

## Lesson 6

# NUMBERS

---

In the Hebrew Bible, Numbers is called “in the \_\_\_\_\_ [a] (desert).” When the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek (around 250 BC), the translators gave it the new title *Arithmoi* (from which we get the word “\_\_\_\_\_ [b]”). The Latin version of the Bible, known as the Vulgate (which was translated by a man named Jerome around 400 AD), translated *Arithmoi* as *Numeri*. So, we know it as “Numbers” in English.

Why “Numbers”? It’s derived from the two “\_\_\_\_\_ [c]” of the people. When I say “numbering” I mean that a \_\_\_\_\_ [d] was taken. The first census is taken at the beginning of the book as the Israelites are about to leave Mount Sinai and make their way to the Land of Canaan (chapter 1). The second census is taken as they are preparing to enter the Land of Canaan almost 40 years later (chapter 26). In both censuses, the \_\_\_\_\_ [e] over 20 years old who were able to \_\_\_\_\_ [f] are counted. The first census numbered 603,550 and the second one dropped a little to 601,730 (the harsh desert life obviously took a toll on their fruitful-ness). When women and children are added to the number of fighting men, the entire population of the Israelites would have numbered about \_\_\_\_\_ [g].

Some critics of the Bible are skeptical of such large \_\_\_\_\_ [h]. They contend it would have been impossible for the twelve families of Jacob’s sons who first came to Egypt to produce such a large population. But that’s simply not true. Here are a few things to keep in mind:

- \_\_\_\_\_ [i] was making the Israelites especially \_\_\_\_\_ [j] (Ex 1:7,12,19-20). Remember that God promised to make Abraham’s descendants “as the dust of the earth” (Gen 13:16) and “as the stars of the heavens” (Gen 22:17).
- The Israelites were in Egypt for \_\_\_\_\_ [k] years (Ex 12:40). If each generation had four children per son, reaching the figure of 600,000 males of fighting age in 430 years is about right.
- Only a great number of Israelites would make sense of Pharaoh’s \_\_\_\_\_ [l] (Ex 1:9).

Some people also question how such an immense human and animal population could be sustained in the desert of southern Sinai for such an extended time (40 years). The answer to this question is simple—*God* \_\_\_\_\_ [m] *provided for them*. The whole forty-year enterprise of living in the desert was an unending series of miraculous

acts whereby God \_\_\_\_\_[n] his people.

The book of Numbers concentrates on events that take place in the \_\_\_\_\_[o] and the \_\_\_\_\_[p] years after God led Israel out of Egypt. Every-thing in Numbers 1-14 occurs in the year after the exodus, and Numbers 20-36 chronicles the fortieth year after the exodus. Sandwiched in be-tween those sections is the 38 years of wilderness \_\_\_\_\_[q] (Numbers 15-19). So, the book of Numbers can be divided into three sections: (1) “The \_\_\_\_\_[r] Generation” (Num 1-14), (2) “The \_\_\_\_\_[s] Transition,” (Num 15-20), and (3) “The \_\_\_\_\_[t] Generation” (Num 21-36). Let’s quickly summarize each section.

### **THE OLD GENERATION (NUMBERS 1-14)**

The story of the first generation of Israelites that left Egypt in the exodus begins in Exodus 2:23 when they were slaves in Egypt. Their story continues through the book of Leviticus and through Numbers 14. As I said earlier, the active warriors are “numbered” for the upcoming conquest of \_\_\_\_\_[u], the land God promised to give to the descendants of Abraham (Gen 12:5-7; 13:15).

The Israelites are given special instructions before they begin the journey from Sinai to Canaan. They then march to the boarder of the Promised Land on a course set by the \_\_\_\_\_[v] that covered the \_\_\_\_\_[w].

The march to the Promised Land was tough. God wanted his people to trust him to meet their needs. But they just \_\_\_\_\_[x] and \_\_\_\_\_[y]. They grumbled about the lack of water, they grumbled about the monotonous food. They actually had the audacity to say that things were better for them in Egypt as slaves (Num 11:4-6). God heard them and responded accordingly with deadly fire (Num 11:1-3) and plague (Num 11:31-34).

Numbers 12 reveals another tragic incident that occurred on their march to Canaan: Moses’ brother and sister (Aaron and Miriam) challenged his unique role as God’s \_\_\_\_\_[z]. God rebuked them for speaking against Moses and inflicted Miriam with leprosy for seven days (Num 12:10-15).

Chapters 13-14 is the “theological and historical \_\_\_\_\_[aa]” of the book. It describes a terrifying report of the Promised Land by twelve spies. They insisted that the cities of Canaan were too fortified and the inhabitants were too large and fierce to be conquered. Actually, this

terrifying report was endorsed by only 10 of the 12 spies. Two of the spies—Joshua and Caleb—insisted that “We \_\_\_\_\_ [bb], but God \_\_\_\_\_ [cc]!” and they both urged the people not to rebel against God’s command to conquer the land. The people, however, refused to enter the Promised Land. Instead, they complained against Moses and Aaron for bringing them to a place where they would be killed by the Canaanites, and they wanted to choose a leader who would take them back to \_\_\_\_\_ [dd] (Num 14:1-4).

Because of this rebellion against the Lord’s command, all the adults 20 years old and older are sentenced to \_\_\_\_\_ [ee] in the wilderness. Only Joshua and Caleb, the two spies who argued that they should take the land, will live to enter the new land.

### **THE TRAGIC TRANSITION (NUMBERS 15-20)**

In these chapters, the old generation (i.e, the first generation) and the new generation (i.e., the second generation) overlap. The old generation dies out as the new generation grows to adulthood. These chapters provide a sad ending to a story that begins with such promise. It should have only taken about 11 days to travel from \_\_\_\_\_ [ff] to the \_\_\_\_\_ [gg] Land, but it actually took them almost 14,000 days!

Very little information is given about the four decades the Israelites spent living in the desert. This is not surprising because, as many have pointed out, Numbers isn’t really a history of Israel, but rather an essay about the consequences of \_\_\_\_\_ [hh].

There are really only two major episodes recorded in this section. First, a rebellion against Moses and Aaron is instigated by a man named \_\_\_\_\_ [ii]. Korah and 250 community leaders felt they should have access to God and be permitted to serve as \_\_\_\_\_ [jj] (even though God had limited the priesthood to the tribe of Levi). It was really a challenge to God’s right to choose people for specific roles in his plan. The result of this rebellion was that the households of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram were swallowed by the earth (Num 16:25-34) and the 250 community leaders were incinerated by God (Num 16:35).

Unfortunately, it seems that many of the Israelites weren’t willing to accept God’s judgment in the matter, and they grumbled against Moses and Aaron. So, God unleashes a \_\_\_\_\_ [kk] that killed 14,700 before Aaron stopped the plague by making atonement on the people’s behalf (Num 16:41-50).

The second significant episode in this section is the \_\_\_\_\_ [ll] of Aaron's rod. To provide more divine confirmation that Moses is God's chosen leader and the priesthood is reserved for Aaron's line, God orders that each tribe bring one rod to the tabernacle. He then announced that one rod would sprout and produce blossoms and ripe almonds. Whoever owned that rod would be the one selected by God. Aaron's rod budded (Num 17).

This section also contains the account of Moses \_\_\_\_\_ [mm] the rock to bring forth water instead of \_\_\_\_\_ [nn] to the rock as God commanded (Num 20:1-13). For his unbelief in that regard (Num 20:12), Moses himself was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. Not even Moses himself can \_\_\_\_\_ [oo] God without \_\_\_\_\_ [pp].

### THE NEW GENERATION (NUMBERS 21-36)

Like the first generation, the second generation journeys to the boarder of the Promised Land. They too are given instructions, and the second census is taken. Moses appoints \_\_\_\_\_ [qq] as his successor and the leader of this new generation. But, unlike the old generation, the new generation is not fearful of going to war, and within a short time will inherit the land.

As they march toward the Promised Land, they are challenged militarily by Arad, the Amorites, and Moabites (Num 21). God gives Israel victory over these enemies. In desperation, the Moabite king hires a false \_\_\_\_\_ [rr] (Balaam) to curse Israel (Num 22-25), but Balaam can only say what God permits him to say. \_\_\_\_\_ [ss] can stop God's promises to Abraham. Israel can only be stopped by their unbelief (disobedience), which seems very likely in Numbers 25. The people must learn that God requires \_\_\_\_\_ [tt].

Finally, it's in this section that people once again speak out against God and Moses, and this time God sends poisonous snakes among them. When the people repented of their sin, Moses prayed and the Lord provided a cure for the poison. He had Moses make a \_\_\_\_\_ [uu] serpent and hoist it up on a pole. Whoever was bitten and looked at the bronze serpent would live. \_\_\_\_\_ [vv] applied this healing event to himself in John 3:14-15.

### THE LESSONS OF NUMBERS

- \_\_\_\_\_ [ww] can stop God's promises from coming true.

- “We \_\_\_\_\_[xx], but God \_\_\_\_\_[yy].”
- The two sides of God’s character: \_\_\_\_\_[zz] and \_\_\_\_\_[aaa].
- \_\_\_\_\_[bbb] and \_\_\_\_\_[ccc] remain the keys to pleasing God.
- Learn from Israel’s \_\_\_\_\_[ddd].
- A good \_\_\_\_\_[eee] doesn’t guarantee a good \_\_\_\_\_[fff].
- The \_\_\_\_\_[ggg] of God always brings new \_\_\_\_\_[hhh].
- \_\_\_\_\_[iii] carefully to God.
- \_\_\_\_\_[jjj] is the ultimate solution to getting to the Promised Land.

### KEY PASSAGES IN NUMBERS

- Numbers 6:24
- Numbers 11:23
- Numbers 14:18-19
- Numbers 14:20-23
- Numbers 20:8-13

**FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY:**

[a] wilderness	[aa] core	[aaa] sternness
[b] arithmetic	[bb] can't	[bbb] faith
[c] numberings	[cc] can	[ccc] obedience
[d] census	[dd] Egypt	[ddd] failure
[e] men	[ee] die	[eee] start
[f] fight	[ff] Sinai	[fff] finish
[g] 2.5 million	[gg] Canaan	[ggg] mercy
[h] numbers	[hh] unbelief	[hhh] hope
[i] God	[ii] Korah	[iii] listen
[j] fertile	[jj] priests	[jjj] Jesus
[k] 430	[kk] plague	
[l] fear	[ll] budding	
[m] supernaturally	[mm] striking	
[n] sustained	[nn] speaking	
[o] second	[oo] disobey	
[p] fortieth	[pp] consequences	
[q] wanderings	[qq] Joshua	
[r] Old	[rr] prophet	
[s] Tragic	[ss] Nothing	
[t] New	[tt] faithfulness	
[u] Canaan	[uu] bronze	
[v] cloud	[vv] Jesus	
[w] tabernacle	[ww] Nothing	
[x] grumbled	[xx] can't	
[y] complained	[yy] can	
[z] spokesman	[zz] kindness	