

The background of the entire image is a detailed, sepia-toned illustration of a vast crowd of people, likely representing the Israelites, moving through a landscape. The people are depicted in various poses, some walking in lines, others in groups, filling the entire scene from the foreground to the distant hills. The title 'Towards the PROMISED LAND' is superimposed in large, bold, white capital letters over the upper half of the crowd.

Towards the PROMISED LAND

The book of Numbers



Numbers: Towards the Promised Land

Important dates for Term 2:	2
Before You Begin.....	3
Study 1: Remembering God’s Deliverance	5
Study 2: Surprised by Grumbling	9
Study 3: Hard Hearts.....	13
Study 4: From the Fire Pan into the Fire	17
Study 5: When Leaders Let Us Down	21
Study 6: Soft Hearts	25
Study 7: God Will Bless His People	29
Study 8: Looking to the Future	33
Study 9: Holy War	37
Study 10: Cities of Refuge	41
Pray for our Mission Partners....	44

Important dates for Term 2:

May

28th April – Numbers Overview &

Term 2 Kick Off

2nd – Soulies Kicks Off

3rd – SMBC Children’s Min Conf

4th – Newish Lunch

8th – PTC Kicks Off

18th – Chillout Mission Launch!

25th – Parent’s Seminar

**26th – Anglicare Foster Circle
Event**

June

**12th – Combined Northern
Beaches Prayer & Praise Night**

15th – Chillout Team Meeting

21st – Equip Women’s Conf

27th – Last week of Soulies

July

9th – CG Leaders Meeting

15th – Chillout Team
Meeting

16th-18th – Chillout Mission

20th – Chillout Church
(4pm)

21st – Start Term 3

25th – Soulies Kicks Off

Before You Begin

Introduction

The book of Numbers is one of the less-studied books of the Bible, but it contains a wealth of wisdom for the people of God. It is primarily a narrative about the Israelites' journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land. This narrative is interspersed with legal regulations that govern the relationship between God and his people, both during their journey and after they settle in the Promised Land.

The book takes its name from the fact that the narrative is dominated by two military censuses (1:1–46; 26:1–65), one at the beginning of their sojourn in the wilderness, and the other at the end of their sojourn. But it contains much more than a couple of censuses. The theological purpose of the book is to show that while God punished the first generation of Israelites for their failure to enter and take possession of the Promised Land (Numbers 13–14), God mercifully allowed their descendants to take possession of it.

Due to the shortness of time and space, we are not able to explore every part of this book, but we have chosen a representative sample of key passages, which reflect the major movements in the book and the most important theological themes.

Context

The book of Numbers is one of the first five books in the Bible written by Moses known as the Pentateuch (Greek for “Five Books”) or Torah (“Law”). It is therefore set in the context of creation (Genesis 1–2), the fall into sin (Genesis 3), God's setting aside a chosen people for himself (Gen 12:1–3), the people flourishing into a great nation (Exod 1:7), being taken into captivity in Egypt (Exod 1:8–14) and then being delivered from captivity through the Exodus. Thus, an important piece of the puzzle is that the Israelites are God's chosen people whom he has redeemed from slavery in Egypt.

Theology

In the book of Numbers we see a God who is faithful to his promises, despite the Israelites' failure to trust in him, reflected in their repeated rebellions against him and his appointed leaders, Moses (the great law-giver) and his brother Aaron (the high priest). The holiness of God is writ large, in that his people are to utterly wipe out the inhabitants of the Promised Land before they take possession of it, to protect themselves from idolatry and immorality. We see continual reminders of both the holiness of God and the seriousness of sin.

Dominating the outlook of the book is the threefold promise that God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3, that God would bless his people, give them the Promised Land, and multiply them into a great multitude. The book effectively shows how these promises came to fruition. As we read this book, it is important to keep in mind that the promise of land was all about God being present with and among his people. Jesus is the fulfilment of this promise, so that God's

people today are no longer restricted to a particular land to enjoy being present with him. This is one reason why we should be cautious about attempts to identify the Promised Land of the Old Testament with the modern state of Israel, and to put our hopes in it.

One of the most difficult aspects of studying the Book of Numbers is confronting the reality of holy war. In several passages, God commands the Israelites to engage in battle with the inhabitants of Canaan. These episodes are challenging, especially for modern readers, as they raise difficult questions about God's justice, the nature of war, and the ethics of violence. We should keep in mind a number of things. Firstly, God has absolute rights of ownership over all peoples and places (Exod 19:5; Ps 24:1; 50:10). Secondly, God is just and righteous in all that he does (Deut 32:4; Rom 9:14). Thirdly, all people deserve God's justice; none of us deserve God's mercy (Ro, 3:23). Fourthly, inhabitants of Canaan were enemies of God – guilty of wickedness, idolatry and immorality – who deserved to be punished (Gen 15:6; Lev 18:24–30; Deut 9:5). The destruction of the Canaanites was precisely because of their rebellion and according to God's special purposes. Holy War was restricted to a particular time and place, and is not a pattern for Christians to emulate today, for we are to persuade people of the truth about Christ with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15–16).

Interpretation

An important principle of interpretation is that the whole Bible is about Jesus, who he is and what he came to do (John 5:39; Luke 24:44). In order to avoid simplistic, moralistic applications (i.e. the Israelites did some amazing thing and we should do likewise), it is important to understand how each passage points to Christ, before considering how it applies to us. Christ is the faithful son of God who brings about God's kingdom on earth (Matthew 8–12). Christ is the one in whom all of God's promises find their "yes" and "amen" (2 Cor 1:20). As we study the book of Numbers, we will identify and discuss both direct scriptural references and also indirect thematic references to Christ, which shed light on God's redemptive plan in him. For example, the grumbling of the Israelites and their failure to trust in God finds its ultimate resolution in Christ, who perfectly trusted his Father and fulfilled the law. In the book of Numbers, we see the need for a saviour, and in Jesus, we see the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel and to the world.

Application

The book of Numbers has a wealth of wisdom for Christians today. Just as the Israelites struggled with grumbling, rebellion, and a lack of trust in God, we too are often tempted to distrust God's promises when things are difficult. These ten studies will challenge us to resist the temptation to grumble in the face of hardship, to confront our rebellious attitudes, and to learn to trust God more fully. The story of the Israelites reminds us that God is faithful, even when we are not, and that he will fulfill his promises, even when we doubt. As we walk through these difficult texts, we will be invited to examine our own hearts, recognise areas where we struggle to trust God, and be reminded of his unchanging faithfulness. Ultimately, the book of Numbers points us to the need for a saviour who can lead us into the true rest that God promises, a rest that is found in Christ alone.

Study 1: Remembering God's Deliverance

Numbers 9:1–23

Getting Started

1. Starting something new, like a new job or a new school, or moving to a new place, can produce anxiety and stress. Where can we find comfort in these moments?

Introduction

Fittingly, the book of Numbers opens with a census, a count of all the men aged 20 and over who are able to fight in battle, while the Levites are set apart for their role in the Tabernacle (Numbers 1). The Israelites are then carefully arranged by tribes round the Tabernacle (Numbers 2). The Levites are assigned specific duties related to the Tabernacle, and a second census is taken of the Levites, noting their roles in serving God (Numbers 3). Detailed instructions are then given for the transport of the Tabernacle and its sacred objects (Numbers 4). Laws are given concerning purity, including the treatment of people with certain physical conditions (Numbers 5). God introduces the Nazirite vow, which allows individuals to dedicate themselves to God in a special way (Numbers 6). The leaders of the twelve Israelite tribes offer gifts for the dedication of the Tabernacle (Numbers 7). The Levites are then purified and consecrated for their service in the Tabernacle (Numbers 8). By the time we arrive at Numbers 9, the Israelites are about to resume their journey toward the Promised Land (Numbers 10). This is one of four occasions when Moses does not know what to do with the people, and consults with God, who answers his questions (cf. Lev 24:10–16, 23; Num 15:32–36; 27:1–11).

Read Numbers 9:1–14

1. When do these events take place (9:1)? Why is this significant?

2. What is the presenting problem in this passage (9:6–7)? See Leviticus 7:20–21 for background.
3. What is God’s solution to this problem (9:8–12)?
4. What does this passage show us about God’s character?

Read Numbers 9:15–23

5. How is God’s presence experienced by the Israelites (9:15–16)? If you have time, lookup the origins of this approach in Exod 13:21; 14:19, 20, 24.
6. What do you think it would have been like experiencing God’s presence in guiding his people in this way?
7. How is this passage (9:15–23) related to the previous one (9:1–14)?

8. Why is it important that God guide his people? What does it say about our relationship with God?

Read 1 Corinthians 5:7

9. How does the Passover celebration point to Jesus? If you have time, also lookup John 1:29 and Matt 1:23.

Application

10. God continues to guide people today. Look up the following passages and reflect on what God says about leading us on our journey to the new heavens and the new earth:

(a) John 14:6

(b) Mark 8:34–38

(c) Hebrews 4:11–13

11. What are some ways that we can commemorate God's deliverance in our own lives, in the same way that believers in the Old Testament celebrated the Passover? If you have time, look up 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.

Prayer

- Ask God to help you trust in his perfect timing and direction, just as the Israelites followed his lead through the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, and to give you the strength to be obedient to his will in all areas of life.
- Thank God for the sacrifice of Jesus, the ultimate Passover Lamb, and pray for a deeper understanding of the deliverance he provides, that you may live in gratitude and honour his sacrifice daily.

Study 2: Surprised by Grumbling

Numbers 11

Getting Started

1. Why might we think that grumbling is a trivial matter? What can be the consequences of grumbling be?

Introduction

In the previous chapter, God commanded his people to commemorate the Passover, in order to keep his deliverance of them front and centre as they travelled through the wilderness to the Promised Land (9:1–14). God also promised to guide them in the form of a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night (9:15–23). The Israelites set out for the Promised Land with much fanfare in Num 10:11–36. In this study, we see the Israelites grumbling for the first (or many) times.

Read Numbers 11:1–35

2. What did the Israelites do to arouse God anger (11:1)? Why did God's anger cease (11:2)?
3. What's so tragic about this second complaint (11:4–6)?

- 10

Read Philippians 3:7–11

9. What is the secret of contentment?

Application

10. The conflict in this chapter is stirred up by rabblers (11:4). How does this serve as a warning for us today?

11. In what areas of your life do you struggle with contentment? How can what we have read today (Numbers 11; Philippians 3:7–11) help?

12. What does this passage tell us about the burdens of those who lead God's people?

Prayer

- Ask God to help you trust in his sufficiency and to cultivate a heart of gratitude, even when you feel dissatisfied or tempted to complain, remembering his faithfulness in providing for you.
- Thank God for the gift of his Spirit, who empowers and equips believers for service, and pray for a deeper sensitivity to the Spirit's leading and a willingness to use your gifts for his glory.

Study 3: Hard Hearts

Numbers 13:26–14:45

Getting Started

1. In what areas of our life are we prone to not trust God? Why?

Introduction

In the previous chapter, the Israelites grumbled because they failed to remember what life was like during their captivity, as well as the awesome deliverance wrought by God – not to mention the fact that they had spent a whole year living under God’s tutelage. This is significant because in this part of the book, God is going to rest their trust in a significant way. At the start of Numbers 13, God has Moses sent out 12 men from each tribe to scout the land of Canaan, including his assistant Hoshea (renamed Joshua) from the tribe of Ephraim and Caleb from the tribe of Judah (13:1–16). They were to report back about the people (including their number and strength), the land (including its quality, productivity and fortifications; 13:17–20).

Read Numbers 13:26–33

2. What report did the scouts bring back (13:26–29)?
3. How did Caleb respond to this report (13:30)? How did the other scouts respond (13:31–33)?

Read Numbers 14:1–38

4. How did the Israelites respond to this report (14:1–4)?
5. How did the leaders respond to the Israelites (14:5–9)?
6. How does God respond to the Israelites (14:10–12)?
7. How does Moses attempt to divert God’s wrath (14:13–19)?
8. How does God respond to Moses (14:20–38)?

Read Numbers 14:39–45

9. What was the aftermath of these events?

Read Hebrews 3:7–19

10. How does the author of the letter to the Hebrews apply this incident in Numbers to Christians today?

Application

11. What situations do you find yourself in that cause you to feel overwhelmed and make it hard for you to trust in God? What can you do about this?
12. How can we support others who struggle to believe and trust in the promises of God?

Prayer

- Ask God to strengthen your faith and give you the courage to trust in his promises, even when challenges seem insurmountable, and to help you overcome fear with confidence in his power and faithfulness.
- Thank God for his mercy and patience, recognizing that, despite our doubts and disobedience, he continues to offer forgiveness and opportunities for restoration.

Study 4: From the Fire Pan into the Fire

Numbers 16

Getting Started

1. We have seen two episodes where the Israelites have grumbled (Numbers 11) and rebelled against God's command to take possession of the Promised Land (Numbers 13—14). Do you think by now the Israelites will have learned their lesson? Why or why not?

Introduction

In the previous study, we saw the Israelites scout the Promised Land but fail to take possession of it because they were afraid of the people there. Numbers 16 is the most dramatic chapter in a book filled with drama. Although God's judgment of the Israelites in Numbers 14 put a temporary halt on their rebellion, in this chapter the theme of rebellion comes back with a vengeance. Previously, the Israelites had talked about replacing Moses and Aaron; here, Korah nominates himself as a replacement. As a Kohathite Levite, Korah is closely related to Moses.

Read Numbers 16:1–3

2. What is the presenting problem?

Read Numbers 16:4–17

3. What litmus test does Moses propose to test their claim to holiness (16:5–7)?

4. Read Lev 10:1–2. What happened when Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu burned incense in an unauthorised manner? What is at stake in the present situation?
5. What charge does Moses bring against Korah (16:8–11)?
6. What charge does Moses bring against Dathan and Abiram (16:12–15)?

Read Numbers 16:18–40

7. What was the outcome?

Read Numbers 16:41–50

8. What was the aftermath of these events?

Read Psalm 106:13–18, 23–27

9. How does the Psalmist interpret the events in Numbers 16?

Read the Book of Jude

10. What is the presenting problem here? How is the rebellion of Korah relevant (Jude 11)?

Application

11. What is the relationship between God's justice and God's love?

12. How does this passage point to Christ? If you have time, consult Heb 9:15, 24; 1 John 2:1.

13. At the end of this story, we see Aaron making intercession for the people using ritual incense. How can Christians intercede for others today? If you have time, consult 1 Pet 2:9; Matt 5:44; 2 Thess 1:11 and Jam 5:16.

Prayer

- Ask God to help you recognize areas in your life where pride or disobedience may be hindering your relationship with him, and to give you a humble heart that seeks his correction and guidance.
- Thank God for his patience and mercy, recognising that, despite our failures and sins, he continues to offer forgiveness and restoration through Jesus Christ.

Study 5: When Leaders Let Us Down

Numbers 20

Getting Started

1. Think of a time that a leader (it doesn't have to be a church leader!) let you down. What did you feel like? What impact did it have on you?

Introduction

In the previous study, Korah, Dathan, Abiram and 250 of their co-conspirators attempted to usurp the authority of Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16). This attempt met a predictable conclusion: Korah, Dathan and Abiram and their families were swallowed up by the earth, the 250 co-conspirators were consumed by fire, and a plague broke out which killed 14,700 people. This event follows an earlier rebellion against God (the refusal to take possession of the Promise land in Numbers 13—14) and grumbling about him (demanding meat in Numbers 11). In this study, we will see whether the Israelites' leaders will fare any better.

Read Numbers 20:1–13

2. What does Miriam's death represent (20:1)?
3. What is the presenting problem (20:2a)? How do the Israelites react to this problem (20:2b–6)?

4. How did Moses and Aaron respond? What did God command them to do (20:6–8)?
5. What did Moses then do? How did God interpret this? What was the consequence of this (20:9–13)?

Read Numbers 20:14–29

6. What do the Israelites ask of the Edomites (20:14–17, 19)? What was their response (20:18, 20–21).
7. How does Aaron's death frame the chapter (20:22–29 cf. 20:1)?
8. What does God's decision to punish Moses and Aaron for their disobedience teach us about the holiness of God and the seriousness of sin?

9. What does this chapter reveal about God's provision and faithfulness, even in the midst of human failure?

Read Psalm 78:9–39

10. How does the Psalmist characterise the Israelites?

Read John 7:37–39

11. How does Jesus bring us the kind of water we need to survive as his people? If you have time, also consult 1 Cor 10:1–5.

Application

12. How should the leaders of God's people treat them when they sin?

13. It can be devastating when we learn that a Christian leader has fallen. How can we reassure ourselves at times like this?

Prayer

- Ask God to help you follow his instructions carefully, trusting in his wisdom, and to reveal any areas where you may need to repent of disobedience or pride.
- Thank God for his mercy in providing for your needs, even when you make mistakes, and pray for a deeper understanding of his grace and patience.

Study 6: Soft Hearts

Numbers 21

Getting Started

1. Have you ever faced a difficult or painful situation that made you question God's plan for you? How did you respond?

Introduction

When the Israelites came face-to-face with the Edomites, they shrunk back in fear (20:20–21). Will they ever have the gumption to trust in God's promises and take possession of the Promised Land? We know that 38 years passed from the time the Israelites left Kadesh Barnea until they crossed the Zered Valley (Deut 2:14). This block of time takes place between Num 20:22 and 21:12. The events in this chapter take place when most of the first generation have died, and the second generation have come of age.

Read Numbers 21:1–9

2. What was the result of the first confrontation between the Israelites and the inhabitants of the land of Canaan (21:1–3)? Why is this significant?
3. What immediately follows this initial encounter (21:4–9)?

Read Numbers 21:21–35

4. At first glance, the encounter with the Amorites looks like a re-run of the encounter with the Edomites (21:21–32; cf. 20:14–21). What is different this time?
5. How did events play out in the confrontation with Og, king of Bashan (21:33–35)?
6. What does God's response to the Israelites' sin and subsequent healing teach us about the relationship between judgment and grace?

Read John 3:13–15

7. How does Jesus apply the episode about the bronze snake to himself?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:6–10

8. How does Paul apply the episode about the bronze snake to Jesus?

Application

9. How are we to make sense of the fact that God's people have been tasked with undertaking holy war against the inhabitants of Canaan?

10. How does the second generation of Israelites compare with the first?

11. Have a look back over 1 Cor 10:6–10. In what ways are we in danger of mimicking the Israelites?

Prayer

- Pray for a deeper trust in God's provision and faithfulness, especially when facing challenges or hardships in life.
- Give thanks for the salvation offered through Jesus Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of the bronze serpent, and ask for the strength to turn to him in faith in every situation.

Study 7: God Will Bless His People

Numbers 22:1—23:12

Getting Started

1. When you think about God's blessings in your life, what are some specific examples that stand out to you, and why?

Introduction

In the background of the events in the book of Numbers is the tripartite promise made to Abraham in Gen 12:1–3: descendants, land and blessing. Note in particular Gen 12:3: “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” The censuses in the book of Numbers (Numbers 1 and 26) show that the first part of the promise has been fulfilled: there are many descendants. We saw the second part of the promise being fulfilled in the previous study, when the second generation of Israelites started to take possession of the Promised Land, defeating the Canaanite king (21:1–3) and the Amorite kings of Sihon (21:21–32) and Og (21:33–35). The question that remains is whether the third part of the promise will come to fruition.

Read Numbers 22:1–20

2. What do the Moabites – including Balak, the king of Moab – think about the chance of a military operation succeeding against the Israelites (22:1–4a)? What does Balak propose instead (22:4b–6)?
3. How does Balaam, a diviner, respond to Balak’s request (22:7–20)?

Read Numbers 22:21–41

4. What danger does Balaam face? How does Balaam's donkey spare him from disaster?
5. How can we make sense of the fact that God allowed Balaam to go (22:20) and then got angry at him for doing so (22:22)?

Read Numbers 23:1–12

6. What does Balaam do after Balak has made the necessary preparations? How does this meet with Balak's expectations?

Balak tries to get Balak to change his message a second time (23:13–26) and a third time (23:27–24:14). Then a fourth prophecy emerges, containing this promise:

- ^{17b} A star will come out of Jacob;
a sceptre will rise out of Israel
He will crush the foreheads of Moab,
the skulls o of all the people of Sheth.
- ¹⁸ Edom will be conquered;
Seir, his enemy, will be conquered,
but Israel will grow strong.
- ¹⁹ A ruler will come out of Jacob
and destroy the survivors of the city.”

Balaam then proceeds to offer further oracles against the Amalekites (24:20) the Kenites (24:21–22), the Assyrians and Eber (24:23–24).

7. Why can't Balaam curse the Israelites, despite repeated requests by Balak to do so (23:12)? What does this tell us about God?

Read 2 Peter 2:10b–16

8. How does 2 Pet 2:15 help us to understand why God is angry with Balaam?

Application

9. How is Num 24:17 fulfilled in the Old Testament (2 Sam 8:2, 13–14)? How is Num 24:17 fulfilled in the New Testament (2 Pet 1:19; Rev 22:16)?
10. In this passage, God spoke his message through a donkey and a pagan prophet. How do we expect God to speak to people today? Read Heb 1:1–2 and 2 Tim 3:14–17.
11. What sort of blessings from God do Christians enjoy now, and what blessings from God do we look forward to? How might we regard the threats to God's people today?

Prayer

- Pray that by his Holy Spirit, God would allow us to discern the truth as we read his word
- Pray for humility, that we would understand that any insight we gain into his word comes from him alone

Study 8: Looking to the Future

Numbers 27

Getting Started

1. How does our vision of the future shape the present?

Introduction

The Israelites have begun to take possession of the Promised Land (Numbers 21) despite the attempts of their enemies to defeat them and to curse them (Numbers 22—24). The Israelites continued to rebel against God, exemplified in the way the men began to engage in sexual immorality with Moabite women (Numbers 25). Once again the High Priest (this time Aaron's son Eleazar) intercedes to stop the ensuring plague, but only after 24,000 people have died (25:9). A second census is conducted (Numbers 26 cf. Numbers 1), which shows that everyone in the previous generation of Israelites has now died, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb (26:65). This census also provides the basis for equally apportioning the Promised Land (26:52–56). The Levites were not counted along with the other Israelites because they were entitled to no inheritance of land (25:62). Their inheritance was God himself (Deut 18:1–2).

Read Numbers 27:1–11

2. Who are the daughters of Zelophehad, and what is their predicament (27:1–4)?
3. Why do the daughters of Zelophehad include the insertion “Our father died in the wilderness. He was not among Korah’s followers, who banded together against the Lord, but died for his own sins...” (27:3).

4. How does God resolve this problem (27:5–11)?

Read Numbers 36:1–12

5. What potential complication arises from the solution commanded by God (36:1–4)? How can this complication be addressed (36:5–9)?

Moses and Aaron were condemned to die for their disobedience when Moses struck the rock twice (20:1–13). Previously, Aaron went up Mount Hor and died after symbolically transferring his garments (and therefore the priesthood) to his son Eleazar (20:22–29).

Read Numbers 27:12–23

6. What is Moses told to do, and why (27:12–14)?

7. How will God provide for this new situation (27:15–20)?

8. How was Joshua to discern God's will (27:21)? How does this differ from Moses?

Read Galatians 3:26–29

9. On what basis will people be “heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:29)?

Read Hebrews 11:13–16

10. What awaits those who die trusting and believing in Jesus?

Application

11. Moses was a shepherd in the land of Midian for 40 years before the Lord spoke to him in the form of a burning bush and called him to shepherd the Israelites for a further 40 years (Exodus 3). Look up the following verses about Jesus, the true shepherd, and reflect on what good shepherding looks like:

- Matthew 9:35–38

- Mark 6:33–34

- John 10:7–15

- John 10:27–30

- John 21:15–17

12. God observes that Joshua has “the spirit of leadership” (27:18). What qualities should we look for in leaders, based on what we have seen in the book of Numbers?

Prayer

- Give thanks that God gives leaders to his people. Pray that they would exemplify the spirit of leadership demonstrated by Joshua and his namesake, Jesus.
- Give thanks for God’s continued faithfulness in providing for his people, and pray for the courage to trust His plan, even when facing transitions or uncertainties in life.

Study 9: Holy War

Numbers 31:1–31

Getting Started

1. How does our culture feel about the idea of justice? How does this line up with what you believe as a Christian?

Introduction

After commissioning Joshua (Numbers 27), the book of Numbers outlines prescribed offerings and festivals (Numbers 28 and 29) and regulations surrounding vows (Numbers 30). Today's passage opens with a declaration of Holy War against the Midianites (31:1). Holy War is a bloody war of total destruction where God used his people to execute moral judgment against his wicked enemies.

We need to keep a few things in mind when exploring God's command to Holy War. Firstly, God has absolute rights of ownership over all peoples and places (Exod 19:5; Ps 24:1; 50:10). Secondly, God is just and righteous in all that he does (Deut 32:4; Rom 9:14). Thirdly, all people deserve God's justice; none of us deserve God's mercy (Ro, 3:23). Fourthly, the Canaanites were enemies of God who deserved to be punished (Gen 15:6; Lev 18:24–30; Deut 9:5). Fifthly, God's actions were not an example of ethnic cleansing. Ethnic cleansing and genocide refer to destruction of a people due to their ethnicity. The destruction of the Canaanites was precisely because of their rebellion and according to God's special purposes.

It is important to recognise that the Israelites have a mixed relationship with the Midianites. On the one hand, Moses's father-in-law Jethro was a Midianite priest (Exodus 3:1; 4:18; 18). On the other hand, the Midianites collaborated with the Moabites against the Israelites (22:4, 7). When the Israelite men began engaging in sexual immorality with Moabite women, a Midianite woman was also involved (25:6, 14–15). This is known as the Baal Peor incident. In the wake of the Baal Peor incident, God said to Moses: "Treat the Midianites as enemies and kill them" (25:16). In one sense, the Midianites are no different from the other wicked people inhabiting the land of Canaan.

Read Numbers 31:1–24

2. What did God tell the people to do? What would ensue for Moses (31:1–2)?
3. What was the result (31:7–12)?
4. Why was Moses angry with the officers of the army (31:14–16)? What was the solution (31:17–18)?
5. What does God tell the Israelites to do once they have put the Midianites to death (31:19–24)?

Read Numbers 31:25–31

6. What does the allocation of the plunder and spoils of war reveal about God?

Read 1 Pet 2:11–17

7. Christians are not expected to conduct Holy War against non-Christians. Why is this? What has changed?

Application

8. How does this chapter challenge our views about justice?
9. How can we escape the wrath of God:
- Romans 5:9
 - Ephesians 2:1–10
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10
10. The Israelites were warned to protect themselves against the idolatry and immorality of the Midianites. How can Christians guard against the temptation to idolatry and immorality today?

11. What do we learn from this passage about the role of personal holiness and ongoing sanctification in the life of God's people?

Prayer

- Pray that our desire to see God's justice honoured would grow
- Give thanks that God has saved us from his wrath through Jesus Christ (Rom 5:9)
- Pray that God would help us to grow in purity and holiness

Study 10: Cities of Refuge

Numbers 35:1–34

Getting Started

1. How do you typically react when you hear about laws or rules that seem unusual or difficult to understand? Why do you think certain laws might be hard to accept or follow?

Introduction

In the previous study, we saw the Israelites conducting Holy War against the Midianites (Numbers 31). Following this, Moses deals with a request by the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh to settle east of the Jordan River, outside the Promised Land, in the land they had captured from the Amorite kings Sihon and Og (Num 21:21–35). Then we have a “big picture” overview of the journey of the Israelites (Num 33:1–49). God then tells Moses once again that the Israelites must completely drive out the inhabitants of the Promised Land. Doing so will bring great blessing, and failure to do so will bring great cursing (Num 33:50–56).

Read Numbers 35:1–5

2. What is the purpose of the provision for the Levites?

Read Numbers 35:6–34

3. What is the purpose of the cities of refuge (35:6–15)? What do they reveal about God’s character?

4. Why do you think 6 of the 48 Levite cities are to be cities of refuge (35:6)?
5. How does God define accidental death? How are those involved in killing someone to be treated (35:16–25)?
6. What happens if the accused killer leaves a city of refuge (35:26–28)?
7. What final provisions does God make (35:29–34)?
8. How can the cities of refuge be seen as foreshadowing Christ?

Read Hebrews 6:13–20

9. Heb 6:18 says that “we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged.” How do the provisions about cities of refuge in Numbers 35 apply to believers today?

Application

10. How can we apply the principle of refuge in our lives today, when dealing with conflict, or when dealing with situations where justice and mercy are at odds? See Matt 5:38–42.

11. What does Numbers 35 teach us about how we should approach forgiveness and reconciliation in our relationships?

12. Thinking back over the “big picture” of Numbers, what has stuck in your mind?

Prayer

- Pray for a deeper understanding of God’s justice and mercy, asking him to help you live in a way that honours his holiness and protects the sanctity of life.
- Give thanks for God's provision of refuge and his care for those who are vulnerable and ask for the wisdom to show compassion and justice in your own relationships and decisions.

Pray for our Mission Partners....



CHRIS & KAREN WEBB

RECEIVE PRAYER UPDATES



DAN & OLIVIA WEBSTER

RECEIVE PRAYER UPDATES



CHRIST OUR REFUGE CHURCH
BRISBANE

VISIT WEBSITE



THE VILLAGE CHURCH
JINDABYNE

VISIT WEBSITE

Visit www.stfaiths.church for more information

