

The Whole Truth Numbers

Introduction

A. About Numbers

1. Fourth book of Pentateuch
2. Moses as author
3. Title derives from Latin Vulgate “Numeri” (see census lists in chapters 1, 3, 4, and 26)
4. Hebrew title: “In the Wilderness”

Then the Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting, on the first of the second month, in the second year after they had come out of the land of Egypt, saying ... Numbers 1:1, NASB

5. Summarizes nomadic life of Israel

B. Geographical location of Numbers is the wilderness

1. Unpopulated stretch of land between Egypt and Canaan
2. Entered the wilderness in Exodus 15:22

²² Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water. Exodus 15:22, NASB

3. Can serve as a place of trust or doubt—describes our faith journey
4. For Israel the wilderness represented possibilities or problems

“... buffer zone between ‘liberation and landedness’” (Victor Hamilton)

C. Possible Outlines

1. Many Scholars suggest that it lacks a unified structure
2. Census-based outline (first generation—1-25 and wilderness generation—26-36)
3. Geographical-Chronological Structure
 - a. Preparations to depart from Sinai (1:1-10:10)
 - b. Departure from Sinai and arrival at Kadesh (10:11-20:21)
 - c. Journey from Kadesh to Moab (20:22-36:13)
4. Geographical-Theological Structure—Our Lens
 - a. At Sinai—God prepares Israel to inherit Canaan (1:1-10:10)
 - b. At Kadesh—People forfeit inheritance (10:11-21:35)
 - c. At Moab—God prepares a new generation to possess Canaan (22-36)

I. At Sinai—God Prepares Israel to Inherit Canaan (1:1-10:11)

A. Preparing to march (1-4)

1. God instructs Moses to take a census of Israelite congregation (1:1-3)
 - a. Males, 20 years or older able to go to war (15x)
 - b. Military activity is inevitable
 - c. Possible 600,000 men and total of 1-2 million
2. Moses is assigned a representative from each tribe to help (1:4-16) minus Levites (read v. 5)
3. Census taken (1:17-46, read v. 17-19)
4. Levites exempt and given special role (1:47-54)—guard and care for tabernacle

Lesson: This preparation for military and spiritual activity reminds us that Israel couldn't be nonchalant in their approach of their enemy nor could they be careless or indifferent in worship of a holy God—same is true for us

5. Organizations of Israel's camp (2:1-34)
6. Two Levitical censuses (3:1-4:3)
 - a. 1 month old or older (3:15)
 - b. Thirty to fifty years old (4:3)
7. Levitical responsibilities (4:4-49)
 - a. Kohathites—carry “holy things” of tabernacle (4:15, 19)
 - b. Gershonites—carry tabernacle curtains (4:24-26)
 - c. Merarites—stand guard over wood frames and pillars (4:31-32)
 - d. Consequences for overstepping responsibilities

NOTE: They have yet to travel with the tabernacle, so these instructions are contextually vital to their health

B. Establishing Camp Rules (5:1-6:21)

1. Emphasis on those who are to be exiled from sacred camp (i.e. leper—5:2-3)

⁴¹ Moved with compassion, Jesus stretched out His hand and touched him, and *said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Mark 1:41, NASB

2. Physical impurities defile camp (5:1-4)
3. Deliberate sin defiles camp and brings consequences (5:5-10)—unholy people dwelling among holy God
4. Suspected acts of marital unfaithfulness (5:11-31)
5. The Nazarite Vow—special sign of devotion (6:1-20)

C. Dedication of the Tabernacle (6:22-9:14)

1. Aaronic blessing (6:21-27)—gift from God

The God who gives blessing at the end of chapter six is the God who receives it in chapter seven. That the gift to God follows the gift from God shows that any gifts to God are a response to His gift and not a means of earning that gift of blessing” (Victor Hamilton).

2. Chapter seven is the longest in Pentateuch
3. Offerings brought by the tribal leader to the tabernacle (7:12-88)—act of worship (sacrifice)
4. Consecration and purification of Levites (8:1-26, read 8:5-6)
5. Reminder to celebrate Passover (one year later) before departure (9:1-14)

D. Following Divine Guidance to Canaan (9:15-10:10)

1. When camping, tabernacle must remain at the center of the camp
2. God’s presence will guide (cloud and fire) (read 9:15-28)

II. At Kadesh—The People Forfeit Their Inheritance (10:11-21:25)

A. Complaints and an outpouring of the Spirit (10:11-12:16)

1. Leave Sinai (10:12)
2. People complain (11:1)
3. God punished the people (11:1-3)
4. People complain about manna—want meat and food from Egypt (11:4-9)
5. Moses cried to the Lord about heavy burden (11:10-15)
6. God responds—choose 70 men to share load (11:16) (i.e. Jethro, Exodus)
7. Men are given the Spirit to carry burden of leadership

Human responsibility and delegation, as well as divine empowerment, are necessary to fulfill God’s assignment for us (Victor Hamilton)

8. Quail and plague (11:31-35)
9. Aaron and Miriam’s jealousy and consequences (12:1-15)

B. Rebellion of the spies (13-14)

1. 12 spies sent to scout land of Canaan
2. Land was good and fruitful
3. Ten spies lacked confidence to take land due to strength and size of enemy
4. Two spies (Caleb and Joshua) realized God would help provide victory (i.e. perspective)
5. People believe ten spies, discussed rejecting Moses as leader, and wanted to stone the two
6. God desires to wipe people out (minus Caleb and Joshua) and start fresh
7. Moses intercedes, God forgives, unbelieving generation dies in the wilderness

Read: Numbers 14:26-33

C. 38 Years of Wandering (15-20)

1. Clerical opposition from Korah—Levitical tribe (read 16:1-3)—first cousin
2. Covet higher position and authority (read 16:8-14)
3. Lord desired to destroy people (16:18-21)
4. Moses and Aaron intercede (16:22-27)
5. Men and families swallowed in earth (16:31-35)—Judgement (i.e. Jonah)
6. Plague hits people (16:47-50)
7. Aaron confirmed as high priest—staff budded and placed in ark (17)

NOTE: God has assigned different tasks to different groups and you must learn to be content with your role (i.e. body of Christ)

8. The events of chapter 16 and 17 leave the people in utter fear (read 17:12-13)
9. Privileges and duties of priests (18:1-19)
10. Roles of Levites (18:20-32)

NOTE: Fear of death invades this congregation

11. So a cleansing ritual for impurity caused by contact with deceased is given (19:20-22)
12. No water, strike rock (20:1-11)—lack of trust in God's provision
13. Moses denied entrance into land of Canaan (20:12-13)
14. Moses trying to get Edom to give them the green light to pass through their land (20:14-15)

IMP: Moses, despite bad news and failure, still carries out his ministry task

D. From Kadesh to Plains of Moab (20-21)

1. Aaron dies
2. After 38 years, they finally arrive at the border of Canaan—still complaining (read 21:4-5)
3. Due to complaining, God sends poisonous snakes, bite and kill many
4. People ask Moses to intercede on their behalf
5. God's response—Bronze snake brings healing (read 21:8-9)

¹⁴ As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up;¹⁵ so that whoever believes will in Him have eternal life. John 3:14, NASB

- a. Why the comparison between snake and Jesus? 2 Corinthians 5:21
- b. King Hezekiah broke this down (2 Kings 18:4) because idolatrous — worship the creator not the creation
6. Travels continued (21:10-35)

III. At Moab—God Prepares New Generation to Possess Canaan

A. Balak & Balaam (22-24)

1. Balak, son of the Moabite King, knew of Israel's reputation and feared for their life (22:2-4)
2. Balak requests the help of Balaam to call a curse upon Israel and immobilize them (pays him for the curse)
3. God instructs Balaam not to honor the request (22:12)
4. Servants return with a larger offer, so this time the Lord says to go and do what He says (22:20)
5. Balaam's donkey, the angel, and Balaam's agreement to say what the Lord says
6. Balaam's four oracles (three in response to Balak, one spontaneous)—Blesses Israel and promises increase (see 24:17)

B. Immorality and Idolatry (25)

1. With the daughters of Moab (25:1)
2. Worship gods of Moab (25:2-3)
3. Plague upon the people—kill those who have been yoked to gods of Moab
4. Zimri brings a woman into the “inner” room, Phinehas brings to an end (25:6-13)
5. Ruth—Moabite woman

C. The Second Census (26:1-27:11)

1. Census of the generation born in the wilderness who will inherit land of Canaan (26:4)
2. Similar count to census in chapter one—600,000 men for war
3. Daughters of Zelophehad—can they inherit land as women with no brothers and deceased father? (27:4)
4. Solution is provided (27:5-11)

D. Joshua Commissioned to Lead (27:12-23)

E. Religious Calendar and Vows (28-30)

F. War with Midian (31) — read v. 1-2

G. Dividing and Settling the Land (32-36)

Conclusion

- A. The parameters and guidelines laid out in Scripture will enable us to better travel throughout our faith journey
- B. The wilderness encounters can be navigated but it requires a total trust in God
- C. To achieve God-size dreams and promises we have to have a divine perspective and see not what our human eyes see but what God's eyes see
- D. Obedience ... Obedience ... Obedience

