

Numbers

Theme: God remains a faithful promise-keeper as His people struggle with unfaithfulness, idolatry, and sin.

Context: In the book of Numbers, we find God's people in the wilderness. They are between their slavery in Egypt and their conquering of Canaan. The date is sometime around 1400 BC (perhaps a few hundred years later). God has delivered them, He now dwells with them, and they are beginning to operate formally within His revealed law. Found within this book of the Bible are several genres: census, prophecy, song, narrative, and law. The genre of census is where the book gets its name of Numbers. But that's not all one can find within the pages of this book. Whereas Exodus had very cut and dry portions of narrative and law, Numbers works in example fashion. A need for a law arises, and God gives the law they need. The narratives serve to highlight the depth and practicality of the law. In this way, God reveals both general and particular calls to holiness for His people as well as the need for their continued redemption.

Connection: Numbers is the fourth of five books to be taken together (as the Pentateuch). Genesis started it all (literally), Exodus brought the reader into the formal redemptive narrative (deliverance from Egypt), Leviticus opened the inner workings of the ceremonial law (sacrificial system), and now Numbers continues them all. The promised land from Genesis is seen, the need for continued deliverance—as it was in Exodus—is obvious and noted, and the law continues to be revealed, which in turn reveals Jesus Christ (and our need for Him). Along with this close connection of continued redemptive narrative, there are direct references to this book spattered throughout Scripture. God speaking through the Psalmist warned His people against testing Him in Psalm 95. The author of Hebrews recalls this Psalm when speaking of true rest through belief in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3). Jesus Himself references Numbers 21 in John 3 as a primary proof for the Gospel, which leads into one of the most famous Gospel proclamations in Scripture (John 3:16). Likewise, Paul points out the dangers of sin in 1 Corinthians 10 from a reference to Numbers 20. Peter recalls Numbers 22 to show God's power over false prophets and teachers (2 Peter 2). Even in the Gospel narrative of Matthew do we find the Magi from the east looking to Numbers 24 regarding the prophecy of Jesus Christ's birth (Matthew 2). Along with these direct references are general ones like Jesus' feeding the multitude in the wilderness (revealing God's power to sustain life just as He did in the wilderness journey of the Israelites), Jesus' testing and temptation in the wilderness for forty days (mirroring the forty years of the Israelites), and so on. In many ways, Numbers documents a critical point in the spiritual life of God's people. God revealed Himself over and over to them, and the reality that God continued to save them time and time again became seared into the people's mind as they prepared to finally enter the promised land, which itself was another picture of God's gracious working on their behalf.

Solid Rock Verses*:

Numbers 13-14; 26 (see 26:63-65)—*Send men to spy out the land of Canaan... Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt... you shall bear your iniquity forty years... These were those listed by Moses and Eleazer the priest, who listed the people of Israel... But among these there was not one of those listed by Moses and Aaron the priest, who had listed the people of Israel in the wilderness of Sinai...*

*Let the reader take note that the full list of "Solid Rock Verses" can be found on the back of this document. Numbers 13-14 and 26 carry a thematic overview of the whole book. There is buildup to the promised land, disobedience and discipline from God, and redemption and relief in coming back again to that which God promises His people—the promised land.

Numbers 7:22-27—*The LORD bless you and keep you...*

Numbers 11:16-30—*And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone...*

Numbers 14:2, 27, 29, 33 (see 11:1, 16:41)—*And all the people of Israel grumbled...*

Numbers 16:46-48—*And he stood between the dead and the living...*

Numbers 17—*Behold, we perish, we are undone, we are all undone. Everyone who comes near, who comes near to the tabernacle of the LORD, shall die. Are we all to perish?*

Numbers 20:2-13—*These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the LORD, and through them he showed himself holy.*

Numbers 21:4-9—*So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole...*

Numbers 22-24—*And the angel of the LORD said to Balaam, "Go with the men, but speak only the word that I tell you..." I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel...*

Numbers 27, 36—*Then drew near the daughters of Zelophehad... Why should the name of our father be taken away from his clan... And the LORD said to Moses, "The daughters of Zelophehad are right..."*

The daughters of Zelophehad did as the LORD commanded Moses... and their inheritance remained...

Numbers 35:9-34—*then you shall select cities to be cities of refuge for you, that the manslayer who kills any person without intent may flee there... for he must remain in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest...*