

NUMBERS

Study Guide

AUTHOR

Numbers 1:1 implies the author of the book as Moses and Numbers 33:1-2 further support Moses' authorship.

DATE

Numbers covers a span of about 39 years of wilderness travels. Since Moses did not enter the Promised Land himself, his authorship means that this book was written while still in the desert, yet somewhere shortly before Israel did enter the Promised Land. Therefore, Numbers was written somewhere around 1404-1400 B.C.

BASIC INFORMATION

The title of "Numbers" is actually from the Greek title *arithmoi*, meaning numbers. The Hebrew title for the book is actually "In the Wilderness," taken from the first verse of the book where the Lord spoke to Moses in the "tent of meeting in the Desert of Sinai." (Num. 1:1 NIV)

This book serves as a major transition document within the overall Pentateuch. The travels of the first wilderness generation following the exodus lead into the second generation appointed to inherit the Promised Land. Numbers also establishes the leadership transition from Moses to Joshua. As pastor laian Duguid well stated, "The story of the book of Numbers is written to a people whose lives are lived between the accomplishing of their redemption and its consummation, between the exodus and the Promised Land." This means Numbers has much to speak to each of us as we live our lives between salvation in Christ and our future Promised Land of heaven!!

STRUCTURE

Numbers is easily broken into three main sections:

- I. Preparation for & Departure from Sinai (1:1-10:36)
- II. Failure of the First Generation to Inherit the Promised Land (11:1-25:18)
- III. Preparation of the Second Generation to Inherit the Promised Land (26:1-36:13)

KEY WORDS

- **God**
- **Jesus** (foreshadowing, theophanies, type, etc.)
- **Holy Spirit**
- **Israel/Sons of Israel/the people**
- **Holy/Consecrate/Set Apart**
- **Atonement** (NLT uses "purify/made right")
- **Sin**
- **Complain/Grumble**

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

Because it's easy to get bogged down in the details of Numbers, we're going to do the summary questions differently so you can stick with the plot of the story and grasp what the text is trying to communicate.

Chapters 1- 10

A couple things of note before starting this section. First, the listing of the tribes in 1:5-15 is in an interesting order. Remember, the Levites belonged to the Lord, so they are not included in the 12-tribe headcount and neither is Dinah, Jacob's only daughter. Joseph was allotted a double portion; therefore, his sons are listed in his place and brings the number of tribes to a complete 12.

Birth Order (Mother)	Numbers 1:5-15
Reuben (Leah)	Leah's Children
Simon (Leah)	• Reuben
Levi (Leah)	• Simeon
Judah (Leah)	• Judah
Dan (Bilhah, Rachel's servant)	• Issachar
Naphtali (Bilhah)	• Zebulun
Gad (Zilpah, Leah's servant)	Rachel's Children
Asher (Zilpah)	• Ephraim (son of Joseph)
Issachar (Leah)	• Manasseh (son of Joseph)
Zebulun (Leah)	• Benjamin
Dinah (Leah)	Servants' Children
Joseph (Rachel)	• Dan
Benjamin (Rachel)	• Asher
	• Gad
	• Naphtali

Second, directional orientation was significant in the Bible. The east was considered forward and therefore the most important direction, followed by south, west, and then the north.

With these things in mind:

- What differences do you notice between the listing of tribes in 1:5-15 vs. 1:22-43? Why are they different?
- What do you notice & learn from the arrangement of the tribes, Levites, and tabernacle in the wilderness camp? What does this arrangement teach about God & His people?
- What is the total number given for the first census (2:32)?
- Given the list in 3:17-20, what differences do you see in the Levites' placement in the camp? Why do you think that is? Take note of the different Levitical clans & their responsibilities.
- What is the lesson behind the jealous husband in ch. 5?
- What do you notice about the attitude of the people in ch. 7? Take note of the gifts given & the nature of those gifts. What were the purposes behind the gifts given?
- What do ch. 1-10 teach about God & His ways?

Chapters 11-25

- For what reasons was Israel grumbling? How was grumbling received by Moses? The Lord? What do you think was at the core of their grumbling? (Look all throughout ch. 11-25!)
- What do you learn about intercession through the actions of Moses & Aaron? (Again, look throughout the entire section of ch. 11-25.)
- What similarities & differences are there to Pentecost (Acts 2) in Num. 11:25-29? What is the importance of Eldad & Medad? Why do you think Joshua was so concerned about this? How is Moses' response significant?
- What is the core difference between the scouts' reports of the Promised Land? How did the people reveal the true condition of their hearts?
- What do you learn about sin throughout this section? The nature of it, the kinds, the result?
- What is the lesson to learn from the man who disobeyed the Sabbath (ch. 15)?
- What do you learn from Aaron's budding staff? What about the priestly responsibilities? How does this apply today?
- Why is Moses judged for striking the rock? Is his punishment fair? What becomes apparent as the requirement for entry into the Promised Land?
- What is to be learned about the bronze serpent?
- Describe Balaam's obedience & disobedience? What does this speak of his character? What are his goals? What does this teach about blessings of God, curses of God, and one's ability to affect blessings of God?

Chapters 26-36

- What was the purpose of the second census? And what does the mention of Korah's sons allude to? How is their presence also a testament to God's faithfulness?
- The daughters of Zelophehad make an appearance in ch. 26 & 36. What do you learn about them & the nature of their requests? What does this teach about God?
- What do you notice about the frequency of offerings in ch. 28-29? What were the different kinds of offerings & what does this teach us about fellowship with the Lord?
- What do you learn about the importance of vows & oaths? Is there a broader picture of the husband/father and wife/daughter when it comes to vows? If so, what might this be?
- Why does the Lord declare war on the Midianites? What does this teach?
- The Hebrew word for "they saw" in Num. 32:1 has significant meaning. It means to see with the eyes in the natural & often such sight led to poor decisions. This is the same verb used when Eve "saw" the fruit was good for food & ate of it and when Lot "saw" the land of the Jordan was well-watered and chose to live near Sodom. In light of this:
 - What was influencing the tribes of Reuben and Gad?
 - In Moses' initial response, he accuses the Reubenites & Gadites of being like whom?

- Why do you think their counter-offer was accepted? How is their offer actually a statement of faith?
- In chapter 34, there are 42 stages listed in Israel's journey, but the journey into the Promised Land is not yet complete. With numbers being significant to Hebrew understanding, this chapter in essence outlines six sets of seven, or six completed periods of wandering.
 - How would recalling this list of places been encouraging to Israel? How might it have been somber?
 - In light of Israel's completion of six periods of wandering, how do verses 50-56 speak to what the seventh period will be? How was that hopeful for them & how is it hopeful for us today?
- What do you learn about cities of refuge? What was the dual purpose of these cities? How did they serve the purposes of justice? Do you see any irony in the Levites living in these cities (Gen. 34:1-31, 49:5-7)? What does this demonstrate about God?

OVERALL SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did the Lord teach YOU through what you read?
- What do you learn about God the Father? Where/how is Jesus & the Holy Spirit represented in the book?
- **KEY WORD** – How would you summarize what you've read into one word or very short phrase? Why did you choose that?
- **KEY VERSE(S) & CHAPTER** – Like key words, key verse & chapter reflect something that stood out to you from the book. It may be a means of summarizing the book, or it may be something that the Lord taught you through that verse & chapter. So, what are they for you and why?