

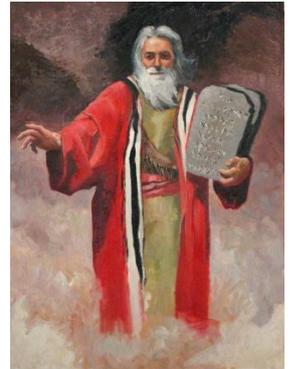
Numbers

By Ross Callaghan

<http://rosscallaghan.yolasite.com>

Numbers

Numbers is the fourth book in the Bible and in the Pentateuch - the “five volumes” that make up the Hebrew *Torah*. Numbers describes the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness, and records two counts of their population – one in the second year after the exodus from Egypt, and the other 40 years later, just before entering Canaan.



Author

Moses is the traditional author of Numbers and of the other books in the Pentateuch, which is why Numbers is sometimes known as the “Fourth Book of Moses”. On several occasions the Lord commanded Moses to write down His words *on a scroll*, e.g. Exodus 17:14; 34:27,28. The five books of the Pentateuch, including Numbers, are the product of that writing, although there may have been slight changes to spelling and grammar as the scrolls were hand-copied over the centuries.

Date

The events described in Numbers began *on the first day of the second month of the second year after the Israelites came out of Egypt* (1:1), and lasted for about 40 years. Scholars are divided as to when the Israelites left Egypt and travelled through the wilderness to Canaan. Some think it happened at the end of the 15th century BC, others early in the 13th century BC. The tabernacle was consecrated exactly 1 year after the Israelites left (Exodus 40:17), and the Israelites then spent another month at Sinai, during which time the laws in Leviticus were given to Moses. They then left Sinai and Numbers describes how they travelled through the wilderness towards the Promised Land, arriving about 40 years later.

Background

The final chapters of Genesis describe how the children of Israel had settled in Egypt due to a famine in their homeland of Canaan. They were rescued by the intervention of one of Jacob’s twelve sons, Joseph, who had risen to become the Pharaoh’s right hand man. The Israelites lived in Egypt for 430 years and became slaves of the Egyptians. They were cruelly used as a labour force to build the city of Rameses, at that time the capital of Lower Egypt. The Israelites multiplied rapidly over the 430 years and became a threat to the Egyptian rulers so persecution intensified and they were in great danger of being completely wiped out as a family nation. God raised up Moses as the person who would deliver His people from bondage to Egypt and who would lead them back to their homeland of Canaan: their “Promised Land”.

Exodus tells the story of how Moses was raised up and how he led the Israelites out of Egypt towards the Promised Land. It shows how God gave the Law to His people (including the 10 commandments); provided for His people as they travelled through the wilderness; dealt with their grumbling and rebellion, and revealed Himself to them in the Tabernacle. Leviticus describes how God revealed further laws to Moses in the Tent of Meeting, and how the Levitical priesthood was established. It adds greater detail to the laws for how the three great Feasts are to be celebrated, and to how the Sabbath is to be observed. Numbers describes the wanderings of the Israelites through the wilderness towards the Promised Land. It is followed by Deuteronomy, which describes how God renewed the covenant with His people and prepared them for entry into the Promised Land. The final chapters of Deuteronomy describe how Moses led the Israelites right up to the Jordan River on the border of Canaan, and how he died without actually entering the Promised Land.



The journey through the wilderness



The straight line distance between Sinai and the Jordan River is about 240 miles (386km). The terrain is very rough, the ground arid, the climate at times extremely hot, and at other times extremely cold. God sustained His people throughout the journey through the cloud by day; the fire by night, the manna and quail for food, and water from the rock. (See Exodus 13:20-22 and 16:1-17:7 and Numbers 11:1-9). This was a mighty miracle of provision, especially as the group could have been about 6 million people!

The journey could have been completed in a few weeks but took 40 years because:

- The people continually grumbled against the Lord and against Moses, their leader. God finally got so angry about this that He said *'As I live, declares the Lord, what you have said in My hearing I will do to you: your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness, and of all your number, listed in the census from twenty years old and upward, who have grumbled against Me, not one shall come into the land where I swore that I would make you dwell, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh and Joshua the son of Nun.* Numbers 14:28-30. With only Joshua and Caleb of the original multitude that departed from Egypt being allowed to enter the Promised Land, a generation had to pass for the rest of the original people to die off. See Numbers 14:29-30; 26:64-65; 32:11-12.
- The Israelites encountered a number of hostile tribes along the way and had to negotiate or fight their way past them. These tribes included the Amalekites and Canaanites (14:25-45; 24:20); the Edomites (20:14-21; 21:4-11) who stopped them going along the King's Highway and made them take a longer route; the Aradites (21:1-3); the Moabites (21:11-15; 22:1-24:25); the Amorites (21:21-35), and the Midianites (25:16-18; 31:1-54).
- Moses sent spies into the Promised Land and the report came back that it was *a land flowing with milk and honey* but that *the people who live there are powerful and the cities are fortified and very large.* There were even giants there and *we seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes!* This caused a rebellion among the people and God decreed that the time they spent exploring the land would be the time they would have to spend in the wilderness – a year for a day. *For forty years – one year for each of the forty days you explored the land – you will suffer for your sins and know what it is like to have Me against you.* (14:34). The time they wasted wandering around in the wilderness was a direct consequence of their rebellion against God. There is a major lesson here for us all!

Purpose

Numbers records the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness from Mt Sinai to the border of the Promised Land of Canaan. It faithfully records the Israelites' unbelief and disobedience during the journey and the consequences of their sin. At the same time, it shows God's faithfulness and forbearance in dealing with a rebellious people, and His great desire that they would live according to His ways. God always keeps His covenants, but at the same time, He is a Holy God whose justice demands He should punish unbelief and rebellion. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians that *the things that happened to them are examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come.* 1 Corinthians 10:11.

Numbers also shows the importance of keeping records of family history including genealogies. Significant sections of the book are devoted to recording the names and numbers of different groupings within the Israelite community.

Content

Chapter 1. The first census.

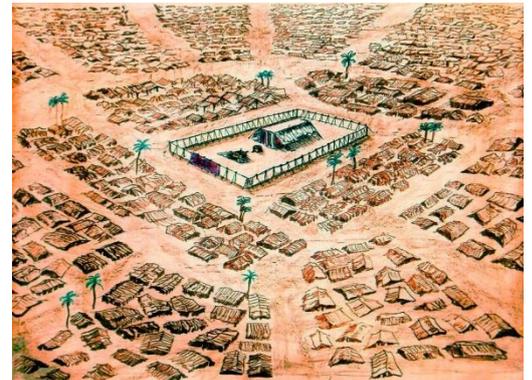
God told Moses to *take a census of the whole Israelite community by their clans and families.* This identified 603,550 men who would *be able to serve in the army.* The Levites were not counted because they were *in charge of the tabernacle.* Women and children were not included in the census (nor were they typically included in genealogies).

Chapter 2. Arrangement of the tribes in the camp.

The Lord told Moses how the tribes were to be arranged around the tabernacle when they were camping:

- To the east: Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, 186,400 men.
- To the south: Reuben, Simeon, and Gad, 151,450 men.
- To the west: Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, 108,100 men.
- To the north: Dan, Asher, and Naphtali, 157,600 men.

When the community was on the march the east group went first, followed by the south group. They were followed by the Levites and the tabernacle, and then the west group. The north group brought up the rear.



Chapter 3 and 4. The role of the Levites.

Aaron was the great-grandson of Levi (Exodus 6:16-20), and his descendants - the Levites - were appointed to be the priests, serving in the tabernacle (Exodus 28:41, Numbers 3:2-3). After Mt Sinai there were three families of Levites and God told Moses to count their numbers.

- The Gershonites were responsible for the tabernacle coverings, hangings, and screens. They numbered 7500 males over the age of 1 month. The Gershonites were to camp between the western group of tribes and the tabernacle.
- The Kohathites were responsible for the furniture of the tabernacle. They numbered 8600 males over the age of 1 month. The Kohathites were to camp between the southern group of tribes and the tabernacle.
- The Merarites were responsible for the frames, bars, and foundations for the tabernacle. They numbered 6,200 males over the age of 1 month. The Merarites were to camp between the northern group of tribes and the tabernacle.

Moses and Aaron's family were to camp between the eastern group of tribes and the tabernacle

Baby boys were counted because the Lord had previously decreed that *the firstborn male is Mine.* This was in remembrance of how the firstborn male children and animals were spared by the blood on the door-posts when the Israelites left Egypt. Now the Levites were to be the Lord's, in place of the firstborn male children and animals. The count identified that there were 22,273 male first-born babies; 273 more than the number of male Levites. Redemption money had to be paid for the 273, totalling 1365 shekels, and Moses gave this money to Aaron. From this time on the Levites were a special group within the Israelites, and were provided for by the rest of the community so they could carry out their duties as priests.

God told Moses that only Levites between the ages of 30 and 50 were *to serve in the work of the Tent of Meeting*. A census of the Levites revealed that there were 2,750 Kohathites; 2,630 Gershonites and 3,200 Merarites, making a total of 8,580 who were eligible to serve as priests. The Kohathites were responsible for the furniture of the tabernacle so provisions were made to protect them when the tabernacle was being dismantled for a march. The furniture was covered with blue cloths so that the Kohathites didn't see or touch the *holy things* because if they did so, they would die.

Chapter 5. Regulations for the purity of the camp.

Anyone who was unclean due to a skin disease, bodily discharge or from touching a dead body had to be sent away from the camp until they were purified. Further, anyone who had wronged another *in any way* and so was *unfaithful to the Lord* must make full restitution plus 1/5 extra. If the wronged person was no longer alive, the restitution was to be given to the priests. If a man suspected his wife of being unfaithful but could not find evidence of it, the woman was to be tried by drinking bitter water. If she swelled up she was guilty and would be *accursed among her people*, but if she stayed well she would be cleared of guilt. Regulations like this were needed to keep the community healthy as the people were travelling in such close proximity to each other.

Chapter 6. Regulations about Nazirites.

Nazirites were "holy people" who consecrated themselves to God for life or for a set period of time, often to perform some special service for the Lord. Anyone could make a *vow of separation to the Lord* and become a Nazirite. During the period of their consecration to the Lord Nazirites would not drink wine, not eat grape products, not cut their hair and not touch dead bodies. Regulations are given should they defile themselves and for when they want to terminate the vow.

Chapter 6 finishes with the priestly blessing, a blessing that is still widely used today: *"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord turn His face towards you, and give you peace"*.



Chapter 7 and 8. Consecration of the tabernacle and of the Levites.

When Moses finished setting up the tabernacle *he anointed it and consecrated it and all of its furnishings*. The tribal leaders (except for the Levites) then brought offerings and gifts for the tabernacle piled on six wagons and twelve oxen. Full details of each gift are recorded. Moses gave two wagons and four oxen to the Gershonites and four wagons and eight oxen to the Merarites. The Kohathites were to carry the furniture of the tabernacle on their shoulders so they didn't need wagons and oxen. God showed His pleasure with the offerings and gifts by speaking to Moses *from between the two cherubim above the atonement cover on the Ark of Testimony*.

The seven-branched lampstand was then set up *exactly like the pattern the Lord had shown to Moses*. Next, the Levites were purified and *presented before the Lord as a wave offering* so they would be *ready to do the work of the Lord*. This is when the Levites replaced first-born males as those who were *set apart* for God.

Chapters 9 and 10. Preparation for leaving Mt Sinai.

It was now time to leave Sinai and head north into the wilderness. The whole community celebrated the Passover before they set out, except for a few people who were unclean on account of a dead body or who were away on a journey. God gave these people permission to observe the Passover a month later.

The Israelites knew when to move from the cloud which covered the tabernacle by day and the fire by night. When the cloud or fire moved they moved; when it was still they stayed where they were. *At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out*. Two silver trumpets were blown by the priests to assemble the community before the tabernacle and to announce when the tribes could begin marching. The trumpets would also be blown if they encountered enemies and when they were to come together for feasts and celebrations. The tribes travelled in their prescribed order in procession behind the Ark of the Lord.



Before each new journey Moses said “*Rise up O Lord! May Your enemies be scattered; may Your foes flee before You*”. Whenever they stopped he said “*Return, O Lord, to the countless thousands of Israel*”.

Chapters 10-14. Travelling from Sinai to Kadesh-barnea.

The journey from Sinai to Kadesh-barnea took about two months. (10:11; 13:20). Almost immediately *the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when He heard them His anger was aroused.*

- At Taberah (which means ‘burning’) *fire from the Lord burned among them*, only stopping when Moses prayed to the Lord.
- The people craved meat to eat and the Lord sent them quail to add to their manna.
- Moses struggled with *the burden of all the people* and the Lord told him to delegate to seventy elders. The Spirit of the Lord came on these men and they helped Moses so he didn’t *have to carry the burden alone.*
- *Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.* Miriam and Aaron challenged his right to speak for God to the people and *the anger of the Lord burned against them.* Miriam became *leprous, like snow* and was punished by being banished from the camp for seven days after Moses asked God to heal her. God stood by Moses and said that *with him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles. He sees the form of the Lord.*
- At Kadesh-barnea Moses sent a leader from each of the tribes ahead to *explore the land of Canaan.* They were asked to report back on the land, its people, fortification of its towns, and the fertility of its soil. They returned 40 days later saying that the land *flows with milk and honey* but its people and cities are *very powerful.* Joshua and Caleb urged the people to *go up and take possession of the land* but all the others were afraid and gave a *bad report.* The people wept and complained, some even wanting to go back to Egypt. Joshua and Caleb said the land was *exceedingly good* and that in not going up to take it they were rebelling against the Lord. The people tried to stone them but were stopped by the sudden appearance of the glory of the Lord over the tabernacle.
- Moses asked the Lord to forgive the people and He did so, but God swore in his wrath that, apart from Joshua and Caleb, *not one of them* would ever see the Promised Land. The unbelieving spies were cut down and God decreed *For forty years – one year for each of the forty days you explored the land – you will suffer in your sins and know what it is like to have Me against you.* See Hebrews 3:7–4:10.
- Some of the people disobeyed the Lord (Deuteronomy 1:42), and tried to go into the land leaving Moses and the Ark of the Covenant back in the camp. They were attacked by the Amalekites and Canaanites and beaten back.

The Israelites probably stayed in the area around Kadesh-barnea for the next 38 years, spreading out to take advantage of its springs and oases (Deuteronomy 1:46). The next few chapters of Numbers describe this period in the wilderness.

Chapters 15-19. Establishing the priesthood.

It took a while for the priesthood to get established, and a few power struggles were involved!

Chapter 15 gives more detailed regulations for how sacrifices and offerings were to be made once the Israelites entered the Promised Land, including regulations for unintentional and deliberate sins. Blasphemy and Sabbath-breaking were considered very serious sins and punishment was harsh – excommunication and execution. Aliens and Israelites were considered *the same before the Lord*, but the Israelites were to tie blue tassels to their outer garments to remind them to obey the Lord. There were 39 windings in each tassel, which equals the numerical value of the Hebrew words “the Lord is One.” This has evolved into the modern-day Jewish prayer shawl.



Korah challenged Aaron’s high priesthood, and Dathan, Abiram, and On challenged Moses’ leadership. God wanted to put an end to this rebellion and would have punished the whole community but Moses pleaded on their behalf *Will You be angry with the entire assembly when only one man sins?* The rebels and their 250 followers gathered in one place and the earth opened up and swallowed them all. See Psalm 106:16-18. The people grumbled about this and *gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron* so God wanted

to *put an end to them at once*. A plague started among the people killing 14,700 which only stopped when Aaron made atonement for the peoples' sin.

Korah is mentioned in Jude 1:11 as a rebel. Apparently some of his family survived (Deuteronomy 9:6; Numbers 26:11) and the "sons of Korah" later became musicians in the temple, composing 12 of the Psalms (Psalms 42–49, 84–85, 87–88).

God vindicated Aaron's high priesthood by getting the leaders of each tribe to bring a rod to the tabernacle and write their tribe's name on the rod. Aaron's name was written on Levi's rod and the next day it had *budded, blossomed and produced almonds*. Aaron was clearly above all other priests and his rod was to be kept as a *sign to the rebellious Israelites*. Hebrews 9:4.



Only Aaron and his family were to serve within the sanctuary as priests, and they were to be assisted by the Levites in the other duties of the tabernacle. Offerings were to be taken and tithes collected for support of the priests and Levites, since they would have no inheritance of land. Tithes were a tenth part of the produce of the land, not money. A tenth part of the tithe – the best part - was *the Lord's portion* and was to be given to Aaron.

Chapter 19 gives additional regulations for the cleansing of those who were unclean through contact with a dead body. A red heifer was to be sacrificed and the ashes used to purify *the water of cleansing*. The water could then be sprinkled over unclean people so they could be cleansed.

Chapters 20-25. Journeying north through Edom and Moab.

Numbers now moves ahead to the first month of the 40th year after leaving Egypt. The whole community had gathered at Kadesh-barnea, on the southern border of the wilderness of Zin. There Miriam, Moses' and Aaron's sister, *died and was buried*. Yet again the people *gathered in opposition to Moses and Aaron*, this time because there was *no water*. The glory of God appeared and God told Moses to speak to a rock and water would flow. Instead Moses struck the rock twice and water came out so *the community and its livestock could drink*. God was angry with Moses because *he didn't honour Me as holy* before the Israelites and said that Moses' disobedience meant he would not be the one to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. The waters there were called Meribah, meaning *quarrelling*.



As the Israelites journeyed north along the King's Highway the Edomites would not allow them to pass through their territory, and came against them with a *large and powerful army*. This resulted in God's judgement against Edom. See the book of Obadiah. Aaron died at Mt Hor near the border of Edom and the office of High Priest was passed on to his son, Eleazar. As the Israelites were going around Edom they encountered the Aradites and quickly overcame them. The people again become impatient with God and with Moses, especially about eating manna calling it *miserable food*. The Lord sent poisonous snakes into the camp, and many died. *Moses prayed for the people* and God said to raise up a bronze snake, so that *anyone who is bitten may look at it and live*. The bronze snake was later destroyed by Hezekiah, as it had become an idol (2 Kings 18:4). Jesus used the bronze snake as an illustration in John 3:14,15 to compare sinners looking to a snake for deliverance with how people could look to Him in faith and be saved.



The Israelites then journeyed past Moab into the territory of Sihon, king of the Amorites. Sihon would not let them pass through his territory and was defeated in battle, and the Israelites occupied all Amorite cities. A similar fate was handed out to Og, king of Bashan and *they took possession of his land*.

The Israelites had reached the Jordan River, and made camp in the Plains of Moab, *along the Jordan across from Jericho*. The wilderness wanderings were over and Promised Land was in sight! The events in the rest of Numbers; in Deuteronomy and in the first three chapters of Joshua are based at this camp by the Jordan River.

All of the people who left Egypt had perished (except Moses, Joshua and Caleb); none of the male children had been circumcised (Joshua 5:2-9) and the people, although many in number, were in a poor spiritual state. They now had to cross the Jordan, enter the Promised Land and subdue its peoples.

Psalms 90 is worth reading at this point, because it shows how Moses was feeling at this critical time in the nation's history.

Balak, king of Moab, was frightened by the number of Israelites camping in his territory so he joined with the Midianites and tried to hire Balaam, a sorcerer to curse them. God spoke to Balaam and told him *not to put a curse on those people because they are blessed*. Initially Balaam agreed but then changed his mind and went with Balak's princes. God opposed him by placing an angel in front of his donkey which then wouldn't move forward. Balaam beat the donkey three times then God opened the donkey's mouth and it asked why it was being beaten. Balaam realised he had sinned and that God was opposing him, and agreed to carry on, but only say to the Israelites what God told him to say. Balaam made four oracles and in each one blessed the Israelites, rather than cursing them! (Numbers 23:7-10, 18-24; 24:3-9, 15-19). He also predicted the destruction of Moab, Edom, Amalek (24:20), the Kenites (24:21), and Asshur (24:24). See 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 1:11.



The Israelites then sinned against God by indulging in sexual immorality with Moabite women, and worshipping Moabite gods and *the Lord's anger burned against them*. Moses said that all who were involved were to be killed so that *the Lord's fierce anger may turn away from Israel*. 24,000 died. Phinehas, a priest and the grandson of Aaron, killed Zimri and Cozbi, a Midianite princess. God honoured him for this act saying his descendants would form a *lasting priesthood*. From then on the Midianites were enemies of the Israelites. See Numbers Chapter 31.

The pattern that would cause Israel's downfall had begun even before they entered the Promised Land. Rather than eliminating foreign nations as God had told them to do, they intermarried with foreign women and were seduced by foreign gods.

Chapter 26,27. The second census.

After the plague God told Moses to take another census of *the whole Israelite community*. This identified 601,730 men who were *twenty years old or more who were able to serve in the army*. This was 1,820 men less than the number in the first count, taken before they set off from Mt Sinai. The size of each tribe determined the size of land they would be allotted in the Promised Land. Each tribe was to *receive its inheritance according to the number of those listed*. Male Levites over a month old were also counted and totalled 23,000. Moses, Joshua and Caleb were the only ones left alive of the original group who set out from Sinai. Moses died before entering the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 34) so the Lord's judgment in Numbers 14:28-35 was fulfilled.

The daughters of Zelophehad came to Moses wanting to inherit their father's possessions because he had died with no sons. Moses brought this before the Lord and God clarified how the line of an inheritance should be passed on. It should go first to sons, then daughters, then brothers, then father's brothers and then to the nearest relative.

God reminded Moses that he would be dying soon and Moses wanted to appoint a successor *so that the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd*. God chose Joshua, *a man in whom is the Spirit* and *Moses laid his hands on him, and commissioned him* for the task.

Chapters 28-30. Regulations for offerings, feasts and vows.

Regulations are now given for:

- Daily, monthly and Sabbath offerings.
- The Passover.
- The Feast of Weeks.
- The Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles.
- Making of vows. If a man makes a vow he *must not break his word but must do everything he said*. If a woman makes a vow the man responsible for her (father or husband) could nullify it if he felt that it was rash.

These regulations complement and repeat the ones given in Leviticus.

Chapter 31. Vengeance on the Midianites.

This chapter describes the judgement on the Midianites that was declared in 25:16-18. This judgement was to be Moses' final act before he was *gathered to his people* (i.e. died.). Phinehas the priest and 12,000 men armed for battle, 1000 from each tribe, went against the Midianites. The victory was complete and Balaam, five kings and all Midianite men were killed. The Midianite women and children were taken captive, but only the young women were spared. Much plunder was taken and not one Israelite was killed. Afterwards the soldiers and the plunder were purified, before the plunder was divided up. Half went to *the soldiers who took part in the battle and half to the rest of the community*. Out of this some went to the High Priest (as *the Lord's part*), and some to the Levites. The officers gave an offering to the Lord out of their spoils, in thankfulness that no Israelite was killed and this was accepted by Moses and Eleazar as *a memorial for the Israelites before the Lord*. Later on, during the time of the Judges, the Midianites continued to be a major enemy of the Israelites. See Judges 6.

Situations like this where the Lord requires or sanctions the deaths of large numbers of people are hard to reconcile with the *God of love* exemplified in the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that God wanted His people to be *holy unto Himself*, and that this precluded any kind of relationship with foreign people and their gods. The goal of this was that the Israelites would then be a light that reflected the nature of God to all other nations. How blessed we (and all peoples) now are that Jesus has shown us that He is *the way, the truth and the life* (John 14:3), and that His way is indeed the *way of love* for all.

Chapter 32. Land for Reuben and Gad.

Two of the tribes, the Reubenites and Gadites, had very large herds and flocks. The land where they were camping by the Jordan had suitable land for their livestock so they asked Moses if they could settle there. Moses was angry because this would mean they would not go over the Jordan into *the land the Lord has given*, and they wouldn't support the other tribes in the conquest of Canaan. A compromise was reached in which Reuben and Gad could settle where they were but would cross the Jordan and help the rest of the Israelites to subdue the land of Canaan. Once this was done they could return back across the Jordan to their settlement. Moses made it clear that if they didn't do what they agreed they would be *sinning against the Lord*, and they could be sure that *your sin will find you out*. Joshua Chapter 22 shows that Reuben and Dan honoured this agreement and were allocated land over the Jordan, along with the half tribe of Manasseh.

Chapter 33. Summary of the journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.

At the Lord's command Moses recorded the stages in their journey, including the places where they camped. The Lord reminded Moses that 'When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, drive out all the inhabitants of the land before you. Destroy all their carved images and their cast idols, and demolish all their high places. Take possession of the land and settle in it, for I have given you the land to possess. He was to distribute the land by lot, and to a larger group give a larger inheritance, and to a smaller group a smaller one.

If they didn't drive out the inhabitants of the land *those you allow to remain will become barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. They will give you trouble in the land where you will live. And then I will do to you what I plan to do to them.'* Unfortunately the Israelites didn't heed this clear command of God, and it caused them endless trouble from then on.



Chapter 34. Boundaries of the Promised Land.

This chapter describes the northern, southern, eastern and western boundaries of the land of Canaan that was to be allotted to the Israelites. Only 9½ tribes would occupy this land, because Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had already *received their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan*.

Chapter 35. Allocation of special places within the Promised Land.

48 towns on both sides of the Jordan were to be given to the Levites, with pasture land around each town. This was to be a permanent possession because the Levites could not inherit land like the other tribes. 6 of the Levitical towns were to be *cities of refuge* where *a person who has killed someone accidentally may flee*. Regulations are given for situations where people are killed by murder, by accident, and with and without pre-meditation. If a death was murder the *avenger of blood* could put them to death but if the death was unintentional, they could flee to the nearest city of refuge for a trial. If found innocent of murder, the one who caused the death had to stay within the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. If they left the city before then, the avenger was allowed to put them to death.

Chapter 36. Zelophehad's daughter's inheritance.

Family heads from Manasseh asked Moses what would happen if a daughter received an inheritance and then married outside her tribe. (This was based on the law established in Numbers 27 allowing a daughter to receive an inheritance, if there were no sons). The Lord spoke through Moses and directed that Zelophehad's daughter must marry within her own tribe, to prevent property transferring between tribes during the Year of Jubilee.

The book of Numbers finishes with the statement: *These are the commands and regulations the Lord gave through Moses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab by the Jordan across from Jericho*. (Compare this to the final statement in Leviticus: *These are the commands the Lord gave Moses on Mt Sinai for the Israelites*. Leviticus 27:34).

Numbers leads into the book of Deuteronomy where the Lord renews His covenant with the Israelites and reviews the lessons they should have learnt from their time in the wilderness.

Discussion questions

1. Why was the book of Numbers written as part of the 5 books of the Torah? How does Numbers link with the other books?
2. Why is important to keep records of past generations? What can we learn from these records? Do you have a record of your life? Is it available for future generations to read and use? What would future generations learn from your life?
3. What can you learn from the book of Numbers about how God involves Himself in the life of His people?
4. Numbers contains regulations relating to purity, offerings in the tabernacle, and the celebration of the Sabbath and the annual feasts. Who were these regulations written for? Are they relevant for Jewish people today? Are they relevant for Christians today?
5. The wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness is used many times in the Bible to illustrate aspects of living in relationship with the Lord. Identify two different places where this happens and the lessons that are taught.
6. Consider the logistics involved in moving a group of possibly 6 million people and their animals 240 miles (386km) through a desert. What leadership qualities did Moses demonstrate as he led the group? How did God provide for His people? How was health maintained? How was order maintained? How were difficulties handled (including attacks by enemies and dealing with inter-personal relationships)?
7. What have you learned from your study of Numbers? How will you apply this in your life in the future?