

Numbers

Numbers takes up where Leviticus left off—at Mt. Sinai. It was written by Moses and takes its English name from the two numberings of the Israelites—the first at Mount Sinai and the second on the plains of Moab. The bulk of the book’s material, however, consists of narrative accounts concerning the experiences of Israel during their 38 years of wilderness wanderings. The book picks up after the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai and concludes with the nation on the brink of entering the Promised Land. These accounts show the few successes and many failures of the people in following the newly given “manual” for national life. The book contains the records of two generations, two censuses (or two numberings, for which the book is named), and two sets of instructions for enjoying the land of promise. Numbers records events from ~1444-1406 B.C.

Numbers was written to trace the history of Israel’s wanderings from Sinai to Moab. But the fact that there is very little aggregated record of the thirty-eight years of wandering shows that Numbers is a thematic history; it selects those events that are important to the development of God’s redemptive program. It shows the many sins of the first generation to serve as a reminder and a warning to the second generation.

The book is intertwined with both narrative and regulative material, and each type of material requires a different hermeneutical approach. Therefore, two methods of interpretation will be employed.

Things to think about in each chapter/scene (Law/census material):

1. Subject / Complement
 2. Summarize logical divisions (not an outline)
 3. Key verse / Focal point
 4. Observations
 - Why is it in the Bible?
- Why here (how does it relate to the other scenes)?
 - What does this tell me about God or Israel’s history?
 - Are there any binding stipulations, or trans-dispensational principles?

Things to think about in each chapter/scene (narrative material):

1. Identify limits of scene
2. Subject – Complement
3. Summarize/analyze plot (start ~ climax ~ conclusion)
4. Key verse / Focal point
5. Observations
 - Why is it in the Bible?
 - Why here (how does it relate to the other scenes)?
 - Significant issues, questions, etc.

Numbers 1

- Census – Taken
- Divisions:
 - Tribes and leaders – vv. 5–15
 - Tribes and numbers – vv. 20–46
 - Levites excluded – vv. 47–53
- Key verses – vv. 2–3 :: Yahweh told Moses to take a count of Israel
- On the heels of the book of Leviticus where Yahweh has stipulated how Israel is to approach Him, Numbers opens with the census which gives concrete evidence that the Lord has kept His Abrahamic covenant promise concerning a numerous seed (Gen. 15:5).¹ The census would inspire confidence in the people that they are strong enough, through Yahweh’s blessing, to face their enemies in the wilderness. The census also bestowed a heightened sense of God’s miraculous deeds on their behalf. Since He has already delivered this great number of people, He will continue to provide for them in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

¹This would likely indicate to the Israelites that Yahweh will also keep His promises concerning the Mosaic covenant.

Numbers 2

- Positions – Assigned
- Divisions:
 - East side of Tabernacle – vv. 3–8
 - South side of Tabernacle – vv. 9–16
 - Place of Tabernacle – v. 17
 - West side of Tabernacle – vv. 18–24
 - North side of Tabernacle – vv. 25–31
- Key verse – v. 2 :: Yahweh assigns each tribe an area of camp to set up at
- Yahweh prescribed how the camp was to be arranged for the anticipated years of journey to Canaan. The nation was to have a set procedure of encampment and march in order to insure efficiency of procedure, especially with such a great number of people (as reported in chap 1).

Numbers 3

- Levites – Numbered
- Divisions:
 - Levites serve – vv. 1–13
 - Levites registered – vv. 14–39
 - Firstborns redeemed – vv. 40–51
- Key verse – v. 15 :: Yahweh instructs the census taken of Levites
- The Levite genealogical records served ¹to preserve familial organization within the larger societal structure and ²to provide future generations with a knowledge of their source and status. The positioning in this place of the book emphasizes the centrality of the priesthood within this Israelite nation. The priesthood is important enough to be mentioned apart from the rest of Israel. The Levites were to function as examples of holiness to the people of God, who were to be holy because their God was holy.

Numbers 4

- Duties – in Transporting
- Divisions:
 - Kohathites, most sacred objects – vv. 1–20
 - Gershonites, general and carry loads – vv. 21–28
 - Merarites, carry loads – vv. 29–33
 - Listing of clans – vv. 34–49
- Key verse – v. 49 :: Each of Levite clans recorded and assigned tasks.
- The chapter continues the census of the Levites that was described in ch. 3. Here, however, detail is given as to what clans have certain responsibilities for the Tabernacle's transportation. This is a very important matter so these clans must take great care in carrying out their duties exactly as Yahweh has prescribed. These men must be holy in their dealings with Yahweh's holy dwelling place.

Numbers 5

- Purity – Protected
- Divisions:
 - Dealing with skin diseased – vv. 1–4
 - Dealing with wrongs – vv. 5–10
 - Dealing with adulterous women – vv. 11–31
- Key verse – v. 31 :: There will be accountability for sin
- Impurity and lack of cleanliness cannot to be tolerated in the camp where the holy Yahweh has His dwelling among His people. The holiness of Yahweh and the assertion that the collective people of God must maintain standards of purity and holiness are emphasized.

Numbers 6

- Nazirite – Laws

- Divisions:
 - Nazirite vows – vv. 1–21
 - Priestly blessing – vv. 22–27
- Key verse – v. 31 :: There will be accountability for sin
- The Nazirite consecration stands in contrast to the defilement of the previous chapter. Priestly, Levitical service was the exclusive privilege of those who belonged to the tribe of Levi but Yahweh here instituted a provision whereby any man or woman of Israel who wished could take a vow before Yahweh to *consecrate* himself for a stated period of time to serve God.

Numbers 7

- Offerings – Dedicated
- Key verse – v. 84 :: Summary of offering
- As the Israelites prepare to move camp they are keenly aware of their need to pay homage to Yahweh for His presence (v. 10). They are also brought so that the Levites might be able to do their work.

Numbers 8

- Levites – Dedicated
- Key verse – v. 16 :: Levites elevated in God’s eyes
- The Levites are brought out before all of Israel and dedicated for their priestly role. This dedication was necessary because it had been previously prescribed by Yahweh, but it also displayed to Israel that Yahweh had chosen and placed this tribe to lead the nation in worship and holiness. The Levites were set apart from the rest of the nation; they are separate for God’s work.

Numbers 9:1–14

- Passover – Instructions
- Key verse – v. 2 :: Yahweh instructs to remember Passover celebration
- There are a couple things to note from this account. First, Yahweh gives this command a month before His call for the census (cf. 1:1; 9:1). This indicates that Moses is not following a strict chronology; rather, he groups three events that pertain to the commencement of the journey. Second, Yahweh demands that the keeping of the feast be a top priority. No one is excused; failure to celebrate the Passover will result in excommunication.² The delivering and protecting Yahweh must be remembered for His mighty work of rescuing His people from the Egyptians.

Numbers 9:15–23

- Cloud – Leads
- Key verses – vv. 22–23 :: The people follow the leading of the cloud and Moses
- The cloud was the manifestation of the very person and presence of Yahweh. Whatever the situation, the nation moved in response to His divine direction (v. 23). Here again Yahweh’s sovereign control of every dimension of life is revealed.

Numbers 10:1–10

- Trumpets – Remind
- Key verse – v. 10 :: The trumpets remind of Yahweh’s covenant.
- The silver trumpets are to be used for calling the community together or having the camps set out. Two trumpets sound for the rising and settling of the cloud (time to move camp). The trumpets (blown by the priests) are to be regarded as the voice of the Lord, calling the people to heed the Lord’s directions (as indicated by the cloud of his presence). They would also be blown for alarms, festivals, months, and offerings. Each would be a memorial for the people before God, a kind of reminder of His guidance and blessing in the past, particularly in the wilderness.

²Yahweh does allow for two exceptions: if a person is unclean because of contact with a dead body or is away on a journey at the time.

NARRATIVE MATERIAL BEGINS

Numbers 10:11–36

- Journey – Begins
- Scene:
 - Story — Israelites set out for 1st time (vv. 1–14)
 - Conclusion — Moses shouts Yahweh’s fame and protection (vv. 33–35)
- Key verse – v. 13 :: Setting out according to Yahweh’s leading
- The people set out, following the cloud as the book’s events have been pointing to—Yahweh is leading the Israelites to the Promised Land. As the cloud of the Lord’s presence is above, the ark³—Yahweh’s throne, travels some distance (three-days walk) in front of the people. Moses’ proclamations as the ark begins to move and when it stops reminds Israel that the Lord is sovereign; He protects and gives His people victory. Yahweh’s abiding presence is Israel’s source of well-being and peace.

Numbers 11

- Complaints – Recompensed
- Scene:
 - Story — Israelites complain about conditions (vv. 1–15)
 - Climax — Yahweh confronts Moses concerning declaration that all will have meat (v. 23)
 - Conclusion — Yahweh overwhelms Israel with quail (vv. 31–35)
- Key verse – v. 33 :: God "cursed" the people with overwhelming amounts of quail.
- The people's complaints show a lack of respect for Yahweh and a poor recollection of conditions in Egypt and of Yahweh's mighty saving hand. Yahweh and Moses are rightly disgusted/enraged. Yahweh will remind the people of His might, and He will also use it as a punishment for their ingratitude.
- *God's mighty acts must not be forgotten; He deserves worship and respect, not complaints and rebellion.*

Numbers 12

- Criticism – Recompensed
- Scene:
 - Story — Miriam and Aaron criticize Moses (vv. 1–3)
 - Climax — Yahweh confronts Miriam and Aaron (v. 4–9)
 - Conclusion — Miriam must stay outside camp b/c of her leprosy (vv. 14–15)
- Key verse – v. 9 :: God angrily confronted and punished (Miriam probably led the criticism/jealousy and was thus punished with leprosy).
- Miriam’s offense was serious because she had led an insurrection against God’s choice servant and covenant mediator. Yahweh speaks personally, directly, and clearly to Moses. Therefore, to challenge Moses was to challenge Yahweh. The nature of Miriam's offense was disrespect. If she had suffered the disgrace of being spat on by her father she would have had to remain outside the camp for seven days. Surely she must remain outside at least that long for having committed such a serious disrespect of Moses ("spitting in his face" as it were). The author places all these acts of rebellion/ingratitude together to stress the point that the people were sinning from top to bottom.
- *God's servants deserve respect and rebellion against them is tantamount to rebelling against God.*

Numbers 13

- Exploration – Reported
- Scene:
 - Story — 12 leaders sent to explore Canaan (vv. 1–26)
 - Climax — Report of amazing things (vv. 27–29)
 - Conclusion — 10 spies recommend not conquering (vv. 31–33)

³The role of the ark is given special attention (10:33–36).

- Key verse – v. 27 :: Report given
- The spies confirm what the Lord had promised them: a fertile land of abundance. Their fear, however, overwhelms them, and ten of the spies recommend evil rather than good. The previous sections provide the context of rebelliousness without noting the specific time frame of each. The sections are precursors to this final rebellious act. They are compounded one upon the other, and show the terrible nature of the nation's ingratitude.

Numbers 14

- Insurrection – Punished
- Scene:
 - Intro — The Israelites complain about their leadership (vv. 1–12)
 - Story — Yahweh wants to destroy and Moses pleads for sparing (vv. 13–25)
 - Climax — Punishment announced (v. 29)
 - Conclusion — Continued defiance (vv. 39–45)
- Key verses – vv. 34–35 :: Punishment declared
- The Israelites heed the bad advice of the 10 and go against Yahweh's command to take the land. In addition they complain again about leaving Egypt and desire new leaders. They have rejected the Promised Land and rejected God's leadership through Moses. Yahweh has finally "run out of patience." We should, in fact, be surprised that it has taken this long since practically every chapter has recorded the people's disobedience, rebellion, and ingratitude. Moses pleads on the nation's behalf, arguing for God's greatness to be shown. Punishment is handed down, but the nation as a whole is spared. However, this will be a lesson to all Israel for generations to come.

Numbers 15 (Law-giving Excursus)

- Offerings – Adherence
- Divisions:
 - Offerings (burnt, voluntary, etc) upon arrival in the land – vv. 1–16
 - First-fruit offerings – vv. 17–21
 - Unintentional violation – vv. 22–29
 - Intentional violation – vv. 30–31
 - Case study – vv. 32–36
 - Tassels on clothing – vv. 27–41
- Key verse – v. 40 :: Remember obedience to Yahweh required
- The section on attaching the tassels to one's clothing may at first glance seem odd; however, it is the key to understanding the chapter. In the previous chapter the Israelites had grievously sinned against Yahweh. He now prescribes that He is to be remembered upon entry into the Promise land via sacrifices & offerings. The tassels are a current reminder to celebrate Yahweh's mighty delivering hand and to fulfill the Covenant by obeying its requirements. For God is their God and He requires holiness.

Numbers 16

- Insurrection – Confronted
- Scene:
 - Intro — Korah and company rebel against Moses' and Aaron's leadership (vv. 1–3)
 - Story — Moses confronts Korah and expects God to show who is right in the dispute (vv. 4–30)
 - Climax — Earth swallows up Korah and followers (v. 32)
 - Conclusion — Israelites side with Korah (vv. 41–47)
- Key verse – v. 28 :: Moses confronts, claiming Yahweh will show He has chosen Moses
- Reading this book is like listening to a broken record. The depths of Israel's depravity are elucidated in that they continually return to complaints against Yahweh and His leaders. This case is an almost exact recurrence of the events of chapter 14, which is incredible on the heels of the punishment (14:26ff) and call to remembrance (cf. chap 15) Yahweh has given. Not only is there another insurrection but after it is abundantly evident that Yahweh has sided with Moses and against the rebels, the people again

question Moses' authority (v. 41). It's simply amazing that ¹Yahweh does not destroy them and ²Moses keeps pleading for Yahweh's grace (vv. 45–46).

Numbers 17

- Designation – (divinely) Displayed
- Scene:
 - Story — Yahweh will end this constant rebellion against His leader (vv. 1–7)
 - Climax — Aaron's staff buds (v. 8)
 - Conclusion — Israel recognizes Moses' and Aaron's authority (vv. 9–13)
- Key verse – v. 5 :: Yahweh will show all who He has chosen to lead
- Yahweh will have no more of the questioning of Moses authority (and by proxy Yahweh's authority); He will squelch the rebellions by divinely displaying it to all. Yahweh proclaims that this should end the complaints, prevent deaths, and warn all would-be rebels.

Numbers 18 (Law-giving Excursus)

- Levitical – Providence
- Divisions:
 - Levitical duties in Tabernacle – vv. 1–7
 - Levitical right to offerings – vv. 8–24
 - Levitical right to offerings – vv. 25–32
- Key verses – vv. 20–21 :: Yahweh provides because Levites serve Yahweh & have no allotment of land
- In light of Korah's rebellion against Moses and the Aaronic priesthood (chaps. 16-17), this chapter is a reminder and amplification of the priests' and Levites' responsibilities. Only to the Levites did the task of ministry at the tabernacle belong. In return for their service to the Lord the priests and Levites would receive from Him a portion of the offerings which the people presented in worship.

Numbers 19 (Continued Law-giving)

- Purification – Necessary
- Divisions:
 - Red heifer & cleansing – vv. 1–10
 - Defilement by touching a dead body – vv. 11–16
 - Resolution of defilement – vv. 17–22
- Key verse – vv. 20 :: Water purification necessary for right standing with Yahweh
- This chapter seems out of place, but when we consider that Yahweh's response to Korah's rebellion was the death of 14,700 in via a plague (cf. 16:36–40) it is apt. Contact with the bodies of the nearly 15,000 dead would require a massive application of purification codes. Contact with the dead was an especially contaminating experience because of the obvious association of physical death with spiritual death (Gen. 2:17; Deut. 30:15, 19; Rom. 6:23).⁴ Therefore, some means of purification must be provided so they might be able to associate freely and without impediment with Yahweh and His community.

Numbers 20:1–13, 22–29

- Rebellion – Encountered
- Scene:
 - Story — The people again complain (vv. 2–5)
 - Climax — Water comes from the rock (v. 11)
 - Conclusion — Yahweh chastises Moses and Aaron for disobedience (vv. 12–13)
- Key verse – v. 10 :: Rebellion confronted and water provided
- The Israelites take up the refrain of their incessant song of rebellion; they continue to forget God's mighty hand of deliverance and His promises of the wonderful Promised Land. Moses and Aaron also

⁴Life was bound up with symbolism. For example, skin diseases implied uncleanness because they typified or symbolized sin. Cf. Miriam's having been struck by such an affliction which made her unclean and clearly attested to her sin of rebellion (12:9-15).

rebel against Yahweh in not obeying completely. It dishonors Yahweh; therefore, they will not see the Promised Land.⁵ It's ironic that the people mourn for Aaron's death (v. 29) since they have only continually complained about him and rebelled against his authority.

Numbers 21

- Traveling – Difficult
- Scene:
 - Story — The people travel all around in the wilderness facing different adversities (vv. 1–35)
 - Climax — Punishment for complaining (vv. 6–9)
 - Conclusion — Israel defeated enemies and occupied land (vv. 35b)
- Key verse – v. 5 :: Complaints over the long, tough journey
- The Israelites are wandering in the wilderness *around* Edom (and, of course, the land of Canaan), and it seems that at every turn they run into opposition. The nations surrounding Canaan certainly do not want to help the Israelites and are always mounting attacks against them. In the midst of these travelings we are given the account of another act of rebellion: the Israelites complain about their plight in the wilderness. Despite the nation's continuing sin, Yahweh is still their God and grants them victory over their opposition.

Numbers 22–24

- Prophecy – Requested / Delivered
- Scene:
 - Story — Balaam is summoned by Balak to curse Israel (ch 22–24)
 - Climax — For the 3rd time Balaam blesses Israel as Yahweh instructed (24:3–9)
 - Conclusion — Only Yahweh's favored ones will survive (24:24–25)
- Key verse – 24:13 :: Balak requests a prophecy, but Balaam speaks Yahweh's message
- Balak, king of Moab, sees the oncoming, seemingly unstoppable Israelite clan, and realizes that he needs some type of "divine" assistance to defeat the Israelites. Balaam finally understands Yahweh is in control (22:31) and that His message must be proclaimed, which leads to 3 pronouncements of blessing as directed by Yahweh.

Numbers 25

- Idolatry – Seduces
- Scene:
 - Story — Some Israelites seduced by Moabites and worshipped Moab's gods (vv. 1–3)
 - Climax — Phinehas spears a man and his adulteress (vv. 7–8)
 - Conclusion — Yahweh orders Israel to destroy Midianites (vv. 16–18)
- Key verses – vv. 17–18a :: Midianites deceived Israel into idolatry
- Even in their short time under the Covenant, the Israelites have had an extremely difficult time remaining faithful to Yahweh. Israel has just received Yahweh's blessing (via Balaam) and yet Moab is able to infiltrate and seduce the people to fall into idolatry.⁶ Yahweh punishes by executing the ringleaders and sending a plague that kills 24,000. The account serves as a reminder to the new generation (and its successive descendants) of the grave consequences of rejecting God's sovereign rule through the worship of other deities.⁷

Numbers 26

- Census – Taken
- Scene:
 - Story — Census of all men of fighting age in Israel (vv. 1–62)

⁵This is the first time we see Yahweh displeased with Moses. He will continue to be an able leader of the people to the land of promise.

⁶Rev 2:14 helps connect the dots, explaining that Balaam taught Balak this methodology to try to overcome the nation of Israel.

⁷Idolatry, however, would become the thorn in Israel's side for generations to come.

Conclusion — Previous generation not on this census (vv. 63–65)

- Key verse – v. 64 :: Only Joshua and Caleb were on both censuses
- The census is necessary ¹to show that the previous generation had passed off the scene in the wilderness. ²There was a need to know how many fighting men were available to fight on entry into the Promised Land. ³There was, of course, also a need to distribute the portions of land according to the size of the tribes.

Numbers 27:1–11

- Inheritance – Provision
- Scene:
 - Story — Women with no inheritance appear before Moses (vv. 1–4)
 - Conclusion — Yahweh provides stipulations for such cases (vv. 5–11)
- Key verses – vv. 8–11 :: Provision made for inheritances
- The land was allotted in the previous chapter and some women did not have any since they had no existing male family members. Yahweh makes provisions for how to deal with such cases. The land was an important part of the Abrahamic Covenant and Yahweh provides for it so that all may partake of the Covenant.

Numbers 27:12–23

- Successor – Chosen
- Scene:
 - Story — Moses to die and successor needed (vv. 12–21)
 - Conclusion — Moses did as Yahweh said, presenting Joshua (vv. 22–23)
- Key verses – vv. 17–18 :: Joshua chosen and given authority
- Since Moses (and Aaron) disqualified himself from entering the Land,⁸ Israel was in need of a strong godly leader. Yahweh appointed Joshua to be that man. He is commissioned and given authority, which the Israelites were to recognize and follow.

Numbers 28–29

- Offerings – Instructed
- Divisions:
 - Daily offerings – 28:1–8
 - Sabbath offerings – 28:9–10
 - Monthly offerings – 28:11–15
 - Passover offerings – 28:16–25
 - Festival offerings – 28:26–31
 - Trumpet offerings – 29:1–6
 - Day of Atonement offerings – 29:7–11
 - Festival of shelters offerings – 29:12–39
- Key verses – 28:2 :: Yahweh instructs Moses to reiterate the requirements for offerings
- On the eve of the conquest and occupation of Canaan it was necessary that the younger generation be instructed/reminded (1st given in Lev 23) of Yahweh's required offerings. Upon initial reading one is struck by the number of offerings required daily, weekly, and monthly. How would the Israelites ever have enough resources to give such offerings? The answer: the land was so overwhelming resplendent with blessing, once in the land, Israel would have all the provisions required to bring the offerings at the specified times. One is also struck with the entirety of Yahweh's offering requirements. However, we must remember that He is the one who has delivered Israel from Egypt and initiated His Covenant with them; therefore, He has the right to such requirements (cf. Lev 23:43). The offerings are a pleasing

⁸Interestingly, Moses did not protest or show self-pity. He instead is thinking about who should replace him. What a tremendous testimony of this man's godliness and compassion.

aroma to Him (28:2)! They prepare the people to worship Him and they make it possible to remain in right standing with Him.

Numbers 30

- Relationships – Vows
- Divisions:
 - Vows of a man – vv. 1–2
 - Vows of a woman in father’s home – vv. 3–5
 - Vows of a woman then marries – vv. 6–9
 - Vows of a married woman – vv. 10–15
- Key verses – v. 16 :: Yahweh instructs on relationships
- Vows, though voluntary, are serious matters and must be fulfilled; however, Yahweh stipulates some arenas in which women are subject to their familial head—women are to be subject to their fathers while still at home and to their husbands once they are married. This is an outworking of the principle of headship. When God declares someone to be in a position of rightful authority and others are expected to submit to that authority, the head also is accountable before God for the result.⁹

Numbers 31

- Conquest – Vengeance
- Scene:
 - Story — Moses’ final task—lead Israel in retribution against Midian (vv. 1–24)
 - Climax — The women of Midian had been wrongly spared by the warriors (vv. 15–16)
 - Conclusion — Plunder divided (vv. 22–23)
- Key verses – v. 2 :: Yahweh instructs Moses to take revenge on Midian
- Now that Yahweh has given some final instructions to the new generation of Israelites, through Moses. Yahweh sends Moses on one final mission: he is to take vengeance on the Midianites for their seduction of Israel into idolatry (ch. 25). The vengeance of the Lord on Midian is severe. Their idolatrous worship is an extreme abomination. The Midianites attempted to seduce, defile, and eliminate the people of the covenant, thereby bringing the full curse of the covenant upon themselves. Therefore, they must be completely eliminated for their attacks against Yahweh’s chosen nation.

Numbers 32

- Request – Inheritance
- Scene:
 - Story —Reuben & Gad request to inherit land E. of Jordan and fight in Canaan (vv. 1–33)
 - Climax — Reuben and Gad promise to fight with rest of nation in Canaan (vv. 31–32)
 - Conclusion — Land East of Jordan conquered for Reuben, Gad, and half Manasseh (vv. 34–42)
- Key verses – vv. 26–27 :: Request for inheritance accepted and ratified
- This scene fits in the narrative nicely. The ingress into the land is about to take place and 2.5 tribes are content where they are at. They were satisfied with the gains of the present and did not have the vision for the even greater opportunities that lay ahead in the Promised Land. They presented a request that threatened the tribal unity and potentially the very structural fiber of the nation. Negotiations ensued and a compromise was reached.¹⁰

Numbers 33

- Journeys – Remembered

⁹You may notice that no mention is made of how this section fits in with the previous section and with the general flow of the book in general. That is because the appearance of this passage here is difficult to connect. The best explanation is to recall the mention of vows that appears at the end of the previous section (cf. 29:39). With only a brief mention of vows being made in that chapter, an expansion is now necessary to give a fuller account of such vows and their governing relationships.

¹⁰The seeds of disharmony and discontent, however, were planted. This passage would predicate future divisions among the tribes, divisions transpiring during the period of the judges and again near the conclusion of Solomon’s reign.

- Scene:
 - Story — The travel record from the exodus to present recalled (vv. 1–49)
 - Climax — Failure to drive out *all* will result in constant turmoil (v. 55)
 - Conclusion — Yahweh’s command to wipe out all in Promised Land (vv. 50–56)
- Key verses – vv. 1–2 :: Record of route
- The stages of Israel’s journey are summarized. Since the new generation of Israelites are ready to storm the Promised Land Yahweh recalls their journeys from Egypt to this point. The record is given so that the people would recall Yahweh’s provision and protection along the way and not only give Him glory as a result but also trust and obey Him as they continue on. This is apparent from Yahweh’s direction at the end of the chapter to completely exterminate the inhabitants of Canaan.

Numbers 34

- Boundaries – Established
- Scene:
 - Story — Yahweh specifies boundaries for Israel & Eleazar will divide them for tribes (vv. 1–29)
- Key verse – v. 13 :: Land to be divided into territories for 9.5 tribes
- This chapter looks forward to the occupation of Canaan, which lay tantalizingly just across the Jordan River (west of the Israelite’s camp). Although God had promised victory to His people if they continued to obey His commands, nothing was left to chance in the organization of their new life in their own land.¹¹

Numbers 35

- Cities – Levitical
- Scene:
 - Story — Levites get 48 cities throughout Promised Land, 6 are cities of refuge (vv. 1–29)
 - Conclusion — Murderers must die so land not polluted (vv. 30–34)
- Key verse – v. 6 :: 6 of the 48 Levitical cities are cities of refuge
- The Levites will not possess a tribal portion of the land, but Yahweh will provide for them. They will have cities spread throughout the land and the Levites will be available for conducting worship in local areas, the teaching of the people, and the gathering of tithes and offerings. In specifying the cities of refuge we find that ¹above all the holiness of the Lord is to be maintained, ²but mercy is also to be shown, and ³justice must be carried out. An infrastructure for the religious and social well-being of the nation has been set forth—the Levites were to provide a constant visible presence whereby the peoples of the twelve tribes would be reminded actively and passively of the need for holiness and righteousness as the people of God before the nations of the world.

Numbers 36

- Inheritance – Remains
- Scene:
 - Story — Question regarding women who have inherited and marry (vv. 1–9)
 - Conclusion — Case study women obeyed (vv. 10–12)
- Key verse – v. 8 :: Women who inherit must marry inside tribe so land stays in tribe
- The book ends somewhat abruptly, but fittingly. The people are ready to possess the land—they have been given all their instructions on what land is to be occupied and who should possess what piece. This chapter is not trivial for the inheritance of land is a key component of the OT, for it was a part of sharing in the Abrahamic Covenant. The general theme of land inheritance in the book finds specific application and culmination.

Conclusion

¹¹Harrison, Numbers, 411–12.

We have seen Numbers' description of Israel's reactions to Yahweh's expectations as set forth at Sinai (cf. Exod 19ff; Lev); moreover, Israel's reactions are often sinful. Instead of ^Afaithfully trusting Yahweh's instructions, ^Bremembering His mighty works in the past, and ^Cobeying the Covenant He graciously instituted, the people choose to act in rebellion, ^adisobeying His instruction, ^bcomplaining about Yahweh's provision, and ^crebellious against His leadership. However, in the end Yahweh preserves His nation, if not the current generation, and is faithful to His promise.

The basic theme of the book concerns the consequence of disbelief and disobedience to the holy Yahweh; however, Yahweh will keep His Covenant with His people. This theme includes several aspects:¹²

- 1) Yahweh is the sovereign Lord of heaven, earth, nations, and creation, and He, therefore, has the right to make certain claims and expectations.
- 2) Having bound himself to his people with the covenant bond of love, He redeems his people and is ever with and for them. He will, however, maintain his holiness. Therefore, He demands that his redeemed people be sanctified and obedient in all dimensions of their lives.
- 3) Yahweh is with His people in their varied circumstances, and He instructs, blesses, chides, chastises, and punishes them in the immediate context of their lives.
- 4) He demands fellowship, worship, and work from His people at all times and in all circumstances. His people have the great privilege of being Yahweh's prized possession, a priestly people among the nations. These privileges do, however, entail awesome responsibilities. When obediently met, covenant blessings follow; when disobedience is evident, the curse of the Covenant is administered.
- 5) Yahweh provides qualified leaders essential to the people's well-being; they are to be acknowledged and respected. To rebel against Yahweh's appointed leader/leaders is to rebel against Yahweh himself.

Numbers shows how God preserves His promised blessings from internal and external threats, despite the rebellious attitudes and actions of His chosen nation. Therefore, as Israel enters a new phase in God's plan (entering and conquering the Promised Land), they must learn that they can move forward only as they trust and depend on Him.

**God justly and appropriately punishes sin, yet He is faithful and mercifully,
acting to fulfill His promises even though His people are often unfaithful.**

¹²Adapted from the Introduction to Gerard Van Groningen's commentary on the book of Numbers. Ed. Walter A. Elwell, vol. 3, *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).