

NUMBERS

Author: Moses

Date: About 1406 B.C.

This fourth book of Moses gets its name from the Septuagint (Greek) title, *Arithmoi*, because of the census in chapters 1 and 26, as well as the other numerical data given throughout the book. The Hebrew title is much more descriptive of the book as a whole: *Bemidbar* - "In the Wilderness." This narrative covers the period between Israel's departure from Egypt and her arrival at Canaan. One year after they fled Egypt, the Israelites were gathered at Mt. Sinai. This book describes the wandering 39 year journey from Sinai to Kadesh Barnea and through various places in the wilderness and finally to the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho.

The narrative of roughly 40 years in the wilderness is full of interesting stories: the spies visiting Canaan, Korah's rebellion, Aaron's rod that budded, the brass serpent, Balaam and his donkey, and other lesser known events.

The principle theme of Numbers is that God's people must walk by faith, trusting in His promises, if they are to move forward. In reinforcing this, the book recounts the unbelief and discontent of the people in general, the refusal at Kadesh Barnea to enter the Promised Land, Moses' sin, and the idolatrous worship. Yet, in spite of the repeated failures, the Israelites' covenant-keeping God miraculously supported them during those years of rebellion and wandering.

This book should not be thought of as merely Hebrew history. All of these things happened for our spiritual edification. We are to learn from the mistakes of the Israelites, not to repeat them. Consequently, Numbers is a very important book.

Numbers Outline

- I. The Last Days at Sinai (1:1 – 10:10)
 - A. The Census and Arrangement of the Tribes (1:1 – 2:34)
 - B. The Number and Duties of the Levites (3:1 – 4:49)
 - C. Cleanliness and Confession (5:1-10)
 - D. The Law of Jealousy (5:11-31)
 - E. The Law of the Nazirite (6:1-27)
 - F. The Offerings of the Leaders (7:1-89)
 - G. The Services of the Tabernacle (8:1-26)
 - H. The Passover, the Cloud, and the Silver Trumpets (9:1 - 10:10)
- II. From Sinai to the Plains of Moab (10:11 – 22:1)
 - A. Setting out from the Sinai Wilderness (10:11-36)
 - B. Rebellion in the Camp (11:1-35)
 - C. Rebellion of Aaron and Miriam (12:1-16)
 - D. The Report of the Spies and the Reaction of the People (13:1 – 14:45)
 - E. Various Legislation (15:41)
 - F. Korah's Rebellion (16:1 – 17:13)
 - G. Instructions to the Levites (18:1 – 19:22)
 - H. The Sin of Moses (20:1-13)
 - I. The Death of Aaron (20:14-29)
 - J. The Bronze Serpent (21:1 – 22:1)

- III. Events on the Plains of Moab (22:2 – 36:13)
- A. The Prophet Balaam (22:2 – 25:18)
 - B. The Second Census (26:1-65)
 - C. Inheritance Rights of the Daughters (27:1-11)
 - D. Joshua, Moses' successor (27:12-23)
 - E. Offerings and Vows (28:1 – 30:16)
 - F. Destruction of the Midianites (31:1-54)
 - G. Transjordan Settlements of 2 ½ Tribes-Reuben, Gad, Manasseh (32:1-42)
 - H. Wilderness Travels Reviewed (33:1-49)
 - I. Instructions for Occupying Canaan (33:50-56)
 - J. Boundaries of the Promised Land (34:1-29)
 - K. Cities of the Levites (35:1-5)
 - L. Cities of Refuge and of Capital Punishment (35:6-34)
 - M. The Inheritance of the Daughters Who Marry (36:1-13)

Megathemes of Numbers

Census – People have to be organized, trained and led to be effective in great movements. It is always wise to count the cost before setting out on some great undertaking.

Rebellion – Rebellion against God is always a serious matter. It is not something to take lightly, for God's punishment is often severe. Our rebellion does not usually begin with all-out warfare, but in subtle ways like griping and criticizing.

Wandering – God judges harshly because He is holy. The wanderings in the wilderness demonstrate how serious God considers flagrant disobedience of His commands. Purging our lives of sin is vital to God's purpose.

Promised Land – Although God's punishment for sin is often severe, He offers reconciliation and hope. His love truly is amazing. Just as God's love and law led Israel to the Promised Land (Canaan), God desires to give purpose and destiny to our lives.

Numbers, which records the tragic story of Israel's unbelief, should serve as a dramatic lesson for all God's people. God loves us and wants the very best for us. He can and should be trusted. Numbers also gives us a clear portrayal of God's patience. Again and again He withholds judgment and preserves the nation. But His patience must not be taken for granted. His judgment will come. We must obey.