

**The Weekly Word**  
August 26-September 1, 2013

The end of August is in sight. The rhythm of Fall is about to start. May reading God's Word be a mainstay of your rhythm, fall, winter, spring and summer! Happy reading...  
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

**Monday, August 26: Numbers 25– Beware sexual seduction...**

With Baalam, Midian (Moab) tried a frontal assault against Israel. And it failed. Today, sadly, we read that where the frontal assault failed, seduction succeeded. Moab women sexually seduced Israelite men, even Israelite leaders, who we would hope would know better!

Then, as now, sex seduces! Then, as now, sex entices. Just turn on the TV and you will see sex sells, too.

I recall reading about Bill W, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous. AA helped him gain victory over the bottle. Sadly, what I read said he was never able gain a similar victory over his sexual addiction. The seducing power of sex is in a league of its own!

Today's reading is a strong reminder about the seductive power of illicit sex. How many people, political and business leaders and even religious leaders have fallen prey to illicit sex's seductive call.

God is telling me...guard your heart, guard your thoughts, guard your genitals! Guard your eyes...pornography is so easily available on any and every screen... Guard your eyes!

*Lord, sexual temptations are everywhere in our modern life. From innuendo in TV ads, to raw language and even scenes in popular TV shows, to explicit pornographic channels and internet sights... the seduction of sex is all around us. Lord, keep me pure! Lord, keep your church pure. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.*

**Tuesday, August 27: Numbers 26– God sustains...**

Moses and Israel stand on the plains of Moab, for 40-years they have been wandering. Now, finally, they are preparing to enter the Promised Land. God directs Moses to take a second census, which is summed up like this: *Not one of them was among those counted by Moses and Aaron the priest when they counted the Israelites in the Desert of Sinai. For the LORD had told those Israelites they would surely die in the desert, and not one of them was left except Caleb ... and Joshua ... (63-65).*

God keeps His word. God said that the faithless generation would die in the desert and they did. God keeps his word.

Then another thought filled my meditations; the natural life cycle, birth and death, was not included in the story. I am not sure what to make of this... so I pondered.

So much of life is the ordinary and doesn't make it on to the 'highlight' reel of life and yet God is there. God is present and God supports and cares and provides. For 40-years God watched over His people, faithless as they were. He provided food, blessed them with children, was present at their marriages and comforted them when death took loved ones. When I review my life, many more days fall in the category of ordinary as compared to a 'highlight' reel event. Through it all, God sustains...

*Lord, I find myself being oh so grateful for Your everyday care for me and those around me. Thank You and bless You, Lord. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, August 28: Numbers 27– Standing up for what is right...**

It took a lot of guts for the daughters of Zelophehad to approach the Lord through Moses and all the other leaders of Israel.

In most ways, the OT world was a man's world and these women had a legitimate problem. From our 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective, this is a no-brainer but not so back in their day. As a result of their boldness, God issued a decree that not only answered their concern but set a precedent for all time in Israel. *"Say to the Israelites, 'If a man dies and leaves no son, turn his inheritance over to his daughter. If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers...'"* (8-9).

With no assurance that they would even be heard, these women approached Moses and elders with their problem. How many times do I see an injustice and do nothing? How many times do I allow the possibility of defeat keep me from taking up a cause or seeking to correct an injustice?

*Oh, Lord, give me the courage and boldness of the daughters of Zelophehad. In Jesus' name and for the sake of justice for all people, I pray. Amen.*

### **Thursday, August 29: Numbers 28– My Life as a please aroma to the Lord...**

I found my attention glued to the daily and Sabbath offerings described in this chapter.

Twice a day, in the morning and at twilight, a lamb without defect was offered to the Lord as a burnt offering along with some grain and oil. As a burnt offering fire consumed the entire offering. I don't know how long a burnt offering would burn, but I would think it would burn for many hours. As the meat cooked and then charred, the aroma would fill the Tabernacle... an aroma pleasing to the Lord (2). I'm thinking that the aroma of the morning burnt offering would fill the Tabernacle until evening when the second offering was made.

Thus, it seems that a pleasing aroma of worship was before the Lord constantly in His Tabernacle.

On the Sabbath 2, additional lambs with grain and oil were offered.

I found myself thinking about the offerings and equating or connecting them to my daily offering of praise and worship to the Lord. First, I connected it with the imagery of Psalm 1, meditating on the law of Lord day and night. Then I contemplated my life as a constant fragrant offering to the Lord, that my life would produce an aroma pleasing to the Lord day and night (check out 2Corinthians 2:14)!

Finally, I thought about the Sabbath as a double offering. Maybe I should double my offering, double my aroma, double my time with the Lord on my Sabbath days?

*Lord, may my life be a pleasing aroma to You. May the words I speak, the actions I live, the thoughts I have, be captive to You and thereby be pleasing to You, my Lord and my Redeemer. Amen.*

### **Friday, August 30: Numbers 29– Holidays...**

Most cultures that I know have special days, holidays, to celebrate important landmarks in the culture or country's heritage. In the US we have the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, the celebration of our nation's birth and enjoy a slice of Americana fireworks included.

We have Thanksgiving, a day to feast on Turkey and enjoy family. The celebration harkens back to the Pilgrims thanking God for watching over them and providing for them. Although more and more the thanking God part of Thanksgiving is disappearing in our culture.

Then there are days like Memorial Day, Labor Day and Presidents' Day. We could possibly add Halloween (although I don't know who this got to be such a big deal in our country).

Christmas is a unique holiday in the US. Starting as a religious celebration of the incarnation of Jesus, it is now a huge commercial engine for our materialist-driven society. Retailers generate something like 20-40% of their annual profits from Christmas, often referred to now as 'Holiday Sales'. The jewelry industry reports 33% of their sales in November and December.

My stroll through yearly holidays in the US is simply recognition that holidays play an important role in most cultures.

In today's reading, Moses reminds the people of 3 key feasts or holidays that God wants His people Israel to celebrate annually. (I am shocked that Passover is not mentioned here.)

Celebrating the goodness of God is a very good thing. These celebrations become anchors of the faith in the yearly calendar. Also they become tremendous ways to pass along faith-highlights to our children.

In our western world, Easter remains far more religiously pure than Christmas, although the secular creep is certainly present in the Easter bunny and baskets. Christmas has been almost completely swallowed up by the US secular culture...

As I ponder the engulfing of Christian feasts by secular culture, sadness falls on me. What have Christ-followers done or allowed to be done to these celebrations of God's amazing message?

*God, I grow even more sad realizing that we have likely crossed the tipping point and cannot reclaim Christmas from the secular world. The question I am wrestling with personally is what could I do within my own family to reclaim Christmas for Jesus... and even more do I really want to part with the many secular additions to the celebration???*

*Lord, I am left today wondering about the place of Faith-Feasts in life. Be with me in my wonderings, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

### **Saturday, August 31: Numbers 30– ...**

Vows are a big deal to God. When we make one, God expects us to keep them. *When a man makes a vow to the LORD or takes an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he must not break his word but must do everything he said* (2).

Vows are serious business to God. This got me thinking about vows we make to God.

I thought about the vow congregations make when someone is baptized in worship: *Do we the members of the church, promise to guide and nurture these new members by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging them to know and follow Jesus Christ and to be faithful members of Christ's church? If so say, "I do."*

I thought about the vows we make when we join a church:

- To renounce evil and its work in this world
- To pledge fidelity to Jesus and God's Word, and

- To share faithfully in the worship and work of this congregation, giving of yourself in every way

Then there are wedding vows made before God, if we are married, and the list goes on.

This text is driving me to examine the vows I have made... asking myself if am I faithful to the vows I made to the Lord.

How about you, are you faithful to the vows you made?

*Lord, God, it is so easy to speak pledge words fidelity and to vow this and that before You. You hold us accountable to the words we speak and the vows we make.*

*Forgive me when I have NOT lived up to my vows and even more so, God, may I have the strength to fulfill my vows made to You.*

*I pray in Jesus' name. Amen*

### **Sunday, September 1, 2013, Sunday Worship**

*If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.*

*If you are reading along with me from the PCOG website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at [office@pcogonline.org](mailto:office@pcogonline.org).*

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.