

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS
**Homeward
Bound**



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Introduction: Numbers Studies

Approach

These studies explore the main themes of the book as they are developed and have an emphasis on reading chunks and considering the context for the original hearers. Having appreciated that message in context we can then consider how it relates to us today post Jesus' death and resurrection.

One difficulty faced in studying the Old Testament is the lack of familiarity we have with names, places, and the historical context. Handouts associated with these studies look to provide enough background information to help you. Each Study also has a brief introduction to help set the scene. Another challenge is the volume of material to cover. Summary sections provide an overview of parts of the book that are skipped help with continuity.

A question followed by a star in superscript (^{*}) indicates that the supporting notes at the back have more information.

Quick Facts

Author: Moses, though some sections added by others

Purpose: Numbers is a book about faithfulness—God's faithfulness even when we are faithless. It is a book about learning from the failures of past generations so as to be more faithful today. Numbers teaches these lessons through the story of two generations of Israel: one generation that consistently breaks faith with God, and an emerging generation that trusts him.

Israel experiences the real and visible presence amongst them in Numbers. The cloud leads them on their journey and appeared in moments of crisis heralding judgement. In these judgements we learn about God holiness, He will not tolerate sin. Yet God is also merciful and gracious, listening to Moses' intercession, providing a means for restoration via sacrifice and priests to stop God's wrath overtaking Israel. God is constant, faithful to his promises to bless Israel and ensure that they will enter the promised land.

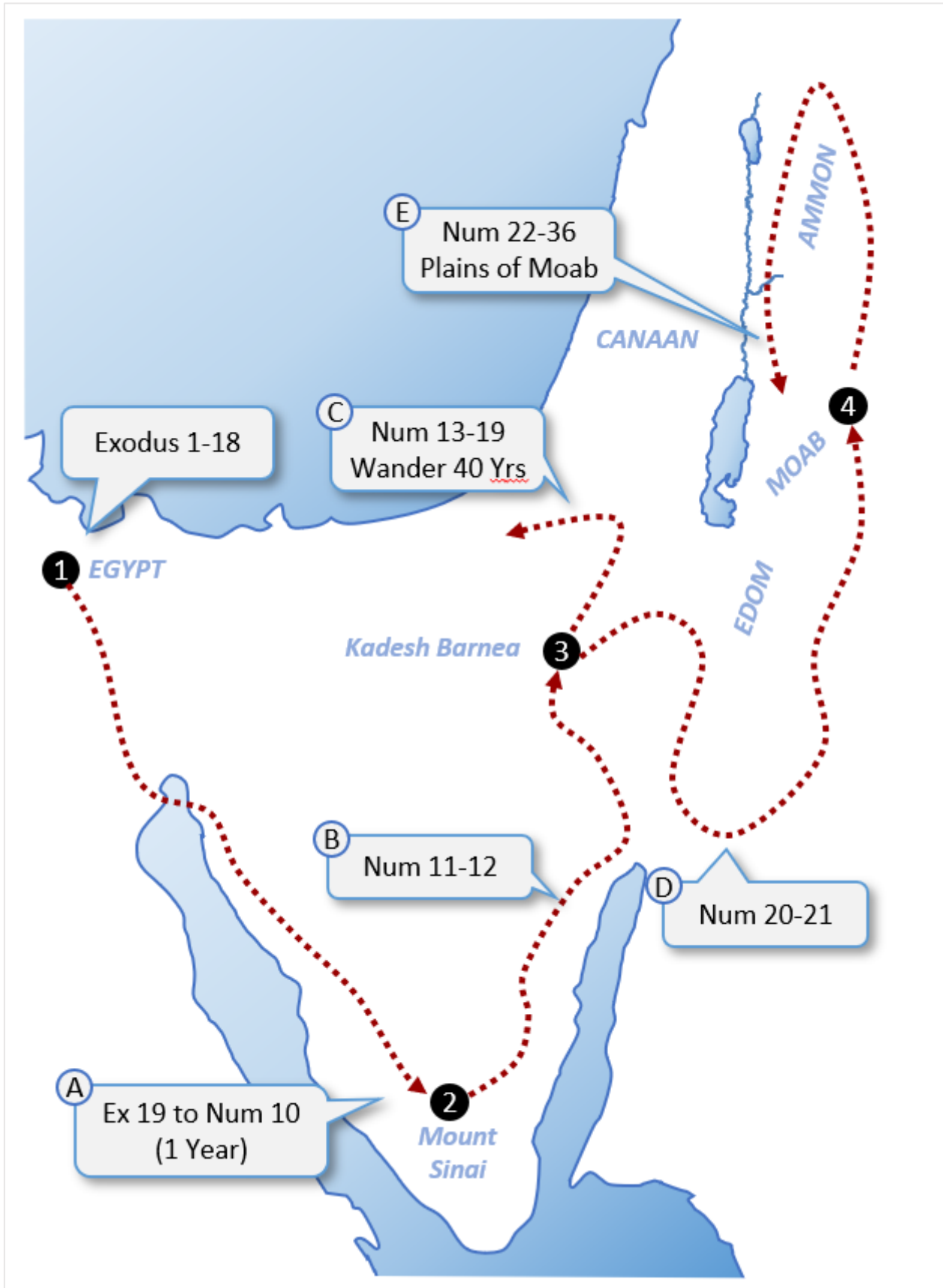
Timing: Approx: 1500 BC

Genre: Mix of Narrative, Law, Song

Outline

Spiritual	Study	Ch	Title	Loc'n	
FIRST GENERATION - DEATH	PREPARE TO ENTER	1	Census - Military	SINAI	
		2	Camp arrangement of tribes		
		3	Census of Levites and responsibilities		
		4			
		5	Camp purity in relationships		
		6			
		Obedience in relating to God	7		Dedication of the Altar
			8		Dedication of the Levites
			9		Second Passover & Cloud over the tabernacle
			10		Silver Trumpets & Leave Sinai
	FAILURE TO ENTER	Rejecting God's provision	11	Complaints about hardship	S2K ↓
			12	Complaints about Moses	
		Rejecting God's promises	13	Reporting on Exploration of Promised land	KADESH BARNEA
			14	Rebel by refusing to enter Promised land.	
			15	Regulations when you do enter Promised land.	
		Rejecting God's Priests	16	Korah: everyone is holy.	KADESH BARNEA
			17	God: Aaron is holy.	
			18	Provisions for priests and Levites	
			19	Provisions for purification	
		Blessings and curses - Physical	20	Leadership Transitions – Death.	K2M ↓
			21	Learning to trust - Military victory	
		Blessings and curses - Spiritual	22	Balaam summoned to curse Israel.	MOAB
			23	Balaam blesses Israel – Oracles 1 & 2	
			24	Balaam blesses Israel – Oracles 3 to 7	
			25	Baal worship seduces Israel – cursed.	
SECOND GENERATION - LIFE	PREPARE TO ENTER	26	Census - Military	MOAB	
		27	Laws regarding Inheritance and succession		
		28	Laws regarding Offerings		
		29	Laws regarding Festivals		
		30	Laws regarding Vows		
		31	Vengeance on Midianites		
	God's provision - a foretaste	32	Inheritance granted to 2.5 tribes East of the Jordan		
		33	Inheritance journey: Egypt to Edge of Promised Land		
		34	Inheritance boundaries defined		
		35	Inheritance for Levites		
		36	Inheritance rules for tribes		

Numbers is a long book. A simple reading plan is to read a chapter a day.



Stages in Israel's Journey

Study 1 Num 1-6

Obedience in preparation.

Introduction

Israel have been camped for a year at Mount Sinai after having left Egypt as freed slaves (Ex 12:37). Here, God establishes his relationship with them via covenant and gives them his law. The first ten chapters span 50 days, where they prepare to move to the promised land with God in their midst.

Num 1	Census - Military
Num 2	Camp arrangement of tribes
Num 3-4	Census of Levites and responsibilities
Num 5-6	Camp purity

Discuss

1. God made promises to Abraham in Gen 12:1-4, 17:3-8 How does Numbers fit into that story?

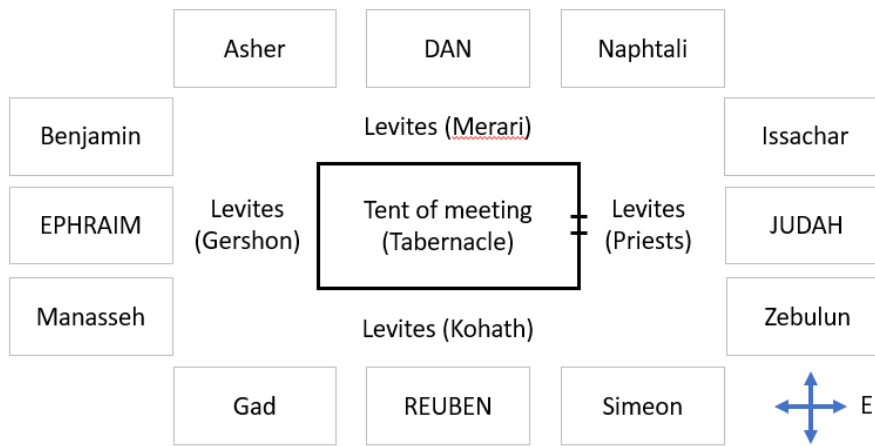
Investigate

Read Num 1:1-15 & 44-54

1. What kind of Census is this? What should the Israelites expect?

2. Why are the Levites not included in this census? What is their role instead?

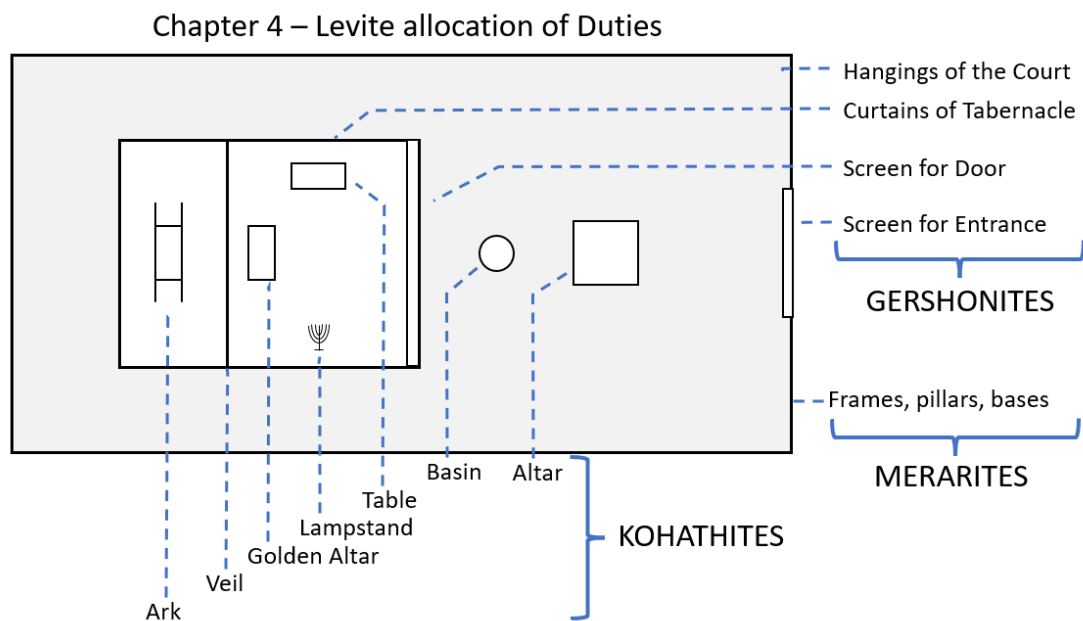
Chapter 2 explains the camp arrangement as shown below.



3. What does having the tent of meeting in the middle of the camp arrangements suggest? *

Summary

Chapters 3-4 give more detail regarding the Levite's role. They are 'given' to Aaron the priest to support him and are to take care of the tabernacle furnishings and to transport them. The Levites are redeemed as the firstborn in place of Israel and are therefore dedicated to God's service. Picture below shows the Levite clan responsibilities, note that the Kohathites are not to even look at the items they carry! (Num 4:20)



1

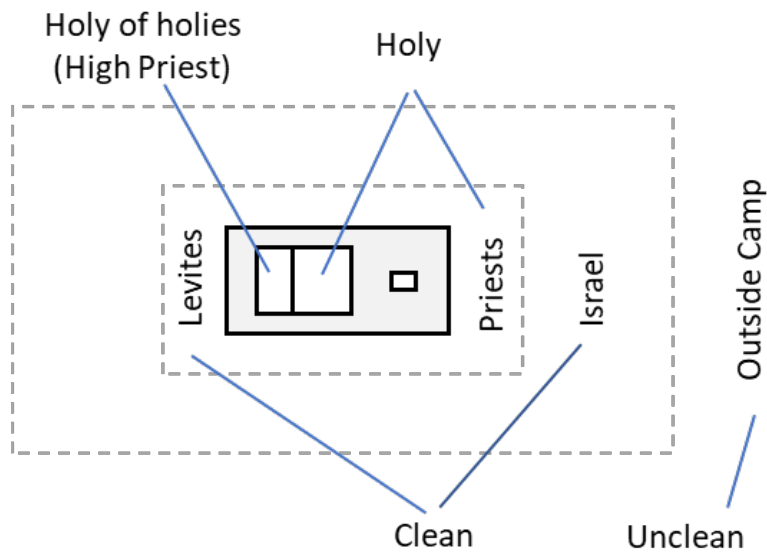
¹ Adapted from Wenham, p.72.

Read Num 5:1-10

4. Why must unclean people be sent outside the camp?

5. How is sin understood in Num 5:6?

Based on numbers thus far we can draw the following picture



6. What does this arrangement tell you about approaching God? (Note Num 3:10)

7. Look at the pairs of verses and note the repeating pattern.

Passage 1	Passage 2	Observation
Num 1:1	Num 1:54	
Num 2:1	Num 2:34	
Num 3:14	Num 3:39	
Num 3:40	Num 3:42	
Num 3:44	Num 3:49	
Num 4:1-2	Num 4:49	
Num 5:1	Num 5:4	

8. What does this repetition tell you about God, about Israel?

Summary

Chapters 5-6 relate to purity (camp, relationships, marriage, service). Chapter 6 contains details of the Nazirite vow. This vow allows anyone to be considered holy for a period of time – similar to the priests. The sacrifices offered at the completion of the vow are the same as for a priest as are the rules regarding the way they live.

Read Num 6:22-27

9. How will God bless his people? (Compare Psalm 67)

Reflection

God's people are under God's rule, but they are not yet in God's place: the promised land. At the start of Numbers, we see that Israel obediently hear and action God's word via Moses. God's presence amongst his people is made visible via the tabernacle and the camp layout, and it is he who will lead them to the promised land.

Read 1 Peter 1:1-5

10. We too are on a journey to our promised inheritance; how does God accompany us? *

11. Numbers shows us that not just anyone can approach God. It is different for us today as explained in Heb 10:19-22. How should we respond?

Introduction

The narrative goes back in time (Ex 40:17), by reversing the order we can see the significance of the events about to unfold. The whole Israelite community contributes to consecrating the tabernacle and lay their hands on the Levites, in readiness for service. They remember God's saving acts in celebrating the Passover and obediently follow God's command/leading as they leave Sinai. Could there be a better start to their journey?

Num 7	Dedication of the Altar
Num 8	Dedication of the Levites
Num 9	Passover & Cloud over the tabernacle
Num 10	Silver Trumpets & Leave Sinai

Discuss

Why are Christians confident they can approach God?

Investigate

Read Num 7:1-17 & 89

Moses consecrates the Tabernacle² and its furnishings, and in Num 7:10-11 the Israelite tribes are to bring offerings for the dedication of the altar.

1. What is the purpose of the altar? (E.g. sacrifices) *
2. What does the repetition say about the Israelite tribes?
3. Once the ceremony is completed, we reach the climax in v89. What

² Tent of meeting and Tabernacle – two words used for same structure. Refer Ex 28:43 where it is referring to the altar and holy place which Aaron is to minister but uses term tent of meeting.

does this tell us about the purpose of the tabernacle?

Summary

Chapter 8 the Levites are made ceremonially clean in readiness to serve God, the ritual includes people laying hands on them. They are set apart and are to be dedicated to the service of God. They are also to guard the sanctuary to stop people approaching so that no plague will strike the Israelites.

Chapter 9 the Passover is celebrated. The focus is not on the event itself (which celebrates God's mighty saving acts at the exodus) but on the rules regarding the celebration. Provision is made for those who cannot celebrate due to uncleanness. Note: v13 failure to celebrate will result in being cut off from their people!

Read Num 9:15-23

4. What is the purpose of the cloud? (Compare Ex 13:20-22)

Read Num 10:1-10

5. What are the uses of the trumpets?

6. Which trumpet signals relate to their journey and which to use in the promised land?

Read Num 10:11-13 & 33-36

7. Israel set out on their journey. How would you characterise Israel's response to God in the first ten chapters of Numbers?

Reflection

Israel looks back to God's salvation at the exodus celebrated in the Passover; they look forward to the inheritance every time the trumpets sound for them to move; and they act now obediently, doing everything as God commands. This obedience is seen in how they approach God via the tabernacle and how they follow the cloud.

Today we look back to Jesus's sacrifice on the cross as our Passover lamb, we look forward to God's inheritance with assurance as we have the promised Holy Spirit, and we are to live now obediently and patiently whilst we wait for Jesus's return.

Read Heb 1:1-2

8. Moses heard God voice from above the atonement cover (Num 7:89).
How does God guide us today?

Read Heb 4:14-16

9. Israel had to sacrifice to approach God, how do we approach God today?
10. How does God guide us today? Are we obediently following?

Introduction

Having obediently established the camp layout and priests roles regarding the tabernacle, Israel, led by God, start moving towards the land promised to Abraham centuries ago. The narrative now (perhaps surprisingly) changes from obedience to discontent. How will a holy God respond to his covenant people?

Num 11 Complaints about hardship

Num 12 Complaints about Moses

Discuss

As a Christian, what are you tempted to grumble about?³

Investigate

Read Num 11:1-3

1. What role does Moses play in this episode?

Read Num 11:4-15

2. The rabble complain in vv 4-6. What do they crave? What is wrong with this attitude?

3. In vv 10-15 What is Moses' chief complaint? Compare Moses attitude to the people. (note Num 10:31-32)

³ Grumble: complain about something in a bad-tempered or discontented way

Read Num 11:16-23

4. God will provide meat for the people, how is this a judgement on them?
5. How is Moses corrected as well? (vv 21-23)

Read Num 11:24-30

6. How is the giving of the Spirit to others a provision for Moses?

Read Num 11:31-35

7. What should Israel learn from these events?⁴

Read Num 12:1-16

8. What is at the heart of Miriam and Aaron's complaint?^{*}
9. How does God respond to this complaint? What do we learn about Moses's relationship with God?

Reflection

Israel grumbled about food and leadership whilst God was in their midst and they were judged. Grumbling at its heart is believing that God is not good and is not faithful in providing what we need⁵. Faith in God's

⁴ Note the footnote in your bible. Kibroth Hattaavah means graves of craving.

⁵ Reynolds, p.124.

character should lead to contentment not complaints!

In 1 Corinthians 10:1-9, Paul looks back to the events in Numbers summarising and applying their journey to us today.

Read 1Cor 10:10-13

10. Consider your response to the discuss question. How has the example of Israel challenged you?

Moses was a great leader but ultimately was flawed, we long for a better leader of God's people. Heb 3:1-2 uses Num 12:7 directly and compares Moses and Jesus

Read Heb 3:5-6

11. How can we avoid grumbling today?

Introduction

At the border of the promised land Israel choose to live by sight rather than trusting God: they rebel and refuse to enter! Wandering for 40 years till this generation dies out is a fitting judgement. How can people who have seen God's great acts of salvation be so hard hearted and fail to trust God? (cf Ps 78:5-8)

Num 13 Reporting on Exploration of Promised land (Canaan).

Num 14 Rebel by refusing to enter Promised land.

Num 15 Regulations when you do enter Promised land.

Discuss

What makes Christians certain of their ultimate destination? (1 Pet 1:3-9)

Investigate

Summary Num 13:1-20

God instructs Moses to send men into the land. Moses asks them to bring back information on the land, its people, and its produce. The spies take 40 days to complete their exploration.

Read Num 13:26-33

1. The spies all share the same experiences but respond differently. What lies at the 'heart' of their responses/reports?

Read Num 14:1-12

2. What impact does the report have on the people?

3. Summarise the appeal Moses, Aaron, Caleb and Joshua make in vv5-9

4. What is the outcome v10-12?

Read Num 14:13-25

5. What are the two 'arguments' in vv13-16 and vv17-19 that Moses uses to intercede for Israel? *
6. God forgives and Israel do not face the annihilation they deserve, but there are consequences of their sin. How does their punishment fit the crime (so to speak)?

Read Num 14:39-45

7. Why is their action ironic and presumptuous?
8. Why do they fail?

Summary

Numbers 15 contains regulations which at first reading seem out of place. However, given the judgement of Chapter 14, the refrain in 15:1, 15:17 "The Lord said to Moses, speak to the Israelites and say to them "**After you enter the land I ...**" is a message of grace to a people who have just rejected God.*

Read Num 15:37-41

9. What are future generations to remember? How does v41 add emphasis to this?

Reflection

Israel is on a journey between having seen God's salvation accomplished in the exodus and God's salvation completed in obtaining rest in the promised land. The Passover festival reminded them to look back at God's power and thus live in the present anticipating what God would do in giving them the promised land (Num 13:1). However, they fail to believe in God's power to give them land, his sovereignty by doubting his purposes and his leaders who exhort them to trust. Moses intercedes for them, and God mercifully grants them forgiveness (though there are consequences)

As Christians today we too are living between Gods great act of salvation seen through Jesus's death on the cross and Gods promise of inheritance when Jesus returns. We too have a mediator, who intercedes for us, Jesus.

Read Heb 3:7-19 & 4:11

10. Considering Israel's example, how are we to respond according to the writer of Hebrews?

11. What are some of the ways you can do this?

Introduction

At some point during the 40 years of wandering Korah, Dathan and Abiram challenge Moses and the Priestly role by asking is not all Israel holy? A holiness 'showdown' results in death and the people living in fear for their lives. Aaron as high priest intercedes for the people's atonement and his unique role is reinforced by God. Aaron's role is reinforced, to guard the sanctuary and altar thus protecting the people from the wrath of God.

- Num 16 Korah: everyone is Holy.
- Num 17 God: Aaron is Holy.
- Num 18 Provisions for priests and Levites
- Num 19 Provisions for purification

Discuss

What are some of the ways people might try to approach God today?

Investigate

Read Num 16:1-15

1. Who are the rebels and what are their grievances (v3, v10, v13)

Read Lev 10:1-3

2. What happens to Aaron's sons? Why?

Read Num 16:16-21*

3. What is God's response in v21 to this censers test?

4. How does this answer the accusation made in v3?

Summary: Num 16:22-35

Moses intercedes for the people and they are told to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram (v24). V28 reinforces that unique judgement on these men will prove Moses has been sent by God to lead Israel. In v31ff this occurs with the ground swallowing them and their possessions. Israel reacts in panic, fearing for their lives.

Read Num 16:35-40

5. The altar overlay is to be a visual reminder of what to Israel? What does this tell us about God?

Read Num 16:41-50

6. What happens when Aaron offers incense in v47? (Note how different this is to Korah and followers!)

Summary: Num 17:1-9

At this point you would think Israel understand the need for Aaron as high priest, yet the grumbling continues! Thus, God provides a visual test for the heads of the tribes of Israel – the staff belonging to God’s choice would sprout. Aaron’s staff not only sprouts but produces almonds!

Read Num 17:10-13

7. What is the sign in v10 meant to convey? (cf v3, 41)

8. Is the Israelites response in v12-13 valid?

Read Num 18:1-5

How does the role⁶ Aaron has as described here help answer the fear shown Num 17:13?

If you have time

The water of cleansing requires a complex preparation involving a red heifer. This is an unusual sacrifice in that it is made once for use for many people. The sacrifice is made outside the camp and is used for sanctifying (making clean) people who have come into 'contact' with death.

Read Num 19:1-13

9. What do v11-13 tell us about the seriousness of being unclean? *

Reflection

Approaching a holy God on your own terms is a fearful and dangerous thing. The Israelites response in Num 17:13 "...are we all going to die?" captures this well, as presumptuous, or unauthorised access to God results in death! However, God does allow access via his chosen/approved mediator in the high priest Aaron.

In the new covenant, Jesus is our high priest chosen by God (Heb 5) who intercedes for us. It is in his name that we can gain access to God.

Read Heb 10:19-25

10. Considering Numbers, how should we respond to the access to God we now have?

⁶ The NIV "be responsible" but the ESV uses "keep guard". Recalling the camp layout in chapter 2 where the Levites are between the sanctuary and the Israelite tribes the notion of guarding makes sense.

Introduction

In the first month of what is possibly the 40th year of their wandering (compare Num 20:22–29 with 33:38) the people approach Canaan's border again. The last of the stiff-necked first generation remain true to form with quarrelling and impatience. Israel's leaders, Miriam and Aaron die. Moses too will not enter. Regardless of the people's faithlessness, God still faithfully provides for his people, food, rescue from judgement and even military victories in preparation for conquest ahead.

Num 20 Leadership Transitions – Death.

Num 21 Learning to trust - Military victory.

Discuss

What promises of God do you find helpful to remember?

Investigate

Read Num 20:1-13

1. What is different between what Moses was told to do vv7-8 with what he did vv10-11.
2. Moses will not be allowed to enter the promised land (v 12). What does this reveal about God's character.

Summary Num 20:14-29*

Moses tactfully asks Edom to allow Israel to pass through their land but is denied (even though they are related). At Mount Hor Aaron dies and his son Eleazar becomes the high priest. Israel's journey towards Moab is now extended as they go around Edom.

Read Num 21:1-3

3. Why were the Israelites successful? (v2)
4. Israel was here 40 years ago in Num 14:45! Compare the episodes. What do you learn?

Read Num 21:4-9

5. How is the people's complaint a rejection of God? (v5).
6. In what way does the bronze snake 'save' people? (note 2 Kin 18:4)

Read Num 21:10-20

7. Compare the 'song of the well' to the last section, particularly v16 with 20:3 and 21:5. What does this tell us about God and his provision?

Read Num 21:21-35

This time it's different, unlike Edom who were related to Israel the Amorites (Gen 15:16) were destined for judgement, their time has come.

8. Why might these battles outside the promised land encourage Israel? (Note v34)

Reflection

Israel have been wandering for 40 years and the first generation would nearly have died out. Israel has seen God's power and provision many times, but even so they repeat the grumbling sins of the past, even Aaron

and Moses fail to honour God. God in his grace however provides⁷ for their physical needs (clothes, water, food), saves them from judgement and gives them victory over their enemies.

Read John 3:13-16

9. How does Jesus interpret and apply the significance of the events in Numbers 21:4-9?

10. It might be easy to sympathise with the Israelites on their long journey. What should we learn from their experiences? (see 1 Cor 10:1-10 particularly v9!)

⁷ Moses in Deut 29:1-8 tells us that it was God who ensured that their clothes and sandals didn't wear out, and the defeat of Sihon and Og resulted in an inheritance for the Reubenites, Gadites and Manasseh

Introduction

Moab realising Israel is too strong for them, hires Balaam to curse Israel to get an advantage in war. Their plan is thwarted by God who protects and blesses Israel despite them being unaware of events. (Remember, in Gen 12 God promises to Bless Abraham and nothing can thwart his plans to give them the land). Sadly, Moab's plan B – adulterous Baal worship snares the faithless Israelites. Will they turn away from God's plan after all?

- Num 22 Balaam summoned to curse Israel.
- Num 23 Balaam blesses Israel – Oracles 1 & 2
- Num 24 Balaam blesses Israel – Oracles 3 to 7
- Num 25 Baal worship seduces Israel – cursed.

Discuss

Why can Christians be assured of heaven?

Investigate

Read Num 22:1-14

1. Why is Balak concerned, what does he hope to achieve through Balaam? (Compare Num 21:34-35)

2. How does God intervene in this narrative? Why does he do this?

Read Num 22:21-35*

3. The narrative in which a dull donkey has more spiritual insight than a prophet hired at great expense, ridicules Balaam. However, what is the main point of this story in the context of Numbers?

Read Num 23:1-12

4. What is the main point of the first message?
5. How does Balak respond?

Summary Num 23:13-24:25*

Balak is undeterred, and tries twice more, from different vantage points to curse Israel, but fails as Balaam continues to bless Israel. Balak in anger retracts his offer to pay and orders Balaam to leave at once. Before going Balaam has four more messages! The fourth predicts a king coming out of Israel who will crush Moab! The remaining messages talk to the other nations (perhaps visible from the last vantage point) and reaffirms that none can stop Israel from being blessed.

Whilst we are not told now, later on in Num 31:16 we learn that Balaam had given advice to entice the Israelites to be unfaithful. Perhaps if you cannot curse, you can corrupt?

Read Num 25:1-18

6. Whilst God was blessing Israel from afar, what two sins did Israel indulge in?
7. How do you view the judgement pronounced? (just/harsh/...)
8. Why does Phineas' actions stop God's judgement (the plague)?

Reflection

In Num 22-25 Israel are almost within sight of the land that God has

promised them when they face unseen opposition: an external spiritual opposition with a 'super-prophet' hired to curse them and internal apostasy as Israel is seduced by idolatry and sexual immorality. However, God is for them, and neither is sufficient to thwart God's plans as he turns curses into blessings and God's priest atones for sin bringing an end to judgement.

As Christians we look forward to an inheritance and are shielded by God's power until salvation comes (1 Pet 1:3-5). There is a spiritual battle, but the result is already known.

Read Rom 8:31-32 & 37-39

9. Israel looked back to the promises to Abraham and were expected to persevere, what event do we look back to and how does it help us to persevere?

10. Although assured, we are not immune from temptation, how should we live today then?

Introduction

Another military census is undertaken, and the second generation's numbers are nearly unchanged from the first, showing God's faithfulness. Whilst the narrative contains laws about offerings, festivals, and vows; seemingly familiar, it is new detail as it applies to the next generation that will soon inherit the promised land and will have the means to offer the prescribed sacrifices and festivals. Thus, the final chapters focus on life in the promised land and how it is to be lived.

Num 26	Census - Military
Num 27	Laws regarding Inheritance and succession
Num 28	Laws regarding Offerings
Num 29	Laws regarding Festivals
Num 30	Laws regarding Vows

Discuss

When you think of heaven, what do imagine living with God will be like?

Investigate

Read Num 26:1-12 & 51-56

1. This census has more detail than the first, but it has two purposes, what are they? (v2, v54) *

In Num 27:1-11 Zelophehad's daughters raise a question of their inheritance, we will pick this up in the following study.

Read Num 27:12-23

2. Why is Moses not entering the promised land? (v14)

3. What is Moses's request regarding the one who takes over from him?

Nearly half of the Pentateuch relates to laws and rituals, whilst this underscores its importance to the original writers it is difficult for us to appreciate. Ritual and organisation grant us an insight into how a nation operates and its value system. "What then is the essence of religious ritual in the Bible? It is a means of communication between God and man, a drama on stage watched by human and divine spectators."⁸

Read Num 28:1-8

4. What is the purpose of the morning and evening sacrifice? (Compare Lev 1:3-4, 17:11)
5. Atonement means to make one, to reconcile. Why is Atonement needed? *

⁸ Wenham, p.29.

Summary of sacrifices in chapter 28 & 29

Num:	Frequency	Day & Month	When/What	Burnt	Sin	Fellow-ship
28:4	Daily	-	Morning & Twilight	Y		
28:9	Weekly	-	Sabbath	Y		
28:11	Monthly	1/x	Each new moon	Y	Y	
28:16-25	Annual (Festivals)	14/1	Passover	Y	Y	
		15-21/1	Unleavened Bread	Y	Y	
+50days		Feast of Weeks	Y	Y	Y	
29:1-6		1/7	Trumpets	Y	Y	Y
29:7-11		10/7	Day of Atonement	Y	Y	
29:12-38		15-22/7	Tabernacles, Booths	Y	Y	Y

Notes

1. Grain and Drink offered together with Burnt offering.
2. Feast of weeks also called Pentecost as its 50 days after feast of unleavened bread.
3. Fellowship also called peace or freewill offering. Was also expected at completion of a Vow.

Sharing in the offerings

Who gets to partake/eat when the sacrifices are made:

Offering	Animal	Altar	Priest	Offeror
Burnt	Lamb, Ram, Bull	Y		
Grain	n/a	Y	Y	
Sin	Goat	Y	Y	
Fellowship	Lamb, Ram, Bull	Y	Y	Y

Notes

1. Sin offering – was burnt outside the camp.
6. With reference to the first table, what do you notice about the order the sacrifices are listed in?

7. How are the festivals (annual) different to the regular sacrifices? (Num 28:18, 26, 29:1, 7, 12). What is their purpose? *

8. The sacrifices offered were cumulative, thus “every year in the future the priests will have to sacrifice 113 bulls, 32 rams and 1086 lambs, offer more than a ton of flour and a thousand bottles of oil and wine”⁹ What is the point of vast quantities of animals to be sacrificed? *

Chapter 30 contains details regarding vows, these were expected to be followed by a fellowship offering when completed. A natural time to do this would be at one of the festivals where Israel gathers, and this is why these regulations are placed here. Another reason is that Israel are about to engage in a long campaign of conquest and vows are likely to be made during war.

Reflection

We can see two aspects regarding the symbolism of the tabernacle; it is a pledge of God’s presence amongst his people, and it provides a warning of his holiness and demands - God can only be approached on his terms. The sacrifices are a means by which a sinful people can restore their relationship with a Holy God. By obediently observing the prescribed rituals, Israel will continue to enjoy God’s presence as he gives the land in the years to come.

These sacrifice rituals are truths portrayed visually and they point to a need for atonement to deal with sin and the need for a substitute to take our place (represented by the placing of hands on the animal in Numbers). Every day a lamb was sacrificed in the morning and evening to atone for sin. In Col 2:16-17 we are told that these sacrifices are only a shadow and were designed to point us to Jesus in whom we find the reality.

⁹ Wenham, p.197.

Read John 1:29 & 1 Peter 1:18-19

9. How is Jesus described? How does this link back to the sacrifices?

Heb 9:11-14

10. Understanding the work of Christ, what impact should that have on our faith?

Introduction

Numbers ends with a faithful generation ready to enter the promised land (their inheritance). The Midianites are defeated, the boundaries of the inheritance are defined and how it is to be distributed, initially and in perpetuity is made clear.

Num 31	Vengeance on Midianites
Num 32	Inheritance granted to 2.5 tribes East of the Jordan
Num 33	Inheritance journey: Egypt to Edge of Promised Land
Num 34	Inheritance boundaries defined
Num 35	Inheritance for Levites
Num 36	Inheritance rules for tribes

Discuss

How do you know if someone has faith?

Summary Num 31:

God instructs Moses to take vengeance on the Midianites in response to Num 25:16-18 where we are told it is because they deceived Israel at Peor (Baal worship). Post battle Moses and Eleazar are concerned with the purity laws being followed (Num 19) and the fair division of the spoils between the soldiers and the community and the Levites. In God's provision the battle is won without a single loss of life – a foretaste that God will **give** them the land/victory. Israel is acting faithfully and things auger well for entering the promised land.

Investigate

Read Num 32:1-24

1. What is the Reubenites and Gadites request?

2. Why does this anger Moses? What is at stake here?

3. How do the Reubenites and Gadites respond? Do you think they will honour this agreement?*

Summary Num 33 – 35

The stages of Israel's journey provide an overview from Egypt to the edge of the promised land, listing key stops. We are told that they are to destroy all idols, demolish high places and drive out the inhabitants. But if they do not, then they will be trouble to them. They are to divide the land up by lots and the boundaries prescribed by God are given in Chapter 34. (Note that Israel never fully achieves this goal). Provision for the distribution of the Levites amongst the tribes is made, as is for cities of refuge – a place where someone can flee to avoid retribution. There is no police force, so provisions for dealing with manslaughter and stopping accidental shedding of blood are important so that they don't pollute the land where God dwells! (Num 35:33). This new generation is ready to enter the promised land, and these chapters provide clarification on how they are to relate to and take on this inheritance, a fitting conclusion to the book.

Read Num 27:1-10

4. What do Zelophehad's daughters request? *
5. How is this request an example of faith?
6. Moses doesn't decide or dismiss their claim but brings their case before the Lord. What is the purpose God's response in vs8-11?
7. What is the purpose of the law given by God in vs8-11

Read Num 36:1-13

8. Who brings the question to Moses? (note Num 26:29-33) What is their concern?¹⁰

9. What is the solution?

Reflection

The daughters response in Num 25:10-11 is a fitting way to end the book – they show a people concerned for preserving the inheritance given by God, acting in faith and obedience to God’s commands. This is a stark comparison to their fathers in Num 14 who turned away 40 years earlier. Whilst Numbers contains many warnings of what to avoid, here we have a positive witness of faith in action.

Read Heb 11:1-2 & 11:13-16 & 12:1-3

10. What is the ultimate inheritance we look to?

11. How should we respond to this witness? (Heb 12:1-3)

¹⁰ The year of Jubilee see Lev 25:8-17. Every 50 years everyone is to return to **their** land.

Supporting Notes.

Study 1:

Q3 In addition to God being at the centre of Israel's camp and life (he is with His people) facing the sunrise (East) rather than North is considered "up", then we see that the priests and tribe of Judah are 'prioritised'. Judah was not the firstborn (Gen 35:23-26) however we know that the Messiah (Jesus) comes from Judah. Perhaps this is a hint?

Q10 John 1:14 Jesus Tabernacled (or dwelt) amongst us.

Study 2:

Q1: Altar: was the focal point of daily worship, and a place of slaughter, where the blood of an animal and its fat was burnt. Whatever was burnt on the altar was considered to be consumed by God, symbolising that the offeror was accepted.

Study 3:

Miriam was a prophetess and Aaron was the high priest. They were also Moses's siblings. Here we have an alliance of prophet and priest challenging Moses' position as sole mediator between God and Israel. Wenham p110

Study 4:

Q5. Hard to read Num 14:10-25 without thinking of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32. Moses was away 40 days up the mountain (Ex24:18) receiving the law and during that time Israel sins. God threatens to destroy them, and Moses intercedes, using a similar argument as in Numbers. For the Israelites this was recent history, approx. a year previously.

Chapter 15 has laws that assume they will enter the promised land. The food offerings could only be made by a settled people in a bountiful land. The offering for unintentional sin provides a mechanism for restoration of relationship, which given chapter 14 is reassuring (interestingly is to apply to foreigners as well).

Study 5:

Q2 In Lev 16:12 burning incense before the Lord at the day of atonement, something only high priest can do. Aarons own sons die for offering unauthorised fire. Thus, this really is a holiness test – who will God accept.

Q9 Heb 9:11-15 references the ashes of a heifer and points to the blood of Christ being superior in making us clean and thus acceptable to God.

Study 6:

Edom, located on the southeast border of Israel, shares a relationship to Israel that spans nearly the entire Bible. The Edomites originated from the offspring of Esau when he separated from Jacob (Gen. 36:6–8).

Study 7:

Q2 Balaam – good or bad? An initial reading suggests good, as he listens to God and blesses Israel. However, there are clues in the text (resorting to omens and sorcery are not good) and the rest of scripture views him as bad, he would have cursed Israel if God had not intervened. (Deut 23:4-5, 2 Pet 2:15, Jude 11, Rev 2:14)

Q3 Why is God angry that Balaam goes in v22 given v20 where it seems that God allows him to go? The original command was not to go in v13, but it seems that after an increased offer of reward that Balaam wants to go in his heart. Thus, allowing him to go is a 'giving over' to his greed which when he does go he faces the judgement of God. (Noting that Jude 11 implies he was greedy)

Num 24:17. Balaam's Fourth oracle predicts a ruler out of Jacob who will crush Moab (not encouraging for Balak!). Years later, king David who completed Israel's conquest fulfils this. Jesus is a king who comes from David's line so it's possible that this prophecy is looking even further ahead to his rule.

Study 8:

Q1 A comparison of the census counts

Tribe	Census 1: Num 1	Census 2: Num 25
Reuben	46500	43730
Simeon	59300	22200
Gad	45650	40500
Judah	74600	76500
Issachar	54400	64300
Zebulun	57400	60500
Manasseh	32200	52700
Ephraim	40500	32500
Benjamin	35400	45600
Dan	62700	64400
Asher	41500	53400
Naphtali	53400	45400
Total	603550	601730

Q5: Atonement – to make one – to restore unity and relationship. We are estranged from God by sin and so need a way to be restored.

Q7: The seventh month is after the harvest. The festivals encouraged remembering God's saving acts, to repent of sin and thank God for his blessings. At the festivals the fellowship offering was where everyone got to share in the sacrifice made and so would be a time of celebration and joy.

Q8: Sacrifices are costly and abundant – they convey thankfulness and repentant humility before a great God. They will be possible because God richly blesses them in the land and they are to remember his blessing.

Study 9:

Q3 Joshua 4:13 says about 40 thousand troops from these tribes went across the Jordan, compared to the census count that is roughly half. In Joshua 22:1-5 they are released by Joshua as they have done all that was commanded and are blessed to return to the other side of the Jordan.

Q4 Note where they make their request – at the entrance to the tent of meeting. Unlike earlier chapters where people grumble, complain and confront they come to Moses and ask.

Resources

Reynolds, Adrian., *Teaching Numbers from text to message*, (Great Britain: Proclamation trust resources, 2012).

A clear and readable book. Provides an overview of the text and suggested outlines for sermons and study questions. Looks to link to Jesus and application to us today. Was used extensively in preparing these studies.

Wenham, Gordon J., *Numbers*, Tyndale Old Testament commentaries (Leicester: Inter-varsity press, 1981).

Concise, but details good insights into what the text means and how it points to the wider bible message. Was used extensively in preparing these studies.

Pakula, Martin., *Numbers Homeward Bound*, Reading the Bible today series (Sydney: Aquila press 2006).

Writing by a Christian who grew up as an orthodox Jew. Non- technical and very approachable, Martin helpfully points from the text to God's purposes fulfilled in Jesus.

Brown, Raymond., *The message of Numbers*, Bible Speaks Today (London: Inter-varsity press 2002).

A more detailed exploration of the text and application to us

LeFebvre, Michael, Numbers. A 12-Week study. (*Knowing the bible series*): Crossway Ltd. 2000

Studies that look to explore biblical theology and gospel themes. Many insightful summaries of ideas or topology.

The Bible Project overview of Numbers

[Cited March 2023] Online: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/numbers/>

Short video which helps to visualise the story and themes of the book.

New Dictionary of Biblical Theology. England: Inter-Varsity Press. 2000.

"Numbers "p156: summary of book and key themes.

"Land" p623: Development of the theme of land throughout the Old Testament and how it is used in the New Testament.