

Numbers

I. The Main Idea of Numbers

The book of Numbers explains why the first generation of Israelites died in the wilderness. It highlights God's faithfulness in spite of Israel's faithlessness.

II. Outline of Numbers

Numbers 1-10	Organization of First Generation at Sinai
Numbers 11-25	Rebellion and Death of the First Generation in the Wilderness
Numbers 26-36	Organization of New Generation on the Plains of Moab

III. Interpretive Keys to Numbers

- Genre: Historical Narrative
 - The author of Numbers intends to communicate historical events. It doesn't tell us everything we may want to know about history, but what it does tell us is a truthful account of the past.
- The two censuses highlight the two generations within the book:
 - In Chapter 1, the generation that left Egypt is numbered (minus the Levites). This generation was faithless to God and died in the wilderness.
 - In Chapter 26, the generation that will enter Canaan is numbered (minus the Levites). This generation had been spiritually prepared by the wilderness experience to be faithful to God and inherit the land.
 - The totals in these two censuses are very close:
 - 1st Generation: 603,550 (Num. 1:46)

- 2nd Generation: 601,730 (Num. 26:51)
- What is the point of all these numbers?
 - First, the census helped determine who received which territory after the Conquest was completed. A larger population resulted in a larger area of land. A smaller population resulted in a smaller territory.
 - “The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Among these the land shall be divided for inheritance according to the number of names. To a large tribe you shall give a large inheritance, and to a small tribe you shall give a small inheritance; every tribe shall be given its inheritance in proportion to its list. But the land shall be divided by lot. According to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. Their inheritance shall be divided according to lot between the larger and the smaller.’” (Num. 26:52-56)
 - Second, God was proving His word came true and His judgment was fully carried out. The conclusion of Numbers 26 states:
 - “But among these there was not one of those listed by Moses and Aaron the priest, who had listed the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai. For the Lord had said of them, ‘They shall die in the wilderness.’ Not one of them was left, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.” (Num. 26:64-65)

IV. Key Passages of Numbers

- Num. 13-14 The Rebellion of the First Generation
 - Twelve spies sent out (one from each tribe) to scout out the land.
 - Ten of the spies discouraged the people:
 - Numbers 13:28 “However, the people who dwell in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large. And besides, we saw the descendants of Anak there.”
 - Numbers 13:31-33 “Then the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.’ So they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, ‘The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.’”

- Caleb & Joshua encouraged the people:
 - Numbers 13:30 "But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, 'Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.'"
 - Numbers 14:7-9 "The land, which we passed through to spy it out, is an exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, he will bring us into this land and give it to us, a land that flows with milk and honey. Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not fear the people of the land, for they are bread for us. Their protection is removed from them, and the Lord is with us; do not fear them."
- The people's reaction:
 - "Why is the Lord bringing us into the land, to fall by the sword?" (Num. 14:3a)
 - "Our wives and our little ones will become a prey." (Num. 14:3b)
 - "Let's go back to Egypt" (Num. 14:4)
- God's reaction: The Rebellion of the first generation.
 - "I will wipe out this people and start over with Moses." (Num. 14:11-12) But Moses intercedes for the people and God grants forgiveness.
 - "None of these men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test these ten times and have not obeyed my voice, shall see the land that I swore to give to their fathers. And none of these who despised me shall see it." (Num. 14:22-23)
 - "But your little ones, who you said would become a prey, I will bring in, and they shall know the land that you have rejected." (Num. 14:31)
 - "According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, a year for each day, you shall bear your iniquity forty years, and you shall know my displeasure." (Num. 14:34)
- Geography of the Wilderness Wanderings:
 - Much of the wilderness wandering happened in the Wilderness of Zin and the Wilderness of Paran.
 - When Edom refused to let the Israelites pass through their land, they had to travel about 160 miles out of their way to go around the land of Edom (80 miles south to the Red Sea, then 80 miles back north).
 - Instead of traveling through Edom and Moab on the King's Highway (a route with natural resources) they were forced to travel on the Wilderness Highway, skirting the edge of the Arabian Desert.
 - Finally, Israel camped in the Jordan Valley on the Plains of Moab.

- Num. 23-24 Balaam's Oracles
 - Balaam's oracles amplify God's promises made to Abraham, and they position Israel in the center of God's blessings.
 - **Balaam's First Blessing** (Num. 23:7-10): Focuses on the promise to Abraham about his offspring being numerous (Gen. 13:16). "Who can count the dust of Jacob or number the fourth part of Israel?"
 - **Balaam's Second Blessing** (Num. 23:18-24): Focuses on the promises to Abraham about protection (Gen. 15:1) through the divine presence. "He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob, nor has he seen trouble in Israel. The Lord their God is with them."
 - **Balaam's Third Blessing** (Num. 24:3-9):
 - Focuses on the promises to Abraham about the land (Gen. 17:6) by describing well-watered forests and gardens.
 - Echoes Jacob's prophecy about Judah: "He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up?" (cf. Gen. 49:9).
 - Also repeats the refrain, "Blessed are those who bless you, and cursed are those who curse you" (cf. Gen. 12:3).
 - **Balaam's Fourth Blessing** (Num. 24:15-24) Predicts a future king in Israel, focusing on God's promise that kings would come from Abraham (Gen. 17:6, 16; cf. Gen. 35:11; 49:10).
 - **Key Verse: Num. 23:19.** "God is not a man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?"
 - The promises made to Abraham and Israel are secure because God keeps his word! It is futile to try to curse a people God has chosen to bless.

V. Messianic Elements within Numbers

Prophecies:

- Balaam's Final Prophecy - Numbers 24:15-19

- Prophecy of a Future king of Israel, referred to metaphorically as a “star” and “scepter.” This king will conquer Israel’s enemies once and for all, and will exercise dominion over other nations.

Foreshadowing Events:

- Water from the Rock – Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:20-13
 - Foreshadowing how Jesus would be a life-giving spring of water.

Types of Christ:

- The Bronze Serpent – Numbers 21:4-9 (cf. John 3:14-16 and Galatians 3:13)
 - Just as the bronze serpent was raised up, Jesus was raised up.
 - Just as those who looked on the serpent with faith were saved, those who look on Jesus with faith are saved.
 - Just as the bronze serpent was the form of the curse that was sent upon the people, Jesus became a curse for us.