



Overview for Numbers

Author: Commonly accepted to be Moses

Date Written: Approximately 1450 B.C. – 1410 B.C.

Setting: The Desert of the Sinai region, as well as the area just south and east of the Land of Promise

Prominent Characters: Moses, Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, Caleb, Balaam

Objective: To provide the account of the pilgrimage of the Children of Israel as they prepare to enter the Promised Land

Central Passage: “Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice; Surely they shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it” – (Numbers 14: 22-23).

Comments: The Book of Numbers, the fourth writing of Moses, resumes the narrative of God’s people that stopped in Exodus. (Leviticus, placed between Exodus and Numbers, details Israel’s legislation.) It is a book of transition; the people aged twenty and above were excluded from the Promised Land because of their unbelief and replaced by a new generation. It is also a book of wanderings; the Children of Israel who were not allowed to enter the Promised Land were destined to wander from place to place until the younger generation came of age.

The Hebrew title for this book means simply “in the wilderness.” The Greek name, “Numbers,” was given because the book contains a record of the numbering of the Children of Israel. The book opens with the nation of Israel camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. The people had received God’s laws, and were

preparing to move. At this point, a census was taken to determine how many men were fit for military service. They were again numbered nearly thirty-nine years later on the plains of Moab. This numbering or census taken at Mount Sinai showed 603,550 males above age twenty who were fit for military service. The second census showed 601,730. Both numberings excluded the Levites.

Numbers is not intended to be a continuous narrative. There is a gap of approximately thirty-eight years between chapters 19 and 20 of the book, covering the interval between their first stop at Kadesh (Numbers 13:26), and their final departure from Kadesh for the Promised Land. Their first stop ended with the discouraging report from ten of the spies. Their second stop preceded their final departure for Canaan. Significant events, rather than the extent of time, are the emphasis.

The Book of Numbers is also noted for recording the murmurings of the Children of Israel. They complained about the journey, the food, the giants, Moses, and desert life in general. In spite of their murmurings, God faithfully sustained the Children of Israel with daily manna, water, and quail. In addition, He guided them with the visible sign of the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. In spite of their failures, He protected, preserved, and provided for these people.

Numbers concludes as it began, with the people in a state of preparation. The new generation of Israelites are gathered and sanctified. After defeating a number of enemy armies, they occupy the east side of the Jordan River. As the book closes, they are preparing to face their greatest challenge yet: that of crossing the river and possessing the beautiful land God had promised them.

Timeline

	SLAVERY IN EGYPT		First Census 1444	WILDERNESS WANDERINGS		Joshua appointed, Canaan entered 1406		United Kingdom under Saul 1050
Joseph dies 1805 B.C.	Exodus from Egypt 1446	Ten Commandments given 1445	First spy mission 1443		Second Census, Balaam prophesies 1407	Judges begin to rule 1375		

Outline

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A complete amplified outline of this book is available on our website at www.apostolicfaith.org.*

- I. The preparation for the journey from Sinai (1:1—10:10)
 - A. The census and arrangement of Israel's men of war (1:1—2:34)
 - B. The census, arrangement, and duties of the Levites (3:1—4:49)
 - C. The measures for the maintenance of purity in the camp (5:1—6:27)
 - D. The measures for the maintenance of worship in the camp (7:1—10:10)
- II. The journey from Sinai to the plains of Moab (10:11—21:35)
 - A. The journey to Kadesh-Barnea (10:11—12:16)
 - B. The stay at Kadesh-Barnea (13:1—14:45)
 - C. The wanderings in the wilderness (15:1—19:22)
 - D. The journey to Moab (20:1—21:35)
- III. Events on the plain of Moab (22:1—36:13)
 - A. The encounter with Balaam (22:1—25:18)
 - B. The preparation for entering Canaan (26:1—36:12)
 - C. Conclusion (36:13)