

BOOKS OF THE BIBLE STUDY QUESTIONS

by WAYNE PALMER

N U M B E R S

A landscape photograph of a hillside with olive trees and dry grass under a blue sky with clouds. The scene is a rural, hilly area with several olive trees in the foreground and middle ground. The grass is dry and yellowish-brown. The sky is bright blue with scattered white clouds. The overall mood is peaceful and natural.



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INTRODUCTION

The Book of Numbers focuses on the wilderness wanderings of Israel. It begins at Mount Sinai after Moses receives the Ten Commandments and God's directives for Israel's worship.

After the tabernacle and its furnishings are consecrated, the tribes are counted, and then God leads His people toward the Promised Land. Numbers relates the faithlessness of Israel over forty years of wandering, yet shows God's faithfulness in providing His people's needs as He guides them home.

AUTHORSHIP

Moses wrote Numbers in addition to Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy.

PURPOSE

For all the world, it must have looked like mass chaos and confusion as Moses and Aaron pushed a million people across the wilderness to the Promised Land. But Numbers shows us that God was watching over His children from the mighty pillar of cloud and fire, ordering them, guiding them through the wilderness, guarding them from harm, providing for all their needs, and making sure not a single child was lost.

OUTLINE

For the purposes of this study, we will divide Numbers into three parts to reflect the stages of their journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land.

1. From Mount Sinai to Kadesh (chapters 1–12)
2. From Kadesh to Transjordan (chapters 13–21)
3. Israel on the Plains of Moab (chapters 22–36)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

FROM MOUNT SINAI TO KADESH— NUMBERS 1–12

Exodus and Leviticus recorded God's bringing Israel out of slavery in Egypt. He led them to Mount Sinai, where He established the moral, civil, and ceremonial laws for Israel and instructed Moses to build the tabernacle and have holy garments made for the priests. The Book of Numbers begins at Mount Sinai just a little more than a year after the exodus. The tent of meeting and ark of the covenant have been built and consecrated, and God makes final preparations to lead Israel to a place called Kadesh, a city on the southern boundary of the Promised Land. He begins with a census of the Israelite warriors.

Israel's Warriors

This census showed how mightily the number of Israel's children grew while in slavery—a fact attested to by the ruthless way the Egyptians mistreated the Israelite slaves. This census was not taken to make Israel confident of its own military might, but to give them confidence in what God could do for them with His mighty hands—despite trying situations such as bitter slavery or this barren wilderness.

Read 1:1–46.

Q 1: What are some surprising observations when you consider the number of warriors from each tribe?

A 1: Jacob's firstborn, Reuben, is one of the smaller, less influential tribes (Genesis 35:22; 49:3–4). The largest single tribe is Judah—the tribe that will bring us Jesus Christ. Joseph is represented by the two tribes Ephraim and Manasseh. When their numbers are combined, the offspring of Joseph number second only to Judah. The tribe of Levi is not numbered in this military census.

Levites Exempted

The Lord set aside the tribe of Levi for special service in Israel. Theirs was a spiritual service, not a military service. Their job was to move, maintain, and protect the tabernacle and its furnishings.

Read 1:47–54.

Q 2: Why did the Levites camp around the tabernacle?

A 2: They shielded or separated the Israelites from defiling the holy things of God. They served as a reminder of our sins, which separated us from God until Christ Jesus came and took our sins on Himself and paid the penalty we deserve on the cross.

Arrangement of the Camp

To see the beauty of chapter 2, try to visualize sending a drone high above the Israelite camp. In the center is the tent of meeting or tabernacle. Camped immediately around the tabernacle on all sides is the tribe of Levi. The twelve military tribes (remember that Joseph's sons count as two tribes) lay outside the Levites, arranged in four camps of three tribes each. These four camps are located on the east, north, south, and west. But the doorway of each tent in each tribe faces the tabernacle. All of Israelite life is centered on God—whose pillar of cloud and fire rises from the tabernacle to spread over the entire nation of Israel to give them shade by day, and the light and heat of fire by night.

Read chapter 2. (Notice that the center verse of this chapter, v. 17, is the tent of meeting.)

Q 3: Which tribe sets out first to lead the nation of Israel?

A 3: The tribe of Judah—the tribe from which Jesus will come to be our Good Shepherd, fight our battles, and lead us to the promised land of heaven.

Q 4: What do these careful arrangements tell us about God?

A 4: Moving a nation this large from place to place through the wilderness could have been a logistical nightmare. But God is a God of order. Because of this order, every warrior and family in Israel knew exactly where to go and in what order. It avoided traffic jams and allowed Israel to break camp, move, and set up camp again efficiently.

Sons of Aaron

In chapter 3, God lays out the specific responsibilities of the Levites. We begin with the family the Lord chose to oversee their Levite cousins—Moses' brother Aaron (the high priest), and his sons, the priests and future high priests.

Read 3:1–4.

Q 5: Why did Moses again mention the disaster that befell Aaron's two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu?

A 5: The priests, their Levite cousins, and all the other Israelite tribes needed to remember and respect the holiness of God. They needed to be careful to approach God and His holy things only in the ways the Lord Himself had prescribed for them. Since the Levites were in charge of moving, carrying, assembling, maintaining, and guarding the tabernacle and its furnishings, they needed to pay close attention to God's directions, lest they defile God's things and be destroyed the way Aaron's two sons were.

Duties of the Levites

God reveals His orderliness again, as He sets out the specific responsibilities of the Levites. He begins by recalling the names of the three sons of Levi (Gershon, Kohath, and Merari) whose descendants form the three divisions

of Levites. Their descendants are listed (and thus numbered or counted) and given specific responsibilities related to the tent of meeting.

Read 3:5–39.

Q 6: What assignments were given to the three divisions?

A 6: The Gershonites carried the curtains and cloths that made up the tent; the Kohathites carried the holy furnishings (e.g., ark of the covenant, lampstand, altar); the Merarites carried the tent frames, bases, and tent pegs. All three divisions were in close proximity to the holy things, but the Kohathites actually handled those holy things, so they had to be very careful to give God His due reverence.

Q 7: What do you notice about the placement of the three divisions and the priests around the tent of meeting?

A 7: The three Levite divisions camped/guarded the sides (north and south) and back (west) of the tabernacle. The priests and high priest camped/guarded the front (east) of the tent of meeting—protecting the holy furnishings from being defiled and the Israelites from being destroyed for inappropriately approaching the tabernacle.

Redemption of the Firstborn

At first glance, this section might seem totally disconnected from the material before it, but it isn't. To free Israel from slavery in Egypt, God struck down the firstborn of Egypt. When He did this, He set aside the firstborn of Israel (pointing ahead to His very own firstborn and only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ). Instead of assigning all the firstborn of the various tribes to attend His holy things, God chose the tribe of Levi to serve as their substitutes.

Read 3:40–51.

Q 8: How can we see Jesus Christ, our Savior, in this redeeming of the firstborn?

A 8: After the firstborn were counted, the Levites took their places man for man—which left 273 extra firstborn. Instead of ignoring this discrepancy, these extra firstborn were each redeemed at the price of five shekels. Because Jesus Christ is God's only-begotten Son, He was able to redeem each and every human by Himself, at the price of His blood shed on the cross.

Duties of the Kohathites

Kohath's descendants (which included Moses and Aaron) were put in charge of carrying the most holy items in the tabernacle. Notice how orderly God's directions are—and how He wants to protect the Kohathites from destroying themselves by carelessly mishandling the things He has declared holy.

Read chapter 4.

Q 9: What role did the priests play in supervising the work of the Kohathites?

A 9: They first covered the ark of the covenant and all the other holy things with coverings, then assigned each individual Levite his specific responsibility within the tabernacle.

Q 10: How should Christians imitate the great reverence, fear, and care of the Kohathites?

A 10: We would do well to treat our church altars and their furnishings with reverence because of the body and blood of Christ that adorn them during Holy Communion. Likewise, we should hold the Word of God and the Sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion with such reverence and care as the Kohathites handled the furnishings of the tent of meeting—guarding the Word and Sacraments from being defiled by false teaching; and protecting those who would partake of Holy Communion from harming themselves because they do not discern the body and blood of Christ.

FINAL PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY TO THE PROMISED LAND

Now that the Israelite camp is laid out in order, and everyone has their marching orders, Moses attends to some final preparations before the people head out to the Promised Land.

Unclean People

During Moses' forty days on Mount Sinai, God gave him purity laws (recorded in Leviticus 13–15). These laws governed the Israelite nation as it camped around the tent of meeting. God's presence made that ground holy, therefore those who were ceremonially unclean had to be removed from the camp until they were cleansed. This protected the individuals and the entire Israelite nation from God's wrath.

Read 5:1–4.

Q 11: What did the ceremonial purity laws teach the Israelites about their relationship to God?

A 11: Ceremonial uncleanness was symbolic of our sin, which separates us from God and makes us deserving of death. But Jesus took our sin upon Himself and paid its penalty in His death on the cross. Through Holy Baptism, He washes away our sins and makes us clean to live in His presence. Jesus has freed us from the ancient rules of purity, and God's Word and Sacraments provide us spiritual purity.

Confession and Restitution

God was not merely concerned with restoring the relationship between individual Israelite sinners and Himself—He also wanted to deal with the damage their sins would do to one another. He knew that His nation would be divided if sins one Israelite committed against another went unresolved. So He established rules to restore the relationship between Israelites who sinned against one another.

Read 5:5–10.

Q 12: Why is it important to realize that our sins harm our fellow Christians and are not simply a matter between God and ourselves?

A 12: When we sin against other Christians and fail to repent (confess those sins to one another and seek forgiveness), we can drive other Christians to become inactive. If that continues, it can cause our congregation to splinter and split. Since we are all together the Body of Christ, it is vital to seek reconciliation with one another through repentance, confession, and granting forgiveness to one another.

Test for Adultery

Another divisive factor among the Israelites was a husband who was suspicious that his wife was unfaithful to him. In order to reveal the truth, God provided a test in which He would directly intervene to expose a wife's guilt or innocence.

Read 5:11–31.

Q 13: Why is marital faithfulness so important for God's children in every generation?

A 13: God designed and established marriage to be the foundation of society. Though it is afflicted by the sinfulness of husbands and wives, God offers His peace, forgiveness, and strength to couples who repent of their sins and lean upon Him. In the Old Testament, the punishment for marital unfaithfulness was death. But in Christ Jesus, we can repent, and our marriages can be restored.

Nazirite Vow

Some Israelites would be moved by the Holy Spirit to freely, voluntarily take a vow to separate themselves from normal living and dedicate themselves to serve the Lord. The Nazirite typically determined the length of his separation, though in some cases the Spirit chose the Nazirite vow to be lifelong (Samson and Samuel, for example). In this section, Moses lays out God's law governing the Nazirite vow—showing that God expects His people to take their vows seriously because He does.

Read 6:1–21.

Q 14: How is the role of the Nazirite continuing in the Christian Church today?

A 14: Jesus abolished the Nazirite role, but we Christians are free to dedicate ourselves for special service to our Lord (e.g., voluntary mission trips, teaching Sunday School). Also, we are permitted to take vows (e.g., marriage, oath of office, testifying in court) and know that God holds those vows very seriously. Thanks to Jesus Christ, there is forgiveness even when we break our vows.

Aaron's Blessing

God gave Aaron the words of a blessing used in worship in the Old and New Testaments and throughout the Christian Church to this day.

Read 6:22–27.

Q 15: What is the significance of the name Lord being repeated three times in this blessing?

A 15: It reflects the three persons of the Holy Trinity—and even the work the Scriptures ascribe to each. God the Father blesses us with all the provisions needed for this life and keeps and protects us; God the Son became man to permit us to look upon His face, and out of grace He sacrificed Himself for our sins; God the Holy Spirit gives us peace through the faith He creates in us.

Q 16: What does it mean that God puts His name upon His people?

A 16: God claims Israel as His people and gives them the right to claim Him as their God. This sense of family or belonging also applies in Baptism where we are baptized “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

Offerings at the Tabernacle’s Consecration

It is now time for the Israelites to present their thank offerings to God as the tabernacle is consecrated, which means dedicated and set aside for the Lord’s service. For twelve days, the chief of each of the twelve tribes of Israel presented identical offerings to show their thanks to God for bringing Israel out of slavery in Egypt.

Read chapter 7.

Q 17: Why do the tribes give the Levites six wagons and twelve oxen to pull them?

A 17: The Gershonite division will use two wagons to transport the curtains for the tent of meeting through the wilderness. The Merarite division will use four wagons to carry the frames and bases on which these curtains are spread.

Q 18: Why were no wagons given to the Kohathite division?

A 18: God commanded the Kohathites to physically carry the holy items, including the ark of the covenant. Each of these items was made of wood overlaid with gold, and carried by long wooden poles overlaid with gold. In 2 Samuel 6, King David will experience a great disaster when he tries to bring the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem on a cart.

Seven Lamps

The single lampstand (in Hebrew, “*menorah*”) held seven lamps, and was sometimes known as “the seven lamps.” It stood in the Holy Place in front of the curtain, which separated that space from the Most Holy Place where the ark of the covenant stood. It was designed to shine its light forward onto the table of the presence, which held twelve loaves of bread, one for each tribe in Israel (see Exodus 25:37). After Moses set this in place, the tabernacle was complete and Israel was ready to move on to the Promised Land.

Read 8:1–4.

Q 19: What was significant about the lampstand and its seven lamps?

A 19: There were no windows in the tabernacle; the walls and ceiling were formed by thick curtains hanging over the tabernacle frames. So the only light for the priests came from these seven lamps on the menorah. It was truly God’s light shining in the darkness. In that way, it symbolized Jesus Christ, who is the Light of the world. It may

also remind us of the heavenly throne room scene in Revelation 4:5: “And before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.” The seven spirits are also known as the sevenfold Spirit—that is, the Holy Spirit.

Cleansing of the Levites

The Levites took the place of the firstborn to serve the priests at the tabernacle. In this divine service, the people of Israel would lay their hands on the heads of the Levites who represented them. Then the Levites in turn laid their hands on the heads of the sacrificial animals that would die to cleanse them of their sins so that they would be able to serve their holy God without defiling His tabernacle by their sins.

Read 8:5–22.

Q 20: What is the significance of the laying on of hands here and in the other Israelite sacrifices?

A 20: This gesture represents the transference of sin and guilt from one to another. The Israelites lay their hands on the heads of the Levites who will bear away their guilt. The Levites lay their hands on the heads of the sacrificial animals who will bear away the guilt of both the Israelites and the Levites. All of this points forward to the words of John the Baptist, who points to Jesus and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Retirement of the Levites

The Levites were required to disassemble, carry, and reassemble the parts of the tabernacle. In mercy, God set age limits for the Levites who would do this hard physical labor. Levites began these labors at age 25, but retired at age 50. After that time, they could still serve as guards and instruct the younger Levites but were spared the heavy work. (The priests were able to serve at an older age.)

Read 8:23–26.

Q 21: How do these age limits show God’s mercy and concern for the Levites?

A 21: It would not be surprising if the Egyptians showed no such mercy to the Israelite slaves, letting them retire from their labors when they turned fifty. God cares about the health of His servants and wants them to be in good physical shape when they retire. We do well to care for our pastors and other church workers as well.

Passover Celebrated

On the one-year anniversary of the Passover and deliverance from Egypt, God commanded Israel to celebrate the Passover at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Read 9:1–14.

Q 22: How is this Passover celebration like our celebration of the Lord’s Supper?

A 22: The Israelites slaughtered their Passover lambs and ate their meat, thereby giving God thanks for the animals who died that they might be forgiven, protected from their enemies, and set free from slavery. In Holy Communion, we eat the very same body and blood that Jesus, our Passover Lamb, sacrificed to death on the cross to forgive our sins, protect us from the devil, and set us free from death and hell.

Q 23: How did God show His mercy to the men who honored their dead by taking care of their corpses, but became ceremonially unclean by doing so?

A 23: He permitted them to wait one month and still be able to eat the Passover. In fact, for the sake of these men, God had the entire Israelite camp wait that extra month so they could celebrate the Passover in the second month before setting out from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land.

Cloud Covering the Tabernacle

God directed Israel's travels through the wilderness by His miraculous pillar of cloud and fire. When the cloud lifted from the tabernacle, they set out, and when it remained, they stayed encamped. So clearly God guided every step the nation took across the wilderness.

Read 9:15–23.

Q 24: What extra benefits did Israel receive from the pillar of cloud by day and fire by night?

A 24: This pillar was a perpetual reminder that God was present with His people—something they could look at any time, day or night. But it also spread out as a giant cloud covering the entire nation, shading them from the blazing desert sun. At night, it was fire to give light and warmth from the cold desert night.

Silver Trumpets

God commanded Moses to have two silver trumpets made to signal the nation when it was time to set out on their march through the wilderness. These would also be used in times of war and at the sacrifices and feasts.

Read 10:1–10.

Q 25: What other significant times do we see trumpets used in Scripture?

A 25: When God came down on Mount Sinai and recited the Ten Commandments to Israel, a loud trumpet blasted from the mountain and caused the people to tremble (Exodus 19:16). Christ's return on Judgment Day will also include "the sound of the trumpet of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

JOURNEY TO KADESH

Israel Leaves Sinai

In the second month of the Israelite calendar (which would have fallen over April and May of 1445 BC), a year and a month after leaving Egypt, the Israelites set out from Mount Sinai on their journey toward the southern border of the Promised Land.

Read 10:11–36.

Q 26: As the Israelite tribes set out, where was the ark of the covenant located among them?

A 26: It led the way (v. 33) carried by Levites from the division of Kohath—it symbolized God guiding His people.

Q 27: Where was the rest of the tent of meeting and its furnishings?

A 27: The first three tribes under Judah followed the ark, then two Levite divisions (Gershonites and Merarites) carried the tent, frames, and bases. The next three tribes set out, and the Kohathites carried the holy furnishings in the middle of the twelve tribes. This symbolized God in the midst of His people. When the ark found a place of rest to set up camp, the Gershonites and Merarites had the tent of meeting set up by the time the Kohathites arrived with the holy things.

People Complain

Moses recorded few events along the way. But those he recorded almost always involved the Israelites grumbling and complaining about the way God was guiding them. Sadly, the Book of Numbers is not the glorious record of a nation humbly and willingly suffering hardship with a deep trust in and gratitude toward the God who set them free.

Read 11:1–15.

Q 28: How was Israel's behavior in the wilderness sadly similar to our behavior through this life?

A 28: We also quickly forget God's love and goodness, lose confidence in His guidance and provision for our life, and grumble and complain about the hardships we encounter.

Q 29: How does God help us rise above this faithless behavior?

A 29: His Scriptures remind us of God's great power, His promises, and His trustworthiness. If He did not withhold His own Son from suffering and death for our salvation, we should know He will not withhold any good thing we need for this life. When we receive Jesus Christ's body and blood in Holy Communion, He strengthens us in faith and helps us learn contentment in any and every situation because we know God is with us always.

Elders Appointed to Aid Moses

When Israel complained and wept three days into their journey, Moses cried out to God for help. God provided a solution in two parts. First He lightened Moses' load by giving him aides; then He miraculously fed the people to put a stop to their crying.

Read 11:16–30.

Q 30: Why did Joshua react so strongly against the two elders who did not make it to the consecration in verse 26?

A 30: He feared they were rising up against Moses, challenging his leadership. When Moses expressed his desire for all the Israelites to be prophets, he revealed his exhaustion and his deep humility.

Q 31: In what way was Moses' desire fulfilled at the Pentecost after Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension?

A 31: God the Father poured out His Holy Spirit upon all the believers without measure. So we are a nation of royal priests sent out to share God's mercy in Jesus Christ with the world.

Quail and a Plague

To satisfy Israel's hunger, God sent a strong wind over the sea that blew a huge flock of quail over and around the Israelite camp. It is likely the birds were too exhausted to flee when the Israelites approached them.

Read 11:31–35.

Q 32: Why did God give the quail, then strike down the people who ate it?

A 32: The huge flock of birds should have restored Israel's confidence in God's provision. But the Israelites responded by spending an enormous amount of time killing and collecting large quantities of birds. This response showed they did not trust the Lord to continue providing their daily needs.

Miriam and Aaron Oppose Moses

After stopping off at Mount Sinai, God intended to bring Israel into the Promised Land a little over a year after He brought them out of Egypt. Instead, He ended up condemning them to forty years of wandering through the wilderness because of rebellion that spread through the Israelite camp. It all started with Aaron and Miriam, Moses' older brother and sister.

Read chapter 12.

Q 33: What do you suspect was behind Miriam and Aaron's rebellion?

A 33: The text states the reason they rebelled was Moses' marriage to a foreign, that is, Ethiopian woman. It could also have been jealousy that Moses was their younger brother, because he had a stammering tongue that they didn't have, and perhaps because he was raised in

Pharaoh's household. They also took pride that God had revealed Himself to them as well as Moses. Whatever the causes, they were looking at Moses the human, rather than Moses the prophet God had chosen. Like Israel, they didn't realize their rebellion against Moses was actually rebellion against God.

Q 34: How does God show both Law and Gospel?

A 34: First, since Moses will not defend himself, God shows Gospel by quickly stepping in to vindicate His choice of Moses, and to keep the nation from joining in on Aaron and Miriam's rebellion. To Miriam, the Lord first shows Law through the leprosy, then Gospel by healing her. He commands Miriam to remain ceremonially unclean outside the camp for seven days, perhaps to make the lesson sink in. The Israelites must postpone their trip to the Promised Land by seven days.

FROM KADESH TO TRANSJORDAN—NUMBERS 13–21

REFUSAL TO INVADE CANAAN

Twelve Spies and Their Mixed Reports

God commanded Moses to send the spies into the Promised Land so the Israelites would have a clear idea of the good land He promised to give them and put their trust in His great power to give it to them. It is hard to say how much the spies were influenced by Miriam and Aaron's rebellion, but ten of them clearly lacked faith and trust in God—and spread their unbelief through the nation.

Read chapter 13.

Q 35: Why did God command Moses to send the spies when He knew ten would give a bad report to discourage the Israelites?

A 35: Deuteronomy 1:22 makes it clear that the idea of sending in the spies originated from the Israelites, not from God. Despite all the mighty miracles they had witnessed in Egypt, on Mount Sinai, and along the way, they were not willing to take God at His Word. They wanted human intelligence to assure them they could defeat these nations. So God let them have what they wanted.

Q 36: Why did the spies change their report about the land (between 13:27 and 13:32)?

A 36: The ten unbelieving spies did not deny that the land was good, and the huge cluster of grapes they carried proved that. But they took their eyes off of God and felt it would be impossible for Israel to succeed in the conquest of the land in their own might. When Caleb and Joshua urged the people to turn their attention to God and trust in His might, the spies lied about the land as though it were a wild jungle devouring those who entered it.

People Rebel, Are Punished and Defeated

Poisoned by the bad report of the ten spies, the Israelite people cry at their tents, refusing to obey God's command to enter the Promised Land and conquer it. God sentences them to forty years of wandering. The Israelites change their mind and try to invade the Promised Land—without God's help.

Read chapter 14.

Q 37: What does Moses' intercession for Israel teach us about Jesus' intercession for us?

A 37: God's righteous wrath and justice demanded punishment for Israel's disobedience—and demands it for ours. Yet Moses appealed to God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—His unchangeable nature and God's greater mercy won out. Likewise, Jesus went to the cross to suffer the punishment we deserve for our sins, and for the sake of His blood, He sits at the Father's right hand interceding for us—even in our times of stubborn, sinful rebellion.

RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS

Laws about Sacrifices and Unintentional Sins

Despite Israel's persistent grumbling and disobedience, God is gracious and forgiving. Targeting those under twenty years old, He gives laws about the sacrifices they will offer when they reach the Promised Land. He also restates the sacrifices prescribed for sins committed unintentionally. At the same time, God does not ignore the older Israelites who will die in the wilderness. He offers mercy to those who repent, and promises not to forsake their children and grandchildren.

Read 15:1–31.

Q 38: What comfort does it bring when you think about God's promises to provide and care for your generation and the generations yet to come?

A 38: God has been faithful throughout all generations and will remain faithful until Christ returns. Whenever it may be our turn to leave our loved ones behind—spouse, brothers and sisters, children and grandchildren—God will be with them and faithfully provide for them until the end of time.

A Sabbath-Breaker Executed

After Israel was disciplined for their rebellion against God, they began to observe the commands and regulations of God more closely. When an Israelite was found breaking the Sabbath, they obeyed God explicitly.

Read 15:32–36.

Q 39: Why does God show such harsh judgment for this sinner instead of mercy?

A 39: In Exodus 31:12–16, God clearly taught the meaning of the Sabbath, and laid down very strict rules demanding execution for anyone who worked on the Sabbath. Now consider the context of this Sabbath-breaking—God had just sentenced the nation to forty years of wandering for their disobedience and gave them instruction about unintentional sin. When this man blatantly, defiantly disobeyed God's Third Commandment by gathering sticks on the Sabbath Day, God demanded stern judgment to turn Israel from further rebellion

and disobedience. We will see this rebellion raise its ugly head once more in chapter 16.

Tassels on Garments

In a further attempt to protect Israel by reminding them to strictly observe His commandments, the Lord commanded the Israelites to add tassels to their garments.

Read 15:37–41.

Q 40: Why did God command the wearing of tassels?

A 40: In light of the Sabbath-breaker, God used an outward reminder that would brush the hands and fingers of the Israelites every time they walked around. The tassels were to remind them to diligently obey God's Commandments. God was giving the Israelites a tool to help fight off their sinful urge to rebel and disobey God.

Korah's Rebellion

God gave the Levites a tremendous, important position in Israel, especially the Kohathite division, which was assigned to guard and carry the holy furnishings of the tent of meeting. But that position went to their head, and Korah the grandson of Kohath and great-grandson of Levi led a rebellion against Moses and Aaron.

Read chapter 16.

Q 41: Why was this rebellion so dangerous?

A 41: Korah and the other three leaders clearly thought Moses had shown favoritism to his brother Aaron to make him high priest. Korah was ambitious to become the high priest instead. He was able to convince and gather 250 influential Israelite leaders to stand with him against Moses and Aaron. This group would have had a huge influence on the fickle Israelites.

Q 42: What important lesson do we learn from the way Moses dealt with Korah and the others?

A 42: Moses first summoned them to come so he could teach and instruct them, but they stubbornly refused and slandered him. When Moses realized they refused to be instructed, he turned the matter over to God, praying for God to not receive Korah's sacrifice.

Q 43: How did God vindicate Moses and Aaron?

A 43: Korah and his family took their stand against God in stubborn unrepentance, so God caused the earth to open up and swallow them alive. The 250 false leaders were struck down by fire from the Lord.

Q 44: What is so unbelievable about the response of the congregation the next day (see v. 41)?

A 44: Instead of humbling themselves under God, they grumbled against Moses and Aaron for striking down those leaders—again not

realizing they were really grumbling against God. The Lord sent a plague that was only stopped when Aaron ran into the assembly and burned incense to seek the Lord's forgiveness. The people were saved by the intercession of Aaron, their high priest.

Aaron's Staff Buds

In order to stop the persistent grumbling against Aaron, God worked one more miracle with the staff Moses and Aaron used to work the miracles in Egypt.

Read chapter 17.

Q 45: How did this miracle distinguish Aaron from the leaders of the other tribes?

A 45: In one night, God worked the growing cycle of a year in Aaron's staff—the dead branch leafed out, blossomed, and bore fruit.

Duties of Priests and Levites

Once again, God showed His grace and forgiveness. Even though the latest rebellion against God's set order had arisen from the Levite Korah, God gave instructions to protect and provide forgiveness for the Levites that they could continue to serve Him and His people.

Read chapter 18.

Q 46: What is remarkable about the instructions God gave to Aaron in this chapter?

A 46: God called on Aaron the high priest and his family, the priests, to forgive and protect their Levite brothers—even though these brothers rebelled against them, trying to rise out of their position to take the priesthood as well. It parallels God's forgiveness of Adam and Eve, who ate the forbidden fruit in an attempt to rise above their exalted position in creation and become like God.

Laws for Purification

God provided a means to cleanse those who had come in contact with a corpse, the bone of a dead person, or a grave.

Read chapter 19.

Q 47: How does this purification foreshadow the New Testament Christian Sacrament of Baptism?

A 47: When a person was defiled, he or she was cleansed by water being sprinkled on him or her—just as the water of Baptism cleanses us. But it was not simple water alone, but water that carried the ashes of the red heifer sacrificed for cleansing. Likewise, Baptism is not simple water only, but water connected to the Word of God and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ to wash away our sin.

JOURNEY TO MOAB AND CONQUEST OF TRANSJORDAN

Death of Miriam

Moses recorded the death of his sister Miriam.

Read 20:1.

Q 48: Why is Miriam such a significant woman in Israel's history?

A 48: When baby Moses was put in the Nile in the basket, she watched from the shore and offered her mother to nurse him when Pharaoh's daughter found him (Exodus 2:1–10). She led the Israelite women in song after Israel miraculously crossed through the Red Sea (Exodus 15:20–21). She joined Aaron to rebel against Moses' leadership and was briefly struck with leprosy, but then was cleansed and forgiven (Numbers 12).

Waters of Meribah

God tested Israel's faith and confidence by leading them through a dry place where there was no water. Once again, the Israelites responded with grumbling and rebellion.

Read 20:2–9.

Q 49: What is so astonishing about their complaint this time?

A 49: They said they would have been better off if they would have died when the plague broke out after Korah's rebellion.

Q 50: What was Moses and Aaron's response?

A 50: They both humbled themselves and fell on the ground before the entrance of the tent of meeting.

Moses Strikes the Rock

Though commanded to patiently speak to the rock, Moses struck it in anger.

Read 20:10–13.

Q 51: Where did Moses go wrong here?

A 51: Israel had no reason to doubt God's loving care and providence. They should have known better by now, but they grumbled again. Moses lost his temper and answered in wrath. He was so mad he forgot about God's mighty miracles and took credit along with Aaron for the miracles by saying, "Shall *we* bring water for you out of this rock?" (v. 10).

Q 52: Why was God's judgment on Moses and Aaron so harsh when their sin didn't seem as bad as that of the people?

A 52: The Lord wanted Israel to know Him as a God of grace and mercy,

longsuffering and patient—Moses and Aaron’s words and behavior presented God as being wrathful and spiteful. God was quick to forgive Moses and Aaron, but they had to live with the consequences of their action. The fact that their prophet and high priest would not be leading them into the Promised Land would be a reminder to Israel of their guilt, but also remind them God was patient and gracious toward them, totally different from the anger, impatience, and wrath Moses and Aaron had portrayed.

Edom Refuses Passage

Moses requested permission for the children of Jacob to pass through the land of the descendants of his brother Esau on their way to the Promised Land.

Read 20:14–21.

Q 53: How was the Edomites’ treatment of the Israelites so different from their father’s treatment of Jacob?

A 53: Humanly speaking, Esau had every reason to hate Jacob for all the ways Jacob had cheated him. Yet, when Jacob returned to Canaan from Laban, Esau welcomed him with tears and an embrace, and brought armed men to escort them safely to their destination. Though the Israelites had done nothing to hurt these Edomites, they refused to welcome their brother Israelites and escort them through their territory.

Q 54: What lesson can we learn for our own lives from this?

A 54: Family discord and resentment can be passed down through generations if we do not seek God’s help to forgive and live in peace with one another.

Death of Aaron

Moses and Aaron install the high priest’s oldest surviving son, Eleazar, as Israel’s second high priest, and Aaron dies.

Read 20:22–29.

Q 55: How does Aaron’s death point out the need for a new high priesthood in Jesus Christ?

A 55: Aaron’s death was a reminder of his sin and disobedience of God. Imperfect high priests who offered the blood of animals could never make the children of Israel perfect. They pointed ahead to the perfect High Priest and the perfect Sacrifice, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God.

Arad Destroyed

A Canaanite king who lived in the southern part of the Promised Land attacked Israel without provocation.

Read 21:1–3.

Q 56: What lesson did Israel learn from the incident of the twelve spies?

A 56: When God forbid Israel to enter into the Promised Land to fight, the tribes went up anyway and were defeated because of their disobedience. This time they sought God's permission before going to fight.

Q 57: How was devoting those cities to destruction another act of obedience?

A 57: The Israelites could have convinced themselves that God was now giving them the Promised Land and tried to keep those cities for themselves. Instead, they totally destroyed them.

Bronze Serpent

Moses led the people south out of the Promised Land back toward the Red Sea. Having a foretaste of the Promised Land, the impatient Israelites began grumbling again.

Read 21:4–9.

Q 58: How did the bronze serpent on the pole save the Israelites?

A 58: The serpent did not save them—looking to the serpent on the pole in faith and trust in God's promise saved the Israelites.

Q 59: How does this foreshadow Jesus' salvation?

A 59: In John 3:14–15, Jesus refers to this incident, "And 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."

Arriving in Moab

In a series of moves and encampments, God led Israel to the east shore of the Jordan River.

Read 21:10–20.

Q 60: What is significant about the "Song of the Well" in Numbers 21:17–18?

A 60: God had led them to a place where they could find water just digging beneath the ground with their staffs. Their time of wilderness wandering was nearly over.

Conquest of Transjordan

Two Amorite kings refused to permit Israel to pass through their territory, but rode out with their armies instead.

Read 21:21–35.

Q 61: What is significant about these two victories in the Transjordan (land across the Jordan River from Canaan)?

A 61: The tribes of Reuben and Gad would settle this land, as well as half of the tribe of Manasseh, son of Joseph.

ISRAEL ON THE PLAINS OF MOAB—NUMBERS 22–36

BALAAM BLESSES ISRAEL, BUT ISRAEL DISOBEYS

Balak Summons Balaam

The people of Moab (descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot [Genesis 19:37]) greatly fear Israel, who is camped on their border. Balak their king summons a soothsayer named Balaam to put a curse on the Israelites.

Read 22:1–21.

Q 62: Why did Balak think Balaam could curse the Israelites?

A 62: Ancient peoples believed their gods were dependent on the food and drinks sacrificed to them, so priests and soothsayers could manipulate the hungry gods (something like the way Jacob was able to buy Esau's birthright with a bowl of stew).

Q 63: Why did Balaam consult God again in Numbers 22:19 when he already knew God's answer?

A 63: Balaam was greedy for the money Balak was offering and hoped to find a way to convince God to change His mind and allow Balaam to collect it.

Q 64: What comfort does God's refusal to change His mind bring when we think of Satan's attempts to harm us?

A 64: We are reminded that Satan is a creature completely under God's control. Nothing can curse us when we are under God's blessing and protection.

Balaam's Donkey and the Angel

Balaam mocked God's Word by going along with Balak's representatives, so God mocked him by giving his donkey the power of speech.

Read 22:22–41.

Q 65: Where do we see Balaam's folly in this passage?

A 65: Balaam was so filled with rage that he argued with his donkey, apparently oblivious to the fact that his donkey is talking to him with rational speech. The angel of the Lord brought him to his senses and commanded him to speak only what God told him—he would indeed serve as a mouthpiece of the Lord to Balak.

Balaam's First Oracle

God gave Balaam his first oracle—Balaam could not curse the people God had not cursed.

Read 23:1–12.

Q 66: How was God trying to break through Balaam's greed and move him to repentance and faith?

A 66: In Numbers 23:10, God put these words on Balaam's lips, "Let me die the death of the upright." Sadly, that would not happen.

Balaam's Second Oracle

Thinking Balaam was overawed by seeing the whole nation of Israel, Balak moved him to a spot where he would see only a small part of it, thinking that then he might feel confident enough to curse it.

Read 23:13–30.

Q 67: What is the second message God gives Balaam for Balak?

A 67: Yahweh, God of Israel, does not change His mind like humans do—Israel remains under His blessing.

Q 68: How is God trying to bring Balak to repentance and the salvation of faith?

A 68: Balak and his people are not at risk from Israel—God will give them the Promised Land, not Moab's land. But as God promised Abraham (Genesis 12:3), those who bless Abraham's descendants will be blessed, but those who curse them will be cursed. Stop opposing God and seek His forgiveness.

Balaam's Third Oracle

Balak did not listen to God. He led Balaam to yet a third place from which he hoped God would be pleased to curse Israel.

Read 24:1–14.

Q 69: What was different about this third oracle of Balaam?

A 69: Balaam no longer resorted to seeking omens, but was directly inspired by the Holy Spirit and pointed that out.

Q 70: How did this third location backfire on Balak?

A 70: From this location, Balaam could see the beauty of God's arrangement for the camp of Israel with the twelve tribes camped out in threes to the north, south, east, and west around the tribe of Levi, which itself was camped around the tabernacle in the center. This oracle was remarkable because Balaam told us what God sees when He looks at His grumbling, rebellious, and complaining people (and you and me)—God sees the spotless Bride of Christ washed clean in the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God.

Balaam's Final Oracle

Balak was furious at Balaam for blessing Israel three times. With one final oracle, God gave Balaam and us a look at the future.

Read 24:15–25.

Q 71: Where can we see Jesus in this final oracle?

A 71: By the eyes of prophecy, Balaam saw Christ in verse 17. But it was revealed to Balaam that the time of Christ was in the distant future, not at that time in history or near to it. This prophesy pointed to the coming of the Messiah, who would rise out of Jacob in approximately 1,500 years.

Baal Worship at Peor

The daughters of Moab invited the Israelites to sacrifice to their gods.

Read 25:1–9.

Q 72: How do we see God's mercy in the plague that killed nearly 24,000 Israelites?

A 72: Some Israelites remained faithful to the Lord. They gathered to Moses at the tent of meeting, weeping for the unfaithfulness of the other Israelites.

Zeal of Phinehas

Aaron's grandson burned with zeal for the Lord when he saw an arrogant Israelite chief take a Moabite woman into his tent.

Read 25:10–18.

Q 73: How did the gory act of Aaron's grandson Phinehas save Israel?

A 73: This Israelite leader publicly declared his disdain for the First Commandment, and Phinehas honored the Lord above this leader. By doing this, he turned back God's wrath against Israel and was promised a perpetual priesthood for his descendants.

SECOND CENSUS AND NEW LAWS

Census of the New Generation

At the end of the forty years of wandering, God commanded a second census. It showed that none of those who were twenty years or older in the previous census were left—only Moses, Joshua, and Caleb, as God had said.

Read chapter 26.

Q 74: What does this census show about the Lord’s miraculous, fatherly care for Israel during the forty years in the wilderness?

A 74: Overall, the population of Israelite men only decreased by .3 percent. And this was after three devastating plagues because of Israel’s unfaithfulness. Interestingly, Simeon lost 62.5 percent of its population likely due to persistent unfaithfulness—it was one of Simeon’s tribal leaders that Phinehas put to death in the idolatry of Baal of Peor in 25:4.

Daughters of Zelophehad

Five daughters of Zelophehad, an Israelite with no sons, humbly approached Moses and Eleazar the high priest to request their father’s inheritance.

Read 27:1–11.

Q 75: How is this request different from the grumbling and complaints we have seen so often throughout Numbers?

A 75: The daughters came with great humility and reverence. The Lord answered their plea (prayer) with tender grace and mercy.

Joshua to Succeed Moses

The Lord commanded Moses to climb a nearby mountain (Nebo) to behold the Promised Land before he died. The nearness of his death stirred Moses’ concern for Israel, prompting him to ask God to appoint a new leader for Israel.

Read 27:12–23.

Q 76: How was Joshua uniquely qualified to be leader of Israel after Moses’ death?

A 76: Joshua had been Moses’ aide from the first days of the exodus, he had led Israel in battle under Moses, and he with Caleb was one of the two faithful spies who gave a good report of the Promised Land and encouraged Israel to trust God and go up to take that land.

Q 77: Why did Moses not mention Joshua by name when asking God to raise up a man to lead Israel?

A 77: Moses was not arrogant or conceited in his relationship with the Lord. He left room for God to choose who would best lead Israel rather than insist on his own thinking.

Q 78: If Moses was this near to death, why is so much of Numbers and the entire Book of Deuteronomy left?

A 78: In the final chapters of Numbers, Moses wraps up some loose ends, giving further instruction for the people and their leaders. The entire Book of Deuteronomy is a series of farewell sermons.

Summary and Calendar of Sacrificial Services

For the benefit of the new generation of Israelites, the high priest Eleazar, and Joshua the new leader, the Lord provided a convenient summary and calendar of the sacrificial services for Israel.

Read chapters 28 and 29.

Q 79: Looking at this listing of animal sacrifices, what strong impression was God giving the Israelites?

A 79: The blood of a substitute had to be shed to atone for the Israelites' sins.

Israelite Vows

God laid out the rules for enforcing vows voluntarily made before God by Israelite men and women.

Read chapter 30.

Q 80: What is the idea behind a vow?

A 80: A vow is a solemn promise to complete an action. A person swears by God's name, calling upon the Lord to punish him or her if that vow is not kept. It should only be done over important matters (e.g., marriage, testimony in court) about which one is very serious. Breaking vows hurts our reputation and shows a disregard for the Lord and His reputation.

Q 81: Why was there a difference between men and women when it came to vows?

A 81: In Israelite culture, women were usually in dependent relationships with their fathers or husbands. God gave fathers and husbands the right to nullify the vow to safeguard parental and marital relationships.

DEFEAT OF MIDIAN AND SETTLEMENT OF TRANSJORDAN

Vengeance on Midian

God gave Moses a final assignment: to destroy a group of Midianites who had tempted Israel to idolatry and brought a plague among them.

Read chapter 31.

Q 82: Why did Moses send Phinehas the priest (grandson of Aaron) to lead the battle instead of Joshua?

A 82: Phinehas had demonstrated his zeal for God when he stopped the plague on Israel in connection to the Baal of Peor incident back in chapter 25. In a sense, this battle completed God's vengeance on Midian for instigating that idolatry. In Numbers 22:4, Moab talked with the elders of Midian. Though the whole incident between Balaam and Balak spoke of Balak as king of Moab, it is possible Balak was actually a Midianite ruling over land the Midianites had taken from Moab.

Q 83: Why did Israel put Balaam to death?

A 83: Balaam was at the heart of the idolatry that brought the plague on Israel. He had desperately wanted the treasures Balak had offered him if he could get God to curse Israel. When Balaam could not convince God to do so, Balaam advised Balak to send his young women to seduce the Israelite men to adultery and idolatry—thus stirring God's wrath against themselves. See 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; and Revelation 2:14.

Reuben and Gad Settle in Gilead

Two of the tribes asked to take possession of the land Israel conquered east of the Jordan, the lands of kings Sihon and Og, and the Midianites.

Read chapter 32.

Q 84: What fear did Moses have about this request?

A 84: He was afraid a new rebellion like the one at Kadesh-barnea at the instigation of the ten evil spies would begin there at the instigation of two tribes. He feared they would discourage the other tribes from trusting God and going up into the Promised Land.

Q 85: How did the two tribes allay Moses' fears?

A 85: The fighting men vowed to go up to the Promised Land to fight alongside their brothers and only return to their lands when the other tribes had received their possessions.

FINAL PREPARATORY MATTERS

Recounting Israel's Journey

Moses recounted the entire forty-year journey through the wilderness camp by camp.

Read chapter 33.

Q 86: How can a reader find meaning in this list of places?

A 86: We might find reading this list as tedious as reading genealogies, but the Israelites listened to Moses with joy and delight, seeing just how God had faithfully protected them, guided them, and provided for them. We might do something similar if we recall every place we have called home in our own lives.

Q 87: In verse 52, God calls on Israel to “drive out” the Canaanites. Is this different from His command to destroy them all in Deuteronomy 7:2?

A 87: The big point here is that God wanted to make room for the Israelites to live without being influenced by the Canaanites. The incident at Peor indicated that Israel could not resist the influence of its neighbors. The Canaanites could have survived if they would have fled from the land, but they were determined to stay there, and in time, Israel stopped trying to drive them out, leading to Israel's idolatry and eventual exile.

Promised Land's Boundaries

First, God described the boundaries for Israel in the Promised Land. Then He appointed chiefs from each tribe who would divide the land between the tribes.

Read chapter 34.

Q 88: What was significant about the Israelites inheriting the land by lot?

A 88: God would choose where each person would live. He also reminded the Israelites that the land belonged to Him, and it was a gift to them.

Cities of Levites and of Refuge

The tithes and offerings of the Israelites supported the Levites (who in turn supported the priests and their families). But these were not enough for the Levites and their families. So they were given pastureland and cities within each of the tribes of Israel. God hand-selected some of these cities as cities of refuge, places where individuals could flee for safety if they were accused of accidental killing.

Read chapter 35.

Q 89: What happened if someone guilty of intentional murder sought refuge in a city of refuge?

A 89: The matter was carefully investigated by the elders of that city, and the person was put to death.

Q 90: What is significant about the judicial rule in Numbers 35:30?

A 90: On the basis of this rule, the Jewish high priest Caiaphas was unable to use the testimony of the false witnesses against Jesus because their testimonies did not agree.

Inheritance of Daughters

In Numbers 27:1–11, God promised an inheritance for daughters of a man who had no sons. But tribal elders approached Moses with a possible problem.

Read chapter 36.

Q 91: What was the danger of allowing daughters to inherit their father's property?

A 91: If a daughter married a man from another tribe, the sons of that marriage would inherit the land. Since tribal identity came from the father, the land of the daughter's tribe could become the property of the husband's tribe.

Q 92: What remedy did God provide for this situation?

A 92: Daughters who inherited land from their fathers had to marry within their own tribe. Israelite women who did not inherit their father's property were free to marry outside their father's tribe.