



Numbers

Summary

The book of Numbers is all about a journey that went very wrong. The people of Israel had been delivered from Egypt by God's mighty hand, and they were ready to enter the Promised Land. God had prepared the way, and He was leading them forward. He was with them in miraculous and obvious ways. All the Israelites had to do was cross the border into the land and follow God's instructions and leading; they just needed to follow God with faithful hearts. Sadly, with fear gripping their souls, the people of Israel rebelled and refused to follow God into the land. The consequence of rebellion was painful and costly. The nation stayed wandering in the desert for four decades until almost everyone from the rebellious generation had passed away. During this time, they continued to grumble and disobey, but God continued to love them and shape His plan for the future. Once the rebellious generation passed away, a new generation had their turn to follow God and finish the journey into the Promised Land. This generation obeyed!

The title "Numbers" comes from the fact that the people of Israel were counted in a census (numbered) at the beginning and end of the book, each time they were preparing to enter the Promised Land.

Author

The book of Numbers, as well as the rest of the first five books of the Bible that form the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), have been attributed to Moses.

Date

The most common date given for the writing of Numbers is the middle of the second millennium B.C., most likely between c. 1446 and c. 1406, depending on the dates that Moses lived.

Primary Characters

God, who is seeking to lead His stubborn people (Numbers 1-36)

Moses, God's chosen leader of Israel (Numbers 1-36)

Aaron, Moses' brother (Numbers 6, 12, 17-18)

The Levites, the priests of Israel (Numbers 3, 4, 18)

The people of Israel, who are very stubborn and rebellious (Numbers 13-20)

Historical Moments

Israel at Mt. Sinai Preparing to Enter the Holy Land (Numbers 1-9)

Israel Moves to the Edge of the Promised Land and Acts Faithlessly (Numbers 10-14)

Four Decades of Wandering in the Desert and Continued Rebellion, as God Seeks to Instruct Them and Establish a People Who Will be Faithful and Worship Him (Numbers 15-36)

Major Theological Themes

God Leads His People On a Pilgrimage of Faith - God is always in the front, leading us forward. Sometimes, His people rebel. Other times, they follow faithfully. He has a plan, purpose, and destination for all of us. If we pay attention, we will see Him leading us forward.

God Is Our Provider - In Numbers, we see God's provision in His leading them with a cloud, in food that fell from heaven, in protection from their enemies, and in the discipline when it was needed. God's love for His children is reflected in His commitment to providing all we need, even when we are not aware of it.

Sinful Rebellion Has Serious Consequences Because God Disciplines Those He Loves - When the people turned from God and acted faithlessly, there were serious consequences. In His love and holiness, God disciplined a whole generation, and they never entered the Promised Land.

God's Wise and Sovereign Plan Will Be Accomplished - Our rebellion can get in the way of God's plan for a time. However, God will always accomplish His plan, whether it is through us or through another person or generation. It is always best to submit to God's will and be part of His plan rather than resist and spend time in the desert.

Lessons Learned from Numbers

God Is Not a Fan of Grumbling and Bad Attitudes - Throughout this section of the Bible, we see the people of God display a grumbling and negative attitude. They complain, rebel, and speak against God. This never leads to blessing or intimacy with God, only judgment. As you read Numbers, let the Holy Spirit search your heart and teach you to have a humble and obedient spirit rather than be a grumbler.

Sometimes the Promised Land Is Just One Step Away - The people of God walked, hiked, and danced on the edge of the Promised Land for almost four decades. If they had taken one more step of faith, they would have entered God's promise. Instead, fear and faithlessness kept them in the desert. When you are on the edge of God's promise, be very careful not to be frozen by fear. Instead, step boldly and faithfully forward toward the will of God, even when the odds seem to be against you.

A Majority Is Not Always Right - The people of Israel took a vote. The majority of the spies who went in to survey the Promised Land gave a bad report. So, instead of following the faith-filled report of Joshua and Caleb (the only two spies that finally entered the land four decades later), they took the advice of the majority, and they let fear stop them from walking in obedience. A majority is not always right, but God is. Follow God's Word and will, even when you are in the minority.