



NUMBERS

LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS

Familiar Stories Of An Unfamiliar Book

The Old testament book of Numbers has some great stories:

- Quail in the desert (11)
- Water from the rock (20)
- Fire from the Lord (9 and 14)
- Korah's rebellion and the ground opening and swallowing the rebels (16)
- 12 spies who spied out Canaan (13-14)
- Balaam and the talking donkey (22-24)

But, as a whole, it's not exactly a well known book and, the lists of numbers and the census data can be tricky to read through. But, it's part of God's Word and can teach us much about our our journey in life, as we press on as God's people.

Where Is It?

Pentateuch: After Leviticus, before Deuteronomy

At this point, God's people have received law but not yet enter the promised land. It's approximately 2 years since they left Egypt and the book begins at Mount Sinai.

It emphasizes the journey in the wilderness to Canaan.

About

God's grace in sustaining his grumbling, rebellious people in the wilderness and brining them to the promised land not because of the, but inspire of them.

It foreshadows Christ more clearly than perhaps any of the Pentateuch and its lessons are still relevant for a wandering generation today as we make our way towards our promised land. It ends on a high note with

those we could call the heroines of the book, Zelophehad's five daughters, the women who walked by faith.

There's a whole generation who fall in the desert. Numbers describes this. Ominous note. Sadly, the sin of the first generation that perishes is repeated in the second generation. But the fact that two armies of almost identical size are raised up testifies to God's faithfulness to his promise to Abraham. Eleazar, replaces Aaron, and Joshua replaces Moses.

Two sides to the message of Numbers (1-25 and 26-36). The first is the ominous note of judgment to characteristic sin and idolatry. Numbers documents the lows of human sinfulness after the wonders of redemption. But positively, Numbers (like Leviticus) establishes

the sharp contrast between what is holy, and what is not.

Obvious connection with us

Redeemed through Christ's death, but still awaiting promised inheritance. It's about the journey through the wilderness. In fact, Hebrew title of the book is not 'Numbers', but 'In the wilderness', from 1.1. (Only called 'Numbers' in our bible because of the census of fighting men that the book begins with).

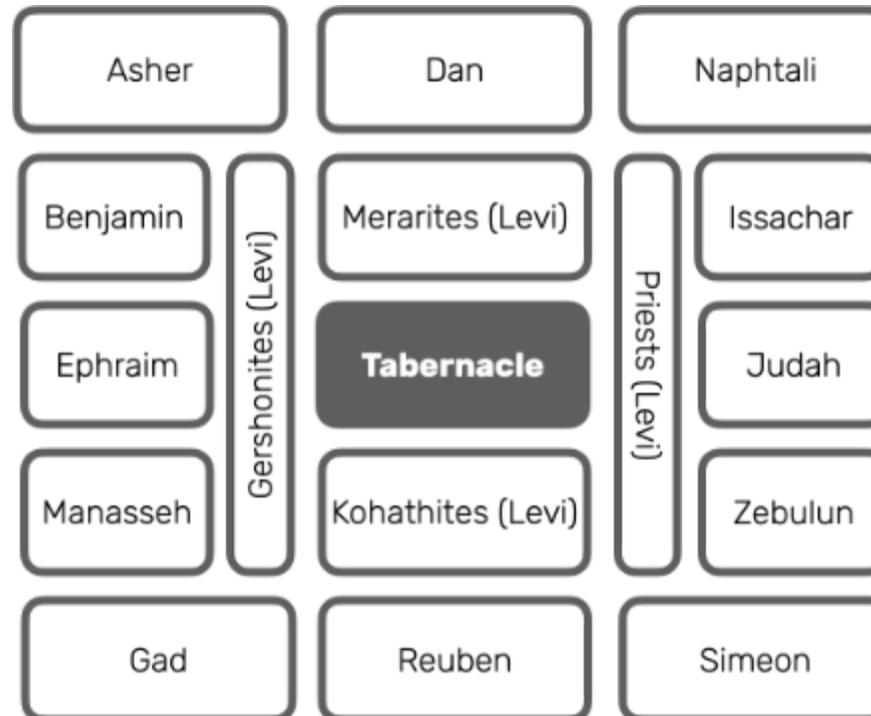
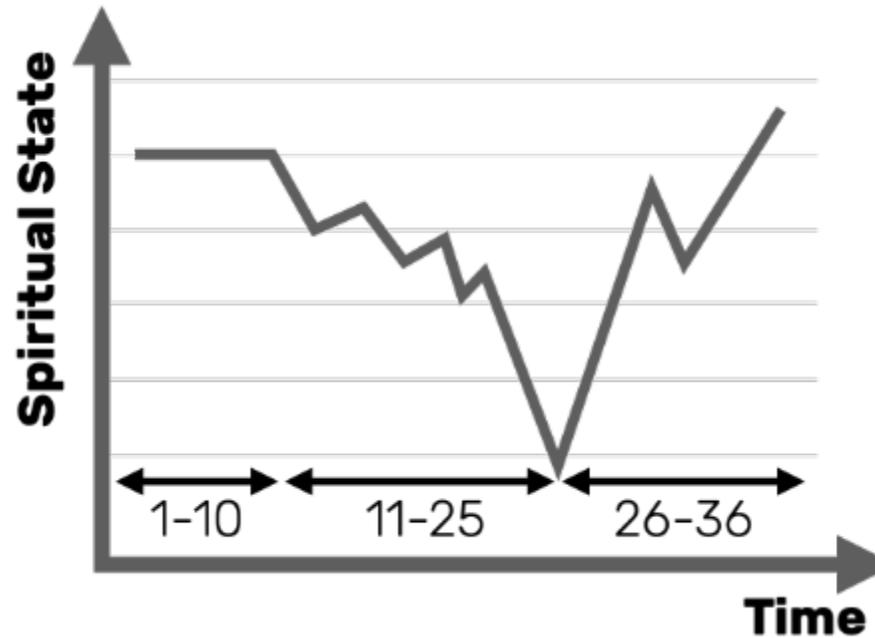
The message of Numbers is that if Israel is to enjoy the blessings of the land of promise, it must follow God's unfailing guidance and keep itself unspotted. Therefore, there's a tension within the book: a need for obedience, holiness, and trust in God, verses the persistent and characteristic sin of God's people.

Structure

- 1-25 first census and decline of first generation = example to avoid in wilderness
- 26-36 second census and second generations faithfulness = example to emulate in land
- Leadership change: 1-25 Moses and Aaron. 26-36 Joshua and Eleazar

So Zelophehad's daughters did as the Lord commanded Moses.

Numbers 36:10



Camp Plan

- Numbers 1-10 outline the camp formation of God's people. Notice:
- The Lord is at the heart of camping, marching, fighting. Everyone focused towards his presence
- Everyone turned to, but access restricted to a few
- Everyone is united and has a part to play
- God is giving them his presence as the provision

At the Lord's command they encamped, and at the Lord's command they set out. They obeyed the Lord's order, in accordance with his command through Moses.

Numbers 9:23

Title helps us see that it is about Yahweh, accompanying his people on their wilderness journey to the promised land.

This tension will only be resolved in the NT with the coming of Christ to provide atonement once and for all as the basis for a new covenant relationship between God and his people, and the pouring out of God's Spirit, by whom God writes his law on our hearts, gives us the motivation from within to obey and his presence for the journey.

Pointers within Numbers to Jesus

Positive

- God making provision to dwell with his people (1-10)
- God's faithfulness to his people despite their sinfulness
- Moses as humble leader (Hebrews 3)
- Necessity of divine guidance to get to heavenly rest (9.15-23; 14.44)
- Provision in desert (feeding of 5000)
- Atonement through zealous intervention of Phineas the priest
- Intercession of Moses in priestly role (14)

- Faithfulness of Joshua, the new leader (13)
- Moses' desire for all of God's people to have the Spirit (11:29)

Negative

- Staggering continuation and repetition of sin across generations
- Necessity of a Moses-like mediator post-redemption (14)
- Moses' sin - even the greatest prophet commits ultimate blasphemy (20:10-12)
- Snake on pole (21, John 3.13-15) But, positive in that it points to Jesus

What we share in common with the Israelites

We, like them, are post-redemption, and before entering rest. Like them, we are vulnerable to temptation and to grumbling, and to rejecting God's present day rule over our lives, and ignoring his human word to us.

1 Corinthians 10:1-10 reminds us that in the events of Numbers, their example might be a warning to us against setting our hearts on evil things, which will destroy us. This is notwithstanding our status under new covenant. Warning sounded here is serious. 2 Timothy 4.10 - 'Demas,

because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica'.

God's sovereignty in salvation. Balaam oracles demonstrate that God is even sovereign over those who are spiritually against us and want to curse us.

Preaching Plan

1 May: Numbers 1-10

8 May: Numbers 13-14

15 May: Numbers 20-21

22 May: Numbers 22-24

29 May: Numbers 31

5 June: Numbers 27 and 36

Resources

Watch

bibleproject.com/explore/video/numbers

Book

John Goldingay, *Numbers and Deuteronomy for Everyone*.

Blog

bibleproject.com/blog/israels-rebellion-wilderness

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”

Numbers 6:24-26