

# Numbers

## Title

From the first chapter of Numbers we see the reason for the title: ***“Take a census of all the congregation of the children of Israel... You and Aaron shall number them by their armies” (1:2-3).*** A second census was taken in chapter 26. The LORD commanded the census in order to strengthen the people for their conquering march through the Promised Land. For this reason, only the armies of the tribes were numbered, once before the people rebelled, and again many years later as they prepared to enter the Promised Land for a second time. Based on the census Israel numbered some two and a half million people, setting the tone for the remainder of the book as the LORD miraculously cares for and provides for them all (14:34).

Despite the name, the numbering of the people makes up only a small part of the book (Chapters 1-8). The Hebrew title again comes from the first word of the book, *“And He said,”* though it was commonly, and more fittingly, referred to as, *“In the Wilderness.”* This is a much more descriptive title for the book since its chapters cover the 40 year history of Israel in the wilderness recording the events from the foot of Mt. Sinai to the plains of Moab, which is just South of the promised land of Canaan.

## Time Frame & Purpose

The book covers almost thirty-nine years (about 1444 - 1405 B.C.), covering the departure from the base of Mount Sinai to the plains of Moab, twice. The second trip to Moab was made necessary by Israel’s lack of trust in the LORD to deliver the Promised Land into their hand. As a result the Israelites wandered in the wilderness for forty years (14:34). It is in this wandering that we find the purpose for the book. It shows the longsufferingness of the LORD, the need to rest on the love of God and to focus on Christ. In addition, Israel’s faithlessness is contrasted with the LORD’s faithfulness and His continued grace and mercy in sustaining the

entire nation. In the same way, we are to trust that He will see us through as we journey in the wilderness of this sinful world, on our way to the Promised Land of eternal life.

## The Holy Writer

Moses (See the notes on Genesis through Leviticus). A number of New Testament passages associate events from Numbers with Moses (cf. John 3:14; Acts 7,13; 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Hebrews 3-4; and Jude 11). Beginning with the opening verse we find that more than eighty times ***“the LORD spoke to Moses” (1:1).*** Numbers 33:2 especially supports Moses as the holy writer: ***“Now Moses wrote down the starting points of their journeys at the command of the LORD.”***

## Christ In Numbers

There are a number of direct references to Christ contained within the book. There is the Brass Serpent in 21:4-9, which is a type of Christ (John 3:14). The rock that quenches the thirst of the people (20:9-13) is also a type of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). Balaam prophesies of the Messiah in 24:17. The red heifer sacrificed for the sins of the people in 19:1-10 is most certainly a reference to the Savior who died for the sins of all people.

On a related note, we find the Trinity in the so-called Aaronic Blessing (6:24-26), the words God wanted the Priests to use when blessing the people: ***“The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; the LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.”***

## Content

There are repeated rebellions mentioned in Numbers. Chapters 13-15 record the history leading up to the preparation for entrance into the promised land. The idea of spying out the land of Canaan was first thought up by the Children of Israel (Deut. 1:22). Moses then brought this idea to the LORD Who gave them approval and told them how it was to be done. When the spies went into the land they saw how prosperous it was, but also became afraid of the

people who lived in the land because of their size and strength. Remember that the Children of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for several hundred years, and were not trained warriors. The people of Canaan, on the other hand, were always fighting with each other and were battle hardened fighters. We might see how this could be frightening. But they had forgotten that the LORD was on their side, and that with the LORD they could do anything.

In Chapter 14 we find the people of Israel siding with the ten spies in their analysis of the people of that land, and refusing to enter the land as the LORD commanded them. They thought it would be impossible for them to overtake the native Canaanite peoples. Because of their lack of faith the LORD told them that no one over the age of 20 would enter the promised land (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, who had trusted in the LORD). Instead they would wander in the wilderness for 40 years as a judgment on the older generation for rejecting God's promise. This judgment was not because they complained, but because of their unbelief which was evidenced in their complaining.

More rebellion is spoken of in 14:39-45. When God forbid the people from entering the promised land, the people quickly changed their mind and decided to go ahead without the LORD, and were driven back with a smashing defeat. It is so typical of this people to do the exact opposite of what God says. Later on in 15:29-36, God shows how serious rebellion is in His eyes, with His punishment of rebellion.

On the heels of Leviticus and the laws that were set up for the good of the people, in Numbers we find more laws being added by God. Contained in Numbers are numerous laws which were formulated as needed, and as different situations arose as they spent those many years in the Sinai wilderness.

Much is also told us about Moses and his relationship with God as well as the responsibility which he was given by God. In Numbers 12:8 God says about Moses, "*I speak with him face to face.*" In several places Moses is portrayed like Christ, as God's chosen mediator between Himself and His people Israel.

In 20:7-13, we read about the sin that Moses committed which kept him from entering the promised land. His sin was two-fold: It began with a failure to trust and sanctify the LORD, giving Him the glory. But it was also his disobedience of God's command to speak to the rock (cf. Numbers 27:14; Deuteronomy 1:37; 3:26-27; and Psalm 106:32-33 which point out how Moses spoke harshly to the people). This may seem like an extreme punishment, especially when we see how long suffering the LORD was toward the people of Israel in spite of all of their disobedience. But we are reminded of the words of Jesus, who said, "*For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required*" (Luke 12:48). The LORD certainly had given Moses many gifts in order to lead and control so great a people, and so, much was also required of Moses in his role of leadership.

The book of Numbers closes with some civil instructions for Israel in preparation of their arrival in the Promised Land regarding the accommodations for the tribe of Levi and instructions concerning the cities of refuge. The book ends with instructions regarding the taking and dividing of the Promised Land between the twelve tribes.

## Outline

### I. The Preparation of the Old Generation to Inherit the Promised Land (1:1 - 10:10)

- A. The Organization of Israel. (1-4)
- B. The Sanctification of Israel. (5-10)

### II. The Failure of the Old Generation to Inherit the Promised Land (10:11 - 25:18)

- A. Israel's failure en route to Kadesh. (10-12)
- B. Israel's failure at Kadesh. (13-14)
- C. Israel's failure in the wilderness. (15-19)
- D. Israel's failure en route to Moab. (20-25)

### III. The Preparation of the New Generation to Inherit the Promised Land (26:1 - 36:13)

- A. The Reorganization of Israel. (26-27)
- B. The Regulations of offerings and vows. (28-30)
- C. The Conquest and Division of the promised land. (31-36)