



In 1985 ish, when I was three years old I decided to become a man and venture out of my own. That day I petitioned the help of one of my faithful friends, Skippy the beagle. At daylight we ventured into the woods. However, when the sun began to set I had not returned. To make matters worse for my parents, Skippy knew it was dinner time and returned on his own. So here I am, 3 years old, in the woods alone and finally after a short search I was discovered behind the neighbor's house. Did I tell you that on the other side of the woods was a busy two-lane highway and a pond? Clearly

1. I was lost
2. It was possible I was wondering around in circles without any hope of rescue
3. There was no indication that I was ever scared. I was confident even in my lostness
4. I had a Father and mother who were looking for me even when I did not realize it

I believe this is a perfect picture of our spiritual lives. Today we begin a new series in the book of Numbers entitled: *Lost*. What do you do when you are confident, but really have lost your way? What do you do, when you feel like nothing is working right? What do you do when your walking around in circles or treading water? How do you pick up the pieces after you sin or brokenness? We find the community of faith, Israel, grappling with the same issues we still face and struggle with today. So take hope! You are not alone! You have a Father who is looking searching and rescuing you

God's Presence in the Wilderness [Numbers 1:1-5]

The Presence of the Lord centers your life

The theme of the book of Numbers is the journey to the promised land of Canaan. But something happens between the miraculous deliverance in Egypt, the supernatural parting of the Red Sea and the acquisition of the long awaited Promised Land. **Two Words: The Wilderness.** When you are in the wilderness, and make no mistake, if you are living in paradise now; one day you will walk in the wilderness, to know that the presence of Yahweh is in midst of the camp, changes everything!

I cannot think of a better way to begin a journey, than to hear these words, "The Lord Spoke." The term *wayēdabbēr* occurs at least **sixty-one** times in the book, and divine speech is recorded "over **150 times** and in more than twenty ways." When Yahweh spoke, the words were always of paramount importance. Because it is so common in the Pentateuch, the

significance can be overlooked. **Never take it for granted** that you can hear the Lord. What would our lives look like if all we wanted was “the Lord to speak.”

Saving history begins with God speaking (Gen 1:1; Lev 1:1). *When the earth was void and formless God said, “Let there be light.” When you were empty and dark because of your sin Jesus said “It is finished!”* **Do you crave the presence of the Lord?**

Salvation history begins in your life the moment God calls you, through His son Jesus Christ to believe, reject your sin, and follow him fully.

So vital is the presence of the Lord to the community of God, that they encamped facing the Tent of Meeting (**Show Camp Graphic**). And the community would only move when the presence of God (smoke by day and fire by night) would advance. The presence of God is central! The presence of the Lord centers your life. **If your life was a camp, would every aspect face the Lord? Keys, wallet, dreams, vacations, hobbies, occupation?** Often we are content to be in the camp but have our tents face outward. No! we must face the tent—the presence of the Lord Almighty!

We no longer have the tabernacle of Temple, but we still have the wilderness, **Heb. 13:5 Be satisfied with what you have, for He Himself has said, I will never leave you or forsake you. 6 Therefore, we may boldly say: The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?**

The **Presence** of the Lord centers your life. Because of Christ, the presence of the Lord is here and will never leave. **The sweetest words you will ever hear: Now the Lord spoke**

The Plans of the Lord guide the way

As Numbers begins, Israel is in its final days at Sinai. The yearlong experience of Israel at **Mount Sinai** forms the foundation of its life as the covenant people of God (Stubbs, 27). God did not intend for Israel to **stay on the mountain**. He had a plan and a promised land. **A plan is a detailed proposal for doing or achieving something.**

God spoke on a specific day, on a specific month to take a specific count of all the assembly. And this would be done God’s way not mans. Yahweh does not do anything half way or haphazardly. Let the plans of God guide your way. **The more you let the plans of God guide your way, the less you let the pains of wilderness lose your way.**

Did you know that God has a plan (s) for you? Jer 29: 11 For I know the plans I have for you” — this is the LORD’s declaration — “plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.
12 You will call to Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you
13 You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.

If you are in the will and plan of the Lord, you are not lost. You might feel lost, you might not know the way, you might look lost, but you are not. I find the doing of the will of God leaves me no time for disputing about His plans. –George McDonald Where are these plans hidden? In his Holy Word! **Let the Plans of the Lord guide your way.**

The Promises of the Lord bring hope in difficulty

In the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt. Egypt, a part of Israel's past, had such a profound impact on their lives that they marked time by the experience. **Ever had anything like this? Anyone remember where you were when: 9/11, first man on the moon, challenger shuttle explosion, when the Berlin wall fell?**

For hundreds of years the people of God were enslaved in Egypt. At times this enslavement simply necessitated that they could not worship. In other instances, the bondage included extreme burdensome controls and expectations. And the community of faith longed for the day that the Lord would rescue them and they could worship freely in spirit and in truth.

Can you image the first time that they heard (Exod 4:31) that the Lord paid attention and heard their misery. The day God rescued them left a permanent indention in their lives. On the second year, out of Egypt. Israel remembered the promises of the **promise maker and keeper**. It was Israel's way of singing:

Standing, standing
Standing on the promises of God my Savior
Standing, standing
I'm standing on the promises of God

The promises of the Lord bring hope in difficulty. Promises like: eternal life (1 Jn 2:25), nothing is impossible with God, a new heart (Ezek 36:26), no death-life-angels-rulers-present-future-powers-heights-depths-any other created thing can separate from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

God is true. His Word of Promise is sure. In all His relations with His people God is faithful. He may be safely relied upon. No one ever yet really trusted Him in vain. We find this precious truth expressed almost everywhere in the Scriptures, for His people need to know that faithfulness is an essential part of the Divine character. This is the basis of our confidence in Him. –A.W. Pink

Remember the promises of the Lord. **If the enemy can't make you doubt the faithfulness of God, his next best thing is to forget.** The Promises of the Lord bring hope in difficulty.

The Purpose of the Lord gives reason to keep going (1:2)

Why a census? First, a head count of troops before a campaign and at its conclusion. Make no mistake, the people of God were going to battle. For Israel, the mission and campaign was to take the land Promised to the covenant people.

For those in Christ Jesus, the mission remains. To follow Christ means that you live on campaign. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. **But you must not think that missional living is a peaceful endeavor. God Himself tells you to**

Eph. 6:11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the tactics of the Devil.
Eph. 6:13 This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. **Knowing the purpose of the Lord give reason to do something and keep going!**

Additionally, taking a census is a political act in which a ruler demarcates and **makes a claim upon** the people being numbered (Stubb, 30). They are counted like a treasure, in this way establishing the boundaries of the people. **Exod 19:5** Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, **6** and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.'

The census was a reminder that God had claimed the people as their own. If you are in Christ, he has complete claim upon your head and upon your life.

There is no such thing as Christian who has not surrendered their life. It is a myth that Christ has no claim over one who calls themselves a Christ follower. Jesus has complete authority. And you are his possession, his special treasure. And knowing the purpose of the Lord, give reason to keep going and to live on mission.

Head-Heart-Hands

What do you do when you feel lost? What do you do when you know the destination but it is taking forever? Remember:

- Presence- look to Jesus
- Plans- guide
- Promises- hope
- Purpose- motivate

For some, you have never acknowledged your need for Jesus or trusted in Him. Without Christ we are not sick, good but wondering, or lost with hope of finding our way. No without Christ we are dead and eternally separated from the Father. ***But while you were lost the Father went searching for you.*** Here is hope, Jesus came, lived a sinless life, died, and rose again for you!

Luke 19:9 "Today salvation has come to this house," Jesus told him, "because he too is a son of Abraham. **10** For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save the lost."

Notes

As Numbers begins, Israel is in its final days at Sinai. The yearlong experience of Israel at Mount Sinai forms the foundation of its life as the covenant people of God (Stubbs, 27).

God did not intend for Israel to stay on the mountain. God gave it a vocation to be “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exod 19:6). That vocation required it to move from the Sabbath-like experience of Sinai to its life in the promised land of Canaan.

The theme of the book of Numbers is the journey to the promised land of Canaan, in the first 10 chapters a mere 50 days are described.

Num. 1:1 ¶ Now the LORD spoke to Moses in the Wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle 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:

The Lord Spoke

- Because it is so common in the Pentateuch, the significance can be overlooked. Saving history begins with God speaking (Gen 1:1; Lev 1:1).
- The term *wayēdabbēr* occurs at least sixty-one times in the book, of which fifty have Yahweh as the speaker. Of the other eleven occurrences, Moses is the speaker in nine, Miriam and Aaron in one, and on one occasion (21:5) the people speak against God in a passage that completes the cycles of rebellion. Seven times *wayēdabbēr* functions as a major sectional divider, plus ten times as a minor division marker. Allen noted that divine speech is recorded “over 150 times and in more than twenty ways.” When Yahweh spoke, the words were always of paramount importance.
- Communication is an essential element of any relationship and is paramount in the realm of divine-human intercourse. Of the essential tenets of Judaism set forth by Maimonides in the twelfth century A.D., the essence of divine communication and the preeminence of Moses among the prophets are fundamental.

Wilderness

- The Hebrew word for wilderness means a place for driving flocks. It is not a completely arid desert, but contains a little vegetation and a few trees (Wenham, 57).
- The phrase “Desert of Sinai” locates the census taking in the rugged regions of the Sinai Peninsula. The precise location of the encampment of Israelites near Mount Sinai (Mount Horeb), the mountain of God, has been debated since at least as early as the fourth century A.D.

Tent of Meeting

- The tent of meeting was the location of divine disclosure to Moses, where God and man met in revelatory communion and where Aaron made atonement for the nation on Yom Kippur (NAC, 67).
- The tent was regarded as a portable Sinai

Num. 1:2 “Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel, by their families, by their fathers’ houses, according to the number of names, every male individually,

Num. 1:3 from twenty years old and above—all who *are able to* go to war in Israel. You and Aaron shall number them by their armies.

Num. 1:4 And with you there shall be a man from every tribe, each one the head of his father’s house.

- Why a census?
 - They are counted like a treasure, in this way establishing the boundaries of the people.
 - Taking a census is a political act in which a ruler demarcates and makes a claim upon the people being numbered (Stubb, 30).
 - A head count of the troops was always taken before a campaign and at its conclusion.
- God’s marking Israel off as a visible and demarcated community that will shine in part through its contrastive practices—is a pattern that should inform the Christian church.
- Directions for taking the census are given in an imperatival phrase, which translates the Hebrew “lift up the head” (*šē’û ’et-rō’s*) and echoes the phraseology of Exod 30:12.
 - In the Exodus passage, census taking is anticipated as a means of assessing a tariff for sanctuary (tabernacle) maintenance in the amount of one-half shekel per person.
- The method and boundaries of numbering all the congregation of Israel is “by clans and families,” literally “by families and their fathers’ households.”
- The term “tribe” (*maṭṭeh*) is used in v. 4 with reference to those who would assist Moses and Aaron in making the assessment. Listing in the subsequent text is by tribal summary, with the figure given reflecting the total of clans and families within each tribe.
- In typical Hebrew fashion, the directions become more specific as the narrative progresses.
- The ultimate purpose of the census is to enumerate the male members who are at least twenty years of age and eligible for military service. The “divisions” (*lēšib’ōtām*, lit., “by their armed divisions”) are classified for the future need of mustering militia for the entry and conquest of the land of promise, a kind of draft enlistment process.
- No upper age limit is given, and several notable Israelite leaders served valiantly in their elder years (e.g., Moses). The work was to be accomplished under the direction of Moses and Aaron, with the assistance of one patriarchal leader (*rō’s lēbêt ’ābōtāw*, “head of the household of his father”) from each of the twelve tribes.

Number 1:5-16

- Verses 5a and 16 provide an inclusio for framing the enlisted aides in the assessment of the able militia for the nation of Israel. The word for “assist” in the Hebrew is *’amad* (“to stand”), for the elder statesman for each tribe was to stand as a spokesman in the registration of community members.
- The twelve names recorded here recur in 2:3–31 (tribal camp arrangements), 7:12–83 (tribal offerings for the sanctuary), and 10:14–27 (tribal divisions depart from Sinai), though in varying order.
 - These men functioned as representatives for their ancestral tribes in matters of military conscription, worship leadership, and general administration.
 - The Levites and their tribal leaders (Aaron and Moses) are not cataloged here, due to their nonmilitary function on behalf of the nation, but are added subsequently at the conclusion of the census.
- The order of the tribal patriarchs generally follows the birth order according to their mothers, as is true in Gen 29–30; 41; 46:

- In (3) and (4) Gad and Dan are reversed for some undetermined reason
- Appellations came by family tradition, birth circumstances, and special designation.

Tribe	Name	Derived Meaning(s)
Reuben	Elizur ben Shedeur	(My) God Is a Rock, Is Strong (God of Strength) / Shaddai Is a Flame (Fire, Light)
Simeon	Shelumiel ben Zerishaddai	(My) Peace Is God / (My) Strength Is Shaddai, (My) Rock Is Shaddai
Judah	Nahshon ben Amminadab	Serpent (My) People Are Noble
Issachar	Nathanel ben Zuar	Gift of God / Little One
Zebulun	Eliab ben Helon Joseph	(My) God Is Father / Rampart??
Ephraim	Elishama ben Ammihud	(My) God Hears, Has Heard / (My) People Are Majestic
Manasseh	Gamaliel ben Pedahzur	Reward of God / Ransomed Rock, Strength
Benjamin	Abidan ben Gideoni	(My) Father Is Judge / (My) Hewer
Dan	Ahiezer ben Ammishaddai	(My) Brother Is a Helper / (My) People of Shaddai
Asher	Pagiel ben Ocran	Encountered by God, Met by God / Troubled
Gad	Eliasaph ben Deuel	(My) God Has Added, Multiplied, Enriched / Knowing God
Naphtali	Ahira ben Enan	(My) Brother Is Evil / One Who Sees

- Milgrom has noted that sixteen of the twenty-four names never recur in biblical literature, and none contain the abbreviated theophoric element YH (for Yahweh), as is the case throughout the Book of Genesis.
- Only the leaders from the tribes of Judah and Ephraim figure significantly in the later history of Israel.
 - Through the Judahite line of Amminadab and Nahshon came Boaz, who married Ruth and fathered the Davidic ancestry (Ruth 4:20–22) and consequently the Messianic line of Jesus Christ (Matt 1:4–16; Luke 3:23–33). Elishama ben Ammihud, through his son Nun, was the grandfather of Joshua (1 Chr 7:26–27), who succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel as the nation entered the land of promise.
- **God at the Center**
 - The way the people are organized can be represented graphically: centered on the tabernacle, the priests and Levites form an inner square around the tabernacle, the tribes of Israel form a square around the exterior.
 - At the centre of the camp stood the tabernacle where God was enthroned about the ark in the Holy of Holies. Both at rest and on the move the camp was organized to express symbolically the presence and kingship of the Lord (Wenham, 56).

"They shall encamp facing the tent of meeting . . ."

