

NUMBERS & ROMANS Bible Reading Schedule

7 Weeks

WEEK 1

I don't know how much you know about Numbers, but I imagine the Book isn't very familiar to you. So, our journey through the Book over the next several weeks will be illuminating for you and me. The Book of Numbers tells the story of Israel in the wilderness. God tested his people in the crucible of the wilderness to see if they would be faithful to him as a unified nation. Numbers records their successes and failures. We will notice God's patient persistence in raising a new generation to fulfill his plan. Romans, on the other hand, is fairly familiar to believers as it forms the theological foundation of the Christian faith.

DAY 1 – Numbers 1 & Romans 1:1-7

Chapter 1 of Numbers displays the nature of the first four chapters with listings and numbers that coincide. An assessment of who and how many shows some intentionality in readiness for the potential of conflict and opposition. The wilderness of Sinai is an inhospitable and terrifying place to set up camp. As we begin the Book, this is where God will speak to the people through Moses. They will realize their utter dependency on God because the surrounding elements reveal challenges beyond human wisdom. However, God had already mobilized a people group of over 2 million. So, how has God supplied them with the needed human resources? The tabulation yields 603,550 qualified men ready to protect, defend, and move out when God gives the order. Also, the uniqueness of God's purpose for the tribe of Levi is highlighted as well. How do you respond to these beginning paragraphs of Numbers?

There is no doubt that reading through Romans is always a meaningful and enriching experience for the earnest believer. The introduction of seven verses is rather short, but they include a creed of sorts in verses 3-4. The Good News is... The Apostle Paul will do this time and again to clearly establish the significance of Christ and the assurance of his resurrection. This makes these introductory verses unique from other letters, as he is focused on presenting the foundational truth of Christianity in this letter. There are several phrases to notice and absorb. Verse 6, "called to belong to Jesus Christ." The word "belong" is strong and endearing to me. Belonging means to be a part of and close to... which is indeed special because it is true for me as a Christian. When I remember I belong to Christ, it shapes my behavior and strengthens my

confidence. Which verse or sentence caught your eye? Why? How are you anticipating our journey through Romans? What might God have in mind for you?

DAY 2 – Numbers 2 & Romans 1:8-17

The first few chapters are just like the book suggests: numbers. It is obvious to see that a large group like the Israelites needed a plan of organization, which is basically outlined in this chapter. They were organized by tribal groupings. This was absolutely necessary as the Hebrews had grown to approximately 2 million people. The plan had to do with water and food supplies, protection from their enemies, and the security of the tabernacle. History records that Egypt had a similar way of protecting itself and its sacred objects as it camped in a community. The Egyptians had a gradual but definite influence on God's people because they were under Egyptian rule for over 400 years. In 1 Corinthians 14:32, it says our God is not a God of disorder, but of peace (or harmony). The Lord instructed the people to follow this plan for their own good, but they would not follow his direction for very long.

The theme of the Book of Romans is contained in our reading today with verse 16, "For I am not ashamed of the Gospel..." We will unpack the Gospel and all its glorious implications during our journey through Paul's letter to the Romans. I notice the desire for Paul to visit Rome and the believers there in verse 11. That caught my eye because this was a theme in the Book of Acts as we read to the very end, until Paul arrived in Rome under house arrest. He made it there and fulfilled his desire. His personal notes reveal a strong love and affirmation for the ministry of these believers in Rome. He is such a great example of encouragement and hope. But nothing compares to his words in verses 16 & 17. These verses are worth memorizing. I especially notice how the Gospel, when believed, makes us right in God's sight. A righteousness from God by faith (V17) had been predicted by Habakkuk as we read a few weeks ago in Hab. 2:4. Paul will repeat this idea several times in this letter, reminding us that only through faith can human beings be made right in God's sight. This also will be called "justification by faith," which essentially means the same thing, "declared righteous." Why is the Gospel so treasured by Paul? Why do you also love it?

DAY 3 – Numbers 3 & Romans 1:18-32

I think it is interesting to note that assigning the Levites to the duties tied to the Tabernacle seemed like overkill to me. The Levites represented one in twelve Israelites, which is a large number. This reflects the importance that the Lord placed on the meaning of the Tabernacle, God's presence, and His prominence. In fact, the next chapter will go into greater detail about their duties and valued position in the nation. The connection with the firstborn sons to the

Levites adds to the elevated role for the Levites since the firstborn male was dedicated to the Lord. "Take the Levites as substitutes for the firstborn sons of the people of Israel." (V44) This provision that a special class of substitutes points to Christ as our substitute. Listen to this: "Give the silver to Aaron and his sons as the redemption price for the extra firstborn sons." (V48) It is not clear who covered this cost, but it definitely points to the price that Christ paid to redeem all humanity. This is a very fascinating connection to a cultural dynamic that also points to the significance of Christ in this way.

Our reading in Romans has a high and a low for me. The evidence of the Lord in creation is enough to make people accountable for not believing. (Verses 19-20) Psalm 19:1-4 reveals how creation is an aspect of God's revelation. It is sometimes called "general" or "natural" revelation. God has purposed to use natural revelation to awaken people to the reality that he is God because he created the beauty and intricacy of this universe, which can stimulate a search for the Creator. But the "low" is very low and has been the reality for many ever since Paul wrote these words. Verse 23 is the turning point with "instead of worshiping the glorious and ever-living God, they worshiped idols..." and, as the NIV translates, "God gave them over..." meaning that the Lord allowed the consequences of their sin to have its natural outcome. How do you see this dark list of sins causing destruction in our world and in the lives of people you know? People have been warned, but verse 32 tells us that they ignored God's warnings and did what they were doing, and even more so, anyway.

DAY 4 – Numbers 4 & Romans 2:1-16

The Kohathite clan sounds like the "green beret." They were on the front lines of care for the sacred objects of the Tabernacle. Several times it says that if they do it wrongly, they will die. This is either an incredible privilege or an impossible task. What do you think? The truth is, Aaron and his sons were also from this clan. They were responsible for the Ark of the Covenant, the Bread of the Presence, the lampstand, and the altar for sacrifices. With the task of moving these sacred items, they were not allowed to touch them. The two other clans mentioned had heavier jobs to fulfill, but not nearly as risky. The readiness to move the large encampment of God's people was important enough to outline detailed instructions for the Levites, along with Aaron and his sons. They would need to travel several times to new locations as directed by the Lord through Moses. The moving of the Tabernacle was paramount for God's people as it represented the holiness and presence of God.

As with every reading from Romans, there will be important truths and solid theological teaching from Paul, as this letter stands as the most thorough presentation of the Christian faith. The Jews were as guilty as the Gentiles because everyone sins. So why hasn't God

punished sinners with destruction? Because he is merciful. “Can’t you see that his (God’s) kindness is intended to turn you (repentance) from your sins?” (V4) The law condemns everyone because no one has ever kept the law completely. But what about the Gentiles without the law? “They demonstrate that God’s law is written in their hearts, for their own conscience and thoughts either accuse them or tell they are doing right.” (V15) Maybe to your surprise, the human conscience is a biblical concept. From Genesis, we know we are created in the image of God, and part of this truth relates to the human conscience being aware of wrong and sinful moral choices. The conscience is not foolproof and has no power to help us do right, just like the law. But when we feel the guilt associated with doing wrong, it can nudge us toward the realization that we need God. So far, we have read about the Creation revealing the presence of God and now we read about how God can use the human conscience to point us to him. But nothing reveals the Lord to us like Christ. However, we are a few days away in Romans from inserting Christ into the equation. Why do we so often try to justify ourselves through good behavior or religious activities?

DAY 5 – Numbers 5 & Romans 2:17-3:8

The first emphasis in this chapter is something I am familiar with because it is also outlined in Leviticus (11-15). Obviously, there is concern for health and hygiene, but the motivation behind this ceremonial law is God’s holiness. Did you notice the importance of confession? The principle of confessing one’s sins is found throughout the Bible. Verse 7 reads like any New Testament passage, “They must confess their sin and make full restitution...” Restitution reveals the sincerity of their confession. It is somewhat easy to say I’m sorry, but more difficult to follow through with deeds of repentance. However, the words found in verses 11-31 are actually a new concept for me, believe it or not. Maybe I have only read these verses previously and never thought about them very much. I have learned that this is the only time this “test” of innocence regarding adultery is ever mentioned. Nonetheless, it is in the Bible and teaches me about God’s high view of marriage and faithfulness. Do you think the Lord still views marriage like this? Why or why not? God promotes the significance of marriage as the foundation of Hebrew society. There’s no reference to this procedure actually occurring, even though we might conclude that it must have taken place from time to time. The purpose is sobering enough that it most likely helped ensure faithfulness in marriage. Side note – Leviticus 20:10 & Deuteronomy 22:21-22 teach that both male and female parties were to be punished for adultery.

Our reading in Romans begins the topic of following the law. Paul will conclude this section in 3:20 with words that summarize some of his thoughts from verses 17-24, “For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. (Why? Because we will always fall short.) The law simply shows us how sinful we are.” Thus, circumcision is an external procedure

and means nothing without complete obedience on the inside, which no one has ever done except Christ. I debated on whether to include 3:1-8 in today's reading because it seems to move the train of thought toward 3:9f more than what we have read in 2:17-29. Let me suggest that you reread 3:1-8 next time and continue with verses 9 through 20. One of Paul's major emphases in Romans will be the Spirit. He alludes to the Spirit in verse 29, highlighting the ministry of the Spirit on the inside as the Spirit changes our hearts, something the law could never do. According to the New Covenant, the ministry of the Spirit is to write God's laws and principles on the hearts of believers (Jeremiah 31:31-34). How would it feel to be evaluated by the law? Performance-based Christianity is still a prevalent stumbling block for believers and is even promoted by some church leaders. But the life of the Christian is meant to be lived out in the Spirit. What does that mean to you?

WEEK 2

Reading both the Old and New Testaments at the same time is proving to be very meaningful, and also helps us to read parts of the Bible we might avoid. Numbers is such a Book, but it is obviously included on purpose according to God's will. It continues to be satisfying to read this historic Book. The readings this week from Numbers are sure to be more inspiring and interesting. Romans 3, 4 & 5 present the foundation for the message of grace so essential for sinful people like you and me. We will enjoy reading familiar words that mean so much to our Christian lives.

DAY 6 – Numbers 6 & Romans 3:9-20 (please reread 3:1-8)

The Nazirite vow gave devoted men and women a way to set themselves apart for the Lord. The way that this vow has been interpreted has varied in Hebrew history. The most well-known Nazirite was Samson in Judges 13-16. Most often, it involved refraining from alcoholic drinks, hair cutting, and contact with corpses. Nazirite restrictions gave non-Levitical tribes a way to enter into a more rigorous and respected relationship with God. Avoiding dead bodies might seem unusual, but it was already outlined that touching a dead body defiled the person. If any of these stipulations were violated, there was an elaborate process to be cleansed, as is mentioned in verses 9 to 12. Being fully dedicated seems like a very positive step, but I am actually more inspired by the beauty of God's blessing in verses 24 to 26. This simple and elegant text is something we appreciate at New Harvest. Often, the pastor will share these words as we conclude our worship gathering. Aren't they uplifting but also comforting? Why do you enjoy being blessed? How might you share this kind of blessing with those closest to you?

Chapter 3 of Romans begins with a rather convoluted argument about the Jewish advantage and then adds the idea of sinning even more, so God's righteousness seems even more righteous. Paul is showing his awareness of their twisted thinking when the truth is "No one is righteous, not even one." (V10) The way that Paul summarizes this section is completely understandable and really helps us clarify the purpose of the law. Essentially, it says, "the entire world (the people in it) is guilty before God." (V19) When I have been in conversation with a skeptic, who tells me that he/she is as good as the next person, I often refer to the law of God. Most people know the Ten Commandments, but if they don't, I can easily recite those, and it usually jogs their memory. Within a short time, they realize their guilt because the law is very good at condemning us. That is what I think Paul is saying here. Our ability to make ourselves right by doing the law falls face-first to the ground. But we aren't without hope. Get ready for tomorrow's reading. In what ways do you try to be acceptable by human effort?

DAY 7 – Numbers 7 & Romans 3:21-31

I am sure by the third day of offerings in verse 24, you have been skimming the verses since they are identical. All twelve tribes participated in the dedication of the Tabernacle, which is significant and intentional. It was prescribed by the law what each tribe was to bring, thus making them the same. The gifts and offerings of each tribe are tabulated in verses 84-88, revealing the enormous costs and large sacrifices made in giving attention to God. This elevated the importance of the altar, the Tabernacle, and the Lord Himself. The Hebrews shared these gifts and sacrifices with a generous spirit. The last sentence in this long chapter shares something that brings this all together: “The Lord spoke to him there.” In God’s presence, surrounded by the cherubim and the Ark of the Covenant, Moses heard the voice of the Lord. No doubt, this was an especially holy place and reminded the people that God was with them. How does the purpose of all these sacrifices and the wonder of God’s presence in the tabernacle speak to you?

Romans 3 is so illuminating to me. No one is righteous... no one does the right thing all the time. But there is the amazing truth of God’s mercy and grace. The word mercy is not specially used in these verses, but it is essentially shared in verse 25 as he left sin unpunished. Mercy is not getting what we deserve (condemnation); grace is getting what we don’t deserve, motivated by the loving-kindness of God. But the strongest message in these verses is summarized in one word, “justification,” which means to be made right with God. Verses 23 to 25 are some of my most treasured verses because without them, I have no hope. But don’t forget verses 27 to 31, because they explain how both Jew and Gentile are made right by faith and faith alone. There are many phrases and sentences that are definitely worth contemplating. Today, in Numbers, we read about the sacrifices necessary for holiness. Verse 25 supersedes what the Old Testament required by saying that, “God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood.” The once-and-for-all sacrifice is found in Jesus. God paid our redemption price with the blood of his own Son to rescue us from our slavery to sin. This is worded in such a way as to make Christ’s sacrifice ultimate compared to the rigors of the Old Testament sacrificial system. The writer of Hebrews expounds on this truth in 10:4-10. How does this monumental Scripture passage touch your heart and mind?

DAY 8 – Numbers 8 & Romans 4:1-25

You might think that the preparation of the Tabernacle and all the details are ceremonial but the lampstands were actually fairly practical because they lit up the dark Tabernacle with light that reflected forward. Plus, the menorah lamps were also very decorative. The rest of the chapter is focused on the preparation of the Levites to serve God in the Tabernacle. The Levites

have a special place in God's plan for worship and honoring the Tabernacle. It seems like the Lord changed his mind about setting apart the firstborn and now having the tribe of Levi take their place instead. Again, I think this is fairly practical because all the Levites would serve in this way together, compared to the firstborn sons, which would disrupt the family cohesion and eliminate the firstborn in each family from having influence and legacy. Laying on of hands is something we still practice today when we commission a pastor or a mission team. This designated the Levites for special service as they represented the Lord to the people. I have always felt the honor of serving God as a pastor, believing it was his gracious will to use me in this way. But it is also humbling and sometimes frustrating, as too many followers of Christ are so casual about their relationship with God. I imagine the Levites might have felt the same way as their fellow Israelites from time to time.

Romans 4 is an especially important chapter because it tells us about how faith is primary and was always how God wanted us to relate to him, rather than works. The example of faith is Abraham from start to finish in these 25 verses. This is a longer reading compared to what we usually read in the New Testament, but it all goes together so well, right?! Sometimes the NLT says it in such an understandable way, like verse 15, "For the law always brings punishment on those who try to obey it. (The only way to avoid breaking the law is to have no law to break!)" This whole chapter brings clarity and emphasis in just the right way, with faith being front and center. Which verse or statement stands out to you? The argument of verse 4 says a lot: "When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have to earn." You know that salvation is a gift from God, and so is forgiveness, as David is quoted in verses 7 & 8, from Psalm 32:1-2. Plus, verse 25 summarizes the theological truth about what his death meant for us and what his resurrection means as well. How has this chapter stirred your heart?

DAY 9 – Numbers 9 & Romans 5:1-11

Two interesting topics fill this chapter. The importance of the Passover and the guidance of God by a fiery pillar by night and a cloud by day. The time for the second Passover had arrived. But this time, there were a few concerns with being unclean after touching a dead body or being away from home when it took place. The provision was for people to have another Passover a month later at the exact time. It is also interesting to note that the Israelites will not commemorate the Passover again for another 39 years, which seems like another aspect of God's punishment. However, the record of God's guidance in verses 15-23 has my full attention. It reveals to me God's willingness and desire to lead his people. Verse 22 is a great summary of God's involvement: "Whether the cloud stayed above the Tabernacle for two days, a month, or a year, the people of Israel stayed in camp and did not move on. But as soon as it lifted, they broke camp and moved on." Do you realize that a similar promise for believers is found in the

New Testament? This is an aspect of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who leads and guides us. In John 16:13, we learn that the Spirit guides us to the truth, and in Romans 8:14, we learn that believers are truly believers as they are led by the Spirit. God's presence and activity in our lives are meant to be especially personal, as he knows what is best for us and has a plan in mind. How do you respond to the guidance that the Lord offers?

Romans 5 jumps off the page for me. Justification through faith leads to peace with God when previously I was hostile toward God. Peace with God is fantastic, and so is the peace of God that fills my heart; plus, the God of peace guides me on his path. Peace is a special gift given with salvation. I am also drawn to the paragraph that outlines growth in my walk with God. The Lord is at work to deepen my perseverance, which I appreciate. Perseverance leads to godly character, and that leads to hope, which has such a positive influence on my life, all culminating in love. Do you notice the growth and progression the Lord has in mind for us in verses 3 to 5? Verse 8 is an important verse as it helps us to see an aspect of God's redemptive plan. He would send his Son to die even while we were still sinners. We had nothing to attract attention; we had nothing to earn such amazing favor. God pursued us first. The NLT translates the idea of reconciliation with the word "friendship" with God. Verse 11 summarizes this section very well: "So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God." I love thinking of myself as a friend of God. How about you? What truth stands out to you in these exceptional verses of spiritual truth?

DAY 10 – Numbers 10 & Romans 5:12-21

This chapter is very practical but may not seem especially relevant to our lives today. The use of the trumpet makes sense to us as it is used as an instrument to get everyone's attention, since there are 2 million people camped out. This is not the Hebrew "shopar," which is mentioned frequently in the Old Testament and was made out of a ram's horn. The trumpet call of God is also associated with the Lord's Second Coming. This practical aspect for the Israelites is followed by the marching orders for the people when they were called to move. In the second year of life in the Sinai, God began to move as the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle. (V11) The order was especially important for the moving of the Tabernacle and the setup necessary in their new place in the wilderness of Paran. The most fascinating insertion in this chapter is Hobab, the brother-in-law of Moses. Moses asks him to be their guide, which literally means "to serve as Israel's eyes." (Verses 29-32) As a Midianite shepherd, he knew the routes and possible sources of food and water in this region. Again, a very practical aspect of life in the Sinai. Judges 1:16 tells us that Moses' in-laws and their families joined them in the journey all the way to the Promised Land, so we can deduce that Hobab accepted Moses' invitation and guided the people on their journey. How do you feel about the practicality of this chapter and others like it?

In Romans, there are so many powerful statements that deserve our attention, but I will need to limit myself to a few and sometimes just one. The comparison of Adam and Jesus is found here and in 1 Corinthians 15. The Apostle Paul elaborates on this topic in 1 Corinthians more so. But the overall concept is actually identical in the verses we read today. It doesn't use the term first Adam and last Adam, in Romans 5. But the idea is the same: "Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone (because all have sinned), but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone (through faith)." (V18) It is interesting to realize that Adam is the first person on the globe but his name also means "human." Adam is our representative until we choose a better representative, right?! The Jews thought that the giving of the law to them reversed the negative effects of Adam's sin. But Paul says that God's law magnified and illuminated their sins and their sinfulness. (V20) How does the comparison of Adam and Christ affect you? What does this say about God's offer of grace instead of condemnation?

WEEK 3

The readings for Numbers pertain to some key events that lead up to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. I think you will find it interesting and inspirational, even though it highlights a lack of faith among God's people. On the other hand, Romans will focus on the "heart" of the Book with chapters 6 & 7 and even one reading in chapter 8, which is thought of as the most significant chapter in Romans. It is sure to be a meaningful week in God's Word.

DAY 11 – Numbers 11 & Romans 6:1-14

Yesterday, in the sermon, I mentioned the "bread from heaven" called manna. The supply of manna from the hand of God is an exceptional and noteworthy event in the life of God's people. There's no doubt that God sent manna to sustain the people, but also to show them his love and mercy. In John 6, after the feeding of the 5000, Jesus identifies himself as the "true bread of God" and "the bread of life." Just as the manna provided food in the wilderness, Jesus offers spiritual food that will fill one's soul. Israel was humbled by their need for food in the wilderness, and now the followers of Jesus must humble themselves and receive the fullness of his life by faith. The second half of Numbers 11 is actually quite practical, as we too often refuse to ask others for help. Moses was like that, but God intervened by giving his Spirit to many more leaders. Isn't it great to know we have been given His Spirit in Jesus!? How do you respond to these two themes of provision, both of food and people to help?

Romans 6 has timeless truth, as one verse after another gets my attention. The teaching on the meaning of baptism begins the chapter along with the importance of "counting yourself dead to sin" because of your union with Christ, so that you live in freedom under God's grace. As I have mentioned previously, Romans is the foundation of Paul's writings on Christian theology. Essentially, Paul writes, the law of Moses was the governing power of the Old Covenant, but now believers live under the governing power of Christ himself. My favorite verse in 11 (NLT) is "So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus." That phrase from the NIV says, "count yourselves dead to sin." As I begin my day, I often pray that phrase, "Lord, help me to count myself dead to sin." If I emphasize the marvel of God's Spirit in me, it helps me immensely to be in step with the Lord. But I am actually getting ahead of myself because that is the theme of Romans 8. How might God be speaking to you today through Romans 6?

DAY 12 – Numbers 12 & Romans 6:15-23

Criticizing leadership is commonplace in our world. But when Aaron & Miriam displayed jealousy and disloyalty, God immediately confronted their lack of respect. You might even think God's punishment on Miriam is a bit harsh, but actually, the Lord is merciful to her in this situation. Verse 3 says Moses was more humble than any other person on earth, which seems ironic since Moses is the author of Numbers. But most scholars believe that those words were added by some scribe who wanted to affirm Moses and share God's esteem for this humble leader. The lesson for me elevates "servant leadership" in God's economy. Jesus told us that he was gentle and humble in heart. Joshua was also a humble leader, and the Apostle Paul demonstrated humility as a leader. The Lord chooses to use unlikely leaders more so than those who other human beings look up to, like King Saul in 1 Samuel. Moses did not seek power, prestige, or material gain, but assumed his leadership with caution and submission to God. Why do we affirm leaders who are arrogant and full of pride? Why is humility such an important quality in a leader? How might you demonstrate humility in any leadership role you have?

Romans 6:15f continues the same theme about freedom from the bondage of sin as we began yesterday. In what ways might you be a slave to sin, a slave to righteousness? You may say that you don't want to be a slave to anyone or anything. But the idea is you will choose to serve yourself, the flesh, the opinions of others, or the living God. The only freedom that unbelievers have is the freedom to sin. They feel no obligation to obey God and, without Christ in their lives, they are unable to do so. There is much at stake in these verses because Paul finally summarizes with "things that end in eternal doom (V21)," as well as "the wages of sin is death (V23)." This death is not primarily a physical death; it denotes separation from fellowship with God that, if not reversed through faith in Christ, will last forever. The Holy Spirit's impulse will be to obey God, and the flesh will only be satisfied with one's own agenda. One leads toward holiness and the other impurity. Which one will you choose to honor today?

DAY 13 – Numbers 13 & Romans 7:1-12

Today and tomorrow, we get to read the well-known story about the 12 spies. The situation intensifies in chapter 14, but we get to read of their exploits in the Promised Land as they investigate the rich land of Canaan and assess the possibilities of victory. We know what happens. Caleb is the hero of faith in this chapter, but it seems like he stands alone. But by 14:6, Joshua stands right alongside Caleb with faith and courage. These 12 men were gone for 40 days and traveled 275 miles north and then had to return as well. This was a strenuous mission. The assessment is summarized in verse 33, "Next to them (the people that inhabited the Promised Land) we felt like grasshoppers and that's what they thought too." That means our assessment is how these foreigners viewed us, also. NIV, "We looked the same to them." The Canaanites were not intimidated by the stature of these 12 spies. If you are like me, you

probably read ahead, but I will save my comments for tomorrow and grieve with you for their lack of faith.

Romans 7 is a very fascinating chapter that has been debated back and forth. Could a believer have so many doubts and such weak spiritual determination? The answer is yes. The way that Paul uses marriage as an illustration is very creative and also applicable to marriage. If your husband dies, you are free from the obligation of your marriage to him. The point he is making is much deeper than that. We once had a relationship with the law, but if the law died, so to speak, then we can have a new relationship that supersedes the old one. Death can release a person from obligation to the law, and freedom from one relationship can allow a person to establish a new one. This is very insightful of Paul, which is clearly written in verse 6, "Now we serve God, not in the old way of obeying the letter of the law, but in the new way of living in the Spirit." In verses 7 to 12, Paul is explaining the purpose of the law as he did so clearly in 3:20, "The law shows us how sinful we are." This chapter focuses on the limitations of the law. Instead of bringing life, the law only confirms and exposes our lost and helpless condition. We need a change of heart that the law cannot provide. This prepares us for the relevant message contained in the remaining verses of chapter 7. Does it make sense to you that the law commands obedience but doesn't help us obey?

DAY 14 – Numbers 14 & Romans 7:13-25

The fear of the people overwhelmed them. They were responding in the moment and forgetting all that God had done for them previously. This is very grievous to God. There's a crucial point in this chapter that suggests God will wipe them out, similar to Noah and the flood. But, in my opinion, the Lord is getting Moses' attention and stirring up his faith. How much of a leader and shepherd will Moses be for these rebellious people? Maybe Moses will tell God to wipe them out also. Wandering in the wilderness will be a very challenging journey, and the godly strength of Moses as their leader will be essential. We read the prayer of Moses to God, which gives us a close look at how close Moses walked with God. This truly is an example to me of deep prayer and the possibilities of communion with God on the highest level. But the people move from one aspect of rebellion to another. The chapter begins with a lack of faith in God's promise to give them the land and ends as they ignore God's words of punishment in verses 26 to 38. They forge ahead without the Lord's presence or help and are defeated. I hope you notice the spiritual lessons in this chapter; there are many. Fear can grip me; faith can connect me to God during the hardest times; self-effort can do me in. What is at least one spiritual lesson you are seeing in this chapter for you?

These words in Romans are so relevant. I was leading a study in the Jail a few weeks ago, and one of the inmates read these verses because it was exactly how he felt. The others agreed that they do what they don't want to do, and they end up with such disappointing outcomes and consequences. Some scholars have suggested that these words are for an unbeliever. But I don't think that, and most Christian leaders don't either. Paul wants to clear up any confusion about the law. He might have seemed negative about God's law, but the law is not the problem. In fact, he wants to do what the law commands, but some other factor must be causing him to do the opposite. He suggests that it is the sin within and my flesh (sinful nature) that remains tied to the world and resists the will of God, which keeps pulling me away. The Apostle Paul shares these words of frustration to bring us to a tipping point of surrender. "Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?" (V24) The answer is Jesus, and focusing on how he might have the ultimate control through his Spirit, which is the theme of Romans 8, known as the most illuminating chapter in this profound book. How do you relate to Paul's line of thinking in this chapter? How have you worked through the pull of your own selfish flesh?

DAY 15 – Numbers 15 & Romans 8:1-13

This chapter begins the long journey in the wilderness, which we don't know a lot about. These sacrificial laws will prepare them for one day being in the Promised Land. Moses will continue to govern the people and deliver legislation that will honor God's desires. The section on the tassels attached to one's clothing is still something I notice among some Jews today. This was meant to help the Hebrews remember their special relationship with the Lord. He had redeemed them from Egypt and called them into a covenant relationship centered on observing the law. The blue color signified royalty and reflected God's holiness. The extent of the sacrifices shows how deeply embedded the sacrificial system would be in Jewish culture. I find that ironic since the message of Jesus is clearly culminated in his sacrificial death. The Jews should be the first to see the connection, but the devil has veiled their eyes to the truth. Anything jump out to you in this chapter?

Romans 8 has stirred my heart time and again during my 48 years of life in Christ. Isn't it so incredible that this chapter begins with "no condemnation in Christ?!" Neither sin (chp 6) nor the law (chp 7) can keep believers from having eternal life. The focus on the Spirit begins in this chapter more so and teaches us the way of freedom and victory. Verse 5 (NIV) has been a point of meditation for me: "Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires." Mindset is a very significant aspect of Christian living. I just finished a study in Philippians, and mindset was a crucial component of living a joyful life in Christ. Verses 12 & 13 use the word "therefore" summarizing what we have read today, "Therefore, you have no

obligation to do what your sinful nature (flesh) urges you to do... through the Spirit you (may) put to death the deeds of your flesh and you will LIVE!" One more marvelous truth to contemplate is found in verse 11, with the reality of God's Spirit in our hearts, we have resurrection power through him. Take a look at verse 11 and think about what these words might mean to you. How are you responding to our first glimpse of Romans 8? Most of next week we will camp on this chapter.

WEEK 4

The narrative of Numbers continues with different stories and challenges while the Hebrews are in the wilderness. Rebellion against the Lord is a serious issue and results in death, even eternal death, as people who reject the Lord are destined to be separated from him forever. The first two chapters reveal how serious this is to the Lord. Plus, establishing the procedures and protocol for the journey in the wilderness will carry us through this week. Our reading in Romans will slow down so that our focus this week will be on chapter 8. There's no reason to speed through these words because they are indeed inspired and timeless. Enjoy!

DAY 16 – Numbers 16 & Romans 8:14-17

How often have you seen people, like employees, sports teams, or citizens of a city or country, desire to “oust” those in charge? Numbers 16 comes from 3300 years ago, but is a common theme among human beings, right? “What right do you have to act as though you are greater than the rest of the Lord’s people?” (V3) This wasn’t probably just some random criticism; they actually wanted to be the ones to take over. This is true defiance. Moses remained confident in the Lord’s justice, and so the intense intervention of God portrays the seriousness of their actions. Verses 28-30 tell us about the boldness of Moses as he is sure that God will stand by him and bring a miraculous judgment on those who were rebelling. Again, I can’t help but think that God was also testing Moses’ resolve to lead the people and be their Shepherd, even though they were rebellious. What lesson or lessons surface in this encounter with a group of Levites against Moses and Aaron?

Four short verses (8:14-17) that call us to meditation, in my opinion. Children of God are led by the Spirit; the beauty of adoption is the emphasis; “Abba Father” is so illuminating to the kind of relationship God opens to us; the whisper of the Spirit tells us the truth about our identity; being co-heirs with Christ is a mind-blowing reality... which of these or even some other heartfelt thoughts come to mind as you slowly read through these verses? The significance of adoption is worth camping on because of how it would be understood in Roman culture. In Greco-Roman customs of adoption, a man had the right to adopt a child and confer on them all the legal rights and privileges that would be given to a natural child. There’s also the marvel of addressing God, the Almighty God, as Abba. I am sure you know that Abba means father but is the way children would speak to their dads in Aramaic (the language of the common people in Jesus’ day). Which verse will you memorize? How has God possibly spoken to you through these verses?

DAY 17 – Numbers 17 & Romans 8:18-25

How's that for a short reading? The message it brings is amazing to me. Who has God chosen to lead the nation spiritually? God will make it very clear through a miracle. This stems (no pun intended, ha-ha; buds form on the stem of the staff, right!) from the previous chapter and their rebellion against God and God's leaders. "I will finally put an end to the people's murmuring and complaining against you." (V5) Close to the end of this chapter in verse 11, these words are added, "and prevent any further deaths." These are the words of God to Moses. Let's not have any more deaths because of this terrible rebellion. After God's miraculous demonstration with a staff blossoming, the people should get it. I can't remember if the people criticize Moses and Aaron again in the Book of Numbers, but I don't think so. This would be imprinted on their minds. How might this chapter speak to you?

Romans 8:18-25 is a special section to me as several years ago I wrote a devotional on these verses. I was serving in Single Adult Ministry as a pastor, and many other single adult pastors prepared a devotional Book for single adults entitled, "Single to Single." This was in 1991. I wrote, "From the beginning of creation, life has been a struggle, a battle against a world strongly reluctant to yield its benefits. Words in this passage remind us of this fact: 'groaning,' 'pains,' and 'groan inwardly' describe life as we know it. We groan; we ache; we do experience disappointment and confusion. Are there answers for us in the midst of our pain? The thought that comes to mind is, 'I hope so.' That's it, hope is the answer God's Word gives. 'For in this hope we were saved.' Hope is, without a doubt, the answer while we groan in these mortal bodies. What is hope? Hope is not easily or precisely defined. That's what makes hope so profound. Hope has great certainty for something better. It has the strength to persevere. Hope is anticipation; hope is patient assurance. Hope comes alive as we trust in Jesus. His strength can be ours. His comfort is real. He is our hope. 'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Colossians 1:27). Hope will sustain you as you wait patiently for his help now and his presence in heaven forever!"

DAY 18 – Numbers 18 & Romans 8:26-30

This chapter may seem irrelevant, but the instruction to the Levites would protect the importance of the Tabernacle and what it represented. In the previous chapter, the leadership of Aaron and Moses was questioned, and the role of the Levites was tied to their leadership. If there weren't clear boundaries, as we noticed yesterday, the spiritual health of God's people could be compromised. Verses 26 & 27 caught my eye because they had to do with the tithe for the Levites. The people of Israel gave their tithes to the Lord, which the Levites handled and managed. But what about the Levites and their tithe? I have heard of pastors saying they are exempted from the tithe since the church people contribute to the Lord's work, which they do

as leaders and overseers of the church. As if to say, “Why would I tithe on the people’s tithe since that is my salary?” But in this section, it is clear that the Levites also honor the Lord with the tithe: “When you receive from the people of Israel the tithes I have assigned as your allotment, give a tenth of the tithes you receive—a tithe of the tithe—to the Lord as a sacred offering.” (V26) I remember bargaining with God as a “poor” pastor that I could not afford the tithe and at the same time promised to give my all to the church. But I never had peace, my work for the Lord was never enough in my mind, and the money always seemed to be less than we needed. So, through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, I began to tithe and trust God. It changed everything, and I have never looked back. God honored his principle and has met every need for me and my family as we faithfully honor the principle of the tithe. Glory be to God!

Verse 26 to 30 of Romans is another shorter reading that is absolutely packed with truth: The Holy Spirit’s help; the Spirit’s direction is always in line with God’s will; everything for the believer works out for the good; formed into the likeness of Christ; and, the marvelous identity we enjoy as God’s chosen ones. Again, every one of these verses has depth and promise for us as followers of Christ. Which one would you choose to highlight in your life? Why? For me, verse 26 is about praying in the Spirit. Ephesians 6:18 uses that terminology for prayer. I don’t know how to pray in a way that lines up with God’s will 100% of the time; maybe not even 50% of the time. But the Spirit knows the will of God 100% of the time. That’s why I want to learn how to pray in the Spirit, because those prayers move mountains. I am thrilled about prayer more so than at any other time in my life that I can remember. In my spirit, I sense the Spirit moving through my prayers and, oftentimes, the prayers of others. The Spirit is interceding for us, the followers of Christ, according to verse 27. What if I could listen in on his prayers?! I think we can. More and more, I sense the spiritual closeness of the Holy Spirit, and more and more I perceive what he might be praying with deep groans beyond words (V26). That’s God’s reminder to me today. How about you?

DAY 19 – Numbers 19 & Romans 8:31-34

We can look at this specific ceremonial purification from a broader point of view. Life and death are the two poles of existence inside and outside the Bible. Holiness, God, and life are intertwined in the Bible. Whereas uncleanness, sin, and death belong together. Human corpses caused the gravest kind of pollution under Mosaic law, affecting all who approached them. This means that those who have contact with the dead must keep away from the sanctuary and undergo cleansing. This rite is designed to provide ritual cleansing for all who have been near or touched a corpse. We have read about the number of people who died due to disobedience and disease (a plague). Someone(s) had to take care of those bodies, right? The cleansing water mixture probably resembled blood from the red heifer on purpose. Blood would be utilized for

washing away sins throughout Biblical history. This might seem hard to apply to your own life, but confessing our sin as we desire to approach God could be a very relevant point of application. Make sense?

Romans 8 is so full that I have suggested a shorter, more contemplative approach to these verses. How's this for a summary statement that follows in line with what Paul has been writing? "If God is for us, who can be against us?!" (V31) In our paragraph today, I appreciate the questions that Paul poses and the answers he gives. I like this paragraph so much that I want to camp on it for today. There is an affirmation of God's love for us, his generosity to us, and the marvel of our elevated status in Christ. The phrase that stands out is, "he did not spare his own Son...", which reveals the extent of his love and desire for a relationship with him. It is an amazing blessing and great assurance for us to read these words and believe what is said. However, I think verse 34 tops them all. If I were to choose one verse from this paragraph to memorize, it would be 34. I like how the NLT puts it, "Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading (interceding) for us." If this truth doesn't uplift you, there's nothing in the Christian message that will. These words are a blessing to me and fill my soul. How might God be speaking to you through our reading today?

DAY 20 – Numbers 20 & Romans 8:35-39

There are three separate topics in this chapter. The one that I think about most is Moses' disobedience. I think about it because I could see myself doing just what he did. It seems to me that Moses was caught up in the rebellion of the people, and his anger caused him to act impulsively. He didn't just hit the rock once but twice. God gave him instructions to take the staff and speak to the rock (V8). Moses' punishment may seem extreme to us, as he will not enter the Promised Land. His lack of faith and impulsive response to the people demonstrated a sense of decline in his life, it seems to me. But it also reminds us of God's authority and holiness which should never be diminished. The situation with Moab is far from over, even though it seems like Moab got the upper hand this time. The chapter began with Miriam's death and closes with Aaron's. Aaron had to feel blessed to pass on the mantle of priestly leadership to his son, Eleazar. Eleazar would assist Joshua with the spiritual matters of God's people as they entered the Promised Land. He would play the important role of high priest. What caught your eye from this chapter?

If you thought yesterday was special, I bet you understand that today's reading is even more inspiring. (Verses 35-39) The paragraph answers another question from Paul. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Sometimes hardships make us feel like God doesn't love

us, so Paul addresses that topic head-on. He teaches us that these difficulties have the potential of making us stronger, so we can say we are more than conquerors. (V37) The last two verses are especially powerful in the Message Paraphrase: “None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. I’m absolutely convinced that nothing—nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, high or low, thinkable or unthinkable—absolutely nothing can get between us and God’s love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.” I hope you join me in appreciation and devotion to the Lord through the message of Romans 8. How do you respond to this last paragraph in the chapter? How has God used this week of readings to uplift you?

WEEK 5

Our readings in Numbers will include the bronze snake, Balaam's donkey, and his three messages, plus the deception of the Moabites and their idolatry. These chapters will resemble the relevancy of our readings in Numbers last week. The Israelites are camped in the wilderness now and will face various challenges as the day approaches for entry into the Promised Land. Romans takes us to Paul's deep concern for his fellow countrymen in chapters 9 to 11. The Jews have largely rejected Jesus as the Messiah and thus are lost without hope. But the Apostle Paul shares about a time coming that we will see Jews placing their faith in Christ.

DAY 21 – Numbers 21 & Romans 9:1-13

I had mentioned that I thought the Israelites had stopped complaining, but we read it as plain as day that they continued to grumble. "Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die here in the wilderness?" The Lord punished their grumbling with poisonous snakes, and they repented of their sin. Then, God instituted a very unusual approach to being healed: fix your eyes on the snake replica attached to the pole. This would be an isolated event if it weren't for Jesus mentioning it in John 3:14-15. "And as Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him will have eternal life." Then, we read John 3:16, the most well-known verse in the Bible. This is easily the most thought-provoking part of this chapter. The rest of the chapter has the Israelites moving from camp to camp and facing opposition, which causes warfare and victory for God's people. How does the story of the snake(s) strike you?

Romans 9:1-5 is indeed special as we read about Paul's heart for his fellow Jews. It is hard to believe that the Lord's own people would, by and large, reject Christ. As Paul wrote, they have everything necessary to understand who Jesus is and what he came to do for them, but they don't believe. Our reading continues until verse 13, which might feel like an abrupt break, however, this idea of Abraham and his descendants reveals the intentionality of God and his plan. Obviously, my focus for today is on the heart of Paul and how he was even willing to be cursed if the people of Israel would see the true identity of Jesus. (V3) This prayer from Paul resembles Moses' prayer for the people in the wilderness from Exodus 32:30-32. Paul knows he cannot be cut off from Christ and offer himself for their punishment; only Jesus is a satisfactory sacrifice for the sins of the people. He died so that God could show mercy, but the Jews turned away and missed it. I am sure you have people in your life who have done the same. You might want to do whatever it takes to bring them to faith. But you cannot make the choice for them. I

encourage you right now to pray for those you are heavy-hearted for because they have not received Jesus as their savior.

DAY 22 – Numbers 22 & Romans 9:14-29

You have arrived at the talking donkey. Isn't that amazing and stretches my faith, for sure. Balaam's character and motives appear throughout this chapter and the next two. It seems like he has a genuine relationship with God, but Balaam seems to be as much interested in the money as in doing God's will. He hopes that God will change his mind because he would like the money due him from King Balak of Moab. Listen to the words from Peter: "They (the false teachers) have wandered off the right road and followed the footsteps of Balaam, son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong. But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice." (2 Peter 2:15-16) Our reading is a bit confusing because Balaam may appear to only do what God gives him permission to do, but his greed will be his downfall. Can you name the other event in Bible history when an animal spoke to a human? Balaam's approach is not unlike what we might be tempted to do. We know what we want, and we sense God's warning, but we go with it anyway. How are you viewing this story? Balaam was missing God's rebuke until his donkey got his attention. That seems funny and sobering at the same time.

This section in Romans could be titled, "God is in Charge." Does that fit for you? Every day, we hear messages that minimize God's role in the world. But the Scriptures highlight God's sovereignty over all. We debate the difference between God's actions and our human decisions. But Paul makes it very clear that God's sovereign control stands out as of ultimate significance. Paul utilizes prophetic words from Hosea and Isaiah to further his teaching on the subject. Hosea predicted God's inclusion of the Gentiles, which would far outweigh the receptivity of the Jewish people. Gentiles will also be called 'children of the living God' because they would receive salvation through Jesus. Then, Isaiah's prophecy tells us that only a remnant of the Jews will be saved, which is also true. I have taught that God's sovereignty and man's free will are both true at the same time. But the only one who can explain this truth is God himself. I know I have free will to decide on many fronts, but God is ultimately in control. When we arrive in heaven this challenging aspect of our faith will be completely clear. Tomorrow we will enjoy some very important words about faith, proclamation, salvation, and the beauty of the Gospel. How do you understand the idea of God being in control?

DAY 23 – Numbers 23 & Romans 9:30 – 10:21

It might seem to many of us that Balaam is a good guy. He does not curse Israel and seems to follow God's direction. But his practice of sacrifices and his pagan roots would suggest divination and sorcery as his "go to" approach as a seer. According to other ancient eastern texts from that day, this form of fortune-telling was a widely practiced and highly developed art. Such practices were banned in Israel. Balaam seems to cover his bases with a "prayer" in verse 10, "Let me die like the righteous, let my life end like theirs." This assures us that God is bigger than the superstition that Balaam and King Balak represent. Israel was safe from the harm that Moab and Midian sought to inflict through divination. King Balak directed Balaam to a new location so that he might get different results, which will be our focus tomorrow. You do realize that even the devil knew Scripture when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness. (Luke 4:10-11) Darkness may utilize something from the light to accomplish its devilish purposes. Balaam is operating in that way. But isn't it encouraging to see that Balaam could not curse Israel because of God's protection and presence among the people? This is true for you and me also. How does that encourage you?

Our reading in Romans includes one of the clearest promises for salvation in the Bible (10:9). Chapter 10 admonishes us to proclaim the message because it is essential to stirring up faith. Again, Paul is troubled by his people's lack of faith in the message of Christ. The crux of the detour is found in 10:1-4, which confronts their misguided religious zeal. The essence of the Gospel is repeated in verse 4, "All who believe in him (Jesus) are made right with God." This is the foundational truth of the whole book, as we read about way back in chapter 3. But how can people respond if they don't know the message of the Gospel? They can't! So, the urgent need around the world is to reach 3 billion people who, at present, have little to no opportunity to hear the message of Christ. This is a missionary passage as well as a confrontation for Israel to believe. Which verse would you highlight as significant for you? Why? Would you consider memorizing Romans 10:9?!

DAY 24 – Numbers 24 & Romans 11:1-15

Even though they change locations, the words from Balaam remain the same. God will not curse his own people through Balaam but rather bless them. The final message from Balaam is the most interesting as it predicts victories for Israel and points to an outstanding leader in the future. These words of Balaam seem especially significant and inspired. It is hard to believe that God would give his message through a selfish prophet like Balaam, but Balaam is faithful to tell it like it is. Verse 17 jumps off the page as it clearly announces one coming with the sign of a star. A star was a symbol for a king, and a scepter was an image of power and majesty. Some suggest that King David fits the description, but others identify these words with Jesus and affirm the presence of the Magi who announced that they had come to Jerusalem because they

saw his star. Balaam is a unique character in the Bible, and I am not even sure how to interpret his presence. But it does affirm the fact that my ways are not God's ways. He uses unlikely people all the time throughout the Bible. Balaam is an example of that, right? What are your thoughts about Balaam?

The Apostle Paul writes more about the dilemma of the Jews and their lack of faith in God's Messiah. The first part of chapter 11 parallels the remnant of people in Elijah's day that remained faithful to the Lord (7000). It was a small number in comparison to the whole. So too, the Jews in Paul's day had mostly responded in unbelief, but God was still working to preserve a believing remnant. One component of God's grace and salvation to the Gentiles was for Jews to see the Gentiles enjoying the blessings of salvation that God promised to Israel, and for them to be "jealous." The word is used in a hopeful sense as it would spur Jews to desire salvation so they could also enjoy its blessings. Again, God's ways are not our ways, as he would harden the hearts of Jews and show his blessings to the Gentiles. The purpose was that the Jews would see the emptiness of ritual and religion and want the real thing offered through Jesus Christ. God is still using the contagious attraction of his grace in the lives of his followers to draw lost people to himself. He wants to use you and me. How do you respond to his plan?

DAY 25 – Numbers 25 & Romans 11:16-36

In Numbers 31:16, we read that Balaam's advice led to immorality and apostasy at Baal-peor, which is the setting of this chapter (25). I am not sure how Balaam did what he did, but in chapter 31, he is executed for what he did. The Israelites were on the verge of crossing the Jordan, and then this. They plunged into a new low of moral failure and spiritual bankruptcy. The judgment of God was swift and severe. So much was at stake and the Israelites failed the test again. Phinehas acted righteously and was elevated by God before the people. Bold faith is risky, but Phinehas, the priest, rescued the people as he punished the sin and the ones sinning in such a way as to purify Israel so that no one else would die in the plague. The temptation to sin is as real today as it was then. The evidence of immorality is everywhere, and the subtle deception of idolatry still exists in placing other "gods" before the Lord. The announcement of war against the Midianites will surface again in chapter 31. Next week, we will read about preparations to enter the Promised Land. I am sure some of these stipulations will speak to us still today.

I have always been inspired by how Romans 11 concludes. I also appreciate the promise of Jews coming to faith in Christ as a crescendo to wrap up life as we know it on earth; at least that is how I understand the phrase, "until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ." In the end, in the last days, all of Israel will be saved (those who are alive will place their faith in Christ). When

God's awesome plan is accomplished, people everywhere will praise him. Right now, Jews respond to the Gospel with (mostly) unbelief. Gentiles often respond to the Gospel with faith and are grafted in (V17). When the Jews finally have their eyes opened and respond to the Good News in faith, a great blessing will flood the world, including the resurrection of the dead (V15). The message in the Bible, with this as a primary text, will see a great number of Jews joining with Gentiles, at the end of history, praising God together. At that time, the revelation of God's plan and the culmination of his decisions for mankind will be known. But until then, "How impossible it is to understand his decisions and his ways." (V33) How does the promise of a Jewish revival in Christ before the Lord returns strike you?

WEEK 6

Numbers, this week, gives specific instructions for being ready to enter the Promised Land. I hope you are sensing the value of reading books like Numbers. We have read some important events and practical teaching that not only applied back then but also now. I think that will be true again this week. Romans 12 is a favorite; at one point, I memorized these 21 verses. We only have two weeks left in Numbers and Romans, so enjoy!

DAY 26 – Numbers 26 & Romans 12:1-2

We get the name of this book from chapters like this. There are a few things that caught my eye in this chapter. The census tells us that there are now 601,730 men of military age (20 years of age and older). The first census, 40 years previously, registered 603,550 soldiers. That means the Lord did not whittle the nation down very much, showing his faithfulness to Israel in spite of their rebellion. Plus, it is clear from verses 63-65 that not one person, except Caleb and Joshua, was listed from the previous registration. In 40 short years, God raised up a new generation of Hebrews that had been refined by life in the wilderness as well as the discipline of the Lord. How does this scenario strike you?

Obviously, this is one of our shortest readings, but one I purposefully wanted to make front and center for us. A living sacrifice, the aim of God for transformation, and the importance of being in God's will highlight these powerful words in just two verses. Verse 1 teaches us that surrender to God is the essence of worship. Living sacrifice equals "true and proper worship." (NIV) How would you describe being a living sacrifice? How might you be a living sacrifice? The pull of the world we live in can squeeze us into its mold (MSG). In the old form of life without Christ and the help of His Spirit, we would wander aimlessly. But the new age in Christ has begun and we can set our minds on the things of God and his truth so that the Spirit shapes us (transformation) into a new person. This allows us to be in step with God's will, which is good, pleasing, and perfect for us. Again, these two verses are definitely worth the effort to memorize. What stands out to you?

DAY 27 – Numbers 27 & Romans 12:3-8

I imagine that this step took lots of courage for the daughters of Zelophehad. Women did not have a very strong voice in the affairs of Israel, but this did not stop them from pursuing what was right and fair. Because of their courage, the inheritance laws were changed. This is much bigger than we might realize. God's people have always been known for their courage, as we

see in these women. In most cases, the people of God are a minority. This leads to the courage of Joshua and his solid life as a man of God. He was a warrior, a leader, an apprentice of Moses, a faithful spy (Chap 11), and recognized as someone full of the Spirit. Moses' exclusion from entering the Promised Land can feel harsh. But God keeps his word and also has a purpose for this new generation under the leadership of Joshua. Does anything inspire you from this chapter? I am impressed with the women and want to learn from Joshua's example about being a courageous leader.

Romans 12 continues with relevant and helpful instruction. The reality of spiritual gifts is worth our focus today. We first learn about how to view ourselves because spiritual gifts have sometimes led to pride. So, verses 3-5 emphasize humility and the need for each other before we get a practical list of gifts given to us as believers. (This list is far from complete, but it gives us several key ways that the gifts are distributed.) The Apostle Paul will use the analogy of the human body both here and in 1 Corinthians 12. This is actually very helpful as well as profound. It gives us a picture of the unity and diversity in the church. As you read this list of seven gifts in verses 6-8, do you resonate with any of these gifts mentioned? What do you think is the key to the gifts? I will answer that for you... Use them! Peter wrote, "God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another." (1 Peter 4:10) Prophecy is mentioned first and could be misunderstood. Sometimes we think of prophecy as predicting the future. But I think prophecy basically means "forthtelling," not "foretelling." This gift is essentially sharing the truth of God with others in a practical way, but often in a challenging way. Also, we may think of prophecy as something we share with a group or crowd of people. But I have found that a Spirit-led admonition, one-on-one with someone, can be a very fruitful way of proclaiming the truth in love. What do you think about the gift of prophecy? I think that God intended for more of his followers to utilize the gift of prophecy. "Let love be your highest goal! But you should also desire the special abilities the Spirit gives—especially the ability to prophesy." (1 Corinthians 14:1) What do you think about that?

DAY 28 – Numbers 28 & Romans 12:9-21

Two things come to mind as I read this chapter: order and the importance of sacrifice. The list required daily, weekly, and monthly offerings with a few annual events as well. Israel was instructed to worship God with intentionality and consistency. The religious system of God's people was tied to sacrifice from start to finish. Don't you find that interesting? Verse 22 especially gets my attention: "You must also offer a male goat as a sin offering to purify yourselves and make yourselves right with the Lord." The idea is related to atonement, which points to reconciliation and sacrificial payment for sin. This is easily seen as a forerunner to what Jesus would do for us. Worship was also a very significant aspect of Jewish culture and was

woven into every part of their lives. These are worthy “takeaways” for me. How does this emphasis affect you?

Romans 12 continues with the strongest section in Romans about Christian living. These exhortations are numerous and central to our lives as believers. In view of God’s mercy, let’s live a life devoted to God and a blessing to others. What phrase or verse gets your attention? There are too many for me to comment on, but the one that stirs my heart presents a challenge to live at peace with everyone; that has always been an idea that jumps off the page for me. The NLT translates it this way, “Do all you can to live in peace with everyone.” (V18) I often ask myself if I have honored that principle in my life. Have I done all that I can? When should I let it go? Is God calling me to trust him in the situation? Obviously, this verse is worded in a way that factors in the unwillingness of another to reciprocate a gesture of peace toward me. I need to ask this question of myself, “Have I done all that can?” If so, I believe it is time to give it over to God. Coupled with this principle is the strong admonition to not take revenge, which is also something that tells me to release the situation to God. Aren’t these statements so practical for us as followers of Christ?! How are you specifically stirred by this teaching from the Apostle Paul?

DAY 29 – Numbers 29 & Romans 13:1-7

I find it fascinating that these special days are still very much a part of Jewish religious culture. The first is called Rosh Hashanah and begins on SEPT 22nd this year, with Yom Kippur (the holiest day for Jews because it has to do with atonement) beginning a week later with fasting and ceremonial repentance. The Festival of Shelters is called Sukkot, which means a temporary shelter. It begins the following week. I learned something new today because I didn’t know these significant religious holidays are literally back-to-back. Devoted Jewish people have to set aside over two weeks for these celebrations. Rosh Hashanah celebrates the beginning of the New Year for Jews, which leads to spiritual devotion as Jews honor Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement). However, the Jews have not sacrificed animals as a part of these holidays since the destruction of the temple in 70 AD.

Romans 13 was a hot topic during COVID. Various denominations interpreted these verses differently from what this passage seems to say at face value. However, the government is not higher than God, so our submission to the governing authorities must always be in terms of our ultimate submission to God. When the disciples were ordered to not talk about Jesus in Acts 4, the disciples boldly said, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him?” (4:19) But the message is fairly clear that God is overseeing the placement of leaders and rulers and they are also called God’s servants in verse 4. The other thing that comes to mind is how corrupt the

Roman government was in the 1st century. But that doesn't seem to change Paul's strong message of submitting to the governing authorities. Plus, the reality of taxes was real then, as it is now. History actually reports that there was a tax revolt in those days, and Roman Christians could have very well been involved. Paul confronts their rebellion against the government. Isn't this an interesting topic? How do you respond to these ideas?

DAY 30 – Numbers 30 & Romans 13:8-14

This is a unique aspect of Jewish culture. Offerings were sometimes tied to vows. Clarification about vows was necessary with a daughter or a wife. Vows were an important way to express devotion, but were sometimes made in haste and often forgotten. Voluntary pledges were commonly made on special occasions or in times of war. An example of this is found in 1 Samuel 1 with Hannah and her husband Elkanah. Hannah made this vow in verse 11, "O Lord of Heaven's Armies, if you will look upon my sorrow and answer my prayer and give me a son, then I will give him back to you. He will be yours for his entire lifetime, and as a sign that he has been dedicated to the Lord, his hair will never be cut." Her son was none other than Samuel, who might be considered the greatest prophet in the history of Israel. The main topic in this chapter of Numbers deals with females. They were subject to approval by the responsible male, who would be a financial partner in the vow. Vows were not to be neglected unless the person was freed from the vow. I am not personally drawn to promise the Lord certain things since it will tempt me to bargain with God. The topic of vows lessened as time went on. Any thoughts that come to mind concerning this subject?

Romans 13:8 challenges the idea of debts and owing others because you borrowed from them. It reminds me of our topic in Numbers today about vows. These kinds of obligations can easily become chains that weigh us down and disrupt our relationships with each other. The goal is freedom with each other, and the only obligation that is affirmed in these verses is love for one another. Verse 12 highlights the "day of salvation," which has two basic meanings in this passage: 1) It points to the day of the Lord when God's plan culminates with judgment for the world and salvation for God's people. 2) But it also refers to the day as living in the light of God's goodness, compared to the night with darkness and evil deceiving the Lord's followers and pulling us down. Because believers "belong to the day," we should be living out its values and avoiding the deeds of darkness that often operate in the night. How might God be speaking to you through these practical words of application to your Christian life?

WEEK 7

Congratulations! You have made it to our last week in Numbers and even Romans. Numbers has demanded discipline as several of the chapters have to do with territory and how many soldiers, as well as the disobedience of God's people. We will wrap up with some particulars of preparation for invasion and life in the wilderness. Romans will highlight some unique topics and personal acknowledgements of people who mean so much to the Apostle Paul.

DAY 31 – Numbers 31 & Romans 14:1-12

This chapter begins with God's judgment on the Midianites. The Midianites had joined with the Moabites in leading the Hebrews into idolatry (Chap 25). The Midianites inhabited large portions of the south and east regions of Palestine. The elders of Midian had joined King Balak in hiring Balaam to curse Israel, which led to significant rebellion among God's people because of the influence of Balaam. In verse 8, we read that Balaam was killed, which should be understood as God's retaliation for him and the pagan people of Midian. The practice of complete destruction is hard for us to understand, but the influence of these devilish tribes could derail God's plan to inhabit the Promised Land and his future redemption through his Son, the Messiah. The evidence of God's involvement brought decisive victory and the preservation of all the Israelite warriors: "We have accounted for all the men who went out to battle under our command; not one of us missing!" (V49) This was only possible through the hand of God.

I think our reading in Romans is actually quite practical. I would suggest that Paul is admonishing the believers in Rome to "not sweat the small stuff." What do you think? Their disputes were about nonessential concerns in the life of a Christian. For example, the Sabbath is a valuable principle of rest and worship. But the trappings of the Sabbath were burdensome and rigid. Paul is teaching that this is no longer the necessary approach, with freedom to worship God every day and specifically select any day that a believer chooses to honor the principle of the Sabbath. Do not judge each other on these nonessential matters. He takes it a step further and says all believers will be accountable to God at the judgment seat. "Yes, each of us (believers) will give a personal account to God." 2 Corinthians 5:10 also tells us that when we die, we will stand before the Lord, who will then reward us for what we did in this life that honored him and loved others. Verses 10-12, in Romans 14, are the most compelling to me because they remind me that I am called to honor One and do not need to be preoccupied with pleasing the many. How do you understand these verses?

DAY 32 – Numbers 32 & Romans 14:13-23

Do you ever have things that trigger more intense emotions than the situation would dictate? I sure do. When someone is choking, I often get nervous. When I was four years old, I almost choked to death as barbed wire stopped my red wagon abruptly and wrapped around my neck. I obviously made it after 21 stitches, but the trauma has had a lasting effect. When the tribes of Reuben and Gad wanted to stay east of the Jordan River, Moses thought the worst and recited the trauma of not being able to enter the Promised Land 40 years earlier. (V7f) But that wasn't the case as these tribes were loyal to Israel, yet they wanted to have the best opportunity for their families and their livestock. How often do we jump to conclusions about something someone wants to do or something they say, and we assume the worst? By verse 31, the tribes staying east of the Jordan reaffirmed their pledge of loyalty before all of Israel's leaders. What caught your eye in this chapter?

It is important to know the backdrop of our reading in Romans for today. The truth that no food is wrong to eat was not easy for pious Jews to accept because they had been raised to honor God by avoiding certain foods. Paul urges those who are strong in faith not to force others to violate their consciences. Verses 18 & 19 really summarize the concern on Paul's mind, "If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God, and others will approve of you too. So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up." By giving preference to others who have a sensitive conscience, we display a maturity that helps build a stronger unity. Unity is Paul's main concern because a divided church community damages their testimony and results in weakening the impact and importance of the Gospel to onlookers. Does this make sense to you? How might God be asking you to apply this to your life?

DAY 33 – Numbers 33 & Romans 15:1-13

I am not sure how inspiring this chapter is to you, but you are probably surprised by the numerous locations where Israel camped during their 40-year wanderings in the wilderness. This represents 42 waystations for God's people. However, it is still difficult to track the precise route because some of the locations don't appear anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible. It is impressive that they even kept a record of their journeys as verse 2 says, "At the Lord's direction, Moses kept a written record of their progress." We have thought of Moses being the author of the first five books of the Bible, and this is a statement that points to this possibility. As the chapter closes, we read about God's biggest concern, "You must destroy all their carved and molten images and demolish all their pagan shrines." (V52) The underlying issue for all the Canaanite people were their religious superstitions and pagan practices, like sacrificing their children to the gods, that made their annihilation necessary. How do you respond to the many locations and challenging instructions for the Israelites?

I have often mentioned how many times the Bible uses the phrase “one another.” In verse 7, we see it again with “accept one another.” After the challenging words of verses 1-6, Paul summarizes with the importance of putting others first and accepting each other as followers of Christ because we have way more in common than we have differences. Right?! He affirms the inclusion of the Gentiles with several Old Testament references, and then he wraps up this section with one of the best benedictions from his letters. The benediction includes hope, joy, and peace through the overflow of the Holy Spirit. I encourage you to read this benediction, think about its meaning, and pray it for yourself and others. In some ways, Paul is concluding his letter to the Romans in verse 13, but then he seems to decide to end with encouragement and affirmation of all those who have blessed him and who are serving God by serving others. You can anticipate that focus in our last two readings from Romans tomorrow and the next day. The bottom line in our reading today is, how do we achieve harmony with one another? It will only happen with God’s help as we put others above ourselves. Paul will emphasize this other-centered approach to life, time and again. Philippians 2:3-4 might be the clearest example of his emphasis on unity and harmony among believers. How do you respond to this theme?

DAY 34 – Numbers 34 & Romans 15:14-33

I have to admit that this chapter is not especially inspiring, but it is informative. The plan of God for his people is extensive and bountiful. The Lord is renewing his promise and forecasting the amazing gift of land he has in mind for them. Even though the Israelites of Joshua’s day would not inhabit the full extent of what is written in this chapter, this territory would describe the days of David and Solomon when the borders were actualized more so than at any other time in the history of God’s people. The assignment of allocation was given to Joshua (the political leader) and Eleazar (the high priest) in verse 17. Does anything stand out to you in this instructional chapter? How so?

Romans 15:14f expresses personal concerns and thoughts from Paul’s life. I like reading about him because he is such an amazing example of serving sacrificially and wholeheartedly. He quotes Isaiah 52:15, which essentially promises that God will reach the unreached. Paul has felt led to fulfill this prophecy from Isaiah. I personally have a passion for the importance of reaching the unreached. I am delighted that our church is partnering with missionary servants who courageously work among the unreached. Indonesia is an example of this, where Muslims occupy over 90% of the island of Java, which I think is 100,000,000 people, with most of them having little or no chance to hear about Jesus and what he has done. But there are two men who are called by God, like Paul, to share the Gospel in a city of spiritual darkness and ignorance. Please pray for Roy and Alfredo. They are taking the Gospel, like Paul, to the lost souls of the city of Tasek (about a million people). We read about Paul making it to Rome, but

probably not in the way he envisioned it. He never made it to Spain, as far as we know. But Paul was a man of ambition for the Gospel, especially tenacious in reaching unreached Gentiles. He has set before us an incredible example, as the Lord has used Paul to inspire many to do the same. What part might God be asking you to play in sharing the Gospel with the 3 billion people who remain unreached?

DAY 35 – Numbers 35 & 36. Plus, Romans 16

These two chapters represent two practical topics in the life of God's people to create safety and equity. Capital punishment is a controversial topic in our world, but the stance was clear: if someone intentionally murders another person, they would pay with their own life. But this wasn't always self-evident, so the cities of refuge were established to assure a fair trial. In the world of agriculture, accidents happen, and there might be a false assumption of guilt, especially from the dead person's family. It is never God's desire for innocent human blood to be spilled except when the innocent Lamb of God gave his life for our payment. The issue of inheritance needed greater clarification from chapter 27, referencing the daughters of Zelophehad. The stipulation of marrying within the tribe was to secure the stability and continuity of the tribal land allotment. The daughters submitted to this regulation in 36:10-12. CONGRATULATIONS! You have read through another more challenging Old Testament book. I know we don't gravitate to these historic books, but you have to admit that we have read about some interesting dynamics that existed during the wandering years in the wilderness. Our next Old Testament endeavor will be in 1 Chronicles.

Romans 16 is especially personal and inspiring to me because the Apostle Paul affirms the partnership of so many with the admission that he could never do this without them. The expansion of the early church was dependent on the faith and courage of others who trusted Jesus as their Savior. Paul recognizes that fact and applauds the efforts of so many listed in this chapter. Verses 17 to 20 are similar to Paul's emphasis in Galatians, Colossians, and 1 Timothy, as divisive false teachers created confusion and harm to the unity of the people and the purity of the Gospel. God will crush the enemy of our souls who has inspired these false teachers (V20). In Genesis 3:15, the curse of God is pronounced on the serpent in the Garden of Eden, and Paul assures them that the Lord will complete his promise to defeat the devil for good, forever. Which personal message from Paul to his friends gets your attention? Why? Verse 13 has a fascinating story of possibility behind it because Rufus might be the son of the person in Mark 15:21, "A passerby named Simon, who was from Cyrene, was coming in from the countryside just then, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. (Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus.)" It is interesting to realize the interconnection of believers in the Early

Church. Romans has been a beautiful reminder for us of how wonderful the Gospel is. Amen!
We will keep going next week with 1 Corinthians.