

The Book of Numbers

Lesson 20: The Journey Recalled and the Land Apportioned -- Numbers 33:1-36:13

There is a kind of remembering that does more than recall facts. It steadies the soul. At the close of Numbers, before Israel takes a single step into the Promised Land, Moses sits down and writes out the whole itinerary, station by station, from Rameses in Egypt all the way to the plains of Moab. Forty-two camps. Forty years. A long list of place names, many of them otherwise forgotten, each one a place where God had led, fed, corrected, and kept His people. It reads like a travel diary, but it is really a testimony. Look where He brought us from. Look where He has brought us.

Then the book turns toward the future. God gives the boundaries of the land, north and south, east and west, the land He had sworn to Abraham generations before. He names the men who will divide it, tribe by tribe. He carves out forty-eight cities for the Levites, who would receive no territory of their own because the LORD was their inheritance. And among those, He sets apart six cities of refuge, places where a person who killed someone by accident could flee and be safe from the avenger of blood until justice was done. Mercy and justice, built right into the map.

The book ends, fittingly, where it had nearly ended in tears, with the daughters of Zelophehad. These five sisters, who had once boldly asked for an inheritance because their father left no sons, now appear again, and a careful provision is made so that the land granted to them would stay within their tribe. The very last verse of Numbers reads almost like a quiet exhale: these are the commandments which the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses unto the children of Israel in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho. Near Jericho. So close you could see it.

And that is exactly where this lesson means to leave you, on the edge of the promise, looking back at God's faithfulness and forward to your inheritance. Because the land Israel was about to enter was never the final destination. The patriarchs themselves looked past it to a better, heavenly country. The rest that Joshua gave was only a shadow of the rest that still remains for the people of God. The cities of refuge were a picture of the refuge we have fled to in Christ. This week, recall your own journey, every station where God kept you, and lift your eyes to the inheritance that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

Group Discussion: Take a few minutes as a group to recall your own journey of faith. What are some of the stations, the hard places and the gracious ones, where you can look back and say, God was faithful there? How does remembering His past faithfulness strengthen you for what is ahead?

Personal Reflection: Where are you living right now, on the edge of some promise God has made, hesitating to step forward in trust? What would it look like this week to remember His faithfulness and take the next step?

Read Numbers 33:1–36:13

Study Questions

1. 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)?
2. 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?
3. 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)?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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)?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Joshua 21:43–45, the LORD gave Israel all the land and not one good word failed; Hebrews 4:8–9, if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak of another day; a rest remains for the people of God; Hebrews 11:13–16, the patriarchs sought a better, heavenly country; 1 Peter 1:3–4, an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in heaven for you; Hebrews 6:18–20, we have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us

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