

LITERARY OVERVIEW

Title: Numbers – Reference to the two census of the eligible soldiers for Israel. There is much more here than that.

The Hebrew title was from 1:1 (Heb. "Bemindbar") or "in the wilderness."

Author: Moses as primary writer and compiler.

Audience: The nation of Israel and its posterity; also us (1 Corinthians 10:11 – more later)

Purpose: To record the history of Israel in the wilderness wandering, to demonstrate the goodness and severity of God (Romans 11:22).

Plotline: Israel is prepared to leave Mt. Sinai and enter the promised land, but through a series of rebellions is consigned to wander in the wilderness for 40 years.

Main Events: The giving of more ceremonial and moral laws. Cycles of complaint and judgment. Failure to believe God and enter the promised land. 40 years of wilderness wandering.

Main Characters: God, Moses, Israel, Balaam, Jethro (with various nations as sub-characters).

Form/Genre: Law codes. Also epic "travel stories."

Timeline: c. 1527 b.c. Moses is born - c. 1487 b.c. Moses flees Egypt for Midian - c. 1446 b.c. The Israelites cross the Red Sea - c. 1445 b.c. The Law is given at Mount Sinai - c. 1445-1405 b.c. Events in Numbers - c. 1405 b.c. Israel enters the Promised Land

Challenges:

- 1.) The cycle of narrative and law codes. Be prepared for this and don't get bogged down. The first 10 chapters can be discouraging and one can be ready to give up before getting to some very significant narrative.
- 2.) Unfamiliarity with nations and peoples. Remember they are real people, and some of the action becomes perplexing.
- 3.) Apparent harshness of God in dealing with their sins. Remember they have agreed to enter into a covenant, and that God has not only created them but also redeemed them from harsh slavery.
- 4.) Try to read yourself "into" the action and history.

OUTLINE**PART 1 - PREPARATION AND DEPARTURE (chs.1-12)**

- Leviticus covers one month, this section of the book about one month.
- I. The First Census (1:1-54)**
 - *There is a systematic counting of the men who are of fighting age (603,550). This makes them aware that what they are about to do involves military exploits. God is not going to merely overcome their enemies while they passively sit by, but they He is going to help them as they fight to take the land.*
- II. The Camp Configuration (2:1-34)**
 - *When it describes the order of the encampment, it is several square miles of tents, and around 2.5 million people. This is not merely a mass of military men, but women, children, old people. The need for orderliness is obvious. God provides for this to keep from confusion. Everyone knows their place. They also receive directions of how they are to break camp to march. One of the key points is that every camp points to the tabernacle, showing the centrality of worship in their lives*
- III. Census and Instruction for the Priesthood (3:1-4:49)**
 - *Worship was not a partitioned part of their existence, but literally at the very center. Key to this worship was the priesthood and sacrifices. Here again we see order, and how the sons of Aaron knew their responsibilities clearly. This was a dedicated order of men who had special responsibilities in the tabernacle of worship.*
- IV. Ceremonial and Moral Laws (5:1-6:27)**
 - *While some of the particular laws are hard to understand their reasoning or apply, we look through to the moral principles. In this section concern about protection for the well from the sick (lepers), making restitution for sins (justice), and marital purity (suspecting adultery) are seen.*
 - *There is also the introduction of the Nazarite vow that will play a part in the story of Sampson in Judges. There are further instructions on the verbal priestly blessing.*
- V. The Dedication of the Tabernacle (7:1-8:26)**
 - *Special offerings of the leaders are received, special instruction about the lamps, and the dedication of the Levites.*
- VI. Provision of an Alternate Passover (9:1-14)**
 - *In the narrative, we are told of the Passover being celebrated, but some were ceremonially defiled and could not partake. The LORD graciously allows for another alternative opportunity to celebrate it.*
- VII. The Cloud and Fire (9:15-23)**
 - *God sets His visible presence among them in the cloud of shelter over the tabernacle by day, and the fire by night. This becomes the means of His directing them of when to move and where to settle.*
- VIII. Two Silver Trumpets (10:1-10)**
 - *Trumpets are crafted (unlike the shofar) that are used to direct the camp, the meetings, sacrifices, and the warfare.*
- IX. Departure from Sinai (10:11-36)**

- They are now on the move and headed toward the land God had promised. Moses tries to convince his father-in-law to go with them, to receive the blessings the LORD has promised, but he will not.
- X. The People Complain (11:1-15)
 - No sooner have they departed than they complain about the food. They inaccurately remember their time of bondage (we ate "freely"), and the Lord's wrath burns against them. They even complain about the manna that God was supernaturally providing.
 - Moses himself succumbs to the pressure, and is displeased with the LORD. He requests that God kill him if He won't do something. He declares that the burden of leadership of the people is too great for him.
- XI. The Seventy Elders (11:16-30)
 - God responds by having him call 70 of the elders of Israel and promises to put the same spirit that is in Moses in them. The Spirit comes, and prophecies through them showing God's promise is fulfilled and that they are ordained for this special purpose.
- XII. The Miraculous Provision of Quail (11:31-45)
 - God sends Quail until the people loath it. They believe they know what is best for them, but God shows that He knows best. They are then struck with a plague by the LORD as chastisement.
- XIII. Aaron and Miriam Rebel (12:1-16)
 - Not only is there a problem with the people, but now even his brother and sister show signs of rebellion. Miriam is struck with leprosy, Moses mediates, and yet she is put outside the camp for several days.
- XIV. The Reconnaissance Mission (13:1-14:45)
 - This is the critical turning point – 14:22-23. An eleven day journey becomes a forty-year agony.

PART 2 – THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY (chs.14-25)

- This section will cover about 40 years. It is in the form of a travel story.
 - Travel story - A story in which a leading action is the journeying of a person or group through a series of places. One reason this genre is so prevalent (including in the Bible) is the literary motifs that converge in a travel story: variety of adventure; danger; risk; suspense; testing; encounters with a range of characters; quest; flight; escape; exile; wandering (Ryken's Bible Handbook).*
- I. **Ceremonial and Moral Laws (15:1-41)**
- II. Rebellion Against Moses and Aaron (16:1-17:13)
- III. **Ceremonial and Moral Laws (18:1-19:22)**
- IV. Moses' Anger at Kadesh (20:1-13)
 - This is a key turning point, Moses essentially receiving the same punishment as Israel.
- V. Trouble in Edom (20:14-21)
- VI. The Death of Aaron (20:22-29)
- VII. Victory at Hormah (21:1-3)
- VIII. Rebellion and the Bronze Serpent (21:4-9)
- IX. Continued Journey to Moab (21:10-20)
- X. Victory Against King Sihon and Og (21:21-35)
- XI. Balak and Balaam (22:1-24:25)
- XII. Harlotry in Moab (25:1-18)

PART 3 – PREPARATION TO ENTER THE LAND (chs.26-36)

- This brings them to the plains of Moab.
- I. **The Second Census (26:1-65)**
 - Begins at Sinai with one generation, ends in the plains of Moab 40 years later with another generation.
- II. **Ceremonial and Moral Laws (27:1-30:16)**
- III. Vengeance on the Midianites (31:1-54)
- IV. Settling East of the Jordan River (32:1-42)
- V. Review of the Journey (33:1-49)
- VI. **Instructions on Conquering Canaan (33:50-56)**
- VII. **Boundaries and Leaders Appointed (34:1-29)**
- VIII. **Levite Cities, Cities of Refuge, and Female Inheritance (35:1-36:13)**

MAJOR THEMES

- 1.) **The character of God**
 - God is teaching them about Himself, who they have utter ignorance of after 400 years of Egyptian bondage. His holiness, justice, mercy, patience, and sovereignty.
- 2.) **The sinfulness of man.**
 - Unbelief, rebellion, unthankfulness, fleshly desires.
- 3.) **The place of a mediator.**

- Moses is a type of Christ who continues to lay his life before the LORD for their preservation. But he is only an imperfect type, as seen in his sin and anger.
- 4.) The consequences of unbelief and disobedience.**
- God’s love is exquisite, and His presence was still with them in a way unlike any other people. He supernaturally sustained them and prepared them to be a special people. Nevertheless, there were devastating consequences of being unsettled and frequently under chastisement.
- 5.) The application of 1 Corinthians 10:11.**
- 6.) The application of Hebrews 3:7-4:6.**
- The whole book becomes a kind of spiritual analogy and motif for the Christian life.