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Bible Studies from the book of Numbers

**About This Study**

This 6-week Bible study series on the book of *Numbers* has been kindly created by **Jess Sheely**, our 2025 Canberra Women’s Christian Convention speaker. Originally developed for use at St Andrew’s (St Scots) in Sydney, this version has been lightly adapted with Jess’s permission for wider use in the lead-up to the convention.

We encourage you to use these studies personally, with a friend, or in a small group as you prepare your heart and mind for this year’s convention theme: *Trusting God in the Wilderness*.

We are deeply grateful to Jess for sharing this resource so generously.

# Overview

Read along so you cover the whole book across 6 weeks! Read a chapter a day and ask yourself:

How is God keeping his promises?

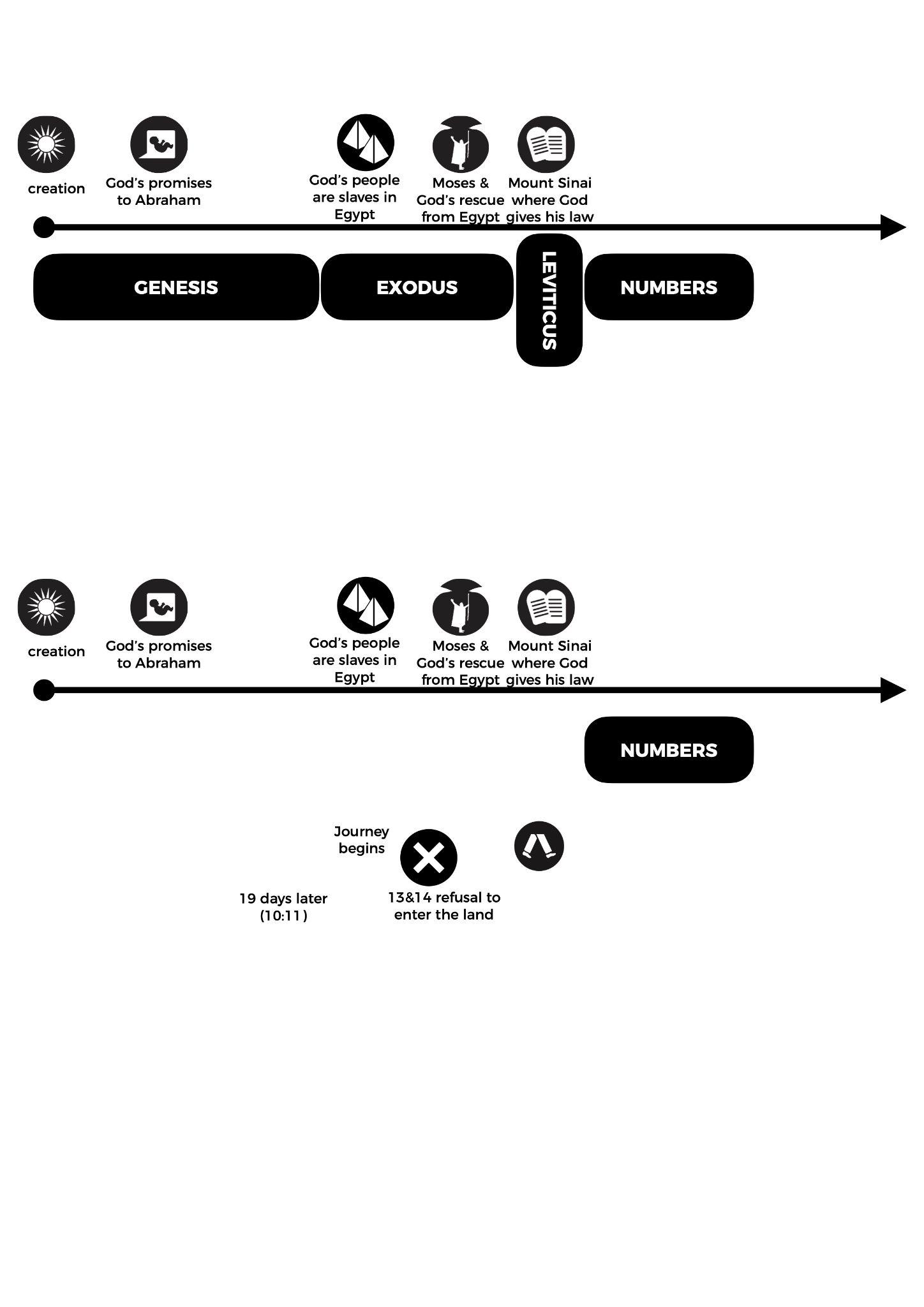
What else do I learn about God’s character?

What questions do I have?

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| Study | Passage | Big Idea | Application | Read along |
| 1 | 1 Cor 10  Num 1 | The Lord has faithfully rescued and grown the people of Israel, just as he promised Abraham. This numerous nation is waiting to fully enjoy the benefits of their salvation as they head towards the promised land, God’s presence going with them. | As God’s saved people now, we too are waiting to enjoy the benefits of salvation fully. The danger as we wait is to grumble and doubt God’s promises. | Num 1-6 |
| 2 | Num 2, 5  2 Tim 1 | God is holy, so the holiness of his people is crucial to God. | In Jesus, we have been given the status of God’s holy children and given the Spirit who enables us to live out the identity we have. | Num 7-12 |
| 3 | Num 10-12 | Despite everything God has done for his people, they quickly doubt his goodness and grumble. God does not let this unbelief go unpunished. | Growing in contentment comes from trusting and delighting in God’s character (not denying the difficulties of life). | Num 13-18 |
| 4 | Num 13-14  Heb 3-4 | Pivotal chapters in Numbers. Trust in God’s promises was required for his people to inherit the promised land. A lack of trust rejects the promises of God and results in judgement. | Hebrews exhorts us to encourage one another daily so we don’t turn away from God like those in the wilderness. | Num 19-24 |
| 5 | Num 20-21  John 3 | Once again, sin hinders the people’s journey towards the promised land. Even a leader like Moses struggles with the problem of sin which means he does not enter the promised land. | Humanity is desperately reliant on God to deal with our problem of sin for us to have any hope of life with him. We also need a leader who is freed from sin too. Praise be that God has given us the Lord Jesus! | Num 25-30 |
| 6 | Num 27, 36  1 Pet 1 | The Lord both grants and preserves the inheritance he gives his people. The 5 daughters' requests and willingness to go along with whatever the Lord decides is their obedient response to what he is doing. | Christians need to understand that God who gives us our inheritance also preserves it for us. Our appropriate response is to find security in him and to all that he commands. | Num 31-36 |

# Setting the scene

Numbers is a book about faithfulness. God’s faithfulness even when his people are faithless. It is a book concerned with learning from the failures of previous generations to understand what it means to be God’s faithful people today.

Numbers 1:1

*The LORD spoke to Moses in the tent of meeting in the Desert of Sinai on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt.*

The book of Numbers opens 13 months after the Lord had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt (see the book of Exodus). The Lord has promised his people a land of their own. At the end of Exodus and all of Leviticus, the Lord has gathered his people, given them direction for how to live as his holy, chosen people and he is about to lead them to their promised home.

The book of Numbers covers two generations of God’s people.

1. A faithless generation: Death in the wilderness (1-25)
   1. A good beginning 1-10
   2. An inevitable end 11-25
2. A faithful generation: Life in the promised land (26-36)

# Study 1

1. What are you looking forward to in the coming months? Do you find it easy or difficult to wait?
2. Have you ever read through, studied or listened to a sermon series on the book of Numbers? What are your current feelings about the book, and why?

Before we open Numbers, let’s consider one reason the New Testament gives for Christians to read Numbers. Paul is writing to a church in Corinth, urging them to take seriously the lessons of God’s people from the book of Numbers.

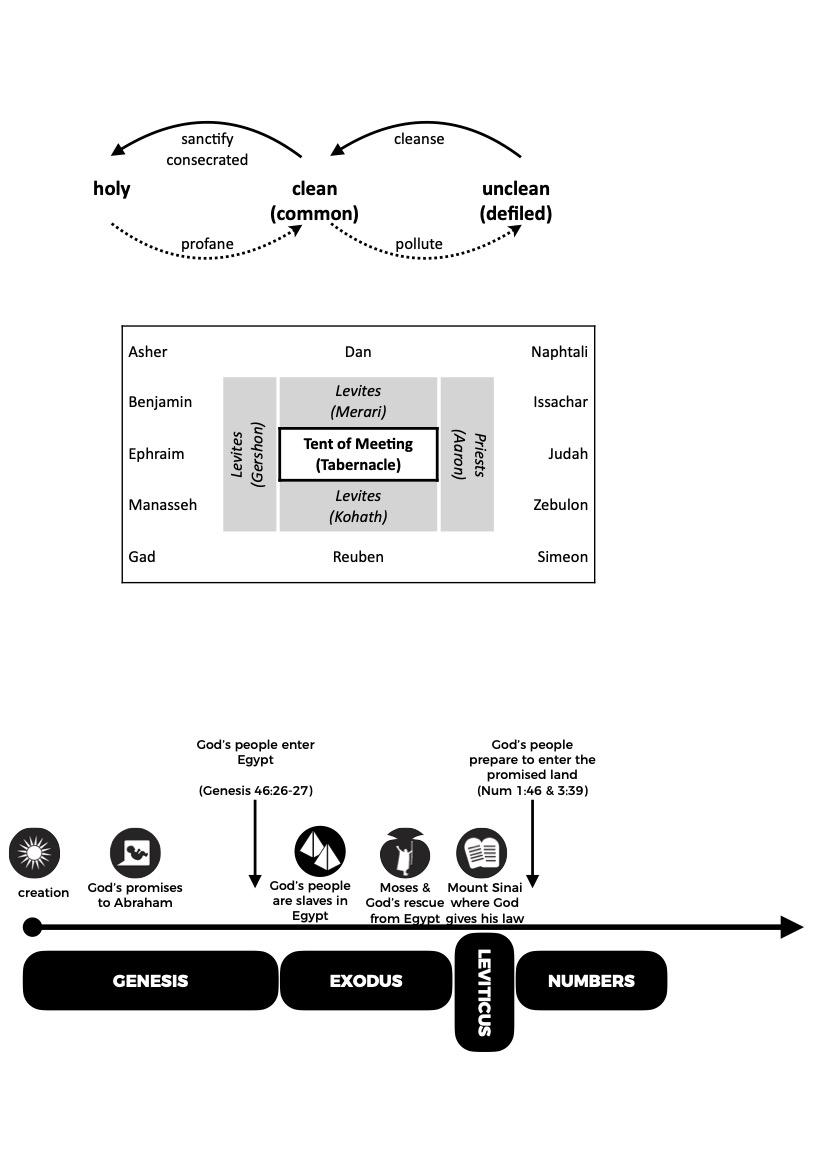
**Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

1. What links or similarities are there between ‘our ancestors’ (10:1) and the Corinthian church?
2. What lessons are to be learnt from Numbers?

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| **Tip**  As we turn to Numbers, heads up, there are a lot of names. But a few tips with lists of Old Testament names:   * If you’re reading names out loud, you’re a gift to others. Thank you! And no one minds if you don’t pronounce them correctly. Be confident and give it a go. * It’s often tempting to skip over lists of names. But we record names and numbers of things that are important to us. As you’re reading along, ask yourself, ‘why might these names and numbers be important to God?’ |

**Read Numbers 1:1-54**

1. What do you notice about the census in chapter 1?
2. Compare the number of God’s people who enter Egypt (Genesis 46:26-27) to the number who leave Egypt (Num 1:46 and 3:39).



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| **Background**  Several generations before God’s people entered Egypt, God made significant promises to Abraham. The Lord promised he would   1. give Abraham many descendants 2. give the whole land of Canaan as an everlasting possession and home to Abraham’s descendants 3. be with Abraham’s descendants as their loving Lord.   (Read Gen 17:1-8 for more details) |

1. By the end of Numbers 1, to what extent has the Lord fulfilled his promises to Abraham? What expectations are still remaining?

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| **Numbers to Jesus**  Numbers can feel confusing, not just because of the weird names, but because it can be difficult to know how Numbers points us to Jesus and how we should respond.   * Numbers 1 is the beginning of the journey of God’s newly rescued people. A people who were once slaves, have been freed to live as God’s people and heirs of the promises to Abraham. They have received salvation but are yet to fully enjoy the benefits of salvation. Christians now have been rescued from slavery from sin and have been freed to live as God’s people, true heirs of Abraham. But we too are waiting to fully enjoy the benefits of salvation. Don’t lose heart, waiting does not mean God has forgotten! |

1. What do you find difficult about waiting to fully enjoy the benefits of salvation?
2. What aspects of the gospel do you need to keep remembering as you wait?

Prayer suggestions:

* Praise God for his ongoing faithfulness to his people.
* Ask God for help in waiting well and to protect us from grumbling and doubt
* Pray for those not yet part of God’s family, that God would be changing the hearts of our unbelieving friends and family to turn to Jesus.

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# Study 2

1. Share a special possession you have. What makes it special to you?

**The story so far…**

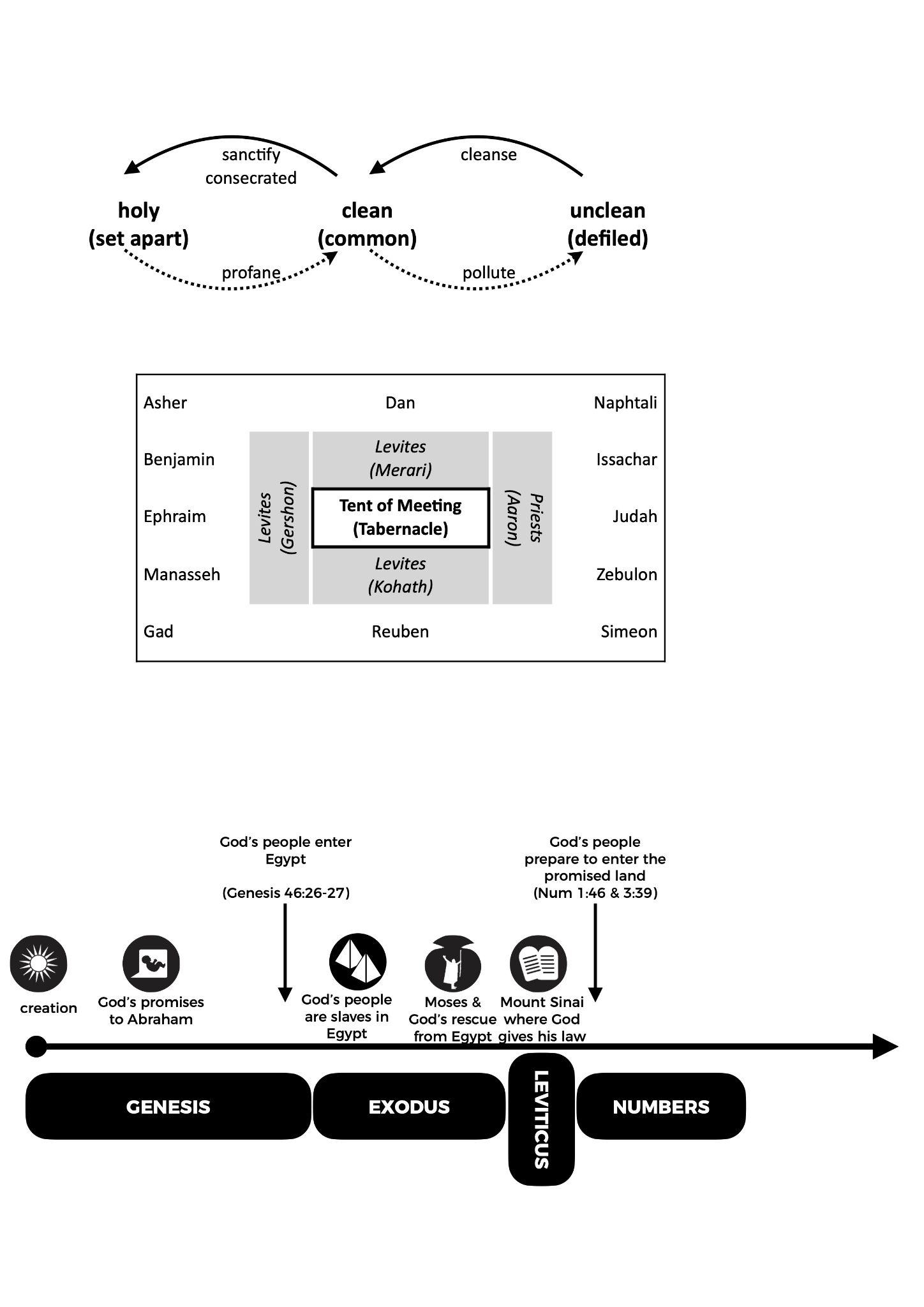
Numbers 1 is the beginning of the journey of the Lord’s newly rescued people. The Lord has rescued his people, saved them from slavery, and promised them land of their own. He’s gathered them, and given them direction for how to live as his holy, chosen people. And he’s about to lead them to their promised home. But there are still a few things left before they can set out on their journey…

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| **Tip**  As we read the Old Testament, some terms like *holy* and *defiled* feel foreign. Here’s a diagram of how some of these terms fit together. |

**Numbers 2:1-2**

*The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: “The Israelites are to camp around the tent of meeting some distance from it, each of them under their standard and holding the banners of their family.”*

Before God’s people set out on their journey to the promised land, in Numbers 2-4 the Lord directs his people to camp, tribe by tribe around the tabernacle (tent of meeting). The four subgroups of the tribe of Levi encircle the tabernacle with the other tribes camping as a ring around the outside.



The Lord is present through the tabernacle as his people camp. This reality is to shape how his people live.

**Read Numbers 5:1-10**

1. What things surprise or stand out to us from these verses?
2. How do these verses show both the horizontal (person to person) and vertical (person to God) impact of sin?
3. How does God’s holy presence with his people impact how they relate to one another?

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| **Numbers to Jesus**   * Numbers 5 (and all of Numbers 5-9) show us that the holiness of his people is crucially important to God. God’s desire for his people to be holy stems from his own holiness and presence. However, God also recognises that on our own, we cannot attain holiness and so provides atonement for our sins ultimately in Christ Jesus. * Jesus has lived a pure life of righteousness and holiness for us. * The gift of the Holy Spirit means we have already been given the identity of God’s holy people. We do not need to strive to attain this status, we are called to live it out. |

**Read 2 Timothy 1:9-10**

*9 God has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, 10 but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

1. What does the Lord’s call for holiness in Numbers tell us about our own journey of following Jesus?
2. How might you keep growing your understanding and love of God’s holiness?

Prayer suggestions:

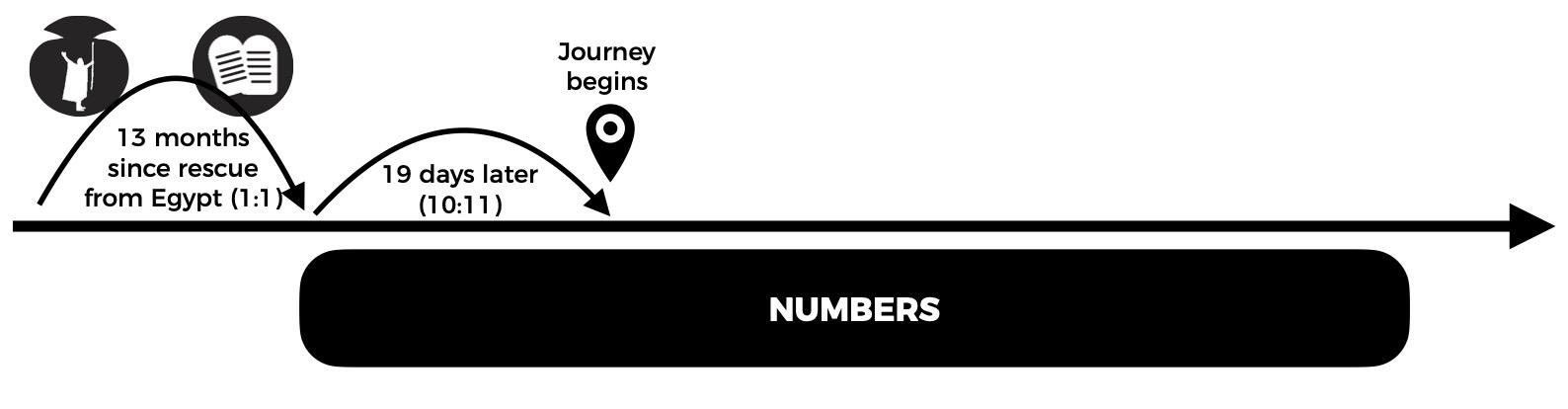
* Spend time confessing your sin to our holy God.
* Rejoice in the forgiveness Jesus offers that enables us to be his holy children
* Ask God to grow one another in holiness

# Study 3

1. What has been a memorable journey you’ve taken? What made it memorable?

**The story so far…**

It’s been about 14 months since God rescued his people, saved them from slavery, and promised them land of their own. He’s gathered them and given them direction for how to live as his holy, chosen people. Finally, they are about to set out on their journey to their promised home. How will God’s people go with their journey?



**Read Numbers 10:11-13, 33-36**

As the glory cloud lifts, God’s people set out for the first time on their journey to their promised home.

1. What do you imagine God’s people are thinking and feeling?

God’s people have been on their journey for only three days before the tone shifts in chapter 11. Chapters 11-12 introduce a sadly common cycle of God’s people grumbling.

1. As you read sections of these two chapters, note down who is grumbling and what they are grumbling about (there’s a table below to help you)

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|  | Who is complaining? | What are they complaining about? | How does the Lord respond? |
| **Numbers 11:1-3**  First complaint |  |  |  |
| **Numbers 11:4-10, 18-20, 31-34**  Second complaint |  |  |  |
| **Numbers 12:1-16**  Third complaint |  |  |  |

1. As God’s people grumble and complain, what are they doubting about God’s character and/or ability?

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| **Numbers to Jesus**   * In 1 Cor 10:1-13, Paul thinks that grumbling is a present danger for Christians too. And that the antidote to grumbling is a growing conviction that God is faithful and trustworthy (1 Cor 10:13). * Like God’s people in every generation, life is not always easy and there will always be a temptation to grumble. * Jesus’s death and resurrection mean believers do not need to fear God’s anger. Jesus has already paid for all of the anger our sin rightfully deserves. * Growing in contentment comes from trusting and delighting in God’s character (not denying the difficulties of life). God is sovereign and caring. He has provided all we need for life and godliness in the Lord Jesus. |

1. What sorts of things are we prone to grumble about?
2. What aspect of God’s character are we doubting in these specific grumblings?
3. How might we help one another fight against grumbling?

Spend time praying together:

* Pray for the areas we are prone to grumble. Ask God to grow us in contentment
* Ask for God’s help to remember his character of goodness, faithfulness, and care.

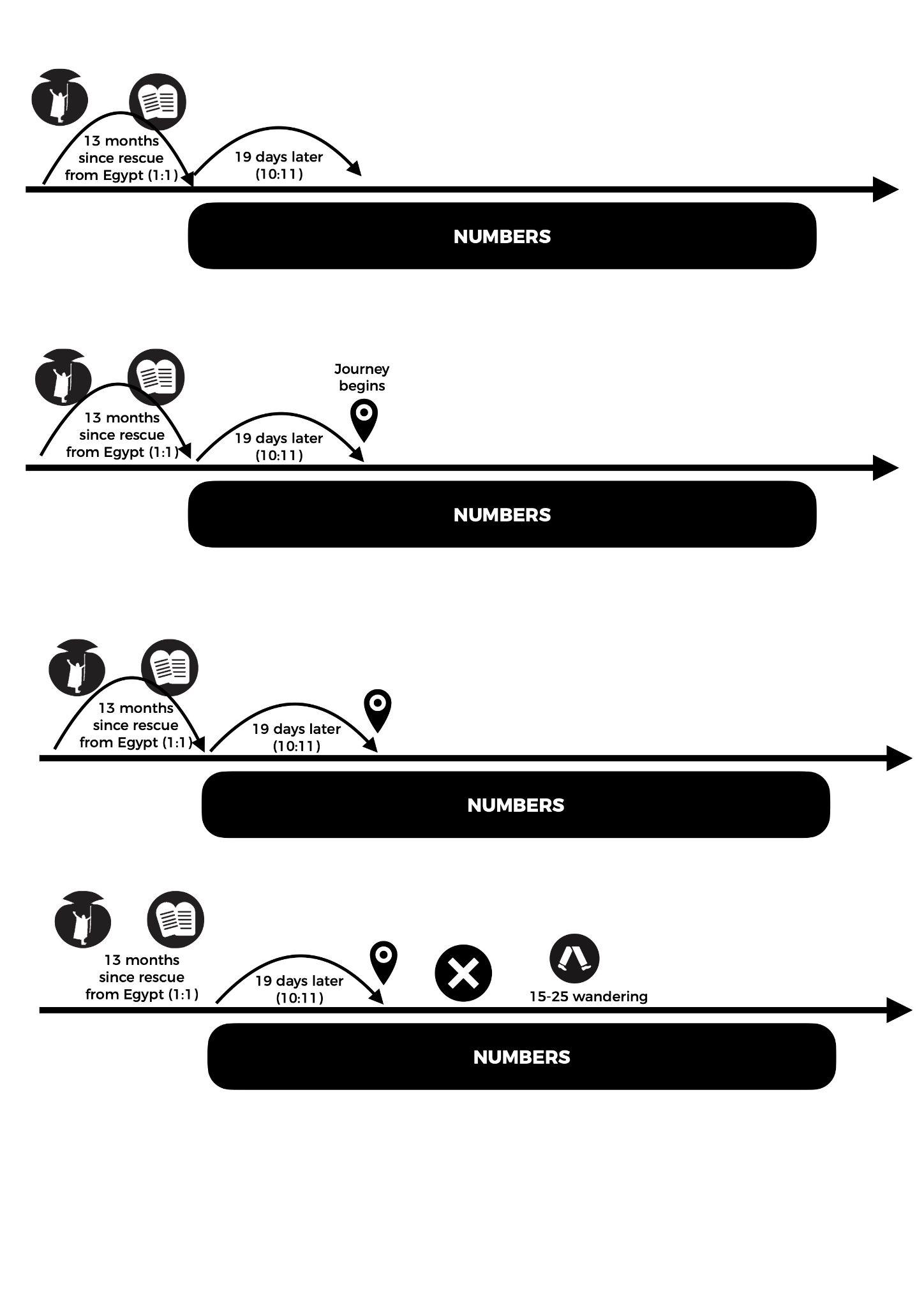
# Study 4

1. What’s something you are afraid of (eg. spiders, public speaking etc)? To what extent would you go to avoid this fear?

**The story so far…**

It’s been about 14 months since God rescued his people, saved them from slavery in Egypt, and promised them land of their own. He’s gathered them and given them direction for how to live as his holy, chosen people. God has been guiding them towards their promised home. Despite all this, God’s people have doubted God’s character and goodness and have been grumbling on their journey.

They’ve arrived at the edge of their promised home. Will they make it home?



People are sent to explore the land God has promised them.

**Read Numbers 13:30-14:10**

God has promised his people the land the spies explored. After the spies reported back, there were two reactions from God’s people; confidence and doubt.

1. What are the concerns of the people who doubt they can take the land?
2. What gives the others, Caleb, Joshua, Moses etc, confidence that they can take the land?

As we saw last week, God does not leave the grumbling of the people unanswered…

1. Using the table below, compare how the consequences mirror the sin of God’s people.

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| People’s complaint | God’s response |
| 14:2 | 14:27-32 |
| 14:3 | 14:31-35 |
| 14:10 | 14:36-38 |

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| **Numbers to Jesus**   * This was a pivotal moment in the history of God’s people. Trust in God’s promises was required for his people to inherit the promised land. A lack of trust rejects the promises of God and results in judgement. Many books of the Bible look back to this moment to warn God’s people not to make the same mistake. * In Jesus, the promise of rest and a home is no longer the physical Jerusalem. Now we have a greater promise, the heavenly Jerusalem, the new creation, rest from sin and death where we enjoy and delight in God’s presence. * Christians are still waiting to enter the promised land. The writer of the book of Hebrews urges Christians to take sin and unbelief seriously as they wait, it’s a matter of life and death. |

**Read Hebrews 3:7-4:2**

1. What might it look like for a Christian to ensure they don’t have “a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God” (Heb 3:12)?
2. Why can Christians be certain about entering the promised land?
3. What might it look like to “encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (Heb 3:13)?
   1. As an individual?
   2. In your small group?
   3. In your wider church community?

Prayer suggestions:

* Praise God for our certain hope of rest and a home in the new creation.
* Ask God for help in encouraging one another and for protection against being deceived by our sin.

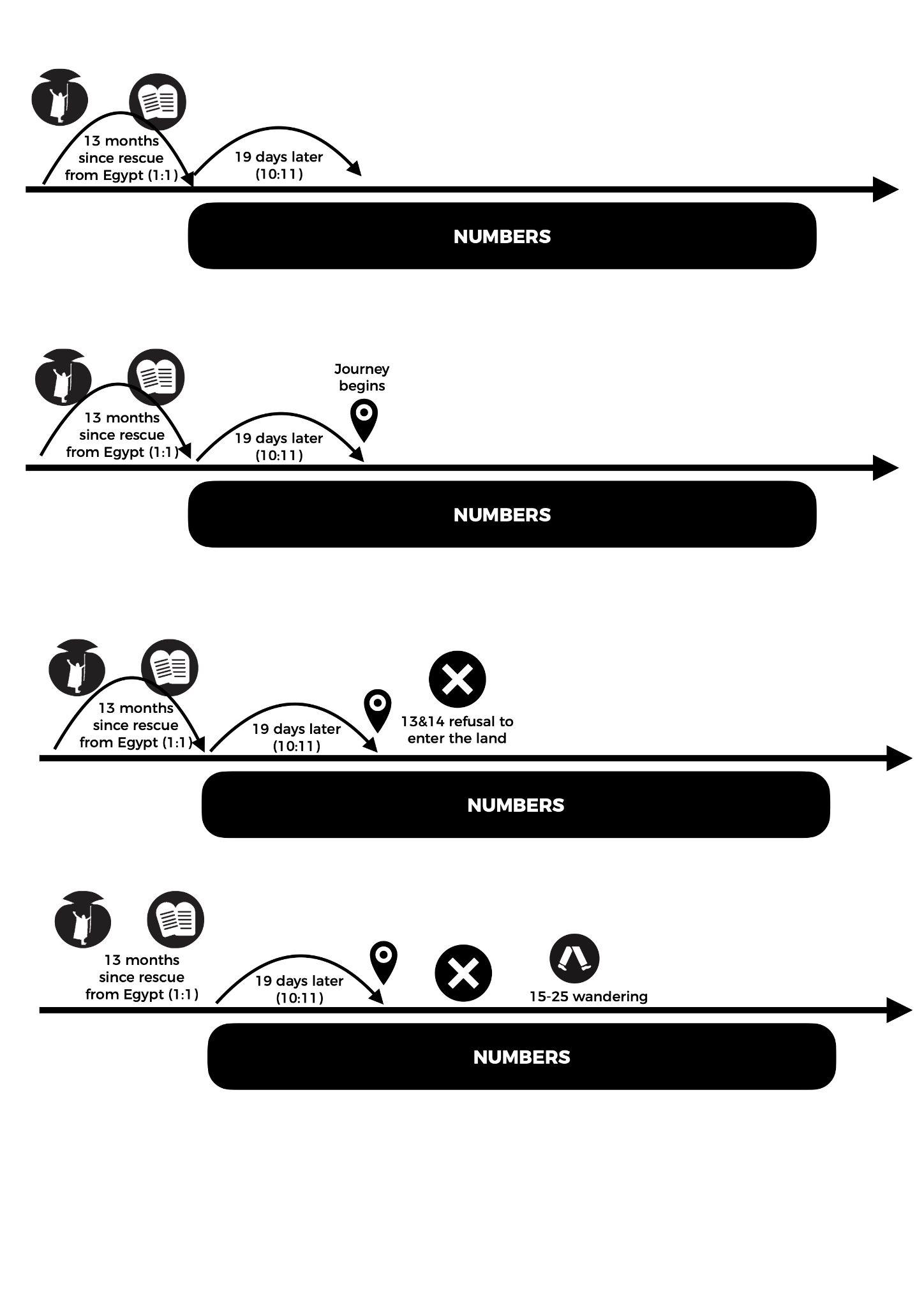
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# Study 5

1. Who has been a significant teacher/boss/leader in your life? What about them made them significant?

**The story so far…**

God’s people had made it to the border of their promised home, but because of their lack of trust in God’s ability to keep his promise, they have been wandering in the desert for years. Some time has passed and our passage this week begins “in the first month” (20:1) of a new year.



**Read Numbers 20:1-13**

1. What is it about Moses’ response to the people’s complaints that will keep him from leading them into the land?
2. In 20:12, the Lord tells Aaron and Moses that for their failure, they will not enter the land. What does this tell us about the type of leader needed to successfully lead God’s people into his rest?

**Read Numbers 21:4-9**

1. What causes the people to grumble yet again?
2. How does the Lord respond this time?
3. What salvation does the Lord provide when the people repent?

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| **Numbers to Jesus**   * Sin is painted fairly bleakly in these chapters. Even God’s appointed leader, Moses, is impacted by his sin. Sin has a devastating effect, the wages of sin is death (Num 21:6, Rom 6:23). * Despite the bleakness of our sins, the Lord provides a way of salvation. The provision of water and battle victory were needed by God’s people to make it out of the wilderness. But the provision of the bronze snake was needed for his people to be rescued from deserved judgement and death. No wonder John uses this as an illustration of Jesus’s triumph of grace over sin (John 3:13-18). * Back in Numbers 12:7 the Lord describes Moses as “my servant Moses, he is faithful in all my house.” Despite all of Moses’ faithful service, his sin prevented him from entering the land. This highlights the need for God’s people to have a leader who does not fall because of sin. Hebrews describes Jesus as having “been found worthy of greater honour than Moses” (Heb 3:3) because “Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory” (Heb 3:6). |

**Read John 3:13-18**

1. How does John interpret the snake from Numbers 21? How does this begin to help us understand how sin is dealt with by the cross of Jesus?
2. How does the triumph of the cross over sin help us to fight indwelling or recurrent sin?

Prayer suggestions:

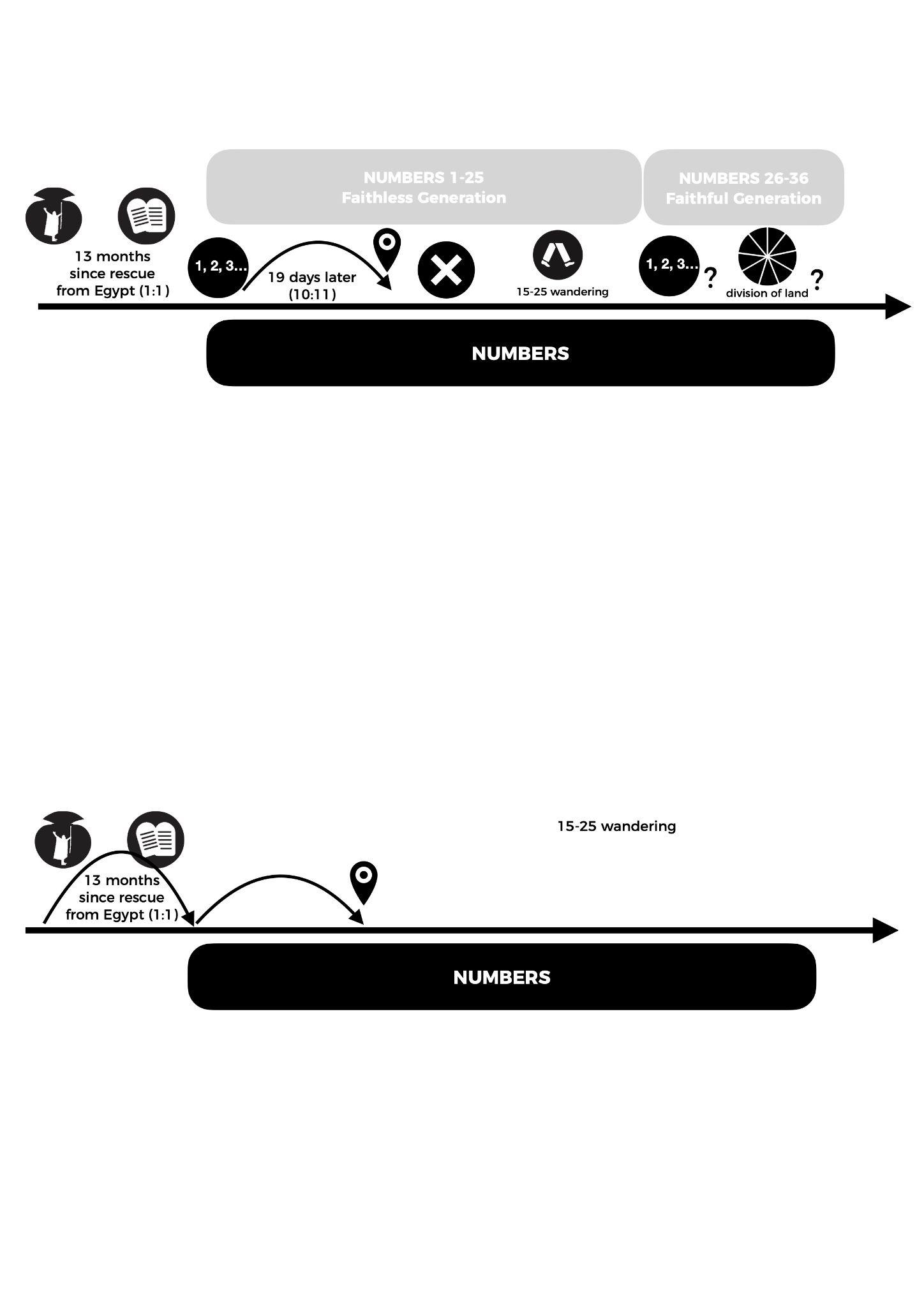
* Spend time before God recognising the seriousness of our sin.
* Praise God for Jesus, our sunless leader who offers forgiveness and life.
* Pray for our unbelieving friends and family, that they would believe and have eternal life in Jesus.

# Study 6

1. Share a time when you felt protected.

**The story so far…**

Numbers 26-36 introduces us to the second generation. Their parents have died for their sins, wandering in the wilderness. This new, second generation, after wandering for 40 years has reached the edge of the promised land. But what if, right on the brink of entry, there is a risk that the land might be snatched away from a family because there are no male heirs to inherit?



**Read Numbers 27:1-11**

1. What is the concern raised? What’s at stake?
2. The previous generation of God’s people had numerous concerns on their journey. How do the daughters of Zelophehad compare to how the previous generation dealt with concerns?
3. How does the Lord answer?

**Read Numbers 36:1-14**

1. What is the follow-up issue raised? What’s at stake?
2. How does the Lord answer this time?
3. In the final verses of the book, we are told how the daughters of Zelophehad honour their family and their clan heritage in their marriage decisions (v 10-12). Why do you suppose the book of Numbers concludes its lesson on faithfulness with the testimony of these five women?

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| **Numbers to Jesus**   * Zelophehad’s daughters model for us that faithful servants of the Lord know that it is the Lord who gives and protects the inheritance he promises. They respond in trust and obedience. * Jesus shows us that the promise of inheritance and land is even better than the physical land the daughters were looking forward to. In Jesus, we are given the promise of life and home with our gracious Lord and Saviour. * The confidence that we have in our future inheritance transforms our lives now. Jesus calls us to trust, obey, and rejoice even in the face of suffering as we journey home. |

**Read 1 Peter 1:3-6**

1. How does Peter describe our inheritance in Jesus?
2. What is one way you would like God to grow or strengthen you as we journey home to him?

Prayer suggestions:

* Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
* Praise God for the living hope and imperishable inheritance we have in Jesus.
* Ask God to grow and strengthen us as we journey home.