Leviticus and Deuteronomy

Last time we finished up about halfway into our discussion about Leviticus, and we talked about the fact that Israel is now encamped around Sinai. They are trying to understand and are taught through its priests how the covenant relationship is to be maintained with a holy God. Turn in your Bible to Leviticus 10; we are going to look at the vocation of the priests.

Leviticus is about Israel being true to its vocation as a holy nation. The goal of holiness is very clear, “For I am holy,” the Lord says. And yet there is also the need for forgiveness. Already this Levitical instruction comes in the wake of the rupture of the covenant relationship after the golden calf incident. That is very vivid. With that incident we get a description of Israel that will be carried through the Pentateuch and will be carried into the prophets later. The description is this, “You are a rebellious, stiff-necked people.” What we see with Leviticus is not a way to come into a relationship with God—Israel already has a relationship with God. But in these instructions to the priests primarily and then their instruction to the people is how to maintain a relationship and repair a relationship with a holy God when you need forgiveness and stand daily in need of forgiveness.

In Leviticus 10:8-10 we see a description of the vocation of priests. The Lord says to Aaron, “You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the tent of meeting or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for generations to come. You must distinguish between the holy and the common.” We will see all the way through the next five chapters, as we mentioned last time, that Leviticus 11 through 15 really leads up to chapter 16, which is the Day of Atonement. Leviticus 11 through 15 is all about this division between clean and unclean. It covers matters of personal and private life, matters of everything from mold in your house to the kind of materials you use for your clothing to personal issues of menstruation. The priests have a role in saying who is prepared to come to the tabernacle for worship. You must be clean in order to be ready to come to worship in the tabernacle. A big responsibility is to distinguish between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean. Another big responsibility is in verse 11, “You must teach the Israelites all the decrees the Lord has given them through Moses.” So the primary teaching ministry is through the priests, and there is also this responsibility to distinguish between the holy and the common, the clean and the unclean.

This comes on the heels of the incident of Nadab and Abihu and the offering of strange or unauthorized fire in their incense before the Lord. We do not know exactly what that is about, but there is the requirement that only the coals that are from the altar must be used for incense. So evidently they used coals that were not from the altar. And also because of the regulations about intoxication that come right after that it may well be that they were intoxicated as well. So those are a couple of thoughts about what was going on there. In Leviticus we do not have very many narratives. We really only have two narrative sections, and this is one of them. So it really stands out that this story of Nadab and Abihu is in here for a reason. It is a very strong warning to the priests that they are to follow the regulations that God has set out for them.

The priestly representatives are given instruction in Leviticus 8 through 10, and in Leviticus 11 through 15 we have all this business about clean and unclean. There is a lot of discussion about how these distinctions are made. I think probably Mary Douglas and Gordon Wenham have made some of the best suggestions. Wenham’s commentary on Leviticus is really quite fine. (Of course we are waiting for Dr. Sklar’s [a professor at Covenant Seminary] commentary to appear.) But what we see are things like “fish without scales.” Fish without scales are more like amphibians. You also see some of these categorizations of “bodily fluids outside the body.” These are circumstances that are unnatural, so to
speak, and are part of what may be going on with these distinctions. But some of them seem quite arbitrary. The main thing to keep in view here is in every sphere of life God distinguishes Israel from the nations as His unique, treasured possession, as His holy people. The routines and realities of daily life are integrally related to living before the presence of God in their midst. Chapters 11 through 15 lead up to chapter 16.

You really should know that Leviticus 16 is where the Day of Atonement is described. Here we have that Aaron is to offer first an offering for himself by offering a bull. Once a year he is to go into the holy of holies, the most holy place, and then on behalf of the people he is to offer a goat. There are two goats involved. There is the goat that will be offered for Kippur, and there is the Azazel goat that will be the scapegoat that will then carry off the sins outside the camp for the people. That is all described in chapter 16. The Day of Atonement in the liturgical calendar is unique. There are two types of events in the liturgical calendar, and we come to that in Leviticus 23 through 25. We have creation order events, which are those worship events related to the Sabbath. You have Sabbath and everything leading up to the jubilee years. Then you have redemptive order events related to the Exodus. You have Passover, first fruits, and tabernacles. All of those commemorate and reenact aspects of the Exodus. In the liturgical calendar in Israel’s worship they are reenacting, first, creation order issues, but also redemptive order issues. What is interesting is that the Day of Atonement is not related to either of those things. It kind of stands out in that it does not commemorate another event; Sabbath issues commemorate the days of creation; the others commemorate the Exodus event. But the Day of Atonement does not commemorate an event, so it accentuates Israel’s need for forgiveness every year. Leviticus 16:30 says, “Because on this day atonement will be made for you to cleanse. Then before the Lord you will be clean from all your sins. It is also a Sabbath of rest, and you must deny yourselves. It is a lasting ordinance. The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to make atonement for the most holy place first, for the priests, and then for the people of the community. Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.”

In the last section of Leviticus 17 through 27 we have what it looks like to live as a holy nation. First of all, you are only to bring authorized sacrifices in chapter 17. Sacrifices can be for personal matters as well as for corporate matters. Then we have a whole list of case law. In Leviticus 18 through 20 there is a mixture of apodictic and case law, moral codes and the sentences of punishments for sexual sin. There are special requirements also given for the priest. In Leviticus 23 through 25 we have the liturgical calendar. You can see how this works: Sabbath, Sabbath year, rest for the people, rest for the land. The year of jubilee underscores the fact that the title of the land that the people will inherit from the Lord does not belong to the people. The title of the land belongs to the Lord. He retains title, and so the way in which you do real estate and business in Israel is related to the fundamental covenantal reality that the Lord owns the Earth and this land that He has deeded to Israel. The year of jubilee reminds us of that fact. It comes around every 49 years for every tribe. Perhaps there has been famine, and your family through generations has become indebted to other tribes. Your land has basically been used to pay off those debts every year, but in the year of jubilee that deed goes back to your family. You are no longer indebted, and all debts are wiped clean. So that is a reminder that the Lord owns the land.

Another reminder comes to us in the form of the sanctions in chapter 26. Listen to this language, first of all, the language of blessing. Sanctions have to do with both blessing and curse and reward for obedience, or perhaps better yet a sense of everything as it should be. Women have babies, crops grow, and the created order works properly. The goodness and grace of God functions, and we are in communion with that God. Listen to the language we hear in Leviticus 26:9-12, “I will look on you with favor, make you fruitful and increase your numbers. I will keep my covenant with you. You will still be eating last year’s harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new.” That is a sign of
blessing on the land. First there is blessing in increasing your numbers: be fruitful and multiply. Subdue the Earth: I will bless your harvest. “I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” In Leviticus 26:9-12 we get this very strong resonance with Genesis 1 and 2. Israel and the presence of God in Israel’s midst is supposed to be like the way it was at the beginning. It is supposed to be the way God intended it all along to be. Again, this is redemption as restoration of created order. It is the language of “I will walk among you in the cool of the garden,” the language of “be fruitful and multiply,” the language of “subdue the Earth.” Leviticus 26 goes on, “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians. I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.”

This is blessing, but then the tables turn in verse 14, “If you do not listen to me and if you reject my decrees and fail to carry out my commands I will bring sudden terror upon you, wasting diseases that will drain your life away. You will plant seed in vain. Your enemies will eat it. I will set my face against you.” Verse 32 says, “I will lay waste to the land so that your enemies will live there and be appalled. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out my sword and pursue you. The land will enjoy its Sabbath years that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies.” So we see in the language of the curse the language of the reversal of the Exodus. The reversal of the Exodus is what we see in the language of curse in Leviticus 26.

There are two types of expressions or aspects of worship that celebrate the created order the way God intended it to be. One is Sabbath rest, blessing on the land, blessing on your children, protection from enemies, and the presence of God in your midst. Then also three times a year there are pilgrimages to the central place that reenact aspects of the Exodus. This includes Passover, the expression of first fruits celebrating God’s blessing on you by giving you this harvest in the land that He promised to give you, and tabernacles remembering our time in the wilderness.

The grammar of grace in Leviticus is that sin causes separation and death. This includes separation from God, separation from the land, separation from the tabernacle, and uncleanness. Holiness is required to live in God’s presence. Since we cannot achieve holiness it must be provided. This happens through substitutionary atonement and priestly representation. This looks forward to something greater that is discussed in Hebrews 5 through 10.

Let us go over some questions about the book of Leviticus. The priestly representation is not at odds with the substitutionary atonement. Both are necessary. The priest in many ways represents what Israel is to be like. What you see in things like the priestly garments is both representation of the 12 tribes of Israel and representation of the type of garments that are appropriate for wearing in the presence of royalty. The priests are coming into the presence of the King. The garments themselves show that the priests are standing in for the people, but also the priests are in the presence of the King. There is a mediation that is needed. Both are aspects of grace that on the one hand preserve the holiness of God and on the other hand recognize the sinfulness of man and provide a way for that relationship to be repaired. It is important to understand, as Hebrews tells us, that what really forgives the sins of the faithful of Israel is the sacrifice of Jesus. So the means of forgiveness is still the same for all of us who belong to God. There is one covenant people of God, and we are all forgiven the same way: through the substitutionary death and atonement of Jesus, the High Priest and the Sacrifice. The best way to understand all of these sacrifices in Israel, the tabernacle, and the temple is to understand them sacramentally. It is real forgiveness. It is partial, but it appropriates a forgiveness that will be ratified later.
Let us turn to the book of Numbers. What we have with the book of Numbers is really a seat change in terms of the generational divide between the first and second wilderness generations. Numbers functions primarily with two edges to it. It functions as a warning and as a motivation to the second generation. Number one, do not rebel like your parents. Number two, get yourselves in the land. Quit dilly dallying around, and let us get on with it already. The canonical function and original significance of Numbers is to motivate the second generation to move into the land in conquest, but it must do so in covenantal obedience and submission to authorized leadership and not in rebellion like their parents. Rebellion is a huge theme in Numbers. We get the name “Numbers” from the Septuagint, and it is so titled because of the two big censuses. There is a census at the beginning of Numbers for the first generation, and there is a census for the second generation in Numbers 26.

You take a census when you get ready to go to war. You count the strong fighting men in order to assess your preparedness for war. Another aspect of Numbers, which prepares us for Joshua, is the idea of land inheritance and holy war. There is inheritance legislation that is related to these tribes and how the tribes are arrayed around the tabernacle and march into battle together. That comes up at the very end when you have the Reubenites and the Gadites who want to go ahead and settle down. Moses says, “Hang on. You have to help us conquer the land first.” You can go ahead and build your cattle pens, and your families can settle down. But you have to go to war with us because the only way to take the land is to do it together. Numbers is a warning to the second generation not to rebel like their parents and to move on into conquest of the land. It is a call to take possession of Canaan as God’s holy army and avoid the failures of the first generation. Numbers 1 through 10 is about preparing Israel’s first army at Sinai. Chapters 10 through 25 are about the failed march or the rebellion of Israel’s first army in the desert. Chapters 26 through 36 are about preparing Israel’s second army for conquest.

We have some problems with the numbers in the first part of Numbers. Look at Numbers 1:44-45, which lists all the descendents of the various tribes. “The men counted by Moses and Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, each one representing his family. All the Israelites 20 years old or more who were able to serve in Israel’s army were counted according to their families, and the total number was 603,550.” There is a problem in terms of how large this number is. If that is the number of fighting men, then the estimate of the total population would be around two million people. We have three primary logistical problems with that number. First, it could have easily overwhelmed the Egyptian army back in Egypt, which probably numbered around 20,000 men. Second the cities in Canaan were not large enough to support a population of this size. Third, the territory of Goshen in Egypt could not support a population of that size.

How do we deal with these numbers, and how do we face this dilemma? There have been various solutions by those who take the Bible seriously. One is to literally accept them despite these problems. Another is to note that the Hebrew word translated “thousands” can also be translated as captains or chiefs. And if the word “thousands” is translated captains or chiefs, then they could be over groups of people that are much less than thousands. Many people have gone that direction, and the groupings would reduce the overall number to about 72,000, which would still be a sizeable number. Turn to Numbers 10, which is related to the last suggestion. Notice what we have at the end of chapter 10 in the song as the tribes go out and leave Sinai for battle: “Rise up, O LORD. May your enemies be scattered. May your foes flee before you.” Whenever the cloud came to rest, Moses said, “Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel.” The glimpse that we see in this phrase, “the countless thousands of Israel,” is perhaps that these numbers are intentional hyperbole that are intended to highlight God’s blessing on Israel in light of the multiplication mandate. Some have gone that way as well. I do not particularly know what the answer to this particular dilemma is. I think it is an outstanding issue, but it is a real one that needs to be looked at squarely.
What we see in Numbers 1 through 10 are the preparations that are necessary for this huge nation to leave Sinai. Remember that from Exodus 18 to Numbers 10 in terms of the geography of the Pentateuch Israel is encamped at Sinai. It is not until Numbers 10:10 that Israel sets out from Sinai for conquest.

Some of the most important things that we need to consider in terms of the preparation have to do with, first, recognizing who all is present. All of the various tribes are arrayed, and they are arrayed around the tabernacle. Within the inner circle of the tabernacle we have the sons of Aaron and the sons in the tribe of Levi.

Turn to Numbers 3, and I want to point out a brief discussion on the various responsibilities of these sons. In verse 17 it says that the names of the sons of Levi are Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The leaders of these families had specific responsibilities in relation to the tabernacle and all of its paraphernalia, everything that was needed to set it up, to take it down, and all of its furniture. In verse 24 and 25 it says that the Gershonites are responsible for the care of the tabernacle and the tent, its coverings, its curtains, the curtains of the courtyard, the curtain of the entrance, and everything related to its use. You can see that they are responsible for all the fabric. Verse 30 says the Kohathite clans are responsible for the ark, the table, the lamp stand, the altars, and the articles of the sanctuary. Verse 36 says the Merarites are appointed to take care of the frames, all the crossbars, and posts.

We see that the Levites are to take the place of all the firstborn of Israel. The significance of the firstborn is that they belong to the Lord. In terms of recognizing that in an ongoing way the Levites represent the firstborn. That is articulated clearly in Numbers 3. Verse 41 says, “Take the Levites in the place of all the firstborn of the Israelites and the livestock of the Levites in the place of all the firstborn of the livestock of the Israelites, for I am the LORD.” Verse 46 says that to redeem the number of Israelites who exceed the number of Levites they are to collect money. They are to give the money for redemption to Aaron and his sons to support the service of the tabernacle. When they are encamped it looks a certain way. These various sons of Aaron have various responsibilities, and then as they move out you see where they are supposed to travel and carry the elements of the tabernacle. The cloud and the fire of the Lord that goes with them is the glory of the Lord as the army marches with them. So we see a lot of preparation for them moving out in terms of the priestly responsibilities, the dedication of the tabernacle in Numbers 7, the setting apart of the Levites, and the movement of the cloud above the tabernacle. In Numbers 10 the trumpet blast sounds, and verse 11 says, “On the twentieth day of the second month of the second year,” so that is about a year and a half that they are encamped at Sinai. “The cloud lifted from the tabernacle of the testimony and the Israelites set out from the desert of Sinai and traveled from place to place until the cloud came to rest in the desert of Paran. They set out the first time at the LORD’s command through Moses.” So this is a big moment.

This is a huge moment in Numbers 10, but notice that right from the beginning in verses 29 and 30 that there is an inkling of a problem. “Moses said to Hobab son of Reuel the Midianite, Moses’ father-in-law, ‘We are setting out for the place about which the LORD said, “I will give it to you,” come with us and we will treat you well for the LORD has promised good things to Israel.’ And he answered, ‘No, I will not go. I am going back to my own land and my own people.’” So we see in this initial refusal a sense of what might be coming, and sure enough what we see in Numbers 11 through 16 in particular is, time and time again, various expressions of rebellion against the Lord. In Numbers 11 the people complain about the hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when He hears them His anger is aroused and the fire from the Lord burns them and consumes some from the outskirts of the camp. The place was called Taberah because fire from the Lord had burned among them. In the rest of Numbers 11 we get this notion of manna and no meat. And this burden is so heavy on Moses, so we have the appointing of the 70 elders to help him. But we see the people complaining about God’s provision for them, and again we see
judgment coming on them. Verse 33 says, “While the meat was still between their teeth and before it could be consumed, the anger of the LORD burned against the people, and he struck them with a severe plague,” because the people had craved other food. We see various expressions of rebellion about God’s provision of food.

Second, they rebel against God’s provision of leadership. Miriam and Aaron challenge Moses in Numbers 12. Notice this extraordinary description of the Lord’s relationship with Moses in Numbers 12:6, “When a prophet of the Lord is among you I reveal myself to him in visions. I speak to him in dreams, but this is not true of my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. When I speak to him I speak face to face, clearly, not in riddles. He sees the form of Yahweh. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”

Then in Numbers 13 and 14 the spies explore the land. God’s people are encamped at Kadesh, and they are sent to explore the land of Canaan. What we have here is the turning point between the first and second generation. That is why Numbers 14:31-32 are good memory verses. They capture the purpose of the book of Numbers. We see a pattern of how the Lord’s judgment operates against the wilderness generation. Oftentimes he uses their very words against them. In Numbers 14:3 the people say, “Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Would not it be better for us to go back to Egypt? We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt.” In Numbers 14:26,

The Lord says to Moses and Aaron, “How long will this wicked community grumble against me. I have heard the complaints and the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, ‘As surely as I live I will do to you the very things that I heard you say. In this desert your bodies will fall. Every one of you twenty years old or more, not one of you will enter the land that I swore with uplifted hand to make your home except Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun. As for your children that you said would be taken as plunder I will bring them in to enjoy the land that you have rejected. But you, your bodies will fall in this desert. Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness until the last of your bodies lies in the desert.’”

God refers here to those counted in the first generation census. We are to get that echo. We have the generational divide, which divides the book of Numbers and gets at its heart, based on the rebellion of refusing to go into the land.

We have some other expressions of rebellion. The Sabbath breaker is in Numbers 15, but we also have, more importantly, Korah, Nathan, and Abiram in Numbers 16 who again oppose Moses and Aaron. What is so startling about them is they are Levites, so we have the degree of corruption and rebellion being reflected in the fact that those who are to represent the Lord to the people and the people to the Lord are in rebellion against the Lord’s plan. What this requires, then, is that actually the priests and the Levites have to be reconstituted. That is what we see with the budding of Aaron’s staff in Numbers 17 and the duties of the priests and the Levites having to be restated in chapter 18. The cleansing of the red heifer takes place in Numbers 19. The priesthood in many ways has to be redone because of this rebellion and the degree of the rebellion of the first generation.

They say, “We are really sorry,” and there is a depth of mourning and grief about their rebellion against God. They mourn bitterly, it says in Numbers 14:39, and some of them want to go ahead and go up again and continue the journey toward the land. Notice that in Numbers 20 we have the beginnings of what the Lord said would happen coming true. We have Miriam and Aaron’s death. The Lord said that the first generation would die. The corruption and rebellion of that generation extends even to the
Levites. Miriam and Aaron die in Numbers 20. We also have there the incident with the water from the rock with Moses. Even Moses himself, in some ways representing that first generation, will not go into the land either. We have this passage in Numbers 20:12, “‘Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites you will not bring this community into the land that I give them.’ These were the waters of Meribah where the Israelites quarreled with the LORD and where he showed himself as holy among them.”

We also have other problems. They begin journeying up on the eastern side toward Edom. Edom is from Esau, and they will not allow them to pass through even though they are distant brothers. They say it more than once: “You may not pass through here. You may not pass through here.” This happens even though they say they will just walk right through and anything they use they will replenish. We will see judgment against Edom for that. Then we have the incident with the bronze snake in Numbers 21. In Numbers 19 we see the red heifer, and in chapter 21 we see the bronze snake. Later comes the scepter and the star and the issue about Balaam’s oracle in Numbers 24. These are all types that will be picked up in the New Testament later. We see with the emerging second generation this two-edged aspect of the book of Numbers. When they rebel like their parents or with their parents they suffer defeat and judgment as with the bronze snake. When they are obedient they are victorious. With the defeat of Arad and Sihon and Og are these foretastes of obedience producing conquest and success.

The Sihon and Og issue takes place in Heshbon, just north of where Edom is on the eastern side of the Jordan coming just across from Jericho. The defeat of Sihon and Og sets up the situation with Balak the king of Moab. That takes quite a long time, and Numbers 22 through 24 is given to this whole cycle with Balak and Balaam the seer. In some ways this is hysterical. There are so many things about this that are funny. Balaam is a seer, but the seer cannot see the angel of the Lord in front of the donkey. We are supposed to get that joke. The donkey can see, but the so-called seer cannot. This whole cycle is just dripping with irony. Balak hires a mercenary prophet diviner to come and to do an easy, simple job for him: “Pronounce a curse against this massive people who are on my doorstep. We are shaking in our boots because there are lots of them. They have defeated Sihon and Og. We have heard how God brought them out of Egypt. So I will hire you, and you come and pronounce a curse.” The guy who is supposed to be able to divine these things and to see these things cannot see, but his donkey can see. We see the donkey incident and the multiple appeals of the delegation that come from Balak to hire Balaam. In this the Lord makes it very clear to Balaam that he must not say anything other than what He tells him to say. The whole incident with the donkey is very much focused on stressing to Balaam that he better not say anything other than what Yahweh, who appears to him graciously and gives him eyes to see, says for him to say. It is interesting that by the time that we get to the fourth oracle we see this phrase, “The oracle of Balaam son of Beor, the oracle of the one whose eye sees clearly: I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star will come out of Jacob, a scepter will rise out of Israel and crush the foreheads of Moab, the skulls of all the sons of Sheth. Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered. But Israel will be strong. A ruler will come out of Jacob and destroy the survivors of the city.” The irony extends finally to the fact that the one who hired Balaam to come and pronounce a curse on the Israelites pronounces blessing instead on the Israelites and pronounces a curse on Moab. The exact opposite happens.

What is stressed to the second generation in this narrative is the lengths to which the Lord will go to protect them. If they do not go into the land, if they do not obey, if they rebel like their parents did, it will not be the Lord’s fault if they do not make it into the land. These incidents, first with Sihon and Og and then with Moab, make the Lord’s commitment to Israel abundantly clear. Through four oracles and all these appearances of the Lord to this diviner dripping with irony, the Lord’s commitment to Israel and to the Abrahamic covenant is abundantly clear. In Numbers 24:9 we see a direct quotation in
Balaam’s third oracle. Balaam sees that it pleases the Lord to bless Israel. He finally sees only what the Lord reveals to him. In verse 4 he sees a “vision from the Almighty […] how beautiful are the tents of Jacob, the dwelling places of Israel.” He blesses Israel. Notice what he says in verse 9, “May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed.” This is a direct echo of Genesis 12. This whole cycle of visions, oracles, worship sites, and gracious appearances of the Lord to this foreign diviner, this mercenary diviner, make it abundantly clear to the second generation that the Lord is committed to their protection and their blessing if they will be faithful in covenant with Him.

Unfortunately even though the Lord goes to these lengths and protects them against the pronouncement of a curse we also see that Moab seduces Israel. They give into the seduction of sacrifices to Baal and to fertility rites in Numbers 25. We also see the rise of Phinehas as he is the instrument of the Lord’s judgment against those who participate. He is the son of Eleazar, who is now the priest, the son of Aaron, who is now dead. Phinehas is the instrument of the Lord’s judgment in chapter 25. In chapter 26 we see the new census that takes place. From Numbers 26 through 36 we begin to get a renewed momentum toward conquest in the land by the second generation. That momentum builds on these preliminary experiences of both judgment for disobedience and blessing in military victories when they do obey. We also see the emphasis again and again on the inheritance. Numbers 26:52 says, “The Lord says to Moses, ‘The land is to be allotted to them as an inheritance based on the number of names. To a larger group give a larger inheritance. To a smaller group a smaller inheritance. Be sure the land is distributed by lot, what each group inherits will be according to the names for its ancestral tribe. Each inheritance is to be distributed by lot according to larger and smaller groups.’” This is at the end of the second census, which was not only for battle preparation but also for the expectation of land being conveyed.

We also have the emphasis on the succession of Joshua in Numbers 27:18-19—“Take Joshua, the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit and lay your hand upon him. Have him stand before Eleazar the priest.” So Moses did as the Lord commanded him. Then we get in chapter 32 what I mentioned before where the Reubenites and the Gadites want to go ahead and settle down. We see that they are not to settle down according to Moses until the land is taken. We need everyone together in this battle. But they can have the land on the eastern side of the Jordan after the conquest takes place. Then in Numbers 33 we have the Exodus reviewed again. We see the emphasis on the distribution of the land and the boundaries of the land the Lord will give them in chapters 33 through 35, and the inheritance is allotted. In Numbers 26 through 36, with the beginning of the second census, we get momentum. On the eastern side of the Jordan things are moving toward conquest of the land by the second generation. The pastoral purpose of the book of Numbers is to warn the second generation not to rebel like their parents did but instead to go into the land that the Lord gives.

Let us talk about Deuteronomy. We do not need to do a whole lot with Deuteronomy, because we have said so much already about the law in our discussions about Exodus. We do need to say a few things about Deuteronomy, and I think we can do that fairly quickly. Is this a second law? Deutero nomas in Greek means “second law.” That is somewhat of an unfortunate translation of Deuteronomy 17:18. Perhaps a better translation is a “copy of this law.” The notion of copying the law is a provision of treaties. Treaties are supposed to be copied by kings and passed on to those who follow after them. They are supposed to be copied, distributed, and read among the people. We have a restatement of the law, and this restatement is for the second generation. We see in Deuteronomy 4:15 Moses reminding the second generation by saying, “You saw no form of any kind the day that the Lord spoke to you out of fire.” Why does he say, “the Lord spoke to you” at Horeb if the second generation was not there? Their parents were there, but they were in the loins of their parents. He says in verse 23, “Be careful not to forget the covenant of the LORD your God that he made with you. Do not make for yourselves an idol in
the form of anything the LORD has forbidden. The LORD your God is a consuming fire.” Then he emphasizes in chapter 4 that this covenant is made with the second generation. Verse 45 says, “I set before you the stipulation, decrees, and laws that Moses gave to them when they came out of Egypt and were in the valley near Beth-peor, east of the Jordan.” Moses says in Deuteronomy 5:1, “Here O Israel the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant but with us and with all of us who are alive here today.” We see a restatement of the law for the second generation.

Even more clearly than Exodus, the book of Deuteronomy takes the form of a treaty or a constitution for this new nation-state. It incorporates into the constitution things that are different from Exodus. These are things that they will need for living in the land, so we have some new legislation regarding that. For example, in Deuteronomy 12 we come to a turning point. We see that Moses begins talking about this place where “I am going to put my name, where you are to go to worship.” While they travel through the wilderness with the tabernacle they know where the place is because it is right there with them. They are all in one place together as this nation traveling through the wilderness. Once they begin to go settle in all of these various places of the land inheritance, then the Lord will have a place where they need to travel to where He causes His name to dwell. That is just an example of the fact that the pastoral needs of the second generation are different. Now they settle in the land, so there are aspects of this legislation that are tailored for the second generation and added to what was given before. They need this legislation as they go into the land. It reconstitutes the second generation as the Lord’s covenant people and gives them additional leadership and legal structures for life in the land. It also warns them that retention of that land is tied to their exclusive loyalty to the Lord.

We really should not overlook the importance of the first commandment. The first commandment is at the heart of the entire law. In the Shemah in chapter 6 we see the emphasis underscoring the first commandment. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, “Hear O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. These commandments that I give to you today are to be upon your heart.” All these intricate laws that Moses is about to give them are summed up in verse 20, which says, “In the future when your son asks, ‘What is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees, and laws?’ tell him this, ‘We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Before our eyes the Lord sent miraculous signs and wonders. The Lord brought us here from there to bring us and give us to a land that he promised on oath to our forefathers. The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God so that we might always prosper and be kept alive as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey this law before the Lord our God that will be our righteousness.’” At the very heart of all of these decrees and stipulations is this fundamental, exclusive loyalty to the One who brought them out of Egypt. “You shall have no other gods before me,” gets expressed over and over and over again in various ways. We see it here in the Shemah. “Hear O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart.”

This structure for the outline of Deuteronomy in many ways follows the treaty format. We have a preamble, an historical prologue that reviews the history from Egypt through the wilderness. Then we have the stipulations in Deuteronomy 4 through 26. That is divided into two parts, as we will see. Then from Deuteronomy 27 through 30 we have the sanctions of this treaty, which are the blessings and the curses. There are blessings if you obey and curses if you disobey. Chapters 31 through 34 show the leadership succession. This really is a constitution and a polity for the people who will go into the land.
We get provisions in Deuteronomy 17 and 18 for new institutions that will take place in the land. I mentioned that chapter 12 is about the place where the Lord will put His name. That will be instrumental later for identifying the place for the temple as we will see in 1 Kings 8 and 2 Chronicles 7. We get provisions for a king in Deuteronomy 17. For example, when a king comes to power, how is the king supposed to behave? It is those very provisions in chapter 17 that Solomon will violate, and the writer of Samuel and Kings use these to show the violation of the covenant. Solomon does not behave like an Israelite king should. We also have the provision for another institution, the office of prophet, in Deuteronomy 18. Some things are added that were not talked about in Exodus in order to provide for this people that will settle in the land.

I mentioned that the stipulations from Deuteronomy 4 through 26 are really divided into two parts. We have the phrase “stipulations, laws, and decrees” several times as we saw in Deuteronomy 4:45. We see it again in Deuteronomy 6:20, and it outlines what follows. The stipulations come first with the laws and decrees coming afterward. What we see in the stipulations is this emphasis over and over again on loyalty to Yahweh. Loyal love is the basis of all of these commands. Moses warns them against making treaties with the nations who dwell in the land that they are about to enter. This is an emphasis on their unique pastoral situation. Notice what he says in Deuteronomy 8:11 and following, “When you come into the land remember the LORD your God. When you have eaten and have been satisfied, praise the Lord for this good land. Be careful not to forget by failing to observe his commands, laws, and decrees otherwise when you eat and are satisfied and you build your fine houses and you settle down with your herds and your flocks and they grow large your heart will become proud. But remember the LORD your God, that he is the one who has given you this land. He is the one who provided manna in the wilderness.” He reminds them not to forget the Lord their God. He says they will say to themselves, “By our own power and strength I have produced this wealth.”

We see in Deuteronomy 5 through 11 over and over again a reminder of God’s grace to them from Egypt through the wilderness and a specific charge that they should remember the Lord in loyal love. That comes very clear in Deuteronomy 11:13, “Be faithful to obey all the commands I am giving you today, to love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and soul, and I will send rain on the land in its season. I will provide grass in the fields.” The basis of this constitution is loyal love to Yahweh.

We begin to see in Deuteronomy 12 through 26 various and specific applications of these commandments. There are the 10 words that were listed in chapter 5, and we begin to see various applications and combinations of what that will look like when you are in the land. For example, in terms of words one through three we see the emphasis on the place of the name in Deuteronomy 12 through 16, “Go to the place where I shall put my name and worship me there. Have no other gods. Go to no other place, no other gods.” With the phrases “no other place,” “no other gods,” and “my name,” you can see the emphasis on the first three commandments to have no other gods, make no graven images, and to not take the name of the Lord in vain. It begins to talk about what it will look like to embody these 10 words when you come into the land. The king is referred to in Deuteronomy 17, and the priests, Levites, and prophets are discussed in chapter 18.

When we come to the last major section we get a refrain that we heard not only in Exodus but also in Leviticus 26. This refrain is about blessings on the land and blessings on your children for your loyal love in this covenant relationship. “This land that I have given you, the children that I give you, you will experience death if you do not obey me. You will be vomited out of the land.” In Deuteronomy 27 and 28 we see that curses and the blessings are related to covenant faithfulness. Blessing results in life in the
land. Choose life, not death. Curse results in exile, being ejected and evicted from the land that the Lord has given them.

A good way to end in looking at Deuteronomy is found in chapter 26. You can see in chapters 26 and 27 lists of blessings and curses. Let me just give you this vivid image of bringing the firstfruits. Deuteronomy 12 through 16 tells us where they are supposed to go to bring the firstfruits. The firstfruits are the crops that result from having been brought into the land. The Lord has kept His promise to them; He has brought them into the land. Now they are to go to that place that expresses complete loyalty to Yahweh to worship Him there, the place where His name is put. They are to bring the first from each of the crops and the cattle, and they are to bring an offering for their firstborn children. Again, the issue of the firstborn expresses with the Passover out of Egypt. In worship they are supposed to recite this passage from Deuteronomy 26:5 and following,

My father was a wandering Aramean. He came down into Egypt with just a few people. He lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. We cried out to the Lord, the God of our fathers. The Lord heard our voice. He saw our misery, our toil and oppression, so the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. And he brought us to this place. He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now I bring the firstfruits of the soil, O Lord, that you have given me. And place the basket before the Lord.”

Again, it is like we are there in Egypt. This is a powerful image in the feast of firstfruits of the whole story being reenacted. The faithfulness of Yahweh who now has made good on the land promise is emphasized. Not only are we in the land, but the land is so good it produces crops. Now I express my faithfulness and my loyalty to this God who is faithful by bringing the fruit of that land. I commune with that God in this place where His name dwells, the place of the name and the place of the land. You see in this picture of worship the image of Eden and this communion between the covenant people and their God. That covers the book of Deuteronomy.