

OLD PLACES,

NEW FACES

**Bible Places Illuminating
Today's Christian**

**12 Studies Based on
Numbers & Deuteronomy**

by Pastor Kent Groethe

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LESSON 1:**LIVING WITH A COMMISSION***Desert of Sinai*

The fourth book of the Old Testament is called Numbers because there are two censuses of the Israelites recorded in it. The first census takes place at Mt. Sinai where the Israelites were encamped after their escape from Egypt. The second census takes place after the Israelites had wandered in the wilderness for forty years. God commanded that each census take place, placing Moses and Aaron in charge of the task.

God's command to "Take a census..." in Numbers 1:2 is, outside of the exodus from Egypt, the most significant event of the Old Testament story since the twelfth chapter of Genesis. There God gave another command, this one to Abraham: "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). These two commands are intimately connected, though they are separated by over five hundred years. The first involves a promise made by God, and the second is the fulfillment of that promise.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**READ NUMBERS 1:1-4, 17-19, 45-46**

1. Who ordered the census to be taken? (vs. 1-2)
2. Who was to coordinate the census? (v. 3)
3. Who was counted? (vs. 3, 45)

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3. Who was counted? (vs. 3, 45)

4. How many able-bodied men were there? (v. 46)

This census declared the fulfillment of the promise God made to Abraham and Sarah five hundred years earlier.

READ GENESIS 12:1-3

5. What did God promise to do for Abraham and Sarah? (v. 2)

Abraham and Sarah left Ur and journeyed to the land that God promised to show them. It was the land of Canaan, currently inhabited by seven different groups of people.

READ GENESIS 13:15-16

6. What two promises did God make to Abraham and Sarah when they arrived in Canaan?

Five centuries after these promises were made, the Israelites escaped from four hundred years of slavery in Egypt. They encamped at Mt. Sinai, just a short distance south of the Promised Land. They had been there for over two years when God commanded Moses to take a census.

REREAD NUMBERS 1:2-3

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7. Which one of God's promises to Abraham was He going to fulfill through Israel's army?

REREAD NUMBERS 1:46

8. The number of fighting men proved the fulfillment of which promise made to Abraham and Sarah?

God had promised His people a place to live, a place which would be a permanent home for them. This promise had been a constant hope for Abraham's descendants. It had been the light that guided the direction of their lives. When God was finally ready to give them this land, the census was for counting the soldiers who, with God's help, would take possession of that land.

There are really two geographical places in today's story: the Desert of Sinai, where the Israelites sat dreaming about a better place; and the Promised Land itself, where they were promised a permanent home and provision for all of their needs. It was a great promise for those who sat in the desert where there was a scarcity of everything.

9. Metaphorically speaking, what is the Desert of Sinai in our lives?

10. What is our Promised Land?

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9. Metaphorically speaking, what is the Desert of Sinai in our lives?

10. What is our Promised Land?

11. When the Israelites were dwelling in an uncomfortable place in the desert, how might they have been positively affected by the knowledge that God had prepared a better place for them?

READ JOHN 14:1-3

12. How should the hope of a heavenly home benefit a believer in this world?

READ I CORINTHIANS 15:51-58

13. Who made this great promise of life after death possible?
(vs. 56-57)

REREAD GENESIS 12:2-3

14. How does God's promise to Abraham and Sarah hint at Jesus' work of salvation?

15. How does I Corinthians 15:58 suggest that the knowledge of life after death should motivate the believer?

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READ I THESSALONIANS 4:13-14

16. How should the promise of life after death affect a believer when faced with the death of a loved one who was also a believer?

READ GENESIS 15:1, 4-5

17. Could Abraham count the number of his descendants who would one day be in the Promised Land?

READ REVELATION 7:9

18. In John's vision of heaven, he counted how many people in white robes (the saints who have died)?
19. Are the descendants of Abraham and Sarah (Israelites, Jews) the only ones who will be in heaven?
20. How is this image of a heaven filled with people of all nationalities a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, where He said, "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you"?

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During the time that the Israelites were encamped in the Desert of Sinai, they looked forward to inhabiting the city of Jerusalem. Later, when they were actually in the land, Jerusalem became a symbol of the Promised Land.

READ REVELATION 21:1-7

21. Jerusalem is a metaphor for heaven, our Promised Land. What will life in heaven be like?

In the meantime, we live in the Desert of Sinai where we suffer sorrow, pain, and want. This fallen world offers disappointment, heartache and finally death. But because of the hope of a Promised Land, we live in joy and with perseverance, anxious to serve God's purposes and to invite others who do not yet know of Christ's defeat of death to join us.

CLOSING**READ REVELATION 22:1-5**

Sing and/or read the hymn, *Jerusalem, the Golden*. (LBW #347)

PRAYER

Almighty God, glorious Father, give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we may know you better. May the eyes of our hearts be enlightened in order that we may know the hope to which you have called us, the riches of your glorious inheritance in the saints, and the incomparably great power for us who believe. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen. (*Ephesians 1:17-19a*)

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