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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of the Sabbath School Publications Board, a subcommittee of the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM), publisher of the Bible study guides. The published guide reflects the input of worldwide evaluation committees and the approval of the Sabbath School Publications Board and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s).

# People on the Move:

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In the book of Exodus, the Lord described the birth of a nation. Exodus and Leviticus detailed the rules and laws for this nation. In the book of Numbers (the topic for our quarter), we see another dimension of this nation, that of God's people on the move.

But not just moving anywhere. They are to go and take possession of the land promised to them—promised not because of their inherent holiness, not because of their inherent goodness, but because of God's words to their father Abraham centuries earlier: "For all the land which

*"Perhaps the most important lesson in Numbers is that God will fulfill His promises."*

thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee" (*Gen. 13:15–17*).

Directly tied to this promise is another aspect of this nation, that of the nation as an army, a mighty army of God, a conquering army that cannot be defeated by external enemies because the Lord, the Creator of heaven and earth, is in their midst.

And because of God's presence, they were not only an army, they were a holy army and thus were expected to act like one, as well.

Unfortunately, that isn't exactly what happened. This mighty, powerful, and conquering army, hovering on the edges of the Promised Land, was defeated, not by the Canaanites but from within. Satan knew that as long as they obeyed the Lord, as long as they trusted in God and lived by faith and obedience to His commandments, he would be helpless against them. All he could do, therefore, was use them against themselves.

And it worked. No wonder Ellen White warned: "We have far more to fear from within than from without. The hindrances to strength and success are far greater from the church itself than from the world."—*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 122.

# *The Book of Numbers*

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Hence, it should be obvious that, as a people on the move, as a people seeking to reach the Promised Land, as a people called out by God, we can learn from the book of Numbers. We can learn from how God organized the camp and assigned duties to the priests and the Levites. We can learn from the festivals and ordinances of the sanctuary service. We can learn from their cries about returning to Egypt, which they called “a land that floweth with milk and honey.” We can learn from Miriam’s leprosy, from the twelve spies, from Caleb’s faith, from the intercession of Moses, from Korah’s rebellion, and even from Balaam’s recalcitrant donkey.

“These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall. No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it” (*1 Cor. 10:11–13, NAB*). These words contain not just a warning but a promise, as well.

Despite the setbacks, the delays, and the devastating judgments, perhaps the most important lesson in Numbers is that God will fulfill His promises. Whether He will fulfill them through us, despite us, or without us at all is, indeed, another question entirely. But they will be fulfilled, and that’s for sure.

In the context of the Cross and the New Covenant, the book of Numbers reveals that God has already made His choice regarding us. The only question left is, What will be our choice regarding Him?

*From 1981 to 1990 the late Frank B. Holbrook was an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland, U.S.A.*

# Got Questions?

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