

“THROUGH THE BIBLE”
Union Chapel M. B. Church
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NUMBERS
OUTLINE 1
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Numbers: The 40 Year Journey to the Promised Land

Introduction to Numbers

Many times we have talked about how the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years. Well, the Book of Numbers tells that story.

Numbers follows Moses and Israel’s journey from the foot of Mount Sinai (which is where Leviticus ends) to the edge of the Promised Land of Canaan. If this were a regular road trip of the time, the journey would only take about two weeks.

So why does it take 40 years? When the people get about halfway there, Moses sends a few spies into the land to scout it out for the upcoming invasion. They knew current inhabitants probably aren’t going to welcome them with open arms.

Most of the spies come back in a panic, claiming that the Canaanites are far too powerful for Israel to overcome. This leads to a revolt, with the people refusing to take the land.

God gives them their wish, decreeing that the whole generation will die in the wilderness, and the land will be taken by their children.

It’s a vital part of the Torah, Israel’s five-part origin story and the foundation of the Bible.

Numbers: The 40 Year Journey to the Promised Land

I. Major Characters in Numbers

God - the creator of heaven and earth, who chose Israel as his special nation and dwells in their midst.

Moses - the prophet and human leader of the nation of Israel. He's the chief spokesperson for God to his people, and vice versa. Moses is considered the most important prophet in Judaism and one of the most important prophets in Christianity, and he authored the first five Books of the Bible.

Aaron - Moses' brother, spokesperson, and the high priest of Israel.

Eleazar (El-a-zar) - Aaron's son, who takes his place when Aaron dies.

Balaam - a diviner (fortune teller) for hire. A non-Israelite described in chapters 22-24 of the Book of Numbers, the fourth Book of the Bible (Old Testament), as a diviner who is importuned by Balak, king of Moab, to place a curse on the people of Israel.

Joshua - Moses' aide who spies on the people of Canaan. God selects him to be Moses' successor.

II. Theme

There are a lot of weird happenings along the Israelites' journey - including that episode with the talking donkey. But the main focus of the book is Israel's repeated rebellion and God's repeated mercy and discipline on his people.

If we had to choose just one verse to sum up the key theme in this book, it would be Numbers 14:11

“And the LORD said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have sewed among them?” (Numbers 14:11 KJV)

III. Human Rebellion

The Israelites rebel against God and Moses several times in the Book of Numbers. They complain about food. They complain about water. They complain that they'll be crushed by their enemies. They complain about Moses and even make a few death threats.

- Numbers chapter 11 is where the children of Israel along with the mixed multitude that came out with them fell lusting and complaining about the food they had in the wilderness. God burnt many of them with a fire in the wilderness in the uttermost parts of the camp.
- In Number 12, Moses' brother and sister, Aaron and Miriam, try to launch a revolt against his authority. They appear to have a reasonable complaint. Moses teaches that Israelites are not to marry foreigners (Deut. 7:3), yet he himself has a foreign wife.

IV. Divine Punishment

When the people complain, God hears them - and it doesn't go well. The Book of Numbers has stories of God killing rebellious Israelites with fire, plague, and snakes. Sometimes Moses calls to God for help when the people turn on him - sometimes God punished them directly.

V. Divine Provision

But even though the people prove to be rebellious, God extends mercy to them. Rather than killing off the whole nation in the wilderness, he waits for the rebellious generation to die and preserves the younger people.

He continues to provide manna, that mysterious bread from heaven. He even prevents Balaam, the pagan prophet, from cursing the people.