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SESSION ONE

Numbers 6:22-
27; 9:15-23

Learner Session Guide

Focus Statement

God is the source of blessing and holy presence for our lives.

Key Verse

The LORD bless you and keep you. **Numbers 6:24**

Where Is God in Our “Wilderness” Times?

Focus Image



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Gather

Check-in

Take this time to connect or reconnect with the others in your group.

Pray

O God, you bless us every day. Your face shines on us continually. Yet, we are so often closed to your blessing and presence in our lives. Help us to trust you, look to you, and turn our faces toward you. Show us how to be a blessing to others. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Focus Activity

Reflect on the Focus Image. Tell about a time when you were lost or didn't know which way to go. How did you feel? Who or what was reassuring or helpful during that time?

 Notes

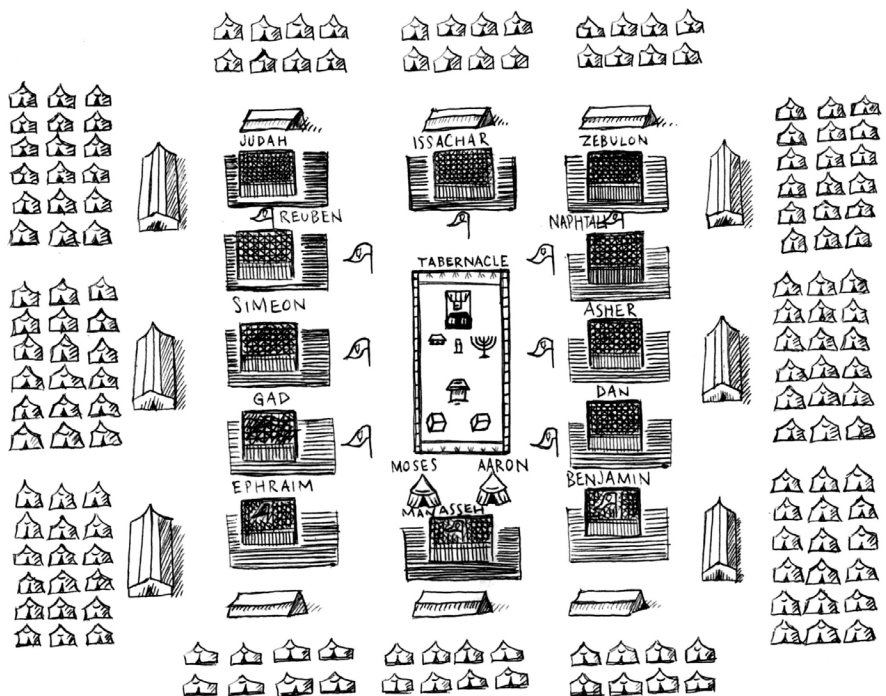
Open Scripture (10-15 minutes)

Read Numbers 6:22-27; 9:15-23.

- Have you heard any part of these texts before? If so, when?
- What in these texts is most comforting to you?
- What words or phrases stand out the most to you?

Join the Conversation

Historical Context



Israel's wilderness encampment around the central tabernacle

1. The story of Numbers begins with organizing the people by counting those who can serve as soldiers to defend the people (chapters 1–2). This is how the book got its name in Greek, Latin, and English. In Hebrew the book of Numbers is called “In the Wilderness.” The tribes of Israel camped in specific places around the tabernacle of God (see the illustration above).

- How do these two titles (“Numbers” and “In the Wilderness”) symbolize different aspects of the book or even today’s study texts?
- What does the arrangement of the camp say about the Israelites at this time?

2. Chapters 3 and 4 introduce Aaron and his sons, as well as the Levite tribes. Together, these groups served as the priests, the religious leaders, and the workers who took care of the tabernacle and all the items related to worship and the sacrifices to God. That’s why in 6:22-27 Aaron and his sons are given the task of passing God’s blessing on to the people.

“There is a tradition that the priests would hold their hands up with their palms facing the people, their thumbs pointing to themselves, first two fingers touching each other, and the second two fingers touching each other” (from *Lutheran Study Bible*, p. 250). This is similar to the greeting given by the Spock character from the Star Trek series.

- Why do you think it was important that God’s people have appointed priests and a whole tribe dedicated to serving the religious aspect of the community?
- How do you think the blessing in Numbers 6:22-27 may have affected the people wandering in the wilderness?

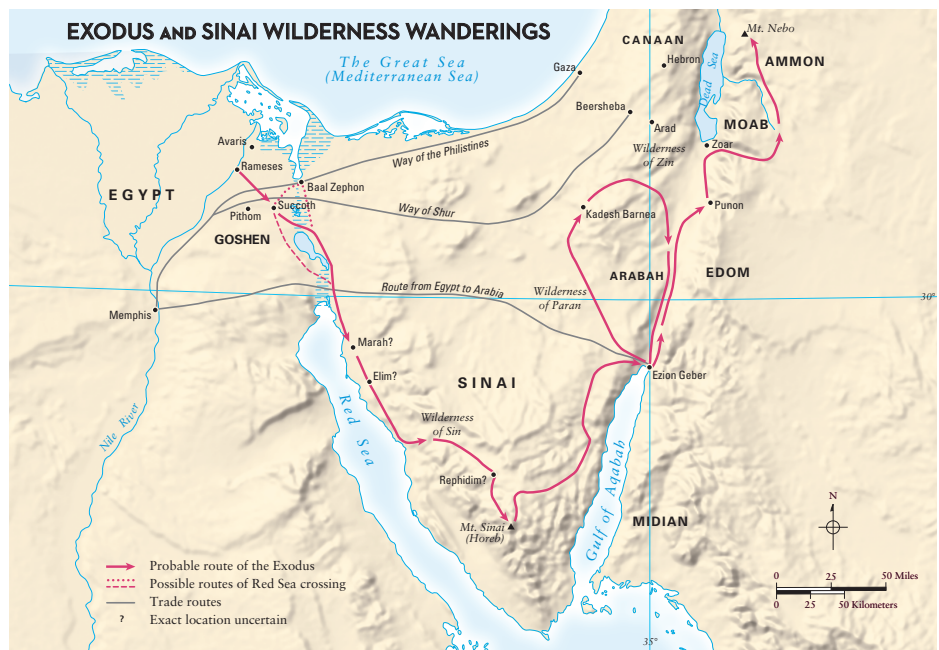
3. The story of the people in the wilderness actually begins in the book of Exodus, with God freeing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. (The Israelites of the Old Testament are not the same as citizens of the nation of Israel today. Much has changed since biblical times surrounding national governance, religious identity, and interactions with surrounding nations and ethnicities.) In Numbers, the people wander in the wilderness between Egypt and Canaan (see map on p. 8) for 40 years in search of the promised land.

- Imagine what it would have been like to live among the Israelites as they moved from place to place in the wilderness. Describe some of the challenges you might face. Describe some of the joys you might experience.



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4. Names, especially the names of gods, were believed to have great power in the ancient world.

- Read Deuteronomy 12:5; 28:10; Jeremiah 7:10-11; and 14:9. Discuss what it would have meant for the Israelites to have God’s name placed on them (Numbers 6:27).

Literary Context

1. Describe the role each of these characters plays in the session Scripture texts: Moses, Aaron and his sons, the Israelites, and the LORD.

- Who is the main character in these texts, and why?

2. With the words *promise* and *presence* in mind, try to draw some comparisons between blessing in 6:22-27 and the description of how the Lord’s cloud and fire led the people from one camp to another in the wilderness in 9:15-23.

- What common themes do you see at work?
- What would it be like to move when God says “move,” and stay when God says “stay”?
- Do you think the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire would have been reassuring or frightening to the people in the wilderness? Explain your answer.

Lutheran Context

1. Use the Lutheran principle of “Scripture interprets Scripture” to learn more about Numbers 6:24-26.
 - Read Psalm 4:6-8 and 80:1-19. What does it mean for the people to have God’s face shine on them?
 - How do these texts shed light on the blessing in Numbers 6:24-26?
2. The blessing in the session Scripture texts (often called the Aaronic blessing) means that God’s favor is on this group of people and that God’s heart is deeply intertwined with them. Lutheran worship today often includes the same blessing as a benediction or final blessing.
 - List reasons why we might use the same blessing given to the Israelites wandering in the wilderness. What does this say about God? What does it say about us?

Devotional Context

1. Wilderness times can be frightening and lonely. Think about a “wilderness” time in your life—perhaps when you felt lost and out of touch with God, or burned out, or . . . ?
 - What words would you use to describe that wilderness time?
 - Who or what reminded you that God is with you?
 - How can “wilderness” times also be times of blessing?
2. Make a painting, draw a picture, or create a sculpture that depicts a sign of God’s presence with you.
3. Aaron passes God’s blessing to the people, so that the people can give it to others.
 - What blessings has God given you?
 - List some ways you can remind others of God’s presence and be a blessing to them this week.

Wrap-up

Be ready to review the session with your group.

Pray

Precious Lord, take our hands. Lead us through those wilderness places in our lives, especially when we feel lost and alone. Help us to look to you for guidance and direction and purpose. Help us to see your face, to experience your love, and to feel your grace. Remind us that you will never leave us or forsake us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.



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Extending the Conversation

Homework

1. Read the Scripture text for the next session: Numbers 13:1-3, 17-33.
2. Use a concordance or online Bible search engine to look up other passages about “blessing.” Consider writing a summary of the results to share at the next session.
3. Reflect on God’s blessing and presence in your life as you write or draw in a journal.

Enrichment

1. If you want to read through the book of Numbers during this unit, use the following daily reading plan:

Day 1: Numbers 1:1—3:39

Day 2: Numbers 3:40-51

Day 3: Numbers 4:1—6:21

Day 4: Numbers 6:22—7:89

Day 5: Numbers 8:1—10:36

Day 6: Numbers 11:1—12:16

Day 7: Numbers 13:1-33

2. Watch the movie *Cast Away* (DreamWorks, 2000, PG-13) starring Tom Hanks. This movie illustrates one man’s journey through the wilderness and back to normal society. He still feels lost in many ways even after he is “rescued,” but the reorientation process is illuminating.
3. Search on art.com (or another art site) for pictures of “wilderness.” Compare the images presented and notice what the pictures have in common.

For Further Reading

Blessings and Rituals for the Journey of Life by Susan Langhauser (Abingdon, 2000). Provides ready-made, easily adaptable blessings and rituals for a variety of occasions.

A Forgiving Heart: Prayers for Blessing and Reconciliation by Lyn Klug (Augsburg, 2003). Includes prayers from spiritual writers such as C. S. Lewis, Mother Teresa, Henri Nouwen, and Desmond Tutu.