

**Wilderness Period:
Israel in the Wilderness *Numbers 1:1-36:13***

The book of Numbers gets its name from two censuses taken in the book. The Septuagint calls it *Arithmoi*, which means, "Arithmetic."

Beginning the second month of the second year after the Exodus and continue until the 10th month of the 40th year the events of Numbers covers approximately 39 years.. The dates of these events are from 1461-1423 B.C. The book records the nation of Israel from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea. The 38+ years of wilderness wandering comprise the major time span of the book

They leave Mount Sinai and journey to Kadesh-Barnea. This was a total of 150-200 miles. It was an 11-day journey. However, they spent forty years wandering on a journey that should have been forty days.

We will follow the following outline to study this book.

- I- First Census. *Num 1***
- II- Order of Camp. Getting Ready to March. *Num 2-7***
- III- Order of the March. *Num 9-10***
- IV- Sinai to Kadesh Barnea. *Num 11-12***
- V- Failure at the threshold of the Promised Land. *Num 13-14***
- VI- Wandering in the Wilderness. *Num 15-21.***
- VII- The Prophet Balaam. *Num 22-25.***
- VIII- Second Census. *Num 26.***
- IX- A new generation prepared. *Num 27-36***

I- First Census. *Num 1*

Numbers 1:1-46 records the first census taken of the fighting men, 20 years old and up, of Israel. (See **EXTRA**

STEPS (C).) The total number of fighting men of this first census was 603,550 (***Num 1:46***) This did not include the tribe of Levi. There were 12 tribes numbered however. The tribe of Joseph was divided into two tribes and became the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. (See **EXTRA STEPS (B).**)

II- Order of Camp. Getting ready to march. *Num 2-7*

Because there were approximately 2 million people in the camp there had to be an order established. God gave Moses instruction on the order of the camp. (See **EXTRA STEPS (C).**) God gave specific instructions concerning the tabernacle and the tribe of Levi. You will notice that the tabernacle was located in the middle of the camp. This showed (shows) the worship of God is to be central.

III- Order of the March. *Num 9-10*

The order of the March had to be very precise if they were to ever get anywhere. God gave specific instructions on the order He wanted the tribes to march in. There were four lead tribes that carried a banner for the people to see and follow as they moved.

The New Testament tells us, "***Let all things be done decently and in order.***" ***1 Cor 14:40*** God is a God of order and organization.

God's presence was with them in the form of a cloud over the tabernacle. When the cloud moved forward the tabernacle moved and when the cloud stopped they camped.

IV- Sinai to Kadesh-Barnea *Num 11-12*

On the trip from Mount Sinai, where they had been camped, to Kadesh-Barnea two major events occurred. First, the people's complaining displeased the Lord. **Num 11:1**. The chastisement was a consuming fire. They named the place "*Taberah*" which means, "*a burning*." There would be many sad events such as this during the next 40 years.

Second, Miriam and Aaron became jealous of Moses and God struck Miriam with leprosy. **Num 12**. Aaron repented and Miriam was restored when Moses prayed for her.

V- Failure at the Threshold of the Promised Land. Num 13-14

The spies are sent into the land that flowed with milk and honey and return with their report. All but Joshua and Caleb were afraid and did not trust in the Lord. They were on the threshold and because of unbelief did not enter the Promised Land.

13:1-25 records that the spies spied out the land 40 days. **14:1-10** records the rebellion of the people against Joshua and Caleb's advice to go forward. This was rebellion against God. **14:26-39** reveals the punishment will be 40 years of wandering (1 year for each day they spied out the land) and death in the wilderness for all the adults 20+. These were the ones numbered in the census.

VI- Wandering in the Wilderness. Num 15-21

There were many events that took place during the wilderness time of 38 years and 10 months. God fed them from heaven every day. Their shoes did not wear out. God provided, as they experienced God's provision daily.

There were several significant events during this time. First, in **16:10-**

19 is recorded the rebellion of Korah against the authority of Moses. **16:20-50** reveals that the ground opened up and swallowed them alive.

Second, in **Num 17** Aaron's rod buds and shows again God intended the tribe of Levi to be the priest. This rod was kept for a testimony in the temple. (see **Heb 9:4**)

Third, in **Num 20** the people are again complaining about no water. In **Ex 17:1-7** you will recall that Moses was instructed to strike the rock and water came out. In **Num 20:8** Moses was told only "*...speak ye unto the rock...*" Moses however was weary of the people and struck the rock 2 times. **Num 20:11-12**. This is the reason Moses was denied entry into the Promised Land. **Num 20:12**. This rock was a type of Christ and did not need to be struck more than one time. Christ needs to not be crucified, or struck, but one time for our salvation.

Num 21 records their punishment by serpents for murmuring. Moses lifted up a bronze serpent and they only had to look to live. This pictures Christ being lifted up. Israel worshipped this serpent and in **II Kings 18:4** we see that King Hezekiah destroyed it. This shows us that we do not need to worship the cross and make it an idol but worship the risen Savior.

VII- The Prophet Balaam. Num 22-25

Balaam was a prophet for hire. The Canaanite King Balak, out of fear for the Israelites, hires Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam attempts to talk God into allowing him to do it. As he journeys to the King Balaam's donkey speaks. An angel blocks the passage, the donkey sees it and runs Balaam into a wall. For this Balaam beats her. Balaam then has

a conversation with the donkey and the angel.

The episode of Balaam is a very important event. Merrill Unger gives a very simple understanding of the influence of Balaam event unto today. "Balaam is the type of a mercenary prophet, ambitious to exploit his gift financially. This is "the way of Balaam" (2 Pet 2:15). The "error" of Balaam" (Jude 11) is the diviner-prophet's blunder in reasoning that God of necessity must curse the nation of Israel because of its sin.....The "doctrine of Balaam" (Rev 2:14) was the teaching of the money-man seer to abandon a separated pilgrimage for world conformity (Num 31:15-16; Jas 4:4)." (*Unger's Bible Handbook*, Moody Press. Chicago. 1966. p.133-34)

The prophet had a very large effect upon the Nation of Israel when he told the King of Moab to have the Moabite women to seduce and marry the Israelite men. God would not allow Balaam to curse Israel but because of their carnality Balaam succeeded in his task.

VIII- Second Census. Cpt 26.

The second census is taken after the years of wandering in the wilderness. All but Joshua, Caleb and Moses are dead that were 20 years and older at the first census. J.V. McGee points out an interesting fact about the two numbers. "A comparison of the two sets of census figures will show that their number was decimated. Numbers 1:46 says there were 603,550 fighting men. Numbers 26:51 states that there were 601,730 fighting men. This represents a loss of 1,820 fighting men. God command was for them to be fruitful and multiply, but they were losing instead of gaining during the years in

the wilderness." (*Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, Vol. 1. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1981. p 453)

IX- A new generation prepared. Num 27-36

Num 27-36 gives some of the preparation of the details for the new generation about to enter the Promised Land. We will take up this more in the next step.

Application to Life's Steps:

- 1- God is a God of organization and wants us to give attention to organization.
- 2- God does not want His people to be a complaining people.
- 3- Christ's one time sacrifice is enough for our salvation.
- 4- We should be on guard to not follow the course of Balaam.
- 5- When we wander out of God's will we gain nothing.

Retracing our Steps:

- 1- Where does the book gets its name?

- 2- How many men were from 20 years and older at the first census?
_____ The second census?
_____.
- 3- What moved in front of the Israelites to direct and lead them. Hint this was not the Ark of the Covenant. _____
- 4- What prevented Moses from entering the Promised Land? _____
- 5- Who was Balaam? _____
- 6- What was Balaam's:
way? _____
error? _____
doctrine? _____