

Adam Clarke:

Preface to the Book of Numbers

This, which is the fourth book in order of the Pentateuch, has been called Numbers, from its containing an account of the numbering and marshalling the Israelites in their journey through the wilderness to the promised land. Its English name is derived from the title it bears in the Vulgate Latin, Numeri, which is a literal translation of the Greek word $\acute{\alpha}\nu\eta\kappa\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$, its title in the Septuagint; and from both, our Saxon ancestors called it numeration, because in this the children of Israel were numbered. This title, however, does not properly apply to more than the three first chapters, and the 26th. This book, like the preceding, takes its name among the Hebrews from a distinguishing word in the commencement. It is frequently called בְּמִדְבָּר (Vaidabber), and he spoke, from its initial word; but in most Hebrew Bibles its running title is בְּמִדְבָּר (Bemidbar), in the wilderness, which is the fifth word in the first verse.

The contents of the book of Numbers are briefly the following: On the first day of the first month of the second year after the departure from Egypt, the tabernacle being erected, and it and the priests consecrated, Moses is commanded to make a census or enumeration of the people, the Levites excepted, who were appointed to watch over, guard, pitch, and carry the tabernacle and its holy furniture; Numbers 1.

To form the vast mass of the people into a regular camp, each tribe by itself under its own captain or chief, known by his proper standard, and occupying an assigned place in reference to the tabernacle; Numbers 2.

Moses is commanded to separate the Levites to the service of the tabernacle, whom God chooses to take, instead of the first-born of every family, which he claimed as his own. When these were selected in their families, etc., the sum amounted to 22,273; Numbers 3.

All this tribe is appointed to serve the tabernacle in a variety of offices, each person from the age of thirty till fifty, after which he was excused from farther service; Numbers 4.

When these points were settled, God commands them to purify the camp by the expulsion of every unclean person, and establishes the trial of the suspected adulteress by the waters of jealousy; Numbers 5.

He next institutes the laws relative to Nazarites; and lays down the form according to which the people shall be blessed; Numbers 6.

Then follows a particular account of the offerings made to the tabernacle by the princes, or chiefs of the twelve tribes, and the amount of those offerings; Numbers 7.

When this work was finished, the Levites were consecrated to their respective services, and the duration of the service of each ascertained; Numbers 8.

The passover is commanded to be kept, and the first one is celebrated in the wilderness on the 14th of the first month of the second year after their departure from Egypt; Numbers 9.

Moses is commanded to make two silver trumpets; he is informed of their use, in what order the different tribes shall march, with the ceremonies at fixing and removing the tabernacle and the departure of the people from the wilderness of Sinai on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year of their exodus from Egypt; Numbers 10.

The people murmuring, the fire of the Lord consumes many of them; it ceases on the intercession of Moses: they murmur again, quails are sent, and they are smitten with a great plague; Numbers 11.

Miriam and her brother Aaron rise up seditiously against Moses, having conceived some dislike against his Cushite wife, and supposing that he assumed too great an authority over the people: at this sedition the Lord is displeased, and smites Miriam with the leprosy; Numbers 12.

Twelve spies are sent to examine the promised land; they pass through the whole, return at the end of forty days, and by bringing an evil report, dishearten the people; Numbers 13.

In consequence of this the whole congregation meditate a return to Egypt: God is displeased, and pronounces that all of them, from twenty years old and upwards, shall die in the wilderness. They repent, attack the Amalekites contrary to the commandment of God, and are discomfited; Numbers 14.

A number of ordinances and directions are given relative to the manner of conducting the worship of God in the promised land: different laws are repeated, and a Sabbath-breaker stoned to death; Numbers 15.

Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their associates, form an insurrection against Moses: they are swallowed up by an earthquake: the congregation murmur, and 14,700 of them are cut off; Numbers 16.

As a proof that God had called Aaron and his family to the priesthood, his rod, or staff, buds, and miraculously brings forth blossoms and fruit, and is commanded to be laid up before the testimony; Numbers 17:1-13.

The charges of the priests and Levites, and the portions they were to have of the Lord's offerings, for their support in the work; Numbers 18.

The ordinances of the red heifer; the water of purification, and its uses; Numbers 19.

The death of Miriam; the waters of Meribah. The Lord tells Moses that because he did not sanctify him in the eyes of the congregation, he shall not bring the people into the promised land. The king of Edom refuses the Israelites a passage through his territories. Aaron is stripped of his sacerdotal vestments on Mount Hor, and

they are put on Eleazar, his son, who is to be a high priest in his stead. Aaron dies, and the people mourn for him thirty days; Numbers 20.

Arad, one of the Canaanitish kings, attacks Israel, and he and his people are utterly destroyed. The people murmur for lack of bread and water; fiery serpents are sent among them, they repent; are healed by looking at a brazen serpent. They journey and come to Beer, where they find water; Sihon, king of the Amorites, attacks them, and is defeated; so is likewise Og, king of Bashan, and the people possess the lands of both; Numbers 21.

Balak, king of Moab, sends for Balaam to curse Israel; he departs, is opposed by an angel, and reproved by his ass, whom God, for the purpose, miraculously endued with the gift of speech. He comes to Balak, king of Moab, and shows him that Jehovah had limited his power; Numbers 22.

Balak offers sacrifices, and Balaam, under the influence of God, prophesies good concerning Israel; Numbers 23.

Continuing to foretell the prosperity of Israel, and the destruction of their enemies, the king of Moab dismisses Balaam in great wrath; Numbers 24.

The Israelites, seduced by the women of Moab and Midian, commit fornication and idolatry - the chiefs are hanged - bold act of Phinehas; Numbers 25.

A second census or enumeration of the people takes place, and the amount is 601,730, among whom not one of those of the first census was now found except Joshua and Caleb; Numbers 26.

From the case of the daughters of Zelophehad a law is made to enable daughters to inherit. Moses ascends Mount Abarim, sees the promised land, and constitutes Joshua his successor; Numbers 27.

A repetition of the laws relative to burnt-offerings, the Sabbath, the passover, first-fruits, etc.; Numbers 28.

The three solemnities of the seventh month are commanded to be held on the first, tenth, and fourteenth days of the month; Numbers 29.

Several laws and ordinances concerning vows of different kinds, made by various persons; when they should be confirmed, and in what cases annulled; Numbers 30.

Twelve thousand Israelites go against the people of Midian and slay them, their five kings, and Balaam their prophet; and the Israelites take immense booty in persons, cattle, gold, silver, and precious stones, of which they make a great offering to the Lord, because in this contest they lost not one man; Numbers 31.

The children of Reuben and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh, request to receive for their inheritance the territories of Sihon and Og on the east side of Jordan; their desire is granted on the condition of their going over armed with their brethren, to assist them in conquering the land; Numbers 32.

A circumstantial account of the forty-two journeys of the Israelites from their departure from Rameses till their arrival at Jordan. They are commanded to expel all the ancient inhabitants; Numbers 33.

The borders of the land are described, and the persons appointed by God, who should assist Joshua in dividing the land among the nine tribes and half; Numbers 34.

Forty-eight cities are to be assigned to the Levites, out of the twelve tribes, for their goods and for their cattle: and out of these they were to appoint six cities of refuge for the person who had unawares slain his neighbor; to one of which cities the manslayer was to escape, and tarry there till the death of the high priest; Numbers 35.

A law established that the daughters to whom the paternal inheritance descends, shall not marry out of their own tribes, lest their inheritances should become alienated and lost by being blended with those of other tribes; Numbers 36:1-13. See the case of Zelophehad's daughters, Numbers 27.

In this book, which comprehends the history of between thirty-eight and thirty-nine years, we have in one word a distinct account of the several stages of the Israelites' journey in the wilderness, the various occurrences on the way, their trials, rebellions, punishments, deliverances, conquests, etc., with several laws and ordinances not mentioned in the preceding books, together with a repetition and explanation of some others which had been previously delivered; the whole forming a most interesting history of the justice, mercy, and providence of God.