

THE
WILDERNESS WAY



A Study of the Book of Numbers
and Israel's Wilderness Journey
by Sue LeBoutillier

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Table of Contents

Week 1: Introduction — God’s Plan Through the Wilderness

Week 2: Exodus 20-40 — Hearing God’s Word

Week 3: Numbers 1-10 — Living in God’s Presence

Week 4: Numbers 11-12 — Living in Contentment

Week 5: Numbers 13-14 — Seeing With Eyes of Faith

Week 6: Numbers 16-18 — Satisfied with God’s Call

Week 7: Numbers 20-22 — God’s Mercy Follows our Failures

Week 8: Numbers 23-33 — Walking in God’s Blessing

❧ *The Wilderness Way* ❧ *Numbers*

Dear Friend,

Did you know that our Bible is a story of **God's Plan** for His creation from the beginning in Genesis to the new creation in Revelation? **The Wilderness Way** is an essential part of that plan and I think you'll be very blessed by studying along with us.

This is the third segment in our Women of the Word Old Testament series, "**God's Unfolding Plan.**" It's mostly a study in the book of **Numbers**, although we'll begin in Exodus, right where we left off in our second segment, **Divine Deliverance**.

The main point of our study will be observing how God led Israel through their journey, from the base of Mt. Sinai to the very banks of the Jordan River. There, they will be positioned to cross over and claim the land God had promised long ago to Abraham and his descendants.

While our studies of Genesis and Exodus each covered many hundreds of years, this study will encompass 40 short years — all of them in the Wilderness.

At the risk of being overly dramatic, may I suggest that those years could be summarized this way?

*It was the best of times — it was the worst of times,
it was the age of wisdom — it was the age of foolishness,
it was the epoch of belief — it was the epoch of incredulity,
it was the season of Light — it was the season of Darkness,
it was the spring of hope — it was the winter of despair,
we had everything before us — we had nothing before us,¹*

God's kindness had brought Israel out of their bonds of slavery in Egypt and His grace made provision for His Holy presence to accompany His chosen people into the land He had promised. It was certainly a season of wisdom, light and hope!

However, because of their collective foolishness, grumbling and unbelief, it turned into a 40-year winter of despair. An entire generation was granted their wish when they cried before the Lord...

***“Would that we had died in the land of Egypt!
Or would that we had died in this wilderness!” (Num. 14:2)***

Even in the worst of times, there remains valuable lessons to be learned and a spring of hope for the best of times.

- We’ll study many New Testament texts that draw our attention to this period of history as examples and warnings for our own lives.
- We’ll ponder God’s direction for our lives as well.
- We’ll trust the Holy Spirit to grow us in contentment, satisfaction, perseverance and poise as women who claim His name.

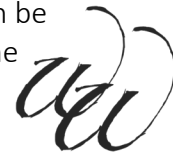
Wherever you are, and whatever type of a group you are studying with, I pray that the Lord will richly bless you as you learn to know Him better through His Word—

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To watch the video teachings for this Bible Study go to:
ccontario.com/womens-studies
or
YouTube.com/calvarychapelontario

*The best translation of the Bible to use is the one you understand the most easily—and using more than one translation can be a great aid to study! This study guide was created using the ESV (English Standard Version) which may be a helpful tool as you work through your study.



Week 1 — God’s Unfolding Plan Through the Wilderness

This page is for note-taking on the Week 1 Introductory Teaching—

The Bible explains the _____ story of _____ plan.

Genesis gives us the history of God’s special people

from _____ to _____.

In the first half of **Exodus**, we follow God’s special people

from _____ to _____.

In our **Wilderness Way** study, we will follow God’s special people

from Mt. Sinai to the banks of the _____ River.

Author : _____

- The first five books of the Old Testament are often called:
From Latin: _____ From Hebrew: _____
- The Wilderness Way takes up _____ chapters of the **Pentateuch**.
- The book of **Numbers** in the Hebrew literally means:

The three-fold **purpose** of studying the **Wilderness Way** is:

- _____
- _____
- _____

**What do we need to learn from The Wilderness Way?
1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

¹For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.

⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. ⁶Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did.

⁷Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” ⁸We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.

¹¹Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

¹²Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. ¹³No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

“With Israel, there was the initial faith to go up out of Egypt. But when they were tested to see if they would “...**hold their original confidence firm to the end**” (Hebrews 3:14) the great majority failed. Their faith was but for a time — they had faith to leave Egypt, but they had not faith to enter Canaan.”

— Andrew Murray, *Holiest of All* ¹

Week 2 — Hearing God’s Word

Are you a good listener — or do you get impatient with long stories or drawn-out instructions? If you finish people’s sentences (like me), you might be an impatient listener.

At the base of Mt. Sinai, the community of Israel heard God speak the Ten Commandments. But did they really listen? I always thought it was smart of God to keep His instructions short and sweet — ten bullet points!

After the Ten Commandments, Moses made several trips up and down the mountain, listening to several chapters worth of God’s plans — a large part being plans for making *one tent*! And what a glorious plan it was because God was telling His people to prepare a place where He could dwell with them: “***Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst!***” (Exodus 25:8) God’s desire to dwell with Israel is a main theme for our study this week.

There are 60 chapters from Israel’s arrival at Mt. Sinai to their departure in **Numbers 10**. It’s obvious we can’t study each chapter in depth, but what we can do is focus on themes and events of particular significance that will help us better understand **God’s Unfolding Story of Redemption**.

Day 1: Hearing God’s Desire

🔗 READ **Exodus 20:18-21**.

- What was Israel’s response to hearing God speak to them, and why do you think they responded that way?

- Moses didn’t share their fear. In fact he even offered what explanation for God’s motives?

🌀 READ Exodus 24:1-7.

- When Moses told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules (v.3), *the people answered with one voice and said*, _____

- When Moses took the Book of the Covenant (v.7) and read it in the hearing of the people, *they said*, _____

Those are two important affirmations. We'll check back with these guys in 40 days and see how they're holding up on this!

🌀 READ Exodus 24:15-18.

- How long did Moses stay with God this time? _____

During this trip up the mountain, Moses heard the Lord's *plan* and *pattern* for what would be His dwelling place among His people.

🌀 WRITE Exodus 25:8. _____

Note the word *dwell* in that verse (circle it). The reality of God dwelling with His people is at the core of God's Unfolding Plan. He had initially dwelt with His creation in the Garden of Eden in Genesis and our final dwelling will be the New Heaven and the New Earth in Revelation.

🌀 WRITE Revelation 21:3. _____

(Circle the words dwell and dwelling above)

🌀 WRITE John 1:14. _____

Have you thought much about God's desire to dwell with us? This is an important reality we find in the Word of God, so let's be attentive listeners and responders as we hear His Words throughout this study.

Day 2: Hearing God's Plan

Have you ever heard the phrase, 'invite Jesus into your heart'? In light of our study yesterday, knowing God has always desired to *dwell* with His people — inviting Jesus to live in our heart is a good description of having a relationship with God — inviting Him close!

If there is one thing to be learned from the *pattern for the tabernacle* in **Exodus 25-31**, it's that a Holy God dwelling with sinful man will require not only an awareness of His *holy* presence, but a means to deal with the *unholiness* of His people.

The tabernacle would be a great study with amazing new covenant implications. But what we're doing today is similar to merely peeking through the front window of a great museum. We won't have time to enjoy each artifact in the museum since covering the entire Wilderness Journey is our goal.

As we skim these chapters, most Bibles have headings for the various pieces of furnishings and important elements of the tabernacle:

The Ark of the Covenant

The Table for Bread

The Golden Lampstand

The Bronze Altar

The Priest's Garments

The Altar of Incense

The Bronze Basin

The Tent itself

If you have the time to read or listen to chapters 25-31, that would be fantastic. If not, one point that needs to be highlighted is the care and attention that God expected Moses to follow regarding His instructions. Read these verses and jot down phrases that indicate this special care:

- Exodus 25:9 _____
- Exodus 25:40 _____
- Exodus 26:30 _____
- Exodus 29:35a _____
- Hebrews 8:5 _____

🔗 READ Exodus 29:43-46 and note important aspects of God's plan:

...I will _____ with the people of Israel
...I will _____ the tent of meeting and the altar
...I will _____ Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests
...I will _____ among the people of Israel and will be their God
They shall know that I am _____, who
brought them out of the land of _____ that I might _____
among them.

🔗 READ Exodus 32:1-6. Meanwhile, back at Israel's base camp, that same group of people to whom God just said He wanted to dwell with; and that same Aaron, who God intended to consecrate as priest, *fashioned a golden calf* and said (v.4b): _____

What a tragedy! We heard the thoughts and plans happening in both *God's camp* and *Israel's camp* at the same time, and were heart-sick!

Let's bring what Israel did home to our own lives...

#1 — Israel **grew tired** of waiting on God and Moses. They gave up and made their own plans and their own *golden calf*.

- Have you **grown tired** of waiting on God's plan?
- Has it been too long with too much silence?
- Have you been tempted to give up and design plans of your own?

#2 — Israel **lost sight** of all that God had done for them when He brought them out of the kingdom of darkness in Egypt.

- Is there a chance you've **lost sight** or **lost gratitude** over what God has done for you in bringing you out of the kingdom of darkness?

READ these Scriptures and choose one to write on an index card and use as a bookmark through this study:

Psalms 27:13-14

Psalms 130:5-6

Lamentations 3:25-26

Micah 7:7

Day 3: Hearing and Obeying

God desired to dwell with His people but while they waited for Moses to return, Israel lost patience and forgot WHO they belonged to. They quickly took on the characteristics of Egypt rather than God's people.

As we finish the narrative in **Exodus 32** today, rather than answering directed questions, simply make notes of what you consider to be important or interesting elements in each of these sections:

🌀 READ **Exodus 32:7-10** *What the Lord said to Moses:*

-
-
-
-

🌀 READ **Exodus 32:11-14** *How Moses implored the Lord:*

-
-
-
-

🌀 READ **Exodus 32:15-20** *When Moses came down the mountain:*

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-
-
-

🌀 READ **Exodus 32:21-29**. *How did Moses confront Aaron and how did the Levites respond?*

-
-

-

-

📖 READ **Exodus 32:30-35** *The Lord and Moses talked it over:*

-

-

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-

Three times at the base of Mt. Sinai, when Moses set God's Covenant before the people, they said, "We will do it!" But their actions were nothing like their words! They violated at least two of the Ten Commandments they had *just said* they would follow.

Maybe you've learned that lesson in your own life. The chasm between saying you'll do something and actually doing it can be quite wide!

- Why do you think Christians, in general, find themselves disobeying God's instructions?

- Why do you think that you, specifically, find yourself disobeying God's instructions?

- Explain the danger for a Christian when she loses sight of WHOM she belongs to:

Day 4: Hearing God's Character

It's unclear how much time passed between the plague at the end of **Exodus 32** and the beginning of **chapter 33**. What is clear is that Israel was left with a broken covenant — literally, as seen in the broken pieces of the stone tablets, and spiritually, as seen by the broken relationship with the God who desired to *dwell* with them.

🌀 READ **Exodus 33:1-6** *God commands them to leave Sinai*

- What did God say about who was and wasn't to go up into the land of Canaan, and why?

- How did Israel respond to this news?

🌀 READ **Exodus 33:7-11** *The Tent of Meeting*

- Where was the Tent of Meeting located at this point?

- Describe what would happen whenever Moses went out to the tent:

🌀 READ **Exodus 33:12-17** *Moses' intercession before God*

- What seemed to be Moses' main plea with God?

- What were some of his points of reason in **v.13** & **v.16**?

- What was God's response in **v.14** & **v.17**?

🔗 READ **Exodus 33:18-23** *Moses' request before God*

- What did Moses ask from the Lord?
- What arrangement did God suggest to make that happen?

🔗 READ **Exodus 34:1-9**. This was Moses' second 40-day trip up the mountain (**Ex. 34:28**). He took with him two tablets of stone like the first and God descended in the cloud. Write out God's proclamation of His name and character from **v.6-7a** (up to the word *but*):

Circle the three elements over which God declared His forgiveness.

It's a passage like this that helps us see Moses as a type of Jesus Christ. It is Moses' intercession, combined with God's mercy and faithfulness, that brought forth the renewal of the Covenant. Moses stood in the gap for Israel to enable them to restore their relationship with God.

We also need our relationship with God restored, often daily! It is Jesus' intercession that combines with God's mercy, to pave the way for a relationship with Him that is filled with peace and rest.

🔗 READ **Psalms 106:19-23** to appreciate the Psalmist's perspective. Then write a statement explaining how Moses took on a role similar to Jesus himself:

Day 5: The Blessing of God's Word

 READ **Exodus 34:10-35**.

- According to **v.27**, who were the participants in the renewal of this covenant?

- What were some of the differences in Moses' second return with the new stone tablets compared to the first time?

Exodus 35-40 tells how Israel set about the task of physically building the tabernacle once the covenant was renewed. Reading or listening to those chapters is optional...we'll head right down to **chapter 40**.

 READ **Exodus 40:1**.

- What month and day did God instruct them to erect the tabernacle of the tent of meeting? _____ day of the _____ month. (**V.16** tells us that Moses did according to all that the Lord commanded him.)

We know that Israel left Egypt directly following their first Passover on the **14th day** of the **1st month (Exodus 12)**. Almost a year had passed now since they left Egypt and it had been about 10 months since God first spoke to them at Mt. Sinai.

Dates and times can be a dull part of any historical study, but when it's our own history, we perk up. Have you ever flipped through your journal pages to discover a memory from the same date last year? Maybe Facebook fed you a photo memory of your vacation three years ago. You may have thought, *'wow, that seems like yesterday'* or, you may have said, *'that feels like a different lifetime!'*

Just for a moment, put yourself in Israel's place and imagine what life had been like over the last 10 months: living, waiting, gathering manna, grief, moments of joy, babies born, children growing, disappointments, preparations for the tabernacle. Now...

📖 READ Exodus 40:34-38. Imagine their excitement as *the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle*. This had never happened in the history of mankind! Draw a little sketch of these verses below:

- What would be the sign that would indicate to Israel that they were to set out and move (v.36)?

...and that's how it was for their whole wilderness journey!

Next week, we'll begin the book of Numbers to study the rest of the Wilderness journey with Israel to the banks of the River Jordan.

To summarize, none of this would have been possible without God's spoken Word! **Everyone Needs to Hear God's Word!** In this first week of study, we saw that:

- God reminded them of His deliverance through *His Words*.
- God revealed how they were to live in response to His deliverance through *His Words*.
- God revealed His desire to dwell with His people through *His Words*.
- God revealed His character through *His Words*.

We also need to hear God's *Words* — and then after being a hearer, we need to be a doer of His *Word!*

*Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;
... and receive with meekness the implanted word,
which is able to save your souls.
But be doers of the word, and not hearers only so deceiving yourselves.
— James 1:19-22 (ESV)*

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. What difference does it make in a Christian's life to think in terms of God dwelling within, rather than being remote in heaven?
2. Can you offer any reasons why you think Israel abandoned their hope in Moses' return after such an amazing display of God's presence?
3. God had a big plan for how Israel was to *prepare* for the ministry they were *chosen* for — namely entering into the promised land. Are there any ways that God would want to *prepare* you for the ministry you were *chosen* for, if only you would wait and listen?
4. The ways and passions of Egypt had made a big impact on Israel — why did they even think to ask Aaron for a golden calf? How can the ways and passions from our culture become our 'go-to' when we grow tired of waiting on God?
5. Read **The Ten Commandments — As a Bill of Rights** on p. 92. Discuss how considering each of God's commands from this perspective may help us really *hear* what God intends us to *hear* in those commandments.

Notes for Teaching on Week 2 —

Week 3 — Living in God's Presence

As we closed the final chapter in Exodus, the *glory of the Lord had filled the Tabernacle*. The presence of Yahweh was dwelling in the midst of Israel, just like He had planned. They had their instructions for proper worship and proper living, and the only elements left were a sense of order and organization for their journey.

As we begin Numbers, we're reminded that chronology wasn't always the driving force behind ancient writings. In this week's study, we will sift back and forth through Scriptures to gather bits and pieces that will shape our understanding on important topics. Hopefully, by day five, we will have gathered meaningful information and be ready to process and apply it to our lives.

Day 1 — The Order of God's Presence

READ Numbers 1:1-4.


- Based on the time frame in **v.1**, and remembering when Israel left Egypt (**Ex. 12**), how long had their journey been so far?
- What was God's main instruction to Moses and how was it to be accomplished?

READ Numbers 1:47-54.

- Which tribe was not included in the census? _____
- How would you describe their job when Israel was *on the move*?
- How would you describe their job when Israel was *camped*?

- Was anyone else allowed to come near while the tent was taken down or set up?

Numbers is a book of organization. It opens and closes with two censuses of the people almost 40 years apart. It also teaches us that God's plans are ordered and organized! He had chosen the tribe of **Levi** to *keep guard over the tabernacle of the testimony (1:53)*. We'll study their role soon, but first let's examine God's organization for the greater nation of Israel.

 READ **Numbers 2:1-2**. The next page contains a diagram of each tribe's placement when they camped. They couldn't just pitch a tent anywhere they wanted, they needed order! They were to camp *each by his own* standard. God loves order — do you remember how ordered the days of creation were?

You'll notice the Levites were to camp surrounding the tabernacle compound, then the whole company of Israel was to camp in their designated place surrounding the Levites...

- Who was to face the tent of meeting?

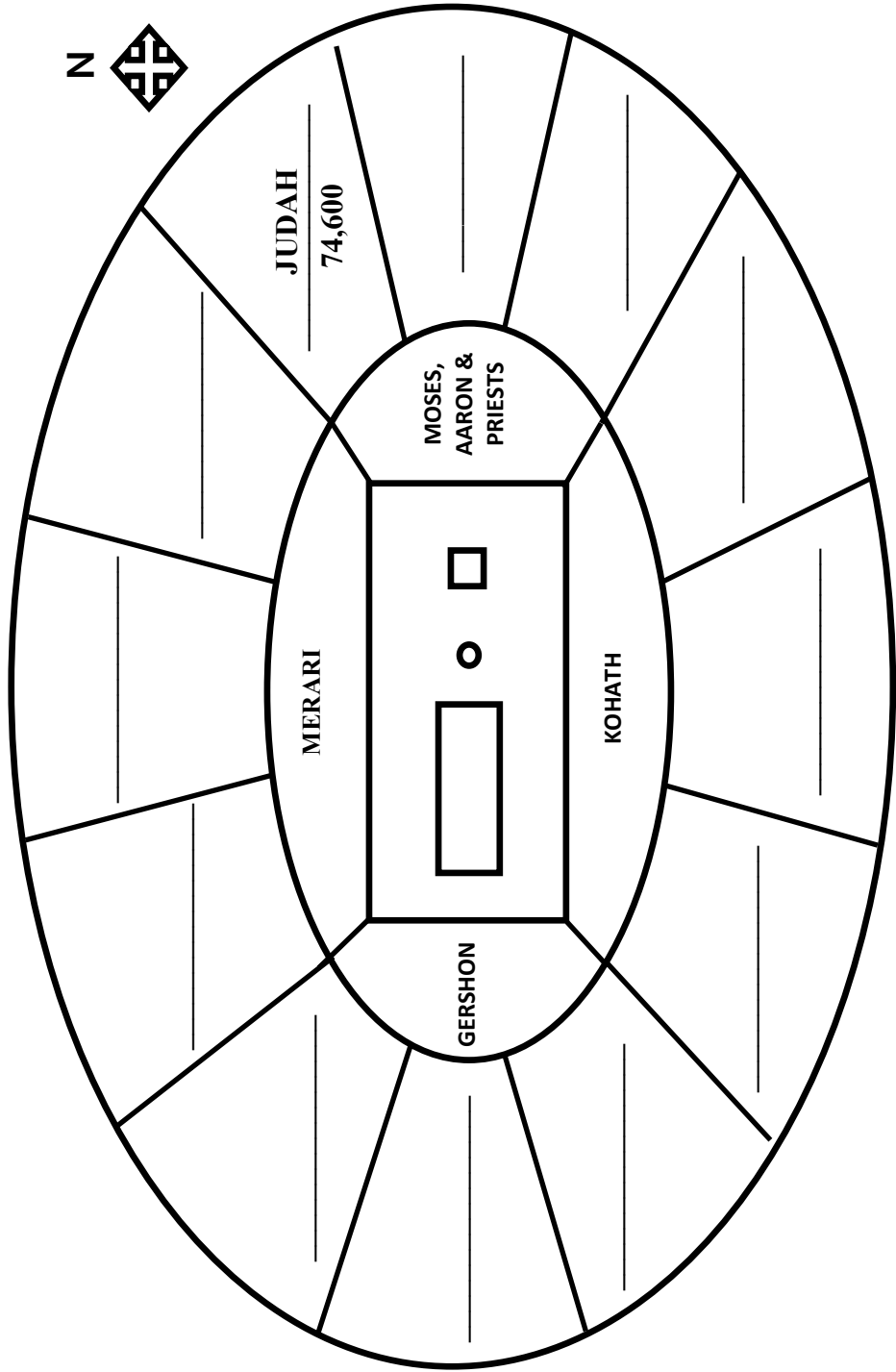
 READ **Numbers 2:3-34**.

As you read the listing of the tribes and their placement surrounding the tabernacle, fill in the diagram with each tribe's name above the line and their census count below the line. Judah is completed for you and the remaining tribes will go in clockwise order, following Judah.

Yahweh wanted to be in the center of Israel for their journey to be successful. Perhaps, as we look at that diagram, something will stir us to remind us that God desires the central location in our lives — right in the middle of our living and moving, planning and doing. Our task is to spiritually face Him continually.

Do you regularly offer Him that central place in your life? In your life right now, are you figuratively facing toward Him or away from Him?

The Camp Arrangement of Israel



Day 2 — *The Levites Around God's Presence*

Did you know that God doesn't always treat everyone the same? Is that a new concept to you? The ideal of *same treatment* is more American than Biblical, as we'll see in today's lesson.

If we look again at the divine order of God's community in our diagram, we see that one tribe was chosen to lead a different life than the rest, based on nothing they had or hadn't done — it was simply God's choice. They would live adjacent to and protect the inner rectangle of the diagram. We're talking here about the lives and duties of the **Levites!**

🔗 READ **Numbers 3:14-17**. — List the names of the sons of Levi:

These are the three clans you see camped around the Tabernacle in our diagram. There was a distinction made between the Levites and the rest of the tribes. In fact, they even had a separate census.

🔗 READ **Numbers 4:34-49**. Pencil in their number in your diagram.

- Even among the Levites, what two different types of work were they given? **v.49**: _____ or _____

At this point, you may wonder what these things have to do with your life and the purpose of studying them — after all, you're a busy lady!

Well, for one thing, knowing the Biblical history of the Levites will go a long way in helping you understand the rest of your Bible. Secondly, embracing the reality that God indeed makes distinctions between people as He chooses and gives people different tasks in His kingdom, will go a long way in helping find a place of contentment for the tasks you've personally been given. (More on this later!)

Let's begin with the history of the Levites! Before Israel even crossed the Red Sea, God said He wanted them to always remember the strength with which He brought them out of Egypt. He even killed all the firstborn of Egypt in order to complete their exodus. Therefore, all the future firstborn of Israel would now belong to God as a memorial.

☞ READ **Exodus 13:11-16**. How were the future firstborn supposed to be consecrated to God?

- The firstborn of male animals:
- The firstborn among sons:

☞ READ **Numbers 3:11-13**.

- Who did God determine to take *in exchange* for all of the firstborn males in Israel (v.12)?

☞ READ **Numbers 3:38-45**.

- What was the total census of the Levites? _____
- What was the total census of all of the firstborn males of the people of Israel? _____ (God had His own accounting methods to take care of the difference!)
- There is an important Bible truth we learn from God's own Words in v.45 "The _____ shall be _____: I am the LORD."

Since the Levites belonged to God, dwelled closer to God's own dwelling, and served Aaron and his sons, they also required special consecration for their task...

☞ READ **Numbers 8:5-12**. Note things involved in Levite cleansing

-
-
-
-

☞ READ **Numbers 8:13-19**. Who were the Levites specifically given to and what was their purpose?

Day 3 — The Priests Around God's Presence

Of all the sons of Israel, the Levites were chosen for the special task of surrounding and serving the tabernacle. Of all the Levites, Aaron and his sons were chosen to be priests before the Lord. They had special tasks that required special clothing and special consecration (**Exodus 28-29**). They also received a special listing...

🌀 READ **Numbers 3:1-4**. — List the names of Aaron's four sons:

-
- Strike through the two sons who *died before the Lord*. (If you want, you can read about that event in **Leviticus 10**)

It's important to realize that not all **Levites** were **priests**, but all **priests** were **Levites**, since they had all descended from Aaron.

The book of the Bible sandwiched between **Exodus** and **Numbers** is **Leviticus**, meaning *pertaining to the Levities*. In Leviticus, there are dozens of times when we read, "God said to Moses...tell Aaron and his sons..." God gave ordered instructions meant to guide Israel in the art of proper worship and right living with a Holy God in their midst.

Now in our current text in **Numbers**, we see priestly instructions that protect the holy things and protect the people of Israel as well.

🌀 READ **Numbers 4:5-20**.

- Summarize how Aaron and his sons were to prepare the tabernacle for travel:

- What was the task of the Kohathites (**v.15**)?

- What was the warning to the Kohathites (**v.20**)?

In our reading, we notice again that God chooses some for one task and some for another task. He instructs each according to His assigned work. Understanding this makes a big difference in our lives!

Before we finish today, let's peek into one more text that reminds us that God's work is to be accomplished in His time and His way and it's not always measured out identically from person to person.

 READ **Numbers 7:1-9.**

- What resources were given to the sons of Gershon (**v.7**)?
Wagons _____ Oxen _____
- What resources were given to the sons of Merari (**v.8**)?
Wagons _____ Oxen _____
- What resources were given to the sons of Kohath (**v.9**)?
Wagons _____ Oxen _____
Why? _____

Do you ever struggle with comparison? If you were in the workforce of Kohath, would you have been tempted to say, *What? They get carts and we have to carry this load on our shoulders? It's not fair!*

Yeah, I've said stuff like that too when I've focused on what I thought God gave someone else compared to what He's given me. (We rarely think someone else deserves the wagons more than we do, right?)

Check out these New Testament passages and note what's relevant for where you are right now in your spiritual journey:

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

Hebrews 2:4

1 Peter 4:10-11

Day 4 — The Early Days of God’s Presence

In about two month’s time, the tabernacle was set up, the people were counted and organized, and things were set in place for Israel to head to their future home. These were the *early days* of God’s presence among Israel. It was seven weeks in all from the day the tabernacle was erected until the day Israel moved out from Mt. Sinai.

Because chronology wasn’t the most important target for ancient writers, today’s Scripture reading is reorganized for us — something like puzzle pieces. (After today’s study, we’ll have the delight of studying the Wilderness Journey event-by-event in chapter order, so hang in there!)

The chart below contains the events listed during those seven weeks. The point of our reading will be to get a sense of what life was like for the people of Israel right before they left Sinai. It looks like quite a bit of reading, but I timed it — you can read all of those Scriptures in about five minutes if you skim **Numbers 7** for highlights, and about ten minutes if you read that whole chapter.

(The date pattern used is *year-month-day* — as recorded in **Numbers 10:11**: “*In the second year, in the second month, on the twentieth day of the month, the cloud lifted from over the tabernacle...*”

 **READ** the following passages in this order:

<u>Passage</u>	<u>Events and Scripture References</u>	<u>Date</u>
Ex 40:17	Tabernacle set up	2-1-1
Num 9:15	Cloud covered the tabernacle	2-1-1
Num 7	Tribes brought offerings beginning with Judah	2-1-1
Num 9:1-4	God reminds Israel of the coming Passover	2-1-?
Num 9:5	Passover is observed	2-1-14
Num 1:1-2, 18-19	God orders the census	2-2-1
Num 10:11-13	Israel leaves Mt. Sinai	2-2-20

There you have it! The energy and momentum of the presence of God, the gifts and offerings of the people, the feast of Passover, and most importantly, no indication of any rebellion or stubbornness on Israel’s part. It was a very sweet and cooperative season.

🌀 READ **Numbers 9:16-23**. Summarize the ongoing obedience of Israel to the cloud of the Lord:

Note: We never read of Israel struggling in this area of obedience

Our final passage today may seem out of sequence, but since we're enjoying reading about the blessing and obedience of Israel, this is a fantastic place to insert the *Blessing of the Priests!*

🌀 READ **Numbers 6:22-27**. We don't know when or how often this was spoken over the people, but certainly we see God's deep affection for His people. Write out this trilogy of blessing here:

The Lord _____

The Lord _____

The Lord _____

Day 5 — Moving Forward in God's Presence

Today we'll try to soak in the *sights* and *sounds* and *prayers* as Israel actually leaves Mt. Sinai. Let's begin with what *sounded* like...

🌀 READ **Numbers 10:1-10**. — *The call of the trumpets:*

- List the three useful purposes given for the blowing of the trumpets:
 - V.1-7
 - V.9
 - V.10
- Who was allowed the privilege of blowing these trumpets?

Now, to read what it *looked* like...

📖 READ **Numbers 10:13-34.** — *The Advance of the People*

- List the first three tribes that set out in order (**v.13-16**):

- List the first two groups of Levites that set out (**v.17**): _____
and _____. What were they carrying? _____

- List the next three tribes that set out (**v.18-20**):

- The final group of Levites, the _____ set out next
(**v.21**). What were they carrying? _____

- List the next three tribes that set out (**v.22-24**):

- List the final rear guard tribes that set out (**v.25-28**):

- How many days did they travel from Mt. Sinai (**v.33**)? _____

I wanted us to read that passage carefully because, to me, that's not a boring list of names, rather it's a joyful description of a much-anticipated event that was completed exactly as God instructed. Remember, these seven weeks were a time of general obedience and it was really beautiful!

Lastly, let's hear the *prayer* that accompanied Israel moving out...

📖 READ **Numbers 10:35-36.** — *The Prayer of Moses:*

Moving the whole nation of Israel was a big deal — we read what it sounded and looked like on moving day. Moses had developed a routine prayer specifically for those times.

- Summarize the purpose of this prayer.

I'm not big on memorized and recited prayers, but I love that Moses' exact words are given to us in this passage.

Is there a specific purpose in your life for which you might want to develop a repeatable prayer? The *first day of school*? When you have to *travel by plane*? At the *beginning of each workday*? I personally have a certain prayer that I whisper to the Lord right before I teach a Bible lesson. Think about it and as God directs you, develop that simple prayer below using this passage as a model:

This week's lesson is entitled **Living in God's Presence**. Yahweh wanted to dwell with Israel and now they were living in His presence, as evidenced by the cloud over the tabernacle. For seven weeks, there didn't seem to be an obedience problem or a faith problem as all was right with the nation of Israel because they listened to and obeyed God's Word.

God's Word comes to us as well with an expectation of obedience. When we choose to obey His commands, we also experience the blessing and peace that surrounds His presence. But it doesn't come naturally to us. We need His help to enable us to live graciously in His Presence.

- Ask the Lord to stir up a desire for obedience to His commands as revealed in Scripture...
- Ask the Lord to gift you with patience to wait on His timing for transitions in your life...
- Ask the Lord to equip you with faith when He directs you into seasons of change...

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. If you truly placed the awareness of God's presence in the center of your life, like the tabernacle at the center of Israel, what area of your life would notice changes first?
2. After studying the assignments God gave to the different tribes and the Levites and priests, what would you say to the statement, *"God doesn't treat everyone the same, but He does treat everyone fairly?"*
3. What are some tell-tale signs that a woman may be caught up comparing her life (her assignment, resources and giftings) to what God has given others?
4. How would you advise a friend who has grown accustomed to that type of comparison? Give specific action steps.
5. What makes a memorized prayer effective and what makes it just recited words (like the pledge of allegiance)?
6. Do you think it's possible to maintain a nearness to God (keeping Him in the center) without obedience to God?

Week 4 — Living in Contentment

It's fascinating to me that, when the Apostle Paul exhorted the Philippian church to continue obeying, his very next sentence was a warning against *grumbling* and *complaining* — as if those were the giants who threatened to take them down. READ **Philippians 2:12-15**.

That is the reality played out in this chapter — initial obedience stained by grumbling and discontent. It's a common temptation — so we better pay attention to these chapters!

Day 1 — Complaining Begins

 READ **Numbers 11:1-3**.

- What were the people complaining about?
- Who heard their complaint?
- What were the consequences of their complaining?
- Make note of *where*, specifically, God's discipline happened (this may be useful for tomorrow's passage.)
- What role did Moses play and what was the result?

I can imagine why Israel felt their circumstances were unfortunate. They had been in the Wilderness over a year, in a land that wasn't theirs, depending completely on God for food and direction. I'm sure the process of moving that many people was taxing, so I have no hypocritical judgment over them since I've complained about lesser difficulties in my life.

If we were to lay **Philippians 2:12-15** over the top of this portion of the Wilderness Journey, it would sound something like this:

“Obey today — then obey again tomorrow — and the next day!

Be content with what God has given and what He has done!

Don't complain about what you don't yet understand!”

But it's not that easy, is it? We've all found ourselves believing our life as having great *misfortunes*. We've all been tempted to grumble — and we HAVE grumbled — either out loud or just in our heart.

Think for a moment about the people of Israel:

- Had God indeed provided for them in the past?
- Was God guiding them right now?
- Did He have a plan for their future?

Now think about your own circumstances in life and mull over those same three questions, with the goal of replacing any discontent with gratefulness. (First READ **Matthew 6:25-34** for inspiration.)

- List ways God has specifically **provided** for you in the past — then THANK Him.

- List ways He has **guided** you or is guiding you right now — Then THANK Him.

- What areas do you want to have confidence that He has a good plan for things related to your future? — ASK Him.

There is a cycle in the Wilderness Journey that looks like this:

- A. Grumbling or rebellion
 - B. The Lord's discipline
 - C. Moses' intercession
 - D. The naming of the location as a remembrance
- What was this location named and what was the meaning? **(v.3)**

Day 2 — Complaining is Infectious

🌀 READ Numbers 11:4-6.

- What was all the complaining about in this passage?

- Who seemed to initiate the complaining at first (v.4) and why?

- Who joined in with the complaining (v.4)?

🌀 READ Numbers 11:7-10.

- How long do you think Israel had been receiving the daily manna?

- How is the complaining described (v.10, v.4)?

- Why do you think Moses and the Lord were displeased with Israel's attitude toward their food supply?

There are many things in life that are contagious, but a few of the most infectious are: colds, fashion, and complaining!

It was the *rabble* — the *mixed multitude* — who came out of Egypt that started this discontent with their *strong craving*. They had chosen to come out of Egypt, but Egypt had not yet come out of them.

- Based on the diagram of the camp on p.22, where would you guess the non-Israelites tents might have been?

Do you think there is any correlation between the location of those who started the complaining and the location of God's judgment?

We too live among a *mixed multitude* and we should be on our guard against infectious attitudes. Has someone else's discontent stirred you up recently, so you began complaining about what God has given you? Think about it and take steps to correct the situation.

*Do everything without complaining or arguing,
so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God
without fault in a crooked and depraved generation,
in which you shine like stars in the universe.*
— Philippians 2:14-15 (NIV)

Day 3 — Complaining Becomes Rejection

✞ READ **Numbers 11:11-15**.

Moses' frustrations are understandable, but did you notice the complaining infection had reached even to him? Jot down notes on what you see in these verses about Moses' attitude:

-
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Moses sort of makes the problem *all about* him! Does his '*weight of the world*' attitude look familiar to you? Sometimes when we see how it looks on someone else, it can motivate us to shed that attitude ourselves. However, there is one stark difference between Israel's weeping and complaining and Moses' — HE took his complaint vertical — directly to the Lord who knows our weaknesses and will help in our time of need.

READ these Scriptures and process how they APPLY to similar situations and attitudes in your life:

- **Matthew 11:28-30**
- **Hebrews 4:15-16**

 READ **Numbers 11:16-25**.

- Explain what God would do for Moses' complaint (**v.16-17**):
- Explain what God would do for Israel's complaint (**v.18**):
- What was the predicted result of God's solution (**v.19-20**)?

Have you experienced that same effect? You wanted *something* or *something different*, or *something more* so badly. You *craved* it, you set your heart on it, you couldn't stop thinking about it and when you finally got it — it was a burden to you.

*"You say, '...if I had a little more I should be very well satisfied.'
You make a mistake: if you are not content with what you have
you would not be satisfied if it were doubled."*

— Charles Spurgeon³

Lord, spare us from such shallow thinking and cultivate a response of contentment in every area of our lives!

Moses also suffered from a partial hardening of his faith as he heard God's solutions.

- What form did his unbelief take in **v.21-23**?
- And yet, in spite of his own words in God's presence, what did Moses say and do in the people's presence in **v.24**?
- And how did God honor his small step of faith in **v.25**?

I've heard the accusation that we're not being *real or vulnerable* with one another, if we don't share exactly how we feel in our distress. This passage may be a good example of the wisdom that lies in speaking our unbelief and fear to God and turning around and speaking with faith to our friends and family. Something to consider!

Day 4 — Complaining Brings Discipline

I wonder what it meant in **v.25** that the seventy men *prophesied* when God placed His Spirit upon them. Even if we don't fully know, but it must have been a huge encouragement to Moses because his ability to leave things in God's hands seemed to significantly increase at that point.

 READ **Numbers 11:26-30**.

Eldad and Medad were selected to be among the seventy:

- Where had the rest of the seventy men gone (**v.24**)?
- Where did Eldad and Medad remain (**v.26**)?
- Regardless of where they were, what did all seventy do?

- Why do you think some, including Joshua, found this offensive?
- Summarize Moses' response.

Should we have a *live-and-let-live* attitude in the Body of Christ? Certainly there are commands to be obeyed, and certain issues that are clearly right or wrong; but there are also philosophies of ministry where God seems to extend great latitude. Sometimes He blesses people who we feel aren't doing things the right way! At those times, I believe it delights God when we adopt a similar attitude as Moses, *'let the Lord decide what He wants to do with His own Spirit'*!

✞ READ **Numbers 11:31-35**.

- How did the Lord choose to give the people meat?

- READ **Psalm 106:13-15** and write the first six words of **v.15**:

Those are six of the most terrifying words in all of the Bible! We've seen this in Scripture before — after a period of warning or discipline, God will often give people exactly what they ask for. Do you remember this conversation right before the final plague on Egypt in **Exodus 10:28-29**?

Pharaoh to Moses:

"Get away from me; take care never to see my face again"

Moses:

"As you say! I will not see your face again."

After multiple warnings and time to repent, God gave Pharaoh exactly what he wanted. In the matter of the quail, God gave Israel exactly what they asked for. The heartbreak will be next week's lesson, when God will again give Israel exactly what they said they wanted!

The pattern for much of the Wilderness Way is: *grumbling, God's anger, Moses' intercession, God's discipline, naming of the location*. Well, here we go...we've read about Israel's grumbling (v.4), God's anger (v.10), and Moses' intercession. Now,

- Describe how God's discipline was manifest among Israel:

- What was the memorial name given to this location (v.34) and what did it mean?

If you gave a memorial name to time periods or places when you went through a cycle like this — grumbling, discontent or rebellion — what would one of your locations be named and why?

Day 5 — Complaining Becomes Personal

 READ **Numbers 12:1-3**.

- Who was complaining now?

- Against whom and for what reasons?

- How was Moses described in this passage?

People rarely say things that fly into their head out of nowhere. You can bet Aaron and Miriam's case of envy had been brewing under the surface for awhile, but God's patience had run thin.

🔗 READ **Numbers 12:4-16.**

- Who was called forward as God spoke at the tent of meeting?
- Summarize what God had to say about Moses in their hearing:

- What was God's discipline for Miriam?

- WRITE out Moses' words of intercession to God (**v.13**): _____

- Describe God's discipline of Miriam:

This episode really began with Aaron and Miriam's jealousy over Moses' ministry. Maybe they resented the influence his wife had over him, maybe they were *put out* that *they* didn't prophesy like the 70 elders; but something got under their skin and wouldn't go away.

***A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body;
jealousy is like cancer in the bones.***

—Proverbs 14:30 (NLT2)

The Proverb above is the key to healthy living — a peaceful heart that leaves it all in God's hands! And we **need** to leave it in God's hands!

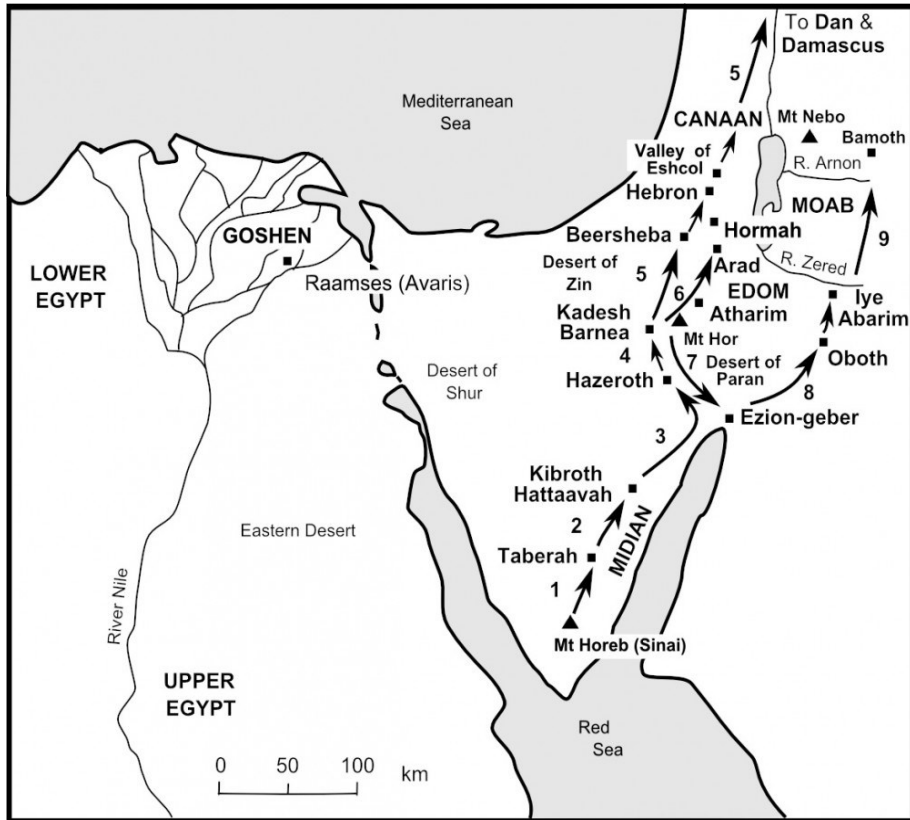
All of Israel had to wait at Hazeroth until Miriam was restored to the camp — an unnecessary delay. If her attitude wasn't obvious before her short exile, the wait may have revealed her personal heart condition to everyone.

The application for us is to turn and run from those feelings of jealousy, envy, and criticism, and learn to leave God's work in God's hands.

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Can you recall a time when you caught the *complaining virus* from someone else?
2. Think about your words right now. Are there any complaining contagions being passed around because of your own attitudes?
3. **Numbers 11:10** tells us the people were *weeping in their tents*. Do you find that your home, your safe space, can draw you into complaining faster and deeper than other places?
4. When Israel whined for meat, **Psalm 106:15** tells us, *God gave them their request but sent leanness into their souls* (NKJ). How would you resolve what we've studied this week with **Psalm 37:4**, which states, *Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart?*
5. Think about Miriam's discipline by the Lord. READ **Hebrews 12:5-10**. People often wrongly think God is punishing them. Do you think the discipline of the Lord is something we consider very much? Do you think that God still disciplines His kids today?
6. A peaceful heart doesn't just happen. READ **Phil. 4:8** and discuss the training of the mind that is necessary for a heart to be at rest.

Map of the Wilderness Way



- 1 — **Taberah** Complaining brought fire at edge of the camp (p.34)
 - 2 — **Kibroth Hattaavah** Strong craving brought quail and epidemic (p.40)
 - 3 — **Hazeroth** Aaron and Miriam criticize Moses (p.41)
 - 4 — **Kadesh Barnea** Israel camps at the edge of promised land (p.45)
 - 5 — **Canaan** Journey of the spies into Canaan (p.46)
 - 6 — **Hormah** Failed advance against Canaanites (p.53)
- 38 year intermission with not much to report
- 7 — **Mt. Hor** Where Aaron died (p.70)
 - 8 — **Hormah** Successful advance against the Canaanites (p.72)
 - 9 — **Oboth** Following the incident with the snakes (p.73)
 - 9 — **Plains of Moab** Balak and the Midianites (p.76)

Week 5 — Seeing with Eyes of Faith

A person wonders if Charles Dickens had **Numbers 13 & 14** in mind, when he penned the opening of **A Tale of Two Cities**. For Israel, it was *the best of times* since they were on the doorstep of the land God promised and their desert travels were nearly over. Then it became *the worst of times*, as their journey ended in death instead of victory.

This week's chapters present important history lessons, but they also hold important spiritual lessons — at least the Apostle Paul thought so. Remember **1 Corinthians 10:11**, "*Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.*"

Day 1 — A Chance to See with Faith

Israel was camped in the wilderness of Paran at a place called Kadesh Barnea. They were ready to step into the new home that God promised to them as Abraham's descendants and finally be at rest. But first, they would have to fight some battles.

Since they knew they would face inevitable battles, it was a great idea to form a strategy. Strategies succeed best after information has been gathered and information comes from a reconnaissance mission. So, God's instructions in these verses make a lot of sense.

📖 READ **Numbers 13:1-20**. Make any pertinent notes about who was to go on the mission and what they were to observe. List as many contrasts in Moses' instructions as you can find:

- Note what crop was just coming to ripeness:

🌀 READ **Numbers 13:21-24**.

- Do you think the spies were successful in covering the territory they were assigned?
- What type of edible souvenirs did they bring back?
- If this passage was all the information you had about the forty-day spy mission, what would you have thought about the land?
- Do you perceive much emotion in this account of their mission?

READ **Exodus 3:17**. So far do you think the report of the land is an accurate resemblance of the land God promised to give them?

Day 2 — Seeing with Double Vision

Yesterday's emotionless description stands in contrast to what the spies tell *the congregation* in this passage...

🌀 READ **Numbers 13:25-29**.

- Did they find the prosperity of the land just as God had said?
- Did they find the inhabitants of the land just as God had said?

🌀 READ **Numbers 13:30**. What was Caleb’s perspective and advice?

🌀 READ **Numbers 13:31-33**. — Ten of the spies saw the situation through a different lens than Caleb. Describe their perspective using words/phrases from the text:

<u>View of the People/Land</u>	<u>View of Themselves/Capabilities</u>

Isn't it fascinating that two spies saw the opportunity presented to them from one angle and the other ten spies had a completely different perspective? What causes some people to see their life with eyes of faith and others to be filled with fear?

It was the majority spy report that grabbed the megaphone. We've already learned that *grumbling* is as contagious as a head cold, and this passage shows us that *lack of faith* is just as contagious. Once we're seeing a situation through our natural eyes of discouragement, soon others around us are seeing things from that same perspective.

🌀 READ **Numbers 14:1-4**.

- What emotions surfaced in Israel following the spy report?
- What phrases tell us these emotions were shared by the majority?
- Who were they specifically grumbling against?

- Write out their exact lament in v.2b _____
-
-

- What decision did their natural perspective cause them to make (v.4)?

This was completely tragic! God had been unfolding His plan for Israel since He gave His promise to Abraham in **Genesis 15**. Israel was close enough to Canaan to smell what they were cooking for dinner; but rather than see their opportunity through eyes of faith, they broke down in fear and distress; they wept and wailed and packed their bags for Egypt.

I wonder, was God's *pillar of fire* keeping the chill off the desert floor as they wept in their tents all night? Were they gathering rocks, along with their *manna*, the next day to stone Aaron and Moses? Did they make plans for their trek back to Egypt while eating their *bread from heaven*?

It's sobering, isn't it, to think that we also can lose faith, grumble, see through a bad perspective rather than eyes of faith, and make harsh judgments about God's course for our lives — all while we are enjoying the comfort of situations and things God has provided for us.

- Write down one or two situations in your life where you need eyes of faith and a perspective that says, "*we can do this*," just like Caleb.

Day 3 — Seeing the Beauty of Grace

🌀 READ **Numbers 14:5-12.**

- Moses and Aaron had a spiritual perspective — what did they do?
- Joshua and Caleb had eyes of faith — what did they do?
- Israel held their natural perspective — what did they threaten?
- God grieved over Israel's unbelief — what was His decision?

Now we come to a passage, where Moses really shines as a *type of Christ!* Israel had rejected Yahweh in so many ways that He was finally ready to allow them to live under the consequences of that rejection. If not for the intercession of Moses (their Savior in this case), they would have had no future relationship with God. If not for Jesus, we too would have no future relationship with God.

🌀 READ **Numbers 14:13-16.**

- List Moses' arguments for why God should not abandon Israel.

☞ READ **Numbers 14:17-19**. What a man of insight! Moses used God's words to remind Him how He acts graciously toward His creation. Nicely done! Do you know God's character well enough to use His own words in your prayers? Do you appeal to God on the basis of what **He** has promised, rather than what your actions deserve?

READ **Psalm 103:7-13**. Lift out one or two things, describing how God acts toward us — things you have either taken for granted or simply not dared to believe. List them below and speak them back to God in your prayers this week.

Day 4 — Seeing Discipline Unfold

Remember last week we said God will sometimes give His people exactly what they ask for. (For example — the incident with the quail.) Today's passage is one of the most sobering examples in all Scripture.

☞ Write out **Numbers 14:28b** below:

The people of Israel were so fearful of being devoured by the sword if they entered Canaan, that they said they would prefer to die in the desert. So, God finally granted their request.

Like a parent skilled in both mercy and justice, God's hand was drawn back from destroying them completely because Moses had acted as a covenant mediator. He reminded God of His character — that He was indeed long-suffering and full of mercy — and he also pointed out that Israel was intended to be a testament to the nations and that would not happen if they were strewn out dead in the desert!

📖 READ **Numbers 14:20-24**. Summarize God's response to Moses:

📖 READ **Numbers 14:25-35**.

- Israel said (14:3) *"Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt"*
In v.25, which direction did God send them?
- Israel said (14:2) *"Would that we had died in this wilderness"*
In v.29, where did God destine them to die?
- Israel said (14:3) *"Our little ones will become a prey"*
In v.31, who did God determine to bring to the Promised Land?
- According to v.34, what did the 40-year pause in the Wilderness represent?
- Who were two exceptions to those who died in the Wilderness?

Why do you think two men saw through eyes of faith when those around them seemed blind to God's plan? Do some people just 'get it' and some don't? Do you think it could possibly have anything to do with what they saw and believed and told themselves regularly about God and His promises before their forty-day mission even began?

A mug in an Etsy shop caught my attention recently and reminded me of the power of my daily conversations with myself:

**Your mind will always believe what you tell it,
feed it faith ... feed it truth ... feed it love**

That's not from the Bible, but when it comes to *Seeing with Eyes of Faith*, mentally feeding ourselves the truth of God's Word every opportunity we get, will go a long way to improving our spiritual vision.

List one or two areas where you suspect your spiritual vision has gone dim but you *want* to see with eyes of faith, like Caleb and Joshua.

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After praying about those areas, how do you intend to change how you *feed yourself faith and truth*? Be specific!

Day 5 — The Reality of Disobedience

Numbers 14:39 tells us that Israel *mourned greatly* when they were told by Moses about God's discipline for their lack of faith. What a sad situation! Have you ever fumbled a situation so badly that all you wanted was a *do-over*? They wanted a *do-over* as well, but they didn't ask permission, they just did it!

🔗 READ **Numbers 14:39-45**.

- What territory did some of the people invade (**v.40**)?
- What had God already told them about that very territory when He instructed them to turn toward the Red Sea (**v.25**)?

Even in judgement, God was still proactively warning them and offering loving guidance for their protection. Does this not remind you of a very attentive parent? Have you ever had to administer necessary discipline to a child in order to shape their character? Did it about kill you? Israel was still in adolescence and the book of Numbers proves they still required God's attention and discipline.

- READ **Deuteronomy 1:30-32** and then **8:5-6**. What strikes you about how God's actions are described in these verses?
- We often think that God turned gracious in the New Testament. Read **Micah 7:18-20** and share how His mercy and grace were manifest long before Jesus came to earth:

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. We often say to each other, '*are you comfortable with this?*', meaning do you accept these terms? God's purpose in the spy mission was not to find out if they were *comfortable* with their God-given task. What do you think the purpose was?
2. READ **Hebrews 13:7**. Consider Moses, Caleb and Joshua. How could the Wilderness storyline have been altered if Israel had imitated their faith? How can we imitate the Godly faith of others?
3. We can despair at election results that are different than we hoped. Israel overwhelmingly voted *no* to God's directive. How can you apply Moses' example of intercession to your life when those situations happen in our world?
4. When we see our future through eyes of fear (like Israel did), our perspective of God may become fuzzy. We need to go back to the last time our perspective was in focus. What would that time have been for Israel? What would that time be for you?
5. READ **Romans 1:16-17**. God wanted Israel to have eyes of faith for the promises He had given. What do our eyes of faith rest upon?
6. READ **Hebrews 3:7-14**, which speaks to the meaning of this history lesson for us. What are some of the important elements of this passage for you?

Week 6 — Satisfied with God’s Call

I almost feel that an apology is in order as we begin another week of disturbing Wilderness experiences. We’re skipping over Numbers 15 and going straight into chapter 16, which holds the familiar theme of *rebellion* and *disobedience* to God’s plan.

If there was one thing that could have prevented the whole mess we’re about to read, it would have been for each person to have found *satisfaction in God’s calling for their life*. Finding satisfaction in *our* call from the Lord also goes a long way in avoiding messes today!

Day 1 — Looking Outside My Lane

📖 READ **Numbers 16:1-11**.

- Four men *rose up against Moses*. Fill in their names on this chart:

_____	a Levite of the Kohathite clan
_____	} all from the tribe of Reuben

- How many chiefs (influential men) of the congregation did they gather to speak against Moses and Aaron? _____
- Go to the diagram on p.22 — note the proximity of the Reubenites and Kohathites. How do you think this may have played into the situation?
- What was their main complaint (v.3, 9-11)?

- Can you think of any reasons why Korah wanted to also perform the duties of the priests rather than his own task? (Read **Numbers 4:15** to review the traveling job given to the Kohathites.)

I think there are two significant lessons in this passage...

#1 Dissatisfaction — which is just as contagious as grumbling and complaining; otherwise why would 250 normally reasonable men join in this rebellion?

#2 Comparison — which clouds our vision for walking in our unique calling! The message was clear that Korah wanted the job that Aaron had, rather than the job he'd been given.

Dissatisfaction and *Comparison* are first cousins, but I think *Comparison* has the dominant personality and tells *Dissatisfaction* when it's time to wake up and go to work.

Comparison directs our gaze onto other people's lives — what they get to do in life — what they get to do in God's Kingdom — how much more significant their life seems — how much more affirmation they seem to enjoy from others. Then she asks us to take a look at our own path in life — what we've been given to do — and suggests that our own calling is either unfair, boring, thankless, or insignificant and maybe we deserve better, and certainly we would be happier doing something else.

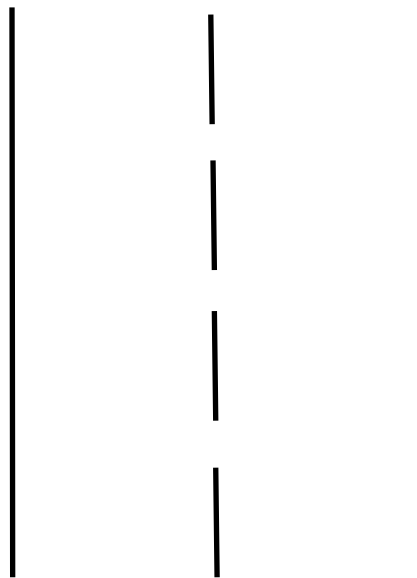
We either become annoyed with God (and our calling) or we become annoyed, jealous and bitter toward the very people we've compared ourselves with — as if they had anything to do with our misplaced emotions! It's pretty unfair to them! THAT is what we saw playing out in Korah's rebellion. It wasn't fair to Aaron that Korah set his sights on Aaron's job rather than the one he himself had been given to do.

So we should ask ourselves if this could possibly happen in your own life? — IS it happening right now in your own life?

For a guy who once thought he couldn't talk very well, Moses has sure developed a way with words now. Complete his arguments from v.9 that were intended to help Korah appreciate what he'd already been given in life: *"Is it too small a thing for you that the God of Israel has _____ from the congregation of Israel, to _____ to himself, to do _____ in the tabernacle of the Lord, and to _____ before the congregation to minister to them ... And would you _____ the priesthood also?"*

Moses was pointing out that God HAD given Korah an important and fulfilling ministry. He'd been assigned a specific *lane to run in*, but Korah chose to take his eyes off his own finish line and instead focus on the runners in the lanes beside him.

Now, think about the path God has given YOU — the *lane* in which YOU must *run*. The drawing below represents *your lane*. Write on *your lane* what God has assigned to you. Circle any elements that you have taken for granted or become dissatisfied with.



Now to the right and left of your lane above, honestly list anything outside your lane that you realize you have been reaching for, wanting to have, that has brought a sense of dissatisfaction into your relationship with God or others. Take these things to prayer!

Day 2 — *Safety Inside my Lane*

In Numbers, we've seen that God established and communicated *an ordered existence* for Israel. Part of that order was the assignment of tasks. Dissatisfaction with God's order was rebellion. That's what we see in this lesson.

🌀 READ Numbers 16:12-19.

- Which land were they referring to in **v.13** when they accused Moses, '*you have brought us up out of a land flowing with milk and honey*'?
- As you've read the text, do you think Moses actually acted as a *prince over them*? Why or why not?
- Since they wanted the job of the priests with their censors, what did Moses tell Korah and his 250 men to prepare in **v.16-18**?
- Since Korah's confidence was so great, what actions did he take in **v.19**?

🌀 READ Numbers 16:20-35.

Even in the midst of treachery and blatant rebellion, Moses and Aaron are found interceding on behalf of the rebels in **v.22**.

Isn't it interesting that in **v.24-26**, before God's judgment, a warning is given to the congregation, so they can make their *final choice* of identifying with one group or the other?

- Summarize the rest of **v.27-35**:

For another perspective read the poetic summary in **Psalm 106:16-18**.

In **v.28**, when Moses said, “... *the LORD has sent me to do all these works...it has not been of my own accord.*” There are few things more freeing in life than knowing you’re doing what God gave you to do. That’s how we can follow the advice of Elisabeth Elliot when she said, ‘*leaving all results with Him*’.

Are you under attack in any way right now for following God’s calling in your life? With your eyes on the Lord and humility in your heart, you can move forward with an assurance of safety in your lane.

READ **2 Timothy 4:5**. — List the three pieces of advice you see in this verse that may pertain to your life:

-
-
-

How might that advice, along with the example of Moses and Aaron as humble and faithful servants, help you this week?

Day 3 — A Second Chance with God’s Call

These passages are tough! If the only scrap of Scripture we had was **Numbers 16**, we might come away with a warped view of God. But, since we do have the entire Bible, we can know three things about God that are observed in this section of Scripture:

- 1) He is not unpredictable,
- 2) He makes His instructions abundantly clear,
- 3) He gives generous warnings before He judges rebellion.

🌀 READ **Numbers 16:36-40**.

- As the ashes of judgment were still cooling, what did God instruct Eleazar to do as a lasting reminder and warning to Israel?

Note another evidence of God's mercy — in **Numbers 26:10-11**, we find some of the sons of Korah did not stand with their father in the rebellion and God spared them. Their descendants actually went on to pen a number of Psalms, which became part of our Scriptures!

🌀 READ **Numbers 16:41-50**. I can hardly believe **v.41** — accusing Moses and Aaron of ***killing the people of the Lord?*** God was angered by their attitude once again and a plague began among the people.

- This episode started with 250 men, but now who was added to the grumbling, according to **v.41**?
- What posture of humility do we see in Aaron and Moses again (**v.45**)?
- Summarize Aaron's actions of atonement on behalf of the people.

The more that Moses' (and Aaron's) roll as mediator between God and the people is displayed in the Wilderness experience, the more they are opposed and even despised by the people for that very role. This is certainly an echo of what Jesus Himself endured. — SL

When I read how Aaron interceded to end the plague, my mind goes back to another time when Israel was perplexed and grumbling and begged him to make, “*gods who shall go before us.*” (**Ex 32:1**) And Aaron did it! It was a great failure on his part, for which he must have suffered regret, and subsequently repented, because look where he ended up! God didn’t toss Aaron aside — He was given another chance at faithfulness and here he stands as an echo of Christ, who also made atonement for the rebellion of man.

Are you sitting under a cloud of past mistakes, wondering if they will be your *scarlet letter* for the rest of your life? Certainly, some things in life can’t be fully repaired even after repentance; but our relationship with God *can be* repaired. Think this through and talk with the Lord about any past transgressions that have not been dealt with.

Day 4 — Satisfied with God’s Choice

 **READ Numbers 17.**

I’m sure you’ve gone through drama-filled situations in life. Emotions get hot, misunderstandings swirl and sometimes there’s even a climactic episode that polarizes those involved. When things like that happen (and we hope they are rare), it’s always a good idea to let things cool down, let a little time go by, but then initiate communication in a calmer manner.

Is that what God was doing here with the staffs? Maybe!

- Describe all of the staffs to be collected?
- Where were they to be placed overnight?
- What was the desired outcome of this demonstration (**v.5**)?

- Draw an illustration of Aaron's staff in **v.8** compared to the other twelve staffs:

It's common to refer to these people as 'the Children of Israel'. It's a great phrase since they are biologically *children* of Jacob (Israel); but it's also a descriptive phrase because they took a *long time* to outgrow resemblances to childhood. Take **v.12-13** for example:

"Behold, we perish ... everyone who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, shall die. Are we all to perish?"

A bit dramatic, don't you think? Like a four-year-old running out of the house, away from her mother, screaming (for the neighbors' benefit), *she's gonna kill me!*

The good thing was Israel *finally* recognized God *appointed* Aaron to the priesthood to bless them and protect them as they lived with a Holy God in their midst. The bad thing was they still had a hard time accepting that God was *for them* and His choices were for their good.

Do you struggle believing that God has good plans for your life? Does Israel's emotional response feel familiar? Do you understand that you are now able to draw near to God through His appointed man Jesus Christ, who is the perfection of the image we saw in Aaron?


READ these passages as a little survey through Hebrews and note how God appointed our high priest for our good as well...

- Hebrews 2:17
- Hebrews 4:14-15
- Hebrews 5:1,5
- Hebrews 6:19-20
- Hebrews 8:1-3

Day 5 — Satisfied with God's Call

After her rebellion, Israel finally embraced the reality that the priesthood had been given by God as a gift so that, through cleansing and atonement, they could co-exist with Yahweh. Aaron and his sons were not there to *rule over* the people, they were appointed to *serve* the people. Furthermore, the Levites had been given to the priests as a gift to help in their ministry. God had a created order for everything!

Today's chapter reaffirms and explains the important roles of both groups. Note, in **v.1**, that God is speaking directly to Aaron this time, rather than telling Moses to tell Aaron.

 READ **Numbers 18**. Note what interests you in each section:

- V.1-7:

- V.8-20:

- V.21-24:

- V.25-32:

Everyone from the tribe of Levi was a Levite! That's not complicated, but that reality may have complicated some people's lives. They were given great privileges, but also certain restrictions. For example, they had no inheritance coming in the Promised Land — no fields to work, which meant no food to eat.

- If the Levites were not to be given an inheritance, how would they live? How would they eat?
- Do you think that everyone who was a Levite automatically loved this arrangement? Do you think some had to (as we say) *wrap their minds around* this plan?
- How might you have felt about not being able to earn your own living? Would you have needed time to embrace that idea?
- Are there any principles found in those passages that you think translate to New Testament times? How so?

We learned that some people were jealous of the position of priests, or Levites, but perhaps some who were priests or Levites may not have been automatically thrilled with *their* path in life. This is a common situation for all of us, isn't it? Consider this Psalm of David:

“LORD, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.” Psalm 16:5-6 (NIV)

- Are you satisfied with your portion and cup?
- Do your boundary lines mean you won't have something that others have?
- Do your boundary lines mean you may have to depend on God in a greater way than others around you?
- Do your boundary lines mean you get to do something that others don't often get to do?

God truly does love His people and has our best interest in mind all the time. He is trustworthy, He is good!

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. Some of the trouble going on with Korah was that he wanted a position of ministry that had been assigned to someone else. How difficult do you think it is to be content with the work God assigns *us* in the kingdom?
2. Moses tried to change Korah's attitude by pointing out his blessings. It wasn't successful but that doesn't mean it's not a good strategy. Have you ever snapped out of a *dissatisfaction funk* after your blessings were pointed out to you? Explain.
3. How do you think our world of social media plays into the lack of significance we may feel in the path God has given us?
4. If a friend asked you, '*how do I even know what's in my lane and what's not?*' how would you answer?
5. What would you say to a friend who was under fire for simply doing the *good works* she believed God had called her to do?
6. How does seeing Aaron (the former people-pleaser and compromiser) in a role of intercession for his people encourage you?

Week 7 — God’s Mercy Follows Our Failures

It’s often said the children of Israel *wandered in the desert for forty years*. While that’s a true statement, it’s not an exact description of the Wilderness Journey. The word *wander* implies they were continually lost. Perhaps saying the children of Israel *were delayed in the Wilderness forty years* would be more accurate. We’re nearing the end of that delay and the text gives us one of the first indicators that they were entering their final year.

Day 1 — Mercy Following Harsh Words

🌀 READ **Numbers 20:1**.

The phrase *in the first month* means the first month of the final year in the Wilderness and many things are about to change...

- Who died and was buried? _____

That’s a simple answer to write, but think through the implications. *She* was watching when Moses was drawn from the river, she brought Mom to be his nurse, *she* was big sis, *she* led the women in songs of celebration. Miriam, Moses, and Aaron had to have been very close, and now she was gone. Before you read the next section, think of what Moses was emotionally carrying at this point in time.

🌀 READ **Numbers 20:2-13**.

- What is the legitimate need at the moment?
- List the familiar, tired complaints from Israel in **v.3-5**:
 - What was Moses and Aaron’s customary response in **v.6**?
 - What were God’s instructions in order to supply water in **v.8**?

Look at Moses' actions in **v.10-11**. He sort of obeys, but two things are very wrong. In what areas did Moses fail?

We feel badly for Moses. He's old and tired; he's been leading a couple of million grumbling and complaining people for forty long years and he just lost his sister...no wonder he also lost his temper!

Read **Psalm 106:32-33** for the poetic version of this failure.

Because of God's mercy, the needs of the congregation were met in spite of their leader's failure. Water did come from the rock in abundance, but something precious was lost for both Aaron and Moses.

- READ **1 Corinthians 10:4**. Who did the Apostle Paul say that **rock** represented?
- What pleasure did Aaron and Moses forfeit (**v.12**)?
- Review the bottom of p.10 in your study guide and READ **James 3:1**. Do you think this may be an example of stricter judgement awaiting those who lead?

Mercy means *not getting what we deserve*. Moses misrepresented God and deserved the penalty he was given. However...

- READ **Numbers 27:12-14**. What did God's mercy still allow Moses to do?

Has God's mercy ever been poured out on you in a similar way, so you were still allowed some measure of goodness in the midst of His discipline?

Day 2 — Mercy Following Grief

Moses sent a message out from Kadesh, seeking a shortcut into the Promised Land. It seemed like a reasonable request and yet another disappointment was on the horizon for Moses.

🌀 READ **Numbers 20:14-21**.

- Summarize Moses' request and the answer from Edom:

- What was the final sign that Edom meant business by their answer?

🌀 READ **Numbers 20:22-29**. It takes some wisdom to know when it's time to move to *Plan B*. God moved them to a specific place, where it would be time to say good-bye to Aaron.

- Why was Aaron denied access to enter the land?
- We have another important date marker for Aaron's death, just like we did for Miriam. READ **Numbers 33:38**. How much time had lapsed since Miriam was *gathered up to her people*?
- What important symbols of the transfer of the priesthood needed to be taken care of?

It's been said that *grief is the last act of love we have to give someone whom we have cherished*. As I write this, our country is mourning the death of a great President, but we won't mourn thirty days. We'll watch a few televised services to honor his legacy and soon return to our normal schedules. In contrast, think of the entire house of Israel halted from their travel and spending a whole month in mourning — that's a deep grief.

Grief or not, Moses still had two million people to lead; he still had a mission from God to complete; and he still had to face Israel's enemies, without the support of his long-time brother/comrade. This stretch of his race may have needed the most endurance of all.

What about the current stretch of YOUR race?

- What is yet remaining in your race?
- Does this leg of the race require even more endurance than the past?
- Have you had to say goodbye to something or someone that you had leaned on? How does this affect your reliance on the Lord?
- Is there something about Moses' faithfulness that inspires you to keep pressing on in your own calling?

Moses had experienced two family funerals, two confrontations with critics in the camp, and a personal failure at Kadesh; yet he picks up his rod and goes right back to work. Victorious Christian service, like the victorious Christian life, is a series of new beginnings. No matter what mistakes we've made, it's always too soon to quit. — Warren Wiersbe⁵

Day 3 — Mercy Following Impatience

🌀 READ **Numbers 21:1-3**.

Was that passage inspirational? My guess is probably not! But there's honestly quite a bit of significance to that seemingly small victory.

- Go back and READ **Numbers 14:39-45** to refresh your memory on the last scuffle that happened almost 40 years ago near Hormah. Why was Israel defeated that time?

- Explain how the conflict plays out differently this time.

- The place had been named **Hormah**, meaning 'destruction'. What impact do you think it may have had on Israel's momentum to see destruction turned on the Canaanites this time?

🌀 READ **Numbers 21:4**.

Think of the House of Israel surging forward with energy, but having to take the long route '**around the land of Edom**'. (see map on p.44) Sometimes that happens in life — energy and momentum become foiled by one single thing! Write the last five words of **v.4**:

"and the people _____"

I think those words set the stage for the next five verses.

🌀 READ **Numbers 21:5-9**.

- What did the people complain about now?

- READ **Psalm 78:25**. How was the daily manna, that God had provided for them every day for almost 40 years, described?
- READ **John 6:32-35**. Who did the manna represent?
- And yet, they grumbled and *tested the Lord*. What was God's response to their testing and rebellion and what happened?
- With what attitude did the people come to Moses?
- What did Moses do?
- How was God's mercy displayed to those who were repentant and willing to obey God's instructions for a remedy?

Jesus Himself (**John 3:14**) paralleled His impending death to this very event when He said "***As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.***"

- List as many comparisons as you can between the bronze serpent lifted on the pole and Jesus Christ lifted on a cross:

Day 4 — *The Boundaries of Mercy*

At the opening of **Numbers 21**, Israel was confronted with war by the Canaanites, and asked for God's favor: (v.2) "***If you will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction.***"

One people group destroying another and taking their land is not appreciated by modern readers. It gets worse when God seems to be taking sides in the matter. Why was it okay for Israel to ***devote the Canaanite cities to destruction?*** What had they done to harm Israel?

These are important questions that we'll incorporate in our lesson. Let's read the next set of conquests and come back to that question.

🔗 READ **Numbers 21:21-32**.

- Israel politely asked to pass through the territory of the **Amorites**, whose king was _____. What was his response (v.23)?

A battle ensued, Israel won, and they took possession of the land *as far as the Ammonites* (v.24). We have now read about **Amorites** and **Ammonites** and it may seem to us that all of the '*ites*' in Scripture only exist to be wiped out...I guess...but we don't really know why.

- READ **Deuteronomy 2:18-19**. Why was God protecting the land of the Ammonites?
- READ **Exodus 23:23-24**. What were God's instructions for the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and Jebusites?

Why would God protect one people group and issue orders to destroy another? Because He is God and has a perspective that we do not have! The Amorites were a wicked people and God knew it, and yet His character trait of long-suffering had given them centuries to change.

How do we know this? When God was making a covenant with Abraham back in **Genesis 15:16**, He told Abraham that his own descendants, after a period of slavery, would return to that very land in the future, ***“for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”***

What does that mean? It means that God’s long-suffering wasn’t yet used up. In His mercy and justice, He would give them several more generations to repent of their godless wickedness.

This is a lesson for us and helps us understand that God, in His mercy, gives people chance after chance after chance, but there is a limit and it does come to an end. He is the *only wise God* and when the time is up, His judgment will be complete.

 **READ Numbers 21:33-35.**

Israel turned toward the area of Bashan, whose king was _____.

- Summarize the result of that battle.

When we read passages like this, which may unsettle our modern views of societies and cultures, we can rest with two thoughts:

- 1) As we search the Scriptures, there are often explanations (as in the case of the Amorites);
- 2) We see life through a mirror dimly and we should always remember the words of the Lord to Isaiah, ***“my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.”*** (Isaiah 55:8)

“If God did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah ... when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; and if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority.”
— 2 Peter 2:5-10

Day 5 — Mercy Even in Perversity

Israel had been advancing. They defeated the Canaanite king of Arad; the Amorite king Sihon; and Og, king of Bashon. They were now ***camped in the plains of Moab beyond the Jordan at Jericho (22:1)***. It made sense that **Balak**, the king of **Moab**, would have been fearful of what seemed to be an inevitable invasion. There was, however, one piece of missing information that could have calmed his anxious heart.

- READ **Deuteronomy 2:9** and explain why he needn't have worried in the first place:

But he *was* frightened and the resource he knew best was magic! Where could he find a successful sorcerer, who could pronounce a curse over these people to protect his kingdom?

🌀 READ **Numbers 22:1-21**.

- Who did Balak reach out to for help and what did he ask to be done?
- What was this sorcerer known for (v.6)?
- READ **2 Peter 2:15** and explain why Balaam wanted the job even though his initial response seemed cool:

- Write out God's initial answer to Balaam from v.12: _____
-

🌀 READ **Numbers 22:22-41**.

It may seem like God said *no*, then *yes*, then got angry after changing His mind, but that is not the case. God allowed Balaam to pursue what he really wanted to do, but then had the last word Himself in the midst of the deed (which we'll study next week).

- Summarize important or interesting things about the journey with Balaam, the donkey and the Angel of the Lord:

This lesson carries the subtitle, *'mercy even in perversity.'* God told Balaam in **v.32**, *your way is perverse before me*. God had no time for the occult or divination, and yet because of His mercy, He had given Balaam ample time to repent — which means to turn the other way.

Once Balaam's decision was made, however, God would not be trumped. Out of Balaam's own mouth came the prediction of what would happen.

- WRITE out Balaam's words from **v.38**: _____

No one plays a game of intrigue with God and wins. For a season, it may seem that someone is getting away with something; but every game comes to an end and God *always* wins. But the revealed character of God is mercy and long-suffering. I don't think we can read that enough, or focus on it enough.

In closing this week, READ **Psalm 103:8** and write out the verse below:

Questions for Thought & Discussion


1. Why do you think it was such a big deal that Moses struck the rock rather than speaking to the rock?
2. Grief is very personal. No one can really understand another's burden of grief. Certainly NO ONE could have truly understood the emotional impact of Moses' loss. Have you known a faithful person in your life who continued with their mission in the midst of grief? Explain.
3. Israel grew impatient with God's timetable, so they grumbled against Him once more. What Biblical advice (Scriptures) would you give to someone who is grumbling about delays in their life?
4. How might you answer a Sunday School student, who asks you to explain why it was okay for God to tell Israel to kill all the inhabitants of Canaan and take their land?
5. Balaam became an example of someone God used for His own purposes, even though his own motives were anti-God. Can you offer any other examples in Scripture of ungodly people who were used by God to bring about His will?

Week 8— Walking in God’s Blessing

The predominate theme this week is **God’s blessing**, as Israel prepared to walk into the land of His promise. Ironically, it was a pagan sorcerer, who saw the blessing most clearly and spoke the brightest statement of hope in the entire book!

Day 1 — God’s Blessing for His People


We left Israel camped on the plains of Moab, totally unaware that, in his fright, the king of Moab had summoned a mail-order soothsayer to cast a spell on Israel. We’ll find out in the next two chapters how that cursing business worked out for the Moabite king.

 READ **Numbers 23:1-12** *Balaam’s First Oracle.*

- Describe the scene as Balak and Balaam attempt to curse Israel:

- What intrigues you most about Balaam’s first Oracle in **v.7-10**?

- What was Balak’s response?

 READ **Numbers 23:13-26** *Balaam’s Second Oracle.*

- Describe the scene as Balak and Balaam attempt to curse Israel:

- What intrigues you most about Balaam’s second Oracle in **v.18-24**?

- What was Balak’s response?

Balak kept trying for the perfect *vantage point* so Balaam's curse would be effective. He was well-acquainted with a high place dedicated to the wicked god Baal; so to *the top of Peor, which overlooks the desert (v.28)* they went in order to get a really good curse pronounced.

🌀 READ **Numbers 23:27-30, 24:1-13** *Balaam's Third Oracle.*

- What intrigues you most about Balaam's third Oracle in **v.3-9**?

- What was Balak's response?

🌀 READ **Numbers 24:14-25** *Balaam's Final Oracle.*

Even though the players had grown tired of the cursing game, God still wanted the last word. He gave Balaam one last oracle filled with **blessing** for Israel and **curses** for her enemies.

- Who do you think **v.17** is referring to?

It is the star from Jacob and the scepter from Israel that offer the **blessing** of the Lord God to people beyond Israel.

Israel had certainly not earned God's blessing these 40 years, but He blessed them anyway because it was His choice and His promise. **We** also do not earn God's blessing, but anyone who believes in Christ IS blessed. READ these Scriptures and note how **you** are blessed in Jesus:

- **Romans 4:5-8**
- **Galatians 3:7-9**
- **Ephesians 1:1-3**

Day 2 — God’s Blessing for the Righteous

Here comes one last frustrating passage. The frustration isn’t due to grumbling or complaining on Israel’s part, but blatant sexual sin!

God often warned Israel of two allurements to avoid — *prosperity* and *paganism*. God said, over and over, *you shall not do as the inhabitants of the land you are entering*. And yet, before they even set foot across the Jordan, they had already fallen into the sins of the Midianites through the worship of the pagan god Baal.

It wasn’t by accident that Israel stumbled onto the wicked worship feasts of Baal. Oh no, both **Numbers 31:16** and **Revelation 2:14** inform us that, after Balaam was robbed of his profits for divination, he advised Balak of an alternate means to subdue Israel — let their pretty women invite the men to the sacrifices of Baal at Peor. It worked like a charm!

🌀 READ **Numbers 25:1-9**.

- What was God’s response to their actions in **v.4-5**? Do you think this was harsh?

- What was Phinehas’ response to the Israelite and his Midianite woman? Do you think he over-reacted?

- How many people died in the plague from this event?

🌀 READ **Numbers 25:10-17** and **Psalms 106:28-31**.

- How were Phinehas’ actions described by the Lord?

- How was he blessed for his zeal for righteousness?
- READ **Matthew 5:6**. How does this convey a similar thought in New Testament words?

Do you remember that Moses spent from age 40 to 80 in Midian, took a Midianite wife and had two sons in that country before he returned to Egypt? Think about that in relation to **v.16-18**.

- How did God instruct Moses to act toward the Midianites because of this incident?
- Do you think that might have been a difficult command for you to follow had you been in his shoes?

We're going to fast forward and read how this dark period in Israel's history gets resolved.

 READ **Numbers 31**.

- **Numbers 24** had said Balaam *went back to his place*, but he never returned to his home. Describe the justice of Balaam's end in **v.8**:

READ **Deuteronomy 4:1-8**. How do Moses' words here express that people are not saved by their attention to righteousness, but are blessed by attention to God's revealed righteousness?

Day 3 — God Blesses a Simple Request

At the very beginning, we noted that Numbers has two bookends — a census near the beginning and a census near the end — almost 40 years apart. Chapter 26 contains the second census for the generation who would enter into the land. The first sentence of that chapter tells us this took place after the 24,000 died in the plague.

READ Numbers 26.

You may read the whole chapter (and record the new census numbers on the diagram on p.22); or you can skim the chapter. But do read the final paragraph v.63-65.

- What information was Moses careful to reiterate?

(For now, we'll skip chapters 27-31. We'll come back to portions of chapter 27 soon. The remaining passages simply restate instructions to be followed in the promised land, so they are optional reading.)

READ Numbers 32:1-15.

- The people of Reuben and Gad placed what simple request before Moses?
- Do you think Moses understood immediately what they were asking?
- Do you think the leaders of Reuben and Gad could have presented their request more clearly than they did?

READ Numbers 32:16-27.

- Even though Moses called them a *brood of sinful men*, how do the leaders of these tribes assure Moses they are not trying to get out of their obligation to help win the land for the whole community?

🌀 READ **Numbers 32:28-31**.

- Can you think of a practical reason for Moses to get Joshua and Eleazar involved in their promise to fight first and come back to their land later?

Some may question the wisdom of these tribes settling outside the Promised Land — perhaps it wasn't the best choice, but I'm going to steer us along more personal and practical lines from this narrative.

Clear communication is my biggest takeaway from this chapter. It's a simple matter, but not always an easy thing to accomplish.

So many issues in life are avoidable.

So many misconceptions result from a lack of information.

So many relationships are strained by misunderstandings.

Have you recently gone through a situation where something wasn't communicated as clearly as it could have been, resulting in misunderstandings? What could have been done differently?

In this text, if the tribes of Reuben and Gad had simply acknowledged their intention to participate in Israel's battles before settling down, that may have solved everything. Had they asked themselves, '*what's important to Moses?*' — they could have included that in their request and avoided the entire misunderstanding.

If this topic resonates with you, there is a glowing example of clear and thoughtful communication in **Numbers 27:1-11**. That text can serve as an example of clarity, as the leaders lay out the potential problem for Moses to consider and help him better understand their request. It's a very good example for us.

Day 4 — All Shall be Blessed

The next chapter in Numbers is a lengthy diary of the Wilderness Journey, followed by some essential precautions for their future life.

🌀 READ or LISTEN TO **Numbers 33:1-49** — Moses' diary.

🌀 READ **Numbers 33:50-54**.

List two things that seemed to be the most important instructions to be carried out once Israel entered into the land:

-
-
- What did God warn would happen if they weren't attentive to those instructions (v.55)?

Israel had a key role to play in God's Unfolding Story of Redemption. God wanted them to obey and finish well. He wanted them to possess the land, be devoted to Him and worship Him. God wanted to bless the people of Israel since they would bring forth His Messiah.

Let's review what God said to Abraham (the Father of Israel) way back in **Genesis 12:1-3**:

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Israel *would* be a blessing to all the families of the earth, but their current leader Moses would not be the one to lead them into the land of His rest.

☞ READ Numbers 27:12-14. Summarize how and where Moses' life on earth would end:

☞ READ Numbers 27:15-18: *Moses' Prophetic Prayer*

Moses spoke to the LORD: *"Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, _____ a man over the congregation ... who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no _____."*

The LORD said to Moses: *"Take _____ the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him."*

The transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua is where we end the Wilderness Way. The days of Moses were the days of the law. The Law is truth, the Law is beautiful, the Law teaches us about God's character, but the Law itself (represented by Moses) could never bring anyone into a place of rest — that is a job for a shepherd.

You probably know that the Hebrew name **Joshua** (*Yeshua*) is the same as the Greek name we translate *Jesus* in English. Joshua, the son of Nun, was the physical man who was chosen to physically take Israel into Canaan and give them rest. **Jesus** is the God/man chosen to spiritually take anyone who believes in Him into the blessed rest of God. The law can never take us into a place of resting in God, as that is a work of the Spirit.

And that is where we leave Israel until the next phase of their Journey. But tomorrow's lesson will help us personalize the Wilderness Way to our own Journey.

For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Hebrews 4:8-10

Day 5 — God's Blessing to Me

All families of earth *are* blessed through God's Plan of Redemption! God's blessing has extended to my life and to yours through our salvation in Jesus Christ. But as we reflect on the narrative of the Wilderness Way, the *blessing* for us lies in the *warning*.

The book of Numbers has two censuses for its bookends, so I've decided to bookend this Bible Study in a similar way — with a reminder from the same passage we opened with from **1 Corinthians 10:11-12**:

"Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall."

Every person, who believes that Jesus is our spiritual Passover Lamb, and symbolically applies His blood over the doorpost of their heart, will be freed from the bondage of Egypt. But that doesn't mean that every person will be automatically transferred into a life of *victory* and *rest*, as symbolized in Canaan. There is a **Wilderness Journey** for each of us called sanctification — where we learn to walk out a life of faith in God alone.

🌀 READ **1 Corinthians 10:1-12**.

- From this passage, list two of the many temptations that entangled Israel and caused them to fall short of the land of rest:
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🌀 READ **1 Corinthians 10:13**. As you consider your own life, what is God's promise regarding those temptations?

The writer of Hebrews had the *Wilderness Way* in mind and liberally applied it to the lives of New Testament Christians like you and me:

*“Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands,
let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it.*

Hebrews 4:1

He’s not talking about failing to be saved from our sins, but failing to reach the life characterized by rest and obedience to God — the life of faith. I think you’ll agree that we live among a culture of Wilderness Christians and perhaps some of us thought desert living was all there was to life.

*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God,
for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works
as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest,
so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.*

Hebrews 4:9-11

Sister, God’s Word teaches us that victory and rest *is* possible in this life, as we respond to Christ’s leading through our own Wilderness. God desires to sanctify us and lead us to a place of blessed rest as we acknowledge...

Christ is my **PASSOVER LAMB**

I must accept His blood, which alone atones for my sin

Christ is my **MANNA**

I must partake of the bread of heaven each day for strength

Christ is my **LIVING WATER**

I must receive this refreshment from the Rock that is Christ

Christ is my **LEADER** — like Moses

I must follow where He leads me

Christ is my **HIGH PRIEST** — like Aaron

I must accept His intercession before God in the holy place

Christ is my **SHEPHERD** — like Joshua

I must allow Him, by faith, to lead me to **victory** and **rest** in this life

May you be abundantly blessed as the Holy Spirit continues in your heart to minister more revelation from lessons of the Wilderness. May you have eyes of faith to press forward into the life that God has promised to you...a life of victory and rest! With my Blessing, Sue

Questions for Thought & Discussion

1. How does God's blessing toward Israel extend to Christians?
What is the link?
2. What is the difference between upholding righteousness (like Phinehas) and being legalistic?
3. Can you think of an example where considering, *what's important to the other person?* makes all the difference in communication?
4. What are the areas of temptation that have kept you from a life of rest and victory?
5. How does **1 Corinthians 10:13** encourage you regarding those temptations (remember the context of that passage is Wilderness life)?
6. Why do you think it's relevant that Jesus was also tempted in the Wilderness for 40 days, yet did not harden His heart, but entrusted Himself completely to His Father in Heaven?

The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:2-7 From a “Bill of Rights” perspective

In **Matthew 22:36-40**, Jesus responded to an *expert in the law* who asked about the greatest commandment. Jesus gave a brilliant simplification and summary of what God spoke in the hearing of all Israel at Mt. Sinai. He said:

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind.
This is the great and first commandment.
And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.
On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*

Loving God, followed by loving people, means to respect and honor their rights. Below is a numbered list of the Ten Commandments, followed by a simple statement, that shows how obeying God’s simple instruction gives honor and respect to God and our Neighbors:

<u>Instructions to Love God</u>	<u>Because Yahweh has a Right to...</u>
#1 Have no other gods (v.3)	Exclusive Allegiance
#2 Don’t make a carved image (v.4-6)	The Definition of His Image
#3 Don’t take God’s name in vain (v.7)	Proper Representation
#4 Remember the Sabbath day (v.8-11)	Israel’s Time
<u>Instructions to Love your Neighbor</u>	<u>Because of a...</u>
#5 Honor your father and mother (v.12)	Parent’s Right to Respect
#6 Don’t murder (v.13)	Neighbor’s Right to Life
#7 Don’t commit adultery (v.14)	Neighbor’s Right to Sexual Purity
#8 Don’t steal (v.15)	Neighbor’s Right to Personal Property
#9 Don’t witness falsely (v.16)	Neighbor’s Right to Honest Testimony
#10 Don’t covet your neighbor’s things	Neighbor’s Right to Household Security

Would you like to live in a world where people were concerned with upholding your rights like this? It would be glorious. Suddenly the Ten Commandments seem to facilitate an appealing society, rather than restrict freedom.

Adapted from What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About⁶

REFERENCES

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p.44 — **Map of Wilderness Way**— <https://www.thebiblejourney.org>

Women of the Word Bible Studies

The following WOW Bible Studies, written by Sue LeBoutillier, are available through the **Calvary Chapel Ontario bookstore**, and through our online store at www.ccontario.com.

Old Testament:

- **Genesis** —Divine Design, From Eden to Egypt
- **Exodus** —Divine Deliverance, From Egypt to Sinai
- **Numbers** —The Wilderness Way, From Sinai to the Jordan
- **Joshua** —The Path of Promise, From the Jordan into Canaan
- **Judges** — A Time of Turning
- **Ruth** —Rescue and Rest
- **1 Samuel** — The Coming King
- **Jonah** —The Call of Compassion

New Testament:

- **The Way of Jesus** —The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew)
- **Simply Jesus** —The “I AMs” of Christ (John)
- **Acts** —Walking in the Spirit, The First Days of the Last Days
- **Galatians** —Finding Grace in a Demanding World
- **Philippians** —Finding Joy in a Disjointed World
- **Colossians** —Walking in Strength and Power
- **Titus** —While We Wait
- **James** —Real Faith for Daily Life
- **1 & 2 Peter** —Hope, Holiness and Humility in a Hostile World
- **1,2,3 John** —Light, Love and Logic, Lessons from the Apostle John

