

Highlights in the Book of Numbers

- Key Thought:** The book of Numbers provides the account of the young Nation's 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. It is often referred to as "the book of wanderings." The theme is one of testing and in many ways demonstrates God's patience, holiness, forgiveness, faithfulness, encouragement and presence.
- Book Name:** Name of the Hebrew book is *Bamidbar* – meaning "in the wilderness." The name "Numbers" comes from the two census numberings of Numbers ch 1 and ch. 26.
- Key Passages:** Num 6:24-27 The priestly blessing and its meaning
Num 20:13 – Moses cannot enter the Promised Land
Chapters 13-14 – The spies and the reasons for the wanderings
Num 14:22-23 – Reason why the people cannot enter the land
Num 35:34 – The Lord promises His presence
- Author:** Moses
- Historical Context:** Date of Exodus: 1446 (the early/conservative date), hence wanderings 1445 BC – 1405 BC
Pharaoh of Exodus: Amenhotep II (1450 – 1424)
Israel spent a year at Sinai, leaving after the 2nd Passover (Num 9:1)

Outline of Numbers

- I. Preparation for the Journey (Chapters 1- 10:10)
 - A. The Census & Organization of People (Ch 1-2)
 - B. Selection and Duties of Levites (3:1-4:49)
 1. Levites-ministerial duties by families
 - a. Aaron's descendents – Priests
 - b. Kohathites – Tabernacle Furnishings
 - c. Gershonites – Tabernacle Coverings
 - d. Merarites – Wood and Metal things
 - C. Setting Apart of Israel (5:1-10:10)
- II. Failure of the Old Generation to Inherit the Land (10:11-25:18)
 - A. Repeated cycles of failure, consequences, intercession, and instructions. Notable stories include:
 1. Discontentment with manna – quail (chapter 11)
 2. Dissension of Aaron & Miriam, Moses intercedes (chapter 12)
 3. Failure at Kadesh (spies report) (chapters 13-14)
 4. Korah's Rebellion & Aaron's Rod (chapters 16-17)
 5. Moses failure at Meribah (20:1-13) Edom causes 180 mile detour (20:14-21:35)
 6. The bronze serpent (21:4-9)
 7. Key military victories east of the Jordan (21:10-35)
 8. Balaam & Israel (22:1-25:18, c.f. 30:8, 16; 2 Pet 2:15-16)
- III. Preparing the New Generation to Enter into the Promised Land (26:1-27:11)
 - A. Second Census, Methods for dividing the land (26:1-27:11)
 - B. Joshua the new leader (27:12-23)
 - C. Regulations and Offerings (chapters 28-30)
 - D. Early conquests and division of the land (31:1-36:13)

Devotional Thoughts for Numbers

1. What thoughts do you have concerning the repeated failures of the people of Israel recorded in Numbers? Consider each of the following groups: a) The people's failures, b) The leader's failures (Aaron, Miriam, Korah), and c) Moses failures.

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2. Consider chapter 11. How does God respond to Moses' complaints in v. 10-16? How does this compare with Moses in Exod. 32:11 f and Numbers 14:11 ff? What insight does this give us into God's dealings with us in difficult times?

3. The big failure in Numbers is found in chapters 13-14. Identify three applications from this section.

4. What cautions do we get from the life of Balaam and his subsequent influence (22:1-25:18, 30:8, 16; 2 Pet 2:15-16).

5. Why would you think God would establish special cities in the new land as described in chapter 35: How is this summarized in 35:34?

Table of the Two Censuses (i.e. the "numbers" of Numbers)

Tribe	First Census (Num 1)	Second Census (Num 26)	Difference
Reuben	46,500	43,730	-2,770
Simeon	59,300	22,200	-37,100
Gad	45,600	40,500	-5,100
Judah	74,600	76,500	1,900
Issachar	54,400	64,300	9,900
Zebulun	57,400	60,500	3,100
Ephraim	40,500	32,500	-8,000
Manasseh	32,200	52,700	20,500
Benjamin	35,400	45,600	10,200
Dan	62,700	64,400	1,700
Asher	41,500	53,400	11,900
Naphtali	53,400	45,400	-8,000
TOTAL	603,550	601,730	-1,820
Levi (Nu 3:46)	22,000	23,000	1,000

Levite Family	Census (Num 4)
Kohathites	2750
Gershonites	2630
Merarites	3200

Note: The general census only accounted for men over the age of 20. Numbers 1 gives the number when the people were ready to leave Sinai and head to Canaan, Num 26 gives the number near the end of the 40 years of wandering after those over 20 at the time of the spies in Numbers 13-14 died out. The count of the Levites was separate from the others. The Levites are separated to the Lord in place of the first born of all the children of Israel (3:12). The census allowed for God to show with precision the setting apart of the first born to Him (22,273 firstborn of Israel, 22,000 men of Levi plus 273x5 shekels). In Numbers 4, the men eligible for temple service (between the ages of 30 and 50) are counted in the individual families. Simeon's numbers dropped a significant amount. A possible explanation is that the man killed by Phineas with regard to the incident of Baal of Peor (Num 25:1-14) was from the tribe of Simeon. 24,000 died in that plague and it is possible that men from the tribe of Simeon were heavily involved in that sin.