

NUMBERS

INTRODUCTION

Numbers reflects the two censuses of Israel. The first census was ordered during the encampment at Mount Sinai, the second census forty years later just prior to Moses' death.

Numbers covers a little over thirty-eight years and bridges the gap between the giving of the Law at Sinai and Moses' death in Moab.

The purpose of the book of Numbers is to give an accurate tribe-by-tribe count of those who left Egypt and later, comparative figures as Israel enters the Promised Land.

The events between Sinai and the preparation for crossing the Jordan River would be totally unknown without the book of Numbers.

The book of Numbers is also God's search for a pure, reliable people.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The first ten chapters of Numbers record the census and the final days at Mount Sinai.

Verses 1-19

The purpose of the census was to count all the twenty-year old males and up who are able to go to war.

Verses 20-54

The Levites were not counted so as to serve in the military but were to serve religiously. The Levites were to camp beside the Tabernacle, serve in it, dismantle, move, erect it, and guard it against intrusion by any unauthorized individuals. They were servants in behalf of the people and God.

Any priest was a Levite, but not all Levites were priests. The priests were consecrated; the Levites were purified.

CHAPTER 2

Verses 1-34

Chapter 2 details each tribe's location while encamped. This would make for orderliness in camping, and it preserved their tribal identity.

The tabernacle represented the presence of God, so the tabernacle tent was situated at the very center of the camp of Israel. Judah occupied the place of greatest importance so his tribe occupied the east side, toward the sunrise.

CHAPTER 3

Verses 1-51

Verse 10 gives the details concerning the death sentence for anyone who approaches the tabernacle who has not been authorized to do so.

A "shekel" means weight. It establishes the value of an item by equating it with a measured weight of gold, silver, or even bronze or iron. The "shekel" weighed about four tenths of an ounce. (Verse 47)

CHAPTER 4

Verses 1-49

The Kohathites were of the tribe of Levi. They were given the most responsible chores. They were referred to as the *militia sacra*, or sacred army. They were assigned the holy things of the Tabernacle, the Ark of the Covenant, the table of showbread, the lamp stand, the altar of incense, the altar of burnt offerings, as well as all the articles pertaining to them. The Kohathites and their burdens marched at the forefront of the nation when they were on the move.

The Gershonites were responsible for transporting the tabernacle, its curtains and coverings, the outer court, and their curtains. The Merarites had the heavy burden. They were the nations carpenters and under Ithamar's direction, they were to care for the structural framework of the tent and the court.

CHAPTER 5

Verses 1-31

Chapter 5 deals with various laws that were recorded in the book of Leviticus and are repeated in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6

Verses 1-27

The word “Nazirite” means separation. When one became a Nazirite, it was for the purpose of separation unto a special service for God. The Nazirite pledged himself to one of two kinds of vows, either temporary or lifelong. The vows lasted until the special task was accomplished. There were three distinguishing marks of a Nazirite.

1. Neither wine nor grapes nor any portion of the products of the vine were to be consumed.
2. The hair was never to be cut or trimmed.
3. The Nazirite was never to come into contact with a dead body, even of the near of kin.

Three Bible characters were known to be Nazirites, Samuel, Samson, and John the Immerser.

Verse 24 through 26 is called the Aaronic benediction and consists of three sections, each of which begins with “The Lord” followed by two parts.

CHAPTER 7

Verses 1-89

Chapter 7 covers the leader’s offerings at the dedication of the tabernacle. The leaders were men who stood as representatives of their entire tribe.

The “carts” or “wagons” were a “cart” without wheels carried by one ox at the front and another at the rear, with the load on a bed supported by shafts between the animals.

From this chapter we learn that before God, all are equal. Regardless of the size of the tribe, the status of the leader, the wealth held personally by him or his tribe, all were to bring precisely the same elements—nothing more and nothing less.

CHAPTER 8

Verses 1-26

The Levites had been selected for special service in the tabernacle. But before they could perform their duties they must be fully set apart in special rites of consecration. They were to be sprinkled with the blood of sacrifices.

In chapter 4, the age of the Levites in service to God is given as thirty to fifty. Here in verse 24 the age is given as twenty-five. In chapter 4 the age of thirty refers to the transportation of the tabernacle and its trappings. In verse 24 God is talking about those who serve in the tabernacle.

CHAPTER 9

Verses 1-23

The people were concerned about whether or not they were to celebrate the Passover while in the wilderness. God commanded them to keep the feast every year. He did add one additional direction and that was a warning against deliberately absenting oneself from the feast for no valid reason. If they did deliberately absent themselves from the feast they were to be disfellowshipped, a penalty as significant as the death penalty in a society as tightly knit as that of the Israel's.

The “cloud” was over the tabernacle assuring them of the Lord's presence.

CHAPTER 10

Verses 1-36

Verse 11 marks the departure of Israel from Mount Sinai. Israel arrived at Mount Sinai in the third month after their departure from Egypt. They had been at Mount Sinai for about seven months. This departure was the beginning of a long and difficult trip. Only two of the number above the age of twenty years would ultimately walk across the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

Their own stubbornness and lack of faith will keep them from crossing the Jordan River. More than thirty-eight years must be spent going from place to place in a barren waste area before God finally leads them into the Promised Land.

As the “cloud” moves from the tabernacle and the trumpet sounded, the tribes of Judah led them away from Mount Sinai northward towards Kadesh-barnea.

CHAPTER 11

Verses 1-35

At Taberah the people murmured and complained. Their fatigue and anxiety in the march from Mount Sinai, their year of comparative idleness, the frightful nature of the country, and the unknown terrors of the way before them contributed to their murmuring and complaining. It was necessary for them to trust totally in God who had promised to lead them and care for them.

God’s anger was kindled and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp. (Verse 1)

The term “rabble” or “mixed multitude” refers to the Egyptians who had attached themselves to Israel as they left Egypt. They may have also been those of combination marriages between Israel and Egypt. (Verse 4)

Note: Problems in the Lord’s church today most often come from the weak that just attach themselves to the church.

The complainers were strongly wishing for the rich, strong flavored foods they enjoyed in Egypt. They were also crying for meat to eat, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic that were delicacies to the Egyptians. They loathed the manna.

God promised the Israelites a month’s supply of meat. He said it would be coming out of their nostrils and be loathsome to them.

God sternly rebuked them for their complaints and ingratitude.

God caused a south wind and an east wind and rained quail upon the camp that covered the ground to a depth of three feet. The murmurers were greedy and a greedy spirit cannot allow for gratitude. After the meat was supplied they were unmoved, ungrateful, and still disrespectful to the Lord. (Verse 32-34)

CHAPTER 12

Verses 1-16

Chapter 12 relates one of the most common and troublesome problems and that is Moses' sister Miriam turning upon her brother with a vicious and verbal assault with two thrusts. She is critical of Moses' wife and she is envious of his special and unique relationship with God. Miriam's motivation was jealousy. Miriam was inflicted with leprosy and Moses called upon God to remove the leprosy and He did, but she had to spend a week among the lepers.

CHAPTER 13

Verses 1-33

With God's approval twelve men are chosen to go into the land of Canaan and spy it out. They were to examine the land. They were to appraise the residents — are they weak or are they strong, do they have fortified cities, is the soil productive, and are the trees useful for fruit. Upon their return the ten spies reported how large the inhabitants were and how fortified their cities were, but Joshua and Caleb said, "We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it." (Verse 30)

The multitude listened to the ten spies rather than to Joshua and Caleb who remembered God promised that He would drive out the inhabitants if they would just trust Him.

CHAPTER 14

Verses 1-45

Joshua and Caleb made one final effort to influence the people to march into Canaan but the mob was convinced they could not overcome the Canaanites. For the second time God proposes to destroy an ungrateful rebellious people and make of Moses a greater people than they.

Moses, in his prayer, said that the Egyptians would delight in pointing out to the inhabitants of Canaan that the God who led Israel across the Red Sea and to the edge of Canaan was not able to finish His proposed work.

God accepted Moses' prayer and directed that those men responsible for misleading Israel be struck down by the plague and the people who had been so gullible would not be permitted to enter the Promised Land. Those who chose to believe the ten spies rather than God were to wander about in the wilderness for the remainder of their lives.

CHAPTER 15

Verses 1-41

For the next thirty-seven years, no actions of the people are recorded except a rebellion led by Korah as recorded in Chapter 16. God did not abandon His people. They were cared for and the cloud went before them so that the wandering was not aimless and undirected. This was now a new generation about to enter the Promised Land so the Lord repeats the previously given laws. (Verses 3-41)

CHAPTER 16

Verses 1-50

Korah and company plus two hundred fifty Levites assembled against Moses. They accuse Moses of assuming too much authority—elevating himself above the people without authorization. This is the fourth serious incident that has disrupted their progress. This rebellion seems to be the worst of all.

Moses fell on his face no doubt in frustration, bitter disappointment, and grief, seeking Divine counsel. God directed that the rebels were to bring their censers into God's presence on the following day and He would make His verdict clear.

The next day Korah and his companions appear while the congregation draws near to watch. God warns Moses and Aaron to separate from the throng to avoid being caught in their destruction.

Moses makes one last effort to dissuade the revolutionaries from their course, but was not successful.

Moses said to the people that if these men die an ordinary death, then he is not God's ordained spokesman. If however, the earth splits and swallows them up, the people must recognize them for what they are, rebels against the Lord. He had scarcely finished when the earth opened and they were destroyed.

Korah and the two hundred fifty Levites were overcome by a fire emanating from the tabernacle and were consumed. The fickle crowd hurled bitter charges against Moses and Aaron accusing them of having "killed the people of the Lord."

God appears in a cloud at the tabernacle and asked Moses and Aaron to separate themselves from the murmurers. Aaron offers incense in behalf of the offenders and prevents their death.

CHAPTER 17

Verses 1-13

The seeds of rebellion had led to the deaths of about 15,000 people when God's appointed leaders had been subjected to crude, cruel, totally unjustified criticism.

God is going to demonstrate that He is still in power. He has twelve rods (one for each tribe) brought before Him and He would reassure them who would be their leader because that rod would sprout or "bloom." Aaron's rod sprouted and put forth blossoms and ripe almonds.

The rod was a symbol against rebellion warning them that they were not to grumble against God and be subject to death for doing so.

CHAPTER 18

Verses 1-32

The duties of the Levites and the duties of the priests are now put into a clear relationship to one another. The Levites were to supply what assistance may be required while the priests were to attend to the affairs of the sanctuary and of the altar of sacrifice.

CHAPTER 19

Verses 1-22

Chapter 19 gives the detailed instructions by the Lord to provide for the purification of one who had come into contact with a dead body. A red heifer was to be killed and a small amount of blood was sprinkled seven times towards the Tent of Meeting, after which the animal was burned in its entirety. The one who was clean took the heifer's ashes and preserved them for the purifying water.

This water was used to remove uncleanness from death as well as to cleanse a leprous man or his house.

CHAPTER 20

Verses 1-29

The period of wandering has ended. All those who had lived under the sentence of death outside the Promised Land are either dead or will die within this fortieth year since leaving Egypt. They return to Kadesh where Miriam dies of natural causes. Aaron would die in the fifth month and Moses at the close of the year.

Moses' sin in verses 10-11 may have been that he struck the rock twice whether motivated by anger, righteousness, or impatience. He was told to speak to the rock and not to touch it so he violated God's command. Verse 12 says that Moses failed to glorify God's name, thus singling out the great offense.

Water gushed out in spite of Moses' error because God did not intend for His people to suffer.

Choosing to enter the Promised Land from the east they had to cross Edom. Moses asked Edom for permission to cross their land but the king refused. As a result, Moses had to detour.

One day's journey northeast of Kadesh is Mount Hor. Here God chose to call Aaron to the peak of the mountain where he dies. The death of Aaron, like that of Moses, comes before the Israelites enter the Promised Land, and it is for the same reason, the disobedience at Meribah.

The priestly robes were removed from Aaron and given to Eleazar his third son, as God's next man chosen for the office of high priest.

CHAPTER 21

Verses 1-35

Arad, the king, fought against Israel and took some of them captive. The Israelites made a simple vow to the Lord that if God would grant them victory they would pronounce a curse upon the cities of the Canaanites.

Upon leaving Mount Hor the people again spoke against God and Moses saying they wanted to return to Egypt rather than die here in the wilderness. As a result, God sent fiery serpents among them whose bites caused death. The people went to Moses saying, "We have sinned speaking against the Lord."

God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and set it upon a pole. The people must look upon the bronze standard in the center of the camp if they were to be healed. It was purely a test of obedient faith.

Later the bronze serpent became an object of worship. During Hezekiah's day the practice of offering incense before the standard was ended when the good king ordered it to be broken into pieces. (2 Kings 18:4) The Edomites are convinced that the Israelites have no military intentions so they let the huge number of Israelites pass through their land unharmed.

Passing through the valley, the Israelites came to Mount Pisgah, which offered a view of the land of Canaan. They had passed through the land of the Edomites and the Moabites and now they turn their attention to the Amorites. Sihon refused to allow Israel to cross Canaan. He organized his people into an army and attacked the Israelites but was defeated by the Israelites and they gained control over the land.

CHAPTER 22

Verses 1-41

The defeat of the Amorites and Israel's residence near Moab causes fear in the heart of Balak, the king. Balak sends messengers to Balaam, the son of Beor. Balaam is one of the most mysterious and intriguing people in all the Word of

God. Balaam was a widely known soothsayer. (Joshua 13:22) Balaam rejected Balak's request to condemn Israel, but his downfall came when he betrayed his own conscience.

Balak was willing to pay a high price for the soothsayer to curse Israel.

Balaam already knew the will of God but it appears he hoped to change God's course of action but God replied in simple terms that His people are not to be cursed. Balak would not accept Balaam's answer so he sends his messengers again to Balaam to set a price for his services to curse Israel. Balaam abides by the instructions of God regardless of the offer. He saddles up his donkey to go to Balak, but God uses the donkey to teach Balaam a lesson.

On the way God placed an angel in the way of the donkey that Balaam could not see, but the donkey could. The donkey saw the angel with a drawn sword and turned towards the field. Balaam beat the donkey and returned him to the narrow path of the vineyard. The donkey saw the angel again and pressed Balaam's foot against the wall. He struck the donkey again but when the donkey saw the angel again, he laid down.

God opened the mouth of the donkey and the donkey had a conversation with Balaam. Then the Lord opened the eyes of Balaam and he saw the angel. Balaam was not too flattered to find that the donkey had been more responsive to the manifestation of God's influence than he was. The angel gives Balaam a stern warning that he is not to speak anything except what he is told, and sends him on his way.

CHAPTER 23

Verses 1-30

Balaam orders the construction of seven altars upon which a bull and a ram are to be sacrificed. Balak is told to stand beside the altar while Balaam consults God. God's words have not changed. God refused to let Balaam curse Israel for Balak. Balak is disappointed so he requests they try the ritual at another spot, but the results were the same. Balak's reaction to Balaam was, "If you can't say something bad about the people, don't say anything at all." Balaam again suggests they try again to gain a favorable word from God.

CHAPTER 24

Verses 1-25

Now persuaded that God will not curse Israel, Balaam conducts himself differently. He pronounced a totally favorable word about Israel. (Verses 3-9) This infuriated Balak who then struck his hands together as a token of rage. He blames God for preventing Balaam from cursing Israel.

Whether Balaam's motives were greed or not he was at least consistent. Balaam launches into a prophecy concerning the future and Israel's superiority over the nations. Moab, Edom, and the Amalekites would be conquered and so would the Kenites.

The last part of Balaam's prophecy was that Israel also would come to destruction, perishing forever. (Verse 24)

CHAPTER 25

Verses 1-18

The harsh life Israel had led for nearly forty years is now drawing close to its end. They are stationed in the final encampment before launching on the last leg of their journey.

Sadly the Israelites observed the immoral religious rituals of the Moabites and yielded to the seductions of the Moabite women. They join in the sacrificial festival of Baal-peor, who is believed to be the same as Chemosh, the Moabites national god. The defectors also practiced the lustful conduct, along with gluttony.

God's anger rose high over the conduct of His people. He summoned Moses and instructed him to kill the guilty sinners, especially the leaders.

A Midianite woman is introduced in the sight of Moses, to the congregation for immoral purposes. Without waiting for a called assembly to stone the man, Phinehas, the son of Eleazer, killed Zimri. The sinning couple was killed in the very act of adultery within the tent of their deed. Twenty-three thousand died of the plague and one thousand were hanged.

God credits Phinehas with having turned away His wrath from the people. Zimri and Cozbi were individuals of prominent families. God's order to strike the Midianites and not the Moabites was that the Moabites were not acting upon the advice of Balaam, as were the Midianites. The Midianite women have acted deliberately and craftily. Chapter 31:16 names this motive and incriminates Balaam.

CHAPTER 26

Verses 1-65

The census taken just before the final preparation to enter Canaan served two purposes, they were to wage war with the Midianites and they are counted in preparation for the proper division of tribal inheritances in the new land. 603,550 were counted in the first census and 601,730 were counted in the second census. The difference is a slight loss of 1820.

Instructions for the land allotment were given and two factors figure in the division of the land to the tribes. The size of each tribe and the area specified for each will be established by casting lots.

The Levitical tribe received no land, but forty-eight cities in which they could serve the people.

CHAPTER 27

Verses 1-23

A problem developed in the case of Zelophehad's five daughters. The father had died without leaving a son who would have inherited the family estate. They petition God to have the land given to them rather than have it lost to the family and God granted their request.

God told Moses to go up to the mountain of Abarim for the purpose of examining the land into which the people would enter. The peak from which Moses views the land was Pisgah or Nebo. Because of Moses' sin at Kadesh, he was not permitted to cross the Jordan. A new leader must be appointed to lead the people. God does not hesitate in rendering His decision. Joshua, the son of Nun, is chosen and filled with God's Spirit.

The laying on of hands signifies the transfer of power inherent in an office being assumed.

CHAPTER 28

Verses 1-31

An addition given to the laws already received is the new moon offering. The new moon offering was to be held each month and the event was celebrated by another special offering. The true purpose was to bring into remembrance before God those sins committed during the month for which pardon had not been received, and to renew their life-covenant with God through the burnt offering.

CHAPTER 29

Verses 1-40

Chapter 29 deals with the offering for the Feast of Trumpets that announced the beginning of the civil year.

CHAPTER 30

Verses 1-16

Chapter 30 deals with vows made by women. The widowed or divorced woman is unconditionally bound by any vow her heart leads her to make. If she is unmarried and lives in her father's house, her vow is subject to her father's approval. The concurrence of her husband is required of any married woman.

Two types of vows are covered, the *nedher* and the *issar*. The *issar* is a vow of abstinence and the *nedher* is when one pledges something given to God.

CHAPTER 31

Verses 1-54

God had earlier commanded the attack upon the Midianites citing their prostitution of Israel at Peor. The victory was total. All the adult males were killed along with Balaam. Following the victory comes the matter of dividing the spoil. The booty was brought before Moses for disposition.

Moses and Eleazer were angry because they had spared the very women who had caused the people of God to sin in sexual immorality. God ordered the women to be killed, those who had known a man intimately.

All male children were to be killed also to bring Midian to extinction. The virgins were permitted to be servants and if they married their children would have been considered Israelites.

CHAPTER 32

Verses 1-42

Gad and Reuben decided they wanted to possess the land east of the Jordan. Moses was angry at Gad and Reuben's request, feeling they were trying to avoid having to participate in the military campaign in the Promised Land. But this was not their intention. They requested time to settle their families in the cities and then they would take up arms and fight until the land of Canaan is conquered.

CHAPTER 33

Verses 1-56

Chapter 33 is a list of "places" at which the Israelites encamped from the time of leaving Egypt until they reached Canaan. Forty-one names appear in the list. The children of Israel were to drive out all the inhabitants, destroy all the idols and places of idol worship, possess and settle the entire land, and to divide it by tribes determined by lots, when they entered Canaan.

CHAPTER 34

Verses 1-29

Two and one-half tribes have already received their inheritance east of the Jordan River so the remaining nine and one half tribes will have land in Canaan.

Eleazer and Joshua, the religious and civil leaders, were to oversee the casting of lots along with one man from each tribe.

CHAPTER 35

Verses 1-34

No land inheritance was awarded to the Levites. Instead they received forty-eight cities with open ground used for farming and pasturing their animals. This open ground stretched out three thousand feet around each city.

Six of these cities were appointed as cities of refuge to which any manslayer should flee until proper disposition might be made of his homicide. The cities of refuge were not intended to protect that individual who had committed deliberate willful murder.

The motivation behind any homicide was subjected to three areas of inquiry. The motive, weapon, and occasion were the prime factors in any murder charge.

The “revenger of blood” could pursue a manslayer and if he were overtaken before reaching a city of refuge he could be slain. In the city of refuge an individual was tried in court and if found guilty of murder was stoned to death. If he was not guilty of murder he was required to remain in the city until the death of the current high priest.

CHAPTER 36

Verses 1-13

An inheriting daughter married to a man of another tribe could not take her inheritance with her. But to prevent this, women who inherited land were forbidden to marry outside their tribe.

The book of Numbers was given to present commandments and judgments given by God through Moses to Israel during the last days in Moab before crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land.