

Notes & Outlines

NUMBERS

J. Vernon McGee

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(Called *Arithmoi* in the Septuagint, meaning “Arithmetic”)

WRITER: Moses (see outline of Genesis)

THEME: “PILGRIM’S PROGRESS” — walking, wandering, working, warring, witnessing, and worshiping. It is a handbook for pilgrims. “Chart and compass come from Thee.” It is a road map for the wilderness of this world.

For whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we, through patience and comfort of the scriptures, might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Now all these things happened unto them for examples, and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages are come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

These all died in faith, not having received the promises but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul. (1 Peter 2:11)

I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. (John 17:14,15)

FORWARD MARCH:

In the Book of Numbers, we see the children of Israel depart from Mt. Sinai and march to Kadesh-barnea. At Kadesh-barnea, the attitude of unbelief is crystallized into actual disobedience. The light is focused on faith, and they failed. “So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:19). After Kadesh-barnea, they began to wander until that entire generation died in the wilderness (two notable exceptions were Joshua and Caleb). The years of wandering were a veritable saga of suffering, a trek of tragedy, and a story of straying.

Numbers gets its name from the two censuses recorded in chapters 1 and 26. C. H. Mackintosh called it “a divine history of the wanderings of the Israelites in the wilderness for about 38 years and 10 months, commencing with the first movement of the camp after the tabernacle was reared.”

KEY PASSAGE: Numbers 14:29-31

Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all who were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, who have murmured against me, doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I swore to make you dwell therein, except Caleb, the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua, the son of Nun. But your little ones, whom ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land which ye have despised.

These verses outline the experiences of the children of Israel during the time of wandering until the new generation came to the east bank of the Jordan in the land of Moab.

COMMENT:

It was 150 to 200 miles from Mt. Sinai to Kadesh-barnea — a journey in that time of 11 days (Deuteronomy 1:2). They spent 30 days at Kibroth. That means they spent 40 years on a journey that should have taken 40 days. At Kadesh-barnea, walking was turned to wandering. They did not advance an inch after Kadesh-barnea; at the end of the wanderings they came back to the same place (Numbers 20:1).

That their number was decimated is seen by a comparison of the two censuses:

603,550 fighting men (Numbers 1:46)

601,730 fighting men (Numbers 26:51)

1,820 loss (They were told to “be fruitful and multiply.”)

The census in the first chapter furnishes a yardstick by which a total figure can be estimated. Dr. Melvin Grove Kyle gave to his students this approximation, which he considered a conservative figure.

600,000 fighting men (Numbers 1:46)

400,000 women

200,000 older men

800,000 children

100,000 mixed multitude

2,100,000 TOTAL (tribe of Levi not included)

From Egypt to Mt. Sinai

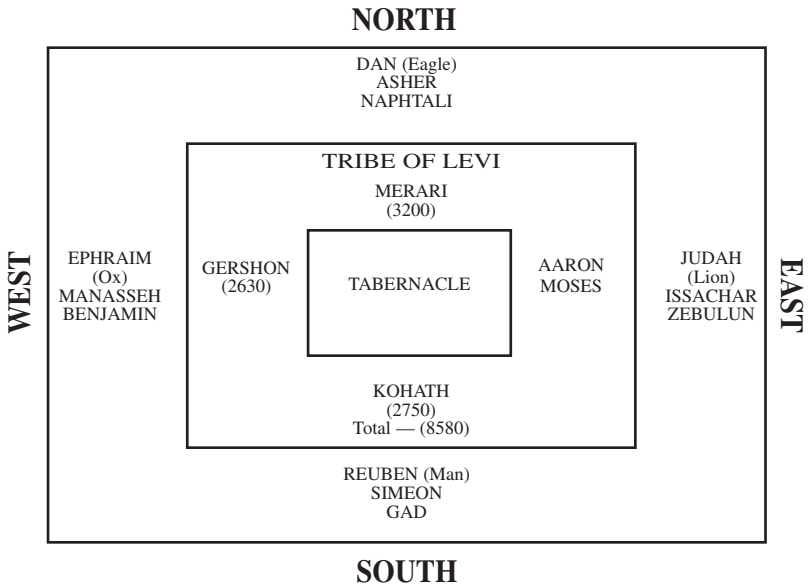
The first 10 chapters deal with the order of the camp. Israel was not a mob crossing the desert. Every man had to know who he was and where he belonged in the camp.

From Mt. Sinai Onward

The tabernacle was the center of the camp, and the twelve tribes were arranged according to the situation of the tabernacle. They marched according to their position. The tribe of Levi was directly around the tabernacle according to their families.

HOW ISRAEL ENCAMPED ON WILDERNESS MARCH CHART OF CAMP

12 Tribes of Israel



The 40 years of wandering and the unbelief at Kadesh-barnea are not recorded in the “faith” chapter of Hebrews (chapter 11). The record of their unbelief is recorded in Hebrews 3:7-19. This is the “doubting chapter.”

THE ORDER BY WHICH THEY MARCHED IS GIVEN IN NUMBERS 10:11-36

	<i>Section 7</i>	<i>Section 6</i>	<i>Section 5</i>	<i>Section 4</i>	<i>Section 3</i>	<i>Section 2</i>	<i>Section 1</i>
	Dan	Ephraim	Kohathites	Reuben	Gershon Merari	Judah "Praise"	Moses Aaron, Ark
Mixed Multitude	<i>bearing standard</i> (v. 25)	<i>bearing standard</i> (v. 22)	<i>bearing sanctuary</i> (v. 21)	<i>bearing standard</i> (v. 18)	<i>bearing tabernacle</i> (v. 17)	<i>bearing standard</i> (v. 14)	<i>(v. 33)</i>
	Asher Naphtali	Manasseh Benjamin	Sons of Levi	Simeon Gad	Sons of Levi	Issachar Zebulun	
	<hr style="border: 1px solid black;"/>						FORWARD MARCH!

The years of wandering were not exactly wasted. God taught them many precious lessons during this period — among them:

1. The **rebellion of Korah** led to the confirmation of the priesthood of Aaron by the budding of the almond rod. This has become a picture of the priesthood of Christ, which is based on His resurrection.
2. The offering of the **red heifer** in chapter 19 sets forth the method God uses to keep believers clean. Chapters 16 through 19 all have to do with the priesthood.

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin. (1 John 1:7)

3. The constant complaining of the people led to the judgment by serpents and the provision of the **serpent of brass** as the remedy. This teaches us that Christ was made sin for us.

Numbers 22 — 25 gives us the account of **Balaam**, one of the bad men of the Bible, a rogue of revelation, a scoundrel of Scripture, a villain of the volume. He was a strange character. He was a heathen prophet with magical powers (Numbers 22:6). He is specifically labeled a soothsayer (Joshua 13:22). He received the rewards of “divination” (Numbers 22:7). He confessed that he used these methods (Numbers 23:23).

He gave four of the most remarkable prophecies in the Scriptures regarding Israel:

1st prophecy — Numbers 23:8-10

2nd prophecy — Numbers 23:20-24

3rd prophecy — Numbers 24:5-9

4th prophecy — Numbers 24:17-24 (This is a source from which the wise men could have known about the star.)

Balaam had some knowledge of God, and God used him (Numbers 22:9, 20, 22, 31). He is a strange anomaly. The Scriptures have a great deal to say about him — see Numbers

31:16; Deuteronomy 23:4, 5; Joshua 13:22; Joshua 24:9, 10; Nehemiah 13:2; Micah 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15; Jude 11; Revelation 2:14.

Every preacher of any consequence has preached on Balaam. Here are a few observations from some of these men. Bishop Butler: “Self-deception — Balaam persuaded himself that his sin could be brought into rules of conscience and revelation.” Cardinal Newman: “The dark shadow cast over a noble course by standing always on the ladder of advancement and by the suspense of a worldly ambition never satisfied.” Charles Spurgeon: “Double-minded man — he could see the right, and yet his lower nature turned him from it.” B. H. Carroll: “He had but one real mind — greed and power. Religion — a stalking-horse.”

Scripture distinguishes between the *way* of Balaam, the *error* of Balaam, and the *doctrine* of Balaam:

“The *way* of Balaam” (2 Peter 2:15) was that he prostituted his gift for gain, he was covetous, he commercialized his office.

“The *error* of Balaam” (Jude 11) was that he concluded a righteous God must curse Israel. He was unaware of the grace of God revealed in God’s redemption of Israel out of Egypt.

“The *doctrine* of Balaam” (Revelation 2:14) was his counsel to Balak. Finding that he could not curse Israel, he showed Balak how to break down the wall of separation by marriage with women of Moab (Numbers 31:15, 16).

At chapter 26, the new generation has come of age. The generation that came out of Egypt has died in the wilderness. Preparation is made for entering the promised land.

OUTLINE:

I. Fitting out the nation Israel for wilderness march, Chapters 1 — 8

(Preparation for the pilgrimage)

A. Order of the camp, Chapters 1 — 4

“Let everything be done...in order.”

1. First census, Chapter 1

(603,550 of those able to go to war [v. 3].

Probably 2 1/2 million came out of Egypt.)

*An Israelite must be able to declare his pedigree,
know who he is in order to serve and fight.*

*A Christian must know his pedigree — “Now are
we the children of God” (1 John 3:2).*

2. Standards and position of the 12 tribes on wilderness march, Chapter 2

*They had to know where they belonged (see chart)
and rally around their standard. Each had his
God-appointed place and service.*

3. Census, position, and service of Levites on wilderness march, Chapter 3

(Census of firstborn)

a. Aaron and Moses, vv. 1-4

b. Tribe of Levi given to Aaron, vv. 5-13
(cf. John 17:6, 9)

c. Three families of Levi, vv. 14-20

d. Gershon — in charge of curtains, coverings,
and cords, vv. 21-26

e. Kohath — in charge of articles of furniture,
vv. 27-32

f. Merari — in charge of boards, bars, pillars,
sockets, and vessels, vv. 33-37

- g. Total of Levites (22,000), vv. 38, 39
 - h. Census of firstborn of all Israel (22,273), vv. 40-51
4. Service of Levites about the tabernacle, Chapter 4 (census of Levites [ages 30-50] for service)
- B. Cleansing the camp, Chapters 5 — 8**
(Reason: “Our God is a consuming fire” [Hebrews 12:29])
- 1. Restitution and jealousy offering, Chapter 5
 - a. Defilement by disease and death, vv. 1-4
For the Christian, lepers represent the flesh; the dead represent the world.
 - b. Restitution, vv. 5-10
Repentance is more than saying, “I am sorry” (2 Corinthians 7:10).
 - c. Jealousy offering, vv. 11-31
“I am a jealous God.”
 - 2. Vow of the Nazarite: the triune blessing, Chapter 6
 - a. Nazarite vow, vv. 1-21
Voluntary and temporary
 - (1) Not to drink wine or strong drink, v. 3
His joy is to be in the Lord.
 - (2) Not to shave head, v. 5
He is to bear shame (1 Corinthians 11:14).
 - (3) Not to touch dead body, v. 7
He is to forsake father and mother.
 - b. Triune blessing, vv. 22-27
 - 3. Gifts of the princes, Chapter 7
All give the same. The smallest gift is recorded.
 - 4. Light of lampstand and laver for Levites, Chapter 8

- a. Light of lampstand, vv. 1-4
(Walking in the Light)
- b. Levites cleansed, vv. 5-26
The Christian's cleansing is by the Word.

II. Forward March!, Chapters 9, 10

A. Passover and covering cloud, Chapter 9

- 1. Passover observed by all on wilderness march, vv. 1-14
- 2. Pillar of cloud by day; pillar of fire by night, vv. 15-23

B. Silver trumpets, Chapter 10:1-10

(Used for moving Israel on wilderness march and calling an assembly)

C. Forward March! Order of march, Chapter 10:11-32

(See chart.)

D. Halt!, 10:33-36

III. From Sinai to Kadesh, Chapters 11, 12

A. Complaining and murmuring of people displeasing to the Lord, Chapter 11

Complaining is initiated by the "mixed multitude" (vv. 4-6).

God provides quail because of dissatisfaction with manna (v. 31).

When Moses complains, God permits the appointment of elders (v. 16).

B. Jealousy of Miriam and Aaron; judgment of Miriam, Chapter 12

(Rebellion in high places, an infection which delays the march)

IV. Failure at Kadesh, Chapters 13, 14

(Place of decision; great breach of the covenant)

A. Spies chosen and sent into land of Canaan; return and report, Chapter 13

1. Cause for sending spies (cf. Deuteronomy 1:22), vv. 1-3
2. Choice of spies, vv. 4-16
3. Commission of spies, vv. 17-20
4. Conduct of spies, vv. 21-25
(Did a thorough job)
5. Confirmation of facts, vv. 26, 27
6. Misinterpretation of facts, vv. 28, 29; 31-33
(Majority report: giants vs. grasshoppers)
7. Right interpretation of facts, v. 30
(Minority report: reliance upon God)

B. Israel refuses to enter because of unbelief, Chapter 14

“So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief” (Hebrews 3:19).

V. Faltering, fumbling and fussing through the wilderness, Chapters 15 — 25

(Silent years — only 4 incidents recorded — no connected history: [1] log, Numbers 33:19-37; [2] did not circumcise children, Joshua 5:5, 6; [3] did not offer sacrifices to God, Amos 5:25, 26; [4] worshiped idols, Acts 7:42, 43.)

A. Delay God’s blessing; do not destroy God’s purpose, Chapter 15

God goes forward; the people go backward. He gives rules for the land. God said they would enter — it was as good as done. Thirty-eight years later, Israel, in

new generation, enters land. These are the children that the fathers thought might perish (Numbers 14:31). (Death penalty for breaking sabbath, vv. 32-36. Do all commandments carry death penalty?)

B. Incidents relating to the priesthood, Chapters 16—19

1. Gainsaying of Korah, Chapter 16

5th murmuring, vv. 1-3

Rebellion against divinely constituted authority. Korah, a man of great authority, has his place in the camp; Moses has his. Rebellion must be dealt with.

6th murmuring, v. 41

Judgment is stayed by Moses.

2. Aaron's rod that budded, Chapter 17

Office of Aaron is attested by resurrection (v. 8). Christ is priest after order of Melchizedec, established as priest after His resurrection from the dead.

3. Confirmation of priesthood, Chapter 18

(Charge and position of Aaron and Levites)

Levites receive tithes and give tithes (v. 26).

4. Offering and ashes of red heifer, Chapter 19

(Purpose: cleansing the redeemed, cf. Galatians 6:1)

5. Deaths of Miriam and Aaron; water from the rock, Chapter 20

a. At Kadesh again (after 37 years), v. 1

b. 7th murmuring, vv. 2-6

c. Water from rock; disobedience of Moses, vv. 7-13

d. Edom refuses Israel passage through their land, vv. 14-21

- e. Death of Aaron, vv. 22-29
- 6. First victory of Israel; first song; serpent of brass, Chapter 21
 - a. 8th murmuring, v. 5
 - b. Serpent of brass, v. 9 (cf. John 3:14)
 - c. Israel sings, v. 17
- 7. The prophet Balaam, Chapters 22 — 25
 - a. “The way of Balaam” — covetousness, (cf. 2 Peter 2:15, 16), 22
 - b. “The error of Balaam” — ignorance of God’s righteousness (cf. Romans 8:31-34), 23
 - c. “The doctrine of Balaam” — fornication with Moabites; embrace their idolatry, 24, 25

VI. Future (new) generation prepares to enter land, Chapters 26 — 36

- A. Census of new generation (v. 64), Chapter 26**
Less than first census (cf. Numbers 1:46 with Numbers 26:51)
- B. Woman’s place under law, Chapter 27**
Daughters of Zelophehad claim possession of their father. Moses appeals to God for a decision. God grants their request.
- C. The law of offerings, Chapters 28, 29**
The offerings illustrate the abiding preciousness of Christ, what God thinks of Christ. True worship is thinking God’s thoughts after Him.
- D. Law of vows, Chapter 30**
A vow is inviolate. A woman’s vow depends upon her father or husband. The vow of a widow or divorced woman must stand.

- E. Judgment of Midian, Chapter 31**
(Moses' last act)
*Midian in the wilderness is a type of the world.
The Christian is to be separated from the world
(cf. Galatians 6:14; 1 John 2:15-17).*
- F. Reuben and Gad ask for land on wrong side of Jordan, Chapter 32**
Jordan is a type of death and resurrection of Christ.
- G. Log of the journeys, Chapter 33**
- H. Borders of promised land, Chapter 34**
- I. Cities of refuge given to Levites, Chapter 35**
(To be used as refuge for manslayers)
- J. Law of land regarding inheritance, Chapter 36**
(Land to remain in tribe and family)

These notes, prepared by J. Vernon McGee, are for the purpose of giving assistance to the listeners of the THRU THE BIBLE RADIO program. They are to be used with the Bible and will be more meaningful as you look up all the Scripture references. Due to the necessary brevity of both notes and broadcasts, a list of recommended books is included for those wanting a more detailed study. These books may be obtained from a Christian library or bookstore or ordered from the publishers.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS:

- Epp, Theodore H. *Moses*. Lincoln, Nebraska: Back to the Bible Broadcast, 1975.
- Gaebelein, Arno C. *Annotated Bible*, vol. 1. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, n.d.
- Grant, F. W. *Numerical Bible*. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1891.
- Gray, James M. *Synthetic Bible Studies*. Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1906.
- Heslop, W. G. *Nuggets from Numbers*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1958.
- Hvey, F. B., Jr. *Numbers*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, Publishing House, 1981.
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- Kelly, William. *Lectures Introductory to the Pentateuch*. Oak Park, Illinois: Bible Truth Publishers, 1870.
- Mackintosh, C. H. (C.H.M.). *Notes on the Pentateuch*. Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1880. (Excellent devotional study.)
- Meyer, F. B. *Moses: The Servant of God*. Fort Washington, Pennsylvania: Christian Literature Crusade, n.d.
- Noordtzij, A. *Numbers*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, Publishing House, 1983.
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- Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Handbook*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1966.
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