

BOOK OF NUMBERS

Numbers in the Hebrew Bible, is called “Bemidhar,” i.e. “In the wilderness.” This is the fourth word in the first chapter and is a good description of the contents of the book. since it speaks of the wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness. The English title comes from the fact that in the book there are reports of two census being taken. (chap. 1 & 26).

The book records a journey which should have taken them about 40 days to complete, instead it took them 40 years. We cover the period from the close of the first year after the exodus from Egypt to the end of the period of the wanderings. Little is recorded of those long and weary years of wandering. The greater part of the record deals with the happenings of the last year.

Numbers describes the difficult adventures of the Israelites in the wilderness of Sinai. It details their rebellious murmurings and their habitual lapses into sin, and how God punished them as a result. Lack of faith and courage on the part of the Israelites were responsible for this long period of wanderings. The book also underscores the longsuffering of God and how He mercifully led them to safety and finally brought them to the Promised Land.

The Israelites were dependent every day during this period, upon the bounty of God. The daily provision of manna as food was a continuous expression of God’s care and goodness. The manna never failed, and the people were made to realize that this “food from heaven” was a gracious and miraculous dispensation of providence in their behalf. The same was true of God’s other merciful provisions, such as supplying them with water. Nehemiah stated that they lacked nothing (Neh. 9:21). They did not always respond as they should have to these blessings, a fact that is shown in their murmurings and rebellious attitude in general. When the Israelites needed something at a given moment, they often forgot God’s past goodness to them and failed to grasp the truth that His mercies in the past were pledges for the future.

A great lesson, “God will providentially care for His people, but there is a price to be paid for unfaithfulness.” Let’s get into the book.

I. Last Days of Encampment at Sinai (chapters 1-10)

A. The Israelites are still at Mt. Sinai. This book begins where Exodus left off.

B. In view of the fact that they were going to have to fight to conquer the land, God orders a census taken (1:3,4).

1. All males who were twenty and upward and who were able to go to war, were counted.

2. The Levites were exempt from war, thus they were not counted (1:47).

a. They were to care for the tabernacle (1:50,53)

b. Tremendous job when you consider that they moved from place to place.

3. The total number – 603,550 (1:46)

a. Keep in mind that this is only the males, age 20 and up who were able to go to war.

b. The total number of people has been estimated to be over 2 million people.

C. In chapter 2, he shows us how the tabernacle is to be the very center of the life of Israel (God is to be the center of our life today).

1. The tabernacle always faced east. The tribes were to encamp on all four sides.

2. God assigned a specific place for each tribe.

D. In Chapters 3 & 4, only the Levites were to care for the tabernacle and all things pertaining to it (Levites –Exod. 6:16-20; Moses and Aaron were Kohath’s grandsons).

1. God was very explicit that only the Levites were to care for the tabernacle, and they were to do it properly.

2. Remember Lev. 10–Nadab and Abihu.

3. To serve in the tabernacle had an age requirement. No younger than 30, no older than 50. (Sounds like a lot of preaching positions today).

4. The Kohathites were to carry certain things when they moved from place to place, but they were not to touch them. The priests would carefully wrap each thing, then the Kohathites

- would carry them (4:5, 15, 20).
5. The Levites were numbered (8,580)
- E. Miscellaneous laws and regulations were given in chapters 5 & 6.
1. Isolation of the unclean (5:1-4)
 2. Restitution of stolen property (5:5-10) [spiritual lesson: any sin against man is a sin against God (Gen. 39–Joseph; Luke 15–sinned against heaven)]
 3. Ordeal of Jealousy (5:11-31. Very unusual vow, or test.
 4. Regulations of the Nazarites.(6:1-21).
 - a. This is the only full explanation of the Nazarites (one who is separated, set apart) in O.T.
 - b. Nazarite vow was a voluntary vow.
 - c. Includes Samson --Judges 13:5; and John the baptizer --Luke 1:15.
 - d. Not to eat or drink anything from the vine.
 - e. He was not to have his hair cut or his beard shaven.
 - f. He was not to make himself unclean at the death of members of his family.
 5. The Priestly blessing (6:22-27). The climax to the whole blessing is “and give thee peace.”
 - a. The Hebrew word peace (shalom) means far more than we mean when we used the word.
 - b. The root meaning of the word was “completeness, wholeness.”
 6. The final weeks at Sinai are recorded in 7-9:14.
 - a. Offerings are made by the princes (heads of the tribes–chap. 7)
 - b. The Levites were consecrated in Chap. 8
 - c. They observed the first Passover feast in chap. 9.
 - d. The fiery cloud is described in more detail in chap. 9.
- II. From Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea (10-14).
- A. In chapters 10-12 the people journey from Mt. Sinai, to Kadesh-Barnea in wilderness of Paran.
1. How long had they been there?
 - a. In some ways it seemed an eternity. By actual count, it was eleven months and five days.
 - b. Now the Shekinah cloud of glory began moving once more.
 2. They now head to the “promised land.”
 3. In chap. 11, they complain about the lack of meat to eat.
 - a. The mixed multitude–unrelated families of uncertain ancestry (Exod. 12:38).
 - b. The complaining grew till all they could see was the troubles of that day. Are we like that?
 - c. God sent the quail, but also a plague (11:18-35). (esp. 11:22,23)
 4. Miriam and Aaron rebelled against Moses because of Ethiopian woman in chap. 12.
 - a. May have been the result of jealousy and envy.
 - b. Miriam was smitten with leprosy. Aaron repented (v.11).
 - c. Aaron was not smitten because he was the high priest, no leper could be high priest.
 - d. Moses prayed for her to be healed and God granted it.
- B. The Spies (13-14).
1. The twelve spies were chosen. “Scouts” might be a better name.
 2. Moses told them to go and find out some specific things (13:17-20).
 3. Their report (13:26-33).
 - a. Only Joshua and Caleb had confidence that they could take the land with God’s help.
 - b. The other 10 doubted, thus they gave an unfavorable report.
 4. People complained in chap. 14.
 - a. They even suggest appointing a new captain and going back to Egypt (14:4).
 - b. The troubles of the present made the past troubles fade from their minds.
 - c. They were so close to the promised land (c. 2 weeks) and yet so far away.
 - d. Chose to follow the majority, but majority opinion does not determine truth (Matt.7:13f)
 - e. After Joshua and Caleb appealed to the people again, they tried to stone them (14:10).
 - f. God’s punishment is announced (14:26-34).

(1) No one over 20 (except Joshua and Caleb) would ever enter the land (v.29).

(2) All Israel would wander 40 years in the wilderness (v.34).

g. They people decided to go now and try to take the land (14:40-45).

III. Wilderness Wanderings (15-19) [approx. 38 years]

A. Some laws concerning offerings are in chapter 15.

B. The old attitude of rebellion creeps in again in chap 16.

1. Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebelled.

2. They were questioning God's duly appointed authority (v.3). [Same occurs today]

3. After Korah and his group were destroyed, the people murmured against Moses and Aaron (41)

C. Chapter 17, God makes it very clear who has the authority by the budding of Aaron's rod.

D. Chapter 18 we see how the Levites are to receive their inheritance.

E. Chapter 19 shows various laws of purification (Red heifer offering which seems to have been instituted as atonement for a particularly gross sin; Priest considered unclean after offering 19:20ff).

IV. Last Years of the Wanderings (20-36).

A. In chapter 20, we read of Miriam's death, the mistake of Moses and Aaron, and the death of Aaron

1. Moses apparently took credit for bring the water out of the rock. (20:10).

2. They were not allowed to enter the promised land (20:12).

B. Chapter 21, the people murmur again.

1. God sent the serpents among them (21:4-9)

2. John 3:14f

C. Chapters 22-25, we meet the character Balaam.

1. Balak, king of Moab, conspired with Balaam to curse the Israelites.

2. God, however, caused Balaam to bless the Israelites each time they were supposed to be cursed

3. In spite of his failure to curse Israel, Balaam nearly succeeded in destroying that nation by craftily arranging for the Moabite women to sexually seduce the Israelite men (25:1; 31;16).

D. In Chapter 26, they arrive in the plains east of the Jordon.

1. Second census taken.

2. First census—603,550; Second census—601,730 (26:51)

E. In chapter 27, Joshua is chosen to lead the people into the promised land.

F. Various laws were given in chapters 28-30

G. Chapter 31, the Midianites were exterminated.

H. Before the children of Israel crossed the Jordon, some of the tribes (2½) desired territory east of the Jordon (Chapter 32).

1. Verse 6—shows Moses concern.

2. They promise to do their part (vss.16-19)

3. Numbers 32:23—be sure your sins will find you out.

I. Orders are given for the conquest and division of Canaan (33-35).

J. Chapter 36 deals with marriage of an heiress and her inheritance.

Con: the basic message of the book of Number is best stated in Rom. 11:22.. "the goodness and severity of God..." We must understand the true nature of God. We must beware of apostasy. We must beware of complaining and murmuring. We need to lift Christ up to a lost and dying world. We need to be subject to his authority. We all need to be actively involved in the Lord's work (32:6).

They were so close to the promised land, yet they didn't make it. Heb. 3:19 says it was because of unbelief. A lot of people today are close to salvation, to heaven, yet they won't make it.