



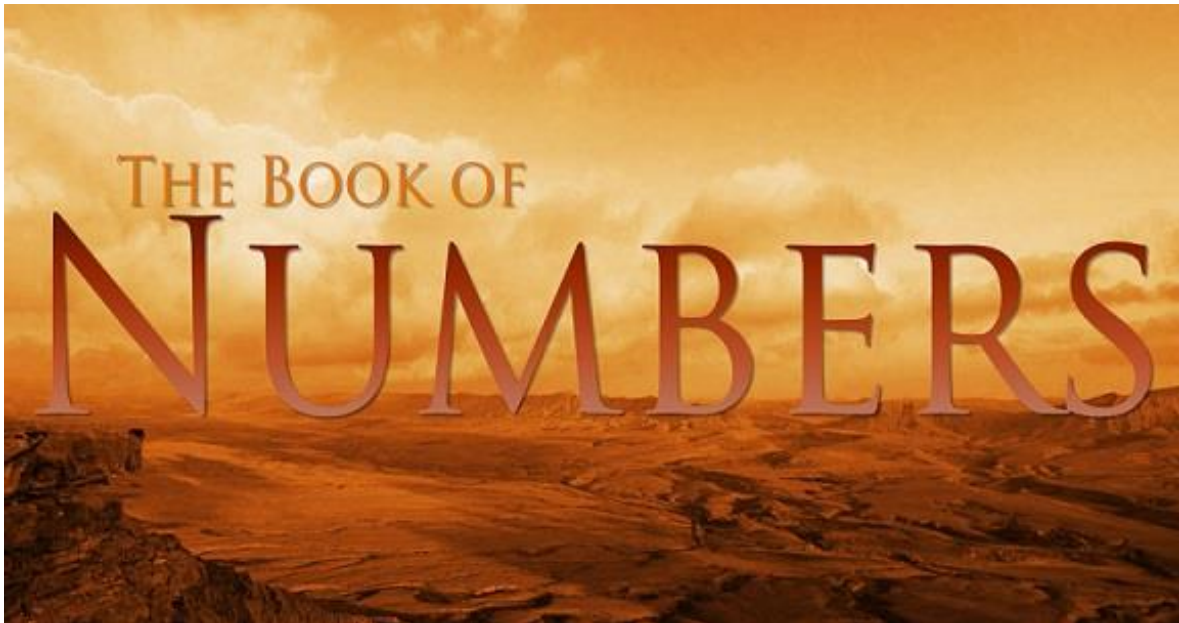
My Drift

Title: Bible – The Book of Numbers

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The book of Numbers continues the history of the people of Israel after they escaped from Egypt, and it tells what happened during the forty years when the Israelites lived in the desert on their journey from Mount Sinai to Canaan. This book is named "Numbers" because it begins with Moses counting the Israelites to find out the number of people in each of Israel's twelve tribes.

The First Census

In the first census taken at Mt. Sinai in 1446BC, God orders Moses to number those able to bear arms—of all the men twenty years and older and to appoint princes over each tribe. A total of 603,550 Israelites were found to be fit for military service. The tribe of Levi was exempted from military service and therefore not included in the 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 total number of Israelites at this time was about 2 million men, women, and children.

Israel's Twelve Tribes

1. Judah.

The tribe of kings, and the most preeminent of the 12 tribes in the biblical narrative. Judah “prevailed over his brothers,” (1 Chronicles 5:2), and the tribe’s territory included the city of Jerusalem and the holy temple. King David was part of this tribe, and his royal line ruled in Jerusalem from around 1,000 BC until the city fell to Babylonian forces in 586 BC. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel and the capital of the Southern Kingdom after the nation divided. Jesus is of the tribe of Judah (Matthew 1:1–2). Notable tribesmen: Jesus, David, Mary, Solomon, Caleb

2. Reuben.

Descended from Jacob’s firstborn, whom Jacob said was as “uncontrolled as water” (Genesis 49:4). The tribe chose not to settle in the Promised Land, and instead asked Moses for some of the territory that they conquered east of the Jordan River. Moses agreed to this, on the condition that they assist the western tribes in conquering Canaan (Numbers 32:28–32). They did so, but they did not assist the other tribes in battle during the period of judges (Judges 5:16), and the tribe falls into scriptural obscurity.

3. Simeon.

The man Simeon (with his brother Levi) slaughtered the men of an entire city to avenge his sister (Genesis 34:25–31). The tribe’s portion of land was within the midst of Judah’s territory (Joshua 19:1); however, Simeon did not grow as rapidly as Judah and seems to have dispersed across multiple territories (1 Chronicles 4:38–43; 2 Chronicles 15:8–9). This is consistent with Jacob’s prophecy concerning Simeon and his brother Levi: “I will disperse them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.”

4. Levi.

The tribe of the priesthood. The tribe of Levi stood by Moses (a Levite) during the golden calf incident at Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:25–29), and later took their place as ministers to the tabernacle, and later the Temple. Levi had no tribal territory—the Lord was the tribe’s inheritance (Numbers 18:19–20)—though they did receive pasture lands for their cattle (Joshua 21). Levitical duties were extensive (read Leviticus!), but Moses gives a brief summary of their significance in his blessing for the tribe (Deuteronomy 33:8–11). Notable tribesmen: Moses, Aaron, John the Baptist, Barnabas

5. Zebulun.

Zebulun doesn't get very much attention in the Bible. The tribe does boast a strong, loyal fighting force during the days of the judges and King David. In fact, Zebulun had the largest presence in the army that made David king of Israel at Hebron, and they served him with "an undivided heart" (1 Chronicles 12:33).

6. Issachar.

Issachar has even less biblical presence than Zebulun, but the tribe was loyal to Deborah and Barak (Judges 5:15). They're also remembered as "men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do" (1 Chronicles 12:32).

7. Dan.

We don't read much about the man Dan, but we do see his tribe up to no good in the book of Judges. The tribe did not secure their original portion of land (Judges 1:34; 18:1), and instead migrated northward. In the process, they took for themselves other gods (Judges 18:14–17) and set up a new priesthood (Judges 18–20). The tribe later joins Jeroboam in idolatry when the kingdom of Israel divides (1 Kings 12:28–29). Notable tribesman: Samson

8. Gad.

Little is said of Gad, the man or the tribe. They, like Reuben, settled east of the Jordan.

9. Asher.

Jacob prophesied that Asher's tribe would enjoy rich foods (Genesis 49:20), and the tribe went on to possess a region of eastern Galilee which is still known for its olive groves.

10. Naphtali.

Naphtali, with Zebulun, is mentioned by the prophet Isaiah in a passage we read often during Christmastime: "For a child will be born to us" This promise was given concerning the land of Galilee, specifically, the "land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali." You can read the whole prophecy in Isaiah 9.

11. Ephraim.

This tribe is named after Joseph's son. Joseph received the birthright from Jacob, and instead of just one tribe, he is the ancestor of two (Manasseh is the other). After the kingdom divides, the Northern Kingdom's capital is in

Ephraim's territory, and the prophets sometimes refer to the entire nation as "Ephraim" (Jeremiah 31:9, Hosea 5:3). Notable tribesmen: Joshua, Samuel

12. Benjamin.

This small tribe has played several important roles in Israel's history. Benjamin stood against the rest of Israel in a national civil war (Judges 20:14–21:24). Saul, the first anointed king of Israel, was from Benjamin. The tribe was also loyal to David's descendants when the northern tribes seceded (1 Kings 12:16–24). Notable tribesmen: King Saul, Mordecai, Paul

13. Manasseh.

This tribe descended from Joseph's firstborn son, and uniquely settled on both sides of the Jordan River (Joshua 17:5–6). The eastern settlement is often referred to as the "half-tribe of Manasseh."

Wait—13 tribes of Israel? Kind of. Remember, Levi didn't receive tribal territory like the other tribes, so it isn't counted.



Numbers can be divided into three parts.

In the first part (1.1 - 10.10) the Lord has Moses count the people, and then he gives Moses the instructions for setting up Israel's camp and for assigning the Levites their duties. Preparations are then made for resuming the march to the Promised Land. This part ends with everyone celebrating Passover and offering sacrifices to the Lord.

The second part (10.11 - 21.20) includes events that happened while the Israelites were on their way to Moab, a nation living east of the Jordan River. This was a very difficult journey through the desert, and the people often complained and even rebelled against Moses and against God. The Israelites refused to enter Canaan after hearing about the nations that lived there, and so the Lord punished the Israelites by making them remain in the desert for forty years. This part of Numbers ends with the people camped in Moab near Mount Pisgah.



Sinai Desert

More information about what went on during the trip to the promised land.

The Israelites set out from Mt. Sinai. The people murmur against God and are punished by fire; Moses complains of their stubbornness 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 on the border of Canaan. Twelve spies are sent out into Canaan and come back to report to Moses. Joshua and Caleb, two of the spies, report that the land is abundant and is "flowing with milk and honey", but the other spies say that it is inhabited by giants, and the Israelites refuse to enter the land. God decrees that the Israelites will be punished for their loss of faith by having to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

What can we learn from the Israelites wandering in the desert for 40 years?

No one likes a detour or delay in a journey. Whenever we encounter a road under construction or traffic that halts our trek by half an hour, we may feel tempted to throw up our hands and say, “Why now? Why did this have to happen to me?”

Enter the Israelites, who had endured hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt. When God freed them, through his servant Moses and via 10 plagues (Exodus 7-11) and a splitting sea (Exodus 14), they must have thought that they’d arrive in the land of their dreams, the Promised Land, in no time. But sure enough, they hit snags along the way. The journey takes too long, and they turn to other idols and gods to speed up the process (Exodus 32).

The proverbial straw breaks the camel’s back when they almost reach the Promised Land and send 12 spies to scout the area. The report of the 12 spies was the same, the promised land flowing with milk and honey but there were giants. 10 of the spies reported to the people of Israel that the challenge was too great, that they seem like insects to the giants. Two of the spies, Joshua, and Caleb, reported that the people of Israel were able to overcome the challenges that were before them through the faithfulness of God. All but Caleb and Joshua tried to dissuade the Israelites from going into the new land (Numbers 32).

Because of their obstinance and disobedience and forgetfulness of God’s promises, God delays their entry into the Promised Land by 40 years. Aside from Caleb and Joshua, anyone over a certain age would not see the Promised Land since their generation did not exercise a strong faith in God’s provision.

Although the 40 years in the desert may serve as a cautionary tale, can we learn anything from the Israelites as they wandered for four decades?

Indeed. Here are some of the many lessons from the 40 years in the desert:

God provides in our darkest moments.

In the desert, the Israelites had run low on provisions (Numbers 11:5). It gets to the point where the Israelites pine after the “good ole days” of their slavery in Egypt, where they didn’t have to worry about starvation. They get so hungry that they think hundreds of years doing hard slave labor in Egypt sounds like paradise.

God, seeing their need for food, provides them with a substance known as manna. A heavenly bread and He also gives them protein via quail and provides this bread and birds from heaven daily until they enter the Promised Land.



Manna and Quail from Heaven

God understood that the desert was a temporary limbo for the Israelites. They wouldn't stay there forever but would enter the Promised Land decades later. Nevertheless, he meets their needs, nonetheless.

From this, we can learn that God meets us in limbo. We might be waiting on a job or living from paycheck to paycheck, but God provides for us in the desert and in the Promised Land. He doesn't leave or forsake us in our greatest hour of need.

God's plan never seems to align with ours - Nor does his timeline.

The Israelites may have thought that everything would be smooth sailing since they left their former lives from Egypt. No longer would they have to operate under cruel taskmasters, and they had a bright future ahead.

But they expected it all to happen so fast. So easily. They didn't realize that sometimes getting to the Promised Land takes time. That God may have wanted them to learn some lessons along the way about trusting him, and that he fights for them when they are surrounded by a great number of enemies on their way to the Promised Land (Exodus 17).

We can learn that God's timeline and plan often veer far away from how we expect a situation to play out or an outcome to fall in our favor. Nevertheless, God's plans always are best, and we have to trust Him. Especially when we need to rely on his provisions, like the Israelites in the desert.

God doesn't keep us in the desert forever.

Forty years sounds like a long time. To the Israelites who were in their teens, they didn't reach the Promised Land until they had turned 50 or 60 years old.

But even though God's timeline may not align with ours, he doesn't keep us in the desert forever. Whether the "desert" we're currently enduring is a trial or if we think of the "desert" as this world (a limbo until we reach the Promised Land of paradise) God doesn't hold us in limbo forever.

We will reach the Promised Land since promised is in the title. God doesn't break covenants, and he won't keep us suspended in the desert for eternity. Whether our trial lasts four years or 40, we will make it to the Promised Land.

The third part of the book (21.21 -36.13) begins with the Israelites conquering the land just east of the Jordan River from the border with Moab in the south to Lake Galilee in the north. Then the King of Moab hired the foreign prophet Balaam to curse the people of Israel. But the Lord told Balaam to bless the Israelites, and Balaam obeyed.

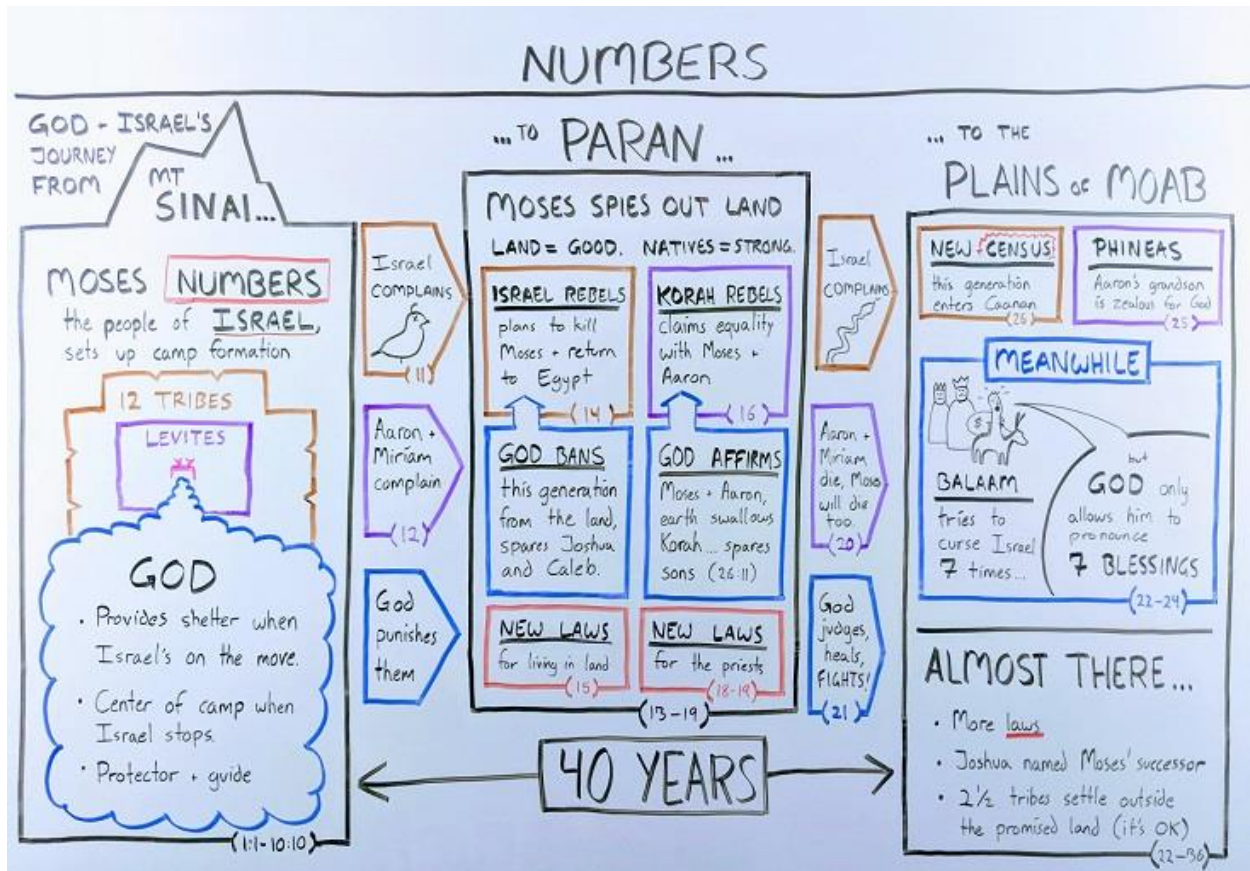
The Israelites prepared to cross the Jordan River and conquer the land of Canaan, although some of the people decided to settle east of the Jordan River. The Israelites were counted a second time, then the Lord appointed Joshua to be Israel's next leader and chose other leaders to help Joshua divide the land among the tribes. The book concludes with the Lord giving the Israelites more laws.

The last book (fifth) of Moses Deuteronomy should be exciting!

Quick Recap

Numbers is about people who were rebellious and discouraged and who refused to believe that the Lord would take care of them. But the book also shows how the Lord protected them in war and gave them food and water in the barren desert. The Lord wanted the Israelites to realize that He did not want them to be destroyed; He wanted to bless them, just as Aaron prayed:

*I pray that the LORD will bless and protect you,
and that he will show you mercy and kindness.
May the LORD be good to you and give you peace. (Numbers 6.24-26)*



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