

Old Testament Survey
Lesson 5 – Numbers
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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Introduction

Between Exodus and Numbers a period of about a month passes and The Book of Leviticus takes place. In contrast, the events recounted in Numbers take about 38 years. Numbers gets its name from the first census (numbering) in the first chapter and the second census in chapter 26. In Numbers 33 it is called a "roll call" – called Arithmoi in the Septuagint, which means Arithmetic or Numbers, its name carried over to our present translations. It is interesting to note that the generations numbered at the beginning are not the same as those numbered at the end. Why? Because of the failure of the people of Israel to press on into Canaan and possess the "Promised Land" when God offered it to them.

The book begins with the movement of the camp and Tabernacle from Mt. Sinai (13 months after the Exodus) and continues through 38 years of wandering in the wilderness. This is the journey from Sinai to Moab, on the border of Canaan. One thing to remember about the Book of Numbers throughout this study is: God had a perfect and direct way through the wilderness to bring His people immediate possession of the Promised Land. Unbelief robbed His people of that pleasure. From beginning, almost to the end, it is pervaded by a spirit of rebellion which grieved God.

¹⁰"For forty years I loathed that generation, And said they are a people who err in their heart, And they do not know My ways. Psalm 95:10

This is another chance for us to point our fingers and say: "What stupid people these Hebrews are." God gives and gives and gives, and they gripe and gripe and gripe. BUT WAIT: Do I walk my daily journey through this "foreign land" listening to and obeying God, or do I constantly try to do it myself? Do I admit that God can meet my needs in the wilderness and also defeat the fortified cities and giants in my life, or do I choose to run?

In Genesis we saw the election of God's people; in Exodus we saw their redemption; in Leviticus we saw their sanctification; in Numbers we see their direction given by God. Whereas the lessons in Leviticus are broad and typical, the lessons in Numbers are clear and practical; and, their impact did not end there. In 1 Cor 10:6, 11 we are told that these things that happened to them happened as "examples for us." Their history is an object lesson for us illustrating God's desires and dealings with His chosen people, old or new Covenant.

Fortunately, Numbers is not just negative. In fact, you notice it ends with a repentant return to Yahweh and a final victory under the great leadership of Joshua and Caleb. But, the question remains: Why was God so patient with them? He made an unconditional covenant with them: 1) a Special Land; 2) a Special People; and 3) a Special Witness

Why is God so patient with us? He made a new covenant with us:

⁶And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Phil 1:6 (ESV)

Outline

It is interesting to notice that the distance between Mt. Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea is about 150 to 200 miles, about an 11 day journey according to Deut 1:2. Then they spent 40 years on a journey that should have taken, at most 40 days, ending up back where they started, in Kadesh-Barnea. Why? Unbelief! They refused to go in and take the Promised Land. One supreme message of Numbers is that unbelief in following God will lead to frustration and lack of progress in our lives.

| Events | Month/Day/Year |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 1) Passover observed (Exodus 12:2) | 1/14, 1446 BC |
| 2) Departure from Egypt after 430 years (Exodus 12:41-42; Numbers 33:3) | 1/14, 1446 BC |
| 3) To the Wilderness of Sin, manna is given (Exodus 16:1) | 2/15, 1446 BC |
| 4) Arrival at Sinai (Exodus 19:1) | 3/14, 1446 BC |
| 5) Encampment at Sinai for 11 1/2 months. During this time: --Moses is on the mount with God twice for 40 days each time (Exodus 24:18; 34:28) --The instruction was given concerning the tabernacle, and that structure was put up. | |
| 6) The Tabernacle was set up for the first time (Exodus 40:1, 2, 17) | 1/1, 1445 BC |
| 7) Passover observation commanded (Numbers 9:1-2) | 1/?, 1445 BC |
| 8) Passover observed (Numbers 9:5)—evidently first time since the night of Exodus | 1/14, 1445 BC |
| 9) Numbering of the men (Numbers 1:1-2) [took 20 days] | 2/1-20, 1445 BC |
| 10) Departure from Sinai (Numbers 10:11-12) | 2/20, 1445 BC |
| 11) Spies sent out from Kadesh-Barnea at time of first ripe grapes (Numbers 13:17-20) | 6/? 1445 BC |
| 12) Spies return 40 days later; because of disbelief, Israel is sentenced to 40 years of wandering (Numbers 13:3; Deuteronomy 2:7; 8:2, 4; 29:5) | 7-8/? 1445 BC |
| 13) From Kadesh-Barnea to the crossing of the Zered River, 38 years of wandering (Deuteronomy 2:14) | |
| 14) Arrival at the wilderness of Zin; Miriam dies (Numbers 20:1; Numbers 33:36-38) | 1/?, 1407 BC |
| 15) Aaron dies at Mt. Hor at 123 years of age (Numbers 20:28; 33:38) | 5/1, 1407 BC |
| 16) Israel mourns Aaron for 30 days, departs Mt. Hor, sets out through Edom (Numbers 20:29; 21:4) | 5 th month, 1407 BC |
| 17) Israel captures the land of Sihon in Transjordan (Numbers 21:21-35; vs. 25-28, 30) (This is where the 300 years of Judges 11:26 begins) | Probably Fall, 1407 BC |
| 18) Moses final address to Israel (Deuteronomy 1:3) | 11/1, 1406 BC |
| 19) Moses death (Deuteronomy 34:7) | 12/? 1406 BC |
| 20) Israel spends 3 days preparing to cross the Jordan River (Joshua 1:11) | 1/?-?, 1406 BC |
| 21) Israel crosses the swollen Jordan under Joshua (Joshua 4:19) | 1/10, 1406 BC |
| 22) Passover is observed for the first time in Canaan (Joshua 5:6, 10, 11; cp. Numbers 14:33; 32:13) | 1/14, 1406 BC |
| 23) The manna ceases two days after the 40 th anniversary of the Exodus (Joshua 5:10-12) | 1/16/ 1406 BC |

Timeline of the Exodus from Terry Riley's OT Chronology notes.

I. Old Generation (1-19)

The first part of Numbers deals with a generation of Hebrews who had experienced slavery and oppression in Egypt, but also the miraculous acts of God in escaping from Pharaoh's tyranny. Now God is ready to move these ex-slaves and aliens into a land of their own, a land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In all of these chapters very little is given us about the wanderings portion of Israel's history, probably because it was boring. They wandered aimlessly because they refused to trust God when He offered them a life of exciting challenge. Perhaps, if we are bored, we have the same problem.

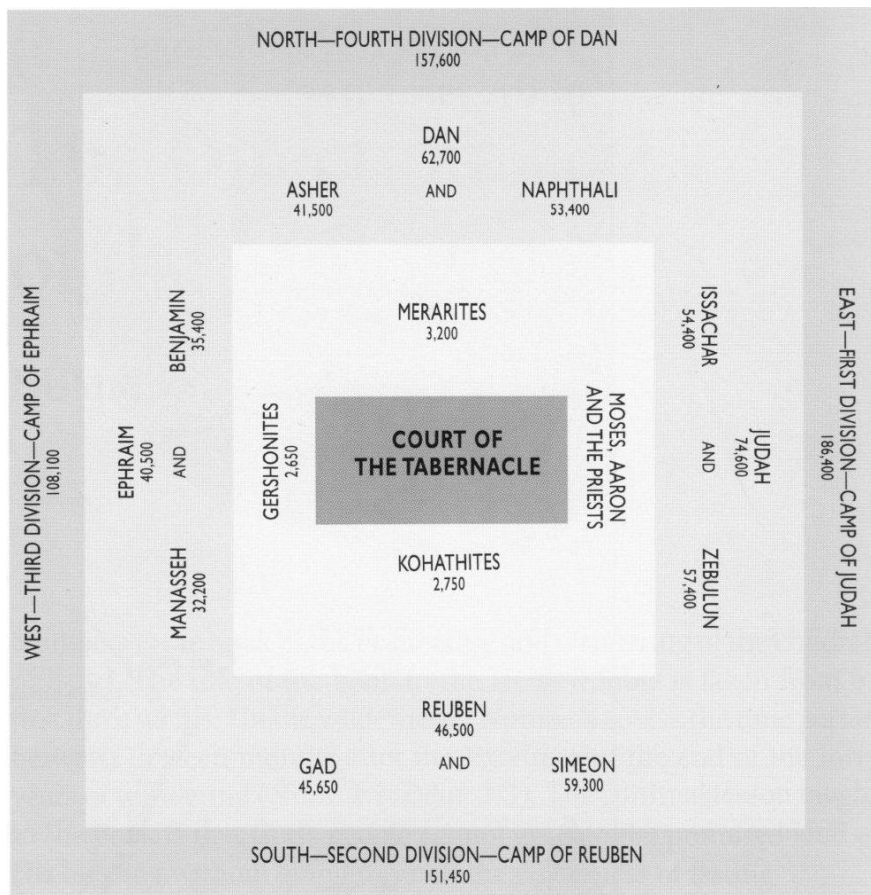
A. Fitted (1-9:14)

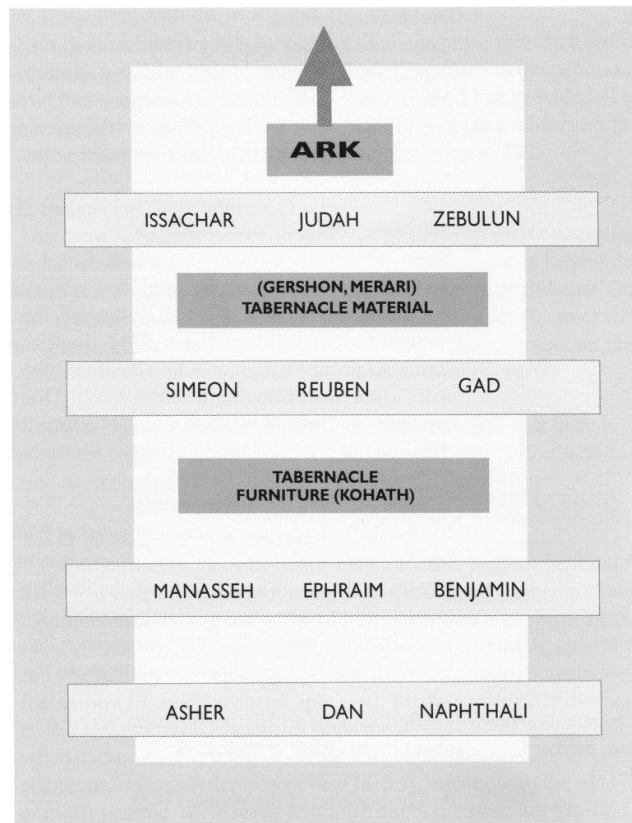
God is a God of perfect order (1 Cor 14:33). The entire book of Numbers confirms this. The census totaled more than 600,000 fighting men (adult males) which conservatively extrapolates to more than 2 million with women, children, and elder adults. This is not a mob teaming across the wilderness in disorder, but a highly organized nation moving efficiently and quickly to and into the Promised Land.

| Tribe | Men (20 yrs or older able to go out to war) |
|-------------------|--|
| Reuben | 46,500 |
| Simeon | 59,300 |
| Gad | 45,650 |
| Judah | 74,600 |
| Issachar | 54,400 |
| Zebulun | 57,400 |
| Ephraim (Joseph) | 40,500 |
| Manasseh (Joseph) | 32,200 |
| Benjamin | 35,400 |
| Dan | 62,700 |
| Asher | 41,500 |
| Naphtali | 53,400 |
| Total | 603,550 |

1. Counted and Camped (1-4)

The children of Israel are numbered for the purpose of building an army (1:3), for the purpose of organization (1:4). Chapters 1-4 go into detail on the organization of the people (chapter 1), where they were to camp (chapter 2), and where they will marching line (chapters 1 & 10). It also divides their responsibilities and separates the tribe of Levi for the special work of service.





2. Cleansed and Consecrated (5-9:14)

Next physical and moral defilement dealt with as God prepares the hearts of the individual persons for the journey. Physical purification – First they must put out everything that is unclean from their camp. Lepers, persons with issues of blood (unhealed wounds, natural period, or after birth). Spiritual purification – Guilty who have unconfessed or unforsaken sin (sacrifices made with a broken, repentant heart). They were to separate themselves unto God by: the required sacrifice and worship and a special Nazarite vow (Ch 6).

At the end of Chapter 6 we see Aaron's famous benediction:

²⁴The LORD bless you, and keep you; ²⁵The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you;
²⁶The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace.' Numbers 6:23-25

Chapters 7-9 describes the individual offerings for the leaders of the tribes(7:1-8:4); the consecration of the Levites (8:5-26); and the celebration of the Passover (9:1-14).

B. Forward (9:15-10:36)

The host has been numbered, organized, sanctified, celebrated. NOW ...

1. God Leads (9:15-10:10)

If, up to this point, there has been any question of who will lead the nation, God gives them a miraculous visual aid: an evidence of His presence looking like a cloud by day and a pillar of fire in the night. God led the people personally.

¹⁸At the command of the LORD the sons of Israel would set out, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud settled over the tabernacle, they remained camped. ...or if it remained in the daytime and at night, whenever the cloud was lifted, they would set out. Num 9:18, 21

God gives the people an announcement of His events by trumpets (10:1-10). Visually, by the movement of God (The Cloud) and with a system of signals sounded on two trumpets, they could make or break camp, move into position or gather all the people at the "Tent of Meeting."

2. People Follow (10:11-10:36)

Thirteen months after the Exodus, the Israelites set out for the Promised Land at God's leading.

C. Failure En Route to Kadesh-Barnea (11-12)

The theme of the following chapters could be "The Continued Complaining of God's Children." They do complain and God does get fed up with them. But, it could have been a time of testing that built faith in, and love for their God which would have saved them the later grief. If they had learned their lessons here, they would have responded differently when they came to the Promised Land. The people progressed from small acts of disobedience to a major disaster.

1. Failure of the People (11:1-9)

Every time the people complained, God showed himself to them trying to draw them back into a relationship of trust. He spoke, He pleaded, He disciplined, He got angry (just like any parent).

Was there a cause beyond the usual tendencies? Yes! (11:4) -- "The rabble (mixed multitude) with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost--also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic.'"

Who were the rabble or mixed multitude? They were Egyptians, unrighteous Jews, sinners, mostly products of mixed marriages in Egypt. These marriages were not forbidden, but having idols was, and this was an ongoing problem and cause difficulties for Israel from now on. God provided all their needs for this "short journey." They had no hunger, no thirst, no worn-out clothing and no disease. They had enough . . . to be content.

2. Failure of Moses (11:10-15)

The negative, complaining attitude now affects Moses, and he joins in. He insists that God has put too heavy a burden upon him and that the people are too rebellious.

3. God Provides for Moses and the People (11:16-35)

Here God provides the additional workers to assist Moses (the seventy elders) and enough quail for the people who complained about eating manna. The people's lusts were so great that they killed an excessive amount of the quail and God judged them with plague.

4. Failure of Miriam and Aaron (12:1-16)

The confrontation by Aaron and Miriam seems righteous enough. After all, Moses married a Cushite woman (12:1). They are from tribe of Levi. They have served beside Moses. They have spoken for God. They deserve to be co-leaders. The problem is pride, so God's response is harsh. Miriam is leprous for seven days and shut up outside the camp.

D. Failure at Kadesh-Barnea (13-16)

This brings them to Kadesh-Barnea and their biggest test of faith. Big faith comes from being close to God and obeying in the little things. (Episode of Jesus in boat in storm. "Oh, you of little faith.") Our faith is built in times of stress so we are ready for the real trouble. Too bad they didn't learn because faith will be necessary to "face this final challenge."

1. Sent Twelve Spies (13)

Send out a reconnaissance party of one man from each tribe. Goals:

1. What is the land like? (good or bad, fat or lean)
2. What are the people like? (strong or weak, few or many, cruel)
3. What are the cities like? (open camps or fortresses)

After 40 days of spying out the land, reports come back: Ten say we cannot do it! – FEAR, TWO SAY DO IT! – FAITH (our God can deliver.)

2. Delay of Blessing (14 and 15)

Final act of disbelief brings final judgment to all unbelievers. After all the acts of kindness and supernatural strength God showered on His people they, in mass, refuse to believe. (14:1-4)

Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Caleb plead with the people and plead with God but the children won't yield until the ten spies die of plague (14:40) but it is too late. Judgment is pronounced. None of the generation that rebelled will enter the Promised Land except Joshua and Caleb (men of faith). They will wander for forty years as shepherds until only the descendants are left (vs. 32-33).

Chapter 15 is the preparation of the people through reinstitution and clarification of sacrifices, laws, and Sabbath.

3. Leadership questioned (16)

Do the people of God learn their lesson? Do they repent in sackcloth and ashes? NO! The rebellion against Moses and Aaron, and through them, against God increases to a loud crescendo. By 16:11 Moses is saying, *"You and all your company have gathered together against the Lord."*

Korah, a Levite, along with 250 princes (well renowned community leaders) of the tribes, said they did not need human leadership because: 1) we are holy and 2) the Lord is with us. Why do we need you? (vs. 3)

God's response to Moses is immediate: *"Separate yourself from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly."* (16:21). God separates the rebels/God separates the earth.

The next day the congregation grumbled against Moses and Aaron. God punishes the congregation with a plague. Aaron took his stand between the dead and the living so that the plague was checked.

4. Priesthood Re-affirmed (17-19)

God provides a back-up object lesson for the remaining leadership. 12 tribes, twelve rods--rod that buds belongs to the leader. Aaron's rod buds, blossoms, and produces fruit.

In chapters 18 the duties of priests and Levites and their offering portions are reaffirmed. In chapter 19 the sacrifice of the red heifer and water of cleansing ceremonies are instituted.

II. New Generation (20-36)

This section includes the death of Miriam, Aaron, and the sins of Moses and Edom, but it also marks the end of the wandering in the wilderness as the new generation finally sees the Promised Land.

A. Rehearsing the Past (20)

The nation of Israel ends up back where they started, at Kadesh-Barnea. God has kept His promise to sustain them but withheld His blessing because of their parents' unbelief.

1. Murmuring and Miracles (20:1-6)

The people grumbled again against Moses and Aaron because they did not have any water.

2. Moses' Mistake (20:7-13)

What do you think Moses' sin was? Anger? Striking rock instead of speaking (disobedience)?

“Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel...” Num 10:12

B. Grasping the Present (20:14-27:11)

Chapter 20 brought us to the end of the wilderness wanderings. Israel asks permission to pass through Edom, but Edom refuses. Aaron dies and his priesthood is transferred to Eleazar. Wandering is over and warfare will now begin. We will see their first victory and experience their last griping.

1. Physical and Spiritual Victories (21-25)

The king of Arad captured some Israelites in a token battle. This time the Hebrew children asked God for help. He delivers them and the Canaanite cities are completely consumed.

Israel leaves Mount Hor to circumvent Edom (21:4) and find the route difficult. With no bread (manna) and water they gripe again. God brings a plague of fiery serpents. This time they admit their sin quickly (growing) and God provides a quick solution.

A brazen serpent is made and all they have to do is look at it for healing. In this case we don't have to guess at the symbolic meaning. Jesus told Nicodemus, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so shall the Son of Man be lifted up: that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life, ..." -- John 3:14-16

From here there is a succession of victories and even an attempt (22-24) to have the Prophet Balaam (talking donkey), a soothsayer from Mesopotamia, curse them turns into a blessing from God. Midianite and Moabite women came to the Israelite camp and enticed men to worship Baal of Peor with feasts, rituals, and prostitution. The zeal of Phinehas (the son of Eleazar) is shown in his delivering God's judgment on a Simeonite who took a Midianite as his wife (25). The destruction of the Midianites was then ordered.

2. New Census, New Hope (26:1-27:11)

The next chapters relate the preparation for entering of the Promised Land under their new leader – General Joshua. A new census is taken to determine the apportionment of the land to each family including a provision for families with only daughters for heirs.

| Tribe | Men (20 yrs or older able to go out to war) |
|-------------------|--|
| Reuben | 43,730 |
| Simeon | 22,200 |
| Gad | 40,500 |
| Judah | 76,500 |
| Issachar | 64,300 |
| Zebulun | 60,500 |
| Ephraim (Joseph) | 32,500 |
| Manasseh (Joseph) | 52,700 |
| Benjamin | 45,600 |
| Dan | 64,400 |
| Asher | 53,400 |
| Naphtali | 45,400 |
| Total | 601,730 |

Finally, after 40 years, the children of Israel are ready to enter. The only males that were still alive from the original failure to enter the Promised Land was Moses, Caleb, and Joshua.

C. Previewing the Future (27:12-36)

The time of fulfillment of the judgment of Moses for his sin at Meribah is now at hand. God took him up on Mount Nebo overlooking the Promised Land. We will see that scene in detail in Deut 32-34. Moses shows his true heart by asking God to bless Israel and not leave them:

¹⁵Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, ¹⁶"May the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, ¹⁷who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd." Num 27:15-17

1. Leadership (27:12-23)

God chooses Joshua to carry on for Moses. Moses is still in prime condition at 120 years of age, but God took him home. Did he ever set foot in the Promised Land? Yes, at the transfiguration.

2. Laws (28-30)

The Laws of God are finalized and reiterated to govern the physical and spiritual lives of the new nation in the new land. There are Laws of Offerings, Laws of Feasts, and Laws of Vows.

3. Land (31-36)

Just before crossing the Jordan River into Canaan Israel decimated Midian (31) as ordered by God in 25:16-18. This harsh punishment was:

1. Judgment for sin of the Baal-Peor enticement.
2. To protect the Israelites from future temptations

There were two separate allotments of land:

1. Reubenites and Gadites saw the land of Gilead from the Dead Sea on the South to the Sea of Galilee on the North as perfect range land for their cattle. They ask special permission to stay. Moses was nervous about it but allowed them to return after they served in the army to conquer the Promised Land (32).

2. Each tribe inherited a land to be kept perpetually. Forty-eight cities including the cities of refuge were given to the Levites (35).

Chapter 33 details the travels of Israel. Chapter 34 apportions the land. Chapter 36 ensures that the inheritance stays within each tribe.

Homework

1. Deuteronomy
2. Reread the Pentateuch