

Numbers

Focus	Exodus Generation		Tragic Transition				Wilderness Generation		
Divisions	Organization of Israel	Sanctification of Israel	To Kadesh-Barnea	At Kadesh Barnea	In Wilderness	To Moab	Reorganization of Israel	Regulations of Offerings and Vows	Conquest and Division of Israel
	1-4	5:1-10:10	10:11-12:16	13-14	15-19	20-25	26-27	28-30	31-36
Topics	Order		Disorder				Reorder		
	Preparation		Postponement				Preparation		
Place	Mount Sinai		Wilderness				Plains of Moab		
Time	1584-1545 BC								

Introduction

Only a year has passed since the exodus from Egypt when the Book of Numbers opens. Numbers, the book of divine discipline, shows the painful consequences of unbelief and irresponsible decisions on the part of God's chosen people. Numbers begins with the Exodus generation (1-12), moves through a tragic transition period (13-20), and ends with the Wilderness generation (21-36) poised at the doorstep to the land of Canaan. The book contains the records of two generations, two censuses, and two sets of instructions for enjoying the land of promise. God's love is kind, but it can also be severe. His people must learn they can move forward only as they trust and depend on Him. Numbers is the book of wanderings. It takes its name from the two numberings of the Israelites—the first at Mount Sinai and the second on the plains of Moab. Most of the book, however, describes Israel's experiences as they wander in the wilderness. The lesson of Numbers is clear. While it may be necessary to pass through wilderness experiences, one does not have to live there. For Israel, an eleven-day journey became a forty-year agony.

Title: The title of Numbers comes from the first word in the Hebrew text, *Wayyedabber*, "And He Said." Jewish writings, however, usually refer to it by the fifth Hebrew word in Numbers 1:1, *B'midbar*, "In the Wilderness," which more nearly indicates the content of the book. The Greek title in the Septuagint is *Arithmoi*, "Numbers." The Latin Vulgate followed this title and translated it *Liber Numeri*, "Book of Numbers." These titles are based on the two

numberings: the generation of Exodus (1) and the generation that grew up in the wilderness and conquered Canaan (26). Numbers has also been called the “Book of the Journeyings,” the “Book of the Murmurings,” and the “Fourth Book of Moses.”

Author: The evidence that points to Moses as the author of Numbers is similar to that for the previous books of the Pentateuch. These five books form such a literary unit that they rise or fall together on the matter of authorship.

External Evidence: The Jews, the Samaritans, and the early church give testimony to the Mosaic authorship of Numbers. Also, several New Testament passages cite events from Numbers and associate them with Moses. These include John 3:14; Acts 7; 13; 1st Corinthians 10:1–13; Hebrews 3–4 and Jude 11.

Internal Evidence: There are more than eighty claims that “the LORD spoke to Moses” (the first is Numbers 1:1). In addition, Numbers 33:2 makes this clear statement: “At the LORD’s command, Moses wrote down the starting points for the stages of their journey...” Moses kept detailed records as an eyewitness of the events in this book. As the central character in Exodus through Deuteronomy, he was better qualified than any other man to write these books.

Some scholars have claimed that the third person references to Moses point to a different author. However, use of the third person was a common practice in the ancient world. Caesar, for example, did the same in his writings.

Date and Setting: Leviticus covers only one month, but Numbers stretches over almost thirty-nine years (c. 1584–1545 B.C.). It records Israel’s movement from the last twenty days at Mount Sinai (Numbers 1:1; 10:11), the wandering around Kadesh-Barnea, and finally the arrival in the plains of Moab in the fortieth year (Numbers 22:1; 26:3; 33:50; Deuteronomy 1:3). Their tents occupy several square miles whenever they camp since there are probably over two-and-a-half million people (based on the census figures in Chapters 1 and 26). God miraculously feeds and sustains them in the desert—He preserves their clothing and gives them manna, meat, water, leaders, and a promise (Numbers 14:34).

Theme and Purpose: The theme of Numbers is the consequence of disbelief and disobedience to the holy God. The Lord disciplined His people but remained faithful to His covenant promises in spite of their fickleness. Numbers displays the patience, holiness, justice, mercy, and sovereignty of God toward His people. It teaches that there are no shortcuts to His blessings—He uses trials and tests for specific purposes.

Numbers was written to trace the history of Israel’s wanderings from Sinai to Moab. But the fact that there is almost no record of the thirty-eight years of wandering shows that Numbers is a very thematic history. It selects those events that are important to the development of God’s redemptive program. The sins of the first generation were written as a reminder and a warning to the second generation. They must implicitly trust God before they can possess the Land of Blessing.

Key Verses:

Yet as surely as I live and as the whole earth is filled with the LORD’s glory, none of the men who have seen my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness and have tested me these ten times and did not obey me, will ever see the land I swore to give their fathers. None of those who have despised me will see it (Numbers 14:21–23).

But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust me to demonstrate my holiness in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this assembly into the land I have given them (Numbers 20:12).

Key Chapter: The critical turning point of Numbers may be seen in chapter 14 when Israel rejects God by refusing to go up and conquer the Promised Land. God judges Israel “You will bear the consequences of your iniquities forty

years based on the number of the forty days that you scouted the land, a year for each day. You will know my displeasure.” (Numbers 14:34).

Christ in Numbers—Perhaps the clearest portrait of Christ in Numbers is the bronze serpent on the stake, a picture of the Crucifixion (Numbers 21:4-9; John 3:14). The rock that quenches the thirst of the multitudes is also a type of Christ (1st Corinthians 10:4). The daily manna pictures the Bread of Life who later comes down from heaven (John 6:31-33).

Balaam foresees the rulership of Christ (Numbers 24:17). The guidance and presence of Christ is seen in the pillar of cloud and fire, and the sinner’s refuge in Christ may be seen in the six cities of refuge. The red cow sacrifice is also considered a type of Christ (Numbers 19).

Contribution to the Bible—In Genesis God elected a people, in Exodus He redeemed them, in Leviticus He sanctified them, and in Numbers He directed them. Numbers takes up the story where Leviticus left off, on Mount Sinai. Leviticus describes the believers’ worship, Numbers their walk:

Leviticus	Numbers
Sanctuary	Wilderness
Purity	Pilgrimage
Fellowship	Faithfulness
Legislative	Narrative
Ceremonial	Historical

Numbers teaches the important lesson that biblical faith often requires trusting God against appearances (in this case, the prospect of annihilation by superior enemy forces). Two extensive New Testament passages turn to this wilderness experience for illustrations of spiritual truth. In 1st Corinthians 10:1-13 it illustrates the danger of idolatry and immorality, and in Hebrews 3:7-4:6 it illustrates the theme of entering God’s rest through faith.

Overview: Israel as a nation is in its infancy at the outset of this book, only thirteen months after the Exodus from Egypt. In Numbers, the book of divine discipline, it becomes necessary for the nation to go through the painful process of testing and maturation. God must teach His people the consequences of irresponsible decisions. The forty years of wilderness experience transforms them from a rabble of ex-slaves into a nation ready to take the Promised Land. Numbers begins with the old generation (Numbers 1:1-10:10), moves through a tragic transitional period (Numbers 10:11-25:18), and ends with the new generation (Numbers 26-36) at the doorway to the land of Canaan.

The Exodus Generation (Numbers 1:1-10:10): The generation that witnessed God’s miraculous acts of deliverance and preservation receives further direction from God while they are still at the foot of Mount Sinai. God’s instructions are very explicit, reaching every aspect of their lives. He is the Author of order, not confusion; and this is seen in the way He organizes the people around the tabernacle. Turning from the outward conditions of the camp to the inward conditions, Numbers describes the spiritual preparation of the people.

The Tragic Transition (Numbers 10:11-25:18): Israel follows God step by step until Canaan is in sight. Then in the crucial moment at Kadesh they draw back in unbelief. Their complaining had already become incessant (Numbers

11:1). But their unbelief after sending out the twelve spies at Kadesh-Barnea is something God will not tolerate (Hebrews 6:3-6). Their rebellion at Kadesh marks the pivotal point of the book. The generation of the Exodus will not be the generation of the conquest.

Unbelief brings discipline and hinders God's blessing. The old generation is doomed to literally kill time for forty years of wilderness wanderings—one year for every day spent by the twelve spies in inspecting the land. They are judged by disinheritance and death as their journey changes from one of anticipation to one of aimlessness. Only Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who believed God, enter Canaan.

The Wilderness Generation (Numbers 21-36): When the transition to the new generation is complete, the people move to the plains of Moab, directly east of the Promised Land (Numbers 22:1). Before they can enter the land they must wait until all is ready. Here they receive new instructions, a new census is taken, Joshua is appointed as Moses' successor, and some of the people settle in the Transjordan.

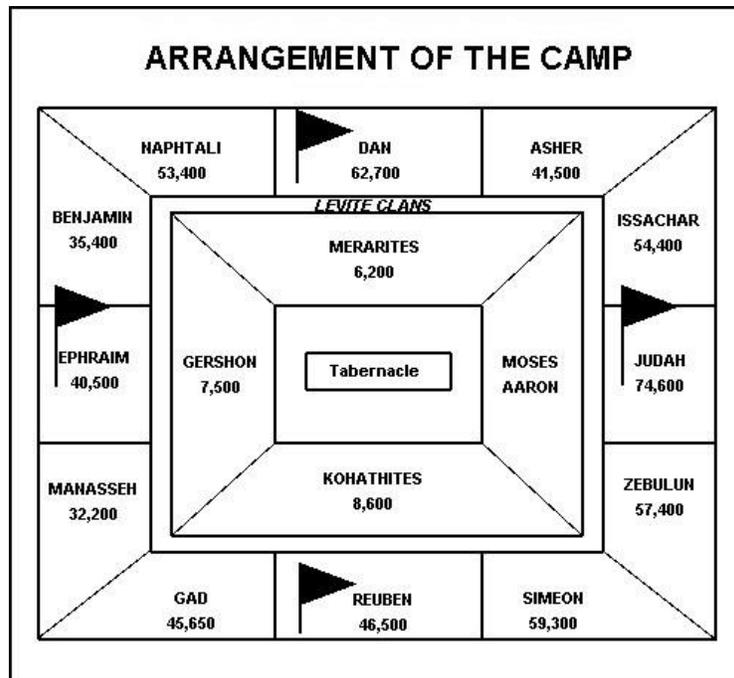
Numbers records two generations (Numbers 1-14; 21-36), two numberings (Numbers 1; 26), two journeyings (Numbers 10-14; 21-27), and two sets of instructions (Numbers 5-9; 28-36). It illustrates both the kindness and severity of God (Romans 11:22) and teaches that God's people can move forward only as they trust and depend on Him.

The Exodus Generation (Numbers 1:1-10:10)

Chapter 1

1. The Lord to Moses in the tent of meeting from above the mercy seat between the two cherubim that were over the Ark (Leviticus 1:1 cf. Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89; 12:7-8).
2. Wilderness (מִדְבָּר midbar) does not mean desert, for although its scant rainfall cannot support cultivation, it can provide adequate pasturage for flocks (Numbers 1:1 cf. Exodus 18:5; 19:1; Leviticus 27:34; Numbers 10:11-12,33).
3. Mustering the troops (Numbers 1:3; Joshua 8:10; 2nd Samuel 24:1-9 || 1st Chronicles 7; 21:1-8; 2nd Chronicles 14:7).
4. The census taken by King Amaziah early in the eighth century B.C. also began with those twenty years old (2nd Chronicles 25:5). In the ancient world the age for entering military service was twenty in Sparta, eighteen in Athens, and seventeen in Rome. No upper age limit is set (Numbers 1:3).
 - a. Qualified to do work (Numbers 4:3,23).
 - b. Bearing spear and shield (2nd Chronicles 25:5).
 - c. The idea is able bodied men.
5. The census was completed in fewer than 20 days, possibly in 1 day (Numbers 1:17-19; 10:11). By contrast, David's census took nine months and twenty days to complete (2nd Samuel 24:8).
6. The order of enrollment is according to military divisions in preparation for the organization of the camp (Numbers 1:20-42 cf. Numbers 2:3-31 see chart).
7. 603,550 (Numbers 1:46 cf. Exodus 12:37; Numbers 11:21).
8. The Levites were not to be counted as soldiers and had their own muster (Numbers 1:47-54 cf. Numbers 3:15).

Chapter 2



Chapter 3

1. The family records (תּוֹלְדוֹת *tōlēdōth*) of Aaron and Moses (Numbers 3:1 cf. Genesis 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1,32; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12,13; 25:19; 36:1,9; 37:2).
2. Aaron is the firstborn (Numbers 3:2 cf. Exodus 6:20; Numbers 26:59–61; 1st Chronicles 5:29; 23:13).
3. The anointing of Aaron and his sons by the sprinkling of blood and oil (Numbers 3:3 cf. Exodus 29:21; Leviticus 8:30 cf. Exodus 30:30; 40:15).
4. Nadab and Abihu (Numbers 3:2,4 cf. Leviticus 10:1–2).
5. The tribe of Levi is set apart for the support services to the Aaronic priesthood (Numbers 3:5–10).
6. The tribe of Levi is also taken by the Lord in place of the firstborn that were to be dedicated to His service (Numbers 3:11–14,40–51 cf. Numbers 8:13–19; Exodus 13:2,12,13,15; 22:29; Leviticus 27:26).

Levitical Census		
Levite Clans	1 st Registration (From 1 Month Old) Numbers 3	2 nd Registration (30 – 50 Years Old) Numbers 4
Gershonite Clans Libni Shimei	7500	2750
Kohathite Clans Amram Izhar Hebron Uzziel	8600?	2630
Merarite Clans Mahli Mushi	6200	3200
Totals	22000	8580