

study guide

life in the

WILDERNESS

a study in the book of Numbers

cherry hills

life together

About this Study

Dear Cherry Hills family,

This study is an attempt for us to move deeper into our vision as a church, which is: *To see people of every generation giving themselves fully to Jesus and His mission.* Our strategy for accomplishing this vision is by pursuing *life together* with Jesus, one another and our community and world. So, while this study can certainly be used individually as a way to grow in your relationship with Jesus personally, my prayer is that you might go one step further and use this tool as a way to grow with others, specifically in a life group. We truly believe that we cannot grow as disciples of Jesus without doing it *together*.

So, a word about how to use this study. Each week includes five days of studying the passage of Numbers that we will be preaching on Sunday morning. Our suggestion is that you do the study *before* that Sunday and then use both the study and the message as your discussion guide in your life group. More than anything, I hope your discussions are less about filling out answers and repeating them and more about paying attention to what the Holy Spirit is highlighting for you as you study the passage that week. The two most important questions I will ask every week are: (1) What most stood out to you and why? (2) What do you sense the LORD is prompting you to do as a result of what stood out? In my opinion, learning to pay attention to those two questions is what it means to “walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16)

Foundationally we believe that the Bible is our source of authority in life, and in order to grow deeper with the LORD studying the Bible is a necessary discipline. So...I want to pray for you as you begin this journey with us with a famous prayer from this very book: “May the LORD bless you and keep you; may the LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you; may the LORD turn His face toward you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26).

In Christ,

Pastor Steve

Introduction to Numbers

Author and Date

The author of *Numbers* has traditionally been ascribed to Moses, who wrote Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy as well, though others may have contributed to these writings as well, especially as Deuteronomy records Moses' death. This means that it was written probably between 1446 and 1406 BC. A large part of the book is about preparation for entering the Promised Land, hence the large amount of space dedicated to the counting of the people and their families (note: we will not be spending time in these sections for this particular study). This is why it was given the name *Numbers*, though in Hebrew (in which most of the Old Testament is written) the book of *Numbers* is called "In the Desert" or "In the Wilderness" which seems much more appropriate.

Theme

Numbers presents an account of Israel's preparation to enter the Promised Land, their refusal to enter, and the ensuing wandering in the desert (or wilderness) for the 40-year period that follows. The larger theme of *Numbers* is really about worship. This will be repeated in themes such as: God's presence with His people, His holiness, His faithfulness, His graciousness, and His sovereignty.

Purpose

Much of the content of this book centers on the life of those God had redeemed from slavery in Egypt and their often rebellious and complaining nature culminating in their refusal to take the land God had promised. As people redeemed from the slavery of Sin and Death, we have much to learn from their experience and attitude as we too find ourselves in the "in-between" times, which can feel like a wilderness as we wait for our Heavenly home.

Week 6—Numbers 19

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

Day 1

1. Read Numbers 19:1-22. Take your time and make notes below about what you notice, questions you have, and what stands out to you.

Day 2

1. Read Numbers 19:1-10. Now read Leviticus 1:3-9 and describe the normal sacrifice that must take place for sin. What makes this one in Numbers 19 different? Why might that be?

Red Heifer—According to the NIV Study Bible, “While the words “without defect or blemish,” are familiar to sacrificial language, this particular animal is not familiar. This is a cow, not an ox; it is to be slaughtered, not sacrificed; and it is to be killed outside the camp, not at the holy altar. The ashes are the primary focus of this act, for they will be used in the ritual of water of cleansing. The burning of the animal with its “blood and intestines” (v. 5) is unprecedented in the Old Testament.”

2. This whole ritual was to create water for purification. Describe how this water is made. Why all the red (i.e. heifer, cedar wood, scarlet thread)? What lesson is God teaching them about sin? Why did it take place outside the camp in your opinion?

Purify themselves with water—The ashes from the red heifer were kept outside the camp and would be mixed as needed with water to provide a means of cleansing after contact with dead bodies.

3. Why is it relevant that the people doing the sacrifice were defiled?

Day 3

1. Read Numbers 19:1-10. Why do God's people need a priest to atone for their sins? Did it work permanently? Why or why not? Is there a difference between sin and sins? If so, what is it?

2. Read Hebrews 9:11-14. This passage is a direct reference to Numbers 19, what does it say? What did Jesus' sacrifice accomplish? Did it work permanently? In what way?

3. If Jesus' sacrifice cleansed us permanently, why do we still sin? What do we do with that sin? What does 1 John 1:8-9 say about this? Why is confessing sins still important even if we have been cleansed by Jesus?

Day 4

1. Read Numbers 19:11-22. Why is the stain death such a serious thing to the Lord? Why does it "defile" a person to be near it? What does Habakkuk 1:13 and Isaiah 6:3-5 say about this? Now read 2 Corinthians 5:21 and note what this says? How does that make you feel?

2. Why would a person who did not cleanse themselves be "cut off from the community" (v. 20)? How might this relate to Jesus and the New Testament?

3. When these rituals of cleansing are not observed, what becomes defiled by the lack of cleansing (13, 20)? What does this teach us today in light of 1 Corinthians 6:19-20?

Defile the LORD's Tabernacle—I find it remarkable that the neglect of a person to follow the provision for cleansing not only brings judgment on them but also pollutes the tabernacle itself!

Day 5

1. Read Numbers 19:17-22. What was the effect of the water on a person? How does Numbers 8:5-7 relate to this? Did the water itself cleanse a person or did it symbolize something else? What claim does Jesus make about it in John 4:7-14?

Fresh water—The words for “fresh water” can also be translated as “living water” because it would make that person “clean” again after being in death’s presence.

2. What is the symbol of our purification today? What do the following verses say about it?

Mark 16:16—

Acts 2:38—

Acts 22:16—

3. Have you been baptized? If so, what does it mean to you still today? If not, what is keeping you?

4. After studying this passage this week, how would you answer someone who asked what Numbers 19 has to do with us today?

Conclusion

1. What most stood out to you as you studied Numbers 19 this week? *Why* do you think this was the case?

2. What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to *do* as a result of this? Be prepared to share with your group!

Week 7—Numbers 20:1-13

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

Day 1

1. Though our focus this week will be on vv. 1-13, Read Numbers 20:1-29 and jot down thoughts, questions, and observations you have.

At the Desert of Zin...at Kadesh—This is the same place where the spies brought back their fearful report of the Promised Land and the people rebelled suggesting the time for the next generation to enter is coming close.

Day 2

1. Read Numbers 20:1-5. As the transition from one generation to the next is taking place, how does this generation compare to the last (see Numbers 11:4-9)? What can this teach us about how generational sin can spread? How can we keep it from spreading?

Miriam died—This chapter begins with the death of Miriam (v. 1) and ends with the death of Aaron (v. 28), signifying the end of an era of those who rebelled against the Lord and the chance for the next generation to enter the Promised Land.

2. How does Philippians 2:12-15 speak to the kinds of attitudes God's people displayed in in these verses? Why does Paul speak so strongly against complaining? What are some of the effects it can have on us and our work and service as followers of Jesus?

3. In what situations are you most tempted to be a complainer? What can you learn from these verses in Numbers and Philippians about dealing with that temptation?

Day 3

1. Read Numbers 20:6-8. What was Moses' role between the Lord and people? Compared to Numbers 11, how does Moses handle the people's complaining in these verses?

2. Who is our mediator today? What do the following verses say about this:

1 Timothy 2:5—

Hebrews 8:3-8—

Hebrews 9:11-14—

Hebrews 12:18-24—

Why is Jesus a “better” mediator according to these verses? How does this encourage or inspire you?

3. What were God’s precise instructions to Moses in v. 8? Where do we find God’s instructions for us today? Are you able to follow them faithfully? Why or why not?

Day 4

1. Read Numbers 20:9-11. Based on v. 8, how well does Moses follow God’s instructions? Make note of what Moses did outside of God’s instructions. Why is this important? Why is it still important for us today?

2. What is at the heart of Moses’ disobedience here in your opinion? How can anger keep us from following God with courage and faithfulness still today.

What do the following verses say about anger:

Proverbs 15:1—

Proverbs 30:33—

1 Corinthians 13:4-6—

Ephesians 4:26-27—

James 1:19-21—

3. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4. What does v. 4 tell us about this story and its relation to Christ? How does Jesus speak to this in John 4:7-14? What does this mean for you?

Day 5

1. Read Numbers 10:12-13. What is it about Moses' response to this instance of the people's complaining that will keep him from leading them into the land according to the LORD? Do you find this too harsh? Why or why not? How does Psalm 106:32-33 speak to this?

2. What does this punishment tell us about the standard of perfection that must be met by a mediator who would successfully lead God's people into His rest? Thinking back to Day 3's study of a "mediator", what does this tell us about Jesus?

3. Read Matthew 17:1-3. Who appears with Jesus on the mountain? What does this tell us about God's grace to Moses? What does it tell us about God's grace to us under the new covenant?

Conclusion

1. What most stood out to you as you studied Numbers 20:1-13 this week? *Why* do you think this was the case?
2. What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to *do* as a result of this? Be prepared to share with your group!

Week 8—Numbers 21:4-9

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

Day 1

1. In order to understand the situation in this story, first read Numbers 20:14-21. What happened in those verses? What did this mean for the Israelite's travel? See the map below and notice how much more this added to their journey.



2. Now read Numbers 21:4. Does their situation explain their “impatience”? What might God have wanted them to learn through this setback? How would you have responded to this situation? Why?

3. Read Numbers 21:4-5. How do the Israelites respond in their impatience?

How do the following verses speak to the importance of patience in our journey?

Proverbs 14:29—

Romans 28:22-24—

Romans 12:11-12—

James 5:7-8—

What does God want you to know about having patience through your own journey through the wilderness times? Take time to repent of impatience and ask the Spirit to help you be patient on your journey, even when it isn't going the way you want it to.

Day 2

1. Read Numbers 21:4-6. What is the LORD's response to the people's impatience and complaining? How would you compare it to previous complaints as noted below?

Numbers 11:4-5—

Numbers 14:2—

Numbers 20:5—

2. Before reading the note below, answer why this complaint is so serious to the LORD? Now read the note. Do you agree with what it says? What does it mean to blaspheme God?

We detest...—The people's impatience led them to blaspheme God, to reject His servant Moses and to despise the "bread from heaven" (Ex 16:4). This is the most bitter of their complaints, as the people spurn God's grace.

3. Read Matthew 12:30-32. V. 32 is one of the most misunderstood verses in Scripture and has caused many followers of Jesus to needlessly fear. *Before* reading the note below, what do you think Jesus means? Now read the note and record your thoughts. You may want to read John 16:8-14 and take note of all the Holy Spirit does.

Speaks against the Holy Spirit—"Speaks against" is the same word as blaspheme. According to Jesus in John 16:8-14, it is the Holy Spirit who calls a person to salvation, so to "blaspheme" the Holy Spirit most likely means rejecting God's gift of grace of salvation, similar to how the Israelites reject God's grace to them with the manna.

Day 3

1. Read Numbers 21:7. How is this response by the Israelites different than any other response they have made thus far? Why is this response so important?

2. What do the following verses say about the importance of *and* God's response to *repentance*:

Jeremiah 15:19—

Ezekiel 18:32—

Matthew 11:10—

Luke 5:32—

Luke 15:7—

Acts 2:38—

Acts 3:19—

Romans 2:4—

2 Corinthians 7:10—

2 Peter 3:9—

3. Do you view repentance as a negative or a positive? Why? How do the verses above affect you?

Day 4

1. Read Numbers 21:8-9. How does the LORD respond to the people's repentance? What can that teach us about Him?

Bronze snake—The Hebrew term “bronze” can also be translated as “copper,” and according to the *ESV Study Bible*, “The area through which the Israelites were traveling had copper mines and archaeologists have found a 5-inch long copper snake in a Midianite shrine at Timna, so it seems likely that copper is meant here.” This is significant because it has a red color, so perhaps it is symbolically chosen as the instrument for atonement on this occasion to represent blood.

2. Jesus refers to this incident in John 3:14-17. Read it and answer how the bronze serpent foreshadows Christ and His cross.

3. John 3:16 is perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible but notice how Jesus connects His words to this story in Numbers 21:4-9. What insight does this give you about the Bible? About Jesus?

Day 5

1. Read John 3:14-17 again today. When did you repent and “look up to Jesus” to be saved? If you haven’t yet, why not? Be prepared to share your story of when you looked to Jesus with your group this week. Write it out below:

2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 and spend the rest of today simply by praising Jesus for being “lifted up” for us so we might be saved from the “bite” of sin and death!

Conclusion

1. What most stood out to you as you studied Numbers 21:4-9 this week? *Why* do you think this was the case?

2. What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to *do* as a result of this? Be prepared to share with your group!

Week 9—Numbers 22-24

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

Day 1

1. Read Numbers 22-24. Because this is a longer text, I want to invite you to simply read it over today and make notes of what you notice below. Consider these questions as your guide: what is the main point of this story? What do we learn about God? The Israelites? Where is Jesus in this story?

Day 2

1. Read Numbers 22:1-22a. In chapter 22, what desires and motivations are at work in Balak and Balaam? What actions do these motivations lead to? What can this teach us about our own motivations?

Plains of Moab (22:1)—The Israelites are now back to the staging area to enter the Promised land east of the Jordan and north of the Dead Sea. From here they will launch their attack on Canaan, beginning with Jericho.

The answer the LORD gives me (22:8)—The language here has led some to believe Balaam was a believer in Yahweh, but based on the rest of the narrative and Balaam's condemnation throughout the rest of Scripture (cf. Josh 13:22; 2 Pet 2:15-16; Jude 11; Rev 2:14) it is more likely he is claiming that he is a spokesman for any and every god. For him, Yahweh would just be another god that he could get divine answers from through his pagan rituals.

2. What discoveries does Balaam make in chapter 22 about the LORD and His people? How does this all point back to God's covenant/promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3? How does it apply to us today according to Galatians 3:23-29?

3. How do you understand vv. 20-22a? Is there a contradiction between what God grants in v. 20 with His anger in v. 22? Why or why not? What insight does Jude 11 and 2 Peter 2:15 give us into this situation? Are there times in your life where you might use obedience to God for the wrong intentions? When?

Day 3

1. Read Numbers 22:21-41. What would you say is the main point of this section? Where do you see irony in this story? What does God want Balaam to learn (see especially vv. 20, 35, 38)? What can we learn from this?

2. Can you share a time God spoke to you in a surprising way? Write it out below. What did you learn from that experience?

3. How does God normally speak to His people today? How is He speaking to you in your life in the present moment?

Day 4

1. Read Numbers 23:1-30. What does God do with Balaam's "curses?" Which of his three oracles in this chapter are especially meaningful to you? Why?

2. In this series we are learning that this world is not our home. How does this chapter help us to live with courage and faithfulness even in the wilderness times of life in this world?

3. What does it mean that God is Sovereign? Read Romans 8:18-39 and write down every promise we have because He is sovereign. How can knowing that help us through our own times of wilderness?

The shout of the King is among them (23:21)—This is the first explicit mentioned of the LORD's kingship in the Bible. The fact that it is made by Balaam is ironic because it shows that God as Sovereign can use Balaam, a pagan prophet for His own ends.

Day 5

1. Read Numbers 24:1-25. What makes these oracles even more powerful than the previous ones? How is vv. 15-19 different than the others? What do these verses point to? What do the final three oracles tell us about the future?

The Spirit of God came on him (24:2)—As Ronald Allen notes, “This time there is a significant change. Balaam does not go about his normal routine of sorcery. This time “the Spirit of God came on him.” This unexpected language is used to prepare the reader for the heightened revelation that is about to come from the unwitting messenger. The oracles are building in intensity and in their depth of meaning.

I see him...I behold him...A star will come out of Jacob; a scepter will rise out of Israel (24:17)—Partially fulfilled by David, ultimately this predicts the coming of Jesus, a Messianic ruler. Israel’s future Deliverer will be like a star (see Revelation 22:16) and scepter (see Genesis 49:10) in His royalty and will bring victory over the enemies of His people (v. 19).

2. Read Numbers 25:1-3. Scripture tells us this situation was the result of Balaam’s actions (see Numbers 31:15-16). What does this show us about him and what he learned? What was most important to him? Can you think of any example of this in the New Testament?

3. As the Israelites are on the cusp of entering the Promised Land (cf. 22:1), what is the *main thing* the LORD wants them to learn through this story of Balaam and Balak? What does He want us to learn?

Conclusion

1. What most stood out to you as you studied Numbers 22-24 this week? *Why* do you think this was the case?
2. What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to *do* as a result of this? Be prepared to share with your group!

Week 10—Numbers 27:12-23

Begin each day of your study by asking the LORD to speak to you through His Word.

Day 1

1. Read Numbers 27:12-14. What do these verses teach us about God's holiness? What do they teach us about God's grace?

This mountain (27:12)—As we discover in Deuteronomy 34:1, this is mount Nebo which would have a clear view of Jericho.

2. Read Galatians 6:7-8. How do these verses relate to Moses' situation? Being in the New Testament, does this conflict with your view of living under the New Covenant of Jesus' forgiveness? Why or why not? How would you explain these verses to someone?

3. How was God's command to Moses in 27:12-14 later fulfilled in Deuteronomy 34:1-6? How would you feel if you were Moses? Are there situations in our lives that might be similar? If so, what?

Day 2

1. Read Numbers 27:15-23. What does 27:15-17 reveal about the character of Moses? Would you have responded in a similar way? Why or why not? How could you become more like Moses here?

God who gives breath to all living things (27:16)—This phrase is used elsewhere only in the prayer of Moses and Aaron after Korah’s rebellion (see 16:22). Here Moses uses it after being reminded of his coming death, and he prays for God to provide a new leader for Israel who will be a spiritual shepherd. As Gordon Wenham notes, “God, as the giver of all life, must be specially concerned with the continued existence of His chosen people, Israel.”

2. From what you see in 27:16-23 and from earlier in Numbers, how was Joshua uniquely qualified for the leadership position God was giving him?
3. How is this similar to what Jesus did with His disciples? What do we learn about discipleship from these two examples?

Day 3

1. Read Numbers 27:14-23. How do Moses and God envision Joshua’s leadership? In what ways do you see this as a model for leadership among God’s people today?

2. What are some of the specific duties assigned to Joshua as the new leader of the people (16-20)? How will Joshua's leadership *differ* from that of Moses? How will it be *similar*? What role will Eleazar now have? What does this show us?

3. Read Hebrews 1:1-3 and 3:1-6. How is Jesus even greater than Moses? What three roles in the Old Testament does Jesus fulfill in the New Testament?

Day 4

1. How did Jesus prepare His disciples for His departure? What does this mean for us today in terms of the younger generations coming behind us?

2. What did the LORD give Joshua as Moses laid his hands on him? What did Jesus give His disciples upon His departure? What does this mean for every disciple of Christ?

3. Read John 15:26-16:33 and consider as you're reading: what does Jesus promise His disciples when He departs? What doesn't He promise? What does this mean for us as we still journey through the wilderness? From these verses, what most helps you on your journey?

Day 5

1. Read Joshua 1:1-9. What do you notice from these verses about God? Joshua? The people of Israel?

2. Who is a "Joshua" in your life that God may be asking you to disciple? How does this week's story encourage you in that relationship? What practical steps is the Holy Spirit asking you to take in that relationship?

3. *This last question is for the whole study, not just this week:* What is the most important thing you learned in this study in Numbers? How has it encouraged you to live with courage and faithfulness in your journey through the wilderness of this world?

Conclusion

1. What most stood out to you as you studied Numbers 27:12-23 this week? *Why* do you think this was the case?
2. What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to *do* as a result of this? Be prepared to share with your group!

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