

BE COUNTED

LIVING A LIFE THAT COUNTS FOR GOD

OT COMMENTARY

NUMBERS

Warren W. Wiersbe

DAVID  COOK®
transforming lives together

A SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

Theme: Man's failure and God's faithfulness

Key verses: Numbers 14:8–9

- I. At Sinai: Obeying the Lord (Numbers 1:1—9:14)
 - A. Numbering the soldiers (Numbers 1:1–54)
 - B. Organizing the tribes (Numbers 2:1–34)
 - C. Assigning the duties (Numbers 3—4)
 - D. Purifying the people (Numbers 5—6)
 - E. Dedicating the tabernacle (Numbers 7—8)
 - F. Celebrating the Passover (Numbers 9:1–14)
- II. To Kadesh: Tempting the Lord (Numbers 9:15—12:16)
 - A. The camp marches (Numbers 9:15—10:36)
 - B. The people complain (Numbers 11)
 - C. Aaron and Miriam criticize Moses (Numbers 12)
- III. At Kadesh: Rebelling against the Lord (Numbers 13—14)
 - A. Exploring the Promised Land (Numbers 13)
 - B. Refusing to claim the land (Numbers 14:1–9)
 - C. Turning away from the land (Numbers 14:10–45)
- IV. In the Wilderness: Learning from the Lord (Numbers 15:1—20:13)
 - A. About sacrifices (Numbers 15:1–31)
 - B. About authority (Numbers 15:32—17:13)
 - C. About responsibility (Numbers 18)
 - D. About purity (Numbers 19)
 - E. About humility (Numbers 20:1–13)

V. In Moab: A New Beginning from the Lord (Numbers 20:14—36:13)

- A. New victories (Numbers 20:14–21; 21:1–35)
- B. A new priest (Numbers 20:22–29)
- C. New dangers (Numbers 22—25)
- D. A new generation (Numbers 26)
- E. New regulations (Numbers 27:1–11)
- F. A new leader (Numbers 27:12–23)
- G. New commitment to the law (Numbers 28—30)
- H. New commitment to battle (Numbers 31—32)
- I. New laws for the new land (Numbers 33—36)

ORDER IN THE CAMP

(Numbers 1—4; 9:1–14)

The code name for the enterprise was “Operation Overlord.” The more popular name was “D-Day”—June 6, 1943, when the combined Allied forces landed on Omaha Beach and signaled the beginning of the end of the war in Europe. It was the largest assembly of military personnel and matériel in the history of warfare. Historian Samuel Eliot Morison wrote, “The Allied forces of soldiers, sailors, aviators and supporting services amounted to 2.8 million men in England.”¹

Moses was about to launch his own “Operation Overlord,” and his greatest desire was that Jehovah, the Lord of Hosts, truly be Lord over the whole enterprise. More than two million Jews were anticipating entering Canaan, conquering the inhabitants, claiming the land, and enjoying their promised inheritance. But before all of this could happen, Moses had to organize this assembly of former slaves, who had been enjoying their freedom for only a year. It wasn’t an easy task.

His preparation for conquest involved four stages: celebrating the Passover (9:1–14), numbering the soldiers (chap. 1), organizing the tribes (chap. 2), and assigning the priestly duties (chaps. 3—4).

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What are the qualities of a person you can count on?
2. In the “A Word from the Author” section, Wiersbe says, “Studying the book of Numbers can help us better understand how God directs His people, why being faithful to Him is important, and how we can grow spiritually in the difficulties of life.” Choose one of these benefits and talk about how that would be valuable for you.
3. The first thing Moses did to prepare for conquest was to celebrate the Passover (Num. 9:1–14). Why was this an important thing to do?
4. Why was the Passover bread made without yeast? What was the significance of the bitter herbs?
5. The book of Numbers records 150 occurrences of God speaking to Moses. How does God speak to us today?
6. What was the point of counting the soldiers?

7. The phrase *able to go forth to war* is used fourteen times in Numbers
 1. What makes us able to go forth to war today against evil (Eph. 6:10–18)?
8. How are worship and warfare related?
9. Israel was highly organized. In what ways do you think it's helpful for the church to be organized? What might be some pitfalls of over-organization?
10. Why is it valuable to know so much about the ministry of the Levites?

DEDICATION AND CELEBRATION—PART I

(Numbers 5—7)

When Mohandas K. Gandhi was the spiritual leader of India, a missionary asked him what he thought was the biggest obstacle to Christian missions in India, and Gandhi replied, “Christians.”

We may not like his answer, but we do have to face the fact that too often God’s people get in the way of God’s work. This is no better illustrated than in the book of Numbers where we see Israel repeatedly disobeying God and suffering for it. This explains why the Lord laid down some plain and practical rules for daily life in the camp of Israel. Israel was God’s chosen people, separated from the other nations, and God wanted them to be different in the way they lived. What kind of people did the Lord want them to be?

A CLEAN PEOPLE (5:1–31)

God’s glorious presence dwelt in the camp of Israel (Num. 5:3; Ex. 29:45); therefore, the camp had to be pure and holy in His sight. “I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people,” was His promise (Lev. 26:12 NKJV), and with that gracious promise came the solemn responsibility: “You shall be holy; for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44–45).¹

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How can Christians sometimes be their own biggest obstacle to evangelism?
2. What was the basic purpose of God's emphasis on clean and unclean (Num. 5:1–31)? How can understanding this aspect of the law of Moses deepen our understanding of what Jesus did and taught?
3. What was the significance of the interpersonal laws concerning confession and restitution (5:5–10)?
4. What is the main message of the adultery test (5:11–31)? After reading Wiersbe's explanation, what are your thoughts about the test?
5. Why would men or women take on the Nazirite vow (6:1–21)?
6. When, if ever, is it proper today to make a vow to the Lord? When is it not proper?

7. In what ways can you show your total dedication to the Lord?
8. When you read or hear Aaron's blessing (6:22–27), which images especially touch you?
9. What encouragement and what challenge can we draw from the long account of the offerings of the leaders (7:1–89)?
10. What special offering could you bring to the Lord?

DEDICATION AND CELEBRATION—PART II

(Numbers 8; 9:15—10:10)

We are still examining the events that occurred in the camp of Israel at Mount Sinai on the day the tabernacle was erected and dedicated to God (Num. 7:1; Ex. 40:2, 17). It was the first day of the first month of the second year after Israel's exodus from Egypt.

Everything that was done in the camp of Israel was ordered by the Lord. In the Holy Place of the tabernacle, before the veil, Moses would speak to God and God would speak to Moses from the mercy seat (Num. 7:89). Then Moses would pass along God's orders to the people of Israel. "So the LORD spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex. 33:11 NKJV).

Two things are involved here: divine revelation and divinely chosen leadership. All of God's people comprise a holy priesthood (Ex. 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9)¹, but the Lord has given spiritual leaders to His people (Eph. 4:11–16) and these leaders should be respected and obeyed (Num. 12:6–8; Heb. 13:7–9, 17). In the church today, God doesn't speak audibly to His people as He did to Moses, but as God's people worship together, pray, and study His Word, He reveals His will. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thess. 5:21). God spoke to Moses about three important matters: caring

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Where was the lampstand placed (Num. 8:1–4)? What was its practical significance?
2. Of what did the lampstand remind the priests? What does the oil for the lamp symbolize?
3. How can we today be like a lampstand in a dark world? What are the challenges of doing this, and how can the Holy Spirit help us overcome them?
4. What were the responsibilities of the Levites (8:5–16)? How were they set apart? How do people today get chosen and ready for spiritual service?
5. When we feel competitive, prideful, or shameful in our spiritual service, what can we learn from God's choice of the priests and Levites?

6. How is serving the Lord related to serving His people?
7. What does Wiersbe say is “vitally important to a fulfilled and fruitful Christian life”? Why is that vital?
8. How does the pillar of cloud and fire symbolize the Word of God?
9. What does it mean to “walk in the darkness” and to “walk in the light”?
10. What were the purposes of the trumpets in the life of God’s people in the past (10:1–10)? What will the trumpet’s purpose be in the future?

MARCHING TO MOAB

(Numbers 10:11—12:16)

The people of Israel camped at Mount Sinai about eleven months. They arrived there in the third month after their deliverance from Egypt (Ex. 19:1), and it was now the second month of the second year. During that time, God's law had been announced and the tabernacle had been constructed and dedicated. Moses had consecrated the priests and Levites, counted the soldiers, and organized the tribes. Israel was now a nation ready for action.

However, Israel's history for the next thirty-eight years (Num. 10:11—22:1) is for the most part a record of unbelief and failure. They were years during which the people opposed Moses and rebelled against God's will. Because of their disobedience at Kadesh-Barnea, Israel wandered in the wilderness for thirty-eight years, leaving behind a trail of graves as the older generation died off. Of that generation, only Joshua and Caleb survived to enter Canaan.

In contrast, the first ten chapters of Numbers have recorded the activities of a nation obeying the Lord. "And the children of Israel did according to all that the LORD commanded Moses, so did they" (1:54) is a theme often repeated in these chapters (2:34; 3:16, 51; 4:49; 5:4; 8:3, 20,

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Israel had been comfortable at Sinai, but God soon said to move on.
In what area of your life are you comfortable but you sense that God is telling you to move on?
2. Why is complacency the enemy of spiritual growth?
3. What do you think about Moses' decision to ask Hobab to be Israel's "eyes" in the wilderness? Did this indicate a lack of trust in the Lord? Why or why not?
4. Moses invited others to come with Israel and enjoy God's blessings.
Whom could you invite to share in God's blessings? How will you do this?
5. What was the purpose of Moses' prayers each time they stopped or started on their journey (Num. 10:33–36)? Why did the people need this from God?

6. Who were the “mixed multitude” (11:4)? What negative effect did they have on the Israelite community?
7. What does Wiersbe mean by “counterfeiters” inside the church? Why are they more damaging than enemies outside the church?
8. Why did Moses become discouraged (11:10–15)? In his despair and frustration, what did he ask God to do? How did God respond to Moses’ complaint of “I can’t do it”?
9. Where did Miriam and Aaron go wrong (12:1–3)?
10. What is meekness? What evidence do we have of Moses’ meekness (12:3)?
11. Is there anything in this section about complaining, discouragement, or meekness that is relevant to your life? If so, what?

CRISIS AT KADESH

(Numbers 13—14)

At Kadesh-Barnea, on the border of Canaan, the people of Israel foolishly forfeited their opportunity to enter the Promised Land and claim their inheritance. This tragic failure has made the name *Kadesh* a synonym for defeat and lost opportunity. Israel's downfall at Kadesh is a reminder to us today that it's a dangerous thing to trifle with the will of God. You may end up spending the rest of your life wandering around, just waiting to die.

In spite of what some of our hymns declare, Canaan is not a picture of heaven. Certainly there won't be any battles in heaven! Rather, Canaan is a picture of the inheritance God has planned for each of His children today, the work He wants us to do, and the places He wants us to occupy. Paul called it "good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10 NKJV). The Lord has a perfect plan for each of His children, but we can claim these blessings only by faith and obedience.

Like the people of Israel centuries ago, many believers today walk by sight and not by faith, and therefore they fail to enjoy the good things God has for them. They can't say with David, "The lines have fallen to

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. According to Wiersbe, what does Canaan represent for us? What is Canaan in your life?
2. What were five of the sins Israel committed at Kadesh?
3. In what way did the Israelites show they doubted God's Word (Num. 13:1–25)? When do you find yourself most tempted to doubt God's Word?
4. When have you seen discouragement spread because of unbelief? Why is unbelief so serious?
5. Why does complaining against God indicate that a person is defying His will (14:1–10)? Is it possible to question God without this kind of defiant complaint? Explain.

6. Wiersbe says, “The will of God is the expression of the love of God for His people.” Have you seen this proved true in your life? If so, how?
7. What were Moses’ four reasons for God to spare the Israelites (14:11–19)?
8. In what ways do children suffer for the sins of parents or grandparents?
9. What is the difference between regret and true repentance? Between admitting sin and confessing sin?
10. After studying the episode at Kadesh-Barnea, how would you define “faith” in this context?

A QUESTION OF AUTHORITY

(Numbers 15—17)

The events described in these chapters probably occurred shortly after Israel's tragic failure at Kadesh-Barnea, and they reveal clearly that the people still hadn't learned how to trust and obey. No wonder the Lord rejected the older generation and made a new beginning with the younger generation!

God had a special word of encouragement for the younger generation: "After you enter the land I am giving you as a home" (Num. 15:2 NIV). The younger generation faced thirty-eight years of wandering, but the Lord guaranteed that they would one day enter the land and claim their inheritance. The children suffered because of the sins of their fathers and had to participate in history's longest funeral march.

The older generation of Israelites repeatedly refused to submit to the authority of God's Word as well as the authority of God's appointed leaders. Believers today commit the same sins, and the consequences are evident: divided churches, dysfunctional families, and disobedient individuals who wander from church to church but never accomplish much for the Lord. Unless we submit to God's Word and God's chosen leaders (Heb. 13:7–9, 17), we can't successfully

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What four special instructions did Moses give the new generation (Num. 15:1–41)? How would you put each of these into your own words?
2. What does the fine flour in these Old Testament sacrifices point toward?
3. The drink offering can symbolize life poured out for God. How, practically speaking, can you pour out your life for God?
4. What different types of sins did the sacrifices cover? Why couldn't the sacrifices cover "presumptuous" sins (15:30–36)?
5. What was the purpose of wearing the tassels (15:37–41)? What creative reminder can help you to remember to obey God's law?
6. Numbers 16 brings us to another case of complaining. What attitudes about God and self do you see in these complaints?

7. What was Moses' response to Korah's rebellion? In what situations would this example be helpful to you?
8. Why do you think people so often do not learn from history?
9. What should be our proper attitude toward our church leaders today? When, if ever, would it be right to remove a church leader from a position of responsibility?
10. In the last paragraph of Wiersbe's chapter, he lists things the Lord has given believers to encourage us to submit to His will. When have you been encouraged by one or more of these?

ANOTHER CRISIS AT KADESH

(Numbers 18—20)

It's probable that the instructions in chapters 18 and 19 were given by the Lord while Israel was still at Kadesh-Barnea. However, when you get to chapter 20, the nation has completed its thirty-eight years of wandering and is back at Kadesh (Num. 20:1, 16).

Very little is written in Numbers about Israel's years of wandering, although a list of their camping places is found in Numbers 33. Miriam died in the first month of the fortieth year (20:1), when the nation had returned to Kadesh, and Aaron died in the fifth month of that same year (33:38). When Moses died at the end of the fortieth year (Deut. 1:3), the entire older generation had perished, except for Joshua and Caleb, who were permitted to enter Canaan.

God's people had been stubborn and rebellious, and the Lord had chastened them for it, but in spite of their disobedience, the Lord had been faithful to care for them. "Nevertheless, he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power known" (Ps. 106:8 NKJV). Consider some of the Lord's concerns on behalf of His people as expressed by the instructions and events found in these chapters.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How easy is it for you to think of God as someone dangerous to approach in the wrong way? Explain.
2. Without the priests, the people couldn't approach God. Why not?
3. What are the commonalities and differences between the priest/Levite distinction and the elder/deacon distinction in the New Testament?
4. How were the priests and Levites cared for? How can and should we care for our church leaders, both paid and unpaid?
5. What do you think is the Christian's responsibility in the area of giving?

6. How do you understand the change from the Old Testament teaching of “clean” and “unclean” (Num. 19) to the New Testament teaching of Paul that “nothing is unclean of itself” (Rom. 14:14)?
How did this change come about?
7. In what way are God’s people now to cleanse themselves?
8. How can the account of Moses getting water from a rock (Num. 20:1–13) encourage you in difficult times?
9. The Lord disciplined Moses for disobedience. How can we know if at any certain point we are being disciplined by the Lord?
10. Why did Moses decide that Israel wouldn’t go through Edom but would instead take a new route (20:14–21)?
11. Why are new beginnings a normal part of victorious Christian service?

MARCHING IN VICTORY—AND DEFEAT

(Numbers 21)

It's remarkable how many unconverted people have the mistaken idea that the Christian life is boring. How can walking with God be boring when our Father in heaven arranges the experiences of life for our good and His glory? For the Christian believer, life becomes a school (Ps. 90:12) in which we learn more about God and His Word, as well as more about ourselves and how much we need to grow. Life also becomes a gymnasium and a battlefield (Heb. 12; 2 Tim. 2:1–5) where we must exercise our faith and develop strong spiritual muscles for running the race and fighting the battle.

This truth is well illustrated in Numbers 21, a chapter in which God's care and discipline of His people are so evident.

THE POWER OF GOD (21:1–3)

Life goes on. The Jews completed their mourning for Aaron and were soon back on the road and back in the battle. Arad was a Canaanite town about twenty miles south of Hebron, so the new generation of Israelites was facing its first conflict with the Canaanites. The Jewish army would spend at least seven years conquering the nations in the Promised Land,

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How would you answer the objection that Christianity is boring?
2. What did it mean to “utterly destroy” (Num. 21:2) a city or a people?
Why did God approve of, and even command, that the Israelites
utterly destroy whole cities?
3. Despite their victory over Arad, the people’s faith lacked endurance
(21:4–5). What can help us build endurance in trusting God?
4. In their difficulties, the Israelites forgot God’s promise and the
“big picture.” When you encounter obstacles, what can you do to
remember God’s promise and the “big picture”?
5. In what ways was the manna a type of something that pointed ahead
to Jesus Christ? How was manna part of the Word of God?

6. Looking up at the bronze serpent brought healing to the dying people. How did Jesus use this event to help us understand God's grace? Of those bitten by the fiery serpents, who could not be delivered from death?
7. The Israelites were grateful for the well God provided (21:17–18). Why were they so grateful for water? What are you especially grateful for today?
8. How do you see God's plan unfold in Sihon's attack on Israel (21:21–31)?
9. Wiersbe warns against borrowing “secular words” to express praise and worship to God. What does he mean? Why might it be acceptable to borrow tunes but not words?
10. What was the pattern to the conquests of Israel in the land of Canaan (21:32–35)? When could you use this same pattern?

INTERLUDE

The story of Balaam, the mysterious soothsayer, is given in Numbers 22—25. Because this is a complete unit, we will follow the suggested outline given below. Chapter 9 will cover Numbers 22:1—23:26, and chapter 10 will cover Numbers 23:27—25:18.

- I. Balaam and God's will (Numbers 22:1–35)
 - A. The king's request (Numbers 22:1–20)
 - B. The donkey's resistance (Numbers 22:21–30)
 - C. The angel's revelation (Numbers 22:31–35)
- II. Balaam and God's message (Numbers 22:36—24:25)
 - A. The first oracle (Numbers 22:36—23:12), a separated people
 - B. The second oracle (Numbers 23:13–26), a conquering people
 - C. The third oracle (Numbers 23:27—24:14), a prosperous people
 - D. The fourth oracle (Numbers 24:15–19), a royal people
 - E. Three concluding oracles (Numbers 24:20–25)
- III. Balaam and God's people (Numbers 25:1–18)
 - A. The sin of Israel (Numbers 25:1–9)
 - B. The courage of Phinehas (Numbers 25:10–15)
 - C. The judgment of Midian (Numbers 25:16–18)

IV. Balaam and the church today

- A. The way of Balaam (2 Peter 2:15)
- B. The error of Balaam (Jude 11)
- C. The doctrine of Balaam (Revelation 2:14)

Before studying the details, you may want to read Numbers 22—25 at one sitting in order to get the overall picture. Note also the three important New Testament references in part IV of the outline, as well as the following Old Testament references: Numbers 31:8; Deuteronomy 4:3–4; 23:3–6; Joshua 13:22; 24:9–10; Nehemiah 13:1–3.

PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS—PART I

(Numbers 22:1—23:26)

On Passover night, the people of Israel marched out of Egypt like conquering soldiers, and God buried the pursuing Egyptian army under the waters of the Red Sea. Except for the Canaanites that Israel rashly attacked out of the will of God (Num. 14:39–45), every enemy Israel encountered, they defeated: Amalek (Ex. 17:8–16), the king of Arad (Num. 21:1–3), the Amorites (vv. 21–25), and the forces of Og, king of Bashan (vv. 33–35).

But when Israel arrived on the plains of Moab, they faced a different kind of enemy, one who was hidden in the mountain heights and able to call upon the forces of the Evil One to assist him. Camping peacefully in the valley, the Israelites had no idea that Balaam was trying to curse them so that the Moabites and Midianites could defeat them. This scenario reminds us of Paul’s warning in Ephesians 6:12, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world [age], against spiritual wickedness in high [heavenly] places.”

Satan often comes as a lion who devours (1 Peter 5:8), but if that fails, he will attack again as a serpent who deceives (2 Cor. 11:3). The

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What does the church today battle against? Give an example of what that looks like today.
2. Balaam's words in Numbers 22:18 sound great. Do you think they were sincere or just pious talk? How can we know if a person is sincere?
3. Since the Lord had given his permission for Balaam to go with the men (22:20–22), why was the Lord so angry with Balaam for going?
4. If God used Balaam to speak God's word, what other types of people might we find God using to accomplish His will?
5. Why didn't Balaam's words "I have sinned" (22:34) count as true repentance? How is that relevant today?
6. What truths about the people of Israel did God's message to Balaam reveal (23:4–26)?

7. In what ways are God's people to be separate from the world? How do you work this out in your life? How can we do this and still reach out to the world?
8. Why is the love of money so destructive?
9. Why do you think God did not allow Balaam to speak false prophecies, even though He allowed other false prophets in other situations?
10. What can we learn from Balaam's first two oracles that is relevant today?

PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS—PART II

(Numbers 23:27—25:18)

Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor, a mountain identified with the pagan god Baal (Num. 25:3, 5; Deut. 4:3; Ps. 106:28–29; Hos. 9:10). The usual altars were built and the animals sacrificed, but this time Balaam didn't try to use his sorcery. Instead, he gazed out at the camp of Israel, and the Spirit of God came upon him and gave him the third oracle.

BALAAM AND GOD'S MESSAGE (NUM. 23:27—24:25)

The third oracle (23:27—24:14). The emphasis here is on the contentment of God's people in their own land. The conquest of Canaan is over (Num. 24:8–9), their enemies have been defeated, and Israel is enjoying the abundance of God's provision in "the land of milk and honey." The Promised Land is a paradise with an abundance of water, an important commodity in the East, and Israel's dwelling places are situated like beautiful flowers and trees in a garden. Beauty and bounty are seen in the land because of the blessing of the Lord.

In the second oracle, Balaam saw God as Israel's King (23:21), but now he sees the nation ruled by its own king who is greater than Agag (24:7). Since the name Agag shows up centuries later (1 Sam. 15:9), it may have

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is one thing God has given you that moves you toward contentment?
2. Balaam's third oracle (Num. 23:27—24:14) emphasizes the contentment of God's people in their own land. What reasons did they have for contentment?
3. How could Balaam have such a powerful experience of the Lord and still not have saving faith? What can we learn from this?
4. What comfort can a believer draw from 24:23 (NLT), "Alas, who can survive when God does this"?
5. God did not allow Balaam to curse Israel. But after Balaam blessed the people, what did he do (25:1–3; 31:16)? What did Balaam appeal to in the Israelites to get them to stumble?

6. What did the Israelites look to Baal for? Why should they have known better?
7. In 2 Peter 2, how are dangerous false teachers compared to Balaam?
8. How can God work out His plan when people reject God's rule over their lives?
9. When are we walking in the "way of Balaam"? What was Balaam's tragic error?
10. What were the sins of the Israelites at Baal Peor? How could they rationalize this "doctrine of Balaam"?
11. How can we be careful to avoid being religious and yet "rotten at the heart"?

A NEW BEGINNING

(Numbers 26—29; 36)

The transition between chapters 25 and 26 reminds us of the transition from chapter 14 to chapter 15, for in both of them the Lord moved from judgment to mercy, from punishment to promise. At Kadesh-Barnea and at Baal Peor, Israel had sinned greatly and God chastened them, but in His grace He forgave their disobedience and gave them a new start. Ezra the scribe expressed this truth in his prayer of confession when he said, “You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve” (Ezra 9:13 NKJV); David felt the same way when he wrote, “He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities” (Ps. 103:10 NIV).

As Israel lingered in the plains of Moab, Moses fulfilled four important responsibilities to prepare Israel for what lay ahead.

1. NUMBERING THE SOLDIERS (26:1–51)

By the time Israel had entered the Zared valley (Num. 21:12), the old generation had died off (Deut. 2:14–15), except for Moses, Caleb, and Joshua (Num. 26:63–65), and very soon, Moses would die. Israel was making a new beginning, thanks to the faithfulness and mercy of God.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What four important responsibilities did Moses fulfill in preparation for Israel's conquering future?
2. Wiersbe writes, "According to the record in the book of Joshua, some of the tribes gladly accepted their inheritance and went to work making it home, some complained about the land they were given, and some went out and conquered more territory." What parallels can you draw between this and how believers might react to situations God has put them in?
3. How did Moses respond when approached by the five daughters of Zelophehad for an unprecedented inheritance question (Num. 27:1–11)? What does this change of policy tell us about God's view of women?
4. What experiences and qualities in Joshua made him a great choice for Moses' successor?

5. Faith and obedience were crucial for Israel's success. What is a current circumstance in your life that calls for both of these?
6. Think about the daily sacrifice (28:1–8). How can your life be a daily living sacrifice to God? Give some examples.
7. Numbers 28:26–30 tells of the Feast of Weeks, also called Pentecost. What happened at a Pentecost celebration in the New Testament? What difference does this make for us?
8. What did the holy Day of Atonement picture? What did the Feast of Tabernacles look forward to?
9. What three lessons can believers learn from these accounts of offerings?
10. How is Jesus Christ our high priest?

PREPARING FOR CONQUEST

(Numbers 30—35)

For forty years, Israel had been moving from place to place, a nomadic people traveling to their Promised Land. Soon they would enter and conquer that land and establish their own nation, and for this responsibility they had to be prepared. The final chapters of Numbers, along with the book of Deuteronomy, record the Lord's instructions through Moses, given to prepare the people for this challenging new experience. For Israel to become a holy nation to the glory of God, they had to accept and apply the basic principles Moses enunciated, and these principles still work in communities and nations today.

THE SANCTITY OF WORDS (30:1–16)

In Leviticus 27 Moses had touched on the subject of vows in terms of dedicating people and possessions to the Lord, but here he deals with personal vows and how they are affected by relationships. The chapter makes it clear that the home is basic to the nation, that there must be authority and subordination in the home, and that truth is what binds society together.

There is a difference between “vows” and “oaths,” but both were to be considered inviolate. The vow was a promise to do a certain thing for the

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. How do you usually feel when someone breaks his or her word?
Why?
2. What is the difference between a vow and an oath in Numbers 30?
What is the basic principle concerning vows for men? For women?
3. Why is speech so powerful? Why is speaking truth and keeping your word so essential?
4. Could there ever be a “holy war” now, as there was in Numbers 31:1–10? Why or why not?
5. What was the reason for the week of purification after the defeat of Midian (31:12–24)? What does this say about God?
6. What kind of offering could you make out of special gratitude to the Lord?

7. Why did the two and a half tribes decide to settle outside of the Promised Land (32:1–42)? Why weren't these very good reasons?
8. What evidences of God's sovereignty do you see from the time of the Exodus from Egypt to the beginning of conquest in the Promised Land (33:1–49)?
9. How does God's sovereignty work together with individual responsibility?
10. Why did the resident nations in the Promised Land need to be exterminated (33:50–56)?
11. Cities of refuge were provided for the people of Israel. What refuge is provided for believers today?

THE WILDERNESS SCHOOL

(Summary and Review)

The Jewish scholar Martin Buber once wrote, “All life is meeting.” It’s a brief statement, but the more you ponder it, the more luminous it becomes.

Life is meeting new circumstances, many of which we don’t expect and can’t control. Life is meeting new people and developing new relationships; it’s meeting new ideas, some of which may upset us. As much as we try to avoid it, life is meeting ourselves and not always liking what we see. But most of all, life is meeting God, for He’s always there, protecting us, wanting to teach, and always seeking to mature us.

Life is meeting, and meeting ought to lead to learning and learning to growing. Let’s review some of the lessons we can learn while marching with Moses and the people of Israel, people just like you and me.

WE LEARN ABOUT LIFE

The metaphors for life are many, and each one teaches us something important. Sometimes life is like a battle and sometimes it’s more like a race, but always it’s a school where we need to be awake and alert to what God is trying to teach us. To Moses and the people of Israel, life

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION OR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Wiersbe says, “The essence of Christian living is to enter into your spiritual inheritance as quickly as possible.” What does that mean?
2. Israel continually made three mistakes: “They looked back and glorified Egypt; (2) they looked around and complained about their circumstances; and (3) they looked within and magnified their own desires.” Give examples of how a modern person might do each of these things.
3. Why does God allow trials in our lives? What is God’s desire for us?
4. What did Israel learn about God during the wilderness journey?
5. What does it mean to you that “the Lord is the God of new beginnings”?

6. One test of spiritual maturity is what Paul calls “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col. 1:10). How can we assess our growth in this area?
7. What do we learn about ourselves from Israel’s experience as recorded in the book of Numbers? Give an example of something you have learned about yourself during this study.
8. What must be coupled with age to have true maturity?
9. What is the difference between the faith of Christians and that of non-Christians? What is faith? How is faith nourished?
10. What kind of person can the Lord count on? What are some choices we have to make as we decide how to live our lives?