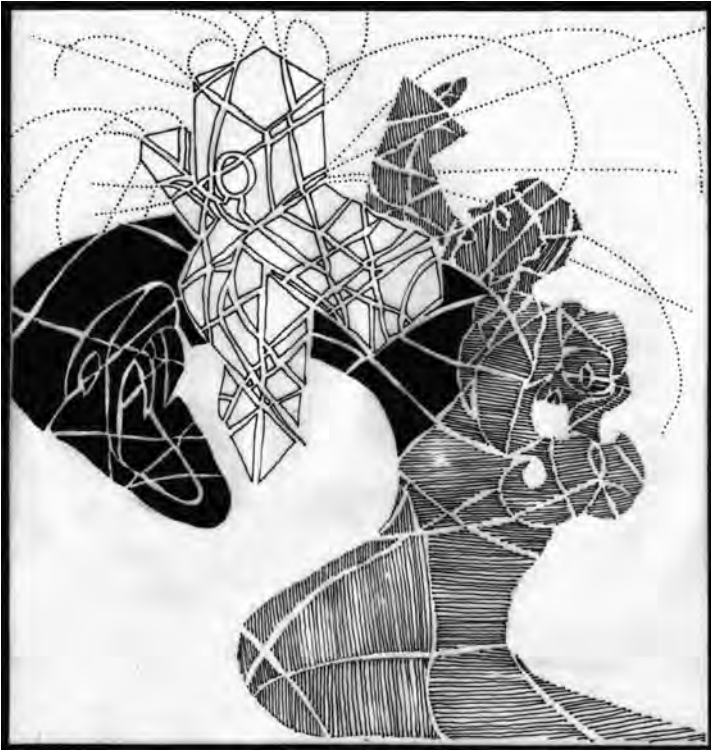


lesson one

SEPTEMBER 26–OCTOBER 3

A New **Order**

“Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor. 10:11, NKJV).



Ps. 37:23, 24

Introduction

Order Out of Chaos

It is often said that creative people need to work in chaos. I am one such person. Neat piles on a desk stifle my creative juices as my thoughts clumsily bump into the sterile organization of imposed order. As a writer, I need my mind to be free of such constraints.

To me, it was an absolute nightmare.

I remember the time when my husband decided to tidy my desk. I literally went spare (blank)! I simply couldn't find anything at all. I couldn't figure out what to do. Where were my things? To me, it was an absolute nightmare. Nothing was where it should be, and I had deadlines to meet.

My husband frequently asks me, "How can you work in such a mess?" Mess? Believe me, I know where to find anything I want on my desk. To me, everything is in order. But to my beloved, it's chaos.

God gave Moses a difficult task—leading a large group of people out of slavery. He really would have to be organized. No wonder Moses was a little scared. I would have been extremely terrified.

God, however, took a humble shepherd who was slow of speech and made him an organized leader (Exod. 4:10–12). The God that can do something like that is a wonderful and challenging God. A God who chooses the most unlikely person to be a leader lets us know that His order is not quite like our order. And the God who put a man like Moses in charge didn't just leave him on his own. From the very beginning of the journey, He gave Moses detailed instructions. (Review such chapters as Exodus 12; 13; and 16.)

This week we'll begin to learn from the book of Numbers how God organized His people for their sacred calling. As you study each daily lesson, consider how He guides you in your sacred calling. We can trust a God who makes order out of chaos. The God who led the Israelites through the wilderness can certainly order our steps today.

Logos
*In the Presence of the
King*

Gen. 15:14–16;
Lev. 10:1–11;
Numbers 1–4;
Jer. 23:23, 24;
John 14:15–18, 24

Promises: Living in Hope and Faith (Gen. 15:14–16)

The Jews lived in hope for over four hundred years. Parents told their children stories about the promises God had made, promises that were passed down from father to son. These words were spoken by God to Abraham, promises about great possessions, of freedom from slavery, and of a country of their own. It took a great deal of work for the parents to flesh out these promises in their stories in order to capture the vivid imagination of their children. How can you convey the truth about God's reliability when you talk about promises made to an ancestor (Abraham) who is long dead? How can you describe richness when you live in poverty, or freedom when all you know is slavery? How can you imagine an entire country of your own, when all you've ever known

You are guaranteed the presence of God in your life.

is the one in which you and your parents live? This became increasingly more difficult as time passed by and their oppression became tougher and tougher. As these children became adults, they had two options regarding their view of these promises: (1) that they were lovely subjects of their childhood stories, or (2) that they were an ever-growing certainty in their lives, a surety that one day they would become reality (Heb. 11:13).

Misconceptions About God: Taking Him for Granted (Lev. 10:1–11)

More than four centuries of slavery and pagan influence meant that the Israelites had lost their sense of who God is. In fact, so heavy was the impact of their surroundings that when they entered into the very presence of God, they thought it was all right to do so under the influence of alcohol. What they failed to understand is that the God they worshiped was a real God, unlike those worshiped by the Egyptians. The differences were real: *YHWH* was the Creator God (thus separating Himself from the status of His worshipers, who were His creation). He was the Deliverer God (thus differentiating Himself from those who were slaves to human masters). Finally, He was the God who gave them a hope and a future, which they didn't have (Jer. 29:11).

The Reality About God: In the Presence of the King (Numbers 1–4; Jer. 23:23, 24)

God desired to be with His people, and He wanted to help them understand

who He was. So He instructed Moses and Aaron in how to build the sanctuary. He instructed them to set apart an entire clan for full-time service in the sanctuary. He gave them a detailed layout of their campsite and detailed how entire families were to be dedicated to performing the particular services of the sanctuary (the care of furniture, livestock, worship, etc.). These instructions would help them realize who they were and who He really was.

Contrary to What the World Thinks, God Takes Things Seriously (John 14:15–18, 24)

“The world cannot accept him [the Holy Spirit], because it neither sees him nor knows him” (John 14:17, NIV). God, in the form of His Spirit “live with you and will be in you” (John 14:17, NIV). Therein lies the challenge: We know in our hearts what God has promised to us and what He expects of us. However, these views are not shared by all those around us. The promise is there, too, that “whoever does not love me [Jesus] does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me” (John 14:24, NRSV). You are guaranteed the presence of God in your life. Isn't it marvelous to have the Creator of the universe live with you!

REACT

1. In what ways are we living in hope and faith regarding the promises made many centuries ago to our spiritual ancestors (promises about the Second Coming; the mansions Jesus is preparing for us; the City of God that will come down from heaven; etc.)?

2. What are some of the influences (positive and negative) in your life that affect the way you think about God? What are some of the possible misconceptions you may have about God? Is God serious about such things as keeping the Ten Commandments, or are they up for negotiation in light of the examples of Nadab and Abihu (especially those commandments which relate to worshiping Him)?

3. How do you view such expectations in church as punctuality, thorough preparation for special musical items/drama/Pathfinder activities (homework), etc.? Are they mere challenges given to you by your leaders, or do they serve a greater purpose in your appreciation of who God is? Why is it that we can observe the laws laid down by our schools, society, and place of work, but many times try to negotiate those laws relating to worshiping God?

4. How do you deal with the contrast between what you know (and feel in your life) about God and what those around you think? Is there a place for making a decision based on the evidence you have in your own life and just going with it, and then asking others to respect your choice just as much as they would have you respect theirs?

Testimony *A Call to Order*

Genesis 1; 2;
Numbers 1–4

From the very beginning, we witness an orderly God at work. And again in Numbers 1–4, one is struck by the orderliness of His instructions to Israel.

“God is a God of order. Everything connected with heaven is in perfect order; subjection and thorough discipline mark the movements of the angelic host. Success can only attend order and harmonious action. God requires order and system in His work now no less than in the days of Israel. All who are working for Him are to labor intelligently, not in a careless, haphazard manner. He would have His work done with faith and exactness, that He may place the seal of His approval upon it.”¹

“Order and perfection are seen in all His work.”

We again witness orderliness when Christ arose from the grave. “The graveclothes were not thrown heedlessly aside, but carefully folded, each in a place by itself. . . .

“It was Christ Himself who had placed those graveclothes with such care. When the mighty angel came down to the tomb, he was joined by another, who with his company had been keeping guard over the Lord’s body. As the angel from heaven rolled away the stone, the other entered the tomb, and unbound the wrappings from the body of Jesus. But it was the Saviour’s hand that folded each, and laid it in its place. In His sight who guides alike the star and the atom, there is nothing unimportant. Order and perfection are seen in all His work.”²

To us, as well as to the Israelites and to Jesus, comes a call to order: “Disorder and untidiness in daily duties will lead to forgetfulness of God and to keeping the form of godliness in a profession of faith, having lost the reality. We are to watch and pray, else we shall grasp the shadow and lose the substance.

“A living faith like threads of gold should run through the daily experience in the performance of little duties. Then students will be led to understand the pure principles which God designs shall prompt every act of their lives. Then all the daily work will be of such a character as to promote Christian growth. Then the vital principles of faith, trust, and love for Jesus will penetrate into the most minute details of daily life.”³

REACT

What needs organizing in your life?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 376.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 789.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 170, 171.

Amos 9:7

Evidence *Even God Has a Plan B*

Based on all the trouble the Israelites caused that we read about in Numbers, Israel shouldn't be in existence today. Other nations, more erudite and established, did not survive the same test of time. The Sumerians, who developed the cuneiform system of writing, along with the Aztecs, Mayans, and Phoenicians, have all come and gone. Twentieth-century historian Arnold J. Toynbee concluded that societies decline not so much because of environmental and economic issues but because of a moral and religious collapse.¹ While many historians do not adhere to Toynbee's conclusion, the Bible does deal with God's part in the movements of nations and civilizations. Amos 9:7 in particular mentions God's leading with Israel and with the Ethiopians, Philistines, and Syrians.

Israel's survival was nothing short of miraculous.

Israel's survival was nothing short of miraculous. Clearly, the genius behind their new order was the God who was a "cloud by day" and a "pillar by night." Clearly, He also desires to be personally involved in our lives (Rev. 3:20). This is seen in stark contrast with a deist's hands-off wind-it-up-and-let-it-run-on-its-own view of God. That being said, however, Numbers gives the distinct impression that because of their perennial stubbornness, God constantly had to rework His original plans for "sheepish" Israel. They were meant to subsist on the heaven-sent manna, but they craved earthly meat (Numbers 11). They were meant to arrive at Canaan sooner, but they caused their rebellion, they wandered for 40 years while the old guard died (Num. 14:33). "We have far more to fear from within than from without. The hindrances to strength and success are far greater from the church itself than from the world."²

Nevertheless, we see God's sovereignty and grace. We see His mercy despite our self-inflicted misery as He works around our mess-ups in order to move us from plan A to plan B—all so that we can still be conquerors in Christ (Rom. 8:37–39; Romans 8). We are encouraged to increase our faith and trust in God, so that the order He wills for our lives will bring protection, peace, and an abundant life.

REACT

What evidence is there in your life that you can trust God's plan for you?

1. Philosophy Professor Arnold J. Toynbee, <http://www.philosophyprofessor.com/philosophers/arnold-toynbee.php>, retrieved December 1, 2008.

2. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 122.

How-to Making Sense of Life

Num. 3:5–7, 38;
4:1–4

At the center of the order God brought to Israel's camp was His desire to be with His people, to protect them, and to guide them like a loving parent. The symbol of this desire was the sanctuary, or the tent of meeting. In time, Jesus, God's Son, came to live among them, as the true temple of God, bringing love and order into the lives of those He touched. And now, through the Holy Spirit, we have the same opportunity to make a place in the center of our lives in which Jesus can dwell. In that place, He promises to love us, to take care of us, and to bring meaning, purpose, and order into our lives (John 14:23; Rev. 3:20). How do we make a place for Jesus to live in us? Here are a few pointers:

God will never give up on you!

You are His temple. When we believe in Jesus and decide to follow Him, our very bodies become a temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells (1 Cor. 6:19).

Let the Word of God be real to you. During Creation, God spoke, and the world came into existence (Gen. 1:3). Jesus spoke, and people were healed (Luke 7:1–10). God's Word never fails. And just as the Israelites put the tabernacle in the center of their camp, we also should make God's Word central to our lives. Here are some ways we can do so:

- a. *Come to grips with the big picture.* Always remind yourself of the Bible's core message. God loves you so much that He was willing to send His Son to die for you so that you could live with Him forever. God is love, and His plans for you are all good ones! (Jer. 29:11; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8).
- b. *Don't let your feelings or circumstances dictate how you see yourself or what you do in life.* Feelings are not always reliable. However, God's Word is. Circumstances change all the time, but His Word never does. Discipline your mind and will by making yourself familiar with all of His promises (Isa. 40:8; 55:8–11; Matt. 24:35).

Remember that God will never give up on you! It's just not His nature to do that. His desire is to come to the center of your being and from there love you, care for you, bring order into your life, and transform you to reflect His character.

REACT

1. How does it make you feel to think that God wants you to be a temple in which He can dwell?
2. What about your life would you like to "put in order"?

Jeremy Tramier, Welsh Mission, Wales, United Kingdom

Num. 2:1–33

Opinion

The Center of Attention

In life, we have a multitude of choices to make. Sometimes we may look back at a choice we've made and think that if we had the chance to make that decision again, we would choose differently. Some choices we make are less important; some are more important. Exodus 25:8 tells us that God told Moses to build the tabernacle so He could dwell among the people. Numbers 2:2 says that the Israelites were to dwell around that tabernacle. God gave direct orders about where the Israelites were to camp in relationship to the tabernacle—the tent where He “lived.” The rest of Numbers 2 describes how He planned His tent to be at the very center of the Israelite encampment. This illustrates that it was His desire not only to live with them, but to be at the very center of their lives.

God has made His choice quite clear.

The book of Hebrews describes Jesus as a fulfillment of the tabernacle and its services (Hebrews 8–10). God has made His choice quite clear: He wants Jesus Christ to be at the very center of our lives. To me, it is amazing that a holy God, the Creator of the universe, wants to be at the center of my life. This is where we encounter the most important choice we will ever have to make: How do we respond to God's desire to be the center of our lives? Do we accept Him? Or do we turn our backs on Him?

Does it matter what we believe in regard to this subject? Yes, it does, and the place where it matters most is in our daily lives. How we live each day makes it clear whether or not Christ really is the center of our world.

Peter wrote that our “enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8, NIV). Satan has numerous ways of trying to take our attention away from Jesus.

Admittedly, it is not natural for humans to keep focused on Christ. Thankfully, however, Christ says the same words to us as He said to the apostle Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV).

REACT

1. What distractions does the devil use to break your focus on Christ?
2. What does having Christ at the center of your life actually mean?

Exploration

God's Special Class

1 Cor. 10:11–38

CONCLUDE

God's plan was a daunting one—to take a people, degraded by many years of slavery, and make them His ambassadors to the world. These unformed, undisciplined people were to learn lessons of order and organization, faith and obedience, through one of the most amazing of all object lessons—a live-in experience with God, as He demonstrated His plan for salvation through the sanctuary service. That God is holy, that He is particular, that He is just, and that He bore on Himself the consequences of our sins because He loves us are all lessons we still need to learn today.

CONSIDER

- Designing a model sanctuary and encampment to scale. Add to your model throughout the rest of the quarter's lessons to make your study more visual. Then plan on sharing it with the rest of your class.
- Organizing members of your class into a team to act out a daily temple service at the conclusion of the quarter as a means of outreach. Some members may want to build temple furniture, others may sew priestly robes, and still others may opt to work on a script or set design.
- Examining your life or home for areas of chaos. You may want to search your church family for a mentor to aid you in reordering these parts of your life.
- Finding a special area in nature or in your home that can become your sanctuary. Make comfortable seating arrangements and visit your sanctuary regularly for prayer and devotions.
- Brainstorming creative ideas for keeping Christ at the center of your life. Imagine how your devotional life might be revitalized through pictures, music, memorizing Bible verses, and nature walks. Then choose one or two ideas to put into action.
- Choosing a motto from one of the inspired passages you have encountered in this week's lesson. Print it in a special font, or write it out in calligraphy, display it, and share it.

CONNECT

Patriarchs and Prophets, chapter 27.

Nancy Van Pelt, *Get Organized* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald®, 1998).