

RUF Bible Study – The Book of Exodus
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Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy

In Deuteronomy 34, we read of Moses' death. He has just preached a really long sermon, or a series of sermons. He was 120 years old, and his eyes undimmed and his vigor unabated, according to 34:7 – and yet he died. As a result of his missteps in Numbers 20 (only a few paragraphs for such a monumental punishment), he was not allowed to go into the Promised Land. The job to lead the people there to take the land would fall to Joshua, and turning the page we find the next book with his name and the narrative resumed.

But what did we find in the pages between Exodus 40 and Deuteronomy 34? I'm afraid that we often skip these books. Only Numbers carries a narrative, and that story is interrupted by counting after counting. We might like Balaam's donkey, but what in the world is Balaam himself talking about in all those chapters? The Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 is fairly memorable, but the offerings, rules and regulations for holiness can get rather tedious. We appreciate the 10 Commandments for the second time in Deuteronomy, but the prohibitions of sex with every possible person, place and thing seem a little excessive.

It would be profitable to teach through those books, and I hope to do so at some point in ministry. But that will have to be another time. Now I want to give some sort of overview and framework for understanding them at a macro level. That is my task, for when you get out of Exodus, I don't want you to immediately skip to Joshua. Three important books lie between. What do they teach us?

Let's recap. We have been reading and experience the story of the redemption of God's people. It is our story. It is the story with this theme: from slavery to worship by a redeemer. Along the way we learned about who God is and how he works; who we are and how we sin so much; and how we need redeemers, pictures, symbols and stories to understand our very own histories. We've seen incredible events, ones that people have found easy not to believe. We've seen subtle things like grumbling and wrongly focused worship. We've scratched our heads. We've felt a little uneasy at times. We've heard familiar passages that we love in a new way.

Exodus is the recounting of how God saved and saves his people. It's Israel's testimony. God worked in their lives.

But then what? Now what?

As we've shared our stories with each other, I've tried to get the storytellers to talk about how God *is at work* in their lives. Presently. Currently. Still. Not just in the past, but in the present. He didn't just do something way back there in youth group or when I was 8 or when I was a freshman. He is doing something NOW. We can forget this because we like to focus on our salvation stories. But there is so much more than that. Is God still speaking? That's what we want to know.

I think that what we get from Exodus is an answer to that question – yes, God is still speaking to and leading his people. But how does he do that? Reformed tradition has seen Jesus working with his people through his offices. What are those offices? I'll let the Westminster Shorter Catechism² answer that.

WSCQ. 23. What offices does Christ execute as our redeemer? A. Christ, as our redeemer, executes the offices of a prophet, of a priest, and of a king, both in his estate of humiliation and exaltation.

We've seen aspects of these offices in Exodus because Moses was a precursor to Jesus, a shadow of the Mediator or Redeemer. Moses spoke the word of God to the people as a prophet. He stood in the gap between God and the people, pleading with God and praying for the people as a priest intercedes through the worship and sacrifices between God and man. And he led the people as king, representing them in official capacities before Pharaoh and ruling over them in wisdom and justice.

What follows then is a furthering of those aspects. I realize things don't fit into nice and neat boxes like this. There are other ways to look at these books, but I think this will be helpful as a few big-picture categories. Don't strain them too much and too far though. I don't want to get in trouble or anything.

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Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2007, website: www.ouruf.org. For this series, I used commentaries on Exodus from Cole, Ryken, Enns, Childs, Pink, Cassuto, Motyer and Currid, as well *A House for My Name* by Leithart, *From Paradise to the Promised Land* by Alexander, and *The Gospel According to Moses* by A Dickson. I listened to sermons from Tim Keller and Les Newsom. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

² This is a document written by pastors and scholars in the 1640s in England. The Presbyterian Church in America (my denomination) requires its pastors to submit to it. I do so gladly.

Leviticus – Holiness – Priest

I have found Eugene Peterson's introductions to the various books in his *The Message* paraphrase translation to be some of the most insightful around. On Leviticus he writes:

"One of the stubbornly enduring habits of the human race is to insist on domesticating God. We are determined to tame him. We figure out ways to harness God to our projects. We try to reduce God to a size that conveniently fits our plans and ambitions and tastes."³

This is what Derek Webb sings of in his song, "I Repent":

I repent, I repent of trading truth for false unity

I repent, I repent of confusing peace and idolatry

by caring more of what they think than what I know of what we need

by domesticating you until you look just like me

I am wrong and of these things I repent

Peterson goes on to discuss how, despite what we try to do, we absolutely cannot use God. He is holy. That means God is alive on his own terms. He burns. He transforms. He is in charge.

Leviticus is a narrative pause for God's people to Canaan. It's a time of instruction, detailed and meticulous, much to our chagrin. But Leviticus tells us that there is a way to combat the tendency by other cultures and our own hearts to make God what we want him to be. The way is to worship God exactly the way he wishes. This has already been a problem for the people in Exodus – remember the Golden Calf incident. Oops. And it's trouble throughout the Old Testament as you read about the Baal worship, the Asheroth poles, the "alternative" worship sites, and the sins of the people.

I contend it's a problem today. Churches are doing what they want and not necessarily considering if God would be pleased. I worry about this a great deal.

The other theme you can find in Leviticus is that God is present and he affects every area of our lives. Nothing is left out. God provides a way to bring everything into his presence. You might be surprised at just how detailed God's instructions on these things are. He's not just giving general principles to his people. He's giving explicit instructions on holiness. Do you care about holiness?

Key Chapter:

Leviticus 16 – The Day of Atonement chapter is uber important. Jesus fulfills this. The veil is ripped and we have access through our Great High Priest who makes atonement for his people.

New Testament:

Matthew 5:13ff (Jesus ordained as a priest for his ministry), Jesus forgives sins and prays for his people, Hebrews 9:11ff

In Our Worship:

Forgiveness of sins, the Lord's Supper, Baptism, the offering, the benediction

Catechism:

WSCQ. 25. How does Christ execute the office of a priest? A. Christ executes the office of a priest, in his once offering up of himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us.

WLCQ. 44. How does Christ execute the office of a priest? A. Christ executes the office of a priest, in his once offering himself a sacrifice without spot to God, to be a reconciliation for the sins of the people; and in making continual intercession for them.

Hymn:

Approach, My Soul, the Mercy Seat based on Ps. 32:5-7

Chorus: *Approach, my soul, the mercy seat, Where Jesus answers prayer;*

There humbly fall before His feet, For none can perish there.

1. Thy promise is my only plea, With this I venture nigh;

Thou callest burdened souls to Thee And such, O Lord, am I.

2. Bowed down beneath a load of sin, By Satan sorely pressed,

By wars without and fears within, I come to Thee for rest.

3. Be Thou my shield and hiding place, That, sheltered near Thy side,

I may my fierce accuser face, And tell him Thou hast died!

4. O wondrous love! To bleed and die, To bear the cross and shame,

That guilty sinners, such as I, Might plead Thy gracious name!

³ E Peterson, introduction to Leviticus in *The Message*.

Application:

If you aren't a Christian, then how do you think you are made right with God? Do you think you understand holiness and how to gain forgiveness? The Bible says there must be blood to forgive sins. Do you agree? Isn't that a little drastic? How do you think you forgive sins? Someone has to pay.

If you are a Christian, do you read Leviticus with a sigh of relief? It has been paid! Atonement is made! We don't have to go through all that because of Jesus' priestly work for us. But before you move on, do you think about holiness in quite this detail? God cares about your holiness. He says you are to be holy. Out of your redemption, your atonement, your forgiveness, be holy as he is holy.

Outline:

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Heading/Key Event</u>
1-6	Sacrifices/Offerings
8-10	Ordination of Priests
11-15	Separation from Defilement
16	Day of Atonement (this is the centerpiece of the book)
17-27	Laws for Holiness

Numbers – Wandering – King

Let's again start with Peterson because he's just so good: "Becoming a human community is a long, complex, messy business. Simply growing up as a man or woman demands all the wisdom and patience and courage that we can muster. But growing up with others, parents and siblings and neighbors, to say nothing of odd strangers and mean enemies, immensely complicates growing up. The book of numbers plunges us into the mess of growing up. The pages in this section of the biblical story give us a realistic feel for what is involved in being the people of God, a human community that honors God, lives out love and justice in daily affairs, learns how to deal with sin in oneself and others, and follows God's commands into a future of blessing. And all this without illusions."⁴

Nowhere in the Bible do we find any hint of a romanticized spirituality. We, however like that sort of notion. When bad things happen, we assign blame and wish we were somewhere else. People long for the 1950s. Or the pioneer days. The founding of our country. The 1750s or all the way back to living during the Old or New Testament. But the true Biblical story is that we've always needed help. Always.

We find in Numbers that we need organizational help. We need jobs. We need leaders. Being a community means we need these things and it's okay. Some people get a little queasy about organization in the church, but they shouldn't. A part of being a good society, a good community, is figuring out who is going to turn on the lights, pay the bills, set up the chairs, call on the sick, deliver the meals, and so on.

However, Numbers doesn't mean to communicate only that. Yes you'll find a good deal of organizing. But you'll also find a fair bit of relationship. Frankly, we need relational help. We walk together, and we're all sinners. There is quarreling, bickering, grumbling, rebelling, fornicating, and stealing. How can we get along? We need help and discipline. We need a way to go.

Numbers has a lot of counting and quarreling as God leads the people through Moses. They bow up to him. They rebel against him, trying his authority. Moses shows his kingly roles in this book as he leads his people, administers justice and quiets rebellions. That's what kings do. They count and lead their troops. And they adjudicate disputes. It's a picture of what we need as well. Do you want to be led?

Key Chapters:

Numbers 13 – the spies sent into Canaan give a bad report but Joshua and Caleb believe the promises

Numbers 16 – Korah leads a rebellion and God deals with it dramatically

[something I didn't realize until just now is that the people kept the snake pole and worshipped it. This is talked about in 2 Kings 18:4: *He broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the people of Israel had made offerings to it (it was called Nehushtan).* Yikes.

New Testament:

Jesus' healings and miracles provide for his people, Jesus leads his people, John 19

⁴ E Peterson, introduction to Numbers in *The Message*

Catechism:

WSCQ. 26. How does Christ execute the office of a king? A. Christ executes the office of a king, in subduing us to himself, in ruling and defending us, and in restraining and conquering all his and our enemies.

WLCQ. 45. How does Christ execute the office of a king? A. Christ executes the office of a king, in calling out of the world a people to himself, and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he visibly governs them; in bestowing saving grace upon his elect, rewarding their obedience, and correcting them for their sins, preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings, restraining and overcoming all their enemies, and powerfully ordering all things for his own glory, and their good; and also in taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the gospel. Jesus' healings and miracles provide for his people, Jesus leads his people, John 19

In Our Worship:

The reading of the law, the stipulations of the kingdom, baptism as entrance into the covenant community

Hymn:

Lead On O King Eternal

Lead on, O King eternal, The day of march has come;
Henceforth in fields of conquest, Thy tents shall be our home.
Through days of preparation, Thy grace has made us strong;
And now, O King eternal, We lift our battle song.

Lead on, O King eternal, Till sin's fierce war shall cease,
And holiness shall whisper, The sweet amen of peace.
For not with swords' loud clashing, Nor roll of stirring drums;
With deeds of love and mercy, The heavenly kingdom comes.

Lead on, O King eternal, We follow, not with fears,
For gladness breaks like morning, Where'er Thy face appears.
Thy cross is lifted over us, We journey in its light;
The crown awaits the conquest; Lead on, O God of might.

[there are other great King songs, some of which you can find at www.igracemusic.com]

Application:

If you aren't a Christian, how do you make decisions in your life? What rules you? Are you truly free? Who is your master? Whom or what do you serve? Even Bob Dylan sings about how "You have to serve somebody."

If you are a Christian, do you care about God's leading and God's rule in your life? How can you see your submission to his rule? How has Christ subdued you to himself? Do you believe that he restrains and conquers your enemies? What do you think that means? Do you know the rules of the kingdom so that you can live properly in it and serve the king? Do you flaunt the king's rules and rely solely on the king's favor and mercy? Is that really a good idea?

Outline:

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Heading/Key Event</u>
1-9	Counting and Duties (6:22-27 Blessing)
10ff	Heading Out
13-14	Scouting Out Canaan – the bad report (Joshua and Caleb stand strong)
16-17	Rebellion
20	Moses Strikes the Rock (the bad version)
21	The Life/Death Snake
22-24	Balaam and the Talking Donkey
25-36	Bad Stuff and Organizing Stuff

Deuteronomy

Let's not break the pattern. Peterson writes: "Deuteronomy is a sermon – actually a series of sermons. It is the longest sermon in the Bible and maybe the longest sermon ever. Deuteronomy presents Moses, standing on the Plains of Moab with all

Israel assembled before him, preaching. It is his last sermon. When he completes it, he will leave his pulpit on the plains, climb a mountain, and die.”⁵

That’s the end of Deuteronomy, and where we began in talking about this today. Moses is 120 years old and still preaching. Think of all that has happened to him as he has led God’s people. He’s had a full life. He lived nearly 40 years in Pharaoh’s court and then 80 wandering in the wilderness, 40 of which were leading God’s people, a thankless task. He has spoken to God. He has seen God. God counts him as a friend. They’ve spoken face to face. He is an amazing man. A sinner to be sure. But a good leader and a mediator for the people.

Here he is preaching, something I’m sure he never really thought he’d do when he started. “This sermon does what all sermons intend to do: Take God’s words, written and spoken in the past, take the human experience, ancestral and personal, of the listening congregation, then reproduce the words and experience in a single event right now, in this present moment. No word that God has spoken is a mere literary artifact to be studied; no human experience is dead history merely to be regretted or admired. The continuous and insistent Mosaic repetitions of “today” and “this day” throughout these sermons keep attentions taut and responsive. The complete range of human experience is brought to life and salvation by the full revelation of God: Live this! Now!”⁶

The people have experienced a lot. Now they are ready to go across the Jordan River and possess a new land. Moses speaks to them as their leader, but as one who isn’t going with them.

“Moses puts all of their experiences of salvation and providence into the present tense; he puts the entire revelation of commandment and covenant into the present tense, and then he wraps it all up in a charge and a song and a blessing to launch them into today’s obedience and believing. Let’s go.”

That is an awesome thing and what preaching is all about. This isn’t just stuff that was “back there.” It is now. It is real. It is for you. Today. You must hear the word of God preached to you. It is God’s means for salvation, given through broken vessels.

Key chapters:

Deuteronomy 5 – the 10 Commandments

Deuteronomy 6 – the Shema – Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is one...

Deuteronomy 18 – the stipulations of a prophet and the prophet to come

New Testament:

Jesus preaches the Word to his people as a prophet, Matthew 5-7, He is the Word of God made flesh

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have believed and have come to know that you are the Holy One of God.” Peter to Jesus in John 6:68

Catechism:

WSCQ. 24. How does Christ execute the office of a prophet? A. Christ executes the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by his word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation.

WLCQ. 43. How does Christ execute the office of a prophet? A. Christ executes the office of a prophet, in his revealing to the church, in all ages, by his Spirit and word, in divers ways of administration, the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.

Hymn:

I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say

1. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, O weary one lay down, Your head upon My breast.”
I came to Jesus as I was, So weary, worn and sad;
I found in Him my resting place, And He has made me glad.
2. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold I freely give
The living water; thirsty one, Stoop down and drink, and live.”
I came to Jesus, and I drank From that life-giving stream
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, And now I live in Him.
3. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “I am this dark world’s light;
Look unto Me, thy morn shall rise, And all thy days be bright.”
I looked to Jesus, and I found In Him my star, my sun;
And in that light of life I’ll walk ’Til pilgrim days are done.

⁵ E Peterson, introduction to Deuteronomy in *The Message*.

⁶ Peterson

In Our Worship:

In the faithful preaching of the Word of God and its reading in our midst.

Application:

We must attend to the Word of God. The more we hear, the safer we are. Unfortunately, we are hearing less and less Bible in our churches. We have downgraded ordination, theology and Biblical teaching. Our churches are filled with charisma, powerpoint and music. But not much Bible. We need more. It is our only because it shows us who God is, who we are and how we are to worship.

If you aren't a Christian, how do you know what is true? What is your basis for truth, for morality of any kind?

If you are a Christian, are you hearing the Bible preached to you? Do you choose your church based on things other than good preaching? Why? What do you have in first place in your factors that make up a good church? How would you be able to discern a false prophet, as discussed by Jesus in Matthew 7? In the children's catechism that my kids are working on the answer to the question "Why do you need Christ as your prophet" is this: "Because I am ignorant by nature." Do you agree with that? What do we ignorant people need then and how can we get it? Increase your appetite for the word. Sit under good, faithful, gospel preaching that explains the Scriptures in their contexts week by week.

Outline:

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Heading/Key Event</u>
1-11	Salvation and Providence (5 10 Commandments) (6 The Shema)
12-28	Commandment and Covenant (18 True Prophets)
29-34	Charge, Song and Blessing (34 Moses dies)

You are ready to read these great books of our faith. You are ready then to go on to Joshua with an understanding of who God's people are and what they are to be. The Promised Land awaits them. Will they take it? Will they fulfill the promises? What will this people be like?

We can ask the same questions for ourselves. Thankfully, we have THE prophet, priest and king. Will we follow and serve him?

JOIN ALL THE GLORIOUS NAMES, by Isaac Watts

*Join all the glorious names Of wisdom, love, and power, That ever mortals knew,
That angels ever bore: All are too mean to speak His worth, To poor to set my Savior forth.*

*But O what gentle terms, What condescending ways, Doth our Redeemer use
To teach his heav'nly grace! Mine eyes with joy and wonder see What forms of love He bears for me.*

*Arrayed in mortal flesh, He like an angel stands, And holds the promises
And pardons in His hands; Commissioned from His Father's throne To make His grace to mortals known.*

*Great Prophet of my God, My tongue would bless Thy Name, By Thee the joyful news
Of our salvation came, The joyful news of sin forgiv'n Of hell subdued, and peace with Heav'n.*

*Be Thou my Counselor, My Pattern, and my Guide, And through this desert land
Still keep me near thy side: Nor let my feet e'er run astray Nor rove nor seek the crooked way.*

*I love my Shepherd's voice, His watchful eyes shall keep My wand'ring soul among
The thousands of His sheep: He feeds His flock, He calls their names, His bosom bears the tender lambs.*

To this dear Surety's hand Will I commit my cause; He answers and fulfils

His Father's broken laws: Behold my soul at freedom set! My Surety paid the dreadful debt.

*Jesus, my great High Priest, Offered His blood, and died; My guilty conscience seeks
No sacrifice beside: His powerful blood did once atone, And now it pleads before the throne.*

*My Advocate appears For my defense on high; The Father bows his ears, And lays his thunder by:
Not all that hell or sin can say Shall turn his heart, his love away.*

*My dear almighty Lord, My Conqueror and my King, Thy scepter and Thy sword,
Thy reigning grace I sing: Thine is the power; behold I sit In willing bonds beneath Thy feet.*

*Now let my soul arise, And tread the tempter down; My Captain leads me forth
To conquest and a crown: A feeble saint shall win the day, Though death and hell obstruct the way.*

*Should all the hosts of death, And powers of hell unknown, Put their most dreadful forms
Of rage and mischief on, I shall be safe, for Christ displays Superior power, and guardian grace.*