

Old Testament Basics

Numbers Chapters 1-36

Chapters 1-9

Historical Setting

- “*Numbers*” comes from the Greek translation of the Old Testament “Arithmoi” because of the prominence of census figures within the book.
- The chronological dating of Numbers begins one month after the ending of Leviticus which left the Israelites at Mount Sinai.
- Exactly one year after they fled Egypt, the Israelites were gathered at Mount Sinai to receive instruction concerning the Law and the Tabernacle.
- This event took place in the Month of Nisan.
- The Book of Numbers begins with Israel starting its 39 year journey through the wilderness.
- The book ends with Israel, 39 years later, in the plains of Moab, ready to cross the Jordan River (Ryrie).

Theme

- The primary lesson of Numbers was for God’s people to walk by faith, trust His promises, and inhabit the Promised Land.

Israel’s Preparation at Sinai

- Numbers 1:1-3 gives an account of Israel’s census.
- It is interesting to note the tribe of Judah had the most men equipped for war.
- The number of men from the 12 tribes, twenty years old and upward, totaled 603,550.
- It is estimated there were between two and three million Israelites.
- This number demonstrated God’s favor to Israel in multiplying the original 70 over the span of 400 years.
- The tribe of Levi was not numbered since they were to be consecrated as the priestly tribe who ministered to the Lord.
- The Levites were not to go into battle (Numbers 1:47-50, 53).
- The tribe of Judah had the most prominent position since it was the first tribe listed on the east side of the Tabernacle.
- The east side of the Tabernacle was very significant in that it was the entrance to the Tabernacle (temple at a later time).
- The East Gate is very significant in terms of prophecy.
- The East Gate of the Temple (Herod’s Temple-at the time of Jesus’ ministry) was the gate Jesus supposedly entered on the Monday before His crucifixion.
- It was on this day Jesus drove out the money changers (Matt. 21:12).
- The East Gate was also where Jesus departed after being rejected (Matt. 21: 17).
- The East Gate played a significant role in Ezekiel’s vision in which he saw the glory of the Lord depart Israel.
- This vision took place before their capture by the Babylonian army (Ezekiel 10:18-19)

- Ezekiel also saw in his vision the Lord's glory returning back through the East Gate (Ezekiel 43:1-5).
- It is possible Christ will enter the East Gate when He returns to earth after the Tribulation (Zech. 14:4).

The positions of the Tribes when moving or camping

- The Sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.
- The sons of Gershon were to set up the tabernacle, the tent, its covering, and the screen for the doorway of the tent of meeting.
- The sons of Kohath were to set up the ark, the table, the lampstand, the altars, and the utensils of the sanctuary.
- The sons of Merari were to set up the frames of the tabernacle, its bars, its pillars, its sockets, and all its equipment.
- When the camp was set to leave, Aaron and his sons were to take down the veil and cover the ark.
- Only Aaron and his sons were to see and touch the *most holy things*.
- After they were packaged, the Kohathites could move them but not look at them.
- The form of the ark could be seen by everyone.
- However there was a blue covering over the ark.
- Numbers 6:24-26 gives a wonderful blessing to Israel.
- Numbers 9:15-17 explains the cloud and fire over the tabernacle.
- Whenever the cloud lifted, the Israelites would move and when it stopped, they would stop.

Chapters 10-24

Israel Moving Toward the Promised Land

- In the second year, the second month, on the twentieth day, the cloud was lifted from the tabernacle and the Israelites began their journey to the Promised Land.
- The tribe of Judah was the first to set out.
- Almost immediately, the people began to grumble about the diet that God was providing (Ch. 11:5-6; 18).
- Moses did not understand how God could provide meat for 2-3 million people.
- God's response to Moses showed His power and provision Ch. 11:23.
- Miriam and Aaron, the sister and brother of Moses, became jealous of Moses' leadership and attention.
- Ch. 11:29 and 12:3 gives us an insight to Moses' humble spirit. God punished Miriam (Exodus 2:4) with leprosy due to her sinful spirit.
- Chapters 13 and 14 demonstrate the mercy and judgment of a Holy God.
- God had repeatedly demonstrated his power and provision to Israel and yet they refused to believe.
- God brought them close to the Promised Land. Spies were sent to bring a report about the land.

- Joshua and Caleb were the only ones who encouraged Israel to take the land.
- The other spies spoke fear and discouragement to the people.
- As a result, Israel was not willing to go into the Promised Land.
- Because of Israel's unbelief, God pronounced judgment upon them by not allowing any of the people 20 years and older to go into the Promised Land.
- Only Joshua and Caleb would be allowed to enter the Promised Land after the 40 years (Numbers 14:22-24).
- The 40 years represented the 40 days the spies were in the land of Canaan.
- God showed His judgment toward unbelief by opening the ground and consuming Korah, Dathan and Abiram (Numbers 16).
- What does it take to trust in God's word (Luke 16:31)?
- God demonstrated His dedication of Aaron as priest by causing his rod to bud with blossoms and almonds.
- Aaron's rod, the tablets of the Law (Ex. 25:16), and the pot of manna (Ex. 16:33-34) were placed in the Ark of the Covenant.
- God refused to allow Moses and Aaron into the Promised Land because of their disobedience.
- Dishonor was brought to God when Moses and Aaron struck the rock to bring forth water (Ch. 20).
- God is not a respecter of persons.
- God judged Israel again for their grumbling by sending poisonous serpents among them.
- Moses was told to make a bronze serpent and to set it on a standard (21:7-9).
- If any person were bitten, they would live if they looked toward the bronze serpent.
- This act symbolized Christ's death upon the cross (John 3:14-15).
- Balak, king of Moab wanted Balaam, a prophet, to pronounce judgment upon Israel (Numbers 22-24).
- No matter how much Balak persuaded Balaam to pronounce judgment, Balaam continued to bless Israel.
- This is a reminder of God's protection and faithfulness to us.
- No one will ever separate us from the love of God.
- Numbers 24:9 gives another warning and blessing for those who bless or curse Israel.
- Numbers 24:17 gives a prophecy for the coming Messiah (see also Rev. 22:16).

Numbers 25-26

Israel Worships Baal and the Census

- After the Israelites had wandered throughout the dessert for many years, they arrived at Shittim.
- Shittim was the last stop before Israel crossed the Jordan into the Promised Land.
- The women of Moab seduced Israel to follow and sacrifice to Baal.
- This was apparently the workings of Balaam (Numbers 31:16).
- Because of this extreme sacrilegious act, God struck 24,000 Israelites dead.
- Phinehas, the grandson of Aaron slew an Israelite who had brought a Midianite woman into the camp.
- Because of Phinehas' act of purging sin from Israel, God promised to make his descendants a perpetual priesthood (Numbers Ch. 25).

- The Children of Israel were ready to enter the Promised Land and all those who had been numbered at Sinai were now dead (Numbers 26:64-65).

Chapters 27-32

Moses Gives His Last Instructions to Israel

- God told Moses he would not enter into the Promised Land (Numbers 27:12-13).
- Verses 18-21 explains the transfer of leadership from Moses to Joshua.
- Numbers 27:21 states Joshua would not hear from God directly as did Moses but would know God's will through the *Urim*.
- God gave a last command to Moses before his death in Numbers 31:1-2.
- The slaughter of the Midianites was a fulfillment of Numbers 25:16-18.
- The Midianites were the ones responsible for causing Israel to commit adultery.
- Ch. 31:8; 16 notes that Balaam was killed for his part in suggesting Israel's seduction to Balak.
- The tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh were given land on the east side of the Jordan because the land was suitable for their livestock.
- Moses allowed them to have this land if they would first help the other tribes conquer the land of Canaan.

Chapters 33-36

Moses Reviews the Journey from Egypt to Moab

- Moses reminded the Israelites they began their journey from Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month of Nisan, the day after the Passover (the 14th of Nisan).
 - Aaron's death is reviewed (Ch. 33:37-38).
 - God gave specific commands to drive out all the inhabitants of the land of Canaan (33: 51-53).
 - God also gave a warning if this command was not obeyed (vs. 55-56).
 - The Children of Israel would not drive out all the inhabitants.
 - As a result, their hearts would be turned from God and they would be captured by the Assyrians (722 B.C.) and the Babylonians (605 B.C., 597 B.C., and 586 B.C.).
- Chapters 34-36 describe the allotment of the land.

Summary

- God directed the children of Israel to move camp whenever the cloud was lifted from the tabernacle and to stop whenever the cloud stood still.
- It must have been discouraging to not know if and when the cloud would move or stop.
- Has the cloud stopped in your life?
- Do you feel stuck in the middle of a great desert?
- Be encouraged, God has a plan.

- Perhaps the cloud has lifted and God is moving you on to another place or situation.
- Is God prompting your heart to take a step of faith by moving you outside your comfort zone?
- Are you willing to trust God?
- Numbers 23:11 states, "...Is the Lord's power limited? Now you will see whether My word will come true for you or not."