

NUMBERS

Contents:

[Background](#)

[Author](#)

[Date and Location](#)

[Purpose](#)

[Outline](#)

[Timeline](#)

BACKGROUND

Having received the law at Sinai (Exodus-Leviticus), Israel prepared for their return to Canaan ([Numbers 1-10](#)). After completing the short journey to the borders of Canaan, however, they rebelled against the Lord ([Numbers 13-14](#)) and were condemned to 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. [Numbers 15-36](#) records various events of those years of wandering, as the nation vacillated between spiritual success and apostasy. The book ends with Israel encamped once more within sight of the Promised Land.

AUTHOR

Moses (see [Genesis: Author](#); [Exodus: Author](#)). There are indications within the book itself that Moses is its author ([Numbers 1:1](#); [Numbers 33:2](#)). The detailed, eyewitness account could only have been provided by Moses.

DATE AND LOCATION

Since the Exodus occurred in 1446 B.C. (see [Exodus: Date and Location](#)), the book could not have been written until about 1406. Moses probably kept a journal of the wandering, so Numbers would actually have been written over the course of the 40 years and put into its final form in 1406.

PURPOSE

- To show that God chastens his people when they disobey.
- To foreshadow the sacrifice of Christ through symbolism such as the red heifer and the bronze serpent ([Numbers 19](#); [Numbers 21](#)).
- To continue revealing the attributes of God (Genesis—Leviticus) by showing:
 - his perseverance in covenant keeping
 - the balance between his grace and his wrathful chastening

OUTLINE

1. ISRAEL AT SINAI: PREPARATION ([Numbers 1:1-10:10](#))
 1. A census of the people ([Numbers 1](#))
 2. Assigning campsites around the Tabernacle ([Numbers 2](#))

- C. Census of Levites, their duties assigned ([Numbers 3-4](#))
- D. Stan2 Nazirites ([Numbers 6](#))
- E. Offerings for the Tabernacle from Israel's leaders ([Numbers 7](#))
- F. Dedication of the Levites ([Numbers 8](#))
- G. Fiery cloud, silver trumpets ([Numbers 9:1-10:10](#))

II.FROM SINAI TO KADESH: FRUSTRATION ([Numbers 10:11-20:13](#))

- A. Departure from Sinai ([Numbers 10:11-36](#))
- B. Complaints and solutions ([Numbers 11](#))
- C. Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses ([Numbers 12](#))
- D. Rebellion at Kadesh-barnea ([Numbers 13-14](#))
- E. Additional laws ([Numbers 15](#))
- F. Rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram ([Numbers 16](#))
- G. Aaron's staff buds ([Numbers 17](#))
- H. Duties of Levites ([Numbers 18](#))
- I. Purification by the ashes of a red heifer ([Numbers 19](#))
- X. Moses strikes the rock ([Numbers 20:1-13](#))

III.FROM KADESH TO MOAB: ANTICIPATION ([Numbers 20:14-36:13](#))

- A. Edom denies passage to Israel ([Numbers 20:14-21](#))
- B. Death of Aaron ([Numbers 20:22-29](#))
- C. Bronze serpent ([Numbers 21:1-9](#))
- D. Israel defeats Sihon and Og ([Numbers 21:10-35](#))
- E. Balak and Balaam ([Numbers 22-24](#))
- F. Israelites seduced by Moabites ([Numbers 25](#))
- G. Second census of the people ([Numbers 26](#))

- H. Joshua to succeed Moses ([Numbers 27](#))
- I. Regulations for worship and vows ([Numbers 28-29](#))
- X. Regulations for vows ([Numbers 30](#))
- K. Israel defeats the Midianites ([Numbers 31](#))
- L. Settlement of Transjordan tribes ([Numbers 32](#))
- M. Review of the wilderness journey ([Numbers 33](#))
- N. Settlement of Canaan described ([Numbers 34-36](#))

TIMELINE

- 1446 B.C.: The Exodus, Law given
- 1443 B.C.: Kadesh-barnea, wilderness wandering begins
- 1406 B.C.: Israel enters Canaan

[Numbers 1:1-46](#) *The first census: All able men over 20.* With Israel still at Sinai, Moses was commanded to take a census of all the men 20 years and older who could fight for Israel when they entered Canaan. He selected one man from each tribe to assist him. The total number of fighting men in the 12 tribes was 603,550, suggesting a total population of well over 2 million. (On the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, see exposition on ^s[Genesis 48:1-22](#).)

[Numbers 1:47-54](#) *"But leave out the Levites."* The Levites were excluded from the census because, as those responsible for the Tabernacle, they were not to be warriors.

[Numbers 2:1-34](#) *Tent sites for 2 million.* God wanted the Israelites to have an organized camp. Each tribe was assigned a place around the centrally positioned Tabernacle. Each tribe had a "banner" ([Numbers 2:2](#)) to identify it. The men appointed to help conduct the census were appointed to lead each tribe. The tribes on each side were given specific marching orders to follow whenever the Israelites broke camp ([Numbers 2:9](#), [16](#), [24](#), [31](#)).

[Numbers 3:1-4](#) *His two surviving sons.* With Nadab and Abihu dead because of disobedience ([Numbers 10:1-7](#)), Aaron had only two sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, to assist him as priests.

[Numbers 3:5-13](#) *"The Levites are mine, for your service."* Because he had freed the Israelites from Egypt, their firstborn males belonged to the Lord ([Exodus 13:1-2](#), [11-16](#); [Exodus 22:29](#)). God now claimed all the male Levites in place of the firstborn of all the tribes and gave them to Aaron as assistants.

[Numbers 3:14-39](#) *"Now you can number the Levites."* God told Moses to number the Levites, divided into three families according to the three sons of Levi—Gershon, Kohath, and Merari (see [Exodus 6:16-20](#); Moses and Aaron descended from Kohath). This census differed from that of the whole nation in that all Levite males one month and older were counted.

The families of Gershon were to camp near the Tabernacle to the west. They were to care for its curtains and coverings.

The families of Kohath were to camp to the south and care for the Tabernacle furnishings—the Ark of the Covenant, table, lampstand, altars, and vessels.

The families of Merari were to camp to the north and care for the framework of the Tabernacle and courtyard.

Moses, Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar were to pitch their tents to the east of the Tabernacle, at its entrance.

The total number of Levite males one month old and older was 22,000.

Numbers 3:40-51 *Redeeming those not redeemed by Levites.* Moses now counted all the *firstborn* males of Israel *one month and older*. The total was 273 more than the total number of male Levites, who were to have been their ransom (**Numbers 3:5-13**). Each of these 273 "extra" firstborn sons were to be redeemed with five shekels of silver.

Numbers 4:1-49 *Second census of Levites: All males aged 30 to 50.* Next came a census of Levite males between ages 30 and 50, which was apparently the age-span of their official Tabernacle service. The total was 8,580.

The Kohathites were given more detailed instructions concerning care of the Tabernacle furnishings, especially of transporting them from one site to the next. Apparently Eleazar was to supervise these duties (**Numbers 4:16**).

The Gershonites' and Merarites' duties were reiterated. Ithamar was assigned to supervise their work.

Numbers 5:1-4 *"Those who are defiled must depart."* Because God's presence was with Israel, all who were ritually defiled by disease or death had to be removed from the camp until cleansed.

Numbers 5:5-10 *Confession and restitution plus 20 percent.* This instruction seems to supplement **Leviticus 6:1-7**. Theft was to be confessed and the stolen goods returned, plus the monetary equivalent of 20 percent of their value. If the one stolen from was now deceased, the goods were given to the priest.

Numbers 5:11-31 *"Is she innocent or immoral? The test will tell."* If a man suspected his wife of adultery, the priest would make her drink a special mixture of holy water and dust. Her guilt or innocence would be determined by her physical reaction to the drink. This unusual "trial by ordeal" placed justice in God's hands and protected innocent women from the false accusations of jealous husbands.

Numbers 6:1-21 *The way of the Nazirite.* A Nazirite was one who voluntarily took a vow of separation to the Lord for a fixed period of time. During the days of his vow he was not to drink any strong beverage, cut his hair, or touch a corpse. When he had completed his period of separation, he was to appear before the priest with specified offerings. After his head was shaved and his hair burned, he was permitted to resume normal life.

Numbers 6:22-27 *A special blessing from priest to people.* God gave Moses the words for a special blessing, speaking of security, grace, and peace, whereby the priests were to bless the people.

Numbers 7:1-88 *Gifts for the Tabernacle: The legacy of the leaders.* On the day Moses finished setting up the Tabernacle, the 12 tribal leaders who assisted with the first census (**Numbers 1:5-15**) brought an offering. (This was probably the same day mentioned in **Exodus 40:17**; the events of **Numbers 7** probably preceded those of **Numbers 1**.)

Each leader brought an ox, for a total of 12; and each two leaders brought a wagon, for a total of six. Two of the wagons and four oxen were given to the Gershonites to help them transport the Tabernacle curtains and coverings. Four wagons and eight oxen were given to the Merarites to transport the Tabernacle boards. The Kohathites, who were to carry the Tabernacle furnishings on their shoulders (**Numbers 4:15**; **Numbers 7:9**), received no oxen or wagons.

The altar of burnt offerings was dedicated over a period of 12 days (**Numbers 7:10-83**). The description of these days is repetitious, for each day a tribal leader brought identical gifts and offerings. While the repetition may seem monotonous, it shows that God valued each gift.

Numbers 7:84-86 summarizes the silver and gold offerings. The silver weighed a total of 2,400 shekels, and the gold totaled 120 shekels. **Numbers 7:87-88** summarizes the leaders' sacrificial offerings.

Numbers 7:89-8:4 *He hears a voice above the Ark.* Whenever Moses entered the Tabernacle, the Lord spoke to him from between the two cherubim above the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant. On this occasion, God gave instructions concerning the golden lampstand. This ornate, seven-branched lampstand was fashioned from a single piece of gold. The seven lamps were to light the Holy Place in the Tabernacle.

Numbers 8:5-19 *Dedication of the Levites.* To be purified for service, the Levites underwent a ritual of sprinkling and shaving. Then the people laid their hands on them, and they were offered "as a special offering" (**Numbers 8:11**), indicating that they were being substituted for the firstborn of the other tribes (**Numbers 3:5-13**). The Levites in turn laid their hands on two bulls and made atonement for themselves.

The Levites were a gift to the priests to assist with the Tabernacle. They were also a gift to all Israel, to atone for the other tribes. By camping near the Tabernacle they prevented the other tribes from carelessly violating the Tabernacle and incurring God's wrath.

Numbers 8:20-26 *Duties of the Levites.* Having been purified and dedicated to the Lord, the Levites assumed their responsibilities. **Numbers 4:3** indicates that Levites began serving at age 30, while **Numbers 8:24** says they could begin at 25; there may have been a five-year apprenticeship. Retirement from active service was at age 50.

Numbers 9:1-14 *Passover: Instructions, extensions, but no exemptions.* A year had passed since Israel left Egypt. It was the first month of the year (roughly equivalent to March-April), and they were to observe the Passover on the 14th day, to commemorate their deliverance.

As Passover was about to begin, some men in the camp were ceremonially unclean because of contact with a corpse, and therefore could not participate. They were concerned enough to ask Moses

what they should do about it. God told Moses that, when there was a legitimate reason for nonparticipation, the person could observe Passover exactly one month later. If, however, a person willfully refrained from Passover, he or she was to be excommunicated.

Foreigners could participate in Passover if they were willing to meet the same requirements as the Israelites ([Exodus 12:48-49](#)).

[Numbers 9:15-23](#) *The cloud: It moves, they move; it stops, they stop.* The Israelites journeyed through the wilderness as the pillar of cloud or fire led them (see [Exodus 13:21-22](#); [Exodus 40:34-38](#)). When the cloud hovered over the Tabernacle, Israel remained camped. When the cloud began moving, they broke camp and followed.

[Numbers 10:1-10](#) *The several sounds of the silver trumpets.* Two silver trumpets were made for the leaders to communicate with the people. The sounding of both trumpets called the nation to gather at the Tabernacle. The sounding of one trumpet called only the leaders. Sounding "short blasts" ([Numbers 10:6](#)) signaled breaking camp and resuming the journey.

[Numbers 10:11-36](#) *Departure from Sinai: The cloud moves, so they move.* On the 20th day of the second month of the second year since Egypt, the cloud began to move, so Israel broke camp and departed from Sinai.

Israel's march was as organized as its camp. Leading the march were Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, the tribes encamped to the east of the Tabernacle. The Gershonites and Merarites followed, carrying the Tabernacle structure. Then followed Reuben, Simeon, and Gad, from the south. The Kohathites then followed, carrying the Tabernacle furnishings. Then came Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin from the west, and Dan, Asher, and Naphtali from the north.

Moses invited Hobab, his Midianite brother-in-law, to accompany the Israelites.

Whenever the cloud moved (presumably in the morning), indicating Israel should break camp, the Ark set out and Moses claimed God's promises with a prayer: "Arise, O LORD, and let your enemies be scattered! Let them flee before you!" When the Ark rested (presumably in the evening), Moses prayed, "Return, O LORD, to the countless thousands of Israel!"

[Numbers 11:1-3](#) *The fire of anger falls from heaven.* No sooner had the people begun their journey than for some unspecified reason they complained. God became angry and sent a fire that consumed some of those on the outer edges of the camp. Moses prayed on their behalf, and the fire was quenched.

[Numbers 11:4-23](#) *"Oh, for the good old days of slavery!"* Tiring of the daily manna, the Israelites quickly forgot their grievous days of slavery in Egypt and remembered only the delicacies they no longer enjoyed. Moses felt overwhelmed by the complaining. He told God that the burden of providing for the people was too great, and asked God to just take his life and relieve him of his responsibilities. Instead, God instructed Moses to select 70 men to assist him. (For a similar incident, see [Exodus 18:13-27](#).)

God promised to send the meat that the Israelites craved. He warned Moses, however, that the meat would become loathsome to them.

Numbers 11:24-30 *"I only wish they were all so Spirit-filled!"* The Spirit of God fell on the 70 selected men, just as promised, and they began to prophesy. When two of them, Eldad and Medad, continued to prophesy after the others had stopped, Joshua suggested that Moses stop them. Moses refused, saying that he wished all the people would be so Spirit-filled, instead of complaining!

Numbers 11:31-35 *Death at the dinner table.* God sent meat as promised—a great flock of quail. While the people were enjoying it, God sent a plague (as also promised!) and many of them died.

Numbers 12:1-16 *Finding fault with the world's meekest man.* Moses' own sister and brother, Miriam and Aaron, criticized him for marrying an Ethiopian. They were also jealous of Moses' leadership role—even though he was the most humble man on earth (**Numbers 12:3**)! God severely reprimanded them for speaking against Moses. Miriam, apparently the instigator, was struck with leprosy. Moses prayed for Miriam, and she was healed but was still required to be quarantined from the community for seven days. Israel did not proceed on its journey until Miriam's quarantine ended.

Numbers 13:1-20 *At Kadesh-barnea: "Is Canaan worth taking?"* While camped at Kadesh-barnea (see **Numbers 32:8**), Moses chose 12 men, one from each tribe, to go into Canaan and search it out, gathering information about the people and their fortifications, the soil and its fertility and vegetation.

Numbers 13:21-25 *The evidence: Two men to carry a cluster!* As a sample of Canaan's bounty, the spies brought back samples of figs and pomegranates, along with a cluster of grapes so large it took two men to carry it.

Numbers 13:26-14:9 *The answer: Two say let's go, the rest say no.* After a 40-day tour through the land, the men returned to report to Israel. They all agreed that the land was good. However, 10 of them felt that the Canaanites were so strong that Israel couldn't possibly defeat them. Caleb and Joshua disagreed, urging the people to claim the land at once. The people sided with the 10 who brought the negative report.

Numbers 14:10-38 *Their dues for distrust: 40 years for 40 days.* God was angry at Israel for their distrust. He threatened to destroy them all and make a greater nation from Moses and his descendants. Moses interceded for Israel, arguing that God's reputation with the Egyptians would be damaged if anything happened to Israel (compare **Exodus 32:1-14**). He appealed to God's mercy.

God promised to pardon Israel. However, he assured Moses that the present generation, who had witnessed his power and yet distrusted him, would die before Israel reached the Promised Land. Only Caleb and Joshua (**Numbers 14:29-30**) would enter Canaan. God specified that the death sentence would apply only to those 20 years and older (**Numbers 14:29-31**).

Israel had rejected a good land because they doubted God's ability to give it to them. For every day that the spies had gotten to see Canaan and yet rejected it, Israel would spend one year in the wilderness—as God waited for the present generation of disbelieving adults to die off. The 10 men who had brought the negative report, however, died immediately by a plague.

On "punishing the children for the sins of their parents" (**Numbers 14:18**), see exposition on [§]**Ezekiel 18:1-18**.

Numbers 14:39-45 *They repent, but it's too late.* When the Israelites heard God's judgment against them, they confessed that they had sinned and began preparing to move forward into Canaan. They did

so in spite of Moses' warning that God would not be with them, and they were horribly humiliated by the enemy.

Numbers 15:1-21 *Offerings to please the Lord.* The Lord gave instructions on how to offer grain and drink offerings with the burnt or fellowship offerings ([Numbers 15:1-16](#)). These burnt offerings were to be brought for special vows, freewill offerings, or festival offerings, as a pleasing aroma to the Lord. Then he gave instructions concerning the firstfruits that were to be offered once Israel was in the Promised Land ([Numbers 15:17-21](#)).

Though few historical details are given, [Numbers 15:1-20:1](#) actually covers some 38 or 39 years, the majority of the Israelites' 40-year journey to Canaan.

Numbers 15:22-29 *Offerings to appease the Lord.* Next came instructions about burnt offerings for those sinning unintentionally.

Numbers 15:30-36 *When no appeasement is possible.* No sacrifice was provided for the one who sinned deliberately. That person was to be excommunicated. "Brazenly" ([Numbers 15:30](#)) literally means "with a high hand." [Numbers 15:32-36](#) records a real-life example of such deliberate sin. A man willfully violated the Sabbath by gathering sticks; in this case the Lord prescribed death by stoning.

Numbers 15:37-41 *The tassels are silent reminders.* The Israelites were to attach tassels to their garments, to remind them of God's commandments and to promote meditation on those commandments.

Numbers 16:1-11 *Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebel.* Moses and Aaron were challenged by 250 of Israel's leaders who were envious of their positions of honor. The rebellion was led by Korah, a fellow Kohathite, along with Dathan and Abiram. Moses proposed that they all appear before the Lord and let *him* decide who would be the leader.

Numbers 16:12-19 *The rebels' charge: "You'll destroy us in this desert."* Dathan and Abiram refused to appear before the Lord and accused Moses of failing to take them to the Promised Land. The meeting proceeded without them; the Lord displayed his glory before the whole congregation of Israel and threatened to destroy them all.

Numbers 16:20-35 *The rebels' fate: Destroyed by the desert.* When Moses interceded, God instructed the congregation to withdraw from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram so that they would not die along with those rebels. After the congregation had retreated, the ground miraculously opened up and swallowed Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. The other 250 rebels were destroyed by fire.

Numbers 16:36-40 *Recycled as a reminder.* God instructed Moses to take the censers of the deceased rebels and make them into sheets to cover the altar. This covering would serve as a reminder to all Israel that anyone who was not a descendant of Aaron was forbidden to offer incense to the Lord.

Numbers 16:41-50 *He stands between the dead and the living.* The people blamed Moses and Aaron for the death of the rebels, so God brought a plague on the people. Moses quickly instructed Aaron to make atonement for the congregation. As Aaron stood literally "between the living and the dead" ([Numbers 16:48](#)), the plague ceased, but not before 14,700 more had died.

Numbers 17:1-13 *A stick grows sprouts.* Since Aaron's authority had been challenged by Korah's rebellion, God provided miraculous proof of Aaron's preeminence. A leader from each tribe was told to put his name on his staff and lay it before the Lord, along with Aaron's staff. On the next day Aaron's staff sprouted blossoms and almonds. This was a clear indication that he was God's choice to be priest and that his position was not to be contested. Moses was told to preserve Aaron's rod before the Ark of the Covenant ([Numbers 17:4, 10](#)) as a reminder of this disastrous rebellion.

Numbers 18:1-7 *"They, and they alone, can help you."* After once more declaring his choice of Aaron and his sons as priests, God decreed that the rest of the tribe of Levi could assist them in their work. No one else was to come near the Tabernacle to serve in any capacity, and not even the Levites were to handle the "sacred objects" ([Numbers 18:3](#)).

Numbers 18:8-20 *"This part is for the priests."* Since the priests would not be receiving land in Canaan, remuneration for their services was to come through the offerings. Any portions of offerings not burned on the altar were to be gifts for the priests. This, said the Lord, was to signify that "I am your inheritance and your share" ([Numbers 18:20](#)).

Numbers 18:21-32 *"They'll tithe to you; then you'll tithe to me."* Because the Levites would have no land in Canaan, they would receive all the tithes of Israel. From those tithes they would tithe to the Lord.

Numbers 19:1-22 *The ashes of the red heifer.* For ceremonial cleansing, a red heifer was to be selected and burned outside the camp, and the ashes saved. Anyone needing cleansing would be sprinkled with the ashes mixed with water. Anyone who touched a corpse, entered the dwelling of someone who had died, or touched a grave was ceremonially unclean and was to be purified by the ashes. Anyone refusing to be purified in this manner was to be excommunicated. The heifer's red color may have represented blood.

Numbers 20:1 *The death of Miriam (and her whole generation).* Moses' sister Miriam died in the first month of the 40th year of wilderness wandering, making her among the last of her unbelieving generation to die before Israel reached Canaan.

Numbers 20:2-13 *He says, "Speak," but they strike instead.* Once again Israel complained about their lack of water. They felt sorry for themselves, saying it would have been better had they died in Korah's rebellion or remained in Egypt. Once before Moses had been instructed to strike a rock, and it had given water ([Exodus 17:3-6](#)). This time Moses and Aaron were told to *speak* to the rock. Instead, they angrily struck it. Their disobedience disqualified them from leading Israel into Canaan.

Numbers 20:14-21 *A reasonable request rudely refused.* As Israel traveled around the southern end of the Dead Sea before turning northward, Moses asked the king of Edom (descendants of Esau) to let the Israelites pass through his land. He assured the king that Israel would not stray from the trade route and would pay for any water they used along the way. The king refused the request. For the historical consequences of this refusal, see exposition on both [§Jeremiah 49:7-22](#) and [§Obadiah 1:1-21](#).

Numbers 20:22-29 *Aaron dies, the torch of priesthood is passed.* Warned that his death was imminent, Aaron, his son Eleazar, and Moses went up Mount Hor. There Moses removed Aaron's

priestly garments and placed them on Eleazar, signifying the transfer of the priesthood from father to son. Aaron died, and Moses and Eleazar returned to the camp.

Numbers 21:1-3 *Israel defeats Arad.* The king of Arad attacked Israel and took some prisoners. Israel retaliated and defeated them.

Numbers 21:4-9 *A snake problem solved by a serpent!* Again the Israelites complained and God sent a plague of serpents, causing many to die. Moses was instructed to erect a bronze serpent on a pole, and all who looked upon the serpent in faith were healed. Jesus would see this as a foreshadowing of his death on the cross ([John 3:14](#)).

Numbers 21:10-20 *On toward Moab.* The account of Israel's travel to the border of Moab is sketchy at best. The writer reports that further details are given in the "Book of the Wars of the LORD," which has been lost to history. When Israel came to Beer (Hebrew, "well"), the Lord gave them water. They responded in song, "Spring up, O well . . ."

Numbers 21:21-30 *Israel defeats Sihon.* Israel requested permission from Sihon, king of the Amorites, to pass through his land, but he refused. Israel fought the Amorites and defeated them. The war was recounted in poetic verse ([Num. 21:27-30](#); see similar poetry in [Exo. 15:1-21](#); [Judges 5:1-31](#)).

Numbers 21:31-35 *Og and his men try; Og and his men die.* Og, king of Bashan, and his people tried to do what Sihon and the Amorites could not do—stop Israel. Encouraged by God, Israel had quick and complete success over Og. Though Moses' account is brief, the victory would be remembered for centuries to come ([Psalm 135:10-11](#); [Psalm 136:18-20](#)).

Numbers 22:1-20 *Balak's deal for Balaam: Cash for curses.* Israel "traveled to the plains of Moab and camped east of the Jordan River, across from Jericho," where they would remain during the rest of the events recorded in Numbers ([Num. 26:3](#); [Numbers 33:50](#); [Numbers 35:1](#); [Numbers 36:13](#)). Balak, king of Moab, knew of Israel's success against the Amorites and feared what Israel might do to him. Along with the "leaders of Midian" ([Numbers 22:4, 7](#)), he offered to pay Balaam, a diviner, to curse Israel. God permitted Balaam to go to Israel, but warned him to speak only the words God gave him.

Numbers 22:21-35 *Which one is the real donkey?* As Balaam traveled to Israel, God caused his angel to stand in Balaam's way. Balaam didn't see the angel, but his donkey did. Twice it tried to avoid the angel, but each time Balaam beat it. The second time, the donkey spoke to Balaam, and then he saw the angel—who was about to kill him. Once again God warned Balaam to speak only the words he would give him.

Numbers 22:36-24:25 *He can't curse what God has blessed.* Arriving in Israel, Balaam tried to satisfy Balak and curse Israel . . . but he blessed Israel instead! His second and third attempted curses resulted in more blessings. Balaam's final words about Israel ([Numbers 24:10-25](#)) included references to a "star" and "scepter"—prophecies ultimately fulfilled by the Messiah. See exposition on [Ezra 6:1-12](#); [Jude 1:11](#).

Numbers 25:1-18 *Israelites seduced by Moabites.* While Israel was encamped at Acacia Grove near Moab, the people engaged in immorality with Moabite women and worshiped their gods,

including the Baal of Peor. God instructed Moses to have the participants in this apostasy executed. (For Balaam's key role in this apostasy, see exposition on [§Numbers 31:1-54](#).)

Despite this threat of execution, an Israelite brazenly brought a Midianite woman into his tent. Phinehas, son of Eleazar, was angered by this outrageous action and speared them both. As a reward for his zeal, Phinehas was promised an everlasting priesthood (see [Joshua 24:33](#); [Psalm 106:30-31](#)).

God blamed the Midianites for both of these incidents and told the Israelites to take revenge upon them ([Numbers 25:16-18](#); [Numbers 31:1-3](#)).

[Numbers 26:1-65](#) *The second census of the people.* God called for a new census. Like the earlier one ([Numbers 1:1-54](#)), this was to include males 20 and older who could fight. The total this time was 601,730. Since the first census, five tribes had decreased in size, and seven had increased. Overall, Israel had shrunk by almost 2,000 men.

God instructed Moses concerning distribution of land in Canaan. Larger tribes were to receive larger portions of land, and smaller tribes were to receive smaller portions.

The Levite men were counted again; they totalled 23,000—an increase of 1,000.

As [Numbers 26:64-65](#) indicates, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, all the adult males numbered in the first census had died in the wilderness, just as God had predicted ([Numbers 14:20-23, 29-32](#)).

[Numbers 27:1-11](#) *Five determined daughters.* Zelophehad, a man from the tribe of Manasseh, died without a male heir. His daughters appealed to Moses to give them their father's inheritance in the land so that his name would not disappear from the clan. This was a unique situation; Moses brought their appeal to the Lord for his judgment. The Lord granted their request and gave Moses instructions for similar situations that might arise in the future.

[Numbers 27:12-14](#) *Permitted to look, but not to live there.* God told Moses to go up "the mountains east of the river," from where he would be able to view the Promised Land before dying. As God had told him, he would be barred from entering the land because of his disobedience ([Numbers 20:7-13](#)). (Moses' actual viewing of the land and his death are not recorded until [Deut. 34](#), after his final exposition of the law. There, the place of his death is called Mount Nebo [[Deut. 32:49](#)] and Pisgah Peak [[Deut. 3:27](#); [Deut. 34:1](#)].)

[Numbers 27:15-23](#) *"Joshua has my Spirit, so he'll succeed you."* God informed Moses that Joshua would be the one to succeed him as Israel's leader, because he was one "who has the Spirit in him" ([Numbers 27:18](#)). Moses presented Joshua to Eleazar and to the whole congregation. He laid his hands on him, symbolizing the transfer of office, and publicly gave him his charge.

[Numbers 28:1-29:40](#) *Festivals and offerings: Why, what, and when.* [Numbers 28-29](#) gives details about offerings and festivals, supplementing the instructions in [Leviticus 1-7](#); [Leviticus 16-17](#); [Leviticus 23-25](#). The offerings are dealt with according to their frequency of observance, starting with daily and ending with yearly offerings.

[Numbers 30:1-16](#) *Regulations for vows, for him and her.* All vows made by men had to be kept. If a woman was unmarried and lived under the authority of her father, he could either approve or annul

her vows. A married woman was under the authority of her husband. He could approve or annul her vows, even if they had been made before marriage.

Numbers 31:1-54 *Punished for Peor: Five kings and a false prophet.* God had told Moses to take revenge against the Midianites for what had happened at Peor ([Numbers 25:16-18](#)). He was to select 1,000 warriors from each tribe. The Israelites defeated the Midianites and killed their five kings.

They also killed the false prophet Balaam; although [Numbers 24:25](#) states that Balaam returned to his home after failing to curse Israel, he had apparently joined with the Midianites. According to [Numbers 31:16](#) and [Rev. 2:14](#), Balaam was the one primarily to blame for Israel's apostasy at Peor.

Moses was angry when he learned that the army leaders had spared the Midianite women and children. He ordered them to kill all the male children and all the women who were not virgins and could therefore have been among those who had led Israel into sin.

Moses was instructed to divide the spoils equally among the Israelites, with one-half going to those who had fought for Israel and one-half going to the rest of the people. Israel didn't lose a single man in the battle with the Midianites. They showed their gratitude for this by bringing all the gold of the spoils to the Lord.

Numbers 32:1-42 *"You can have the east, if you'll help us win the west."* The men of Reuben and Gad saw that the land Israel had already conquered east of the Jordan River was suitable for their cattle. They asked that it be given to them for their inheritance instead of land on the western side.

Moses was angry with these tribes, assuming they wanted to avoid helping the other tribes conquer Canaan. The Reubenites and Gadites protested that they did intend to help. Moses finally agreed to their request, but only after warning them that they could not return to their land until the conquest was complete.

"Half the tribe of Manasseh" chose to join Reuben and Gad east of Jordan ([Numbers 32:33](#)).

Numbers 33:1-49 *His journal of the journey.* Moses gave a review of Israel's travels and encampments, from the time they left Rameses in Egypt to their present campsite in the plains of Moab.

Numbers 33:50-56 *The bottom line: Destroy or be destroyed.* God told Moses to warn Israel to drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan and destroy all their pagan shrines and other symbols of worship. Otherwise the people of the land would become irritants to them, and the punishment meant for the Canaanites would fall on Israel.

Pagan shrines, also called "high places," were a common feature of pagan religion in ancient times, as worshipers sought literally to get closer to their gods by being nearer to the heavens. These shrines would remain a common feature of the landscape in the Promised Land because the Israelites either failed to destroy those built by pagans or built them for their own worship ([1 Kings 14:23](#)). Even some of Israel's better kings failed to remove these vestiges of paganism (see exposition on [^s1 Kings 3:2-4](#); [1 Kings 15:14](#); [2 Kings 12:3](#)).

Numbers 33:50-56 *The bottom line: Destroy or be destroyed.* God told Moses to warn Israel to drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan and destroy all their pagan shrines and other symbols of

worship. Otherwise the people of the land would become irritants to them, and the punishment meant for the Canaanites would fall on Israel.

Pagan shrines, also called "high places," were a common feature of pagan religion in ancient times, as worshippers sought literally to get closer to their gods by being nearer to the heavens. These shrines would remain a common feature of the landscape in the Promised Land because the Israelites either failed to destroy those built by pagans or built them for their own worship ([1 Kings 14:23](#)). Even some of Israel's better kings failed to remove these vestiges of paganism (see exposition on [1 Kings 3:2-4](#); [1 Kings 15:14](#); [2 Kings 12:3](#)).

[Numbers 35:9-34](#) *Cities of refuge.* Israel was to set aside six "cities of refuge"—to which those guilty of accidental manslaughter could flee from the avenger of blood. If one who had killed intentionally fled to one of these cities, he would be put to death. If the killing had resulted from sudden anger, without forethought, the congregation would decide whether it was manslaughter or murder. A murder conviction required the testimony of two witnesses ([Numbers 35:30](#)). The person granted asylum had to remain in the city of refuge until the death of the high priest. Should he leave before that time, the avenger of blood could kill him and not be charged with murder.

[Numbers 36:1-12](#) *Those five determined daughters, again!* Moses had granted the request of Zelophehad's daughters to receive their father's inheritance in Canaan ([Numbers 27:1-11](#)). Now, some elders of their tribe asked Moses what would happen should those daughters marry outside their tribe: Wouldn't some of their tribe's inheritance transfer to the other tribe? Moses agreed and told the five that they would have to either marry within their own tribe or lose their inheritance. All five married within their tribe.

[Numbers 36:13](#) *"By the Jordan, across from Jericho."* As Numbers ends, Moses notes once more that Israel was encamped in the plains of Moab, just across the Jordan from Jericho ([Numbers 22:1](#); [Numbers 26:3](#); [Numbers 33:50](#); [Numbers 35:1](#)).

People to remember from Numbers

- [Balaam](#)
- [Miriam](#)

BALAAM

(PEOPLE TO REMEMBER FROM NUMBERS)

Key Fact: Tried to curse Israel ([Numbers 22-24](#))

Father: Beor ([Numbers 22:5](#))

Occupation: Diviner ([Numbers 22:7](#))

Death: Recorded in [Numbers 31:8](#)

Total Bible References: 61

Key References: [Numbers 22-24](#); [Numbers 31:16](#); [Deut. 23:3-5](#); [Joshua 24:9-10](#); [Neh. 13:1-2](#); [Micah 6:5](#); [2 Peter 2:15](#); [Jude 1:11](#); [Rev. 2:14](#)

Balaam Speaks

I know what people are saying behind my back: "There goes Balaam, the best prophet money can buy!" But it could be worse: They could be talking about how a four-legged creature made a donkey out of its two-legged rider! ([Numbers 22:7, 22-31](#))

On my recent assignment in Israel, of course, I wasn't paid a cent. Talk about sheer frustration! There I was, standing on the hills of Jordan, looking out over the Israelite camp. My assignment seemed simple enough: Pronounce a curse on Israel. But that was far easier said than done! When I opened my mouth to blast out against the "chosen nation," instead of curses I heard words of blessing come forth! Well, I may have been frustrated, but those who had hired me were absolutely furious! ([Numbers 22-24](#))

But all is not lost. I was able to instigate some sexual involvement between some Israelite men and Moabite women. While I couldn't curse them, I did manage to corrupt them! In fact, rumor has it that more than 20,000 Israelites were killed by their God for this little escapade. Not a bad day's work for a prophet who never got paid! ([Numbers 25:1, 9](#); [Numbers 31:16](#); [Rev. 2:14](#))

But I'll have to admit to being a little worried; things are just too quiet around here. What if Israel survives all this? What if they destroy Moab as I unwillingly predicted they would? Worse still, what if they come looking for me? ([Numbers 31:8](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Balaam

- God has many ways of humbling us when we stubbornly refuse to do his will ([Numbers 23:22-30](#)).
- We should not let the love of money cause us to misuse our God-given abilities ([2 Peter 2:15](#); [Jude 1:11](#)).
- When Satan and his servants fail to defeat us one way, they may attack us on another front ([Numbers 24:10](#); [Numbers 25:1-3](#); [Numbers 31:16](#); [Rev. 2:14](#)).

Key Verses

"They have wandered off the right road and followed the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved to earn money by doing wrong. But Balaam was stopped from his mad course when his donkey rebuked him with a human voice" ([2 Peter 2:15-16](#)).

MIRIAM

Key Facts: Moses' sister, a prophetess ([Numbers 26:59](#); [Exodus 15:20](#))

Birth: Recorded in [Numbers 26:59](#)

Father: Amram ([Numbers 26:59](#))

Mother: Jochebed ([Numbers 26:59](#))

Brothers: Moses and Aaron ([1 Chron. 6:3](#))

Death: Recorded in [Numbers 20:1](#)

Total Bible References: 14

Key References: [Numbers 12:1-16](#); [Exodus 2:1-10](#); [Numbers 15:20-21](#); [Deut. 24:9](#); [Micah 6:4](#)

Miriam Speaks

Spring has finally arrived, and the desert is blooming with wildflowers. But for me it is late autumn. I know death is near. Both Aaron and Moses stopped by this morning. I felt constrained once again to express my deep regret to Moses for that shameful time when I criticized his choice of a wife and actually tried to undermine his ministry. As usual, he reassured me that he had long since forgiven me. And he reminded me of the terrible price I paid for my criticism. How could I have forgotten that! ([Numbers 12:1-16](#); [Numbers 20:1](#))

He also reminded me that, had I not persuaded an Egyptian princess to hire our own mother to raise him, our nation might still be in Egypt rather than marching toward the Promised Land! It's truly amazing how God uses us in our human frailty—I only hid Moses because he was my little brother; but just look what has come of it! ([Exodus 2:1-9](#))

I must remember to give Aaron my tambourine—just for safekeeping. I don't want anyone to discard it after I'm gone. After all, maybe it will wind up in a museum someday. They would probably make a sign saying something like "tambourine once played by Miriam, Israel's first prophetess." That makes me smile and feel a little better. What a story this old instrument could tell about our celebration after our supernatural escape from the Egyptians. Let's see, what were the words of that song? "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously. . . ." I hope that that faithful old tambourine will be treasured for generations to come and that it will always remind our people of how God miraculously brought our nation into being. ([Exodus 15:1-21](#))

Spiritual Lessons from Miriam

- Cain was wrong! We *are* to be our brother's keeper ([Genesis 4:9](#)). Miriam's faithful care of her infant brother assured a deliverer and lawgiver for Israel ([Exodus 2:1-10](#)). A seemingly insignificant act of concern can have far-reaching results.
- We should be careful about criticizing our leaders—especially those who look after our spiritual needs. We may not pay for such rebellion the same way Miriam did, but the results can be equally disastrous ([Numbers 12:1-16](#); [Psalm 105:15](#); [1 Tim. 5:17, 19](#); [Hebrews 13:7, 17](#)).

Key Verses

"Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine and led all the women in rhythm and dance. And Miriam sang this song: 'I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; he has thrown both horse and rider into the sea' " ([Exodus 15:20-21](#)).