

## Numbers 00 Overview

Overview of Numbers

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**Introduction:** This first lesson in Numbers will not be on Chapter 1 as we normally do, but will first be an overview of all things we will be covering and highlighting some of the upcoming events in the book. While studying this series on Numbers, we need to keep in mind that while we are studying about the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, the whole bible is really about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The law and the prophets were all used to bring the people to a point to be ready for the coming Messiah. People in the Old Testament were saved by trusting God by faith and looking forward to the promised Messiah to come. We look back, and trust that Jesus did come by faith. To get a feel for the book, let's read the first three verses in chapter 1.

### I. The Book of Numbers

*Num 1:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying,*  
*Num 1:2 Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls;*  
*Num 1:3 From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.*

The Hebrews have two names for this book: (1) meaning, "And He said," based upon the custom of using the first word of the text as the title; and (2) meaning "In the wilderness." This is the fifth word in the text and is more descriptive of the contents of the book. The name "Numbers" is from the Latin Vulgate title, Liber Numeri, "Book of Numbers," which is based upon the two numberings or censuses which we read about there in verse 3 of Chapter 1 and a later count in Chapter 26. i

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iW.A. Criswell, *Believer's study Bible [computer file], electronic ed.*, Logos Library System, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1991 by the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies.

The second Hebrew meaning of “bemidbar” really fits this book since most of it concerns the wandering in the wilderness of Sinai. We know the reason that the children of Israel were not allowed to enter directly to the promised land of Canaan was due to the ten spies who spied out the land and returned with a bad report. Twelve men went over, but only Joshua and Caleb thought that they should go in and possess the land. In a few minutes, we will read that account over in Chapter 13 and 14 and make a few comments about those spies.

## II. Historical Setting

The book of Numbers covers the period of time between Israel’s departure from Egypt where they were serving as slaves for 400 years and their arrival in Canaan. The nation of Israel was actually in Egypt for over 430 years, but only in captivity the last 400. I’m sure most of you are familiar with the account of how God chose Moses to be the man who would go to Pharaoh and ultimately lead them out of the land.

One year after they fled from Egypt, they gather at Mount Sinai to receive instructions concerning the law and the Tabernacle. (This was recorded in the book of Leviticus). When you read the last verse of Exodus Chapter 40, there is a one month gap before Numbers begins. So this covers those 40 years of the winding journey that started in Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, and then on through various places of the wilderness, and finally to the plains of Moab across the Jordan River from Jericho.

Let’s turn over to Chapter 13 and read why the people had to make this long and winding 40 year journey in the wilderness.

*Num 13:16 These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua.*

*Num 13:17 And Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said unto them, Get you up this way southward, and go up into the mountain:*

*Num 13:18 And see the land, what it is; and the people that dwelleth therein, whether they be strong or weak, few or many;*

*Num 13:19 And what the land is that they dwell in, whether it be good or bad; and what cities they be that they dwell in, whether in tents, or in strong holds;*

*Num 13:20 And what the land is, whether it be fat or lean, whether there be wood therein, or not. And be ye of good courage, and bring of the fruit of the land. Now the time was the time of the firstripe grapes.*

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*Num 13:23 And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.*

Num 13:24 The place was called the brook Eshcol, because of the cluster of grapes which the children of Israel cut down from thence.

Num 13:25 And they returned from searching of the land after forty days.

Upon returning, the twelve spies gave their account of the land.

*Num 13:26 And they went and came to Moses, and to Aaron, and to all the congregation of the children of Israel, unto the wilderness of Paran, to Kadesh; and brought back word unto them, and unto all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land.*

*Num 13:27 And they told him, and said, We came unto the land whither thou sentest us, and surely it floweth with milk and honey; and this is the fruit of it.*

*Num 13:28 Nevertheless the people be strong that dwell in the land, and the cities are walled, and very great: and moreover we saw the children of Anak there.*

*Num 13:29 The Amalekites dwell in the land of the south: and the Hittites, and the Jebusites, and the Amorites, dwell in the mountains: and the Canaanites dwell by the sea, and by the coast of Jordan.*

*Num 13:30 And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.*

*Num 13:31 But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we.*

*Num 13:32 And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in it are men of a great stature.*

*Num 13:33 And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.*

*Num 14:1 And all the congregation lifted up their voice, and cried; and the people wept that night.*

*Num 14:2 And all the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron: and the whole congregation said unto them, Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! or would God we had died in this wilderness!*

*Num 14:3 And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?*

*Num 14:4 And they said one to another, Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt.*

*Num 14:5 Then Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before all the assembly of the congregation of the children of Israel.*

*Num 14:6 And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched the land, rent their clothes:*

*Num 14:7 And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land.*

*Num 14:8 If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey.*

*Num 14:9 Only rebel not ye against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us: fear them not.*

*Num 14:10 But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel.*

*Num 14:11 And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? and how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them?*

*Num 14:12 I will smite them with the pestilence, and disinherit them, and will make of thee a greater nation and mightier than they.*

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Moses interceded for the people, and the Lord did not destroy the people.

*Num 14:22 Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice;*

*Num 14:23 Surely they shall not see the land which I swore unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it:*

*Num 14:24 But my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him, and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went; and his seed shall possess it.*

*Num 14:25 (Now the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwelt in the valley.) To morrow turn you, and get you into the wilderness by the way of the Red sea.*

*Num 14:26 And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying,*

*Num 14:27 How long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me? I have heard the murmurings of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me.*

*Num 14:28 Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the LORD, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you:*

*Num 14:29 Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me,*

*Num 14:30 Doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.*

*Num 14:31 But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.*

*Num 14:32 But as for you, your carcasses, they shall fall in this wilderness.*

*Num 14:33 And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness.*

*Num 14:34 After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise.*

So because of unbelief in the Lord, this is why they had to wander the forty years in the wilderness of Sinai. They would not have had to do this had it not been for a lack of faith. We need to learn from men like Joshua and Caleb, and believe the Lord and trust Him.

*Num 13:30 And Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.*

### **III. The Theme of Numbers**

The principal lesson of Numbers is that God's people must walk by faith and trust God's promises if they want to move forward. Over 2,000 years have passed, and this truth is still just as real today.

To build a successful church and to reach the lost, we must do things God's way and believe the plans and methods that God laid down in His word are the way to do it. We may not see huge numbers, but God has seemingly always done His work with a faithful few. When we stand by God's promises and believe His word, God is pleased with us.

In reinforcing the this theme of trust and faith, the book recounts the unbelief and discontent of the people in general in Numbers 11:1 and that of Miriam and Aaron in Chapter 12:1.

*Num 11:1 And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.*

*Num 11:2 And the people cried unto Moses; and when Moses prayed unto the LORD, the fire was quenched.*

*Num 11:3 And he called the name of the place Taberah: because the fire of the LORD burnt among them.*

*Num 11:4 And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat?*

*Num 11:5 We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic:*

*Num 11:6 But now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes.*

We see that the people were not content to be fed with bread from heaven that God provided by the manna. They sound a little like a lot of us in the church today. Many times we get more worried about the next meal that we will eat than doing the Will of the Lord in our lives. We need to always put God first.

*Num 12:1 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman.*

God apparently was not pleased that Moses had taken the Ethiopian woman to be his wife rather than one of the children of Israel. We know there are commands in the new testament warning us to not be unequally yoked with those who do not know the Lord.

There were three other accounts of the people showing a lack of faith and being discontent. One was in the verses we read in Chapter 14 where the people did not believe God there at Kadesh-barnea and would not enter the Promised Land. Then there was the account of Moses' failure and the worship of idols.

*Num 20:8 Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink.*

*Num 20:9 And Moses took the rod from before the LORD, as he commanded him.*

*Num 20:10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the congregation together before the rock, and he said unto them, Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?*

*Num 20:11 And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also.*

*Num 20:12 And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.*

Moses was told to speak to the rock the second time, but he rather chose to smote it again. This upset the Lord very much because it marred the type of Christ. He was smitten on Calvary only once, not twice, for our sins. And all types should be perfect. Because of Moses' failure to follow the Lord's command, he was not allowed to enter into the Promised Land.

*Num 25:1 And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab.*

*Num 25:2 And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods.*

*Num 25:3 And Israel joined himself unto Baalpeor: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel.*

You would have thought after what they had suffered in Egypt, that they would have learned their lesson. But again they fail and worship these false gods. Yet, in spite of all these repeated failures, the covenant keeping God whom we serve still supported the people.

And after all those years of rebellion and wandering in the desert, God finally as promised brought them to the land of Canaan. We have many accounts in the New Testament that remind believers of the seriousness of sin using examples from the book of numbers. We won't read them all, but here is a list of some.

John 3:13 compared to Numbers 21:9  
I Cor 10:5-11 compared to Numbers 14:29-35

2 Pet. 2:15-16 (as well as Rev 2:14) compared to Num. 22-24

Jude 11 compared to Numbers 16 and 27:3

We need to learn from these errors, and try not to make the same mistakes.

Many of the outlines we will be using are based upon the Ryrie Study Bible. We will not hold these guidelines higher in standard than God's Word. Dr. Ryrie holds to the belief of a one universal and invisible church which is very popular today. It is clear in Holy Scripture that all references to the church are in regards to a local and visible body of believers.

When the church is used in a general sense, it includes all of the local churches making up the Lord's complete Body of Christ. All saved people of all time make up the family of God, but only scripturally baptized believers that are members of the local church make up the body of Christ.

## Numbers Chapter 1

Some basic information about Numbers from the Believers Study Bible

The fourth writing of Moses has a fascination of its own. The story that unfolds comes short of victory; however, its message is universal and timeless. It reminds believers of the spiritual warfare in which they are engaged, for Numbers is the book of the service and walk of God's people.

**Name.** The Septuagint translators assigned the names to the Old Testament books as they now appear in our English version. The Hebrew title for this book means, simply, "in the wilderness" and comes from the original of 1:1. The Greek name "Numbers" was used by the Latin Vulgate and was later adopted in English Bibles as well. Numbers derives its name from the double numbering of the children of Israel (see chs. 1;26). Combining the Hebrew and Greek names, the gist of the book is given: "in the wilderness" and "numberings."

**Authorship.** The human author of the Pentateuch was Moses. There is internal and external evidence to support this conclusion.

1. Internal evidence. Numbers 33:2a states: "And Moses wrote their goings out according to their journeys by the commandment of the LORD." Here it is expressly stated that Moses wrote the itinerary of the Israelites from Egypt to

Moab. If Moses wrote this, without doubt he also wrote the narrative surrounding the wilderness wanderings.

2. External evidence. The book of Joshua is filled with references to Moses. There are several explicit references to the Mosaic authorship of the written Law: “written in the book of the law of Moses” (Josh 8:31; cf. also vs. 32, 34; 23:6); “the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses” (Josh 22:9; cf. also vs. 5). Like the Old Testament, the New Testament bears witness to the Mosaic authorship of the Law. The words “Moses” and “law” are considered to be equivalent in the New Testament. Christ quotes from the Pentateuch and ascribes it to Moses: “Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives”<sup>ii</sup>

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*Prov 4:18 But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

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**Practice Random Acts of Kindness. Each act spreads, and many will be blessed.**

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<sup>ii</sup>Jerry Falwell, executive editor; Edward E. Hinson and Michael Kroll Woodrow, general editors, *KJV Bible commentary [computer file], electronic ed., Logos Library System*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson) 1997, c1994.