

Intro to NUMBERS

Author: Moses

- Intro to Numbers

The Hebrew title of this book was taken from the words of the first verse, and literally meant “in the wilderness.” When the Hebrew OT was translated into Greek (the Septuagint), it was renamed, “Arithmoi,” which means “numbers,” or a counting. Much of this book is a census of the tribes of Israel.

Historical Setting: The account covers the period between Israel’s departure from Egypt and the arrival in Canaan. Exactly one year after they fled Egypt, Israel gathered at Mt. Sinai to receive the law. Numbers picks up the story one month after the last chapter of Exodus and covers the 40 years journey to the promised land.

Themes and Divisions of the Book: If the theme of Leviticus was “Be Holy for I am Holy,” then the theme of Numbers very well may be, “Making you Holy is going to be hard work for both of us.” The principle lesson in the book of Numbers is that God’s people must walk by faith, trusting His promises if they are to move forward.

- Summary of the Book of Numbers

- Numbering God's people

God orders Moses, in the wilderness of Sinai, to take the number of those able to bear arms—of all the men “from twenty years old and upward,” the tribe of Levi being excepted, and to appoint princes over each tribe. 603,550 Israelites are found to be fit for military service. (In chapter 26, a generation later, approximately forty years after wandering in the desert, the Lord God orders a second census). Moses consecrates the Levites for the service of the Tabernacle in the place of the first-born sons, who hitherto had performed that service. The Levites are divided into three families, the Gershonites, the Kohathites, and the Merarites, each under a chief, and all headed by one prince, Eleazar, son of Aaron. Preparations are then made for resuming the march to the Promised Land. Various ordinances and laws are decreed.

- Forty years in the wilderness

The first journey of the Israelites after the Tabernacle had been constructed is commenced. The people murmur against God and are punished by fire; Moses complains of the stubbornness of the Israelites and is ordered to choose seventy elders to assist him in the government of the people. Miriam and Aaron insult Moses at Hazeroth, which angers God; Miriam is punished with leprosy and is shut out of camp for seven days, at the end of which the Israelites proceed to the desert of Paran. Twelve spies are sent out into Canaan and come back to report to Moses. Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies, tell that the land is abundant and is “flowing with milk and honey”; the other spies say that it is inhabited by giants, and the Israelites refuse to enter the land. Yahweh decrees that the Israelites will be punished for their loss of faith by having to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Moses is ordered to make plates to cover the altar with the two hundred fifty censers left after the destruction of Korah’s band. The children of Israel murmur against Moses and Aaron on account of the death of Korah’s men and are stricken with the plague, with 14,700 perishing.

Aaron and his family are declared by God to be responsible for any iniquity committed in connection with the sanctuary. The Levites are again appointed to help in the keeping of the Tabernacle. The Levites are ordered to surrender to the priests a part of the tithes taken to them.

- Preparations for crossing the Jordan

After Miriam's death at Kadesh Barnea, the Israelites blame Moses for the lack of water. Moses, ordered by God to speak to a rock, disobeys by striking it, and is punished by the announcement that he shall not enter Canaan. The King of Edom refuses permission to the Israelites to pass through his land. Aaron dies on Mount Hor. The Israelites are bitten by fiery serpents for speaking against God and Moses. A brazen serpent is made to ward off these serpents.

The new census, taken just before the entry into the land of Canaan, gives the total number of males from twenty years and upward as 601,730, the number of the Levites from a month old and upward as 23,000. The land shall be divided by lot. The daughters of Zelophehad, their father having no sons, share in the allotment. Moses is ordered to appoint Joshua as his successor.

The Israelites massacre the people of Midian population. The Reubenites and the Gadites request Moses to assign them the land east of the Jordan. After their promise to go before the army to help in the conquest of the land west of the Jordan, Moses grants their request. The land east of the Jordan is divided among the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

The stations at which the Israelites halted during their forty years' wanderings in the wilderness are enumerated. While in the plains of Moab the Israelites are told that, after crossing the Jordan, they should exterminate the Canaanites and destroy their idols. The boundaries of the land are spelled out. The land is to be divided among the tribes under the superintendence of Eleazar, Joshua, and twelve princes, one of each tribe.

Chapter Synopsis:

Chapter 1 - Census of the entire Israelite Community

Chapter 2 – The Arrangement of the Tribal Camps

Chapter 3 – The accounting of the Levites and families

Chapter 4 – The accounting of the Kohathite, Gershonite, and Merarite branches of the Levites

Chapter 5 – Purification of the Camps

Chapter 6 – The Nazirites and the Priestly Blessing

Chapter 7 – The Dedication of the Tabernacle

Chapter 8 – Consecration of the Levites

Chapter 9 – Celebration of the Passover

Chapter 10 – The Silver Trumpets and Departure from Mt. Sinai

Chapter 11 – **God's Provision of Quail**

Chapter 12 – Moses Opposed by Miriam and Aaron

Chapter 13 – Moses dispatches spies to scout Canaan / Scouting Report

Chapter 14 – Rebellion of the people

Chapter 15 – **God's call for offerings to be made**

Chapter 16 – Mutiny in the camp

Chapter 17 – **The Budding of Aaron's Staff**

Chapter 18 – Responsibilities of the Priests and the Levites

Chapter 19 – Responsibilities of the Priests and the Levites, continued

Chapter 20 – **Moses strikes the rock and is forbidden to enter the Promised Land / Aaron's Death**

Chapter 21 – Conquering the Land

Chapter 22 – Balaam and His Donkey

Chapter 23, 24 – **Balaam's Oracles**

Chapter 25 – Israel Compromised

Chapter 26 – The Second Census

Chapter 27 – Joshua named as successor to Moses

Chapter 28, 29 – Instructions of Offerings and Feasts

Chapter 30 – Misc. Vows

Chapter 31 – Midianite Vengeance

Chapter 32 – The Gadites and the Reubenites

Chapter 33 – **Stages in Israel's Journey**

Chapter 34 – Boundaries of Canaan

Chapter 35 – Cities of Refuge

Chapter 36 – **Zelophehad's Daughters**