

Summary

In the first half of Exodus, you'll read the action-packed story of Moses and the Israelites' escape from Egypt. In the second half, you'll see instructions for the tabernacle (God's holy dwelling) and the priesthood. The book begins with Moses' origin story, his forty years as an adopted son in the Egyptian royal family and his forty years as a fugitive in the desert. At age eighty, he encountered God in the form of a burning bush and received a mission to free God's people. Reluctantly, with the help of his brother, Aaron, he confronted the pharaoh, demanding that he let God's people go. The pharaoh's refusal resulted in ten grisly plagues; in the final plague, the angel of death "passed over" Hebrew homes that had been painted in the blood of pure lambs.

You'll read about the Hebrews' dramatic exit from Egypt and escape through the Red Sea. While they set out through the wilderness, God provided guidance through a pillar of cloud and fire; food through manna and quail; and water from a rock. Then, critically, He gave Moses the Ten Commandments, the foundation of Hebrew Law and our standard for holy attitudes toward God and other people. In the story of the golden calf, you'll see the first of many cycles of God's people toward idolatry and back to God again. God then gave Moses instructions for His holy tabernacle, a place of worship and a reminder of His presence in the middle of the people's camp. All of its symbolic aspects were there to remind them of His covenant, His provision, and His guidance.



Reflections

1. Based on Moses' choices and actions, how would you describe him? What does it mean to you that God chose to rescue His nation through Moses?

2. How does this book show that God equips the called, instead of calling the equipped? How does this make you feel about your own calling? Do you trust that God equips you just as He equipped Moses and Aaron?

Leviticus

“I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

LEVITICUS 11:45

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READING PLAN

10 days; 2.5 chapters a day

THEMES

laws; rituals; regulations for the holiness of God’s people

MAJOR PLAYERS

Israelite people, Levites (Israel’s priests and priestly assistants), Moses

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Background

As part of the Pentateuch, or first five books of the Bible, scholars traditionally attribute authorship to Moses, who passed on God’s laws to the people at Sinai. Dated from 1450 to 1410 BC, Moses wrote this book as a handbook for the Levites, God’s priests.

Summary

The Levites were one of the twelve tribes of Israel, descended from Levi. They were priests for all of Israel, as well as assistants, judges, teachers, and personnel for the tabernacle and temple. They were supported by tithes from the other eleven tribes, and

they had varied and detailed responsibilities. This book is a manual for their work with sacrifices, offerings, and rules for daily living and governance. When you read, you may find some of these statutes odd, shocking, severe, or even funny (please, only eat bugs with jointed legs, and lay off the geckos). However they may seem to us now, they reflect a God who is interested in every corner of His people's daily lives and who would protect them from anything that could undermine or weaken them as a civilization. Pay special attention to the sacrifices described in Leviticus; they'll come back up again in relation to Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Reflections

1. As you read, keep track of the different kinds of sacrifices and offerings and why the people made them. Knowing Christ acts as our final sacrifice, are there any reasons in your life that signal you to turn to Him?

2. Do you believe God still wants to be involved in every corner of your life? What areas in your life can you ask Him in to, even though they may seem mundane?



3. Do tradition and ritual play any part in your faith practice? If so, look into the meanings behind the traditions you practice, and examine any relation they might have to Jesus' atonement for your sins. How do traditions and rituals make you feel connected to God's people who practiced the Levitical rituals and laws?

4. God set aside special days for feasts of remembrance, worship, repentance, rest, and renewal. How might celebrating feast days for the same reasons deepen your faith?

5. Were you ever made to follow rules that you didn't understand, but they turned out to benefit you in some way? Which rules in Leviticus stand out to you as a reflection of a Father's love for His set-apart people?

Numbers

“Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel. . . . You and Aaron shall number them by their armies.”

NUMBERS 1:2-3

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READING PLAN

16 days; 2.25 chapters a day

THEMES

Israel’s forty years of wandering; organization of the people; challenges and grace on the way to the Promised Land

MAJOR PLAYERS

Aaron, Balaam, Balak, Caleb, Joshua, Korah, Miriam, Moses

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Background

At the beginning of Moses’ fourth book, the people had been encamped at Mount Sinai for approximately two years. Numbers starts with a census, or numbering (hence the name of the book), and continues through the next thirty-eight years of wandering in the desert.

Summary

After Moses had received the Law, it was time to organize and move the people toward the Promised Land. The census at the opening of Numbers counted only the men of fighting age, but scholars estimate that the Israelites numbered approximately two million in total. Moses and Aaron organized the men into armies, regulated the camps and marching orders, made offerings, and set out. Along the way, you'll see how Moses faced mess after mess, from complaining and griping people, to challenges to his authority, to plagues, fires, and attacking locals. Still, the cloud of the Lord instructed them on when to stay and go, and Moses pleaded for God's mercy on the people again and again.

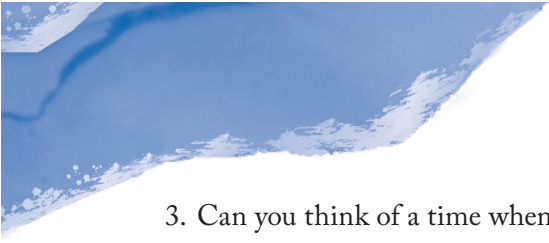
So why did they wander so long over such a short distance? At one point, they were on the edge of the Promised Land, and Moses sent out twelve spies to assess the situation. They reported that the land was a beautiful and fertile place but filled with frightening enemies. Only two spies, Caleb and Joshua, wanted to go forward. The rest wanted to turn back. At the edge of their promise, they faltered—and God made it so that none of them, except Caleb and Joshua, would enter the land. Due to his disobedience, Moses would only view it from a mountaintop.

Numbers covers not only numerical data and regulations of life in the camp but also the cycle of unbelief met with consequences, and then Moses' intercession, and then God's mercy.

Reflections

1. Note the times and reasons Moses and Aaron have to intercede and pray that God will save the people from the consequences of their actions. What does it mean to you that Jesus does the interceding for us today?

2. Think about the possibility that God may have let the people wander not only as punishment but also as a way to teach them, preserve them from harm, and let the surrounding nations know that these were His people. How do you see this happening in Numbers?



3. Can you think of a time when this happened in your life? A time of “wandering” that taught you, preserved you, or made you a witness to others? How did God meet you in that time?

4. What were the results of the people’s lack of trust in God? Of Moses’ lack of trust? When you are short on trust, how do you deal with it? What helps you return to God?

Deuteronomy

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!
You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength.

DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5

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READING PLAN

12 days; 2.75 chapters a day

THEMES

restatement of the most important laws for the new generation;
preparing to enter the Promised Land

MAJOR PLAYERS

Joshua, Moses

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Background

The final book of Moses is his farewell to the people. The next generation had risen up and was ready to enter Canaan, the Promised Land. It is dated circa 1406 BC, with the last chapter's authorship attributed most often to Joshua.

Summary

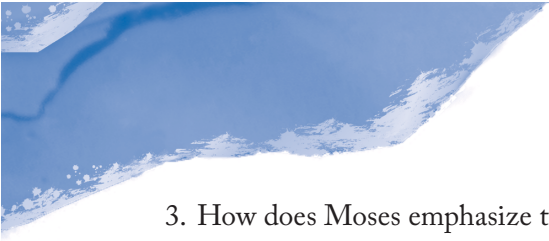
Moses knew the end of his life was approaching, and within view of the Promised Land, he summarized the most important points, laws, and lessons of the Israelites' wandering in the wilderness. *Deuteronomy* means "second law" or "repetition of the law," but it is more than just a rehashing. Verses from this book are quoted often in the New Testament, most notably by Jesus as He responded to Satan during His temptation. Deuteronomy is the basis of the prophets' message in the rest of the Old Testament. And this book is, for us, a way to learn from the history, laws, and even the mistakes of God's people. Moses took the new generation through a retrospective of their spiritual history, emphasizing how important it was to study, honor, and teach God's Word.

Deuteronomy is set up as a treaty between God and the people, including the consequences of breaking the Law and the benefits of keeping it. Moses used this opportunity to recap daily laws on subjects small and large, showing how much God cared about justice in every aspect of their lives. He reminded them of feasts to be celebrated in remembrance of God's goodness and for social unity. Moses emphasized that their covenant with God would bring them life and that all other ways would bring death. He left them with a song and blessing, and then Moses went atop Mount Nebo to view the Promised Land, where he died. Joshua, Moses' successor, was left with the task of moving the people into the Promised Land.

Reflections

1. What are the most oft-repeated, reinforced points Moses wanted to leave with the Israelites? How are these points still relevant today?

2. Consider how important it is to review history, learn from it, and not repeat the mistakes of our ancestors. What can we learn from Moses' generation? What about generations in our time?



3. How does Moses emphasize the importance of God's Word?
As you journal through the Bible, how has reading and learning more about God's Word affected your life so far?

4. While some of these laws and regulations were specific to the people during their time, many are still easily applicable to us today. What do these laws tell us about God's attitude toward His people, His character, and His goals for them? For us today?

Joshua

“Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them.”

JOSHUA 1:6

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READING PLAN

7 days; 3.5 chapters a day

THEMES

taking hold of the Promised Land; faith and obedience; courage

MAJOR PLAYERS

Joshua, Rahab, tribes of Israel

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Background

Joshua is the first of the Historical Books of the Bible, a bridge between Moses' books and the nation of Israel's entry into the Promised Land. While the book's author is anonymous, tradition says Joshua started it and a high priest completed it. It is dated to the mid-1400s BC; be sure to check out the fascinating archeological discoveries surrounding the cities mentioned in this book.

Summary

Moses had died within view of the Promised Land, and leadership fell to his assistant, Joshua. God was with him and told him many



times to have courage as he led the people into Canaan. The first half of the book covers the conquest of the Promised Land, starting with Jericho and Israel's miraculous, wall-tumbling victory there. God continued to show up for Israel in incredible ways as they campaigned across the region, though they were still prone to faithlessness and errors of judgment. Nonetheless, God brought them into the land. The second half of the book covers land division between Israel's tribes and their restoration after forty years of wandering.

Reflections

1. Write down how many times God told Joshua and His people to "be courageous." What situations were they in? How did they respond? How did God provide? In what areas could God be calling you to be courageous?

2. God had promised Canaan to Israel, so it was basically theirs already. All they had to do was trust Him and lay hold of the blessings of Canaan sitting in front of them. Are there any promises of God that you have yet to lay hold of? If so, what is stopping you?

3. Joshua warned the people about idolatry, a recurring problem for them. They were in danger of taking on the gods of their neighbors. But Joshua declared, “As for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (24:15). If you make this declaration for yourself, what kinds of things in today’s culture will you choose *not* to serve?

4. At the end of the book, Joshua set up a stone memorial or altar to celebrate God keeping His covenant. What kinds of battles has God helped you through? How can you set up metaphorical “altars or memorials” to remind you of how God has helped you through your battles and of His goodness?

Judges

In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

JUDGES 21:25

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READING PLAN

8 days; 2.5 chapters a day

THEMES

cycle of sin; consequences and deliverance; God using the weak to fulfill His purposes

MAJOR PLAYERS

Abimelech, Amalekites, Ammonites, Arabians, Barak, Deborah, Delilah, Gideon, Jael, Jephthah, Midianites, Moabites, Philistines, Samson, Sisera

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Background

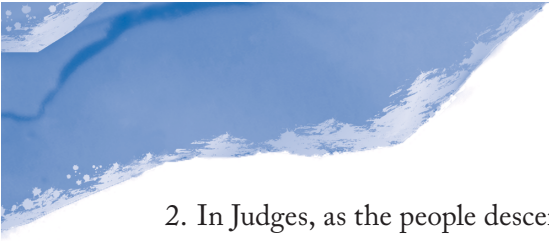
Judges takes place after Joshua died and covers nonchronological events during a period of 300–400 years, circa 1400–1100 BC. The author is anonymous, but tradition points to Samuel, writing circa 1050–1000 BC.

Summary

After Joshua's generation died out, the Israelites fell into disunity and idolatry, picking up their neighbors' habits as well as their false gods. At that time their government was a *theocracy*, led directly by God. But they launched into a cycle of forgetting God, being oppressed by other people, crying out to God, and being rescued. In response to their cries, God raised up judges not only to govern the people but also to lead battles against those who would destroy them. Here we see a civilization continually approaching the brink of destruction and being miraculously saved by God every time. You'll read some grim and grisly tales in this book, but you'll also see a God who continually steps in to save His people.

Reflections

1. As you read, write down some of the odd things Israelites used for weapons (millstone, tent peg, jawbone of a donkey, etc.). This seems to complement God using odd items (and ill-suited people) to win a victory—or using the weak to put the mighty to shame (1 Corinthians 1:27). How has God used something odd or ill-suited in your life to bring victory?



2. In Judges, as the people descend into separation from God, we hear the same refrain: “Everyone did what was right in [their] own eyes” (Judges 21:25). How did this lead to disaster for them? How does it for us? Have you ever followed your own desires and found yourself lost?

3. With each judge, the people went through a predictable cycle (rebellion, consequences, repentance, salvation). Have you personally seen this cycle in action? How does it comfort you to know that God offers restoration?

4. How would you describe Gideon’s leadership? Have you ever suffered from “impostor syndrome” like him? How did God encourage him, and how does that encourage you in the things you’re called to?

Ruth

Ruth said: “Entreat me not to leave you, or to turn back from following after you; for wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.”

RUTH 1:16

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READING PLAN

1 day; 4 chapters a day

THEMES

loyalty; redemption; dedication; family acceptance

MAJOR PLAYERS

Boaz, Naomi, Orpah, Ruth

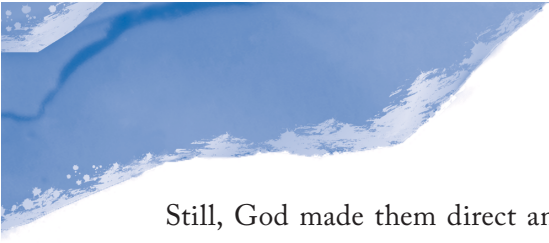
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Background

Jewish tradition tells us that Samuel wrote this book, though the book is anonymous. The author wrote it to show the lineage of a newly anointed King David, likely circa 1011–970 BC. It’s set during the time of the judges.

Summary

This is a story of love and loyalty—and of how God redeems. Ruth wasn’t born a Jew, but she made Naomi’s God her God. Boaz was a descendant of Rahab, another Gentile woman.



Still, God made them direct ancestors of Christ. Today Boaz is considered a “type” of Jesus, and Ruth, the bride of Christ or the church. That’s because Boaz, a distant relative of Naomi, acted as a kinsman-redeemer—a relative who marries a widow and takes her under his protection. As you read Ruth’s story, you’ll see a beautiful picture of how Christ welcomes us into His family.

Reflections

1. Which of Ruth’s qualities impressed Boaz and Naomi? Which ones impress you? How can you make those qualities a bigger part of your life and faith?

2. Family lineage was extremely important to the original readers of this book. What does it say about God that Ruth and Rahab were foreigners, yet He made them ancestors of Jesus?

3. Look back on Rahab's story (Joshua 2). In what ways did she and Ruth take risks to be part of God's family? How were they brave? What is your approach to risk when it comes to following God?

4. What parallels can you find between Boaz as a kinsman-redeemer and Jesus as your Redeemer?

