

Why read the book of Numbers?

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[0 : 00] Well, now we come to our Bible reading, which is in the book of Numbers. We're starting a new series in this great Old Testament book. And you'll find Numbers chapter 1 on page 108 in our hardback Bibles.

I'm not going to read the whole chapter. You'll see why as we go along, but I'll explain that when we get there. So Numbers chapter 1, and you'll see the heading here is a census.

Of Israel's warriors. The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai in the tent of meeting on the first day of the second month in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt.

Saying, take a census of all the congregation of the people of Israel by clans, by fathers' houses, according to the number of names, every male head by head.

From 20 years old and upward, all in Israel who are able to go to war, you and Aaron shall list them company by company. And there shall be with you a man from each tribe, each man being the head of the house of his fathers.

[1 : 18] And these are the names of the men who shall assist you. From Reuben, Eliezer, the son of Shedeur. From Simeon, Shalumiel, the son of Zerishadai.

From Judah, Nashon, the son of Aminadab. From Issachar, Nethanel, the son of Zuar. From Zebulun, Eliab, the son of Helon. From the sons of Joseph.

From Ephraim, Elishamah, the son of Amihud. And from Manasseh, Gamaliel, the son of Pedazur. From Benjamin, Abidan, the son of Gideoni. From Dan, Ahiezah, the son of Amishadai.

From Asher, Pagiel, the son of Ochrán. From Gad, Eliasaph, the son of Duel. From Naphtali, Ahira, the son of Enan. These were the ones chosen from the congregation.

The chiefs of their ancestral tribes. The heads of the clans of Israel. Moses and Aaron took these men who had been named. And on the first day of the second month.

[2 : 20] They assembled the whole congregation together. Who registered themselves by clans. By fathers' houses. According to the number of names from 20 years old. And upward.

Head by head. As the Lord commanded Moses. So he listed them in the wilderness of Sinai. The people of Reuben. Israel's firstborn.

Their generations. By their clans. By their fathers' houses. According to the number of names. Head by head. Every male from 20 years old and upward. All who were able to go to war.

Those listed of the tribe of Reuben. Were 46,500. And then you'll see that Moses follows through with a list of the warriors.

Those who are able to go to war. Men of 20 years old and upward. From all the 12 tribes of Israel. Then we get the summing up of this section in verse 44.

[3 : 15] These are those who were listed. Who Moses and Aaron listed with the help of the chiefs of Israel. 12 men. Each representing his father's house. So.

All those listed of the people of Israel. By their fathers' houses. From 20 years old and upward. Every man able to go to war. In Israel. All those listed.

Were 603,550. This is the word of the Lord. And may the Lord make it a blessing to us. This evening.

Well let's turn again to the book of Numbers. On page 108. And you'll have gathered that we're starting a new series in this book.

This evening. Do let me encourage you to read this book of Numbers. Over the next week or two or three. Good idea? Challenging?

[4 : 24] It is good isn't it? When we're working our way through a book. To have a view of the whole book. So do let me encourage you to do that. Maybe half an hour in the evenings with a cup of coffee.

But not too late in the evenings. Because one falls asleep. Now my title for tonight is a question. Why read the book of Numbers? And my aim tonight really is to introduce this book.

Next week we'll get stuck into the text properly. But this evening I just want to say a few things. To help us to see what we're getting ourselves into. Let me begin by reading a famous sentence.

Which is the opening of a famous book. See if you know where this comes from. I might ask somebody to say where you think it comes from. As I walked through the wilderness of this world.

I lighted on a certain place where there was a den. And I laid me down in that place to sleep. And as I slept. I dreamed a dream.

[5 : 24] Does anybody know where that comes from? Raise a hand. Progress. Was that preceded by pilgrims? Thank you very much. The pilgrim's progress. Exactly. Bunyan's pilgrim's progress.

Isn't that a great opening phrase to a book? As I walked through the wilderness of this world. Now the man who wrote those words. John Bunyan. Was a deeply convinced Christian.

As you know. He knew the Lord so well. He was sold out for the Lord. In fact so much sold out. That he was prepared to preach the gospel in England. In places where you were not allowed to preach it.

And he was prepared to go to prison. I think for a total of something like 10 or 12 years. In the later part of his life. Because of doing that. He was a wholehearted Christian. He knew the Lord. And yet.

For him. The Christian life was a long journey. Through the wilderness. Of this world. Now look at the opening phrase of the book of Numbers. The Lord spoke to Moses.

[6 : 19] In the wilderness. Of Sinai. This book of Numbers. Tells the story. Of the great wilderness journey. That the people of Israel took. From Mount Sinai.

Just after the Exodus. Up to the banks of the river Jordan. Just before they crossed into the promised land. Now as the crow flies. The distance between Mount Sinai.

And the banks of the Jordan. Where they crossed over. Is only about 200 or 210 miles. It's a very short distance. But it took them 40 years to do it. For painful reasons.

Which we will discover. As we read the book. So this is a book. About a journey. That great journey. Through the wilderness. And for that reason. It's going to strike all sorts of chords.

Which will echo our own experience. Of walking through the wilderness of this world. When you think about it. There's more than one journey. That we're embarked on. There's the journey of our church.

[7 : 15] Our congregation. If you belong to a particular congregation. For any length of time. You realize. That you're on a shared journey. A journey. Which is marked by. Encouragements and joys.

Sometimes struggles and battles. As you seek to serve the Lord. In a particular place. But then there's the journey. Not just of the congregation. But of the whole church of Christ. Throughout the world.

We're involved in that. We're part of a global people. Who are journeying to the new creation. And there's also our journey. As individuals. As the old song says.

It's a long way to Tipperary. And it's also a long way. From the cradle to the. To the new creation. Via the grave. Edward Lobb.

Born 1951. Born again 1967. Died 20. Je ne sais quoi. That means date. As yet unknown. But. Whenever that date is.

[8 : 10] It's a long journey. If you're getting on in years. You will look back. And you'll realize. That you have come. A very long way already. And there have been. High points in your life. And low points.

And all manner of twists. And turns. In the road. And even if you're young. Even if you're still a teenager. It already feels. A very long time. Since your first day at school. At the age of five.

And you have had some real. Difficulties in life. To face already. But look again. At the first verse. Of the book of numbers. The Lord. Spoke. To Moses.

In the wilderness. Of Sinai. What a comfort that is. Certainly a comfort to him. But a comfort to us. So it may have been. A wilderness. But the Lord. Was not absent. He was in charge.

He was in command. He was with Moses. And he spoke to Moses. Telling Moses. What to do. And how to lead. The people of Israel. Israel. So this wilderness journey. Is not a journey.

[9 : 06] Without map and compass. And as the Lord. Was with Moses. And the people of Israel. Speaking to them. Then. In that wilderness. We have glorious assurance. From the New Testament.

That he is with his people today. As we walk through. The wilderness. Of this world. Now there's a further parallel. Between the book of numbers. And our position today.

This journey. Of the Israelites. Is a journey. Between. Salvation. Accomplished. And salvation. Completed. Just think of that.

Salvation accomplished. To salvation completed. The journey starts. At Mount Sinai. At this stage. The power of God. Has just accomplished. The exodus. God has brought his people.

Across the Red Sea. By an act of mighty power. And he's delivered them. Decisively. From their slavery. The slave people. Have now become. A free people. But they're not yet.

[9 : 59] In the promised land. They haven't yet. Crossed the Jordan. They haven't yet. Taken possession. Of the promised inheritance. The land flowing. With milk and honey. So their rescue.

Has been accomplished. But their salvation. Has not yet. Been completed. And we. Who are Christians. We're in a similar position. Our rescue. Has been decisively.

Accomplished. The rescue. That Jesus. Has achieved. For us. On the cross. That has delivered us. From a greater slavery. Than the slavery. Of the Israelites. Of old. We have been delivered.

From our slavery. To sin. Our slavery. To the devil. But we have not yet. Reached. Our promised inheritance. So our salvation. Is accomplished. But not yet.

Completed. And that's why. We are still walking. Through the wilderness. Of this world. So as we follow. The Israelites. On their journey. From salvation. Accomplished. To the banks.

[10 : 53] Of the river Jordan. We will find. Striking parallels. Between their journey. And our own journey. The God. Who spoke to them. In the wilderness. Is the same God.

Who speaks to us today. As he was then. To the Israelites. So he is to us. He is the same. Gracious. Compassionate God. He is the same.

Jealous God. Who requires. Our exclusive allegiance. He is the same. All-seeing. And all-knowing God. Who has our best interests. At heart. So as we study this book.

We are going to learn more. About God. The true God. The physical circumstances. Of the lives. Of God's people then. Were very different. From ours today. But it is the same God.

That we are dealing with. Well let me make. Four points. This evening. About the book of numbers. So that we can get. A bit of a handle. On this book. And on its message. First.

[11 : 48] It is a book. About two generations. Of Israelites. The first generation. Set out from Sinai. But did that generation.

Reach the promised land. No they did not. Think of Aaron. Moses elder brother. He never reached the promised land. Miriam. Their sister. She never reached the promised land. Moses himself.

Although he was allowed. By God. To look out. Across the land. From a high mountain peak. He was not allowed. To enter it. Only two people. Of that first generation. Were allowed. To cross the Jordan.

And enter the land of Canaan. Can anybody tell me. Who those two people were. Raise a hand. Brr, brr, brr, brr. Yeah. Say it. Joshua.

The son of. Nun. And secondly. Caleb. The son of. Paul. Anybody.

[12 : 45] Jephani. That's a good word. Isn't it? Joshua. The son of Nun. And Caleb. The son of Jephani. Those were the only two people allowed to. To cross into the promised land. Why?

Why was it that not even Moses was allowed? It was because of. A defiant. Disobedience. Which many of them. Most of them. Showed towards the Lord. On a number of occasions.

And on one occasion in particular. It's put like this in Psalm 95. And quoted in the letter to the Hebrews. Today. If you hear his voice. Do not harden your hearts.

As in the rebellion. As in the day of testing. In the wilderness. Where your fathers put me to the test. And saw my work for 40 years. Therefore I was provoked.

With that generation. And I said they always go astray in their hearts. They've not known my ways. And I swore in my wrath. They shall not enter my rest. And they didn't.

[13 : 41] God did not permit. That generation to cross into Canaan. And that great act of rebellion. Is something which we read about. In the heart of the book of Numbers. Now these two generations of Israelites.

The first generation were the ones who died in the wilderness. And the second. The generation who crossed over. Over the Jordan. They are distinguished. By a simple feature of the way in which the book of Numbers is written.

And that is. By two censuses. This is why the book is called Numbers. The first census. Which we read about this evening in chapter one. Comes right at the start. Chapters one and two.

And then there's a second census. Recorded in chapter 26. And that is the census. Of the new generation. The next generation of Israelites. Who were able to press forward.

And enter the promised land. So this is the basic structure. Or arrangement. Of this book. It falls into two parts. Part one. Part one. Is chapters one to twenty five. And at heart.

[14 : 40] It's about rebellion. And decline. And part two. Is chapters 26 to 36. And at heart. That is about pressing forward. To the promised land. Now you wouldn't think.

Would you. That two censuses. Could be so significant. But they are. The first. Is a census. Of gathering gloom. Whereas the second. Leads finally to life and peace.

So this means. That this book. Carries both warning. And promise to us. The message is. Warning. Make sure you're not like. The first generation. But promise.

Be sure that you're like. The second. So there's the first thing. It's about two generations. Now second. It's a book about. The family of Abraham's descendants.

Now we can take it. That Moses is the author. Not simply of this book. But of all the first five books. Of the Old Testament. And these first five books. Of the Bible. Which are known collectively. As the Pentateuch.

[15 : 36] Which means the five scrolls. Moses writes them all. And he writes for posterity. And what he's writing here. Is a history. Of the Jewish nation. Now on the merely human level.

Many people have written histories. Of their own nations. Some of the great. Greek and Roman authors of old. Wrote histories of Greece and Rome. Walter Scott. Wrote a three volume history.

Of Scotland. For his little grandson to read. But for Moses. The Pentateuch. The Pentateuch was more than. Just a historical record. The Pentateuch is really a sermon. In five volumes.

Moses was saying to his Jewish readers. This is the story of. Our God. Its purpose. Is to tell you who he is. And how he has acted.

Since the beginning of everything. And its purpose also. Is to tell you Israelites. Who you are. To describe to you. Your origins. As a people. And to tell you of your privileges. And your responsibilities.

[16 : 32] You are a distinctive people. You're not like any other people. Of the world. And you are therefore not to behave. Like any other people. Of the world. Paradise was lost.

And it's through you. Israel. That God is working out. His purpose. Whereby paradise. Will be regained. It's through you. From our nation. That will come.

Ultimately. The key figure. Who will crush the serpent's head. A descendant of Adam and Eve. Yes. But also. A descendant of Abraham. And central.

To Moses teaching. Which is of course. God's teaching. Through Moses. Is the wonderful fact. Of the covenant. The solemn undertaking. Given by God. To Abraham. That God was going to bless.

The Jewish nation. And through them. Bring blessing. To the Gentile nations. Of the world as well. Now friends. Let's turn back. Could I ask you to do this. To Genesis chapter 12.

[17 : 28] Which you'll find on page 8. Because in Genesis chapter 12. We have the initial statement. Of God's covenant. That God gave. To Abraham. It's there in the first three verses.

Of Genesis chapter 12. This is the beginning of the story. Of the Jews. You might say. So Genesis 12. 1. 2. And 3. Now the Lord said to Abraham. Go from your country.

And your kindred. And your father's house. To the land. That I will show you. And I will make of you. A great nation. And I will bless you. And make your name great.

So that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you. And him who dishonors you. I will curse. And in you. All the families of the earth. Shall be blessed.

And just keep your eye on that. For a moment. Fundamental to these verses. Is God's assurance. That he is going to bless Abraham. And his descendants. And this blessing.

[18 : 23] Is going to show up. In three ways. First. In the form of a land. A promised land. So verse one. Go from your country. To my country.

And you can see where the wilderness journey. Of numbers. Is going to fit in here. Because it's a journey. To that country. Finally. Secondly. A people. A great nation. With a great name. And then thirdly.

Blessing to all the families of the earth. All the non-Jewish nations. Through Abraham. In you. Says the Lord. All the families of the earth. Shall be blessed. Now friends.

Some of you. I know. Will be well aware. Of these opening verses. Of Genesis chapter 12. But others of you. Perhaps haven't noticed them before. Particularly. In which case. Let this be a red letter day.

In your personal history. Let me suggest this. That when you get home this evening. Get a piece of paper. Or card. And copy out these three verses. Genesis 12. 1. 2. And 3. And then stick them up.

[19 : 20] Next to your kitchen sink. So that you can't avoid them. I'm assuming. That you go regularly. To that place. In your kitchen. And each time you see those verses.

Say to the Lord. This Lord. Is the basis of your covenant. With your people. Thank you for it. Alleluia. Amen. Will you do that? Now the Pentateuch.

These five books. They describe. The first stages. Of God. Performing. What he has promised. To Abraham. Carrying out. What he's promised here. In these first.

Three verses. Throughout the Pentateuch. Moses is saying. To his readers. I want you Jewish folk. To see how faithful. God is. To everything. That he's promised. He's promised.

You a land. Land. Well. Here is the story. Of how the Israelites. Came eventually. To possess that land. He promised. To make of you. A great nation. With many descendants. Well.

[20 : 15] Here's the story. Of how God multiplied. Or began to multiply. His people. And he promised you. That the Gentiles. Would be blessed. Through Israel. That's a promise. That will not reach.

Its fulfillment. For a long time yet. But I'm going to show you. The beginning. Of its outworking. So the Pentateuch. These five books. It's all about God.

Faithfully performing. His promises. To Abraham. And to Abraham's descendants. Genesis. Is about the first four generations. Of Abraham's family. And how they went from Canaan.

Down into Egypt. Exodus. The second book. Tells the story. Of how they left Egypt. 400 years later. How they received the law. At Mount Sinai. And began their journey.

Towards the land of Canaan. Book three. Leviticus. Teaches them God's law. How to live the holy. And distinctive life. That is to mark them out. As different from the Gentile nations.

[21 : 11] And numbers. Includes further sections of law. Alongside the history of their journey. Through the wilderness. And Deuteronomy. The last book. Records the preaching of Moses.

To the second generation. Of the Israelites. Just before they crossed the Jordan. And just before Moses dies. All of which. Enables Joshua. To say to the Israelites.

In the sixth book of the Bible. After they're well settled. In the promised land. He says to them. You know that not one word. Has failed. Of all the good things. That the Lord your God. Promised you.

So this whole section. Of the Bible. Is about the promise. Indeed. The whole Bible. Is about God. Fulfilling his promises. To his people. God can be trusted.

To perform. Everything that he has promised. Now I often have in my pocket. I don't have one tonight. But I do often have in my pocket. A piece of paper.

[22 : 05] Which reads. I'm sure some of you. Have got a piece of paper. Like this in your pocket tonight. But the piece of paper. Reads this. I promise. To pay the bearer. On demand.

The sum of. Twenty pounds. Now I don't really believe. That promise. Do you think if I went to the headquarters. Of the Clydesdale Bank. Or whatever. I don't think they give me. Twenty quids worth of gold.

I don't think so. But I do believe. The great promise of the Bible. That God's people. Christ's people. Will one day. Inhabit. The new heavens. And the new earth.

In which righteousness dwells. The Bible. Is all about. The fulfillment of a promise. Faith. According to the Bible. Faith means. Believing. That God will do.

Everything he has promised to do. And the book of numbers. Describing. This journey. Through the wilderness. Is all about God. Beginning to fulfill. His covenant promise. To Abraham.

[23 : 01] So that's the. The big context. Of the book of numbers. It's Abraham's family history. But it's really about God. Doing for Abraham's descendants. What he promised that he would do.

Back in Genesis 12. Verses 1. 2. And 3. Now thirdly. Numbers. Numbers is also about. Jesus. Let's never forget.

What Luke records. At the end of his gospel. In Luke chapter 24. About the words of Jesus. To the two disciples. On the road to Emmaus. Beginning with Moses. That's the Pentateuch.

Beginning with Moses. And all the prophets. Jesus interpreted to them. In all the scriptures. The things concerning himself. That is to say. The Old Testament. Foreshadows Jesus.

Prophecies Jesus. Describes. His character. His mission. His role. And his work. And the Old Testament. Does that in a thousand. Different ways. And numbers. Is no exception.

[23 : 59] Let me give you. Just a couple of examples. Of this. No need to turn this one up. But in Numbers chapter 21. An incident is recorded. Where the people. Are grumbling. It's one of their besetting sins.

It wasn't for the first time. But their grumbling. Was against God. And against Moses. And as a chastisement. Or punishment. The Lord sends some poisonous snakes. Into the camp of the Israelites.

Many people are bitten. And many people die. So it's a chastisement. To bring the people. To their senses. And it works. They go to Moses. And they cry out.

Moses we've sinned. We've been grumbling. Against the Lord. And against you. Pray to the Lord. Please. And ask him. To take these snakes away. So Moses prays. But the Lord doesn't actually remove the snakes.

He does something different. He tells Moses. To make a bronze figure. A bronze image. Of one of these snakes. And to mount it up on a tall pole. And to set the pole up.

- [24 : 57] Right in the middle of the camp. So that any time an Israelite. Gets bitten by one of these snakes. All he has to do. Is to look. Trustingly. At the bronze snake. Set up on the pole.
- And he would recover. And live. And that's just what happened. Now rather surprisingly. In John's gospel. Chapter 3 verse 14.
- Jesus says to Nicodemus. As Moses. Lifted up the snake. In the wilderness. So must the son of man. Be lifted up. That whoever believes in him.
- May have eternal life. In other words. Look at the figure. Lifted up on the pole. Exercise faith in him. And you will live. So Numbers 21.
- Tells us of a life saving event. Which sets a pattern. Sets a pattern. And 1500 years later. Jesus says. To Nicodemus. That Old Testament pattern.
- [25 : 53] Finds its replication. In me. Yes it was a real and true. And effective remedy. In its own day. It performed a life saving service. For the sinful Israelites. In the wilderness.
- But much more importantly. It happened. So as to teach a great truth about me. Namely. That I shall be raised up on a pole. So that whoever looks at me.
- Hanging on that pole. The cross. And then puts their trust in me. Will not die. But will live forever. Truth is so often.
- So surprising. You wouldn't think. Would you. That an episode. Involving snake bite. And a bronze sculpture. Could teach us the meaning. Of the cross of Jesus. But that's exactly.
- What's going on. It does so eloquently. And vividly. We have all been. As it were. Bitten by the great serpent. And the lethal venom. Is in our system.
- [26 : 45] And if nothing is done about it. We will die. But God has provided. This great remedy. We look at that figure. Hanging up on the cross. We put our trust in him. And we live.
- We live forever. Now Jesus himself. Speaking in Matthew's gospel. Says. I have come to fulfill. The law. That's the Pentateuch.
- And the prophets. And very often. That fulfilling. Works in this way. That a pattern is set. In some Old Testament incident. Like the bronze snake.
- On the pole. And then Jesus. In some way. Replicates. That pattern. That's really what. Fulfillment means. And the Old Testament pattern. Fills out our understanding.
- Of the role of Jesus. These Old Testament patterns. Teach us. About Jesus's character. And his achievements. Let me give you. Just one more example.
- [27 : 38] From the book of numbers. This is very different. But I'm going to mention it. Because it shows. The great variety of ways. In which Jesus fulfills. The Old Testament. Now as I said earlier.
- The first part of the book of numbers. Is rather depressing. Because it shows the people of Israel. Disobeying the Lord. Again and again. Grumbling and generally. Showing themselves. To be rebels against God.
- And this is all the more shocking. Because this is the generation. Of Israelites. Who have been so spectacularly. Rescued. By the Lord. It's these Israelites.
- Who saw the walls of water. Rising up to their left. And their right. As Moses led them through the Red Sea. It was these very Israelites. Who saw the Egyptian army. Being drowned with water.
- As the waters closed in upon them. These are the Israelites. Who went to Sinai. And they saw the terrifying manifestations. Of God's presence there. The fire and smoke on the mountain.
- [28 : 34] But despite all this. That they had seen and experienced. They quickly fell back. Into disobedience and unbelief. All of which brings the point home to us.

That if God's people are to live as God intends. If they are to live a holy and happy life. That demonstrates the transforming power of God. They need a greater rescue.

A greater rescue. Than the rescue of the Red Sea. And they need a greater deliverer than Moses. And a greater prophet than Moses. They need a salvation that delivers them. Not from the Egyptian army.

But from the powers of hell. They need Jesus. The only one who is able to conquer Satan. And death. So the book of Numbers. Forces us to see.

An aching hole. Which only the figure of Jesus. Can fill. Well now fourth. And last. The book of Numbers. Teaches us lessons.

[29 : 29] In how to live the Christian life. Now I'd like at this stage. To ask you to turn with me please. To 1 Corinthians chapter 10. And you'll find this on page 957.

In our hardback Bibles. 1 Corinthians chapter 10. Page 957. I'm turning here. Because there's an important piece of instruction. From Paul the apostle.

About how to use. The Old Testament. How to benefit from the Old Testament. And specifically. How to profit. From the narrative parts. Of the law of Moses. Now as you probably know.

Paul the apostle. Is giving the Corinthians. A great rocket. In this letter. They were behaving badly. In all sorts of ways. And Paul knew. And Paul knew. That they were in danger. Of falling from Christ.

And losing their salvation. So he is saying to them. In this first part. Of chapter 10. Attend. To your Old Testament history. My friends. Learn some fundamental lessons.

[30 : 24] From it. God's people. Our fathers. Were greatly blessed. But most of them. Failed. To reach salvation. They never made it. To the promised land. And you.

Dear Corinthians. He is saying. Are in a similar position. Of danger. So let me read. From verse 1. I want you to know. Brothers. That our fathers. The Jews.

Back in Moses. Day. Our fathers. Were all under the cloud. All passed through the sea. And all were baptized. Into Moses. In the cloud. And in the sea. And all ate. The same spiritual food.

And all drank. The same spiritual drink. For they drank. From the spiritual rock. That followed them. And the rock was Christ. Nevertheless. With most of them.

God was not pleased. For they were overthrown. In the wilderness. Now these things. Took place. As examples. For us. That we might. Not desire evil.

[31 : 19] As they did. Do not be idolaters. As some of them were. As it is written. The people sat down. To eat and drink. And rose up to play. We must not indulge.

In sexual immorality. As some of them did. And twenty three thousand. Fell. In a single day. We must not put Christ. To the test. As some of them did. And were destroyed. By serpents.

Nor grumble. As some of them did. And were destroyed. By the destroyer. Now. These things. Happened to them. As an example. But they were written down.

For our. Instruction. On whom the end. Of the ages. Has come. Therefore. Let anyone. Who thinks. That he stands. Take heed. Lest he fall.

No temptation. Has overtaken you. That is not common. To man. God is faithful. And he will not. Let you be tempted. Beyond your ability. But with the temptation. He will also provide.

[32 : 14] The way of escape. That you may be able. To endure it. Therefore. My beloved. Flee from idolatry. I'm sure you can see. The thrust of what Paul.

Is saying here. Come with me brothers. He's saying. Come with me. Back to the books. Of Exodus. And numbers. The books that record. That great journey. Through the wilderness. Our Israelite fathers.

Had unparalleled. Blessings there. Verse one. They were all. Under the cloud. That is the great cloud. Of blessing. By which God. Guided them. As it moved forward.

Across the desert. They all passed. Through the sea. And saw God's power. As he parted the waters. To left and right. They were all. Verse two.

Baptized into Moses. So just as Christians. Are baptized. Into Christ. And thus united. Under his leadership. So the Israelites. Were all there together.

[33 : 07] Accepting the leadership. Of Moses. Verse three. They all ate. The same spiritual food. That means the manna. From heaven. No plowing or sowing. For forty years.

And they drank water. From the rock. The rock. Which split apart. And gushed forth. And that rock. Was Christ. Christ was with them. They may not have recognized him. As such. But he was accompanying them.

Now verse five. Nevertheless. Despite these extraordinary. Manifestations. Of the presence of God. With most of them. That's an understatement. It was all but two of them.

Wasn't it? Joshua and Caleb. With most of them. God was not pleased. For they were overthrown. Literally. The verb means. That their bodies. Were strewn and scattered. Across the wilderness.

It's a verb of utter. Devastation. So in verses one to five. Paul is very concisely. Summarizing the blessings. That God gave the Israelites. In the wilderness.

[34 : 04] And then he makes his point. To the Corinthians. In verse six. Now these things. Took place. As examples. For us. That we might not desire. Evil. As they did.

So what were the temptations. To evil. Which they found. They could not resist. Verse seven. Idolatry. Principally. The golden calf episode.

Then sexual immorality. In verse eight. And a particularly horrible. Example of that. Comes in numbers. Chapter 25. Putting Christ to the test. And grumbling.

Verse nine. And being destroyed. By serpents. As we've already noticed. In numbers. Chapter 21. And Paul sharpens his point. Yet more. In verse 11. Where he says.

Now these things. Happened to them. As an example. But they were written down. For our instruction. On whom the end. Of the ages. Has come. Therefore.

[34 : 59] Verse 12. If you Corinthians. Think that you're in no danger. Of falling over. You'd better open your ears. And take notice. The story. Of the wilderness. Wanderings. Stands there.

In scripture. As a constant warning. To the Corinthians. And of course. To us too. And if we ever think. As we might be tempted. That the level of temptation. That we're undergoing.

Is surely sharper. And harder. Than other people. Have had to endure. We're simply deceiving ourselves. It'll be no good. Saying to God. In the end. Oh but the temptation. You allowed me to suffer.

Was greater than any human being. Can bear. No says Paul. No. No temptation. Is too strong. To resist. God will provide. Escape routes. And you must take those routes.

If you refuse. To resist temptation. You're behaving like your fathers. In the wilderness. And you will suffer the destruction. That they suffered. Therefore. Corinthians. Verse 14.

[35 : 54] Flee from idolatry. You can do it. The pull of it. Is not irresistible. That's what he's saying. Now friends. This is a tough passage. It's a shot across our bowels.

We need to take it that way. But Paul is teaching us. How to read the book of numbers. Verse 6. These things took place. As examples. For us. So Moses was not writing.

Simply for his own generation. He was writing for us today. As well. And verse 11. These things happen to them. As an example. But they were written down. For our instruction.

For the instruction of Christians. To teach us. How to live the Christian life. Now friends. I'm not going to do this. Because this would be too embarrassing. And too awful.

But if I were to say. Will everybody in this hall. Who is ever tempted to idolatry. Ever tempted to worship the idols of money.

[36 : 50] Or power. Sport. Music. Personal beauty. Home or family. Please stand up now. I think we'd all be standing.

Wouldn't we? I certainly would be. That's verse 7. If I then said. Will everybody who is tempted. To indulge in sexual immorality. In thought. Or action.

Please stand up. Again. I think we'd all be standing. That's verse 8. If I then said. Will all of us. Who ever grumble. Please stand up.

I think we'd all be quickly. On our feet. The reason grumbling. The reason grumbling. Is so serious. Is that it combines. Unbelief. And ingratitude.

Think of it. If I grumble. About my circumstances. In life. I'm effectively saying to God. You're not looking after me properly. My life should be strawberries and cream.

[37 : 45] But you're giving me dry bread and water. You're an inadequate provider. That's verse 10. You see how we need the book of Numbers. To teach us how to live the Christian life.

It will train us. To flee from idolatry. It will train us to shun. Sexual immorality. It will train us to be sweet tempered. And grateful about our circumstances.

And it will train us in many other ways. Besides. Well friends. God willing. We shall pick this up in a fortnight's time. At Numbers. Chapter 1. Verse 1. The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai.

In the tent of meeting. And he said. Take a census. Of the people of Israel. Count. The numbers. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray.

Dear God. Our Father. We thank you so much. That these great Old Testament books. Were written not simply. For Moses own. Contemporaries. But for us.

[38 : 48] As well. Upon whom. The end of the ages has come. We thank you so much. For the lessons that we shall learn. And we thank you for the experience.

Of the people of Israel. Even though so much of it was so dismal. But there's so much to learn. About your faithfulness. Your love for them. And your wonderful determination.

To fulfill everything. That you had promised to Abraham. Not only in terms of the Jews. But even more so. In terms of. All the families of the earth.

Being blessed. Through the Lord Jesus Christ. Who was to come from the Jews. And. So we thank you dear Father. And pray that you will help us to. Live our lives in great confidence.

That you will fulfill. Everything. That you have said to us. That you will do. And we ask it in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Pray for the Lord.

[39 : 43] Amen. After the Lord.aches him. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.