

Numbers

"In the Wilderness"

Background Information

Author: Moses (see 33:2 and 36:13)

Written during the last year of Moses' life. The events from chapter 20 onward occur during the 40th year after the Exodus, the last of Moses' life.

"Numbers" comes from the emphasis on numbering the people in chapters 1-4 and 26. In ancient Greek texts, the book was called *arithmoi* ("arithmetic").

In most Hebrew Bibles, it is called "In the wilderness," which is a better title for the whole of the book.

Time Covered and Outlines

The book covers slightly more than 40 years, and ends with the people of Israel on the eastern side of the _____, ready to enter the Promised Land.

Outline #1: The Two Generations

I. The First Generation in the Wilderness

A. Obedience to the Lord (1-10)

B. Disobedience to the Lord (11-25)

II. The Second Generation on the Plains of Moab: Renewed Obedience (26-36)

Outline #2: Major Events

I. Numbering and organizing Israel (1-4)

II. Special laws (4-5)

III. Preparing and starting the journey to Canaan (6-10)

IV. Rebellion and fear (11)

V. Miriam and Aaron's struggle and the 12 spies (12-14)

VI. Korah's rebellion and other laws (15-19)

VII. Movement toward Canaan (20-21)

VIII. Balaam (22-25)

IX. Counting the people a final time (26)

X. Various laws and events (27-36)

Major Themes

Fear and rebellion against God (14:26-38)

Inheritance of the Promised Land (26)

Sin demands punishment, even among God's people (11, 12, 14, 25)

God is faithful to His word, despite our unfaithfulness.

God's Character in Numbers

Long-suffering (14:18)

Merciful (14:18)

Providence (26:65)

True, or honest (23:19)

Wrathful (11, 12:9-10, 14:40-45, etc.)

Jesus in Numbers

The _____ that was raised up to heal the people was a reference to Jesus being lifted up to heal all people (21:4-9; John 3:14).

God sent manna from heaven to sustain the people, and Jesus is called the "Bread of Life" to sustain us now (John 6:31-33).

The rock that brought water was a type of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 10:4).

Key Words in Numbers

"Sacrifice" (Hebrew *zebach*), "to slaughter an offering." 6:17; 7:17; 7:29; 7:47; 15:3; 15:5; 15:8

"Anointed" (Hebrew *mashach*), "to dab with oil." 3:3; 6:15; 7:1; 7:84; 7:88; 35:25

"Vow" (Hebrew *neder*). 6:2; 6:21; 15:3; 21:2; 30:2-3

"Elders" (Hebrew *zagen*) 11:16; 11:24-25; 11:30; 16:25; 22:4; 22:7

Elsewhere in the World...

The Chinese culture begins to flourish and produce bronze sculptures.

Elsewhere in Scripture...

The book of Numbers stands alone chronologically. No other book overlaps with its contents.