



Guide Me Oh Thou Great Jehovah

A STUDY OF ISRAEL'S
WILDERNESS YEARS

Numbers

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A Study of Israel's Wilderness Years (*Numbers*)

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At the 1997 funeral of Princess Diana, the choir sang, "*When I tread the verge of Jordan, bid my anxious fears subside.*" 14 years later it was sung again at the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton. What is the power in the long-lasting popularity of this hymn?

"Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah" appeals to the universal experience of struggle and need for dependence on God to get us through. It also alludes to the well-known stories of Israel's beginnings in the "barren land." They were fed bread from heaven, guided by pillars of cloud and fire, until their fears subsided as they crossed the Jordan River.

Lord willing, these are the stories we will be studying in this class. We also hope to add to our knowledge and faith by studying other parts of Israel's story that aren't as well-known. We will do this in the hopes that we too will take God's mighty hand and join with Israel in singing,

*Strong Deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield;
Songs of praises, I will ever give to thee!*

An Introduction to Numbers from the New Testament

Paul loved the church of God at Corinth. Despite their various struggles, he was confident that God would confirm them in the end. In the first four chapters he pleaded with them to focus on God more than men, avoid divisions, have humility regarding their leaders, be a servant of Christ Jesus, and avoid sexual immorality. He surprised some of them with their private details. They had written him a letter that asked other questions, such as is it ok for a man to touch his wife. After he addressed their questions regarding their individual rights and freedoms combined with the issue of food sacrificed to idols, he begins a critical admonition.

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, 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 were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved. ⁷Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." ⁸Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. ⁹Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. ¹⁰Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. ¹³No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

¹⁴Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say.

Perhaps one can imagine a pagan Corinthian asking, "What is this? Where did this come from? What is he talking about?" On the other hand, the Jews in the congregation should know full well what Paul is referring to. He is referring to Israel's "Wilderness Years," a book we poorly title, Numbers. G. Wenham's commentary on Numbers makes this observation:

Paul describes the experiences of Israel in the wilderness in such a way as to make clear the parallels with the situation at Corinth. Baptism (1 Cor 1:14ff), Manna and Water (the Lord's supper, 1 Cor 10:14ff), Idolatry (1 Cor 8-10), Immorality (1 Cor 5-7), Grumbling (1 Cor 12-14). Surprisingly, most of the sins of Corinth are prefigured in Numbers, and if Israel was punished so severely, what can the church of the new covenant expect?

It isn't just Paul who makes use of this incredible book to offer warnings about the severity of God and coming judgment. The apostle John uses it throughout his account of Jesus to point to God's amazing grace:

If the epistles focus on Israel's disobedience in the wilderness, the gospels remind us of God's gracious provision then and the more wonderful era ushered in by the coming of Christ. In the synoptic gospels Jesus is in a sense the new Israel who succeeded where the old Israel fell... In John's gospel Jesus is portrayed as the prophet who is greater than Moses (6:14; cf. 5:46), the good shepherd (10:1-18; cf. Nu 27:17), the life giving serpent (3:14), the Passover lamb (19:36), the water giver (4:10-15), the manna from heaven (6:26-58), and the glory of the Shekinah (1:14-18). In our Lord all the OT symbols of the grace & presence of God find their ultimate fulfillment. (Wenham again, pg 50-52)

So, I encourage you to join with us in studying this great story of Israel's "Wilderness Years." It can help equip us for our wilderness years. The Jews call this book "In the Wilderness." We rightly call Moses the author of Genesis through Deuteronomy but notice that Numbers states over fifty times in thirty-six chapters, "God told Moses." **God is telling us this story.** He merely uses Moses to write it down. This makes the book so critical for our understanding about life. In His wisdom, God revealed His will for Israel and all of us through various writing styles: laws, letters, poetry, prophecy, and even census lists. YHWH is a God of order. He takes the chaotic and puts things in their correct place.

There is much debate over how to order or outline the book of Numbers. Some use geography and others use chronology. Our class will cover up to five chapters each week and loosely follows the outline at the end of this introduction. You can use the outline to keep stories in the context of when and where they are happening. There will be several rebellions against leaders and of course rebellions against God. The rebellions will test the patience of God and Moses. Moses will intercede for them in a beautiful passage in **Numbers 14**, only to later lose his patience with them, therefore losing the opportunity to see the Promised Land. (**Numbers 20**)

The wilderness stories of Israel are the background not only to New Testament ideas but also several passages in the Psalms and the Prophets. The better we know Israel's wilderness years, the better we will understand what the rest of Scripture is teaching. In addition to their history, we learn about YHWH, our God. He wants to be with His people, taking up residence in the Tent and sealing a covenant oath with the Ark. God wants to speak to humanity using Moses repeatedly and uniquely (**Numbers 12:6-8**). God even used a donkey to talk with a foreigner (**Numbers 22:22-35**). He is a faithful God who keeps His promises and doesn't give up easily on the fickle faith of Israel (**Numbers 23:19-20**). YHWH is also a holy God who punishes moments of sin. He protects women as seen in the two stories of the daughters of Zelophehad. Finally, with compelling relevance for today, He desires to instill faith in His people and not fear. Fear is the sin that kept Israel wandering aimlessly and unable to enjoy God's deepest blessings.

I hope you'll join us as we study together the kindness and severity of God (**Romans 11:22**). As Roy Gane has said, "Numbers is *not* primarily about numbers." We will watch how every part of God's people struggled at working together and engaging in the spiritual warfare of journeying through the wilderness of life.

Numbers Outline:	Book 1: Reverence and Rebellion (Ch 1-25)	Book 2: Renewal (Ch 26-36)
Reverence:	1:1-10:10 (Organization)	Mt Sinai
Rebellion:	10:11-25:18 (The Journey & Rebellions)	Kadesh, Zin, Mt Hor, etc.
Renewal:	26:1-36:13 (Preparations to Enter)	Plains of Moab

July 5

1) Introduction to The Book of Numbers

1) How would you summarize the book of Numbers in 10 words or less?

2) What are your favorite parts of this book?

3) What literature genres are found in this book?

4) How does the NT use this book?

5) What does this book teach us about God & His people?

July 19 3) Ch 1-4 Organizing The Camp and Levitical Service

1) When did the census occur? Who was included in the count? What was the purpose?

2) Why were the Levites excluded? What duties did they have?

3) How were the tribes arranged in the camp? Why were they arranged this way?

4) What does the text pause to tell us about Aaron's sons? Why?

5) What reason did God give to Moses for "taking" the Levites for a special purpose?

6) What happened if a stranger or layman came near Moses and Aaron's tent?

7) List the three Levitical fathers. What was collected for the Levites at the end of **Chapter 3**?

8) When could a Levite begin to serve in the tabernacle? Can this imply a principle for today?

9) In **chapter 4**, what procedures were required for moving the camp?

July 26 4) Ch 5-7 Purity, Nazirites, Spiritual Leadership

- 1) Summarize the rules of **5:1-10**. How can these laws be relevant to us today?

- 2) What law is discussed in **5:11-31**? Why is this a good law?

- 3) Summarize the vow of a Nazirite. Where else does this vow occur in Scripture?

- 4) What was the purpose of the priestly blessing in **6:22-27**? How can we use this today?

- 5) Who were the leaders that made an offering? How long did this go on? Why?

- 6) How did God communicate with Moses according to **7:89**? Why is this significant?

Aug 2 5) Ch 8-10 Lighting Lamps, Levites, and Passover

- 1) What was the purpose of the 'lighting of lamps'? Who designed the lamps?

- 2) How were the Levites cleansed? According to **8:11**, why did they need cleansing?

- 3) When were Levites to retire from service? What could they do in retirement?

- 4) In **chapter 9**, when and where does God speak to Moses? What does God tell him?

- 5) Why could Passover be missed? What provision was made? What about those w/o excuse?

- 6) What allowances were made for foreigners?

- 7) Summarize **9:15-23**, *especially* **verse 22**. What were the silver trumpets for?

- 8) How long had Israel been at Mt Sinai? Who was Hobab and what happens to him?

- 9) What did Moses do to begin and end each journey? What did the people begin to do?

Aug 9 6) Ch 11-14 Journey Begins, and So Does Rebellion

1) Why was God angry? What did He do? How did Moses end it? Who complains next & why?

2) What did Moses say to God about the situation? What did he ask of God? **11:10-15**

3) How does God lighten Moses' burden? How does Moses respond? How does God answer?

4) What exchange do Moses and Joshua have in **11:26-30**? Why is this significant?

5) When God sends the quail in **11:31-35**, what happens? Who complains in **Ch 12** and why?

6) How does God answer the complaint? How do Aaron and Moses each respond?

7) Who commands the 12 spies? How did they describe the land? What about its occupants?

8) What counsel did Caleb & Joshua give? Describe Israel's disposition toward Moses & Aaron.

9) What does God want to do for Moses? How did Moses respond? What is God's response?
What foolish act then occurs? **14:39-45**

Aug 16 7) Ch 15-18 Laws for The Land and The Rebellion of Korah

- 1) How could the laws of **Ch 15** bring hope to Israel? Were foreigners allowed in Israel?
- 2) What is the significance of the differences between the sins in **15:22-29** and **15:30-31**?
- 3) What caused a man to be stoned in **15:32-36**? What does God command in **15:37-41**?
- 4) Who leads a rebellion in **Ch 16** and why? How does Moses respond?
- 5) What do Dathan and Abiram charge Moses of in **16:13**? What does God say in **16:21**?
- 6) How do Moses and Aaron respond in **16:22**? What is God's verbal & miraculous response?
- 7) What was done to their censors and why? Did the grumbling stop? Summarize **16:41-50**.
- 8) How is Aaron's priesthood proved in **Ch 17**? According to **17:5, 10** why did God do this?
- 9) What did Israel think would happen in **17:12-13**? What is the focus of **Ch 18**?
- 10) How were the Levites & priests different? How were they to be supported financially?

Aug 23 8) Ch 19-21 Purification Laws; Meribah and The Bronze Serpent

- 1) What is the law of the red heifer? How does **Hebrews 9:13** use this concept?

- 2) What happened if a man touched a corpse? What happened when a man died in a tent? What if an unclean man refused these prescriptions?

- 3) What did Israel complain about in **Ch 20**? How were Moses & Aaron to address the issue?

- 4) What did Moses say & then do? How did God respond? What was this place named?

- 5) Who were the Edomites? What did Moses request of them? What was their response?

- 6) Why does God say Aaron will die? How did Israel react to his death? Who replaced Aaron?

- 7) Describe the battle of Hormah. Why did it happen? What does it show us about God?

- 8) Why did fiery serpents attack Israel? What did Israel ask Moses to do? How did God answer?

- 9) What is the purpose of **Numbers 21:10-20**? What two kings are defeated next?

Aug 30 9) Ch 22-25 The Chronicles of Balaam, Phineas' Slaughter

1) Where is Israel now? Who was Balak & why is he scared? What people does he appeal to?

2) Who is sought out to curse Israel? Why? How does he respond? What does God tell him?

3) How does Balak react to Balaam's decision? Why does Balaam refuse a second time?

4) What does Balaam agree to do? How does God answer? In **22:22**, why is God angry?

5) What does "the angel of the LORD" then do? What did YHWH do for Balaam?

6) Why does Balaam go on to meet Balak? What does Balak do for Balaam?

7) What 1st set of words did God give Balaam? What 2nd set of words did God give?

8) What changes in Balaam's third inquiry? What happens to him & what does God tell him?

9) How is the fourth prophecy different than the others?

10) What sin does Israel then commit? What does Phineas do & how did God respond?
What does God command about the Midianites? Why?

Sep 6 10) Ch 26-29 A New Generation, New Leadership, and New Laws

1) What is the purpose of the census in **Ch 26**? How have the numbers changed from earlier?
Who is mentioned in **26:61** and why?

2) Why did the daughters of Zelophehad come to Moses? How do Moses and God respond?

3) What does God command of Moses in **27:12-14**? What does Moses ask of God?

4) What instructions did God give Moses for transferring authority to Joshua?

5) What admonition does God give in **28:2**? What laws are given in this chapter?
How did these laws and this calendar give hope for Israel?

6) What was the daily offering? (**28:3-8**) What was the weekly offering? (**28:9-10**)
What was the monthly offering? (**28:11-15**)

7) What was Passover and Unleavened Bread (**28:16-25**) and the Feast of Weeks (**28:26-31**)?

8) What was the Blowing of Trumpets (**29:1-6**)? What was the Day of Atonement (**29:7-11**)?
What was the Feast of Booths (**29:12-38**)?

Sep 13

11) Ch 30-33

Midianites, Eastern Tribes, and Journey Summary

1) What were the laws on vows? What do we learn about women in **Ch 30**?

2) What did God ask of Moses in **Ch 31**? Did everything go as planned? Why was Moses angry?

3) What did God require for cleansing? What did He require them to do with the spoils of war?

4) Who requested to live east of the Jordan? How did Moses respond?

5) What do the eastern tribes promise to do for Israel? How does Moses warn them?

6) What does **33:2** tell us that Moses did? What stands out about the journey summary?

7) What does **33:40** tell us about the Canaanite King?

8) What commands does God give Moses in **33:50-56**? How would the land be distributed?

Sep 20 12) Ch 34-36 Dividing the Land, Special Cities, Inheritance Laws

1) How much land was promised to Israel? (Consult a map) Who would apportion the land?

2) Why were the Levites given cities? What farmland did the Levites receive?

3) What were the cities of refuge? Where are they? Who could use these cities?

4) Who was to judge between the slayer and the blood avenger?

5) What happened to one guilty of manslaughter? What about murder?

6) Why was a ransom payment not allowed for murder?

7) Who approaches Moses with a question in **36:1-4**? What is their concern?

8) What answer did God give Moses for this problem?

Sep 27 13) Conclusion and Catch-Up Day