

The Book of Numbers, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 20: The Journey Recalled and the Land Apportioned

Numbers 33:1–36:13

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This final lesson is meant to land as a capstone on the whole book of Numbers and indeed the whole wilderness story. Doctrinally, two things are at stake. First, the faithfulness of God: the detailed journey list (chapter 33) and the apportioning of the promised land (chapters 34–36) testify that God keeps His word, bringing His people to the very edge of the promise He swore generations before (Joshua 21:43–45). Lead the class to trust the God who finishes what He starts. Second, and crucially, the fulfillment of the land promise. Guard the class firmly against any premillennial or dispensational reading that expects a future earthly, political restoration of national Israel. The land was a shadow. The promise to Abraham is fulfilled in Christ and all who are His (Galatians 3:16,29), the kingdom is the church over which Christ reigns now, and the true inheritance is the better, heavenly country (Hebrews 11:13–16; Hebrews 4:8–9; 1 Peter 1:3–4).

Present the cities of refuge (chapter 35) as one of Scripture's most beautiful pictures, holding together God's justice and His mercy, and pointing forward to the refuge we have in Christ, to whom we have fled for safety (Hebrews 6:18). Handle the command to drive out the inhabitants (33:50–56) soberly within its old covenant setting, drawing from it the timeless call to deal thoroughly with sin and idolatry in our own hearts (Colossians 3:5) rather than any modern application of conquest.

Above all, aim for spiritual formation. This is the end of a long study, and the class should leave not merely informed but moved: steadied by God's faithfulness across the whole journey, sobered about lingering compromise, comforted by the refuge they have in Christ, and lifted up by a living hope set on the inheritance reserved in heaven. Let the closing question call each student to name how Jesus has been and is forming them, and to take a concrete next step. End the study where Numbers ends, on the edge of the promise, looking forward in faith.

Question 1

Student Question:

Numbers 33:1–49 carefully records all forty-two stages of Israel's journey from Egypt to the plains of Moab. Why would God have Moses write down this detailed itinerary, and what does this record of every station teach us about God's faithfulness throughout the entire wilderness story (Deuteronomy 8:2)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Numbers 33 may look, at first glance, like the kind of chapter we skim, a long list of place names, forty-two of them, marking each stage of Israel's journey from Egypt to the plains of Moab. But Moses wrote it down by the commandment of the LORD (33:2), and that alone should make us slow down. God wanted this itinerary preserved. The journey itself was to be remembered, station by station.

Each name carried a memory. Here was the Red Sea, where the waters parted. Here was Marah, where the bitter water turned sweet. Here was the wilderness of Sin, where bread fell from heaven. Here was Sinai, where God came down in fire. Here, too, were the places of failure and grief, where a generation died for unbelief. The list is a testimony in shorthand, a record of a God who led His people every step, through victory and through discipline, and never once abandoned them.

Deuteronomy explains the purpose plainly: thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years (Deuteronomy 8:2). Remembering is a spiritual discipline. A forgetful people grow ungrateful and afraid. A remembering people grow steady, because they can look back at every station and say, He was faithful there, and He will be faithful still. God writes down the journey so His people will not forget who brought them through.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God commanded the journey to be recorded so it would be remembered (33:2).
- Each station testifies to God's faithfulness through both blessing and discipline.
- Remembering God's past faithfulness is a spiritual discipline that steadies us (Deuteronomy 8:2).
- A forgetful people grow ungrateful; a remembering people grow trusting.

Discussion Prompts

- Why would God want every stage of the journey written down and preserved?
- What do the named places, both the triumphs and the failures, teach about how God led Israel?
- How does remembering God's faithfulness in the past change how you face the future?

Question 2

Student Question:

As you look back over your own life with God, what are the stations you would most want to write down so you never forget what He did there? How might recalling them strengthen your faith for the road still ahead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

It is one thing to read Israel's itinerary; it is another to write your own. Every believer has a journey, a string of stations where God did something you must not forget. The day you first really heard the gospel. The crisis where He carried you when you could not stand. The wilderness stretch that felt endless, where you learned to depend on Him. The Marahs where bitterness turned sweet, and even the Kadeshes of failure where His mercy met you.

We are forgetful people. The pressures of today crowd out the memory of yesterday's grace, and we find ourselves anxious as though God had never come through before. That is why remembering matters. The psalmists constantly rehearse God's past deeds precisely to fuel present trust. Writing down, or at least deliberately recalling, the stations of your own journey is a way of fighting fear with memory.

Try it. Name the places, the hard ones and the gracious ones, where you can honestly say God was faithful there. You will find that the very act of remembering steadies you for the road ahead. The God who led you to this point is not going to abandon you now. The journey list is not just Israel's. It is an invitation to keep your own, so that you never forget who brought you through.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Every believer has a personal journey of stations where God proved faithful.
- Forgetfulness breeds anxiety; remembering fuels trust.
- Deliberately recalling God's past faithfulness is a way of fighting present fear.
- Past faithfulness is the ground of confidence for the future.

Discussion Prompts

- What are the stations of your own journey you most want to remember?
- Why do we so easily forget God's past faithfulness when new troubles come?
- How could deliberately recalling those stations steady you for what is ahead?

Question 3

Student Question:

In Numbers 33:50–56 God commands Israel to drive out the inhabitants and destroy their idols, warning that any left would become pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides. What does this command teach about the seriousness of dealing thoroughly with sin and idolatry, and how does the New Testament call us to that same thoroughness in our own hearts (Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 12:1)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

In Numbers 33:50–56 God gives Israel a sober command as they prepare to enter the land: drive out all the inhabitants, destroy their carved images and molten idols, and demolish their high

places. And He attaches a warning. If you let them remain, those you leave will be pricks in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and they will trouble you in the land where you dwell (33:55).

We must read this within its old covenant setting. This was God's judgment on the deeply corrupt Canaanite nations and His provision to protect Israel from being drawn into their idolatry, the very thing that would later destroy them. It is not a template for conquest today. But the spiritual principle reaches straight into our lives, and the New Testament makes the application explicit.

The warning is about half-measures with sin. What Israel tolerated would not stay quietly in the corner; it would become a thorn, an irritation, eventually a snare. So Paul says, mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth (Colossians 3:5), and Hebrews calls us to lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily entangles (Hebrews 12:1). Sin left alive does not stay tame. The compromise we spare today becomes the thorn that wounds us tomorrow. God calls for thoroughness, not because He is harsh, but because He knows what a tolerated idol will eventually do.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The command to drive out the Canaanites belongs to its old covenant judicial setting and is not a model for conquest today.
- Tolerated idolatry would become pricks and thorns that wound and ensnare Israel (33:55).
- The timeless principle is to deal thoroughly with sin rather than make half-measures.
- The New Testament applies this directly to putting sin to death (Colossians 3:5; Hebrews 12:1).
- Spared compromise does not stay tame; it becomes tomorrow's snare.

Discussion Prompts

- How should we read the command to drive out the Canaanites in its old covenant context?
- What does the image of pricks and thorns teach about tolerated sin?
- How does the New Testament call us to the same thoroughness in our own hearts?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where in your own life have you tolerated a small compromise that you knew you should have driven out completely? What has that lingering thing cost you, and what would it take to deal with it thoroughly now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The warning of pricks and thorns has a way of finding our consciences. Most of us are not battling some dramatic, obvious idol. We are tolerating something smaller, a habit we have

made peace with, a grudge we keep alive, a corner of our lives we have quietly fenced off from God. We tell ourselves it is manageable, contained, not worth the disruption of dealing with it fully.

But God's warning to Israel was precisely that the thing left alive does not stay contained. The small compromise spared becomes the thorn in the side later. The resentment nursed becomes bitterness that poisons relationships. The habit indulged becomes the master that owns us. What we will not drive out, we will eventually serve. There is no neutral, permanent peace treaty with sin.

So the question is honest and personal. Where have you settled for half-measures? What have you allowed to remain that you know, deep down, you should have dealt with completely? Dealing with it thoroughly may feel costly now, but it is far less costly than living with the thorn for years. The God who calls for thoroughness also gives the grace to carry it out, and the freedom on the other side is worth far more than the comfort of the compromise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Tolerated compromise rarely stays contained; it grows into a snare.
- What we refuse to drive out, we eventually end up serving.
- Dealing thoroughly with sin is costly now but far cheaper than living with the thorn.
- God gives grace to deal with what He calls us to put away.

Discussion Prompts

- What small compromise have you made peace with that you know you should drive out?
- What has that lingering thing already cost you?
- What would it take to deal with it thoroughly, and what freedom might lie on the other side?

Question 5

Student Question:

In Numbers 34 God lays out the exact boundaries of the land He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. How does this fulfillment of the land promise testify to God's faithfulness to His word over many generations (Joshua 21:43–45), and what does it teach us about trusting the promises God has made to us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Numbers 34 reads like a deed of property, with careful boundaries drawn out, the southern border, the western, the northern, the eastern, fixing the shape of the land tribe by tribe. It can feel dry until you remember what it represents. These boundaries trace the fulfillment of a promise God made to Abraham centuries earlier, when Abraham owned not a single acre and

had not a single child. Unto thy seed will I give this land, God had said. Now, generations later, He is drawing the map.

This is the faithfulness of God made visible. Joshua would later put it without qualification: there failed not aught of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass (Joshua 21:45). The God who promises is the God who delivers, even when the fulfillment takes generations and runs through slavery, wilderness, and war. He does not forget. He does not give up. His word stands.

For us this is enormously steadying. The promises God has made to His people in Christ are not wishful thinking; they rest on the track record of a God who keeps His word across centuries. The same faithfulness that drew these ancient boundaries undergirds every promise He has given you. He who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23). We can build our lives on that.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The boundaries of the land trace the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:7).
- God keeps His word even when fulfillment takes generations (Joshua 21:43–45).
- God's proven faithfulness is the ground for trusting His promises to us.
- He who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23).

Discussion Prompts

- How does the fulfillment of the land promise display God's faithfulness over generations?
- What does it mean that not one good word of God's promise failed (Joshua 21:45)?
- How does God's track record of keeping His word help you trust His promises to you?

Question 6

Student Question:

When you read of a settled inheritance, fixed boundaries, and a permanent home, what longing does it stir in you? How does that longing for a place that is truly yours and truly secure point you to something deeper than any earthly address?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Read the boundaries of the land slowly and something stirs in you, a longing. A settled place. Fixed borders. A home that is truly yours and cannot be taken away. After forty years of tents and wandering, of never being able to say this is ours, the prospect of a permanent inheritance must have felt almost too good to believe. There is something in the human heart that aches for exactly that, a place to belong, secure and lasting.

That ache is not a flaw. God put it there. We were made for home, and every earthly home, however good, is finally a signpost to a deeper one. The most settled house, the most secure

address, is still temporary; the borders of even the best earthly inheritance are drawn in disappearing ink. The longing for a place that is truly and permanently ours is bigger than anything this world can satisfy.

That is exactly why the New Testament takes this longing and lifts it higher. The same patriarchs who were promised land confessed they were strangers and pilgrims, looking for a city whose builder and maker is God (Hebrews 11:10,13–16). The land was real, but the longing it stirred pointed past itself. The home your heart aches for is not finally a piece of ground. It is the inheritance reserved in heaven, the city of the living God, prepared for all who are His.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The promise of a settled inheritance speaks to a deep human longing for home and security.
- That longing is God-given and points beyond every earthly home.
- Even the best earthly inheritance is temporary and cannot finally satisfy.
- The longing is met fully in the heavenly home God has prepared (Hebrews 11:10,13–16).

Discussion Prompts

- What longing does the promise of a permanent, settled home stir in you?
- Why can no earthly home, however good, finally satisfy that longing?
- How does the New Testament redirect this longing toward our true and lasting home?

Question 7

Student Question:

In Numbers 35:9–34 God establishes six cities of refuge so that one who killed unintentionally could flee and be safe from the avenger until a fair trial, holding together both justice for the guilty and protection for the innocent. How do the cities of refuge reveal the character of God, and how do they point forward to the refuge we have fled to for safety in Christ (Hebrews 6:18)?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Numbers 35:9–34 establishes one of the most beautiful institutions in the Law: the cities of refuge. Six cities, spread so that one was always within reach, where a person who killed someone unintentionally could flee and find safety from the avenger of blood until the case could be judged fairly. If the death was truly accidental, the city sheltered the manslayer; if it was murder, justice was done. Mercy and justice met, neither one canceling the other.

Look at the character of God revealed here. He cares about justice, real blood guilt was not winked at. And He cares about mercy, the one who killed without intent was not to be cut down in hot blood. So He built into the very map of the land a place to run, a refuge accessible to anyone who would flee to it. God is at once perfectly just and richly merciful, and in the cities of refuge we see both held together.

The New Testament draws the line forward. Hebrews speaks of those who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us (Hebrews 6:18). The cities of refuge are a picture, pointing toward the refuge we have in Christ. In Him the demands of justice are fully met at the cross, and mercy is fully extended to all who flee to Him. He is the place we run to and are safe. The roads were kept clear so the runner could reach the city; in Christ the way is open, and whoever comes He will in no wise cast out.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cities of refuge held together justice for the guilty and protection for the innocent (35:9–34).
- They reveal a God who is both perfectly just and richly merciful.
- Refuge was accessible to all who would flee to it.
- They point forward to the refuge we have in Christ (Hebrews 6:18).
- In Christ justice is satisfied at the cross and mercy extended to all who flee to Him.

Discussion Prompts

- How do the cities of refuge hold justice and mercy together?
- What do they reveal about the character of God?
- How do they point forward to the refuge we have in Christ?

Question 8

Student Question:

The cities of refuge required the person to flee to them and to remain there to be safe. In what areas of your life are you tempted to stay outside the refuge God provides, trying to manage on your own, when He is calling you to run to Him and stay close?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The cities of refuge offered real safety, but only to those who actually fled to them and stayed. A manslayer who refused to run, or who wandered back outside the city's bounds before the appointed time, forfeited the protection. The refuge was free, but it had to be entered and remained in. Safety was found inside, not at a distance.

There is a spiritual picture here that searches us. How often are we tempted to stay outside the refuge God provides, to manage our guilt, our fear, our weariness on our own, rather than running to Him and staying close? We treat Christ as a place we visit on Sundays rather than the refuge we live inside. We try to handle things ourselves, keeping a careful distance, when the safety we long for is found only in drawing near and abiding.

Jesus said, abide in me, and I in you (John 15:4). The refuge is not merely a one-time flight; it is a place to dwell. Where are you keeping your distance, trying to cope on your own when He is

calling you to run to Him and remain? The invitation is not to occasional visits but to a home. Safety, peace, and rest are found inside the refuge, near to Christ, not out in the open managing on your own strength.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The refuge protected only those who fled to it and remained within it.
- We are often tempted to manage life at a distance rather than run to Christ.
- Christ is not merely a place to visit but a refuge to dwell in (John 15:4).
- Safety and rest are found near to Him, not in self-reliance.

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you tempted to manage life on your own rather than run to Christ?
- What is the difference between visiting the refuge and abiding in it?
- What would it look like this week to draw near to Christ and stay close?

Question 9

Student Question:

The land God apportioned was the inheritance He had sworn to give, yet the New Testament tells us the patriarchs themselves looked beyond it to a better, heavenly country, and that the promise to Abraham is fulfilled in Christ and all who belong to Him. How does the apportioning of the land find its true fulfillment in Christ and His church and in the heavenly inheritance God holds out to us (Galatians 3:16,29; Hebrews 11:13-16; Hebrews 4:8-9; 1 Peter 1:3-4), rather than in a future earthly, political restoration of national Israel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here is the doctrinal heart of this final lesson. The land of Canaan, with its drawn boundaries and apportioned inheritance, was a genuine fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. Joshua would soon enter it and the LORD would give them rest from their enemies. And yet the New Testament insists that the land was never the end of the story. It was a shadow pointing to something far greater.

Consider how the apostles read it. The promise to Abraham, Paul says, was ultimately about one Seed, which is Christ, and all who belong to Christ are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:16,29). The inheritance, then, is not finally a strip of land in the Middle East but a place in Christ. Hebrews presses further: if Joshua had truly given them rest, God would not afterward have spoken of another day; therefore there remains a rest for the people of God (Hebrews 4:8-9). The land-rest was a down payment on a greater rest. And Peter names the inheritance plainly, incorruptible, undefiled, that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:3-4).

This is why we must firmly reject any reading that expects a future earthly, political restoration of national Israel as the fulfillment of these promises. The patriarchs themselves did not look for that; they confessed they were strangers seeking a better, that is, a heavenly country, and God has prepared for them a city (Hebrews 11:13–16). The kingdom is not a future earthly realm; it is the church, established at Pentecost, over which Christ reigns now at God's right hand. The apportioning of the land in Numbers finds its true and final fulfillment in Christ and His church, and in the heavenly inheritance He holds out to all who are His. We are not looking backward to a map; we are looking upward and forward to a city.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The land was a genuine fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise yet always pointed beyond itself.
- The promise to Abraham is fulfilled in Christ and all who belong to Him (Galatians 3:16,29).
- The land-rest was a shadow of the greater rest that remains (Hebrews 4:8–9).
- The true inheritance is incorruptible and reserved in heaven (1 Peter 1:3–4).
- We reject premillennial and dispensational readings of a future earthly, political restoration of national Israel.
- The kingdom is the church, established at Pentecost, over which Christ reigns now (Hebrews 11:13–16).

Discussion Prompts

- How does the New Testament show that the land promise is fulfilled in Christ and His church?
- Why must we reject the idea of a future earthly, political restoration of national Israel as the fulfillment?
- How does setting your hope on the heavenly inheritance change the way you live now?

Question 10

Student Question:

As we close this study of Numbers, name one specific way Jesus has been forming you through this book and is forming you now, perhaps in trusting His faithfulness, in dealing thoroughly with sin, in running to Him as your refuge, or in setting your hope on the inheritance reserved in heaven. What is your next step in following Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We have come to the end of Numbers, and the book leaves us in a fitting place: in the plains of Moab, by Jordan, near Jericho, on the very edge of the promise. Behind lies the long wilderness, every station of it marked by God's faithfulness. Ahead lies the land, and beyond the land, the better country. It is a good place to take stock of what God has been doing in you through this whole study.

Think back over Numbers. The census and the ordering of God's people. The grumbling and the discipline. The faithlessness at Kadesh and the long years of waiting. The grace that kept providing manna and water. The pictures of Christ scattered throughout, the bronze serpent lifted up, the rock that gave water, the refuge that sheltered the runner. Through all of it, one steady theme: a faithful God patiently bringing an imperfect people to the edge of His promise. And that same God has been at work on you.

So name it. How has Jesus been forming you through this book? Perhaps He has been teaching you to trust His faithfulness when the road is long. Perhaps He has been pressing you to deal thoroughly with some lingering sin. Perhaps He has been drawing you to run to Him as your refuge, or lifting your hope from the things of earth to the inheritance reserved in heaven. Whatever it is, do not let this study end as mere information. Like Israel, you stand on the edge of the promise. The God who brought you here is faithful. Take the next step, and keep following Him toward the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Numbers ends on the edge of the promise, a fitting place to take stock of God's work in us.
- The whole book testifies to a faithful God patiently bringing an imperfect people forward.
- Christ has been pictured and at work throughout the study.
- Spiritual formation calls for a named response and a concrete next step.
- We stand, like Israel, on the edge of the promise, called to keep following toward the heavenly city.

Discussion Prompts

- How has Jesus been forming you through this study of Numbers?
- Which theme has He pressed on you most: His faithfulness, dealing with sin, running to Him, or hope of the inheritance?
- What is your next step in following Him toward the city that has foundations?