

# Pilgrims

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Numbers 33

Numbers 33 opens with an unusual line: “*Moses wrote down their starting places, stage by stage, by command of the Lord.*” In a book full of laws and narratives, this verse pauses to highlight a practice—writing. Gordon MacDonald, in *Ordering Your Private World*, argues that a well-ordered inner life is cultivated, not accidental. One of his key tools is the habit of reflective writing: capturing where we’ve been, what God has done, and how our hearts are being formed.

That is exactly what Moses models. Israel’s wilderness itinerary is not trivia; it’s spiritual bookkeeping. Each “stage by stage” entry confronts forgetfulness and anchors the community in God’s steady faithfulness through missteps, manna, rebellion, and rescue. MacDonald contrasts a “driven” life—busy, reactive, memory-poor—with a “called” life—attentive, reflective, grateful. Numbers 33:2 shows a called leader ordering his world by recounting grace.

As we study this chapter, read it as a journal of sanctification. The list of camps becomes a map of God’s patience and provision. And it invites us to imitate Moses: to write our own “starting places,” to name the stops where God corrected us, fed us, and led us on. In MacDonald’s language, this is how the inner garden is tended—by remembering on paper so that we can obey in practice. Let this verse call us from hurried amnesia to ordered remembrance, so that the next stage of our journey is guided not by impulse but by a rehearsed confidence in the God who leads.

## I. Pictures of the Lord’s Faithfulness (Genesis 15:13-14).

### A. The Places

1. Rameses – Where the Lord brought judgment on the Egyptians (**Numbers 33:3-4**)
2. The Red Sea - God led them across the Red Sea. (**Numbers 33:8**).
3. Elim – 70 palms & 12 springs of water (**Numbers 33:9**)
4. King of Arad – the Canaanite – God delivered Israel from the Canaanite King (**Num 33:40; 21:1-3**)

### B. The principle – God is Faithful and looks for faithfulness in His people.

#### 1. The Faithfulness of God

##### a) True to His Name

- (1) Yahweh – God is self-existent and needs nothing from His creation.
- (2) Elohim – God.
- (3) Adonai – Lord of All
- (4) Jehovah-Jireh – Provider
- (5) Jehovah-Rapha – Healer
- (6) Jehovah-Shalom – Peace
- (7) Jehovah-Tsidkenu – Righteousness
- (8) Jehovah-Sabaoth - Army

##### b) True to His Character (**John 17:12**, *While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.*)

##### c) True to His Word (**Deuteronomy 8:2**, *And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.*)

#### 2. God expects faithfulness from His people

- a) **Hebrews 10:23**, *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.*

### C. The Lessons - Your Ebenezer stone?

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1. **1 Samuel 7:12**, *Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the Lord has helped us."*

## **II. Pictures of the Lord's Forgetfulness.**

### **A. The Places**

1. Marah – the people grumbled over the lack of water (**Ex 15:23-25**)
2. Desert of Sin – Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron (**Ex 16:1-3**)
3. Rephidim – Israel quarreled with Moses over water (**Ex 17:1-3**)
4. Kibroth-hattaavah – Israel complained about manna and asked for meat (**Num 11:33-35**)
5. Kadesh – Moses struck the rock twice, rather than speaking to the rock (**Num 20:2-13**)

### **B. The principle – God is forgiving**

1. It is significant that in the Lord's inspired summary of Israel's wilderness wanderings, he chose to pass over their sin in silence!
2. God does not keep a record of our wrongs to use against us at an opportune moment!

### **C. The Lessons**

1. **Psalms 130:3-4**, *If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? 4 But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.*
2. **2 Corinthians 5:17**, *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*
3. **1 Corinthians 6:11**, *And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.*
  - a) **Psalms 103:11-12**, *For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; 12 as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.*
  - b) **Micah 7:19**, *He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.*
  - c) **Isaiah 38:17**, *Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back.*

## **III. Pictures of the Lord's "Tuesdays"**

### **A. Israel was 40 years in the wilderness. Although many days were days of miracles and judgments, in comparison, most days were ordinary "Tuesdays." Not memorable.**

1. Most of your life is made up of ordinary days. Nothing is striking or dramatic about them. Our days are not filled with surprising moments of judgment or deliverance.
2. There are a few days of "turning points."

### **B. The principle**

1. God is a God of the ordinary, as well as the dramatic.
2. God's providences, faithfulness, and provisions are the creators of the "ordinary."
3. Thank God in the ordinary.

### **C. The Lessons**

1. **Lamentations 3:22-23**, *The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*
2. **Malachi 3:6**, *"For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."*

**40 years – The days are long, but the years are short!**

**If I live another 40 years, it will be a rounding error to 100. What will I do with these years, based on my prior 40 years?**