



The Bible's Big Story

Numbers

At first glance Numbers seems like a mixed bag: two censuses, narrative interspersed with laws, camp layouts, land divisions, and prophecy. Yet a careful reading reveals God's patient and purposeful outworking of redemption. Its laws and ceremonies are laced with beautiful pictures pointing to Christ and the gospel.

Introductory Information

Title: The English name Numbers comes from the Septuagint's *Arithmoi* and the Vulgate's *Liber Numeri*, both references to the book's two censuses. The original Hebrew title was drawn from the opening phrase "Yahweh spoke," later replaced by the fifth word, *Bəmidbar* (במדבר) — "in the wilderness."

Authorship: Historical tradition unanimously attributes the Pentateuch to Moses, supported internally by the repeated phrase "the Lord spoke to/commanded Moses" and explicit statements about his recording of events (e.g., the travel itinerary in Num. 33:1–2).

Date: ca. 1445–1406/1405 BC. The book's timeline begins one month after the Exodus (Num. 1:1) and concludes on the borders of the Promised Land (Num. 35:1; 36:13), spanning the forty years of wilderness wandering. Dating the Exodus to circa 1446 BC places the events and composition of Numbers to approximately 1445–1405 BC.

Theme & Purpose: The main theme of Numbers is God's continued outworking of his covenant purpose through Israel, with particular focus on the progression toward the land of promise. Numbers does not stand alone — it continues the story begun in Exodus and Leviticus. In Exodus God redeemed his people; in Leviticus he prepared them for covenant worship; in Numbers he leads them toward the land he promised to Abraham. The journey, however, is far from direct. The people's unbelief produces a forty-year detour, yet woven through that detour are the themes of God's continuing presence, his covenant faithfulness, his preservation of Israel, and his provision of mediators to intercede on their behalf.

Summary Theme: *God accomplishes his purposes from generation to generation through both judgment and mercy, demonstrating the consequences of unbelief and the necessity of obedience that comes from faith.*

Redemption Revealed in Numbers

Numbers reveals that pleasing God requires faith.

The Exodus generation had many advantages: the covenant promises, the law of God, the tabernacle with

God's visible presence in their midst, and divinely appointed mediators interceding for them. With all of this, they needed only to trust God and obey. Yet they consistently failed. The New Testament gives the verdict plainly: "the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened" (Heb. 4:2).

Numbers is a sustained demonstration that no people is holy enough, no amount of external religion can satisfy the standard of God's holiness. The only way to be truly pleasing to God is by faith — placing full confidence in God himself to save (Heb. 11:6).

Numbers reveals the necessity of a divinely chosen mediator.

The central roles of Moses as prophet and Aaron as priest are repeatedly validated by God through signs, wonders, and judgments. Yet both are shown to be mere men—imperfect and fallen. Aaron challenges Moses; Moses strikes the rock at Meribah in unbelief. They are essential mediators, but they are not the final mediator. Their lives are sermons which point to God's final Prophet and Priest who is the only Mediator between God and men. Rebellion against him, brings eternal consequences far greater than death.

Numbers is filled with pictures pointing to Christ.

The book is rich with types and shadows that find their fulfillment in Christ:

- **The bronze serpent** (Num. 21:4–9): Jesus himself compared being lifted up on the cross to Moses lifting up the serpent. (John 3:14).
- **The rock** (Num. 20:1–13): The rock from which life-giving water flowed is a type of Christ, who is the Rock (1 Cor. 10:4).
- **The manna** (Num. 11:7–9): The daily provision of manna points to Christ as the bread come down from heaven (John 6:31–33).
- **The red heifer** (Num. 19): Its ashes foreshadow the cleansing obtained through Christ's blood (Heb. 9:13–14).
- **The cities of refuge** (Num. 35): They picture the safety to be found by those who flee to Christ for refuge (Hebrews 6:18).
- **The oracles of Balaam** (Num. 22–24): Even a pagan seer's compelled prophecies look forward to the Star and Scepter — Christ — who will subdue every nation under his authority.

