



A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

PREPARING THE CAMP (NUMBERS 1–6)

The Place of the Passage

The Hebrews left Egypt as freed slaves (Exodus 12:37). At Mount Sinai, the Lord gave them his law and formed them into a new nation (Exodus 19:6; Deuteronomy 33:4–5). Now the time has come to organize them as an army (Numbers 1:3, 45) for their march to the Promised Land. These chapters describe the nation's organization as a mobile kingdom, with their King's tent in its midst, as he journeys with his people.

The Big Picture

God does not simply wait for his people at the end of their journey. He meets them in the wilderness to be with them, to guide them, and to bless them on their journey to his Promised Land.

Gospel Glimpses

NAZIRITES. Nazirite vows, the rules for which originate in Numbers 6:1–21, are an important theme throughout the Old and New Testaments. Normally, Nazirite vows were undertaken for a limited period of special devotion and worship, but there are notable examples of lifelong Nazirites as well. Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist were lifelong Nazirites. Some suspect that Anna, who “did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37), may also have been a Nazirite in her widowhood.

TENT OF MEETING. The first verse of Numbers begins, “The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting.” This is the first instance of God's meeting with Moses inside the tabernacle (although he spoke to Moses from the tabernacle on the day of its inauguration; Leviticus 1:1). As late as Leviticus 25:1, Moses was still ascending Mount Sinai to meet with the Lord. But Numbers 1:1 introduces the tabernacle in full operation as the “tent of meeting,” an important name by which it is known throughout the Bible.

Theological Soundings

PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS. After Jesus completed the final sacrifice, the rituals of Israel's priesthood were to come to an end. This was not because the privileges of priestly worship ended. Rather, in the new covenant all of God's people are a “holy priesthood” (I Peter 2:5). The Nazirite vows anticipated this “priesthood of all believers” by providing a way for lay Israelites to undertake a priestly level of ritual purity for a time.

MEDIATION. The priests and Levites encamped between the tabernacle and the other tribes (3:5–10), but they were not there as an obstacle between the people and God. The priests and Levites served as mediators³ to bring the people acceptably into God’s presence (3:8). It is an awesome matter for the holy God to dwell with sinful people. The offices of the priests and Levites represented the need for mediation, fulfilled perfectly in the person and work of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:18–29).

Whole Bible Connections

ENAZIRITES. Nazirite vows, the rules for which originate in Numbers 6:1–21, are an important theme throughout the Old and New Testaments. Normally, Nazirite vows were undertaken for a limited period of special devotion and worship, but there are notable examples of lifelong Nazirites as well. Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist were lifelong Nazirites. Some suspect that Anna, who “did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day” (Luke 2:37), may also have been a Nazirite in her widowhood.

TENT OF MEETING. The first verse of Numbers begins, “The Lord spoke to Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tent of meeting.” This is the first instance of God’s meeting with Moses inside the tabernacle (although he spoke to Moses from the tabernacle on the day of its inauguration; Leviticus 1:1). As late as Leviticus 25:1, Moses was still ascending Mount Sinai to meet with the Lord. But Numbers 1:1 introduces the tabernacle in full operation as the “tent of meeting,” an important name by which it is known throughout the Bible.

Theological Soundings

PRIESTHOOD OF BELIEVERS. After Jesus completed the final sacrifice, the rituals of Israel’s priesthood were to come to an end. This was not because the privileges of priestly worship ended. Rather, in the new covenant all of God’s people are a “holy priesthood” (I Peter 2:5). The Nazirite vows anticipated this “priesthood of all believers” by providing a way for lay Israelites to undertake a priestly level of ritual purity for a time.

MEDIATION. The priests and Levites encamped between the tabernacle and the other tribes (3:5–10), but they were not there as an obstacle between the people and God. The priests and Levites served as mediators³ to bring the people acceptably into God’s presence (3:8). It is an awesome matter for the holy God to dwell with sinful people. The offices of the priests and Levites represented the need for mediation, fulfilled perfectly in the person and work of the Great High Priest, Jesus Christ (Hebrews 12:18–29).

Glossary of Terms

CLEAN/UNCLEAN. The ceremonial, spiritual, or moral state of a person or object, affected by a variety of factors. The terms are primarily related to the concept of holiness and have little to do with actual physical cleanliness. The Mosaic law declared certain foods and animals unclean, and a person became unclean if he or she came in contact with certain substances or objects, such as a dead body. Jesus declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19), and Peter's vision in Acts 10 shows that no person is ceremonially unclean simply because he or she is a Gentile.

MEDIATOR. One who intercedes between parties to resolve a conflict or achieve a goal. Jesus is the mediator between God and rebellious humanity (I Timothy 2:5).

TABERNACLE. The tent where God dwelled on earth and communed with his people as Israel's divine King. Also referred to as the "tent of meeting" (Leviticus 1:5). The temple in Jerusalem later replaced it.

Please answer the following questions:

Chapter 1

1. From where had the Israelites come out when this book was written? (1)
2. What did the Lord Command Moses to do? (2-3)
3. How many that were able to go to war were numbered? (45-46)
4. What tribe was not numbered? (47-49)
5. What was the duty of the Levites? (50-51)

Chapter 2

6. Name the tribes that camped at the east (3-9), south (10-17), west (18-24), and north (25-31).

Chapter 3

7. Why did Nadab and Abihu die and which sons of Aaron continued as priests? (4)
8. What did the Lord take from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb? (12)

9. Who were the sons of Levi, where did each camp and what were their duties? (17-37)

10. Who camped east of the tabernacle? (38)

Chapter 4

11. Who had the oversight of the things in the tabernacle? (16)

12. What were the Kohathites not to watch? (18-20)

13. Under whose authority were the duties of the Gershonites (28) and the Merarites (33)?

Chapter 5

14. If the spirit of jealousy came on a man who suspected his wife committed adultery what was the wife made to drink? What happened to the woman if she was guilty of adultery? (17-27)

Chapter 6

15. What did the vow of the Nazarite consist of concerning wine, hair, and dead bodies? (2-8)

16. What was Aaron to say when he blessed the children of Israel? (23-26)

Personal Application

17. How is your relationship with God similar to that of the tribes of Israel as illustrated in the arrangement of their camp?