

Numbers

Discontent, Disaster and

Discipline in the Desert

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Title of the Book

- From Greek Ἀριθμοί (*Arithmoi*)
- The Hebrew title comes from the word במדבר (*Bemidbar*), “in the desert [of]” from the first verse of the text
- Numbering of the men who were of war age (20 years old and above)
 - Ch. 1 (Sinai): 603,550
 - Ch. 26 (Moab): 601,730; Levites excluded from the census

Time of the Events

- Numbers covers about 39 years, nine months if Deuteronomy picks up immediately where Numbers ends (Num. 1:1; Deut. 1:3)
- Many say Numbers covers 38 years
- God said they would wander in the desert 40 years (14:34; 32:13)
 - Part of a year constitutes a whole year

Key Words & Concepts

- wandering or journeying
- “service”
- “work”
- “war”

Key Phrases

- “The Lord spoke” or “said” or “commanded” (102 times) in 36 chapters
- “in the desert (wilderness)” (31 times)
- “all who were able to go to war” (14 times in the first chapter)

Verses to Remember

6:24-26—“The Lord bless you and keep you”

14:22-23—Consequence of disobedience

14:24—“My servant Caleb”—rewarded

20:12—“Because you did not believe me”

22:18—“I cannot go beyond the word”

32:23—“be sure your sin will find you out”

Passage to Remember

13:26-33—The report after spying out the land

- v. 32—“bad report”—lit. “evil”
- v. 33—“giants”—lit. “nephilim” (Gen. 6:4)
- Grasshopper complex

Chapter to Remember

- Ch. 14—the critical turning point in Israel's history
- They were headed out of slavery and into the Promised Land, but “they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Heb. 3:16-19)

Outline

- Chs. 1-10—the first census and the divine order for service, departure from Sinai
- Chs. 11-20—complaining, disobeying, and wandering
- Chs. 21-36—victory over pagan kings in Moab, the second census, and preparation to enter Canaan

Topics & Events

- Organization at Mt. Sinai (chs. 1-10)
- 70 elders appointed (11:16-25)
- God sent quail (11:31-34)
- Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses (ch. 12)
- Disobedience at Kadesh (chs. 13-14)

Topics & Events

- Laws (ch. 15)
- Korah's Rebellion & death of 250+ and death of 14,700 complainers (ch. 16)
- Budding of Aaron's Rod (ch. 17)
- Duties, offerings, tithes (ch. 18)
- Laws of Purification (red heifer) (ch. 19)

Topics & Events

- Return to Kadesh, sin of Moses and death of Aaron (ch. 20)
- More complaining & dying; bronze serpent (ch. 21)
- Balaam (chs. 22-24)
 - 2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 11
 - Rev. 2:14

Topics & Events

- Corruption of Israel (idolatry, immorality, righteousness of Phinehas) (ch. 25)
- Second census (ch. 26)
- Additional laws and preparation for entering Canaan (chs. 27-36)

Israel Complained About:

- Plain complaining (11:1-3)
- The food God fed them (11:4-6)
- The land and the giants (14:2-3)
- The leaders God appointed (chs. 16-17)
- God's judgments (16:41)

Israel Complained About:

- Living—not dying sooner (20:3)
- Being in the desert (20:4)
- Not being in Egypt (20:5a)
- Not having “grain or figs or vines or pomegranates” (20:5b)
- Not having water (20:5c)

A Whole Lot of Complaining

- “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the desert? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread” (21:5)
- “Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (Phil. 2:14-15)

Trivia

We remember the names of Joshua and Caleb, but can you name any of the ten faithless men who were sent to spy out the land of Canaan?

Num. 13:4-15