

Numbers Chapter 1

The book of Numbers was penned by Moses. It is the fourth book of the Pentateuch. This book is set during the 40 years of the wilderness wanderings. The book was named Numbers, because the Israelites were numbered during this time period. Their unbelief stops them from entering the Promised Land, until the doubters die off. In this book, we see the miraculous feeding of the multitude. Water comes gushing from a Rock to quench their thirst. Many other miracles take place during this time period. We will see types of the Lord Jesus in the smitten Rock and in the brazen serpent which was lifted up. We see an army of people walking 40 years in the wilderness without their shoes wearing out. Egypt symbolizes the world. God was not only trying to get them out of the land of Egypt, but was in fact, trying to get their worldly ways out of them. Only the children who believed would enter the Promised Land.

Verses 1 – 10:36: The first 10 chapters of Numbers record the final preparations of Israel necessary for the conquest of the land of Canaan. In this section, the Lord spoke to Israel through Moses (1:1; 2:1; 3:1, 5, 11; 14:44; 4:1, 17, 21, 5:1, 5, 11; 6:1, 22; 7:4; 8:1, 5, 23; 9:1, 9; 10:1), and Moses and Israel responded with obedience (1:19, 54; 2:33-34; 3:16, 42, 51; 4:49; 7:2-3; 8:3; 9:5, 18:23; 10:13; 14-28 in accordance with 2:34). These chapters divide into two parts (1:1 – 6:27 and 7:1 – 10:36), which both end with an invocation of the Lord's blessing on Israel (6:22-27 and 10:35-36).

Numbers 1:1 "And the LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first [day] of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying,"

“The Lord spake”: A common phrase indicating that saving history begins with God speaking (Gen. 1:3; Lev. 11). Revelation is the foundation for a true belief. Here He speaks “In the tabernacle”, as in Leviticus He spoke “out of the tabernacle”.

The phrase “in the wilderness” constitutes the Hebrew title to the book (*bemidbar*). Taken from the first few words, as was the custom in early writings (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy), this literary device indicates the antiquity of the works. The thought closely associated is the almost 40 years spent in the wilderness as a result of Israel's unbelief.

“On the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt”: Indicates there is a break of just one month between the erecting of the tabernacle, at the end of Exodus, and the start of Numbers. It was one year and two weeks since the Exodus from Egypt, and 10-1/2 months since their arrival in Sinai.

“In the tabernacle of the congregation”: The tabernacle, where the Lord's glory resided in the cloud, had been erected one month earlier (Exodus 40:17). This was God's dwelling place in the midst of his people. In (Num. 1:1 – 6:27), Israel was organized with the tabernacle as the central feature.

“The second year”: Numbers begins in the 14th month (337 days), after the Exodus from Egypt.

We find that the children of Israel had already been in the wilderness of Sinai since the third month after they left Egypt.

Exodus 19:1 "In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they [into] the wilderness of Sinai."

In this tabernacle of the congregation, Moses had met with God.

Exodus 25:22 "And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which [are] upon the ark of the testimony, of all [things] which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel."

This message is given directly to Moses from God.

Verses 2-16: After making the covenant and giving the Law at Sinai, the Lord told Moses to "Take ye the sum": of all the tribes of Israel. Its purpose was not taxation or political control but preparation for military service, the next phase in Israel's development. This census began one month after the tabernacle was erected at Mount Sinai (Exodus 40:17). In the second year of Israel's history as a nation (1:1; 9:1).

Numbers 1:2 "Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of [their] names, every male by their polls;"

The command "Take ye the sum" was given one month after the tabernacle was set up (compare Exodus 40:2, 17), and is probably the same as the command mentioned (in Exodus 30:12 and 38:21). There the men were counted in connection with the atonement money, that is, from that day forward, to pay for the daily offerings of the community. Since Exodus 30 does not state that the census was carried out, it makes sense to assume this census is the implementation of the payment. Also, the figures mentioned (in Exodus 38:26 and in Numbers 1:46), are identical (603,550 males from 20 years old and upward). This is the first of five Israelite censuses taken in the Old Testament. For the others (see chapters 3, 4, 26 and 2 Sam. 24).

"Every male by their polls" in an expression indicating the "skull, head, or person". It is usually used for counting people (Exodus 46:16; 38:26; Num. 3:47; 1 Chron. 23:3-4).

There had been a tax levied in the tabernacle of a half-shekel of silver on each male, for the service in the tabernacle. The Jews kept accurate records, and that is why each family would be recorded separately. We will find they came up with the same numbers as found during the tax. It appears, they used round numbers, and not exact counting of each adult male. The "poll" is speaking of the tax records.

Numbers 1:3 "From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies."

“Able to go forth to war” is a phrase that occurs repeatedly in this chapter (verses 3, 20, 22, 24), and stresses that the nation was being organized to invade the Promised Land. To opt out through doubt or fear was a great sin (chapter 14; Deut. Chapter 20). “Twenty years old and upward” indicated the prime of life, for (Leviticus 27:3-4), gave the highest valuation of people at this bracket. (Deut. 20:7 and 24:5), provide that those recently engaged or married were exempt from duty.

Those younger than 20 years old were not required to go to war. Females were not required to go to war at all, so they were not numbered. The task of the numbering, and the accuracy of the count, would be left up to Moses and Aaron.

Numbers 1:4 "And with you there shall be a man of every tribe; every one head of the house of his fathers."

“A man”: One leader from each of the 12 tribes was to assist Moses and Aaron in the numbering of the men. These same leaders are mentioned (in Num. 2:1-34 and 10:14-28), as the heads of tribes and in (7:1-88), they bring gifts to the tabernacle.

There was one man from each tribe, and the tribe was numbered under his name. The tribes were comprised of the children of Jacob and his two wives, and their two maids. This numbering was for a totally different purpose. The one that was taken by the Levites for taxing the males. This is for military purposes. All of the men 20 years and older were soldiers in time of war.

Numbers 1:5 "And these [are] the names of the men that shall stand with you: of [the tribe of] Reuben; Elizur the son of Shedeur."

Be present with Moses and Aaron when numbering the people. Not merely as spectators of the affair, and inspectors of the accounts, but as assistants in the work. Each man in his tribe, being best acquainted with the families and houses in it. And these men were not pitched upon by Moses and Aaron, nor chosen by their respective tribes. But were appointed and named by the Lord himself, which was doing them great honor.

"Of the tribe of Reuben: or "for Reuben", for the taking the number of men in this tribe; and so of all the rest (see Numbers 1:44).

Elizur the son of Shedeur (from Numbers 1:5). The names of those several men are given, which were very proper for Moses and Aaron to know, though of little importance to us. Nor the signification of their several names, given by Ainsworth and others. Only, as Bishop Patrick observes, most of them show how much God was in the thoughts of those who, imposed these names on their children. Several of them having in them "El" or "Eli", "God" or "my God", and "Shaddai", "Almighty" or "all-sufficient". To which may be added, that in some of them they seem to respect the Messiah. As Elizur, signifying "my God the rock"; and Shelumiel may be rendered, "God my peace"; and Zurishaddai, "my rock the Almighty", or "all-sufficient"; and Pedahzur, "the rock redeemeth". Nor is there anything of any moment to be remarked, unless the order in which the several tribes are placed.

And first the children of Leah, beginning with Reuben, the firstborn. And the rest, Simeon and Judah, are ranked according to their birth. Levi being omitted, because that tribe was not now numbered, and besides, Moses and Aaron were of it. And then Issachar and Zebulun. After those the children of Rachel, because of her honor and glory above the handmaids, as Aben Ezra remarks. Who further observes, that it begins with Ephraim, following Jacob our father. That is, because of the blessing of Jacob, who preferred Ephraim the younger to Manasseh the elder. And here Ephraim and Manasseh are set before Benjamin, because they were in the place of Joseph. And after that the account goes on with Dan, because, he was the firstborn of the handmaids. And after him Asher, though the second son of Zilpah, is placed before Gad, the first son, because, says the same Aben Ezra, the Lord knew that he would be the head of those that encamped by the standard of Dan. And so is placed next to him. And after him Gad, who was the firstborn of Leah's handmaid. And Naphtali last of all, the second son of Bilhah. This order seems to be designed to suit with their encampments, and the form of them.

The princes of the tribes, selected (Num. 1:4) under divine direction, were for the most part the same persons as those chosen a few months previously at the counsel of Jethro (Exodus 18:21-26). Nahshon, prince of Judah, is mentioned in (Exodus 6:23), and Elishama, in (1 Chron. 7:26-27). The peers of men like these were no doubt entitled, among their fellows, to the epithet "renowned" (Num. 1:16).

Reuben was the firstborn son of Jacob and Leah. Reuben committed a terrible sin when he slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine. Reuben of course, is dead at this time, but this is his tribe. Elizur would be the prince of the tribe of Reuben.

Numbers 1:6 "Of Simeon; Shelumiel the son of Zurishaddai."

See notes on Numbers 1:5.

Simeon was the second son of Jacob by Leah. Shelumiel is the head of Simeon's tribe.

Numbers 1:7 "Of Judah; Nahshon the son of Amminadab."

See notes (on Numbers 1:5).

The name "Judah" means God be praised. He is the fourth son of Jacob and Leah. His brothers, who have the same mother he does, are Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Nahshon is the leader of this tribe at the time of the census. Nahshon was the brother-in-law of Aaron. He is also, ancestor of David and Jesus Christ.

Numbers 1:8 "Of Issachar; Nethaneel the son of Zuar."

See notes (on Numbers 1:5).

The name "Issachar" means he will bring reward. Issachar is the 9th son of Jacob and the 5th of Leah. Issachar, Judah, and Zebulun, marched on the east of the tabernacle in the wilderness wanderings. Nethaneel was prince of this tribe at the time of the census.

Numbers 1:9 "Of Zebulun; Eliab the son of Helon."

See notes (on Numbers 1:5).

Zebulun was the 10th son of Jacob and the 6th son of Leah. Eliab was prince of this tribe at census time.

Numbers 1:10 "Of the children of Joseph: of Ephraim; Elishama the son of Ammihud: of Manasseh; Gamaliel the son of Pedahzur."

See notes (on Numbers 1:5).

The name "Joseph" means may he, or Jehovah add. Joseph was the first son of Rachel and the eleventh son of Jacob. This is the same Joseph that went into Egypt, and then later saved his family from the famine. Ephraim and Manasseh were both his sons, born in Egypt. Manasseh was the firstborn, but Ephraim got the spiritual blessing of the right hand. Elishama, who was the prince of the tribe of Ephraim, was the grandfather of Joshua. Gamaliel was the prince of the tribe of Manasseh.

Numbers 1:11 "Of Benjamin; Abidan the son of Gideoni."

See notes (on Numbers 1:5).

Benjamin was the twelfth son of Jacob and the second son of Rachel. Even though Rachel was the second wife of Jacob, she was his favorite. Rachel died soon after the birth of Benjamin. Abidan was the prince of the tribe of Benjamin. We notice that in all of the sons up to this time, were of the wives. The following sons will be from the maids of the two wives.

Numbers 1:12 "Of Dan; Ahiezer the son of Ammishaddai."

See notes (on Numbers 1:5).

Dan was the first son of Bilhah and the fifth son of Jacob. Bilhah was not a wife. She was Rachel's handmaid. Dan, along with the other sons of the handmaids, would receive inheritance with the sons of the wives. Ahiezer was the prince of the tribe of Dan at the time of the numbering.

Numbers 1:13 "Of Asher; Pagiel the son of Ocran."

See notes (on Numbers 1:5).

Asher was the eighth son of Jacob and the second son of Zilpah, the maid of Leah. Pagiel was the prince of the tribe of Asher at the time of the census.

Numbers 1:14 "Of Gad; Eliasaph the son of Deuel."

See notes (on Numbers 1:5).

Gad was the first son of Zilpah and the seventh son of Jacob. Eliasaph was the head of the tribe at the time of the census.

Numbers 1:15 "Of Naphtali; Ahira the son of Enan."

See notes (on Numbers 1:5).

Naphtali was the sixth son of Jacob and the second son of Bilhah. Ahira was the prince of the tribe of Naphtali at the time of the census.

Numbers 1:16 "These [were] the renowned of the congregation, princes of the tribes of their fathers, heads of thousands in Israel."

The most famous and eminent among the people, for their birth and pedigree, or for their excellent qualities of wisdom, courage, and the like (Or captains, and governors). Or "the called of the congregation". Whom God had called by name and selected from the rest of the congregation to the above service. Whereby great honor was done them: Aben Ezra says. The sense is, that the congregation did nothing until they had called them. With which agrees the note of Jarchi, "who were called to every business of importance in the congregation."

"Princes of the tribes of their fathers": As Elizur was prince of the children of Reuben (Num. 7:30). The same is there said of the rest in their respective tribes.

"Heads of thousands in Israel": The congregation of Israel being divided into thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, by the advice of Jethro (Exodus 18:21). Each of these divisions had a ruler over them, and thousands being the highest number. These princes were chiliarches, rulers or heads of thousands.

Jacob was the father of twelve sons, who made up the twelve tribes of Israel. Each one of the princes were over the thousands of members of his tribe.

Numbers Chapter 1 Questions

1. The book of Numbers was penned by _____.
2. It was the _____ book of the Pentateuch.
3. What time period does the book cover?
4. Why is it called Numbers?
5. What are some of the things revealed in this book?

6. What shows us types of the Lord Jesus in this book?
7. God was not only trying to get them out the land of Egypt, but was, in fact, trying to do what?
8. Where was Moses, when God spoke to him?
9. When did he speak to him?
10. When had they entered Sinai?
11. What did God tell Moses to do?
12. Who were they to count?
13. What is "polls" speaking of in verse 2?
14. Those younger than 20 years old were not required to go to _____.
15. Who was the accuracy of the count left up to?
16. Who were the parents of these families, that had turned into tribes?
17. Reuben was the _____ son of Jacob and Leah.
18. What terrible sin had Reuben committed?
19. Who was the mother of Simeon?
20. What does the name "Judah" mean?
21. Who was Judah's mother?
22. Who was Nahshon related to?
23. Issachar was the _____ son of Jacob and the _____ of Leah.
24. What two tribes represented Joseph?
25. What does the name "Joseph" mean?
26. Joseph was the first son of _____.
27. Who was the firstborn of Joseph?
28. Which of Joseph's sons received the right hand blessing?
29. Who was the mother of Benjamin?
30. What happened to his mother soon after his birth?

31. Bilhah was not a wife, but what?
32. Who was Asher's mother?
33. Jacob was the father of _____ sons.
34. Who were the princes over?