

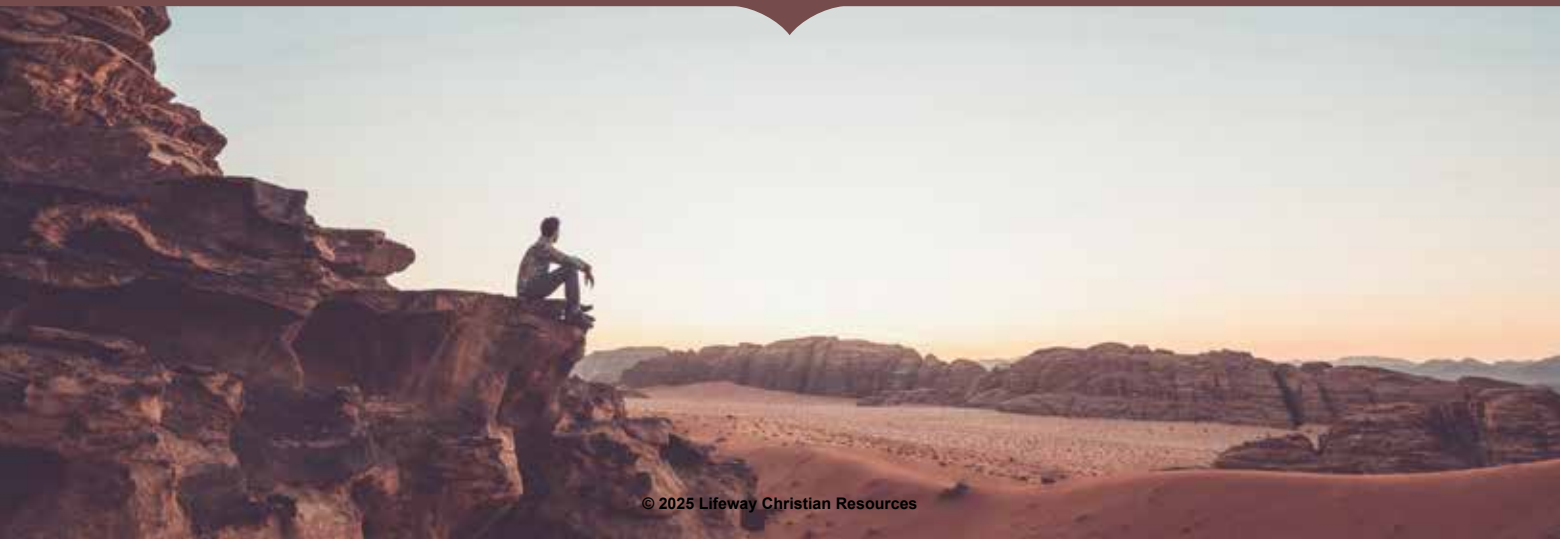


EXPLORE **THE BIBLE.**  
*Adults*

# *Numbers & Deuteronomy*

**Leader Guide (CSB)**

**Fall 2025**



# STEP BY STEP

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In poetry and music, various metaphors have been applied to life on earth. For example, one song tells us that “life is a highway,” a journey that never stops and takes us on any number of adventures if we will take the time to embrace the magic. Decades earlier, a poet suggested that life is more like a choice between “two roads” that split at the edge of the woods. We’d love to try them both, but we have a choice to make—and the road we choose makes “all the difference.”

For all the images used for our short time on this earth, roads and highways might resonate more than others. It’s the simple process of putting one foot in front of the other each day that keeps us going. No matter how hard life gets, if we can just move a little farther down the line, we’re confident that better days will shine on us.

Humans are incredibly resilient that way.

Speaking of resilient, the ancient Israelites had started a life journey on pretty solid footing. They escaped the slavery of Egypt, walked through the walls of the Red Sea, and received God’s gameplan at Mount Sinai. Before long, they were on the edge of the promised land . . . until they weren’t.

Stubborn rebellion and disobedience moved them back to “Start” in the game of life. Now, their journey entailed forty years of walking around in circles until an entire generation died out. But while putting one foot in front of the other raised new struggles, they never lost God’s presence or His promises. Even as they were marking time in the desert, He was leading them—step by step—toward a second chance at Canaan.

That’s the story of Numbers and Deuteronomy. It’s all about God leading and protecting a band of imperfect people through a wilderness as they learned to trust Him. And as they learned to trust Him, they moved closer to the promised land.

That’s not just the story of the Israelites, though. It’s our narrative, as well. Rebels against our Creator we are born into a wilderness of sin that we can’t escape on our own. But God demonstrated His love by sending His Son to die in our place, to pay the price for our sin. All we have to do is put one foot in front of the other, step toward Him, and trust Him with our lives. If you’re ready to take that step, here’s what you must do . . .

- **Admit** to God that you are a sinner. Repent, turning from your sin.
- **By faith receive** Jesus as God’s Son and accept His gift of forgiveness from sin. He took the penalty for your sin by dying on the cross. Jesus also rose from the dead, making a new, eternal life possible for us.
- **Confess** your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. You may pray a prayer similar to this as you call on God to save you: “Dear God, I know that You love me. I confess my sin and need of salvation. I turn away from my sin and place my faith in Jesus as my Savior and Lord. In the name of Jesus I pray, amen.”

After you have received Jesus Christ into your life, tell a pastor or another Christian about your decision. Show others your faith in Christ by asking for baptism by immersion in your local church as a public expression of your faith.

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\*Evangelistic Emphasis

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# MEET THE WRITERS



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## A WORD FROM **THE TEAM LEADER**



Steadfast faith. Time-tested devotion. We each desire a deep faith in God that enables us to persevere through the valleys and rejoice on the mountaintops of life. In the books of Numbers and Deuteronomy, we get a front-row seat as the Israelites journeyed from Mount Sinai through the wilderness to the edge of the promised land. Like most expeditions, this journey was packed with unexpected events, a longer-than-expected timeline, and unforeseen challenges. The Israelites responded to these circumstances with grumbling, frustration, and disobedience to God's commands. Upon reaching the Plains of Moab, Moses called the Israelites to commit to wholehearted devotion—following God, His commands, and His ways.

Through the twists and turns of events, God's faithfulness to His people never faltered. He was with them. Time and again God demonstrated His loyalty to provide for and protect them as He led them to the promised land. His promise to be their God was neither forgotten nor dismissed. Despite their unfaithfulness, He remained fully faithful.

The lessons learned by the Israelites prove to be powerful truths we can cling to today. Our journeys will take unexpected turns, leaving us frustrated or unsure of what may lie ahead. Thankfully, we aren't left on our own to navigate our experiences. Like the Israelites, we can choose to follow Him each day. We serve a God who is wholly trustworthy. He is with us!

In Him,

**Amber Vaden**

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*Explore*

**Discover**



# *What Preschoolers Taught Me about Leading Adults*

Dwayne McCrary

One of the more desired rewards to earn in a preschool class is being the line leader. The first thing children will reveal to their parents at the end of the day is that they got to be the line leader that day. They won the prize by setting an example for the rest to follow. In most cases, the line leader is the one exhibiting the behavior desired by the teacher. In some cases, the child is selected by the teacher, who hopes the child will exhibit the desired behavior. Either way, the line leader sets the standard for that day.

When we accepted the role of leading an ongoing Bible study group, we became the line leader for that group. It is even possible that we too shared with our parents that we are a group leader! Let's think about how the line leader in a preschool class helps us understand our role as an adult group leader.

## **SETS THE EXAMPLE**

As already stated, the line leader serves as an example for everyone else to follow. That is how he got to be the line leader in the first place. The other preschoolers know that the line leader represents the expectations for the rest of the class.

When we accepted the role of a group leader, we also accepted the responsibility of representing what it looks like to be a follower of Jesus. That willingness to follow Jesus should be one thing that qualifies us to be the group leader. Following matters.

As strange as this may seem, the title of leader is earned by a willingness to follow. The preschooler follows the expectations defined by their teacher, and adult group leaders follow the expectations defined by the Teacher. Following makes us capable of leading.

## **FOCUSES ON THE TASK**

The preschool line leader focuses on the assigned task, which can include holding on to the rope, walking with purpose, and arriving at a specific destination. Holding the rope may be the



**“HOLDING ON TO THE ROPE, WALKING WITH PURPOSE,**



biggest challenge for the line leader because children often let go of the rope as they make their way down a hall or through a group of other preschoolers.

Lots of distractions exist that can take the attention of an adult Bible study group as well. We can become focused on physical needs, world events, and class socials, and forget about some of the larger items. None of these are bad if they do not become the primary focus of the group.

One of the roles we play as the group leader is maintaining a focus on reaching those far from God. This focus includes challenging ourselves to be more intentional in praying for those far from God and making sure our group does the same. If we lose sight of the main thing, so will everyone else in our group.

### **BRINGS OTHERS ALONG**

The preschool line leader brings others along for a walk. She encourages other classmates to grab the rope and join her in the journey. She also helps those who get disconnected and lose their grip to reconnect. She makes sure everyone arrives safely.

As adult Bible study group leaders, we get to encourage others to join our group, so they can discover some biblical truths together. We may be called upon to contact others who are struggling and in danger of becoming stragglers. We want to do our best to give everyone an opportunity to arrive safely.

Everyone arriving safely may mean we add a second “rope” and show others how to be a group leader. We then can make room for more people to grab part of the rope. Apprenticing others to become great line leaders may be more important than we realize. There really is no better way for another person to become a great line leader than learning from those already doing it.

We have the privilege of being line leaders for the Bible study group we lead. We can set an example, help the group remain focused, and bring others with us for the journey. We make our heavenly Father proud when we serve well as a line leader.

**Dwayne McCrary** is the manager of Adult Ongoing Bible Studies at Lifeway.

*and* **ARRIVING AT A SPECIFIC DESTINATION ”**





Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

**Anak** [AY nak]—patriarch of a clan of giants who were also known as Nephilim (Gen. 6:4; Num. 13:33)

**Asherah** [uh SHEE ruh]—Canaanite fertility goddess, considered the mother (and wife/consort) of Baal

**Baal-peor** [Baal-peor]—place where Israel kindled God’s judgment by embracing Baal worship (Num. 25:1-9). As a result, 24,000 people died.

**Balaam** [BAY luhm]—non-Israelite prophet from Mesopotamia. An ancient inscription suggests that he was well-known internationally as a “seer” who could speak for various gods. The Bible calls Balaam a “diviner” or “soothsayer” (Josh. 13:22).

**Balak** [BAY lak]—king of Moab who sent for Balaam to curse the Israelites (Num. 22:2-6)

**Hamath** [HAY math]—term used to describe the northern border of Israel (Num. 34:7-8; Josh. 13:5; 1 Kings 8:65; 2 Kings 14:25,28)

**Hebron** [HEE bruhn]—ancient city in the hill country of Judah where Abram sojourned (Gen. 13:18) and purchased a cave to bury Sarah. When Moses sent the twelve spies into Canaan, the tribe of Anak lived in Hebron (Num. 13:22).

**Horeb** [HOH reb]—a synonym for Mount Sinai. Some see “Horeb” referring to a region, while “Sinai” refers to the mountain.

**Jeshurun** [jih SHOO ruhn]—another name for Israel (Deut. 32:15; 33:5,26; Isa. 44:2)

**Meribah** [MEHR ih buh]—rocky desert between Kadesh-barnea and the Dead Sea in southern Canaan. It later became part of Judah (Num. 34:3-4; Josh. 15:1,3).

**Moab** [MOH ab]—region south of Jericho on the east side of the Jordan River. Israel camped near this area on the plains of Moab (Num. 22:1) until after the death of Moses (Deut. 34:1) when Joshua led Israel across the river.

**Negev** [NEH gehv]—the root word means “to be dry,” the basic meaning is “south”; region where the Amalekites lived (Num. 13:29)

**Paran** [PAY ruhn]—wilderness area north of Sinai where Israel camped after leaving Sinai; from there Moses sent out the twelve spies (Num. 13:3,26)

**Wilderness of Zin**—desert region stretching from Kadesh-barnea to the Dead Sea, formed part of the southern border of Canaan and later Judah (Num. 34:3-4)

# BIBLE READING PLAN



## SEPTEMBER

- ☐ 1. Numbers 1:1-54
- ☐ 2. Numbers 2:1-34
- ☐ 3. Numbers 3:1-13
- ☐ 4. Numbers 3:14-39
- ☐ 5. Numbers 3:40-51
- ☐ 6. Numbers 4:1-20
- ☐ 7. Numbers 4:21-33
- ☐ 8. Numbers 4:34-49
- ☐ 9. Numbers 5:1-31
- ☐ 10. Numbers 6:1-27
- ☐ 11. Numbers 7:1-23
- ☐ 12. Numbers 7:24-47
- ☐ 13. Numbers 7:48-71
- ☐ 14. Numbers 7:72-89
- ☐ 15. Numbers 8:1-26
- ☐ 16. Numbers 9:1-23
- ☐ 17. Numbers 10:1-36
- ☐ 18. Numbers 11:1-15
- ☐ 19. Numbers 11:16-35
- ☐ 20. Numbers 12:1-16
- ☐ 21. Numbers 13:1-33
- ☐ 22. Numbers 14:1-25
- ☐ 23. Numbers 14:26-45
- ☐ 24. Numbers 15:1-26
- ☐ 25. Numbers 15:27-41
- ☐ 26. Numbers 16:1-30
- ☐ 27. Numbers 16:31-50
- ☐ 28. Numbers 17:1-13
- ☐ 29. Numbers 18:1-32
- ☐ 30. Numbers 19:1-22

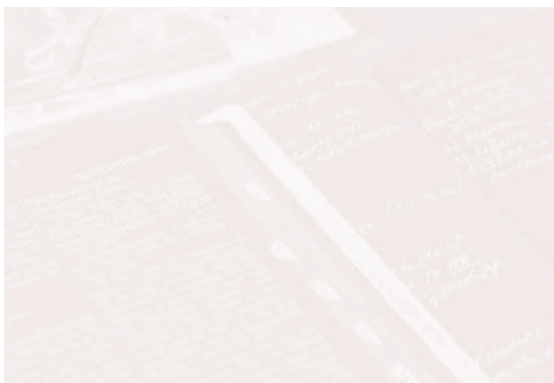
## OCTOBER

- ☐ 1. Numbers 20:1-29
- ☐ 2. Numbers 21:1-35
- ☐ 3. Numbers 22:1-41
- ☐ 4. Numbers 23:1-30
- ☐ 5. Numbers 24:1-25
- ☐ 6. Numbers 25:1-18
- ☐ 7. Numbers 26:1-27
- ☐ 8. Numbers 26:28-65
- ☐ 9. Numbers 27:1-23
- ☐ 10. Numbers 28:1-31
- ☐ 11. Numbers 29:1-19
- ☐ 12. Numbers 29:20-40
- ☐ 13. Numbers 30:1-16
- ☐ 14. Numbers 31:1-30
- ☐ 15. Numbers 31:31-54
- ☐ 16. Numbers 32:1-19
- ☐ 17. Numbers 32:20-42
- ☐ 18. Numbers 33:1-56
- ☐ 19. Numbers 34:1-29
- ☐ 20. Numbers 35:1-34
- ☐ 21. Numbers 36:1-13
- ☐ 22. Deuteronomy 1:1-21
- ☐ 23. Deuteronomy 1:22-46
- ☐ 24. Deuteronomy 2:1-23
- ☐ 25. Deuteronomy 2:24-37
- ☐ 26. Deuteronomy 3:1-29
- ☐ 27. Deuteronomy 4:1-24
- ☐ 28. Deuteronomy 4:25-49
- ☐ 29. Deuteronomy 5:1-33
- ☐ 30. Deuteronomy 6:1-25
- ☐ 31. Deuteronomy 7:1-26

## NOVEMBER

- ☐ 1. Deuteronomy 8:1-20
- ☐ 2. Deuteronomy 9:1-29
- ☐ 3. Deuteronomy 10:1-22
- ☐ 4. Deuteronomy 11:1-32
- ☐ 5. Deuteronomy 12:1-32
- ☐ 6. Deuteronomy 13:1-18
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- ☐ 25. Deuteronomy 30:1-20
- ☐ 26. Deuteronomy 31:1-30
- ☐ 27. Deuteronomy 32:1-27
- ☐ 28. Deuteronomy 32:28-52
- ☐ 29. Deuteronomy 33:1-29
- ☐ 30. Deuteronomy 34:1-12

# USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD



## BEFORE THE GROUP TIME

### 1. STUDY THE CORE PASSAGE.

Prepare early. Read the passage, listing key people, places, words, phrases, and actions. Use the commentary included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* and the *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* to dig deeper into the items you listed. If a QR code is available in a lesson, scan it to gain additional information on what's found in the passage. Write a summary of the session's main idea. Use the statement printed under each session title as a starting place.

### 2. READ THE GROUP TIME PLAN.

Study the Group Plans in the *Explore the Bible Leader Guide*, which include ideas for integrating the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide*. Page numbers for related PSG content are provided in the Group Plans. These page numbers correspond to the regular print version of the PSG and may differ from large print versions. Adjust the plan to fit the needs of your group. Identify ways to engage adults, explore the text, summarize the lesson, and challenge the group.

For additional ideas or questions, consult *Explore the Bible QuickSource* and *Explore the Bible Extra* (which identifies a current event to introduce and conclude the lesson and is found at [goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras](http://goExploreTheBible.com/LeaderExtras)).

Review the items available in the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*. Look at the Lifeway Sunday School blog and Groups Ministry blog for additional helps on leading an ongoing Bible study group.

### 3. GATHER AND REVIEW.

Review the group plan and options again and collect any supplies you will need. Make sure you have additional copies of the *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for guests.

## DURING THE GROUP TIME

### 4. ARRIVE EARLY.

Make sure you are the first person to arrive. Pray as you set up the area. Greet adults as they arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

### 5. LEAD THE GROUP IN A TIME OF BIBLE STUDY.

Use the plan, recording notes of how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns, so be flexible.

## AFTER THE GROUP TIME

### 6. EVALUATE AND RECORD.

Review and implement the After the Session idea to encourage the group to put the truths they discovered into practice. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you grow as a leader.

### 7. START PREPARING TO LEAD THE NEXT GROUP TIME.

# MEETING THE EXPLORE THE BIBLE FAMILY OF ADULT RESOURCES

## CORE RESOURCES

Use the *Daily Discipleship Guide* or *Personal Study Guide* and *Leader Guide* as the core resource for your group.

---

### Daily Discipleship Guide

Resource for both the group members and the group leader. An alternative to the *Personal Study Guide/Leader Guide* model. Includes key words, commentary and questions for the group, daily Bible readings for personal study after the group time, and ideas for smaller groups to discuss the study. Leader helps with targeted teaching plans included in the back.

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### Personal Study Guide

Resource for the group members to help them prepare for and study during the group time.

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### Leader Guide

Resource for leaders of groups using the *Personal Study Guide*. Includes commentary and group teaching plans.

## ADDITIONAL LEADER HELPS

### Commentary

Provides additional insight into the passages studied.

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### QuickSource

Resource for leaders, providing additional discussion questions, an object lesson, and dig deeper feature. Also provides ease of use for an individual called on to step in and lead the group on short notice.

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### Leader Pack

Resource filled with posters, masters for informative handouts, and access to a digital leader pack (includes DOC files of the *Leader Guide* commentary, group plans, the pack items in PDF format, and other helps for the leader).



Find out more or order at [goExploreTheBible.com](https://goExploreTheBible.com)

# BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

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Numbers and Deuteronomy comprise the fourth and fifth books of the Pentateuch (a Greek term meaning “five books” and covering Genesis–Deuteronomy). Scripture, as well as both Jewish and Christian tradition, ascribe their human authorship to Moses.

Exodus 1–3 describes Moses’s birth in Egypt and how he was saved from death. Later, he was adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter and raised in Egypt’s court. He fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian and took up residence in the wilderness of Midian.

God later met Moses at Mount Horeb. After Moses had spent forty years working as a shepherd for his father-in-law, the Lord called him to return to Egypt to lead His people out of slavery. As Moses did so, he wrote down the material we now know as the Bible’s first five books. These books, including Numbers and Deuteronomy, were recorded during the Israelites’ travels in the wilderness.

Besides the testimony of Jewish and Christian tradition, the books themselves describe Moses as recording God’s words (Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:9). Both the Old Testament and the New Testament also mention Moses as the author of these books (2 Chron. 25:4; 35:12; Ezra 6:18; Neh. 13:1; Matt. 19:7-8). Jesus Himself did, as well (John 5:46). It appears likely a few passages were written by another inspired author (Num. 12:3; Deut. 34), but the overwhelming majority came from Moses.

Israel’s exodus from Egypt occurred around 1445 BC, and the people spent forty years in the wilderness before they arrived at Canaan’s border. Thus, the composition of Numbers and Deuteronomy likely occurred between 1445 and 1405 BC.

## NUMBERS

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the book of Numbers is known as *Bemidbar* because that is the first word in the Hebrew text. The term, which means “in the wilderness,” is a fitting

title for the events in the book. The English title of Numbers is tied to the Greek word *arithmoi* and relates to the census described in the book’s opening chapters.

Numbers is a transitional book, as the Israelites moved away from Sinai toward the promised land and from receiving the law to learning how to live it out. It also recounts the transition from one generation to the next.

## PURPOSE

The book of Exodus traces the history of God’s people from Egypt to Horeb (Mount Sinai), where they received God’s commands (Ex. 19–24). Leviticus records more commandments and emphasizes the personal holiness God expected from His people. Numbers highlights the journey of God’s people through the wilderness from Horeb to the edge of Canaan, followed by forty years of wandering after that generation refused to enter God’s promised land. The book ends with a new generation’s arrival at the Plains of Moab, looking across the Jordan Valley at Canaan.

## MAJOR THEMES

**Numbering the People.** As noted, the book gets its English name from the numbering of the people, an event that actually occurs twice in the book. God instructed Moses to number the people (Num. 1) and to organize them into camps by their tribes (Num. 2). He then took the tribe of Levi as His special tribe to serve Him (Num. 3–4). Later, Moses conducted a second census (Num. 26) that did not include those who had died in the wilderness because of their unbelief.

**Wilderness Wanderings.** The wilderness wanderings constitute a central theme of the book. Numbers 13–14 record how the Israelites arrived at Kadesh-barnea at Canaan’s southern border and sent twelve scouts to determine the best strategy to take the land. When the scouts returned, ten gave a negative



report. God's judgment came, as He decreed that the unbelieving generation would wander in the wilderness until they died.

**Return to Canaan.** During the course of Israel's travels, God's people defeated Sihon and Og, two mighty kings east of the Jordan River (Num. 21:21-35). The tribes of Reuben and Gad, along with the half tribe of Manasseh, later settled this area (Num. 32). At last, the Israelites arrived in the Plains of Moab, where the Lord provided them further instructions on the conquest of Canaan (Num. 33:49-56).

## DEUTERONOMY

The English title for Deuteronomy comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, which is called the "Septuagint." The name means "second law," even though the book is a repetition of the law rather than a revision.

Like Numbers, the Hebrew title for Deuteronomy comes from the book's opening line and means "the words." Among Old Testament books, only Psalms and Isaiah are quoted in the New Testament more than Deuteronomy.

## PURPOSE

Deuteronomy highlights Moses's "farewell speeches" to Israel. We might think of the book as a review as God prepared to lead His people into their new land. Some interpreters have noted the similarities between the structure of Deuteronomy and treaties that ancient Hittite kings made with subordinate kings. If so, God was communicating His covenant with the people in a way that was familiar to their understanding and culture. They were His people, and they needed to follow the stipulations of their King.

## MAJOR THEMES

**Remembering.** Moses commanded God's people to remember the past. He recounted how God had led them from Horeb to Kadesh, where the spies gave a bad report (Deut. 1).

He then highlighted God's faithfulness during their wilderness wanderings (Deut. 2-3).

Moses also challenged God's people to let their past inform their present (Deut. 4-11). He wanted them to remember that God had chosen them (Deut. 4: 6: 7), so they needed to obey His commands (Deut. 5). His provision (Deut. 8), their rebellion (Deut. 9), and their responsibility to serve God faithfully (Deut. 10-11) were milestones that should define their life as a nation.

**Laws and Commands.** Deuteronomy 12-26 contains laws on a variety of topics, including some that repeat and reemphasize God's earlier words from Exodus or Leviticus. God wanted His people to know and embrace life as He had designed it.

**Commitment.** Deuteronomy 27-30 describes Moses's call for the people to commit themselves fully to God. They were to publicly declare their commitment to Him on Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim in Canaan's central region (Deut. 27-28; Josh. 8:30-35). Moses also put before them the path to blessing and the path to curses (Deut. 29-30). He encouraged them to choose life, for only through a covenant relationship with God would they experience all life had to offer. In fact, a covenant relationship with God was life itself (Deut. 30:19-20).

**Transition.** Moses had led God's people for forty years, but he would not enter the promised land (Num. 20:12). At God's direction, he commissioned Joshua as Israel's next leader (Deut. 31:7-8). The same God who had empowered Moses now would empower Joshua.

Deuteronomy 32-33 record Moses's song and blessing over Israel. The book concludes with an account of Moses's death on Mount Nebo, after which Israel mourned his death for thirty days and Joshua assumed his new leadership role (Deut. 34:1-9).



## NUMBERS

- **I.** First Census and Consecration of Israel at Sinai (Num. 1:1–6:27)
- **II.** Preparation for Departure to the Promised Land (Num. 7:1–10:36)
- **III.** From Mount Sinai to Kadesh (Num. 11:1–15:41)
- **IV.** Rebellion Against Aaron's Priesthood (Num. 16:1–19:22)
- **V.** From Kadesh to the Plains of Moab (Num. 20:1–25:18)
- **VI.** Second Census and Preparation of the New Generation (Num. 26:1–30:16)
- **VII.** Preparation for Entering the Promised Land (Num. 31:1–36:13)

## DEUTERONOMY

- **I.** First Address of Moses (Deut. 1:1–4:49)
- **II.** Second Address of Moses (Deut. 5:1–26:19)
- **II.** Third Address of Moses (Deut. 27:1–30:20)
- **III.** Final Days of Moses (Deut. 31:1–34:12)



# *The Journey*

GOD GIVES DAILY GUIDANCE TO HIS PEOPLE.

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**Scripture Passage: Numbers 9:15-23    Memory Verse: Numbers 9:23**

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Sprinters run as fast as they can, but for a short distance. Marathoners need a different strategy to cover 26.2 miles. Their race lasts more than two hours, in contrast to sprints that are measured in seconds. Both require significant training and preparation, but the marathon really tests an athlete's endurance.

Life is much more like a marathon, and God's people need the right training to finish our race well. The Israelites knew they needed to follow God's leading every day. They stayed in place at God's leading, and they broke camp and journeyed at God's leading. God guided them daily.

As you prepare this Bible study, consider how you might encourage adults in your group who struggle in their Christian journey. Pray the Lord will give you an opportunity to point them toward the ways He usually guides His people—through His Word, prayer, and His church. Help them to embrace the benefit of listening to God daily.



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### ***Weekly Podcast: Group Leader Training***

Scan here to gain insights about this week's study on Apple podcasts, Spotify, Google Podcasts, or at [goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training](https://goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training).



Many of us rely on GPS navigation when going someplace new. Not only will it tell us to turn left in 1.2 miles, but it will also tell us what time we can expect to arrive. GPS systems weren't as reliable when they first came out. They were programmed at the factory and didn't automatically update with the most up-to-date information. They didn't know about new roads or routes. Thus, sometimes they gave wrong information, and people got lost. (PSG, p. 10)

**Think of a time when bad directions led you somewhere unexpected.  
How can getting just one detail wrong disrupt our travels?**



## Understand the Context (Numbers 1:1-10:10)

The book of Numbers fittingly begins with a census of God's people. God instructed Moses to count all the men twenty years or older (1:1-3). The text carefully recorded those numbers according to their respective tribes (1:4-46). Only seventy people had entered Egypt at the end of Genesis; but in the span of four centuries, they had become a great multitude.

God provided instructions for the arrangement of the tribes (2:1-34). Each of the twelve tribes had its place around the Israelite camp: three each on the north, east, south, and west sides. The half tribes of Manasseh had their own space, and the Levites settled in the middle of the camp with the tent of meeting (2:17-21,24). God affirmed His desire to set apart Levi as the priestly tribe (3:1-51). Aaron's sons in particular would serve as priests, and the other Levites would assist them in the tabernacle (3:5-10). At God's direction, Moses assigned the various Levite clans their duties (3:25-39; 4:1-49).

God desired a holy, undefiled people. Those who sinned were to confess and offer a sacrifice of restitution (5:1-10). People also could consecrate themselves to God for life or for a period of time (6:1-21; the term "Nazirite" means "consecrated one"). Israel's tribal leaders then dedicated themselves and their tribes to God and brought offerings to support the work of the priests and Levites (7:1-88). This dedication lasted twelve days, according to the number of Israel's tribes.

The text then describes God's instructions for ceremonially cleansing the Levites (8:5-22). They were to shave their entire bodies, be sprinkled with water, and wash their clothes. After that, they were to present offerings to the Lord. They then could serve in the tent of meeting.

God gave Moses further instructions for Passover as the festival approached during the second year after the people left Egypt (9:1-14). The people celebrated Passover as Moses commanded on the fourteenth day of the first month (9:5), though some people were unclean and needed to wait until the second month to observe it (9:6-11). Foreigners who lived among the Israelites were also permitted to celebrate the festival (9:14).

The text describes how God led the people in their wilderness journey (9:15-23). A cloud covered the tabernacle during the day, and the appearance of fire covered it at night. As long as God's presence (the cloud/fire) remained, the people stayed in their camp. When He moved, the people would resume their journey.

Finally, God commanded the creation of ten silver trumpets (10:1-10) to summon the people to assemble or sound an alarm for battle.

**Read Numbers 9:15-23 in your Bible and underline the phrase "at the LORD's command" each time it appears. In what ways did the people demonstrate their faith in God? (PSG, p. 11)**

# ENGAGE



**PREPARE:** On a focal wall, display **Pack Item 1** (*Map: From Kadesh-Barnea to Moab*) and **Pack Item 2** (*Poster: Outlines of Numbers, Deuteronomy*). Make copies of **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Numbers, Deuteronomy Time Line*).

## INTRODUCE:

As adults arrive, encourage them to share about a recent trip they took. Encourage them to share where they went and why, as well as landmarks or tourist sites they visited along the way. Find out if they used a GPS on any part of the trip.

## READ:

Enlist a volunteer to read the opening paragraph on page 10 of the PSG.

## ASK:

**Think of a time when bad directions led you somewhere unexpected. How can getting just one detail wrong disrupt our travels?** (PSG, p. 10)

## EXPLAIN:

Share that this session is the first in a study of Numbers and Deuteronomy. Direct attention to **Pack Item 1** (*Map: From Kadesh-Barnea to Moab*). Provide copies of **Pack Item 7** (*Handout: Numbers, Deuteronomy Time Line*) for additional context for the books. Point out that in these books, Israel moved through the wilderness, but they always had a solid Source of direction: the Lord's presence.

## TRANSITION:

*As you reflect on the journey Israel was undertaking, think about your own spiritual walk. Consider times when you've followed the wrong guide and where those experiences led. Ask God to help you go where He wants you to go for His glory.*



## Group Activity Option

### Music

Show a video of the hymn “Our God Will Go Before Us” by Keith and Kristyn Getty. (If the video does not have the words to the song, consider providing the lyrics.) After watching the video, encourage adults to share words or phrases that stuck out to them. Ask: **What is it about the promise of God’s presence that helps us step out in faith?** Share that this session examines how Israel moved with the presence of God while they were in the wilderness.

## God's Presence (Num. 9:15-16)

**15** On the day the tabernacle was set up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the testimony, and it appeared like fire above the tabernacle from evening until morning. **16** It remained that way continuously: the cloud would cover it, appearing like fire at night.

Exodus ends with the completion of the *tabernacle* and the arrival of God's glory to consecrate Israel's new worship center. Here, after recounting the census of the people, Moses returned to the dedication of the tabernacle and the *cloud* of God's glory that engulfed the structure.

The term "tabernacle" comes from a word that means "to dwell" and describes God's dwelling place among His people. The word first appears in Exodus 25:8 and denotes a *tent*, a portable structure that Israel could transport through the wilderness. Solomon built the temple 480 years later as a permanent structure where God's people could worship Him (1 Kings 6-8; see 6:1).

Exodus 25:1-39:43 describes the instructions for the tabernacle. All was done exactly as God commanded (Ex. 39:42-43). The tent included a holy place and a most holy place, and its furnishings included the ark of the covenant, an altar of incense, a table for holy bread, a lampstand, and an altar of burnt offering outside the tent proper. The ark was placed inside the most holy place, normally to be seen only once a year by the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:12).

**(v. 15)** The cloud of God's glory is significant, as it was a common companion with Israel in the wilderness. When God's people left Egypt, God showed His presence with a cloud (Ex. 13:21). The cloud was a visible manifestation of His guidance; the people did not need to fear, because God led them!

By covering the tabernacle, God also confirmed that His glory/presence would dwell there. He had commanded Moses to build the tabernacle as His dwelling place, and the cloud demonstrated God's presence. As noted, when Moses dedicated the tabernacle, the cloud covered it, and God's glory also filled it. Not even Moses could enter because of the radiance (40:34-35).

The biblical text sometimes refers to the tabernacle using other terms, particularly the "tent of meeting" (indicating a place where God would meet with His people) and (as here) *the tent of the testimony*. The word "testimony" also can

be rendered "witness." Again, by demonstrating His glory through the cloud, God provided a visible witness to His presence and to His approval of this structure. His people could take courage from seeing He was with them.

Moses compared the glory of God to *fire*. The expression literally reads "the appearance of fire" in both verses 15 and 16. Interpreters have generally understood the cloud as containing a fiery glow at night. During the day, God's people could follow the cloud; but if they were moving at night, they could discern a fiery glow better *until morning* came.

Such a sight also likely would add to their perception of God's power and holiness. He was with them at all times, and He was revealing that presence day and night.



### The Tabernacle

Discover more about this place of worship built by the Israelites.

**(v. 16)** God's people never failed to see the cloud's presence as it guided them. By day or by night, they followed the cloud *continuously*. The fiery presence of their Creator and Lord never left them.

One of the most precious promises God gave His people was the promise of His presence. He had told Moses He would be with him to help him lead the people from Egypt (Ex. 3:12), and He had kept His word. Now, as the people began the second year of their journey (Num. 9:1), God's presence clearly remained among them.

In the New Testament, Jesus assured His followers He would be with them forever (Matt. 28:20), and He later sent the Holy Spirit to guide them to the truth they needed (John 16:13). The Lord's presence is still a reality among His people. While we are not guided by clouds or fire, we have the reliability of His Word and the assurance that His Spirit will lead us in the right paths.

## EXPLORE Numbers 9:15-16



### OVERVIEW:

**APPLICATION POINT:** Believers can be assured that God is with them and can provide trustworthy guidance.

Share the following information from Understand the Context (PSG, p. 11) to set the background for the book of Numbers:

*The book of Numbers presents three primary scenes, and geographic locations identify each. The first part (chaps. 1–10) occurred while the Israelites were still at Mount Sinai. The second describes their journey from Sinai toward Canaan (chaps. 11–25). The final section (chaps. 26–36) describes God’s people on the Plains of Moab—across the Jordan River from Jericho.*

### IDENTIFY:

Use **Pack Item 2** (Poster: Outlines of Numbers, Deuteronomy) to show where this session falls. Explain that after a census of the people, Moses returned to the narrative in Numbers 9:15.

### READ:

**Invite a volunteer to read aloud Numbers 9:15-16** as the group listens for God’s actions in the verses.

### EXAMINE:

Encourage adults to work in pairs to review verses 15-16 (PSG, pp. 12-13). After a few minutes, allow volunteers to share. Emphasize that God wanted to dwell among the Israelites, so He made His presence known above the tabernacle.

### ASK:

**How can you be assured of God’s presence in your life?  
What are some ways you benefit from His presence?**  
(PSG, p. 13)

### TRANSITION:

*God was all about revealing His presence to His people. But His presence provided much more than just comfort and encouragement. It also guided them on their journey.*



### Group Activity Option

#### Object Lesson: Diary

Show adults a diary. Talk about why people keep a diary. Give each adult a sheet of paper and pencil. Direct them to read Numbers 9:15-16 and to write a diary entry in the voice of an Israelite experiencing these events. After a few minutes, allow a few volunteers to share their entries. Emphasize the power of God’s presence among His people and remind adults that God still reveals His presence to those who will trust Him.

## Faithful Direction (Num. 9:17-21)

**17** Whenever the cloud was lifted up above the tent, the Israelites would set out; at the place where the cloud stopped, there the Israelites camped. **18** At the LORD's command the Israelites set out, and at the LORD's command they camped. As long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle, they camped. **19** Even when the cloud stayed over the tabernacle many days, the Israelites carried out the LORD's requirement and did not set out. **20** Sometimes the cloud remained over the tabernacle for only a few days. They would camp at the LORD's command and set out at the LORD's command. **21** Sometimes the cloud remained only from evening until morning; when the cloud lifted in the morning, they set out. Or if it remained a day and a night, they moved out when the cloud lifted.

(vv. 17-18) The Hebrew word for *lifted up* occurs three times (vv. 17, 21, 22) in the passage in slightly different forms, but each includes the same basic sense. It's important to understand that *the cloud* did not lift on its own. This was no morning fog. God was the Source of the lifting. Again, the settling or lifting of the cloud provided a visible expression of His guidance and faithful direction for His people.

When God moved, the people *set out* with Him. The verb also can be rendered “journeyed,” and it stresses not merely the resumption of trip, but the traveling itself. God determined when His people needed to resume their travel by lifting the cloud *above the tent*. The word appears in seven consecutive verses in this passage. So, it is reasonable to believe that the text stresses God's intentional direction of His people.

Of course, if the cloud *stayed* above the tabernacle, Israel remained in place. The Hebrew verb used here, *shakan* (sha-KAHN), can also mean “to dwell.” It is related to *mishkan* (mish-KAHN), the word for “tabernacle,” God's dwelling place. Literally, the text describes God's cloud as dwelling over His dwelling place.

When God's people saw the cloud staying in place, they *camped*. They set up their temporary lodgings when the cloud stood still over the tabernacle. This wording occurs six times in five verses to stress Israel's response to God's guidance.

(vv. 19-20) Moses had noted again that Israel only moved at the Lord's command (v. 18). Literally, this means “according to the mouth of the LORD.” The expression occurs seven times in these verses and could indicate a verbal command. However, the text does not say for sure, and the expression may be figurative, referring to

God's guidance through the movement of the cloud without requiring speech. However, adding “through Moses” after the expression in verse 23 may suggest God also spoke to Moses about the people camping or setting out.

One key element to this endeavor is absolute obedience. Even if the cloud remained *many days*, the people remained faithful. They put their own desires to the side and awaited God's direction.

Joshua used a similar Hebrew phrase to describe most of Israel's wilderness wandering (Josh. 24:7), so it could have referred to years instead of days. In this context, however, it probably should be taken literally. The people did stay at Mount Sinai for forty days and nights twice as they waited on Moses to receive God's commandments (Ex. 24:18; 34:28), but that seems to be the longest they stayed at a single location. In most cases, *a few days* seemed more common.

The words *carried out* and *requirement* are related and denote the people's careful observance of the commands given by the Lord. His instructions were key to their successful journey, so they paid careful attention to His leading.

(v. 21) The cloud did not always stay in one place for long. This verse emphasizes a potential short stay for God's people. The stop could possibly be nothing more than an overnight rest, *from evening until morning*. Not knowing when they might set out again probably was difficult; but through God's direction, they learned patience.

The text gives no reason as to why God chose to have the people move or stop when they did, but it does stress His faithful direction and guidance. The cloud demonstrated His presence with them, even though it never revealed the reasons behind His timetable.



## READ:

**APPLICATION POINT:** Following God's guidance will require believers to act on His instruction.

**Direct the group to read silently Numbers 9:17-21,** considering Israel's response to God's revelation of Himself.

## ACTIVITY:

Prior to the session, collect several games that require players to move around a board. During the session, show adults the games and encourage them to share how players determine their movements. Point out that knowing where and when to move is also an important skill in life.

## DISCUSS:

Draw two columns on the board: *Move* and *Not Move*. Encourage the group to share how Israel determined whether they needed to move or stay put. Lead a brief discussion about why they were willing to follow God's presence.

## RECAP:

Summarize the following excerpt from page 15 of the PSG:

"At times, the cloud stayed in place for many days. Other times, the wait lasted only a few days. These verses are a reminder that the Lord sometimes compels us to wait. He may call us to sit still—which can be difficult to do. Many times we wait without knowing why. Verse 21 provides a contrast to verses 19-20. Rather than the tabernacle remaining in place for multiple days, at times the sacred space was to be in place only overnight. When the cloud lifted the next morning, the people resumed their journey."

## ASK:

**Have there been times when God made you wait for an answer or solution from Him? How did that experience affect your faith?** (PSG, p. 15)

## Active Obedience (Num. 9:22-23)

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**22** Whether it was two days, a month, or longer, the Israelites camped and did not set out as long as the cloud stayed over the tabernacle. But when it was lifted, they set out. **23** They camped at the LORD's command, and they set out at the LORD's command. They carried out the LORD's requirement according to his command through Moses.

(v. 22) The text again notes the unpredictability of God's leading: *two days, a month, or longer*. Shorter camping times meant the people would scarcely get settled before they gathered their possessions and moved out again. If the people were already tired, they might struggle with (or even resent) a quick turnaround. Longer camping times might prove restful, but without progress toward their ultimate destination.

The people's active obedience was key to their receiving the land God had promised their ancestors centuries earlier. As they journeyed, some likely wanted to get to Canaan faster, while others were more patient. Nevertheless, they had to learn to trust God's pace. They needed to believe that He would lead them faithfully, and they needed to demonstrate their faith by obeying and following the *cloud*. They were not to run ahead of God's leading or to lag behind it.

The principle applies to us as well. We create problems for ourselves when we run ahead of God's timing or resist moving when He moves. Like Israel, we are best served by staying in step with God's timing. This requires discernment, which requires time in His Word.

(v. 23) The text stresses one last time how Israel carefully followed God's leading: *They camped at the LORD's command, and they set out at the LORD's command*. He knew the way better than they did! He also knew the dangers they might face, the needs they would experience, the enemies they would encounter, and the other challenges they would meet. He knew what was coming, and they did not.

While He could have told them everything in advance, He chose a different path. He commanded them to follow Him as He revealed the way. Most of the time, God does not reveal His entire agenda at once. As humans, we might feel overwhelmed, and our faith would be hindered. Instead, He graciously reveals His purposes on a "need to know" basis. This allows us to trust Him and obey Him one step at a time.

The people of Israel demonstrated their faith in God through active obedience. They did not obey Him to become His people, for they already were His people by covenant. God had established His covenant with Abraham centuries earlier and ratified that covenant with His people at Mount Sinai. The commands were not a means to a relationship with Him, but a reflection of an existing relationship. His commands reflected the best way for them to live.

The apostle Paul stressed how people enter into a relationship with God by grace through faith, not by doing good works (Eph. 2:8-9). Yet, he also noted that God created us to do good works that demonstrate we are His workmanship (2:10).

The passage stresses God's presence (Num. 9:15-16), His faithful direction (9:17-21), and the people's active obedience (9:22-23). Yet, it closes with the words *through Moses*. Sometimes God communicated directly with the people. In Numbers 9, the cloud over the tabernacle was a visible means of God communicating with His people. However, He often communicated using Moses as His agent, as He did at Mount Sinai.

God spoke to Moses face to face at certain times (Ex. 33:11-16), an action that demonstrated Moses's close relationship with God. Then, Moses would demonstrate obedience by sharing the Lord's message with the people. "Through Moses" suggests that God was using Moses as His spokesman, along with guiding the people by the cloud.

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### Key Doctrine

#### God

To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience. (See Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 1 John 5:3.)

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**APPLICATION POINT: Following God in faith means that we act on His timeframe and not our own.**

**READ:**

**Invite a volunteer to read Numbers 9:22-23** as the group reflects on how God set the timeframe for Israel's journey.

**EXAMINE:**

Direct the group to read the information for verses 22-23 (PSG, pp. 16-17). Note that the PSG emphasizes two implications from "lifted": abrupt action that suggested prompt obedience and decisive leadership that followed God's plan with no questions asked. Encourage adults to suggest why both of these are important to experiencing God's presence and following Him well. Note that we can afford to act "abruptly" when we are confident in God's leadership.

**READ:**

Read verse 23 aloud once again. Emphasize God's "command" and God's "requirement." Share that through all the focus on the movement of God's presence, we can learn much from Israel's obedience.

**ASK:**

**Why does it matter that we follow the Lord's lead?**  
**Why do we sometimes delay doing what He wants us to do?**  
 (PSG, p. 17)

## Group Activity Option

### Bible Skill

Direct adults to work in teams of two or three to complete the Bible Skill (PSG, p. 17). Note that Numbers 9:15-23 describes how God led His people through the wilderness on their way to the land of Canaan. Instruct the teams to read the passage again slowly, noticing how the text intentionally reaffirms God's faithful guidance and Israel's careful obedience. Read also the article "Pillar of Fire and Cloud" in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* or another Bible dictionary. As a group, review the questions in the Bible Skill activity.

## CHALLENGE

### SUMMARIZE:

Review these points from Apply the Text on page 18 of the *Personal Study Guide*:

- *Believers can be assured that God is with them and can provide trustworthy guidance.*
- *Following God's guidance will require believers to act on His instruction.*
- *Following God in faith means that we act on His timeframe and not our own.*

### IDENTIFY:

Encourage adults to consider the three statements and to identify the one that presents the greatest challenge to them. Provide an index card and direct them to write a prayer, asking God to help them lean into His presence and help as they address this issue during the week.

### DISCUSS:

Direct the group to read the first set of questions on page 18 of the PSG. Allow adults to suggest ways the group can be more involved in an existing ministry or start a new ministry. Urge them to make this a matter of prayer during the week. Encourage them to reflect on and respond to the second set of questions on page 18 of the PSG during the week.

### PRAY:

Close in prayer, asking God to help adults become more sensitive to His leadership each day.

### AFTER THE SESSION

Reinforce the session by texting or emailing the group. Remind adults of the suggestions they came up with for existing or new ministries. Challenge them to prayerfully consider the options during the week and to bring their top two options to the next session. Urge them to seek God's leadership as they reflect on where God might be leading them.

### LEADER EXTRAS



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