



## A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

### THE BOOK OF NUMBERS

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#### A FAITHFUL GENERATION, AT LAST (26:1–30:16)

##### The Place of the Passage

Typically, an older generation is known for wisdom while a younger generation tends toward folly. The book of Numbers, however, confronts us with the opposite: here the older generation is stubborn and marked by folly whereas the new generation learns from its parents' failures, demonstrates remarkable faithfulness, and experiences great victories. Numbers introduces this new generation with the book's second census (26:1–65). The previous census (1:1–46) introduced the generation who wandered in the wilderness; the new census introduces us to a new generation—followed by a refreshing series of narratives and rituals marking its faithfulness.

##### The Big Picture

A faithful generation moves beyond the sins of its parents but honors and continues the godly heritage received through them.

##### Gospel Glimpses

COVENANT-KEEPING GOD. It takes only one weak link for a chain to fail. It takes only one major business failure for a multigenerational family company to go under. It takes only one childless generation for a family name to die out. But the covenant-keeping grace of God, ensuring that his kingdom of grace will persist, is demonstrated profoundly in this passage, especially in the appearance of a new generation counted in the census reported in chapter 26. This is seen also in God's ordination of a new priest and a new ruler to replace Aaron and Moses for the shepherding of the new generation. It is seen further in the special arrangements appointed by God in order to ensure that the family name of Zelophehad does not lose its place in Israel. These pictures illustrate the faithfulness of God to uphold his covenant people through all ages, even in the wake of a generation as stubborn and faithless as that of the exodus.

##### Whole Bible Connections

SONS OF KORAH. All of those who participated in the rebellion of Korah (studied in a previous section; 16:1–50) perished, including “all the people who belonged to Korah and all their goods” (16:32). But now, in 26:9–11, the census clarifies that “the fire devoured [the] 250 men” who had shared in Korah's rebellion, “but the sons of Korah did not die” (26:10–11). These children of the rebel Levite remained faithful to the Lord and to the priesthood of Aaron, in spite of their father's rebellion. It is probably descendants of this line who are the “sons of Korah” identified with several of the Psalms (see the headings of Psalms 42–49, 84–85, 87–88).

## **Theological Soundings**

**FAMILY.** The goodness of creation, reported in the opening chapter of Genesis, climaxes with the creation of mankind. God created “man in his own image, . . . male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). Then he blessed them and commanded them to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over . . . the earth” (Genesis 1:28). God created the family as the cornerstone of society, and family-centered society as the structure for human stewardship of the earth and its fruitfulness. The family is not merely a practicality. God ordained the family to be the fundamental realm wherein his likeness as a God of love is to be displayed and from which his love is to be learned and further reflected between neighbors and extended social institutions. Other social experiments have been attempted throughout history, and many science fiction novels envision societies organized around other patterns besides the family. But the nature of a family is one of shared identity and love, thereby indicating God’s design for love—not other principles of communion—as the foundation of communities. The genealogies and censuses of the Bible (as in Numbers 26:1–65) contribute to this important doctrine of the family in God’s Word.

**VOWS.** The laws concerning vows in Numbers 30:1–16 are often misunderstood, since the English word vow is typically restricted to commitments such as wedding vows or ordination vows. However, in the Bible a vow is typically the promise of a person to bring an offering of special praise or thanks to God in response to some display of his kindness. Most Israelites lived at a distance from the sanctuary or for other reasons would not be able to drop everything and take a sacrifice to the altar on the day they received God’s special care. Thus, in the moment God’s kindness occurred or was recognized, the worshiper might engage in prayers of thanksgiving expressing their purpose to bring an offering to God’s house suitable to express the reality of that gratitude. The laws in Numbers 30:1–16 lay out some of the basic parameters for that practice and serve to remind us of the importance of remembering to show our gratitude and commitment to the Lord.

## **Glossary of Terms**

**SANCTUARY.** In the Bible, a place set aside as holy because of God’s presence there. The inner sanctuary of the tabernacle (and later the temple) was called the Most Holy Place.

**Please answer the following questions:**

**Numbers Chapter 26**

1. When Moses took his second census how many were numbered? (51)
2. How was the census used to divide the land? (53-56)
3. How many Levites were numbered? (62)
4. Who were the only ones still alive at the second census that were alive at the first census? (63-65)

**Numbers Chapter 27**

1. What incident prompted the laws of inheritance to be given? (1-11)
2. Who did the Lord choose to succeed Moses? (18-19)
3. What was Moses to give him? (20-23)
4. New Generation Leadership (27:12–23)

5. Moses is about to die, and so new leadership must be appointed. There are two offices of leadership in Israel at this time: the priesthood, to be continued by Eleazar; and overall rule, to be continued by Joshua. What are some of the specific duties assigned to Joshua as the new leader of the people (vv. 16–20)?
  
6. What are some of the duties Eleazar will carry as the new high priest (v. 21)?

### **Numbers Chapter 28**

1. How many lambs were offered each day as a burnt offering? (3-4)
  
2. What was to be presented on the first day of each month as a burnt offering? (11-15)
  
3. When was the Passover to be held? (16)
  
4. When were they to hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work? (18, 25-26)

### **Numbers Chapter 29**

1. What was the offering for on the tenth day of the seventh month? (7-11)
  
2. What began on the fifteenth day of the seventh month? (12)

### **Numbers Chapter 30**

1. What must a man do who makes a vow to the Lord? (2)
2. Who can disallow a vow of a young woman in the day he hears of it? (3-5)
3. Who can disallow a vow of a married woman when he hears of it? (6-8,10-15)
4. What is said about vows of widows and divorced women? (9)