

Not Alone: God's Relentless Pursuit
Leviticus - Deuteronomy: God Provides for His People

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For these eleven weeks, we are going to find hope through the encouragement of Scripture, through everything that has been written in the past! How will we possibly cover 21,612 verses? Think of doing a “fly-over.” When we are on a flight and the plane reaches cruising altitude at 35,000 feet, if it’s a clear day, we can see an enormous amount of land, water, mountains, or cities below, and something will capture our attention. In the same way, we will look at this expansive amount of Scripture each week and see **four** distinct ways the passage speaks into our lives, and the good Lord willing, something will capture our attention. Using the word LIFE, here’s the sermon outline for all our note-takers for these eleven weeks.

- L → Literal—What is the original meaning/message of the book?
- I → Incarnational—How is Jesus reflected in the book?
- F → Formational—How does the book apply to our lives?
- E → Eternal—How does the book point us to heaven and eternity?

Last week, we did a fly-over of Exodus and this week, we are doing a fly-over of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, which is *only a mere 97 chapters!*

LITERAL

As we make our fly-over these three books, we discover that the Israelites are no longer in Egypt. Under the cover of darkness, in the middle of the night, they exited Egypt. What also stands out in our fly-over is that the Israelites have not yet arrived at their destination in the Promised Land of Canaan. They’re not in Egypt, nor in the Promised Land; they are in what could be called is the **land between**. What was it like for them in the land between? Four things stand out from our fly-over as to the literal content of these three books.

Harsh

In Hebrew, the word Numbers means “in the wilderness,” and that is exactly where the Israelites found themselves. It was a vast desert wasteland covering more than 24,000 square miles of barren land, an area equivalent to the state of West Virginia! With the land receiving less than four inches of rainfall in an entire year and temperatures commonly over 100 degrees, the taste of dust between the people’s teeth and the smell of sweat was ever present. It is no wonder there were constant complaints and cries from the people with the blazing sun overhead and burning sand underfoot. Harsh may even be too simple a word.

Huge

Another word that describes the literal context of these three books is “huge.” We need to grasp the sheer number of people moving through the wilderness together. As the Israelites began their trek, God instructed Moses to count the people, to take a census, and here’s the result: “These were the men counted by Moses and Aaron and the twelve leaders of Israel, each one representing his family. All the Israelites twenty years old or more who were able to serve in Israel’s army were counted according to their families. The total number was 603,550” (Numbers 1:44-46).

If we assume that these 603,550 20-year-old and older men were married, that would give us 1.2 million men and women (and some had more than one wife). Then let’s give each couple two or three children (which is a modest, minimal number), so conservatively roughly three million people were making this

hike together! What a HUGE number of people. Camping in their tents—with their livestock—next to one another in close proximity, they would cover an area roughly one hundred square miles in size. That's Detroit, Michigan! Walking fifty people across, three million people would stretch out in a line forty miles long. Walking at an average pace, it would take sixteen hours for them all to pass the same point. Three million people would require thirty railroad cars of food and 300 tanker cars of water PER DAY! After the forty years they spent in the wilderness, the adults would NOT enter the Promised Land. They would die in the wilderness and there would be a funeral every twenty minutes. How would Moses communicate with people covering one hundred square miles, and distribute food and water to these millions and their herds of animals? Where would you go to be alone to find some peace and quiet?

Help

Think about it. Three million people moving through 24,000 square miles of desert wilderness. There was no Costco or Sam's Club to buy food and water in bulk, no rest areas to pull over for a quick stop, no central air to quell the oppressive heat, no swimming pools to enjoy. How would they survive in the land between? Their survival was nothing less than the direct and divine intervention of Almighty God.

“On the day the tabernacle, the tent of the covenant law, was set up, **the cloud** covered it” (Numbers 9:15-17). God provided shade during the day and light through the night by means of a pillar of cloud that was always positioned vertically over the tabernacle. When the pillar of cloud moved, the people broke camp and moved, and when the pillar remained stationary, the people set up camp and stayed. And God provided food—bread and meat—for millions of people.

The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this **manna!**” (Numbers 11:4-9)

Now a wind went out from the Lord and drove **quail** in from the sea. It scattered them up to two cubits deep all around the camp, as far as a day's walk in any direction. All that day and night and all the next day the people went out and gathered quail. No one gathered less than ten homers. Then they spread them out all around the camp. (Numbers 11:31-32)

Manna (meaning “what is it?”) mysteriously appeared six days a week, fifty-two weeks a year, for forty years. As soon as they stepped foot in the promised land and ate food there, the manna stopped just as mysteriously as it started (Joshua 5:12).

The quail blew in from over the Mediterranean Sea and fell dead at the feet of the Israelites—three feet deep! People picked up dead quail with each person taking home no less than ten homers. There are numerous interpretations of the quantity of a homer, yet many, if not most, interpretations say a homer was six bushels, so ten homers likely amounted to sixty bushels of dead quail! How do you eat sixty bushels of quail? You don't! It spoils, rots, and decays, especially in desert heat with no possibility of refrigeration. The complaining Israelites had meat to eat, and plenty of it! And they washed it down with water from God.

He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, “Listen, you rebels, must we bring you **water** out of this rock?” Then Moses raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. (Numbers 20:10-11)

This is but one instance of many when God miraculously provided water for His people to drink.

With the constant pillar of His presence, bread and meat to eat, and water to drink, God helped his people in ways they never could provide for themselves in the land between.

Hurt

The Israelites experienced a whole lot of hurt while in their land between. Repeatedly, they rebelled against God. After all that God had done and was doing for them, the Israelites rejected God and repeatedly wanted to return to Egypt. It all reached a peak when God told Moses to send twelve men (one from each of the twelve tribes) into the Promised Land to see its bounty. The twelve men (i.e., spies) traveled throughout the land for forty days and they brought back a report for Moses and the people. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, reported that the land was incredible and that they could take possession of it. However, ten of the spies spread a bad report among the people that they could not take the land, but that the Israelites would be conquered by its inhabitants. Here's what they said.

That night all the members of the community raised their voices and wept aloud. All the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and the whole assembly said to them, "If only we had died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! 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. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" (Numbers 14:1-3)

What was God's response? He was about to wipe them out, but Moses interceded for them and God relented. Though God forgave the Israelites, there were consequences for their rebellion against and rejection of God. One year of wandering in the harsh wilderness for each day the spies were in the Promised Land. The Israelites experienced forty years of profound, unnecessary suffering. The book of Deuteronomy is a collection of three sermons that Moses preached right before he died and the Israelites marched into the Promised Land. Check out how Moses began his collection of sermons. It should have only taken them eleven days to get to the border of the Promised Land—not forty years (Deuteronomy 1:1-2). But rebellion against and rejection of God led to a whole lot of unnecessary hurt.

What stands out in our fly-over of 97 chapters of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy? Literally, a **huge** number of people made it through a **harsh**, unforgiving terrain by the **help** of God amid a whole lot of **hurt**.

INCARNATIONAL

How is Jesus reflected in these three books of the Old Testament? Three unmistakable pictures of Jesus appear in this section of the Bible, which validates the veracity of Scripture.

For forty years, God compassionately and generously gave the Israelites manna to eat. Roughly 1,400 years later, Jesus said,

"Your ancestors ate the **manna** in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. I am the **living bread** that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." (John 6:49-51)

Jesus is reflected in the manna. Jesus also made another statement that tied Him directly to the Israelites in their land between: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up" (John 3:14).

In the Israelites forty years of wandering and rebellion against God, there came a moment when venomous snakes were biting and killing people. Moses made a pole with a bronze snake on it. When people who had been bitten looked up at it, they lived. Jesus made a prophetic statement that He would be lifted up, referring to His death on a cross. Those who turn to Him in surrender live forevermore.

FORMATIONAL

How do these three books apply to our lives, forming us increasingly into the likeness of Jesus? Simply put, we are in **our land between**. Like the Israelites, we have been freed from bondage. For those who have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ, we are no longer slaves to sin because the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross has freed us from bondage to sin. But we are not yet with Him in heaven, our Promised Land. We are literally in our land between.

The Israelites were taken suddenly from what they knew as normal, being slaves in Egypt, and were put into the wilderness, an unfamiliar, unknown place. It may be that we are no longer in what seems normal, but suddenly find ourselves in an unfamiliar, unknown place while on the road of life. We find ourselves in the land between when we lose a job and before we find another. It's the time between an injury or illness suddenly inflicting us and healing happening over time. We experience the land between when a marriage and family explodes in disagreement and dysfunction that seems to last far too long and is much too deep. The land between can be physically moving from one familiar place we call home to another place that is unsettling—and not home. We enter the land between when we graduate from high school and find ourselves in college, the military, or the work force. The land between can be when we find ourselves suddenly single, or now making weekly visits to the nursing home, or finding sources for food assistance. The land between is where life is not as it once was and where the future is not yet known.

For the Christian, the land between can be a desert where faith goes to die or a place where faith becomes deep. Corrie ten Boom and her Dutch family were known for saving 800 Jews from death at the hand of Nazi Germany. Corrie survived imprisonment in the Nazi concentration camp Ravensbrück, but her sister, Betsie, did not. Just twelve days before Corrie was released in 1944 at the age of 52, Betsie died. Before she died, Betsie reminded Corrie, “No pit is so deep that God is not deeper still.” No matter how huge or harsh, how deep or difficult, the land between appears, God is deeper still. Life in a wasteland does not have to be wasted. We can be formed into the likeness of Jesus while in the land between.

The soil of suffering can cause monumental growth in God. But be warned. The land between is also the place where faith goes to die. It is easy to see how that happened among the Israelites. Transformational growth is not on autopilot. We can emerge from the desert more bitter than when we went in, more angry with God than in times past, more resentful than we have ever been. Do not cave in to complaint. The climate of the land between either draws us to God in dependency or drives us from God in anger and bitterness. There is no neutral. The choice is ours.

It all comes down to a decision, and a *daily* decision at that. Will I be bitter or better today while in the land between? Repeatedly, the Israelites decided to be bitter. They toyed with going back to Egypt where they thought they were better off without God. Day after day, the repeat offenders moaned and groaned, whined and wailed. It was a gargantuan gripe fest of three million people. Regretfully, human nature has not changed. In our land between, our hearts become hard from enduring hardships and like repeat offenders we make the same wrong decision day after day. “See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows to cause trouble and defile many” (Hebrews 12:15).

Day by day, do not miss God's grace, mercy and kindness—and offer the same to others while making sure that no bitterness takes root in your life. This is that time of year when seeds of soft maple trees fall to the ground like mini helicopters. Left alone, they quickly take root. But we can simply pluck a seedling

from the ground with our thumb and forefinger. If we leave it alone for a spell, we may have to wrap our hand around the sapling if we are to pull and tug to uproot it. If we leave it alone for months, we will need a shovel to dig it up because as it grows tall, the roots will go deep into the ground. The same happens in our land between. Daily decisions to be bitter, angry, and resentful towards someone or something is a waste in the wasteland. A formation occurs but it is far from being like Jesus.

Conversely, if while in our land between, we make a daily decision to be better, we become increasingly like Jesus. God is immutable, meaning that He does not change. God even said, “I, the Lord, do not change” (Malachi 3:6). God said it; that settles it. So then, more than 3,500 years ago, God was present with His people in their land between, providing for them with food to eat, water to drink, and clothes to wear. Our never-changing God is still our provider in our land between. Will we decide to turn to and trust in God, our ever-present provider or, like the Israelites, will we turn from God in bitterness, resenting and rejecting Him? In their land between, the Israelites were blind to God’s constant presence and goodness. The question is, are we? We find that for which we look. If we are looking for red in this room, we will find it. If we are looking for God’s goodness in our land between, we will see it. “For I am confident of this, I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait on the Lord. Be strong, take heart and wait on the Lord” (Psalm 27:13-14).

The purpose of the land between is to forge a relationship of faith and trust in God. Because we trust Him to take us into heaven—our Promised Land—when we die, we should decide to trust Him now for all that we need in our land between.

ETERNAL

How do these books of the Law—the Torah—point us to heaven and eternity? Twenty-five times they mention a “promised land” where God is taking His people. If it is repeated, it is important! Going all the way back to Abraham in Genesis, God spoke of a land into which He would bring His people. Yet the Israelites chose to dwell on the present and not focus on the future. They were on a journey to a land flowing with milk and honey, a land with abundant food and water. Rather than look ahead, they hung their heads, thinking the land between was all there is.

God kept pointing them to a Promised Land, and God—who never changes—points us to our Promised Land! With our heads held high, we must focus on the future that is as bright as the promises of God. The Apostle Paul did this very thing. Paul’s land between was one of great suffering. If anyone could have become bitter, Paul could have, but he didn’t as he chose to be better by placing his trust and faith in Almighty God. Day after day, Paul kept looking up to his Promised Land while being in the land between. While unjustly incarcerated, Paul wrote, “This one thing I do: forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which the Lord has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13-14).

Paul was not focused on his current suffering in the land between; he was focused on his coming salvation when he would see Jesus in the Promised Land of heaven. Similarly, he wrote to struggling Christians in Colossae.

Since, then, we have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things about where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, and not on earthly things, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

To the church in Corinth, Paul wrote strong words that gave them hope about the future in spite of the present.

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but on what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

The Torah—especially Numbers and Deuteronomy—repeatedly speak of a Promised Land on the other side of the land between. We have a Promised Land awaiting us on the other side of this land between.

Conclusion

When we do a fly-over of America while in a plane, something might stand out. The same happens when we do a fly-over of Scripture. What stood out to you from the 97 chapters of Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy? How did the Lord speak to you through His Holy Spirit? Remember, God Himself said, “I, the Lord, do not change” (Malachi 3:6). God *still provides* for His people. You and I are **not alone**.

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace” (Number 6:24-26).