

# Through the Bible Book by Book

## Old Testament

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### Numbers

**Title:** The book of Numbers is so called because it contains the record of the two numberings of Israel before entering Canaan.

**Theme:** In Exodus we saw Israel redeemed; in Leviticus, Israel worshipping; and now in Numbers we see Israel serving. The service of the Lord was not to be done in any haphazard manner, so the book gives us a spectacle of a camp where everything is done according to the first law of heaven - order. The people are numbered, according to tribes and families; every tribe is assigned its position in camp; the marching and encampment of the people are regulated with military precision; and in the transporting of the tabernacle, every Levite had his appointed task. Besides being a book of service and order, Numbers is a book recording Israel's failure to believe GOD's promises and enter Canaan, and of their wandering in the wilderness as a punishment. But it is a failure that does not thwart GOD's plans, for the end of the book leaves us at the borders of the Promised Land, where the new generation of Israelites awaits to enter. Thus four words - service, order, failure, wandering - will sum up the message of Numbers.

**Author:** Moses.

**Scope:** 39 years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness from about 1490 to 1451 B. C.

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We shall outline Numbers according to the principal journeys of Israel. In these studies it is suggested that the student use a map in locating the different places mentioned in the course of his reading.

1. At Sinai (Chapters 1-9).
2. Sinai to Kadesh (Chapters 10-19).
3. Kadesh to Moab (Chapters 20-36).

#### I. Israel at Sinai (Chapters 1-9)

1. The numbering of the people (Chapters 1,2).
2. The numbering of the priests and Levities (Chapters 3,4).

3. Laws (Chapters 5,6).
4. Gifts of the princes (chapter 7).
5. Consecration of Levites (chapter 8).
6. The Passover and the guiding cloud (chapter 9).

For what purpose were the people numbered (1:3)? In preparation for what (13:30)? What was one reason? Why was it necessary that tribal distinction (1:2, 4) be kept in Israel (Hebrews 7:14), also family distinction (Luke 1:27)? What tribe was not numbered with the others (1:49)? Why (1:50)? Who were to lead in the march (2:3; 10:14)? Why (Genesis 49:10; Hebrews 7:14)? What was the total of the census taken (2:32)? What was the number of the Levites (3:39)?

A distinction should be noted between priests and Levites. The priests were those members of the tribe of Levi descended from Aaron and his sons (3:2-4), and they had charge of priestly functions of the tabernacle, such as sacrificing, ministering in the Holy Place, etc. The Levites, the remaining members of the tribes, were given to Aaron as helpers (3:9) to take care of the tabernacle with its furniture and utensils. All priests were Levites but not all Levites were priests.

In 3:12 we read that the tribe of Levi was set apart to the Lord instead of the first-born of Israel. In patriarchal times, the first-born enjoyed many privileges, one of which was to act as priest of the family. After the slaying of the first-born of the land of Egypt, the Lord commanded that the first-born of the Israelites be sanctified unto Him; i.e., to His service (Exodus 13:12). Now, for reasons that will suggest themselves to the student, the Lord, instead of having the first-born from different tribes serve Him, set apart one particular tribe for that service - Levi. But there were more first-born than Levites. What was then to be done? See 3:46-51. Those above the number of the Levites were to be redeemed from service by the payment of a certain sum. The ceremony is still performed among orthodox Jews of today.

The law of the Nazarite (chapter 6) sets forth a beautiful type of consecration. A Nazarite (Nazarite comes from a word meaning to separate) was a person who consecrated himself to the Lord with special vows, either temporarily or for life. As examples of the latter class we may mention Samuel (I Samuel 1:11) and John the Baptist (Luke 1:13-15). The Nazarite drank no wine (typical of abstinence from natural joy), wore his hair long (perhaps willingness to endure reproach for the Lord, see I Corinthians 11:14), and was not allowed to touch a dead body, not even of his parents (severance from family ties). The cause of Samson's fall was the breaking of his Nazarite vow (Judges 13:5; 16:17).

What does the threefold benediction by the priests in Num. 6:24-26 remind you of? (See II Corinthians 13:14). Notice the beautiful ceremony of the laying of the Israelites' hands on the Levites (8:10). Does Acts 13:2, 3 suggest any resemblance? What new addition to the Passover law was made in chapter 9:1-14? Notice the lesson taught in this connection; namely that GOD does not lower His standards but helps men to reach them.

## **II. Sinai to Kadesh (Chapters 10-19)**

1. Beginning of the march (chapter 10).
2. Murmuring and lusting (chapter 11).

3. The seventy elders (chapter 11).
4. Aaron's and Miriam's rebellion (chapter 12).
5. The spies' report and Israel's unbelief (Chapters 13-14).
6. Korah's rebellion (Chapters 16,17).
7. Ceremonial laws (Chapters 18,19).

Did Hobab and his children accompany the children of Israel (Judges 1:16)? Did they remain with them (I Samuel 15:6)? What went before the children of Israel (10:33)? What did that represent (Exodus 25:20-22; Joshua 7:6)? What was one of the causes that led to Israel's lusting (11:4; compare Exodus 12:38)? What lesson is there here for us (II Corinthians 6:14)? Who were appointed to assist Moses (11:16, 17)? What does the manifestation of the Spirit in 11:25 remind you of (Acts 19:6)? Was Moses' prayer in verse 29 ever answered (Acts 2:17; I Corinthians 14:31)?

Notice that the quails were not piled two cubits high, as might seem from the hasty reading of 11:31, but they flew that high and so were easily captured. Notice how contagious was the spirit of murmuring. It affected even Miriam and Aaron. From the fact that Miriam's name is mentioned first in verse 1, and that she was the one who was punished, it seems clear that she was the leader in the rebellion. Since marriage with Gentiles was discouraged by the law (Genesis 24:3; Deuteronomy 7:3), Miriam had a just cause for complaint. But she failed to take into account the grace of GOD that can sanctify Gentiles. Some have seen in Moses' action a dispensational and prophetic significance. Rejected by Israel, Moses married a Gentile bride (Acts 15:14). Aaron and Miriam represent those Jews who objected to the union of Jew and Gentile (Acts 11:1-3). The exclusion of Miriam is typical of the temporary rejection of Israel, and her reception into the camp, of their restoration.

Deuteronomy 1:9-22 shows that the command to send out the spies was given in response to the people's request. GOD's plan was that the people should trust Him in this matter, but seeing the weakness of their faith, He allowed them to have their own way. Whose name was changed at this time (13:16)? What does a change of name in the Bible usually signify (Genesis 32:28)? What kind of report did the spies bring back (13:25-33)?

What effect did the report have on the people? What did they plan to do (14:4)? What was the attitude of the faithless people toward those who really believed GOD (v. 10)? What does 14:13-19 reveal as to the character of Moses? Notice verse 21. In spite of the people's failure, GOD's plan would be fulfilled. What was Israel's unbelief the beginning of (14:25)? Notice verse 28. As reward is according to faith, so loss is according to unbelief. Was the sin of the people pardoned (v. 20)? Did that save them from reaping what they had sown because of their unrepentant attitude (14:29, 30)? What happened to the men who brought the evil report (v. 37)? Was the act of the people in 40-45 true obedience? What was it (v. 44)?

In chapter 14:22, the Lord mentions the fact, that up to this time, the people had tempted Him ten times. Look up the following scriptures and make a list of these temptations: Exodus 14; chapter 15; chapter 16; chapter 16:20; chapter 16:27; chapter 17; chapter 32; Num. 11; chapter 12:1; chapter 14

Chapter 15:27-29 deals with sins of ignorance; i.e., sins not committed in the spirit of willful disobedience. In contrast verse 30 mentions sins committed presumptuously, for which sacrifice does not avail, and the following verses give an illustration of such a sin in the case of a man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath. The severe penalty visited was not for the mere act of gathering sticks, but for the spirit of presumption in which the law was broken.

Why was it necessary for the Lord to command the Israelites to wear a fringe on their garments (15:37-41) as a visible reminder of His commandments (Psalm 78:11; Jeremiah 2:32)?

Notice in the case of Korah and his company how the murmuring, begun after the departure from Egypt, has developed into open rebellion. The sin of Korah and his company consisted in rebellion against Moses and Aaron and intrusion into the priestly office. Did Moses attempt to vindicate himself (16:4)? Against whom was Korah really rebelling (v. 11)? Was Korah's accusation true (13)? How was he punished? How were the 250 men punished? What shows the utter hardness of the people's hearts (v. 41)?

Chapter 19 gives an account of the preparation of a water for legal purification. For its typical significance read Hebrews 9:13, 14. Its main purpose was for the cleansing of people who had touched dead bodies, which touch brought defilement. This law may have been enacted because of the presence of so many dead after the Lord's judgment on the rebels, for it is not found in Leviticus.

### **III. Kadesh to Moab (Chapters 20-36)**

1. Moses' sin (chapter 20).
2. Death of Miriam and Aaron (chapter 20).
3. The brazen serpent (chapter 21).
4. Balaam's error and doctrine (Chapters 22-25).
5. The numbering of the new generation (chapter 26).
6. Preparations to enter the land (chapters 27-36).

We have come to the end of Israel's thirty-eight years of wandering, and we find them again at Kadesh-barnea; the same place from which they turned back to begin their long journey in the wilderness. That period is almost a blank as far as historical record is concerned. It was simply a time of waiting until the unbelieving generation had died out. They are now ready to enter the land.

In what did Moses' sin consist (20:12; Psalm 106:32,33)? What does this teach us concerning Moses, in spite of the beauty of his character (James 5:17)? Though Esau and his brother Jacob became reconciled, the descendants of the former harbored enmity toward Israel, as shown in chapter 20. This enmity was never forgotten (See Psalm 137:7; Ezekiel 35:1-5; Obadiah vv. 10-14).

What types of the atonement does the brazen serpent suggest to you (John 3:14; Galatians 3:19; Romans 8:3)?

We now come to the story of Balaam. The fact of his being a prophet teaches us that sometimes GOD revealed His will to individuals other than Israelites. Melchizedek and Cornelius, both Gentiles, will serve as further examples. It is clear that Balaam's besetting sin was covetousness (II Peter 2:15). It may be asked why GOD permitted Balaam to go with the messengers and then was angry at him for so doing (22:20, 22). It was GOD's perfect will that Balaam refuse to go, but seeing the intenseness of his purpose, He gave His permission, but with this condition, "**yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do**" (v. 20). Now, reading verses 22, 32 and 35, we infer that Balaam left with the thought in mind of violating that very condition.

Thus far we have had a record of Balaam's error (Jude 11), which consisted in the belief that GOD could not refuse to curse such a sinful people: as Israel. But he failed to take into account that which could blot out their sins like a thick cloud - the grace of GOD. Now in chapter 25 we are given an account of Balaam's doctrine (Revelation 2:14), which consisted in teaching Balak to corrupt by immorality, the people which he could not curse by enchantments.

Why was it necessary to re-number the people (26:64, 65)? What do we learn in 26:11 concerning Korah's children? What was Moses' attitude toward the Israelites to the very last (27:15-17)? What was the Lord's estimate of Joshua (v. 18)? With what was he endued (v. 20)? By what ceremony was he inducted into office (v. 23)?

Against whom were the Israelites to go to war (chapter 31)? Why (chapter 25)? Who in particular perished in this war (v. 8)? Was his prayer In Numbers 23:10 granted?

Some have objected to the wholesale slaughter of the Midianites as being inconsistent with the love of GOD. But let it be remembered that these people were a moral cancer in the midst of a land that threatened the purity of Israel. Read in Leviticus 18:24-30 and context, the account of the corruption of the nations surrounding Israel, and it will be seen that the action of the Lord in utterly destroying them was as necessary from the standpoint of the natural as the action of a surgeon in amputating a diseased limb.

The 32,000 female children (31:18) were kept alive for domestic service, and not for immoral purposes as some infidels have imagined. Had not Israel been severely punished for impurity (25)? Was not impurity punishable by death (Deuteronomy 22)? Hebrew law permitted a soldier to marry a captive woman but only on condition of observing the legislation made in her favor, designed as far as possible to make immorality impossible (Deuteronomy 21:10-14).

Passing over chapter 32, recording the choice of land of the two and a half tribes; over 33, containing a summary of Israel's journeys; and 34, recording the borders of each tribe, we come to chapter 35, containing the account of the appointment of cities of refuge. What was the inheritance of the Levites? For whom were the six cities of refuge to be (v. 11, 12)? Where were these cities to be located (v. 14)? How long was the slayer to remain there (v. 25)? Who was excluded from the cities (vv. 20, 21)?

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