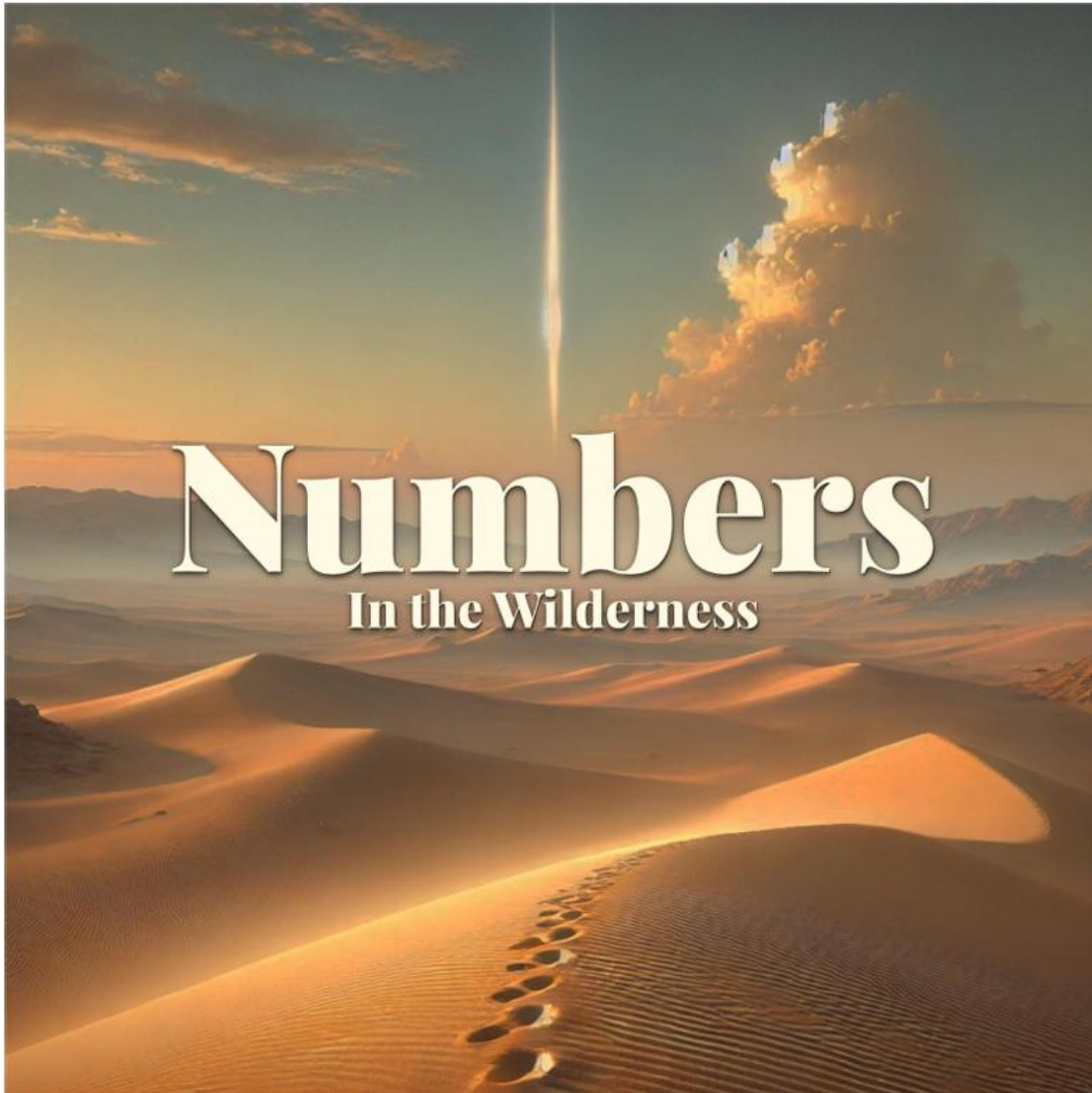




Book of Numbers
Growth Group Studies
Term 2 & 3, 2026

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Introduction to Numbers

Numbers is a book not many of us have read. Its name is hardly inspiring: 'Numbers.' Who would want to read a book like that? And so we don't.

But Numbers is actually a cracking read. It's the story of how the Israelites, God's people, almost enter the promised land, but then chicken out at the last minute. As a result, they have to wander in the desert for 40 years until that rebellious generation has died out, & then their descendants can go back to Canaan's border & have another go. While all this is going on, they have some big adventures. There are wars with desert kingdoms, plagues, swarms of snakes, earthquakes, talking donkeys, pagan wizards & more. In other words, Numbers is much more exciting than its name suggests.

It is also not a stand-alone story. Rather, it is part of the story of the first five books of the Bible - the Pentateuch.

In Gen 1-2, God creates people & lives with them in peace in the Garden of Eden. But then, in Gen 3, people rebel against God & he banishes them from the Garden: the holy God can no longer live with unholy people.

But God is determined to live with them. So, in Genesis 12, he promises one man & woman, Abraham & Sarah, that he'll make their descendants into a great nation, that he will live with them & bless them & rule them, & that he will put them in a great land. By Exodus 1, God has kept the first part of this promise: Abraham & Sarah's descendants, the Israelites, are now very numerous. However, they're living in slavery in Egypt & so need to be freed before God can keep the second part of his promise: to live with them, rule them & bless them. This is the story of Exodus & Leviticus. In the first half of Exodus, God frees the Israelites & in the second half of Exodus & all of Leviticus, God gives them his laws & 'moves in' with them in the tabernacle (a large tent in the centre of their camp).

However, the Israelites still don't live in the land - the third part of the promise - & so need to be given it. This is where the story picks up in Numbers: the Israelites are camped at Mt Sinai, waiting to travel to Canaan to invade it. What happens next is what Numbers is all about.

Study 1 - 'Ready to Go'

Numbers 1:1-10:10

Getting started

How can you tell when something is at the centre of someone's life? Give examples.

Light from the Word

1. Read Numbers 1:1-4, 45-46

a. When and where does the Lord speak to Moses? What does this tell us about where we are up to in the overall story of the Bible?

b. What does the Lord tell Moses to do?

c. What kind of group of people is the Lord forming? What does this tell us Israel is being prepared for? (See also 10:9)

d. What is the result of the census?

2. Read Numbers 1:47-54.

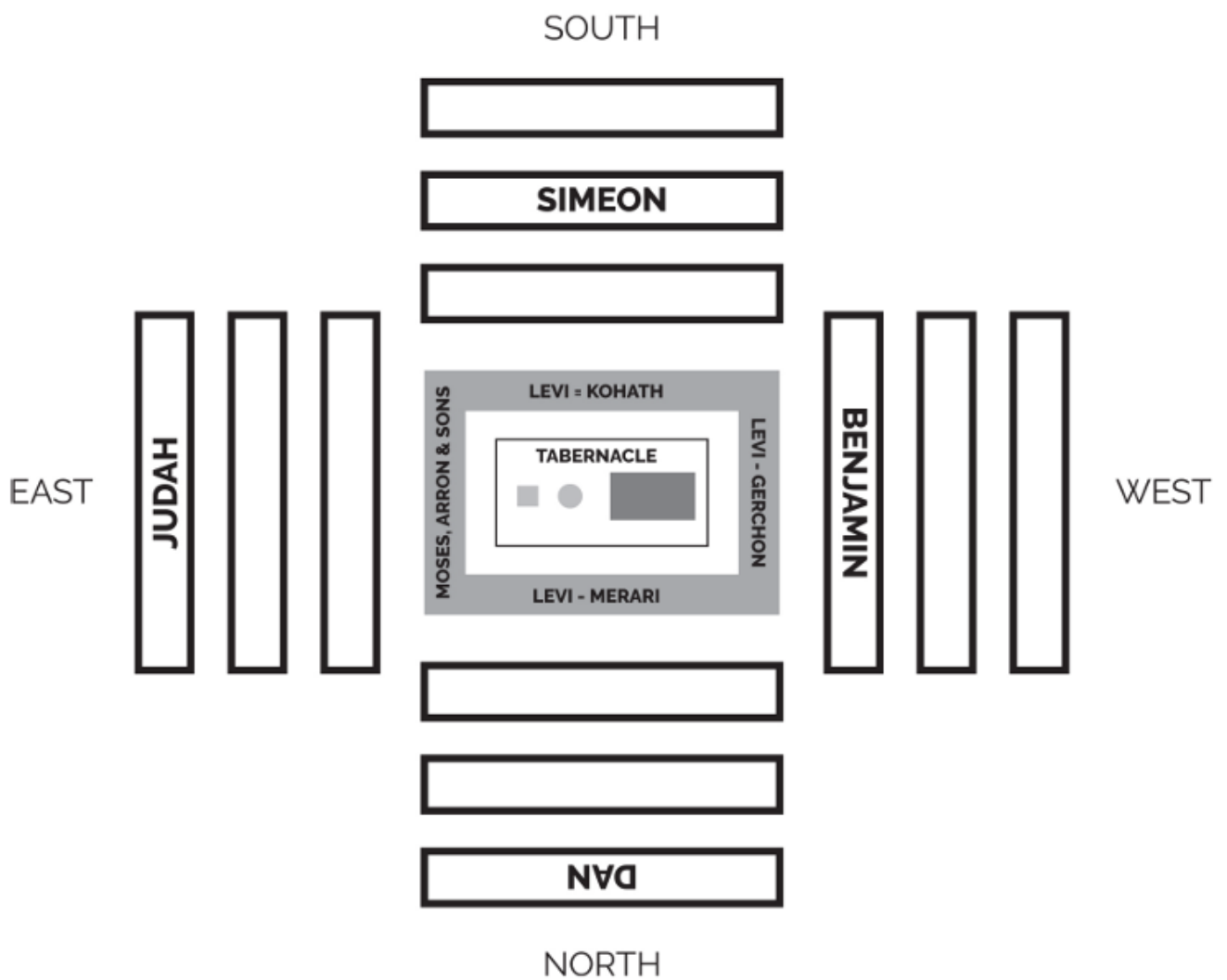
a. What is to happen to the tribe of the Levites?

b. Where are they to camp?

3. Read Numbers 2:1-2

a. Where are the rest of the Israelites to camp?

b. Skimming over the rest of Numbers 2, fill in the diagram below, showing where each of the tribes are to camp.



c. What does the layout of the camp tell us about what God wants his relationship with the Israelites to be?

4. Read Numbers 9:15-23

- a. When do the Israelites set out from camp, and when do they encamp?

- b. What does this tell us about their relationship with the Lord?

5. Read Mark 8:34-9:1

- a. What position does Jesus want to take in people's lives? Give examples of what this might look like in practice.

- b. What will be the result of following him?

- c. What will be the result of not following him?

To finish

- What are the things in your life that are most likely to tempt you away from making Jesus the centre of your life?
- Dwell for a moment on the warnings and encouragements in Mk 8:34-9:1. How do they make you feel? Are there any in particular that stand out to you? Why?

Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that, though he calls us to give up anything that will stop us from making him the centre of our life, it's well worth it.
- Pray for God to help you increasingly make him the centre of your life in everything you do.

Study 2 - 'Mustn't Grumble'

Numbers 10:11-12:16

Getting started

Why is grumbling fun? But why is it also wrong?

Light from the Word

1. Read Numbers 10:11-13. What happens?

2. Read Numbers 11:1-3
 - a. What do the Israelites complain about?

 - b. How does the Lord respond?

 - c. How does it end?

3. Read Numbers 11:4-20, 31-35

a. What do the Israelites complain about?

b. How does the Lord respond?

c. How does it end?

4. Read Numbers 12

a. What do two of the Israelites complain about?

b. How does the Lord respond?

c. How does it end?

5. Paul is writing to the Corinthians about what the Israelites got up to in Numbers - including grumbling, though it was a later incident.

Read 1 Co 10:6-13.

a. Why did these things occur? (vv.6, 11)

b. What should we do as a result? (v.12)

c. What encouragements do we have when we're tempted? (vv.13)

To finish

- What views of God might we have that lead to grumbling? How might we need to correct them?

- Think about something you're tempted to grumble about. What is some helpful 'self-talk' you can do to help you resist this temptation?

Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for all the good things he's given us in our life - most of all, salvation and an eternal future with him.
- Pray for help to be content and against a grumbling spirit.

Study 3 - 'Cold Feet'

Numbers 13:1-15:31

Getting started

Have you ever got 'cold feet' on something good? Almost been brave enough to do it, but then chickened out at the last minute?

Light from the Word

1. The Israelites are now on the edge of the promised land, Canaan, and ready to enter it.

Read Numbers 13:1-2, 17-25.

- a. What are the spies to look for when they explore the land?

- b. What do they find?

2. Read Numbers 13:26-33

- a. What do the spies report to the Israelites when they return?
- b. What does Caleb say they should do?
- c. What do the other spies say they should do?

3. Read Numbers 14:1-10a

- a. Which side do the Israelites take: Caleb's, or the other spies'?
- b. Joshua and Caleb try to convince the Israelites to enter the land. What would a failure to enter the land be?
- c. What do the Israelites end up deciding?

4. Read Numbers 14:10b-38

a. How does the Lord initially respond to the Israelites' rebellion?

b. How does Moses intervene? What does the Lord then do?

5. Read Numbers 14:39-45

a. What do the Israelites try to do when they hear the Lord's decision?

b. How does it go?

6. How do you think you would feel if you were:

a. one of the rebellious generation?

b. one of their children?

7. Hebrews uses this episode as a lesson to us as Christians.

a. Read Hebrews 3:7-19. What are we not to do?

b. Read Hebrews 4:1-11.

i. What is the 'rest' held out to us? (vv.9-10)

ii. What should we do?

To finish

- What fears tempt you away from following Jesus until the end?
- When you feel that way, what can help you keep trusting Jesus?

Give thanks and pray

- Thank God for his promise to bring everyone who keeps trusting him safely home to heaven.
- Pray for help to keep trusting him, even when we're afraid to do so.

Study 4 - 'Lost'

Numbers 15:32-19:22

Getting started

'I don't need someone to mediate between me and God. I can come into his presence on my own.' What would you say to someone who says this?

Light from the Word

The Israelites are now in the wilderness (15:32) for their 40 year punishment.

1. Read Numbers 16:1-35

a. What reason do Korah and the other community leaders give for rebelling against Moses and Aaron? (v.3) What do you think they mean by this?

b. How does Moses respond? (vv.4-17)

c. What does the Lord do? (vv.18-35)

2. How does the Lord reinforce Aaron's position as priest after this?

a. 16:36-50

b. 17:1-12

c. 18:1-7

3. What does all of this teach us about the importance of priests?

4. Read Hebrews 5:1-10

a. How are high priests chosen? Why are they necessary?
(vv1-4)

b. How is Jesus the same as the Aaronic priests? Better?
(vv5-10)

To finish

- What does the fact we need a mediator between us and God say about our natural condition?
- Non-Christians often have a ‘DIY’ approach to their relationship with God, thinking they can approach him on their own terms. What does the fact God has to hand-pick their mediator - Jesus - say to this? How might you explain it to them?

Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that he has chosen Jesus to mediate between us, and that he lives forever and so can mediate forever.
- Pray for those who still think they can relate to God on their own, that they’ll stop their rebellion and start trusting in Jesus, God’s priest.

Study 5 - 'Back to The Future'

Numbers 20-25

Getting started

'The Christian life is a pilgrimage towards heaven.' What do you think of this statement?

Light from the Word

The Israelites have now finished their 40 years of wandering in the desert: the old, rebellious generation have all died. As such, the next generation can start heading to Canaan. They start their journey at Kadesh (20:1), the place where the first generation got 'cold feet' (13:36). The question is: will the next generation do any better? Will they trust the Lord and enter the land, or get cold feet too? And will the Lord preserve them along the way? That's what Numbers 20-25 is all about.

1. Read Numbers 20:1-13

a. What is the threat to the Israelites?

b. How does God save them?

c. How do some of the Israelites still suffer for sin here?

2. Read Numbers 21:4-9

a. What is the threat to the Israelites?

b. How does God save them?

c. How do some of the Israelites still suffer for sin here?

3. Read Numbers 22:1-7, 20.

What is the threat to the Israelites?

4. Read Numbers 23:1-24:9

How does God save them?

5. Read Numbers 25:1-9

How do some of the Israelites still suffer for sin here?

As we've read these passages, we've seen a pattern. As the Israelites make their way to their new home, they face threats: thirst; snakes; pagan curses. But each time, God saves them so they can make it in the end. But that does not mean they still won't suffer when they sin. They will! God gives them water, but Moses and Aaron still miss out on the land. Most of the Israelites are saved from both the snakes and the plague, but some of them aren't. So God's promise to bring his people home isn't a promise to save them from *all* the consequences of their sin. But it is a promise to *ultimately* save them. We see a very similar picture in the New Testament.

6. Read 1 Corinthians 1:8-9; Philippians 1:4-6; Jude 24.

What promises does God make as we keep travelling towards our new home, heaven?

7. Does that mean we won't suffer if we sin along the way? No! But even then, how does God say we should view this? Read Hebrews 12:4-11.

To finish

- When you face suffering on the way to eternity, how can you cling onto the promises of God to bring you home safely in the end?
- Inevitably, you will still sin along the way and sometimes suffer as a result. What truths can you remind yourself of to stop despairing when this happens?

Give thanks and pray

- Thank God that he will bring us safely home to heaven in the end, if we keep trusting him.
- Pray that we won't despair when we sin along the way and suffer for it, but will rather see this as God's loving discipline, and respond to it.

Study 6 - 'Regeneration'

Numbers 26-36

Getting started

Have you ever made a new start? What did you look forward to about it?

Light from the Word

The next generation of Israelites is now on the edge of Canaan, ready to go in. So, God tells them what life will be like in there. He says they will be:

1. A new generation

a. Read Numbers 26:1-4, 63-65

i. Who is counted in the new census?

ii. Who is not included in this census? Why? (See 14:26-31)

- b. How do you think you'd feel being part of this new generation?

2. In a new land

- a. Read Numbers 26:51-56. How is the land to be divided up?

- b. Read Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-12.

- i. What part of the system of land distribution does this case protect? What do you think is the principle behind it?
- ii. If you were an Israelite about to inherit your piece of land, how would you feel reading this?

3. With a new leader

a. Read Numbers 27:12-23

i. Why does Moses need to be replaced?

ii. Who will replace him? What is he to do?

4. With a new rhythm of life

a. Skim read Numbers 28-29

i. What are the new generation to do to mark out their days, weeks, and months, and to divide up their year?

- ii. What are these ceremonies to achieve? What do you think this communicates to the Israelites as they live their life in the land?

5. Summarise in a few words what life in the land will be like for this new generation.

6. Like the Israelites, Christians are also on the verge of receiving a great inheritance. Read 1 Peter 1:3-9.

a. What is our inheritance?

b. What will it be like?

c. What will life be like before we inherit it?

d. What will help us hang on until we receive it?

To finish

- How much do you think about heaven? Whatever your answer, what factors do you think are at play in this?
- What could we do to make the fact of heaven more real to us?

Give thanks and pray

- Give thanks for the inheritance we will receive: a home in heaven, that will never perish, spoil or fade.
- Pray that God will help us to hang on while we wait for this inheritance, even while we suffer.

Notes / Prayer Points:

