of completion. Afterward, on the eighth day, an entire sacrificial ritual takes place at the doorway to the tabernacle, and the resulting atonement declares that this person is now cleansed and able to return to full, unrestricted fellowship with the people and God.



We watch a similar pattern emerge in Leviticus 15:19, which addresses women, menstrual flowing discharges, and so forth. As you read 15:19-27, compare and contrast your findings to verses 1-15. Notice how God requires the same seven-day completion time, and notice the same kind of purification ceremony we saw with the men, including two turtle doves, a sin purification offering, and a burnt ascension offering, all of which make atonement for her.

Notice the special, loving attention that God gives—male and female, walking through normal life, each with different instructions related to their specific bodies and how to enter God's space.

Leviticus 15:18

Sex

If men and women engaging in sexual intercourse renders them unclean, how can they follow God's instructions to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 9:7)? Doesn't saying "you are unclean" after sex imply that the action, itself, is somehow outside of God's will or design?

Remember, these holiness laws are not all addressing moral right and wrong. Consider the good action of helping to bandage a person's wounds. Such work does not become immoral because of blood exposure. And elsewhere, Scripture teaches that God is well-pleased to see human beings love and care for the wounded or sick. So perhaps the point is that exposed blood is still not where it's supposed to be—inside the body—so when it is spilled and exposed, it is also "dying." Maybe this same kind of logic is at work in regard to reproductive fluids? Or maybe fluids and activities so intimately associated with either death or life were important enough to symbolically render a person unclean, similar to women and childbearing?

Better clarity about this rule requires further meditation, but we can at least see that God says these and many other flowing fluids render a person unclean, including anyone or anything who touches that person during the appointed time of uncleanness. It's almost like God is saying, "Keep paying attention to me. You'll start to see how deep, pure, infinite, and good real human life is. Trust me."

Notice that the person is unclean until evening, which in the Hebrew world meant "for the rest of the day," because sunset (not midnight) marked the end of their day. At most, if the couple adhered to this law, they were in an unclean state for less than a day.

Leviticus 15:31

Life and Death Decisions

Major impurities, like those described throughout Leviticus 12-15 (skin problems, flowing discharges, etc.), defiled the tabernacle, an Eden-like space where God and humans could be together. As we have read, these defilements were regarded as unintentional and could be atoned for. God was not making skin rashes punishable by death.



But you could die if you went into the tabernacle with a skin rash. That was the only way people could “die in their uncleanness” in terms of transgressing God’s law. So this is a kind reminder, along the same lines as, “Don’t put your face in the fire.” or “Avoid jumping off tall cliffs.” Here, the warning is, “Don’t come into the tabernacle with ritual impurities.” Doing so may cost your life.

Recall the young priests Nadab and Abihu from earlier in this movement (see the link for Leviticus 10:3). That story does not imply they were wild or particularly rebellious. They hadn’t committed any heinous murders or terrible crimes. But they did misuse the ceremonial incense inside the tabernacle’s holy place, and that mistake cost their lives. We were told then that the mishap resulted from treating God as if he were not holy—treating him and his space as common.

Tracing the **holiness** pattern, here we see once more that only a blameless priest who truly honors the holiness of Yahweh’s presence will be able to enter the tabernacle.

Leviticus 15:31

Behind the Veil

We’re back at the scene just after the young priests Nadab and Abihu tried to customize the tabernacle worship plans for themselves, treating God as common (see the link above for Lev. 10:3). Acting this way, as though God is common and *not* holy, defiles the sanctuary, and they immediately die—yikes!

Here, at the beginning of chapter 16, God is reminding Aaron and company that they too will die like Nadab and Abihu if they follow the “treating God as common” example. However, here we see the veil more clearly than in chapter 10.

Notice how God sets off the inner holy place (referred to as the “holy of holies”) as forbidden. Nobody should enter inside the veil ever, for any reason, except for the high priest on Yom Kippur (Lev. 16:30). But pay special attention to Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospel accounts. At a certain point in his story, this veil gets destroyed, and the holy space it covers gets opened up in a new way.

Something about this holiness pattern (certainly in Leviticus, but also patterned throughout Scripture) has much to do with Jesus, including the sacrifice he makes to atone for all human beings. Keep meditating on these Scriptures and watching for the holiness pattern.

Leviticus 16:30

Yom Kippur

As the second movement of Leviticus closes, God makes a law about celebrating Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. He says that this sacrificial celebration properly observed will restore everyone from their sin, and the “cleanse” and “clean” wording activates the holiness pattern again. God says this day is supposed to be a restful Sabbath for



everyone in the land, including non-Israelites, whether they are native to the land or the “alien who sojourns amongst you” (Lev. 16:29).

The blessing echoes! When God first said he would bless Abram, it was so that all the families of the earth would also be blessed (cf. Gen. 12:1-3). This law shows the same heart by blessing everyone, including the non-Israelites among them, and the law moves both Israel and all the families of the earth toward freedom.

Often, mainstream thinking interprets biblical law as something that inherently restricts or restrains freedom. From that angle, God’s law looks oppressive. And yet, by examining details and symbols woven throughout biblical law, we see people being cared for. We see harmful human tendencies like greed and malice held back, but exploitation and oppression from God does not occur. Instead, the law is moving people toward wisdom and freedom.

This closing Day of Atonement passage, read within the larger **holiness pattern**, seems to introduce two specific characteristics of God’s law.

First, God says that by following this law, “you will be clean from all your sins before the Lord.” What does this say about God’s desire for people? Does God want to judge and destroy people? Or is he eager to forgive and restore people? Making a law that, in the end, pronounces forgiveness for all of Israel’s sins, both intended and accidental—that says something we want to pay close attention to. Yes, God wants sin and anything death-related outside of his space, but these laws all suggest that he wants to make a way for people to be back inside of it.

Second, in verse 31, God talks about why this Day of Atonement needs to be a legal observance for everyone. He wants it to be a Sabbath rest for them so that they may “humble their souls.” Nadab and Abihu become examples of what happens to the non-humbled soul (see the Lev. 10:3 link, where trying to usurp God’s role proved deadly, as it had for Adam and Eve). Therefore, God’s desire to humble peoples’ souls is a desire to give a gift of peace, well-being, and truth.



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[Purity and Impurity in Leviticus](#)

[What Is the Day of Atonement?](#)





LEVITICUS SCROLL

Movement 3: Reforming the People

Unless the people are formed again, they will not be able to see God's reality. Now that he's given law to help repair the relationship and restore his holy space, Yahweh now gives instruction aimed at reforming the people themselves.

Watch

[Leviticus video](#)

Read

Leviticus 17:1-27:34

Primary Pattern

[Sabbath](#)

Sabbath starts with Yahweh resting on day seven of his cosmic construction work, and his Sabbath instruction for Israel becomes a gift—a rhythmic burst of Eden's true-life blessing into common life.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Leviticus 19:3

Keep My Gift to You!

God's command here finds its roots in his own character as the originator of Sabbath. The Hebrew word "*shabbat*" can be translated "to cease or rest." Genesis 2:2-3 tells the first Sabbath story, connecting the number seven to the idea of fullness or completion. In fact, in Hebrew, the words for "seven" and "*shabbat*" are one letter apart, creating a sort of wordplay between the two. When you see the number seven in Scripture, something is probably being completed.

God is telling the people to never neglect the great gift he's giving them for their good. This is a blessing, tightly bound to their bodies and emotions and thoughts, always providing a sense of belonging with other people, with God, and even with the land as Sabbath provides renewal and ongoing life. In Exodus 20:8-11, God instituted Sabbath observance as part of the agreement he made with Israel, essentially guaranteeing this gift to them wherever they ended up.

Notice how God frames this just before, in Leviticus 19:2. He says he wants the people to be like he is—holy. He does not want them harmed and devoured by the human-using, human-abusing world around them. That's death. Sabbath says, "Be alive! Cease and rest." We might wonder for ourselves: Has God created us to be perpetually worried about working hard enough to make it, or has he created us to be alive, free, and at peace?

The pharaoh says, "More bricks! More bricks!" Our world says, "More work! More work!" But God says, "Keep my Sabbaths."

Tracing the **Sabbath pattern** will move us deeper into God's real intent for human living. Let's continue! And remember, this exercise is only highlighting a few of the main places that authors activate the pattern. Your goal is to find and consider the others, both in this movement and beyond.

Leviticus 19:30

Love Connects with Sabbath

The phrasing is exactly the same in Leviticus 19:3, but notice how the focus shifts here. Previously, in verse 3, every Israelite was being commanded by God to keep his Sabbaths and revere his or her mother and father—to honor them (which primarily means to care for them with material support as they aged). Here they are told to keep his Sabbaths and revere his sanctuary, his holy space for meeting with the people.

When authors repeat the idea like this but add different or new information, we should pay attention. As readers, we want to hold the discoveries we've already gleaned along with any new information we find in the pattern. The authors are not connecting these ideas accidentally. The pattern is designed to communicate different aspects of the same story. So is the author saying there's a connection between Sabbath rest and



how we relate to people? The emphasis on family and God's sanctuary, or holy meeting space, suggests as much.

Notice especially how Leviticus 19 gets bookended with Sabbath language. And right in the middle, verse 18, the authors reveal a core theme, one so central that we might call it the heartbeat of the Torah. God warns against engaging in violence, against harboring ill will toward others, and against holding grudges. "None of that has anything to do with who I have created you to be," God seems to be saying.

Instead of that way of life, God says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Later, Jesus will teach that this command is central to understanding the whole law. Here, that central command to love others finds a deep connection to Sabbath rest.

Leviticus 23:3

Tastes of Eden

Yahweh lays out a list of holy days, including Passover, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), and others, and each of them is supposed to be a Sabbath rest for the Israelites. So this is not only about refraining from work once per week; it's about a way of being. The weekly days off and the appointed holy days and festivals all become experiences of Sabbath—bursts of Eden into common, ordinary life.

Notice in chapter 23 that we see seven appointed feasts, and each of them (except the celebration of First Fruits) somehow associates with the number seven. Biblical authors designed this connection so readers wouldn't miss the principle: Sabbath rest is the goal.

God's work is complete when his creation enters into Sabbath rest with him, and we'll keep seeing phrases like "it is to be a Sabbath of complete rest for you," "appointed time," and "on the seventh day." When we see the pattern, we're seeing a literary arrow sign pointing back and saying, "This started in Genesis—God has always been about bringing creation into Sabbath rest."

Leviticus 23:15

Seven Sabbaths

The festival described here, the Feast of Weeks, lasted for seven weeks so seven Sabbaths could happen. It starts after the celebration of First Fruits and lasts seven weeks plus one day, for a total of 50 days. As history unfolds, after the exiles, this festival becomes Pentecost (meaning "fiftieth") to the Israelites living under Greek occupation and influence.

Notice the Sabbath layering here. Sabbath has already been tied to completion. Seven is the number of completion. Sabbath on the seventh day, to be observed seven times in a row—this is saturated with sevens! Not only that, but notice the abundance here.



For an entire month, everyone in town was baking bread and sharing meals. Notice how the sacrifices being offered end up looking like a full meal: meat from the peace offerings (Lev. 23:19), bread from the grain offerings (Lev. 23:17), and wine from the drink offerings (Lev. 23:13).

Tracing the **Sabbath pattern**, note how this moment develops the Sabbath principle through a picture of God and humanity, celebrating together (for a long season), grateful for the gift of produce from the land.

Leviticus 23:24

New Year Trumpets

Because people observe it weekly, Sabbath sometimes sounds like a simple way to describe a day off from work every week. Work six days and cease on the seventh day, the Sabbath—a simple work schedule.

But already we've seen the Sabbath concept expand beyond a day off on the weekly calendar. Sabbath also refers to a state of being, a way of life, even the ultimate goal God has for completing all creation. If we are tracing the Sabbath pattern, we won't be able to interpret Sabbath as merely a day off for long. It's more than that.

The festival described here, the Feast of Trumpets, celebrated the beginning of a new year. For most of the modern world, the new year begins January 1. But for those adhering to the Torah's calendar, the new year starts on Rosh Hashanah, on the "first day of the *seventh* month." On this day, priests blew trumpets to signal the celebration, and everyone experienced a Sabbath rest together to kick off another year.

Leviticus 23:32

Rest for the Weary

The Yom Kippur celebration in view here serves as an annual reset button for the Israelites. On this day, everyone in the land (Israelites and foreign neighbors) all took Sabbath. During the sacrificial ceremonies, all known and unknown sins of the entire community were atoned for and forgiven. And the connection of forgiveness and atonement to the **Sabbath pattern** can't be missed.

Human beings suffer under toil and labor, no doubt. Human beings also suffer under the weight of harm, violence, and other sin, whether they are victims or perpetrators. The experience corrupts everyone involved and makes the humans God intends to form into restful, peaceful beings (like God is) anxious and weary. So our Sabbath principle includes more than rest from labor. Real Sabbath, when all of God's work is finally complete, will be free of sin.

God wants people to know that they will no longer experience burden from sin once his work is done. And the Day of Atonement is a taste of that—a strong dose of Eden to let



people feel what it means to be free, alive, and totally together with God. Yom Kippur is a gift given for humankind's benefit.

Sabbath, likewise, was created for human beings in order to love and bless them with a taste of freedom from the weariness of sin.

Leviticus 24:8

Love and Light

We are at the tabernacle again, and Yahweh is focusing on the spot “outside the veil of testimony in the tent of meeting” (Lev. 24:3). He instructs them to put a big lamp made of pure gold there and tell the sons of Israel to bring plenty of olive oil. Then they are to light up the lamp and keep it lit from “evening to morning” (Lev. 24:3), which alludes to Genesis 1, where the days are indicated by a “new evening.” Notice the image here: light perpetually burning, driving out darkness and illuminating the holy space, the space meant to bless people with a taste of Eden. And there's more.

Genesis 1 describes the sun, moon, and stars as symbols of divine glory and markers of the “appointed times” (see Gen. 1:14-16). So the lamp symbolizes the divine, endless light of God, shining upon Israel, the bread. That's why the bread needs to go directly across from the light, so that “Israel” gets “re-created” every Sabbath.

“Celebrate this Sabbath,” says God. Get this golden lamp burning perpetually. Set the showbread right across from the light and call it the “eternal” or “perpetual” covenant (Lev. 24:8) because this is going to be a symbol of our ongoing relationship. (Yahweh, not surprisingly, is being so creative and thoughtful.) And then put this all together—the newly baked bread represents a newly re-created people, and that re-creation happens through God's Sabbath gift to people.

Can you imagine what this would be like, to think about and pay attention to Yahweh in such a detailed and meaningful way? Through sight, sound, smell, touch, emotion, and thoughtful memory, Yahweh forms his people with Sabbath laws that generously provide Sabbath experiences.

This showbread across from the golden lamp, or the “bread of the presence,” got replaced every single Sabbath day, adding to the **Sabbath pattern**, an idea of ongoing, perpetual renewal and refreshment for people and all of creation—Yahweh's love and light bursting into common life with the essence of Eden.

Leviticus 25:2

Rest for the Land

Here, Yahweh applies the Sabbath principle to fields and pastures, orchards, vineyards, and so on. Go ahead and work the land for six years, he says, but in the seventh year, you should let the land “have a Sabbath of complete rest” (Lev. 25:4).



Every seventh year becomes a sabbatical year for Israel, and time is given for the land to, in a sense, revert back to the Eden-like conditions originally established. They were prohibited from all agricultural activity during this year (Lev. 25:4).

What can we learn about God and creation from this part of the biblical story? God loves people and gives them a gift through Sabbath. Is he also giving the same kind of gift to creation itself?

Notice how tracing the Sabbath pattern not only helps us define it more comprehensively, but it also reveals things we might not have expected. God wants people to take care of the land and work toward its ongoing life and health. His commands, when followed, will put humanity into a close relationship with the land, forming people who care for his own creation, which is itself a miracle of life. What else are these biblical authors trying to show us when they employ the **Sabbath pattern**?

Notice in verses 25:4-7 that the people are to pick and eat whatever grows naturally, plus they can eat their cattle and whatever wild animals live around them. Doesn't this feel very Eden-like, in the sense of returning to a more open-handed posture of dependence on God? Israel would have to deeply trust God to provide the vitamins and protein their bodies needed every day. It's almost like Yahweh is saying through the requirement, "Trust me. I've got you."

To live in an agricultural world, where growing and harvesting crops meant staying alive, to agree to stop all farming for a full year would have been a massive declaration and practice of faith in Yahweh. And just imagine how good and life-renewing it was for the people and the land.

Leviticus 25:8

Super Sabbath Time

Sabbath can refer to the seventh day or to a period of seven. So every seventh year is a sabbatical year, as we saw in the Leviticus 25:2 link.

After 49 years had passed—seven seven-year time periods—a special year needed to be observed: the year of Jubilee. We might think of this like a "super Sabbath" because so many Sabbath-style blessings happen during it. This Sabbath year wasn't only a taste of Eden's blessing; this was sinking your teeth into a sweet, juicy chunk of Eden's blessing.

On the year of Jubilee, which begins on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), full-scale agricultural work ceased and people simply gathered what the land produced on its own without cultivation. All debts had to be forgiven during this year, signaling freedom from slavery. All the lands that were traded or sold had to be returned to the



smaller households or family groups, creating a scenario where no tribal land could be controlled by a small few. Notice how the law limits the ability for oppressive practices to linger on. And imagine how the very existence of this requirement would change the way commerce worked among God's people. Imagine, too, if you knew that no matter what, God's blessing of land would eventually come back to your family, and no matter what, no debt can be held over you forever.

The year of Jubilee blessed people, animals, landowners, and everyone involved. Through it all, we can hear Yahweh reminding the whole world that he created it to be right-functioning, or *tov* in Hebrew, which means conducive for ongoing life. This super-Sabbath works, in a sense, like a big restoration button. That button gets pushed once every 50 years, and the whole community is reminded about God's Sabbath goal by observing a year-long season of peace, forgiveness of debts, and ongoing blessing.

Leviticus 26:34

Rest for the Land (Again)

Yahweh has rolled out a long and detailed list of instructions, and, as usual, the people have a choice to make: to listen or ignore, to live life on God's terms, or to live it on their own. Now, as the movement (and entire scroll) draws to a close, we see the benefits and consequences related to listening or ignoring.

In 26:2, he says again that the people *must* "keep my Sabbaths" and revere his sanctuary as a holy space. Why? In order to follow a path toward life and freedom (see Lev. 26:3-11). "Conversely," Yahweh tells them, "if you don't follow through on all I have commanded to you, you're going to be experiencing the path that leads to death" (see Lev. 26:14-33; it gets painful). And then 26:34 offers a new development.

He says that disobedience will result with exile, into bondage, under yet another oppressive power monger. "Then," God says, "the land will make up for all its Sabbaths."

"To ignore the Sabbath regulation is to harm my creation," Yahweh is saying. "If you don't let the land rest, then you're ignoring me, so I will have to move you off that land so it can have back all of those Sabbaths you stole."

This addition to the Sabbath pattern expands the idea of God's reverence for this land, this creation that he calls good. He makes Sabbath for himself, for the land, and for human beings—a good gift. And in a real way, because it happens on the seventh-day completion moment, Sabbath is being shown as the ultimate goal for all creation.

Remember that we have only traced the Sabbath pattern through the third movement of Leviticus for learning and practice. But the pattern starts in Genesis and continues to Revelation, so keep tracing it! Continuing to learn the Sabbath pattern and seeing how biblical authors use it will continue bringing fruitful reward as you study.



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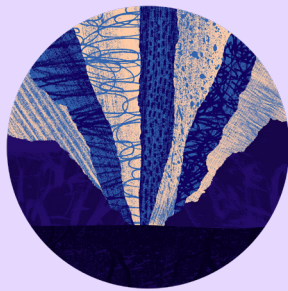
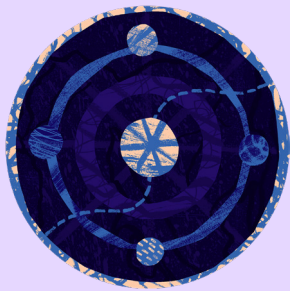
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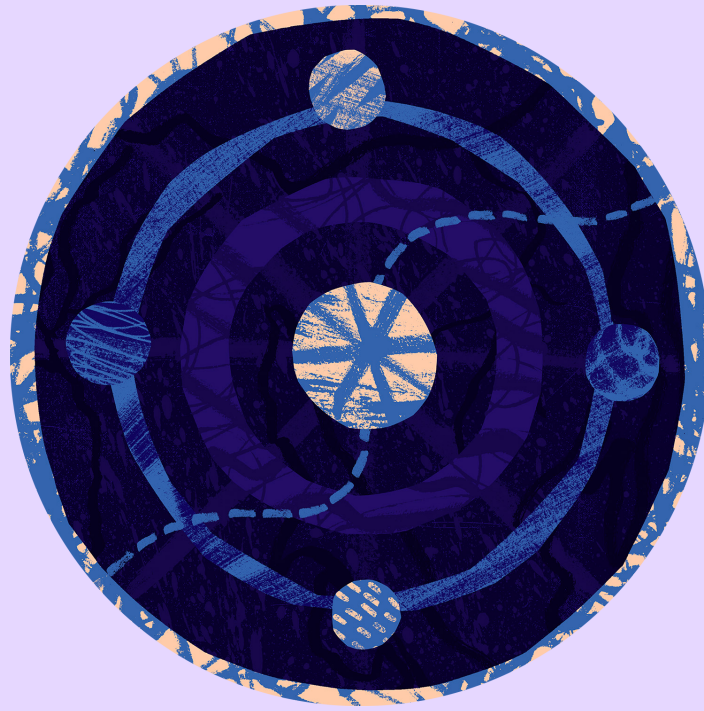
[What Israel's Feasts Teach Us](#)

[The Law of the Blasphemer](#)





Numbers Scroll



NUMBERS SCROLL

Movement 1: Preparing for Travel

One year and two months after escaping brutal slavery and death in Egypt (Num. 1:1), Israel prepares to leave Mount Sinai with God, heading into the place of testing, the wilderness.

Watch

[Numbers video](#)

Read

Numbers 1:1-12:16

Primary Pattern

[Temple](#)

Israel's temple is described as the place where God's space and humanity's space are one. In fact, the whole biblical drama can be seen as a story about God's temple. Explore the origins of the temple and see how this pattern develops throughout the whole Bible.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Numbers 1:1

Tent of Meeting in Numbers

Before the tabernacle became central to Israel's life, Moses had his own small meeting tent pitched outside the camp. He spent time with God there, talking and listening together on the fringes of the larger community. When the people finished the tabernacle, they called it the "tent of meeting" and set it up in the middle of camp as God instructed.

No longer alone with Moses on the fringes, Yahweh is going to the central part of the camp, the heartbeat of community life. He "tabernacles" or "makes his dwelling place" among them.

Remember, at this point, the Israelites have been camped at Mount Sinai for a year and two months, so they are starting their second year of freedom after they and their ancestors survived 430 years of slavery in Egypt. God is working with them, and they have much to learn about being human and being free. In this part of the story, Yahweh is preparing the people to leave Mount Sinai and journey on toward the land of promise.

Numbers 1:50

Guardians and Caretakers

The "tabernacle of testimony" description triggers our pattern, and what follows in verses 50-54 offers a picture of severity and wisdom. Notice how the Levites are the only tribe entrusted with the setup and tear-down of the tabernacle. If a non-Levite comes near it, death must follow (Num. 1:51). The Levites take care of the tabernacle, and they also guard it from others while simultaneously guarding others from it!

But why the Levites? One possible answer comes through Exodus 32:26 when, following the rebellion of the people, Moses asked if anyone among them was actually for Yahweh or not. The Levites responded by gathering with him. Also, Moses and Aaron are themselves Levites who have so far played the main priestly role.

However, God made his decision to dedicate the Levites to this work. The tabernacle was to be built, transported, set up, taken care of, and guarded by the Levites. Numbers 1:54 affirms that the people responded well to this instruction, showing us a picture of faithful people, listening and centering their lives around Yahweh's presence with them in the tabernacle.

Numbers 2:2

Wise Distance

It may seem strange that Yahweh, a God who consistently wants to be with his people, instructs them to camp around his tent of meeting "at a distance." What is significant about this kind of arrangement?



First, as we noted earlier, Yahweh remains at the center of Israel's camp. From a metaphorical perspective, readers might see a connection to centering their lives, or their community's life, around Yahweh—an acknowledgement that he is present and remains their source of life.

Second, by tracing the pattern, we have already seen who can camp right up next to the tabernacle not at a distance, the Levites. That warning in Numbers 1:51 about lethal consequences for getting too close to the tabernacle suggests that camping at some distance is wise. (Aaron's two priestly sons, Nadab and Abihu, would strongly agree if they were still part of the picture here. See Lev. 10 for details.)

Number 2:17

Thoughtful, Orderly Departures

The second chapter of Numbers is one some might feel tempted to skip past—are all these numbers really important to us? It's understandable, but the literary structure is worth paying attention to before moving on in the scroll.

Yahweh's instructions for setting up camp reveal an intent for order and care on his behalf. These instructions for departure—who leaves first, who marches in the middle, who walks at the end of the massive caravan—appear to reveal that same intent for order. He designs not only the campground design but also the traveling order for the whole community.

Did you notice anything unique about the placement of “tent of meeting” in this chapter? It's in the middle. The authors are emphasizing the central location of the tabernacle not only in the settled camp but also on the traveling road!

The authors' point? Yahweh is the center of life. And the people are to continue meditating on the location of the tabernacle during their travels, battles, and times of peace. Yahweh is preparing the people to walk together with him at the center.

Number 3:7

Serving with Aaron

Leading up to this verse, the author reminds us about the shocking deaths of Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's two sons (see Lev. 10). While that mysterious scene created plenty of questions, readers still learned that tweaking God's tabernacle instructions brought about fatal consequences. Nadab and Abihu didn't treat the tabernacle as holy, and here again in Numbers 3:2-4, the pattern reminds readers that taking care of the tabernacle was a specific, weighty, life-and-death kind of responsibility.

So God says that the tribe of Levi will be fully responsible for the service of the tabernacle: Gershonites in charge of the curtains and cords, Kohathites in charge of the holy objects used for rituals and worship, and the Merarites in charge of all the structural pieces used to build the tabernacle.



Interestingly, in verses 3:12-13, the author connects God's choice of the Levites to God's requirement to give the firstborn. Back in Egypt, God took the firstborn sons of all of Egypt and protected the firstborn sons of Israel. Instead of taking the firstborn sons from all the tribes, God says he is "taking the Levites from among the sons of Israel" to make them his own—a tribe of priests. God dedicates the Levites to serve both him and the people as they care for the tabernacle and all that happens within it.

Numbers 3:38

Facing the Light

This provides a good example of the nuance involved with pattern tracing. We are paying attention to the key words, such as "tabernacle," or "tent of meeting," or "tent." But we are also paying attention to words, phrases, and concepts that authors have previously connected to the main idea. Here, the eastward-facing tabernacle doorway recalls the entrance of the garden of Eden, which also faced eastward.

The word "eastward" in this literary context becomes a signal. A reader can recognize that the author wants him or her to connect the ideas of tabernacle and Eden tightly together. Is the tabernacle a sort of Eden-like space with a purpose similar to that of the garden? The authors are saying, "Yes!"

In Eden, Yahweh and humanity walk and talk together, while living fully present with one another. The realms of Heaven and Earth exist together as one, and humans are described as priestly figures, working and keeping the garden, much like the tribe of Levi has been put in charge of working (or serving) and keeping the tabernacle.

Not always, but often the single word "east" or "eastward" activates the tabernacle pattern and, later, the tightly connected temple pattern. Eden, the tabernacle, the temple—all three have east-facing entrances. All turn toward the dawn's light, the place where sunshine breaks through night's darkness, blessing all of creation.

Numbers 4:47

Holy Work

Chapter 4 rolls out the work orders for the three main groups within the tribe of Levites (Kohathites, Gershonites, and Merarites). The author here attaches another key word to the tabernacle pattern: work.

English translates the Hebrew word "*abad*" as "work," which is the same word Genesis 2:15 uses to describe the activity of human beings—people in the garden are to work (*abad*) and to keep it.

Earlier, we noted how authors connect the tabernacle to Eden with the word "eastward." Similarly, this word "work" ties us to the original purpose God gives to people. Notice, back in the garden and here in the tabernacle, this is not described as toil or degrading,



life-consuming activity. Instead, this work appears to be rooted in the original, good characteristics of human flourishing.

Notice the required age range for this service as well. Yahweh wanted men between 30-50 years of age in charge of this tabernacle work (e.g., Num. 4:3, 23, 30, 39, 47), a repeated detail that warrants further meditation. Wouldn't it make more sense to designate the younger, more able-bodied for these efforts, especially carrying the extremely heavy tabernacle materials? Perhaps this work requires both strength and wisdom.

Numbers 5:3

Inside the Border

Here, the author uses the Hebrew word "*shokhen*," which means "I dwell" and stems from the noun "*mishkan*," which means "tabernacle" or "dwelling place." God is boldly saying that he is willing to dwell in the tabernacle, in the midst of their camp, if the people are willing to keep the space ritually pure—free from anything related to death. This space was to be like Eden.

Notice how this law creates an analogy, comparing the tabernacle and the borders of Israel's camp with the tree of life in Eden and the borders of the garden. Human beings in Eden chose to defile the tree of life and were then expelled from the borders of the garden. Here, human beings who choose to defile the tabernacle must also be expelled, placed outside the border of the camp.

The author uses spatial location to connect the tree of life to the tabernacle, as both are set in the middle, either the middle of the garden or in the middle of the camp. Even more importantly, the middle or center of the tabernacle is the holy of holies, where God himself specifically dwells. Remember this because it will become important for understanding key moments in the rest of the Numbers scroll.

Numbers 5:17

Life and Death Rituals

Chapter 5 presents ritual purity laws aimed at keeping Israel's camp free from anything related to death or corruption. Verse 17 introduces the odd image of dust that is "on the floor of the tabernacle" getting mixed into water by priests to create a bitter beverage. Then they force a woman suspected of adulterous behavior to drink this "water of bitterness that brings a curse" (Num. 5:19). And then, if the woman had committed adultery, her abdomen is supposed to swell as her womb and any life within it dies. But if she ends up being innocent, then her abdomen would apparently remain healthy, and she would be able to conceive a new life.

This is an abrasive law and certainly the most obscure of chapter 5. It is helpful to remember in moments like these that we are reading prose discourse from ancient Hebrew law, not instructions for husbands today who suspect their wives have been



unfaithful. This literature is not attempting to establish key principles for human life in all places and times. This is about the tabernacle, the traveling Israelite camp, and Yahweh's first stages of teaching humanity about life and death.

While we cannot easily answer all of the questions (and legitimate objections) raised by this law, we can still notice a few key connections in the literature itself.

First, the whole chapter is about keeping the camp pure from diseases, "unclean" bodily fluids, and contact with death. Second, while the first ritual is about impurity, and the second is about betrayal, this one focuses on both impurity and betrayal by giving instructions about how to cleanse the camp from the causes and consequences of both.

Most importantly, the author links this troubling ritual to the flood narrative in Genesis. There, Yahweh used water to bring death upon wickedness with the intent to remove it, but he also preserved a family through the same waters because of Noah's blamelessness. Here, Yahweh uses water to bring death to her womb if it represents cursed behavior, but if she has not engaged in cursed behavior—if she, like Noah, is blameless—then the life in her womb is preserved.

However one interprets the passage, the clearest point in all of it seems to focus on God's ongoing work of removing evil and its consequences from the place he intends to dwell with humanity.

Numbers 6:10

Nazirite Vows

Another dimension of worship and obedience develops here, through these instructions about the Nazirite vow. The tent of meeting remained set apart from the rest of camp as a cleansed, holy space. Similarly, an Israelite could dedicate him or herself by way of a Nazirite vow to following the priestly way. By taking this vow, the person would accept a sacred role in the community, and this option was open to both men and women.

The Nazirite was to commit to remaining ritually pure. What does it mean to be ritually impure? Well, for example, encountering a dead body makes one ritually impure because the rituals are about creating an Eden-like space, which needs to be free from death. Nazirites who end up touching death (which is necessary at times) then engage in a seven-day purification process to "remove" the defilement. And the number seven is significant here.

Back in Genesis 8:10-12, Noah sends a dove out two times, each after a seven-day waiting period. The Nazirite's seven-day waiting period for purification, followed by the sacrifice of two turtle doves, echoes the story about Noah and his doves. Additionally, in Numbers 6:4, we read that the Nazirite abstained from wine or strong drink, including any fruit from the grape vine. Similarly, Noah abstained from such things, at least until



his 40 days on the water were complete. Once Noah and his family leave the ark, he plants a vineyard, eats its fruit, and drinks its wine. It is in his drunken state that Noah reintroduces corruption. The Nazirite, perhaps, is acknowledging this human weakness while learning from Noah's mistake.

Numbers 7:1

Finished, Consecrated Construction

If this is the day that Moses finished setting up the tabernacle, that means we're talking about the same scene we saw at the end of Exodus (see chapter 40)! Numbers 1:1 opens with an already-constructed tabernacle, so Numbers 7 is a flashback. In other words, chronologically speaking, Numbers 7 happens before Numbers 1-6.

Exodus 40 details Yahweh's glory filling the tent when Moses and company finish constructing the tabernacle. Numbers 7 repeats and adds details about cleansing (or consecrating) the space and describes the 12 tribes contributing to both the work itself and this dedication ceremony. Overall, readers cannot miss the immense importance that the tabernacle holds for all of Israel's life.

Also, here, the authors describe this stage of construction with the Hebrew word "*kalah*," which translates to English as "finished." *Kalah* carries a sense of accomplishment or completion, and we first see this word back in the Genesis creation stories.

The Genesis narrator says that the heavens and the earth were "completed" or "finished" (Gen. 2:1-3), which was also when God sanctified it, the Hebrew word "*qadash*." Here, in Numbers 7, Moses is a human partner following Yahweh's tabernacle-creation instructions, and he finishes (*kalah*) and consecrates (*qadash*) this tent much like God finished and consecrated his creation.

The author is using literary patterns to communicate that the tabernacle is meant to be an Eden-like space, a place for Yahweh to dwell with his creation!

Numbers 7:89

Facing East

At the end of Exodus and through most of Leviticus, we see Moses disconnected from the real presence of God—standing outside the tent of meeting. This move to enter into the tent is a big moment in the narrative, and it reminds readers that this tabernacle's primary purpose is to be a space conducive for relationships to form and grow.

The tabernacle is for meeting, communing, and being with one another, Yahweh and humanity together. Moses hears the now-familiar voice speaking to him, the voice of his creator and dear friend.



Numbers 8:19

Why the Firstborns?

We hear echoes from Numbers 3:7 (see “Serving with Aaron” link above), where Yahweh says that Levites should be presented on behalf of the firstborn sons of all of Israel. Wait, what? In verse 18, God says he’s choosing the Levites instead of choosing “every firstborn from among the sons of Israel.” To understand this, we have to go back in the story.

Within the larger Torah context, readers see the beginning of a pattern in the death-plague scene of Exodus 11-12. There, all firstborn sons throughout the land of Egypt die—whether human or animal—but the “destroyer” spares all who trust Yahweh and paint their doorways with blood and a hyssop branch, as instructed. For households who follow the instruction, Yahweh promises to redeem or rescue their firstborn sons from death.

Here, to Moses, Yahweh is saying that he brought those firstborns through death for the purpose of establishing a firstborn tribe among the whole people of Israel. Instead of claiming all the firstborn sons from all the tribes, God dedicates the Levites alone for this kind of service.

Notice how the Levites will also continue using sacrificial blood to atone for Israel, and their presence in the community will ultimately serve in a way similar to the blood over the doorways way back in Exodus 12. God is helping, loving, and protecting his people through their willingness to love and obey. This is about the relationship with God and one another, as God redeems the whole community.

Numbers 9:15

Cloud Covering

Yahweh’s presence often becomes visible through fire or cloud. With fire, his presence sometimes consumes (e.g., the Nadab and Abihu story from Leviticus 10) and sometimes remains non-consuming (e.g., the burning bush story from Exodus 3). With the cloud, his presence sometimes guides, as in the pillar of cloud leading the people of Israel. Other times, it hovers over or fills holy spaces, such as the top of Mount Sinai or here in the tabernacle.

And did you catch the literary location marker at the beginning of this sentence, “on the day the tabernacle was erected”? We saw the same wording in Numbers 7:1, and both cases remind readers that this whole scene is happening on the day that the tabernacle was finished, the same scene we entered in Exodus 40. Now, the same cloud that directs Israel’s path out of Egypt comes to fill the tabernacle, signaling that God will now dwell with the people here, in this tent of meeting.



Numbers 9:18

Cloud Settling

Here, the narrator is painting a picture of loving dependence. It has been more than a year since Israel's escape from brutal slavery, where their lives depended on a cruel taskmaster who gave little to no freedom to truly live or to worship Yahweh. Now they've been learning to break free and become dependent on their loving creator instead.

Yahweh's initial pillars of cloud and fire served as guide, albeit a somewhat distant guide. As they listen and obey him by finishing the tabernacle, he begins leading from a more intimate place with them. The people are obeying—setting up and tearing down and moving the tabernacle with the community from place to place. It's a ton of work and requires meticulous obedience to God's Torah. By following his instruction in this way, the people draw nearer to him.

This section of the narrative reiterates Exodus 40:36-37, which details the cloud's movement in the same way (almost verbatim). Notice the authors' emphasis on participation between human and God here. Yahweh does not settle his cloud until the people finish setting up the tabernacle. And the people do not pull stakes and prepare to move until Yahweh lifts his cloud from over the tent (Num. 9:17). As long as the cloud remained settled, they stayed. When it lifted, they too rose up and prepared to depart.

Yahweh has always been leading the people, but as this tabernacle pattern unfolds, the biblical authors reveal a deepening relationship that includes new kinds of participation and dependence on Israel's behalf.

Numbers 10:11

Time To Roll

Time to double-check the packing list because God has just lifted the cloud, which means it's time to move! The narrator again tells us that this is the second month of the second year since they escaped Egypt, so we're close to where this scroll's narrative began. In Numbers 1:1, we were on the "first [day] of the month," and here we're on the "twentieth [day] of the month," so it's only been about 20 days since Numbers started—approximately 14 months since the first Passover and divine rescue from Egypt.

This is no longer a discombobulated group of terrified escapees. Now we see them organized as a family whose life remains centered around Yahweh whether camped or on the road. He's already dwelling in their midst through the tabernacle, and now it's time to begin the next leg of this great adventure. The people are leaving the holy mountain and heading into the wilderness, on their way to the land of promise. There, Yahweh plans to dwell forever with them in loving kindness and generous blessing.



Numbers 10:34

Eden on the Move

We don't see "tabernacle" or "tent of meeting" language here, but this cloud has been so tightly connected to the tabernacle that it's fair to see the authors conceptually repeating the pattern once more. In other words, by following the tabernacle pattern up to this point, we know that the cloud moving means the tabernacle is moving as well. And the tabernacle is all about Eden and God's life blessing.

God's Eden-like holy space is on the move, and so too is his cloud-like presence. What does all of this look like? Apparently, it looks like a massive group of Israelites, with the Levites out front, carrying a heavy gold box. A mysterious cloud floats ahead of them, guiding their march into a barren, desolate wilderness as they look for a place to camp. God's Eden-presence is on the move.

Numbers 11:24

The Spirit Descends

Paying attention to the tabernacle's development and function in this first movement of Numbers has already given us a picture of this holy space's centrality. It's at the heart of the camp. It's a genuine source of life and blessing, just as Eden once was. Here, the author adds to its centrality and ongoing blessing with the idea of God's Spirit moving out from the tent.

In this part of the story, the tabernacle becomes God's commissioning site for Israel's elders. The cloud of Yahweh's presence came down onto Mount Sinai in Exodus 24, where 70 elders watched Moses ascend up into the cloud as the single, unique representative of Israel.

In Numbers 11, Moses' uniqueness proves burdensome, as he complains that the people will need way more mediation than he alone can offer. So God gives some instructions, and soon the same 70 elders are surrounding the tabernacle. First, the divine cloud descends onto Sinai, while Moses ascends into it and becomes the sole leader of Israel. But now, the divine cloud settles onto the tent, and the divine Spirit descends upon the 70 elders (plus Eldad and Medad, Num. 11:26-30). The result? It's not going to be a one-leader system from here on. All 70 elders have been commissioned as leaders who now share in the same Spirit first given to Moses.

At the tabernacle, God blesses Moses as he blesses the 70 elders (plus two), which is all a greater blessing for Israel as a whole.

Numbers 12:5

Not in Yahweh's House

We've already seen dramatic (even shocking) moments in the story that reveal Yahweh's evil-expelling actions related to the tabernacle. He does not want any kind of death in there. No corruption, lying, sinning, or defiling of any kind—no betrayal and no darkness.



But Aaron and Miriam speak against Moses with unwarranted suspicions. They first aim at his marriage, but that reveals their deeper, truer issue: They disapprove of the choice to give Moses the authority he has. Why should he receive such commissioning and responsibility? So Yahweh summons the three siblings, and he appears in a cloud at the entrance of the tabernacle. This tabernacle doorway is where justice will be determined and served.

In a way, this creates the image of a wise parent helping bickering siblings find peace. Betrayal, jealousy, false accusation—the wise parent says these harmful actions are not permissible in a house marked by divine goodness.

Numbers 12:10

Eighth-Day Renewal

Here, several previously established tabernacle themes tie together: the tabernacle as a death- and disease-free holy space, the settling and departing of Yahweh's cloud of presence, purification rituals necessary for tabernacle entry, etc. This story about Miriam becomes a thematically saturated inversion of something we've seen before.

In Numbers 6, a leprous person is removed from the camp because the cloud of Yahweh's presence has settled on the tabernacle in the center of camp. Yahweh is about life, and life does not blend with death. Death and corruption must be taken out if he's going to be dwelling in humanity's midst.

Here, however, Yahweh's cloud lifts off from the tabernacle and departs. When that happens, Miriam is immediately overtaken by leprosy and left standing in the center of the camp! Now she too must experience a seven-day restoration process, and on the eighth day, she can rejoin the camp of Israel. This last day, after seven days, symbolizes new creation. The "death" of Miriam's skin disease made her incompatible with the life of God's presence, and in his love, God provides a way of restoration so that life can return to Miriam and she can return to full life, which is consistently found in the divine presence of Yahweh himself.



Related Resources

Video

[Temple](#)

Article

[What Does It Mean For Us To Be The Temple of God?](#)

Podcast

[What's So Special About the Tabernacle?](#)

[Why Does the Tabernacle Furniture Even Matter?](#)

[Why Moses Couldn't Enter the Tabernacle?](#)

[What Made the Tribe of Levi Special?](#)

[What's a Nazarite Vow?](#)

[There Isn't a Law For That](#)





NUMBERS SCROLL

Movement 2: Refusing to Enter

Spies go to scope out the scene in the promised land as the second movement in Numbers gets underway. Israel is about to face a new kind of fear, and the test will prove exceedingly difficult for the Exodus generation.

Watch

[Numbers video](#)

Read

Number 13:1-25:18

Primary Pattern

[The Test](#)

Why does God test people? Trace the pattern of testing in the Bible and see how God determines whether or not his covenant partners will trust him. Though these tests present serious challenges to God's people, they also lead to growth and transformation along the way.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Numbers 13:19

Courageous Investigation

This “good or bad” language recalls the original tree of good and bad in the creation story found in the Genesis scroll. Adam and Eve faced the ultimate human test in the garden: Will we trust Yahweh’s definition of good and bad and eat from the tree of life? Or will we trust our own ideas about good and bad and eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad (e.g., Gen. 2:17)?

When activating two simple words, “good” and “bad,” authors draw readers deep into a foundational biblical test pattern. Here, we’re not concerned so much with what fruits to eat, but the nature of the test is going to be the same: Will the spies courageously obey Yahweh’s instruction, trusting his will, or will they opt for their own ideas and plans instead?

The spies are being tested and challenged to decide whether they will follow through on the instructions God gives them. Notice how the command to the spies here inverts Yahweh’s command to Adam and Eve. They were not supposed to take and eat of the fruit to determine good and bad. But now that humanity is outside the garden, it looks like God needs, or simply wants, to train them in the knowledge of good and bad. The spies will have to embrace a courageous decision to follow God as he also helps them learn to discern life from death, good from bad.

Numbers 13:33

Fear-Based Assessments

The spies head in with great courage, but when it’s time to report back, fear fills their words and ideas. They talk about the sheer impossibility of following through on God’s instructions—the work will be too difficult and deadly, according to them.

The “in our own sight” phrase advances the testing pattern by echoing the bad decision Adam and Eve made way back when they chose to do what was good in their own sight rather than trusting what was good in God’s sight. It appears that the spies have made a similar mistake, trusting in their own eyes.

And there’s a twist. The serpent in Genesis is a resident in the garden of Eden who tempts the humans to choose poorly and fail the test. Here, similarly, the Canaanites are residents in the land, and they influence the spies, leading to the spies making a similar mistake of trusting themselves over Yahweh.

Numbers 14:2

Fear and Mistrust

This “grumbling” language often signals another occurrence of the test pattern. Choices are difficult, back then and still today. The Hebrew word “*lun*,” which we translate as “grumble,” shows up in the first story after Israel’s salvation from Egypt as well. In Exodus 15:24, Israel faces deadly dehydration in the desert, and they lose their trust in



God. It makes more sense to them, based on their situation, that God is actually not trying to help them at all. It gets so bad that they start saying that slavery in Egypt would be better than this life with God.

When grumbling shows up in these stories, we know a test is underway. Some will pass. Some will fail. And everyone will learn about life and death, including readers today.

Numbers 14:7

Good Choice

During the spying test, we saw many complaining and failing the test, but not everyone! Joshua and Caleb return with a different report than the other spies. They trust Yahweh at his word and boldly encourage Israel to do the same.

The authors present Joshua and Caleb as a redeemed Adam and Eve. In the garden of Eden, the resident serpent tempted them to ignore God. Here, the resident Canannites have tempted many to ignore God, but unlike Adam and Eve, Joshua and Caleb stay the course. They chose to see the land as Yahweh sees it, “exceedingly good,” a land flowing with abundance, a gift.

Numbers 14:22

A Voice Worth Listening To

By grumbling and distrusting Yahweh, Israel ends up accusing him of doing bad, which is a fatal mistake. Moses pleads with God on behalf of the people (Num.14:11-19), and God forgives the sin. They will continue to live, but instead of entering the land, they will die in the wilderness. Similarly, when Adam and Eve made the deadly choice, their lives are not immediately gone, but they are nevertheless headed toward death. Here in Numbers, these Israelites will continue to live even as they face the consequence of dying in the wilderness (Num. 14:23).

Did you hear a Genesis echo in verse 22? The phrase “have not listened to my voice” pairs with the words Yahweh said to Adam when he listened to the voice of another human being (Eve) over the voice of God, leading to similar results. Then, in Genesis 16:2, Abram listens to Sarah’s voice over God’s, which eventually leads to tremendous suffering and corruption for Hagar and Ishmael. Listening to God’s voice means trusting and following it, which always leads to life and healing. The opposite is always deadly.

Numbers 15:35

Outside of Life

Stories like this can remind us that we are reading ancient Hebrew literature, designed as many woven-together texts that tell one complete story. In this part of the narrative, being inside the camp is synonymous with being inside of God’s blessing and life. That means inside the camp is a place for Yahweh-followers, not Yahweh-rejectors.



This short narrative about the Sabbath violator comes after the rebellion of the spies in Numbers 13-14, and it serves as a condensed summary of Israel's failure in the wilderness. Just as the Sabbath violator broke God's instruction to receive the gift of Sabbath rest on the seventh day, so also the spies rejected God's explicit instruction to receive the gift of their promised land. Similarly, the Sabbath violator is going to die outside the camp, just as this generation of Israel will die outside the land in the wilderness. We're watching the pattern unfold, the pattern that began with Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden.

Numbers 16:6

Take and Put

When Eve made the decision to go against God's way, she engaged in two specific actions, captured by the Hebrew verbs *"laqakh,"* "to take," and *"natan,"* "to give, to put." Yahweh appears to say that his creation is a gift to be received as it is, as he has created. Receiving that gift means listening to his voice and following his direction. But people have other tempting options.

Rather than receiving, Eve takes. And then she tries to give what she has determined to be good in her own eyes. Authors use "take" and "give/put" repeatedly in testing narratives (e.g., the rebellion of the sons of God in Gen. 6). These words signal a moment when Israel is being faced with a test.

Back in Leviticus 10, where Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu make a fatal mistake in the tabernacle, we read that they **"took** their ... firepans, and after **putting** fire in them ...". The problem was that God had not instructed them to do that in his tabernacle at that time. Subtle as it seems, the author is giving readers a literary clue, telling us that this moment they face is like the testing moment Adam and Eve faced.

The same is true here in Numbers 16:6-7. But notice that God now instructs them to do the same thing he told Nadab and Abihu not to do: He tells them to take censers or fire pans and to put fire in them. The key has everything to do with listening carefully to the voice of God and following through on his instructions for life.

Numbers 16:30

Division Death

It's a shocking, unsettling moment as the ground "opens its mouth." The phrase transports readers back to the story of Cain and Abel, where Genesis 4:10-11 tells readers that Abel's blood cried out to Yahweh and that the ground "has opened its mouth" to receive Abel's blood.

The ground here in Numbers 16 swallows up the rebellious ones, and this is the result of brotherly division. Like Cain growing to divide from and despise Abel, Korah's group of Levites are dividing from Moses and Aaron's group. It's a decision to live outside of God's way, which we have consistently seen as a decision leading to death.



Numbers 16:41, Numbers 17:10

Grumbling Again

The author saturates the story between 16:41 and 17:10 with grumbling and death language, which strongly signals the testing pattern. First, in 16:41, they grumble against Moses and Aaron. Then, in 17:10, they turn their sights on Yahweh.

Notice how all the people of Israel are intensifying the rebellion of the few. Opposing trust in God always connects to death, and death always begets more death. We are watching the infection spread. Just as the leaders stood up against Moses and Aaron in Numbers 16:3, now the whole congregation grumbles against Yahweh.

Now, in this scene, Yahweh offers a test to show which tribe has been chosen from among the Israelites. Each tribe has a representative staff that would be set before Yahweh—whichever bloomed revealed Yahweh's chosen tribe. Aaron's staff (representing Levi) was chosen, and this was another message from Yahweh signaling that Aaron was his choice for priestly leadership. Aaron's staff was to serve as a witness against anyone who would rebel and grumble against Yahweh, which would result in death.

Numbers 18:1

Guilt-Bearing Service

In Numbers 16 and 17, we read narratives about some of the Levites rejecting Yahweh's choice to have priests act as Israel's representatives. This rejection pits brother against brother. They soon realize their mistake, but it's too late, and they are swallowed by the earth. In Numbers 18, Yahweh re-establishes his choice and reminds everyone that the priests are selected to bear the guilt of Israel. This priestly position comes with honor, but not according to the world. The priest holds a position of loving, humble, and guilt-bearing service.

Notice the profound reversal of outcomes compared to the Cain and Abel narrative, the second major test in the Hebrew Bible. Cain's failure of the test means he must bear his own iniquity—he has to carry the crippling burden alone. God wants chosen representatives to live in unity among brothers (not division and contempt), so he appoints them to bear this iniquity even as he also promises to take special care of them as they serve (Num. 18:8-19).



Numbers 18:7

Attending and Performing

After the brutal scenes resulting from disobedience, many of us are surely wondering: Will the Israelites be able to obey Yahweh's instructions for the priesthood?

In Genesis 2:15, God tells human beings to do two things in the garden. They are to *shamar*, which can mean “keep” and/or “guard” it, and they are to *avad*, which can mean “work” and/or “serve.” (*Avad* can also mean “perform.”)

Numbers 18:7 uses both *shamar* and *avad* to describe the work of priests. Notice how the choice to use these words aims at connecting these two scenes and ideas. God is still teaching humanity what he started teaching them in the garden—priests are to keep/guard and work/serve. The question about whether or not people will listen remains, which means that more testing will come.

Levites are given Adam and Eve duties, but split into two. Aaron and his sons are meant to care for the most holy things as they serve the people, and the other Levites are to serve them and their work. Brothers are reuniting, which means we are seeing another repeated aspect of God's way of life, serving one another and living in harmony. When the priests and Levites work together, they return to a garden ideal of **working** and **serving**.

Plus, they are promised plenty of nutritious eating, which echoes Yahweh's generosity to the priests of the garden who were given freedom to eat of every tree except one. Just as Adam and Eve had to trust Yahweh's wisdom for their sustenance, the Levitical priests have to do the same.

Numbers 18:32

Generous Trusting

Cain's anger toward Abel back in Genesis 4 focused on the quality, the “fat” or the “best,” of Abel's sacrifice to God. God affirmed that Abel's way of generous trust, which manifested in his willingness to give his best to God, was the way to live a good life. Now the chosen line of priests are called to offer up the fat portions to Yahweh.

Yahweh told Cain that he could avoid sin if he chose to do what is good. Now Yahweh warns the priests that they will avoid sin if they choose to obey these instructions. Obeying the instructions of Yahweh, in regards to these offering portions, allows the priests to avoid sinning (profaning the sacred gifts) and death as a result of rebellion.

Along with 18:31, these two verses provide a blessing and a warning from Yahweh that echo the testing of the humans in the garden. Just as Yahweh said the humans could eat from various trees in the garden, he now tells the priests, “you may eat it anywhere.” In tandem, Yahweh warned Adam and Eve not to eat of the forbidden tree, or they would surely die. Here Yahweh tells the priests that profaning the sacred gifts will also lead to death.



Numbers 20:12

Moses Fails His Test

The people become so frustrated by their inability to find water, they nearly drive Moses crazy by constantly blaming him. Yahweh rescues the situation with a gracious provision of water, but Moses ends up making a mistake.

The text highlights that Moses chose wrong in his time of testing, by “not trusting” and consequently “not treating Yahweh as holy in the sight of the people.” (His actions were supposed to represent the unique holiness and otherness of God, but instead he ends up suggesting God might be petty or vindictive.) As a result, Moses is not allowed to enter the promised land.

Moses has been instructed to represent Yahweh completely, as a leader of the people, so his behavior represents God’s behavior. Acting in an ungodly way while standing in a position of representing God presents a deadly conflict, consistent with the testing pattern. Moses does not die immediately, but he will not be able to enter the rest of God.

Notice too that the people are complaining about how the wilderness is not an Eden place (e.g., Num. 20:5; no vines, fruit, water, etc.). For Adam and Eve, and now for Moses, failing the test leads to being outside the land, which is equated with death.

Numbers 20:24

Aaron Fails His Test

Aaron failed the test alongside his brother in the wilderness. Although Moses was the one who struck the rock, Aaron as co-leader maintained his participation with Moses in not trusting God. Therefore, he would also die outside of the land of promise.

Notice how Moses’ and Aaron’s actions are difficult to separate in the passage. This is common, especially throughout the book of Exodus where the actions of Yahweh, Moses, and Aaron are often melded together. The point is that they represent each other and work as a unit. Moses and Aaron carry a high responsibility to always serve, lead, and represent Yahweh well.

The text highlights that Aaron rebelled, putting him in the same position as the people, who rebelled in Numbers 20:10 and did not believe (Num. 14:11). Rebelling and not believing become mapped onto one another as mutually defining or parallel ideas.

At this point, the people have chosen not to trust Yahweh (Num. 14), and Moses has chosen not to trust Yahweh (Num. 20:12), and now Aaron chooses not to trust Yahweh either (Num. 20:24). Each person, in his or her own way, has failed the test, leading to expulsion from the garden—death outside the camp and death outside the land of blessing and life.



Numbers 21:5

Languishing in Complaints

The grumbling continues as Israel complains about Yahweh's decisions and instructions while also complaining about his chosen leader, Moses. They continue to say that their deliverance from Egypt was worse than staying in Egypt. Following God has not brought fast satisfaction, even as it has brought freedom and life. The wilderness is a place of testing, and as the people languish in grumbling, they are unnecessarily embracing more death.

Over and over, we see a lack of desired food and water prompting testing scenes. The land God promised sounded rich and full of life, but the wilderness is scarce. This is no place for life, the people decide. Yet the story shows Yahweh consistently, patiently, and firmly teaching Israel that life is deeper and fuller than they know. Yes, life is about what can be seen and felt and sensed. But true, deep, human life, like the life first given in the garden, is found by those who choose to listen to God's voice and trust him. In the place of testing, whether a lush garden or barren wilderness, God promises to always give true life. The choice to turn away from him always ends in death.

Numbers 21:8

Looking at Life

Israel has chosen a more tempting option than to trust God, failing the test and bringing about harsh consequences. With a plague of snakes, it's almost as if they are tangibly having to face the decisions they are making, or the "snakes they are choosing." It's an ironic reversal of the garden language of Genesis 2, where the snake brought death. Here, God is saying he can take what seems like death and make it life.

Yahweh's instruction is almost too simple, if they will simply look in a different direction. If they pay attention to a different voice, they will find life. In contrast to the story of the quail, where the people complained and grumbled over a lack of food (see also Num. 21:5), this story results in life in the midst of a failed test. All they have to do is choose.

In the New Testament, John's Gospel picks up this scene in John 3:14, using it as an analogy for what would happen to Jesus of Nazareth. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up," he writes, using the same pattern we have been tracing here. John seems to say that even in the midst of whatever "failure" narrative one finds him or herself in, paying attention to Jesus, or looking at him, is a decision that moves people into true life, just as it did for these Israelites and the bronze snake.

The pattern suggests that a change from looking down at death to looking up at life is somehow part of passing or failing the test.



Numbers 21:34

Fighting Fear

Moses again faces an opportunity to trust or distrust the word of Yahweh. The test is on. Yahweh promises to protect Israel against its enemies. Therefore, he says, do not be afraid. Fear is deep in the heart of each of these test scenes—fear of starvation, fear of thirst, fear of sickness, and fear of war. But Yahweh continues to remind the people that he will protect them and deliver on his promises.

Notice the land emphasis here. The result of choosing to trust Yahweh is the gaining of good land. We saw how failing the test led to losing good land (see Num. 14 and 20). Here, however, Moses' willingness to trust and follow God's way leads to an inheritance of good land.

Numbers 22:2

Seeing Good or Bad

The verb "saw" is certainly not rare in the Hebrew Bible, so we cannot say that every instance of saw or "seeing" connects to the testing pattern. But most do. Subtle as it may seem, the author is sending a signal. If someone is looking or seeing something, they may be facing a decision about whether to trust God's way or not.

Here, a foreign king named Balak is tested. How will he deal with Israel? He's heard scary things about these people, and like the Pharaoh of Exodus, he's not interested in losing what he's got. The author puts words from Pharaoh into Balak's mouth as Balak says the people are "too numerous" (Num. 22:3) and "too mighty" (Num. 22:6) before calling out his magicians. The author does not want readers to miss that connection. And there's more!

These Moabites are the extended family (brothers) of the Israelites, but they do not want to acknowledge the blessing that the children of Abraham have. We've seen this repeated theme as well—brothers in discord and stepping outside of the way of God. And this always leads to corruption and death.

Balak calls for Balaam the magician, and he credits Balaam with having the power to determine the blessing and cursing of someone. "For I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed," Balak says (Num. 22:6). As the story unfolds, however, he will have a new option in terms of who to trust. What will he choose?

Numbers 22:31

Eyes Wide Open

The authors keep this testing scene alive with a unique opportunity from Yahweh, a blessing of sight that could prevent death.

Balaam's eyes are finally opened, and he is able to see rightly. Opening the eyes recalls the garden (and so does the talking animal), but this time, it is the good work of God



opening the eyes. Balaam is seeing through God's eyes! Seeing rightly has everything to do with wisdom and understanding the difference between good and bad.

This scene is a contrast to Adam and Eve's garden scene, where they take the deceitful advice of a talking animal. Brutal as the consequence is, at the end they do have open eyes to see that God was not lying to them. They can see that the snake was the real liar. So in Eden, the talking animal lies to lead to death, but here, the talking animal tells the truth, which leads to life.

Numbers 24:1

Balaam Chooses Wisely

Balaam finally sees the blessing of Israel, recognizing the God it comes from, and he sees that it pleases God to bless Israel. This is a good thing, he determines, thereby aligning himself with the people. In Hebrew, when something is pleasing, authors often say that it "was good in the eyes of" the onlooker. During the creation narratives, God also looked at his work and said it was good. Balaam is passing the test by rightly seeing Israel in a manner that parallels the God of creation!

Balaam was hired for pay and enjoyed the benefits of being a prophet. However, his test was to see if he'd be willing to release the benefits offered by Balak and instead choose to heed Yahweh's instruction to bless Israel. Literarily speaking, the money becomes a form of forbidden fruit that he is deciding whether or not to grab.

He does not go to seek "omens," a word in Hebrew that sounds eerily familiar to "snake," echoing Genesis 3. The author is saying Balaam chooses not to follow the way of the snake.



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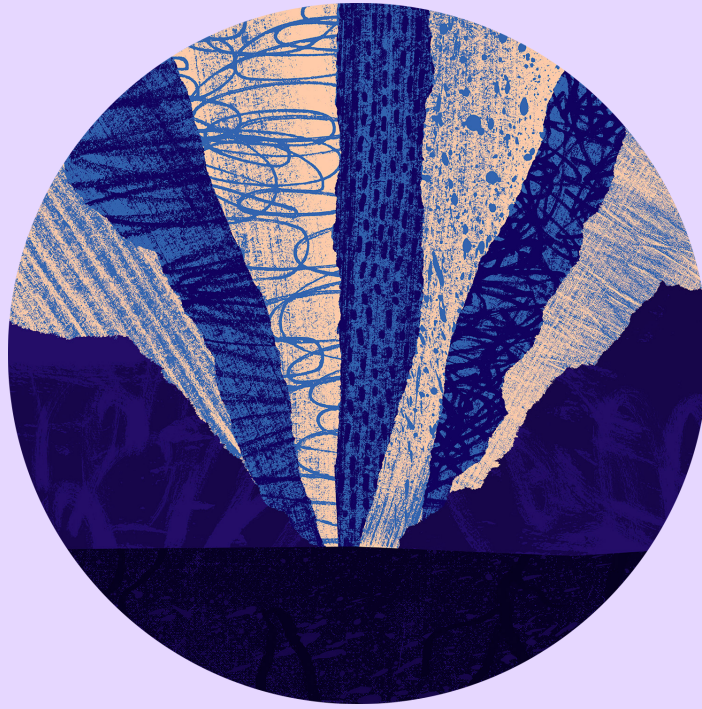
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NUMBERS SCROLL

Movement 3: Preparing to Enter

The story unfolding here has to do with Israel's new generation and its willingness, or lack thereof, to listen to Yahweh's instructions as they journey into the promised land.

Watch

[Numbers video](#)

Read

Numbers 26:1-36:13

Primary Pattern

[The Land](#)

Eden and everything about it—peace, provision, ongoing blessing and life without death—is the stencil biblical authors use to pattern the land concept from the Bible's beginning to end. God has not only created life. He has also created good (*tov* in Hebrew) land for that life to freely flourish upon.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Numbers 26:53

Dividing the New Eden

In this chapter, Yahweh commands Moses and Eleazar to take a second census of the people so that, when they enter the land, they can fairly divide it according to the number of people in each tribe. The dividing of the land is one way that the land is being portrayed as a new Eden.

In the beginning, God tells humans to be fruitful, multiply, fill the land, and exercise authority over it (Gen. 1:28). Their existence is meant to be secure and peaceful. The census shows that the people had been following God's way and had, therefore, multiplied as designed. Now they are ready to fill the land.

Dividing the land is both a way of exercising authority over it and also providing lasting security for each family. The apportioning of inheritance according to tribal size and by casting lots was a way of maintaining equity and security. Notice in Numbers 26:62 that the Levites are not given an inheritance among the tribes of Israel, which at first sounds unequal. But they will also find security through particular cities and agricultural properties in the land. In this way, they will also partake in the Eden blessing of the land, but the setup is complex and will be explored later in chapters 35-36.

Numbers 26:65

No Trust, No Belief, No Entry

The census reveals that those who did not believe would not enter the land. To die in the wilderness is the opposite of living in the land.

In addition to providing an equitable way to divide the land, the census also shows that none of the earlier generation had survived, except Caleb and Joshua. This recalls the narrative of Israel's failure to trust Yahweh in Numbers 14, which resulted in their failure to enter the land. Only Caleb and Joshua, the two spies who trusted Yahweh, were allowed to possess the land.

The point is that dwelling in the land requires trust in Yahweh. This is an idea founded in the Eden narrative, where the unity of the relationships between humans and between humanity and God is the design. Recall that the exile from the garden occurred because the humans chose not to trust Yahweh and relied instead on their own definitions of good and bad. Dwelling in Eden, in this case the new Eden-like land of Canaan, will be marked by relationships of trust and harmony.

Numbers 27:4

Security for the Vulnerable

This chapter contains a story about five daughters whose immediate family stands to lose its inheritance of land among their tribe because there are no surviving males. This case raises the issue of how to preserve a family's land in the absence of sons and is followed by other examples of how to preserve a family's inheritance (see verses 9-11).



The story is about reaffirming the promise of inheritance to each family and about how the people will continue their traditions by adapting them to work with life in their new world. As a narrative, it provides a model for the creative adaptation of the laws of Yahweh in accordance with their nature as true wisdom. Here, we see the law reshaped to allow daughters to inherit the land. The custom being disputed is whether land should only belong to males. The values of equal distribution, stability of tribal inheritance and identity, and security for the vulnerable in society (in this case, five young women with no father) are upheld against the traditional value of inheritance that is contingent on patriarchal lineage.

These women provide a model for the next generation by appealing to core values, which, according to the way the author has set this up, is an appeal to Eden-like living. The result is that both women and men can inherit and rule the land, just as they were designed to do in the creation narratives. The land is portrayed as a secure place for everyone, male and female alike, and in this way, it will be a taste of the Eden promise of security and unity.

Numbers 27:12

Seeing What Is Real

The land should be a place of trust in Yahweh. God tells Moses to go up on a mountain and **see** the land which he has **given** to Israel. The command has at least three major effects.

First, the command reminds the reader that Moses was not allowed to enter the land because of his lack of belief in God (Num. 20:12). This further makes the point that entering the land is tied to trusting relationships with Yahweh.

Second, the command echoes the provision of the land in Genesis 1. There, the land was given as a place of safety and life. Yet Moses, like Adam and Eve, didn't trust in Yahweh and was not able to enter.

Third, the command is also reminiscent of the language of the failed test in the garden, where the woman sees that the fruit of the tree is good, and then takes it and gives it to her husband (Gen. 3:6). Here, the land is portrayed as good in God's eyes and a gift he has given to Israel. Because it is God doing the seeing and giving, this command functions as a reversal of the act of mistrust that led to the humans' exile from the garden.

The ideal land is depicted as one where the people settle within it as God's people, trusting fully in him and the human way of life he instructs.



Numbers 28:26

Grain Offerings and Firstfruit Offerings

Firstfruit and grain offerings assume a fruitful land and a fulfillment of the ideal role of humanity in keeping the land. Giving grain and firstfruits offerings will happen when the land is bountiful and the people are in it.

In chapters 28-29, the author summarizes some of the instructions for worship given at previous points in the narrative (especially Lev. 23). The authors summarize daily offerings, Sabbath offerings, monthly offerings, and offerings during feasts. It may be that these instructions are reiterated here for the new generation that now exists after the new census in chapter 26.

In these instructions, we see a variety of offerings that the Israelites are commanded to give to Yahweh. Among them are grain offerings and firstfruit offerings. Grain offerings involve fine flour from a harvest of wheat or barley; firstfruit offerings are given from the first harvest of the year. The depiction is one where the Israelites will settle in the land and cultivate it for agriculture and farming so that the land will be fruitful for them.

The fruitful land depicts the fulfillment of the Eden blessing in Genesis 1:28-29, where the humans are told to subdue the land and are given every fruitful plant for food. The fruitful land also depicts the initial task of working and keeping the garden, given to the human in Genesis 2:15.

These chapters are pointing forward to settling in the land and partaking in the Eden blessing.

Numbers 32:5

A New Generation

The land east of the Jordan is also portrayed as an Eden-like land. This story creates some tension in the plotline, which so far has been heading toward the possession of the land God promised to Israel.

In language reminiscent of the initial failure narrative of Genesis 3, we find the tribes of Reuben and Gad **seeing** the land east of Canaan and deciding that it would be **good** for them to settle there rather than cross over. This kind of assessment of whether a land is good or not led to failure in Numbers 13. So we are left wondering whether this too will be a failure narrative.

But this story makes a comparison to show that this generation is different from their ancestors. Moses himself makes the comparison when he interprets their request to not cross over into the land as similar to what the spies did in discouraging the people not to go into the land that God had promised the Israelites (Num. 13). The result was that none of that generation could enter the land—another threat to the entry of the promised land!



But the tribes of Reuben and Gad show that they are not motivated by unbelief (as their ancestors were) when they say they will bring the other tribes into the land and will not leave until those tribes have received their inheritance (Num. 32:17-18). This story creates hope for the trust that is required for Israel to enter the promised land.

This story also shows that the promise of inheriting the land is not restricted to the physical land of Canaan. This Eden-like existence can occur even outside of the land proper. It can be wherever God is blessing—there are other ways for God to fulfill his promises to the people.

Numbers 33:1

Up from Bad, into Good

This section summarizes everything from the time of Passover up to this moment as the people are finally ready to enter the land. It's a story of God's blessing and ongoing provision in the midst of the people's history of turning away from God, paying attention to voices of fear and distrust, and failing the test. The people are going from one land up into another as they become a new kind of people.

Interestingly, the story breaks traditional form in two places to include a comment about how both Moses and Aaron were indeed faithful to Yahweh's command (see Num. 33:2, 38). This is surprising in light of how these two leaders were not allowed to enter the land, offering readers a complex and positive portrayal of a believing generation building hope for a successful entry.

Numbers 33:52

One God in the Land

Participating in the Eden blessing requires worship of Yahweh alone. God intends that the land of Canaan be like a new Eden, providing blessing through Israel to all the nations (Gen. 12:1-3). For this to happen, Yahweh needs to remain at the center of his people.

Dwelling in the land of Eden and experiencing its fruitfulness involve trust in Yahweh. Yahweh is depicted as dwelling among his human partners in the garden (see Gen. 3:8), but when they choose not to trust him, they are exiled from the garden land (see Gen. 3:22-24). It was failure to trust, or believe, that kept the previous generation from entering the land (see Num. 14 and 20).

Blessing begins in Eden (or an Eden-like space) and extends out to the entire world. This generation stands on the precipice of entering this land, and Yahweh reminds them that when they enter, they are to worship him alone. The problem is that other nations worship their own gods, and the threat is that they would lead the people away from worship of Yahweh, just as they did a few chapters earlier (see Num. 25).



To keep the people dwelling in the land and in trusting relationship with him, Yahweh commands that the people drive out the inhabitants there, so that they do not turn away to worship the gods of the nations. He tells them to destroy their figured stones, molten images, and high places, which are all ways that the nations practiced their worship of other gods (Num. 33:52).

Notice how instructions for fairly apportioning the land are given again—each family should have an inheritance according to their size. The emphasis is on how the laws surrounding the land should provide order and justice for the people.

Numbers 34:2

Divine Borders

The border descriptions of the land provide a concrete indication that God's promise to give the people real, tangible property to live on is going to happen. This is the specific place where he wants to provide abundance and bless Israel with the promises first made to their forefathers Abraham (Gen. 15:18-21), Isaac (Gen. 26:4), and Jacob (Gen. 28:13-14). To each, God specifically said he would provide the land of Canaan to their descendents. This will be the Israelites' first experience of life in the land since the patriarchs sojourned there in Genesis.

The delineation of the boundaries also echoes the order that God built into his creation from the beginning, where he set a boundary between land and sea to create a space conducive for ongoing life. Yahweh is never described as chaotic, and his ordering of the world reveals divine wisdom we can continue to meditate upon.

Sidenote: God is giving real ownership of land here. Historically speaking, land disputes often fuel violent, chaotic wars between families and nations. So why not eliminate the concept of land ownership altogether? Why wouldn't God simply do away with borders? Whatever we conclude, in this part of the story, he appears to give human beings real ownership of property, and he instructs them to use it like Yahweh is using his property (all creation)—its purpose is to abundantly bless and give life to others.

Recall Genesis 12:1-3, where Yahweh gives his original promise to Abraham, noting that he's blessing Abraham's family so that they will ultimately bless "all the families of the earth." God is giving this specific land to these people so that they can live like he lives, as people who love and give tangible blessing to others.

Numbers 34:17

Divine Property Lines

After establishing the larger border of the whole land, the story now shifts to describe the internal divisions of land by Israel's leaders. Tracing the land pattern helps us see previous themes emerging here. The specific territorial and tribal information in this section may feel irrelevant or inaccessible for modern readers, so we have to focus more on the land themes already established. Apportioning the land is, in itself, the key.



Remember, the people are not in the land yet. They are being prepared by Yahweh to enter, and part of that preparation now focuses on what they're going to do when they move in. One thing they *will not* do is begin fighting over land, a problem-solving method that always favors the most powerful and leads to oppression. Instead, God teaches them to fairly, justly, and generously give more than enough land to each of the groups within the community. And what is the intended result? From all we have been reading about land so far, it appears that God is offering Eden-like safety and security—a space filled with peace, well-being, and *shalom*.

Notice here (Num. 34:17) how we see Israel being led by the priestly figure Eleazar and the prophetic figure Joshua. Then, a leader from each tribe is chosen, and the tribes are listed in rough order from south to north. The authors are showing readers that Israel, as an entire community, is to become a priest and prophet to the world around it. Israel's leaders represent the character of the nation as a whole, as a priest (see Exod. 19:4-6) and a prophet, living within God's order and wisdom so that the surrounding world can also learn and find blessing.

Numbers 35:2

Vulnerable and Blessed

Israel's tribes receive generous portions of land, except the Levites (see Num. 26). Why? Numbers 18:23-24 explained that the Levites have no land inheritance because the generosity of other Israelites from other tribes will be their inheritance.

Here, as the other lands get divided up, Levites are not given one space to live. Instead, they are given "pasture lands around the cities." This arrangement provides a significant addition to the land pattern, as it reveals a sense of reciprocal giving in the heart of Yahweh's wisdom. He's giving land to the other tribes so that they will give land to their brothers and sisters in the tribes of Levi, and the Levites are commissioned by God to serve the entire nation always, every day, as priests. The reciprocation of gifts among human beings creates goodwill and social bonding, and this is all part of God's good creation.

So the Levites have no tribal land, no place to call their own. This position is both vulnerable and blessed. Read carefully and notice how those who have more give more, and those who have less give less. Each person is to offer a right proportion from what they actually have. Once more we see this land from God connected with justice, equity, security, and people living in harmony with one another. Also, notice how this arrangement ends up distributing Levites throughout every tribe of Israel, which means that God's priests will be among everyone, concretely reminding the people of their sacred relationship with Yahweh.



Numbers 35:11

Safe Cities

Six of the Levites' cities are set apart as "cities of refuge." These are cities where someone who kills another person **unintentionally** may find refuge or safety as they wait for their case to be brought before the community (see also Num. 35:24). These cities bear Eden-like characteristics as they provide security for human beings and make a way for peaceful restoration of brothers and sisters, including neighboring nations.

The cities are given on both sides of the Jordan, validating that the Eastern tribes are also part of the nation—there is supposed to be unity and peace between brothers, recapitulating the Eden blessing (Num. 35:14). The cities are for Israelites, foreigners, and sojourners. In other words, justice and safety is for everyone (Num. 35:15).

Here, the authors are again expanding the concept of Eden beyond a specific garden from long ago to any land on earth where the qualities and characteristics of Eden are present. The cities of refuge, then, are Eden spaces in non-Eden-like worlds. Death and corruption, which are not part of Eden, are inevitably going to happen. And death and blood will pollute the ground. But God brings order and peace to that chaos with instructions to live in a way that avoids more killing and war.

We are watching the start of a massive shift in human consciousness, from a vengeance-based society to one that is patient, humble, loving, and ordered in a way that restrains chaos and ongoing death.

Numbers 35:33

No Pollution!

The land must be kept pure from violence, blood, and death so that God and his goodness may dwell among the people there in his eternally life-giving ways. As we have consistently seen, he is always inviting people to join him in the same good life, flourishing on land that has not been polluted or corrupted by death.

This section on bloodshed emphasizes one of the most serious threats to living in the land. The land is a sacred space, like the tabernacle, because God is dwelling within it (Num. 35:34). Throughout the Bible, violence, especially in the form of bloodshed, pollutes the land (see Gen. 4:10-11; 6:11-12).

Notice how the authors portray the land almost like its own character in the Bible—the **land itself** "cries out" to God when violence occurs upon it, and it responds to human evil by no longer giving its fruitfulness (see Gen. 3:17; 4:10-11). The land must be cared for and kept pure by dealing with violence according to God's instructions, whenever it occurs. In the case that someone kills another person unintentionally, they must go to a city of refuge (Num. 35:11). They cannot buy their freedom with money—death is serious, and life is sacred. Instead, they must wait for the death of the high priest.

That instruction feels abrasive, especially to modern readers. Why wait for the death of the high priest? Much could be said, but two points are worth emphasizing here.



First, a sense of justice emerges when we realize that the offender killed unintentionally, or by chance, so now that person must await the death of the priest by chance.

Second, the death of the high priest alone is the way that the death of another may be atoned for. This contributes to the picture of a priestly figure who steps in to intercede, providing his own life as an atonement for the lives of others. On the day the high priest died, people who had retreated to cities of refuge in fear of death now have new lives given to them—they are forgiven and restored. When the priest dies, so do the consequences of death.

By tracing the land pattern, we can become mindful about the character and nature of the land. It's a place where death is not returned for death, where the sword stops begetting the sword, and where a high priest absorbs that death and takes it into the grave.

Numbers 36:3

How to Lose the Inheritance

The conflict faced in this chapter is about what happens when a family's inheritance gets passed out of one tribe and into another. In the case where a daughter who has inherited land and marries a man from another tribe, based on previously established laws from God, her tribe's inheritance would pass to her husband's tribe. What do we do then?

The final conclusion is to adapt the law itself, providing a significant clue for understanding the nature of God's instructions. Laws are static and do not fluctuate, but humanity is dynamic and constantly changing. So which one is more important? Is humanity supposed to form itself into a never-changing system of regulations to serve the law? Or is the law supposed to adapt for a constantly changing community of human beings to serve them? Put simply, was humankind created for the law, or was the law created for humankind?

In this story in Numbers, they adapt the law so that the same Eden ideals can continue in this now-changed world. Secure, ordered inheritances of land are going to be a constant in Eden. There will not be families or nations who amass unequal portions of wealth.

Tracing the land pattern from Eden, through all the Hebrew Bible, through the New Testament to its final book, Revelation, will consistently demonstrate that this land from God is a permanent blessing to be enjoyed within a fluctuating humanity.

By instructing the people in this way, God seems to be saying that he wants his people to live freely, adapting the laws when the time requires it. And this freedom will be experienced when they are living with God's wisdom and order. Here, and in the New Testament, the picture of freedom given from God is never a freedom from restraint and always a freedom to live within reality, according to the wisdom and order built into the creation humanity belongs to.

Related Resources

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Deuteronomy Scroll



DEUTERONOMY SCROLL

Movement 1: The Agreement

Israel's new generation is camped at the edge of the Jordan River, with the promised land on the other side. But Moses' journey will end here—he will not cross over with them. So he gathers the people for an important message, inviting them to live differently than the previous generation.

Watch

[Deuteronomy video](#)

Read

Deuteronomy 1:1-11:32

Primary Pattern

[Listen and Love](#)

Two instructions—listen and love—form a central theme in Deuteronomy and the most important instruction in the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Deuteronomy 1:16

An Attentive Response

The Hebrew word “*shama*” can be translated as “hear” in this verse. Specifically, it’s about hearing a case so well that the hearer truly understands what is happening. The listener pays close attention to both sides of a dispute and forms impartial responses based on truth rather than showing favoritism based on social status.

To this point, Yahweh has consistently clarified that he alone judges honestly. Still, he is always training humanity to live as he does, so he delegates judging responsibilities to some of the Israelites on his behalf. He wants them to judge righteously because he judges righteously and because fair decisions benefit everyone involved.

Deuteronomy 1:16-18 offers a short narrative about Moses appointing these judges, and the authors repeat the word “*shama*” three times. When the authors concentrate repetitions like this, they underscore the main point. Here, we read that effective listening is about 1) carefully paying attention to one’s interlocutor, 2) using wise discernment before responding, and 3) following through with active, right responses.

Hearing involves understanding *and* acting.

Deuteronomy 1:43

You Didn’t Listen

What does Yahweh mean here? That the people simply weren’t paying attention, or that they could not hear? He says, “I spoke to you [Israelites], but you would not listen,” which suggests that human choice, or will, was involved. It’s not that they could not or did not. It’s that they *would not* listen.

He offers clarity in the next clause of this same verse, “Instead you rebelled ... and acted presumptuously.” The verbs there—acted and rebelled—signal intentional choices to 1) avoid paying attention to Yahweh’s instruction and 2) act in an opposing way, one rooted in human assumption rather than trust in God.

Hypothetically, if Israel listened as Yahweh meant for them to, they would not have rebelled against him or acted with presumption. Therefore, listening has to be about accepting the instructions of God and then trusting God’s understanding of reality more than our presumptions.

Simply stated, listening to God and actively trusting God are two aspects of the same way of life.



Deuteronomy 1:45

God Stops Listening

Throughout the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, listening often describes a human activity, but not always. Tracing the listen pattern helps us see several scenarios where Yahweh is the listener and sometimes stops listening to people. Typically, God responds to the cries of his people by acting on their behalf, but sometimes, when his people stop listening to him, he stops listening to them.

Note: This is not Yahweh expressing a vindictive, “get even” attitude toward his people. In this case, Yahweh had instructed them to avoid the hill country, and he told them they would be defeated if they fought. But the people did not listen because they did not act as Yahweh instructed. As a result, they are crushed and chased out in fear (Deut. 1:44), returning quickly to Yahweh with new pleas for more help. But at that time, he chooses not to respond.

Listening and trusting are two sides of the same coin called “choosing to act.” In other words, neither listening nor trusting can happen without acting. When the author says Yahweh “did not listen,” the point is not about whether God could hear the pleas of his people—he could. But in love and wisdom, he warned them about what would happen and did not intervene. So whoever the listener is, not listening means not responding.

Deuteronomy 2:25

Hearing the Report

As Moses recounts Israel’s travel and combat stories (cf. Num. 20-21), he focuses on what happened after Yahweh instructed them to “begin to take possession” of the promised land (Deut. 2:24).

To help Israel succeed against its enemies, Yahweh put dread and fear of them into everyone, everywhere. How did this happen? God said that when other people “hear a report of you [Israel],” they will experience fear.

Here, readers may hear an echo from the flood story (Gen. 6-9). When the floodwaters recede, God says to Noah that the “fear of you and the terror of you” will be on all the animals in the world (Gen. 9:2). We encounter the same idea in this Deuteronomy passage. Israel is being portrayed as a new kind of flood that is pouring into the corrupted land to drive out death, corruption, and chaos.

Deuteronomy 3:26

Listening Is Believing

Here, listening means hearing and agreeing. Moses has been pleading with Yahweh for permission to enter the promised land, but God keeps saying no, even to the point of frustration. “Enough! Speak to me no more about this!” he says.

Why is Moses unable to enter this land of life and promise?



The reason given is that he didn't listen to God. Adam and Eve experienced the same consequence—when they stopped listening to God (obeying his instruction), they could no longer live in the place of real life. They get expelled. And how do they respond? They blame each other.

The narrator shows Moses blaming the people of Israel, essentially saying, "You people made me choose poorly! You are why I didn't listen, and now God's not listening to me!" In this sense, listening appears to be synonymous with believing and following. When the separate parties stop listening, chaos and frustration ensue. But when the listening continues, harmony becomes possible again.

Deuteronomy 4:1

Listening Is Living

These final instructions from Moses are not personal opinions or perspectives. These are divine directives that present Israel with the choice between living and dying, and the concept of listening expands here.

Listening means inheriting the land—listening means living. And living in the land of their inheritance will require listening. All three ideas exist in parallel, and this story contrasts the previous stories of Israel and Moses. Their failure to trust and listen ended in their inability to enter the promised land.

When Israel enters the promised land, listening to the statutes and ordinances will be the same as enjoying life and living close with Yahweh—just like Adam and Eve.

Deuteronomy 4:30

Hoping to Become Listeners

Through Moses, God tells Israel that it will become a listening people. They did not listen in the past, but they will listen in the future—once they've walked through a tremendous season of suffering. This hope will become a lifeline during Israel's times of deep suffering.

However brutal things get (see 4:25-29), the people can trust that God is leading them and making them into a living, listening people. Becoming listeners who are attuned to Yahweh means becoming people who really live.

As the author states in 4:31, Yahweh promises never to abandon or destroy them because he will not break his covenant promises, and he has promised them that all he is doing is intended to restore them into fully alive human beings.



Deuteronomy 4:37

A Perfect Combination

This first mention of love in Deuteronomy describes a feeling but also speaks to actions and choices. The Hebrew verb “*ahav*” can be translated as “to love”, and we will start seeing the authors connect it tightly to *shama*, which means “hear” or “listen” in English.

Moses reminds everyone that Yahweh’s decision to set Israel free from slavery was a choice to *ahav*—love—them and their ancestors. Yahweh’s destruction of Pharaoh’s evil empire was not only to demonstrate divine superiority or challenge oppressive rulers. Yahweh’s love compelled him to rescue his people, and Moses says the same love is driving God now.

Notice the action of love. Yahweh’s desire to *ahav* is about keeping the promises he made when establishing a covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To *ahav* is not merely about having warm affections or passive experiences of emotion. Real *ahav*—real love—is an action, and in this case, God’s real love becomes tangible activity as he makes good on his promises to Israel and its ancestors.

Deuteronomy 5:1

Ten Commandments, Part Two

Here, Moses gives the Ten Commandments again—this time to the children of the Exodus generation. “Hear, O Israel!” he says, addressing these people the same way he addressed the previous generation who first received the commands.

Notice how “today” becomes an emphasis point. Today is the day they are hearing his voice, so today is the day to *shama*—to listen. That means this is not about what we should have, could have, or would have done previously. This isn’t about waiting until a safer or better time in the future when listening might be easier. This is about now, Moses says to Israel. Listen in this moment—*today*.

Tracing the pattern so far, we have read that listening leads to living and both are about love. If Moses is reminding them that today is the day to listen, we can glean from the phrase that he is talking about a moment-to-moment way of life. He appears to be teaching them that choosing the way of Yahweh is possible, so listen to him and love him. Unlike their parents’ mistakes from yesterday, the people can keep and do what he instructs today.

Deuteronomy 5:10

Love and Lovingkindness Reciprocated

Loving and listening fuse together even more in this verse, offering a good example of the way pattern tracing helps readers more fully understand biblical writers. Notice how the author says Yahweh’s *khesed*, or lovingkindness, will pour out on human beings who love (*ahav*) God and keep his commands. It does not overtly say that such *khesed* gets poured out on those who listen well.



But consider the way Deuteronomy's authors have been repeating and connecting "listen" so far in the pattern. When Moses says Israel failed to keep God's commands, he also says they were refusing to listen—not keeping commands means not listening. Here, when it says God pours his lovingkindness out on those who keep his commands, we see the authors drawing both ideas into one. People who keep God's commands are also people who listen, and listening to God is inseparably part of experiencing his generous *khesed*. Furthermore, people who are listening and keeping are also actively loving God—three aspects of one way of life.

The reciprocal nature of a relationship with God becomes clearer here. To receive *khesed* (lovingkindness) from God, one will also *ahav* (love) him. This is how grace works, one party giving to another so that the receiving party reciprocates gifts of gratefulness and love. And it becomes the foundation of the apostolic teaching on grace in the New Testament (e.g., "We love him because he first loved us" in 1 John 4:19).

Deuteronomy 5:23

Listening Requires Nearness

We have seen listening closely connected to keeping God's commands—doing them, obeying them, etc. This link gives insight into another dimension of listening: relational proximity.

Moses recalls Yahweh's voice from the fire cloud that appeared on Mount Sinai (see Exod. 19-20). Upon hearing his voice, the people experience overwhelming terror and ask God to back off. They assume that if God doesn't, they will die. That's when God establishes Moses as a middleman, a mediator between God and humans who can draw near to Yahweh and hear his voice. Then Moses speaks God's words to the people, offering them a chance to listen and have life (cf. Deut. 5:33).

Notice that this short narrative is about proximity. Pay attention to the repetition of the word "near" throughout, and see how "go near" (i.e., close proximity) and "hear" are tightly paired (see 5:27).

Deuteronomy 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:5

Life Essentials

Listening without loving is impossible, and loving without listening will not work. The authors will continue tying these ideas together into one way of life—the way of love-motivated listening.

This prayer is traditionally called the Shema, something every Israelite prays every morning and evening. The particularly pious also pray it at midday, and nobody had permission to avoid praying. (There was one exception: A son did not have to say the Shema on the day of his father's death, presumably because of grieving and burial responsibilities.)



The opening word, “*shema*,” is a command to listen: “Hear, O Israel!” And the major instruction is to love (*ahav*) Yahweh. People are reciting God’s will for them, which is that they would be formed into people who love Yahweh with every part of their lives. Later, when Jesus is questioned about the greatest commandment, he repeats this prayer and adds the instruction to love one’s neighbor with the same kind of love (see Matt. 22:36-40).

Loving and listening are central to the entire law and work of God.

Deuteronomy 7:9

Mutual Affection

The Israelites are peering over the Jordan River at the ominous (yet promising) land their parents refused to enter. Moses is trying to encourage them—not by promising a triumphant military defeat of their enemies but with a bold call to remember God’s steadfast love.

Keep on loving Yahweh, Moses says, and Yahweh is going to keep on loving us as he’s been doing all along.

Here, the authors again emphasize the reciprocal nature of human and divine love. Those who love God will simultaneously experience God loving them. This does not mean a person’s love for God makes him love them back. The story has shown him consistently loving humanity. Instead, it suggests that a human’s ability to know and experience God’s love will be directly related to the way they choose to love God in return. And because those who love God also listen to him, they are keeping his commands. Keeping is part of loving, loving is keeping, and both are part of listening.

Yahweh’s lovingkindness, *khesed*, compels him to keep the covenant. His choice to keep his word moves human beings to love (*ahav*). In the end, both human and divine enter a way of loving that truly participates in the divine nature, and this mutual way of love continues to “the thousandth generation,” a Hebrew idiom that means “forever.”

Deuteronomy 8:20

Life and Death Voices

The garden of Eden story does not include the nomadic tribes and carved idols we read about in Deuteronomy, but it does present a choice, or a test, similar to the one Israel faces here. In Eden, two humans face two choices offered by two voices—one from God and the other from a snake. The people must either trust God and follow his command or disregard God and ignore his command.

Here in the wilderness, Israel also faces two choices presented by two voices—one from God through his command and the other from the Canaanites. Notice how the story maps the snake of the garden and the Canaanites onto one another. Just as the snake was already inhabiting the garden, here the Canaanites are already inhabiting the promised land. Deuteronomy’s authors are making this connection for readers.



They're saying, "This big scene is like that smaller opening scene. The decision humanity faces is the same!"

In the garden, Yahweh said "you shall perish" if you disregard my instruction. Similarly, Moses says to Israel "you shall perish" if you disregard God's command to not serve other gods (8:19). What reason does he give? "Because you [Israel] would not listen to the voice of the Lord your God."

Though ages have passed since the garden story, the essential choice has remained the same. Listening to God and keeping his commandment is the way to life. Ignoring God by listening to the voice that opposes him is the way to death.

Deuteronomy 9:1

Speeches Worth Hearing

Is Moses yelling at the top of his lungs here? The text does not say, but the wording suggests an emphatic, attention-grabbing challenge to the people as Moses begins another speech. And Moses has used this "Hear, O Israel!" instruction verbatim several times so far in Deuteronomy.

We see it in the opening of Deuteronomy's fifth chapter (5:1), where Moses starts a series of speeches and restates the Ten Commandments. We also see it in the opening of the foundational Shema prayer (Deut. 6:4-5).

Here, the instruction opens Moses' final speech to the people, and the authors are using "Hear, O Israel" to indicate units of thought and literary structure. Even more, they're showing that all of these speeches from Moses are worth hearing—the people should listen. In this case, *shema*, which means "listen" or "hear," signals the last speeches of Moses before he gives law updates in chapters 12-26.

Deuteronomy 9:19

Divine Listening Is Active

Paying attention to the way authors describe God listening helps us understand what listening means, and we learn here that Yahweh is not a passive listener. Referring back to the golden calf incident at Mount Sinai (Exod. 32), Moses reminds Israel that God's anger burned hot toward them back then and that he was close to destroying Israel altogether. But Yahweh listened to Moses' assertive pleas for mercy. Rather than ignoring Moses or hearing passively, God responds and acts—listening is about responding and acting.

In 10:10, Moses talks about the same thing happening again. God did not only listen to Moses that one time. God listens again and again. And if God is the source of true life and the one who teaches humanity about life, we can say that active, responsive listening is part of real human life, as it is also part of divine life.

God listens to people, and it brings them life. Likewise, when people listen to him, they move deeper into real life. The story is revealing that God is actively listening to humans.



Deuteronomy 10:12

What Does the Lord Require?

Remember when Moses smashed the Ten Commandments tablets on Mount Sinai? In this scene, God replaces that artifact by rewriting those same commands on a new pair of stone tablets—and not with a begrudging bitterness. Instead, the authors tell us that this is about Yahweh’s endless, unrestrained love for them.

In Deuteronomy 10:10, we see that Yahweh is listening to the people, and we’ve already seen the authors tie the idea of listening to the idea of love (or in Hebrew, *shema* to *ahav*). In Deuteronomy 10:15, we read that God “set his affection and love” upon Israel. In this context, where God consistently loves Israel, Moses is telling Israel to love God back.

Revere him by walking in his way of life, Moses says, and love him while you do. This means serving Yahweh with all that you are. Notice that Yahweh is not requiring them to sacrifice children or to honor him with treasure houses full of war spoils (as many neighboring gods would require). His requirements expand on the requirement to *ahav*, to love. Like we saw in Deuteronomy 6:4-5, God is forming them not into people who merely obey him but into people who *want* to obey him, which means people who truly love him. Yahweh desires Israel’s love.

Deuteronomy 10:15

Promising to Love Without Condition

In context, these beautiful encouragements also bring formidable challenges. God is speaking through Moses to remind Israel about his love for Israel’s ancestors—“on your fathers did the Lord set his affection to love them.” He is saying, I love *you* because I loved *them*, not because you have proven to be particularly perfect or obedient. So far in Deuteronomy, the authors have been reminding readers about Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness, the golden calf problem, and many more moments of rebellion and complaints. The point? This love is not because of Israel’s actions or obedience. Yahweh’s love for his people is purer and deeper.

In Deuteronomy 7:7, we learn that God’s choice to love Israel was not related to their popularity or power (even implying that they were a relatively weak nation when he showed them love). He simply says that he loves them because he made a promise to their forefathers, and he made that promise because he loves them!

Therefore, this willingness to love (*ahav*) cannot mean earned love or conditional love. This is the work of lovingkindness (*khesed*), loyalty to a group of people who do not seem to embrace loyalty toward him. God’s will to love without condition appears to be rooted in the inherent goodness of living that way.

Notice how all of this divine love toward human beings becomes the fundamental reason for listening to him. Verse 10:16 concludes the idea by suggesting that there’s no good reason to tune God out or to “stiffen your necks” (rebel) against him any longer.



His love motivates human listening, and listening to God forms human beings into people who love him back and love others as he does.

Deuteronomy 11:1

Therefore, Love!

Two strong verbs here—love and keep—build the foundation for what the authors describe as the reasonable response to God’s love. Because of his immense love for you (see Deut. 10), you come alive when you love him back and keep his commands, which means Israel should actively respond by listening to him. In other words, people love God because he first loved them, and truly loving him includes obeying him.

Notice how loving is synonymous with keeping, and in the overall context of Deuteronomy’s first movement, both are synonymous with listening. Yahweh is not commanding Israel to manufacture a warm affectionate feeling—he is inviting the people into truthful reflection and wise, active response.

Deuteronomy 11:13

Listening Leads to Completion

“Nourishing rains for farming, robust cattle for commerce and food, lots of crops—these major benefits and many more will bring satisfaction when you truly listen to me,” God says (see 11:14-15). And not only when the people listen but also when they love. Once more, the authors pattern these two words in a way that makes them inseparable.

The culminating words are “you will eat and be satisfied.” In this case, listening leads to everything you would want out of life. Listening leads to completion and satisfaction—to fullness of life.

Deuteronomy 11:27

Always Listening, but to Whom?

In the previous verse (11:26), Yahweh gives people two choices, one leading to blessing and the other to curse. Adam and Eve faced the same decision in Eden, and they chose poorly.

Notice how the choice is not between listening and not listening. No matter what, human beings are listening to and following some kind of voice. “If you’re not listening to me,” Yahweh says, “you’ll be listening to other gods,” or *elohim* in Hebrew.

God is asking the people to trust him as they face another Jordan River crossing, this time into unknown territory. “Trust me when I teach you how to live,” God is saying, not the voices of fake authorities, rulers, or gods that promise other ways to find safety and well-being. “Those other voices ultimately bring death. Trust me by listening to me,” Yahweh says, “and you will ultimately find the blessing of real life.”



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DEUTERONOMY SCROLL

Movement 2: The Instruction

Moses continues his speech, giving final guidance to the people before they cross the Jordan River into the promised land. Here, he restates the terms of Israel's agreement with God—the instruction everyone agreed to follow.

Watch

[Deuteronomy video](#)

Read

Deuteronomy 12:1-26:14

Primary Pattern

[The Law](#)

The Hebrew word “*torah*” can be translated as “instruction” or “law.” When we trace the law pattern, we can see that God’s *torah* is more than rules and regulations—it’s about people being formed into a community driven by real love for God and others.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Deuteronomy 12:1

These Are the Statutes

Moses is speaking to the new generation of Israel, the people who watched their parents die in the wilderness because they refused to listen to God's instruction. And Moses wants this next generation to have flourishing lives in the new land.

He's introducing a long section of laws, and he wants the people to observe every statute and command all the days of their life. Following this instruction will move people into the source of true life, Yahweh.

The people need to worship Yahweh alone so that he can dwell among them. This language has Eden echoes. When Adam and Eve listened to another voice instead of Yahweh's, the human-divine partnership was fractured, and the humans were expelled from the land. The same consequence will be true for the Israelites in this new land. So Moses instructs them to destroy all the places where the previous inhabitants worshiped other gods. Notice that God does not command them to enter their neighbors' lands to destroy any idols and places of worship they find anywhere. He specifically tells Israel to eradicate every trace of other-god worship from the promised land—to cut down the old idols and destroy the old temples that exist in this land he is giving to them.

Worshiping Yahweh at the place he chooses is an act of trust in Yahweh, in contrast to "doing what is right in their own eyes" (Deut. 12:8)—a statement reminiscent of the human failure to trust God in the first garden.

Deuteronomy 12:11

Commands That Lead to Flourishing

Yahweh first shows generosity to the people, and he instructs them to do the same by living generously toward him and others. He asks them to present all their offerings at the place he chooses, and these sacrificial offerings will then provide huge feasts for individual households and whole communities.

Only the burnt offering is burned down to ash; all the other offerings are cooked on the altar, with most of the edible meat returned to the worshiper or priest for consumption. Verse 12 explains how everyone is included, and verse 13 reiterates the importance of avoiding any other kind of temple or worship space associated with the gods previously worshiped in the land before Israel arrived.

Notice how these rigid, detailed instructions all lead to the flourishing of every human being in the land. God teaches them to give to him and each other generously, and he reminds them to do this with and for him alone—at the place he shows them—never trying to mix worship of other gods into worship of him.



Deuteronomy 12:28

Enjoying Life and Doing Good

The notion of a strong deity commanding weak mortals sometimes feels unfair or even bad. Is God simply obsessed with controlling people, pushing them around, or making them do whatever he says?

Deuteronomy 12:28 is one place in the Hebrew Bible where the authors reveal God's purpose behind these commands—he wants people to enjoy life and peace. “Listen with care to everything I’m telling you,” he says to Israel, “so that it may go well with you and your children after you forever.” Since the first days of creation, this has been Yahweh’s intent.

In Genesis 1, each time God completes another part of his creation project, he says, “It is good.” Our English word “good” comes from the Hebrew word “*tov*,” which can mean “good,” “beautiful,” or “right-functioning.” A *tov* space is conducive to ongoing life, a place where all is well. Notice that part of this goodness included God’s command to Adam and Eve. Receiving instruction from God is part of a *tov* world, and the Deuteronomy authors pick that theme up here.

The word “command” recalls the first command in the garden, especially when paired with the result: “that it may be well [or *tov*] with you” and that doing these commands is doing what is good (*tov*) in the eyes or sight (*einayim*) of Yahweh. Doing what is good in the eyes is a callback to the garden story, where the humans had a choice to do what was good in their eyes or what was good in Yahweh’s eyes. The commands to eat and not eat certain things are also reminiscent of God’s command in the garden to freely eat, but not of the one tree.

Notice how the result of following these commands is a good life for this generation and their children forever and so that they would do good (Deut. 12:28). In other words, they would experience a thriving life and also participate in creating one. God desires a thriving life for this community about to enter the promised land, and he has been desiring that since he first created life.

Deuteronomy 12:32

Unlike and Unfollow

God’s way of good life for the people is unlike the ways of other ancient gods, so the authors end this section with a final command to not follow the gods of the nation they are entering, which doubles down on the opening command of chapter 12.

God’s concern is that the people would be set apart for him only, with him dwelling at their center, just as in the garden. Notice the important detail we learn about God from the reason given in 12:31. God hates the way other nations are oppressed by their gods



who require things like burning their own sons and daughters to death as sacrifices. God's way leads to ongoing life for every human being. He has a good and wise way of doing things, which he calls his people to follow and trust, even against the cultural norms surrounding them.

Deuteronomy 13:18

Specific Commands, Specific Blessing

Following Yahweh's commands leads to compassion and blessing. The listen pattern is activated again in this command: "If you will listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, keeping all his commandments..." Once more, listening links to keeping, and both focus on the command "listen to the instruction." God is saying to Israel, "Keep the instruction, and by doing so, you will move into my deep blessing."

The language of chapter 13 may seem harsh to us as modern readers. We read that for anyone who gives their allegiance or offerings to other gods, the consequence is death. It is helpful to understand this chapter in light of the Eden story, where the authors establish a contrast between following Yahweh (which leads to life) and following other gods (which leads to death).

This chapter is all about the Eden instruction of not doing what's good in your own eyes and being able to recognize and turn away from those who are deceitful, like the snake in the garden. God's desire is to bless his people abundantly and give them true life. Listening to the commands and "doing what's right in the eyes of Yahweh" leads to life and goodness, as it did in the garden (13:18).

Deuteronomy 14:3

Menu Commands

While no explicit command language exists here, this whole unit (14:1-21) becomes a series of commands about what to eat and not eat. But for what reason? Has bacon become immoral? Are shellfish now evil? The simple answer is no. Yahweh's food instructions give people an opportunity to entrust their lives to him in every way. By adhering to these food laws, the people are uniquely set apart as a sign of devotion to Yahweh that other nations can see and learn from.

These commands about food echo the initial Eden command. Deuteronomy 14:3 says, "you shall not eat," which is exactly what God says to Adam and Eve in the garden. While the rationale for determining which foods are clean and unclean is not given, the overall purpose is more clear. By listening to God and keeping these food laws, Israel will be set apart from the nations for Yahweh.

Notice that the ambiguity of the rationale may mirror the puzzle about knowing good and bad in the garden. It is not obvious why either would be a bad thing, but this is not about inherently good or bad substances. This is about trusting Yahweh even when an easy rationale cannot be discerned.



The language of being Yahweh's "possession out of all the peoples" and a "holy people" also mirrors the language of Exodus 19:4-6, where the people are Yahweh's "possession out of all the peoples" and a "holy nation." There, the people are called a "kingdom of priests"—a nation meant to reveal who Yahweh is to the nations and function as a mediator for them. As simple (and odd) as these commands may seem to modern readers, these food rules in Israel's ancient context powerfully said to the onlooking world, "We are people who trust Yahweh's instruction and live with total devotion to him."

Deuteronomy 15:5

Social Generosity

The laws about tithing are about Yahweh's desire to create a generous society where no one lacks. Every year, the people are to tithe a portion of their crops (14:22-26). And every three years, the people will bring their tithe from that year to those in need—the Levite, the alien, orphans, and widows (14:28-29). Every seven years, they are to forgive any debts owed by their fellow Israelites (15:1-3). This social system keeps debt under control and moves resources to everyone in need. It's a system of mutual kindness that leads to flourishing.

Deuteronomy 14:22-16:17 forms a literary unit focusing on the ritual calendar tithes, offerings, debt rules, etc. It is all about worship of Yahweh and caring for others through practicing these things repeatedly.

These laws about tithing imply that Yahweh will bless his people abundantly with grain, wine, fruit, and oil in the land. Yahweh's generosity toward people is his good gift, and his human images learn to live as they were created to, generously giving back to him and providing for others.

With Yahweh at their center, these tithing laws promote generosity and flourishing for the community, moving people toward true life. Deuteronomy 15:4-5 makes this connection explicit, using divine command language and blessing. If the people listen and observe Yahweh's commandments, which he commands them, it will lead to blessing in the land.

Deuteronomy 15:11

Life and Goodness for All

Yahweh commands his people to be especially generous to the poor. All around Israel, neighboring nations serve gods who encourage competition among humans to dominate and survive, and they value some over others to gain honor and glory. But Yahweh's commands about giving generously to the poor reveal his heart—he's unlike the neighboring gods. He wants everyone to experience real life and deep goodness that restores the whole person.



Verses 7-11 focus on the poor within the community and command the people to give freely to anyone in need, whatever they lack. Notice, these are not laws based solely on what we might call action, but they also involve the heart. Yahweh says, “do not harden your heart” (Deut. 15:7), and “your heart shall not be grieved when you give to him” (15:10). He calls this generosity (15:8). Life in the land of God’s promise is portrayed as generosity, provision, security, and equality.

Deuteronomy 15:15

Ending Indentured Servitude

Yahweh commands Israel to never engage in slave ownership the way it was practiced in Egypt, where you could remain a slave your entire life. Often in the ancient world, people could sell themselves or their labor to someone else in an effort to survive when their own resources had run out (see Gen. 47:13-25). Many weigh the options of dying from starvation or surviving as a slave, opting for survival. But that often ended in the person remaining a slave for the rest of his or her life. Here in Deuteronomy, God is telling them to free all indentured servants every seven years, without exception (15:12).

There will be no lifetime indentured servitude in the land of Israel.

The laws here are about setting these fellow kinsmen (men and women) free and providing them with good things. The good treatment and freedom of these workers is based on an empathy for their situation. Notice the reason for generosity: “You shall remember that *you* were a slave in Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today.”

The society God intends to create is one where people treat each other with the same love that he showed them in redeeming them from Egypt. Notice also that when someone frees his indentured worker, that person should give to him from everything he has been blessed with. The pattern is that God will bless his people, and in turn, they will bless one another and contribute to the community.

While reading these laws, we might wonder why Yahweh only put parameters on the practice of slavery rather than abolishing the idea altogether. There is no easy answer to that good question. We can remember that these laws are for ancient Israel as part of its covenant with Yahweh, and these laws are set within the context of the ancient Near East. God is meeting Israel in its cultural setting, including moral culture. He often addresses Israel through existing traditions of ancient law, but he pushes them forward incrementally, patiently moving humanity toward greater justice and equality over long periods of time.



Deuteronomy 16:1

Party Time

God commands the people to throw big parties, to be filled with thankfulness, and to remember all he has done by celebrating his generous gift of life. These are not add-on suggestions to complement a deeper, more serious command. These are legal statutes! God wants people to observe the laws about rhythmic celebration.

What does this tell us about God and human beings?

Most of chapter 16 deals with celebrating yearly feasts—Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Booths. The commands that drive these feasts encourage people to love and listen to Yahweh through any part of daily life. Loving and celebrating Yahweh is meant to draw them into the redemption story of rescue from Egypt and the creation story of Yahweh's generosity and rest. The result is an experience of joy for the people (Deut. 16:11), which flows out of God's blessing (Deut. 16:17).

By tracing the command pattern through Scripture, we can learn more and more about the loving, generous character of God. Even the word "command" can sound unloving to many of us modern readers, but a closer look reveals that he is mandating beautiful celebration, commanding care for all in the community, and requiring people to operate with loving provision and blessing toward one another as he promises to operate the same way toward them. These commands are beautiful, and they come from an inherently loving creator.

Deuteronomy 17:10

Support Local Listening

In order to build a thriving community, Yahweh commands the people to listen to local leaders, who will be continuously teaching *torah*. The command comes with intense and lethal consequences for failing to obey. Again, Yahweh's instruction is all about guiding people into real life, and his instructions consistently teach them that his way of real life cannot be mixed with ways of corruption and death. If a person is trying to receive life without listening to God's instruction, this command reminds everyone involved that such an endeavor is categorically impossible.

Choosing not to listen is the same as choosing not to live. God has been and will continue offering generous, thriving life, and he always does so on his terms.

Deuteronomy 17:8-13 gives a case study for how to settle disputes with judges. Two key points reinforce the idea that God wants these local leaders to represent his own will. First, the case has to be debated in the place where he dwells (Deut. 17:8, 10). Second, the judge (or priest) will declare a judgment and also teach on behalf of Yahweh (Deut. 17:9-11). The judge or priest is said to teach the law—two words from the same



root (*yarah* and *torah*). So far, the word “*torah*” has only been used in Deuteronomy to describe what Moses is setting before the community (Deut. 1:5; 4:8, 44). The judges here are being depicted as Moses-like figures embedded into every Israelite community—people who represent Yahweh’s words and perspectives to the people.

Deuteronomy 17:19

The Meditating, Living King

God knows that Israel is going to eventually want a king, and he knows the people have no memory of positive kingship. They’ve seen slave masters and dictators, and they’ve experienced domination and oppression at the hands of kings. So Yahweh mandates that Israel’s kings must be radically different. Abundant life in the land will depend on the king’s willingness to continue meditating on the *torah* and following it.

The people are standing at the Jordan River’s edge, about to enter the land, and so far, they’ve been led primarily by Moses. Chapters 16 and 17 pave the way for new leadership, as Moses instructs the people about appointing judges and describing the character a judge should have.

Verses 14-20 focus on the character and practices of the future king, and these entirely break the norm. A king typically provides security and life for his people through military security, alliances, and economic abundance. These are precisely the things the king is told not to do here—not to multiply horses, not to trust alliances with Egypt, not to obtain many wives or accumulate wealth. Instead, the king is told to meditate on the *torah* all the days of his life, observing all the words (*debarim*) of this law (*torah*) and these statutes (*khoqim*). This is what makes a king unified with his people. He is to be a humble, wise leader, which means he will follow Yahweh wholeheartedly by not turning aside from the commandment (*mitsvah*). As a true and good ruler, this one will contribute to the blessing and flourishing of others.

Deuteronomy 18:18

Do Not Ignore Prophets

The prophet speaks the words and commands of Yahweh to the people. In that sense, the prophet becomes an audible law, so Yahweh commands the people to listen. Moses says the prophet will emerge from “among you [Israel]” and will be “like me [Moses]” because Yahweh’s law also came through him (Deut. 18:15). An Israelite who speaks God’s instruction like Moses is the paradigm for future prophets (Deut. 18:18).

Previously, Deuteronomy 17-18 designated three kinds of rulers over Israel, each calling back to the garden story. First, the king (Deut. 17:14-20) represents the image of God as a ruler. Second, the priests represent Adam and Eve serving and tending to the garden (Deut. 18:1-8). Third, the prophet speaks Yahweh’s words on his behalf (Deut. 18:15-22).



If Adam and Eve had chosen to listen to Yahweh, they would have been kings, priests, and prophets—ruling, serving, and speaking God’s instruction to others. Instead, they listen to the voice of another (the snake), which the Deuteronomy authors compare to listening to the voices of other gods.

Interestingly, they describe worshipping other gods as “divination,” which is translated from the Hebrew word “*nakesh*” (Deut. 18:10). *Nakesh* uses the same letters as the word for snake, “*nakash*.” By wording things this way, the authors allude to Eden and show that listening to those who follow other gods is like listening to the snake—it leads to death (Deut. 18:20).

Deuteronomy 19:7

Cities of Refuge

When a person is killed, grieving friends and family members might use violence to take vengeance on the perpetrators. Even in the case of an accidental killing, the “manslayer” in ancient Israel was in danger of being killed by those seeking vengeance. Yahweh’s command about refuge for the manslayer acknowledges that some killing is accidental. The command is meant to support harmony and prevent more death.

Deuteronomy 19:1-13 is all about cities of refuge, places where someone who has accidentally killed a person may go so that more innocent blood may not be shed (Deut. 19:10) This is not the Eden ideal of life; it’s a command related to a death that has already happened. This is important because it adds a second dimension to God’s law. We previously saw how God’s laws can lead to life. Here, we see how his law mitigates the effects of sin and death when they occur. (Much later, when writing to the Church in first-century Galatia, the apostle Paul will say that the law served in these ancient days as a “guardian.” See Gal. 3:24.)

The goal of these laws is to prevent more death, preserve life, and create harmony. These are Eden ideals. The bloodshed described here also echoes the discord among brothers seen in the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4. There, Cain killed his brother, but Yahweh placed a sign of protection on him so that more blood would not be shed.

Yahweh also exiled Cain from the garden, where he ended up building a city. The parallels strengthen the idea that death is something for “outside the Eden place,” but God will still work there to preserve life and prevent more death. Yahweh’s laws or commands can preserve life even outside of Eden, and the provision of cities of refuge creates order and harmony in society, reflective of the creation ideals of order and harmony between siblings.



Deuteronomy 19:9

Love Is Observing the Command

Observing Yahweh's commands (defined as love) leads to the expansion of the Eden blessing. In Deuteronomy 19:8-9, we see that if the people keep Yahweh's command, it will lead to Yahweh blessing them abundantly and expanding their territory. In other words, Yahweh's law is meant to lead followers to abundant life. While this expansion did not happen, this verse reveals that Yahweh's ideal was to expand the Eden blessing out into the nations (cf. Gen. 12:1-3).

It is also interesting that Yahweh's command (the three cities of refuge in the land) can be expanded to new situations (adding additional cities if the land expands). The existing law will be adapted to a new set of circumstances that will require wisdom.

Finally, notice the way that verse 9 gives definition to what it means to keep Yahweh's command—"to love Yahweh your God and to walk in his ways always." Yahweh was concerned about the state of the people's heart toward himself and others, not mere adherence to the law. In other words, he was not interested in compelling people to follow his rules. He was forming this nation into people who want to follow him because they want to find life and love Yahweh.

Deuteronomy 20:18

Deadly Influencers

This is a difficult passage and topic because it depicts God giving a command to wipe out all the inhabitants of a land. It sounds like a command about genocide or ethnic cleansing. There is not sufficient space to explore those ideas here theologically, but they are worth exploring! Understanding this part of the Hebrew Bible helps us understand God's heart, including his relationship to violence in our world.

In this literary context, it appears that Yahweh's command for total destruction has nothing to do with genetics, world domination, or anything like that. Instead, the larger story suggests the motive is theological—the command is given so that Israel would find life through worship of Yahweh alone and not be led to serve other gods. As we have seen so far in the Torah, obeying the voice of another over the voice of Yahweh is a sure path to death.

Odd as it may sound, this command appears to be aimed at providing ongoing life for Israel. But why Israel? Do others matter to God as well?

In the broader literary context, we know that what God is doing with Israel is ultimately for the good of "all the families of the Earth" (cf. Gen. 12:1-3). We remember that we're only examining one of many parts and eras in a long, complex story. The heart revealed here is love, and in his love, Yahweh is always working to remove everything that ultimately harms all human beings and to heal all of the harm that has happened so far, including restoring life to those who have died.



For our purpose of tracing the theme of law through this section, we want to provide some tools for interpreting difficult passages. First, remember that this is an ancient text written within and to an ancient culture. Their practices, including those of war and religion, are different from many of ours today. God, in his choice to partner with humans, and one nation in particular, works and communicates within systems and language used by humans. Those systems do not necessarily represent his ideal, as he is speaking into the painful realities of human life.

We can see throughout Scripture that God's ways are pushing culture forward on a redemptive trajectory. He may not move culture from point A to B right away (e.g., from women as property to full and equal rulers), but he works with humans to push society toward life and flourishing. This pace can feel dissatisfying, bringing up more questions than answers. But we can remember that God was working with and through an ancient culture.

Second, it is helpful to look in the immediate literary context to see if there are any clues for the reason behind particular laws. In this case, the reason is given in verse 18: The Israelites are to destroy all of the inhabitants "so that they may not teach you to do all the detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against Yahweh your God."

Remember in the beginning of this movement that the things the inhabitants "have done for their gods" are described as including burning their children as sacrifices (Deut. 12:29-32). God desires life for his people—not death. When Yahweh dwells among his people in the land and they live according to his wisdom, his blessing can go out to all the nations. While none of this may satisfy our own sense of love and care for others, it is helpful to understand the reason provided.

Third, we can ask how this passage fits into any broader literary patterns, especially Eden. In this part of the Torah, as the new generation of Israel prepares to enter the promised land, the conditions of Eden are being recalled. God's commands point to his desire for a space where humans can live by the blessings of Yahweh in order to bless the nations. This is all a description of the first stages of God's plan to restore and rescue, and he tells us that his work is aimed at all of the nations on Earth (Gen. 12:1-3).

Deuteronomy's authors cast the Canaanites in the role of the snake who will deceive Israel and lead it astray. While these tools do not fully explain God's connection to violence in our world, they can help us begin to understand the broader literary strategies.

Deuteronomy 21:14

A Different Trajectory

The initial shock of this law makes it hard for modern readers to see anything other than a mistake or contradiction. God seems to be commanding Israelite men to treat the women they capture well, but where's the command to stop taking women captive



in the first place? Is God endorsing this violent, dehumanizing treatment of women? In many other parts of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, God prohibits violence toward neighbors and commands people to treat women and men as equal, so how can we make sense of this?

The simple answer is that Yahweh is starting a new trajectory here. He's beginning the process of teaching people to value one another equally in an ancient society. This law speaks to a common ancient practice during wartime. So God is addressing a situation that already exists in the world—a patriarchal world where women, children, and slaves are all viewed as property. God is not saying this scenario should happen, but he knows it will happen (21:10-11), and he commands the men to start treating women better.

Yahweh is not articulating an ideal for human life here. Instead, he is moving Israel's way of life along a redemptive trajectory through these commands, and the commands address the woman's well-being in two ways.

First, she is not just to be taken—she is meant to assimilate into the family. Also, she is to be given a period of grieving before going near her (Deut. 21:13). Second, she cannot be sold for a profit (treated as an object). In other words, this law is doing the unthinkable in Israel's ancient context—God is giving captive women legal rights (Deut. 21:14).

Deuteronomy's authors invite readers to see how God accommodates the realities of a broken world, while also pushing it forward toward redemption. Because God has committed himself to a nation that's going to fight against enemies and take captives, he meets them there and gives instructions that set a new trajectory.

Deuteronomy 21:18

Listen or Die?

When Deuteronomy's authors say that someone "won't listen to the voice," they are activating a key Eden idea from Genesis 3. When Adam listened to the voice of another person (his wife) over God's voice, which resulted from Eve listening to the snake instead of God, death happened.

The rebellious son in Deuteronomy 21:18 won't listen to anyone's voice except his own, and he refuses to receive instruction. Here, the mother and father are set as an analogy to God. Therefore, the command to put a stubborn son to death activates the pattern of how not listening to Yahweh leads to death. Despite this connection, this command remains utterly shocking to modern readers! What do we make of a divine command to kill your child?

The cultural differences between ancient Israel's world and our own should not be underestimated. This command exists in a context where children are seen as property and where people value the collective identity and security of the whole community



more than any individual's survival, happiness, or autonomy. Collective identity, collective security, and social security were forms of self-preservation, so in their context, a family member who goes rogue and won't listen is endangering the whole.

Deuteronomy 22:9

Gardening and Mixing Laws

Doesn't it seem like a God who forbids people from planting two kinds of seed or mixing threads in fabric is, at best, somewhat odd and perhaps even petty or arbitrary? What's going on here? These laws are difficult to understand because most modern readers will see no moral conflict with planting tomatoes and carrots in the same garden or wearing jeans made of a cotton and polyester blend. What are these laws about, and do they even matter anymore?

As modern readers, we need to pay attention to the literature's structure that will reveal more about its meaning. Notice how Deuteronomy 22:5 and 22:9-12 create a conceptual frame. The authors are telling us that this whole section is about creating order "according to kind," which refers back to the original creation story in Genesis 1-2. These laws are communicating something much deeper than regulations for crops and clothes.

In the middle section (Deut. 22:6-8), we get laws about providing and preserving life—the life of the creature and the life of the human—activating life themes from day six of the creation narrative (Gen. 1). Weaving all these things together, we see a picture of life-giving order emerging. God's commands are about order, each "according to its kind," which is the opposite of chaos. This kind of life-giving order comes from God's commands, and when human beings listen to the order God has set, they experience blessing and flourishing.

Israel practices laws that order life, even down to details about clothing and seeds, and these faithful practices form each person into one who remembers and expresses the wisdom of Yahweh—the God who orders the world.

This is wisdom literature. It's not a perfect expression of the ideal will of God for all times and all places, but it is an invitation to meditate on God's wisdom as you read the biblical story.

Deuteronomy 22:26

Regarding Sexual Assault

In cases of sexual assault and harm, God's laws aim at providing security for the vulnerable. The laws articulated in Deuteronomy 22:22-29 focus on a series of sexually violating situations, including adultery and rape. Both acts are cast as wrong, negative, and connected to death.



For many, the most shocking part of this section of law is an apparent assumption that it is a man's prerogative to see and take women—women were treated as property. These laws expose the existing patriarchal context at work when God gives them. They do not reveal God's ideal for human flourishing. This is not the best way to deal with rape and adultery. Instead, it is a better way than anything people were assuming or doing back then, thereby moving people toward a better trajectory to begin the centuries-long process of learning to value and respect women in the way God does.

Without offering the ideal, these laws still intend to provide protection for the vulnerable. It is assumed that adultery and rape will happen. So Yahweh's commands create structures to decrease corruption happening to both parties, but especially women.

Because of this topic's complexity and controversy, let's go deeper and examine consent, consequences, and the concept of a redemptive trajectory.

Consent: This passage distinguishes between the woman's consent and lack thereof. On one side, if a man and woman willingly choose to have an adulterous relationship, this is recognized as a sin leading to death (Deut. 22:22-24). But in the case of rape, meaning a woman does not consent, she has done nothing wrong, and the law protects her (Deut. 22:25-29). Although being in a field or crying out may not be sufficient descriptions for what we call consent today, this is an ancient society's way of defining such an act. Notice, too, that betrothal is considered as strong of a commitment as marriage here and is treated the same.

Consequences: It also seems unjust (or appalling!) to say that an unmarried woman who is sexually assaulted must be joined in marriage with the man who violated her (Deut. 22:28-29). In this cultural context, the man's brutality toward her has harmed her public image, making her significantly more vulnerable than she already was. No longer a virgin, she has slim chances of ever finding a husband, relegating her to ongoing poverty and exclusion. Additionally, if she were to become pregnant, she would have access to little security or provision for her child in this ancient culture. The wickedness of a patriarchal system is being exposed here, and God's laws are working against, not in favor of, the standard practices of creating value and status on the basis of gender. Most ancient cultures refused to consider women as anything beyond property, but Yahweh's law sees women as infinitely valuable, and the law protects them in their vulnerability. In other words, men can no longer engage in flippant, non-consequential acts with women as though they had less value than a man. The man has an obligation to care for her and provide for her as his own family.



Redemptive Trajectory: Notice that although this law looks abrasive, it is intending to provide life and security. And remember: **This law does not represent God's ideal!** Adultery and rape are serious crimes, punishable by death, but Yahweh provides laws that protect the vulnerable in those situations and in that culture. Even though it's a different cultural framework, this law is trying to protect and elevate the dignity of the vulnerable—in this case, an unmarried woman.

These are horrific situations. God is speaking into them because he cares and he wants to push humanity forward toward greater redemption. There is beauty in that, but it doesn't change that these passages are difficult to read.

Deuteronomy 23:3

Beyond Law, Toward Wisdom

Kicking people out and excluding people on the basis of race or religion are not good things. But these laws in 23:1-14 instruct Israel to keep certain people groups out of their community. How does this fit with the loving, welcoming God who, as we learned in Genesis 12:1-3, intends to bless every nation on Earth? Presumably, this blessing includes Ammonites and Moabites, so what's going on here?

Here's another place where attention to literary context will increase our understanding, and reading laws like this in communication with related stories can shed light on how the laws function as wisdom literature rather than simplistic commands.

The laws described in 23:1-14 use the word "assembly" synonymously with "camp," with assembly referring to people and camp referring to place. Belonging to the holy people means being in the camp. Both require holiness so that Yahweh may dwell among them and provide life. The Moabites and Ammonites cannot enter because when Israel was marching out of Egypt and in need of food and water, both nations refused to provide for them. Instead, they sought Israel's destruction by hiring Balaam to curse them and bring death (see Num. 22-24). In the Hebrew Bible's overarching story, the Ammonites and Moabites represent a collective character that intends to curse and kill Israel.

Interestingly, the larger section of text surrounding this verse highlights the inclusion of foreigners, such as Edom and Egypt, who have also been enemies of Israel throughout the story. As the Torah and later books explore the nature of the enemy nations, they bring more nuance to this situation. For example, Ruth, who is a Moabite, not only receives a warm welcome into the assembly, she also becomes part of the lineage that Jesus of Nazareth will come from. In other words, the Deuteronomy 23 law against Moabites gets reinterpreted in the book of Ruth, where Boaz will act by God's wisdom by not obeying this law from the Torah.

This leaves us to consider that the face value of a law may not communicate the whole purpose of the law. It's another case demonstrating our need to read the law as wisdom within the context of the whole story.



Deuteronomy 24:4

Stop Taking and Discarding Women

These verses carry strong Eden echoes, and they portray the husband negatively—he “takes” a woman. The word “take” often intends to recall the negative act of taking fruit from the forbidden tree in Eden. Then, the man judges for himself, “in his own eyes,” that she is not favorable or good. God is the one to pronounce things good, and he calls all of his creation good.

A “matter of nakedness” is likely idiomatic, recalling the nakedness of humans in the garden. Once they had made the mistake, they recognized their nakedness because of the snake’s voice. God asks them, “Who told you you were naked?” That idea didn’t even come from God! Deuteronomy is identifying this man and his actions with corruption and death.

So Yahweh’s commands are meant to decrease the negative effects that already vulnerable women face in ancient divorce cases. These commands aim at a man who takes a woman as a wife but does not find her favorable. The authors say he “sends her away,” or expels her, using the same Hebrew word for what God does to Adam and Eve because of their sin in the garden (*shalakh*, see Gen. 3:23).

Deuteronomy’s authors intentionally show the husband as wrongly usurping God’s role by divorcing his wife because he is not pleased with her. When he takes God’s responsibility into his own hands, it’s illegitimate—he’s exercising power against a mutual human who is supposed to be united with him.

Although this act is portrayed negatively, it’s also portrayed as a cultural norm. In other words, divorce is going to happen. So Yahweh establishes protective laws, such as requiring a legitimate certificate that makes it harder to get a divorce. In other words, just because you are a man in a patriarchal society that diminishes women does not mean you can live that way—you have to go through a process that respects the woman. And the man cannot marry her again, protecting the women from flippant and expedient divorce. We get the sense here that Yahweh is valuing women exponentially more than the average culture does. Men cannot divorce and remarry as they choose, and the woman has the right to remarry if her husband divorces her (Deut. 24:2).

Sidenote: The interpretive approach we have been taking so far is rooted in the way we see Jesus teaching about these laws much later, in the context of first-century Judaism. Jesus sees this law as an accommodation to humans because of their hardness of heart (see Matt. 19:8). Jesus reminds us that this law never intended to represent God’s ideal. Instead, it protects women from the hard-hearted results of being divorced illegitimately.



Deuteronomy 24:18

Strengthening the Vulnerable

Yahweh commands care for the vulnerable in a world where such care seemed unnecessary or even foolish. In step with his instruction so far, Yahweh will command Israel to live differently than the surrounding world.

Deuteronomy 24:6-22 contains various laws aimed at protection and care for those in need. We read laws about protecting the livelihood of brothers (Deut. 24:6-7), keeping the entire community safe from infection (Deut. 24:8-9), not taking advantage of others through loans, especially the poor (Deut. 24:12-13), treating the hired servant well (Deut. 24:14-15), and protecting whole families from being held accountable for one member's sin (Deut. 24:16).

Deuteronomy 24:17-22 forms a literary unit of four laws, all focused on providing for the vulnerable—the alien (immigrant), orphan, and widow—those outside the land and its security.

The foundational reason an Israelite should observe these instructions is because they belong to a people once brutalized by slavery. But God redeemed them, so their treatment of others should be the same as God's treatment toward them in their most vulnerable circumstances. "Live like I live," God is saying, "and by doing so, you and all the people around you—including the poor and vulnerable—will have life and blessing without partiality."

Deuteronomy 25:4

Care for People and Animals

God commands provision and honor for those who serve—including animals! The authors build the chapter's laws into a theme of provision and protection of others, especially the vulnerable.

The majority of chapter 25 speaks about human-to-human interactions. But this verse stands out in its reference to the treatment of an ox. God says Israel is to honor the animal's health and well-being as it performs labor for them. It's a way of honoring the dignity and agency of a co-laborer.

This instruction follows a section about letting the vulnerable in society—the immigrant, the orphan, and the widow—gather among the field and vineyard (Deut. 24:19-22). Similarly, humans have a responsibility to care for creation and provide for the animals that they rule over. This is a fulfillment of their role as representatives of Yahweh.

An underlying principle emerges: Do not take the service or labor of another. Rather, the people are to contribute to the thriving lives of others, especially when one is in a position to take advantage of another. Later in the first century C.E., Paul will apply the



underlying principle to church life, urging the community to honor and provide for those whose work is to teach and serve the people (1 Tim. 5:18). Paul's guidance becomes a good example of biblical authors interpreting the law as wisdom and adapting that wisdom to new situations.

Deuteronomy 26:13

Receive and Contribute to Life

Deuteronomy 26:1-15 describes in detail a ritual introduced in the opening part of the movement, so it functions as a bookend. Recall that this second movement began in chapter 12 with laws about worshiping Yahweh alone, including the bringing of tithes and firstfruits (see Deut. 12:6, 14:22). There God also commands Israel to care for the Levites because, by design, they received no land inheritance, making them perpetually reliant on the people's generous provision (see Deut. 12:19, 14:27-29). The people of Yahweh are to receive abundant life by participation in giving the same kind of life to others. This happens by listening to God and following his ways and commands.

This section summarizes the whole movement, highlighting worship of Yahweh (the bringing of tithes) and care for others. And this movement can be seen as a summary of the biblical story so far—humans are called to love God and love others.

The authors summarize all acts of tithing to Yahweh and generosity toward others with the picture of a person following “all your commandments which you have commanded” (Deut. 26:13). When the people follow his ways, abundance in the land will follow, and the intended result is a loving group of people who give generously to nourish life.

Verse 14 contrasts ideas of life and death. The sacred tithe must not be associated with death in any way—never tied to the worshiper mourning (a death), to uncleanness (usually related with ideas of death), or to offerings given to the dead. In other words, this offering represents life.

This section repeats command language to signal the close of the movement. Just as we saw in the opening chapters of the movement, it involves instructions for giving a ritual speech that the worshiper needs to say to Yahweh when bringing tithes or offerings. The worshiper ends by proclaiming that they have done “according to all your commandments (*mitsvot*) which you have commanded me (*tsavah*); I have not transgressed or forgotten any of your commandments (*mitsvot*) ... I have listened (*shema*) to the voice of Yahweh my God; I have done according to all that you have commanded (*tsavah*) me” (see Deut. 26:13-14).

Once more, the authors use the phrase “listening to the voice of Yahweh” to describe obeying the command, echoing what the first humans should have done after God instructed them. They should have listened to Yahweh's voice over any other voice. Instead, they listened to the voice of the snake and each other. Yahweh wants humans to receive the law as wisdom and to walk in his ways, adapting that wisdom to whatever new situations they face.



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DEUTERONOMY SCROLL

Movement 3: The Choice

Having gone through all of the laws, Moses now issues a final challenge to Israel. Whatever happens, in all circumstances, they will find wisdom and life if they listen to their God and learn to love like he loves.

Watch

[Deuteronomy video](#)

Read

Deuteronomy 26:15-34:12

Primary Pattern

[Blessing and Curse](#)

God's blessing is about flourishing and multiplication of life. While God shares his life-producing ability with all creation, human beings must choose to either receive or reject it, and denying the blessing leads to corruption and death—the curse.

As you read, keep an eye out for the following [links](#).



Deuteronomy 26:15

Forever Promising to Bless

Yahweh promised to bless Abraham with a massive family (see Gen. 12:1-3), and through Moses, he promised to set Israel free and to provide good land for ongoing life and flourishing. The authors use the Hebrew word “*barakh*” here, which can be translated as “to bless.” We will see this language repeatedly throughout the final Deuteronomy movement.

Verse 15 offers a prayer for Yahweh’s blessing, and it advances the original blessing of creation, where human beings and all creation are blessed by God (see Gen. 1). Like Eden once was, the promised land is supposed to be fruitful and abundant. The land described in Genesis 1 is filled with fruit trees, so the language in this verse taps into the life-giving characteristics of blessing. Once the people cross the Jordan River, they will be entering “a land flowing with milk and honey.” Blessing is about fullness, generosity, and everything conducive to real life.

Notice the mutual blessing of humans and the land—God wants both to live and share in his own ability to create more life. The authors tie this kind of blessing directly to the promises God makes to Israel through Abraham and Moses. This is what he’s been committing himself to all along.

Deuteronomy 27:12

Orientation Day, Part 1

Rather than passively hearing, the Israelites actively listen and participate by joining with God to declare the potential blessings and curses they must face in the future. At the start of this final movement (see Deu. 26:15-19), the authors affirm that these are the people of God, his treasured possession, and they are entering into a covenant to live as the blessed people in the land.

On the day they cross the river, the people are to perform a ceremony. Half of the tribes will hike up Mount Gerizim and declare the blessings. The other half will hike up Mount Ebal and declare the curses. Oddly, while the authors tell us that both are going to take place, they do not record the blessings. Instead, we get a set of 12 curses (Deut. 27:14-26). Some consider this evidence of later redaction by the Torah’s editors, who have seen the story play out further. Knowing that these Israelites ultimately fail to uphold the covenant, the editors may have omitted the blessing records (because the people did not receive them) and chosen to emphasize the words of the curse instead.



Deuteronomy 27:13

Orientation Day, Part 2

The required ceremony here splits Israel into two groups, with each group at the top of two separate mountains (think large hills here). The first group is supposed to declare words of blessing to the other group, and the other group is to pronounce words of curse. So is God telling one part of the community to curse the other?

The short answer is no—not at all. Recall Adam and Eve in the garden, when God describes the death associated with ignoring his command. This is the same thing but with crowds of thousands instead of two people. All of Israel is participating with God in laying out the two options they will face in their new home. Will they trust God and participate in his blessing, or will they trust another voice that leads to corruption and death? In the end, this half of Israel on Mount Ebal is presenting an option, not cursing their own people.

Deuteronomy 27:15

Already Cursed Actions

Starting with this sentence, the word “cursed” opens every subsequent line through Deuteronomy 27:26, offering 12 total descriptions of cursed behavior. Notice that the descriptions are not about future consequences for current mistakes. Instead, the authors describe what already-cursed behavior looks like. In other words, these are pictures of reality, not coercive threats.

The people affirm this long list of instructions by saying, “Amen!”, which means “This is true! Let it be so!” They will now willfully join themselves in covenant with God. And in verse 27:26, we read, “Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.”

Affirmation and confirmation of the commands will happen by doing them, not by merely voicing agreement with them. And the words “this law” in the same verse most likely refers to the whole set of instructions given by God (see Josh. 8:30-35).

Deuteronomy 28:2

Overtaken by Blessing

Notice how this list never describes the characteristics of “blessed” decision making. Instead, the authors give specifics about what kinds of blessings people can expect when they follow one major blessed choice—the choice to obey all that Yahweh has commanded.

If the choice will lead to a life-giving result, it will be a choice that does not oppose God’s instruction.



Also, if the person's goal is to achieve or procure blessing for him or herself, then the person is already on the wrong track. But if he or she sets out with resolve to listen to and observe all that God has commanded, the result is abundance and flourishing (Deut. 28:2-7), even to the point where these blessings will "overtake them" (Deut. 28:2). Notice, they are not taking blessings for themselves. Rather, they are being overtaken by God's blessing, which happens when everyone is living within his way.

For a poetic comparison, consider the way Psalm 23 describes a similar experience with the words, "surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life" (Ps. 23:6). The poet sees this overtaking as a result of trusting God as his true guide in life, his "shepherd" (Ps. 23:1).

Deuteronomy 28:15

Overtaken by the Curse

Starting here, and continuing for 53 verses, the authors detail the consequences of practicing inherently cursed behavior, which we know from the context means any behavior that opposes God's instruction. In other words, disobedience to Yahweh will lead to scarcity, isolation, and death. God's way is life, and to be disconnected from the way of God leads to death.

Notice how descriptions of blessing include all kinds of abundance and flourishing, and the descriptions of the curse include heinous, horrifying results like the destruction of livestock and crops (Deut. 28:51) that leads to a starvation so brutal that people are forced to eat their children (Deut. 28:53). This is enough to make anyone's stomach turn, and the authors use images like these to communicate that corruption, sorrow, and death will become rampant and unimaginable if we ignore God's way of life.

Deuteronomy 27:15-26 offers descriptions of cursed behavior, and these verses in 28:15-68 offer descriptions of cursed consequences. Note that the narrative of the Torah, and the wider biblical narrative, depicts a God who loves life and desires that none should perish, so we read these as instructive warnings about reality as God has created it. These aren't tyrannical threats—they are reminders that true life and abundance only exist through Yahweh.

Deuteronomy 29:19

Boastful and Happy but Dead

This is about people who believe they are blessed when, in reality, they are enduring a curse. These situations happen when people try to take or seize God's blessing and act according to their own wisdom. Adam and Eve's choice to take the fruit from the forbidden tree is the first example of this in the biblical narrative.



From that point on, we see people in the biblical story consistently desiring better lives with more freedom and flourishing, but some trust that blessing comes from following Yahweh and others think they can seize blessing for themselves.

Notice the boastful person described here saying, “I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.” God’s response is essentially to say that that is impossible—it’s fake peace. Even if our stubborn hearts help us acquire wealth, security, and other perceived benefits, it’s not accomplished through God’s wisdom. So we’re actually hurting other people and on a path that leads to death, even if it’s not immediately obvious.

The ancient Israelites believed the heart was the source of all knowledge, and we see the authors emphasizing the word “heart” throughout this section. This repetition points to the need for the people to reorientate their hearts so that they may see things as they really are—to know reality as God knows it. Walking in the “stubbornness of heart” ends in a form of apostasy by calling what is good, “bad,” and what is bad, “good.”

In other words, a stubborn heart will lead a person into death even while he or she assumes a certain blessing is happening. This all raises questions about what forgiveness means and when God offers it, which we will explore in the next link.

Deuteronomy 29:27

Erasing Eden

The authors and later editors of Deuteronomy craft this section like a prediction of Israel’s failure to uphold its own agreement and the consequences that will follow. The people and the land itself will both experience the curse. The Eden-like land will be made un-Eden-like, and others will see that opting out of God’s way means opting into death.

The Israelites have not even entered the promised land at this point, but the authors talk about them being “cast out, into another land.” Verses 28-29 talk about Israel’s future exile in the past tense, as though it already happened. A certain clarity results from writing this way—it helps readers place these Torah warnings in the broader context of the Hebrew Bible. Later in the Hebrew Bible, we often see the prophets refer back to these curses and predictions in Deuteronomy 28 and 29.

Also, onlooking nations will see the curse destroying Israel and wonder what’s going on. Deuteronomy 29:25 suggests that they’ll come to see it was all about listening to and following Yahweh alone. It won’t be because God turns from loving and gracious to hateful and vicious. It will be due to Israel’s own choice to listen to and follow after other gods. Notice the implication between the lines: It’s the other voices that lead to cursedness. Yahweh’s voice leads to blessing and is, therefore, worth trusting over all other voices.



Deuteronomy 30:1

Remembering the Lost Blessing

After so many descriptions of cursing and brutal consequences, we are finally given a message of real hope here. Brutal destruction and exile will scatter the people, but wherever they find themselves, they will once again remember these blessings and curses in light of Yahweh's promise to restore them. The authors are casting these curses as one temporary part of a much larger and longer story that ends with a collective life of loving obedience to God's instruction, full restoration from captivity, and the experience of divine compassion. This curse and death they must face will not be their end.

Heart and action are once again united throughout Deuteronomy 30:1-14, which ends with an interesting promise about the availability of God's commandments. Some assume that God gave his law to demonstrate that human beings could not follow it, but the Bible does not support that idea. Notice how God says that this commandment "is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach." (Deut. 30:11) Verses 12-14 expand and repeat the same point. Even the apostle Paul says that according to the law, he is "blameless," which are not the words of a person who cannot follow God's law.

Deuteronomy 30:19

Choose Life!

The experience of blessing or curse depends on human choice, and the authors emphasize that here. Notice how God does not say, "I will choose who receives life and death." Instead, he says, "I have set before you life and death ... So choose"

Elsewhere in Scripture, biblical authors emphasize God's good rulership over his creation by talking about the many impactful choices that God makes. Those authors also intend for readers to integrate passages like this in order to help us develop wisdom. Yes, God is ruling with uninhibited power to control, and in that sovereignty, he says that his people have a real choice to make.

One choice leads to death and the other to life. And what does God say he wants them to do? His answer reveals his heart. He says, "choose life so that you may live, you and your descendants." Deuteronomy 30:11-14 set the stage for this choice by reminding them that God's law is not impossible to figure out or to follow. If it were out of reach or impossible, then human volition would make little difference. But since it is available and possible, the rest is up to the person.

Here, the paths to life or death are both available to the Israelites. They will experience one or the other based on their choice. And remember, this choice comes with God's promise to restore life and bless humanity, even after the experience of curse has played out.



Deuteronomy 33:1

Moses Blesses Israel

Moses blesses all of the tribes of Israel as he is preparing to depart from them. He is pronouncing, “Life! Life! Life!” over the people, expressing his love for everyone and his hope for their ongoing well-being. Notice how he steps into the way of God here. God spoke life into existence and continues to give words that bring life. And now Moses is doing the same.

These blessings express Moses’ hope, but they also express God’s own desire for his people. Moses is directing and guiding people to walk in Yahweh’s ways, so are the authors suggesting that Moses is rightly living in the blessed way of God? It appears so.

Moses is modeling what Yahweh calls life and blessing. No coercion, no twisting of the truth or manipulation. Instead, the one who blesses others tells the truth about reality and invites others to make a choice. For Israel, and all who will become grafted into the family of God (see Rom. 11:11-31), God’s instruction to become a “blessing to all the families of the earth” (Gen. 12:2-3) finds some clarity through Moses’ repeated pronouncements of life here in Deuteronomy 33.

God’s people are to do this kind of thing with others—to become humans who bless in this way that Moses is blessing, which is how Yahweh blesses.

Deuteronomy 33:29

#Blessed?

How does Deuteronomy 33:28-29 make any sense in light of everything we’ve read so far? In verse 28, God talks to Israel as though it is already saved and restored, saying “Israel dwells in security” as a continuous, present reality. But he’s talking to the Exodus generation’s children because their parents have presumably died. And the Numbers scroll tells us that they died because they repeatedly turned away from trusting God and violated the covenant.

The Exodus generation experienced the curse over and over, even into their wilderness graves. Now, their descendants have not even entered the land yet, and we know from previous chapters that they will fail in the same ways their parents did, eventually being exiled from the land. So how can God here say, “Blessed are you!” and “Who is like you? A people [already] saved by the Lord”?

This kind of passage reminds us that the Bible is wisdom literature, and our job as readers is to take all of the story into account and continue meditating on what we learn. Our categories for “life” and “death” get expanded here because God talks about both in ways we are not accustomed to.



Notice how his statement to these people seems to also address all Israelites from each era. He knows they are about to experience the curse because of their willful disobedience, yet he calls them blessed. Moses will die with his generation and never enter the rest of God's promised land, yet we are told in Deuteronomy 34:7 that his eyes are wide open, not dim, and his vigor is not abated. He is entering into true life even as his body is dying.

In Deuteronomy 34:5, Moses dies, a conclusion that we can see is associated with the curse. Death is cursed, and it happens to those under the curse. Yet Moses is described as one "whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). The simple, common experience of death simply cannot be the end of Moses' life, not if the rest of the story is true. And we are left wondering and waiting for a fuller answer.

This all points to a future prophet like Moses to come—one who always chooses life and will follow in the ways of Yahweh. This prophet will be similar to Moses but greater, and he will bless Israel and all the families of the Earth.

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