

A New Society¹



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 26

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Genesis 15:14–16; Leviticus 10:1–11; Numbers 1–4; Jeremiah 23:23, 24; John 14:15–18, 23.

MEMORY VERSE: “Those things happened to them as examples for us. They were written down to warn us who are living at the time when God’s work is being completed” (1 Corinthians 10:11, NIV).

A CHRISTIAN STARTED TALKING WITH ANOTHER MAN. The man was a biologist.² The Christian was trying to find a way to witness. He asked, “Do you not see the hand of a Creator when you study the things that you do?”

Quickly, the biologist answered, “Everything you look at, you see perfect order (arrangement).”

Much of our world has been damaged by sin. But we still can see the working of our Creator in the perfect design³ of the world of nature. Even a very loyal Darwinist⁴ was forced to admit that nature shows “the illusion⁵ of design.”

Illusion? No way! Design and order are real, and they show the work of our Maker.

But God’s order does not just end with nature. It is seen also in how He worked with the people of Israel while they wandered in the wilderness. This week we will look firsthand at how God organized His people for their holy work. And we will learn some lessons for ourselves today.

1. society—people living together as a group, or forming a group, with the same way of life.
 2. biologist—a scientist who studies living things and the way they live and grow.
 3. design—the way the parts of something are put together or arranged to form or make the whole thing.
 4. Darwinist—a strong supporter of Charles Darwin, who developed the theory of evolution, the belief that we became humans by slowly changing from a lower form of life to a higher form of life.
 5. illusion—an idea that fools people; something that seems to be true but is not; an image (something that can be seen) that is misleading and is not what it appears to be.

SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 27**ORGANIZING THE ARMY
(Numbers 1:2, 3)**

With God's help, the people of Israel made an escape from Egypt. The large crowd flowed into the wilderness of Sinai and made camp around the mountain. They heard the voice of God telling them what He wanted of them (Exodus 20). After having seen such a wonderful showing of God's power, some people in Israel fell away from God and worshiped the golden calf (Exodus 32). After that sad event, the people who repented⁶ spent time building a portable⁷ sanctuary⁸ (Exodus 25:8). The work was finished on the first day of the first month in the second year (Exodus 40:17).

Another month followed. Then the Lord went ahead and organized the nation more carefully (Numbers 1:1). At this point, the book of Numbers picks up the holy story of God's working with His covenant⁹ people.

According to Numbers 1:2, 3, what kind of census¹⁰ did the Lord ask Moses and Aaron to take? Why?

The people of Israel were not a warlike nation. Their work had been that of taking care of sheep and cat-

tle (Genesis 47:3). They were freed slaves, without weapons or training for war. It may seem strange for the Lord now to organize them into an army. But we must remember their main job was to conquer seven nations of the most wicked people in the Near East, including the Amorites and Canaanites. Israel would serve as God's sword against these nations, who had filled the cup of their sins (Genesis 15:14–16). Israel was now a theocracy¹¹ under God's control. They were a people, a powerful army, on the move.



Israel would serve as God's sword against the nations that had filled up the cup of their sins.

What do Genesis 15:14–16 and Deuteronomy 9:5 suggest to us? How can these verses help us understand Israel's wars with the Amorites?

6. repented—to have felt great sorrow over having sinned and to want to stop sinning.

7. portable—something that can be folded up and carried from place to place.

8. sanctuary—the home of God on earth in early Bible times. Here the high priest offered prayers and the blood of animals to God for the sins of the people of Israel.

9. covenant—a promise or agreement between God and His people.

10. census—a count of people.

11. theocracy—a group of people, a country, a state, or government that is ruled by God.

In the time of Abraham, God would not let the Amorites be destroyed. Here God showed His great patience. “The Amorites were enemies of God’s law. They did not believe in Him as the true and living God. But among them were a few good persons. For the sake of these few, God showed His great patience.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, volume 1, page 1093.

Many people are concerned about the killing of these people by Israel. We may not understand these things. But why do we simply need to go by faith, trusting in the goodness of God, who has shown Himself to us in Jesus? Read John 14:9.

MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 28

THE LORD WITH HIS PEOPLE (Psalm 139:1–10)

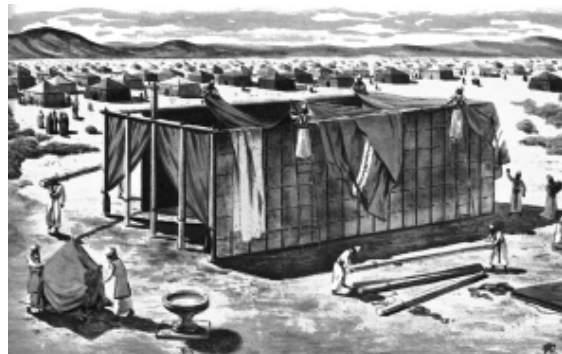
According to Numbers 1:50–54, what kind of work were the Levites chosen to do?

Moses put the portable tabernacle¹² in the middle of Israel’s camp. The Levites put their tents around it, on all four sides. Their tents protected the place where God made His home.

Why was it set up this way? The Bible does not give a reason. But

some important lessons can be learned from this arrangement.

Yahweh, the Living God, was with His people. He, the Creator, was among His people. So, how could they lose if they remained faithful? But at the same time, they put their tents rather far from the tabernacle (Numbers 2:2). That was because God was holy. The people, as sinners, could not come too close to God. So, in one way, they could see God close to them. But at the same time, they still were reminded that He was great and holy. Only through the work of priests, they, as sinners, could reach a holy God.



Moses placed the tabernacle in the middle of the camp.

According to Psalm 139:1–10; Isaiah 57:5; Jeremiah 23:23, 24; and John 14:15–18, 23, what do other Bible writers say about God’s being far and near His people?

“At all times and in all places, in all sorrows and in all sufferings, the out-

¹². tabernacle—a place of worship or house of God; tent.

look may seem dark or the future may be puzzling. And we may feel helpless and alone. But the Comforter [the Holy Spirit] will be sent in answer to the prayer of faith. Events may separate us from every earthly friend. But no event can separate us from the heavenly Comforter. Wherever we are, wherever we may go, He is always at our right hand to support, encourage, and cheer.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 669, 670.

In what ways have you experienced that God is really close and merciful? But what things are you doing that keep you from an even closer relationship with God?

TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 29

UNDER THE STANDARDS (FLAGS) (Numbers 2:34)

Read Numbers 2. Talk about “organized religion”! What one thing is clear in Numbers 2 about how the Israelites were supposed to live?

The government of Israel was very well organized (formed). For example, Numbers 2 shows how the Lord had arranged for the camp itself to be organized. He chose where the people were to set up their tents. The Hebrew camp was separated into three great groups. Each group had its chosen place in the camp. Everything was based on families and tribes.

The place of each tribe in the camp also was organized. Each was to march and to encamp beside its own flag. Nothing happened by accident. The Lord carefully had organized the nation. They were one people. But their family connections were not broken.

What does Numbers 2:34 tell us about how the Lord set up the camp in a clear pattern? But He also left room for differences among the tribes. What lessons can we learn from that?

Why is it so important for the church today to be organized too? What happens when people are left to do anything they please? Why does that so often lead to chaos (confusion, mess, no order) and false teachings? How has belonging to an organized group helped you in your walk with God?

WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 30

CALL TO MINISTRY (WORK DONE FOR GOD) (Numbers 3:46–51)

God freed His people from being slaves in Egypt. He caused the death of the Egyptian children. He saved Israelite children under the sign of the blood. For these reasons, God asked Israel’s firstborn children to be dedicated (given; set apart) to Him (Exodus 13:2, 12–15).

Giving God our firstborn children? That is very serious. What

powerful lesson should we learn from this about how much we owe the Lord for our salvation?¹³ Why, then, is self-pride so sinful?

At Mount Sinai, the Lord made an exchange (trade) for the firstborn of all Israelites. Instead of them, He would take the Levites in their place (Numbers 3:12, 13). This act, then, required the count of the Levites, who had not been counted with the rest of Israel. To make the exchange, Moses is told to count the male firstborn children of a month old and older (verse 15). Their total number came to 22,273. This means that there were 273 more firstborn Israelites than there were Levites.

According to Numbers 3:46–51, what were the extra Israelites to do for their salvation? To whom was it given?

The Lord also dedicated (gave) the Levites to Aaron and his priestly sons and future children. They were to help with the worship of God and the care of the tabernacle. In a way, they were responsible for the work done for God in the church in the wilderness.

Once the Hebrews reached the Promised Land, the Levites continued to work in the sanctuary doing many different things (1 Chronicles 23:27–32). The Levites were spread

out among the tribes. Some became teaching Levites (2 Chronicles 17:7–9). Others became judges (2 Chronicles 19:8–11). They taught the people in the ways of God.



The Lord dedicated the Levites to Aaron and his sons to help with the worship of God and the care of the tabernacle.

In what ways do you find the Cross and the death of Jesus as our Substitute¹⁴ (John 3:16) shown in these sanctuary services?¹⁵ What does it mean that Jesus died as a Substitute for you? How should this knowledge be real in your life and help you change it?

THURSDAY—OCTOBER 1

PROTECTING WHAT IS HOLY (Leviticus 10:1–11)

God set up the system¹⁶ of worship at Sinai. He chose one family of the Levites to work as priests. This work

13. salvation—God's plan for saving sinners from eternal (without end) death; the gift of eternal life; being saved.

14. Substitute—someone or something that takes the place of another person or thing. Jesus is our Substitute because He died for our sins.

15. sanctuary services—the offerings of animal blood given as a payment for sin. The animal blood was offered in place of the sinner's blood. This service represented Jesus' dying on the cross for our sins. After Jesus died, these services were not needed.

16. system—a set of beliefs and practices.

was described in Numbers 4. Moses set apart Aaron as high priest and his four sons—Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar to work as priests. The rest of the tribe of Levi would help the others but would not work as priests. Every working Levite had his place and service. They were to work together to protect the holiness of Israel’s worship system.

The Levites had been given a serious duty. The sons of Aaron would work as priests of the Lord in the tabernacle. Think about the work they were supposed to do. The Lord Himself, the Creator, showed Himself among them in the sanctuary (Numbers 14:10, 11). His presence reminded them that their safety depended completely on Him. He was the One who had saved them from Egypt. These priests were the mediators¹⁷ between a Holy God and sinners. Their work also showed they were symbols (examples) of Jesus, our true High Priest in the heavenly sanctuary¹⁸ (Hebrews 8).

What happened in Leviticus 10:1–11? What lessons are there for us today?

These young men had been given such holy work to do. God already had given them so much (read Exodus 24:9–11). But they would dare to disobey a clear command of God. Unbelievable! Their punishment¹⁹

might seem too hard for us to understand. But it shows how holy and serious their work for God was. No doubt others got the message about how seriously the Lord expected the priests to honor and obey His commandments about the sanctuary.

“To handle holy things as we would common things is an insult to God. The things that God has set apart for giving light to this world are holy. Those who are connected with the work of God are not to depend on their own foolish wisdom. Instead, they always should depend on the wisdom of God. If they do not, they will be in danger of placing holy and common things on the same level. In this way, they might separate themselves from God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Evangelism*,²⁰ page 639.



Nadab and Abihu handled the holy things of God as though they were common things.

According to Leviticus 10:10, how can we today tell the difference between the holy and the common or between the clean and

17. mediators—priests who served as “peacemakers” and messengers between God and His people.

18. heavenly sanctuary—the place in heaven where Jesus works as our High Priest before the throne of God.

19. punishment—a penalty (price to be paid) for, or the result of, doing something wrong; when someone must suffer loss or pain for doing something bad, wrong, or against the law.

20. *Evangelism*—the spreading of the good news about Jesus to the world.

unclean? Bring your answer to class on Sabbath.

FRIDAY—OCTOBER 2

ADDITIONAL STUDY: The theme of God’s holiness runs like a silver thread through the whole Bible. Describe this thread. According to Exodus 28:36; Leviticus 11:44, 45; Isaiah 6:1–7; Hebrews 12:14; and 1 Peter 1:15, 16, what connection does it have with the believer?

“Angels work together. They move in perfect order. If we follow the perfect unity²¹ of the angels, they will be more successful in their work for us. If we do not try to work well together, the angels cannot work for us successfully. They turn away sadly because they are not supposed to support and bless confusion. All who desire the cooperation of the angels must work well with them. Those who have the blessing of God are to work together with one another and with order. Then the angels of God can work together with them.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*²² to *Ministers [Pastors]*, page 28.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① Talk more about the idea of “organized religion.” Why are some people so against it? But why is organized religion necessary? At the same time, what are the possible problems it brings? How can we learn to work better with the church system, even with the problems that arise?

② Talk about your answer to Thursday’s question. In class, make a list of what is holy and what is common. How can we know the difference? In what ways does our culture²³ influence²⁴ our understanding of these things? Or our education? For example, how might the idea of mixing Darwin’s evolution²⁵ with our faith be a mixture of the holy with the unholy? What other examples can you think of?

③ Think more about the idea in Wednesday’s lesson of Jesus as our Substitute. Why is this idea so important to the whole plan of salvation?²⁶ How did, and still does, Jesus work as our Substitute? Why is that work so important?

21. unity—when two or more people or things are joined together as one; when two or more people or things are in agreement in ideas, feelings, and so on.

22. *Testimonies*—the writings of Ellen G. White.

23. culture—the way people live, dress, think, eat, and get along with one another.

24. influence—to have power, or an effect, over persons or things.

25. evolution—the belief that we became humans by slowly changing from a lower form of life to a higher form of life.

26. plan of salvation—what God has done or is doing to save us from sin.